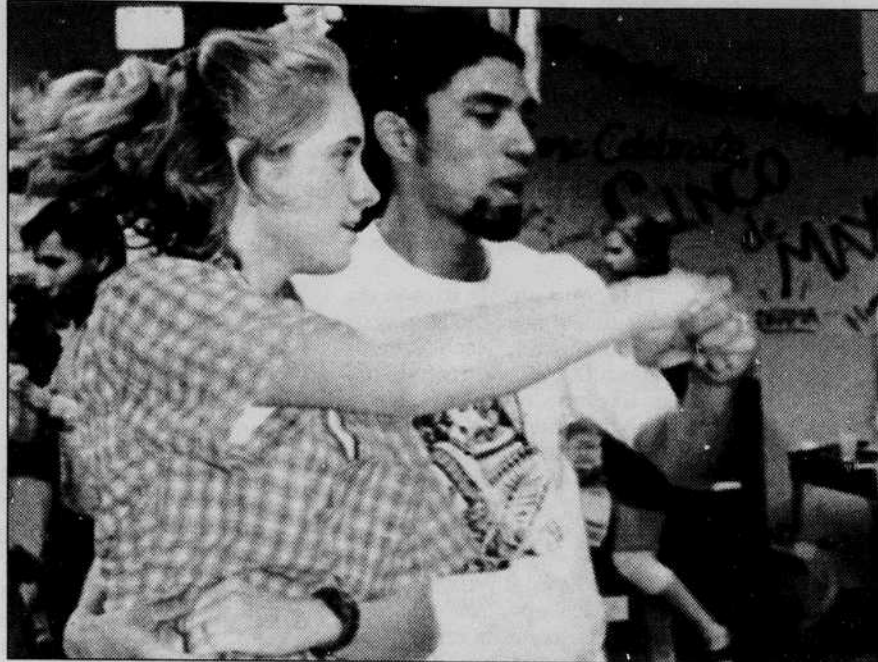


Celebrating Cinco



Two students celebrate Cinco de Mayo in the Hamilton dining center by dancing together. The celebration was put on by the High School Equivalency Program students who also prepared authentic Mexican food.

EMILY NIEBRAND/Emerald

Study ranks Oregon 21st nationally in child care

■ **CARE:** The state placed relatively higher in categories such as prevention of low birth-weight babies

The Associated Press

A high dropout rate helped Oregon slip one place to 21st nationally in an annual study of the well-being of children, but the state was a leader in reducing child deaths and poverty.

The study released today by the Baltimore-based Annie E. Casey Foundation ranks states by 10 categories of child care.

Oregon ranked second in preventing low birth-weight babies, 16th in reducing infant mortality, and 12th in preventing deaths of older children.

Nearly a fifth of Oregon's children live in poverty, but that represents a decrease of 11 percent since 1985 and ranks the state 17th.

The study revealed Oregon also has its share of problems. The rate of births to teen-agers in Oregon increased 30 percent

since 1985, a greater rate of increase than the national average.

The high school dropout rate shot up by 22 percent, while the rate fell 18 percent nationally.

"It really points to some challenges we have in the area of education," said Tonia Hunt, spokeswoman for Children First for Oregon, a nonprofit Portland group that also tracks child welfare and receives funding from the Casey Foundation.

However, the teen birth rate in Oregon — 23 per 1,000 teen-age girls — still is below the national average of 31 per 1,000. The state dropout rate of 9 percent also remains below the national figure of 11 percent.

Hunt said the dropout rate in Oregon probably is related to an increase in jobs for teen-agers. The percent of teen-agers not attending school and not working fell 18 percent since 1985.

Juvenile arrests for violent crimes increased 52 percent since 1984 in Oregon, and 70 percent nationally.

Many lawmakers find flaws with the initiative petition system

■ **LAW:** There are many ideas of how to fix the system but no overwhelming support for one in particular

By Charles Beggs
The Associated Press

SALEM — As the 1997 Legislature got under way, some lawmakers said it was time to rein in an initiative petition system that is running amok.

Too many measures on the ballot, many of them poorly worded or legally flawed, show the need for reform, they said.

But now it appears there's no extensive support for any major changes in this legislative session. There's no shortage of ideas, though.

They include using different colored initiative petitions for paid and unpaid signature gatherers, making it more difficult to put proposals on the ballot and having screening committees sift through measures before they reach the voters.

All told, close to 80 bills have been introduced to modify the initiative process, which Oregon pioneered in 1902. But none of the major measures has passed both houses.

Secretary of State Phil Keisling thinks the time is ripe for change, but he detects little happening so far.

"I've yet to see any kind of leadership," he says.

Keisling, the state's top election official, noted that voters faced 23 statewide ballot measures in last November's election and 18 propositions in the 1994 general election.

"If you cannot pass reforms now, I'm not sure when you can," he said.

The House and Senate are making separate efforts at reform.

The Senate has passed and sent to the House a proposed ballot measure that would raise by 50 percent the number of signatures needed to put a suggested constitutional amendment on the ballot. That would increase the cur-

rent signature requirement from 97,000 to 146,000.

The measure also would decrease by about 16 percent the number of signatures needed to put a statutory measure before the voters.

The idea is to encourage petitioners to propose statutory changes. Those can be revised by the Legislature if there are problems, while constitutional amendments cannot be altered except by the voters.

The other major proposal is being drafted by representatives of interest groups at the request of House Majority Leader Lynn Snodgrass, R-Boring.

Snodgrass, also chairwoman of the House Rules and Elections Committee, says the bill probably will propose some kind of review process for initiative measures before they reach the ballot.

The idea is to find potential problems. There also have been suggestions that the Legislature's legal office or the attorney general issue opinions about issues in

the proposed measures.

All the ideas have detractors.

"We'd be open to some changes geared mainly toward assistance in drafting initiatives," said Randy Tucker of the Oregon State Public Interest Research Group, which has put several measures on the ballot.

But Tucker is wary of having the government issue opinions on proposed measures.

"Any review process has to avoid the perception that the state is taking an official position," he said. "The sponsors must retain control of their measures, and we shouldn't upset the balance between the initiative process and the Legislature."

Tucker also opposes the Senate-passed bill to sharply raise signature requirements for constitutional amendments. He says the change would burden grassroots campaigns and have little effect on well-financed signature drives.

Bill Sizemore of Portland, author of the Measure 47 tax limit, doubts if the public wants much

done about initiatives.

"I don't think you're going to see a lot of action in changing initiative process," he said. "People communicated in May 1996 they don't want to fix a system they see as not broken."

He referred to voter defeat of a measure that would have required petitioners to gather portions of their total signatures from each of the state's five congressional districts.

The idea was to make petitioners show broader support for their proposals than just collecting all signatures at Portland-area shopping malls.

"That was a real lesson in how skittish the public is" about changing the system, Keisling said.

Sen. Randy Miller, R-Lake Oswego, chairman of the Senate Rules and Elections Committee, is among those who are skeptical about any major changes.

He says technical review procedures already can be done without passing any laws.



International Day of Cultural Reconciliation

You are invited to join speakers from the African American, Chicano, East Timorese, Japanese, Japanese American, Jewish, Native American, Palestinian, Romany (Gypsy), Vietnamese, and Vietnamese American communities in presenting testimony and sustaining a dialogue to re-examine our historic relationships, and consider sharing our collective home and its limited resources in ways that transcend cultural imperialism and genocide.

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