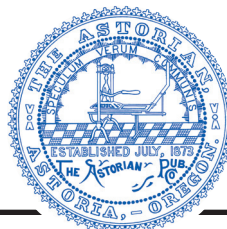


OPINION



the Astorian

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OUR VIEW

Graduation rates rising — but work still ahead

Clatsop County educators should take a brief, but well deserved, break for a moment to pat themselves on the back for a significant achievement.

The celebration marks the latest reports from the state that highlight the manner in which on-time graduation rates have improved across the board.

The statewide graduation rate for the class of 2018-19 was 80%, ahead of last year's rate, though still below the national high school graduation rate of 85% recorded in the 2016-17 school year.

The rates for the county's three largest school districts are all increases from the prior years:

- Astoria, 85.8%
- Warrenton, 80.5%
- Seaside, 76.8%

Jewell, which admittedly has one of the smallest enrollments among school districts in the state, had every student graduate this past year.

Knappa, however, showed a slight decline to 88.8% after a stellar 94.2% in 2017-18 and 90.6% the year before.

Statistics sometimes mask the human element when examining issues, so perhaps we need to state the issue in another way: Even these kind of rates still signal that out of every five students, at least one is in danger of not graduating.

Astoria's leaders have been proactive about seeing the big picture.

Designating graduation counselors to guide students on a workable path has been a good move. A while ago, school district lead-



Danny Miller/The Astorian

Graduation rates are improving.

ers made it a priority to combat absenteeism; they can chart significant progress in this effort. They acknowledge that students rarely succeed to their full potential when enduring hunger, homelessness and mental health issues. The schools have no magic wand to wave these problems away. But identifying them, and working with other agencies to alleviate problems, are important steps in the right direction.

Tackling the root causes of students missing school is one key. The other is providing a relevant and engaging educational experience. Curriculum should be under constant review to ensure it appeals to the broadest range of abilities and interests.

Much discussion in the modern era has been about schools balancing the needs of students

who are bound for higher education after graduation with those for whom more practical skills and experience will best prepare them with trade skills for success in the workplace.

It is pleasing that Astoria offers an opportunity for students to earn credit at Clatsop Community College by taking more advanced classes while still in high school. This stimulates those students who are high achievers academically and has the added benefits of saving money and time for when they graduate and step up to a two- or four-year institution.

But the smart districts know that they also need to invest in practical classes like shop, automotive and others offering potential trade skills. Not all students are destined for further academic education beyond high school. Their

contribution to society is no less valuable.

And let's not forget about music, the arts and activities like sports. Often they are the first to be targeted when the budget ax looms. But anyone who has worked in our public schools can point to students for whom such enrichment has been the key to keeping them in school, maintaining high grades.

An analysis by The Oregonian of the statewide picture reveals Clatsop's gains — which are reflected from Coos Bay to Klamath County — can be attributed to several initiatives. These include adding spending priorities to assist students, mostly Latinos, for whom English is not their first language.

Other strategies include making sure freshmen students are earning sufficient credits to qualify for their diplomas on a realistic pace without falling behind.

This latest announcement of improvements in graduation rates around Oregon is indeed cause for some celebration. A couple of years ago, the revelation that our state's on-time graduation rates were the second worst in the nation was an embarrassing wake-up call.

We commend North Coast educators who have played their role in enhancing this important, measurable achievement. But we know — as they do — that until every school district mirrors Jewell's success with 100% of students graduating on time, there is still work to be done.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Heartfelt

I would like to convey a heartfelt and sincere "thank you" to the kennel staff and front office staff of Bay Breeze Boarding & Grooming in Warrenton.

The choice to leave our pets behind while traveling is a difficult, but sometimes necessary, decision to make. On the occasions I have to make that choice, it is such a relief to know Bay Breeze Boarding & Grooming is there to care for my animal family members.

The staff always puts my mind at ease, making me feel welcome to call anytime to check in, generously offering details on how my pets are doing and generally easing my worries.

Bay Breeze Boarding and Grooming is a wonderful part of our community, and I cannot thank them enough for their dedication to the safety, health and well-being of our beloved pets.

ANNA KELLEY
Astoria

Different perspective

A letter appeared recently titled "Dis-mantling democracy" (The Astorian, Jan. 9). I would like to offer a different perspective on the writer's comments relating to the negative impacts on our democracy by a president.

I am not a fan of everything President Donald Trump has done in office, but I do support some of his decisions. Now, is he leading us to a Russian model of government that we should fear? I think not.

