



Early Works  
**PROGRESS  
REPORT**  
**2015**

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# Early Works: Transforming education together

We know that investment in the early years, beginning at birth, is one of the single most effective ways to improve a child’s chance for life success. This knowledge is the foundation of Early Works.

Early Works, a 10-year initiative of the Children’s Institute, was launched in two Oregon communities to demonstrate a new approach to education. The approach is driven by parents, educators and partners in the community and grounded in what research has shown children and families need to thrive. The Children’s Institute, Mt. Hood Community College Head Start, the Multnomah Early Childhood Program and the David Douglas School District initially launched Early Works in 2010 at **Earl Boyles Elementary School** in Southeast Portland. Two years later, the Roseburg-based Ford Family Foundation and the Children’s Institute partnered with the Yoncalla School District to launch a rural Early Works site at **Yoncalla Elementary** in Douglas County.

The Early Works initiative at both sites seeks to implement an integrated set of policies and services in early learning, health, and family engagement and brings together various partners working on behalf of children and families. The goal of Early Works is to create a seamless system that supports children in their critical years from birth through age 8, while at the same time serving as a learning laboratory to inform both practice and policy.

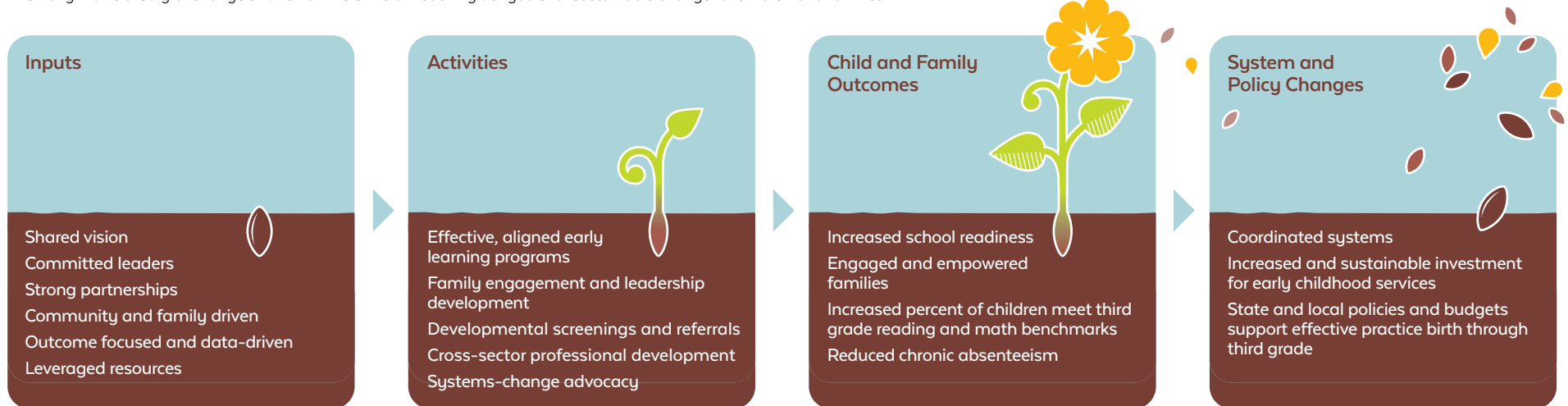
Most importantly, Early Works is built on a foundation of research and evaluation. Since the inception of the initiative, the Children’s Institute has partnered with Portland State University’s Center for the Improvement of Child and Family Services to evaluate child outcomes and system changes of the Early Works initiative and provide continuous feedback to families, partners and teachers at the sites. That feedback helps everyone involved in Early Works learn what works for kids and drive decision

making. It allows the Children’s Institute to create a stronger connection between public policy and on-the-ground community experience.

What you’ll read in this report are highlights of the results of the 2015 Early Works evaluation. The results show areas of real success, along with areas of continued challenge. One thing is certain: Early Works partners are deeply committed to improving the system—and creating a new reality where all children, families and their communities can thrive.

## Theory of Change Model

The Early Works theory of change shows how we envision reaching our goals for sustainable change for children and families







2010 - 2015

# Earl Boyles Elementary

**Earl Boyles Early Works was launched in 2010** at Earl Boyles Elementary as a partnership between the Children’s Institute, Mt. Hood Community College Head Start, the Multnomah Early Childhood Program and the David Douglas School District. Earl Boyles Elementary is in an urban community with high poverty rates but also with a rich mix of cultures.

