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JOINT COMMITTEE ON STUDENT SUCCESS

Students Ready and Able to Learn Work Group

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Because students being ready and able to learn in the K-12 system starts long before they set foot in our schools, the work group looked broadly at its charge, and established four overall goals:

- Support healthy, attached family relationships to help ensure every child is ready to learn when they enter school by providing access to services for all children and families who need them. This includes, but is not limited to, prenatal care, home visiting, education and engagement for new parents, and school readiness programs.
- Provide all children with access to affordable high-quality preschool programs.
- Provide sufficient resources to schools and families to meet the behavioral health, physical health, nutritional and support needs so students can reach their full potential to learn.
- Maximize learning time for students.

To achieve all these goals, the work group believes that the following implementation principles are necessary to develop specific strategies to meet the goals:

- A rational and thoughtful examination of whether the existing set of services and programs best meet the need of students and families;
- Using existing organization, including community partners, and coordinating structures whenever possible instead of creating new delivery systems;
- Maximizing and coordinating the role of existing non-education entities such as Community Care Organizations (CCOs) or public health agencies to meet the goals, whenever appropriate;
- Programs identified to serve more children will likely need to be scaled up over time, given the need to expand both the available workforce and facilities;
- As programs are scaled up over time, expansions should be prioritized based on need, family income and risk level;

- Strategies must use an equity lens and address the need to provide services in a culturally appropriate way; and
 - Strategies must be cost-effective and whenever possible maximize the use of federal funding.
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GOAL 1: Support healthy attached family relationships to help ensure every child is ready to learn when they enter school by providing access to services for all children and families who need them; including but not limited to, prenatal care, home visiting, education and engagement for new parents, and school readiness programs.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Expand home visiting programs to move toward voluntary universal home screening and ensure that families with identified service needs are directed to the appropriate service providers.**

One home visiting program currently funded by the state is the Healthy Families Oregon program. Its goals are to reduce child maltreatment, increase positive health outcomes, and improve school readiness. Currently, Healthy Families Oregon serves roughly 10% of the estimated 30,000 eligible families at a cost of \$24 million General Fund (2017-19). The program could be scaled up over multiple biennia serving lower income at-risk households first. There are programs like Family Connects which would also address these goals. There should be a review of how this program relates to home visiting programs under the Oregon Health Authority including Babies First and CaCoon to avoid duplication and overlap.

- 2. Increase access to intensive early childhood services such as Early Head Start and Relief Nurseries.**

Early Head Start is currently funded (2017-19) at \$1.6 million General Fund for 64 state slots in addition to approximately 2,000 federally funded slots. This program serves low income families through both home visiting and center-based services to support healthy parent/child relationships, child growth and development, and self-sufficiency. The Early Learning Division (ELD) estimates the number of eligible children for this program at approximately 25,000. Based on the numbers above on who is currently served, each 1,000 additional slots would cost roughly \$25 million General Fund.

Relief Nurseries support families in crisis -- generally for children at risk of abuse. Services include therapeutic preschool services and support services. Current funding for Relief Nurseries is \$8.9 million General Fund and \$2.1 million Other Funds. An estimated 3,310 children and families are served from an estimated eligible population of over 36,000.

- 3. Fully fund Early Intervention (EI) and Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) services for children with disabilities and delayed learning.**

The program funds services for over 26,000 eligible children. Current 2017-19 funding is \$175 million General Fund and \$33.6 million Federal Fund. Funding has not kept pace with increasing costs of services, so overall service levels have not kept pace with need. This is a federally mandated program and the Oregon Department of Education estimates the cost of fully funding the program at the current cost of programs would be an increase of approximately \$75 million for 2019-21.

