

November 7, 2017

Chair Bryant and Commission Members:

The Willamette Promise Advisory Board (WPAB) requests that the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) temporarily suspend, for a minimum of 24 months, the required Assessment-Based Learning (ABL) transcript notation. We make this request on behalf of 56,000 high school students in 57 school districts from 10 western Oregon counties. The signatories to this letter include three post-secondary institutions, two professional organizations, four ESD superintendents, and 57 school district superintendents. We believe this requirement produces unintended and detrimental impacts on students as they transition to postsecondary education. We urge HECC to hold students harmless as conversations about the Accelerated Learning Standards continue, longitudinal data is collected, and the program oversight process is completed.

Before the adoption of the new accelerated learning standards in June 2016, the Willamette Promise Advisory Board raised concerns that the special transcript notation (*brand*) for ABL would make Willamette Promise credits less transferable than traditional Dual Credit and Sponsored Dual Credit options, neither of which carry a transcript notation. HECC staff assured us that the notation would have no detrimental impact, and HECC intended that all accelerated credit pathways be viewed as equally valid options for Oregon's students.

By October 2016, the ABL notation was causing issues for some students, particularly those enrolled at Oregon State University campuses. For example:

- *“Mary” attended a small, rural high school and earned university credits in three Willamette Promise courses. She was accepted to Purdue University where Willamette Promise credits transferred seamlessly. After one successful semester at Purdue, she chose to return to Oregon to be closer to family and enrolled in the local community college. The Purdue University and Willamette Promise credit transferred without incident. After a term at the community college, she chose to attend Oregon State University--her parent’s alma mater. Willamette Promise credits did not transfer. The University provided no appeal process which placed her academic progress in jeopardy. Problems with the transferability will increase Mary’s costs and extend the time required for her to complete a degree.*
- *“Jose” attended a small, rural high school and earned university credits in two Willamette Promise courses. He chose to attend one of Oregon’s community colleges and enrolled in a university transfer program. His WP credits were accepted without question. At the end of his first year at the community college, he chose to enroll at Oregon State University. After submitting his transcripts, he was notified that Willamette Promise courses would not transfer, and he would need to retake the courses. He was provided no opportunity to appeal.*

These are not isolated cases. Based on data from the National Student Clearinghouse, Western Oregon University has identified twenty-eight (28) 2015-16 Willamette Promise students whose ABL credits were articulated as elective courses by OSU. Those same courses taught at WOU satisfied general education requirements. It is disheartening to know the reason WP credits are branded is the date of course registration. Students register at the end of the course, rather than the beginning. We considered abandoning this non-traditional approach, but our students and schools see significant value in the practice and in growing evidence that it narrows the equity gap.

After almost a year of effort and dialogue, Oregon State University agreed to transcribe most WP credits as free electives that will not satisfy OSU general education requirements. This resolution devalues the WP credits, forcing students to repeat general education coursework for which they have already earned college credit. This duplication wastes students' time and precious state resources. It is especially ironic because ABL is a more cost-effective model for accelerated learning. Post-secondary institutions are funded only for students who meet or exceed expectations for learning. This advantage for state taxpayers is squandered when ABL credits are branded and treated differently from other accelerated learning. Innovation is at risk of being stymied, when it has produced a sustainable and more fiscally responsible approach to accelerated learning. The State of Oregon cannot afford such waste. As we look to a future of constrained education funding, we must employ creative and cost-effective solutions if we are to find the resources to expand access.

The special notation also hampers efforts to expand access to accelerated learning to previously underserved populations. Schools of all types and sizes have faced challenges in providing accelerated learning opportunities for their students. Small, rural and large, urban schools hit walls created by rigid standards for traditional dual credit, and have embraced Willamette Promise with gratitude and enthusiasm. In some cases, after districts finally find opportunities for their students, the students are placed in a position where credits earned through legitimate means may not advance their college and career goals. Further, we believe when a student earns credit at one Oregon university, in a program compliant with HECC standards, and is required to retake the same coursework at another university, it is the antithesis of: *ensuring affordable access, removing barriers, coordination of transfers, and creating a culture of college attendance*--all of which are listed in HECC's chartering statutes. [ORS 350.075]

