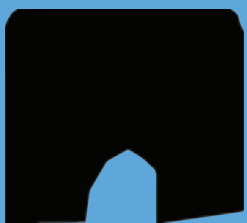


# OREGON'S STUDENT SUCCESS ACT



**Illuminating Five Years of  
Implementation and Impact**

FALL 2024

Foundations for a Better Oregon's report on the Student Success Act can be found online at: [www.betteroregon.org/ssa](http://www.betteroregon.org/ssa).

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# OREGON'S STUDENT SUCCESS ACT

ILLUMINATING FIVE YEARS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

## A LETTER AND INVITATION

To our fellow Oregonians,

Five years ago, Oregon took a historic step on the path to providing a high-quality public education to every child in every community. The landmark Student Success Act of 2019 (SSA) not only brought the largest new investment in public education in a generation but also launched a bold new vision where school districts, their communities, and the state work together to improve how public schools support every child to learn, grow, and thrive. For many, it was a new era of hope.

Five years later, our team at Foundations for a Better Oregon is reflecting on how much has happened—and changed—since the SSA passed. As families, schools, and the state navigated extraordinary challenges, we wondered whether most Oregonians know how the SSA has unfolded in the fog of these turbulent times. As an organization that championed the bill and tracked its implementation, we even found ourselves seeking a clearer picture of the SSA's earliest impacts.

The Oregon Legislature passed the SSA first and foremost to remedy decades of underfunding for public education, raising and investing \$1 billion more for K–12 and early learning every year. Equally important—but less well known—are the law's sweeping provisions designed to ensure that these new funds are improving K–12 schools and student outcomes.

The SSA has focused new spending on strengthening students' academic success and well-being from preschool through high school graduation, including targeted support for students of color, students experiencing disability, rural students, students navigating poverty, and far too many more who are underserved by Oregon public schools. The law also enshrined robust requirements for school districts to authentically engage youth, families, educators, and community members before deciding how to invest SSA dollars, and has catalyzed a long-overdue effort to align how Oregon school districts set goals and report on improvement.

We hope you'll join us to explore how the SSA is reshaping Oregon's public education system and what it means for Oregon children. Through listening, documentation, research, analysis, and stories, we gathered insights and lessons from the SSA's first five years to illuminate what's working and what's not. With so much recent attention on K–12 funding, spending, and accountability, Foundations for a Better Oregon has developed this five-part report to build shared understanding and help guide our state's way forward.

1

Part 1 begins with an overview of the SSA’s history, goals, and architecture, paying special attention to initiatives designed to scale improvement across school districts and boost K–12 student outcomes.

2

Part 2 features a new public opinion survey showing Oregonians’ overwhelming support for the SSA’s animating values, K–12 investments, and systems change strategies.

3

Part 3 dives deeper into how school districts and communities are working together to put SSA dollars to use and make a difference for K–12 students.

4

Part 4 examines how the SSA has established critical but often invisible new systems change infrastructure to support K–12 improvement and accountability.

5

Part 5 builds on lessons from the SSA to offer recommendations for the future, ensuring Oregon stays laser-focused on the most promising strategies to accelerate progress for children.

While five years is a short time in the long-term arc of systems change, there is already much to learn from the SSA and much reason for hope. And while we at Foundations for a Better Oregon can’t possibly capture the full breadth and nuance of SSA implementation and impacts, which represents the work and experience of thousands, we also believe this is a critical moment to shine a light on what it takes to create meaningful, lasting change across the K–12 education system.

In this spirit, we invite our partners across state, school, tribal, community, and civic leadership to join us in dialogue, reflect on the SSA’s early impacts, and continue making progress toward an Oregon where every child can learn, grow, and thrive.

With hope and deep resolve,

The Foundations for a Better Oregon Team



## OUR APPROACH

Foundations for a Better Oregon employed mixed methods research and analysis to illuminate key components and early impacts of the SSA. Although the law’s implementation involves billions of dollars and vast infrastructure across Oregon, we strategically focused our inquiry on investments and strategies that seek to advance a more modern, integrated, and effective model for K–12 funding, spending, and accountability.

To assess the SSA’s theory of change and impacts, we grounded ourselves in the research and science of sustainable systems change and childhood development. Our work also benefited from robust documentation and existing analysis provided by school districts, education service districts, the Oregon Department of Education, and the Oregon Secretary of State Audits Division.

For quantitative analysis, we gathered and analyzed statewide and disaggregated data on student outcomes, SSA investments, and school district improvement goals. We also commissioned statewide opinion research from an independent and nonpartisan research partner. Using qualitative methods, we listened to those most closely connected to SSA implementation and elevated lessons from three place-based spotlights. Our efforts included interviews and focus groups with school district, education service district, and community-based organization leaders across Oregon.

As we synthesized our findings and developed recommendations, we solicited outside review of our findings in this report from a cross-section of partners with distinct vantage points and expertise. Although this report was shaped by a range of voices and nuanced perspectives, the synthesized findings and recommendations represent the views of Foundations for a Better Oregon and do not necessarily reflect the views of our many contributors, partners, and member foundations.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND GRATITUDE

This report examining the Student Success Act is only possible because of the steadfast work of school and community leaders across Oregon doing the hard work of implementation through and beyond a global pandemic. It is also indebted to the work of the staff at the Oregon Department of Education and the Oregon Secretary of State Audits Division.

Foundations for a Better Oregon is deeply grateful to the more than two dozen state, school district, education service district, and community-based organization leaders who hold unique insights into the SSA and generously shared their expertise and feedback. We also extend enormous gratitude to Scott Nine, whose guidance and contributions were essential to the development of this report, as well as our sincerest appreciation to our research partners, including Monica Cox / Ten02 Consulting, Amaury Vogel / Oregon Values and Beliefs Center, and Tanisha Tate Woodson / DHM Research.

Additional thanks to Brandan Kearney and Jenni Kotting for their support in preparing this report for release, to former state Senator Mark Hass for his thoughtful review, and to the Umatilla, Medford, and Grants Pass school districts for generously contributing photography to this report.





# OREGON'S STUDENT SUCCESS ACT

Illuminating Five Years of Implementation And Impact

## WHAT IS THE STUDENT SUCCESS ACT?

1



In 2019, the Oregon Legislature made history by passing the Student Success Act (SSA) for children and families. The SSA marked not only a major new investment in public education—the first in decades—but also a renewed effort to address long-standing challenges in the state’s K-12 system: lagging student outcomes, deep-rooted educational inequities, and the growing need for mental health support.

To appreciate the SSA’s early impacts, we must look back at significant shifts in Oregon’s public education funding and strategies since the 1990s, and what problem the SSA was meant to solve. Join us as we explore the history behind the SSA, unpack the law’s key components, and shed light on how it was designed to improve the lives of Oregon children from birth through high school graduation.

# THE ROAD TO THE STUDENT SUCCESS ACT

## A SEISMIC SHIFT IN HOW OREGON FUNDS K-12 EDUCATION

Before 1990, Oregon mostly funded public education through a patchwork of local property taxes. This approach created stark disparities and volatile shifts in public school funding driven not only by whether a community chose to invest but also by the assessed values of property within the community. The instability and eventual breakdown of this approach would ultimately set the stage for the SSA.

When voters passed Measure 5 in 1990, they sent a shockwave through Oregon’s public education system. By capping how much local communities could collect in property taxes, the ballot measure sought to balance public school funding across the state. Supporters rallied around leveling the playing field, though many were also driven by the promise of lower property taxes. But as Measure 5 starkly limited local revenue for school districts, the burden to fund K–12 schools suddenly shifted squarely onto the Oregon Legislature, fundamentally altering how the state finances public education.

Table 1. — Interdistrict disparities in spending and school property tax rates for selected medium-sized unified districts, Oregon, 1987-88

Spending range	Low tax rate	High tax rate
Low spending	<i>Brookings-Harbor</i> (1,418 students) \$2,591/pupil \$6.65/\$1,000	<i>Fern Ridge</i> (1,755 students) \$3,781/pupil \$20.61/\$1,000
High-spending	<i>Morrow County Unit</i> (1,683 students) \$4,802/pupil \$8.85/\$1,000	<i>Pleasant Hill</i> (1,187 students) \$4,736/pupil \$28.28/\$1,000

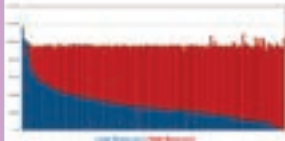
This table, originally published in 1989, demonstrates the wide disparity in investment per student across Oregon due to the variation of local tax rates and spending.<sup>1</sup>

## FROM LOCAL PROPERTY TAXES TO THE STATE SCHOOL FUND

In response, the Legislature created the State School Fund (SSF). This new system pooled local property tax revenue with state General Fund dollars and distributed resources back to school districts through a funding formula. While this formula didn’t add more money to the K–12 system, it essentially redistributed public education funding equally across school districts. As a result, public education funding became relatively balanced across school districts regardless of their local tax rate or economic conditions.

<sup>1</sup> Weber, B.A. (1989). *Oregon School Funding: Assessing the Options*. Oregon State University Extension. <https://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/downloads/9880vr17q>

## Key design principles baked into our 1990s State School Fund formula



**Equalize per student district funding to help advance equitable funding** for regions that are restricted in local revenue.

**Support greater operational costs for districts for student and district characteristics that have greater needs to meet,** done through additional funded per student (weighted funding).



**Maintain local decision-making over spending priorities.**

This slide, created by the Office of Gov. Tina Kotek in 2024, outlines what Oregon's State School Fund was designed to achieve.<sup>2</sup>

The SSF is still the primary funding source for state school districts today. Its funding formula factors in everything from teacher salaries to student transportation and school infrastructure. Largely unchanged since the early 2000s, the formula bases local K–12 funding primarily on student enrollment but with crucial adjustments: More funds are allocated for school districts serving particular student groups such as those living in poverty, learning English, or navigating the complexities of homelessness, pregnancy, or parenthood.

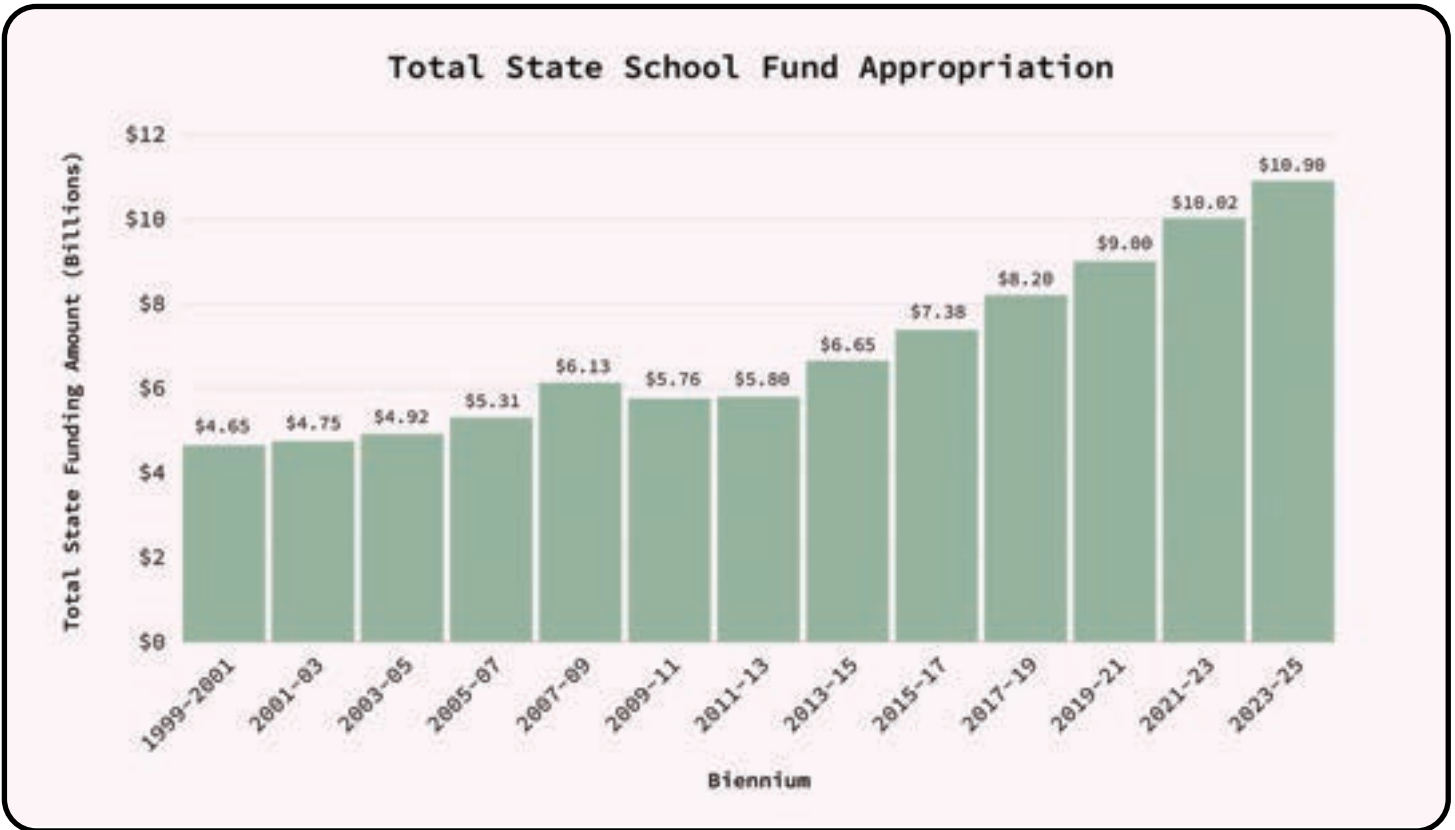
The Oregon Legislature sets a new SSF budget every two years. This is one of the Legislature's most significant budget decisions, with around 28.2% of Oregon's General Fund and Lottery funds

allocated to the SSF in 2023–2025.<sup>3</sup> The state's total investment in the SSF has more than doubled since 2003–2005 from \$4.907 billion to \$9.372 billion.

While the SSF sought to equalize and stabilize public education funding, its approach is not seamless. For instance, school districts must often prepare—and sometimes even adopt—their local budgets before the Legislature finalizes the SSF budget, leading to uncertainty and confusion about available resources. Moreover, while SSF funding has grown steadily over two decades, SSF budgets fluctuate with economic growth and recession because Oregon's General Fund largely relies on personal income tax revenue.

<sup>2</sup> Office of Gov. Tina Kotek. (2024, August). *Connecting the Dots to Improve Education for Oregon Students* [Slideshow]. Oregon Department of Education Roundtable on Education Funding.

<sup>3</sup> Oregon Legislative Policy and Research Office. (2023, August). *K–12 Education Funding*. Oregon State Legislature. <https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/lpro/Publications/Education%20Funding%20Background%20Report%202023.pdf>



Oregon Quality Education Commission. (2024, August). *Quality Education Model: Identifying Best Practices and Calculating the Cost of a Quality Education*. Oregon Department of Education. [https://www.oregon.gov/ode/reports-and-data/taskcomm/Documents/M000266 DOE Quality Education Model Report 2024.pdf](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/reports-and-data/taskcomm/Documents/M000266%20DOE%20Quality%20Education%20Model%20Report%202024.pdf)

## AS K-12 EDUCATION NEEDS GROW, VOTERS REJECT NEW TAXES

For two decades, the governor-appointed Quality Education Commission consistently reported that Oregon needed to invest \$1 billion to \$2 billion more per biennium to provide a high-quality education to all students. Yet despite widespread recognition that Oregon’s K–12 funding was not keeping pace with school and student needs, voters were not ready to shoulder significant new taxes.

In 2016, a coalition led by labor unions—including the Oregon Education Association—hoped to close

this gap with Measure 97, which proposed raising taxes on corporations’ gross receipts to generate an estimated \$6 billion per biennium.<sup>4</sup> This revenue would have increased the state budget by nearly a third, with much of it earmarked for public education and health care. However, business advocates strongly opposed the measure, arguing it would cripple the state’s economy.

After the most expensive ballot initiative campaign in state history, Measure 97 was soundly defeated, with 59% of Oregonians voting against it.<sup>5</sup> The vote underscored a harsh reality: While many voters recognized the need to fund critical public services, the prospect of significant new taxes was too much for them to bear.

4 Oregonians have historically been resistant to sales tax measures, voting them down nine times in the past century.

5 In the same election, voters overwhelmingly passed Measure 98, which would become the High School Success Initiative. However, the ballot measure did not create a new revenue source, leaving it up to the Legislature to determine how to fund this multimillion-dollar program.



## AS STUDENT OUTCOMES LAG, SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS FALTER

As Oregon sought to equalize public education funding, it also embarked on several ambitious efforts to improve K–12 schools and student outcomes, with a special focus on boosting graduation rates and closing stubborn achievement gaps.

In 1991, the Legislature passed the Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century, which aimed to improve academic rigor and learning outcomes through a system of certificates demonstrating students' initial and advanced mastery of school subjects. In 2011, the Oregon Education Investment Board was created both to oversee the public education system from early childhood through postsecondary school and to spur K–12 improvement through “achievement compacts” as part of the local budgeting process.

Though initially celebrated as groundbreaking reforms, all such initiatives eventually lost momentum and ultimately faltered due to inadequate funding and inconsistent support. In 2022, the Oregon secretary of state's K–12 Education—Systemic Risk Report acknowledged that once-promising endeavors launched in the 1990s and 2000s “were eliminated or replaced with limited analysis of lessons learned.”<sup>6</sup> The state would continue without a cohesive statewide approach to K–12 school improvement through the late 2010s.

## THE LEGISLATURE'S JOINT COMMITTEE ON STUDENT SUCCESS

After Measure 97 was defeated, the Legislature's attempts to pass a more modest tax increase in 2017 met with continued resistance. Facing a persistent shortfall in public education funding, Senate President Peter Courtney acted in 2018 by forming the Joint Committee on Student Success, a bipartisan group of 14 legislators. Then-House Speaker Tina Kotek quickly joined forces, declaring, “It's time we come out of our corners and solve this problem together. Every student deserves a fair shot at success. It's time to come together and forge a path forward that will ensure every child has access to the high-quality schools they deserve.”<sup>7</sup>

Over the following year, the Joint Committee traveled across the state, holding forums and roundtables in 29 communities. In January 2019, they released a bipartisan report capturing what they heard and learned from hundreds of students, teachers, administrators, and families. Priorities included closing persistent academic disparities, strengthening mental health support, expanding access to hands-on learning and a well-rounded education, and fostering more collaboration between educators. Legislators also emphasized the public's clear demand that any new state funding should result in better student outcomes and that local communities would have a voice in how school districts invested this funding.<sup>8</sup>

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6 Oregon Audits Division. (2022, May). *K–12 Education—Systemic Risk Report*. Oregon Secretary of State. <https://sos.oregon.gov/audits/Documents/2022-16.pdf>

7 Pate, N. (2018, January 4). Legislators Tasked With Fixing Oregon's Dismal Graduation Rate. *Statesman Journal*. <https://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/education/2018/01/04/legislators-tasked-fixing-oregons-dismal-graduation-rateoregon-house-senate-leaders-create-joint/1005579001/>

8 Legislative Policy and Research Office. (2019, January). *Joint Committee on Student Success: Report on 2018 Activities*. [http://opb-imgserve-production.s3-website-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/original/jcss\\_report\\_on\\_2018\\_activities\\_1548375392795.pdf](http://opb-imgserve-production.s3-website-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/original/jcss_report_on_2018_activities_1548375392795.pdf)

## TAKEAWAYS FROM THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON STUDENT SUCCESS

As the Joint Committee on Student Success toured communities across the state, legislators gained a broader and more nuanced view of the public education system. They heard clear and consistent messages from the public and stakeholders at every stop.



Members of the Joint Committee on Student Success visit a classroom at Rex Putnam High School in Milwaukie.  
*Image Source: Oregon Joint Committee on Student Success. (2018, May 9). Facebook.*

Schools need stable and adequate funding to meet student, educator, and community needs.

**“Money spent in education is good money spent.”**

**–Hermiston, April 25, 2018**

Because every school is different, no one-size-fits-all policy can improve the public education system.

**“Even in high-resource schools, we don’t have enough.”**

**–Portland, September 27, 2018**

Because young children lack sufficient access to high-quality early childhood education programs, too many show up on the first day of kindergarten not ready for the challenges and demands of that year.

**“Investing early in kids is the most effective strategy to ensure that children will thrive in school and life.”**

**–Baker City, April 24, 2018**

## TAKEAWAYS FROM THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON STUDENT SUCCESS

Students face significant challenges outside the classroom and need a stronger network of mental and physical health support to be able to learn in school.

**“We need more counselors and support systems to expand access to mental health services.”**

—Woodburn, May 24, 2018

Students do not have sufficient access to career learning programs that help them engage in school and prepare them to achieve their goals.

**“CTE [career and technical education] requires alignment between middle school, high school, and community college.”**

—Bend, September 12, 2018



Rep. Barbara Smith Warner (right), co-chair of Joint Committee on Student Success, joins a student listening session in Baker City in April 2018. *Image Source: Oregon Joint Committee on Student Success. (2018, April 24). Facebook.*

Opportunity gaps persist, especially for students of color, linguistically diverse students, low-income students, students with disabilities, and rural students.

**“Rural schools are really lagging behind urban schools. We have less resources, which results in less opportunities for us students.”**

—Salem, February 9, 2018

Oregon faces a shortage of teachers, particularly racially and linguistically diverse teachers, qualified math and science teachers, and qualified special education teachers.

**“Our future teachers are in our classrooms now.”**

—Hermiston, April 25, 2018

**“At Cesar Chavez, my middle school, the teachers I had were people of color, and they respected my culture and my traditions, and I had great memories with them. Then I learned that many of my peers have never [had a teacher of color].”**

—Salem, February 9, 2018



## THE NEGOTIATIONS

The Joint Committee on Student Success laid the groundwork for the SSA as Oregon’s next major increase in public education funding and next major effort to improve public schools. Despite broad consensus on the need for greater investment in early learning programs and K–12 schools, the debate over how to fund any new initiative remained contentious. The Corporate Activity Tax (CAT)—a novel revenue source that now funds the SSA—faced significant pushback but eventually gained traction when key business groups chose to stay neutral on the legislation, recognizing that a high-quality public education system benefits Oregon both economically and socially.

Tensions also emerged during negotiations over how to allocate the new funds. Education associations and school districts argued for minimal restrictions, allowing flexibility to address unique local needs. Legislative leaders, business groups, and other education advocacy groups pushed for more targeted investments and accountability to ensure that every dollar would have a tangible impact. The final agreement struck a balance, allowing school districts some flexibility to invest new K–12 funding on a range of student needs and proven strategies while also empowering the Oregon Department of Education and local communities as partners in school district improvement and accountability.

