



Creative Leadership Achieves Student Success

*The CLASS Project: Empowering
Educators, Raising Student Achievement*



PRESENTED BY
CHALKBOARD PROJECT

ABOUT CHALKBOARD PROJECT



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 with a central belief that expert research is essential to identifying policies and practices that improve outcomes for students. Launched in 2004, Chalkboard is the first initiative of Foundations for a Better Oregon (FBO). FBO founding foundations are: 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.

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Chalkboard Project welcomes the chance to continue the conversation about the CLASS Project with anyone interested in learning more. Please contact Tonia Holowetzki, Communications Director.

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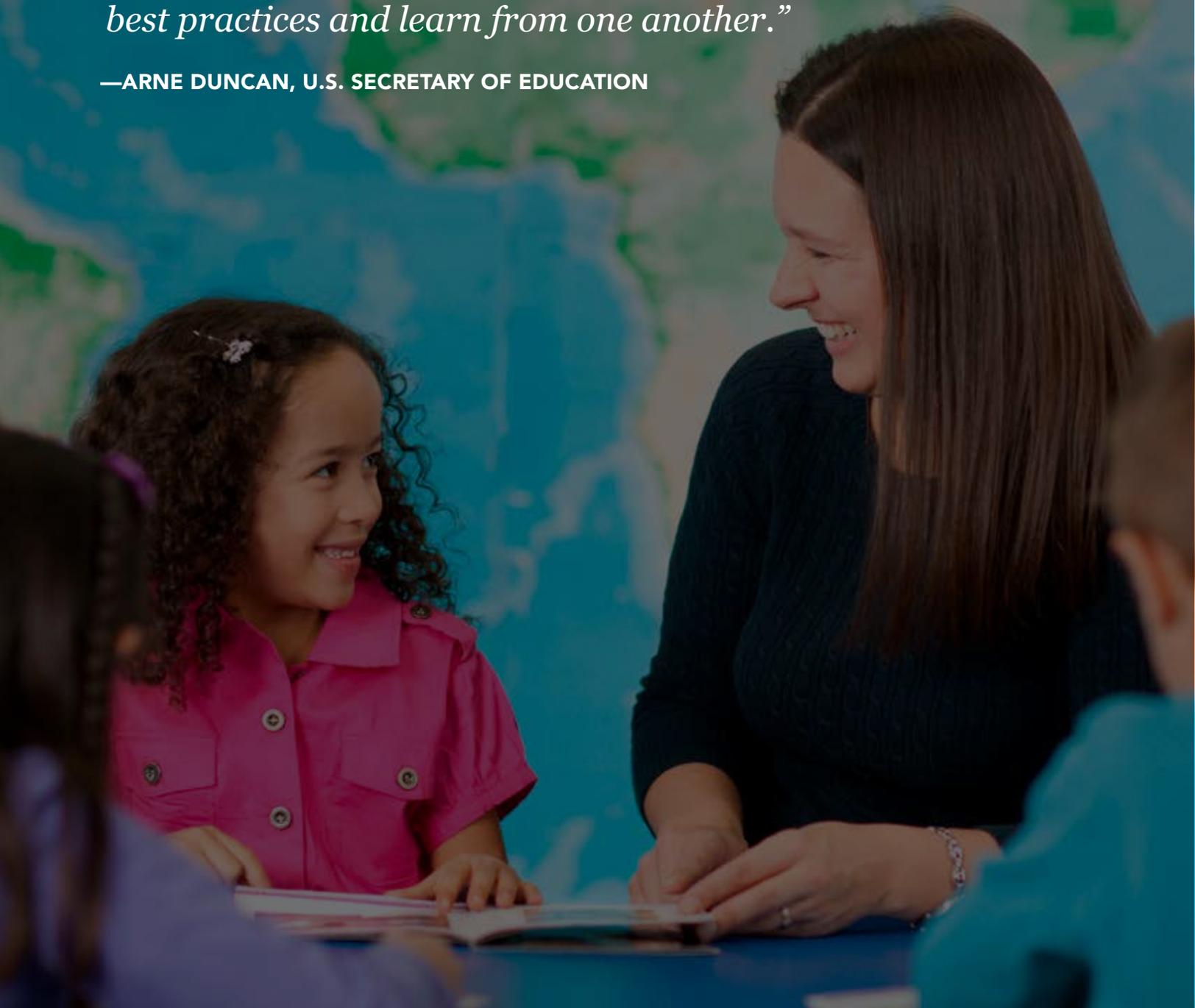


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“Teachers have the single greatest in-school impact on a child’s education. The CLASS Project is a tremendous example of successful work that should be taken to scale, because students benefit when teachers work together to share best practices and learn from one another.”

—ARNE DUNCAN, U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION





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(Creative Leadership Achieves Student Success)

SUMMARY

In Oregon, a model of education system transformation has emerged that is successfully impacting education inequity, elevating levels of student achievement across the board, and increasing teachers' levels of job satisfaction. Predicated upon best-practice research, and supported by a groundbreaking coalition of major statewide foundations, Chalkboard Project's CLASS Project focuses on improving educator quality by providing teachers with expanded career paths, effective performance evaluations, relevant professional development, and new compensation models.

The CLASS Project is a process by which teachers develop the next generation career model for their districts, which elevates the teaching profession and improves outcomes for children. Under the existing system, Oregon's students of color and low-income students suffer much lower achievement rates, and as a whole, Oregon's education system consistently performs poorly in

national rankings. The CLASS Project is shifting those trends. The CLASS Project's first pilot school districts have seen an 18 percent increase in four-year high school graduation rates and a narrowing of the achievement gap. Now, with more than 40 percent of Oregon's schoolchildren in CLASS districts, student achievement is steadily improving, and the Oregon Department of Education has adopted the program and is expanding it to districts ready to undertake the work.

This paper delineates the CLASS Project model, outlines the research underpinning its strategy, analyzes its impacts on the ground, describes Chalkboard's accompanying legislative and policy initiatives, and discusses CLASS' evolution, implementation challenges, and lessons learned. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan celebrated CLASS' successes and recommended it be taken to scale: this paper will provide an introductory blueprint for other states and systems that could benefit from this model.

HISTORY

Chalkboard Project has unusual origins. In 2003, Oregon's five leading foundations (joined later by a sixth) pooled their resources to form Foundations for a Better Oregon (FBO), an independent nonprofit dedicated to moving the needle on the most pressing issues facing the state. FBO's structure and theory of change are innovative: each foundation committed itself to collaboration with the other partners, to equal responsibility and risk, to the process of public policy work (unusual for foundations), and to open-minded research and discovery resulting in grassroots-led, rather than top-down and prescriptive, initiatives.

“There is no silver bullet. The only solution is to come together around key issues.”

—Anne Kubisch, president, Ford Family Foundation
(Oregon Business Magazine, Sept 17, 2014)

At a 2002 statewide leadership conference sponsored by the Oregon Community Foundation, Oregonians had selected K-12 public education as the state's most pressing concern.¹ In light of this, and after further public and private consultation, FBO selected Oregon's struggling education system as its priority. In 2004, FBO formed Chalkboard Project, a 501(c)(3) under FBO's umbrella. “We didn't see Oregon's education system strengthening, and we thought we could help in a systemic way,” said Sue Hildick, FBO and Chalkboard's founding and current president.

Under Hildick's leadership, Chalkboard leveraged its unique funding structure to refrain from jumping straight into programming: instead, Chalkboard Project spent its first two years hosting

conversations across the state and conducting best-practice research and extensive public-opinion polling to investigate the most effective interventions. The process required patience and faith from Chalkboard's funders, but the foundation collective realized that research into best practices and feasible interventions would not only save future costs but lead to greater impact.

“The notion that you could take these private philanthropic organizations to use the power of their money not for handing out gifts [...] but to try to effect systemic change... To me, it was brilliant.”

—Ron Saxton, early Chalkboard supporter

Chalkboard's research resulted in a 15-point action plan (Appendix I) that centered upon three areas: educator quality, funding and accountability, and student success. Educator quality was selected as the area that most impacted student achievement and as the field in which Chalkboard could have the most far-reaching and expedient impact; subsequently, Chalkboard's legislative and programming initiatives—including its flagship CLASS Project—have targeted educator and administrator effectiveness through well researched and carefully piloted interventions.

Project Context

When Chalkboard Project was formed in 2004, Oregon's public schools were reeling from recessionary spending cuts that had seen one of the sharpest declines in per-student spending nationally. Districts were dealing with the legacy of legislation that,

while improving funding equity across districts and centralizing K-12 policy, left local authorities and educators frustrated and unable to respond fully to local needs.² The 2001 passage of No Child Left Behind helped the state to identify student groups that needed additional resources, but also increased the system's administrative burden and was perceived by some³ to be over-regulated and ineffective. Class sizes were high against national averages, as were rates of student absenteeism and dropouts.⁴ Teachers felt they lacked a voice; students were underachieving in comparison with national averages; and the achievement gap between middle-income white students and low-income students and students of color was widening.⁵

“Chalkboard Project is taking some flak because it’s not at the Legislature lobbying for higher K-12 funding and has not produced proposals for immediate action. It shouldn’t be. Chalkboard intends to build a broad base of support for well-documented, common sense changes that increase accountability [and] educational quality...There’s lots of work ahead and Chalkboard is on the right track full-steam ahead.”

