

State Board reviews final survey results on High School graduation requirements

by Bend Weekly News Sources

The Oregon Department of Education presented the findings of an unprecedented public engagement process at the State Board meeting Thursday, January 18. The results cover more than 5,000 responses from 300 school and community meetings across the state on the details of the Board's proposal to increase Oregon's high school graduation requirements. The report also includes comments from more than 1,000 surveys filled out on the ODE website. In addition, the Department received over 500 letters, emails, and meeting comments on the high school diploma changes. "I am very pleased with the incredible response we have received," Superintendent Susan Castillo said. "Everyone in the state was very engaged in the discussions, and I am confident that we have strong support as the State Board prepares to move forward on making Oregon's high schools ready for the demands of the 21st century." A summary of the feedback is below:

Response to changes in the diploma was positive. In this first question regarding perceptions of the changes to the high school diploma, generally, respondents showed a higher frequency of "positive" ratings (4 or 5), than "negative" ratings (1 or 2) -- 59.7% positive to 13.7% negative. The overall mean average response was 3.70. Average ratings above 3.5 are considered to be pretty strong Yes votes. Ratings for "Second Language/Arts/Applied Arts" were similar, coming in at 3.69. Again, a very strong show of support for upping this requirement to three credits. "Science" and "Math" changes rated somewhat lower, with ratings at 3.52 and 3.39, respectively. However, both were significantly above the 3.0 mark, and even with "Math," 53% of the respondents gave it a positive rating (4 or 5 on a 1 -- 5 scale), showing good support for the changes. Only 28% gave math negative ratings (1 or 2 on a 1 -- 5 scale). Respondents felt that the most appropriate method for assessment was "course grades and portfolio of essential skills by the local districts." The largest percentage of respondents preferred that the Second Language/Arts/Applied Arts credits be structured requiring students to take three credits in any combination, and not having to demonstrate a proficiency in a second language. Thirty-two percent of the respondents voted for the "any combination" structuring of the "Second Language / Arts / Applied Arts" credits. Next most popular, with 22% of the responses, was "Students should be required to take at least two credits of second language. The other credit would be an arts/applied arts option." Finally, 20% of the response was "Students should be required to take at least one credit of second language."

Findings show that "Funding" is the top challenge facing the State Board's increasing graduation requirements. The following list shows the level of difficulty respondents feel will need to be overcome for each of the challenges listed. Each challenge was rated on a 1 to 5 scale, the higher the number the greater the challenge.

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| Funding | 4.54 |
| Adequate number of teachers | 4.38 |
| Adequate number of classrooms and labs | 4.26 |
| Support for students who need additional help meeting new requirements | 4.24 |
| Impact on students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency | 4.09 |
| Loss of vocational and elective options | 3.96 |
| Strong support from teachers, parents and community | 3.54 |
| Educator preparation and phase-in period | 3.52 |

Respondents seem to feel that a four to five year phase-in period is about right. The average response was 4.25 years. Demographics: Educators made up 69% of the respondents, and responses came from across the state -- Portland metro area (23%), Willamette Valley (34%), Central Oregon (7%), Southern Oregon (15%), Eastern Oregon (11%), Coast (6%). Almost all Oregon high schools were represented in the responses, including small schools (less than 500 students) -- 21%, medium schools (500 -- 1200 students) -- 25% , and large schools (more than 1200 students) -- 39%.

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