

SB 213: Early Learning Hubs

Senate Human Services and Early Childhood Committee

March 1, 2015

Chair Sara Gelser, Vice Chair Olsen and Members of the Committee,

For the record, I am Susan Graham, Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education (EI/ECSE) Programs Director for Region 3 (Southern Oregon). I am submitting testimony in support of SB 213, which 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.

First of all, the work of the Early Learning Hub is important. There is a multitude of research which shows that a child's brain develops more in the first five years of life than at any other time, creating the foundation for all future learning and development. In fact, during the first few years of life, 700 new synapses (neural connections) are formed every second. If a child is in child care for 8 hours a day, that equates to over 20 million new synapses formed while in child care. Early learning experiences are focused on a child's learning and development can make a tremendous impact on a child's future.

We can most greatly impact the young children in our counties by working collaboratively with a common vision and shared resources. The South Central Oregon Early Learning Hub is drawing upon the experience and expertise of early learning providers and working to amplify our effort through cross sector collaborations. The Hub is leveraging and coordinating existing programs such as home visiting, Head Start, and relief nurseries to build on the good work of these programs, share lessons learned across service providers, and encourage the reduction of duplicated services in order to provide the most relevant and effective services to families. For example, the local Home Visiting Work Group has made great progress towards developing a collaborative system of coordinating visitors for families, which helps assure that no duplication is happening, and also that no families are falling through the cracks as in the old system.

In my role as Director of EI/ECSE Programs, I have been able to see a real impact that our local Hub has made. As part of the Hub, we are all asked to think beyond the mission and reach of our individual programs to ensure that the children and families in our region who most need services are receiving them. We are accepting collective responsibility for the underserved children and families in our region. For example, the Douglas Early Intervention/Early Childhood Education Program has seen significant growth (25%) in enrollment this school year in comparison to last year due to increased referrals resulting from greater awareness of the program among our community partners.

Our program has also been able to identify more children needing specialized services as a result of more frequent screening by physicians and partner agencies at the earliest stages of development. Developmental screening is one of the tools we use in order to get young children and families the support they need to succeed. In the counties represented by our Hub (Douglas and Lake), we have a target population of 6,000 children. Of these children we have identified the baseline number of those who receive screening prior to age 3 is 1,607. The Hub is working to increase this number of screenings significantly and is developing data collection processes to be able to determine the outcome of these efforts.

Children enrolled in EI/ECSE services will also be benefitting from more options in quality placement in community preschools and daycare settings. As a Hub we've been supporting child care providers to reach early learning and development standards through the QRIS. This work is elevating providers in our community and building our supply of high quality early learning environments.

Please help us in our work to improve learning outcomes for young children in our communities. Strengthening early learning through the Hubs will benefit children, families and our region. I urge your support of SB 213.

Sincerely,

Susan Graham, M.S., C.C.C.

Director of EI/ECSE Programs for Region 3