

# Gervais School District #1

## *Strategic Plan Background Data Report*

February 2021



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## **Introduction to Report and Background Information**

This report was written to give the 16-member District Strategic Planning Team background information that they can consider for the creation of the 2021-2024 Gervais School District Strategic Plan. A number of different data sources were used to compile this report. The two major sources were notes taken during focus group meetings and responses from the district's Student Investment Account (SIA) Survey questions. Other sources the District Strategic Planning Team will consider are listed directly below in no priority order. The board and superintendent want the practices, policies, programs, and beliefs currently in place to be carefully evaluated before they are modified or replaced.

### **District Website Banner**

This important wording is at the top of the homepage on the district website. *We, with the involvement of our culturally rich and dynamic community will provide an educationally creative, enriching, and safe learning environment that will instill a desire to enter the 21st century workforce and to be responsible citizens.*

### **Gervais Priorities Meeting Including School Board Member Input and Approval**

In November 2019 and January 2020, Superintendent Stevens met with district administration and school board members to informally discuss district priorities. The group unanimously identified four areas of emphasis to be considered for future district improvement efforts.

1. Use consistent K-12 instructional strategies and adopt a common K-12 vocabulary for teaching and learning.
2. Increase district involvement and district partnerships through job skills training, job shadowing experiences, and career and technical education programs.
3. Expand social/emotional learning opportunities for district students that include character building, use of coping mechanisms, and building healthy relationships.
4. Promote K-12 ownership and advocacy for students to personalize their education.

Other items mentioned at the meeting as important but not prioritized above include:

- The district should use additional forms of communication through “a more
- Robust social media presence”.
- There was support for the district to offer a more “holistic education
- approach” (holistic education represents educating students beyond basic
- education by incorporating ethical, social, and emotional needs as well).
- Students need to connect with at least one significant staff member at their
- school through structures such as advisory programs and homerooms.
- Safe and secure school programs should be expanded through a K-12
- social/emotional curriculum that includes staff professional development
- and
- resource centers that provide mental health assistance.

Also, during the meeting the members were asked to respond to the questions below. Their answers are bulleted below each question.

1. When you think of words to describe our school district of the future what words come to mind?
  - Engaged, hands-on, project-based
  - Technology, distance-learning
  - Focus on diversity
  - Grow your own (teachers, administrators, support staff)
  - Increase the diversity of the staff
2. When you think of the day-to-day actions that would support a mission statement what do you think of?
  - Class meetings and advisory class with dedicated curriculum
  - Increased counseling staff
  - Support at all levels; a plan for every student, K-12
  - After school activities for students
  - Nutrition for students
  - Actively pursuing social/emotional learning goals
    - Social/emotional curriculum day-to-day
    - Draw out students who need these services

On August 6, 2020 The Gervais School Board refined and approved the work listed above to read:

*With equity of access and opportunity for all students as the foundation of every part of our work, the Gervais School Board adopts the following priorities:*

- K-12 curriculum and instruction alignment to maximize individual student achievement at each level
- All students graduate with the skills and experiences to implement their post-secondary plan
- Within a safe and secure environment, students are equipped with social and emotional skills to access their educational opportunities
- Student engagement (social/emotional, instructional, interest-based, peer relationships)

### **The Existing Strategic Plan**

Revised in 2016, the current plan is composed of four quadrants made up of the following areas.

1. Instruction and Learning: Consists of developing clear achievement goals and outcomes aligned with learning strategies and effective use of data and ensuring effective, ongoing professional development aligned with district learning goals.
2. Student Opportunities: Consists of ensuring comprehensive instruction for all levels, pre-K-12 to 12<sup>th</sup> grade and expanding career and technical education and instructional technologies to support instruction.
3. Partnerships and Community Involvement: Consists of communicating with families and stakeholders on student learning and exploring partnerships to expand instruction.
4. District Facilities and Planning: Consists of planning for short and long-term facilities goals, expanding communication for district facilities planning and projects, and supporting instruction and learning through exceptional classroom technology.

