

**USOE Graduation and Grading Task Force  
Summary and Recommendations to the USBE  
October 4, 2013**

**Graduation and Grading Task Force Purpose and Membership**

At the request of the Utah State Board of Education (USBE), in March 2013, the USOE Deputy Superintendent Brenda Hales, joined by Assistant Superintendent Mary Kay Kirkland (Box Elder SD) and Linda Mariotti (Granite SD), conducted a webinar on “Increasing High School Rigor and Ensuring College and Career Readiness.” The webinar reviewed the current identified gaps to graduation in Utah, concerns with current grading practices, and identified possible solutions to the gaps, including three possible graduation gateways to college and career readiness, while soliciting stakeholder input on the proposed solutions.

The webinar was followed by a USOE Graduation and Grading Task Force, co-chaired by Karl Wilson (Director of Title I & Federal Programs, USOE) and Glenna Gallo (Director of Special Education, USOE). The 17-person Task Force included staff and representatives from rural and urban local education agencies (LEA), the PTA, the USBE, the Utah System of Higher Education, and the Utah State Legislature, and were supported by USOE staff from Teaching and Learning, Special Education Services, Career and Technical Education (CTE), Adult Education, and Federal Programs.

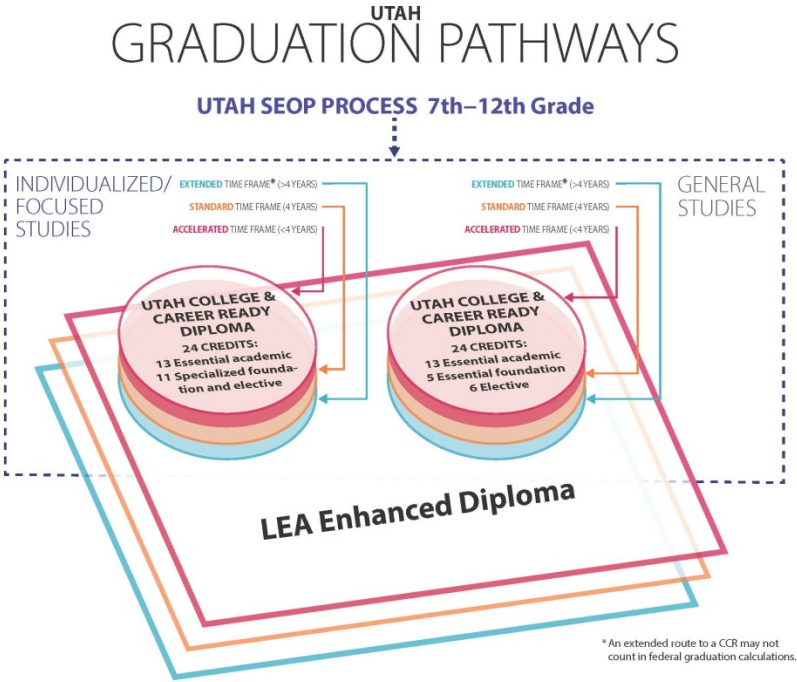
<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Agency/Organization</b>
Sonia Woodbury	Charter Director	City Academy
Cheryl Cox	Local School Board Member	Garfield School District
Kristie Cooley	Local School Board Member	Logan School District
LeAnn Wood	PTA	Davis PTA
Sara Jones	Teacher Organization	Utah Education Association
Jason Skidmore	Local CTE Director	Jordan School District
Dixie Allen	State Board of Education Member	Utah State Board of Education
Steve Hirase	Local Superintendent	Murray School District
Shane Erickson	Local Superintendent	Piute School District
Mary Kay Kirkland	Local Curriculum Director	Box Elder School District
Linda Mariotti	Local Deputy Superintendent	Granite School District
Kenna Rodgers	Local Regular Ed Teacher	Salt Lake School District

Sheryl Lundwall	Local Special Ed Teacher	Tooele School District
Charlene Lui	CMAC	Granite School District
Carol Spackman Moss	House of Representatives	Utah State Legislature
Rob Couraud	Local Comprehensive Guidance	Murray School District
Melissa Miller Kincart	Higher Education Representative	Utah System of Higher Education

**Graduation and Grading Task Force Guiding Principles and Recommendations**

The Task Force met in person four times between May and August to review previous work, identify concerns/gaps, and develop recommendations for the USBE. The Graduation and Grading Task Force recommendations were developed in alignment with the following “Guiding Principles”:

- Take into account individual student competency and progress;
- Ensure that the Utah graduation diploma reflects meaningful College, Career, and Life Readiness;
- Consider Multiple Pathways (academic or vocational) that are honored and adjusted;
- Acknowledge that resources will be required for LEA implementation;
- Help to mitigate barriers to access for students;
- Address individual student needs and challenges; and
- Allow autonomy for local decision-making and control.



### Recommendation #1: Pathways to Diploma

- The Graduation and Grading Task Force recommended two state pathways to graduation with a regular high school diploma.
  1. General Studies Diploma (24 credits) with 13 essential credits, five essential foundation credits, and six elective credits.<sup>i</sup>
  2. Individualized/Focused Studies Diploma (24 credits) with 13 essential credits, and 11 elective credits.<sup>ii</sup> This option requires additional state-level decisions regarding the amount of desired available flexibility for the 11 elective credits; determine which, if any, of the 11 elective credits should require exposure to specific coursework (i.e., PE, art, etc.); and still be flexible enough to demonstrate the student’s intent to work towards a specific area of focus. It must be part of a College and Career Readiness (CCR) plan and link to post high-school options. (See Recommendation #3 for example of revised graduation credit requirements)
- Both pathways are essential to providing students, families, and LEAs with flexibility to meet student needs, while allowing for changes in priorities and preferences throughout secondary experiences (i.e., middle school/junior high and high school).
- Credits towards graduation may be accrued in a variety of methods including traditional classes, online or distance learning, and/or demonstration of knowledge and skills through competency assessments.
- These two pathways rely on focused Student Education Occupation Plan (SEOP) planning starting in grade 7 and continuing through graduation, necessitating additional school counselor training and changed responsibilities to ensure all students receive ongoing appropriate course planning.
  - Middle school/junior high (7-8):
    - Rigorous courses aligned with Utah Core Standards and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills
    - SEOP process with guidance counselors with adequate time for student discussions and planning (e.g., decreased student to counselor ratio, planning tools and assessments that provide for efficiency, relevance, and individualization)
  - High school (9-12):
    - Rigorous courses aligned with Utah Core Standards and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills
    - SEOP process continues with ongoing discussion and decisions regarding diploma pathway and timeline options. Planning occurs with guidance counselors with adequate time for student discussions and planning (e.g., decreased student to counselor ratio, planning tools and assessments that provide for efficiency, relevance, and individualization)

- Both state diploma pathways (General Studies and Individual Studies) have timeline options for:
  - extended time (greater than 4 years)
  - standard time (4 years)
  - accelerated time (less than 4 years)

There is an understanding that an extended timeline may not count in federal cohort graduation calculations, but should be included in state graduation calculations. There should be compelling reasons for using the alternate timelines, either accelerated or extended options, directly linked to legitimate student needs.

- In addition to the two state diploma pathways listed above, LEAs could offer an LEA-enhanced diploma with additional requirements, such as a senior project or additional course/credit requirements, including the use of a citizenship grade. If this is the case, all three diploma options would be available to all students in the LEA. This will address mobility and equity concerns.

Additional Actions/Decisions Needed:	Review limitations of CTE funding (e.g., timelines corresponding with school year, determine if current state law or Board Rule may impede flexibility).
	Consider changing SEOP to College and Career Readiness Plan (CCRP) and strengthen connections with CCR.
	Determine methods to provide additional resources to LEAs (e.g., counselors, professional development, course options, community-based partnerships, and advisory Boards).
	Continue credit flexibility discussion for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accrual of credit</li> <li>• Individual Studies Diploma</li> <li>• Online schools</li> </ul>
	Develop criteria or guidance for LEAs to use to determine areas of individualization for diploma.
	Develop a timeline for changing Board rule that allows LEAs to plan for changes. Board rule should address timeline options and consider use of ACT benchmarks in the four content areas as criteria for early graduation.
	The accrual of credits towards graduation would need to meet new grading standards adopted by the USBE.

## Recommendation #2: Competency-Based Grades

- The Graduation and Grading Task Force recommended the Board engage in additional discussions to consider providing LEAs with guidance and recommendations for LEA policy regarding moving towards the consistent use of subject matter competency-based grading practices and away from the standard grading system that allows students to improve their grades without a demonstration of competency. The Task Force recognized that a difference exists between demonstrating competency/ being awarded graduation credit and creating a system of proficiency-based grading for grade levels and content courses.
- The Graduation and Grading Task Force recommended the Board, in making recommendations regarding the grading system, ensure that a student’s citizenship grade be separate from their proficiency grade. The citizenship grade should hold students accountable for both positive and negative behaviors and consider possibilities for reflecting service, leadership, and non-academic skills. It should remain an LEA-level decision to determine if they will use a citizenship grade for graduation.
- This recommendation is based on the following assumptions:
  - Proficiency-based grades for courses would reflect proficiency in the prescribed course standards and would cover understanding, skills, and application. Students should have multiple opportunities to demonstrate that proficiency in a variety of ways. Grades should NOT be based on elements unrelated to proficiency such as attendance, behavior, extra credit, etc.
  - Students who demonstrate competency must reach more than a minimal level of proficiency in the course standards by multiple, flexible measures that address not only informational content but intended learning outcomes, essential understandings, etc. Such measures could include tests, projects, performances, etc.
  - A competency-based grading system would assist parents, students, and the public with understanding of what it takes to be College and Career Ready and also provide increased opportunities to embed 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills in required courses.

