

Early Works at Earl Boyles 2014-2015 Annual Report

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Executive Summary of Early Works at Earl Boyles: Evaluation Results 2014-2015

What is Early Works?

Early Works is a 10-year initiative of the Children's Institute that seeks to develop effective approaches for increasing school readiness and third grade achievement by implementing universal, outcome-focused early childhood services that are integrated and aligned with elementary schools. The Children's Institute has partnered with Portland State University to conduct ongoing program evaluation for the Early Works Initiative at Earl Boyles Elementary school in Southeast Portland and to facilitate utilization of these data for continuous program development and improvement. Implementation of Early Works is based on a community-driven approach that involves developing and sustaining partnerships between K-12 systems and staff, early childhood and other community service providers, and families. The Initiative targets not just short-term successes, but long-term changes in how these stakeholders work together to support educational and life success for children at the local, regional, and state levels. A key aspect of the Early Works Initiative is to thoughtfully stage and sequence system changes over time. Thus, implementation decisions are driven by and made through a collaborative, inclusive decision making process that weighs data about child, family, and community needs, evidence of service effectiveness, community capacity, and sustainability.

Implementation Successes This Year

Significant progress was made this year in implementing activities in support of Early Works goals, including opening of the school-based Early Childhood Wing at the school, substantial expansion of the Earl Boyles preschool, from 30 children served in 2 classes to 90 children in 6 classes, ongoing development of parent leaders and advocates, cross-sector and aligned professional development for child care, preschool, and kindergarten teachers, and a community-driven process for developing a vision and strategic plan for the school-based Neighborhood Center. Detailed timelines showing the key activities being implemented in support of: (1) Early Learning & School Readiness, (2) Family Engagement, (3) Family Health and Well-Being, and (4) Prenatal-Grade 3 Systems Change are provided in the full report. Below are some highlights from the 2014-15 school year:

1. **Early Learning and School Readiness:** This year brought a major expansion of the Earl Boyles on-site preschool using braided funding provided by the David Douglas School District, Mt. Hood Community College Head Start, and Early Childhood Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education. Ninety (90) children were served in 6 classrooms providing half day preschool at Earl Boyles, allowing universal access to free preschool for four year olds in the Earl Boyles catchment area. The success of this work is evident in this year's outcome data, which saw the 4 year old children who participated in the preschool exceeding their kindergarten peers at Earl Boyles, David Douglas, and statewide in terms of several key indicators of school readiness.

- 2. Family Engagement:** The expansion of the preschool was made possible in part by the opening of the on-site Early Childhood Wing and Neighborhood Center, which were formally dedicated on September 18, 2015. This event was attended by then-Governor John Kitzhaber and by 140 key state and local partners, parents, and community members. The Neighborhood Center is intended to serve as a vehicle for family engagement and support by bringing in community organizations and resources to support family health and well-being, facilitate parent connections, and provide a family-friendly venue for programs that support child development and early learning.

To develop a strategic plan for the Neighborhood Center, parents were actively engaged in a year-long facilitated visioning process that used information collected by parents through the Community Health Assessment. This year also saw Earl Boyles parents engaged in family-driven advocacy and leadership that culminated in major statewide early childhood legislation and in securing funding from Multnomah County to staff the Neighborhood Center. Family engagement work also focused on helping parents to strengthen their children's learning through a variety of school-based literacy activities such as Reading Breakfasts and infant-toddler groups. By the end of the year, the importance of family engagement had clearly extended beyond the preschool and kindergarten classes, with teachers across multiple grades at the school indicating that professional development support to strengthen family engagement is a top priority for the upcoming school year.

