

## EDITORIAL

## Lowering students' standards

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.

(Baker County's two legislators — Rep. Mark Owens of Crane, and Sen. Lynn Findley of Vale, both Republicans, voted against Senate Bill 744.)

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 computers monitors replaced actually classrooms.

An organization that supports the bill, Foundations for a Better Oregon, said in a statement that "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 that 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 that 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 that they haven't actually attained.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



## Your views

## It's time to start thinking about the drought

Guess it's time we talked about the drought.

Being a farming and ranching community, this is likely to hit us pretty hard in the near future. Tourism isn't enough to save us economically. The long-range forecast says this drought condition will continue to worsen. In fact, some areas are seeing the driest conditions in 1,200 years.

If you can't grow crops or water cattle, what are we to do?

Then you have to consider people in town here. We HAVE to have water to drink. That's priority No. 1. Nothing can live without water and that includes us. Will it get so bad later in the summer that we can no longer water our grass or fill a pool? Quite possibly. And we should be thinking about this.

I see all the sprinklers going this morning as I write. Worked hard the past couple of years to give my place a nice yard with grass that looks like premium carpet. Might I have to give it up soon? Watch the flowers wilt and turn to dust? And the grass will become sunburnt and lifeless. I will if that's what needs to be done.

I hope the town leaders have some

vision of what to do when this comes calling ...

Dan Collins  
Baker City

## Another date should join Juneteenth as national holiday

On June 19, Juneteenth, 1865 federal troops landed at Galveston Bay in Texas and ended 200 years of slavery. It is now and should be a national holiday. But there is an even more important date — April 19, 1775, when a shot heard around the world was fired. That shot was literally heard around the world. It challenged tyranny, which at that time was vested in royalty. Royalty, the idea that you are born to rule and could pass that on to your heirs. The idea of republics, where the people elect their leaders caught on. Bolivar in South America challenged Spanish royalty, the French chopped their heads off. Later the Russians shot their royal family. The republic idea caught on, except in the so-called Great Britain, Islands, where they still kiss the royal arse.

I guess it is the failure of the American education system that subjects me to what Megan and Harry are doing.

They are everywhere, even Fox News. Tucker Carlson and Sean Hannity both have had Piers Morgan on, because he trashes Harry and Megan. Morgan is a staunch supporter of the royal family. He is, however, a vocal opponent of our Second Amendment. It shouldn't be hard to google Piers defending the British idea that only the elite should possess arms, the exact opposite of the American ideal.

Enough crap about whether Biden violated royal protocol and other such tripe. I don't care if there is another royal brat, I don't want to hear anymore about an American royal baby. Titles of royalty are specifically prohibited in our constitution. Coverage of Megan and Harry gives our poorly educated citizenry the idea that royalty is a legitimate form of government. That shot fired at Lexington Green challenged that.

It is time to teach history in our schools again and it is time that April 19 becomes a national holiday. It set the idea that people of all colors all around the world are capable of controlling their own lives. People of all colors.

Steve Culley  
Baker City

## Biden and Putin have met, but will things get better?

## Editorial from The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette:

President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin have had their much anticipated summit meeting in Switzerland. Now the question is: Will it improve anything?

Will Putin cease meddling in other countries, including our own?

Will he cease persecuting dissidents and lovers of freedom in Russia?

Will it lead to better U.S.-Russian relations?

Biden's own answer was: "We'll see." That's not encouraging, for there is little ground for optimism.

So, the question then becomes: What will Biden do when what we see is not a change but more of the same?

No president would show all his cards in a situation like our current one with Russia.

And it is better that neither president saber-rattled in the meeting.

But it is hard to avoid the sinking feeling that the answer may be: The U.S. president will not do much at all about V. Putin.

There are limits, of course, to what any U.S. president can do about any tyrant in any foreign land.

But Putin could not be blamed for assuming there will be no real test of his limits.

Biden's argument for chastising and containing Putin might be called realism, plus.

He knows we cannot dictate terms to Putin.

He also knows we cannot trust him. He knows Russia is a brutal autocracy, of the kind he has vowed to oppose.

But Biden's basic argument is that world opinion and economic self-interest will bring Putin around.

That is, it is in Putin's interest to seek the approval of civilized nations and not to be seen as a rogue autocrat leading a rogue state.

It is in his interest to accept international norms.

If he wants expanded U.S. trade and trade with the NATO countries, he will clean up his act.

If he wants U.S. business investment, he will cease kidnapping and jailing U.S. businessmen, like Michael Calvey.

In short, the new realism assumes Putin is a rational actor.

Call it realism, plus hope.

But why would Putin be a more rational actor after the summit than in the years before?

All these reasoning calculations could have been made by him prior to the summit — for many years prior.

Why would he start caring that the world thinks him a thug, now?

It was Biden, after all, who called Mr. Putin "a killer."

He was right.

Killers usually do not seek the approval of rule followers.

So there is no reason to believe that Putin has been in any way chastened by this meeting.

Moreover, Biden's promise that if

Putin persists in his Putin ways, "we will respond," probably does not change much, either.

And restoring full diplomatic relations, now promised, is probably not the right signal to send.

Realism really means that the life of one man — like dissident Alexei Navalny, who is now being slowly killed in a gulag — is not sufficient cause for a new cold war.

But what if the cold war is already on?

And what if Putin did not get, and does not plan on receiving and reading, the West's memo about reason and reputation and good opinion?

The good opinion of the West, and cordiality with the United States, did not stop the Putin regime from poisoning dissidents, from jailing them or, yes, from killing them.

So, maybe the way to get the dictator's attention, and to drive home the larger point about democracies having as much guts and staying power as autocracies, is to say: The consequences are now. We are not giving you another chance. Free Navalny and free Calvey now. And then we will trade robustly with you and send a new U.S. ambassador.

Maybe the true realism is standing for American values as well as interests.

Maybe playing nice with a killer and warning that one day there will be consequences isn't realistic at all.