

MONITORING REPORT: Policy R-2.8 (Academic Achievement: Electives)

PHASE ONE: Interpretation, Benchmark Data, and Goals

DATE: June 2019

Policy

All students will master the skills and demonstrate proficiency in each required discipline and electives:

Discipline: Electives

Interpretation

We understand this policy expresses the value the Board places on offering our middle and high school students a vibrant program of elective courses.

In this context, **elective** refers to those courses a student takes by choice rather than to fulfill a particular graduation requirement. In fact, the word elective is sometimes used as a noun to mean "optional class." High school electives often encompass such subjects as art, music, drama, and career & technical education. Electives may also be classes a student takes in core subject areas that go beyond the required minimum. For instance, while a certain number of math, physical education, or world language classes may be required for graduation, additional math, physical education, or world language classes a student chooses to complete beyond the minimum are considered elective. While specific elective courses are not required, they do generate credit a student can apply toward the 24-credit minimum necessary to earn a Washington State diploma. The Board recognizes electives are an important component of young people's secondary-level education, offering them many benefits that support their development as well-rounded learners and individuals. Such benefits include the following:

1. Electives provide an **element of choice**, which, in turn, engenders student engagement. In a nationwide survey of students in grades 6-12 conducted by Heather Wolpert-Gawron for book called *Just Ask Us: Kids Speak Out on Student Engagement*, student choice ranked very high in their responses to the question, "As learners, what engages you most?" According to education researcher Robert Marzano, choice "has also been linked to increases in student effort, task performance, and subsequent learning." In short, electives play a role in keeping students on campus, in class, and making positive progress.

2. Electives lead to **new relationships and friendships**. They provide an avenue for students to meet peers with similar interests and make new friends through shared pursuits.
3. Electives foster student **connection with teachers**. In many cases, the content of elective courses reflect the interests of the teachers who teach them as well as the students who choose them, thereby providing a young person with a self-selected connection to the adult in the room.
4. Electives promote **more engagement of teachers** as well as students. When teachers help create a master schedule that reflects their interests, they tend to experience greater job satisfaction.
5. Electives provide **support for core classes and academic skills**. Courses such as yearbook, journalism, world languages, theater, and business & marketing can do double duty as vehicles for reinforcing literacy standards in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Many CTE, physical education, and health classes provide perfect venues for real-world application of science and math standards.
6. Electives provide **an element of differentiation** by providing access to key competencies through subject areas that reflect a learner's interests and preferences. This kind of interest-based differentiation helps students engage with new information, understanding, and skills by making connections with things they already find appealing, intriguing, relevant, and worthwhile. Such things are often linked to students' strengths, cultural context, personal experiences, questions, and/or sense of need. They help students "own" the content, and they often positively impact their emotions and feelings about the learning.
7. Electives help students **discover and explore** who they are and what their **interests and aptitudes** are. Through electives, they can find out "how they are smart," not just "how smart they are" according to standards for a course of study determined by someone else.
8. At the secondary level, electives become **gifted and talented programs**. Students who excel in math, science, or world languages can choose advanced classes in these content areas to fulfill their elective credit requirements. Swing Choir and Concert Band are avenues for gifted and talented musicians. AP Studio Art provides a rigorous learning experience for students whose talents lie in the visual arts. And so on.
9. Electives foster **self-confidence**. Finding success in electives can boost students' self-esteem in ways that motivate them in life and even in their other academic courses.
10. Electives play a role in our achieving our goal of ensuring all students graduate **college, career, and citizenship ready**. By encouraging the exploration of individual

interests, elective classes can help students discover their strengths and begin to think about potential career pathways that reflect their skills and passions. For instance, recent research by the Bureau of Labor and Statistics reports that some of the fastest growing occupations between now and 2026 will be in the fields of renewable energy, technology, and healthcare -- all of which are reflected in the electives we currently offer in our schools. Whether students choose college or career directly following high school, the electives they are exposed to in middle and high school can direct them in selecting their most appropriate post-high course of action.

11. Electives enhance **resumes and college applications**. Many employers and institutions of higher learning look for young people with a unique interests and skill sets.

We understand this policy expresses the School Board's expectation that all students enrolled in elective courses will demonstrate mastery of content, concepts, and practices as measured by national, state, and/or classroom-based assessments. Or they will provide evidence they are making reasonable progress toward such mastery. In other words, the Board is interested in results.

