



# **SCHOOL BOARD ACTION REPORT**

**DATE:** December 8, 2020  
**FROM:** Denise Juneau, Superintendent  
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**For Introduction:** January 27, 2021  
**For Action:** February 10, 2021

## **1. TITLE**

Partial Waiver of Board Policy No. 2415, High School Graduation Requirements, to Suspend Service Learning Requirement for Graduating Seniors

## **2. PURPOSE**

This Board Action Report temporarily suspends the local service learning graduation requirement in Board Policy No. 2415, High School Graduation Requirements, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **3. RECOMMENDED MOTION**

I move that the School Board temporarily suspend the provision in Board Policy No. 2415, High School Graduation Requirements, requiring that graduating seniors complete 60 hours of service learning for graduation from today's date until August 31, 2021.

## **4. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **a. Background**

Seattle Public Schools (SPS) requires students to complete 60 hours of service learning in order to graduate. This is a locally-determined requirement, not a state requirement for graduation. As such, the requirement can be suspended at the discretion of the School Board. Currently, Seattle Public Schools has the authority to waive this requirement for individual students, based on their circumstances, but a suspension for all students requires Board action.

As part of Board Resolution No. 2019/20-33, the School Board previously authorized the suspension of the service learning requirement for students in the Class of 2020. This resolution was a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was approved in April of 2020, and expired on July 31, 2020, in conjunction with the other stipulations in the resolution.

It is well documented that the pandemic has not abated since July, and restrictions are still in place to protect the health and safety of all members of the Seattle Public Schools community, as well as all residents of Washington. At the time of writing this BAR (December 8, 2020), COVID-19 cases are increasing rapidly in the state, and Governor Inslee has issued strict restrictions on gatherings of all kinds. Given the increasing number of COVID cases, and the restrictions coming from the state, Seattle Public Schools staff have serious concerns about the service learning requirement. Staff do not have the capacity to identify safe, socially distanced learning opportunities for all the students who may need them, nor does staff have the ability to vet opportunities that students find on their own. Without safe options, students who are trying to meet the requirement may pursue unsafe options that put themselves and others at risk of contracting COVID-19. To eliminate this risk, staff recommends suspending the requirement for students graduating this school year, or in the summer of 2021.

**b. Alternatives**

As stated above, the service learning requirement can currently be waived for individual students, based on their circumstances. The waiver process involves the student filling out a form to request the waiver, having that waiver request reviewed by the principal, and then finally having the request reviewed and either approved or denied by a Director of Schools. As an alternative to suspending the service learning requirement for all of this year's graduates, schools could continue to process individual waivers for students who are not able to meet the requirement due to the pandemic or other circumstances. This is not recommended for several important reasons.

1. Going through the process of requesting a waiver would put an unnecessary burden on students who are already struggling to meet state graduation requirements during the upheaval of the pandemic and remote learning.
2. It would be extremely time consuming for school and district staff who should be using all their available time to support students with their academic, social and emotional needs. Doing this paperwork for the many students who will need a waiver is not a high priority use of staff time.
3. Some students may choose not to pursue the waiver and could put themselves or others at risk by completing service hours in unsafe environments.

**c. Research**

Using the Class of 2019 as a typical year, about 9% of graduating students were approved for a service learning waiver. As can be seen in Table A below, that percentage is significantly higher for African American males, Students of Color Furthest from Educational Justice, and English Language Learners. Staff have not conducted research to determine why SPS students waive this requirement, but several possibilities are likely. For example, they may not have time to complete the requirement because they need to work or take care of younger siblings, they are participating in time consuming sports and other extracurricular activities, or they are devoting their time outside of school to studying and school work.

**Table A: Class of 2019 Graduates Who Waived Service Learning**

Student Type	Waived	Total # of Students	Percentage
All Students	291	3167	9%
African American Males	51	262	19%
Students of Color Furthest from Educational Justice	142	1223	12%
English Language Learners	66	328	20%
Students with IEPs	36	386	9%

\*Data for waiver calculations provided by Business Intelligence

\*\*This data does not include Class of 2019 graduates who graduated prior to 2018-19, so it may not match OSPI Class of 2019 data.

Students in the Class of 2021 are the first SPS students who will need to earn 24 credits to graduate, up from 21. With the increase in required credits, this year's seniors have even less time than the students in the Class of 2019 to complete 60 hours of service learning. Table B shows 77% of students in grade 11 for the 2019-20 school year finished the year with at least 18 credits, putting them on track to earn 24 credits by the end of 12<sup>th</sup> grade. For African American males, that figure is 61%, and for Students of Color Furthest from Educational Justice, that figure is 71%. For this year, SPS staff is recommending students who are not on track with credit earning to prioritize credit recovery over service learning.

**Table B: On-Track Rates for 11<sup>th</sup> Graders, End of 2019-20 School Year**

**All Students**

Total Enrollment	On-Track Rate
3713	77%

**Students of Color Furthest from Educational Justice**

Total Enrollment	On-Track Rate
1393	71%

**African American Males**

Total Enrollment	On-Track Rate
264	61%

\* Data based on 6/1/20 enrollment counts; estimates of credit-earning data generated 8/18/20 and may not include summer credits.

