

**New at 9:05 a.m.**

## All students deserve equal access to best education

By Eduardo Angulo

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The achievement gap in our Salem-Keizer schools and around the state affects our economic future. The students furthest behind are students of color, and/or of low-income homes.

Here's an example: Just 44 percent of Hispanic students in our community meet state reading standards, as opposed to 69 percent of white students. That gap is nearly as wide in math, and the gap is similar for African-American students. Statewide, the numbers are just as bad, and the gap in achievement gets much worse by high school.

As a parent and leader of the Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality, this achievement gap is completely unacceptable to me. Disproportionate numbers of our ethnic minority children and those who live in poverty are moving through our schools without the skills they need to succeed in life.

My belief in the need for education equality is why I've been so involved in the work of the Chalkboard Project. They understand that you have to approach this problem from more than one angle.

First, you have to get parents more involved in their children's learning. Chalkboard has funded several grants to school districts and parent organizations around the state to help them do a better job of reaching out to families who face a lot of barriers to interacting with schools. Here in Salem, Chalkboard has provided \$1,000 to Stephens Middle School to support efforts to connect with these underserved families.

At the Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality we are also doing our part. We have educated 400 parents about getting involved in their children's education. But the school system needs to change, too. And that means getting everyone from the governor on down to commit to some improvements.

Chalkboard is promoting an important bill in the Legislature right now (House Bill 2612) that would do one very important thing: Make sure that every child who enters Oregon's public school system gets off to a good start.

Chalkboard's research shows that students who start school behind probably won't catch up unless they learn to read well by the third grade. Research shows there are two things you can do to make sure that all students learn to read: Lower class sizes in the first two grades to 15 students, and make sure every child who needs extra reading help gets a tutor or other individual support. These steps can help close the achievement gap.

It's hard to believe that anybody could argue with this practical approach from which all students would benefit. It shouldn't be difficult to get a few million dollars from a \$6 billion education budget to start funding this program, but it is.

Almost 235,000 of our public school students — more than 40 percent — qualify for free and reduced-price lunches. Nearly 150,000 of our students are ethnic minorities. All of these students deserve equal access to the best education we can offer.

I ask our legislators to do the right thing and show that our commitment to educating all students really means “all.”

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