

# Oregon School District: The Path Forward

The world in which we teach our children is a global community where information on almost any topic is easily obtained. Technology has afforded us the ability to communicate and interact with people across the world as never before.

And yet, technology designed to enhance communication can isolate us from human interaction and can inundate us with information that must be critically analyzed. The gap between those who reap the benefit of progress and those who do not is widening, and we threaten the very environment that affords us abundance.

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author Thomas Friedman suggests a reason for this disconnect:

“It’s the story of our time: the pace of change in technology, globalization and climate have started to outrun the ability of our political systems to build the social, educational, community, workplace and political innovations needed for some citizens to keep up.

We have globalized trade and manufacturing, and we have introduced robots and artificial intelligence systems, far faster than we have designed the social safety nets, trade surge protectors and educational advancement options that would allow people caught in this transition to have the time, space and tools to thrive.”<sup>1</sup>

Inherent in what Friedman says is that, as the world changes, so too must the way in which we educate our children so that all can thrive.

No longer can learning simply be defined by the accumulation of concepts, facts and figures. Rather, our children must have the ability to think critically and creatively, problem solve, apply their learning, reason, develop global competencies and be intrinsically motivated to learn. These skills must apply to all children, not just the subset of the college-bound.

The question is whether we can evolve as a public school district to meet these challenges. The natural inclination when institutions are called upon to change is to view what has been done in the past as inadequate. The fact that we need to evolve does not mean that what we have been doing has somehow not served our students well. We have been good at what we do.

Our district has a proud tradition of deliberate reflection on how we educate our students, the opportunities we offer to learners of all ages, and what a meaningful education looks, sounds and feels like. The theme that has resonated in our past visioning is “continuous improvement.” We are now at the point of taking the next step consistent with that theme,

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<sup>1</sup> Friedman, Thomas. “You Break It, You Own It,” The New York Times, June 29, 2016.

one which we have been working toward for 25 years, and will require us to evolve at a fundamental level.

Over the last year, we have engaged district stakeholders in a continued discussion about our future. What we have learned is that there is a strong commitment to what we value in education — a set of core values — and an understanding that key to the success of our students is the development of meaningful relationships between all involved in the learning process.

We also have learned that we envision a District whose students are fully engaged in learning, enthusiastic about school and understand the value of lifelong learning. We aspire to a place where learners of all ages are challenged to grow and have their intellectual curiosity piqued by highly qualified, motivating, and innovative educators. We strive for learning that occurs through collaboration and cross-disciplinary projects, and takes place inside and outside the classroom. We dream that all students, regardless of who they are, how they learn best or where their dreams may take them, have access and opportunity to reach their full potential.

Our past strategic reflections have set us on a course towards this vision, and now we are at an important crossroads. In **Section I** of this paper, we identify where we have been, the rationale behind why and how we got there, and the status of our current initiatives. This reflection is essential in a system built upon continuous improvement.

In **Section II**, we address how we make the leap forward. We believe that the evolution of our District will best take place if done in the context of recognizing and moving towards attainment of those values which our district has recognized are at the core of educational success. To get there may require removing barriers that are the product of an educational model that served us well, but is no longer sufficient if we are to meet the needs of a rapidly changing world. In doing so, we will be better able to implement practices which are consistent with those values and leave behind or change those which are not.

Our hope is that our students step into the world of adulthood fully prepared to meet the challenges they will face, ready to build rewarding and satisfying lives, and a world better than ours.

The path is before us.

## I. Oregon School District History and Education Philosophy

During the settlement of the Oregon-area, education was primarily delivered close to home in rural, one-room schoolhouses. At one time, there were at least 25 one-room schools in what is now the Oregon School District. A typical school served students ages 5-20 years old and one school had as many as 58 students in first through eighth grades taught by one teacher. Due to the rural nature of the schools, the school calendar was marked by adherence to the agrarian calendar (i.e. a three-month fall term beginning in August, a four-month winter term that began December 1, and a three-month spring term with a variable schedule).<sup>2</sup>

Because of the nature of these schools, movement through grade levels was obtained by demonstrating subject-matter proficiency, and was not defined by chronological progression. Some students were able to enter high school at the age of 12 or 13 and graduate when they were 16. Learning was enhanced by older students helping younger students.

Improvements in transportation changed area education because students had an easier means to commute to bigger schools. Beginning in 1925, the one-room schools began to close and students were transported into Village of Oregon schools. In 1947, the myriad of one-room schools consolidated into what is now the Oregon School District and in 1962, the Brooklyn schools became part of the Oregon School District.

