

# OPINION

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## OUR VIEW

# One homeless student is too many

## Educators should be saluted for their efforts

In the richest and supposedly most advanced country ever conceived, the words “student” and “homeless” shouldn’t be used in the same sentence.

The idea that young people working hard to get a much-desired education don’t have a permanent or safe place to live should be a priority to overcome.

Yet it is a problem.

The latest statistics released by the state of Oregon show one Clatsop County community is in the unenviable role of leading the way.

Warrenton-Hammond School District recorded 160 — more than half of Clatsop County’s 315 homeless students last school year. And that was up from 125 the prior year.

Now we acknowledge that statistics rarely paint a totally accurate picture in any circumstance. There are always “ifs” and “buts” when compiling any data. For example, that doesn’t mean all those 160 teens and their younger siblings live rough on the banks of Coffenbury Lake. “Homeless” covers a multitude of conditions, including family members who couch surf or share dwellings with others because of their poverty.

But still, nearly 10 percent — that’s 31 students — were considered “unsheltered,” living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings and other substandard housing. All were in Warrenton,



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

Students at Warrenton Grade School have demonstrated above-average academic progress.

including in campgrounds such as KOA and Fort Stevens State Park.

That is both appalling and unacceptable.

One bright note is that Warrenton leaders are aware of the issue. Mark Jeffery, the school superintendent, is among those who has these damning stats on his front burner.

And his educators are doing something about it.

“If we have a student who’s struggling — the cause for that struggle, while it’s worth noting — we get in there and work with them at the point of struggle,” Jeffery said.

The other bright aspect is that stu-

dents classified as “homeless” in Warrenton have higher attendance records than much of the state.

And the district’s most recent state test scores, just one way of measuring students’ academic progress, are actually looking pretty darned good.

For example, it was the only district in Clatsop County to post a high rating for academic progress of students between the third and eighth grades. That included high scores for low-income students and average academic progress for Hispanic and multiracial students.

Warrenton’s academic prowess was most evident in math, where half of the district’s eighth graders met or exceeded

grade-level competency; its third graders vastly outperformed their peers in the county and statewide in English language arts competency, with 69 percent meeting or exceeding state standards.

The focus of these achievements is Warrenton Grade School, a vibrant building where the entire staff is dedicated to one cause — properly equipping every student to advance well-prepared for their high school years. Principal Tom Rogozinski’s team of educators do emphasize basics, including test-taking skills. But this strategy is enriched by focusing on seeking ways to broaden their educational diet, specifically the application of learning to the real world. Students who demonstrate prowess beyond their grade level are nurtured, too.

So these latest headlines from Warrenton offer a mixed report with no obvious conclusions. On the one hand, academic progress appears evident. On the other, students are still disadvantaged by poverty. The fact that many are succeeding in spite of their circumstances should not change our commitment to enhancing their situations.

But until our society properly commits to addressing economic inequality, and the North Coast truly provides adequate affordable housing, the number of homeless students will continue to be unacceptably high. Meanwhile, we must salute and encourage those educators doing what they can to help their community’s young people succeed.

## OTHER VIEWS

Excerpts from Oregon newspaper editorials

### Bend Bulletin, on lawmakers needing to ignore fuel industry

Here’s a prediction for the coming legislative session, which begins in January: The fuel industry, led by Chevron, will seek to change the law underpinning Oregon’s Clean Fuels Program in a way that hides the operation of its credit market securely from public view. When that effort begins, legislators should consider the state motto, “She flies with her own wings.”

This motto celebrates Oregon’s independent spirit, which has sent the fuel industry into a tizzy in recent weeks. How dare Oregon be different!

Perhaps nowhere is this indignation more evident than in the words of Jason Schwenneker, executive director of Iowa-based biofuel giant Renewable Energy Group. REG has joined a November lawsuit brought by Chevron that seeks to block the release of credit-transaction information related to the Clean Fuels Program.

Disclosing such information, Schwenneker practically huffs in a court filing, would make Oregon’s credit market “the only carbon compliance trading program in North America, if not in the world, in which this kind of disclosure occurs.”

Since when is being different a bad thing, if that’s what the public interest demands?

This transparency fight began in October, when the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality refused to release credit-transaction information requested by a Bulletin editor. The Bulletin appealed the denial, and in November the Oregon Department of Justice ordered DEQ to release the information. Chevron promptly summoned its lawyers to fight the release and, in an unmistakable message to journalists, sued the editor who’d made the request.

