THE INVISIBLE INFRASTRUCTURE OF SYSTEMS CHANGE

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When Oregon passed the Student Success Act (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.[1]

Nearly 80,000 educators and staff are the heartbeat of the K–12 system.[2] 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.[3]

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

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1 Oregon Department of Education. (2023, November 30). *Oregon Statewide Report Card 2022–23: An Annual Report to the Legislature on Oregon Public Schools*.
2 Ibid.
3 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."[4] 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.

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4 Fullan, M. (2011, May). *Seminar Series 204: Choosing the Wrong Drivers for Whole System Reform. Centre for Strategic Education*.
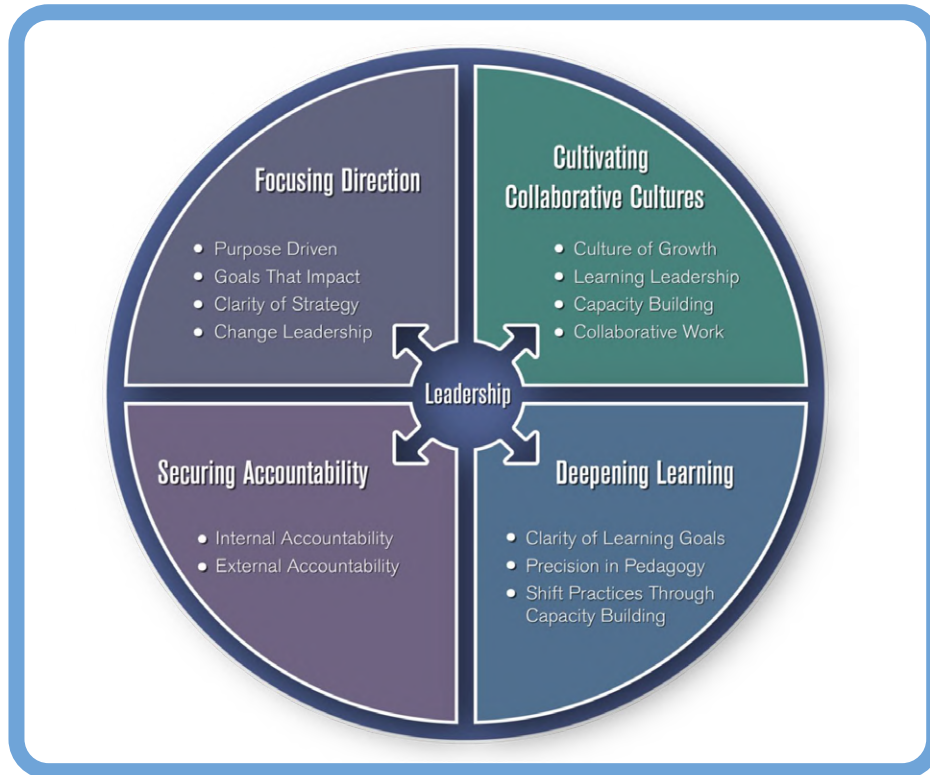
This diagram from Dr. Michael Fullan shows the four drivers of education systems change, with effective leadership central to their success.[5]

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 supports 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.

5 Fullan, M., & Quinn, J. (2015, July 20). *Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems*. Corwin & the Ontario Principal's Council.

SYSTEMS CHANGE DRIVER: FOCUSING DIRECTION

Establishing and maintaining *focused direction* is essential to system 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 (CAT) 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.[6]

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6   Oregon Department of Education. (n.d.). *Impact of High School Success on CTE Programs and Enrollment*.

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 2019–20—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.[7]

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.[8]

One year later, when the agency repeated this process with 232 HSS funding grantees, they found that 42 needed additional support and "corrective action."[9] 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."[10]

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7 Stand for Children. (n.d.). *Measure 98: High School Success: An Analysis*.

8 Oregon Department of Education. (2020, August). *The High School Success Eligibility Requirement Rubric*.

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

10 Oregon Secretary of State, Oregon Audits Division. (2022, December). *ODE Continues to Effectively Implement Measure 98 and Increase Collaboration Across Agency Programs*.

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 is designed 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.[11]

The SIA is a critical mechanism for achieving 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 housed 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."

