

OPINION

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Learning Standards

Prepare every student for college or work

BY VANESSA GASTON

Are Oregon high school graduates ready for college or work?



In order to ensure that students graduate from high school better prepared for college and careers, the Oregon State Board of Education is reviewing Oregon's academic content standards, curriculum requirements, credential requirements, and statewide student assessment system from top to bottom.

We believe that Oregon needs to set learning standards with the expectation that all students can master high levels of knowledge and skills that enable success in postsecondary education, employment, and life. That means every high school student graduating with a diploma should be "college ready." The skills and knowledge that make high school graduates ready for postsecondary education are also the same skills and knowledge that make them ready for employment.

We want to reduce the achievement gap that now plagues many low-income and minority students, as well as provide students the opportunity to accelerate their learning with college courses should they have the capability and interest in doing so.

The current system was developed 14 years ago when Oregon passed the Education Act for the 21st Century. State leaders directed the Board of Education to adopt high standards for all students and an assessment system to measure attainment of those standards. Today, those standards and as-

sessments are firmly in place in schools throughout Oregon.

However, it is time for the current high school diploma requirements to be upgraded so that credentials are meaningful to colleges and universities, employers, and the students themselves. These credentials should confirm that a student has met rigorous academic and career-related standards and is ready for college or work.

We invite any interested Oregonians or Oregon institutions to offer written comments. By November 2006, we plan to adopt significant changes to high school graduation requirements and to the state assessment system.

We want to hear from you and your participation will help ensure these changes improve the education delivered to our students. We are seeking a wide range of perspectives, and we are asking for input from parents and students, school administrators and teachers, business and community leaders, community college and university educators, and interested citizens. Our goal is to hear about what works in our current policies and what needs to be modified.

Please submit your comments by December 16, 2005. Go to our web survey online at <http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/results/?id=144>, read the position paper and fill out the survey questions. Another option is to send your comments to jan.mccomb@state.or.us or mail them to State Board of Education, ATTN: Jan McComb, 255 Capitol Street NE, Salem, Oregon 97310.

With your help, the new diploma requirements will make sure that Oregon's graduates will be ready for the challenges of the 21st century.

Vanessa Gaston is executive director of the Urban League of Portland and a member of the Oregon State Board of Education.



Holidays Bring Alcohol-Induced Stress

Have fun and set an example for children

BY KAREN WHEELER

You can hardly get through the holidays without seeing a news story about the stress that many people experience at this time of year.

There's the loss of loved ones who won't be gathering around the table. And family members who are forced together even if they're not on good terms. Or the

letdown of unfulfilled expectations. An element of stress that's often neglected is that which alcohol brings: People already challenged by alcohol tend to overindulge at this time of year. People giving parties where alcohol flows freely are at risk of lawsuits if a departing guest is injured in an auto accident. And there's the alcohol-induced stress of embarrassing yourself in front of co-workers or family.

For many people, alcohol is a subject of New Year's resolutions: "On Jan. 1, I'll resolve to do something about my drinking."

This year, consider taking charge by resolving now either to become alcohol-free or to use and serve alcohol more responsibly.

Even if you're a parent saying, "I already use alcohol responsibly," this message may still be for you. That's because you have a golden opportunity to set a good example for the children and teens in your life.

If they don't abuse alcohol, that will reduce your stress year-round.

It's no small task, in Oregon, many teens make poor decisions about alcohol. Record numbers of eighth- and 11th graders report using alcohol and, even worse, 47 percent of 11th graders report dangerous binge drinking in the past month.

I'll admit it: when I was in high school, a lot of kids drank. But even

though that was a poor (and illegal) choice, the amount being consumed was relatively moderate. Today, by contrast, kids have contests to see who can drink the most. Although death is always tragic, we're now less shocked by news stories reporting that a teen has fallen victim to alcohol poisoning.

What can parents do? If you give an adult party where alcohol is served, make sure it's done responsibly. But also consider an alcohol-free party with games, a white-el-

supervision.

Send a frequent, firm and loving message to your kids with your expectations about alcohol and other drugs. The data is conclusive: Children whose parents do this are far less likely to use alcohol and other drugs.

Alcohol is a pervasive part of our society. We conservatively estimate that alcohol advertising amounts to \$55 million or more annually in Oregon alone. Yet like other things that we know aren't



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ephant gift exchange, fun beverages and good food; you'll be delighted with the results.

