

Graduation Rates: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Graduation Requirements

What are Oregon's Graduation Requirements?

Graduation is a key milestone for Oregon youth. The final year of high school comes with traditions and culminating activities designed to recognize and celebrate their K-12 experience, accomplishments, and learning. The cornerstone to this event is the Oregon Diploma - designed to prepare each student for success in all aspects of their life, including college and career, citizenship, and life-long learning.

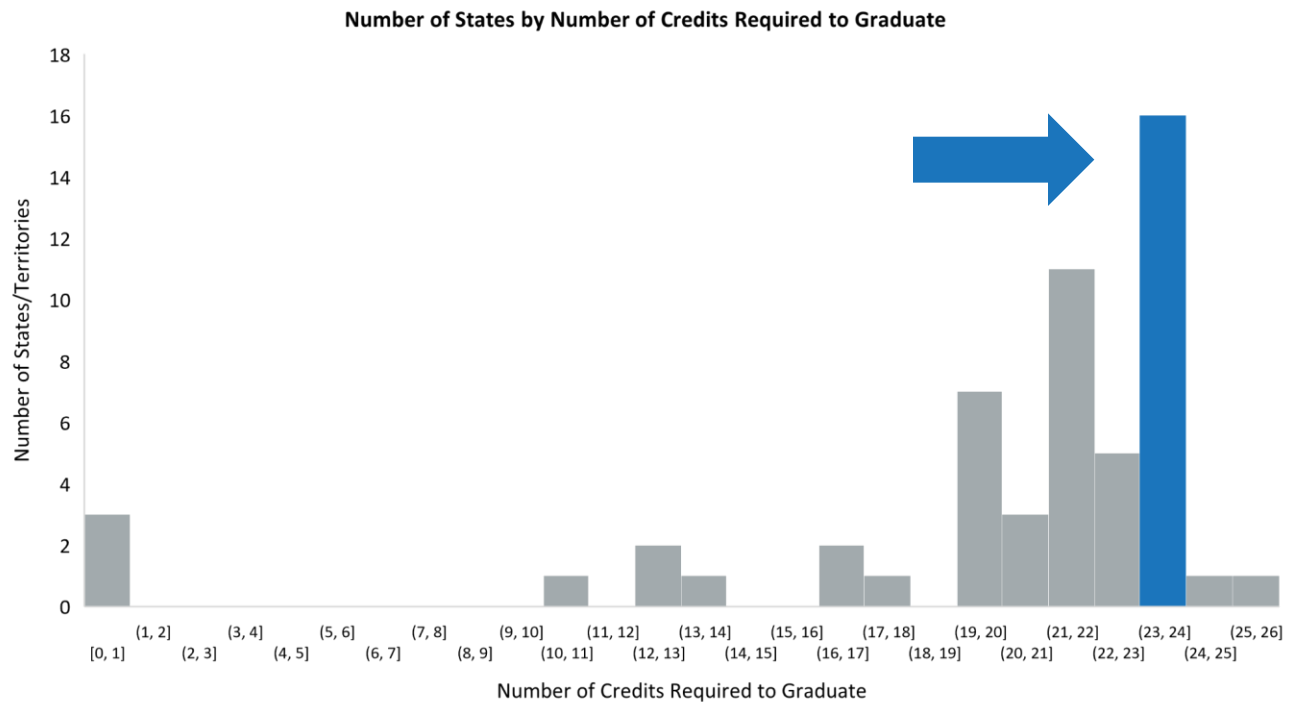
When compared with other states, Oregon has one of the most demanding graduation requirements in the country as measured by course credit requirements ([Education Commission of the States, 2023](#)). This required coursework that students need to be able to graduate has been and remains a focal point of the Oregon Diploma.

To earn a diploma recognized by the state of Oregon, students need to successfully meet the following [graduation requirements](#):

- earn 24 credits,
- complete personalized learning requirements, and
- demonstrate proficiency in the Essential Skills.

Districts may have additional requirements beyond the state minimum requirements.

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Source: [Education Commission of the States, 2023](#).

Note: Along the x-axis, parentheses are exclusive of the number in the presented range, while brackets are inclusive.

What has not changed?