## THE CELEBRATION OF A HISTORIC INVESTMENT

Headlines and press releases across the state and beyond celebrated the SSA’s passage as historic and unprecedented. “Today marks a turning point for education in Oregon,” said Gov. Kate Brown in her remarks at the bill’s public signing, “and what we have come together to do over the past few months will be felt by students, teachers, and schools for years to come.”<sup>9</sup>

The National Education Association also heralded Oregon’s success in making one of the nation’s most significant investment increases. “Tens of thousands of educators, students, parents, and supporters gathered in one voice in nearly 100 communities across the state to call on lawmakers to prioritize Oregon students,” said John Larson, a high school English teacher and president of the Oregon Education Association, in an NEA publication. With this new law, he added, “Educators and public school families can start to breathe a sigh of relief, knowing that instead of worrying about budget cuts, we can instead focus on the educational needs of our students and our future.”<sup>10</sup>

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9 Governor Kate Brown Press Office. (2019, May 20). *Student Success Act: A Turning Point for Education in Oregon*. My Oregon News. <https://www.myoregon.gov/2019/05/20/student-success-act-a-turning-point-for-education-in-oregon/>

10 Menas, A., & Wimmer, L. (2019, September 23). *Oregon Educators Led the Way to Historic School Funding Victory*. National Education Association. <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/oregon-educators-win-school-funding>



# WHAT IS THE CORPORATE ACTIVITY TAX? AND WHO PAYS?

The CAT, which funds the SSA, was designed to stabilize education funding by acting as a balance against the volatility of personal and corporate income taxes. As summarized by the Oregon Center for Public Policy:

The tax, which took effect in 2020, applies to business receipts—not profits—exceeding \$1 million after certain deductions. Specifically, a business deducts 35 percent of their labor costs or costs of goods sold, whichever is higher. Any receipts exceeding \$1 million after the deduction are taxed at a rate of 0.57 percent. The CAT applies to all business forms, including C-corporations, S-corporations, partnerships, limited liability corporations, and sole proprietorships. The law contains numerous exemptions, including exemptions for receipts from the sale of groceries and fuel.<sup>11</sup>

The Oregon Department of Revenue provides an annual report on CAT revenue statistics and the characteristics of CAT taxpayers. While the CAT applies to all businesses with more than \$1 million in Oregon sales annually, state data shows more than 70% of the total revenue is paid by corporations with more than \$25 million in Oregon commercial activity.<sup>12</sup>



Data from the Oregon Department of Revenue outlines the share of tax returns and share of tax liability across Oregon businesses.<sup>13</sup>

11 Hauser, D., & Ordóñez, J.C. (2020, April 23). *Oregon Schools Would Pay the Price of Suspending the Corporate Activity Tax*. Oregon Center for Public Policy. <https://www.ocpp.org/2020/04/23/oregon-schools-suspending-corporate-activity-tax/>

12 Oregon Department of Revenue Research Section. (2024). *Oregon Corporate Activity Tax Statistics: Characteristics of CAT Taxpayers*. <https://www.oregon.gov/dor/programs/gov-research/Documents/Edition%202024%20Oregon%20Corporate%20Activity%20Tax%20Statistics%20150-106-010.pdf>

13 Ibid.

# UNPACKING THE STUDENT SUCCESS ACT



This graphic, produced by the Oregon Department of Education, outlines the SSA’s three main program accounts and its community engagement requirements.<sup>14</sup>

Though often viewed as a single initiative, the SSA is a tapestry of over 20 targeted programs and strategies supporting students from their earliest years through high school graduation. These programs include critical investments in areas contributing to student success and well-being, from preschool programs and parenting support to educator professional development, youth reengagement efforts, and initiatives focused on nutrition, school culture, and safety.

To fund these programs, most CAT revenue flows into Oregon’s new Student Success Fund, which is separate from the SSF. A portion of CAT revenue is used to manage the tax itself, but a significant chunk—\$701.9 million for the 2023–2025 biennium—is first directed straight into the SSF to bolster the state’s base K–12 funding.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Oregon Department of Education. (n.d.). *The Student Success Act Marks a Turning Point for Education in Oregon*. [https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/SSA\\_infographic\\_2019.pdf](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/SSA_infographic_2019.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> The SSA requires transferring a portion of CAT revenue to the SSF to address a small decrease in personal income tax that was negotiated as part of the legislative package in 2019. For the 2023–2025 biennium, \$701 million in CAT revenue was transferred directly to the SSF.

The remaining funds—\$2.18 billion for the 2023–2025 biennium—are then strategically allocated to three main program accounts: the Student Investment Account (SIA), the Early Learning Account (ELA), and the Statewide Education Initiatives Account (SEIA). The SSA mandates that at least 50% of CAT revenue must be funneled into the SIA, and at least another 20% into the ELA. The remainder—up to 30%—supports the SEIA.

The SSA’s 2023–2025 program funding summary reveals the SSA’s breadth, detailing how funds are distributed through a mix of competitive and noncompetitive grants for entities promoting children’s learning and well-being, including school districts, child care providers, community-based organizations, and other key players in the education system.<sup>16</sup>

## THE STUDENT INVESTMENT ACCOUNT

The SIA is the cornerstone of the SSA, often overshadowing its other crucial components. As the largest and most comprehensive of its investments, the SIA represents the core of the SSA’s goal to bolster K–12 funding and outcomes. Commanding at least 50% of CAT revenue, the SIA channels substantial funding directly to school districts through a noncompetitive formula grant.

The SIA’s strategic aims include improving academic outcomes, closing academic achievement gaps, and addressing students’ mental and behavioral health needs.<sup>17</sup> Its architecture places a priority on better supporting “focal students”—groups of students who have historically been underserved by Oregon’s K–12 schools and have long faced systemic disparities in educational

access and outcomes—in order to drive progress where it’s needed most. The SIA’s allocation formula is similar to the SSF formula—it’s based on student enrollment with additional “weights” for certain student groups—but the Legislature felt it critical to increase the weight given for students living in poverty to ensure focal students’ needs could be met.

To focus how school districts invest new resources, the SSA includes several “allowable uses” for SIA funding, including expanding instructional time, addressing student health and safety, providing a well-rounded education, and (in certain cases) reducing class sizes. In this report exploring the SSA’s early impact, Foundations for a Better Oregon will examine how districts have spent their SIA funding, the research behind their strategies, and the broad public support for these investments.

In addition to parameters placed on the use of SIA funds, school districts must follow equally important processes and protocols to access these funds. Unlike the SSF, which is allocated to school districts largely without constraints, the SIA includes a set of planning requirements to improve the quality of district spending toward SIA goals. For example, school districts must authentically engage students, families, and school staff in their planning and budgeting process, with a particular focus on engaging those who represent focal students. The SIA also requires districts to conduct a needs assessment, review disaggregated student data, and consult best-practice recommendations in Oregon’s Quality Education Model to guide their spending decisions.

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16 Oregon Department of Education. (n.d.). *2023–2025 Student Success Act: How the Revenue Flows*. <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/GO%20SSA%202023-25%20LAB%20FINAL%20ONLY%20PORTRAIT.pdf>

17 “Behavioral health” is a strengths-based term for addressing needs related to substance use and abuse. It is not related to student behavior in classrooms, even where that is a distinct need.

## WHO ARE SIA FOCAL STUDENTS?

To close persistent achievement gaps, state legislators originally specified the following groups of students as SIA focal students:

- Students from racial or ethnic groups who have historically experienced academic disparities.
- Economically disadvantaged students.
- Students with disabilities.
- Students who are English language learners.
- Students who are foster children.

The SSA also authorizes the Oregon State Board of Education to identify additional focal student groups who have been historically underserved by the public education system. Since 2019, the Board has expanded SIA focal students to include students who are enrolled members of federally recognized tribal nations, LGBTQ2SIA+ students, refugee and immigrant students, migrant students, and students navigating the justice system, among others.

## THE STATEWIDE EDUCATION INITIATIVES ACCOUNT

The SSA allows up to 30% of total distributions to the Statewide Education Initiatives Account (SEIA). Perhaps the most diffuse of the three SSA accounts, it funds more than 25 programs ranging from school nutrition, to wildfire recovery, to reengaging youth who have left the education system.

Since the SSA's passage, the SEIA has integrated preexisting and new programs such as High School Success and the Early Literacy Success Initiative. While the SEIA houses over 20 unique investments, we will focus on a subset of key K–12 programs on the next page.





## STATEWIDE EDUCATION INITIATIVES ACCOUNT PROGRAMS

### HIGH SCHOOL SUCCESS

Beginning with Ballot Measure 98, which voters passed in November 2016, Oregon invested \$324.9 million in High School Success for the 2023–2025 biennium, including nearly \$180 million in CAT revenue via the SEIA. The program seeks to improve high school graduation rates by advancing best practices and effective systems to support students' transition to ninth grade, expanding access to advanced coursework, and investing in career and technical education.

### EARLY LITERACY SUCCESS INITIATIVE

A priority for Gov. Tina Kotek and many education advocates, the Early Literacy Success Initiative was passed by the Legislature in 2023 and integrated into the SEIA. This \$100 million statewide investment aims to improve early literacy outcomes, reduce disparities, and support families and educators in developing literacy skills. The initiative includes grants to school districts, early learning providers, tribes, and community-based programs.

### SSA ADVISORIES AND STUDENT SUCCESS PLANS

SSA Advisories are advisory groups that leverage community knowledge and experience to develop Student Success Plans with recommendations to better support historically underserved students. School districts are required to consult these population-specific plans when investing SIA dollars. The plans also grant a relatively small amount of funding to trusted community-based organizations and partners that provide wraparound, school-day, and out-of-school support to specific youth communities. The SSA integrated Oregon's existing American Indian/Alaska Native Student Success and African American/Black Student Success plans into the SEIA and increased funding for their grant programs. Since 2019, the Legislature has also supported creation of the Latino/a/x and Indigenous\* Student Success, LGBTQ2SIA+ Student Success, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Success, and Immigrant and Refugee Student Success advisories and plans.

### INTENSIVE PROGRAM

This \$25 million-per-biennium program invites struggling school districts with the highest needs into a multiyear partnership with the Oregon Department of Education based on education improvement science and national models like the University of Virginia's Partnership for Leaders in Education School Turnaround. Incentivized by additional funding, this opt-in program is the state's strongest intervention strategy for K–12 improvement.

## LEARNING FROM THE STUDENT SUCCESS ACT

Grasping the full scope of the SSA is essential to understanding how Oregon is moving to strengthen investment, improvements, and outcomes across early learning and K–12. While the ELA and various SEIA programs all play a vital role, this report on the SSA spotlights key pieces of the law that are poised to spark and scale systemwide improvement in K–12 public schools.

By concentrating on investments like the SIA, High School Success, and other innovative system infrastructure, we hope to illuminate how Oregon can advance toward a more modern, integrated, and effective model of K–12 funding, spending, and accountability. Understanding these strategic investments is crucial as Oregon charts its course toward a more equitable and high-performing education system.



# OREGON'S STUDENT SUCCESS ACT

ILLUMINATING FIVE YEARS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

## OREGONIANS EMBRACE SHARED VISION FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

2



A new statewide survey conducted by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center (OVBC), an independent, nonpartisan opinion research organization, shows Oregonians overwhelmingly support the vision and promise of the SSA, finding exceptional levels of common ground across the state.

The survey, commissioned and co-designed by Foundations for a Better Oregon (FBO), shows Oregonians embracing a shared vision of a high-quality, inclusive, and community-centered public education system where high hopes for children and high expectations for schools go hand in hand.

## BACKGROUND

Six years ago, a bipartisan group of Oregon legislators kicked off a statewide listening tour to better understand the challenges facing Oregon students and schools. From Baker City to Bend to Coos Bay, they visited dozens of communities to hear directly from youth, families, educators, administrators, and civic leaders about opportunities to strengthen public education.

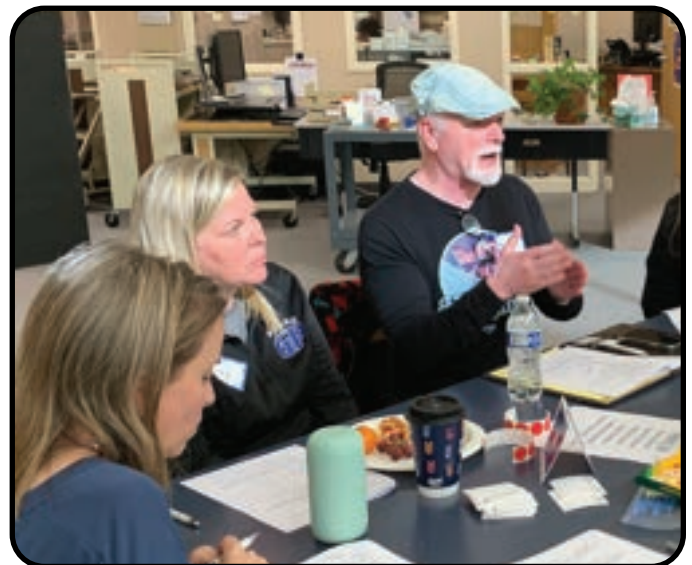
That listening tour—and the solutions that emerged along the way—formed the basis of what would become the SSA, a historic \$1 billion annual investment to expand early learning and strengthen K–12 public schools for all students.

Since then, we’ve witnessed how a global pandemic, an ongoing national reckoning with racial justice, and painful ideological polarization have shaken public schools and shattered conventional wisdom about public education. Five years after the SSA’s passage, we wanted to know: Do Oregonians have the same hopes and dreams for children they shared with legislators back in 2018? Do the SSA’s strategies to support and improve K–12 schools still resonate? Is there sufficient public support for the values the SSA represents to apply its lessons systemwide?

## METHODOLOGY

In a 30-question survey, FBO and OVBC tested Oregonians’ support for the SSA’s animating values, goals, and strategies to improve K–12 schools; 1,626 Oregon adults participated in the survey in April and May 2024, with data weighted by gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, and geographic region to provide a statistically valid and representative sample of statewide opinions. With a 2.43% margin of error, the final survey data is independently validated, analyzed, and reported by OVBC.

OVBC’s full survey questionnaire, analysis of findings, and cross tabulations are available at [oregonvbc.org/oregon-education-priorities-and-planning/](https://oregonvbc.org/oregon-education-priorities-and-planning/).



A community engagement session about local Student Success Act investments in Grants Pass. *Image Source: Grants Pass School District.*



## NOTABLE SURVEY DATA TRENDS

In these contentious times, we're inspired to see Oregonians express strong and often overwhelming agreement at levels seldom seen in statewide opinion research (90% and above). The levels of agreement also far exceed the 60% threshold that political strategists believe is pivotal to successfully advance public policy and pass ballot measures.

Similarly, we're encouraged by the very low levels of uncertainty among respondents, who almost universally answered "I Don't Know" significantly below the 10% rate typically observed in opinion research. This suggests that Oregonians are clear in their shared values and vision for students and schools, willing to engage with the nuts and bolts of public education systems, and ready to grapple with the nuances of public education policy.

## OREGONIANS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The FBO/OVBC survey shows most Oregonians value the opportunity to engage in local school district decision-making and agree that community engagement helps schools make better decisions.

Many survey respondents emphasized that fully understanding student needs and developing solutions requires listening to a community's diverse perspectives, breadth of knowledge, and lived experiences. They also discuss community engagement as a way to hold school districts accountable.

Still, some Oregonians expressed mixed or negative feelings about community engagement in school districts' decision-making. Some cited respect for and deference to the expertise of district leadership and school staff, while others raised concerns about polarizing voices that aim to stoke division—rather than offer solutions—through public processes.

The quotes featured throughout these pages offer a window into how Oregonians think about working with schools to support every child.

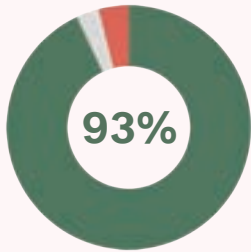
**"I believe [community engagement] helps because we are able to hold the districts accountable and make sure they do what is in the best interest of our children."**

**—Woman, age 30–44,  
Klamath County,  
White**

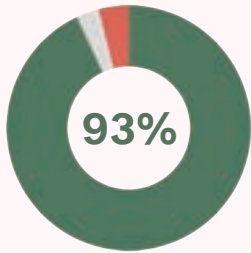
# KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

1

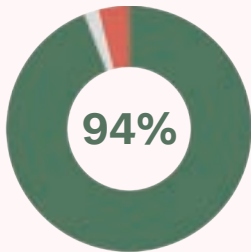
Oregonians are deeply committed to public education and emphatically share the SSA’s vision of high-quality learning in safe and inclusive schools for all students.



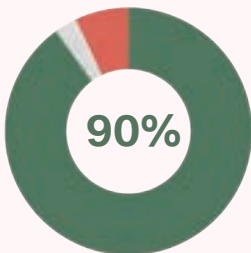
93% agree every student deserves to access high-quality educational experiences, including options to take accelerated and advanced courses.



93% agree students should receive a well-rounded education, including world languages, arts, civics, physical education, and life skills.



94% agree students, communities, and businesses all benefit when education includes hands-on learning through science, technology, engineering, arts, and math as well as career and technical education (CTE).



90% agree it’s important for schools to support students’ health, safety, and sense of belonging.

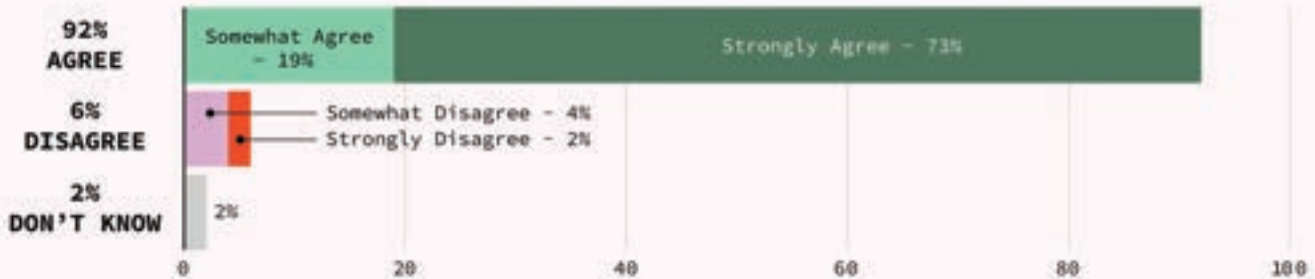
“School districts should reflect the needs of the communities they serve.”

–Man, age 30–44, Umatilla County, Native American, American Indian/Alaska Native, White

# 2

**A strong majority of Oregonians value a public education system that gives every student the same chance and support to succeed in school, no matter their background or circumstances.**

**92% agree every student deserves a rich academic experience, fully including students who experience disability.**



OVBC survey of Oregon adults, April 29-May 28, 2024 (representative sample, N = 1,626)

**83% agree schools must focus on ending persistent academic disparities so every student has the same chance to succeed in school, no matter their background.**



**High levels of agreement hold across urban and rural communities, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and households with and without children.**

OVBC survey of Oregon adults, April 29-May 28, 2024 (representative sample, N = 1,626)

**77% believe targeted strategies to improve how schools support historically underserved students will ultimately create learning environments that better support all students.**



The highest level of strong agreement is seen among Democrats, respondents earning less than \$25,000, those who speak a first language other than English, people with a high school diploma or less, women, people ages 18–29, BIPOC respondents, and people who work (or have family members who work) in the education field.

OVBC survey of Oregon adults, April 29–May 28, 2024 (representative sample, N = 1,626)

**“Education should be decided by experts and those employed in education.”**

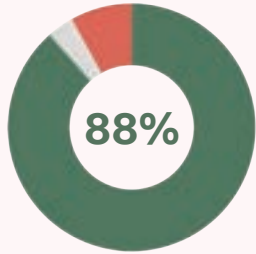
**–Man, age 30–44, Multnomah County, Asian and Hispanic or Latino/a/x**

**“Education doesn’t happen in a vacuum. Community engagement is needed, and the needs/wants of that community should be supported—as long as it is in the best interest of the students and equitable.”**

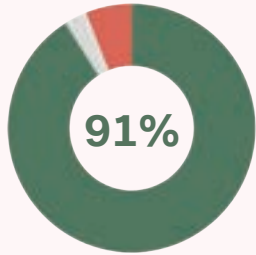
**–Nonbinary/gender non-conforming, age 18–29, Tillamook County, White**

# 3

**Oregonians widely support a more cohesive and coordinated statewide approach to accelerate and measure K-12 school improvement.**



**88% agree school districts should be required to set clear strategies, plans, and budgets to improve schools and better serve all students.**



**91% agree schools and districts should be required to set attainable, realistic, and ambitious goals for academic progress, attendance, and graduation for the next five years.**

**“Community engagement helps schools make better decisions and improve... [S]tudents can learn better when their families and local community organizations are engaged in schools.”**

**–Woman, age 18-29, Wallowa County, Black/African American**

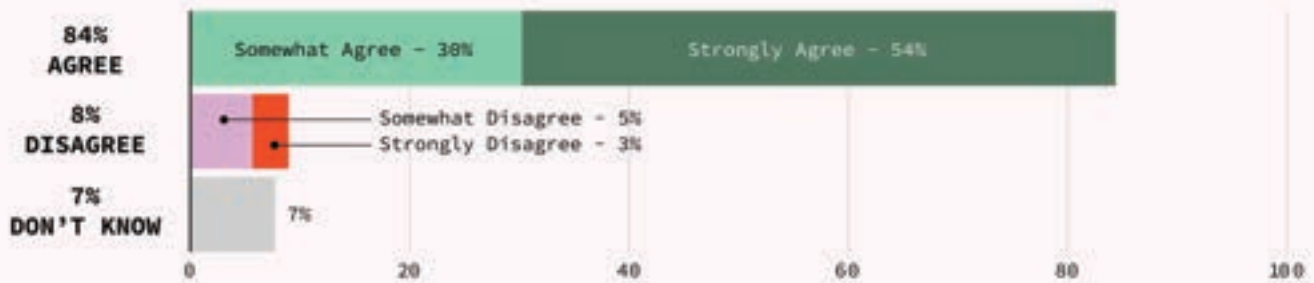
**“My greatest hope is that the adults in our local communities can come together and agree on common goals and standards for our children to work toward, removed from political strategizing and social engineering.”**

**–Woman, age 45-54, Yamhill County, White**

**4**

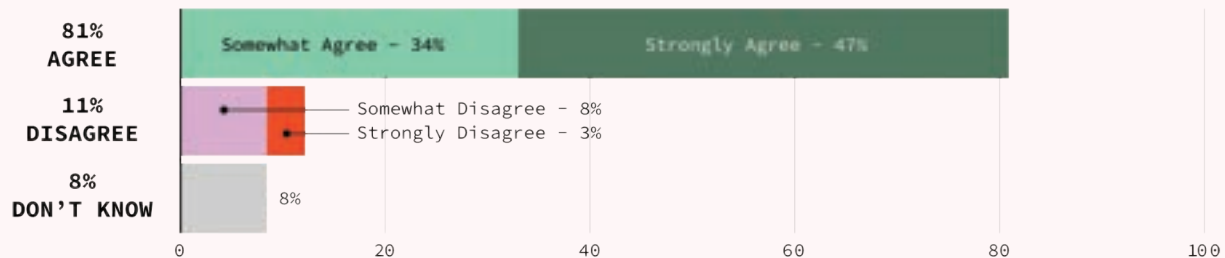
To improve K-12 schools, Oregonians favor policies that leverage community wisdom to address unique local contexts.