- 3. Collaborative Governance Structure:** At the end of 2013-14 a new structure for governance and committee work for the Early Works at Earl Boyles project was developed and implemented for 2014-15. This plan successfully ensured that families were represented in leadership and policy-related committees. Additionally, the Preschool Operations committee dedicated significant resources to overseeing the expanded preschool program, and ultimately engaged an external consultant to do a comprehensive review of the first year of implementation that is being used to inform program improvements for 2015-16. However, at the end of the year it was clear that additional modifications to the governance plan may be needed to ensure that a strong, community-based structure for planning and oversight can be sustained.
- 4. Professional Development:** Work continued this year at the school to align curricula and approaches between the preschool and early grades. A preschool report card was developed that aligned with both the Head Start Early Learning Standards and the Kindergarten Common Core. Further, teachers and community child care providers participated in Early Childhood Positive Behavioral Support and Intervention (EC-PBIS) training. A preschool Professional Learning Team was established to support the preschool and kindergarten teachers. Work continued to align Head Start Performance Standards and the TSGOLD assessments with the Common Core and David Douglas School District requirements and policies. Finally, all preschool and kindergarten teachers participated in training on the Parent-Teacher Home Visit program model.

5. **Policy Work & Prenatal-Grade 3 Model Expansion:** The Children’s Institute continued ongoing communication and support to national, state, and local efforts to design and implement prenatal-Grade 3 approaches to school readiness. The Early Works site at Earl Boyles has now hosted over 100 visits from interested school districts, philanthropic organizations, state representatives, and others interested in learning about this innovative model. During this spring’s Oregon Legislative Session, Earl Boyles parents, the Children’s Institute, and other key early childhood advocacy groups aligned their work in support of major increases in funding for early childhood home visiting programs, Kindergarten Readiness Partnership and Innovation projects, and implementation of a statewide model for expanded “mixed delivery” preschool. Together these efforts represented one of the most significant legislative agendas in support of early childhood learning and school readiness in Oregon.

Evaluation Methods

The evaluation of Early Works at Earl Boyles seeks to document changes at the child-, family-, community-, school-, and system-levels, providing information to guide ongoing decision making and to ensure that the foundations for long-term success are being put in place. The current report presents detailed results from the 2014-2015 school year. This year represents the fourth cohort of entering kindergarten students and parents for whom data were collected and the second cohort of preschool students assessed and served at Earl Boyles. Data were collected in several ways, including direct assessments of preschool and kindergarten children’s early literacy, language, early numeracy, and social-emotional skills; surveys of preschool, kindergarten, and older grade parents; administrative data collected from the David Douglas School District for attendance and school readiness; and qualitative interviews with key partners in the Early Works effort (parents, teachers, early childhood providers, community providers, school and district leaders, and representatives of the Children’s Institute).

Data Highlights & Key Findings

Characteristics of Earl Boyles Preschool and Kindergarten Children & Families

Seventy-one (71, representing 87% of last year’s kindergarten students) and 82 (94% of preschool students) participated in the 2014-15 evaluation data collection. Characteristics of these children and their families are summarized below.

- Just under three quarters (73%) of kindergarten children qualified for free and reduced lunch;
- These children reflected the diversity of the Earl Boyles school:
 - 53% (Kindergarten) and 46% (Preschool) were White/Caucasian;
 - 32% (Kindergarten) and 33% (Preschool) were Latino;
 - 4% (Kindergarten) and 4% (Preschool) were African American;
 - 8% (Kindergarten) and 15% (Preschool) were Asian;
- Eleven (11) kindergarteners were English Language Learners (72% Spanish-speaking), and 37 (52%) preschoolers came from homes in which at least one language other than

English was spoken (33% Spanish, 3% Vietnamese, 5% Cantonese, and 11% some other language).

- About one-fourth of families had no adult employed full time (27% in kindergarten; 41% in PreK);
- 22% of kindergarten parents and 20% of preschool primary caregivers had less than a high school education.

Summary of Key Findings: Early Learning & School Readiness

One of the overarching goals for this project is to improve early learning and school readiness by developing and enhancing the early learning system at Earl Boyles. Children who start school “ready to learn” in terms of their cognitive, social, and emotional development are more likely to reach later academic benchmarks. Tracking and ensuring that Early Works at Earl Boyles is improving student outcomes is key to establishing evidence of the approach’s effectiveness. Especially important in Early Works is addressing disparities in school readiness for children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. To assess ongoing changes in these domains in children, the evaluation has tracked multiple domains of school readiness for each cohort of kindergarteners during this project. Additionally, data were collected starting in Year 2 from children who attended the Earl Boyles on-site preschool. Results, summarized below, suggest both areas of considerable success as well as areas in need of ongoing improvement.

