



The Recovery High School Act of Oregon: A Concept for a Bill.



Background

Oregon youth impacted by addiction and mental health issues are suffering at increasingly alarming rates. Recent national survey data indicate that Oregon continues to have a high prevalence of youth with substance use disorders (SUDs) relative to other states and a correspondingly high share of adolescents needing treatment for SUDs but not receiving treatment at a specialty facility. Depression among adolescents is also relatively more prevalent in Oregon and the Portland region, compared to the nation as a whole. An Oregon survey of teenagers in public schools suggests increasing prevalence of unmet mental health needs over time. This dire situation for Oregon's youth has only been exacerbated by COVID-19.

Data released from the CDC's National Syndromic Surveillance Program from Jan. 1 to Oct. 17, 2020, compared to the same months in 2019, found a staggering 31 percent increase in mental health issues reported among adolescents between 12 and 17 years old. This is the next pandemic that will haunt communities in a post-COVID world for years to come if not addressed soon. In fact just recently, the CDC reported that in 2020, adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 accounted for the highest proportion of mental health-related Emergency Room visits.

Bottom Line:

Oregon youth with significant substance use and mental health disorders are not receiving the level of care and support they need and deserve to thrive in school and life. Simply put, we can and must do better. Thankfully, there is a new model in place **RIGHT NOW** in Oregon that could bring immediate relief to Oregon communities if expanded statewide in a strategic, equitable and sustainably resourced way. That model is the **Recovery High School (RHS)**.

Recovery High Schools

We are excited to introduce you to an innovative educational model beginning to take root in Oregon, Recovery High Schools (RHS). RHSs are designed to meet the specific educational and behavioral health needs of adolescents experiencing co-occurring substance use and mental health disorders in our public school system. Why RHSs? According to national research, students who attend treatment and return to their high school of origin relapse at a rate of 70% or more within 6 months. Conversely, students who return to a RHS experience a relapse rate of less than 30% for the same time period. We know from years of research that adolescents with substance use issues need a more supportive environment to grow and thrive and live their best lives.

RHSs provide that special, supportive environment, creating an atmosphere of hope and recovery infused with laughter, fun and the latest advancements in adolescent treatment and student-centered instruction. RHSs are secondary schools designed specifically for students in recovery from a substance use disorder or co-occurring disorders. Although each school operates differently depending on available community resources and state standards, each recovery high school shares the following goals:

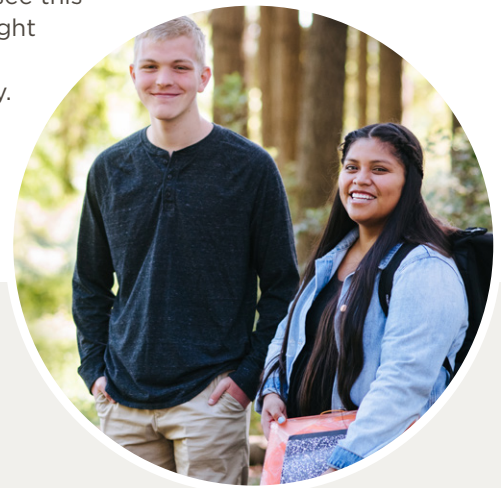
Primary purpose is to educate students in recovery from substance use or co-occurring disorders;

- Meet state requirements for awarding a secondary school diploma, i.e. school offers credits leading to a full Oregon diploma, and student is not just getting tutored or completing work from another school while there;
- Intent that all students enrolled be in recovery and working a program of recovery from substance use or co-occurring disorders as determined by the student and the school;

- Available to any student in recovery who meets state or district eligibility requirements for attendance, i.e., students do not have to go through a particular treatment program to enroll, and the school is not simply the academic component of a primary or extended-care treatment facility or therapeutic boarding school.

The staff of recovery high schools most often includes administrative staff, teachers, substance misuse counselors, and mental health professionals that each play a critical role in supporting their students. Additionally, recovery high schools provide support for families learning to how to live with, and provide support for, their teens entering into the recovery lifestyle.

