

To: Co-Chair Senator Roblan and Co-Chair Representative Smith Warner and Members of the Joint Committee on Student Success

From: Peggy Samolinski, Director, Youth & Family Services Division

Date: March 10, 2019

RE: Support for House Bill 2019

Dear Co-Chair Senator Roblan and Co-Chair Representative Smith Warner and Members of the Joint Committee on Student Success,

I am writing in support of HB 2019 to establish the Fund for Student Success, notably the **early learning efforts** and **statewide initiatives related to school nutrition**.

Early Learning Account

The foundation for who we become as adults, and thus how our communities succeed, is constructed during early childhood. Yet, in Oregon, 3 out of 4 of children in low-income households lack access to the high-quality early learning programs that research shows predicts their success in school and later life. Children of color and English Language Learners are both the state's fastest growing population of young children and face the greatest barriers to opportunity and disparities in educational outcomes. These figures are mirrored in Multnomah County, where two-thirds of the children ages 0-6 living in poverty are from culturally specific communities.

If we hope to see better outcomes, we must invest in early childhood supports for children and families that meet the needs of culturally specific communities. All the programs included in the Early Learning Account within HB 2019 will significantly increase and improve the early learning opportunities available in our state.

In particular, we would like to highlight the Early Childhood Equity Fund (HB 2897 A-Engrossed) as there are many culturally specific programs in Oregon that have developed high-quality, innovative program models that are proven to produce positive outcomes for children of color, immigrants and refugees. We need to take advantage of these effective programs and community expertise to ensure the success of our youngest residents - and therefore, our future economic stability as a state. The state does not currently invest in these proven programs, creating a significant gap in opportunity for our most vulnerable children. The Equity Fund is a step toward addressing this gap, using culturally specific strategies that build off of community strengths and meet family and child needs.

Statewide Initiatives Account- Universal Meals and Breakfast

Multnomah County schools educate 93,000 students per year. Research indicates these students have a better chance of succeeding in academics and life when they have nutritious school meals. Our county has 113,950 people who lack consistent access to adequate food. Many families who experience food insecurity earn just a little too much to qualify for free meals at schools.

The inclusion of Universal Access to School Meals (HB 2760-1) and Breakfast After the Bell (HB 2765-1) in HB 2019 is a critical opportunity to address hunger many of our students experience every day. FRAC's "School Breakfast Scorecard," a national analysis of school breakfast participation, shows that Oregon is 31st in breakfast participation among states and the District of Columbia. This legislation would ensure that students have access to breakfast after the bell at schools with higher rates of poverty. States with similar legislation have demonstrated a significant increase in statewide school breakfast participation.

Universal Access to School Meals (HB 2760-1) fills federal funding gaps for meals so that schools with the highest need will offer lunch and breakfast to **all** students at no cost. Multnomah County schools would see a significant impact from this fund. Over 30 schools could be added to the 35 sites in Multnomah County that currently offer no-cost meals to students without families completing eligibility applications. This legislation would also help families experiencing poverty in the remaining 127 schools in our county because it would increase income eligibility for no-cost meals. Let's make certain our students have nutritious breakfast and lunch as a foundation for them to succeed academically.

I support the Joint Committee on Student Success' proposed Fund for Student Success and appreciate your work on HB 2019.

Thank you,

Peggy Samolinski, Director
Youth & Family Services Division