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11 Oregon Values and Beliefs Center. (2024, September 26). *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 and exacerbate 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 across K–12 programs.[12]

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's 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.

> "ODE 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[13]

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12 Oregon Legislature, Joint Committee on Ways and Means (2019, March 3). *HB 5047: A Budget Report and Measure Summary*.
13 Oregon Secretary of State, Oregon Audits Division. (2022, May). *K–12 Education: Systemic Risk Report*.

BEFORE THE SSA	AFTER INTEGRATED GUIDANCE
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.	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.
School district program budgets were not tied to clearly defined K–12 improvement strategies and outcomes.	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.
ODE's siloed approach did not allow school districts to combine or integrate K–12 program-specific funding streams for increased efficiency and effectiveness.	ODE's integrated approach now encourages school districts to responsibly braid and blend Integrated Guidance program funds to increase efficiency and effectiveness.
ODE did not audit the implementation of K–12 programs in local school districts.	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.
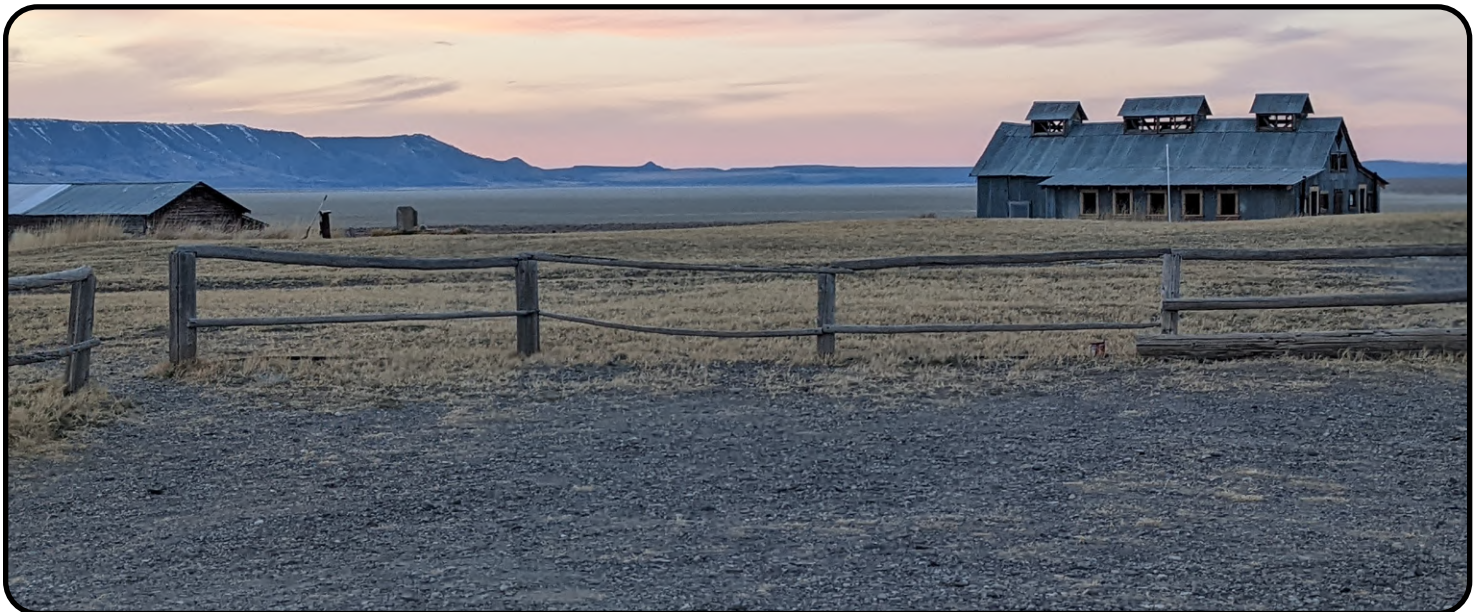
STRATEGIC PLANNING INFORMED BY EVIDENCE AND ENGAGEMENT