Course credit attainment and [personalized learning requirements](#) continue to be required for the Oregon Diploma. The [nine essential skills](#) also remain in place as graduation requirements and are assessed in Oregon’s classrooms, where students must continue to demonstrate proficiency in order to earn a diploma. [Oregon's state summative tests](#) also remain in place, pursuant to federal and state law, and are [publicly reported annually](#), as well as provided to families in an effort to continue sharing reliable evidence of how well their children are learning challenging grade-level standards in reading, writing, and mathematics.

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What are the nine essential skills?

The [nine essential skills](#) are conveyed in the table below. The ways in which students demonstrate proficiency in relation to those essential skills prior to and after 2020 are also included.

Essential Skill	How Proficiency is Determined for Graduation 2014-2020	How Proficiency is Determined for Graduation 2020 to present
Read and comprehend a variety of text	State-approved assessment options and classroom assessment practices	All essential skills are embedded in students' k12 education and they are assessed with classroom assessment practices (formative and interim/benchmark tests) by highly qualified educators.
Write clearly and accurately	State-approved assessment options and classroom assessment practices	
Apply mathematics in a variety of settings	State-approved assessment options and classroom assessment practices	
Listen actively and speak clearly and coherently	These essential skills are embedded in students' k12 education and they are assessed with classroom assessment practices (formative and interim/benchmark tests) by highly qualified educators.	
Think critically and analytically		
Use technology to learn, live, and work		
Demonstrate civic and community engagement		
Demonstrate global literacy		
Demonstrate personal management and teamwork skills		

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What happened to the Assessment of Essential skills policy?

The Assessment of Essential Skills policy was suspended by the Oregon State Board of Education through 2027-28, eliminating a duplicative testing requirement, which evidence has shown was not working and not associated with college and career success ([Community-Informed Recommendations for Equitable Graduation Outcomes, 2022](#)). As page six in that report notes, “Most states have moved away from these types of redundant, and sometimes biased, requirements. The review of statewide data shows the Assessment of Essential Skills requirement was implemented inequitably and did not ensure anticipated benefits for students in their preparation for postsecondary transition.” As conveyed above, students demonstrate proficiency in relation to the essential skills in the classroom by earning credits.

Graduation and Dropout Reporting

Who is Counted as a Graduate?

Graduates are students who earn an Oregon or Modified Diploma within four or five years, as well as students who complete a PostGraduate Scholars program. These students are in the numerator of the graduation rate.

- Four-Year Graduate - The percentage of students who earned a regular or modified diploma within four years of entering 9th grade.
 - Five-Year Completers - The percentage of students who earned a regular or modified diploma, GED, extended diploma, or adult high school diploma within five years of entering 9th grade.
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What is a Cohort Graduation Rate?

In Oregon, we use the term “cohort graduate” to refer to a group of students entering high school for the first time in a given school year. The cohort is adjusted for students who have documentation that they have moved into or out of the system. A cohort graduation rate follows students who are first-time high school students in a particular year and determines the percentage that graduate within a given time frame, such as four years. For example, the 2022-23 four-year cohort centers on students who began high school in 2019-20.

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How do Completers Factor into Graduation Rate?

Completers are students in the cohort who are supported to achieve any completion credential (including Oregon, Modified, and Extended diplomas or a GED) within four or five years. Oregon schools increasingly offer the option to remain enrolled in high school for a fifth year in order to pursue college credit options through partnerships with community colleges and universities. Legislation that took effect in the 2016-17 school year placed limits on this practice. Beginning with the 2013-14 cohort graduation rates, students who had met all requirements for an Oregon or Modified Diploma were counted as graduates, even if the diploma was not awarded, in order to allow the student to remain enrolled for a fifth year. For four and five year rates by all student groups, and historical data, see the [Cohort Media Files](#). The files also provide district and school-level data, including counts of students with other outcomes, such as GEDs or continuing enrollment.

When are students Added or Removed from a Graduation Cohort?

The cohort of first-time high school students is adjusted by adding in those students who transfer into the state during the period being measured, and removing those students who transfer out of the state, transfer to private school or homeschool, emigrate, or are deceased¹. Students who transfer into the cohort are assigned a cohort year based on their first high school enrollment in any state. Districts are required to have valid documentation² when documenting an outcome that results in the removal of a student from their cohort.

