



IMAGINE THE FUTURE

Imagine a Multnomah County that is a thriving cultural and economic center. Imagine a Multnomah County where the quality of life is so healthy that others around the region and world aspire to replicate it. Imagine a Multnomah County that is a leading global competitor that attracts and retains outstanding businesses providing workers with higher income, and greater employment security. Imagine a community with more stable families and better health and longevity. Imagine a Multnomah County where individuals and families have greater potential than today to thrive and contribute to their families and to the community.

Imagine a Multnomah County in which 100% of students graduate from high school and where all go on to post-secondary education, career training or jobs that pay a living wage. Imagine that over 80% of the population has completed at least two years of post-secondary education and that businesses relocate to Multnomah County because of the well-educated workforce and because of the high quality education system.

The Leaders Roundtable believes this vision is possible if students in Multnomah County are given an expanded range of options and opportunities that support greater educational attainment. Much more can and should be done both for those who are struggling to stay on the path to educational attainment and for those who are able and eager to travel that path farther and faster while still in high school. In all cases, students should be better prepared for education after high school, whatever form that takes, and for the skills and responsibilities demanded by work and civic life.

Today, unfortunately, far too many of our students fail to finish high school, and a disproportionate number of these students come from communities of color and poverty. Even among those who do graduate, too many underachieve and are not sufficiently prepared for and connected to education and work opportunities beyond high school. Although some of these youth find their way to a productive path, they do so inefficiently, and thus at a higher cost to them personally and to the community in general.

PURPOSE

Before us lies an opportunity to create an extraordinary 21st Century community; one that is an outstanding place to live and raise a family; one with a workforce that would attract the new industries of the knowledge economy; one that would increase job opportunities and the quality of

The Leaders Roundtable was founded by community leaders from business, education, government, and human services to focus on common goals that contribute substantially to the health and viability of our communities and our children. Our goal is to ensure that 100 percent of our children complete school with the skills to enter employment and/or access post-secondary education. Achievement of this goal is critical to the health, safety and self-sufficiency of our children and families.

life across Multnomah County. The path to this end requires that we do something we have not done before and that carries with it a moral imperative given the implications for individuals and our communities should we fail: We must educate ALL Multnomah County students to high levels.

Educating all students to high levels is possible. But to accomplish that goal, we must transform the way students are educated—particularly in the high school years—and the way students are supported in their education by the community.

The purpose of the paper is to begin the process of engaging our community in a conversation about whether there is a shared belief in the need for such a transformational change in education and the community's role in supporting that process. The purpose is also to initiate a conversation about what it will take for the transformation to occur.

WE BELIEVE . . .

The Leaders Roundtable believes that we cannot afford to waste the potential or impede the progress of a single student in our midst – for the sake of that person and for the greater community. Students should be encouraged and challenged to comprehend and pursue their full potential as rapidly as they choose. And they should have a broad array of support in that quest. *All students must graduate from high school ready for postsecondary study and skills to enter employment.*

If individuals and the community are to reach their potential, there needs to be a transformation in the way learning occurs in the schools that serve our students, particularly in the high school years. We want to engage in dialogue with you about whether this is a belief that we share in common, and what the changes are that are needed to achieve the vision. While the Roundtable will be a catalyst for this discussion, the actions must be the product of the stakeholders, citizens, and institutions responsible, finally, for adopting and implementing improvements.

The conversation is vital. Consider the following:

- In Oregon only 69 out of 100 9th graders complete high school within four years. This places Oregon 35th among the states and compares to a rate of 90 percent for the best performing state, New Jersey.
- Oregon ranks 40th among states in the number of high school graduates going directly to college (33%) and 44th among states in the percentage of college students continuing into their sophomore year.
- Only 15 of 100 9th graders ultimately complete a college degree. This rate is below the national rate of 18 percent and well below the best performing state, Massachusetts, which has a college completion rate of 29 percent. (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education 2004 report).

OPPORTUNITIES

In the past teachers prepared most students for jobs that were well established and often required only basic knowledge and skills. Today, we must prepare students for jobs in a technological and global world that will require everyone to be more highly skilled. They will have jobs that do not yet exist. They will be asked to solve problems we cannot now imagine. High wage jobs in this century will be based upon the skills, knowledge, and ability of individuals to adapt to/learn new skills and knowledge. Workers will likely have many employers and even more than one career, requiring constant education and retooling. Citizens will need to be more involved in and exercise greater scrutiny over decisions involving the future of city, state, and nation.

Education will play a vital role in helping students acquire the skills and knowledge they will need to be successful in the 21st century. Advances in what is known about student learning (research) make it possible to educate more people in more meaningful and effective ways, though much of that research is far from being fully implemented on a broad scale today. Means of using technology and the vast resources of the internet make information on nearly any topic easily accessible from our homes and offices as well as our libraries. Therefore it less necessary or useful for teachers to teach “facts,” and they are more free to help students engage in meaningful problem-solving activities that engage them in higher-level thinking skills of analysis, evaluation, and creation of information.

The new global economic forces create greater competition for our businesses, but they also create huge new markets for our services and products. The population of the United States is growing increasingly diverse and while this poses immediate challenges such as delivery of bilingual education, it offers far greater opportunities as we educate a population with bilingual and multicultural backgrounds which are increasingly valuable if not necessary in a global economy.

