

Graduation requirements: learning from the past

[Profession](#), [Teacher](#)



Graduation Requirements: Learning from the Past Over the past few decades, the way students learn has taken a drastic turn for the worse. Students memorize what they need to know, take the test, and then forget. Is this really going to help them in the long run? Students should be learning the material so that they can use it in the future. Back in Pythagoras' time, there were no graduation requirements. Pythagoreans learned on their own time. They wanted to learn and apply as much as they could. Pythagoreans searched for knowledge and understanding. Our education systems should focus on what will be best for each student. That is why President Obama is trying to make education reforms. The government wants students to learn more effectively and efficiently. As of right now, high schools require students to gain a certain amount of credits to graduate. This requires students to take classes that are not as academic so that they can gain enough credits to graduate. Students waste time taking classes like teacher aide and math lab. This wastes valuable time that students could use to continue their education. The University of Michigan explains that slowly losing memory and the ability to learn is not really noticeable until the loss is substantial enough to affect everyday activities. This is why younger adults in their 20s and 30s notice no losses at all, even though they are declining at the same rate as people in their 60s and 70s (University). The younger the student is, the better their memory and learning ability is. Students are forced to waste these valuable learning years taking classes that are not as important, when they could be learning more and implementing what they have learned. In the past, schools have tried implementing high school exit exams. The students were required to pass a test in order to graduate. In

1978, one school in Florida implemented a competency exam that students had to pass to receive their diploma. During that time period, the United States was still going through many racial issues in the South. Many people and students thought that the exit exam was another way to segregate the students. African-American students united and challenged the statewide test as racially based. In this case, the United States District Court held that the state could not deprive students of a high school diploma based on a competency exam unless the state could prove that the material on the test was taught in the classroom, that the test was fundamentally fair, and that the students were given adequate notice about the exam. In this case, the court determined that the test did not meet those requirements. The Florida education system was then mandated to remove the test (Philips ; Karger 5; " Summary"). This test was not implemented so that it would benefit the students in a positive way. The administrators should have put the students first. Later in the 1980's, schools tried to implement exit exams but another problem arose. The dropout rate was increasing. Many citizens believed it was due to the stress placed on students to pass the exams (Warren 137). Students should not feel worried when they take the tests. They should be prepared and feel confident when the time comes. The schools did not properly prepare the students for the tests. The most important thing in high school is that the students are learning. If students are not being educated so they are confident in their skills, why are they there? Schools should teach students they can accomplish anything, and then give them tools to do it. Schools in California have implemented the California High School Proficiency Examination or CHSPE. The CHSPE is an exam that a student

could take, and if they passed, he or she would receive the equivalent of a high school diploma and have the opportunity to leave high school. Since the program was implemented in 1975, adjustments have been made due to the lack of participants. Researchers believed that it was because many students did not know "about the tests (Abramowitz 53). The researchers also interviewed students and asked their opinions about the exams. One girl explained that she knew the diploma would gain ready acceptance, but she was not quite sure what having a certificate of readiness would do (Abramowitz 53). Other students felt that the CHSPE might get them out of high school, but it would not help them pass all the courses they need to excel in college (Abramowitz 53). Many students who passed the exams choose to stay in high school instead of continuing their education in college. In order for the program to be successful, the implementers would need to gain support from colleges, the community, and make it so the students felt confident they had enough knowledge to continue their education in college. Another point that was brought up was discrimination. The tests were said to be favoring certain types of students, the gifted or the fast learners. But every person is different. Everyone learns at different rates, so why punish the students who learn quickly? Should they not be encouraged to continue learning and gaining more knowledge? In the past, the tests may have favored certain students. If the school board took what they learned from all these different examples and compiled them, they could accomplish more. If they took positive pieces from each failed attempt, they would create the perfect graduation system that would benefit every student. High schools should change graduation requirements to demonstrated proficiency.

