

Chalkboard Project – 13 Proposals Summary of Citizen Feedback June 2006

— Introduction —

For the past two years, the Chalkboard Project (Chalkboard) has taken a comprehensive and independent look at Oregon's public schools. They have commissioned deep and broad research in the key areas of school quality and funding and conducted extensive public opinion research to find out what Oregonians think about our schools and to gather their ideas for improving them. Thousands of diverse individuals, groups, and organizations have weighed in to date.

This document summarizes the most recent citizen feedback Chalkboard received from March – June 2006 on 13 proposals that support teachers, boost reading skills, make our school system more accountable to taxpayers and stabilize school funding through:

- **Statewide random sample online survey**
- **Website visitors online survey**
- **20 facilitated discussions throughout the state**

The statewide random sample online survey (random survey) involved 699 respondents,¹ age 18 and over, randomly selected from a panel of 30,000 Oregonians demographically representative of the state's general population. The survey findings are statistically reliable within a margin of error.

The website visitors online survey (website survey) was visited by 1,046 citizens and fully or partially completed by 841 visitors² to the website, including Chalkboard stakeholders who were informed about the online survey. The website survey duplicated two key questions about the 13 recommendations asked in the random survey.

Unlike the random survey, website survey respondents self-selected to complete the survey and have very different demographics and psychographics than the general Oregon population. They tended to disproportionately represent females, educators, parents of K-12 school-aged children, older age groups, registered Democrats, self-identified as very or somewhat liberal, and those with higher incomes. Thus, findings from the website survey often differ from the random survey representative of all Oregonians.

The facilitated discussions were designed to draw input from community leaders and involved many current and past participants in the American Leadership Forum and other community members in the following locations: Beaverton, Bend, Burns, Corvallis, Klamath Falls, Madras, Medford, North Bend, Pendleton, Portland (4 separate groups), Roseburg, Salem, and Tillamook, as well as discussions with an Education Roundtable in Eugene, the African American Alliance in Portland, Centro Cultural de Cornelius in Cornelius, and a Community Leader Meeting in McMinnville. This summary includes key points from the facilitators' reports

¹ Some questions were asked of a split sample of 220, 232, and 247.

² Findings in the document reflect only those who fully completed the survey (n=703). Some questions were presented to a split sample of 217 respondents.

on the discussions, along with findings from a sampling of individual feedback forms completed by participants.³

— Overall Summary Chart —

Shows Percentage Support and Vote for “Top Three” Most Important

The following table shows the overall percentage of support (combined strongly support & somewhat support) from both the random survey and website survey. In addition, an early exercise in the surveys was for respondents to indicate which of the 13 proposals they thought were the first, second, and third most important. The “Top 3” columns show the percent of three most important combined from the random survey and the website survey. All of these figures, including importance rankings, are referred to throughout this summary. (For a detailed explanation of the below Proposals, please visit the “New Proposals” section of the Chalkboard website at www.chalkboardproject.org)

Proposal	Random survey % support	Website survey % support	Random survey “Top 3”	Website survey “Top 3”
Provide a tutor and one-to-one support for every child not reading at grade level in grades K-3	82%	87%	43%	36%
Launch voluntary pilot programs to pay educators based on performance, rather than seniority and experience	69%	48%	38%	12%
Reduce class sizes to 15 in grades K-1	66%	81%	34%	40%
Establish a new guaranteed funding level for every Oregon student	62%	74%	28%	44%
If new revenues are necessary, they should come from mixture of different sources and not from income tax increases	67%	73%	27%	25%
Implement the Open Book\$ Project, allowing Oregonians to see how school districts spend dollars and compare with others	79%	69%	23%	12%
Implement business performance audits of schools	68%	48%	20%	12%
Launch statewide program to identify and implement business cost savings	61%	61%	19%	20%
Mentoring for every beginning teacher and administrator	65%	85%	17%	28%
Enhance professional development for every teacher and administrator (tie to student achievement and school needs)	66%	73%	16%	18%
Replace local option laws with new laws allowing every district to ask for extra local money equal to 15% of what it receives from the state school fund	58%	63%	14%	17%
Convert the state’s educational stability fund to a general rainy day fund and double its size	56%	78%	14%	17%
Change the way we pay for student transportation to encourage spending efficiency	48%	48%	8%	4%

³ This summary includes information from facilitator reports and feedback forms from most, but not all, of the discussions. In some cases, participants didn’t return the forms.

Additionally, for both the random and website surveys we ranked participant ratings of all of the proposals into six “tiers” of importance. . These tier rankings, along with overall support numbers, are referred to in the following summaries of responses to all of Chalkboard's proposals.

