

Oregon's On-Time High School Graduation Rate Shows Strong Growth in 2014-15

Oregon continues to make gains in its on-time high school graduation rate.¹ The rate increased to 74% for the 2014-15 school year—up from 72% the year before.

The graduation rate for almost all student groups rose, led by Hispanic students (2.4 percentage points) and Black students (2.4 percentage points). The rate for economically disadvantaged students also showed a substantial increase—rising by 2.2 percentage points—but the gap for those students, compared to their counterparts from more affluent families, is still substantial.²

Exhibit 1: Change in Graduation Rates By Student Group

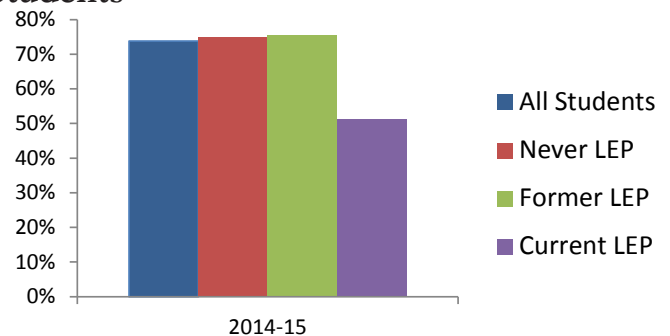
	2013-14	2014-15	Change
All Students	72.0%	73.8%	1.8%
Males	68.0%	70.1%	2.1%
Females	76.2%	77.8%	1.5%
American Indian/Alaska Native	53.5%	55.0%	1.4%
Asian	85.9%	87.5%	1.6%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	68.8%	63.2%	-5.6%
Black	60.2%	62.6%	2.4%
Hispanic	64.9%	67.4%	2.4%
White	74.2%	76.0%	1.8%
Multi-Ethnic	69.8%	72.7%	2.9%
Economically Disadvantaged	64.2%	66.4%	2.2%
Not Economically Disadvantaged	81.4%	83.3%	1.9%
Current Limited English Proficient	51.7%	51.2%	-0.5%
Former Limited English Proficient	74.9%	75.3%	0.5%
Never Limited English Proficient	73.1%	75.0%	1.8%
Students with Disabilities	51.1%	52.7%	1.6%
Students without Disabilities	75.3%	77.3%	2.0%
Talented and Gifted	92.4%	93.2%	0.9%
Not Talented and Gifted	69.8%	71.8%	2.0%

¹ On-time graduation is defined as students who graduate within four years of entering high school.

² Economically disadvantaged students are those who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches under the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National School Lunch Program.

Only two student groups saw a decline in on-time graduation rates this year: Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students and those English Language Learners who had not achieved English proficiency by the time they entered high school (current Limited English Proficient (LEP) students). Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders constitute a very small group of students and its graduation rate has had quite a bit of variation over the years. The rate for current LEP students fell by 0.5 percentage points, from 51.7% to 51.2%. The number of students in this group, however, has been falling rapidly, declining 16% from last year and by 55% since 2008-09. Former Limited English Proficient students—those who achieved English proficiency prior to entering high school—graduate at much higher rates (75.3% in 2014-15); higher than the rate for all students and higher even than the rate for students whose first language is English.

Exhibit 2: LEP Students Compared to All Students

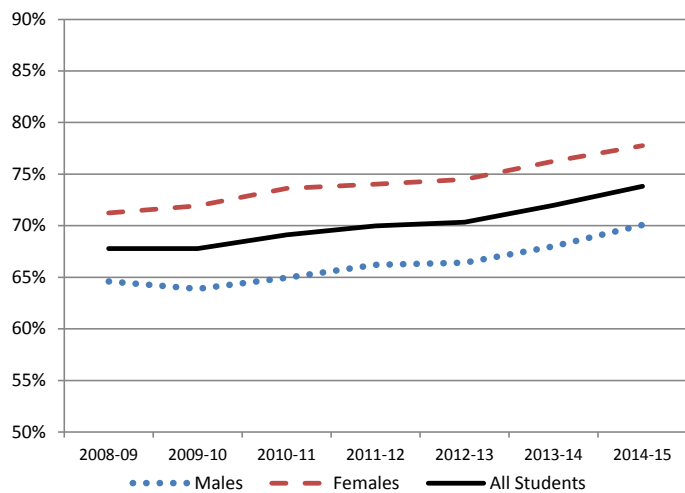


Significant Growth But Gaps Remain

Exhibit 3 on the next page shows the trends in graduation rates for all students and by gender since the cohort graduation rates were first calculated in 2008-09.³ The overall rate increased by over six percentage points over the 7-year period, with gains made in every year. While the rates for both male and female students showed steady growth, the gender gap has remained essentially unchanged.

³ Starting in 2013-14, in addition to students receiving regular diplomas, the rate includes students receiving modified diplomas and students who earned their diplomas but had not yet received them because they were returning for a 5th year of high school to earn college credits. To create greater comparability, we have adjusted the data prior to 13-14 to include modified diplomas, but we do not have data for 5th-year students prior to 13-14 to make that adjustment.

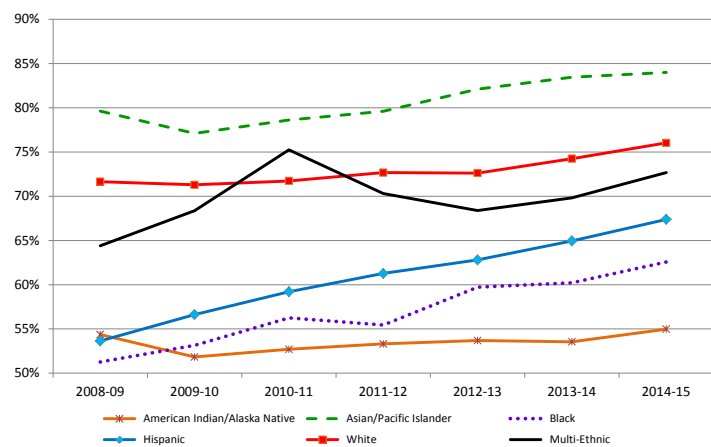
Exhibit 3: Trends in Graduation Rates - All Students and by Gender



Other analysis by the Department of Education has shown that males, even when they perform as well on state tests of math and reading as females, still graduate at a significantly lower rate.⁴ This suggests factors other than academics present larger barriers to graduation for males than for females.

While nearly all student groups experienced growth in their graduation rate, significant gaps remain. Exhibit 4 highlights gaps among racial and ethnic groups. American Indian/Alaska Native students trail their peers in both their actual graduation rate and in growth. Rates for Black and Hispanic students have shown the greatest sustained growth, but they also still trail their peers. Asian and White students have the highest rates relative to other racial and ethnic groups.

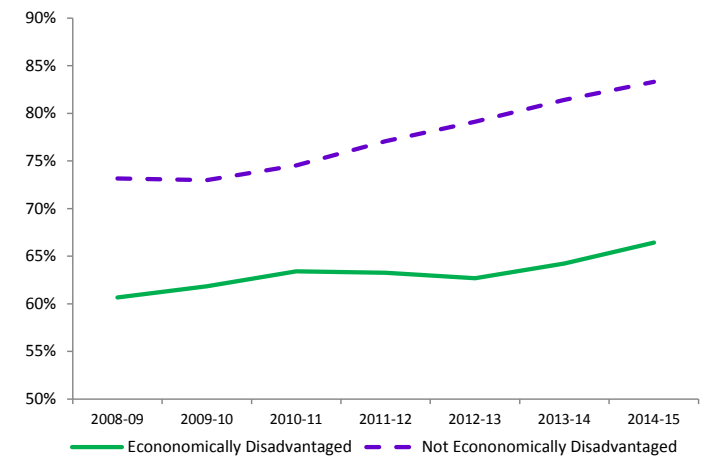
Exhibit 4: Trends in Graduation Rates by Race and Ethnicity



The number of students in the multi-racial group has grown very rapidly with recent changes in the federal ethnicity reporting rules, and the graduation rate for that group has been somewhat variable.

