

My name is Julie Conroy and I am a high school counselor in east Multnomah County. I enroll and support students we call newcomers: students who are in their first two years of school in the United States.

To more fully support these students, Oregon needs a common framework to review cases and award credit to ensure equitable transcription practices are happening across the state in a timely fashion.

This school year, I have enrolled 71 newcomers in our high school, a 154% increase since the 2019-2020 school year. Our newcomers this year have arrived from Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Chile, Cuba, Ukraine, Poland, Moldova, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Chuuk and Tonga. They represent young people across the globe who have fled wars, violence and traumas unimaginable for the majority of students in our Oregon schools. And yet, as they bravely walk into our Oregon high schools, entering a very different world from that which they left, we often strip them of their identity as a student.

Many of these students were academically focused youth in their home countries, on technical paths ambitiously working toward careers, while others were deprived of the opportunity to attend school and instead worked to help their families put food on the table. Some arrive as 14-year-olds, with four years of high school ahead of them, while others arrive as 18-year-olds, often having completed multiple years of high school already. These students arrive with an eagerness to complete their degrees and move on to community college, university, or the workforce.

When they arrive in my office and the conversation moves to that of their transcripts, responses run the gamut. As we develop a plan to transcribe their records or discuss options to retrieve their transcripts, we get them started in classes and they join our school community. As time passes, they begin to experience uncertainty around their standing as a student and it becomes difficult for them to plan for the future. They realize they must rely on others to make academic decisions for them that may or may not be in their best interest, robbing them of their ability to have agency during their high school academic experience.

Many of these students fled gang-affected communities, war zones, or poverty, hoping to find a better, safer life. When it becomes clear that their international coursework won't be honored or isn't honored, or they don't understand why they haven't been provided a clear idea of where they stand as a student, they are left with uncertainty and often a real inability to plan for their future.

The impact of this is great. Often students' motivation in school, attendance, and classroom behaviors become impacted. This compiles as they await transcription, resulting at times in failed classes and a feeling of hopelessness about their ability to graduate from high school.

The negative impacts of this situation are immense. Some students simply drop out, turning toward minimum wage jobs and away from school. The lifelong impact on their ability to earn a living wage in a career they are passionate about slips by the wayside as they once again become survivors instead of thrivers.

Currently in our building, fifteen juniors in high school do not know their current academic status going into their senior year. Eighteen current sophomores are in the same predicament. They are in limbo, unsure if they have enough credits to graduate on time and begin planning for their post-secondary options, let alone having the motivation to achieve at their highest potential.

Many schools in Oregon do not have systems set up to interview international students and support them through the process of requesting transcripts from their home country. In those schools, where there are no personnel focused on newcomer students' academic backgrounds, where there is no one willing or able to put in the work to gather the necessary documents to award credit for completed coursework, students simply never receive credit for their previous academic accomplishments.

In schools where this work is happening, the amount of time required to see a transcript through to completion can be very long, with multiple interviews needed, translation services accessible, and personnel trained to do the work. When current school staff shift their focus to this work, they are depriving other students of the critical support school staff provide otherwise. In the case of a school counselor, this includes academic, social-emotional and college and career preparation.

Honoring international students' completed coursework should not come at such a high price, nor should it be ignored. The load has become too great for school staff. Schools in Oregon need clear guidance and support from ODE to ensure that all international high school students who have international coursework have a fair chance of having it evaluated and included on their Oregon high school diploma.

Again, Oregon needs a common framework to ensure equitable transcription practices are happening across the state in a timely fashion, all to benefit Oregon's high school students.

Thank you.