

NEWS RELEASE

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State audit validates work under way to improve Oregon graduation rates

(Salem, Ore.) – An audit released today from the Oregon Secretary of State highlights the important work under way at the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to improve Oregon’s graduation rate and provides recommendations to build on that work and help prepare more students for graduation with a plan for their future.

“We appreciate the Secretary of State and the Audits Division staff for spending time on this topic and sharing thoughtful recommendations to further our work to improve high school graduation rates,” Acting Deputy Superintendent Colt Gill said. “Many of the themes raised in the audit are consistent with what we have been identifying in recent years, and we look forward to continuing to develop and implement a variety of strategies to help more students graduate.”

Among the audit recommendations are tactics like providing targeted support to students in specific groups with lower graduation rates, such as highly mobile students who transfer between schools and districts, economically disadvantaged students, and middle school students. Another is to provide support to schools with mid-range graduation rates rather than emphasizing focus on schools with the lowest graduation rates.

ODE has focused its work on disparities in outcomes experienced by many student groups, including American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students, African-American/Black students, Hispanic/Latino students, students with disabilities, students experiencing economic hardship and English language learners. The department has worked with stakeholders to develop success plans for these groups of students. Although outcomes have improved for African-American/Black students and Hispanic/Latino students, there are still sizable gaps that exist for many groups.

“Addressing opportunity gaps between student groups is an ongoing priority, and we look forward to building upon recent success in narrowing those gaps,” Gill said. “This work includes providing guidance to districts on best practices to making schools a welcoming place for all students to get a relevant, well-rounded education.”

Other audit recommendations include developing initiatives and collecting data about middle schoolers, identifying strategies to better support economically disadvantaged students, and providing better support to districts on using data and continuous improvement plans. Some examples of



programs and policies either already in place or expected to be implemented soon consistent with the audit's recommendations are:

- The Oregon Framework for School Counseling, which provides intentional focus on advocacy and socially just outcomes by embodying the Oregon Equity Lens to ensure the creation of a data-informed, equity-based school counseling program that helps close achievement, opportunity and attainment gaps and access for all students.
- The High School Success Fund (Measure 98), which allows districts to spend up to 15 percent of their allocation on 8th grade, which can help keep middle school students engaged in school and ease the transition to high school.
- Guidance on the use of Early Indicator and Intervention Systems, which helps districts use data to identify students that need more supports before they get too far behind on their path to graduation.

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