

# The Oregonian

## IN MY OPINION - MEASURE 26-84

### **Our schools, our kids are counting on us**

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PEGGY FOWLER, SAM ADAMS AND RANDALL EDWARDS

Portland is fortunate to have a public school system strongly supported by local families and their neighbors. That's why our schools are the anchors of our neighborhoods. They help maintain the vitality and livability of our community by attracting and retaining families with children. We care about our local schools and want to provide children with the best possible education.

Our public schools also are vital on a larger level: Schools teach young people the skills that businesses need when hiring workers and leaders. Quality schools are critical to our state's continued economic recovery, producing graduates who are ready to perform on the job or to continue on to college or technical training. Portlanders also want our children to reach their highest potential, while learning the importance of giving back to their community. That's why leaders throughout the community are supporting the local option levy, Measure 26-84, for Portland Public Schools.

This levy will provide essential funding for our schools to offer reasonable class sizes and up-to-date books and materials. Students will get individual attention from teachers when they need it. Struggling students will have access to special programs to help them succeed. Every school will be able to offer a class of full-day kindergarten for children whose families cannot afford to pay for it. Math and science programs will be strengthened, with updated learning materials and lab supplies. All of these are critical ingredients for our children's education.

In the past few years, Portland Public Schools has had to rely on temporary, cobbled-together funding to avoid massive cuts to teaching positions and educational programs. Now that both the local temporary income tax and the previous local option have expired, our schools are turning to us for continued support. This local option is the basis for five years of stable and predictable funding, allowing more students access to a well-rounded curriculum and essential preparation for their futures.

Efficient use of our tax dollars is essential in today's economy, and Portland Public Schools is meeting the mark. Just 4.3 percent of the Portland Public Schools budget goes to central administration -- which is geared completely toward supporting teaching and learning in our schools. Today, central staff is 33 percent smaller than it was 10 years ago. The district is selling or leasing unneeded buildings. Buses have been switched to propane, and bonds have been refinanced -- all to divert more dollars to classrooms.

Equally important, Portland's students are succeeding in school. Test scores are up at every grade level. Portland students score above the state average on achievement tests; that's almost unheard of for an urban school district. Our schools are setting the bar higher for all students, and many are beginning to close the achievement gap.

All the money raised by the local option levy will go to the classroom. An independent citizen oversight committee will ensure that it is spent as voters directed -- in the classroom -- for teachers, updated textbooks and classroom materials. None of the funds raised by this measure can be spent on administration.

A responsible, focused school system is welcome news for all of us, whether we have children in schools or not. Quality schools are the backbone of our community and the foundation for a strong economy. They are critical to attracting businesses and high-wage jobs to Portland and Oregon. Our children get just one shot at an excellent education, and our community is responsible for providing that, just as our grandparents did for us.

We count on our schools; now they're counting on us.

Peggy Fowler is CEO and president of Portland General Electric. Sam Adams is a member of the Portland City Council. Randall Edwards is Oregon state treasurer. They lead the finance committee in support of Measure 26-84.