

2019-2020 Oregon Student Dental Screening Report

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Introduction

Dental problems are one of the most common types of chronic childhood diseases, affecting more than 60 percent of children, and causing an estimated 51 million lost school hours yearly, as estimated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [i]. This burden falls more heavily on lower-income families, who suffer from oral health problems 12 times as often as higher-income families. One study found that children with poor oral health were 2.3 times more likely to have poor academic performance [i]. On any given day, as many as 3,800 Oregon children in the first and third grades are suffering from dental pain or infection [ii]. In Oregon, one in six children (16.5%) have oral health problems [iii, v, vii, viii].

Schools play an increasingly important role in how children receive health information and services. School-based oral health programs improve access to oral health education, prevention, and treatment services for children [vi]. Since 2017, school districts have been required to report the number of students who submit a certificate that demonstrates completion of a dental screening.

Background and methodology

In order to better understand and promote the oral health of students in Oregon, ORS 336.213 (2017) requires school districts to collect and provide preventative dental care information.

According to ORS 336.213 (2017),

“each education provider shall require a student who is seven years of age or younger and who is beginning an educational program with the education provider for the first time to submit certification that the student received a dental screening within the previous 12 months”.

Beginning in the 2016-2017 school year, school districts are required to collect dental screening information on students who are seven years of age or younger and new to the district. Students are required to provide a certificate that demonstrates the completion of a dental screening within the last 12 months. Each year, school districts report the number of students who submit a certificate, do not submit a certificate, or opt out of dental screening altogether.

According to Oregon law, school districts are not required to provide dental screening services to students, only to collect these certificates. When school districts do conduct dental screenings, they often partner with community dental programs to provide these services. It is estimated that 19% of students receiving these dental screenings at school need follow-up care by a dentist (v).

From 2017-2019, data was collected from school districts via an electronic survey on the platform Smartsheets. This format was different from most other official ODE data collections that are distributed and completed on ODE’s School District Data Collection website. In the 2019-2020 school year, and for the first time, the method of collecting data was moved from the electronic Smartsheets survey to ODE’s District site. The data reported reflects dental screening information from the 2019-20 school year.

Results

Table 1 below provides information about the percentage of districts that submitted dental screening information. The districts who reported numbers in this survey enrolled 568,031 of all 582,661, or 97%, students in Oregon. 175 school districts (88%) reported data to ODE, which is a 30% increase from 115 school districts (58%) who submitted data in the 2018-2019 school year.

Table 1: District Submission

Number of Reporting Districts/Number of Districts in Oregon	Number of Students Enrolled in Reporting Districts/Number of Students Enrolled in Oregon
175/197= 89%	568,031/582,661= 97%

Table 2 below provides dental screening data collected during the 2019-2020 school year. The count of students required for whom the district is required to submit a dental screening certificate includes only students who are seven or younger and who are new to a district (such as transferring into the district or first enrolling in school). Only 54% of required students submitted dental screening certificates. This is down from 57% in 2018-19.

Table 2: Dental Screenings

Count of Students Required To Submit Dental Screening Certificate *	Number of Dental Screening Certificates Collected
48,093	26,095

**Age seven and under who are new to a district.*

Students who opt out of dental screening are required to provide a reason. Reasons provided on ODE’s template form for opting out include: the student submitted a screening certificate at a prior school, the screening poses a religious conflict to the student or family, or the student or family faces a resource burden in obtaining a screening. Table 3 below provides the reasons reported for the 4,811 opt outs. Results

demonstrate that for those students who report a reason for opting out, resource-related barriers were the most common.

Table 3: Students Opting Out of Dental Screening

Reasons for Opting Out of Dental Screening	Number of Students Who Opted Out of Dental Screening
Screening Completed the Previous Year	368
Religious reasons	105
Burden (financial or other)	1,620
Total Number of Students Who Opted Out of Dental Screening	4,811

School districts frequently provide dental screenings themselves to better support their students, improve their health, and reduce barriers in their education, although this is not required. Dental screening services are often provided in partnership with community dental providers. Of the 175 districts that submitted dental screening data, 148 districts (85%) reported that they provide dental screenings directly to their students. This is a 5% increase from the 2018-2019 school year.

Conclusion

In order to better understand and promote the oral health of students in Oregon, ORS 336.213 (2017) requires school districts to collect data on student screening certificates. Information collected from school districts demonstrates that many students in Oregon receive dental screening services in their schools-- 75% of all school districts in Oregon reported providing dental screening services during the 2019-2020 school year-- but many students still report facing resource-related barriers in obtaining screenings.

Dental problems negatively affect student academic performance, especially for students from lower-income households. A recent survey reported that dental problems were responsible for about 1/3 of elementary school absences (v). Schools have an opportunity to provide much needed health information and services and can serve as models for improving equitable access to oral health education, prevention, and treatment services for students and communities [vi].

References

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