

Testimony of Rachael Harms  
Teacher  
Salem-Keizer School District

Thank you for the opportunity to share our experiences with you and your team. It is truly an honor to be here today.

Each day in Salem-Keizer Public Schools, 40,000 bright young people come through the doors of our schools depending on us to prepare them to enter the workforce, or to be college ready by the time they graduate from high school. We have made tremendous growth in doing just that.

We know that having an effective teacher is one of the most important things in each of our student's lives, and the single most important factor in increasing student achievement. In a paper published by Eric A. Hanushek last month, he states: "The key element defining a school's impact on student achievement is teacher quality." Replacing or increasing the effectiveness of the bottom 5-8 percent of teachers in the U.S. could move the U.S. near the top of international math and science rankings.

***Professional Development matters!***

Although 98.9% of our teaching staff is highly qualified, we are striving for 100%. We also look closely at teacher performance, and offer support to those teachers who are require additional opportunities for growth and development in order to provide the high quality teaching that our students deserve. Our office of Staff Quality works alongside teachers who need this additional support. Although the costs associated with this intensive intervention can be high, the cost of allowing marginal teaching is even higher.

We are placing highly qualified teachers in our high needs schools, but *every* student needs and deserves the very best teacher we can provide. We must be sure our teachers are getting the professional development they need in order to meet student needs.

In Salem-Keizer, we strive to provide high quality, job-embedded professional development that includes coaching and follow-up. This deepens the content knowledge of each teacher, providing them with the research-based instructional strategies to assist students in meeting rigorous academic standards, and prepares teachers to use various types of formative assessments appropriately. With coaching, we know that what they are learning and practicing is much more likely to be consistently applied in the classroom. Coaches also facilitate learning labs, professional learning communities and data study teams as they study and reflect on the progress of each student.

In the past year our district has endured over \$58 million in cuts from our general budget. We have maintained our core value of increased student achievement as our highest priority, and have therefore preserved our instructional coaching program, knowing that this is one of the best things we can do to support teachers. We have made huge gains in the last several years and do not want to jeopardize the momentum we have. Without Title I and Title IIa funding, this valuable program would be lost. In the words of our

superintendent, Dr. Sandy Husk, “When times get tough, we don’t take away the very thing that helps us do our jobs better.” Again, professional development matters!

During the 2010-2011 school year in Salem-Keizer Schools, 1,413 Paraprofessionals, and 1,835 Licensed Teachers took part in at least one professional development opportunity. Many of these 3,248 education professionals were involved in multiple and ongoing training, in addition to working with an instructional coach. This powerful approach to professional development is showing results, as evidenced by our increased student achievement, and supported by our teacher surveys and professional development evaluation feedback forms.

We strive to make sure that our teachers have appropriate technology available in their classrooms, and that they know how to tap the potential of each technology tool. Technology should enhance student learning, and make teaching easier and more enjoyable. Technology is truly an amplifier; it makes good teachers even better! With the proper professional development, teachers can realize the potential of the technology available to them and maximize its effectiveness. Without this professional development, technology is either under-utilized, or fear of failure keeps teachers from using it at all. Educational Technology - tools such as document cameras, SMART boards, MP3 players, Apple mobile devices, and web-based instructional software - in conjunction with sustained, ongoing, job-embedded professional development has proven very successful in Salem-Keizer. In the last two years, we have been the recipient of two Title IID Competitive grants and will begin a final IID competitive grant in the fall. We have seen increased student academic achievement, better attendance, lower discipline incidents, increased homework completion, and a host of other indicators that show that these when these tools are placed in the hands of excellent (and technology savvy) teachers, both teachers and students benefit more from education than in classrooms without these tools.

Our teacher retention rate for teachers in their first 2 years in the profession has moved from 59% to 89%, and this year, we had *no losses* of year first or second year teachers (except those lost due to our reduction in force). This growth in retention of new teachers is due largely to our mentor program, which consists of teacher induction, ongoing support of mentors (minimum 90 individual hours per new teacher), observation and feedback, learning labs, a targeted focus on professional teaching standards and professional growth, and intentional and intensive analysis of teacher practice and moving that practice forward. Without this intensive support to our new teachers, we would continue to lose half of our new hires, and the investment made in each of them.

Additionally, we are taking another look at how we approach our teacher performance evaluation system. We are engaged in meaningful collaboration with the CLASS Project and our Teacher Innovation Fund schools to link multiple measures of student growth to a performance based incentive pay system for teachers.

All of these initiatives are proven to be effective, but all require adequate funding, which our district cannot support through general fund dollars alone. It is my sincere hope that

as you consider the reauthorization of the ESEA you would provide adequate and stable funding for this important work to continue.