

# Issues linger around bill

By HILLARY BORRUD  
The Oregonian

SALEM — For the next five years, an Oregon high school diploma will be no guarantee that the student who earned it can read, write or do math at a high school level.

Gov. Kate Brown had demurred earlier this summer regarding whether she supported the plan passed by the Legislature to drop the requirement that students demonstrate they have achieved those essential skills. But on July 14, the governor signed Senate Bill 744 into law.

Through a spokesperson, the governor declined again Friday, Aug. 6, to comment on the law and why she supported suspending the proficiency requirements.

Brown's decision was not public until recently, because her office did not hold a signing ceremony or issue a press release and the fact that the governor signed the bill was not entered into the legislative database until July 29, a departure from the normal practice of updating the public database the same day a bill is signed.

The Oregonian asked the governor's office when Brown's staff notified the Legislature that she had signed the bill. Charles Boyle, the governor's deputy communications director, declined to answer.

Boyle wrote in an emailed statement that suspending the reading, writing and math proficiency requirements while the state develops new graduation standards will benefit "Oregon's Black, Latino, Latina, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islander, Tribal, and students of color."

"Leaders from those communities have advocated time and again for equitable graduation standards, along with expanded learning opportunities and supports," Boyle wrote.

Lawmakers and the governor did not pass any major expansion of learning opportunities or supports for Black, Indigenous and students of color during this year's legislative session.

The requirement that students demonstrate freshman- to sophomore-level skills in reading, writing and, particularly, math led many high schools to create workshop-style courses to help students strengthen their skills and create evidence of mastery. Most of those courses have been discontinued since the skills requirement was paused during the pandemic before lawmakers killed it entirely.

Democrats in the Legislature overwhelmingly supported ending the long-time proficiency requirement, while Republicans criticized it as a lowering of academic standards. A couple lawmakers crossed party lines on the votes.

Proponents said the state needed to pause Oregon's high school graduation requirements, in place since 2009 but already suspended during the pandemic, until at least the class of 2024 graduates in order for leaders to reexamine its graduation requirements.

Much of the criticism of the graduation requirements was targeted at standardized tests. Yet Oregon, unlike many other states, did not require students to pass a particular standardized test or any test at all. Students could demonstrate their ability to use English and do math via about five different tests or by completing an in-depth classroom project judged by their own teachers.

A variety of factors appear to have led to the lack of transparency around the governor's bill signing decisions this summer.

Secretary of the Senate Lori Brocker said a key staffer who deals with the governor's office was experiencing medical issues during the 15-day period between when Brown signed Senate Bill 744 and the public database was updated to reflect that.

# Risk of large fires to stay high into fall

By BRAD CARLSON  
Capital Press

SALEM — The risk of large fires will remain high through November in much of the West thanks to widespread drought, dry fuels and above-normal temperatures, the National Interagency Fire Center predicts.

With more than 95% of the West in drought, timber, brush and grass are "exceptionally dry," said Jim Wallmann, meteorologist with the NIFC-tied National Interagency Coordination Center. Some recent rainfall helped, "but we would need something much longer-duration than we've seen to really make a large impact on the rest of the fire season."

A strong start to the monsoon season returned fuels to normal moisture levels in Arizona, New Mexico and parts of Colorado, he said. Near-term risk in the Four Corners region should drop to normal or below normal.

But in much of the West, "every fuel type is available right now given the drought," Wallmann said.



Bootleg Fire Incident Command/Contributed Photo, File A DC-10 tanker drops retardant on July 15, 2021, over the Bootleg Fire in southern Oregon. The risk of large fires remains high into the fall.

Fire-ready fuel is available "from California right up through Oregon and Washington, through Idaho and into Montana and Wyoming."

Temperatures were well above normal in July across the West and Northern Plains.

Wallmann said above-normal fire potential is expected through August in Northern California,

Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana and into the Dakotas and part of Minnesota.

Exceptional drought and "any potentially strong wind events, which become more frequent in August," are among reasons, he said.

Large-fire risk should lessen gradually in the northern U.S. as fall unfolds, and return to normal by November.

"But for much of California, we are expecting above-normal potential to remain through November due to a delayed start to their rainy season," Wallmann said.

NIFC said climate outlooks indicate warmer-than-normal conditions are likely for much of the continental U.S., especially the West, into fall. The drought is likely to expand and intensify.

Most California mountains and foothills should have above-normal potential for large fires through September, with areas prone to offshore winds likely to retain above-normal potential into October and November in the state's south, the report said.

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Guest Speakers:  
State Rep. Greg Smith

RSVP Required  
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