

**A Framework for Supporting Improved  
Early Learning Outcomes during the 2013-15 Biennium**

*Proposed by the  
Early Learning Work Group of the House Democratic Caucus*

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**Goal:** By 2017 ensure every child receives appropriate support and enters kindergarten ready to succeed in school.

**High-Level Measures:** Kindergarten Readiness Assessment and 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading.

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This framework is intended as a specific set of practical steps that can be taken during the 2013-2015 biennium and which lays the groundwork to help Oregon reach its early learning goals by 2017.

**Pathways:**

**1) Kindergarten Readiness**

Currently the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) is being piloted in select school districts around the state and is scheduled to be implemented statewide beginning with the 2013/14 school year. The success of the KRA will be largely influenced by schools' ability to integrate and implement the tool into classrooms.

Proposal: Support an investment for the Department of Education to provide technical support to school districts as they institute the KRA. Support should include specific training on the KRA, its goals, and appropriate follow-up protocols.

Proposal: Work with the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission to support the development of a kindergarten endorsement that promotes a teacher's knowledge of early learning programs and the importance of transitions from pre-K to kindergarten.

**2) Early Childhood Screening**

A critical component of ensuring young children have access to appropriate interventions that prepare them for kindergarten is identifying developmental gaps at an early age. Oregon currently does not employ a standardized screening model that can be utilized in the myriad settings where a child could be assessed.

Proposal: Ensure standardized screening and appropriate referral across all home visiting models including Healthy Start, Relief Nurseries, and Coordinated Care Organizations (CCOs). Require all early learning programs, human service and health care related programs that receive state resources implement a standardized screening tool and referral guidelines approved by the Early Learning Council (ELC). Outcomes shall be integrated into the data system being developed by the ELC.

Proposal: Expand assessments and supports provided by Healthy Start Family Support Services to include children age 0-3 and their families.

### **3) Enhance Early Childhood and Health System Integration**

Research shows that the greatest opportunity for influencing a child's development occurs in the first three years of life. This includes pre-natal care for mother and baby, well-baby checks for newborns and infants, and continued exams for at-risk children.

Proposal: Require the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and the ELC to work collaboratively with CCOs in developing performance metrics around prenatal and infant care that align with early learning outcomes. By 2016, CCOs and other state-supported health delivery models shall ensure that 75% of women are receiving prenatal care in the first trimester. By 2017, 95% of women should receive prenatal services in the first trimester and well-baby checks.

Proposal: Create an Early Learning Incentive Pool to align our early learning and health systems for improved 0-3 developmental outcomes.

Proposal: Guarantee that all women in Oregon have access to prenatal care.

### **4) Support Access to Quality Child Care**

The ELC is currently engaged in an effort to establish a tiered quality rating and improvement system (TQRIS) for child care providers that establishes a set of progressively higher standards for evaluating the quality of an early learning and development program. An important component to the success of making sure children enter school ready to succeed is guaranteeing that our child care system provides quality, access, and affordability. For many families, the best and most affordable option is found outside of child care centers with friends, family, or neighbors.

Proposal: Require that the TQRIS incorporate a pathway for greater quality for Friends, Family and Neighbor (FFN) care that is subsidized by the Employment Related Day Care Program.

Proposal: Ensure Employment Related Day Care (ERDC) maintains its ability to help families find quality child care that supports a child's development while allowing parents the opportunity to work.

### **5) Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education**

All children, including those with the most significant disabilities, are born and live ready to learn. Students with disabilities face unique barriers that may make it difficult for them to demonstrate proficiency on indicators for readiness for kindergarten success. Early childhood programs and kindergartens must be ready to help children access the general curriculum and opportunities for learning despite physical, developmental, intellectual or sensory disabilities.

Proposal: Ensure that all children with a need have access to a comprehensive plan for communication by age 3. This could include oral language, sign language, assistive technology, or augmentative communication. EI/ECSE programs and early childhood programs should prioritize making needed technology available to these children in a manner that allows the child to engage in expressive and receptive communication across all learning, home, and community settings.

