

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Gloria Romero, Chair
2009-2010 Regular Session

BILL NO: AB 2446
AUTHOR: Furutani
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FISCAL COMM: Yes
URGENCY: No
HEARING DATE: June 30, 2010
CONSULTANT: Beth Graybill

SUBJECT: Graduation Requirements

KEY POLICY ISSUE

Should students have the option to take a course in career technical education to meet high school graduation requirements?

SUMMARY

This bill temporarily adds, commencing with the 2011-12 school year, career technical education, as defined, as an option for pupils to fulfill the existing high school graduation requirement to complete a course in visual or performing arts or foreign language.

BACKGROUND

Existing law requires the governing board of a school district that maintains at least one high school to prescribe courses of study designed to provide pupils with the skills and knowledge required for adult life, including a course of study designed to prepare prospective pupils for admission to state colleges and universities and a course of study for career technical training. (Education Code § 51224)

In order to graduate high school, current law requires all pupils to: 1) pass both the English language arts and mathematics portions of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE); 2) complete the 13 year-long courses listed below; and 3) complete other coursework requirements adopted by the governing board of the school district. (EC § 51225.3)

- 1) 3 courses in English.
- 2) 2 courses mathematics.
- 3) 2 courses of science, including biological and physical science.
- 4) 3 courses in social studies, including: United States history and geography, one semester of American government, and one semester of economics.
- 5) 1 course in visual or performing arts or foreign language.
- 6) 2 courses in physical education, unless exempt by law.

High school students interested in matriculating to a California public university upon graduation must complete the minimum coursework for high school graduation and satisfy the subject area requirements established by the California State University (CSU) and the University of California (UC) for undergraduate admission. The following pattern of coursework is commonly referred to as the "a-g" requirements:

- a) 2 years of history/social science.
- b) 4 years of college preparatory English or language instruction.
- c) 3 years of college preparatory mathematics (4 years recommended).
- d) 2 years of laboratory science (3 years recommended).
- e) 2 years of a foreign language (3 years recommended).
- f) 1 year of visual and performing arts.
- g) 1 year of college preparatory electives.

Existing law requires each school district maintaining any of grades 7 to 12, inclusive, to offer courses of study that (1) fulfill the requirements and prerequisites for admission to California public institutions of postsecondary education and (2) provide an opportunity for pupils to attain entry-level employment skills in business or industry. School districts may fulfill their responsibility pursuant to number (2) by adopting a required curriculum that meets or exceeds the model standards CTE adopted by the State Board of Education. (EC § 51228)

ANALYSIS

This bill:

- 1) Temporarily adds, commencing with the 2011-12 school year, a course in career technical education as an option to the existing graduation requirement that pupils complete one course in visual or performing arts (VPA) or foreign language.
- 2) Defines a course in career technical education to mean a course in a district-operated career technical education program that is aligned to the career technical model curriculum standards and framework adopted by the State Board of Education (SBE).
- 3) Specifies that a school or school district that does not currently offer career technical education courses is not required to start a new career technical education program for purposes of this bill.
- 4) Requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to report to the appropriate policy committees of the Legislature by January 1, 2015, on the number of pupils who took a CTE course in order to fulfill the graduation requirement and allows school districts to report this information through the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System.
- 5) Makes the provisions added by this bill inoperative on July 1, 2016, and repeals the provisions of the bill on January 1, 2017.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) Need for the bill. Various studies have indicated that California's ability to maintain competitiveness in the global economy will depend on a highly skilled and educated workforce. Yet according Superintendent's recent report to the Legislature on "Multiple Pathways to Student Success" nearly one-fifth of all students fail to graduate from California public high schools and many high school graduates find they have not gained the skills they need to qualify for either postsecondary education or family-wage career paths. A February 2008 report from the California Dropout Research Project concluded that dropping out and low achievement have many shared causes, including low engagement. According to the author's office, the purpose of AB 2446 is to help students stay engaged during high school and enable them to be successful by allowing them meet one of the graduation requirements by taking a CTE course.

- 2) Career technical education (CTE). Although this bill would require the CTE course to be aligned to the state CTE model curriculum standards, it is difficult to know how many CTE courses meet the CTE standards as there is no statewide mechanism in place to ensure the courses are aligned to the SBE standards. The SBE adopted CTE model standards in 2005 and the CTE framework in 2007. CTE course offerings range in method of delivery and course content. CTE courses may be delivered by Regional Occupational Centers/Programs (ROC/P), partnership academies, agricultural programs, and tech-prep programs. While there are a number of CTE courses that meet or even exceed the rigor of high school graduation courses and more than 6,500 have been approved to meet the a-g requirements, CTE courses vary in the degree of rigor and alignment to the CTE standards, thus raising the question of whether CTE courses would be as rigorous as a VPA or foreign language course.

This bill restricts the CTE courses that may be taken to satisfy the graduation requirement to district-operated CTE programs, which could limit access to qualifying CTE courses, such as county operated Regional Occupational Center or Programs (ROC/P) or courses available through a ROC/P that is operated by a joint powers agency (JPA). While some would argue that restricting the option to district-operated CTE programs enables a district to have greater control over the coursework, ROC/P programs integrate core academic knowledge with technical and occupational knowledge to provide students with a pathway to postsecondary education and careers. Should they also be an option for students?

- 3) Potential impact on student success and achievement. A variety of studies have shown that students who participate in programs that include rigorous and relevant CTE, tend to stay in school and perform well on state assessments such as the CAHSEE. While proponents of this bill maintain that providing students the option to take a CTE course instead of a VPA or foreign language course could help schools reduce their dropout rates, opponents have expressed concern about the effect AB 2446 could have on student achievement. The Multiple Pathways report notes that California