—Editorial, News-Register (McMinnville),
June 13, 2005

Chalkboard Project also entered a landscape of quickly shifting student demographics. As Chalkboard and CLASS have developed, Oregon's student population has become increasingly impoverished: in 2015, 56.8 percent Oregon students qualified for free or reduced price lunch, compared

to 41 percent in 2004.⁶ It has also grown substantially more diverse: while only 8.3 percent of Oregon teachers are non-white, students of color now make up more than one third of Oregon's K-12 population.⁷ Many of these students also have additional needs: for example, Oregon's Latino population increased by 144 percent from 1990-2000 and by 64 percent from 2000-2010, leading to heightened demands for English language learner services.⁸

These demographic, policy, and budgetary shifts have increased pressures on educators, who struggle with larger class sizes, students of increasingly diverse needs, few professional development opportunities, and inadequate mentorship and support. Retention rates for early-career teachers have plummeted, particularly in rural and low-income schools, and Oregon currently spends \$45 million a year on teacher turnover costs.⁹ Low teacher retention rates, a paucity of educators trained in cultural competency, shifting achievement targets and evaluation systems, high student mobility rates between districts, and many other factors have exacerbated the already sizeable achievement gap between middle-class white students and low-income students and students of color, meaning that not only do Oregon's schools underperform as a whole, but that systemic inequities ensure certain student populations are given fewer chances for success.

Meanwhile, the political impetus for statewide education reform across the last decade has been erratic: although legislative appetite for education interventions has grown significantly, few legislators have teaching backgrounds or maintain deep knowledge of education topics. Political leadership since Chalkboard's inception has also been uneven. The last elected superintendent of public instruction was Susan Castillo, from 2003-2012. Upon her resignation, the legislature eliminated the position as an elected office under the

assumption it would be more impactful as a gubernatorial appointment. Governor Ted Kulongoski, who was in office for Chalkboard's first seven years, showed little interest in education reform. Governor John Kitzhaber, who was elected in 2011, showed greater commitment and pushed for the passage of Senate Bill 253 (or "40-40-20"), which states that by 2025, 40 percent of adult Oregonians will have an associate's degree or certificate; 40 percent will hold a bachelor's degree or higher; and all Oregonians will hold a high school diploma or equivalent. With Governor Kitzhaber's resignation in 2015, Oregon's political leadership faced another shake-up. It is too early to tell whether new Governor Kate Brown will make progress towards further education reforms in the near future, especially with a recent decision by the state's Supreme Court related to escalating state benefit costs.

"During Gov. Ted Kulongoski's eight-year reign, state government bypassed genuine education reform. While the state sat on the sidelines, such organizations as the nonpartisan Chalkboard Project filled the vacuum."

—Editorial, *Statesman Journal*, April 8, 2015

Finally, while authentic education transformation in any state must engage a number of diverse stakeholders (teachers, school leaders, district leaders, policymakers, and teachers' unions), Oregon's teachers' union is the second strongest in the United States. Most other interventions in Oregon's school system have focused on early-childhood education, reducing class sizes, and increasing various funding streams; few had tackled educator compensation, evaluation, and

professionalization, likely because of barriers created at the state level by the Oregon Education Association (the teachers' union).

"When Chalkboard matched their school conditions data against outcomes, they concluded that class sizes, teachers' degrees, and per-student spending didn't predict a school's effectiveness. Rather, they found the overachieving schools had redesigned their operations to deliver high dosage tutoring, extended instructional time, and frequent teacher feedback."

—John Taponga, President, ECONorthwest, a firm that analyzes data and advises upon Chalkboard strategy

Foundational Research

The CLASS Project was created to tackle educator quality head-on during an era of acknowledged need but little optimism.

When Chalkboard Project began, it was clear that Oregon had a long battle ahead of it to achieve Chalkboard's primary goal: for Oregon to become one of the top ten states in the nation for student achievement. To help Oregon attain this goal, Chalkboard realized that it needed pragmatic, targeted, achievable strategies, yet ones that were panoramic enough to catalyze tangible, systemic improvements in student achievement levels.¹⁰

Initial research determined that there were few silver-bullet interventions that had been proven conclusively to elevate student achievement. To fill this knowledge gap, Chalkboard conducted statewide stakeholder conversations and public opinion polling, and commissioned additional research, including the analysis of data collected from every Oregon student but left largely unanalyzed and catalogued by the state.¹¹ Chalkboard also spent five months in early 2005 asking Oregonians for their best ideas for strengthening Oregon's K-12 public schools. It developed a citizen feedback guide that centered around five leading priorities identified through the largest public opinion poll ever conducted about education in the state. The civic engagement activities ranged from citizen feedback forums, informal book groups, Rotary Club luncheons, online surveys, and performances by the Sojourn Theatre. Hundreds of organizations and thousands

of Oregonians weighed in with their ideas for handling the tough choices required to strengthen the public school system.

Chalkboard's research and civic engagement efforts were indeed innovative: most stakeholders agreed that Oregon's K-12 education system had done a poor job of testing interventions or gathering input from its citizenry in a systematic way. Accordingly, Chalkboard's ongoing commitment to research and evaluation also set a high bar for assessment while simultaneously providing stakeholders with data that has helped evaluate diverse additional needs and projects. As a result, Chalkboard placed itself at the intersection of evidence and demand, a strong position from which to advance transformation.

The multi-year research led to Chalkboard's 15-point action plan (Appendix I), which it then distilled down into three key focus areas, all centering upon improving teacher quality.¹² Prioritizing teacher quality placed Chalkboard at the cutting-edge of education reform. For much of the twentieth century, American education policy has been driven by research suggesting that educators have little impact on a child's success when pitted against extracurricular factors such as poverty, geography, and the socioeconomic impacts of endemic racism and other systemic inequities. But within the last twenty years, several studies have emerged asserting that teacher effectiveness impacts student achievement far more than students' demographic circumstances, and more than other challenges within education systems as well.¹³

As Linda Darling-Hammond summarizes in a 2000 report, "while student demographic characteristics are strongly related to student outcomes at the state level, they are less influential in predicting achievement levels than variables assessing the quality of the teaching force. [And] ... teacher quality variables appear to be more strongly related

CHALKBOARD THEORY OF CHANGE

To create one of the nation's top ten education systems, we will drive forward initiatives founded upon best-practice research and public priorities by:

- **Building relationships** with legislators, unions, teachers, administrators, communities, leaders, parents, and students
- **Spreading the message** with targeted media and awareness-raising campaigns
- **Disseminating research and data** to educators, legislators, and the public about existing needs and the efficacy of research-driven, best-practice initiatives
- **Mobilizing community leaders** to catalyze and tailor new programs and opportunities, and to share their challenges and successes

OUTCOMES INCLUDE: strengthened alliances, improved organizational capacity, shifts in norms and attitudes, increased support base, groundswell for policy and system change.

to student achievement than class sizes, overall spending levels, teacher salaries (at least when unadjusted for cost of living differentials), or such factors as the statewide proportion of staff who are teachers.”¹⁴

Founded upon growing consensus around the impact of teacher quality, and reinforced by Chalkboard’s own research and civic engagement, the CLASS Project

became one of just a handful of other interventions working to improve teacher quality, such as Minnesota’s Q Comp¹⁵ (funded by Minnesota legislators in 2005) and the Milken Family Foundation’s Teacher Advancement Program (piloted in 1999).¹⁶ Chalkboard’s focus on teacher quality was also a pragmatic one: it had set itself a goal that was at once highly ambitious but also within the range of possibility.

THE MODEL

With the CLASS Project firmly committed to enhancing teacher quality as the key marker for increasing student achievement, Chalkboard carefully and thoughtfully reached out to interested education stakeholders to develop a pilot program model. The CLASS Project is grounded in a system representing four key areas to improve teacher effectiveness: new career paths, meaningful performance evaluations, relevant professional development, and expanded compensation models for new roles and responsibilities. Each CLASS school district developed planning ‘blueprints’ in these four key areas.

“We’re right in line with the most current research—we’re now evolving from initiative-based pilots to impact-and-process-based pilots. If we come to the design table with an open mind and a blank slate rather than with all the answers, that’s when the magic happens. Even if the resulting design isn’t the greatest thing, it’ll go far because of participants’ enthusiasm.”

—Julie Smith, former CLASS Project coach, now director of educator effectiveness at Chalkboard

- **New Career Paths.** Research shows that while many teachers love teaching, they are frustrated by a flat career path. CLASS provides teachers with the opportunity to develop their leadership skills and to be recognized as teacher-

leaders, including responsibilities such as mentoring, instructional coaching, district curriculum leadership, and transitions into administration.