84% support state education policies that ensure schools rely on community knowledge, experience, and partnership to make sure students from all backgrounds receive a high-quality education.



OVBC survey of Oregon adults, April 29-May 28, 2024 (representative sample, N = 1,626)

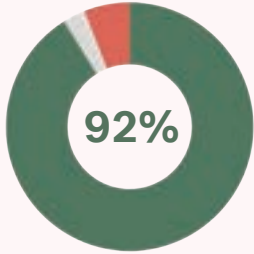
81% support state education policies that honor rural communities and recognize what makes them distinct from urban and suburban communities.



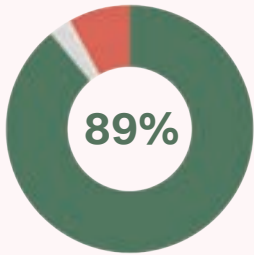
OVBC survey of Oregon adults, April 29-May 28, 2024 (representative sample, N = 1,626)

**5**

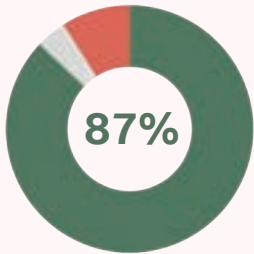
**Oregonians highly value transparency and accountability as essential to K-12 improvement.**



**92% agree it's important that school and district plans and budgets are transparent and easy to understand for the general public.**



**89% agree it's important to see evidence that school leaders are making equitable decisions about where and how to invest public education funding.**



**87% agree it's important to hold schools and school districts accountable for whether they reach their improvement goals over the course of five years.**

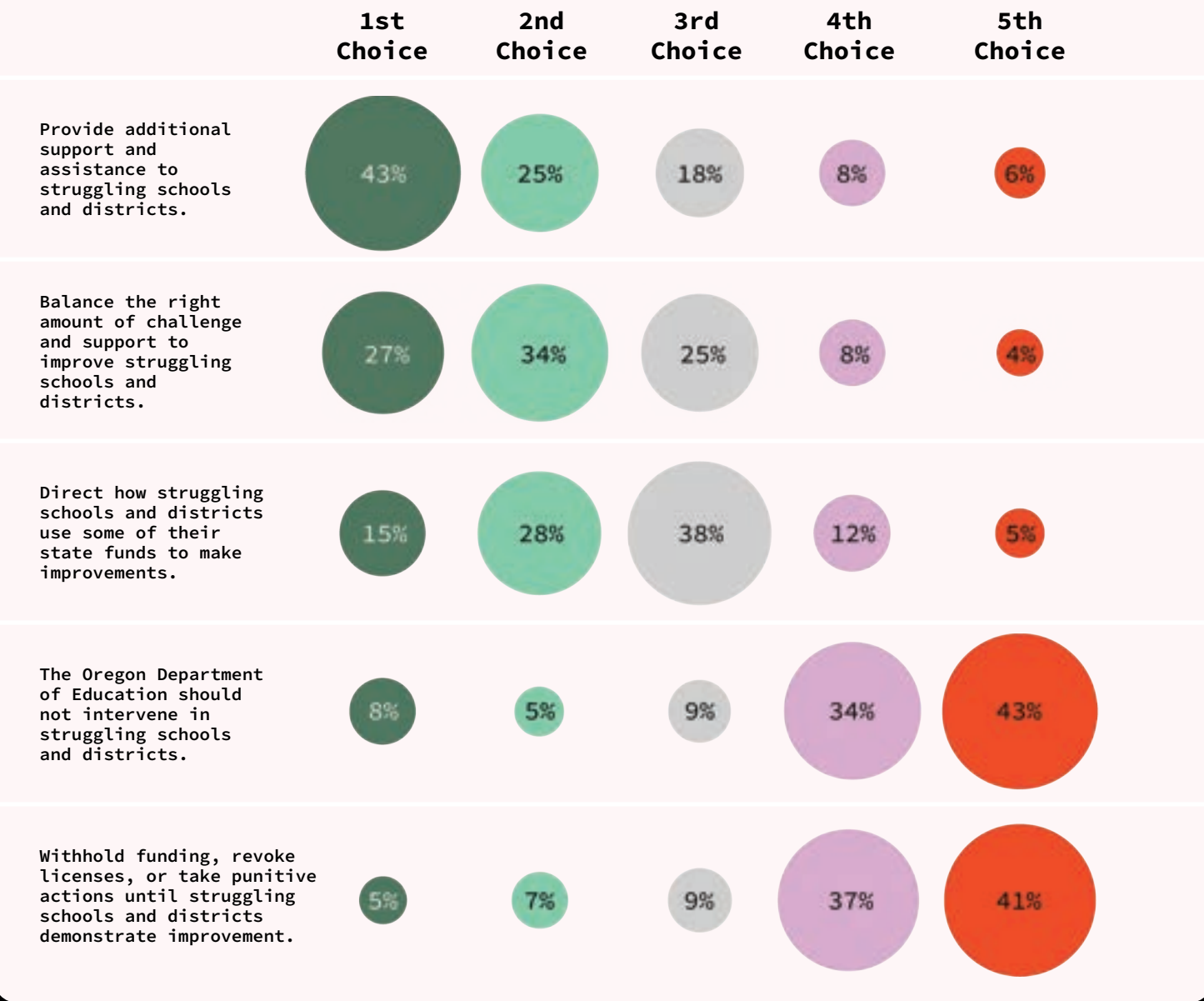
**“Most do not want to do the hard work of learning about school finance, debt/debt service, collective bargaining, or the myriad state and federal regulatory requirements to be fluent enough to participate, let alone contribute... [F]or better or worse, relying on elected boards and volunteer budget committees remains the best source for outside input.”**

**—Man, age 65-74, Multnomah County, White**

**6**

**When a school or district is struggling, Oregonians expect the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to intervene and collaboratively support improvement.**

In a ranked-choice vote, most Oregonians believed ODE should provide additional support and assistance to struggling schools and districts, followed closely by those who believe ODE should balance the right amount of challenge and support. Meanwhile, Oregonians resoundingly rejected a punitive or hands-off approach to accountability.



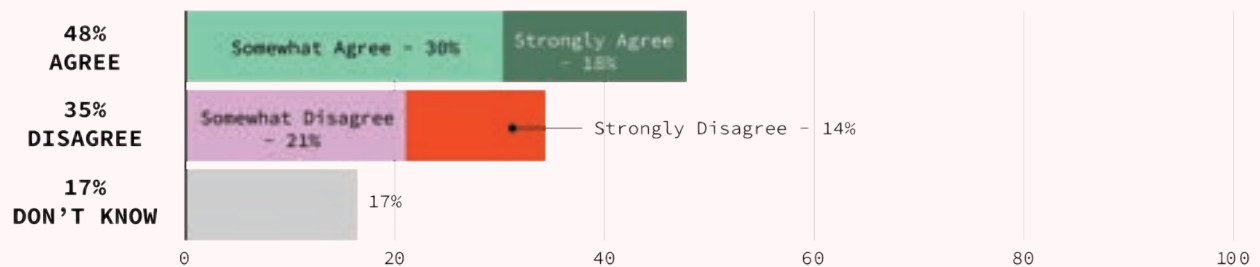
OVBC survey of Oregon adults, April 29–May 28, 2024 (representative sample, N = 1,626)



# 7

**Oregonians are more divided when asked whether they see schools and districts actually taking steps to improve.**

**Are Oregon schools and school districts taking steps to improve and make better use of their resources?**



**Respondents with children in their household are more likely to say that K–12 schools are taking steps to improve, with 54% generally agreeing compared to 45% of respondents without children in their household. In addition, only 10% of those with children in their household say they don't know, compared to 20% of those without children in their household.**

**Results also differ by age range, with 29% of respondents ages 18–29 strongly agreeing, compared to only 13% of those who are 55–64, 7% of those who are 65–74, and 11% of respondents 75 and over.**

OVBC survey of Oregon adults, April 29–May 28, 2024 (representative sample, N = 1,626)

**“[It’s] not just parents and teachers... education involves an entire community. The success of students impacts everyone. There is a wealth of knowledge within the community that should be heard and considered.”**

**–Man, age 75+, Multnomah County, White**

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Taken as a whole, the FBO/OVBC survey shines a light on Oregonians' enduring support for a shared vision, a set of values, and a range of solutions that live at the heart of the SSA. These ideas so thoroughly embraced by Oregonians are far greater than any one education policy, program, or budgetary line item.

At a time when K–12 students' learning and well-being remain starkly impacted by pandemic disruptions, this survey shows how Oregonians believe K–12 schools can—no, *must*—improve to meet the moment and bring a brighter future. As our state grapples with questions about public education funding, spending, goals, and priorities, these powerful points of common ground should guide Oregon's way forward.



## WHAT CHANGED FOR STUDENTS, SCHOOLS, AND COMMUNITIES?

3



When the SSA passed in 2019, it kindled hopes that new public education investments and improvements would make a lasting difference in children's lives. Five years later, when Foundations for a Better Oregon set out to examine the SSA's early impacts on K-12 education, our research focused primarily on what has changed for children, schools, and communities.

By design, the SSA affects every school and community differently; its impact cannot be defined by any individual or universal change. Documenting change over the last five years was further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic and other challenges families, schools, and communities have faced since 2019. Nevertheless, this analysis identifies emerging patterns, highlights encouraging trends, and flags opportunities for improvement.

As we look back for signs of progress, Oregon is still grappling with the fact that important student outcomes—such as reading and math proficiency—were well below state benchmarks before 2020 and haven't rebounded since the pandemic. Unacceptable academic disparities persist, and as in many other states, schools are struggling with chronic absenteeism and increased student mental health needs. Making sustainable progress requires keeping these metrics clearly in sight while also contending with the complexity and pace of large-scale systems change.

## STRONG FIRST STEPS

In fall 2019, school districts and communities enthusiastically welcomed the SSA. This excitement fueled a dedicated state and local effort to implement the extensive new law collaboratively. Although these efforts spanned all SSA initiatives across early learning and K–12 education, this analysis mainly focuses on two of the most significant K–12 investments: the Student Investment Account and the High School Success Initiative.

### BUILDING AN IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

Almost immediately after the SSA’s passage, ODE began designing and hiring new staff positions funded through the law. To coordinate SSA implementation, ODE established the Office of Education Innovation and Improvement, which was led by a new assistant superintendent and a team of education systems change practitioners. To facilitate cross-program collaboration, ODE integrated federal school improvement programs and the High School Success Initiative under the umbrella of this new office.

During this time, ODE also partnered with Oregon’s 19 education service districts (ESDs) to create a network of regional liaisons charged with helping local school districts prepare for SSA implementation. With the support of these liaisons, school districts were better able to understand the new law and to determine how new funding and requirements would fit into their existing planning and budgeting processes.

These roles and structures were designed to strengthen state, regional, and local collaboration and communication, which proved invaluable



when the pandemic emerged. The new personnel and partnerships supported the K–12 system’s early crisis response, quickly demonstrating the value of SSA implementation.



## CENTERING EQUITY THROUGH IMPLEMENTATION

One of the SSA’s key goals is to create a more equitable and inclusive public education system—one that supports the well-being of all students, especially those historically underserved by Oregon schools. This commitment is embedded in the law’s goals and requirements, and it ripples out across school districts through processes and practices that promote inclusive decision-making and equitable investments.

For instance, the SSA’s Student Investment Account (SIA), a major new funding stream for improving K–12 academic and health outcomes, requires local investments to focus on reducing academic disparities for “focal student groups” who have been historically underserved by public

schools. The Oregon Legislature originally specified six focal student groups in legislation—including economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities—and gave the State Board of Education regulatory authority to designate additional groups.

This focus on investing in historically underserved students follows the “targeted universalism” framework developed by legal scholar John A. Powell, which posits that reaching a universal goal—such as high-quality public education access and outcomes for all students—requires targeted support and tailored strategies to meet the unique needs of specific groups.

**“Applying targeted universalism provides an operational pathway to lead for educational change in a way that bridges relationships and perspectives while maintaining a dedicated and precise attention on focal students and their families.”**

**—Oregon Department of Education<sup>18</sup>**



<sup>18</sup> Oregon Department of Education. (2024, April 26). *Aligning for Student Success: Integrated Guidance Update 2025–27*. [https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/ODE\\_IntegratedGuidance25-27.pdf](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/ODE_IntegratedGuidance25-27.pdf)



The polarized political environment might suggest that Oregonians are more divided than united around the need for a more equitable and inclusive education system. In fact, opinion research shows that very strong majorities agree schools must focus on ending persistent academic disparities so every student has the same chance to succeed in school, no matter their background or circumstances.<sup>19</sup> More than two-thirds of Oregonians also believe targeted strategies to improve how schools support historically underserved students will create learning environments that better support all students.

To help achieve the SIA's goals, ODE required every school district to adopt and use an equity lens to assess possible impacts of decisions, policies, and practices on focal student groups. The agency also made sure that school districts not only reviewed and understood disaggregated student data, but also made this data accessible to educators and community members to identify which student groups are not being well served at the local level.

ODE also strengthened long-standing requirements for school districts to consult formally with Oregon's nine federally recognized tribes.<sup>20</sup> These requirements are meant to ensure that sovereign nations can meaningfully contribute their perspectives and expertise during local planning and decision-making for school districts that receive federal Title VI resources or where more than half of students are American Indian/Alaska Native. While these requirements alone do not guarantee inclusive processes and equitable investments, ODE set important baseline expectations for school districts while also sending a message that the state's implementation strategy was serious about honoring the SSA's commitment to equity.

## BEGINNING A REGULAR RITUAL OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The SSA's emphasis on community engagement is rooted in the belief that public schools belong to their communities. That belief is backed by research indicating that authentic engagement is essential to improving outcomes for historically underserved students and families.<sup>21</sup> To fulfill this commitment, a new ritual has emerged: In the fall of every even-numbered year, the SSA requires school districts and charter schools to engage students, families, educators, and community members in discussions on how to invest and target SIA funds.

Before the SSA, 32 state and federal grant programs required school districts to conduct some form of community engagement. However, these programs often lacked clear expectations or mechanisms to ensure community engagement actually informed school districts' plans and investments. Engagement was often limited to surveys or one-off town hall meetings, and community members likely never heard how their feedback was integrated into school district plans (or even if it was actually considered).

In fall 2020, ODE published a Community Engagement Toolkit to help school districts meet—and even go beyond—the SIA's community engagement requirements.<sup>22</sup> This resource, which has been revised and improved with input from educators and community leaders, set initial expectations for authentic community engagement and provided best-practice guides, tools, and templates. Once again, ODE's approach to SSA implementation showed the state was serious about building school districts' capacity to meet both the spirit and the letter of the law's community engagement requirements.

19 Oregon Values and Beliefs Center. (2024, September 26). *Oregon Education Priorities and Planning*. <https://oregonvbc.org/oregon-education-priorities-and-planning/>

20 Oregon Department of Education. (2024). *Understanding the ESSA Law and How to Honor Educational Sovereignty* [Version 2.1]. <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/NativeAmericanEducation/Documents/A%20Toolkit%20for%20Tribal%20Consultation.pdf>

21 Ross, E.M. (2023, March 21). *The Case for Strong Family and Community Engagement in Schools: A Roundup of the Latest K–12 Research Reveals Persuasive Evidence*. Harvard Graduate School of Education. <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ideas/usable-knowledge/23/03/case-strong-family-and-community-engagement-schools>

22 Oregon Department of Education. (2024). *Community Engagement Toolkit*. [https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/AppendixA\\_CommunityEngagementToolkit25-27.pdf](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/AppendixA_CommunityEngagementToolkit25-27.pdf)



## SSA IMPLEMENTATION SPOTLIGHT HIGH DESERT EDUCATION SERVICE DISTRICT



Foundations for a Better Oregon partnered with DHM Research to spotlight how High Desert ESD and school districts in Central Oregon met the SSA's community engagement requirements with humility and creativity.

At the schools High Desert ESD serves, about 8% of students identify as nonwhite. Gathering authentic feedback about their specific needs is tricky, as one administrator puts it, “without making those families feel tokenized.” Despite various hurdles, many school districts in the region have succeeded in reaching target community members by employing a person-first model.

Meeting the needs of marginalized students and families entails gathering their feedback in a way that diffuses power dynamics and stimulates open and honest conversation. As an example, High Desert ESD provided districts with community conversation facilitators who are unaffiliated with the district and who reflect the demographics of the families they assist. It also found that some groups are better served through one-on-one conversations, especially families experiencing houselessness or poverty. In this way, families can ask questions and make their needs clear in a supportive environment that minimizes fear of stigma.

The biggest surprise from these outreach efforts was the ESD's realization that many community needs were relatively easy to implement. For instance, one school district serves three Native American tribes whose reservation is partly within its boundary. The district's ability to provide essential information on topics like extracurricular eligibility to Native students and families has been invaluable to strengthening relationships and communication, and critical to becoming a trusted resource for a marginalized community in a White-dominant region. Continuing to build pipelines for community members to serve as facilitators or hold positions of power will further foster trust between districts and target populations.<sup>23</sup>



<sup>23</sup> DHM Research. (2024, October). *Student Success Act Implementation Spotlight: High Desert Education Service District.*

## THE PANDEMIC DISRUPTION

On March 8, 2020—only months after the SSA became law—Gov. Kate Brown issued the first of several executive orders responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Economic upheaval, school building closures, and health care shortages all profoundly impacted students, families, educators, and communities.

As school districts were preparing their first SIA applications, they suddenly faced a crisis. Schools were shifting gears to deliver meals, provide laptops and internet hotspots, and connect families to other essential resources. Within weeks, nearly every school district transitioned to distance learning, which eventually evolved into hybrid learning models. Students wouldn't fully return to in-person learning until a year later (and in some cases, not until fall 2021).

The pandemic forced districts to adapt and share information at an unprecedented pace. While this spurred innovation, it also exacerbated challenges. Educators faced immense pressure in a constantly shifting environment, and student learning was disrupted.

In August 2020, the Oregon Legislature held a special legislative session to address the economic uncertainty caused by the pandemic. Fearing an economic downturn, legislators shifted SSA revenue into the State School Fund, reducing SIA funding from \$500 million to \$150 million. They also directed ODE to freeze hiring for SSA-related staff positions and suspended requirements that school districts create five-year targets to improve academic outcomes and reduce disparities—a major SSA accountability measure.

With student health and safety becoming a top priority, many school districts amended their SIA-funded investments to address pressing new needs. Eventually, federal emergency relief funding infused \$1.7 billion into Oregon's K–12 system, further easing the strain.

Amid these challenges, education leaders found new ways to collaborate and support students. In many cases, districts that built strong community partnerships in the early days of SSA implementation were better equipped to respond to the pandemic and other crises such as wildfires. The regional network of SSA liaisons also shifted from assisting school districts with SSA implementation toward helping them understand new public health regulations and coordinate pandemic response.

Although SSA resources and partnerships helped districts weather the storm, the pandemic interrupted many school/community partnerships and collaborations. In interviews with DHM Research, some community-based organization leaders lamented lost progress.

“There was great momentum [for SSA implementation] at the beginning, but the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic understandably brought that to a halt. Now, even though the height of the pandemic is over and most schools have returned to in-person instruction, several community-based organizations [have been] told by school personnel that there is no space for them to conduct business within their schools, even though these spaces were there pre-COVID. There is a collective feeling that collaboration is going backward—not because of the SSA, but because it didn't buffer us from what hit us.”

– Community-Based Organization Leader





## SSA IMPLEMENTATION SPOTLIGHT PHOENIX–TALENT SCHOOL DISTRICT



Foundations for a Better Oregon partnered with DHM Research to spotlight how Phoenix–Talent School District leveraged new SSA funding and partnerships to improve student mental health, build trust with migrant and Spanish-speaking communities, and respond to crisis.

Five years after implementation, the Student Success Act (SSA) has brought many benefits to Phoenix-Talent School District. The biggest bright spots have been in the realms of supporting mental health and engaging with migrant and Spanish-speaking communities. These connections are important not just in the district’s day-to-day operations but were also critical to navigating the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 Alameda Fire.

In this rural area, where schools are small and resources are scarce, the SSA introduced new community engagement opportunities that helped the district “offer what [the] community’s been asking for a long time.” The most requested community resource—even before the pandemic— was better mental health services. Since this need went beyond what the district alone could provide, funding from the SSA’s Student Investment Account allowed Phoenix-Talent to hire new counselors and partner with Medford-based La Clinica Health Centers. That partnership opened the door to new mental health resources—including a therapist in each elementary school—and has allowed the district to place a greater emphasis on mental health care for students and staff. Even though providing such resources was an anticipated SSA outcome, Phoenix-Talent administrators are surprised at how integral these services have become:

“What I didn’t anticipate is that the services with SIA are a staple now. ... We couldn’t have gotten through the pandemic—we couldn’t have gotten through fire recovery—without those services that were started with those funds.”

This was especially clear during the Alameda Fire— the most destructive wildfire in Oregon’s recorded history—which destroyed more than 2,600 homes between Ashland, Talent, Phoenix, and Medford. During the fire, it took several weeks for the Red Cross to come and help—and even longer for the Federal Emergency Management Agency—so much of the community’s immediate needs were handled by local leadership, including Phoenix-Talent administrators. Community trust—something Phoenix-Talent had been cultivating since the SSA’s inception—played a crucial role in mitigating this disaster.



