

**JULY 29, 2019**

**ADVANCED OPPORTUNITIES REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR'S SUBCOMMITTEE ON BUDGETS**

**SUBMITTED BY SEN. DAVE LENT AND ROD GRAMER**

We were assigned to research several questions regarding the Advanced Opportunity program for Idaho students. The over-arching question is whether the program has achieved its goals of:

- Increasing the go-on rate in Idaho?
- Getting more students to attend postsecondary who would not have gone on?
- Making postsecondary more affordable for students and families?
- Improving the retention rate in postsecondary?
- Increasing the completion and on-time completion rate?

We were also asked to determine the budgetary impact of the Advanced Opportunities program in future years.

Over the past few weeks we have interviewed several educators, state education officials, postsecondary leaders and national experts.

This document is intended to answer the question: How is the Advanced Opportunities program working and how can it be improved?

**ADVANCED OPPORTUNITIES OVERVIEW**

The Advanced Opportunities (AO) program has grown steadily in terms of the number of students taking courses and the credits they have earned. In fiscal 2015, 12,829 students participated and earned 50,926 credits. By fiscal 2017, 21,333 students participated and earned 153,728 credits. Meanwhile, the cost of the AO program has increased proportionately as the program model has been adjusted. In fiscal 2016, the state spent \$4.6 million on AO programs and by fiscal 2018 it had increased to \$16 million. The program is estimated to increase to \$18.5 million in fiscal 2019.

The AO program especially took off when it was extended to grades 7-12 and each student was allowed \$4,125 to take AO credit-bearing courses.

Advanced Opportunities program allows students to individualize their high school years and begin the transition to college or career opportunities. These options include dual credit, International Baccalaureate programs, college-level examination program (CLEP), Advanced Placement exams, and career technical education exams that lead to an industry-recognized certificate, license, or degree. The true value of Advanced Opportunities is the chance for students to engage and self-direct their education, while cultivating their discipline, resiliency, confidence and work ethic. The earlier these practices can be developed in youth the more likely they are to experience personal and professional success as adults.

Overall, the utilization of the current program appears to be well thought out and easy to navigate. One small school district utilized an adviser to complete the registration process for students but generally students can complete the task on their own.

## **KEY ADVANCED OPPORTUNITIES QUESTIONS ASKED AND ANSWERED**

**Question:** Has the Advanced Opportunities program increased the go-on rate?

**Answer:** The answer seems to be no. Although there has been a significant increase in students taking Advanced Opportunities the go-on rate in Idaho has not increased. For the years that the program has been in effect, the go-on rate plateaued at 48 percent. In 2018, the go-on rate actually dropped to 45 percent. One would have expected the overall go-on rate in Idaho to increase if Advanced Opportunities had achieved its goal of more students going on. Some speculate that AO may have prevented the go-on rate from dropping more. Still, one would have expected at least a slight uptick in the go-on rate.

**Question:** Has the Advanced Opportunities program increased the number of students who otherwise would not have gone on?

**Answer:** There is anecdotal evidence and data that indicates that most of the students participating in AO are students who would be going on anyway. There is also evidence that this trend is true for Advanced Opportunities programs in other states as well.

Of the students taking AO courses in Idaho, 79.3 percent are Caucasian which over-indexes the total Caucasian student population in Idaho of 75.9 percent. Every other student ethnic group under-index when it comes to their AO participation. However, there is data showing that Hispanic students are increasingly participating in AO. In fiscal 2018, 14.26 percent of the total Hispanic student population of 17.5 percent participated in Advanced Opportunities.

Looking at traditionally underserved student populations: In fiscal 2017, only 29 percent of the total Title 1 student population of 42 percent took Advanced Opportunities. In fiscal 2018, that percentage slipped slightly (28 percent) while the total Title 1 student population shrunk to 32 percent. Among at-risk students, 2.38 percent out of a possible 4.65 percent of the students participated. And 1.29 percent of English Language learners out of a total population of 2.95 percent participated.

In most respects, the utilization of the program across student populations is predictable. High performing students are accessing the program at higher percentages than identified disadvantaged populations. This can be attributed to their existing focus on post-secondary objectives, and parental involvement. This could also account for the rapid growth in the program which may level off as that population group is saturated. Additionally, the system favors high achieving students over average students.

There are other reasons students who would be going on anyway participate and fewer students who wouldn't be going on do not. It could depend on family encouragement and culture; academic capability; the availability or lack of availability of Advanced Opportunities

programs in certain school districts; the availability or lack of availability of effective academic advising across school districts, the availability or lack of availability of on-line courses; the availability or lack of availability of transportation to participate, to name a few. *(See our recommendations for ways to close this gap)*

One superintendent told us that of the three high schools in their district, the one with a higher socio-economic student body took more AO credits than the two other high schools with a lower socio-economic student body.

A significantly higher number (58 percent) of female students take Advanced Opportunities than male students (42 percent). That is so even though women make up 49 percent of the total students in Idaho and males make up 51 percent. This statistic reflects the trend that a greater percentage of female students in Idaho - and across the United States – are going to college than male students.

**Question:** Do Advanced Opportunities make postsecondary education more affordable for students and families?

**Answer:** Yes. No question students and families are saving money as a result of the Advanced Opportunities program. In the latest report available from the State Department of Education, families saved \$55 million in college tuition by having their students participate. That came with an investment by the state of \$16.4 million. According to a fiscal 2018 report, for every \$1 the state spent on Advanced Opportunities, Idaho families saved \$4.58 on college tuition. We interviewed one father of a rising senior in the West Ada School District who said that by the time his daughter graduates from high school in 2020 she will have earned 39 college-level credits at a cost to the state of roughly \$2,535. If his daughter had obtained those credits at a community college after graduating from high school, the cost to the family would have been \$5,421 and even more if she chose to attend a 4-year university.

**Question:** Do Advanced Opportunities programs improve the retention of students in postsecondary?

**Answer:** Yes. There is evidence that Advanced Opportunities do improve retention rate of students who go on to postsecondary. A report from the Office of the State Board of Education indicates that students who participated in dual credit were 15 percent more likely to re-enroll in postsecondary than non-dual credit taking students. The retention rate is even higher – 32 percent – among those students who have obtained 20 or more dual-credits compared to non-dual credit students. *(One opportunity is to get students to take more dual credit courses because the latest data shows 50 percent of students obtain 7 or fewer credits).* Additionally, the College of Western Idaho has seen an increase in fall to spring continued enrollment the past two years – from 67 percent in fiscal year 2016 to 73 percent in fiscal year 2018.

**Question:** Do Advanced Opportunities improve the completion and on-time completion rate in postsecondary?

**Answer:** The answer is it’s too early to tell. We don’t have enough data to assess this question with certainty because we haven’t had enough students under the new AO model progress through the postsecondary system.

Nationally, there is some evidence that students who take dual credit have a better completion rate generally and on-time. But one cannot make a direct causal conclusion based on Advanced Opportunities alone. There could be other factors that influence completion outcomes. If, as evidence suggests, more Caucasian and middle-to-high income students take AO and go on, socio-economic factors could play a significant role in completion. On the other hand, even for vulnerable students who take AO and go on, there could be factors out of their control that affect their completion and on-time completions rates.

**OTHER OBSERVATIONS BY INTERVIEWEES THAT CAN ADVERSELY AFFECT THE USE OF ADVANCED OPPORTUNITIES, THE GO-ON RATE AND COMPLETION OUTCOMES**

In short, demographics seem to play a strong role – both positively and negatively – when it comes to Advanced Opportunities programs, go-on and complete rates. There could be many reasons students from more vulnerable populations don’t participate in Advanced Opportunities and/or don’t go on to postsecondary or complete if they do. Tuition is only one factor when it comes to affecting outcomes. Other, non-tuition factors could be whether a student has to go to work full or part time; expenses for moving to a college campus, lodging and food; whether the student has a dependent child or children; the lack of transportation. These are just a few of the barriers that life throws in the way of students.

**ESTIMATED GROWTH IN ADVANCED OPPORTUNITIES SPENDING**

We were asked to project the future cost of Advanced Opportunities. As one can see from this chart, spending on Advanced Opportunities took a significant increase once we moved to the current model where students have \$4,125 each to spend on AO courses. AO program costs could rise to \$23.4 million by fiscal 2023.

