

Common Core: 21 Ore. districts miss mark for test taking

By LAURA FRAZIER
The Oregonian

PORTLAND — Twenty-one Oregon districts ranging from small to the state's largest failed to meet federal testing targets for Smarter Balanced assessments, according to state data.

The launch of new Common Core aligned assessments last school year sparked opt-out movements across the country. States are required to test at least 95 percent of students overall and in every group, such as low-income students and English Language Learners — to fit the No Child Left Behind law and receive federal education dollars.

In Oregon, which has nearly 200 school districts, the Smarter Balanced tests replaced the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills starting during the 2014-2015 school year, in grades three to eight and 11 in English language arts and math.

Rates fell below 95 percent in at least one subject area for 21 Oregon districts, according to the Oregon Department of Education. In 2013-2014, only two districts missed the mark in a subject area and none fell below subject targets the year prior.

Oregon's schools chief Salam Noor told superintendents and principals in an email that \$344 million in funding could be at risk. This year about 95 percent of Oregon students took the tests but rates for African American students and students with special needs dropped to 93 percent.

The U.S. Department of Education said in a statement that the department has not yet had to withhold funding due to participation requirements because states either fit the law or addressed low rates at specific schools or districts.

The department has not made any decisions in relation to Oregon's latest participation rates, said Press Secretary Dorie Turner Nolt.

"We have made no decisions, and as we have said many times, continue to look to states to ensure districts and schools are meeting the law," she said.

Oregon districts that missed participation targets in at least one subject range from small, rural areas to Portland. For example, in Gaston, near Forest Grove, 340 students were scheduled to take exams and about 92 percent did. And out of the approximately 25,100 students set to test in Portland Public Schools, roughly 87 percent took assessments.

More than a quarter of students at some schools refused to test, according to Portland Public Schools figures. Portland community members had at times visibly advocated against the test — the district's union passed a resolution this winter and a local opt out committee formed last year.

"I think we see this kind of concern anytime there is a new test that is being rolled out," said Joe Suggs, the district's assessment lead. "It's possible that the opt-out numbers will decline. Obviously we won't that know until we are into testing again."

The state plans to work with districts to communicate why test data is valuable, said spokeswoman Crystal Greene. Test scores allow districts and the state to accurately evaluate which schools and student groups are doing well and who needs more help.

Opt-out advocates in the Portland area have shared concerns with the amount of time each test requires and the initial predication that many students would fail, among other red flags.

In some cases, students took the lead. A student union founded at Lake Oswego High led to 234 exemptions, which made up 88 percent of the total number of district opt-outs, said spokeswoman Nancy Duin. Overall 92 percent of Lake Oswego School District students took tests.

BRIEFLY

Experts: GOP candidates' tough talk doesn't always square with facts

CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — If there was ever a week for the Republican presidential candidates to talk tough on China, this was it: Spurred by the stock market's wild ride, they lashed out at the world's most populous nation.

Wisconsin's Scott Walker demanded President Barack Obama cancel an upcoming state visit with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Mike Huckabee said the next president should "build America's economy, not China's or Mexico's." Donald Trump said the U.S. economy needs to "do a big uncoupling pretty soon, before it's too late."

It's rhetoric that doesn't always square with the realities of the relationship between the world's two largest economies, said experts on America's ties with China, even if it does make for nifty campaign sound bites.

"When you're in the early phases of the primary season, and you don't have a lot in the way of foreign policy bona fides, a surefire applause line is to go to the extreme — and in the case of China that's always a very easy thing to do," said Jon Huntsman, a former Republican governor of Utah and U.S. ambassador to China under Obama.

No candidate went further than Trump, whose pledge to bring back to the U.S. the roughly 2 million jobs lost to China since 1999 is a centerpiece of his campaign. "Not only now have they

taken our jobs ... but now they are pulling us down with them," he said Monday amid a worldwide swoon in stock prices.

Clerk asks Supreme Court to intervene in gay marriage case

FRANKFORT, Ky. (AP) — Two months after it legalized gay marriage nationwide, the U.S. Supreme Court is being asked by a Kentucky county clerk for permission to keep denying marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

Rowan County Clerk Kim Davis, who objects to gay marriage for religious reasons, asked the nation's highest court Friday to grant her "asylum for her conscience."

The Supreme Court ruled in June that the Constitution guarantees gay people the right to marry. But Davis contends the First Amendment guarantees her the right of religious freedom.

