

League of Women Voters of Lane County November 2009 Everymember material

A PICTURE OF K-12 PUBLIC EDUCATION IN LANE COUNTY

Introduction

In the spring of 2009 the League of Women Voters of Lane County (LWVLC) determined that the state of K–12 public education, in Lane County would be a topic for unit discussions. This paper presents background material for such a discussion, but it is not a study nor is it in preparation for consensus. Information was gathered on graduation requirements and rates, annual yearly progress (AYP), benchmarks, technology, and alternative education. Since local school districts must adhere to state and federal guidelines, the current local situation must be examined in light of the state and federal influences and strictures.

A growing concern about the quality of public education can be seen nationwide, caused in part by national evaluations under the No Child Left Behind Act. This year the State of Oregon received a D+ (Federal ranking) for education delivered in schools, K-12. Although Lane County school districts generally fared better than the State average, a large number of Lane County middle school and high school students are in schools that do not meet federal standards or are rated “satisfactory” rather than “strong” or “exceptional” for academic performance under state guidelines.

Many of the low ratings under the No Child Left Behind criteria are a result of not making AYP in categories for students with disabilities or lacking English proficiency. Two schools in Springfield that fit that description have been labeled poor performers under federal guidelines and are under sanctions for this coming school year. Additional schools in Eugene, Springfield and other Lane County districts would have received the same label except that they were not eligible for Title I money and so were not included on the list. (see Title I under Definitions)

Of the fifteen public school districts in Lane County, the committee selected data for five representative Lane County school districts of varying size, economic and geographic backgrounds: Eugene 4J, Springfield 19, Bethel 52, Creswell 40 and South Lane 45J3 (Cottage Grove area).

League Background

In 2003 LWVLC completed a county-wide survey of the condition of classroom buildings in Lane County. However, that study did not look at the education K-12 students were receiving. League of Women Voters of Oregon (LWVOR) studies and reports on K-12 education have not been updated for ten years.

The most recent reports are:

1999 K-12 School Finance Study (tax reform initiated reforms in 1990s).

1995 Children at Risk

1993 Education Reform in Oregon: A Blueprint for the 21st Century

1988 Oregon school Finance: Solving the Dilemma

1988 Schools Project Report of Round I and II

There has been no League study of quality and deliverance of K-12 education.

Oregon Background:

In 1994 a massive reform of the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) standards and guidelines focused on creating the "best educated and prepared workforce in the nation by the year 2000 and a workforce equal to any in the world by 2010." Oregon Shines and Oregon Education Benchmarks (see Benchmarks under definitions) were established under a collaborative intergovernmental agency partnership of federal, state and local/regional departments of labor, work force quality councils, economic development, employment and human resource agencies, departments of education, vocational rehabilitation and adult and family services and business partners. Twelve years later it was obvious that K-12 education was not meeting the 1994 reform goals.

In January 2007, the ODE adopted new high school graduation requirements to be implemented through years 2011 and 2012. This is essentially an unfunded mandate. The Chalkboard Project (see Chalkboard Project under definitions) has determined the goal that Oregon schools are to be in the top 10% nationwide. Federal mandates and federal education dollars with required performance guidelines attached are influencing states and local districts to rewrite their laws and regulations in order to receive more federal dollars. What does all of this mean for Lane County public schools?

Graduation Requirements and Rates

One of the most important measurements of a school district's success is its high school graduation rate of district students. In addition, the requirements students fulfill for graduation are an indication of the quality of education a student has received. In Oregon and therefore Lane County, a different formula to evaluate graduation rates will be used beginning 2009-2010 school year. It will allow comparisons between Oregon districts and the nation as a whole. This standard formula will be implemented nationwide for the class of 2010.

The new national standard rate of graduation formula measures simply the percentage of graduates within a district and per high school. It does not include GED completers, students who take more than four years to graduate or students who leave school

to go into the military. It measures only the percentage of students who actually fulfill high school graduation requirements within four years. Using this new formula, the Oregon high school graduation rate is below 75%. In Lane County the Bethel District is 62.44%, Creswell is 77.3%, South Lane is 80.62%, Eugene is 75.86% and Springfield is 62.26%. There has been some concern that GED rates are not included in these numbers; however, including them would make little difference. For example, in Bethel the 2008-2009 class cohort was 410 potential seniors; only 256 successfully graduated. Of the non-graduates, only 15 earned their GED. By including those 15 students, the graduation rate would have increased only from 62.44% to 66.1%.

Oregon received a D+ rating this year on the federal performance report. New Oregon high school requirements will be phased in over a five-year period to be completed in the year of 2014 (the graduation year of 2009-2010 8th graders).

Oregon High School Requirements

Since AYP and graduation rates are determined by general national standards, the committee examined education requirements data from five other states for comparison that also have experience with increasing their graduation requirements and graduation rates. The states are Arkansas, Georgia, Minnesota, Missouri and New York. All five of these states have a more rigorous set of graduation requirements demanding more credits and more advanced study in the national core areas of English, math, and science than does Oregon.

Arkansas went through an education reform similar to the 1990's Oregon reform, but increased its graduation requirements along with a career focus requirement and implemented strong guidance and counseling components. Arkansas received an A+ performance report at the federal level, boosted its attendance rate to 94% and under national guidelines has a 76% graduation rate.

Missouri and Georgia have implemented free tuition plan to any public state institution of advanced education for state high school graduates. Teachers and parents work to see that students are eligible for the plan. Missouri and Georgia have an 85.2% and an 81.1% graduation rate respectively.

Minnesota did a comprehensive retooling of its education program in the 1990's, has continued to fully finance its school districts and is recognized nationwide as a model system. Minnesota students

must pass comprehensive exams in English/reading, mathematics, science, and social science to graduate. Minnesota has an 80.9% graduation rate.

New York State has for decades required rigorous regents exams in English language arts, mathematics, global history, U.S. history and science. Two distinct diplomas are available in New York, the Regents Diploma and the Local Diploma along with a Technical Endorsement. New York has a 75.6% graduation rate.

Benchmarks

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was enacted January 8, 2002. The NCLB Act is a standards-based education reform. It requires states to develop assessment in basic skills, to be tested at certain grade levels. Standards are set by the individual states in reading, math and writing. All students take a yearly exam, devised and/or approved by their state department of education. A Benchmark is a point of reference set by the ODE to measure standards.

Schools receiving Title I funding must make AYP. If a Title I funded school does not achieve AYP by the second year, special tutoring must be provided for economically disadvantaged students. Economic disadvantage is based on figures for the free lunch program.

According to a recent *New York Times* article, school test scores are up, but criticism continues. This is also true in Lane County school systems. *Register Guard* reporter Anne Williams reports, "We are meeting federal academic targets called adequate yearly progress." However, according to ODE report, 71 schools, including two middle schools in Springfield, need improvement. Two weeks before the start of the school year, parents of students in these two schools must be notified and offered a chance to transfer their child to another middle school in the district.

Proponents of the standards-based education reform (No Child Left Behind) say:

1. Test scores in reading and math have improved.
2. Accountability in public schools, linking state academic standards with student outcomes has increased.
3. Parent information has improved due to the requirement of detailed reports outlining the school's AYP.

Critics of the No Child Left Behind claim:

1. Motivation exists to manipulate the standardized test results "by teaching to the test."
2. Incentives exist to set expectations lower rather than higher.
3. Focus on English skills and math may also narrow the student curriculum and diminish the benefits of a broad education.

