

High School Graduation Requirements Task Force Meeting #6
October 25, 2017 at 6:00 PM
441 4th Street, NW, Suite 1114
Washington, DC 20001

Attendance

High School Graduation Requirements Task Force Members:

Present:

- **Markus Batchelor** (Task Force Co-Chair, State Board of Education, Ward 8)
- **Erin Bibo** (Deputy Chief, College & Career Programs)
- **Julie Camerata** (Parent, DC International, Executive Director, DC Special Education Cooperative)
- **Celine Fejeran** (Deputy Director, Raise DC)
- **Jerome Foster II** (Student, Washington Leadership Academy)
- **Cara Fuller** (Principal, Ballou STAY High School)
- **Larry Greenhill, Sr.** (Vice President, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers)
- **Cosby Hunt** (Teacher & Senior Officer of Teaching & Learning, Center for Inspired Teaching)
- **Sandra Jowers-Barber** (Director, Division of Humanities, University of the District of Columbia College)
- **Sanjay Mitchell** (Director of College & Alumni Programs, Thurgood Marshall Academy PCHS)
- **Karla Reid-Witt** (Parent, Banneker High School)
- **Cathy Reilly** (Executive Director, Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators)
- **Naomi Rubin DeVeaux** (Deputy Director, DC Public Charter School Board)
- **David Tansey** (Teacher, McKinley Technology High School)
- **Justin Tooley** (Special Assistant for Legislation & Policy, Office of the State Superintendent of Education)
- **Laura Wilson Phelan** (Task Force Co-Chair, State Board of Education, Ward 1)

Phone:

- **Latisha Chisholm** (Special Education Coordinator, Anacostia High School)
- **Shenita Ray** (Director of Online Operations, Georgetown University School of Continuing Studies)
- **Jimell Sanders** (Parent, Houston Elementary School)

Absent:

- **Tom Brown** (Executive Director, Training Grounds, Inc.)
- **Senovia Hurtado** (School Counselor & Parent, School Without Walls)
- **Dwan Jordon** (Senior Advisor, Friendship PCS)

- **Kimberly Martin** (Principal, Wilson High School)
- **Carol Randolph** (Chief Operating Officer, DC Students Construction Trades Foundation)
- **Jahari Shelton** (Student, Sidwell Friends School)
- **Jane Spence** (Deputy Chief, Secondary Schools, DC Public Schools)

SBOE Staff:

- **John-Paul Hayworth**, Executive Director
- **Sabrina Hernandez**, Policy Fellow
- **Paul Negron**, Program Support Specialist
- **Matt Repka**, Policy Analyst
- **Maria Saliccioli**, Policy Analyst
- **Alexandria Smith**, Communication Fellow

Executive Summary

Members of the High School Graduation Requirements Task Force (TF), led by Ms. Wilson Phelan and Mr. Batchelor, gathered for their sixth meeting on October 25, 2017. TF members reviewed the portions of the District of Columbia Code that regulate District high school graduation requirements, taking an opportunity to gain greater clarity on how the TF's work might impact these official regulations. After the October 11 meeting, TF members split into discussion groups. These groups worked to identify the purpose of the District's diploma and generate ideas to ensure credit will be awarded evenly across local education agencies (LEAs) and schools. TF members shared their discussion groups' ideas, after which TF members indicated the ideas that resonated with them mostly deeply. The TF ended the meeting by discussing how these ideas might form the purpose of the diploma. As the meeting concluded, the TF co-chairs announced that SBOE staff would aggregate the evening's work into a statement on the purpose of the diploma, and at the next meeting, the group would use this statement to identify graduation requirements that support the diploma's purpose.

At this point, the TF adjourned until its seventh meeting on November 8, 2017.

Agenda Items

Imagining our Work in Regulations

Ms. Wilson Phelan greeted TF members and explained the opening exercise; TF members were instructed to review portions of the DC Code that related to graduation requirements, reading to understand the scope of the Board and TF's authority and to identify places where a new regulation could be added to the Code.

After bringing the group back together, Ms. Wilson Phelan asked the TF what they thought about the regulations, and where they could add language that might ensure credit is awarded consistently.

