

MARCH 31, 2025



# An Education Funding and Spending Dashboard for Oregon Community Engagement

OREGON'S KITCHEN TABLE



## Introduction

Over the past year, Oregon Governor Tina Kotek and members of the state legislature have asked the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to help make the state's education spending more transparent to Oregonians, helping to ensure that we are collectively accountable for our investments in K-12 public education. As part of that work, ODE has prioritized creating a data dashboard that everyone can use when they seek information related to education funding and spending in Oregon.

As ODE began to plan for and create that financial data dashboard, they sought to better understand how education partners and community members currently use educational financial data and how they would like to access and use such data in the future. During the winter of 2025, ODE partnered with Oregon's Kitchen Table (OKT) to hear about people's needs related to financial data transparency and their preferences related to a data dashboard.

This summary report identifies themes and areas of uncertainty or disagreement for ODE to consider. It also suggests places where more information and engagement might be helpful as ODE continues to develop the data dashboard.

As is evident throughout this report, the vast majority of the people we interviewed emphasized that the dashboard should be clear, understandable, and useable for a wide range of people. Not surprisingly, however, each person we spoke with has their own version of what a clear, usable, and understandable dashboard might look like. When added up, the cumulative list creates the risk that the dashboard could become overly complicated or cluttered. ODE will have to consider balancing the overwhelming desire for clarity alongside the hunger for many different types of information.

On a broad level, people also shared a concern about Oregon's tendency to try new approaches or tools and then abandon them due to budget cuts or a shift in interest to the latest trend.

We also heard a fair amount about trust and mistrust when it comes to accessing information about education funding and spending, as well as some skepticism about whether a data dashboard will contribute to more transparency and accountability.

Many people noted that their level of trust in data and information is directly correlated with trust in the source of information. Some people talked about seeking information from ODE or district staff who they knew and trusted, while others referred to recent high-profile misunderstandings, such as over the Portland Public Schools' budget during the Portland Association of Teachers' strike in 2024. We heard some hope that the dashboard could serve as a shared, public space to help "level set" and move beyond factual disputes about budgets to conversations about what actions people want to take.

And, of course, many people see this dashboard as an opportunity to advocate for what they want and to use the information to support their position. Preferences for what kinds of information are included in the data dashboard often depend on the role or position individuals hold related to education. Our interviews and conversations occurred during a time of heightened awareness and tension related to education funding and spending. During the interview period, local media covered recent reports related to education spending and outcomes, while the state legislature considered several bills related to school spending and accountability during the 2025 session. A number of participants voiced uncertainty about federal funding related to education and what impacts Oregon schools may see in the coming months.

What is clear is that people do not see financial data in a vacuum. It will be important for ODE to consider what values guide all manner of decisions related to the dashboard. In our conversations, people voiced a desire to tie information about funding and spending to outcomes or growth for Oregon students in some way. Participants believe that the data dashboard will be most useful in supporting accountability and transparency as part of a suite of changes related to education in Oregon.

Based on what we heard in these conversations, we recommend that ODE consider the following:

- Prioritize simplicity and clarity in the initial development of the dashboard;
- Continue to engage partners and community members along the way, checking in with people at key development milestones; and
- Build in a plan for long-term engagement - either convening and training a core group of community members or conducting community workshops - to support people in using the dashboard.

This summary report includes the following sections:

- How people access and use data now
- Desire for dashboard to be very clear
- Support for navigating the dashboard
- Tying spending to outcomes
- Granularity: details and frequency of updates
- Reactions to model dashboards
- Cautions
- Recommendations
- Conclusion
- Appendices with process details and interview and conversation materials

This report is not a scientific study, nor a presentation of the facts about issues facing education funding and spending in Oregon, but rather a recounting of a community conversation over a particular period of time. It does not offer a comprehensive list of every comment shared. We do include a selection of quotes or comments we heard in different conversations and interviews. Quotes and comments included in the report either illustrate a particular point in someone's own words or echo what other people shared. This report is now in the hands of ODE and the community to be used – alongside other data, information, experiences, and ideas – to decide what the state's new data dashboard includes and how to present that information.

