

Making Oregon a Great Place to Teach

*Recommendations from the
Distinguished Educators Council*

DISTINGUISHED EDUCATORS COUNCIL
Fall 2012 Recommendations and Report

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Pictured from left to right: Allan Bruner, Mary McGinnis and Donna DuBois. DEC members discuss research on state and national best practices.

INTRODUCTION

September 2012

In its search for advice on ways to support and strengthen teaching and learning in Oregon's K-12 classrooms, The Chalkboard Project turned to an expert panel: teachers themselves. It wanted to create an independent platform for educator voices through which educators could offer their perspectives on reform efforts to Chalkboard and state policy leaders.

We have been honored to serve on the Distinguished Educators Council since May 2012. This report details our recommendations—after months of study and discussion—for ensuring Oregon is a great place to teach.

While we are a diverse body—representing a variety of Oregon regions, grade-levels, subject areas and Oregonians—the 13 of us share a common perspective: We are teacher leaders who have been recognized by peers as exceptional educators and we are all committed to strengthening our profession. Members of the council include Oregon teachers of the year, National Board-certified teachers and Milken Family Foundation Award winners, among other honors. All of us are actively engaged in efforts to improve teaching and learning inside and outside our classrooms.

Making Oregon a great place to teach is an essential component of improving education. If Oregon is serious about reversing the sliding performance in too many schools and creating vibrant classrooms that help all students achieve at high levels, then making Oregon a great place to teach needs to be a core strategy.

Research has proven what we all know intuitively to be true: When it comes to how well students are learning, nothing matters

more in school buildings and classrooms than teachers. Indeed, the best in-school antidote to closing achievement gaps is an effective teacher: One study, for example, concludes that children of color who have an effective teacher four years in a row achieve at the same level as white children at the end of this period. The reverse is also true: other studies show students who get a less effective teacher for several years in a row fall further and further behind.¹

Excellent teaching isn't the sole solution to better student learning—strong principals, engaged parents and high-quality teaching tools matter too. But excellent teaching is non-negotiable. Our recommendations are designed to support teachers and strengthen teaching because, in the end, it's great teaching that lifts student performance. Our recommendations consider steps that can improve the profession at every phase: from how teachers are prepared, to how they improve their practice, to how they are compensated.

We believe now is an opportune time to engage and listen to teachers. Oregon has pointed itself in a new direction in regards to education policy. It is committing itself to more ambitious goals for college readiness and success by all students; it is redeploying existing investments in the P-20 education system in order to focus on innovations and "what works" to improve student achievement; it is creating new accountability expectations for school districts, and it is engaging new talent to lead the educational system.

With all these changes—most driven by sweeping policy changes at the state level—it is especially important to take stock of what a cross-section of Oregon's teacher leaders say is now most needed to help all teachers succeed. We trust policymakers and school leaders are listening.

Making Oregon a Great Place to Teach
Recommendations from Oregon's Distinguished Educators

Sincerely,



Allan Bruner
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 Colton School District
Oregon Teacher of the Year, 2006



Lionel Clegg
 Woodlawn School,
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Founder of Boys of Distinction, 2002



Kelly Devlin
 Teacher on Special Assignment,
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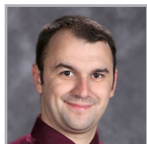
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RECOMMENDATIONS: Overview

To support and strengthen teaching and ensure Oregon is a great place to teach—which we think needs to be the first step in any strategy for boosting learning and closing achievement gaps—the members of the Distinguished Educators Council have developed the five following recommendations for state and local policymakers and educators:

1. Emphasize classroom experience and effective mentors in teacher preparation.
2. Provide meaningful, ongoing evaluations of teachers that contribute to improved teaching practices and increased student achievement.
3. Ensure personalized professional learning

opportunities tailored to teachers' needs and the students they teach.

4. Establish new leadership opportunities and career pathways for the most effective teachers.
5. Ensure that Oregon's teachers can address the needs of diverse students.

These recommendations are based on our review of research from across Oregon, the nation and the world about effective reforms designed to support teachers and strengthen the teaching profession. We looked at how different reform ideas have been implemented and what lessons could be learned. We met and debated the issues and agreed on our recommendations during a series of meetings (and related homework) between May and August 2012.



Focus on All Phases of Teacher Careers

We also made sure to look at all phases of a teacher's career, from how teachers are recruited to how they are prepared to how they continue to deepen their skills, practice and leadership. The continuum of a teacher's career is illustrated below.

In our profession, existing systems and institutions responsible for recruiting, preparing and supporting teachers are often fragmented, driven by external mandates, and mostly unaligned with the goal of reinforcing effective teachers and teaching. To support teachers as professionals, we believe attention must be paid to how policies, programs and practices fit together to support success across all phases of a teacher's career, including:

- **Recruitment and Selection:** Entice strong candidates to teach, and provide them assurance that teaching is the right career choice.

- **Preparation:** Ensure that preparation programs provide new teachers the learning and experiences they need to be successful in teaching.

- **Hiring and Induction:** Connect teachers with the right jobs based on their skills and interests; support the success of new teachers by providing them appropriate assignments and formal mentor support; and ensure that they receive meaningful performance evaluations.

- **Development:** Support teachers' growth by providing them new leadership roles, meaningful performance evaluations and targeted professional development.

- **Retention and Rewards:** Create collaborative, supportive and inspiring workplace environments that reinforce successful teaching and learning and provide teachers with genuine and fair rewards for leadership and effectiveness.

We intend for our recommendations both to strengthen the support teachers receive

at every stage in their careers and to make sure that all these steps are aligned with the goal of supporting excellent teaching and student learning statewide.

