



**REPRESENTATIVE JULIE PARRISH
OREGON HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
HOUSE DISTRICT 37**

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REPRESENTATIVE JULIE PARRISH STATEMENT ON 2015 GRADUATION RATES

Parrish applauds the two-percent increase, but says we have a long way to go

Tualatin/West Linn, Oregon – Representative Julie Parrish (R-West Linn) applauded Oregon’s educators for moving the dial on graduation rates across the state by two percentage points. Rep. Parrish, whose legislative district includes West Linn-Wilsonville School District, Tigard-Tualatin School District, and Lake Oswego School District, pointed out that while there are pockets of excellence that are driving that overall percentage increase, Oregon still has school districts and high schools that are no way near the 74% statewide graduation rate average.

“As a mother of three teenagers, one in high school, I’m encouraged by today’s graduation rate numbers. It shows what can be done when we give students and their families more choices, and when we make targeted investments in programs like Career and Technology Education that keep kids engaged in their own learning.”

Rep. Parrish served on the House Committee on Education in 2011 when Oregon took major steps to increase school choice and set graduation rate goals. However, Rep. Parrish noted that while the numbers today reflect the results of better funding and policy changes, dozens of schools across Oregon do not achieve the state’s average graduation rate.

“While I’m encouraged by the increase, I’m also alarmed that we are still struggling to lift graduation rates to the statewide average for nearly every community of color in Oregon,” Rep. Parrish stated. “You can also see where the graduation rate is lower than the statewide average in many high-poverty districts. The legislature must address the issue of individual schools and districts that continue to fail these communities.” Rep. Parrish pointed out that low income students and children of color disproportionately wind up in the foster care system, juvenile justice system and in systemic, multi-generational poverty when they do not finish high school.

Rep. Parrish cited the disparities in Portland Public Schools as an example of her concern. “When kids at Lincoln High are graduating at a 92% rate, and kids across town at Roosevelt are graduating at a 61% rate, in the same district, with the same budget, and the same educational goals, you know we have a problem that cannot be ignored.” Rep. Parrish pointed to the success in other states of tools like educational savings accounts and scholarship tax credits that raising the graduation rates amongst communities of color and high-poverty kids. “Nearly 70,000 at-risk kids in Florida are accessing the school of their choice through a scholarship tax credit. Choice legislation, largely sponsored and supported by progressive Democrats in other states, is having a significant impact in breaking the graduation rate barrier for kids that otherwise might have dropped out.”

In the 2016 session, Rep. Parrish and Rep. Mike Nearman are the co-sponsors of HB 4119, a bill to lift the sunsets on Oregon’s Open Enrollment law and Multiple Authorizers for Charter Schools law, both of which were part of the 2011 education package.

“What we’ve seen with the education package from 2011 is that some concepts worked well, some are still in process, and some we’ve already had to end. Thousands of families are using Open Enrollment across Oregon with great success.” Rep. Parrish went on to explain that while no university or community college has yet exercised the option to sponsor a charter school, having that as an option has made it easier for charter school petitioners to work with school districts to start or renew charter schools.

“It would be a shame if Oregon took a step backwards and reduced choices given today’s news that Oregon’s graduation rates are inching up in the right direction. More choices, with targeted funding to high-impact programs, will continue to positively impact Oregon’s graduation rates.”

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