
High School Policy – Elective Focus

The Background:

The State Board of Education’s *High School Policy*¹ states that “All students will pursue a focused program of study preparing them for postsecondary study.” The elective focus consists of three credits of linked curricula beyond the required course of study for a high school diploma. The Board created five elective focus areas² and granted latitude to local education agencies to create or adopt others to meet the needs and resources of the district and the students. Districts have been creative in both designing focus areas and finding ways for students to meet the elective focus requirement.

Most states do not have a similar elective focus requirement. Often, when students transfer into a Tennessee high school from another state or another district they arrive without the credits necessary to complete the elective focus requirement in a timely manner. This can delay graduation significantly, or even make graduation impossible for some students.

This agenda item adds language to the *High School Policy*. It gives additional flexibility to principals and directors of schools, and allows them to waive the elective focus requirement if “completion of the elective focus would prevent or delay graduation.” This flexibility in no way lessens the other aspects of the curriculum and students will need to meet the minimum number of credits for graduation. The amendment articulates the differences between students who transfer within the state and those who transfer from a school outside Tennessee.

The State Board of Education staff would like to thank Mr. Michael Kyle, principal of Wooddale High School in Shelby County. He raised the issue of transfer students and how this was creating additional challenges for students who had otherwise met the requirements for graduation. Mr. Kyle and Board staff worked together on this language through a series of conversations and correspondence.

The Recommendation:

The State Board of Education staff recommends adoption of this item on final reading.

¹ High School Policy 2.103

² The elective focus areas are CTE, math and science, humanities, fine arts, and AP/IB

High School Policy

2. ONE PATH

All students will pursue a focused program of study preparing them for postsecondary study. While all students may not enter postsecondary training immediately following high school, they must be prepared for lifelong learning.

Policy Implications:

- a. Students will complete an elective focus of no less than three credits. The elective focus may be CTE, science and math, humanities, fine arts, AP/IB, or other areas approved by the local board of education. Students completing a CTE elective focus must complete three units in the same CTE program area or state-approved program of study. Students completing a CTE elective focus in Trade & Industrial Education must complete three credits from one of the eight state-approved focus areas. (The eight focus areas are identified in Board Policy 3.208, #19. Trade and Industrial Education.)

Schools should make every effort to ensure that all students complete a state or locally approved elective focus, however schools may waive the elective focus requirement for those students who transfer during the junior or senior year to a Tennessee high school from a school in another state, if the completion of the elective focus would prevent or delay graduation.

Students who begin an elective focus in a Tennessee high school and transfer during the junior or senior year to another Tennessee high school may, with the permission of the Director of Schools, have the elective focus requirement waived if the receiving school does not offer the same elective focus area and is unable to offer related coursework to complete a state or locally approved focus area, or if the completion of the elective focus would prevent or delay graduation.

- b. Local boards of education are encouraged to consider requirements for students to complete a capstone experience such as, but not limited to:
 - senior project
 - Virtual Enterprise
 - internship
 - externship
 - work-based learning
 - service learning (minimum of 40 hours)
 - community service (minimum of 40 hours)
- c. Students will complete two units of the same foreign language and one unit of fine arts except in limited circumstances (students not planning to attend the university), schools may waive the two units of foreign language and one unit of fine arts to expand and enhance their elective focus.

- d. Students will be required to complete a total of 22 units, including electives. Since most high schools offer the opportunity to take at least 6 units each year, for a total of 24 units, students will actually have an opportunity to take a considerable number of electives. Students who attend high schools using block scheduling have the opportunity to take a total of 32 units.
- e. Students who score at or above all of the subject area readiness benchmarks on the ACT or equivalent score on the SAT will graduate with honors.
- f. Students will be recognized as graduating with “distinction” by attaining a B average and completing at least one of the following:
 - earn a nationally recognized industry certification
 - participate in at least one of the Governor’s Schools
 - participate in one of the state’s All State musical organizations
 - be selected as a National Merit Finalist or Semi-Finalist
 - attain a score of 31 or higher composite score on the ACT
 - attain a score of 3 or higher on at least two advanced placement exams
 - successfully complete the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme
 - earn 12 or more semester hours of transcribed postsecondary credit

Each local school board shall develop a policy prescribing how students graduating with “distinction” will be noted and recognized.