**Preschool was a top priority**, as identified in an initial community needs assessment. The assessment showed strong support for a community preschool, with over half of incoming kindergartners entering Earl Boyles without any preschool, Head Start, or formal child care experiences. Early on, those limited early learning experiences were evident: Entering Earl Boyles kindergartners from low-income families were more than two years behind their more affluent peers statewide, both socially and academically.

But Early Works at Earl Boyles has helped bring change. The site has implemented programming focused on three areas to foster child development: high quality early learning, engaged families and health.

**To foster high-quality early learning, the initiative has:**

- created a high-quality preschool available to every 3- and 4-year-old in Earl Boyles’ catchment area, integrated with elementary school.
- provided summer learning, including an early kindergarten transition program for incoming Earl Boyles kindergartners and a summer literacy program for K-3 students.
- supported professional development for preschool and elementary teachers to connect early years to early grades.

**To encourage greater family engagement, the initiative has:**

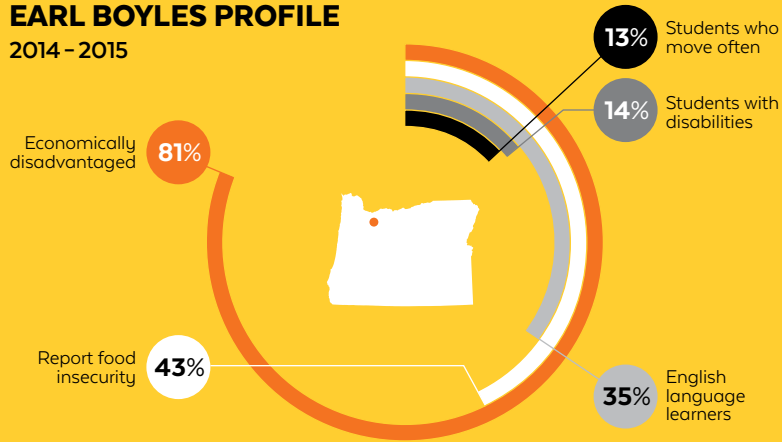
- provided education and leadership development opportunities.
- disseminated books to families and offered parent-child literacy activities.
- initiated parent-teacher home visits.
- led activities to reduce chronic student absenteeism.

**To improve child, family and community health, the initiative has:**

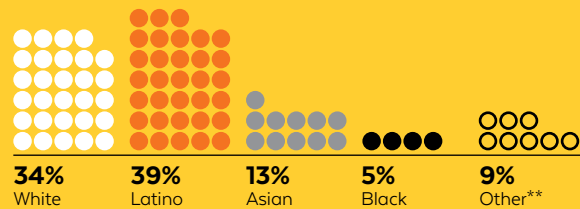
- increased capacity to use screenings to refer children with potential developmental delays to further assessment and services.
- catalyzed a community investment in a new early learning wing and neighborhood center through a voter-approved capital bond. These funds were matched by other investors, including the city and county.
- conducted a community-wide health assessment to identify priorities for the neighborhood center.

All this work has brought some positive results for Earl Boyles families and children. Yet there are still areas in need of improvement, particularly for Latino children and families. The work is still in the early stages, and we will continue to learn, and share what we learn, over the next several years.