From 2017-2019 the Oregon Recovery High School Initiative (ORHSI) planned, designed and launched the first RHS in Oregon, Harmony Academy. And we proudly graduated our first class of students in 2020. In launching Harmony Academy, ORHSI took the best practices from the fields of education and behavioral healthcare to create efficacious programming that attracts youth, retains them in school, and supports them on their personal recovery journey. Our team at ORHSI is comprised of leading, experienced healthcare and education professionals from across Oregon, as well as those with lived experience as youth or parents of youth that have struggled with substance use and mental health disorders. At ORHSI, we envision a world where all young people can enjoy vibrant, fulfilling lives. We see this vision coming to light in the success of Harmony Academy.



Key Elements of the Recovery High School Act of Oregon

- Four-year statewide pilot modeled after Oregon's first and only RHS, Harmony Academy in Clackamas County. Three sites in total (Eastern Oregon, Eugene and Bend) with a fourth site (Wash Co) possible during year three provided readiness and resources exist.
- Affiliation with Oregon Recovery High School Initiative
- Membership in Association of Recovery Schools
- For all Recovery High Schools under pilot, including Harmony Academy, charter contract flow-through, ADM of \$23,820 per student who voluntarily enrolls and possesses a DSM-5 diagnosis of Substance Use Disorder
- Treatment and positive peer recovery community partnership must be in place prior to site opening
- 2022-23 year zero for preparation and recruitment 500k startup per site
- School operation: 2023-24, 2024-25, 2025-26 funded with per-pupil dollars
- Efficacy data reported to ODE and legislature
- Must have ESD support in identifying a satisfactory location within the county by month six of year zero.
- Transportation coordination through local ESD
- Transportation costs will be federally reimbursable

Overview of Oregon's First Recovery High School: Harmony Academy

Harmony Academy is a vibrant, tuition-free high school serving students with substance use disorders (SUD) in the tri-county Portland area. Students at Harmony are reengaged with learning through curriculum rooted in social justice, positive peer culture, and strong community that extends far beyond the walls of the school. Harmony offers a full Oregon diploma and post-secondary planning for a life filled with purpose.

Youth with SUD in our schools face complex challenges, and students at Harmony tell similar stories of being marginalized and/or pushed out of previous schools. Our youth have missed significant schooling due to hospitalization, treatment, adjudication, and other behavioral health related events including suspension and expulsion. The impact of SUD is often complicated by factors like complex trauma, systemic racism, disability, and the politics of identity. For many of Harmony's teens, their SUD had become a formidable barrier to a free and appropriate public education. We know that something different is possible.

We collaborate to create innovative, holistic support for adolescents in an intimate recovery-based environment where, "Nothing about us without us" means that our youth have high degrees of ownership in the program. To increase positive outcomes, we provide access to full-time peer mentors, highly trained and trauma-informed staff, positive peers with shared goals, targeted academic skill support, post-secondary planning, small class sizes, culturally relevant curriculum, and individualized recovery plans that build on personal, cultural, and community strengths. Students are lifted by robust, cross-sector partnerships, live arts programming, and a community that celebrates growth.

Oregon's first recovery high school celebrated five graduates in our inaugural year. We have served well over 50 students from diverse backgrounds since we opened. We look forward to twelve graduates in 2021. We work with the Association of Recovery Schools to measure what matters for our students: recovery, health, community, hope, and the opportunity to contribute their unique gifts to society in whatever ways they choose. We believe that something different is not only possible, it is necessary.



HARMONY
ACADEMY

"I came to Harmony because I could not survive anywhere else. I did not think I could live a life without using. I stay at Harmony because of the people—people who are kind and support me, who struggle with me, and who could not have imagined joy without drugs. I return to Harmony because it is a place of safety, possibility, and just chaotic enough to make me feel sane."

— Mae, class of 2021