

OREGON STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
NOTICE OF POLICY REVIEW  
AND REQUEST FOR COMMENTS

Regarding:

*Alignment and Adequacy of Oregon's Education Standards,  
Requirements and Assessments  
Within K-12, Between K-12 and Postsecondary Level*

Adopted at the State Board Meeting on September 16, 2005

Nikki Squire, Chair  
Jerry Berger  
Steve Bogart  
Brenda Frank  
Vanessa Gaston  
Emilio Hernandez  
Duncan Wyse

## CONTENTS

Request For Comments	. . . . .	1
Student Knowledge and Skills	. . . . .	4
High School Credentials	. . . . .	8
Content Standards and Assessments	. . . . .	15

## REQUEST FOR COMMENTS

The State Board of Education invites your participation in a review of Oregon's current academic content standards, curriculum requirements, credentialing requirements, and statewide student assessment system. These staples of K-12 policy and practice were shaped 14 years ago when Oregon passed the Education Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In this visionary legislation, state leaders directed the Board of Education to adopt high standards for all students and an assessment system to measure attainment of those standards. The standards not only addressed core academic content, they also set ambitious goals for learning in teams, problem solving, speaking, and interdisciplinary studies.

Today, those standards and assessments are in place in schools throughout Oregon. Despite their successes, including many featured in short stories throughout this document, Oregon cannot take anything for granted or lapse into complacency. The Board wants to take stock of Oregon's accomplishments and determine what adjustments in policy would improve student learning. The Board has already deliberated on these questions, and has reached some tentative findings. However, before embarking on specific policy changes, the Board would like to hear from Oregonians and Oregon institutions with a stake in K-12 education.

This public comment process is vitally important. While the Board's role is to determine desirable student knowledge and skills, learning standards, assessments, and credentials, the Board is mindful that local school districts are responsible for delivering education services. New policies and requirements must be feasible, even more so given constrained resources available to schools.

This notice is the first step in the comment process. Over the next several months the Board will seek a wide range of perspectives. The Board intends to hold community forums throughout the state with K-12 parents and students, school administrators and teachers, business and community leaders, community college and university educators, and interested citizens to learn what works in our current policies and what needs to be modified.

To begin the dialogue we invite any interested Oregonians or Oregon institutions to offer written comments on five broad questions stated here. Background and preliminary Board perspective on the first three questions are provided in the subsequent three sections of this Notice.

*By November 2006, the Board plans to adopt changes to high school graduation requirements and the state assessment system. Your participation will help ensure these changes improve the education delivered to our students*

### **1. What knowledge and skills do all Oregon students need in order to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?**

The Board believes Oregon needs to set learning standards with the expectation that *all* students can master high levels of knowledge and skills that enable success in postsecondary education, employment, and life. That means every high school student graduating with a diploma should be "college ready." The skills and knowledge that make high school graduates ready for postsecondary education are also the same skills

and knowledge that make them ready for employment. The Board wants to reduce the achievement gap that now plagues many low-income and minority students. The Board also wants to afford K-12 students, particularly high school students, the opportunity to accelerate their learning should they have the capability and interest in doing so.

## **2. What should be included in high school diploma requirements?**

### **What can we do to improve Oregon's high school credentials (Diploma, Oregon Honors Diploma, CIM, CAM, GED, others)?**

The Board believes that the current high school diploma requirements need to be upgraded in light of the demanding academic standards we are challenging all students to meet. The Board believes that Oregon should have a set of credentials (and curriculum standards and assessments associated with those credentials) that are meaningful to post-secondary institutions, employers, and students themselves. The credential (or combination of credentials) should confirm that a student has met rigorous academic and career-related standards.

## **3. What can we do to improve Oregon's standards and assessments?**

The Board believes it is important to have common standards and assessments statewide that measure progress of students at all grade levels in core academic subjects. These standards and assessments should reliably inform Oregonians about the preparation of Oregon students for higher education, rewarding careers, citizenship, and life. The system should also be helpful to individual students as they make plans for postsecondary education and careers.

## **4. How can you or your organization contribute to the success of this initiative? What do you see as your role?**

## **5. After reading this paper, what other comments do you have?**

### **Let Us Hear From You**

We invite your responses to each of these questions. Please send your comments to [jan.mccomb@state.or.us](mailto:jan.mccomb@state.or.us) or mail them to State Board of Education, ATTN: Jan McComb, 255 Capitol Street NE, Salem, Oregon 97310. There is also a web survey with the five questions online at <http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/results/?id=144>.

The comments will be summarized and presented to the public and to the State Board of Education. *To be sure that your comments are included in the first round summary, please submit them by December 16, 2005.*

As noted above, this document features short stories that illustrate school and student successes in meeting Oregon's higher learning standards. These stories demonstrate that higher expectations of students, more rigorous curriculum, and relevant learning experiences outside the classroom are already making a difference for hundreds of students. They illustrate what is feasible, on a larger scale, in districts across Oregon, to realize the vision of the Oregon Education Act.