- **Meaningful Performance Evaluations.** The creation of clear standards that advance the quality of teaching and learning, with gains in student achievement and teacher growth measured in multiple ways.
- **Relevant and Targeted Professional Development Opportunities.** Providing support and resources to teachers so they can improve their teaching practices, remain at the leading edge of their craft, and feel motivated and inspired to stay in the profession are key drivers for teacher satisfaction. This often includes early-career mentorship, paid leave for trainings, cultural competency skills, and subject-specific trainings. CLASS provides districts with support as they design sustained, systemic professional learning opportunities that are evidence based and align with current professional learning research.
- **Expanded Compensation Models.** Perhaps the most controversial reform category, CLASS districts create alternatives to traditional salary schedules through career-based pay and bonuses, in response to expanded teacher responsibilities, leadership opportunities, professional growth, and student outcomes. In practice, this has ranged from housing assistance meant to help keep teachers in rural school districts, to shifts in pay grades based not only on seniority but also on leadership capacity, personal development, and student results.

“CLASS depends on leaders who have the courage to step back: principals and superintendents who try to control the CLASS process will fail.”

—Dan Jamison, former CLASS district superintendent and Chalkboard policy advisor

These four teacher effectiveness areas form the basis for CLASS: each participating CLASS school district receives funding to collaboratively design its own blueprints for improvement in each of these areas, all four of which must be tackled. That each district must tailor its own package of reforms is part of CLASS’ innovation—the interventions respond to on-the-ground, local needs, but they also foster dialogue and inclusivity in the process. In fact, the relationship building that CLASS catalyzes has become one of its greatest hallmarks. Districts emerge from the CLASS process with notably stronger and less hostile relationships between teachers, administrators, school boards, and unions. The most transformative impact of CLASS happens inside the district’s culture: the changing mindset toward teaching and learning, and accepting responsibility and accountability for the academic success of every student in the district. As the district culture changes, conversations about student achievement start changing too, gaining in energy and purpose.

What Chalkboard provided to CLASS grant recipients is four-year funding for these programs; data analysis and best-practice research; public opinion information and policy analysis; CLASS coaches and technical supports; and advocacy and policy change to support CLASS reforms. Although the specific interventions of CLASS vary by district, the process is the same for all CLASS districts:

1. Each school district that joins the CLASS Project must demonstrate that there are collaborative relationships between the superintendent, the school board chair, and the union president by including all three signatures on the CLASS grant application.
2. Once a district receives its grant, it forms a design team made up of a representative sampling of teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders to lead the CLASS work.
3. Grant funds pay for release time or stipends for teachers to participate on the design teams.
4. Chalkboard provides each design team with a CLASS coach, who helps the team create blueprints around the four CLASS components. The team works to create a comprehensive system of supports so that all educators can maximize their potential. The CLASS coach, meanwhile, helps facilitate and mediate the process while also providing the design team with expert knowledge and extensive best-practice research.
5. CLASS design teams reach out to teachers and administrators in the district to get feedback.
6. Once the design is approved, the districts receive implementation funding, and form larger subcommittees to begin implementing their teacher-led designs. The funding helps pay not only for the participation of those helping to roll it out and oversee the design, but also for initial improvements within the four blueprint areas, although the district must fund these sustainably going forward. The funding is for one design year and

three years of implementation (at \$100 per child per year during implementation).

7. Districts are encouraged to continually revise and improve their models throughout implementation.

“In the past, there was often an expectation that good teachers would jump into administration. Now we’re seeing great teachers involved in other ways and being recognized for their leadership. The teachers feel supported and that helps keep them in the classroom and in the district.”

—Melanie Casprowiak, elementary school instructional coach, Albany School District

Key Components

There are several design principles and strategies that have proven essential to the CLASS Project’s longevity, success, and growth. The most crucial are:

Teacher Voice. From early on, Chalkboard realized that CLASS’ success depended largely upon teacher involvement, and to have high levels of ownership, teachers needed to be helping to shape the reforms intended to help them. “The profession wasn’t often at the table in key policy discussions,” explains Julie Smith, director of educator effectiveness at Chalkboard. “We brought them into the room and gave them a voice.” Having teachers work side-by-side with administrators, policy experts, union representatives, and other stakeholders empowers teachers to take leadership roles in shaping their own career trajectories, and also means that CLASS has additional potential to grow through

teacher-to-teacher networks and inter-district dialogue. Dan Jamison, an early Chalkboard district superintendent who later joined Chalkboard as vice-president of education policy, says that, “the teacher voice in reforms has to be authentic and not symbolic.” Betty Komp, state representative and a former school principal, says, “the best asset that a principal can have is a team of teacher-leaders. They can bring [CLASS] ideas back to their schools and share them... That’s how we can really improve, that’s how we can really teach students to be successful—it’s by teacher-to-teacher sharing.” Basing reforms upon teacher voice has also meant that Oregon’s strong unions are participants in CLASS design and implementation. “Every year [of CLASS] is an improvement in the culture in terms of transparency and trust,” says a special education teacher from Eagle Point School District. “Our professional learning

“When the creative process gets going, magic just happens. I love that moment when someone in the design team brings it home—this is what keeps me going in my career—when a design team member really engages their colleagues in it... Watching those teachers who didn’t even know they were leaders.... You can’t even hold them back because they’re so engaged in the work.”

—Julie Smith

communities and data teams are getting stronger and [are] helping teachers to have more of a voice. We have more leadership coming from teachers than ever before.”

Consensus Driven, Locally Led Reforms.

When Foundations for a Better Oregon started Chalkboard Project, the initial goal was to immediately push for statewide education transformation. After a handful of early small and incremental legislative wins, Chalkboard realized that the statewide climate was hostile to wide-sweeping change, and that it needed to earn its stripes through carefully evaluated pilot programs. Promoting locally led and designed transformation is the central tenet of the CLASS Project and is one of the main reasons for its success. Local design creates improvements that are tailored specifically to each districts’ needs, be it retention incentives or cultural competency training. And if stakeholders are sometimes antagonistic to reforms at the statewide level, at the district level relationships between parties can be strong, and there can be a readiness for reform from teachers, administrators, and particularly the union that may not be present at the top level. Dan Jamison explains that, “I’ve seen so many education programs fail because they are top-down reforms. We have an obligation

“We see increased professional development offerings by in-house experts among our teachers. [CLASS has] been a significant change for us and it has improved morale because our teachers feel more valued. It has really heightened the sense of mutual respect among teachers in the district.”

—Heather Lowe, first grade teacher,
Phoenix-Talent School District

to listen to those voices in our fields... I don’t believe you can do meaningful work without building relationships and trust with unions.” Locally led reforms also mean that a groundswell of popular support for statewide reform can emerge and spread organically based on firsthand experience.

Evaluating Readiness and Mandating Stakeholder Buy-in.

Districts can only join the CLASS Project when the school board president, association leader, and superintendent agree to apply. Dr. Kate Dickson, former Chalkboard vice president for education policy and one of CLASS’ creators, says that “we wanted CLASS to be a collaborative process, engaging all key stakeholders – teachers, administrators, and the school board. To accomplish this collaborative priority, one of the more brilliant ideas was to require all stakeholders, including the unions, to sign the grant application.” The CLASS process has been instrumental in helping to strengthen relationships between sometimes antagonistic stakeholders, and channels of dialogue have been opened for greater district-wide buy-in. The stronger these working relationships are, the more dramatic the improvements in teacher effectiveness.

CLASS Coach. The CLASS coach has become a central figure in the CLASS model: as Sue Hildick notes, the coaches are “right at the heart of the CLASS project and the work of Chalkboard—having coaches and mentors in the schools has definitely changed K-12 education in Oregon.” Throughout the CLASS project, each district is assigned a coach who serves as facilitator, mediator, policy expert, conversation starter, rainmaker, funder liaison, and to some extent, watchdog. Coaches help drive forward both implementation and design, “surfacing the difficult questions to make sure teams were getting into deeper and more nuanced work; managing group agreements; to some degree enforcing requirements; providing the design team

with really good recent research; and helping them to understand district level and teacher union leadership. They ensure good ongoing, authentic communication," says Dan Jamison. State representative and former CLASS coach Betty Komp said that serving as a coach was "an incredible opportunity to see the mentoring and professional development opportunities evolve."

"The coaching was the big piece: our coach attended all of our meetings, helped construct the agenda, was often on the agenda to provide statewide information... She got us resources that got our thinking beyond just Oregon and took a look at what people were doing across the country. She did a lot of that legwork and synthesized the information for us...we were always in the know about how we were connected to the bigger picture."

—Krista Parent, superintendent,
South Lane School District

Evaluation and Analysis. Chalkboard took great care to ensure its neutrality and independence. Its goal from onset was to not drive an agenda, but to support work on-the-ground that would inform best practices and help shape a data-driven and evidence-based approach to transformation and improvement. At the beginning of the CLASS Project, Chalkboard paid ECONorthwest to aggregate annual student data into a statewide database of

student records, in partnership with the Oregon Department of Education. It was, as state representative Betty Komp states, "a win-win for the state, because this research didn't cost the state anything," and it also enabled Chalkboard to chart CLASS districts' progress by very specific, differentiated markers (such as tracing the narrowing of the achievement gap between white middle-income students, and low-income students and students of color). In addition to quantitative data, Chalkboard continually commissions qualitative surveys both of the general public's opinion around CLASS and of teachers' impressions of CLASS reforms on the ground. "The research sends the message that you're doing your homework, and secondly, it gives people a sense of engagement," Adam Davis says. Julie Smith explains that, "what's going on locally is important. We think it's more important to monitor how folks are feeling about Chalkboard's initiatives rather than Chalkboard the organization. It takes so much to move the needle on awareness and knowledge that the true gauge is are you improving teachers' support levels at the local level?"

