

Career and College Ready Regional Achievement Collaborative Partners Sign Declaration of Cooperation

Fostering Collaboration to Enhance Educational Outcomes across the P-20 Continuum

Students attending Tillamook High School in Oregon are getting an early taste of the college experience thanks to a new program that links the school with area colleges. The program, which is designed to give students an educational foothold as they advance to college or directly into careers, is being led by the Career and College Ready Regional Achievement Collaborative (RAC) in Tillamook. Participating students earn high school credit, while also earning college credit from either Tillamook Bay Community College, Oregon State University Open Campus, or George Fox University. The college-level courses are offered free of charge, and instruction is provided on-site at the high school. The RAC's goal is to ensure that by 2015 every Tillamook High School student will be benefiting from the opportunity to complete at least one college course before high school graduation.

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More than thirty RAC partners, representing education, business, parents and community members, signed a Declaration of Cooperation (DoC) pledging resources to support the program. Randy Schild, Superintendent of Tillamook School District, kicked off a DoC signing event in March 2014 at Tillamook High School. The event featured a panel of six students who had completed dual-credit courses. The students praised the courses for



providing "a whole new level of rigor," and for teaching them "a ton." According to several students, one of the best features of the program is that, because the classes are held at the school, students can continue to participate in the "high school experience." Seven high school teachers also joined the panel to discuss their approaches for preparing students for the courses.

Teachers at the event shared their concerns that students and families in many Oregon communities may not recognize the value of college course work. In particular, they felt that the value of college experiences for high school students who are moving directly into careers may be overlooked. RAC partners recognize that fostering community awareness of the benefits of college courses is important for motivating youth to pursue advanced education. But early experiences are critical.

Tillamook Bay Community College President Connie Green, one of the RAC conveners, highlighted research that indicates fifth grade is

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a "magic year" for sparking children's interest in pursuing education and careers. In light of such research, RAC partners are looking ahead to the important next step of introducing elementary and middle school opportunities. Teachers cited a possible opportunity to use entry-level writing courses, which are currently mandated for all incoming high school freshman, as a place to prepare students for college courses available to them during their high school years. And, starting fall 2014, Tillamook High School will publish a new registration booklet that highlights dual-credit college tracks available to students.

Educators began discussion of establishing the dual-credit high school program in 2011. The effort recently received a boost when the Oregon Educational Investment Board (OEIB) identified the group as a RAC pilot site. Regions selected to participate in the RAC pilot receive facilitation support through the Oregon Solutions Network and funding ranging between \$40,000 and \$50,000.



Community partners have praised the collaborative spirit that brought the dual-credit program to fruition. And Oregon's Chief Education Officer, Dr. Nancy Golden, has prepared a video congratulating the Career and College Ready RAC on the signing of the DoC. The broad community involvement evidenced by the signing of the DoC signals powerful local momentum toward improved educational achievement and school-to-career transitions in Oregon. ■