

Optional Coursework

One of the surprising conclusions to come out of the BRC report is the fact that one of the best predictors of life success is **Optional Coursework** as can be seen on Page 11 of the report: [New York State Blue Ribbon Commission on Graduation Measures](#)

The Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC) literature review analyzes the positive association between college, career, and civic readiness on six success measures. The success measures identified were

1. college enrollment,
2. college performance and/or persistence,
3. college degree attainment,
4. employment,
5. earnings and wages, and
6. independent living.

The BRC then evaluated six factors that contribute to the attainment of these goals. They evaluated the impact of **Optional Coursework, Math Curriculum, College Prep Programs, Additional Experiences, Non-academic skills, and Required Curriculum** in terms of attaining the six success factors identified.

The only factor that impacted each of the first five success factors was *Optional Coursework*. *Required Curriculum* only helped with one of the six goals - college enrollment. *Math curriculum* helped with the first three measures relative to college performance but had no impact on career success and the next best indicator was *college prep courses* that helped students get into college and graduate.

In our view, this finding makes sense as educators struggle to prepare students for an increasingly complex, rapidly globalizing world of exponential technological change, “required curriculum” is important in terms of providing academic success, but does little to prepare students for the unprecedented opportunities and challenges of our 21st Century world. In order to prepare students for our 21st Century world educators are going to need to develop a capacity to offer elective courses that complement the traditional academic offerings.

The conclusions make even more sense if we look at the questions the BRC Commission was trying to address as they attempted to address “*what students should know and be able to do before they graduate*”. It is not clear that “*Required Curriculum*” addresses any of the things students should know and do before they graduate. In contrast, the **Optional Coursework** developed by One World Future Ready not only provides for the 21st Century skills called for

by the BRC but also provides multiple opportunities for the kind of assessment needed to develop these skills.

What Students Should Know and Be Able to Do Before they Graduate

- 21st century skills (creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem-solving, communication, and collaboration)
- social and emotional skills (including collaboration, communication, and selfmanagement)
- digital literacy and information processing
- basic life and career skills
- authentic learning experiences (connecting classroom learning to the world in which students live)
- civic education and civic readiness