

FOR MORE INFORMATION

✉ [info@r16cc.org](mailto:info@r16cc.org)

🌐 [r16cc.org](http://r16cc.org)



REGION 16  
Alaska  
Oregon  
Washington

Region 16 Comprehensive Center

# THE OREGON STUDENT SUCCESS PLANS: CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR STUDENTS TO THRIVE

**Project Brief**



## Introduction | Modeling the Spaces We Want to Create for Our Students



*Remember, it's not just us.*

*It's the stars.*

*People have looked up at the stars long before us and learned to navigate their lives.*

*We are sitting in the same spot... and long after we are gone, it will be somebody else.*

**Atan Winkelman (Yup'ik)**

Region 16 Washington Project Manager Chrissy Dulik Dalos (Makah) shared this reading at the Region 16 All Stewards Convening in Tacoma, Washington, the ancestral lands of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians. Fifty Region 16 stewards, comprising the Region 16 Advisory Board Program, Community of Stewards, staff, Principals, and champions from throughout the three-state region, sat together, their chairs creating a circle facing the center.

As the group ruminated on the idea of navigating by the stars, many began to see educational transformation as spatial. One Region 16 Steward, a leader from Oregon's state education agency (SEA), shared that the education system has become like a maze, creating misleading paths where students get lost.



*Mazes aren't necessarily natural; they're designed with a particular outcome in mind. In the same way, educational systems are designed with a particular outcome in mind. The question is, who is designing? And what are the outcomes intended for folks who have navigated this particular system?*

**SEA Leader**

The metaphor of a maze can be useful in describing how students get lost in the education system. A maze is rigid and linear; there is only one path that leads to the center; the walls of the maze prevent the navigators from seeing where they're supposed to

go, creating false paths that lead to dead ends. “It also assumes that everyone is starting and finishing at the same place,” shared the Oregon SEA leader.

In opposition to the maze is a concept that an Oregon ESD leader shared: *difrasismo* (Rhem, 2009), an Aztec concept for the powerful space in between. Such a liminal space, where there is no singular path forward or single vision of success, would allow students — as well as educators and educational leaders — to bring their **whole, authentic selves** (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020) to learning spaces. Within a space of *difrasismo*, students could experience the freedom of navigating by the stars, forming their own, unique constellations — and even dismantling the notion that there is one center or endpoint to strive for.



Participants complete a theme-mapping activity at the All Stewards Convening.

In many ways, the All Stewards Convening reminded participants that such a space is possible. In post-event reflections, participants noted how the space created at the convening was “non-hierarchical,” “not like any professional learning or conference [I] had been to before,” and “created space for the room to breathe.” It’s important that not only students, but also those



Artifacts from a theme-mapping activity at Region 16’s All Stewards Convening Jan. 11, 2024.

charged with championing educational equity, feel invited to bring their whole, authentic selves to their work.



*I felt invited to come with joy and with curiosity into that space [...] And I think that we can extend that kind of invitation in our equity work and make people comfortable being in that space of non-closure [...] I loved that so much. I've used that [approach] multiple times [in my work since then].*

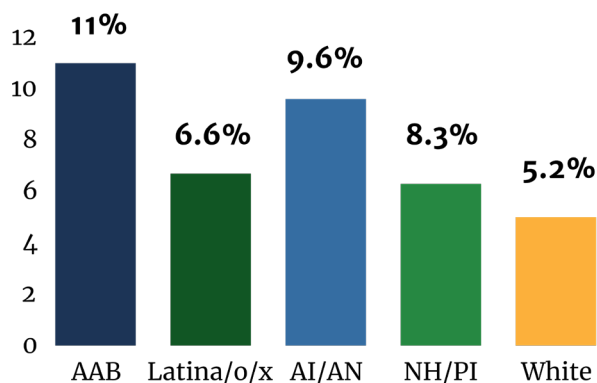
**ESD Leader**

The All Stewards Convening was emblematic of the innovative, relationship-centered approach that Region 16 brings to its projects. Our consortium model carries forward the belief that if we are to meaningfully transform and reimagine our education systems, we cannot simply replicate past models that have created inequitable educational experiences for students and those who champion them.

