**Education Heading in Right Direction, Needs to Keep Pace to Remain Globally Competitive**

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As we enter high school graduation season, we have much to celebrate. Our sons, daughters, grand children, nieces, and nephews are either pursuing post-secondary education or starting careers. However, there is one major question we must ask: are they ready? Are they ready to start college without taking remedial classes in core subjects like math and English? Are they ready to help Oregon businesses innovate and grow in today’s global economy?

These are questions that Oregon businesses consider each day as they struggle to find highly-skilled workers with the academic knowledge and deeper learning skills—critical-thinking, collaboration, and communication—that are needed to fill jobs. The number of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) jobs in Oregon are expected to grow by 19 percent between 2010 and 2020. Most of these STEM jobs (94 percent) will require post-secondary education or training by 2018 and 69 percent will require a bachelor’s degree or higher.

This shouldn’t be a problem, but it is for Oregon. Unfortunately, 32 percent of our state’s high school freshmen do not graduate within four years. Those who graduate are often not considered ready for college or the workforce. Only 31 percent of the 2013 high school graduating class taking the ACT admissions test met college readiness benchmarks in all four core subject areas tested—English, math, reading, and science.

What is the impact? Over half of recent graduates at Oregon community colleges and more than one in 10 students at four-year colleges need remedial classes. These student outcomes are not good enough for Oregon businesses to compete in the global marketplace.

However, there is good news. Oregon is heading in the right direction. The Oregon Education Investment Board—working on improving the state’s education system—set a 40-40-20 goal to ensure our young people are ready for the jobs of the future. By 2025, every Oregonian is expected to graduate from high school, 40 percent will earn a post-secondary credential, and 40 percent will graduate from college. In addition, our 2013 state legislature invested in this goal by increasing funding for innovative high school models called Career/Technical/Skills Academies that provide students with project-based, real-world learning opportunities within various career pathways like engineering and health sciences. These programs engage students who might otherwise drop out and prepare them for two-year and four-year degrees. Students in the programs have less absenteeism, higher graduation rates than non-participants, higher incomes, stable employment in the students’ chosen fields, and an increase in business productivity.But it is imperative that the Oregon legislature and local school boards continue to increase funding to scale up these proven models statewide to prepare our young people for college and careers.

These goals are laudable, but meaningless unless we continue to invest in what works for Oregon students. We must have high expectations and provide learning opportunities in and out of school to ensure our students are ready to succeed.

Then, we can truly celebrate all our students’ graduations and their futures.

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