

## Report addresses why schools lack parents' presence

Language barriers, lack of awareness stand in their way

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WOODBURN -- Many minority, low-income and non-English-speaking parents in Oregon are not getting involved in their children's schools because they don't know how or they don't feel welcome, according to a report released Friday by the Chalkboard Project.

Chalkboard, an initiative that has been examining how to improve Oregon's schools, surveyed low-income and minority parents across the state in the fall. The survey found that Latino parents volunteer an average of three days each school year in their children's schools and that African-American parents average eight days. By contrast, white parents volunteer an average of 30 days.

However, the survey also found that 31 percent of Latino parents help their children with homework five nights per week. Only 14 percent of white parents did this.

"It's not like they don't want to be involved," said Stefani Willis, the project director for Chalkboard. "They value education. They're helping kids with homework. They're just a little timid about walking in the door of the school."

Chalkboard organizers released their survey results Friday at Valor Middle School in Woodburn. They said that more parental involvement in schools is directly tied to student success, which is why they are concerned about the survey results.

The project is launching two new programs to address the issue. One is a program called "Running Start," which gives schools toolkits with two parts -- information aimed at training all school staff members on how to welcome and work with parents, and information for parents who may not understand how schools work.

Chalkboard also is partnering with the Oregon Department of Education to give stipends to schools to help them find ways to develop parental involvement policies. The goal is for all schools in the state to have such policies by next school year.

Willis said parents often don't volunteer because their work schedule interferes or they are intimidated by encountering staff members who don't speak their language.

Also, schools don't always offer the most welcoming atmosphere, she said. They may not have translators available, or secretaries may be hurried and not take time to answer questions.

Eduardo Angulo, the chairman of the Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality, said that many Latino families are not used to volunteering at schools because that was not the way schools worked in their home countries.

"The American education system is different," Angulo said. "Latino parents don't understand, you have to be present in the schools, in the classroom."

Chalkboard chose the Woodburn School District as the location of its press conference because it thinks Woodburn has done well in reaching out to parents.

Valor Middle School social-studies and Spanish teacher Sara Csaky said her school holds monthly meetings for parents -- with Spanish and Russian translators -- to discuss issues that parents have said they want to know more about. Those include how to curb drug and alcohol use and how to apply for colleges and financial aid.

Many Woodburn schools also participate in a program called Love and Logic, which provides classes for parents to learn more about skills they might need to

### New programs

The Chalkboard Project announced two new programs to help schools get parents involved.

Running Start: This program will give schools a two-part toolkit that can help them train staff members to work with hard-to-reach families.

The toolkits also provide materials for parents who want to learn more about schools, from how to read report cards to how to have a successful parent-teacher conference. These toolkits will be available in April, and schools will be able to download them from Chalkboard's Web site,

[www.chalkboardproject.org](http://www.chalkboardproject.org).

Partnership with Oregon Department of Education: The Education Department is coming up with ways schools can adopt policies that encourage parents to get involved. Chalkboard will award \$1,000 stipends in the spring to 10 public schools that are willing to work on early adoption of some of these suggested policies to improve communication between parents and schools. The deadline to apply for the stipends is March 15. To apply, go to [www.chalkboardproject.org](http://www.chalkboardproject.org) or call Michelle Jensen at the Oregon Department of Education, (503) 378-3600, Ext. 2718.

work with their children.

"Students don't come by themselves," said Patricia Martinez, the district's director of parent and community outreach. "They come with families, and the families have histories of growing together."

Woodburn parent Maria Gonzalez said she has appreciated what the district has done to help her be a part of her four children's schools.

"The administrators and teachers have opened doors for parents," Gonzalez said in Spanish through a translator. "The more parents participate, the better academic results the kids will have."

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