

How Fares Competency Development in Oregon?

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In 1972, the Oregon State Board of Education adopted new requirements for high school graduation, based on minimum competencies judged necessary by the local school district. This author reports that "We have made mistakes, we are correcting them, we have learned much, and we are still committed to the concept of establishing clearly and publicly expressed goals for education, and then providing the resources which will enable students to achieve those goals."

In September 1972, the State Board of Education adopted high school graduation requirements that became effective with the freshman class of 1974. The new requirements reflected a dramatic change from those in effect since the early 1930's, the earlier requirements having been largely college preparatory in nature and based upon prescribed attendance requirements and completion of a required number of units of credit.

A series of events had taken place prior to the Board's action:

1. The Oregon Department of Education, in cooperation with a marketing and research firm, conducted an assessment of Oregon's educational needs by sampling opinions of students and drop-outs, educators and the public.

2. The State Board of Education and Superintendent of Public Instruction held a series of meetings, and a report was issued under the title, "Oregonians Speak Out." The Board received strong statements of public concern that the high school diploma had lost its credibility and that all students were not receiving training and instruction necessary to function in a complex society.

3. The Oregon Association of Secondary School Administrators requested that the Superintendent of Public Instruction explore the possibility of revising high school graduation requirements into quality or performance standards.

4. A first draft of proposed requirements was developed, distributed, and discussed in the fall of 1971. Elementary and secondary administrators, classroom teachers, board members, students, business and labor leaders all contributed to a much-changed second draft of the proposed standards.

5. The second draft was used as a basis for public hearings at five meetings of the State Board of Education. After statewide testimony, the Board revised the second draft and adopted the new minimum standards at the September 1972 meeting.

6. Six pilot school districts developed guidelines and model competency statements in the areas of personal development, social responsibility, and career development. Approximately 300 Oregon educators and community members participated in these pilot projects.

7. A state-level workshop involving local project and Oregon Department personnel was held in May of 1973 to synthesize the six project reports and develop guidelines for local districts.

By July 1, 1974, districts were asked to file their implementation plans for State Board approval.

Essentially, the new requirements retained the earlier attendance and units of credit requirements with major modifications, and added a third requirement component, minimum competencies judged necessary by the local school dis-

trict and community for functioning successfully in today's society.

Major modifications in the attendance requirements were:

1. *Old*—Four years attendance in grades 9-12 in school.

2. *New*—At local district option, provision for graduation in fewer or more than four years with a variety of educational settings—off-campus experience, dual enrollment at the college level, independent study, work experience, and credit by examination.

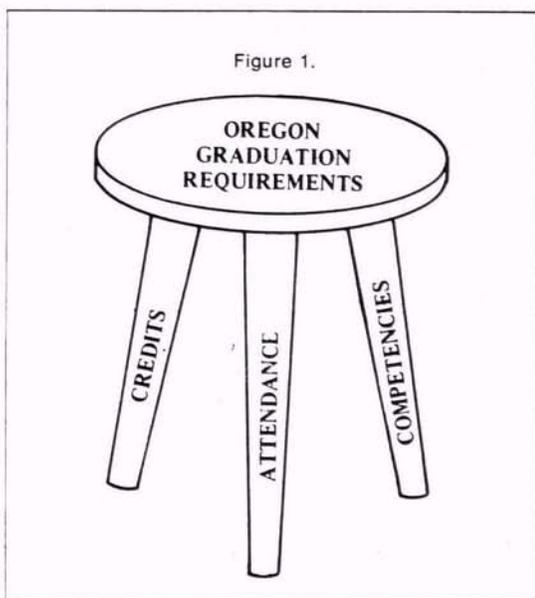
Modifications in the unit of credit requirements:

1. <i>Old Required Subjects</i>	Units
• English/Language Arts	3
• Social Studies (U. S. History, Modern Problems)	2
• Health and Physical Education	2
• Science	1
• Mathematics	1
• Electives	10
<i>Total</i>	<i>19</i>

