



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

April 3, 2015

Representative Dougherty, Chairperson
House Committee on Education
Oregon House of Representatives
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Chair Dougherty:

House Bill 3126 “The Accreditation Protection Act” was offered to provide clarity. The purpose is simple: to ensure that people delivering instruction to students have the academic preparation to delivery meaningful instruction. It was offered to provide a speedbump: from pushing an already overburdened K-12 system closer to the brink of collapse. As a classroom instructor at the college level I am concerned about the well-intended, but potentially harmful amalgamation of strategies to make collegiate level academic preparation available – absent collegiate level instructors.

Even at this moment of severe budgetary challenge, we must guard against the soothing, warm temptation of committing to “cheaper” policy alternatives that provide the appearance of academic rigor. I believe an evolving Educational-Industrial Complex is advancing an agenda that may well provide some K-12 students with a more flexible, less expensive alternative. However, I also believe the structures and systems related to collegiate credit during high school warrant our attention: we must not put affordability before the value of demonstrated rigor and quality.

Teaching is a profession. It is an honorable profession with many components. Adults learn differently than adolescents or pre-adolescent children. This is why the State of Oregon through TSPC requires grade-centric certification as well as completion of the MAT as the industry standard. The coursework preparing our K-12 teachers is complex; it is targeted upon the discrete pedagogical strategies associated with instructing development targeted learning cohorts.

Teaching at the collegiate level is also a profession – though admittedly we do not appear to value it as such in modern times. However, most colleges and universities require at least twenty-seven (27) credits of a specific content area and/or a MA or MS for a permanent teaching position. And while there is an ever-growing army of Graduate Teaching Assistant programs to provide lower cost, higher income alternatives for lower-division coursework for the universities, these instructors are both: performing teaching duties under the supervision of a tenure or tenure-track professional as well as personally engaged in rigorous academic study relevant to the subject matter they are learning to teach.

House Bill 3126 provides us with an opportunity to pause and consider our purpose: to reflect upon our objectives and the actual costs/benefits and potential consequences of our choices. At issue is whether the State of Oregon will facilitate the delivery of post-secondary education to students while simultaneously enrolled in K-12 programming: not as an exception, but as an evolving standard operation. There is clear evidence that simultaneous learning is not only possible, but yields a positive advantage given the budgetary and time constraints so common throughout our existing public school system. Yet, evidence also suggests that the promise of rigor absent the structures and systems that secure it can be worse for the student as well as the institution making the promise.

Sometimes the desire to do good, cancels out the quieter calls for caution. I am not against providing alternatives for students that need additional academic preparation: I am not against finding ways to deliver collegiate level academics for high school students. What I am concerned about is taking actions that establish a circumstance where K-12 schools are compelled to make choices they might otherwise not make because of the political pressures to do something, anything, regardless of its actual value for our students over the long-term. We must be cautious. And we must be clear. Both K-12 and collegiate level instruction require skills and talents that are not as interchangeable as they might appear to those unfamiliar with the respective environments.

In the end, this bill is offered to foster a meaningful discussion about how we best prepare our students for the emergent 21st Century landscape. I support providing collegiate level instruction to our K-12 student body so long as that instruction is absolutely consistent with the accreditation standards our colleges and universities are expected to sustain. This measure provides us with an opportunity to ask the question: are we asking the K-12 instructor to do even more with less, and if we are, how are we sufficiently preparing them – and their students – to succeed?

Respectfully,



Paul L. Evans
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District 20