Although we have made many improvements in Oregon education over the past 14 years, the economy and life are demanding more of our students, and we know Oregon can do better. Tell us what you think of our proposed positions, what works now, what doesn't, and what we can improve.

**We look forward to hearing from you!**

## STUDENT KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

The purpose of this section is to share the Board's vision for student learning through the teenage years and our preliminary perspectives on how well current policies on curriculum, standards assessments and graduation requirements support that vision.

### Vision for Education Oregon's K-12 Education

The current framework for Oregon's education system is a product the Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century, which passed in 1991 and then was updated in 1995 and again in 2001.

This legislation was based on two big ideas emerging at the time and still valid today:

*A broader role for education in the economy.* Since the 1970s, sweeping changes in economic competition, technology, and the organization of work itself have called for higher levels of knowledge and skills in the workforce. To acquire and maintain these skills, policy leaders reasoned, Oregonians need more education than they have in the past. By the late 1980s, the economy demanded more skills and education of job seekers, and the fastest growing jobs were those that require more education. On the other hand, the pool of family wage jobs for those with just a high school education or less was rapidly drying up, leaving them mostly low-paying, low-skilled jobs.

*New standards-based designs for learning.* Oregon policy leaders concurred that learning standards in traditional academic subjects should be higher, should be uniform across the state, and that student attainment of these standards should be measurable through statewide assessments. They also agreed on several other aspects of pedagogy: schools and teachers must make the learning experience more engaging to students and relevant to the adult world where acquired knowledge and skills are ultimately applied. Some study should be interdisciplinary. Each student should have a personalized learning plan, spelling out long-term goals, intermediate steps, and milestones to measure progress.

This vision for learning was encapsulated through the creation of two certificates, the Certificate of Initial Mastery and the Certificate of Advanced Mastery. The CIM represents standards of knowledge and skill proficiencies that students can demonstrate in academic subjects through uniform statewide and local assessments. CIM proficiencies are benchmarked to the tenth grade level, but students have time to achieve them through the senior year. The CAM combines achievement of CIM proficiencies along with additional academic proficiencies and career-related proficiencies achieved through a variety of hands-on, real-world learning experiences that are sometimes called contextual or applied learning.

**What knowledge and skills do all Oregon students need in order to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?**

## Board Perspective on the Vision and System Design

The trends identified in the early 1990s have only accelerated with increased automation and the migration of low-skilled manufacturing jobs to nations with lower costs of labor. With economic competition reliant on intellectual capital and innovation, employers were coming to value not only specific occupational skills, but also a range of capabilities fostered by a broad education: higher levels of literacy in language and math, abstract reasoning, communication, critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, and initiative.

Looking back over a decade and a half, the Board can see significant statewide progress under the Oregon Education Act. Higher content standards, expectations of student learning, and uniform assessments have been defined and put into place.

Oregon's elementary, middle and high schools have largely adopted the standards-based system, and periodic assessment is used to measure student, classroom, and school progress. We have seen considerable gains on test scores especially at early grade levels. Assessment data have helped shape instruction, and many students are learning at higher levels. The Nyssa School District (see box) provides one of many inspiring examples of improvement.

As we examine implementation challenges associated with our system of standards and assessments – and the associated credentials – we find that they have been received less favorably in high school than in grade school and middle school.

There are four reasons.

First, the requirements at the elementary and middle school mesh well with traditional academic subjects. While assessment demands have increased, the content itself is familiar to teachers. In high school, by contrast, new curriculum requirements were created through the Certificate of Advanced Mastery that are complex to implement. The standards for high school encourage all students to achieve at high academic levels *and* learn in a variety of applied contexts. A number of high schools have implemented this vision brilliantly. David Douglas (see box, next page) provides one of many examples. However, many others have struggled as they have attempted

to redesign their programs to meet the new standards.

Second, standards and assessments in high school are less connected with traditional academic course categories. For example, the tenth grade math assessment covers algebra, geometry, and statistics, subjects that high school students may or may not

### Nyssa School District, Nyssa

#### High Expectations and Support Are Keys To Closing the Achievement Gap

Six years ago, academic outcomes in the Nyssa School District mirrored the state trend: students of color, those from low-income families, and second-language learners achieved at levels well below their peers. With a high percentage of students from these groups, Nyssa focused on closing its achievement gap.

The effort has paid off. In 1999, 37 percent of Nyssa's Hispanic students met state standards in math compared to 53 percent among white students. Today the story is dramatically different. Math benchmark achievement among Hispanic students has risen to 60 percent, and achievement for all students has improved.

Nyssa began its journey to close the achievement gap by closely aligning curriculum with state standards and putting in place teaching practices that ensure standards are addressed. In that process it encouraged strong collaborative involvement by parents as well as school personnel.

