

Summary of Civic Engagement Feedback – Cross-Section of Oregonians August, 2005

I. Introduction

For over a year, Chalkboard has been asking Oregonians for their best ideas to strengthen our K-12 public schools. This dialogue has gone back and forth many times – we wanted to listen to your thoughtful ideas and connect them with best educational practices. We started out by listening to focus group participants, citizens in a statewide poll, and stakeholder feedback. By far, the largest and most critical effort that was undertaken during this period was Chalkboard’s statewide civic engagement process, which reached out and heard from Oregonians in all 36 counties. This process consisted of a number of different information-gathering activities including regional meetings throughout the state, Sojourn performances-regional discussions, community discussion groups, website visits, and an online survey.

Thousands of Oregonians have participated in Chalkboard’s civic engagement process since mid-January of this year. An overview of all civic engagement activities can be found at www.chalkboardproject.org in the “Where We’ve Been” section of the website.

Civic engagement participants were asked to rate and rank the various initiatives presented in Chalkboard’s Citizen Feedback Booklet. Chalkboard has now finished processing all the completed booklets. Following is a summary of all data collected from 1) a statistically reliable online survey which involved administration of the Feedback Booklet to nearly 800 Oregonians to learn how a representative cross-section of Oregonians felt about the initiatives, and 2) all other statewide civic engagement activities.¹ Accompanying this report is a complete set of tables showing the final tabulations.

The results below, including an initiative’s rating or ranking relative to other initiatives, was only some of the considerable amount of information Chalkboard considered in developing its Action Plan. Other information considered included extensive educational practices research, statewide telephone polling, and additional opinion research with stakeholder group members.

II. Highest Rated and Ranked Initiative Concepts

A. Parental Involvement.

On-Line Survey Results: Seven parental involvement initiative concepts were presented, all of which scored on the “agree” side of the scale.² School environments that encourage teachers, parents, and school staff to communicate with each other (#6) was clearly ranked the highest, and was one of two concepts with the highest average rating of 4.3. The other was parents limiting TV and video game time (#4). Over half strongly agreed with both of these ideas.

Although the Individual Development Plans (IDPs) concept was not included in the rankings, it was in the second tier of ratings averages (3.9) and 53% strongly agreed with it.

¹ The ratings and rankings reported in this summary for the other statewide civic engagement activities are not necessarily representative of all who participated in Chalkboard’s civic engagement process or of the full population of Oregonians.

² Unless otherwise indicated, the scale for presenting findings is 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree.

Civic Engagement Results: School environments that encourage teachers, parents, and school staff to communicate with each other (#6) was ranked and rated the highest (4.6/65% strongly agree). Also highly rated were parents limiting TV and video game time (#4) and parent education classes (#5) at 4.3 (58% and 48% strongly agree). When asked for other ideas for parental involvement, the most common response was to emphasize its importance.³ Civic engagement findings were analyzed by parent versus other respondents. Of the three top rated results presented in the previous paragraph, both school environments that encourage communication (#6) and parent education classes (#5) revealed a difference where parents agreed slightly more than others.

Several of the top mentions among comments about how to improve parent involvement focused on changes in the parent-teacher relationship. Other ideas mentioned often were emphasizing the importance for parents to be involved, a welcoming family environment, parent education classes, and employer incentives.

As with the on-line survey, IDPs were in the second tier of average ratings (3.7), but with only 36% strongly agreeing. Comments about IDPs were more negative than neutral or positive.

B. Funding Stability.

On-Line Survey Results: Two funding stability concepts were presented. Establishing a guaranteed annual reserve in the state general fund for budgetary shortfalls received a higher rating (3.7) and percent that strongly agreed (43%). Allowing school districts to ask voters to augment funds was rated above average (3.3), but only half as many strongly agreed.

Civic Engagement Results: A guaranteed annual reserve was rated higher (4.3) and had a higher strongly agree percent (57%) than allowing districts to ask voters for funds (3.8/39% strongly agree).

Comments about establishing the annual reserve fund were varied, with “make the fund protected for education only” and “where will dollars come from?” mentioned slightly more often. The most common comment about districts asking local voters for money was that “funding would not be equal between districts.” Asked for other ideas for ensuring stable school funding, comments often focused on some type of tax reform, with sales tax and revising corporation taxes mentioned the most.

³ Civic engagement participants were asked open-ended for comments and ideas on most questions. Only responses from Albany, Astoria, N. Clackamas, The Dalles, Baker City, and Pendleton were processed and included in this report.

C. Quality Educators.

On-Line Survey Results: Eleven initiatives for quality educators were presented. Two had very similar high ratings (4.3) and percent who strongly agreed (56% and 54%):

- ♦ require teachers and principals to participate in systematic professional development (#1)
- ♦ improve processes to review the job performance of teachers and principals and set clear expectations and consequences for those in need of improvement (#9)

The latter also got the highest ranking, with 20% indicating it was most important among all eleven. Rewarding teachers and principals with incentives for skill development and working in high need schools and subject areas (#8) and make the removal process more effective (#10) also had high ratings and half strongly agreed.

Civic Engagement Results: The highest rating was for requiring districts to provide peer mentoring to new teachers and principals (#2/4.2/47% strongly agree), followed by three initiatives rated 4.1 with 40% to 41% strongly agree: requiring teachers to participate in systematic professional development (#1), rewarding teachers and principals with incentives (#8), and improving processes to review teacher and principal job performance (#9).

The most-mentioned ideas for how to have quality educators were increasing pay, mentoring system, improving the process to remove ineffective teachers and administrators, treating teachers as professionals, and more support for teachers. While all four of the highest rated initiatives showed small parent-other respondent differences, only #9 had more than a 0.1 difference (4.2 parent to 4.0 other; 43% to 38% strongly agree).

D. Good Readers.

On-Line Survey Results: Both proposals to assure each child reads at grade level by third grade did fairly well. Conducting annual reading assessments and providing one-on-one tutoring for all K-3 students who fall below grade level (#2) was rated (4.0/46% strongly agree) and ranked the highest (52% most important). Minimizing class sizes in K-1 grades was rated slightly lower (#1/3.8/43% strongly agree).

Civic Engagement Results: Minimizing K-1 grade class sizes rated higher (#1/4.5/65% strongly agree) than conducting annual reading assessments and providing tutoring (#2/4.2/52%). Rankings showed some preference for class size over annual reading assessments (40% to 31%). Participant comments about minimizing K-1 class sizes included the need for small classes, adding additional staff, giving singular attention, and including additional grades. Comments about annual reading assessments included more parental involvement and assessments conducted often; others asked how it would be funded.

E. Budget Accountability.

On-Line Survey Results: Oregonians agreed with using the type of figures presented in the Feedback Booklet when school districts share budget information with the public (#2/4.1). Agreement was not as strong when asked about information on the figures helping them gain a better understanding of how and where school dollars are spent (#1/3.4).

Asked to rank six different key findings for their information value, the following were ranked the highest, although by three or fewer out of 10:

- ♦ showing the number of students by type, the per-student spending on each type, and the total expenditures by type (#1/28%)
- ♦ spending per student by type of student and revenue source (#2/18%)

Civic Engagement Results: Participants agreed with using the type of budget information in the Feedback Booklet (#2/3.9) to a greater degree than the information in the figures helped them (#1/3.5). They ranked the informative value of showing the number of students, per-student spending, and total expenditures by type the highest (#1/16%) and comparing Oregon's expenditures with national averages the next highest (#5/13%). Participants suggested, among many ideas, that more detail, better graphic presentation, comparing to other states, districts or schools, and cost related to achievement would be helpful information about how public school dollars are being spent.

F. Additional Topics. Five additional topic areas were included in the Feedback Booklet and participants were asked for additional topic areas for Chalkboard to consider or research. Although no single idea stood out, they commented on the need to have solid funding, more parental involvement, student accountability, CIM/CAM elimination, focus on the basics, and removing ineffective teachers and administrators among many other suggestions.

Noteworthy is that many of the following initiatives were rated or ranked higher than the initiative concepts presented above. The reader is reminded that these ratings and rankings were not the only information considered by Chalkboard in selecting which initiatives to pursue.

✓ *Readiness and support to meet standards.*

On-Line Survey Results: Three initiatives – enhanced capacity to support schools that fail to meet standards (#2), schools conduct a systematic process to validate the effectiveness of their reading programs (#3), and expand and fund after school tutoring and community programs (#4) – were similarly rated (4.1 to 4.2; 47% to 51% very important). Rated slightly lower was providing highly targeted support for low-income students to attend preschool and piloting subsidized full-day kindergarten (#1/3.9).