2. <i>New Required Areas of Study</i>	Units
• Language Arts/English	3
• Social Science/History	1
• Citizenship/Government	1
• Health Education	1
• Physical Education	1
• Science	1
• Mathematics	1
• Consumer Education/Personal Finance/Economics	1
• Career Education	1
• Electives	10
<i>Total</i>	<i>21</i>

The changes in the unit of credit requirements do not appear to be especially significant at first glance—the addition of required study in citizenship, personal finance, and career education. Perhaps a more significant requirement in this area was that the local school district was to have, for each course offered in grades 9-12, a written planned course statement. The planned

Figure 1.



course statement had to include course title, amount of credit for the course, an overview of course content, clearly defined course goals written in terms of learner outcomes, and any required minimum competencies assigned to that course for verification.

• The addition of a third requirement to be met by students in order to qualify for the diploma, minimum competencies, has led a number of people to illustrate Oregon's program as a three-legged stool (See Figure 1).

The original mandate from the State Board of Education to local school districts was that each local district was to develop minimum competencies in specified areas, and that students in the graduating class of 1978 were to have achieved all the competencies as a requirement for receiving a diploma. The following areas were specified by the State Board: read; listen; speak; write; analyze; compute; scientific and technological processes; healthy mind and body; life-long learner; citizen in the community, state, and nation; citizen in interaction with the environment; citizen on the streets and highways; consumer of goods and services; function within an occupation or continue education leading to a career. At that time also, a competency was de-

defined as the "possession of skills, knowledge, and understandings to the degree that they could be demonstrated."

These were the requirements as established in 1972, which students beginning with 1974's freshmen were to meet in order to qualify for a diploma. What have two years of preparation and three years of implementation shown?

- **Attendance**—The revised attendance requirement has posed little difficulty and has resulted in students having a wide variety of learning settings and opportunities opened to them. Better utilization of student time, instructional time, and community resources has resulted. A significant number of school districts saw students who were freshmen in 1974 graduate in 1977 rather than in 1978.

- **Units of credit**—The unit of credit requirements, including the planned course statements, brought about results that are considered positive in Oregon. Probably more study has been devoted to curriculum at the secondary level in the past five years than was made in the previous twenty-five. Courses have been revised, alternatives have been developed, and the necessity to develop specific and publicly stated goals for each course in grades 9-12 has had many positive benefits. These include:

1. Informing students of course requirements and content at the beginning of the course. Students learn what is required of them, of the opportunities provided for their attainment of course goals and any required minimum competencies.

2. Communicating to parents and the public what is being taught. Open communication encourages public understanding of and participation in school matters.

3. Providing the basis for careful curriculum planning in order to reduce possible gaps or overlaps.

4. Serving as instructional planning guides for classroom teachers. Planned course statements are useful reminders of the goals identified for each course.

A typical, planned course statement as developed by a local school district is shown in Figure 2:

Figure 2. Planned Course Statement

Department _____ Area(s) of Study _____

Course Title _____ Course Number _____ Length of Course _____

No. of Credits _____ Grade Level(s) _____ Prerequisite(s) _____

Credit by Exam Available? Yes No

Check One

- Required
- Selective
- Elective

*Alternative Learning Opportunities
(Check One or More)*

- Does Not Apply
- Independent Study
- Off-Campus Experience
- Other (Explain in Course Overview)

Course Overview: The ninth-grade English course is directed units. A prerequisite is eighth grade English.

Course Overview: The ninth grade English course is directed toward achievement in speaking, reading, writing, listening, and analyzing with emphasis on usage, vocabulary, capitalization, and punctuation.

Course Goals:

The student will be able to:

1. Use oral communication effectively in a variety of situations (e.g., person to person, small group, etc.).
2. Adapt vocabulary to the listener when communicating orally.
3. Gain information through nonverbal communication cues (e.g., facial expressions, body posture, mannerisms, etc.).
4. Follow a set of oral directions.
5. Write clear, concise sentences.
6. Write a paragraph which explains or informs.
7. Adapt writing style to fit a variety of purposes (e.g., personal letters, business letters, reports, descriptions, etc.).
8. Spell correctly the words on a basic word list appropriate for grade nine students.
9. Use dictionary as an aid in spelling words typically unfamiliar to grade nine students.