Fast forward to 2016, the Oregon School District now educates close to 4,000 students who are grouped by age in grades (4K-12), curriculum is primarily delivered by subject matter, and graduation is determined by the attainment of time-based credits.

In addition, significant improvements are being made to Oregon School District facilities as a result of a \$54 million referendum passed in 2014. Less visible, however, are the meaningful changes occurring in the District with respect to the education of our students. These changes are consistent with the continuing evolution of public education in the United States and fueled, in part, by the educational options that technology has provided for our educators and students. Public education does not have a monopoly on knowledge and learning, and technology offers opportunities to motivate and challenge learners in new ways. The District is charged with understanding how we can seize these opportunities to create a relevant and engaging learning environment.

While fundamental changes continuing to take place in public education bring us to this point, it is well worth noting that our District has a 25-year history of purposeful visioning and a proud tradition of educators who are passionate, highly knowledgeable and innovative. The process of the development and delineation of our District vision has been shared in the form of position papers, which have served to guide policies, practices, teaching and learning within our District. These papers reflect the collective values of our community with respect to education and trace the evolution of public education in Oregon since 1992. Before looking forward, it is important to understand from where we have come.

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<sup>2</sup> "Oregon School District: Rural and Village Schools, from 1846-1998, From Immigrant to Internet," Oregon Area Historical Society (1998).

## **A. “Commitment to Continuous Improvement: Education for Lifelong Success” (1992)**

In 1992, the Oregon Board of Education adopted a position paper titled “Commitment to Continuous Improvement: Education for Lifelong Success,” which was the culmination of a District strategic planning initiative that began in the 1988-1989 school year.

An important result of this effort was the development of the Oregon School District Mission Statement, which stands today:

“The mission of the Oregon School District is to educate by helping students acquire the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to achieve their individual potential, to contribute to a changing society and to be receptive to learning as a lifelong process. The mission will be accomplished by delivering a high quality program through the joint efforts of students, staff, parents and community.”

Also of note in the paper was the recognition that numerous factors both inside and outside the District were driving the need for change, and that demonstrable, continual improvement in all aspects of the District were needed. The systemic change was built upon the premise that “all students can learn” and the framework for change was the Outcome Based Decision Model (OBDM), which called for:

1. Clearly defined graduation outcomes that accurately identify the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by Oregon graduates in an increasingly complex, changing world;
2. An articulated curriculum framework of program, course, and unit outcomes and assessments derived from identified exit outcomes (i.e. a standards-based curriculum); and
3. A criterion-based, consistently applied system of assessments that are aligned to the outcomes or standards.

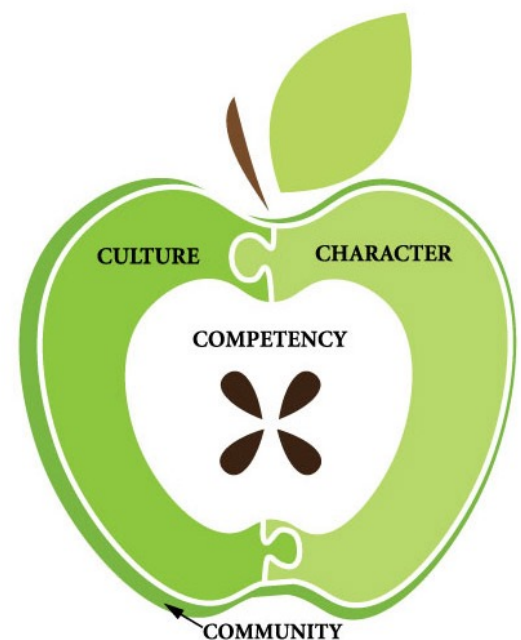
The paper indicated that, under OBDM, the rate at which learners successfully master clearly specified outcomes will determine their placement in a grade level or subject level, not chronological age or the rate at which their peers master the outcomes. This meant that learning time may drive changes in how learners and teachers interact and how they use their time during the school day and school year.

After the adoption of the 1992 paper, our District took steps toward OBDM including the adoption of course outcomes. Other initiatives contemplated by the 1992 paper were not fully implemented. For example, assessment of students remained based upon a point-average grading system rather than upon mastery of outcomes, time continued to be the constant with respect to curriculum delivery and assessment, and the District did not create a way in which to determine whether our graduating students demonstrated they met those outcomes.

## B. “Accountability for Student Achievement in the Oregon School District”: The Four C’s (2003)

In 2001, the federal government passed the No Child Left Behind Act<sup>3</sup> which required all public schools receiving federal funding to administer annually a statewide standardized test to all students and required districts to make “Adequate Yearly Progress” This federal entry into defining the success of our students led to the creation of an Accountability Task Force in 2002 to begin the process of defining “success” for ourselves and how it would be measured.

