

On behalf of the Neah-Kah-Nie School District, I would like to share my testimony regarding the importance of investing in early learning. The Neah-Kah-Nie School District has a long-standing history of investing in early learning. The school district has been investing in Full-day Kindergarten since 2007 and has a long-standing district-sponsored preschool program. With a move toward P3 Alignment, the district has invested in improving and expanding this program over the course of the last three school years.

The district invested in improving the preschool program with the goal of sending district preschool students to kindergarten with a higher level of readiness. The preschool teacher position, previously a classified position, is now filled with a licensed Early Childhood and Elementary endorsed teacher. The program, previously scheduled for two and half hours, four days a week, is now scheduled for three hours a day, five days a week.

The district has also invested in expanding the preschool program with the goal of increasing the number of students in our district who are academically and socially/emotionally ready for Kindergarten. In order to reach more students, the preschool program is now able to serve 40 students, with two preschool sessions, instead of one. The district also provides a generous sliding scale for tuition to make it accessible to low-income families. The district also provides transportation to and from preschool to make the program further accessible, even to families who live in rural areas.

2013 and 2014 Oregon Kindergarten Assessment Data for the district shows a clear advantage in terms of readiness for our students who were able to attend a preschool program, especially in Early Literacy skills. The tables below show a district-generated comparison of students who attended other preschools in the area, students who attended Neah-Kah-Nie Preschool, and students who did not attend preschool. These tables clearly outline that students who attend preschool enter Kindergarten with a significant advantage over students who have not attended preschool. Furthermore, it shows the even greater advantage for students who attended the district-sponsored preschool program. The difference, particularly in early literacy skills, is truly profound. Students who did not attend preschool in our district entered Kindergarten with negligible skills to support them in learning to read and write.

2013

	<i>Approaches to Learning</i>			<i>Early Mathematics</i>	<i>Early Literacy</i>	
	<i>Self-Regulation</i>	<i>Interpersonal Skills</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Numbers & Operations</i>	<i>Letter Names</i>	<i>Letter Sounds</i>
State Average	3.5	3.9	3.6	8.0	18.5	6.7
Students Attending Local Non-District Sponsored Preschool Average	3.71	4.25	3.89	8.47	20.72	6.38
Students Attending NKN Preschool Average	3.68	3.83	3.73	8.67	30.07	14.47
Local Students Not Attending Preschool Average	3.52	4.27	3.77	7.12	10.92	2.52

2014

	<i>Approaches to Learning</i>			<i>Early Mathematics</i>	<i>Early Literacy</i>	
	<i>Self-Regulation</i>	<i>Interpersonal Skills</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Numbers & Operations</i>	<i>Letter Names</i>	<i>Letter Sounds</i>
State Average	3.6	3.9	3.7	8.0	17.7	6.6
Students Attending Local Non-District Sponsored Preschool Average	3.71	4.5	4.3	8.0	20.1	7.1
Students Attending NKN Preschool Average	4.3	4.7	4.4	10.0	34.8	18.5
Local Students Not Attending Preschool Average	4.2	4.4	4.3	8.7	8.9	1.9

To further support our district efforts toward early learning, the Neah-Kah-Nie School District applied for and was awarded a Kindergarten and Early Learning Partnership and Innovation Grant. Funds from this grant have enabled us to purchase research-based assessments and curriculum to help us to meet the needs of all learners, identify students who are at risk, diagnose instructional needs, and provide early intervention to get those learners on course for meeting standards. Funds have also been used to enhance the connection between work at Neah-Kah-Nie Preschool and the work that is happening in the primary grades at the local elementary schools. This has enabled us to further align our efforts to make sure the instruction at Neah-Kah-Nie Preschool supports the learning students will encounter in Kindergarten and that Kindergarten instruction is responsive to the learning that has already occurred at Neah-Kah-Nie Preschool. We are also using grant funds to draw connections between school and family through the development of a series of family nights where authentic relationships are being established, enabling us to support parents in supporting their children’s social/emotional, and academic development.

The Kindergarten and Early Learning Partnership and Innovation Grant has also enabled us to improve access to our preschool program. Grant funds have enabled us to convert an existing space into a sensory gym, where in partnership with NWRESD and Tillamook Hospital, occupational and physical therapists have been able to teach us how to support students with special needs, particularly students with Autism Spectrum and Sensory Processing Disorders. This has greatly improved our ability to offer services to students with special needs. Additionally, access to our program has been improved through spending grant funds to expand transportation to reach students who would not have been able to attend without adding in a bus stop very near their homes.

Through prioritizing our local funding and seeking out grant funding, the Neah-Kah-Nie school District has made a commitment to supporting our youngest learners. As a district, we recognize the value of investing in early learning. The 3-3 literacy initiative supports and builds on the work that we’ve been doing to close the achievement gap. We’re excited that there’s a state effort on 3-3 alignment that is sensible and will make a difference. I urge you to support the work that is included in SB214. Truly, there is no better investment in education.

Sincerely,
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