



Beth Unverzagt, Director
Testimony for Age 3 – Grade 3 Initiative

We are in favor of the age 3 grade 3 reading investment.

We believe it is critical to recognize that the opportunity gap between low and high-income children represent one of the most important, yet least acknowledged, causes of underachievement in the United States. National research combined with harrowing statistics of over 14,000 - the 34% that are not reading at 3rd grade level reading, highlights the need for significant intervention.

We know reading by third grade is critical to student success.

- Programmatic longitudinal research clearly indicates that deficits in the development of phoneme awareness skills not only predict difficulties learning to read, but they also have a negative effect on reading acquisition.
- Children raised in poverty, those with limited proficiency in English, those from homes where the parents' reading levels and practices are low, and those with speech, language, and hearing handicaps are at increased risk of reading failure.

In addition, a growing body of national research establishes lack of access to expanded learning opportunities in afterschool and in the summer is as a contributing factor to the “achievement gap” between low and high-income students.

This research tells us that roughly two-thirds of the ninth-grade gaps between lower and higher income youth can be attributed to unequal access to afterschool and summer learning opportunities during the elementary school years (Alexander et al. 2007).

We know that with summer learning loss.

- Students typically score lower on standardized tests at the end of summer vacation than they do on the same tests at the beginning of the summer. Most students lose about two months of grade level equivalency in *mathematical* computation skills over the summer months.
- Low-income students also lose more than two months in *reading* achievement, while their middle-class peers make slight gains.
- Children gain weight three times faster during the summer months, gaining as much weight during the summer as they do during the entire school year.
- Parents consistently cite summer as the *most difficult time* to ensure that their children have safe and productive things to do. These challenges may stem from lack of awareness, affordability, and availability of summer learning opportunities.
- More than half of families, 51% surveyed in spring of 2014 say they want their children to participate in a summer learning program.

Furthermore, this learning loss is cumulative—summer after summer, this lag in achievement has tremendous impact on students’ success, including high school

completion, post-secondary education, and workforce preparedness. The phenomenon of summer learning loss is well documented, and a recent comprehensive report from the RAND Corporation¹ encourages policy makers to get involved to help mitigate its effects, particularly among low-income students. We encourage you to do the same.

We know expanded learning opportunities (ELO) that happen afterschool and in the summer increase student achievement.

- Students who regularly attend structured afterschool and / or summer learning programs demonstrate higher rates of attendance in school, have fewer discipline referrals, are more prepared for the academic rigors of school, and demonstrate increased achievement in core academic areas such as mathematics, science, reading, and language arts (Martin, et al, 2007; Farmer-Hinton, Sass, & Schroeder, 2009; Huang & Cho, 2009)
- Participation in afterschool, summer learning, and other community-based programs have been associated with improved academic achievement and improved linguistic and social development of English Language Learners. (Tellez & Waxman, 20110; Hirsch, 20111)

Expanded learning opportunities are evidence-based learning opportunities that complement and build linkages between in-school and out-of school programs by employing hands-on, experiential activities which are culturally relevant and responsive to students' needs and communities served.

Five key components that define expanded learning opportunities ELO's :

- ELO's are offered through strong **intentional partnerships** between schools and afterschool/community-based organizations during before and after school hours, summer, and intersession-learning programs. They focus on developing the academic, social, emotional and physical needs and interests of students through hands-on, engaging learning experiences in afterschool programs, and over school vacations and summer breaks.
- ELO's should be **student centered**, results driven, include community partners, and complement but not replicate learning activities in the regular school day / year. An expanded learning opportunity is designed to improve student outcomes around academic performance, grades, attendance, and student behaviors (task persistence, work habits, pro-social behaviors).
- ELO's actively **engage the families** of the student population in the learning of their child; using a shared responsibility model. Expanded learning opportunities are committed to creating meaningful ways in which families are committed to actively supporting their children's learning and development.
- ELO's are **targeted**, cost **effective**, **affordable** and **scalable** strategies across diverse geographical settings.

First and foremost, you can adopt progressive policies designed to support afterschool and summer learning programs, providing the opportunity for high-need students to make academic gains. Oregon has adopted an ambitious vision for its students to make academic gains, highlighting the state's commitment to inquiry, achievement, and success. By taking a strong stance in favor of age 3 grade 3, we have a tremendous opportunity to keep our students and our state on track to meet our goals—together.
