

To: House Early Childhood & Family Support Committee
From: Dana Hepper, Director of Policy & Program, Children's Institute
Date: Monday, February 5th, 2018
Re: Support for Early Childhood Equity Fund (House Bill 4066)

Establishing an Early Childhood Equity Fund is an urgent next step in the creation of a high-quality early learning system in Oregon. Children are born learning and experience their most significant brain development during the first eight years of life. The quality of young children's experiences during this time sets the foundation for all future learning.

Early childhood education has tremendous benefits for children from all socio-economic backgrounds, but high-quality early education is especially beneficial for English language learners, children of color, and children who live in low-income households. When these children enter kindergarten ready for school, they are healthier and less likely to interact with the criminal justice system and have higher earnings throughout their lives.

An increasing number of Oregon's youngest children across the state are children of color and English language learners. Children of color comprise the majority in five Oregon counties and are approaching the majority in the state's most populous county. According to the U.S. Department of Education, English language learners make up a quarter of the student population or more in eight Oregon school districts. This increasing diversity brings great cultural and linguistic benefits to our region. To take full advantage of these benefits, Oregon needs to increase access to programs that are designed to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of our diverse communities. Specifically, we must support the robust development of vocabulary and early literacy skills in a child's home language that is critical for learning English and becoming bilingual.

Thankfully, Oregon has dual language and culturally specific early learning programs that are closing opportunity and achievement gaps. Despite strong results, current state funding for early childhood education is restricted to a small number of programs, keeping organizations that provide culturally specific programming from accessing state funds. The Early Childhood Equity Fund will also provide the state with valuable information about community informed early childhood models that can help close the opportunity gap for young children across Oregon. Now is the time to grow these programs and their impact.

We are excited to support the work of Latino Network, Black Parent Initiative, IRCO, Salem-Keizer Coalition for Equality, Kairos PDX, Coalition of Communities of Color, and many others in proposing the creation of the Early Childhood Equity Fund. We urge Committee Members to support this important legislation and funding.