As it raised the bar for achievement, the district also increased student support. For example, a weekly, district-wide tutorial hour gives students a chance to focus on weak skills, summer school helps migrant children maintain their academic progress, and staff has two hours of professional development time each week to assess student progress and improve learning outcomes. The result: Nyssa's vision for students is becoming reality – every child can succeed.

have covered by spring of sophomore year. High schools complain that testing in such cases is out of sequence with instruction.

Third, the new certificates were added on top of other assessments and credentials of interest to high school students – including the diploma itself as well as various honors credentials such as International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) credits. High school students and teachers in some cases have complained about facing too many tests and requirements.

Finally, it isn't clear how the new certificates relate to and connect with college entry and work. The Oregon University System was highly innovative in creating the PASS system for college entry, which was designed to establish learning standards and an assessment system that connects with CIM and CAM standards. However, implementation has been slow, and the connections among CIM, CAM and PASS remain unclear to a great many people. Performance assessments related to certificate standards appear to have little or no bearing on university admissions and community college program placement.

What has become clear is that postsecondary education of some type is now imperative for virtually all students. Therefore, our vision for K-12 must now explicitly include preparing more of our students to aspire to, enter, and complete postsecondary education. Specifically, we must dramatically increase the share of students who complete a postsecondary program (certificate, AA, baccalaureate or higher) in the years following high school. To do that we must: 1) get more entering ninth graders to stay in high school, adopt postsecondary goals, and develop proficiencies up to standards required for the next level, 2) help all students reach rigorous standards of skill and knowledge by the time they are 18 years old, and 3) close the achievement and postsecondary preparation gap among low-income and minority students.

What is equally clear is that currently many students are not reaching those goals. Right now, only about 70 percent of our ninth graders obtain a high school diploma, and at least 40 percent of those who graduate are not prepared to meet the demands of postsecondary programs.\* Going to the next level, they typically struggle with

### *David Douglas High School, Portland*

#### **Skills for Life Prove Worth in College**

In the early 1990s, half of David Douglas High School's graduates bypassed postsecondary education to seek jobs. Because formal education ended at twelfth grade for so many, David Douglas raised graduation requirements to ready students for life after high school. Ironically, what began as an effort to better prepare students for work, became a model for preparing them for college.

Among its changes, David Douglas increased credit requirements from 22 to 25, expected all students to master the same rigorous content, and required students to meet state benchmarks and earn a C or better to pass core classes. The school also created career-related learning experiences for all juniors and seniors, which helped students see the application of their academic skills and explore career options. David Douglas knew its efforts were bearing fruit when the share of students bound for college jumped from around 50 percent to 84 percent.

But students weren't just going to college, they were thriving there. Research at Oregon's public universities reveals that students who meet or exceed tenth grade benchmarks are more likely to earn a higher GPA in related college courses. The students of David Douglas are proof of that. Among 44 Portland-area high schools with at least 20 graduates going on to Oregon's public universities, nearly all saw their students average C's as college freshmen. David Douglas graduates averaged B's.

---

\* This could well be more than 50 percent. Less than a third of Oregon high school graduates receive a diploma with a CIM. Fewer than half of all tenth graders failed the most recent assessments in writing and math. Based on its extensive national assessment data, ACT, the assessment organization, recently reported "Most of America's high school students are not ready for either college or work." Nothing about Oregon suggests that it is doing better

frustration and often remediation, and many either take too long to complete their studies or they stop.

To prepare more students for postsecondary success, we must be certain that the standards, the assessments, and the curriculum content related to them are appropriate to the demands of colleges, apprenticeship programs, employers, and others as students move to the next stage. In that effort, we need our next-stage partners – postsecondary institutions and employers – to be involved in setting our requirements so those requirements are meaningful.

The Board believes that the basic vision of the Oregon Education Act is sound and that we need to make continuous improvements as we learn from implementation.

We want to make sure that we have set the right standards for learning and that the certificates and assessments work effectively, especially as the K-12 system connects with next step partners. The following two sections address specific issues surrounding standards, assessments and credentials, and address these questions in greater detail.

## **What knowledge and skills do all Oregon students need in order to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?**

# HIGH SCHOOL CREDENTIALS

Oregon has a two-tier K-12 education credentialing system. The traditional path still in effect requires a student to acquire a certain number of credit hours in a minimum set of courses to receive a high school diploma. The student has the added option to qualify for a Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM), a Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM), or both by demonstrating, through an assessment process, proficiencies in a set of academic subjects.

## Current Requirements for a High School Diploma

School districts must provide students an opportunity to earn a high school diploma. Oregon has required a student to pass a minimum of 22 credits to acquire a high school diploma. The 2005 Legislature directed the addition of two more credits, one each in math and English. The state sets a minimum of 130 instructional hours in a year to earn one credit, but it does not set a minimum grade point average to earn a credit. School districts establish their own pass-fail grade requirements, so it isn't clear how high or low the bar is in various school districts because that information is not collected centrally by the state. Theoretically, a student could receive a diploma with a 1.0 or D average.

Prior to the legislative direction to add one math and one English credit, this is how the credit requirements have broken down.

- English/language arts – 3 credits
- Mathematics – 2 credits
- Science – 2 credits
- Social sciences – 3 credits
- Applied or fine arts or second languages – 1 credit
- Physical education – 1 credit
- Health education – 1 credit
- Electives – (determined locally)

Individual school districts have the option to set higher diploma requirements, and students have the opportunity to take courses well beyond the minimum requirements for a diploma. Because they are aware that Oregon's minimum high school diploma credits fall short of admission standards at many colleges, school districts in many cases have set higher credit requirements for graduation. For freshman admission, for example, the Oregon University System requires three more units – one each in English, math, and a second language – than Oregon's recent minimum for high school graduation.

## New Career-Related Learning Diploma Requirements

During 2001-02 the Board added to the content credits specified above four Career-Related Learning Standards requirements for high school graduation starting in the 2006-07 school year. These requirements, which are also a requirement for a CAM, are fundamental skills essential for success in employment, college, family, and

**What should be included in the high school diploma requirements? What can we do to improve Oregon's high school credentials (diploma, Honors diploma, CIM, CAM, GED, others)?**

community life. Students demonstrate achievement of these requirements through integrated, interdisciplinary approaches and hands-on activities such as accomplishing a task or discovering a solution to a problem, in the classroom or another setting involving career-related learning experiences. To meet these requirements, each student must:

- *Develop an education plan and build an education profile.* This is a way for students to methodically identify personal, academic, and career interests and goals, to plan learning experiences that prepare students for steps after high school, and to track and document progress.
- *Demonstrate applied learning through a collection of evidence.* Students build a body of evidence in a variety of media or project products to demonstrate the application and acquisition of skills and knowledge related to their interests and post-high school goals.
- *Demonstrate career-related skills and knowledge.* These include capabilities in personal management, problem solving, communication, and teamwork, along with knowledge about the workplace and career planning and advancement.
- *Participate in career-related learning experiences.* This enables students to connect classroom learning with experiences in the workplace, in the community, or in school relevant to their interests and post-high school goals.

Because these diploma requirements apply to students graduating in the 2006-07 school year, school districts must have implementation under way beginning with tenth grade students in the 2004-05 school year.

These four requirements also apply to the Certificate of Advanced Mastery, which is described below. These new requirements reflect the Board's view that a student plan and profile, applied learning, and career-related learning are integral in helping students master academic subjects and explore options beyond high school. In the case of the high school diploma, school districts judge student work associated with the new requirements as they do with other diploma requirements. In the case of the CAM, proof of proficiency is required, and the state sets the standards for those proficiencies just as it does with the CIM.

### **CIM Requirements**

School districts must provide all students the opportunity to meet the performance standards required to earn a CIM. School districts award the CIM to students who qualify. Students have been earning the CIM since 1999. The CIM is not required by the state to graduate.

To earn a CIM, a student must meet performance standards in reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, and science through state tests and classroom work samples. Students may earn Subject Area Endorsements in addition to the CIM by meeting state standards in social sciences, the arts, second languages, physical education and/or health. School districts are not required to offer Subject Area Endorsements but are required to provide instruction in these content areas to meet diploma requirements.

### **CAM Requirements**

School districts must provide all students the opportunity to meet the standards required to earn a Certificate of Advanced Mastery. School districts award the CAM

and must be ready to award the certificate to students who qualify in 2008-2009. The CAM is not required by the state to graduate.

To earn a CAM, a student must meet the four requirements described on the previous page and must meet CIM performance standards through tests or work samples.

### **Guidance and Counseling**

To help students meet the diploma and CAM requirements described above, schools must provide comprehensive guidance and counseling support and access to information about careers. Guidance and counseling, and career information should be made integral to the educational process, including each student's effort to develop an education plan and profile. Each student should receive counseling and guidance support from an adult advocate in the school or community. Family members, other school personnel, and, where appropriate, other community members should have a hand in advising and guiding students about career options.

The guidance and counseling programs that districts offer must help students to:

- Develop decision-making skills
- Obtain information about self
- Understand the educational opportunities and alternatives available to them
- Establish tentative career and educational goals
- Accept increasing responsibility for their own actions
- Develop skills in interpersonal relations
- Utilize school and community resources.

Another way to look at Oregon's guidance and counseling framework is through the four student development domains it seeks to advance: 1) learning to learn (academic), 2) learning to work (career), 3) learning to live (personal and social), and 4) learning to contribute (community involvement).

