

Education Policy Agenda:

Every Oregon Student Engaged,
Empowered, and Future Ready

Kate Brown, Governor
Lindsey Capps, Chief Education Officer
Pooja Bhatt, Education Policy Advisor

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STATE OF OREGON
Office of the Governor
KATE BROWN

Vision

A seamless system of education from cradle to career, where every student graduates high school with a plan for their future.

Executive Summary

Every child must have the opportunity to achieve their full potential. In moving Oregon forward to achieve this vision we must set early, solid foundations for kids, with access to high-quality preschool for our highest-need families and manageable class sizes in kindergarten through third grade. As students progress through middle and high school, Oregon students should have access to hands-on, career-connected learning and a jump-start toward a college degree. Teachers need tools and professional supports designed by educators, for educators. And all students, regardless of grade, should have a longer school year closer to national norms, a safe school environment that supports learning, and a culturally-responsive curriculum that engages students from diverse backgrounds.



How our state provides for the needs of children, especially those who face the most barriers to accessing quality services, is a marker of who we are as a community. Education can be transformational to helping children break the cycle of intergenerational poverty, and education outcomes are inextricably linked with health, criminal justice, and economic outcomes. Because of this, we must prioritize investments targeted at improving education outcomes across the state.



Background

Ensuring that all Oregon students graduate with a high school diploma is critical to ensuring that our workforce has the skilled workers needed to contribute to our state's economic vitality and to reduce poverty. Research is clear that high school graduates are more likely to be employed, less likely to live in poverty, less likely to have children who also live in poverty, and more likely to be in good health compared to those who don't graduate.¹ The Alliance for Excellent Education calculated that for all metro areas in the State of Oregon, increasing the graduation rate to 90 percent could mean 300 new jobs, \$8.2 million in state and local tax revenue, and \$92 million in healthcare savings.² While the economic outcomes of education investments are important ways to quantify benefits to our community as a whole, there is no dollar value that we can place on the boundless opportunity that every student deserves to have.

In national comparisons, Oregon's average four-year graduation rate lags behind other states at 77 percent on average for all students, but is up nearly 5 percentage points over the past three years and in the same time period up 7 percentage points for historically underserved students. While states have different graduation requirements and Oregon has among the most stringent, the current graduation rate still leaves too many kids behind. There is much work to do to ensure those who face an opportunity gap are supported to achieve their full potential. This means we need targeted investments to improve outcomes for children of color, children with disabilities, and children in poverty. Graduation rates for these groups are: 73 percent for Hispanic/Latino students, 68 percent for Black/African American students, 59 percent for American Indian/Alaska Native students, and 59 percent for students with disabilities.

1. America's Promise Alliance. (2013). GradNation Community Guidebook. Retrieved from <http://guidebook.americaspromise.org/section/demonstrating-the-benefits-of-high-school-completion>.

2. Alliance for Excellent Education. (n.d.). The Graduation Effect. Retrieved from <http://impact.all4ed.org/>.



“ We need to focus our improvement efforts to prioritize the kids who face the most barriers ”

A number of factors influence a student’s ability to access quality education. As noted in the Chief Education Office’s Practice to Improve Student Achievement (2017), students’ poverty status are closely correlated with student engagement and achievement. The report states “While all students in poverty can achieve and succeed provided adequate and appropriate supports and opportunities, health, social service, and education system conditions impose barriers that often result in achievement gaps when juxtaposed with students from families of higher incomes.”³ We know that brain and cognitive development is affected by Adverse Childhood Experiences, of which growing up in poverty is one such experience. Children in poverty are less likely to attend preschool and are known to start kindergarten up to a full year behind in reading and math than their peers.⁴

It’s not surprising then that overall high school graduation rates are significantly lower for those who experience poverty. The Annie E. Casey Foundation released a study several years ago which found that 32 percent of students who spent more than half of their childhood in poverty failed to graduate high school compared to 6 percent of those who had never been in poverty.⁵

3. “Practice to Improve Student Achievement” (2017), Chief Education Office. http://education.oregon.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Practices-to-Improve-the-Achievement-of-Students-in-Poverty_CEdO_Feb_2017.pdf.

