

Coming soon: Judging success on a harder test

Oregon students are preparing for their first crack at the Smarter Balanced test.

You can forgive them, and teachers and administrators, for suffering from testing whiplash, and maybe even some PTTD (post-traumatic test disorder).

The top-down, executive branch approach to education reform has tried to reinvigorate primary and secondary education in the country over the last decade – to varying degrees of success. But there is no debate that the United States remains decisively behind many European countries and many first-world Asian countries in quality of education. The much maligned and misunderstood Smarter Balanced tests and Common Core curriculum is the latest attempt to resuscitate our education reputation.

It won't come easily.

Students in grades three through eight and high school juniors will be subjected to seven hours of intensive testing over the next two months. The goal is to measure their reading, writing, listening, math, research and thinking skills. Teachers are prepared for the worst; more than half of all students who take the test are expected to receive "failing" grades. And administrations are busy pivoting to the new curriculum so more students pass the challenging tests every year from here on out.

Anything new, unproven and difficult makes people fearful. Many teachers have expressed that fear, and some have passed

What's in a name?

If the moniker for the test – Smarter Balanced – seems a little ungainly, you can blame the folks behind the plan. The test takes its name from the multi-state coalition of education officials that developed the test, who named themselves the Smarter, Balanced Assessment Consortium.

those fears along to their students. Most athletic coaches know that confidence is key to success and convincing their players to give their best effort. And what is true on the pitch is also true on paper. We think school officials should remind students that Smarter Balanced tests the U.S. education system as much as it tests the students themselves.

Sure, it won't be easy for the majority of students to see their low scores, especially for children who are used to getting good grades. But those good grades in less-challenging work weren't cutting it on the international scene. This country had to up its game and any short-term setbacks will make our children smarter (and balanced) in the long run.

For now, remind your son and daughter, or niece or nephew, to take a deep breath. To try hard but not be overwhelmed. To remember their self-worth no matter what a computerized score tells them. The key mantra should be the old parental standby that all young people should hear over and over again: Do your best.



OR wage hike would be good ... for Idaho

By Joe Beach
EO Media Group

Farmers and processors in Eastern Oregon are keeping a close eye on proposals in the Legislature that would increase the state's minimum wage – now \$9.25 – to as high as \$15 an hour over the next few years.

They say if that happens they would have to consider moving operations to nearby Idaho, where the minimum wage is \$7.25.

Shay Myers, Owyhee Produce general manager, said that type of increase would make it extremely difficult for Eastern Oregon farmers and agribusinesses to compete with their colleagues across the state line. A \$15 minimum wage would increase labor costs 62 percent at his company's onion packing shed and farming operations.

"How do we take a 62 percent reduction in what our earnings are ... and think that we can remain in business competitively?" he said.

Myers and other producers say they'd have to cut costs, either through more automation or moving labor-in-

tensive operations to Idaho.

Supporters of a minimum wage hike say they've heard all this before. Oregon has the second-highest minimum wage in the country. Washington state has the highest. They say there hasn't been a noticeable migration of businesses across the state line.

"We hear these predictions every time we propose raising the minimum wage and yet we don't see that happening," Senate Majority Leader Diane Rosenbaum, D-Portland, said.

A bill she sponsors would increase the minimum wage to \$10.90 next year, and to \$12.12 in 2017. A separate measure in the House calls for a hike to \$11.50 next year, \$13.25 the year after, and \$15 in 2018.

Supporters note that 400,000 low-wage earners in Oregon qualify for government assistance that costs taxpayers \$1.7 billion a year.

Rosenbaum said low-wage earners "work hard at some of the hardest jobs there are and we think these people should earn a wage that is closer to where they can support themselves."

We agree that some of the talk about

moving is bluster. The current disparity hasn't pushed many, if any, to move to Idaho. But there's a big difference between \$2 and \$7.

Farmers and packers are price takers, not price makers. They can't just mark up the price of the crop to cover a mandate from Salem — particularly if producers in the next county have such a competitive advantage.

Raise the wage high enough and large operators will find a way to reduce labor costs — move or automate. Small operators and their employees will be forced out.

The way to raise wages is to increase demand for labor, not reduce it. Eliminate the barriers for existing businesses to hire, and on new business from starting in the first place. Put more people to work, and the market will increase their worth. The emotional appeal of a higher minimum wage is easy to understand. Unfortunately, it doesn't hold up to the laws of economics. The government cannot mandate prosperity.

Joe Beach is the managing editor of the Capital Press, an EO Media publication.

COMMENTARY

It's time to take a new tack, reinvest in schools

By Sen. Ted Ferrioli
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

Despite years of campaign promises, Oregon's Democrat majority has underfunded Oregon schools for more than a decade, shortchanging our children.

When Republicans last controlled the budget process in 2003, 44.7 percent of the discretionary budget went to K-12 education. Today it is only 39.2 percent.

Democrats appear to be leveraging our children to manipulate the budget forecast (Senate Bill 929) to steal the voter-approved kicker tax refund for Oregonians. Are they underfunding education to generate public support for union-backed initiatives that will increase business and personal income taxes?

Regardless of their tactic, underfunding education is the wrong choice. Republicans propose a better way.

