



Preparing Students for Life and Work:

**A Guide to the New
Graduation Requirements**



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Preparing Students for Life and Work: A Guide to the New Graduation Requirements

Why did we create new high school graduation requirements for the class of 2008 and beyond?

It's pretty simple: The world is a much tougher and competitive place than it used to be, and our children have to be much better prepared than we were when we left high school.

Here's what's changed:

Students must have a fundamental set of skills when they leave high school. The vast majority of jobs now require some kind of training or education after high school. And too many of our students are still struggling with just the basics. Business leaders report they can't find qualified employees who can read operating manuals, write coherent memos and compute sales prices.

There's much more need for people who have strong math, science and communication skills in our fast-moving, high-tech, global economy.

To succeed in life, whether it's buying a home, choosing a doctor, or applying for and keeping a job, people must be able to think critically and creatively solve problems. Students need to learn these skills in school by applying what they learn in real-world situations. Memorizing facts and formulas to repeat on a test isn't good enough preparation anymore.

It seems obvious that our schools should be preparing all students to read, write and do math at a level that will allow them to succeed both personally and professionally. But for decades, we haven't reached all students – only some of them. We can no longer afford to let some students “fall through the cracks” of our education system, and leave high school without the skills they need to succeed in life.

What will happen if our children leave high school without fundamental skills?

They will struggle to survive, both personally and professionally, and have difficulty making informed decisions about everything from managing their money to electing qualified local, state and national leaders.

Prior to 2008, the state of Washington has only required that students pass 19 classes to graduate (although many local school districts have additional requirements). Beginning with the class of 2008, students will need to meet four state graduation requirements:

- Earn passing grades in 19 core courses
- Complete a culminating project (often referred to as a senior project) to apply learning in a particular area of interest
- Complete a “high school and beyond” plan that outlines steps needed to prepare for the first year after high school
- Pass the reading, writing and math portions of the high school Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL); science also will be required beginning in 2010

The three new graduation requirements are focused on the new “applied learning” skills that students need to be successful. The project allows students to dive into a subject that interests them and demonstrate their skills in a creative way. The plan requires students to begin thinking about their career and life options before they leave high school. And the WASL places a strong emphasis on short-answer and essay questions that require students to demonstrate they can understand what they read, write a persuasive essay, and understand how to get the answer to real-life math problems, such as calculating the mileage on a long trip and interpreting simple charts and graphs.

Most students must do far more than fulfill these four basic graduation requirements to achieve their career goals. But those requirements are a solid start to ensure all of our students keep their career and life options open.

General graduation requirement questions

Q: *What are the new graduation requirements, and when do they take effect?*

A: The state of Washington requires that public school students who graduate from high school in 2008 and beyond must, in addition to compiling a minimum of 19 credits, complete a culminating project (often referred to as a senior project), create a plan that outlines how they will use high school to prepare for their career objectives; and earn a Certificate of Academic Achievement, or a Certificate of Individual Achievement for some students in special education programs.

Q: *Do students enrolled in private schools or who are home-schooled have to meet the new graduation requirements?*

A: No

Q: *What is the Certificate of Academic Achievement?*

A: To obtain a certificate, students must pass the high school Washington Assessment of Student Learning in reading, writing and math. Students who graduate in 2010 and beyond also must pass the science WASL.

Q: *Do all students have to earn a Certificate of Academic Achievement? What about options for special education students?*

A: All students must earn either the Certificate of Academic Achievement or the Certificate of Individual Achievement as part of their graduation requirements.

State law provides the Certificate of Individual Achievement for some students enrolled in special education programs. The Certificate of Individual Achievement is for students whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams determine that passing one or more portions of the high school WASL isn't an appropriate measure of the students' abilities. Students may earn a Certificate of Individual Achievement by passing the Washington Alternative Assessment System portfolio, a developmentally appropriate WASL (e.g., a 10th-grade student taking an 8th-grade math WASL), one or more high school WASL tests, and/or through multiple measures as determined by students' IEP teams. Again, the determination of whether a student is eligible for the Certificate of Individual Achievement, and the route the student must take to earn it, is completely up

to the individual IEP team. For more information about how to implement the Certificate of Individual Achievement option for students enrolled in special education programs, see the OSPI publication, "Guidelines for Participation and Testing Accommodations for Special Populations in State Assessment Programs" (October 2005).

