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Background Brief on ...

Early Childhood Programs

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; and
- 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 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 Support and Parent Education;
- Health;
- Nutrition; and
- 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 (**OHS PreK**). OHS PreK programs are funded through an open competitive grant application process similar to federal Head Start.

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

OHS PreK received a total of \$110 million in General Fund during the 2009-2011 biennium and an additional \$113.1 million in federal funds. Currently, there are 31 OHS PreK grantees in 36 counties, serving 12,648 children.

In February 2010, the Oregon Department of Education (**ODE**) received \$1 million in General Fund to provide services to existing federally funded Early Head Start programs. These additional funds were awarded to eleven programs to provide services to an additional 64 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 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 services is provided by state General Funds (72 percent), federal funds (26 percent), and Medicaid fee-for-service reimbursements (two percent). The ODE contracts with education service districts to provide direct services to qualifying children and their families. As of March 2010, there were 2,672 infants and toddlers receiving early intervention services and 7,361 children receiving early childhood special education for a total of 10,033.

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 – Oregon has an Early Childhood Matters Advisory Council (ECMAC) appointed by the Governor per requirements in

the Head Start Act, plus others determined relevant by the Governor. The charge of the group is to adopt a state-wide early childhood strategic report and a multi-year investment plan for Oregon based on recommendations from its Steering Committee. The strategic report and investment plan will link existing and new public and private early childhood efforts into a coordinated and collaborative system that will foster optimal outcomes for quality comprehensive services for all children, birth to school entry, and their families. The Advisory Council will provide recommendations to the Governor that will set strategic direction to support a quality and effective collaborative early childhood system.

The Steering Committee is led by the ECMAC Chair and Vice Chair appointed by the Governor. Steering Committee members are appointed by the ECMAC Chair including three private partners.

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 \$576,603 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 three Even Start grantees in Oregon.

Preparing Children for Kindergarten

The ODE uses five developmental categories to determine the readiness of students to learn:

- *Physical Health, Well Being, and Motor Development:* Gross motor skills, fine motor skills, physical fitness, and daily living skills;
- *Communication, Literacy and Language Development:* Receptive and expressive language, reading and writing;
- *Approaches to Learning:* Curiosity and interest, attentiveness and persistence;
- *General Knowledge and Cognitive Development:* Critical and analytical thinking, number sense and operations, scientific thinking; and
- *Social/and Personal Development:* Adult interaction, peer interaction, adaptive social behavior and self-control.

Results from a 2008 survey of Oregon kindergarten teachers demonstrate the value of preschool education. Of the students reported on through the survey, 46.3 percent of all kindergarteners met all five domains of readiness and 59.4 percent met four or more of the developmental domains. Children who attended preschool exceeded the all-student averages in all five developmental domains.

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, OHS 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. OHS 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 66.7 percent of the three and four-year-old children living at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. The goal is to increase the service level to 75 percent during the 2011-2013 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, OHS 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. Twenty-nine states have increases in

the percent of three and four-year-olds enrolled in state pre-k programs in 2008-2009, while nine states decreased. In 2008-09, total funding for state pre-k programs rose to more than \$5 billion, but this represents a reduction from growth rates of previous years, and is about half the increase from the previous year.

For a detailed breakdown of what other states are doing around preschool initiatives, refer to *The State of Preschool 2009*, published by The National Institute for Early Education Research.

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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