## How people access and use data now

To better understand how people are likely to approach using a data dashboard on education funding and spending, we began our conversations and interviews by

"I am asking myself, 'why are the outcomes where they are?' I'm looking at data in order to answer my question about why."

ascertaining how people currently access and use data now. We asked people about the kinds of information they seek and where they go to find that information. We also asked about how easy it is for them to access data.

How people currently use financial information differs depending on the roles that people have related to the education system. Common uses of financial data that people mentioned include:

- To communicate both internally to school board members and district staff and externally to families, community members, or the media
- To better understand what is happening in their own children's schools
- For advocacy or to mobilize support at some level, whether at the statewide, legislative level or at a local, district level
- To inform policy at the state or local level
- To help make hiring and compensation decisions, such as comparing salaries for particular positions between districts
- To inform bargaining between districts and employee associations
- When putting together or reviewing district budgets
- When supporting others in their budget work
- When trying to understand when or why cuts are being made at different levels
- To dispel or respond to rumors or assumptions related to education funding and spending, such as about how money is being used, budget cuts, personnel decisions, district reserves, etc.

“When we talk about any budget numbers, people want to know, what does that mean to my school with its unique demographics, unique student interests, community?”

“We are trying to solve problems in classrooms. When we go into bargaining, we need to see the minutiae of what districts are spending.”

In terms where and how they find information now, many people referred to direct, individual relationships with a trusted source as the key to accessing information about education funding or spending, whether that person was someone at ODE, a district staff member, or a legislative staff person. Absent a direct relationship with a trusted individual, people said that finding the data they seek is very challenging. Several people noted that they find themselves trying to navigate different sections or pages within ODE's website to try to piece together the information they seek, which is cumbersome and time consuming. A couple of people simply said they turn to Google

“It's a Google and a prayer and hopefully I get there.”

first as they see that as the most direct path to getting to the specific data or information they want.

One common challenge we heard regarding how ODE has presented data is that static PDFs or spreadsheets are not interactive. Several people described downloading multiple reports then having to conduct their own analyses to be able to get the data they sought. In the midst of our interviews and conversations, ODE released an updated [Oregon Online Report Card](#) (January 2025). Those who we spoke with who mentioned the updated way of presenting the report card appreciated that there was more ability to interact with the data on the site and said they thought it was an improvement over past years' reports.

“It isn't that easy. It's very disjointed. We have to go to several places to get different things.”

## **Desire for dashboard to be very clear rather than everything to everybody**

No matter what roles people have, we heard a strong desire for ODE to focus on simplicity and clarity when creating the data dashboard, particularly the first version of the dashboard. Even people who want the ability for more complex components noted that ability might be developed down the road, once a simple and interactive dashboard is created.

“The dashboard should not overwhelm the user and - at the same time - if someone is a data person or expert, they can deep dive and get the data they need.”

A few common characteristics of a “simple” dashboard emerged across the different discussions. For many people, a simple dashboard would include:

- Data visualization
- Plain language that people with varying degrees of background and knowledge about education finances can understand
- Some way to show comparisons between districts and how a particular district compares to the whole state

- Translation options so people whose preferred language is not English can also access information
- Some explanation or narrative about what the data means, without too much text upfront

“One of the things that the dashboard can help with is to demonstrate what is true and what is supposition.”

Beyond those elements, people have many different ideas about what should be included in a simple and clear dashboard. When all those elements are aggregated, the dashboard could become complex, overwhelming, and increasingly difficult to navigate.

"I want to see us track a limited number of indicators, whatever outcomes we decide in our accountability system we're going to focus on."

As ODE builds the data dashboard, being responsive to different people's needs and preferences while striving for simplicity and clarity will be an important balance to keep in mind. As several people put it, the dashboard can never be everything to everyone, and there will likely need to be other ways to access financial and other data related to a big and varied system.

## Support in navigating the dashboard

Within the conversation about a data dashboard, many people talked about the fact that some of what makes financial data opaque is not only how it is presented, but the complexity of school funding and expenditures in the state. Given that, even a simple data dashboard may be difficult to navigate and use for many people. Several people suggested some kind of tool - such as an introductory video explaining how to use the dashboard - to support people. One person suggested ODE hold a series of workshops for community members to introduce the tool and explain how it works.

