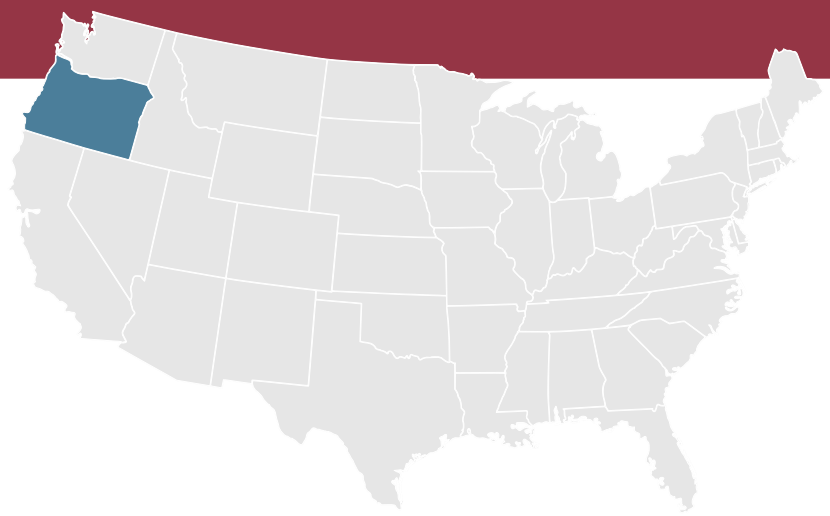


# An Independent Review of ESSA State Plans



## Oregon

### *Project Overview*

In partnership with the Collaborative for Student Success, Bellwether Education Partners, convened an objective, independent panel of accountability experts to review ESSA state plans. We sought out a diverse group of peer reviewers with a range of political viewpoints and backgrounds, and we asked them to review each state's accountability plan with an eye toward capturing strengths and weaknesses.

We aimed to provide constructive feedback to the states, and to serve as a source of straightforward information to the public so that they are better able to engage policymakers if and how they see fit. Inherently, this independent process could not take into account the numerous political and situational challenges that occur in every state. We are in no way attempting to diminish those challenges, but the scope of this review was to compare the rigor and comprehensive nature of state accountability plans.

Peers worked in small teams to review the plans that states formally submitted to the U.S. Department of Education. After writing their own reviews independently, the peers met for two days to discuss their individual reviews and work together on the collaborative draft you'll see below. The teams were asked to use their discretion and expertise to respond to and score each rubric item, and those scores were normed across states and peers.

Each state was given the opportunity to review the draft peer analysis and to provide substantive additions and corrections. Still, the reviews should be considered a snapshot of state plans as of April–June 2017, and we anticipate that states will continue to update their plans going forward.

To read more about the project, as well as a list of the expert peer reviewers, visit the Bellwether website [here](#).

## Overall Strengths and Weaknesses

**Strengths:** What are the most promising aspects of the state’s plan? What parts are worth emulating by other states?

Oregon has laid out an ambitious long-term vision and has incorporated stakeholder feedback and input throughout its plan. The equity lens that is described appears to be thoughtful, detailed, and appropriate. Oregon also places emphasis on growth in its school rankings, and it is trying to emphasize early learning, for example in its exploration and development of social-emotional learning standards for kindergartners, as well as the focus on culturally relevant pedagogy. The state has articulated strategies for identifying and counting subgroups of students, although it is still unclear how they will actually be incorporated into the state’s rating system.

The state identifies school districts as the agent of change throughout the plan and provides a clear theory of action for districts.

**Weaknesses:** What are the most pressing areas for the state to improve in its plan? What aspects should other states avoid?

Despite articulating a deep commitment and priority for advancing equity, Oregon’s plan does not clearly identify the state role or strategy for advancing it through objective statewide expectations and criteria.

While Oregon’s description of the indicators in its accountability system is clear, it is not apparent how the indicators, weights, and subgroup performance are combined to identify schools. In particular, the state doesn’t clearly define consistently underperforming subgroup, or how schools with low-performing groups will be identified annually for targeted support.

Oregon’s plan also does not contain any indication of the kinds of interventions or evidence-based practices it imagines will support its low-performing schools. The implementation section references “leveraging state-sponsored and evidence-based system initiatives,” but the theory of action underlying state-supported intervention is not articulated. In addition, Oregon has not clearly identified concrete criteria for low-performing schools to exit improvement status. Once its identification system is complete, Oregon should lay out clear, transparent targets for schools to demonstrate real, sustained progress.

