

GOVERNOR'S POLICY ISSUES 84/85

Standards for Advancement and Graduation

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I. Executive Summary:

Issue Title: Standards for Advancement and Graduation

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Minnesota Department of Education

Subcabinet: Education and Cultural Affairs

Summary of Issue:

The critical area of concern in this issue is, "Should the State adopt a policy or policies that would control the advancement and exit (graduation) of students in the public schools?" Current state policy, established through the rule making authority of the State Board of Education, sets the exit requirements (graduation) at 20 credits (1 credit per subject per year) for grades 9-12. No standard exists at present which control the advancement of students from grade to grade. This remains a discretionary policy of local school districts.

This issue is the result of several major initiatives over the past 10 years. In 1974, the State Board of Education established the "Committee of 21" to make recommendations about expanded graduation requirements. This committee failed to reach a clear conclusion and the board released the committee in 1975. Three years later, in December, 1978, the State Board requested the Department to conduct a study of local school districts to determine their graduation standards and policies. Finally in 1983, the legislature requested the Department, as part of a larger study, to make recommendation on changes in graduation requirements and achievement standards. This request preceeded by several months, a host of national reports, including a Nation at Risk, which indicated that school new stricter standards for advancement and graduation.

Major Findings:

- For students attending schools organized in grades 9-12, the state board rule requires 20 credits for graduation. (One credit equals a minimum of 120 clock hours of instruction.) Ten and two-thirds credits are specified: four in communication skills, three in social studies, one in math, one in science, two-thirds in physical education (9th grade), one-half in physical education (10th grade), one-half in health, plus nine and one-third electives.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education - Secondary Education Section.

- For students attending schools organized as grades 10-12, state board rules presently require 15 credits for graduation. (One credit equals a minimum of 120 clock hours of instruction.) This is approximately 43 minutes per daily class period for 170 school days. Six credits are specified: three in communications skills, two in social studies, one-half in health, one-half in physical education, plus nine elective credits.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education - Secondary Education Section.

- The latest study of graduation requirements by the Education Commission of the States was completed in 1983.

The 1983 study shows that Minnesota, Pennsylvania and Utah are the only states to specify credits for graduation as those earned in grades 10-12. This may be one of the reasons people are surprised when they learn no math or science is required for graduation in Minnesota. State Board of Education's revised rules now also identify credits required for graduation in 9-12 schools. The following are summary statements on comparisons between the 50 states:

- 1) Three states have more high school credits required for graduation than Minnesota: Florida - 24, Washington - 22 1/2, and Oregon - 21;
- 2) Twelve states equal Minnesota requirements of 20 credits for graduation earned in grades 9-12;
- 3) Twenty-five states have fewer required credits for graduation than Minnesota;
- 4) Ten states allow local boards to determine their own requirements, including the number of credits for graduation, i.e., no state minimum numbers of credits are required;
- 5) Of those states which require specific courses for graduation, eleven require a math credit earned in grades 10-12. These eleven include one, Washington, which requires two math credits earned in grades 10-12, and
- 6) Of those states which require specific courses for graduation, ten require a science credit earned in grades 10-12.

Source: Education Commission of the States, 1983.

- The most recent study of graduation requirements in Minnesota school districts was completed in 1980. The following are major findings of that study:

- 1) 61% of the districts require 20 credits for graduation (state minimum).
- 2) 20% of the districts require 20+ through 21 credits.
- 3) 10% of the districts require 21+ through 22 credits.

- 4) 7% of the districts require 22+ through 23 credits.
- 5) 2% of the districts require 23+ through 25 credits.
- 6) 36% of the districts indicated they required no additional required subjects beyond the state minimum of communications (English), social studies, math, science, physical education and health.
- 7) 58% of the districts indicated they require one additional credit of science.
- 8) 47% of the districts indicated they require one additional credit of social studies.
- 9) 44% of the districts indicated they require one additional credit of math.
- 10) 9% of the districts indicated that they require one additional credit of communications (English).
- 11) 4% of the districts indicated that they require one additional credit in physical education.
- 12) 3% of the districts indicated that they require one additional credit in health.
- 13) 15% indicated they require additional credits in other areas*.

* Some districts require more than one additional subject, therefore, the total percentages are greater than 100.

- 14) When local districts were asked "When a student has not learned basic skills prior to grades 9, how does your local board policy provide for credit to be granted for completion of a special basic skills program?" Districts responded as follows:
 - 55% indicated that the basic skill program would be required and student would receive credit.
 - 29% indicated that the basic skills program would be elective and the student would receive credit.
 - 15% indicated that they grant no credit for basic skills work beyond 9th grade.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education - Secondary Education Section.

