

Docket Item:

New and Emerging Approaches and Models for College in High School – Proficiency-Based Dual Credit

Summary:

In 2014, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and Oregon Education Investment Board (OEIB) announced approximately [\\$2M of replication grants](#) to help launch five new “Regional Promise” consortia that are implementing new and emerging models for accelerated learning, or the awarding of college credit to high school students. Modeled after the successful “Eastern Promise” collaboration that education and civic leaders in northeastern Oregon launched several years earlier, these grants are designed to expand college credit options for all students, and particularly historically underserved students, and to further support students’ transition to higher education through enhanced collaboration between K-12 and higher education partners.

Innovations piloted by the Eastern Promise and several of the Regional Promise consortia have raised important questions about how the state should define, categorize, and fund such new and emerging approaches to accelerated learning. The Willamette Promise, in particular, is distinctive from traditional Oregon dual credit partly for the fact that it relies heavily on measures of student proficiency to assess whether or not college credit should be awarded to a particular student. Partly as a result, the model relies less on certain standards that community colleges, following state and national guidelines, have historically used to determine whether or not a high school course qualifies for dual credit (eg the high school instructor’s educational qualifications).

In its reliance on measures of proficiency, the Willamette Promise parallels a national movement to support stronger student preparation through proficiency-based models. (See [New England Collegiate Endorsement of Proficiency-Based Education and Graduation](#)). Institutions like [the University of Wisconsin](#), [Northern Arizona University](#), and [Western Governors University](#) are offering degrees that are based on directly assessing what students know and can do, rather than awarding degrees based on seat time. The Bill and Melinda Gates and Lumina Foundations are supporting breakthrough innovations in this area. A 2014 report entitled [All Hands On Deck: Ten Lessons from Early Adopters of Competency-Based Education](#) was published by WICHE and WCET. Further, the Department of Education is preparing to use legislative authority to approve experimental sites which include competency-based models through the [First in the World Program](#). And the Southern Accreditation Commission now has accreditation policy related to direct assessment competency-based education that states:

“Federal regulations define a direct assessment competency-based educational program as an instructional program that, in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning, uses direct assessment of student learning relying solely on the attainment of defined competencies, or recognizes the direct assessment of student learning by others. The assessment must be consistent with the accreditation of the institution or program using the results of the assessment.”

As models like Willamette Promise apply a “direct assessment competency-based education” model into high schools, some elements of the program implementation do not align with current and known models for college credit in high school such as Dual Credit, Expanded Options, Online courses, CTE, Credit by Proficiency, Credit for Prior Learning, and AP and IB courses.

Several questions need to be addressed by the HECC to determine how to best identify and support new approaches and models to dual credit in high school. These include:

- What state standards should be developed for proficiency-based dual credit programs such as the Willamette Promise?
- How should these programs be approved, and under what authority?
- Should state policies be developed to address how these programs intersect with other accelerated learning options?
- Which state rules regarding instructor qualifications need to be adjusted in order to ensure that community colleges and public universities have equal opportunity to participate in these programs?
- How do state funding formulas need to be adjusted in order to ensure that community colleges and public universities have equal opportunity to participate in these programs?
- How will this model be researched for its impacts on student success and completion?

Recognizing that a more in-depth conversation was needed, including content area expertise, the HECC, Council of Instructional Administrators (CIA) for community colleges, and the university Provosts Council made this topic a priority for convenings in March and May. A joint work group was formed and tasked with these questions to ensure consistency and quality of all college credit programs in high school. The purpose of the work group is to identify the key issues and concerns expressed by community colleges and universities regarding new accelerated learning models, and begin to suggest potential solutions. These were the same issues identified by proposed legislation (SB 84) and it was critical to engage practitioners in informed and structured conversations and to clearly understand the key issues and to craft viable solutions.

The work group has met twice and has identified what are described as “points of tension” within the area of accelerated learning. Issues such as definitions, instructor qualifications, quality and consistency of instruction, service regions, credit utility and transfer, funding, and collaboration were a few of the issues identified. On May 15, 2015 the Provosts Council and CIA met jointly to discuss those points of tension in further detail. In addition, Executive Director Ben Cannon convened a May meeting with stakeholders including Presidents and Provosts regarding the topic of accelerated learning.

