



OREGON
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Oregon achieves . . . together!

Graduation in Oregon: Critical Elements Leading to Positive Outcomes

OVERVIEW

This report provides schools, policymakers, and community leaders with actionable information for improving graduation outcomes in Oregon. The report shares background information about Oregon's graduation current four-year cohort rates and explores eight critical elements leading to improved graduation outcomes.

OUR VISION FOR GRADUATION

Success cannot be achieved by schools alone. Successfully supporting all students to graduate depends upon strong partnerships between educators, parents, businesses, community organizations, social service providers and communities-at-large. Graduation is the launching pad not the finish line for students entering our community. Currently, thousands of Oregon's youth are not being successfully supported in reaching this graduation launch pad.

Oregon's State Plan under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) includes the 40-40-20 goal; a statewide aspiration to markedly improve individual

and statewide prosperity in Oregon. The goal calls for 100 percent of Oregon students to earn a high school diploma or equivalent by the year 2025, 40 percent of Oregonians to receive a bachelor's degree; and 40 percent of Oregonians to receive an associate degree or certificate. Through creating equitable access to a high-quality education and a seamless path to future opportunities, more Oregon students will prosper, ultimately benefitting us all. Individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to be healthy, to earn higher wages, have rewarding careers and make positive contributions to their community. This work is about building the kind of seamless system – from birth through career – that ensures each and every one of our students has the opportunities to be successful.

HOW MANY OF OREGON'S STUDENTS GRADUATE IN 4 YEARS?

In 2015-16 74.8 percent of students in Oregon graduated in four years. The rate was even lower for some segments of Oregon students such as American Indian/Alaska Native (56.4 percent), Black/African American (66.1 percent), Economically Disadvantaged

(68.1 percent), English Learners (52.9 percent) Hispanic/Latino (69.4 percent), and Students with Disabilities (55.5 percent). While the graduation rate did increase a percentage point over the previous year, it still amounts to 12,000 high school students failing to reach even the lowest rung of the 40-40-20 goal. Those who did graduate still faced challenges. A [2015 study by Education Northwest](#) found that 75 percent of Oregon graduates going on to community college required some sort of remediation.

THE IMPERATIVE TO IMPROVE

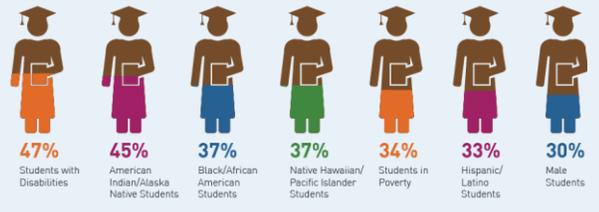
Oregon’s four-year graduation rate falls below the national average. For some groups of students, our American Indian /Alaskan Native, our students of color, students with disabilities, those living in poverty and male students our education system is failing to help them reach this important milestone.

IMPROVING GRADUATION IN OREGON

Why Graduation is Urgent

Approximately 12,000 Oregon students per year do not graduate on-time. Oregon gains from each student who earns at least a high school diploma or its equivalent in increased tax revenue and reduces costs due to crime, poor health, and other social supports.

Students Who Did Not Graduate On Time in 2014-2015



In December 2015, Deputy Superintendent Salam Noor convened a Graduation Advisory Committee of education leaders including Education Service Districts (ESD), school district superintendents, Oregon Early Learning Hubs, faculty and administrators at institutions of higher education, business and industry partners, community organizations and service providers. The Committee was charged with identifying strategies and collecting classroom examples of successful educational practices from birth to high school and beyond. The 48 members of the Committee provided expert judgments on how Oregon partners could use evidence-based practices to improve outcomes for students under current funding

This report is the outcome of the Committee’s work and serves as a guide that provides an overview of eight critical elements leading to positive graduation outcomes and examples of strategies implemented in Oregon with demonstrated success. The examples included here show only a few of the innovative practices in Oregon schools, chosen at the Committee’s recommendation and validated by national evidence of their effectiveness. We expect to continue this work; to collect and share creative strategies that are raising graduation rates in Oregon.

