



## The Oregonian

### Group offers 13 ways to improve schools

Education - The Chalkboard Project takes up funding and class sizes in legislative proposals

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BEAVERTON -- The Chalkboard Project, an independent nonprofit group aimed at improving Oregon schools, unveiled a slate of proposals Monday that could be weighed in the next Legislature.

Presented at William Walker Elementary School in Beaverton, the 13 recommendations target school quality and funding, and include plans for increasing state spending and decreasing class sizes.

After two years of research, organization leaders say public feedback will offer the finishing touches on a school improvement package for the 2007 Legislature.

"If Oregonians expect to have a top 10 school system, we'll need new revenue," said Sue Hildick, the organization's president.

Chalkboard leaders pointed to William Walker as an example of a school where achievement has increased dramatically despite having many students from poor households. About \$700,000 in federal tax money went to the school this year to help students, more than 70 percent of whom receive free and reduced-price lunches.

Leaders at William Walker assess some students as often as every two weeks, collect high levels of data and hold four-hour meetings with teachers each month to go over the findings.

"There are a great deal of challenges, but it can be turned around at any school in the state," said Beaverton schools Superintendent Jerry Colonna, who worked on The Chalkboard Project's recommendations. "And this school is an example."

The Chalkboard Project was created in 2004 by five Oregon foundations to find ways to strengthen the state's K-12 system. Two years ago, the organization launched the state's largest public opinion survey on education issues, collecting 50,000 Oregonians' opinions about their schools.

For the past six months, two statewide work groups crafted proposals based on those opinions. The groups' work centered primarily on increasing teacher and school quality, and stabilizing state funding.

Chalkboard leaders will hold a public comment period, including meetings with community leaders from across the state, until June 15.

In September, they plan to draft a proposal for next year's Legislature, said Shirley Skidmore, communications director.

"This public feedback period is so important to us," Skidmore said. "We want these proposals to reflect the priorities Oregonians have for their schools."

State Superintendent Susan Castillo said some of the independent group's recommendations are in line

with Department of Education priorities for the next legislative session. Still, Oregon legislators will decide which proposals to finance.

"Some of these are doable," Castillo said. "It's a matter of whether the Legislature will step up and pay for it."

The State Board of Education also will lobby the Legislature on issues such as high school diploma reform and funding, Castillo said.

"The list is a good list, it's just a big one," Castillo said. "Put all those things together, and we'll have a rich agenda in the next session."

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