The following six strategic goals accompany the four quadrants:

- Relevant, engaging and rigorous instruction in every classroom, every day

- All third graders read at grade level by end of year
- 100% graduation rate
- All eighth graders meet/exceed math levels by end of year
- The continuous development of 21<sup>st</sup> century employable skills
- Meaningful parent and stakeholder involvement

**The Gervais School District Board of Directors' Goals for the 2020-21 School Year Are:**

1. Develop and adopt a districtwide equity lens tool to be used in all areas of work throughout the district in order to support all students achieving to their highest academic potential.
2. Prioritize addressing social and emotional learning and mental health supports for students and staff to foster educational environments where students are surrounded by well-trained staff resulting in students being prepared to learn. Staff will be equipped with the necessary supports and trainings to create this environment.
3. Facilitate long-term planning for the district that is responsive to community growth and student learning needs.

**The Superintendent's Goals for the 2020-21 School Year Are:**

1. With an emphasis in equity, optimize instructional opportunities and supports for students.

Areas to measure:

- Academic achievement
- Maintaining and expanding Career Technical Education opportunities
- Comprehensive K-12 counseling department

2. Facilitate long-term planning for the district that is responsive to community growth and student learning needs.

Areas to measure:

- Long-range facilities task force
- Strategic planning task force
- Equity work

3. Proactively communicate information regarding Gervais School District operations, events, and accomplishments with all stakeholders and provide opportunities for those groups to participate in decision-making processes.

Areas to measure:

- Types of communication
- Types of engagement opportunities

## **Equity and Inclusion Engagement**

District Administration has been participating in a variety of activities since June 2020 aimed at creating safe learning and working environments. An update was sent to all stakeholders and is included here:

### **Update from Gervais School District Administration regarding Equity and Inclusion Efforts June 9, 2020-February 2021**

On June 9, 2020, the Gervais School District administrative team drafted a statement sent out to students, parents, staff and community members affirming our commitment to creating safe learning and working spaces for all of those in our education community.

In that statement the administrative team re-committed ourselves to the following:

- Treating each student as an individual
- Making GSD classrooms safe places to express opinions
- Stopping all racist and culturally insensitive remarks
- Investigating and resolving all suspected instances of racism
- Training for ourselves to recognize and respond to our own biases

The administrative team also stated a commitment to providing updates with regard to progress made and/or steps taken to creating those learning environments so vital to the success of students.

The following is a timeline of actions taken to date:

- Statement sent to stakeholders

- Administrators viewed and discussed Dr. Bryant Marks’ presentation “The Hidden Biases of Good People: Implications for Educators and the Populations They Serve. This was part of a Fall 2019 conference members of the Gervais School Board attended.
- Oregon School Board Association’s (OSBA) Summer Conference “Educational Equity 101”—attended by one board member and superintendent
- Researched possibilities of hiring Dr. Marks to run a series of workshops for all staff on Implicit Bias Training. Due to CDL and COVID-19 issues the district decided to postpone this expenditure.
- GSD Board Meeting—Discussion of OSBA “Educational Equity 101” conference including looking at the power point and discussing how topics applied to district. Reviewed the Oregon Equity Lens. Discussed how to move work forward.
- Administrators attend Statewide Educator Equity Summit and debrief areas relevant to the district
- Superintendent working with counseling department and all specialists to review K-12 Comprehensive Counseling standards and update
- Course offerings and instruction include Spanish, Russian and American Sign Language
- Superintendent works with survey company “Youthtruth”—added survey questions on “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion” and added demographic category of White—Russian
- Districtwide All Staff meeting—Discussion of upcoming elections and protocols to handle discussions. Issued “*Guidance for School Staff on Political Activities, Free Speech, and Facilitating Student Conversations on Controversial Topics*”
- Email to parents regarding Election Day, social media posts which may be targeting groups of people and providing resources in terms of who to ask for help if they become aware of issues.
- Email sent to all staff giving additional guidance in terms of political statements and monitoring their own classrooms for unsafe behavior.
- OSBA Fall Convention—“Implicit Bias in an Age of COVID”—GSD Board Members attended this zoom workshop
- Board adopted goal: Develop and adopt a districtwide equity lens tool to be used in all areas of work throughout the district in order to support all students achieving to their highest academic potential.