Following is a summary of the percentages of students meeting

state benchmarks in the representative Lane County districts:

I. Reading and Literature Benchmarks

A) Elementary level:

	3rd graders	5th graders
Oregon	82%	76.0%
Bethel	86.9%	76.4%
Creswell (below state average)	76.6% (below state average)	72.5% (below state average)
South Lane	91 %	77.87%
Eugene 4J	89%	85.4%
Springfield (below state average)	86.4%	72.5%

B) Middle school level:

	6th Graders	8th Graders
Oregon	76.5%	69.5%
Bethel	80%	70.5%
Creswell	74.7% (below state average)	59.5% (below state average)
South Lane	69.0% (below state average)	60.8% (below state average)
Eugene	85.1%	78.4%
Springfield	75.4% (below state average)	68.9% (below state average)

C) At high school level, 10th grade testing, the state average percentage of students meeting the benchmark standards was 66.1 %. In Bethel the percentage was 60.0%, in Creswell the percentage was 61.87, in South Lane the percentage was 70.6%, in Eugene the percentage was 73.7%, in Springfield the percentage was 58.5%.

- II. Math knowledge and skills.
 A) Elementary school level:

	3rd Graders	5th Graders
Oregon	76.5% 76.5%	
Bethel	81%	80.8%
Creswell	72.1% (below state average)	75.2% (below state average)
South Lane	81.3 %	73.8% (below state average)
Eugene 4J	82.6%	83.3%
Springfield average)	77%	72.7% (below state average)

B) Middle school level:

	6th Graders	8th Graders
Oregon	72.0% 70.6%	
Bethel	73%	67.2% (below state average)
Creswell	65% (below state average)	62% (below state average)
South Lane	68.5%	61% (below state average)
Eugene	81%	74%
Springfield average)	70.7% (below state average)	67.8% (below state average)

- C) At high school level, 10th grade testing, the state average percentage of students meeting the mathematics benchmark standards was 53.6 %. The percentage of Bethel students was 48.2%, Creswell was 53.9, South Lane was 52.2%, Eugene was 60.9%, and Springfield was 50.9%.

III. Writing Skills.

The only test results reported were at grade 10. The percentage of students across the state who met the state standards was 55%. In Bethel the percentage of 10th graders was 48.9%, in Creswell 54.1%, in South Lane 35.3%, in Eugene 66.1% and in Springfield 38.8%. All districts except Eugene were below the state average.

Technology

What started as a grading tool has become a major interactive teaching resource. As an example of advances in technology, at the two new schools opening in Springfield fall 2009, teachers will have access to Google Earth on their computers, which can be projected for instructional use rather than using traditional pull-down paper maps. The benefit is that all maps are current and include world-wide and individual street views.

Small school districts across Lane County use computers for distance learning (see Distance Learning under definitions) to deliver classes in foreign languages, advanced mathematics such as calculus and other courses that may not be available in a small high school. McKenzie School District has a large interactive distance learning laboratory where several students can take distance learning classes in different subjects during the same hour. The laboratory greatly expands the high school curriculum.

Technologies such as hand held computers, document cameras, projectors, student response systems, interactive white boards and Web 2.0 are used in classrooms. However, due to financial constraints only a limited number of students and staff have this kind of set-up. Every school has a computer lab with at least thirty computers. Computers on wheels (COWS) are rolling carts of laptops which can go into the classroom for testing or instructional use. A huge discrepancy exists in the number of computers available and type of usage among districts and even schools within the same district. One school may have a single lab for 60 students and another school a single lab for 400. Computers are the sole agent for state testing in math and reading. During testing times, which generally take about five months of computer time during the school year, often little or no access is available to computer technology for instructional purposes.

A main focus for all districts is to insure technology literacy by the end of 8th grade which is part of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

program. Every district must have a technology plan that is updated every three years. Partial funding for technology comes from Title IID monies and E-rate (a technology subsidy based on level of poverty of a school). Fifty percent of the federal Title II funds come automatically to every district. The other 50% goes to ODE to be distributed through competitive grants. In some districts, individual schools have discretionary funds that can be used for technology.

The four largest local districts' goal is to assist all teachers in the integration of technology into instruction by providing grade level subject area-appropriate digital tools and training. A basic goal is to provide one computer per student. Springfield has desktop computers in all classrooms so they are available at all times. Cost for equipment is a big issue; however good training and an enthusiasm for technology in the schools are the most important aspects for progress in this most essential movement toward integrated technology.

