Parents Together

A Coalition of Parent Groups in Oregon

Oregon PTA, Oregon Save Our Schools (Oregon SOS), Oregon Parental Information and Resource Center (Oregon PIRC), Oregon Afterschool for Kids (Oregon ASK), Albina Head Start, CORE-Calling Oregon to Re-Invest in Education

Dear Members of the Oregon Education Investment Board:

As members of several large parent organizations in our state, we want to voice our interest in the changes you are planning for Oregon's educational system. We want to partner with you to make meaningful changes that will impact children's academic and lifelong success.

We ask six things of you

- **Include parents* in your decisions and in the change process.** Education reform cannot succeed without them.
- **Invest in children, not high stakes testing.** Provide relief from the rules, mandates, and narrow-minded focus on standardized testing that undermine love of learning and straitjacket our schools. Simple metrics are not an indicator of the education of a whole child or a measure of engaged learning.
- **Make changes based on the best research on how children learn,** and design systems to support their growing minds.
- **Create a system that assures that parents are welcome** and integrally involved in the education of their child.
- **Support the creativity, commitment and compassion of excellent teachers**. Research shows that parents trust the experience and training of their child's teacher. Respect the professionalism of teachers, include them on a deeper level in the education reform and policy-making process and design their evaluations so they can grow in their profession. Work with administrators and unions to help identify and move ineffective teachers out of the classroom.
- **Take care when you think about centralizing education decisions at the state**; local solutions owned by community members are at the heart of public education.

*"Parents" refers to any primary caregivers, family members, custodians or other caring adults.

We appreciate our state's concern with improving the education of our children. Central to this improvement is changing from a test driven model to a system that is responsive to the needs of students and their families. Governor Kitzhaber has demonstrated strong leadership in health care, and his vibrant interest in education is valued. We are particularly pleased with the emphasis on early education, the goal of assuring that children enter kindergarten ready for school, the recognition of 3rd grade reading as an educational keystone, and the intent to coordinate transitions between different levels of schooling. The Governor is right: our children cannot wait. But, **children do not exist in isolation from families**, and we are writing to request that you include parents as an essential component of educational success and the reform process.

We preface our comments about the current reform efforts by noting two things:

- The Oregon Quality Education Model is widely accepted as a prototype for educating our children; current reforms should continue to build on this model.
- In order to improve outcomes in education, Oregon must invest adequate money in education and to do that, the state must revamp its state revenue system.

A Different Kind of Compact

We know you are tasked with an enormous responsibility to create an effective educational system that yields results. We support your efforts; and we have some concerns as you embark on this endeavor. There has been much discussion about Achievement Compacts, which we understand to be agreements between the Oregon Education Investment Board and local school districts. While we understand that OEIB is looking at education systemically, we see that no mention has been made of what we believe to be the **core educational compact**:

Education is a compact between students, teachers and parents. Everything else in our educational system should be designed to support the vitality of those interactions.

It is through this **very real** compact that children build confidence in their ability to take risks, experience success, cope with failure, are challenged to think critically, learn to enjoy education, absorb information, build curiosity, have the courage to respond creatively to new situations, and ultimately, learn. These are the traits that create high performing students. These are the traits that will build our state's economic sustainability. These are the traits that will help us approach the 40-40-20 goal.

The outcomes that we, as parents and citizens of the state of Oregon, want for all Oregon children emerge from a well-rounded education that offers critical thinking skills to prepare students for a global society. They do not emerge from a bare-bones core curriculum, from narrow metrics, from state-controlled achievement compacts, from standardized testing, or from mechanistic changes in the way we evaluate teachers. Those measures, despite the best intentions, limit curriculum, rob good teachers of creative methodologies, "standardize" our students instead of actualizing their potential, and **ignore the powerful influences of race and -socioeconomic status.**

The Absence of Parents in OEIB's Proposals

Research has long held that the most significant influence on a child's success is his relationship with one caring adult, most often a parent. Over emphasis on metrics diminishes the value of such a relationship. While many participants on the OEIB are parents, no one directly represents the interests of parents as a positive and necessary factor in the academic and social success of children. No one speaks out to assure that parent involvement in schools is a genuine, dynamic, programmatic, committed and integral part of the educational process. No one has articulated the barriers that diverse parents face in participating in their child's education.

> Even test scores reflect the effectiveness of a parent's involvement in his child's education. PISA (Program for International Student Success which assesses 15 year old youth internationally) results published in late 2011 confirm that parents' involvement with their child—regardless of socioeconomic status—gave the child a significant performance advantage on PISA test scores. (*Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2009 study by Andreas Schleicher*).

These relationships that are so essential to school success do not emerge from text books and they cannot be measured by standardized tests, but they are the underpinning of an educated and thriving community. They are the backbone of a creative community that develops new ideas into economic engines. They are the foundation of a responsible community that pays taxes and deliberates on issues of public interest.

Why Parents Should Be Involved in Educational Reform

Education is not a corporate endeavor reproducing widgets, but under NCLB, it has become a business of winning the highest scores on international tests and standardizing results. **Educating children is a creative process that emerges when caring, smart adults guide a child to her or his highest potential. It is about growing**

talents, discovering interests, cultivating focus, developing values, understanding culture, being challenged, and contributing to society.

> ***Parents know and understand this discovery process; policy makers don't always remember it. Without parents, reforms rarely move forward and children struggle to succeed. Parents are fierce advocates for their children and can be great campaigners for the success of their child's school and all children that attend. The best policy and politics cannot override their commitment and determination. They must be part of the planning, the visioning and the solution. It is startling how often parents are the forgotten partner in education even though children spend far more time with their parents than in school. In truth, the school system is a way to help parents educate their children.***

Parents as Partners in Change

While every person on the OEIB is accomplished and seasoned, we challenge you to use this opportunity to dig deep into your knowledge and understanding of how a child learns and act to create better results for all children. Our educational system needs major change, but simply re-forming the governance structure and setting new and more challenging outcomes will not accomplish that. Please do not let this be another example of re-form without change.

Parents want to be partners with you in this process. We do not want to stop reform; we do not want to halt change. We want to understand how the changes you propose will actually be better for children. We want to join you in thoughtful decisions and meaningful shifts that help children learn. We can be your best champions.
Let's do this together.

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