

AFT-Oregon Testimony on Senate Bill 84

The American Federation of Teachers-Oregon represents over 12,000 members across the state of Oregon. Our members work in the private and public sectors in elementary and high schools, child care centers, community colleges and four-year universities.

AFT-Oregon supports the concept of high school students learning college level material and earning college credits. It can create a strong interest in high school students to enroll at college and help students get on track for success at college or university. If done right, it can foster a keen interest in a higher level of learning and critical thinking.

However, the members of AFT-Oregon have serious concerns about the emphasis in the proposed accelerated learning bill on dual-credit, i.e., college courses primarily taught by high school teachers. While this has been somewhat successful on a small scale, the effect on a large-scale of removing the role of college instructor and his or her oversight of these high school students and their courses will be a mistake. College offers a different type of education than in high school, with a higher level of analysis and critical thinking applied to the curriculum. A college course is not simply the contents of a textbook—the curriculum for a course is focused on achieving outcomes (which may or may not be in the text). The knowledge and expertise of a college professor helps form the content of a course.

We want every high school student in the state to have access to quality college courses. Simply having their schools and teachers offer a course that mirrors a college course on paper does not guarantee the rigor of a college course nor the quality of a higher education. There are other models of offering college courses to high school students that should be promoted. These include Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs, on campus or online college courses, college-high school collaborations (e.g., like Portland Community College runs at Jefferson High School), or online college courses taught by college instructors that coordinate with high school teachers as lab instructors or mentors in the classroom. All of these enable more involvement of college faculty and materials in the higher education process.

A further problem with the current emphasis on dual-credit is the lowering of the minimum qualifications for college instructors (usually over 20 graduate credits in their content area) to

accommodate the current qualifications of many high school teachers. As stated previously, the content expertise of a college professor is crucial to the quality of college-level instruction. Furthermore, if school districts are to partner with community colleges, they should be restricted to partnering with the community college in their district rather than “shopping around” for colleges who may be tempted to offer compromised course offerings to underbid or under-qualify their courses.

We urge the Senate Education Committee to promote offerings in high school that are true college courses, taught and overseen by college instructors who will maintain the same level of rigor and quality that they do for their courses for adults. A more significant role for college faculty than merely an instructor of record on paper needs to be included in legislation. True partnerships between high schools and the community college serving their district have to be fostered. This is essential if we are to offer college courses that will instruct, engage, and motivate high school students.