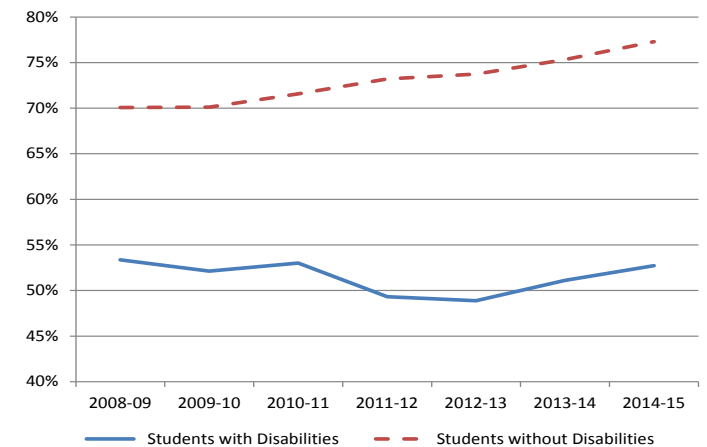
Gaps among other student groups remain as well. Exhibit 5 shows graduation rates by economic status. Although the rates have been increasing for both groups, the gap for economically disadvantaged students is particularly concerning because the share of students in this category is increasing and the gap is very large—nearly seventeen percentage points in 2014-15—and has increased over time.

Exhibit 5: Trends in Graduation Rates by Economic Status



Students with disabilities face unique challenges in completing high school relative to their classmates. Exhibit 6 shows they graduate on time at rates considerably lower than students without disabilities.

Exhibit 6: Trends in Graduation Rates by Disability Status



⁴ [Quality Education Model Final Report, August 2014, pp. 45-50.](#)

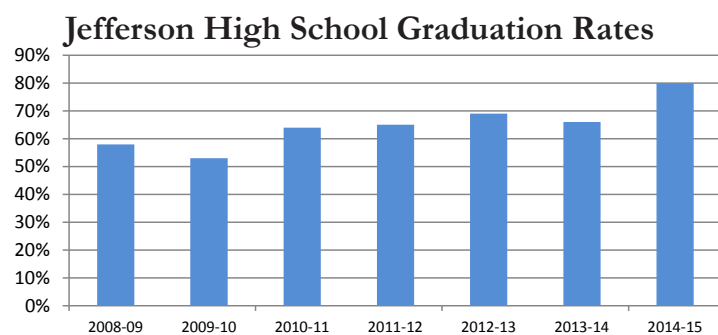
Examples of Success from the Field

ODE staff spoke with principals from seven Oregon high schools that have significantly improved their graduation rates or reduced the graduation gap between student groups: Jefferson High School in Portland, Newport High School, North Medford High School, David Douglas High School in east Portland, Neah-Kah-Nie High School in Rockaway Beach, Rainier Jr/Sr High School, and Gervais High School. We also spoke with Superintendent Charles Ransom about the success of the high schools in the Woodburn School District. Each school has a unique story to tell about how it has created its success, but some common threads emerge:

- A shared vision among students and staff that all students can succeed
- Close connections between staff and students that create a positive school climate
- A focus on college and career goals that emphasizes high school success as a path to later success
- Partnerships with community colleges/universities and community organizations
- Individualized attention and early intervention for students falling behind

Jefferson High School—Portland Public Schools

Jefferson High School increased its on-time graduation rate from 66% in 2013-14 to 80% in 2014-15, with increases for almost every student group. Principal Margaret Calvert attributes their success to her staff's ownership for student success, a focus on college-level coursework for all students, and close partnerships with Portland Community College, Portland State University, and Self Enhancement, Inc., a Portland non-profit supporting historically underserved youth.