Sustainability. In terms of funding, the grants pay for the design year and the first three years of implementation, including funding substitutes for teachers involved in design work, stipends for additional work taken on, and the expenses of the alternative career pathways, salary structures, professional development opportunities, and evaluation that is required as part of the CLASS process. ("For a full year, funds are used to free up people and pay them to do research," explains Julie Smith. "That's a huge gift to educators.") But after the grants conclude, funding these projects will return to the districts and to the taxpayers, so finding budget consensus is part of the CLASS project design work. For

the most part, these reforms do not have to be expensive to a district. Dan Jamison, former superintendent of Sherwood School District, said that they built it into their district budget and figured that, at most, it would cost \$386,000 per year—1 percent of the district’s \$38m budget. “For 1 percent of your bottom line, it is a smart investment to know that your teachers are inspired and your students are performing better.”

Beyond preserving funding, CLASS districts have found that the process itself is easy to sustain—once these conversations begin, they snowball, accumulating pace and interest. Julie Smith notes that even if the funds for CLASS reforms dry up, “the process—this think-tank with equity of voice—will remain. People’s language starts changing, suddenly from they to we did this. That empowerment doesn’t disappear.” Nor, Chalkboard hopes, would the student achievement gains. Dr. Charlie Walker, an early Chalkboard board member and former university president, puts it simply: “Teachers who are excited about teaching lead to students who are excited about learning.”

“I have gained a whole new set of skills, which—no matter what avenue I choose—will help me be a better teacher and advocate for students.”

—Melissa Radcliffe, teacher, Tillamook School District

Advocacy and Policy Change to Support CLASS Reforms. Chalkboard has always had a strong legislative focus and remained attentive to policy opportunities based on lessons learned from the field. Its work led to key statewide support programs for educators, resulting in growing confidence among legislators. In 2009, the legislature funded the Oregon Teacher and

“We’ve been consistent with the people that originally did the training: those mentors are now teaching others to be mentors and coaches—we’ve started a really good cycle of support for beginning teachers.”

—State representative and former CLASS coach Betty Komp

Administrator Mentoring Program and a professional development clearinghouse. In 2010, the School District Collaboration Fund was passed to support CLASS-like work. In 2011, SB290 was signed into law, requiring all districts to revise educator evaluation systems based on statewide standards and to include student achievement in evaluations. In 2013, the legislature enacted the Network for Quality Teaching and Learning and created a permanent fund dedicated to it in statute. The Network creates a systemic and sustainable approach that supports and invests in educators throughout their career pathway. It oversees the School District Collaboration Fund, Oregon Teacher and Administrator Mentoring Program, TeachOregon (a teacher preparation initiative), and statewide professional development support.

Third Party Funding. Third-party funding and advocacy allows districts and individuals to be more comfortable with risk-taking: their state funding is not on the line. Meanwhile, the state knows that some smart and powerful people are commissioning research, investing their own funds, and practicing what they preach, not to mention compiling data useful both to CLASS and to the Department of Education. This third-

party commitment to piloting programs founded upon contemporary scholarship means that the biggest risks and failures ideally happen before a program's adoption by a state agency, thus clearing the way for later state investment and appropriation. This is precisely what happened with CLASS: after launching in 2007, and after receiving a 2010 federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant of more than \$24 million based on CLASS' early successes, the Oregon state legislature voted in 2010, 2011, and 2013 to enact and fund measures that are gradually rolling out CLASS reforms at a statewide level administered by the Department of Education.

“One of the biggest issues that Tillamook School District had was that it had a tremendous amount of beginning teachers. They needed to recruit experienced teachers and retain beginning teachers. They worked out incentive program to entice teachers to stay at least five years. They’ve been very successful: when you have a very rural school district, teachers think it’s the first step, but now they have their community behind them, they help teachers find housing, and teachers are staying. Their student performance is excelling now and they’ve done a great job.”

—Betty Komp

SUSTAINING TRANSFORMATION: ADVOCACY AND POLICY CHANGE

Statewide policy reform has always been the ultimate goal of Chalkboard, with the CLASS Project and its other initiatives used to guide and inform advocacy efforts. Accordingly, as evidence accrued to suggest that CLASS reforms were truly effective, Chalkboard maintained a rigorous schedule of advocacy and policy initiatives. Chalkboard gradually built up public awareness and appetite for reforms through legislative victories, which also strengthened the legislative groundwork for CLASS priorities. Examples include the passage of the Oregon Teacher and Administrator Mentoring Program (2007) and the establishment of a professional development clearinghouse (2009)—both were relatively low-cost, impactful, and widely supported legislative reforms, and both improved teacher quality.

“The model was to pilot with certain school districts and at the same time, as they become successful, build legislative policy, starting with areas of low-hanging fruit such as the mentoring legislation. It wasn’t an uphill battle.... And I will say that the districts who received the funding—it just brought you to tears the impact it had on both mentors’ and mentees’ lives.”

—Kate Dickson, PhD, former Chalkboard vice president for education policy and one of CLASS’ creators

As part of its strategy, Chalkboard is careful to gauge and build its legislative momentum, leveraging positive opinion and hard data from its pilot programs to help swell its support. Although there are few Oregon legislators with professional backgrounds in education, Chalkboard has built up a reputation for successful interventions, garnering the support of former Governor John Kitzhaber and many others.

“The legislature has become a powerful ally,” Chalkboard president Sue Hildick says. “We have a lot of friends who believe us and who have seen our work, and we have built political capital. A proof-point would be the last legislative session, 2013-15, during which \$120 million were directed to new strategic investments around education, with \$45 million designated for the creation of the Network for Quality Teaching and Learning¹⁷,” a statewide umbrella of support for teachers that now oversees funding for the School District Collaboration Fund, the mentorship program, professional development clearinghouse, and a variety of other Chalkboard-driven initiatives designed to recruit, prepare, support, and develop teachers throughout their career. Chalkboard’s current legislative agenda includes maintaining and expanding funding for the Network’s component initiatives as well as advancing legislation around CLASS’ companion programs, including TeachOregon, which helps improve teacher training programs, and Leading for Learning, a program for district administrators.

Under Hildick’s leadership, Chalkboard’s initiatives are receiving national attention: Chalkboard has formed relationships with organizations including the Center for American Progress, the National Council

of Teachers and funders, the National Governors' Association, and the Education Trust, who are national leaders in closing the achievement gap. And it has been recognized by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who saluted the CLASS project and granted Chalkboard and partner districts a \$24.7 million Teacher Incentive Fund grant to help develop CLASS-like reforms.

Sustaining transformation also means keeping education reform in the public eye locally. Chalkboard has sponsorship spots on public media broadcasts, and, during the legislative session, has a few billboards dotted around Salem, Oregon's capital. It partners with media outlets for coverage and opinion spots, and leverages its supporters' prominence to do the same. Sometimes these pieces channel a useful bluntness. Adam Davis, Chalkboard supporter and principal of DHM Research, recently wrote an opinion piece in the Portland Tribune that concluded: "Message to the Oregon Legislature: help fund the CLASS project so that more Oregon children can have an effective teacher in their classroom. Oregonians have your back."¹⁸ Chalkboard has also received many unsolicited endorsements from the media, including a glowing 2015 editorial from the Salem Statesman Journal that recommended the new governor, Kate Brown, hand over everything to do with education to Chalkboard.

