

Revisiting School Choice

Looking at the challenges ahead

Is the school choice issue really off the table? Interesting. George Russell, the 4J superintendent, recommended that the School Board *not* seek public and staff input on the district's school choice policy as part of the new planning initiative (see www.4j.lane.edu/files/reports/shaping4j/4J_SH4J_ThinkTank_Superecs.pdf). In fact, the issues of the segregation and inequities related to the alternative schools will become a major focus of the continuing planning effort — especially if the district seeks to find ways to sustain the segregated, too-small alternative schools while it closes and merges the less advantaged neighborhood schools. So let's look at some of the challenges.

The district has indicated that the alternative schools that are co-located with neighborhood schools will be moved because of the tensions related to the "have" and "have-not" status of these two kinds of schools. The district intends to separate these schools rather than address the "have" and "have-not" problem.

So what is this going to look like in the Sheldon region where Buena Vista is co-located with Meadowlark? There are no empty buildings in the region.

Will the district have to merge Meadowlark and Willagillespie in order to make space for the stand-alone independent segregated Buena Vista?

There is no way that highly segregated Charlemagne can ever hope to become integrated at its location way up in the south hills. A move to the Willard building makes some sense. Not sure where the two charter schools will go.

But where, oh where, will the district put the equally highly segregated Eastside with its 144 students? There is one other too-small alternative school, Family. Putting these two school cultures together would be like trying to mix oil and water. Wouldn't work. And where would the district put them? Close Adams and put them there? Where would the Adams and soon-to-be-closed Hillside students go? Or put these two alternative schools at Willard? But then where would they put Charlemagne so that it could have a chance of becoming integrated?

How about putting the two most highly segregated alternative schools, Eastside and Charlemagne, in the same building? At least their elitist school cultures would not clash. But this would be a total of around 450 students. So where would the district place these two schools? Well, I guess we will have to build a new school. Raise your hand if you are in favor of passing a bond so the district can build a brand new school for the two most elitist, segregated schools in the community. And then where would the district put Family?

And of course, we have not solved all of the problems in the north region, where the neighborhood schools have an average of 57 percent of students on free and reduced lunch whereas the average of the two alternative schools is 33 percent. In the alternative school review process, the district hid this degree of segregation by comparing Corridor and Yujin Gakuen to the district average — when it is clear from the transfer data that most students come from the north region.

Whether or not the superintendent and the board want to think the problems associated with school choice have been resolved, it is clear that they have not been. In the very near future, this will become more obvious.

Raise your hand if you are in favor of passing a bond so the district can do anything if it refuses to address the inequities and segregation associated with the alternative school program.

Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D., is known in Eugene as the 1985 Eugene Celebration S.L.U.G. Queen and self-described "chief complainer" about Eugene 4J segregation and inequities. She is also director of the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use and a mother of three children who attend 4J schools.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PITTANCE FOR THE POOR?

Wow, Phil Knight gives \$100 million to Oregon's athletic department. That's a lot of money, right? I have watched for years as that kind of money has influenced the behavior of some of our most renowned athletes. Let's see, Pete Rose — gambling. Then there's Kobe Bryant — rape charges. Barry Bonds, Mark Maguire and Jose Canseco (to name a few) — suspected steroid use. And we can't forget the latest inductee into the Abomination Hall of Fame — Michael Vick — dog fights.

These boys are all products of our society's unconditional and limitless investment into sports. And their behavior shows us what comes of giving athletes too much money for exercising their bodies instead of their brains.

So I humbly ask, please, Mr. Knight, could you split that \$100 million and give \$50 million to the academic departments at the UO? As it stands now, your donation will catapult the athletic department into the highly revered top 2 percent while the rest of the school's programs desperately attempt to maintain poverty status. An ironic dichotomy, don't you think? You did graduate from the UO with an accounting degree, right? The last time I checked, the athletic department isn't responsible for bestowing degrees ... are they? Funding education is the path to true enlightenment, Mr. Knight, and it would send a powerful message to athletes everywhere that while you may love sports, you value education more.

Linda Cathey
Eugene

OLD FAIR-Y NETWORK

As a Country Fair member (Community Village), I was happy to see Michael Connelly's letter offering to help someone find an entry to fair participation. But you should not have to write EW to join.

When I first came to Eugene I went to the Fair office and asked how to join a crew,

which ones had openings. I was told each crew did its own recruiting. So I asked for a list of the crews and contact information for the crew leader, but I was told that information was private and not available. Basically, I would have to know someone who could help me. The Old Fairy network.

This not only excludes individuals who would like to get involved, but it hurts the Fair since people get to join crews based on who they happen to be friends with, rather than getting to choose the crew where their skills would be most useful.

Martin Henner
Eugene

APPLY NOW

I am writing to ask community members to consider applying for a position on the newly forming Eugene Sustainability Commission. Two years ago I undertook the Sustainable Business Initiative (SBI) to elevate and energize this city's commitment to sustainability and to respond to finite resources and climate change.

The SBI task force examined ways the city of Eugene could support and foster the growth of businesses that produce sustainable products, the growth of businesses using sustainable practices and the increased understanding of sustainability in general. Eleven recommendations were sent to the city council. Among them was creating an Office of Sustainability (which we have done) and putting in place a Sustainability Commission to ensure that the city continues to focus on steps to be truly sustainable. Two of the recommendations this commission will seek to implement are zero waste and carbon neutrality by 2020. This has been a very exciting process and continues to have as much possibility and promise as we have the energy to undertake.

We are seeking a diverse pool of applicants representing a wide range of interests, experience, ages and ethnic and cultural communities to serve on the commission. People

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