

Transferring High School Credits Earned Outside of the United States

Report to the Legislature

September 2024



Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	2
Findings.....	2
Recommendations.....	3
Introduction	4
Background	4
Diversity of Recently Arrived Students in Oregon	4
Existing Policy and Guidance for Evaluation of International Schooling Experiences	5
OAR 581-021-0210- Evaluating Student Transcripts	6
OAR 581-022-2025- Credit Options	6
Access to Linguistic Inclusion (House Bill 2056).....	7
U.S. Department of Education’s Newcomer Toolkit.....	8
Study Method	9
Survey	10
Survey Respondents’ Roles and Engagement with Non-U.S. Credit Evaluation	10
Focus Group Discussions.....	11
Findings	11
Recommendations	18
References	33
Appendix A: Evaluation and Interpretation of Credits Earned Outside the U.S. Survey Questions	34
Appendix B: Quantitative Survey Responses (Sections II and III)	37

Executive Summary

Senate Bill 940 (SB 940), passed during the 2023 regular legislative session, required the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) “to conduct a study to identify how to improve processes to more easily and accurately transfer to high schools in [Oregon] any high school credits earned by a student outside the United States.” The bill also directed ODE to submit a report describing the study’s findings and recommendations to the interim committees of the Legislative Assembly related to education by September 15, 2024.

Pursuant to SB 940, ODE designed a two-tiered study. First, ODE developed and conducted a survey on the evaluation and interpretation of high school credits earned outside the United States. Second, ODE facilitated five focus group discussion meetings to collect further data from the impacted education partners on the current practices, challenges, and needs for evaluating high school transcripts and credits earned outside of the United States. Taken together, 189 educators, counselors, and administrators contributed to this study.

The remainder of this executive summary provides a synopsis of the study findings followed by the study recommendations.

Findings

This study resulted in seven findings. Specifically, a thorough analysis of the data gathered using the two methods stated in the preceding section led to the following findings:

Finding 1. School districts mainly rely on transcripts from students' home countries and follow similar general steps for obtaining academic records, evaluating credits, and placing students.

Finding 2. Districts are generally not aware of existing guidance regarding the evaluation of credits earned outside the U.S.

Finding 3. There is wide variation in recognizing students' prior academic achievements.

Finding 4. Obtaining academic records from other countries is difficult, causing delays and confusion in credit evaluation.

Finding 5. Inconsistent translation practices and reliance on uncertified translators can lead to errors.

Finding 6. Lack of standardized training for staff evaluating international credits results in inconsistent and inequitable treatment of students' academic experiences.

Finding 7. Resource disparities among school districts and the cost of professional credentials evaluation providers hinder accurate and timely evaluations of international credits.

Recommendations

In addition to its findings, the study resulted in nine state and local-level recommendations to improve international credit transfer processes:

State-level recommendations:

Recommendation 1. Provide high-quality, evidence-based training and professional development to school counselors, registrars and other staff involved in internationally earned high school credits to promote a standardized process for the transfer of high school credits earned outside the United States.

Recommendation 2. Strengthen partnerships with Consulates and Embassies of Mexico and other countries of origin for Oregon students.

Recommendation 3. Create a collaborative network of school professionals to promote the proper high school grade placement and the evaluation of high school credits earned outside the United States.

Recommendation 4. Work with State Board of Education to revise OAR 581-021-0210 to clarify state policy for transfer of credits earned outside of the U.S.

Recommendation 5. To increase the State's capacity to provide resources and guidance with respect to the transfer of high school credits earned outside the United States and implement recommendations 1-4, increase staff capacity at ODE to support international schooling.

Local-level recommendations:

Recommendation 6. Expand use of professional credentials evaluation providers to improve accuracy of and fairness in the evaluation of immigrant students' previously earned credits outside the United States.

Recommendation 7. Expand the use of validated placement exams or assessments offered in students' home languages to evaluate students' prior schooling experiences and eligibility for transfer credit.

Recommendation 8. At the district level, consider centralizing the evaluation of credits earned outside the U.S. at a single location within each district.

Recommendation 9. Complete schooling history interviews with all newcomer immigrant students to collect detailed information about the school system of origin, length of the course, grading system, and standards covered in the course schools in Oregon.

Introduction

Senate Bill 940 (SB 940), passed during the 2023 regular legislative session, required the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) “to conduct a study to identify how to improve processes to more easily and accurately transfer to high schools in [Oregon] any high school credits earned by a student outside the United States.” The bill also directed ODE to submit a report describing the study’s findings and recommendations to the interim committees of the Legislative Assembly related to education by September 15, 2024.

Pursuant to SB 940, ODE designed a two-tiered study. First, ODE developed and conducted a statewide survey on the evaluation and interpretation of high school credits earned outside the United States. Second, ODE facilitated five focus group discussion meetings to collect further data from impacted education partners on the current practices, challenges, and needs for evaluating high school transcripts and credits earned outside of the United States. Taken together, 189 educators, counselors, and administrators contributed to this study.

Background

Senate Bill 940 comes at a critical time. There is an urgent need to better support students who bring credits earned outside the United States. According to Vazquez Cano (2024), only 6 States¹ in the U.S. provide explicit guidance on the evaluation of non-U.S. schooling experiences. This is compounded by the fact that, nationwide, the population of recent immigrant students (also known as Recently Arrived Students) has been steadily rising in recent years (Sugarman, 2023). Likewise in Oregon, several public schools are experiencing a notable increase in their recently arrived students, the target student population for SB 940. Indeed, the statewide increase of 31% in recent arrivals² from the 2022-23 school year (6,957 students) to the 2023-24 school year (9,117 students) represents the largest annual increase in the recently arrived student population since the 2016-17 school year and the second largest annual increase since ODE’s launch of the recently arrived students’ consolidated data collection (i.e., 2011-12 school year).

Diversity of Recently Arrived Students in Oregon

In addition to their population size, recently arrived students in Oregon embody a diverse student population. For example, in 2023-24, recently arrived students identified with a wide range of home languages with Spanish (4,112 students; 45.1%), English³ (1,117 students;

¹ These 6 states include Colorado, Missouri, New Jersey, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Washington.

² Recent arrivers are defined as students aged between 3-21 who were not born in any state or Puerto Rico and have not been attending one or more schools in any one or more state for more than three full (cumulative) academic years.

³ Most of these recently arrived students are non-English Learners, and the data on their home languages may be subject to validity constraints.

12.2%), Russian (439 students; 4.8%), and Ukrainian (351 students; 3.8%) being the four most frequently spoken home languages. This linguistic diversity strongly correlates with the fact that 77% (7,047 students) of recently arrived students were designated as English Learners (EL) and received EL services in the 2023-24 school year.

As shown in Figure 1, in the 2023-24 school year, recently arrived students identified with a variety of ethnic backgrounds, with Hispanic (4,520 students; 50%), Asian (1,800 students; 20%), and White (1,737 students; 19%) representing the majority of those ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, 18% (1,596 students) of recently arrived students experienced houselessness and 4% (379 students) were reported as being students with interrupted or limited formal education (often abbreviated as SIFE or SLIFE)⁴.

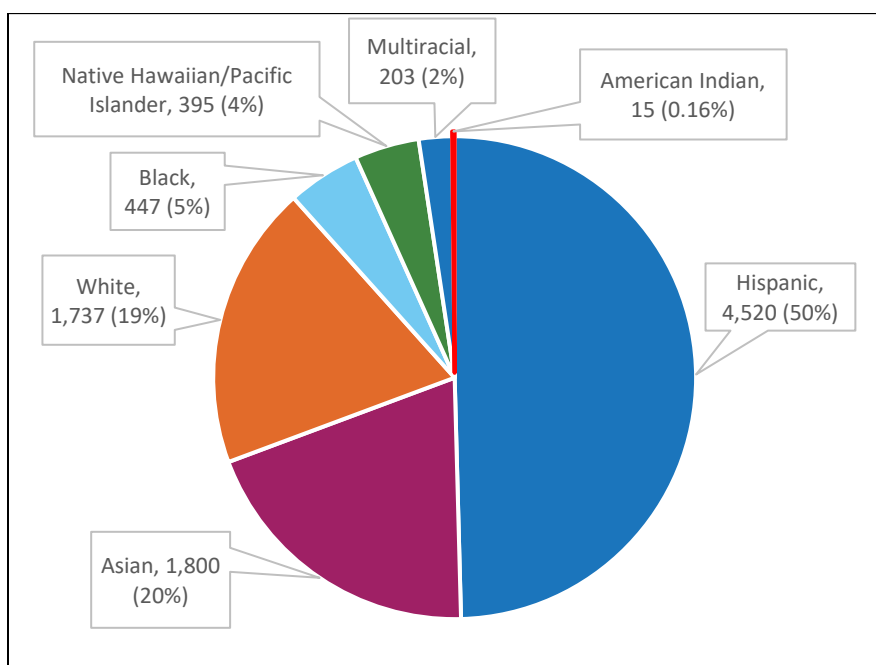


Figure 1. Ethnic backgrounds of recently arrived students (2023-24)

Existing Policy and Guidance for Evaluation of International Schooling Experiences

There are no Oregon administrative rules specific to the evaluation and transfer of credits earned outside of the U.S. However, state policy provides some general guidance on the evaluation of student transcripts ([OAR 581-021-0210](#)) and credit options ([OAR 581-022-2025](#)). In the sections to follow, we summarize these and other applicable State and Federal guidance.

