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## **MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Members, Utah State Board of Education

**FROM:** Martell Menlove, Ph.D.  
Chief Executive Officer

**DATE:** February 7, 2014

**INFORMATION:** Graduation and Grading Task Force

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### **Background:**

Under the direction of the Utah State Board of Education, a task force was created to examine current required standards for graduation. A presentation of the Graduation and Grading Task Force recommendations was made at the October 4, 2103 Board meeting. In follow up to the meeting, the USOE was charged with sharing information with stakeholder groups and seeking feedback.

### **Key Points:**

The Graduation and Grading Task Force will share a summary of the stakeholder input regarding the DRAFT recommendations with the Board.

### **Anticipated Action:**

The Standards and Assessment Committee will hear the report on the DRAFT recommendations from the Graduation Task Force and consider a course of action for implementation.

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**Graduation and Grading Task Force**  
 Progress Report to the Utah State Board of Education  
 February 7, 2014

Background

In the spring of 2013, the Utah State Board of Education (USB E) requested that the Utah State Office of Education (USOE) establish a task force to further research the recommendations that were presented in the USOE-sponsored webinar entitled “Increasing High School Rigor and Ensuring College and Career Readiness.” The Graduation and Grading Task Force was established, met numerous times, and presented its recommendation to the USB E at the October 4, 2013 Board meeting.

Following the presentation of the Graduation and Grading Task Force recommendations, the task force chairs, Glenna Gallo and Karl Wilson were directed to organize public input meetings in order to share the recommendations and gather additional public input. Over a four-month period, ten meetings were held with Utah stakeholders (parents and community, curriculum directors, special education directors, charter school directors, and superintendents). Meetings were announced publicly and a press release was disseminated to the media. Stakeholders unable to attend a meeting were provided with a copy of the materials and the opportunity to submit input through email.

Summary of Input

The Public Input meetings were organized to provide the same presentation that was given to the Board (October 2013) and to request written input around key Graduation and Grading Task Force recommendations. At each of the Input Meetings held, participants asked that the USB E recognize the impact on Utah’s education system of implementing multiple major initiatives at the same time. The chart below outlines the questions and summarizes the responses.

<b>Question 1:</b> Will the recommendation to have two pathways (General studies; Individualized/Focused) better meet the future needs of students?	
Yes – 88.7% Maybe – 8.5% No – 2.8%	<p><u>Most Common Responses to Question 1</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Individualized/Focused Pathway would work well for students who have specific direction and are able to set goals; this may not work as well for students who don’t have those supports or traits.</li> <li>2. Provide greater flexibility.</li> <li>3. Extended time would be good for some students.</li> <li>4. Need to consider how higher education would accept a diploma based on an individualized focus.</li> <li>5. Recommendation to standardize credits.</li> <li>6. Accelerated time would be good for some students.</li> <li>7. Need for additional counselors who work individually with students in planning.</li> </ol>

**Question 2:** What challenges will need to be addressed in order to enable LEAs to implement the two pathways?

Most Common Responses to Question 2

1. Need to consider the funding implications of the two pathways, including extended learning period.
2. Counselors will need additional time to work with students and families, and need to receive professional development.
3. Need to consider the course taking options at the local level (e.g., limitations for small LEAs).
4. Need to allow for individual student needs, interests, maturity, and capacity (e.g., SWD, EL, High Achieving, adaptations, changing student interests).
5. Need to provide training to teachers and administrators.
6. Need to consider parent training and support.

**Question 3:** Will the proposed credit recommendations better meet the future needs of students?

Most Common Responses to Question 3

Yes – 75%  
Maybe – 14.3%  
No – 10.7%

1. Perception that determining credits outside the core 13 would provide greater choice and flexibility for students.
2. Need to consider the course work necessary for college acceptance.
3. Need to consider which courses/credits would be required of all students (e.g., 13 essential academic credits: Math, Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies).
4. Need to consider the implications (including resources needed) for smaller LEAs to provide a variety of courses aligned with the non-13 essential academic credits.
5. Need to ensure that all students have a variety of courses that create well-rounded individuals.

