

February 9, 2024

Dear Honorable Members of the Washington State Legislature:

We are writing to express our concern with HB 1915 and SB 5849, which would both change graduation requirements.

We support the intent of these bills and recognize that financial literacy, digital literacy, and computer science are all very important content areas for students to study. However, passing graduation requirement bills in isolation causes significant unintended consequences and strains on the system. We are concerned that these bills remove choice and flexibility for students and place additional burden on educators, school counselors, and families who are already challenged by the frequent changes to graduation requirements. This also adds two new graduation requirements that students must complete within the span of two years, starting in 2025 for computer science and 2027 for financial literacy.

We would like to see the Legislature amend the bills to direct the State Board of Education to review graduation requirements comprehensively to determine the best way to meet financial literacy and computer science literacy goals. This review should align with work the Board has already planned as part of its 2024-2028 strategic plan.

We would also request that any new graduation requirements be appropriately timed to include middle school students since planning for High School and Beyond Plans now begins in seventh grade.

Further, this work should be done in concert with institutions of higher education and the Washington Student Achievement Council in reviewing College Admissions Distribution Requirements (CADRs) to ensure our "Washington State Career and College Ready Diploma" aligns with the expectations of colleges.

Here is some feedback from our members:

"As a mother of a senior it's been a tough four years to fit all the grad requirements in and allow my child to follow his career pathway." – Walla Walla School Board Member

"While this is a nice idea, school districts are already so constrained within the 24-credit requirement, that if we add 'just one more thing' to the plate, then something has to come off, especially considering that this would be another unfunded mandate." – University Place School Board Member

"I expect that this might have a real impact on some (or all) of our smaller districts." – Yakima School Board Member

"The difficulty is that with the 24 credit diploma students have fewer and fewer options for electives including arts and Career and Technical Education. This potentially will have the impact of: 1) adding a required course for all kids that may not tie into their career path, or 2) causing us to reduce content from another course to integrate/accommodate the standards into another course."

“The timeline is fast. It would give districts one year to figure out how to implement to be sure the Class of 2029 could meet the requirement. This will also require resources. It must be funded.” – Shoreline School Board Member

And a few questions:

“We are currently teaching necessary content relevant to current graduation requirements in existing classes, so can the Legislature suggest what we can let go, course or content wise?”

“Instead of another graduation requirement, could the learning standards for existing and required courses be rolled out in a way that doesn’t add but instead updates/replaces?”

“How many teachers in WA have a Computer Science endorsement or reasonably could by the time we would have to implement this?”

“Do all districts have the technology needed and are equipped with multi-lingual and fully accessible devices and materials to accomplish this?”

Additional requirements by the Legislature have real consequences for the workforce; the burnout and damage to employees is real and we continue to hear of educators leaving the profession because they are maxed out and don’t have the resources to do their work well.

If we are going to change graduation requirements, let's do it intentionally with a look at the whole system and ensure they are done well with the needed funding, training and resources, not to mention an equity lens that supports the success of all students across the state.

We hope to work with bill sponsors on potential amendments to clarify the approach and implementation and align it with the ongoing development of graduation requirements and competency-based education.

Sincerely,



Association of Washington School Principals
Washington Association of School Administrators
Washington Education Association
Washington State Board of Education
Washington State Parent Teacher Association
Washington State School Director Association