One other key factor for ODE to consider is how important trust is for people in accessing, understanding, and then using education financial data. As mentioned previously, many people currently turn to trusted individual sources to get their information or to validate information. We also heard several people express confusion about conflicting reports from different sources related to education financial data. People will likely

“There's a lot of people in education who don't understand how funding works, not as straightforward as other states.”

bring - or carryover - that level of trust or distrust, depending on their roles and past experiences, to the new data dashboard as well. Given that, ODE may also want to consider holding orientation sessions for trusted district, community, and/or legislative sources.

## **Tying spending to outcomes**

Many people we talked with see funding, spending, and educational outcomes as one ecosystem when it comes to accountability and transparency. In almost every conversation, people said they want to be able to see connections between funding, spending, and outcomes in some way. Several people referred to a recent Georgetown study that showed a dramatic increase in education spending in Oregon over the past ten years, while student achievement lagged behind or got worse. We also heard some

“How can we show that it is not just as simple as more money equals better outcomes  
- whatever ‘better’ might mean?”

awareness that the Georgetown report was not uncontested, with people raising another recent report from the American Institutes for Research that indicates Oregon isn’t spending enough on education. For the most part, people did not go into detail about recent reports on education funding, spending, and outcomes during our conversations;

however, people did mention them and suggested that funding and spending data alone would not be as useful as data that integrates spending and educational outcomes. Some people specified that they are interested in seeing progress over time and that longitudinal data is what is most important to them. A couple of people also emphasized that they would be interested in seeing areas where districts who have high numbers of students in focal student populations are “outperforming” expected outcomes to “celebrate and replicate” what those districts are doing elsewhere.

## **A Range of opinions about granularity of data and frequency of updates**

There were two areas where we heard more varied opinions:

1. how granular or detailed people thought this dashboard should be; and
2. How frequently the information should be updated.



## Granularity

While we heard a widespread desire for the dashboard to show district-level financial information, there were some differing opinions about other levels of detail. A couple of people noted that they want to be able to see actual expenditures and not just budgets for districts. And while some people feel that district-level data would be sufficient, other people – particularly people who identified as parents - want to be able to see information at the school level.

“Maybe instead of recreating the wheel, we can already utilize what we have.”

People also recognize that increased granularity might create additional work for already overworked school district staffs. While there is agreement that people do not want to overburden districts – particularly smaller districts – there is a difference of opinion about whether the data already exists and it is simply a matter of *how* it is shared or displayed or whether the granularity of the data (at the district level) does not yet exist or gets reported for ODE to be able to display it. A couple of people hope that the dashboard might help to decrease reporting rather than increase it.

Special education came up repeatedly in our conversations as one area that people want to see the dashboard cover. While people mentioned other focal student populations, special education was raised by far the most frequently. Several people

“The dashboard should track funding for weighted student investments. Are those resources going to the students who need them? Or even the schools?”

expressed concerns about whether resources are actually being used to serve special education students or whether those designated funds are being used to backfill budgets in other areas. A couple of people shared the hope that the dashboard could help to create some visibility about funding and spending tied to students experiencing a disability and other focal student populations.

Some people want to be able to understand funding and spending related to particular learning outcomes. A few people specifically mentioned early literacy as an example. Even while people noted that they want to see how funding and spending impact outcomes in those particular areas, they recognize that it may be challenging to show on the data dashboard in a simple, understandable way. While some people talked about wanting to be able to trace investment by learning outcomes, other people talked about a desire to be able to trace by funding source. One person thought it would be

“I would be interested in expenditures and revenue related to specific programs and initiatives.”

helpful to be able to see what grants similar districts received, for example, to help inform what might be helpful for their school to apply for in the future.

The ability to show comparisons came up frequently in our conversations as well. Most people we spoke with want the ability to compare similar districts as much as possible. People often described “similar districts” as being comparable in size and community demographics. We heard that the variations in “codes” districts use to label costs and expenditures creates a challenge to being able to make comparisons. One

"We love flexibility in Oregon but it erodes accountability."

person described creating a more standard coding system as a trade-off between the values of efficiency and clarity and the value of flexibility and thought it would be a “heavy lift” to get to a set of standardized codes.

Some people also want to be able to make larger comparisons that may be beyond the scope of this dashboard. A couple of people want to be able to see how education funding compares to other types of state funding; other people want to be able to see funding from programs in other state agencies that may be education-adjacent in that they support school-age children and families in some way. Several people are interested in being able to compare education funding and spending in Oregon with other states.

