

THE SUPERINTENDENT'S *Pipeline* — *Extra!*

Extra!

DECEMBER 16, 1999

This *EXTRA!* edition of Pipeline is devoted to information about school and district report cards to be issued the end of January.

CONTACT US

Beginning Dec. 20, you can:

- Find final sample report cards at this web address:

www.ode.state.or.us/reportcard

- Call us about the report cards at:

(503) 378-8004 ext. 800

- E-mail us about the report cards at:

ode.reportcard@state.or.us



From My Desk to Yours

A Message from Stan Bunn
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

The school and district report cards we will distribute next month are the result of hours of collaborative work. With a very short timeline, department staff traveled the state, talked with educators and community members, consulted with researchers and national experts, and polled other states also developing accountability reports. Our finished product will present key information in a readable, inviting format.

We have much to be proud of in Oregon schools, and the report cards will reflect this good news.

- Statewide student performance rates are high. In 1999 the number of students meeting standards on state tests increased in nearly every subject and grade.
- Student performance has risen over time. About 80 percent of schools improved student performance since 1996.
- Student test participation rose along with student performance. About 90 percent of students attempted the state tests under regular conditions in 1999—nearly 18,000 more students than in 1996.
- Attendance rates also are high, with an average school attendance rate of more than 93 percent.
- Schools are lowering their dropout rates. Half of Oregon schools succeeded in reducing their dropout rates over the last two years.

This *Extra!* edition of *The Superintendent's Pipeline* is designed to help you and your staff understand and use the upcoming report cards to strengthen your positive relationships with your community and celebrate the many good things you are doing for students. The department will provide more information in January to help you do this.

Public engagement is essential to improve education. An *Education Week* study of states with school accountability measures revealed three key points for communicating with constituents:

- Understand that educators and the public sometimes have different priorities;
- Help parents and community members understand how to use information in report cards; and
- Ask people in your local community what matters to them.

I encourage you to make the report cards a centerpiece of public discussions in your schools and community about the positive work you are doing. In addition to discussing the reports, community forums offer an opportunity to find out what counts in your district so we can address those issues in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stan Bunn". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Stan Bunn

Report Cards Demonstrate Accountability

The following are frequently asked questions about school and district report cards.

What are the report cards?

Senate Bill 1329, passed by the 1999 state legislature, requires the department to produce annual performance reports for schools and districts, beginning in January 2000.

What is the purpose of the report cards?

The report cards are a logical extension of other programs initiated in Oregon to improve education over time. They are designed to communicate the many good things occurring in Oregon schools and show the public that schools are accountable for their work.

Can the report cards be used to evaluate principals or teachers?

No, these report cards cannot be used to evaluate educators.

Will districts receive ratings?

No, districts will not receive ratings. Schools will.

Why so much emphasis on state test scores?

State test scores are the most reliable, consistent and stable measurement of student performance over time across the state. The rating system is an educationally and technically sound means of reflecting current performance and improvement over time.



Why emphasize the number of students who take state tests?

The percent of students who take state tests is a good indicator of whether all eligible students receive the same educational opportunities. High state test participation rates also help ensure sound comparisons over time, a key element of validity.

What happens to schools with low ratings?

The department will direct energy and other resources to help these schools, allocating \$450,000 in professional development grants for which these schools may apply.

District Contact Person Verifies Data

Earlier this month, each school district central office identified a contact person to verify school and district data for the report cards. As the timeline below shows, the department will provide data tables on Jan. 10 for the contact person to verify. Contact

people must notify the department by Jan. 18 if there are any inaccuracies in the data. Please work with your district contact person to ensure that the department has accurate data.

Timeline Lists Key Events, Dates

Here is the department's tentative timeline to produce and release school and district report cards. This is the first time the department has ever tried to produce such reports and dates below may change as work continues with data, technology applications and national experts.

TENTATIVE DATE	EVENT
JAN. 5	ODE e-mails passwords to district contact people
JAN. 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ODE posts on web site information about rating system and communications resources • ODE notifies superintendent via listserv that data tables are posted to verify using district password
JAN. 18	Deadline for district to verify above data. If no response received by this date, ODE will accept information as correct.
JAN. 26	ODE contacts superintendent if any school in district is likely to receive low or unacceptable rating
BY JAN. 28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ODE notifies superintendents via listserv that report cards are accessible using district password but embargoed until news conference. (Preparing reports during embargo for later distribution is OK. Distributing reports during embargo is not.) • ODE mails hard copy of school and district report cards to district office
BY FEB. 1	Via news conference and web site, ODE releases school and district report cards to media and public
MAR. 31	Deadline for districts to send report cards to parents

Communications Key to Success

The report cards are an opportunity for you to describe what is working in your district and what actions you are taking to help students learn. We encourage you to plan how to communicate with your communities about the report cards. The Oregon School Public Relations Association suggests the following approach.

- Describe existing perceptions and challenges. For example, your staff may feel anxious about the reports.
- Analyze relevant research you have about state report cards, in general, and your audiences, in particular. For example, *Reporting Results: What the Public Wants to Know* by A-Plus Communications of Arlington, Va., provides useful information about school accountability reports, including educators' opinions. For a free copy, call the department at (503)

378-8004 ext. 800 or e-mail us at ode.reportcard@state.or.us.

- With a realistic assessment of the situation and a research basis, outline an action plan stating your overall goal and objectives. For example, a goal may be to demonstrate accountability. An objective may be to raise understanding about local student achievement.