These artificial barriers have been particularly disheartening to the 35% of the Willamette Promise students who are economically disadvantaged and 57% of students who are Hispanic or Latino. Research published in March 2017 by REL Northwest and commissioned by the Oregon Department of Education, Higher Education Coordinating Commission and the Chief Education Office reports that: *"dual credit students are more likely to be white, female, high-achieving and not eligible for the federal school lunch programs, shows that there are persistent gaps in equity in dual credit participation..."* Artificial barriers such as branded transcripts, protracted appeals processes, duplicative efforts and costs help the equity and opportunity gaps persist.

The Willamette Promise is committed to providing more opportunity, reducing barriers and advocating for every student, particularly those who are not served well by other dual credit or AP programs.

In 2017, Oregon's legislature acted to ensure the consistent award and transferability of Advanced Placement credit in Oregon's public colleges and universities. Advanced Placement is an assessment-based program with no teacher qualifications or course equivalency. We believe there is value in Advanced Placement, but AP does little to close a glaring equity gap. It does not reach the underrepresented and underserved students the Willamette Promise reaches. The Willamette Promise Advisory Board does not view legislative action as the best method to make policy adjustments. We believe the greatest opportunity to improve the current system is through continuous, reflective and incremental change--the kind of change we are advocating in this letter.

The ABL special transcript notation connotes a less rigorous approach to accelerated credit. WP is far more than a series of summative assessments. Our staff work side by side with Western Oregon University, Oregon Tech and Corban University faculties to define common student outcomes for each course. University faculty write assessments and coursework aligned with on-campus offerings. High school teachers and university faculty frequently meet to ensure equivalency. WP also ensures interrater reliability by cross scoring assessments and maintaining a database of student work, assessments, and grades. We are aware of no other accelerated credit program in Oregon that takes all of these quality assurance measures.

The Willamette Promise is committed to continuous improvement. As advocates for student success, we have avoided the echo chamber of tradition where innovation and quality are drowned out by the loudest voices. Because we listen, we know what our students, schools, and districts value. We learn from experience, external evaluation, and research. As stewards of public resources, we deliver what we promise, on time and under budget.

Our greatest challenges are not finding educators and students who believe in the Willamette Promise. Our greatest challenge is finding policymakers willing to risk a little to gain a lot for students, finding champions who can remove barriers that slow progress towards closing the equity and opportunity gaps. Sometimes changing a single line in policy or delaying judgment until the evidence is clear will improve the lives of students in Yamhill Carlton or Salem or Mill City or Springfield or Tillamook for the better. Our request to suspend the ABL transcript brand is a small act, the removal of a single impediment. We believe that act will make a difference in the lives of many students.

Willamette Promise is committed to working within the HECC accelerated credit framework, but the lack of advocacy for our students has been challenging. We are hopeful that HECC will assume the role of *barrier-buster* and advance the belief that every Oregon student should have access to high-quality, affordable and transferable college coursework while in high school.

**Respectfully,**

**Willamette Promise Advisory Board**

Dr. Dave Novotney, Superintendent, Willamette ESD  
Dr. Dan Clark, Director, Center for Teaching and Learning, Western Oregon University  
Marla Edge, Director of Academic Agreements, Oregon Tech  
Dr. Mike Patterson, Interim Provost, Corban University  
Rob Saxton, Superintendent, Northwest Regional ESD  
Charan Cline, Superintendent, Yamhill Carlton SD  
Jeff Clark, Superintendent, Amity SD  
Kelly Carlisle, Assistant Superintendent, Salem Keizer SD  
Steve Spencer, Principal, Dallas High School, Dallas SD  
Andy Gardner, Superintendent, North Santiam SD

**Professional Organizations**

Craig Hawkins, Executive Director, Confederation of Oregon School Administrators  
Gary Peterson, Executive Director, Oregon Association of Education Service Districts