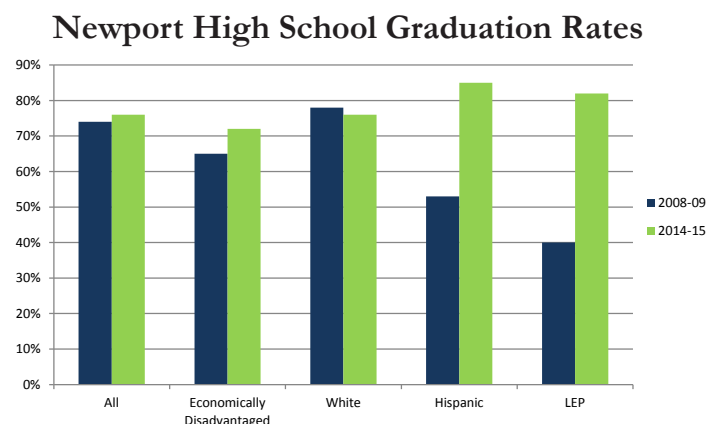


In 2011-12, Jefferson adopted a “Middle College” approach that promotes a college-going focus for all students. The school scaled up its partnership with Portland Community College, going from 10% to 100% of students participating. According to Principal Calvert, Jefferson has reached a “tipping point” where a shared commitment to success and an ethic of excellence and hard work have taken over the school. The partnership with Portland Community College has helped students navigate the higher education environment more effectively once they enter college. The class of 2014-15 is the first to spend all four years of high school under the new program.

Newport High School—Lincoln County SD

Newport High School has almost entirely eliminated the graduation rate gap among its student groups. In 2008-09, Hispanic students had a graduation rate of 53%, 25 percentage points lower than for White students. Economically disadvantaged students had a rate of 65%, and Limited English Proficient students, 40%. By 2014-15, these gaps are gone, with Hispanic and LEP students outperforming their White peers.

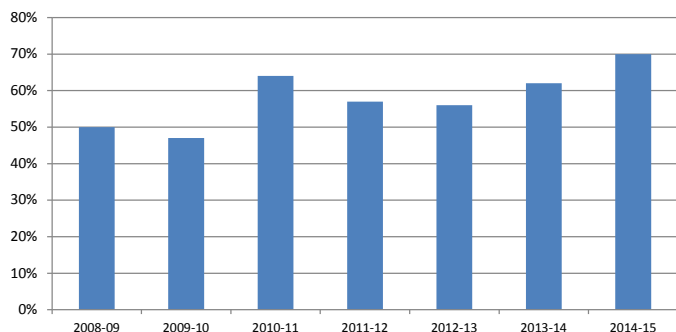
Newport Principal Jon Zagel attributes Newport's success to a culture that engages all students and promotes three values the school calls “The Cub Way”: a Growth Mindset, a focus on Achievement, and an emphasis on Character. School staff is committed to students both inside and outside of school, and the school intervenes early when students are struggling. As Hispanic students increased from 8% of the student cohort in 2008-09 to 24% in 2014-15, there were struggles helping all students integrate into the school culture, according to Principal Zagel. That changed over the past few years, and the result is dramatically higher graduation rates for Hispanic and Limited English Proficient students.



North Medford High School—Medford SD

North Medford raised the graduation rate for its Limited English Proficient students by 8 percentage points from 2013-14 and by 20 percentage points since 2008-09. Perhaps more importantly, a growing share of English Learners (EL) are becoming proficient in English prior to entering high school and those students are graduating at even higher rates: 97% in 2014-15. That success may be the result of North Medford working closely with its primary feeder school—Hedrick Middle School—to better prepare students for the transition to high school.