Major Student Activities:

1. Oral reports that require full usage of the library facilities.
2. Preparation of bibliography.
3. Apply capitalization, punctuation, and paragraphing to a passage that has none of these.
4. Compose an original story with dialogue, as suggested by a series of pictures.
5. Make a one-sentence oral summary of a report.
6. Matching words in vocabulary lists.
7. Worksheets involving the choosing of basic grammar and accepted usage.
8. Interpretation of the message intended by mime.

Assessment Procedures:

1. Pretests and follow-up tests.
2. Observation by teacher.
3. One-to-one conference between teacher and student.

Minimum Competencies Which May Be Verified In This Course:

1. The student is able to follow oral directions.
2. The student is able to summarize the main points of a speaker's presentation.

3. The student is able to express ideas through writing.

Note: Although performance indicators are not listed here, it should be kept in mind that they are the basis upon which one judges whether a competency has been met.

The following excerpt from *Graduation Requirements, Revised*, a spring 1977 publication of the Oregon Department of Education, is a brief description of the type of options available to local districts in providing alternatives for student acquisition of unit of credit requirements:

School districts in Oregon have established a variety of ways for students to earn the unit of credit in career education. Students earn credit through enrollment in career cluster programs, through work experience programs, and through combinations of other alternatives.

Credits earned by such alternatives should be monitored by certificated personnel. Particular care should be taken to prepare planned course statements for those learning activities that are conducted outside the regular classroom. Work experience credit should be carefully designed and be well supervised to assure the quality of learning required to earn the credit assigned to that activity.

Several districts require a semester course (one-half unit) and allow students to earn the other one-half unit in a variety of courses or activities depending on their career interests. Students interested in teaching, for example, may earn credit by serving as teacher aides; students interested in music as a career may fulfill the requirement through advanced music classes.

At some point in the program, students should have a chance to learn about job opportunities, application procedures, good work characteristics, remuneration and retirement, and other career-oriented topics.

Minimum Competencies

When the State Board introduced the minimum competencies requirement, the intent was to provide a means to assure that Oregon's high school graduates would be able to cope adequately with the demands commonly faced in adulthood. Most districts urged the State Board to delegate to them the authority and responsibility for competency development. The State Board concurred, believing that competencies should reflect the cultural and societal goals of the local community.

From the outset there have been difficulties with competency development. Since little work had been done in this area, there was a limited background to draw from. Questions immediately arose—"How many should be required? How should they be writ-

ten? How difficult should they be?" Even the original definition of a competency—"possession of skills, knowledge and understandings to the degree that they can be demonstrated"—was a limited view of the concept. Guidelines were prepared to help districts develop and implement the new graduation requirements. They grew out of local district experiences as well as the collective assumptions of educators statewide. Not surprisingly, mistakes were made. From those mistakes and subsequent experience in seeking solutions, Oregon's districts have made progress and even achieved some success.

To more accurately reflect its intent, the State Board in June 1976 refined the competency definition to read, "a statement of desired student performance representing demonstrable ability to apply knowledge, understanding, and/or skills assumed to contribute to success in life role functions." Districts could avoid developing long lists of competencies which describe isolated skills and recall. Rather, the district's set of competencies should be a representative sampling of student ability to apply skills and knowledge to life role situations. The list should be limited to those which the local community, through its board of education, could support as acceptable evidence that its schools had provided students with the basic minimum abilities needed to function in the six life roles identified by the State Board of Education.

With the new definition and with more experience to draw from, local districts now are developing a different type of competency. These competencies are written to measure student ability to perform representative life role functions, while they help solve some of the earlier logistics problems. They are more comprehensive statements and therefore there may be fewer of them. This reduces the time and effort necessary for record keeping and for developing transportable records for transfer students.

