



Yamhill Community Care Organization
Your Local Health Partner

SB 213: Early Learning Hubs

March 13, 2015

Oregon State Legislature
Senate Human Services and Early Childhood Committee
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Chair Sara Gelsler, Vice Chair Olsen and Members of the Committee:

For the record, I am Jennifer Richter, Early Learning Coordinator with the Yamhill CCO/Early Learning Hub. I am submitting testimony in support of SB 213. SB 213 makes the Early Learning Hubs permanent and continues the work local communities have undertaken to align early learning systems, support thriving families and ensure children are ready to succeed in kindergarten.

Prominent business associations, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Business Roundtable recognize how essential early learning is to a prepared workforce and a strong economy. Focusing on early learning and development provides the most effective and efficient returns when it comes to investments in human capital. Our community has over 4,000 underserved children. These children are less likely to receive services and supports and more likely to struggle in school as a result. It is our responsibility to close this opportunity gap and give all children the best chances for success.

Together we are holding ourselves accountable for better understanding our community needs and working together to meet them. If our Hub receives support this session by making Hubs permanent, we will be able to continue implementing our strategic plan in order to successfully meet designated early learning metrics. For example, those resources may be used to:

- Coordinate across early learning and health systems to ensure that all children receive developmental screenings by their third birthday.
- Train our childcare providers and help to facilitate their QRIS star rating so that our children are receiving quality input from the adults in their lives from their earliest months, thus arriving at school ready to learn.
- Invest in kindergarten transition activities to help children prepare for a smooth and effective transition to the K-12 educational system.
- Hold Ready for Kindergarten workshops in each school district to teach our parents how to prepare their children to arrive at school ready to learn.
- Promote families who are stable and attached through classes and programs such as the financial literacy and ESL classes that are currently being offered, as well as parenting classes (including one for families struggling with addiction). We will soon be offering a series of family cooking and nutrition classes in each of our seven school districts, and would love to have the opportunity to continue such programs in the future.

In addition to these activities, we've brought partners to the table on behalf of children through our Early Literacy grant. Some of the opportunities that have come out of these partnerships include:

- Reach Out and Read: a program that trains doctors in providing literacy education and promotion to families of young children as a regular component of well child and other medical exams. The project includes distribution of free, appropriate books for children, and the reminder to parents that reading daily with their children is critical for successful development.
- Read and Feed: a program that provides free, appropriate children's books and opportunities for story times at locations where free meals are served, including the soup kitchens across our county.
- Summer Library: funds to support the staffing of school libraries to remain open one day a week in conjunction with the USDA summer foods program.
- Professional Development: training for child care and other early learning providers on the importance of intentional teaching in the area of literacy and numeracy to ensure children are prepared for kindergarten and beyond. This gives providers the Pre-K standards which align to kindergarten common core standards so we can be sure they are teaching effectively from the outset.

Having focused goals as a Hub has changed the conversation about early learning in our community. We've changed the way we work together to support community-wide success across sectors and how we determine who our neediest children and families are. Building relationships across sectors allows us to focus less on silos and more on families. For example:

- Our Family CORE universal referral program allows anyone in the county – from a physician to a concerned neighbor – to refer a family with children under five to a central team, which coordinates extra support for that family during this crucial time in the child's development. Our CCO funds the coordinator position, but the partners at the table include nine other agencies who are invested in the wellbeing of our youngest children.
- We have matched funds with another agency to provide bus passes and gas vouchers to folks who need them to get to DHS or WIC appointments, medical appointments, or job interviews. In a rural area such as ours, the lack of access to transportation can be crippling to families' attempts at self-sufficiency.
- Two of our partner agencies have collaborated with Yamhill CCO in a recent grant application to fund an expansion of our relief nurseries to include respite services for families in crisis *before* DHS has to step in.
- The CCO has also recently submitted an application to fund six Service Integration Teams in our communities, where community members and service partners can come together to discuss clients who have needs that cannot be met through any currently available services. In the SIT team currently operational in Willamina, a recent discussion centered on providing much needed tires for a working poor family so the husband could continue to get to his job.

While the last two projects mentioned above are dependent on receiving the outside grants that we have applied for, they show the dreams of this community and what we want to provide, if we are enabled to do so.

We have done significant work in the community to build relationships and create the infrastructure of a true early learning system. I urge your support of this locally driven work and SB 213.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Richter

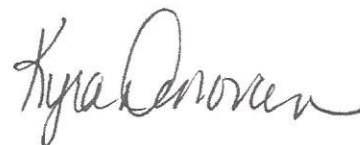
Early Learning Coordinator



Suey Linzmeier

ELC Co-Chair

CCO Board Member



Kyra Donovan

ELC Co-Chair