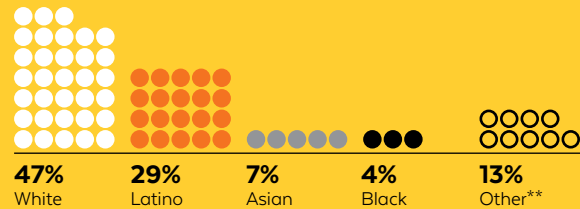
## EARL BOYLES PROFILE 2014 - 2015



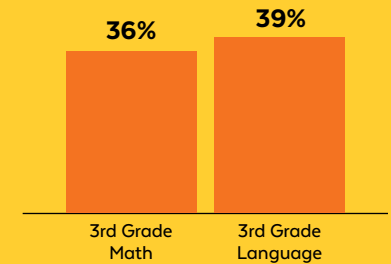
### 85 students enrolled in Pre-K\*



### 70 students enrolled in kindergarten\*



### Percent meeting benchmarks, from the 2014-2015 Smarter Balanced Assessments



## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

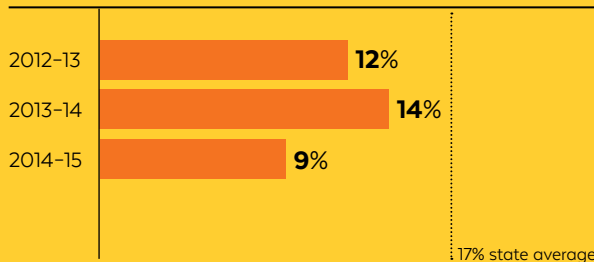
Families are the first and most important teachers of their children. Research shows children are most successful when their families are engaged in their learning.

Our evaluation measures those family outcomes that are most highly predictive of later school success. Research shows caregivers' reading to children daily is related to children's language and literacy development. The number of books in the home is also strongly associated with higher educational attainment.

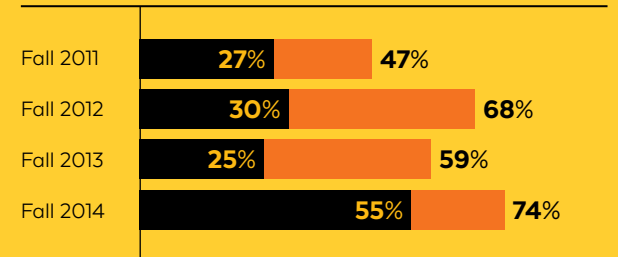
And we track school attendance as another key measure of success, because students who are chronically absent—who miss 10 percent or more of school days—are far more likely to fall behind in school and drop out of high school.

**FINDINGS** While Earl Boyles families—especially Latino families—are below national averages in some reading measures, trends are moving in the right direction. A bright spot: families have more books in their homes. Additionally, chronic absence in kindergarten has been consistently lower than the state average.

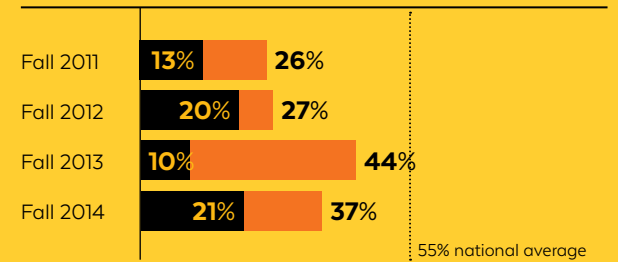
### Chronic absence rate among kindergartners



### Kindergartners' homes with 26+ books



### Kindergartners read to daily



\*Students who participated in the evaluation

\*\*Other includes American Indian, Middle Eastern, Multi-ethnic and unknown

## SCHOOL READINESS

School readiness reflects how prepared a child is to succeed in school beginning in kindergarten. Young children from low-income families often start school behind their more advantaged peers. Children who have limited early learning experiences frequently fall behind in reading and math by third grade, and continue to have social, health, and economic challenges later in life.

A focus has been to leverage multiple public funding sources to create a high-quality preschool on site, to give more children from low-income families access to quality early learning. The Early Works evaluation measures school readiness skills in the areas of, among others, early literacy, math and social-emotional and self-regulation skills. These areas are most predictive of later academic achievement.

### Letter Sounds

One of the best predictors of later reading achievement is children's ability to recognize and name the letters and sounds of the alphabet. We measure early literacy skills in part through the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment.<sup>2</sup> The scores represent the number of sounds a student is able to correctly identify in one minute.

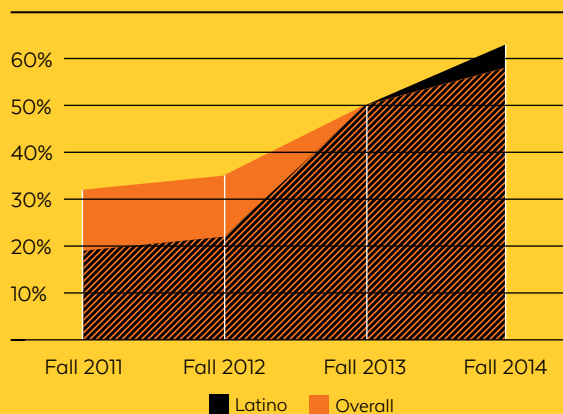
**FINDINGS** Kindergartners who attended the Earl Boyles preschool far exceeded their peers who did not attend preschool and the overall district and state averages for letter sounds.

