

English

Graduation Task Force wants more flexibility, post-secondary assets

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The Graduation Requirements Task Force on Tuesday recommended more flexibility in courses required to get a high school diploma, but still favored the 21-credit minimum.

In a presentation to the State Board of Education, the task force also added that students should acquire what are being called post-secondary assets, such as career and real-world experience, and showing academic achievement.

State Board member Jim McNiece, who serves as chair of the Graduation Task Force, and other board members said a key to improving student success is making sure all students have a high-quality Individual Plan of Study.

Currently, the state requires that a high school student have a minimum of 21 credits to graduate, although every school district in Kansas requires more than the minimum number.

The 21-credit minimum must include four units of English Language Arts, three units of history and government, three units of math, three units of science, one unit of physical education, one unit of fine arts and six units of electives.

The Graduation Task Force proposal broadens these unit categories. There would be 3.5 credits of English and .5 credit of communications, such as speech, debate, forensics and public speaking. The history and government units would include 2.5 units of social studies and a .5 unit of fine arts (music, dance, art, theater) and one humanities credit, such as additional fine arts, additional history and government, foreign language and other subjects. The three units of math and three

units of science would become seven units of math, science and STEM (including computer science). The one unit of physical education and six electives would become .5 physical education and .5 health or personal finance and 4.5 units of Individual Plans of Study.

Under the recommendation, students will complete two or more postsecondary assets from either of two categories aligned with their Individual Plan of Study. This could include career experiences, such as youth apprenticeships and industry-recognized certificates, and it could include academic assets, such as scoring 21 or higher on the ACT, completing the regent's curriculum or gaining college credits while still in high school.

McNiece said the recommendations need to be further fine-tuned. The task force has received input from nearly 2,200 Kansans, but he said they want to get even more input. “We are only scratching the surface. We need to keep moving on this,” he said.

McNiece said he wants to bring back a more specific recommendation to the State Board in August or September.

Members of the task force said under the current system and the proposed recommendation, there is a lot of flexibility. School districts already are able to improve student engagement and change course offerings to better meet the needs of students.

State board members had numerous questions, some expressed some reservations, but indicated they wanted the task force to continue its work.

“I appreciate the fact that you are making serious efforts to talk to a lot of people,” State Board Chairman Jim Porter said. He also emphasized the need for schools to have “rigorous” Independent Plans of Study.