Better Together is a regional movement to ensure success for Central Oregon youth from before birth to career.
When it comes to serving students and families, Central Oregon really is “better together”. For the past four years, Better Together has regularly convened regional, cross-sector partners within a collective impact framework that has shifted the standard and practice of education in the region. As the backbone for this movement, we bring partners together around targeted initiatives on the cradle to career continuum focused on improving critical outcomes for youth. This partnership is built on open and continuous communication, mutually reinforcing activities, a truly common agenda, and shared measurement that tracks our progress. While Better Together plays the role of the convener and catalyst for this work, it is the partners around the table who get it done.

We know that nothing is collective about our impact if we do not include the diverse voices of those we aim to serve throughout the process of this work and in every decision that is made. We are always working and learning how to ensure safe spaces, open up workgroups, and universally inform the shared vision of the partnership with equity and inclusion at the forefront. Young people in Central Oregon require this of us. We invite you to find your role in this growing partnership, and to know that no one person or organization can do it all! Come work collectively with us to agitate the status quo of how we prepare youth in Central Oregon for a successful future!

— Katie Condit, Better Together Executive Director

The data for this report was provided by the Oregon Department of Education’s Office of Accountability and Reporting, unless otherwise indicated. Underserved Race & Ethnicity includes those who identify as Hispanic/Latino, Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, and/or Pacific Islander. All data represent Crook, Deschutes, and Jefferson counties unless otherwise indicated.
Graduating from High School Matters

To ensure all students in Central Oregon are equipped with the necessary skills and mindset to enter a career they find meaningful, we need to consistently move the needle on high school graduation rates. Graduating high school significantly increases the likelihood of success in post-secondary education and boosts future earnings. Overall, an increased graduation rate has a direct positive impact on economic development and community progress. Fortunately, our graduation rates in Central Oregon have steadily increased over the past three years. Significant gaps in completion rates between different groups of students remain, however, and there is room for rates to improve for all groups of students. This means we still have work to do.

What the Data Tell Us

The story that students from underserved backgrounds and with different abilities graduate at lower rates than their peers is not new, but it takes on increased significance when we realize this portion of our student population is growing significantly. In order to continue to increase our overall regional graduation rate, there is no doubt that we need to ensure we are reaching all children with the resources and support they need to succeed from birth onward.

Like all quantitative data, graduation rates only tell a portion of the story. Young people cannot be condensed down to just numbers and statistics. They have their own stories to tell, and each of those stories is full of nuance and experience that make it both impossible and undesirable to put them in discrete boxes of measurement. For that reason, as we look at the data in this report, we try to remember and include stories of student experience. The Better Together partnership works hard to ensure the whole story of the child is what influences our regional, collective work.

Graduation Rates (4-year) (2015-2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Students</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline (2013-2014)</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underserved Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficient</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graduation Rates (5-year) (2015-2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Students</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline (2013-2014)</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underserved Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficient</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References:


Working together to increase the number of students graduating from high school, continuing their education and training after high school, and ultimately beginning work in a career they find meaningful.
Supporting Children and Families - Before Birth to 8

Kindergarten Assessment Score Disparities from State Average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2013-2014</th>
<th></th>
<th>2016-2017</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Pop</td>
<td>Underserv</td>
<td>Total Pop</td>
<td>Underserv</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Central O</td>
<td>ed Central</td>
<td>Central O</td>
<td>ed Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Average</td>
<td>-0.8</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
<td>-0.8</td>
<td>-3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kindergarten Readiness and 3rd Grade Reading Scores strongly predict student success to high school graduation and beyond. The preparation needed to succeed in these two areas, however, begins long before children step foot in a formal school setting. For example, access to quality early learning environments makes a huge difference for children entering kindergarten ready to learn. Additionally, we know that receiving a comprehensive developmental screening before entering kindergarten allows for early understanding of potential learning needs and barriers for children. The sooner we know about developmental delays children face, the more prepared we are to support those children once they enter school through targeted strategies such as tailored curriculum and learning tools.

