



# Supporting Rural Students in Oregon in High School and Beyond:

A Study of College Enrollment,  
Persistence, Transfer, and  
Completion Outcomes

Report Summary

# 2 out of 3

Oregon high schools are considered rural based on this study's definition.



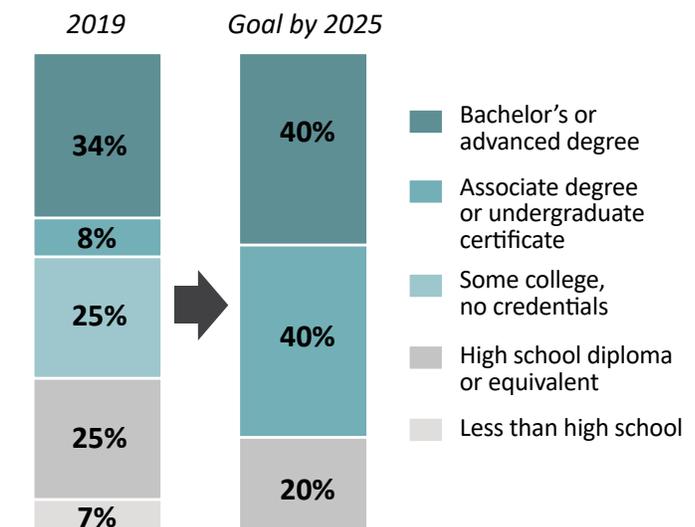
Oregon is committed to equitable access to higher education for all and has set a goal that 80 percent of all Oregonians will earn a postsecondary degree or credential by 2025. Increasing access and completion for rural students is key to reaching this goal.

Recent research commissioned by The Ford Family Foundation and carried out by Education Northwest follows on an Institute of Education Sciences-funded Regional Educational Laboratory study (REL) Northwest study (Pierson & Hanson, 2015). In the five years since this study, rural students have not gained ground in postsecondary enrollment, persistence, transfer and completion compared to nonrural students.

**In fact, the gap between rural and nonrural enrollment has increased.**

Rural students face additional barriers in pursuing and completing postsecondary education compared to nonrural students, such as limited access to accelerated learning opportunities, fewer resources available in high school, and more persistent poverty in their communities. Despite this, rural communities continue to work hard to support the success of their students in high school and beyond, and with the right resources, rural students can be equally as successful.

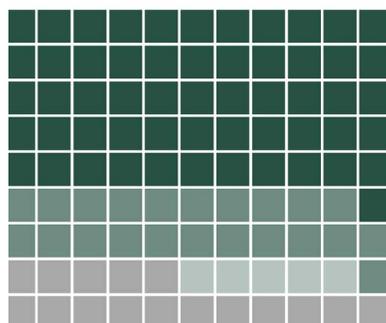
## Oregon Aims to Increase All Levels of Education by 2025



Source: American Community Survey 2019 1-year estimates for Oregon adults ages 25-34, <https://www.oregon.gov/highered/research/Pages/educational-attainment.aspx>

## Breakdown of First-Time Rural Public High School Graduates Enrolled in Oregon Postsecondary Institutions – Fall 2019

1 unit - 235 students



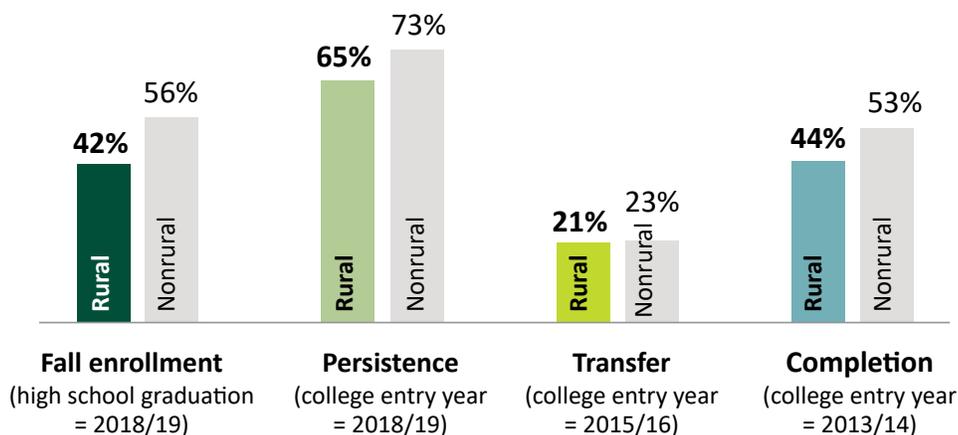
## 23,543 rural public high school graduates entered college in Fall 2019

Rural students who enrolled in...

- Oregon 2-year public (57%)
- Oregon 4-year public (22%)
- Oregon 4-year private not-for-profit (5%)
- Other colleges (for-profit and out of state) (16%)

Source: Authors' analysis of Oregon Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, and National Student Clearinghouse data.

## College enrollment, persistence, transfer, and completion rates for Oregon's rural and nonrural public high school graduates



Mathematical models suggest that gaps between rural and nonrural would shrink significantly if rural students could access equal opportunities.

