

## Putting Students at the Center: An Overview of Oregon Learns At the End of Six Years *January 2018*

### OBC and Education Policy

Improving public education outcomes has been an OBC policy priority more than three decades. Over these years we have consistently supported approaches to education policies, governance, funding, and school-level practices intended to improve student learning and attainment while reducing disparities in opportunities and outcomes for student groups traditionally underserved.

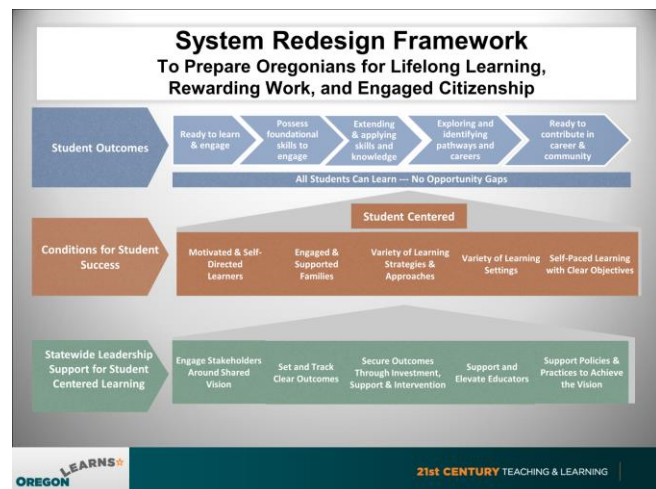
As a consequence, we have advocated wide ranging overhaul and redesign. We have called for higher levels of education attainment; student-centric teaching and learning; standards-based assessment, credit, and advancement; outcome-based funding; a P20 continuum of better integrated standards and student pathways; a stronger filter for equity in education policy and practice; and a host of other policies, structures, and practices to improve the prospects of individuals, communities, and the Oregon economy.

### Creation of Oregon Learns

The Oregon Business Council created the Oregon Learns education initiative in November 2011 in response to an unprecedented opportunity to influence education reforms that OBC advocated as far back as 1997. In 2010 John Kitzhaber was elected governor on a policy agenda that included a great many of OBC's education positions. In the 2011 legislative session he successfully sponsored an extensive package of measures to redesign education governance, funding, and education practice from preschool through postsecondary schooling – or P20.

The idea of creating Oregon Learns was bolster the efforts of policy makers and stakeholders to implement these initial redesign measures and advocate for additional, complementary redesign legislation in subsequent legislative sessions. This effectively consolidated all of OBC's ongoing education policy work under the Oregon Learns banner.

As a consequence, Oregon Learns fell under the oversight of the longstanding OBC Education Task Force, and for purposes of receiving grant support, it became an initiative of the OBC Charitable Institute, OBC's 501 (s) (3) arm.



**Oregon Learns was created to support this vision of education system redesign that began to emerge in 2011.**

### Initial Oregon Learns Focus and Funding

At that time it was formed OBC submitted a grant request to the Oregon Community Foundation to become an anchor funder for the expanded policy work anticipated. In that proposal, we spelled out our intent to help the State of Oregon achieve stronger high school and postsecondary completion (the 40-40-20 goal) by making three key education design changes:

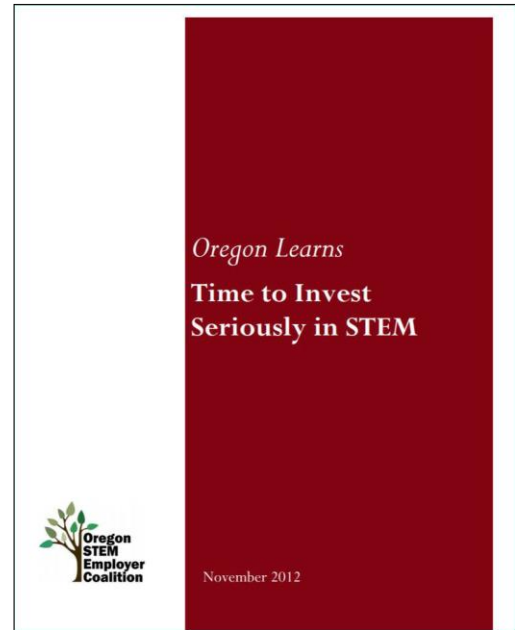
1. **Build a learning continuum**, up through grade 20, of integrated student pathways rather than a collection of disconnected institutional silos.
2. **Invest in learner and learning outcomes instead of seat time** by organizing the state budget as investments in well-defined student outcomes and readiness for the next level of schooling or life.
3. **Adopt proficiency-based teaching and learning practices** with flexible learning pace and environments and proficiency-based determination of student credit and promotion.