### **Career Learning Frameworks**

Schools must also provide students access to career information and technical skills in Oregon's Career Learning Frameworks. These are planning tools that integrate learning in a career context. They are used to guide the development of the student's education plan and learning experiences. Career learning frameworks help students gain a deeper and broader view of their career interests and the expectations required for post high school employment and postsecondary training and education. They provide teachers a context that connects instruction and curriculum to real world applications. The frameworks also provide a common focus for employer and education partnerships, postsecondary connections, and community involvement.

Career learning frameworks are currently available in the following career categories:

- Agriculture, Food & Natural Resource Systems
- Arts, Information & Communications
- Business & Management
- Human Resources
- Health Services
- Industrial & Engineering Systems

Schools are not required to provide programs in any of the career areas to meet the CAM or diploma requirements. However, many schools choose to develop programs using career areas as a unifying theme and context for learning.

### *Gresham-Barlow School District, Gresham*

#### **Standards Relevant to Students In Credit-for-Proficiency Program**

During the summer of 2004, 11 students from Gresham High School earned credit by demonstrating proficiency using a variety of state learning standards. The participating students chose three or four standards related to CIM, CAM, PASS or Career Related Learning and used their summer work, travel, or hobbies as the framework for designing individual, interdisciplinary projects. At the end of the summer the students were required to discuss the standards related to their activities and to present work samples as evidence of newly acquired proficiency.

“You mean I get credit for doing stuff I want to do anyway?” That was Maria’s response when asked if she would like to take part in the pilot. She chose standards in Language Arts, Career Related Learning, and Health to go with her projects producing a community service radio program, and writing and performing health-related skits. Maria presented and discussed the scripts she wrote as well as tapes of her shows, lists of her presentations, a journal, and photographs.

Gresham-Barlow has expanded the program, which now includes 80 students and seven teachers working outside of the school day. The district’s goal is to make credit for proficiency a part of the regular school day.

#### **Credit for Proficiency**

The Board adopted a policy in 2002 that allows school districts the option to award students credits toward graduation based on demonstrated proficiency. As an alternative to Carnegie Unit contact time, this gives students a means of receiving credit for learning that takes place in and out of school. Policies for proficiency credit are created and implemented by the local school district.

The purpose of this policy is to offer districts and schools flexibility to meet the various needs, interests, and learning pace of each student, to create additional options for students while maintaining high system standards and accountability, and to empower local decision-making and creativity. For example, it would be characteristic of an interdisciplinary course to cover more than one academic subject while exploring a particular topic in depth. Students who demonstrate proficiency in academic content as an outgrowth of interdisciplinary work might meet Carnegie Unit credit requirements for the disciplines involved.

Credit for proficiency represents the first Board policy that applies the benefits of the proficiency-based standards model to the traditional Carnegie

Unit credit system. As such, it may provide a path to bring the two separate high school credentialing systems now in place closer together.

#### **Board Perspective on Credentials**

The Board needs to confront the question of whether Oregon’s current high school credentialing system serves students well enough, particularly its two-tier diploma/CIM arrangement and its current traditional course credit requirements. There is also some concern whether high schools are on track to meet new diploma and CAM career-related proficiency requirements on time.

In the two-tier high school credentialing system, the state does not require students to attain a CIM in order to receive a high school diploma (although school districts have the option to require this locally). Students who demonstrate the proficiencies associated with the CIM are prepared for postsecondary education and employment far better than those who meet only the minimum high school credit requirements. Students, however, do not necessarily know that, and because the CIM is not required, many do not become proficient at these levels.

The Board believes it is important to have common standards and assessments statewide that measure progress of students at all grade levels in core academic subjects. These standards and assessments should reliably inform Oregonians about the preparation of Oregon students for higher education, rewarding careers, citizenship, and life. The Board believes it is time to consider requiring demonstrations of minimum proficiencies in core academic subjects and career related skills as a requirement for a high school diploma, as the North Clackamas District has already done. This would signal to students how important it is to master critical academic and work-related skills. If we were to take this step, we might include many of the proficiency standards currently required for the CIM and the CAM, although not necessarily all of them.

What makes the CIM and CAM so important are the higher standards of proficiency they represent (compared with the current minimum diploma requirements) and the use of a common form of assessment. Yet, the traditional diploma has certain advantages over these two new credentials. First, the high school diploma remains something of a cultural milestone for students and their families and is widely recognized in the larger community. In addition, the course requirements for a diploma include subjects that are beyond the scope of the CIM and the CAM, and teacher grading on individual courses provides useful feedback for students and helpful indicators of competency for next-step partners, especially in higher education. By requiring demonstrations of proficiency as part of the diploma, we would blend the best features of these different credentials into one.

