

Oregon graduation rates increase

Natalie Pate
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Whether students are graduating in four or five years, or completing high school by earning a modified diploma or GED, the goal is to finish.

And more than 83 percent of Oregon students are doing that.

But typically, the four-year graduation rate — students who earn a traditional diploma in the preferred amount of time — is used to gauge the success of a state's education system.

And in that regard, Oregon is still doing poorly — third lowest in the country. About one in four Oregon high schoolers will fail to graduate in four years.

But there has been improvement.

The latest numbers from the Oregon Department of Education, released Thursday, show a 2-percentage-point increase from 74.8 percent in 2015-16 to 76.7 percent in 2016-17. This is a marked improvement from 2008-09 when the rate was 66.2 percent.

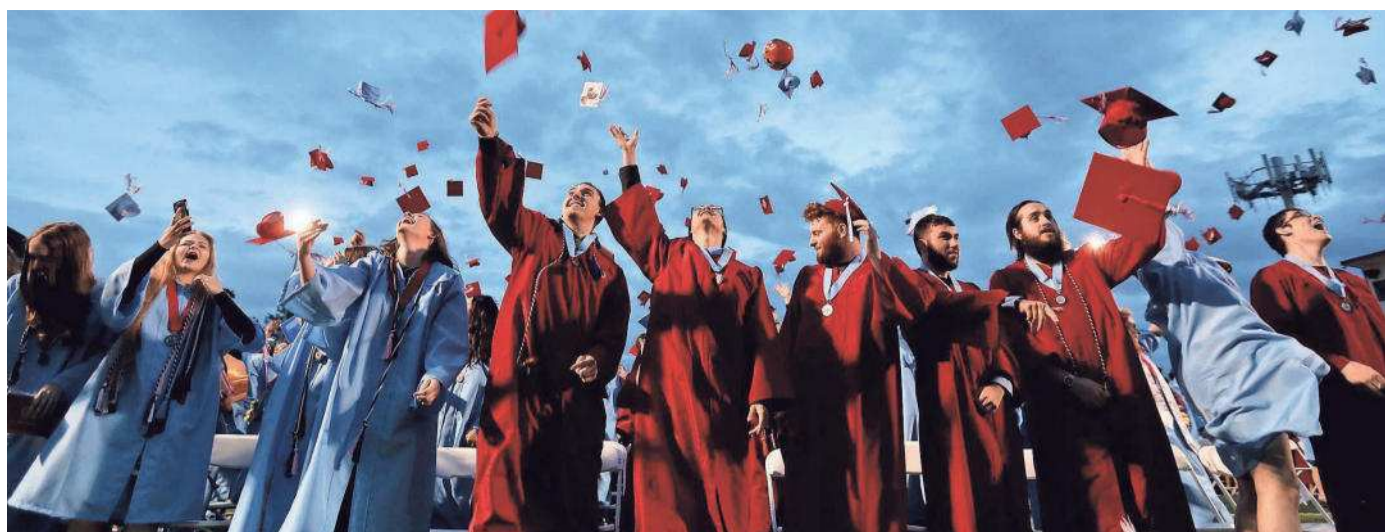
Perhaps the most impressive gains were made by Hispanic/Latino students, who have increased their graduation rate by 7.6 percentage points in three years and are graduating at a rate higher than the statewide average was three years ago.

Dropout rates, not to be confused with "non-completers" who may continue their enrollment, have remained practically stagnant statewide. At 3.86 percent, this is the lowest dropout rate the state has seen in five years.

Additionally, this is the first year the department issued data on the four-year graduation rate for homeless students statewide, coming in at 50.7 percent.

State lawmakers and education officials see graduation rates as one of the most important issues facing K-12 education in the state.

Research shows as long as graduation rates are below 100 percent, non-graduates earn less and require more



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social services, costing Oregonians hundreds of millions of dollars in Medicaid, lost tax revenue and incarceration expenses every year.

The Legislature has instructed the state education department to reach a 100 percent graduation rate by 2025.

Latino students lead progress

Hispanic/Latino students' four-year graduation rate reached a high of 72.5 percent in 2016-17.

This is a substantial improvement from 2011-12 when these students were graduating at a rate of 59.5 percent.

Other student subgroups, including Black/African American students, have seen similar increases, though they have smaller enrollments.

Roughly 20 percent of the students calculated in this year's graduation rate identify as Hispanic/Latino.

This progress is being made at a time when the state's achievement gap is notably shrinking.

The gap in four-year graduation rates between students of historically underserved races/ethnicities — Black, His-

panic, American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander — and other students — White, Asian and multiracial — has been notably wide.

But it has been cut in half over the last seven years, from more than 18 percentage points to less than 9 percentage points.

Colt Gill, acting superintendent for the state, said the education department has done a better job providing information to schools on things like chronic absenteeism that can show earlier when students are getting off track.

Rather than a 'one-size-fits-all' approach, Gill said the state is looking for strategies that can address individual district's needs.

Reaching the finish line

By law, Oregon public schools must provide schooling for students until they are 21 years old.