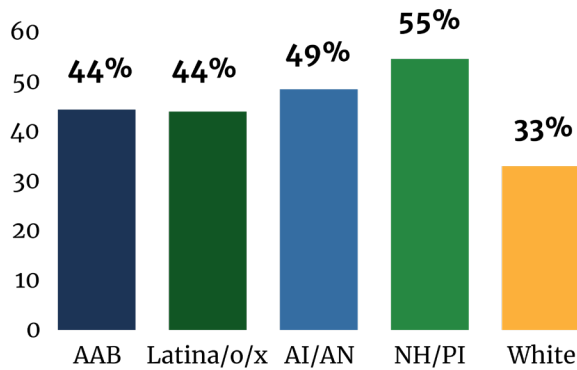
In this spirit, we approached our capacity-building support for the Oregon Department of Education's Student Success Plans, asking the critical question: **How can we dismantle the maze so all students can navigate to their unique chosen endpoint?**

## The Challenge | Oregon's Educational Landscape

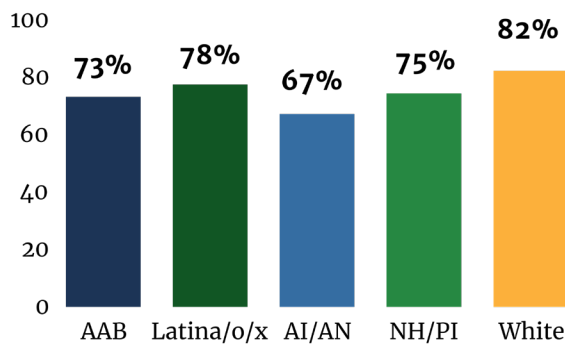
When we look at how different student groups across the country are affected by opportunity gaps, Oregon generally follows the observed national trends. Historically marginalized student groups experience **higher rates of disciplinary actions** such as suspension and expulsion (Figure 1), and thus **lower attendance and graduation rates** (Figures 2 and 3).



**Figure 1.** Percentage of Oregon students with one or more disciplinary actions by focal group (Oregon Department of Education, 2022, p. 24).

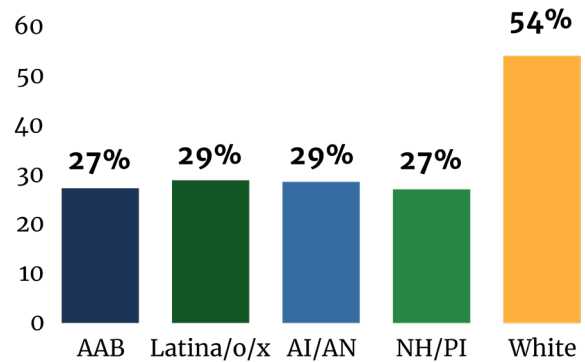


**Figure 2.** Percentage of Oregon students who are chronically absent by student focal group (Oregon Department of Education, 2022, p. 64).

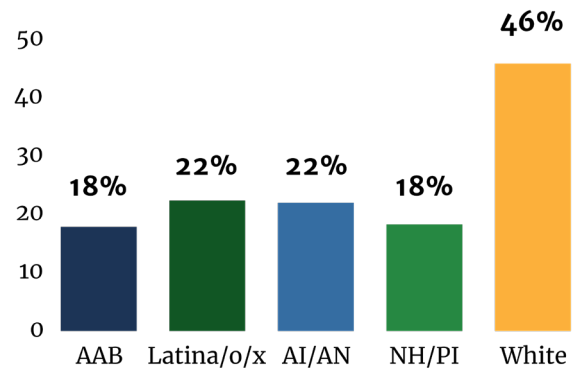


**Figure 3.** Percentage of four-year graduates, averaged between 2016, 2017, and 2018 cohorts, by focal group (Oregon Department of Education, 2022, p. 37).

By third grade, historically marginalized student groups such as Native students, Black students, Hispanic or Latino students, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students experience **less than half the English language arts and math proficiency rates** of their white peers on statewide assessments (Figures 4 and 5).



**Figure 4.** Percentage of 3rd–5th-grade students meeting the standard on state English language arts tests, 2018–2019 and 2021–2022 averaged (Oregon Department of Education, 2022, p. 43–4).



**Figure 5.** Percentage of 3rd–5th-grade students meeting the standard on state mathematics tests (2018–2019 and 2021–2022 averaged). (Oregon Department of Education, 2022, p. 43–4).



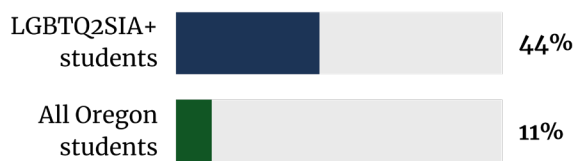
*It is predictable, based on one’s race, one’s gender, and one’s socio-economic status. If you have those three variables, you can pretty accurately predict how things are gonna play out.*

**SEA Leader**

In this way, student groups for whom the maze of the traditional education system wasn't originally designed get lost in our education system.

Alongside traditional markers of student success like grades and test scores is a growing concern for student mental health and well-being, **particularly in a post-COVID landscape** (Elias & Sharp, 2022). Research has shown that social-emotional capacity is **primary** to academic success. Studies continue to show that support for mental health and wellness is **vital to students' sense of belonging — and ultimately success — in school** (Alzahrani et al., 2019).

This is particularly true for LGBTQ2SIA+ students. A **2022 report** by the Trevor Project indicates that rates of suicidality are around four times higher among this group of students than the **general population of students in Oregon** (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** Suicide ideation rate among Oregon students (Trevor Project, 2022; Oregon Health Authority & Oregon Department of Education, 2022).



*The consistency of outcomes, to me, is part of the maze's design. It assumes we can't build a system where everyone can succeed. I think we can.*

**SEA leader**

## The Pathway

In Region 16's support of the Oregon Department of Education's (ODE) development and implementation of Student Success Plans (SSPs), we began to think about equity as spatial. The SSPs act as a map to help students navigate their way to the center of educational spaces — and even create the possibility for multiple centers or endpoints. These plans were co-developed in close collaboration with the communities surrounding six student focal groups:

- » **B/AA students**
- » **AI/AN students**
- » **Latino/a/x students**
- » **LGBTQ2sIA+ students**
- » **NHPI students**
- » **Immigrant/refugee students**

The SSPs are **one component of Region 16’s support for ODE** (Region 16 Comprehensive Center, 2024) in implementing the Department’s **Equity Strategic Plan**, or ESP (Callen et al., 2021).

The ESP embraces an inside-out theory of change, grounded in the belief that transforming educational landscapes starts with centering equity within the Department itself, where educational leaders can approach their work with **authenticity, bravery, and vulnerability** (Brown, 2018)—modeling the environments we want to create for students to thrive.



*We believe that if we create conditions where everybody who encounters our system — learners, parents, educators, families, and community partners — feels like they belong and matter, a natural outgrowth will be improved attendance, engagement, and outcomes — including those measured by traditional [metrics].*

**ESD Leader**

---

We used a multi-faceted approach to help transform the educational landscape from one that resembles the maze of the traditional education system into one where students can see their destination clearly and even forge a new, untraveled path to the center of their choosing:

### **1. Turn the maze into a labyrinth**



*I wonder what the implications of a labyrinth would mean for the educational system, where it’s a clear path, and it would lead you lovingly to the center. I think that would be a beautiful move.*

**SEA Leader**

---

While many may think that mazes and labyrinths are the same, there are important distinctions between the two. Unlike the tall, insurmountable walls of a maze, a labyrinth may be etched on the floor in stone or drawn in sand. Travelers never lose sight of their destination. Rather than a wrong turn resulting in getting

lost, misdirections create the space to breathe and re-assess.

