

What People in Our State Think about High School Graduation Requirements

From Oregon's Kitchen Table

In 2021, the Oregon Legislature passed Senate Bill 744. This bill was to explore how to make graduation requirements more equitable for all students in Oregon. It directed the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to review state high school graduation requirements. As part of this review, ODE partnered with Oregon's Kitchen Table to get input from people across the state about this topic.

We got this input from late 2021 to early 2022. We wanted to learn how people think high school graduation requirements could work better for future students. We also asked how they thought students could have the support they need to be ready for success after high school. This means success no matter what path students choose after high school.

ABOUT OREGON'S KITCHEN TABLE

Oregon's Kitchen Table (OKT) is part of the National Policy Consensus Center at Portland State University. We give all the people of Oregon a voice in public decision-making. Many organizations have asked OKT to get feedback from the public. We use public gatherings, online surveys, and small talks to allow people to share their thoughts with decision makers.

HOW WE LISTENED

OKT held public meetings, small talks and interviews for this project. We did them by phone, Facebook, Zoom or in-person. We also did an online survey in Arabic, Chinese, English, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

To achieve this, we worked with community leaders and partners. They connected their communities to this project. Some of them held their own community talks. Others supported people in filling out the survey.

WHAT WE HEARD

People across the state shared these overall thoughts:

- A shared value many people in Oregon have is to be flexible. This includes being flexible about requirements to graduate from high school.
- It is important to acknowledge:
 - That there are inequities in educational outcomes
 - That they are caused by many factors that go far beyond high school graduation requirements
- People see and appreciate students' different strengths and learning styles.
- It is very important to give students support that is culturally appropriate to help them meet graduation requirements.
- People think subjects like math, reading, and writing are important to learn. But they also want to explore how Oregon now addresses the required credits in those subjects and how it assesses competence in those subjects.
- Many people thought current math requirements were a barrier for students. They want to see math requirements for graduation reflect students' interests. They also want to see them have direct and practical use for jobs, college, and other paths in life after high school.
- People want to learn more about whether Oregon's system of multiple diploma options is serving students well. They want to know about this for students who have disabilities.
- It is very important to families to get clear information early and in many languages about:
 - What diploma options are
 - What the requirements are
 - What they mean for after high school
- The skills and knowledge many people value most for high school graduates are financial literacy, critical thinking, and civics. People also want to see students learn communication as well as workplace, social, and interpersonal skills.

- There were different beliefs about:
 - Whether assessments like tests should be required for graduation
 - What role the state should have in assessments
- Some people thought that credits and assessments are too focused on getting students ready for college or university. Other people didn't think they were focused enough on college or university.

WHO WE HEARD FROM

Over 3,500 people shared what they thought in different ways. 3,114 people answered the survey online or on paper. About 350 people came to 43 different community talks. Fifty people took part in interviews.

We heard from:

- Parents, guardians or family members of current or recent high school
- Current or recent high school students
- Current or recent teachers and other staff in Oregon schools
- People who work for organizations that support high school students and youth
- People from each of Oregon's 36 counties

Over half of the people said that they or their students belong to one or more of these groups:

- Tribal members
- LGBTQ2SIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, 2 Spirit, Intersex, Asexual, plus other non-heterosexual orientations or genders)
- English learners
- People with a disability
- People who have been or at present are without a house
- People who are immigrants or refugees
- People who are migrant workers or students
- Youth in foster care
- Students who have changed high schools

We recognize that people identify with a number of communities. They are not limited to just one category in how they experience the world.

CONCLUSION

More public input will be important as ODE and the state introduce recommendations and think about making any changes. If or when ODE makes changes to diploma options, it will be very important to include the voice of students with disabilities and their families. We encourage ODE to keep learning from schools, teachers, students and families about what support or resources they might need if the state makes changes.

We designed this work to be both broad and focused on unique communities in different parts of the state. Getting the views of other communities that are under served will also be important in the future. We encourage ODE to keep reaching out to people in the state in culturally appropriate ways.

Some quotes from people who we heard from:

Muchos alumnos aprende diferente y aues ocupan mas ayuda a otros por como aprende y se ocupan mas saber de la materia o se les llegan mas facil.(Rough translation: Many students learn differently and even need more help because of how they learn and for others they take more care of knowing the subject or it comes to them more easily.)

Я думаю что ученик должен попробывать набратся опытом в различных облостях чтобы, к таму времени когда он уходит со школы он знал что ему нравиться делать. (Rough translation: I think that a student should try to gain experience in various fields so that by the time they leave school they know what they like to do.)

I would have welcomed being given the option of something different than the standard diploma for our child experiencing disabilities. When I became aware of it in his junior year, I was told I was too late to change to a modified diploma since we didn't start there in his freshman year. He nearly gave up on education all together while we forced a standard education upon him.

Some quotes from people who we heard from:

Los maestros conocen más la Capacidades de sus alumnos que un simple examen del estado, los estudiantes tienen exámenes regulares y los maestros deberían saber el nivel de aprovechamiento y que son capaces de lograr sus alumnos (Rough Translation: Teachers know more about abilities of their students than a simple state exam, students have regular exams and teachers should know the level of achievement and what their students are capable of achieving)

There should be culturally responsive teaching. Put the material in cultural context that makes sense.

mi hijo le quieren dar una diploma modificado Pero no me han dejado tener la informacion suficiente de lo que significa que barreros ba a tener mi hijo al resivir ese - certificado, que obciones le bas a pemitir estudiando (Rough translation: They want to give my son a modified diploma but they haven't given me enough information about what it means and that my son will have barriers if he receives the certificate or what will he be allowed to study)

Please ensure that there is enough rigor in the instruction and evaluation to make Oregon high school diplomas mean something of value.

Although I agree with most requirements currently in place (English, science, history) one of my large concerns is around math. As a math tutor and someone who has worked in Oregon high schools, I know math is a big struggle for a lot of students. I also think a lot of high school math as is currently done is not applicable to future life, depending on the goals of the student. Other math topics, such as budgeting, making large purchases (house, car), credit, and other financial literacy are much more applicable to most students than their ability to solve quadratic functions or the Pythagorean theorem.

老师的决定未必完全客观，需要用考试来协助证明学生的表现 (Rough Translation: Teachers' decisions may not be completely objective, and exams are needed to help demonstrate student performance)

I'd love for young people (recent graduates in the last 10 years) to be actively engaged to inform the design of the next steps...whatever they are.

We need to all be pulling in the same direction. This is difficult, because there is so much variability district to district, school to school, and even educator to educator on what they think is important to focus on teaching in the classroom.

High school graduation requirements should include the basic skills needed to successfully enter adulthood. They need to know how to read, write, spell and have basic personal finance and hygiene so that they can live on their own, obtain and hold employment, pay their bills without going into debt, and contribute to society.