



NEWS RELEASE:

TRIO OF STATE EDUCATION ORGANIZATIONS INVITE OREGONIANS TO “DREAM” THE FUTURE OF SCHOOLS

April 12, 2016 -- Three organizations representing Oregon’s school board members, educators and administrators have joined together to accomplish a task that has never been undertaken at such scale: to engage Oregonians across the state in a conversation about education and what is best for students – without the burden of budget talk or funding solutions.

Oregon Rising, a public outreach campaign that launches across Oregon this week, asks Oregonians to engage at a local level to answer a fundamental state-wide question: What do we want Oregon schools to be for our children and grandchildren?

Beginning this week, superintendents, educators, principals and school board members across the state are holding Oregon Rising gatherings in their communities. Equipped with two explanatory videos, an outline for a conversation and a survey, their goal is to gather 10,000 voices from across the state. Between now and early June, Oregon Rising intends to hold at least one public session in each of the majority of school districts in the state.

The effort is made more exciting by the alliance of its sponsors: the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators (COSA), Oregon School Boards Association (OSBA) and the Oregon Education Association (OEA). The organizations have plenty in common, as student success is the primary focus of each, yet this is the first effort of its kind that the trio has undertaken together. “These groups and their members are the ones who are in the classrooms, in the buildings, who are running the districts. They know the ins and outs of education but they aren’t the public. They want to hear from their communities – parents and people without kids, too,” describes COSA Executive Director Craig Hawkins.

Too often, the sponsors say, aspirations for Oregon students are tempered by the current restrictions of budgets and other realities. “We’ve become so accustomed to living within the borders of budgets – which in all fairness is the only way to be fiscally respectful and responsible – that it’s become too easy to disregard opportunities our students might be given on the premise that we can’t afford it,” says OSBA Executive Director Betsy Miller-Jones. “Oregon Rising deliberately leaves the money talk at the door and asks what do we want? Let’s dream.”

“At home, if your family comes up with a dream together – whether it’s about a home improvement project or for a summer trip – you’re much more likely to achieve it,” adds Miller-Jones. “There’s so much more energy and interest that the logistics become easier to chart out.”

Community gatherings are a dynamic experience for those who take part, but work and family obligations can make attendance difficult for some. To allow for full participation, the effort has a parallel online component as well, with the videos and survey posted at www.oregon-rising.org. All materials will also be available in Spanish.

“We want to make this process accessible to all. Our goal is to hear the voices of everyone who cares about public education and is willing to share their hopes and dreams for how we build the schools our students deserve,” says elementary physical education teacher and OEA President Hanna Vaandering.

This is the first phase of the Oregon Rising effort. The initial survey and gatherings will wrap up in June, to allow the group to analyze and report the findings in late summer/early fall. Participants who provide an email address will receive the report.

A second outreach effort will take place in early 2017, with the intention of allowing for exploration of the initial findings.

When the first round of gatherings is completed, the group estimates that hundreds of meetings will have been held across the state, with representation from all counties. The stated goal of 10,000 voices seemed lofty at first, organizers say, but even before the launch, more than 1,000 people were following Oregon Rising on Facebook and several hundred had taken the survey in pilot gatherings and online.

Visit oregon-rising.org for more information.

###