

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Raising the graduation bar

Education is the key to a better life, and a high school diploma or GED is a bare minimum requirement to enter adulthood with the skills to be successful.

That's why it's a shame Oregon is stuck at a solid "C" when it comes to high school graduation rates.

The report card released this week shows Oregon high schools graduate fewer than 77 percent of students on time, an increase from previous years but still short of the 84 percent rate across the U.S.

Hermiston's rate of 65.8 percent for the district (72.5 percent if you don't count online school) is the lowest in Umatilla County. It's also the largest district.

Small districts had more success, including a big jump for Umatilla from 72 percent to 82 percent. Pendleton also ticked upward.

But we agree with the administrators we spoke to this week: Regardless of the rate, there's more work to be done.

Here are a few ideas on how to set a higher bar and get more students out the door on time with a diploma in hand.

Don't take an easy out. When bad news comes — and this report wasn't pretty for some districts — it's easy to try to deflect and dodge.

From the outset, we should say that statistics are easily malleable. Tuck a few lower-achieving students here, explain away a few there and pretty soon your graduation rate looks pretty good.

But keep in mind, the base rate — the one we reported in the paper Thursday — is the same rate every district in the state uses. It accounts for students who have moved and not registered elsewhere, gone on to get a GED or

fifth-year diploma or simply dropped out.

Just as no two students are the same, neither are any two districts. Socio-economic factors make it an inherently uneven field.

But that's no reason to allow a quarter of students or more to fall by the wayside before graduation, no matter the external factors.

The buck stops with administrators, tasked with hiring and developing competent educators and guiding students from kindergarten to graduation day, no matter when, where or how they enter the system.

Ask for help. It was disheartening to hear Hermiston principal Tom Spoo say the district hasn't looked around at other districts to see how they're doing or what's working. Especially so because there are several neighboring high schools with similar demographics that found ways to increase their rate.

Since Hermiston has withdrawn from the InterMountain Education Service District, collaborating with others must be intentional. The district can't become an island.

Both Hermiston and Umatilla said a key strategy has been bringing administrators in to work with struggling students. It would appear, based on the data, that some of those conversations and methods have been more effective. Spending some time learning what is working up the road could make a difference for Hermiston students.

There may also be academic programs in place in smaller districts that could be scaled up, or from larger urban districts that could be scaled down.

Try something different. Accepting the status quo shouldn't be acceptable,



Hermiston High School's Class of 2017 celebrates graduation.

East Oregonian file photo

and the state average is a low bar to leap for. In order to get radically different results, radical changes are often necessary.

We'll leave it up to the school administrators to decide where serious changes could be implemented, but we've got some ideas.

A district with low rates could start by examining and defining its priorities. Athletics, everyone's favorite connection to their alma mater, teach important life skills but don't do much to academically prepare a graduating class.

Hermiston is in a unique position of gaining some extra hours in the next school year as it moves into Washington's athletic conference. Student athletes will spend fewer hours on the bus, and the district will shell out fewer dollars for transportation. We hope the school will funnel those saved dollars directly into academics.

Districts that allow students to

leave for lunch (including Pendleton and Hermiston) could also consider closing the campus, or at least restricting the number of students who can come and go. By creating a more focused academic atmosphere for students, where every day is built around education first and social and extracurricular activities second, fewer students will slip through the cracks, fall behind and drop out.

Get everyone involved. We've heaped the responsibility on administrators, and they are the ones ultimately responsible for raising the level of academic success. But it's not our intention to hang them out to dry.

Education is a community process, guided by an elected school board and funded by taxpayers.

The classroom teacher — the core element in an education — can only do so much, and we want to put them in a position to succeed.

OTHER VIEWS

The Jordan Peterson moment

My friend Tyler Cowen argues that Jordan Peterson is the most influential public intellectual in the Western world right now, and he has a point. Peterson, a University of Toronto psychologist, has found his real home on YouTube, where his videos have attracted something like 40 million views.

In his videos, he analyzes classic and biblical texts, he eviscerates identity politics and political correctness and, most important, he delivers stern fatherly lectures to young men on how to be honorable, upright and self-disciplined — how to grow up and take responsibility for their own lives.

Parents, universities and the elders of society have utterly failed to give many young men realistic and demanding practical wisdom on how to live. Peterson has filled the gap.

But what's most interesting about Peterson's popularity, especially the success of his new book, "12 Rules for Life," is what it says about the state of young men today. The implied readers of his work are men who feel fatherless, solitary, floating in a chaotic moral vacuum, constantly outperformed and humiliated by women, haunted by pain and self-contempt. At some level Peterson is offering assertiveness training to men whom society is trying to turn into emasculated snowflakes.

