



PRESS release

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Salem (OR) - Today, the Oregon Progress Board released its first ever Oregon Benchmark Certificates of Achievement awarded to selected Oregon counties. Counties were chosen based on their performance of four categories of Oregon Benchmarks: economy, education, public safety, and child well-being. The county with the top ranking in each category and the county with the most improved ranking in each category between 1999 and 2001 were recognized today at the Association of Oregon Counties annual meeting in Pendleton.

Harney and Washington counties were the big awarded winners; each captured two of the eight awards given. Washington County received Certificates of Achievement for top rankings in both economy and child well-being. Harney County was recognized as being the most improved in both the economy and education categories. Other winners include Wallowa County for a top ranking in education; Wheeler County for a top ranking in public safety, Crook County for most improved in child well-being; and Malheur County for most improved in public safety.

Oregon Benchmarks are the state's 92 quality of life measures developed as part of the state's strategic planning process, *Oregon Shines*. The Oregon Progress board is responsible for overseeing the Oregon Shines' process.

Progress Board Chair Governor John Kitzhaber recognized the special contribution Oregon's counties made in improving the state's benchmarks. "By recognizing these six counties, the Progress Board honors the many Oregonians who work tirelessly to better K-12 education, to reduce crime, to improve economic conditions, and to protect our children," said Governor Kitzhaber. The governor also noted that he hoped these awards would engender "a little healthy competition between counties."

Oregon Progress Board Executive Director Jeff Tryens said, "These awards show that excellence in improving and maintaining quality of life is not limited to any single part of the state. Washington and Harney counties couldn't be more different in many respects, but they have both made significant contributions to improving the quality of life in Oregon in the past few years." Tryens went on to note, "Few Oregonians know that Wallowa County students are far and away the best overall achievers in reading and math in the third and eighth grades.

This award is an opportunity to provide that recognition.”

Each award category consists of a representative set of Oregon Benchmarks that are measured at the county level:

1. The *economy* category consists of job growth/loss, per capita income, wages, and unemployment.
2. The *education* category consists of third grade reading, third grade math, eighth grade reading, eighth grade math, and the drop out rate.
3. The *public safety* category contains overall reported crime and the juvenile arrests.
4. The *child well-being* consists of prenatal care, infant mortality, child abuse, women who smoke while pregnant and teen pregnancy.

Rankings are determined using the average of between three and five years of data, depending on data availability. Most improved status is determined by comparing the difference between county rankings in 1999 and county rankings in 2001. Most recent year of reported data varies by benchmark.

For a complete listing of county rankings by category, see the Progress Board's website at www.econ.state.or.us/opb

Oregon Benchmark Certificates of Achievement Recipients

The three best counties in each category are:

Top Economy: Washington, Clackamas, and Multnomah

Top Education: Wallowa, Benton, and Grant

Top Public Safety: Wheeler, Grant, and Wallowa

Top Child Well-being: Washington, Polk, and Benton

Counties with two top three finishes for best county are:

Benton, Grant, Wallowa, and Washington

The three most improved counties in each category are:

Most Improved Economy: Harney, [Crook and Union (tie for 2nd)]

Most Improved Education: Harney, Columbia and Coos

Most Improved Public Safety: Malheur and Yamhill, [Polk and Coos, (tied for 3rd)]

Most Improved Child Well-being: Crook, Multnomah and Clatsop

Counties with two top finishes for most improved category are:

Coos, Crook and Harney