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CONTACT: Martha Brooks 503-649-2068 [mbrooks@readynation.org](mailto:mbrooks@readynation.org)  
Charlie Burr 971-673-0788 [charlie.burr@state.or.us](mailto:charlie.burr@state.or.us)

### **Business and education leaders urge school innovation for economic growth**

BEAVERTON, OR – Citing an alarming skills gap that prevents Oregon employers from filling thousands of jobs, a group of local business and education leaders today called for stepped-up investments in schools that prepare students for the world of work. Representing the national business leader group ReadyNation, they released *Ensuring Oregon's Global Competitiveness*, a report spotlighting several innovative K-12 schools that are setting examples they would like to see replicated statewide.

"Right now students can take two very different routes in their educational journey," said **J. P. Palanuk**, an Oregon entrepreneur and founder of the International Youth Silent Film Festival. "They can spend 12 years in the classroom earning a high school diploma without a clue to what they should do with their lives. Or they can be immersed in much deeper learning activities that give them a true head start toward exciting careers. My experience is that our communities and economy will be a lot better off if we get more students on that second track."

Palanuk was joined by **Brad Avakian, Commissioner of the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries** and **Beaverton Arts & Communication Magnet Academy (ACMA) principal Michael Johnson** for the release of the report. Rated by the Oregon Department of Education as one of the top 10 percent of high schools in the state, ACMA integrates academics and several arts disciplines that prepare students for careers in the arts.

"Oregon can build a stronger economy by investing in student access to hands-on learning," said Labor Commissioner Avakian. "Today's report underscores the importance of driving 21<sup>st</sup> century shop classes back into our middle schools and high schools so that we can engage students early. It's hard to look around ACMA and not come away with a deep appreciation for the role that arts education plays in creative development. Smart programs like this build a more competitive workforce and more well-rounded citizens."

Labor Commissioner Avakian has championed skills investment, including the Career and Technical Education Revitalization Grant Fund that has returned access to career and skills focused programs to 200 high schools and middle schools serving 100,000 students around the state. Avakian noted that despite the effort's success, demand for CTE grant dollars far exceeds current investment.

The event was built around the showing of *Art Day* produced in collaboration with Arts & Communications Magnet Academy students Denis Berberovic and two other ACMA students. As

a senior at ACMA in Beaverton, Denis is engaged in core academic coursework while gaining significant hands-on experience in film-making. He has attended ACMA since 6<sup>th</sup> grade and plans on attending university once he graduates this spring.

“The headline for today’s event at the Beaverton Academy is that the medium really is the message,” said **Johnston**. “We put our students to work so they’re prepared for the rigors of higher education and engage them early on in the types of work that can lead to productive and fulfilling careers.”

The report, *Ensuring Oregon’s Global Competitiveness*, emphasizes the value of innovative high schools that offer multidisciplinary lessons that blend academics with experiences that connect students to postsecondary education and careers long before they graduate. Schools highlighted in the report also focus on teaching deeper learning skills vital to today’s high-skills workforce such as the ability to collaborate, communicate and think critically.

Commissioner Avakian and ReadyNation are urging more schools to replicate this innovative deeper learning model because 70 percent of Oregon’s job openings between 2010 and 2020 will require postsecondary education, including 94 percent of those in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields, and 92 percent of those in the arts and community services sector.

Today, too many students are leaving high school without the knowledge and skills to succeed in postsecondary education. Only 26 percent of Oregon’s class of 2013 graduates who took the ACT college admissions test met college readiness benchmarks in English, math, reading and science. Over half of incoming students at Oregon community colleges and one in 10 at four-year colleges need remediation.

The report highlighted several Oregon schools incorporating innovative models that prepare students for postsecondary education and good jobs.

At McMinnville High School’s Engineering and Aerospace Science Academy, for example, students engage in a rigorous science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) program while earning dual high school and college credits. And at Portland’s Jefferson High School, students also get a head start on higher education through a curriculum focused on health sciences and biotechnology while taking classes at Portland State University and Portland Community College.

While each of these schools offers a unique academic focus, they are united by their results – solid and even superlative on-time graduation rates, hands-on technical and career training, and experiences that clearly connect academics to the world of work.

*Ensuring Oregon’s Global Competitiveness* also refers to a new American Institutes for Research report showing students who participated in deeper learning activities in 13 schools were more likely to graduate from high school on time; were more likely to enroll in four-year and selective colleges; and reported higher levels of several non-cognitive skills that employers depend on – such as self-efficacy and the ability to collaborate.

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