

MEMO AND TALKING POINTS

Proposed High School Diploma Changes

BACKGROUND

The Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) has [proposed](#) significant changes to the high school diploma structure with the introduction of the Indiana GPS Diploma and Indiana GPS Diploma Plus. These proposed changes include flexible course selections under the Flex 40 model and a more rigorous option under the Flex 40 Plus. The proposal raises serious concerns regarding their impact on student preparedness, educational equity and the overall stability of the learning environment. The [State Board of Education](#) (state board) is the governing body responsible for approving these proposed changes through a formal rulemaking process. Indiana's current graduation requirements sunset on October 1, 2028, making the final requirements effective for all students beginning with the class of 2029 (current seventh graders). Schools may opt-in to the new requirements beginning with the completion of the state board's rulemaking. All stakeholders can submit official feedback to the IDOE [here](#).

TIMELINE

- **Rulemaking Initiation:** March - The state board initiated the rulemaking process following a proposal from the IDOE.
- **Public Comment Period 1:** Spring - The first opportunity for public feedback, allowing educators, parents and students to voice their opinions on the initial proposal.
- **Proposal Revisions:** Summer, likely June - Following public feedback, sometime this summer the IDOE will revise the initial proposal.
- **Public Comment Period 2:** Late Summer - A second public comment period will occur after the revisions, providing another opportunity for feedback on the updated proposal.
- **Anticipated Final Vote:** August, or likely, September - The state board is expected to take a final vote on the revised diploma changes.
- **Legal Approval Deadline:** By law, the state board must give their final approval of the new diploma model by December.



KEY CONCERNS AND PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Flexibility vs. Rigor in Diploma Options

- **Concern:** The Flex 40 model is seen as too loose, lacking the rigor of the current Core 40, while the Flex 40 Plus is viewed as too rigorous and unattainable for many students and difficult for numerous schools to offer it. Some districts, particularly rural and small school corporations, may lack the resources and available opportunities to provide students with external work-based options.
- **Solution:** Introduce a middle-ground diploma option that balances flexibility and rigor, ensuring it meets both academic standards and diverse student needs.

Early Specialization

- **Concern:** Requiring students to choose a specific educational path in middle school is premature and may limit their ability to explore different interests in high school. It is misguided to expect students at such a young age to make lasting decisions about their futures with tracks that limit adaptability.
- **Solution:** Allow for more flexibility in changing educational pathways throughout high school, possibly by implementing regular review points where students can adjust their course trajectories.

Curriculum Alignment with Higher Education Requirements

- **Concern:** The proposed diploma requirements may not align with college entrance requirements, leading to the need for remedial courses.
- **Solution:** Establish a task force with representatives from higher education institutions to ensure the diploma requirements align with college admissions standards and reduce the need for remedial courses.

Accountability and Tracking of Student Progress

- **Concern:** There is significant worry about who will monitor and verify the completion of coursework and extracurricular activities, especially those conducted outside of traditional school settings. Additionally, the new requirements could cause workload increases and staffing concerns in many districts where school employees are already overloaded beyond capacity.
- **Solution:** Develop a centralized tracking system managed by school districts, with clear guidelines and support for both students and educators to document and verify out-of-school learning experiences.



Equity in Access to Educational Opportunities

- **Concern:** Transportation to off-site learning opportunities poses a significant equity challenge, potentially disadvantaging students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
- **Solution:** Leverage existing career centers to provide accessible, high-quality learning opportunities within local communities. Additionally, provide funding for transportation solutions, such as school-provided shuttles, to ensure all students have equal access to these opportunities.

Implications for Transferring Students

- **Concern:** The transition for students moving between districts or from out-of-state poses challenges under the new system.
- **Solution:** Create standardized guidelines for credit transfer and pathway equivalencies to ensure smooth transitions for transferring students.

Implementation Timeline and Preparedness

- **Concern:** There is widespread anxiety that there is not enough time to properly implement these changes by the time current 7th graders begin scheduling for 9th grade.
- **Solution:** Extend the implementation timeline to allow for thorough preparation and piloting of the new diploma structure, ensuring all stakeholders, especially parents, are adequately prepared.

Maintaining a Broad Educational Perspective

- **Concern:** The focus on workforce readiness will overshadow the importance of creating well-rounded citizens with a broad worldview.
- **Solution:** Integrate essential courses such as world history and world languages into the diploma requirements. Additionally, separate civic literacy from financial and digital literacy, and consider making civic education a standalone requirement to emphasize its importance in preparing active and informed citizens.

