

To: Ways and Means Education Subcommittee Members  
From: Dana Hepper, Director of Policy & Program at the Children's Institute  
Date: March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015  
Re: House Bill 5016

Co-chairs Sen. Monroe and Rep. Komp and members of the committee, my name is Dana Hepper. I am the Director of Policy and Program at the Children's Institute. Our focus is improving kindergarten readiness and third grade success. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of House Bill 5016.

Everyone on this committee understands the importance of improving high school graduation rates and boosting success in college and the workforce. An increasing body of research supports investing in early learning as a cost-effective approach to achieving these goals. In fact, it is very difficult and expensive to move the needle if you don't start early. Oregon's high school graduation rate (72 percent) is strikingly similar to the portion of our students reading at grade level in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade (66 percent)<sup>1</sup>, and this is no coincidence.

The reality is much worse for children of color -- especially Native American, African-American, and Latino students -- children in low-income families, and children with diagnosed disabilities. For these children, the current odds of reading at grade level in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and graduating from high school hover between 50 and 60 percent. We know you all agree that we must do better for these children and for the future of our state.

Increasingly, brain science tells us why a child's earliest experiences are so linked to third grade reading and high school graduation. The quality of a child's early experiences during his or her first eight years of life, a sensitive period of brain growth, is particularly important as it sets the foundation for all future learning.<sup>2</sup> Early experiences are cumulative and even small disparities in infancy can lead to large differences by kindergarten entry.<sup>3</sup> Research demonstrates that the opportunity gap is well-established by kindergarten, particularly for low-income children and children of color. Delays can be detected as early as nine months of age.<sup>4</sup>

Yet communities have incredible strength, knowledge, and capacity to change these trajectories when we commit to smartly investing in that goal.

Despite the mounting evidence, we actually spend far less on children from birth to age 5 than we do after they enter kindergarten. Oregon and federal investments combined, on a per capita basis, result in \$0.14 spent on children from birth through age 5 for every dollar spent on education and development for children from age 6 to 17.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Oregon Department of Education, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2007). The timing and quality of early experiences combine to shape brain architecture: Working Paper #5. <http://www.developingchild.net>

<sup>3</sup> Ounce of Prevention Fund (2014). Start Early To Build A Healthy Future: The Research Linking Early Learning and Health. Chicago, Illinois. <http://www.theounce.org/start-early-to-build-a-healthy-future>

<sup>4</sup> Tamara H., Forry, N., Hair, E., Perper, K., Wandner, L., Wessel, J., & Vick, J. Disparities in Early Learning and Development: Lessons from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study: Birth Cohort (ECLS-B). (Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Bruner, Charles. Early Learning Left Out: Building an Early Learning System to Secure America's Future. (BUILD Initiative, 2013).

<http://www.buildinitiative.org/WhatsNew/ViewArticle/tabid/96/smid/412/ArticleID/661/Default.aspx>

The dollars we do spend in these early years have a significant impact because only targeted families receive the services. Every dollar that we spend on early learning is going to change the trajectory for the children I mentioned earlier – children in low-income families, children of color, especially Native American, African-American, and Latino students, and children with diagnosed disabilities.

Although we are heartened to hear so many new voices recognizing the importance of early learning, we are still a long way from the level of investment needed to ensure kids are prepared for kindergarten success. We won't move the dial on 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading and high school graduation without investing more significantly in the birth through 5 years. We continue to use our scarce dollars for costly remediation and interventions instead of cost-savings preventions in the early years. The \$60 million investment proposed in the framework presented by the co-chairs of the Legislature's Joint Committee on Ways and Means is simply not sufficient to close the pervasive opportunity gap that exists in this state. The biggest new education investment proposed in the Co-Chairs framework begins after the achievement gap is well established. If we are in fact serious about leveling the playing field in Oregon we need to reach more vulnerable kids earlier. The Children's Institute supports:

*Home Visiting (\$10 million increase)*

Effective, voluntary home visiting for at-risk families supports good parenting, improves child health and ensures kids are ready for school. Research shows it works. Yet currently only about 15 percent of Oregon's highest risk families are served. Oregon currently has the Healthy Families Oregon program in every county, so the system is well poised to expand. A \$10 million increase would serve an additional 500-1000 children and their parents annually.

*Preschool (\$30 million increase)*

Currently 32,000 low-income 3- and 4-year-olds in Oregon – or 72 percent of kids in families at 200 percent of federal poverty level and below – don't have access to high quality preschool. Furthermore, the state just lost out on \$15 million in federal Race to the Top preschool funding in part because it didn't have a preschool program in place that allowed for more than a Head Start model. With this \$30 million investment, the committee will have the opportunity to create a preschool funding stream that allows the state to fund a variety of high quality models shown to be effective in other states at producing long-term, positive outcomes for children.