THE EIGHT CRITICAL ELEMENTS

This report will provide examples of eight critical elements, or promising practices, and how they are implemented in Oregon. All the critical elements support an indicator associated with high graduation rates. The common indicators are: reading at grade level by 3rd grade, 9th grade freshman on track, zero or few disciplinary issues at school, not chronically absent, and engaged with the school (as defined by students having a sense of belonging in school and seeing the relevance of school for their future).

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This document is meant as a conversation starter to build, expand and improve existing programs in schools. It is not intended to describe how graduation rates are calculated or address funding issues. Instead it is intended to feature the practices that are working in Oregon, and across the country, as a scaffold of ideas for local communities and schools to discuss, plan and implement so that all Oregon students reach the launching pad of a high school diploma.

Common Themes to Improving Graduation

Across all of the research and recommended strategies several clear themes rose to the top, *relationships, partnerships, and equity*. At the core of the issue of graduation are the relationships that we foster and nurture. Students need to feel that they matter, that somebody cares about them as an individual and will advocate for their needs. They need to know that we expect the most of them and will support them in achieving their goals. Students need to feel heard and that their story, their strengths and their interests are integrated into their educational experience. Schools and teachers need to have strong relationships not only with the students, but with the students’ families and the communities surrounding them.

Oregon is committed to address the disparities experienced by American Indian/Alaskan Native Students, African American and Black Students, English Learners, Students with Disabilities, and Opportunity Youth. To that end the Department of Education has been working with stakeholder groups to develop success plans. These success plans all include many or all of the critical elements identified here. Oregon will focus on these young people as a key to improving our education system for all.

To learn more visit:

[African American/Black Student Success Plan](#)
[English Learner Strategic Plan](#)
[Opportunity Youth](#)
[Oregon American Indian/Alaska Native Education State Plan](#)
[Students with Disabilities Transition Guide](#)

To build school systems that respond to and embrace the cultural diversity of our students and prepare them for the future needs of our communities, schools need to bridge the gap between our communities, businesses, and culturally specific organizations. Partnerships focused on dialogue and finding solutions to ensure that each and every student has their basic needs met so that they are ready and able to engage in learning and explore their interests and skills.

Historical disparities in the educational outcomes for students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds continue today. Oregon will not significantly improve graduation rates without looking at those students who are not succeeding within the existing school structures. All of the critical elements and education strategies presented here should be adopted within the context of the equity lens. Our systems need to be designed to meet the needs of each and every student and all students have a right to be safe and have their voices heard in their school. A successful education system requires building connections between the learning happening in school and a student's identity as a cultural, emotional, social and intellectual being who brings a diverse set of cultural experiences, personal beliefs and individual goals.

Oregonians want to see the social and economic benefits of improved education in our communities.

Schools can't do this work on their own. It is imperative that communities come together in partnership to support the common goals of student well-being, safety, health and education. There is a need for partnerships with community organizations, businesses, chambers of commerce, local governments, coordinated care organizations and others to ensure that students have opportunities to learn and participate in the community. Partnerships help students and families receive the support and resources they need to be ready to participate in school and learn. Oregon is strengthened by inclusion of the voices and talents of our diverse community. Oregon achieves graduation...together.

As you explore the eight critical elements leading to positive graduation outcomes and the educational strategies identified within each element, remember the themes of relationships, equity and partnerships. If these strategies aren't implemented in collaboration with educators, families, students and community members, they won't have momentum. If they aren't implemented with the true belief that each and every student has the potential to excel and be successful, they won't be authentic. And if they aren't implemented with the knowledge of whose voices are missing or who may not have the opportunity to participate fully in the educational experience, they won't move the dial on improving graduation. We hope that through these resources and stories your community will see opportunities for growth and change. If you have successful practices that are making a difference in your community, we want to hear about your work and share your story. Please send us your success stories [at this survey site](#).

