

# East Side Union High School District

*Preparing Every Student to Thrive in a Global Society*

**White Paper: A Driver for Change – Aligning ESUHSD Graduation Requirements to A-G**  
*Chris D. Funk, Superintendent*

In March 2010, the East Side Union High School District Board of Trustees took a significant step toward improving the educational outcomes for all students when it approved the measure to make the A-G sequence of courses for UC/CSU admission the default curriculum for all students. This was a significant step toward closing the opportunity gap and establishing access to higher-level course work for historically marginalized students. ESUHSD was only the second district in Santa Clara County to make this policy.

In the spring of 2012, the Board of Trustees took another significant step toward furthering the district's commitment to equity by passing Equity Board Policy 0105. At the time of approval, fewer than 10% of school districts across California had an equity policy, thereby, positioning East side as a leader in this critical movement. This courageous and symbolic move sent a message to our community that ESUHSD has a moral imperative to create access to opportunity for every student.

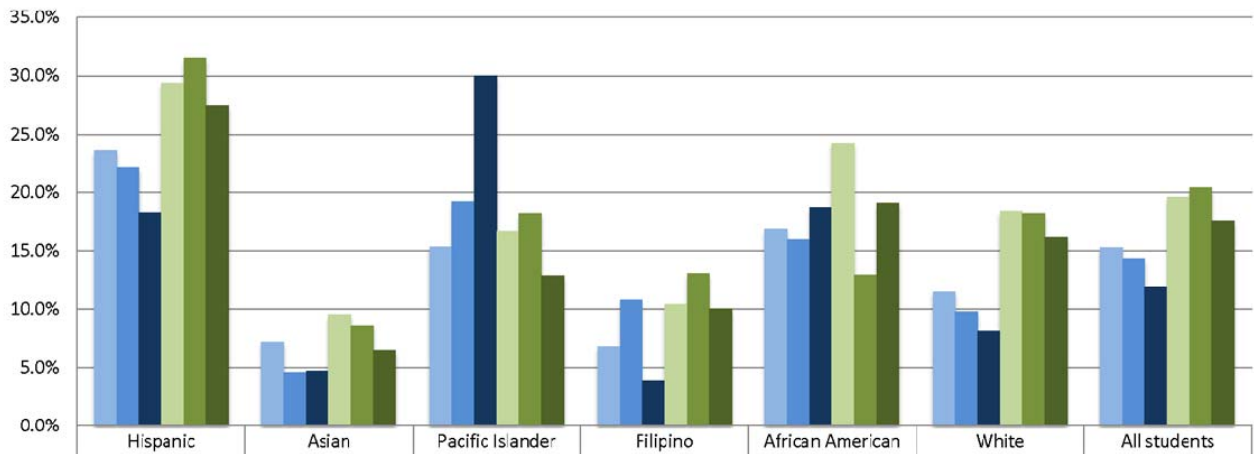
Currently, the Board of Trustees is on track to ratify a new Strategic Plan with the overall goal that: **Every** student graduates prepared for college and career, empowered to thrive in a global society. The Strategic Plan will operationalize the district's commitment to equity through five key change levers, each linked to goals, strategies and actions. The Trustees have also identified five key performance measures to hold the organization accountable to its vision:

1. Improve *graduation rate*
2. Decrease *dropout rate*
3. Improve *A-G completion rate (15 course sequence for UC/CSU qualifications)*
4. Develop *College & Career Readiness Indicators (5Cs) –Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, and Civic Engagement*
5. Decrease *achievement gaps as defined by measures 1-3 and other indicators, such as suspension and expulsion rates.*

## **The Challenge We Aim To Address**

Even as East Side is steadfast in its commitment to improve learning outcomes for all students; the district recognizes it has a significant achievement gap. Latinos and African American students comprise 49% of East Side's overall population and are the lowest performing student subgroups within the district. On every critical academic performance indicator, Latino and African American subgroups score significantly below their Asian and White peers. Considering the anticipated majority population of these subgroups, it is imperative that we create policies, structures and learning environments that prepare every student to thrive in a global society. The transition to the Common Core Standards is a great opportunity for educators and school districts to truly transform how teachers teach and how students demonstrate their learning.

