

Oregon teachers tout method

Education | A federal official visits Westview High to see proficiency-based learning

By **MELISSA NAVAS**
THE OREGONIAN

BEAVERTON — When a top U.S. education official visited Westview High School on Friday, the purpose was twofold.

Deputy Education Secretary Tony Miller came to tout the benefits of jobs saved or newly created through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Oregon education leaders had some touting of their own to do. They told Miller about proficiency-based learning, which measures students' achievement based strictly on what they know; attendance or extra credit do not factor into grades. Oregon schools are in the forefront of adopting the system.

The Oregon Department of Education hopes the innovative model will help it win a portion of \$4 billion in federal grants that will be awarded next spring.

Proficiency-based learning is gaining traction among Oregon school districts.

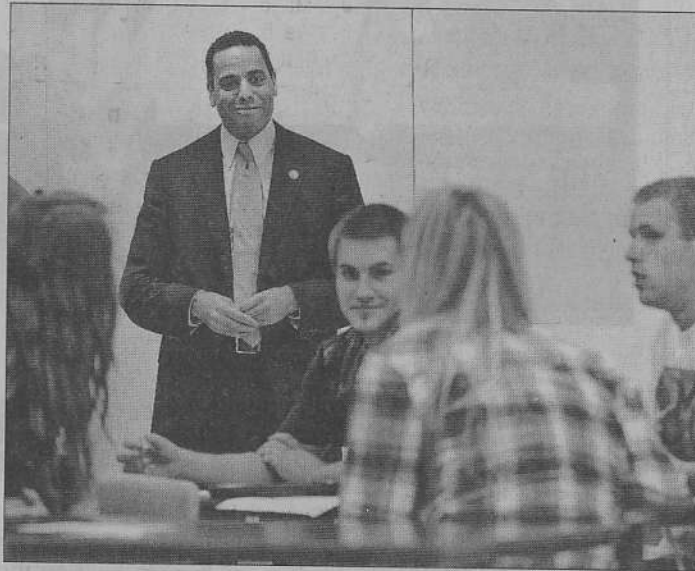
"You do a lot of things in an innovative way," Miller said of the system. "Not a lot of districts are using it around the country."

Beaverton, Scappoose and Redmond districts use the proficiency-based model; Forest Grove and Gresham-Barlow are using elements of it. Others districts are getting ready to.

Oregon schools Superintendent Susan Castillo said students respond well to the teaching philosophy and that it particularly works with struggling students.

"This is the direction that our state needs to go," Castillo said.

Transparency is key in credit for proficiency. Students are told what they are expected to learn and how assignments or lessons help meet those goals. Report



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Deputy Secretary of Education Tony Miller visits an Algebra II class Friday at Westview High School, where he met with local educators to discuss Oregon's proficiency-based learning model. The system measures achievement based on what students know without factoring in attendance or extra credit.

card grades are determined by what a student knows, rather than by absences, tardies or extra credit, which traditionally factor into grading. More emphasis is placed on learning, regardless of how long it takes to master a subject.

The proficiency pitch is a big one for Oregon, which formally announced Monday it would vie for the "Race to the Top" grants to be awarded competitively by the U.S. Department of Education.

Grants will encourage and reward states that are being innovative or reforming education while improving student achievement, closing the achievement gap, increasing graduation rates and preparing students for college or careers.

"Oregon has done very deep work on this practice for a very long time," Redmond School District Superintendent Vickie Fleming said. "Other states can learn from what we've done here."

During the Westview visit, Miller spent about 10 minutes in

Ryan Johnson's Algebra II class. The temporary teacher found out in August that his job was one of 132 saved in the Beaverton School District by federal stimulus money.

Students shouldn't be assessed on how long and how hard they spend learning the curriculum, Johnson said.

"Isn't that kind of like what real life is like?" Johnson said. "If you're an accountant and work really hard but don't get the numbers right, you don't have a job anymore."

Miller also had brief interactions with Johnson's students.

"Why are you here?" one asked.

Traveling allows him to see innovative work around the nation, Miller said.

"When we're sitting in Washington, D.C., sometimes you don't hear that or see that," he said.

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