In addition, Chalkboard builds civic engagement around education more directly, in part through partnerships with organizations such as Stand for Children and the Oregon Business Alliance, and in part through polling. 2013's Oregon Values and Beliefs Project (OVBP) indicated that Oregonians from all parts of the state place improving Oregon's schools as among their

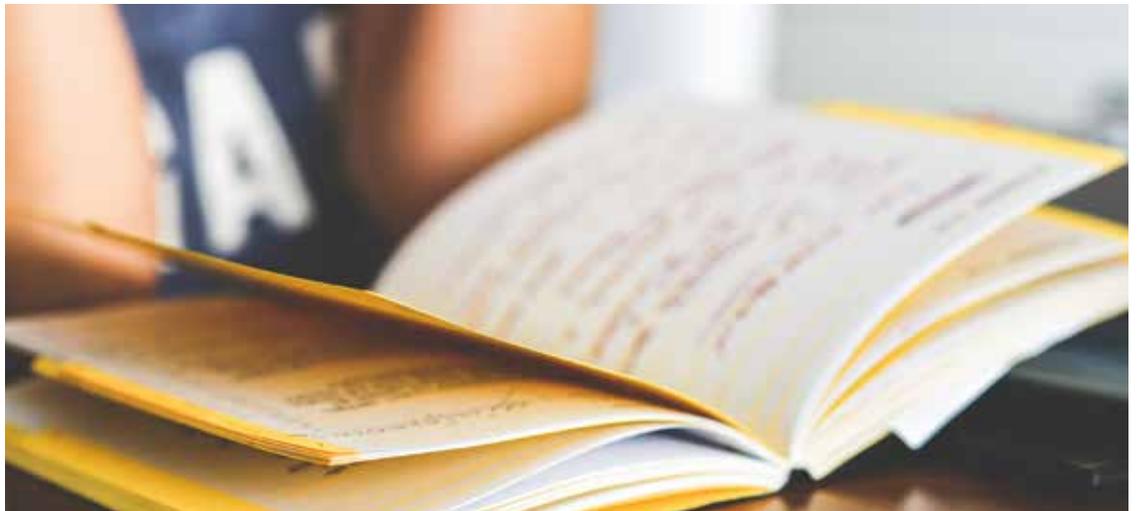
top priorities, and more than 60 percent of Oregonians believe that additional funding is needed for public K-12 education.¹⁹ And according to Adam Davis (whose firm does much of Chalkboard's public opinion polling and also published the OVBP survey), the public also agrees with specific aspects of CLASS strategy: 93 percent of Oregonians say our students need highly effective teachers to succeed in school, and more than 80 percent favor creating a different pay system for public school teachers that compensate teachers based on their experience, performance, and workload, not just seniority.²⁰

That public opinion slants so heavily in favor of education reform is a trend that Chalkboard tries to leverage. Polling is important, Davis says, because "to be effective in the public policy arena, you need to know where the bell is on the bell-shaped curve on any of the populations affected by the policy. At first, Chalkboard was being hit really hard by the shrill ends of the opinion populations... It's useful to have a tool that you can use to push back against those shrill ends: 'here's what the majority of people are saying...' 'we understand, but here's how the majority of the business community feels.'"

Of course, the most crucial way that Chalkboard is ensuring that CLASS reforms are sustained is through maintaining momentum in attracting new districts to join CLASS. While Chalkboard and its supporters can celebrate CLASS' successes, CLASS participants are the most valuable advocates, and it has been the teachers, superintendents, school administrators, and union representatives who have experienced CLASS reforms firsthand that have become the most effective missionaries for its program.

Dan Jamison recalls that when he went to present to districts interested in joining CLASS, “the worst thing that could happen would be a song and dance with PowerPoint. I always brought teacher leaders with me, the veteran teacher leaders who’d been in the profession for 20-30 years and who could answer questions about the meaningfulness of the work.” These educators have been imperative to maintaining the momentum of CLASS reforms. As Sue Hildick notes, “we can only

move the coalition of the willing. CLASS grows because [those who have participated in it] talk to their peers in other districts. It’s valued as a means for change on the ground.” Although CLASS has been absorbed into the Oregon Department of Education through the School District Collaboration Fund, Chalkboard is still providing a number of technical services to the project, and is certainly working to drive along the pace of CLASS-based improvements.



IMPACT

Starting with 12,000 students in 2008 and reaching more than 40 percent of Oregon's students today, CLASS has impacted more than 215,000 students to date. CLASS districts have significantly improved student achievement results, including narrowing the achievement gap between white, middle-income students, and low-income students and students of color, and have seen increased job satisfaction among their teachers.

Students in CLASS districts have consistently shown greater success in state assessments than the rest of the state, and gains tend to increase over time in the years after a district has implemented CLASS. The first school districts to implement CLASS have seen an almost 10 percent gain in reading scores and an almost 13 percent gain in math scores.²¹ Later districts also show gains in both reading and math and tend to show the same upward trajectory in student outcomes.

“The professional development opportunities have provided the ability to be more reflective about my practice and to hone my instructional skills. I have a greater understanding of what good teaching is.”

—Kelly Hicks, Elementary school teacher,
Redmond School District

Low-income students and students of color, two groups that are traditionally the most underperforming, have also demonstrated greater achievement in the CLASS districts, resulting in smaller achievement gaps. An analysis of 2013-2014 student achievement data shows that all CLASS student groups outperformed their peers in the rest of the state, in some cases meeting or exceeding performance by as much as 30 percent. This narrowing of the achievement gap means that CLASS has become an equity strategy in its own right, an important and useful tool for redressing some of the systemic inequities lingering in Oregon's education system.

As expected, CLASS student achievement gains have also been mirrored by increases in teacher satisfaction. Although a causal link cannot be proven, CLASS has demonstrated at least a correlational link between happier teachers, more effective teachers, and higher levels of student achievement. An independent analysis of the statewide 2014 TELL survey administered by the Department of Education indicated that teachers in CLASS districts were significantly more satisfied with their teaching conditions than those in non-CLASS districts.²² For example, 93 percent of teachers in CLASS districts agreed that they were held to high professional standards for delivering instruction and 82 percent felt that school leaders made a sustained effort to address their concerns around instructional practices and support. While the TELL survey was not designed to specifically examine the impact of CLASS interventions in districts where it was implemented, it did measure key indicators of the teaching environment that are foundational to the CLASS project, such as school leadership, professional development endeavors, and how school leaders addressed teachers' concerns.

In classrooms and in school districts, CLASS has helped usher in new models of educational openness and is helping to redesign Oregon's schools by building on a foundation of collaborative, empowered, data-driven instruction. "In the effective [CLASS] schools, teachers monitored student proficiency with well-designed assessments; discussed results with principals and other teachers; and used the data to adjust tutoring groups, assign remediation, modify instruction, and develop individualized student goals," explains John Taponga of ECONorthwest. "In other words, teachers stepped away from the century-old industrial model of

"At the local level, Chalkboard has been stunningly successful in boosting student achievement by focusing on teacher quality, autonomy, and support... If [Governor Kate] Brown and the Legislature were daring, they would turn public school reform over to Chalkboard Project, the one organization that has developed school reform from the ground up, has involved stakeholders throughout Oregon, and has a record of significantly improving student outcomes. At the least, Brown should appoint a proven education reformer and Chalkboard champion to lead the Department of Education... And every school district, backed by the Legislature and the Department of Education, should embrace the successful, evidence-based practices of Chalkboard Project."

—"Will Oregon improve schools or settle for status quo?" Statesman Journal Editorial Board, April 8, 2015

education delivery, opened their classrooms, and employed data to pinpoint and address the specific needs of each learner."

Teachers have also benefited from expanded career paths and professional development opportunities, which in turn have brought their voices to greater prominence within districts. Their voices have added to a sense not just of classroom openness but district-wide openness: relationships formed during the CLASS project design and implementation phases have in many cases led to greater collaboration and transparency between disparate stakeholders. As one teacher noted, "we have increased communication between the district office and the schools and classrooms. There is a lot more opportunity for teachers to provide feedback and to be more involved in decision making."

Chalkboard's adjacent policy agenda has helped to cement CLASS reforms. It has employed strong lobbyists on both sides of the partisan aisle, and it has continually evaluated the state's legislative process, bringing to every legislative session initiatives that look toward the future. As Dan Jamison suggests, "a state that, from 2000-2010, had been myopic, provincial, and focused solely on compliance with No Child Left Behind, now has strong state leadership, and I really do believe that's through the work of Chalkboard."

None of this would have been possible without the patience and generosity of Chalkboard's funders. Nor would it be possible without growing public and legislative support. In general, approval for CLASS reforms is high, and although the political climate for education reform is currently uncertain owing to turnover in the governor's office, Chalkboard and CLASS have garnered extensive commentary and praise.

THE CHALLENGES

The foremost challenge to the CLASS Project—and likely to most improvement efforts in any state’s education system—is the tenacity of the status quo. Oregon is a strong local-control state, where most education decisions are made at the local, school board level. Oregon also has powerful teacher unions that advocate more for seniority driven pay structures than for professional development opportunities, and it has a legislative body that has few educators in it and therefore few continuous voices for education reform.

CLASS has learned to work within these structures, but shifting the culture of the state education system has been an uphill battle. The inclusion of teacher voice, the emphasis on professional development and teacher career ladders, building bridges between formerly acrimonious stakeholder groups—all of these efforts have been met with resistance and controversy, in part because some stakeholders were likely either too fearful or frustrated to contemplate reform, and in part because some felt fatigued by an overabundance of previous reform initiatives.

As mentioned above, assessing district readiness has also been a challenge. Although having the superintendent, union president, and school board president all sign the CLASS grant application is an important first hurdle, not all districts that have made it past that step have the same levels of stakeholder collegiality and ideological commitment. “Readiness takes courage. Strong CLASS districts formulate group agreements, articulate how they will work and make decisions, make an ongoing commitment to meaningful conversations, and are skilled at conflict management and negotiations,” explains Dan Jamison.

“CLASS districts that fail tend to mask mistrust, avoid crucial conversations about the nature and topics of effective teaching, and tend to remain dominated by top-down decision making.” Readiness is crucial to CLASS success: unless the majority of stakeholders buy into it, CLASS reforms will be meaningless as they will not be thoroughly adopted.

