

Edmonds School District
Culminating Project Committee
Final Recommendation
June 2014

BACKGROUND

As the Board of Directors is aware, during this most recent legislative session, the state legislature passed Senate Bill 6552 which states:

“Effective with the graduating class of 2015, the state board of education may not establish a requirement for students to complete a culminating project for graduation.”

In that same legislation it reminded districts that “any decision on whether a student has met ...high school graduation requirements...shall remain at the local level”, thus leaving the option to continue with a culminating project requirement should local school boards choose to do so.

The Board of Directors is also aware that earlier this school year, we convened a committee to review the current state of the Senior Project in the Edmonds School District across all high schools. The original purpose of that committee was to have representatives in all schools share out their current practices around senior project with the goal of collaboratively producing common expectations for all students regardless of which school they attended.

After three meetings in the winter and fall, the committee recommended changes to district procedures that were implemented resulting in a more common experience but not one that was equal. The committee established common expectations on the length of presentations, portfolio contents, and even dates when students could begin their projects.

The inequality was based in large part on the history of the implementation of the senior project across schools which was largely site-based and in some cases involved a significant amount of classroom time in some schools, particularly in senior English classes. Other schools had very little, if any time, dedicated to senior project during classroom time.

With the announcement of the new legislation, the committee was reconvened in April to review our past work in light of this new legislation and charged with making a recommendation to the board on whether to maintain a senior project requirement locally even though it was no longer required at the state level. The committee recommended that a survey be conducted to gather input from all stakeholders, particularly students, staff, parents, and community members. Specifically, the committee wanted to know, in light of the new legislation, if stakeholders wanted to either a) keep the senior project requirement as it currently is b) eliminate the senior project as a graduation requirement or c) keep it as a requirement but modify it in some way.

The survey resulted in over 3800 replies including over 1300 written responses. With regard to the three options noted above the results were heavily in favor of eliminating the requirement.

Keep the Project	14.2%	481
Eliminate the Project	75.3%	2552
Keep the project, but modify	10.5%	355

A deeper analysis of the data showed that the sentiment to eliminate the project was shared across stakeholder groups.

	Keep the Project	Eliminate the Project	Keep, but Modify
Parents	13%	79%	8%
Students	11%	80%	9%
Staff	17%	67%	16%

Likewise the sentiment was similar when respondents were isolated by the high school with which they associated.

	Keep the Project	Eliminate the Project	Keep but Modify
EWHS	12%	81%	7%
LHS	8%	83%	9%
MDHS	17%	68%	15%
MTHS	13%	77%	10%

A common theme among many of the written comments was a sense of stress felt by students, families and some staff. And while many commented on the benefits of the project, some hoped the requirement would be taken away as it was too stressful for some.

In addition to the survey results, the committee also considered the increased requirements and expectations for our high school students beginning in 2015. Next year's class is the first required to not only meet standard on reading, writing and math assessments; they will be the first that is also required to pass the biology end of course exam. Next year will also be the first time that the new Smarter Balanced Assessment will count as a graduation requirement. If experience with other states is any indicator, the passage rate on this new assessment may be lower than we currently experience with the HSPE and EOC models. Lastly, SB 6552 also talks about adding two more credits to the graduation requirement in the next few years that will raise the number from 22 to 24 in Edmonds.

The culminating project was an unfunded mandate from the state when it was initiated several years ago. It is rare that a school district has an opportunity to remove such a requirement.

RECCOMENDATION

In consideration of the information provided above, the Culminating Project Committee recommends that the Edmonds School District Senior Project graduation requirement be eliminated.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 1) As mentioned previously, many stakeholders who advocated for the removal of the senior project, acknowledged the benefits of some of the elements of the project. In that regard, the committee would recommend that the board explore ways to embed those elements in existing classes or programs. While not exhaustive, some of those important elements include:
 - a. Time Management Skills
 - b. Presentation Skills
 - c. Organization Skills
 - d. Reflection
 - e. Setting goals and determining how to reach them.
 - f. Defining Success
 - g. Community/Civic Mindedness

- h. Discovery
- i. Career and College Planning

Being thoughtful during next year's 7-12 Language Arts Adoption process, with a keen eye on 12th grade English might be a place to consider embedment of some of the elements above. Likewise, the current Personal Finance Class, which is a graduation requirement, and already has some elements listed above, could be another place to look for that opportunity. Perhaps an exploration of an elective option for seniors could address some of these areas as well. Incentivizing students to volunteer in their community should be explored as well as there is fear by the committee of a drop off with removal of the requirement. Lastly, we would encourage further exploration of a college and career planning tool/platform that could build some of the skills over the entire secondary experience, not just in 12th grade.

- 2) As mentioned, some 12th grade English classes already have large amounts of classroom time dedicated to the senior project. If the project is eliminated as a graduation requirement it will be critical for the district to offer support to those English teachers that will need time and resources to adjust their class offering next year before the new curriculum adoption goes into effect.