She stopped issuing all marriage licenses in the days after the Supreme Court's landmark decision. Two gay couples and two straight couples sued her, arguing that she must fulfill her duties as an elected official despite her personal Christian conviction. A federal judge ordered Davis to issue the licenses and an appeals court upheld that decision.

Davis' lawyers said they filed an emergency appeal with the Supreme Court Friday, asking that they delay the mandate to issue licenses until her appeal is finished, a process that could stretch for months.



Bodies of migrants who drowned off the coast when their boat sank are collected in Zuwara, Libya. It was not clear how many migrants had drowned. Dozens of boats are launched from lawless Libya each week, with Italy and Greece bearing the brunt of the surge.

Europe's migrant crisis brings new death by land and sea

Associated Press

VIENNA — Death and desperation mounted in Europe's migrant crisis Friday as Austrian police said 71 people appeared to have suffocated in the back of an abandoned truck, while an estimated 200 people were feared drowned off Libya when two overloaded boats capsized.

More than 300,000 people have sought to cross the Mediterranean Sea so far in 2015, up from 219,000 in all of last year, as European authorities grapple with the largest influx since World War II.

The death of 71 people locked in the truck on a highway south of Vienna shows "the desperation of people seeking protection or a new life in Europe," said Melissa Fleming, spokeswoman for the U.N. refugee agency in Geneva.

The International Office of Migration has recorded 2,636 deaths linked to Mediterranean crossings this year, and more may have vanished beneath the waves out of sight of rescuers.

Each day, thousands are boarding flimsy boats for Italy or Greece, and many more are placing themselves and their families at the mercy of human traffickers by slogging for days or weeks through the western Balkans toward what they hope will be a brighter future. Most are fleeing war, conflict or persecution in countries including Syria, Afghanistan and Eritrea.

Several factors are driving the surge of Syrian refugees, including worsening conditions in that country's refugee centers partly due to budget



A Syrian man tends to his daughter recovering in a hospital after the boat they were sharing with hundreds of other migrants capsized off the coast of Zuwara, Libya.

cuts and the reluctance of neighboring countries to take in more people, the U.N. said.

In a rare statement issued under his name and not a spokesman, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said he was "horrified and heartbroken" by the latest deaths and stressed that a "large majority" of people undertaking such dangerous journeys are refugees who have the right to protection and asylum.

He called on all governments to act with compassion and said he plans a "special meeting devoted to these global concerns" on Sept. 30, during the annual General Assembly of world leaders at U.N. headquarters.

Two ships went down Thursday off the western Libyan city of Zuwara, where Hussein Asheini of the Red Crescent said at least 105 bodies had been recovered. About 100 people were rescued, according to the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, with at least 100 more

believed to be missing.

"A coast guard team is still diving in and checking inside to see if there's anyone else," Asheini added.

Workers pulled the dead from the water and placed them in orange-and-black body bags that were laid out on the waterfront in Zuwara, about 105 kilometers (65 miles) west of Tripoli. Several victims floated face-down in a flooded boat towed into the harbor. At least one of the dead wore a life vest.

Most of the people rescued came from Syria and sub-Saharan African countries, said Mohamed al-Misrati, the spokesman for the Red Crescent in Libya.

"You can imagine what they are going through. Some of them are still looking for their friends. We're trying to speak to them but many of them are too traumatized to even talk about the incident," he said.

Lawless Libya, which doesn't have the resources to deal with the flow of migrants, is a prime starting point for many, with human

traffickers filling boats they know cannot reach European shores but figuring that rescuers will pick up the passengers and take them to Italy.

Often, the smugglers force migrants below deck where their chances of survival are even dimmer. Rescuers who boarded one boat Wednesday counted 52 people who suffocated in the hold, according to the U.N. refugee agency. Survivors said the smugglers beat them with sticks to keep them below deck, and one said they demanded money to let the migrants come up for fresh air.

While the U.N. agency said more than 300,000 refugees crossed the Mediterranean so far this year, the International Office of Migration, an intergovernmental agency, put the number at 332,000 on Friday.

Hungarian police arrested four people overnight after the decomposing bodies of 71 migrants, including eight women and four children, were found in the truck on Austria's main highway.

The suspects, allegedly part of a larger Bulgarian-Hungarian smuggling ring, include an Afghan and three Bulgarians, one of whom owns the truck, Hungarian national police spokeswoman Viktoria Csiszer-Kovacs said. Police raided houses and questioned almost 20 others in the case.

Hans Peter Doskozil, chief of police in eastern Burgenland province, said the migrants probably suffocated. At least some of the dead were Syrian, travel documents indicated, though most of the partially decomposed bodies remained unidentified.

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