

**The Oregon Coalition for
Quality Teaching and Learning**
(State Partner of the National Commission for
Teaching and America's Future--NCTAF)

Response to Quality Counts 2010

The recently released *Quality Counts 2010* scorecard assigned Oregon an “F” under the category of the “The Teaching Profession”—the same grade issued in 2008¹. As a Coalition committed to strengthening the teaching profession in Oregon, we recognize room for improvement and commend Editorial Projects in Education (EPE), and its funders, for maintaining a focus on a number of critical leverage points and generally moving the debate and policy regarding teacher quality and preparation in a productive direction.

However, Oregon’s ranking—at the tail of the distribution—simply doesn’t ring true. Specifically, we find a number of design flaws in both the wording of the survey questions and research methods. The survey design gives no credit for partial implementation of key initiatives, relies too heavily on state-level regulations as proxies for quality, and sometimes misses identically effective policies or projects advanced by school districts, universities, or foundations.

For example, since 2007, the legislature funded mentors for beginning educators, created a statewide commission for professional development, and provided funding for a web-based network for professional development. Meanwhile, the state board of education passed standards for quality professional development—the National Staff Development Council’s (NSDC) standards. And, with private funding, twelve school districts launched pay-for-performance pilot projects.

These hard fought efforts of recent years didn’t change the score on the *Quality Counts 2010* scorecard. An improved survey instrument would move Oregon well up the list, although not to the top.

We have developed this response with three goals in mind. First, as officials at the US Department of Education consider a variety of competitive funding applications this year, we want to set the record straight and assert that the condition of Oregon teaching is not in the dire, worst-in-the-nation, position suggested by *Quality Counts*. Second, we want Oregon policymakers to recognize that the state does fall short in a number of areas that are worthy of their attention and action. And third, by advancing a constructive critique of the survey, we hope to improve EPE’s methodology for future editions of *Quality Counts*.

¹ 2010 report: <http://www.edweek.org/ew/qc/2010/17src.h29.html>. 2008 report: <http://www.edweek.org/ew/qc/2008/18src.h27.html?intc=ml>

Through a categorical review of the scorecard and its underlying questions, we draw the following broad conclusions:

- *Quality Counts* appropriately identifies a number of emerging policy areas where Oregon’s progress lags behind that of other states, especially in the areas of employment evaluations and incentives for teacher leadership and performance. The scorecard should move our state’s policymakers toward innovative, promising practice in these areas.
- *Quality Counts*, at times, places too much weight on state-mandated policies or state-level funding earmarks. In those instances, the scorecard implicitly penalizes Oregon for its preference for local control under a broad umbrella of state policy and statute.
- In some areas, *Quality Counts* simply asks the wrong question and Oregon would fare better in its answer to a stronger question.

The balance of this letter expands the discussion on each these points.

AREAS WHERE *QUALITY COUNTS* IS CORRECT, OREGON LAGS PIONEERING STATES, AND OREGON POLICYMAKERS SHOULD TAKE NOTICE

Through its scoring scheme, EPE has rewarded states that have expanded their evaluation systems, launched state-supported incentive programs for teacher leadership, and developed coherent accountability systems for teacher education programs.

Oregon answered “no” to the following questions, and if the state fails to make progress in the areas, Oregon will fall outside the top tier of the *Quality Counts* rankings.

- *Does the state require all teachers’ performance to be formally evaluated and does the state require them to be tied to student achievement?*

The EPE survey indicates that Oregon is 1 of only 7 states with no state requirement to formally evaluate all teachers. Oregon law mandates evaluations of probationary teachers, but local bargaining agreements govern evaluations for non-probationary teachers. Whether through a formal state mandate or other means, Oregon should improve the frequency, rigor, and equity of evaluations.

- *Does the state provide incentives to teachers or principals for hard-to-staff positions or subjects?*
- *Does the state have any policy regarding the use of pay-for-performance programs for teachers? Does the state have formal recognition of differentiated roles for teachers?*
- *Does the state provide financial incentives for teachers to earn National Board Certification or incentives for Board certified teachers to work in targeted schools and take on differentiated roles?*

Oregon lags pioneering states in the use of incentives and rewards in its compensation system. While new approaches are far from proven, the Obama

Administration, Congress, and leading foundations are wise to encourage to broad experimentation in the area. Despite a lack of direct state support, Oregon can claim important progress in this area through the CLASS project—twelve, district-level demonstrations sponsored by the Chalkboard Project.

- *Does the state publish the rankings of teacher education institutions statewide?*

Like all other states, Oregon’s teacher preparation programs comply with Section 205 of Title II of the *Higher Education Opportunity Act* that mandates the collection of data on state assessments, other requirements, and standards for teacher certification and licensure, as well as data on the performance of teacher preparation programs. Additional efforts by TSPC to standardize employer satisfaction and follow up studies of Oregon’s new teachers along with efforts to streamline data exchanges between the Oregon Department of Education, TSPC, and local teacher preparation program are supporting much needed access to data that can support continuous improvement of Oregon’s teacher preparation programs.

