

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

of Professional Development Supports for P-3 Alignment in Oregon

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Introduction

The public education system in Oregon is undergoing significant changes. From the governor's office to the Department of Education, there are many new education leaders. There are also systemic changes taking place, including the initiation of a system of Early Learning Hubs across the state. Included in these changes has been a movement towards connecting the early years and the early grades; this is commonly referred to as P-3 alignment. The vision behind P-3 alignment is to improve the quality and coherence of children's learning opportunities, beginning well before children enter school and extending through third grade. Launched in 2010 by the Children's Institute along with several partners, Early Works was one of the first P-3 initiatives in the state.

[Early Works](#) began as a demonstration site to provide a blueprint for what an integrated birth through third grade system could look like. Within a very short timeframe the initiative served as a catalyst for both public and private investments to implement similar efforts statewide. At the state level, the Children's Institute developed and advocated for the Kindergarten Partnership & Innovation Fund (KPIF). The KPIF created the first opportunity in Oregon's history to intentionally invest in innovative and promising models for birth-to-third-grade alignment in sixteen school-communities across the state. The Early Works model also provided a template for the Oregon Community Foundation's prenatal to 3 transformation grants.

These P-3 initiatives have amplified the need for technical assistance from districts and communities. Since launching Early Works, the Children's Institute and its partners have increasingly received requests from early learning and K-12 education leaders statewide for technical assistance and support for P-3 related work. These requests inspired the Children's Institute to conduct a landscape analysis to better understand the technical assistance needs in the state and how Oregon's early learning and public education systems could ensure quality implementation to support strong connections between K-12 and early learning.

The Children's Institute contracted with an external consultant to conduct a total of 40 interviews (49 individuals) with education leaders and stakeholders across the state. The interviewees were early adopters working to align early learning and the early grades. Interviewees included: early learning providers, K-12 educators and administrators, state agency staff from

the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and ODE's Early Learning Division (ELD), community-based organizations, researchers, and foundation representatives. Selected interviewees had some familiarity with and exposure to beginning efforts at P-3 alignment. (Please see Appendix A for a list of questions asked and Appendix B for a list of individuals interviewed.)

The overarching goal of this interview project was to learn more about the professional supports needed to ensure public and private investments in early learning lead to improved child outcomes through 3rd grade and that those outcomes can be sustained. Following is a summary of the key learnings from those interviews.

(Note: K-12 is used to refer to the public education system in Oregon. Interviews primarily focused on work being done within or in partnership with public elementary schools.)

Overarching System Alignment Needs

Following are the recurring needs that emerged from these interviews around P-3 alignment. These needs were highlighted by a majority of interviewees across systems (e.g., early learning, K-12, community-based partners, researchers):

- Principal leadership is the linchpin in creating a culture that supports the connection between early learning and K-12 instruction. It is also critical in creating a culture that engages families.
- K-12 administrators and teachers need core grounding and training in early learning concepts and developmentally appropriate instructional strategies.
- The K-12 and early learning systems have different philosophies, ideas of what quality means, how or whether to engage families, and who they respect to provide training and professional development. Bringing these professional communities together requires a bridge effort that keeps the focus on outcomes for children.
- The best professional development involves presentation of concepts and then coaching, mentoring, and reflection to embed concepts in practical day-to-day instruction. Some of the most valuable time should be spent in "vertical professional development" with early learning and K-1 teachers that involves significant time for conversation and planning to align the two systems ("co-creation time").

