

Senate Bill 321 Testimony

To: Chair Doherty and State of Oregon House Education Committee

From: Dan Gaffney, *Clatsop Kinder Ready* Coordinator (PreK-3 alignment consortium of 5 school districts) and past Seaside School District administrator

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Throughout the country there is considerable talk about America's youth not receiving/achieving an appropriate education. Sadly, we know that Oregon is one of the worst in terms of high school graduation rates. If we are to make significant changes soon we must provide children, at an early age, the tools to be successful as they enter school and throughout their formal education.

There is considerable research available that illustrates that the first five years of a child's life are critical in determining their health and success in school, as future workers and as contributing citizens. James Hickman, a Nobel Prize winning economist specializing in the economics of human development, has 35 years of data that indicates the economic benefits for people who attend quality preschool programs. Analysis of the Perry Preschool program shows a 7% to 10% per year return on investment as well as reduced costs in remedial education, health and criminal justice system expenditures. The estimated return on investment is \$7 for every dollar spent.

By partnering with parents, childcare providers, preschools and other professionals that interact with young children we can support a child in developing their potential. This partnership is critical for all children and the State of Oregon. Efforts are underway to align developmentally appropriate strategies and resources, PreK-Grade 3. If children are not involved, their development will fall behind. If they are behind when they start kindergarten they must work harder to catch up to their peers. Unfortunately, many children never will. These continued struggles impact their self-esteem, motivation, self-control and sociability.

I have addressed these issues regarding preparation for kindergarten because I have witnessed during my 13 years as an elementary school principal and 4 years

as special education director the struggles of young children, their families and the educators who work with them. I have seen the social and academic struggles of those who have not been blessed with a family that provides high quality early childhood experiences on their own or as part of a preschool. I have heard parents of children attending kindergarten say “it’s only kindergarten” when their child’s attendance is 60%, 70% or 80%. I have written to my legislators many times to have the compulsory attendance age lowered because I have seen the negative impact on individuals (and their peers) when they do not attend kindergarten and enroll in school for the first time as first graders. These struggles are long lasting and needless.

Now that Oregon has adopted the Common Core State Standards we need to have all 5 and 6 year olds in school where teachers use developmentally appropriate practices to engage children in their own education. These more rigorous standards can and will be mastered. As a result we will find our need for remedial education go down, more engaged learners throughout K-12 schools and our graduation rate go up.

By having all 5 and 6 year old children attend school regularly we will have more time to help them grow at a developmentally appropriate pace rather than using drills and memorization to catch up to peers. We will help children develop an enjoyment of learning, creativity and discovery. We will also be better managers of the funds we use to educate the youth of Oregon. We already provide funds for kindergarten and first grade. Why would we not have all children take advantage of the free and appropriate education that is made available by the tax payers of Oregon?