As we start the 2015-16 school year, I have been reflecting on all of the amazing educational leaders we have throughout the state. Leaders at every level, from the superintendents and principals who guide local school improvement efforts, to the classroom aid who takes the extra time to help a child master a new skill, to all of the staff at every level who play key roles in supporting our students’ learning and wellness. And of course there are all of our outstanding teachers who come to school every day knowing they can and will make a difference in the lives of their students. I am a firm believer that leaders are present – and necessary – at every level of our education system and that we all have a shared responsibility in leading the work forward.

But there is one particular educational leader that I want to recognize today. As most of you are probably aware, Nancy Golden announced her retirement as Chief Education Officer last month. Nancy is an amazing leader who has dedicated her career to improving education for our students. I want to join with many others in thanking Nancy for her service, her passion, her collaborative spirit, and her deep dedication to the work at hand. I look forward to working with all of you to continue to move forward many of the efforts she has championed over the past two years.

One such effort that has been on my mind this month is student attendance. This is a topic both Nancy and I care deeply about, as do many of you. As educators, you see the impact when students miss too much school and fall further and further behind their peers. Regular attendance is critical to providing students the opportunities they need to learn, grow, and reach their full potential.

September is attendance awareness month and as you welcome students and families back from summer break, I encourage you to talk with parents about the importance of regular attendance – particularly about setting up strong patterns of attendance early. In Oregon, roughly one in seven students in kindergarten or first grade are chronically absent, meaning they miss 10% or more of school days. This not only impacts learning time in these foundational early grades but also sets up patterns of poor attendance that can carry over into later grades. But whether you work with kindergarteners or seniors, this is the perfect time of year to have these conversations and engage parents as active partners in boosting student attendance and achievement.

In an effort to better understand student attendance, we will be releasing the first state-wide report on Oregon’s absenteeism data later this fall. The goal with this new report is to provide Oregon policymakers and educators with actionable data that can be used to help inform future initiatives to improve student attendance. I look forward to learning together and exploring ways to better support students and families in this area.

Thank you again for your leadership and service. I wish you and everyone in your school communities a wonderful start to the school year!
Story Time

Stories Highlighting Educational Success, Best Practice, and Innovation Around the State

Spotlight on AVID

As a result of more rigorous learning standards, Oregon schools are holding students to higher expectations. The expectations emphasize the knowledge and skills needed for life after high school, and ensure students, teachers, and parents understand what students should know and be able to do at each grade.

One nationally-recognized program that promotes college-and career-readiness is thriving in its implementation in Oregon schools and districts. The program is called AVID, and stands for Advancement Via Individual Determination. The AVID program brings research-based curriculum and strategies to students each day that develop critical thinking, literacy, and math skills across all content areas.

Beaverton:

AVID is helping Beaverton schools create a “college going” culture. Currently, the program is in all 8th and 9th grade classes at comprehensive middle and high schools in Beaverton. Every year grade levels are added, and eventually the program will be system-wide grades 6-12. “It’s probably the most innovative and supportive approach to college and career-readiness for all,” says Danica Jensen-Weiner, AVID Teacher on Special Assignment. “There are high expectations and it is rigorous, but there is school-wide support.” In the AVID elective class, students focus on the skills needed to be successful in high school and college, such as writing, critical reading, and organization and study skills. Students also participate in weekly tutorials and collaborative study groups, in which students work together to learn and grow.

Reynolds:

Reynolds High School in the Reynolds School District had its second AVID graduating class in June 2015. Twenty-eight seniors completed the requirements of the program and are now headed off to college, many with large scholarship awards. AVID students received the Future Connect awards from both Portland Community College and Mt. Hood Community College. These awards provided scholarships to cover tuition, but also College Success coaches to support students in their transition to college.

*Photo Caption: Reynolds High AVID Awards Night

Salem-Keizer:

The leadership team at Claggett Creek Middle School in Salem-Keizer School District recognizes Oregon’s standards as the “what” students should know, and AVID strategies as the “how” students will learn and master the knowledge and skills needed to meet the standards. “The AVID approach to learning has resulted in improved teacher practice and student success,” said Rob Schoepper, Principal. One way Claggett has used the strategies is by ensuring all students establish a solid foundation of literacy skills. They emphasize critical reading, student-to-student talk, and professional development for teachers to hone in on high leverage instructional strategies to better serve students. Not only that, but every single Claggett student has a large 3-ring binder, tabs for organization, and a pencil pouch. “Binder checks” throughout the week in different classes make sure students are ready and prepared for their next steps.
2015-16 Back to School Toolkit

As you welcome your students and families back from summer break, we wanted to provide you with materials and resources to support the critical conversations you will be having on the topics of Smarter Balanced test results and Oregon’s higher standards and the new tests. Please feel free to modify these materials to support your local communication efforts. Please see below for specific toolkit items. The entire toolkit, along with additional resources, can be on our website here. Spanish language versions are available for a number of resources and more will be added to our website in the coming weeks.

