

March 16, 2017

Senator Monroe, Co-Chair
Representative Smith Warner, Co-Chair
Members of the Ways & Means Joint SubCommittee on Education
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Co-Chair Monroe, Co-chair Smith Warner, members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Dr. Ellen Stevenson. I am a pediatrician at Oregon Health and Science University.

Long before a child enters a classroom, we are focusing on child development as a health issue. Early brain development provides the foundation for learning. As physicians, we have a tremendous opportunity and a responsibility to provide families with the tools they need for children to be successful when they start kindergarten.

Waiting to address language development in preschool is already too late. By two years of age, the brain architecture and the brain's processing speed already differ based on parent child language interaction. Reading aloud is the single best activity to increase language exposure and parents should start in infancy. Despite all of the benefits of reading aloud, only half of parents read to their young children daily and fewer than 10% read to their children from infancy.

I would like to very briefly share a story about a 3 year-old girl who came to our clinic for her well-child visit. As soon as the doctor opened the door, Z excitedly opened her backpack to show all of her well-loved books. We all thought this was incredibly sweet. Looking more closely, we saw that every one of those books, her entire library, was given to her through the Reach Out and Read program. They were the only books that she had.

We can write prescriptions for families to read with their child every day and at bedtime and provide the first "dose", the first "book", right in our clinics and offices, benefitting families like Z's.

Research findings from 15 published studies clearly demonstrate that the Reach Out and Read model works. And, it's particularly effective in low-income and bilingual households. Participating parents are more likely to read to their children, have more children's books in the home, and have a six-month developmental gain in their language skills by the time they enter kindergarten. No other early literacy intervention has this kind of evidence base or impact.

With your support of Reach Out and Read, we can spark a life-long love of reading, foster social and emotional growth, increase school readiness, close the achievement gap, and open the doors of opportunity to all of Oregon's children.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I hope to see you on April 13th. I would be happy to answer any questions.