Q: *Will special education students who earn a Certificate of Individual Achievement get a different diploma?*

A: No. Earning a Certificate of Individual Achievement will lead to a "regular" diploma. The difference in the certificate will be noted only on the student's transcript.

Q: *How many other states require students to pass a test to graduate from high school?*

A: Twenty-six states have some kind of exit exam requirement that students must meet to graduate.

Q: *For students who are getting a high school diploma as adults through the community college system, what will be expected for high school graduation? Will they be required to pass the WASL, complete a culminating project, etc.?*

A: Under current law, the requirement to successfully pass the 10th-grade WASL applies to adults only if they belong to the high school class of 2008 and beyond. In other words, if their original expected high school graduation date was prior to 2008, they would not need to meet the new requirements, even if they graduate later than 2008. If their "on time" graduation date is 2008 or later, they will need to meet the new requirements to earn a diploma.

The WASL

Q: *How many questions do students need to get right on the WASL to pass?*

A: Students generally have to get about 65 percent of the points possible on each test to meet standard, or "pass."

Q: *Why are the dates changing for the spring 2006 high school WASL? What are the new dates?*

A: Reading and writing tests will be given in March in order to have time to score the tests and return scores to students by early June. Math and science tests will follow in April, with scores also to be returned in early June. Following is the mandatory 2006 high school testing schedule. The test is untimed, but students generally take between 90 minutes to two hours to complete each section of the test:

Monday, March 13 – Reading, day one
Tuesday, March 14 – Reading, day two
Wednesday, March 15 – Writing, day one
Thursday, March 16 – Writing, day two
Tuesday, April 18 – Math, day one

Wednesday, April 19 – Math, day two
Thursday, April 20 – Science, day one
Friday, April 21 – Science, day two

There are no exceptions to the mandatory schedule.

Additional information can be found at:

<http://www.k12.wa.us/assessment/TestWindow.aspx>

Q: *What if a student misses the test? When is the make-up?*

A: There are no make-ups for the high school test. If students miss a test (one or both sessions of the reading test, for example), then they may take the test at the next regularly scheduled test administration in August 2006. If a student takes only one session of a test, the test will be scored as incomplete.

Elementary and middle school students may continue to take make-up tests during the regular spring WASL testing window.

Q: *Why can't high school students make up the test later in the spring test window like they have before?*

A: Because the high school test now is required for graduation purposes, security is critical to ensure the reliability and validity of the results for each student. All students must take each test at the same time on the same day (similar to the procedure used for the SAT and related exams). Allowing a make-up test later in the spring test window would require that a completely different test be given.

Q: *Can 9th-graders take the test?*

A: Yes, school districts must provide students who are enrolled in 9th grade the opportunity to take the test. However, this opportunity is designed for students who have the knowledge and skills to pass the test and wish to get all or part of the WASL graduation requirement "out of the way" in their 9th-grade year. OSPI has provided information to school district assessment coordinators explaining how students will register.

Q: *If 9th-graders take the test, is this considered a "practice" attempt?*

A: No. Taking the test in 9th grade will be counted as one of a student's five state-paid opportunities to pass the test.

Q: *Can a school or district require 9th-graders to take the WASL?*

A: No. The decision to take the WASL in grade 9 is an individual student decision. The school or school district cannot mandate that all 9th-graders take all or part of the test.

Q: *How will 9th-grade WASL results affect AYP calculations?*

A: If a 9th-grader meets standard on the test, the student's results will contribute to the school and district's "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) calculation (for federal accountability purposes) in the year the student is enrolled as a 10th-grader. If a 9th-grader does not meet standard on the test, the score when the student attempts the test again as a 10th-grader the following year will count for AYP purposes.

Q: *How can a student receive a "scholar" designation based on WASL performance?*

A. Students can receive scholar's designations on their transcripts for each subject when they achieve a level 4 score ("exceeds standard") on the WASL the first time they take the test. If students take the WASL for the first time in either grade 9 or 10 and do not achieve level 4, they have lost their opportunity to receive the scholar's designation on their transcripts.

Q: *When will 10th-graders receive their test results?*

A: School districts will receive results from next spring's testing in early June. Districts will be asked to distribute those results to individual students immediately.

Q: *What WASL information goes on the transcript?*

A: The highest WASL scores achieved in each subject are posted on students' transcripts. This began with the transcripts of students in the Class of 2006. There is no indication on the transcript of how many times a student took the WASL – just the highest score achieved and the date.