EIGHT CRITICAL ELEMENTS LEADING TO POSITIVE GRADUATION OUTCOMES

EIGHT CRITICAL ELEMENTS:

Leadership:

Success and transformational change happen with strong leadership. Leadership focused on student success as individuals is necessary from all levels, district, school, community, and students.

Student Indicators for Graduation

Some common indicators correlated with 4-year graduation rate are: reading at grade level by 3rd grade, not chronically absent, few or no disciplinary issues, on track to graduate in 9th grade, and engagement with the school.

Strategies:

1. Distributive Leadership
2. Professional Learning Communities for School Leaders
3. Administrator Mentoring Programs

Start Strong:

Early foundations for learning are essential. Strong partnerships and integration of early learning with K-12 provide some of the largest returns on investment.

Strategies:

1. Pre K- 3rd Grade Alignment
2. Professional Early Learning Community Partnerships and Early Learning Hubs

Whole Child Approach:

This whole child approach to education focuses on preparing students for the challenges of today and tomorrow by addressing the students' comprehensive needs through partnerships.

Strategies:

1. Trauma Informed Practices
2. Child Nutrition Programs: alternative breakfast
3. Mentor programs
4. Physical Education
5. Mentor programs
6. School based health
7. Social / Emotional Learning integrated into curriculum

Inclusive School Culture:

Building practice and system that include all students rather than push them out of the education system lead to a reduction in the opportunity and achievement gaps.

Strategies:

1. Restorative practices
2. Active parent engagement and partnerships with communities.
3. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Quality Data Systems:

These longitudinal early indicator and intervention systems are paired with a culture of using data and can help foster relationships and supports for students in need.

Strategies:

1. Multi-tiered System of Support
2. Addressing chronic absenteeism
3. Early Warning Systems
4. Partnerships with community resources such as: mental and physical health providers, human services, tribes and culturally specific community organizations
5. Academic support: tutors / mentors

P-20 Seamless Education System:

Student supports during the transition between school buildings and teachers offers continuity.

Strategies:

1. Summer bridge programs and camps
2. Effective use of School Counselors
3. Intentional focus on transitions between buildings and coordination of supports
4. Reengagement centers
5. Ongoing vertical curriculum alignment across all grade levels

Clear Education Pathways:

Relevant and challenging educational opportunities that help students achieve their goals promote engagement and 21st Century skills.

Strategies:

1. Career technical education

2. Accelerated Learning (AP, IB, Expanded Options, Dual Credit, Sponsored Dual Credit and Assessment Based Learning Programs)
3. Student Education Plan and Profile
4. Career pathways and career guidance
5. Creative course offerings and flexible credit options

Effective Instructional Practices:

The core of education happens in the classroom with the interaction and relationship between students and teachers. The purpose of effective instruction is to promote meaningful learning that engages students toward academic success.

Graduation Success in Oregon’s Small Towns

Graduation rates in small towns exceed the state average by 5 percentage points at 80% graduation. Some common themes for successful small town schools include: student engagement in school and community events, college and career ready focus of the schools, and strong relationships between staff and students. See the [ODE Brief](#) for more information.

Strategies:

1. Culturally responsive teaching practices
2. Effective use of formative assessments to promote student growth
3. Personalized learning for each child and student centered instruction
4. Offering relevant, engaging and challenging learning opportunities aligned to students’ goals
5. Integrating growth mindsets and social emotional skill development for students and teachers

LEADERSHIP

Change in outcomes for students will only happen when there is strong visionary leadership focused on this work. Instruction, staff development, behavioral and socio-emotional supports, attendance, counseling, facilities, master schedule and parent and community outreach are some of the systems at the forefront of school leaders’ minds as they enact a cohesive district

or school improvement plan. With so much at stake in each school, it is important for leaders to involve all staff, students and community members in creating a strong positive culture so that energy can be concentrated on areas in need of improvement. Relationships based on trust promote a positive student, staff and parent culture which research shows leads to student success.