- Only two states have adopted state level tests which restrict advancement to higher grade levels.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education - Assessment Section.

- Only 13 states have adopted state level tests which mandate uniform high school graduation tests for all students.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education - Assessment Section.

- Only one Minnesota school district, Minneapolis, has developed a policy which restricts the advancement of students from grade to grade on the basis of achievement tests.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education - Office of Planning and Policy Research

- The Commissioner of Education's mandated report to the legislature in October, 1983, indicated that the Minnesota Department of Education would develop model graduation requirements for all districts. Districts would be free to establish their own or use the state model, whichever was more rigorous.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education - Program Effectiveness

- The HECB adopted several recommendations in May, 1984 directed at remedial and skill development in Minnesota post-secondary education. Highlights of recommendation to local school districts, in cooperation with the State Board of Education and the Department of Education are as follows:

- Establish standards for high school graduation based on mastery of skills and knowledge and not just accumulated credits.
- Develop and implement assessment procedures throughout elementary and secondary education to identify students who need additional instruction to meet the standards for high school graduation.
- Develop and implement skill development opportunities throughout elementary and secondary education for those students identified in need.

Source: HECB, Remedial and Skills Development Instruction in Minnesota Post-Secondary Education, May, 1984.

- The State Board of Education, under M.S. 121.11, has the authority to test students each year in the elementary grades and may develop tests for use in secondary subjects.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education - Office of Planning and Policy Research

- The State Board of Education has established rules which will specify the minimum types of electives to available in each Minnesota high school by 1985-86.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education - Secondary Education Section.

- Department of Education is currently developing a model set of graduation requirements and related learner outcomes including achievement measures.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education - Elementary-Secondary Education Section.

CONCLUSIONS

- Only three states exceed Minnesota's required credits for graduation.
- Thirty-nine percent (39%) of Minnesota's local school districts require more than 20 credits for graduation.
- Nearly half of Minnesota's local school districts require at least one additional credit in science, social studies and math.
- More than half (55%) of Minnesota school districts required a basic skills course, for credit for those students who have not reached mastery by ninth grade. In addition, 29% of these districts offer this course as an elective and grant credit.
- Few states have adopted state level tests for advancement or graduation.
- The Department of Education has plans in place to establish a model set of graduation requirements, based on learner outcomes, and related achievement measures.
- The State Board of Education has adopted rules that will, during the 1985-86 school year, ensure that all Minnesota high school students have access to a comprehensive program.

RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION

- Continue this Issue Team and expand its membership to include the State Board of Education, Community College Board, the State Board for Vocational Education, and the University of Minnesota. This Team shall continue to explore the feasibility of developing and implementing a model set of graduation requirements and related standards for advancement.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications for the 1985 or 1986 session.

IMPLEMENTATION

- 1984-85 - Issue Teams finalizes report on the feasibility of establishing state level graduation requirements, and related achievement standards. If the establishment of graduation requirements and standards for advancement are feasible, then:
- 1985-86 - State Board of Education/Minnesota Department of Education should provide copies of the suggested requirements to all school districts and proceed with rule making, if necessary.
- 1986-87 - Local school districts review and adjust, if necessary, to the suggested requirements and standards.
- 1987-88 - Local school districts have in place either the suggested requirements or a set of locally determined requirements, whichever are more rigorous.

II. Background

a. Issue Background:

This issue is the result of several major initiatives over the past 10 years. In 1974, the State Board of Education established the "Committee of 21" to make recommendations about expanded graduation requirements. This committee failed to reach a clear conclusion and the board released the committee in 1975. Three years later, in December, 1978, the State Board requested the Department to conduct a study of local school districts to determine their graduation standards and policies. Finally in 1983, the legislature requested the Department, as part of a larger study, to make recommendation on changes in graduation requirements and achievement standards. This request preceded by several months, a host of national reports, including a Nation at Risk, which indicated that school new stricter standards for advancement and graduation.

b. Issue Charge:

To develop a set of recommendations concerning what state policy initiative, if any, should be developed relative to standards, advancement and graduation.

c. Analysis Method:

The analysis method used was predominantly "literature review". Members of the Issue Team were:

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III. Findings/Conclusions

Results of the Analysis including Sources

- For students attending schools organized in grades 9-12, the state board rule requires 20 credits for graduation. (One credit equals a minimum of 120 clock hours of instruction.) Ten and two-thirds credits are specified: four in communication skills, three in social studies, one in math, one in science, two-thirds in physical education (9th grade), one-half in physical education (10th grade), one-half in health, plus nine and one-third electives.

