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March 16, 2015

Senator Sara Gelser

Re: SB 213 - Early Learning Hubs  
Senate Human Services and Early Childhood Committee

Dear Senator Gelser:

My name is Marlene Yesquen, and I am a school board member for the Medford School District and am a member of the Early Learning Council. I am writing to ask you for your support of Oregon's Early Learning Hubs and Senate Bill 213, which will make Hubs permanent and allow them to help align our early learning services, continue working in our communities to achieve Kindergarten readiness, and eliminate achievement gaps.

In Southern Oregon our early learning providers and supporters organized themselves under the name of Southern Oregon Early Learning Services (SOELS). This group includes individuals from Jackson and Josephine Counties. Initially when this group organized in August of 2012, I witnessed a lack of enthusiasm for reforms in early learning and the majority of the people coming together were government employees in early learning. Many knew what others were doing, but were not communicating with each other regarding their work in early learning and how it might improve. They did not have the school district involve, they were not talking to the business sector and private providers, and they were not communicating with the Latino community. After a lot of work and support from the Early Learning Division, this group is talking to each other and other members of the community that are from both inside and outside of the early learning sector. Our Hub in Southern Oregon continues to meet and communicate. They are well organized and are looking at programs differently. They are now actually working with Kindergarten teachers and the school districts to assure early learning services are successful for the children of Southern Oregon.

I was a critic of the work that was happening in Southern Oregon. I almost lost faith that change could take place and people could begin evaluating their work and each other's work more critically. Evaluation of early learning services is a must in order to assure we are effectively providing assistance to a child. There is still much work to be done, but the communication and work that takes place because of the Hub has helped diminish duplication of services and spot barriers to our Early Learning System. It has also allowed early learning service providers to obtain new contacts and new ideas as they have included individuals on their team from the health and business sector.

The Southern Oregon Hub is crucial to our children. As a school board member, I know what happens when a child does not enter Kindergarten ready to learn. These children do not graduate. I also see what happens when a preschool provider does not understand what is required of a child in Kindergarten. More public funds are spent on that child, because they are behind and due to limited budgets, not enough funds are spent on that child so they likely will remain behind and not graduate. Thank you for your advocacy for children. I urge you to support SB 213 and this effective change to Oregon's Early Learning System.

Sincerely,

Marlene Yesquen

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