⁴ The data on the number of SIFE/SLIFE students may be underestimated and subject to validity constraints.

OAR 581-021-0210- Evaluating Student Transcripts

OAR 581-021-0210 provides guidance on the evaluation of student transcripts for students transferring from out of state, private, alternative, nonstandard public schools, home school, distance learning, or community college programs. For students coming from another state, school districts are required to accept credits and attendance from standard secondary schools outside Oregon as equivalent to Oregon's requirements. School districts must evaluate and determine the value of prior credits and the equivalent years of school attendance for students coming from private, alternative, nonstandard public schools, home school, distance learning, or community college programs. Grade placement is determined at the local level, as school districts are responsible for determining appropriate placement for students enrolling in grades K-8 based on their prior education.

OAR 581-022-2025- Credit Options

In addition, OAR 581-022-2025 provides the following guidance around the credit options available to the school districts and charter public schools:

Methods for Earning Credits:

- Credits can be awarded if students demonstrate proficiency or mastery of recognized standards, including state academic content standards, essential skills, or industry-based standards. The following methods are available:

(a) Classroom or Equivalent Work:

- Credits are earned through successful completion of classroom activities or equivalent work, such as supervised independent study, career-related learning, or project-based learning, aligned with state academic content standards.

(b) Proficiency-Based Work:

- Students can earn credits by completing classroom or equivalent work specifically designed to assess proficiency or mastery of defined standards, regardless of instructional hours.

(c) Exams:

- Passing exams that measure proficiency or mastery of the identified standards can result in credit being awarded.

(d) Assessment Evidence:

- Providing a collection of work or other forms of assessment that demonstrate proficiency or mastery of the standards can lead to earning credits.

(e) Prior Learning Documentation:

- Credits may also be awarded for prior learning activities or experiences that demonstrate proficiency or mastery, such as certifications, diplomas, awards, or other relevant documentation.

Access to Linguistic Inclusion (House Bill 2056)

In 2021, the Oregon Legislature passed HB 2056, which amended ORS 329.007, 329.025, 329.045, 329.451, 329.485, 336.477, 338.115, 340.300 and 350.260, replacing references to “English language arts” with “language arts,” opening the door for students to earn language arts credits in languages other than English. This has implications for students who have multilingual and international schooling experiences. ODE’s [guidance for the implementation of Access to Linguistic Inclusion \(HB 2056\)](#) offers the following guidance on international transcripts:

- Every effort should be made to obtain missing transcripts, working in close collaboration with families.
- Staff who are responsible for transcript evaluation should have appropriate training and professional development.
- Ideally, the same group of trained staff will handle all transcript evaluation, to ensure consistency across schools and years.
- Courses taken outside the United States should be judged solely on their academic merits:
 - Course credit equivalencies and credit transfer should be in the same content area/subject, regardless of the language of instruction.
 - Courses should transfer in, whenever possible, with an equivalent letter grade.
 - Students’ levels of English proficiency should have no bearing on how their transcripts are evaluated.
- Districts should have a clear policy and process in place for international transcript evaluation.
- District policy should be reviewed regularly to meet the needs of newly-arrived students.
- Language Arts and World Language courses may appear on transcripts from any country. ELD courses or their equivalents are most likely to appear on transcripts from English speaking countries.

U.S. Department of Education's Newcomer Toolkit

Aside from the state-level guidance discussed above, the [U.S. Department of Education's Newcomer Toolkit](#) provides guidance on several areas as regards evaluation of newcomer students' prior schooling records. The following provides a summary of three key areas:

1- Collecting and analyzing newcomer student records and transcripts

The U.S. Department of Education provides guidance on collecting and analyzing records for new immigrant students to ensure appropriate program placement and support services. The key points include:

- **Data Collection:** Schools should gather academic records, birthdates, vaccination records, and other essential data during registration. This helps in accurate grade placement, course scheduling, and credit assignments.
- **Credit Tracking:** Properly tracking credits from prior schooling ensures students stay on track for graduation.
- **International Transcripts:** Evaluating international transcripts can be complex due to differences in language and curriculum. Schools are advised to follow structured processes or use external services to ensure accurate credit transfer.
- **Translation and Interviews:** Translating transcripts and conducting family interviews help gather comprehensive information, particularly when academic records are missing.
- **External Support:** Schools may contract outside organizations for complex tasks like transcript evaluation and translation.
- **Informed Placement:** Analyzing translated and validated transcripts allows for proper student placement in courses and programs, ensuring that students receive the credits they deserve and meet graduation requirements.

2- Assessing home language literacy and content knowledge

The U.S. Department of Education also provides guidance on assessing the home language literacy and content knowledge of new immigrant students in K-12 schools to help with course placement and support services:

- **Home Language Literacy:** Assessing students' literacy skills in their home language is crucial as it can predict their ability to acquire literacy in a second language. These assessments aid in placing students in appropriate language courses and help teachers focus on transferring pre-existing skills.
- **Assessment Methods:** Schools may use formal assessments, such as those recommended by the [Los Angeles Unified School District](#) or the [New York State](#)

[Education Department's SIFE screener](#), to evaluate proficiency in various languages.

Informal assessments, like short written responses or conversations, are also used.

- **Content Knowledge:** Assessing students' knowledge in subjects like math and science, either in English or their home language, helps in making informed decisions about course placement and necessary support. Language-neutral assessments, such as those that do not rely on written or spoken instructions, are also used.
- **Resources:** Several resources are available, including guides for native language standardized assessments, tools for evaluating math skills in multiple languages, and strategies for assessing math background through problem-solving.

3- Awarding competency-based credits

Finally, the U.S. Department of Education provides guidance on awarding competency-based credits for new immigrant students' prior schooling outside the United States to help them meet high school graduation requirements. This guidance focuses on:

- **Competency-Based Credits:** These credits allow students to earn high school credit by demonstrating their knowledge through assessments aligned with district or state learning standards. This approach helps immigrant and refugee students gain credits for their prior education and move toward graduation, even as they work on English proficiency.
- **Credit Earning Methods:** Students can earn credits by passing exams that assess their knowledge in specific subjects, such as world languages, math, or science. For instance, some districts in Washington allow students to earn Algebra I credit by either passing an end-of-course exam or a higher-level Algebra II course.
- **Resources:** The guidance includes resources like competency testing processes and sample district policies for awarding credits, especially in world languages. Schools and districts can advocate for local policies that support awarding competency-based credits and use them to create strategic individualized graduation plans for immigrant and refugee students.

In the next section, we describe the methods that this study used to identify how to improve processes to more easily and accurately transfer to high schools in Oregon the credits earned by students outside the United States.

Study Method

Given the background discussed in the previous sections, this study utilized a mixed-methods approach combining a survey and follow-up focus group discussions to gather comprehensive

data on the processes and challenges of transferring high school credits earned outside the U.S. for this student population.

Survey

The survey included 29 items including 5 open-ended and 24 multiple-choice items (see Appendix A). The survey was designed into three sections:

1. Respondents' backgrounds and roles in evaluating international high school credits (9 questions),
2. Processes and challenges of transferring international high school credits (12 questions),
3. Resources and recommendations for improvement (8 questions).

