



Success, Achievement, Together ... for All Students

Testimony from April 3, 2019

Good afternoon Chair Wagner, Vice Chair Thomsen and Committee Members,

For the record, my name is Gretchen Brunner and I coordinate the Willamette Promise program through the Willamette Education Service District in Salem, Oregon and act as the Accelerated Credit Coordinator for Western Oregon University.

First, I would like to offer my support to the proposed changes to SB800. SB800 with the amendment 1 is an incremental step in reaching a plan that is truly equitable for students, but there is still work to be done. The original language we proposed for SB800 was clear and direct by design in order to break down barriers for students. Our team has seen firsthand the students affected by transferability problems and we look forward to continued progress toward reaching the goal of equitable access for all.

Five years ago, our state came to educators asking for innovation to reach underrepresented and underserved students with accelerated credits and career and college readiness. This request was based on the Oregon Equity Lens. The nine Promise Replication sites spanning the state have delivered on that request.

Since 2014, 6,807 students from over 60 high schools have earned 39,761 credits saving families over 8 million dollars in the Willamette Promise alone, just one of the nine sites. Numbers of students participating in accelerated credit and going on to postsecondary education and training have increased overall based on expanded opportunities.

Education Northwest found that most historically underrepresented groups take Regional Promise courses at higher rates compared to other accelerated learning types. They also found that schools participating in Regional Promise programs had higher rates of participation in accelerated learning for economically disadvantaged students and students in rural schools (EdNW, 2018¹). Regional Promise students were 5% more likely to have attendance rates of 90% or higher, 11% more likely to graduate, and 6% more likely to enroll in college in the fall after graduation (EdNW, 2018). The Willamette Promise Assessment Based Learning courses make up close to 48% of this data.

Willamette Promise students who had taken Assessment Based Learning courses were found to carry larger loads in their first year in college or university and had higher grade point averages compared to students who had participated in other types of accelerated credit according to a HECC study in 2017 (HECC, 2017²). In 2017, 310 WP students attended at least one term of college post-graduation- 34% of those students were economically disadvantaged. In 2017-18, 41% of the 2,645 students taking WP courses were economically disadvantaged and 41% were students of color.

This data along with the information on our program provided by Deputy Superintendent, Keith Ussery, is proof that this work is setting out to fulfill the goals of Oregon's Equity Lens. Our biggest barrier at moving this forward at this point is transferability across the state. We are excited to take this next step, but fearful

¹ Hodara, A. (2018). Supporting the Transition to College: Accelerated Learning Access, Outcomes, and Credit Transfer in Oregon. *Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest*.

² Weeks-Earp, E. (2017). Spring 2017 Assessment Based Learning (ABL) Transcription and Transfer Brief. *Higher Education Coordinating Commission*.

of the additional time and effort it will take to reach true change and equity in practice. For four years we have engaged in difficult conversations and actions to promote access and equity for students in the transferability of credits, making little progress. Simply stated, our students do not have the time and resources to wait for us to make change. As we embark as a state to educate and prepare Oregon's next workforce, we must not get mired in the tradition of what we think policies should be or doing things the way they have always been done. We need to consider what we are asked for in the equity lens and truly create practices that lead to equitable outcomes.

We urge you make change for all students so they don't face systematic barriers as they work toward postsecondary education and training. Push toward meeting Oregon's Equity Lens remembering that "one of our most critical responsibilities going forward is to implement a set of concrete system changes and policies to deliver a truly student centric education system that improves outcomes and opportunities for students across Oregon."³

Thank you for your time and support for Oregon's students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gretchen Brunner". The signature is enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Gretchen Brunner
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Accelerated Credit Coordinator, Western Oregon University

³ (2019). *Oregon.gov*. Retrieved 3 April 2019, from <https://www.oregon.gov/highered/about/Documents/Commission/COMMISSION/2017/08-August-9-10/4.0d%20Equity%20Lens-reformat.pdf>