- Administration of “YouthTruth” survey
- Counseling Team applies for and receives almost \$100,000 in grant money for “COVID-19 Culturally Specific Community-Based” grant to be used to develop and apply strategies focusing on behavioral, mental, emotional and social health for students and families.
- Part of the consortium with the WESD who received the “Grow Your Own” grant aimed at providing financial assistants to students and classified staff who desire to become teachers.
- Building administration and their team receive data from YouthTruth Survey and tasked with assigning data teams to consider the data, share with all staff and be prepared for “15 days of data” in March.
- Communication to staff regarding guidance and ideas for use in the classroom after the riots in Washington DC and the upcoming Inauguration Day. Included ways to make classroom space safe and links to resources in supporting students through difficult events and how to participate appropriately in difficult conversations about controversial topics.
- Administrators and two other staff members attend “Teaching While White” and debrief on how to move this work forward for all staff
- Parent engagement night to discuss issues in the school setting. Meeting held entirely in Spanish.
- Parent engagement night to discuss issues in the school setting. Meeting for parents from the Russian Old Believer community.
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Seminar—some members of the administrative team will be attending
- Staff professional development on Bridges 13

There have been many moving parts to this work. The district has offered some opportunities for staff participation but was also trying to be sensitive about requesting participation in trainings in the current education climate and knowing many staff members are feeling overwhelmed with the demands of the job this year. Next steps moving forward (as we hopefully return to a more normal school setting) include:

- All buildings will analyze data from Youthtruth Survey to begin identifying areas of focus
- Continued work with the GSD Board of Directors on moving forward in creating an equity lens tool
- Plans for use of grants secured by counseling department

- Finalize k-12 comprehensive counseling plan
- Recruit staff to participate in “Teaching While White” workshop
- Analysis of systems within the district which may be creating barriers for students of color or other marginalized groups (curriculum guides, course offerings including prerequisites, discipline policies and practices)
- Work over the summer—curriculum focus on inclusive practices and incorporating feedback obtained from survey
- Determine student engagement/education priorities
- Work with student leadership at all grade levels to use their voice in creating plans/strategies
- Establish staff lending libraries in all buildings providing opportunities for staff to gain understanding and perspectives of race and equity issues and how current systems may create barriers for our students
- Determine best PD plans for Summer 2021 and 2021-22 school year—Dr. Marks? Moe Carrick? Teaching While White?
- Establish monthly cultural celebration/recognition/awareness
  - Every other week notifications pushed out

These “next steps” are by no means complete. As each building gathers the data from Youth Truth and the work of the Gervais School District Strategic Planning Committee moves toward completion, this list of priorities and ideas may change.

### **Student Investment Account (SIA) District Survey Information**

Through the Student Success Act the Oregon Legislature created the Student Investment Account to increase the overall state school fund. The SIA has distributed \$200 million to Oregon’s public education system. Approximately 50% of the money was apportioned to public school districts to:

1. Meet students mental and behavioral needs
2. Increase academic achievement especially for student groups that have historically experienced academic disparities

In order for any of Oregon’s school districts to receive SIA funding they had to administer a comprehensive needs assessment. The Gervais School District conducted its needs assessment via a survey from November 2019 to February 2020. The survey data includes responses from 164 Gervais School District staff, parents/guardians, business partners, and other community members. The questions in the SIA survey are similar to those the district used for its more

recent focus group meetings. Since COVID-19 factors limited the district's ability to obtain a larger number of participants in the focus group meetings and electronic survey, a very general SIA summary of information relevant for the strategic plan process and is included below. *Keep in mind that this survey was completed before COVID-19 was being dealt with in GSD schools.*

### **Chart of Most Wanted District Improvements Based on SIA Survey Responses**

The percentages below are a combined ranking of the most important priority and important but not the highest priority.

Invest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics...95%  
More opportunities for internships for high school students...94.26%  
Invest in career and technical education...94%  
Invest in advanced and college-level courses...93%  
Purchase curriculum for teachers and students...92%  
Hire more teachers...90.4%  
Invest in student technology tools...90.32%  
Hire student success advocates...90.08%  
Hire more instructional assistants...85%  
Expand art education...83%  
Assessment of district facilities to determine safety/security needs...82.4%  
Hire more counselors/social workers...82.3%  
Hire more subject matter specialists...82.26%  
Hire campus monitor/supervision staff...80.80%  
Increase talented and gifted program...80.64%  
Increase music program...78.86%  
Expand after school programs...78.52%  
Make school day longer...76%  
Hire school resource officer...72%  
Hire more school psychologists...71%  
Hire more nurses...67%  
Expand summer school programs...54  
Add days to the school year...34%

