

PARENTS TALK BACK

Why can't American students be the smartest in the world?

When the topic of America's mediocre international ranking in student achievement comes up, there are a few typical reactions among adults.

Invariably, there's denial: Our students are more creative and innovative than those in countries that produce robotic test-takers. The test is somehow flawed. Those low-performing students must be at other (read: poor) schools.

Or there's anxiety: Our children are going to be left behind in the global economy. This fear leads those who can afford it to pour more time and resources into their children and their education, continually upping the ante and the latent stress levels.

And, of course, there's blame. Pick your target: lazy students, bad parents, lousy teachers, greedy unions, inefficient bureaucracies, not enough government funding or too much governmental meddling. It's easier, though ultimately futile, to scapegoat than commit to ideas of how we can improve our system.

Each of these knee-jerk reactions miss the most disquieting questions of all: Why do the most privileged American teenagers in the best schools and with well-educated parents still perform worse in math than affluent children in 27 other countries? Why does our country spend more than other countries on students but get less in performance? Why has America's performance on a common measuring stick remained essentially flat for decades, while students in other countries have skyrocketed to the top in a short amount of time?

Journalist Amanda Ripley investigated these mysteries in her book "The Smartest Kids in the World: And How They Got That Way." She took the Program for International Student Assessment herself and found it to be a sound yardstick. She then followed three American teenagers who chose to spend a year in school at one of three high-performing countries: Finland, South Korea and Poland. She looked at what American schools, students and families were doing differently than their counterparts in the top-performing countries.

She, and the students she followed, discovered curricula and schoolwork far more rigorous than ours in their schools abroad. They met teachers who were better prepared to teach and more respected for their profession. It was harder to become a teacher in these other countries. Their selective teacher training schools attracted the brightest and best. Their cultures ingrained high expectations for all students, and the competition among peers raised the bar. While the American communities focused heavily on sports, the countries with the smartest students focused on academic skills, critical thinking and training programs.

Ripley's work should inform the current discussion about President Obama's proposal to offer two free years of community college to any student who maintains a 2.5 grade-point average and makes progress toward a degree or technical certificate in a high-demand field.

There is an appeal to the idea of making the basics of higher education available to all students willing to work for it, to give them a shot at the American dream. It's in the country's best interest to have a trained and educated workforce that can fill the jobs at home and grow the economy.

But how well do community colleges actually perform? They tackle the outcome of an underperforming K-12 system. They serve close to half of all undergraduates in the U.S., and nearly half those students require remedial coursework. It seems ludicrous to inject rigor into a system struggling to bring students to baseline, doesn't it?

But consider the natural consequence of setting the bar too low: "Far too few of those students persist to achieve the educational outcomes that would change their lives and their families' lives for generations to come. By six years after college entry, only 46 percent of community college students have earned a certificate or associate degree, have transferred to a 4-year institution, or are still enrolled," wrote Kay McClenney, director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement, in a 2012 opinion piece.

Yes, community colleges expand college attainment rates for students who otherwise wouldn't attend college at all. Making higher education more accessible is an important goal. But community colleges — as well as our lagging K-12 schools — should take this proposal as a challenge to incorporate greater academic rigor, high expectations and consequences for all vested parties.

Are we less willing to have that discussion because deep down, we don't believe American students can be the smartest in the world?

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AISHA SULTAN
Parents talk back

'Paw-paparazzi' take note: Inaugural World Dog Awards honor star pets

By SUE MANNING
Associated Press

LOS ANGELE — Awards season is underway in Hollywood, but one show will roll out green turf instead of red carpet and celebrate achievements like best mutt instead of best actor.

At the inaugural World Dog Awards hosted by comedian George Lopez, dogs will walk in on artificial grass and wag out with golden fire hydrant statuettes honoring the best in entertainment and social media.

There are no long speeches or fashion critics at the show airing Thursday on the CW Network. At this event, the podium is packed with dog treats, patches of grass allow pets to do their business and signs call for barking instead of applause. Plus, pooches lounge on couches and sniff out swag bags boasting pet food, collars and toys.

The World Dog Awards are the latest in a series of canine kudos weaving their way into Hollywood's human awards landscape.

The Pawscars gives accolades to animals in film roles, including a tarantula that won best supporting arachnid a few years ago for appearing in "Salt" with Angelina Jolie. Voting is open for the show, scheduled to air March 4.

The Golden Collar Awards made their online debut in 2012, giving the top nod to a Jack Russell terrier named Uggie for his star turn in "The Artist." After a two-year hiatus, the show returns Oct. 4 and is open only to adopted shelter dogs



Paris Hilton, center, joins former NFL player Terrill Owens with the other nominees on the stage during the taping of the 2015 World Dog Awards Jan. 10 at the Barker Hanger in Santa Monica, Calif.

that have appeared online or in TV, movies or commercials.

The World Dog Awards are different than other shows, executive producer Robert Horowitz said.

"You have seen Westminster, you have seen dogs honored for their service and to promote adoption, but not a show that focuses on how important they are in everyday life," he said.

Fans voted online for the winners of most categories before the show's filming on Jan. 10. They chose Most Pawpular Dog, for the most influential pooch on social media; Happiest Reunion, for the most inspiring videotaped reunion between a returning military member and a dog; and even Most Dog-Like Cat.

Lopez said hosting the show gave him a chance to "create an awareness of our most loyal companions, who love unconditionally and never take their eyes off of you."