**Question 4:** What challenges need to be addressed in order to enable LEAs to align course offerings with recommended graduation credits?

Most Common Responses to Question 4

1. Consider the need for additional resources (e.g., funding, counseling, teachers, small LEAs).
2. Serious concerns about implementation timeline and adequate professional development for staff and parents.
3. Determine the implications for students enrolling in higher education or entering the military (e.g., credits, ACT, rigor).

4. Need to consider how schools will provide sufficient course offerings to meet the individualized/focus pathway for some students.
5. Consider how schools will address the situation when students establish a specific focus under the individualized/focus plan and then change their mind.
6. Consider specific courses that would be required of all students outside the 13 essential academic credits (e.g., Arts, P.E., Health, Financial Literacy, Computer Technology).
7. Concern expressed about the number of major education initiatives already underway and the stress of adding another major change at the same time.

**Question 5:** Will the recommendation to move toward competency-based grading systems better meet the future needs of students?

Yes – 74.1%  
 Maybe – 17.2%  
 No – 8.6%

Most Common Responses to Question 5

1. Need to determine how student competency would be accurately and consistently measured.
2. Determine which courses would be subject to competency-based grading requirements.
3. Consider the resources necessary to implement a new grading system.
4. Consider how to provide information to parents and potential employers that would foster support of competency-based grading.
5. Some respondents felt that separating citizenship from the academic grade would be a good idea, but citizenship is still valuable.

**Question 6:** What challenges will need to be addressed in order to enable LEAs to implement new competency-based grading systems?

Most Common Responses to Question 6

1. Consider the need for professional development for teachers and counselors to successfully implement a new competency-based grading system.
2. Consider how competency will be defined and measured.
3. Consider how to share with teachers (inform and persuade) the value of a new grading procedure.
4. Consider how populations with unique needs (e.g., EL, SWD) will demonstrate competency.
5. Consider how to share with parents (inform and persuade) the value of a new grading procedure.
6. Consider how student remediation opportunities will be consistently and clearly defined, in order to ensure alignment with new grading and graduation requirements.
7. Recognize that other major initiatives (e.g., core standards, new assessment, educator evaluation) make implementing one more major initiative overwhelming.

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**Question 7:** What additional input would you provide to the Utah State Board of Education in considering graduation and grading requirements?

### Most Common Responses to Question 7

1. In determining the mandatory credits that all students must have to graduate beyond the 13 essential academic credits, opinions differ on what additional courses should be required by the state:
  - Computer Technology
  - Increase Total Math Credits
  - Financial Literacy
2. Need to consider the importance of training for counselors and other staff.
3. Although change may be difficult, numerous respondents felt that the change is needed.
4. In developing the pathways to graduation, ensure that the needs and rights of students with disabilities are preserved.
5. With the proposed extended-time option for students (other than students with disabilities), consider the implications in terms of funding, dropout, and the process for determining if students qualify for extended-time pathway.
6. The USBE should consider the impact of multiple initiatives already underway, when moving toward new graduation and grading requirements, to not overwhelm LEAs, schools and teachers (e.g., reasonable timeline, additional resources).
7. In developing ways to measure student competency, ensure that competency measures are fair, rigorous, and accessible to students.
8. Need more counselors with specific time dedicated to working with students on graduation pathways.

### Next Steps

In consultation with USOE leadership, the chairs of the Graduation and Grading Task Force recommend that USOE staff take the following steps to prepare more formal recommendations to the Utah State Board of Education regarding Graduation Pathways and Requirements and Grading Policies:

1. Convene representatives from the three major task forces to align recommendations:
  - Graduation and Grading Task Force
  - Computer Technology Task Force
  - Financial Literacy Task Force
2. Gather data and conduct an analysis of cost estimates related to specific Graduation and Grading Task Force recommendations
3. Participate in discussions with representatives from higher education to share the Graduation and Grading Task Force recommendations and to identify specific issues related to college admissions and scholarships that might result from the recommended changes.