The SSPs create these conditions by:

- » Identifying and supporting **navigational guides**, or trusted adults within each student’s community, who can help orient them in the right direction.
- » Expanding access, support, and integration of **career and technical education (CTE) programs** and **post-secondary readiness programs**, allowing students to clearly envision a destination beyond their secondary education.

## 2. Dismantle the concept of “one path for all”



*What might different centers look like, rather than a pre-determined outcome?*

**SEA Leader**

While the SSPs help students traverse a given route to success, this is only the first step to

creating a system where students can navigate by their own unique “constellations.” The SSPs recognize that there cannot be a single “center” or vision of success for students to strive for. In this way, the SSPs can help dismantle the notion of “one path for all” by providing individualized support based on students’ unique strengths, challenges, and goals, such as:

- » Factoring in **considerations beyond academic success**, such as emotional well-being.
- » Providing **academic enrichment opportunities** tailored to each student’s interests and aspirations.



*[The labyrinth is] not a perfect metaphor [...] slowly and surely, we have to dismantle and replace it with something better [by] changing the parts of the system that were never designed to serve [these student focal groups].*

**ESD Leader**



### 3. Expand how we measure success



---

*There are many ways of being successful that don't require going to your traditional, four-year liberal arts college. Our K-12 systems are slowly beginning to shift to imagine these other pathways.*

SEA Leader

---

To reimagine a system with many paths leading to many endpoints, we must diversify the methods used to measure success — or even expand the very definition of success. This includes supplementing traditional metrics such as test scores and grades, **which have been shown to carry cultural and other biases** (Shannon, 2008), with individualized measurements determined by each student's goals.

The SSPs create expanded definitions of success by:

- » Providing support for **individualized goal setting**, where students can identify

stops along the path that reach beyond traditional academic metrics, such as skill development, social-emotional competencies, and community contribution.

- » Including mechanisms for **gauging students' progress toward their individual goals**, such as regular check-ins, social-emotional health indicators, and communication with each student's support network.



---

*One of the people in my group [at the All Stewards Convening] said, 'We should tell [system leaders] that we will talk to them about reading and math scores when they're willing to talk about suicide rates among [LGBTQ2SIA+ students].'* *Creating spaces for kids to be safe is worthy work, regardless of whether that also impacts their reading and math scores. That was a powerful moment for me and gave me new language to use around my own equity work.*

ESD Leader

## 4. Make All Students Visible



---

*There are ways in which our current identification systems invisibilize Native students. So there's work that's being done... It's effectively trying center what Tribal relations are identifying as needs for students.*

SEA Leader

---

The six distinct Student Success Plans depend on the accurate identification of students within their respective communities.

For example, federal reporting requirements that **lead to the erasure of AI/AN students** have materially affected resource allocation — and thus outcomes — for Native students (Region 16 Comprehensive Center, 2023a and 2023b).

The Oregon Department of Education's Equity Strategic Plan sets the SSPs up for success by addressing this data disparity through:

- » Outreach to districts to offer guidance and trainings for **improved data collection and reporting** at the local level.

## The Results

While Region 16 is supporting ODE in preparing for full implementation of the SSPs, local contexts are already seeing results in the mindset shifts stemming from the Equity Strategic Plan.



---

*It's having this ripple effect because the air that is being breathed on a day-to-day basis allows for that [systemic change] to emerge.*

SEA Leader

---

When schools and districts recognize many pathways designed to address culture-specific goals, challenges, and strengths, new and innovative approaches to academic enrichment can **enhance the educational experience for all student groups** (Figure 7).



**Figure 7.** The average graduation rate for CTE-concentrated students versus the national average graduation rate (Peter, 2019).

*[In schools that incorporate CTE], you don't get the feeling that kids are waiting for life to begin after high school. You get the feeling that they are living life. That's one of the ways I think we can help bring down the walls of the maze.*

**ESD Leader**

By better understanding each student's unique needs as they forge their own individualized path, educators have begun to see student behavior as attempts to communicate and self-advocate, creating safer spaces not just for students but for everyone within the system.