The baby boom generation is approaching retirement age and we will need many well-educated young people to replace them. Thus, the job opportunities for those prepared will be great. How must such opportunities affect the role of public education, particularly high schools? The following table suggests where we have been and where we are headed:

	WHERE WE HAVE BEEN	WHERE WE ARE GOING
Mission of Public Education	Prepare the brightest for college to train for leadership, management, and the professions; prepare the rest to go directly into the work force and to be good citizens.	Assume <i>everyone</i> is and should be bound for postsecondary education of some kind; prepare <i>everyone</i> for the more demanding skill requirements of postsecondary education, work, and citizenship.
Role of Assessment	Sort the best from the rest.	Use assessment to improve instruction and to ensure that everyone meets high standards and reaches his/her potential.
Structure and Nature of Schools	Schools are self-contained education factories in a management hierarchy modeled on mass production business.	Schools become a base for more flexible learning experiences where students can assume more initiative, work in teams, and learn in community settings, online venues, and other education institutions as well as in their school of record.
Curriculum	Disciplines are independent of one another and content is not always consistent with standards or what is necessary for postsecondary success.	Content is consistent with standards. Rigor and relevance are driving criteria. Disciplines are more frequently integrated through applied learning. Content is keyed to what students need for postsecondary studies and job success.
Student Outcomes	Students accumulate graded units of instruction to graduate through “seat time,” regardless of grades or skill levels acquired, and a standard diploma is regarded as the end point of the high school	Students are assessed to assure that they have acquired high standards of knowledge and skills defined by minimum state diploma requirements (skill in reading, writing, math, presentations, use of technology, and a variety of work-related capabilities).

	WHERE WE HAVE BEEN	WHERE WE ARE GOING
	experience. Students who are capable of doing more and advancing while still in high school are not always challenged and the senior year is often wasted as students coast to graduation	Students with an interest in advanced certification and credits (AP, IB, college credits) are supported in advancing as far as they are able.
Role of Teachers	Teachers are content experts who dispense knowledge about subject matter.	Teachers are content experts, mentors, resources, partners in shaping the school experience and utilizing community resource providers.
Role of Students	Students listen, recite correct answer, achieve on tests.	Students envision and share in planning their educational path, they are vested in their own progress, they learn in a wide variety of ways through a wide variety of focused activities that include they develop both individual and group skills.
Role of Community	The community depends on schools to take full responsibility for educating students with parent support	The community supports what schools cannot do and provides significantly greater opportunities to address student's needs outside of the school setting. The community asks questions about the quality of the students' school experience.

PRINCIPLES THAT APPLY TO THIS EFFORT

The Leaders Roundtable proposes to advocate actively to achieve several particular objectives that will improve the options, opportunities, and success of Multnomah County students in and through the public schools. The principles that apply to this effort are:

- Preparing all students for college, work, and citizenship is increasingly important for young people and the nation to be competitive in the global economy.
- Rigor, relevance, relationships, and high expectations are the cornerstones for personal and academic excellence for all students.
- Raising academic standards alone is insufficient – learning must be personalized to meet student's needs, and students must be given support to succeed.
- The community has important roles in improving and supporting students' academic success.
- Meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population requires being responsive to the cultural, social and economic needs of all students and their families.
- Research based best practices for teaching and learning must be integrated and aligned with high school standards, curriculum, instruction and assessment, and these must be aligned with postsecondary standards for student success.

COMPELLING FACTORS THAT FAVOR TRANSFORMATION

- Good progress is being made leading up to high school. In September, 2007 [update with 2008 data], the Oregon Department of Education released assessment results indicating that students in grades six, seven and eight posted improved scores on reading, writing and math, with strong gains in reading in particular. For 10th graders, by contrast, passing rates were flat for a third straight year, and just slightly more than half were performing at grade level in writing and math.
- Nationally and locally, employers, postsecondary educators, and concerned public officials are calling for improvement in secondary education. This is evident in a range of quarters: the Small High Schools initiative of the Gates Foundation, the American Diploma Project, the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, Oregon's new high school graduation standards, and focus group observations of Oregon employers about the job readiness of Oregon's high school and college graduates.
- The Portland region is blessed with cutting-edge programs and best practices to build on.
- About 20 percent of Oregon's high school students are in Multnomah County. Successes achieved here have an impact on the quality and output of secondary education statewide.

EXAMPLES OF KEY QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

- Who are the stakeholders and how do we ensure their input?
- What county-wide measures are needed to address the problems perceived?
- How can employers and educators partner more effectively in expanding education pathways and taking the best programs and practices to larger scale?
- What barriers stand in the way of these measures?
- What changes and commitments would individual organizations need to make as a part of a larger improvement agenda?
- How do we define success?
- How will we measure success adequately and frequently enough to create progress?
- What are the costs associated with the proposed changes? What are the costs associated with making no changes?
- How do we cover the costs associated with the proposed changes?
- What can other stakeholders do to become partners in achieving this agenda?
- How do we maximize opportunities throughout the community for educating young people?

We look forward to engaging with you in this important conversation.

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