

# Graduation Pathways 2021

*An overview of Oregon's graduation requirements and supporting resources*



*Graduation Pathways 2021* takes on renewed importance for graduating seniors as districts continue to lead through the COVID-19 pandemic. The class of 2021 has endured a year of cancellations and disruptions, and yet continues to demonstrate perseverance and resolve. Oregon's seniors deserve consistent connection, encouragement, opportunity and support, and this resource is intended to provide clarity and resources to help see that promise through. ODE and districts share a collective responsibility to light a path toward graduation and postsecondary opportunities for every senior.

With a strong commitment to high standards, quality learning and achievement, *Graduation Pathways 2021* maintains the statutory 24 credit and subject-area requirements. Thanks to the Class of 2020 and their teachers and families, Oregon's graduation rate last year was a record high of 82.6%, with significant gains for Black/African American students and Hispanic/Latino students. Our goal is for this trend to continue with the class of 2021. While graduation is an important milestone in a student's education journey, the transition from K-12 to life after high school is an equally important opportunity to support learners. Two-thirds of all jobs require post-high school training and education, and it is more important than ever that we prepare our students well. Providing personalized planning, academic guidance, supportive adults, and access to career exploration amplifies every senior's success.

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## Section 1: Centering Equity and Guiding Principles

Graduation policies are part of educational systems and institutions that have historically marginalized certain groups of students. As we examine the values of graduation requirements, we have an opportunity to provide guidance that interrupts policies that do harm to students. *Graduation Pathways 2021* is centered in the same principles that guide [Ready Schools, Safe Learners](#), rooted in ODE's equity stance:

*Education equity is the equitable implementation of policy, practices, procedures, and legislation that translates into resource allocation, education rigor, and opportunities for historically and currently marginalized youth, students, and families including civil rights protected classes. This means the restructuring and dismantling of systems and institutions that create the dichotomy of beneficiaries and the oppressed and marginalized.*

*Ready Schools, Safe Learners* outlines the following guiding principles that should inform district planning and support of students:

- **Ensure safety and wellness.** The decision to return to school settings must be driven by health and safety considerations. In planning, prioritize basic needs such as food, shelter, and wellness and support the mental, social, and emotional health of students and staff.
- **Cultivate connection and relationship.** Quality learning experiences require deep interpersonal relationships and a learning environment where people feel safe, seen, and valued. Especially in the midst of returning to school settings from an extended school closure, supporting students and families should begin with connection and relationship.
- **Center equity.** Recognize the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Latino/a/x, Pacific Islander communities; students experiencing disabilities; and students and families navigating poverty. Apply an equity-informed, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive lens to promote culturally sustaining and revitalizing educational systems that support every child.
- **Innovate.** The complex circumstances in which learning is currently situated requires ongoing reflection and iteration to assure deep learning for every student.

Additionally, the following guiding principles are included as key factors to ensure that all students are supported on their pathway to graduation:

- **Collective Action:** It is incumbent upon each of us as educators to acknowledge the predictable inequities in our system and be held accountable to collective action that actualizes our equity stance as it applies to graduation.

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- **Asset-Based:** We must prioritize recognizing the strengths, honoring the accomplishments, and meeting the needs of students who may be experiencing disproportional effects from the pandemic in order to support them to graduation and beyond.

## Section 2: Graduation Requirements for the Class of 2021

This guidance for *Graduation Pathways 2021* relates to current high school seniors, as defined by students who first enrolled in ninth grade in the 2017-18 school year or earlier (including 5th or 6th year seniors). This guidance does not apply to students who first enrolled in ninth grade in the 2018-19 school year or later, unless students have an early graduation plan in place that is in accordance with their local district policy.

### What's Essential For Graduation 2021

- Maintain current Oregon Diploma, Oregon Modified Diploma, and Oregon Extended Diploma subject-area and credit requirements (see Summary of 2021 Oregon Diploma Requirements, below).
- Ensure opportunities for seniors to earn credit for course work or learning they have engaged with since March 2020. See ODE's [Addressing Grades and Credit Options](#).
- Waive Oregon's Essential Skills Assessment and Personalized Learning Requirements (Suspended by State Board of Education [OAR 581-022-0104](#)).
- Communicate regularly with students and families so that every senior is supported in their pathway to graduation and postsecondary transitions.
- Provide opportunities for seniors to complete graduation requirements through August 31, 2021.
- Schools and districts have authority to establish local equitable grading policies and to implement flexible credit-earning options.

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## Summary of 2021 Oregon Diploma Requirements

Subject Area	2021 Regular Diploma Requirement	2021 Modified Diploma Requirement*	2021 Extended Diploma Requirement
English Language Arts	4.0 credits	3.0 credits	2.0 credits
Mathematics	3.0 credits	2.0 credits	2.0 credits
Science	3.0 credits	2.0 credits	2.0 credits
Social Sciences	3.0 credits	2.0 credits	3.0 credits
Second Language/ The Arts/CTE	3.0 credits	1.0 credits	1.0 credits
Health	1.0 credits	1.0 credits	1.0 credits
Physical Education	1.0 credits	1.0 credits	1.0 credits
Electives	6.0 credits	12.0 credits	0 credits
Essential Skills Assessment and Personalized Learning Requirements	Suspended	Suspended	Not Required
<b>Total</b>	<b>24.0 credits</b>	<b>24.0 credits</b>	<b>12.0 credits</b>

\*Credit for a modified diploma shall be granted through a continuum of instruction beginning at basic skills and progressing through high level skills, according to individual student needs across academic content areas. Courses granting credit towards a modified diploma must contain substantial academic content.

## Flexible Credit Options

Students increase their likelihood of graduation when provided with multiple avenues to demonstrate proficiency as outlined in Oregon's [Credit Options](#). For this reason, it remains an important lever for schools in supporting students toward graduation. Credit earning options may include evidence generated in courses, stand-alone assessments, collections of student work, and demonstration of prior mastery. ODE strongly encourages districts to apply creativity and flexibility when designing opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning in order to earn credits required for graduation.

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## Section 3: Recommended Practices to Support Seniors

### Prioritize Seniors and Monitor Progress

Spring term is a critical time for schools to prepare seniors for life after high school. The following practices are recommended to focus on seniors and support their progress:

- **Establish a school team to monitor seniors' progress** toward graduation and reach out to students who may need additional support. Consider assigning selected staff to be graduation coaches or advisors. Ensure that every student in the class of 2021 has at least one consistent and supportive adult to guide and advise them on graduation and postsecondary opportunities.
- **Identify students for strategic support and credit-recovery**
  - Provide in-person opportunities for students to receive additional support. Consider prioritizing seniors, especially those not yet on track to graduate, if transitioning to a Hybrid or On-Site instructional model from Comprehensive Distance Learning.
  - Pay attention to each senior's context and learning environment, including work and family.
  - Consider partnerships with community-based and tribal organizations to provide academic, social emotional, and culturally and linguistically-responsive support.
  - Invest in summer programming, after-school options, and/or peer tutoring models to provide additional opportunities.
  - Review any previous [Credit Assurance Plans](#) for completion, and continue supporting students who may have unfinished coursework/credits.

### Recommended Practices to Support Seniors



#### Prioritize Seniors and Monitor Progress

Ensure that every senior has a consistent adult staff member to guide and advise them. Identify and prioritize seniors for strategic support and credit-recovery. Utilize equitable grading practices and flexible credit options.



#### Communicate with Students and Families

Timely communication with students and families is crucial. This requires frequent and ongoing communication and engagement with students and families. Engage with families in their native language and provide multiple opportunities for partnership.



#### Plan for Post-Secondary Transitions

Every senior should have a personalized student graduation and transition plan. Work with students to complete FAFSA/ORSAA. Consider whether summer bridge and/or youth employment programs would be beneficial.

### Communicate with Students and Families

Ensuring every senior leaves school prepared for postsecondary life requires frequent, sustained, ongoing communication and engagement with the student and their family. Such engagement must attend to the academic, linguistic, social-emotional and cultural strengths and needs of each student and family. The following practices are recommended to engage and communicate with students and families:

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- **Initiate regular check-in meetings** with seniors who are not yet on track to graduate on time.
- **Develop a [personalized student graduation and transition plan](#)** for each student, prioritizing (a) those who need credit to graduate and (b) students who are historically and presently underserved by the system may benefit from additional support navigating transition to college and/or career. When developing personalized student graduation plans, reflect the student context, funds of knowledge, and the learning environment.
- **Ensure a continuum of services and supports are provided through the local Comprehensive School Counseling Program** to provide a continuum of services and supports matched to the level of individual student need. More information is available in the [Comprehensive School Counseling Plan for Seniors](#).
- **Utilize a student's [education plan and profile](#)** for additional considerations such as student goals, career exploration, [FAFSA/ORSAA](#) completion, and college applications when creating personalized plans. Emphasize support for students who are first in their families to attend college.
- **Ensure teachers provide regular grade reports and updates** to the student and family (translated when needed), especially for any student at risk of not passing required courses.
- **Communicate with seniors and families** to share credit status prior to the final grading period and confirm their graduation pathway plan. This [Sample Letter](#) provides an editable template for communication to students and families.

## Plan for Postsecondary Transition

Each senior should leave school with an appropriately ambitious postsecondary transition plan that enables them to achieve their vision for where and how they live, work, and play in their life after high school. Schools can help students and families to become knowledgeable of effective strategies to prepare for these next steps such as career training and [college](#) options. The following practices are recommended in planning for successful postsecondary transition:

- Provide timelines and a calendar of important graduation activities, critical dates, and academic deadlines.
- Ensure students have completed the [FAFSA or ORSAA](#) and their [Oregon Promise](#) application to support access to postsecondary education and training opportunities (even if students are unsure about their plans for the fall).
- Support students in applying to colleges.

*National research shows that over 90% of high school seniors who complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) go to college immediately after graduation, compared to just 49% of seniors who do not complete the FAFSA.*

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- Adjust transcripts to reflect current local grading and credit awarding practices (see [recommendations for communicating changes due to COVID on student transcript or school profile](#))
- Connect students with summer bridge or youth employment programs. Most community colleges and many universities offer summer bridge programs for new students. Local workforce investment boards offer many youth employment opportunities. Many tribes have summer programs for both employment and enhancement. Follow up with graduating seniors to support their participation in these programs.
- Consider providing follow-up summer support to graduated students by extending staff contracts or providing a peer or adult mentor. Some schools assign each senior a staff member who will reach out three times after graduation to provide continued support to students.
- Develop a “next steps” checklist for seniors that can include steps such as: monitor summer tasks and deadlines, register for orientation and other events, finalize housing application or process, review financial aid materials and file aid appeals if needed, etc.

## Section 4: Communication to Families About Graduation Status

Once a student's graduation status for 2021 is determined, communicate directly with seniors and their families about a plan that articulates the student's pathway to graduation and beyond.

ODE recommends districts provide an initial communication that outlines the process and timeline for determining graduation status as soon as possible. All communication must be accessible to seniors and their families in the home language(s) of both the student and family.

- **Seniors meeting credit requirements for Oregon Diploma in 2021:** Reach out to students and their families to affirm Oregon Diploma 2021 credit requirements have been met. Outline a plan to continue each senior's learning and transition to career and/or college. For seniors supported by an IEP who are graduating with a regular diploma, this must include notice of termination of special education and related services upon graduation or the transition services offered.
- **Seniors needing credits to meet requirements for Oregon Diploma 2021:** Reach out to students and their families as soon as possible via phone (or another mode based on family preference) to confirm that the student needs additional credits to meet the Oregon Diploma 2021 graduation requirements. Outline a plan to continue the senior's learning, earning of credits, and transition to career and college. For students with an IEP, this must include any necessary secondary transition services specified in their IEP. Follow-up with confirmation on credit status as it relates to Oregon Diploma 2021 and

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the graduation plan in writing in the preferred home language(s) of both the student and family.

- **Communicating with multilingual and bilingual families:** Ensure communication is linguistically responsive. This includes mindful consideration of preferred home language and providing translation support. Partner with community-based and tribal partners who provide culturally and linguistically responsive services to students, families, and staff.
- **Communicating with Seniors Supported by Individualized Education Programs (IEPs):** Consider holding an IEP team meeting to review the student's current status and IEP goals and supports in place. As districts develop coursework options for seniors who are not on track to graduate, there must be consideration for provision of services and supports included in student IEPs.
  - For seniors with IEPs who are not on-track to graduate, schedule an IEP meeting to discuss credit-earning options to develop a plan to support the student's graduation by August 31, 2021.

## Section 5: Celebrations, Traditions and Ways to Honor Seniors

Despite the challenges of the past year, Oregon's seniors have accomplished significant achievements. They have shown tremendous resilience and flexibility over the last year. Districts are encouraged to recognize senior accomplishments such as additional credits earned, outstanding academic performance or improvement, earning of career credentials, Seal of Biliteracy, Indigenous graduation services, and other honors. Applying an equity lens to any recognition programs or awards is a first step when planning for these end-of-year ceremonies and traditions. Further discussion of graduation ceremonies, recognition and end-of-year activities can be found in the [Graduation Ceremony Guidance](#).

These recommended practices help to ensure seniors' efforts, academic achievements, families and cultural identity are honored.

- Consider scheduling celebrations in ways that maximize opportunities for students and families to celebrate in person, while meeting all health and safety requirements.
- Explore ways to live stream celebrations and ceremonies, increasing access to all students, families, and community.
- Maintain school honors for students (cords, medals, certificates, awards, honors, etc.).
- Integrate student, staff, and community voice to develop both personalized and public recognition for students in the graduating class of 2021.
- Connect with other community partners and neighboring districts to exchange ideas for unique ways to celebrate.

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- Allow policies and practices that recognize the diversity of our students and families to promote cultural inclusivity and equity. The Oregon Department of Education fully supports policies and practices that promote cultural autonomy and gives students the ability to wear items of cultural significance honoring their unique and diverse cultures.
- When centering the graduation needs of American Indian students and their families, a cultural practice for many is the wearing of culturally significant items such as eagle feathers, beaded caps, tribal insignias, moccasins and stoles during ceremonies.

## Section 6: Tools and Resources for Districts

TOOLS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS ON THEIR PATH TO GRADUATION AND BEYOND <i>(Tools are linked below)</i>	
	<a href="#">EQUITABLE GRADING PRACTICES</a>
<a href="#">FLEXIBLE CREDIT OPTIONS</a>	
	<a href="#">PERSONALIZED GRADUATION AND TRANSITION PLAN</a>
<a href="#">FAFSA/ORSAA RESOURCES</a>	
	<a href="#">CREDIT ASSURANCE PLANS</a>
<a href="#">COMMUNICATING ON TRANSCRIPTS</a>	