

School Success committee draws up \$3B wish list

Panel tackles big needs with proposals to extend school year, reduce class sizes and expand some services

PARIS ACHEN
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — In an effort to put more Oregon students on track to graduate, the Legislature's Joint Committee on School Success has proposed everything from expanding access to preschool to expanding the school year to 180 days.

The committee's wish list of education reforms totaled 50 and together cost more than \$3 billion, according to rough estimates by the Legislative Fiscal Office. "It just illustrates the need that is out there," said Rep. Julie Fahey, D-Eugene.

Committee leaders will draft a report on the recommendations by the first day of the legislative session, which begins Jan. 22, said Committee Co-Chair Sen. Arnie Roblan, D-Coos Bay. The report will provide a foundation for later developing policies, a cost

containment plan and a spending plan to improve graduation rates and school attendance — measures where Oregon lags behind most of the nation.

The committee is unlikely to offer a legislative spending package equal to that amount. "We are going to really quickly have to start thinking about how to prioritize all of the things on this spreadsheet," Fahey said. "My prioritization personally is going to be what has the biggest bang for buck in terms of increased student outcomes ... and then what is the best return on investment for our taxpayer dollars."

Investment in early learning typically delivers the strongest results in overall educational outcomes, said Michael Griffith of the Education Commission of the States who spoke to the committee Thursday night, Dec. 13.

Sen. Kathleen Taylor, D-Portland, pushed back on the idea of prioritizing the recommendations. "If we want to see the outcomes ... I don't see how we are going to have these great improvements without doing basically all of this," Taylor said.

Rep. Greg Smith, R-Hepner, said the committee



Portland high school student Lydia Wade-Sully chats with Oregon legislators, including State Sen. Tim Knopp, right, during a town hall hosted by the Joint Legislation Committee on School Success.

needs to craft a long-term vision for what they want a prized educator and prized student to look like and draft legislation to gradually accomplish that goal.

Some of the reforms, such as decreasing the ratio of guidance counselors (and school nurses) and decreasing

ing classes sizes, would have to be phased in, and not just for financial reasons. Many of the professionals in those fields already are in short supply, and officials might have to wait to recruit or grow graduates in those fields, said Doug Wilson, chief analyst in the Legis-

lative Fiscal Office. Meanwhile, decreasing class sizes would require construction of new classrooms at some schools, which takes time, he said.

The reforms would cost money. For example, increasing Oregon's average 170-day school year to

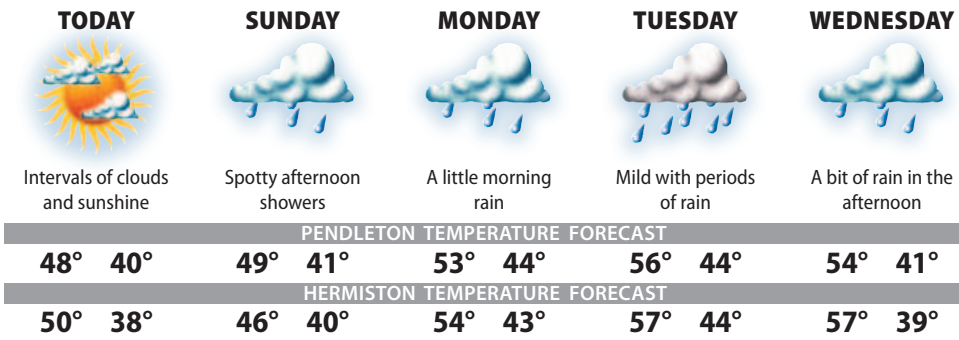
180 days would cost about \$516 million every two years. Reducing class sizes to 20 students in kindergarten and first grade, 23 in second and third, 24 in fourth and fifth and 29 in core middle and high school classes would cost about \$370 million.

Expanding access to behavioral and physical health services by increasing school nurses to 1 for every 750 would cost \$126 million. Increasing the counselors to one per 250 students would cost \$238 million. The actual cost would probably be more after further analysis, Wilson said.

The 14-member committee toured the state for about seven months to hear ideas and opinions from teachers, students, parents and others on best educational practices and student and teacher needs. During that time, the panel visited about 50 schools and other educational facilities.

