

Medford celebrates graduation jump

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The Medford School District's graduation rate rose for the second consecutive year, reaching 77.15 percent for 2015-16 and surpassing the state's graduation rate of 74.83 percent, according to data released Thursday.

This year's graduation rate marks the district's highest since the state began calculating graduation rates by cohort in 2008-09. In 2014-15, the district's graduation rate was 74.95 percent, up from 65.21 percent in 2013-14.

"I think it's important to acknowledge that with graduation rates, it's a K-12 effort, so I think the quality of teaching, the engagement of students and the support of families is helping to produce this momentum," said Medford's Chief Academic Officer Michelle Zundel.

The graduation rate jumped from 83.05 to 87.92 percent at South Medford High School, from 83.51 to 83.74 percent at North Medford High School and from 27.97 to 31.68 percent at Central Medford High School.

Although its graduation rate dropped from 91.04 to 90.67 percent, Logos Public Charter School continued to report the highest graduation rate of any high school in the county.

"There was no magic bullet to get (a 2 percentage point increase)," said Medford schools Superintendent Brian Shumate. "Some of it is structural, and some of it is cultural."

Over the last few years, the district has expanded its credit recovery options and improved the way it shares data and tracks students so teachers know how students are progressing and can respond quickly if a student is falling behind, Shumate said.

District officials also are excited to see the impact of some of their long-range strategies, including full-day kindergarten, smaller class sizes and an improved English language arts curriculum.

"We're shifting the culture of the district to not let kids fall through the cracks," Shumate said.

As Medford's overall graduation rate went up, so did the graduation rates for many of its most vulnerable populations, including students with disabilities, migrant students, Hispanic/Latino students, English learners and economically disadvantaged students.

In 2015-16, the graduation rate for students with disabilities went up 11.67 percentage points to 56.25 percent. Of the 96 students with disabilities in the cohort, 28 earned a regular diploma, and 26 earned a modified diploma, according to Oregon Department of Education's data.

Tania Tong, Medford's director of special education and student services, credits several initiatives, including the implementation of the Check and Connect Mentor Program and the co-teaching model.

Trained Check and Connect mentors at the high schools and middle schools meet weekly with students with disabilities, who are considered "at risk," to discuss attendance barriers, grades, discipline referrals and, if necessary, to advocate for schedule changes, Tong said.

Under the co-teaching model, a special education teacher and regular teacher work in tandem in a general ed classroom to support all students, Tong explained.

"The benefit is that students with IEPs (individualized education programs) receive all the instruction in a core class and aren't removed from the general ed setting to receive specialized services," she said. "It reduces the number of transitions."

In 2015-16, the district also reduced the number of expulsions and suspensions among students with an IEP and, by doing so, kept them in school, she said.

"The improvement of our graduation rates is a community celebration," said Zundel. "We are really proud of the work our staff are doing to change lives. We know that improved education outcomes increase opportunities for a lifetime, and that is not lost on our staff."

In Eagle Point and Central Point school districts, the graduation rates also rose in 2015-16, while Ashland, Phoenix-Talent and Rogue River's rates fell.

Nevertheless, the Ashland district still has the highest graduation rate in the county, with 88.21 percent of its students earning diplomas in four years.

Eagle Point High School Principal Jenn Whitehead said the school was "bursting at the seams with pride" over its 84.86 percent graduation rate, a 5.22 percentage point gain over the year before.

She said school staff have been more vigilant about involving parents when a student is struggling and encouraging students to complete their essential skill requirements as freshman.

Beginning last year, students in all grades began meeting in biweekly advisories to explore career fields and colleges, and go over transcripts, credits and grades so students could take ownership in their education, Whitehead said.

Last year, the high school also had more students participating in student-led conferences with their teachers. About 92 percent of all students attended these conferences with their teachers, compared to 23 percent of students in 2014-15.

"It's a lot of different things coming together, but to me, it's all of us wrapping our arms around these students and helping them get there and walk across that stage," Whitehead said.

At Phoenix High School, the graduation rate dropped from 83.77 percent in 2014-15 to 75.27 percent in 2015-16.

The class of 2016 was a smaller class, and the difference in the number graduating in 2015 compared with 2016 was only about 15 students, said Phoenix-Talent Superintendent Teresa Sayre.

"While we did experience a dip — and we recognize that — our trajectory over the last five years has continued to climb, so we know that the interventions and supports we put in place K-12 seem to be working, and we will continue using those," she said.

However, she said, the dip was confirmation that the district needs to improve its system of tracking students who transfer out of the high school.

Sayre said there were several students in the cohort who left to attend another school, but because the school was not able to verify that they were enrolled elsewhere, it had to include them in their dropout rate.

If resources allow, Sayre said, she'd like to add a staff member dedicated to following through with students with poor attendance and helping them overcome barriers and get connected with the school. She said she'd also like to develop more opportunities for students to retrieve credits outside the school year.

"Those two things would have definitely helped with this class, and are a good reflection for us and a lesson we learned," she said.

15-16 District Grad Rates-1 by **Mail Tribune** on Scribd

Four-year cohort graduation rate				
High School	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
State of Oregon	66.38	67.65	68.44	68.66
Medford School District	61.59	64.12	63.91	67.32
South Medford High School	83.18	79.9	80.37	84.9
North Medford High School	63.79	69.34	67.98	74.65
Central Medford High School	9.5	11.04	11.11	14.97
Logos Public Charter School		80	19.44	51.35
Ashland School District	86.42	90.87	85.82	82.98
Ashland High School	88.66	91.2	86.12	82.98
Phoenix -Talent School District	62.69	56.52	56.43	62.56
Phoenix High School	73.68	73.02	70.59	79.38
Armadillo Technical Institute	18.75	8.47	7.69	10.2
Eagle Point School District	50.04	60.86	60.06	62.18
Eagle Point High School	73.49	71.58	73.75	80.81
Crater Lake Charter Academy				
Upper Rogue Center for Educational Opportunities	1.56	5.45	0	0
Central Point School District	71.01	70.57	74.52	70.29
Crater Academy of Health and Public Services	74	67.62	74.49	75.21
Crater Renaissance Academy	70.37	77.17	80	74.73
Crater School of Business Innovation and Science	73.68	71.74	79.17	73.17
Rogue River School District	74.74	59.79	68.13	64.56
Rogue River Junior/Senior High	74.74	59.79	68.54	70.83
Rivers Edge Academy Charter School			50	0
Butte Falls Charter School	90.48	85.71	87.5	86.67
Prospect Charter Schoool	83.33	42.86	43.48	90.48
Pinhurst School District	100	50	100	83.33

15-16 Subgroup Grad Rates by Mail Tribune on Scribd

Medford School District: Graduation rate by student population				
Student populations	2015-16 Cohort	2013-14 four-year graduation rate	2014-15 four-year graduation rate	2015-16 four-year graduation rate
All Students	998	65.21	74.95	77.15
Male	502	60.57	71.67	70.92
Female	496	69.98	78.56	83.47
American Indian/Alaska Native	13	64.29	57.14	53.85
Asian	15	92.31	92.31	100.00
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	11	25.00	91.67	72.73
Asian/Pacific Islander	26	76.47	92.00	88.46
Black/African American	10	65.00	50.00	80.00
Hispanic/Latino	196	50.75	65.28	69.39
Multi-Racial	47	57.89	68.97	76.60
White	706	68.88	78.15	79.32
Underserved Races/Ethnicities	230	52.32	64.85	69.13
Not Underserved Races/Ethnicities	768	68.75	78.05	79.56
Economically Disadvantaged	618	56.93	67.43	68.77
Not Economically Disadvantaged	380	77.80	86.39	90.79
Students with Disabilities	96	43.75	44.58	56.25
Students without Disabilities	902	68.04	77.65	79.38
Ever English Learners	137	62.39	67.57	75.18
English Learners	41	51.02	48.48	56.10
Not English Learners	957	65.87	75.84	78.06
Talented and Gifted	52	92.42	91.11	98.08
Not Talented and Gifted	946	63.48	74.20	76.00
Migrant	53	47.50	69.57	77.36
Combined Disadvantaged	673	57.83	67.99	69.24

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