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:
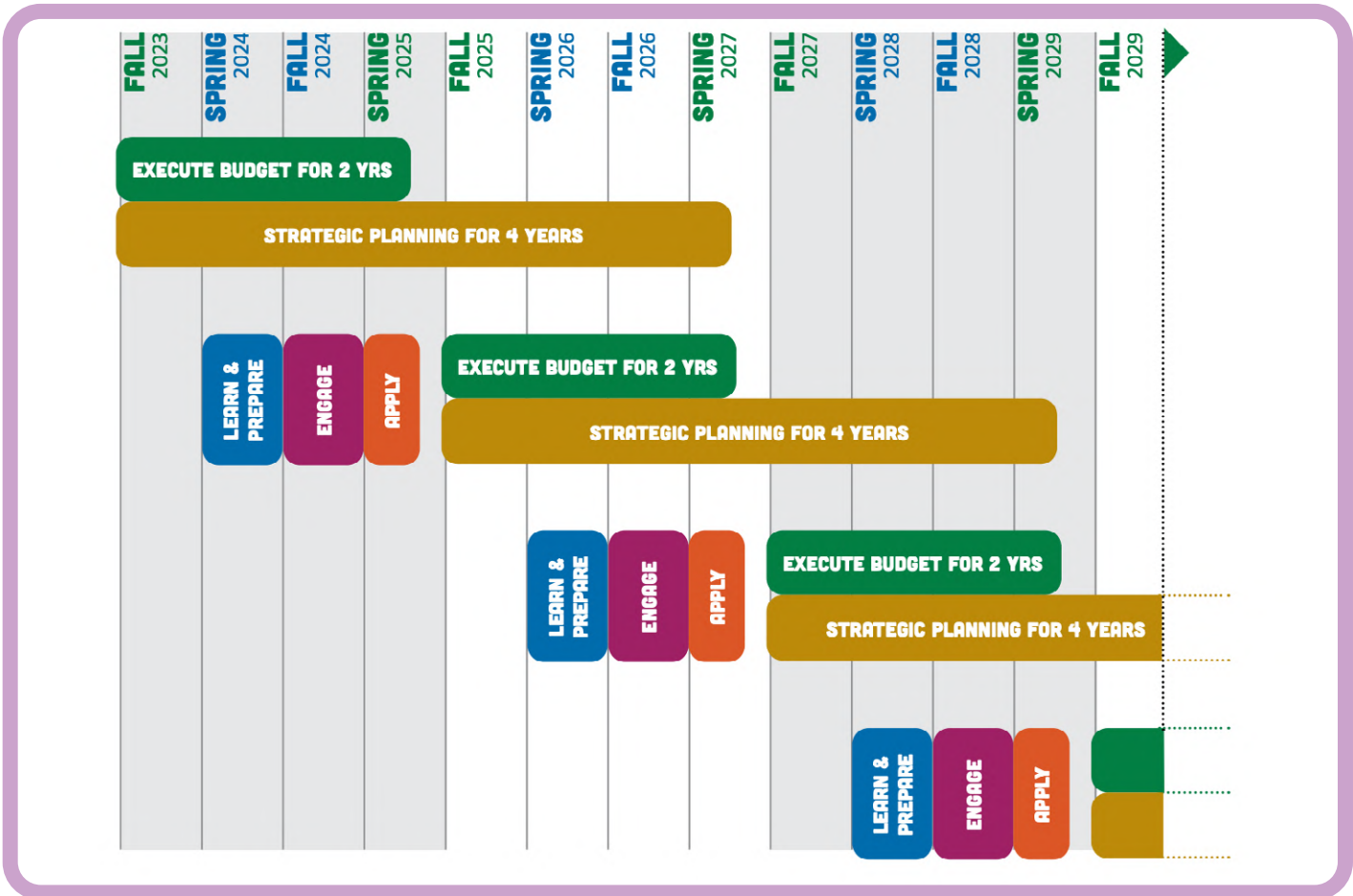
- Commit to meaningful community, family, student, and educator engagement through each planning cycle.
- Engage in authentic Tribal Consultation as a sacred form of collaboration between the district and a sovereign nation.
- Review and integrate inputs from district equity committees and regional CTE 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 towards common goals is becoming a meaningful routine."**
>
> **—Dr. Charlene Williams, Director, Oregon Department of Education[14]**

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14   Oregon Department of Education.(2024, April 26). *Aligning for Student Success: Integrated Guidance Update 2025–27*.