Mr. Tansey said that he learned from the regulations that the Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE) sets the credit requirements, following the advice of the SBOE, and it was helpful for him to understand SBOE's role in the process.

Ms. Wilson Phelan followed up to ask about avenues to include language on the purpose of awarding credit. Dr. Jowers-Barber responded that there wasn't language on the reason behind the credits as they existed. Ms. Reilly added that a prior TF had discussed relevant issues.

Ms. Wilson Phelan volunteered that there seemed to be an opening at the beginning of the regulations for the purpose of the diploma to be delineated, or perhaps elsewhere in the code, and part of the exercise was designed to show TF members what the regulations look like. Rather than lengthy guidelines, they are not prescriptive, giving LEAs flexibility with implementation.

She added that this body would not be likely to delineate the specifications of the process for consistently awarding credit, but would create the policy that credit should be awarded consistently. This guidance will help the group stay out of the weeds but also understand that once it has defined a purpose for a District high school diploma, it will be easy to look at areas where courses are outlined to see if they help meet the intended purpose.

Welcome

Mr. Batchelor greeted the group and provided an overview of the meeting to come; TF members would share the results of their working meetings, and the group would then dive into the purpose of a high school diploma to guide the work over the next several weeks. This would lead the group to be able to understand ways in which the requirements might fall short of the desired purpose.

Working Group Read-out and Discussion

Ms. Wilson Phelan thanked the TF members for their work between groups. She explained that TF members would present their group's work, and after each presentation, the entire TF would conduct a gallery walk and identify points from each group's presentation that should be incorporated into the final product.

Mr. Mitchell presented for the first group. His group decided that a high school diploma should prepare students for college, career, and civically engaged lives, and part of this work included developing technology skills and "soft skills" – being flexible, managing time, embracing change, developing social-emotional competence, and navigating college systems. He added that many students, particularly first generation students, are not aware of the body of extant resources, and he stressed the importance of teaching students to navigate important systems, such as attending jury duty and paying taxes, through coursework.

Dr. Bibo shared on behalf of group two, noting that in the District's economy, college and career readiness are synonymous. Citizen readiness is critical, and community service hours are a good way to demonstrate it, but it is difficult to measure. Students should develop empathy and the empowerment to be an engaged, impactful citizen from community service. Dr. Bibo added that LEAs must ensure community service experiences are meaningful.

Ms. Reilly shared on behalf of the third group. The conversation had similarities to the first two groups' discussions - the group did not bifurcate the issues of citizenship and college/career preparation. They agreed on the importance of exposure to the jobs one might have as an adult, but the group was not sure how to include this in the District's graduation requirements. A diploma should prepare students for their secondary goals after high school, including post-secondary education, job and career training, and productive citizenship. They were invested in making sure students were confident and well prepared upon exiting high school. The group struggled with the fact that many students graduate but may not leave with the knowledge one might hope for. They rejected the idea of an exit test, but noted that it could demonstrate knowledge in the four core subjects. Students should also be exposed to topics outside of the core subjects. Communication skills and reading proficiency should result, but may not fit into the requirements. The group that examined requirements in 2007 tried to ensure there was a greater level of preparation when students reached high school, but even mapping out supports and interventions, students are not yet where we'd like them to be.

The group concluded by examining what one should expect from a District diploma recipient - strong skills, exposure to career possibilities, a sense of themselves and their passions, and the ability to learn how to learn. They know where to get support, regardless of whether they've gotten it yet.

The fourth group was not in the room to present their work, but Ms. Wilson Phelan shared some thoughts from Ms. Randolph, who wrote in about how the second prompt applied to CTE specifically. She talked about the construction trades' reliance on cross-functional competencies and public-private partnerships. The purpose of this work was to ensure CTE credits could be acknowledged uniformly across schools. A diploma should demonstrate attainment of skills and workforce readiness.

Ms. Fejeran spoke on behalf of group six, which spoke about credit transfer, discussing the difference between making recommendations on implementation and creating policies that make certain outcomes possible. The group wanted to move away from implementation, instead considering parameters and policies that might be in existence and can be leveraged. An example was the transfer of credits for military families - since this has been discussed at the central office level, Ms. Fejeran wondered how the policies established for this group could be used for students moving across LEAs.