Carving out the space for CLASS reforms has been further complicated by turnover in both elected and non-elected stakeholder leadership, which can impact district readiness. In some districts, progress has been upended when one superintendent or teacher-leader leaves and a new one begins mid-process. Turnover among members of the design and executive committees can also create difficulties and delays. District boundaries also shift, leading to different priorities. Legislative adjustments have also proved challenging: for example, the state’s No Child Left Behind 2012 exemption waiver catalyzed re-analysis of CLASS’ structure and implementation in some districts. Similarly, Chalkboard’s winning of a \$24.7 million federal Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant was both a triumphant moment and a difficult one, as TIF districts were mandated to include added requirements on top of CLASS reforms.

Labor management shifts have perhaps proved the most pervasive challenge for CLASS (and likely for any other program attempting to adapt teacher evaluation and salary scales in a strongly unionized state). Part of the difficulty is in articulating the nuances of a complicated reform system to union outliers whose instinct is to reject any alteration to teachers’ compensation packages without learning about the fine print. Most union representatives are willing to explore possibilities, but the loud

objections from the margins were difficult to break past: it took significant expenditure and groundwork to catch the eye of the many union members curious about new pathways.

Chalkboard's willingness to experiment has also proved a difficult message to control. This catalyzed added misperceptions: certain school districts and union representatives have since suggested that CLASS represents a corporatization of the teaching profession—that CLASS is pro merit pay, pro test scores, and represents the establishment...all assumptions that could not be further from the truth. Rather, Chalkboard's independent funding structure means simply that it is not as afraid to try and to fail; meanwhile, its locally led, consensus-driven reform agenda represents the opposite of top-down or corporatist ideology.

“It is unusual for foundations to acknowledge that they don't know the answer...Our work with Chalkboard demonstrates what ongoing learning looks like at the foundation level.”

—Martha Richards, executive director of the James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation, quoted in *Oregon Business Magazine*

That said, a final key challenge has been convincing the grantmakers who comprise Foundations for a Better Oregon to stay the course. When FBO began in 2003, grantmakers knew that education reform was no easy matter but assumed that,

through their combined investment, they could make substantial changes in 18-24 months. Persuading funders to stay on board through the slow but valuable process of relationship- and consensus-building, and through expanding waves of three-year pilot programs and subsequent analysis, has taken effort and reassurance. Their hands-on oversight and governance has been a unique ingredient to the success of Chalkboard and the CLASS Project. Each foundation has different priorities and different reasons for being at the table, and appealing to each foundation's priorities has been challenging. When FBO moved from renewing their funding annually to renewing it every three years, it became the anchor that allowed Chalkboard's work to continue securely, and the real strength of Chalkboard comes precisely from funders' long-term commitment and willingness to learn together about K-12 education for 12 years.

Retaining funders through a process that has (by education system standards) produced quite immediate and impressive results, but that has (by normal foundation grantmaking standards) progressed at an incremental pace has been tiring for funders and staff alike. But as results at last began to appear, Chalkboard's funders have seen the value of their long-term strategy: as Collins Foundation president Truman Collins noted, “I've learned that change is difficult, especially in education where there are so many different stakeholders. The value of what we're doing with Chalkboard is that we're bringing together all of these stakeholders. It takes a long time, but it's worth it since we're making a real difference.”²³

CONCLUSION

Chalkboard Project's unique funding structure, independence, and best-practice-driven pilot programs have enabled the CLASS Project's innovative reforms to improve teacher effectiveness, increase student equity by narrowing the achievement gap, and elevate levels of student achievement across the board via tailored reforms to four teacher effectiveness areas: new career paths, meaningful performance evaluations, relevant professional development, and expanded compensation models.

“One of the greatest successes in our work with Chalkboard was how we really grew in our understanding and belief that the unit of change is at the teacher level: we focused on the right leverage points and we have the data from both the teachers and the students to support the notion that by supporting teachers, you support students... If you do this program, it'll work magic.”

—Kate Dickson, PhD

The patience of Chalkboard's visionary funders has meant that the CLASS Project has been able to catalyze dramatic shifts in student achievement numbers, providing evidence that teacher quality is indeed a

primary determinant of a student's success. CLASS' reforms have been buoyed by recognition at the local and statewide level, and validated by the receipt of a \$24.7 million federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant. And CLASS has remained at the cutting-edge of national efforts.²⁴

Moreover, the CLASS Project has generated a number of unexpected benefits that have now been absorbed into its mission and into Chalkboard's theory of change. By pivoting away from statewide reform in Chalkboard's early days and committing itself instead to a model that married a gradual legislative agenda with a deep commitment to piloting programs on the ground, CLASS became centered upon locally-led, community-designed interventions, an innovative model that has likely helped increase stakeholder buy-in and educational outcomes.

Because each district's CLASS plan by definition addresses local needs and increases stakeholders' sense of ownership, the tailored nature of districts' plans has perhaps helped ensure a more thorough and enthusiastic adoption of the resulting interventions. Additionally, the design and implementation process that each new CLASS district undertakes has itself become a seminal tool for building grassroots dialogue, collegiality, and momentum for reform among disparate stakeholders. Burgeoning collegiality helps drive the acquisition of newfound knowledge, as each design team is given the chance to dig deep into best-practice interventions. The CLASS process has been particularly successful in breaking down barriers between administrators and union representatives. Because of the ongoing educational

legacy of these strengthened stakeholder relationships, many participants have noted that the CLASS design process is just as formative as the reforms it inspires. And with built-in teacher leadership opportunities, the design and implementation teams are microcosms of the reforms they research and propose.

While the CLASS Project is still pointedly a dynamic, evolving initiative rather than a static set of guidelines, the CLASS model has been transformative to the students and teachers it has touched. Through careful evaluation and analysis of its pilot programs, CLASS has been able to position itself authoritatively as a best-practice reform

strategy for statewide adoption. Recently the state agreed, passing legislation to gradually introduce CLASS-inspired reforms statewide. In 2011, the state established the School District Collaboration Fund to support CLASS-like work, and has continued to expand the Fund from its original funding of \$5 million to \$16 million in 2015. And the districts that first embraced the CLASS model have become early adopters for the state on efforts such as performance evaluation and alternative compensation models. With this report, we hope that other states and communities will be inspired to do likewise—tailored, of course, for their respective local needs.

CASE STUDIES**Bend-La Pine School District—
Evaluation and Professional
Development**

Located in Oregon's central high deserts, the Bend-La Pine School District is the sixth largest district in the state, with 17,000 students. It traverses a broad geography both physically (its population stretches along a 30 mile corridor), economically (some schools are in very affluent communities, but almost 50 percent of the district's students are on free and reduced lunch), and culturally (its Hispanic student population has increased by 200 percent over the past decade).

Bend-La Pine School District was a CLASS early adopter and was one of the districts awarded a federal Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant, which extended their participation in CLASS/TIF by a year and added additional objectives and reporting requirements.²⁵ Ron Wilkinson, Bend-La Pine's superintendent, says that the TIF grant meant that some of the work they had begun with CLASS had initially to be set aside to prioritize the TIF requirements, which overlap with CLASS but are not identical. Wilkinson also noted that TIF is more about complying with specific guidelines, whereas CLASS privileges creativity and "localized, individualized strategy." TIF has "been an extremely valuable thing to our district," Wilkinson says, but CLASS "has really given us the opportunities to design a framework for improvement, a bottom-up design strategy."

Under CLASS/TIF, Bend-La Pine has undertaken a number of transformations. They have created a three-tiered system of educator professional advancement

that is tied to increased opportunities for leadership, including roles for curriculum and instructional leaders, mentor teachers, content specialist/instructional coaches, administrators, and master teachers/studio classroom teachers. They have also instituted a 16-point Professional Development Framework built on an analysis of district-specific student and educator learning needs. These developments have led to a visible increase in teacher leadership opportunities, including the creation of teacher-leader positions within elementary schools, a new system of mentorship, and coordinated time every week for teachers to learn from targeted experts without even needing to leave their school building. They have also integrated teachers into the district's Summer Leadership Academy, which had traditionally been only for administrators.

New compensation initiatives have been tied to their teacher leadership and professional development initiatives, but the TIF grant also promotes incentive programs, which Wilkinson suggests Bend-La Pine have found to be "not a very effective way to move people forward—the other three blueprint areas were more effective to us." In contrast, their work on teacher evaluation has been transformative—"a really valuable piece." Bend-La Pine has worked particularly hard on its performance evaluations system. "Because of the TIF grant," Wilkinson explains, "we became the leaders in the state around evaluation." They changed to a four level evaluative rubric, which mandated that evaluators spend significantly more time in the classroom, moving from a system of minimal but extended observations to far more frequent observations with a focus on helping the teachers acquire needed skills and helping the schools cater to educators' professional development needs.

“The real change was that professional conversations with teachers became about development rather than evaluation. The idea is to extract strategies for improvement. We think it’s improved the culture in our buildings, and definitely improved the feeling around evaluation,” Wilkinson says. “From my experience—it’s my 43rd year in education—teachers really appreciate having administrators in the room, and really appreciate the engagement. It’s more of a focus on how can we partner to improve.”