Finally, preliminary data shows that seniors are at risk of earning many Incompletes this semester. The College and Career Readiness team is closely tracking Incompletes for 12<sup>th</sup> graders and determining how to support those students to help them complete the coursework. Table C shows that 26% of students have at least one Incomplete at the quarter mark, and the percentage is significantly higher for Students of Color Furthest from Educational Justice, and African American males. It is not too late for students to raise their grades and earn credit for these courses, but it will take time. As with credit recovery, SPS staff recommends students prioritize finishing their work for the semester and earning credit in these classes.

**Table C: 12<sup>th</sup> Graders with Incompletes, Quarter 1 of 2020-21 School Year**

12th Graders with One or More Quarter 1 Incompletes	Number of Students	Percentage of Students	Total Students
All Students	935	26%	3,581
SoC Furthest from Ed Justice	508	34%	1,495
African American Males	117	40%	290

\*Data provided by Business Intelligence at end of Quarter 1

In conclusion, service learning is an important activity for students, but with the challenges and burdens of remote learning, and the first year of the 24 credit requirement, seniors should be focusing on academics and their social and emotional needs.

## 5. FISCAL IMPACT/REVENUE SOURCE

Fiscal impact to this action will be n/a.

The revenue source for this motion is n/a.

Expenditure:  One-time  Annual  Multi-Year  N/A

Revenue:  One-time  Annual  Multi-Year  N/A

## 6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

With guidance from the District's Community Engagement tool, this action was determined to merit the following tier of community engagement:

Not applicable

Tier 1: Inform

Tier 2: Consult/Involve

Tier 3: Collaborate

West Seattle High School and other schools were consulted regarding the temporary suspension of the service learning requirement and are overwhelmingly supportive. Several school leaders and counselors reached out to the College and Career Readiness team to indicate that students are not able to find safe service learning opportunities, and to request that the requirement be suspended. Directors of Schools were also consulted and were very supportive.

If this action is passed, staff will inform seniors and their families. Based on anecdotal evidence from school staff, central leadership anticipates that students and families will be relieved to have this requirement suspended.

## 7. EQUITY ANALYSIS

As detailed in the research section above, African American male students and Students of Color Furthest from Educational Justice were significantly more likely than other

Class of 2019 graduates to waive the service learning requirement (9% of all students, compared to 19% of African American male students, and 12% of Students of Color Furthest from Educational Justice). The 2018-19 school year was a typical school year, but the 2019-20 school year is anything but. In addition to the usual challenges associated with meeting graduating requirements, our students graduating this year have had to contend with the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism. Staff expect that a far higher number of students of color would need to request waivers this year if the requirement were not suspended.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention<sup>1</sup> and multiple other sources, the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted people of color. SPS students of color are more likely to be suffering from the negative health and economic impacts of the pandemic, and perhaps more likely to be working to support their families. Given this reality, suspending the service learning requirement is aligned with our goal of promoting racial equity. SPS students of color who are already struggling with the effects of COVID-19 and racism should not be required to go through the process of applying for the service learning waiver, nor should they risk exposure to COVID-19 in order to complete the requirement.

With the time saved, students can focus on earning the necessary credits for graduation. 39% of African American males, and 29% of Students of Color Furthest from Educational Justice finished 11<sup>th</sup> grade with fewer than 18 credits. In order to graduate with 24 credits, students need to not only earn all of the credits they are enrolled in this year, but also recover credits from previous years. One of SPS's strategic goals is to increase graduation rates for our students of color. Suspending the service learning requirement would be a small but significant step towards achieving that goal, and a message to students that the district understands the challenges they are facing.

**8. STUDENT BENEFIT**

Across the district, students are working hard to learn in a remote environment. Senior students are working to pass all their classes, make up classes from previous years (for some students), and make post-secondary plans. Temporarily suspending the service learning requirement will benefit all students, as it will allow them to focus on completing their courses and planning for the future.

**9. WHY BOARD ACTION IS NECESSARY**

- Amount of contract initial value or contract amendment exceeds \$250,000 (Policy No. 6220)
- Amount of grant exceeds \$250,000 in a single fiscal year (Policy No. 6114)
- Adopting, amending, or repealing a Board policy

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<sup>1</sup> Health Equity Considerations and Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html>)

Formally accepting the completion of a public works project and closing out the contract

Legal requirement for the School Board to take action on this matter

Board Policy No. \_\_\_\_\_, [TITLE], provides the Board shall approve this item

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. POLICY IMPLICATION**

This action would temporarily suspend the service learning requirement in Board Policy No. 2415, High School Graduation Requirements, as described in the attachment to this Board Action Report, through August 31, 2021.

**11. BOARD COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION**

This motion was discussed at the SSC&I Committee meeting on January 12, 2021. Director DeWolf made a motion to move this item forward to the full Board with a recommendation for approval. Director Harris seconded. This motion passed unanimously.

**12. TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

Upon approval of this motion, high school staff, 12<sup>th</sup> graders, and their families will be notified immediately. Communications will go through several channels to ensure that all seniors and their families are aware of this temporary change to graduation requirements.

