

ARTICLE: FUTURE-READY CORE ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS

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During the summer of 2007, the North Carolina State Board of Education approved a Future-Ready Core Course of Study that is intended to prepare all students for careers and college learning in the 21st century. The new course of study will be effective with the rising ninth grade class of 2009-10 (current eighth graders). In a news release shortly following the State Board of Education's unanimous approval of the new standards, Chairman Howard Lee commented, "The Future-Ready Core will help ensure that students graduate with the academic foundation they need for success in the global economy. The Core gives students the ability to tailor course concentrations to fit their interests and goals – including opportunities for college-level work – while building a strong academic foundation."

Last month, middle and high school principals and guidance counselors across our state received copies of communication materials on the Future-Ready Core course of study and new high school graduation requirements. In the next few weeks, parents and guardians of current eighth grade students will receive copies of the following materials:

- Student Accountability Standards: Make the Grade to Succeed, and
- Graduating Future Ready.

This information will allow students, parents/guardians and community members to better understand why high school graduation requirements have been changed. Specific information will also be including regarding the required courses to be taken while in high school. The following units will be required for graduation under the Future-Ready Core:

- 4 Mathematics Units
- 4 English Units
- 3 Social Studies Units
- 3 Science Units
- 1 Health and Physical Education Unit
- 6 Elective Units
- 4 Unit Concentration

The changes represent an increase in the level of mathematics proficiency for many students as well as a one-unit increase in the total number of units required under state standards. The Occupational Course of Study will continue to be available for those students with disabilities who are specifically identified for this program. There are no changes to the Occupational Course of Study.

In Macon County, we have previously taken advantage of the flexibility provided to local districts to create curricula pathways that are innovative and rigorous. We will continue to encourage all students to take advantage of opportunities to participate in college level courses while in high school. Such opportunities for our students include access to the Macon Early College Learn and Earn partnership with our school district and Southwestern Community College. In addition, all students have access to dual enrollment courses that provide both high school and college credit for the designated course(s) completed. Recently, the North Carolina Virtual Public High School and evolved and now offers more than 190 online courses that include a wide array of AP courses for juniors and seniors. Through these programs and partnerships, our students will be “globally competitive” individuals who can now graduate high school with up to two years of college completed including an associate’s degree – tuition free!

Innovations in Macon County continue that have placed our school system slightly ahead of other districts throughout the state. Other changes being mandated by the State Board of Education include the need for all students to complete a graduation project. Highlands High School, Nantahala High School and Franklin High School students have been requiring the “senior projects” prior to this mandate from the State Board of Education. The Graduation Project provides an authentic way of measuring the mastery of skills from the North Carolina Standard Course of Study throughout high school, as well as obtaining and practicing 21st century skills. To complete the graduation project, students must first select a topic from one of three categories: exploration of a career they are considering as a future profession, exploration of a topic that impacts the community, or, exploration of a new skill that can be enjoyed for their entire lives. The range of topics is as diverse and broad as our students’ interests and imagination. Beginning with the Class of 2010 (this year’s junior class), this requirement will be extended across North Carolina to ensure that all high school students complete the graduation project. As aligned with our current local requirements, the North Carolina Graduation Project has four components: 1) a research paper, 2) a product, 3) a portfolio, and 4) an oral presentation. The *North Carolina Graduation Project*, one of the new exit standards, provides an opportunity for students to demonstrate their knowledge in an area of interest.

We are very fortunate in Macon County to be slightly ahead of the curve with this and other accountability processes already in place for our graduates. A tremendous thank you is extended to our Board of Education for establishing a vision for our school district, to all administrators and staff members for carrying out this vision and for the parents, students and community leaders who have continued to encourage and celebrate with students as they continue to meet higher academic standards. If you or someone you know may be interested in assisting with Graduation Projects, please contact Mrs. Nancy Cantrell, Director of Secondary Education at the Central Services Office, 524, 3314. For more information about the Future-Ready Core, the NC Graduation Project, or 21st Century Graduates, please visit the Public Schools of North Carolina at www.ncpublicschools.org.

