

EDUCATION

## **Plan to give 4 graduation credits for sports gets mixed reaction**

### **New requirements have squeezed out electives, so athletics should count, some instructors say.**

By Molly Bloom  
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Anderson High School junior Anna Gitter was slightly dubious about state education officials' plans to award four years of graduation credit for athletic participation, putting sports on the same level as English, math, science, band and dance.

"What are they going to have (in the lesson plans) for cross-country?" Gitter asked. " 'Get up and run?' "

The State Board of Education gave preliminary approval Wednesday to a plan to create guidelines for how sports should be taught in Texas public high schools, which would include adding athletics to the list of electives that count toward graduation. The vote was 10-5.

The measure, which the board is likely to approve today, was in response to a petition by a Brenham football coach who said he was concerned that new requirements that high school students take four years of English, math, science and social studies could squeeze athletics out of their schedules.

The board has ratcheted up graduation requirements, Anderson High School newspaper adviser Jack Harkrider said Thursday : "They're crowding out the electives."

High school students need 26 credits to graduate under the standard plan. Currently, students can earn up to two credits for physical education classes, and 11½ credits of physical education are required. Many student athletes satisfy that requirement through sports.

Students also must take 21½ credits of state-approved electives under the standard plan. The change approved by the board would allow student-athletes to count sports as electives and add those credits to the physical education credits for a total of four sports credits.

Ann Smisko , an Austin assistant superintendent, said with the seven-class-period day at most schools, students can fit graduation requirements plus four years of sports into their schedules. But they may have to make hard choices, she said.

"Kids always have to choose among electives, so they always have to prioritize," she said.

State Education Commissioner Robert Scott recommended the board approve the curriculum-writing process for athletics. Board Member Geraldine Miller, who represents Rockwall County and parts of Collin and Dallas counties, voted against the motion, saying that it was "incrementally chipping away" at efforts to increase the rigor of high school graduation requirements.

"It opens the door up to water down all the efforts that we went through all those years ago," Miller said.

Eventually, coaches would have to be certified somehow in the sports they coach, a requirement that Board Member Terri Leo said would open "a huge can of worms."

Westlake High School football Coach Derek Long said Thursday that his school has already shifted to an eight-period day to help students meet state graduation requirements. Long said he hasn't seen athletes forced to leave teams because of the new requirements.

As to the curriculum that might be taught, Long, whose team is in the second round of the state playoffs, said he would "leave it to the experts."

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