

Testimony from The Oregon Community Foundation in Support of Continued Funding for “Reach Out and Read”

Submitted by Mary Louise McClintock, OCF Director of Education Programs

Co-Chair Monroe, Co-Chair Smith Warner, Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of The Oregon Community Foundation (OCF) I would like to enthusiastically urge you to support continued funding for the “Reach Out and Read” program through the Oregon Department of Education budget.

OCF, Oregon’s largest foundation, has been investing in early care and education for nearly three decades. It is one of our highest priorities because the early years are the time when our dollars go the furthest when it comes to giving children a strong foundation for success in school and life.

In an arena known for a high return on investment, “Reach Out and Read” (ROAR) is one of the most cost-effective strategies. It reaches very young children and families in a place they already are with regularity: the offices of their primary care physicians; 91 percent of children birth to age six have a routine check-up at least once per year. And it is built on a very simple, compelling premise: delivery of critical information by a trusted authority figure. As you know, ROAR is a national program in which pediatricians and family practice physicians are trained to “prescribe” books and reading at every well-child visit. Physicians model interactive book-sharing, and families take home a developmentally appropriate book after each visit. In numerous national evaluations ROAR has been shown to lead to higher vocabularies in children and more frequent family reading – in many cases, for families who might not otherwise have children’s books in their homes or be exposed to information on how to nurture their children’s literacy and language development.

OCF has invested \$189,000 in “Reach Out and Read” since helping launch the statewide program in 2011. The program has been able to leverage two biennia of modest state funding with support from other foundations and partnerships with Coordinated Care Organizations and other health care providers, community-based organizations and early learning Hubs. Annually Oregon ROAR has reached 121 clinics and 75,000 families, but this is only a portion of the families who could benefit, and demand by additional clinics for training outpaces the capacity of the ROAR program to meet it.

If we are going to reach our goal of kindergarten readiness for all children we need all hands on deck and a variety of tools and touchpoints. The Oregon Legislature can help ensure that more pediatricians and other front line health care providers are equipped to use well-child visits to encourage and support parents in their role as their children’s first teachers. Please keep funding for “Reach Out and Read” in the Department of Education budget.

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