

OUR VIEW

What should be required to graduate in Oregon

Some high school graduates are proficient in calculus while others struggle with algebra.

Some graduates can write complex sentences without pondering the mysteries of clauses, while others can't distinguish between the passive and active voices.

But despite the range in accomplishments, it's hardly an extreme notion that Oregon students should demonstrate basic abilities in math and writing before they receive a diploma.

Beyond the obvious reason — after 12 years in school, students ought to be capable of proving they've learned a certain amount in those two subjects — to distribute diplomas to students who lack these skills is to set them on a potential path of frustration and failure, particularly if they go to college.

But Oregon's Democrat-controlled Legislature thinks differently.

Lawmakers recently passed Senate Bill 744, which now awaits Gov. Kate Brown's signature. The bill will suspend for the next three years the Essential Skills graduation requirement, and it directs the state Department of Education to evaluate how Oregon determines graduation requirements.

(Rep. Bobby Levy of Echo and Sen. Bill Hansell of Athena voted against Senate Bill 744, while Rep. Greg Smith of Heppner voted for it.)

An evaluation is reasonable.

But it's hardly necessary to waive the current requirements while evaluating them.

Oregon initially suspended the Essential Skills requirement due to the COVID-19 pandemic, during which many students in the state have taken mostly, or only, online classes.

That suggests, if nothing else, that "comprehensive distance learning" wasn't especially comprehensive.

Another flaw in the concept is that it ignores the reality that most students preparing to graduate were subjected to distance learning for less than a year and a half. Surely it's not too much to expect that many of those students would have acquired the necessary skills to show proficiency even before computer monitors replaced actual classrooms.

An organization that supports the bill, Foundations for a Better Oregon, said in a statement, "An inclusive and equitable review of graduation and proficiency requirements, when guided by data and grounded in a commitment to every student's success, will promote shared accountability and foster a more just Oregon."

That statement falls squarely within the category of "sounds nice but what, exactly, does it mean?"

First, why would any review of graduation requirements be anything except "inclusive and equitable" if the same standards, as they do now, apply to all students?

Second, what evidence is there the current graduation requirements are not "grounded in a commitment to every student's success"? What else would they be grounded in? The entire purpose of graduation requirements is to ensure that students have learned what they need to learn to have a chance to be successful.

The last part of the sentence from Foundations for a Better Oregon is even more perplexing. What does "shared accountability" mean in this context? That schools are responsible for teaching, and students for learning? If so, just say that.

It's a laudable goal to improve Oregon's graduation requirements. High school diplomas should have relevance; they should ensure the students who receive one have, during the preceding years, learned enough to pursue a productive life as an adult.

But suspending such requirements, even for a few years, is more likely to hurt students, by awarding them diplomas that imply a level of education they haven't actually attained.



More things that make me go hmmm



TAMMY MALGESINI
INSIDE MY SHOES

Earlier this year, I wrote a column about things that puzzled me or defied logic — based on a bit from Arsenio Hall's late-night talk show. So, for Round 2 of "Things that make you go hmmm," here are some recent head scratchers:

- Living in Eastern Oregon since 1985, I've noticed a pervasive attitude among people who seem to feel the west side of the state controls things. People get annoyed with statewide election results, saying that Willamette Valley voters basically make the decisions.

- With low vaccination rates in our part of the state, I'm betting the people of Umatilla and Morrow counties (and beyond) won't be complaining when many additional COVID-19 restrictions are lifted when the 70% statewide vaccination rate is met — thanks mostly to people residing in the western part of the state.

- With significant limitations on indoor gatherings still in place during graduation season, how was Hermiston

High School able to pack all the graduating seniors into its gymnasium (along with school officials and guests of the graduation speakers)? It seems most other area school districts held their ceremonies outdoors.

- I never understood how the state justified the expense to open an Oregon Lottery payment center in Wilsonville, which is approximately 30 miles from the main office in Salem. During the onset of the global pandemic, both offices closed.

- The Salem office reopens June 24 for in-person claims, while the Wilsonville center still is closed. I'm suggesting that maybe the Wilsonville office should remain shuttered.

Jack Roberts, who was the Oregon Lottery director at the time the Wilsonville center first opened, explained on OregonLive the rationale behind the additional payment center. "Providing a closer alternative for those players is a win-win for both the players and Lottery," he said, referring to Portland metro area residents.

Seriously, they are going to get a wad of cash and they can't spend the extra time and money to drive an additional 30 miles? If a second center is truly needed, instead of eventually reopening the Wilsonville center, why not consider opening one in Southern Oregon, the

Bend area or Eastern Oregon?

- The phrase "common courtesy" is an oxymoron, especially in regards to some fellow drivers behind the wheel. Most of us have experienced inconsiderate motorists — you know the ones who won't let another vehicle over in a lane of traffic or someone who cuts you off to take a parking spot.

- Situated on a truck route, sometimes the traffic is horrendous in front of our house. I can't even begin to count the times I've had someone hugging my bumper when I'm slowing to turn into our driveway or having someone zoom up on me when I'm backing out.

- You can be sure none of them have a "How's my driving?" decal on their rig. I urge people to drive as if their phone number was plastered on the back of their car.

- And lastly, if you truly love your children and your pets, prove it. Don't leave them unattended in your vehicle, especially during the current heat advisory.

Tammy Malgesini, who recently returned as an East Oregonian community writer, enjoys spending time with her husband and two German shepherds, as well as entertaining herself with random musings.

YOUR VIEWS

Irresponsible accident gives gun owners a bad rep

I realize that Helix is a rather small town, even by Oregon standards (that is why I chose to live here), and I do appreciate the articles that occasionally appear in the East Oregonian concerning Helix. I would like to draw your attention to a particular incident that occurred in Helix on Wednesday, June 16, but never showed up in the newspaper.

On the late afternoon of June 16 a gentleman entered the Helix Market and Pub, and while enjoying himself at the pub, he pulled out a handgun and, in playing around with it, he shot himself in the arm.

Due to the quick response of Ms. Jeralyn Dodge, the market operator, and our resident deputy sheriff, John Roberts, who was off duty at the time, they were able to call emergency services and apply pressure to the wound to control the bleeding until the ambulance got there and the victim

was transported by an air ambulance to the hospital.

My real concern is the fact that the person who was shot actually went into the pub with a loaded gun, and apparently was unaware that if the trigger were pulled it would actually fire a round. I have no problem with the possession and/or shooting of firearms, but to go into a tavern with a loaded gun, and then pull it out to show off, just seems to be the height of stupidity.

It is actions like this that anti-gun people use to try to limit our right to have firearms. We are seeing too many shooting stories in the news already, and it is predicted there will be many more before the summer is gone. But stupid acts like this incident in Helix need to be illustrated in order for people to wake up and use better judgment in their actions.

Hopefully, the victim in this case has learned his lesson.

Robert Park
Helix

Utility bills aren't as cheap as you think

I got my Pendleton city utility bill for \$124.15, along with a nice letter from the Public Works Department telling us how cheap our utility bills are. They say we are 27th out of 42 cities.

What they don't say is that the more expensive utility bills are all in Western Oregon, with higher wages than Pendleton; closest to us are The Dalles and Bend. The amazing fact is that most of the cities below us are in Eastern Oregon or Eastern Washington. Seven of the cities with lower rates are cities we are in competition with for businesses, industry and tourism.

Why would they send this letter out to all utility users knowing the above facts? I wonder if our city department heads think we all would believe their propaganda.

Even high-paid city management are not always correct.

Rex J. Morehouse
Pendleton

EDITORIALS

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