

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Sensible ideas on schools

The Baker School Board and district officials recognize the reality — district voters won't approve a property tax measure to build a new elementary school.

Voters expressed their disdain for that plan, in an unequivocal way, last November when they rejected a \$48 million measure. More than two-thirds of those who voted — 68% — were opposed.

We endorsed that measure.

And we continue to believe that the problems it would have addressed, including overcrowding at Brooklyn and South Baker schools, and a surplus of space at Baker High School, ought to be addressed.

The Board hasn't made any decisions about how to proceed, but its initial discussions about a potential new measure are encouraging.

The preliminary plan is comparatively modest monetarily, at an estimated \$6 million. The overall project would cost about \$12 million, including a \$4 million state grant and \$2 million from the district.

Details of the possible bond measure are yet to be determined. But the financial burden on property owners certainly would be less — both in the amount per \$1,000 of assessed value, and the length of time the higher tax rate would apply, which is likely to be no more than 15 years rather than the 30 years that last year's measure would have extended.

But though the cost would be less onerous, the benefits would still be substantial. The proposal that board members discussed last week would alleviate crowding at Brooklyn and South Baker by removing one grade level from each school. Brooklyn, which now houses kindergartners and first-, second- and third-graders and has about 117 more students than it's designed for, would lose third-graders.

They would move to South Baker, which would serve third- and fourth-graders rather than students in grades 4, 5 and 6 as is the case now.

Fifth- and sixth-graders would move to the Helen M. Stack building, the current Baker Middle School.

And the seventh- and eighth-graders who are in that building now would move to a renovated, and separate, section at Baker High School, where the current enrollment, in grades 9-12, is about 380 students below what the campus can accommodate.

The details, as mentioned, are uncertain. Nor is it clear whether a measure would go on the ballot this November or in May 2020.

But it's obvious that 5J officials heard voters' message in November.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Answer vaccination fears with information, not name-calling

Over the years, I have noticed a steady increase in anti-vaccine misinformation circulating on social media. I find it troubling, but I am somewhat reassured because for every anti-vaccine click-bait article posted, there are 20 other posts urging parents to follow their pediatrician's vaccine schedule. So when I read that there was a confirmed case of the measles in Baltimore recently, I was alarmed but not surprised.

My first reaction is anger: How could anyone deny the indisputable evidence from hundreds of studies that prove the safety and efficacy of childhood immunizations? My second reaction is fear — not only for the unvaccinated children, but for the babies too young to be immunized, as well as immunocompromised adults. Scrolling through hundreds of Facebook comments, I see that I am not alone in my fear and outrage. "Vaccinate your damn kids!" one angry father writes. "I'm never leaving the house again," an 8-week-old infant's mother laments. Their feelings are understandable; it's hard to understand the logic behind refusing to vaccinate children, and it's easy to blame their parents.

Still, I wonder how this blame-game will play out: Will the mountains of scientific evidence behind vaccines convince vaccine-hesitant parents, or will it push them farther into the depths of internet conspiracy black holes insisting that vaccines cause autism? I'd put money on the latter.

In my health communications class in college, vaccines were a month-long topic of discussion. But rather than focusing on the debate itself, we learned how to communicate with vaccine-hesitant parents. We learned about confirmation bias: the tendency to seek

MEREDITH ALSTON

out information that confirms what we already believe. We learned that bombarding vaccine-hesitant parents with research and data would likely never change their minds, because being an "anti-vaxxer" is more than just a belief; it's an identity. We learned that calling parents who are opposed to, or hesitant of vaccinating their children "anti-vaxxers" only feeds into this identity and pushes them farther away.

My perspective on how we should communicate with parents who express concerns or hesitations about vaccines changed. I discovered that more often than not, their decisions were based on the best information they have at the time.

I have a 9-month-old baby with a severe breathing disorder. I noticed that her breathing was off when she was just 2 days old. When I asked her pediatrician, he flippantly said "Oh, not to worry. Babies just make a lot of noise." He dismissed my concerns, even when I insisted that there was something clearly wrong with her. A few days later she was projectile vomiting and gasping for air, so we rushed to the Emergency Department where she was admitted and diagnosed with severe laryngomalacia, a condition that would require surgery to correct.