Since the beginning of its involvement with CLASS/TIF, Bend-La Pine has demonstrated a strong trajectory of student achievement

improvement. Wilkinson attributes “much of [it] to teacher leadership and professional development. The idea of acknowledging and building teacher leadership has been really critical.” The new evaluation and mentorship programs, which are linked together, have also been hallmarks of Bend-La Pine’s success. In a district-conducted survey, an elementary teacher responded that, “[o]ne of the best parts of the mentor program is knowing that I can ask my mentor anything about teaching without judgment. I think a strong support program for new teachers is the sign of a school district that cares to keep their teachers happy, healthy, and sane.”²⁶

South Lane School District – Shared Decision Making

When South Lane School District Superintendent Krista Parent heard about the CLASS Project, she thought it made perfect sense. “We were doing pieces of it already, but this was a way to systematize all of those elements,” she says. District readiness was certainly not an issue: “I’ve been here for thirty years, and we have a strong culture of trust established between the district and the union. So when [the CLASS model was presented to us], we had teacher leaders, our union president, and a couple of principals in the room, and all of us were like, ‘why wouldn’t we do this?’”

South Lane School District is predominantly suburban and rural, with 2800 students, many of whom live in poverty or are English language learners. The CLASS Project, they figured, would help support teachers’ development so that they could better address students’ needs, as well as formalize existing innovations and incentivize them to work on other, less developed, aspects of teacher effectiveness. “Out of the four blueprint areas,” Parent says, “we had already done a lot of work around professional development, including a weekly early release across all ten schools for dedicated professional learning time; contractual agreements about general fund budget dollars for professional development; and teacher leader positions.” Career pathways were a related area of strength: “we have a long history of teacher leaders and elevating them into administrative roles.” But the district was weaker in its alternative compensation offerings and evaluation systems. “None of us really wanted to deal with our evaluation system—it was archaic and wasn’t aligned with our cutting-edge work. We needed a kick start.”

Diane Hicks, a teacher and the local union president, said that the CLASS process “was very exciting. Once we got going, people really jumped on board. [The design team] was a very diverse group, with small schools, big schools, elementary and high schools, some classified professionals, and administrators.” They overhauled their evaluation system, creating a matrix model that “is pretty uniquely ours,” Hicks notes, as well as working on compensation, creating new teacher leadership roles, and formalizing professional development opportunities.

Now, with its CLASS grant complete as of 2014-15, South Lane has noted a number of improvements. Across the four years of CLASS, third grade reading proficiency scores raised from 67.4 percent to 72.8 percent. Poverty has always negatively impacted their students’ achievement, but in 2014 Cottage Grove high school—which at times had had a dropout rate in double digits—had a four year graduation rate of 90 percent, with 100 percent of their students meeting assessments of essential skills.

Part of these early successes is attributable to the resources CLASS brought into the district, Parent says. “In education, our lens gets narrowed sometimes. It’s hard for us to pick our head up and look at what’s going around in the rest of the world... They [Chalkboard] bring things to the table that we don’t have, that the Oregon Department of Education can’t do... I think that’s a real benefit.” CLASS also helped streamline the district’s organization: “Typically districts have zillions of initiatives going on, all with good intentions, but they don’t have a system for how to organize and prioritize them,” Parent says. “[CLASS] gave us a framework.”

At the close of its CLASS grant, almost all of their CLASS reforms have been structured into the district's budget going forward ("sustainability is a big thing," Parent says). More than 40 paid teacher leadership positions have been created and bargained into the contract for sustainability beyond the end of the CLASS grant, and more than 70 percent of teachers participated in two or more CLASS activities by the fourth year of South Lane's grant. Perhaps most impressively, their 25-30 member CLASS executive committee—the initial design team—has grown beyond its original purpose, taking the district-wide collaboration forged during CLASS design and becoming, as the district's website explains, the leadership team for the district on all matters of importance.²⁷ They are the district's Achievement Compact team, PLT team, Proficiency Grading Committee, Improvement Team, etc., and make recommendations and decisions regarding almost every initiative implemented by the district.

As Parent notes, "I said over and over again that CLASS is the work of our district: we organize all of our district work around the CLASS work. Reforms can sometimes feel elitist, but we anticipated that challenge and got in front of it by constructing a very large executive committee, including all schools, all grade levels, and classified staff."

Because of widespread participation in CLASS reforms, teachers and administrators alike have a real sense of ownership and empowerment, a collaborative expectation that has become standard operating procedure across the district. "I would say there has been a huge increase in teacher morale," Diane Hicks says. Julie Smith, Chalkboard's director of educator effectiveness, puts it simply. "South Lane's hallmark really is shared decision making: the superintendent and the teachers have equal voice."

David Douglas School District – CODE and Evaluation

The David Douglas School District, located in greater Portland, serves a significantly more diverse student population than most of Oregon's districts, with a student body that is 25 percent Hispanic, 15 percent Asian, 10 percent Black, and 42 percent white. Four-fifths of its more than 10,000 students qualified for free or reduced lunch in 2014, and more than a fifth of its students are English language learners, with more than 55 languages spoken by students in its high school alone.²⁸

Julie Smith notes that "every single one of their buildings has high poverty, high diversity, and high ELL: those traits are their district." Yet while these traits typically predict underperforming districts in Oregon, for more than a decade, David Douglas has bucked that trend so markedly that in 2010, Education Week rated it one of 21 nationwide urban districts to "beat the odds," positioning it at second in the nation because it exceeded its expected graduation rate by a full 20 points.²⁹ In 2014, 75 percent of David Douglas' high school seniors graduated, and the district has acquired a glowing reputation for student achievement, parental engagement, community building, and a strong partnership between district administrators and the teachers union.

Brought into the district in 2012, CLASS has built upon the DDSD's strengths to help ensure that teacher empowerment and effectiveness are counted among its successes. In shaping their CLASS reforms, David Douglas created its Effective Educator Evaluations program, and its Cadre of Distinguished Educators (CODE) initiative, which incorporates the three remaining

CLASS blueprint areas: new career paths, expanded compensation, and professional development opportunities.

CODE promises its participants—one from each building in the district—respect and recognition, the opportunity to influence decisions at the district level through the CODE think tank and the superintendent's advisory council, the opportunity to impact the district's long-range planning, additional professional learning opportunities, the chance to lead learning opportunities for their teacher colleagues, and additional compensation in the form of stipends, release time, and a few other opportunities. Its reforms have already garnered national acclaim: the Cadre of Distinguished Educators were asked to present the CODE concept at a national summit, and then were invited to convene a Teacher Leadership Lab at David Douglas through the Teach to Lead initiative (a joint project of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the U.S. Department of Education). Chris Dwyre, a middle school teacher, says that CODE is great because it provides access to cross-district dialogue and other learning opportunities: "the open door is such a gift, because in the teaching world we're all so isolated. If we can start opening those doors and drawing on the expertise of our neighbors, our fellow colleagues, and people from other buildings, the potential is unlimited."³⁰

The district's Effective Educator Evaluations sets 22 standards and has opened doors for increased dialogue about professional practice between teachers and their peers, and between teachers and administrators. Through self-evaluations, goal setting, mid-year reviews, collaborative conversations, regular observations, and end-of-year

conferences, educators continually engage in a reflective process about their and their colleagues' educational practice. Although the program was initially met with skepticism, the district provided after-school workshops explaining the new evaluation system, and now it is being widely embraced as supportive and effective. "I've seen some major, amazing things happening with the evaluation system," says Leah Starkovich, student achievement specialist at Ventura Park Elementary School and member of the CLASS design team. "Now, people are talking about teacher practice. Before we didn't have the rubric, but now they have the language they need. It's moved teachers into a learning role. It also makes sure that administrators have time to talk to

teachers... It's too early for hard data yet, but teachers can now say at the end of the year whether the kids have met their goals, and there's a perception that the new teacher evaluation rubric is positively impacting kids' growth."

From Julie Smith's perspective, David Douglas School District has created one of the most supportive and effective teacher evaluation systems yet. "David Douglas really owned the belief that an evaluation system, if done right, can become a professional growth model. It doesn't become a 'gotcha' for underperforming teachers, but rather a 'we've got you' statement of support, so that educators can grow and accelerate in their profession."