The research behind preschool is clear. Low-income children who attend high-quality preschool programs are: 40 percent less likely to need special education services or be held back a grade, 30 percent more likely to finish high school and twice as likely to attend college. A \$30 million investment would serve approximately 1,500 additional children annually.

*Kindergarten Partnership & Innovation Fund (\$5 million increase)*

Research shows that for kids to achieve success in third grade, they need a strong continuum of teaching learning, and supports from birth through third grade. Oregon's Kindergarten Partnership & Innovation Fund provides grants to communities to build a seamless path from the early years to the early grades. The 16 communities that received the grants have used them to implement family engagement programs targeted at building kindergarten readiness, kindergarten transitions programs, and shared professional development between elementary and early childhood educators to align practices and share knowledge, among other things. In 2014, there were \$10 million in applications for the \$4 million that was available, so there is strong interest to do this work. A modest \$5 million increase means this good work can continue.

We are sure you will also hear about needed increases to other early learning services, and we are supportive of those items as well, including expanding Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education to respond to increased developmental screenings statewide and strengthening Early Learning Hubs to begin to create a cohesive early learning system. Thank you.



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## **2015 Strategies: Advancing birth-to-3rd-grade success**

Our children's first eight years in life are critical. In the 2015 Legislative session, we will advocate for these actions that strengthen the development of at-risk children in the early years:

### **INVEST IN EVIDENCE-BASED HOME VISITING**

*\$10 million to expand birth-to-3 home visiting services*

Expand Oregon's investment in home visiting to ensure more at-risk infants and toddlers and their parents receive evidence-based home visiting services. Opportunity gaps can be detected before the preschool years. Effective home visiting supports positive parenting, improves health outcomes, increases school readiness, and can help prevent achievement gaps before they start.

### **INVEST IN HIGH-QUALITY PRESCHOOL**

*\$30 million to expand access to high-quality preschool*

Build on Oregon Pre-K/Head Start to serve more low-income preschoolers and build toward a cohesive state preschool program. Allow high-quality programs to receive state funding for low-income students. Under this new preschool investment, schools, child care providers, community-based preschools and Head Start programs would all be eligible. Oregon Pre-K/Head Start only reaches half of eligible children. The state has nearly 32,000 low-income 3- and 4-year-olds who don't have access to high-quality preschool. Oregon's investment hasn't kept pace with the growing number of low-income children. Disadvantaged kids need preschool access to be prepared for kindergarten. Oregon recently lost its bid for \$15 million in federal money in part because it doesn't have a shared definition of quality preschool or a developed plan to expand preschool to reach all low-income children. We also support legislation that paves the way to create a shared definition of high-quality preschool in Oregon.

### **ENSURE EARLY LEARNING IS SUSTAINED THROUGH THIRD GRADE**

*\$9 million to expand Kindergarten Partnership & Innovation Fund*

Early learning investments must be effectively connected to the early grades to ensure third-grade success. The Early Learning Council this year awarded \$4 million to 16 applicants (a one-year fund). It received 40 applications requesting more than \$10 million. This fund gives communities the opportunity on a competitive basis to create critical linkages between schools, early care and education and health providers, and parents. Cross-sector alignment and integration must be incented and supported at the local level to see meaningful system change.

### **ADDRESS CHRONIC ABSENCE**

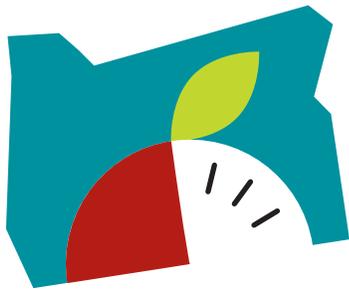
Oregon needs to maximize the effectiveness of all of its early learning investments, including full-day kindergarten. Oregon has one of the highest chronic absence rates in the nation (generally defined as a student missing 10% or more of the school year). Included in our recommendations are to establish a system of public reporting around chronic absence beginning with kindergarten; provide guidance to districts in tracking and monitoring student attendance; and incorporate attendance data and goals into existing initiatives.

***To read the full 2015 Strategies policy brief, go to [childinst.org](http://childinst.org).***

# 2015 Strategies: Advancing birth-to-3rd-grade success

Our children's first eight years in life are critical. In 2015, we will advocate for these actions.





# Ready for School

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## Third-Grade Success for Oregon's Children Means Starting Early

The good news is that we know that students who read proficiently by 3rd grade are four times more likely to graduate high school. The troubling news is that Oregon has one of the most significant achievement gaps, and unacceptably low graduation and third-grade proficiency rates.

- Oregon's high school graduation rate was 69% for the class of 2013, among the worst rates in the country.
- Oregon is consistently in the bottom 25% nationally for reading proficiency at 4th grade (source: NAEP) and high school graduation rates.

