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Background Brief on...

Children's Programs

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Background

Oregon, like other states, provides a number of services to children, ranging from education to nutrition to parental instruction. These services are provided by a number of state and local agencies, with varying levels of coordination. There is a growing realization, however, that improved coordination of these services might be more efficient and also improve delivery of services to children and their families.

Oregon Children's Plan

The Oregon Children's Plan (OCP) represents the continuation of statewide efforts to identify and assist at-risk children and their families. OCP expands the statewide Healthy Start program and is a voluntary program that focuses resources on front-end prevention and treatment, rather than after-the-fact intervention. The identified goals of OCP are:

- To screen all Oregon children and provide follow-up support services to those families that need and request assistance
- To create relationships necessary to improve school performance and prevent involvement in the criminal justice system
- To decrease the rate of child abuse and neglect
- To decrease infant mortality
- To decrease the percentage of infants whose mothers use alcohol and/or tobacco during pregnancy
- To increase the percentage of children entering school ready to learn
- To increase the percentage of children fully immunized at age two
- To increase the percentage of women accessing early prenatal care

Legislative History

In 1999, the Legislative Assembly enacted Senate Bill 555, which required the development of a local, coordinated comprehensive investment plan by each county for at-risk children and their families. Senate Bill 555 expanded local comprehensive plans to contain a continuum of social support at the community level for children from the prenatal stage through 18 years of age and their families. In addition, the measure included alcohol and drug treatment services for youth and their

families and acknowledged that certain intervention programs reduce the probability that a child will enter the juvenile justice system. Senate Bill 555 required the creation of a work group, consisting of more than 60 individuals representing 25 local and state organizations, to develop recommendations for the early childhood component of the measure. The Interim Task Force on Children and Families, also created by Senate Bill 555, consisted of eight state legislators and 19 public and private stakeholders. That group was directed to obtain information relating to early childhood assessment programs, evaluate the feasibility of a statewide coordinated program, and report its findings to the 71st Legislative Assembly. A few of the task force recommendations included: voluntary implementation; universal home visitations in all Oregon counties, ensuring that children with special needs receive specialized home visits and community services.

Building on Senate Bill 555 (1999), the 71st Legislative Assembly enacted House Bill 3659 (the Oregon Children's Plan), which contains three key policy elements:

- Define the goals and elements of a voluntary state early childhood support system
- Define and coordinate state and local responsibilities in carrying out an early childhood support system
- Build upon existing programs and improve linkages between them

Components of the OCP

1. *The Healthy Start Program* – The Healthy Start program was created in 1993 and is housed under the Oregon Commission on Children and Families (OCCF). Primary elements of the program require the counties to provide a voluntary universal screening of first born children and their families, to identify families that would benefit from the assistance, and to provide appropriate support services when the family gives express written consent.

The 2001 Legislature directed resources to expand Healthy Start services throughout the state. Funding for the Healthy Start will be on delayed rollout. The intent of OCP is that existing Healthy Start counties will be funded to serve 60 percent of the counties' first births until January 2003. Counties currently

without Healthy Start will receive 60 percent of first birth funding beginning February 2002, and all counties will be funded at 80 percent of first birth beginning January 2003. Special Session II delayed the implementation of the Healthy Start to seven counties and reduced the statewide first birth funding rate from 80 percent to 65 percent. The Legislature is anticipating that local communities, businesses and foundations will contribute the 20 percent matching funds.

2. *Head Start and Expansion* – The federal government created Head Start in 1965 to provide preschool education for children ages 3-4 from disadvantaged backgrounds. Administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start is available for free to children of families whose income is at or below federal poverty guidelines. Head Start is also required to accept severely handicapped children. Services provided include:

- Health
- Education
- Parent Involvement
- Mental Health
- Social Services
- Nutrition

Grants are administered by the federal government to local public agencies, private non-profit and for-profit organizations, Indian Tribes and school systems, which in turn use the funds to operate programs in the community. Over 826,000 children were enrolled in Head Start nationwide in 1999.

In 1987 the Legislature passed Senate Bill 524, creating the Oregon Prekindergarten program (OPK), patterned after and designed to work side-by-side with, the federal Head Start program. Collectively the programs are known as Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten (OR HS Prek). Oregon preschools are funded through a grant model similar to the federal Head Start, and may accept gifts, grants, and other funds. Oregon statute stipulates that OPK was to be fully funded by 2004, having been modified by the 1995 Legislature from the original full implementation date of 1998. In 1998 only five percent of eligible children participated in Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten. In 2003-04 approximately 61 percent of all eligible children are

served, leaving approximately 6,200 children unserved statewide. Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten received a total of \$141.7 million during 2001-2003, including \$93.1 million in federal funds. This total reflects the economic emergency reduction in OPK funding of \$2.8 million in February 2003. In 2002-2003, there were 303 Oregon head Start Prekindergarten sites in 36 counties, serving 9,749 children. For school year 2006-2004, the number of children served was 9,704.