Timeline (Fall 2023 – Fall 2029):

- FALL 2023 | SPRING 2024 | FALL 2024 | SPRING 2025 | FALL 2025 | SPRING 2026 | FALL 2026 | SPRING 2027 | FALL 2027 | SPRING 2028 | FALL 2028 | SPRING 2029 | FALL 2029

Cycle 1:
- EXECUTE BUDGET FOR 2 YRS
- STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR 4 YEARS
- LEARN & PREPARE | ENGAGE | APPLY

Cycle 2:
- EXECUTE BUDGET FOR 2 YRS
- STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR 4 YEARS
- LEARN & PREPARE | ENGAGE | APPLY

Cycle 3:
- EXECUTE BUDGET FOR 2 YRS
- STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR 4 YEARS
- LEARN & PREPARE | ENGAGE | APPLY

This timeline produced by ODE shows the required cycles of community engagement, strategic planning, and budgeting under the Integrated Guidance process.[15]

15   Ibid.

HILLSBORO SCHOOL DISTRICT

SSA IMPLEMENTATION SPOTLIGHT
HILLSBORO SCHOOL DISTRICT

dhm RESEARCH

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.

HILLSBORO SCHOOL DISTRICT

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 each goal and how far that goal 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 of the challenges 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 summary, 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.[16]

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16 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 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."[17] 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 a dedicated 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.

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17 Fullan, M., & Quinn, J. (2015, July 20). *Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems*. Corwin & the Ontario Principal's Council.

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.
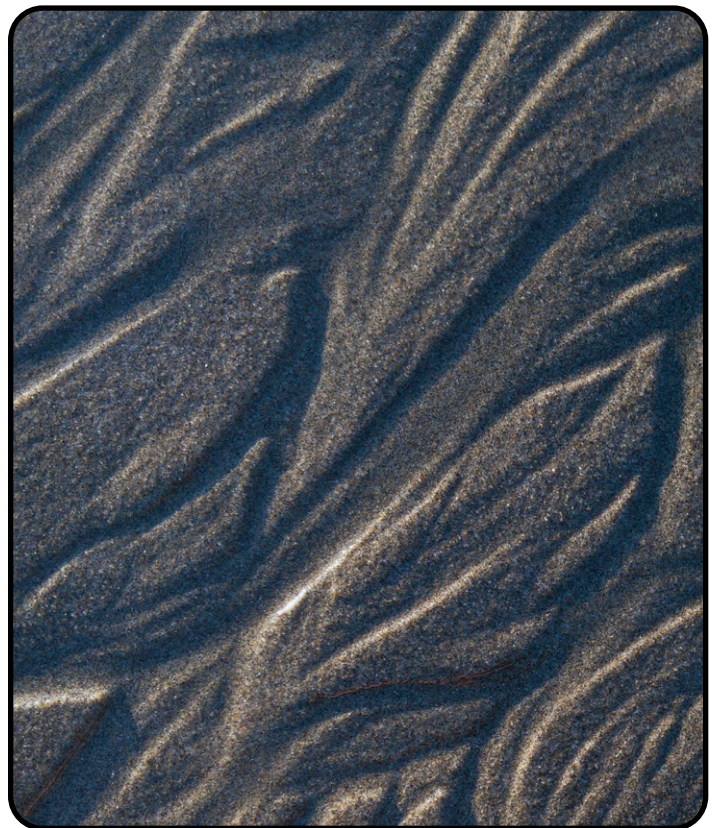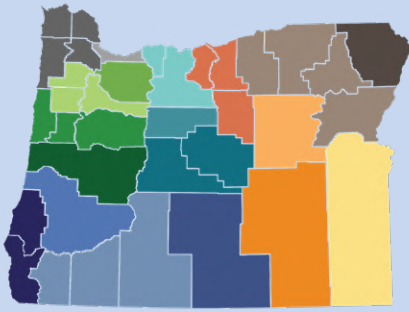
SSA IMPLEMENTATION SPOTLIGHT

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.[18]

18 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 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 their 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.[19]

Oregon maintains Student Success Plans for students identifying as American Indian/Alaska Native, African American/Black, 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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19 Oregon Department of Education.(2024, April 26). *Aligning for Student Success: Integrated Guidance Update 2025–27* [Appendix G].

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."[20]

The SSA upholds a shared value for deeper learning, and public opinion research affirms that Oregonians share this value.[21] Quantitative analysis shows 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.

20 Fine, S, & Mehta, J. (n.d.) *A "Big Tent" Strategy for System-Wide Transformation: Seeking Deep Learning in Ottawa*. New Pedagogies for Deep Learning.
21 Oregon Values and Beliefs Center. (2024, September 26). *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 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.[22] 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 measurable growth targets as part of the SIA in order to track how the significant K–12 funding increase would impact student academic outcomes. The required LPGT 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 school district to review its most current data and, informed by historical trends, set growth targets that reflect meaningful and achievable improvements in student outcomes over five years—not unrealistic or politically driven goals.[23] 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.[24] (Gap-closing targets can be set for individual focal student groups or for all focal student groups combined.)

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22 Ibid.
23 Oregon Department of Education. (2024, April 26). *Aligning for Student Success: Integrated Guidance Update 2025–27* [Appendix P].
24 Focal groups include American Indian/Alaskan 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 2027–28 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[25]

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.


25 Fine, S, & Mehta, J. (n.d.) *A "Big Tent" Strategy for System-Wide Transformation: Seeking Deep Learning in Ottawa*. New Pedagogies for Deep Learning.

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.

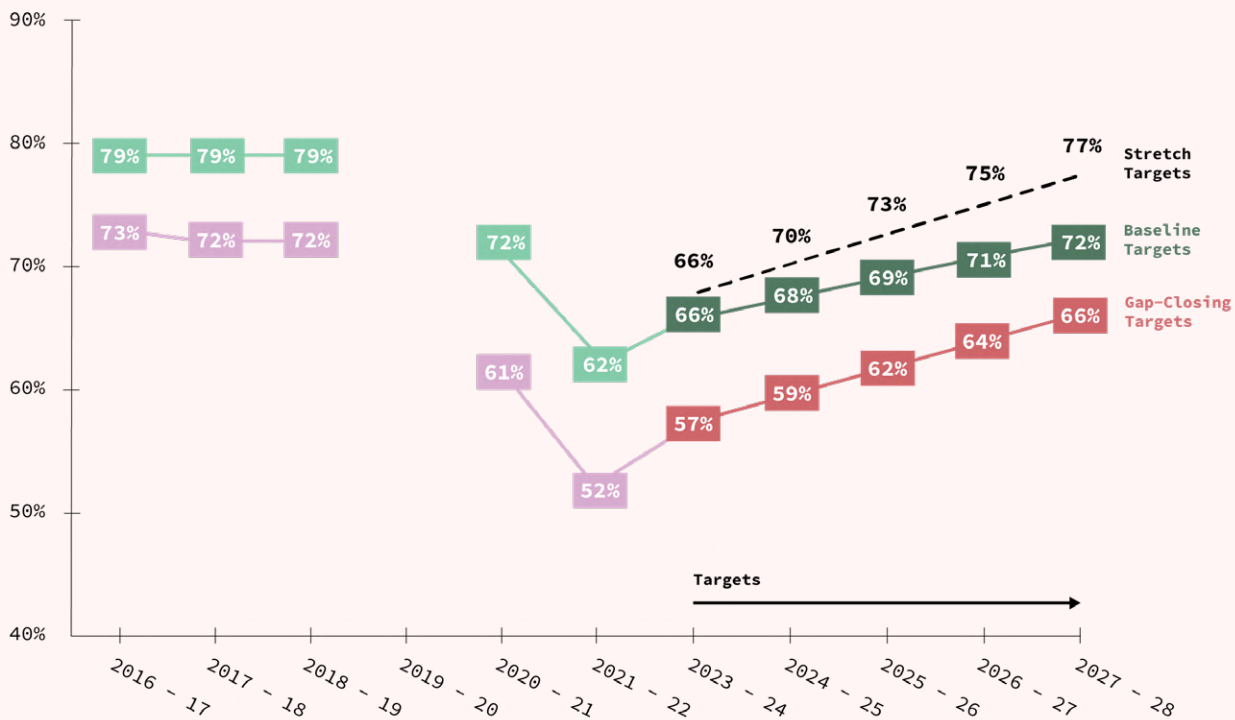## Historical Data Trends and LPGTs for English Language Arts
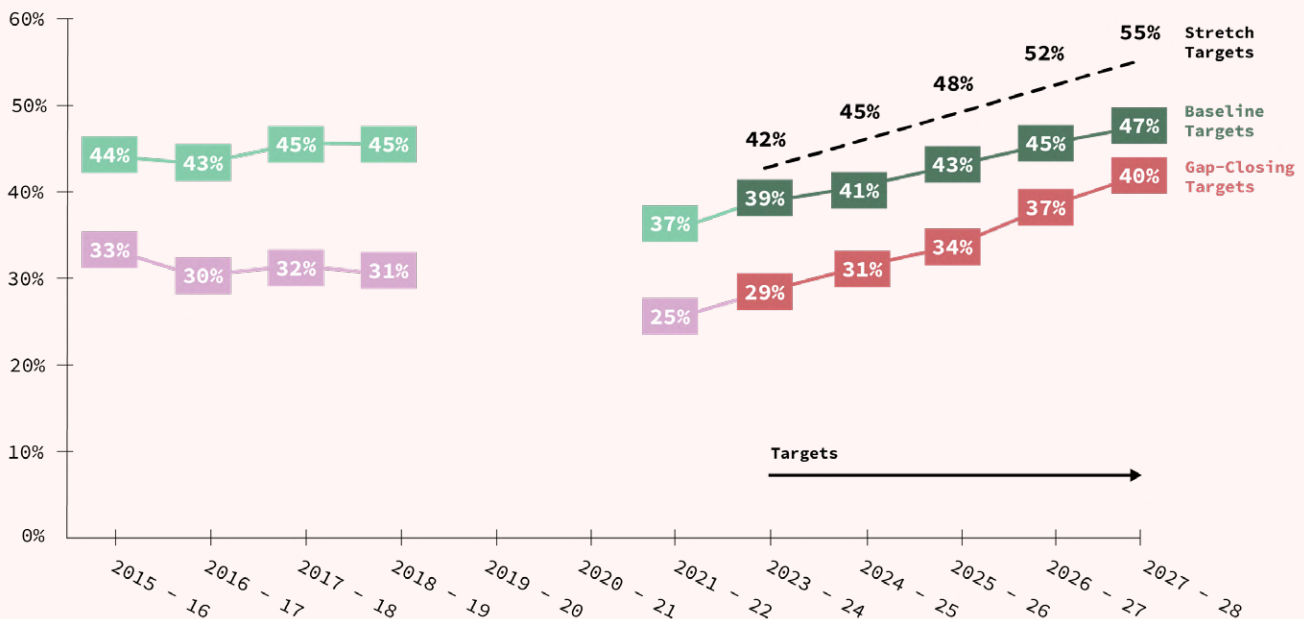
Data Source: Oregon Department of Education.

