

# Report examines Oregon education against other states

## Oregon graduation rate second lowest among states

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN  
East Oregonian



Greg Smith



Mark Mulvihill



Heidi Sipe

Oregonians have heard before that their graduation rates are among the lowest in the country. But some data recently compiled by the state's Legislative Policy and Research Office may clarify why, and explain that Oregon students don't always face a level playing field when it comes to achievement comparisons.

Additionally, the Oregon Department of Education released its statewide report card last week, examining overall numbers for many aspects of Oregon education. The report included data on graduation and dropout rates, school funding, attendance, test results and progress for students in specific demographics.

Numbers for the two reports did not always match up, and the data comparing various states was pulled from several different years. For some data points, the year was not specified.

A few months ago, State Representative Greg Smith's office requested data from

the Legislative Policy and Research Office with the hopes of understanding why Oregon's graduation rates are suffering. They asked for a side-by-side comparison of Oregon and 10 other states: five high-performing states and five comparable Western states.

A spokesperson for Smith said although they won't be able to act on the data until the legislative session begins, Smith wanted to take a look at what states with the highest-performing schools were doing differently from Oregon.

Against high-performing states Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, Vermont and Minnesota, and western states Colorado, Utah, Washington, Nevada and Arizona, the data showed how Oregon stacked up in eleven categories.

Among the findings:  
• Oregon displayed lower scores than the other states

in most categories. Oregon's graduation rate was 72 percent, lower than all the states listed except for Nevada, at 70 percent. New Jersey's graduation rate was highest, at 89 percent.

• Oregon had one of the shortest school years, with students in school 161 days. Only Colorado's was shorter, at 160 days. Students in most other states listed attended for 180 days.

• Oregon had 22.18 pupils per teacher, one of the highest. Utah and Arizona had comparable ratios, while Vermont's was the lowest, at 10.59 and new Jersey's was 11.96.

• Oregon and Washington had the highest percentages of chronic absenteeism, at 22.7 and 24.8 percent, respectively.

• Oregon requires 24 credits to graduate, tied with New Jersey for the highest number among the states surveyed. Massachusetts and Colorado have no state-

**"The continual pattern in Oregon education is that you're given less and you expect more."**

— Heidi Sipe, Umatilla Superintendent

wide credit requirement, and Connecticut, Vermont and Washington require 20 credits.

On the Oregon statewide report card, the ODE reported that its teacher-to-student ratio is decreasing, and was at 20.26 for 2016-2017 (average of all three school levels). It said 95 percent of its funding goes to school buildings and student services, and that it spent \$11,241 per student in 2015-2016.

Data for the state report card is available at the state's education website.

Some local educators have said while a few of the factors were comparable across states, education data tends to lump together things that can't really be compared.

"Graduation rates are difficult to compare state-to-state because of what's reported and what's required for diplomas," said Inter-Mountain Education Service

District Superintendent Mark Mulvihill. He added that some data, such as SAT scores, can be compared nationwide. But for things like chronic absenteeism and graduation rates, there are too many factors that don't translate across state boundaries.

He said in Oregon, someone who completed high school in four years and completed 24 credits is considered a "graduate." But someone who is credit-deficient, or completes in five years, will count against the district.

"What we consider a dropout versus what other states do counts against our graduation rates," he said.

Umatilla Superintendent Heidi Sipe, who has served on various statewide education boards, echoed Mulvihill's comments.

"I think it's great that people are really looking at this (data)," she said. "It's difficult to have a discussion about graduation rates when the comparisons are simply not comparable."

Sipe noted the discrepancy in the number of days of school Oregon students attend and the number of credits they're expected to complete.

"My kids went to school one full school year less than their cousins in Washington,

yet they're expected to do more than many students in neighboring states," she said. "The continual pattern in Oregon education is that you're given less and you expect more."

Sipe said considering the limited resources Oregon educators have, they performed relatively well. She cited a news release from the Oregon Department of Education in September 2016 that noted Oregon students scored between 12 and 31 points higher than the national average on each section of the SATs.

