

MATTHEW KNIGHT MONSTROSITY

What is the cost of Matthew Knight Arena (MKA) to the taxpayers of Eugene and Oregon state?

The MKA is financed by a series of bond measures provided by the city of Eugene and a "Legacy Fund" (Phil Knight's money). Although Knight pledged \$100 million for MKA operating costs, I found zero references to profit. I found nary a reference to the *lack of funds* that MKA has brought to Eugene in the past seven years.

I wanted to find hard numbers on the cost to the city, budget numbers, anything that would be concrete evidence that the arena is a positive asset. When I searched the University of Oregon's databank, I found zero budget numbers despite MKA being hailed as a huge economic gain for the university. I found few pieces on projected windfalls and actual revenue; the numbers are dismal in comparison to what was originally predicted.

Looking back, I can see that only 16 games in seven years have been sold out — far fewer than anticipated. Beyond that, MKA employs only 44 people, while MKA sits empty most of the year.

Who is benefiting from the MKA monstrosity? It certainly isn't the university students, who are expecting a huge tuition hike next year; and it isn't the city taxpayers.

I looked up Dana Altman's financial contract, and found that his contract will expand to \$23 million by 2023. Judging by extrapolation, I would say that it's the UO basketball team, the coach and, again, Phil Knight.

But hey, what do I know?

Cindy Wiley
Springfield

KINDER STEWARDSHIP

"Slow Wood," Carl Segerstrom's Aug. 3 article on Oregon's resilient forestry movement, captures the newly emerging spirit of stewardship for working forests. The ethos of these visionary foresters rejects the rapacious and extractive model perpetuated by corporate timber companies.

Many of the leaders of an alternative forest business model mentioned in the article are partnering with Beyond Toxics to raise awareness and increase advocacy. Our joint work created a statewide series of Resilient Forestry Tours and town hall meetings.

During our tours, conservationist foresters demonstrate how the Oregon's outdated Forest Practices Act — which maintains harmful practices of aerial herbicide sprays, clear cutting, slash burning and planting genetically enhanced mono-species — must be shunned as a bygone relic.

Those who attend Beyond Toxics' forestry tours experience the bio-diversity and beauty of a true resilient working forest — one that works for everyone in Oregon by protecting water, wildlife habitat and climate through carbon sequestration.

The visionary forester David Eisler, owner of Shady Creek Forest Products just west of Veneta, is co-hosting the fifth in Beyond Toxics' series of Resilient Forestry Tours 5 pm Wednesday, Aug. 23. Come learn about how healthy forests yield an overabundance of rewards that extractive forestry companies steal from future generations of Oregonians. Call us or visit beyondtoxics.org to reserve your spot.

Beyond Toxics continues to lead a grassroots campaign to overhaul Oregon's forestry laws and help rural communities stop aerial herbicide assaults. We welcome volunteers and support to bring about a needed transition to eco-healthy forests.

Lisa Arkin, executive director
Beyond Toxics
Eugene

NO IDLE PROBLEM

In this time, when we as a progressive state, county and city want to find ways to combat climate change in the simplest ways, I think there is an overlooked educational opportunity that makes a lot of sense to bring into law: Automobile drivers need

to be aware that idling an automobile engine is a serious contributor to air pollution and therefore climate change.

The air quality in Southern Lane County/South Willamette Valley often suffers from stagnation. The lack of air movement in summer and winter allows particulate matter to collect at an alarming rate, to the point where in winter Lane Regional Air Protection Agency (LRAPA) halts wood burning in some cities.

The exhaust of automobiles is substantially more harmful to air quality than wood burning, which is bad enough.

The first steps could be taken by government agencies — state, county and city could provide signage in their parking lots. All public agencies would pass ordinances prohibiting idling. There would be a requirement that privately owned businesses provide appropriate signage within a reasonable time.

The message is simple: forbidding idling car engines with a monetary punitive damage to be decided upon.

The Environmental Defense Fund has an in-depth quantitative report that provides a ton of insight. Beyond that, however, are the prohibitions that major cities, such as Boston and Minneapolis, have enacted with very strict fines to limit air pollution from auto exhaust.

DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION BY LAURA FARRELLY

A Tale of Two Countries

A TEACHER'S REFLECTION ON HER VISIT TO FINLAND

"It's all about attention. We all want to be heard." That was my friend Tuuli Lehtisalo's response to how to best serve students. It's still resonating within me a month after visiting with this dedicated teacher in Finland.

I had the good fortune to meet with Lehtisalo for a delightful chat that lasted over four hours. Lehtisalo has been teaching for over 30 years at Helsingin Suomalainen Yhteiskoulu located in Helsinki, Finland where the students have the distinction of achieving among the highest scores on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).

The PISA is an international assessment that measures 15-year-old students' reading, mathematics and science literacy every three years. It should be noted that these tests carry no high stakes for students and are not used to rank teachers or schools.

I wondered: How can Finnish students perform so well on the PISA when they take no standardized tests during their K-12 education, whereas Lane County schools administer up to 120 standardized tests by 12th grade? Why is the Finnish educational system so highly rated? How do citizens know which schools are the best without ranking schools according to test scores?

Of course, when buying a house or moving to a new neighborhood, one of the first questions many American parents ask is about the local schools. Who can blame them? Who doesn't want their child to receive a great education?

But, thankfully, Finnish parents do not need to stress over these concerns. According to Lehtisalo, emphasis is on public schools that are equitable and neighborhood-centered. And, they all offer the same education. In fact, there is a national curriculum, which every school in Finland follows but with the clear expectation that teachers have autonomy to develop their own lesson plans. In other words, the local schools are in control of student learning. When I expressed wonder and admiration at her words, Lehtisalo told me, "The government trusts teachers."

I further asked her to describe the kinds of assessments she finds most useful to

determine student comprehension, application and critical thinking in her classes. As an English language teacher, Lehtisalo says she asks students to, among other things, "Write essays and narrative stories and work cooperatively in groups." Furthermore, she believes that it is the teacher's duty to "find out what kids are interested in and then develop lesson plans around those passions." Wow. Imagine that. All of these assessments, by the way, happen within the classroom and are not purchased from an outside company.

Another reason why schools are equitable is that every school receives the same funding. Lehtisalo added, "But we also have something called positive discrimination between schools. Schools that are in so-called challenging areas with a lot of immigration and families living in poverty get more money because children might lack support for school. That's why schools get more money for extra resources to help these kids."

In Finland, education is treated as a basic human right. In fact, the right to a free, equitable public education is a part of their constitution.

School funding in Finland is provided through state and local taxes. Lehtisalo said, "The money for education is pretty regulated. You cannot do anything silly with it." She shared that she pays about 36 percent of her income towards taxes, yet I heard no rancor in her voice. She says it is well worth it due to all of the incredible services she receives, including universal healthcare and one of the best school systems in the world.

As school resumes shortly in Finland and here in Eugene-Springfield, let's ask ourselves: Are we satisfied with our children's education, or do we want something better like Lehtisalo has? Are we going to continue standardizing education in an inequitable fashion, or will we allow teachers the freedom to create interactive classrooms where all student voices are heard regardless of the zip code? Our public schools need an answer.

Laura Farrelly is an educator in the Springfield School District and a member of the Community Alliance for Public Education (CAPE, oregoncape.org), a coalition of parents, teachers, professors, students and community members who challenge the many assaults on public education and who believe in a strong public education as the foundation for American democracy. For more information about the PISA International Tests, visit nces.ed.gov/surveys/pisa.