

SB17-272

Currently the Colorado Department of Education determines the achievement level of public schools, Colorado Charter School institutes, school districts, and the state of Colorado based on four categories. These four categories include student academic growth, student achievement on statewide assessments, progress made in closing the achievement and growth gaps, and college and career readiness (Colorado Education Accountability Act of 2009, 2013). College and career readiness is currently indicated by the percentage of students that graduate from high school with a postsecondary and workforce readiness endorsement, the high school graduation rate, and the proportion of students who scored at or above achievement level on college entrance exams.

Additionally, the State Board of Education has high school graduation guidelines which include a list of college and career ready demonstrations. This list currently only includes minimum achievement levels needed to graduate high school. School districts choose from this list how their students can demonstrate college and career readiness.

First, this bill would require the State Board of Education to include both a list of the minimum achievement levels needed to graduate high school (which it already has) and a higher level needed to ensure a student does not need remediation in higher education. Second, this bill would add to the postsecondary and workforce readiness endorsement the State Board's menu of college and career ready demonstrations. This would allow schools to receive additional performance credit based on the number of students who meet college and career ready items. Finally, it would include enrolling in and receiving college credit as a measure of postsecondary and workforce readiness. All three of these aspects are appropriate for government discussion, as will be discussed in the following three sections.

Higher Achievement Level for Postsecondary School

It would be beneficial for all students if the State Board of Education added achievement levels needed to ensure a student does not need remediation in higher education. Currently there is asymmetric information, as many students and parents do not know the high school standards needed to succeed in postsecondary institutions without remediation.

The government should provide this information, as there is no incentive for the private sector or for schools to advertise this information. Schools that exceed college and career preparedness standards are likely to have a large proportion of students that are already aware of these standards; schools that are below the standards would likely not have the funding to figure out what the standards are. Therefore schools will not provide this information. The private sector is unlikely to provide this information as they do not benefit from students receiving this additional information.

Many students and high schools are likely to mistake the graduation requirements as the necessary requirements to succeed in postsecondary schools. This causes high school graduates to enroll in postsecondary institution that they did not realize they were not prepared for.

For example, currently Colorado requires a composite ACT score of 18 for high school graduation (Colorado Department of Education, 2016). However, The ACT (2014) reports that a student needs a 23 to indicate a fifty percent chance of getting a B or a seventy five percent chance of getting a C in an introductory biology course. Thus Colorado high schools and students have a goal that is five points lower than needed to succeed in college.

From these scores, twenty five percent of students in Colorado met the ACT college readiness benchmark, while sixty one percent of students met Colorado ACT graduation

requirements (The ACT, 2014). This means thirty six percent of students, over twenty thousand students, met graduation requirements but were not college and career ready.

The current system mostly burdens low income individuals, as low income individuals score lower than high income individuals on many of these measures. Currently their own income would then have to be spent on these remedial courses. Under the bill students and high schools would know what postsecondary school preparedness looks like, and they would be able to focus on that in secondary school for free.

College and Career Ready Demonstrations

Additionally, this bill would prevent schools from being penalized if a large proportion of their students wanted to go into vocational fields or the military. Currently schools' postsecondary and work readiness standard is only based on high school graduation rate and college entry exams. This penalizes schools if their students would prefer to go into the military (which requires a passing score on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test), or if a student got an industry certificate from the district for the accumulation of knowledge of an occupation. Under the bill, schools would be acknowledged for preparing their students in a variety of ways deemed appropriate by the Colorado Department of Education, not just with ACT scores and high school graduation rates.

Since people fund public schools through taxes, the schools should take into account what the people want for their schools. If college and career readiness is only measured by ACT scores and high school graduation rates, schools will end up focusing on improving these measures alone. However, this is not beneficial for students wanting to enter the military or industry immediately out of high school. Therefore college and career readiness should be measured in a variety of ways that support all students.

College Credit

Finally, some schools that have a large proportion of students struggling to meet other college and career-ready demonstrations may push their students into concurrent enrollment. Thus this bill would likely increase the number of concurrent enrollment courses students take in some high schools.

Empirically, participating in concurrent enrollment is associated with a higher likelihood of completing high school (Karp, 2007). Secondary education creates positive externalities including socialization and a knowledgeable and united citizenry (Rosen & Gayer, 2009). Hence more students would graduate high school, which in turn would increase the benefits experience by the rest of society.

Additionally, a student is 22.9% more likely to enroll in college immediately after high school graduation if they participate in concurrent enrollment, holding gender, race and ethnicity, ACT scores, and income constant (Colorado Department of Higher Education, 2014). Further, it is associated with a nine percent decrease in the likelihood of needing remedial college education.

Thus, the bill would increase concurrent enrollment, which would in turn increase high school graduation rates, increase college enrollment rates, and decrease remedial rates. However, the bill would give schools and districts performance credit for the number of students “enrolling in and receiving college-level credit” (page 4, line 19). The ambiguity in the wording could result in schools and districts urging unprepared students to enrol in these courses to boost ratings. It would be better to clarify that these college credit courses must be passed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this bill should be passed for three reasons. First of all, it would address problems of asymmetric information. Second, this bill would allow schools to support the career aspirations of a variety of students. Finally, it would increase high school graduation rates, which would in turn increase social benefits.

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