We envisioned the redesign supporting a learner-centered system where everyone believes all students can learn, where student motivation is essential, and where educators are empowered to succeed. The assets we planned to deploy included our extensive body of work on education reform, our strength and credibility in policy analysis, and our skills in raising awareness and advocating solutions through communication, convening of pertinent parties, and consulting with policy makers and stakeholders on the redesign vision and policies.

In November 2011 OCF awarded Oregon Learns the first year of what would become six years of grant funding. Later the Meyer Memorial Trust, Miller Foundation, and PGE Foundation became grant supporters of the initiative. In addition, a group of private philanthropists funded Oregon Learns work on redesigning postsecondary governance and funding.

## 2012 Highlights

**Project Organization.** In 2012 Oregon Learns spent a portion of its time organized internally and establishing a working relationship with key education officials and stakeholders. During that time we began to build the Oregon Learns website, PowerPoint presentations, a video presentation, and other materials as communication tools. We also began outreach on education redesign to stakeholder and policy audiences individually and in small groups. Heading into 2012, we added a second day to the December 2011 Oregon Business Plan Leadership Summit (managed by OBC) to explain the education reform framework to state legislators and other policy makers and stakeholders. (In each subsequent year, Oregon Learns work and advocacy has been a prominent part of Oregon Business Plan leadership summits.)



**Outcome-Based Education Budgeting.** Oregon Learns' chief work on education redesign that year was to develop an outcome-based budget (a new model) for Governor Kitzhaber for use in building Oregon's 2013-15, \$8 billion education budget. The Governor had requested that work and arranged a state grant of \$250,000 to contribute to it. The team formed for that purpose was led by Duncan Wyse and included John Tapogna of ECONorthwest and several experts from Public Strategies Group. That work, which extended through the summer and fall, also included helping the newly formed Oregon Education Investment Board to develop achievement compacts mandated by the 2011 Legislature for improved education outcomes.

**Support for CTE and STEM.** Another important task that year was to convene a group of prominent Oregon employers and form the Oregon STEM Employer Coalition (later renamed the Oregon CTE-STEM Employer Coalition). That work was funded by approximately \$80,000 in contributions from employers. The Coalition, with Oregon Learns staff support, was instrumental in advocating for greater investment in STEM and CTE education by the 2013 Legislature as well as legislative creation in that same session of the Oregon STEM Investment Council to guide state investments in STEM education. A significant aspect of that work was partnering with ECONorthwest to produce an analysis of the need for STEM education in Oregon and its value to learners and the Oregon economy.

## 2013 Highlights

**LearnWorks Reconvening.** In January we held a day-long reunion of the educators and stakeholders who participated in the August 2011 education redesign lab that we called LearnWorks. OBC had organized this month-long, intensive design lab of some 40 individuals to develop implementation strategies for the newly created Chief Education Office, OEIB, HECC, and other entities charged with redesign. The 2013 reunion itself was a work session to check progress over the past year and a half, to gather ideas for Oregon Learns outreach on education redesign, and to consider additional education policy and fiscal issues being teed up for the 2013 Legislature.

**Legislative Advocacy.** One of our chief activities in 2013 was to support redesign of postsecondary governance and budgeting. With significant grant support from a group of private philanthropists we developed a redesign proposal sponsored by the Governor and we engaged a consultant who worked with legislative sponsors in the session. We also successfully advocated significant state investments in CTE and STEM education.