Scooby-Doo, the titular animated Great Dane who's been investigating mysteries for decades, is receiving a lifetime achievement award, given to an iconic dog character in popular culture. Warner Bros. created a

OUT OF THE VAULT

Til Taylor statue the first of Pendleton's bronzes

The other day, as I was walking home for lunch, I was stopped by a local businessman who praised my history column and chatted with me a bit about news coverage in the *East Oregonian*. We got onto the subject of the Main Street statue kerfuffle, and he asked about the history of the statue of legendary lawman Til Taylor, which holds court in the park named after him in Southeast Pendleton. This week, as I was searching the archives for a photo for a woman in Florida, I came across a news story about Taylor's murder and the commissioning of the statue that memorializes him. It was kismet, I guess.

Tilman D. Taylor was hired as a deputy sheriff in 1898, and was elected Umatilla County Sheriff in 1912. He served in that capacity for the next eight years, until he was gunned down while trying to prevent a jail break on July 25, 1920. During



RENEE STRUTHERS
Out of the vault

his time as sheriff he was responsible for thousands of arrests, without once firing a shot. Even as he lay dying in St. Anthony Hospital he was directing the search for the three gunmen involved; they were all returned to custody by July 31 and all were hanged for his death.

Sheriff Taylor also was elected president of the Pendleton Round-Up Association in 1912, and donned cowboy attire each year during Round-Up Week. It was in this costume that sculptor A. Phimister Proctor immortalized Taylor for the 11-foot-tall statue that depicts him riding his horse. (Contrary to popular belief, while working Sheriff Taylor favored business suits

and black or brown Oxfords, not cowboy attire.) Proctor was a regular visitor to the Round-Up and fascinated by the cowboys and Indians; he also knew Taylor well.

A committee was formed to take donations, the first \$25 coming July 30, 1920, just days after Taylor was killed, from W.R. Frey of Vancouver, B.C. In all, \$20,000 was collected, and Proctor recreated Taylor's likeness in Rome and Brussels before shipping the statue to Portland. From there the Penland Brothers of Pendleton brought the statue by truck over the narrow, crooked highway to its new home.

The statue was installed on a 4-foot-tall granite base, surrounded by reflecting pools, and dedicated Sept. 18, 1929, before thousands of people. Speaking at the dedication were Governor I.L. Patterson; Roy Raley, who introduced the sculptor, Proctor; and Poker

Jim, chief of the Round-Up's Indian delegation, who recalled that it was because Til Taylor invited the tribes to take part in the Round-Up that they brought their camps every year. More than 200 police officers, sheriffs and federal officers from Oregon, Washington, Idaho and California also attended the dedication, as well as Til Taylor's widow and members of his family.

Til Taylor Park is a popular one in the summer with parents of young children, where a wading pool has replaced the reflecting pools, but it is not as well-used as others in town. Still, Taylor keeps vigil at the eastern end of Pendleton, a town he protected so well until his untimely demise.

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ODDS & ENDS

'In Dog We Trust' accidentally printed on sheriff's rugs

LARGO, Fla. (AP) — The Pinellas County Sheriff's Office in Florida has gone to the dogs. Well, at least its rugs have.

Department spokeswoman Cecilia Barreda said Wednesday that a new, \$500 rug at the sheriff's administration building said "In Dog We Trust" instead of "In God We Trust."

The forest green rug with the sheriff's yellow badge was in the entrance area for a couple of months when the error was discovered Wednesday by a deputy.

Barreda says the error was made by the rug manufacturer and it's in the process of being corrected. A second rug did not have the misprint.

The rugs were rolled up and put away Wednesday. It's not clear if the new carpet smell had worn off.

Mother, son firefighters respond to same blaze

LEOMINSTER, Mass. (AP) — Lunenburg firefighter Matt Benoit had a memorable first call. His mom was there.

The 20-year-old Benoit recently graduated from the Fire Academy and was working his first shift last Tuesday when he responded to a house fire in



This image released by ABC News/WFTS-TV/ABC Action News, Adam Winer shows the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office rug in Largo, Fla., Wednesday. WFTS news reported that the new rugs at the sheriff's administration building say "In Dog We Trust" instead of "In God We Trust."

Fitchburg.

As he arrived on scene, his mother, Leominster Fire Lt. Audra Brown, exited the house.

Brown tells *The Sentinel & Enterprise* she wasn't worried. Her son was with a pair of experienced colleagues and she knows he's been well trained.

She's also given him some maternal advice: "I always tell him to check his equipment and don't be complacent."

Benoit is a call firefighter in Lunenburg who hopes to land a full-time job.

Brown, a Navy veteran, became Leominster's first female firefighter when she was hired 18 years ago.

Bucharest metro officials vow to fight 'no pants' stunt

BUCHAREST, Romania (AP) — Romanian subway officials have gotten their knickers in a twist over a planned stunt in which people will ride the Bucharest subway without their pants.

Briefed about plans, the Metrorex subway managers said Friday that those "who disturb public order or are indecent will be fined," and reported to the police.

The No Pants Subway Ride began in 2002 in New York as a stunt and has taken place around

the world since then. Organizers call it "an international celebration of silliness" and are organizing it in dozens of cities on Sunday.

Sub-zero temperatures are forecast for Sunday in Bucharest, when participants are expected to turn up at a downtown subway station wearing coats, hats, scarves and gloves — but no pants.

Man steals money, caught after drunken-driving crash

ROCHESTER, N.H. (AP) — Police in Rochester, New Hampshire, say a man suspected of stealing money from a gas station was captured about an hour later after he crashed his car while driving drunk.

WMUR-TV reports that police arrested 27-year-old Daniel Wilson after responding to the accident scene on Charles Street near Knight Street around 3 p.m. Saturday. Police say he crossed the double yellow line and crashed into a parked car. He was charged with driving while intoxicated and unauthorized use of a propelled vehicle.

Police identified him as the suspect who an hour earlier had stolen money from a safe at a Shell gas station on Washington Street. They say he managed to take the money while the clerk was busy with several customers.

He was charged with theft.