For the Class of 2008 and beyond, the transcript will indicate whether a student has earned a Certificate of Academic Achievement by passing the reading, math and writing portions of the WASL, or a Certificate of Individual Achievement by passing the Washington Alternate Assessment System (WAAS) or some combination of the WAAS and WASL in those three subjects (the latter is designed for access by some students enrolled in special education).

Q: *Can 11th- and 12th-graders who don't need to pass the test to graduate still retake it?*

A: In spring 2006, 11th- and 12th-grade students who have not met standard or wish to improve their previous score may retake the test.

Retaking the WASL

Q: *How many times may a student retake the WASL?*

A: A student who does not meet one or more of the standards on the WASL may retake the assessment up to four times at no cost to the student. In addition, the student may retake the assessment four additional times if (s)he is enrolled in a high school completion program at a community or technical college. That means anyone who leaves high school and enrolls in a high school completion program could have a total of nine tries to take each portion of the WASL required to earn a diploma.

Q: *May students who have met the standards retake the WASL to increase their scores?*

A: Yes. However, under current law, these students are required to pay for retaking the assessments. Due to the complexity of collecting these fees, a system is not yet in place to charge students for taking the assessments.

Q: *When will retakes be available?*

A: Beginning in 2006, the high school WASL will be given two times a year – once in the spring, and once in August. Students will receive their spring scores in mid-June so that they can access summer school, tutoring or other services over the summer to help them improve their skills and be better prepared for their first retake in August.

Q: *If a student meets the standard in a content area (e.g., reading), but not in other content areas, does (s)he have to retake all three assessments?*

A: No. Students will only need to retake the portions of the WASL they didn't pass.

August 2006 WASL Retakes

Q: *When will the summer 2006 assessments be administered?*

A: The assessments will be administered from August 7-10, 2006 according to the following schedule:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Content Area</u>
August 7	Reading
August 8	Mathematics
August 9	Writing (Expository)
August 10	Writing (Persuasive)

Q: *Which students are eligible to retake the assessments during the summer administration?*

A: Students in Grades 10 and 11 in 2005-2006 (Classes of 2007 and 2008) are eligible to take the assessments. This includes students who met or did not meet standard in the spring of 2006, did not participate in testing or who have transferred from out-of-state. Students may take one, two or all three of the assessments.

Q: *Which students should retake the assessment in the summer?*

A: While this decision should be made on a case-by-case basis, the probability of meeting the standard on the retake will be much higher for students who participated in a summer school program or received other types of assistance after taking the WASL in the spring. Also, students who did not pass in multiple subject areas may want to focus on taking the WASL in just one or two subjects (e.g., writing).

Q: *Where will the summer 2006 assessments be administered?*

A: The August tests will be offered at a variety of locations around the state. School districts will be asked this winter to identify a testing site in their district or in a neighboring district. These locations are likely to include high schools, community college campuses and educational service district offices. Students may take the assessments at any of the testing sites, but will be encouraged to take the assessments at their school district's designated site.

Q: *How will students register to retake the assessments?*

A: Students will be able to register online or via a toll-free telephone number from mid-June through early July.

Q: *Can students retake the science test in the summer?*

A: No. Students who wish to retake the 2006 science WASL will have an opportunity to retake the test in the spring of 2007. Beginning in 2008, the high school science WASL

will be given two times a year – once in the spring, and once in mid-August. The science test does not become required for graduation purposes until 2010.

Q: *Will school districts be reimbursed for the cost of administering the summer assessments?*

A: The Legislature appropriated funding to pay school districts for the costs of administering the assessments. These funds are intended to pay for central office, proctoring, janitorial and indirect administration costs. OSPI is currently developing an allocation formula for distributing these funds to school districts.

Q: *Will transportation be available for students?*

A: School districts are encouraged, but not required, to provide transportation to the testing site for students who cannot otherwise get to the testing site. However, funding for transportation is not available from the state.

Q: *Will accommodations be available for special education and ELL students?*

A: Yes, districts will be required to provide accommodations for special education and ELL students.

Q: *Will “Developmentally Appropriate WASLs” (DAWS) for other grades be available for special education students?*

A: Only the 10th-grade WASL will be administered during the summer 2006 retakes.