The 2013 Legislative outcomes that we advocated through the Governor's Education Funding Team include the following:

- HB 3120, reorganization of postsecondary governance and budgeting to support state universities, community colleges and student aid under a significantly strengthened Higher Education Coordinating Commission. This change connected basic state support for community colleges and universities more tightly with tuition policy and need-based aid. Most significantly, it tied state funding to improved learner outcomes rather than enrollment or seat time.
- SB 270, autonomy to state universities, consistent with the state's education mission, to create their own governing boards and oversee their own fiscal management. This freed the schools to better chart their own destinies and raise additional funds on their own.
- HB 2636, creation of the Oregon STEM Investment Council, and \$8 million for incentive grants to boost STEM education in Oregon schools.
- HB 3233, to raise the effectiveness of educators through improvements in teacher candidate recruiting and preparation and in professional development among working educators.

**Communication Tools.** By the middle of the summer, we had completed the two-minute animated "Ellie" video explaining education redesign, the basic buildout of the Oregon Learns website (<https://oregonlearns.org/>), and an extensive package of PowerPoint presentations and handout materials.

**Outreach Convenings.** From mid-summer into the fall, we organized a series of community meetings at various state locations featuring Chief Education Officer Nancy Golden to introduce education redesign ideas to local education officials and stakeholders. These received positive reviews, in particular from legislators who participated.

## 2014 Highlights

**Additional Organization.** To further build its partnerships and network, Oregon Learns developed two advisory groups: Oregon Learns Fellows, distinguished individuals with expertise in the principles and challenges of education redesign, and the Stakeholder Advisory Group (made up of prominent education and youth advocacy organizations). The Fellows have been an extremely helpful thought partner in our work, and the Stakeholder Advisory Group has been an excellent means of staying in touch with emerging developments and perspectives in Oregon Education.

**Higher Education Leadership Symposium.** In January we organized a leadership symposium to help Oregon's higher education leaders and stakeholders better understand the governance and investment changes in postsecondary education resulting from HB 3120 and SB 270 in the 2013 Legislature. The Governor, his education team, and more than 200 of the state's top postsecondary educators and stakeholders attended, including members of newly created university governing boards. Jamie Merisotis of the Lumina Foundation keynoted the event.

**STEM Summit.** To assist the State in starting work on a state STEM strategy, we partnered with the State STEM Director in convening a state STEM Summit in April. Some 140 CTE and STEM educators, business leaders, and other stakeholders from across Oregon attended the two-day event.



**State Education Budget for 2015-17.** We participated in the Governor’s subcommittee charged to develop the 2015-17 state education budget.

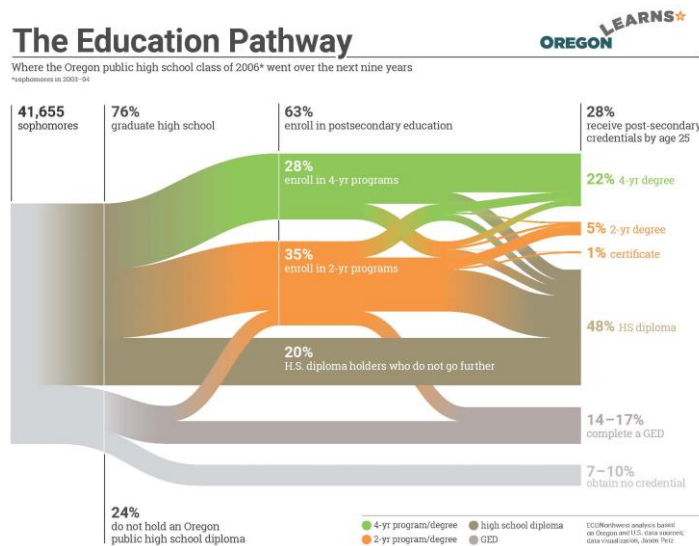
## 2015 Highlights

**Education Policy Management.** In January OBC hired Kyle Ritchey-Noll as Oregon Learns executive director and lead manager on OBC’s education policy initiatives. She had been an OBC consultant on education since the summer of 2012.

