

REPORT FROM OREGON EDUCATORS SHOWS CONSEQUENCES OF UNDERFUNDING SCHOOLS

Oregon’s high school graduation rate ranked fourth lowest in the country in the 2013-14 school year; Oregon’s student-teacher ratio is a third higher than the U.S. average; two years ago, Oregon had the third largest class sizes in the U.S.

These painful statistics are so frequently cited that Oregonians almost go numb upon reading them, but as a new report by the Oregon Education Association (OEA) and other education advocates points out, Oregon must figure out a way to fully fund its schools if the state ever wants to see its rankings rise.

The report, released jointly by OEA, Oregon PTA and AFT-Oregon on Aug. 25, details the state of school funding in Oregon and how it impacts students across the state.

For educators like Tad Shannon, president of the Eugene Education Association, the numbers aren’t new, but they point out the disturbing trend of Oregon’s disinvestment in education over the past few decades.

“Looking at Eugene 4J, for example, the average caseload for guidance counselors is 618 kids, which is a lot,” Shannon says. “How can one guidance counselor provide adequate services to that many kids?”

The report breaks down Oregon’s statistics district by district, examining how each district compares to the national average. During the 2014-15 school year in Eugene School District 4J, the median class size was 27 students, and its student-

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— TAD SHANNON, EUGENE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

teacher ratio was 24, with the national average at 15.8 students per teacher.

In the Springfield School District, high school graduation rate clocks in at 71.5 percent, 6.9 percentage points below the state average.

The report ties these numbers to Oregon’s public education funding, which ranks 35th in the nation. Oregon’s Quality Education Model shows it would take an additional \$1 billion per year to bring Oregon up to average. The report says that an investment of \$3 billion more per year would bring Oregon to the level of states with strong public education systems, like Massachusetts.

“I guess that’s the question: Are people satisfied with this?” Shannon asks. “Do they feel comfortable in a state that has these pretty grim statistics?”

Shannon says that how Oregonians vote on Measure 97 — a ballot measure that proposes taxing corporations with Oregon sales of more than \$25 million to fund education, health and senior services — will serve as a litmus test for how much the state cares about public education.

As businesses, including Comcast, Walmart and Target, rally to defeat the ballot measure, Shannon says the decision to vote for or against Measure 97, which could raise \$3 billion a year, is simple.

“Are people comfortable with gaining a reputation nationally for disinvesting in public schools?” Shannon asks. “If people feel like that’s something to be satisfied with, then they should vote against Measure 97. If they feel that Oregon should be a better place than that, then they should vote for it. It’s pretty straight forward.” ■

To read the full report, visit goo.gl/RqW4Pd.

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