



Chalkboard Project Focus Group Highlights

– PRINCIPALS –

Summary of research methodology: Three focus group discussions were held during May 2004 with 12 public school principals from three regions: Southern Oregon and Willamette Valley (including Medford, Corvallis, and Eugene), Central and Eastern Oregon (including Bend, Pendleton, Baker City, and Klamath Falls), and the three county Portland metropolitan region.

Highlights of research findings: The findings emerge from the major areas discussed with the principals.

Student Achievement Assessment

Principals were the most positive group (compared with students and teachers) when assessing student achievement in their district. They noted the quality of teachers, size of classes, community support, and traditions of high student performance (particularly in the Central/Eastern and Southern Oregon/Valley groups). They also had a more nuanced view of student achievement. “Excellence is not a point we reach, but a commitment we make to keep improving.”

Problems with the K-12 System

“Whatever happened to the partnership with everyone?”

Principals expressed two central frustrations with the K-12 system:

- ◆ Funding limitations
- ◆ Undue focus on test scores as a measure of success

They talked about the impacts these frustrations had on the education system, from classroom constraints to their ability to connect programming to their communities outside of the school day. They were generally more critical than teachers about the lack of understanding policymakers and the public have of the complexities of a successful school.

–PRINCIPALS Continued–

Best Practices

Principals had a broad view of both needs and opportunities. Their school-wide framework and attention to the array of student populations in their schools were clear in their responses. They identified a number of best practices involving staff opportunities, curriculum, pedagogy, and community involvement. Specific ideas included:

- ◆ Smaller class sizes
- ◆ More staff development
- ◆ Increased teacher collaboration
- ◆ Greater parent involvement
- ◆ Strategies to better serve ESL students
- ◆ Elementary reading support
- ◆ All day kindergarten
- ◆ Using data to drive improvements in classrooms

Role for Chalkboard

Principals felt Chalkboard had a role as an outside agent with the resources to finance and fund school improvement to help make schools more active, robust learning centers. Their specific suggestions included:

- ◆ Sharing information
- ◆ Promoting staff development
- ◆ Fostering collaboration among teachers, parents, and community members
- ◆ Training parents
- ◆ Increasing family involvement
- ◆ Supporting after school and community programming

Role for Principals

“Educate the powerful community members about the real needs and issues in schools.”

Principals saw a role for increasing schools’ relationships and involvement with their larger communities to strengthen what goes on in a school and to nurture greater public understanding and support for schools. Some also saw this extending to informing policymakers’ decisions about funding and policy.