



HIGH SCHOOL SUCCESS COALITION

July 7, 2020

Washington State Board of Education
c/o Randy Spaulding, Executive Director
600 Washington Street
Olympia, WA 98504

RE: July 2020 State Board of Education draft legislative priorities

Dear State Board of Education members and staff,

We are writing to you as the High School Success Coalition in advance of your consideration of legislative priorities for a possible 2020 special session and the 2021 regular session. As a group of organizations, we advocate for proven policies that are grounded in racial equity and that support every student on their path to achieve a rigorous high school diploma and pursue their dreams. Our membership includes Black Education Strategy Roundtable, College Success Foundation, Education Reform Now, Graduate Tacoma, School's Out Washington, Stand for Children Washington, Treehouse, and the Washington Roundtable.

We strongly discourage any suspension of the graduation pathway options in the 2020-2021 school year without providing alternatives that demonstrate a student's postsecondary and career readiness. Removing this requirement for all students goes against the intent of the legislature and the duty of our public schools to ensure students leave high school prepared for their post-secondary pathway.

Additionally, flexibility granted to districts in terms of credit requirements should first address barriers to instruction that would necessitate a waiver in the first place. We also recommend that any attempt to make the credit waiver process permanent through legislative action must incorporate a way for districts to make good on the intent of House Bill 1599 and allow *alternatives of comparable rigor*.

We know that students of color, particularly Black and Brown students, native and indigenous students, and students learning English, with special needs, experiencing poverty, or experiencing foster care or homelessness, are bearing the brunt of inequity in the wake of school closures. We also acknowledge the disproportionate effects felt by students without internet connectivity or devices to access instruction. However, these students should not be pushed through high school with waivers because of their background or circumstances. They deserve access to instruction, not a lower bar for success. **We urge the State Board to direct its attention to supporting students, not suspending requirements that ensure a rigorous and high-quality education.**

A critical way to ensure the State Board meets its paramount duty to students is to systematically engage and hear from a broad and diverse group of community-based stakeholders as legislative priorities, policies, and rules are developed, drafted, and adopted. The State Board's engagement processes have mostly included districts, associations, and stakeholders with limited representation by communities of color. Therefore, we urge the State Board to meet its commitment to equity and diversity by including community-based organizations, especially from underserved communities, in any conversations that engage districts and professional associations. This includes countless community-based organizations working directly with students, particularly students of color and their families.

The High School Success Coalition members are available to partner with the State Board to broaden and diversify stakeholder engagement. In submitting this letter, we hope to continue engaging in the ongoing process outlined in the Board's [equity statement](#) to collaboratively and transparently use "equity as a lens to continuously assess and improve the collective process of policymaking to ensure our school system's commitment and ability to meet the needs of all students today and into the future."

Sincerely,

The High School Success Coalition, including:

Steve Smith, Executive Director
Black Education Strategy Roundtable

Juliette Schindler Kelly, Director of Public Affairs and Strategic Partnerships
College Success Foundation

Shirline Wilson, Executive Director
Education Reform Now

Tafona Ervin, Executive Director
Foundation for Tacoma Students (Graduate Tacoma)

David Beard, Policy & Advocacy Director
School's Out Washington

Libuse Binder, Executive Director
Stand for Children Washington

Dawn Rains, Chief Policy & Strategy Officer
Treehouse

Brian Jeffries, Policy Director, Partnership for Learning
Washington Roundtable