



# Liberty Elementary School

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KRAIG SPROLES  
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Dear Chair Roblan and Committee,

I am writing in support of the Age 3 to Grade 3 Early Learning Initiative. I strongly believe that taken together, the different components included in this initiative will help to close the literacy and achievement gaps that currently exist in our schools.

My support for the Age 3 to Grade 3 initiative comes from my experience as a community educator, public school teacher, and elementary principal. I am currently the principal at Liberty Elementary in the Greater Albany School District. Before coming to Albany, I worked as a principal at Metzger Elementary in the Tigard-Tualatin School District, a teacher in the David Douglas School District, and a Schools Uniting Neighborhoods coordinator in Portland Public Schools. In all of these positions and settings I have seen firsthand the importance of investing in early learning and emerging literacy. Creating an integrated system that better links early childhood providers, public schools, and extended school-day providers is an essential first step toward ensuring that every child comes to kindergarten ready to learn, and every student is a strong reader by 3rd grade. Investing in early literacy pays dividends because students who feel successful at school at an early age establish strong school connections that exist throughout their educational careers. These connections are especially important for children who come from economically disadvantaged homes and children of color.

There is compelling evidence that income disparity between children plays a significant role in how quickly children acquire vocabulary that is essential for early literacy skills. A study by Hart and Risley (2003) found that students from higher-income families will experience 30 million more words within the first four years of life than a child from a lower-income family. They also found that these early vocabulary foundations lay the groundwork for slower literacy gains for children who are economically disadvantaged and accelerated gains for children who come from more privileged backgrounds. Even though poverty does have a powerful influence on school achievement, recent research by Blair and Raver (2012) has demonstrated that the effects of poverty can be remediated by changing the environmental conditions that exist at home and better shaping preschool children's experiences. Programs like home visitations for new parents to model how to use language with children, daycare centers that have strong links to kindergarten curriculum, high quality daycares that have strong links to kindergarten, and coordinated standards between preschools and elementary schools work in concert to accelerate how children to learn and develop. **Waiting to act until a child is already in kindergarten is a loss of precious time in closing the predictable and well-established gaps that exist between our children.**

One of the most promising components of the Age 3 to Grade 3 initiative is the proposal to offer afterschool and summer extended learning opportunities for students. While I was principal at Metzger Elementary we created a JumpStart program for incoming kindergartners and quickly saw the benefits of this type of extended programming. Working closely with local preschool and Head Start, we identified cohorts of incoming kindergartners who needed extra academic and self-regulation supports. We invited those most at-risk children to start school a few weeks early to give them a jumpstart on kindergarten learning. The program focused intensely on both early literacy skills and teaching children the skills to regulate their emotions. Due to lack of funding we were only able to offer this program to a handful of students and families, but the students who did participate outperformed their peers on indicators for early literacy and were able to quickly transition to a full-day kindergarten program. From this program I learned that a systematic approach with targeted interventions that are closely linked to kindergarten can help offset some of the deficits that students bring to school.

It is an exciting time to be an educator in Oregon! The implementation of full day kindergarten holds a promise for better preparing our students to read at grade-level by the 3rd grade and ensuring that all students have the literacy skills to succeed in high school and beyond. The Age 3 to Grade 3 Early Learning Initiative will help us accelerate the gains that will result from full day kindergarten by ensuring that all children come to school ready to learn with a strong foundation of self-regulation skills and early literacy skills. Please support this important initiative and provide all children in Oregon the supports they need to thrive in our public schools.

Respectfully,



Kraig Sproles  
Principal, Liberty Elementary  
Greater Albany School District

Sources:

Blair, C. & Raver, C. (2012). Child Development in the Context of Adversity Experiential Canalization of Brain and Behavior. *American Psychologist*, May–June 2012.

Hart, B. & Risley, T.R. (2003). The Early Catastrophe: The 30 Million Word Gap by Age 3. *American Educator*, Spring 2003. <http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/TheEarlyCatastrophe.pdf>