A Message from Deputy Superintendent Salam Noor

January is a month for looking forward. The whole year stretches in front of us and holds the promise of new opportunities and fresh beginnings. I’ve spent several days already this month traveling around the state to talk with students, teachers, education support professionals, administrators and families about what we can look forward to as we prepare our state plan for implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Based on the passion and enthusiasm for education I see in everyone I meet and talk with in communities and at our community forums, there is no doubt this year has the potential for greatness.

Part of my travels this month have been to eastern Oregon, during a severe winter storm. But despite single digit temperatures and blowing snow, community members in Arock, Baker City, Jordan Valley and Ontario were eager to come out to hear our plan and provide their input on where Oregon education needs to go. The great news is that our vision for every student to have access to, and benefit from a world-class, well-rounded and equitable educational system is shared by everyone I’ve met. And department goals for students to “start strong, transition successfully, graduate college- and career-ready and experience outstanding customer service” reflect the same goals educators and families have statewide.

I was privileged to meet and shake the hand of every student in the Arock district – all 12 of them! Because it’s such a small school, the two teachers can provide personalized learning opportunities and the students are excited about school. They receive a well-rounded education and even had opportunities to travel to New York and Puerto Rico. Making sure students have access to programs that interest them and keep them engaged in school is an important part of our ESSA plan.

In Baker City, more than 60 people showed up for our event even though schools were impacted by the severe weather. This is another demonstration of how deeply our communities value education. Parents there talked about the need for a welcoming environment and better facilities for their children at school. I talked with student leaders who expressed many of the same concerns I’ve heard from their peers around the state: students should have something that motivates them to learn.

The passion for education in eastern Oregon resounds, just as it does in the other areas of the state I have traveled. The districts in the areas I visited may be small in terms of the number of students, but there is a great sense of collaboration between districts to make sure everyone does well. They are committed to providing students the best and most relevant education possible and want the state to continue to research best practices so they can implement these in their schools.

We have two more opportunities to discuss our ESSA plan with community members over the next few weeks. Check out the ESSA page on our website for information on where upcoming community forums will be held. I can assure you that if you come and engage in conversation with others, you will quickly see why 2017 holds so much promise for education in Oregon.

Sincerely,

Arock Elementary classroom visit.
Winter weather impacts class time; State Board to consider options for flexibility

Winter weather is wreaking havoc on many Oregon school districts. The snow and ice caused many closures and delays, and administrators and school boards are assessing their options for making up the time. Last week, Deputy Superintendent Salam Noor sent the following message to districts:

In light of our continuing inclement weather, many of you have contacted the Oregon Department of Education with questions about the impact of school closures on instructional time requirements. We understand the challenges many of you are facing and are aware of the many school closures that have occurred.

We are reviewing the instructional time rules, considering options and exploring potential solutions with the State Board of Education within the parameters of state rules and law.

Deputy Superintendent Noor will be presenting options (see accompanying article) to the State Board of Education at the Board’s meeting on January 26. The options include giving districts more flexibility for the current school year when it comes to calculating hours of instructional time.

If a district already has a school calendar that ensures students are above the minimum hours of instructional time, and the closure due to weather would not place them below the minimum requirement, then the districts would not be required by the state to make up the time. Many school districts have school calendars that would result in more instructional time hours than the required state minimums.

If a school’s closure would result in the district not offering the required minimum number of instructional time then the school district would be required to add hours of instruction to the school year. Currently the option for the district would be to seek a waiver from the requirement by the State Board of Education.

A request for a Division 22 waiver must be made in writing to the Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction. The request must specify the reason the district is seeking the waiver and other relevant information. Districts should email waiver requests to Dr. Noor and the State Board Administrator, Jessica Nguyen-Ventura.

State Board to Consider Temporary Rules for Instructional Time

Members of the Oregon State Board of Education will consider temporary rules regarding flexibility for instructional time to accommodate the high number of inclement weather delays and cancellations this school year. This discussion will take place at the Board’s next meeting on January 26, 2017, 1-5 pm at the Oregon Department of Education. Click here to view the board docket for this agenda item.