The study used a snowball sampling method where potential respondents were invited to participate through multiple platforms including the Comprehensive School Counseling (CSM) listserv, Oregon School Counselor Association, as well as the Multilingual and Migrant Education contact lists maintained by ODE. The CSM listserv is disseminated to school counselors, school social workers, child development specialists, college access professionals, district office directors, building administrators and other staff who support comprehensive school counseling programs. The Multilingual and Migrant Education contact lists include Superintendents, Education Service District (ESD) administrators, Migrant Education Coordinators, District ML/EL coordinators, District Curriculum Directors, Teachers with ESOL endorsements, Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSA), other licensed teachers (i.e. reading specialists, content, etc.). Using this method, 189 respondents participated in the survey. As shown in Figure 2, this sample provided a broad coverage representing 91 school districts and Education Service Districts (ESDs) in Oregon. Rural districts represented the largest percentage of the respondents (n=63; 34%) followed by those located in Suburban (n=42; 23%), Urban (n=41; 22%), Towns (n=34; 18%), and other (n=5; 3%) areas. The respondents represented districts with various population sizes ranging from large with more than 7,000 students (n=60; 34%), to medium with 1,000 - 6,999 students (n=77; 43%), to small with fewer than 1,000 students (n=36; 20%).

Survey Respondents' Roles and Engagement with Non-U.S. Credit Evaluation

In terms of survey respondents' roles, counselors (n=70; 37%), administrators (n=44; 23%), and registrars (n=26; 14%) constituted the three main groups of respondents, most of whom worked in a high school setting (n=124; 66%) or a district office (n=36; 19%).

Additionally, respondents varied in how they engaged with credits earned outside the U.S. Most respondents were involved in making course and grade placement decisions (n=113; 59.8%) followed by evaluating course equivalency and awarding credits (n=88; 46.6%) and conducting schooling history interviews or other methods to obtain non-transcript course

history (n=73; 38.6%). Other roles fulfilled by respondents with respect to the international high school credits included obtaining documents from the students' previous school (n=43; 22.8%), authenticating obtained documents (n=43; 22.8%), translating the documents into English (n=39; 20.6%), and administering assessment for placement or proficiency-based credits (n=35; 18.5%)

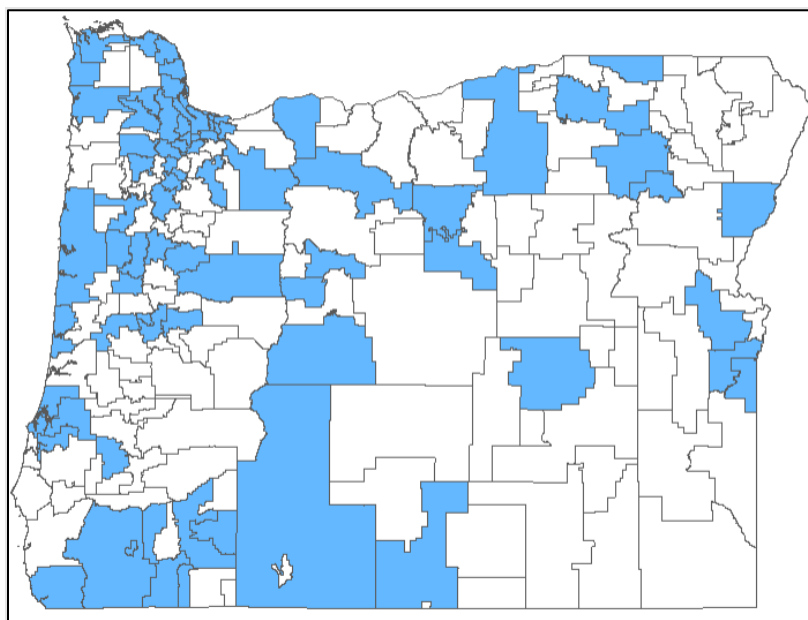


Figure 2. Survey coverage across the school districts in Oregon

Focus Group Discussions

In addition to the survey, five focus group discussions were conducted with 21 participants selected from the survey respondents (11.1% of survey participants). These discussions aimed to delve deeper into the step-by-step process of evaluating international credits, identify specific challenges faced by different schools and districts, and discuss (or explore) recommendations to improve those processes. The focus group participants, representing 19 school districts (20% of all participating school districts and ESDs), provided detailed insights into their experiences and offered recommendations for improving the accuracy and ease of transferring international high school credits.

In the next section, the findings from the survey (also see Appendix B) and focus group discussions are described.

Findings

Finding 1. School districts and high schools largely rely on transcripts from students' home countries as evidence of credits earned outside the U.S. and follow similar general steps for obtaining academic records, evaluating credits, and placing students.

Data from the survey and focus groups show that only two out of 91 school districts (2.2%) have written general guidance for international transcript evaluation, and most of them developed localized processes that rely on newcomers' transcripts and the knowledge of staff members that have experience evaluating credits. However, the localized processes that high schools in Oregon have developed follow some patterns and can be grouped in three steps summarized below.

- Step 1: Contact with family and student

The process begins with initial contact, where staff members contact the student's family. They assist with understanding district enrollment rules and collect all available academic records and transcripts. This initial step is crucial for setting the foundation of the evaluation process. However, schools differ significantly regarding the staff designation for this initial contact depending on their capacity to communicate with newcomers and families in their home language. They may assign this task to multilingual staff like Teachers on Special Assignments (TOSAs), registrars, program administrators, coordinators, or counselors.

- Step 2: Obtaining and translating transcripts and academic records

The next step involves translating and preliminarily assessing the collected documents. Findings show that schools across Oregon do not have uniform acceptance criteria for transcripts and other academic records from students' home countries. While some accept original hard copies only, others accept photocopies or digital pictures of the documentation.

Regarding the timeline for this process, participants consistently emphasized it may vary significantly case by case. With one exception, all focus-group participants mentioned having had at least a few cases of students facing timelines of six to nine months before reaching a final placement. In those cases, high schools place students before having other forms of credit evaluation in place and without having a final analysis of newcomers' academic history. Participants also shared that this statewide practice is necessary for newcomers to attend schools, but also creates many misplacements that affect students' track for graduation.

Participants in all focus groups commented that, in most cases, the multilingual staff members who contact families also translate newcomers' academic records. Data also show a clear pattern across all the school districts represented in this study. For the translation process, school districts rely on multilingual staff members who have received training on translation and interpretation specific for credit evaluation. Spanish is the most prevalent language among both newcomer students and districts' bilingual staff members, which means translation and interpretation intends to be more readily available. While external translation services are an option for large and diverse school districts, free online translation platforms have become

more normalized, mainly when translating less common languages in small or rural school districts.

- Step 3: Evaluation of credits and translated records

This step requires thorough and comprehensive research into international grading scales, instructional hours, and course content to understand how earned credits compare to the local district, state, and federal educational systems and regulations. In this part of the process, the same multilingual staff in charge of previous steps 1 and 2 also consult with consulates, international educational authorities, newcomers' previous schools, and online resources to clarify uncertainties in the translation process and interpretation of school records. Based on this research, they provide a recommendation for determining the U.S. course equivalencies of student's previous coursework, mainly focusing on core subjects like math, science, and language arts.

All focus groups show that, typically, counselors analyze the translated transcripts to determine U.S. course equivalents and assign appropriate credits. It is common for the multilingual staff members in charge of the previous two steps to provide comments and recommendations for the counselors who evaluate these documents to place newcomers. To clarify questions regarding course content, number of credits per course, schools re-interview students and families or contact experienced colleagues from other schools or school districts. However, schools do not follow a consistent or homogenous process within and across school districts to evaluate newcomers' previous transcripts or to integrate the recommendations provided by multicultural staff members or other institutions.

Finding 2. Districts are generally not aware of existing guidance regarding the evaluation of credits earned outside the U.S.

International transcripts are only one of the resources that schools may use to evaluate international credits, and ODE provides some [interpretive guidance](#) and explanations to assist school districts when placing newcomers. Survey and focus-group data show an extensive lack of awareness of this guidance and emphasized the need for statewide regulations to provide an alternative method different from international transcripts for evaluating international credits. From among the survey respondents (n=23) that chose to share if their districts possessed written guidance or policies to guide the evaluation of high school credits earned outside of the United States, 74% of them indicated that they do not have one or that they are unaware of it.

Findings also show that the toolkit "Evaluating Foreign Transcripts: The A-Z Manual," produced in 2006 by the New York City Department of Education, is one of the only resources districts report referencing to understand grading systems from other countries. This manual needs to be updated, does not provide resources for the specific contexts in Oregon school districts, and

only a handful of staff members in the state with extensive credit evaluation experience seem to be aware of it.

Finding 3. There is wide variation in recognizing students' prior academic achievements.

