FACT SHEET

We've Made It Our Business –

To Give Oregon's Kids a Better Start.

*We're working to improve the lives of Oregon's children and build a stronger economy with wise public investments in high-quality early learning programs. Make it **your** business, too!*

Why support Ready for School?

Currently, only 66 percent of Oregon's high school seniors graduate in four years. Less than 30 percent of Oregon high school graduates attend college.

Research has shown us repeatedly that the most cost-effective way to improve graduation and college-attendance rates is to stop this achievement gap before it starts and reach children at an early age – well before they attend kindergarten.

By helping children arrive at kindergarten ready to achieve success in school and life, the state of Oregon will both give students a robust and meaningful education, and deliver a return on the educational investment for the state of Oregon.

Who is Ready for School?

Ready for School is a group of business leaders, former elected officials, Republicans, Democrats and community leaders from around the state who have donated time and expertise to ensure that all children in Oregon arrive at school ready for success.

We believe that a sound foundational investment in early learning must be an essential part of Oregon's effort to close the achievement gap and reach the 40-40-20 vision, where 40 percent of Oregon graduates receive a four-year degree, 40 percent a two-year degree, and 20 percent a high school diploma.

We are committed to ensuring that Oregon is wise in its investments and holds itself accountable for achieving this goal.

What is the current Ready for School agenda?

Ready for School continues to advocate for wise investments in high-quality early learning and we recognize that the positive benefits of early investments will be sustained when our early learning and K-12 systems are brought together. To that end, Ready for School is currently asking the Oregon Legislature to fund a $10 million competitive Early Learning Strategic Grants fund. This fund would support schools and districts that are pioneering the way.

What are some past Ready for School accomplishments?

Ready for School is well-established as a leader in advocating for investment in early learning and supporting change to make our early learning system effective and accountable.

A few key accomplishments include:

- In 2007, Ready for School leadership helped to secure an additional $39 million for Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten – a change that resulted in 3,000 additional children enrolling in Head Start each year.
- In 2010, Ready for School successfully advocated for a first-time state investment of $1 million in Early Head Start.
- Ready for School supported SB 909 in 2011 and HB 4165 in 2012, legislation that has initiated the reform of the early learning system in Oregon.

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Swati Adarkar – *President & CEO, Children's Institute*

Ready for School *is a statewide campaign to improve the lives of Oregon's children and build a stronger economy with wise investments in high-quality early childhood programs. The campaign is led by a coalition of top business and community leaders who have made it their business to better prepare at-risk children for success in school and life. The campaign is informed by a growing body of social, scientific and economic research compiled and presented by the Children's Institute.*

MAKE IT YOUR BUSINESS

For more information or to join the ***Ready for School*** campaign, call 503.219.9034 or visit www.ready-for-school.org.

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Children's Institute

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October 17, 2012

Connecting the Early Years to the Early Grades

Early Learning Strategic Grants Proposal

Children's Institute Supports Oregon's Vision for Education Reform

The Children's Institute applauds the reform strategy the state of Oregon has taken with the creation of the Oregon Education Investment Board. We feel confident the important work being done by both OEIB and the Early Learning Council to create an education continuum that stretches from early learning through post-secondary education is the best strategy to close the achievement gap; closing this gap will ultimately help children realize their potential and yield a better return on investment for the public.

In order to achieve these goals, OEIB will need viable, local models of a new approach to education, one that begins at birth. Schools, districts, and early childhood programs will need guidance and examples in order to effectively connect and collaborate with each other. **The purpose of this memo is to propose strategic grants that would incent and reward school districts to align and integrate early learning with the elementary continuum at school(s) within their districts. We propose an initial allocation of $10 million for this purpose.**

The Challenge for Schools

Children who arrive at kindergarten ready for success are more likely to reach third-grade benchmarks, stay on track and graduate from high school. While schools recognize these milestones and the overall importance of early learning, early childhood remains an unfamiliar world for most of them. Many educators have little opportunity to work with the early childhood service providers in their community. Those who are interested in serving preschool children often discover that the landscape of early childhood – including curriculum, assessment, or parent involvement – is quite foreign and not aligned with the K-12 world.

Examples of Local Leadership

In 2011, the Children's Institute launched the Early Works initiative to demonstrate how in one high-needs community, aligning early education and development programs with the elementary grades can ensure school readiness and future school success. Now in its second year, the Early Works initiative has already begun to build an infrastructure of support and resources at Earl Boyles to help families and teachers overcome the challenges they face in addressing the persistent achievement gap. So far, this includes a summer literacy initiative, a preschool

classroom, a comprehensive community needs assessment, and professional development opportunities for the staff at Earl Boyles.

Earl Boyles Elementary School is not the only early learning initiative in Oregon. Other communities around the state have in recent years taken on projects with similar objectives. A notable example is the Gladstone Center for Children and Families. In addition, the Children's Institute is collaborating with Ford Family Foundation to launch a second Early Works site in Yoncalla. Already this partnership has begun to help us better understand and address the unique challenges facing rural schools and communities.