The Collective Work

Our Central Oregon Health Council, Central Oregon Early Learning Hub, and United Way have each played a critical role in aligning efforts aimed at increasing Kindergarten Readiness and 3rd Grade Reading across the region. Bringing together key partners engaged in this work, these regional conveners are working towards eliminating duplication and closing gaps in support of families with children in their early years of life. The goals of this collective work include building resilience for children and families, increasing access to high quality early learning environments, and increasing parent engagement.

3rd graders achieving level 3-4 in English Language Arts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Economically</td>
<td>Underserved Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>Limited English Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Disadvantaged</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Students (2015-2016)</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline (2014-2015)</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

References:

Empowering families with information and long-term resources

We know that students do not stand alone on the road to educational success. Families play a critical role in preparing young people for the future. When families have the information and resources they need (and they feel comfortable), there is a long list of ways they can support their children from reading with them at home, helping with homework, ensuring they go to school, navigating college options and resources, and understanding school policies and available programs for their children. Specifically, when parents and guardians are connected to and knowledgeable about school, we find that this has a direct, positive impact on student attendance and engagement. For a host of reasons, this information is not equally accessible to all families, and this is frequently reflected in the differences in chronic absenteeism rates for different groups of students. Showing up for school matters, and is one of the strongest predictors of on-time high school graduation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6th grade regular attenders (2015-2016)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Students</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline (2013-2014)</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underserved Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficient</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As we see from the data, there are certain disparities in the rate at which students are chronically absent, which is defined as missing 10% or more of school days during the year. Not only do chronic absenteeism rates increase substantially between 6th and 9th grade, but the gap also widens between students of color and low-income students and their peers in 9th grade. Making sure families have direct access to the resources and information they need to engage students in school is clearly important for student success.

9th grade regular attenders (2015-2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Attenders 2015-2016</th>
<th>Attenders Baseline (2013-2014)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Students</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underserved Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficient</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Latinos Success Initiative

Across the country, Latino students and families are shown to often have limited access to school resources and information. Reasons for this vary, including both language and cultural gaps that often exist. In Central Oregon, over 30 partner schools, organizations, government agencies and businesses have come together in an effort to increase access to information and resources for these families by creating a pipeline of supports and programs from before kindergarten through college enrollment and completion. This group is also focused on creating enduring systems that support diversity, equity and inclusion through increased community awareness and knowledge, and infusing equitable practices and policies into local schools and partner organizations.

When we look at the data throughout this report, gaps between students who identify with an underserved race/ethnicity and their peers are substantial. Through the work of dedicated partners around this table, more families that identify as Latino are reached every year and are invited into our schools. More families are given the resources and information they need to support their children through learning how to read, building relationships with teachers, and navigating the path beyond high school into college and career opportunities. Through this work, partners are moving the dial on critical indicators of student success. The number of Latino students who were not chronically absent in 6th grade has increased eight percentage points, from 80% in 2014-2015 to 88% in 2015-2016. On-track with 9th grade credits increased by seven percentage points over the last year, from 75% to 82% of Latino students on track. While we celebrate these gains, it is important to remember that gaps in academic subjects like reading and math remain significant (See Supporting Families and Bridges sections).

References:
“Summer slide”, the learning loss that occurs for students between the time they leave school in the spring and return in the fall, significantly impacts academic performance and high school graduation. This learning loss is particularly pronounced for students from underserved backgrounds and low-income households. While many families are able to enroll their kids in engaging summer activities to keep them learning, access to these opportunities is not equal for all young people.

**8+9 Project**

The good news is that there are now more ways to combat this summer learning loss. Better Together’s 8+9 Project is a cross-sector, regional partnership aimed at increasing summer program and mentor support for 8th grade students transitioning into high school. This work is based on research showing that students who are on track at the end of their 9th grade year are four times more likely to graduate than those who are not. “On track” means a student has earned at least 25 percent of the number of credits required for high school graduation by the start of 10th grade. Attendance in 9th grade is also a critical factor for on-time graduation (See Supporting Families section).