If we add proficiency requirements into the high school diploma, we will need to consider what knowledge and skills are critical for success in postsecondary education and employment. The Oregon University System has articulated proficiency requirements through the PASS system. The community colleges use placement exams to define readiness for college level work. Employers also often test candidates on knowledge and skills as a condition for employment. We need to understand how these knowledge and skill levels compare to the CIM and CAM level proficiencies as we explore new high school diploma requirements. We also need to consider whether K-12, postsecondary, and employer assessment tools can be better linked, a subject that we address in the next section.

### *North Clackamas School District, Milwaukie*

#### **CIM-Level Requirements Boost Performance**

North Clackamas is one of a few districts in the state that requires students to earn a Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM) or its equivalent to graduate. Students must meet state performance standards in reading, writing, speaking, math and science by passing state tests to earn a CIM or by demonstrating CIM-level skills through additional work samples. The district began phasing in the CIM in 1998. It aligned curriculum with state standards, trained teachers in CIM requirements, and educated students and families about the new academic demands. Students in the class of 2004 were the first to demonstrate CIM-level skills as a prerequisite to earning their diplomas.

In 2002, 25 percent of North Clackamas students earned a CIM. In 2004, that number jumped to 60 percent, one of the highest success rates in the state. The district insisted on CIM-level skills because it believes these higher standards will raise student achievement and contribute to student success after high school.

Performance results for the Class of 2004 suggest the district is on the right track. The district's average SAT and ACT scores increased, and so did the number of tenth graders meeting state benchmarks in reading and math rose. The district is encouraged by this initial success.

The Board also sees the need to re-examine the Carnegie unit requirements. Apart from the question of proficiencies, Oregon's current minimum high school credit requirements fall short of OUS entrance requirements. Although school districts can require more subject credits and a higher GPA, the Board is considering raising the minimum credit requirements statewide to include at least the minimum for admission in the Oregon University System. That means one more unit each of English, math, and a second language -- and a higher GPA.

The Board sees great merit in granting credit to students who demonstrate proficiency associated with specific high school courses. Currently, the proficiencies associated with the CIM and CAM do not tie directly to specific courses. In the future, we envision common examinations (such as AP exams) for all courses that can be taken to earn course credit for those students who master material, whether inside the

traditional classroom or outside, drawing on web-based learning, applied learning, or other means. In the meantime, we will continue to rely on district level initiative to award credit for proficiency, relying on assessment tools of district choice.

Current diploma requirements must be in place by 2006-07 and career related proficiencies must be in effect by 2008-09. The Board believes that career oriented requirements are important and will serve students well. Many schools and districts have said they share that view. The Board would welcome comments on how we should work with schools struggling to meet the timeline.

We want all the credentials designed to celebrate solid achievement and to be recognized by postsecondary institutions, employers and the community at large. In particular we want the minimum requirements for a high school diploma to represent high levels of academic accomplishment. Our aim is to design an education deliver system that brings all students up to rigorous standards of skill and knowledge. Skills include ability to read and comprehend complex material, write well for a variety of purposes, listen and

communicate orally, solve problems, work effectively in teams, and take initiative. We also want a system that provides all students the opportunity to apply their learning in at least one field of interest, in order to gain deeper understanding of academic subjects and to explore potential career interests. The diploma should represent this level of learning

### *Powers School District, Powers*

#### **Students Shine in Service Learning Program**

In an isolated valley in southwestern Oregon, on the South Fork of the Coquille River, the Powers School District – student population 145 – is demonstrating that service learning projects keep students motivated, focused, and on track for success.

Service learning integrates student involvement in community service projects with math, history, natural sciences, and other curriculum. Working with local government agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Powers students at all grade levels participate in projects such as migratory fish stock enhancement and restoration of native plants beneficial to forest ecosystems.

In his four-and-a-half-year tenure, Superintendent Bill Gehling counts more than 140 service learning activities and "tremendous turnarounds" among students, a significant outcome in a district where the majority of the students are from low income backgrounds.

In the native plant species program alone, he says, among 18 high-risk students, all but one have improved their academic performance and have either graduated or are on course to graduate. One student, who was an eighth grade dropout, is now an honors student who hopes to obtain a college degree in agronomy.

**What should be included in the high school diploma requirements?**

**What can we do to improve Oregon's high school credentials  
(diploma, Oregon Honors Diploma, CIM, CAM, GED, other?)**

## CONTENT STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

Oregon's Statewide Assessment System measures student attainment of academic standards leading to and including those required for the Certificate of Initial Mastery. Like the standards that it measures, the assessment system is uniform and statewide in scope, so it gives students, parents, educators, elected officials, and the public a basis to compare student performance and progress within a school, within a district, across the state, and over time.

**What can we do to improve Oregon's standards and assessments?**

In addition, the assessment system:

- Informs students, teachers, parents, employers, and postsecondary programs about student skill proficiencies.
- Provides information on student and school performance useful for policy decisions on budgets, staffing, and other matters by state elected officials, the State Board of Education, and local school districts.
- Supports instructional program improvement.
- Informs the public about statewide student and school achievement in Oregon.