Understanding the Results
School, district, and state-level results will be made public September 17. Test results look different this year than they have in the past. Students and parents will need to understand how to interpret the scores and what they mean. The sample cover letter for the Individual Student Reports can be sent home in the mail or provided alongside the students’ results during a parent meeting. The robo call script is provided for administrators who may wish to use these types of calls as an additional means of communicating about what parents can expect to see regarding their student’s results. These tools are intended to support initial conversations with parents and students, and therefore, should not be the only communication tools used to help parents understand and interpret their child’s test scores.

- Cover Letter for Individual Student Reports: English, Spanish
- Robo Call Script to Parents: English, Spanish

Talking with Parents About Standards and Assessments
Individual student results will vary on the new tests, and it’s critical parents feel like they have resources to support their child, especially if the student receives a 1 or 2. Parents and students need to know that this new test is only one measure to determine whether students are on track to be successful in their next steps and that students will not be held back a grade or kept from graduating based on the results of this test alone. Parents’ best resource is their child’s teacher(s) who can provide specific information about student’s strengths and areas for improvement. Therefore it is critical that teachers have the information and support they need to carry on these important conversations.

- Key Messages about Smarter Balanced for Educators: English, Spanish
- CCSS Handout and FAQ
- FAQ for Parents
- Key Message Handout about Smarter Balanced for Parents: English, Spanish
- Smarter Balanced Factsheet: English, Spanish

Many additional resources are available in the toolkit and can be found here. We hope these resources will be helpful as you begin communicating to your communities. If you have questions about communicating about the test results, please contact Meg Koch. If you have questions about the assessment, please contact Derek Brown.
Teacher Talk

Articles and Resources Relating to Curriculum, Instruction, Special Programs, and More...

iSchool Initiative

The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) Office of Information Technology (OIT) and the iSchool Initiative (iSi) are partnering to host a digital learning leadership event at the Oregon Department of Education on Monday, September 28, 2015. The iSi Leadership event is designed for ODE’s leadership, district leadership, and anyone else who is passionate about inspiring students to learn with the right technology tools, skills, and environment.

The event will include keynote sessions with Travis Allen and the opportunity for all attendees to step inside the iSi 38-foot classroom-on-wheels and experience a complete mobile solution for schools. Along with inspiring presentations, the Digital Learning Revolution Tour demonstrates solutions for mobile technology integration and brings the full experience of digital learning to your doorstep!

Please plan to visit the iSi bus and/or participate in one of Travis’ sessions. Schedule will be available here at by September 15. For a sneak preview, check out the video that started the iSchool Initiative.

OR Teacher Inservice Day

Click here for a listing of opportunities and resources for the 2015 Statewide Teacher Inservice Day, which is Friday, October 9. Inservice activities are also available on Thursday, October 8 and Saturday, October 10. Please contact the Oregon International Council via email or call 503-873-4941 with any questions.

Oregon Blue Books

Cases of 2013-14 Oregon Blue Books are still available for $20 to use as textbooks in your classroom. Avoid shipping costs by arranging to pick them up – come to Salem to pick up a case or two. Otherwise, add $18 per box for UPS shipping. The on-line Oregon Blue Book is updated daily and has enhanced resources for teachers and school children. Click here to access the Blue Book order form. Reserve a case or arrange a pick up by contacting Julie Yamaka at the State Archives at 503-378-5199.

Mental Health First Aid

In 2015, President Obama’s Now Is the Time initiative identified the need for school staff to have mental health first aid training to help them respond to students in crisis. For the second year in a row, the Oregon Department of Education is offering a Youth Mental Health First Aid training opportunity, a public education program that can assist those in the field in their work with youth, teaching them to better understand mental illness. This training is appropriate for parents and family members, caregivers, teachers and school staff, neighbors, health and human services workers, and other caring citizens who want to support early detection and intervention of mental illness in Oregon youth. This year’s training will be hosted at the ODE/COSA Special Education Fall Conference in Eugene, Oregon as a day-long preconference institute. The cost is only $99 and includes 8 hours of instruction and lunch. Click here to register.

CTE Revitalization Grant RFP

The 2015 CTE Revitalization Grant RFP has been released. It can be found on the Revitalization Grant webpage. The CTE Revitalization Grant is a competitive grant that funds activities related to developing or enhancing Career Technical Education (CTE) programs of study. Eligible recipients include schools districts, charter schools, and ESDs. The deadline for submission is October 16, 2015. Please contact Tom Thompson, 503-947-5790 for questions regarding the grant.
Legal Corner

Registration Fees
As a reminder, district school boards or public charter schools may not require payment of fees as a condition of admission to those pupils entitled by law to a free appropriate public education. District school boards are specifically required to admit free of charge to the schools of the district all persons between the ages of 5 and 19 who reside within the district. A district must also admit students who have not yet attained 21 years of age who are receiving special education and have not yet received a high school diploma. A registration fee is strictly prohibited under Oregon law. See ORS 339.115 and 339.155 for more details on the admission of students, as well as ORS 339.147 relating to provisions that must be made for low-income families’ students.

