A Union of Professionals
AFT-Oregon

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Recommendations on Achievement Compacts
AFT-Oregon

Oregon is in the midst of embarking on an ambitious agenda to increase the number of students graduating, focusing on high school diplomas, college certificates and college degrees. This agenda highlights the need to develop methods and ways to improve student success in our state. The achievement compacts can offer a focus on the priorities of our education system, the plans to get there, and making sure we have sufficient resources to achieve our goals.

The faculty and educational professionals of American Federation of Teachers-Oregon are dedicated to the success of all our students. We know firsthand the barriers that our students face every day, and the degree of their success, both inside and outside the classroom. Our recommendations on achievement compacts stem from our desire to engage education professionals on a deeper level than ever before. Our voices must be a part of the conversation around education reform and accountability. Education professionals are a vital link in this process, and our engagement is vital to the success of the 0-20 system in Oregon.

General recommendations

Faculty and Educator Engagement

There was a lack of opportunities for involvement of faculty, educators, and other staff in the development of the achievement compacts and their goals. According to the leaders of AFT-Oregon locals in primary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions, only one institution included a representative from their membership in discussions to develop compact targets. This is part of the reason that many educators are not even aware of the compacts nor see them as having any relevance to their instruction or students.

In order for Oregon to focus its education system on increasing student success and completion, educators have to be involved in the design and implementation of changes to the system. It should be recognized that there is a level of “reform fatigue” among those in the education community who have too often experienced efforts at education reform and redirection that were not sustained or adequately funded. This, combined with the current lack of morale in our classrooms due to Oregon’s disinvestment in education, have to be reckoned with if we want to build a healthy 0-20 education system. In order to be

successful we must make sure that measures are not top-down mandates with little or no input of educators.

Recommendations
Teachers, education assistants, and other educational staff of schools, colleges, and universities should be encouraged by their institutions to participate in developing ideas for compacts; setting and meeting targets; and implementing changes for increased student success. This should be implemented above and beyond the minimal level set in the statutory language that defined the compacts.

The OEIB should take seriously any cases where educators in schools, colleges, or universities are excluded from the development of the compacts for 2013-2014. In order to remain in touch with how Oregon's goals for education are being implemented in classrooms, OEIB should make an effort to reach out to educators to assess their awareness of the compacts, and survey their expectations and ideas for meeting the goals of 40/40/20.

Missions of individual institutions
The compacts are uniform in scope among institutions in all three levels: K-12, community colleges, and the university system. The categories of completion, educational quality, connections to the community and other education systems, unfortunately give the appearance that the state limits the spectrum of what it values in education. Many educators have the impression that the compacts narrow the mission of education to checking off boxes.

Important areas of education are absent from the compacts. For example, the arts, humanities, and social sciences all are integral to a well-rounded, quality education. While science, technology, engineering, math and healthcare professions are important, the state has not been clear on how emphasizing these areas in the compacts fits into any comprehensive plans to strengthen the workforce and the economy. The research mission of many universities is also neglected, even though this contributes to the state's economy and the educational stature of the university itself.

Recommendations
The OEIB should encourage local districts and institutions to explore compacts that have relevance to their students, their community and their individual missions. The aim of the goals in each compact should be clarified within the context of the educational plan for the state and for the community.

More concise, mutual agreements
Take a look at any compact for an institution or district. Then imagine you're a teacher going in to teach the first day of school this year. How does the compact help you improve student success? A list of accountability targets without additional background information is not going to be practical to anyone in the classroom. The compact between the state and districts or institutions lacks the vision to inspire educators, students, and the public. Meeting numerical goals cannot be an end in itself. Our schools should not focus attention on students "most likely to succeed" instead of supporting underrepresented and minority students in their desire to succeed.

Recommendations
The compacts should offer a vision for the 40/40/20 goals. They should explain what the school district, college or university aims to achieve, what the state will do to help meet these goals, and what this means to the students and the community. This would communicate more clearly to educators, administrators, students, decision makers, and the public the relevance of the 40/40/20 aims. It would offer a vision and provide a focus that would inspire educators in the field to work toward common goals to improve student success.

