



## The Oregonian

### A 'field of dreams' in more than athletics

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A few years ago, a group of enthusiastic Tillamook parents proposed a new football and soccer field for our Tillamook High School Cheesemakers. We all thought, what a great idea. But there was no way the district could pay for it. Undeterred, these parents and coaches went out and raised \$475,000 and got hundreds of people to donate countless volunteer hours. The result is Doc Adams Field, a beautiful, state-of-the-art venue for football and soccer games. It was our very own "field of dreams" project.

As we smiled in satisfaction, many parents wondered aloud: If we can do this for sports, why not for academics? Why not create something similar for teachers and students?

Small towns such as Tillamook have trouble recruiting and keeping teachers. We like to say the best way to retain our young teachers is to find them a spouse and a house. The need for something new was clear.

That's where the Chalkboard Project stepped in. The nonprofit education reform group gave us a \$300,000 grant to make Tillamook one of three districts pioneering a new teaching career path called CLASS. It stands for Creative Leadership Achieves Student Success. The idea is to create new leadership and mentoring roles for teachers and compensate them for it. If CLASS were a football game, the four quarters would be expanded career roles for teachers, comprehensive performance evaluations, additional professional development opportunities and, finally, increased pay for those who take on additional responsibilities.

Traditionally, career options in education are like end zones on a football field. On one end is the teacher in the classroom. On the other is an administrator. But many teachers love the classroom and don't want to become a principal or superintendent. CLASS creates new jobs in between those two ends of the professional spectrum. The new opportunities could include becoming a master teacher or a content area coach. Higher pay for the additional duties would follow.

The process of developing this new system was similar to how Doc Adams Field came to be. Teachers, administrators and school board leaders volunteered their time and worked collaboratively to remake the teaching profession in our district.

It wasn't easy. In fact, negotiations came close to breaking down several times. Teachers were concerned that CLASS was just merit pay, a system linking salaries directly with arbitrary test scores. But CLASS is not about merit pay in the Tillamook School District.

Student performance is measured in a number of ways, and it is only one piece of a larger evaluation of a teacher's professional practice. The new system is more comprehensive, more objective and ultimately fairer to teachers.

The result of a year of talks is this: When young people join the teaching profession in Tillamook, they're entering a field that's rejuvenated and reinvented. Research clearly shows that the single most important factor in student performance is the quality of the teacher in the classroom. That's why CLASS is so important.

In Tillamook, we built a "field of dreams" for our football and soccer teams. Now we've done that for our teachers and students too.

Randy Schild is the superintendent of the Tillamook School District. Karen Thenell is president of the teachers union in the district.

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