“When I look at budgets, I look at it as a piece of the entire state government. When we ask for more money, who are we competing against?”

### *Frequency of Updates*

Similarly, there was not broad agreement amongst the people we spoke with about how frequently they would like to see the data updated. Most people think that

“It would be great to know at the beginning of the school year to have where funding is going - allocations. And then one time during that year before the next cycle of budgets, an update to allow for the change and need – flexibility - that districts should have.”

either annual or biannual updates would be sufficient. Many people did share a sense that Oregon currently often lags two or more years behind in reporting. A few people - particularly district-level staff - thought quarterly updates would be helpful, particularly to be able to track changes over the course of the year. Still, other people want to be able to see rolling updates as they come in - or, as a few people said, “as up to date as possible.” A few district level staff noted that they currently provide reports at different times for different items, so a

“rolling” basis made sense to them. A couple of people said that even if different pieces of data are updated at different times, it is important to be clear about how up to date each piece of data is.

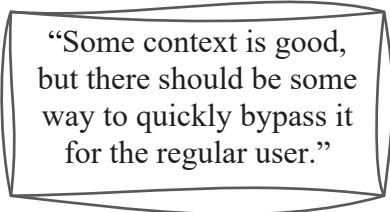
## Reactions to model dashboards

During our conversations, we shared dashboards from three states that ODE is looking at as models - Washington, Indiana, and Michigan - and asked people what appealed or didn't appeal to them in regard to how data is presented. We heard very similar reactions for the people we spoke to – what a combination of components from each of these models (particularly Indiana and Washington) would be most appealing.

### *Indiana*

Many people liked the way the Indiana dashboard uses data visualization. People said it was both visually appealing and simple. Several people liked the way that the dashboard also showed both successful and areas that need improvement. In general, people also found Indiana's language and text easy to understand.

At the same time, many people had a negative reaction to the landing page for a variety of reasons. Several people found the scrolling navigation burdensome and that the text blocked them from getting to the data they wanted to immediately access. One person felt like the narrative was “selling a story.” People frequently shared that they wanted to skip it almost immediately. One person who felt initial frustration then went back and said that they found the context helpful, but frontloading the site with so much text led them to ignore it at first. One person described Indiana's initial page as “gloriously painful” to get through.



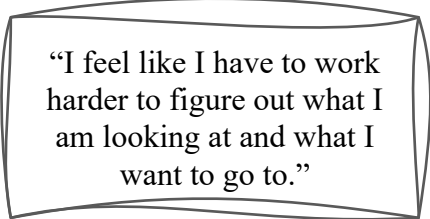
“Some context is good, but there should be some way to quickly bypass it for the regular user.”

### *Washington*

Overall, many people liked that the Washington homepage and navigation tools were felt simple and easy to use. The ability to immediately go to a specific district was appealing, and people shared that they thought parents especially would like that feature. A few people also noted that Washington is the only dashboard that has a

translation tool (Google Translate) available. As with Indiana’s dashboard, people thought the Washington language and text was also accessible and easy to understand.

On the other hand, many people observed that the Washington dashboard lacked visuals, relied heavily on PDFs, and was text heavy. While on the surface the dashboard



“I feel like I have to work harder to figure out what I am looking at and what I want to go to.”

initially seemed easy to navigate, people expressed frustration that once they began to dig, they often ended up at a PDF. Several people also shared a sense of feeling like there were too many different types of information in one place.

### *Michigan*

Fewer people we spoke with liked the Michigan dashboard as a whole. However, there were a few features that people found useful. One aspect that people pointed to as appealing was the ability to click on a type of “user role,” allowing them to see data specifically relevant to the perspectives of educators, parents, policymakers, media, or researchers. A few people also said they liked the map interface, which allowed them to select districts from a map rather than a list. People also liked that Michigan showed trends over time.

But, overall, we often heard that Michigan - like Washington - was too text heavy and provided a lot of different information. A couple of people said that they felt like they had to work too hard as a user to find what they wanted.