And for some, a little extra time is all they need to reach the finish line.

Statewide, the graduation rate increases to 78.9 percent for the five-year cohort. It increases even further if you

include students considered "completers."

Four-year completers had a rate of 80.2 percent in 2016-17 and five-year completers had a rate of 83.2 percent.

Some students are included in the five-year rate for simply needing one additional class to complete their diploma. Others may need to take another year or two.

In some states, six- and seven-year graduation rates are published for this reason.

Students who transfer schools and students living in poverty are at especially high risk of dropping out. Gill said schools are working to bring back students who haven't finished and keep them engaged.

"Our primary hope is (for students to) graduate in four years of high school," Gill said. "But we don't give up on them if they don't."

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Wurstfest comes to Mt. Angel Feb. 9-10

Christena Brooks
Special to Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Everyone's invited to come celebrate Mt. Angel's German heritage at Wurstfest, where attendees will find hand-crafted German sausages and local and German beers.

Wurstfest runs from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., Feb. 9 and 10. The annual event features other great food, live German music, dancing, games and demonstrations.

Special events include Senior Day for 65 and over, with special giveaways on Friday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

So dust off your lederhosen, starch up your Bavarian dirndl, and join the happy folk of Mt. Angel for a fun-filled, two-day celebration of the wurst at the Festhalle.

Admission for guests 21-and-over is \$5, or \$10 with specialty stein or glass. Guests under 21 are free if accompanied by an adult.

For more information, go to www.mtangelwurstfest.com.



Mt. Angel Wurstfest is a celebration of sausages, beer and wine and food with live music and kids area, plus Feb. 9 senior day lasting until 3 p.m. with specials for ages 65 and older and a 5K and 10K road race at 9:30 a.m. Feb. 10, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Feb. 9-10, Mt. Angel Festhalle. \$5 entry or \$10 with special mug or glass; ages 21 and younger free with an adult. ANNA REED/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Water

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"It's clear that we have some significant concerns about this project," Salem City spokesman Kenny Larson said.

Corps officials stressed they're in the early planning phases and will study the project's impact on Salem's water supply, among other factors, in the coming year.

A draft decision on the project and plans are expected around fall 2018 or winter 2019, while construction would begin around 2021.

"The Corps values input from the community and is looking forward to reviewing the comments, including from the city of Salem," Corps spokesman Tom Conning said. "All comments will be used to shape the scope of our analysis."

The primary concern expressed by Salem officials centers on the project's impact to water quality and quantity.

Here's a breakdown of their concerns.

Foul drinking water

Salem officials worry that warmer-than-normal water temperatures, and contaminants from the bottom of Detroit Lake, could impact Salem's water quality during construction.

They pointed to "DDT bound sediment" being released into the McKenzie River during construction of a similar project, at Cougar Reservoir, 10 years ago.

"The city is concerned about the possible release of contaminants in the silt at the bottom of the reservoir," city officials wrote.

In addition, city officials said, low water in Detroit Lake and Big Cliff Reservoir may lead to high water temperatures in the North Santiam. That, in turn, could lead to water impacted by toxic algae blooms in city drinking water supply.

"Algal blooms can negatively impact water treatment by clogging filters, production of algal toxins and taste and odor issues ..." officials wrote.

Muddy water

City officials are worried construction also will lead to muddy or "turbid" water in the North Santiam, impacting the city's water filtration process.

They pointed out that construction of a similar project, at Cougar Reservoir, created high turbidity on the McKenzie River for four months.

"The turbid water will dramatically affect the city's ability to utilize slow sand filtration operations ... and will create significant operations challenges," the city's comments said.

Water shortages

In order to supply Salem with enough water to meet normal demands, the North Santiam River needs to be running at around 700 to 800 cubic feet per second.

But with Detroit Lake close to empty during construction, city officials are worried there won't be enough water in the river, especially in late summer, leading to potential shortages.

"If this occurs, the city will be unable to produce enough drinking water to meet the needs of its community," officials wrote. "Salem water customers may face some level of water curtailment for potentially long periods of time."

Algae and 'offensive odors'

Water from the North Santiam is diverted into both Mill and Pringle creeks, which run through Salem.

City officials said lower and more turbid flows from the North Santiam, passed into the two creeks, could impact Salem's parks and homes along Mill and Pringle creeks.

"Many homes and businesses are located streamside," the city wrote. "Low-

er flows with increased turbidity in Mill and Pringle creeks will likely have a negative effect on water quality by causing increased steam temperatures, algal blooms and offensive odors. The city also is concerned about harmful algal blooms extending into the various waterbodies within the city parks, which are fed by North Santiam River source water."

Shorter construction timeline

Salem officials said they would like the Corps to consider "alternative construction practices" that minimize effects on the North Santiam River.

The federal agency said the cheapest and safest plan is keeping Detroit Lake almost empty for two full years, followed by alternative plans that keep the lake dry for closer to one year.

But Salem officials suggested a type of construction that "could reduce the time period of impact and minimize the reservoir drawdown level."

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