



The Oregonian

Education advocates must fight status quo

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As a former teacher, administrator and leader of a statewide literacy organization, I know the budget woes our schools have faced for more than a decade now. I have seen truly heroic work in classrooms to help the most challenged students achieve. I know schools need adequate funding to prepare our students for a global, competitive world. But as I watched our legislators this spring and summer continue to skirt the tough issues of what to do with the \$6.3 billion we'll give our schools over the next two years, my frustration grew.

I saw the common-sense school reforms proposed by the Chalkboard Project fought at every turn. Here's an organization that actually reflects what the public wants -- a strong, focused investment in our public schools that promotes increased student achievement and school accountability they can see. And Chalkboard laid out a solid, research-based plan to do just that.

Legislators agreed this session to restore mentoring for new teachers and principals and to explore better ways to fund and operate our student transportation system and provide more long-term stability in school budgeting. But why wasn't more done, like creating a better ongoing professional support system for teachers, prioritizing spending for critical initiatives such as making sure every child is a good reader by third grade, and requiring all districts to go through an outside review of their business practices every six years?

There's plenty of blame to go around. Republicans need to realize we can't "beat" more savings out of schools. Democrats need to realize a blank check invested in the status quo won't solve schools' problems. Established education groups need to realize what Oregonians outside the special-interest world in Salem really want -- a generous, but smarter, investment in our K-12 schools.

Tough choices about spending aren't needed just in bad economic times. They're especially needed in a flush year like this one, when the public expects even greater results.

We must get over the political -tug of war about who owns the education agenda. The reality is, we all own it -- not just teachers or bus drivers or parents, but all of us who pay taxes to support our schools and expect them to deliver educated, engaged citizens who will make our state a better place.

We had a chance this legislative session to make a real difference for children with our record education budget, and we didn't get it done. But there is still hope. We're now talking about accountability as well as funding priorities. And beginning as early as next February, legislators will have more chances to seize on these issues and act.

The generous Oregon foundations behind the Chalkboard Project have made a phenomenal investment and commitment to improving our schools. Their active presence is even more important now. We need an objective group like Chalkboard pushing against the status quo to build bipartisan support for what's best for our children.

Mary Jubitz is former chief executive officer of the Start Making a Reader Today program and is a member of the Chalkboard Project's statewide citizens' corps.

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