

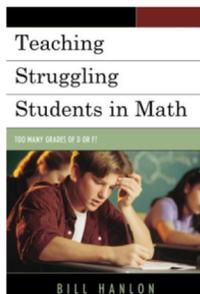
Nevada Public Education News



Social Promotion – Earning Advancement

Bill Hanlon

The common core standards are required of all students. How's that different from our own experiences in school? How's that working out for students?



Twenty years ago, students enrolled in college preparatory classes because they determined they wanted to go to college or their parents told them they were going to have that opportunity. With the common core, all students are enrolled in college preparatory classes.

Pre common core, students enrolled in college preparatory classes were typically more serious students, students who set and met goals and tried to meet the expectation associated with those goals. More often than not, if students did not earn a grade of C or better in a college prep class, they had to repeat the class before going to the next level. In other words, students had to earn their way into the program and maintain grades to stay in the college preparatory program. That's not the case with the one-size-fits all common core.

The results of earning your way into the next class could be seen in the enrollment decline as students progressed through a college prep program. If a high school offered 16 classes of first year algebra, the number of classes needed for geometry the next year decreased to 9 or 10 sections. By second year algebra, there were only 4 or 5 sections needed to serve the students who were making the prerequisite grade. Those enrollments often dipped to two pre calculus classes and finally one section of calculus. Clearly, 30 – 40% of the students did not perform, they did not move on.

What was clear in that weaning out process was that students who made it through second year algebra typically knew something about mathematics.

Many business people will tell you when you have to earn what you get, you take it more seriously. The same is true in education.

But there is the rub. In the common core, secondary students don't earn the right to be in college preparatory classes, they are just placed there. It's like social promotion. Some students don't take education seriously. That results, as business people will tell you, in people not taking care

of the asset. Are the people who support these placements the same who don't support social promotion in elementary schools? A little contradiction in thought, don't you think?

These automatic placements are having a negative impact on students who want to be in college preparatory classes. Rather than attending classes where students attend school on a regular basis, pay attention, take notes, do homework and study for exams, students and teachers are having to put up with students whose attendance is spotty, who don't see the value in the classes, don't have to goal of going to college, don't necessarily pay attention in class, don't take notes in class, don't do homework, and don't study for exams. Teachers having to deal with these issues know firsthand that these distractions result in classes being watered down for academically motivated students.

And, if these teachers fail students who don't do the required work, they are criticized because the fail rates result in lower graduation rates and increased remediation costs. There is a lot of pressure on teachers to give passing grades. We also see a greater need for students entering college.

So while the common core creates higher expectations for all students, it results in coursework that all students are expected to be able to do, which is a watered down class. One-size –fits-all models simply don't work.

Students wanting to go on to college are not receiving the depth of knowledge they should and students who clearly don't have an interest in college, or who want to enter a trade are not being served well either.

So, we are back to the original question, should students be required to have learned/mastered prerequisite skills before moving on to the next class or should they be socially promoted?

Today's educational issues are more about politics and money - not what we really expect students to know, recognize, understand, communicate and be able to do when they graduate high school.