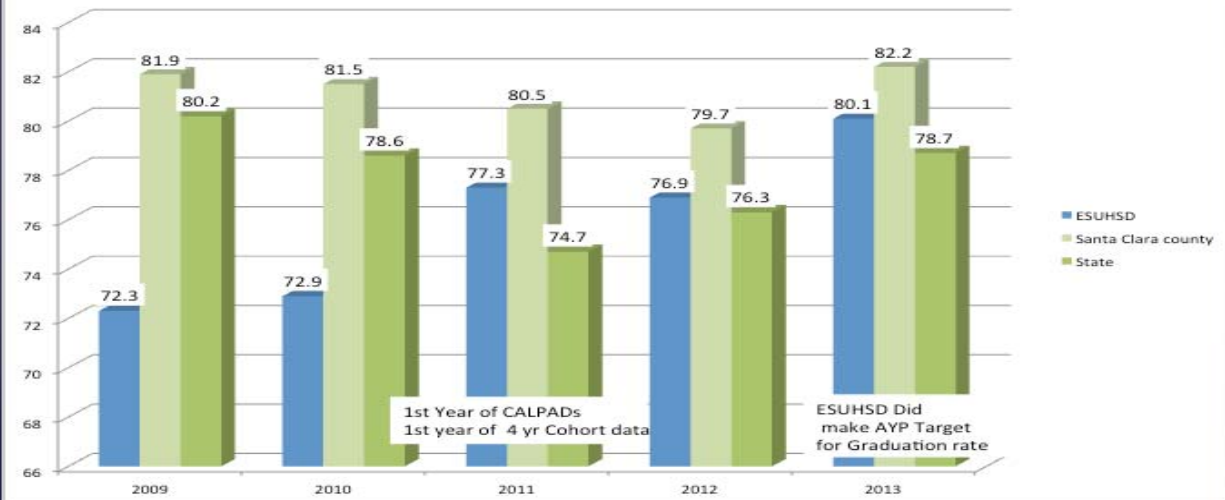
### ESUHSD 4-year Cohort Dropout Rate By Gender & Ethnicity