*How do we meet 40-40-20 education goals with these issues facing us? Research shows us that high-quality early learning closes the gap.*

High-quality early learning programs designed to foster children's early development and learning to support school readiness can help close the achievement gap and improve school readiness and later educational and life outcomes. High-quality early learning programs include strong parent engagement and health and are connected to the early grades.

***We have no time to lose.***

- More than one-third of students do not meet third-grade reading benchmarks
- 50% of our youngest children are low income, a strong predictor for an achievement gap
- Too few have access to high-quality early learning

## We've Made It Our Business — to Give Oregon's Kids a Better Start.

We're improving the lives of Oregon's children and building a stronger economy with wise public investments in high-quality early learning programs. Make it your business, too.

### 2015 Ready for School Agenda

#### Get More Children Ready for Kindergarten

Serve more low-income children in high-quality early learning settings. Invest \$10 million to expand birth-to-3 evidence-based home visiting, invest \$30 million to expand high-quality preschool, and support legislation that defines high quality for preschool.

#### Make Kindergarten Count

Support full-day K and ensure kids get to school consistently by measuring and addressing chronic absence. Oregon's chronic absence rate is among the worst in the country.

#### Connect the Early Years to the Early Grades

Invest \$9 million to expand the Kindergarten Partnership & Innovation Fund and ensure early learning is sustained through third grade.

### About Ready for School

Ready for School is a group of business and community leaders and former elected officials from around the state who contribute their time and expertise to ensure all children in Oregon arrive at school ready for success.

Ready for School is well-established as a leader in advocating for investment in early learning and supporting change to make our early learning system effective and accountable.

We believe that a sound foundational investment in early learning must be an essential part of Oregon's effort to close the achievement gap and reach the 40-40-20 vision.

We are committed to ensuring that Oregon is wise in its investments and holds itself accountable for achieving this goal.

## STATEWIDE LEADERS PANEL

Isaac Regenstreif, Co-Chair – IHR Consulting, LLC  
 Lyn Hennion, Co-Chair – Umpqua Investments, Inc.  
 Julia Brim-Edwards – Nike  
 Rich Brown – Bank of America  
 Duncan Campbell – The Campbell Group  
 Steve Corey – Corey, Byler & Rew, LLP  
 Gun Denhart – Business and Civic Leader  
 Carol Dillin – Portland General Electric  
 Theresa Dulaney – Comcast Cable  
 Lori Flexer – Ferguson Wellman Capital Management  
 Don Frisbee – Business and Civic Leader  
 Ray Guenther – Business and Civic Leader  
 Pastor W.G. Hardy – Highland United Church of Christ  
 Teresa Hogue – Cascade Center for Community Governance  
 Al Jubitz – Business and Civic Leader  
 Ray Jubitz – Jubitz Family Foundation  
 Gregg Kantor – NW Natural  
 Ted Kulongoski – Former Governor, State of Oregon  
 Irving Levin – Genesis Financial Solutions  
 Pat McCormick – AM:PM PR  
 Sue Miller – Civic Leader  
 Barbara Roberts – Former Governor, State of Oregon  
 George Russell – George Russell & Associates  
 Linda Shelk – Civic Leader  
 Lane Shetterly – Shetterly Irick and Ozias, Attorneys at Law  
 Patsy Smullin – California Oregon Broadcasting, Inc.  
 John Sweet – Sause Brothers Ocean Towing Company  
 John Tapogna – ECONorthwest  
 Chris Tebben – Sapient Solutions, LLC  
 Chip Terhune – Cambia Health Solutions  
 Bill Thorndike – Medford Fabrication  
 Ken Thrasher – Compli  
 Jim Torrey – Business and Civic Leader  
 Kerry Tymchuk – Oregon Historical Society  
 Anthony Veliz – Izo, Inc.  
 Susan Walsh – The Campbell Foundation  
 Donald Washburn – Business and Civic Leader  
 Janet Webster – Hatfield Science Center  
 Gary Withers – Concordia University  
 Dick Withnell – Withnell Motor Company  
 Julie Young – Civic Leader

Elise Brown – Campaign Manager  
 Swati Adarkar – President & CEO, Children's Institute

Richard C. Alexander – Founding Chair, 2005-11 (deceased)  
 Lynn Lundquist – Member, 2005-11, Co-Chair 2011-13 (deceased)



## MAKE IT YOUR BUSINESS



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Ready for School is a statewide campaign to improve the lives of Oregon's children and build a stronger economy. The campaign is led by a collation of top business and community leaders who have made it their business to better prepare at-risk children for success in school and life. The campaign is informed by a growing body of social, scientific and economic research compiled and presented by the Children's Institute.