North Medford High School Graduation Rates



North Medford connects with Hispanic students and promotes a college-going culture in multiple ways: Heritage Spanish classes where Spanish-speaking students can earn college credit, parent outreach for the families of EL students, parent nights where parents play an integral role in planning the meetings, and field trips to nearby community colleges and universities to introduce students to college culture. Many of these activities are led by Cesar Flores, a graduate of nearby Phoenix High, who now works at North Medford and was the first in his family to graduate from college.

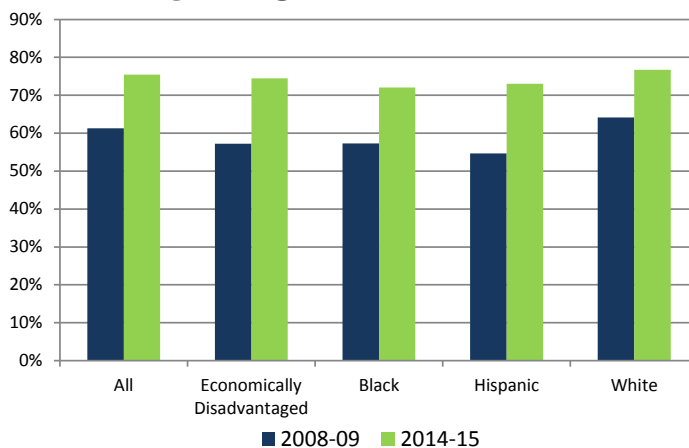
David Douglas High School—David Douglas SD

Six years ago, staff at David Douglas set an ambitious goal: increase graduation rates 2% a year. By 2025, staff are striving for a 100% graduation rate. The total student graduation rate has increased from 61% in 2008-09 to 75% in 2014-15, a 14 percentage point gain that puts the school well on its way to achieving its goal. Nearly all student groups made progress during this period, including African American students who increased their rate from 57% to 72% and Hispanic students who increased their rate from 55% to 73%.

Principal John Bier attributes the increase in graduation rates to a multi-faceted approach rooted in two central values:

- Staff who go above and beyond in developing relationships with students.
- High academic and behavioral standards for all students.

David Douglas High School Graduation Rates



Bier characterizes his staff as being an innovative group of people who aren't afraid of taking risks. He specifically highlighted the efforts for Etema Banks, the African American Student Liaison, who has made a huge difference by connecting with Black students and promoting a college-going culture.

From a full-day tutoring center, to an after-school activity bus, to focusing on attendance, David Douglas is working on increasing graduation rates from multiple angles. Each effort has the potential to make a student's experience more individualized. To Bier, the more individualized the student experience can be, the better.

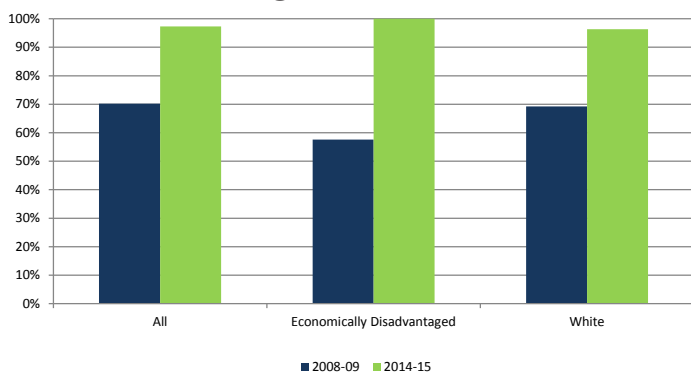
Neah-Kah-Nie High School—Neah-Kah-Nie SD

Neah-Kah-Nie's graduation rate has increased from 70% in 2008-09 to 97% in 2014-15. For economically disadvantaged students, the gain is even greater. The graduation rate for students in this category rose from 58% to 100% over the same time period.

