

Oregon Early Learning Programs

Early learning programs, including home visiting and child care assistance, support families and the development of children in critical periods of growth.



Early Learning Programs bring long term societal benefits

Early learning programs lay the foundation for a child's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Research shows that the first few years of life are critical for brain growth, and high-quality early education can significantly boost a child's academic success. These programs also promote essential life skills, such as communication, problem-solving, and collaboration, which are key for future learning and success. Early learning programs help close achievement gaps by providing all children, regardless of background, access to learning opportunities. Additional early learning programs also foster the following long-term societal benefits:

Return on Investment	Every dollar invested in early childhood education can yield a return of between \$4 to \$9 dollars in economic benefits.
Family Economic Stability	When parents are assured that their children are receiving quality care and education, they are better able to pursue full-time employment, which enhances household income.
Economic Impact in Community	Investment in early learning programs creates jobs in the sector, and the economic stability of families generates economic activity in local communities.
Supports Business	While many early learning providers are small businesses, access to child care reduces employee absenteeism and increases employee productivity. Forty-two and a half percent of respondents to the Business Community Survey cited lack of child care as a key challenge for employee retention ¹ .
Literacy and Equitable Access to Education	Early learning programs help close the achievement gap between children from families with varied socio-economic backgrounds.

¹ Oregon 2024 Talent Assessment oregon.gov/highered/strategy-research/Documents/Reports/2024-talent-assessment.pdf

Valuing Parent Choice: A mixed-delivery model of programs and settings

In Oregon, a variety of early learning programming options, including home visiting, and settings are available to families to choose from. This mixed delivery model of early learning programs offers parents flexibility by providing a variety of options, such as public schools, private centers, and home-based programs. This approach allows parents to choose the setting that best meets their child's needs, family schedule, and values. It supports diverse community preferences, ensuring that all families, regardless of income or location, have access to quality early education. Ultimately, a mixed delivery model empowers parents to make informed choices that best support their child's growth and development. Although a variety of programs are offered, in most Oregon counties, less than 40% of eligible children under 5 years—and less than 10% of eligible infants and toddlers—have access to a spot in a publicly funded program.

DELC's Core Programs

The variety of programs administered by the Department of Early Learning and Care are included below. Information about additional DELC services and initiatives can be found on the DELC website.

Baby Promise	Provides families with free, full day, year-round, high-quality infant and toddler care (six weeks to three years of age) in child care centers and home-based child care across three regions of the state.
Early Childhood Equity Fund	Supports culturally-specific kindergarten readiness and family support programming, including parenting education, parent-child interaction, kindergarten transition, and Tribal language preservation and revitalization.
Employment Related Day Care (ERDC)	Helps families with children up to age 13 (or who have special needs) who are working, in school, or receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) pay for child care.
Healthy Families Oregon (HFO)	Provides free, voluntary home visiting program that offers support and education to families who are expecting or parenting newborns for a minimum of three years.
Oregon Prenatal to Kindergarten (OPK)	Provides free, high-quality, culturally responsive preschool, infant/toddler and family support services to families who meet federal low-income guidelines or other circumstances that confer automatic eligibility. This is Oregon's state-funded Head Start program.
Preschool Promise	Offers free, high-quality preschool in child care centers, home-based child care, and public schools to children ages three and four living at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.
Relief Nurseries	Offers comprehensive and integrated early childhood therapeutic and family support services to children from birth to five years old.

Supporting program quality

To optimize the impact of the state investments in early learning programming it is critical to focus on the quality of services offered to children and their families. High-quality early learning programs require well-trained, qualified educators who are knowledgeable about child development and effective teaching strategies. Consistent and adequate funding ensures that programs can maintain small class sizes, low child-to-teacher ratios, and provide a nurturing environment. Strong family engagement and support systems are vital, helping parents stay involved in their child's education and fostering a collaborative approach. Additionally, ongoing assessment and professional development for educators are necessary to continuously improve program quality and outcomes for children.

For more information please contact:

Dorothy Spence, *Child Care Assistance Program Manager*, dorothy.spence@delc.oregon.gov

Gwyn Bachtle, *Early Learning Programs Director* gwyn.bachtle@delc.oregon.gov