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# 12,000 Oregon students fail reading test they must pass to graduate

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By **Betsy Hammond, The Oregonian**  
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Educators say the desire to earn a high school diploma was a powerful motivator when sophomores took the state reading test this spring. A record high 71 percent passed.

This year, knowing their diplomas depend on it, Oregon high school sophomores made

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unprecedented gains in reading, with a record 71 percent of students passing the state reading exam.

Still, 12,000 Oregon students will begin their junior year next week at risk of failing to graduate.

They must pass the state reading test or its equivalent by senior year to get a diploma.

Students who reach the halfway point of high school unable to read well probably will require extra reading classes and instruction targeted to their skill level if they are to improve enough to earn a diploma, said Julie Anderson, Oregon's reading and writing specialist.

Staff in the office of **Oregon schools Superintendent Susan Castillo** are phoning every district's superintendent this week to alert them how many of their students have yet to pass and the importance of helping them do so, said communications director Susanne Smith.

"It's full-court press," she said. "It's definitely on the top of our list, getting these folks to focus on it."

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**Statewide results on Oregon's achievement tests in reading, writing, math and science**, released Monday, show that students made modest progress in most subjects and grade levels

during the past school year.

Improvement was widespread in math, with scores inching up to record levels in every grade tested. Educators credit the new **statewide effort to teach a few math topics in depth at each grade level rather than trying to cover the mathematical waterfront**

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each year.

Nowhere, however, was the change more dramatic than on the sophomore reading test.

The passing rate had remained stuck at about 65 percent for years. This year it shot up to 71 percent -- mainly because students tried harder knowing their diploma was at stake.

"We do think motivation is behind this," Anderson said.

Test yourself: You can [take a sample version of the 10th-grade reading test here](#).

The state Board of Education voted more than two years ago to add Oregon to the list of 27 states that require students to pass a standardized test to get a diploma. The class of 2012, which enters its junior year this fall, is the first to face the requirement, and only in reading.

The class of 2013 will also have to pass the state writing test, and the class of 2014 the math test, too -- requirements expected to be much more daunting than the reading test.

Still, the reading requirement seemed to have sneaked up on some high schools, including [Aloha](#), [Wilsonville](#), [Century](#) and [Beaverton](#), where passing rates were lower than at schools with similar or higher poverty levels. At Wilsonville, for example, just 72 percent of 10th-graders passed, leaving 70 students in the class of 2012 needing to improve reading to earn diplomas.

Students can retake the [computerized reading test](#) up to three times in their junior year and three more times as seniors. They also have an option to demonstrate mastery by reading passages, answering questions and writing an analysis at the same level required on the multiple-choice test.

As is typical with test scores, this year's reading results tended to track schools' socioeconomic makeup.

West Linn, Lakeridge and Lake Oswego high schools, which primarily serve children of college-educated parents and where about one-tenth of students are low-income, had the best passing rates of big metro-area high schools. Roosevelt, Jefferson, Madison and David Douglas, all high-poverty high schools inside Portland city limits, had the worst.

But there were notable exceptions: [Oregon City High](#) -- where one-third of students are low-income -- got 88 percent of its sophomores to pass, tying Lake Oswego and beating Lincoln. [Forest Grove High](#), where 54 percent of students are low-income and half are Latino, got 80 percent of its students to meet state reading standards.

Similarly, Roosevelt's rock-bottom results -- just 40 percent of sophomores passed the test -- were eclipsed by the 61 percent passing rate at Woodburn High, even though that high school's enrollment is also about 80 percent low-income and is more predominantly Latino than Roosevelt.

You can use a new ranking feature on [The Oregonian's online schools guide](#) to find the best and worst passing rates on state tests in all subjects and grade levels. (Scroll down to the bottom of the page where it says "Test Scores -- See the top -- or bottom -- 150 schools.") This for instance [shows the top schools when it came to 10th grade math](#).