He has no more than five years to accomplish this, while Vladimir Putin has had more than 20 at the helm of Russia's government, which was already communistic and autocratic. So even if Trump were to be reelected, it is an overstatement that we should fear becoming another Russia. Term limits prevent this type of long-term influence by a president.

However, I do fear the dismantling of our democracy from an entirely different direction. If the American public is not judicious, I believe we will set ourselves on a path to socialism.

Two of the top Democratic candidates for president have indicated they would do this, in the form of legislation and formal programs that would be hard to undo. Other Democrats have challenged our Bill of Rights.

To me, this would be far worse than the short-term machinations of a self-ab-

sorbed egomaniac, and would change our democracy into something the Founding Fathers would have rejected.

The writer is right in a sense: Moderate Democrats are not my enemy, but those at the fringes of their party threaten our democracy just as surely as the Republican he decries.

NORMAN BROWN
Seaside

Curious

Remember when President Donald Trump said: "Trade wars are good, and easy to win"?

In the story "Log exporter wants out of Port" (The Astorian, Jan. 16), the opening sentence of the second paragraph said: "The company's log exports have evaporated amid a prolonged trade war between the U.S. and China."

As our Republican president continues to demonstrate his breathtaking ignorance of how the world's economy works, other countries have rushed to fill the orders his trade wars have lost.

Northwest soybean farmers are watching Brazil gobble up the business they once enjoyed with China. Russia has stepped in to satisfy the Chinese hunger for Oregon wheat. The timber industry is watching Russia and other countries fill the orders Northwest forests used to fill.

With each lost order, ancillary jobs are lost. The truckers, dock workers and others who once moved, stored and processed those goods are left idle. The guy who made the farm machinery that now rusts in a storage yard due to lack of sales is seeing his job go away.

Much, possibly most, of that business will be lost forever. What is regained will come at the expense of lower margins, meaning continued job, wage and benefit cuts.

I'm curious. Will #TimberUnity try to get the guy responsible for their job losses out of office? Will American farmers happily cash their bailout checks while ironically blaming socialism for their problems? Will blue-collar Republicans ever stop voting against their own interests?

BILL GRAFFIUS
Gearhart

Pick a side

Imagine my disappointment upon finding out that the letters "NAV" on my



voter registration card mean "Non (party) Affiliated Voter," and not "Navy," like I was hoping.

I will need to contact the Clatsop County election office (via SOS.Oregon.gov or 866-673-VOTE) to choose a political party, either Democrat or Republican, so I can vote in the primaries. Otherwise, I will not be receiving a ballot.

In 2016, Oregon "bundled" our voter registration with driver's license maintenance, so it's easy, but automatically-registered NAVs are excluded from participating in partisan elections where Democratic or Republican party candidates are on offer.

This means if you are currently listed as a nonaffiliated voter, you have to take action. Our election primaries are coming up on May 19, and in order to vote in these contests, you must be registered with a political party, and you have to pick one by April 28.

If you do nothing, and languish in NAV no man's land, your voice will not be heard in the primaries, and now is absolutely the worst time to remain silent about your elected leadership. Do not give up on this nation, but pick a side and make your voice be heard.

JULIA STAVENHAGEN
Hammond

Can we agree?

Can most of us agree there is nothing more fundamentally foundational to democracy's survival than free and fair elections? Ask the Founding Fathers.

Given the Russian interference in our 2016 election, that they seem to be meddling in our upcoming elections, and Congress seems to be in a mood to pass resolutions, may I suggest one?

"We, the U.S. Congress, in order to form a more perfect union, resolve total commitment to protecting our free and fair electoral process. We will finance, support and defend all measures that ensure our elections follow election laws, and are free of all foreign and domestic interference (voter suppression, etc.)." Translation: Don't mess with our elections.

This isn't a party line issue. It's a "land of the free" issue.

Seems like this should be a slam dunk — 435-0 in the House, and 100-0 in the Senate. Who'd vote against it?

I think this would restore faith and pride in our elections, raise voter participation and make any congressperson who votes for it wildly popular. What do you think?

The question is: Is there a congressperson who will champion this Civics 101 cause? I'd vote for that person. Would you?

Calling 202-224-3121 will connect you to your congresspersons. Free and fair voting is a privilege easily lost if "we the people" don't stand up.

Remind your friends, write it on your bathroom mirror or yell it from the top of the Astoria Column, but most importantly, vote. It's our country, and it's worth defending.

CARL DOMINEY
Astoria