Transparency matters because the credit market is, at heart, a mechanism for spending public money.

Under the Clean Fuels Program, importers of conventional road fuels such as Chevron generate carbon deficits, which they eliminate by purchasing credits from a variety of entities, including producers of low-carbon fuels such as REG. This complex subsidy program is funded by motorists, who pay for carbon credits at the pump.

Problem is, the people footing the bill aren’t permitted to see where their money’s going, as DEQ makes only aggregate credit-sale data available to the public. Anyone who wonders which companies are winning big under the Clean Fuels Program, and whether the program



is operating as lawmakers intended, is out of luck.

Of course, that’s just the way the fuel industry likes it. To paraphrase REG’s Schwenneker, if secrecy is good enough for the rest of North America — and maybe the world — why shouldn’t it be good enough for Oregon?

Even after two years in operation, the state’s Clean Fuels Program still doesn’t work well. Yet journalists, lawmakers and other members of the public can do no more than imagine the kind sort of sausage that’s being made inside Oregon’s super-secret credit market. They must place their trust, instead, in program regulators. What could possibly go wrong?

Surely a state that prides itself on its independent spirit can come up with a way to subsidize alternative-fuels businesses and reduce carbon emissions without keeping the public utterly in the dark.

### Corvallis Gazette-Times, on Gov. Brown’s proposed budget

So let’s say, for the sake of argument, that you’re building a household budget for 2019. Let’s say you think you might have a shot at a 5 percent increase in income during the year; good work on your part.

But let’s say that there are some items on the expenditure side of the budget that you’ve been putting off for years. Maybe the house finally needs that new roof. Maybe you need to find a bigger house. But you’ve done a little bit of financial work and you don’t think that 5

percent boost in income is going to cover those expenses.

So you say, what the heck: You go ahead and build all of those expenses into your 2019 budget, even if you’re not clear where the money will come from.

What you have isn’t really a budget. It’s more of a wish list.

Which brings us to Gov. Kate Brown and the budget plan she released last week. The big takeaway from Brown’s proposed budget: She’s hoping to work with legislators to find an additional \$2 billion to help fund K-12 schools (and to help them pay off their growing bills for the state’s public pension system) and to stave off what would amount to cuts in the state’s higher education system.

But Brown is silent on how to raise that additional money; she says she plans to work with legislators to craft a revenue deal. She might be aided by the fact that Democrats finally have a three-fifths supermajority in each chamber of the Legislature, which allows them to raise taxes without a single Republican vote, but the supermajority margins are slender indeed: In the Senate, it would take the defection of just one Democrat to eliminate the supermajority.

So what this plan amounts to is a wish list.

To be fair, the governor’s budget represents just a starting point, and will get a thorough working-over from legislators when they gather for their 2019 session. And Brown does have some business allies on her side in her negotiations for revenue increases, most notably the Coalition for the Common Good, a new organization that includes Nike and some of the state’s powerful public-employee unions.

Brown also is hoping to gain allies from the

state’s public universities: Her proposal now includes no general fund increases for university programs, despite projected cost increases of more than 8 percent for the state’s public pension system and health care costs.

To be fair, Brown has termed that unacceptable, and has offered a carrot to higher education: If legislators find that additional \$2 billion, she’ll earmark more than \$580 million of that for higher education. But if the revenue deal falls through, higher education officials say they may have no recourse but to cut programs and impose double-digit tuition increases. (There’s a catch to that as well: Tuition increases over 5 percent require the approval of the state’s Higher Education Coordinating Commission, and Brown has lobbied that body in the past to keep a lid on those increases.)

So it could be that higher education officials will be in Brown’s corner as the Legislature convenes — why pass up a chance to collect an additional \$580 million? — but you couldn’t blame them for having a sour taste in their mouths.

That sour taste could extend as well to Oregon taxpayers, who might point to the fact that the state, despite signs of a looming economic slowdown, will collect more tax money in the coming two-year cycle than ever before but still will be some \$623 million in the red, thanks mostly to rising costs for the state’s Medicaid program.

In the meantime, Brown has said she didn’t put a revenue proposal of her own on the table because she didn’t want to eliminate any options. At some point, though, she’s going to have to show her cards for this proposal to get past the wish stage.