**Oregon Education Leadership Changes.** In February Governor Kitzhaber unexpectedly resigned. Later that year we would also see Chief Education Officer Nancy Golden and Deputy Schools Superintendent Rob Saxton leave and move on to other opportunities. The sudden change of leadership dampened redesign momentum and support at upper policy levels of government.

**Legislative Advocacy.** We were successful in partnering with elected leaders, educators, and a broad businesses-labor-educator coalition to advocate for increased CTE and STEM support in the 2015 Legislature. The session doubled CTE and STEM investments from \$17 million in the previous biennium to \$35 million, and it allocated a separate \$6.1 million to the Oregon Talent Council. The bulk of CTE and STEM funding went to CTE revitalization grants, STEM innovation grants, a career pathway fund, and regional STEM Hubs.

**Education Pathway Visual.** As a way to underscore the urgency and better define the nature of Oregon’s challenge in secondary and postsecondary completion we developed the Oregon Education Pathway diagram. This visual illustrates data tracing the cohort of Oregon public high school students who were sophomores in 2003-04 (i.e., the graduating Class of 2006) to depict the paths they traveled to whatever level of high school and postsecondary completion they achieved by age 25 (in 2013). Among the full cohort of 41,655 Oregon students who were sophomores in public high schools in 2003-04, 68 percent started postsecondary studies, but only 27 percent attained any kind of postsecondary degree by the age of 25 (nine years later).



**New Higher Education Funding Formula.** Earlier work that Oregon Learns did on restructuring postsecondary governance and funding in Oregon came to fruition in April when the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) adopted a new funding formula for state government’s share of investment in universities, community colleges, and student aid. The HECC approved the “Student Success and Completion Model,” which shifts the basis for state funding from enrollment – seats in a class – to access and successful completion of degrees for resident students.

**OCF CTE-STEM Report; State STEM Plan.** Toward the end of 2015 OCF awarded us a special grant to carry out three tasks: 1) oversee development of the initial draft of the Oregon STEM Plan, 2) survey needs and opportunities for private and foundation funders to support improvements in CTE and STEM education, and 3) provide counsel and support to the State STEM Director in his work building out the state’s new STEM ecosystem.

The most significant initial outcome of this work was a preliminary draft of a state STEM education plan. We engaged Education First, a prominent education consulting firm, to work with us and the State STEM Director to produce the draft. We unveiled that document as a first draft and work in progress at the 2015 Oregon Leadership Summit.



## 2016 Highlights

**CTE-STEM Opportunities for Private Funders.** From January through May we carried out research to identify potential opportunities for private funders to most effectively support CTE-STEM education across the P-20 continuum in Oregon. We also assisted OCF in organizing a funder advisory group to provide feedback on the research design, findings, and report draft.

**STEM Plan Completion.** Taking the work done by Education First, we worked with the State STEM Director to refine the initial version of the STEM Education Plan and solicit feedback on it from stakeholder communities across the state. The final plan was produced and distributed in November.

**Education Pathway Tool Online.** In December our contractor Seabourne Consulting finished work on the interactive online version of our education pathway visualization and placed the tool online. It was very well received and we have continued to promote awareness of its presence online.

