



# Building a Stronger Future Workforce for Oklahoma

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Oklahoma's future workforce is in school today. Regarding education policy, the business community can work to ensure Oklahoma's K-12 and post-secondary education systems prepare students for the workforce and hold the state's educational institutions accountable to that goal. Several education policy recommendations will better align Oklahoma's K-12 and post-secondary education systems to the workforce needs of the economy and business community.

## ***K-12 Education System [Align high school graduation requirements to career pathways](#)***

As Oklahoma shifts its educational focus to student outcomes instead of inputs, the state should also introduce flexibility in graduation requirements so that schools can build—and students can pursue—alternative pathways that align to readiness metrics.

Oklahoma's [current graduation requirements](#) permit very little deviation from the traditional college path established at the state level. Even with this attempt to strictly impose a college path on local districts and students, the state has little to show for it in terms of college readiness. Currently, Oklahoma allows two graduation tracks: college preparation/work ready [70 OS 11-103.6\(B\)](#) (the default track) and core curriculum in [70 OS 11-103.6\(D\)](#). Students must complete 23 credits during their high school career with the credits outlined in each track conforming to a mostly uniform, one size fits all standard set by the state.

These highly prescriptive graduation requirements not only limit schools from offering alternative career pathways for students, they also fail at their ostensible goal, preparation for college. Oklahoma significantly lags the nation in college readiness, ranking 46th in ACT takers meeting math benchmarks, 40th in ACT reading benchmarks, 42nd in SAT math benchmarks, and 36th in SAT ERW benchmarks.

With each track, there is a list of courses that must be completed. There is little ability for a student to gain competencies from each subject from anything other than classroom style instruction at the brick-and-mortar school. This eliminates the ability for students to receive applicable credit for completion of career and technology classes, applied or experiential learning, work experience, or other instructional work. Other states have begun to shift their graduation requirements to allow for more student flexibility.

West Virginia, for example, now mandates that all students must complete [the usual baseline requirements](#), but has added workforce specific requirements, as well. It is up to local school boards to set the accepted requirement. West Virginia has two unique hallmarks to their graduation requirements: the [personalized education plan](#) (PEP) and career and technical education (CTE) credentials. PEP credits are courses that will directly lead to entry-level credit bearing classes, an industry recognized license or certificate, or a workforce training program. CTE credits, meanwhile, are focused on specified career clusters, preparing students for either university or graduating with an industry credential.

Since 2019, [Washington](#) has allowed students to [choose between various options](#) including passing tests to meet benchmarks, receiving dual credit, accomplishing IB/AP/Cambridge courses,

completing a transition course, performance based study, the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), or CTE. [Performance based study](#) allows students to ‘count’ their experiences toward graduation requirements. If the student volunteered or had a job, he or she is able to apply that experience to the graduation requirements. Local districts must make rules regarding the parameters of acceptance.

Colorado takes a highly localized approach. Local districts set all graduation requirements, while the state sets what competencies each student should meet as well as [other benchmarks](#). Although Colorado’s model would provide the most flexibility for schools and districts, there are far fewer districts in Colorado than in Oklahoma, so a similar approach in Oklahoma carries the risk of extreme variations that limit cross-district cohesion. The first class with the fully implemented new menu of options for graduation requirements was the 2021-2022 graduating class, so it may be too early to assess the full impact of the shift.

Oklahoma must follow suit. Creating flexibility in the graduation requirements will make it easier for students to be on an educational pathway to prepare them for their post-secondary goals. This is accomplished by examining what courses count for each subject. This will not reduce the rigor of any class—rigor lies with the standards and competencies.

Graduation Requirements	
<p><i>Current - 23</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English – 4</li> <li>• Mathematics – 3</li> <li>• Science – 3</li> <li>• History and Citizenship – 3</li> <li>• World/Non-English Language OR computer Science – 2</li> <li>• Fine Arts or Speech – 1</li> <li>• Additional Unit – 1</li> <li>• Electives – 6</li> </ul>	<p><i>Proposed – 23 - Pathway</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English – 4</li> <li>• Mathematics – 3 → 4</li> <li>• Science – 3</li> <li>• History and Citizenship – 3</li> <li>• <del>World/Non-English Language OR computer Science – 2</del></li> <li>• <del>Fine Arts or Speech – 1</del></li> <li>• <del>Additional Unit – 1</del> → Pathway Units – 5</li> <li>• Electives – 6 → 4</li> </ul>

In the proposed Pathway centric graduation requirements, Math increases to four while allowing 3-hour career and technology programs to count as credit. A 3-hour career and technology course could also count toward science. Including these CTE courses as a core subject for graduation allows a student the ability to learn about the subject in a manner applicable to his or her future career and could possibly spark a greater interest in the subject because the student understands its applicability more.

The pathway centric plan also removes the world language or computer science and fine arts or speech requirements—shifting those credits to pathway units. This gives the student flexibility to obtain courses geared to what is next in his or her future. If that is college, then the student can still take a world language and it counts toward graduation; if that is a career, then that student can take career-oriented classes and it counts toward graduation. The pathway plan also shifts two electives to the pathway units, so that there is a focus on pathway inclusion and completion.