**SSA IMPLEMENTATION SPOTLIGHT**  
**PHOENIX–TALENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

“When you have Department of Homeland Security trucks pulling in, it is not a celebration for a lot of people. And a lot of people in our community don’t know who they trust. But the one person or entity that people trust is the school district, for sure. ... Just wearing a Phoenix-Talent T-shirt or a hat, people automatically trusted me—not even knowing me. People were just buying gift cards from Fred Meyer—just handing me stacks [to hand out to people]. We needed our families, and they needed us as a default trusted partner for everything.”

Partnerships born from SSA programming also buffered the community against the fire’s devastating aftermath. Phoenix-Talent staff served as a hub directing community members to much-needed resources like mental health services from La Clinica:

“I don’t want to call COVID a blessing. But the silver lining is, we were developing those relationships due to COVID. And at the same time, with the SSA and SIA, we were developing relationships with our community and schools. We [knew] the people at Jackson County Emergency Operations. ... We partnered with La Clinica due to our engagement with the Student Investment Account. With the fire, we couldn’t have responded the way we did if we [hadn’t] had intentional connections with groups of people.”

Crises like these are a reminder of the importance of community and the dynamic relationships—made possible in this case by the SIA—that foster crisis response and resilience. Even so, administrators expressed concern that they will lose some of those partnerships over time. Providing opportunities, funding, and guidance for maintaining partnerships may mitigate this risk. Also, although several years have gone by since the pandemic and fire, it has taken Phoenix-Talent longer than expected to rebuild, raising concerns for the future of affected students. Research shows that students who lost homes in the fire aren’t recovering at the same rate as their peers and “are still making little to no growth in academics.” Despite the mental health support Phoenix-Talent has already put in place, this particular demographic needs specialized help. Phoenix-Talent recognizes that while its current SSA efforts buffered the community during the crises, it has little or no planning in place to deal with the aftereffects; this is likely true for most districts in the state. District leadership sees a need for greater state support to reinforce emergency preparedness for schools and, where possible, provide funding security for those that do experience an emergency. Despite experiencing two public crises in the past five years, Phoenix-Talent School District has seen major improvements in family engagement, especially among migrant and Spanish-speaking families. One administrator recalled a recent math night in which Spanish-speaking participants “could have stayed all night” asking questions about their children’s education and the curriculum. Another talked about their migrant education program, which has gotten Spanish-speaking families more involved in the district and more willing to offer feedback.

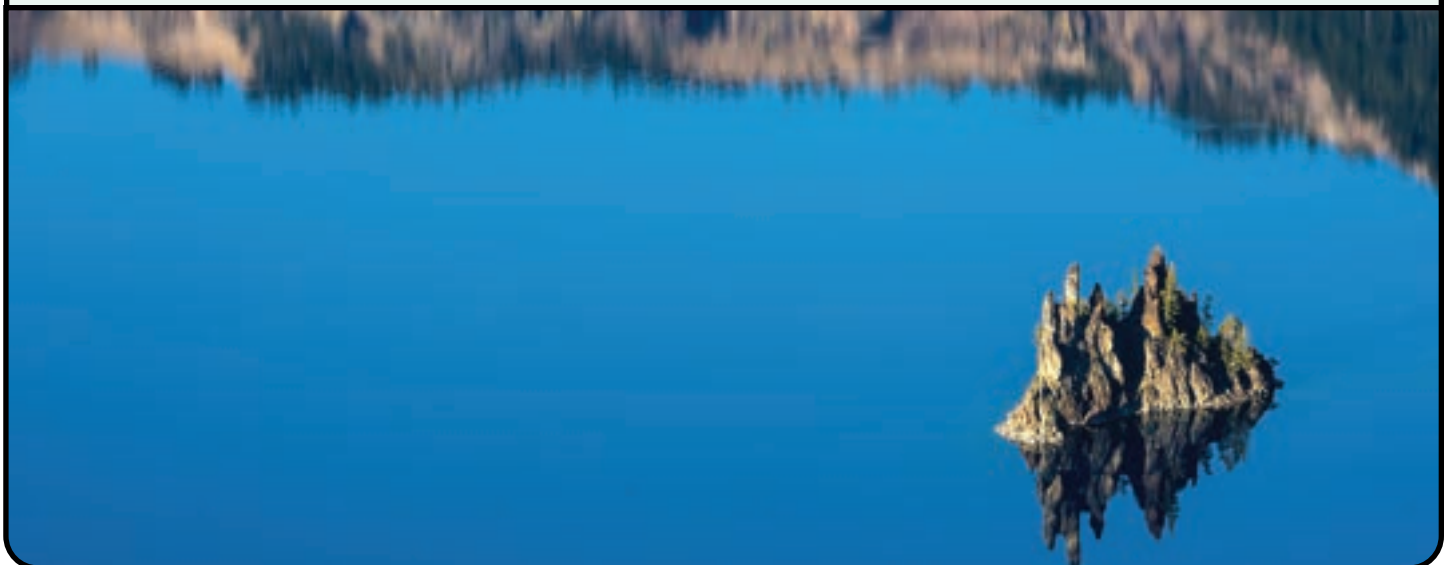


## SSA IMPLEMENTATION SPOTLIGHT PHOENIX–TALENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

“On the first day of our summer experience for migrant education, there were some busing issues. Normally, I think our families might not have expressed the issues that we had, but they stormed to the district office from the outlet, which, in one hand, you’re like, ‘Oh my gosh, there’s all these families that are kind of angry about the busing right now.’ But the good news was, they knew where to go; they knew who they could trust and talk to. The mere fact that a group of family members that traditionally would not feel comfortable going to a district office of the school district did—without hesitation—really made me proud [and] makes me feel glad that more people have a voice than just the few really loud people that often times drive decisions made in school districts because they have privilege.”

This is a definite shift from how families previously engaged with the district. Phoenix-Talent has been strategically empowering families and parents to be facilitators, which has bolstered engagement and garnered “richer information” to guide district planning and decisions. Because of these engagement efforts, the district’s migrant students have had an unprecedented 100% graduation rate for several years in a row. Phoenix-Talent is a prime example of how SSA funding can inspire school districts to authentically and meaningfully engage with their community.

Phoenix-Talent largely attributes these successes—both during the crises and in general—to leadership; the district is conscientious about bringing on new staff who “share the values of supporting the whole community.” As other case studies have mentioned, there has been a shift in the overall mindset around inclusivity. Creating opportunities and staffing pipelines to uphold these values is a promising way to maintain that momentum.<sup>24</sup>



# HOW ARE SCHOOL DISTRICTS INVESTING SSA FUNDING?

When designing the SSA, policymakers debated how much latitude the law should allow school districts in investing SIA funds. Ultimately, they settled on what they thought was the right balance of prescriptive planning, community engagement,

and data review requirements that gave districts sufficient flexibility to decide which investments would best serve local students. To guide district investments, the SSA specified six allowable uses for SIA funding.<sup>25</sup>

STUDENT INVESTMENT ACCOUNT ALLOWABLE USES	
<p><b>IMPROVING STUDENT HEALTH AND SAFETY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expanding social-emotional learning and development, student mental and behavioral health services, student health and wellness, trauma-informed practices, and access to school health professionals.</li> <li>Making facility improvements that promote student health and safety.</li> </ul>	<p><b>WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive literacy programs in pre-K through third grade.</li> <li>Culturally responsive practices and programs in grades six through eight, including counseling and student support connected to colleges and careers.</li> <li>Broadened curricular options at all grade levels (e.g., access to art, music, physical education, and science) and access to librarians.</li> </ul>
<p><b>INCREASING INSTRUCTIONAL TIME</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing more hours or days of instructional time, summer programs, or before-school or after-school programs.</li> <li>Making technological investments that minimize the class time used for student assessments.</li> </ul>	<p><b>REDUCING CLASS SIZE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing the number of instructional assistants, educators, and counselors.</li> <li>Using evidence-based criteria to maintain appropriate student-teacher ratios and staff caseloads.</li> </ul>
<p><b>ONGOING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School districts and charter schools may use a portion of SIA funds to improve ongoing community engagement practices.</li> </ul>	<p><b>ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Every year, school districts and charter schools may use up to 5% or \$500,000 of the total amount spent (whichever is lower) for administrative costs.</li> </ul>

<sup>25</sup> Oregon Department of Education. (2024, January). *The Student Investment Account: 2024 Legislative Report*. <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/SIALegislativeReport2024.pdf>



Now that schools have emerged from the peak of pandemic disruptions, state and local data is beginning to paint a picture of how SIA resources are being budgeted and (presumably) spent. The data shows school districts are investing their new SIA funds broadly across the SIA's six allowable use categories, with the majority opting to invest in student health and safety, followed by more well-rounded educational opportunities.



### How School Districts Budgeted 2023-24 SIA Funds

Education Service District	Total SIA Budget	Health and Safety	Increased Instructional Time	Ongoing Community Engagement	Reduced Class Size	Well Rounded Education
All Grantees	\$525,248,844	36%	5%	4%	21%	31%
Clackamas	\$50,171,648	28%	3%	3%	32%	30%
Columbia	\$7,583,746	22%	11%	3%	18%	41%
Douglas	\$12,574,574	35%	10%	0%	9%	45%
Grant	\$1,302,223	53%	12%	8%	0%	28%
Harney	\$1,884,173	35%	2%	2%	12%	47%
High Desert	\$27,163,804	40%	9%	5%	28%	16%
Intermountain	\$21,953,775	40%	9%	2%	12%	35%
Jefferson	\$3,738,592	48%	0%	1%	5%	41%
Lake	\$1,065,308	14%	30%	9%	17%	29%
Lane	\$41,500,202	32%	13%	6%	14%	32%
Linn Benton Lincoln	\$31,901,586	39%	7%	2%	19%	30%
Malheur	\$6,205,588	55%	4%	0%	15%	23%
Multnomah	\$83,828,923	33%	3%	4%	17%	41%
North Central	\$1,296,445	9%	0%	2%	6%	81%
Northwest Regional	\$93,700,515	36%	2%	4%	32%	25%
South Coast	\$10,949,505	47%	3%	3%	18%	23%
Southern Oregon	\$48,458,181	37%	4%	4%	19%	32%
Wallowa	\$1,148,785	34%	0%	0%	0%	64%
Willamette	\$78,821,271	38%	8%	8%	15%	29%

A regional view of how school districts in each of Oregon's 19 ESDs budgeted their SIA funds in 2023–2024.

Data Source: Oregon Department of Education.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Budget percentages may not add up to 100% due to incomplete data. Preliminary data available in spring 2024 shows a limited number of local budget line items uncategorized by SIA allowable use. These may include administrative costs and other indirect or unallocated expenses. ODE expects complete data to be available by the end of 2024.

## INVESTING IN STUDENT HEALTH AND SAFETY

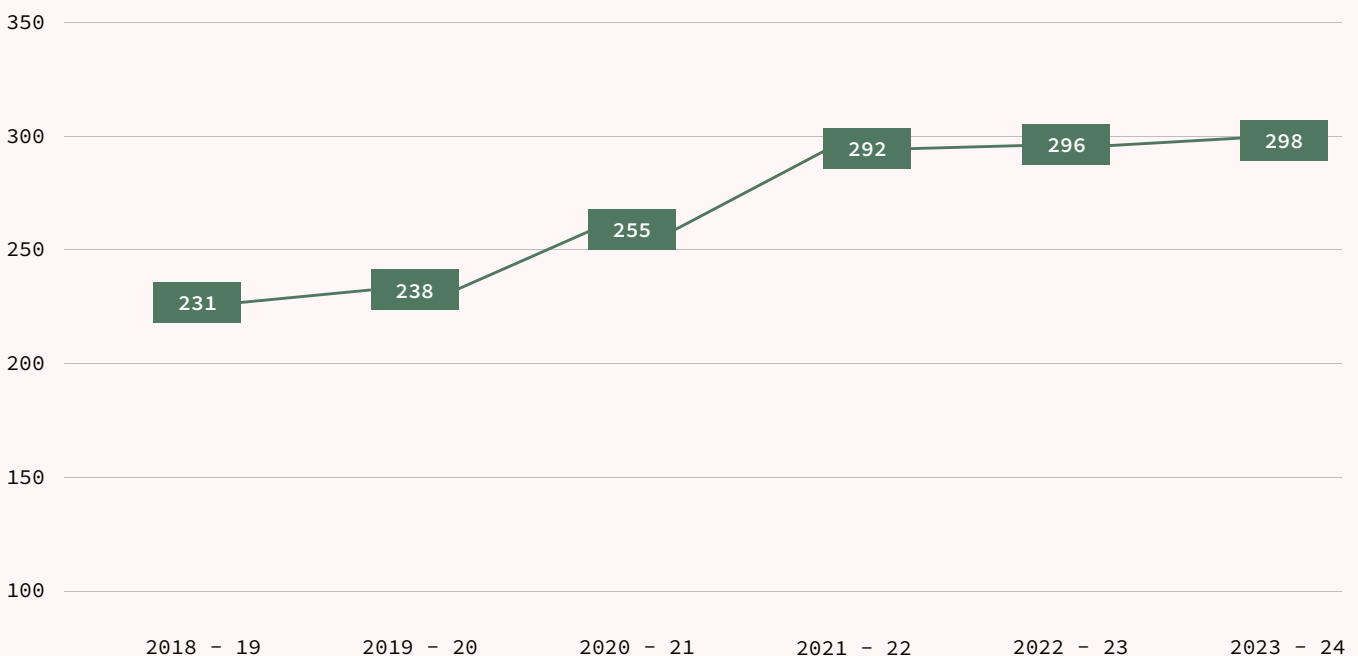
When state legislators began developing the SSA, they were already hearing from educators, families, and communities who urgently wanted more support for student health and wellness. Inevitably, this existing need was exacerbated by the pandemic.

In focus groups, many regional education leaders emphasized that social, emotional, mental, and physical health is critical to student learning. ESD leaders and staff noted that thanks to the SSA, schools are now better equipped to support “the whole student” rather than focusing solely on academic performance. As an example, one school district held a comprehensive districtwide training on trauma and trauma-informed practices. Another regularly conducts empathy interviews with students to better understand their needs. Informed by student feedback, the district can develop

better strategies for encouraging regular school attendance and keeping ninth graders on track for graduation. A broader perspective on student success—combined with new SIA funding—has also allowed schools and districts to expand critical mental health support.<sup>27</sup>

Conversations in the field and workforce data from ODE point to significant increases in staff who directly support students’ social, emotional, mental, and physical health. Year over year, the number of nurses, psychologists, and social workers has increased statewide since the SSA’s passage, likely bolstered by federal pandemic relief funds. In addition, the percentage of Oregon school districts that are staffing school counselors within the recommended ratio of one counselor per 250 students has grown from 2% in 2016–2017 to 24% in 2023–2024.

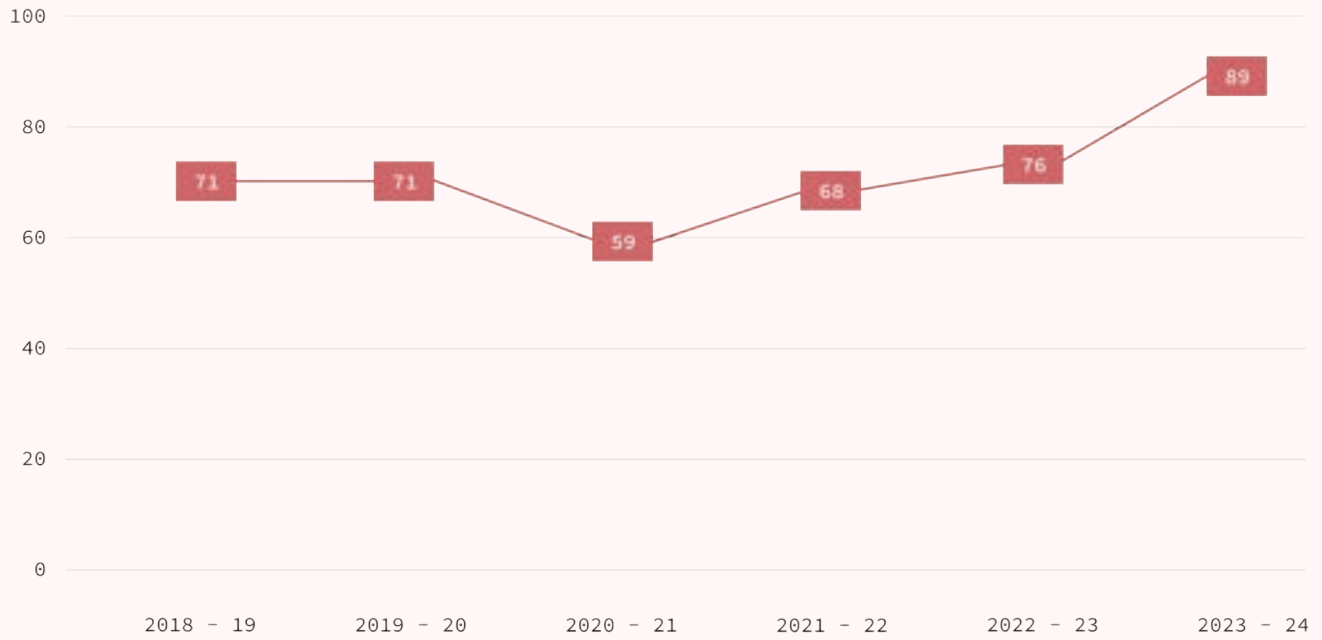
**Statewide Number of School Nurses in Oregon**



Data Source: Oregon Department of Education.

27 DHM Research. (2024, October). *Student Success Act Implementation Spotlight: Regional Collaboration and Infrastructure*.

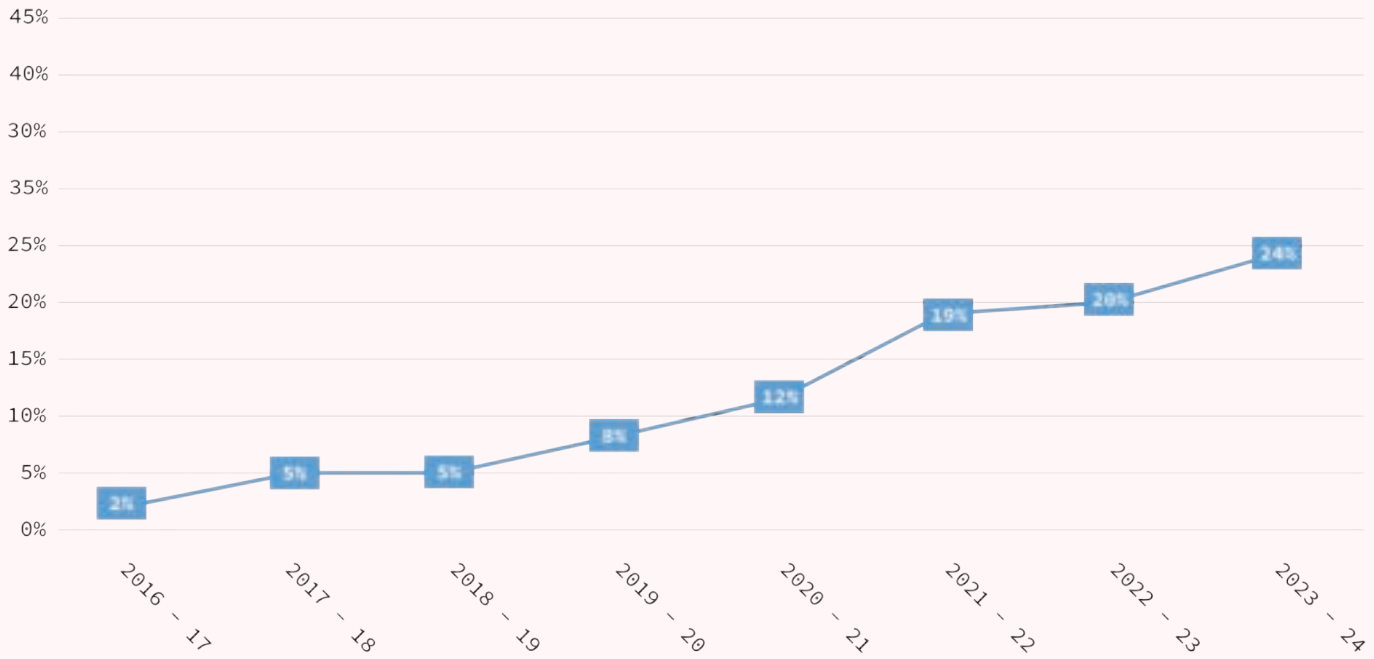
## Statewide Number of School Psychologists in Oregon



Data Source: Oregon Department of Education.



### Percentage of Oregon School Districts Within the Recommended Ratio of Students to School Counselors (250:1)



Data Source: Oregon Department of Education.<sup>28</sup>

Oregon’s ability to hire more school staff supporting school health and safety was especially timely during the pandemic, and it remains important to bolstering student success. Sustaining these gains will depend not only on continued state investment in the K–12 system, but also on creating an adequate workforce pipeline along with strategies for recruiting and retaining these professionals throughout the state. “The focus is starting to shift [toward] maintaining and deepening these initiatives, rather than continually creating new ones,” said one leader at High Desert ESD.<sup>29</sup>



<sup>28</sup> Staff position data was not available from Eugene School District 4J for the 2022–2023 school year.

<sup>29</sup> DHM Research (2024, October). *Student Success Act Implementation Spotlight: High Desert Education Service District*.



## WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION AND HANDS-ON LEARNING

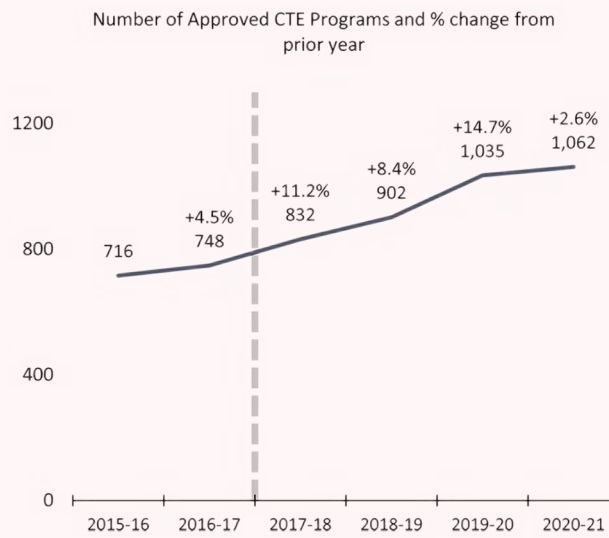
The SIA's investments in well-rounded education reflect what education scholar Dr. Michael Fullan calls *deep learning*. Fullan's research on education systems change shows a strong link between schools giving students well-rounded educational opportunities—including more engaging academic curricula, hands-on learning opportunities, and varied opportunities for applying knowledge—and nurturing deeper competencies like creativity, communication, citizenship, critical thinking, character, and collaboration.