Key Successes in Children’s Early Learning & Kindergarten Readiness

This year saw a number of strong successes among children at Earl Boyles. In particular, the following should be celebrated and sustained:

1. **Many more kindergarteners had preschool experience.** The number of children who started kindergarten with some type of formal preschool or group-based early learning experience has grown steadily for the past four years, and with the expansion of the preschool should increase even more dramatically next year. Last year, 58% of entering kindergartners started school having had some kind of formal group-based early learning experience, compared to 31% in 2013-14 and 23% in 2012-13.
2. **Preschool students met or exceeded early literacy benchmarks for kindergarten readiness.** At the end of preschool, 4-year olds who were going to be attending kindergarten in Fall 2015 had higher early literacy assessment (letter names and letter sounds) scores than the 2013-14 entering kindergarteners at Earl Boyles, kindergarteners overall in the David Douglas School District, and statewide. Further, Latino children who had attended the EB preschool did particularly well and were on track to start kindergarten at or beyond benchmark for key early literacy markers. For example, Latino 4-year olds scored 14.6 on the letter sounds assessment compared to an average of 2.1 for Latino students on average in David Douglas School District. 93% of Latino 4-year old preschool children met kindergarten entry benchmarks for letter sounds.

3. **Receptive language (vocabulary) has steadily increased among kindergarteners at school entry.** On average, children had higher receptive language/vocabulary skills at kindergarten entry this year (average score of 100 points this year, compared to 94 in 2012-13).
4. **Entering kindergarteners had more self-regulation skills this year.** Children’s self-regulation and social-emotional skills were strong at kindergarten entry and at the end of preschool. More incoming kindergarteners exceeded the benchmark for self-regulation skills (53%) than last year (43%). Further, Latino children in both the kindergarten and the preschool showed the most growth in these areas during the school year.

Top Challenges in Early Learning & Kindergarten Readiness

In terms of areas for strengthening the work, the following outcomes suggest areas for improvement:

1. **Preschoolers need language development support.** Preschool students started the year with low receptive language skills, and a significant proportion remained in the “concerning” range at the end of the year. As a key predictor of later school success, additional focus on vocabulary development both before and during the preschool year is warranted.
2. **Language development is especially concerning for children of color.** Latino children and children from other racial/ethnic backgrounds had especially low receptive vocabulary, and although there was significant growth during the year, these children were still more likely to be in the “concerning” range on measures of receptive language, compared to other children.
3. **Preschoolers could build more numeracy skills.** Preschool children did not do as well on early numeracy assessments this year as was the case for last year’s preschoolers. Efforts should be made to continue to strengthen early numeracy skills among the preschool students.
4. **More support for developing self-regulation skills could be beneficial.** Similarly, this year’s preschool students did not show as much growth in self-regulation skills, and on average, fewer met self-regulation benchmarks in the spring compared to last year.
5. **Two years of preschool could be even more beneficial.** Given some evidence that children with two years of preschool were more school-ready, it will be important to ensure early outreach to and engagement of 3 year olds in the EB PreK classroom so that more children can have two years of preschool experience.

Summary of Key Findings: Family Engagement

Another key component of the Early Works Initiative is to increase parent/caregiver and family engagement in order to maximize children's learning in the home as well as at school. In order to capture information about family engagement, the evaluation has collected information from parents/caregivers in two areas: (1) families' support for children's learning and development at home and (2) family-school relationships, including parent perceptions of the school climate, interest in leadership at the school, child attendance, and parent-teacher/school communication.

Key Successes in Family Engagement

1. **Efforts to improve access to books and to improve the frequency of reading to young children have started to show clear evidence of success in kindergarten.** More kindergarten parents were reading to their children daily (48%) than in any previous year. This is approaching the national average of 55%. Further, by the end of the year, Latino parents and parents of children who had been in the EB PreK during 2013-14 were reading at markedly higher rates – 50% of these parents reported daily reading. Thus, Latino parents of kindergarteners far exceed the national average for Latino families nationally (25%). Further, incoming kindergarten parents were much more likely to have 26 or more books at home (74%) compared to last year (58%).
2. **Rates of chronic absenteeism in the kindergarten** were lower this year (9%) than in any prior years; Latino children in the preschool had the lowest rates of chronic absence (7%).
3. **More parents have college aspirations for their children.** More parents in both the preschool and kindergarten this year believe that their child will attend college.

Top Challenges for Family Engagement

1. **More focus on preschool parents' developmental support is warranted.** The expansion of the preschool, while clearly linked to strong outcomes for children, did not reflect the same level of success in terms of parents' support for children's learning at home. Among PreK parents/caregivers, support for children's learning at home in the form of daily reading, developmental supports, and access to books were lower this year compared to prior years. This will be an important area to strengthen moving forward, as ongoing parental support for children's learning at home is critical to sustained school success.
2. **Parents of children of color and who speak languages other than English at home need more confidence in supporting children's learning.** Disparities in parent's confidence to support children's learning at home continued to be evident, with confidence of parents/caregivers of Latino and ELL students generally lower, especially in literacy and writing.

3. **Parent-teacher communication could be increased.** More frequent parent-teacher communication (with a goal of weekly communication) could strengthen connections between the classroom and home.

Summary of Key Findings: Health & Well-Being

While the majority of the work related to supporting health and well-being this year was focused on developing the vision and strategic plan for the Neighborhood Center, some intervention work was implemented this year, primarily through ongoing partnership with the Metropolitan Family Services' SUN program. Additionally, some health and well-being outcomes are supported through the comprehensive services provided through the Earl Boyles preschool in fulfillment of Head Start performance standards. Findings related to health are summarized below.

Key Successes in Health & Well-Being

1. **Children have good access to preventive care.** Almost all preschool and kindergarten children at Earl Boyles have a regular doctor and have health insurance coverage.
2. **Families may be less mobile.** There is some evidence that families are moving less frequently, although this indicator should be monitored moving forward. One potential benefit of having free, high quality preschool is that it can be a powerful incentive for families to remain in the neighborhood.
3. **Families are using the lending library.** Family use of the library was higher this year, which may reflect the development of the Earl Boyles family lending library, which is staffed by parent volunteers and located in the front of the school.

Top Challenges for Health & Well-Being

1. **Dental health is a challenge.** While many families reported taking their young child to the dentist last year, the rate of dental caries was high, indicating the need for earlier intervention to promote oral health among children at Earl Boyles. This may be a particular concern for Latino children, who both accessed dental services at a lower rate and had higher rates of dental caries compared to other children.
2. **Food insecurity remains a concern.** Food insecurity remains an issue for between 20-25% of families.
3. **Families need better access to, and information about, basic resources and supports.** Families need better, and more, information and support about how to access tangible resources such as transportation, food, money, and housing.

Summary of Key Findings: Governance & Prenatal-Grade 3 Systems Change

Early Works is not a single program or intervention. Rather, it is focused on changing the way that early childhood and family support programs, schools, and families work together to support children's success. Further, the initiative is grounded in a collaborative cross-system governance and leadership structure that drives project planning, decision making, and ongoing improvement. Thus, a key aspect of the evaluation focuses on documenting this systems-level work and associated changes in the prenatal-Grade 3 systems at Earl Boyles. Last year, interviews were conducted with 23 key stakeholders, including parents, teachers, Earl Boyles school data, DDSD administrators, community partners, and staff at the Children's Institute. Additionally, a quantitative survey of the effectiveness of the governance structure was also conducted and included 23 respondents.