In her book *Trust Matters* (2004), Megan Tschannen-Moran describes five key facets of trust that are key to developing a strong and positive culture: benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability and competency. By working collaboratively and building trust in the organization, all members of a school or district community can feel empowered towards united building a strong foundation focusing on school improvement and student success.

Leaders also need opportunities to grow and develop their skills. Having strong mentoring programs and networking opportunities for leaders is essential to building capacity across the state. Oregon has many amazing leaders at the regional, district and school administration level, teaching level, community level and student level. Building opportunities for these leaders to collaborate with other passionate individuals dedicated to this work will produce the structures to continuously improve Oregon’s education system.

Strategies:

1. Distributive Leadership
2. Professional Learning Communities for School Leaders
3. Administrator Mentoring Programs

START STRONG

Research shows that when children have access to high quality, developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive learning experiences between the ages of 0-5, they are far more likely to be successful in school. Some of the outcomes associated with high-quality early learning experiences, such as increased attendance in the early grades—which is predictive of attendance patterns in later years—and improved 3rd grade reading scores, appear fairly early on. The impact of a strong start has been shown to be sustainable over time and have a positive impact on a range of longer-term outcomes, spanning education, health and employment. Simply put, it is difficult to

overstate the importance of the role that high quality early learning plays in supporting all students to graduate from high school.

In Oregon, efforts to transform and strengthen the state's early learning system have been underway since 2013. 16 regional early learning hubs foster collaboration between early learning providers, K-12, health and human services, community-based organizations, tribes and the business sector to ensure that all children, particularly those furthest from opportunity, are ready to succeed in school when they start kindergarten. Spark, Oregon's quality rating and improvement system, helps families find high-quality child care programs in their communities and supports child care providers to continually improve their practice. Through programs such as Head Start/Oregon PreK, **VROOM**, and Preschool Promise, children experiencing poverty are able to access high-quality, developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive Pre-K programs in a wide range of settings. The Early Learning/Kindergarten Readiness Partnership & Innovation program, along with other efforts underway designed to connect early learning and K-12 education, supports communities throughout Oregon to help children make seamless transitions into kindergarten. These, along with a host of other initiatives, are working to ensure that all children in Oregon start strong.

Strategies:

1. Pre K- 3rd Grade Alignment
2. Professional Early Learning Community Partnerships and Early Learning Hubs

WHOLE CHILD APPROACH

Health and education are symbiotic: what affects one affects the other. The healthy child learns better, just as the educated child leads a healthier life. Similarly, a healthier environment - physical and social-emotional - provides for more effective teaching and learning. Whole Child Education is a shift in focus from narrowly defined academic achievement to a focus on the long-term development and success of all children. A Whole Child Approach to education focuses on understanding and addressing the needs of students and staff as people so that we can all learn and teach at an optimal level.

What allows students and staff to be successful? Some of the tenets of the Whole Child Approach to education are that each student:

- Enters school **healthy** and learns and practices a healthy lifestyle
- Learns in a physically and emotionally **safe** environment
- Is **challenged** academically
- Is **engaged** and **connected** to the school and broader community
- Is **supported** by caring adults

Historically, the narrow focus on academic success and accountability systems overshadows the ability of schools to focus on areas such as physical education and activity, nutrition, health education, mental health resources and community partnerships. These components of schools are equally important in providing a well-rounded education that helps address and prepare our students for lifelong health and academic achievement. The whole child approach leverages systems to support these often unmeasured, pivotal aspects of school.

There has been extensive research on the impacts of traumatic experiences on children and adults. Adverse Childhood experiences (ACEs) like prolonged exposure to traumatic events are associated with greater risk of absenteeism, lower school engagement and increased behavior problems in school. A Whole Child Approach to education calls for a trauma-informed approach that creates a psychologically and physically safe environment where staff recognizes the signs of trauma and responds with proper practices and procedures. Part of the approach is helping students become more aware of their social and emotional responses and giving them tools to help self-regulate. Connecting children with caring adults and mentors also helps foster a sense of belonging and helps keep youth engaged in education. Focusing on physical, mental, and social aspects of learning makes the Whole Child Approach a key element of improving graduation.