# Plan Components

Each state’s plan has been rated on a scale of 1 (“This practice should be avoided by other states”) to 5 (“This could be a potential model for other states”).

**Goals:** Are the state’s vision, goals, and interim targets aligned, ambitious, and attainable? Why or why not?



Oregon’s plan opens with a description of the state’s 40/40/20 vision, which articulates the percentage of students who will hold a bachelor’s, associate, and high school diploma by 2025. This is a clear, ambitious vision, but Oregon has not paired it with interim, aligned benchmarks for which the K-12 system can hold itself accountable. Additionally, the state has not provided a baseline about the current state of progress toward the 40-40-20 vision.

The state has set ambitious long-term goals for achievement in English-language arts (ELA) and math. By 2025, it expects 80 percent of students will score at a Level 3 or higher on the SBAC assessments in ELA and math (a “3” signifies that a student is on track to be college and career ready). This nine-year time frame is ambitious, but it isn’t clear how it aligns with the state’s 40-40-20 vision, or if it’s even feasible. Oregon’s baseline data suggest these goals may be overly ambitious even for the “all students” group where meeting the goals requires a 26-percentage-point increase in ELA and almost doubling of the current proficiency rate in math, let alone for lower-performing groups.

For high school graduation, Oregon’s goal is 90 percent for the four-year cohort graduation rate by 2025. The state believes some students will take longer than four years to graduate, while others will earn an “alternative diploma.” This is still an ambitious goal that requires a steady increase of about 2 percentage points a year for the “all students” group and a greater annual increase for some subgroups. Oregon’s long-term goals and interim measures are appropriately rigorous for extended-year graduation rates—93 percent of students graduating in five years by 2025.

Oregon has not included long-term goals for English-language proficiency, arguing that the state does not have sufficient information to calculate goals due to having only one year of data. Even without additional data, the state could propose a methodology for establishing long-term goals, which could then be refined once more data become available.

**Standards and Assessments:** Is the state’s accountability system built on high-quality standards and assessments aligned to college and career readiness? Why or why not?

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Oregon has put in place strong college- and career-ready standards based on the Common Core State Standards and is using Smarter Balanced as its statewide assessment system in English-language arts and math in grades 3-8 and high school. Additionally, the state is developing a new science assessment aligned to the state-adopted Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS).

The state indicates that it intends to take advantage of flexibility under ESSA to offer districts a choice of nationally recognized high school tests. However, Oregon must consider how it will accomplish this while staying true to its values around equity, as well as ESSA’s statutory requirements. The state does not describe how it will identify the high school assessment(s) for districts, though the plan does include several key principles to maintain quality (standards alignment, reliability and validity, comparability, accommodations and accessibility). While this could be helpful in improving participation and investment in the state testing program on the part of high school students and their parents, the state should resolve these technical issues before going down this path. Lastly, Oregon should strengthen its plan by ensuring that it has a process in place to meet the 1 percent cap on alternate assessments for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

**Indicators:** Are the state’s chosen accountability indicators aligned to ensure targets and goals are met and likely to lead to improved educational outcomes for students? Why or why not?

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Oregon proposes to use a simple list of high-quality indicators: academic achievement, progress, graduation rate, English proficiency, and school quality, which includes chronic absenteeism, freshmen on-track, and a five-year high school completion rate. Each of these measures is clearly defined in the plan.

Given Oregon’s focus on ensuring *all* students graduate from high school (per the 40-40-20 vision), the state may want to reconsider the definition of its five-year completion rate, which treats a GED as equivalent to a standard high school diploma. Oregon may want to consider incentivizing students to earn stronger high school credentials within five years and could provide graded weights for stronger outcomes. Since the state has articulated goals around college completion, the state could better align its K-12 accountability system with this goal by adding measures of postsecondary success (enrollment, remediation rates, etc.). Similarly, Oregon is missing an opportunity to include measures of college and career readiness, such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, dual enrollment, or industry credentials. Those types of indicators can push high schools to increase rigor and equity in courses offered and would help align schools toward the state’s vision.

The plan notes that some workgroup members and stakeholders wanted results on the statewide science assessment to be included as an accountability indicator but that, since Oregon is developing a new science assessment to align with NGSS, the state won't make a decision until a future date. Oregon's willingness to include science is positive, and doing so would help round out the state's indicator list for elementary schools.