In its most recent report on SIA implementation, ODE detailed the variety and impact of school district investments in well-rounded education.

**“Nearly one-third of SIA grantees reported changes and improvements related to well-rounded education. These were identified through increases in offerings of and enrollment in extracurricular activities. There was also frequent mention of increased participation of focal group students who may have previously experienced barriers to participation in those extracurriculars. Further, as investments in [well-rounded education] center whole-child learning, they were also attributed for engendering improvements in both student engagement and social emotional learning.”**

**– Oregon Department of Education<sup>30</sup>**

### Statewide Number of CTE Programs in Oregon



According to this graph produced by ODE, Oregon has seen a 42% increase in CTE programs since High School Success was launched.<sup>31</sup>

The High School Success Initiative has also significantly increased the availability of career and technical education (CTE) programs across the state. CTE programs have long been recognized as boosting student engagement, facilitating deeper learning, and promoting student success in school and adulthood. Since 2017, the High School Success Initiative has contributed to a 42% increase in CTE programs available to students across Oregon.

30 Oregon Department of Education. (2024, January). *The Student Investment Account: 2024 Legislative Report*. <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/SIALegislativeReport2024.pdf>

31 Oregon Department of Education. (n.d.). *Impact of High School Success on CTE Programs and Enrollment*. <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/GraduationImprovement/Documents/CTEProgramsAndEnrollment.pdf>

## DOING MORE TO MEET THE SSA'S PROMISE

### STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY

As local education leaders inform communities about SSA programs and investments, there's a growing recognition that the success of Oregon children is a shared responsibility. SSA implementation has sparked or expanded formal and informal school/community partnerships, with every school district tailoring its approach to its community's unique strengths and assets.

According to a review of school/community partnerships conducted by DHM Research, many districts focus on strengthening ties with local organizations. For example, Forest Grove School District is enhancing partnerships with community-based organizations like Adelante Mujeres and Centro Cultural to improve communication and engagement pathways; Beaverton School District is revitalizing school-based teams with support from a district-level community resource coordinator to sustain the involvement of local organizations, businesses, and faith-based groups; and Klamath Falls School District is collaborating with local community groups to support parents of focal students to participate in community engagement processes.

Some districts are emphasizing partnerships with higher education institutions and local employers. Forest Grove School District is collaborating on initiatives such as dual credit and mechatronics programs to bridge K–12 and higher education pathways. It also fosters partnerships through industry advisory boards, internships, and career-

oriented events. Ashland School District is developing industry sector partnerships and community tours to expand work-based learning opportunities, and Medford School District is collaborating with employers through programs like apprenticeships and health care workforce training.

In Oregon's more densely populated regions, community-based organizations (CBOs) play a crucial role in supporting students and families. Since many of these organizations are led by culturally specific communities, they hold deep, trusted relationships with underserved students and families, making them essential partners in Oregon's education ecosystem. CBOs work both independently and in partnership with school districts to provide a range of in-school, after-school, and summer programs and services that support academic growth, social and emotional learning, and mental and physical health.

Although the SSA is advancing a community-centered approach to public education, challenges to school/community partnerships remain. Addressing these barriers is essential to ensuring that all students—and especially those who are historically underserved—benefit from the strong school/community partnerships that are integral to the SSA's goals and promise.

## CHALLENGES TO SCHOOL/COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

### A LACK OF CAPACITY

Schools and partner organizations are frequently stretched thin as they address urgent daily challenges, leaving them with little time and resources for long-term planning and collaboration.

### POWER AND RESOURCE DISPARITIES

School districts typically have greater legal authority and financial resources than their CBO, nonprofit, and faith-based partners, creating a power imbalance that can hinder the formation of mutually beneficial partnerships.

### LIMITED INVESTMENT IN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

While the SSA's K–12 programs *require* school districts to involve their communities in investment decisions, they merely *encourage* school districts to invest SSA funds in community partnerships that deliver student programs and services. School and community leaders acknowledge it is difficult to mandate partnerships and investments in a way that also promotes authentic school/community relationships and collaboration. Still, the state could take a more prominent role in incentivizing and supporting such efforts.

### A LACK OF CONNECTORS

During SSA implementation, ESDs stepped into a “bridging” role between schools, school districts, and community partner organizations and service providers. However, schools and school districts could benefit from additional support in identifying and connecting with community partners who can help them meet students' needs.

## MOVING FROM COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TO COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

Over the past five years, most school districts have made progress toward authentically engaging students, families, and educators. But despite the many bright spots across our state, it will take more work to achieve a consistent and deep level of engagement that truly puts students and families at the center of decision-making.

According to DHM Research's interviews with ESD leaders, SSA implementation has either launched or expanded culturally responsive communication and engagement between school districts and communities.<sup>32</sup> School districts are now more mindful of how different communities communicate and are using new listening strategies to better understand their perspectives and feedback.

<sup>32</sup> DHM Research (2024, October). *Student Success Act Implementation Spotlight: Regional Collaboration and Infrastructure*.

For instance, one ESD found success with focus groups, story circles, and empathy interviews geared toward whole communities as well as specific student and family groups.

In another example, an ESD invested SSA dollars to provide professional development for educators throughout the region to teach Oregon’s Tribal History/Shared History curriculum. This led school districts in the region to come together and partner with local Native American families on further efforts to better support Native students.

“I think our districts that were really hesitant five years ago of what this process could look like, they’ve really embraced it ... and it’s been fun to watch school districts try out strategies, see where their successes are, try out different modes of communication, and kind of change that idea of ‘engagement is one way.’”

– ESD Leader

“Without SSA funds, we would not have been able to provide that professional development, which then led us to apply as a consortium for a Title VI grant. And so districts have been working together with families, and they are driving that plan.”

– ESD Leader



Though community engagement efforts began as an SSA requirement, ESD leaders believe they are making the K–12 system’s commitment to inclusivity “more and more automatic.” New school district investments in culturally specific initiatives and programs—an SSA priority—have also led to more transparency and trust between districts and communities. With access to additional resources and deeper community engagement, some have observed school district leaders opening up to new culturally specific strategies and partnerships that were once hindered by fears of using up limited resources.



## LEVELS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

STANCE TOWARDS COMMUNITY					
IGNORE	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	DEFER
INTENTION					
Protecting School/District Interests <i>Unintended Impact to Consider: Marginalizing Communities</i>	Keeping Communities Updated <i>Unintended Impact to Consider: Placating &amp; Underestimating Community Wisdom</i>	Receiving Community Input <i>Unintended Impact to Consider: Tokenizing &amp; Gatekeeping Community Engagement</i>	Meaningfully Engaging Community Voice <i>Unintended Impact to Consider: Community Voice is Not Heard</i>	Collaborating and Sharing Power with Communities <i>Unintended Impact to Consider: Collaborative Process Derailed by Power Dynamics &amp; Lack of Relational Trust</i>	Communities Drive and Own the Work <i>Unintended Impact to Consider: Sovereignty and Core Agreements are Not Honored</i>
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GOALS					
Deny access to decision-making processes	Provide students, families & community with relevant information for them to support district/school goals	Gather input from students, families & community without including them in decision-making	Ensure students, families & community needs and assets are integrated into district process & planning	Ensure student, family & community capacity play a leadership role in implementation of decisions	Foster lasting educational equity through community-driven schools that are culturally rooted and responsive to whole and sovereign people and communities

The Oregon Department of Education created a community engagement spectrum to assess and deepen engagement practices in the K–12 system during SSA implementation.<sup>33</sup>

Even though much progress has been made, there remains a strong need to sustain and improve how school districts practice meaningful community engagement and build community partnerships. In interviews with DHM Research, some CBO leaders expressed a sense that pandemic disruptions have led some districts to lose focus on targeted community engagement and strategies to support historically underserved students. Some also observed that frequent turnover of school district leadership can slow or reverse progress on school/community partnerships, sometimes breaking previous leaders' commitments to listen to and learn from impacted students and families.

Many ESD and CBO leaders also emphasized the importance of building authentic feedback loops and sharing the actual impact of feedback with communities. One administrator with High Desert ESD emphasized wanting families to know that their words matter and their requests are taken into account even when there is no concrete or immediate change. This requires districts to prioritize transparent communication with community members during and after community engagement, and to make clear distinctions between short-term plans that require few resources and longer-term plans that are more difficult to implement.

<sup>33</sup> Oregon Department of Education. (n.d.). *Student Investment Account: Community Engagement Toolkit 2021–2022*. [https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/69236\\_ODE\\_CommunityEngagementToolkit\\_2021-web\[1\].pdf](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/69236_ODE_CommunityEngagementToolkit_2021-web[1].pdf)



## A LONG ROAD IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Over the last five years, Oregon school districts have leveraged the SSA to prioritize student health, safety, and well-being, all of which are critical to improving student learning. The High School Success Initiative—one of the first targeted improvement strategies to be fully implemented—has already contributed to improved student outcomes, including high school graduation rates. Further, collaborations and partnerships developed during early SSA implementation served to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic and wildfires while also building the resilience that is crucial to weathering and recovering from future crises.

Individually, these strategies and investments—along with many others made possible by the SSA—have made an appreciable difference in students’ lives over a relatively short but very turbulent period. On the whole, the SSA is fostering a more community-centered K–12 education system that better recognizes students’ unique strengths and needs, acknowledges that school districts can’t work alone, and welcomes youth, families, educators, and community members as true partners.

The long-term impact of the SSA’s ongoing investments in K–12 students and schools remains to be seen, and we have certainly not yet achieved the population-level progress on student academic outcomes that every family rightfully and urgently expects. In the arc of large-scale systems change, Oregon is walking a long road toward ensuring every child has what they need to learn, grow and thrive. The SSA’s early impacts offer hopeful signs that we are moving in the right direction.



## THE INVISIBLE INFRASTRUCTURE OF SYSTEMS CHANGE

### 4



When Oregon passed the SSA in 2019, a broad coalition of lawmakers, educators, community leaders, and business leaders moved the landmark legislation across the finish line. This coalition came together in this historic action not only to raise much-needed funding for public schools but also to promote improvement and accountability across the K-12 education system.

Understanding what causes education systems to change begins with examining the people, institutions, and components that make up a complex system. It also requires recognizing the conditions and infrastructure that must be in place to change how a system operates and what outcomes it produces. When we collectively identify and embrace the factors that drive education systems to change, we open new pathways to high-quality schools and sustained student success.

The SSA made a significant promise to reshape how Oregon's public education system supports K-12 students—especially those who have been historically underserved. Understanding the fundamentals, complexity, and trajectory of long-term systems change is therefore essential to advancing the SSA's implementation. It is also crucial to build connections and coherence between the SSA and the rest of Oregon's K-12 system in order to achieve systemwide change.

# THE COMPLEX WEB OF OREGON'S K-12 SYSTEM

Children and youth are at the heart of Oregon's K–12 public education system: 552,000 children and youth attend public schools across the state, each of whom brings unique gifts and assets, relationships and experience, challenges and opportunities. These students come from homes where 333 different languages are spoken, and more than 40% of them identify as people of color.<sup>34</sup>

Nearly 80,000 educators and staff are the heartbeat of the K–12 system.<sup>35</sup> They work with and for students in school buildings, community centers, school district and education service district (ESD) offices, and homes. Thousands of community-based organizations and wraparound service providers also play a vital role in educating Oregon's children and youth, connecting families to resources and each other, helping children connect with their culture and sense of place; and expanding learning opportunities through after-school and summer programs, mentoring, and leadership development.

Oregonians are deeply sensitive to local context and the need to recognize and respect every community's unique strengths and diverse needs. In the K–12 system, this commitment to local governance—more commonly known as “local control”—means over 1,200 schools are organized into 197 school districts, each

governed by an independent school board elected by the community. Most of these districts are small, serving less than 1,000 students. However, the majority of students are educated in districts serving 7,000 or more.<sup>36</sup>

Oregon's school districts are supported by 19 regional ESDs, which are led by independent boards elected by their regional communities. Their services and supports include professional development opportunities for educators, services for students with special needs from birth to 21 years, technical assistance for local SSA implementation and other school improvement efforts, and technology, administrative, and financial support services for school districts.

The Oregon Legislature is responsible for funding the K–12 system but largely leaves spending decisions up to districts. The governor of Oregon and the State Board of Education oversee the Oregon Department of Education (ODE). Led by a gubernatorial appointee, ODE is responsible for supporting and monitoring schools and districts to ensure students are well served.

Together, this complex web of people, boards, organizations, and buildings, spanning 36 counties and nine federally recognized tribes, makes up Oregon's K–12 public education system.

<sup>34</sup> Oregon Department of Education. (2023, November 30). *Oregon Statewide Report Card 2022–23: An Annual Report to the Legislature on Oregon Public Schools*. <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/schools-and-districts/reportcards/Documents/rptcd2023.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

## KEY CONDITIONS AND DRIVERS OF SYSTEMS CHANGE

“Systems change” is a well-researched concept that identifies the necessary conditions for large-scale transformation that improves a system’s effectiveness and coherence. The research provides frameworks to help us recognize when change is occurring, how it can sometimes remain hidden, and how we can accelerate it to achieve our goals.

Since systems consist of people, their success relies on human behavior. The most successful systems feature a shared understanding about the purpose and nature of the work that supports collective action toward a common goal. ODE and the Joint Committee on Student Success looked to the research and scholarship of Dr. Michael Fullan to ensure that the SSA’s design would promote system change.

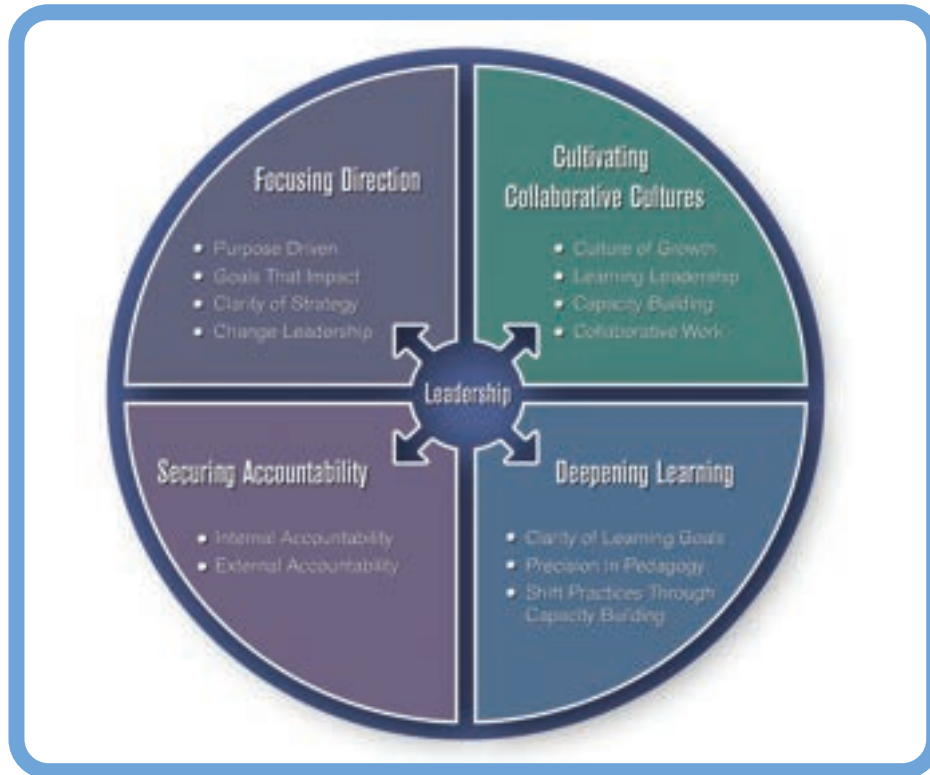
Over years of applied research and study, Fullan posited that education systems change depends on certain conditions that he calls “the right drivers.”<sup>37</sup> The right drivers require the education system to be clear about what we collectively want, to grow our capacity for collaboration, and to stay accountable for our shared aims. When guided by focused and effective leadership, these drivers promise to transform education systems and deliver the change we seek.

Using the following four drivers as a framework, we can examine how the SSA has built some of the critically important—but often invisible—infrastructure and conditions that drive K–12 system change. We can also recognize the work that still remains to reinforce these drivers.



37 Fullan, M. (2011, May). *Seminar Series 204: Choosing the Wrong Drivers for Whole System Reform*. Centre for Strategic Education. <http://michaelfullan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/13396088160.pdf>





This diagram from Dr. Michael Fullan shows the four drivers of education systems change, with effective leadership central to their success.<sup>38</sup>

## FOUR DRIVERS OF EDUCATION SYSTEMS CHANGE

### FOCUSING DIRECTION

A purpose-driven set of explicit and high-impact shared goals; rapid cycles of transparent communication using shared language; and opportunities to work together in networks with strong leadership.

### CULTIVATING COLLABORATIVE CULTURES

A growth mindset that prioritizes building collective capacity and effectiveness over time through shared learning, with high expectations and opportunities for flexible and dynamic collaboration.

### SECURING ACCOUNTABILITY

A strengthened approach to accountability that helps people inside the system to improve while allowing those outside the system to monitor progress.

### DEEPENING LEARNING

An expanded understanding of how students learn and thrive, and precise shifts in how adults can best support and influence student learning and well-being.

38 Fullan, M., & Quinn, J. (2015, July 20). *Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems*. Corwin & the Ontario Principal's Council <https://michaelfullan.ca/books/coherence-right-drivers-action-schools-districts-systems/>



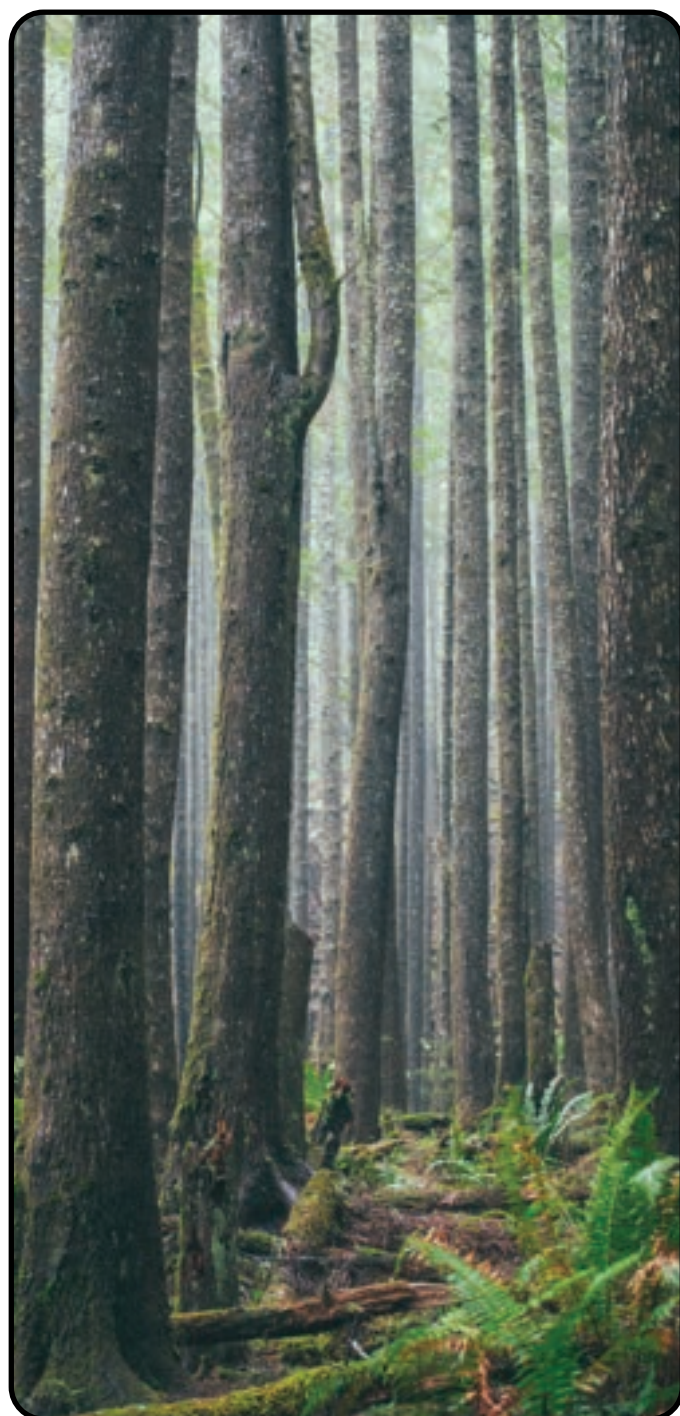
## SYSTEMS CHANGE DRIVER: FOCUSING DIRECTION

Establishing and maintaining *focused direction* is essential to systems change. It requires a clear strategy grounded in high-impact collective goals, supported by a system of people who continually expand their capacity to adopt new ways of thinking, doing, and being. The following examples show how Oregon has advanced this driver through SSA implementation over the past five years.

### HIGH SCHOOL SUCCESS SUGGESTS FOCUSED DIRECTION YIELDS IMPROVEMENT

Before the SSA, advocates for improving Oregon's high school graduation rates took the unusual step of putting forward a ballot measure to direct school districts' existing resources toward three strategies they believed would help more students earn a high school diploma. Measure 98, which created the initiative now known as High School Success (HSS), passed in 2016 with overwhelming support from Oregon voters. However, it did not receive full funding for implementation until the SSA passed in 2019. It is now fully funded by a combination of General Fund dollars and the SSA's corporate activity tax dollars.