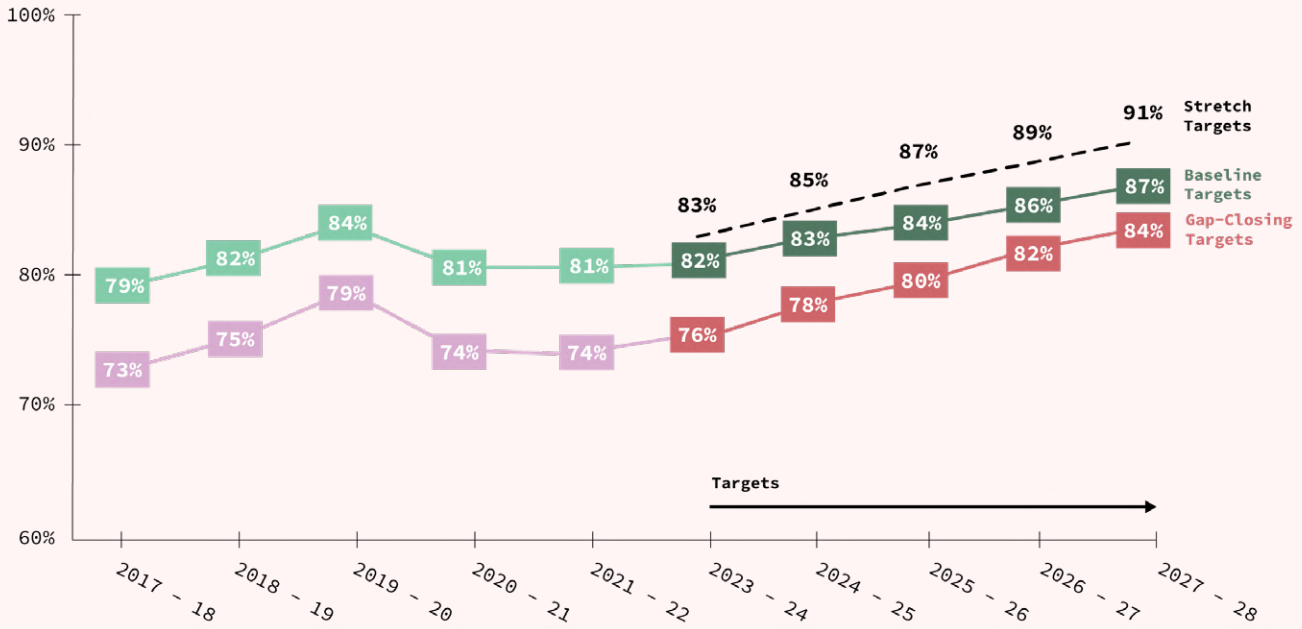## Historical Data Trends and LPGTs for Ninth Grade On Track
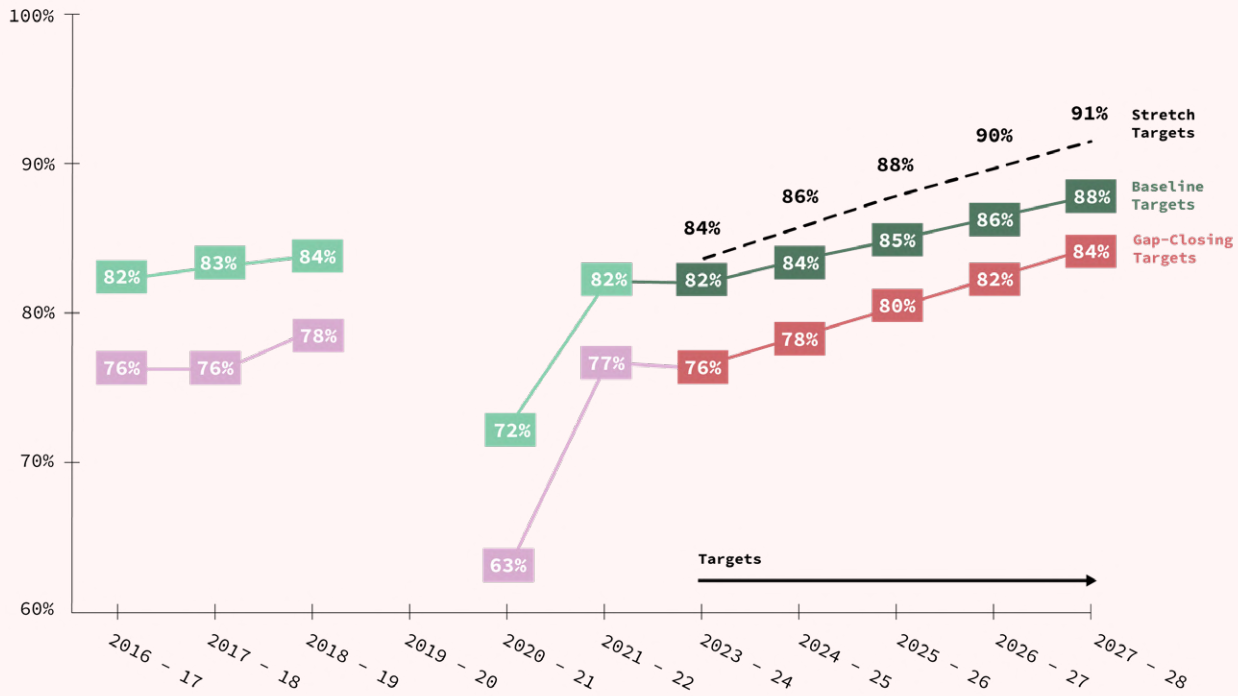
Data Source: Oregon Department of Education.

