

Since I have started high school, I have taken challenging classes in an effort to prepare myself for higher education. I started taking high school level classes in middle school in preparation to take college classes as a high school student through the Advanced Opportunities-Fast Forward program. My high school, STEM Charter Academy, requires students to take STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) courses to graduate, which are above and beyond the current Idaho standard requirements to graduate.

We live in a competitive society, and I want to be ahead of the curve. Currently, in Idaho, the required standardized assessments do not have any expectations of proficiency; the only expectation is that we participate. There are 46 high school credits required by Idaho to graduate, and 17 of those credits are undesignated elective credits. The highest math course specifically required by the state is Geometry. At my school, students meet that requirement by the end of ninth grade. We live in a world of technology, yet the majority of high schools in Idaho have no graduation requirement for basic technology competency. As Bill Gates said, "Our current expectations for what our students should learn in school were set fifty years ago to meet the needs of an economy based on manufacturing and agriculture. We now have an economy based on knowledge and technology." For some of us, the high school experience goes far beyond these state requirements.

If Idaho had the option of a "STEM diploma" for high school students who put in the extra effort to take more STEM-related courses than what is required by the state, it would give those students a competitive edge in regards to higher education and the job market. I am asking policy makers to reimagine what the high school experience could

be with higher expectations, and recognize those students who are willing to do the work to achieve them. I am extremely thankful that I attend a school that encourages students to go above and beyond the standard requirements, and I will receive a transcript that reflects my efforts. I firmly believe that if a student goes far beyond what is required of them, they should be recognized for their hard work.

Sincerely,

Paige Pence

North Idaho STEM Charter Academy's Class of 2018