

September 14, 2009

Synopsis of *A Gathering of Good Dinner & Discussion*

Oregon's Education Enterprise: The 40-40-20 vision and its impact on higher education

We, as a state, are vastly uneducated.

Our challenge for the larger community: How can we, as citizens, make the point that education is the key to the future prosperity of Oregon?

What we know:

- We need people at different educational levels to fulfill a variety of employment opportunities.
- The 40-40-20 plan, adopted by Governor Kulongoski, is shorthand for the Oregon's educational and occupational vista.
 - 40% of Oregonians earn college degrees
 - 40% of Oregonians have some college education: associates degrees or in the trades
 - 20% earn high school diploma
- We are nowhere near these numbers.
 - 12% of Oregonians aged 25 and over have not received a high school diploma.
 - 28% of Oregonians aged 25 and over have earned bachelor's degrees.
- The number of Oregonians who possess bachelor's degrees has increased in the last 10 years by only 6%. We, as a state, are vastly uneducated.
- There is a growing statistic in this state that older generations are more educated than the younger. The number of Oregonians earning bachelor's degrees aged 25-35 < number aged 35-45 doing so < number aged 45-55. Oregon is one of the few states in the nation where this is the case.
- 30 years ago, people didn't need higher education for a family wage job.
- Tuition has kept pace with inflation. We are spending the same amount per student as we were 20 years ago. Oregon places 44th in the nation per student spending in higher education, which is quite low.

Observations and ideas generated from the group discussion:

Oregon appears to possess an interesting demographic and antagonistic socio-cultural bias toward higher education.

- Parents with bachelor's degrees are not sending their kids to nor preparing their kids for a college education. Many parents without college education are not actively encouraging higher education for their children.
- The "payoff" of higher education seems unclear to families where higher education is foreign or who may have had unpleasant or poor educational experiences.
- Many people move to Oregon for the lifestyle, not for higher education, hence less likely to invest in it.

Remove barriers to higher education to ease the transition from high school to college

- Instill in children and families that the high school diploma is just a milepost on their educational journey.
- Make opportunities for high school academic success known to parents whose kids need assistance. Connect with families to increase awareness of educational paths.
- Peer influence plays a major role in fostering student success. For example, Cleveland high school has reduced their dropout rate by placing high risk kids in classrooms with higher achievers.
- Decrease the financial barrier and increase student potential. Offer incentives, opportunity grants and create sustainable state, merit-based scholarships to cover the first two years of college. A high percentage of students who receive financial assistance the first two years of college find a way to complete their education.
 - Learn from and improve on ideas from other states, such as Florida's *Bright Futures* program
 - Review how other countries, such as Australia, provide higher education to students.

Increase Accountability

- Leaders ensure economic opportunities exist and take advantage of Oregon's brainpower
- Businesses provide jobs to qualified individuals and support higher education
- Citizens value education as imperative to our state's health and vitality
- Community demand for higher teacher and student performance standards
- Voter, parent, and community support teachers by advocating for smaller class size, classroom support and stable financial structure
- Parents participate in their child's education, modeling the value and importance of education and individual potential

Move past chicken-or-the-egg thinking

- Attract and keep large scale employers to Oregon (Tektronix, Intel, Freightliner, Knowledge Learning Corporation are great examples) who in turn support higher education and create jobs for graduates
- Stop questioning whether we should stop funding higher education
- Realize we cannot rely on the legislature to sustain funds for higher education

Higher Education has to mobilize its own advocacy organization.

- Demand stabilization for post secondary education. Encourage the same impassioned debate as we do for public education.
- The **Oregon Higher Education Alliance** is a newly formed advocacy group. OHEA is seeking regional revenue sources; increasing partnerships with local businesses and creating deeper integration with K-12.

Homework: How can we make the pitch for the need to recognize higher education as a public good, a wise investment for everybody?