Oregon launches educator mentor program Web Site

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The future of our children rests in an educator's hands. Yet, too many of Oregon's beginning teachers and administrators are routinely thrust into situations where they are merely given a key to a classroom and a pat on the back as they start their career. The Beginning Teacher and Administrator Mentor Program aims to change this trend by supporting nearly 1,000 new educators in the most crucial stage of their careers by providing them an experienced educator mentor. The Chalkboard Project, in partnership with the Oregon Department of Education (ODE), created a new website, www.MentoringEducators.org to provide information and resources for beginning and experienced educators, policy makers, and the general public. MentoringEducators.org is a hub where Oregonians can find an overview of the mentor program, a list of participants and program locations, a mentoring calendar, general educator resources, research and much more. "MentoringEducators.org represents an important collaboration between ODE and our private sector partner, the Chalkboard Project," said Susan Castillo, State Superintendent. "It is a great resource, not only for those interested in mentoring, but for all educators. We know that one of the best ways to support our students is by supporting the educators who teach them." At the heart of the website and mentor program lies the reality that educator quality affects student learning more than any other factor. By providing beginning educators with experienced mentor teachers and administrators, schools are increasing the effectiveness of the education provided to students. The result is an effective educator force that is responsive to the diverse academic needs and cultural backgrounds of all students. Few people understand the benefit of Oregon's Mentor Program like Jill Davidson, a first grade teacher and educator mentor at Bohemia Elementary in the South Lane School District: "When I started teaching, I had no support. My deepest regret is that I wasn't the kind of teacher I could have been. Had I been mentored, the real beneficiary would have been my first grade students."

Rigorous mentor programs produce gains in educator retention while improving teaching practices and raising student achievement. Not only is this good news for students, but in Oregon where nearly 40% of its teachers leave the profession in the first 5 years at a cost of more than $45 million, it is also good news for taxpayers. Oregon's mentor program provides a formal induction program that provides structured time for interaction focused on improving new teachers' content, classroom management, and instructional skills. The programs are organized by the New Teachers Center at UC Santa Cruz, which has over 20 year of experience in the field. "Not all mentor programs are created equal," stated Sue Hildick, President, Chalkboard Project. "The Beginning Teacher and Administrator Program offers comprehensive and consistent support for new educators and mentors. The program raises the bar for the profession both in Oregon and nationwide." Oregon's Beginning Teacher and Administrator Program was signed into law in July 2007. At the request of the Chalkboard Project and Stand for Children, legislative champions Representative Roblan and Senators Devlin, Starr, Johnson and Walker proposed the legislation. These groups, along with the Oregon Department of Education, ESDs, the Oregon Education Association, Higher Education, the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators (COSA), education associations, teachers, administrators, and community members worked together to advocate for a teacher and administrator mentor program.