Oregon is also clear that additional, local indicators of school quality may be publicly reported but will not be included in the accountability system at this time because they are not collected statewide, do not meet the law's requirements (i.e., for disaggregation), or are otherwise not ready or appropriate for inclusion in the accountability system. This is a smart way to incorporate additional, contextual indicators. Other states could use this approach as a way to balance the desire for more nuanced data on student and school performance with the desire to maintain a focused, clear, valid, and reliable statewide accountability system.

**Academic Progress:** Has the state created sufficient incentives for schools to care about both student proficiency and student growth over time? Why or why not?



Oregon's plan places a strong weight on student achievement and growth. It proposes to include a simple measure of student achievement (percent proficient) and a normative growth model. The state plans to give more weight to academic growth (44 percent of a school's rating) than academic proficiency (22 percent) in the accountability system. The growth measure applies only to elementary and middle schools.

Oregon's growth model, called the Student Growth Percentiles (SGP), compares the progress students make against their similarly performing peers and converts those scores into percentiles. While this approach is relatively simple to calculate and interpret, it does not ensure students cover the content they need to master to stay on track toward mastery at graduation. Oregon deserves credit for pairing this type of growth model with a clean measure of achievement, but placing such a strong weight on SGP scores could dilute the benefits of having strong state standards if they play a much smaller part in school ratings.

Oregon will use two indicators for English-learner progress toward proficiency. One will measure the percentage of English learners on track to English proficiency, and the other will measure growth as measured by median growth percentiles. Depending on the student, Oregon set English-language proficiency targets of up to seven or eight years, which sets a low bar for exiting English-learning students.

**All Students:** Does the state system mask the performance of some subgroups of students, or does it have adequate checks in place to ensure all students (including all subgroups of students) receive a high-quality education? Why or why not?

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In theory, Oregon has a number of components that should help it identify schools with low-performing subgroups of students. It identifies 11 unique student groups for accountability and is to be commended for reducing the subgroup threshold from 40 to 20 students for the ESSA accountability system. Oregon should also be commended for including data analysis that shows the effect of using different n-sizes (30 vs. 20) on the inclusion of key subgroups in the accountability system.

Oregon is also committed to using three years of data for accountability purposes, which will help lower the number of students needed to meet the n-size of 20 (as only seven students in a given subgroup would be needed in each of the three data years). This is a helpful practice to increase year-to-year stability of each school's results and build in extra subgroup accountability, and it's one that other states could consider.

In addition, Oregon will continue to rely on a "combined underserved race/ethnicity" subgroup when any given school's groups do not meet the state's minimum threshold on its own. Even with an n-size of 20, some of the state's smaller subgroups would be underreported individually and not emphasized in the accountability system. For example, even with an n-size of 20, only 47.6 percent of Native Americans would be included in the accountability system, only 74.6 of Oregon's black students would be captured, and only 38.3 percent of the state's Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islanders would be included. By creating the combined subgroup, Oregon states that it has ensured that at least 98 percent of each of these groups will be captured in some way. Oregon should be commended for its attempts to include these students, but, given the different needs of each of these subgroups of students, the state should clearly articulate how it will target interventions accordingly. Additionally, the state may consider if this same result would have been accomplished by lowering the n-size to 15 or 10.

Further, the state has chosen to include students in the students-with-disabilities group who have been exited from special education in the previous two years. The state has also chosen to include students previously identified as English learners as part of the English-learner student group for an additional four years after being exited. These choices will inflate the scores for these groups and lessen the focus on students continuing to receive services, and the students-with-disabilities idea in particular may violate federal requirements. Oregon could instead create an additional subgroup made up of exited students, which would mitigate potential unintended consequences and further masking of these important subgroups.

After identifying which subgroups it will consider and how it will define them, Oregon’s plan indicates that the state will use the overall performance levels to identify schools in need of comprehensive and targeted support and improvement. Any school with at least one low-performing subgroup will be identified for targeted support, and any Title I school with a subgroup that has underperformed for three or more years will be identified for comprehensive support.

While these definitions may meet the letter of the law, Oregon has left in too many unknowns to determine how this will actually play out. It has not defined what level of performance would qualify a school for each category, nor has it provided data suggesting how many schools might fall into each category. Thus, despite all its good work on how it defines subgroups, it isn’t clear how they’ll actually be included in the state’s accountability system.

