

Oregon Prekindergarten (OPK) Head Start is the most experienced and successful Early Childhood Care and Education (ECE) program in Oregon. Head Start is a federal program that promotes the school readiness of young children from low-income families by enhancing their cognitive, social and emotional development. Oregon modeled Oregon Pre-kindergarten (OPK) after Head Start to expand high-quality early learning opportunities for lowest-income and highest-need preschool children.

Funding OPK provides children and families with 72 high-quality, comprehensive preschool slots in Union and Baker Counties while providing my agency, Eastern Oregon University Head Start (EOUHS), with the necessary nonfederal match for Federal Head Start funding to serve an additional 105 children and families. Investment in OPK Head Start compounds the Oregon taxpayer dollar in ECE. Further state investment in ECE positions EOUHS to compete for additional Federal investment.

Eastern Oregon is a childcare desert. Approving the Governor's proposed ECE investments will immediately allow EOUHS to serve more children and families 0-5. More center-based care, especially for children 0-3, will provide immediate relief to families.

The recent historical investments that Oregon has made in ECE doubled EOUHS' community impact. Twice the number of children and families have access to equitable and family-centered care in Union and Baker Counties today than only two years ago. This is a celebration! The ECE system in Eastern Oregon integrates across sectors; we all work together to create positive impacts for our children and families. Oregon is on the right path to meet the need for an equitable, integrated, scaled, and family-centered ECE system.

The governor's requested budget is essential for EOUHS to counter the need for comprehensive 0-5 year ECE. EOUHS has a workforce shortage. We need more highly trained and specialized ECE professionals and to pay them competitive wages. We need more high-quality facilities to provide services in safe, developmental environments. If the state of Oregon can sustain the continuous improvement of ECE policy and, program funding, OPK Head Start will improve the services and practices for young children and their families in the local communities we serve.

I urge you to please consider approving all Early Care and Education enhancements found in the Governor's proposed budget. No other public investment will generate the return generated by investing in ECE.