### **What Statewide Assessments Measure**

The assessment system measures student performance against Oregon's Content Standards, i.e., what the Board of Education considers important for our students to know and be able to do.

Oregon's content standards form the foundation for curriculum and assessment at all grade levels. They represent the knowledge and skills that the Board believes all students should achieve, while leaving local districts discretion on additional subjects and studies. The content standards are available for review at <http://www.ode.state.or.us/go/standards>.

Oregon's assessment system differs from those found in many states in that Oregon relies not just on multiple choice tests, but also samples of student written and oral work which is assessed by Oregon teachers in the classroom (in the case of work samples) or centrally by trained scorers (in the case of statewide performance assessments).

Specifically, Oregon's assessment system consists of:

- State multiple-choice tests of knowledge and skills in math, reading, science, and social sciences
- State performance assessments (centrally scored student work) in math and writing
- Classroom work samples in math, science, speaking, and writing.

The state assessments begin in third grade and are conducted every year thereafter in grade school in English and mathematics, and at fifth and eighth grade in science. In high school the state assessments are targeted at the tenth grade, with local work samples accumulated both in freshman and sophomore

Tests Scheduled in 2004-05

Grade	English	Writing	Math	Science	Social Sciences
3	√		√		
4	√	√	√		
5	√		√	√	√
6	√		√		
7	√	√	√		
8	√		√	√	√
CIM	√	√	√	√	√

years.\* At each grade, benchmark scores are established which reflect achievement of the academic standards set for that level. The CIM is awarded when students demonstrate proficiency on these tests at the tenth grade level.

In addition to the state content standards and statewide assessments, the Oregon University System has created the Proficiency-Based Admissions Standards System (PASS), which represent standards and assessments OUS believes will prepare students for university level work.

The multiple-choice assessment of student proficiencies for the CIM satisfies many of the assessment requirements for college-level proficiencies contained in PASS. In this sense, CIM assessments *align* with PASS assessments, but they do not constitute the complete assessment requirements of PASS, just as CIM content standards do not meet all of the requirements of PASS. Additional qualitative assessments, i.e., teacher review of student work at a more demanding content level, is required for PASS assessment.

The PASS staff has been training high school teachers how to administer the classroom PASS assessment, and also how to merge the traditional grading process into the PASS assessment process to conserve teacher time and effort in assessment. So far, about 1,500 Oregon high school teachers have received this training, including concentrations of staff in the Beaverton School District and the math, English, and science departments of several other district high schools. Students who meet the PASS classroom assessment for particular content areas are awarded credit for CIM proficiencies in those content areas if they have not already passed CIM standards for those subjects.

There is a misconception in some parts of the K-12 system that students who qualify for a CIM meet PASS standards. They don't, and it probably isn't realistic that they should since CIM standards are aimed at the tenth grade level. CIM proficiencies *align* with Oregon University System PASS standards in the sense that they are the right building blocks on the way to PASS standards, but they are not *all* the building blocks needed. They fall short, for example, in math, where CIM requirements stop at geometry. OUS minimums include algebra II and more competitive institutions often require pre-calculus.

---

\* Although CIM assessments were originally anticipated for the tenth grade, they occur throughout the four-year high school period, depending on student readiness. Testing through computers located at schools under the Technology Enhanced Student Assessment (TESA) program makes it easier for students to access assessment anytime they are ready, and about half of all assessments occur through the TESA system. Work samples also accumulate throughout the four-year period.

## Board Perspective on Statewide Assessments

As we reflect on Oregon’s assessment system, the Board has developed a set of criteria to consider as we evaluate the current system and its alternatives.

1. We want an assessment system that fairly measures whether each student has mastered established content knowledge and skills.
2. We want the assessment system to support teachers. We want to be clear about the content that needs to be covered and we want assessments to be helpful for supporting improvements in classroom practice and for identifying the specific needs of individual learners.

### *Nixáawii Community School, Umatilla Indian Reservation*

#### Standards Plus Heritage Boost Student Success

At the Nixáawii Community School, Joe has a 2.83 GPA, is school president, and embraces learning about his native culture. He is beginning to consider directions to take his education and career.

But a year ago, those options were limited. Before applying to Nixáawii, Joe had a GPA below 1 (it was .17) and was at-risk for dropping out. At his old school he preferred to “hide out” in the classroom, disengaged at the back of the room. At Nixyáawii he is “tuned in,” asking questions and voicing his opinions.

The focus of Nixáawii Community School is to provide college preparation for all students and preserve native culture. Central to the school’s success is a rigorous curriculum that is relevant to students’ lives. Using native art, history, skills and culture as the context for core academics, Nixáawii students take pride in who they are and in what they can achieve. Students in need of academic support are provided personal tutors. Tribal members help teach, mentor, and motivate students.

