

California State Library Career Online High School (COHS) Pilot Project -- Information and Requirements

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1) What is COHS and why is it needed in California?

Career Online High School (COHS) is an educational program offered by Gale, a division of Cengage Learning, which gives students the opportunity to earn a high school diploma and credentialed career certificate at the same time. The goal is to bring non-traditional and/or adult learners back into the educational system and prepare them for jobs in growing sectors of the economy. Students graduate with the tools to take the next step in their careers or career-education.

Career Online High School (COHS) is a division of Smart Horizons Career Online Education (SHCOE), the world's first online school district that is fully accredited by the AdvancED Accreditation Commission, the national commission that confers the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI), North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), and the Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC) accreditation seals. This means that the SHCOE district and all of its schools are accredited, and that Smart Horizons Career Online Education is recognized across the nation as a quality school system, delivering an AdvancED/SACS/NCA/NWAC accredited online high school diploma. Established in 2011, COHS has a proven track record. Public libraries offering COHS in their communities are experiencing retention rates of over 90 percent, according to Gale.

The latest available data estimate that nearly one-fifth, of California's population over 18 years of age has not attained a high school diploma. Among the 50 states, California shares last place with Texas in terms of percentage of adults with high school diplomas or equivalencies.

There are several differences between a GED equivalency and an accredited high school diploma. The most significant is the fact that some colleges, institutions, companies and organizations require a high school diploma and may not accept the GED. Research suggests that a high school diploma has far better economic outcomes than a GED. On average, those with high school diplomas end up earning an average of about \$1500 per month more than those with GEDs (<http://blogs.census.gov/2012/02/27/ged-recipients-have-lower-earnings-are-less-likely-to-enter-college/>).

An additional plus for COHS is that students receive the benefit of earning a career certificate and completing additional job preparation and training, in addition to earning a high school diploma.

2) What's in it for public libraries?

Public libraries are embracing new roles that allow them to be agents of transformative social engagement, actively working to better their communities. COHS is a service that libraries can offer which can make a huge difference in people's lives and the well-being of the community. COHS is also feasible for libraries to implement, as it requires relatively few resources to manage once established. The service was designed by Gale, specifically for public libraries.

3) Who is the target population for this program?

The target population for this program is adults aged 19 and over.

Prospective students must complete an online self-assessment and a two-week prerequisite course, designed by COHS to determine if they will be successful. Students are then interviewed by library staff. Those that pass the interview are considered for a funded scholarship to attend COHS.

Students can transfer in credits previously earned from other accredited institutions, if they meet COHS transfer requirements. For further information about credit transfer and the COHS student experience, please see <http://www.careeronlinehs.org/program/>.

4) What do libraries receive as part of this program?

Participating libraries receive:

- Career Online High School scholarships, including unlimited access to online self-assessments and pre-requisite courses
- Outreach materials and marketing support from Gale|Cengage
- Intensive training and ongoing technical assistance

5) What do libraries have to contribute as part of this program?

- Staff time and expertise, to manage the COHS program
- A matching scholarship/student enrollment for each scholarship given to the library by the State Library (\$1095 per scholarship)
- A participation agreement form, signed by the library director

Most of the staff time that libraries contribute is at the beginning of the project, as they need to spend time being trained on the system, in developing their workflow and procedures, and in recruiting and interviewing candidates. Here's a general overview:

- Prospective students complete an online self-assessment, which is forwarded to their public libraries. Libraries screen the assessments and offer those who meet basic criteria (e.g. age 19 and over; resident of the jurisdiction served by the library; library card in good standing) access to a 2-week prerequisite course, designed by COHS to determine if they will be successful ((Note: All coursework is available in English only).
- After completing the assessment and prerequisite course, candidates are interviewed by library staff, often from the library's literacy program. (As a seat is lost if a candidate drops out or doesn't earn a diploma within the 18 month time frame, it's important for qualified staff to be part of the interview team in order to assess candidates' readiness and capacity to be successful in the time allowed.)
- Those that pass the interview are then considered for a funded scholarship to attend Career Online High School.

Once enrolled, students are given access to the Career Online High School system, which can be used through any computer with an Internet connection. All coursework is web-based, and students can work from home as their schedules allow. Each student is paired with an online academic coach (provided by Gale as part of the COHS service), who provides the student with an individual career path, offers guidance, evaluates performance, and connects the student with the resources needed to master the courses.

COHS offers comprehensive, easy to use online tools for monitoring candidates entering the pre-assessment process, and for tracking the progress of enrolled students.