I was outraged. Why had her pediatrician not taken just a few minutes more to hear me out? The experience left me angry and distrustful, but it gave me a new perspective; vaccine-hesitant parents want what I wanted: their fears and concerns to be addressed, not disregarded. They want to be a part of the decision-making when

it comes to their child's health care, and above all, they want what's best for their children.

It's challenging for pediatricians, nurses and other public health professionals to interact with these parents because we see the imminent danger in their misinformed decision. But instead of turning them away, what if we made more of an effort to bring them in?

A 2005 study on immunization attitudes and beliefs among parents found that that their views on vaccines aren't as black and white as they may seem. In fact, five clusters of parents were identified; their beliefs ranged from immunization advocates to parents who were worried that vaccines would harm their children. Another national survey in 2000 found that a substantial number of parents believe that their child's immune system could be weakened by vaccines and that children get more vaccines than are good for them. Both studies came to the same conclusion: Children's health care providers are the most important source of information on immunizations.

Vaccines are one of the most important public health advances of our time, but we still have a long way to go in addressing common misconceptions to ensure informed decision-making. Pediatricians, primary care doctors and public health workers have the opportunity to contribute to this educational effort through respectful, well-informed and compassionate dialogue with parents. We all want what's best for our children; we just need the right information to get there.

Meredith Alston works for the Anne Arundel County Department of Health in Maryland.

Your views

Boardman-to-Hemingway power line is far from a done deal

Reading Jayson Jacoby's recent "State moves ahead on B2H power line" article makes the B2H line seem like a done deal. IT IS NOT. We never asked for it and still don't want it. Instead, Jayson quotes Idaho resident and Idaho Power facility sitting coordinator, Jeff Maffucio, who in turn, is crowing

his company's bum's-rush agenda. This, of course, to get the thing built ASAP come hell or high water, pay lip service to protocol while pretending to take into account the public's objections.

Maffucio wrongly assumes that Oregon's Energy Siting Council — after hearing and reviewing the public's comments and complaints — will vote in Idaho Power's favor, a

process he claims will take six months. After that, Maffucio spouts that it will take another 12 to 18 months before being granted a permit to start construction of the power lines.

This, of course, is purple-ribbon poppy cock. It was Idaho Power who planted the thought that the power lines were a sure thing, that it was just a matter of time and choosing a route before it happened. The fact that we

were never given a choice whether we wanted it or not was never offered to us. Well, Idaho Power and Jeff Maffucio, we are the public and we don't want your power lines. Period. Don't tell us when this is going to conveniently happen for you. The B2H line is anything but a done deal.

Whit Deschner
Baker City

GUEST EDITORIAL

Will Bernie the millionaire change his attitude a bit?

Editorial from Newsday:

Kudos to Bernie Sanders for saying that he will celebrate tax day by releasing his tax returns for the last 10 years. Quite right. And congratulations to the Vermont senator and Democratic presidential candidate for acknowledging that he has become a millionaire.

The next step might be for Sanders, who routinely vilifies "millionaires and billionaires" on the campaign trail, to say something constructive about work and wealth, and how to use public policy to promote them.

When asked about his happy financial status, Sanders offered this bit of wisdom: "I wrote a best-selling book. If you write a best-selling book, you can be a millionaire, too."

Oh. But what if you're the owner of a small business, or an entrepreneur, or a dentist? Are those equally acceptable routes to becoming a millionaire? What if you're a farmer, or an engineer, or an investor? Do those count?

There are millions of millionaires spread across the United States — 17.3 million of them in fact, the most in the world by a long

way. Not all of them reached that status by writing books like "Our Revolution" and the "Bernie Sanders Guide to Political Revolution."

This is not to demean Sanders's achievement. Hard-earned wealth should be celebrated. It's to say that demonizing the creation of that wealth, scoring points off class warfare, and elevating one person's paycheck over another's is ultimately unproductive. It may sound nice — and it may win votes — but it misses the point.

Bernie Sanders has spent his career of-

fering simple slogans to address complex problems: free college, break up the banks, Medicare for All, and more. He has promoted impractical, unaffordable and ineffective projects at the expense of achievable policies that would benefit millions of Americans. And he has done all this while pointing his finger at the easiest of targets: millionaires and billionaires.

Now that he has become one himself, Sanders' story has become a bit more nuanced. American politics would benefit if his rhetoric and policies became a bit more nuanced, too.