### Math

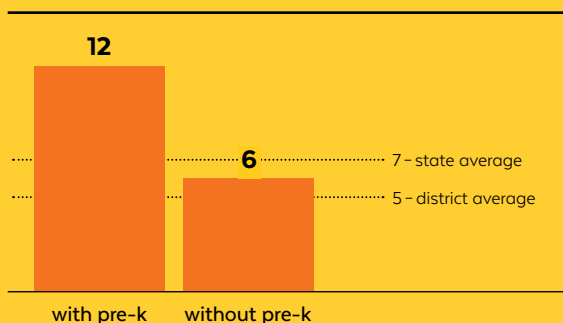
We're increasingly understanding that mastering early math concepts such as knowledge of numbers and shapes is an important predictor of later school success. We measure early numeracy using the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment.

**FINDINGS** Kindergartners who attended Earl Boyles Preschool scored slightly higher than their peers who did not attend preschool and higher than district and state averages in math.

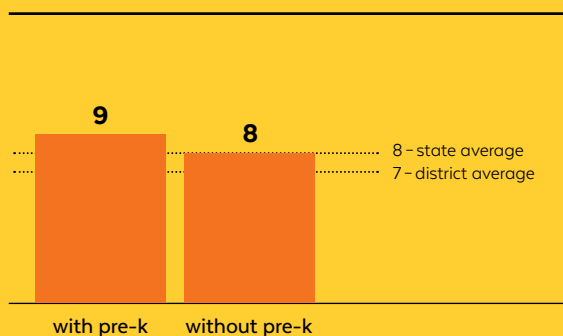
Increased percentage of entering Earl Boyles kindergartners have preschool experience



Kindergartners' knowledge of letter sounds (Fall 2014)



Kindergartners' knowledge of math skills (Fall 2014)

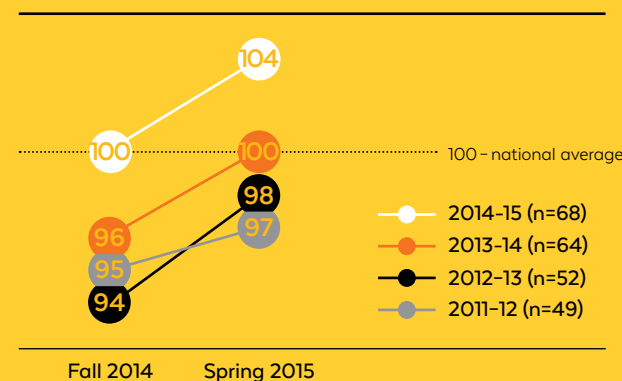


## Vocabulary

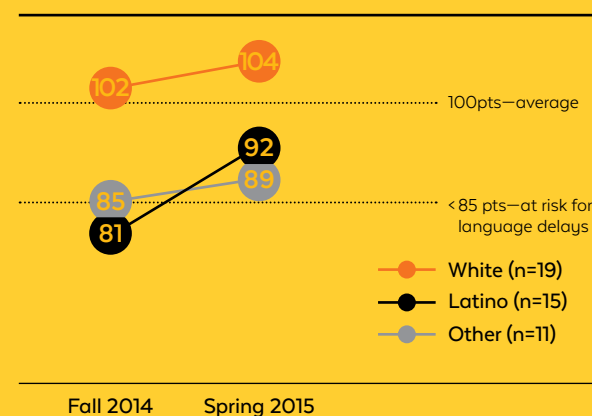
Studies show low-income children typically enter kindergarten well below their more affluent peers in vocabulary, a gap that's difficult to narrow after children are in school. When at-risk children enter kindergarten with higher vocabularies, their chances of succeeding in school are much higher. We measure vocabulary with a widely used measure of young children's vocabulary.<sup>1</sup>

**FINDINGS** Entering kindergartners in Fall 2014 who had the greatest access to preschool had higher vocabulary skills than any previous group.

