

Don't throw out the 'essential skills'

The Oregon Legislature has suspended through 2024 the requirement that students show proficiency in reading, writing and math — the aptly named “essential skills” — as a requirement for getting a high school diploma.

Is the ability to apply those skills no longer necessary in everyday life? If so, we didn't get the memo.

Essential skills proficiency was added as a requirement for graduation a decade ago.

Teaching kids to read and write and do basic math was the whole point of public education when it came into existence. The public school curriculum has become more complicated over the years, but has always been filled with courses where students presumably learned and used those skills.

But a lot of students were graduating without the ability to apply them in real-life situations. Employers weren't the only ones to take notice, and the decision was made to mandate proficiency as a requirement for a diploma.

It does not seem too high of an expectation after 12 years of schooling.

School districts had various options to test that proficiency. But critics of the requirement have called those tests into question, alleging that they are unfair to non-native English speakers and racial minorities.

Senate Bill 744 calls a halt to the testing and the proficiency requirement and orders the Oregon Department of Education to evaluate graduation standards.

“The testing that we've been doing in the past doesn't tell us what we want to know,”

Sen. Lew Frederick, D-Portland, told KATU. “We have been relying on tests that have been, frankly, very flawed and relying too much on them so that we aren't really helping the students or the teachers or the community.”

We see nothing wrong with evaluating and upgrading graduation requirements. We are less enthusiastic about, but not completely against, alternative evaluation methods for determining proficiency.

But we agree with Republicans in the legislature who say the state should not suspend the current standard while this evaluation takes place.

“The approach for Senate Bill 744 is to, in fact, lower our expectations for our kids,” said Oregon House Minority Leader Christine Drazan. “This is the wrong time to do that, when we have had this year of social isolation and lost learning. It's the wrong thing to do in this moment.”

Our biggest fear is that the real goal of SB 744 is to find more ways to declare students proficient without actually teaching more students to be proficient.

Putting your boots in the oven won't make them biscuits, and declaring a student proficient through some convoluted evaluation won't make that so either.

The goal should be for every student, regardless of race or ethnicity, to be proficient in the essential skills, not to artificially increase the graduation rates.

To demand less turns an Oregon high school diploma into a participation trophy. That would truly be a disservice to the students and to the community.



EO Media Group launching Go! Magazine

Starting in July, EO Media Group is launching Go! Magazine, a weekly arts and entertainment publication designed to do exactly what it says — get readers to “go” out and experience all of what Eastern Oregon has to offer. For readers in Union, Baker, Umatilla and Morrow counties, Go! will be in your Thursday newspaper. For readers in Wallowa and Grant counties, you will receive the magazine every Wednesday.

Go! is designed to be a solid platform to connect our readers in more diverse — and I hope, interesting — ways. The magazine gives you plenty of options to know what is going on where and in what town, with a calendar of event dates and times for a host of weekly entertainment venues throughout the region. The accompanying website, goeasternoregon.com, will offer a mobile-friendly digital version of the magazine and calendar to take with you as you explore Eastern Oregon again. After more than a year of staying home, we are all ready to take to the roads and start celebrating at festivals, rodeos, concerts and events throughout the region.

After trying to find ways to work more efficiently and working on joint projects such as Northeast Oregon Artisans and AgriBusiness, the six papers that make up EO Media Group's eastside publications are launching Go! Magazine as another



Andrew Cutler

shared venture for our readers.

La Grande and Baker City readers are more than familiar with the product, since it has been a staple of those papers

for more than a decade.

Our six papers — The Observer, Baker City Herald, East Oregonian, Wallowa County Chieftain, Blue Mountain Eagle, and Hermiston Herald — are combining resources to expand the reach of the magazine.

Ultimately, what we do — all we do — is centered on our readers. We are a news product, sure, but all six newspapers also provide a vehicle for readers to know what is going on in the towns that dot our great region of Oregon.

That kind of reach is something we take some pride in. Eastern Oregon is a big chunk of real estate. But we have managed to provide a comprehensive news package at our newspapers on a consistent basis for a long time. While we are proud of that, we are most proud of the fact that we can furnish our readers with complete coverage in a remote part of our great state.

Finding a way to work more efficiently by designing and then executing joint programs between our newspapers is a way to “work smarter” and the payoff — which is what really matters — is that our read-

ers will gain a wealth of new information.

Our six papers provide unprecedented reach across our region and the addition of Go! will ensure that our readers continue to receive the benefit of our combined newspaper team strength.

I am especially pleased that we will be able to give you, the reader, more resources to make decisions and to go and see places and events that are part of our common heritage.

While it is great that we are expanding the product to new areas of the region, none of it would mean anything if we didn't have someone to be a “champion” for the product, someone to see it through from beginning to end week after week. For us, that someone is Lisa Britton, who is based at the Baker City Herald and can be reached by phone (541-406-5274) or by email (lbritton@bakercityherald.com). If you have an event that you'd like to let readers know about, she is the person to contact. We need information at least a week in advance of publication, so the sooner you can submit an event, the better. We welcome news about concerts, art shows, festivals, community events, museum exhibits and more.

Andrew Cutler is the regional editorial director for the EO Media Group, overseeing the content of the Blue Mountain Eagle and five more newspapers in Eastern Oregon.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

'A new player in the game of fools'

To the Editor:

There appears to be a new player in the game of fools. The prospective petition to recall duly elected Grant County Judge Scott Myers is amateurish and sophomoric in content and intent. The terms in Mr. Walker's petition indicate Judge Myers has god-like control over the events of Grant County. The term “quorum” appears outside of his English repertoire or his mentors' intellect. One man does not decide the fate of Grant County, so why are these ankle-biting accusations aimed at only one court member? As to the lame interpretation of an

oath of office, which is shared by all members of the court, it's not limited to the judge to indulge in redundant meetings on demands of one city council's incessant badgering for special financial considerations.

Collaboration, financial issues and county personnel actions require a court quorum decision. “Invest in economic development” seems to be reminiscent of the complaint from John Day based on the quorum's denial to obligate county taxpayer dollars to the city's unceasing extravagances and failure to perform maintenance on streets and utilities. The loss of economy and population decline can be attributed to the state's COVID-19 shutdown, the federal government's bowing before environ-

mentalists and shutting down of mills due to lack of timber sales and the list goes on. Not meeting with other duly elected officials? There are three duly elected county officials. How choosey are you? Refusal to collaborate, financial mismanagement, lack of transparency — who are we talking about here? Do Walker's backers have a mirror?

Folks need to concentrate in the here and now, not some perceived slight, slander or mistake in judgement of a quorum in the past. Consider: the governor can appoint a replacement judge if this petition succeeds. The results can be nasty because she does not like conservative Grant County. How about “no”?

Judy Kerr
Canyon City

LETTERS POLICY: Letters to the Editor is a forum for Blue Mountain Eagle readers to express themselves on local, state, national or world issues. Brevity is good, but longer letters will be asked to be contained to 350 words. No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. No thank-you letters. Submissions to this page become property of the Eagle. The Eagle reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content. Letters must be original and signed by the writer. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. We must limit all contributors to one letter per person per month. Deadline is 5 p.m. Friday. Send letters to editor@bmeagle.com, or Blue Mountain Eagle, 195 N. Canyon Blvd., John Day, OR 97845; or fax to 541-575-1244.



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