Oregon Department of Education
Office of Educational Improvement and Innovation

Program Brief on

Credit for Proficiency

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Overview

In January 2007, the Oregon State Board of Education approved the following policy: "A key feature of the future diploma will be wider use of proficiency, ensuring that all students will have the opportunity to choose to earn credit by demonstrating proficiency." In order to enhance the relevance of education for students, the State Board also broadened the definition of what could qualify as courses that meet math and science requirements of the diploma. In a decision paper published in 2007 the Board endorsed the concept of meeting math requirements through courses such as Integrated Math, Applied Math, Construction Math, and Business Math as long as they meet the content threshold of Algebra I or higher. Similar flexibility is encouraged in courses offered for science credit.

As the new Oregon Diploma requirements are phased in, many districts are considering alternatives to the traditional academic course work in math, science, and language arts. In conjunction with the national Math-in-CTE curriculum integration model sponsored by the National Center for Research in Career and Technical Education, Oregon has been working to enhance mathematics, science, and other core academic concepts embedded in Career & Technical Education (CTE). CTE program courses, integrated academic course sequences, and project based learning are delivery models in which students may earn credit or partial credit by successfully demonstrating that they have met academic area content expectations. These integrated approaches give students the opportunity to apply academic content in real-world situations to demonstrate proficiency. Students may demonstrate proficiency inside the classroom, outside of the classroom where hours of instruction may vary, through documentation of prior learning, by appropriate examination, or by any combination thereof.

Background

Oregon's experience with credit for proficiency began in 2001, when the Board focused on the relationship between a time-based and proficiency-based system, and the awarding of units of credit. In 2003 the Credit Options Oregon Administrative Rule (OAR 581-022-1131) was adopted, which provides the current policy framework on which districts in the state of Oregon award proficiency-based credit.

In the spring of 2004, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) provided small grants to seven districts to develop local implementation policies and processes, provide local and state professional development, and document implementation progress. Overall, by keeping the focus on standards and defined performance levels, participating schools maintained consistent and appropriate rigor for awarding high school credit. The results of the pilot project reinforced the importance of local flexibility in meeting individual student needs and engaging staff in new approaches to teaching and learning.

Program Results

Statewide awareness of credit for proficiency has continued to grow exponentially since the original policy adoption in 2002. Numerous workshops and presentations, along with coordinated professional development by ODE and other education partners have developed a greater understanding of credit options within the Oregon standards-based educational system. Some district efforts in this area include:

- **Beaverton School District** - Beaverton has made a district-wide commitment to be a proficiency-based K-12 system within the next ten years. Their efforts have been teacher and principal led

with support by district leadership through release time, professional learning communities, and approval of various school design structures. Participating teachers have noted increased student engagement and academic success, as well as a reduction in disciplinary referrals.

- **Scappoose School District** - One of the state's Research and Demonstration pilot schools from 2004 through 2006, Scappoose's proficiency-based efforts began with one English/social science teacher and has spread throughout the science and mathematics departments. In 2007-08, 52 out of 55 Pre-algebra and Algebra I students successfully transitioned to Algebra II through proficiency and standards-based practice.

- **Redmond School District** - Beginning in 2007 with a freshman academy designed around proficiency-based instruction and assessment, Redmond intends to move proficiency throughout their system by grade level increments and opening a proficiency-based charter school. In the first year of the ninth grade academy, their dropout rate plummeted to zero and discipline referrals fell to 8.7 percent.

Other school districts working on system-wide implementation include Lincoln County, Umatilla, Forest Grove, Springfield and Roseburg.

An important partner in the Credit for Proficiency endeavor, the Business Education Compact (BEC), has provided key leadership and training activities for proficiency-based teaching and learning and has served as a resource for districts around the state. The BEC estimates that as of this printing it has trained over 1,000 teachers, most of them in proficiency practice, representing over half of Oregon's 197 school districts and more than two-thirds of Oregon's 36 counties. They have also been successful in engaging higher education partners such as Western Oregon University and Portland State University in supporting BEC workshops and providing graduate level credit for workshop participation.

Next Steps
As a result of further research into successful implementation across Oregon, the Credit for Proficiency Task Force was appointed and charged with developing recommendations to support wider use of proficiency options associated with the new diploma. Task force members represented K-12 school districts, community colleges, public and private four-year colleges and universities, business and industry and a variety of educational organizations. Their recommendations included:

- Definition and required elements for implementing credit for proficiency,
- Timelines for school district implementation and accountability,
- Guidelines for school district policy development,
- Processes and procedures for local implementation, and
- Resource and professional development needs.

Related Links and References
- ODE Credit for Proficiency web page - http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/results/?id=35
- Credit for Proficiency Guidelines for Schools and Districts http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/standards/creditforproficiency/cfpguidelines2009.pdf
- Guidelines for Offering Credit in Applied Academics http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/certificates/diploma/appliedacademiccredit.pdf

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