3. Mental Health and Substance Abuse Prevention – Current resources are available to counties on a fee-for-service basis. Alcohol and drug prevention and treatment services for families and children have been identified in the coordinated local planning process throughout the state. HB 2120 (2003) requires that public health and mental health plans will be a part of the local plan. With increased demand, additional funding and resources were allocated to provide services to children and families that do not have access to other resources. Services include treatment, supplemental wraparound supports for alcohol/drug services, and early intervention services for clients at risk which result in children at risk.

4. Early Childhood System Evaluation – Oregon has contracted to conduct an evaluation of the Early Childhood System of Supports and Services beginning August 2002 and continuing into April 2003. The information will establish a foundation for the multi-year efforts to assess the outcomes of Oregon's Early Childhood System of Supports and Services.

5. Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education - State law (ORS 343.475) requires the Oregon Department of Education (**ODE**) to administer a statewide program of early intervention and early childhood special education (**EI/ECSE**) services for infants, toddlers and preschoolers with disabilities or significant developmental delays. Early intervention services are for children birth through two years of age who have a severe delay in developmental areas such as cognitive, adaptive, physical, communication, social or emotional, and have a need for services. Early childhood special education services are for children between age three and school age who experience a developmental delay or suffer from a federally-defined physical or mental disability or impairment.

Funding for EI/ESCE services is provided by state general funds (78 percent), federal funds (20 percent) and Medicaid fee-for-service reimbursements (2 percent), and distributed via contract to education service districts (**ESDs**) for programs that provide direct services to qualifying children and their families. As of December 2003 there were 1,833 infants and toddlers receiving early intervention services and 5,264 children receiving early childhood special education.

6. Medical Community Partnerships – The OCCF is increasing and developing partnerships between physicians, nurses, hospitals and other early childhood system services by contracting services for training and technical assistance. Training includes development of medical setting partnerships for psychological and social screening and improved linkage with local service and support systems.

7. Statewide Coordination – OCCF, the ODE and the Department of Human Services (**DHS**) have come together to support and develop policies and facilitate statewide planning to embed prevention services throughout multiple agencies, both state and local.

Even Start

One approach for addressing the educational needs of a child is to ensure that he or she has parents who can play an active role in their learning. The primary goal of the federal Even Start program is to help break cycles of illiteracy and poverty. The program integrates several components, including adult education, English as a Second Language, early childhood education, job training, and parenting education.

Oregon's Even Start program is administered by the ODE; it was transferred from the Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development in 2003 to provide a closer tie with No Child Left Behind (**NCLB**) programs. ODE receives about \$2 million annually through NCLB for Even Start, which is distributed via competitive grants to entities that deliver services at the local level, including school districts, education service districts, and community colleges. Each project must be a collaboration between a local education agency and a community-based organization. Grants are awarded competitively for four years, with continuation based

upon performance. There are currently 13 Even Start grantees in Oregon.

Preparing Children for Kindergarten

ODE utilizes six developmental categories to determine the readiness of students to learn:

- *Physical Well Being*: physically healthy, rested, and nourished
- *Language Usage*: Communicates needs, wants, and thoughts verbally
- *Approach to Learning*: Enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities
- *Cognition/General Knowledge*: Ability to follow simple two-step directions
- *Social/Emotional Development*: Plays and works cooperatively, adapts to planned activities and changes, responds appropriately to a variety of situations
- *Motor Development*: Ability to use pencils and other similar objects, ability to walk or run with ease, balance, etc.

Results from a 2000 survey of Oregon kindergarten teachers appear to demonstrate the value of preschool education. While 76 percent of all kindergarteners met all six dimensions of readiness, 83.2 percent of those who attended preschool met all six, as did 67.5 percent of children who attended Head Start. 92.4 percent of preschoolers entered kindergarten meeting at least five of the six dimensions of readiness, while 81.6 percent of Head Start kindergarteners achieved five or more. Overall, children who attended Oregon Head Start Pre-kindergarten performed closer to parity with children from more privileged backgrounds, particularly in physical well being, language use, and approach to learning.

What Other States Are Doing

Many states have begun to focus more attention on early childhood education to help improve education outcomes. Nationwide, state spending on pre-kindergarten programs exceeded 2.4 billion in 2001-02.

Of the 21 states that coordinate child services, seven (Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin) have implemented full-day, full-year services that include prekindergarten. Ohio's Head Start grantees are authorized to partner with child care programs and to access child care funds to establish full-day, full-year services.

Twenty-six states limit state-funded preschool services to children of poor families and to those who are educationally disabled. New York, Oklahoma and Georgia are in various stages of implementing universal preschool, open to any child of preschool age free of charge. New York began its program in 1997 but has been unable to implement it due to budget constraints. Oklahoma allows school districts to offer pre-kindergarten and currently serves over 50 percent of eligible 4-year olds. Georgia has had the most success of the three; utilizing a dedicated funding stream from the state lottery, the state provides preschool to approximately 75 percent of eligible children.

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