Schools and districts, with little to no consultation with professional credentials evaluation providers, have developed their own local methods for assessing and awarding credits, leading to inconsistencies. These discrepancies can manifest in various ways, such as different interpretations of what constitutes a high school credit, the number of credits per class, and grading systems, depending on the experience and judgment of the counselors and registrars who make the final credit equivalency determinations.

In Oregon, the acceptance criteria of school records from students' home countries vary significantly among high schools, leading to inconsistencies and systemic inequities that complicate the enrollment and credit transfer processes for recent arrivals. For instance, as mentioned earlier, some schools are more flexible in accepting photographs or hard copies of transcripts. In contrast, others may require more formal documentation, leading to confusion and delays. Another challenge arises from the need to verify the authenticity and completeness of the provided documents (n=49; 27%). Schools sometimes must navigate bureaucratic hurdles to obtain the necessary records, often relying on communication with international institutions with different administrative practices or limited capacity to respond to requests. Additionally, the burden of proof frequently falls on students and their families to provide these records, which can be daunting, especially when working with schools in countries with different educational systems.

There were three key concerns and discrepancies that consistently arose in all focus groups: the equivalency of 9th-grade credits, number of credits per course, and the evaluation of course content. The first concern highlighted the struggle to account for courses that students in the U.S. typically take during 9th grade, but newcomers might have taken in middle school or later in high school in their home countries. For the second concern, participants stressed that in newcomers' home countries, students would take more course hours and therefore more credits than what they normally receive in Oregon. Lastly, participants also shared the urgent need for more guidance to evaluate course content that should count for language arts, mathematics, or science credit. For instance, the course Logical Thinking, taught in Mexican high schools, was suggested as a potential language arts credit in Oregon. When participants were asked about their process to compare credits on transcripts with the local district catalogs, they showed several discrepancies. One of the counselors shared the process they follow, and their words show a combination of these three concerns:

What we do when we receive transcripts that have a lot of classes on them is that we combine those, we combine classes. For example, if it's History and Geography, based on the descriptions that we have in the course catalog, we would probably give World Studies for those courses. Instead of giving one credit for history and one credit for geography, we just give one for both. We look at how we can combine them so that we don't end up giving students a lot of credits.

- School Counselor

While counselors in this school district combine courses and the number of credits, other participants mentioned that their schools would accept all credits as written in the transcripts, providing newcomers from the same schooling system with numbers of credits and courses that differ across districts. This lack of uniformity complicates the evaluation process and undermines equity regarding how students' prior academic achievements are recognized, negatively impacting their ability to be on track with their education and goals.

Finding 4. Obtaining academic records from students' home countries represent significant challenges in evaluating high school credits earned outside the U.S.

Obtaining documents from the student's previous school was rated as the most significant challenge for the survey respondents (n=69; 38%). Gathering academic records and transcripts from students' home countries presents several challenges that complicate the accurate evaluation of high school credits earned outside the U.S. One significant issue is the inconsistency in documentation, where students often arrive with incomplete, outdated, or difficult-to-read records. Many students, especially those from regions affected by conflict or instability, may have attended multiple schools in their transition from their home country to Oregon or experienced interruptions in their education, resulting in multiple gaps in their academic history.

In cases where transcripts are not available or sufficient, only ten percent of participants in the focus groups mentioned that proficiency tests have been rarely and inconsistently administered to help assess the student's knowledge in specific subjects. In the focus groups, only two participants from different districts mentioned having used the STAMP test to assign credit by proficiency. However, both districts emphasized that these decisions are made on a case-by-case basis mainly due to the inconsistency in their processes. This inconsistency not only delays the academic progression of these students but also adds to the obstacles they and their families must overcome to succeed in their new educational environment.

Even when records are available, they may be challenging to interpret, incomplete, or inadequately reflect the student's entire educational experience. Furthermore, the complexities increase when students come from countries with significantly different mechanisms to record

students' records, such as East Africa, Micronesia, or Asian nations. In many cases, transcripts are handwritten or in languages that are difficult to translate, requiring extensive research and sometimes direct contact with foreign embassies or schools. This lack of comprehensive documentation makes it difficult for schools to accurately assess and transfer credits, potentially leading to student academic progression delays.

Finding 5. Translating and interpreting international schooling records is challenging and districts rely on free online translation platforms and uncertified translators, leading to potential errors that affect students' academic paths.

The translation of transcripts and school records from students' home countries presents significant challenges due to the lack of consistency while translating schooling documentation. The potential for subjective judgments during translation increases the likelihood of errors, which can have long-term implications for the student's academic trajectory and integration into the new educational system.

Translating newcomers' previous schooling records poses challenges, regardless of the language in which they are written. Schools often rely on offices with multilingual staff members such as non-classified support staff, Teachers with ESOL endorsements, and Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSA) to conduct translation and interpretation for documents written in languages commonly spoken among the school districts' newcomer students, like Spanish. However, it's important to note that these personnel, while proficient in other languages, are often not certified interpreters and may have never received professional training in translation and interpretation.

Schools often resort to free online translation platforms or external translators for international schooling records written in less common languages among newcomers. Data from focus groups show that educational service districts and school districts face different challenges regarding the cost of translation and interpretation services, as well as finding professional translation services with standardized guidelines for translating educational documents.

Finding 6. The individuals responsible for evaluating non-U.S. schooling experiences and making decisions about credit transfer and grade placement have had little to no training in how to do this fairly and accurately.

A lack of formalized training for staff responsible for these evaluations exacerbates the difficulties in evaluating international credits, as decisions can vary widely depending on the individual's experience and knowledge. Indeed, the vast majority of the survey respondents (n=138; 74%) indicated that they learned or are learning the evaluation processes on the job. This situation highlights the need for a more structured and equitable approach that ensures all students are evaluated fairly and consistently.

Given the lack of specific training for each step in evaluating international credits, the role of local staff members varies significantly among high schools, leading to inconsistencies in how students' international academic experiences are recognized. As one counselor puts it:

Increasing the capacity with training from ODE. Some people are experts for sure, but I feel a lot of pressure because I have the knowledge. I'm making decisions that are outside of the scope of my role. And I want to do what is right for students.

- School Counselor

Her words show an example of how counselors are forced to make decisions based on individual experience and emphasized that part of this work falls outside the scope of their role given the lack of training.

The role of local staff also varies in terms of the evaluation methods employed and the level of collaboration within and between districts. For example, one registrar commented during the focus group that the process at their school is very structured, with a dedicated bilingual staff member overseeing interviews with families and handling document translations. This approach contrasts with the experience of a participant at a different school, where they rely on language liaisons and their personal expertise to determine credit equivalencies.

Meanwhile, some schools lack multilingual staff, struggle with the evaluation process, and occasionally consult foreign consulates or colleges in other school districts to navigate the complexities of different international education systems. These variations illustrate the lack of standardized training and guidance across Oregon schools to define the role and procedures for staff members involved in the evaluation process, resulting in unequal treatment of students' international academic experiences.

Finding 7. Evaluation of international schooling is resource-intensive, very few districts are using professional credentials evaluation services, and resource constraints hinder districts in improving their efforts.

The disparity in resources available across schools and districts further intensifies the challenge. Larger districts may be able to establish dedicated teams and processes for evaluating international credits, while smaller or less-resourced schools often struggle with limited access to expertise, administrative support, and technological tools. The variability in assessing similar educational backgrounds and the uneven distribution of resources leads to inequitable outcomes, where the same academic experiences may be credited differently, depending on the district.

Schools and districts face a shortage of personnel, especially those with the specialized skills needed for accurate and prompt credit evaluation. This lack of dedicated personnel and technological tools means the evaluation process becomes slower and more prone to errors, potentially affecting students' academic trajectory. The absence of robust technological tools to assist in these evaluations exacerbates the situation, as manual methods are time-consuming and lead to inconsistencies in credit allocation.

In many cases, school districts do not have the capacity to serve the increasing numbers of students arriving with diverse educational backgrounds. Additionally, they often lack the necessary resources to evaluate these transcripts effectively. The process frequently requires manual translation, research, and communication with educational institutions, which demand significant time and specialized knowledge. Participants commented that due to budgetary constraints, many schools cannot hire sufficiently trained personnel or invest in technology that could streamline these evaluations. Consequently, the evaluation process is often delayed, leading to inaccuracies in credit assignments and delays in student enrollment.

Professional credentials evaluation providers are perceived as costly. Participants in all focus groups mentioned that the high cost of these services can severely strain limited budgets, sometimes making it financially unfeasible for schools to use them. Indeed, the vast majority of the survey respondents (n=171; 90%) indicated that they did not consider hiring external experts or agencies.

