

Grant's goal to improve teachers

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Salem-Keizer School District is participating in an education-reform project this year that will design a training and incentive-pay system for teachers and could address turnover in the district's most challenging schools.

Salem-Keizer will receive a \$28,500 grant to design a plan that improves teacher effectiveness by focusing on teacher career paths and training, and uses performance evaluations and incentive pay. Twelve school districts statewide are participating in the Chalkboard Project initiative.

"It's designed to keep teachers in the highest needs areas," said Aimee Craig, spokeswoman for Chalkboard, a nonprofit that aims to improve education in Oregon.

Salem-Keizer schools with the most low-income and minority students are more likely to have the newest and least-experienced teachers on staff than more affluent schools, according to data analyzed by the Statesman Journal and reported in May.

Those schools are often the lowest performing in the district.

The issue can be magnified when a lack of experience is coupled with teacher turnover, as some students can be taught year after year by new teachers.

"The goal of the CLASS project, especially the professional development part, is to give teachers the support and encouragement and mentoring so they don't feel like they have to leave the high needs areas," Craig said.

Nationally, many teachers transfer from more challenging schools, and about 40 percent leave the profession altogether during the first five years.

Designing reform

Salem-Keizer leaders will work with the teacher's union to develop a plan using Chalkboard's guidelines this school year, said Mary Cadez, assistant superintendent for human resources.

"It's a planning grant. What is it that we can do to incentivize teachers?" Cadez said. "(The goal is to develop) new ideas, new ways to reward and inform our teachers and improve equality for instruction for students in Salem-Keizer."

The district's grant application points out the challenges of teaching a high number of English language learners and students in poverty. Cadez also said the goal is to improve achievement for all students and schools.

"The challenges for the district and our staff are daunting," Salem-Keizer's grant application says. "We recognize that the key to these challenges is quality teaching and instruction for every child every day."



First year teacher Ruby House works with Grant Mowbray in a group reading session while the rest of her fourth graders spread out in her classroom to read independently.

Other districts participating in the design portion of the Chalkboard project are Bend-LaPine, Crook County, High Desert Education Service District, Lebanon, Oregon City, Redmond, Sisters and Vernonia.

Three school districts, Forest Grove, Sherwood and Tillamook, are implementing the project and showing initial signs of success, Craig said.

Portland State University researchers are working with the districts and looking at student test results on state subject and college entrance exams, as well as teacher recruitment and retention rates.

Chalkboard is funding the grants through private donations from foundations and individuals.

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