The above quote from the new Oregon Department publication cited previously states clearly that implementation of the competency area of graduation requirements has been difficult. The primary difficulty has been the development of extremely long lists of developmental skill and recall items that in turn required too much teacher time in verification and record keeping. It appears that the new definition of a competency, the application of skill or knowledge to life role functions, and the suggestion that the required competencies be a representative sampling acceptable to the local community will be conducive to competency requirements that are manageable in number, yet still give public assurance that students have demonstrated the ability to function in today's society.

Figure 3*

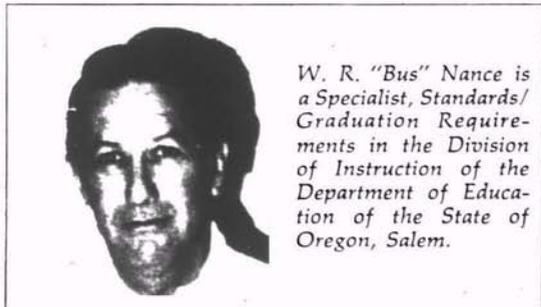
Competencies	Performance Indicator(s)
Read	
The student is able to:	
1. Apply basic reading skills to obtain information from reference materials.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Given a dictionary, the student will use it to find the correct meaning, spelling, pronunciation, and use of ten words selected from a newspaper. Given a library card catalog, the student will use it to find information of use in three assigned areas. Given an article (approximately 200 words in length) from the front page of a recent daily newspaper, the student will read it and answer to the teacher's satisfaction four out of five factual recall questions composed by the teacher.
2. Read and state three conditions of an apartment rental agreement.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Given a standard written rental agreement for an apartment, the student will read the document and then select and accurately paraphrase a minimum of three conditions, responsibilities, and/or obligations which either party to the agreement must fulfill.
3. Read and comprehend a job application form.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Given a job application form, the student will read it and provide the required information.
4. Understand written requirements for applying for employment.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Given three job opportunity ads from a newspaper, the student will read them and list the requirements and/or experiences necessary for each.
Compute	
The student is able to:	
1. Balance and maintain a checking account.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Given a simulated series of entries, and status reports over at least a two-month period of time, the student will maintain a correct balance in a checkbook with over 20 withdrawals per month interspersed between three to five deposits.
2. Complete the short form of the federal income tax report.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Given a hypothetical family and income data, the student will correctly complete the short form of the federal income tax report.
3. Determine the consumption of gasoline on a miles per gallon basis.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Given three problems each showing the total gas consumption and miles traveled by a car, the student will compute the gasoline consumption to within one mile per gallon for each case.
4. Determine the added costs associated with time payment purchases.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Given the price of an item, a whole number annual interest rate, and the length of a time payment contract, the student will determine the simple interest charges within two percent accuracy.

Figure 3 shows examples of the types of competency statements that districts are now developing.

Even with the redefinition of competencies and better models that can now be provided districts for guidance in implementing the new program, some of the original deadlines for implementation have had to be extended. In June 1976, the State Board of Education, upon the recommendation of State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Verne Duncan, modified the competency requirements schedule. Now, instead of the class of 1978 having to have all competencies verified for graduation, members of that class must be verified only in the areas of reading, writing, listening, speaking, analyzing, and computing. The remaining competency areas need not be met until the class of 1981, although many local districts will require verification of all competency areas for the class of 1978 as originally intended. The feeling of the Superintendent and the Board, upon review and study of the mandate given to local districts, was that additional time for some districts to complete planning and initiation of the program would offer greater opportunity for success than would holding to the original schedule.

This, then, is how competency development is faring in Oregon. We have made mistakes, we are correcting them, we have learned much, and we are still committed to the concept of establishing clearly and publicly expressed goals for education, and then providing the resources which will enable students to achieve those goals. ^{PH}

* Note: The competencies listed in Figure 3 are written at varying levels of generality. The local district has the option to select the level of generality preferred.



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