Around the question of nontransferable credits, Ms. Fejeran said the group thought there might be thresholds for passing rates that motivate students to move transfer from one school to another. For example, students might get graduation credit for a D at one school

but not another, and students might move schools for this reason. While the group did not want to tell LEAs what should constitute a passing or failing score, the issue was deemed worthy of TF attention. The group discussed creating conditions that would create a consortium LEAs could opt in to, and she thought this might be more appealing to schools, since they would be constructing policies together. She wondered what would have to happen at a policy level to make this happen.

Key Ideas and Whole-Group Discussion

TF members walked around the room and circled ideas and phrases that resonated with them from each group's presentation. When this exercise concluded, SBOE staff displayed some of the ideas that had emerged, and TF members broke into four in-person groups and one remote group. The groups were tasked with defining any terms they would add to the official graduation regulations, and deciding what information should be added to the District Code as guidance around high school graduation requirements and the purpose of a diploma.

The entire TF reconvened, and Mr. Batchelor asked for the groups to share summaries of their discussions. Mr. Hunt shared his group's feedback: that while an emphasis on soft skills is admirable, it is not necessarily achievable via policy change. College and career readiness is critical, but workforce programs would ideally align their entrance requirements with the graduation requirements. The group wondered whether the community service requirement is the right proxy for civic engagement, and Mr. Hunt added that perhaps 18 required credits would be sufficient.

Mr. Tansey shared on behalf of the next group, stating that the diploma should signify that students are ready for college, career, and civically engaged lives. College-ready should be defined as having the credits necessary to enter college, broadly defined, as well as familiarity with college entrance requirements and the path to post-college careers. Career-readiness was defined as the flexibility to help students navigate multiple careers, as well as knowledge of varied job sectors and career pathways. Civically engaged lives could be defined as understanding systems of democracy, the function of government, the social contract, and how an individual participates in them. He wondered about how students might move from college and career to 21st century work preparedness.

Dr. Bibo spoke on behalf of her group, agreeing with others that the high school diploma should ensure students are civically engaged, have a strong academic foundation, and have the technology literacy necessary for the workplace. The requirements should not preclude these things from happening. Soft skills were defined as including but not limited to communication, teamwork, time management, and social-emotional competency. Civically engaged was defined as knowledgeable about US government systems and how to engage with them for the self and community benefit. Dr. Bibo's shared her personal perspective that a strong academic foundation requires that students maintain four years in the core subjects. She added that colleges like to see at least two years of language requirements, are divided on what they require with regards to art, music, and physical education, and would like to see career preparation coursework. Dr.

Bibo concluded by saying that students are not always sure if they are interested in college or a career after high school, so the requirements must be adequate for either choice.

The final group agreed that a high school diploma should ensure that a high school student is civically engaged, and that soft skills can't be prescribed, but also can't be prohibited by the requirements. The group began to define soft skills as including, but not limited to, communication skills. Civically engaged was defined as knowledgeable of government systems and how they can be leveraged in real life. The group concluded by saying that it was important to maintain four years of the core subjects, and they liked the suggestion of one year of arts' credits and one to two years of career and life skills preparation.

Ms. Reilly said that since LEAs are varied, there would be potentially perverse incentives if the task force changed the .5 credits each of art and music to 1 credit of arts, adding that schools would then cut music programming.

Mr. Tooley said that some of the group's priorities are already embedded in the requirements and are part of the Common Core State Standards. Mr. Foster offered a differing viewpoint, saying that skills embedded in classes are not always taught thoroughly and do not reflect the focus of the class. He supported a separate class to teach students career-focused skills and to increase post-secondary preparedness.

Closing

Mr. Batchelor thanked the group for their feedback. He announced that SBOE staff would synthesize their input into a concise draft statement of purpose for the diploma, which would be shared with the group for feedback before the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:03 PM. The group will hold its next meeting on November 8, 2017, from 6:00 – 8:00 PM.