



TO: Local media

FROM: Kelly McIver, South Lane School District, 942-3381 x128

DATE: May 1, 2009

**** FOR WEDNESDAY, MAY 6 ****

Teachers, mentors share what works in class while budget cuts loom

In the talk of trimming school days, laying off teachers and raising class sizes, an important topic has nearly gone overlooked: how can public school teachers develop the best possible skills, and choose to stay in a business that has proven unpredictable?

That's just the question leaders of the **Chalkboard Project** (www.chalkboard.org) will ask a gathering of Oregon teachers — many who are part of a popular teacher mentor program — on Wednesday, May 6 at Cottage Grove High School from 3:30 p.m.-5:30 p.m.

More than 70 teachers are expected for a discussion-and-feedback session on what professional development works best and is most needed by teachers, with leaders from Chalkboard, a non-partisan education group advocating for improvement to Oregon's K-12 public schools.

The "Conversation with Oregon Teachers" agenda includes brief addresses from Chalkboard president Sue Hildick, vice president Kate Dickson and board member Charlie Walker, South Lane Superintendent Krista Parent, Clackamas High School teacher Ford Morishita, and Bohemia Elementary teacher Jill Davidson (who herself was one of South Lane's mentor teachers this year).

During the 2008-09 school year, teachers in South Lane and three other districts (Pleasant Hill, North Douglas and Creswell) worked under one of 11 state grants to establish "mentor programs." The goal is to set up a system in which inexperienced teachers pair with skilled veterans, and learn the ropes of quality instruction while avoiding the trial-and-error pitfalls that could make for poor teaching, or drive young teachers to leave the field. Sharing knowledge and priming new teachers for success is critical for districts like South Lane, which will have turned over more than half of its teachers between 2005 and 2010.

The mentor program has had a great initial response: new teachers with skilled mentors are BETTER teachers, and are more apt to improve and stay in their profession. They teach students more effectively, which results in higher student achievement. Educators learned that experienced teachers acting as mentors benefit from the process as well: they re-evaluate and improve their own practices, and become re-invigorated as educators.

"Being a mentor, I feel like I'm learning as much on this side," mentor teacher Jill Davidson said. "It provides that kind of constant collaboration and support that I think honestly everybody benefits from. Just in general, working together makes you better."

With the state's school budget plunging a billion dollars below projections, continuing funding for mentor programs is in doubt. And that's not the only threat: seven of South Lane's 16 novice teachers in the program are on the district's "RIF" (reduction in force) list, and may be lost to budget cuts.

Cottage Grove High School is located at 1375 South River Road in Cottage Grove. More on South Lane's Teacher Mentor Program at www.slane.k12.or.us

###