



# QUALITY EDUCATION MODEL

FINAL REPORT  
AUGUST 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FOR THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

QUALITY  
EDUCATION  
COMMISSION

Oregon has ambitious educational goals and has established high expectations for all of its students. But adopting high expectations is not enough. Although we have made impressive progress by some measures—notably graduation rates—there are still large opportunity and achievement gaps for some student groups, particularly students of color, students from low-income families, English language learners, and students with disabilities. Many students fall into two or more of these groups, making our challenges even greater.

These persistent gaps make it clear that Oregon cannot meet its education goals with the system we currently have. We need to build an educational system that is intentionally designed to close the opportunity and achievement gaps that the current system produces. In 2019, the Oregon Legislature provided the funding and the mechanism—the Student Success Act—to do that.

In addition to added funding, the Student Success Act provides guidelines for implementation that are designed to create long-term school improvement strategies for all of Oregon’s school districts and early education programs. Perhaps most importantly, the Act is centered in equity, making a clear and strong commitment to improving equity in student outcomes by increasing access and opportunities for historically underserved students. That commitment shows up both in the allocation of added funding specifically for underserved groups and in requirements for community participation in the development of school distinct plans for school improvement.

Over the past two years the Quality Education Commission evaluated the environment for K-12 education in Oregon, looking at funding, student outcomes, and the educational practices needed to continue making progress toward the state’s educational goals.

**Based on that work, the Commission made the following findings:**

**Oregon has an inequitable education system.** The result is that specific student groups consistently achieve at lower levels than their peers. The resulting opportunity and achievement gaps have existed for generations, leaving many students less well-prepared than their peers and less than what they deserve.

**We must change our system if we expect to get different outcomes.** Our current education system is delivering the outcomes it was designed to deliver, so if those outcomes are not the ones we want—and clearly they are not—then we need to change the system to one that delivers outcomes more consistent with our values.

**Successfully changing the system requires a cooperative and coordinated effort.** Implementation of the Student Success Act System is the key to successful school improvement. To bring about this type of fundamental system change, each of the many stakeholders in the system has an important role to play,

**Changing the system will also take more resources.** Through the Student Success Act, the Oregon Legislature provided the needed resources by raising more revenue and appropriating more to education, with the clear goals of improving equity. The coronavirus pandemic means that the added revenue will come in slower than initially projected, but the added revenue is still considerable.

**Despite lower than expected revenue, the K-12 funding gap will fall.** While lower than earlier forecasts, the revenue from the new Corporate Activities Tax is still substantial, reducing the funding gap to a projected \$834 million in the 2021-23 biennium. That’s down from a gap of \$1.77 billion in the 2019-21 biennium.

**The closure of Oregon schools creates a new challenge.** The closure of Oregon’s schools required by the coronavirus outbreak means our students are missing critical in-person instruction, and many students will fall behind. This is particularly true of historically underserved students, so schools and districts must be prepared to give those students the extra help they need.

**Based on the analysis and findings of the Commission’s work, we make the following recommendations.**

**Oregon should make educational equity and eliminating gaps in opportunity and achievement its primary education goals.** We should no longer tolerate an educational system that delivers inequitable results, disadvantaging students of color, English learners, disabled students, and students from low-income families. An inadequate education will disadvantage them throughout their lives.

**We should focus our educational improvement efforts on system and process improvement.** We should avoid the temptation to rely on discrete programs, activities, and interventions that only treat the symptoms, not the root causes, of the system’s inadequacies.

**In the short-term, these actions are the most important:**

**Continue implementing the foundational elements of the Student Success Act.** Despite new revenue coming in lower than initially expected, continue implementing the aspects that build the capacity and “infrastructure” required for system reform. This will put schools and districts in the best position to move forward effectively when revenue growth increases.

**Develop plans to assist students who were the most adversely affected by the school closures.** The coronavirus pandemic is exacerbating the inequities in student opportunities, making it even more important for Oregon to focus on the work to reach students we are not adequately serving now. Oregon has an obligation not just to provide the opportunity for every student to succeed, but to make sure that every student actually does succeed

**In the longer-term, focus on these actions:**

**Institutionalize equity based practices within schools.** Work toward creating a more welcoming culture and reducing disparities in student outcomes by developing an equity stance and making decisions and taking actions through the lens of that stance.

**Increase equal opportunity and access to high-quality early learning programs.** This includes developmentally appropriate, culturally specific, and inclusive early learning programs. The research is clear that high-quality early learning has life-long positive impacts on the lives of underserved children.

**Pay attention to social and emotional learning.** Children need to develop social and emotional skills to be effective learners and to thrive in social settings.

**Build community partnerships.** Schools and districts need help. Community partners such as non-profits and social service agencies can deliver key services that schools and districts can’t.

**Build systems designed to continuously improve.** Districts are the key to school improvement, and that requires leadership and for districts to acknowledge, measure, and evaluate how needs differ across schools. Change at the school level matters the most. The focus for change must be on school-level processes, and they must be tailored to the specific needs of each school.

**Distribute resources to individual schools based on measures of student need.** In an equitable system, districts will account for variations in need among their schools when distributing resources to those schools.

**Work cooperatively with partners to effectively implement the provisions of the Student Success Act.** The Act provides both the funding and the mechanism for the kind of change that can transform Oregon’s schools. It is a once in a generation opportunity to build a system that is more effective and equitable than the one we have today.

A copy of the full report is available [online](#).