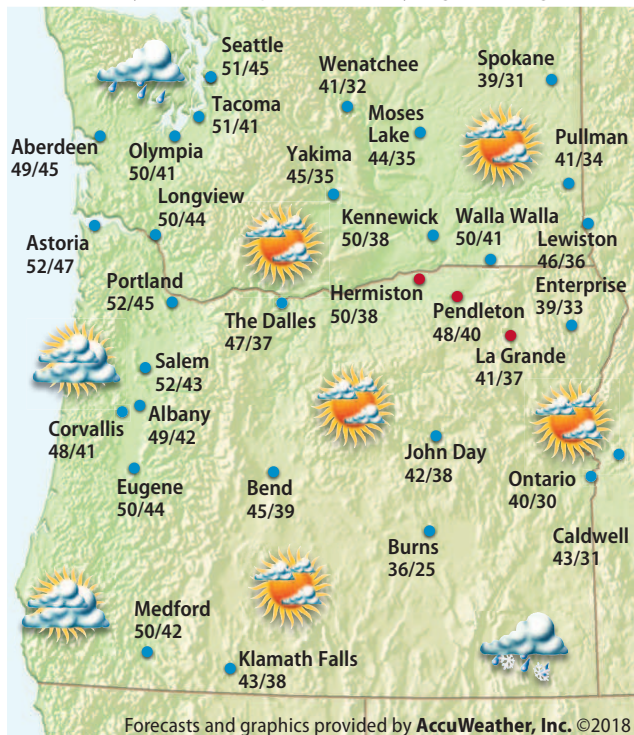
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Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	54°	44°
Normals	39°	26°
Records	64° (2002)	-22° (1919)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"
Month to date	0.34"
Normal month to date	0.64"
Year to date	9.21"
Last year to date	15.34"
Normal year to date	12.11"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	53°	31°
Normals	39°	27°
Records	68° (2002)	-7° (1972)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"
Month to date	0.19"
Normal month to date	0.71"
Year to date	7.15"
Last year to date	8.77"
Normal year to date	9.18"

WINDS (in mph)

Today	Sun.
Boardman ENE 3-6	NNE 4-8
Pendleton SE 4-8	SSE 4-8

SUN AND MOON

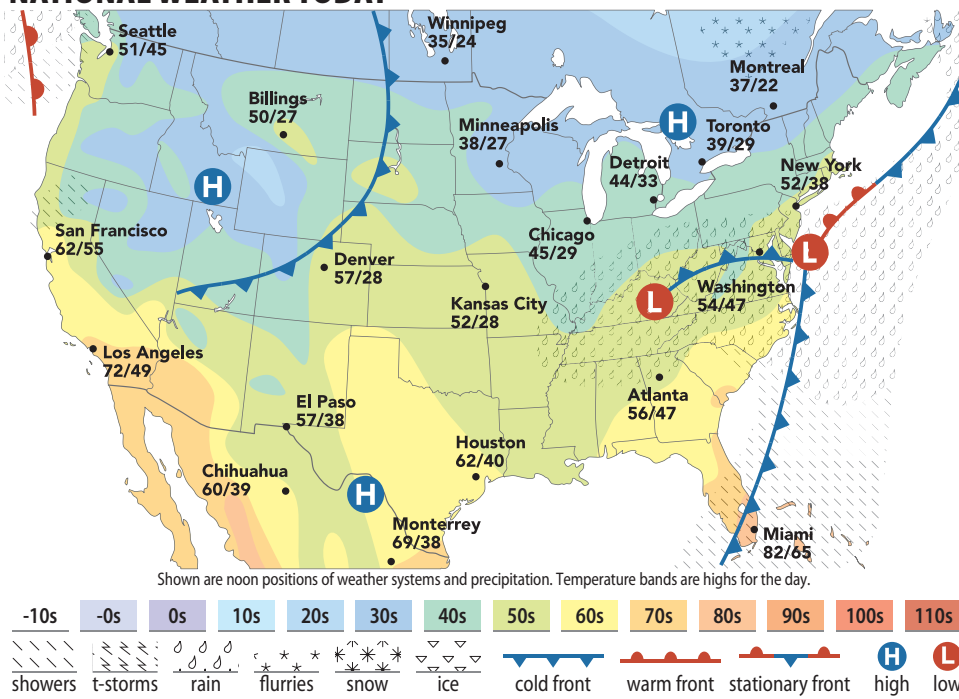
Sunrise today	7:29 a.m.
Sunset tonight	4:12 p.m.
Moonrise today	12:38 p.m.
Moonset today	none

First Full Last New
Dec 15 Dec 22 Dec 29 Jan 5

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 88° in Immokalee, Fla. Low -17° in Crested Butte, Colo.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Lawmakers mull big changes to death penalty

By DIRK VANDERHART
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Oregon lawmakers and death penalty opponents are considering a roundabout approach at gutting the state's capital punishment law — without sending it to voters.

Since 1984, the death penalty has been enshrined in the Oregon Constitution, meaning it can only be removed by a vote of the people. But under proposals being discussed by Rep. Mitch Greenlick, D-Portland, Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, and others, the policy could be largely dismantled next year via a vote of the Legislature.

"I'm going to try to deal with it right now on a statutory basis," Greenlick told OPB.

The precise details of the bills Greenlick and Prozanski are considering are still being worked out. But lawmakers and death penalty opponents all describe some general ideas.

Under one possible proposal, the Legislature would alter the definition of aggravated murder, the only crime punishable by death in Oregon. Currently, the definition includes elements such as multiple victims, the inclusion of torture in the crime, an exchange of payment for a killing, and a list of victims such as children or law enforcement officers.

Greenlick and others are considering a bill that would scrub those factors. Instead, the definition of the crime would be limited to deaths resulting from acts of domestic or international terrorism. Elements of a crime that currently meet the standard for aggravated murder would be placed into other degrees of homicide, not punishable by death, they say.

"What's happened in Oregon is we've created an incredibly broad category," said Jeff Ellis, a Portland attorney and board member of Oregonians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty who is consulting on the proposal. "It's virtually impossible to commit a murder without committing an aggravated murder."

By altering the crime's definition, Ellis said, lawmakers would focus on the "worst of the worst" murders.

One thing that's not yet clear is whether proponents of the change will seek to make the change retroactive, a move that

would result in Oregon's death row being cleared out. It's become a matter of debate among death penalty opponents, because some prisoners on death row were sentenced before jurors were given an option of sentencing them to life without parole. That means they'd be eligible for parole if a change was made retroactive.

Ellis estimated that six or seven of Oregon's 33 death row inmates would be parole-eligible under that change.

A second possible proposal, Greenlick and Ellis say, would change the questions that jurors must answer in capital murder cases in order to sentence a defendant to death. The change would be aimed at making such sentences less likely.

Currently, state law requires jurors to answer "yes" to three or four questions during the sentencing phase, depending on the facts of the trial. Those are:

Whether the person committed the crime deliberately

Whether there is a "probability" they commit further violence in the future

Whether there is evidence the defendant acted unreasonably in response to provocation by the victim

Whether they should be sentenced to death

Ellis says two changes should be made to that list. First, he'd like to get rid of the second question, which asks jurors to predict future violence. Death penalty opponents say it's an impossible question to accurately answer, and point to studies that suggest jurors frequently get it wrong.

Supporters of the death penalty disagree, arguing that the question is thoughtful and presents another hurdle to prosecutors seeking a death sentence.

"It creates a heavy burden and it also requires that the state produce a great deal of evidence," said Clatsop County District Attorney Josh Marquis, who has long argued in favor of capital punishment.

Ellis also proposes changing the standard by which jurors must answer "yes" to the final question, whether a defendant should be sentenced to death. It is the only question on the list that does not require jurors to be sure "beyond a reasonable doubt."

"This is something that essentially says, 'Let's just attach the traditional criminal burden of proof,'" Ellis said.

BY ALTERING THE CRIME'S DEFINITION, ELLIS SAID, LAWMAKERS WOULD FOCUS ON THE 'WORST OF THE WORST' MURDERS.

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