- To offer quality vertical professional development, each system needs to address its structural barriers that prevent alignment (e.g., union/contract restrictions, need for substitutes to cover early learning teacher time, different times of day when staff members are available for professional development, etc.).
- Programs serving children and families of color, immigrant communities, and rural communities need tailored support with training, partnerships, and resources as well as flexibility in strategies used to reach quality outcomes.
- Most interviewees agreed that ODE/ELD and the Early Learning Hubs could conceptually lead the provision of quality supports and professional development for early learning/K-12 alignment at a later date, but they are far from building their own systems and capacity to support such work. Bridge efforts/partnerships are necessary in the meantime.
- There isn't a common structure in place that allows for shared professional development.
- Several interviewees reported that Head Start does the best job at family engagement and removing barriers to truly support families; also developing parents as leaders, governance contributors, etc. Other interviewees also reported that Relief Nurseries can be good partners, particularly around family engagement. Ultimately, early learning interviewees reported that schools should do family engagement through partnerships.
- However, Head Start's more than 1,600 standards are too complicated. Some interest in looking more at National Association for the Education of Young Children Standards alignment vs. Head Start.
- Child Care Resource and Referral agencies, often known as CCR&Rs, can be a great training resource – connecting Pre-K partners/schools to quality trainers in early learning and linking child care networks to Early Learning Hubs and P-3 networks.
- Alignment between early childhood system regulations and schools will be needed for schools to effectively provide preschool services.
- Feels like an unequal playing field between early learning and K-12. K-12 system values credentials. With early learning community, it is more about on-the-ground experience, which is not as respected by the K-12 system. It is not a level playing field, with inequality in pay and training.
- Many early learning providers are skeptical of K-12 professional development resources.

Specific Interview Insights and Observations

From the early learning perspective:

Interviews with early learning professionals such as Head Start directors and early learning experts revealed that many in the early learning sector fear becoming absorbed by K-12 systems without those systems developing teaching strategies that are developmentally appropriate and effective for young children and families. Yet, interviewees expressed a strong desire to work with and align with the K-12 system to achieve better outcomes for children. The following themes emerged in the interviews:

- A number of interviewees said, “Don’t just push kindergarten down.” Very different philosophies between early learning world and K-12 world. How they each define quality is very different. (For instance, importance of play came up frequently with early learning providers; it was rarely mentioned by K-12 leaders.)
- Need more collaborative style of leadership in P-3 work. There is a need for leadership training for collaboration.
- The early learning world needs to better understand the K-12 system to work with the early grades more effectively.

From the K-12 perspective:

Interviews with principals, superintendents, and district-employed early learning specialists revealed that while schools are becoming increasingly eager to take on preschool, they do not yet have the professional training and experience to work with very young children or understand the broader landscape of prenatal through grade 3 work. Partnerships with early learning providers have been challenging, often leading schools to try to take on this work themselves. In addition, tying success to data is important for K-12 leaders (not mentioned as much by early learning interviewees). The following are key themes that arose during interviews with K-12 leaders:

- The early learning community needs to allow some room to understand how its work relates to K-12 benchmarks and standards (“can’t just reject Common Core”). Providers need to better articulate their role in a child’s educational pathway, what one researcher

calls the “upward progression of learning.”

- Several superintendents suggested early learning leaders need to develop a culture to embrace and interpret data. Tying success to data is critical. Early learning leaders need to collect relevant data around P-3 needs (e.g., from community needs assessments) and then adapt the analysis of that data to be “actionable” to school leaders and staff.
- Some type of capacity needs to be added for schools to do parent engagement well – a dedicated position to coordinate and assist principal and teachers to create relationships and new strategies for engagement. Partnerships can also be effective to do this work but the school needs to embrace the partner.
- Concept of co-designing is critical for teacher buy-in. Administrators and teachers need to “muck about and build together.”
- Several superintendents and principals agreed that Oregon’s Response To Instruction and Intervention, or RTIi, program could be a good model for cohort-style professional development in P-3 alignment: it provides coaching and mentoring, supported by ODE but implemented on the ground by districts/schools. RTIi program is a model of scaling up with a high level of fidelity. One superintendent cautioned, however, that where the RTIi model falls down is that it will take years to get it implemented across all school districts (took one district three years to get accepted into RTIi cohort).
- Several interviewees expressed “demonstration project fatigue” and felt we need a way to scale up that meets reality of resource availability. Also, how do you truly tie early learning partners into a K-12 model?
- Several interviewees said any type of professional development model needs to build in a strong English as a Second Language component.
- Institute for Youth Success (formerly Oregon Mentors) approach suggested; they are nimble, responsive, offer regional workshops, and utilize a strong coaching model.
- One K-12 education technical assistance provider highlighted ODE’s rollout of common core training to districts: they used professional learning teams, asked districts to put together a consistent team and helped them spell out who should be on teams. ODE funded both initial training and then training to implement what they learned. Level of professional development was much higher than anything they’ve done in the past.
- Adding a family resource center in schools has been a productive strategy for family engagement. Need

funding for capacity to staff it and connect its work to teachers and administrators. Schools need added resources for quality family engagement. Can’t just add it into what they are doing – no time or bandwidth.

