

BABY STEPS INTO A BIG WORLD

*How Pre-K Started at
Earl Boyles Elementary*



**Children's
Institute**

The Children's Institute is an organization dedicated to closing the achievement gap in Oregon. Our mission is to promote wise investments and effective action in early childhood to prepare children for success in school and life. We have been working toward this goal for a decade through legislative and political action.

Early Works is the Children's Institute's first demonstration project. Launched in 2010, it is an effort to model best practices and improve educational outcomes for children age 0 to 8.

There are two Early Works sites: Earl Boyles Elementary in Southeast Portland, and Yoncalla Elementary in Yoncalla, Oregon. The two sites have a number of significant differences. Earl Boyles is located in a diverse, urban community, while rural Yoncalla has a population of just 1,000. Both communities have many at-risk children. The Early Works team selected these two locations in part because of the breadth of learning opportunities they together provide.

BOARD MEMBERS:

LORI FLEXER

Senior Vice President,
Ferguson Wellman Capital Management

MEERA MANI

Director of Children, Families, and Communities program,
The David & Lucile Packard Foundation

ISAAC REGENSTREIF

IHR Consulting, LLC

JOHN TAPOGNA

President, ECONorthwest

CHRIS TEBBEN

Education Consultant

KEN THRASHER

Chairman of the Board, Compli

ANTHONY VELIZ

President, Izo PR & Marketing

NAN WALLER

Presiding Judge,
Multnomah County Circuit Court

SUSAN WALSH

Executive Vice President,
The Campbell Foundation

GARY WITHERS, CHAIR

Executive Vice President,
Concordia University

JULIE YOUNG

Children's Advocate

BOARD MEMBERS EMERITUS:

DUNCAN CAMPBELL

Chairman Emeritus, The Campbell Group

GUN DENHART

Founder, Hanna Andersson

DON FRISBEE

IRVING LEVIN

CEO, Genesis Financial Solutions

ARLENE SCHNITZER

Executive Vice President, Harsch Investment Properties



Children's Institute

1221 SW Yamhill St, Suite 260 • Portland, OR 97205

Phone: (503) 219-9034 • Fax: (503) 517-8993

Websites: childinst.org; early-works.org



STAFF:

SWATI ADARKAR

President & CEO

KARA CHRISTENSON

Development & Communications Associate

MOLLY DAY

Early Works Site Liaison

ROBIN DOUSSARD

Communications Director

ESRA KHALIL

Senior Development Associate

DAVID MANDELL

Policy & Research Director

KATIA RIDDLE

Communications Manager

CYNTHIA SANDALL

Executive Assistant

ANDREINA VELASCO

Parent & Community Engagement Coordinator

DOUG WELLS

Chief of Staff & Chief Financial Officer

PUBLICATION CREDITS:

Art Director: **JON TAYLOR CARTER**

Photographer: **SOL NEELMAN**

Copy Editor: **MORGAN STONE**



CONTENTS

On the Cover:

Earl Boyles preschool student
Luz Karina Armenta

Page 4

BUILDING BRIDGES:

How Earl Boyles Elementary School brought a publicly funded preschool into its halls

Page 5

The Partners

Page 6

What Does It Cost?

Page 9

A Team Planning Checklist

Page 12

Early Works Guiding Principles

Page 15

A Community in Need

Page 19

Postscript

Page 20

Recipe for a Blended and Braided Classroom

Page 21

Additional Reading

Page 22

Policy Solutions and Recommendations

Page 23

Acknowledgements

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Both in Oregon and nationally, early learning stands at a critical point in its evolution. Policymakers from both sides of the aisle, educators, parents and concerned citizens agree that in terms of human capital, there is no greater return on investment than the one made in the early years of a child's life.

Yet despite the growing drumbeat of enthusiasm, questions remain as to how best to weave early learning into the education continuum. At the Children's Institute, we believe that learning laboratories are needed — places where programs, departments and agencies come together fueled by data and research to learn how best to align the early years with the early grades.

It's for that reason that we launched the Early Works initiative to discover and document what it takes to create a seamless and high-quality education system starting from birth. This first report focuses on how a publicly funded preschool began at Earl Boyles Elementary School in Portland. Courageous and entrepreneurial partners came together to leverage multiple funding streams and open two half-day preschool classrooms for 3- and 4-year-olds in the school catchment area. We knew it would be hard but we weren't prepared for the numerous obstacles, large and small, we would encounter in putting publicly funded programs together.

If we are going to build an effective bridge between early learning and K-12, we need to rework our state and federal guidelines so programs can align and integrate. Given scarce public resources, we cannot afford the alternative.

We applaud the Governor and President for setting a new and bold vision for education reform that rightly anchors early learning as the first building block. But this vision won't materialize until we simplify the rule book for practitioners while keeping a focus on best practices and quality.