### Best and worst metro passing rates

Shown are the highest and lowest rates at which sophomores passed the state reading exam in metro-area high schools\*

#### Best rates

*school* *% who passed; no. who haven't*

<b>West Linn</b>	93%; 26 students
<b>Lakeridge</b>	90%; 26 students
<b>Lake Oswego</b>	88%; 36 students
<b>Oregon City</b>	88%; 60 students
<b>Lincoln</b>	86%; 44 students
<b>Wilson</b>	86%; 46 students
<b>Tualatin</b>	85%; 67 students
<b>Clackamas</b>	83%; 93 students
<b>Sherwood</b>	83%; 54 students
<b>Colton</b>	83%; 10 students
<b>Southridge</b>	82%; 91 students
<b>Sunset</b>	82%; 85 students
<b>Barlow</b>	81%; 88 students
<b>Tigard</b>	80%; 95 students
<b>Forest Grove</b>	80%; 87 students

#### Worst rates






*school* *% who passed; no. who haven't*

<b>Roosevelt</b>	40%; 90 students
<b>Jefferson</b>	45%; 53 students
<b>Madison</b>	51%; 87 students
<b>David Douglas</b>	57%; 315 students
<b>Benson</b>	59%; 103 students
<b>Milwaukie</b>	61%; 109 students
<b>Marshall</b>	62%; 59 students
<b>Aloha</b>	65%; 168 students
<b>Reynolds</b>	65%; 224 students
<b>Estacada</b>	68%; 57 students
<b>Parkrose</b>	71%; 70 students
<b>Wilsonville</b>	72%; 69 students
<b>Century</b>	73%; 103 students
<b>Beaverton</b>	74%; 104 students
<b>Hillsboro</b>	74%; 95 students


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The exceptional results at Oregon City and Forest Grove have similar explanations -- not surprising, since Oregon City educators emulated

\* Excludes magnet schools, alternative schools and schools with fewer than 50 sophomores  
Source: Analysis of Oregon Department of Education statistics by The Oregonian

many of Forest Grove's techniques.

Both "double dose" students who aren't up to grade level in reading, requiring them to take a second, intensive reading class in addition to their regular language arts class. They also make those reading catch-up classes part of a larger strategy.

At Forest Grove, there is a push to develop the English skills of native Spanish speakers and for all teachers to meet together frequently to plumb results and adjust techniques.

In Oregon City, the district decided to require students to pass the reading, writing and math tests to get a diploma starting with the class of 2010. Word filtered down from last year's seniors that the requirements were real.

"As a result," says literacy coach Kathy Haynie, "we have seen huge buy-in from teachers and students to include literacy and math skills in all classes." She predicts that, apart from students whose disabilities qualify them for a special education diploma, every single Oregon City High student will be able to show they read at grade level by 2012 and thereby qualify for a diploma.

-- **Betsy Hammond**








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 **Lost in Liberal Land** August 30, 2010 at 9:55PM [Follow](#)


"Staff in the office of Oregon schools Superintendent Susan Castillo are phoning every district's superintendent this week to alert them how many of their students have yet to pass and the importance of helping them do so, said communications director Susanne Smith. "


Well thank God they're calling the superintendents! I'm sure without that courtesy phone call the superintendents would have no clue how mane of their students passed. Why would they bother paying attention to their students performance, after all? And they definitely need to be told how important it is for them to pass it. Because I'm sure the superintendents don't realize that they need to pass to graduate. I feel much better knowing that these phone calls are being made.


And keep in mind that many of these students were probably close to passing and they have two more years to get there. Leave it to the O to make it sound like the sky is

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falling.

[Reply](#) [Post new](#)[Inappropriate?](#) [Alert us.](#)**Seriously?** August 31, 2010 at 10:50AM[Follow](#)

Spell check bro, especially when being so critical in response to an article on literacy.

[Reply](#) [Post new](#)[Inappropriate?](#) [Alert us.](#)**Jim\_McCarthy\_959** September 02, 2010 at 7:30PM[Follow](#)

Yeah, use the damn spell checker--especially because you can use it on your writing exams! Don't believe me? Read this! Oregon students will be able to use spell check to pass state writing test  
[http://www.oregonlive.com/education/index.ssf/2010/09/oregon\\_students\\_will\\_be\\_at](http://www.oregonlive.com/education/index.ssf/2010/09/oregon_students_will_be_at)

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only 40% passed at Roosevelt? clearly the test must be racist.

