

## ATTACHMENT B: Coursework and Graduation Requirements in Public School Education

- The majority of states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core State Standards or equivalent standards, and school districts have responded with corresponding curricula.
- The number of required units for graduation ranges from 13 to 24.5, with the majority requiring 22 to 24 units. All but three states require a specific number of units for graduation; the remaining three states either allow districts to individually make the decision or require demonstrations of proficiency rather than Carnegie units<sup>1</sup> as a measure of curricular mastery.
- Basic diploma requirements in almost all states have become increasingly rigorous, including algebra I and geometry. The numbers below reflect the most basic diploma requirements applicable to all students except those with disabilities or those with a waiver.
  - English/language arts: All but one state require four units.
  - Mathematics: Eighteen states require four units; 23 require three units; and six require two units. While some states do not specify actual course requirements, of those that do, 31 (100 percent) require at least algebra I and 27 (87 percent) require at least algebra 1 and geometry. Another three states base their assessment of student mastery on the CCSS standards, which includes both algebra 1 and geometry.
  - Social Science: Requirements range from a half unit to four units, with an average of three units. Most states specify particular courses of study for these units, most often courses in state history, world history, U.S. history, and civics.
  - Science: Science requirements range from two to four units, averaging three units. Within this requirement, some states name specific courses to be completed and/or the number of courses with a laboratory component to be completed. Of those states that dictate the number of courses that must have a laboratory component, 23 (100 percent) require at least one lab course, seven (30 percent) require two lab courses, and 10 (44 percent) require three lab courses. In states that define a “laboratory course,” almost all define the lab portion as involving 20 percent of class time.
  - Other requirements: Most states require one to two units of physical education/health and many require some combination of arts, foreign language, and career technical courses, in addition to electives.
- The summative assessment(s) required for graduation vary. Increasingly, states are requiring demonstration of content proficiency, at least at the 11<sup>th</sup> grade level. States are creating proficiency assessments, using existing high school exit exams or preparing to set cut scores for Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), and similar assessments. Several states require demonstrations of proficiency (essentially summative assessments in all courses) not Carnegie units, to earn a high school diploma.

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<sup>1</sup> A Carnegie Unit is 120 hours of class or contact time with an instructor over the course of a year at the high school level.

- The extent to which states accept (or require) proficiency demonstrations in lieu of units also varies. Some states allow demonstration of proficiency in lieu of Carnegie units or as partial completion for Carnegie units. One such demonstration of proficiency common in Job Corps high school programs is the granting of Carnegie units for passing sections of a High School Equivalency (HSE) exam. With the growth of capacity in computer programming to identify skills and understanding that students have (or have not) mastered in any given curriculum, states have increasingly endorsed the concept of competency-based certification of learning, as opposed to or in addition to Carnegie unit-based certification.