The Board’s deliberations will also be live streamed at the following link: https://livestream.com/accounts/4436497/ODEVideo.
Check Out ODE’s New Website!

If you’ve been to the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) website in the last month, you’ve seen just how much we’ve changed! It’s been a long time coming and required a lot of work behind the scenes, but we think the end result is a far better experience for all users.

The new site is adaptable to today’s mobile devices, more accessible to all Oregonians and much easier to navigate. Don’t forget that we have a new URL, so be sure to bookmark www.oregon.gov/ODE. If you have comments or suggestions to improve the website, please contact Peter Rudy, ODE public affairs specialist.

ODE Resources and Supports for Safe and Respectful Schools

The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) is committed to assisting schools and districts in providing safe and respectful places of learning for ALL students. As school leaders, students and staff begin this new year, we want to reiterate our standing offer of support, and also share additional resources and information.

On November 14, 2016, Deputy Superintendent Salam Noor sent an email to all superintendents offering ODE resources to support their related efforts. Also on November 14, Governor Kate Brown called on Oregonians to unite against hate in this video. The State Board of Education issued a statement on November 16, 2016 to reiterate the Board’s commitment to student safety. Dr. Noor also spoke about ODE’s work to support districts in ensuring a safe and respectful environment at the December 8, 2016 State Board meeting.

On December 2, 2016, ODE issued this statement in response to a protest called “Racism in Oregon from the Classroom to the Jail Cell.” The statement outlines ODE’s commitment to and resources for individuals navigating the Oregon prekindergarten through grade 12 education system who experience harassment, bullying, or racism.

Earlier this month, Dr. Noor reiterated the offer of support and resources to district leaders, including the following statements:

ODE recommends that students and families contact their principal, school district superintendent and school board when confronting situations that threaten a student’s safe and respectful learning environment. ODE supports school districts in addressing harassment, bullying and racism, and as noted in the Dec. 2 statement above, we will immediately act upon civil rights complaints that we receive. Additionally, we urge any individual who is the victim of a hate incident to report it to local law enforcement.
ODE invests in new professional development approach for assessment literacy

This week, around 70 individuals statewide will receive specialized training to become professional development providers through the Building Educator Assessment Literacy (BEAL) project. The goal is “to improve classroom instruction by providing teachers with in-depth, hands-on training” about the Smarter Balanced assessments and how they “can guide deeper teaching and learning in the classroom.” These providers represent nearly all of the education service districts (ESDs) in the state.

Cristen McLean, Assessment Operations and Policy Analyst for ODE’s Office of Teaching, Learning and Assessment says this is a very different approach. “There are a substantial number of resources a school or district can purchase to become more knowledgeable about assessment and other aspects of education,” she said. “These include, for instance, purchasing education books, professional development programs, and conference attendance. The limitations of these approaches, though, are that although a person may be able to make local reproductions or adaptations of some content, copyright laws generally prohibit sharing these adaptations with other schools. As a state-level investment, this project places priority on royalty-free, editable, shareable professional development resources so that all educators in Oregon can benefit from the investment.”

Once the trainers have been trained, they will hold regional one-day BEAL events in February to share their knowledge. Across the three scheduled events, there are nearly 400 participants registered, representing more than 100 different schools distributed across more than 75 school districts. Find out more about those events on our website.

So why is this training important?

The professional learning will start with framing the concept of assessment literacy and where performance assessment fits within the various assessment types and purposes. Then participants will collaborate with colleagues in like content areas on:

- collaboratively scoring student work from Smarter Balanced performance tasks to build a common understanding of what student proficiency looks like;
- reviewing student work as the basis for reflecting on the evidence of learning that performance tasks can generate; and
- planning ways of using performance tasks as part of formative assessment practice, including providing feedback and planning instructional practices.

By engaging in this professional learning, participants can make sure their lesson plans better serve their students, giving them skills that will help them far beyond the assessments, but in their college and careers as well.

