



2016 INITIATIVE PETITIONS TACKLE K-12 EDUCATION

• Warren Weisman of Eugene-based renewable energy start-up **Hestia Home Biogas** tells us the home biogas digester manufacturer has been invited to audition for the hit TV show ABC's *Shark Tank*. Hestia's biodigester tanks, which convert compost into "clean-burning renewable energy," are manufactured in Vancouver, Washington, and metal work is fabricated in Eugene by Chandler Metal Works. Weisman says Hestia has "passed the initial application process and demo video selection process for *Shark Tank* and is in the process of video pitch coaching prior to taping in Los Angeles. The appearance would be for season eight, beginning fall of 2016. The show does not notify contestants of an air date until two weeks prior to airing."

• **Studio One Café** south of the UO campus has been closed since December 2015 for remodeling of its kitchen. Owner Anthony McCabe says on social media that improvements have taken much more time than expected and that he appreciates patience from the community as the breakfast spot finishes its updates. There is no official reopening date set.

• Oregon tech companies **SheerID** and **Concentric Sky** traveled to Washington, D.C. with tech companies from around the U.S. for ACT The App Association's App Economy Conference. Katie Keller of SheerID tells us that the company's co-founder and CEO, Jake Weatherly, and Concentric Sky President Cale Bruckner, "will spend three days with senior members of Congress discussing contentious issues that plague companies across the U.S. and in Oregon." The challenges include encryption and security, government access to online communications and the need for computer science education in our schools, Keller says. Also heading to the nation's capitol is Eugene-based entrepreneur Ben Garney of The Engine Company. Garney won a trip to the conference at the February "Hack for a Cause" event organized by the Technology Association of Oregon.

• **HIV Alliance is welcoming new staff and board members.** Vincent Mays and Emily Farrell join the board of directors. The nonprofit also hired new staff, including a new program director, Amanda McCluskey, and a new prevention manager, Tyler Boyet. HIV Alliance provides care coordination and advocacy services for people living with HIV/AIDS in 11 Oregon counties. Its mission is to help individuals living with HIV/AIDS and prevent new infections.

POLLUTION UPDATE

Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) assessed a civil penalty of \$6,600 against Maryland-based **W.R. Grace & Co. — Conn.** on April 6 for illegally transporting thousands of pounds of hazardous waste from a Portland warehouse to a Grace manufacturing facility in Albany in May of last year. Grace can appeal the penalty, pay it, or offset it by implementing a "supplemental environmental project." DEQ is currently accepting comments on erosion control plans for two Eugene construction projects: **Seneca Sawmill's log yard** (comments due April 21) and **McKenzie Deerhorn Estates** (east of Waltherville; comments due May 2). Visit goo.gl/Yp4iAK for more information on commenting.

Doug Quirke/Oregon Clean Water Action Project

Oregon educators say that K-12 school funding is in crisis mode. From dwindling high school graduation rates to booming elementary school class sizes, Oregon kids have endured years of underfunding.

Though many in education agree that schools need more money, there's less consensus about how to acquire those funds.

Perhaps that's why Oregon has three education-related initiative petitions circulating this year. Initiative petitions, or IPs, are citizen-generated proposals that need a set number of signatures to qualify as a measure on the November ballot, when Oregonians vote for or against the measure.

IP 28, IP 65 and IP 67 all target K-12 education, but not all initiative petitions are created equal, and the campaigns for each petition don't seem to be working closely together.

EW spoke with proponents of each campaign to explore the overlaps between them.

IP 28, also known as A Better Oregon, represents the weightiest of the three petitions. If passed, IP 28 could generate about \$5 billion each biennium (with around \$2 billion for education every two years) by increasing taxes on corporations doing business in Oregon that make \$25 million or more in sales [See "Our Kids Deserve Better," Feb. 25 issue].

