

encouragement and opportunities. They clearly hunger for mentorship and for a supportive work environment, for a workplace that gives them opportunities to demonstrate what anyone who's had an inspiring teacher knows to be true: good teachers love to teach, and love to teach *well*. As a result of Chalkboard's strategic vision and strong community mandate, teachers across Oregon are feeling more empowered, optimistic, knowledgeable, and fulfilled, and students are reaping the benefits.

### **SALEM-KEIZER COALITION FOR EQUALITY: A GRASSROOTS ADVOCATE FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE**

Chalkboard's statewide pilot programs and legislative reforms bode very well for Oregon's students and teachers, but there is still a battle to be fought on the ground. Many organizations are advocating for systemic change from the front lines, ensuring that reforms are driven by the local knowledge needed for bottom-up *and* top-down change. Salem hosts the Oregon Department of Education, but it also houses many of the at-risk students that Oregon government, nonprofits, and private citizens are working to help. There, a group of local parents, activists, and educators have joined together to advocate for systemic change across the Salem-Keizer School District and the state as a whole.

The Salem-Keizer Coalition for Equality's (SKCE) headquarters is in a drab office block in north Salem. The corridors, lit with dim fluorescence, are covered in *noticias* and posters filled with lists of employment rights, aid organizations, community events, immigration guidance, and rallying cries of *Sí se puede*, Dolores Huerta's and Cesar Chávez's motto (which roughly translates to "yes, we can"). Past these, and past study centers, conference rooms, a meeting hall, and a couple of curious children wandering around, is the office of co-founders Eduardo Angulo and Annalivia Palazzo-Angulo.

When we visited, every surface was draped in paper. Tables towered with it, stacks crawled up the walls, reams and folders were buttressed against printers. "Oregon has some of the best minds to write proposals," Eduardo explained in half-joking apology, "and the reason that the office is filled with paper is because these great minds write beautiful education reform proposals with these beautiful mission statements that are, in practice, 90 percent *crap*, and I mean *crap*. How many meetings have we gone to in ten years?" he asked. "*Five thousand* meetings, no exaggeration."

He apologized again, and explained that SKCE had just received some new statistics that suggested that the achievement gap in some areas was widening. Angry and impassioned, he interpreted this news in italics and in bold. "But this is the part where we have to be *courageous*. We must all insist from the governor down that this is *unacceptable* and *has to stop*. We need *accountability*."



Leyendo Avanzamos at Cesar Chavez Elementary. Courtesy Salem-Keizer Coalition for Equality.

We need school districts to take the money they're supposed to be using for English language learners [ELL] and use them for ELL programs. Here's the road map! This same problem is happening across the nation—ELLs, students of color, poor whites—everyone's in the same predicament, badly educated, disempowered... people have been talking about it, crying about it, speaking up, but *no one's listening!* All of these ideas and initiatives, all the *smart Oregonians* get together and then we don't get to first base because we don't make the courageous decisions, we don't say, '*Enough!*'"

His passion and anger come from personal experience. Eduardo and wife Annalivia share similar stories, if not backgrounds. Both grew up poor and disadvantaged, Eduardo in Puerto Rico and Annalivia in Salem. Eduardo moved to New York in his teens and progressed from working in a textile factory to mentoring former gang members in Los Angeles. LA's gang culture finally dispirited him enough that he asked to transfer to the Oregon program, "and as soon as the plane had landed, the greenness of the land, and the Willamette Valley, was just such an incredible, wonderful shift," he recalls. Annalivia, meanwhile, dropped out of high school to marry and have a child, and then, after a divorce at age twenty-eight, opened up a sewing business of her own. Both Annalivia and Eduardo realized that an education would open doors, and they both returned to school, where they met and fell in love.

"I finished my college degree at Chemeketa as valedictorian, then went to Linfield and did a double major in poli-sci and Spanish literature," Eduardo said. Just after he graduated, "Oregon's voters passed Measure 11 [a

mandatory minimum sentencing law]—one strike and you're out, the most draconian anti-gang measure in the nation." Oregon's gang population, Eduardo knew, was not nearly as entrenched as LA's, and he thought, "OK, this is doable here—there is hope." He immediately started volunteering with local families to warn them of the one-strike-you're-out policy and of the dire consequences for their children: one fight in the playground can sentence a fifteen-year-old to almost six years in an adult prison. "It has taken a toll on the youth of color in Oregon," Eduardo states, "and it's pushing our kids out of school and away from the opportunities that they need." To combat this injustice, Eduardo started asking questions, talking with the NAACP, Latino leaders, police, principals, and superintendents about how to remedy the situation. "In June of 1999, African American kids represented 1 percent of Salem-Keizer's student body and 49 percent of the disciplinary cases. There's something broken in the system. As a researcher, I knew that bureaucracies exist to perpetuate themselves, they wear you out, so we got people together in order to advocate systematically and *organize*. Let's *sandblast* these bureaucracies, but let's also be part of a *process*," Eduardo says emphatically. "I wanted to challenge people at the decision-making table, because I don't think that anything will happen otherwise."