Criteria for Our Recommendations

In the end, we selected and applied these criteria to help winnow the options and surface the ideas that we think can have the biggest impact in Oregon during each step of a teacher's career:

- *Student-centered, teacher-led: We focus squarely on what matters most for our students, and prioritize the role of the professionals who we have entrusted to help them achieve.*
- *Visionary, but achievable: Our recommendations are bold, because they need to be. At the same time, we prioritized actions that have a chance to succeed given Oregon's unique historical, political and fiscal environment.*
- *Research-based: We aggressively sought out evidence to support our recommendations and revised our thinking based on the research.*
- *Scalable: Ultimately, we want our recommendations to reach as many teachers—and students—as possible. Our ideas are intended to extend best practices to more and more places throughout the state.*
- *Resource considerations: We recognize the fiscal constraints facing our state. We also assert that without strategic investments in teachers and teaching, Oregon will not succeed in advancing learning for all of our students. Implementation of our recommendations will require resources, but we took care to target those few we felt were highest leverage to strengthen teaching and learning.*

Our recommendations reflect the consensus of DEC members. While not every member agreed strongly with each specific recommendation and idea, we included in our final recommendations only those that every member supported and believed would contribute to effective teaching in Oregon.

Other Important Considerations for Policymakers

We hope local and state policymakers will consider our recommendations with these additional considerations in mind:

- Public schools in Oregon are underfunded—as both educators and policymakers have recognized—resulting in larger class-sizes and fewer electives for students. Ultimately, stabilizing funding and dealing with the significant budget challenges the state faces as its health care and corrections costs continue to grow will be essential to any long-term effort to make Oregon a great place for teaching and student learning.
- Time for teachers to prepare their lessons, assess student learning, collaborate with colleagues, coordinate with parents and further their professional knowledge is minimal at best in many Oregon school districts. When our recommendations call for teachers to do more, they will need the time to do so. School leaders should prioritize adequate planning and preparation time for teachers to do their jobs well and meet diverse student needs.
- Implementation of our recommendations, when they require new resources, should be funded. Oregon's schools do not need additional unfunded mandates.

RECOMMENDATION #1:
Emphasize classroom experience and effective mentors in teacher preparation.

The best preparation for teaching comes from placing teacher candidates in actual classroom situations. But too many of Oregon's current teacher preparation options are viewed by practicing teachers as ineffective due to their distance from actual classroom realities and needs.

"Many teachers, when asked about their teacher education programs, indicate that these programs held little relevance to their teaching practice and were 'jumping through hoops.' Most practicing teachers believe they could have benefited from more time actually teaching under a mentor teacher's tutelage before they began independent practice. There is a sense that pre-service and in-service programs are designed and implemented in a vacuum from the realities of classroom instruction."

—Colleen Works

To address this challenge we recommend that Oregon establish innovative training programs for prospective teachers ("pre-service") that prioritize clinical, on-the-job preparation and coaching. These efforts should be led by school districts in collaboration with schools of education and preparation programs. Teachers also need to be prepared for teaching in different environments; even small and rural school districts, further away from colleges and universities, can play leadership roles in creating richer mentorship programs. These new programs should:

- Emphasize comprehensive residency experiences with effective mentor teachers for prospective teachers;
- Ensure that "cooperating teachers" (teacher mentors and coaches that work with prospective and new teachers in

the classroom) are given the time to effectively work with teachers-in-training;

- Be driven and directed by school districts in collaboration with college or university schools of education to ensure teacher preparation meets the real-world needs of schools and teachers; and
- Reflect the recommendations for improving teacher education from NCATE's Blue Ribbon Panel on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Student Learning.²

Specifically, to work toward these objectives, we ask state policymakers and school district leaders to:

- Require full-year residency (minimum 30 weeks of clinical experience over a school year) in all teacher preparation programs; and
- Provide for high-quality "cooperating" teachers in all teacher preparation programs by ensuring appropriate training for this role, stipends and reduced teaching responsibilities.

Our recommendations are two-fold: To improve the quality of teacher preparation programs, we believe Oregon's political and educational leaders need to ensure a greater emphasis on in-classroom practice and improve the quality of the mentoring new and prospective teachers receive.

Background, Research and Lessons Learned

Too many teachers simply do not feel ready for the classroom following the completion of their preparation program. According to one national survey of new teachers, 62 percent of all new teachers reported they felt unprepared for the realities of their classroom.²

In most teacher preparation programs—

including Oregon's—teachers usually undergo a semester or two of actual in-class experience with little mentoring or follow-up support. College course instruction is important, but too often teachers feel they do not have what they need on day one of a new job: effective instructional techniques for diverse learners, classroom management skills, appropriate lesson planning and assessment strategies, and knowledge of state and districts standards.

NCATE Recommendations: Strengthening Teacher Preparation

- Ensure **rigorous monitoring** and enforcement for state program approval and accreditation.
- Increase accountability by **making districts partners in assessing teacher-candidates** and using multiple measures to gauge their effect on student learning.
- Require all programs that prepare teachers, whether inside or outside of universities, to meet requirements for **clinical preparation**.
- Revamp curricula to ensure **alignment with field-based experiences**.
- Create **more-rigorous selection processes** for teacher candidates.
- Give candidates the **opportunity to work in hard-to staff schools**.
- **Make districts an equal partner** in the preparation of teachers.
- Redesign higher education tenure-granting structures to **reward clinical faculty** members and boost their prestige.
- Ensure candidates are **supervised by clinical educators and mentors**.
- **Target federal funding toward research** and development into clinical preparation.

Source: National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, *Transforming Teacher Education Through Clinical Practice* (2010).

New approaches that incorporate more “on-the-job” training combined with ongoing mentoring and structured support are becoming more prominent. For example, the Blue Ribbon Panel on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Student Learning—convened by the influential National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education’s (NCATE)—has recommended intensive clinical teacher preparation programs with supervised field experiences (see box above with summary of recommendations).³

In turn, colleges and universities across the country are beginning to initiate programs that place much greater emphasis on teaching prospective teachers in K-12 classrooms rather than in college classrooms. We studied programs as diverse as Arizona State University’s “iTeachAZ” effort—where the preparation program gives teachers one full year of in-class experience in hard-to-teach classrooms—and University of Michigan—where teacher candidates generally spend one year working closely with a mentor teacher.⁴

We were also intrigued with more home-grown models for teacher preparation—models designed and run by school districts and charter schools to provide tailored training for unique needs. In California, the state has authorized the High Tech High charter school network to run a teacher certification program to prepare teachers for the particular instructional approach (project-based learning, integration of technical and academic education, etc.) found in its 11 schools. As part of earning their certificates as High Tech High Teachers, new-teacher candidates work as full-time employees and undergo a 600-hour intern experience working with mentor teachers.⁵

