

# SUCCESS STORY

**Running Start is a success in many ways, but funding model needs to be changed**

**M**any young people are ready to leave high school long before they actually do. For them, the aptly named Running Start program accelerates.

Earning college credit while finishing high school courses benefits more than just the students (who become official full-time college students with credits already earned) and their parents (about \$30 million in tuition savings was achieved statewide last year). It also benefits taxpayers by streamlining public education.

So we were pleased to learn in Monday's Columbian story by Howard Buck that Clark College has increased its enrollment of Running Start students to 1,074, a record high, ranking third in the state behind Green River and Bellevue community colleges. Credit hours taken by Clark's Running Start students reflect more than 800 full-time-equivalent students.

In addition to academic benefits, Running Start offers social advantages. What to wear? Whom to befriend? How to be popular? How to escape other teenagers' discipline problems? Nagging quandaries so typical of teenagers fade for Running Start students as they focus on learning. Skyview High School senior Jena Bodell noted in Buck's story, "All the social problems aren't there. There are no social cliques, really. You can concentrate on your schoolwork and not worry about what people think of you."

Even Clark County residents who have no indirect connection to Running Start ought to feel a

sense of pride and accomplishment in its success. With ample public attention and educators' efforts concentrated on bringing students up to minimum compliance with the controversial Washington Assessment of Student Learning, it's encouraging to see

Running Start serving high achievers.

The 14-year-old program's steady success has created a bit of a problem. It's a good problem to have, for it reflects a soaring academic proficiency, but it's a challenge nonetheless. The original funding gap of \$900 per student — created by a statutorily established reimbursement formula — has more than tripled to \$3,000.

The Legislature must address this challenge, plus a few related predicaments. Statewide, colleges are losing tuition revenue because of the success of Running Start students, about 17,000 statewide. Also, college enrollment targets are not affected by this type of college student. And for community colleges, Running Start has meant adding more courses, sometimes to the detriment of serving other college programs.

According to the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, colleges receive 93 percent of the Basic Education Allowance from high school programs, but this year that amount will cover less than 60 percent of Running Start's operating costs.

Lawmakers should pursue two objectives: First, recognize and celebrate Running Start's success. Second, assure its solid and growing future by finding ways to increase funding for the program.

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