4. Ibid.

5. Hernandez, D. J. (2012). Double jeopardy: how third-grade reading skills and poverty influence high school graduation. Retrieved from <http://education.oregon.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Double-Jeopardy-Report-030812-for-web1.pdf>.



The study also examined the intersection of race and poverty with third grade reading outcomes, finding that 31 percent of low-income African American students and 33 percent of low-income Hispanic students who were not proficient in reading by the end of third grade failed to graduate. However, the graduation opportunity gap disappears when children reach the third grade reading proficiency benchmark.

This illuminates a truth: that all students are capable of succeeding. To get there, we must focus our efforts to ensure all kids have access to the services they need to thrive.



BEST PRACTICES

- *Remove Barriers to School Readiness*
- *Give the Youngest Students Personalized Attention*
- *Target Student and Family Engagement Strategies*
- *Use Comprehensive Dropout Prevention Strategies for the Most At-Risk*
- *Develop and Empower Educators*
- *Engage and Equip Students for Career and College*



BEST PRACTICES

Education outcomes are closely connected to many other factors – a child cannot focus on school if they are fearful of consequences related to their immigration status or frequently miss school to travel to the nearest medical clinic hundreds of miles away in rural Oregon. Learning becomes secondary when they feel unsafe, are hungry, or are experiencing housing instability. There is no single cure to improve an ailing education system that is so connected to other social issues that our state faces.

According to the [Quality Education Model \(QEM\)](#), a statewide approach to identifying best practices that support student achievement and understanding education funding needs, Oregon continues year-after-year to underfund its K-12 system. The most recent report estimated that the state is almost \$2 billion per biennium short of what it needs to provide districts with a system of highly-effective schools.⁶ This funding is not keeping pace with student needs or the operational costs of our public schools, where further strategies for sustainability and stabilization are needed, including stabilizing pension costs for school districts.

To be successful in an under-resourced environment, we must identify best practices and invest in them.

6. [Quality Education Model Report](#), 2018.



Remove Barriers to School Readiness

7. American Educational Research Association (2017). Comprehensive research review finds lasting effects of quality early childhood education through high school. Retrieved from <http://www.aera.net/Newsroom/Comprehensive-Research-Review-Finds-Lasting-Effects-of-Quality-Early-Childhood-Education-through-High-School>.

8. Gormley, W. T. Jr., Gayer, T., Phillips, D., & Dawson, B. (2005). The Effects of Universal Pre-K on Cognitive Development. *Developmental Psychology*, 41(6), 872-884.

9. Center on the Developing Child (2009). Five Numbers to Remember About Early Childhood Development (Brief). Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.

10. Preschool Promise, Oregon Prekindergarten, and Early Childhood Special Education/Early Intervention.

11. ChildCare Aware. (2017). Parents and the High Cost of Child Care. Retrieved from https://usa.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2017_CCA_High_Cost_Report_FINAL.pdf.

Decades of research is clear: children need to have a solid foundation before they start kindergarten. Ninety percent of a child’s brain is developed before the age of five, and this means that exposing children to early learning experiences is necessary to reap long-term benefits. While public investments in preschool seem daunting and not conducive to quick results, these investments, when sustained, produce long-term dividends that well exceed their return on investment. The benefits of early learning include statistically significant reductions in special education placement, and increases in high school graduation rates.⁷

It is also well-documented that benefits of universal high-quality pre-kindergarten and early childhood programs are especially beneficial for children from low-income families.⁸ Three early childhood studies found a range of return on investment between four and nine times for every dollar invested in early childhood programs that target low-income kids.⁹

The problem is that the availability and cost of these opportunities are out of reach for many Oregon families. Oregon’s preschool programs only reach 30 percent of eligible families¹⁰ and relative to income, Oregon is among the least affordable states for infant and toddler child care in the country.¹¹



Give the Youngest Students Personalized Attention

The average elementary school class size in Oregon is 25 students, though class sizes can be much smaller in rural areas and much larger in urban areas.¹² Early grade teachers have to navigate transitioning students to school environments while teaching foundational skills that are necessary building blocks toward high school graduation. With an average ratio of one teacher to 25 kids, teachers struggle to meet the needs of each student, and classroom climate issues often result in conflicts among students, or teachers not feeling supported. One of the most prominent education research studies relating to class size found that class sizes of no more than 17 students in early grades (up to third grade) result in better student outcomes,¹³ especially for low-income students and students of color. Students in smaller class sizes were more likely to graduate on time (in four years) and go to college.

12. Oregon Class Size Report, 2018, Retrieved from https://www.oregon.gov/ode/reports-and-data/Documents/class_size_report_20172018.pdf.

13. Mathis, William. Research-Based Options for Education Policymaking. National Education Policy Center. Retrieved from <https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Mathis%20RBOPM-9%20Class%20Size.pdf>.

14. “Practice to Improve Student Achievement” (2017), Chief Education Office. Retrieved from http://education.oregon.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Practices-to-Improve-the-Achievement-of-Students-in-Poverty_CEdO_Feb_2017.pdf.

Target Student and Family Engagement Strategies

House Bill 4057 (2016) and House Bill 2968 (2015) directed the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and Chief Education Office (CEdO) to report on how school districts allocate funds they get specifically for students in poverty and report on promising practices for serving these students.¹⁴ The top five practices identified by schools and districts include: 1) more time for learning in the summer or after school; 2) wrap around services such as providing backpacks, school supplies, or clothing, 3) health services such as counseling or access to a school nurse, 4) reduced fees for school activities, and 5) early learning.¹⁵ The study, which complements years of educator wisdom and experience, indicates that we see better outcomes for kids, especially those experiencing poverty, when they can access a comprehensive set of services.



“Imagine a team of educators, counselors, and administrators who come together regularly to discuss student progress”

Use Comprehensive Dropout Prevention Strategies for the Most At-Risk

One of the most accurate early indicators for high school graduation occurs in the freshman year of high school and relates to whether the student has at least 25 percent of the credits they need to graduate by the beginning of sophomore year. Tracking this indicator for all students, often called “on-track,” can predict whether the student will graduate within four years. This indicator is especially important for students of color and economically disadvantaged students. For example, American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students who are on-track by the end of freshman year are nearly three times more likely to graduate than AI/AN students who are not.¹⁶

Educators around the state are using strategies with Measure 98 funds that allow educators to collaborate with one another to support individual students. Imagine a team of educators, counselors, and administrators who come together regularly to discuss student progress, when family outreach may be necessary, and areas where connections to tutoring or social services may be needed. These and similar strategies work to engage students and build relationships with families.

16. Oregon Department of Education. (2018). On-track status as a predictor of graduation. Retrieved from https://www.oregon.gov/ode/reports-and-data/Documents/databrief_ontrack_yr4_v3.pdf.



Develop and Empower Educators

It is well-known that quality educators can be the single biggest driver to improve student outcomes. They are often the first to recognize and respond to trauma that students may experience, and they are often the first to recognize a learning delay. Educators and school leaders require time, resources and support to develop effective, student-centered practices tailored to individual student needs. And they need to be their own guides to identifying what professional support they need to engage and teach their students.

- The Educator Advancement Council is working to design and implement a statewide system to improve professional supports for all educators and connect teachers in developing quality, culturally-responsive instruction to the next generation of increasingly diverse students. In keeping with the recommendations of the Chief Education Office's 2018 Educator Equity Report and the recognition that Oregon's students are projected to become increasingly racially and ethnically diverse, the Council is bringing to scale strategies to improve teacher recruitment and retention and make the educator workforce more reflective of the student population.
- The Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission is reviewing and will consider for revision licensing rules which may create barriers for diverse candidates seeking to enter the teacher workforce. In 2018, 38 percent of Oregon students were from ethnically diverse populations, compared to just 10 percent of teachers.¹⁷ Evidence suggests that when teacher populations reflect the diversity of student populations, students do better in school including higher test scores, increased attendance, fewer suspensions, and increased graduation rates.¹⁸

17. Chief Education Office. (2018) Oregon Educator Equity Report. Retrieved from http://education.oregon.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/CEdO_Educator-Equity-Executive-Summary_2018-WEB.pdf.

