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Oregon Parents Deserve to Be the Voice for Kids’ Education Options

By Bobbie Jager

For the second year in a row, Oregon has reported the [third-lowest graduation rate in the country](#). With a four-year adjusted public high school graduation rate of 74.8% (2015-16), Oregon only beats Nevada and New Mexico, according to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#).

The typical response to this kind of bad news is for teachers unions and legislators to claim that taxpayers are “underfunding” public schools; and that’s why so many kids don’t make it to graduation. But [Oregon already spends more on K-12 education than 33 other states](#). According to the National Education Association’s [Rankings & Estimates report for 2016 and 2017](#), revenue per Oregon student in Average Daily Attendance is nearly \$14,000, including local, state, and federal funding. That puts Oregon more than four percent above the national average in school spending.

As a mother and parental choice advocate, I have been involved with education for 38 years, and I have been deeply involved at the state level here in Oregon for five. I have listened to story after story of young people whose parents went to extraordinary lengths to help them succeed in school. Whether through earning a scholarship to a private school, moving to another neighborhood or public school district, winning a charter school enrollment lottery, or choosing online or home school options, Oregon families have amazing tales to tell. While there are many inspiring success stories, there are also far too many heartbreaking examples of frustration and of families spending years fighting the government school bureaucracy.

I have interacted with the public school system for decades. Sadly, nothing is changing for the better. When is enough, enough? The one-size-fits-all, government-run school system isn’t meeting the learning needs of many kids today. Handing more money to the same system isn’t changing anything.

As parents, we have the right and the responsibility to say it’s time for us to have the power to choose the education options that are best for our children. We are the ones who tuck our children in at night, help them when they can’t understand their schoolwork, hold them when they “feel dumb” because they’re just not getting it, or support and encourage them when they are a “failure to launch” into



CASCADE POLICY INSTITUTE
4850 SW SCHOLLS FERRY RD.
SUITE 103
PORTLAND, OREGON 97225

T: 503.242.0900
F: 503.242.3822

INFO@CASCADEPOLICY.ORG
CASCADEPOLICY.ORG
SCHOOLCHOICEFOROREGON.COM

adult life because they didn't get the education they needed to get a good start. But parents are too often the last ones invited into the conversation or listened to.

To raise awareness about all the choices parents have for K-12 education today, Americans from coast to coast are celebrating National School Choice Week January 21-27, 2018. Beginning seven years ago with 150 events, the Week has grown exponentially ever since, becoming the world's largest education-related public awareness effort. National School Choice Week (www.schoolchoiceweek.com) is nonpartisan and nonpolitical and does not advocate for or against any legislation.

National School Choice Week celebrations include school fairs, parent nights, school tours, educational field trips, homeschool information sessions, student performances, celebratory rallies, and more. More than 32,240 events and activities will focus on all education options available today, including traditional public schools, public charter schools, public magnet schools, private schools, online learning, and homeschooling. More than 313 events [will take place in Oregon](#) alone, sponsored by private schools, charter schools, and other organizations.

Hundreds of thousands of parents already "vote with their feet" to get their children the education that is best suited to their talents, interests, needs, and learning styles. They sacrifice whatever it takes to make sure their children have the chance to succeed. Whatever kinds of schools parents choose, the landscape of educational options to meet students' learning needs is more diverse today than ever.

I believe that with Oregon's latest round of dismal graduation results, we are at a tipping point. There are no "do-overs" when a child is growing up. We must get it right from the start. [More choice in education](#) is the way of the future. Join us in celebrating National School Choice Week, and help us make a change for your—and for all—children.

*Bobbie Jager, Oregon's 2012 "Mother of the Year," is a parental choice advocate and the School Choice Outreach Coordinator for the Portland-based Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon's free market public policy research organization. A version of this article was [originally published by the Pamplin Media Group](#) and appeared in *The Portland Tribune* on January 25, 2018.*

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Please contact:

Cascade Policy Institute
4850 SW Scholls Ferry Rd.
Suite 103
Portland, Oregon 97225

Phone: (503) 242-0900
Fax: (503) 242-3822

info@cascadepolicy.org
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schoolchoicefororegon.com