

Lane Early Learning Alliance

3171 Gateway Loop
Springfield, OR 97477
tel 541.741.6000
fax 541.726.4150

earlylearningalliance.org



February 23, 2015

House Committee on Education
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street
Salem, OR 97301

GOVERNANCE CONSORTIUM

SHELDON BERMAN

Eugene School District 4J

NANCY BISCHOFFS

Early Learning Stakeholders

MARIAN BLANKENSHIP

PacificSource Health Plans

NOREEN DUNNELLS

United Way of Lane County

DEBI FARR

Trillium Community Health Plan

COLT GILL

Bethel School District

TINA GUTIEREZ-SCHMICH

Bethel School District

ALICIA HAYS

Lane County

KAREN GAFFNEY

Lane County

JOHN LIVELY

Oregon State Representative

JUDY NEWMAN

Early Childhood CARES

SUE NORTON

Lane Community College

KRISTA PARENT

South Lane School District

JOHN RADICH

Department of Human Services

GEORGE RUSSELL

George Russell & Associates,
LLC

ANNIE SOTO

Head Start of Lane County

LARRY SULLIVAN

Lane Education Service District

RENEE VAN NORMAN

Early Learning Stakeholders

JENNIFER WILKS

Parent Representative

Dear Chair Doherty and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Lane Early Learning Alliance (Hub), I am pleased to submit this letter of testimony in support of Oregon's Age 3 to Grade 3 Literacy Initiative (SB 214). Local partners agree that sufficient funding for the entire education continuum, from birth to adulthood, is essential to achieve our State's 40/40/20 goal. Reducing funding in any part of the Birth-20 educational continuum will decrease outcomes for Oregon's students.

Reading proficiently by third grade is one of the single greatest predictors of lifelong success; however, in Lane County over 1,000 students - or 31.6% - were not reading at grade level in third grade in the 2013-14 school year.

The Lane Early Learning Alliance is focused on addressing these learning gaps early by ensuring children enter kindergarten ready to learn, that families are stable and attached, and that services are coordinated into one system that effectively meets families' needs.

We have firsthand experience with the impact that schools' partnerships with community-based organizations can have on children's early literacy and school readiness skills. Working with OSLC Developments, Incorporated and the Creswell and Eugene 4J school districts using funding provided through the Kindergarten Partnership and Innovation grant, this past summer we were able to begin scaling an evidence-based school readiness program that has been proven to increase the early literacy and social emotional skills of kindergarteners, the Kids in Transition to School (KITS) program.

The KITS program has been shown in randomized clinical efficacy trials to improve children's early literacy and social emotional skills prior to kindergarten. Gains continue to positively affect the children's adjustment in kindergarten and first grade. Additionally, parents' skills improve and this leads to increases in parent involvement in the children's schooling. The KITS program has worked with dual language learners and their parents as well as families from a range of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. United Way of Lane County, and now the Lane Early Learning Alliance, has a long history of successfully partnering with the KITS program and local school districts to provide this summer learning opportunity.

Developed at the Oregon Social Learning Center, the KITS program is a 16-week school readiness intervention for children and their parents that takes place in the summer eight weeks prior to kindergarten entry and afterschool for the first eight of school. The KITS program provides a boost to entering kindergartners' literacy, self-regulation, and social skills through a 24 session school readiness group for the children and a 12 session workshop for the parents.

This partnership is an excellent example of the types of programs that will be supported by the Age 3 to Grade 3 Literacy Initiative and proof that such programs can be very successful in helping children prepare for long-term reading and school success.

KITS is one component of the Lane Early Learning Alliance's comprehensive approach to closing the opportunity gap early. For example, through our Early Literacy grant efforts we have also:

- Trained over 100 local early learning providers in evidence-based early literacy curricula;
- Established a book rotation program that currently serves 350 parents through our network of school-based Family Resource Centers and 60 child care providers through our local Child Care Resource and Referral agency;
- Distributed over 2,000 books to children through our three Summer Reading Spots program held in local parks in conjunction with Food for Lane County's Summer Lunch Program.

While our partnership with the KITS program and our early literacy efforts are strong stories of success, there is more work that must be accomplished to strengthen partnerships between families, community-based providers, and schools to fully support students in their transition from early learning to the K-12 system. The Age 3 to Grade 3 Literacy Initiative would allow many more school districts to take advantage of summer and afterschool programs such as KITS that would greatly enhance the skills of children and the abilities of their families to support these skills. Such opportunities are critical to reaching Oregon's 40/40/20 goals.

Sincerely,



Holly Mar-Conte
Director of Education
United Way of Lane County and the Lane Early Learning Alliance