Strategies:

1. Trauma Informed Practices
2. Child Nutrition Programs: alternative breakfast

3. Mentor programs
4. Physical Education
5. School based health
6. Social / Emotional Learning integrated into curriculum

INCLUSIVE SCHOOL CULTURE

At the core of inclusive schools is the belief that each student can and will learn and succeed; that diversity of language, culture, religion, sexual identification and preference, socioeconomic status and [neurodiversity](#) enrich us all. A belief and acknowledgement that each student has strengths and needs - and that collaboratively, school communities can succeed - is a necessary foundation for an inclusive school culture. The inclusive school environment requires a thoughtful and informed look at disciplinary practices within schools and an understanding of potential bias. Exclusionary practices related to discipline, such as suspension and expulsion, result in increased feelings of anger, resentment, distrust and isolation. Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), a systems-level approach to building a positive school culture and restorative practices have shown results in increasing positive social behaviors, decreasing suspensions and expulsions, and improving the academic achievement and work habits of students (Kelm, 2014). The International Institute for Restorative Practices states that the premise of restorative practice "...is that people are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes when those in positions of authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them." Restorative Practices aim to repair harm through dialogue and relationship-building. Educators and communities have recently sought to use this approach as an alternative to punitive or exclusionary disciplinary consequences that are linked to chronic absenteeism and low graduation rates. Suspension and expulsion when used as the primary tool for behavior management can create inequitable outcomes, especially for students of color, LGBTQ students, those living in poverty and those who may be disengaged from school. Restorative Practice builds safe school climates, develops social problem-solving skills, creates community and reestablishes norms and relationships via an inclusive lens (RNW, 2016).

Many schools in Oregon are implementing PBIS and many are combining PBIS with Restorative Practices. Six Multnomah County schools have adopted a

Restorative Practices lens as a means of resolving conflict at their schools. Each has a Restorative Practices training model taught by a staff member dedicated solely to the purpose of youth accountability. Youth accountability not only provides social and emotional development skills, but reduces suspension and expulsion rates and can be the basis for creating an inclusive school culture and increasing engagement and success.

Strategies:

1. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
2. Restorative practices
3. Improve/Increase parent engagement and partnerships with communities-

QUALITY DATA SYSTEMS

Data systems enable administrators, teachers and counselors to see a coordinated picture of whether students are on track to graduate by presenting information such as attendance and behavior information along with end-of-course grades. In addition, these systems can be used to provide more frequent information to parents and students and facilitate their engagement with the student's education.

With a quality data system, schools can see quickly which student may be at-risk for not graduating. Teams of educators can then use this information as a starting place for planning how to support the student in getting back on track for graduation. This process may include following up with individual students and their families to learn more about the circumstances that are contributing to the low attendance, disruptive behavior or poor course grades in order to match the supports to the individual student circumstances. Examples of student supports include: academic supports, such as tutors and other forms of individualized interventions, and community supports, such as connecting students and families with **human services organizations, including mental and physical health providers.**

Looking at the school system data allows teams of educators to see what percentage of students are on track to graduate, what percentage are at some risk for not graduating and which are at severe risk for not graduating. By considering these different tiers of risk,

the teams can systematically plan to match the interventions available in the school to the students who need them. Such a data system also can provide a quick snapshot of how well the school system is functioning.

It is important to add that education is not a technical enterprise, like manufacturing, in which the data alone indicates what action should follow. Rather, data systems provide part of the picture and can contribute to planning so that educators are able to use their instructional time for the greatest impact. In the course of a class period, though, educators are constantly collecting information (data) about what students know--through student dialogue and student work--and are responding to this information with feedback and instruction that moves students forward in their learning. These minute-to-minute interactions are the art of teaching and it is not feasible to capture this information in a data system. With a skilled educator, the data would be obsolete as soon as it could be entered into the system because the student would already have built more skills and understanding.

Quality data systems can be used to engage each student and his or her support system as partners in ensuring the student graduates ready for college and career. This occurs by providing real time information about the student's attendance as well as showing whether the student has received disciplinary action for poor behavior and how the student is doing in his or her courses. For parents and guardians, access should be accompanied by resources that empower them to use this information as a part of a dialogue with the student and the school about the student's education. For students, access should be accompanied by resources that empower them to take ownership for their success and to advocate for their needs as they prepare for graduation.

Strategies:

1. Multi-tiered System of Support
2. Addressing chronic absenteeism
3. Early Warning Systems
4. Partnerships with community resources such as: mental and physical health providers, human services, tribes and culturally specific community organizations
5. Academic support: tutors / mentors

P-20 SEAMLESS EDUCATION SYSTEM

Creating a system of learning that begins at birth and includes successful transition experiences for students as they switch between learning environments and buildings is one of the most important systems we can build as a state. Successful transition experiences include nurturing relationships, high-quality learning programs and developmentally appropriate supports. These serve as the foundational building blocks for later educational and life outcomes. A successful educational continuum is created by family-school-community partnerships working together to support children's social, emotional, and academic development.

Oregon's 40-40-20 education goal (100% high school graduation, 40% achievement of a postsecondary certificate or 2-year degree, and 40% achievement of a 4 year degree or above) and Governor Kate Brown's vision for a seamless education system from birth through college require agencies and organizations from health services, K-12 education, early learning education and care providers to reach out to each other and identify opportunities to collaborate, align work and leverage resources.

In designing and supporting the Oregon Diploma, the Oregon State Board of Education remains committed to preparing each student for successful transitions to his or her next steps. When there is intentional focus on creating a seamless transition between learning environments students experience greater success. Schools that find ways to merge the educational experience at each level can help ease transitions, i.e. headstart programs located in elementary schools, middle school students taking courses at high school, and high school students taking college credit while in high school. School counselors play an important role preparing and supporting students through the stress that a change in environment and peer supports can have particularly for adolescents. However, the most successful programs approach transition support from a variety of stakeholders, students, teachers, families, and community organizations. **Structures that support** a student's sense of belonging in the new school and give them the social, academic and emotional supports will be the most effective.

Strategies:

1. Summer bridge programs and camps

2. Effective use of School Counselors
3. Intentional focus on transitions between buildings and coordination of supports
4. Reengagement centers
5. Ongoing vertical curriculum alignment across all grade levels

CLEAR EDUCATION PATHWAYS

Students are more engaged when they see the relevance of their time in school. Students need to have time to explore their strengths and interests and career opportunities. In Oregon, it is our goal that every student will graduate with a plan. Our diploma requires a student to build an education plan and profile each year starting in 7th grade with the support of an adult. This plan should highlight a student’s strengths, help the student set goals and outline a path they can take to meet those goals. Partnerships between K-12 institutions, colleges and business and industry can help clarify the education and career opportunities available for students and provide a relevance to student learning.

Clear Education Pathways help students and parents see the direction forward from K-12 to career. When schools, districts and states create articulated pathways, teachers and parents can more easily support their students knowing what pathways lay ahead. Students can choose high school classes aligned to their postsecondary goals. Graduates can leave high school with a plan they helped shape.

Labor force projections indicate most states will lack sufficient numbers of workers with postsecondary degrees, certificates, and high-quality credentials. Currently only six states have percentages of residents with knowledge and skill credentials over 50%. Yet soon all states will need approximately 65% of their working-age populations with these career indicators if they are to meet the expected demand for the trained/skilled workers needed in their state.

For traditionally underserved students (i.e. economic disadvantaged, African-American, Native American/Alaskan Native, and Hispanic), close friends and families in their social networks may have not pursued these credentials themselves so clear education pathways can help students plan their futures in the absence of career mentors. For students on an education/training pathway to career, there may be some economic protections for them as well.