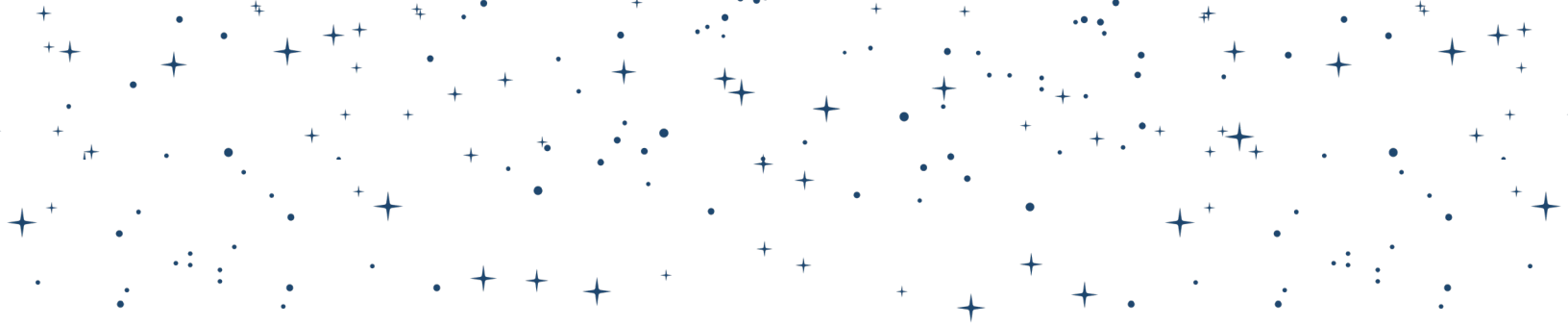


*We've seen huge decreases in exclusionary discipline practices. We have seen huge increases in not just teacher retention, but retention of all educators: bus drivers, cafeteria workers, educational assistants. In fact, in one elementary school, they had zero staff turnover last year.*

**ESD Leader**

## Our Impact

In supporting ODE's department-wide equity work with capacity-building services, Region 16 has helped clear the path for all champions of educational equity to be fully present and resourced in their work. Helping to create such an environment allows ODE to center equity within all facets of education, ensuring this enduring commitment to equity is enmeshed within the Department's DNA. ➤



*There are no fewer than ten different connection points that Region 16 Comprehensive Center has to the work with the Equity Strategic Plan. The move to create consciousness of the Student Success Plans throughout the agency would not happen without Region 16. The well-thought-out, intentional, strategic moves of the student success work have been two years in the making.*

**SEA Leader**



## References

- Alzahrani, M., Alharbi, M., & Alodwani, A. (2019). The effect of social-emotional competence on children academic achievement and behavioral development. *International Education Studies*, 12(12), 141–149. [doi.org/10.5539/ies.v12n12p141](https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v12n12p141)
- Brown, B. (2018). *Dare to lead: Brave work. Tough conversations. Whole hearts*. New York: Random House.
- Callen, A., Cheang, S., Hsiao, C.Y.A., Kotting, J., & Stoudamire-Wesley S. (2021). State of Oregon diversity, equity, and inclusion action plan: A roadmap to racial equality and belonging. Office of Governor Kate Brown. [oregon.gov/das/Docs/DEI\\_Action\\_Plan\\_2021.pdf](https://oregon.gov/das/Docs/DEI_Action_Plan_2021.pdf)
- Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B., & Osher, D. (2020). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 24(2), 97–130. [doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791](https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791)
- Elias, J., & Sharp, H. (2022). *Roughly half of public schools report that they can effectively provide mental health services to all students in need*. National Center for Education Statistics. [nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press\\_releases/05\\_31\\_2022\\_2.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/05_31_2022_2.asp)
- Oregon Department of Education. (2017). *African American/Black student success plan*. [oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/AfricanAmericanBlackStudentEducation/Pages/HB2016AdvisoryGroup15-16.aspx](https://oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/AfricanAmericanBlackStudentEducation/Pages/HB2016AdvisoryGroup15-16.aspx)
- Oregon Department of Education. (2021). *Latino/a/x and Indigenous student success plan*. [oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/Latinx/Documents/ODE\\_LatinX%20Student%20Success%20Plan\\_2021.pdf](https://oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/Latinx/Documents/ODE_LatinX%20Student%20Success%20Plan_2021.pdf)
- Oregon Department of Education. (2022a). *American Indian/Alaska Native student success plan*. [oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/NativeAmericanEducation/Documents/AIAN%20Student%20Success%20Plan%2020\\_25%20PDF.pdf](https://oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/NativeAmericanEducation/Documents/AIAN%20Student%20Success%20Plan%2020_25%20PDF.pdf)
- Oregon Department of Education. (2022b). *LGBTQ2SIA+ student success plan*. [oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/Documents/LGBTQ2SIA+%20Student%20Success%20Plan.pdf](https://oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/Documents/LGBTQ2SIA+%20Student%20Success%20Plan.pdf)
- Oregon Department of Education. (2022c). *Oregon statewide annual report card*. [oregon.gov/odhs/data/cwdata/cw-apsr-2024-att-06.pdf](https://oregon.gov/odhs/data/cwdata/cw-apsr-2024-att-06.pdf)