Kindergartners improving in vocabulary



However, a gap remains in vocabulary between white children and children of color at the Earl Boyles preschool



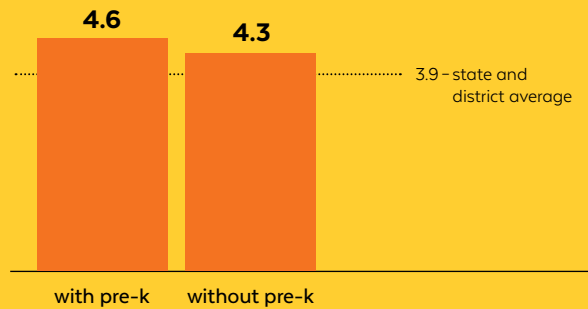


## Social-emotional skills

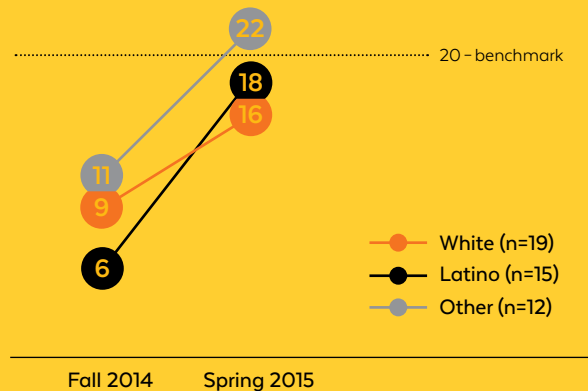
Children need both academic and social skills to be successful learners. Otherwise, they are at risk for difficulties in school. We measure social emotional development and self-regulation through two key measures. One assessment measures how well children follow directions and pay attention. The other measures children’s interpersonal skills, or how well they get along with others.

**FINDINGS** Self-regulation among Earl Boyles preschoolers steadily improves during the school year. Entering kindergartners who attended the Earl Boyles preschool have interpersonal skills that are higher than their peers who did not attend preschool and are higher than the overall district and state averages.

### Entering kindergartners interpersonal skills (Fall 2014)



### Preschoolers improve self-regulation skills, children of color improve the most



## CHANGING SYSTEMS, MAKING PROGRESS

Research shows that to maximize the effectiveness of individual services, we need a well-coordinated system informed by data. Therefore, our evaluation of Early Works focuses on documenting this systems-level work and how it evolves over time. We do this through interviews with key stakeholders, including parents, teachers, school district staff, and community members and conducting a survey that measures the effectiveness of the collaboration. Here are some key strengths and challenges we’ve found at Earl Boyles:

### STRENGTHS

- Strong leadership by school, district and key partners
- Highly engaged parents in Early Works leadership
- Blended public resources to provide universal, inclusive high-quality preschool
- A shared vision that family engagement and early learning are core priorities

### CHALLENGES

- Strengthening professional development focused on birth-to-third-grade alignment
- Increasing leadership capacity in early learning, especially as the David Douglas School District expands early learning district-wide
- Clarifying roles and decision-making authority among the leadership team



2012 - 2015



# Yoncalla Elementary School

**Yoncalla Early Works, the second Early Works site, launched in 2012** at Yoncalla Elementary School as a partnership among The Ford Family Foundation, the Children's Institute and the Yoncalla School District. Yoncalla is a community of about 1,000 residents located in Southern Oregon. The opportunity to create an Early Works site in a high-poverty, rural community was compelling because of the clear need for a new approach to addressing the educational disparities faced in the community. The Children's Institute also wanted to learn about unique challenges to children and families in a rural community, and learn how the Early Works initiative could adapt and respond to those challenges.

**Building trust with families and key partners** has been the focus of the first three years of Yoncalla Early Works. Findings from an initial community needs assessment in Yoncalla indicated that parents felt distrustful and disconnected from the school and had limited interest in sending their children to preschool. Yet parents wanted to be more involved in their children's learning and better prepare their

children for school—and find new ways to connect with other families. The assessment provided a complex picture of children's school readiness and parent and community perspectives on what was most needed in the community. The community decided to first focus on family engagement and building a decision-making structure to support the work of the initiative.

**To help families engage with the school and community, the initiative has:**

- opened a Family Room at Yoncalla Elementary to create a welcoming place for families, focusing on those with children from birth to age 5, and offered playgroups for parents with young children.
- partnered to offer multi-week, evidence-based parenting classes with dinner and childcare for families with young children at the elementary school.
- expanded existing school and library events to incorporate activities for children birth through age 5, all with a focus on early reading, math, social-emotional and self-regulation skills.