She said some of the statistics are often linked to low-income populations.

"Most of the time, high poverty schools really align with low attendance," she said.

Mulvihill said it was important to hold Oregon schools accountable, but that some national comparisons were unfair to students.

"Some of these indicators are 'apples to apples,' and some are 'apples to oranges,'" he said. "The 'apples to apples' are where we need to have conversations."

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## No settlement reached for Houfmuse

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No settlement was reached Monday during a conference between the Umatilla County District Attorney's Office and Tyree Houfmuse, who is charged with murder, manslaughter, felon in possession of a firearm, and two counts of unlawful use



Houfmuse

of a weapon, in the May death of Hermiston resident James Cragun.

Jaclyn Jenkins, the chief deputy district attorney, said the next step would likely be for the judge to set motion dates and trial dates, but no such dates have yet been scheduled.

Cragun's parents and sister were at the court-

room Monday before it was closed for the private hearing. They talked about the toll the last few months has taken on their family.

"His kids are just going through hell," said Beverly Cragun, the victim's mother.

His sister, Cynthia Bailey, said the family was hoping for a life imprisonment sentence.

She said the family was also hoping to find out exactly what happened that night, as they still don't know the exact series of events that led to Cragun's death.

Some of Houfmuse's relatives were also at the courthouse on Monday. Houfmuse's aunt declined to comment on the case.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

## Flipped semi on I-84 shuts down eastbound lanes

Pendleton firefighters respond to a semi-trailer flipped on its side causing another cash with a vehicle in the eastbound lane of Interstate 84 on Tuesday in Pendleton. The wreck completely closed traffic in the eastbound lanes of the freeway.

## Schools interested in joining education research project

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Pendleton could get another extension service, but not in the field of agriculture.

At a meeting Monday, the Pendleton School Board discussed entering the school system into the Oregon Research Schools Network, a University of Oregon pilot project that touts itself as the agricultural extension service model for education.

Under the five-year project, Pendleton and several other districts across the state would have an embedded researcher studying local schools and providing best practices to teachers based on the data.

In exchange for funding the researcher position, the university will get a chance to do student outreach and recruitment.

Superintendent Chris Fritsch said the researcher would likely be an existing faculty member who would

split their time between the classroom and research. He added that one area the Pendleton researcher could study is best teaching practices for Native American students.

Fritsch said the district and the university are trying to hammer out the final details of the project and not every aspect of network's offerings will make it to Pendleton. For instance, the network's dual-credit program would replicate the dual-credit classes Pendleton High School already offers.

Director of Business Services Michelle Jones said she will return to the board with an intergovernmental agreement between the district and college.

The board seemed supportive of the project and like the length of the university's commitment.

"It seems like a good opportunity that's not going to collapse in 18 months," board member Debbie McBee said.

## COMING EVENTS

**WEDNESDAY, DEC. 6 ADULT BEGINNERS' COMPUTERS**, 3-4 p.m., Pendleton Public Library meeting room, 502 S.W. Dorion Ave., Pendleton. Registration is required. Classes tailored to the needs of the attendees. (541-966-0380)

**ADULT & TEEN COLOR CLUB**, 5:30 p.m., Pendleton Public Library, 502 S.W. Dorion Ave., Pendleton. A relaxing hour of coloring. We have colors and coloring sheets so just come join us. (Mary Finney 541-966-0380)

**COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS LIGHTING CELEBRATION**, 6 p.m., SAGE Center, 101 Olson Road, Boardman. Living nativity, Christmas tree lighting, preschool choir, Christmas carolers, Santa Claus, refreshments and more. Free. (541-481-7243)

**KIDS CLUB**, 6:30-8 p.m., Hermiston Christian Center, 1825 W. Highland Ave., Hermiston. For ages 5-12. Includes open gym, games, prizes, snacks music, puppets and more. Transportation available. (Joanna Hayden 541-561-5573)

**VEGAN/SUSTAINABLE LIVING POTLUCK SUPPER**, 7 p.m., location varies, location varies, Pendleton. Bring a veggie dish and recipe. Gluten-free friendly group. Call to RSVP and for driving directions. (541-969-3057)