In an important example of focused direction, HSS requires school districts to invest in three strategies: expanding career and technical education (CTE), reducing high school dropout rates, and increasing access to college-level opportunities. Districts have expanded CTE statewide, increasing the number of programs available to students by 42% since 2017.<sup>39</sup>



<sup>39</sup> Oregon Department of Education. (n.d.). *Impact of High School Success on CTE Programs and Enrollment*. <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/GraduationImprovement/Documents/CTEProgramsAndEnrollment.pdf>

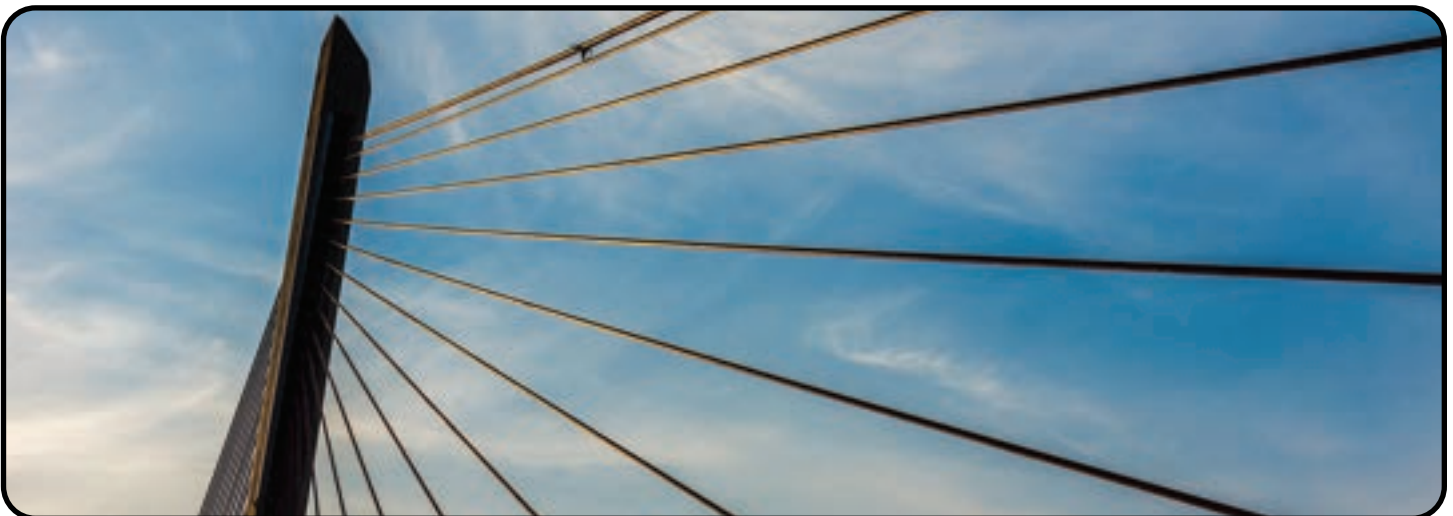
An independent analysis of the program’s impact conducted by Stand for Children, Oregon found that “the most significant single-year improvement (+3.27 percentage point growth) and the best-ever recorded high school graduation rate in Oregon (82.63%) occurred in 2019–2020—the first year of full funding for Measure 98.” The analysis showed particularly strong gains for Latino/a/x students and revealed that the number of ninth graders on track for high school graduation was one of the first statewide metrics to rebound after the pandemic.<sup>40</sup>

The focused direction needed to sustain change and improvement requires more than simply focusing and aligning strategies. It requires clarity of purpose, leadership at all levels, and systems of continuous support and accountability. ODE has made significant progress working with districts to create these conditions.

In the first three years of HSS implementation, school districts developed plans, assessed their own progress, and saw positive early changes in both the rate of ninth graders on track to graduate and actual rates of high school graduation. That

progress was buoyed by ODE’s efforts to further strengthen implementation through collaboration with districts in the following years. Agency staff visited nearly all public high schools in the state. School and district leaders used an ODE rubric to assess their progress toward program requirements, which include data-informed practices and targeted strategies for reducing chronic absenteeism, avoiding bias in course assignments, and ensuring at-risk students stay on track to graduate.<sup>41</sup>

One year later, when the agency repeated this process with 232 HSS funding grantees, they found that 42 needed additional support and “corrective action.”<sup>42</sup> Without shame or public retribution, and in collaboration with school leaders, ODE directed how those 42 grantees would spend some of their allocated dollars to build better systems. In 2022, an Oregon Secretary of State audit noted that “in the six years since Measure 98 passed creating [HSS], ODE has worked to improve processes” for school districts, including monitoring and support, and “continues to effectively implement” the program.<sup>43</sup>



40 Stand for Children, Oregon. (n.d.). *Measure 98: High School Success: An Analysis*. <https://stand.org/oregon/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2024/06/M98-memo-Stand-for-Children.pdf>

41 Oregon Department of Education. (2020, August). *The High School Success Eligibility Requirement Rubric*. <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/GraduationImprovement/Documents/eligibilityrequirementrubric8.2020.pdf>

42 Oregon Department of Education. (2024, May). *High School Success Grantee Status Update*. Retrieved May 29, 2024.

43 Oregon Secretary of State Audits Division. (2022, December). *ODE Continues to Effectively Implement Measure 98 and Increase Collaboration Across Agency Programs*. <https://stage-sos.oregon.gov/audits/Documents/2022-33.pdf>

## SIA OFFERS A STARTING POINT FOR FOCUSED DIRECTION

The Student Investment Account (SIA), the SSA's largest and most comprehensive investment, provides more than \$1 billion per biennium directly to school districts through a noncompetitive formula grant. By targeting investments, promoting collaboration, and strengthening accountability, the SIA aims to advance a high-quality, inclusive, and community-centered public education system where high hopes for children and high expectations for schools go hand in hand. Public opinion research shows the SIA's focused direction is broadly supported by the vast majority of Oregonians.<sup>44</sup>

The SIA is a critical mechanism for reaching the SSA's overarching goals of reducing key academic disparities and supporting student health and well-being. But although the SIA offers a strong starting point for focused direction, its wide latitude of allowable uses—coupled with the sheer number and variety of K–12 programs within the SSA (25 at last count)—suggests an overall lack of direction.

Focused direction requires specificity: clearly defined system change goals, a shared understanding of what strategies will achieve those goals, and a collective concentration on fewer but more powerful strategies. Developing focused direction across Oregon does not necessarily mean that every school district should have the same focus or strategies. However, the goals and strategies districts choose to pursue must be understood and valued at all levels—from students, to educators, to board members, to the community. Perhaps most critically, state leadership must remain united around clear statewide goals instead of constantly shifting priorities and approaches. As school districts and their communities work toward change, the state must commit to providing support, asking hard questions, and sustaining efforts long enough for change to happen.



As one school district leader told DHM Research in an interview, “[W]e want everybody paddling in the same direction, and that’s easier said than done. But if the metrics and goals are meaningful to folks, and it is aligned with the work that [school districts] should already be doing, and we’ve been asking them to be doing for years, then I think the buy-in is better.”

<sup>44</sup> Oregon Values and Beliefs Center. (2024, September 26). *Oregon Education Priorities and Planning*. <https://oregonvbc.org/oregon-education-priorities-and-planning/>



## INTEGRATED GUIDANCE ALIGNS K-12 PLANS AND BUDGETS

When the SSA passed, some worried that adding another layer of planning and processes on top of existing state and federal program requirements would cause confusion while also exacerbating the administrative burden on school districts. The Legislature attempted to address this concern by directing ODE to explore how it could align and simplify planning processes, funding applications, and reporting requirements for K–12 programs.<sup>45</sup>

In 2021, ODE began working behind the scenes with community, school, business, and tribal leaders to explore operational changes. The goal was to align multiple existing K–12 initiatives, including federal and state continuous improvement plans, the SIA, High School Success, Every Day Matters, Early Indicator and Intervention Systems, and CTE Perkins. After more than a year of collaboration, ODE released *Aligning for Student Success: Integrated Guidance for Six ODE Initiatives* in February 2022.

By 2022, every school district and charter school was expected to meet the rigorous application and planning requirements set out by Integrated Guidance. If a district fell short, ODE helped them meet the necessary standards. In April 2024, after Oregon passed a major new investment to improve K–3 literacy instruction and outcomes, ODE released updated Integrated Guidance that incorporated Early Literacy Success Initiative grants into the streamlined grant planning, application, and reporting process. While too many complex statutory requirements and programs remain, this effort to integrate K–12 initiatives is a solid foundation for further streamlining.

In its *2022 K–12 Education Systemic Risk Report*, the Oregon Secretary of State Audits Division lauded Integrated Guidance not only for reducing the administrative burden on school districts but also for likely amplifying the positive impact of K–12 investments on students.

**“The Oregon Department of Education is integrating six programs to streamline the application process for school districts and other program participants, and to allow a larger pool of staff to support districts in all six programs. If integration is successful and school districts are able to use funds from the separate programs with similar purposes, students could experience more robust programs than they would if districts are limited to smaller offerings from separate funds.”**

**—Audits Division, Oregon Secretary of State<sup>46</sup>**

<sup>45</sup> Oregon Legislature, Joint Committee on Ways and Means. (2019, March 3). *HB 5047: A Budget Report and Measure Summary*. <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2019R1/Downloads/MeasureAnalysisDocument/52361>

<sup>46</sup> Oregon Secretary of State Audits Division. (2022, May). *K–12 Education—Systemic Risk Report*. <https://sos.oregon.gov/audits/Documents/2022-16.pdf>

<b>BEFORE THE SSA</b>	<b>AFTER INTEGRATED GUIDANCE</b>
<p>School district financial information submissions to ODE were inefficient and incongruent. Each program budget used different terminology, was submitted on different software platforms, and was reviewed by different ODE offices.</p>	<p>School district financial information submissions to ODE are now aligned and efficient. Integrated Guidance program budgets use shared terminology, are submitted on a common platform, and receive a thorough ODE review.</p>
<p>School district program budgets were not tied to clearly defined K–12 improvement strategies and outcomes.</p>	<p>School district program budgets are now clearly tied to specific K–12 improvement strategies and required outcomes, which are publicly reviewed, approved, and monitored by school boards.</p>
<p>ODE’s siloed approach did not allow school districts to combine or integrate K–12 program-specific funding streams for increased efficiency and effectiveness.</p>	<p>ODE’s integrated approach now encourages school districts to responsibly braid and blend Integrated Guidance program funds to increase efficiency and effectiveness.</p>
<p>ODE did not audit the implementation of K–12 programs in local school districts.</p>	<p>ODE conducts performance reviews of school district Integrated Guidance programs every four years, and also conducts random and “just cause” audits to support system improvement.</p>





## STRATEGIC PLANNING INFORMED BY EVIDENCE AND ENGAGEMENT

Under Integrated Guidance, school districts and charter schools must complete a rigorous strategic planning process on two-year and four-year cycles. They must also meet the following requirements when preparing their ODE grant application:

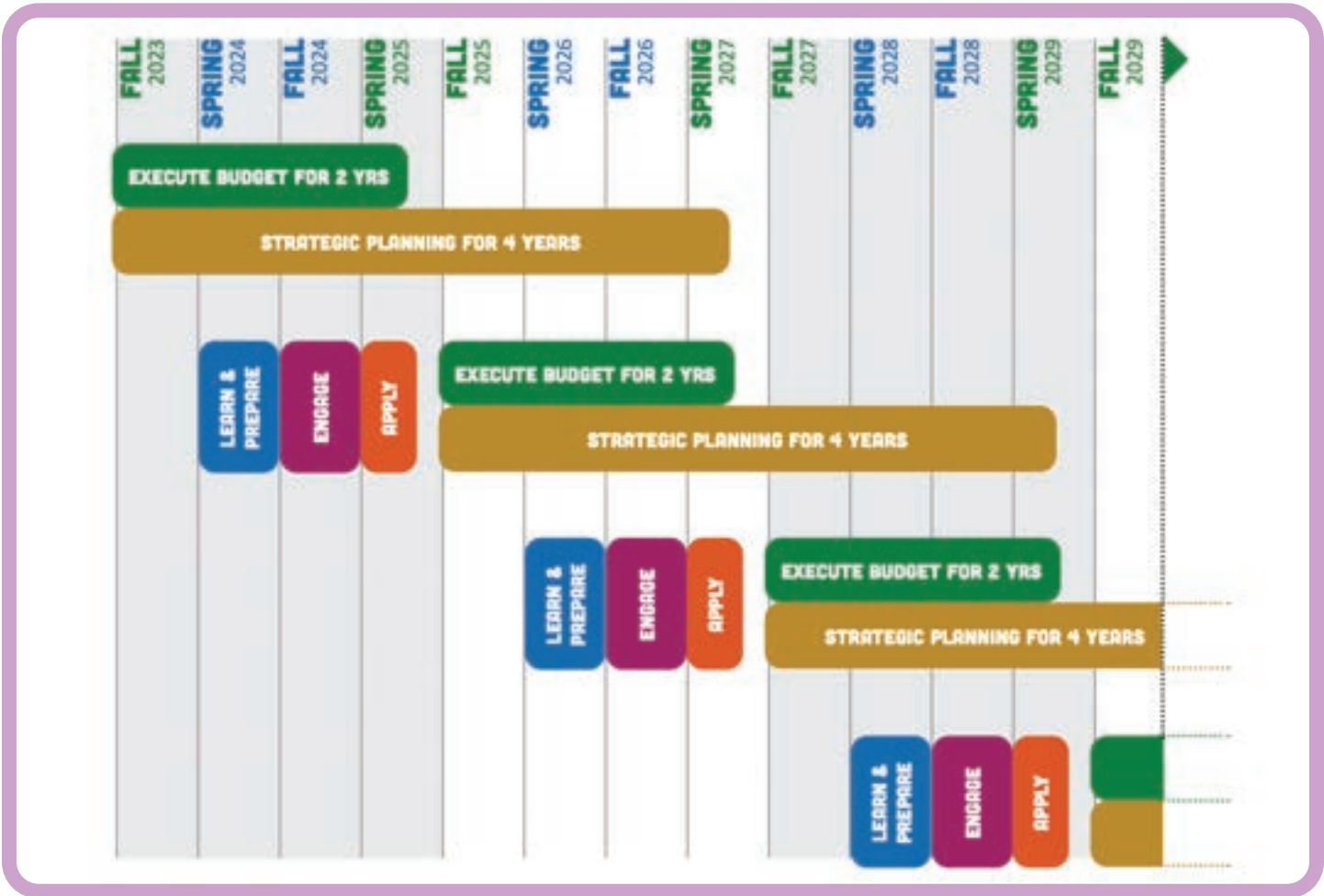
- Commit to meaningful community, family, student, and educator engagement through each planning cycle.
- Engage in authentic Tribal Consultation as a sacred form of collaboration between the district and a sovereign nation.
- Review and integrate inputs from district equity committees and regional CTE consortia.
- Review and consider best practices recommended by Oregon’s Quality Education Commission for K–12 student success and continuous school improvement.
- Review and consider best practices and targeted strategies recommended by Oregon’s SSA advisories, which draw on community expertise to improve educational opportunities for historically underserved student groups.
- Review and address local disaggregated student data, and make it accessible to educators and community members to identify student groups who are not being well served.
- Review and address core instructional practices outlined in Oregon’s Early Literacy Success Initiative and HSS Initiative.
- Apply an equity lens when designing local plans and budgets to assess the possible impacts of decisions, policies, and practices on historically underserved students.
- Develop a comprehensive, four-year plan with clear outcomes, strategies, and activities across Integrated Guidance programs.

Through the trials and triumphs of the last five years, the K–12 system’s shift toward meaningful community engagement and aligned strategic planning is gaining momentum and beginning to yield results. Several school districts are using Integrated Guidance processes to drive their strategic planning and budgeting rather than isolating the process to Integrated Guidance and other state and federal grants that may or may not align with the district’s overall strategic plan.

**“The continued implementation of the Integrated Guidance and the established rhythms of aligned engagement, planning, and reporting processes toward common goals is becoming a meaningful routine.”**

**–Dr. Charlene Williams, Director, Oregon Department of Education<sup>47</sup>**

<sup>47</sup> Oregon Department of Education. (2024, April 26). *Aligning for Student Success: Integrated Guidance Update 2025–27*. [https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/ODE\\_IntegratedGuidance25-27.pdf](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/ODE_IntegratedGuidance25-27.pdf)



This timeline produced by ODE shows the required cycles of community engagement, strategic planning, and budgeting under the Integrated Guidance process.<sup>48</sup>



48 Ibid.



**SSA IMPLEMENTATION SPOTLIGHT**  
**HILLSBORO SCHOOL DISTRICT**



Foundations for a Better Oregon partnered with DHM Research to spotlight how Hillsboro School District has built on Integrated Guidance planning processes and requirements to guide the district’s strategic planning and budgeting.

**Hillsboro School District put a lot of work into creating targeted goals and planning how to meet them.**

To create their districtwide strategic plan for the SSA, Hillsboro School District administrators worked closely with faculty, students, and parents to understand families’ unique needs in and out of school. They made sure their planning process was comprehensive and inclusive by centering the voices, experiences, and feedback of students, families, and the community. Deepening their community connections to gather this information was not a small feat; administrators described the process as “extremely involved, intentional, and careful.”

**A lot of effort went into collecting feedback from students, families, and community members, including data relating to the SSA’s new targeted metrics.**

Hillsboro School District recognizes the value and power of student and family insights; identifying focal student groups with targeted goals better positioned the district to meet their stated needs. Gathering family feedback was a major part of this process; it encompassed student surveys—of which the district reported an 80–85% return rate in the 2023–2024 school year—as well as parent and student listening sessions where administrators got honest input about what families expect from the public education system. This was a change from the pre-SSA process, when school administrators expressed frustration at the lack of cohesive plans and follow-through.







## SSA IMPLEMENTATION SPOTLIGHT HILLSBORO SCHOOL DISTRICT

**The school district is making data and feedback easily accessible and user-friendly for teachers and staff.**

Data-driven planning is a crucial tool for the district’s planning and implementation processes. The school district was meticulous in ensuring both that community input informed strategic plan development and that schools would use the plan to guide their own planning processes. In the strategic plan, each goal is tied to a data source that identifies the target of that goal and how far it is from being met. Data is a significant focal point for the district, comprising family feedback as well as attendance, test scores, program participation, demographics, and other metrics. Because this data is central to the strategic plan, the district compiled a Strategic Plan Almanac—an interactive dashboard that makes hard data readily available to teachers and school administrators working toward district goals. The Almanac clearly outlines each goal, its focal groups, the data that informs the goal, and the district lead for that goal. Each goal also links to a detailed data breakdown that lets administrators check when the data was last updated and look up specific numbers for specific schools. Hillsboro was already focused on academic return on investment before the SSA, but leveraging data-driven planning requirements and state expectations has aligned and optimized the implementation process.

One challenge of the last few years, as described by administrators, was finding a solid footing to work on—and stay accountable to—a strategic plan with rigorously targeted goals. SSA funding established a role for instructional technology support, which evolved into districtwide technology support for creating data dashboards within the Strategic Plan Almanac. In interviews, administrators describe these dashboards as fundamental to their planning efforts. Much of their work entails basing goals on real data and testimonials from students and families; a stronger grasp of that data, combined with easier access to it, made their current standard of strategic planning possible and has also simplified the allocation of funds. In short, SSA funding gave Hillsboro School District opportunities to develop more effective and data-driven planning and improvement processes; this is spawning new opportunities for the entire community to work together toward educational excellence.<sup>49</sup>



49 DHM Research. (2024, October). *Student Success Act Implementation Spotlight: Hillsboro School District*.

# SYSTEMS CHANGE DRIVER: CULTIVATING COLLABORATIVE CULTURES

A crucial element of systems change is nurturing empathetic leaders who understand how their role contributes to the system’s goals and interacts with its many parts. This approach to system leadership and culture fosters collective trust, tolerance, and shared purpose. Although not without its challenges, SSA implementation has initiated a shift in how schools operate, with a greater focus on cultivating mutual respect across the system and creating environments that support collaboration.

This shift aligns with a system change drive that Dr. Michael Fullan calls *collaborative cultures*: a “dynamic force that uses relationships and shared expertise to transform complexity and fragmentation into a focused, coherent force for change.”<sup>50</sup> While this aspect of the SSA’s implementation may be difficult to measure, it is a vital part of its success. Understanding and appreciating this intangible yet powerful shift is essential to recognizing the SSA’s impact on K–12 education.

## NEW STATE APPROACHES TO COLLABORATIVE IMPLEMENTATION

From the outset, ODE approached SSA implementation with a focus on collaboration. Shortly after the law passed, it formed an advisory committee to gather input on the administrative rules that would guide implementation. While ODE had a long practice of convening advisory groups to inform rulemaking, these groups typically only involved traditional education system stakeholders. For the first time, ODE also sought to engage more than 40 community-based organizations, business associations, and education advocacy groups in the process. Many of these groups had never been invited to participate in statewide rulemaking before; this inclusive approach developed stronger rules that led to more effective SSA implementation. The process was so valuable for agency leaders that engaging a broader set of perspectives and voices through ODE’s Rules Advisory Committee is now the norm for rulemaking.



50 Fullan, M., & Quinn, J. (2015, July 20). *Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems*. Corwin & the Ontario Principal’s Council. <https://michaelfullan.ca/books/coherence-right-drivers-action-schools-districts-systems/>



Later, when school districts submitted their SIA/ Integrated Guidance applications to the state, ODE supplemented its internal review with an external review conducted by Quality Assurance Panels to ensure all grant applications met requirements. These panels included students, family members, educators, school and district administrators, school board members, community partners, business leaders, postsecondary leaders, representatives from philanthropy, and other education advocates. Although this process required significant time and effort, it made the application review process more transparent and fostered a sense of shared responsibility for the SSA's success.

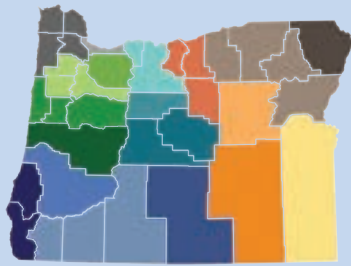
## **BUILDING REGIONAL SUPPORT FOR LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION**

With 197 school districts and numerous charter schools potentially eligible for SSA funding, state legislators took a regional approach to streamline and harmonize high-quality implementation. The SSA budget included state funding for all 19 ESDs to provide technical assistance to school districts in their region during SSA planning and implementation. This effort included forming a network of regional SSA liaisons who help school districts understand and meet the new law's requirements while also supporting coordination and communication between ODE and school districts. For instance, liaisons help school districts navigate rigorous planning and budgeting processes, apply an equity lens to their decisions, share strategic plans in public school board meetings, and prepare grant applications for submission to ODE.

Since fall 2019, ESD superintendents and SSA liaisons have been meeting regularly with ODE. A key part of early implementation was a strong commitment to two-way communication. ODE prioritized previewing implementation documents and strategies with ESDs before releasing them, which built trust and reinforced the value of the partnership. ESDs have also acted as a crucial connector between school districts, community-based organizations, early learning providers, postsecondary institutions, and other student support systems that play a role in local SSA implementation.

Over time, Oregon's 19 ESDs expanded their capacity to help the K–12 system meet SSA goals. They built regional technical assistance infrastructure that initially focused on SIA implementation, but has now expanded to all state initiatives included under Integrated Guidance. Together, ESDs are sustaining the critical collaborations and conditions that promote high-quality implementation and K–12 system improvement.