- planned and hosted community events in partnership with families.
- disseminated books and provided parent-child story time.

**Early Works leadership is strong and provides a foundation for change. The initiative has:**

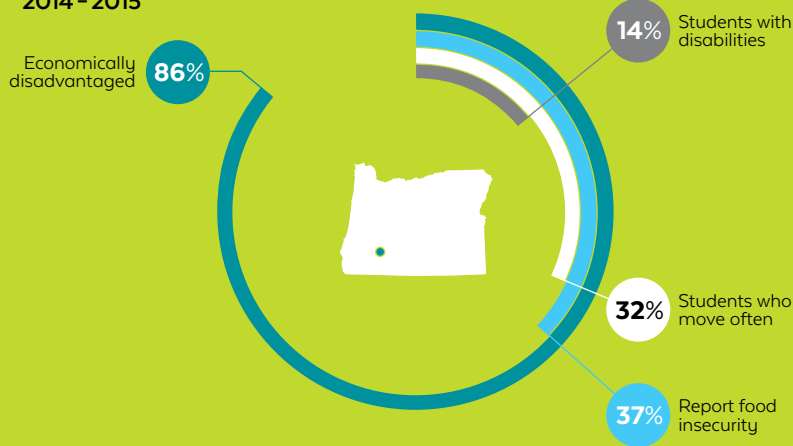
- built a core group of committed leaders from the school as well as partner agencies.
- developed effective work groups that include school leaders, community partners, and families.
- facilitated the co-location of the Family Room, a private preschool, and an Early Head Start classroom at Yoncalla Elementary.

These early efforts have yet to result in consistent improvement in child outcomes in Yoncalla. But there are bright spots. Furthermore, we see great progress in building systems that can begin to improve learning and the quality of life for Yoncalla's children and families.

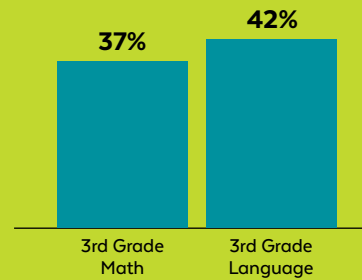


## YONCALLA PROFILE

2014 - 2015



Percent meeting benchmarks, from the 2014-2015 Smarter Balanced Assessments



## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

We know families and communities play critical roles in helping prepare children for school. Yoncalla Early Works is working with families to help them understand how to support their children's early learning to improve school readiness. Families also play an important role in shaping the Yoncalla Early Works initiative.

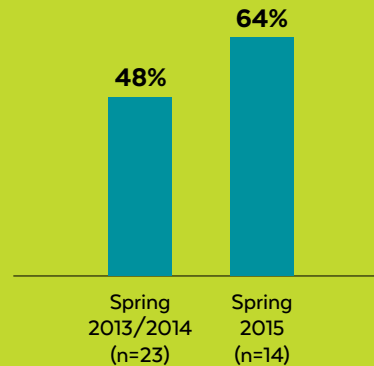
Our evaluation measures those family outcomes that are most highly predictive of later school success.

**FINDINGS** The community has made some progress in getting books into the homes of kindergarten families, an important measure of educational attainment.

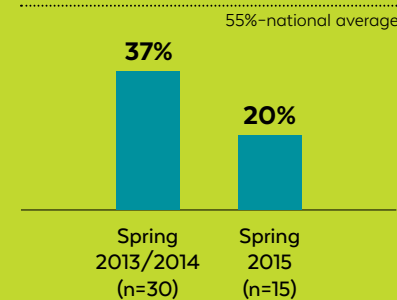
The frequency of daily reading to kindergartners remains well below the national average.

Parents are also struggling to get their children to school consistently; in part this may be due to the remote rural areas where many families live and their lack of reliable transportation.

