



Orientation to Washington Schools:

Preparing for High School Graduation and What Comes Next

To graduate from high school in Washington state, students must complete three main requirements:

1. Finish a High School and Beyond Plan
2. Earn enough high school credits
3. Complete a graduation pathway

High School and Beyond Plan

Starting in seventh grade, every student in Washington is required to create a High School and Beyond Plan. This is a step-by-step guide that helps students think about their future goals, choose the right classes, and prepare for education or job training after high school.



The students work on this plan every year and it includes:

- **A class schedule:** A class schedule: a list of classes to take during the four years of high school that meet graduation requirements
- **Future goals:** a list of career or jobs the student is interested in
- **A resume:** a document that shows a student's education, skills and work history
- **Financial support:** information on how to find and apply for money to pay for college or job training

It is important for students and parents to ask the school how to access the plan online and complete check-ins and tasks each semester. Parent involvement helps students make better choices about classes and future goals.

High School Credits

In high school, students earn credits when they successfully complete their classes. To graduate, students must earn at least 24 credits, though some school districts may require more. Check with your school counselor about your district's requirements.

Most year-long classes give one full credit, while semester classes usually give half a credit. To graduate in four years, students generally need to earn six credits each year.



Students must complete 17 required credits in main subjects. These include:

- **English** – 4 credits
- **Math** – 3 credits
- **Science** – 3 credits
- **Social studies** – 3 credits
- **Arts** – 2 credits
- **Health and fitness** – 2 credits



Students also complete **7 elective credits**. Electives are classes students pick based on their interests and what's available.

Multilingual Students who can show their ability to speak, read, or write another language other than English may be able to earn up to four high school credits. Ask your school counselor about getting **world language credit**.

Students must also complete a **Washington state history class**, usually in middle school. If your student started school in the United States after seventh grade, talk with your school counselor about how to meet this requirement.

Most students complete high school in four years, but some students may need more time to complete graduation requirements. Students can attend high school until the age of 21. If you are concerned about how long it will take your student, you can ask your school counselor about summer school, online courses, and other options for credits.

Graduation Pathways

Students must also complete a graduation pathway.

The available graduation pathways provide options for how students show they're ready to graduate and prepared for life after high school.

Graduation pathway options vary but may include passing certain state or college entrance tests, passing specific advanced or college level courses, completing career and technical education courses, or demonstrating readiness through real-world experiences, such as a project, work experience, or community service.

Talk to your school counselor to learn more about graduation pathways and determine which one is best for your student.



Getting college credit in high school

Students can sometimes get college credit while still in high school. These are called "dual credit" programs. Ask your counselor about the options available at your school.

Support from School Counselors

School counselors play a really important role in preparing your student for graduation and life after high school.

In addition to helping students with the topics we have already discussed, school counselors can help with much more, including exploring career paths, applying for college or training programs, and finding financial aid.

School counselors often host family information nights about college and career planning.

Families are encouraged to request individual meetings with a school counselor when they start high school.



How Families Can Help Students Prepare

Important ways you can support your students:

1. Support regular school attendance
2. Use the school's online system to check grades and attendance
3. Attend parent-teacher conferences and family information nights
4. Talk with your student about their goals and future plans
5. Encourage students to join sports, clubs, or activities
6. Meet with the school counselor at least once each year
7. Ask your school counselor early in high school about the High School and Beyond Plan and how many semesters your student needs to graduate
8. Review your student's High School and Beyond Plan at least once a year



Planning early can help students stay on track for graduation. Talk with your school counselor regularly and use school resources to follow your student's progress.

When families stay informed and involved, students are better prepared for graduation and for their next step after high school.

Resources

- Ready Washington: [High School and Beyond Plan](#), [Plan for the Future](#), [Resources for Students and Families](#)
- Washington State Board of Education: [Graduation Requirements](#), [World Language FAQs](#)
- Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction: [Credit Requirements](#), [Graduation Pathways](#), [High School and Beyond Plan](#)

This resource was supported by the Office of Refugee Resettlement's Afghan Refugee School Impact: Support to Schools Initiative, under an agreement between the Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Washington (OSPI) and School's Out Washington, financed by Washington State Department of Social and Health Services' Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance (DSHS/ORIA), but do not necessarily represent the policies or official views of OSPI nor DSHS/ORIA and should not assume endorsement by the State of Washington.