



How Well Is Oregon Supporting Excellence in Our Schools?

A summary of Chalkboard's study on professional development

The Chalkboard Project has looked long and hard to find out what it will take to elevate Oregon's K-12 public school system to among the best in the nation. No single strategy is sufficient, but one stands out above the rest: Attract and support great teachers and teaching. Our research shows that teacher effectiveness is the biggest single factor influencing gains in student achievement – an influence bigger than race, poverty, parent's education or any other factors, including class size. If we want all students to succeed, we need great teachers in every classroom.

The challenges teachers face are changing all of the time, from increasing populations of students who speak English as a second language, to more rigorous graduation requirements. Every successful business invests in keeping its employees well trained and at the top of their profession. Teachers need that investment, too. They need more time to collaborate with their peers to solve classroom challenges. Time for in-depth, ongoing professional development to find new ways to deliver literacy, math, science or history content to students in ways they will understand. Time for opportunities to share great, new teaching methods with their peers.

Chalkboard's outreach to teachers over the past four years has raised questions about whether Oregon does a good enough job of providing teachers with the ongoing professional support they need. In a rigorous study conducted over the past several months to answer those questions, Chalkboard found that professional development for Oregon teachers is inconsistent and unevaluated and tends to be random and episodic. Development opportunities vary widely by district and even within districts. No system exists to provide equitable access to quality, ongoing staff development, or to share "best practices" that have a clear impact on student achievement. As a result, it's difficult to know whether Oregon's investment in professional development is really helping to increase student achievement.

Chalkboard reviewed professional development practices in six geographically and demographically diverse Oregon school districts, pored over survey data from Oregon teachers and their peers across the country, and revisited findings from focus groups with teachers. Chalkboard initiated the review with the following national findings in mind:

- Professional development that provides teachers more "content knowledge" – more information about the subject matter they teach – is most strongly linked to increasing student achievement.
- Professional development content for curriculum, instruction, and assessment must be research/evidence-based.
- The information must be delivered by a dynamic, credible, and knowledgeable expert.
- Training that takes place over several days or weeks and is reinforced through follow up has more impact on student achievement than one-day workshops.

Our research found there is no consistent way to measure the effectiveness of – or even general satisfaction with – professional development activities in Oregon. Standards for what constitutes "quality" professional development have not been articulated. Yet new national research shows that in states like Vermont that have adopted statewide professional development standards and professional learning networks, teacher satisfaction with staff development opportunities soars.

To truly support teacher excellence, Chalkboard believes the following steps are necessary to assure increased student achievement and powerful teaching and learning in every Oregon classroom:

- ➔ **Equity:** Develop statewide partnerships to make sure all educators have equal access and time devoted to high-quality professional development opportunities.
- ➔ **Quality:** Adopt quality standards for professional development similar to those adopted in 30 other states.
- ➔ **Professional Learning:** Establish an electronic learning network to link all Oregon educators with resources and best practices.
- ➔ **Time:** Encourage state and local policymakers to invest more time and resources to professional collaborative learning linked to increasing student achievement.
- ➔ **Accountability:** Support accountability systems that link professional development activities and outcomes with school district improvement plans and goals.

Improving professional development should be a high priority. When educators receive the support and training they need and want to enhance their skills, students win. Ensuring high-quality professional development statewide is a critical to our schools and to our future.