4. Explore additional policy options to build an integrated birth-to-five system that supports children and families.

While the work group acknowledges that these additional policy options may be outside the formal scope of the Joint Committee on Student Success, they are critically important to creating healthy, attached families and in developing a unified, integrated birth-to-five early learning system that ensures children arrive at kindergarten ready to learn. Options include:

- provide state resources to expand the capacity of parenting education programs like the Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative programs; and
- increase Oregon’s supply of high-quality infant/toddler child care, and ensure that the investments in child care and Pre-K are coordinated to meet the needs of working families.

GOAL 2: Provide all children with access to affordable high-quality preschool programs.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase access to state subsidized preschool programs for children aged 3 to 5 who have not entered kindergarten, particularly for children living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.

Currently the State has two major programs providing financial assistance with preschool – Oregon Pre-K (OPK) and Preschool Promise. OPK, which serves 8,100 children out of approximately 20,000 eligible with household incomes of 100% of the federal poverty line (FPL) or lower, is a companion program to the federal Head Start program which serves roughly another 4,400 of the same population. The 2017-19 budget for this program is \$150.7 million General Fund. According to the ELD, the average annual cost of the program per child is approximately \$9,100. The Preschool Promise program serves 1,300 children and families with household incomes of 200% of FPL or less. The number of children eligible for this program is approximately 40,000. The 2017-19 budget for this program is \$35.7 million General Fund. The average annual cost of the program according to ELD per child is approximately \$11,500.

In developing options to increase access to preschool, the following factors should be considered:

- Programs should include those that promote strong educational outcomes for all preschool aged children including children of color and children of immigrants and refugees. One option is an Equity Fund (like what was proposed in HB 4006 - 2018), which could be used for grants to organizations and providers that provide culturally specific preschool opportunities, other early learning programs, and parent support programs.
- There should be a review of other models for delivering preschool based on quality and effectiveness as well as the cost per child.
- Any proposal should include addressing the issue of expanding facilities to meet the growing number of children participating in programs as well as investments in the early childhood workforce to meet the demand for preschool teachers and other staff. Also, steps should be taken to minimize competition for workers between preschool programs.
- Rules and requirements for each program should be reviewed with the intent to have as similar a set of rules across all related programs.

2. Expand the early learning workforce by increasing the capacity of training and certification programs across the state.

There is a shortage of available staff for many early learning programs. The state should take a more active role in supporting and expanding programs to increase and diversify the early learning workforce, including those at community colleges, public universities, and potentially high school CTE programs. Since many of the existing early learning programs require a four-year degree for some staff, one alternative could be an effort between community colleges and public universities to develop a four-year early learning/preschool related degree that would be centered at a community college but with ties to a public university. Another alternative is to establish an 18- to 24-month program at community colleges that would qualify workers as interim or supporting teachers. Any actions under this strategy should include increasing the diversity of this workforce to serve a culturally diverse preschool population.

GOAL 3: Provide sufficient resources to schools and families to meet the behavioral health, physical health, nutritional and support needs so students can reach their full potential to learn.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Increase access to behavioral and physical health services by increasing the number of counseling, mental health, school nurses, and other staff available to students. These services could be provided directly by school staff or in partnership with other organizations such as School-Based Health Centers, Community Care Organizations (CCOs), community groups, and county mental health and public health agencies.**

Throughout the hearings of the Joint Committee on Student Success, one common theme has been the need to provide a variety of mental and physical health services that support learning by students. In most schools, classroom teachers spend an increasing amount of time and effort dealing with issues that are better dealt with by other professionals. This also takes teaching time (and quality) away from all students as a teacher must spend more time dealing with the issues of one or a few of their students.

Each school district needs to determine what level of each type of service is right for their schools and how each service is delivered in the most cost-effective way (e.g., directly by school employees or in partnership with other providers) to best meet the needs of the district's students. There may be a shortage of available professionals in some of the required fields, at least initially. The state's role, other than as a funding source, may be to offer technical assistance and information-sharing for approaches like trauma-informed practices.

2. Establish a funding source/formula separate from the State School Fund specifically for school physical and mental health as well as for other “wraparound” and support services.