- Oregon Department of Education. (n.d.). Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander student success. [oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/NativeHawaiianPacificIslanderEducation/Pages/default.aspx](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/NativeHawaiianPacificIslanderEducation/Pages/default.aspx)
- Oregon Health Authority & Oregon Department of Education. (2022). *Oregon student health survey data portal*. Bach Harrison. [bach-harrison.com/SHSDDataPortal/Variables.aspx](https://bach-harrison.com/SHSDDataPortal/Variables.aspx)
- Peter, R. (2019). *Career and technical education: Targeted indicators*. Oregon Department of Education. [oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/graduationimprovement/documents/cte%20graduation%20improvement%20strategies.pdf](https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/graduationimprovement/documents/cte%20graduation%20improvement%20strategies.pdf)
- Region 16 Comprehensive Center. (2023a, August 23). *Advancing equity through data justice*. [www.r16cc.org/data-justice](https://www.r16cc.org/data-justice)
- Region 16 Comprehensive Center. (2023b, December 20). *Pursuing data justice: Developing the conditions to change practice*. [r16cc.org/our-impact/features](https://r16cc.org/our-impact/features)
- Region 16 Comprehensive Center. (2024, March 28). *Student Success Plans: Improving outcomes for all students across Oregon*. [r16cc.org/student-success-plans-improving-outcomes-for-all-students-across-oregon](https://r16cc.org/student-success-plans-improving-outcomes-for-all-students-across-oregon)
- Rhem, J. (2009). Sentipensante pedagogy. *The National Teaching & Learning Forum*, 18(2), 1–5. [laurarendon.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/tlforum.pdf](https://laurarendon.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/tlforum.pdf)
- Seger, T. (2024). *Student success plan for immigrant and refugee students approved by Oregon Senate*. Office of Senator Kayse Jama. [oregonlegislature.gov/senatedemocrats/Documents/SB%201532%20Release.pdf](https://oregonlegislature.gov/senatedemocrats/Documents/SB%201532%20Release.pdf)
- Shannon, J. (2008). *Reading results: A critical look at standardized testing and the linguistic minority* (Publication No. ED502355). [Masters thesis, Dominican University of California]. ERIC Institute of Education Sciences. [eric.ed.gov/?id=ED502355](https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED502355)
- Trevor Project. (2022). *2022 national survey on LGBTQ youth mental health: Oregon*. The Trevor Project. [thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/The-Trevor-Project-2022-National-Survey-on-LGBTQ-Youth-Mental-Health-by-State-Oregon.pdf](https://thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/The-Trevor-Project-2022-National-Survey-on-LGBTQ-Youth-Mental-Health-by-State-Oregon.pdf)

*The contents of this project brief were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal government.*