

## Teachers need professional development to better serve kids

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Last month, latte lovers panicked. Starbucks shut down for 3 1/2 hours.

It wasn't just the corner coffee shops in downtown Salem and Keizer. The entire corporation's 7,100 stores closed their doors. Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz said the purpose of the shutdown was to retrain baristas across America how to make a quality cup of espresso.

"Over the years we kind of lost our way," Schultz said.

Businesses understand this challenge well: It's called professional development.

There's another sector of our society that is yearning for professional development, and it's far more important than coffee. Kindergarten through high schools need more time and resources for teachers to learn the best practices of their colleagues, to collaborate on making their schools the best they can be, and to find growth within themselves.

Research has clearly shown that educators who receive classes and seminars on how to improve their skills get better results from their students. But there's a problem. Research also shows that Oregon lacks a systematic way of offering and tracking professional development for teachers.

In January, the Chalkboard Project released two studies that found that Oregon's K-12 teachers need and want more time for focused, ongoing professional development opportunities to keep up with changing school and classroom needs, including new graduation requirements, and to raise student achievement levels. We also found that these career enrichment resources disproportionately go to big districts ahead of small ones.

In the coming months, the Chalkboard Project plans to focus attention on specific districts, helping them to develop their own systems of bettering their teaching skills. The beneficiaries of this are not just teachers but students as well. That's why businesses need to care about what's happening in education today.

Peek through the window of any kindergarten class today, and you'll be looking into the eyes of Oregon's workforce 20 years from now. Whether those future employees have the skills they need to compete in a global economy depends largely on the abilities of the teacher guiding that class.

The mission of the Chalkboard Project is help to make Oregon schools among the best in the nation. One message we've heard loud and clear from Oregonians is they want best practices of high-quality classrooms spread around to all schools.

Next year, our organization will work with our partners in the education community to convince the Oregon Legislature to pass a bill to create a statewide network that would deliver rigorous professional development programs for educators across Oregon. Lawmakers failed to endorse a similar proposal in 2007. We hope the idea will win approval in 2009.

The need is clear. If Starbucks can sacrifice an evening of sales to improve the quality their product, then we can wake up and smell the coffee about professional development for teachers. The children of today and the work force of tomorrow depend on it.

*Sue Hildick is the executive director of the Chalkboard Project, which is sponsored by Foundations for a Better Oregon, a consortium of the leading foundations in Oregon.*