The Task Force identified four categories of “success” indicators, which are **The Four C’s: Competency, Character, Culture and Community**. This holistic view of student success views **Competency** (mastery of subject matter curriculum) as the core supported by individual and group **Character** traits that emphasize honesty, integrity, respect, responsible behavior and appropriate social skills, and a personal and collective **Culture** that establishes a nurturing and supportive learning environment. These are bound together by a learning **Community** both inside and outside our schools that support the learning process. The interrelationship is illustrated in the included apple graphic.



This concept of the holistic student meshed well with the District Exit Outcomes outlined in the September, 2003 paper “**Accountability for Student Achievement in the Oregon School District**”. In particular, it affirmed the District’s vision of using a standards-based curriculum, which is based on students demonstrating understanding or mastery of knowledge and skills they are expected to learn as they progress through their education.

At the same time our District was grappling with how to respond to these federally-imposed assessment mandates, we were also examining the role of constituent groups within our District, including the Board of Education, administration, leadership teams, teachers, parents and the community, knowing that each has a specific role in our commitment to student success.

In order to tie District decision-making to an accountability system based on data, the Board of Education adopted a framework by Douglas B. Reeves<sup>4</sup> which established three tiers of indicators.

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<sup>3</sup> No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, 20 U.S.C.A. § 6301 et seq. (West 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Reeves, Douglas B. *Accountability for Learning: How Teachers and School Leaders Can Take Charge*. Center for Performance Assessment (2004).

1. The first tier consists of system-wide data points of success to use to establish District-wide goals. This focuses the role of the Board of Education on setting District-wide goals and enacting policy and budgets in the context of these goals.
2. The second tier consists of individual school-building based indicators linked to the achievement of the system-wide goals. This defines the role of administrators, teachers, staff, parents and the community to work collaboratively within the context of the school building-based system to establish building level goals consistent with District goals.
3. The third tier consists of school building narratives telling the story behind the data measures. This defines the role of administrators, teachers and staff in collecting, reporting and analyzing data regarding student achievement.

All three tiers would be evaluated and re-assessed each year, consistent with our District's standards-based model of curriculum and assessment, which focuses on continuous improvement.

After each school year, building administrators, teachers and staff would then assemble data they deemed relevant to "The Four C's," assess that data and determine goals for the upcoming school year to address the data points. This information would then be shared between building staff and the Board to serve as the driver for our District goals and budget formation.

### **C. "Visioning For the Future" (2007)**

In a process of continuous improvement, our District continued to assess the fundamental questions behind the student data the District was collecting and analyzing in order to measure whether graduating students had achieved their educational goals and were prepared for the next step in their journey.

The District's 2007 paper "**Visioning for the Future**," recognized that the world in which our students were heading was changing at a rapid pace fueled by three factors – globalization, digitization and individualization – and, therefore, the current educational model would need to change as well.

It followed that our District's challenge was to look critically at all aspects of how we educate our learners, including these three areas in particular:

- **Curriculum:** The digital age has allowed students to access information from anywhere. In addition, the state of knowledge has evolved so rapidly that student success is now largely dependent upon having the abilities to think critically and creatively, read and write, problem solve and apply learning.
- **Delivery of Curriculum:** The one-size-fits-all model is no longer relevant in an economy and society which affords the ability to educate individually, with learning as

the constant and time as a variable. Therefore, the door opened for an exploration of how our District was delivering our curriculum.

- **Assessment of Student Progress:** Determining whether our graduating students had demonstrated sufficient skills to be successful in the world was a concern, in particular, what those skills are and how we would assess them.

It was with this background and challenge that our District became committed to a path of personalized learning in each of the above mentioned aspects – curriculum, delivery of curriculum and assessment.

Resulting from the 2007 paper, the District Visioning Committee held a community-based two-day summit in 2008, called the 20/20 Visioning Conference. Comprised of people from all District constituencies, the summit focus was discussing how to move our District into a new educational era. Approximately 100 stakeholders reviewed our past, assessed our current practices and dreamed of a new way. The conclusions drawn from the 20/20 Visioning Conference were that the community was committed to a process of change, was willing to move toward the future and expected that the Board would ensure that forward direction. As a result, the Board established a variety of task forces with the charge to evaluate practices, including re-writing the teacher job description, revising our graduation standards and evaluating assessment practices.

Based upon this review process of how our District would educate our students in the rapidly changing world, the District initiated the World Language program (which brought foreign language instruction to the elementary schools) and Online Instruction (curriculum developed internally by our teachers and delivered online to students as part of our standard curriculum).

#### **D. “Initiatives for Student Success: Assessment of Student Achievement” (2010)**

While the 2008 visioning process resulted in the implementation of critical components of 21st century learning, our District was still looking to grow and improve in certain initiatives, particularly in the area of assessment practices.

The findings of the 2008 task forces were summarized in a 2010 paper titled “**Initiatives for Student Success: Assessment of Student Achievement.**” Significant among the findings were these:

##### **1. Grading**

The Grading Task Force confirmed that our District’s grading practices were varied, inconsistent between teachers and buildings, and failed to fully incorporate the District Exit Outcomes. The purpose of “grades,” as reflected in Board Policy 415, was to provide a format to evaluate student progress, inform the student and parent of educational growth, and provide data for modification of programs, if indicated, for an individual student or group of students.

Therefore, the following recommendations were made in regards to District assessment practices:

- Grading was to be based upon proficiency with respect to curricular standards and behavioral factors would be separately measured;
- Grading rubrics would be developed to ensure consistent, defensible and clear practices that are easily understood and communicated;
- Means would be developed for reporting 21st century skills such as critical thinking skills, creativity and problem solving; and
- Grading practices inconsistent with best practice would be eliminated, including the use of formative assessments in the summative grade and the elimination of zeros for averaging purposes.

Recognizing that training was critical and time was needed to determine implementation steps, our District committed to a staged implementation period to be developed by administration and staff, and also to a professional development program to assist in the transition.

## **2. Recognition of Student Achievement**

As a result of Task Force work, the historical practice of recognizing student achievement through a system of ranking, including the designation of Valedictorian and Salutatorian, was also reviewed. While ranking and award practices may have a positive behavioral impact on some students, there is potential for negative impact on many others. Given that best assessment practices reject the use of behavioral components in the assessment of student achievement, our District made a change to no longer rank students by grade point average and to eliminate graduation honors for the top students. Rather, a new system was established to recognize students across a broader achievement spectrum that included, not only competency, but all of “The Four C’s.”

## **3. Graduation Standards**

The Graduation Task Force was charged with reviewing the graduation standards that were based solely on the attainment of credits measured by time-in-seat (i.e. semester credits) and whether these were consistent with the need to assess students in the context of the new skills necessary for success in today’s world.

The Task Force, comprised of Board of Education members, administrators, teachers and parents, focused primarily on whether to remain at the current level of required units for graduation (23) and which units to include in that requirement (in particular whether to include additional math, science and arts requirements). There was also discussion about the creation of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and a capstone project, that is, a multifaceted project or assignment that serves as a culminating experience for our graduating students to demonstrate the attainment of District graduation credits.



The Task Force was unable to deliver a final set of recommendations given the diversity of opinions on the topics discussed. In light of this, our District focused the inquiry on creating a path of individualized and personalized instruction and assessment for each student.

The Graduation Task Force was then directed to review and finalize recommendations in the following areas:

- Graduation Policy regarding the number of units required for graduation;
- Creation of electronic portfolios for each student, to include data relevant to “The Four C’s”;
- Establishment of student-led conferences; and
- Use of ILPs (Independent Learning Plans) to guide students from 8th grade through graduation, including the considerations of a process in freshman year advisory, ILP review in the senior year and the potential for inclusion of a capstone project.

The 2010 paper concluded by emphasizing the speed at which the educational world was changing and that if we as a District did not respond, others would impose change upon us, including the state or federal government or competition from alternative educational models. The paper concluded that the best way to maintain local control of our educational community would be to chart our own course.

## **E. Current Status (2015-2016)**

Since the adoption of the 2010 paper “**Initiatives for Student Success: Assessment of Student Achievement,**” our District has been making positive progress in the identified priority areas of Curriculum, Curriculum Delivery and Assessment of Student Progress.

### **1. Curriculum**

The District was ahead of the educational curve in 1992 as we began moving toward a standards-based curriculum. It was not until 2011, however, that the District took the final steps in vertically integrating the K-12 curriculum and then began a coordinated effort in 2012-2015, assisted by the Board’s allocation of monies from District Fund Balance, to complete curriculum standards for all classes and subject areas.

Our District now has an integrated, K-12 standards-based curriculum, that is also available on-line through the “Build Your Own Curriculum” software. It incorporates not only substantive subject matter, but also essential elements of 21st century learning, including helping our students learn to think critically and creatively, problem solve, apply their learning and develop global competencies.