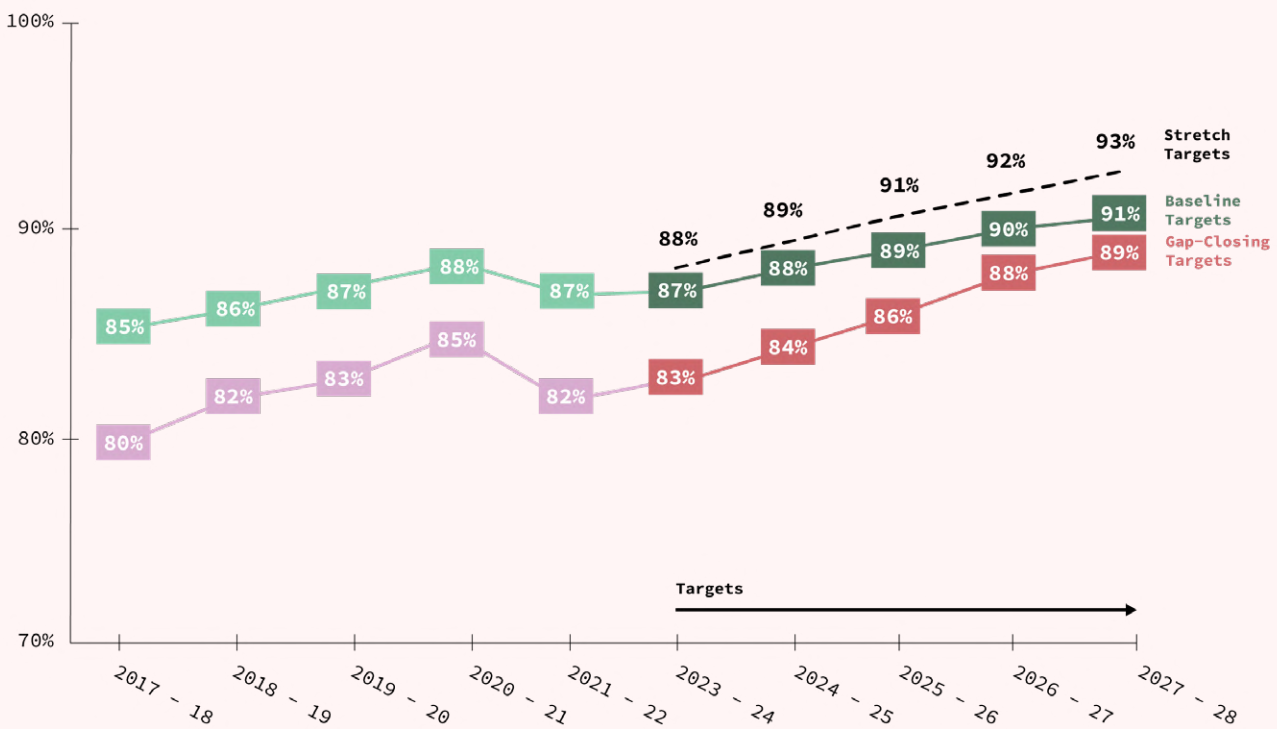## Historical Data Trends and LPGTs for Regular School Attendance

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.

24

PROGRESS MARKERS

PM 1 PM 2 PM 3 PM 4 PM 5 PM 6 PM 7 PM 8 PM 9 PM 10 PM 11 PM 12 PM 13 PM 14 PM 15

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

LPGTs

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 **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.

PM 9
9GOT

A review of **9th grade course scheduling**, as it relates to on-track status for focal student groups, accounts for core and support core class placement. School staff ensure emerging bilingual students are enrolled in appropriate credit-bearing courses that meet graduation requirements.

PM 10
3GR 9GOT 4YG 5YC RA

Foundational learning practices that create a culturally sustaining and welcoming climate are visible. This includes practices that ensure safe, brave, and welcoming classrooms, schools and co/extra curricular environments. Strengths-based, equity-centered, trauma and SEL-informed practices are present and noticeable. Policies and practices prioritize health, well-being, care, connection, engagement, and relationship building. Multiple ways of being are supported through culturally affirming and sustaining practices for students, staff, and administrators.

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.

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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.[26]

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.[27]

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26 Oregon Department of Education. (n.d.). *Progress Markers*.
27 Oregon Department of Education. (2024, January). *The Student Investment Account: 2024 Legislative Report*.

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.