**Identifying Schools:** Is the state’s plan to identify schools for comprehensive and targeted support likely to identify the schools and student groups most in need?



The process for identifying schools is one of the least clear and most complicated parts of Oregon’s accountability system. The state will provide schools with a Level 1-5 designation on each indicator based on meeting goals and interim targets, but it does not describe what those goals and interim targets are for English-language proficiency, growth, or school-quality/student-success indicators.

Given all these uncertainties, it’s difficult to determine how many schools Oregon will identify for additional supports. It’s also concerning that Oregon doesn’t appear to identify schools with consistently underperforming subgroups annually for targeted support and improvement, nor does it clearly define what constitutes a consistently underperforming subgroup (see above).

With regard to weighting of indicators, the balance between academic and school-quality or student-success indicators makes sense in elementary and middle school, where academic indicators clearly receive “much greater” weight, as required by ESSA. However, in high school, academic achievement is weighted less than the school-quality or student-success indicators. As noted above, once final assessment decisions are made at the high school level, the state may want to consider a growth component at the high school level.

**Supporting Schools:** Are the state’s planned interventions in comprehensive and targeted support schools evidence-based and sufficiently rigorous to match the challenges those schools face? Why or why not?

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Oregon’s plan emphasizes district responsibility to support local school improvement. However, the strategies for doing so in the plan focus mostly on process—such as comprehensive needs assessments, self-evaluations, and tools for root-cause analysis—and less on what districts will do based on this information to adopt evidence-based interventions that will successfully turn around struggling schools.

Districts will complete a Readiness and Screening Protocol, used by the state to determine a district’s commitment to “demonstrate a commitment to improving schools through partnership, authentic stakeholder engagement and the use of evidence to drive improvement.” Oregon plans to provide support and financial resources only to prioritized districts that have shown through this protocol their “readiness” for improvement. The state says that it needs to prioritize which districts get access to funds due to the state’s limited capacity.

For districts that are not considered “ready,” the state will allow them to write their own plans and implement them independently. There is no explanation as to how these districts will be encouraged to build capacity and “readiness” to gain access to additional supports and funding in future years. This could lead to districts being identified as chronically underperforming year over year, without state intervention.

The state also does not have a concrete plan for how it will spend its 7 percent set-aside dedicated to school-improvement activities. The state is relying on increased coaching/monitoring, professional learning, a review of district capacity, and other steps that are less intensive than what many chronically low-performing schools require. Oregon is not likely to turn around some continuously low-performing schools without having more substantial intervention strategies at its disposal.



**Exiting Improvement Status:** Are the state’s criteria for schools to exit comprehensive and targeted support status sufficient to demonstrate sustained improvements? Why or why not?

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Oregon lists three exit criteria for both comprehensive and targeted support schools: the school is not identified for supports in the next improvement cycle; the school demonstrates “improved outcome (accountability) data”; and a school review by an outside review team and stakeholders confirms the school has improved its systems. While these could potentially be a useful set of indicators, the state does not provide further detail on what exactly they would mean or how they will be meaningful to schools.

Moreover, the state doesn’t differentiate its exit criteria for its comprehensive and targeted support schools. It’s particularly problematic that the state has not set clear standards for what progress for subgroups or low-performing students would constitute sufficient improvement. To strengthen its plan and provide better signals to schools, Oregon should set clear, transparent exit criteria and tailor those based on the particular reason a school was identified for additional support in the first place.

**Continuous Improvement:** Has the state outlined a clear plan to learn from its implementation efforts and modify its actions accordingly, including through continued consultation and engagement of key stakeholders? If not, what steps could the state take to do so?

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Oregon’s plan clearly expects schools and districts to engage in a process of continuous improvement, and the state identifies some very specific steps and timelines for districts and schools to take as part of the continuous-improvement process. The state’s role is to support schools and districts in improving, and a great deal of stakeholder engagement is built into the process.

Oregon is clearly placing a big bet on the district as the unit of change, which comes across in its plans. The role of the state if any districts struggle is less clear—what’s the backstop to improve low-capacity or poor-performing districts if they are not succeeding in this strategy? It would be helpful for Oregon to develop a regular feedback mechanism that involves key stakeholders to solicit feedback about the operation of the accountability system and identify where adjustments and revisions are needed.