



# Press Release

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## Oregon Makes Modest Improvement In Its Benchmarks, Says State Planning Group

*Public safety, other social measures show significant improvement,  
other areas show little or no improvement since 1998.*

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JEFFREY TRYENS  
Executive Director

**Salem (OR)**—Despite improvements made over the last two years in some indicators a report released today by the Oregon Progress Board gave the state a ‘C plus’ grade for its overall progress toward achieving the state’s benchmarks.

The report, entitled *2001 Benchmark Performance Report*, gave 25 of 90 Oregon benchmarks A’s, indicating that Oregon has met or is on track to achieve those targets. However, nearly one-third of the benchmarks received poor or failing grades, meaning they were moving away from the state’s desired target.

The Oregon Progress Board monitors 90 indicators—commonly known as benchmarks—of economic, social, and environmental health for the state. Their report grades each Benchmark and then assigns an overall grade for Oregon’s performance in seven categories: *economy, education, civic engagement, social support, public safety, community development, and the environment.*

The Progress Board sets performance targets in consultation with citizens, policy-makers and issue experts. Year 2005 and 2010 performance targets for the Oregon benchmarks can be found in the benchmark tables, entitled “2001 Benchmarks,” in both the full report and highlights of the report, also available on the Progress Board website.

Grades were calculated by comparing baseline data points to where the benchmark should be to be “on track” to achieve the benchmark target. At or above the target rated at “A,” negative movement rated an “F,” and partial progress was assigned the appropriate “B,” “C,” or “D.” For a thorough description of grading and the use of confidence intervals, see the full report.

Public safety received a full two-letter grade improvement—the category with the greatest improvement since the 1999 report. Much of this improvement was due to declining overall reported crime and juvenile arrest rates. Oregon also saw improvements in education and social support. The only category with a lower grade in 2001 is economy. It declined, slightly, from a C+ to a C.

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“We’re doing better in public safety and some other areas, but we’re not living up to our potential,” said Governor John Kitzhaber. “While this is an improvement from last time, it’s still not good enough.”

Senate President Gene Derfler agrees. “This report provides us with an overview of our state’s progress on many issues,” said Derfler. “We have a lot to be proud of, but we need to work to improve our economic, environmental, and educational opportunities for all Oregonians.”

Jeff Tryens, executive director of the Progress Board, said that the grades provide an opportunity every two years for Oregonians to take stock of how we’re doing. For instance, average personal income gives Oregonians an indicator how we’re doing relative to the rest of the country. Others, like student test scores, provide a glimpse of the progress of certain policy initiatives.

“Benchmark trends and grades point out areas where the state needs to focus and act,” Tryens added. “Oregon ranks 49<sup>th</sup> in the nation for immunizations of two year olds. Homelessness and measures of abuse have gotten markedly worse and deserve critical attention.”

According to Brett Wilcox, vice chair of the Progress Board and president of Northwest Aluminum, it is important to remember that these grades reflect how well Oregon, as a state, is achieving the goals set forth in *Oregon Shines*. He added, “These grades are not performance measures for government agencies. They reflect a responsibility we all share.”

Governor Kitzhaber affirmed the Board’s commitment to the *Oregon Shines* vision of a strong twenty-first century economy and superior quality of life. “I believe the plan is sound and that Oregon is headed in the right direction,” he said. “But the benchmarks are telling us that we could be in trouble in the long run if we don’t pay attention.”

Summaries of each category follows. For the first time the full report, available online at [www.econ.state.or.us/opb](http://www.econ.state.or.us/opb), contains analyses on all 90 benchmarks, with detailed emphasis on each of 25 key benchmarks. Reports can also be obtained by calling the Progress Board at 503-986-0039 in Salem.

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## Oregon's Grades by Benchmark Category

### **Economy – Overall Grade C**

Oregon's technology-driven economic transformation has slowed, falling short of high targets set when the economy was its most robust. Per capita income hit the doldrums in 1998.

Oregon's ranking for new companies, its concentration of professional services and net job growth fell. Despite this, parity between urban and rural economies improved, and unemployment reached its lowest point in a decade.

### **Education – Overall Grade C+**

With improved reading and math scores for third and eighth graders and a slight improvement in the high school dropout rate, Oregon's education grade improved half a grade. Educational attainment of adults, affected by slower migration of well-educated professionals, kept this from improving even more. Not surprisingly, Internet usage far outstripped the Board's expectations.

### **Civic Engagement – Overall Grade D**

The key benchmark for this category estimates Oregonians who volunteer at least 50 hours per year. This fell steeply since 1996, though national statistics suggest that episodic or one-time volunteering may be on the rise in Oregon. Voter turnout and state arts funding, two other benchmarks in this category, improved.

### **Social Support – Overall Grade B-**

Fewer teen pregnancies, fewer kids abusing drugs and improved poverty numbers all contribute heavily to Oregon's improved social support grade, up from C in 1998. However, Oregon continues to struggle with numerous social support challenges. Both child and elder abuse numbers continue to climb, and Oregon is ranked 49<sup>th</sup> nationwide for child immunizations. Oregon's performance also weakened for prenatal care, infant mortality and homelessness.

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## **Public Safety – Overall Grade B+**

Steeply declining overall crime and juvenile arrest rates contribute to Oregon's notable improvement in its public safety grade, up two full points from the last report. In addition, fewer students are carrying weapons and recidivism is down.

## **Community Development – Overall Grade C-**

Housing and transportation benchmarks suggest there is room for improvement. Even though bottlenecks that divert traffic to surface roads resulted in a slight decline in Portland's freeway congestion, the percentage of Oregonians who commute has gone down and the number of urban miles they drive has gone up. Affordable housing remains a problem for lower income Oregonians.

## **Environment – Overall Grade C+**

Oregon's performance varies widely for the benchmarks in this category. Air quality earned an A again this year, salmon recovery another F, and land preservation (wetlands, agricultural and forest) dropped from an A to a B-. Hazardous waste cleanup, and both stream water quality and quantity were good as of 1999, but Oregonians continue to generate higher than acceptable levels of municipal waste levels and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Fewer wildlife species are healthy, and the number of acres of state park land has not kept up with Oregon's growing population.

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