18. Ibid.



“ High school students who take career technical education courses in the final two years of high school are more likely to graduate ”

Engage & Equip Students with Career and College Pathways

Making school relevant to students and engaging them with hands-on career learning opportunities helps to increase student engagement and, in turn, increase high school graduation rates. Recent evidence suggests that high school students who take career technical education (CTE) courses in the final two years of high school are more likely to graduate than those who don't participate in CTE programs.¹⁹

Research from the What Works Clearinghouse (known for its rigorous methodology) found that introducing high school students to college via opportunities to earn college credits significantly improves a multitude of outcomes including high school graduation, college readiness, and college graduation.²⁰

19. Gottfried, M. A., & Plasman, J. S. (2018). Linking the Timing of CTE Coursetaking with High School Dropout and College-going Behavior. *American Educational Research Journal*, 55(2), 325-361.

20. U.S. Department of Education. (2017). What Works Clearinghouse Intervention Report. Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/InterventionReports/wwc_dual_enrollment_022817.pdf.



RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Education investments, especially in the early years, can take a decade or more to see results, and require sustained, targeted investments in proven programs. Over the past three years the Governor has championed the following programs based on best practices from experienced educators:

Graduation rate disparities between student groups have narrowed.

As Oregon's high school 4-year cohort graduation rate continues a steady climb, the graduation rate for many historically underserved student groups is rising faster than the state average. Governor Brown and the Oregon Department of Education have explicitly focused on narrowing the opportunity gap to improve graduation rates by working directly with stakeholders and school districts to develop success plans for historically underserved students.

While more is needed, investment in Oregon's public schools increased 22 percent since the Governor took office in 2015.

In addition, Governor Brown secured over \$100 million in new investments in early learning in 2015 to give more children and families access to high-quality, affordable child care and preschool.

Since 2015, the state has significantly increased investment in career-technical education (CTE) while leveraging business and industry partnerships to expand training in schools tied to jobs in their community.

In 2017, the Governor worked with the Legislature for investment in Measure 98 to expand CTE to every school district, provide high school students a jumpstart toward earning an affordable college degree, and other programs to ensure more students earn a diploma on time.



In 2017, the Governor secured \$7.4 million to combat chronic absenteeism statewide, including \$1 million to pilot trauma-informed practices.

This addresses the effects of adverse childhood experiences on learning in the classroom.

In 2017, the Governor championed an innovative statewide initiative to connect all Oregon teachers with professional learning and mentoring opportunities.

This initiative helps meet the diverse learning needs of all students.

With the creation of the Oregon Promise program, Oregon became the second state in the nation to help recent high school graduates shoulder the cost of a two-year community college degree.

New investments in the Oregon Promise are helping 15,000 recent high school graduates and GED recipients attend community college. The opportunity to pursue a college degree is helping more students see the value of completing high school.



The Governor's Strategy:

ONE: High-quality preschool for low-income children

Expand high-quality preschool in the next biennium to an additional 10,000 low-income children, and 40,000 children in this group by 2025

TWO: Improved class sizes in grades K-3

Reduce averages to 20 students in kindergarten, 23 in grades one to three

THREE: Require a 180-day school year

Ensure Oregon children receive sufficient instructional time

FOUR: Ensure safe and effective schools

Investments to not only improve the ability for students to have basic needs met, but allow them to thrive at school

FIVE: Invest in Career and Technical Education and post-secondary pathways

Guarantee that every Oregon student is provided with a jumpstart toward a college degree or hands-on, career-connected learning tied to a job in their community

SIX: Support world-class teachers and school leaders who reflect the communities they serve

Make Oregon home to the best teachers in the nation

SEVEN: Every Oregon school district is accountable to investing resources that are tied to equitable student outcomes

Ensure strategic decision-making at the school district level that is student-centered, equity-focused and ensures processes and practices are in place to drive learning and outcomes



Governor Brown's Goal:

To put Oregon on a path to graduating every student in high school, 90 percent of students will graduate within four years of starting freshman year of high school, either with a diploma or with a GED.