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- 22 Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning Survey, <http://www.telloregon.org/>
- 23 Truman Collins, Oregon Business 9.17.14
- 24 For instance, the US Department of Education has recently deemed the systematic use of data to improve instruction as a national priority, and has instructed their network of regional laboratories to deliver technical assistance to teachers, principals, and superintendents. <https://tech.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/edm-la-brief.pdf>
- 25 See pages 10, 11, 13, and 18, above. Not all Bend-La Pine schools are part of the TIF grant: 18 are, and 9 are not. The TIF grant also supports a Value-Added Model (VAM) of school evaluation, which was a frustration for the district. Wilkinson said that Bend-La Pine examined the VAM concept carefully and found many flaws. "It's a relative reading of all schools in the state of Oregon. We know what the kids need to do to get to the meet-or-exceed level, but with VAM, your kids can improve but your VAM scores can drop," Wilkinson says. "I'm ending the TIF grant disillusioned around VAM: it's hard to say that it's an accurate prediction of value added. We have an incentive based on improving VAM scores, but teachers don't know how to improve it—it becomes meaningless."
- 26 Via the "Mentoring and Induction Program, CLASS/TIF Project, Bend-La Pine Schools" information sheet.
- 27 "CLASS Summary 2014-15 (Year 3 of Implementation)," South Lane School District. <http://www.slane.k12.or.us/departments/superintendent/class/class-summary-2014-15-year-3-implementation>
- 28 Cody, Rachel Graham. "A Miracle on 135th Avenue." Willamette Week , February 13th, 2013. http://www.wweek.com/portland/article-20255-miracle_on_135th_avenue.html
- 29 Swanson, Christopher. "21 Urban Districts Exceed Graduation Expectations." Education Week, June 2, 2010. <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/06/10/34overachiever.h29.html>
- 30 Taken from David Douglas informational video about CODE, accessible here: <http://ee.ddouglas.k12.or.us/2014/10/03/code/>

APPENDIXES

I. Chalkboard Project's 15-Point Action Plan

After spending its first two years gathering citizen input and conducting extensive research, a fifteen point action plan was developed to guide the work of the organization. Those fifteen points were broken down in to three larger topics: educator quality, funding and accountability, and student success.

Although Chalkboard has decided that the most significant potential to improve student achievement in the next five years is to strengthen the effectiveness of the classroom teacher, the initial 15-point plan from 2004 still plays an important role in our organization.

Some of these are very specific to Oregon's educational context, but many of these will translate well to other states' and regions' concerns.

1. Attain and Retain Quality Educators.

We need to make sure there's a great teacher in every classroom and a great principal in every school. It should be easier to keep the good teachers and to remove those who are not performing.

- Generate recommendations on the creation of new standards to license teachers (Issue #1A)
- Create alternative licensure (Issue #1B)
- Re institute Oregon's beginning teacher mentor program (Issue #1C)
- Align high-quality professional development with the needs of schools, and the requirements for continuing licensure (Issue #1D)

- Revise administrator licensing standards (Issue #1E)
- Review and improve methods are for evaluating, improving and removing teachers and principals (Issue #1F)
- Propose an alternative model for compensating teachers and principals based on rewarding performance that improves student learning (Issue #1G)

2. School Funding and Budget

Accountability. Oregon has struggled with questions of funding and accountability for years with little progress. Half of the state's General Fund is spent on K-12 education, so the state needs to be engaged in changes that will produce results.

3. Involve Parents and Communities.

We need more parents and community members to involved in their schools. This is tough, with some complicated barriers. But if we want to see stronger schools and greater achievement, we will have to get more people involved.

4. Understand School Budgets.

Oregonians pay for our public schools. It should be easy to see how that money is spent. Chalkboard supports efforts to create a new, transparent budget that is easier to understand.

5. Effectively Use Transportation Dollars.

Eliminate transportation-matching grants and distribute a fixed block grant to schools, based on program efficiencies.

6. Create Centralized System for

Online Purchasing. Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and the Oregon Department of Administrative Services should combine the buying power of schools across the state. It's a simple fact that when you buy in bulk you spend less. Online purchasing also increases efficiency.

7. Optimize Federal Funds for Special Education. The Oregon Department of Education and the Department of Human Services need to carefully review the state's Medicaid contract with the federal government to make sure it lists all Medicaid-eligible special education services, in order that our schools receive maximum federal reimbursement.

8. Create a Statewide Student Data System. By consolidating individual district student tracking systems and payroll systems into a single, statewide system, the state will have more education dollars to spend in the classrooms.

9. Conduct Community Audits. ODE should work with the Secretary of State's office to define best business practices, and require a performance audit of Oregon school districts that are not making adequate academic progress.

10. Reduce Class Size for K-1. Oregon must do a better job of teaching reading. To do this more effectively, we need smaller class sizes in kindergarten and first grade. ODE should pilot a program to reduce K-1 class size, while also tailoring professional development to help teachers take full advantage of the lower class sizes to improve instruction.

11. Work One-to-One with Early Readers. Early reading skills are crucial to student success. Districts and businesses must work together to support volunteer programs with time and money so that all K-3 students who are reading below grade level get individual help.

12. Take Attendance More Seriously. Attendance reform efforts should begin by creating a uniform way of measuring attendance, so attendance patterns can be compared across schools, and problems and successes can be identified. Next, the state should move to a system where schools are funded based on attendance, not enrollment.

13. Create Safe and Respectful Learning Environments. The State Board of Education should direct school districts to expand existing standards on student conduct and discipline to include standards for civility and to implement a civility plan.

14. Student Health. ODE should require that all school districts provide vigorous physical activity and comply with nutritional standards for school meals.

15. Expand Public School Choices. The Legislature and Oregon Department of Education (ODE) should seriously explore statewide open enrollment, making it easier for all Oregon students to choose from any regular, charter or magnet school, or special emphasis program around the state.

II. Lessons Learned

1. Unless you have bedrock legislative support and are certain of your model, pilot before pronouncing: use credibility from the pilot programs to build support for legislative reforms. Organizational humility and consensus building have yielded enduring effects.
2. Grantmakers should follow Foundations for a Better Oregon's lead and prioritize research before interventions—effective grantmaking includes admitting the unknowns.
3. The piloting process has proven more valuable than best-practice research, and indeed is CLASS' most lasting legacy. The leadership and relationships built up through CLASS design and implementation phases far transcend what early legislative victories accomplished, and will help push through ideas and reforms well beyond CLASS' interventions.
4. Long-term grantmaking can be transformative, but it needs funders with the vision and tenacity to forswear immediate results in anticipation of bigger, more gradual payoffs.
5. The geographic and perceived philosophical diversity of Chalkboard's constituent grantmakers—the six principal foundations hail from across the state—have added to FBO/Chalkboard's consensus-driven policy capacity.
6. Many effective education system improvements require little or no expenditure. Teacher and administrator mentoring programs were inexpensive and highly effective; even CLASS reforms were implemented at relatively low costs.
7. Providing a free flow of evidence, scholarship, and analyzed local data—and commissioning it when none exists—impacts education reform far beyond the initiative for which it was commissioned/shared, and engenders goodwill toward the commissioning organization.
8. Maintaining legislative presence and pushing policy reforms alongside pilot programs is a useful way of paving the way for broader adoption of programs; retaining effective lobbyists helps.
9. Pick pilot districts based on readiness. Make all key stakeholders sign the grant application, but also if possible, ascertain the level of readiness. Giving guidance to districts that want to cultivate readiness is important too. The first districts to sign on will be the most ready; subsequent districts will require more cultivation and outreach. Results from subsequent years may taper accordingly, and these districts will benefit from careful thought about how to increase buy-in and enthusiasm.

10. The ultimate goal of these projects is widespread systemic reform. For many states, initiatives are state-driven and rolled out uniformly statewide. In Oregon—where statewide reforms are slow and initiatives often start at the local level—the strategy was to come alongside the Oregon Department of Education as a critical friend, and help build its capacity and knowledge as the state began funding CLASS-like work and administering the School District Collaboration Fund (SDCF) across the growing number of districts. To help improve the statewide rollout, Chalkboard has become the state’s contractor in charge of overseeing SDCF program; currently, Chalkboard is only supplying the coaching, data, and research. Funding comes from the state.
11. Evaluation is key: to be able to prove impact qualitatively and quantitatively both to dispel critics, to maintain funder and staff morale, and to advocate for further reform.
12. Achieving evenness in implementation and inclusion has been challenging, and will take concentrated and evolving strategy.
13. The \$24.7 million federal Teacher Incentive Fund grant was validation of CLASS’ work, but also a timing challenge: as Dan Jamison explains, “much of the TIF language was very toxic to union leadership in the state.... The TIF grant accelerated a timeline of crucial and contentious conversations.” Kate Dickson notes, “It was a real mixed blessing. The real success of the CLASS project is based on full implementation of all four blueprint areas, but the TIF money only prioritized some of that and only some districts could apply for it.” Sue Hildick adds, “But it brought acceleration of the work and badly needed support dollars to the districts involved, and national attention and recognition for CLASS.”
14. The CLASS Project’s success has been slowed by systemic inertia and limited by external factors. Ron Saxton, a Chalkboard supporter and consultant, asserts, “Chalkboard has by far been the most successful [education reformer] in Oregon. The flip side is that the system is enormously resistant, and ten years later, the change hasn’t been as enormous as it could have been. Chalkboard can provide information, it can point to best practices, it can give examples and do pilot projects, but in terms of changing the overall system, it needs willing partners. Chalkboard is a wonderful partner with the system when the system wants it to be a partner. When the system doesn’t want a partner, it’s hard.”



CREATIVE LEADERSHIP ACHIEVES STUDENT SUCCESS

THE CLASS PROJECT: EMPOWERING EDUCATORS,
RAISING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT