



Statement from Brandy Osborn, Head of School for Oregon Virtual Academy, on virtual schools

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Oregon Virtual Schools are a critical choice option for students and families. They serve students in a manner that suits their individual needs; academically and socially. The brick and mortar only option for students is no longer a best fit for all students; which is evident with the growing number of students attending virtual schools. The option and choice provided allows students to learn at a graduated pace with direct instruction from highly qualified teachers.

Oregon follows the federal government's four-year and five-year cohort graduation calculation. Using this model to measure graduation rates for online schools is woefully unreliable. The graduation rate is designed for traditional schools, not online schools, even though these schools are successfully helping students, including under-credit transfer students and drop-outs, earn the required credits to achieve high school diplomas. Under the federal calculation, students who took more than four years to graduate, negatively impacts the school's rating. Oregon's population of students has changed and their need for options has grown with it. The focus should be on [measuring individual student progress toward graduation.](#)

The Oregon graduation rate assumes that students remain in the same school upon entering high school since most students are zoned into their local school district. That is not true for online schools. Online schools are schools of choice and, for many families, the only public school option available to them. They serve a high percentage of high school transfer students who enter behind in credits and not on track to graduate in four years. Under the Oregon calculation, serving these under-credited transfer students and late start students immediately and negatively impacts a school's graduation rate.

A study on Oregon's virtual schools is not a recommendation that is supported by virtual educators as it is evident that students grow academically within this environment. There is strong data to support the need and it is more important to [focus on policy](#) and change regulations surrounding online schools in Oregon to report out accurate data.

[Research shows](#) that **35% of students who transferred to online schools in grades 10, 11, or 12 were behind in credits at the time of enrollment. The numbers are even higher at Oregon Virtual Academy (ORVA). Currently:**

- **Over 53 percent of 12th grade students entering ORVA are behind in credits**
 - **Over 18 percent are one semester behind**
 - **Over 15 percent are four plus semesters behind**
- **Over 57 percent of new 11th grade students entering ORVA are behind in credits**
 - **Over 21 percent are one semester behind**
 - **Over 12 percent are four plus semesters behind**



A closer look at the data shows that ORVA is successfully graduating students when they come to us during their high school career with a high percentage of late start students:

- **95 percent of the students who were on track to graduate in 2015 graduated.**
 - **ORVA's State Report Card reflects**
 - **30 percent for 4 year cohort students**
 - **23 percent for 5 year cohort**
- **86 percent not on track to graduate returned to complete their graduation requirements in the 2015-2016 school year.**

- **12th Grade – 46 percent of students are new to ORVA this year**
- **11th Grade – 42 percent of students are new to ORVA this year**

The federal government's graduation rate measure is misleading for virtual schools. [Experts and researchers](#) in the field of online learning have recommended reforming graduation rate calculations for online schools. Graduation rates should measure student progress toward graduation for the *actual time* the student is enrolled, rather than relying on a four-year cohort designed for traditional schools.

Oregon's virtual schools serve as a needed option for many students. Our structure allows us to meet the needs of student populations that brick and mortar schools have difficulty serving. These may be caused by student life style, or student with specific educational needs. ORVA has demonstrated a high degree of success in personalizing educational experiences. We are proud to serve students that have encountered barriers in participating in traditional schools, and facilitating them reaching their educational goals. The focus should be on measuring accountability accurately for the online school environment.

Oregon Virtual Academy has been a fixture in Oregon's public education system for almost a decade. The school has been in good standing with the state and has a consistent record of quality, compliance, and high accountability. Our team of teachers and school leaders are committed to serving the needs of all students regardless of their academic needs and despite how it may impact our graduation rate.