Strategy

Governor Brown's agenda for creating a seamless system of education that ensures every student graduates high school with a plan for the future is grounded in best practice research and data-driven analysis. It is also informed by student voice and experience, and the insights and expertise gleaned by parents and educators in communities across Oregon. No single solution is going to change the future of our students, so a multi-pronged approach is essential to address the needs relating to the "whole child." Woven throughout all of these efforts must be a continued focus on the students who face the most barriers: students with disabilities, students of color, low-income students, and English Language Learners.



ONE: High-quality preschool for low-income children

Decades of research is clear: children who start school lacking the fundamental, developmentally-appropriate social and emotional skills are less likely to succeed in school and graduate. And those who are less likely to graduate are less likely to prosper. The state will build upon existing preschool services to expand high-quality preschool in the next biennium to an additional 10,000 children from low-income families or who have developmental delays and disabilities, with a goal of serving all 40,000 children in this group by 2025.

TWO: Improved class sizes in grades K-3

In early elementary grades, class size can be an important driver of how much attention educators are able to provide to the youngest students, especially those who face the most barriers. We must achieve average class sizes in grades K-3 based on the 2018 [Quality Education Model](#) (QEM), especially in the highest need schools. This means aiming to reduce averages to 20 in kindergarten (from the current 22), 23 in first grade (on par with the current statewide median), and 23 in grades 2-3 based on targets in the QEM (current median is 24 for second grade and 25 for third grade).

THREE: Require a 180-day school year

We must implement the equivalent of a full, 180-day school year to ensure that Oregon children receive sufficient instructional time, with support for districts that currently fall the furthest short of this.



FOUR: Ensure safe and effective schools

- a. **School Climate:** Students and staff are expressing that they feel unsafe in some public schools in Oregon due to either bullying or not feeling welcome in the school community. And disruptions triggered by students experiencing trauma in our classrooms impact the learning, development, and academic progress of the affected student and their peers. The Oregon Department of Education has convened an Advisory Committee on Safe and Effective Schools for *All Students* that will be working over the next several months to identify a set of policy solutions to provide an inclusive, safe, and welcoming environment conducive to learning for all students and staff. We will ensure that Committee recommendations are resourced.

- b. **Chronic Absenteeism and Drop-Out Prevention:** Regular attendance is a strong predictor of high school graduation. The size of the out-of-school youth population significantly reduces the effectiveness of many critical initiatives aimed at improving the system because the population most in need of the improvements are not in school to benefit from them. We will target new investment to enhance schools' capacity to provide critical counseling and mental health support, wrap around services – including services co-located in schools – to serve students and their families; enhance trauma-informed social and emotional learning; and effective implementation of early indicator and intervention systems. These investments will improve the ability for students to have their basic needs met and shape an entire classroom climate by reducing disruptions.

- c. **Facilities:** As schools across the state struggle to meet instructional needs of students, they also face aging infrastructure. The state must continue to fund school capital improvements that improve safety and address pressing infrastructure needs by continuing a statewide matching grant program to leverage local bond funding.



FIVE: Invest in career and technical education (CTE) and post-secondary pathways

We must guarantee that every Oregon student is Future Ready and provided with a jumpstart toward a college degree or hands-on, career-connected learning tied to jobs in their community. In implementing the initiatives below, it is imperative that students are not tracked into either one of these options based on their identity. These options should be available to all students, but especially those who have faced an achievement or opportunity gap.