Principal Heidi Buckmaster attributes the improvement to continuing efforts by the entire staff at Neah-Kah-Nie. She said the goal is always 100% graduation. A major piece of accomplishing this goal is the close relationships her staff have with each student. Given the small size of the school, staff are able to get to know students on a personal level. Not only do they know where students are academically, but they know things like where their students want to go to college.

Buckmaster also attributes the school's success to high academic standards and a college-going culture. Students are required to earn 28 credits to graduate, 4 more than the typical requirement for an Oregon high school. Students are supported academically in a variety of ways, including through their advisory class, a class led by the same teacher throughout each student's high school career. The class provides academic support and is also a place where teachers start the college planning process with students.

Neah-Kah-Nie High School Graduation Rates



Neah-Kah-Nie has many initiatives in place to help students succeed. Buckmaster says a large part of the success is the staff's ability to align those efforts and provide a nurturing environment for students to help them succeed.

Rainier Jr/Sr High School— Rainier SD

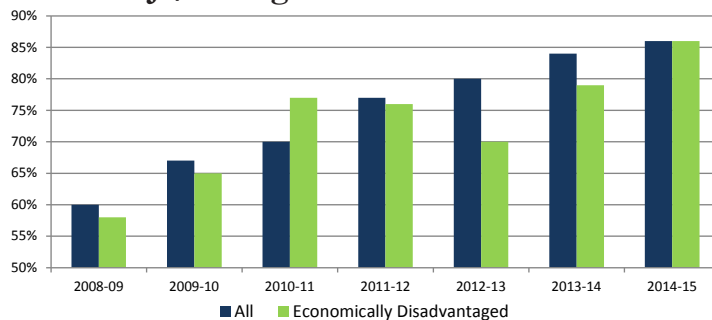
Rainier has experienced a big decline in enrollment as the community was hit hard by the economic recession. The 12th grade cohort fell from 133 students in 2008-09 to 57 in 2014-15. Over that period, despite cuts in funding due to the enrollment plunge, Rainier increased its graduation rate from 60% to 86%, and its rate for economically disadvantaged students from 58% to 86%.

Rainier co-principals Melissa Sandven and Graden Blue attribute much of Rainier's success to dedicated staff who push students to look beyond high school to what comes next. Staff, and posters in every classroom, regularly ask students "Where are you going to college?" Each student has a four-year education plan to guide them, and as the high school program becomes more integrated with the middle school program, those plans will become six-year plans.

The small size of the school allows closer attention to individual student needs and more effective interventions and one-on-one time. Regular professional development and time carved out for teacher collaboration are keys to meeting individual student needs.

According to Sandven and Blue, the school board and district administration have given the school the freedom to try new ideas and enough time to let those ideas fully develop. They recently have implemented a proficiency-based teaching and grading system, a change proposed by teachers and adopted by a group decision. The school has also developed a set of common expectations for all students and a set of common instructional strategies that create a consistency across classrooms that has improved student learning.

Rainier Jr/Sr High School Graduation Rates



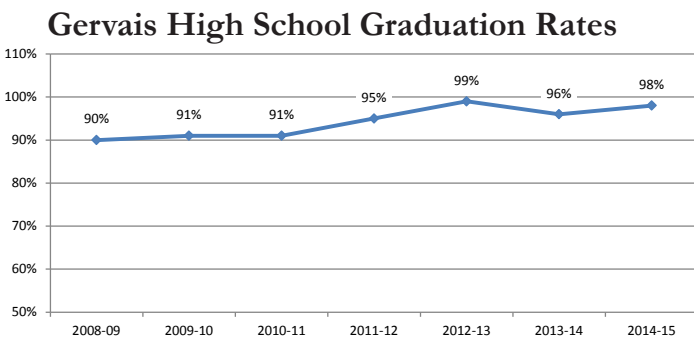
Gervais High School— Gervais SD

Gervais' graduation rate has remained at 90% or higher since 2008-09 and topped 97% for the 2014-15 school year. The school's economically disadvantaged, Hispanic, and English Learner (EL) student groups show similarly high graduation rates.