- *Does the state require all districts to publicly report average salaries per school?*

This important call for strengthening the transparency of school-level finance is technically feasible and would be almost costless to implement. Oregon needs to get it done.

AREAS WHERE *QUALITY COUNTS* SHOWS A BIAS FOR STATE-LEVEL MANDATES AND EARMARKS; OREGON’S LOCAL GOVERNANCE MODEL MAY WORK AS WELL

In several questions, EPE inappropriately uses a state regulation or earmark as a proxy for quality. Oregon answered “no” to each of the following questions and loses full credit despite the fact that local stakeholders—school districts and schools of education—achieve EPE’s objectives through their own actions.

- *Does the state provide professional development funds for all local education agencies?*
- *Does the state require that schools or districts set aside specific amounts of time to be spent on only professional development?*

Oregon has appropriately avoided categorical funding of specific education programs and initiatives, including professional development. In Oregon, school districts receive a share of a broad State School Fund and allocate those resources as needed to meet local, state, and federal educational goals. Accounting shows that all districts direct some level of funding to professional development as a result of local, collective bargaining agreements.

Rather than look to state-level mandates on time or resources as evidence of professional development quality, *Quality Counts* should turn to the National Center for Education Statistics’ School and Staffing Survey, which reports time devoted to professional development as well as the use of the time (e.g., subject matter knowledge, technology, classroom management, etc).

- *Does the state have policies applicable to all schools discouraging out-of-field teaching through parental notification, bans, caps, or other policies?*

On out-of-field teaching, *Quality Counts*' regulatory measures may be warranted, but the rankings would be strengthened with objective state-to-state comparisons of the prevalence of out-of-field teaching. While Oregon may fall short on specific regulations, hiring practices and high class sizes (fewer teachers) may translate into a lower share of out-of-field teachers.

- *Does the state mandate time beyond student teaching?*

Finally, despite the absence of a state mandate, every teaching program in Oregon begins with or includes additional practicum experiences that, together with 15 weeks of student teaching, far exceed most state's requirements. So, while all teaching programs deliver the experience *Quality Counts* calls for, Oregon gets no credit because of the lack of a state-specific *mandate*.

AREAS WHERE A REWORDED QUESTION, OR NO QUESTION AT ALL, WOULD BE ADVISED

Oregon's respondent to *Quality Counts*—the Director of the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission—answers the questions fully and accurately. In some instances, the survey's "all or nothing" approach unnecessarily depresses Oregon's score.

For example, Oregon answered "no" to the following questions.

- *Does the state require ALL prospective teachers from traditional preparation programs to pass written tests in subject-specific knowledge?*

99.5 percent of Oregon's prospective teachers pass a written test in subject-specific knowledge. In 2006-07, Oregon allowed alternative assessments for 21 teachers (0.5%) and, by doing so, lost full credit for the question. The *Quality Counts* survey instrument would improve by asking: *What share of prospective teachers from university-based preparation programs is required to pass a written test in subject-specific knowledge?*

- *Does the state require and fund a teacher mentoring program? If so, is this a mentoring program for new teachers only, for all teachers, or for select teachers?*

During the 2007-08 school year, the state invested \$5 million on new teacher and administrator mentoring, and, despite the recent fiscal crisis, it maintained the funding. However, given the wording of the question, Oregon received no credit for the policy initiative. An improved question would ask: *what share of beginning teachers is assigned a mentor?*

- *Does the state require ALL prospective teachers from TRADITIONAL preparation programs to pass written tests in subject-specific pedagogy?*

Oregon was one of the first states to require a standardized performance assessment called Teacher Work Samples to evaluate pedagogical knowledge, skills,

and abilities--a highly effective practice that is now implemented in more than 200 institutions nationwide and is a key element within a national performance assessment being developed and piloted by Stanford University. So, Oregon officials would argue that the state's approach is preferred to the written tests advocated by *Quality Counts*. EPE should ask: Does the state require work samples or a written test in subject-specific pedagogy?

- *Does the state place a cap or limit class size through state legislation or regulation that applies to all schools in the state?*

This question should be dropped from the survey. Broad, across-the-board class size reduction policies have no empirical connection to the quality of teaching or student achievement. A close read of the literature suggests class size may have an impact in the very early grades, perhaps kindergarten and 1st grade, but the evidence base falls off thereafter.

- *What's the pay parity—teacher earnings as a percentage of salaries in comparable occupations?*

EPE's focus should be on full compensation rather than salary. Unions in Oregon and elsewhere have occasionally traded benefit adequacy for salary. In Oregon, parity would improve if the comparison were made on full compensation as opposed to salary.

CONCLUSION

Quality Counts and EPE deserve credit for engaging policymakers and the broader public in the education policy debate. And in many areas, the scorecard has helped shape the boundaries of that debate. As a Coalition committed to improving the teaching profession in Oregon, we see the 2010 report generating three lines of work: one with Oregon's policymakers to improve in-state policy, a second with EPE to strengthen an otherwise solid benchmarking tool, and a third with Oregonians, philanthropists, federal officials to repair the perception of educator quality in the state.