

RON WYDEN
OREGON

RANKING MEMBER OF COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE

221 DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
(202) 224-5244

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3703

COMMITTEES:

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March 13, 2017

Betsy DeVos
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

I write today to request that you provide me with your plans to increase graduation rates at public high schools in Oregon, and across the country. In light of legislative attempts to strike down Obama Administration regulations implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act and reports of harmful federally funded private school voucher programs from the Administration, clarity about graduation rate policy is more important than ever.

Students, parents and educators who attend my town hall meetings are very committed to improving student outcomes and supporting public education. I share their priorities and am working to get more students to graduation day, ready for college or the workforce. Oregon has a low four year graduation rate of seventy five percent, which is far below expectations for student success.

Congress recently worked in a bipartisan and bicameral way to improve public school performance by passing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that gives local educators more authority to enact policies and programs that will work in their localities. Because of those efforts, I request that you remain open to the flexibility options ESSA affords to states, especially regarding state systems for assessment and accountability.

The recent legislative effort to strike down Obama Administration regulations has created confusion for states, school districts and schools that are working on implementation plans for the upcoming school year. Last week's vote disrupts their ability to efficiently implement the law. Please let me know in the next 30 days how you will support our public schools by implementing the graduation rate-improvement policies in the Every Student Succeeds Act. This includes the accountability provisions and triggers for schools that do not graduate two thirds of their students needing intervention and supports.

Under ESSA, the federal government provides young Oregonians, and our public schools, with the resources, federal funding, and flexibility they need for students to succeed. Moving limited funding away from public schools and toward unaccountable private schools that do not serve all students, or our common civic values, will ultimately harm public education.

911 NE 11TH AVENUE
SUITE 630
PORTLAND, OR 97232
(503) 326-7525

405 EAST 8TH AVE
SUITE 2020
EUGENE, OR 97401
(541) 431-0229

SAC ANNEX BUILDING
105 FIR ST
SUITE 201
LA GRANDE, OR 97850
(541) 962-7691

U.S. COURTHOUSE
310 WEST 6TH ST
ROOM 118
MEDFORD, OR 97501
(541) 858-5122

THE JAMISON BUILDING
131 NW HAWTHORNE AVE
SUITE 107
BEND, OR 97701
(541) 330-9142

707 13TH ST, SE
SUITE 285
SALEM, OR 97301
(503) 589-4555

[HTTP://WYDEN.SENATE.GOV](http://wyden.senate.gov)

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Public schools are meant to serve all students. It is my sincere hope that you will support diverse school programming, like Career and Technical Education programs that have proven to be so successful in Oregon. I also hope you recall the necessity of providing for students with disabilities an equal education as their peers and ensuring that schools are safe, inclusive places, free of bullying. Given the recent action from your department and the Justice Department that rolled back protections for transgender youth, I must also reiterate that protecting LGBTQ youth from harassment should not be optional.

Your support of all these efforts will get more students to their graduation day – a goal that all of us should share. I would like to work with you to carry out the graduation rate provisions of ESSA, and to do so I would like you to respond to the issues raised within 30 days.

Thanks very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator