

**EAST OREGONIAN**  
Founded October 16, 1875

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**OUR VIEW**

# Oregon falls farther behind in graduation rate rankings

Another day, another bit of bad news for Oregon's beleaguered education system.

On Monday, the U.S. Department of Education noted that Oregon's graduation rate is at 74 percent. And this at a time when the country has never been better at graduating its students on time. Nationwide, the on-time graduation rate hit 83 percent for the class of 2015, the best mark in our history.

Yet Oregon continues to fall behind the trend.

The state is now third-worst in graduation rate, having been leapfrogged by Alaska and now only ahead of Nevada and New Mexico. The graduation rate for white students in Oregon is better than just one state — but that's actually an improvement, up from 50th last year to now second from the bottom.

In Oregon, the problems with graduating students on time are multi-faceted.

One reason is surely financial — Oregon students have one of the shortest school years, and are below average for state dollars spent per student. Surely the helpful additions to basic offerings — CTE classes, for instance, along with school nurses and counselors — help keep students on the fringe in school and on track to graduation. Oregon's fluctuating education budget has not allowed those types of positions and

programs to be funded and staffed with enough consistency.

But another, larger reason is cultural in nature. Chronic absenteeism is an ingrained, systemic issue across the state, and it is no different here in Morrow and

Umatilla counties. And the absenteeism problem is exacerbated by the state's short school year, because every minute missed is of greater importance.

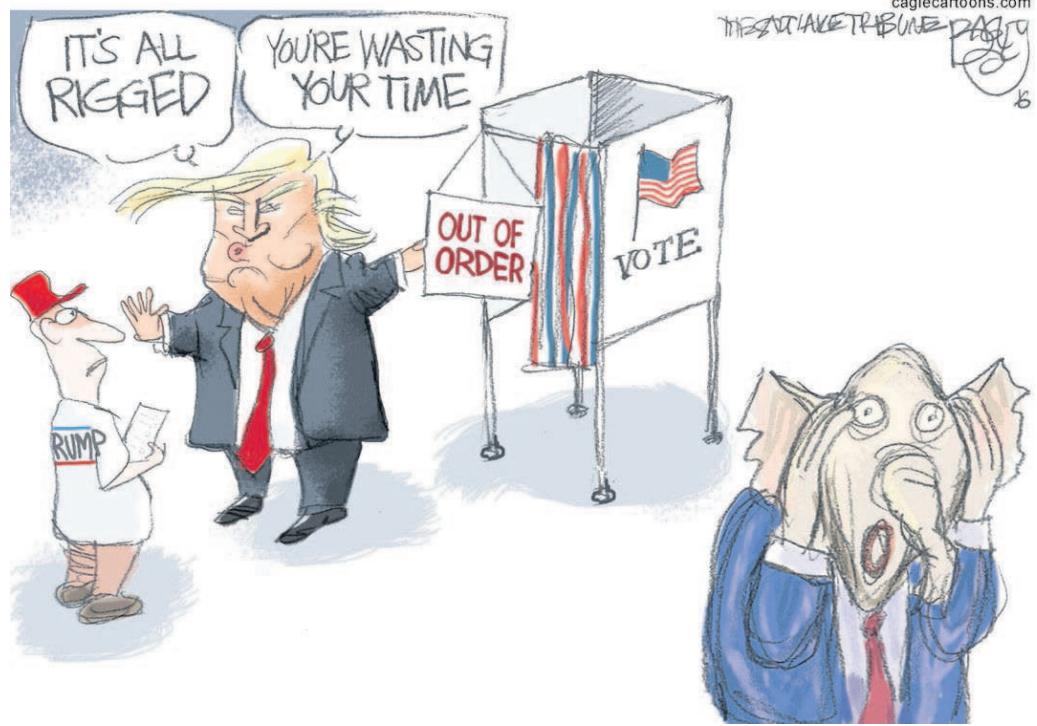
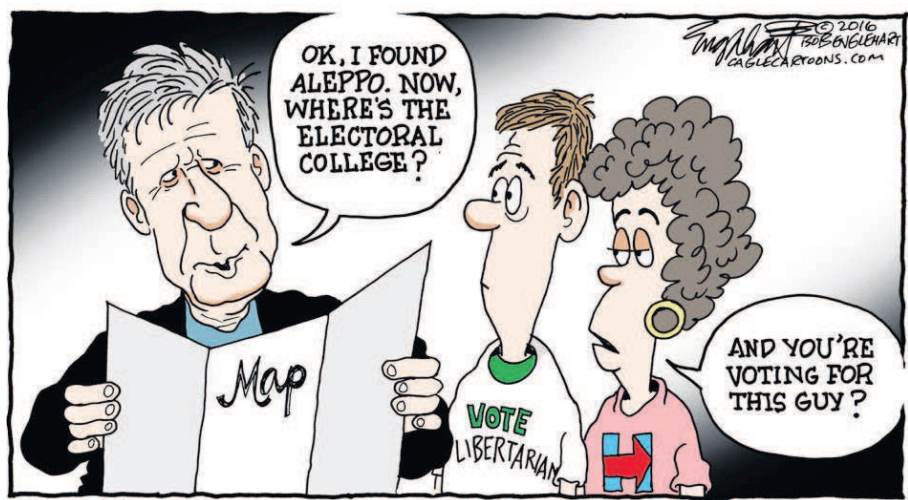
Plenty is up for debate in November, but two Oregon measures have the best opportunity at addressing the state education issue. One

is Measure 97 — you may have seen a billion ads for it while trying to watch your football game or favorite sitcom. It taxes corporate sales and feeds that money into the general fund, where a percentage of it would then go to education. Measure 98 is a smaller, more precise measure that stipulates money to be used specifically to address graduation rates — strengthening CTE programs and the like.

Whatever your political outlook — and your faith in legislators and state employees to direct and spend money wisely — it's clear that something is wrong with Oregon education, and it stretches from the top to the bottom, and from homeroom into dining rooms. If November's measures aren't your cup of tea, better ideas are needed and they're needed now.

**Graduation rates have never been higher in the United States — 83 percent of the class of 2015 graduated on time.**

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.



**OTHER VIEWS**

## What we need next

Kathy Fletcher and David Simpson have a son named Santi, who went to Washington, D.C., public schools. Santi had a friend who sometimes went to school hungry. So Santi invited him to occasionally eat and sleep at his house.

That friend had a friend and that friend had a friend, and now when you go to dinner at Kathy and David's house on Thursday night there might be 15 to 20 teenagers crammed around the table, and later there will be groups of them crashing in the basement or in the few small bedrooms upstairs.

The kids who show up at Kathy and David's have endured the ordeals of modern poverty: homelessness, hunger, abuse, sexual assault. Almost all have seen death firsthand — to a sibling, friend or parent.

It's anomalous for them to have a bed at home. One 21-year-old woman came to dinner last week and said this was the first time she'd been around a family table since she was 11.

And yet by some miracle, hostile soil has produced charismatic flowers. Thursday dinner is the big social occasion of the week. Kids come from around the city. Spicy chicken and black rice are served. Cellphones are banned ("Be in the now," Kathy says).

The kids call Kathy and David "Momma" and "Dad," are unfailingly polite, clear the dishes, turn toward one another's love like plants toward the sun and burst with big glowing personalities. Birthdays and graduations are celebrated. Songs are performed.

I started going to dinner there about two years ago, hungry for something beyond food. Each meal we go around the table, and everybody has to say something nobody else knows about them.

Each meal we demonstrate our commitment to care for one another. I took my daughter once and on the way out she said, "That's the warmest place I can ever imagine."

During this election season of viciousness, vulgarity and depravity, Thursdays at Kathy and David's has been a weekly uplift, and their home a place to be reminded of what is beautiful about our country and what we can do to bring out its loveliness.

The kids need what all adolescents need: bikes, laptops and a listening heart. "Thank you for seeing the light in me," one young woman told Kathy after a cry on the couch. David and Kathy have set up a charitable organization called AOK, for All Our Kids, to help each of the kids come into his or her own fullness. Four started college this year, and one



DAVID BROOKS  
Comment

joined City Year, the national service organization.

Poverty up close is so much more intricate and unpredictable than the picture of poverty you get from the grand national debates. The kids can project total self-confidence one minute and then slide into utter lostness the next.

The college application process often seems like a shapeless fog to them; nobody's taught them the concrete steps to move along the way.

One young woman lied on her financial aid forms because she didn't want to admit that

her father was dead, her mother was on drugs — how messed up her home life actually was.

There's no margin for error for these kids, and she would have lost her college dreams if not for a squad of adults ready to mobilize around her.

The adults in this community give the kids the chance to present their gifts. At my first dinner, Edd read a poem from his cracked flip phone that I first thought

was from Langston Hughes, but it turned out to be his own. Kesari has a voice that somehow emerged from New Orleans jazz from the 1920s. Madeline and Thalya practice friendship as if it were the highest art form. Jamel loses self-consciousness when he talks of engine repair.

They give us a gift — complete intolerance of social distance. When I first met Edd, I held out my hand to shake his. He looked at it and said, "We hug here," and we've been hugging and hanging off each other since.

