

## Plano ISD Council of PTAs Newsletter

August 2008

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The Plano ISD Council of PTAs has adopted a legislative advocacy to change high school graduation requirements in Texas. The project is to secure additional, rigorous high school diploma degree plan choices that recognize each individual student's natural talents, interests and abilities and prepare all students for a variety of career and continuing education aspirations.

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The details of this project are outlined below. Future communications will contain more information and "next steps." As always, feel free to contact us with any questions.

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### Overview of 4 x 4 Legislation

At the May 2006 legislative session, the Texas legislature passed a bill that requires all high school students, starting with students that started 9th grade in 2007, to take:

- 4 years of English (unchanged)
- 4 years of Social Studies (unchanged)
- 4 years of Math (formerly 2; PISD previously required 3)
- 4 years of Science (formerly 2; PISD previously required 3)

The legislation was nicknamed "4 x 4" because it REQUIRES 4 years of all 4 classes for EVERY student in Texas. The 4x4 takes the choices away from students and parents, and mandates a one-size fits all education. This plan does not meet the needs of all students!

### High School Diploma Requirements

Texas offers 3 diploma plans, but in practical terms, there is really only one path to graduation:

- minimum: 24 credits required (for special situations)
- recommended: 26 credits, plus 2 years foreign language
- distinguished: same as recommended, plus a 3rd year of foreign language and AP classes

The 4 years of math offer few choices - students must take:

- Algebra 1
- Algebra 2

- Geometry
- AP Math -- OR -- concurrent enrollment in college math -- OR -- pre-calculus -- OR -- "Math Models," a class that must be taken prior to Algebra 2

The 4 years of science offer few choices - students must take:

- Biology
- Chemistry
- Physics
- A lab-based science class (a chunk of the recent PISD bond is for new science labs to accommodate these classes)

## What About Electives?

Definitions: "Strand" = when you take an elective, such as band, theater, athletics, throughout your high school career (all 4 years)

1 credit = 1 year

.5 credit = 1 semester

The Recommended degree path includes 3.5 credits for electives.

The Distinguished degree path includes 2.5 credits for electives.

Under the 4x4 legislation, a student can have 1 strand, but would have great difficulty enrolling in additional electives. By incurring additional expenses and giving additional time, students could take additional electives by enrolling in summer school, e-school or community college courses.

### Examples of Classes Designated as Electives Include:

Creative Writing, Art II, III, AP Art 2D, AP Art 3D, AP Art Drawing Portfolio, Art History, String, Philharmonic & Symphony Orchestra II, III, IV, Concert, Jazz & Symphonic Band II, III & IV, Wind & Instrument Ensemble II, III & IV, Concert, Mixed, Tenor/Bass, Treble, Vocal Ensemble & Jazz Show Choir II, III & IV, Music Theory, AP Music Theory, Theater Arts II, III, IV, Technical Theater II, III, IV, Theater Production II, III, IV, Dance II, III, IV, Chinese III, IV, French III, IV, AP French, German III, IV, Latin III, IV, Spanish III, IV, AP Spanish, AP Comparative Government, AP European History, Psychology, AP Psychology, Sociology I, II, Introduction to Radio and Television, Debate I, II, III, Oral Interpretation I, II, III, Animal Science, Canine Science, Equine Science, Exploring Aquaculture Science, Introduction to Veterinary Technician, Introduction to Horticulture Science, Landscape Design, Construction & Maintenance, Personal Skill Development in Agriculture, Plant and Animal Production, Veterinary Medical Assistant I, II, Wildlife and Recreation Management, Home Maintenance & Improvement, Interior Design, Advertising Design I, II, Fashion Design I, II, Fashion Marketing, Introduction to Advertising, Business Connections, Business Education Career Preparation, Business Law, International Business, Child Development, Early Childhood Professions I, II, Introduction to Medical Science Careers, Patient Care Technician with Texas CNA Certification, Career Studies, Management, Entrepreneurship, Sports and Entertainment Marketing, Food Science & Technology, Nutrition & Food Science, Sports Nutrition, Personal & Family Development, Preparation for Parenting, AP Computer Science, Cisco CCNA I, II, III & IV, Criminal Investigations

## Practical Problems with 4 x 4

1. Will cause the dropout rate to go up further (Texas dropout rate = 3.9% in 2004; 4.3% in 2005; 8.8% in 2006)
2. Students will enroll in fewer Fine Arts, Athletics, Technology and Vocational Education classes
3. No allowance for natural talents and interest
4. Not enough certified science or math teachers. The average percentage of Texas high school teachers teaching "out of field" in 2004 for math is 15%, for science it is 27%. Annually, less than 6% of teachers become certified in math and 5% in science
5. 4 x 4 doesn't align with college admissions or the Texas job market. Of the top 5 universities as designated by [US World and News Report](#), only Harvard requires 4 years of both math & science. UT, Baylor, TCU, Texas Tech each require 3 years of math and 2 years of science.

How many states offer only 1 path to high school graduation? **Only Texas!** Other states looking to implement similar requirements are looking to have 4 years English, 3 years Math, 3 years Science and 3 years Social Studies, but no other state has done it so far.

## What Plano ISD Council of PTAs Proposes

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- Keep current degree plans, but change Recommended plan to be named STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math) track.
- Add 2 additional degree tracks that do not require 4 years of Science or Math
  - Humanities/Fine Arts - students should be expected to participate in juried competitions, UIL concerts, etc.
  - Career exploration - career preparatory classes already offered in PISD, leading to certifications that students can utilize as they become employed
- Allow students in each of the 3 tracks (STEM, Humanities/Fine Arts/Career Exploration) to voluntarily add the Distinguished designation by completing a 3rd year of foreign language and mastering 3 AP course exams.

We believe the way to engage students is to allow them to select courses that interest and inspire them to create and achieve their own life's dream. **There is honor and value in all work, not just math and science.**

## Our Goal

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- To **inform** the 36,000+ PTA members of Plano and the 600,000+ PTA members of Texas about the 4x4 requirements
- To **educate** the PTA members about expanding the degree plan options and the legislators that are working to expand choices for our students.
- To **engage** PTA members to make their voices heard on this issue in the Texas House & Senate.

### PTA Mission

PTA is

A powerful voice for all children,  
A relevant resource for families and communities, and  
A strong advocate for the education and well-being of every child.

### PTA Vision

Making every child's potential a reality.