Given the time-intensive processes described above, it is possible that external transcript evaluations services costs may be comparable (or less than) the cost for staff members with limited experience attempting to interpret international schooling records. Schools lacking the necessary in-house resources may turn to external agencies for transcript translation and evaluation. The use of professionals may be particularly useful for smaller districts or those with limited internal resources or for when high school students come from countries whose educational system is largely unfamiliar to the hosting schools.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are organized at two levels. The state-level recommendations are directed at the state at large as represented, among other state entities, by the Oregon Legislature and the Oregon Department of Education recommending them to create capacity, allocate funding, or provide guidance and resources. The local-level recommendations are directed at the local education agencies (ex. school districts) recommending them to adopt promising practices and/or take concrete measures that are strongly associated with the accurate and timely evaluation of high school credits earned outside of the United States.

State-Level Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Provide high-quality, evidence-based training and professional development to school counselors, registrars and other staff involved in internationally earned high school credits to promote a standardized process for the transfer of high school credits earned outside the United States.

The lack of a standardized process for evaluating high school credits earned outside the U.S. results in inconsistencies that can impact students' educational trajectories. Each school or district having its own method can lead to varied interpretations of students' transcripts, potentially disadvantaging them based on arbitrary or uneven criteria. To remedy this, it is essential that school and district staff members are trained in how to fairly evaluate students' prior schooling experiences and make credit determinations.

Evaluation of international schooling experiences, however, requires highly specialized knowledge. The school and district staff members can access training programs and resources from professional associations, such as the Association for International Credential Evaluation Professionals (TAICEP) and the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES).

In addition, such training may focus on:

- **Proficiency and Competency Assessments:** Training should cover the principles and methods of competency-based education, where students earn credits based on demonstrated mastery of content rather than seat time. Staff should learn how to assess proficiency through various means, such as exams, portfolios, or performance assessments, and how to align these with state or district learning standards.
- **Credit equivalency:** Instruction on how to translate international coursework and achievements into U.S. credits is essential. This might include evaluating course content, contact hours, and the level of difficulty relative to U.S. standards.
- **Transcript Evaluation Tools:** Providing access to resources such as foreign credential evaluation guides, online databases, and tools for transcript analysis can help standardize the credit transfer process. Training should include how to use these tools effectively.
- **Country-Specific Guides:** Offering detailed guides on the education systems of the countries from which most students originate can help staff make more informed decisions. These guides should include information on common academic credentials, school leaving certificates, and equivalency with U.S. standards.

In addition to comprehensive training programs, the staff involved in international high school credit evaluation will greatly benefit from:

- **Reference materials:** A comprehensive database or a manual, one that is more updated than the [New York Department of Education A-Z Manual](#) (see Findings), that provides standardized credit equivalency charts, course descriptions, and country-specific educational system summaries.
- **Certification programs:** Offering certifications for staff who complete advanced training, helping to ensure a higher standard of credit evaluation within the district. Certification programs designed around a career pathway on credit evaluation and student placement will reduce turnover rates and help school districts retain specialized and certified staff members. For this purpose, districts can, for instance, draw on the certification program offered by the Association for International Credential Evaluation Professionals (TAICEP).

By providing robust training and professional development, schools can ensure that staff are equipped to handle the complexities of international credit evaluation, leading to more accurate and fair assessments.

Recommendation 2. Strengthen partnerships with Consulates and Embassies of Mexico and other countries of origin for Oregon students.

Partnerships with Consulates, Embassies, or educational agencies of other countries can play a crucial role in the timely and accurate evaluation and interpretation of high school credits earned outside the U.S. by newcomer students. These partnerships can be strengthened and expanded to other countries as they provide valuable resources, expertise, and support that enhance districts' ability to assess international academic records effectively. For instance, collaboration on binational teacher exchange programs can bring additional resources and insights, expanding Oregon districts' understanding educational processes in other countries. They can also create communication channels with other countries' educational agencies, facilitating agreements to share transcripts and academic records more efficiently.

More broadly, partnerships with Consulates and Embassies could provide the following benefits:

Access to Accurate and Authoritative Information

- **Educational System Overview:** Consulates and Embassies can provide detailed and accurate information about the educational systems in their respective countries. This includes understanding the structure of the education system, typical grade levels, curriculum frameworks, and national educational standards. Such information is critical for U.S. educators who may be unfamiliar with the nuances of foreign education systems.

- **Course Content and Equivalency:** These partnerships allow schools to access specific details about the content and rigor of courses completed abroad. Consulates can offer insights into how these courses compare with U.S. standards, helping schools make informed decisions about course equivalency and credit transfer.
- **Grading System and Evaluation:** Consulates can explain the grading systems used in their countries, providing a reliable reference for converting foreign grades into the U.S. grading scale. This helps ensure that students are evaluated fairly and consistently with their U.S. peers.

Verification of Academic Documents

- **Authenticity of Transcripts:** Consulates and embassies can assist in verifying the authenticity of academic documents such as transcripts, diplomas, and certificates. This verification process helps prevent fraud and ensures that the credits being considered for transfer are based on legitimate academic achievements.
- **Translation and Interpretation:** Many consulates offer translation and interpretation services, providing certified translations of academic documents into English. This ensures that the translation is accurate and that important details are not lost or misinterpreted, which is crucial for the correct evaluation of the student's prior education.

Consultation and Guidance

- **Education Specialists:** Consulates often have education specialists or cultural attachés who are knowledgeable about the specific educational practices in their home countries. These specialists can provide guidance on complex cases where the equivalency of certain courses may be unclear or where the U.S. school district needs a deeper understanding of the foreign education system.
- **Regular Updates:** Consulates can keep Oregon school districts informed about changes in their country's education system, such as updates to the curriculum, grading reforms, or new national exams. This ongoing communication ensures that U.S. schools are evaluating international credits based on the most current information.

Recommendation 3. Create a collaborative network of school professionals to promote the proper high school grade placement and the evaluation of high school credits earned outside the United States.

Creating a network of school professionals in Oregon could significantly enhance the processes of grade placement and the evaluation of high school credits for immigrant students who have earned credits outside the United States. One such possible model to explore is the Metropolitan Area Foreign Student Advisors (MAFSA) in Maryland and Virginia. This

collaborative network started its early meetings in the 1980's focusing on best practices and ways to support the growing population of international students in public schools. Since its inception, MAFSA has expanded to over 70 members from most districts in Maryland and Virginia as well as the neighboring states. As MAFSA's website indicates: "Most members of MAFSA are counselors, ESOL teachers, supervisors or administrators charged with the proper grade placement and the evaluation of records for international or English Learner (EL) students in the elementary and secondary public schools in the United States" (MAFSA, 2024). This collaborative group meets three times a year with meetings being hosted by various MAFSA members on a rotating basis. Driven by similar interests and needs, MAFSA members have collaboratively developed a set of tools (e.g., MAFSA Comparison Charts) to standardize the evaluation of international transcripts for the placement of students into the appropriate grade level in the United States⁵.

MAFSA is known for its collaborative approach in supporting international students, and adopting a similar model in Oregon could bring several key benefits:

Centralized Expertise and Resources

- **Shared Knowledge Base:** A network like MAFSA would centralize the expertise of various professionals in Oregon—such as counselors, EL teachers, administrators, and international credential evaluators—allowing them to share best practices and resources. This ensures that all schools within the district have access to consistent and accurate information about foreign education systems, which is crucial for proper credit evaluation and grade placement.

Improved Consistency and Fairness

- **Standardized Procedures:** By adopting MAFSA's model, Oregon schools could develop standardized procedures for evaluating international credits and placing students in appropriate grades. This reduces discrepancies between different schools and districts, ensuring that all students are evaluated according to the same criteria, which promotes fairness and equity.

Enhanced Communication and Collaboration

- **Cross-District Collaboration:** Similar to MAFSA's role in connecting professionals across Maryland and Virginia, an Oregon-based network would facilitate communication between schools and districts. This would allow for the sharing of insights, challenges,

⁵ MAFSA tools are copyrighted and available only to MAFSA members but we encourage exploring MAFSA's publicly available [Bylaws](#) and [meeting minutes](#).

and solutions, particularly for students coming from specific countries or educational backgrounds.

- **Interdisciplinary Approach:** The Oregon-based network would also encourage collaboration among professionals with different areas of expertise. For example, counselors could work closely with EL teachers to assess both academic and language proficiency, ensuring that students are placed in courses where they can succeed academically while receiving the necessary language support.

