



LINKING HEALTH TO SCHOOL READINESS

What is important to know about how child health impacts school readiness?

The Children's Institute has begun exploring health factors that affect a child's school readiness, which will include studying health linkages at CI's two Early Works sites and at the state policy level. Early Works is an initiative of the Children's Institute that brings parents, schools and communities together to meet the needs of children from birth to age 8 by identifying best practices that can be translated into policy at the local, regional, state, and federal levels.

Research shows that children who live healthy lives from the beginning are more likely to do well throughout school. In turn, educational success impacts one's entire life trajectory, not only through improved economic potential, but also by making it more likely that one's health will be better. These are factors that even pass from one generation to the next.

A number of ingredients are needed to give young children a good start. Access to prenatal care, nutritious foods and high-quality child health and dental care are important. Also critical during this early period are developmentally appropriate nurturing environments.

Maternal health during pregnancy is very important to a good early start for children. Access to prenatal care is one key ingredient to assuring healthy birth outcomes. In Oregon in 2011, 25% of births occurred to mothers who started prenatal care after the first trimester (Oregon Vital Statistics, 2011). There are large racial disparities for accessing early prenatal care with 35% of African-American women, 36% of Native-American women and 34% of Latinas starting care after the first trimester of pregnancy.

Another very important maternal factor that impacts attachment and responsive childrearing is maternal depression. According to the Oregon Health Authority 24 percent of new mothers reported that they were depressed during and/or after pregnancy. Forty-eight percent of these women continued to report being depressed when their child was 2 years old. These statistics clearly point to the impact that maternal prenatal health (even before the prenatal period) and post-natal health has on a woman's ability to be a nurturing mom and on the physical life-start that her baby will have.

Access to high-quality well-child health care where infants and toddlers receive ongoing developmental surveillance and screening is another important factor to help ensure that children are healthy and ready for school. Successful early intervention strategies such as developmental screenings are a major gain for the individual child and family, and also may prevent later costs of special education and ongoing school difficulties.

Oregon's new efforts to connect the child health and early educational worlds are vital. Developmental screening is one area where we need to share measurement and strategies for referral and treatment. Assessing family strengths and needs in order to assure healthy living conditions, food security and parental mental health is another area that calls for a joint effort between health and early childhood educators.

How does the Early Works initiative address health and readiness issues?

The most effective efforts integrate high-quality child development programs (early childhood education, schools, health, dental health, mental health and other family supports), from the prenatal period on, so all families can have an array of services to increase their confidence and competency as parents and to support community self-sufficiency. Effective and sustaining programs also address the systemic issues that underlie economic and health disparities.

The communities at our two Early Works sites have high levels of poverty. The health work is taking shape at Earl Boyles Elementary School in Portland this year, with Yoncalla Elementary School in Douglas County to follow in the coming year. Current work at Earl Boyles includes:

- The health work is directed by an Earl Boyles Health Governance Committee that involves all initiative partners, and the Children's Institute Health Fellow is the facilitator of the committee.
- The large scale project is the **Community Health Assessment (CHA)** currently under way to assess community health needs and priorities among families with children five years and younger. The CHA is utilizing a community-based strategy to canvass the school neighborhood. Through individual surveys and focus groups the goals of the CHA are to:
 - Understand needs of families in the Earl Boyles community with regard to maternal-child health in areas that impact school readiness;
 - Identify perceptions and priorities of families about maternal-child health in areas that impact school readiness and success;
- Use community data to inform the strategies, programs and services offered at the new Earl Boyles Early Learning Wing and Neighborhood Center that will open at the elementary school in fall 2014.
- Partners to complete the CHA: PSU School of Public Health, David Douglas School District, Multnomah County Health Department, Multnomah ESD, Metropolitan Family Service, HealthShare, FamilyCare, and other Early Works partnering organizations.
- The CHA timeline is:
 - Data collection in spring and early summer 2014
 - Presentation of findings and recommendations to the community and all partners will occur in the fall of 2014, in conjunction with the opening of the Earl Boyles Early Learning Wing and Neighborhood Center.

After the completion of the CHA, the Children's Institute will work with partners on the development, implementation and evaluation of the strategies utilized.