

Moving Forward with Community Trust

Oregon School District works closely with community
as it continues to grow

SESSION A Board's Role in Positively Impacting the Student and Teacher Learning Experience
Presenters Oregon: Brian Busler, superintendent; Steve Zach, board president

As the Oregon School District approached the 2010-11 school year, the district was facing a lot of tough challenges. The district was growing, school facilities needed to be updated and expanded, and the teacher salary schedule and collective bargaining agreement needed to be replaced. In addition to these challenges, the school board was rather inexperienced.

Fast forward eight years and the district has added on or renovated five of the district's six schools. Additionally, the district passed a recurring referendum to fund its new teacher compensation plan.

So, how did they do it? Brian Busler, district administrator, points to three factors that contribute to the district's success.

"Know what you stand for as a district... be an active learner... and choose where you spend your time," Busler said.

As for the first point (know what you stand for as a district), the Oregon School District developed the Oregon Five Values. These values came out of a visioning conference that the district held in 2015 where more than 100 stakeholders from the community came together to discuss the future direction of the school district. From the visioning conference, the district produced a paper

"The Path Forward" which outlines the five values as developed by its community members.

Steve Zach, board president, said the five values helped the school board focus its efforts.

"We were assessing every decision we make as a school board and asking, 'Does it meet these criteria?'" Zach said. "And all other stuff that didn't meet the criteria, we could throw out."

The school board also took an active role in its own development and improvement (be an active learner). They read books on school board governance and forward-thinking books from renowned education experts like Dr. Bill Daggett on the future of education. These were important as the board went to referendum and asked the community for funding to expand and improve its school facilities.

In 2012, the district went to referendum, but voters turned down the \$33 million referendum.

"That failed referendum really hurt," Zach said. "We thought we had a good plan. We went back to our constituents and asked them what went wrong. We thought we had engaged them, but we hadn't engaged them in the right way."

With help from a consultant, the Oregon School District proposed a new



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— Brian Busler,
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building referendum for \$55 million. That referendum passed in 2014.

"It passed for all kinds of reasons," Busler said. "The buildings were all designed by faculty and staff and a few community members in a very grassroots approach."

Things really came together for the district in 2016 when it was able to pass a \$1.5 million recurring referendum to fund its new teacher compensation plan. The compensation plan ensures that the district will be able to pay its teachers a competitive salary and help retain quality educators.

Looking ahead, the district sees even more growth in its future. Student enrollment is expected to increase by 50 percent in 15 years. However, with a community-adopted strategic plan in place, Zach and Busler feel confident about the district's future.

"As we move through the process of how and when do we go back to the public with another referendum, it becomes an easier sell," Zach said. "We have the trust of the community." ■