2015 State Board Retreat
The State Board of Education met on August 19 through the 21 for their annual retreat in Salem. The Board focused on decision making principles and created a two year work plan that will guide their work. The Board was joined by several Oregon Department of Education staff and guest speakers, including Deputy Superintendent Salam Noor, and Lindsey Capps, interim Chief Education Officer. Nationally renowned education equity expert, Dr. Geneva Gay, also led the board through an equity conversation, focusing on possible equity positions and policies that the State Board of Education may consider in the future. During the next few months, the Board will convene work sessions to refine their work plan and will be involving ODE and stakeholders in that process. Click here to view additional state board materials.

Executive Numbered Memorandum

Executive Numbered Memo 002-2015-16 - SB 501 and HB 5507
RE: Senate Bill 501 and House Bill 5507 (Oregon Farm to School and School Garden Grant)
Summary: Provides information about upcoming grants available for the Oregon Farm to School and School Garden program.

The Oregon legislature provided an additional $3.3 million for the Oregon Farm to School and School Garden program, adding to the $1.2 million that was previously approved. This brings the total to $4.5 million for Farm to School and School Garden programs for the 2015-17 biennium, making Oregon the first state to award Farm to School funds to ALL schools.

Executive Numbered Memo 001-2015-16- HB 2016
RE: House Bill 2016 (African American/Black Student Plan)
Summary: Provides information about the creation of the African American/Black Student Plan and possible grants.

House Bill 2016 directs the Department of Education to develop and implement a statewide education plan for African American/Black students who are in early childhood through post-secondary education programs. The Department is convening an advisory group comprised of members of the African American/Black community and other stakeholders from across the state of Oregon to provide advice to the department regarding the plan.
Upcoming Opportunities

Articles and Resources on Scholarships, Grants, Professional Development, and More…

EdTech Professional Development Cadre

The goal of Oregon Ed Tech Professional Development Cadre is to identify and disseminate best practices targeting innovative technology integration into teaching and learning, by providing forums for networking and ongoing collaborative work and effectively integrating technology standards with Common Core Content Standards. The cadre will focus on exemplary staff development skills by designing structures to improve practice and educator effectiveness. In addition, they will model and practice effective instructional strategies while including emerging technologies.

**Dates & Locations:** September 22 and 23, 2015 at Lane ESD, February 24, 2016 at Portland Airport Sheraton (the AcceleratED Conference), and April 26 and 27, 2016 at Clackamas ESD.

Please complete the online registration (link in the registration form) for each participant and mail the attached form with your payment by September 15, 2015. If you have any questions, please contact Carla Wade at 503-947-5631.

Advancing the Field with New Technology

Join Family and Consumer Science teachers on October 2 and 3 at the Oregon Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (ORAFCS) annual conference at the Salishan Resort in Glendale, OR. You will learn how to use Google Classroom with Matt Hurst, the statewide Google representative from Salem-Keizer School District. Participants will hear from Pearl Hart, FACS specialist from the Utah Department of Education speaking on how to align FACS with STEM and the common core. Other speakers include: Liz Woodruff, fashion designer; Chef Thor Erickson, Cascades Culinary Institute; and Crystal Peris, ODE Teen parent and child development programs Consultant. Finally, Victor Cato will be on hand to share updates and ideas from the Oregon Department of Education. Register and see a full agenda here or contact Sara Wright with any questions.

Let’s Do Breakfast!

With only 19% of enrolled students eating school breakfast, Oregon has a unique opportunity to connect more students to the program. Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon, Oregon Dairy Council, and Oregon Department of Education have launched Let’s Do Breakfast, Oregon! to expand participation in the School Breakfast Program by encouraging schools to serve breakfast in ways proven to increase participation: after the bell and at no charge. Participating schools will receive toolkits and assistance in engaging students and families, and will be eligible to receive prizes for increased participation. For more information or to register by October 15, please visit https://oregonhunger.org/breakfast or contact Katherine Selin.

OASL Fall Conference

Administrators, consider sending paraprofessional and licensed library staff to the Oregon Association of School Libraries (OASL) Fall Conference in Coos Bay on October 9 and 10, 2015. Registration is open, and sessions will cover library management 101, new books, eBooks, makerspaces, Google Classroom, teacher and librarian collaboration, statewide databases that support CCSS, and more. Classroom teachers are welcome, too! Please feel free to contact one of the conference organizers on this webpage with any questions.