



Testimony on House Bill 2378
House Education Committee
March 18, 2021

Chair Alonso Leon, Vice-Chairs Neron and Weber, and members of the Committee. My name is Kyle Thomas and I am the Director of Legislative and Policy Affairs for the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC). Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on House Bill 2378. In 2018, HECC submitted a report to the legislature on Competency Based Education (CBE). This testimony summarizes some of the findings of this report.

CBE is a system of instruction and assessment that relies on students demonstrating progress toward specific skills. This contrasts against the current predominant model that relies on student credit hours. While Congress provided an alternative to the credit hour in the “direct assessment” provision of Higher Education Act (HEA) in 2005, the Department’s rule still requires CBE programs to translate competencies back to credit hours in order for their students to receive federal student aid. This is not a long-term solution for providing federal student aid to students enrolled in degree programs not tied to seat time. Given the nature of CBE, any new laws and/or regulations must not rely on credit hour translation to seamlessly allow for the provision of federal student aid to students enrolled in CBE degree programs.

Competency Based Education presents a unique opportunity to increase access to, and foster completion of, degrees for many students who may have historically been underrepresented in higher education. This is not to say that competency based education can, or should, replace traditional higher education approaches, but that it can supplement it.

Currently, some regulatory barriers do exist that limit the expansion of CBE within Oregon. First, and foremost, there are potential issues around state funding for public institutions for student participation in CBE programs, as the current public university and community college funding models do not include CBE.

Second, in the private career school sector, only cosmetology schools may currently be recognized as CBE programs.

Third, federal financial aid rules that are based on student credit hours for determining if a student is making sufficient progress towards a degree are incompatible with CBE models. Although long-term plans to fix this are underway, currently access to financial aid for CBE is provided through waivers of certain federal aid rules to allow CBE programs to disburse federal student aid to students.

Resolving these issues may require adjustments to state funding formulas or robust and complex crosswalks that associate student competencies with credit hours that are reviewed and accepted by the Commission so that institutions can be appropriately funded for CBE students.

Thank you.