

## Oregon Capital Chronicle

### COMMENTARY

# Oregon's graduation rate increases show a proven path forward

SARAH POPE CHRISTINE VERNIER FEBRUARY 6, 2025 5:30 AM



📷 More students graduated last year in Oregon than in all but one previous year – 81.8% of students earned their diplomas. (Photo courtesy of Rob Kerr/OSU-Cascades)

Each student who graduates represents both a personal achievement and also a step toward a stronger Oregon. These graduates are the innovators, problem-solvers and leaders who will drive Oregon's economy forward.

And the good news is more students graduated last year in Oregon than in all but one previous year – 81.8% of students earned their diplomas, with Black and African American students graduating at 74.8%, Hispanic and Latino students at 78.8% and former English Learners at 87.7%. These are some of Oregon's highest rates ever.

We applaud the perseverance and hard work of the class of 2024.

We are especially encouraged to see the overwhelming success of students enrolled in

two or more Career and Technical Education courses. They graduated at an impressive rate of 97.7%. This group made up about one-third of the senior class.

An almost 100% graduation rate for students focused on CTE classes is evidence that when the state commits to investing in what works – which it did through Measure 98's creation of a fund to ensure students are on track in ninth grade, bolster career and technical education and promote college readiness – than students, educators and our workforce benefit.

But our work is not done. We still have too many scholars not crossing the graduation stage, nor entering the workforce or college prepared.

Employers across the state depend on a workforce ready to take on the challenges of a rapidly evolving world, but that journey starts with something as foundational as learning to read. If Oregon is going to see larger increases in high school graduation and more prepared scholars, we must get serious about ensuring all children are strong readers before they leave third grade.

Why? Because students who develop strong literacy skills by third grade are far more likely to stay engaged in school, graduate and build the skills employers need: critical thinking, communication and resilience. Yet far too many children in Oregon still lack access to the support they need to develop these essential skills.

The pandemic has widened these gaps, and every year we wait to address them, the challenges grow. That's why the Early Literacy Success Initiative, which passed in 2023 and is being implemented now, is so critical. By fully investing in proven strategies that ensure children can read proficiently by third grade, we set them up for long-term success – not just in school, but in life.

When students don't graduate, it's not just their futures at stake – it's all of ours. The cost of inaction is felt in diminished opportunities for individuals and in the growing challenges faced by an economy that depends on skilled, capable workers.

Fully funding the Early Literacy Success Initiative by investing the \$300 million needed to support all students, is our chance to change that trajectory, ensuring that Oregon's children – and in so doing, Oregon's economy – are set up to succeed.