



With **Oregon's 40-40-20 education plan**, the state has the goal that by 2025, 40 percent of adult Oregonians will have bachelor's degrees or higher, another 40 percent will have associate's degrees or other certificates and the remaining 20 percent will have high school diplomas. With the state aspiring to have 80 percent of the adult population holding some type of post-secondary degree or designation, Oregon's federally authorized 529 program, the Oregon College Savings Plan, will play a vital role in helping Oregon families meet those goals.

To help parents and families better understand the long-term benefits of higher education and how to reach their college planning goals, the Oregon College Savings Plan has launched a program called **Be College Ready**. This program brings the Oregon College Savings Plan directly into elementary schools, with goals of educating parents about how to plan for future college expenses, motivating kids with fun classroom materials and partnering with local business and civic organizations to provide program resources that meet the needs of each local community.

Be College Ready is specifically designed so that school districts, individual elementary schools and parents can take full advantage of the program's resources with very little time and effort. **Be College Ready** will allow each participating school to become certified as an Oregon 529 College Savings School. This special designation will serve as a continuous reminder to the school population, the parents and the local community about the importance of college savings and what it means to be college ready.

During the 2015-2016 school year, the **Be College Ready** program has been piloted in five school districts: North Clackamas, Grants Pass, McMinnville, Seaside and Hermiston. By participating in the **Be College Ready** program and helping educate community members about the benefits of the Oregon College Savings Plan, these school districts saw some impressive results.

From October 2014 to October 2015, the opening of new Oregon College Savings Plan accounts increased by 5.3% in Clackamas County, 21.7% in the Grants Pass community, 28.3% in the McMinnville community, 88% in Clatsop County and 64.7% in the city of Hermiston. The total college savings contributions during the same time period increased by nearly \$2 million in the five pilot school district areas.

We have created a website where you can see each of the schools that have participated in the **Be College Ready** program and have become a certified 529 College Savings School. In addition, by visiting the website you can view demographic information from all 36 Oregon counties and their engagement with Oregon's 529 College Savings program. *Please click here to learn more:* <http://navigator.state.or.us/apps/becollegeready/>

Building on our success, we are looking to expand **Be College Ready** to neighboring school districts for the 2016-2017 school year. There are several things school districts will receive by participating in the program and in return the school district will help raise awareness about the benefits of the Oregon College Savings Plan.

In return for participating in the *Be College Ready* program each year, school districts will receive the following from the Oregon College Savings Plan:

- Homework folders, pencils, bookmarks and motivational posters for each elementary school
- Every kindergarten parent/guardian that enrolls a kindergarten student in the school will be offered \$25 from the Oregon College Savings Plan to open a new Oregon College Savings Plan account for that kindergartner or add to a pre-existing kindergartner account if one has already been opened by the parent/guardian
- All parents of elementary school students will be eligible to enter an online sweepstakes throughout the school year (September–May) with each elementary school having a winner announced in May with a \$529 award to open a new Oregon College Savings Plan account or contribute to an existing account

To become 529 certified, the elementary school agrees to:

- Post information about the Oregon College Savings Plan on its website, including a short video explaining how the Oregon College Savings Plan works and helps students **Be College Ready**
- Share the Oregon College Savings Plan monthly updates with the school population and parents, including updated results of the kindergarten program and 529 sweepstakes entries
- The school district will be able to schedule one comprehensive **Be College Ready - College Funding 101** presentation during the school year for the entire community that will include Q & A sessions about the Oregon College Savings Plan as well as information about how the college financial aid system works
- Make Oregon College Savings Plan materials available in the main office, both in English and Spanish
- Presentations can be scheduled by individual schools if desired

Opportunities available to school districts participating in the *Be College Ready* program:

- Each school district, unless already offered, will have the opportunity to work with Oregon College Savings Plan staff to offer employees the ability to have an Oregon College Savings Plan payroll deduction option
- The Oregon College Savings Plan will introduce the school district to Financial Beginnings, a nonprofit organization providing financial education programs to youth that are fun, engaging and relevant. Financial Beginnings has programs that serve students in kindergarten through young adults. All programs are free and provide age-specific curriculum and activities that are designed to promote self-sufficiency, fiscal responsibility, and encourage active and educated personal financial management.

In order to be college ready today, schools and families not only need to help prepare students for the academic challenges of the 21st Century, but also be knowledgeable about and prepared for the financial realities of achieving a post-secondary education. The Oregon College Savings Plan is committed to helping families and the **Be College Ready** program offers a great opportunity for elementary schools to partner with the communities and families they serve.

For additional information, please contact:
John Valley at 503-432-1618 or john.valley@ost.state.or.us
David Bell at 503-703-2854 or david.bell@ost.state.or.us.