— Education Quality Proposals Summary of Input —

Chalkboard has five proposals for quality educators and schools. The following list shows the level of support in the random survey for each proposal, the website survey results and summary of facilitated discussions.

1. MENTORING:

Provide each new teacher (and each new principal) with a mentor who will provide personalized support for three years.

Random Survey: When asked which of the 13 proposals they thought were the first, second, and third most important, mentoring ranked in the fifth tier (out of a total of six); 17% combined for first, second, and third most important and 3% *most* important. Not quite two-thirds (65%) of respondents supported the mentoring proposal (26% strongly, 39% somewhat), which ranked 5th among the quality education proposals. Although mentoring was the lowest rated among the education quality recommendations, it still had a relatively supportive mean rating of 3.7⁴.

Website Survey: Mentoring ranked higher in importance among all 13 proposals than in the random survey. It was in the third tier (out of six) of importance, with 28% combined and 6% *most* important. Mentoring also was rated much higher than in the random survey, with a mean rating of 4.3 (compared to 3.7) and 85% overall support (61% strongly, 23% somewhat).

Facilitated Discussions. Discussion participants generally supported mentoring new teachers and administrators. Issues raised included: what does “high quality” mean, “don’t take good teachers out to mentor; they are needed in the classroom too,” and past attempts that have not been consistently funded. Mentoring was frequently noted on individual feedback forms as an attractive feature and likely to attract widespread support.

2. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

- ***Enhance professional development for every teacher and administrator in Oregon and tie all professional development to student achievement goals.***

Random Survey: Enhancing professional development for teachers and administrators ranked similarly to mentoring. It was in the fifth tier of importance with a 16% combined most, second, and third most important and 4% saying it is the *most* important proposal among all 13. Support for professional development ranked second along with reduce

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, all referenced ratings are based on the same scale: 1=strongly oppose to 5=strongly support.

class size and performance-based awards among the education quality proposals, with 66% support (37% strong, 29% somewhat) and a mean rating of 3.8.

Website Survey: Professional development was in the fourth tier of importance (out of six), with a similar 18% combined and 2% *most* important. This proposal earned a mean rating of 4.0 with higher overall support than in the random survey at 73% (43% strongly, 30% somewhat).

Facilitated Discussions: Enhanced professional development was not one of the most-discussed proposals, but there was general support in the groups, especially if focused and tied to specific desired outcomes. Funding professional development seemed to be the biggest issue.

3. PERFORMANCE-BASED AWARDS:

- ***Launch voluntary pilot programs in select schools to test new ways of evaluating and paying educators. The pilot programs should include giving financial awards to schools when schools reach student achievement goals, and new individual pay structures that offer raises to teachers based on performance, not seniority.***

Random Survey: Performance-based awards ranked in the second tier (among six) of importance among all 13 proposals, with 38% combined and 17% *most* important. This proposal was supported by nearly seven in ten respondents, 38% strongly and 31% somewhat. The mean support was 3.8, the same as for reducing class sizes and professional development.

Website Survey: This proposal did not fare as well among website survey respondents. It ranked in the fifth of six tiers of importance, with only 12% combined and 3% *most* important. Among the five quality education proposals, support was lowest for performance-based awards with a fairly low (compared to other proposals) mean rating of 3.1. Fewer than half (48%) supported this proposal, 28% strongly and 19% somewhat.

Facilitated Discussions: Discussion participants had many opinions about performance-based awards. Many emphasized the importance of rewarding schools or units rather than individuals, both to encourage teamwork and to make the proposal more acceptable to teachers. Most objections focused on the negatives of teaching to standardized tests and using them as a measurement. The question was raised whether this provides a “disincentive to teach challenged or impaired students.” Others felt the proposals did not go far enough in enabling school districts to dismiss poor teachers, often noting contractual limitations.

4. CLASS SIZE:

- ***Reduce class sizes to 15 students in kindergarten and first grade. Research in states such as Tennessee has shown that class sizes of no more than 15 in these two critical grades have a major impact on student achievement.***

Random Survey: Reducing class sizes to 15 for grades K-1 received the same support as pilot projects for performance-based awards and professional development, with a mean rating of 3.8. Overall support was 66%, with 45% strongly and 21% somewhat. Among all 13, random survey respondents placed this proposal in the second tier of importance, with 34% combined and 15% *most* important.

Website Survey: Reducing class sizes to 15 for grades K-1 received the same support as mentoring among website survey respondents, with a mean rating of 4.3, higher than the random survey. Overall support was a substantial 81%, with 59% strongly and 22% somewhat. Among all proposals, this one was in the top tier of importance, with 40% combined and 24% *most* important.

Facilitated Discussions: Reducing class size, along with early reading tutors, was among the most supported proposals in the facilitated discussions. Participants emphasized the importance of early learning. Some wanted to extend smaller class sizes to grade levels above K-1. The greatest concern was the cost and how it would be funded.

5. READING TUTORS:

- ***Provide a reading tutor to every student who is not reading at grade level in grades K-3.***

Random Survey: Random survey respondents rated their support for this proposal at 4.2, the highest among the five quality education proposals. More than eight in ten (82%) supported this proposal, 54% strongly and 28% somewhat. The reading tutor proposal was ranked the most important among all 13 proposals, with 43% combined importance and 15% *most* important.

Website Survey: Website survey respondents' support for this proposal also was the highest among the five quality education proposals, with a rating of 4.5 and 87% overall support (65% strongly, 22% somewhat). When ranking importance among all 13 proposals, early tutoring programs were at the top of the second tier (36% combined, 10% *most* important).

Facilitated Discussions: There was general appreciation for the elemental importance of learning to read. Reading tutors received nearly universal support in all groups. One commented that Chalkboard could make a "compelling case to the public" for this proposal, and some suggested that Chalkboard "lead" with this and the proposal to reduce K-1 class sizes. Some noted that even if this were an all-volunteer program, districts would need funding to coordinate the activities.

— Accountability and Funding Proposals Summary of Input —

Accountability Proposals

Chalkboard has developed four accountability proposals. The following list shows the level of support in the random survey for each proposal, the website survey results and summary of facilitated discussions.

6. STATEWIDE EFFICIENCIES:

- ***Launch a statewide program to find and implement cost savings, such as by "pooling" (with other districts and/or statewide) supply purchases or reducing health care costs.***

Random Survey: Among all 13 proposals, statewide efficiencies was in the fifth tier of importance (among six), with 19% combined and 6% *most* important. The mean support rating was 3.8, with 61% supporting the proposal, 28% strongly and 36% somewhat.

Website Survey: Website survey findings were similar to the random survey, with a similar 61% supporting it, and a slightly higher strongly support at 34% (27% somewhat). The importance of statewide efficiencies was also similar to the random survey, with 20% combined and 8% *most* important, placing it in a third tier (among six).

Facilitated Discussions: This proposal was not overly appealing to participants, although many supported lowering health care spending. Participants from rural areas in particular felt that new purchasing options would be harmful to local businesses, whose support was important to local schools. Several wanted Chalkboard to make a stronger case for specifics, asking “*will* it really save money?”

7. SCHOOL AUDITS:

- ***Give the State Board of Education the authority to conduct school performance audits.***

Random Survey: Support for school performance audits had a mean of 3.8, with 68% support (31% strong, 37% somewhat). This proposal, like statewide efficiencies, was in the fifth tier of importance, with 20% combined and 5% *most* important.

Website Survey: Support was far less than among random survey respondents. Fewer than half (48%) of website respondents supported school audits, with 22% strongly and 26% somewhat. This proposal had the lowest support rating among the four accountability proposals at 3.4. It was in a fifth tier of importance (12% combined, 2% *most* important) along with implementing the OpenBook\$ Project and performance-based awards.

Facilitated Discussions: Like statewide efficiencies, school audits did not generate the type of animated discussion other proposals did. The issue raised most frequently was the need for an outsider to do the auditing, rather than the state, with some expressing a lack of trust in the Board and Department of Education.

8. TRANSPORTATION COSTS:

- ***Develop a new funding formula for school transportation tied directly to geography, demographics and other data. As an interim step, provide fixed grants to districts for transportation costs, encouraging efficiency in district busing practices.***

Random Survey: Changing the way we pay for student transportation was in the bottom tier of importance, with only 8% combined and 1% *most* important. While Oregonians did not find this proposal that important in the context of all 13, the support rating was a respectable 3.5, although fewer than half (48%) supported it (15% strongly, 33% somewhat).

Website Survey: Website survey respondents likewise placed this proposal in the bottom tier of importance, with only 4% combined and 1% *most* important. The support

rating was the same as in the random survey – 3.5 – with the same overall 48% support (19% strongly, 29% somewhat).

Facilitated Discussions: This proposal did not receive much support or attention in the facilitated discussions, validating the lack of interest shown in both surveys. Concerns centered around jeopardizing student safety and hurting rural districts because of their student transportation needs.

9. DISTRICT SPENDING:

- ***Adopt Chalkboard's OpenBook\$ Project statewide. The Open Book\$ Project is an online tool to make it easier for the public to understand and track K-12 school district spending.***

Random Survey: Among the 13 proposals, the OpenBook\$ Project was alone in a fourth tier of importance, with 23% combined and 6% *most* important. The mean support rating was 4.2, the highest among all four accountability proposals. Nearly eight in ten (79%) supported the proposal, 45% strongly and 34% somewhat.

Website Survey: Website survey respondents did not rank this proposal's importance as high, placing it along with performance audits and pilot projects for performance-based awards in a fifth tier, with 12% combined and 4% *most* important. Mean support was 4.0, with 69% support (42% strongly, 27% somewhat).

Facilitated Discussions. Discussion participants generally liked the idea of the Open Book\$ Project, valuing its emphasis on transparency. Some asked questions like whether it would be tied into the state budget and whether people would understand how to use it.

Funding Proposals

Oregonians were presented with four funding proposals. The following list shows the level of support in the random survey for each proposal, the website survey results and summary of facilitated discussions.

10. STABILIZE THE SYSTEM:

- ***Double the size of the state's school stability fund to equal 10% of the state's general fund, convert it to general "rainy day" fund for schools and other state services, and fill the fund by redirecting the personal and corporate income tax "kicker."***

Random Survey: Random survey respondents placed this proposal about the state's school stability fund in the lowest tier of importance, with 11% combined and 3% *most* important. They rated their support at 3.4, with a majority (56%) supporting it, 22% strongly and 34% somewhat.

Website Survey: Website survey respondents had a different response than random survey respondents. They placed this proposal in a second tier of importance, along with early reading programs, indicated by 32% combined important and 9% *most* important. Their support rated at a high 4.2. Overall support was 78%, with *strongly*

support at 57%, the same as the combined support of random survey respondents, and somewhat support at 21%.

Facilitated Discussions. Discussion participants overall stressed the importance of funding stability, but did not always agree on the best way to achieve it. There were mixed opinions about the school stability fund proposal. Concerns included doing this at the expense of other funds and mixing the fund with other state services. Some thought 10% seemed high. There also were mixed opinions on the state's readiness to redirect the kicker – some thought the state is ready, others thought there is no chance, and a few suggested focusing on the corporate kicker.

11. PER STUDENT SPENDING

Establish a new guaranteed level of state school funding per student – a “floor” the state will never go below.

Random Survey: Random survey respondents placed a guaranteed per student funding level in a third tier of importance, with 28% combined and 13% *most* important. Its support rating was 3.7, with 62% saying they support this proposal (28% strongly, 34% somewhat).

Website Survey: Website survey respondents viewed this proposal more favorably than random survey respondents. They placed this proposal in the top tier of importance, with 44% combined, and 23% *most* important. They also gave it a 4.1 support rating, with three-quarters (74%) indicating overall support, 28% strong and 34% somewhat.

Facilitated Discussions. Funding stability was very important to most participants in the facilitated discussions, and a guaranteed level of school funding per student was of interest to them. Stability was often viewed as a higher priority than changing the local option. Many groups mentioned that the funding level needed to include differences among districts and raised the concern that the floor could become a ceiling.

12. EXTRA LOCAL MONEY

Repeal the state laws that allow some communities, but not others, to raise varying amounts of money through local school levies. Replace them with a new law that allows every school district to ask for extra local money equal to 15 percent of what it receives from the state school fund.

Random Survey. This proposal to generate extra local money by repealing and replacing local options laws earned a support rating of 3.6, with a majority (58%) supporting it, 25% strongly and 33% somewhat. It was in the fifth tier of importance, with 14% combined and 3% *most* important.

Website Survey: Repealing and replacing local option laws was supported slightly more by website survey than random survey respondents. The mean level of support was 3.8, with 63% support overall (39% strongly, 24% somewhat). It placed in the fourth tier of importance, with 17% combined and 3% *most* important.

Facilitated Discussions: This proposal was vigorously discussed in the groups. Many were concerned that this would lead to an “equalization problem.” One commented that this was a band-aid, not adding any new funding sources.

13. FUTURE STATEWIDE FUNDS

If new revenues are necessary, they should not come from income tax increases, since such variances are the primary cause of our current school funding instability, but from a mixture of different revenue sources.

Random Survey: This proposal about the source of future new revenues for schools was in the third tier of importance in the random survey, with 27% combined and 11% *most* important. The mean support rating was 3.9, the highest among the four funding proposals. Two-thirds (67%) gave this overall support, 31% strong and 36% somewhat.

Website Survey: Website survey respondents similarly placed this proposal in a third tier of importance, with 25% combined and 5% *most* important. Their support rating was at 4.2, with 73% support (47% strong, 27% somewhat), slightly stronger than in the random survey.

Facilitated Discussions: The new revenues discussions often raised more questions than answers. Participants generally did not include this as one of the more attractive proposals or one that would attract widespread support. Some wanted a more substantial proposal on restructuring school finance, including more local control and consideration of a sales tax.