



KATE BROWN  
Governor

November 9, 2018

Colt Gill  
Director, Department of Education  
255 Capitol St. NE  
Salem, OR 97310-0203

Dear Deputy Superintendent Gill,

Although Oregon has made progress in graduation outcomes for students during my administration, we have a lot of work to do to reach my goal that 90 percent of students will graduate with either a diploma or a GED within four years of starting high school. Nearly one-quarter of students do not yet meet this mark, and that percentage is even lower for historically underserved and marginalized students and families, such as those who are navigating poverty, members of tribal communities, racially or ethnically diverse or learning English as a second language.

Every student in Oregon needs and deserves to leave our schools—diploma in hand—ready for college, career, and life.

One of the most significant challenges we face is insufficient learning time for Oregon students. I have laid out seven strategies as part of my education agenda to help every Oregon student graduate high school with a plan for their future and a meaningful diploma. A key component of the agenda is to implement the equivalent of a full, 180-day school year, which will ensure that Oregon children receive sufficient instructional time to master the subjects we know they need to be successful. For those districts that currently fall the furthest short of this target, we must offer supports.

Increasing instructional time will have a significant impact on the future success of our students. In order to ensure effective implementation of this strategy, I am directing the Oregon Department of Education to establish a work group to develop a plan to ensure students in all school districts are provided with a longer school year, ideally within the next two biennia. The work group should focus on the challenges faced by school districts that currently do not provide a full school year, equity considerations that need to be addressed to meet the unique needs of individual students and specific student groups, and applications of the policy across both urban and rural districts and our varied educational settings, including charter schools and alternative schools.



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In addition to focusing on the length of the school year, we need to optimize the instructional time that is already available. The State Board of Education's recent action granting districts the flexibility to exempt students from attending high school on a full-time basis provided a temporary solution to the needs expressed by a number of school district leaders and other stakeholders. However, I have concerns with the recommendation provided to the State Board by the Department that appeared to not have adequate supporting data to inform the decision, particularly with respect to the flexibility exemptions given for students who are deemed "on track to graduate" and "students taking accelerated coursework."

Because of my concerns and the concerns of parents and community members involved in this process, I ask that the Department of Education require all school districts provide student-level data that details the number of students exempted using each of the four "targeted flexibility" criteria. In addition, I would like ODE to perform a deeper analysis of a sample of districts across the state. This deeper analysis would be for all high schools in the district, whereby they provide relevant, de-identified student-level data at the end of each quarter/semester. The data points the sample districts provide should include: school name, grade level, gender, historically underrepresented, number of credits earned toward graduation, number of credits earned in IB/AP/dual credit classes, number of CTE credits earned, GPA, and ACT score. I will let ODE choose the number and name of participating districts, however I would specifically request that Portland Public Schools be one of the sample districts because of the district's history in this issue. The data points listed above will give us a good picture and provide validation that students are both on track to graduate and well positioned for college, career and life.

Finally, as a result of reviewing the submitted data, I would like the Department of Education to revisit these rules before school districts engage in Fall forecasting and, before reaffirming or modifying the rules, to provide my office with data on how districts are applying the new criteria as well as an equity impact analysis of the students affected, including for the sample districts.

In closing, moving to a 180-day school year presents an opportunity for the Board to develop a longer-term and more comprehensive solution that will hold districts to strong standards for the amount of instructional time they provide their students. I would like the Department of Education to produce an implementation plan based on the work group recommendations for providing a 180-day school year by no later than March 1, 2019.

Sincerely,

  
Governor Kate Brown

cc: Board of Education