

# Survey: Oregonians split on COVID-19 school relief

By JACKSON HOGAN  
The Bulletin

SALEM — Politically, Oregon has a clear divide between its urban and rural residents.

A statewide survey conducted in early May shows Oregonians have a similar urban/rural split on how school districts should spend millions of COVID-19 relief dollars from three aid packages passed by U.S. Congress since the spring of 2020.

There are also divides in what young and elderly Oregonians prioritize for education funding.

The survey was conducted by the nonprofit, nonpartisan polling organization Oregon Values and Beliefs Center from May 4-10, according to a press release from the group.

When asked if state and local school leaders should emphasize spending COVID-19 relief dollars to help low-income students and students of color, 54% of all respondents answered “yes,” compared to 28% who said “no” and 18% who were undecided.

About 60% of urban and suburban Oregonians each answered “yes,” compared to only 42% of rural residents.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

**Pendleton High School students walk between classes during a passing period early in the 2019-20 school year. A statewide survey conducted in early May shows Oregonians have a similar urban/rural split on how school districts should spend millions of COVID-19 relief dollars from three aid packages passed by U.S. Congress since the spring of 2020.**

There was a similar divide between respondents from the Portland area and non-Willamette Valley residents.

There were also some differences among age groups — younger respondents were more likely to support increased funding for low-income and nonwhite students — but the gap wasn't as large.

The majority of all age groups

answered “yes,” as well as both white and nonwhite respondents.

The split between urban/rural and young/old respondents was even more pronounced when asked which educational programs should be prioritized when spending COVID-19 relief dollars.

Overall, the most popular

choice among the 14 options was mental health counseling — 62% of all respondents listed it as one of their top three priorities.

However, there is an extreme divide between younger and older respondents: 82% of those ages 18-29 had mental health counseling as a top-three priority, compared to only 38% of

those age 65 and older.

Younger respondents also had a much stronger desire for funding for mentoring and tutoring.

Meanwhile, older respondents' most popular priority, with 51% putting it in their top three, was increased funding toward vocational and job training. Only 17% of 18-29 year olds agreed.

Both urban and rural Oregonians showed strong support for increased funding for mental health counseling. Those two groups' largest gap came in support for vocational and job training: That's something 41% of rural residents had in their top three priorities, compared to only 27% of urban residents.

The survey also included open-ended questions about how school districts should spend COVID-19 relief dollars. The responses varied wildly, even among Central Oregonians.

Many said that school staff, particularly those with lower paychecks, should get salary bumps.

“Raise the salaries of teachers but not administration,” said an unnamed Democrat resident of urban Deschutes County.

Others didn't love the

idea of schools getting any COVID-19 relief funds.

“The schools have gotten excessive funding and they don't do anything to provide for the teachers they just add more schools,” wrote Melissa Aspell, a suburban Deschutes County resident and member of the Independent Party.

The nonprofit spoke with 918 Oregon residents ages 18 and up, and those surveyed came from various backgrounds.

There was a mix of wealthy and poor; high school diplomas and graduate degrees; Democrats, Republicans, Independents.

However, there were a few demographics that were more heavily represented.

Three-quarters of respondents said they did not have school-age children in their households. More than 90% of respondents identified as white or Caucasian, and only about 75% of Oregon is solely white, according to the U.S. Census.

And 72% of respondents either lived in the Portland metro area or Willamette Valley. However, that might be proportionate — the tri-county Portland area alone accounts for nearly 45% of Oregon's population.

## New budget forecast brings optimism for higher education

Forecast shows more than \$1B in tax revenue above previous estimates

By MEERAH POWELL  
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — Oregon higher education leaders are hoping for more state funding to colleges and universities after an unexpectedly positive budget forecast.

With a new Oregon budget forecast showing a boost of more than \$1 billion in tax revenue above previous estimates, higher education officials see an opening for more money to fund public colleges and universities.

Oregon's higher ed leaders hope that some of that anticipated funding can go to state financial aid. At least one university has said it would scale back its tuition increase for the upcoming academic year if the state provides additional financial support.

Late last year, when Oregon Gov. Kate Brown released her proposed budget, she designated about \$836 million to the Public University Support Fund, the source of money for operations and programs at the state's seven public universities. Brown's recommendation left the universities flat-funded — with the same amount they received last biennium.

With this newest state budget forecast, it's looking promising that the public universities may get more than that. The universities have been advocating together for a total of \$900 million in the Public University Support Fund. And that amount has already inched up from the governor's initial recommendation.

“When you look at the Public University Support Fund, the \$900 million request, there's a lot of positivity that we'll get to that number,” Oregon State University's executive director of government relations, Katie Fast, told the OSU board of trustees Friday, May 21.

Fast said earlier this spring, the legislature's Joint Ways and Means Co-Chairs released a budget framework that put the PUSF at about \$886 million — roughly \$14

million short of that \$900 million goal.

Even without hitting the \$900 million goal, at least one public university said it would lower a proposed tuition increase if the current budget released by the co-chairs is authorized.

The Oregon Institute of Technology last month approved a tuition increase of 4.9% in both base undergraduate and graduate tuition. That's the largest tuition increase among all of the public universities. But OIT said that it would decrease the tuition increase to 3.9% if the legislature were to increase the governor's recommended funding by about \$50 million — or the exact amount set by the co-chairs for the PUSF budget.

Official budget decisions typically do not happen until the end of the legislative session, but regardless, the new state forecast is leaving some higher education officials feeling more optimistic.

“The positive revenue forecast creates a clear opportunity for the Legislature to invest now to secure affordable access for Oregonians to colleges and universities, and to ensure that students are well-supported when they arrive,” Ben Cannon, executive director of the state's Higher Education Coordinating Commission, said in a statement. “Postsecondary education and training has never been more important for getting a family-wage job, and we should be doing everything possible to expand this opportunity especially to first-generation, underrepresented minority, and low-income students.”

In addition to investing in the universities' programs, Cannon said the state legislature should also expand financial aid for Oregon students — specifically the Oregon Opportunity Grant, a state-funded grant program for low-income students.

According to the most recently available data from the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, from 2009 to 2019, more than two million applications for financial aid were eligible for the Oregon Opportunity Grant, but only 16.5% of those students received the grant due to the grant's limited funds.

## Ontario City Council has former councilor removed from meeting

Marty Justus removed for aiming placards at the council

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI  
and LILIANA FRANKEL  
Malheur Enterprise

ONTARIO — Acting at the direction of the Ontario City Council, Police Chief Steven Romero ejected former councilor Marty Justus from the council audience on Tuesday, May 18, for silently displaying signs that questioned Mayor Riley Hill's sobriety.

The decision to remove Justus from the public meeting capped weeks of tension between the former councilor and the city council. In a routine that began on April 20, Justus has taken the stand each meeting during the public comment section of council sessions to denounce the behavior of Hill and Councilor Freddy Rodriguez, who has accused him falsely of being a child molester.

He then sits in the front row of the audience, aiming at the council placards that repeat his points.

The signs that got Justus thrown out of the meeting on May 18 questioned whether Hill drank alcohol before council sessions and was sober during meetings.

Hill hasn't responded publicly to the signs and he didn't respond to messages seeking comment.

Justus said that Hill's sobriety was fair game because of his complicity with Rodriguez's accusations.

“If they want to talk about lies from the dais, I'll talk

about truths from the gallery,” he said in an interview with the *Enterprise*.

At a May 6 meeting, Justus held the placards for the first 30 minutes of the meeting before leaving. Later in the meeting, Councilor Ken Hart asked about maintaining decorum in the audience and requested that public attendees not show signs.

City Attorney Larry Sullivan told the council then that someone couldn't be removed for “holding up a sign.”

An excerpt of the city recording of the May 18 Ontario City Council meeting shows the action to eject Marty Justus.

Justus' routine was no

**“THE FIRST AMENDMENT DOES NOT PROTECT PEOPLE WHO ENGAGE IN A CERTAIN TYPE OF SPEECH.”**

— Larry Sullivan, Ontario city attorney

different at the May 18 meeting.

He approached the front of the audience, sat down and began displaying the placards.

Less than a minute after the first sign was displayed, Councilor John Kirby raised a point of order and cited a section of the Ontario Council Rules and Procedures that reads, “Any person making personal, impertinent, or slanderous remarks, or who becomes boisterous while addressing the council” shall be barred from the meeting.

Kirby then asked that Justus stop or be removed.

Sullivan indicated that he had received complaints from other councilors regarding Justus' signs and that he could order the censorship of the

signs if the council desired.

Rodriguez, facing a recall promoted in part by Justus, proposed a motion that the council “keep decorum by removing citizen and ex-councilman Justus.”

Before the motion was seconded, Sullivan said that at least one of Justus' signs, which questioned the mayor's sobriety, was a personal attack and was disruptive.

The council voted unanimously for Justus' eviction. That included Kirby, Hill, Rodriguez, Hart and Councilors Sam Baker and Eddie Melendrez. When Justus indicated that he wouldn't stop showing the signs, Romero asked him to leave.

ity to conduct business.

“It might be difficult to establish that someone holding a sign and showing it to the councilors is interfering with the councilors' ability to do their job,” Sullivan said at the May 6 meeting.

Sullivan said that one of the reasons he changed his stance was reviewing a federal court ruling.

In that case, a federal appellate court ruled that a city council in Santa Cruz, California, didn't violate a citizen's First Amendment rights by ejecting the man for raising his arm in a Nazi salute. The salute came after the mayor cut off a speaker during the public comment section.

“The First Amendment does not protect people who engage in a certain type of speech,” said Sullivan.

Sullivan said that Justus' signs were insulting and derogatory. He didn't feel that they were related to matters before the council.

“The actions of the Ontario City Council are concerning because it is not clear whether the council's actions against the ex-councilor were taken in a neutral and reasonable, narrowly tailored way consistent with how others have been treated or if the council was trying to silence the ex-councilor's views, which is not constitutional,” said Sandy Chung, executive director of the ACLU of Oregon.

Kyu Ho Youm, the Jonathan Marshall First Amendment chair at the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication, said that in the U.S. individuals can say almost anything against the government. He said that at a city meeting, the mayor represents that government.

## EASTERN OREGON PHOTO CONTEST

2021

**Official Rules:**

Photo Contest open now and closes at 11:59 pm Sunday, June 20, 2021.

Staff will choose the top 10. The public can vote online for People's Choice from 12:01 am Monday, June 21 through 11:59 pm Thursday, June 30.

Digital or scanned photos only, uploaded to the online platform. No physical copies.

Only photographers from Oregon may participate.

The contest subject matter is wide open but we're looking for images that capture life in Eastern Oregon.

Entrants may crop, tone, adjust saturation and make minor enhancements, but may not add or remove objects within the frame, or doctor images such that the final product doesn't represent what's actually before the camera.

The winners will appear in the July 8th edition of Go Magazine; the top 25 will appear online.

Gift cards to a restaurant of your choice will be awarded for first, second and third place.

Submit all photos online at: [eastoregonian.com/photocontest](http://eastoregonian.com/photocontest)



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