Civic Engagement Results: Two initiatives – provide highly targeted support to low-income students (#1) and expand and fund after school tutoring and community programs (#4) – were rated the highest (both 4.1/44% and 42% very important). The other two initiatives were rated somewhat lower at 3.9/28% very important (#2 – enhanced capacity to support schools) and 3.8/27% very important (#3 – process to validate effectiveness of reading programs). Those who were not parents

showed a small preference for highly targeted support for low-income students (#1/4.1 to 4.0 for parents).

✓ *School programs.*

On-Line Survey Results: Among six school program ideas, creating an environment within the school system which includes support for the arts, music, physical education, and athletics clearly stood out (#3/4.2 rating) with over 50% saying it was very important. Rated next was adopting a policy where each school building has a written plan to increase civility and create a more positive learning atmosphere (#5/4.1), closely followed by creating a policy to weigh and measure all K-4 students, meet federal nutrition standards, require daily physical activity in K-12, reduce children's screen time, and teach wellness and healthful living (#6/4.0).

Civic Engagement Results: Creating an environment which includes support for the arts, music, physical education, and athletics (#3) was clearly rated highest at 4.4, with 58% very important. Rated next highest at 3.7 were adopting a policy where each school building has a written plan to increase civility and create a more positive learning atmosphere (#5/32% very important) and creating a health and wellness policy (#6/31% very). Two lower ranked initiatives – allowing students and parents to select their public schools (#1) and vouchers (#2) – had notably more support among parents.

✓ *Evaluation and governance systems.*

On-Line Survey Results: Evaluating student achievement and providing alternative teaching and assessing methods based on skills rather than time-in-class rated higher (#2/4.3/over half very important). The other initiative – new governance structures that give parents and students additional choices – also rated fairly high (#1/3.9/one-third very important).

Civic Engagement Results: Evaluating student achievement and providing alternative teaching and assessing methods based on skills (#2) rated the highest at 3.7, although only 21% said it was very important. New governance structures that allow parents and students additional choices was rated lower (3.3/13% very important), but there was slightly more support among parents.

✓ *Structural efficiencies.*

On-Line Survey Results: All but one of the seven structural efficiency initiatives had ratings between 3.6 and 3.8. Four were at 3.8 – altering the Legislature's schedule to better align with revenue and budget timetables (#2), statewide payroll and student tracking system and centralized online purchasing (#4), create a comprehensive data system (#6), and consider alternative models for labor management dynamics (#7) – but only 29% to 31% said very important. Redirecting funding of ESDs to local school districts was next (#3/3.7), followed by per student funding levels based on number of students and average wages (#1/3.6).

The lowest rating was for eliminating transportation-matching funds and distributing a fixed block grant based on program efficiency, and establishing consortiums to reduce energy purchasing (#5/3.3).

Civic Engagement Results: The highest rated structural efficiency concept was altering the Legislature's schedule (#2/3.9), but only 30% said very important. Three initiatives rated 3.5 (17% to 19% very important) – establish a beginning per-student funding level (#1), redirect ESD funding to local school districts (#3), and alternative labor-management dynamic models (#7). As with the on-line survey, the lowest rated related to transportation funding (#5/3.0). Initiatives #1, #2, and #3 showed slight (0.1) parent-other differences.

✓ *Alternative funding approaches.*

On-Line Survey Results: Five approaches were presented. Funding school districts based on student attendance rather than enrollment was the highest rated (#1/3.6/31% very important), followed by increase funding resources available to schools (#4/3.5/20% very important). The only two initiatives that had ratings on the “not important” side of the scale were in this topic area. Lowest rated was increasing student fees, with waivers, for things like lockers, parking, lab and art supplies, and sports (#3/2.5). Rated low, but with a percent very important more similar to some of the other initiatives, was to evaluate instituting a sales tax or changing revenue streams and dedicating revenue to K-12 (#5/2.6).

Civic Engagement Results: Some results for alternative funding approaches were very dissimilar from the on-line survey. Rated highest was to evaluate a sales tax or dedicating revenue to K-12 (#5/4.0 versus 2.6 for on-line). Unlike on-line participants, who rated funding school districts on student attendance the highest (#1/3.6), those in other civic engagement activities rated this idea a point lower at 2.6. However, both rated increasing funding resources available to schools second highest (#4/3.6), and increasing student fees the lowest (#3/2.4).