## Quotes from Student Investment Survey

*Again, keep in mind these comments are pre-COVID-19 and no attempt was made to include all of the hundreds of responses nor are these comments in any priority order. Some of the comments were edited for clarity and proper grammar.*

- “Graduates need to understand life as a young adult and feel confident in all they have accomplished and be ready for the new world ahead of them.”
- “Students should experience a strong core curriculum, leadership, and technology/vocational/skills to continue to move forward with a balanced view of society.”
- “Students need to self-advocate, problem-solve, and collaborate.”
- “Students should be community minded citizens who realize they have importance and significance in the world.”
- “Students in difficult situations need to be fighters (in a positive sense), I don’t want anyone to give up.”
- “I want our students to have study skills, life-skills, and work ethics as well as the ability to critically think about the world with enough historical context to have a deep understanding of the complexities of society.”
- A parent who supports moving to four-day school weeks wrote, “I believe there is opportunity in re-creating the traditional school year calendar to provide more consistency for students, parents, and staff.”
- “Student retention is a major issue in Gervais schools. Strategies to engage and keep students in school are vital.”
- “I feel my children thrive when they have after school activities to look forward to. They excel when they have something to attend after the school day and they try harder not to miss days.”
- “We need emotional support from professional people who can detect, monitor, and help treat our kids.”
- “We need to provide a welcome center for newcomers who are coming to the district and provide them a homeroom with teachers and assistants to support their language needs in one classroom instead of in mainstream classes.”
- “Provide more information to parents about mental health and resources that are available.”
- “Tutors should be added to provide one-on-one after school assistance.”
- “Need a school nurse for the elementary school.”

- “Meet with families of students who require extra assistance more regularly.”
- “Ensure that bullying is taken care of immediately.”
- “I’m more concerned about aging buildings than needing to increase security.”
- “While my students in general are happy with the teachers/staff, they are constantly complaining about the old buildings.”
- “Students do feel very scared that someone might enter their school and start shooting so an officer will be great.”
- “I would like to see a partner program with Chemeketa Community College for dual enrollment so a senior can graduate with both their high school diploma and associate degree.”

### **Focus Group Survey Information**

Throughout January 2021, focus group data was gathered for this report. Focus groups are one of the most important avenues used to gain strategic plan background information and to build ownership with stakeholders. The focus groups were made up of the following representation:

- Parent meeting hosted in Spanish
- Parent meeting hosted in English
- Russian Old Believer and Holy Trinity community representatives
- District Strategic Planning Team members
- Gervais School Board members

### **General Trends from the Focus Group/Website Survey Responses**

The consultant, superintendent, and District Strategic Planning Team approved the survey questions and types of focus groups. In addition to Superintendent Stevens and the consultant, the team is made up of 15 representative members of the district and the greater Gervais community. *Only a small amount of the hundreds of responses are listed below and some have been edited for clarity and proper grammar.*

**Question 1: What is the district doing well that you do not want changed or reduced?**

The team wanted to initially find out what the district is doing that stakeholders approve of before identifying needed improvements, so this is the first question to be answered.

1. The caring nature of staff members toward all students was rated number one. It is about the attitude of staff and the individual relationships they develop with students, hence very few students fall through the cracks.
2. A combination of small-town feel, small class size, and comments from staff members, “We know our families and siblings and therefore are able to connect needs” and “Everyone knows everyone” rated as the second highest positive characteristic of the district.
3. Tied in the third place were open communication and the belief, in time, that there are some silver linings from online learning that can be incorporated for GSD students when in-person education starts up again. A team member said, “We provided internet access for many families that did not have it before”. A staff member added, “We are now doing things instructionally that we have always wanted to do but did not have the time to implement”. One parent summed this point up by saying, “Continue using online learning improvements”. The district’s open communication was most appreciated when it involved personal contacts between individual teachers and parents/guardians and when teachers contacted students.
4. Next in line was the individual support parents/guardians recognize their students are receiving through mentoring and tutoring, especially for those students who require extra or specialized assistance.
5. The district nutrition program (COVID-19 being a factor) was next with a special appreciation for meals that were delivered to homes.
6. The next two are computer programs (Imagine Learning/Power School) and the variety of after school programs and extracurricular activities.
7. Also mentioned were safety/security, engaging and updated curriculum, career and technical education, and the community volunteer program.