### *Other models*

In a few of our conversations, people shared other data dashboard models that they liked or thought had components that Oregon might consider. A couple of people said that they preferred Arizona’s education financial data dashboard<sup>1</sup> as a model more than the three examples we discussed. Another person gave the example of the Higher Education Coordinating Commission’s data dashboard<sup>2</sup> as one ODE might consider.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://schoolspending.az.gov/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.oregon.gov/highered/strategy-research/Pages/dashboard.aspx>

One person pointed to how the City of Portland is describing funding and spending at a high level for the general public as an example of plain, simple language.<sup>3</sup>

## Cautions

While many people we spoke with think a data dashboard showing education funding and spending in Oregon will be helpful or at least an improvement on how the state has displayed information, we did hear some cautions ODE might want to consider moving forward.

Several people warned against over-complexifying the dashboard and creating maintenance burdens, both for districts and for ODE staff. We also heard a concern that creating the dashboard would take so long, that trust would be further eroded. A few people voiced concern that collectively as a state we have a tendency to focus on a particular model or approach and then abandon it once something else becomes the focus. And some people shared that they have an overarching concern in how the data dashboard then ties to a statewide vision for education.

“We have a habit of over-complexifying everything. Don’t do that here and then do nothing.”

Even though many people said they want to see the data dashboard show connections between investments and outcomes, we also heard some hesitation about what we focus on when it comes to outcomes or student achievements. There was not clear agreement on how those connections should be presented. Some people want to see the dashboard highlight both areas we need to work on as well as successes we can learn more from and then replicate. People also have different ideas about tying investments to outcomes through assessment results, as people hold differing

“What does it mean to be on target and including that growth information? We want to make sure that is part of our storytelling.”

viewpoints about how well assessments demonstrate student achievement. Several people emphasized wanting to see growth trends. One person mentioned wanting to ensure that the dashboard also captures spending that broadly supports outcomes, such as spending on extracurricular activities to support student connections to school.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.portland.gov/budget/intro>

We heard some concern for the potential “weaponization” of data and a desire for ODE to pay particular attention and care in being clear and explicit about what values underlie the data dashboard. One person said, “the technical pieces are one thing. . . . If we're talking about accountability and keeping us accountable, that's a different conversation. . . .What are the values of Oregonians around having a tool like this that can build rather than destroy?” As with other aspects of the dashboard, it will be important for ODE to be clear about what the values are that will drive choices about the dashboard.

## **Recommendations**

As ODE creates the new data dashboard, we recommend that staff consider the following recommendations in three areas:

*Keep simplicity and clarity as a central goal in the initial development of the dashboard.*

Because we heard such a strong, widespread desire for a clear, simple dashboard that is as user-friendly as possible, we encourage ODE to keep this goal at the center of decisions around the development of the dashboard. ODE could consider adding components in later stages.

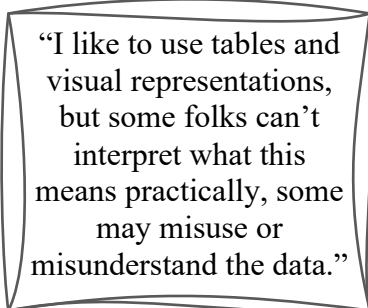
*Conduct further engagement with people in different roles at key milestones during the development phases.*

Many people expressed willingness to stay connected and engaged as ODE develops the dashboard. ODE could share ideas or prototypes with these community members and partners to double-check whether they meet the needs of the various interested communities. Additional points of engagement could help ODE to address skepticism, build trust, and demonstrate how community input informed the dashboard.

*Develop a long-term community engagement strategy to support community members in using the dashboard and making meaning from the data.*

Consider creating a “Core Users Group” or holding community workshops once the dashboard is launched to:

- Help identify gaps and build out additional components;
- Continue to build relationships between ODE staff and trusted district and community partners who often serve as a conduit for information and data to the broader community;
- Support data literacy and help people understand how to use the dashboard, make meaning from and interpret the data, and connect with other people in their communities to access and use the dashboard; and
- Develop partnerships to create components in multiple languages for increased accessibility.



“I like to use tables and visual representations, but some folks can’t interpret what this means practically, some may misuse or misunderstand the data.”

## Conclusion

This engagement process was intended to provide ODE with a snapshot of how a data dashboard might help education partners and the broader community have better access to data related to educational funding and spending. While this period of engagement has ended, we encourage ODE staff to continue to connect with community members throughout the development period as well after the dashboard’s launch. Many people we spoke with - no matter what roles they hold - see the need for more clear and easily accessible information about education funding and spending, even if they are skeptical about some of the details. And many people also view the new data dashboard as one piece of a larger, collective effort around understanding and managing Oregon’s investments in K-12 education.

