

Technical Assistance Paper

High School Graduation Options 2003-2004

BACKGROUND

Senate Bill 30A, passed by the 2003 Florida Legislature, amends several laws related to high school graduation. The purpose of these amendments is to provide students with accelerated high school graduation options and align the number of university admission credits with these new options. Under this new provision, high school students will have three graduation options.

The goal of the Legislature is to provide students and their parents the opportunity to select the graduation option that will most appropriately prepare the student for his or her chosen postsecondary and career path. To that end, the following options have been established:

- A four-year, 24-credit standard program (Sections 1003.429(1)(a) and 1003.43, Florida Statutes)
- A three-year, 18-credit standard college preparatory program (Section 1003.429(1)(b), Florida Statutes)
- A three-year, 18-credit career preparatory program (Section 1003.429(1)(c), Florida Statutes)

THIS LEGISLATION

- amends Section 1003.02, Florida Statutes (District school board operation and control of public K12 education within the school district.—), to require that at the beginning of each school year, each school district must notify parents of students in or entering high school of the opportunity and benefits of advanced placement, International Baccalaureate, Advanced International Certificate of Education, dual enrollment, and Florida Virtual School courses

- creates Section 1003.429, Florida Statutes (Accelerated high school graduation options.—), to require that, beginning with the 2003-2004 school year, each district school board must provide each student in grades six through twelve and their parents with the three-year and four-year high school graduation options, including curriculum for students and parents to select the postsecondary education or career plan that best fits their needs; this includes students graduating in 2004

- amends Section 1007.261, Florida Statutes (State universities; admissions of students.—), to require that students must successfully complete a college-preparatory curriculum of 18 credits to meet the minimum academic standards for undergraduate admission to a state university, instead of the current 19 credits.

SUMMARY OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION OPTIONS

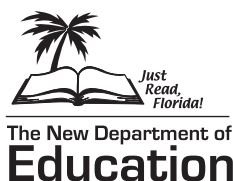
To graduate with a standard diploma, students must earn passing scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), achieve a cumulative grade point average of 2.0 on a 4.0 scale, and successfully complete credits in the required number and distribution, as noted on the following pages.

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BUREAU OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

SUMMARY OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION OPTIONS

The four-year, 24-credit graduation option requires:

- 4 credits in English (major concentration in composition and literature)
- 3 credits in math (must include Algebra I)
- 3 credits in science (two of which must include a lab component)
- 1 credit in American history
- 1 credit in world history
- 1/2 credit in economics
- 1/2 credit in American government
- 1 credit in practical arts/career and technical education or performing fine arts
- 1/2 credit in life management skills
- 1 credit in physical education
- 8 1/2 credits in electives

The three-year, 18-credit standard college preparatory graduation option requires:

- 4 credits in English (major concentration in composition and literature)
- 3 credits in math (Algebra I or higher)
- 3 credits in natural sciences (two of which must include a lab component)
- 3 credits in social science
- 2 credits in the same foreign language
- 3 credits in electives

The three-year, 18-credit career preparatory graduation option requires:

- 4 credits in English (major concentration in composition and literature)
- 3 credits in math (must include Algebra I)
- 3 credits in natural sciences (two of which must include a lab component)
- 3 credits in social science
- 2 credits in the same foreign language
- 3 credits in electives

The two new options require fewer credits but concentrate on more academic courses than the current four-year, 24-credit graduation option. Both of the new options require students to remain in high school for three years, reduce the number of elective courses, and require students to take two credits in the same foreign language. The college preparatory program also requires higher-level math courses than are currently required.

The college preparatory program and the career preparatory program are designed for students who are interested in graduating from high school in three years if that will further their academic and career goals. The number of credits within the college preparatory program aligns with the minimum standards for admissions into Florida's state university system, while the career preparatory program requirements are aimed toward entrance into a technical center or community college for career preparation. These new options are designed for students who are clear on their future goals, possess the maturity to leave high school, and feel they are ready to pursue their goals beyond high school in an accelerated manner. Each student and his or her parents must select the graduation option and curriculum that most appropriately prepares the student for his or her postsecondary education or career plan.

The three graduation options are simply options. The selection of a high school graduation option is the exclusive right of the student and his or her parents. They should be encouraged to consider the benefits of other acceleration opportunities, such as dual enrollment, advanced placement, early admission, and the International Baccalaureate. Advanced coursework in high school continues to be the best predictor of student success after high school. Students and parents are encouraged to discuss these plans with their school counselor on a regular basis during 6th through 12th grades.

Senate Bill 30A (Section 1003.02(1)(i), Florida Statutes) also requires that at the beginning of each school year, parents of students in or entering high school are notified of the opportunity and benefits of the following acceleration programs:

- advanced placement (AP)
- International Baccalaureate
- Advanced International Certificate of Education
- dual enrollment
- Florida Virtual High School

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

General

Q1. What is the timeline for implementation of the new graduation options?

A1. All public schools, including charter schools, must provide all three options to students and parents beginning in the 2003-2004 school year, including 12th grade students scheduled to graduate in 2004.

Q2. Must district student progression plans be updated to reflect the new graduation options?

A2. Yes. Student progression plans must be updated to reflect these options for the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year.

Q3. May high school credits awarded before 9th grade be counted among the required credits for the 18- or 24-credit options?

A3. Yes. However, for both of the 18-credit options, students must be enrolled in high school for three years. Also, high school credits earned before ninth grade are not counted by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) toward a student's NCAA eligibility.

Notice and Selection of Graduation Options

Q4. When must students and parents be given information regarding the graduation options?

