

## Saturday General Session - Dr. Douglas Reeves

Dr. Douglas Reeves' address to Saturday's general session assembly on closing the achievement gap in our schools began by drawing the connection between school dropouts and costs to society. Oregon has about 11,400 dropouts a year which equates to \$3 billion in lost wages and productivity from just one class. If we can reduce the dropout rate for males by five percent we, as a society, would net \$51 million per year.

Dr. Reeves defined elements of the "achievement gap" and cited research to clarify where we need to focus attention.

1. Resource gap – We must focus on what is in the best interest of children.
2. Access gap – The attitude "if it's not tested, it's not important" guarantees inadequate preschool, kindergarten, art and music. We fail to prioritize non-fiction writing in science and social studies. Extracurricular activities and choices are limited even though there is overwhelming evidence that more involvement in these activities leads to increased student achievement.
3. Teaching gaps - Research shows that the biggest difference in the success of one group of students over another is the idiosyncratic grading behavior of teachers. Grading is an important form of feedback but it needs to be accurate, fair and effective. The consequence for missed work needs to be doing the work, not getting a "zero;" grading on a 100-point scale magnifies failure rate.
4. Leadership and policy gaps – The most important role of the board is to hire and evaluate the superintendent. Yet, research shows 18 percent of superintendents are never evaluated and that most evaluations are ambiguous, subjective and political.
5. Domestic and international competition gaps – 74 percent of students say they are not challenged in school. We need to expect more of kids and adults and elevate the profession of teaching.

As consumers, we need to insist on high standards for research and data: consistency over time, sustainability, replication, multiple methods and independence. Properly using data can reduce teacher stress and anxiety by showing efficacy supported by classroom level data analysis. "It is not the board's role to micromanage schools, but to set boundaries and policies," Reeves said. He listed several specific areas where boards should focus attention: put in place rigorous assessments and curriculum; establish policies for consequences for missed and incomplete student work (not zeros); limit choices for teenagers – double efforts in English, math, etc. for early grades and have more participation in electives in later grades; mandatory post-secondary education; save parents more money with college-level courses in the high schools.

Reeves concluded that the goal is to build our schools into monuments to resilience. Much of the research he referenced in his address is available on his website, [www.leadandlearn.com](http://www.leadandlearn.com).