Home Schooling and Private Schools

In Lane County 2,282 K-12 students were in twenty private schools throughout the 2008-09 school year. In addition, numerous students were home schooled (see home schooling under definitions) throughout Lane County. Quality of education varies widely outside of the public schools. K-12 enrollment levels in the public schools have diminished over the past two decades resulting in the school closures and in budget reductions. The more than 2,500 K-12 students not attending Lane County public schools represents approximately \$18 million of potential state reimbursement lost from Lane County public schools.

Charter Schools

Charter schools are public schools that receive public funds via a written contract that defines services the school will offer and outlines student performance goals. Charter schools are exempt from meeting state statutes and ODE rules. Only half of a charter school faculty must be state certified. Although the individual public school district monitors the school, each charter school has its own board of directors and is an independent legal entity. Eugene 4-J District includes three charter schools: Network Charter --grades 6-12 serving 116 students, Ridgeline Montessori -- grades K-8 serving 240 students and Village School -- grades K-8 serving 201 students.

South Lane District includes two charter schools: Child's Way -- grades 6-12 serving 39 students and Academy for Character Education -- grades K-12 serving 63 full-time and 11 part-time students.

SOURCES

- Oregon Department of Education website
- Office of the Oregon State Superintendent of Public Instruction
- Interviews with Laura Hodges, Bethel District Technology Staff; Lynn Lary, Creswell District Technology Grant Writer Consultant; Todd Hamilton, South Lane District Technology Director; Kim Ketterer, Eugene 4-J District Instructional Technology Consultant; Lynn Lary, Springfield District Instructional Technology Specialist
- Oregon School Board Association website
- The Chalkboard Project
- The National Center for Education Statistics
- *Register Guard* April 16 – August 25, 2009
- Arkansas, Georgia, Missouri, Minnesota and New York Departments of Education websites
- State Report Cards of Bethel, Creswell, South Lane, Eugene 4-J and Springfield districts state
- Oregon Quarterly summer 2009
- Oregon Education Association

In addition, two faculty members from the Eugene District 4-J and Springfield District 19 reviewed this material.

Committee Members:

Dixie Maurer-Clemons, Anne Mehl, Linda Roe, Ad hoc, Joyce Salisbury, Richard Wilcox

DEFINITIONS

Alternative Education (including Charter and Home Schooling)

"In the past, alternative education may have been described most often as off-site programs for the most at-risk students. Now, a variety of private and public alternative schools and programs is evolving to support Oregon's commitment to help students achieve high academic and career related standards and to pursue these individual goals and interests." (Oregon Dept. Education Superintendent's Update # 305) ODE alternative programs must be registered with the ODE before a school district may contract or distribute public funds to the program. Each program must "ensure a safe educational environment and instructional program that provides students with an opportunity to make progress toward achieving state academic content and performance standards, successful social and educational transitions to their next step in life." (Oregon Dept. of Education website)

AYP or Annual Yearly Progress

Developed by the federal government No Child Left Behind Law and achieved through annual academic testing, Annual Yearly Progress must be made in English/Language Arts and in Mathematics. Annual Yearly Progress Reports are also broken down by student race/ethnicity groups, Limited English Proficient students, Economically Disadvantaged students and students with disabilities.

Even though a school may meet the AYP overall for students, they will be designated as "not met" if they do not reach AYP in anyone of the sub categories. A school cannot miss the AYP target in the same category for two years in a row without "consequences."

Benchmarks

Benchmarks are to be specific measurable performance measures. Detailed performance goals for students at each grade level were drawn up along with new state designed exams for measuring progress. Teacher education programs are required to include benchmarks attainment projects and portfolios.
Teachers

across the state are trained on student attainment of benchmarks at each grade. Specific career goals were to be established by every high school student before grade eleven at which time structured work experiences were to be provided to eleventh and twelfth graders.