Meaningful goals
The statute covering the compacts identifies three categories of educational outcomes to be measured or validated: completion rates; validations of the quality of knowledge and skills; and relevance and contribution to the workforce, the economy, and society.

For K-12 education, the compacts should not add additional layers of assessments in a system that already puts too high a stake on tests and examinations. The achievement compacts need to focus on student success in a way that helps focus on clear goals and sets the direction for educators.

In post-secondary education, focusing solely on the awarding of degrees or certificates is too narrow of an approach to reflect the diversity of the mission of higher education. We need an approach to student success in broader terms--one that includes community needs and student educational goals. Faculty and staff at each college or university can examine academic programs on the basis of what students say they need—greater clarity in the curriculum, stronger connection between coursework and student goals, a mix of academic and practical knowledge, and/or more counseling and advising. This, along with an approach that supports efforts across various programs and disciplines to strengthen learning, would be far more effective at improving student outcomes than setting targets for debatable definitions of educational quality.

Quality should not be assessed based on what is easy to measure. Evaluation of quality has to look at the learning outcomes that a department or institution has established for the learner and program.

Recommendations
For K-12 education, there are tools for assessing student success like the Oregon Department Education state school report card, the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge, and in the future, assessments for the common core curriculum standards. These types of tools should be emphasized as the means to assess student improvement and curriculum effectiveness. The compacts should focus on increasing student success and offering some indications of how that can be achieved.

Accreditation agencies, along with various academic and professional organizations, are responsible for assessing the quality of post-secondary institutions and programs. Their evaluation reports and recommendations should be referenced in considerations of academic quality.

There are many parallel efforts happening that are not aligned or coordinated in the achievement compacts. For community colleges, the Degree Qualifications Profile from Lumina Foundation is currently a pilot program in the state. This is an attempt to offer a framework for outcomes for associate and bachelor degrees. The Essential Learning Outcomes from the American Association of Colleges and Universities is also an effort to assess the quality of a liberal arts education. These include assessing a student's cumulative progress through college in the following areas:

- Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World
- Intellectual and Practical Skills
- Personal and Social Responsibility
- Integrative and Applied Learning

Additional areas that should be taken into account in institutional quality include amount of state funding per student; average class size and ratio of student to faculty; the number of state- or nationally- recognized or award-winning programs at the university; the ratio of contingent faculty to regular, tenured faculty; and the ranking of faculty and staff salaries compared to national average and comparator institutions.

Staffing crisis in post-secondary education

At our colleges and universities there is a staffing crisis. Many instructors are employed in contingent positions with minimal participation in their department or institution. Adjunct instructors work on a per class basis and cobble together a schedule at several different colleges and universities in the metro areas. If the intent of our education system is to simply meet the basic classroom instructional needs of students, then we are fulfilling that goal. However, to reach the students who are not completing their goals, and to adequately advise, mentor, and coach students who are faced with barriers in their educational path to success, requires faculty who can offer individual assistance and advice to students beyond the time in the classroom. The fact is the adjunct faculty who form a near-majority or even majority in many of our colleges and universities do not get this opportunity to carry out this important duty of a teacher.

Recommendations

The OEIB should track the number of contingent faculty compared to regular faculty at post-secondary institutions in order to establish the connection between instructional staffing and student success. In addition, the OEIB should include a minimum number of full-time tenured faculty members that each institution requires in recommendations for best practices among post-secondary institutions.

Additional recommendations

Degrees to non-Oregonians

Many research universities maintain their status in part through national and international recognition. Awarding degrees to Oregonians should remain a priority, but it should be recognized that at least some Oregon universities need to successfully educate students from outside Oregon and abroad, too.

Continuing Education

Continuing education/community service are important non-degree (and often non-credit) components of the wider educational mission of post-secondary institutions. Many communities benefit from the lifelong connection to education, research, and knowledge that their community colleges and universities offer. Any recognition of institutional quality should include a look at continuing education.

Faculty Satisfaction

An instrument should be developed comparable to the ones used for employers and alumni to allow for an assessment of satisfaction by the faculty. Faculty "satisfaction" could cover student preparation, instructional resources and administrative support. Current outcomes include employer and student satisfaction. A third important measure of the quality of a university comes from the faculty who know first hand the resources available and the quality of student performance.