

Ohio Core Curriculum, Why do We Need It?

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The State Board of Education endorsed the Ohio Core curriculum proposed for Ohio high school students.

All Ohioans need to ask, "What is the Ohio Core and why should I care?" and to understand what is happening to education as a result of our changing economy and the changing world.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Dr. Susan Zelman, often says, "We don't actually know what the world will look like in the future, but we know it is not our world of the past." It is important for all of us to consider changing high school requirements with this in mind.

The Ohio Core, as introduced in the Ohio House and Senate requires all high school students to take four years of language arts, four years of mathematics, including Algebra 2 or its equivalent, three years of science with one year each of biology and physical science, three years of social studies, two years of foreign language, and half years of physical education and health, with three units of electives to fulfill the minimum graduation requirement. More instructional hours for art, music and business courses are available as six or seven periods are scheduled daily. The House Bill actually requires one elective to be in one of those areas. The Core represents one additional year of mathematics and science. The foreign language requirement is new. There is an allowance for parents to sign their child out of the Core, but no student may be admitted directly to any Ohio four year university who has not completed the Ohio Core. The legislation would affect students graduating in spring, 2011, this fall's seventh graders. Additional provisions in the bills require high schools to offer opportunities for students to earn college credit while attending high school, and four year colleges to reduce or eliminate any remedial courses for unprepared college students.

Concerns have been expressed about these bills. Many parents object to the foreign language requirement because it is alien to our thinking as Americans. In this new world, we need to prepare students for a world economy. We will need over 7,000 more foreign language teachers. Training enough new teachers will take time, even using alternate methods of teacher certification.

Many successful professionals say they do not use the higher mathematics required. The important point of learning mathematics is to train the mind for complex problem solving and critical thinking all adults need to navigate a difficult, changing world. The business community has endorsed these bills as important to develop an educated, able workforce for Ohio. Remember, none of us knows what will be needed in this new, changing economy. Closing

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opportunities in high school is not the answer. We will need thousands of additional secondary math teachers to teach four years of math to all students.

Science courses have been avoided by high school students for many years. The new requirements are especially difficult because both teachers and laboratory facilities are in short supply. The goal of exposing all high school students to rigorous laboratory science courses is vital to our economy, our scientific leadership in the world, and for individuals because this sector provides the most high paying jobs.

Please pay attention to this issue. Learn and read all you can. Talk to your neighbors. Talk to your legislators.

The State Board of Education members know that Ohio is surrounded by states that have adopted or are developing their own rigorous high school requirements because all government leaders believe it is their best opportunity to develop a strong, productive economy needed to support their citizens and their state.

We know that remedial courses are needed by over 35% of incoming college freshmen. Studies show that students claim they are bored in high school and that students in poor districts or schools too often receive a less rigorous high school education. Business leaders estimate that 45% of high school graduates are not prepared to advance beyond entry level jobs. A strong high school curriculum with Algebra 2 as the minimum course increases students' likelihood of graduating from college by as much as 28%. In 2000, a high school graduate earned the average of \$28,807. An associate degreed worker earned \$35,388, on average, and a worker with a Bachelor's Degree earned \$46,276.

However, the concerns about the Ohio Core bills as introduced are real. We need to make sure we have the teacher and laboratory capacity to offer all required courses. We need to strengthen elementary and middle grades to prepare students to be successful with more rigor in high school. We need to assure that additional support, intervention, and supplemental opportunities are in place so Ohio's students can be successful in the world, no matter how it changes.

It will take careful planning. It will take understanding and participation by parents, business, and whole communities, and it will take hard work, time, and, yes, money. Any industry would require resources to make huge systemic changes. We cannot assume education can do it with less.

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