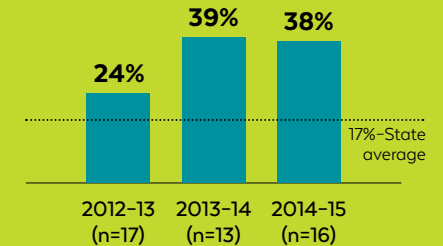
Kindergartners' homes with 26+ books



Kindergartners read to daily



Chronic absence rate among kindergartners

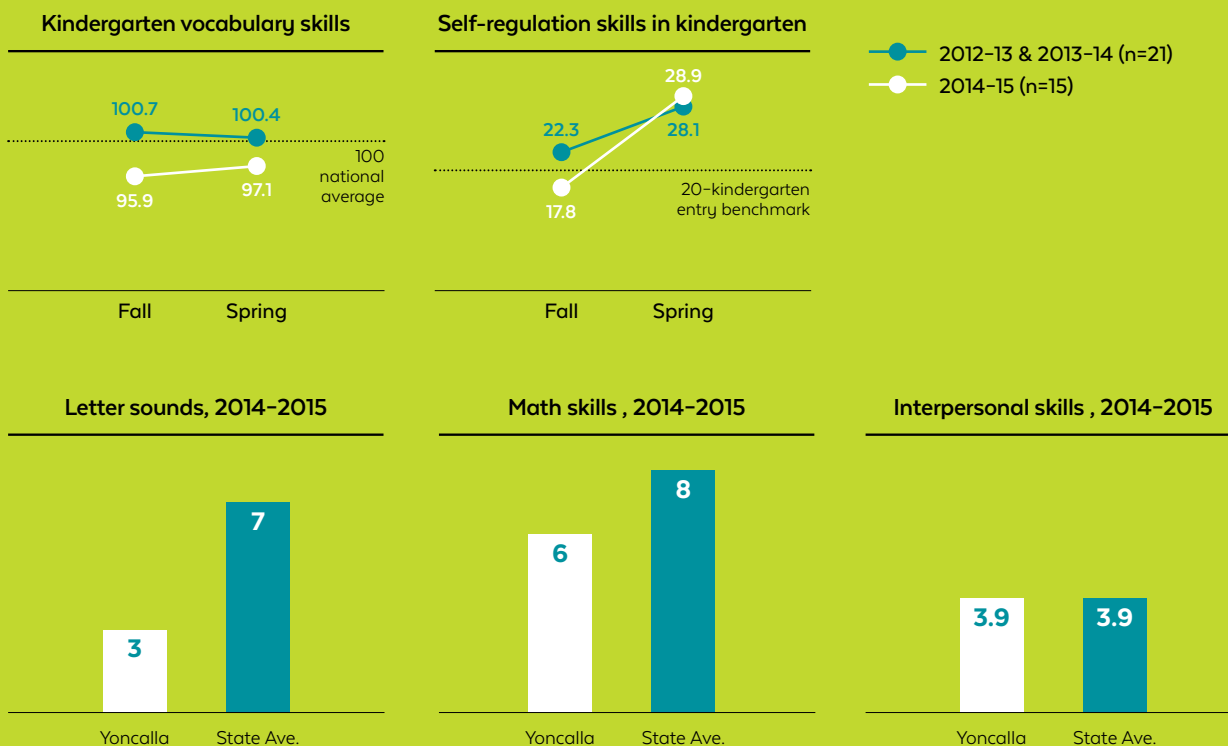


Yoncalla Early Works data includes two years of pre-implementation data—from the fall of 2012 through the spring of 2014—with data collected during the 2014-15 school year, when preliminary Early Works activities were first implemented.

## SCHOOL READINESS

School readiness reflects how prepared a child is to succeed in school beginning in kindergarten. Yoncalla Early Works uses the same assessment tools that Early Boyles does. It uses assessments in language development early literacy, math, self-regulation and interpersonal skills.

**FINDINGS** The most recent entering kindergarten class had vocabulary skills below the national average, but made small gains within the school year. Yoncalla kindergartners' scores on the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment lag behind the state average. A bright spot: Yoncalla kindergartners made large gains during the school year in self-regulation skills, a critical skill for later school achievement.



## CHANGING SYSTEMS, MAKING PROGRESS

A core focus and success of the Yoncalla Early Works site has been developing effective systems and work groups. Given the level of community skepticism at the beginning of the initiative, the partners have had to spend significant time building community trust and effective collaborative teams from the ground up. In just three years, Yoncalla has made incredible progress towards building a strong foundation to support implementation of a comprehensive birth-through-third grade system. Here are some strengths and challenges identified through interviews with key partners, parents, and community members:

### STRENGTHS

- High-quality leadership that engages community members
- Effective use of data for planning and continuous program improvement with input from parents and partners
- A strong sense of shared goals and vision
- A tangible shift in the school community in placing priority in partnering with families to help their children succeed

### CHALLENGES

- Available local resources vary significantly between the two sites, underscoring the challenge of implementing and sustaining programs in rural areas.
- Need for implementing more “high impact” strategies
- Addressing high staff turnover
- Expanding and supporting on-going parent leadership
- Securing systemic school district buy-in, especially at the school board level



# Early Works has already experienced much success in the early years of the initiative.

Each site has made great progress toward creating a culture shift in its school community about how education is viewed and delivered. These communities have taken bold steps and intentional risks to develop new partnerships, collaborate differently, share resources and, most importantly, engage families and the communities they serve as true partners.

