



ISSUE BRIEF

Legislative Policy, Research, and Committee Services • 453 State Capitol • Salem, OR 97310-4002 • 503-986-1813

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March 2002

Oregon Education Reform

Oregon's Education Act for the 21st Century

In 1991, the Education Act for the 21st Century¹ was enacted, and was significantly amended in 1995.² The goal of the original legislation was to have the “best educated citizens in the nation by the year 2000 and a work force equal to any in the world by the year 2010.”³ The Act contained a number of provisions including the following:

- ◆ Establishment of statewide standards for academic subjects.
- ◆ Establishment of statewide assessments given in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10.
- ◆ Creation of certificates of mastery to award students who demonstrated proficiency in meeting state standards. A *Certificate of Initial Mastery* was awarded to those students who, through work samples and statewide tests, demonstrated academic achievement. A *Certificate of Advanced Mastery* was to be awarded to those students who had achieved a CIM, achieved additional academic standards, and had career-related experiences.
- ◆ Fully-funded prekindergarten programs.
- ◆ A second language was required of students.
- ◆ Creation of the *Oregon Report Card*, reflecting each school's progress in meeting the goals of the Act.
- ◆ A policy outlining how social services may be integrated at the school site.
- ◆ Creation of school education reform advisory committees, *21st Century Schools Councils*.
- ◆ Ability of schools to request rule waivers, granting more creative flexibility.

While the Education Act contained a variety of provisions, most people focus on the certificates of initial and advanced mastery, state standards, and state assessments.

Impetus for Change:
Federal Activity

The 1983 study, *A Nation At Risk*⁴, by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, cautioned against the “rising tide of mediocrity.” It cited a high adult illiteracy rate, decreasing student tests scores, an increase in remedial courses in colleges, and the lack of “higher order” intellectual skills in older teenagers. The study called for systemic reform including a strengthening of graduation requirements, more rigorous and measurable standards, additional time in school, and teaching improvements.

In 1990, the report, *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages* was published by the National Center for Education and the Economy. The report called for restructuring education, employment, and training systems. Vera Katz, chief architect of Oregon's school reform, served on the board of directors that created the report.⁵ The Oregon Workforce Quality Council was directed in the original school reform legislation to oversee the reform of primary and secondary education programs “as recommended by the National Center for Education and the Economy in “America's Choice: High Skill or Low Wages.”⁶

¹ House Bill 3565, Chapter 693, 1991 Oregon Session Laws

² House Bill 2991, Chapter 660, 1995 Oregon Session Laws

³ Oregon Laws Chapter 693, section 2. This language was amended in 1995 to “. . . best educated citizens in the nation and the world.”

⁴ <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>

⁵ Graves, Bill. *Deep Changes Urged for School Reform*. The Oregonian, Nov. 7, 1994.

⁶ 1991 Oregon Laws chapter 667(6)

In 1989, President Bush and 50 governors convene an Education Summit and agree to set education goals for the nation; these were adopted in February 1990. In July of 1990, the president and governors form the National Education Goals Panel to issue annual reports on the progress of the nation and the states toward meeting the six goals.

In 1992, the report, *Raising Standards for American Education* is released, and advocates setting world-class education standards and a voluntary national system of assessments.

In 1994, Goals 2000: Educate America Act" is enacted and codifies eight national education goals and establishes a National Education Standards and Improvement Council which, in conjunction with the panel, reviews and certifies voluntary state and national education standards.

As part of the 1994 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization, states were required to adopt or develop challenging curriculum content and performance standards, assessments aligned with content standards, and accountability systems to assess schools' and districts' progress in raising student achievement.⁷ The 2001 reauthorization of ESEA did not eliminate these requirements.

Education Funding Shifts To State Support

At the same time the legislature was adopting school reform, it was coping with the consequences of Ballot Measure 5. This initiative had the effect of transferring the majority of school funding from the local school districts to the state. With the state footing the bill for two-thirds of education costs, a percentage that continues to rise, the state and the legislature began to take more of an interest in how its education dollars were spent. This facilitated the acceptance of statewide education initiatives and accountability measures such as student assessments.

The Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM)

To receive a Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM), students must show proficiency in specified academic areas through test scores and work samples. As new standards and tests are developed academic areas are added. Currently, students are assessed in the subjects of mathematics, English (speaking, writing, reading), and science by the state, and locally in the areas of physical education, arts, and second languages. Social Sciences was scheduled to be added in 19xx, but, due to budget cuts, may not be.