In the Recession of 2008, the jobs lost were largely for low-skill workers. These jobs have not returned and they are not likely to do so. Instead new jobs surfaced and when they did, nearly all required some college education or training. In 2013, the Oregon poverty rate was 17%, up four percentage points over rates prior to 2008 (Tapogna, J and Rowe, M., 2013. A Path to Prosperity, ECONorthwest). Helping students and families understand the pathway from K-12 to career may be Oregon’s best insurance that all students have access to clear educational pathways and eventually to careers, regardless of their family backgrounds or social networks.

Strategies:

1. Career Technical Education
2. Accelerated Learning (AP, IB, Expanded Options, Dual Credit, Sponsored Dual Credit and Assessment Based Learning Programs)
3. Student Education Plan and Profile
4. Career pathways and career guidance
5. Creative course offerings and opportunities to earn credits

Effective Instructional Practices: The purpose of effective instruction is “to promote meaningful learning that raises student achievement” (Moss and Brookhart, 2012). To advance the learning of each individual student the instructional practices need to be personalized. The teacher and the students must be clear about the goal of the learning and what success in the learning would look like. Through this clarity about where the learning is heading, students can have an active role in the learning process, including both advancing their own learning and providing feedback to peers. Within this context, educators are continually collecting evidence of what students know through class discussions, written work, demonstrations, and other means, and they are providing constructive feedback to students. Based on what the educator learns from the evidence, s/he may choose from a variety of teaching strategies, including, for instance, modeling a practice and narrating the steps, explaining a new concept and involving students through discussion, or guiding students through a demonstration. Educators are also continually considering which grouping strategy will best enable them to advance the learning of the students in the class; at some points, bringing together the whole class to learn together may be the

best method while in other circumstances students working in small groups or individually may be more effective. For each student with each concept, there are three possible zones: the comfort zone (the student already knows the content so well it's boring), the panic zone (the student does not know the content and does not have enough support to know how to make progress with the content, so instead of learning the student experiences anxiety and confusion), and between these two zones lies the learning zone (where the student has enough grounding in the content and enough support to productively build his or her knowledge and skills).

The art of a highly skilled teaching is ensuring that minute-to-minute, day-to-day, students are in the learning zone, continually deepening their readiness for college and careers. Such personalized learning must occur in the context of appreciation for the diversity of cultures and perspectives within a class. The cultural heritage and identities of students may come into the learning in the classroom through the practices such as intentionally planning the texts and sources and providing student choice in how they represent their knowledge. Taken together, these practices all fit within the term formative assessment practices and there is a substantial research basis establishing the impact these practices have on student learning.

To dig deeper into the various possible strategies as well as to how effective each of these can be, in Visible Learning, Hattie (2009), explores research identified contributions that a teacher can make in the instructional delivery. Educators can also further student supports and achieve best results by working collaboratively; understanding assessment, using student data and work to examine instruction, develop action plans and assess progress as evidenced by data.

In Engaging Students: The next level of working on the work (Schlechty, 2011), Phillip Schlechty proposes a definition for engagement that predominantly focuses on intrinsic motivation. "We know that children are more engaged in schooling when they feel in control of their own learning, are actively participating in their learning process, are interested in the topic being studied, and are able to respond to the challenge before them" (Bryk et al., p. 104). Educational excellence includes challenging learning tasks for all students where students consistently experience deeper learning by using strategic and extended

thinking that requires reasoning, planning, investigation, and time to synthesize learning into new concepts (Hess, 2009). Educators achieve best results by working collaboratively, understanding assessment, using student data and work to examine instruction develop action plans and assess progress (Boudett et al, 2010). In closing, Viviane Robinson (2011) shares with us in *Student Centered Leadership*, how linking data to decision making is key to the intended outcomes.

Strategies:

1. Culturally responsive teaching practices
2. Effective use of formative assessments to promote student growth
3. Personalized learning for each child and student centered instruction
4. Offering relevant, engaging and challenging learning opportunities aligned to students' goals
5. Integrating growth mindsets and social emotional skill development for students and teachers