### Enrollment

*refers to a high school student completing financial aid and college application processes, and attending college in the fall immediately following high school graduation.*

- ▶ In the graduating class of 2018/19, **42% of rural students enrolled immediately in college**, compared to 56% of nonrural students.
- ▶ **Community college is the pathway of choice** for the majority of rural students who choose to go on to college.
- ▶ **Rural male students have an overall low college enrollment rate of 35%** and lower enrollment rates in Oregon public universities compared to rural female students.

### Persistence

*refers to a student enrolled in the fall term immediately following the student's first academic year of enrollment.*

- ▶ For rural students, **persistence rates were highest at four-year public and private institutions.**
- ▶ **College choice is related to the likelihood of persistence**, and in some cases, the relationship was stronger for rural students.
- ▶ Rural students who were **economically disadvantaged or English learners** persisted at a lower rate than nonrural peers in the same groups.

### Transfer

*refers to student movement from community college to a four-year institution within three years of their initial enrollment at a community college.*

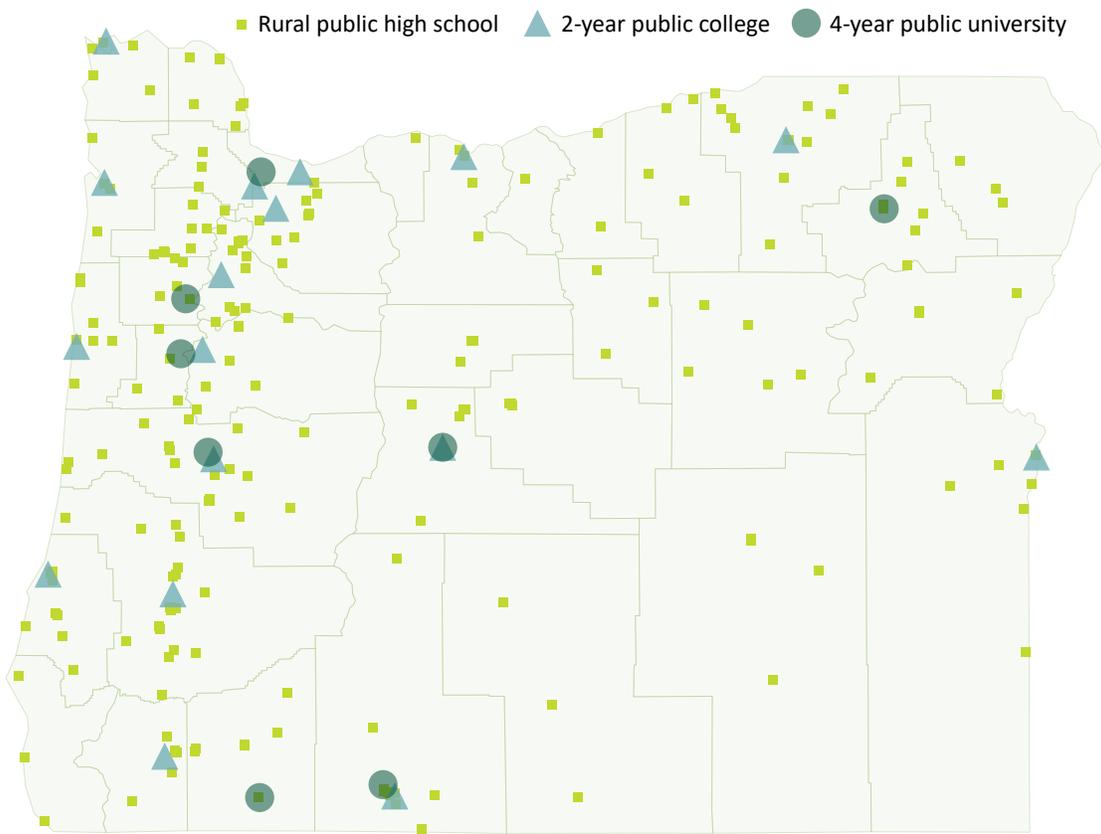
- ▶ **57% of first-time rural college students** began at a community college in fall 2019.
- ▶ **Only 21%** of rural students transfer successfully from community college to four-year institutions.

### Completion

*refers to a student who completed a college credential (certificate or degree) within six years of high school graduation.*

- ▶ College completion has increased slightly for all groups, but the **gaps in completion have not narrowed** between rural and nonrural students.
- ▶ Rural students' **completion rates were highest at four-year institutions.**
- ▶ **College characteristics are related to college completion.** This includes characteristics such as type (e.g., in-state community college, public university, private four-year college, or out-of-state institutions), selectivity, location, and the number of students enrolled full time.

## Oregon Postsecondary Institutions and Rural Public High Schools



### Next Steps

In the past five years, the gaps between rural and nonrural high school students enrolling in college have gotten larger. To reach Oregon's ambitious postsecondary attainment goals, this cannot continue unchanged. With equitable access to resources and support for rural students, and their advocates, we can narrow the gap between rural and nonrural students in Oregon.

As education stakeholders in Oregon, we can work together to:

- ▶ **Increase the focus on improving college access** and success for rural high school graduates, especially for males, students of color and students in poverty.
- ▶ Help rural students **broaden their college aspirations and support community college completion** and transfer efforts.
- ▶ **Invest in college preparatory opportunities** – such as college coursework, college advising, and promoting a college-going culture – for students attending rural high schools.

Increased access to and completion of education beyond high school is critical to the future of our state. We have an opportunity to support the success of our rural students and a responsibility to ensure they have access to the resources they need.