

Chalkboard's K-12 Action Plan

#3: INVOLVE PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

Goal: Increase meaningful parent/adult and community involvement in schools to improve academic achievement for all students.

Success Measurement: A new statewide measure would show an increase in the percent of parents deemed "involved at a satisfactory level". School officials would report high levels of parental involvement in all areas of school decision-making and volunteering and attendance at parent-teacher conferences (including parents who are economically disadvantaged, are disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or are of a racial or ethnic-minority) in background surveys from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Public Opinion: Oregonians believe that the biggest obstacle to successful schools is the lack of direct parent support in the learning process. According to Chalkboard's public opinion poll, 83 percent of Oregonians thought that helping parents become direct partners in their children's education was a high or urgent priority. A recent survey of school officials suggests that Oregon's parental involvement falls roughly mid-range nationally, but lags well behind involvement reported by officials in the Northeast and Midwest. Chalkboard's Citizen Feedback Guide survey asked people to rate the idea of "school environments where teachers, parents and school staff are encouraged to communicate with each other to promote an enhanced teaching and learning climate. Parents and their children's teachers should expect to communicate on a regular basis." Respondents rated this concept at 4.3 on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Oregon Department of Education's parental involvement measurement on the statewide Oregon Report Card received a rating of 3.2.

Recommendations & Concepts:

Conduct statewide parent survey. Chalkboard will use a statewide involvement survey of parents with children in the public school system to set a baseline of current satisfaction levels. Chalkboard will share survey findings with school districts to help inform their criteria for satisfactory parent involvement. One area of focus will be establishing school environments that promote adult involvement.

Local parental involvement policies. Supportive, engaged parents or other adults in the home and family are critical to student success. School districts should use the new Oregon Department of Education (ODE) parent and community involvement policy as a template for creating (or revising) their own district policy. Renewed focus on such policies should result in higher levels of parental involvement, particularly for families of low-income or minority students. The policy should use available resources and integrate ideas from each district by bringing educators, community organizations, parents, and businesses to the table. Chalkboard will encourage all districts to have strong involvement policies and will recognize schools that demonstrate increased parental and community involvement. Chalkboard will partner with ODE and its current parent advisory group, as well as school districts, to focus efforts on this common goal.

Report on Oregon Report Card. In order to hold schools and parents accountable and encourage positive partnerships, Chalkboard will assist ODE in developing criteria for satisfactory parent involvement so that ODE can measure districts and include results on the Oregon Report Card.

Improve educator/administrator training to work with parents and community members. The Chalkboard workgroup on Educator/Administrator Quality will consider the best ways to train teachers to effectively encourage and use parental involvement. The Teachers, Standards and Practices Commission (TSPC) recently adopted new licensure standards for principals that emphasize community involvement.

Offer "Public School 101" for parents. Parents should be able to contribute as partners in schools. That means they need to know what to expect from the school, and what the school expects of them. Parents need to know what their children are supposed to learn in each grade, how that learning will be tested, how to advocate for their children, how the parent can help at home, and what parents should expect from teachers and from the school system. Chalkboard will work with districts where parent involvement has been low to engage parent leaders, community organizing group representatives and school staff in school involvement workshops. Designed to help parents understand the education system and navigate the home/school connection in meaningful ways, these workshops are supported by the No Child Left Behind Act's Parental Involvement Provisions. Participants would gain skills they need to galvanize parents at individual school sites. From this leadership group, Chalkboard hopes to build a team of expert peers who can be called in to assist schools who are struggling with parent and community involvement.

Promote business partnerships that encourage parents and community members to get involved in school: Schools and students need community members and parents to step inside their world and lend a hand. Whether its volunteering to be a SMART reader, signing up to fix-up a school building with SOLV, or participating on a school decision-making committee like a Site Council, there are numerous ways Oregonians can and should step inside a

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school building. Chalkboard encourages all businesses (small, medium and large) to think creatively about ways they can promote school involvement among their employees. A few suggestions include flextime for parents to attend parent-teacher conferences or an extra paid half-day off to spend time volunteering in school.

Supportive Research: Parental involvement is crucial to children's success in school and in life. Children perform better and are interested in pursuing higher levels of education when their parents are involved in their schooling. Active parental involvement may be key to solving problems related to achievement, truancy, and drug use. Research also suggests that strong parental involvement correlates with higher student attendance and improved classroom behavior; NWREL reports that "30 years of research has consistently linked family involvement to higher student achievement, better attitudes toward school, lower dropout rates, increased attendance, and many other positive outcomes for students, families, and schools" (Increasing Student Attendance, 22).

The National PTA calls for more training to facilitate parental involvement and asserts that excellent schools are created in partnerships with superintendents, principals, teachers, parents, and community members who are passionate about student success. The PTA offers a *Parent Involvement Schools of Excellence Certification* to help schools assess and improve their parent involvement practices where needed. Through the certification process, individual schools work to achieve the PTA's six standards of parental involvement: parent-school communication, parenting, student learning, parent volunteering, school decision-making and advocacy, and collaborating with community. These standards are endorsed by nearly 100 health and education organizations. A number of Oregon schools are in the middle of the program's six-month certification process.

Research on parental involvement presents hundreds of possible school-level approaches to boost parental volunteerism, involvement in homework, and attendance at parent-teacher conferences. The School Development Program (SDP), formulated by James Comer of Yale University, has improved student achievement and parental involvement in more than 1,000 schools, and could be a useful tool in Oregon for schools with a history of low parental involvement or low student achievement to initiate more parental education involvement and volunteerism within their communities. The SDP builds strategies for parental involvement around increasing student development. Chalkboard's review of the literature and discussions with policy experts identified a number of promising practices that could work for specific schools but none worthy of wide-scale implementation. For a policy option in this area, we turned to Dr. Robert Bain, a national expert in public-sector accountability systems at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. Bain recommends that Oregon require individual schools to develop their own list of satisfactory parental involvement criteria. These criteria should include: developing and disseminating school-level standards of satisfactory parental involvement; holding parents and schools accountable for their part in meeting these standards; ensuring public reporting of parental involvement based on school-level standards; and documenting best practices and incentives that improve parental involvement.

Oregon schools widely report the need for greater parental involvement, yet parents and administrators conflict about how involved parents should be. At one NCLB Parent and Community gathering in Salem, schools encouraged parents to become more involved, while at the same time some parents complained that they did not feel welcome in schools. The Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality has been working to improve the climate for parents in schools. As Eduardo Angulo reported, this means changing the school administrators' "silent policy" that discouraged parents from taking an active role in local schools (Statesman Journal, 2/27/05).

(Please visit the "Download Center" section of www.chalkboardproject.org to see source data: Citizen Public Opinion Statewide Poll: Highlights of Key Findings; Citizen Feedback Guide Survey Results; and ECONW Report: Condition of K-12 Education in Oregon, pp. i to vi, 2-2 to 2-11; Improving Quality & Strengthening Accountability in Oregon's Schools: Full Report, Ch. 8, pp. 8-1 to 8-7, 8-13 to 8-17.)