This particular engagement process provides a sense of a few commonly held values to help guide ODE in building out the dashboard. It also points out a need for

considering what other values Oregonians hold around larger data, accountability, and transparency goals. Once launched, the dashboard will also very likely instigate new questions about education funding and spending, spurring the need for ongoing conversations among Oregonians about decisions at every level of the educational system.



## APPENDIX A. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS AND PARTICIPATION

Between January and March 2025, OKT staff conducted 15 interviews and 6 small group conversations with approximately 45 people across the state. The people we talked with are in a number of roles in how they relate to education in Oregon and come from a variety of communities and types of schools, from the most densely populated urban areas to very rural areas. Participants often noted that they hold multiple roles at the same time when it comes to education in Oregon. These roles include:

- School board member
- ESD superintendents
- District superintendents
- Principals, including one from a public charter school
- Local elected official
- Legislative staff
- Former state legislator
- People from education-related advocacy organizations
- Parents from a variety of communities
- Educators, including classroom teachers and program staff from a variety of programs
- After-school program board member
- People working at a culturally specific community-based organization serving families
- Staff of statewide education associations
- Former journalist<sup>4</sup>

While we asked people about their roles related to education in Oregon, we do not ask participants in conversations or interviews other demographic information

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<sup>4</sup> OKT reached out to members of the media to hear their experiences and perspectives; however, those who we heard from declined to participate as they felt doing so would create a conflict of interest if they report on the dashboard in the future.

about themselves. Some people self-identified as being members of or working with students who are members of particular communities, including:

- Students experiencing a disability
- Multilingual learners
- Students who move frequently
- Students experiencing homelessness
- Communities with high numbers of people living experiencing poverty
- Communities who prefer to receive information in a language other than English

Several people we spoke with work with communities across the state or work for statewide organizations. Other people who we spoke with either live or work in the following counties:

- Benton County
- Clackamas County
- Lane County
- Linn County
- Malheur County
- Marion County
- Multnomah County
- Washington County

## APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW AND CONVERSATION BACKGROUND AND QUESTIONS



### **An education funding and spending dashboard for Oregon Community Engagement: Background and Questions**

#### **Background**

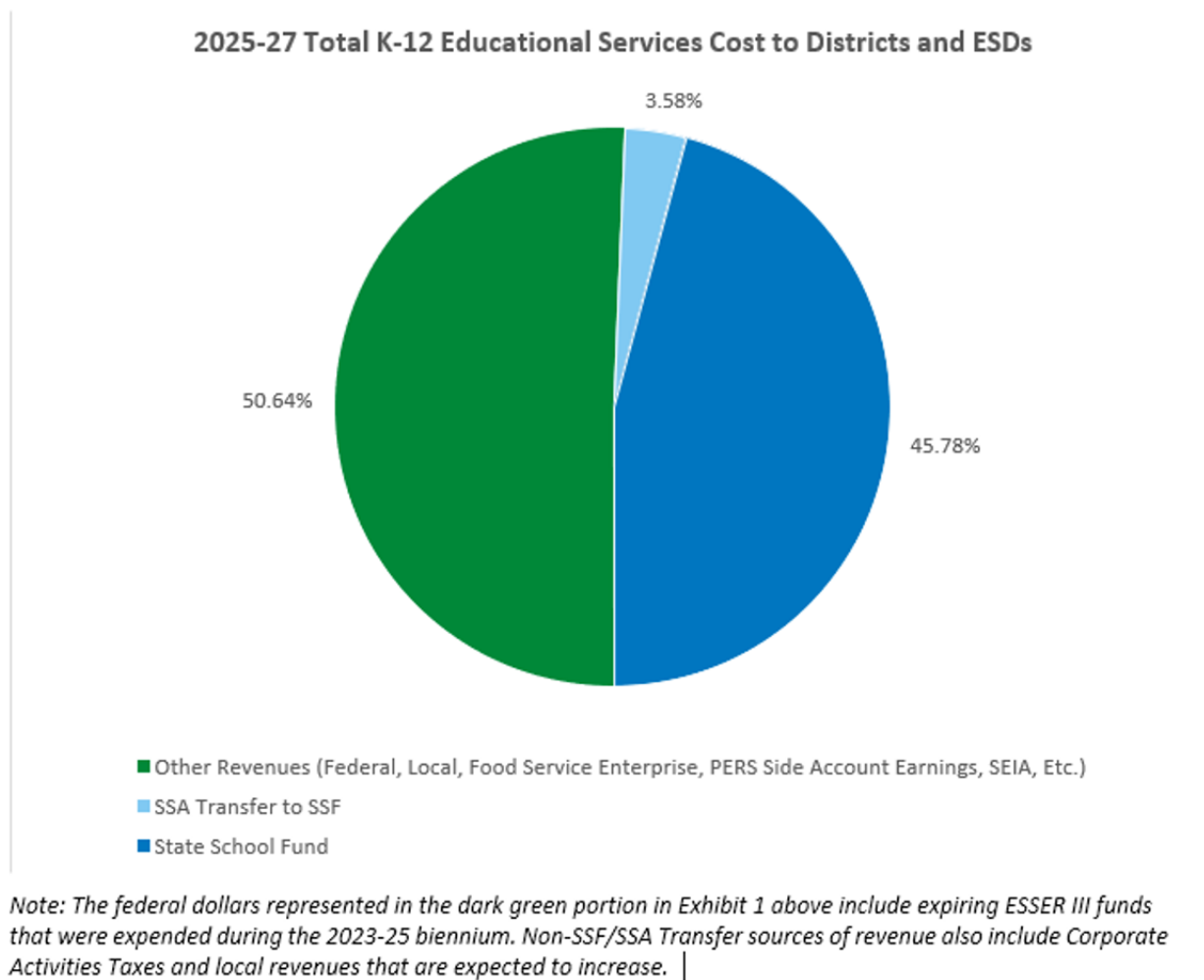
The Governor and members of the legislature have asked the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to help make the state's education spending more transparent to Oregonians, helping to ensure that Oregonians are all collectively accountable for our investments in K-12 public education. As part of that effort, they have prioritized creating a data dashboard that everyone can use when they seek information related to education funding and spending in Oregon.

As ODE creates that financial data dashboard, they want to better understand how education partners and community members currently use educational financial data and how they would like to access and use such data in the future. ODE is partnering with [Oregon's Kitchen Table](#) to conduct a series of interviews and small group conversations in winter 2025 to hear about people's needs related to financial data transparency and their preferences related to a data dashboard.

#### **Basic information about education funding in Oregon**

About half of school expenditures in Oregon are funded by the Legislature, while the other half comes from other revenue sources, including the federal government. About 95% of this budget goes toward supporting students directly ([Oregon State Report Card, 2024](#)). The Oregon Department of Education receives funding from these sources and it is disseminated to districts in multiple ways, including through an online

grant management system. Federal spending is very prescriptive and requires substantial reporting. State funding is more flexible. The chart on the next page shows information about education funding in Oregon.



### Conversation Questions

- How do you see your role(s) in regards to the state's educational system?
- What kind of financial data related to education are you seeking now?
- How are you currently using that data?
- How easily are you able to find what you're looking for? What do you think is missing?
- As you think about the future, what would you like to know more about related to education funding and spending?

- Given your response to the previous question, what do you think needs to be included in a data dashboard?

### *Models*

ODE has been looking at other states as models for how the dashboard might show or display information. Here are some they are looking at:

- Washington - <https://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/>
- Indiana - <https://indianagps.doe.in.gov/>
- Michigan - <https://www.mischooldata.org/>

As you review these websites, think about three areas: 1) the kinds of information that these websites present, 2) how easy the websites are to navigate; and 3) how visually appealing they are to you. With these three areas in mind:

- Which aspects of these websites most appeal to you? Why?
- Which aspects of these websites least appeal to you? Why?
- Indiana is an example of a model that provides a lot of background information. What could DOE provide to help you better make use of the data?

### *Opportunities for further engagement*

- What contact information - if any - would you be willing to share with ODE to hear about decisions related to the dashboard or further opportunities for engagement?
- Are there regular or standing events or groups you think would be interested in connecting with ODE on this topic?
- Who else do you suggest we connect with on this topic?