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Eastern Promise: A credit-by-proficiency approach and building a rural college going culture

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The Eastern Promise is a collaborative effort between InterMountain Education Service District, Blue Mountain and Treasure Valley Community Colleges, and Eastern Oregon University along with nearly 40 school districts in the eastern Oregon region and beyond. The program creates additional opportunities for high school students to participate in college-level courses and earn college credits and/or certificates, while still in high school, which could result in considerable financial savings for families. Also, programs to build college going attitudes and culture begin with 5th grade and 9th grade students and families.

Eastern Promise has five fundamental pillars:

1. A cross sector collaborative between a university, community college(s), education service district(s), and high schools. Eastern Promise is a model where a university, one or more community colleges, and educational service districts with their accompanying high schools form a collaborative partnership as equal partners in the process of developing a proficiency based early college program and building a college culture in their constituents.
2. “Credit By Proficiency” is a fourth pathway for high school student to achieve early college credit. In addition to Advanced Placement, Expanded Options, and dual credit opportunities. Credit By Proficiency as defined by the Eastern Promise project is a “process” rather than a single test or assessment. In the Eastern Promise model, students take a class over a term, semester or year and through multiple measures acquire the defined outcomes knowledge and skills that are equal to the expectations of a college level course. The CBP course is built through the work of a Professional Learning Community (PLC). In the Eastern Promise model the PLC is made up of disciplinary faculty and teachers from the university, community college and ESD/high schools. The higher education faculty participants are the leaders, but all levels participate in discussing and establishing the appropriate curriculum, and in developing appropriate assessment parameters to measure the proficiency outcomes.
3. Build a college going culture through the Academic Momentum program. Academic Momentum is a curricular program that begins in the 5th grade. This activity involves students, parents and the schools signing a “compact” that says the student will work toward developing academic habits to prepare them for post secondary education or training. As a part of this plan, students participate in a visit to university and community college campuses and get a chance to see what it would be like to be a student at a college/university. Through this commitment on the part of the student, family and school they will begin to form a plan regarding their projected education and career future. Continuing on through 6th, 7th, and 8th grades, students and parents will become more acquainted with all the processes and procedures to apply to college, acquire financial aid, and navigate the myriad of dimensions in this process.
4. Initiate a college credit career class in high schools that features the “10-year-plan”. When the students enter the 9th grade, they will participate in a formal class that follows a well developed and tested curriculum called Career Choices”. This is a rigorous class that requires career investigation and a “formal” 10-year-plan. The significance of the 10-yearplan is that your typical high school freshman isn’t really thinking years into the future and how academic decisions made in high school might impact post secondary education/training and career outlook. Because this class is intense and rigorous, students can earn college credit. This class is utilized at several institutions nationally and has resulted in demonstrated outcomes of increased high school graduation rates and increased college attendance rates.
5. Increase the range of students engaged in early college credit by identifying at risk, underserved, and underrepresented populations and providing preparation and opportunity to participate. Within our region this includes native Spanish speakers, Native American youth, and low performing students. This will help fulfill 40-40-20 in our region.