**TOUR OF KNOWLEDGE**, 7-8 p.m., Eastern Oregon Higher

Education Center, 980 S.E. Columbia Drive, Hermiston. Discussion of public hearings, meetings and events relevant to the area, and reports on sites and facilities that impact natural resources and places of historical interest. Free and everyone welcome. (Eileen Laramore 541-303-3872)

**THURSDAY, DEC. 7 PRESCHOOL STORY TIME**, 10:15-11 a.m., Pendleton Public Library, 502 S.W. Dorion Ave., Pendleton. Stories and activities for young children. (541-966-0380)

**PRESCHOOL STORY AND CRAFT TIME**, 10:30 a.m., Milton-Freewater Public Library, 8 S.W. Eighth Ave., Milton-Freewater. (Lili Schmidt 541-938-8247)

**PEARL HARBOR DAY EVENT**, 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Pendleton Air Museum, 21 S.W. Emigrant Ave., Pendleton. Meet and greet opportunity with local Pendleton WWII veterans and members of the Pendleton VFW talking about Pearl Harbor. Cookies and coffee will be served. Free. (Becky Dunlap 541-278-0141)

**BOARDMAN SENIOR MEAL SERVICE**, 12 p.m., Boardman Senior Center, 100 Tatone St., Boardman. Cost is \$4 for seniors 55 and over or \$5 for adults. (541-481-3257)

**MEAL SERVICE**, 12 p.m., Our Lady of Angels Catholic Church parish hall, 565 W. Hermiston Ave., Hermiston. Cost is \$4 for adults, free for children 10 and under, \$4 for Meals on Wheels. Extra 50 cents for utensils/dishes. Bus service to parish hall by donation. (541-567-3582)

**PENDLETON SENIOR MEAL SERVICE**, 12-1 p.m., Pendleton Senior Center, 510 S.W. 10th St., Pendleton. Costs \$3.50 or \$6 for those under 60. Pool, puzzles, crafts, snacks, Second Time Around thrift store 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. For Meals on Wheels, call 541-276-1926. (541-276-7101)

**SENSORY STORY TIME**, 12:30 p.m., Boardman Public Library, 200 S. Main St., Boardman. For children from birth to

age 4. (541-481-2665)

**SKILLS FOR LIFE**, 3-5 p.m., Pendleton Recreation Center, 510 S.W. Dorion Ave., Pendleton. Gym activities and life skills for middle and high school students. Registration requested. (Danny Bane 541-379-4250)

**YARN CLUB**, 5:30 p.m., Hermiston Public Library, 235 E. Gladys Ave., Hermiston. (541-567-2882)

**UMATILLA COUNTY CHILDREN AND FAMILY GRIEF RECOVERY CENTER ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING**, 6 p.m., New Hope Community Church, 1350 S. Highway 395, Hermiston. Meet-and-greet at 5:45 p.m. followed by meeting at 6 p.m. All those interested in volunteering are encouraged to attend. (Matt Terjeson 503-720-1620)

## BIRTHDAY!

Please come join us for a **SURPRISE** 75th Birthday Party for Helen McAfee on Saturday December 9th from 1:30 to 4:00 P.M. at the Hermiston Christian Event Center located at 1825 W Highland Avenue in Hermiston, Oregon. We will provide appetizers and entertainment. No gifts needed just your presence.

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## STUDENT OF THE WEEK

**Sadie Wilson**  
Senior - Griswold High School

Griswold High School is proud to name Sadie Wilson as its Student of the Week. Sadie is a senior at Griswold High School. She is a member of FBLA, National Honor Society and is the current ASB Vice-President. She is also an all-around athlete lettering in volleyball, basketball and track! At the Old Oregon League District Volleyball Tournament this year Sadie Wilson was selected 1st team All-District and made the All-Tournament District Team. She has done all of this while maintaining a 4.0 GPA. Congratulations Sadie and keep up the good work!

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