Both sites are also experiencing challenges. But all Early Works partners are working in collaboration, knowing that the outcome will be better for children.

It is complex and complicated work that takes time. It also requires deep and long-term investments to catalyze real change across all involved systems—change that can then improve children’s learning and development.

## EARLY WORKS SUCCESSES

- A culture shift has happened in how early learning providers view their role as preparing children for school and helping support a seamless pathway to kindergarten.
- A culture shift has happened in how the K–12 community views its role in fostering positive social emotional development in children and partnering with families to ensure student success.
- Clear leadership has been developed within the communities with an aligned vision to create an effective system for children and families and a desire to commit resources to ensure the initiative’s success.
- Families are engaged in leadership roles and are advocating for their needs at the school, county and state levels.
- Early Works has helped inspire new public and private funding and is informing state policy on alignment between early learning and K–12.

## EARLY WORKS CHALLENGES

- Early learning programs and interventions statewide are still significantly underfunded and don’t support needed expansion of services to reach all children.
- Evaluating a complex, evolving initiative is challenging. It can be difficult to attribute outcomes to system changes and takes time to see results.
- Existing policies attached to distinct funding sources create barriers to groups working together to maximize and leverage funds to support higher quality services.
- Oregon’s early learning and health systems are still early in their own transformations. They need time and continued leadership to align their work and secure increased resources. Before this happens, it is difficult to build a comprehensive set of strategies across the full set of birth- to- third-grade systems in the Early Works communities.

## WHAT’S NEXT?

At **Earl Boyles**, we are piloting a deeper model of community schools in the school’s neighborhood center, in partnership with Multnomah County’s Schools Uniting Neighborhoods program. This effort will strengthen existing partnerships and build new ones to address, among other things, community health disparities and access to affordable housing. It will also provide parents and families with educational support, and help them navigate social and other services.

At **Yoncalla**, we are launching a community health assessment to better understand health needs and identify subsequent programming for the community that can be integrated with early learning programs. In the summer of 2015, the

district provided its first ever Early Kindergarten Transitions program and plans to continue this intervention in future years. Finally, we are excited to consider how to best respond to the growing parent demand for high-quality preschool in the community and build on the co-location of the Family Room, private preschool and Early Head Start classroom at Yoncalla Elementary.

Early Works in Yoncalla and Portland will continue to inform the work of the Children’s Institute at the state policy level. The initiative creates a platform for policy change that is informed by families, school and communities, coming together to transform education.



- 1 The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-III) is administered to children fall and spring. The Spanish version of the assessment (TVIP) is administered to native Spanish Speaking children.
- 2 We measure early literacy through the PPVT-III, the early literacy domains of the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment, and the EasyCBM in Spring.

## Early Works Partners

### Earl Boyles

David Douglas School District  
Metropolitan Family Service  
Mt. Hood Community College Head Start  
Multnomah County Library  
Multnomah Early Childhood Program  
Padres Unidos (Parents United)  
Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN)  
SMART

### Yoncalla

Breastfeeding Coalition of Douglas County  
Douglas County Early Childhood Planning Coalition  
Douglas Education Service District  
The Ford Family Foundation  
Family Relief Nursery-North Douglas  
Parents of Yoncalla  
UCAN Head Start/Early Head Start  
Yoncalla Library  
Yoncalla Preschool  
Yoncalla School District

**Evaluation:** Portland State University Center for Improvement of Child and Family Services

**Progress report author:** Marina Merrill, Ph.D,  
Senior Research & Policy Advisor, Children's Institute



The Children's Institute focuses on the first eight years of life—because we know the critical early years of brain development establish the foundation for lifelong health and success.

More information on Early Works evaluation is at: [childinst.org/early-works-eval](http://childinst.org/early-works-eval)