In order to earn a CIM, a student must achieve proficiency in all subjects subject to assessment. The State Board of Education has considered breaking the certificate apart, such that students could earn a CIM in each category, but, to date, has rejected the notion.

Benefits of the CIM include greater standardization around the state in school curriculum, better guaranteeing equal access to all students to a sound education, clearer consensus in what students should know, and school accountability, through test scores, that measure their performance.

The percentage of students meeting state standards and receiving a CIM continues to grow.⁸

| 3 rd graders | 1990-91 | 1995-96 | 1996-97 | 1997-98 | 1998-99 | 1999-00 | 2000-01 |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Reading | 52% | 69% | 79% | 78% | 81% | 82% | 84% |

⁷ <http://www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA/Guidance/intro.html>

⁸ Test scores not available for all years.

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Writing | | | | | | 86% | |
| Math | 35% | 56% | 63% | 67% | 70% | 75% | 75% |
| 5th graders | | | | | | | |
| | 1990-91 | 1995-96 | 1996-97 | 1997-98 | 1998-99 | 1999-00 | 2000-01 |
| Reading | 51% | 62% | 67% | 66% | 69% | 73% | 77% |
| Writing | | | 59% | 58% | 60% | 65% | 64% |
| Math | 47% | 48% | 59% | 62% | 66% | 69% | 73% |
| Math PS | | | 32% | 61% | 59% | 64% | 76% |
| 8th graders | | | | | | | |
| | 1990-91 | 1995-96 | 1996-97 | 1997-98 | 1998-99 | 1999-00 | 2000-01 |
| Reading | 40% | 52% | 56% | 55% | 56% | 64% | 62% |
| Writing | | | 69% | 68% | 68% | 66% | 68% |
| Math | 40% | 48% | 49% | 51% | 52% | 56% | 55% |
| Math PS | | | 32% | 57% | 55% | 55% | 58% |
| 10th graders | | | | | | | |
| | 1990-91 | 1995-96 | 1996-97 | 1997-98 | 1998-99 | 1999-00 | 2000-01 |
| Reading | 31% | 39% | 49% | 48% | 52% | 51% | 52% |
| Writing | 74% | 72% | 74% | | 69% | 42% | 79% |
| Math | 34% | 25% | 30% | 32% | 36% | 40% | 42% |
| Math PS | | | 23% | | 51% | 36% | 57% |

The CIM has not been without criticisms.

- ◆ Teachers complain that state standards constrict creative curriculum options, and "teaching to the test" will become the norm. They also complain that test preparation takes away from other studies.
- ◆ Administrators complain that without adequate funding, enriching programs that do not increase CIM rates will be dropped.
- ◆ Students complain that a CIM has no value in getting into college or getting a job; they may not be motivated to perform their best.
- ◆ Parents complain that tests put too much pressure on students.
- ◆ The underlying premise that all students, with the right teaching and motivation, will earn a CIM, regardless of a student's innate ability, interest, or ability to speak English.

Education officials have worked to make the CIM more valuable. By earning a CIM, students have met four out of ten PASS⁹ standards in English, math, and science. Some employers are now giving greater weight to job applicants with a CIM.

Statewide Assessments

The Act requires statewide assessments in grades 3, 5, 8, and 10. Originally the tests were designed to assess the school's progress, but the focus was changed in 1995 to that of assessing the student. Tests are standardized and criterion-referenced, which means that students are compared to a set standard, not to other students (no grading "curve"). Tests are multiple-choice, math problem-solving (story problems), and essay. Multiple choice tests are

⁹ PASS is the *Proficiency-based Admission Standards System* containing the 2005 admission standards for Oregon universities.

scored by computer. Approximately 1,000 classroom teachers gather for six days at 16 or more sites around the state and score the writing and math problem solving tests. Two teachers independently read and score each paper. If scores differ by more than one point, a third teacher reads and scores the paper.

In reading/literature, students must score at least 239 out of 300; in writing, 40 out of 60; in math, 239 out of 300; in math problem solving, 32 out of 46; in science, 239 out of 300.

