



MEMORANDUM

To: Indiana Department of Education
Indiana State Board of Education

From: University of Southern Indiana

Date: July 28, 2024

Re: Indiana High School Diploma Redesign and Proposed Seals Public Comment

In considering the GPS and GPS Plus diplomas and the Seals proposed by the Indiana Department of Education, the University of Southern Indiana offers the following questions and comments:

- Providing Indiana students more flexibility and opportunity in their education is certainly a supportable concept. The proposed GPS diplomas and accompanying Seals, however, do not appear to be able to achieve these goals and may have the unintended consequence of the opposite effect. It appears that workforce preparation, creating a pathway directly from High School to entry level employment, is given priority rather than aiming to provide all students with the necessary education and skills to access pathways to multiple opportunities, and ultimately be successful in all. Having students commit to a particular pathway appears to reduce opportunities and remove the flexibility sought in redesigning these diplomas. This may actually result in fewer successful outcomes.
- Although the system of competencies and alternative methods of awarding academic and non-academic credit align with recent educational policies and practices, the lack of required, global knowledge is concerning. World languages, history, and culture courses are not required in the proposed GPS diplomas, but are clearly necessary for success in all three broad pathways: higher education, employment, and military enlistment.
- Additionally, there is concern that the diplomas or seals do not directly address the needs of potential first generation or at-risk higher education students in preparation for post-secondary education to the level that they attempt provide opportunities to develop entry-level work skills. This appears to significantly conflict with multiple pillars of the HOPE Agenda, a major focus of efforts by the Commission for Higher Education. In particular, the expectation that institutions work toward improving post-high school training and education going rates for youth and adults across all demographic and create measurable distinction in economic and social mobility and prosperity outcomes.
- While some students may not have the interest or perhaps aptitude to pursuing post-secondary education, data clearly indicates the long-term value of pursuing and achieving

such credentials. As such, a method for students to excel academically should be an essential component to the new diplomas.

- Historically students with the Core 40 Honors diploma have been most prepared and most successful in post-secondary education. Eliminating this rather than replacing it creates a gap for best achieving and most ambitious students. The Enrollment Ready Seal is not an equivalent credential. We recommend retaining or creating an equivalent diploma and academic pathway similar to the Core 40 Honors diploma.
- The Enrollment Ready Seal appears to implicitly offer admission to students awarded this credential to their preferred public institution. If approved, it is necessary that additional information would be provided to students about further requirements and procedures for admission to various post-secondary education programs. We are concerned about the confusion the Seal might cause and do not wish to dissuade, but clearly inform, students about application and admission requirements. This may also directly conflict with the positive results of the Indiana Pre-Admissions program successfully administered by the Commission for Higher Education.

The development of additional ways for students to explore and participate in engagement activities such as employment as part of their education is laudable but should not come at the expense of sacrificing opportunities for all students.



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