



November 2006

## Inside this Brief

- **Background**
- **Oregon's Early Childhood System**
- **Even Start**
- **Preparing Children for Kindergarten**
- **What Other States Are Doing**
- **Staff and Agency Contacts**

Legislative Committee Services  
State Capitol Building  
Salem, Oregon 97301  
(503) 986-1813

Background Brief on ...

# Early Childhood Programs

*Prepared by: Sandy Thiele-Cirka and Patrick Brennan*

## Background

Oregon, like other states, provides a number of services to young children, ranging from education to nutrition to parent education and support. These services are provided by agencies at all levels of government. There is a growing realization that improved coordination of these services not only increases cost-efficiency, but also improves delivery of services to children and their families. As a result, Oregon has made gains in cross-agency collaboration around the planning and implementation of early childhood programs.

## Legislative History

In 1999, the Legislature 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 include a continuum of social support at the community level for children from the prenatal stage through 18 years of age and for 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 71<sup>st</sup> Legislative Assembly. A few of the task force recommendations included voluntary implementation and 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 71<sup>st</sup> Legislative Assembly enacted House Bill 3659, 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 Oregon's Early Childhood System

*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 counties to provide a voluntary universal screening of first born children and their families to identify families that would benefit most from services, and to provide appropriate home visiting support services to those families most at risk when the family gives express written consent.

The 2001 Legislature directed resources to expand Healthy Start services throughout the state. The intent was that all counties would serve 100 percent of first birth families, with state funding covering 80 percent of the cost and local communities, businesses and foundations contributing 20 percent in matching funds. The current funding level, which reflects a \$4 million reduction from the 2005 Legislative Session, allows Healthy Start to serve approximately 41 percent of eligible at-risk first-birth families.

Healthy Start is based on the national Healthy Families America (HFA) model. Healthy Start of Oregon is in the process of completing credentialing through HFA to ensure consistent and quality practice throughout the state. As part of quality assurance, programs are also held to a set of performance indicators linked to funding. Evaluation data of Healthy Start in Oregon supports the pursuit of credentialing, as well as performance-based funding and monitoring. Program quality appears strongly linked to the effectiveness of county-level programs to reduce child maltreatment.

*2. Head Start and Early Head Start* – The federal government created Head Start in 1965 to provide comprehensive child development services, including preschool education, for children ages

3-4, and their families. Early Head Start was created in 1995 to provide comprehensive child development services for pregnant women, children ages 0-3 and their families.

Both programs are administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Head Start and Early Head Start are available for free to children of families whose income is at or below 100 percent of federal poverty guidelines. Head Start and Early Head Start programs are required to reserve at least 10 percent of their total enrollment for children with disabilities. Community and family partnerships are required components of both programs. Additional service requirements include the following:

- Preschool education
- Family supports and education
- Health
- Nutrition
- Mental health

Grants are administered by the federal government directly 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 local communities.

In 1987 the Oregon Legislature passed Senate Bill 524, creating the Oregon Prekindergarten program (OPK), modeled after, and designed to work side-by-side with, the federal Head Start program, serving children ages 3-5, and their families. Collectively the programs are known as Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten (OR HS PreK). Oregon Prekindergarten programs are funded through an open competitive grant application process similar to federal Head Start.

Oregon law stipulates that OPK was to be fully funded by 2004, having been modified by the 1995 Legislature from the original full implementation date of 1997.

Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten received a total of \$152.6 million during 2003-2005, including \$99 million in federal funds. In 2004-2005, there were 31 Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten grantees in 36 counties, serving 9,608 children. This number

represents approximately 60 percent of all income eligible children.

*3. Addictions and Mental Health Prevention Support, and Treatment* – Current resources are available to counties on a fee-for-service basis and through the Oregon Health Plan (**OHP**). Alcohol and drug prevention and treatment services for families and children have been identified in the coordinated local planning process throughout the state. House Bill 2120 (2003) requires that public health and mental health planning be part of local plans. With increased demand, additional funding and resources were allocated to provide services to children and families that do not have access to other resources. The purpose of these behavioral health services is to expand the system that will:

- Support early identification of risks and problem behaviors in young children and their families
- Provide linkages to the behavioral health care and prevention systems of supports and services
- Provide necessary treatment based on a family-centered approach

Eight sites implement an array of services focusing on outcomes that map to the goals of the Early Childhood System. The service population is children 0-8 who are at high risk due to mental or emotional disorders or parental addiction disorders or mental illness, and their families.

*4. Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education(EI/ECSE)* - State law (ORS 343.475) requires the Oregon Department of Education (**ODE**) to administer a statewide program of early intervention and **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 delays in developmental areas such as cognitive, adaptive, physical, communication, social or emotional, and have a need for services or are diagnosed with a medical condition that is associated with a disability. Early childhood

special education services are for children between age three and school age who experience a developmental or communication delay or suffer from a federally-defined physical or mental disability or impairment. Funding for EI/ECSE services is provided by state general funds (72 percent), federal funds (26 percent and Medicaid fee-for-service reimbursements (2 percent). ODE contracts with education service districts (**ESDs**) to provide direct services to qualifying children and their families. As of August 2006, there were 2,341 infants and toddlers receiving early intervention services and 8,021 children receiving early childhood special education for a total of 10,362.

*5. Medical Community Partnerships* – OCCF is developing and enhancing partnerships between physicians, nurses, hospitals and other early childhood system services by contracting for training and technical assistance. Training includes how to link medical settings with community resources for psychological and social screening and how to improve partnerships with local service and support systems, such as linking pediatricians to home visiting programs like Healthy Start and child care.

*6. Statewide Coordination* – OCCF, ODE, the Child Care Division (within the Employment Department) and the Department of Human Services (**DHS**) have come together to support and develop policies and facilitate statewide planning to embed prevention services in multiple agencies, both state and local. The state Early Childhood Team meets monthly to share information, problem solve specific issues, and collaborate on grants and planning efforts. The Early Childhood Team is a subcommittee of Partners for Children and Families, the implementation team tasked with SB 555 Planning oversight and development of state level initiatives based on local plans. Partners for Children and Families makes recommendations to the Oregon Commission on Children and Families, whose membership includes community leaders, agency heads and legislators.

## 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 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 \$1 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 demonstrate collaboration between a local education agency and a community-based organization. Grants are awarded competitively, with continuation based upon performance. There are currently six Even Start grantees in Oregon.

## Preparing Children for Kindergarten

ODE uses 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 2004 survey of Oregon kindergarten teachers demonstrate the value of preschool education. While 80 percent of all

kindergarteners met all six dimensions of readiness, 86.7 percent (up from 83.2 in 2002) of those who attended preschool met all six, as did 73.7 percent (up from 67.5 percent in 2002) of children who attended Head Start. A total of 94.7 percent (up from 92.4 percent in 2002) of all preschoolers entered kindergarten meeting at least five of the six dimensions of readiness, while 86.5 percent (up from 81.6 percent in 2002) of Head Start kindergarteners achieved five or more. Overall, children who attended Oregon Head Start Pre-kindergarten programs are more ready for school on every readiness dimension than those who did not attend preschool. Head Start children from low income families are closing the performance gap.

### *Head Start PreK and Child Care Partnerships*

Oregon Head Start PreK is primarily a part day, part year program for low-income children and their families. Yet some low wage workers need full day and full year services. In order to support low wage workers to maintain stable work arrangements, Head Start PreK grantees are authorized to partner with child care to provide full day/year services and other types of extended day/year arrangements. Partnerships allow working families' access to high quality prekindergarten and child care. Head Start PreK programs place eligible children in existing child care centers or family child care homes or administer a full-day/year round program directly.

### *Universal Head Start PreK Initiative*

Oregon's Universal Head Start Prekindergarten Initiative is designed to support the state's poorest and most vulnerable young children and their families as a top priority and gradually support higher income children until all children receive a high quality preschool experience before entering kindergarten. This approach uses the federal Head Start performance standards as the standard of quality for all children and recognizes that low income children have the highest need for comprehensive services to support positive child outcomes.

Currently, Oregon Head Start PreK, in partnership with federal Head Start, is serving approximately 60 percent of the three- and four-year-old children living at or below 100 percent of the federal

poverty guidelines. The initial goal is to increase the service level to 80 percent during 2007-2009. The full service level is assumed at 80 percent, since some families will choose not to enroll their children. The plan will then expand the income eligibility to 130 percent of the poverty guidelines until an 80 percent service level is attained for this population, after which the income eligibility will be increased incrementally until the 80 percent service level for each income target is attained. As families with higher incomes become eligible and enroll, it is expected that some families may have less of a need for comprehensive services, thus lowering costs as progressively higher income families participate in the program.

#### *Early Childhood Foundations*

Oregon is in the process of finalizing early learning guidelines for children ages birth to five. Referred to as Early Childhood Foundations, the guidelines will align with the K-12 standards and be adaptable for all early childhood settings including child care, Head Start PreK, community preschool, etc. All essential early childhood domains are addressed and include social and emotional development, approaches to learning, physical education and health, language and literacy, mathematics, science, social science, and the arts.

#### **What Other States Are Doing about PreK**

States continue to focus attention on early childhood education to help improve education outcomes. Across the nation, 31 state legislatures committed to increased funding for pre-k in Fiscal Year 2007, offering more families access to voluntary pre-k and improved program quality. Over the past two years, states have increased pre-k spending by more than \$1 billion. No state legislative body authorized a reduction in funding for pre-k during this period. Nationwide, state spending on pre-kindergarten programs exceeded \$3.8 billion in Fiscal Year 2006, up from \$2.9 billion in Fiscal Year 2005.

For a detailed breakdown of what other states are doing around preschool initiatives, refer to ***Votes Count: Legislative Action on Pre-K for FY 2007***,

published October 2006 by Pre-K Now, [www.preknow.org](http://www.preknow.org).

For a summary of 2000 Census data showing a state-by-state breakdown of the percent of three- and four-year-olds who are enrolled in an early childhood program, go to the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) web site at [www.nieer.org/resources/facts/index.php?FastFactID=10](http://www.nieer.org/resources/facts/index.php?FastFactID=10).

For a summary of facts about state Prekindergarten, go to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) at [www.naeyc.org/ece/critical/quickfacts.asp](http://www.naeyc.org/ece/critical/quickfacts.asp).

#### **Staff and Agency Contacts**

Jennifer Olson, Director,  
Early Childhood Programs,  
Oregon Department of Education  
503-947-5662  
[www.oregon.gov/ode](http://www.oregon.gov/ode)

Mickey Lansing, Oregon Commission on  
Children and Families  
503-373-1283  
[www.oregon.gov/occf](http://www.oregon.gov/occf)

Bill Bouska, Department of Human Services  
Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services  
503-945-9717  
[www.oregon.gov/DHS](http://www.oregon.gov/DHS)

Karen Wheeler, Department of Human Services  
Addictions & Mental Health Division  
503-945-6191  
[www.oregon.gov/DHS](http://www.oregon.gov/DHS)

Sandy Thiele-Cirka, Legislative Committee Services  
503-986-1286

Patrick Brennan, Legislative Committee Services  
503-986-1674

*The Oregon Commission on Children and Families  
assisted with the development of this document.*