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so, castillo is calling all the supers.

what leadership.... NOT.

how about showing a little leadership and leading the supers? clearly a lot of the supers have no idea how to lead their schools to better scores so castillo needs to step in and lead them in turn. she proposes to do this by, what, calling them up and informing them how many students didn't pass?

[Reply](#) [Post new](#)[Inappropriate?](#) [Alert us.](#)**baddogcarl** August 30, 2010 at 11:10PM[Follow](#)

It is simply inaccurate to claim that students must pass the state reading assessment in order to graduate from high school. There are alternatives for those who are unable to do so.

[Reply](#) [Post new](#)[Inappropriate?](#) [Alert us.](#)**jdmd8910** August 31, 2010 at 1:10AM[Follow](#)

Seldom is the question asked, is our children learning.

[Reply](#) [Post new](#)[Inappropriate?](#) [Alert us.](#)**MooseKnuckle72** August 31, 2010 at 9:49AM[Follow](#)

Me fail english??? That's impossible!

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The effort to pass as many students as possible is using the wrong test. The state should use the GED as the end goal and remove students as they pass that test. This would leave the teachers with the students that need the help.

[Reply](#) [Post new](#)[Inappropriate?](#) [Alert us.](#)**drbonsky** August 31, 2010 at 5:19AM[Follow](#)

It shouldn't be a surprise that most of the schools in the "worst" category are now largely latino. I went to Parkrose HS many years ago, and it was an excellent school in an excellent neighborhood back then. Obviously, nothing stays the same forever, but it is particularly tragic to watch your alma mater slip into utter despair. I admit, back then it was at least 90% white and the other 10% was black, reflecting the neighborhood. Now it is largely immigrant, with a large portion of both Asian, latino immigrants. Gangs and graffiti are commonplace. Learning is simply not important to a large percentage of these kids. I see that other schools in our league such as Reynolds, David Douglas have taken the same unfortunate route. And the best performers on the list are the Whitest.

It is even more surprising to see that schools such as Aloha and Beaverton are now under-performing schools. These high schools had HUGE budgets and were regarded as a couple of leaders when I was in high school.

[Reply](#) [Post new](#)[Inappropriate?](#) [Alert us.](#)**ordub** August 31, 2010 at 6:30AM[Follow](#)

Off in the distance, I can hear 12,000 voices all practicing...."you want fries with that?".

[Reply](#) [Post new](#)[Inappropriate?](#) [Alert us.](#)**exiled1** August 31, 2010 at 11:25AM[Follow](#)

No you don't.

You hear 12K voices saying, "Hi, I am here to sign up for Oregon Trail and the Oregon Health Plan. Yes, I have four kids."

[Reply](#) [Post new](#)[Inappropriate?](#) [Alert us.](#)**Jordy88** August 31, 2010 at 6:36AM[Follow](#)

It's a shame those 12,000 are not reading right now. Pick up a book, people. Make some EFFORT on YOUR OWN to improve and practice. Pretend it's video games or text messaging. Spend half the time reading you spend doing those other things. You can't rely simply on school -- YOU MUST TRY.

[Reply](#) [Post new](#)[Inappropriate?](#) [Alert us.](#)**riplips** August 31, 2010 at 7:26AM[Follow](#)

Drbonsky,  
Without commenting on your appalling racist rant, oops I guess I just did, your second paragraph doesn't fit your profile. I thought you were a no tax kind of guy and money wasn't the answer for schools. Yet, you admit when Aloha and Beaverton had huge budgets they were a couple of leaders. Maybe they lost their edge when measure 5 took away the local financial control of schools and spread the money throughout the state. Or do you just think there are less whites there now, shoot there I go again.

[Reply](#) [Post new](#)[Inappropriate?](#) [Alert us.](#)**JaneJ** August 31, 2010 at 8:04AM[Follow](#)

Based on my experience, I feel high schools are doing too little to let families and students know about this requirement, let alone to help students with poor reading skills to improve enough to pass the test -- including the test of life.

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