On the other side of the country, the Boston Teacher Residency was created in 2004 by Boston Public Schools to better prepare—and thereby retain—teachers who had the skills and knowledge to succeed in urban schools. The residency is an intensive 13-month residency-based graduate program where teacher candidates are trained in the classroom alongside a mentor. Graduates earn a master’s degree, a living stipend and—if they teach for three years in the district—tuition forgiveness. While nationally 50 percent of new teachers stay on the job in urban school districts past three years, 80 percent of the graduates of the Boston Teacher Residency remain after three years.⁶

Importantly, the Boston Teacher Residency was designed in part to ensure new teachers in Boston schools understood

the unique context of that city, including the standards and curriculum that were expected and the diversity in the student communities. To close achievement gaps in Oregon, we need teachers who—from day one—better appreciate and understand the student diversity in their classrooms and who have the confidence and skills to help all their students succeed. A greater focus on preparation—in schools and driven by school districts—is an important starting point for strengthening teaching in Oregon.

Why We Believe This Recommendation Can Support and Strengthen Teaching in Oregon

In Oregon, some school districts are beginning to experiment with new approaches to teacher preparation. We recommend that more efforts like these be encouraged and cultivated. For example,

“As teachers become more highly skilled, several things follow: greater success, greater job satisfaction and higher teacher retention. This translates into more students learning.” —Mary McGinnis

Springfield Public Schools is developing a model for teacher preparation in which new teachers will complete a comprehensive year-long intern experience with a mentor teacher. The Salem-Keizer School District has formed the Collaborative for Clinical Partnerships with three local universities (Corban, Western Oregon and Willamette) to strengthen real-world training of teachers in classrooms. In addition, Portland State University has initiated the Portland Metro Education Program (PMEP) that brings 10 school districts and 10 universities together to collaboratively set new standards for

clinical practice.

Closer collaboration among practicing classroom educators, increased dialogue with school districts and more comprehensive residency experiences can help shrink the apparent disconnect between teacher preparation programs and classroom practice. We are enthusiastic about these efforts to implement more classroom-based, real-world learning by new teachers and we urge Oregon leaders to catalyze this emphasis in our state.

By emphasizing clinical practice over theory and encouraging school districts to shape (and even offer their own) preparation programs, we expect to see these results:

- New teachers will come into the field better prepared to face the challenges of teaching. They will have a larger set of skills to draw on for success from day one in the classroom. New teachers will step into their initial teaching experiences with more confidence and knowledge.
- With greater awareness among new teachers of what to expect (and concrete skills to better tackle real world challenges in the classroom), the number of new teachers leaving the field will decrease. This will translate into reduced costs associated with hiring new teachers and promote more consistency for students and improved student academic success.
- Teacher preparation and mentoring efforts will feature better coordination and collaboration among schools, districts and schools of education.

RECOMMENDATION #2: Provide meaningful, ongoing evaluations of teachers that contribute to improved teaching practices and increased student achievement.

Without effective evaluations, how do we know an effective teacher? Without high-quality and specific feedback, how can teachers improve? In recent years, state and national policymakers and education advocates have all prioritized answering these questions by designing new evaluation systems, protocols and feedback loops for teachers. With the passage of Senate Bill 290 in 2011 and the ESEA waiver requirements, Oregon policymakers too are now in the midst of finalizing a new framework to guide annual evaluations of teachers.

The implementation of any new system—especially one dealing with human resources—is complex and surfaces fiscal, political and technical issues. As Oregon leaders fine-tune a new statewide approach to teacher evaluation, we recommend the final framework—including state requirements—meet these criteria for design, implementation and use:

Design criteria

- Be designed and implemented collaboratively by teachers and administrators
- Include multiple measures of teaching effectiveness
- Use multiple evaluators
- Be standardized and calibrated enough to ensure “inter-rater reliability” (the degree to which two raters of a teacher’s practice agree) and allow for comparisons across the state
- Create common understanding for what good teaching looks like

Implementation criteria

- Require implementation with integrity
- Support the training of evaluators

Use criteria

- Provide teachers coaching and feedback—both formative and summative—to guide and inform professional practice and learning (“Formative” refers to ongoing assessments, reviews and observations—used primarily to offer real-time feedback; “summative” assessments are typically used to evaluate overall effectiveness at a pre-determined time)
- Inform a professional development plan for helping each teacher improve
- Involve peers and mentors
- Provide and prioritize time for teachers to meaningfully engage in the evaluation system
- Use ratings to incentivize the equitable distribution of teaching talent; focus on encouraging the state’s best teachers to serve our state’s most disadvantaged student populations

Specifically, to work toward these objectives, we ask state policymakers and school district leaders to:

- Invest in statewide training of teacher evaluators to ensure consistency and quality;
- Provide technical assistance to district leaders and professional development to teachers and administrators in order to ensure an effective rollout of Oregon’s new evaluation system; and
- Work toward integrating Oregon’s teacher and administrator evaluation system with new Common Core standards and assessments.

Improving both the evaluation of teachers and how this information is used for improvement is critical if struggling teachers are going to get better, if strong teachers are going to be identified and used as mentors and coaches, and if all teachers are going to get the feedback they need to continually improve.

“By using multiple measures of evaluation on a frequent basis, teaching and thus learning in Oregon will improve greatly. The idea of knowing exactly where we stand as educators and having a plan for growth will allow us to reach new levels of success in education. Teachers can develop and follow a plan for improvement or be removed. As a result, the education system can ensure all students are given the best teachers and opportunities to learn.” —Jessica Smith

Just as important, knowledge about who the most effective teachers are is critical to ensuring that they are positioned to help students who need them most. If Oregon is to improve student learning, the strongest teachers should be working with the neediest students—or coaching and supporting other teachers who are engaged in this task. Better designed and more effective evaluations of teachers are the first step to identifying, supporting and promoting teachers who are most skilled at improving student learning.

Background, Research and Lessons Learned

Education research has long documented that great teaching matters more than anything else within a school. “No other intervention can make the difference that a knowledgeable, skillful teacher can make in the learning process,” concluded the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future in 1997.⁷ But it has not always been as clear what good teaching looks like or what is the best way to measure it and cultivate it.