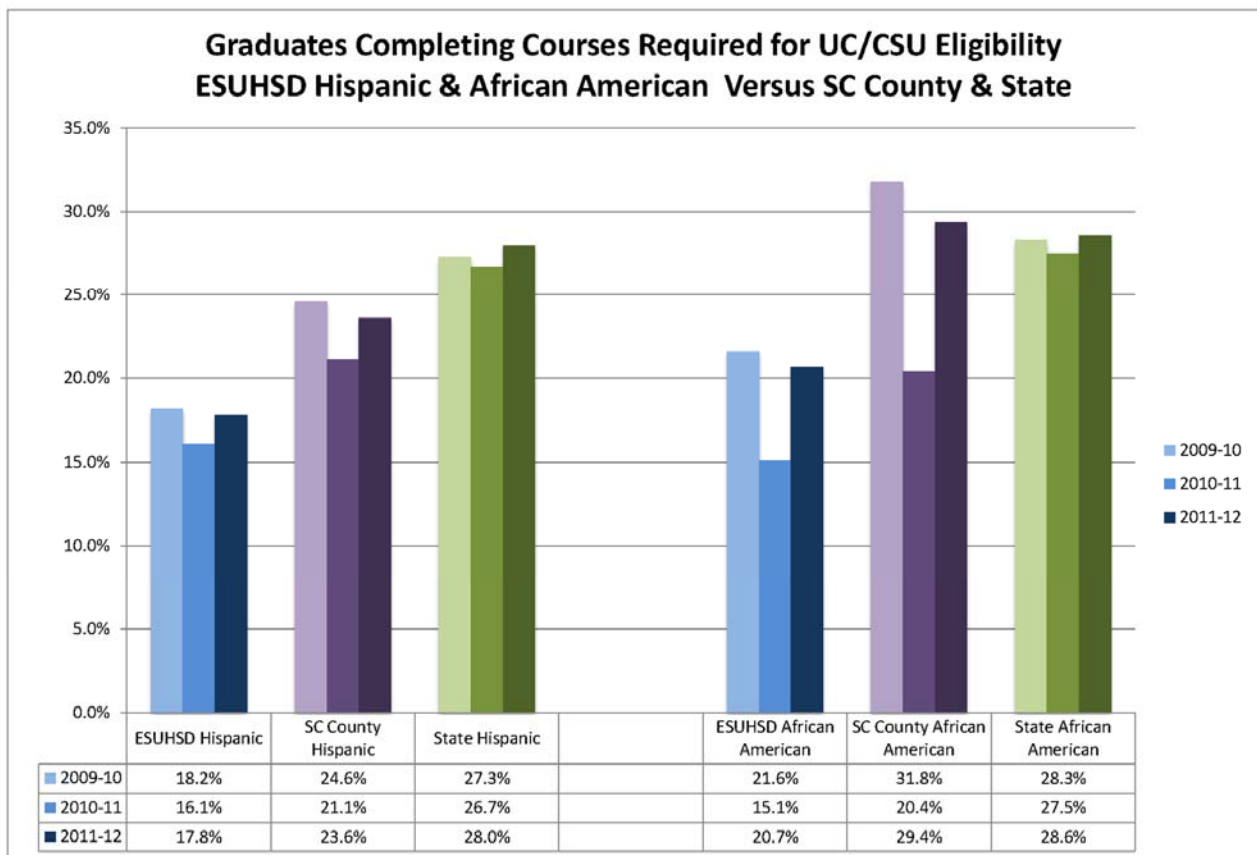
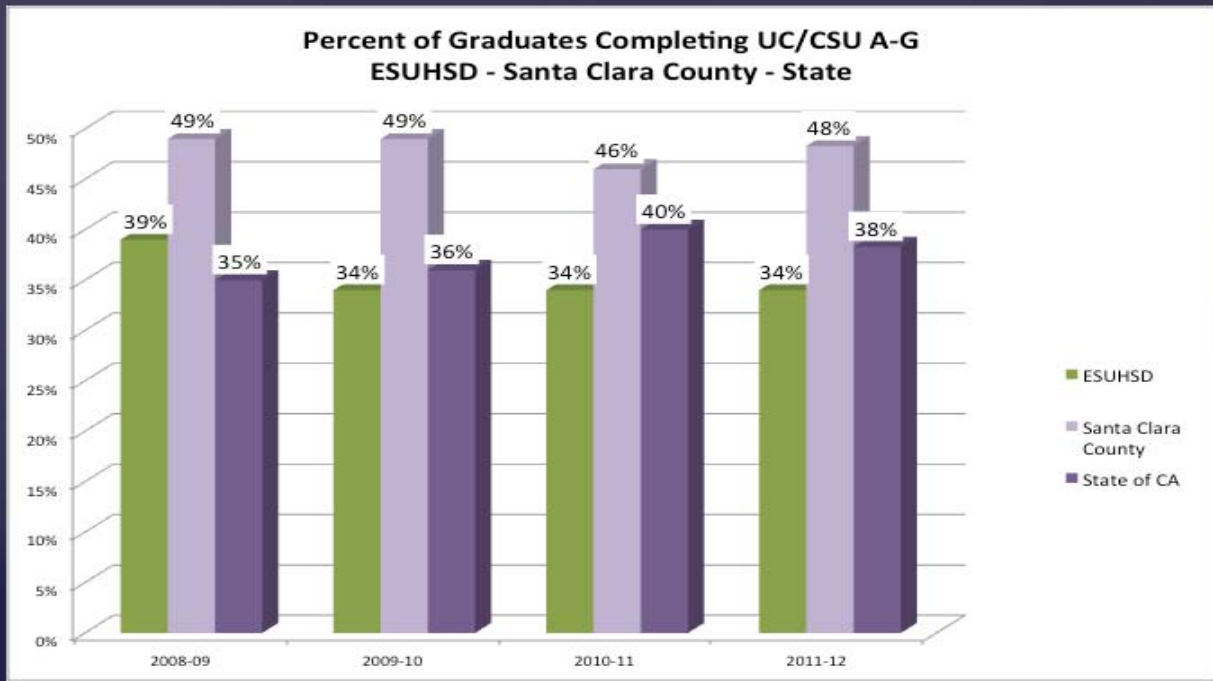
2009-10 Female	23.6%	7.2%	15.4%	6.8%	16.9%	11.5%	15.3%
2010-11 Female	22.1%	4.6%	19.2%	10.8%	16.0%	9.8%	14.4%
2011-12 Female	18.3%	4.7%	30.0%	3.9%	18.7%	8.1%	11.9%
2009-10 Male	29.4%	9.5%	16.7%	10.4%	24.3%	18.4%	19.6%
2010-11 Male	31.5%	8.6%	18.2%	13.1%	13.0%	18.2%	20.4%
2011-12 Male	27.5%	6.5%	12.9%	10.0%	19.1%	16.2%	17.6%

