



Chalkboard Project Focus Group Highlights

– SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS –

Summary of research methodology: Seven school district superintendents representing districts of varying sizes and locations throughout the state were interviewed by phone about issues related to K-12 public education in Oregon. Each was asked the same set of questions during an interview that took on average 20 minutes.

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

Best practices

“Teachers teaching a variety of ways.”

“Cultural competency and differentiated instruction in general.”

“What works is developing professional learning communities.”

The superintendents were asked what they wished was more available in their schools and what were the most important things to improve achievement. Their responses fell into the general areas:

- ◆ Differentiated *instructional strategies* and techniques to meet the needs of different students
- ◆ Highly qualified *teachers* who get the support they need
- ◆ Timely *data* that teachers could use for ongoing assessments and helping individual students
- ◆ Meeting the needs of an increasingly *diverse student body*, including lowering class sizes, instructional techniques to aid language development, increasing the performance of kids “starting with disadvantages,” and full day kindergarten

Impediments

“[In]sufficient time for staff development.”

“Instability of funding. ‘You have this much...now you don’t.’”

“Funding at 70% level – so much support has been stripped away. Teachers are doing non-teaching work, thus quality teaching is suffering.”

– SUPERINTENDENTS Continued –

In response to questions about what was interfering with their ability to do what they wanted their district to do, superintendents talked about:

- ◆ Inadequate *teacher training* and lack of time for staff development
- ◆ *Inadequate and unstable funding* that leads to class sizes that “interfere with relationship building” and less support for teachers and makes it difficult to plan
- ◆ *No Child Left Behind* that, in spite of a good spirit and title, includes a “massive focus” on tests, conflicts with needed school reform, and relies on a flawed measuring system that “compares apples and oranges”

Accountability

“The public wants to know money is being well spent and they are buying a quality product – they expect schools to be performing.”

Asked what they thought the public meant when people refer to accountability, most thought this meant that *students are learning and money is being well spent*. They expressed concern about how information is presented to the public, believing it can “distort” and “misrepresent” student achievement and how schools are spending money.

Role for Chalkboard

“Provide a mirror for the real conditions that exist in Oregon schools.”

“Helping build public consensus on what quality education should look like and how it should be funded.”

“There really is exceptional stuff going on in the schools – find any way to get people in there to see.”

The superintendents had a number of suggestions for the Chalkboard Project:

- ◆ Be a *neutral, objective observer* of what is and is not working well
- ◆ Foster *community engagement* to “coalesce the community for better understanding”
- ◆ Get the *attention of the legislature* to stabilize and ensure adequate funding