- a. **Career-Connected Learning:** A high school diploma is a critical foundation to prosperity, but it simply isn't enough in the 21st century. Students need to have options and to be able to graduate with practical skills that align with workforce needs. We will ensure that students are Future Ready and provided with access to CTE and innovative STEAM learning opportunities through investing at least \$300 million in High School Success (Measure 98) and CTE.
- b. **Culturally Responsive College and Career Navigation Support:** Both of the initiatives above will require partnerships with schools, community-based organizations, business, and higher education institutions to 1) ensure that students understand what their career and college options are – and often this support is best from community members that reflect the diversity of the students – and 2) provide career counseling and mentoring for students in high school.



- c. College Exposure: Giving high school students an opportunity to earn college credits while still in school will help make college a real option for students, as research shows that this option makes students more likely to enroll in college. But greater access is needed across Oregon, and especially in rural Oregon and for students of color. Through expanded partnerships between public schools, community colleges, and public universities, we will work to ensure students in every Oregon high school have access to a wide variety of dual credit (high school and college credit) courses that transfer to any community college or public university in Oregon. This will increase the number of students graduating high school while making earning a college degree more affordable for Oregon students and their families. In order to implement this well, we must also ensure that systems are in place to transfer credits seamlessly across high school and college, to build the pipeline of instructors able to teach these courses, and to collect data to assess how dual credit impacts postsecondary success.

SIX: Support world-class teachers and school leaders who reflect the communities they serve

- a. High-Quality Educator Supports: The Educator Advancement Council (EAC) was created by the 2017 Oregon Legislature (Senate Bill 182) to help the state reach the goal of ensuring high-quality, well-supported, and culturally-responsive public educators in every classroom. The EAC is a new, innovative partnership among the state, teachers and school leaders, and nonprofit and community-based organizations to grow and support a high-quality educator workforce in Oregon. Through the EAC, Oregon's public school teachers and principals will be connected to high-quality, culturally responsive mentoring, and coaching. Oregon will implement new partnerships between K-12, higher education and community partners to diversify the educator workforce and make Oregon home to the best teachers in the nation.



- b. Expanded Scholarships and Support to Diversify Teacher Workforce: More educators are needed to serve a diverse population, prepare future students for high-demand fields, and to counter an anticipated teacher shortage over time. Many individuals interested in becoming educators may have limited resources to fund their educator preparation program. To help create a teacher workforce that is reflective of the increasingly diverse student population, we need to support the expenses of educator candidates from underserved communities to help alleviate the costs of required licensing exams and coursework, including through the Teacher Candidate Support Fund. This support also includes continuing the Teacher Scholars Program, which offers scholarships, opportunities for mentoring, networking, and other resources to help culturally and/or linguistically diverse candidates on their journeys to becoming and remaining an educator.

SEVEN: Every Oregon school district is accountable to investing resources that are tied to equitable student outcomes

We must ensure strategic decision-making at the school district level that is student-centered, equity-focused and ensures processes and practices are in place to drive learning and outcomes. Students and educators must have what they need to be successful, while parents, policymakers, and Oregonians as a whole require that schools deliver good outcomes.

Governor Brown will work over the next biennium to forge a shared commitment between the state and local school districts to close persistent gaps in opportunity. This in part means ensuring that existing state strategies related to these populations – including through SB 13 (2017) to develop statewide curriculum related to Native American experience and history, HB 3499 (2015) for English



Language Learner outcome improvement, and HB 2016 (2015) to create and implement the African American Student Success Plan – are reflected in the strategies and actions of local schools.

Using data to drive policy is a key component to ensuring that we are investing tax dollars wisely. Data can help pinpoint disparities experienced by students at key points in their education trajectories. Researchers from state education agencies are working together to prioritize research to inform policies and programs that improve student outcomes. The key goal is to determine what opportunities or connection points most effectively and efficiently improve student achievement and success. Governor Brown will ensure that this research will use the newly developed State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) to evaluate success over time, study all factors driving student/ youth engagement, and ensure that we are closing the opportunity gap.