**8+9 Project partners served over 410 8th graders transitioning into 9th grade in 2016.**
Students who are not proficient in math in 8th grade are more likely to be placed in a lower level math class in 9th grade and are less likely to be on track for graduation. Less than half our students in Central Oregon reach the state standard for achievement in math, measured as a score of level 3 or 4 on the state Smarter Balanced Test. This doesn’t vary significantly from the state average (44%). Furthermore, there are significant gaps between populations of students, as indicated in the graph below. It is clear we have work to do to increase math skills for all our students in central Oregon.

**8th Grade Math**

Over 90% of students served by 8+9 Project partners during 2015 were on track to graduate at the end of their 9th grade year.

**Post-Secondary Bridges**

Bridges between college years are just as critical for college completion as those between Pre-K to 12 years are for high school completion. In some cases, retention rates from fall to fall are lower than they have been in the past. This is in part due to the inverse relationship between the economy and college enrollment and completion. As the economy improves, more potential students are able to find meaningful work, and are less likely to go to school. There is always more to the data than meets the eye.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Students</th>
<th>84%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseline (2014-2015)</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underserved Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Proficient</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**8th grade achieving level 3-4 in math (2015-2016)**

Over 90% of students served by 8+9 Project partners during 2015 were on track to graduate at the end of their 9th grade year.

**Post-Secondary Bridges**

Bridges between college years are just as critical for college completion as those between Pre-K to 12 years are for high school completion. In some cases, retention rates from fall to fall are lower than they have been in the past. This is in part due to the inverse relationship between the economy and college enrollment and completion. As the economy improves, more potential students are able to find meaningful work, and are less likely to go to school. There is always more to the data than meets the eye.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Students</th>
<th>56%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baseline (2012-2013)</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Students</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline (2012-2013)</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Aligning educational experiences and skills with career opportunities

There are many pathways to entry into a meaningful career. Not all students will go to college, and not all meaningful careers require a college degree. Many, however, do require some type of post-secondary training, and college completion continues to positively impact future earnings and success. Student completion rates from our local higher education institutions can also have an impact on our local workforce, and matter for the vitality of our community. We also know that college completion fluctuates with the economy. As employment opportunities increase, as they have over the past 4 years in Central Oregon, college enrollment and completion rates often decrease. This explains some of the fluctuation in our local post-secondary completion rates. Additionally, while seemingly low, COCC completion rates are two percentage points higher than the average three-year community college completion rates across the state.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COCC first-time, full-time freshman graduating within 3 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baseline</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full-time juniors that graduate within 3 years at OSU Cascades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baseline</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Sources:
OSU Corvallis Institutional Research 2015-2016.
Career and Technical Education (CTE)

Career and Technical Education (CTE) is an important entryway for students to explore career opportunities and learn both technical and “soft” skills. Our CTE programs at the high school and college levels are growing every year and include focus areas such as forestry, business/entrepreneurship, welding, automotive technology, engineering, and a host of other experiential learning opportunities. Particularly impactful are the aligned and articulated Programs of Study linked to CTE opportunities both within and between our K-12 schools and colleges. These offerings matter for students, and their value is reflected directly in their positive impact on graduation rates. Our regional and local CTE experts are valuable voices at the table in the efforts to increase work experience opportunities for young people ages 16-24.

CTE students in our region graduate / 4-year cohort (2015-2016)

- CTE Concentrators (1 or more credits) 92%
- CTE Participants (.5 or more credits) 88%

Youth CareerConnect

Gaining work experience in high school and college has been shown to have a large impact on future earnings and occupational status. It helps students explore career options and figure out what pathway they need to take after high school to enter into a career they find meaningful. Unfortunately, fewer students are exploring careers through work experience while still in school than in previous generations, making the emphasis on these opportunities all the more important. The Youth CareerConnect workgroup focuses on increasing work experience for young people ages 16-24 in Central Oregon. While this is a hard outcome to track, there is a tangible movement afoot and investment from critical partners to build capacity for this work.

