



## The Oregonian

### OREGON SCHOOL FUNDING

#### Getting beyond our education stalemate

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**Sue Hildick**  
The Oregonian

The Oregonian's recent editorial about the Oregon Education Association ("Speaking truth to the teacher's union," March 14) caught our attention with its statement that "education candidates in Oregon must be about more than increased funding." Here at the Chalkboard Project, we firmly believe it's high time to reframe the entire debate.

That's exactly what we aimed to accomplish last summer, when we invited some of the state's best and brightest thinkers to join two working groups: One focused on quality educators and the other on school accountability and finance.

The two groups spent six months tackling the tough choices and tradeoffs required to elevate our K-12 schools to among the nation's best. The ground rules were clear: no media, no politics, no sacred cows. When these groups emerged last month, they handed over a combined list of 65 ambitious ideas that are viable, relevant and timely.

Thanks to their hard work and a two-year investment in best-practices research and public input, Chalkboard has unveiled a round of proposals that shape the backbone for this new debate. From increasing classroom support to teachers to performance audits of schools to using the state tax "kicker" for a robust rainy-day fund, 13 options are on the table.

This isn't glitz and glamour. It's the hard work required to increase student achievement in Oregon schools. Oregonians told us it's not necessary to completely restructure our school system or how we fund it. But it is necessary to take a pragmatic approach to working within the existing system to create positive changes.

Here are some of our ideas:

Boost quality by focusing on teachers and reading. We can't improve student achievement without excellent teachers. But extra support for teachers must be linked to results. We like the idea of awards that compensate teachers and staff for great performance, not years on the job.

If students can't read by the fourth grade, their life prospects dim substantially. Research shows the greatest impact on student success is to lower kindergarten and first-grade class sizes to 15 students. Let's also make sure that every K-3 student who's not reading at grade level gets a tutor and the help he or she needs.

Increase the accountability of schools to taxpayers. Create a visible statewide program that shows Oregonians where their money goes and demonstrate where schools are actively working to save money.

Stabilize school funding and make targeted investments in the areas that will do the most to raise student achievement levels. We need to sock away money during the good times to support our schools when the economy nosedives. Our schools need a solid foundation they can count on in good times and in bad. How

about redirecting the personal and corporate income tax "kicker" to fill that emergency fund?

We also need to change the way we think about funding schools. For starters, it shouldn't be about a single number, such as \$5.8 billion. We like the idea of establishing a guaranteed, per-student state funding level -- a floor of spending per student that will rise based on inflation and other cost factors and that will never be reduced.

We all want our kids to be well-educated. But ultimately we face a choice: Do we continue our education stalemate because our funding disputes are too big, or do we tip over those sacred cows and start moving Oregon schools forward and achievement upward?

Sue Hildick is president of the Chalkboard Project. Oregonians can respond to its proposals online at [www.chalkboardproject.org](http://www.chalkboardproject.org) or by calling 1-877-YOUR-K12.

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