

Early Learning: 3-3 Literacy Initiative

Testimony of Dr. Maryalice Russell, Superintendent, McMinnville School District



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Early Learning: 3-3 Literacy Initiative

Chair Arnie Roblan and members of the Senate Education Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you in support of the 3-3 Literacy Initiative. I am the superintendent of McMinnville School District, and I want to share the early learning initiatives and teaching and learning strategies that we have implemented that have increased student achievement and accelerated academic growth at rates significantly above state average. McMinnville is the only school district in Oregon to have three schools identified as Model Schools for two consecutive years and two schools identified as Model Schools this year. The following initiatives have been essential to the success we have experienced in McMinnville:



- **Research-based instructional strategies**

McMinnville School District has invested in providing district-wide, intensive and sustained professional learning and job-embedded instructional coaching in Power Strategies for Effective Teaching. These research-based, high-leverage strategies are focused on activating learning, engaging the learner, and strengthening literacy. The strategies are utilized on a daily basis in all of the district's Pre-K-12th grade classrooms, providing the consistency and continuity that students need in order to master rigorous learning standards.

- **Common formative assessments/Data Teams**

Common formative assessments are teacher-developed, standards-based, short cycle assessments that provide the critical evidence of student learning that Data Teams use to monitor student performance, analyze instructional strengths and gaps, establish goals, and determine instructional next steps and result indicators for individual students. Data Teams collaborate to examine student performance in structured, twice-monthly scheduled meetings that focus on the effectiveness of teaching and learning. The Data Teams process exemplifies, both broadly and concretely, the intentions of the standards and the content and skills to be taught and learned.

- **Ready for Kindergarten**

McMinnville School District, in partnership with community-based service clubs, is in its fourth year of providing the Ready for Kindergarten (R4K) program free of charge to parents of underserved children, birth to five. The R4K program features three child development workshops per year (fall, winter, and spring) that are provided in both English and Spanish and are targeted to the age of the child (birth to one, one to two, etc.). In addition to the child development instruction and coaching, each family leaves each workshop with a bag of new, high-quality, developmentally appropriate books and toys designed to foster healthy child development. Childcare is provided onsite and each workshop begins with a healthy family meal and an opportunity to connect with community-based resources and services. Thirty-six percent (36%) of families served in R4K are English Learners, 60% are Hispanic, 13% have children with disabilities, and 100% are economically disadvantaged. Despite multiple factors that place them at academic risk, four year olds who participated in R4K last year performed 25.4% above state average on letter names, 52.2% above state average on letter sounds, and 2.5% above state average on numbers and operations on this fall's Oregon Kindergarten Assessment.

At the R4K workshop this winter, I spoke with a couple who intentionally sought me out to tell me what a positive difference R4K has had on their ability to support their youngest child's learning and development. They have older children who attend district schools, and they stated how much they wish they would have had the R4K program back when their older children were toddlers. Thanks to the R4K program, these parents feel far more competent and confident to be their child's first and best teacher, and their aspirations and expectations for all their children have increased significantly as a result of the knowledge and capacity they've gained.

○ **Half-day Pre-K program for underserved four-year olds**

McMinnville School District provides a pre-K program for disadvantaged four year olds. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of children enrolled in pre-K are Hispanic, 50% are English Learners, 7% have been identified as having disabilities, 7% are migrant children, and 100% are economically disadvantaged. On the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment, Hispanic students who attended the district's pre-K program—45% of whom are also English Learners—performed 32.5% above state average for Hispanic students on letter names and 59.3% above state average on letter sounds. In addition to the pre-K programs at Buel and Newby Elementary schools, and in collaboration with the Yamhill Early Learning Hub, district kindergarten teachers provide professional development on a monthly basis to state approved childcare providers in order to increase the quality of early learning programs throughout the county.

○ **Full Day Kindergarten**

Prior to the economic recession and the reduction in the State School Fund, McMinnville School District provided full-day kindergarten to students enrolled at Buel Elementary, the district's highest poverty school. An analysis of student achievement data on 3rd and 4th grade state reading and math assessments, among students who attended full-day kindergarten, as compared to a demographically matched group of district students who did not attend full-day kindergarten, documents that students benefited significantly from the full day program. Full-day kindergarten students performed 16.7% above half-day kindergarten students in 3rd grade reading, 20.7% above in 3rd grade math, 15.9% above in 4th grade reading, and 27.6% above in 4th grade math.

○ **Extended Learning Opportunities**

McMinnville School District provides a variety of extended learning opportunities, including the following:

- Kindergarten intersession for underserved students performing below proficiency, adding one additional hour per day of instruction to the district's half day kindergarten program
- Summer transition camp for incoming kindergarteners
- Summer transition camp for incoming 1st graders
- Afterschool targeted interventions in reading and math for K-5th graders performing below proficiency
- Saturday School focused on reading and math literacy

Fifty-percent (50%) of Oregon children are born into economically disadvantaged families and 40% have additional factors that put them at academic risk. Approximately 40% of children enter kindergarten with the development typical of three and four year olds. These children will have to make two years of academic growth for three consecutive years to meet reading standard by the end of 3rd grade, a key predictor of academic and life success. Nationally, only 15% of students who require remediation

beyond 3rd grade ever reach standard. School districts spend, on average, \$64,000 more per student over thirteen years of schooling for remediation that most often fails to achieve its objective.

A breadth of research documents that early childhood is the most potent time to prevent achievement gaps from developing and becoming entrenched. The real-rate-of-return on investment in early learning has been documented to be 7:1 or greater. To attain and sustain Oregon's 40-40-20 goal, I urge the Senate Education Committee to support the 3-3 Literacy Initiative by investing in early learning and, most importantly, by adequately funding K-12 education to ensure success for all Oregon students. Eliminating the achievement gap among underserved students and fostering a more equitable public education system is an economic and democratic imperative that is core to the future livelihood of our state. Doing so will require that the state invest in:

- **Pre-K/Kindergarten transition services**
- **Full-day Kindergarten**
- **Universal Pre-K for three and four year olds**
- **Child development instruction, coaching, and resources for parents of disadvantaged children ages birth to five**
- **Adequate and stable funding of K-12 education**

Sincerely,



Dr. Maryalice Russell