

Oregon

Backers say Measure 98 will expand ag and vocational classes

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

CLACKAMAS, Ore. — Clackamas High School southeast of Portland has an ag program other schools envy, with a 10-acre farm, livestock, apple trees, greenhouses, a wonderful old barn and other outbuildings.

Teacher Kathy Mayfield has had to fight for it, and savors the prospect of voters approving Measure 98, which would provide at least \$800 annually per student for high school career and technical education (CTE) programs, college-level courses and dropout prevention programs.

The measure, on the statewide November ballot, would establish the High School Graduation and College and Career Readiness Fund as part of the state's general fund budget. Money for the program would come from anticipated increases in state revenue.

Agriculture teachers and many others involved in vocational training strongly support the measure, citing workforce needs in the technical trades and a segment of students who reach a dead end in high school.



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Clackamas High School ag teacher Kathy Mayfield, center, gives directions to students Lauren Dale, left, and Remi Lam. The school district operates a 10-acre farm that has cows, sheep, chickens, apple trees, garden and a large old barn.

Mayfield said she has conversations with parents who tell her the Clackamas ag program "saved my child."

"I think that goes across the board with CTE," Mayfield said. "It provides a relevancy to education that they just aren't getting. All of sudden, math makes sense and science makes sense."

At Sutherlin High School in Southern Oregon, agriculture

teacher Wes Crawford said the real-world application of technical ed "flips the tables" for students who struggle with traditional academic courses or tune out at school.

"Everyone is a lot more equal," Crawford said. "Sometimes this is what gets them through their day."

His program in Sutherlin has four paths: animal science, which includes veterinary

science; plant science, which includes forestry; agri-business; and a sector dealing with power structures and technology, which includes welding classes. In a school of 410 students, about 135 are enrolled in Crawford's classes.

At Clackamas, Mayfield and her husband, Wynn, the school's other ag teacher, offer three years of animal science classes and advanced ag in the final year. Mayfield said animals draw students in, but they're also exposed to a well-rounded program that includes soil science, marketing, tractor driving and other aspects of ag. Students raise and market beef, while beginners press the farm's apples into cider, which is sold as well.

But Mayfield said she and her husband handle classes of 35 students. Passage of the measure might provide money to repair rotting greenhouse walls and add more staff; an instructor-to-student ratio of 1-to-20 or so would be desirable, she said.

The measure has broad support, including endorsements from construction trade unions, newspaper editorial boards, the Latino Network, Coalition of Communities of

Color and Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, among others.

An analysis from the League of Women Voters said Oregon's 72 percent graduation rate in 2014 was the fourth worse in the U.S., and Oregon's per-student spending has dropped 5 percent since 2010. The League said auto shop, wood and metal shop, culinary arts and robotics classes have been "significantly reduced" over the past 20 years.

Data from the Oregon Department of Education showed that students who earned at least one CTE credit in high school have a graduation rate more than 15 percent higher than the state average, according to the League's analysis. The difference "tends to be more dramatic for low income and minority students who have taken CTE," the League said.

Opposition has been low key. A committee studying Measure 98 for the influential Portland City Club split 5-5 on an endorsement vote, with some members saying the measure was too narrowly focused but all agreeing the current state of education in Oregon "threatens the state's future and economy."

The City Club's full membership, however, overrode the committee's concern and voted to endorse the measure. Elsewhere, the Crook County School Board in Central Oregon declined to endorse the measure. Both candidates for governor, incumbent Kate Brown and Bud Pierce, support it.

Vocational education can be a "real life-changer" for young people, said Bridget Quinn, workforce development coordinator for a Portland training center jointly operated by the National Electrical Contractors Association and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

Quinn became a licensed journeyman electrician in 2008 after completing an apprenticeship program. "I had never heard anything in high school about this as a possible career," she said. "I'm trying to deliver the information that, quite frankly, I missed out on."

The contractor-union coalition operating the training center supports Measure 98, she said.

Many high school graduates haven't held a tool in their hands and aren't prepared to enter the trades, which in some cases have been stigmatized as "only for losers couldn't make into college," Quinn said. The stereotype of the "cat-calling construction worker" hasn't helped, she said.

But the construction trades need workers, because up to a third of the workforce will be retiring in the coming years as baby boomers reach the end of their careers, she said.

She welcomes the swing back to career and technical education in high school.

"For a very long time it received cuts," Quinn said. "The first thing cut from the budget was auto shop, wood shop and metal shop."

Owyhee Irrigation District accused of shorting water

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

The Owyhee Irrigation District in Oregon's Malheur County is accused in a lawsuit of delivering insufficient water to a farming couple, causing \$200,000 in crop losses.

Delos and Barbara Lee have filed a complaint alleging the irrigation district delivered fewer than 80 acre-feet of water to their 95-acre farm in 2014 even though they were allocated to receive 142.5 acre-feet that year.

The complaint, filed in Malheur County Circuit Court, claims that the Lees received their allocated 152 acre-feet in 2015, but miscalculations by the district resulted in "no water delivery of water during certain months in which Lee otherwise would have received water."

The lawsuit accuses the district of negligence and breach of contract and seeks \$200,000 in damages.

Jay Chamberlin, manager of the Owyhee Irrigation District, said he's away from the office at a conference and hasn't yet read the complaint.

Delivering water has been a challenge during recent droughts, he said. "The drought has caused a tremendous hardship on our ag producers."

In the 2014 and 2015 growing seasons, about 27 percent of the acres served by the district were idled because of a lack of irrigation water, Chamberlin said.

The situation improved in 2016 but farmers have faced lower prices for hay, cattle, grains and corn, he said. "It's almost like a two-edged sword."

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