For example, a K-12 STEAM Task Force (Science, Technology, Engineering, Creative Arts and Math) was established in 2013. The task force made important strides to align curriculum horizontally across subject areas and establish integrated programming involving all aspects of STEAM.

To increase the global competencies (i.e. investigating the world, weighing perspectives, communicating ideas, taking action and applying expertise) of our students, District educators have continued to infuse learning about the world and how it works into existing subject areas like social studies and art. In addition, our District has developed the K-12 World Language program, created the Global Education class at Oregon High School, and cultivated foreign exchange programs, among other opportunities inside and outside the classroom.

Task forces have also played a significant role in re-designing building spaces as part of our successful 2014 District referendum which authorized the borrowing and expenditures of \$54 million for construction of new facilities as well as the remodeling of current spaces. These “design teams,” comprised of administrators, teachers, staff and parent representatives, were formed to plan the development of their respective buildings.

Inherent in that process was the consideration of developing space needed for the initiatives underway in our District. In particular, space designed and developed for the STEAM work being done at OMS and OHS, and for collaborative spaces for personalized learning. While the new building projects will address some physical barriers to moving forward, we must also work to remove other barriers that impede our path forward.

The vision for our curriculum is to increase opportunities for students to learn based upon their interests and motivations, that is to incorporate inquiry-based learning on a larger scale. In order to move more fully toward this model, our District needs a unified standards-based assessment model as well as graduation standards that recognize and utilize such a model. A standards-based assessment model is critical to ensuring our learners are mastering content standards in addition to the learner empowerment that is inherent in inquiry-based learning.

## **2. Curriculum Delivery**

At the heart of the paradigm changes envisioned by past papers is a focus on student-centered learning; namely, that all students be afforded the opportunity to learn and to chart a path through school within the context of our District’s curriculum and graduation standards, both of which are relevant and meaningful to them and their goals.

### **a. Personalized Learning**

In 2012, the Personalized Learning Task Force was established to explore and begin the implementation of ways in which to personalize learning for each student’s individual needs, abilities and motivations.

The Task Force joined with the CESA1 efforts to incorporate individualized learning into public schools on a systemic basis. Our District has witnessed successes in this initiative, a primary reason being that our educators have been able to organically develop programs, at their own pace and in an area of interest, that are tailored to their teaching subject. This has allowed our educators to feel they are well-prepared for the changes they are bringing to the classroom and our students time to adjust to a new way of learning.

A few examples of personalized learning initiatives within our District include:

- Teachers who are using "learning progressions" to accomplish proficiency-based learning. Instead of learners having to all start at the same place, and progress at the same pace, each learner takes the time he or she needs to learn and demonstrate mastery before moving on. Online classes are an example of this, but even in regular classrooms, teachers use formative assessments and dynamic grouping to make sure each learner is in his or her Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) -- the difference between what a learner can do without help and what he or she can do with help. The result is that learners get the time they need to learn before moving on, instead of being "left behind" by the class, and others can learn more more quickly, without having to wait for others to catch up.
- Tapping into a learner's strengths and interests to help motivate them to learn, students have "voice and choice" within a framework in the topics about which they learn, the way they learn it, and the way they demonstrate their learning. For instance, students in Social Studies learn about a specific state or country of their choice. Language arts skills are taught in the context of writing about interesting topics. Learners are given some choice in how they demonstrate that they understand a concept or can perform a skill. They may write a report, perform a skit, make a video, or create a poster, to name a few.

What we now know about personalized learning is that there is no uniform or correct path applicable to all students. While some students thrive in the freedom provided by inquiry-based learning (being allowed to move through curriculum at their own pace), others thrive in a more structured environment.

As our District continues along our personalized learning journey, questions have arisen in regards to the impact of standardized testing, curriculum, assessment, and school day schedule and calendar on the continued development and expansion of personalized learning. It will be important to assess all of these to see if they create a barrier to personalized learning progress in our District.

Ken Robinson, noted author, speaker and international advisor on education, speaks to the changes needed in education:

"The fact is that given the challenges we face, education doesn't need to be reformed — it needs to be transformed. The key to this transformation is not to standardize education, but to personalize it, to build achievement on discovering the individual talents of each child, to put students in an environment where they want to learn and where they can naturally discover their true passions."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Robinson, Ken. *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything* (2009).

## **b. School Day and School Year**

With recognition that the way our District structures time (school day and school year) has an impact on student learning, Netherwood Knoll Elementary (NKE) staff sought and received Board approval to explore the potential of a “balanced school calendar,” which usually includes a shorter summer break, and longer breaks between sessions during the school year. Some research has shown that a shorter summer break helps reduce the “summer slide” (reversal of some of a student’s previous year gains in achievement). The purpose of the longer mid-year breaks in instruction is to give students time to re-charge and provide mid-year opportunities for teachers to participate in professional development and to plan collaboratively for the next session. After a year of study that included review of models, research and outreach to parents, the NKE task force reported that while they saw educational benefits to a balanced school calendar, the implementation of such in only one building in the District would lead to significant logistical issues for families.

