

Children in Poverty

Education suffers when kids are hungry, stressed

Eugene public schools have been hit hard by budget cuts. Since the 2008 financial crisis began, as state funds and other revenues have shrunk, 4J has made more than \$32 million in budget cuts and spent nearly \$37 million in reserves. Students from kindergarten through high school have felt the results, but for many, it's difficult to conceptualize what such continuous loss in school budgets means.

There's plenty of anecdotal evidence – students assigned to windowsills because classrooms are so crowded that they can't fit enough desks, foreign language classes disappearing, programs for at-risk kids being eliminated or drastically reduced. To supplement that evidence, it makes sense to compare our current schools with our schools of past years. To that end, Eugene Weekly is inaugurating this column to draw attention to the cuts in 4J (with a more limited focus on Bethel and Springfield), compare current spending to that of past school years, and highlight innovative programs that attempt to fill some gaps.

When looking at how our public schools have changed over the years, perhaps what's most striking is the number of students in 4J who are poor. Just 15 years ago, 22.6 percent of 4J students qualified for free or reduced-price lunches – an indication of poverty level at home. Today, the Oregon Department of Education puts that number at 40.3 percent, close to double.

Of the almost 7,000 students who qualify for these lunches, the vast majority (almost 6,000) come from families so poor that they qualify for free lunches.

Janet Huntsman* is one such student. She attends middle school, gets a free lunch every school day, and goes home to a family that's food insecure, meaning that she isn't always sure where her next meal is coming from.

In 2009, Oregon ranked number one for childhood hunger, according to the nonprofit Feeding America; almost a third of our state's children have inadequate access to food. Food insecurity is more common than most of us imagine: More than a fifth of all American homes with children experience it.

When most of us picture hungry children, we envision Third World countries. But in reality, it happens right here in Eugene. What does that mean for our schools?

Life for kids like Janet is stressful. They're more likely to be depressed and anxious and have behavior problems. And they're more likely to struggle academically. In a recent national survey of 1,000 public school teachers by Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry campaign, three of five teachers said students regularly come to school hungry because they're not getting



enough food at home. And according to a recent analysis from Stanford University, the achievement gap between rich and poor has grown steadily over the last half century.

A few programs in our schools help fill some of the gaps but are limited by funding realities. BEST, an after-school program that operates at four of 4J's poorest schools, provides academics and enrichment four days a week for students at risk of failing academically. This program, which was threatened because the grant supporting it is winding down, was saved by an appropriation by 4J of \$60,000, allowing it to serve 120 more children.

AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), a 4th- through 12th-grade program that helps prepare kids for college eligibility and has been shown to narrow the achievement gap, is being expanded this year and will enroll 400 students.

In the coming months, this column will focus on how budget cuts affect children like Janet. Where innovative programs exist, it will highlight them. By shining a light on these issues, it's hoped that the community of Eugene comes to understand better how continued cuts short-change our students.

* Janet's name has been changed to protect her privacy.

Anne Bridgman is a freelance writer and editor and an advocate for public schools and children in poverty. She lives with her husband and daughter in Eugene. To share ideas or stories about how the budget cuts in Eugene have affected your school or child, email Anne at shortchangingourschools@gmail.com

Juan Carlos Valle

City Council Ward 2

Juan Carlos will work on issues important to residents of South Eugene:

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- Promote responsible and appropriate community growth
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Fall 2012

What Is Peace?

Professor Cheyney Ryan (Philosophy, Law)
Saturday, September 29 (10:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.)
Browsing Room, 106 Knight Library, 1501 Kincaid Street

Professor Cheyney Ryan will lead a one day discussion on conflict resolution, non-violence, and peace. Ryan is the founder of UO's Peace Studies Program, teaches in the UO Law School's Conflict and Dispute Resolution Program, and is a fellow at Oxford University's Institute for Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict. (Lunch and book included). Cost: \$45

The Swerve: How The World Became Modern

Professor Jim Earl (English)
Saturdays, October 6, 13, 20, and 27 (9:30 a.m.–noon)
Browsing Room, 106 Knight Library, 1501 Kincaid Street

Shakespeare scholar Stephen Greenblatt's award-winning new book tells of the discovery and impact of the Roman poet Lucretius's great poem, *On the Nature of Things*. The seminar will read Lucretius and Greenblatt for a stimulating roller-coaster-ride through ancient, medieval, Renaissance and modern history and ideas. Cost: \$99

The Friendship: Wordsworth And Coleridge

Professor Jim Earl (English)
Saturdays, November 3, 10, 17, and December 1 (9:30 a.m.–noon)
Browsing Room, 106 Knight Library, 1501 Kincaid Street

Alan Sisman's new book by this title tells how two English university students reacted to the French Revolution by inventing a new kind of poetry to improve mankind. Focusing on Nature, Feeling, and Imagination rather than reason and ideas, the two poets founded the Romantic movement in England and changed the world. The seminar will read Sisman's book along with the poems. Cost: \$99



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