Reflecting this state of affairs, teacher evaluation efforts in too many school districts are one-shot and scatter-shot, rarely offering teachers a comprehensive and detailed assessment of their skills and knowledge and actionable suggestions for how they can improve. According to a recent study, two-thirds of American teachers feel that current evaluations don’t accurately capture the full picture of what they do in the classroom.⁸ Teachers also believe multiple measures should be used to evaluate their performance; they welcome more frequent and meaningful opportunities to improve their practice, including observations from both principals and peers.⁹

A prominent panel of accomplished teachers recently convened by the National Education Association to suggest a new vision for the teaching profession has reached the same conclusion, arguing, “Educators want meaningful feedback about their practice from both peers and supervisors. Far too often, teachers are evaluated infrequently, superficially, and by supervisors who have little or no teaching experience. Frequently, teachers do not receive feedback that is helpful and have little opportunity to address shortcomings in their practice that are identified in an evaluation. Most school administrators are responsible for evaluating too many teachers and are given little opportunity to learn how to evaluate effectively.”¹⁰

This commission on Effective Teachers and Teaching called for a new evaluation system for teachers based on multiple measures of evidence from the teacher’s practice and student work, such as student learning outcomes measured by classroom, school, district or state assessments; observation data from peer reviewers and administrators; and work products, participation in study groups, lesson study or action research.¹¹

The Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Project is the largest study currently underway to rigorously quantify how

evaluation methods can best be used to tell teachers more about the skills that make them most effective and to help districts identify great teaching. The project has brought together 3,000 teacher volunteers in six different school districts with dozens of education experts and researchers to examine different approaches to teacher evaluation. Its findings are being released on a rolling basis.¹²

The MET Project's most recent findings conclude that teacher evaluations are most reliable and predictive when they combine three measures: ratings from classroom observations, evidence of students' achievement gains and student feedback. The findings also suggest that the combination of these three measures is better than either graduate degrees or years of teaching experience at predicting which teachers consistently help their students make achievement gains year after year. Other advice from project researchers includes:

- Require observers to demonstrate accuracy before they rate teacher practice;
- When high-stakes decisions are being made, multiple observations are necessary;
- Track system-level reliability by double scoring some teachers with impartial observers; and
- Regularly verify that teachers with stronger observation scores also have stronger achievement gains on average.¹³

Even before the MET Project and its methodical, large-scale investigation of how best to assess and support effective teaching, school districts have been experimenting with new approaches. One well-known and well-regarded effort we examined is the "Peer Assistance and

Review" (or PAR) effort first developed in Toledo, Ohio, more than 20 years ago and still being used. The model was built jointly by district administrators and the local teachers union and has since been adopted by dozens of other districts nationally.

The PAR model uses "consulting" (veteran) teachers who take sabbaticals from their classroom assignments to mentor new teachers, support other experienced teachers who are struggling, and provide written reports on teacher progress. In addition to coaching and review, the consulting teacher offers an independent assessment of each participating teacher and recommendation for continued employment, continued assistance, non-renewal or dismissal.¹⁴ More recently, the Montgomery County school district in suburban Baltimore, Maryland—whose teachers are affiliated with the National Education Association—has integrated the PAR model into its evaluation efforts.

We also looked at other models that are being tested by districts, unions and teachers. In Hillsborough County school district (Tampa, Florida), all experienced teachers in the district, from the most effective to the least, are assigned a peer evaluator (plus all teachers with no prior teaching experience are assigned a mentor). Peer evaluators are assigned to veteran teachers and are from the teacher's subject area where possible. These teachers are observed between two and eight times per year by the peer evaluator, with the exact number of times determined by the results of the previous year's evaluation. Initial data from the first year of this new approach to evaluation showed principals and peers gave the lowest overall performance rating to teachers at a very consistent rate—suggesting peers can evaluate teachers as well as more traditional evaluators and supervisors.¹⁵

Here in Oregon, the Chalkboard-led CLASS

("Creative Leadership Achieves Student Success") Project has been helping school district and union leaders design new teacher evaluations, compensation models, career paths and professional development systems since 2006. As of 2012, about 30 percent of all Oregon students are in a CLASS district—and several DEC members work in CLASS districts.

For the past three years, Chalkboard has invested in an annual, independent evaluation of results by the Portland State University Graduate School of Education and ECONorthwest. Across CLASS districts with at least three years of data to analyze, the increase in the share of students meeting or exceeding state benchmarks in math and science (as measured by the OAKS exam) was at least twice the rate of improvement in comparison districts with similar student demographic characteristics. In reading and writing, the CLASS districts' improvement was about 1.5 times the improvement rate of comparison districts. Additionally, high school drop-out rates in CLASS districts are half those of state averages and well below those of comparable districts. Survey data indicates that teacher perceptions of their leadership roles in school improvement have increased significantly.¹⁶

Why We Believe This Recommendation Can Support and Strengthen Teaching in Oregon

Implementation of a high-quality model of teacher evaluation would be a sea-change for Oregon, which has for too long tolerated idiosyncratic practices, little practical feedback to teachers and inattention to quality. Many stakeholders are watching and contributing to the design and implementation of the new evaluation framework called for by SB 290. But teachers themselves need to get in front of this movement and take the central role in designing a unique model that is rigorous, learning-centered, and that advances the

professional status of teachers in the state.

The CLASS Project and emerging new models across the country provide insights into how Oregon's new statewide framework for evaluation should be designed and rolled-out. We expect to see these results:

- Teachers will be measured on effectiveness, the key being student learning and how much teachers contribute to enhancing the learning environment through effective teaching and professional practice.
- Properly designed, as described in our recommendation above, the new evaluation system will give teachers a clearer understanding of their strengths and areas for growth as educators. It will give teachers actionable feedback about whether they are using the most effective practices. And it will recognize and reward effective and improving teachers.
- Effective evaluation practices will identify the most effective teachers who can then be encouraged to serve as mentors and coaches for other educators.
- It will be easier to help ineffective teachers improve and—if they cannot improve—to remove them from the profession.