Comprehensive Support for Students and Families

- **Guidance for Families:** MAFSA provides guidance to families navigating the U.S. education system. An Oregon-based network could similarly help immigrant families understand how their child's non-U.S. credits will be evaluated and what to expect in terms of grade placement. This support is essential for helping families feel confident and informed during the transition.

Access to External Resources and Expertise

- **Partnerships with Evaluation Services:** MAFSA members often collaborate with external organizations and evaluation services. An Oregon network could similarly establish partnerships with accredited third-party credential evaluation services. These services can provide objective and accurate assessments of international transcripts, which can be critical for making informed decisions about grade placement and credit allocation.

Data Collection and Analysis

- **Tracking and Reporting:** Like MAFSA, an Oregon network could collect data on the outcomes of grade placements and credit evaluations. This data could be used to refine and improve processes over time, ensuring that the network's practices remain effective and responsive to the needs of immigrant students.

Policy Advocacy and Development

- **Influencing District and State Policies:** MAFSA often plays a role in shaping policies that affect international students. Similarly, an Oregon network could advocate for policies at the district and state levels that support immigrant students, such as standardized procedures for credit evaluation, funding for translation services, and resources for professional development.

Recommendation 4. Work with State Board of Education to revise OAR 581-021-0210 to clarify state policy for transfer of credits earned outside of the U.S.

Revising OAR 581-021-0210 to provide specific guidance on the transfer of credits for students coming from other countries is a necessary step in ensuring that Oregon's education system is equitable, consistent, and supportive of all students. More specifically, the benefits of such a revision may include but are not limited to the following:

- **Addressing the Growing Diversity of Oregon's Student Population**

Oregon, like many states, has seen an increase in the number of immigrant and refugee students enrolling in its schools (see the Background section). These students often come with diverse educational backgrounds, having attended schools in various countries with different curricula, grading systems, and standards. Currently, OAR 581-021-0210 does not provide specific guidance on how to evaluate and transfer credits for students coming from international education systems. This lack of guidance can lead to inconsistencies, inequities, and challenges in ensuring these students are placed appropriately and receive credit for their prior learning.

- **Supporting Oregon's Commitment to Educational Equity**

Oregon has a strong commitment to educational equity, aiming to provide all students with the support and resources they need to succeed, regardless of their background. Revising OAR 581-021-0210 to include guidance on international student transfers aligns with this commitment by ensuring that immigrant and refugee students are not disadvantaged by their prior schooling experiences. It would also support the state's broader equity goals by helping to close achievement gaps and increase graduation rates among this population.

- **Facilitating a Standardized Process for Schools and Districts**

The current lack of guidance places a significant burden on individual schools and districts to develop their own processes for evaluating international transcripts. This can lead to inconsistent practices, confusion among staff, and difficulties for students and families navigating the system. By revising the OAR 581-021-0210 to provide clear, standardized procedures for international credit transfer, the state can streamline this process, reducing the administrative burden on schools and ensuring that all students are treated fairly and consistently.

- **Aligning with Federal and State Education Goals**

Revising OAR 581-021-0210 to include guidance on international credit transfer would align with federal and state education goals, including those outlined in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which emphasizes the importance of providing equitable education opportunities for all students. It would also support Oregon's statewide goals of increasing high school graduation rates and ensuring that all students are college and career ready.

- **Providing Clarity and Support for School Staff**

School counselors, registrars, and other staff involved in the evaluation of international

transcripts often face challenges due to the complexity of different educational systems and the lack of clear guidelines. Revising OAR 581-021-0210 to include detailed guidance would provide these staff members with the clarity and support they need to make informed decisions that best serve students. This, in turn, would lead to more accurate and fairer placement of students in appropriate courses and grade levels.

Recommendation 5. To increase the State’s capacity to provide resources and guidance with respect to the transfer of high school credits earned outside the United States and implement recommendations 1-4, increase staff capacity at ODE to support international schooling.

The state-level recommendations discussed up to this point partly depend on the collaboration and coordination between the Oregon Legislature and Oregon Department of Education (ODE). Importantly, the Oregon Legislature should consider allocating funding to ODE to provide position authority and funding for a new education specialist position focused on international education who will act as the point of contact for school districts, develop resources, coordinate training, connect and create agreements with embassies, consulates and educational agencies in other countries to obtain resources and create agreements to obtain international transcripts, and provide guidance on the evaluation and interpretation of high school credits earned by immigrant students outside the United States. This position is critical to ensuring educational equity, supporting immigrant students, and enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of Oregon’s education system. Some of the primary added benefits would be as follows:

Supporting Oregon’s Growing Immigrant Population

- **Addressing Diverse Educational Backgrounds:** Oregon’s schools are seeing an increasing number of immigrant students from a wide range of countries, each with different educational systems. A specialist in this area would have the expertise needed to navigate these diverse backgrounds and ensure that students are placed in the appropriate grade levels and courses, maximizing their chances for academic success.
- **Improving Integration and Success Rates:** Proper placement and recognition of previous education are crucial for the overall success of immigrant students. When students are placed correctly and their previous coursework is recognized, they are more likely to stay engaged in school, graduate on time, and contribute positively to their communities.

Coordinating Statewide Efforts and Policies

- **Statewide Coordination and Support:** The specialist would play a critical role in coordinating efforts across the state, ensuring that all districts are aligned with state policies and best practices for credit evaluation. This coordination would also involve

liaising with external organizations, such as consulates and third-party evaluators, to support districts in handling more complex cases.

- **Policy Development and Advocacy:** With a deep understanding of international education systems and the challenges faced by immigrant students, the specialist could inform state policies and advocate for changes that support these students. This could include recommendations for legislative changes, new regulations, or the development of statewide initiatives aimed at improving the integration of immigrant students into Oregon's schools.

Developing and Disseminating Critical Resources

- **Creation of Evaluation Tools:** The specialist would develop essential resources, such as country-specific education profiles, grading equivalency charts, and course description templates, which would be made available to all school districts. These resources would help districts quickly and accurately evaluate international credits, ensuring that immigrant students are placed appropriately.
- **Training Programs:** The specialist would also design and deliver training programs for district staff, ensuring they are equipped to handle the complexities of international credit evaluation. Regular training would keep staff up to date on best practices and emerging trends in global education systems.

Fostering a Welcoming and Inclusive Educational Environment

- **Supporting School Districts in Meeting Federal and State Requirements:** Oregon's commitment to educational equity and inclusion is reflected in state and federal laws, which require that all students, regardless of their background, receive a high-quality education. The specialist could help districts meet these legal requirements by ensuring that immigrant students' prior education is recognized and valued.

Funding a dedicated education specialist at the Oregon Department of Education is an investment in the future success of Oregon's students and the state as a whole. This specialist would play a crucial role in ensuring that immigrant students receive the education they deserve, that school districts are supported in their efforts to evaluate international credits, and that Oregon continues to be a leader in educational equity and inclusivity. By approving this funding, the Oregon Legislature would be taking a significant step toward creating a more fair, efficient, and supportive educational system for all students.

Local-level Recommendations

Recommendation 6. Expand use of professional credentials evaluation providers to improve accuracy of and fairness in the evaluation of immigrant students' previously earned credits outside the United States.

The evaluation of international credentials is a profession, and numerous independent credentials evaluation providers provide course-by-course transcript evaluations. However, few Oregon schools and districts appear to be utilizing professional credentials evaluation providers, and instead rely on local staff members. Utilizing professional credentials evaluation providers may be an important resource for Oregon school districts in the timely and accurate evaluation and interpretation of high school credits earned outside the U.S. These specialized services offer expertise, resources, and standardized processes that are particularly valuable when school districts face challenges in assessing the educational backgrounds of students from diverse international systems. Providing more resources for identifying and selecting professional credentials evaluation services that provide course-by-course evaluation of international transcripts, including the turnaround times and costs, would help districts to decide if this is an option they want to consider.

The following is a list of advantages associated with utilizing professional credentials evaluation providers to improve accuracy of and fairness in the evaluation of immigrant students' previously earned credits outside the United States:

Expertise in International Education Systems

- **Specialized Understanding:** These services often have access to a wide array of resources, including databases of international curricula, historical changes in education systems, and specific details about how different countries structure their secondary education. This expertise ensures that evaluations are accurate and consistent.