Here are a few of the many quotes that question one received.

- “Good job on distance learning and opportunities during COVID-19.”
- “Good communication about student progress.”
- “Thank you for the opportunity to opt-out of health courses.”
- “We have a voice.”

- “Our students don’t seem to see color. They have friendships that extend beyond all cultural boundaries.”
- “The district is good at getting input, there have been a lot of community surveys.”

**Question 2: What is the one most important change, improvement, or adjustment you suggest the district should make over the next three years?**

Question two is probably the most important of the six survey questions. And although GSD cannot implement all of the improvements the various stakeholders identified, it can do some of them. Determining what the best improvements are and how to implement them over time is the major purpose of this ten-month visionary process.

1. Comments about district curriculum dominated responses to question two. More elective choices and extra-curricular activities, increased music programs and plays, adding more challenging classes (dual credit, advanced placement/honors, world languages), offer religious studies, and focus on basic skills were some of the suggestions.
2. Next were requests for hiring a more a diverse staff (the last GSD state demographic report the consultant found indicated that 75% of students are non-white and yet only 6.7% of the teaching staff is non-white). Facility concerns were next in priority with remodeling the existing gym space individually mentioned.
3. The next grouping consisting of wanting more cultural promotions, increased partnership and involvement with parents (including requests for parent clubs), and a desire for more support for Russian students.

Some of the remaining suggestions included: add more after school homework help/tutoring, maintain small class sizes, have an early release schedule for Fridays, increase counselors districtwide, add more reading specialists, and aim toward continuous improvement.

Here are a few of the quotes received for question two.

- A Spanish speaking parent said, “Each school should have someone in the main office who speaks both Spanish and English”.
- “I want more support with struggling students, especially with reading for younger students.”

- A Russian parent said, “Educate staff about how all religions are free to express practices and beliefs.”
- Another Russian parent said, “Help support and celebrate Russian Old Believer students so they can feel included.”
- (A major theme from the Russian parents was recognizing their culture and helping their students and families celebrate it.)
- A Spanish speaking parent suggested, “Hold meetings in the languages we are translating into rather than in English that has to be translated for the participants”.

**Question 3: What are some core values (fundamental beliefs that guide the district) you believe should be represented in the district’s new strategic plan?**

This question’s responses will be used to build the foundation for the new strategic plan’s district core values and beliefs. The process the District Strategic Planning Team will use starts with identifying core values then using the core values to create the mission statement, then using both of them to build the vision statement, and finally utilizing each of these three components to identify the district strategic goals for the next three years. So, just like when building a house, it is imperative to start with a very strong foundation. The identified core values/beliefs are listed below in order of the frequency in which they were mentioned:

- Diversity/inclusivity/differences/equality/social justice
- Integrity/honesty/transparency
- Relationships/caring staff/respect
- Commitment to community
- Communication
- Loyalty and unity

The following were mentioned at least once but not multiple times like the core values above. Also, they are not listed in priority order.

- Well-rounded
- Innovative
- Kindness
- Creativity
- Seeing needs and meeting them
- Excellence
- Compassion

- Confidence
- Reaching potential
- Valuing education
- Honor various cultures
- Value parent roles and responsibilities
- Maintain a culture of fun
- Positivity
- A sense of dedication
- External validity, answer why are we doing this?

**Question 4: How can the district better serve all students and specifically its economically disadvantaged, homeless, students of various academic abilities, students with diverse backgrounds and perspectives, LGBTQ+ students, and students learning English?**

GSD student enrolment is diverse, as is the resident population of the greater Gervais area. The ability to adequately meet the needs of such a varied group of students is one of the district's greatest challenges. The new strategic plan has to be anchored in honoring, respecting, and making every effort to meet each student's individual needs. The words in the district website banner, school board goals, existing strategic plan, and Superintendent Stevens 2020-21 goals all prominently refer to diversity, equality, and inclusivity. The concept of diversity and equality was rated as the number one priority in question three above in regard to what core values district stakeholders want most in their public schools.