**Willamette Promise Staff**

Keith Ussery, Deputy Superintendent, Willamette ESD  
Gretchen Brunner, Willamette Promise Coordinator, Willamette ESD  
Cherie Clark, Willamette Promise College & Career Manager, Willamette ESD  
Adam Whalen, Accelerated Credit Manager, Willamette ESD

**Eastern Promise**

Dr. Mark Mulvihill, Superintendent Intermountain ESD

**Marion County**

Christy Perry, Superintendent, Salem Keizer SD  
Kent Klewitz, Superintendent, Jefferson SD  
Andy Gardner, Superintendent, North Santiam SD  
Andy Bellando, Superintendent, Silver Falls SD  
Matt Henry, Superintendent, Gervais SD  
Troy Stoops, Superintendent, Mt. Angel SD  
Ginger Redlinger, Superintendent, North Marion SD  
Joe Wehrli, Superintendent, St. Paul SD  
Dr. Darin Drill, Superintendent, Cascade SD  
Chuck Ransom, Superintendent, Woodburn SD

**Polk County**

Dr. Jennifer Kubista, Superintendent, Central SD  
Dr. Michelle Johnstone, Superintendent, Dallas SD  
Eric Milburn, Superintendent, Perrydale SD  
Art Houghtaling, Superintendent, Falls City SD

**Lane County:**

Dr. Chris Parra, Superintendent, Bethel SD  
James Brookings, Superintendent, Blachly SD  
Todd Hamilton, Superintendent, Creswell SD  
Aaron Brown, Superintendent, Crow-Applegate-Lorane SD  
Dr. Gustavo Balderas, Superintendent, Eugene SD  
Gary Carpenter, Superintendent, Fern Ridge SD  
Dr. Kathleen Rodden-Nord, Superintendent, Junction City SD  
Walt Hanline, Superintendent, Lowell SD  
Jodi O'Mara, Superintendent, Mapleton SD  
Bill Watkins, Superintendent, Marcola SD  
Jim Thomas, Superintendent, McKenzie SD  
Dr. Donald Kordosky, Superintendent, Oakridge SD  
Scott Linenberger, Superintendent, Pleasant Hill SD  
Andy Grzeskowiak, Superintendent, Siuslaw SD  
Dr. Krista Parent, Superintendent, South Lane SD  
Dr. Susan Rieke-Smith, Superintendent, Springfield SD  
Tony Scurto, Superintendent, Lane ESD

**Yamhill County**

Jeff Clark, Superintendent, Amity SD  
Charan Cline, Superintendent, Yamhill Carlton SD  
Dr. Steve Sugg, Superintendent Sheridan SD  
Dr. Maryalice Russell, Superintendent, McMinnville SD  
Jason Hay, Superintendent, Dayton SD  
Dr. Kim LeBlanc-Esparza, Superintendent, Newberg SD  
Carrie Zimbrick, Superintendent, Willamina SD

**Washington County**

Jeff Leo, Superintendent, Banks SD  
Don Grotting, Superintendent, Beaverton SD  
Yvonne Curtis, Superintendent, Forest Grove SD  
Susan McKenzie, Superintendent, Gaston SD  
Mike Scott, Superintendent, Hillsboro SD  
Ernie Brown, Superintendent, Tigard-Tualatin SD

**Multnomah County**

Terry Brandon, Superintendent, Riverdale SD

**Linn County:**

Todd Miller, Superintendent, Santiam Canyon SD

**Clatsop County**

Craig Hoppes, Superintendent, Astoria SD

Alice Hunsaker, Superintendent, Jewell SD

Paulette Johnson, Superintendent, Knappa SD

Mark Jeffery, Superintendent, Warrenton-Hammond SD

**Columbia County**

Lloyd Hartley, Superintendent, Clatskanie SD

Michael Carter, Superintendent, Rainier SD

Scot Stockwell, Superintendent, St. Helens SD

Aaron Miller, Superintendent, Vernonia SD

**Tillamook County**

Paul Erlebach, Superintendent, Neah-kah-nie SD

Misty Wharton, Interim Superintendent, Nestucca Valley SD

Randy Schild, Superintendent, Tillamook SD