Principal Mike Solem talks with pride about the culture at Gervais. He and his staff take extra effort to not only make sure students feel safe and comfortable, but to celebrate student successes often. For example, the school holds monthly assemblies that highlight student excellence. Staff are also able to form close relationships with students and families given the small size of the school. Solem remarked, "At Gervais, you are not a number, you are a name."

He and his staff focus on three areas to keep students on track: attendance, behavior, and academics. In 2013, the school was honored as a MetLife Foundation-NASSP

Breakthrough School for its progress in academic achievement. He credits this growth in achievement in part to his staff who try to maximize the achievement of every student.



Solem and his staff try to show students their value every day. They believe this attitude has created a culture where students succeed.

Woodburn School District

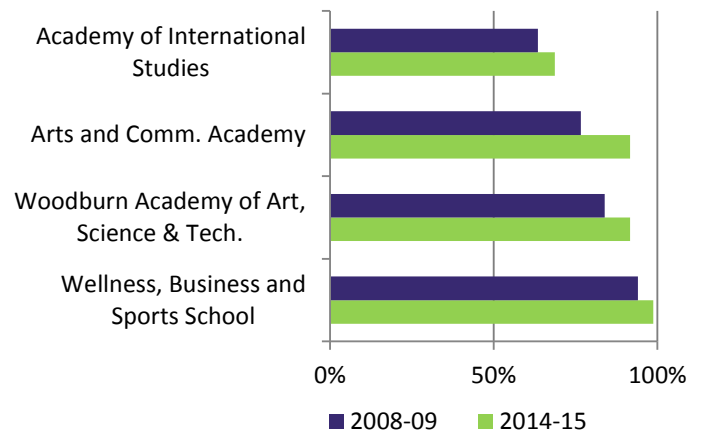
The Woodburn School District’s graduation rate for all students grew from 59% in 2008-09 to 84.5% in 2014-15. In particular, the district has seen strong growth in graduation rates since 2012-13 for its regular high schools.

Woodburn’s regular high school started reorganizing in the early 2000s via Oregon’s Small Schools Initiative. Operationally, this transformation meant the school went from one large high school to four small, autonomous high schools functioning from one campus. This transformation helped Woodburn provide a more personalized learning experience for each of its students. For example, instead of having a large math department, each school has a staff of two or three math teachers. These teachers may have students multiple times during their high school careers. The principals for each school know all their students by name. This helps staff and students develop stronger relationships, which leads to better academic outcomes. Woodburn School Superintendent Chuck Ransom calls it “high school on a human scale.”

While the small schools model is working for Woodburn, Ransom notes that the school district’s success is the result of making high school a more individualized experience for each student. Ransom also credits the recent rise in graduation rates to the school district’s

efforts to value diversity. In the early 2000s, Woodburn changed its curriculum to include a district-wide dual language program. Those students who started the program in elementary school started graduating in the past few years. Ransom believes this shift helped to improve academic achievement at Woodburn and also created a sense of respect and connection with the larger community, which has a high percentage of Hispanics, Russians, and Ukrainians.

Woodburn High Schools Graduation Rates



Ransom says that raising graduation rates requires a long-term investment and complex set of strategies based on best practices and solid research. It also requires continuity of school board members and the belief by staff and community that all children can learn. If we’re asking students to make changes, then the adults need to make changes as well, Ransom says.

Looking forward

The seven schools and one district highlighted in this brief represent a handful of the schools that are making improvements in their graduation rates across the state. These schools are finding ways to make the high school experience more individualized, personal, and engaging. Making sure students feel connected and valued establishes a foundation for their future success. Providing engaging and relevant curriculum helps students connect their high school classes to their future dreams. These schools set high academic expectations and then look for ways to change the system to help students succeed. There is much that we can learn from these and other examples of success across our state as we all work together to reach our state’s graduation goals.