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Background Brief on ...

Early Childhood Programs

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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 Legislative Assembly enacted Senate Bill 555 that 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 8 state legislators and 19 public and private stakeholders. The 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 Seventy-first Legislative Assembly (2001 legislative session). 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, the Seventy-first Legislative Assembly enacted House Bill 3659 that contained 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

Oregon's Early Childhood System

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 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 Legislative Assembly 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 – a proven practice. 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.

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 three and four, and their families. In 1995, Early Head Start was created to provide

comprehensive child development services for pregnant women, children ages zero to three, 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 the federal poverty guidelines. Head Start and Early Head Start programs are required to reserve at least ten 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 Support and Parent Education
- Health
- Nutrition
- Mental Health

Grants are administered by the federal government directly to local public agencies, private non-profit and for-profit organizations, American 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 that created the Oregon Prekindergarten program (OPK), modeled after and designed to work side-by-side with, the federal Head Start program, serving children from age three to five, and their families. Together the programs are known as Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten (HS PREK). OPK programs are funded through an open competitive grant application process similar to federal Head Start.

Oregon statute stipulates that OPK was to be fully funded by 2004, having been modified by the 1995 Legislative Assembly from the original full implementation date of 1999.

Oregon HS PREK received a total of \$55.3 million during the 2005-2007 biennium, including \$113.1 million in federal funds.

Currently, there are 29 Oregon HS PREK grantees in 36 counties, serving 11,325 children.

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. 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 is 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. 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, and
- 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 from the ages of zero to eight who are high-risk due to mental or emotional disorders, or parental addiction disorders or mental illness, and their families.

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 early childhood special education 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 likely to result in developmental delay. Early childhood special education services are for children between age three and school age who experience a developmental delay or a physical or mental disability or impairment. Funding for EI/ESCE services is provided by state general funds (72 percent), federal funds (26 percent), and Medicaid fee-for-service reimbursements (2 percent). The ODE contracts with education service districts to provide direct services to qualifying children and their families. As of August 2007, there were 2,343 infants and toddlers receiving early intervention services and 7,815 children receiving early childhood special education for a total of 10,158.

Medical Community Partnerships – The 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.

Statewide Coordination – The OCCF, the ODE, the Child Care Division (within the Employment Department) and the Department of Human Services 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 Senate Bill 555 planning oversight and development of state level initiatives based on local plans. Partners for Children and Families make recommendations to the OCCF, 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 the ODE; ODE receives approximately \$700,000 annually through the No Child Left Behind Act for Even Start that is distributed via competitive grants to entities that deliver services at the local level. 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 five Even Start grantees in Oregon.

Preparing Children for Kindergarten

The 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 6 dimensions of readiness, 86.7 percent (up from 83.2 percent in 2002) of those who attended preschool met all 6,

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 5 of the 6 dimensions of readiness, while 86.5 percent (up from 81.6 percent in 2002) of Head Start kindergarteners achieved 5 or more. Overall, children who attended Oregon HS PREK programs were 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 Prekindergarten and Child Care Partnerships

Oregon HS 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, HS 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. HS 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 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 HS PREK, in partnership with federal Head Start, is serving approximately 62.4 percent of the 3- and 4-year-old children living at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. The goal is to increase the service

level to 80 percent during the 2007-2009 biennium. 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 has completed early learning guidelines for children ages birth to five. Referred to as Early Childhood Foundations, the guidelines are aligned with the kindergarten through grade 12 standards and are adaptable for all early childhood settings including child care, HS 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 Prekindergarten

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 prekindergarten in fiscal year 2007, offering more families access to voluntary prekindergarten and improved program quality. Over the past 2 years, states have increased prekindergarten spending by more than \$1 billion. No state legislative body authorized decreased funding for prekindergarten during this period. Nationwide, state spending on prekindergarten 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 in October 2006 by Pre-K Now.

A summary of 2000 census data showing a state-by-state breakdown of the percent of three- and four-year-olds enrolled in an early childhood program is available from the [National Institute for Early Education Research](#).

A summary of facts about state prekindergarten is provided by the [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#).

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