

O P I N I O N

Letters to the Editor...

The Nugget welcomes contributions from its readers, which must include the writer's name, address, and phone number. Letters to the Editor is an open forum for the community and contains unsolicited opinions not necessarily shared by the Editor. The Nugget reserves the right to edit, omit, respond, or ask for a response to letters submitted to the Editor. Letters should be no longer than 300 words. Unpublished items are not acknowledged or returned. The deadline for all letters is 10 a.m. Monday.

That small-town feeling

To the Editor:
Having lived in the Sisters Country for nearly two decades. I, like many, have seen much growth. We often don't see as many familiar faces as we used to.

The local music and charity event this week at the Community Garden made me feel at home again with a happy, small crowd of all ages enjoying fellowship amongst the beautiful sunset mountain views and amazing musical artistry.

Thank you Sisters Community Garden members for hosting this event and helping me find our little town of Sisters once again in my heart.

Patti Janego

Tensions at School Board meeting

To the Editor:

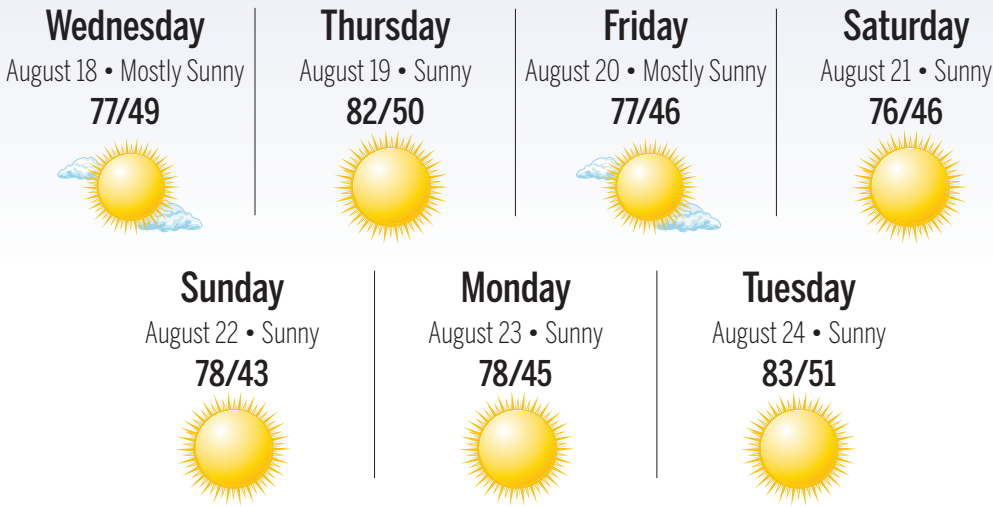
I have never written a letter to the editor before, but after reading the article in *The Nugget* (August 11) about the August 4 Sisters School Board meeting, I feel compelled to share positive experiences about mask wearing in schools.

My daughter is a student in the Sisters School District. Comprehensive Distance Learning was quite challenging for her. It was isolating and confusing. When she was able to return to school, even wearing

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Sisters Weather Forecast

Courtesy of the National Weather Service, Pendleton, Oregon



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Sisters schools uphold education standards

By Jim Cornelius
Editor in Chief

There's a very good reason that Governor Kate Brown wants to avoid talking about her stealth signing of Senate Bill 744. It's indefensible.

The bill drops requirements that Oregon's high school graduates demonstrate they can read, write, or do math at a high school level through the 2023-24 school year.

There's a tell in the fact that Brown did not hold a signing ceremony, and her office did not issue a press release about the signing of the bill. The State didn't enter the bill into the legislative database until 15 days after it was signed. Perhaps the governor recognizes that this move is an embarrassment.

It lets down the people of Oregon, who have a right to expect that their tax dollars devoted to education actually provide education. It is an insult to the teachers who strive, often under trying conditions, to improve their students' capabilities and performance. It is an insult to all those students who strive to better themselves. And, perhaps worst of all, it sends the message to struggling students that we don't believe they can succeed.

According to *The Oregonian*, Brown's Communications Deputy Charles Boyle said in an emailed statement that "suspending the reading, writing, and math proficiency requirements while the State develops new graduation standards will benefit 'Oregon's Black, Latino, Latina, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islander, Tribal, and students of color.'"

How? Since when do we consider failure to prepare students for post-graduation life a "benefit"?

"Leaders from those communities have advocated time and again for equitable graduation standards, along with expanded learning opportunities and supports," Boyle wrote.

We can all get behind "expanded learning opportunities and supports." Where are they? They're not there, because the legislature didn't pass any. They just dropped the standards. That's not "benefitting" students; that's what Michael Gerson, a speechwriter for former president George W. Bush, once called "the soft bigotry of low expectations."

Boyle claims that "SB 744 gives us an opportunity to review our graduation requirements and make sure our assessments can truly assess all students' learning. In the meantime, it gives Oregon students and the education community a chance to regroup after a year and a half of disruption caused by the pandemic."

The final version of the

bill eliminated a provision that would have permanently prevented the State Board of Education from requiring students who completed required coursework to demonstrate proficiency in any other skill or academic content area.

The very fact that such a provision was even considered indicates where this is ultimately headed.

It may be that proficiency assessments need to be reformed and revised. That's a continuous process — but it doesn't require suspending proficiency requirements entirely while it's undertaken. It makes sense to asterisk performance measurements while schools continue to wrestle with the impacts of COVID-19. But that's not what the State is offering to its teachers, students, and taxpayers. This is simply an abdication.

Proponents of SB 744 want to make this about standardized testing, arguing that the requirements place students who don't test well at an unfair disadvantage. That's disingenuous. It's true that testing isn't always the best way to assess proficiency; we all know people who underperform on tests because, well, they underperform on tests. But there are other ways under the suspended standards that students can demonstrate proficiency.

Disingenuous arguments, coupled with the let's-hope-nobody-notices approach to enacting the legislation show that proponents know this abdication of proficiency requirements looks bad. And it looks bad because it IS bad. It's a step in the wrong direction.

The Sisters School District need not move in lockstep with this wrong turn. SSD has standards that are higher across the board than the State's minimum standards. The District has long offered its own diploma, which requires more credits than that issued by the State. Standards of math and reading proficiency are incorporated into the classroom, and those students who have trouble demonstrating that they meet the standards — via testing or through work samples — are given help to clear the bar.

In the current social climate, it's good to see Superintendent Curt Scholl affirm the District's commitment to quality education (see story, page 1). The school board needs to follow up by formally, assertively affirming its commitment to its standards.

The Sisters School District needs to speak up loud and clear in defense of its fundamental mission: to educate ALL of its students to the highest standard they can achieve.

The bill can be read in its entirety at <https://olis.oregon.gov/liz/2021R1/Measures/Overview/SB744>.

Red sunset...



Sisters endured several days of poor air quality due to wildfire smoke. It made for some intense and eerie sunsets.

PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS