

EDUCATION CURRICULUM

Support for consistent core graduation requirements for all students

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) recommends that the legislature review the expansive core requirements in HB 2886 to allow for options in electives and options in meeting graduation requirements to reflect the values of the local district.

The LWVOK suggests that professional educators, legislators, and citizens work together to decide the core graduation requirements necessary for all Oklahoma students. The basic core requirements for high school graduation should emphasize:

- math, including the algebra course;
- science,
- government, economics, and history; and
- language arts.

The LWVOK strongly suggests that all students complete these basic core requirements.

The LWVOK believes that the legislature should not mandate the individual class objectives of local districts or Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS) objectives. PASS objectives should continue to be regulated by a committee of professional educators, classroom teachers and administrators. The objectives should be consistent in all classrooms throughout the state. PASS objectives for all courses required for graduation should continue to be available to the public.

The LWVOK suggests that local districts concentrate on offering a variety of electives that emphasize citizenship and the development of life skills.

The LWVOK believes that state or federal resources should be available to help school districts meet the mandates. The LWVOK suggests high schools look to higher education institutions, including community and junior colleges, as well as career and vocational schools to help meet the challenges of offering advanced courses and electives.

Consensus approved 2005

BACKGROUND

In 2001, the Stillwater League of Women Voters recommended a study on the curriculum offered at the secondary level of common schools. This was adopted at the 2001 LWVOK Convention. The study looked at the history of curriculum development in Oklahoma and the curriculum presently offered in high schools. The study focused on mandates legislated by the state and federal governments and the curriculum concerns of school administrators.

The law resulting from HB 2886, which was passed in 2001, mandated the following requirements for high school graduation in Oklahoma:

- 3 units of mathematics, base level Algebra I;
- 3 units of science, base level Biology;
- 4 units of language arts
- 3 units of social science, and
- 2 units of arts

Thus, 15 of the 23 units required for high school graduation are specified. Two years of a foreign language are not required, but are encouraged.

Course material is based on sets of competencies specified in the PASS objectives adopted by the State Board of Education in 2002. These PASS standards are available to the public.

In 2001, the federal government passed the *No Child Left Behind Act* which mandated tests to evaluate which students met educational standards and listed steps to be taken at schools where students' test scores did not meet standards.

It should be noted that 50.1% of Oklahoma's high school graduates went directly to a public college or university in Oklahoma. Of these, 36.65% took at least one remedial course. During high school, 39.5% of the students participated in career and technology programs.

Questionnaires were sent to school administrators in districts throughout the state to assess their concerns about curriculum. In addition, some school administrators were interviewed by LWVOK members. Sixty-four school administrators responded. The sample included high schools with student populations that ranged from 38 to 4000 and were located from the panhandle to the eastern border of the state. At least one private school responded.

From interviews, the LWVOK concluded that Oklahoma high schools have succeeded in meeting the graduation requirements mandated in HB 2886. The majority of the administrators agreed with the concept of the mandates, but a lack of flexibility was the over-arching concern of the school administrators about the legislated mandates.

The curriculum needed to be flexible enough to meet the needs of both college-bound and vocation-bound students. Flexibility in math requirements was a special concern, especially with the base Algebra I course.

There were also concerns about conflicts with art, music, agricultural classes, career tech, band, and other electives. A large percentage of administrators wanted more local control. However, others felt that, in some instances, state control might eliminate some conflicts with the local school board.

Although administrators throughout the state believed that teachers did control the curriculum in their classes, it was found that teachers have input on the curriculum only after mandates and the PASS objectives were met.