The task force report, along with research data, has led to the question of whether changes to the school day and school calendar should be explored on a District-wide basis. Our District is examining the traditional “school day” and the impact that start times and structure of the school day have on learning, as well as exploring our current school year and whether it should be modified to better serve our students in their learning.

## **c. Technology**

Technology continues to evolve and provide alternative ways to deliver curriculum and improve learning. In 2013, the Board allocated \$600,000 from the District’s Fund Balance to facilitate the expansion of our District’s technology infrastructure to address these needs.

Through these efforts and expenditures, we have become a technologically-capable District, meaning that technological tools are available to staff and students for effective and relevant curriculum delivery. A significant number of staff are now employing “flipped” classrooms or blended learning environments (i.e. using technology to deliver their curriculum), affording educators the opportunity to use class time for tutoring students in groups or individually.

Technology allows teachers to provide deeper feedback to students more quickly than in the past, which gives students the opportunity to revise and improve their learning in a continuous manner. Many teachers use computerized diagnostics and adaptive learning systems to efficiently identify the specific learning needs of each student, and provide the optimal level of challenge and support to keep each student moving at the best pace for him or her.

Technology also enhances communication with families by making it easier for teachers to communicate how students are doing, and letting parents access scores, comments and weekly plans easily online.

Now that the District has become technologically capable and curriculum changes have endorsed the use of technology, the District must be cognizant of and develop solutions to address the challenges that are present for students who may not have access to the Internet and/or technological devices at home.

### **3. Assessment of Student Progress**

Significant strides have been made in the assessment of student achievement. As with curriculum, however, final steps need to be taken to finalize this work.

#### **a. Grading**

In 2010, the Board adopted a formal Grading Policy which incorporated the best practices recommendations from the 2010 paper **Initiatives for Student Success: Assessment of Student Achievement**. While the direction provided by Board Policy 415 did not garner universal acceptance, it did lead to reflection by administration and staff on the purposes of grades and their role in the educational process. That process of informative and constructive discussion has resulted in significant strides in District-assessment practices that are articulated with standards.

Currently, the District has standards-based grading in place for K-8. Under this system, students are assessed on a scale of 1-4 with respect to the curriculum standards. This system does not use an averaging of points on summative assessments to determine a student's progress on the standards. Instead, teachers examine learner progress over time using multiple data sources to determine learner proficiency on the targeted standard.

The Oregon Middle School utilizes a standards-based assessment (1-4) that they then convert into letter grades. Oregon High School does not utilize standards-based grading, but rather continues to use letter grades, which are primarily determined by averaging scores on summative assessments. This has led to discussion about the relevancy of awarding zeros for missed work and the need to utilize, at some level, formative assessments in the summative grade. The policy has been changed to allow up to 10 percent of formative work to be factored into a student's summative grade.

Now that the District has an aligned K-12 standards-based curriculum, it naturally flows that assessment of student's mastery of that curriculum be based upon a standards-based model. This would also be consistent with the growth of inquiry-based learning, which affords students the flexibility to learn curricular standards with significant input from them into how that learning is structured.

#### **b. Graduation Standards**

As indicated, the Board asked the Graduation Task Force to reconvene for purposes of framing a new graduation policy that was consistent with state law and the best practices identified in the 2010 paper. Based on the work of the Graduation Task Force, the Board revised Graduation Policy 411 to retain the use of time-based credits and to increase the number of credits required for math from two to three pursuant to new state law.

In addition, the revised policy also included a requirement that Oregon High School students complete at least 10 hours of community service each school year (40 hours total). Also, the District Exit Outcomes were incorporated into Policy 411 and require that students demonstrate proficiency in a wide variety of areas relevant to success in today's world.

Finally, the revised policy directed that, starting with the class of 2017, proficiency is to be delineated through the use of an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP).

In 2013, the state mandated that each school district provide academic and career planning services to pupils enrolled in grades 6 to 12, beginning in the Fall 2017. This statutory requirement is consistent with the use of ILP's for students to develop relevant and meaningful pathways to graduation and their post-high school life. It is important to note that our District's movement toward such a process pre-dated the passage of this state law and is more encompassing in its scope and objectives.