RECOMMENDATION #3: Ensure personalized professional learning opportunities tailored to teachers' needs and the students they teach.

Professional development opportunities—from teacher study groups to day-long, all-district training sessions to college coursework—are de rigueur components of most teachers' schedules. But too little of this investment in helping teachers improve their professional performance actually makes a difference.

As Hayes Mizell, a senior fellow at Learning Forward, a nonprofit group and membership organization that works to improve the quality of ongoing teacher training, has observed, "The hard truth is that, until recently, the field of professional development has been underdeveloped and immature. It has tolerated a lot of sloppy thinking, practice, and results. It has not been willing to 'call out' ineffective practice and ineffective policy. ... It has not devoted attention to outcomes."¹⁷

"All teachers would savor job-embedded professional development as time to improve and expand their craft and skills."—Kelly Devlin

We recommend that Oregon encourage more targeted, personalized professional development efforts for teachers—efforts that are designed from the start to be effective and support improved practice. Professional development should:

- Involve teachers in identifying and designing their own professional learning efforts;
- Provide teachers consistent opportunities for professional learning within the school day;
- Provide access to instructional coaching for all teachers; and
- Include time for teams of teachers to

collaborate and shape their instruction in ways that are data-driven, student-centered and based upon clear norms and procedures.

Specifically, to work toward these objectives, we ask state policymakers and school district leaders to:

- **Provide high-quality, well-trained mentors for all first- and second-year teachers;**
- **Build teacher team capacity at the school and district levels to design and lead professional learning locally; and**
- **Prioritize time for teachers to engage in planning, collaboration and professional development focused on improving teaching practices—rethinking the design of the school day, the use of time and staffing assignments as needed.**

Better evaluation systems (our recommendation #2) also can lead to better professional learning. Many important decisions should be tied to a teacher's regular evaluations, including decisions about retention, what professional development is needed and how well students are learning. Just because too much of what has passed for professional development in the past has been of dubious quality and limited impact doesn't mean that ongoing professional development of teachers is unimportant. Indeed, with higher student achievement and teaching performance standards now in place in Oregon as well as greater demands for educating a diverse student population, now is the time to take professional development much more seriously and enact approaches that give teachers the skills and strategies to succeed.

Professional learning cannot be viewed as something that somehow happens in addition to good teaching. Reflecting on what went well and what can be improved is what great teachers do because it leads to better instruction. Thus, it can't be seen

as an “add on” on top of an already full day of responsibilities for teachers. We believe time to reflect and grow as a professional needs to be prioritized in every school building in Oregon as a regular part of how teachers use the school day or week.

“With proper professional development, Oregon could have the most knowledgeable, effective and relevant teachers in the nation. Student learning would be greatly enhanced by a teaching workforce that is adept at utilizing the ever-increasing amount of information now and in the future.”—Kevin Zerzan

Background, Research and Lessons Learned

Numerous studies have attempted to determine a relationship between high-quality professional development and gains in student achievement. A recent research review by the U.S. Department of Education concluded that professional development can in some instances raise student test scores, but only in cases where professional development was sustained over a sufficient time period. Programs in which teachers experienced 30-100 hours over a 6- to 12-month period saw the greatest effects. This finding, reinforced by several similar studies, suggests that more effective professional development is ongoing rather than a one-time event.¹⁸

Among educators and researchers (and DEC members), we find there is a high degree of agreement about what sort of professional development makes the greatest difference in helping teachers improve their practice, including these features:

- Alignment with school goals and state standards
- Job-embedded and ongoing (not a one-time event or class)
- A focus on content and teaching strategies that help students learn that content

- Designed by teachers in cooperation with experts in the field
- Opportunities for collaboration among teachers
- Follow-up and continuous feedback

In addition, both national teachers associations have articulated principles for effective professional development that overlap substantially with these concepts. See, for example, the “Vision for Professional Development” produced by the National Education Association (shown in the box on the next page).

Despite this agreement, many countries outside the U.S.—including some of the most high-performing education systems in the world—have been more proactive in ensuring high-quality, individualized and ongoing professional development opportunities for their teachers. Common themes we saw throughout these efforts included teachers identifying, designing and implementing their own professional learning efforts; teachers working together to share ideas and best practices; and time for teacher learning embedded in the school day.

For example, Singapore, whose students regularly top international achievement tests, refers to its teachers as “nation builders.” It has been working for over a decade to support more effective teaching in its schools with initiatives that prioritize both teacher learning and time for teacher learning, such as:

- *Job-embedded collaboration time:* Teachers make use of their non-teaching hours (about 15 hours each week) to work with other teachers on lesson preparation, visit other classrooms to study teaching, or engage in professional discussions and meetings with teachers from their school or their cluster.

National Education Association's Vision for Professional Development

- **Improved student learning and well-being:** In our vision, all professional development conforms to national professional learning standards. Teachers engage only in professional development activities that enhance their knowledge, skills, dispositions, and aptitudes to improve student learning and wellbeing. Teacher leaders assess all professional development using research-based protocols to determine its impact on teacher practice and student learning.
- **Peer review programs:** In our vision, all teachers participate in peer review programs that (1) furnish the support needed for early career teachers to become effective; (2) implement improvement strategies for struggling teachers to become more effective; (3) identify professional learning opportunities for effective teachers to become highly effective; and (4) include a process for teachers who are deemed ineffective to be recommended for dismissal.
- **Job-embedded programs:** We believe job-embedded professional development clearly offers a direct connection between a teacher's daily instruction and professional learning. This connection enhances content-specific instructional practices to improve student learning. A direct connection between learning and its application is critical for continuous professional growth.
- **Differentiation by career stage, expertise, and other criteria:** Teachers' professional development needs vary according to level of experience, evaluation ratings, and school context. A teacher may lead some professional learning activities and be a learner in others, in accordance with that teacher's expertise in particular areas. Professional learning activities should include a wide array of formats to foster accessibility within the school day. Formats may include action research, case discussions, coaching and mentoring, critical friends groups, data teams, examining student work, lesson study, portfolios, and study groups.

Source: Commission on Effective Teachers and Teaching, *Transforming Teaching: Connecting Professional Responsibility with Student Learning* (2011).

