



News Release

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Course-Taking Decisions May Limit Postsecondary Options for Students

PIERRE, S.D. – With recent changes in high school graduation standards in South Dakota, some students and parents may be confused about what course-taking options are available to them and how they impact college-going opportunity.

“Choices that new or soon-to-be high school students make now as they plan their course-taking schedule could limit options available to them in the future,” said Jack Warner, executive director and CEO of the South Dakota Board of Regents. “We encourage students and their parents to become fully informed, since these decisions do impact future options for postsecondary study.”

The public university system recommends a standard college and career-ready curriculum as the best way to prepare students to pursue the widest range of postsecondary education or career options. Students should take at least five rigorous courses each semester, Warner said, and complete courses in key subject areas. The college-ready curriculum includes four units of English/language arts, four or more units of mathematics, four or more units of science, three units of social studies, and two units of foreign language.

“Students who take these courses tend to be college ready, and are more likely to graduate,” Warner said. For example, students taking the college-ready curriculum are more likely to meet ACT college readiness benchmarks, which included 28 percent of all test takers who graduated from South Dakota high schools in 2010.

Warner recommends that school officials make sure all students fully understand their options. “We have suggested that schools set up a rigorous process that requires students to sign off in writing if they intend to seek allowable waivers from certain high school coursework, so that it is clear they understand how this might impact their postsecondary studies,” Warner said.

Students who seek to waive the third year of required math or science classes in South Dakota high schools should fully understand that they may encounter postsecondary roadblocks ahead, he said. Students who waive out of required math and science courses will not meet admissions requirements at South Dakota public universities nor at many other institutions across the country. They will not meet academic eligibility requirements to compete in NCAA Division I and II athletic programs at the college level, and will be ineligible to receive certain forms of federal financial support available to needy students.

Students who fulfill existing high school graduation requirements, without waivers, will meet South Dakota public university admissions requirements, but they should also know that they may need foreign language courses to meet admissions requirements at many out-of-state institutions, Warner said.