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Oregonian named best in nation at getting schools, teachers to use data

By Betsy Hammond, The Oregonian

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Mickey Garrison, a leader in **Oregon's effort to help teachers, principals and school board members make good use of student achievement data**, has been named **State Data Director of the Year for 2009** by the non-profit data-loving group known as the **Data Quality Campaign**.

Garrison, a former teacher and principal, headed a massive effort to equip Oregon educators to know where to find data and to know how to use it correctly. She oversaw a training campaign that has reached more than 2,000 teachers and other educators from more than 130 Oregon school districts.

Her message to teachers is a surprising one, given that she works for a coalition that includes the Oregon Department of Education, which creates and relies on yearly standardized state tests known as the **Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills**, or OAKS.

She often tells teachers that their best data isn't an OAKS score that comes in at the end of the school year once their teaching is largely done. She somewhat jokingly calls those the equivalent of an educational autopsy report. Instead she urges teachers to look at results from tests they give intermittently during the year -- whether tests they make themselves, end-of-chapter tests that come with a textbook series or online reading and math tests created at the University of Oregon -- to see how they're helping students progress and where they still need to do more teaching.

Garrison said she is thrilled to receive the national award because it's a sign she and her colleagues are giving Oregon educators what they need. Previous state winners were recognized primarily for their work building data systems; Garrison won primarily for helping people on the educational front lines know how to use one.

"We went out to the field, and they told us they needed guidance in understanding how to use data," she said. "Longitudinal data systems and data warehouses are terrific, and we have some of the best in the county. But ultimately they don't matter if you don't provide techniques and strategies for how to use data in meaningful ways."

- **Betsy Hammond**

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