



David Douglas School District

Don Grotting, Superintendent
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February 22, 2015

Chair Doherty and Committee,

Please accept this letter as written testimony for submission to the Legislature in support of the 3-3 Literacy Initiative. We know that when children are proficient readers by the end of 3rd grade, they are more likely to graduate from high school, which opens the door for their future success. However, in Oregon only 69% of our students are graduating, and only 66% are reading proficiently by the end of 3rd grade. These outcomes are worse for economically disadvantaged students and children of color, with only about 50% meeting 3rd grade benchmarks or graduating from high school on time with a regular diploma. In David Douglas, as well as across Oregon, districts are working to improve these outcomes. Investing in the 3-3 Literacy Initiative is necessary to support communities to close this gap and increase the achievement of all students. We can do this by implementing 3-3 evidence-based programs, focusing on professional development for educators, increasing parent engagement, and working with partners to prepare students for school success.

David Douglas School District (DDSD) is 12 square miles, all within the city of Portland, and is home to approximately 5,800 children aged 0-5 and 3,350 students enrolled in K-3. Of these, approximately 57% are children of color or multi-racial and 24.5% are Hispanic. More than 80% qualify for free and reduced lunch, 43% speak a language other than English at home, and more than 10% were born outside the US. Of the 925 students who entered kindergarten in Fall 2014, as many as 48% had no access to early childhood education (EC) outside the home.

DDSD Kindergarten Assessment data indicates that we need to strengthen three areas (letter names, letter sounds, and numbers and operations) to meet or exceed state averages. The percentage of DDSD 3rd graders who meet the OAKS performance standards is below the statewide percentage in both reading and math. Every racial and ethnic subgroup, including whites is below the statewide percentage of 3rd graders who meet OAKS performance standards in both reading and math. In addition, there is an achievement gap between all DDSD racial and ethnic subgroups as compared to whites at the 3rd grade level.

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Together, these assessments indicate that children are not arriving at school ready for kindergarten, that these gaps are persisting or even widening through 3rd grade, and that we see greater disparities across racial and ethnic subgroups who score lower than their peers at 3rd grade level. We strongly support the 3-3 Literacy Initiative because it includes the strategies we know will improve outcomes. These strategies include shared professional learning for 3-3 educators, family engagement by working with community based organizations (CBO), adoption of evidence-based programs, screening and monitoring, and funding for direct support for program implementation. We are implementing a number of these new programs through the Kindergarten Partnership Readiness Innovation Grant (KPRI) and our work with the Children's Institute (CI) at Earl Boyles Elementary. However, the 3-3 Literacy Initiative funding is key to continue our work and support districts statewide.

Through the 3-3 Literacy Initiative, children will be more successful in their transition from Pre-K to K. More early childhood (EC) providers and K teachers will understand what the other is teaching. Although there is no Common Core for EC, 3-3 will create opportunities to develop a shared understanding of what is being taught Pre-K to 3 and how it aligns. This year, we are convening a Pre-K-K professional learning community (PLC). Teachers are having conversations about screening/assessment, curriculum, student engagement, instructional strategies, progress monitoring, and Pre-K-K Response to Intervention. Teachers are comparing and contrasting the EC foundations/Head Start Framework with the K Common Core. This work supports the adoption of evidence-based practices that are aligned Pre-K-K. The PLC is participating in guided observations in EC settings and K across the district. These visits encourage thoughtful discussion on Pre-K-K practices and a deeper understanding of developmentally appropriate practices for this age group.

In addition, the 3-3 Literacy Initiative supports working with community based organizations to support children and families. We know this is crucial. In DDS, over 58% of children in childcare are in licensed exempt home relative care settings. DDS is working closely with Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR) to connect with these culturally specific childcare providers. Our joint work focuses on increasing relationships and enhancing learning opportunities for children and providers. Training provided by CCR, onsite at our elementary schools, focuses on supporting providers to meet the benchmarks for quality on the Quality Rating and Improvement System. Connections are made when providers get to know the local school and several providers are now participating in culturally specific story times at Earl Boyles Elementary.

The 3-3 Literacy Initiative will assist districts to increase parent engagement through partnerships with our CBOs. We know parent engagement is one of the most important things we can do to improve outcomes for children. In DDS, we are doing intensive outreach with culturally specific CBOs to locate and engage families in "Learning Events" at the 9 elementary schools. These events focus on what parents said they want to know more about in order to help their child succeed in school. Topics include reading, math and behavior. We're working closely with our CBOs to extend learning in after-school programs, summer reading programs, and our Early Kindergarten Transition Program.

DDSD supports the 3-3 Literacy Initiative because it focuses on what works. The components- professional learning communities, early learning program development, effective curriculum, screening and monitoring, extension to after-school and summer literacy programs, systemic professional development and technical assistance, and direct support for program implementation have to be integrated. We know this work must be done and it will only be effective if addressed comprehensively, within a multi-tiered framework. Thank you for your consideration of funding this important initiative.

Sincerely,

Nancy Anderson
Assistant Director of Student Services
David Douglas School District