**SSA IMPLEMENTATION SPOTLIGHT**  
**REGIONAL COLLABORATION AND**  
**INFRASTRUCTURE**



Foundations for a Better Oregon partnered with DHM Research to interview ESD superintendents and SSA liaisons about the progress and challenges they observed and experienced over the first five years of SSA implementation.

The SSA’s expansion of and designated funding for technical assistance has had major impacts in school districts across the state. In larger districts, it has streamlined coordination: With work now being done in tandem, districts and ESDs feel as though they are running on parallel tracks. In smaller districts, it has provided critical support with burdensome tasks like reporting and strategic planning. Because SSA funds allowed one ESD to expand its professional development team from three to 11 employees, rural districts in this ESD are now able to benefit from services such as working with High School Success teams.

Technical assistance has also allowed districts to collaborate on solving problems. Unlike previous, random efforts, districts are now coordinating their efforts toward more fluid and powerful initiatives. SSA funding has opened up opportunities for cross-collaboration between districts and ODE as well as between districts themselves; continuing to create channels for interdistrict communication can only strengthen these partnerships.<sup>51</sup>



<sup>51</sup> DHM Research. (2024, October). *Student Success Act Implementation Spotlight: Regional Collaboration and Infrastructure*.

## STUDENT SUCCESS PLANS ELEVATE COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

With funding from the SSA's Statewide Education Initiatives Account, Oregon invests in Student Success Plans to improve how K–12 schools support historically underserved students. These plans offer a starting point to build collaborative relationships and share expertise between communities and the education system, conditions which Dr. Fullan describes as critical to meaningful system change.

Student Success Plans are developed by advisory groups whose members represent or serve students, families, and communities who have historically been marginalized by Oregon's education system and continue to face educational disparities. Advisory group members understand the strengths, needs, and lived experiences of a specific focal group of students, and contribute expertise to guide education system change.

The advisory groups develop statewide strategies and recommendations to improve how historically underserved students and families are served in every Oregon school district. Some Student Success Plans grant funds to school districts, charter schools, community-based organizations, and other parts of the education system to implement these strategies.

While specific strategies and solutions vary based on the unique needs of each student group, all Student Success Plans share common goals:

- Address the disproportionate rate of disciplinary incidents.
- Increase parental and family engagement.
- Boost engagement in educational activities before and after school.

- Increase early childhood and kindergarten readiness.
- Improve literacy and numeracy levels between kindergarten and third grade.
- Support transitions to middle school and through middle and high school grades.
- Support culturally responsive pedagogy and practices.
- Support the development of culturally responsive curricula.
- Increase regular school attendance.
- Increase attendance in four-year, postsecondary education institutions.<sup>52</sup>

Oregon maintains Student Success Plans for students identifying as American Indian/Alaska Native, Black/African American, Latino/a/x, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and LGBTQ2SIA+, as well as immigrant and refugee students. Under Integrated Guidance, school districts are required to review and consider these plans and recommendations when developing plans and investments. However, fully integrating these strategies beyond Integrated Guidance programs into school district strategic plans and budgets remains a work in progress.

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52 Oregon Department of Education.(2024, April 26). *Aligning for Student Success: Integrated Guidance Update 2025–27* [Appendix G]. [https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/ODE\\_IntegratedGuidance25-27.pdf](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/ODE_IntegratedGuidance25-27.pdf)



## SYSTEMS CHANGE DRIVER: DEEPENING LEARNING

A wealth of research emphasizes the importance of student belonging, meaningful engagement in school, and academic learning that is rigorous, creative, real-world, and culturally sustaining. This body of research, grounded in the science of learning and childhood development, shapes our understanding of the *deep learning* that students need to thrive.

As education researchers Jal Mehta and Sarah Fine explain, “The phrase ‘deep learning’ is not tied to a prescribed set of practices; it is an integrative term which first evokes what is it not (shallow, rote, authoritarian, teacher-centered) rather than immediately revealing what it is. [...] [A] ‘deep learning approach’ allows for connections to all kinds of related traditions and frameworks: constructivism, culturally responsive pedagogy, design thinking, social-emotional learning, land-based pedagogy, critical pedagogy, youth voice efforts, social entrepreneurship, and project-based learning.”<sup>53</sup>



The SSA upholds a shared value for deeper learning, and public opinion research affirms that Oregonians share this value.<sup>54</sup> Quantitative analysis shows that school districts have invested significant resources from the SIA and the High School Success Initiative to broaden access to well-rounded education, accelerated coursework, and hands-on learning experiences. While the benefits of deeper learning should translate into improved student outcome data, it is difficult to document and determine whether the SSA has systemically fostered conditions for deeper learning.

Furthermore, while increasing system coherence and focus is essential for driving system change, our system should not return to a singular focus on narrow or outdated methods and pedagogies. Recent calls for schools to return “back to basics” oversimplify the challenge of rapidly improving students’ reading, writing, and math skills, and of preparing children for the future in a changing world. To truly foster deeper learning for students, we must move beyond the current “mile wide and inch thick” approach to public education, which spreads content too thin without allowing students to engage meaningfully with what they need to know and do.

53 Fine, S., & Mehta, J. (n.d.) *A “Big Tent” Strategy for System-Wide Transformation: Seeking Deep Learning in Ottawa*. New Pedagogies for Deep Learning. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/11uoubFsidL95HivJ1D4FnKHTUWZwYbvs/view>

54 Oregon Values and Beliefs Center. (2024, September 26). *Oregon Education Priorities and Planning*. <https://oregonvbc.org/oregon-education-priorities-and-planning/>

# SYSTEMS CHANGE DRIVER: SECURING ACCOUNTABILITY

*Securing accountability* is about developing conditions that provide people working inside the system with valuable information and support to improve, while allowing those outside the system to effectively monitor their progress. In K–12 education, the word “accountability” suffers from a legacy of top-down, punitive approaches that were not based in an understanding of how change happens. Since 2013, when the federal government began to ease its rigid school accountability restrictions, Oregon has struggled to develop a vision for accountability that puts continuous system improvement at the forefront.

The SSA’s legislative drafters were keenly aware of the need for a new kind of accountability—one that balanced the right amount of support with the right amount of oversight—and public opinion research shows that Oregonians continue to agree.<sup>55</sup> The SSA renewed the state’s effort to strengthen and reimagine K–12 accountability, leading to critical new accountability mechanisms over the last five years.



## GROWTH TARGETS SET NEW EXPECTATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

One of the SSA’s major achievements is the creation of realistic, attainable, and ambitious longitudinal performance growth targets (LPGTs) for every school district and charter school serving more than 80 students. The Legislature directed ODE and districts to co-develop LPGTs as part of the SIA to track how the significant K–12 funding increase would impact student academic outcomes. The required metrics match those used in Oregon’s state and school district report cards since 2013:

- Third grade English language arts.
- Ninth grade on track.
- Regular school attendance.
- Four-year high school graduation.
- Five-year high school completion.

ODE worked with each district to review its most current data and, informed by historical trends, set growth targets that reflect meaningful and achievable improvements in outcomes over five years—not unrealistic or politically driven goals.<sup>56</sup> For each metric, school districts create baseline targets to set minimum expectations for progress; stretch targets for improvement beyond expectations; and gap-closing targets to improve outcomes for focal student groups who have historically experienced academic disparities.<sup>57</sup> (Gap-closing targets can be set for individual focal student groups or for all focal student groups combined.)

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Oregon Department of Education. (2024, April 26). *Aligning for Student Success: Integrated Guidance Update 2025–27* [Appendix P]. [https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/ODE\\_IntegratedGuidance25-27.pdf](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/ODE_IntegratedGuidance25-27.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> Focal groups include American Indian/Alaska Native students; Asian students; Black/African American students; Latino/a/x students; Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students; multiracial students; students with disabilities; emerging bilingual students; migrant and recently arrived immigrant students; nonbinary students; and students navigating poverty, housing insecurity, foster care, or the criminal justice system.



Every school board is required to discuss and approve its LPGTs in open public meetings, and the targets are embedded in formal grant agreements between school districts and ODE under Integrated Guidance. This gives ODE a consistent legal framework to step in and support, coach, or even direct grant funds in districts that are struggling to meet their targets for students.

Efforts to implement this accountability system were delayed by the pandemic. In 2020, during a special legislative session, the Legislature paused the SIA’s requirement to set growth targets. In addition, standardized testing and other data collection on student outcomes were disrupted for several years. Despite these challenges, co-developed LPGTs have now been established through the 2027–2028 school year.

**“[S]ystem-wide transformation in the world of PK-12 education is hard. It is hard even when it comes to goals like getting all kids to attend school regularly. It is much, much harder when the desired outcomes are as complex and ambitious ... such efforts require clarity, strategy, and persistence.”**

**–Dr. Michael Fullan<sup>58</sup>**

At first blush, Oregon’s baseline targets for system performance may feel underwhelming or unambitious, especially for outcomes like third-grade literacy. However, LPGTs are designed to provide an attainable baseline for improvement that takes into account the pace of change and the effort required to move the needle systemwide. As we continue efforts to improve K–12 education, Oregonians should view these targets as a critical gauge of system health—asking critical questions when they are not met, and looking for ways to uplift lessons and accelerate progress when they are met. Only with continuous improvement and follow-through will these targets guide the system to deliver tangible results.



58 Fine, S., & Mehta, J. (n.d.) *A “Big Tent” Strategy for System-Wide Transformation: Seeking Deep Learning in Ottawa*. New Pedagogies for Deep Learning. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/11uoubFsidL95HivJ1D4FnKHTUWZwYbvs/view>

# HISTORICAL TRENDS AND NEW GROWTH TARGETS

The following graphs provide a statewide snapshot of historical trends and LPGTs across five metrics. Historical trends show the K–12 system’s statewide performance for each metric since 2017, including outcome data for all students and disaggregated data for all focal group students combined.\* Statewide LPGT data for each metric was calculated by averaging all school district and charter school growth targets for each school year.

**■ Historical data and baseline targets for all students.**

Baseline targets represent the minimum improvement a school district must achieve or maintain for all students over five years.

**---- Stretch targets for all students.**

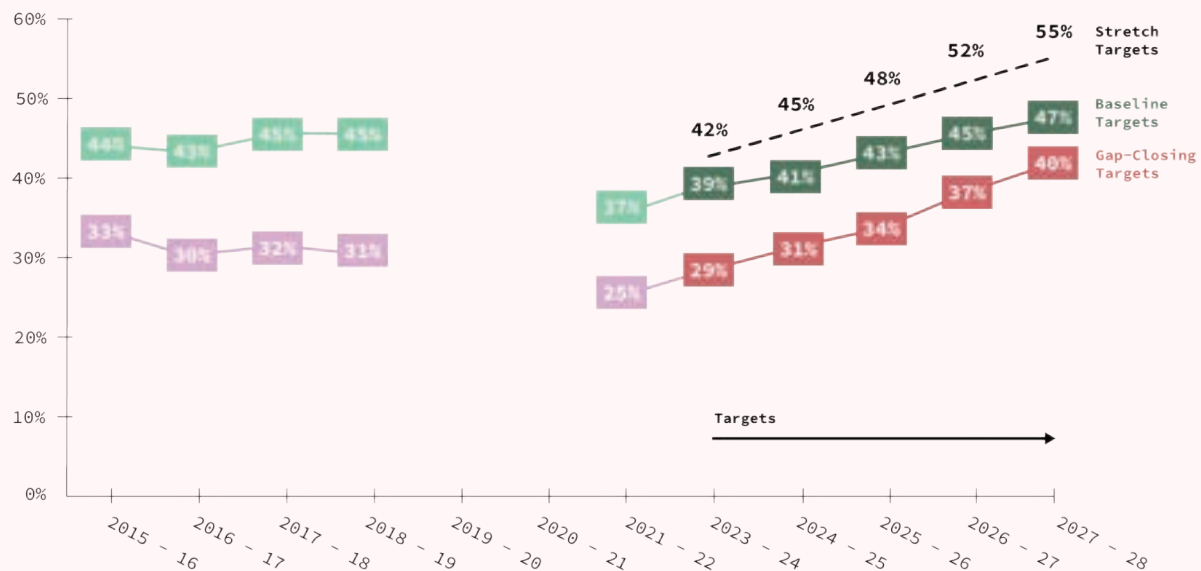
Stretch targets represent significant improvement beyond school district expectations.

**■ Historical data and gap-closing targets for all focal student groups combined.**

Gap-closing targets represent the improvement a school district intends to achieve or maintain to reduce academic disparities for combined focal student groups.

\*Some student outcome data is not included: In 2019–2020 and 2020–2021, certain data was not collected due to the pandemic; 2022–2023 data is not included based on the timing of growth target development; and 2023–2024 data was not available prior to publication.

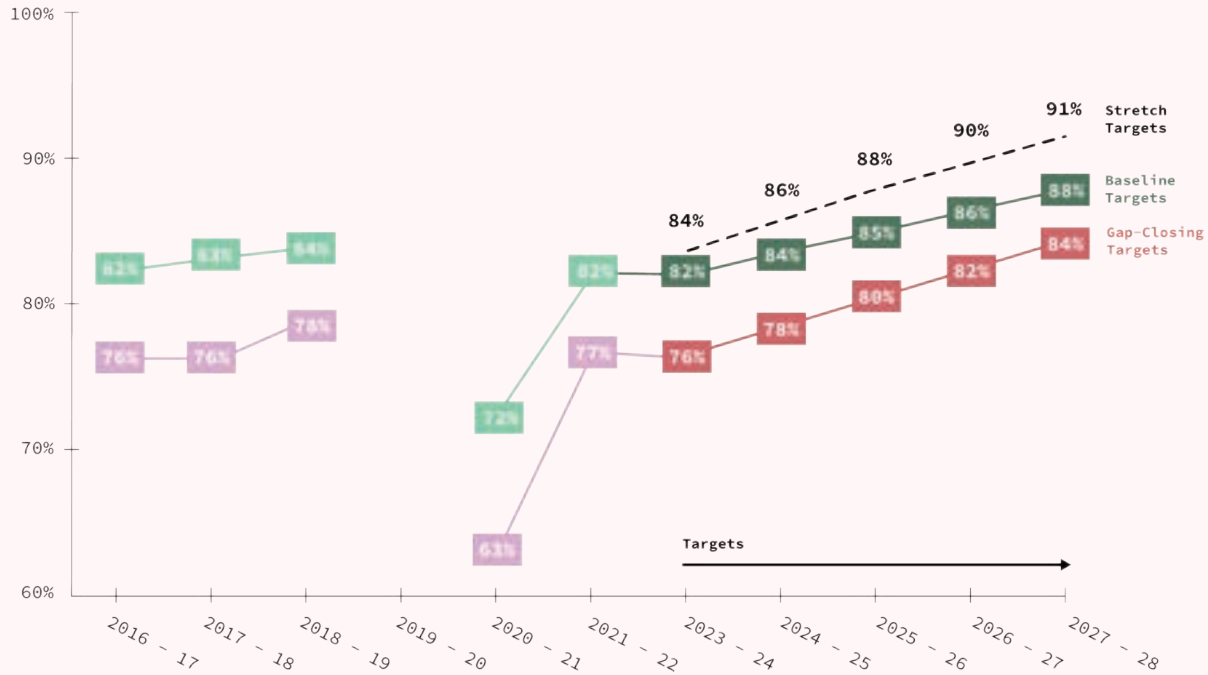
## Historical Data Trends and LPGTs for English Language Arts



Data Source: Oregon Department of Education.

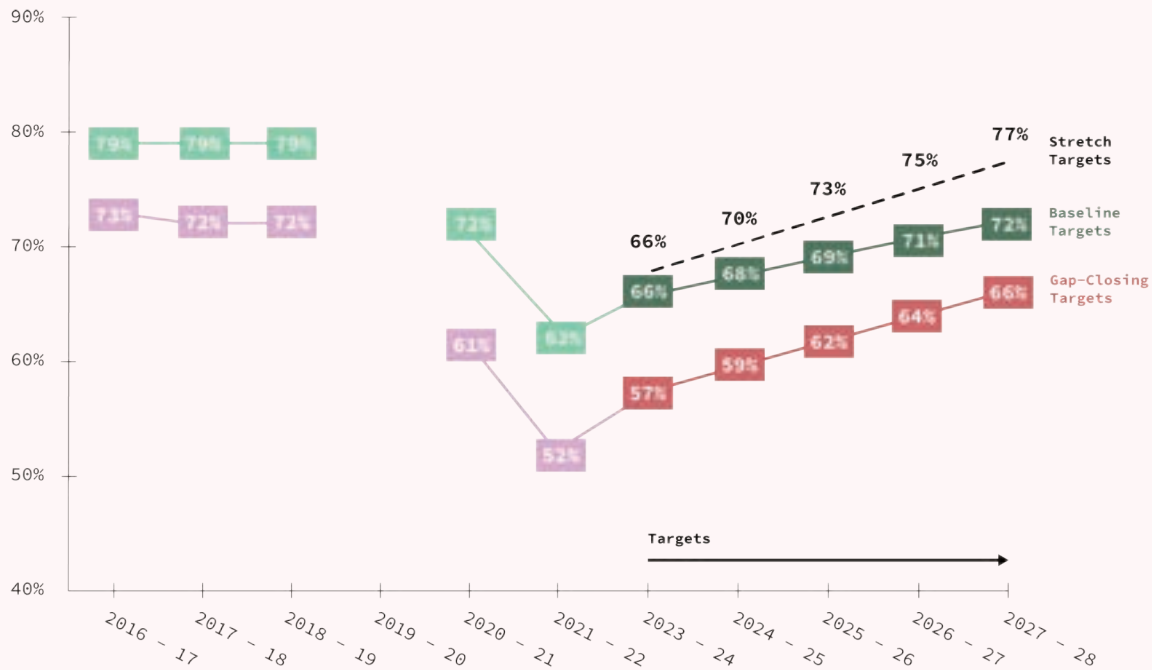


### Historical Data Trends and LPGTs for Ninth Grade On Track



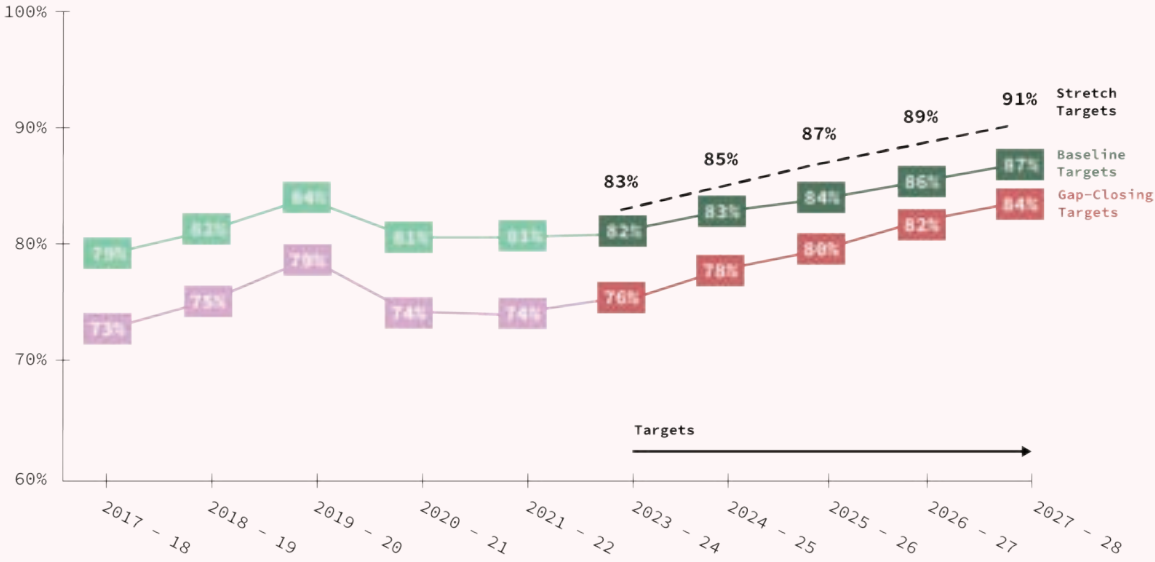
Data Source: Oregon Department of Education.

### Historical Data Trends and LPGTs for Regular School Attendance



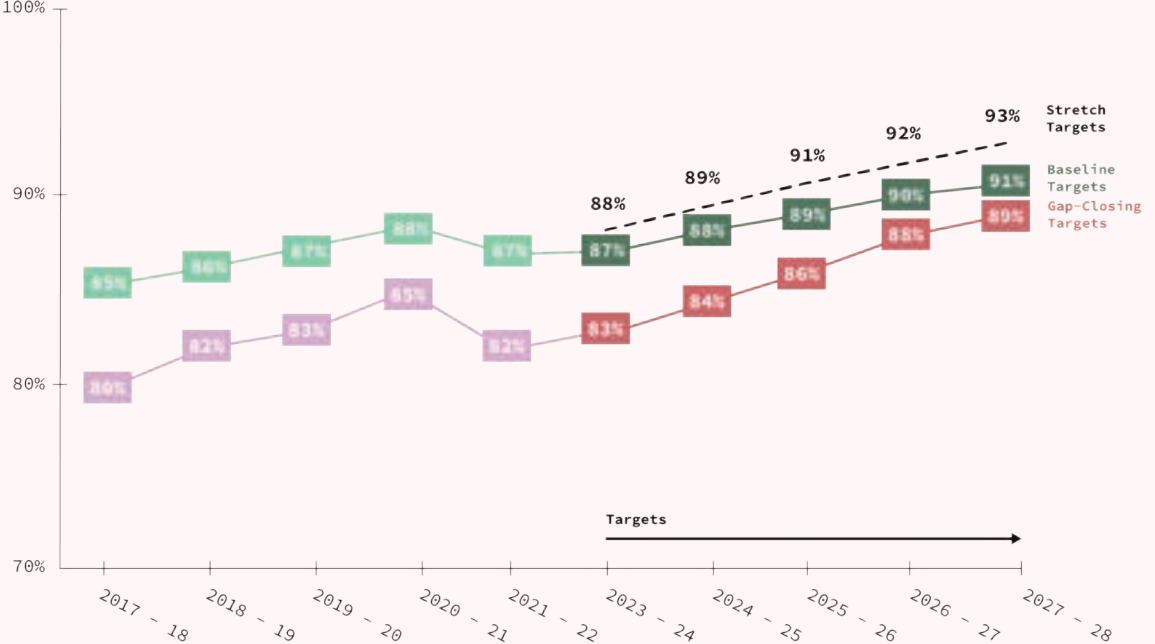
Data Source: Oregon Department of Education.

