



Thursday, April 11, 2019

Joint Committee on Student Success
Oregon Legislature
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Co-Chairs Roblan, Smith Warner and Members of the Committee,

We greatly appreciate the focus on improving how education is delivered in Oregon by the Governor and legislature. We look forward to working with you to pass and implement HB 2019.

The Oregon Head Start Association supports HB 2019 and significant new investments for early learning.

As you know, Oregon Pre-Kindergarten (OPK) is a companion program to the federal Head Start program, providing pre-school programs to ensure children enter kindergarten ready to learn. Children eligible for Oregon Pre-Kindergarten come from families that earn less than 100 percent of federal poverty level, are currently homeless, in foster care, or from families receiving TANF or SSI benefits.

Approximately 12,266 children are enrolled in federal or state Oregon Pre-Kindergarten programs. Just under 60 percent of children eligible for Head Start are being served. **This bill - and these new investments - will allow us to serve more children.**

Oregon Pre-Kindergarten programs not only prepare students for kindergarten, they prepare parents to support their child through life, often providing strong support to families for the challenges and difficulties they face.

HB 2019 makes record level investments in early learning. The Oregon Head Start Association has been working with the Governor's office and the Early Childhood Coalition to support investments of over \$400 million in early learning programs. We believe these programs are critical to sustaining a successful, statewide educational system and that all programs endorsed by the Early Childhood Coalition should be included as programs funded in HB 2019.

Early learning programs generally serve children from low-income families, who have disabilities, or who would otherwise have nowhere to turn. A key challenge is that there is a lack of funding for early learning programs. We still see this today – existing programs, like

Oregon Pre-Kindergarten, Early Intervention, Early Childhood Special Education, and others have been underfunded for a long time. These programs can and must serve more children. There are thousands of students and families that need help, and the sooner we can work with them, the better prepared they will be for K-12 and future endeavors.


If the Joint Committee on Student Success approves HB 2019 and allocates \$400 million for early learning, we can make substantial progress across the early learning system. If Oregon Pre-Kindergarten programs and Early Head Start are allocated \$100.3 million, as recommended in the Governor's Recommended budget, here are some of the things we can accomplish:

- Adequately pay early learning teachers, providers, and staff so we have the personnel to teach our next wave of Head Start children.
- We can take children on our current wait list and put them in programs today. In doing so, we can expand our program by serving more eligible 3-4-year-old children and expanding Early Head Start slots, which provide service for birth to 3 years old.
- Where Head Start programs don't have immediate wait lists, we can convert half day slots to full day slots to better meet family's needs and better prepare children for kindergarten.
- We can ensure that children and families have access to transportation provided by our programs so children can get to class every day to learn.

These investments will strengthen a program that has a proven track record of preparing children for kindergarten, allowing more children and families to benefit from the comprehensive services our programs provide.

Please, support early education, and support HB 2019.

Best regards,



Donna Schnitker
President of the Oregon Head Start Association