

I DREAM OF EUGENE

*Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.*
— Langston Hughes

WHAT DO YOU DREAM? This year, in our second annual “I Dream of Eugene” issue, we asked for your dreams for education, for music and for rivers in our city and Lane County. And from rivers made of chocolate to downtown streets full of percussion instruments, Eugeneans (and some folks from Springfield and Corvallis too) gave us their dreams, from the funny to the poetic to the political and wonky. Hold fast to your dreams, Eugene, and thank you for sharing them. — *EW staff*

What do you dream of funding in Eugene’s schools?

Abby Gershenzon

Parent, Eugene School District 4J

I dream of a 4J School District whose top funding priority is hiring more teachers, with the goal of bringing *all* classroom sizes down to no more than 20 students for K-5, and no more than 30 students for middle and high school.

I dream of a school district where school board members will no longer relegate the reduction of classroom sizes to the back burner, while backing expenditure after expenditure of the district’s limited funding to hire still more administrative staff and educational consultants, purchase new curriculum, adopt yet another standardized test or switch from semesters to trimesters, because they are told that this is the silver bullet that will magically improve student outcomes.

I dream of a school district where teachers’ input is highly valued and our children’s instructors are included in the decision making process at every level, with district funding readily available to back up their recommendations regarding all school-related issues, from buying new textbooks to choosing a schedule that is most conducive to learning.

Audrey Ziglinski

EW intern and senior at South Eugene High School

If I could direct money toward any purpose in Eugene schools, I would put it toward staff in order to reduce class sizes. The way each kid learns varies so much, and teachers cannot adapt to each kid’s learning style if they have to worry about teaching the material to 40-plus students. Most children also need a lot of direct attention and extra help in order to completely learn and understand the material they are being taught. Smaller class sizes have also proven to be a cost-effective strategy to lower the number of students who need to repeat grades or classes.

Personally, smaller class sizes make a dramatic difference for me. I am not the most naturally gifted when it comes to math, and although I currently have one of the best teachers at South, I find it very hard to learn and focus due to my class having around 40 kids. I have the potential to be successful when it comes to math, but I’ve found it just takes a little more time and attention from the teacher.

Tad Shannon

President, Eugene Education Association

As a teacher and parent of two kids who spent their entire school years in post-Measure 5 Eugene, I would hire

more teachers and staff to bring down class sizes and restore enriching programs that have been cut. With more teachers and staff, we could individualize instruction and provide additional resources for struggling students. With more staff, we could restore rich programs in music, art and PE.

At the same time, I would like to see a return to the idea of “teaching to the whole child.” This would mean less emphasis on high-stakes tests, which have the effect of narrowing the curriculum. These moves would help restore the joy in teaching and learning. The future of our community depends on the quality of schools that we provide for *all* our children. It’s our responsibility as adults to do whatever is necessary to get there.



Sabrina Gordon

Reading specialist, Awbrey Park Elementary

If I could wave a magic wand and direct more money to Eugene schools, I would do two things. First, hire more teachers and classroom assistants to lower class size and provide each student with the opportunity to learn in a classroom where he or she can connect with the teacher, build a meaningful and positive classroom community and have individual needs met, whether it be the need for extra help, extra challenge or extra emotional support. Once a reasonable class size is accomplished, money would go to re-building opportunities for enrichment that every student deserves. Art, music, physical education, drama, world languages, debate, science, etc. — all of the things that spark kids’ imaginations and aspirations. These are the opportunities provided to students in elite and expensive private schools, and *all* of our children deserve nothing less.

Shelley Berman

Superintendent, Eugene School District 4J

Eugene’s educators have the vision, passion and talent to provide a world-class education to our students. What we

don’t have is adequate funding. Many strategic investments would enrich students’ learning — such as a longer school year, additional early childhood education, expanded arts offerings and innovative career and technical learning opportunities. But there is one investment that would make the greatest immediate difference: hiring more teachers to shrink class sizes and reduce teacher workload.

Oregon has the nation’s second largest average class size. Eugene, too, has oversized classes, even though they’re a bit better than the state average. Smaller classes enable teachers to know their students better, personalize instruction to meet each student’s learning needs, plan interventions for students who need support and build classroom communities that facilitate learning. Our district seeks to provide classrooms where every student has rich and personal learning experiences. Smaller class sizes would help us reach that goal.

Tracy Ross

Assistant principal, North Eugene High School

If I could direct money toward any purpose in Eugene schools, I would put all the money into elementary education. I would bring class sizes down to 20 students in kindergarten to third grade and then limit class size to 25 in fourth and fifth grade. I would also build in full-time music, PE, library and computers so that every teacher had a 45-minute prep each day at every elementary school and would be required to use that time for planning. I would also add at least one classified instructional assistant to each classroom to assist students and do prep work for the teachers.

Then, I would provide after-school transportation for all students to participate in a one-hour after-school opportunity. I would want a variety of clubs and then a 30-minute invention or homework help time. For struggling students, it would be a requirement but open to all students for free. For non-struggling students, they could take two-to-six week enrichment classes. I believe in a strong foundation and 100-percent success rate in elementary school for students to be successful in secondary school.

Kelley Coplin

American Sign Language teacher, North Eugene High School

If I could direct money toward any purpose in Eugene’s schools it would be to increase the number of second languages offered in middle and high schools. Second languages prepare students to work in a growing global, multicultural and multiethnic society. Students gain insight into other cultures through the learning of second languages which in turn provides opportunities for personal involvement. This involvement fosters those cultural competencies which, in this day and age, are desperately needed.