

Debate continues on short- and long-term graduation requirements

As previously reported, the Ohio House and Senate – cool to the State Board of Education’s recommendation to extend the alternative pathways to graduation in place for the class of 2018 – recessed for the summer without taking action on the issue.

In the meantime, discussion has continued among State Board members tasked with making recommendations on graduation pathways for 2021 and beyond.

At its October meeting, the State Board’s Achievement & Graduation Requirements Committee unanimously supported a resolution to adopt proposed new future requirements, which would provide students with multiple ways to exhibit adequate skills in various subjects including end-of-course exams, averaging a minimum 2.5 GPA, meeting state benchmarks on alternative tests, and successful completion of a “culminating student experience.” Implementation of the plan would be subject to approval by the legislature.

Reaction from members of the State Board, which is expected to vote on the proposed plan at its November meeting, is mixed. But there seems to be general consensus that there should be a transition period of at least two years prior to implementation of new requirements.



Stakeholders continue to express concern regarding the legislature’s failure to take action to extend the flexible graduation standards to the classes of 2019 and 2020. Among those is the Ohio 8 Coalition – representing superintendents and teacher union presidents from Ohio’s eight major urban districts – which recently sent a letter to lawmakers.

“Among all the Ohio 8 school districts, approximately 73 percent of seniors scored below proficient on one or more of the required tests for graduation, with nearly 62 percent of test takers in Mathematics scoring below proficient,” the letter states. “These numbers indicate a need for our students to have options to prove their academic achievement, growth and successes. Skills needed in the workplace, within institutions of higher education and life in general demand that our students can do more than pass tests.”

State Sen. Peggy Lehner (R-Kettering), who chairs the Senate Education Committee and serves as an ex-officio member of the State Board, has suggested that the issue may be addressed in the year-end lame duck legislative session. She advises that attendance as an option to earn points toward graduation not be included in the State Board’s recommendations in light of the fact that she has heard “a lot of derogatory comments” from fellow lawmakers who were critical of including that option among those made available to the class of 2018.

Carolyn Best, a spokesperson for Ohio House Speaker Ryan Smith (R-Bidwell), said in an email to Gongwer News Service that the House will discuss graduation requirements in the coming months.

“Last budget, the General Assembly worked with schools on a legislative fix that was never intended to be a permanent solution, and all were in agreement that it was in the best interest of our students to solidify a long-term plan for graduation,” the email said. “With that in mind, the Speaker will continue to discuss this issue with stakeholders and House members throughout the fall ...”

The Ohio Department of Education’s legislative director told State Board members that dozens of legislators have expressed interest in the issue and that support seems to be growing for extension of the options given to students who graduated in 2018.

State Board members have also discussed a resolution proposed by District 9 representative Stephanie Dodd to lower the cumulative score required to demonstrate proficiency on end-of-course exams from 18 to 14, which would not require approval by the legislature. She sees this as a “last resort,” and Lehner has warned that passing the resolution could create tension with lawmakers.