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Amount Spent</b>		
2016	\$ 4,684,351.00	Published	
2017	\$ 13,107,469.00	Published	
2018	\$ 15,938,398.00	Published	22%
2019	\$ 18,552,403.20	Estimated	16%
2020	\$ 20,685,929.57	Projected	15%
2021	\$ 22,133,944.64	Projected	7%
2022	\$ 22,908,632.70	Projected	3.50%
2023	\$ 23,412,622.62	Proj Per Annum Growth	2.20%

*Source: Office of the State Board of Education*

Thanks to Bill Laude and Tracie Bent of the OSBE for providing the following analysis of the projected growth:

“We had been expecting accelerated growth during the first few years of the program as more parents and students became aware of the program and school districts and charter school developed programs and expanded dual credit offerings at the schools to meet the increased interest generated by the state funding. We are also expecting the program growth to peak and then level off to a point where growth in the program is in alignment with growth in our student population.

The caveat here is that we did not anticipate the large increase in our student population that we saw last year and as Idaho’s population continues to grow at an accelerated rate so will our student body. This growth used in the projection is based on the last few years growth, if we see a sustained accelerated increase in state population the growth in the out years may be more than 2.2% per annum. “

## **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS ON IMPROVING ADVANCED OPPORTUNITIES**

### **GET MORE UNDERSERVED STUDENTS ENGAGED**

While the current Advanced Opportunities program seems to be reaching the higher-achieving 20 percent of students, there are ways we could better reach the middle group of underserved students. Some ideas for doing this include:

- 1) Create an increased state-wide career exploration focus for all 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Supplement and combine existing activities with a state curriculum. Expand the current “wheel” and create a year-long course that includes relevant field trips.
- 2) Reach out to underserved population and their parents. Junior High parent-teacher conferences should always include a discussion on career exploration and related preparations. Counselors should begin shifting more emphasis to the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade level as the critical year for students. A communication plan could include reaching out to parents through their employers as is currently being piloted by Idaho Business for Education and the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco in the Idaho Falls and Nampa school districts.
- 3) Provide these populations with increased communications and sharable information for family discussion. Engaging parents is critical to success. As parents become more aware and engaged with their student’s college and career plans the success rate will respond accordingly.
- 4) Students from economically disadvantaged families have a drive and interest in self-sustainability that can be cultivated through exposure, education, and experiences which may include job shadowing, professional demonstrations and guest speakers from a wide array of professional backgrounds. Sparking interest and making real world connections through relationship building and mentorship can reach those students whose primary supports are not as invested in that process.

## **STRENGTHEN ACADEMIC ADVISING**

We must ensure that students have access to high quality and effective academic advising regardless of where they attend school. This advising can be provided by the school districts or through the colleges and universities. At least two of our community colleges have student advisers embedded in local high schools. This program shows promising results. The University of Idaho has also had pilot advising projects with embedded advisers.

Along with the quality and effectiveness of advising, as we stated earlier, we recommend that advisers and teachers start advising students of the Advanced Opportunities no later than the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade. Furthermore, we recommend that this AO advising be included in the students' Individual Education Plan which they are required to have by the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade. This plan can be updated, including planning for Advanced Opportunities, in subsequent grades.

## **ENCOURAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT LEADERS TO GET BEHIND THE PROGRAM**

Looking at the participation rate by school district, it looks like the enthusiasm and support provided by local school leaders and educators makes a difference between students taking or not taking AO courses. This seems more important than whether a district is large or small, rural or urban. For example, in fiscal 2018 the Melba School District had 42 percent of its students participating in Advanced Opportunities, while the largest school district in the state, West Ada, had 27 percent.

It does appear, however, that the charter school districts generally, but not always, have a higher percentage of students taking Advanced Opportunities than traditional public-school districts. For example, the Meridian Medical Arts Charter had 75 percent of its students participating in AO, the largest percentage in the state. But again, this could go back to the socio-economic make-up of many charter schools compared to traditional public schools. It could also go back to school leadership's support of the AO program.