This concept would create a separate formula stream for a specific set of programs/services related to supports to assist in the learning skills/activities of students. There could be a set of weights in the formula to better distribute the funds to those districts most in need. Funding distributed through this formula stream could only be used for a specific set of programs and services. Issues that would have to be considered include:

- How to account for those resources currently used for these services that are part of the existing school formula revenues or funded in other public agency budgets (e.g., county mental health agencies).
- How to hold school districts accountable (e.g., perhaps by enforcing staffing ratios for select professions like school nurses or counselors).
- How to factor local revenue into the distribution.
- What factors or weights to you use in the distribution formula (e.g. number of special education students, measure of poverty, and others).

3. Provide greater access and connections for students and their families to wraparound and support services that address issues that prevent a student from reaching their full potential.

The delivery model for these types of services should be local in design – what works well in Portland may not work as well in Burns or other communities. One important factor is to somehow link the schools with the various service models. Examples of models include the Family Access Network in the Bend area, Service Integration in Polk county, or the SUN school model in Portland.

4. To address hunger of school-aged children, expand the eligibility for free/reduced lunches or make it easier for more schools to use a school wide free breakfast/lunch program.

Research and experience show us that school meals boost student achievement, attendance, graduation, and earnings later in life. For the 2016-2017 school year, approximately 47% of students were eligible for free breakfast/lunch (130% or less of FPL), 5.5% were eligible for reduced lunch (130% to 185% of FPL) and 47% were not eligible for any subsidy. For the 2017-19 biennium, the ODE budget assumes \$397 million total funds for nutrition programs of which 98% is federal funding. Options for this strategy include:

- Providing funding for a universal program where all students are eligible;
- Ensuring all schools that are federally eligible for the Community Eligibility Provision can participate by funding the gap to make the program cost effective. This program allows schools with a large proportion of low-income students to provide all students in the school with meals at no cost;
- Increasing the income threshold to a level higher than 185% to make more students eligible for free or reduced meals.

None of these options would increase federal funding, so each would have to be funded with state resources. Any actions under this strategy should help encourage and support the Farm-to-School program, when possible.

GOAL 4: Maximize learning time for students, including instructional time, through a longer school year, summer learning programs and increased student attendance.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase learning time by adding additional days to the school year including factoring in those districts with alternative school periods such as four-day weeks.

One key question is whether learning time should be increased for all students or whether the resources that fund increased time should be focused on those students who are not achieving at desired levels. While all students will likely benefit, the cost of increasing instructional time can be substantial (the estimate cost of adding one day is \$52 million per biennium). There also has been some discussion about increasing learning time for specific age groups such as in the early grades to strengthen reading skills. Likely just as important as the amount of instructional time is how that learning time is used. According to the Education Commission of the States, “Shorter more focused instructional periods may be as effective as longer yet less productive periods, but research on how instructional time is used is limited.”

Whatever approach is taken, a recommendation of increasing the school year should be accompanied by a clear definition of a “school day”. Currently, some school days are used for non-student contact time (e.g., professional development days). Other considerations include teacher preparation, grade-level team planning, and sufficient teachers and class time for art, music, and library in elementary schools.

2. Provide resources so students have access to a three- to six-week summer learning program starting initially with low income students who are behind current education benchmarks.

The long summer break makes it difficult for students to retain the skills they learn during the school year. The break can also lead to increasing the achievement gap among students. The 2018 QEM report included an estimate of \$33 million for the needed additional resources over current levels for summer school for struggling students.

3. Support statewide and district level efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism.

Chronic absenteeism is defined as when a student misses at least 10 percent of the school year. ODE estimates that over 20% of students across all grades are chronically absent. Options for investments that could be explored include:

- Funding for districts to address some of the barriers that keep students from attending school including transportation, mental health services, and communication with parents;
- Expansion of current efforts for high-absenteeism districts to additional school districts if these efforts provide positive results.
- Continued investments in student information systems, in part to provide exchange of information between districts as students transfer from one district to another.