In addition to test scores, students must submit CIM caliber work samples. Work samples are scored on a 1-6 scale. For writing, a student must score a 4 or greater on three writing work samples; the samples must represent narrative or imaginative writing; expository; and persuasive. For math, a student must score a four or greater on two work samples, representing statistics and probability, algebraic relationships, and geometry. For speaking work samples, students must give three types of speech: informative, persuasive, and unrehearsed.

Each year, tests are given during periods of time referred to as test "windows." Within these windows, schools determine what days to give the tests. During a testing window, a student can take the test for the first time, or re-test.

The ODE is working toward on-line, on-demand assessment, through its Technology Enhanced Student Assessment (TESA). TESA has a number of advantages, including reduced need for paperwork, testing whenever students feel ready, storage of student records, greater test security, and immediate results.

The reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act mandates yearly testing in grades 3-8 by the 2005-06 school year. Oregon is better positioned than most states to meet this new requirement.

The Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM)

The Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM) is to "prepare students for post-secondary academic pursuits and professional technical careers."¹⁰

Not yet implemented, the CAM is planned to give students real life career experiences to help them determine their next steps in life. To receive a CAM, students must meet specified academic standards and participate in a series of work-related activities. Students may choose from six endorsement areas:

- ◆ Arts and Communications
- ◆ Business and Management
- ◆ Health Services
- ◆ Human Resources
- ◆ Industrial and Engineering Systems
- ◆ Natural Resource Systems

As adopted by the State Board in 2002, students must complete a variety of tasks before they are awarded a CAM.

1. Develop an education plan and build an education profile.
Students must identify personal, academic, and evolving career interests. Students develop, review and update their learning plan in preparation for post-high school next steps. *Students*

¹⁰ ORS 329.475

build their education profile by documenting their progress and achievement.

2. Meet the performance standard for extended application through a collection of evidence. Students must meet the extended application standard: Apply academic and career-related knowledge and skills in new and complex situations appropriate to the student's personal, academic, and evolving career interests and post-high school goals.

3. Demonstrate career-related knowledge and skills.

Students must meet the career-related learning standards in personal management, problem solving, communication, teamwork, employment foundations, and career development.

4. Participate in career-related learning experiences as outlined in the education plan.

Students must connect classroom learning with real life experiences in the workplace, community, or school relevant to their personal, academic, and evolving career interests and post high school goals.

5. Meet specific Certificate of Initial Mastery performance standards in English, mathematics, science and social sciences through CIM assessment options.

Students must meet the CIM performance standards in the English knowledge and skills test and work samples and in mathematics, science and social sciences through the CIM work samples or knowledge and skills tests. [School districts will continue to measure each student's progress toward all standards with the goal of helping each student meet the standards in all seven CIM content areas.]

The first CAM is scheduled to be awarded in the 2004-05 school year.

Reform A Lightening Rod for Controversy

In addition to issues identified by educators, some parents have voiced concerns about Oregon's education reform. In 1994, Ron Sunseri, a member of the 1991 Legislature that enacted HB 3565, wrote *Outcome-Based Education: Understanding the Truth about Education Reform*. In this book, the former Representative Sunseri asserts that the education reform has the following characteristics:

- ◆ De-emphasizes academics and focuses on changing behavior, attitudes, and feelings.
- ◆ Holds top achievers back from further learning by making them teach the slower students.
- ◆ Performs psychological tests on children.
- ◆ Keeps children from graduating if they disagree with the values taught in school.
- ◆ Forces fifteen-and sixteen-year-old students to make career decisions.
- ◆ Is astronomically expensive.¹¹

Lawsuits Dismissed

Opponents of the Education Act for the 21st Century filed a lawsuit claiming that the Act infringed on a student's constitutional rights. The suits, filed by local parents and two out-of-state conservative Christian groups, claimed Oregon's new system of education was rooted in emotions, beliefs, and attitudes, rather than academics.

In *Tennison v. Paulus*, opponents claimed the law violated their children's First Amendment rights to free speech, and the parents' Fourteenth Amendment rights. For example, one of the reform laws promotes respecting "diversity" which some interpreted to mean respecting homosexuality.

¹¹ Sunseri, Ron. *Outcome-Based Education: Understanding the Truth about Education Reform*. Multnomah Books, 1994, pp.9-10.

The case was dismissed, and that dismissal was upheld on appeal.

For additional information

The Oregon Department of Education's web page hosts a wealth of information regarding school reform efforts. It is located at www.ode.state.or.us