

McMinnville School District

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TESTIMONY OF 3/16/17 TO THE EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE MARYALICE RUSSELL, Ed. D. SUPERINTENDENT, MCMINNVILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT

In 2009 (a year in which we had to cut more than 40 teachers due to a State School Fund shortfall), I met with the students pictured here when they were 1st graders, and I asked them what they want to be when they grow up. They attended the district's highest poverty school, with a free lunch rate of 85%. One of the students wanted to grow up to be a pizza delivery man, as that was the job his father had. I told them to be sure to graduate from high school, and then continue their education. I met with the same group of students in middle school and again in high school.



These students now aspire to be doctors, architects, welders, journalists, programmers, game designers, artist, actors, and dental hygienists. They are here with me today. They will graduate in 2019, the last year of the 2017-2019 biennium. Their school experience included the great recession, 40 teachers laid off, and significant reductions in their elementary programs. They then moved on to substantially reduced middle school programs. Now, they're facing the possibility of greatly reduced programs again during their high school experience. This is unacceptable. This cannot happen. Not to them, and not again.

In 1989, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development Task Force published *Turning points; Preparing American Youth for the 21st century*. In 1991, I was able to design a brand new school, and in 1992, I opened the school with a hand-picked staff trained to implement best practices to help adolescents succeed, as outlined in this groundbreaking report. After only one year of successful program implementation, Measure 5 passed. The following spring, I laid-off 8 teachers from my middle school. The school had to transition to a traditional schedule structure without

the necessary supports identified as best practice. Small schools within the larger school disappeared, the ability to personalize learning diminished, and that school, once filled with hopes and dreams for the future, has never returned to the staffing level it enjoyed 25 years ago.

In 2002, I joined the McMinnville School District, where I have been superintendent for the last 15 years. When I came to the district, my first task was to cut \$2 million dollars in programs from a list generated by the previous administration. The middle schools I inherited in the

new district had earlier cut staff and eliminated block scheduling as cost saving measures. Flexible blocks of learning time are important to middle schoolers. Those flexible blocks of time have never been restored.

In our elementary schools, we once had math and literacy specialists to provide personalized, targeted interventions. We had extended day and year programs for students needing additional instruction. Many of those highly-effective programs went away due to insufficient state funding of K-12 education. We offered kindergarten-plus during good financial years, adding an extra hour of instruction to the kindergarten day, but we had to eliminate it when funding declined. In some schools, we offered full day kindergarten, but that also had to be cut on this rollercoaster ride of the State School Fund.

Though the state has now funded full-day kindergarten, it has not funded K-12 education at a level that allows me to restore the other, highly-effective programs lost at all levels within the district. And speaking of kindergarten, I still cannot recover from the fact that, on average, as measured by the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment given the first two weeks of kindergarten, students in McMinnville enter school knowing only 4

letters. How can this be acceptable from any political perspective?



Ready for Kindergarten Program

School districts must be empowered to help families prepare their students for kindergarten, and we can do so with adequate state funding. In fact, the kindergarteners from our families that participate in a grant-funded program, focused on getting young children ready to learn, enter our schools knowing, on average, 23 letters. Such practices are highly-effective and districts need revenue to provide them.

In 2006, after three years of research and discussion about the high school of the future, we implemented whole school reform based on evidence-based best practices in school structure, instruction, culture, and climate. Today, McMinnville High School:

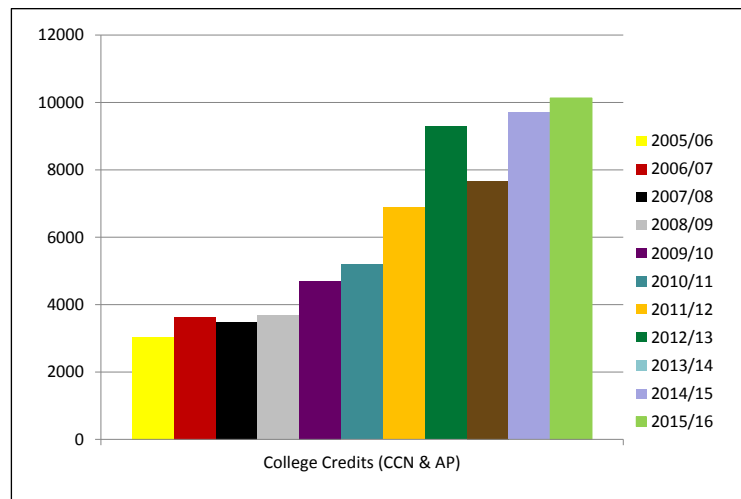
- Leads the state in the number of dual high school/college credits earned (see chart) with 10,130 earned last year
- Has a graduation rate above state average—by double digits among all subgroups
- Has eliminated the graduation achievement gap among Hispanic students and English Learners, as compared to the total population
- Has strong STEM and Pathway programs recognized by the U.S. Dept. of Education as a 'Showcase'

Since 2010, I've participated on the Quality Education Commission, which issued a report that identifies best practices and the cost of implementing those practices. Teaching and learning in McMinnville reflects many of the recommendations in the Quality Education report. Oregon educators know and are very capable of delivering the kind of educated workforce we want for our state. The job of schools is to implement effective practices. The job of the State is to adequately fund schools.

Inadequate resources are forcing McMinnville and districts throughout Oregon to select some and not all of the best practices we know to be important to student success. Often, government leaders talk about the implementation gap or question why one district may be more or less successful than another. I suggest that a lack of funding has significantly limited the menu of practices that districts can select from and actually implement with fidelity.

Districts, with the support of other resources—whether community partnerships or grants—can innovate and supplement, but the children of our state should not be subject to geographical luck. All Oregon students should have access to effective practice plus sufficient time to learn, and that can only be provided through adequate resourcing of our schools. Adequate funding of K-12 education is the only path to equity for all Oregonians.

At minimum, the state must allocate an \$8.4B appropriation for K-12 schools this biennium. With that allocation, and using reserve funds to make up the shortfall, McMinnville will be able to continue existing programs into next year, as will most districts.



I have been a school administrator for 35 years. For 25 of those years, I've had to make cuts. The students I met as 1st graders, the students here with me today, have been attending our schools during budget cut after budget cut, due to inadequate K-12 funding. They need to be assured that the programs of study they are planning for today are here tomorrow, and are here through their graduation in June 2019.