If you keep liquor in the house, be sure it isn't available to your kids. In a new survey, 12 percent of Oregon eighth graders reported they got alcohol at home without their parents' permission.

If the kids want their own holiday party, do it with an organized youth group or in a home where there will be intelligent parental

good for us or our kids, we don't have to buy into it.

We can instead concentrate on what the holidays are intended to celebrate: Our families, our friends, keeping promises to our kids, and lots of happy, stress-free memories that didn't require alcohol to bring out the fun.

Karen Wheeler is addiction policy manager in the Oregon Department of Human Services.

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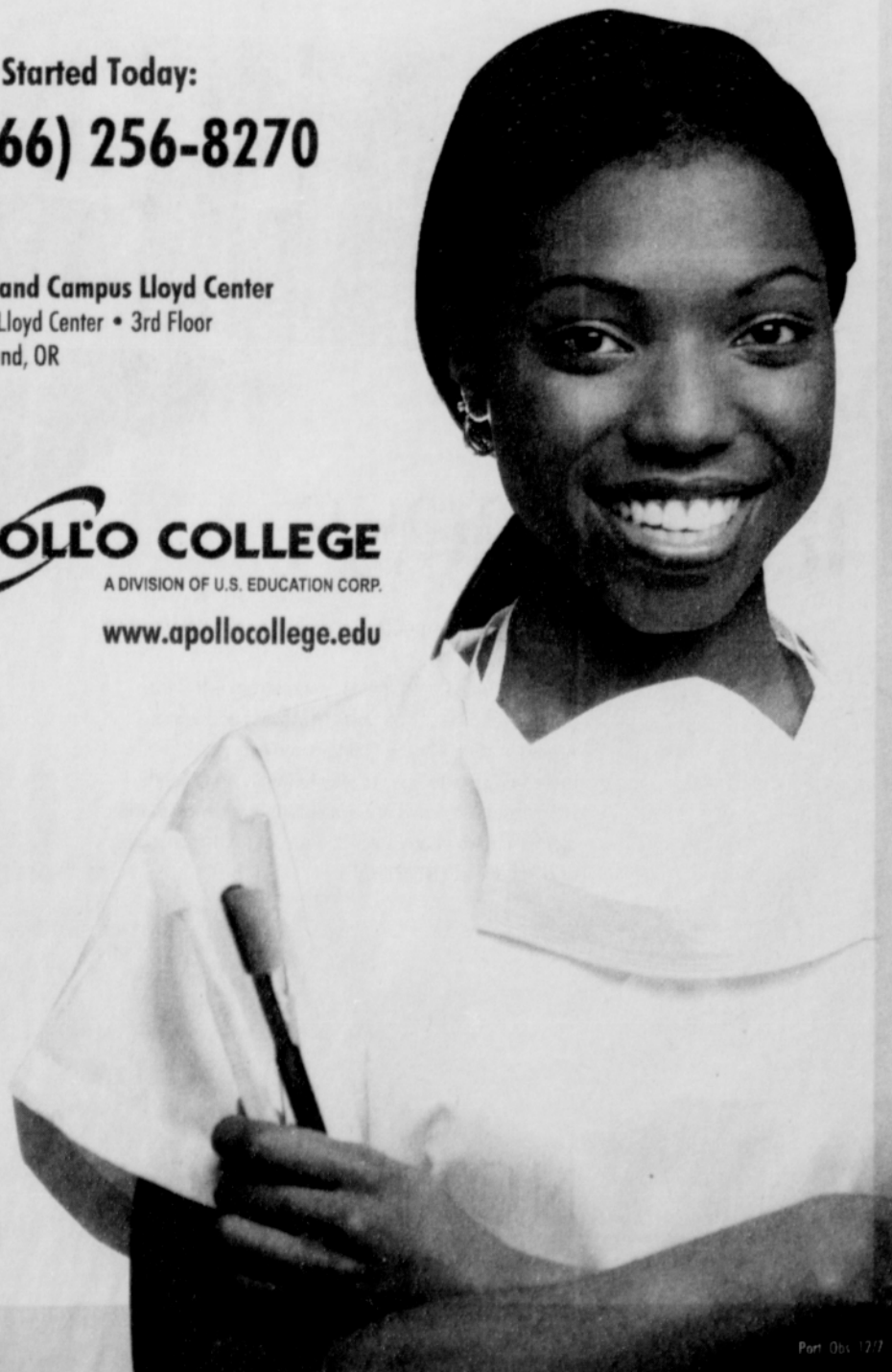
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For more information contact:
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