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## **Gladstone High graduation rate jumps 5 percent, rivals top schools**

As state graduation requirements have become increasingly challenging, graduation rates at Gladstone High have continued their steady rise, a 13 percent gain in just four years. In 2013, graduation rates at Gladstone High (GHS) increased to 84 percent, up 5 percent from last year, and 15 percent over Oregon's current state average of 69 percent. Including GED, alternative, adult diploma, and modified diploma students, Gladstone's five-year cohort completion rate last year was 89 percent. These achievements are notable in a district where about half of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, a common indicator of poverty.

Gladstone particularly excels in serving disadvantaged students. Last year 95 percent of Latino students graduated on time, compared with 61 percent statewide. Gladstone High graduated 86 percent of low-income students on time, compared with 60 percent statewide. In addition, 58 percent of Gladstone's Special Education students graduated in 4 years with a regular diploma, surpassing the state average of 37 percent for students with disabilities.

"We are particularly proud of this success, given the state's more rigorous graduation requirements in the past few years," said Superintendent Bob Stewart. "Today's students must pass state exams in math, reading, and writing to graduate, or demonstrate proficiency through work samples. To earn a diploma, they must also complete three years of challenging mathematics."

Gladstone High School, with a substantial number of low-income families, has graduation rates that compare favorably with more affluent communities like Riverdale, Wilson, Clackamas, and Lincoln High Schools.

One of Gladstone's strengths is a growing array of social service partnerships to increase family stability and to support students' basic needs. Another is the warmth and connectedness of the small town environment.

"As a small school, we have a personal connection with each student. It's much more difficult for them to fall through the cracks," said Vice Principal Patti Alexander. "We understand that for some kids, dropping out is sometimes an act of self-sabotage, so we are relentless in supporting our students and urging each one to meet requirements."

In this era of higher standards, Kraxberger Middle School has played a crucial role in preparing Gladstone students for the rigors of high school.

"Kraxberger has worked to focus teachers on the most effective instructional practices," explained Principal Nancy Bailey. "Teachers emphasize critical thinking skills, asking questions that push students to work at a higher level. In addition, we work with the high school to help students transition smoothly from eighth grade to high school."

At Gladstone High, monitoring student progress toward graduation begins fall term of freshman year. In order to improve graduation rates, retired GHS principal Stu Evans launched Saturday School, lab classes in reading, writing, and math, and even daily check-ins with some seniors. This year, Gladstone High continues to enhance the available supports for students.

"With grant funding, this year we expanded our Saturday School to nearly every week so students can count on dropping in to get the help and use the resources our teachers can provide," said Principal Dr. Natalie Osburn. "We are fortunate to have committed counselors that build positive, supportive relationships with students. We don't give up on anyone, and we work hard not to let them give up on themselves."

Graduation Year	GHS 4-year graduation rate	State 4-year graduation rate	GHS low-income 4-year graduation rate	State low-income 4-year graduation rate	GHS Latino 4-year graduation rate	State Latino 4-year graduation rate	GHS Special Education (regular diploma, 4-year)	State Special Education (regular diploma, 4-year)	GHS 5-year Cohort Completer Rate	State 5-year Cohort Completer Rate
2010	71%	66%	73%	60%	77%	55%	58%	42%	X	76%
2011	77%	68%	67%	61%	60%	58%	51%	42%	X	71%
2012	79%	68%	71%	61%	76%	60%	54%	38%	89%	72%
2013	84%	69%	86%	60%	95%	61%	58%	37%	89%	81%

**X** Data in this category was tabulated differently in these years, preventing an “apples to apples” comparison.

**Completer rate** includes students who within 5 years of starting high school have graduated, received a modified diploma, earned a GED, or received an adult high school diploma. The state goal is to have 100% five-year completers statewide by 2025.

How did Gladstone improve graduation rates?

• **Teaching Critical Thinking**

Starting at Kraxberger Middle School, teachers are trained in best education practices such as the use of Socratic seminars. They ask questions that require higher-level thinking, helping student develop critical and analytical thinking skills.

• **Reading, Writing, and Math Lab Classes**

Gladstone High identifies students who are struggling as early as freshman year, and provides them with extra support through lab classes in reading, writing, and math. This provides help for students who need more time or one-on-one help to master concepts.

• **Saturday School**

Using grant funding, Gladstone High provides drop-in Saturday School for any interested student. The school sends letters to the parents of students who struggle academically, inviting these students to attend.

• **Frequent Check-ins with at-risk Juniors and Seniors**

Counselors and administrators keep a close watch on juniors to keep them on-track for graduation. Senior year, they persistently check in with some students weekly -- or even daily -- encouraging them to fulfill every requirement for graduation, and finding support systems to help as needed.