Key Successes in Governance & Systems

- **Governance:**
 1. The work of the Neighborhood Center Planning Committee was highly successful and included a number of engaged families in developing a vision and strategic plan for the Center.
 2. The high-level Policy Steering Committee included two key parent representatives.
 3. More Earl Boyles teaching staff were included on committees, specifically the Family Engagement and PreK Operations committees involved EB staff.
- **Systems Development:**
 1. Universal access to free, high quality preschool for children in the Earl Boyles catchment area was made possible through the expansion of the on-site preschool.
 2. Parents successfully advocated for county funding for staff at the Neighborhood Center.
 3. District support for preschool and early learning continued to expand, with more DDSD elementary schools adding preschool programs.
 4. There was substantial expansion of statewide support for early learning and P-3 systems improvement, supported through advocacy by Earl Boyles parents, the Children's Institute, and other key community partners.
 5. Earl Boyles continued to serve as a demonstration and learning model, including sites visits from over 100 other districts, schools, and policy makers.

Key Challenges in Governance & Systems

- **Governance**

1. There is a need for more clarity around high-level decision making, in particular about who or what group, is responsible for decisions about the future direction for Early Works at Earl Boyles, including but not limited to programming and development in the Neighborhood Center.
2. Additional clarity and streamlining of workgroup composition, meeting schedules, and responsibilities is needed across most of the current Early Works subcommittee.
3. Governance needs to include a venue for community-based organizations and partners to continue to work together around planning and development.
4. Parent involvement in governance should continue to be strengthened and expanded, with clear pathways for supporting leadership development among Earl Boyles parents, and by including parents with more diverse backgrounds.

- **Systems Development**

1. Ongoing, sustainable resources for staffing and programming at the Neighborhood Center should be a priority for next year.
2. There is a need for additional support and resources for the Earl Boyles principal for Early Works-related administrative and governance work.
3. Given the central role of the DDS cabinet in Early Works governance, it will be important to ensure that this cabinet includes someone with a strong early childhood background/expertise.
4. There is a need to strengthen the training and professional development work aimed at alignment between early learning providers and elementary teachers through training and professional learning teams. Further, ensuring that preschool teachers have regular opportunities to work collaboratively with kindergarten and early grades teachers will be important.

Recommendations & Future Directions

Below, we provide a summary of key recommendations for the initiative. Many of these recommendations are consistent with recommendations and findings from previous years. While there are no large deviations from prior recommendations, this year's data collection

reinforces the importance of several areas of ongoing work, and suggests some areas for broadening (or narrowing) scope. These recommendations and key findings are being shared with the Earl Boyles governing committees and working groups to inform the work moving forward in Year 5.

Extend the work for children ages 0-3:

- Expand and enhance work to support language development, executive function, and social emotional development in the 0-3 and 0-5 period by implementing more on-site evidence based parenting education programming.
- Implement strategies to connect parents of children 0-3 with Healthy Families Oregon, Nurse-Family Partnerships, Early Head Start, and Parents as Teachers home visiting programs.
- In 0-3 efforts, prioritize parenting supports for Latino parents and parents who speak languages other than English. Identify and implement culturally and linguistically specific supports for this population such as Abriendo Puertas and home visiting from Spanish-speaking home visitors.

Continue to strengthen the Earl Boyles Preschool:

- Continue excellent supports for early literacy in the preschool, especially for Latino children.
- Increase efforts to encourage and support preschool families to read and engage children in developmentally supportive activities; ensure these parents have access to linguistically appropriate books and materials.
- Identify and implement strategies in the preschool that enhance current language development and early numeracy curricula.

Strengthening Home-School Connections:

- Provide home visits to all incoming kindergarten students and expand teacher home visits to upper grades.
- Identify strategies for regular (weekly) communication between teachers and parents about children's experiences in class as well as supports at home.
- Provide professional development to all EB staff on strategies for positive family engagement and partnership.

Governance Structure & Membership:

- Ensure that there is a clear group that has the authority and is tasked with decision making for future directions of Early Works and the Neighborhood Center.
- Revisit the subcommittee and workgroup structures to clarify membership, responsibility, and meeting frequency.
- Develop leadership pathways to continue to expand parent leadership and participation.

Sustainability & Replicability:

- Make sure that discussion of resource development and sustainability are regularly featured in leadership meetings.
- Develop a plan for sustained funding for the Neighborhood Center.
- Identify and implement strategies for involving more culturally and linguistically diverse parents; consider more translation, peer mentors, etc.