Our kudos to the team of dedicated and creative educators and practitioners working at Earl Boyles who rise above their respective roles and agencies to do what is best for children. In the spirit of our shared mission to close the achievement gap, we hope others will echo our call for needed system reforms and engage in local innovation to move decades of research to action.



Sincerely,

Swati Adarkar
President & CEO,
Children's Institute

BUILDING BRIDGES

How Earl Boyles Elementary School brought a publicly funded preschool into its halls

BY KATIA RIDDLE



Teaching assistant Megan Little works with student John Dennis. Diagnosed with autism, John benefits from this mixed classroom. His mother, Krista Dennis, says the preschool has helped John tremendously.



In August 2012, about a dozen educators, practitioners and nonprofit leaders were sitting in the library at Earl Boyles Elementary School doing some last-minute planning, when they encountered the spork problem.

It was the last of many meetings before school started in September. That they had encountered a problem was not surprising; this group of visionaries knew there would be obstacles when they undertook the ambitious project to include two publicly funded preschool classes inside this elementary school. They were anticipating challenges around weighty issues such as class size, union rules and teacher credentials.

But it was the question of whether 3- and 4-year-olds should use plastic sporks or metal knives, spoons and forks at breakfast that perfectly crystallized one of the greatest challenges they had encountered during this planning process: how best to blend multiple education programs with different regulations, cultures and architectures together in harmony.

The preschool under discussion (which opened at Earl Boyles in the fall of 2012 with two half day classes of 17 students each) is part of a larger demonstration project called Early Works, an initiative started by the Children’s Institute, an Oregon nonprofit. In an effort to connect early learning with the other elementary grades, the project aims to centralize at one school public services and programs for families with children ages 0 to 8, with a goal that it will demonstrate the power of early learning to improve the chances of success for children in school and in life.

For several years previous, leadership from the Children’s Institute had been engaged in a conversation with a small group of local educators and practitioners about a demonstration project around early learning. In search of a location, the group approached David Douglas Superintendent Don Grotting. Grotting had a personal interest in early childhood education and was enthusiastic, as was one of the elementary school principals who worked for him, Ericka Guynes. Located in a community with high poverty and unemployment, her school — Earl Boyles Elementary — had forward-thinking



Superintendent Don Grotting worked with the David Douglas Education Association to approve an unconventional schedule for the preschool teacher.

“Superintendents from across the state are asking how they can get this started in their district. We’re already seeing the ripple effects.”

DON GROTTING

Superintendent, David Douglas School District

school leadership, eager parents and many at-risk children. This combination made it an ideal site for the initiative.

This initial team included staff from the Children’s Institute, Earl Boyles Elementary, David Douglas School District, Mt. Hood Community College Head Start and

THE PARTNERS

- Children’s Institute
- David Douglas Education Association
- David Douglas School District
- Earl Boyles Elementary School
- Metropolitan Family Service
- Mt. Hood Community College Head Start
- Multnomah Education Service District
- Portland State University Center for Improvement of Child & Family Services

Multnomah Education Service District (MESD). To provide more in-depth analysis of the community, researchers from Portland State University joined the project. Using quantitative and qualitative tools, these researchers produced a formal Community Needs Assessment that reflected the needs of the families and students living in the school's catchment area. It also included thoughts from parents and teachers about the school's role in the community.

After considering the results, the Early Works team decided a preschool class would be one of the initiative's first features, and that in order to truly meet the needs of the community, it was critical that this program be accessible to the community and housed at the school. Planning for the preschool classroom began seriously 13 months before it opened, in the summer of 2011.

Of course, bringing early childhood education into an elementary school raised many questions, including how it would be funded. The team designed this classroom with the funding structure as one of its defining features. Because they were affiliated with different programs, members of the team each brought to the equation access to different funding streams that would finance and support the preschool. The three most critical of these revenue sources were state and federal Head Start funding, general funds from the school district (which included Title I funds) and money from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that came through MESD. Known in the early childhood world as "blending and braiding," this process of pooling resources and sharing programs in one setting was an unusual tool to put to use at a public school,

WHAT DOES IT COST?

One of the goals of this project, established by the Early Works and preschool team from the onset, was for the project to rely primarily on public funding. By making do with the resources available, the team felt the project would help illuminate the shortfalls in funding as well as the road ahead for constructing a meaningful, publicly funded system of early learning.

Given that goal, the preschool was made possible with available resources and public-funding streams. The cost summary below reflects those limitations. It is not intended to be an estimate of the cost of providing high-quality preschool to a high-needs population such as the one in the Earl Boyles community. Rather, it shows the resources available to the team in the environment in which they found themselves working.