Q: *When will students get the results from their August tests?*

A: In mid-October

Alternative Assessments and Appeals

Q: *Will alternative assessments be available?*

A: In House Bill 2195 (passed during the 2004 legislative session), the Legislature directed OSPI to develop “one or more alternative assessments” for students to demonstrate they have required skills in reading, math and writing. These alternative assessments are to be “comparable” in rigor to the WASL and measure the same skills and knowledge assessed on the WASL.

OSPI was directed to develop options for these alternative assessments and make recommendations to the Legislature for its approval. The alternative assessments cannot be implemented statewide without the approval of the Legislature. As a result, OSPI has been working with a statewide team to develop alternative assessment options. Two options are being analyzed and piloted in about 20 schools this year:

- WASL/GPA: Two variations are under consideration. The first involves an index that considers the student’s math WASL score, for example, and a student’s GPA in core math courses that are aligned with the learning standards assessed on the WASL. In the index, a high GPA could compensate for a WASL score that’s just below the “passing” mark.

The second variation compares the student's GPA in mathematics or language arts courses with the GPAs of other students who passed the WASL who took the same mathematics or language arts courses. If the student's GPA is above the median GPA of this "cohort" of other students, the student would obtain a Certificate of Academic Achievement.

- Collection of evidence: This involves compiling student work as evidence that the student has met the learning standards. The student work could include components of a student's culminating project, writing assignments, problems involving mathematics content and processes, and other classroom work that demonstrates the knowledge and skills tested on the WASL. The collection of evidence would be required to meet specified criteria, and would be evaluated by state-level review teams consisting of teachers, principals and community representatives.

Q: *For whom are the alternative assessments intended?*

A: The purpose of the assessments is to provide students an additional means of demonstrating that they have the essential skills and knowledge. They are intended for students who have the required skills and knowledge, but who have not been able to demonstrate them on the WASL. The alternative assessments have the potential to be useful for students in career and technical programs, and for advanced English language learners who have difficulty demonstrating their skills and knowledge on the WASL. The alternatives are not being designed for students who DO NOT have the required skills and knowledge.

Q: *Who is eligible to use an alternative assessment?*

A: Under current law, students are required to take the WASL at least twice before accessing an alternative assessment.

Q: *When will the alternative assessments be available?*

A: OSPI will ask the Legislature to authorize the alternative assessments in the 2006 legislative session. If they are authorized, the alternative assessments will be available beginning in the 2006-07 school year.

Score Appeals

Q: *Will students be able to appeal the score they received on the WASL if they think it was improperly scored?*

A: Yes, a score appeal process will be available for the high school assessment beginning in June 2006.

Transfer Students

Q: *If students transfer in from out of state as juniors or seniors, will they have to pass the WASL to graduate? What if they have already passed an exit exam in their former high school?*

A: Recommended guidelines and an appeal process are currently being developed for students who transfer to Washington public schools in their junior or senior year. Final decisions will be made by OSPI prior to the 2006-07 school year based on decisions made by the Legislature during the 2006 session. The guidelines and appeal process will likely consider whether students have passed a high school assessment in their former state or country, and any other evidence that they have sufficient reading, writing and mathematics skills and knowledge to earn a Certificate of Academic Achievement.

Q: *Will private school and home-schooled students who transfer to a public high school and want to receive a public high school diploma be required to meet the standards on the WASL to graduate?*

A: The guidelines and appeal process for these students will be very similar to the guidelines for students who transfer from another state or country. However, private school and home-schooled students who think they might transfer to a public high school in order to get a public high school diploma should be encouraged to take the high school WASL in the 10th grade at their private school or at a local public school.

Remediation

Q: *What about those students who can't pass the WASL or an alternative assessment? What's being done to help them graduate?*

A: Districts are using a variety of approaches to help students who are behind in learning key skills get over the bar, from providing more intensive instruction in reading and math, to after-school academies and other forms of one-on-one tutoring. Districts have \$12 million in new state funding for high school remediation for the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years. The money is being distributed through the Learning Assistance Program, with poverty as the major driver. Some high schools are receiving quite a bit of new money, while others are getting very little or none. OSPI has requested an additional \$42 million for the coming year so that, combined with the original \$12 million, schools can provide a summer school program or extended learning time for each student in the class of 2008 who has not met standard in one or more content areas. Many districts also are using some of their additional I-728 money for remediation for high school students.