Bill Milliken, a veteran youth activist, is often asked which programs turn around kids' lives. "I still haven't seen one program change one kid's life," he says. "What changes people is relationships. Somebody willing to walk through the shadow of the valley of adolescence with them."

Souls are not saved in bundles. Love is the necessary force.

The problems facing this country are deeper than the labor participation rate and ISIS. It's a crisis of solidarity, a crisis of segmentation, spiritual degradation and intimacy.

Throughout this ugly year, AOK has been my visit to a better future, more powerful than any political tract about what we need next.

Sometimes Kathy and David are asked how they ended up with so many kids flowing through their house. They look at how many kids are out there, and respond, "How is it possible you don't?"

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in September 2003.

**YOUR VIEWS**

### Forget Idaho: Eastern Oregon better by itself

Why should Oregon join with Washington and Idaho? Eastern Oregon should secede by itself. You then declare war on the U.S.A. and quickly lose. At this point we will then receive foreign aid forever!

And by the way, the Electoral College has long outlived its purpose. Our crooked politicians can control the outcome this way. Please vote out all the incumbents.

John Redmond  
La Pine

### Google to know how your rep votes

How much do you know about your national congressmen and the way they vote on the issues? Instead of voting based on a TV ad or on a single issue, one can Google "On The Issues" followed by the name of Representative Greg Walden or Senator Ron Wyden, and it will enter a web site in which that person's voting on 20 separate categories is listed.

Examples of categories are economy, budget, corporations, crime, energy, environment, education, foreign, policy, gun control, health care, jobs, social security, tax reform, welfare and others.

In each category it lists a

one-line summary of what bills the congressperson voted on and how he voted, yes or no. One can, by doing this, decide if the person is voting in the manner which represents your preferences.

Bruce Graham  
Sisters

### Bond dollars needed at Umatilla schools

I am writing in support of the Umatilla School District bond measure on the November ballot. This bond will allow the district to make needed improvements at all three schools in Umatilla — McNary Elementary, Clara Brownell Middle School and Umatilla High School.

I would like to address the needs at Umatilla High School. This school continues to be the flagship building of the district. Built in 1999, the high school is a beautiful facility, serving our students well. However, the roof must be replaced, and updating the HVAC systems and controls will allow our high school to remain in top condition for years to come. If approved by voters, the bond will complete these projects; otherwise the school will have to find funds in the district budget. Investing in these needed capital improvements now will ensure that our elementary and middle school students will still get to enjoy a

wonderful high school building when they are older.

The Umatilla school bond will not increase taxes for Umatilla citizens; the new bonds are estimated to continue the same tax rate of the current bonds, just longer. Also, if voters approve the bond, the Umatilla School District will receive an additional \$4 million from the state of Oregon for district projects.

I encourage the Umatilla community to vote yes on this school bond — to protect our students, to protect our educational investments and send a clear message that the Umatilla community is dedicated to quality education.

Jon Lorence  
Umatilla School District board member

### Nations must obey the laws of God

Deuteronomy 28 promises blessings for those nations that obey God's laws and curses for those nations that forsake God's commandments.

America has been blessed as no other nation save Israel precisely because our leaders honored God's commandments and statutes. The God of our forefathers is no longer honored or observed by our leaders, institutions or courts and America is now suffering the

curses of disobedience.

America is no longer the lender but rather the debtor to nations that disdain America and global bankers that finance the emerging new world order. The present corrupt Obama government is a curse upon America. The CIA, FBI, Homeland Security, IRS, the courts, Republican establishment, the national media and press, and entertainment industry are all controlled by the globalist Democratic party. The Constitution, Bill of Rights, freedom of religion and the Second Amendment will be abrogated if Hillary Clinton is elected president. The citizens of a nation built on the blessings of God will be reduced to bondage if that nation continues to forsake the commandments of its creator.

Can Donald Trump or any constitutional conservative Republican defeat the global Democratic party? The liberal press destroyed the reputation of Sarah Palin, Herman Cain and Mitt Romney, and now they are relentlessly attacking Donald

Trump. The corrupt Clinton/Obama regime will never allow a constitutional conservative to return America to our Godly heritage and Bible-based foundation. They have corrupted the entire American system.

The Christian Church has been silent, hiding and in some cases supporting the desecration of God's standards, laws and statutes beginning in middle of the 20th century.

The corruption of our government, the racial hatred incited by the Obama administration, and the evisceration of our military is the result of disobedience of God's commandments. God's intervention on behalf of obedient and praying Christians is America's only hope and that will only happen when America and the Christian Church repents and returns to proclaiming, honoring and obeying the statutes, and laws of God honored by our forefathers.

Stuart Dick  
Irrigon

**LETTERS POLICY**

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