

## Editorial: Second high school has success in McMinnville

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By NewsRegister.com Staff Report

It's hard to keep up with innovations in education, perhaps because there have been so many of them over the decades. Seems like there's always a "greatest new thing." Learn to read without phonetics? Sure! New math? CIM and CAM? Mastery Learning? You name it and it's been tried, each with varying levels of success.

But if early indicators are any proof, we think Oregon's Small School Initiative shows remarkable potential. Locally, McMinnville's Media Arts & Communications Academy is an example of its success. Dropout rates have decreased, and attendance and graduation rates have increased. Reading and math scores have increased between 5 and 6 percent.

Nationally, the genesis of the program pointed to research that students perform better in smaller, more caring and personalized learning environments. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, a pioneer in funding the small school approach, placed special emphasis on communities of traditionally underserved students.

In 1996, the Oregon Business Council founded the nonprofit E3 — Employers for Education Excellence. Businesses that want to attract top talent understand the role of education in shaping communities. E3's mission is clear: Oregon's success in the global economy is contingent on an educated workforce.

Early in the last decade, the Gates Foundation, along with Meyer Memorial Trust, selected E3 to lead the Oregon Small Schools Initiative. Together, they provided \$28 million in grants to be administered by the nonprofit. In 2004, the first schools enrolled students; MACA opened in 2007.

The Oregon Small Schools Initiative is the largest high school reform project in Oregon history. It aims specifically to address graduation rates and student achievement by creating small high schools characterized by rigorous classroom instruction, highly relevant course work and meaningful student-to-teacher relationships.

At MACA, the academic focus is math, media arts, communications, technology and project-based learning. Its strategies include partnerships with Chemeketa Community College, Northwest Film Center and local businesses. The math emphasis requires specific class time and support classes. There are professional learning communities and pathway options in web design, and still- and moving-image arts and communications.

According to independent analysis by ECONorthwest, an Oregon-based economics firm, all students enrolled in initiative high schools have made measurable achievement gains. The schools have been especially effective in raising academic results for students from low-income households, making significant progress in closing this achievement gap.

The current enrollment is 271 at MACA, which technically is McMinnville's second high school while sharing various activity and athletic program with McMinnville High School. Its first class will graduate in June 2010, and many of those students, by their own admission, would not have made it to graduation in a traditional high school setting.

For us, that's solid proof of success.