- Principals are really the ones who need to change the culture of their schools and lead P-3 alignment work. Principals need training to do this work.
- As schools move to full-day kindergarten, they are seeing more challenging behavior issues. Opportunity to show how early learning staff/providers can be a resource for how to better teach, engage, and support younger children.
- Still tension around the perception that early learning got more resources in the 2015 state legislative session at expense of K-12 system. More work to do to get K-12 to understand that early learning investments are investments in K-12 outcomes.
- Also perception among interviewees outside the Portland metro area that rural schools and communities are ignored by efforts that originate in and are spearheaded by metro area schools and organizations as well as by ODE/ELD. Need to look at different models that can best serve and be sustainable in very rural communities with limited access to resources.
- One state administrator expressed the need for balance between pursuing legislatively mandated initiatives (which are often seen as unfunded mandates, particularly by K-12 schools) and administrative changes, where you can build buy-in through more inclusive processes that bring leaders and practitioners along, allowing them to help shape the change desired.

Where early learning and K-12 are in agreement:

Despite each system having very different training, philosophies, and practice, there was agreement that P-3 alignment should happen and happen well so we achieve the best outcomes for children.

- Need to train K-12 teachers and administrators about the importance and components of early learning – brain development, developmentally appropriate learning, social emotional development.
- Importance of culturally responsive teaching and curricula. There should be ongoing professional development for current teachers/administrators and this should be a central component of teacher preparation programs and principal certification programs for both K-12 and early learning.
- Leadership is critical but need to get beyond the

“heroic leader” model (one district superintendent doing work well). Need to embed importance of early learning and alignment in teacher/principal training programs for sustainability.

- Need more time for conversation and planning through shared professional development between Pre-K and K-3 staff and other early learning partners; vertical professional learning teams are most effective, but need to figure out the logistical barriers that currently exist. Localize professional development as much as possible with respected, local mentors and coaches.
- A lot of concern that the Early Learning Division will not get equal weight/recognition with ODE, so real alignment won't occur at the top. Only two staff really focusing on this work (one position at ODE and one at ELD) – way under capacity to make alignment work.
- ODE seems interested in leveraging public-private partnerships going forward. Early Learning Division team is interested in public-private partnerships as well. How exactly these partnerships should look remains unclear.
- Generally, the Kindergarten Partnership & Innovation Fund grants have been viewed very positively. Really helping with deeper family engagement. But schools believe they need a continued source of funding, like such grants, to make it work long term.
- Schools often don't know who is doing early learning/Pre-K in their community. Schools need to know this before they launch a new Pre-K program in their system. There needs to be a system in place to help make the connections between schools and providers.
- Health systems/Coordinated Care Organizations seen as great partners in P-3 work (best way of getting to kids and families really early, particularly in rural/remote areas).
- The majority of interviewees felt that the role of Early Learning Hubs is confusing and unclear; hubs have potential to be key conveners for professional development but are far from achieving that goal. Some hubs are doing well, have strong leadership, and have strong early childhood and school involvement Others are struggling.

Conclusion

This landscape analysis focused on early adopters in the early learning and K-12 systems who have begun the journey toward implementing P-3 alignment initiatives or systems. Through all 40 interviews, it was clear that these professionals cared passionately about their practice, understood the need for alignment between early learning providers and K-12 systems, and despite frustrations with the “other system,” wanted to find viable ways to bridge those differences. They all wanted to create a system that engages parents and families from the beginning of a child's life and continues that engagement well into elementary school, with all actors in the system focused on what's best for children.

It is important to note that there were some key constituencies not interviewed in this project, including parents, classroom teachers, union representatives, and higher education teacher training faculty. Soliciting and understanding their perspectives as an aligned system moves forward will be critical.

