

Crew

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“We are here today because this is an Oregon Education Investment Board, and they need to invest in our schools, which means actually putting dollars and resources in our schools so that all kids can have access to well-rounded opportunities,” Barrett said.

“Instead of funding, what we got was

achievement compacts to hold our schools accountable, when where’s the accountability to us?”

“Okay, you’re going to hold our schools

accountable for test scores and graduation rates, but you know what? To achieve those things, to achieve better outcomes for kids, we need resources – we need teachers, we need teaching assistants, and we need those things that keep kids engaged,” Barrett said. “And that is not what this board has been talking about at all.”

The Skanner News put this question to Crew during his tour of the Jefferson Middle College, which he said impressed him so much with its program combining high school and college credit – with guaranteed

college admission for students who get good grades — he already hopes to duplicate it in other communities around the state.

Stable school funding is important to him, he said – but it’s not his top priority. Rather, he plans to initiate new educational programs first.

“I think that you’ll start to see the funding conversation will come through this kind of work, as opposed to just simply

‘What I’m saying is that I think that money follows success’

-- Rudy Crew, Oregon Schools CEO

going out and simply asking for more money,” he said.

“What I’m saying is that I think that money follows success, and when we have programs like this it’s going to be up to us to channel these successes so that they factor into the conversation about more funding and more stable funding — and I think they exist already but the channel for it doesn’t exist.

“So my attempts will be to find out where these pockets are, begin to see how and what it would cost to scale them, and move

Ladd

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Ladd: We know that student outcomes are the result of a wide range of factors throughout their lives. So we are trying to build the infrastructure to support youth, recognizing that our systems are broken and we’re living in a time of diminishing resources.

The mayor’s office is working with schools, with the county and with All Hands Raised (formerly the Portland Schools Foundation) to create a community collaboration focused on what the data tells us and on evidence based practices to improve. The data shows us where students are not doing well, and we’ve made a commitment to improve in those areas. So the mayor’s Cradle to Career initiative is targeting investments to programs like 9th Grade Counts and Summer Youth Connects.

We are keeping the focus on equity. Things can be going in the right direction, but we still must ask, “Do all youth show academic gains and achievement that we would hope for?”

TSN: We’re looking at deep cuts for schools. Do schools simply need more money?

Ladd: Certainly, our state has disinvested in education for the last decade, and it’s very hard now because the economy has been so bad. But nationally I think we consistently rank pretty low in our investment in education. Locally, we have done something to cover the shortfall with the Children’s Levy and other local option measures that passed in Portland. Measure 5 has definitely influenced education.

Multnomah County has done a great job in trying to keep funding for SUN schools. And I applaud Portland and PPS district for the support they’ve given to education. David Douglas and Parkrose have struggled to pass school levys. People do care education, but when the hole is X big it’s hard to fill it.

The feds have cut funds too. Nationally we need to fund education better. But money doesn’t solve all the problems. When we’ve had more money for schools, we haven’t seen any better results for students of color.

TSN: What are the biggest challenges you face in closing the achievement gap?



Ladd: That’s a big question. We have a disproportionate number of youth of color who are living in poverty. In Portland, the opportunities for people of color are limited. The coalition of Communities of Color report shows people of color earn cents on the dollar. We know the economy can have an impact on student outcomes.

Another factor is the overrepresentation of children of color for suspensions. That applies to Hispanics and African Americans. African American boys are more likely to be excluded by a factor of 6 to 1. And we know that when students are excluded there is a detrimental effect on their learning and their morale.

It starts young – and as soon as boys start to outgrow their teachers there is a supposed intimidation factor. Policy solutions include more training for teachers, because often teachers don’t realize what they are doing.

English Language Learners are also experiencing problems, and that’s another area where, for over a decade, PPS has been out of compliance for various reasons. And those are largely kids of color.

That said the system has been moving toward equity. For years, middle and high schools in affluent areas have had far more access to resources. But under Carole

Liberty and Hope



PHOTO BY LISA LOVING

Hundreds attended the 2012 Oregon League of Minority Voters Annual Liberty and Hope Award Dinner at the Oregon Convention Center last week. Many civic leaders attended, including, from left, Trail Blazers President Larry Miller; Big Brothers/Big Sisters CEO Andy Nelson, and the organization’s director of community relations and diversity programs, Chabre Vickers. The event honored Phil Knight and keynote speaker was Myrlie Evers-Williams.

them in a direction such that they are part and parcel of the funding conversation.

“And then build into this in some incremental way – year by year, biennium by

biennium — the kind of funding that ultimately supports this continuation and ultimately allows it to grow elsewhere,” Crew said.

Smith’s leadership, PPS is moving to increase equity.

TSN: What are our schools doing right?

Ladd: Roosevelt is a wonderful story and an example of what good leadership can do. Roosevelt is an example of strong teaching and strong leadership. Teachers are very important and Roosevelt has cultivated an atmosphere of high expectations and that shows in the gains students have made. The graduation rate has gone up by 14 percent.

The other thing they are doing is make community partnerships with culturally specific providers. It’s simply not possible for schools to serve all the full needs of students – and they are not necessarily good at it.

TSN: What are your thoughts about Jefferson?

Ladd: Jefferson has gone through change after change. And when a school is in constant reform it has a negative impact on students’ ability to learn. Now I think it has some stability. And I hope it will benefit from the high school redesign, which was aimed at making sure advanced course work

stories of parents who have pulled their children out of the public schools. Parents of students of color say that it’s a lot of work to get teachers to see their children as capable of success.

At one teacher-parent conference, for example, the parent said that she saw room for improvement because her daughter was not excellent across the board. And she asked, what should she do? But the teacher really had no suggestions, and gave the impression that it didn’t matter. That sort of mediocrity of expectations for our kids is really disconcerting. I see very few schools where African American students have high academic achievement.

So as a parent I’m really open to being creative with the education system. I’m very supportive of charters. LEP and OPAL, for example, are doing good work. The challenge of charters in Portland right now is that they don’t serve children of color.

TSN: What about the argument that charters drain support and funds from our public schools?

Ladd: Charters are divisive. I used to be against them when I was in my master’s program. It’s easy to be against charters when you don’t have children.

Now I get it – as a parent. So I’d rather keep my kid in a public system, but I’m open to charters. And I respect any parent who chooses to send their kid to a charter school. You don’t want your kid to be the guinea pig or a casualty of a principle. That, I think, is the most fundamental thing that’s changed in me since I was a student.

I see the role of charters as incubators of creativity and innovation that show how we can improve the system. What’s not surprising to me is the support of the federal system with the president a person of color.

‘Parents of students of color say that it’s a lot of work to get teachers to see their children as capable of success’

-- Kali Thorne Ladd

is available to students at schools like Jefferson, which is predominantly African American, as well as in schools that are predominantly white.

I’m in the camp of believing you need the community to be providers in schools to provide services. Jefferson is on its way with partnerships with SEI, PCC and four-year partnerships with universities. I think we are going to see gains.

TSN: Have your views changed since you became a parent?

Ladd: As a parent I’m hyper-concerned about the achievement of African American kids in the system. And I’m horrified by the

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