Interestingly unlike the first three questions, the responses to question four were not clumped together into similar ideas. Instead, there is a multitude of different recommendations. This question apparently was more difficult for the participants to specifically respond to. The most relevant comments offered for question four are listed below in no priority order.

- There is a need for more resources dedicated to students being able to personalize their learning and explore individual interests.
- Regarding meetings, reach out to non-English speaking families more by use of reminders, newsletters, and phone calls.
- "The social/emotional trauma that many students have experienced from not coming to school for such a long time needs to be dealt with through

one-on-one emotional support when these students return to their classrooms.”

- Daycare, after school programs, and after school activities should be expanded.
- Diverse students benefit from internships and job shadowing experiences.
- Increase extra-curricular activities.
- “Bring in more guest speakers who look like our student population.”
- Add more bilingual instruction.
- Increase the college-credit pipeline.
- Expand the talented and gifted program.
- Refer more students/families to information about financial assistance, resources, and programs, “Some families might be embarrassed and not ask for help”.
- “Do a needs assessment on this question via a survey to all families.”
- Add more electives.
- “Increase the life-skills curriculum by including information about taxes, opening bank accounts, obtaining loans, etc.”
- Add more mentoring options and tutoring opportunities.
- Make Russian reading, writing, and speaking classes available.

**Question 5: How can the district better connect with our community to increase communication, involvement, and help community members gain a greater sense of ownership in Gervais School District’s public schools?**

Question five is similar to question four in that there are a number of different single responses and just a few comments about the same basic recommendation. Also, compared to the first four questions the answers to this question were frequently not about what the question asks but more about recommended non-communication/involvement/ownership improvements. Some of those comments were moved to question six. That being said, throughout the data gathering process increased and effective communications, increased parental/guardian involvement, and feeling a sense of ownership in the public schools are reoccurring themes. Sometimes they were lauded and other times considered as distinct areas for improvement. It is often said that a complex public organization can never communicate too much. Although extensive communication is important, so is effective user-friendly communication of the correct kind for any given circumstance.

Some respondents offered things they appreciated about the district as their answer to this question. They are listed in the first six comments.

- “Good connections between teachers/parents/students.”
- “The district is doing a great job with online instruction right now.”
- “Lots of praise for the new superintendent.”
- “Great relationship between students and teachers.”
- “Liked open house BBQ at GHS.”
- “Like Robocall/Robotext.”

The following areas represent suggestions for improvement.

- Have more community dinners and carnivals.
- “Make families feel more welcome when entering district facilities.”
- Need more timely communications. Send clear communications in all languages, at least a week or two in advance”.
- There is a preference for text messages and emails over phone calls.
- “Let parents know in the first instance when there is a problem with a child, don’t wait until there are multiple instances.”
- “Maintain a strong social media presence.”
- Two parents mentioned that the district website is hard to navigate and it needs to be populated with more information.
- A parent said, “We get a lot of communication from individual teachers but we could use more from the school itself.”
- Another parent responded, “The entry directions for visitors of what route to follow at the elementary school are confusing”.

**Question 6: What else do you want to suggest that you have not mentioned above?**

This is a catch-all question to give participants an opportunity to include any ideas/concerns/suggestions they want the district to be aware of that they either did not hear during their focus group discussion or they want to repeat for emphasis. Only items not already written in the first five questions are listed below. The responses are limited mainly because the allotted time ran out for some of the group meetings before they reached this question.

- Add sports activities for K-3 students.
- The gate to the track should be closed during school hours for security.
- Install swings at the elementary school.

- Remodel and upgrade locker rooms.
- Conduct parent meetings in home languages and allow for more participation so parents can ask questions they would like to have answered.
- Make Spanish conversation classes available for staff members.

## **Thanks and Appreciation**

Thank you to all those who contributed to the data gathering process and especially to Jenny Jones, Kalynn Naulty, Fenya Aman, Maria Usoltseff, Tracy Lewis and Superintendent Stevens. This report will provide a great deal of helpful information for the District Strategic Planning Team to use for building the district's new three-year strategic plan.

## **Original Data Sources**

The GSD main office is located at 290 First Street and holds copies of all original data used to write this report. This information can be made available to those who want to request any or all parts of the report source material by calling 503-792-3803 or making an online contact to Jenny Jones at: [www.gervais.k12.or.us](http://www.gervais.k12.or.us)