Education@Work

This workgroup meets monthly to align advanced manufacturing career pathways between high school CTE programs, COCC, and Oregon Tech. Over the last two years, coursework has been articulated so students can earn college credit in high school and advance into post-secondary training, while gaining internship experience along the way. This pilot partnership started in Redmond in 2015 and is quickly expanding across the region thanks to tireless leadership from our education and industry partners. Advanced manufacturing is a growing field in Central Oregon, and through this partnership we fuel the dual purposes of economic development and student success.

Natural Resources Pathways

With leadership from the Central Oregon STEM Hub, this workgroup is focused on natural resources career pathways, an important economic sector in Central Oregon. This workgroup began meeting in 2016 and has developed incredible career exploration opportunities for young people. Through continued commitment from our non-profit partners, natural resources employers, and schools, we intend to increase the number of natural resources careers filled by local young people in the region.

References:
Central Oregon Data Overview 2015-2016

Early Learning & Wellness

Bridges

Supporting Families

Kindergarten Assessment Score Disparities from State Average
Total Population/Central Oregon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRE-K</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3rd graders achieving level 3-4 in English Language Arts
- (2014-2015): 50% (Numbers), 53% (Letter Names), 0.7 (Letter Sounds)
- (2013-2014): 50% (Numbers), 53% (Letter Names), 0.7 (Letter Sounds)

6th grade attendance
- (2014-2015): 87% (Baseline)
- (2013-2014): 85% (Baseline)

8th graders achieving level 3-4 in math
- (2014-2015): 44% (Baseline)
- (2013-2014): 43% (Baseline)

9th grade attendance
- (2014-2015): 79% (Baseline)
- (2013-2014): 76% (Baseline)

9th grade on track
- (2014-2015): 81% (Baseline)
- (2013-2014): 84% (Baseline)

Full-time OSU-Cascades juniors returning for senior year
- (2014-2015): 56% (Baseline)
- (2013-2014): 57% (Baseline)

Full-time degree-seeking COCC students returning in fall
- (2014-2015): 68% (Baseline)

Full-time juniors that graduate within 3 years at OSU Cascades
- (2014-2015): 22% (Baseline)

COCC first-time, full-time freshman completing within 3 years
- (2014-2015): 19% (Baseline)

High School Graduation Rates (4-year)
- (2012-2013): 68% (Baseline)
- (2013-2014): 76% (Baseline)
- (2012-2013): 75% (Baseline)
- (2009): 75% (Baseline)

Education/Training to Career
Working together to increase the number of students graduating from high school, continuing their education and training after high school, and ultimately beginning work in a career they find meaningful.
**Early Learning & Wellness**

Jen knew her two-year-old son, Carter, was an easily distracted boy. He wouldn’t always pay attention when she spoke to him, and he didn’t seem engaged in interactions with other kids his age. She thought this was just a natural part of Carter’s development, and that he was becoming an independent little boy. One day, a local organization was offering free health screenings at Carter’s day care, so Jen signed him up. After just 30 minutes with a trained volunteer, Carter was diagnosed with a mild hearing impairment, which is what caused his lack of attentiveness when interacting with others. In just a couple of weeks, Jen got connected to a service that provided a low-cost hearing device that wouldn’t be intrusive to Carter’s daily life. That hearing impairment would likely have had significant impacts on his speech and language development, and getting his free screening put him on-track to learn and grow right alongside his peers.

**Supporting Families**

Diego struggled to pass his classes in middle school, and when he entered high school he was already far behind in the credits he would need to graduate. He began to disengage from school, expressing feelings that he didn’t think he would graduate. Then he and his family enrolled in the Juntos program, and after six weeks learning about multiple resources available to get Diego back on track, he felt hopeful. He became involved in Juntos Club after the program finished, and graduated high school on time with the rest of his peers. Diego recently entered into the military with plans to use that support to go to college after completing his service.