**13. ATTACHMENTS**

- Policy No. 2415, High School Graduation Requirements – provision to be waived for the class of 2021 crossed out (for reference)

	<p>HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS</p>	<p>Policy No. 2415 March 11, 2020 Page 1 of 3</p>
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It is the policy of the Seattle School Board that in addition to meeting all graduation requirements set forth by the State of Washington, all District high school students meet the following requirements in order to graduate:

1. Students in the Class of 2020 or earlier must have a minimum of 21 credits in order to graduate, which is one credit more than the state requirement. Per state law, students in the Class of 2021 and beyond must earn 24 credits, but districts may put a policy in place to waive up to two of those credits. The Seattle School Board authorizes this two credit waiver for individual students, based on their circumstances. Credits defined by the State Board of Education as foundational/mandatory core credits may not be waived. The Superintendent or Superintendent's Designee is directed to develop a waiver process for this two credit waiver, which will be outlined in the *K-12 School Counseling Manual*.
2. Students are urged to examine their post-high school plans, and to take the appropriate credits that will allow them to achieve their postgraduate goals. Additionally, students are encouraged to gain proficiency in many areas of the curriculum.
3. Individual schools may require additional credits for graduation; to do so, the school must receive a written waiver from the designated Director of Schools, the Chief Academic Officer, and the Superintendent.
- ~~4. The Board recognizes the importance and is supportive of community service by requiring students to participate in service-learning activities, which are jointly developed by the District and school sites. Students are required to complete 60 hours of service learning before graduation.~~

#### Students Completing the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program

Beginning in Fall 2011, students who fulfill the requirements of an international baccalaureate (IB) program are considered to have met state high school graduation standards, so long as:

1. The student meets state graduation requirements;
2. The student meets the provision regarding study of the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of

- Washington; and
3. The student meets all graduation requirements required by Seattle Public Schools or by the student's school that are in addition to state minimum requirements, unless those requirements are waived by the student's principal or designee. Fulfilling the requirements of an international baccalaureate program means the student has:
    - A. Completed and passed all required IB courses as scored by the school;
    - B. Passed all internal assessments as scored by the school;
    - C. Successfully completed all required projects and products as scored by the school; and
    - D. Completed the final examinations administered by the international baccalaureate organization in each of the required subjects under the IB diploma program.

A student and his/her parent or guardian will be required to sign the "International Baccalaureate Option Form" indicating that the student and family understand that the waiver from state minimum graduation requirements only applies for students who fulfill the requirements of the IB program; should a student fail to meet the requirements, or if a student leaves the program prior to completion, he or she may be required to fulfill state and Seattle Public Schools minimum graduation requirements.

#### Graduation and Participation in Commencement

1. Students must be enrolled and attending a school for the semester immediately preceding graduation to be eligible to graduate from that school. Students who are participating in Running Start or who have properly obtained dual-enrollment in another school district or approved program may graduate from their affiliated District high school.
2. A student must have met all state graduation requirements or fulfilled the requirements of the International Baccalaureate program, and have met or waived all District graduation requirements, in order to participate in commencement, unless the student has a right to participate in commencement as a matter of state or federal law.

The Superintendent or the Superintendent's designee(s) shall annually create, post, and distribute a *Graduation Requirements Bulletin* for each graduating class detailing all graduation requirements, including requirements set forth by the State of Washington, a breakdown of the areas in which students must earn credit, and a process by which district and state requirements may be waived. The *Graduation Requirements Bulletin* and the *K-12 School Counseling Manual* serve as the administrative procedures to further implement this Policy.

Adopted: February 2012

Revised: March 2020; November 2017; January 2017; June 2014; August 2013

Cross Reference: 2420; K-12 Counseling Services Manual, Graduation Requirements Bulletin

Related Superintendent Procedure: N/A

Previous Policies: C15.00, G10.00

Legal Reference: RCW 28A.155.045 Certificate of individual achievement; RCW 28A.230 Compulsory Coursework and Activities; RCW 28A.230.090 High school graduation requirements or equivalencies - Reevaluation of graduation requirements — Review and authorization of proposed changes — Credit for courses taken before attending high school — Postsecondary credit equivalencies; RCW 28A.230.120 High school diplomas — Issuance — Option to receive final transcripts — Notice; RCW 28A.230.170 Study of constitutions compulsory - Rules; 28A.320 Provisions applicable to all districts; ; RCW 28A.600.300-400 Running start program; RCW 28A.635.060 Defacing or injuring school property — Liability of pupil, parent or guardian — Withholding grades, diploma, or transcripts — Suspension and restitution — Voluntary work program as alternative — Rights protected; RCW 28A.655.061 High school assessment system — Certificate of academic achievement requirements — Exemptions — Options to retake high school assessment — Objective alternative assessment — Student learning plans;; WAC 180-51 High school graduation requirements; WAC 392-121-182 Alternative Learning Experience Requirements; WAC 392-169 Special service programs - Running Start program; WAC 392-348 Secondary Education; WAC 392-410 Courses of studies and equivalencies; ESHB 1412  
Management Resource: *Policy News*, June 2013, June 2012