In response, Eduardo and Annalivia formed the Salem-Keizer Coalition for Equality in 1999. For the first three years, they worked unpaid, funding the organization out of their quickly dwindling savings. "We said to ourselves, if we're going to do anything in life, this is it," Eduardo says. "You can't hold anyone accountable if you can't hold yourself accountable. You can't just ask people to do things without showing them that you're committed to bringing about change." Eduardo and Annalivia's own philanthropic contributions were huge, but in order for the organization to survive, they needed additional support.

That's when Eduardo met Dick Withnell, a prominent Salem philanthropist and the owner of a chain of car dealerships, who was working on a committee with Oregon's chief justice to find an alternative to Measure 11. At their first meeting, Dick immediately asked Eduardo, "You like to stir things up, don't you? So, are you part of the problem or part of the solution?" Dick, an established conservative who dislikes entitlement programs and tax raises, was no doubt surprised when Eduardo responded with the same question back, but as soon as it became apparent that they were both Linfield College graduates, the tension eased—"well, that makes us brothers," both agreed.

"Eduardo's a soldier on the ground," Dick says. "I like seeing the underdog succeed, and I believe in giving back to the community." Dick pledged his support to SKCE, albeit with caveats: "I give with strings attached—I want to see improvements, I want a game plan." Eduardo was able to point to several



(Left) Dick and Gayle Withnell, at SKCE's "Raising the Bar" Gala, 2013. (Right) At the podium: Moises Mendoza, North Salem High School student and SKCE mock trial champion, with Eduardo Angulo. Courtesy SKCE.

ways in which SKCE had already improved students' lives, which, Dick says, was great. "It's so important to see a return on your investment." Investing in education is particularly appealing, he adds, because it benefits the whole community by making a more productive, more successful society. He repeats this mantra several times: "Education is the high tide that raises all boats."

With the support of Dick Withnell and other philanthropists and foundations, Eduardo, Annalivia, and the Salem-Keizer Coalition for Equality have significantly raised awareness of Oregon's education inequities and have improved the prospects of many students of color within Salem-Keizer school district and well beyond it. SKCE's defining principle is, as Eduardo summarizes, "if you start behind, if you're left behind from the beginning, you'll finish behind. The achievement gap isn't caused by a lack of hard work or care on the part of parents and educators: it's a result of being unable to start at the same place." Persistence—and cunning—is needed to get that voice at the table. As Eduardo describes, "I used to go to the gym near the courthouse at five in the morning because I knew Kitzhaber would go and use the treadmill. He'd be running and I'd get onto the treadmill next to him. I got no shame, you know? 'Morning, Governor!' I'd say, and then I'd bring him info and ask for his counsel."

Eduardo's rough-and-ready approach informs SKCE's strategies as a whole. Locally, SKCE is on the ground trying to improve students' learning experiences. They have improved support networks for Latino kids, and both in the field and through their cultural center have consolidated a great deal of information and advice about education, Latino heritage, employment rights, skill acquisition, and community building for parents and children alike. They have commissioned school-by-school studies to see where the problems are and have confronted and partnered with local school and district officials accordingly.

SKCE sponsors robotics teams, mock trial teams, and other complementary curricula programs at schools and in areas that traditionally haven't had resources for such skill- and confidence-building extracurriculars. Such programs have relied on the support of a committed network of volunteer experts, including two former chief justices of the Oregon Supreme Court, Paul De Muniz (Oregon's first Hispanic chief justice) and Edwin Peterson. Chief Justice Peterson explains that he works "with the Latino high school mock trial program to assist, in some small way, with their becoming included in our society, . . . to assist them in speaking up without fear of retribution; in getting a better education; in increasing their personal level of performance; and in increasing their self-confidence." Oregon's minority families, Chief Justice Peterson continues, "want the same opportunities that are available to white people like me. They want to own their home, have a good job, and possibly have a business. They want love, peace and tranquility. . . . I support SKCE because it serves a segment of our society that otherwise would not be served: this area's Hispanic families, particularly those who are fairly recent arrivals in the United States." Moises Mendoza, an SKCE student, describes his experience in their mock trial program as transformative. "I used to be afraid of the police, the courts, judges, and the law. Through Mock Trial, I realized that I have a voice, and I can use the law to help others."

