

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Divide present in student survey

The most sobering aspect of a new survey of Oregon high school students is how much their views align with those of their elders.

Each generation wishes for future generations to be better off. Yet Oregon's high school population feels the same divides and discontents as the rest of the country.

There is a divide between those high schoolers who are satisfied with their lot in life and those who are not. There is a yearning for greater respect and for greater involvement in the governmental decisions that affect their lives. There is widespread concern about access to mental health care.

These issues are revealed in the newly released "State of Our Schools: Examining Oregon's High Schools Through Students' Eyes," which might be the first statewide student survey conducted by Oregon students themselves. More than 2,200 high schoolers participated in an online survey or focus groups.

Oregon Student Voice, which is open to students in sixth through 12th grades, conducted the study with the assistance of two respected partners — the Chalkboard Project and DHM Research. Participation was voluntary, so the statistics might not carry the

same weight as randomized surveys. But the conclusions remain relevant, especially because they were written by students.

High schoolers are insightful. They know who's a good teacher and who's not. They recognize whether discipline is administered fairly, equitably and consistently. They care whether the school administration — all the way up to the school board — heeds their ideas.

As a society, we know that students who feel valued and engaged are more likely to carry those attitudes into civic life as adults. In contrast, the Oregon Student Voice report states: "Exclusionary cliques, social tensions and bullying are all present within schools. Students assert that those who do not fit into the typical high school student mold do not receive the respect, stability and support needed to succeed in their school. Students believe that high schools are oriented towards helping those already on a path to success, leaving behind everyone else."

Among the research findings:

- Most students enjoy high school, but 32 percent cite a lack of trust and mutual respect in their schools.
- 40 percent consider access to mental health resources to be the most important issue facing K-12



policymakers. The No. 2 issue, identified by 22 percent, is career and technical education.

- 77 percent of students feel engaged in class. Among those who do not have post-high school plans — college, trade school or the military — that figure drops to 49 percent.

- 76 percent have a teacher or other school staff member whom they trust as a mentor. Again, that figure drops significantly among students who do not plan to attend college.

- 81 percent say their teachers are good, but only 51 percent think the content of required courses is relevant

to their futures.

- Students favor teachers who welcome feedback and adapt their teaching accordingly. The report states: "Students want to learn in interactive, collaborative and hands-on environments. Students are critical of rote memorization and inflexible approaches that favor higher-achieving students while leaving others behind."

The research contains many positives about students' views of their education. But their concerns should generate a statewide call to action. Otherwise, the divides that roil our state and nation will continue to manifest themselves.



YOUR VIEWS

More funding, teachers needed in schools

As a mother of nine and a parent volunteer for the past 20 years, my thoughts on the school shootings might be a little different. I have seen news documentaries, Facebook rants, and personal opinions thrust upon the world, and have not one time seen a solution that everyone agrees upon.

This morning as I watched another person share their views, a thought came to me. What if, instead of taking away guns, locking down schools and destroying the Constitution of the United States of America, we put more adults in the schools to help teachers and students? If there was one adult per 5-10 children in a classroom, there would be less bullying, more individual help, more compassion, positive redirection, accountability and overall guidance.

I've seen the dynamic in a classroom when just one extra adult is present to answer questions and redirect frustration. Students need help, teachers need help, families need help. We would not take 30 children to the zoo by ourselves, or throw a birthday party for 12 without help, yet we expect our teachers to share their knowledge with 30 individuals with varying learning abilities.

If anything, could we figure out how to devote some of our time each week to these children? What if every parent willingly spent 1-2 hours a week in their kids' classroom?

Anny Welch
Pendleton

OTHER VIEWS

The myth of education skepticism

In Alabama's recent special Senate election, the progressive group Priorities USA was looking for ways to lift African-American voter turnout. So Priorities tested several different advertisements, to see which ones made people want to vote.

There was no shortage of potential ad material in Alabama. Roy Moore, the Republican nominee, had a trail of bigoted statements and alleged sexual molestation.

Doug Jones, the Democrat, had prosecuted Ku Klux Klansmen for murder. Priorities tested each of these themes and others, too: Moore's ties to white supremacists; Moore's closeness to President Donald Trump; Jones' endorsements from civil-rights leaders.

Yet none of these tested as well as a 15-second ad that never mentioned Moore.

"My kids are going to do more than just survive the bigotry and hatred," a female narrator says, as the video shows a Klan march and then a student at a desk. "They're going to get an education, start a business, earn a good living, make me proud. Education is my priority. That's why I'm voting for Doug Jones."

The test results surprised the leaders of Priorities, and no wonder: We're supposed to be living in a time of education skepticism. The media regularly run stories suggesting education is overrated. K-12 schools are said



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to be in a never-ending crisis, and college debt has become a new crisis. A much-discussed Pew Research Center poll recently found a jump in the number of people saying colleges had a negative effect on the country.

In truth, though, Americans' attitudes toward education are much simpler than all of this noise suggests — just as that Alabama ad test found. Whatever complaints people may have about their local school or college costs, most have no doubt that their children need a good education. People see it as the most reliable path to a good life, and they are right.

The unemployment rate for college graduates is a mere 2.3 percent. College graduates earn vastly more than non-graduates. Educational gaps in life expectancy and health status are growing too.

When you start to dig into the education skepticism, you find that much of it collapses. Those journalists and academics publicly questioning the value of education? Many are desperately trying to get their own children into strong school systems and colleges. Their skepticism apparently applies only to other people's kids.

And that Pew poll? It was legitimate but misunderstood. The rise in negative feelings toward colleges came largely among Republicans, many of whom see

campuses as bastions of liberalism. Yet those Republicans still want their children to attend college. They understand that the benefits of education outweigh any risks of lefty brainwashing.

Last week, I asked the research group Morning Consult to conduct a poll on education. The main question gave parents a list of schooling levels — high school, community college, four-year college — and asked which they wanted their own children to attain. The results were overwhelming: 74 percent chose four-year college, and another 9 percent chose community college. The progressive think tank Demos recently commissioned its own poll that found strikingly similar support for increased higher-education funding.

The popularity of education offers a giant opportunity to politicians. It's a chance to talk about something other than Trump — and be heard. Many voters, understandably, care more about their lives and their children's future than about Stormy Daniels or Jared Kushner.

Conor Lamb, the Pennsylvania Democrat, just won in a heavily Republican district by focusing relentlessly on his constituents, not Trump. Education was one of his themes. He told voters he was bothered that his brother and sister — both teachers — didn't receive the gratitude that he did for being a Marine.

Given the passions of the Trump era, this

isn't the moment to settle for the modest, technocratic education proposals that Democrats often favor. It's a time for big, ambitious ideas.

In education, that means universal preschool, which would address both inequality and child-care needs, and universal tuition-free community college. A century ago, the United States led the world toward universal high school, and today's economy demands more than a high-school diploma. Community colleges are part of the answer, and are also a common pathway to four-year degrees. Importantly, free tuition there isn't a huge subsidy for the upper middle class and the affluent, who typically start at four-year colleges.

I was glad to see New Jersey's new Democratic governor, Phil Murphy, propose free community college and expanded pre-K for his state last week. And these ideas don't need to be partisan. Tennessee's Republican governor, Bill Haslam, has made his state's community colleges tuition-free, while Georgia and Oklahoma have pre-K leaders.

Sometimes, good policy and good politics align quite nicely. The single best bet that a society or an individual can make — education — also turns out to be the rare idea that transcends today's partisan divide.

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