Q: *Math is the area students have the most difficulty with. What's being done to help improve student achievement in math?*

A: OSPI is developing assessments that teachers can easily use to diagnose students' specific math problems, identifying specific math skills that many high school students appear to lack, and developing curriculum, sample lessons and other tools that can be used in "mini-courses" offered after school or over the summer to boost achievement in specific math skill areas. These projects will be discussed in-depth at the 2006 OSPI January Conference, and the products of that work will be ready for use by next summer. OSPI is requesting an extra \$4.7 million in the coming year to expand this Math Now! initiative.

Q: *How can districts plan for summer school enrollment when WASL scores won't come back until June?*

A: There is no way to predict how many students will need – or take advantage of – summer school opportunities. Past statewide history of high school WASL performance, however, indicates the need probably will be strongest in math. Many districts are taking a look at past WASL performance trends in their high schools to estimate the number of sophomores who won't meet standards in reading, writing and math next spring, in order to plan for summer school needs.

Culminating project

Q: *What is the culminating project?*

A: The culminating project is a new graduation requirement passed by the State Board of Education in December 2000. It is outlined in Washington Administrative Code [WAC 180-51-061](#).

The new requirement states that each student graduating in 2008 and beyond shall complete a culminating project for graduation. The project consists of the student demonstrating how well he/she has met two of the state's learning goals:

- Think analytically, logically and creatively, and integrate experience and knowledge to form reasoned judgments and solve problems
- Understand the importance of work and how performance, effort and decisions directly affect future career and educational opportunities

Each district creates its own written policy on how this graduation requirement will be implemented. The written policy includes assessment criteria.

Q: *When will the state-required culminating project graduation requirement take effect?*

A: Fall 2004, for students who began the ninth grade in the 2004-05 school year. These students will be the graduating class of 2008.

Q: *What do culminating projects have to look like?*

A: Culminating projects can take many forms. Each local school district and school board has the authority to determine the culminating project requirements for that district. Some schools require specific senior projects, while others ask students to create culmination portfolios. Some schools require that an internship or community service element be included in the projects. Some require all of the above and more. Each school district's policy should outline details of the components it requires for the culminating project, and be readily available at each district high school.

Q: *Can a special education student receive accommodations on the culminating project requirement? How would that affect the type of diploma that would be issued?*

A: Students being served in special education programs can receive accommodations on the culminating project based on the Individualized Education Program (IEP) developed for each student. The accommodations should be documented in the IEP just like any

other accommodation provided for the student. Students successfully completing the culminating project based on IEP accommodations will receive a “regular” diploma, provided all other graduation requirements are met.

Q: *Does the culminating project count toward the state minimum number of 19 credits required for graduation?*

A: No. At the state level, the culminating project is a non-credit-bearing graduation requirement. However, a school district has the discretion to attach credit to the culminating project to help students meet higher credit requirements that may exist in that district.

Q: *Under the district policy that is required to implement the culminating project graduation requirement, does the project have to be implemented in the same way at every high school in the district?*

A: No. It is up to the district to determine how the culminating project requirement will be implemented locally.

Q: *Can the district policy allow two or more students to do a joint culminating project?*

A: Yes. It is a local school district decision.

Q: *Does the culminating project have to be done in the student's senior year?*

A: Not necessarily. Districts set their own parameters for when projects may be undertaken.

Q: *If a student transfers from one high school to another, either within the same school district or between school districts, may the student continue with his/her current culminating project?*

A: This is up to local school districts. It would make sense that a school district have a policy in place that allows students to move between schools in the same district without disrupting progress on the culminating project. Districts should also consider having a policy that reviews student progress on the culminating project when students are transferring in from outside the district as well. However, it is up to district boards and administrators to determine how the culminating project requirement will be implemented locally, including taking into consideration these kinds of situations.

Q: *Does a culminating project have to include community involvement, volunteer time or a service requirement?*

A: No. It is up to the district to determine how the culminating project requirement will be implemented locally.

Q: *If a parent objects to some aspect of the culminating project on grounds of safety, inappropriateness, etc., what is the process for responding to the objection?*

A: The district's written policy for implementing the culminating project graduation requirement should address this possibility.

Q: *Where can a district go to get information about how to implement this graduation requirement?*

A: The State Board of Education Web site (www.sbe.wa.gov) includes names of [districts with contact information](#), and offers guidelines that districts may find useful in creating and implementing their culminating project requirements.