

## Teacher training is crucial

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Every good business invests in ongoing employee training. Schools should be no different. Both new and experienced teachers need continued professional support to keep their skills sharp and learn new ways to meet ever-increasing classroom demands.

Most districts set aside time for "professional development" during the school year. Statewide, it represents a major investment -- well over \$100 million a year -- and it's one of the most important things we do to maintain a quality teacher work force.

Yet we've got some challenges, many of them outlined in a study recently released by the Chalkboard Project. We reviewed Oregon's professional development system for teachers. The primary finding? There is no system. We lack equity and effective use of resources. Even though some districts provide great ongoing support to teachers, there is no mechanism in place to make sure that's happening in every district.

Hours devoted to teacher professional development vary widely in Oregon districts. And districts are on their own to find the best quality training opportunities. We constantly hear from teachers about workshops and other training opportunities that they felt weren't useful. And teachers almost universally feel they don't have enough quality time to collaborate with other teachers.

The national publication Education Week and the National Center for Education Statistics both rate Oregon among the lowest nationally in the area of teacher professional development. Education Week's "Quality Counts" report card released earlier this month was hard on Oregon -- probably too hard, given how difficult it is to measure things like teacher quality.

State Superintendent Susan Castillo has reason to be frustrated with national ratings systems that aren't always fair representations of actual performance. But the Quality Counts report did highlight where Oregon clearly can and should improve -- making sure our teachers get quality, ongoing support so they can better do their jobs.

We can start by validating the importance of providing continuing professional support to teachers. We need quality standards like most states have. We must make sure all teachers have equal access to ongoing support, no matter where they teach. We need to enhance the time and resources devoted to professional development and find effective ways to tie that training to results in the classroom.

Forget about grades and ratings. Let's focus on what really matters and what we all agree on: Improving the support we provide to all of our teachers so they can do their best work in the classroom.

That can start to happen through a multi-group effort being led by the governor's office this year to develop ideas that legislators can consider in 2009. Chalkboard is pleased to be a part of this discussion and hopes our research can help lead the

way to a bipartisan legislative solution.

While teachers' most visible work is done with students in their classrooms, arguably their most important work is done with peers and leaders who help them improve their ability to inspire and guide students to the highest achievement levels possible.

Take their word for it -- it's critical to student success. And we need to step up to help them.

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