

# Duncan looks for 'broader education'

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Of The Print

After eight years experience in the position of Oregon Superintendent of Public Instruction, Verne Duncan, 48, was once again reelected in the Nov. 2 elections. The following is an interview with Duncan, conducted by *The Print* at the Duncan home in Milwaukie.

**THE PRINT:** In the Nov. 2 elections Ballot Measure 3 (tax limitation) barely failed. What does that mean to you?

**DUNCAN:** The people want relief—they want property tax relief—and they weren't necessarily voting against schools, or community colleges or the government. They were saying they want to retain those; but we better do something to shift the burden for paying for them.

**THE PRINT:** What can be

**THE PRINT:** To what do you attribute the rise in SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) scores we've seen over the past few years?

**DUNCAN:** I think our students are better prepared. Now with some of the basic skills areas I really think we have a group of students now, their reasoning skills are better. When you start putting all those things together you're going to see a rise in SAT scores.

I think Oregon has really emphasized this. Our own competency program, has reasoning one of the competency/skills expected of students.

**THE PRINT:** What about accusations that high school graduates still aren't prepared for college?

**DUNCAN:** I do support the concept of more new math,

less money for the time they put in.

**THE PRINT:** Why does it cost Oregon so much more to send a student through one year of school than the national average?

**DUNCAN:** There are several reasons why we cost so much more. We had a handicap education law prior to the federal law. So we're ahead of those states. And remember those are very expensive programs. So we have most of them on line already, while other states are just now getting geared up. Our transportation costs are so high because of the size of the state we have is greater than in some parts of the country. And then our class sizes have been smaller, and that's a very positive thing. Opportunities for a better education are certainly there when you keep your class sizes

cess right now of something I think is rather interesting. We're looking and trying to analyze where education is going to be in the next couple of decades. What will the student need down the road? And how are we going to have to restructure the educational setting of this state to meet those needs?

We're looking at the 'megatrends' going on in the country right now, and pulling out the ones that will have an impact on education, and then going one step further—those that have an effect on Oregon. It's kind of exciting. We've just gone through some of our first sessions on it, and I think it's going to have a major effect on education in the state. That includes the short range and long range plan for Oregon education.

**THE PRINT:** What are some of the things you're going to

area? Let's face it, the computer business is a major force in this country.

**THE PRINT:** How do you deal with high school graduates not wanting to continue their education?

**DUNCAN:** Our most important responsibility of public education today is to teach people to keep on learning. It's no longer, you finish high school and say 'Hey, I finished high school,' and go out and say 'Gosh I've got a college degree, now I'm set for life.' That won't do it. You've got to be in a position where you can keep on learning and retaining.

**THE PRINT:** Does there seem to be a problem right now getting people to educate themselves in the areas that will be open in the near future?

**DUNCAN:** Yes. I don't think



done to satisfy the taxpayers, and still get enough money for education?

**DUNCAN:** You have several different groups of taxpayers. When you look at the proponents of Ballot Measure 3, there are those who want to cut taxes, and they want less service. They want less expenditures. Then you have another group of proponents who are saying "We just don't want the burden to be on the property tax. Find another tax."

**THE PRINT:** Are you against a sales tax?

**DUNCAN:** I could support a sales tax, if a measure were presented to the people that included property tax relief right along with the sales tax. In other words if you vote "aye" for a sales tax that same vote has reduced your property tax.

more science and a broader exposure in the college-prep programs. I think we've really been emphasizing the writing skills over the past couple of years, and that is really paying off. It is with those students that the university people are going to be impressed.

**THE PRINT:** Is too much money going to the administrative, and not enough going to the teaching end of education?

**DUNCAN:** When you talk about teachers salaries and administrative salaries, the upward mobility, from the financial standpoint, is to go into administration, and I think that's bad. Teachers should be paid a salary that would encourage them to stay in the classroom. I don't begrudge the principals' salaries, because if you figure it out, they're mak-

down. Oregonians are very supportive of their schools.

**THE PRINT:** Why do we keep seeing levies failing, and in fact, Estacada School District closing?

**DUNCAN:** They weren't really voting against their schools. People generally don't think of a school closing. Who ever heard of a school closing?

**THE PRINT:** Do you think as people see more schools closing, voters will begin to approve levies?

**DUNCAN:** On the first or second time around I don't think they're thinking about that. They may be trying to get a message to the district, to get the costs down. They don't think of closing at first.

**THE PRINT:** What are some of the things you have to get done in the immediate future?

**DUNCAN:** We're in the pro-

implement?

**DUNCAN:** Let's face it: We're in the information era now. It was the agricultural era and the industrial era, now we're in the information era—the technology, computers and all those things put together. A child born this year will be a member of the class 'ought ought (2000)'. That shows you how close the next century is to us. It's here. And we want to be sure that the education they get is not obsolete.

So that's why we try to look at the fiscal picture, the kind of jobs that will be available, what kind of training people are going to need. That is what that whole 'megatrend' is. It looks at things like the current Dow Jones. Is it really a true indicator when you find there are no computer companies listed in the Dow Jones

people have a good picture of what's coming in the future. You've got to be prepared to move with the times.

**THE PRINT:** In what areas do you think people most need to get training?

**DUNCAN:** If I were starting college today, I'd be sure I had a good understanding of the computer world. I think it's still going to be important to have writing skills. I would take everything I could, or get involved in everything I could to work in the analytical processes. But not everybody can go those routes. I think the whole area of technology is important. Everyone needs to at least understand the system. Even if you just want to do your banking, because you'll just sit at home and do your banking at a computer in the future.

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