How Does a Completer Differ from a Graduate?

Completers are students who earn an Adult High School Diploma, Extended Diploma, or GED. Completers are not included in the numerator of the graduation rate.

How does the Completion Rate Differ from the Graduation Rate?

The graduation rate includes graduates, while the completion rate includes completers and graduates.

¹ See pg. 16 of the [Every Student Succeeds Act High School Graduation Rate Non-Regulatory Guidance](#).

² See pg. of the 31 of the [Dropout Rate and Exit Adjustment Policy and Technical Manual](#) for more information on acceptable documentation.

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Are Non-Graduates Counted as Dropouts?

The ODE understands that labeling students as "dropouts" makes it sound like it's the student's fault for leaving school, but we know it's more complicated. Often, school and environmental factors contribute to whether students belong or feel like they were forced to leave. Others might have had difficulties staying in school for different reasons. We use the term "dropout rate" because that's what the federal government uses for reporting, not because it fully captures all the challenges students face.

That said, the answer to this question is, "No." There are many different outcomes for non-graduates. In addition to completers, ODE reports students earning Alternative Certificates and those who continue their enrollment into the next academic year. These outcomes are not considered dropouts.

Does ODE Calculate a Dropout Rate?

Yes. As federally required, ODE calculates a dropout rate using methodology developed by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). While cohort methodology relies on high school entry year, the NCES method looks at one-year dropout rates among students enrolled in grades 9-12, regardless of when they began high school. ODE does not currently calculate a cohort dropout rate.

Who is Counted as a "Dropout?"

As defined in [ORS 339.505](#), a "dropout," oftentimes referred to as a "pushout" in Oregon, is an individual who has the four characteristics (for the purposes of the definition, "current school year" means the year being reported on):

1. Has enrolled for the current school year, or was enrolled in a previous school year and did not attend during the current school year
2. Is not a high school graduate
3. Has not received a GED certificate
4. Has withdrawn from school

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As defined in [ORS 339.505](#), the dropout rate does not include: a student who has transferred to another educational system or institution that leads to graduation; a student who is deceased; a student who is participating in home school, private school, or ODE-approved public or private education program, alternative education program, or hospital education program; a student who is residing in a Department of Human Services facility, a shelter care program, or in a juvenile detention facility; a student who is enrolled in a foreign exchange program; a student who is temporarily absent from school because of suspension, a family emergency, or severe health or medical problems; or a student who has received a GED certificate.

How is the Dropout Rate Calculated?

$$\frac{\text{Total school-year dropouts in grades 9-12}}{\text{Number of students enrolled in grades 9-12 on the first day of school in October}}$$

Can a Student Be Counted as a Dropout more than once?

Yes. The NCES method is considered an “event count,” meaning that students are counted as dropouts each year that they drop out.

Does ODE Calculate a Cohort Dropout Rate?

ODE is in the process of developing a Cohort Dropout Rate. A cohort approach to measuring dropouts offers several benefits over the “event count” method. The cohort approach will use the same denominator as the Cohort Graduation Rate, aligning the two measures for the first time. The cohort approach will also provide a more accurate summary of high school experiences, capturing and adjusting for re-enrollment after an unenrollment spell. While the NCES method counts students as dropouts each year they drop out, the cohort method would reflect each student’s last enrollment event (or best outcome). This means that, for example, a student would be reported as a graduate if they earned a regular diploma, even if they had dropped out during their 10th grade year.

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How do Oregon's graduation rates compare to other states?

Each state structures their graduation requirements differently and it's important to look at other states within this context. Every state is individual and unique and this isn't an apples-to-apples comparison. For example, as identified in the figure above most states require fewer credits to graduate. Many states also have different tiers of diplomas - college prep/honors, career prep, and military prep pathways and career tech diplomas. In addition to affecting the number of graduates (numerator), there are ways to affect the total number of students (denominator) in the graduation rate calculation. Each state sets its own standards for determining which students transferred in, transferred out, or dropped out prior to high school completion. Because of these differences across states in both the numerator and denominator of the formula, caution must be taken when attempting to make comparisons.