## 6) Encourage Innovative, Evidence Based Service Delivery

The current proposal to improve early learning outcomes through the creation of Community-Based Coordinators is modeled upon the creation of CCOs in the health care system. In practice the current construct of early learning services, how resources are connected to services, and the amount of money in the system creates a far different policy environment and raises doubt about the ability of CBCs to produce improved early learning outcomes. A vision of transformed service management needs to be appropriately demonstrated before being scaled statewide.

Proposal: Foster the creation of locally developed models of early learning service delivery by funding five demonstration projects in communities interested in enhancing cooperation and service delivery among school districts, the local health care community, local human service programs, and other service providers that impact early learning outcomes for children ages 0-6. Pilot programs shall demonstrate their effectiveness connecting program outcomes to results from the KRA.

Coordinators of Early Learning Services (CELS) in the demonstration projects will be granted flexibility in how they approach their work. At the same time, they should convincingly demonstrate five core characteristics across their community strategies:

1. **Supporting families.** Oregon's children are best raised and supported in families. All efforts are driven by the belief that families are the first teachers and share responsibility for the successful education of their children.
2. **Reaching the most at-risk children.** Identifying the most at-risk populations will help prioritize limited resources and support those children who most frequently arrive at school unprepared for kindergarten. In addition, creating incentives for EI/ECSE programs to ensure services are delivered in community preschools and child care programs that serve all children will more effectively reach children exhibiting special needs earlier.
3. **Utilizing coordinated and transparent budgeting.** All federal, state, foundation, and non-profit funding streams should be considered potential tools in producing better outcomes. Maximizing all related funding streams and securing matching dollars will enhance the long-term sustainability of this effort.
4. **Ensuring accountability.** Shared accountability for outcomes – at the community and state levels – will help to sustain system changes.
5. **Seeking effective integration.** Integration across delivery systems and prioritizing successful transitions between services is integral to success. The service sectors to engage include health, K-12 education, early learning and prekindergarten services (including early intervention efforts and the full range of child care settings and providers), social/human services, community members, and federal, state and local governments.

Successful demonstration projects will be asked to exhibit competency in five outcome areas:

- 1) Improved results for the most at-risk children, including ability to identify, evaluate, and implement coordinated strategies to ensure kindergarten readiness and ensure needed accommodations are in place on day one of kindergarten. This also includes a shared recognition by all early childhood programs and school districts that disability is a natural and positive aspect of the human experience.

- 2) Meaningful engagement with the populations to be served (including strategies for identifying “unknown” populations).
- 3) Integrating efforts across the identified six sectors toward early learning outcomes and showing inclusion of and coordination with county governments.
- 4) Collecting and using data for continuous learning and adjustment toward achieving results.
- 5) Fiscal soundness, including but not limited to budgeting, procurement, debt and risk management, and contracting for results, rather than services, process, or activities.

Proposal: Require the ELC to work with demonstration projects and all funding entities to identify opportunities for gaining greater flexibility in the use of early learning resources to achieve greater outcomes in the areas detailed above. Outside of the fact that the system is underfunded, the lack of flexibility with existing funds is a critical barrier to directing resources to improve outcomes. The effort thus far has been insufficient and the budget report does not advance our knowledge of options, such as new revenue streams or true funding flexibility. The ELC should complete its work and provide a comprehensive plan for maximizing early learning resources by December 1, 2013.

## **7) Budget Proposal**

The Governor’s Recommended Budget provides for some increase in funding across several early learning programs. It would be appropriate for these recommendations to be reviewed based upon the recommendations detailed in this early framework and based upon a focused set of principals detailed below.

Early Learning Resource Allocation Principles:

- Focus on establishing a strong foundation for 0-3 services.
- Ensure a stable transition between services along the 0-6 continuum.
- Seed greater integration of services that can be scaled up statewide.
- Support local bonding efforts to construct integrated early learning environments.