Lastly, the 2010 paper contemplated the use of capstone projects or some other means by which students would be required to demonstrate that they meet the graduations standards found in Policy 411. While the ILPs would guide and aid in the development of our students throughout high school, assessment of successful plan completion would be subject to some type of culminating process or event. While there has been some research and discussion in our District about incorporating this type of process to assess graduation readiness, our District has not yet formally implemented such a process.

Staff at Oregon High School are in the process of developing a plan to implement this requirement, and the OHS Leadership Team has established this as its highest priority work. The team has established "guiding principles" to meet and exceed the criteria laid out in Policy 411 and in the DPI's Academic and Career Planning expectations. The team has established a subcommittee to author recommendations for a demonstration/celebration of student learning as a means of addressing the emerging graduation requirements. Under contemplation is a process by which students will have options as to how they demonstrate what they have learned, and staff will be involved in providing support and guidance during this process. In addition, the community will be invited to participate in the the process. Oregon High School will use the 2016-17 school year to build capacity within staff, pilot recommendations with groups of students and then make adjustments in order to fully implement in the fall of 2017.

## **II. Oregon School District: The Path Forward (2016)**

Teaching our students to thrive in this global and hyper-technology world, as described by Friedman and others, is the challenge before us. We must continue to transform our system into one where students not only accumulate knowledge and acquire skills, but also learn to apply their knowledge and skills, form meaningful relationships, and develop the inspiration, motivation, and perseverance to keep learning.

After graduation, our students will enter a dynamic world environment where they will vie with other similarly talented students, no matter whether their path is post-secondary education, the workforce, military or other community service, or technical school. To serve our students, we must evolve as a District. In doing so, we first need to understand the new context of our world, and its profound impact on the education and preparation of our students. Relevant for our consideration include the following:

- Our community is becoming increasingly diverse. The District, in partnership with our families and the community, must work to address bias, ensure access and provide opportunities for success for all students.
- Learning and achievement, at any age, are more apt to occur when learning opportunities reflect the interests and motivations of learners.
- Information is ubiquitous and easily obtained, thus the role of education is to help our students learn how to find, analyze and apply knowledge, rather than simply learn content. Learning how to be astute consumers of information and users of technology will serve our students well.
- There is a balance between technology and personal interaction. Technological tools enhance our ability to personalize learning; they do not diminish the importance of educators, but rather reinforce the significant role of educators as mentors, coaches and facilitators of learning.
- Building positive relationships between students and educators is an important factor in the development of the holistic learner.
- The changing landscape of our ecological world has a profound impact on our lives. It is essential to prepare our students to learn about the world, how it works and understand the challenges and opportunities before us.
- The increasingly complex world requires that our students participate in and lead group activities involving a wide variety of people. We can provide them with such opportunities and experiences through co-curricular activities and larger community experiences involving service projects, internships and employment.
- Public school funding challenges continue to strain our ability to adequately meet the needs of our students and educators.

## **A. Visioning and “What We Value”**

In light of this larger context and the challenges ahead, the Board’s Visioning Committee began, in May 2015, to assess the status and progression of District initiatives that had been outlined in previous papers. As a result of recognizing that each of the initiatives were at varying points of implementation, the Committee recommended and the Board agreed that the best next step was a District-wide visioning conference.

Approximately 135 District residents and staff came together to participate in a two-day conference focused on the path forward for our District. Conference participants reviewed priorities from the 20/20 Visioning Conference that was held in 2008 and then spent significant time exploring what they personally valued in education. This included small group work, listening to a student panel share what they felt was significant in their learning experiences, and prioritization exercises to identify values and initiatives that were important to us, collectively, as a District.

As the Visioning Committee and the Administrative team reviewed the data and feedback from this conference, several things became clear. First, there was strong consensus that our District has been on the right path over the last 25 years. Second, there was energy and excitement among the participants about the opportunity to continue to evolve our District and the necessity to do so. Lastly, this community has a strong belief that education in the District should be grounded in and based upon a set of core values.

The Visioning Committee then spent significant time identifying a set of values and exploring them in the context of the path we have been on. What became evident was that the values identified at the conference could be expressed as a set of five interrelated pillars, which would form the foundation for a successful school district. Significantly, the values expressed by those pillars were consistent with the initiatives in process or under consideration in our District. Recognizing this, the following are the values which will guide us into the future and the means by which we will ensure our District is anchored in them.

### **1. Whole Child Emphasis**

Our District's long-standing emphasis on ensuring each child is healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged is reaffirmed. "The Four C's" remain our measures of success. An Oregon School District education will continue to encompass all subjects as academic for a well-rounded education. The school day and co-curricular activities can offer numerous opportunities for students to exercise autonomy and grow. District support for our students' mental health and emotional well-being will continue to be emphasized.

