



Impact of Chalkboard's proposed early age initiatives:

A SUMMARY

There is no silver bullet to increasing student achievement. But two practices to help early learners show particular promise – reducing K-1 class sizes to 15 students, and providing reading tutors to every K-3 student reading below grade level.

There is no way to accurately predict just how much student achievement will rise if you take any individual or series of steps. But implementing steps that have proven to be effective elsewhere raises the probability of good results.

Chalkboard is proposing measures that are the most likely to improve student achievement. Lowering class sizes in K-1 and expanding the use of reading tutors in K-3 are practices that stand apart from all others Chalkboard has studied, to the degree they have been researched and ultimately proven as best practices. So we can predict with confidence that if these two initiatives are implemented effectively in Oregon, we will see measurable improvements in student achievement, particularly with students who are behind academically and those who enter kindergarten already behind.

Reducing K-1 class sizes and providing more K-3 reading tutors could significantly increase the number of students who meet state reading and math benchmarks, and improve Oregon's overall educational performance relative to other states, based on the effectiveness of these initiatives in other states. In other words, we could go from below average or middle of the pack in many categories, to the top third or quarter of states in reading and math performance.

K-1 class size reductions

Getting below 20 students per class is key. Tennessee provides the best-documented effort in class size reduction. Here, students gained an extra year of achievement over time when K-1 class sizes were lowered to an average of 15 students. Lower class sizes benefit all students, but low-performing and at-risk students benefit most from the additional, individualized attention. While there is strong research to indicate the payoffs of lower class sizes in K-1, the research isn't clear that lowering class sizes in higher grades pays off in higher student achievement.

Reading tutors

Evaluation of Oregon's Start Making a Reader Today (SMART) program has shown participants make significant improvements in reading. The program serves about 10,500 students, although an estimated 40,000 are in need. Other studies show the importance of using certified reading tutors to improve student achievement. Chalkboard combines these approaches, and proposes giving schools the option to choose which kind of reading support to provide to students in need.

These concentrated efforts to improve early learning will help more students develop key skills earlier, better preparing them to move through the upper grades. Chalkboard also calls for eventual implementation of full-day kindergarten, although current research indicates the achievement payoffs of full-day kindergarten don't last beyond first grade. Research also shows that by implementing two new effective programs, not just one, and doing it at the same time, students are likely to benefit more than if one program is put in place at a time.