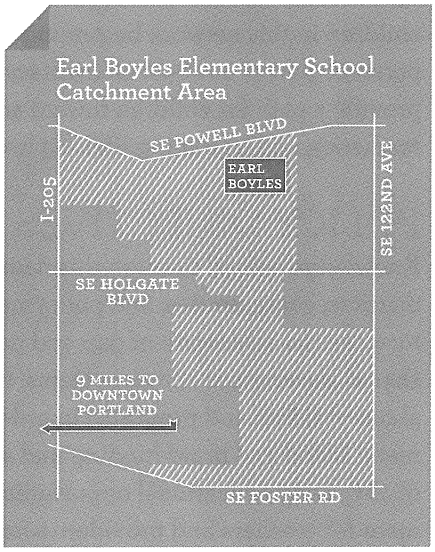
Statewide Strategic Grant Program

These local examples of leadership are evidence of both the need for and support for a statewide initiative. We propose that Oregon establish strategic grants to seed fund early learning initiatives such as these. This grant would reward "ready" communities in which districts, providers, community members, practitioners and educators have come together and are ready to align resources to connect early learning to the early grades. These sites would act as models for other districts pursuing similar initiatives. It would also provide critical information for OEIB, the Early Learning Council, and other education stakeholders.

This proposal is in an early stage of development. At this time, we recommend a competitive grant process that gives weight to the following criteria:

- **Representation** — As a whole, the grant pool should reflect the geographic and demographic diversity of the entire state.
- **Innovation** — Creativity should be rewarded. Building a seamless early learning continuum will require new ways of thinking and behaving.
- **Outcomes** — Applicants should set ambitious but meaningful targets for kindergarten readiness and third-grade reading and math.
- **Sustainability** — Only projects designed to outlast seed funding should be funded.
- **Transparency** — Sites should enter this process with a concept to test, a readiness to learn through experimentation, and a commitment to share what they learn.
- **Parent engagement** — A fundamental component of all funded proposals should be a plan for active involvement of parents in the classroom.
- **Community partnerships** — We recommend partnering with community-based early childhood service providers for preschool and other early learning services.
- **Local investment** — Priority should be given to sites that can demonstrate local investments in early learning (e.g., district funds, Title I).

For additional information about Early Works, visit, early-works.org



BUILDING A NEW MODEL FOR EDUCATION

Over the last several decades, the growing body of research on early childhood has shown us repeatedly that children begin learning the moment they are born. When they start kindergarten, children with fewer resources and advantages are already significantly behind the developmental curve. This gap has a long reach, affecting graduation rates, future earnings and health outcomes.

The good news is there are proven methods to help course correct and put these disadvantaged children on a path to success in school and life. But these interventions must be made early — before children reach kindergarten. And while many school districts and policymakers are interested in pursuing these practices, the path to implementation is not always clear.

The Children's Institute started the Early Works initiative to demonstrate how aligning early education and development programs with the elementary grades can ensure school readiness and future success. We plan to make the results of this project available to inform practice and policy decisions at all levels, especially here in Oregon. Together with our partners at the David Douglas School District, the Children's Institute began this initiative in 2010 at Earl Boyles Elementary School in Southeast Portland.

Third-graders who live in poverty and read below grade level are six times more likely than their peers to fail to graduate from high school.

– "Double Jeopardy: How Poverty and Third Grade Reading Skills Influence High-School Graduation," commissioned by the Annie E. Casey Foundation

THE VISION

With this initiative, our goals are to help children arrive at kindergarten ready for success and prepare them to meet critical benchmarks by third grade. The school will act as the critical hub for this project and, along with community partners, will provide a network of resources, information, services, and educational opportunities. Our aim is to engage families and children in this network beginning when a child is born and to make this experience part of a robust elementary education. Ultimately, our objective is to provide a path for children toward achieving academic success, developing resiliency, and becoming lifelong learners and productive citizens.

POLICY OBJECTIVES

Knowledge gained through this demonstration will be applicable to other districts, communities, and policymakers. We are interested in how best to: close the achievement gap and prepare children for kindergarten; build shared governance across systems; track, manage and share information about children and programs in order to spur continuous quality improvement; blend and braid funding and accurately capture the cost of providing quality early educational opportunities; and integrate professional development for teachers and providers across the birth-to-third-grade spectrum.

THE ROADMAP

Our goals for this project include:

- *Providing universally available services for families and children starting at birth. Examples include parent-child education classes, health screenings, preschool, and parent support groups.*
- *Providing these services at the elementary school.*
- *Integrating and aligning these quality early educational programs with the elementary grades.*
- *Evaluating and documenting the process to inform others.*

WHY EARL BOYLES?

The children attending Earl Boyles face a host of risk factors related to the achievement gap, including poverty, language barriers and a lack of high-quality early educational experiences. As a result, test scores through fifth grade lag behind state standards.

Despite these challenges, the leadership at the school shows a desire to improve the odds for the children at Earl Boyles. In a recent community survey, parents and teachers made clear their wish for more opportunities for group-based early childhood programs. The administration both at Earl Boyles and at the district level shows great strength and resourcefulness. A number of support programs have already been implemented at the school. This combination of need, motivation and commitment makes Earl Boyles an ideal home for the initiative.

Join the Conversation

See more pictures and read about the Early Works initiative — including the Early Works blog and the most recent status reports — at *early-works.org*.

An Initiative of the Children's Institute

The Children's Institute promotes wise investments and effective action in early childhood. Our work is anchored in a commitment to closing the achievement gap early with cost-effective public and private investments in early learning.

Learn more at childinst.org.

Children's Institute

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