Standardized Evaluation Process

- **Established Methodologies:** These services have established methodologies for determining course equivalencies, converting grades, and assessing the overall academic preparedness of students. Their standardized approach minimizes the risk of errors and ensures that students are neither unfairly advantaged nor disadvantaged in the credit transfer process.

Time-Efficient Evaluations

- **Handling High Volumes:** These services are often capable of handling a large volume of evaluations, which is particularly useful during peak enrollment periods or when a school district experiences an influx of immigrant students. This capacity helps ensure

that evaluations are completed in a timely manner, allowing students to be placed in appropriate classes without undue delay.

Unbiased and Objective Assessments

- **Third-Party Neutrality:** As independent organizations, professional credentials evaluation providers offer unbiased assessments that are not influenced by local policies or practices. This neutrality is important in ensuring that all students, regardless of their country of origin, are evaluated fairly based on the merits of their educational background.
- **Transparent Reporting:** These services typically provide detailed reports that explain the basis for their evaluations, including how foreign courses were matched to U.S. equivalents and how grades were converted. This transparency helps school districts understand and trust the evaluation process.

Support for Complex Cases

- **Handling Diverse Educational Backgrounds:** Immigrant students may come from countries with less common or non-standard educational pathways, such as homeschooling, or systems with unique curricular focuses. Professional credentials evaluation providers are equipped to handle these complex cases, providing tailored evaluations that account for the specific characteristics of each student's educational background.

Finally, for students with credentials from vocational or alternative education programs, third-party evaluators can offer expert opinions on how these should be interpreted and how they align with U.S. high school requirements.

Recommendation 7. Expand the use of validated placement exams or assessments offered in students' home languages to evaluate students' prior schooling experiences and eligibility for transfer credit.

While transcripts provide essential information, they may not always accurately reflect a student's knowledge and skills, particularly when there are differences in grading systems or course content across countries. To ensure that students are placed in the appropriate classes that match their current level of knowledge, schools should expand the use of placement exams or assessments offered in students' home languages (see section OAR 581-022-2025-Credit Options).

These assessments may include:

- **Subject-specific placement exams:** Tests in key subjects such as math, science, and language arts that assess students' actual competencies. These exams can help determine the best placement for students to ensure they are challenged but not overwhelmed.
- **Holistic assessments:** In addition to exams, schools should consider other forms of assessment, such as interviews or when available portfolios which can provide a more comprehensive view of a student's abilities and experiences.

In addition to assessments, as discussed in a previous section, OAR 581-022-2025 allows for evaluation of evidence generated in courses, collections of evidence of student learning from a student-created collections of evidence, scored against rubric(s) which can provide further evidence for accurate evaluation of students' knowledge. However, it is critical to note that such assessments may not validly reflect students' knowledge, if they are not linguistically accessible to the recently arrived students. Thus, ensuring language access is a key step in validly evaluating students' knowledge before making credit and placement decisions.

Allowing these assessments as well as evaluations of prior academic works ensures that students are placed in the most appropriate classes, supporting their academic growth and maximizing their potential. By accurately evaluating students' knowledge and skills, schools can tailor their educational approach to meet each student's needs, leading to a more personalized and effective learning experience.

Recommendation 8. At the district level, consider centralizing the evaluation of credits earned outside the U.S. at a single location within each district.

It is unrealistic to expect all high schools in Oregon to have the capacity to translate and evaluate the international schooling experiences of students, and to make equitable credit determinations. Having a designated location (either the central district office, regional ESD or a welcome center) to collect recent immigrant students' academic history is an essential component for high schools aiming to effectively support immigrant students and ensuring that these students receive appropriate academic placements, resources, and support. Designating such a location can provide a number of benefits in terms of accuracy of collecting and documenting the information on prior schooling experiences including:

- **Centralized Coordination:** Establishing a specific location within the school or district dedicated to collecting and processing the academic history of recent immigrant students ensures that the process is well-coordinated and consistent. This centralization allows for specialized staff to handle the collection and evaluation of academic records, ensuring that no crucial information is overlooked.

- **Streamlined Processes:** A designated location helps streamline the process of gathering academic history by creating a single point of contact for students and their families. This reduces confusion and ensures that all necessary documents are collected in a timely manner, preventing delays in the student's educational journey.
- **Expertise and Specialization:** By having a specific location, the school can employ or train staff who are specialized in handling international transcripts and educational records. These staff members can become experts in understanding various international education systems, which is crucial for accurately assessing and transferring credits.
- **Support for Families:** Immigrant families often face challenges when enrolling their children in a new school system. A designated location can provide a welcoming environment where families can receive guidance and support throughout the enrollment process. This helps build trust and ensures that families feel supported as they navigate a new educational system.

By providing a designated location, districts demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity and respect for the educational backgrounds of all students. This inclusivity is important for fostering a welcoming school environment where all students and families feel valued and supported.

Recommendation 9. Complete schooling history interviews with all newcomer immigrant students to collect detailed information about the school system of origin, length of the course, grading system, and standards covered in the course schools in Oregon.

Collecting detailed information about the school system of origin, the length of the course, the grading system, and the standards covered in the course is essential for Oregon high schools to accurately understand the alignment between courses previously taken by recently arrived immigrant students outside the U.S. and those offered in Oregon. This comprehensive understanding is critical for making informed decisions about credit transfers, appropriate class placements, and providing the necessary academic support for these students. Below, we elaborate on the role and the importance of such information.

School System of Origin

- **Educational Structure:** Understanding the structure of the school system in the student's country of origin is crucial because different countries have varying educational pathways, grade levels, and curricular focuses. For example, some countries may have an educational system that divides secondary education into more specialized tracks, such as vocational, academic, or technical, which can influence the content and rigor of the courses taken. In addition, a deep understanding of the transition

requirements between middle school and high school in international educational structures is essential for the correct placements of students, as many countries have a three-year high school system, making credits earned during the last year of middle school equivalent to Oregon 9th-grade courses. Namely, credits for Algebra 1 are taught during the third year of middle school in some Latin American countries like Mexico.

- **Curriculum and Education Standards:** Knowing the education standards followed in the country of origin allows U.S. high schools to compare it with their own curriculum. For example, if a student comes from a country with an education standard that emphasizes certain subjects more than others, this knowledge can help Oregon public schools identify which courses align with those the student has already taken.
- **Cultural and Educational Context:** The educational culture and values in the student's country of origin can affect their learning style, classroom behavior, and expectations. Understanding these factors helps educators interpret the student's prior academic performance and adapt their teaching methods to support the student's transition.

Length of the Course

- **Duration and Intensity:** The length of a course provides insight into the depth and intensity of the subject matter covered. A course that spans an entire academic year in the student's home country may indicate a more comprehensive study of the subject, whereas a shorter course might be less intensive. This information helps U.S. schools determine if a course taken abroad is equivalent to a full-year or semester-long course in the U.S.
- **Credit Hours and Workload:** Understanding the number of credit hours or periods spent on a course can reveal how much time was dedicated to learning the subject. This is important for assessing whether the student's prior coursework meets the credit requirements of similar courses in Oregon, ensuring that the student is neither under-credited nor over-credited for their previous studies.
- **Alignment with U.S. Academic Calendar:** Comparing the length of courses with the U.S. academic calendar can help schools align the student's previous education with the appropriate grade level and course sequence in the U.S. For instance, a student who completed a course in an accelerated program abroad might be placed in a more advanced course in the U.S.

Grading System

- **Understanding Performance Levels:** Different countries use various grading scales, such as numerical grades, letters, or descriptive marks. Understanding the grading system of the student's country of origin allows Oregon schools to accurately interpret the

student's academic performance. For example, a grade of 5 out of 10 in one country might be considered average, while in another, it could be failing.

- **Contextualizing Academic Achievement:** The grading system also provides context for the student's overall academic achievements. For instance, if a student consistently received top grades in a highly competitive and rigorous system, this might indicate a high level of proficiency and preparedness for challenging coursework in the U.S.

Standards Covered in the Course

- **Alignment with U.S. Standards:** Understanding the educational standards covered in the student's previous courses is crucial for determining how well they align with U.S. standards. For example, if a student completed a math course that covers algebraic concepts similar to those in a U.S. Algebra I course, it might be possible to award credit or place the student in the next level of math in the U.S.
- **Competency and Skill Assessment:** Evaluating the standards covered in previous courses helps schools assess the student's competency and skills in key subject areas. This is particularly important for subjects like math, science, and language arts, where a strong foundation is necessary for success in subsequent courses.