- *Time off to attend external training (in addition to job-embedded time):* On average, the government pays for 100 hours of professional development each year for all teachers.
- *Support for teacher-initiated development:* The government's national Teacher's Network sponsors learning circles, teacher-led workshops, conferences and a website and publications series—all with the goal of

encouraging sharing, collaboration and reflection among teachers.¹⁹

The province of Ontario, Canada, also has prioritized professional capacity building with impressive results:

- *Performance Appraisals and Learning Plans:* Experienced teachers design an "Annual Learning Plan" each year, outlining their plans for professional growth.
- *Teacher Learning and Leadership Program:* Experienced teachers apply to participate in this program which emphasizes modeling and sharing best practices with other teachers through self-directed, job-embedded professional development projects. Teachers become part of a provincial network of professional learning where their knowledge and learning is shared with other teachers within and outside their schools.
- *Ongoing professional development dedicated to collaborative activities:* Teachers and principals have six professional activity days every school year to work with each other on activities related to key ministry priorities and local school and school board needs.²⁰

Significant change can start with just two or three teachers—teaching the same grade level or subject areas—who commit to share, critique and improve their practices together rather than work behind closed classroom doors. Indeed, many of the programs we studied emphasized professional learning among small teams of teachers.

There are many teachers in Oregon who are in front of students all day with little or no time to engage in the activities that improve their practices, including collaboration and meaningful professional learning. We

acknowledge that implementing many of these best practices will require significantly restructuring the school day—and we think that is a good thing. Making Oregon a great place to teach will require prioritizing time for teachers to hone their skills and continuously improve their teaching.

Why We Believe This Recommendation Can Support and Strengthen Teaching in Oregon

Empowerment over their own learning is strongly correlated with teachers' motivation, commitment and sense of success.²¹ Many Oregon school districts already are experimenting with new ways of personalizing professional development for teachers. Lebanon Community Schools now sponsors "learning walks" in which teacher leaders take small groups of colleagues into other teachers classrooms six days per year to observe student work. In Sisters School



Pictured from left to right: Kevin Zerzan, Karen Stiner and Sean McGeeny. DEC members meet in small groups to discuss potential recommendations.

District, teams of teacher's are now meeting four times per year to view and critique video recordings of each other's lessons. Also, partner teachers are using some of their preparation time to observe each other's teaching and provide feedback to each other.

We also recognize that Oregon's adoption of new Common Core State Standards in math and English/language arts—combined with newly adopted standards

of professional practice—raises the bar for both students and teachers and creates new urgency for more effective, successful professional development opportunities. These standards are benchmarked to international expectations and designed to ensure students have the skills and knowledge to graduate from high school ready for college, careers and citizenship.

Innovations now taking place in isolated school districts across Oregon should become the norm rather than remain the exception. If we are to systemically improve teaching and consistently reach higher standards, the commitment to continued and high-quality professional development and growth must be a sustained guarantee. If that happens, we expect to see these results:

- When teachers get more time to work together in ways that directly impact what is happening in their classrooms, they will be more engaged and committed to their school building and the learning that takes place there.
- By focusing every professional development opportunity for teachers on their specific needs or weaknesses, their ability to influence and improve student learning will increase.

RECOMMENDATION #4: Establish new leadership opportunities and career pathways for the most effective teachers.

Another important way Oregon can be more deliberate in cultivating great teaching is by ensuring the best educators are in positions to influence key decisions about teaching and learning and to help lift the instruction of other teachers in their schools. However, in too many places, the only avenue for teachers to influence teaching outside of their own classroom is to become an administrator. We believe there should be other routes for tapping the expertise of teacher leaders besides asking them to leave the classroom.

We recommend school districts experiment with new leadership and compensation models that advance student learning by:

- Encouraging teachers to take on leadership roles where they can influence key decisions about teaching and learning in their schools and districts;
- Developing leadership roles that should include:
 - Curriculum design
 - Teacher mentoring
 - Instructional coaching
 - Professional learning, planning and implementation; and
- Supporting and rewarding teacher leaders based on new compensation models.

Specifically, to work toward these objectives, we ask state policymakers and school district leaders to:

- Provide effective teachers with incentives to serve in struggling schools, whether as increased compensation, alternative compensation, tuition forgiveness or loan forgiveness;

- Increase funding for school collaboration grants (2011's SB 252) that promote new teacher leadership opportunities, career pathways, professional development, performance evaluation, and alternative compensation models for teachers; and
- Create regular venues for educator innovators to share with colleagues lessons in creating new leadership opportunities, career pathways and compensation models for teachers.

Teacher leaders in Oregon aren't limited to the 13 members of the DEC. There are thousands of them across our state and any serious effort to improve our profession needs to consider how we can more regularly tap their talents, successes and energy to improve teaching and learning in multiple classrooms. While "teacher leaders" already exist throughout Oregon's 197 school districts, what doesn't exist is an organized commitment to tap their expertise and compensate them for their leadership.

These teacher leaders have found success in their own practice—such as helping students who can't read learn to read, helping unruly students stay focused on task and helping students be the first in their family to attend college. We should tap their expertise, not just as principals or "teachers on special assignment" but as teachers who stay in the classroom while working closely with peers as mentors, as leaders of other teachers, or in other roles that improve instruction.

Background, Research and Lessons Learned

Untapped teacher leadership talent is a severe opportunity loss for teachers themselves, students and Oregon as a whole. "Teachers have the skills and knowledge that are critical to school improvement efforts, and we should be encouraging teachers to take on leadership roles so they can have greater influence

on key decisions that impact teaching and learning," argues Dennis Van Roekel, president of the National Education Association.²² However, most Oregon school districts do not provide teachers with clear pathways to be leaders in their schools, nor do they provide opportunities for teachers to use and share their expertise with colleagues.

Teacher Leader Model Standards: Seven Domains of Teacher Leadership

Domain I: Fostering a collaborative culture to support educator development and student learning

Domain II: Accessing and using research to improve practice and student learning

Domain III: Promoting professional learning for continuous improvement

Domain IV: Facilitating improvements in instruction and student learning

Domain V: Promoting the use of assessments and data for school and district improvement

Domain VI: Improving outreach and collaboration with families and community

Domain VII: Advocating for student learning and the profession

Source: Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, *Teacher Leader Model Standards* (2011).

