

Audit Tackles Achievement Gap

A new state audit has found that minority and economically disadvantaged 8th graders were significantly behind their peers in learning. African-American, Hispanic and Native American 8th graders were at least a year behind their peers in reading and math. Economically disadvantaged students were at least a year behind in math.

"Oregon must improve achievement for all students, especially minority and disadvantaged students who are falling further behind. This audit is a first step to shine a spotlight on the need to improve achievement for all students and close the achievement gap for minority and economically disadvantaged students," said Secretary of State Kate Brown.

There are significant social and



Kate Brown

economic consequences for low achievement. Lower achieving students are less likely to graduate from high school. Oregonians

without a high school diploma are more likely to be unemployed, receive public assistance, and be incarcerated at some point in their lifetime.

Auditors visited nine schools that were successfully closing the gap by maintaining safe and positive school environments with high expectations and high support, teacher collaboration, data-informed instruction and strong leadership.

The audit recommends that the Oregon Department of Education continue to report on the progress in closing achievement gaps, and to identify and disseminate effective practices linked to improving outcomes.

First Lady Student Performance

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"Sex and the City" star Sarah Jessica Parker, who has visited the school and will also be in attendance besides Michelle Obama for the kids' performance.

Tanisha Jones, parent to one of the young performers, says the White House visit will be "a once in lifetime opportunity" and forecasts it will change her daughter's life for the good. She says it's all the more exciting considering her daughter played Michelle Obama in an extra-curricular play with Maverick Main

Stage Productions' last winter.

"We're very proud, and happy and blessed," says Jones.

Recalling the night she and her husband had been informed that their daughter Sinai Jones would be participating, she recalls shedding tears of joy, and having to keep it a secret from her for a whole day so the school could announce it to all the selectees.

Now she says she's mostly hopeful for what the experience will bring.

"We're excited for the experience and for them to bring that back home."

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Last Thursday Curbs

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open during the festivities.

"We're working together with the organizers, the neighbors and the local business community to make Last Thursday a terrific event for everybody," Hales said.

The mayor also is asking police to strictly enforce open-container drinking in the right of way, as well as marijuana use. The city's Noise Office and police will work to bring street musicians within compliance of the city's noise code, officials said.

In recent years, neighbors have complained about livability concerns, including public urinations, drunkenness, loitering, littering, noise, double parking and fights.

Hales began exploring ways of maintaining the celebration while addressing neighborhood concerns last year in his first year of office. He also asked staff to investigate alternative funding proposals.

"Last year, taxpayers throughout Portland subsidized Last Thursday by an estimated \$75,000 to \$80,000," said Chad Stover, project manager in the mayor's office. "That includes police, fire, Transportation Bureau personnel, and the Office of

Neighborhood Involvement. The Mayor's Office also covered the cost of port-a-potties, garbage, recycling and security services."

Stover and others in the mayor's office will spend part of this year looking for a funding alternative that won't cost the public.

Typically, organizers of street fairs develop non-profit status, work together with businesses and neighbors in the area, and apply for a permit from the city. City services are provided in a support role, but the organizers are primarily responsible for funding and management. In the case of Last Thursday, no such body was ever created and, as a result, taxpayers have been covering the cost.

"The mayor believes that should be the model for Last Thursday as well," Stover said.

"Last Thursday is a special event that many Portlanders love," Hales said. "We want to find a way to make it a sustainable event that is welcomed and appreciated by neighbors and businesses, as well as the Last Thursday enthusiasts who attend each year. Ultimately, the event needs to manage appropriately and it needs a financial home."

Community

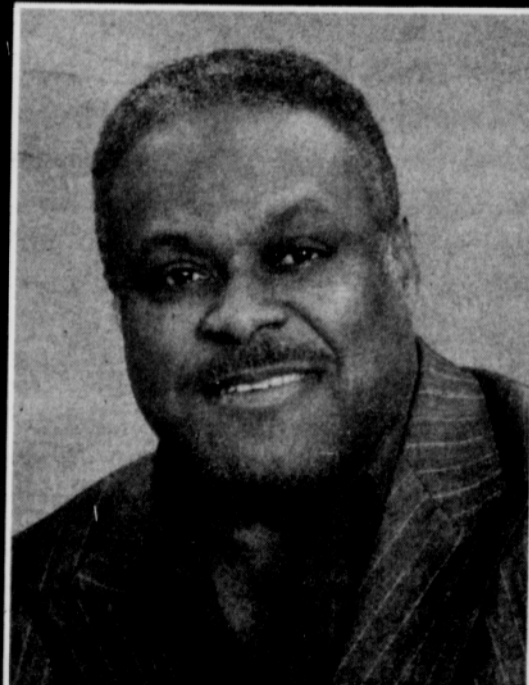
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Jason Dorsette, director of the Lonnie B. Harris Black Cultural Center, moved from North Carolina to Oregon to implement his goals as an agent of change. He set out to visit all 50 states, but as soon as he stepped onto campus, he was energized to make a positive impact — to recruit and retain students of color and educate them about the commonalities all people share — regardless of their background.

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