

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2309

September 16, 2015

Dr. Barbara Gellman-Danley
President
Higher Learning Commission
230 S. LaSalle Street – Suite 7-500
Chicago, Illinois 60404-1411

Dear Dr. Gellman-Danley:

I am writing to express concern regarding the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) intent to implement additional credentialing standards on high school faculty. Of particular concern is the following language:

“If a faculty member holds a master’s degree or higher in a discipline or subfield other than that in he or she is teaching, the faculty should have completed a minimum of 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline or subfield in which they teach.”

I am a member of the Senate Education Committee, and I have authored the bipartisan *Accelerated Learning Act*, which would expand current federal programming that pays for Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) exams for low income students also include dual enrollment and concurrent enrollment as an allowable use of federal Title I dollars. These accelerated learning models can help ensure learning is rigorous and engaging for students, better prepare them for success in postsecondary education, and help them earn college credit while still in high school which can save students and their families a lot of money.

I am a strong advocate for ensuring that our high school students are taught by the most qualified and talented educators; however, I am concerned that your proposed policy will threaten the ability of schools in Minnesota and across our nation to offer concurrent enrollment and dual credit options for students. Furthermore, the proposed rule by HLC to require not only a Master’s Degree but also 18 additional credits could prove incredibly burdensome to educators, many of which have already taught concurrent and dual credit courses for high school students for multiple years.

Therefore, I urge you to reconsider this proposed rule and suggest that HLC continue to approve the use of alternative, holistic qualifications for academic faculty and not go ahead with the proposed rule change at this time. While many Minnesota teachers have master’s degrees, those degrees usually emphasize curriculum, content and pedagogy. Knowledge in the particular academic discipline should be allowed to be demonstrated through a multitude of relevant teaching experience, course work, professional development activities, curriculum development and practical experience.

Currently, the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota State College and University Systems have worked with more than 2,000 Minnesota high school teachers to insure that academic content and the methods of assessment are the same as those taught on college/university campuses and those kinds of partnerships should be allowed to be continued without undue harm or costly change for educators, higher education institutions and school districts.

Our state and nation need more students to succeed in high school and go on to college and concurrent enrollment and dual-enrollment programs help to address this critical need. As such, I urge you reconsider making drastic changes to HLC's rules for accreditation with regard to instructor qualifications at this time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Al Franken". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Al Franken
United States Senator

Cc: Dr. David Anderson, Chairperson, Higher Learning Commission