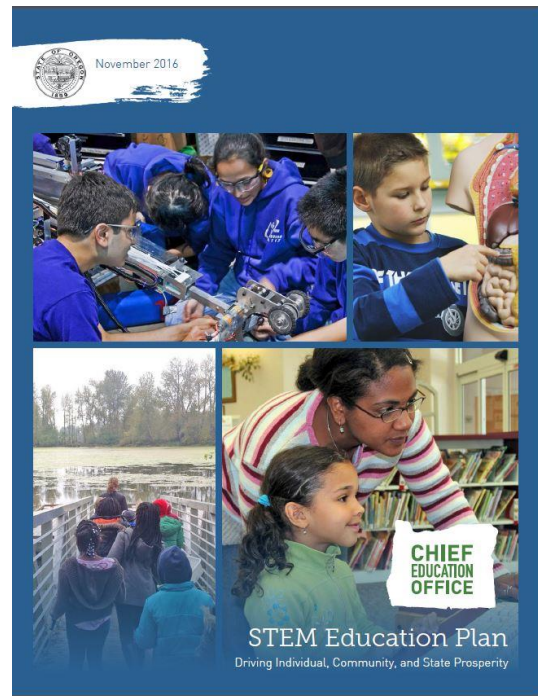
## 2017 Highlights

**CTE-STEM Legislative Effort.** We continued to advocate for greater integration and collaboration of CTE and STEM education in 2017. Through the Oregon CTE-STEM Employer Coalition, we crafted a legislative proposal to restructure the existing STEM Investment Council as the CTE-STEM Investment Council. While the bill to do that did not make it out of committee, the process was valuable in sharpening understanding of what was needed and it laid the groundwork for a future effort to unify policy and investment in career-connected learning. The Oregon CTE-STEM Employer Coalition, also advocated to protect foundational investments in CTE and STEM education, and that effort was successful.

**Future of Learning Design Challenge.** With support from OCF and other donors, Oregon Learns partnered with the Construct Foundation to sponsor a Breaker Design Challenge for high school students on The Future of Learning. The 10-day summer design challenge included 20 College Possible students employing design principles to investigate the gap between how our current learning systems prepare young people for life after school, and what the world expects from them. This project gave us an opportunity to connect with students and elevate their voice in the conversation about making education work better for them. Their recommendations included recruiting diverse educators, expanding applied hands-on learning, and creating a student record to help teachers better connect with students and assess their learning needs.

## Summing Up

Over the past six years the Oregon Learns initiative has tremendously enhanced OBC's work in education improvement, deepening our expertise and thought leadership, and allowing us to develop new resources and tools (research, policy and data analysis, website, videos, and presentations) to support forward looking policy makers, educators, and stakeholders. These skills and resources will continue to strengthen our continuing work to improve education policy, practice, and outcomes. Another benefit of these past six years of work has been deeper relationships, credibility, and trust with education policy makers and leaders.



We also believe that Oregon has locked in a number of gains that improve our prospects for better and more equitable education outcomes. For example:

- The state embraces ambitious education outcomes represented by the 40-40-20 attainment goal.
- The state has developed a strong commitment to equity and inclusion for all learners.
- Policy makers and educators think about Oregon education in terms of an education continuum from early childhood through careers.
- Education leaders understand the need to invest strategically and for outcomes at critical points.
- As a result, we have significantly shifted funding to prioritize early learning, high school success, and need-based postsecondary aid.
- Oregon has greatly increased support for CTE and STEM education.
- With the highest funding increases in the nation, the state in the last two biennia has stemmed significant declines in state budget investment for community colleges and universities.
- We have adopted outcome funding in both higher education and CTE education, which serve as models for wider application of outcome funding in the future.
- The state has made considerable progress in developing a longitudinal education data system and expects to roll it out in 2018.

### **Looking Ahead**

The Future of Work is changing rapidly, fueled in large part by advances in technology and automation, globalization, and other trends and factors. These shifts have significant implications for learning.

Oregon Learns remains committed to a vision of learning built on personalized, student-centered learning. Such learning fosters greater learner agency, mastery not seat time, learner adaptability and dispositions that make for success in both work and life, equity for underserved groups, learning in and out of school, and a more creative role for teachers. We believe this is the future of learning.

In addition, we believe career connected learning through CTE and STEM is an important strategy to provide learners with real-world, hands-on knowledge, experiences, and skills that truly prepare them for the future. OBC and Oregon Learns will play a broader role in convening and engaging the business community and other stakeholders to support career connected, student centered learning and implementation of the state's STEM Education Plan.