A4. Beginning with the 2003-2004 school year, each district school board must provide each student in grades six through twelve and their parents with information regarding all three graduation options, including curriculum, so that students and their parents can select the postsecondary education or career plan that best fits their needs.

Q5. When must a student and his or her parents select the student's graduation option and will they be given an opportunity to revisit their decision on a graduation option subsequent to selecting an option?

A5. The student and his or her parent must receive information regarding graduation options at the beginning of every school year between grades six and twelve. Students and parents should make an initial selection during the student's eighth grade year, prior to the beginning of the student's first year of high school. It would be appropriate to allow the student and his or her parent to revisit this selection during the spring of each subsequent year that the student is enrolled, as the student determines his or her class schedule for the following year. Districts are encouraged to establish a regular schedule of opportunities for the student and his or her parent to revisit the selection of the student's graduation option.

Q6. What happens if a student and his or her parents do not select one of the three graduation options?

A6. If the student and parent do not select a graduation option, the student is considered to have selected the four-year standard graduation program that requires a minimum of 24 credits to graduate.

Q7. Can school districts establish regulations or restrictions on which students can exercise the new graduation options?

A7. No. The selection of a graduation option is the exclusive right of the student and his or her parents. School counselors and career specialists must use this opportunity to provide comprehensive information regarding the three graduation options and the acceleration programs. This will enable students and their parents to consider the educational benefits and programs that most appropriately prepare the student for his or her postsecondary education or career plan.

Q8. How will student choice of a graduation option be documented?

A8. Student and parent choice of a graduation option should be documented on a form that both the student and parent are required to sign.

Class of 2004

Q9. Will 12th grade students expected to graduate in 2004 be eligible to select one of the new graduation options?

A9. Yes. All students scheduled to graduate in 2004 and thereafter may select any of the three graduation options provided for in Section 1003.429, Florida Statutes. Given the impact of this opportunity for "early graduation" for 12th graders, it is important that students and their parents are informed of the critical deadlines for postsecondary admissions, financial assistance, scholarships, housing, and intercollegiate athletic eligibility.

Q10. Can 12th grade students expected to graduate in 2004 choose one of the 18-credit options, meet the requirements, and graduate mid-year?

A10. Yes. Students who complete the requirements for their chosen option mid-year may graduate as soon as they complete the requirements. Twelfth grade students returning to school who expected to graduate in 2004 and who have already met the requirements for graduation through one of the 18-credit

options must be given the opportunity to choose from among the three options. If the student and his or her parents select one of the 18-credit options, the student should graduate immediately. Consistent with Section 1003.433, Florida Statutes, out-of-state or out-of-country students who transfer to a Florida school district in 11th or 12th grade must also be provided with these options.

24-Credit Option

Q11. Is a district prohibited from requiring more than 24 credits for the four-year graduation option outlined in Section 1003.43, Florida Statutes?

A11. No. The district school board may continue to require completion of additional requirements to the four-year 24-credit standard graduation option. However, the new legislation does suggest reducing graduation requirements as a class-size reduction option to be considered by school districts (see Section 1003.03(3)(c)1, Florida Statutes).

18-Credit Option

Q12. Can a district establish additional requirements to the three-year graduation options to require more than 18 credits?

A12. No. Districts may not establish additional requirements for the three-year options (see Section 1003.429(4), Florida Statutes).

Q13. When are students who choose and meet all of the graduation requirements of one of the 18-credit options eligible to graduate?

A13. Students should graduate as soon as they have completed three years of high school and all of the requirements for their chosen 18-credit option, including passing scores on the 10th grade FCAT and a 2.0 cumulative grade point average. The district may elect to have a mid-year graduation ceremony for those students who complete graduation requirements at the end of the first semester, or they may choose to recognize these students during their annual end-of-year graduation ceremony.

Q14. Will a student who has chosen one of the 18-credit options and earned the required credits, but failed to pass one or both sections of the FCAT or maintain a 2.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale, be given a Certificate of Completion?

A14. No. A student who has not completed all requirements for the three-year options, including earning passing scores on the FCAT and achieving the required grade point average, must be required to meet the 24-credit option and would attend high school for a fourth year. The awarding of a Certificate of Completion is limited to students choosing the 24-credit option who have not earned passing scores on the 10th grade FCAT, or completed other district requirements for graduation, or maintained a 2.0 grade point average (see Section 1003.43(9), Florida Statutes).

Q15. Can students who choose one of the 18-credit options remain for a fourth year in order to continue eligibility to participate in high school athletics after they have met the graduation requirements for their chosen option?

A15. No. For more information regarding athletic eligibility, districts may contact the Florida High School Athletic Association at (352) 372-9551 or visit their website at www.fhsaa.org.

Q16. Will students who choose one of the 18-credit options be eligible to receive a Bright Futures scholarship?

A16. Yes, if they meet all of the requirements for a Bright Futures scholarship.

Q17. Will schools and school districts be required to provide instruction during the regular school day in courses normally taken during the student's fourth year (e.g., English IV) for third-year students who have selected one of the 18-credit options or offer classes this fall that may not currently be on their master schedules in order to accommodate 12th grade students choosing one of the 18-credit options and wishing to earn the credits by December 2003?

A17. Districts are strongly encouraged to maximize schedule flexibility to provide students with access to the classes that they need to graduate via their "chosen" graduation option.

Q18. Will students who have chosen one of the 18-credit options be eligible to participate in dual enrollment programs?

A18. Yes. All dual enrollment courses must be taken prior to the completion of the 18 required credits. Dual enrollment eligibility criteria must be specified in the district.