

Oregon State Education Association Receives \$20,000 Grant To Close Student Achievement Gaps

by Bend Weekly News Sources

A \$20,000 grant from the National Education Association is helping the Oregon Education Association revise state education policies and create initiatives to close student achievement gaps. The grant will help OEA identify professional development needs and support lobbying efforts to increase funding for programs to address those needs. National studies have revealed a disturbing achievement gap between children based on their race and economic status. This trend extends to disadvantaged and minority children in Oregon as well as children who live in the state's most crowded cities and most rural towns. Over the past five years, funding for public education in Oregon has declined. At the same time, the Hispanic population in the state has increased dramatically and the percentage of students on free and reduced lunch also has swelled. These factors have escalated the awareness of the achievement gaps and the need to address them. This grant will allow OEA to offer professional development opportunities to address the disparities in student achievement. In addition, the money will go toward the expansion of OEA's Diversity Cadre, a program to help school employees better understand and respond to issues related to diversity. "We've been working collaboratively with numerous educational groups to find ways to meet the professional development needs of teachers that also address the needs of a diverse student population," says Larry Wolf, president of OEA. "The ability to show the community how working conditions and professional development can influence student achievement will be important discussions." The Oregon grant is one of 22 awarded by NEA to state affiliates across the country in an effort to support Association initiatives to close gaps in student achievement. "America's public school employees must use every possible avenue at our disposal to improve student achievement and close the gaps that exist between segments of students," said Reg Weaver, NEA president. "Without unique and innovative efforts like those being undertaken by NEA members in Oregon, America will never make good on its promise that great public schools are a basic right of every child." The National Education Association is the nation's largest professional employee organization, representing 3.2 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators and students preparing to become teachers.

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