

State Board recommends extending relaxed graduation requirements

At its January meeting, the State Board of Education voted to recommend to lawmakers that the eased graduation requirements for the class of 2018 be extended to students slated to graduate in 2019 and 2020.

Current graduation standards require students to score 18 of a possible 35 points on seven end-of-course exams, earn career credentials or score remediation-free on the ACT or SAT.

For the class of 2018 only, students' options were extended to include earning points toward graduation by meeting certain GPA and attendance requirements or completing capstone projects, internships or volunteer work.

The changes were made for 2018 because it would have been the first class slated to meet the new requirements and about one in four students was not on track to do so.

No data is yet available on use of the alternative pathways to graduation; however, surveys have been sent to 156 schools in 48 districts with the greatest number of students who were not on track to graduate under the new standards.

According to State Board member Laura Kohler, chair of the committee assigned to address the issue, other states' best practices will be studied, stakeholder feedback will be solicited, and Ohio data will be assessed in developing a future proposal.

"I think we need to have a discussion on what we want our graduates to know and figure out alternative ways as well as traditional ways that they can demonstrate their knowledge, skills, attributes and abilities," Kohler said.

State Sen. Peggy Lehner, who chairs the Senate Education Committee and serves as an ex-officio member of the State Board, suggested that testing elements of the graduation requirement be considered and assessed as appropriate as true minimums.

"Take some of those major corporations in the State of Ohio that are hiring our students and find out what they are requiring of those students to hire them, and if it's a test, make sure the test lines up with what we're requiring in our end-of-course exams, because I suspect these are all over the place," Lehner said. "I think to have some consistency and understanding of what someone really needs to be handed her diploma from the State of Ohio is something we need to invest a little more time in."

State Rep. Andy Brenner (R-Powell), who chairs the House Education and Career Readiness Committee and also serves as an ex-officio State Board member, said the House Majority Caucus is already working to address the issue.

