

United Way of the Columbia-Willamette

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TO: House Committee on Education

FROM: Begoña Rodriguez Liern, United Way of the Columbia Willamette/Early Learning Washington County

DATE: March 29, 2023

RE: Support for HB3198 to establish an Early Literacy Success Initiative

United Way of the Columbia-Willamette/Early Learning Washington County hub has a long-standing commitment to support families and early childhood educators in our region by promoting safety, good physical and mental health, stable families, and positive experiences that prepare young children in Washington County for success in school. That is why, our organization is happy to support the establishment of an Early Literacy Success Initiative.

Early Literacy has been part of the Early Learning Washington County Hub's Strategic Plan for eight years now. Our region is very diverse, more than 100 languages are spoken in Washington County. ELWC believes that having access to multilingual children's books is tied to a child's academic success and this is also very important for children from immigrant and refugee families that are expected to do well in school, learn English quickly, and contribute to the family's successful adjustment. Furthermore, using dual language books can help them value and preserve their mother tongue and protect linguistic diversity as well as it sparks parent-child interactions.

ELWC started implementing its first early literacy project eight years ago, distributing over 5,000 multilingual travel book bags for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Since then, these are some of the strategies ELWC has implemented:

- **Partnered with local libraries to create multilingual permanent collections and to offer multilingual Storytime(s) programming.** ELWC partnered with six libraries, the ones with the highest concentration of free/reduce school catchment areas, to purchase thousands of multilingual books, as well as to hire multilingual Storytime facilitators and to purchase supplies. Some of the languages targeted were English, Spanish, Chuukese, Marshallese, Mandarin, Arabic, Somali, Q'anjob'al, Quiche, Mixtec, Farsi, etc.
- **Partnered with CCR&R and Washington County Cooperative Library Services (WCCLS).** To offer mobile libraries for in-home child care providers. For 6 months, selected cohort of providers received different literacy prototypes that were delivered to them by early literacy experts. Providers were also trained in the Ready to Read framework in English and Spanish.
- **Sponsored Latino Network and Tigard-Tualatin School District to launch Juntos Aprendemos.** This program equips 3-5 years olds and their parents with the early

literacy and school readiness skills needed to overcome barriers facing Spanish-Speaking children in the Tigard-Tualatin area.

- **Funded TierrAgua, an indigenous led organization, to offer Kindergarten summer programs for Mesoamerican-Indigenous families.** The program supported parents of incoming Kindergarten students to strengthen communication and advocacy skills and their knowledge of how to navigate the US educational system while embracing the Mesoamerican-Indigenous cultures and heritages.
- **Created and distributed almost 5,000 STEM CURIOSITY kits.** These kits were designed to increase parent-child interactions and to align what is learn in the house with that is learn in the early education setting. ELWC created the kits with the ELWC Parent Advisory Council, Portland Metro STEM Partnership hub (PMSP), culturally specific agencies, community-based organizations, Head Start programs, childcare providers, and K-12. To date almost 5,000 kits in four languages (English, Spanish, Arabic and Somali) have been distributed in Washington County.
- **Created specific early literacy campaigns for children enrolled in Preschool Promise (PSP):** Welcome bags, Kindergarten transition backpacks. Also, supporting PSP educators in their classrooms:
 - **Developed Early STEAM Works prototypes** that includes props, activities, professional books, children’s books, and other materials.
 - **Launched an Early STEAM PSP pilot** where parent leaders that are trained bring STEAM activities to selected PSP providers and are offered in English and Spanish. 12 sites have been visited during 2023 and we are working in visiting 29 sites before the end of the school year 2022-2023.

These are just a few examples of how integrated early literacy is in the work of ELWC. However, all these initiatives are not solely funded by the Early Learning Division, but it also comes from Federal and foundations money. Establishing an Early Literacy Success Initiative aims to create a steady source of funding that will allow hubs to focus on growing the existing the work as well as to develop new initiatives.

ELWC strongly support HB3198 to establish an Early Literacy Success Initiative. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact us. Thank you.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:
Begoña Rodriguez Liern
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Begoña Rodriguez Liern

Early Learning Washington County Co-Director

