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CORRECTION: Never Lose Infinite Hope | January 2026 Education Update

1 message

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January 2026

Correction: The original version of Dr. Williams' column had an incorrect date for the State Board meeting addressing targets for accountability metrics. It will be February 19, not at the January meeting.

Oregon Achieves... Together! A Message from the Director of the Oregon Department of Education, Dr. Charlene Williams

Dear Education Community,

I hope you were all able to get some rest and relaxation over the past few weeks and are starting off the year with renewed energy as we head into 2026.

Moving Forward With Accountability

At ODE, our December was very busy! [The State Board approved the first rules stemming from the passage of Senate Bill 141](#), thus furthering this new era of educational accountability in Oregon. These rules established the metrics that will be used to see where our system is doing well and where more attention is needed. On February 19, the State Board will address the targets for those metrics and later in the year, ODE will produce guidance documents to support next steps.



Dr. Charlene Williams

SB 141 also requires regular updates from ODE to lawmakers on the progress that has been made in implementing this landmark legislation. [Our first progress report was sent to the legislature last month](#), and I encourage you to read it over to learn more about what we've done so far and what to expect down the road. And then, stay up to date by bookmarking the [Accountability page](#) on the ODE website. That's where you will always find the most up-to-date information.

Thank You, School Boards

January is School Board Appreciation Month. I want to thank each and every school board member from Oregon's 197 school districts, 19 Education Service Districts and, of course, the State Board of Education. These education advocates work tirelessly on behalf of Oregon's scholars, putting policies in place aimed at improving education outcomes. On behalf of all of us at ODE, thank you for your commitment to education, your passion for improving our schools, and your willingness to serve your communities.

Remembering the Legacy of Dr. King

Speaking of serving your community, this month also brings the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Since 1994, the commemoration of his birthday is not only a federal holiday, it is also a National Day of Service and an opportunity to teach students about hope, justice, compassion, and love. It's a time to put into action the words of Dr. King, "Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve." I hope we can remind the youth in Oregon that this is a special holiday rooted in giving and selflessness: you can check for Day of Service events in your area or make your own by helping out a neighbor or cleaning up in local areas.

2025 was rife with moments of stress, worry, uncertainty, and, for many, exhaustion and despair. Unfortunately, for countless people in our communities, 2026 has begun with a similar mix of heavy emotions. However, I would urge you to continue to believe in humanity's ability to overcome injustice and to heed Dr. King's call to action, not only in our communities, but in ourselves. I believe that in this moment, he would want to remind us that while disappointment is finite, we must "never lose infinite hope."

Here's to a 2026 filled with unbounded hope.

In Love and Justice,

Dr. Charlene Williams

Community Conversations



The Oregon Department of Education (ODE) recently held a meaningful Community Conversation with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, marking the first in a series of engagements with all nine federally recognized Tribes of Oregon. The evening was well attended, and we were grateful for the opportunity to gather with community members, educators, and partners to listen, learn, and strengthen relationships.

[More about the conversation...](#)

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Nominations are Open for the 2026-27 Oregon Teacher of the Year



The Oregon Teacher of the Year program recognizes and honors teacher excellence, with the state Teacher of the Year serving as the face and voice of exemplary educators across the state. **Candidates for Oregon Teacher of the Year are exceptionally dedicated, knowledgeable, and skilled**

licensed public school educators in grades preK-12.

Do you know a teacher who should be considered for this distinction? [Nominate them now!](#) **Nominations are open statewide through 5:00 p.m. on February 11, 2026.**

What happens after nominations close in February?

All eligible teachers* who have been nominated will be invited to submit an application. Candidates who apply will then be in the running to be selected as a Regional Teacher of the Year in one of the 19 Education Service Districts statewide. Every Regional Teacher of the Year will be awarded \$1,000 and will be celebrated across the state in September.

[More about nominating your favorite teacher...](#)

Plan for the 2026 EVE Workforce Survey!



ELEVATING VOICES IN EDUCATION
EVE Workforce Survey

Oregon's 2026 [Elevating Voices in Education \(EVE\) Workforce Survey](#) will open on Monday, February 2 and close on Tuesday, March 31.

The EVE Workforce Survey is a free, anonymous and

confidential survey designed to gather insights from the public education workforce about their workplace experiences in order to provide actionable information to the state and districts.

What is Required?

ORS 342.676 requires public education providers (districts, charter schools, ESDs, YCEP/JDEP, Oregon School for the Deaf, and long-term care or treatment facilities) **to provide**

everything that's happening in education in Oregon!

2026 Annual PIT Count

Schools play an essential role in ensuring that Oregon has accurate data on students experiencing housing instability. The annual 2026 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, which occurs the last week of January, is a critical effort to understand housing instability in our communities across the state.

Historically, children and youth have been underrepresented in our state's data, and this information is crucial to securing funding and enhancing housing services.

Find out more about the PIT Count...

ODE in the News

OPB reported on the results of the SEED survey that ODE offers to students all over the state to hear about their experiences at their schools.

The Lincoln County Leader looked at how Career Technical Education (CTE) works in Oregon.

staff with an opportunity to participate in the EVE Workforce Survey.

[More about the EVE Survey...](#)

Elevating Education-System Employee Wellness



Welcome back from break and to the first wellness column of 2026! To support education-system employee wellness, the [ODE School Wellness, Inclusion Safety](#)

[& Health Unit](#) features a monthly article in the Education Update. Creating a culture of belonging and wellness for education-system employees leads to higher levels of professional satisfaction and promotes employee retention and well-being, which creates a ripple effect that impacts student success!

Part of the landscape of employee well-being includes looking at the entire workforce continuum from recruitment through retirement (and everything in between!). This month we will pick up where we left off in [December's column](#) about Transformative Social Emotional Learning (TSEL), how it connects to adult well-being, and the intersection of TSEL and the work being done to support educator preparation programs. What was taught 5, 10, 15 years ago may or may not align with the skills and resources that are needed in 2026. To that end, we invited a colleague from the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission (TSPC) to share some thoughts and resources.

[Read the rest of the Wellness column...](#)

OPB covered the December State Board meeting where the first set of accountability rules were adopted to comply with Senate Bill 141, passed by lawmakers last year.

Student Spotlight

The Coos Bay World spotlighted a local 10th grader who came in first in his category in the K-12 National Chess Championships.

Lookout Eugene-Springfield talked with Eugene 4-J students getting hands-on learning about the life cycle of salmon.

KATU went to Findley Elementary School (Beaverton SD) to talk with students helping babies in a local intensive care unit stay warm.

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