While Oregon wastes money on expensive failures like Cover Oregon, we are failing our children. With the worst on-time graduation rate in the United States, Oregon is ranked at the bottom of the class nationally. Oregon's failure to prioritize education has resulted in

a D- ranking for student achievement, placing Oregon behind states like Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Virginia, and Washington.

What does this mean for Oregon's schools? Fewer teachers, larger class sizes, and reduced school days. Currently, Oregon has the second largest class sizes in the nation. This has to change.

Here are choices that we should be discussing to strengthen education in Oregon and move us back to where we belong, the top of the class:

Oregon continues paying up to \$35,000 each for criminal defense costs of five Cover Oregon officials under FBI investigation. Now, former Gov. John Kitzhaber and his fiancée Cylvia Hayes may also qualify for state funds. This is an inappropriate use of taxpayer dollars.

After a significant increase in state employee salaries in the last budget, Senate Republicans would freeze state employee salaries to free up \$129.7 million to add back school days.

The Oregon Education Investment Board is a Kitzhaber "feel good" initiative that has long been opposed by teachers and education advocates. Eliminating it could redirect \$20.4 mil-

lion from largely administrative costs directly to classrooms.

Democrats want \$5 million to subsidize Amtrak rail. Why would we waste more money subsidizing a failed federal bureaucracy that has lost money every year for more than 40 years?

The Elliott State Forest is held in trust to generate revenue for schools through sustainable forest management. However, the forest actually lost money the last few years as Democrats pandered to a radical, anti-management philosophy. Restoring sustainable management practices across Oregon, consistent with the Oregon Forest Practice Act, could raise \$80 million per biennium for schools while creating family-wage jobs.

We could go on. To reinvest in K-12 education, we need to increase revenue through job creation and start spending tax dollars responsibly so we can fully fund education, putting much-needed dollars back into our classrooms. Republicans choose to prioritize our kids first and not to hold them hostage to tax increases and partisan efforts to hijack the voter-approved kicker.

Ted Ferrioli, R-John Day, represents District 30, which includes Grant County and most of Eastern Oregon.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Tell it to court

To the Editor:

There's been a lot written over the months about the pending closure of our mountains and who is doing it. While technically the Forest Service is planning and implementing these closures, they are being permitted by the Grant County Court, as they have the ability to address these issues.

Grant County Ordinance 2013-1: "Whereas, the roads, trails, stock driveways, and by-ways over and across these public lands have customarily been utilized unrestricted by Grant County residents for search and rescue, fire protection, firewood gathering, access for hunting and fishing, livestock management, logging activities, min-

ing, recreational uses and general welfare."

"Therefore, be it hereby ordained that for the safety and well-being of Grant County citizens all roads, trails, stock driveways, and by-ways over and across public lands within the boundary of Grant County, Oregon shall remain open as historically and customarily utilized consistent with the Grant County plans and policies, unless otherwise authorized for closure by the Grant County Court and the Grant County Sheriff."

We all need to engage with the Forest Service and tell them how the closures impact us, but it's more important that you tell the County Court that permits these actions to close the roads that it is not acceptable to you.

While we have no real way of re-

moving Forest Service staff that will not look out for the local residents, we do have the ability to remove ineffective "leaders" from county leadership.

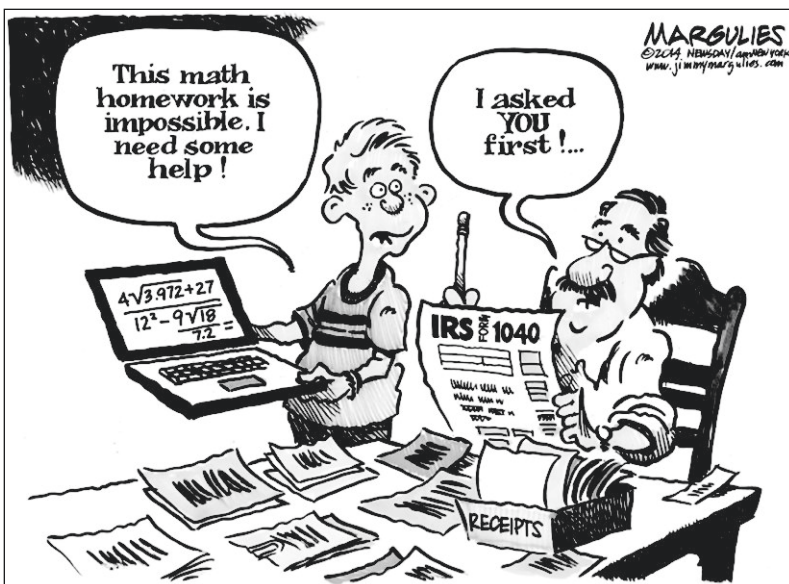
Or, maybe this is really what the County Court wants – "Currently off-road vehicle travel is allowed; OHV use has the potential to disturb wildlife and reduce security for elk and deer, prey species of gray wolves, as well as dispersing gray wolves." (Elk 16 Vegetative project.)

Is the court's desire to expand "wolf habitat"?

Who's going to be to blame when they do?

We are, because we chose to be silent.

John George
Bates





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