

# THRIVING COMMUNITIES SUMMIT

## EXPERT SUMMARY

### **Educational Opportunity - *We are educated***

#### **EDUCATION SNAPSHOT**

A strong public education system is a critical component of any thriving community. Good schools attract both residents and employers. Their well-educated graduates comprise a more qualified workforce, earn more income, create more jobs, and strengthen their communities. Eugene, Bethel and Springfield have a rich history of support for K-12 education. However, declining financial resources have compromised our ability to serve students. Unless our K-12 schools are equipped to provide a world-class education, our colleges, universities, and technical schools will not be able to overcome the knowledge gap of incoming freshmen. Our children will not be prepared to take advantage of higher education and to compete in a global economy. In other words, if our K-12 schools—which are the building blocks of our economy and our society—do not prosper, Lane County and Oregon cannot prosper.

We have seen a continual erosion of staffing capacity in the local school districts. Many schools have made substantial cuts in art, music, health, and physical education in order to maintain barely manageable class sizes in the core content areas. Larger class sizes translate into less individual attention for students—those who could excel and those who are struggling. Many electives have disappeared and most high school students don't receive a full schedule of courses each semester. Between 29% and 43% of our students are unable to complete high school in four years. This year, across our three districts, only 27% of our sophomores are on track to be college-ready in reading and only 23% are on track in math. The average age of school buildings in Eugene exceeds 50 years. Maintenance and other support systems are at an all-time low.

In 1997-98, Oregon ranked 15<sup>th</sup> in the nation in public school funding, spending 103.7% of the national average. By 2008-09, we had declined to 33<sup>rd</sup>, spending only 90.7% of the national average. Oregon public school funding has continued to decline over the past three years. Governor Kitzhaber has set a goal that by the year 2025, a full 40% of the state's adult population will hold a four-year college degree, another 40% will hold an associate degree or certificate, and the remaining 20% will have earned a high school diploma. There will be no high school dropouts, and all of our students will be prepared for college and career. The Governor has also encouraged us to plan for rebuilding early childhood education so that all students enter kindergarten ready to learn and all kindergartners have a full-day school experience.

These are the right goals. However, we will never achieve them unless we commit to making a very significant and immediate investment in our public education system. While the Governor advocates for higher levels of state funding for education, what can we do locally? We can pursue three steps that will move us forward.

First, we need to do everything we can at the local level to secure additional resources for our schools. That means funding local option levies in communities that have yet to pass them. It means supporting bond issues for capital expenses that can renew our infrastructure and provide long-term savings in energy and maintenance costs. It means capitalizing upon our local education foundations

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to garner contributions that can keep us on the front line of innovation. At the same time, we need to advocate for our legislative leaders to create the changes that can renew our investment in the future of our children and the future of our state.

Second, we need to apply new tools that prepare students to be college- and career-ready, such as inquiry-oriented and differentiated instruction. We must move beyond the teacher toiling alone in the classroom to a community of educators collaborating to address students' needs. We can create caring communities within our classrooms and schools that support children's social -emotional development and connection to school We can build alliances with the community organizations that serve our most needy students.

Third, we need to ask, "How are we positioning our community to create a better future for all of us?" Today, communities live and die not by their natural resources and geographic location but by the way they use their intellectual resources and human capital. A recent study revealed that successful cities have three qualities: 1) public schools and colleges with strong graduation rates; 2) the availability of jobs to support families; and 3) an environment rich in parks, arts, sports, and nature. Often spearheaded by the Chamber of Commerce, the effort to make these three elements come together was joined by social service organizations, educational institutions, and governmental leaders—all focused on collaboratively achieving a set of goals in each of these quality-of-life areas.

Like the cities deemed to be successful, Eugene, Bethel and Springfield have significant potential to collaborate in these critical areas. To join the ranks of successful cities, we must position our community to make the most of our combined resources. For example, how might we all benefit by locating a public library, health center, or YMCA inside or adjacent to a school facility? We need to learn from other communities with similar circumstances. And we need to launch a collective effort to achieve these goals so that we, too, can ensure a prosperous future for our children.

## **EDUCATION INITIATIVES RELEVANT TO THRIVING COMMUNITIES**

- 0 – 20 Seamless System of Education
- Achievement Compacts with the Oregon Education Investment Team
- 40-40-20 Goals
- Success by 6 Promise Neighborhood Initiative

### **Link between education and income:**

CHART: [http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep\\_chart\\_001.htm](http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm)

TABLE: <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0232.pdf>

*Education pays in higher earnings and lower unemployment rates.*

### **Oregon graduation rates:**

<http://www.ode.state.or.us/news/announcements/announcement.aspx?ID=7983&TypeID=5>

*67% of Oregon high school students, and \_\_\_% of 4J students, earn a regular diploma within 4 years of starting high school.*

### **Oregon college participation:**

<http://schools.oregonlive.com/college/>

*Compiled by Oregonian from National Student Clearinghouse data: 59% of Oregon high school graduates, and 66% of 4J graduates, enrolled in college within 16 months of graduating in 2009.*

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