

What We Are Trying to Accomplish?

INTENT

To ensure that Oregon children enter kindergarten prepared.

CHANGES REQUIRED TO PUBLIC POLICY, SPENDING, ORGANIZATION

Accomplishing this critical goal would principally require the following key public policy shifts:

The creation of a universal public pre-school system that, building on existing capacity, provides access to every three- and four-year-old Oregonian to high quality preschool.

Commitment to the implementation of key improvements to enhance the quality of infant-toddler care in Oregon.

Commitment to the expansion of home visiting programs and wrap-around services to address the needs identified by the home visitors.

Commitment to the development and implementation of a statewide family literacy program model to teach parents how to be effective teachers of their children.

Implementing all of these policy changes would require in excess of \$1 billion. Implementing lynchpin aspects of the reforms needed, however, would cost much less while still resulting in marked improvements in school readiness and, therefore, K-12 and later outcomes.

Among the key governmental organizational shifts that would likely be required:

- The reformulation and expansion of the Oregon Pre-Kindergarten program, which is already appropriately housed in the Department of Education, and the implementation of the expanded Oregon Pre-K program by school districts.
- The creation of an Office of Elementary School Readiness in the Department of Education that would coordinate the range of programs impacting this area.
- The expansion of the current Child Care Division to enable more rigorous regulation of infant-toddler settings.

□ HOW THIS WILL SUPPORT THE PEOPLE VISION OF THE OREGON BUSINESS PLAN, AND REINFORCE THE 4PS BY PROMOTING TRADED-SECTORS GROWTH AND HEALTH?

If the proverbial Martian visitor listened to most Oregon politicians, pundits, and education professionals, she might conclude that Earth children do not learn before the age of five. Let's listen with her to both the traditional vocabulary of our educational debate and the telling silences:

- Pitched budget battles about taxes are waged over funding levels for our kindergarten-through-grade-12 public school system. *Elementary school readiness receives no mention.*
- The State's vaunted Quality Education Model for K-12 *makes no reference to improving children's elementary school success through pre-kindergarten education.*
- In a 2002 survey by the Oregon Progress Board, 61 percent of nearly 4,000 Oregon households reported being satisfied with K-12 education. *There is no data on parental satisfaction with pre-kindergarten educational experiences, as the questions relating to our youngest children fell under the headings of 'childcare' and 'daycare' (sic), and were all about seat-time, with no references to learning.*
- The Oregon School Boards Association frets only about the funding umbrella that covers K-12 *while the majority of Oregon's more than 150,000 pre-school age children – children who will soon enter that K-12 system – remain mired in a mishmash of inadequate, even unsafe settings that fail to capitalize on their enormous potential for learning and development.*

As Oregon tries to pull itself out of a recession and develop new strength in the technical and knowledge-based industries that had been the saviors of a state still weaning itself from natural resource dependency, helping our children arrive in their first classroom ready to learn is the single most powerful long-term investment we can make. That about-face in state priorities can ensure not only the success of our children, but also the economic viability of Oregon itself.

Listen to Minnesota Federal Reserve researcher Arthur Rolnick, who unveiled some startling statistics during a recent appearance in Massachusetts: "The return on investment of early education is eight-to-one, converting to a real, inflation-adjusted rate of 16 percent. I have probably understated the economic benefits, as this study has yet to cover the long-term benefits to other siblings and the next generation. Based on the research so far, I'd say that any venture capitalist would pronounce our current preschool education system under-funded."

Issue Background

□ HISTORY AND DIMENSIONS OF THE PROBLEM

Indisputable longitudinal evidence is piling up for the importance of quality, educational pre-school experiences to children's long-term social, academic, and economic success in life. Developmental research is crystal clear on this. Eighty-five to 90 percent of a child's intellect, personality, and social skills are formed between birth and age five, when the young brain is malleable and environmental stimuli create essential synaptic pathways for the first time. (Carnegie

Corporation, “Years of Promise” report). The foundation of a person is built prior to kindergarten, and if that foundation is shaky or misshapen, a person’s academic performance in school and all-around potential in life will be irretrievably compromised.

The results of the Chicago Child Parent Preschool Program study illustrate the grim fallout of our failure to invest in quality preschool for three- and four-year-olds. Kids in a non-preschool control group were 67 percent more likely to have been held back a grade, 85 percent more likely to have been placed in ‘Special Ed’ classes, and 70 percent more likely to have been arrested for a violent crime by age 18. The effect on child abuse was equally dramatic: among the 100,000 children who participated in the Chicago preschool program, whose intensive parental involvement put parents in close relationships with their child’s teachers, there were an estimated 5,500 fewer reports of child abuse and neglect than in the control group.

Independent research by the High/Scope Perry Study of low-income children paints another stark picture for at-risk children without access to quality pre-kindergarten educational settings: Out of any 20 toddlers in poor quality pre-k environments, 11 will end up repeating one or more grades, nine will test at less than 85 IQ and need special education, seven are destined to commit five or more crimes and go to jail, 11 will not graduate from high school, and only four will have the skills needed for post-secondary schooling. The High/Scope study, which has tracked children’s outcomes for well over a generation, also shows how much society saves by investing early. For every \$1 invested in quality pre-school for the study participants, society subsequently saved \$7 because of the improved outcomes for those children.

Despite the overwhelming case for investing in Pre-Kindergarten education, as a society, the U.S. invests shockingly little. Nationally, we spend close to \$15,000 annually in public funds per university student. We spend more than \$7,500 per K-12 student (which still is not enough). For each preschooler? We spend less than \$1,000 in public funding each year (In Oregon this figure is about \$600). The results of this underinvestment are not surprising:

- Most child care centers are poor-to-mediocre (86 percent), with more than 40 percent of infants and toddlers in rooms of poor quality, and a turnover rate of early childhood professionals between 30-40% annually.
- Only one in seven centers promote healthy development.
- Child care in one of eight centers threatens the health and safety of children.

