

TESTIMONY FOR 3 TO 3 LEGISLATION

Chair Doherty and Committee:

Kindergarten readiness is one of the most important tasks at hand. There is an expectation that children are reading by the end of Kindergarten. If children do not have preschool, they will not arrive at Kindergarten with the skills they need to be successful. Children who start out behind tend to stay behind because there is so much to learn in Kindergarten that children who do not have basic skills find it difficult to catch up.

The early childhood community in Harney recognizes that preschool is important and that the transition from preschool to Kindergarten is equally important. Harney ESD has been a leader in early childhood for many years by making early learning a priority. Harney County is an isolated frontier community and services are limited. In order to maximize the dollars that we do have, Harney ESD created an early childhood center that provides seamless services to families of children birth to five.

If children have the opportunity for preschool beginning at age three, the outcomes for these children increases measurably. From my experience, children that come to preschool at three spend the first year working on self-regulation, a predictor of future success. If children can learn to function with other children by taking turns, waiting for food, learning to sit in circle and playing cooperatively, then they will be ready to learn more targeted academic skills when they are 4 which will prepare them for Kindergarten.

In Harney County there is a strong relationship between early childhood and the school district. This past year, Kindergarten teachers observed classes at the Early Childhood Center and teachers from the Early Childhood Center observed the Kindergarten classes. The Kindergarten teachers came to a parent night at the Early Childhood Center to talk with parents about expectations for entering Kindergarten and what they could do at home to help. Training is shared between the school district and the Early Childhood Center.

Both the school district and the Early Childhood Center sponsor a robust transition plan that now includes all the other preschool providers in the district:

1. In the spring, children from the Early Childhood Center spend a half day at the elementary school.
2. Each preschool student is partnered with a Kindergarten student for the time they are at the elementary school.

3. Kindergarten teachers plan an appropriate activity in their classrooms for the preschool children.
4. Then the preschoolers go to the gym for a fun time of activities at various stations.
5. The last activity is playing on the playground. While the preschoolers are on the playground, the Kindergarten teachers talk to the parents about summer activities to do at home and share what Kindergarten looks like.
6. Each preschooler leaves with a box of activities to do over the summer.

The strong connection between the K-12 and the Early Childhood Center in Harney County has proven to be a bonus for all. The preschool children benefit by being ready for the challenges of Kindergarten. The teachers benefit by complimenting and enhancing a continuum of learning that makes the transition to Kindergarten better. Parents benefit by making positive early connections to the K-12 system. Everyone wins! This is why we stand united in making sure that the 3 to 4 literacy initiative, SB 214, is a reality. It will help build on the great work we are already doing in county and make it so that every child in Oregon can read by the third grade

Respectfully submitted by:

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