### Historical Data Trends and LPGTs for Four-Year Graduation



Data Source: Oregon Department of Education.

### Historical Data Trends and LPGTs for Five-Year High School Completion



Data Source: Oregon Department of Education.

## LOCAL OPTIONAL METRICS OFFER HOLISTIC MEASURES OF PROGRESS

In addition to the five required LPGTs, the SSA gives school districts and charter schools the opportunity to choose their own local optional metrics (LOMs). The Oregon Legislature hoped districts would locally pilot a holistic set of metrics to improve student learning and well-being. Some districts are using alternative literacy metrics such as proficiency in Spanish as well as English, or using alternative student assessment methods in addition to statewide standardized assessments. Other districts are measuring student enrollment in CTE courses or accelerated academic courses.

As school districts were developing their initial LPGTs, only a handful of districts chose to create LOMs. Nevertheless, they remain a promising strategy for honoring local contexts, testing innovative progress measures, and fine-tuning how Oregon evaluates student outcomes and system performance.

## MARKING PROGRESS IN THE SYSTEM WHEN WE SEE IT

A long-standing challenge in tracking meaningful education systems change has been the lack of reliable ways for school districts and educators to recognize progress before long-term metrics begin to shift. Some progress isn't reflected by traditional metrics, and data points at a moment in time don't fully represent students' achievements, needs, and experiences.

Today, ODE asks school districts to self-report their quarterly progress toward growth targets for all five LPGT metrics. The agency provides progress markers to help school districts determine whether their K–12 investments and activities under Integrated Guidance are showing early signs of progress, gaining traction and making intermediate changes, or even demonstrating profound progress with substantial and significant changes. By tracking and reporting their progress, districts can assess whether they are creating the right conditions for systems change, and reflect on their successes, challenges, and adaptations along the way.





# PROGRESS MARKERS

**4 COMMON GOALS**  
Equity Advanced  
Engaged Community  
Strengthened Systems  
& Capacity  
Well-Rounded Education

**LONGITUDINAL PERFORMANCE GROWTH TARGETS (LPGT) KEY**  
**3GR:** 3rd Grade Reading  
**9GOT:** 9th Grade On Track  
**4YG:** 4 Year Graduation  
**5YC:** 5 Year Completion  
**RA:** Regular Attenders

**Start to See: Early signs of progress (3-6 Months)**  
Based on your investments and activities, what changes or contributions are you noticing? What practices are improving?

**PM 1**  
3GR 9GOT 4YG 5YC RA  
Community engagement is authentic, consistent, and ongoing. The strengths that educators, students, families, focal groups, and tribal communities bring to the educational experience informs school and district practices and planning.

**PM 2**  
3GR 9GOT 4YG 5YC RA  
Equity tools are utilized in continuous improvement cycles, including the ongoing use of an equity lens or decision-tool that impacts policies, procedures, people/students, resource allocation, and practices that may impact grading, discipline, and attendance.

**PM 3**  
3GR 9GOT 4YG 5YC RA  
Data teams are formed and provided time to meet regularly to review disaggregated student data in multiple categories (grade bands, content areas, attendance, discipline, mental health, participation in advanced coursework, formative assessment data, etc.). These teams have open access to timely student data and as a result decisions are made that positively impact district/school-wide systems and focal populations.

**PM 4**  
3GR  
Schools and districts have an accurate inventory of literacy assessments, tools, and curriculum being used, including digital resources, to support literacy (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). The inventory includes a review of what resources and professional development are research-aligned, formative, diagnostic, and culturally responsive.

**Gaining Traction: Intermediate Changes (6-18 months)**  
Based on your investments and activities, are you seeing any of these impacts?

**PM 5**  
3GR 9GOT 4YG RA  
Two-way communication practices are in place, with attention to mobile students and primary family languages. Families understand approaches to engagement and attendance, literacy strategy, math vision, what “9th grade on-track” means, graduation requirements, access to advanced/college-level courses and CTE experiences, and approaches to supporting student well-being and well-rounded education.

**PM 6**  
9GOT 4YG 5YC RA  
Student agency and voice is elevated. Educators use student-centered approaches and instructional practices that shift processes and policies that actualize student and family ideas and priorities.

**PM 7**  
3GR 9GOT 4YG 5YC RA  
Action research, professional learning, data teams, and strengths-based intervention systems are supported by school leaders and are working in concert to identify policies, practices, or procedures informed by staff feedback to meet student needs, including addressing systemic barriers, the root-causes of chronic absenteeism, academic disparity, and student well-being. These changes and supports are monitored and adjusted as needed.

**PM 8**  
3GR  
Comprehensive, evidence-informed, culturally responsive and literacy plans, including professional development for educators, are documented and communicated to staff, students (developmentally appropriate), and families. Literacy plans and instruction are evaluated and adjusted to deepen students’ learning. Digital resources are being used with fidelity to advance learners’ engagement with instruction.

**Profound Progress: Substantial and Significant Changes (18 months+)**  
Based on your investments and activities, are any of these more transformational changes noticeable?

**PM 11**  
3GR 9GOT 4YG 5YC RA  
Schools strengthen partnerships with active community organizations and partners, including local public health, mental health, colleges, workforce development boards, employers, labor partners, faith communities, Tribal nations, and other education partners in order to collaboratively support students’ growth and well-being. Characteristics of strong partnerships include mutual trust and respect, strengths-based and collaborative approaches, clear communication around roles, and shared responsibilities and decision-making power

**PM 12**  
3GR 9GOT 4YG 5YC RA  
Financial stewardship reflects high-quality spending with accurate and transparent use of state and federal funds in relationship to a comprehensive needs assessment, disaggregated data, and the priorities expressed by students, families, communities, business, and Tribal partners in resource allocation and review.

**PM 13**  
3GR 9GOT 4YG 5YC  
Students and educators experience a well-rounded and balanced use of assessment systems that help them identify student learning in the areas of the Oregon State Standards. Educators understand how to assess emerging multilingual students’ assets to inform gauging progress.

**PM 14**  
3GR 9GOT 4YG 5YC RA  
Policies, practices, and learning communities address systemic barriers. Schools and districts have a process to identify, analyze, and address barriers that disconnect students from their educational goals, impact student engagement or attendance, and/or impede students from graduating on-time or transitioning to their next steps after high school. Staff members are consistently engaging in action research, guided by students strengths and interests, to improve their practice and advance professional learning.

**PM 15**  
9GOT 4YG 5YC RA  
Schools create places and learning conditions where every student, family, educator and staff member is welcomed, where their culture and assets are valued and supported, and where their voices are integral to decision making. Instruction is monitored and adjusted to advance and deepen individual learners’ knowledge and understanding of the curriculum. Educators are empowered with agency and creativity. Communities are alive with visions, stories, and systems of vitality, wholeness, and sustainability.

This ODE resource outlines progress markers for school districts as they work to meet growth targets for outcomes such as student literacy, high school graduation, and school attendance.<sup>59</sup>

## INTENSIVE INTERVENTION INSTEAD OF TAKEOVERS

The Intensive Program is a key component of the SIA’s accountability structure. It invites Oregon’s highest-need school districts to opt into a four-year collaborative partnership with ODE. Each district is then assigned a Student Success Team that works in close partnership with district staff and the local community to identify challenges and recommend strategies for improving outcomes.

Unlike the school or school district “takeovers” that other cities and states have attempted with mixed results, the Intensive Program offers a supportive approach based on deeper expertise, resources, and support for systems change and improving student outcomes—along with the necessary funding to build capacity in the schools that need it most.<sup>60</sup>

59 Oregon Department of Education. (n.d.). *Progress Markers*. <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/ProgressMarkers.pdf>

60 Oregon Department of Education. (2024, January). *The Student Investment Account: 2024 Legislative Report*. <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/SIALegislativeReport2024.pdf>

# SEEING AND SUSTAINING SYSTEMS CHANGE

Education systems change is challenging, and the conditions and infrastructure it requires are often invisible. Without making visible what Oregon has created to spark and sustain systems change, we risk abandoning promising efforts and reinventing the wheel instead of building on our strong foundation and early momentum.

Oregon’s SSA implementation has set us on a path toward the greater coherence and focus necessary for a high-performing K–12 system. While we are still far from achieving our goals for students, early progress toward long-term system change represents the tireless efforts of leaders in classrooms, school buildings, communities, school districts, ESDs, and state agencies over the last five years. They are the people who make up the system and dedicate themselves to meeting the needs of Oregon children and families.



## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

5



At Foundations for a Better Oregon, we believe every child in every corner of our state deserves the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive. That opportunity remains persistently—and unacceptably—out of reach for so many children, families, and communities.

Over the last two decades, Oregon has made sporadic gains for certain groups of children, but never sustained systemwide and statewide improvement in public education. Whether we measure against our goals, compare ourselves to other states, or look at our progress over time, one thing is clear: We have much more work to do, and we must commit to doing it together.

Five years ago, passionate champions for Oregon children fought to pass the SSA and celebrated when it was signed into law. State, school, and community leaders hit the ground running on a historic effort to improve how Oregon's K-12 system serves all students and closes disparities. That work was severely tested by a global pandemic and major shifts in Oregon's social, economic, and political landscapes.

Despite these obstacles, the SSA has laid the foundation for lasting change in Oregon's education system. Now, we stand at a crossroads: Will Oregon backtrack, as we have so often in the past? Or will we move forward with determination—and even pick up the pace?

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Making progress for Oregon children requires a shared vision to guide, unite, and sustain us. The SSA is bringing shared vision into focus with major new investment and infrastructure as well as new momentum toward a high-quality, inclusive, community-centered, and accountable public education system. Public opinion research reaffirms that Oregonians strongly believe in the SSA’s values, priorities, and strategies, even though their awareness and perceptions of K–12 improvement remain mixed.<sup>61</sup>

Building on the SSA’s foundation and the lessons we learned during its first five years of implementation, we offer guiding principles and recommendations to accelerate and sustain progress for all children.



1

**Real and sustained change takes time, focus, and commitment.** Oregon must learn from the SSA to maintain and amplify what’s working, and resist the urge to abandon or distract K–12 improvement efforts.

2

**Better results come from systems that continuously improve and stay accountable.** Oregon must maintain and build on the SSA’s new infrastructure and strategies for K–12 system accountability and improvement.

3

**Success depends on ensuring every child can learn, grow, and thrive.** Oregon must rely on community wisdom and partnerships to tailor and target support, close disparities, and better serve all K–12 students.

<sup>61</sup> Oregon Values and Beliefs Center. (2024, September 26). *Oregon Education Priorities and Planning*. <https://oregonvbc.org/oregon-education-priorities-and-planning/>

# 1

## REAL AND SUSTAINED CHANGE TAKES TIME, FOCUS, AND COMMITMENT

In 2019, Oregon’s Joint Committee on Student Success invited experts to share insights from successful education systems around the world. One takeaway stood out: High-performing systems focus on one or two improvement strategies and sustain them for a decade or more.<sup>62</sup> The Oregon Secretary of State Audit Division reinforced the need to stay focused in its *2022 K–12 Education—Systemic Risk Report*: “Taken together, the Student Success Act and Measure 98 [High School Success] comprise Oregon’s fourth major K–12 improvement effort since the early 1990s. The previous three were all abandoned.”<sup>63</sup>

Oregon’s repeated failure to follow through on K–12 improvement is a frustrating yet understandable pattern. When the well-being and future of Oregon children are at stake, progress can feel agonizingly slow. Research and reality both show that abandoning improvement efforts before they’ve had a chance to take root has trapped Oregon in a constant cycle of early implementation without ever reaching the full potential of systems change.

The *Systemic Risk Report* findings, which echo foundational research on education systems change, point to another major challenge: an overload of improvement initiatives and a lack of coherence across the K–12 system. ODE currently manages over 100 grant programs, each with its own goals, expectations, and requirements. While aligning implementation for nine programs through Integrated Guidance is a promising start, the state laws that authorize and govern each program complicate efforts to further simplify and streamline processes.

As a state, we must focus our improvement efforts instead of creating competing priorities that confuse and distract. Policymakers must resist the temptation to continually introduce new initiatives; instead, they should direct and support ODE to further consolidate grant programs into a coherent and effective framework for K–12 improvement.

Staying focused doesn’t mean Oregon should be content with the current pace of change. K–12 improvement requires setting clear goals for students—what we want them to know, learn, and experience—and then developing coherent systems focused on the strategies and practices that evidence and experience tell us will have a positive impact. As a state, we must learn to recognize the early signs of progress, sustain and amplify what’s working, and adjust—but not recklessly abandon—what hasn’t yet delivered.

**“Reforming education is a complex, long-term effort, requiring leaders and policymakers to set clear goals and foster a long-term focus. A large number of separate programs, unrealistic timelines, and frequent changes in funding priorities and leadership can undermine reform efforts.”**

**—Audits Division, Oregon Secretary of State<sup>64</sup>**

62 Oregon Legislative Policy and Research Office. (2019, January). *Joint Committee on Student Success: Report on 2018 Activities*. [http://opb-imgserve-production.s3-website-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/original/jcss\\_report\\_on\\_2018\\_activities\\_1548375392795.pdf](http://opb-imgserve-production.s3-website-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/original/jcss_report_on_2018_activities_1548375392795.pdf)

63 Oregon Secretary of State Audits Division. (2022, May). *K–12 Education—Systemic Risk Report*. <https://sos.oregon.gov/audits/Documents/2022-16.pdf>

64 Ibid.



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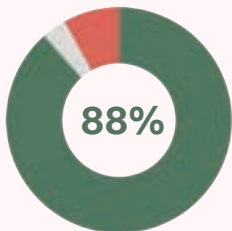
**BETTER RESULTS DEPEND ON SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

For many years, Oregon’s K–12 system was chronically underfunded, leading to a commonly held belief that greater investment was all that was needed to meet our goals for students and schools. Funded by a new corporate activities tax, the SSA brought a historic \$1 billion annual increase in early childhood and K–12 education funding. Although additional investment is crucial, the SSA’s focus on K–12 improvement and accountability is an overlooked but essential part of the law’s story.

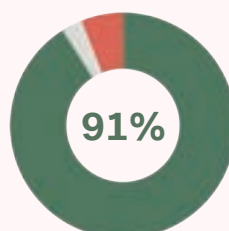
Under the SSA, Oregon has started building an accountability infrastructure to guide and support improvement. For key metrics like literacy, school attendance, ninth grade on track, and high school graduation, ODE and school districts have co-developed ambitious but achievable growth targets for improving student outcomes and closing disparities that impact historically underserved students. Public opinion research shows that Oregonians strongly support requiring school districts to create plans and budgets that will better serve all students, as well as holding schools and districts accountable for reaching their improvement goals.<sup>65</sup> Now, it’s up to policymakers, community leaders, and advocates to ensure ODE is diligently

monitoring school districts’ progress, celebrating and reinforcing success, and stepping in with support and direction when needed. From ODE to school districts to schools, we can do more to support continuous learning and improvement at every level, with state leaders, district leaders, school administrators, educators, families, and students all invested in achieving shared goals.

The SSA has made strides toward ensuring that disaggregated data guides K–12 investment decisions and improvement efforts, but Oregon can still do more to make transparent and accessible data readily available to district leaders, school leaders, educators, and communities as they make decisions and track progress. We should keep innovating to broaden how Oregon measures student learning, and find better ways to evaluate and nurture key conditions for learning such as students’ well-being, safety, and sense of belonging. ODE’s current efforts to improve how data is publicly displayed hold promise, but the state must also resolve disagreements about which metrics should be used consistently across the state, and address obstacles to collecting reliable, meaningful, and actionable data.



**88% of Oregonians agree school districts should be required to set clear strategies, plans, and budgets to improve schools and better serve all students.**



**91% of Oregonians agree schools and districts should be required to set attainable, realistic, and ambitious goals for academic progress, attendance, and graduation for the next five years.**

OVBC survey of Oregon adults, April 29–May 28, 2024 (representative sample, N = 1,626)

65 Oregon Values and Beliefs Center. (2024, September 26). *Oregon Education Priorities and Planning*. <https://oregonvbc.org/oregon-education-priorities-and-planning/>

“But to reach our most ambitious goals for children,” FBO Executive Director Whitney Grubbs wrote in *The Oregonian* in 2022, “we have to build on the Student Success Act and apply its vision, values, and equity-driven approach to the State School Fund.”<sup>66</sup> Although the SSA’s over \$2 billion biennial increase in public education funding was historic, it represents only a slice of the state’s total education budget.

It’s time to take a broader look at *all* of Oregon’s K–12 investments—including the more than \$10 billion State School Fund—and develop a more coherent education funding, spending, and accountability strategy. “Only then will the entirety of our public education system be geared toward ensuring every child in Oregon—no matter their identity, ZIP code, or circumstances—thrives at school and in life,” wrote Grubbs.

At FBO, we applaud Gov. Tina Kotek for moving Oregon in that direction. She is laying important groundwork by bringing together a wide range of leaders inside and outside the education system to discuss how clear goals, adequate funding, strategic spending, and efficient systems work together to deliver better results. During Oregon’s 2025 legislative session, we encourage ongoing dialogue, collaborative solutions, and bold leadership to advance a modern funding and accountability strategy that turns our state’s education goals into a reality.



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66 Grubbs, W. (2022, June 8). Opinion: To Improve K–12, Look to State School Fund. *The Oregonian*. <https://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/2022/06/opinion-to-improve-k-12-look-to-state-school-fund.html>

**3**

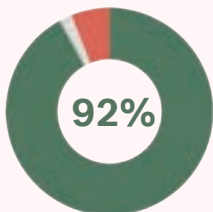
**ENSURE EVERY CHILD CAN LEARN, GROW, AND THRIVE**

Despite a divisive political climate, public opinion research shows Oregonians support the SSA’s core objectives at exceptionally high rates. The findings show they emphatically embrace the SSA’s vision of high-quality learning in safe and inclusive schools for all students. A strong majority also agree that the public education system must give every student the same chance and support to succeed in school, no matter their background or circumstances.<sup>67</sup> The SSA’s investments and strategies to support student health and well-being and reduce academic disparities are crucial to ensuring all Oregon students can succeed.

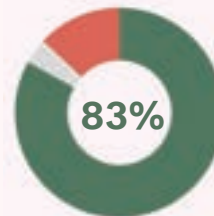
The science of childhood development clearly shows that children learn best when they feel safe, seen, heard, and valued, and that learning begins well before they enter kindergarten. This research aligns with recommendations from the SSA’s Student Success Plans, which connect the resources, conditions, and relationships needed to better support children from historically underserved communities. State and local decision-makers should regularly review these recommendations, which are developed by community-centered advisory groups, and use them to inform decisions.

Last, the SSA’s approach recognizes that educating children and improving schools is not the work of state and school leaders alone. Oregon children deserve an ecosystem of support that extends beyond the K–12 classroom and school year. The state must continue helping school districts to authentically engage students, families, educators, and communities, and ensure that local input meaningfully informs local decisions and guides school improvement.

The state can also do more to build and maintain a range of school/community partnership models that will inherently vary across urban, suburban, and rural communities and uplift unique local strengths and needs. We urge school districts and the state to steadily deepen their collaboration and their investment in early learning providers, community-based organizations, and other community partners. Each of these partners plays a crucial role in helping students thrive inside and outside the classroom, and must be recognized and properly resourced to do this vital work.



**92% of Oregonians agree every student deserves a rich academic experience, fully including students who experience disability.**



**83% of Oregonians agree schools must focus on ending persistent academic disparities so every student has the same chance to succeed in school, no matter their background.**

OVBC survey of Oregon adults, April 29–May 28, 2024 (representative sample, N = 1,626)

<sup>67</sup> Oregon Values and Beliefs Center. (2024, September 26). *Oregon Education Priorities and Planning*. <https://oregonvbc.org/oregon-education-priorities-and-planning/>

## THIS WORK MATTERS, AND THERE IS MORE TO DO

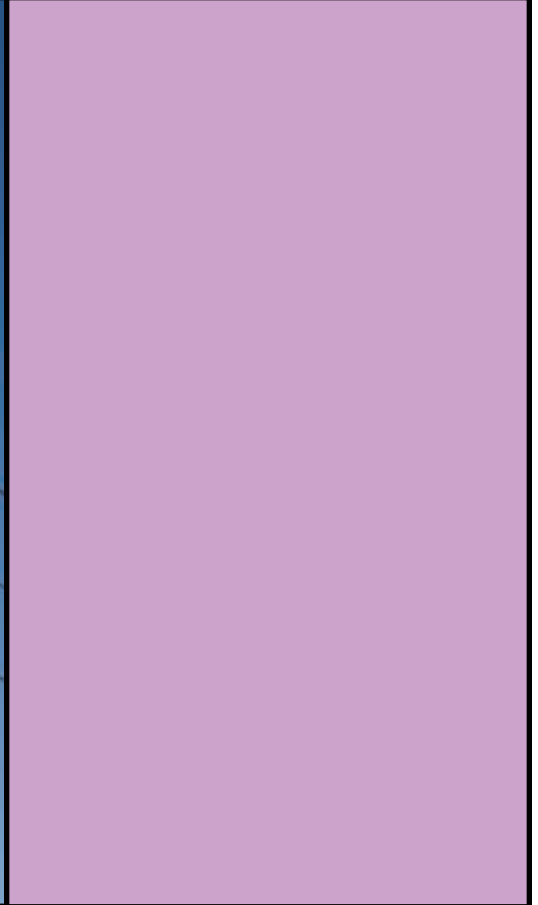
Over the last five years, the SSA has renewed Oregon’s focus on K–12 improvement. It has built new infrastructure for systems change and accountability while delivering resources and support to students, schools, and communities. These important—though often invisible—steps forward matter. They have made a difference, but there is far more to do.

Over the next five years, Oregon’s action—or inaction—will be crucial. We cannot look away from the difficult realities we see in the data or avoid listening to stories that might make us uncomfortable. We must draw hope from our early progress while maintaining the necessary urgency and focus to finally close long-standing disparities and reach our goals for all students. We must follow through on promising efforts while asking tough questions and always striving to do better. And we must embrace a shared vision for public education in which educating and caring for Oregon children is truly a shared responsibility.

As SSA implementation continues, Oregonians should know real and sustained change will take time, focus, and commitment. They should also expect better results—and demand nothing less—from systems that continuously improve and stay accountable. Above all, success will depend on our collective determination to make certain that every child in Oregon has what they need to learn, grow, and thrive.







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**FOUNDATIONS**  
**FOR A BETTER**  
**OREGON**

