

Model: Some teachers may be hesitant to make changes

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only "mediocre," said Marilyn Olson, director of the licensure program.

In 1991, the Oregon Education Act for the 21st Century was passed by the state Legislature, instigating a complete overhaul of the school system. The act was most recently revised and signed into law by Gov. John Kitzhaber in 1995, when guidelines were set for the implementation of standardized performance-based assessments for Oregon students.

The Oregon Education Act requires high schools to offer Certificates of Initial and Advanced Mastery. Assessment criteria for the certificates are still in development, but according to guidelines published by the Oregon Department of Education, statewide criteria will cover a range of areas to provide a "focused, uncluttered set of targets for learning."

In 10th grade, students' proficiency in mathematics, English, science, social science and the arts and languages will be evaluated for a Certificate of Initial Mastery.

Already, a number of high schools in Oregon have begun to implement the initial phase of the restructuring program. This year, the first group of sophomores will be tested for proficiency in mathematics and English according to CIM standards. Every year over the next four years, a new subject will be added, and by 2003 the full testing sequence will be in place.

Evaluations of students' performance levels for CIM are not based on a single test. Instead, students submit a portfolio of "evidence" that demonstrates their proficiency, including a variety of work samples and tests.

To attain the CIM, students will demonstrate skills that apply to real life, such as the ability to deliberate on public issues and understand diversity. Students' foundational skills will also be assessed: their ability to think, self-

direct learning, communicate, use technology, quantify and recognize relationships and collaborate with other members of a team to achieve a goal.

A Certificate of Advanced Mastery, which will document the development of students' career-related skills, will be awarded after testing in 12th grade.

Research and development for CAM is still underway, but assessments will reflect a more individualized educational program built on student outcomes from CIM. Each student will choose at least one from six occupational categories as a context for advanced study: arts and communications, business and management, health services, human resources, industrial and engineering systems and natural resource systems.

Students will work with businesses in the community to develop their skills and will be given some responsibility to assess themselves. By 2005, CAM will be fully implemented, with career-related learning assessments and continued evaluation of the six subject areas tested for in 10th grade.

How will school reform affect students and teachers?

Most schools in Oregon have been assessing students' writing skills using performance-based standards for some time, Olson said.

"Good teachers have been doing this for years," she said.

But where teachers who use more traditional methods often give students feedback after an assignment has been graded, restructuring the evaluation process would mean students would have access — before they began a task — to the assessment criteria.

Access to assessment guidelines, which are very explicit, could be helpful for students who are not sure what is most important when studying for a test or what to include in a paper.

"Standards-based schooling represents a fundamental change

CIM/CAM timeline

The Certificate of Initial Mastery will be phased in by 2003-04. The certificate of Advanced Mastery will be phased in by 2004-05

	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003
English	■	■	■	■	■
Math	■	■	■	■	■
Science		■	■	■	■
Social Science			■	■	■
Arts				■	■
Second Language					■

■ Certificate of Advanced Mastery
■ Certificate of Initial Mastery

SOURCE: Oregon Department of Education

MATT GARTON/Emerald

in how schools work," said Mark Gall, director of the Educational Leadership, Technology and Administration program in the College of Education.

The assessment model can be compared to a driver's license exam, Gall said. There are certain "rules of the road" — standards and expectations for what a driver should know. Passing the test indicates that a driver is familiar with those rules.

"But the state doesn't dictate how you study for a driving test," he said. "Some students may just pick it up from watching their parents; others go to driving school."

Changes mandated by the Oregon Education Act are not the first waves of school reform to pass over Oregon.

Previous efforts to inspire change have often accomplished

little before dying down, said Fitzwater, who did some of his student teaching at Willamette High School. Many people think this is just a phase and that it will go away, he said.

If polled today, Olson said she thinks only about 50 percent of teachers would say the model for performance assessments is "a good idea."

Teachers who have spent years running their classrooms in a certain way — usually successfully — may not recognize or even want to see a need for change, she said.

"It's hard for teachers to be reflective when they are delivering," she said. "They need time to think about the changes and how to implement them."

"We must have the patience as teachers to manipulate a shift from what we did as learners when we were in school to what we are doing now as teachers," Olson said.

But some educators are concerned that levels have been set too high, causing students who had done well under the traditional grading system to fail.

"If standards are set too high — or too low — students will not perform optimally," Gall said. Likewise, if new drivers who have only driven an automatic are told to go out on a hilly road and drive a stick-shift, they won't do too well, he said.

"There are questions about whether every student needs to meet all standards," Olson said. "Students who are particularly proficient in one area may not always be able to meet standards in other areas."

"Standards represent good practice and good learning."

Scoring guides, used to help teachers assess student work, are still in development, but care must be taken to word them carefully.

"They shouldn't be thinly disguised A, B, C, D and F's," said Ginevra Ralph, an instructor in the college's special training pro-

gram.

Changes in the College of Education

Students in the College of Education are sent to observe and practice their teaching methods in local schools. But because the reform guidelines are still in development, many teachers in the field are just beginning to learn about the program. There is often inconsistency in implementation and teachers' behaviors, Olson said.

"It sounds like a good plan, but practically speaking, how well can we implement it?" asked Takako Schneider, a student in the College of Education who is also enrolled in the Middle-Secundary Licensure Program. When she completes the program, she will be certified to teach Spanish and Japanese.

Because the second language portion of the CIM will be the last sequence to be implemented, guidelines for what she will teach are still fuzzy, she said. Despite the fact that benchmarks and scoring rubrics are still in development, the College of Education has stressed that future teachers must be prepared to teach in schools where performance-based assessments are the norm.

Schneider attended a teacher-training session at Willamette High School last fall, where many teachers were given their first glimpse of the assessment guidelines, she said. Using standardized scoring rubrics, teachers were asked to score sample essays. The results were widely different, Schneider said.

Teaching teachers — across the state and in schools — to grade the same way will be a major obstacle in implementing the assessment model, she said.

"With practice and with training, maybe it will work. It's hard, but people just naturally look at different things, and some are harsher and others are more lenient," Schneider said. "The whole bias thing is going to be difficult to overcome."

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