

VIEWPOINT

Parent Involvement Key to Student Success

Chalkboard Project's Efforts Focus on Empowering Parents

By Sue Hildick



The Chalkboard Project wants to empower parents to become more involved in their children's education, a proven method for enhancing academic performance.

The Chalkboard Project has spent nearly four years now listening to Oregonians' desires to improve K-12 schools and merging ideas from concerned Oregonians with those that research shows will truly make a difference for our children. There is public consensus on at least one topic: Increasing parent involvement in schools should be a top priority in our state. The scientific research on this topic is clear, too: When families are engaged in their children's education, those children do better in school (see "The Benefits of Parent Involvement" on page 28). But as any parent can report, this "engagement" is much easier said than done.

One of Chalkboard's primary goals is to help bridge the gaps that often prevent effective parent-school communication. We've offered grants to a number of schools and local parent-teacher organizations to develop innovative parent outreach efforts. Two of our sponsored projects in particular aim to better empower parents and families to help their children succeed in school.

Running Start

Some parents have an easier time connecting with their children's school than others. Many want to be involved but face obstacles, such as language barriers or memories of uncomfortable school experiences in their own childhood. These parents need information about what's going on in their children's classroom, but often can be hard to reach.

Chalkboard has created a two-part toolkit that is helping bridge this communication gap from both sides. The toolkit includes materials that help school staff better understand and address the challenges and barriers that keep many families from connecting with schools. A companion set of materials for parents offers specific ideas on how to become more involved in their children's education,

from helping with homework to making parent-teacher conferences productive. Both sets of materials are available on the Chalkboard Web site at www.chalkboardproject.org, and the parent toolkits have been translated into Spanish and Russian.

Chalkboard has conducted several trainings to help school staff and community groups use the Running Start materials, with more planned for this year thanks to a grant from Bank of the West. As part of this training outreach, we'll offer stipends to schools, parent groups and others who would like to conduct a session on how to use the Running Start materials in their own community. If you're interested in attending an upcoming training, or would like more information about hosting one, call 503-542-4325, e-mail info@chalkboardproject.org, or visit www.chalkboardproject.org.

Black Parent Initiative Research Project

We all read about the latest test scores and school "report cards" put out by one organization or another. But what does this information really tell us about how to help students succeed? You have to look at data much more deeply to get the real story about the challenges our children face and how they can be addressed. This spring, Chalkboard is sponsoring a research project led by the Black Parent Initiative, a Portland-based nonprofit helping parents take action to close the educational achievement gap that too often exists between African American students and their white peers.

The research will help present an accurate portrait, or "roadmap," of African American student achievement throughout the Portland area. The roadmap will delve into all of the characteristics of each metro area school – not just look at test scores – and find out which schools seem to be doing the best job of closing the achievement gap.

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