

Senate Education Committee

Chair, Senator Michael Dembrow
Vice-Chair, Senator Chuck Thomsen
Member, Senator Sara Gelser
Member, Senator Chris Gorsek
Member, Senator Art Robinson

April 5, 2021

Dear Committee Members,

While the full impact of the pandemic has yet to unfold, the crisis has already revealed how precarious the economy currently is for those on the lower end of the wage and experience spectrum.

The COVID crisis has also exposed **serious deficiencies in our programs and systems** intended to provide a safety net during challenging times. From the provision of unemployment insurance to access to childcare, many critical programs and services have failed to meet the challenges posed by COVID-19. Please see the [Reimagine Oregon: Improving Youth-to-Work and Workforce Systems in the Wake of COVID-19](#). In our recent work with four workforce boards and in research we have done in the past three years, we can clearly see the need for better systems and structures.

To return from the COVID-19 crisis as a stronger State, we must strengthen our commitment to those Oregonians most impacted by the COVID crisis. We can't go back to the way things were. The historical inequities highlighted by the crisis cannot be allowed to continue. This will require a fundamental redesign of the systems that make up the state's response to changes in the labor force and economy that:

- Leverages and aligns existing resources, programs, services, and relationships to ensure people and businesses have access to the broadest array of available resources and services.
- Empowers the legislature and communities as partners in implementing equitable, effective approaches to state-funded workforce development programs.
- Emphasizes the need to inform program design and delivery at the local level and provides the structure to "meet people where they are."
- Provides a mechanism to identify and scale best practices, understand system shortcomings, and fill service and resource gaps.

We believe that youth are the future of Oregon and to move students to a fully recovered position in their academic career and social and emotional journey post-pandemic, we would offer the following strategic recommendations in the OST expanded learning space (see how expanded learning is a good investment strategy in this [Return on Investment report](#))

- **Enhance Acces:** Data reveals how youth develop skills and knowledge to help them succeed in life and the workplace, including critical thinking, effective communication, and working with others. This has led the expanded learning field's efforts to increase access to quality afterschool

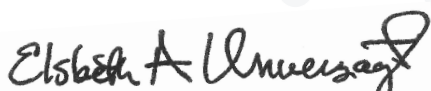


programming across the nation. Yet, current demand far exceeds available supply. We are working now to remove barriers faced by some families, including transportation to and from program sites and, in some cases, cost.

- **Make it Easy to Participate:** In addition to increasing access to quality afterschool programs, the expanded learning field has encouraged consistent and active participation throughout kids' K-12 years. Dr. Vandell recently concluded that consistent participation in afterschool activities during elementary school was linked to higher grades in 9th grade (the high school transition), even after controlling for child and family factors. Economically disadvantaged youth especially benefitted.
- **Communicate Education Lifelong Socioeconomic Benefits:** All parents, regardless of income or zip code, want their children to reach their potential. The ties between educational attainment, academic achievement and lifelong socioeconomic returns have long been established. More and more, we are learning how participation in sports, arts and other activities – all of which are provided in OST programs – positively impacts kids' academics, skills and behavior. According to Dr. Vandell, at age 26, participants who consistently participated in afterschool activities in elementary school reported less impulsivity, less risk-taking and less police contact.
- **Encourage Early Childhood Education AND Afterschool to Minimize Family-related Disparities:** Dr. Vandell's research shows that access to early childhood education and afterschool combined is as – or more – effective as a mother's education level (which is a well-studied predictor of child success). It's why the afterschool field has been focusing efforts on providing afterschool programming to all types of school environments – from urban to rural school districts and advantaged to disadvantaged school districts. More than ever, parents are juggling multiple responsibilities while also tackling their kids' distance and hybrid learning needs. Making these valuable resources readily available to them will resonate and ease their burden.

In the past, out-of-school opportunities have often been an afterthought in addressing education, childcare and economic issues; the pandemic changed that mindset. As such, we would stress the urgency of our shared work. Today, when students and families are requiring different academic, social and emotional supports than in previous years, quality OST programs are open for business and ready to help you meet the needs of our diverse community and ensure an equitable education system for all.

Thank you,



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