Proponents of IP 28 say that it's the only viable solution to Oregon's ongoing funding problem, and that by taxing businesses with sales of more than \$25 million, the measure would target mostly out-of-state corporations while sparing small businesses. The petition is backed by Our Oregon and the Oregon Education Association (OEA), among other organizations.

Tad Shannon, president of the Eugene Education Association (EEA), says signature-gathering is well underway — EEA was the first local teachers union in Oregon to meet its signature goal.

EEA is "close to 6,000 signatures, so we're finding enthusiasm from people when we explain what the measure is about," Shannon says. The Better Oregon campaign has collected around 88,000 signatures statewide, with a goal of 126,000 by July 8.

Detractors of IP 28, including the Oregon Business Association and the Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce, say that businesses would simply pass along the cost of the tax to the consumer. Critics also say that once the money is added to Oregon's general fund, there is no guarantee that legislators will spend it on education.

Shannon says that if the measure passes, the union's goal will shift to "making sure that the Legislature appropriates the money according to the wishes of the electorate."

Local legislators, including Rep. Phil Barnhart, have indicated that they're supportive of IP 28.

While IP 28 generates additional funds, the other two petitions direct pre-existing funds toward specific uses.

IP 65, also known as Oregonians for High School Success, would establish the High School Graduation and College and Career Readiness Fund, funneling money from the general fund to accomplish three goals: the implementation of dropout prevention strategies, more access to college-level courses and the establishment of career and technical education (CTE) programs.

"Three out of four high school graduates who go to community college have to take remedial classes in either English, math or both," says Joy Marshall, Lane County director of Stand for Children Oregon, an education nonprofit that backs the petition. "This is a real de-motivator and they tend not to finish. We want to immediately address that."

Marshall points to Oregon Department of Education data showing that in the Bethel School District, high school students who take CTE courses have an on-time graduation rate of 90.5 percent, compared to the district's average of 70.4 percent. She says IP 65's "proven programs that work for kids" could help Oregon achieve higher graduation rates.

The measure, if passed, would allocate \$800 per high school student per year, which amounts to \$282 million in the 2017-2019 biennium. IP 65 has the support of former Gov. Ted Kulongoski, the Eugene/Springfield NAACP, Latino Network and other organizations, and Marshall says the campaign is on track to collect enough signatures to qualify for the ballot.

IP 65 does not, however, have the support of the Oregon Education Association.

"While we all support technical education at the high school level, [IP 65] doesn't create any new revenue to pay for it, so it takes out of the general fund a sizeable chunk of money and ear marks it to high school," Shannon with the EEA says.

He adds, "If you've been following local school board meetings, parents are constantly complaining about class size at the elementary level. [IP 65] takes away local control from the district by telling districts to spend money in a certain way."

Marshall says that Stand for Children Oregon has not taken a position on IP 28 yet, but adds that "Oregonians are used to seeing a large number of ballot measures, and I don't think they interfere with each other."

The third petition, IP 67, or Save Outdoor School for All, aims to bring a week of outdoor education to every fifth and sixth grader in Oregon. Only half of Oregon students have access to outdoor school, the campaign says.

"We've heard from adults of all ages who say it changed the trajectory of their lives," says strategist Paige Richardson with the outdoor school campaign. "They saw themselves as teachers or scientists for the first time. It's a really powerful program."

Funding for this program would come from unallocated lottery funds, leaving funds for public education, parks and natural areas, and gambling addiction intact.

"We're not saying that other extracurricular activities aren't important," Richardson says. "But Outdoor School is for all kids of all abilities, and when we get full funding, it will be for all kids in all districts."

Stand for Children Oregon and the OEA have not yet taken a position on IP 67.

However, in the teachers union's view, "IP 28 is the most important measure because it deals significantly with the revenue problem we've been struggling with since 1990, and it's the only one that will make a meaningful difference in our schools," Shannon says. "That is priority number one." ■

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— TAD SHANNON, EEA PRESIDENT

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