## Graduation Rate

### Graduation Rates 2009-2013 ESUHSD - Santa Clara County - State



# College Readiness



## **Why are these Subgroups Underperforming?**

There is no simple answer to this complex question. However, there are several factors that can be attributed to the underperforming subgroups which include, but not limited to, the fact that we continue to mirror our educational system on an outmoded factory model of education that isn't personalized and relationship-driven. The traditional curriculum has lost relevance and provides a cultural disconnect between teachers and students. Additionally, barriers that have been created over the decades have created opportunity gaps to access to quality teachers and rigorous curriculum for historically marginalized students.

East Side must better prepare its students to meet the demands of a 21<sup>st</sup> century society and workforce while investing in the acceleration of our most underperforming sub-groups. In the 1960's, workers with a high school diploma filled 70% of U.S. jobs. It is expected that by 2018, more than 60% of the U.S. workforce will need some education and training beyond high school. In today's global economy, having more than a high school diploma will mean the difference between under-employment and employment. Research bears out that education after high school provides opportunities for lifetime earnings. Jobs that pay a living wage require credible career training and/or postsecondary education. Developing a well-rounded student not only supports or local community, but developing an educated citizenry is essential to the survival and success of our democracy (Meier 2008).

Clearly, a highly-educated, highly-skilled workforce remains central to a thriving region, state and country. While 38% of California's high school graduates successfully complete the A-G course sequence (34% in the ESUHSD), Latinos and African Americans students complete the sequence at critically low rates. It is imperative that we create policies, structures and learning environments that transform this current reality and prepare every student to thrive in our global society.

## **Driver for Change - Aligning ESUHSD Graduation Requirements to A-G**

Michael Fullan in his article, *Choosing the Wrong Drivers for System Change* writes, "The key to system-wide success is to situate the energy of educators and students as the central driving force. This means aligning the goals of reform and the intrinsic motivation of participants." For the past fifteen years, education in the U.S. has disproportionately promoted too far to rote memorization and a test preparation mentality that has taken the "art of teaching:" the creativity aspect of teaching out of the profession over critical thinking, reasoning and creativity. The system does not allow for individualized learning plans; forcing students down a single track, which is usually determined by adults in the system instead of the academic nuances and merit of the student. We need to change this dynamic in order to ensure that every student graduates prepared for college and career and empowered to thrive in a global society.

The Board of Trustees' resolution to align the A-G curriculum includes a statement of the District's intention to move thoughtfully toward adoption of the A-G course sequence as the District's graduation requirement. Currently, students can satisfy the District's graduation requirements without completing the A-G course sequence.

The primary differences between the two systems include: 1) completion of a third year of Lab Science, 2) completion of Algebra 2 or Course 3 (Common Core), and 3) completion of a second year of the same World Language. Research is clear that Algebra 2 is one of the strongest predictors of college success (Adelman 2005). Every class taken in math beyond Algebra 2 in high school exponentially increases college completion rates among students of color (Adelman 2005).

<b>Subject</b>	<b>ESUHSD Graduation Requirements</b>	<b>California State University</b>	<b>University of California</b>
A) History/Social Science	3 years = 30 credits	2 years	
B) English	4 years = 40 credits	4 years	
C) Mathematics (including Algebra II)	2 years = 20 credits	3 years	Recommend 4 <sup>th</sup> year
D) Lab Science	2 years = 20 credits	2 years	Recommend 3 <sup>rd</sup> year
E) World Language	1 year (Fine Arts or Foreign Language) 10 credits	2 years	Recommend 3 <sup>rd</sup> year
F) Visual/Performing Arts	See above	1 year	
	2 years Physical Education = 20 credits		
G) College Prep Elective	8 classes = 80 credits	1 year	
<b>Total</b>	<b>22 classes = 220 credits</b>	<b>15 classes = 150 credits</b>	<b>18 classes = 180 credits</b>

The most rigorous aspect of completing the A-G course sequence requires that all courses be completed with a grade of ‘C’ or better. The District’s current graduation requirements allow ‘D’ grades to meet the requirement. In order for the District to effectively prepare students for post-secondary education, the district will need to raise its standards for A-G completion by not allowing students to slip through the cracks by falsely promoting them with “D” grades. Although grading is a controversial topic, with implications for students, teachers and families, it is a topic we must begin a district-wide conversation about the purpose, structure, and quality of grading systems. As we transform our system to a 21<sup>st</sup> century model of teaching and learning, current grading models (i.e. points, letter grades, focus on quantity over quality, etc.) will need to be interrogated and likely transformed as well. These models do not indicate a student’s mastery of core skills and content, nor do they promote a “culture of revision and redemption” (Linda Darling-Hammond) that is essential to learning and even more crucial for our most struggling students. We must open the door to explore alternative models of grading that account for mastery, integrate performance- based assessments, and promote students’ development of a growth mindset (Carol Dweck).

I propose aligning ESUHSD graduation requirements to the UC/CSU, A-G minimum requirements of 150 credits and meeting the California minimum graduation requirements of 180 credits. I also propose including a minimum of four seminar classes (Pass/Fail), as well as community service of 40 hours. Seminar classes would be part of the student’s schedule taken throughout his/her four years in high school. Each seminar class would last 4-6 weeks and could include topics such as financial literacy, study skills, nutrition, SAT Preparation, Chicano Studies, Graduation by Exhibition: A Senior Seminar, internship and coding. The function of the seminar classes would be to develop a well-rounded student by bringing together small groups of recurring meetings, focusing each time on a particular subject, in which everyone present would be required to participate. Strategies would include examples of practical problems to be researched and analyzed, assigned readings and the use of the Socratic dialogue.

### Proposed Graduation Requirements

Subject	ESUHSD Graduation Requirements
A) History/Social Science	2 years = 20 credits
B) English	4 years = 40 credits
C) Mathematics (including Algebra II)	3 years = 30 credits
D) Lab Science	2 years = 20 credits
E) World Language	2 years = 20 credits
F) Visual/Performing Arts	1 year = 10 credits
G) College Prep Elective ( 1), plus one (1) additional year of social science	1 year = 10 credits 1 year = 10 credits
Physical Education	2 years = 20 credits
<b>Total</b>	<b>18 Classes = 180 Credits</b>
<b>Four to Six Seminar Classes</b>	<b>40 hours Community Service</b>
<b>CAHSEE</b>	

Requiring all students to pursue A-G courses beginning their ninth grade year will better prepare them for a post-graduate education, whether for certification, an Associate of Arts degree, Bachelor of Arts degree at a UC, CSU or private university campus. Planning for a career or college cannot be an afterthought: it must be part of the conversation when students immediately enter our system.

Aligning our graduation requirements to A-G will further raise the bar for all students. We should expect every student to take a rigorous curriculum that will help prepare every student for college and career readiness. For some, this will require the District to implement research-based interventions, provide extra help, summer programs, credit and grade recovery and parent outreach and education.

The District will establish alternative diplomas, each with specific requirements. The default diploma pathway for all students in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades will be A-G. After the sophomore year, parents and students will have to decide on which diploma pathway they will continue. The “traditional” (non-A-G) high school diploma will be an option for students depending on their future goals or current progress. Ensuring that all students, including English Learners and Special Needs Students, have access and are successful in A-G courses is a priority.