There was a clear consensus that a stronger partnership between state agencies, K-12 schools, early learning providers, academics, and advocates is needed – one that is intentional, patient, and child/family focused and willing to bridge philosophical differences to jointly reduce system barriers. The Children's Institute as well as the state's major foundations could play a role in helping set the table for understanding, compromise, and truly effective P-3 alignment and implementation.

List of Interviewees

Harriet Adair, Assistant Superintendent and Early Childhood Director, Portland Public Schools
Christina Alquisira, Early Learning Director, Gladstone School District
Nancy Anderson, Assistant Director of Student Services, David Douglas School District
Susan Brady, Director, Child Development and Family Support, Mt. Hood Community College
Abby Bush, Associate Program Officer, Early Childhood, The Oregon Community Foundation
Colin Cameron, Deputy Executive Director, Confederation of Oregon School Administrators
Kendra Coates, P-3 Coordinator, High Desert Education Service District
Bridget Cooke, Executive Director, Adelante Mujeres (Forest Grove)
Pam Greenough Corrie, Associate Director, Mt. Hood Community College Head Start
Christy Cox, Program Officer for Children, Youth and Families, The Ford Family Foundation
Yvonne Curtis, Superintendent, Forest Grove School District
Suzanne Dalton, Coordinator of Professional Learning, Confederation of Oregon School Administrators
Donalda Dodson, Executive Director, Oregon Child Development Coalition
Sadie Feibel, Director of Education Programs, Latino Network (Juntos Aprendemos)
Colt Gill, Superintendent, Bethel School District
Beth Green, Director of Early Childhood and Family Support Research, Center for Improvement of Child and Family Services, Portland State University
Lillian Green, Equity Director, Early Learning Division
Don Grotting, Superintendent, David Douglas School District
Ericka Guynes, Principal, Earl Boyles Elementary (David Douglas School District)
Merrily Haas, Executive Director, Oregon Association for the Education of Young Children
Lisa Harnisch, Executive Director, Marion County Early Learning Hub
Jeneen Hartley-Sago, Program Officer for Children, Youth and Families, The Ford Family Foundation
Nancy Hauth, Program Manager (pre-kindergarten, kindergarten supports, and child care), Portland Public Schools
****Ron Herndon**, Director, Albina Head Start (Portland)
Sue Hildick, President, Chalkboard Project
Megan Irwin, Acting Director, Early Learning Division
Sonia Kool, Director of Instructional Services, Woodburn School District
Kali Ladd, Executive Director, KairosPDX (Portland)
Erin Lolich, Curriculum and Instruction Practice Expert, Education Northwest
David Mandell, Early Learning Policy and Partnerships Director, Early Learning Division
Mary Louise McClintock, Director of Education Programs, The Oregon Community Foundation
Julia Meier, Director, Coalition for Communities of Color
Matt Morton, Executive Director, Native American Youth and Family Center
Sharon Nelson, Early Learning Principal, Coquille School District
Judy Newman, Early Childhood CARES Co-Director (Lane County)
Salam Noor, Deputy Superintendent, Oregon Department of Education
Jon Peterson, Superintendent, Pendleton School District
Maryalice Russell, Superintendent, McMinnville School District
Rob Saxton, Superintendent, Northwest Regional Education Service District
Kelly Soter, Principal, Jackson Elementary School (Medford School District)
Bob Stewart, Superintendent, Gladstone School District
****Pat Sublette**, Special Education Director, Douglas Education Service District

List of Interviewees, continued

Tim Sweeney, Superintendent, Coquille School District

Karen Twain, Assistant Superintendent, Tigard/Tualatin School District

Jean Wagner, Director, Mt. Hood Community College Head Start

Brett Walker, Early Learning Initiatives Coordinator, Early Learning Division

Christine Waters, Director, Child Care Resource and Referral of Multnomah County

Maria Weer, Executive Director, Building Healthy Families (Enterprise)

Stephanie Whetzel, Student Services Coordinator for Early Childhood Programs, Salem-Keizer Public Schools

Kara Williams, P-3 Coordinator, Oregon Department of Education

Jan Zarate, Superintendent, Yoncalla School District

All interviews were conducted in the fall of 2015. Titles and affiliations listed reflect each person's role at the time of the interview.

**Invited to interview