Washington State Requirements Regarding Electives

Electives are characterized by the State as flexible credits. That is, they are courses considered beyond minimum credit requirements for graduation in each of the required content areas. They are not content specific but reach across all content areas.

For example, Pre-Calculus and Calculus are both elective courses. The Washington State graduation requirement in the area of math is 3.0 credits. Any course a student takes beyond the third credit in math is considered elective. All career & technical courses are deemed elective. While students are required to take 1.5 CTE credits to graduate, no specific CTE course is required. Students may choose among the CTE courses offered to meet this graduation requirement.

At the State level, efforts are underway to intensify career-connected education by encouraging the alignment of students' course selections to Personalized Pathways. These efforts promise to become increasingly important considerations as students, parents, and staff navigate the elective options provided by our schools. Recent Washington State Legislation requires all students to begin a High School & Beyond Plan in grades 7-8. Key components of these plans are the Personalized Pathway and Personalized Pathway Requirements, which the State has defined as follows:

- **Personalized Pathway** refers to a locally determined body of coursework identified in a student's High School & Beyond plan that is deemed necessary to attain the post-secondary career or educational goals chosen by the student.
- **Personalized Pathway Requirements** refer to the credits the State allows a student to include as part of his/her Personalized Pathway *instead of* other State graduation requirements. The State allows up to three Personalized Pathway course

credits chosen by the student as preparation for meeting a specific post-secondary career or educational goal.

Current State of Ferndale School District's Elective Programs

Middle School Elective Programming

In the process of preparing this report, we have recognized areas in which we can improve access to achieve greater equity in our elective programs. The following chart provides a first attempt at looking at our middle school electives through an equity lens.

	Horizon	Vista
Total Number of Students	474 students	602 Students
Total Number of Electives Available to Grade 6 Students	8 Courses	9 Courses
Total Number of Electives Available to Grade 7 Students	11 Courses	11 Courses
Total Number of Electives Available to Grade 8 Students	13 Courses	14 Courses
Number of Native American Students in Music Courses	13 Students 2.7%	16 Students 2.6%
Number of Native American Students in Advanced Elective Courses	17 Students 3.6%	7 Students 1.1%
Number of Native Students in a Leadership Courses	23 Students 4.9%	15 Students 2.5%
Number of Students on Free/Reduced Lunch in Music Courses	72 Students 15.2%	91 Students 15.1%
Number of Students on Free/Reduced Lunch in Advanced Elective Courses	112 Students 22.3%	53 Students 8.8%
Number of Students on Free/Reduced Lunch in a Leadership Courses	108 Students 22.8%	97 Students 16.1%
Number of Students with Disabilities in Music Courses	26 Students 5.5%	20 Students 3.3%
Number of Students with Disabilities in Advanced Elective Courses	33 Students 6.9%	9 Students 1.5%
Number of Students with Disabilities in a Leadership Courses	6 Students 1.3%	31 Students 5.1%

High School Elective Programming

As with our review of middle school elective programming, we began our analysis of high school electives by trying to understand what the enrollment of students in particular courses suggests about the degree to which our elective program is both well-rounded and equitable. The following data provides a snapshot of our advanced high school elective programs in terms of the number of courses available at each grade

level. We have also captured specific data about students enrolled in the leadership courses we currently offer.

Grade	Advanced Courses (Includes AP, College Prep, and Honors)	Number of Native American Students in Advanced Course	Number of Hispanic Students in Advanced Course	Number of Native Students in Leadership Course	Number of Students on Free/Reduced Lunch in Leadership Course	Number of Students with Disabilities in Leadership Course
9	8	1	1	1	2	0
10	13	6	17	15	19	6
11	24	7	7	12	25	8
12	36	9	10	13	37	6

Improvement Goals

Creating this report has made us realize that our data collection and analysis around elective programs is incomplete and inadequate. To address these deficiencies, we have established the following goals for the year ahead:

1. Complete a full Equity Audit of our elective programs, followed by an analysis of the reasons for any inequities it reveals (perceptions, fees, counseling, etc.) and plan for addressing these reasons.
2. As part of the Audit, collect and analyze student grade data in elective programs.
3. Create a crosswalk model that maps the ways our elective programs are supporting our students' High School & Beyond Plans through a well-developed Career Pathway model.