

# Seaside, Astoria see double-digit dips in graduation rates

Numbers are off, principals say

By Edward Stratton and R.J. Marx  
EO Media Group

Graduation rates in Astoria and Seaside slumped by about 10 percent last year in figures released by the state Department of Education. But local officials, including Seaside High School Principal Jeff Roberts and Astoria High School Principal Lynn Jackson, are scratching their heads over the numbers.

Astoria and Seaside, Clatsop County's two largest school districts, each averaged more than 74 percent in 2016. But Astoria slipped to 63.3 percent last year, and Seaside to 66.7 percent.

"There's a 7 percent discrepancy from my numbers to their numbers," Jackson said, estimating his district's four-year graduation rate at between 70 and 72 percent.

About five students counted by the state as dropouts had graduated last year, while several others had moved out of the school district, Jackson said.

The state defines on-time graduation as finishing in four years. Statewide, 76.7 percent of seniors finished with a diploma in four years, a nearly 2 percent increase from 2016 but still among the worst graduation rates in the nation. The national graduation rate in 2016 was 84 percent, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

The state's numbers say 41 Seaside students did not graduate, using that number for calculations. That number should have been much lower, Roberts said.

Roberts said 133 students entered as freshmen at Seaside High School in 2013-14. Over the course of the four-year period that is measured the district had 24 of those students leave with codes that the Department of Education considers as drop-outs or not finishing in four years.

Some of those should not be considered dropouts, Roberts said.

"My math tells me that is 18 percent of that class that dropped out in that time frame, 31 of those 133 students left Seaside High School at some point to pursue their education in a manner that was deemed not to be considered a dropout, per ODE, which could include completing a GED program, transferring to another school in state, transferring to another school out of state, or enrolling in online school," Roberts said.

If that number had been used, the graduation rate would have been similar to previous years, about 76 percent.

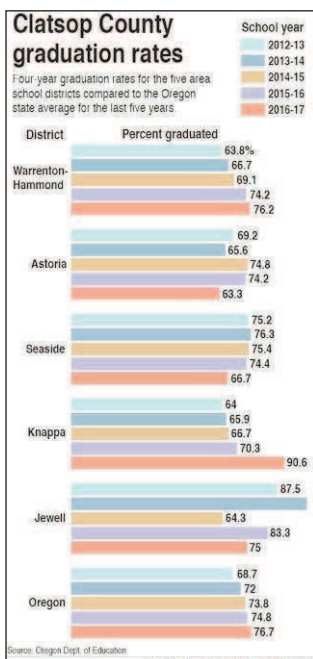
Warrenton-Hammond, the county's third-largest and fastest-growing school district, posted a 76.2 percent four-year graduation rate last year, continuing a steady increase stretching back at least six years.

Warrenton High School Principal Rod Heyen estimated his graduation rate at 80 percent, equating to two or three more students than the state counted, but said overall he is pleased with the district's progress.

Warrenton regularly averages the highest rate of student homelessness in the county, with many students forced to share housing with family and friends out of economic need. Heyen credited district staff and community partners for providing the necessary support such as food and clothing to keep students going to school.

Knappa High School improved from a 70 percent four-year graduation rate in 2016 to 90 percent last year, by far the highest in the county.

Knappa High School Principal Laurel Smalley said there's no one magic bullet, but that the district has experienced a culture shift toward valuing education.



The graduation figures of Jewell, a tiny rural school district in the southeastern corner of the county, fluctuate wildly, with class sizes often below 15 students. The district graduated six out of eight students last year, according to the state.

Voters in 2016 approved about \$800 per student through Measure 98 to improve dropout prevention, collegiate offerings and career-technical programs. The state Legislature funded the measure at about \$400 per student.

The measure's funding has been used by school districts for freshmen advising. Freshmen who stay on track and average good grades are dramatically more likely to graduate.

Seaside has yet to approach the state about the discrepancy. Meanwhile, they intend to work to improve their graduation rates, Roberts said.

"Our goal will always be for 100 percent of students to earn a high school diploma," Roberts added. "It is certainly a concern and will remain a concern until we are able to work with our staff, parents, the students and community partners to consistently ensure our students earn a high school diploma."

# A SCHOOL WITH A VIEW

Planning commissioners get a preview of campus plans

By R.J. Marx  
Seaside Signal

School district consultants walked planning commissioners through designs for the new school campus in the in the Southeast Hills.

One thing is certain: the school will have a magnificent view.

"We've talked about the difficulties of the site, but the benefits are it's going to have the best view of any school in Oregon," architect Dan Hess said. You're going to see the ocean, you're going to see the city."

Hess, project manager Jim Henry, land use planner Greg Winterowd, with input from City Planner Kevin Cupples and Public Works Director Dale McDowell walked the city's planning commissioners through design plans to provide information and listen to suggestions at the Tuesday work session, Seaside School District Superintendent Sheila Roley said.

Some of the plans are dictated by the site itself, located on land south and east of the current Heights Elementary School. "It's a difficult site, but it's not impossible," Public Works Director Dale McDowell said.

The shape of the location — including lane width and parking — is mandated by the fire department.

"When they pull a truck in, they've got to be able to pull their hose 175 feet," McDowell said. "They've got to be able to get to both sides of the school. We're working with the school district and the fire department to make sure we get that right."

Remodeling and additions to the Heights Elementary School will house the district's elementary school population of 730 students, architect Dan Hess told commissioners.



SEASIDE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Spruce Street, providing access to the new campus, as shown in a district planning document.

A combined middle and high school building will provide classrooms in an I-shaped configuration, with middle schoolers on one side of the building and high schoolers on the other.

A track and football field with striping for soccer, road links for two sites, parking and a stormwater detention basin were also presented.

Because of slope, the west side of the campus will stand three stories and the east two stories. The upper floor will house classrooms, the cafeteria and the music program. The cafeteria will be divided to separate high school and middle school students. The space could be also transformed into a performing arts space, he added.

A sports field would be the only athletic outdoor playing area, intended for practice and physical education.

Varsity teams will continue to compete at Broadway Field. The site would also be a collection area for residents in case of an emergency, including an earthquake or tsunami.

The new school will be hooked to a generator in case of outages, McDowell said. Added emergency access comes from a former logging road behind the campus.

A "closed campus" may not please students, Roley said, but it will help keep traffic down on roads to school.



R.J. MARX/SEASIDE SIGNAL

Land cleared at the site of the new district campus.

"This is not an appropriate site for them to be leaving mid-day," she said.

At the current site, there are 17 exits and many ways to access area roadways. At the new campus, there will be only one.

Traffic studies detailing impacts to local roads were designed to be "conservative" in approach, planner Winterowd said.

Families of two or three kids will be able to travel to the same school, reducing traffic to the campus, he said.

The district will have about 330 parking spaces in the new campus, including spaces already designated at the Heights. Overflow parallel parking will be available along roadways for special events.

The site is "being built for growth," Roley said, who said

the district expects steady, modest growth in years to come. The campus, currently at 1,500 students from K-12, will be built to accommodate 1,700.

"Our consultants felt the meeting went very well," Roley said. "We thought it was worthwhile for us and the city as well. We continue to have ongoing partnership with the city staff and it was nice to bring that all to the table have the commissioners looped in so they don't get all this information in a notebook and looking at it for the first time."

School district consultants and officials will share plans in a Spanish presentation takes place Feb. 6 at 6:30 p.m. at Broadway Middle School, 1120 Broadway.

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Pacific Power's Blue Sky program will award the Clatsop County community a 1-kilowatt solar installation for exceeding the North Coast Challenge goal.

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