According to McLean, ultimately, the whole state will benefit as all content will be posted on the ODE BEAL website. “We believe that the resources must be able to be refined and expanded based on the insights that come from educators during their use of this content. By contrast, when content is covered by copyrights that prohibit educators from making edits to the content or from sharing their adaptations, we lose the opportunity to build on the collective expertise of educators statewide.”
ESSA Update: Oregon’s Deputy Superintendent Salam Noor shares more on his travels to Baker School District and Malheur County

You visited rural schools in Arock and Jordan Valley. What was it like to meet students and staff?

Arock, a Kindergarten-Grade 8 (K-8) school 100 miles south of Ontario, currently serves 12 students. At the time of my visit, the area was blanketed in snow and experiencing sub-zero temperatures. Despite the remoteness of the district, the two teachers provide a well-rounded educational experience, including individualized and personalized instruction to each student. I was very impressed by the well-spoken students and the pride they have for their school and community. Just 30 miles north in Jordan Valley, I toured the school and met with educators and community members. Similar to Arock, the community holds an unwavering belief that all students can learn and be successful.

You met with administrators from Baker, Grant, and Malheur Counties. What were some of your big takeaways?

I continue to come back to a deep conviction I hold, and that is that education is local. It is truly grounding to meet with local education leaders in rural Oregon. One of the biggest takeaways I gleaned through the opportunity to sit down with administrators is the power in networking, collaboration, and systems of support. Administrators emphasized this through the mantra, “working better together.” This is a model where educators are not afraid to ask questions or make mistakes; they are continuously learning and in turn, continuously improving. They openly acknowledge challenges and talk about learning from one another to improve their own local conditions.

How is the Oregon Department of Education supporting rural schools?

At the state level, my staff and I are committed to building systems that provide differentiated supports and resources based on local need. We are working hard to change the conversation relative to what students, educators, and schools need in order to thrive. This conversation is critical, and most importantly, must be a two-way dialogue about these local school and district needs and the capacity they have to carry out the work. To that end, we hope to continue to leverage education service districts (ESDs), who serve as key partners in developing statewide systems of support.

Special thanks to Malheur ESD Superintendent Mark Redmond and South Baker Intermediate Principal Nanette Lehman for their support in coordinating these events! Find the latest updates and information on the Every Student Succeeds Act on our webpage and our Twitter feed: ORDeptEd.
ODE Priorities Set for Legislative Session

State elected officials have been sworn in and the countdown is on to the start of the 2017 legislative session. Going into the session, the Oregon Department of Education is focused on its priorities:

Improve Graduation Outcomes for All Students/Implement Measure 98
- Expand career and technical education (CTE) programs
- Expand dual credit opportunities
- Implement dropout prevention strategies
- Create a Graduation Equity Program and Graduation Equity Fund to implement strategies to improve graduation rates
- Reduce Chronic Absenteeism
- Fund and implement the Chronic Absenteeism state plan

Make School More Engaging & Relevant
- Expand from an emphasis on math and English to courses that engage the whole student and nurture their interests such as art, music, and social studies
- Make available free, digital curriculum that students find more timely and engaging
- Expand school internet connectivity
- Improve assessments to enhance classroom teaching
- Incorporate the teaching of Oregon Native American history and culture into classrooms

Support Oregon’s Youngest Learners
- Expand and enhance professional development opportunities for early learning providers

Support Our Teachers
- Diversify education workforce
- Expand culturally-responsive teaching practices
- Mentor novice teachers & administrators
- Create leadership opportunities for teachers
- Improve and support expanded professional development opportunities
- Implement Council on Educator Advancement recommendations

Safe & Healthy Schools
- Continue bond funding for the Capital Improvement Matching Program for school facility upgrades
- Improve Oregon School for the Deaf facilities

Questions about ODE’s legislative agenda may be directed to Jan McComb, ODE Legislative Coordinator.

Key Legislative Dates:
- February 1: Legislative session begins
- April 7: Deadline for bills to be posted for work sessions in house of origin
- April 18: Deadline for bills to be voted out of policy committee in house of origin
- May 19: Deadline for bills to be posted for work sessions in opposite house
- June 2: Deadline for bills to be voted out of policy committee in opposite house
- June 23: Target date for sine die adjournment
- July 10: Constitutional deadline for sine die adjournment