To inform a vision for increased teacher leadership, a broad array of education organizations, state education agencies, teacher leaders, principals, superintendents, and institutions of higher education formed the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium and created Teacher Leader Model Standards in May 2011. Recognizing that teacher leadership can take on many different forms, the consortium developed seven domains for teacher leadership, (as described in the box above).

Further, teacher compensation models should reflect teacher effectiveness and leadership. Most Oregon school districts utilize a traditional salary schedule—in

which teacher compensation is based on credentials and years of service. Research suggests that neither of these considerations correlates strongly with effective teaching and student learning. Research has shown, for example, that the range in effectiveness among certified teachers can be five times as large as the range between certified and non-certified teachers—suggesting years in the classroom aren't necessarily a factor in what makes a teacher effective. Similarly, advanced degrees in education (except perhaps in math) bear little relationship to which teachers are able to improve student achievement.²³

Here in Oregon, the 23 school districts participating in the CLASS Project are all experimenting with new career ladders that support and compensate teachers for new leadership roles. In the Sherwood School District, for example, contract teachers demonstrate their leadership by collecting a portfolio of work with evidence showing how they influence student success. Teachers earn points based on this evidence as well as through new roles and leadership responsibilities they assume. After four to five years of point accumulation they become eligible to skip forward two steps on the salary schedule.

Pittsburgh Public Schools has gone further by looking to change its teacher compensation model. It is seeking to fully embrace the idea of teacher leadership in a comprehensive redesign of its teacher development and compensation system begun in 2010. Pittsburgh offers bonuses to individual teachers, teacher teams, entire schools and all teachers in the district based on student performance. The plan also includes bonuses for teacher leadership, including:

- *Promise-Readiness Corps teachers:* These teachers support an assigned group of ninth-grade students and then transition with them to 10th grade (staying with the same cohort of students for two

years). These teachers are paid an extra \$9,300 annually for their leadership plus are eligible to earn a bonus of up to \$20,000 based on better than expected results in student academic achievement, attendance, and course credits earned over the two-year cohort cycle.

- *K-8 and Secondary Instructional Teacher Leaders*: These teachers help the district ensure instructional quality by supporting, coaching, providing personalized

“Providing new leadership opportunities for teachers means the knowledge ‘wealth’ in schools gets distributed—to the benefit of students.”—Michael Mann

professional development, and evaluating peers. These teachers are paid an extra \$11,300 annually for their leadership.²⁴

The Arizona Career Ladder Program is a performance-based compensation plan that provides incentives to teachers in 28 districts in the state who choose to make career advancements without leaving the classroom or the profession. Districts—representing a diversity of sizes and students served—signed up for the program between 1986 and 1994 and continue to receive extra state financial support for their new compensation model. Given the long track record, the Arizona state department of education has been able to track the success of these districts over time. The most recent evaluation concludes that, on average, students in schools with teacher career ladders are performing significantly better on state exams than students in non-career ladder schools, even after adjusting for differences in student and school characteristics.²⁵

Why We Believe This Recommendation Can Support and Strengthen Teaching in Oregon

Career ladders are about identifying highly effective teachers and engaging

them to apply their talents and knowledge to specific teaching and learning needs while remaining classroom teachers, and compensating them accordingly. Bend-La Pine is one Oregon school district experimenting with career ladders and teacher compensation based on proficiency and increased responsibilities.

Every school district should be exploring similar innovations. If so, we expect to see these results:

- Providing new leadership opportunities for teachers will mean that instructional knowledge is shared throughout schools and districts instead of being isolated in classrooms.
- Formalizing teacher leadership roles will successfully address the need many experienced teachers have for stepping into building-wide and district-wide leadership roles without having to leave the classroom and become administrators. It will encourage and compensate teachers who share with a wider audience the successes they have achieved in their classrooms.
- Career ladders will respond to public frustration with traditional compensation models that award raises to teachers for putting in another year or additional seat time in university courses and workshops that may have little to do with student success.
- Deliberately engaging more effective teachers in leadership roles will help retain them in education, allowing them to grow professionally and earn higher salaries. Our students need these teachers to continue to teach, but it also will allow these teachers to share with others the practices that have allowed them to be so successful with students.

RECOMMENDATION #5: Ensure that Oregon's teachers can address the needs of diverse students.

Everything we've proposed in our recommendations throughout this report to make Oregon the best place to teach is, in the end, a strategy for improving student learning and, we hope, for beginning to close Oregon's widening achievement gap between students of different racial backgrounds and different family circumstances. Indeed, students most at-risk in school are the ones who need the best teachers. We believe these recommendations will improve achievement for all students from all backgrounds.

"Many districts have components that speak to diversity, but outside of a professional development workshop or discussion here and there about race, what are we really doing to address the gap? This impacts all of our students. Whether the schools in which they attend have a variety of students from different races or if they all have the same racial backgrounds, the fact of the matter is that our world is diverse. We want our children to be able to work with people from all over the world and to be respectful of the differences we may have."—Lionel Clegg

But we also believe Oregon should commit to special, focused steps to ensure teachers are as prepared as possible to meet the needs of Oregon's increasingly diverse students. Oregon should:

- Expect—and provide support for—all teachers to practice culturally responsive teaching;
- Strive for a more diversified educator workforce; and

- Embed skills and strategies designed to eliminate racial and economic achievement gaps in all teacher training, evaluation and professional learning efforts.

Specifically, to work toward these objectives, we ask state policymakers and school district leaders to:

- Create a "promising practices" archive with information about how schools and districts across Oregon and across the country have succeeded in closing achievement gaps;
- Require ongoing training for all pre-service and in-service teachers and administrators in the use of these promising practices for closing achievement gaps; and
- Set statewide goals to select, recruit and prepare teachers from historically underrepresented groups to diversify Oregon's education workforce.

Background, Research and Lessons Learned

Oregon has struggled to ensure the academic success of students of color and those who are at-risk.