### Additional Actions/Decisions Needed:

Consider engaging in Board discussions on creating guidance on grading policies, including recommendations for competency based grades, timelines, and criteria to be considered during development of LEA policies.

Ensure USOE mandates for changes include the resources to assist LEAs with implementing the changes.

Consider requesting broader stakeholder input on the issue of competency-based grades.

**Recommendation #3: Credits Towards Graduation**

- The Graduation and Grading Task Force recommended that there be an increased emphasis on the SEOP process for defined course selection. Flexibility on required courses should be addressed through the SEOP process on foundation skills/credits (e.g., require three to five credits rather than the five currently required for PE/Health, Art, CTE, and Financial Literacy), which allows more flexibility with electives (e.g., permits six to eight elective credits rather than the six currently allowed).
- The Task Force recommend the following revised credit proposal, but acknowledges that by maintaining the total number of required credits and the 13 “Essential” credits, there remains only two additional credits of flexibility:

DRAFT Proposal (March 2013)  
General Studies Track

**13 Credits:**

- 4 English
- 3 Mathematics
- 3 Science
- 3 Social Studies
  - .5 Another Social Studies Topic

**5 Credits:**

- 2 PE/Health
- 1.5 Art (Possible .5 Humanities)
- 1 CTE
- .5 Financial Literacy  
(Civic/Consumer/Life Skills)

**6 Electives**

**Total 24 Credits**

Revised Proposal (August 2013)

Individualized/Focused Track driven by SEOP

**13 Essential Credits: (what does this mean? What courses are included? What skills will be learned?)**

- 4 English
- 3 Mathematics
- 3 Science
- 3 Social Studies
  - .5 Another Social Studies Topic

**11 Foundation Credits include:**

- 3-5 Credits from:
  - PE/Health (recommended 2 credits)
  - Art (Possible .5 credits Humanities) (recommended 1.5 credits)
  - CTE (recommended 1 credit)
  - Financial Literacy (recommended .5 credits) (Civic/Consumer/Life Skills)
- 6-8 Elective Credits from:
  - Additional classes based on student SEOP
  - Balanced coursework leading to an outcome

**Total 24 Credits**

Additional Actions/Decisions Needed:

Review the 13 “essential academic credit” requirement to determine if that standard remains appropriate with CCR; conduct the review after Utah Core Standards and ACT implementation completed.  
Review current National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) results.

	<p>Consider developing an LEA waiver process for innovation regarding required credits for graduation.</p>
	<p>Continue discussion with stakeholders to develop policy that addresses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course offering changes/ discontinuations and the impact on previously developed and approved SEOPs relying on previously available courses.</li> <li>• Ensuring all students receive a well-rounded education regardless of diploma option and courses selected.</li> <li>• Ensure SEOPs address needs of at-risk students, including those who potentially with drop out or lack a directed SEOP.</li> <li>• The inclusion of state assessments, such as PLAN, EXPLORE, and SAGE in SEOP planning.</li> </ul>

General Considerations for the Utah State Board of Education

As the Utah State Board of Education considers changes to Utah’s high school graduation requirements, it will be necessary to work with Local Education Agencies to ensure clear communication, support, and flexibility. The USBE will need to work with stakeholder groups to identify a reasonable timeline for implementation of any new graduation requirements. In the implementation plan, the USBE will need to address the following issues:

1. The need for adequate time for LEAs to put new provisions in place for middle school students that will be under the new graduation requirements by the time they reach 12<sup>th</sup> grade
2. The USOE would need to conduct a comprehensive review of existing state law and state board policies and take steps to make needed revisions/amendments to align all new requirements (and eliminate conflicts)
3. With any new requirements, the state will need to provide adequate resources to LEAs to implement new requirements (e.g. additional funding to address appropriate student: counselor ratios)

## Resources Used by Graduation and Grading Task Force

### Graduation Requirements

Harvard Graduate School of Education, *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century*, Pathways to Prosperity Project, February 2011

National High School Center, *College and Career Development Organizer*, April 2012

Tierney, W. G., Bailey, T., Constantine, J., Finkelstein, N., & Hurd, *Helping students navigate the path to college: What high schools can do: A practice guide* (NCEE #2009-4066). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

### Grading Recommendations

Guskey, Thomas R., *Five Obstacles to Grading Reform*

Hales, Brenda, *Increasing High School Rigor and Ensuring College and Career Readiness (PowerPoint Presentation)*, March 2013

Hammond, Betsy, *Missing homework, late assignments matter little as Oregon schools grade exclusively on academic mastery*, The Oregonian, 9-7-2013

Marzano, Robert J., Heflebower, Tammy, *Grades That Show What Students Know*

Reeves, Douglas B., *Leading to Change / Effective Grading Practices*

Scriffiny, Patricia L., *Seven Reasons for Standards-Based Grading*, Educational Leadership, volume 66 no2, 2008

Winger, Tony, *Grading What Matters*

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<sup>i</sup> \*Courses applying to high school graduation are reflected on page 6.

<sup>ii</sup> \*Courses applying to high school graduation are reflected on page 6.