References

Greenberg Motamedi, J., Porter, L., Taylor, S., Leong M., Martinez-Wenzl, M., and Serrano, D. (2021). Welcoming, Registering, and Supporting Newcomer Students: A Toolkit for Educators of Immigrant and Refugee Students in Secondary Schools. Available at:

https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/pdf/REL_2021064.pdf

MAFSA. (2024). Metropolitan Area Foreign Student Advisors. Available at:

<https://www.mafsa.info/>

Sugarman, J. (2023). Recent Immigrant Children: A Profile of New Arrivals to U.S. Schools. Migration Policy Institute. Available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/recent-immigrant-children>

Vazquez Cano, M. (2024). English learner education: examining policy decisions and their impact on student outcomes. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oregon.

Appendix A: Evaluation and Interpretation of Credits Earned Outside the U.S. Survey Questions

Pursuant to SB 940 (2023), ODE gathered data on current practices, challenges, and needs for evaluating transcripts and credits earned outside of the U.S. via a survey. This survey was anonymous.

SECTION I

1. Which best describes your current role? *
2. Where do you primarily work? *
3. On average, how often does your work involve evaluating transcripts or credits from outside the United States? *
4. Which portions of transcript and credit evaluation are you typically responsible for?
5. Which portions of transcript evaluation are you typically responsible for (continued)?
6. Which ESD service region do you work in? *
7. What district do you work in?
8. How would you describe the area in which your school, district, or region is located? For definitions, see (<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/Geographic/LocaleBoundaries>)
9. (Optional) If you work in a school or district, how would you describe the size of the district in which you work?

SECTION II

10. How confident do you feel in your/your district's ability to quickly and accurately interpret transcripts?
11. Were you offered training on how to interpret and/or evaluate transcripts?
12. Did the training provide you with specific procedures on how to interpret and/or evaluate international transcripts and credits in a standardized/uniform way?
13. (Optional) Please describe what training you received, including whether the training was one-time or ongoing.
14. Does your district have written guidance or policies to guide the evaluation of high school credits earned outside of the United States?

15. Which statement describes your knowledge of Access to Linguistic Inclusion (HB 2056)?
16. Which, if any, of the following strategies are applied, when students do not have transcripts?
17. Please describe your district's written guidance/policies to guide the evaluation of high school credits earned outside of the United States.
18. Please rate how much of a challenge each of these areas poses to accurate, timely, and fair evaluation of high school credits earned outside of the United States.
19. Please rate how much of a challenge each of these areas poses to accurate, timely, and fair interpretation of transcripts from outside the United States (continued).
20. Considering the entire process of obtaining, translating, and evaluating high school credits earned outside of the United States, how often does this process meaningfully delay an incoming student's access to appropriate credits and coursework?
21. Are there other areas of challenge or clarity not listed above? If so, please describe them here.

SECTION III

22. If additional resources, guides, or other supports were to be developed, which would be the most helpful to improve the ease and accuracy of evaluation of high school credits earned outside of the United States? Please select up to three that would be most helpful.
23. Have you or your district considered hiring external experts or agencies (credentials evaluation providers) to evaluate transcripts?
24. Is there anything you'd like to share about your experience hiring external experts or agencies. Was the overall experience positive? What were some benefits or challenges to this approach?
25. What barriers or concerns prevented you from hiring external experts or agencies? Please select all that apply.
26. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us? We are particularly interested in hearing any examples or stories of student perspective, or any areas of challenge not covered in previous items.
27. We welcome your suggestions for other survey participants. Please share their name(s) below, and contact information (if possible).

28. Thank you for completing this survey. If you are interested in receiving updates on the findings from this survey and/or sharing more about your experiences and recommendations, please provide your preferences and contact information below (check all that apply).

29. Thank you. Please share your email contact information below for follow up.

Appendix B: Quantitative Survey Responses (Sections II and III)

Section II (Process and Challenges)

10. How confident do you feel in your/your district's ability to quickly and accurately interpret transcripts?

Responses	Percentage
Very confident	16%
Confident	46%
A little confident	30%
Not at all confident	7%

11. Were you offered training on how to interpret and/or evaluate transcripts?

Responses	Percentage
Yes, I was trained by other staff in the district/school/ESD	11%
Yes, I participated in professional development	2%
No, I learned/am learning on the job	74%
No, this is not part of my work	14%

12. Did the training provide you with specific procedures on how to interpret and/or evaluate international transcripts and credits in a standardized/uniform way?

Responses	Percentage
Yes, I was trained in a uniform method/standard procedures	17%
Somewhat; training offered some standard procedures but not for all areas	52%
No, the training did not provide specific procedures or methods	30%

14. Does your district have written guidance or policies to guide the evaluation of high school credits earned outside of the United States?

Responses	Percentage
Yes	26%
No	30%
I'm not sure	43%

15. Which statement describes your knowledge of Access to Linguistic Inclusion (HB 2056)?

Responses	Percentage
I am familiar with it and know how to apply it when evaluating international transcripts	38%
I familiar with it but can not apply it when evaluating international transcripts	0%
I am somewhat familiar with it but can not apply it when evaluating international transcripts	19%
I am not familiar with it and do not know how it relates to evaluating international transcripts	44%

16. Which, if any, of the following strategies are applied, when students do not have transcripts?

Responses	Percentage
Contacting the school in their home country	30%
Conducting a schooling history interview	37%
Review of collections of evidence, such as completed course assignments/projects	17%
Other	17%

18. Please rate how much of a challenge each of these areas poses to accurate, timely, and fair evaluation of high school credits earned outside of the United States. (drag gray toggle below the question to the right to see all options)

Responses	Not at all challenging	Somewhat challenging	Very Challenging	I don't know	This is not part of our process
Obtaining documents from the student's previous school	4%	47.8%	38.3%	8.9%	1.1%
Authenticating obtained documents	11.1%	32.7%	27.2%	17.8%	6.7%
Translating the documents into English	25.6%	47.2%	15.6%	11.1%	0.6%
Conducting schooling history interviews or other methods to obtain non-transcript course history information	15%	44.4%	18.3%	12.2%	10.0%

19. Please rate how much of a challenge each of these areas poses to accurate, timely, and fair interpretation of transcripts from outside the United States (continued).

Transferring High School Credits Earned Outside of the United States

Responses	Not at all challenging	Somewhat challenging	Very Challenging	I don't know	This is not part of our process
Administering assessment for placement or proficiency-based credit	16%	35.6%	13.9%	17.8%	17.2%
Evaluating course equivalency; what credit will be awarded for prior work	12.2%	51.7%	22.2%	9.4%	4.4%
Making placement decisions	11.7%	61.1%	15.6%	8.3%	3.3%
Lack of clarity around process, practices, roles, or responsibilities	18.9%	36.1%	34.4%	10.0%	0.6%
Your own understanding of what is recorded on the transcript	26.1%	50.0%	17.8%	6.1%	0.0%

20. Considering the entire process of obtaining, translating, and evaluating high school credits earned outside of the United States, how often does this process meaningfully delay an incoming student's access to appropriate credits and coursework?

Responses	Percentage
Never; our process is always timely and accurate	12%
Rarely; in some cases, students are negatively impacted	58%
Often; many students are negatively impacted by the time and complexity of the process	30%

Section III (Resources and Recommendations)

22. If additional resources, guides, or other supports were to be developed, which would be the most helpful to improve the ease and accuracy of evaluation of high school credits earned outside of the United States? Please select up to three that would be most helpful

Transferring High School Credits Earned Outside of the United States

Responses	Percentage
Criteria/guidance for authenticating transcripts	23%
Training on international schooling systems	16%
Interview/Schooling history templates	8%
Repository of international transcripts/previously reviewed courses annotated with grade and credit equivalency	17%
Course articulation agreements with specific countries	8%
Proficiency assessments in students' home languages	11%
A professional learning community or community of practice for staff members who are responsible for evaluating credits earned outside of the U.S.	11%
Hiring an external expert or agency to evaluate transcripts	5%
Other	2%

23. Have you or your district considered hiring external experts or agencies (credentials evaluation providers) to evaluate transcripts?

Responses	Percentage
Yes, and we did hire them	3%
Yes, but we did not hire them	6%
No, we did not consider this	90%

25. What barriers or concerns prevented you from hiring external experts or agencies? Please select all that apply.

Responses	Percentage
Unable to find qualified experts	19%
Cost too high	19%
Insufficient volume of transcripts to justify a contract	24%
District contracting processes/policies were a barrier	10%
Concerns about quality or timeliness of work	14%
Other	14%