As we miss the boat about when and how to invest, our youngest citizens go without, resulting in a continual need to pour precious state resources into societal remediation. We end up with a much smaller pool of children who are ready for higher education and a waste of our major but still inadequate investment in K-12 education.

Traditionalists may be adamant that early childhood education is the mother’s job, but the reality is this: the vast majority of mothers of pre-school age children in the workforce every day. Parents who are economically able to stay at home commonly send their children to preschool because they know that preschool is indispensable to their child’s success in life. Frankly, the stakes are too high, both for children whose lives are shaped by their early experiences, and for Oregon, now suffering the consequences of our failure to foster children’s early educational development, for that kind of outmoded rhetoric.

In Mississippi, prison actuaries use third grade reading levels to estimate with chilling accuracy the number of future prison beds that will be needed. In Oregon, we are only providing pre-kindergarten education to a small fraction of our four-year-olds, and as a result a high percentage of children start kindergarten unprepared. Our failure to invest in reading readiness is a recipe for failure.

Whether or not a child arrives at elementary school prepared is very serious business. Arriving behind means remedial investments and opportunity lost. It means special education, lower test scores, lower IQ, higher welfare, public safety issues, higher demand for social services, lower college attendance, and lost productivity. To put it in the context of our state, it means a weaker Oregon with a weaker workforce, a less productive and competitive economy, a lower ability to generate wealth, higher crime rates, and a greater demand for back-end social services. In short, not the state anyone would prefer to live in.

□ PAST ATTEMPTS TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE...

Since 1965, more than 20 million at-risk children – including nearly 1 million in 2002 alone -- have benefited from Head Start’s emphasis on making America’s most vulnerable kids “ready to learn” in school.

The Oregon Legislature first established a state Pre-Kindergarten program in 1987 that uses the Head Start model and is implemented by local school districts. Funds are allocated through competitive grants to applicants who can meet state standards and can prove that need exists in their community. Oregon Head Start Pre-Kindergarten Program (OHSPP) offers:

- Community Preschool Programs
- Help in receiving health services for young children
- Help in receiving dental services for young children
- Family consultants who work with families to prepare young children for kindergarten
- Home visits to offer support parenting skills
- Chances for parents to be involved and help others in the community
- Support in enrolling adults in education programs

These proven, comprehensive services are eligibility-based, but, on a 2002 budget of only \$29 million, serve only a fraction of “eligible” (at-risk) children. Most Oregon families are still on their own in the risky and expensive child care and preschool market.

In 1990, it became a National Educational Goal that “...all children in America will start school ready to learn.” In 1993, the Oregon Progress Board identified school readiness as a Critical Oregon Early Childhood Benchmark. In 1996, the Oregon Department of Education and the Oregon Progress Board began serious discussions regarding how to measure the status of Oregon’s current Kindergarten children and their developmental readiness for school.

A survey was developed, and as of 2002, the Oregon Kindergarten Readiness survey of teachers reported that only 76 percent of Oregon children entering kindergarten met all six of the developmental measures of readiness. Only 76.4 percent of the five-year-olds who were assessed understood that print carries a message in a picture book. This number is down almost a point from 2000 assessments.

All told, between the Oregon Head Start Pre-Kindergarten program for low-income youngsters and our investments in child care (mainly subsidies to help working parents afford care), Oregon currently invests well under \$100 million in pre-kindergarten education and development, as compared with a \$5 billion-plus investment in K-12 education (some of which is wasted on addressing the disproportionate needs of children who did not enter elementary school prepared).

It is imperative for the long term future of Oregon that we address the appalling scarcity of high quality preschool by developing and implementing a model that provides universal access for Oregon four-year-olds.

Specific Recommendations

WHAT ACTION NEEDS TO BE TAKEN, SHORT AND LONG-TERM?

In the short term, we need to develop a broad-based elementary school readiness coalition that includes business leaders, advocacy groups, organized labor, civic groups, representatives from the Governor's office and, perhaps, key state agencies, key legislators, and other key stakeholders. Stand for Children is prepared to convene this group and would welcome other co-conveners.

To move forward toward universal pre-k, the key aspect of a larger school readiness agenda, this coalition would need to:

- Design a universal, half-day pre-kindergarten program, first for all Oregon four-year-olds, and ultimately, for three-year-olds as well.
- Cost out universal pre-k and estimate K-12 system and long term savings that would result.
- Elevate the issue by educating the public, business, and decisionmakers about the research and other states' successful models.
- Evaluate potential funding streams, identify future revenue sources, and build a budget to support the consensus-supported design.
- Develop a campaign to persuade Oregonians that an investment in pre-k now brings a huge return later.

WHAT PEOPLE AND/OR ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD OR COULD BE INVOLVED IN IMPLEMENTING THESE RECOMMENDATIONS?

Business leaders, advocacy groups, organized labor, civic groups, representatives from the Governor's office and, perhaps, key state agencies, key legislators, and other key stakeholders.

WHAT OUTCOMES ARE WE ENVISIONING?...INDICATORS OF SUCCESS?...AND HOW THEY WILL BE MEASURED?

Stand for Children
Policy Opportunity Paper
Leadership Summit 2003
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Some envisioned, short and long term measurable outcomes of the implementation of the entire elementary school readiness agenda listed above include:

- Improvements in the rate of elementary school readiness of Oregon's children.
- Improvements in 3rd grade reading and math levels.
- Reductions in rates of child abuse and neglect.
- Reductions in the high school dropout rate.
- Reductions in teen pregnancy.
- Reductions in incarceration rates and costs.