Beyond eminent educators, scientists, and legal professionals, SKCE has had huge success in mobilizing the Latino community itself, forming a coalition of concerned parents to participate vocally in their children's education and to help promote systemic change. "The way I see it," Annalivia says, "is that we work from the top down and the bottom up to change the educational outcomes of our Latino and other minority children." They do that, she says, by working with parents to help them advocate on their children's behalf. These parents, many of whom come from central America, often lack much formal education themselves: some of them left school at age eight, speak little English, read Spanish poorly, and know little about the American educational system. "Their kids have access to a comprehensive education system here, but they don't have complete equity in the system: they have to fight for their opportunities," Annalivia says. "We were worried that we were going to lose a generation of students who simply couldn't access the opportunities they had in front of them. We have thousands of kids that need help, and we feel that if you really want social change, you need to make parents the central focus. So we embrace parents as their first teachers and as the best advocates for our children."



Former chief justice of the Supreme Court of Oregon Paul De Muniz working with SKCE's mock trial team. Photo courtesy SKCE.

SKCE's *Leyendo Avanzamos* program builds Spanish literacy skills in low-income Spanish-speaking parents so that they can help their children learn to read at grade level from a young age. In the flagship *Educate and Inspire* (*Educa y Inspira*) program, parents attend in-depth bilingual and bicultural workshops that teach them why their children's education matters and how to guide their children to maximum benefit. SKCE also runs training-of-trainers sessions, so that community members can take the lessons onward, and they partner with other school districts and education and minority advocacy organizations to ensure their programs are widely disseminated.

The Salem-Keizer Coalition for Equality also advises similar organizations in other communities, including Jackson County's *Una Voz* (One Voice) group, which also advocates for improved educational opportunities for minority students. And SKCE has helped found the Oregon Alliance for Education Equity (OAE), which exists "to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in education, [and] . . . to educate, advocate, and engage with decision-makers to support policy changes." It brings together the most diverse and comprehensive coalition of minority community groups and advocates the state has ever seen, including Latinos, Asians, Pacific islanders, African Americans, unions, teachers, advocates, policy makers, and social workers—over thirty-five prominent organizations ranging from the Oregon ACLU to all nine Native American tribal governments. "Having this alliance is key: we have never been as organized as we are now, and the advocacy of people with color in Oregon has never been this unified or coherent," Eduardo declares proudly.

SKCE's successes have meant many personal sacrifices for Annalivia and Eduardo. With any nonprofit, burnout is a risk, and Eduardo's tireless activism and punishing schedule pushed him to the edge. In the early hours of August 25, 2013, Eduardo was driving in Portland when he crashed into another car, paralyzing its driver from the waist down. In February 2014, he was sentenced to fifty-four months in prison for driving under the influence. Although the accident was hugely tragic both for its victim and for the communities Eduardo worked so extensively with, Annalivia stepped into the directorship, and the Salem-Keizer Coalition for Equality is benefiting from her clarity of purpose.

Annalivia had always been SKCE's pragmatist and administrator, establishing the protocols and underlying structure that kept the organization moving forward. Eduardo was its public face and motivator, busy articulating SKCE's mission, building connections, and creating partnerships. Now, Annalivia finds herself performing both roles.

Although it's been a tough period for SKCE and for her family, Annalivia relishes her new role. "I love being executive director because I love the work we do. The larger picture is that we empower entire families: we give parents the capacity and tools to change the vision of their households, to help them



Children at Leyendo Avanzamos sessions at Four Corners Elementary. Photos courtesy SKCE.

become education advocates with teachers, with the school district, with the legislature, and with their kids at home. If a kid is told often enough that she will get her homework done and will go to college, it will happen. It's about storytelling, not discipline. We want parents to teach their kids about possibilities—that's how you enact systemic change, that's how you lift up a population."

Annalivia and Eduardo's own philanthropy brought them into this work, and their zeal has inspired donors like Dick Withnell to contribute both passion and financial support and volunteers like Paul De Muniz and Edwin Peterson to offer up their expertise and enthusiasm. Because of SKCE's donors and volunteers, because of their army of engaged parents, and because of Eduardo's and Annalivia's shared vision, Oregon's low-income and minority schoolchildren could face a brighter future. But there is much work yet to be done, Annalivia and Eduardo both agree: these reforms, and these programs, have not come easily. "You know," said Eduardo, "this thing is *hard*, the bureaucracy is *hard*. This is a labor of love. We need to be included in the conversation and have our ideas heard. This is not a partisan cause, it's an American cause, a national cause! The British philosopher J. S. Mill said that human beings are intrinsically good, and I believe that fighting for the greater good is the greatest thing any being can do."

### HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

In fact, there are many things going right for Oregon's education system, thanks to tireless campaigners, educators, and donors, only a handful of whom we could profile in *State of Giving*. Local innovators across the state are making a difference for Oregon's children, offering after-school sports or other extracurricular activities, heritage education programs, outdoor schools, and many other life-altering experiences that many low-income or otherwise marginalized students would never have access to otherwise. Others are working to