At his old school Joe felt “invisible.” But at Nixyáawii, he is respected and challenged by the adults in the school and in the community as a good student looking ahead to a bright future.

3. We want the assessment system to measure the success of individual schools at advancing the knowledge and skills of the students enrolled as well as the broader performance of Oregon’s system of public education. The system should spotlight the number of students meeting state standards as well as the learning gains of students. It should provide clear data by race and ethnicity to spotlight progress within individual schools. This data should inform communities and parents about the quality of their schools, and help schools themselves identify opportunities for improvement.

4. We want an assessment system that is flexible, one that enables students to advance as fast as they choose and provides additional instruction for those who need more time to master a particular subject. This includes providing credit to students who can demonstrate proficiency in a subject, and providing access to postsecondary credits while students are still in high school.

5. We want our system of standards and assessments to be clear and connected so that when mastery is demonstrated at one level, a student is able to move seamlessly to the next level of study in the K-16 continuum. For

example, a student meeting mastery requirements in mathematics should know that she is ready for the next level, whether the course is taken in high school, community college, or at a university. Assessments in high school should be directly useful for community colleges and four-year institutions for admission and placement.

The last two criteria are becoming ever more important, because the lines between high school and postsecondary education are becoming blurred. Teenage students increasingly are seeking courses outside the walls of high school – at community colleges, universities, and over the Internet. We want a system that encourages students to take advantage of all the options available, and that rewards accelerated learning with appropriate credentials

The statewide assessments do not directly connect with assessments commonly used by those seeking to attend college, the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and the Aptitude for College Test (ACT). Neither of those tests directly ties to statewide standards, nor are they applicable to early grade levels. Yet those tests have greater currency for many high school students because they are more widely recognized by colleges and universities.

While the statewide assessments do connect with PASS, that system is not yet widely used for university admission and placement purposes, and many high schools do not have adequate training to administer PASS. The PASS staff has trained 1,500 high school teachers to integrate PASS-level standards and proficiencies in their classrooms. But the PASS connection is being implemented only in districts such as Beaverton where there is strong local commitment and initiative. It isn't likely that PASS standards will be implemented across Oregon high schools without a policy that requires it and without resources to train teachers on a large scale in its use.

The statewide assessments do not tie to the assessments used by colleges and universities once students enter college. Most notably, the community colleges all use assessments for placement once students enter these open-enrollment institutions. Yet, those assessments have in no way been calibrated or connected to the state assessments used in high school. The Board would like to explore how to improve these connections.

While Oregon can take considerable pride in the assessment system it has developed, it is important to acknowledge the system's limitations. The system was designed to determine whether individual schools are meeting state content standards. It serves other purposes unevenly. In particular, as a tool for reviewing school performance, it deserves a careful review, especially because the stakes were raised substantially when the Federal Government passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NLCB), and tied federal funding policy to individual school performance.

*Columbia Gorge Community College, The Dalles*

**Dual Credit Preps Students for College**

For over 15 years, Columbia Gorge Community College has coordinated Project Advance, a program that awards dual credit (high school and postsecondary) for specific, advanced courses offered at 5 area high schools in Oregon.

In each dual credit course, curriculum is articulated with college course content and outcomes, and high school instructors meet college faculty qualifications. About 450 students participate annually in Project Advance, taking college-level courses in math, science, technology, and English.

Shilah did not have a specific goal in mind when she took calculus for college credit at South Wasco County High School. But like the many other students involved, she enjoyed the challenge and the chance to get a jump on college. The experience prompted her to enroll full time at Columbia Gorge Community College after she graduated.

With a core requirement already complete, she entered college with greater flexibility in designing her program of study and the added confidence of knowing she could succeed. Shilah is proof that Columbia Gorge Community College is realizing the multiple goals it has set for Project Advance. Dual credit improves student achievement, prepares students for the demands of college, expands college enrollment, and strengthens the community by supporting a seamless transition to postsecondary education.

In short, we are putting increasing demands upon our assessment system – and we think it is timely to review it. We would appreciate comments on what are important criteria for evaluating any assessment system, and how well the Oregon system performs against those criteria. We would be interested in learning about alternatives, and their benefits.

**What can we do to improve Oregon's standards and assessments?**

---

**How can you or your organization contribute to the success of this initiative? What do you see as your role?**

**After reading this paper, what other comments do you have?**

### **Let Us Hear From You**

We invite your responses to each of these questions. Please send your comments to [jan.mccomb@state.or.us](mailto:jan.mccomb@state.or.us) or mail them to State Board of Education, ATTN: Jan McComb, 255 Capitol Street NE, Salem, Oregon 97310. There is also a web survey with the five questions online at <http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/results/?id=144>.

The comments will be summarized and presented to the public and to the State Board of Education. *To be sure that your comments are included in the first round summary, please submit them by December 16, 2005.*