Students should have a class in each of the main subjects that are required for graduation. The classes should consist of things that would be most beneficial to them when they go to college and their future jobs. Of course, students should have tests along the way to ensure that they are understanding the ideas, and then a test at the end to make sure they remember the important concepts. The classes and tests would allow the students to demonstrate their proficiency. In other words, the students would show that they understand what they are learning and are able to apply it. Students should also have optional classes that they may take to help them prepare for those classes, along with the other classes high schools already have. They will still have the option to take art, physical education, and even teacher aide, but they are not required. Students will be able to take the classes they want to take instead of making sure they have enough credits in each subject to graduate. They are given freedom to see what they enjoy doing and then build upon it. There will be four main classes: one for Science, History, Mathematics, and English. The students will be required to take the classes by their senior year, but if they feel they are prepared, they can take them prior. Giving students the option to decide when to take their final classes will not only help them with their education, but also mentally. The students will be able to take the classes when they feel prepared, which will give them confidence. Once students pass those classes with a passing grade, they will get their diploma and have the opportunity to further their education in college. This will allow the students to manage their time wisely and spend it on the things that are important to them. Implementing demonstrated proficiency into graduation requirements will help students

learn efficiently, be cost effective, and allow students to better manage their time in a productive manner. It will also allow students to gain confidence in themselves. Changing the graduation requirements to demonstrated proficiency would be very feasible. It may initially cost more money based on each individual school, but it would be for the benefit of the school and students. Changing graduation requirements would benefit each school in a variety of ways. Since students will be allowed to take the classes when they feel ready, the other students who feel they are not prepared will be placed in smaller classes. This will benefit both groups of students. The students that feel more prepared will not have to sit in a class that is mostly just a review for them. Instead, they can take classes to help them individually. The other students will be put in smaller classes where the teachers will be able to focus specifically on each student. Whitehurst and Chingos discovered from their research into class-size reduction that, " very large class-size reductions... can have significant long-term effects on student achievement and other meaningful outcomes" (1). During their study, they looked into the Student Teacher Achievement Ratio, or (STAR) study which was conducted in Tennessee during the late 1980s. In the study, teachers were randomly assigned to a small class, with an average of 15 students, or a regular class with an average of 22 students. The large reduction in class-size was found to increase student achievement by an amount equivalent to about 3 additional months of schooling four years later (Whitehurst 1). Students learn more efficiently in classes with fewer students, they feel more comfortable, and are able to comprehend more of what the teacher is explaining. The teacher is able to focus on the standards each student does

not understand, making it so each student gets the most of his or her education. Of course this also means that the teachers must be well educated. Schools may have to pay more to hire better educated teachers at first, but in the long run, when the students are better educated, it will be worth it. Students deserve to be given the best education possible. Hiring teachers that are well qualified will definitely benefit students in the long run. Implementing demonstrated proficiency may take time, but the results will be well worth it. High school and college teachers would need to have a convention to discuss the most important things a high school student should learn. The high school teachers would then need to create a curriculum to fit those standards. The school board, superintendent, and school district administration would then need to approve the idea and concepts. Then if possible, they would need to talk to people who have implemented similar programs to help them implement the new system. The committee should also try to encourage the assistance and approval of the community. The more information that can be provided to the community before the demonstrated proficiency program is implemented, the better the school system. The semester before implementing the new system, advisors should go to a meeting for the upcoming freshmen and parents to explain the program and answer any questions they have. No one likes change, so the first group of students may seem resistant at first, but once the benefits are explained and their questions are answered, the students and parents should be open to the new system. The administration would then start to implement the new graduation requirements. Each student would receive adequate notice and preparation. Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors would

stick to the old graduation requirements because that is what was in place when they entered high school. Freshmen, on the other hand, will just be starting and will not have been working towards gaining credits. The older students will still have the opportunity to take the new classes, but they would not be required for them to graduate. As time goes on, they will see which classes are working and which are not. Because each school district is different, each school should appoint teacher advisors. The school's advisors would need to meet together on a month to month basis to make sure the program is working. As they gather new information, they will record it and make adjustments to make the program better. The advisors could then meet with advisors from other schools to compare data. Each school will then be able to make the necessary changes that will benefit their students. In conclusion, changing graduation requirements to demonstrated proficiency will be very beneficial for the students. It is cost effective and it will enhance the learning capability of every student. Students will gain confidence in themselves while learning in an effective and efficient manner. They will be able to take classes they feel will benefit them, without feeling like they will not gain enough credits to graduate. Students can move at their own pace and will be able to receive the necessary attention they need from teachers. Teachers will be able to focus on standards that the students do not understand and be able find ways to help each student learn and remember the standards. When students graduate from high school, they will be equipped with the necessary knowledge they need as they continue their lives, whether it be in their future jobs or college schooling.

Demonstrated Proficiency is the best choice for graduation requirements

because it focuses on what is best for each student. Works Cited

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