

# Schools seek delay in Oregon's P.E. requirement

## Lack of facilities, teachers hamper districts' progress

By **PARIS ACHEN**  
Capital Bureau

SALEM — With less than 10 percent of Oregon's kindergarten through eighth-grade schools providing the minimum number of weekly physical education minutes mandated by the Legislature nine years ago, districts want lawmakers to extend the fall 2017 compliance deadline.

Rather than inching toward meeting the requirement, the number of compliant schools has actually declined, according to public records reviewed by the EO Media Group/Pamplin Media Group Capital Bureau.

A state law approved in 2007 made Oregon the first state in the nation to require minimum physical education instructional minutes for elementary and middle school pupils, according to the American Heart Association.

The law calls for a minimum of 150 minutes of physical education instruction per week for kindergarten through fifth grade and 225 minutes for sixth through eighth grade. Schools are required to meet that standard by fall 2017.

Most schools are so far from fulfilling the requirement that their advocacy groups are now asking lawmakers to either push back the deadline or allow for a phase-in. They also want other tweaks to the law, such as prorating the standard to account for professional development days and inclement weather, and to add more flexibility in how physical education may be defined.

"Everybody recognizes the pinch we find ourselves in," said Jim Green, deputy executive director of the Oregon School Boards Association. "There are not enough P.E. teachers. Some of the facilities are inadequate in order to be able to provide that level of instruction, and it is going to take a lot to ramp up to that."

Out of 1,080 public schools

with some or all grades in K-8, only 97 schools in 2014-15 provided the minimum number of weekly minutes outlined in the law, according to the state Department of Education's most recent count. That's a decline from the 102 schools in 2013-14 that met the minimum.

Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, championed the law in 2007 as a way to address childhood obesity and boost academic skills. Along with the minimum instructional time, the bill offered schools special grants, known as PEEK-8, or Physical Education Expansion K-8, to help hire P.E. teachers or give existing teachers professional development in physical education. The grants provided about \$4 million to schools in the last four years.

"I started this some 10 years ago because physical education had disappeared from our schools," Courtney said. "I understand resources are an issue, and every school is different. I just hope that together we can find a way to continue to move forward."

Courtney said he is unwilling to compromise on the required number of minutes but could consider a phased-in approach to meeting the standard.

He and his staff met with lobbyists representing schools and health groups this month to discuss concerns about the law.

### Three issues

Schools' concerns about the requirement center on three issues: The cost of hiring additional P.E. teachers and building new space and the limited amount of instructional time, Green said. Schools faced funding rollbacks during the Great Recession and subsequent funding increases have not been enough to keep up with expenses, Green said.

The Pendleton School District recently built two elementary schools that replaced



E.J. Harris/EO Media Group

**A pristine gym in the newly finished Washington Elementary School in Pendleton. The new building provides the district with a facility making it easier to comply with the state's physical education mandate.**

schools that used the same space for the cafeteria and gymnasium.

School administrators had to use creative scheduling, including lunch periods staggered by grade level, to accommodate lunch and biweekly physical education classes. The new schools, Washington and Sherwood elementary schools, have separate gymnasiums and cafeterias, which will make it easier to schedule additional P.E. classes, said Ronda Smith, a Pendleton principal who used to work at Washington Elementary School.

But school administrators said they also struggle to find time for the requirement in Oregon's limited school year, one of the shortest in the nation.

### Other subjects lose time

If schools have to provide more physical education

instruction, other subjects lose time, they said. None of those other subjects have a mandatory minimum of instructional time.

"The larger issue is we have so many hours in the school year that we can use, and we keep having different sets of expectations put on us," said Pendleton schools Superintendent Andy Kovach. "You add up the hours they're expecting of us, and where do you cut it out?"

Christina Bodamer, an Oregon-based lobbyist with the American Heart Association, which pushed for the law in 2007, said she understands the schools' dilemma but thinks the mandate needs to be a priority.