**Bridges**

Carolyn earned mostly C’s in 8th grade, and her teachers were concerned that she had become disengaged from school as the year went on. She had expressed concern about entering a big high school next year, and wondered if she would be able to keep up with her peers. Her counselor suggested she enroll in a free teen summer program that would get her out of the house and meeting other students who would be transitioning into 9th grade with her. Carolyn attended one of our 8+9 Project partner programs and stayed through the whole summer. When she entered 9th grade, her confidence had grown immensely. She finished that first year of high school with her highest attendance on record, and was on-track with the credits she needed to graduate on time.

**Education Training to Career**

Will transferred into Redmond High School to access the welding and manufacturing programs. While there, he took an internship at Smith Brothers Push Rods, which eventually transitioned into a career opportunity. He continues to return to RHS to mentor students in the program.
Gratitude and Recognition

We would not be able to operate in this role without the generous support we receive from our **funding partners:**

Bend-La Pine School District  
Central Oregon Community College  
Corporation for National and Community Service  
Crook County School District  
Ford Family Foundation  
High Desert Education Service District  
Jefferson County School District  
Miller Family Foundation  
Oregon Chief Education Office  
Oregon Department of Education  
PGE Foundation  
Redmond School District  
Sisters School District  
St. Charles Foundation  
Additional Private Contributions

**OUR PARTNERS**

It is with genuine gratitude that we thank our partners who are tirelessly committed to this work:

After School Buddies  
ASPIRE  
AVID  
Bend-La Pine School District  
Bend Chamber of Commerce  
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Oregon  
Boys and Girls Clubs of Bend  
Bureau of Land Management  
Camp Fire Central Oregon  
Central Oregon Community College  
Central Oregon Early Learning Hub  
Central Oregon Health Council  
Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council  
Central Oregon Latino Partnership Program  
Central Oregon STEM Hub  
Chief Education Office of Oregon  
Children's Forest Central Oregon  
City Club of Central Oregon  
Crook County  
Crook County Kids Club  
Crook County School District  
Culver School District  
Deschutes County  
Deschutes Juvenile Community Justice  
Deschutes National Forest  
Deschutes Public Library  
Discover Your Forest  
East Cascades Workforce Investment Board  
Economic Development for Central Oregon  
Employment Department  
Express Employment Professionals  
Family Access Network  
Family Resource Center  
Healthy Beginnings  
Heart of Oregon Corps  
High Desert Education Service District  
High Desert Museum  
Jefferson County  
Jefferson County Kids Club  
Jefferson County School District 509-J  
La Pine Chamber of Commerce  
Latino Community Association  
Let's Talk Diversity Coalition  
Looking Forward  
Madras Aquatic Center  
Madras Chamber of Commerce  
Mid Oregon Credit Union  
Neighborhood  
Ochoco Innovation Station  
Oregon Community Foundation  
Oregon Department of Education  
Oregon Tech  
Oregon State University-Cascades  
Oregon State University-Open Campus  
REACH Redmond  
Redmond Chamber of Commerce  
Redmond Economic Development, Inc.  
Redmond School District  
Regional Career and Technical Education  
Sisters School District  
St. Charles Health System  
United Way  
Volunteers in Medicine  
Youinity  
Youth Transition Programs

**OPERATIONS COMMITTEE**

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Paul Andrews, Deputy Superintendent, High Desert ESD  
Brenda Comini, Director, Central Oregon Early Learning Hub  
Deevy Holcomb, Management Analyst, Deschutes County Community Justice  
Jane Reynolds, Director of Enrollment Services & Student Success, Oregon State University-Cascades  
Courtney Snead, CFO/Operations Manager, Let’s Talk Diversity Coalition  
Kristi Steber, Director, Shelk Foundation  
Ken Wilhelm, Executive Director, United Way
Find your role, help students excel—we’re Better Together!
bettertogethercentraloregon.org