We encourage the State Department of Education and Office of the State Board of Education to work with local school districts to emphasize the importance of getting more of their students, especially underserved students, involved in the AO program. This should include encouraging them to change their class schedules so students can take on-line AO courses if they do not have the locally qualified instructors in their schools.

## **MAKE SURE CREDITS COUNT TOWARD A CREDENTIAL OR DEGREE**

Data shows that 70 percent of the AO credits students earn are in general education courses. This is positive because, generally speaking, these credits should give students a head start on required college credits. But there is some anecdotal evidence that students are taking more general education credits in specific areas than they need. For example, a student might be loading up on English credits when they only need half as many to count toward their college English requirements. Other students use AO for career exploration. That isn't necessarily bad unless that is all they use AO for and don't get credits that can count toward a credential.

The solution for making sure students are taking credit-bearing courses that lead to a credential is again through effective advising.

Here is a list of the top 10 general education courses taken by AO students:

Course Type	Credits
Mathematics	28,318
English	23,418
History	17,192
Spanish	16,447
Biology	12,822
Communications	10,316
Political Science	10,214
Chemistry	6,924
Anatomy	4,411
Psychology	4,254

*Source: State Department of Education*

### **CONSIDER REDEFINING WHAT “GO-ON” MEANS**

Students who complete any academic or CTE course outside defined graduation requirements are in fact “going on.” Other definitions, federal included, have fallen behind the evolution of education in the United States. The increasing ability for students to better utilize K-12 years should be positive, not negatively reported based on traditional scheduling. Idaho has an opportunity to lead out in redesigning the educational process. This would include not just the initiation of higher education goals, but the likelihood of completion in certification or degrees.

### **SEEK OUT ADVANCED OPPORTUNITIES “DESERTS” AND GIVE THEM ATTENTION**

We encourage the state to conduct a deeper study to learn where the Advanced Opportunities “deserts” exist in our state. Where are schools short of qualified instructors? Where do schools lack effective academic advising? Where do students lack access to on-line instruction whether due to the lack of technology or because the local district hasn’t adjusted class schedules so students can take on-line AO classes? Where do students lack access to Career-Technical courses for whatever reason?

By doing such an in-depth study we can close the gaps and give all students – those who would be going on to postsecondary anyway and those who weren’t – an equal opportunity to access high-quality Advanced Opportunities.

## **GIVE STUDENTS GREATER FLEXIBILITY IN USING THEIR ADVANCED OPPORTUNITIES FUNDS**

We know that many high school students are not focused on their postsecondary plans until their junior and often their senior years. This may especially be true for economically disadvantaged and first-generation students. But no student, regardless of their socio-economic situation, is immune from this postsecondary procrastination. How can we help these late bloomers who may not have taken advantage of AO while in secondary school?

One way is to allocate the same \$4,125 to any high school graduate to attend a technical school or community college using these funds within two years (or whatever length of time policymakers decide) of their graduation.

This would give late bloomers, students who go directly into the workforce without advanced skills, students who go on a church mission or join the military the chance to return to school and finish their education or get a jump on a 4-year degree.

Georgia, for example, allows students to carry over their AO allotment to help defray the cost of their postsecondary education. The \$4,125 allotment would cover most or all of the cost of an associate degree and it would certainly cover the cost of a technical certificate.

This could be a good way to make the overall AO program more equitable, inclusive and help us achieve the workforce-building results Idaho needs.

## **INTERVIEWS AND RESOURCES**

Paula Gordon Clark County Schools - Superintendent

Orvin Jorgenson Clark County Schools – Board Chair

Liza Sherick Jefferson School District 251 - Past Superintendent

Chad Martin Jefferson School District 251 - Superintendent

Rick Amen College of Eastern Idaho – President

Travis Swick North Idaho STEM Academy – Vice Principal

Sen. Steve Thayn Senate Education Committee – Member

Jeff Fox, President of the College of Southern Idaho

Bert Glandon, President of the College of Western Idaho

Tracie Bent, Office of the State Board of Education

Bill Laude, Office of the State Board of Education

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Tom Keily and staff of Education Commission of the States