### **2. Equity For All Students**

All learners should receive an educational experience that helps them reach their full potential, regardless of family income, language, background, personal characteristics and ability. As a District, we must identify and address implicit personal and institutional bias which may exist within our learning environment to help ensure that our learners have what they need to develop their potential. Our learning community is viewed as stronger for its greater diversity and prepares our students to live and work in a more diverse world.

### **3. Relevant and Empowering Learning Experiences Inside and Outside the Classroom**

Our District is learner-centered, focusing on the abilities, interests and goals of each individual. Students benefit from meaningful learning experiences that occur both inside and outside the classroom. Learning will not necessarily be constrained by grade or age. An Individual Learning Plan will identify the path for each child to be successful and every classroom will offer personalized instruction to ensure that path is open. Changes to the school schedule, day and year may be needed to support this vision for learning. Learning is not limited to students, but also includes educators, staff, families and the community.

### **4. Caring and Professional Educators**

Skilled, motivating educators are critical to student success, and meaningful educator/student relationships have a significant positive impact. Educators are committed to advancing in their profession by demonstrating competence and engaging in a plan of continual learning. Educators find meaning and value in their work, and the District is committed to retaining, attracting and developing its educators.



## 5. Strong Family and Community Partnerships

Community members are viewed as essential partners in the effort to educate our students, and are also participants in the life-long quest for learning. Our District will effectively communicate with families and the community to strengthen our partnerships. The community will participate in community education classes, serve as mentors and tutors in our schools, and use school facilities. Through community service activities and work/internship opportunities, our students will both give to and receive from the larger community.

This graphic expresses not only these core values, but also illustrates their interlocking nature. The vision is incomplete without all five.



## B. Growth and Achievement for All Learners

Working from the values, the Board of Education, Administrative Team, Building Leadership Teams, the Oregon Education Association, and a representative group of Visioning Conference participants, all engaged in a collaborative process to develop a framework to serve as the roadmap for our District's path forward. This collective commitment to move into a new paradigm for education in our District has resulted in a strategic document entitled "Growth and Achievement for All Learners," which represents an expanded version of the values and the associated practices which drive their attainment (Appendix A).

This document was approved and adopted by the Board in March of 2016, with the intent that the values would serve as the cornerstone, and that the corresponding principles, programs and practices would constitute our District's strategic plan. In addition to further illustrating the values inherent in our District's educational culture, this plan recognizes that the new learning paradigm is based upon the principle that District learners will travel

different paths, so each individual must be given the autonomy to determine their path and how to traverse it. Inherently, this will require a great deal of flexibility and adaptability in the implementation of programs and practices in order to attain the educational values set forth in our strategic plan.

Our District administrators and Building Leadership Teams will spearhead the implementation of the strategic plan and report annually to the Board of Education on steps taken to realize “Growth and Achievement for All Learners” and the vision articulated in this paper. The Board of Education’s role will be to monitor and ensure progress toward the values and vision embraced by the community for our District. Our desire is that the community will not only be supportive of our initiatives, but will also play an important role in their implementation, truly making this a collaborative effort to create the best learning environment for the students of the Oregon School District.

### **III. Conclusion**

This reflection of public education in the Oregon School District spanning the last 25 years shows that we have been deliberate in renewing our commitment to continuous improvement. We are significantly different in form, size and shape than we were more than two decades ago, and we are aware that the pace of change in this world is, if anything, increasing.

What our reflection has also shown is that our District, at its core, has a mission and a set of values that will guide us along this path. The Oregon School District Mission Statement, adopted 25 years ago, remains relevant and calls us to provide to all students a meaningful education that is designed to help each individual reach their potential. We will deliver on this commitment to our students through the development of plans and the implementation of programs and practices that are consistent with the Values developed collaboratively through our visioning process. These values will serve as guideposts going forward and are not only consistent with our journey to date, but also will provide us the flexibility needed in a world of rapid change and individual learning. The Four C’s will serve to measure whether we have been successful in nurturing the diversity of our students and promoting their growth into adulthood as engaged, healthy, curious, thoughtful and productive individuals who will meet the challenges they face in building rewarding lives.

The path is before us.

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Dr. Brian Busler, Oregon School District Superintendent

Board of Education:

Steve Zach (President), Barb Feeney (Vice President), Jeff Ramin (Treasurer),  
Krista Flanagan (Clerk), Dan Krause, Gwen Maitzen, Charles Uphoff.

Approved by the Oregon School District Board of Education on September 12, 2016.