8,484 Oregon students were off-track to graduate on time after their first year of high school.

Oregon's Freshman On-Track Indicator

In 2012, the Oregon Education Investment Board (OEIB) adopted the Freshman On-Track (FOT) indicator based on research findings. The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) has been reporting a FOT indicator on school and district annual report cards ever since. Currently, to be considered on-track, a first year student must be enrolled on the first school day in May with full academic year status (denominator) and have earned 25% of the credits required to graduate (a minimum of 6 credits) prior to the start of the next school year (numerator).

For the purposes of this policy brief, students included in the denominator but not in the numerator of the FOT indicator are defined as off-track. ODE does not define off-track nor calculate an off-track rate, but counts used to calculate the off-track rate are from official ODE estimates (Oregon Department of Education, 2016).

Demographics of Disengagement

Last school year, 8,484* first-year high school students were not on track to graduate within four years prior to the start of the next school year. The state off-track rate was 20.1%.

Off-track students were 83.0% Combined Disadvantage (CDIS), 72.5% Economically Disadvantaged (ECD), 60.2% Male, 39.8% Female, 36.2% Under-served Race/Ethnicity (USETH), and 6.2% English Learners (EL).

*All statistics, percentages, and counts are estimates based on Oregon Department Education (ODE) 2014-15 school year data, unless otherwise stated.

**Combined Disadvantage (CDIS) = Any of the following: Economically Disadvantaged (ECD), English Learners (EL), Students with Disabilities (SWD), and Under-served Race/Ethnicity (USETH): African American, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

Key Findings

- Disengagement is a process, not an event. It can begin at nearly any point on the educational spectrum, but typically culminates during the high school years.
- 83% of off-track students are in the Combined Disadvantage category.
- On-track indicators and early warning systems are a promising approach to increasing student engagement in high school and increasing graduation rates.

The most effective on-track indicators and early warning systems utilize multiple measures. For example, the ABC’s are attendance, behavior, and course grades/credits earned.

Oregon’s Freshman On-track (FOT) Indicator does not utilize multiple measures. It uses credits earned as the sole measure.

Preliminary analysis by ODE indicates that a student who was not on-track at the end of their first year dropped out during their second year at a rate 16 times higher than their on-track peers. If regular attendance is added to create a multiple measure, the odds of dropping out more than double (36) compared to using credits as the sole measure.

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Racial and Ethnic Disparities

The rates of first year off-track students clearly illustrate the racial and ethnic disparities present in Oregon’s education system. Every under-served race and ethnicity has off-track rates above the statewide average of 20.1%.

As indicated in the chart below, American Indian/Alaska Native students last year had a rate of 36.5%. The off-track rate for African American freshmen was 29.8% and for Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders the rate was 26.2%. Hispanic/Latino students had off-track rates of 27.4%. Conversely, students who were Multi-Racial, White and Asian had off-track rates below the state average at 18.3%, 18.0%, and 5.9% respectively.

The table below compares last year’s 4-year cohort graduation rate, (positive outcome) with last year’s dropout and off-track rates (negative outcomes). To be clear, the chart below is to illustrate the similarities in the slope of the lines. It is not meant to compare the difference between rates nor is it presenting race/ethnicity as a continuum. More simply, for the negative outcomes, each under-served race/ethnicity is above the state average, while for the positive outcome each under-served race/ethnicity is below the state average. Notably, American Indian/Alaska Native students have the lowest graduation rates, highest dropout rates, and highest off-track rates of any race/ethnicity.

The similarities in the rates are striking and suggest a predictive relationship between off-track rates and eventually dropping out or at the very least, not graduating on time.
Evidence-Based and Emerging Practices

A growing body of research reports that on-track indicators, also known as early warning indicators, are a promising approach to increasing student engagement in high school and increasing graduation rates (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Freeman et al., 2015; Hazel et al., 2014; Henry et al., 2012; Mac Iver & Messel, 2013; Neild et al., 2008; Roderick et al., 2014).

Initial research has shown that on-track students are nearly four times more likely to remain engaged in school and graduate within four years than their off-track peers, and on-track status was a more accurate predictor of graduation than a student’s race/ethnicity, economic status, or prior achievement (Allensworth & Easton, 2005).

As easy as 1, 2, 3 - ABC

On-track indicators typically track a student's attendance, behavior, and course grades or ABC’s. (Mac Iver & Messel, 2013).
Adopting a multiple measure indicator can help to simultaneously address chronic absenteeism, graduation, dropout, and school engagement. The Oregon Legislature should enable the realization of the Youth Development Council’s legislative mandate to oversee an accountable, measurable, and unified system providing services to Priority and Opportunity Youth by authorizing the full implementation of funding for the YDC to initiate and coordinate statewide prevention efforts.

Prevention efforts with the greatest impact will require cross systems’ collaboration between youth-serving agencies. The YDC is uniquely positioned as the state agency legislatively mandated to coordinate services for the population of youth that prevention efforts must target. To ensure the seamless delivery of equitable statewide services, the YDC must be empowered to implement and coordinate statewide prevention efforts.

Current education policy and statutes should be analyzed to identify areas that have the unintended consequence of discouraging prevention efforts. Oregon’s educational policy and statutes, especially regarding school and district accountability, may unintentionally serve as a barrier to community-based prevention efforts. Legislation should be enacted removing statutory impediments and perceived consequences that hinder community partnerships while maintaining the integrity and intent of the school accountability system.

A robust on-track indicator that utilizes multiple existing ODE predictive measures should be explored and adopted by the state. Adopting a multiple measure indicator can help to simultaneously address chronic absenteeism, graduation, dropout, and school engagement.

References


