

My name is Karen Twain and I am the Assistant Superintendent of the Tigard-Tualatin School District. I have been in education for over 30 years in a variety of roles including working at the state for a year and a half where I was the Director of Early Literacy. At that time, our State Superintendent, Governor and I proposed a plan to have all students in Oregon reading by third grade. The plan had several components but one of the most important was the partnership we wanted to create between schools and culturally specific community based organizations. Without going deeply in to the plan, here are two parts that were included:

1. Invest in strengthening early learning programs while creating a great handoff to reduce achievement gaps early. Build strong partnerships between families, community-based providers, and schools to fully support students.
2. Engage families and Community Based Organizations in accelerated student learning.

While the bill didn't pass due to funding shortfalls, I, and many of my colleagues from K-12 knew what could make a difference for our young learners. I came back to my district with that information and immediately made contact with Latino Network.

We began the Juntos Aprendemos program in one of our schools. Juntos Aprendemos prepares Latino children to succeed in kindergarten and parents are empowered as their children's first teachers and advocates.

Juntos Aprendemos equips 3-5 year olds and their parents with the early literacy and school readiness skills needed to overcome barriers facing Spanish-speaking children in our community. Increasing early numeracy and literacy skills in Spanish as well as these goals are the intent of the program.

- Foster a love of books and reading
- Develop social skills and appropriate classroom behavior
- Embrace Latino culture and heritage through stories, songs, rhymes, and languages
- Partner with parents to strengthen communication and advocacy skills and their knowledge of how to navigate the U.S. educational system

Tigard-Tualatin started with one school and quickly grew to four schools as we leveraged this partnership. Our district is focused on Academic Return on Investment (AROI) in terms of program evaluation and finding the strategies and programs that get the "most bang for the buck." I can tell you that we have never had a more successful program in our district with a high return on investment. I know we will continue to realize that investment's dividends over time. Here are some of the results:

Child Outcomes:

95% of children increased their ability to recognize written letters

100% of children demonstrated the ability to recognize their name in writing

95% of children demonstrated the ability to recognize and name their first initial

90% of children increased their ability to recognize written numbers
90% of children were able to count to 10 or higher, or increased their ability to count

Parent Outcomes:

95% of parents report increased knowledge about kindergarten
100% of parents report reading more frequently with their children
88% of parents report reading with their children at least 3 times each week
100% of parents report engaging in more early learning activities with their children at home

The schools that have Juntos Aprendemos are experiencing incredible success with their families and students. Needless to say, we would like to have this in every one of our schools but funding continues to be an issue. We are pulling from our district general fund and trying to access grants but there is simply not enough money to access this invaluable resource. We have also started to access other culturally specific community based organizations such as Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO). We would like to see school districts throughout the state be able to have these types of working relationships with culturally specific community based organizations. These continued partnerships with Latino Network, IRCO, and the like will ensure that we have improved graduation rates, better attendance, and stronger relationships with our families. We can literally see the third grade reading benchmark within reach because of our work with these types of early learning programs.

In this light, I would like to throw my district's full support of the establishment of the proposed Early Childhood Equity Fund. We absolutely need funding for culturally specific early learning programs. If we are serious about closing the opportunity and achievement gaps in Oregon, this is the perfect starting place.