



### **EARLY LEARNING WASHINGTON COUNTY GOALS**

Children are ready for school and are reading at grade level by the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.

Families are healthy, stable and attached.

Early learning services are coordinated, efficient and effective.

*A partnership between  
United Way of the  
Columbia-Willamette &  
Washington County Health  
and Human Services*



## **June 5, 2017 – Testimony to House Committee on Education: Implementation of PAX Good Behavior Game in Washington County**

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Hillsboro School District's (HSD) adoption of PAX GBG came from a recognition that new and young students were entering our schools with behavior and learning challenges. We needed to better understand and provide supports that would enable our students to grow and thrive. We heard from many teachers experiencing increasingly difficult behaviors in their classrooms. They didn't feel they had the knowledge or the tools to manage these behaviors to best support their students. In addition, teachers were experiencing higher levels of stress and fatigue and expressed a diminished intrinsic joy of teaching. It was at this time that HSD partnered with Early Learning Washington County to host the first teacher training of December 2014.

We are currently completing our third year implementing PAX GBG. I am one of the first teachers in that first cohort of 40 trained. I am proud to say that today all 25 of our elementary schools have begun implementing PAX in at least one classroom. We have over 300 certified teachers grades pre-k through sixth implementing PAX GBG. We have teachers in both English and dual language classrooms, as well as specialists, educational resource center teachers, and an endless number of instructional assistants working to best support our students. We currently have 4 schools implementing schoolwide with at least 2 more schools interested in doing the same this next year. Also of note is that some of the after-school programs have adopted the kernels/concepts to increase the success of our students in their programs.

In Hillsboro, PAX GBG has become an essential piece of our district's trauma-informed school strategy. It is centered on creating nurturing environments and building strong relationships between students, their teachers, and our community. It puts student and staff wellbeing at the core. PAX GBG has given teachers and staff specific, effective tools to use with their students that are fun, trauma-informed, evidence-based, and promote positive youth development.

The desire to expand PAX GBG is quickly growing across the state of Oregon, and I want to introduce you to some of the students and teachers in Washington County whose lives have been permanently and positively impacted by PAX GBG. The following video exhibits just one of our many classrooms where peace, productivity, and joy have been restored (see power point for video).

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I was first introduced to PAX GBG as the Suicide Prevention Coordinator for Washington County, when I was the parent of a toddler – Nathan who is now 11 and has two siblings, Morgan 6 and Coleson 1.5. Before I had school-age children, PAX made sense as a universal prevention strategy. Yet, my relentless passion to pursue PAX GBG in Washington County really took off when Nathan entered school.

In Kindergarten, Nathan's teachers began describing him as a very active child, compassionate and kind, but was fidgety, having a hard time keeping his body to himself, and loud. In his classrooms there always seemed to be about 6 children – typically boys who were different degrees of Nathan – in-attentive, off-task, wiggly, talking, out of their seat and distracting others...all normal behaviors for young children, however challenging in a classroom setting. Nathan's teachers were spending more time managing student behavior, with limited success, than they were teaching.

Nathan is happy, compassionate, active, sometimes forgetful and often off-task; we spent years implementing behavior plans and finally tried medication, which resulted in our typically goofy, outgoing, and cooperative child becoming withdrawn, depressed and defiant – a side-effect of some ADHD medications. Needless to say medication was no longer an option.

Nathan did not have PAX in his classrooms. Nathan may or may not have ADHD, but I can share that his behavioral issues – as well as those of the 5 other identified children in his classrooms could have been addressed or mitigated by changing the classroom environment through PAX.

My daughter Morgan attends the same school as Nathan in the Tigard-Tualatin School District and is lucky enough to be in a PAX classroom. I volunteer in her classroom and while there are still some off-task behaviors, there are much fewer. Morgan and her peers are working as members of a community to support each other's positive behavior. They are PAX Leaders creating the best learning environment for themselves with the guidance of their teacher. The teacher teaches and they all have fun learning! In her kindergarten classroom you do not see 8, 6 or even 3 children that stand out – they are teams working together for the benefit and success of their larger community.

PAX is growing fast in Washington County and starting to take off in Oregon. In our region it has been a grassroots movement, and the success and growth is due to teacher and principal demand to have PAX in their classrooms, in their schools, and in their lives.

In 2014 Washington County was awarded a *Youth & Innovation* grant from the Youth Development Council. All of the school districts participated to some degree, but Hillsboro proved to be ready and willing to begin implementing PAX GBG. After the first year, it was clear the demand for PAX GBG among teachers and schools exceeded our capacity (simply spreading by word of mouth). In the following two years we were able to leverage Medicaid Mental Health Prevention funds and Kindergarten

Partnership Innovation funds to continue expanding PAX GBG in Hillsboro and support the other school districts in building readiness and starting implementation.

Currently, in addition to Hillsboro, Tigard-Tualatin, Forest Grove, Sherwood and Beaverton schools are implementing PAX in various degrees. Hillsboro and Forest Grove intend to implement PAX schoolwide in all elementary schools; TTSD has implemented PAX GBG in all kindergarten classrooms this year and will be training all first and second grade teachers in August. Sherwood has trained more than 50% of their kinder teachers and 20% of their 1st grade teachers. PAX is an amazing and desired contagion, which continues to spread rapidly in our region.

PAX GBG is a change agent and the application of PAX provides teachers, children, parents and community members the tools to co-create nurturing environments for all children, youth and families.

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Washington County has been able to do a lot of work over the last three years, with relatively small amounts of funding. Right now, we have over 700 teachers trained in 51 of the 81 elementary schools in the county. We have been able to leverage both health and education funding streams to support PAX GBG expansion across the county, including alcohol and drug prevention funds. This is due to the large base of research and data that demonstrate GBG's effectiveness in reducing substance abuse, suicide ideation, interaction with the juvenile justice system, and other mental and physical health challenges.

Recently, it feels like Washington County has come to a tipping point where the demand for training – from teachers, schools, and districts – well exceeds our funding capabilities. For example, Washington County hosted a GBG training in February that was supposed to be for 40 teachers and had 80 teachers register within 24 hours. We held two additional trainings for teachers and PAX Partners in May and we are planning five trainings in August – which will mean an additional 200 teachers and staff will be implementing PAX GBG next fall. Preschool Promise and child care providers in Washington County are also interested in being trained in the PAX kernels, which would help children transition smoothly into kindergarten.

Overall, the demand for PAX GBG is coming directly from teachers and schools. However, Washington County recognizes the broad health and social impacts of GBG and has committed to supporting this work as much as we are able. Currently, we have submitted a funding application to the Youth Development Council and are planning to apply for a grant through CareOregon this summer.