



DATE: April 9 , 2019

TO: The Honorable Senator Arnie Roblan
The Honorable Representative Barbara Smith Warner
Co-Chairs, Joint Committee on Student Success
Members of the Joint Committee on Student Success

FROM: Julie Scholz, Executive Director, Oregon Pediatric Society
Ellen Stevenson, MD, MPH, Medical Director *Reach Out and Read*

SUBJECT: ROR/Plan for Student Success HB 2019

For the record, we are Julie Scholz and Dr. Ellen Stevenson, a pediatrician, representing the Oregon Pediatric Society (OPS). OPS is the state chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Our members are committed to improving the health and well-being of all Oregon children. We carry out our health equity mission through policy advocacy; quality improvement programs that support practice change; and the ongoing education of providers who serve children.

We submit this testimony in support of the *Reach Out and Read* program, which is included in the Department of Education budget, SB 5015. We are working with the Oregon Early Childhood Coalition and Children First for Oregon advocacy agenda to invest in proven programs and services that support the healthy development of young children. Strengthening this evidence-based early literacy, parent-child attachment, and brain development program statewide will help fulfill the goals of Oregon's new Early Learning System Plan and achieve the state's kindergarten readiness goals. We ask the legislature to consider increasing the current service level funding by \$250,000 to sustain and expand the program throughout Oregon, especially in underserved rural areas.

The AAP formally recommends literacy promotion as an essential component of pediatric care beginning at birth, highlighting Reach Out and Read as an effective intervention. Reach Out and Read gives young children a foundation for success by incorporating books into primary care visits and encouraging families to read aloud together. Reading aloud with a child stimulates linguistic and cognitive development; it fosters motivation, curiosity, and listening skills. When paired with

attention from a caring adult, shared reading promotes the development of lifelong positive associations with books and reading, building a strong foundation for success in school and beyond.

For many families, a well-child visit is the only consistent contact with the health or education systems before their child enters preschool or kindergarten. In Oregon, 97% of children see a primary care provider in the first two years of life providing the only site for nearly universal access during these critical years of early brain development. In fact, pediatric well visits offer 10 to 14 touch points in the first five years of life to reinforce early learning and health promotion messages.

Trained physicians and nurses provide parents with the tools they need to nurture early learning and provide the best start for their children. Through Reach Out and Read, strategies for language development and promotion of early literacy are modeled for parents, and techniques and materials are modified for adults who have low literacy skills or speak another language at home. At each regular checkup from infancy through five years of age, the child receives a new book to take home and keep. Books are chosen to be developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate.

We know from research that providing literacy materials alone is not sufficient to change parent behavior, but that anticipatory guidance and modeling from health care providers does enhance home literacy behavior. Participating parents are more likely to read to their children, have more children's books in the home, and their children have an impressive six-month developmental gain in language skills by the time they enter kindergarten. No other early literacy intervention has this kind of evidence base or impact.

Currently, Reach Out and Read Oregon serves approximately 86,000 children through 170,000 well-child visits. We have 138 program sites and utilize over 1,200 volunteer medical providers and staff. Reach Out and Read, in conjunction with other efforts in the Early Learning plan, can help reach the 40 percent of Oregon children currently unprepared to start kindergarten. With \$300,000 in funding this biennium, Reach Out and Read can continue to support the existing participating children and clinics, increase its organizational capacity and outreach, with the additional goal of increasing the number of children served by at least five percent annually. Many states, including Washington, Georgia, South Carolina and Colorado invest in Reach and Read at levels significantly higher than Oregon has to date.

We respectfully request that your committee support the state's investment in this important program. With your support of Reach Out and Read, we can inspire a



love of reading during the most critical window for brain development, increase school readiness, and open the doors of opportunity for more of Oregon's children.

Thank you for your time and attention to our state's earliest learners. We would be happy to serve as a resource to the committee and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you in person.