Chalkboard Project

In 2004, five of Oregon's most influential charitable foundations (The Collins Foundation, The Ford Family Foundation, The JELD-WEN Foundation, Meyer Memorial Trust, and the Oregon Community Foundation) joined together as Foundations for a Better Oregon with the written mission to make Oregon K-12 public education among the nation's top 10, titled the Chalkboard Project. The James F and Marion L Miller Foundation joined in 2007. The Chalkboard Project has funded research on what they determine to be:

- 1) Proven educational practices that will raise students achievements
- 2) Oregonians priorities about how to improve schools and where to use tax dollars.

This group is very active with the legislature.

Distance Learning

Distance learning is the process of offering education courses via the web. They range from individual packages to classroom specialty lectures. It is a formalized teaching system specially designed for students who are not "on site". It ranges from single videotaped lectures with students taking exams at a locally designated, monitored site to interactive, live instruction (compressed video conferencing). It is now used world-wide.

ESL

English as a Second Language or in federal and state reports is now referred to as "Limited English Proficient" in federal and state reports.

Home Schooling

Home schooling varies from all the education occurring within the family to use of distance learning and small group lessons outside the formalized school setting. Each state has different laws and requirements for home schooling.

Oregon – Written notification of intent to home school must occur within 10 days of the school year or withdrawing child from school. Notification goes to the local Educational Service District. Children in 3rd, 5th, 8th and 10th grades must be assessed according to state benchmarks via state-approved standardized tests administered by a state certified teacher. If a child falls in the 15 percentile or below, the Education Service District superintendent may determine the child's education be supervised by certified teaching personnel and will require annual testing to follow. If a student enters a public school district at this point, the school district becomes responsible for bringing the student up to state standards.

Missouri – Parents must provide 1,000 hours of instruction per school year per child with 600 hours covering basics such as reading, language arts, mathematics, social studies and science. At least 400 of the 600 hours must be taught in the home location. The home schooling parent must maintain three separate records per child:

- 1) A daily log plan book
- 2) A portfolio of student work samples
- 3) A record of the student's academic progress

Minnesota – Home schooling parents must do everything that a traditional private school does, but in context of their home. Students graduate with home school diplomas and transcripts just as from a private school. Home schools must submit a compulsory instruction report to their local district by October 1st of every year to ensure meeting of all state educational

regulations, benchmarks testing. The “teacher” must pass a competency exam or hold a baccalaureate degree. Children must fall in the thirtieth percentile or no less than one grade level below other children of the same age. All home schooling is supervised by the local school district superintendent.

Arkansas – Home School law established in 1997. Notification is to be made to the local superintendent at the beginning of each school year upon withdrawal from school. National assessment testing is to be done in grades 5th, 7th, and 10th. Non-compliance is considered truancy. Students cannot fall more than two grades behind. Home schooling is not available to students under disciplinary action or expulsion. Students must be enrolled and attending classes with a public high school for at least nine months prior to graduation to be eligible for a district high school diploma.

Georgia – District must be notified within 30 days of the beginning of school and by September 1st every year thereafter. Each school day must include a minimum of 4.5 hours, and it must provide a basic academic program. Attendance must be kept and submitted to the local superintendent each month. A written annual program report must also be submitted. Parents may teach only their own children, and they must have a high school diploma or GED. Children are to take standardized tests every 2 years.

Title I

Title I is a federal program for education. It provides funds to schools with a student population which has a high poverty rate. The No Child Left Behind Law specifically targets Title I fund receiving schools with consequences for not meeting AYP.

QUESTIONS

- 1) How do state and federal decisions impact Lane County school districts?
- 2) How do private and public funding affect local school district goals?
- 3) How should national ranking of a state public education system and local districts be determined?
- 4) What does it mean “to be in the top 10% nationwide” (The Chalkboard Project Goal for Oregon education)?
- 5) What incentives stimulate students to graduate from high school?
- 6) How can districts increase graduation rates?

7) Is there an effective means to educate the general public about declining expenditures for public education?

8) How do Charter Schools and home schooling affect neighborhood schools?

9) Is emphasis on preparation of students for the workforce the best goal for Oregon's K-12 education?

10) What can Lane County school districts learn from states or districts that have higher success and graduation rates?