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## Chalkboard gets a real education

### The school reform group runs into resistance in the Capitol

May 04, 2007

It is not surprising that the Chalkboard Project is encountering resistance to its school reform proposals from the state's entrenched education establishment, but it is unfortunate. The teacher and school employee unions need to get over their defensiveness and recognize that Chalkboard is not their enemy.

The Chalkboard Project, launched in 2004, is an ambitious, nonpartisan effort to gather data on Oregon's school system and conduct surveys and public meetings throughout the state exploring ways to improve public education. Central to that mission is the goal of securing stable, guaranteed funding that will support schools in bad times as well as good.

To reach that goal, Chalkboard understandably spent considerable time poking into how districts spend money now and how they might be encouraged to do so more efficiently in the future.

Cue the resistance.

"They are setting themselves up as people coming in to whip those schools into shape," said a lobbyist for the Oregon School Employees Association, which represents classified employees such as secretaries, aides and custodians. She told The Associated Press, "They think they don't need to learn how things work in schools; their methodology is better."

Well. It's worth pointing out that Chalkboard is hardly sweeping in unannounced, with no understanding of how things work. The project started off by conducting the largest poll on public education in state history, then spent three years amassing data and talking with parents and the general public all over the state.

It's also worth pointing out that those inside a large bureaucracy may have difficulty seeing "how things work" with fresh eyes. Outsiders, free of the pressure to conform to "how things work," may in fact have valuable suggestions to offer.

And these suggestions don't come from a few activists eager to tell educators how to do their jobs. They are condensed from that three-year, fact-finding process and reflect a tremendous amount of public participation.

Public education is the single largest expenditure in the state budget. It is vitally important that Oregonians have confidence that schools are getting the biggest bang possible for the public buck.

Educators and the unions who represent them do themselves and the public no favors by rejecting sincere attempts to examine school spending and propose improvements.

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