



March 29, 2021

To members of the Education Subcommittee, Co-Chairs Frederick & McLain, my name is Jamie Edwards and I am the owner, director, and since the onset of the pandemic, the Lead Teacher at Happy Valley Montessori. We have been in operation as an Emergency Childcare Center through COVID-19 serving children ages 2 ½ to 6 years of age. It is in light of my own experience and that of many of my fellow colleagues in the field of quality early child development that I am here today to offer my support for fully funding Early Learning Hubs in the 2021-2023 budget.

Early Learning Hubs like the one that supports my program (The Early Learning Hub of Clackamas), have been crucial in creating the solutions to address the complex needs of families raising children from pre-birth through age five. Hubs are local conveners with the goal of ensuring there is no wrong door for families attempting to access the myriad of programming and services that support young children and their families. The Early Learning Hubs also interface with the various organizations delivering programming to ensure that when there is a gap in services, it is identified and filled.

The Early Learning Hubs work!

- Happy Valley Montessori has found great advantages to the hub system, which moves outside of agency silos and connects the work of Oregon Health Authority, Oregon DHS, Early Learning Division, the broader ODE, private funders, and community-based organizations to programs like ours here at Happy Valley Montessori.
- The hub role is flexible and tends to adjust to the needs of our local community, which is why you hear a variety of different examples of the work hubs do. At their core, hubs ensure providers of early learning services are accountable for outcomes and that services are provided in a cost-efficient manner.
- Too often the good work being done is stymied by the lack of coordination which can both identify redundancies and gaps in the system to more efficiently serve families.

The Early Learning Hub truly supports my childcare center!

- For Happy Valley Montessori, the Early Learning Hub has connected us to several programs, partnerships, and quality enhancement networks that include SPARK (formerly known as QRIS), ASQ (Ages & Stages Questionnaires Program), and most recently, the amazing Preschool Promise. To be more specific, I have been better able to determine possible neuro-diverse children earlier and helped families get further screening (the Hubs help with this as well, connecting us to local support and helping initiate IEPs, speech development support, and other services depending on where a

child's shortcoming is on the ASQs). I had never heard of ASQ until connecting with my local hub. The Early Learning Hub also introduced me to SPARK, a quality star rating program that has helped me "deepen" and improve my program with accountability and concrete solutions for enhancement. Most significant, especially during this extraordinary time of COVID, has been the Early Learning Hub encouraging and supporting Happy Valley Montessori to apply and become a provider through Preschool Promise. This program has not only served as a lifeline financially, but more importantly, has tackled head on the reality of inequity in the access of quality early learning and development for children of lower income and more specifically, of our BIPOC community. Without the Early Learning Hub, these marginalized children wouldn't have the opportunity to be in programs like ours, let alone, even find us! The Early Learning Hub streamlines the access to such funding and support systems for all of us so that we are not out there trying to reinvent the curve and seek out all of this connection and support on our own. I am at my bandwidth and honestly can't imagine trying to do all of this without the Hub, all the way down to participating in a Zoom tour as a translator, coming to campus (pre-COVID) to observe a child that is displaying behavior and/or neuro-diverse tendencies, or to help me find a service to translate our handbooks into another language. Our local Hub has encouraged me to continue my own equity and anti-racist work with their genuine and persistent efforts to meet the needs of underserved communities. In a nutshell, I can't imagine making it this far, especially during this time, without the Early Learning Hub.

What is Happy Valley Montessori asking for today?

- The current budget contains a **\$1.4 million cut** which was levied on hubs during a COVID-related special session in an effort to balance the budget.
- I can tell you first-hand, the impact of the pandemic on families with young children has been tremendous. Families are struggling to care for their children while maintaining employment, and those who faced economic insecurity prior to the pandemic have taken the brunt of the impact of the last year. We have barely peered into the stress and trauma this year has had on the children, especially those of our marginalized communities.
- Families need coordinated services now more than ever before. BIPOC families have been disproportionately impacted by the virus, women have disproportionately borne the burden of childcare throughout the shutdown, and we have a real risk of undoing the progress we've made.
- With enhanced investment from the federal government and a healthy revenue forecast, we have a responsibility to fully fund the local coordination that ensures families have somewhere to turn when they need help.

What happens if the cut remains?

- A cut to hubs would be detrimental to programs like mine! We could not have made it through this without the financial lifeline and constant, consistent support provided to us through the Early Learning Hub's Preschool Promise opportunity. I fear for programs

like mine and those of my fellow colleagues who have gone to extreme lengths to keep their doors open through the pandemic.

Thank you for this opportunity to voice our concerns about the proposed \$1.4 million cut to the hubs. It should be the right of EVERY child in Oregon to have access to quality care and development; I don't see how we will close the equity gaps and continue this extremely important work without full funding for our Early Learning Hubs. They are the gatekeepers to Oregon's future generations!

In Unity & Wellness,

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