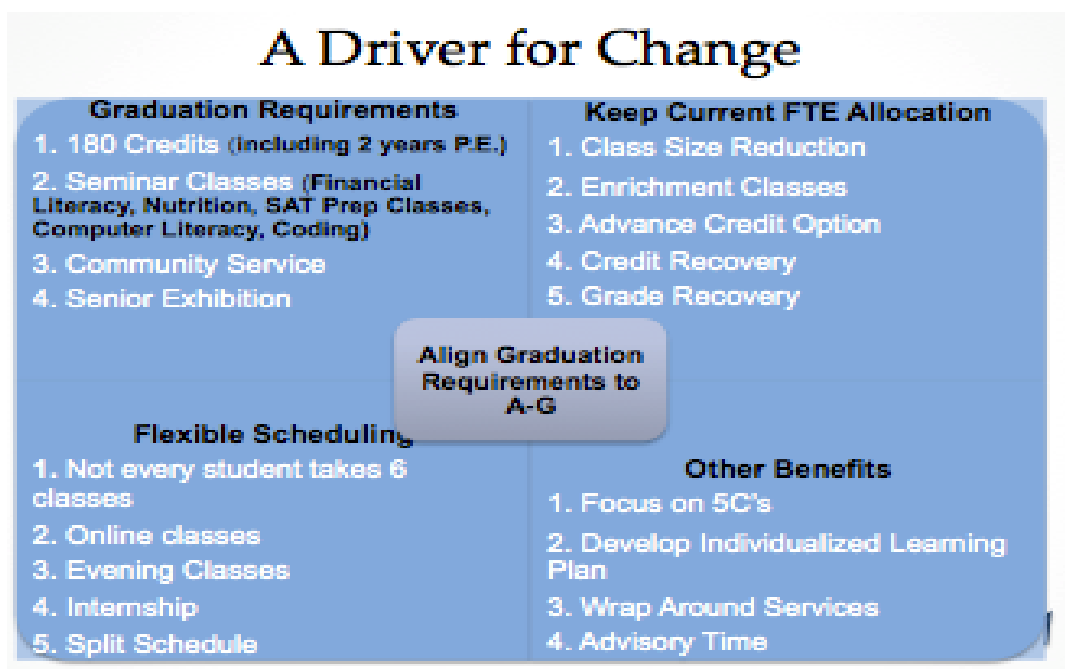
#### Other Implications –

I also propose maintaining our current full-time employee (FTE) allocation to our sites. Maintaining this FTE allocation for only 180 credits allows for many different possibilities, which can transform the current school and workday for our students and employees. It will allow sites the flexibility and opportunity to be creative in developing their bell schedule, master schedule, course offerings and student support.

School sites will be able to reduce class size, offer enrichment classes, provide advance credit options and offer credit and grade recovery within the students regular schedule. Requiring a minimum enrollment, time and budgetary restraints currently hampers all of these benefits.

By maintaining the current FTE allocation for 180 graduation credits, we can offer individualized learning plans that provide flexible scheduling, which may include a non traditional 9<sup>th</sup> grade year, online classes, evening classes, internships and split schedules. Students would not be limited to 180 credits, but rather be free to explore elective courses in the arts, literature or mathematics as they choose. Students could expand the number of Advance Placement classes they take, they could take courses at the community college for concurrent credit, or take elective courses in an area of interest like dance or drama.

The benefits also include the opportunity to fully develop the 5Cs (critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creative thinking and civic engagement). Wrap around services could be provided without having to pull students out of the core classes because of the flexible schedule and the ability to keep the school open for longer hours. Another benefit provides the opportunity for more tutorial and academic counseling.



**Next Steps –**

This paper focuses on one driver for change; aligning ESUHSD graduation requirements to A-G; changing the current level of credits to 180; adding seminar classes to develop a well-rounded student; and adding community service hours to support the 5Cs. Keeping the FTE aligned to 220 credits is a strategy tied to the driver; however, the potential changes associated with the strategy will require each site to engage their perspective stakeholders on what school redesign is best for their community.

As we investigate establishing new graduation requirements, we need to research alternative strategies that further develop the 5Cs and the well-round student as well as improve the relationships within our system.

Research Priority	WHY?
Advisory Period or Seminar Class	Personalize and Relationship Driven
Student Portfolios	Developing Student Agency (5Cs)
Senior Exhibition	Demonstrating communication and critical thinking skills
Project-based Learning	Demonstrating proficiency in the 5Cs (critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, civic engagement)
Team Teaching	Develop Social Capital and Relevance to Learning
Small Learning Communities	Develop Social Capital, eliminate isolation

As for aligning our graduation requirements to A-G, I proposed holding student, parent, and staff focus groups (January - February); establish a working group to discuss the new graduation requirements and implementation timeline (February - March) and hold two or three community engagement meetings to discuss the proposed recommendation (April - May). At the June, 2014 Board meeting, bring forward a staff recommendation for realignment of ESUHSD graduation requirements, as well as a timeline for implementation.

**Conclusion –**

As a system, we have been tinkering with adjustments that rarely move the needle. The transition to the Common Core Standards is a great opportunity for educators and school districts to truly transform how teachers teach and how students demonstrate their learning. If we as a system use this historic opportunity for change, we must change the students’ environment and how they demonstrate their learning. We must provide access for every student to the most rigorous course work available and provide the support system for every student to be successful leaving our system college and career ready. Aligning our graduation requirements to A-G, establishing seminar classes and requiring community service hours are the first step in transforming the educational environment at all of our schools.