

# SOS Audit Finds Oregon Needs to Improve Teacher Training

The Secretary of State's most recent audit of Oregon's teacher training found an appalling lack of any kind of dedicated effort or concern that the people who teach our children for six hours a day be skilled at teaching. We reprint excerpts of the SOS audit here and Oregon PEN will follow-up to find out what improvements, if any, have been made.

*Among the findings from the audit: (reprinted from [http://media.oregonlive.com/education\\_impact/other/CollegesofEdaudit.pdf](http://media.oregonlive.com/education_impact/other/CollegesofEdaudit.pdf))*

## On teacher training at Oregon's teachers' colleges:

Our survey of school district administrators found that half of the respondents did not believe Oregon's public teaching colleges sufficiently prepare their graduates. However, no state agency or commission in Oregon routinely reports performance indicators relating to the effectiveness of Oregon public teaching colleges' graduates, and only three of the six public teaching colleges regularly provide any information on their graduates after they enter the workforce. Other states have begun reporting performance indicators on their teaching colleges' graduates.

## On mentoring (mentoring of teachers is understood to be the standard best practices method of improving the quality of teaching):

Though some school districts in Oregon offer a mentoring program for beginning teachers, most that responded to our survey reported that they do not have policies in place for mentoring. We surveyed 197 districts and received 109 responses regarding mentoring. Sixty-seven of the 109 responses indicated that their districts did not have formal plans for beginning teachers to participate in a mentoring program.

## Responses on Mentoring Programs

Q: Does your school district have written policies, plans or procedures that beginning teachers participate in a mentoring program?

|                   |           |
|-------------------|-----------|
| <b>Yes</b>        | <b>38</b> |
| <b>No</b>         | <b>67</b> |
| <b>Don't Know</b> | <b>4</b>  |

Oregon statutes acknowledge the importance of mentoring for beginning teachers, but they do not require that school districts provide such a program. Therefore, individual school districts decide whether to offer a mentoring program for beginning teachers, and what that program includes.

## Further expand professional development and support for beginning K-12 teachers

Research indicates that beginning teachers need comprehensive professional development in their first three to five years for professional growth and improved student achievement.

Professional development includes high quality mentoring, ongoing learning opportunities, and standards based teacher evaluations

While some Oregon school districts report they provide professional development and support to beginning teachers, other districts face challenges in doing so. Many school districts in Oregon do not have mentoring policies or formal plans for beginning teachers to participate in mentoring. In addition, many school districts told us that they do not set aside time for professional learning, and others are slow to create teacher evaluation systems in line with new requirements.

Oregon has adopted laws and rules that acknowledge the importance of the elements of professional development – mentoring, professional learning, and teacher evaluation. Yet these statutes and rules only require school districts to perform teacher evaluations, leaving the other two elements of professional development subject to available funding.

In 2010, the Oregon Legislature established a task force to study teacher effectiveness. The task force called for high standards for professional development, and made a recommendation to the legislature to fully fund the beginning teacher mentoring program.

The Commission has also sought to enhance professional development by requiring individual teachers to complete professional development coursework or activities in order to renew their teaching license. However, such requirements are the sole responsibility of the teacher, not the school district, which does not ensure that beginning teachers receive mentoring or participate in professional learning opportunities through their school district.

## We are reprinting the audit summary below:

*Secretary of State Audit Report  
Kate Brown, Secretary of State  
Gary Blackmer, Director, Audits Division*

## Education: Additional Efforts and Resources Needed to Improve Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

### Summary

Teachers are critical for Oregon to meet its education goals for high student achievement. While many factors contribute to student achievement, effective teaching is fundamental to student success. Our audit objective was to determine whether state or local actions could be taken to improve preparation and professional development for beginning teachers of kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12). Our work focused on ways to strengthen student teaching practices, increase confidence in Oregon teaching colleges and their graduates, and improve the professional opportunities Oregon's school districts provide to beginning teachers.

Oregon's public teaching colleges can do more to strengthen student teaching

Teacher preparation programs at universities and colleges (teaching colleges) in Oregon are essential to ensuring student teachers are sufficiently prepared to support student achievement. Experts suggest student teaching should be the central part of teacher preparation. This type of preparation coordinates university program coursework with

K-12 classroom teaching, requiring close partnerships between public teaching colleges and school districts.

Oregon's public teaching colleges are making efforts to strengthen

*cont...next page*

# SOS Audit Finds Oregon Needs to Improve Teacher Training

-cont from previous page

student teaching, yet more progress is needed. Public teaching colleges vary on how well they coordinate coursework and student teaching experiences. They also vary in the partnerships they have developed with local school districts. Oregon's public teaching colleges are working with the state's school districts to strengthen student teaching, yet efforts could be expanded.

We recommend the Oregon Education Investment Board work with the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission, the Oregon University System, public teaching colleges, and school districts to continue strengthening student teaching practices. See page 6 for audit results.

## Performance indicators can help inform decision making

Objective information on the effectiveness of Oregon's public teaching colleges could help inform decision making for school district administrators. Performance indicators on how well graduates succeed in the workforce could provide insight into how effectively public teaching colleges prepare their graduates.

Our survey of school district administrators found that half of the respondents did not believe Oregon's public teaching colleges sufficiently prepare their graduates. However, no state agency or commission in Oregon routinely reports performance indicators relating to the effectiveness of Oregon public teaching colleges' graduates, and only three of the six public teaching colleges regularly provide any information on their graduates after they enter the workforce. Other states have begun reporting performance indicators on their teaching colleges' graduates, including:



**hiring and retention data, survey results from teaching college graduates and their employers, measures of student growth attributed to teaching college graduates, and summarized results from teacher evaluations conducted by graduates' principals.**

We recommend the Oregon Education Investment Board identify a state entity, such as the University System or the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission, to gather, analyze, and regularly report on the effectiveness of graduates to provide performance indicators for Oregon's teaching colleges. See page 16 for audit results.

## Stronger licensing requirements could provide greater assurances of teacher preparedness

Oregon's teacher licensure requirements do not include an independent performance assessment to ensure that teacher candidates are adequately prepared. The Teaching Standards and Practices Commission (Commission), which is responsible for licensing Oregon's teachers, relies on recommendations from the teaching colleges to determine whether candidates are ready to teach. In contrast, Washington, Wisconsin, and New York are working to obtain independent performance

assessments of candidate quality by requiring candidates to pass the Teacher Preparation Assessment tool developed by Stanford University and administered by a private contractor. We recommend the Commission consider requiring independent performance assessments of teacher candidates' performance prior to licensure to determine whether candidates are adequately prepared. See page 20 for audit results.

## Further expand professional development and support for beginning K-12 teachers

Research indicates that beginning teachers need comprehensive professional development in their first three to five years for professional growth and improved student achievement. Professional development includes high quality mentoring, ongoing learning opportunities, and standards-based teacher evaluations.

While some Oregon school districts report they provide professional development and support to beginning teachers, other districts face challenges in doing so. Many school districts in Oregon do not have mentoring policies or formal plans for beginning teachers to participate in mentoring. In addition, many school districts told us that they do not set aside time for professional learning, and others are slow to create teacher evaluation systems in line with new requirements.

We recommend the Oregon Education Investment Board work with the Oregon Legislature, public teaching colleges, Oregon Department of Education, and Oregon's school districts to create and implement professional development guidelines and to provide consistent funding needed to improve professional development opportunities for beginning K-12 teachers.