According to a recent analysis by The Education Trust of student performance across the country, Oregon is one of a handful of states where the achievement gap has gotten significantly worse over the past decade. And, still worse, Oregon actually has lost ground between both higher-income and lower-income students and between groups of students.²⁶ Also, African-American and Hispanic students are still far less likely to graduate from high

school on time and attend college than their peers. Similar gaps exist for lower-income students and limited-English proficiency students.²⁷

Oregon's minority populations and the number of students receiving free or reduced price lunch continue to grow. Between 2000-2010, the Hispanic population grew 63 percent—much faster than the white population.²⁸ Currently 50% of Oregon's student population receives free and reduced price lunch.²⁹ It is clear to us that the state needs to address these gaps now to ensure a well-educated and productive population.

The problem is even more acute when one considers that 91.6 percent of Oregon's teachers are white, according to the Oregon Department of Education.³⁰ Moreover, national research on minority teacher shortages has found that while the overall number of minority teachers has increased over time in U.S. schools, turnover rates are much higher for minorities than for white teachers.³¹

Given Oregon's increasing diversity in classrooms, strengthening the cultural competence—the confidence and skill in interacting with diverse cultures in the classroom—of Oregon teachers is very important. Perhaps even more important is taking proactive steps as a state to diversify the teacher workforce to better reflect Oregon's diversity. This will require attention to not just recruitment but also retention. Through the Minority Teacher Act, Oregon set a goal that by the year 2001 the number of minority teachers, including administrators, would be proportionate to the number of minority children enrolled in public schools in the state. Unfortunately, in the 2010-11 school year, the gap continued to persist with minorities making up only 8.4% of the teaching population in comparison to 33.6% of the student population.³²

Reflecting on the teacher diversity gap

across the country, researchers at the Center for American Progress observed: "Increasing the number of teachers of color is not only a matter of a philosophical commitment to diversity in career opportunities. Teachers of color provide real-life examples to minority students of future career paths. In this way, increasing the number of current teachers of color may be instrumental to increasing the number of future teachers of color. And while there are effective teachers of many races, teachers of color have demonstrated success in increasing academic achievement for engaging students of similar backgrounds."³³

Why We Believe This Recommendation Can Support and Strengthen Teaching in Oregon

While efforts to close the achievement gap start with strong teachers, they also require strong principals, involved parents and high-quality teaching tools. We encourage Oregon's leaders to consider all these factors and all the things they can do to strengthen school capacities and cultures.

Outside of a single professional development class or discussion about race, we see too few efforts to provide comprehensive solutions and support educators with all the tools they need. At the very least—and as a foundation—Oregon should commit to more specific, consistent and sustained efforts to ensure that teachers can address the needs of diverse students. Many school districts have individual components or initiatives that speak to Oregon's growing diversity. For example, a few districts, such as Salem-Keizer, are addressing this need head-on by requiring that every teacher go through training in culturally responsive teaching. However, there are many other school districts where teachers are given no tools or guidance to help meet the needs of their diverse students.

Oregon also should improve the diversity of its workforce to better reflect the diversity of

students—building on successful program's like Portland's Teachers Program, which recruits, prepares and retains culturally competent teachers, with a special focus on historically underrepresented groups in the teaching profession. It also should ensure—as it rethinks and reinvests in better professional development and support



We adopted the following criteria to develop our recommendations: 1) student-centered, teacher-led 2) visionary, but achievable 3) research-based 4) scalable 5) resource considerations.

for teachers, as outlined elsewhere in our report—new ways of helping teachers better offer culturally competent instruction.

If Oregon takes these steps, we expect to see these results:

- Teachers will have the skills, confidence and ability to address the needs of diverse students.
- Achievement by all students will improve. Providing a high quality educational experience for every student will benefit *all* students.

CONCLUSION

Oregon's teachers—no less than its parents, students, policymakers and education leaders—want schools that give every student in our increasingly diverse state the best possible foundation for success. For too long, our state has under-invested in its public school system through a lack of resources, lack of innovation and lack of leadership.

In a “flat world”¹—where, newspaper columnist Tom Friedman argues, ideas, people and resources flow to where the work can be done most efficiently and effectively—Oregon needs to recognize it can no longer afford its laissez-faire approach to schooling and teaching. If Oregon is going to make the state a great



Pictured from left to right: Donna DuBois, Lionel Clegg, Allan Bruner and Mary McGinnis. DEC members represent a variety of Oregon regions, grade-levels, subject-areas and populations.

place to be a teacher, it will need to take statewide leadership and make statewide choices that strengthen effective teaching. The policies and supports that follow teachers throughout their careers should be robust, consistent, and responsive to the needs teachers have identified. From the way we are prepared to teach, to the tools used to give us feedback on our craft, to the leadership opportunities in our buildings and districts, to the support we have to meet the needs of all students—these things should no longer be left to chance (or the individual efforts of 197 school districts).

Much of what we call for in this report will require more time from and for teachers, which ultimately means more resources. We encourage state policymakers and school district leaders to consider—in addition to how more schools can receive the financial resources they need to serve all students well—ways of restructuring the school day, specifically how time is used and how teachers are assigned, in order to free up the time needed for professional learning and improvement.

As members of the Distinguished Educators Council, we are excited to contribute our best thinking to the goal of making Oregon a great place to teach. We hope this report will be a significant contribution to the ongoing conversation and inspire further collaboration among all of us who care about the quality of our schools and the outcomes of the students we teach.

ABOUT THE CHALKBOARD PROJECT

The Chalkboard Project is an independent education transformation organization dedicated to making Oregon's K-12 public schools among the best in the country. We are funded by a consortium of Oregon's leading philanthropic foundations that share a central belief that research and on-the-ground expert knowledge is essential to identifying policies and practices that improve outcomes for students. In 2011, Chalkboard was awarded \$24.4M in federal funding to accelerate CLASS, a revolutionary initiative that is transforming the teaching profession by creating new career pathways that lead to higher achievement in the classroom.

Launched in 2004, Chalkboard is the first initiative of Foundations for a Better Oregon (FBO). FBO partners include: Meyer Memorial Trust, The Oregon Community Foundation, The Collins Foundation, The Ford Family Foundation, JELD-WEN Foundation, and The James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation.

www.chalkboardproject.org

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