Peterson gives them a chance to be strong. He inspires their idealism by telling them that life is hard. His worldview begins with the belief that life is essentially a series of ruthless dominance competitions. The strong get the spoils and the weak become meek, defeated, unknown and unloved.

For much of Western history, he argues, Christianity restrained the human tendency toward barbarism. But God died in the 19th century, and Christian dogma and discipline died with him. That gave us the age of ideology, the age of fascism and communism.

Since then we've tried another way to pacify the race. Since most conflict is over values, we've decided to not have any values. We'll celebrate relativism and tolerance. We deny the true nature of humanity and naively pretend everyone is nice. The upside is we haven't blown ourselves up; the downside is we live in a world of normlessness, meaninglessness and chaos.

All of life is perched, Peterson continues,

DAVID BROOKS
Comment

on the point between order and chaos. Chaos is the realm without norms and rules. Chaos, he writes, is "the impenetrable darkness of a cave and the accident by the side of the road. It's the mother grizzly, all compassion to her cubs, who marks you as potential predator and tears you to pieces. Chaos, the eternal feminine, is also the crushing force of sexual selection. Women are choosy maters. ... men do not meet female human standards."

Life is suffering, Peterson reiterates. Don't be fooled by the naive optimism of progressive ideology. Life is about remorseless struggle and pain. Your instinct is to whine, to play the victim, to seek vengeance. Peterson tells young men to never do that. Rise above the culture of victimization you see all around you. Stop whining. Don't blame others or seek revenge. "The individual must conduct his or her life in a manner that requires the rejection of immediate gratification, of natural and perverse desires alike."

Instead, choose discipline, courage and self-sacrifice. Never lie. Tell your boss what you really think. Be strict with your children. Drop the friends who bring you down. Break free from the needy mother who controls you.

And Peterson personifies the strong, courageous virtues he champions. His most recent viral video, with more than 4 million views, is an interview he did with Cathy Newman of Britain's Channel 4 News. Newman sensed that there was something disruptive to progressive orthodoxy in Peterson's worldview, but she couldn't quite put her finger on it. So, as Conor Friedersdorf noted in *The Atlantic*, she did what a lot of people do in argument these days. Instead of actually listening to Peterson, she just distorted, simplified and restated his views to make them appear offensive and cartoonish.

Peterson calmly and comprehensibly corrected and rebutted her. It is the most devastatingly one-sided media confrontation you will see. He reminded me of a young William F. Buckley.

The Peterson way is a harsh way, but it is an idealistic way — and for millions of young men, it turns out to be the perfect antidote to the cocktail of coddling and accusation in which they are raised.

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



YOUR VIEWS

Kill seals and sea lions to protect endangered fish

According to a recent article, there were more than 1,000 seals and sea lions in the Astoria boat basin on a single day in 2015.

That is about half the total number there were in Oregon in 1956. I was a fisheries biology major on a day-long field trip in May of that year. From Garibaldi to Astoria we saw no seals or sea lions and we were with people who knew where to look. There definitely were none in the Columbia River because Bill Puustinen didn't allow them to stay in the river. He was the seal hunter the Fish Commission hired in the 1950s and 1960s to manage the seals and sea lions.

I only had the pleasure of meeting Bill one time when I was a kid, but was impressed with his stories about herding these pinnipeds back to sea. He claimed they were very smart and he only had to kill a few to make them fear him. He said a fisherman would report there was a sea lion or seal in the river and all he had to do was start his boat and they would be heading back to sea. He claimed they recognized the

sound of his boat as far away as eight miles.

Back to the field trip. When we returned to class the following week there was justifiable concern for the fact there were only about 1,000 seals and 1,000 sea lions in Oregon waters. I didn't see anything wrong when the marine mammal protection act came into existence. Unfortunately, emotions now trump reason.

Seals and sea lions no longer need protection but endangered fish do. The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is spending about \$500 million dollars a year of electrical ratepayers' money trying to protect and enhance these fish.

What can we do? We can be creative. If the military can drive ISIS out of Iraq, our National Guard should be able to drive a few thousand seals and sea lions out of the Columbia. I would think the military could come up with some non-lethal ordnances to assist in hazing these animals out to sea.

After you get them out of the river, in might be advisable to hire a few Finnish descendants in Astoria to keep them out, doing whatever needs to be done.

Carlisle Harrison, Hermiston

Quick takes

Makad's lease payments delayed another two years

Data center? I can't even get cell service when I go up there.

— Laura Smith

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