



MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WITNESS APPEARANCE FORM

BILL NUMBER: HB 624		DATE: 2/2/2021	
COMMITTEE: Emerging Issues			
TESTIFYING: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES			
WITNESS NAME			
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:			
WITNESS NAME: KATE CASAS		PHONE NUMBER: 314-809-5042	
REPRESENTING: EXCELL IN EDUCATION IN ACTION		TITLE:	
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CITY: ST. LOUIS		STATE: MO	ZIP: 65101
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: 2/2/2021 12:00 AM	

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WITNESS NAME			
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:			
WITNESS NAME: BRITTANY WHITLEY		PHONE NUMBER: 5733405738	
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FOR A PDF OF THIS TESTIMONY, please visit: https://mostpolicyinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ScienceNote_AcceleratedDiplomas.pdf *This science note was prepared by MOST Policy Initiative, Inc. a nonprofit organization aimed to improve the health, sustainability, and economic growth of Missouri communities by providing objective, non-partisan information to Missouri's decisionmakers. For more information, contact Dr. Brittany Whitley, Education & Workforce Development Fellow - brittany@mostpolicyinitiative.org. This was prepared on 1/13/21.

Alternative High School Graduation Pathways Executive Summary Colleges, employers, and communities expect that students who earn high school diplomas will be prepared for success after graduation, whether in higher education, the workforce or civic life. Allowing students to advance through high school based on subject mastery rather than credit hours is an emerging approach that is meant to improve high school completion and ensure college and career readiness in the United States. Senate Bill 34 and House Bill 624 would establish the "Show Me Success Diploma" as an alternative high school graduation pathway available after the tenth grade. Diploma recipients who have demonstrated mastery of the established standards can stay enrolled in high school or move on to a job or college. For students who enroll in a postsecondary institution before the end of their twelfth year, 90% of the state, local and federal funds that would have been spent on their high school education will be deposited into a Missouri Education Savings Account in their name.

Highlights• High school graduation standards are typically determined by credit hours, or "seat time." However, existing high school diploma standards may not be indicative of a student's college & career readiness. • Several states and school districts have started to implement competency-based education innovations over the past decade, including alternative high school graduation standards. Arizona's Grand Canyon Diploma Program, which most closely mirrors the Show Me Success Diploma, has graduated almost two hundred students over seven years.

Limitations• Because most accelerated diploma programs are relatively new and vary across states and school districts, there is limited research about how these programs affect high school graduation rates, college enrollment and completion. • It is difficult to predict the number of students that would participate in and complete the proposed program in Missouri and therefore the costs of program implementation. • Although students who enroll in college early are likely to attend local community colleges or trade schools, there is not enough information to determine the social-emotional impacts of students entering college at a younger age than their peers.

Research Background High school graduation requirements: seat time vs. mastery For over a century, most American high schools have determined graduation requirements based on seat time, or the number of hours spent in particular courses. However, there is evidence that, under existing seat

time requirements, not all high school graduates are prepared for college and/or the workforce.^{1,2} Some students may drop out of high school because of family and job responsibilities, lack of academic support, or disciplinary actions.³ Because students master topics at different rates and have unique educational needs and career goals, many school districts and states have started to explore competency- or mastery-based education programs as a way to improve graduation rates and ensure college & career readiness (Figure 1).⁴ Virtual learning, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, has also accelerated the consideration of these programs in order to provide more flexible, personalized options without sacrificing educational quality. While competency-based education programs are a promising approach for students who may not be successful under the existing system, additional research is needed to understand the extent to which these programs impact high school graduation rates and postsecondary success. In the absence of existing competency-based education programs, education nonprofits in Kansas City, led by PREP-KC and the Kauffman Foundation, have identified four “market value assets” (MVAs) that are particularly valued by higher education and employers: (1) college credit earned in high school, (2) industry-recognized credentials, (3) career experiences (e.g., robust job shadowing and internships), and (4) entrepreneurial experiences with real-world projects.⁵ Students who graduate with traditional high school diplomas and one or more MVAs are more likely to enroll in and complete post-secondary education and training.⁶⁻⁸ Because an accelerated high school diploma program would allow for increased access to college courses and career & technical education, we expect that students graduating from this pathway may also experience improved success in college and the workforce.

Accelerated High School Diploma Programs in the United States

Most high school students have the opportunity to graduate high school early under the standard graduation criteria if they are willing to take summer school classes and extra credits during the school year. Tennessee offers an accelerated high school graduation program that reduces the total number of credits that students must complete. After five years, only four students enrolled in the accelerated program, in comparison to almost 3,500 Tennessee students who graduated early during that time under the traditional system.⁹ Senate Bill 34/House Bill 624 would not prevent motivated Missouri students from using the traditional graduation pathway to graduate early. Rather, it would establish a unique, additional approach to evaluating and progressing students through school based on their understanding of specific subjects. Several states (e.g., Indiana, Illinois, Colorado) are currently implementing pilot programs to allow for high school diploma flexibility based on mastery rather than seat time. The provisions in Senate Bill 34 & House Bill 624 most closely mirror the existing Arizona Grand Canyon Diploma Program. The diploma option is currently available to over 45,000 students in over 20 Arizona high schools, nearly 50% of whom are Latinx and over half of whom live in low-income households. Seven years after the legislation passed, 192 students had received the Grand Canyon Diploma. At this stage, however, there is insufficient information to compare college and workforce outcomes of Grand Canyon Diploma recipients to those students who receive a traditional diploma. It is also unclear how many students attempted, but did not complete, the accelerated diploma program. Since the program was implemented, Arizona has observed a slight increase in the high school graduation, but it is not possible to directly attribute this to the Grand Canyon Diploma program. One concern about early high school graduation is that students will miss out on the high school experiences that are important for their social-emotional development and future success in college & the workforce. However, for students who might otherwise drop out of high school and those who feel prepared for the next step, the accelerated pathway increases educational options. Finally, states that have unsuccessfully attempted to roll out a statewide overhaul of all four-year, credit-based graduation requirements (e.g., Maine), highlight the importance of clear, state-level guidance and school district standards and the availability of sufficient training and resources to facilitate implementation of any competency-based program.

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