

OSBA Events

2014 Spring PACE Trainings

Through June 25, 2014

NSBA Pacific Region Summer Meeting

June 27-29, 2014

Summer Board Conference

July 18-20, 2014

Students overcome obstacles to reach graduation

The road to high school graduation is littered with potholes: Boredom. Teen angst and aimlessness. Peer pressures. Parental conflicts.

But students in today's world are confronting hurdles that most of us never have. Some are too difficult to even imagine:

- Losing a father, changing continents and learning your first words of English as a teenager.
- Falling into a gang, seeing your mother move to Mexico and working two jobs to support yourself.
- Helping raise three younger siblings with no dad in sight while your mother bounces in and out of rehab.

Meet Gresham High School's Class of 2014. Along with the kids who faced the "typical" challenges to graduating, many of these young people tell amazing stories of perseverance. Their experiences help demonstrate part of the uphill battle Oregon schools face in turning around the second-lowest graduation rate in the country at 68 percent.

Rob Saxton, Oregon's deputy superintendent of public instruction, says local school board members can play a crucial part in boosting graduation rates by creating a culture and climate "where our students – and educators –

feel welcome, supported and engaged in the learning community."

"School boards can play a pivotal role in supporting both the academic side of this equation and the climate side," Saxton said, "including creating systems to ensure credit completion, a strong focus on early literacy, and support programs for struggling learners."

Kris Howatt, who is a member of both the Gresham-Barlow School Board and OSBA's Board of Directors, said one of the biggest challenges local board members face in trying to raise graduation rates is maintaining focus and not getting distracted by the "latest and greatest" study or methodology.

"Sometimes we just have to shut off the noise and really look at the students and how we are going to help them be successful, whether that means career or college," she said. "Finishing high school alone is not enough, but what it does is open the door to go on to whatever they are going to do."

Howatt said she believes local solutions are the answer to decreasing dropout rates, rather than edicts from the state or federal government.



Gresham graduates listen to speakers during the 2014 commencement ceremony.

Gresham High's Class of 2014 gathered on the evening of June 5 at Portland's Memorial Coliseum. More than 300 strong, they counted in their midst more than 70 scholarship winners and over three dozen National Honor Society members.

But in this night of such celebrated accomplishments, for many students the most notable achievement was simply getting the diploma.



Samuel Salazar is proud of being the first person in his family to graduate from high school.

“My sophomore and junior year I didn't care about school and I'd just go when I wanted to,” said Samuel Salazar. “But my junior year I realized I had to get my act together and be the first in my family to graduate.”

Salazar said a counselor's suggestion that he enroll in a special program allowing him to recover lost credits was important in getting back on track.

“We're so happy he made it this far and we hope he keeps going,” said his dad, David Salazar.

Other graduates joined Salazar in crediting adults in their lives – usually parents, grandparents or teachers – as instrumental in their drive toward graduation.

Graduates Patricia Morgan and Samantha Folsom said talking with teachers – and sometimes overcoming disagreements with them – helped.

“My mom also helped me,” Folsom said. “She would help me email teachers and she gave me a lot of strength.”

Amid the long lines of proud parents and grandparents carting cameras and bouquets of flowers stood some students whose graduation stories are nothing short of remarkable.

Kaitlyn Franklin has undergone 30 separate surgeries since she was 2, to correct a range of maladies from

tumors to eardrum holes to spina bifida. She missed school for weeks at a time, yet graduated with a 4.0 grade-point average. She wants to be a doctor.

“Definitely my mom and grandparents helped a lot,” she said. “There were a couple of points where I didn't think I could push through, but I knew that if I wanted to be a doctor I had to get through everything.”

Vastine Niyomwungere's father was murdered in Africa. She, her eight siblings and her mother lived as refugees in Tanzania before moving to Oregon in 2008. She knew hunger and hardship in Tanzania, but not a word of English.

“The hardest thing here was when my teacher would give me homework I didn't know what to do,” she said. “I would just sit there and see what other people were doing.”

Niyomwungere is headed this fall to Western Oregon University, where she plans to study education in hopes of helping young children.



Vastine Niyomwungere's mother and siblings arrive at Memorial Coliseum for graduation ceremonies.