"Knowing there has been 10 years to implement this, I think an important part of a phase-in is accountability, so we don't go another three to

five years and have nothing else happen," Bodamer said.

Several bodies of research suggest that physical activity can hone academic skills such as concentration, and even enhance overall academic performance, according to a review of research in 2010 by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

That research has given momentum to the idea of requiring minimum instructional time in physical education, she said. Washington, D.C., has a policy similar to Oregon's, and Washington state and California are considering following suit, Bodamer said.

### Creative solutions

Apart from state grants, several health organizations also have been dedicating grant money to help schools come up with creative solutions to meet the requirement, she said.

Salem-Keizer and Beaverton schools have been partnering with the American Heart Association to obtain more professional development for P.E. teachers, including how to incorporate physical activity within other lessons.

"It is our hope that P.E. teachers could work with some of the regular teachers on ideas for brain breaks and structured play between lessons," said Neil Anderson, director of instructional services at Salem-Keizer schools.

Meeting the standard "would be a challenge, but I think we could figure it out," said Smith of Pendleton schools. "If you can find five minutes six times a day and say lets put those minutes all together in one area you have another section."

*The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.*

## Man accused of stealing meat from Astoria Safeway

By **KYLE SPURR**  
The Daily Astorian

A Nevada man is charged with felony theft after allegedly stealing a shopping cart full of meat from Safeway in Astoria.

Ronald Joe Whitehair Jr., 54, of Sparks, Nevada, pleaded not guilty Friday in Circuit Court to first-degree theft, a class C felony. He appeared in court via video link from Clatsop County Jail.

Astoria Police arrested Whitehair at about 11:53 p.m. Aug. 11.

An employee reported a theft in progress as Whitehair allegedly ran out of the grocery store with the shopping cart full of various meats, valued at more than \$1,000.

The shopping cart tipped over in the parking lot as Whitehair was attempting to reach his 35-year-old son in their motorhome.

Whitehair abandoned the spilled meat, police said, and hopped into the motorhome outside. His son, who is from Tacoma, Washington, drove from the scene.

An Astoria Police officer was able to see the motorhome and pulled it over near 49th Street.

Whitehair was arrested. His son was not arrested, and has not been charged with any crime.

James von Boeckmann, Whitehair's appointed defense attorney, said Whitehair was in town visiting family and temporarily working with his son driving trucks for BioOregon Protein in Hammond.

According to the District Attorney's Office, Whitehair has an out-of-state criminal history of six felony convictions, including for assault, burglary, criminal trespass and



Ronald Joe Whitehair Jr.

drug possession. The most recent conviction was in 2011.

Whitehair remains in custody on \$15,000 bail. He is due back in court next month for an early resolution conference.

## Pederson to run for Astoria City Council

### Music teacher is founder of Columbia River Symphony

By **DERRICK DePLEDGE**  
The Daily Astorian

Cory Pederson, a music teacher who is the founder and conductor of the Columbia River Symphony, is running for the Astoria City Council.

He will seek the east side seat being vacated by City Councilor Russ Warr, who

chose not to run for re-election in November after three terms.

Bruce Jones, the former commander of U.S. Coast Guard Sector Columbia River, is also interested in replacing Warr.

Pederson, 37, who lives with his wife, Angela, and young daughter in Uppertown, said Astoria is a "pretty extraordinary city. And part of the thing is we want to keep it that way, but also make some improvements along the way."

He said he would bring an

"independent perspective to the table."

Pederson and his wife founded the Columbia River Symphony. He is also the conductor of the North Oregon Coast Symphony in Cannon Beach and the Little Ballet Theater Orchestra, which is known for the annual holiday performance of "The Nutcracker."

Pederson teaches music in the Jewell School District.

The filing deadline for candidates is Aug. 30.



The Daily Astorian/File Photo  
**Cory Pederson, a music teacher and conductor, is running for Astoria City Council.**

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