

New educators need our support

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Every Oregon child deserves great teachers and principals. In this new era of demanding "proficiency" of all students, the need for improved professional development of our educators has never been greater. But where do we start?

More than 50 years ago, I worked my way through teachers' college as a construction laborer and cement finisher. The constant guidance I received from experienced "pros" in the business like Bob Kubinski, Lenny Gagliardo and my dad helped me make it through those hot summers in Illinois! Their experienced advice, demonstration of hard work, strong encouragement and good humor have stayed with me forever.

Then I went into high school teaching. My first year, I taught 160 kids, five different subjects, six different classes. I never saw another experienced "pro" while I did my work! It's a wonder I made it through my first year. Sadly, this lack of support for our new teachers hasn't changed much since then.

Consider this:

- In Oregon, we lose about 35 percent of our new teachers within their first three years.
- This high turnover rate costs Oregon taxpayers \$45 million each year.
- The negative impact is especially strong for students in poor-performing schools whose teachers are more likely to leave the profession.

Consider also the plight of new principals in Oregon. We know from research that, next to the classroom teacher, the quality of the principal is the most important school variable impacting student performance. National estimates indicate that 50 percent of the nation's elementary principals will retire during this decade, so the number of new principals continues to grow.

Like most new teachers, new principals are put in a "sink or swim" situation. Some may be lucky enough to find experienced principals who might occasionally provide some advice. But this type of "mentoring" is sporadic and informal. It rarely strengthens leadership capability.

Virtually every other profession or trade in our country provides significant mentor guidance. We must improve both the performance and retention of new teachers and principals to raise student achievement in Oregon and close the race and class achievement gap.

Stand for Children has partnered with the Chalkboard Project and many other organizations to lead the development of a research-based, cost-effective Oregon Teacher and Principal Mentor Program that will improve student achievement and increase retention of new teachers and principals.

The mentoring program is authorized in Oregon's House Bill 2574. With strong bipartisan support, it has passed the House Education Committee unanimously. The program requirements in the bill are based on rigorous research on best practices around the country. For \$5 million out of a \$6.2 billion two-year budget, we can phase in a program that will retain great new teachers and create more effective principal leaders!

Please contact your senator and representative to encourage swift passage of House Bill 2574.

I know my first mentors, Bob, Lenny and dad, would really be proud of you for supporting this important program.

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