Carlos Cortes was stuck in gang life as a young teenager, but credits his mom with pulling him out. But on Dec. 1, 2012, she moved away to Mexico City and Cortes had to move in with two older brothers and start paying his own bills by working two jobs.

“The day she left was the day I lost my childhood,” he said. “But today I feel grateful because now I know that later on in life I'm going to be able to jump forward to a situation and handle it.”

Brianna Kjenslee said her dad has been in and out of her life since she was 4. She said her mother has battled drug issues, causing her and three younger siblings to move in with their grandparents.

“I had to learn to make dinner and do not only my homework but help my siblings with theirs,” she said. “I had to grow up and be an adult before it was time.

“I pushed myself, because I knew if I didn't my siblings might not get through what I got through. I'm trying to be a role model for them.”

Talk about a role model: Kjenslee maintained a 3.7 grade-point average and will attend Oregon State University in the fall on a Ford Family Scholarship.

In the Loop

How board members can boost graduation rates



*Betsy Miller-Jones
Executive Director*

Graduation season showcases the most visible and measurable result of the work of our public K-12 schools: high school graduation. Attending graduation ceremonies and handing out diplomas is one of the most joyous and satisfying duties of being a school board member.

Yet we have to acknowledge a significant challenge: Oregon currently graduates less than 70 percent of students within four years of entering high school. When you see a class of 26 first-graders, look more closely and try to figure out which eight won't be graduating from high school. We all know how much a high school diploma determines a student's chance for a successful and productive life.

What can we do as board members? What can your board do to increase Oregon's graduation rate so that every student graduates from high school ready for a career or further education?

We can take some lessons from other states and schools that have had success increasing their graduation rates. Some of the steps appear obvious; others require time and a change of culture.

Change, by the way, is one of those things people want, until it happens. Then they say “but that isn't the way it was done when I was....” We have to take risks, make change, do things differently to avoid repeating the past. A graduation rate of less than 70 percent is something we can't afford to continue repeating. We can't be afraid to make the change, take the risks, and give all our kids a better chance at a successful future.

The path to get there:

Step one: Build a sense of urgency in your community, among your staff members, families and students. Know your data and use it to communicate where change needs to occur and why.

Step two: Recognize that relationships and trust, with staff and students, make a difference in keeping children in school. Students, their families and teachers have to know they can trust the administrators and board; and the administration has to be able to trust the staff. All of the focus of the school, administration and board has to be on helping students become career- and college-ready; decisions on programs and budget have to focus on making that happen. The message has to be strong and clear, and actions have to clearly back up this message: “We are student-focused, we are going to graduate every student college- and career-ready and you can trust us to make decisions with that end result in mind.” Follow through. In everything you say and do, talk about how it makes a difference in getting our young people to graduation career- and college-ready.

Step three: Know that culture and message are not enough. There has to be excellent instruction based on intentional planning to meet high standards for all students. Resources – and we never have enough – need to be focused on professional development that results in instruction focused on improving achievement. Make your board decisions based on where you can get the most for your investments of people, time, and money to raise that graduation rate. What programs will increase third-grade literacy? Which interventions will get and keep ninth-graders on track to graduate? Put your resources where they will produce results. Measure and report those results. Use the achievement test data to keep the information in front of your community, staff and students, track progress and make course corrections as needed.

In short, school boards serve a pivotal role in this work. Set high standards, build the culture and deploy resources where they promise the best results. Hold the data in front of your community and celebrate successes, but don't be afraid to name the challenges and work toward overcoming them.

President's Post

Remain vigilant in these troubling times

This is a time when all of us should be celebrating the end of another school year and the accomplishments of our recent graduates. Instead, that sense of joy has been overshadowed by another senseless act of violence in our schools.



Lori Theros
OSBA President

In the 16 years since Kip Kinkel walked into Thurston High in Springfield and started shooting, hundreds of such gun-related school incidents have been recorded. As schools, people and parents, we've been shocked and sickened by the violence, yet unable as a society to reach a solution.

As long as such threats remain real and unpreventable, we have instead gotten better at responding to them. Police agencies involved in the Reynolds High response have said that active preparation and quick thinking at the school helped ensure that more students and staff were not killed or injured by the latest shooter.

