

fact

Family and Community Together



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empowering Oregon families experiencing disability

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Committee Chair Gelser, Committee members,

My name is Roberta Dunn and I am the executive director of Family and Community Together, FACT, funded by the US Department of Education to serve as Oregon's Parent Training and Information center (PTI). On behalf of Oregon families raising a child experiencing disability, we are excited to support efforts to close the achievement gap of students receiving special education services. Efforts in this area will ultimately have results across all achievement gap sub groups in that the sub group of special education is inclusive and representative of all the diversity in our communities.

It is critically important that we challenge the prevalent perception of students receiving special education. The sub group of students experiencing disability is often perceived to be a homogeneous subgroup of students experiencing intellectual disability and those with significant challenges. The reality is that only 5% of Oregon students receiving special education do so with a intellectual disability eligibility. If we add student's eligible with low incident disabilities and those with Autism you are only at 18%. Contrary to this perception, the vast majority of students receiving special education do so with eligibilities of specific learning disability, communication, and other health impaired, which tend to include many students with ADD/ADHD. These students should be graduates receiving standard diplomas!

Increased expectation of students experiencing disability is a critical first step to achieving 40-40-20 goals in diploma acquisition. Families and students must hear, in word and deed, that districts are going to see that the student pursue the most rigorous diploma available and the school is going to identify and implement the supports necessary for success. One example of this would be increased use of differentiated instruction that supports students access of curriculum in the learning style that works for them instead of the "my way or the highway" presentation of curriculum that often leaves students behind. Exploring how we provide supports in one content area without causing the student to miss valuable content in another area is also going to be important. It doesn't work to "rob Peter to pay Paul," by pulling a student out of science to work on reading; curriculum is missed and the student begins to fall behind in another content area.

Students experiencing more significant disability, including those with intellectual disability, also need to reach for the most rigorous of diploma options and districts must ensure access to general education classes with appropriate supports so necessary credits can be obtained. Increased diploma acquisition in this group is reasonable and should be expected and the 40-40-20 measures of completer's should reflect this. Districts should seize the opportunity to increase completer measure outcomes with adoption of practices that support pursuit of a diploma for all students, acknowledging that only a very small percent of students, the most significantly involved, receive a certificate of attendance, and therefore not count as a completer.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you and please let me know if I can provide any additional information or answer any questions.

Roberta Dunn, Executive Director
Family and Community Together, FACT

A family leadership organization for individuals and their families experiencing disability, working collaboratively to facilitate positive change in policies, systems and attitudes, through family support, advocacy and partnerships.