



**EARLY LITERACY
SUCCESS ALLIANCE**

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April 11, 2019

Arnie Roblan, Co-Chair
Barbara Smith Warner, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Student Success
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Members of the Joint Committee on Student Success,

As a coalition of statewide and community-based organizations with proven impact, the Early Literacy Success Alliance (ELSA) shares your commitment to improving literacy outcomes for our state's youngest students.

Literacy is the gateway skill that enables children to access future learning and achievement; yet, over half of third-graders statewide aren't meeting state reading benchmarks. Across Oregon, 80 percent of low-income children aren't meeting the third-grade benchmark, and a major and persistent opportunity gap exists for children of color, children with disabilities, and English Language Learners.

The third-grade reading benchmark, a strong predictor of high school graduation, is a key milestone for students. Not only does it correlate with Oregon's graduation rate, it serves as an accurate predictor of improved health and social success.

ELSA would like to express our appreciation to the members of the Joint Committee for the thoughtful and strategic work you've undertaken to date and for the product of that work, the Student Success Act.

We are heartened to see that a focus on supporting young students in developing early literacy skills is part of the School Improvement Account because we know that a strong foundation in reading opens the door to success in other areas of school, and in life. We also appreciate that the JCSS is recognizing the important role that community partnerships can play in boosting student achievement by including partnerships as a component of the needs assessment required for accessing funds.

The programs run by ELSA members and other nonprofits are underutilized, yet they are viable and willing partners in helping our students succeed. We believe that the role of partnerships should be further expanded in relationship to the School Improvement Account and should be part of guiding principles for the SIA, especially in the implementation of the grant-funded efforts.

Our Vision: All Oregon children - across social, economic and racial strata - receive the access, support and resources they need to succeed in reading and learning.

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To that end, we are enclosing a position paper on this issue, ***Accelerating Progress for Oregon's Youngest Readers: A Case for Investing in Community Partners***, that highlights the role and impact of community based organizations on the state's early literacy goals.

We'd also like to share our support for the Early Childhood Coalition package and the Early Childhood Equity Fund (HB 2897). Those investments are critical to reduce inequality, expand young minds, and set children on the path to success in school and life.

As you finalize the language of the Student Success Act, we urge you to remember the critical role that nonprofit and community-based organizations play in communities across Oregon. We cannot underscore enough the benefits of early literacy and the role it should play in any school district's efforts to increase student achievement and reduce academic disparities.

Sincerely,

Members, Early Literacy Success Alliance
Submitted Electronically