While discussions are in the beginning phases, it is anticipated that by December 2015 the joint CIA/Provosts accelerated learning workgroup will identify a set of recommendations that will then be reviewed jointly by the larger CIA and Provosts Council groups and forwarded to HECC for review and consideration. The recommendations will answer the questions posed above and will include standards and criteria for defining, identifying, and funding new accelerated learning approaches. Relative to the HECC’s role/authority in recognizing and approving these programs, new rules may need to be drafted to govern such programs under Oregon’s accelerated learning program, new funding structures developed to ensure equity between community colleges and universities, and data-based research conducted to measure the impact of new and emerging models.

Until these key issues are addressed by the Commission in late 2015 or early 2016, HECC staff believes it would be prudent to limit the rate at which the Regional Promise programs are encouraged to expand. Some higher education leaders have expressed significant discomfort with what they perceive to be the rapid expansion of new models which are not yet well understood and for which a state policy framework has not yet been developed. Moreover, given potential for upcoming shifts in the state policy landscape with respect to these models, it seems reasonable that implementation in the meantime would be limited.

The following interim data helps provide some perspective on the scale of the Regional Promise replication programs in 2014-15 (data reported and estimated as of April, 2015):

Regional Promise Consortium	Courses	HS teachers participating	College faculty participating	High schools offering new accelerated college credit classes	High school students enrolled in new accelerated college credit classes
Central Oregon Better Together	2	30 ^a	2	6	88 ^c
Connected Lane Pathways	*	*	*	*	*
Oregon Metro Connects	9	46	39	13	240 ^b
Southern Oregon Promise	7	26	18	10	300 ^a
Willamette Promise	18	114	22	23	1,000 ^a
Total	36	216	81	52	1,628
* Estimates forthcoming					
^a Approximate					
^b Does not include forthcoming East Multnomah County group estimates.					
^c Trimester students only; those schools on semester system not officially enrolled until winter but are currently participating in classes.					

On June 5, 2015, K-12 leaders including Deputy Superintendent Rob Saxton and Willamette ESD Superintendent Dave Novotney provided additional details about the relatively small scale of the Willamette Promise, even under its planned expansion in 2015-16. According to their letter, 286 high school students have earned 1,403 college credits in 2014-15 (data as of June 3). While the Willamette Promise intends to expand to the Multnomah and Northwest ESDs in 2015-16, they note that only two small school districts in the MESD (Corbett and Riverdale) have committed to participate in the Promise. They report that Northwest ESD districts, 18 out of 20 of which intend to participate, “have no intention of using the Willamette Promise model to supplant existing dual credit programs with their partner community colleges.” In earlier correspondence, Superintendent Novotney estimated that perhaps an additional 500 students would earn college credits through the model in 2015-16, beyond the 400 or so who are expected to participate in 2014-15. Assuming that the average Willamette Promise student earns as many college credits as the average conventional Oregon dual credit student (~8 credits per year), these estimates suggest that under expansion, Willamette Promise may award in the neighborhood of 7,200 college credits in 2015-16.

By comparison, in 2013-14 (the most recent year for which complete data is available), 28,253 Oregon high school students earned 222,226 college credits at Oregon community colleges through conventional dual credit arrangements.

Based on this data, it seems reasonable to conclude that the scale of the current Regional Promise replication programs remains pilot-sized, at least in comparison with the number of high school students who earn community college credits through other dual credit models. However, the Commission should closely monitor this activity and be prepared to take steps, if necessary, to influence the rate of expansion prior to the full consideration and resolution of key issues identified above.

Proposed Commission Direction for Next Steps:

1. In order to support access and quality for newly-emerging accelerated learning models, HECC staff shall by December 31, 2015 develop recommendations for potential Commission or other state action related to funding allocations, program approvals, instructor qualifications, ongoing research of new and existing models' impact on student success, and the relationship between new models and existing accelerated learning activities in Oregon.
2. In order to support access to and quality for newly-emerging accelerated learning models, the HECC intends that until the process described in #1 above is complete, the five Regional Promise replication consortia shall be encouraged to limit their growth to a scale appropriate for remaining pilot projects. By September 30, 2015, HECC staff shall report to the Commission on whether credits awarded by public universities under the Willamette Promise are eligible for state funding under the HECC's Student Success and Completion Model (SSCM). At that time, staff shall recommend to the Commission any SSCM rule changes or other actions that may be necessary to ensure that the replication programs remain pilot-sized until the resolution of issues raised in #1.