



TO: Governor Ted Kulongoski and Superintendent Susan Castillo
FROM: The Chalkboard Project
DATE: October 29, 2009
RE: Comments on Oregon's Draft Race to the Top Working Group Recommendations

First and foremost, Chalkboard Project would like to commend the Race to the Top (RttT) design team and working groups for their heroic efforts to draft recommendations for Oregon's RttT application. Vickie Fleming, design team chair, and all of the working group leaders have spent countless hours in a very short span of time leading a process to win federal money to raise student achievement in our state. The goal is no small matter, and these individuals have not taken their charge lightly. We hope that these recommendations will form the basis for Oregon's K-12 educational improvement efforts over the next decade, regardless of whether federal funding is secured.

We see the immediate task ahead as weaving these recommendations into a coherent vision and thus, a competitive federal application. This will not be an easy process and it will require courageous leadership to be successful. Below are our comments on the proposed recommendations. We look forward to being a partner in this most important work.

Assurance #1) Increase teacher effectiveness and address inequities in the distribution of highly qualified teachers.

Promising Recommendations:

- The recommendations focus on four areas of effective teaching: career paths, performance evaluations, professional development and new compensation models. The focus on all four components is essential for truly supporting highly effective teachers. Based on our public opinion polling, 77% of Oregonians would be supportive of a statewide program that included these components.
- Mentoring is critical for preparing our teachers to be effective, but it is also essential for recruiting and retaining the best. Oregon currently experiences over \$45 million a year in teacher turnover costs and nearly 40% of our new teachers leaving the profession within their first five years. Teachers must be supported in their early years in the classroom and mentoring is an important investment in the future of the profession. Oregon needs to commit to a sustained investment in new teacher and administrator mentoring. Oregon should consider all research-based models in this area and should look at local models that are producing promising results. In order to reach as many educators as possible, the cost of the program, per teacher and administrator, could be reduced.
- The importance of professional development is made clear in the recommendations. Providing incentives for research-based professional development opportunities that are directly linked to student achievement and providing job-embedded professional development are two ways of strengthening teacher effectiveness which in turn raises student achievement.
- Greater partnerships between teacher preparation programs and school districts are necessary to support effective teaching in our schools. The recommended data systems to provide feedback to preparation programs on the success of their graduates will provide critical insight into how we can best prepare the next generation of highly effective teachers.

Areas for Further Work:

- The recommendations in the area of alternative pathways to certification should go further to address the changing landscape of student needs. The current recommendations assert that there is no shortage of teacher and administrator candidates, but that is not the issue at hand. Our state needs more than just a sufficient number of applicants, it needs high quality applicants who understand the needs of 21st century students.
- The recommendations use “highly qualified” as a stand-in for highly effective. Oregon, does not have an adopted framework for professional practice which distinguishes who its most effective teachers are and this fact needs to be more directly addressed in the application. Our original CLASS school districts are good examples of districts that do have a framework of professional practice that identifies standards for effective teaching and learning.
- Additional emphasis on formative performance evaluation models would be helpful to our state’s school districts. We believe the state should clarify teaching standards (and we are pleased Oregon’s NCTAF Coalition on Teaching and Learning is looking at this issue) and then help develop formative evaluation tools that could be adopted by interested districts.
- The recommendations for ensuring the equitable distribution of effective teachers do not get at the problem of statewide distribution. We need our most effective teachers in our highest needs schools. This issue again requires that the state have a system for judging the effectiveness of a teacher and then provides incentives to help distribute teachers to best meet the needs of Oregon’s most vulnerable children.
- We believe a strategy to increase the number of National Board Certified Teachers in Oregon should be a part of this application. Formerly one of Chalkboard’s supporting foundations provided incentives for participation in this process and Oregon now has .8% of its teachers NBCT-certified. We should continue to promote excellence through this program by offering incentives for participation.

Assurance #2) Establish and use preK-through-college and career data systems to track progress and foster continuous improvement.

Promising Recommendations:

- Providing student data in an “actionable manner” as the recommendations call for will be critical to the success of any data system. A data system that includes strategies, recommendations and resources would be a major asset to Oregon’s educators.
- Including data sets already collected by other state organizations, including TSPC and NWREL, will help to create a unified vision for Oregon’s schools. Teacher and student data must be utilized in a manner that benefits both parties and raises student achievement.

Areas for Further Work:

- Although the recommendations include a commitment to collecting data, there is not a clear commitment to analyzing and using the data for continuous improvement. There needs to be specific standards in place for the state to be able to judge sufficient progress for students and teachers. Otherwise a commitment to collect data does not equate to a commitment to raise student achievement.

Assurance #3) Make progress toward rigorous college- and career-ready standards and quality assessments.

Promising Recommendations:

- Proficiency-based practice has the potential to revolutionize teaching and learning in Oregon’s classrooms. With students and teachers demonstrating proficiency as opposed to seat time, standards take on greater relevancy and become the focus of instruction.

- Internationally normed standards will go a long way towards preparing students for a global economy as long as teachers and administrators have the support and resources to effectively implement such standards.

Areas for Further Work:

- Time for professional development is only effective if the professional development itself is high quality. Professional development must be part of an educator's continuous improvement and must be closely aligned with instructional standards. We also want to support the rapid implementation of SB443 from the most recent legislative session to establish a clearinghouse for professional development programs built on the quality standards for professional development recently adopted by Oregon (the National Staff Development Council standards).

Assurance #4) Support targeted, intensive support and effective interventions to turn around schools identified for corrective action and restructuring.

Promising Recommendations:

- The recommendations give schools the flexibility to engage in reforms that would not otherwise be easy to implement. The ability to create a Memorandum of Understanding that would allow a building principal to hire the most effective teachers possible is essential.
- Overall, the recommendations around low-performing schools are thorough and lay the groundwork for significant interventions.

Areas for Further Work:

- Although the recommendations would give a principal the ability to hire as he/she sees fit, they do not specifically give that principal the flexibility to make changes to staff as necessary. In other words, once a new staff is hired, the principal does not seem to have the ability to gauge the effectiveness of the new staff and make changes as the school year progresses.
- Helping low-performing schools implement evidenced-based practices that will raise student achievement is a high priority – we believe that early age investments such as K-1 class size reduction and K-3 reading tutors should be highlighted, as well as drop-out prevention programs such as “check and connect” from Minnesota.
- For this work of turning around schools to be effective, districts must be able to gauge who their most effective teachers are. Data systems must be developed in a manner that aids this process.

The key ingredient in Oregon's Race to the Top application must be statewide leadership for Oregon's students and we must have effective teachers and leaders behind each of these reforms to see true progress. We would encourage deeper inclusion of teacher leaders in the RttT review process.

Any of these recommendations will fail to reach their full potential if there is not a commitment by education stakeholders and state leadership to do *all that we can* for our students. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts; Oregon has the opportunity to demonstrate nationally its commitment to educating the next generations of citizens. Let us seize this opportunity together.