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- Only 8 states have adopted state level tests which mandate uniform high school graduation tests for all students.

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- Only one Minnesota school district, Minneapolis, has developed a policy which restricts the advancement of students from grade to grade on the basis of achievement tests.

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- The Commissioner of Education's mandated report to the legislature in October, 1983, indicated that the Minnesota Department of Education would develop model graduation requirements for all districts. Districts would be free to establish their own or use the state model, whichever was more rigorous.

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Source: HECB, Remedial and Skills Development Instruction in Minnesota Post-Secondary Education, May, 1984.

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- The State Board of Education has established rules which will specify the minimum types of electives to available in each Minnesota high school by 1985-86.

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- Department of Education is currently developing a model set of graduation requirements and related learner outcomes including achievement measures.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education - Elementary-Secondary Education Section.

IV. Alternative Options

Alternative #1:

Have graduation requirements and standards for advancement placed in law by the legislative process.

Analysis:

The State Board of Education possesses authority, through the rule making process, to establish requirements or standards. Legislative action should not be necessary.

Alternative #2:

Have graduation requirements and standards for advancement placed in rule by the State Board of Education.

Analysis:

This alternative would be preferable to Alternative #1. It allows, through the Administrative Procedures Act, a process which will allow all interested parties to participate.

Alternative #3:

Have the State Board of Education, through the Department of Education and in cooperation with Minnesota post-secondary institutions, develop a model for graduation standards, and related standards for advancement and remediation. This model should be disseminated to all local school districts.

Analysis:

While this alternative would not put into rule the requirements and standards it does allow local school boards to review their policies, in light of the model, and make adjustment as necessary. If it is found that school districts do not respond to this approach, the State Board could begin the rule making process to put the model requirements and standards into rule.

Alternative #4:

Allow school districts to continue to establish their own minimum requirements and standards with no guidance, law or rule from the state.

Analysis:

This has been the course of action to date. It would appear that some state level intervention would be appropriate.

V. Recommendation

a. Preferred Alternative:

Alternative #3 - Have the State Board of Education, through the Department of Education and in cooperation with Minnesota post-secondary institutions, develop a model for graduation standards and related standards for advancement and remediation. This model should be disseminated

to all local school districts. This appears to be the most appropriate next step and this would occur during 1984-85 with the "model" available to school districts during 1985-86. At least one year should be allowed for districts to adjust, if necessary, to the "model". A survey of districts should be conducted in the fall of 1987 to determine the effect this process has had on increased graduation requirements and standards.

b. Support or Opposition:

No significant opposition is anticipated. Support for the recommendation should be board based due to its "local control" qualities.

VI. **Appendices**

Additional References:

- Minnesota Statute, 1982, Session Laws 1983 and 1984.
- Governor's Commission on Education and Economic Growth.
- Minnesota Code of Agency Rules.
- California Department of Education, Model Graduation Requirements, 1983.
- HECB, Report on Proposals for Admission Requirements for Incoming Freshman, 1984.
- A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform, The National Commission on Excellence in Education (Chairman: David P. Gardner, President, University of Utah, President Elect, University of California)
- Action for Excellence: A Comprehensive Plan to Improve Our Nation's Schools, Education Commission of the States, Task Force on Education for Economic Growth (Chairmen: James B. Hunt, Jr., Governor of North Carolina; Pierre S. duPont IV, Governor of Delaware; Frank T. Carey, Chairman of the Executive Committee, International Business Machines, Inc.)
- Making the Grade, Twentieth Century Fund, Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy (Chairman: Robert Wood, Director of Urban Studies, University of Massachusetts)
- A Place Called School: Prospects for the Future, "A Study of Schooling" (Author: John I. Goodlad)
- High School: An Agenda for Action, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, supported by the Atlantic Richfield Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York (Chairman: Ernest L. Boyer, President, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching)

- Education and Economic Progress: Toward A National Education Policy, The Carnegie Corporation (Chairmen: James B. Hunt, Governor of North Carolina and Dr. David Hamburg, President of the Carnegie Corporation of New York)
- Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do, The College Entrance Examination Board, Education Equality Project (Chairman: George H. Hanford, President of the College Entrance Examination Board and the College Board's Office of Academic Affairs)
- School and College - Partnerships in Education, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement and Teaching.
- A Celebration of Teaching: High Schools in the 1980s, National Association of Secondary School Principals, and Commission on Educational Issues of the National Association of Independent Schools (Chairman: Theodore R.Sizer, recent headmaster of Phillips Andover Academy, Andover, Massachusetts, and former Dean, School of Education, Harvard University)