- Identify the best ways to reach each of your audiences. For example, a staff meeting before the reports are released may help educators. The timeline on page 2 may help you schedule events.
- Evaluate your efforts. For example, a staff survey may inform you about the effectiveness of your communications.



ODE Resources Help

Overwhelmed with day-to-day activities of your district? Little time to focus on state report cards? Help is on its way. By Jan. 10, the department will produce several tools to help you explain the report cards to your communities. These resources will include:

- Parent newsletter article
- PowerPoint presentation for staff, school boards and parents
- Guide defining report card elements
- Explanation of the rating system

The Oregon School Boards Association also will provide a variety of resources for districts, including template cover letters and news releases.

For more communications help, contact:

- Tanya Gross
(503) 378-3310 ext. 464
tanya.gross@state.or.us
- Barbara Wolfe
(503) 378-3310 ext. 440
barbara.wolfe@state.or.us

Districts to Distribute Reports by March 31

District offices are required to send both the district and relevant school report to all parents of district students by March 31, 2000.

By late January, the department will post on its web site a PDF format and mail district offices a hard copy of the district and each school report. The timeline on page 2 shows the dates.

Make Copies

Reports will be double-sided, on legal-size (8.5" x 14") white paper with black type. You may make copies from the web site or the hard copy.

The self-mailer panel on the school report card can be wrapped around the district report and addressed so the two can be sealed together for mailing. Or, you may want to mail the report cards in an envelope, along with a local cover letter. If you have a web site, you may post the report cards there.

Although mailing is not required, parents in a recent focus group said they preferred

to receive the reports by mail. They said:

- Districts should not rely on students to deliver the reports.
- Districts should not rely on teachers to deliver the reports, noting there are too many other things to talk about at parent-teacher conferences.
- A parent night or school board meeting to discuss the reports is fine, but should not be the only means of delivering the reports to parents as many do not attend. If such a meeting is planned, list the date and time on the local information panel of the report.
- All community members, not just parents, should receive reports because non-parents vote on school issues too.

Both school and district report cards have a blank 4" x 7" panel where local information may be added. An article on page 4 suggests how to personalize this panel. If you do not want to use the self-mailer panel or the local information panel, you may delete them. With this exception only, districts are expected to distribute the report cards intact, exactly as received from the department.

Personalize Report Cards with Local Information

Each report card will have a blank panel on the back page for you to add local information. By describing the special qualities of your school or district on this panel, you can highlight your success stories and enhance your relationship with your constituents.

You may produce your local information (formatted for the 4" x 7" panel) on a word processor, then print and paste it onto the local information page before copying. Or you can create an extra page to send with the report card.

Although providing local information is optional, the department encourages you to do so. Here are some ideas about the type of local information to provide.

- Describe the best qualities of your schools. (Consider collecting, "What I like best" comments from students, parents, teachers and others.)
- Highlight activities of special interest to your community. Often the school is the hub of important community events.
- Add information that was unavailable at the state level but will help draw a more complete picture of your schools and district and provide local context. For example:
 - Show student academic growth from one school year to the next.
 - List the number and percent of students who received Certificates of Initial Mastery, diplomas and modified diplomas.
 - Describe notable achievements of the school band, sports teams and student leadership groups.

Parents List Ideas

Earlier this month, the department conducted a small focus group of parents to learn what local information they would like to receive. Here are their suggestions, which they did not prioritize.

- School/district mission statement
- Percent of students involved in extra-curricular and leadership activities
- Advantages extra-curricular activities provide for students, such as improved grades and attendance
- Percent of students involved in community service
- Class size
- Percent of Title I and TAG students
- Survey data showing student/parent/staff satisfaction, how students perceive the school, how parents perceive teachers
- More information on attendance, such as number of excused and unexcused absences, tardies and expulsions
- Number of students in alternative education
- Number and age of students dropping out



- For elementary schools: number of students who are prepared, stay on task (possibly summarized from student report cards)
- For high schools: percent of students who go to college and other post-secondary activities
- Percent of teachers with less than three years or more than 20 years experience
- Parent and community outreach, avenues for parent involvement
- Dates and times of parent, site council, school board meetings
- Date and time of parent meeting on state report card
- Phone numbers for principal, superintendent, school board members
- Web site addresses for relevant parent resources

The state report cards give you a forum to talk about local strengths and achievements. Begin thinking now about the local picture you want to paint.

Checklist Organizes Planning

Several decisions can be made now to prepare to release the report cards in your community. This checklist, developed with the Oregon School Public Relations Association, can help you plan.

- Decide how to notify key audiences (school board, staff, etc.) of results the day they are released
- Decide how to copy and send reports to parents
- Work with principals to add local information to blank panels
- Decide how and when to discuss the reports with your school board. At a January meeting, you may want to alert the board that reports will be

coming. At a February meeting, you may want to discuss the reports in detail.



- Decide how and when to discuss the reports with:
 - staff (e-mail, newsletters, memos, meetings planned by all building principals)
 - parents (postcards, newsletters, letters, meetings, web site)
 - students (school newspaper, leadership, clubs)
 - key communicators (background letter before release, cover letter with reports at time of release)
 - community groups
 - local media (meet with editorial board, submit guest column)

If you have questions or comments about this publication, please contact Barbara Wolfe at (503) 378-3310 ext. 440 or barbara.wolfe@state.or.us