



240 N Broadway, Ste 214
Portland, OR 97227

LatinoNetwork
www.LatNet.org

info@LatNet.org
503.283.6881

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Senate Education Committee:
Rep. Margaret Doherty, Chair
Rep. Lew Frederick, Vice-Chair
Rep. Sherrie Sprenger, Vice-Chair
Rep. Greg Barreto
Rep. Jodi Hack
Rep. Susan McLain
Rep. Carla Piluso
Rep. Jeff Reardon
Rep. Carl Wilson

Testimony re: Age 3 to Grade 3 Literacy Initiative

Good afternoon Chair Doherty and members of the Education Committee. My name is Carmen Caballero Rubio, I live at 240 NE 58th Avenue, Portland, and I am here in my role as Executive Director of Latino Network. Latino Network is a Latino youth and family serving organization in Multnomah County that provides programs in early childhood, academic supports, and parent and family engagement.

I am here to express my support for the Age 3 to Grade 3 literacy initiative, which aligns families, communities and schools for children's reading success. For more than a year I, along with Latino Network staff, allies and families have been investing our time, advice, and community voice into the development of this critical initiative. This collaboration will provide much needed support to students through the important school transition time of Pre-kindergarten through the K12 system, by providing full day kindergarten programs for all children, and through the development of strong partnerships among districts and community-based organizations and Early Learning Hubs around the state.

We believe this initiative will have tremendous impacts on hard to reach populations in part because of its valuing of parents and community based organizations as critical education partners of schools and teachers. We know because we have experienced it firsthand.

Young Latinos as a segment of the population is growing faster than any other, and at the same time still face significant disparities in education and life, with notably higher rates of poverty, unemployment, teen pregnancy, and incarceration. Particularly vulnerable are low-income immigrant parents and students at risk of school disengagement: youth with low grades, high absenteeism or disciplinary action, have failed a class, experience housing instability, or have changed schools frequently - all indicators of decreased success in school.

In the next ten years Latinos will be a significant part of the economic base in Oregon, yet this growth far outpaces our educational institutions ability to be appropriately responsive. This is why the 3-3 initiative is a timely and important step toward building a new education model for today's students – not just for Latino youth but ALL children in Oregon.

Our current models are leaving too many students behind – these are the students whose families are currently being served by our organization. Most districts demographics across the state are drastically changing, and it is our charge to envision newer, effective ways to close the literacy gap – ways that place equal value on the learning that happens in school, in the home, and in supportive community organizations.

Parents and families are an asset to schools. Research study after research study states that parent involvement and self-confidence are critical factors in a youth's educational success. And speaking Spanish in the home is a plus - bilingualism has been linked to stronger cognitive abilities, and also is a competitive and sought after skill in today's world. When parents are equipped to become successful teachers and leaders within their own families, generations of future Oregonians are impacted.

The good news is that partnerships like the ones 3-3 calls for are working right now. Some individual districts are already partnering with culturally specific providers to bridge the cultural impasses that may exist in their districts and create capacity within the schools to fully engage families of color.

One of these examples is our partnership with Portland Public, Reynolds and Parkrose School Districts to provide our Juntos Aprendemos program, which engages parents early – *before* their children enter school. Juntos Aprendemos brings Latino children ages 3-5 and their parents/caregivers into their neighborhood school for 30 weeks to develop the early literacy, early math and social emotional skills necessary for success in kindergarten.

Meanwhile their parents learn skills to support their children's early learning at home, participate actively in their children's school, develop healthy parent-child communication practices, and promote their children's positive cultural identity. Our children leave Juntos ready to learn in Kindergarten, with literacy readiness skills at 95% and above. Parents exit armed with knowledge about how to support literacy development in the home, and in the school.

Culturally-specific programs make a difference: parents report on its positive effects on their children's confidence, attendance and enthusiasm for education. Parents are hungry for opportunities to connect with schools and school leadership in a manner that values their engagement, history and their language. So much in fact, that we often have waiting lists for our school-based literacy programs.

One father, Genaro, determined to access literacy support for his daughter Itzel, came faithfully, week after week to our Juntos Aprendemos program at Glenfair School in East Portland after being told the program was full. He would arrive each week, with his daughter dressed up and with her hair in braids, holding her hand as they waited together outside the portable classroom

in the rain, hoping a spot would open up. We were eventually able to accommodate Genaro and Itzel in our program, and they are now among our most active families.

School-community partnerships are a formula that works. Our outcomes prove that in our case. The Age 3 to Grade 3 Initiative gives all Oregon communities the same opportunity to narrow the literacy gap and invest in the unlimited potential of every child.

On behalf of the many families, children and advocates, I urge you to please support this important initiative moving forward.

Thank you for listening.