



**EARLY LITERACY
SUCCESS ALLIANCE**

May 3, 2023

Senator Elizabeth Steiner, Co-Chair
Representative Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Ways & Means
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Co-Chairs Steiner and Sanchez & Members of the Committee,

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. **We want to express our support for the Early Literacy Success Initiative**, and for the attention paid to science-backed instructional strategies and culturally-specific and culturally-responsive pedagogy and programs.

ELSA members include:

- **Reading Results** – Partners with schools serving low-income students to identify early-grade students who are falling behind in reading and provides student-centered, individualized reading support with highly trained tutors that deliver a culturally-responsive program designed to accelerate literacy and foster an academic mindset.
- **SMART Reading** – Mobilizes volunteers to provide reading support and access to books for children from birth to 8th grade, helping to build confidence, literacy skills, and a love of reading.
- **Reach Out and Read** – Integrates reading into pediatric practices, advise families about the importance of reading with their children, and share books that serve as a catalyst for healthy childhood development.
- **The Shadow Project** – Teams up with teachers to offer school-based programs, proven to help K-8 students with learning challenges — like dyslexia, ADHD, autism and trauma — to build students' motivation, increase their confidence, and become joyful readers.
- **Metropolitan Family Service** – Employs a structured, evidence-based tutoring model that improves the overall reading of students in early grades, partnering with Title I schools to place highly trained volunteers who are 50+ to help students attain literacy proficiency by the end of 3rd grade.

As you know, literacy is the gateway skill that enables children to access future learning and achievement; yet, 61 percent of third-graders statewide aren't meeting state reading benchmarks, and a major and persistent education gap exists for historically marginalized students. 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.

We also know that the achievement gaps that appear for young readers in third grade have their roots in early resource and opportunity gaps. For example, children from lower-income households are likely to hear 30 million fewer words between birth and age four than their peers in higher-income households. Children who experience these resource gaps during their first years of life are much less likely to become proficient readers by the end of third grade. Without that foundation, students have difficulty shifting from learning to read to the more complex demands of reading to learn across subjects in the higher grades. As a result, ELSA believes that early literacy supports should be available from birth through at least age 8.

In accomplishing the goals of the Early Literacy Success Initiative, we also want to highlight the important role that community-based organizations can and should play in boosting student achievement. Programs offered by community-based organizations add hundreds of thousands of hours of trained volunteer time and staff time to families' homes, health care settings, pre-schools, and schools – adding significant human resource capacity in a cost-effective way. Plus, they collectively add millions of dollars in donated value through volunteer hours, books, and other resources.

The programs run by ELSA members and other nonprofits are underutilized, yet they are viable and willing partners in providing research-based early literacy supports for students including high-dosage tutoring; one-on-one reading time; access to high-interest, culturally relevant books; assistive technology for students with disabilities, and more. Expanding the opportunity for districts to partner with proven early literacy nonprofits would help increase student achievement and provide support to teachers and families.

We urge you to remember the critical role that nonprofit and community-based organizations play in communities across Oregon. We share your deep commitment to ensuring Oregon children have the skills and support they need to be strong, confident readers and we stand ready to amplify our efforts.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony. Please contact Kylie Grunow at kylie@meriwetherstrategies.org or by phone at 503-707-9653, if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Samuels

Reading Results, Executive Director
Early Literacy Success Alliance, Member