

Graduation Requirements: Fourth year of math and science required for graduation beginning with this year's eight grade class.

In an effort to meet new legal requirements that add a fourth year of math and science study to high school graduation requirements and to avoid harming elective courses, the State Board of Education signaled that it will consider increasing the number of credits required for graduation from 24 to 26 when the board meets Sept. 13-15.

The graduation plan proposals under consideration only apply to the Recommended High School Graduation Program and the Distinguished Achievement Program. The changes are expected to apply to students who are entering eighth grade this fall.

"This is huge. We are significantly raising the requirements to graduate in Texas," said Don McLeroy, a board member from Bryan.

Some of the changes are required by House Bill 1, the education finance and reform law passed by the Legislature and signed by Governor Rick Perry in May. That law mandates that students following either the State's recommended or distinguished graduation plan must earn four credits in math, science, social studies and English, also known as the 4X4.

The diploma requirements already require four courses of social studies / economics and English and the board had already passed a rule requiring a fourth year of science, if there was sufficient funding.

Some additional changes and modifications are being debated as the board considers new graduation requirements.

Board members asked staff to bring the following proposals forward in September for the Recommended High School Graduation Program and Distinguished Achievement Program:

- ❑ Mathematics - All students in these two graduation plans should be required to take Algebra I and II and geometry, plus an additional approved math course for which Algebra II is a prerequisite.
- ❑ Science - All students following these two graduation plans should be required to take biology, chemistry, and physics, plus an additional approved laboratory-based science.
- ❑ Earth and Space Science should be added to the list of approved science classes.
- ❑ Engineering is to be considered for inclusion in the list of approved math and/or science classes and new curriculum standards must be prepared for an engineering course.

Because of a petition to the board by a citizen, Computer Science will be considered as an option for course credit in the math and/or science category.

Additionally, the board will consider increasing the total number of credits required for the Recommended High School Program or Distinguished Achievement Program from 24 to 26.

The Minimum Graduation Program, which requires 22 credits, would not be affected by any of the proposals.

Currently, only Alabama requires students to earn 26 credits for graduation.

Increasing the overall number of credits was suggested when it was noted that the number of elective credits would drop from 3.5 to 1.5 in the recommended program, if the fourth credits of math and science study were added and the total number of course

credits remained at 24. The number of elective credits would drop from 2.5 to 0.5 for the Distinguished Achievement Program under this scenario.

Robert Floyd, executive director of the Texas Music Educators Association, urged the board to preserve elective courses, which can help hold students' interest in school and prevent them from dropping out. "It's important to continue to allow the flexibility to participate in those courses which...engage students in learning," he said.