OSBA has helped focus training, resources and legislative advocacy in this arena:

- At our Annual Convention last November, police and school personnel offered a workshop on "Unarmed Response to an Active Shooter" that included tips on identifying threats, protecting lives and using everyday items to fend off or subdue an assailant.
- Our member insurance pool, Property and Casualty Coverage for Education (PACE) has had John-Michael Keyes of the "I Love U Guys" Foundation speak to multiple groups on the foundation's Standard Response Protocol to school violence threats.
- The OSBA website includes tips and links on crisis response, many of which can be found here: www.osba.org/News%20Center/Announcements/Resources%20help%20schools%20respond%20and%20recover%20in%20times%20of%20crisis.aspx
- In April 2013, when the Legislature was considering a bill to establish statewide policy prohibiting carrying a gun inside a K-12 school, OSBA's legislative staff ensured that local school board members had the opportunity to testify.

That gun bill failed to pass, but the testimony itself from our members demonstrated one of our core strengths. Board members from different areas of the state had very strong and varied beliefs on the issue, but all of them emphasized to legislators that the best solutions would come by allowing local communities to set their own policies.

Let's continue to ensure that we have local control on important issues such as this one. And let's remain vigilant at all times.

PACE's new boundary invasion toolkit promotes student safety

Property and Casualty Coverage for Education (PACE) is continuing to distribute and provide guidance on the Boundary Invasion Toolkit, a new packet of materials designed to identify and prevent sexual contact and misconduct between Oregon school employees and students.

PACE plans to distribute the toolkit in two main ways.



The first will be through personal meetings with department heads within districts and individual schools throughout Oregon over the next nine months. This in-person training allows PACE to answer questions and clarify issues, conduct assessments of programs and policies already in place, and educate member districts on legal compliance and keeping kids safe. PACE will schedule these one-hour trainings with each district. In the meantime, member districts need to be prepared to report to PACE on their current boundary invasion safety programs. Members can also call 1-800-285-5461 for more information.

The second channel of distribution is on the PACE website, and member school districts are encouraged to access the toolkit there (member log-in required: pace.osba.org/Resources/Articles/MandatoryReporting/BoundaryInvasion.aspx). The toolkit is in the form of a downloadable packet, which includes sample policy, reporting forms, a FAQ list, and a comprehensive PowerPoint for educating teachers and staff.

The toolkit materials act as aids to member districts as they seek to keep premium costs down and reduce legal liability. The whole packet is designed to identify and address potential boundary invasion issues and is centered on prevention and saving money for districts up

front. As sex-related liability claims drop in number, insurance costs – and member premiums – are also reduced. Those savings can translate to dollars that districts can instead spend on improving student achievement. Most importantly, a drop in claims means that students are safer, creating a more stable learning environment in which they can flourish.

“At the end of the day, we are all about the kids,” said Scott Neufeld, PACE director of risk management. “And this shows it.”

'Summer Camp' offers Leadership Institute opportunities

Board members can earn OSBA Leadership Institute credits by attending "Summer Camp for School Boards" July 18-20 in Bend.

“Summer Camp for School Boards,” better known as OSBA's annual Summer Board Conference, will be held at the scenic Riverhouse Hotel & Convention Center in Bend. Besides the opportunity to learn more about critical issues facing Oregon's schools, the conference offers certification at the Leadership Institute's bronze, silver and gold levels.

The OSBA Leadership Institute recognizes board members who have advanced through a series of courses offered online and at workshops and conferences. Those who complete new levels are recognized at OSBA's Annual Convention in November.

“Summer Camp” keynote speakers include Nancy Golden, Oregon's chief education officer; Ted Wheeler, state treasurer; and Rob Saxton, the state's deputy superintendent of public instruction. Workshop offerings range from board chair responsibilities to legislative updates to labor relations.

Attend the pre-conference on July 18 and you can learn more about the State School Fund from Michael Elliott, State School Fund coordinator for the Oregon Department of Education. You'll also hear how Common Core can build lasting change in schools from Catherine Nelson of the National Center for Literacy Education.

Board secretaries' workshops will also be held on July 18. Once again we will offer a networking reception for conference attendees and a guest, from 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. July 18.

For a complete agenda and to register, visit: www.osba.org/Calendar/Events/Summer_board_conference-2014.aspx

Find out more about Leadership Institute at www.osba.org/li.