\$210,000*

Estimated total cost of the two half-day Earl Boyles preschool classes for 34 children

\$115,000

DAVID DOUGLAS SCHOOL DISTRICT

Includes staffing costs (one third of preschool teacher, one third of two instructional assistants and one third of bus monitors); \$11,000 for meals, supplies, materials, printing; \$10,000 for curriculum materials; plus miscellaneous items.

\$52,600

MT. HOOD COMMUNITY COLLEGE HEAD START

Includes one third of personnel costs (see DDSD); \$3,600 for classroom supplies

\$43,000

MULTNOMAH ESD

One third of the personnel costs (see DDSD)

COST PER CHILD: \$6,176**

SOURCE: Costs were estimated in April 2013 by the David Douglas School District.

* All but about \$10,000 of this cost is ongoing. Soft costs such as transportation, support services, and specialized services such as speech pathology and other early intervention programs, are not included. Also not included are the Children's Institute costs for the salaries of its Early Works Site Liaison and its Parent & Community Engagement Coordinator.

** The state of Oregon overall spends \$8,500 per child for a half-day, Head Start-like program, according to "The State of Preschool 2012," by the National Institute for Early Education Research, April 2013. This figure includes all comprehensive services and soft costs.



but the team was eager to see if they could make it work.

Bringing these programs together in one classroom meant not just mixing different funding streams but also mixing programs designed to serve different populations of children. Early Childhood Special Education typically focused on 3- and 4- year-olds with special needs; Head Start served children living in poverty; and the David Douglas School District drew from the local catchment area. The partners planned to bring their respective programs together so that the children in them would benefit from all three.

The role of the Children's Institute was different than that of the other participants. Its staff would act primarily as catalysts and conveners, bringing together the right people to have the necessary conversations, and contributing knowledge and research around early learning and capacity building.

Which is how the group found themselves sitting around a table in the Earl Boyles library that afternoon in August debating the value of sporks.

The group was working out the final details before school started, and they discussed topics such as transportation, nutrition and curriculum in the classroom. Then a Head Start representative raised the question of who would be supplying the flatware for mealtime. Head Start practice, she noted, requires that all children have spoons and forks. Since this classroom would be funded in part by Head Start, it would need to meet all the program's requirements. On days when the students were learning to spread things like peanut butter or cream cheese on their sandwiches, they would need knives.

Principal Ericka Guynes laughed and said that not only did the school not have flatware, but she'd never seen as much as a butter knife in the school cafeteria. "All of our students use plastic sporks," she said.

Like most federal programs, continued funding for Head Start is based on the program's adherence to standards. At the same time, the elementary school has its own practices, established with the needs of larger groups of older students in mind. And since flatware would be washed in the school cafeteria, making this initiative work would mean bringing these systems together.



Many preschool parents work regularly in the classroom. Here Maria Elena Cazares reads to Gio Flores-Perez.



James Sanford is one of two fulltime teaching assistants in the preschool classroom.



After recess, teacher Megan Larsen reads to her students to calm them. Helping them gain control of their bodies and learn numbers and letters are goals.



Many activities in the preschool are used to develop social skills and improve cooperative play.

There were many other culture clashes among the multiple program philosophies at work in these classrooms. Most raised more complex questions than which utensils to use.

Take the approach to mental health. Typically, MESD serves 3- and 4-year-old children outside of elementary schools, in a variety of settings including family's homes, community preschools, or childcare facilities. When specialists working in these settings identify students with mental health issues, they usually make a referral through the county public health program. Teachers working at Earl Boyles, on the other hand, use a different mental health system, one that starts with a school counselor trained to serve children in the K-5 setting. Since the students would technically be served by both programs, the group had to choose one mental health system over the other — or consider how a hybrid of both might work.

The group talked through this issue at the meeting. It seemed logical to use Earl Boyles' existing system, but even coming to that decision raised more questions. Would an elementary counselor understand the unique needs of preschoolers? Would the school be staffed to handle this increased demand? Poverty, unemployment, single parents, abuse and substance abuse are among the factors that could be affecting the lives of these young children, and their mental health needs would in turn be complex.

At the meeting that day in August, the preschool planning team worked through these problems one by one.

Sometimes they tabled an issue until more information could be ascertained; sometimes they put into place stopgap solutions.

As for the question of sporks, Guynes eventually solved the problem by switching the whole school to metal flatware. "I had never really thought about it before," she said. "When I came to this school, that's what they were doing, so we just kept on doing it." The Head Start curriculum forced her to question this practice, along with several of the older students who had not been shy about pointing out to her the impracticality of eating salad with plastic sporks. "It's just more polite," she said, laughing. "Plus, why wouldn't we teach kids to use proper utensils?"

As the team went through the planning session, these connections between programs and curriculums produced some of the most satisfying moments. They found that not only did the elementary curriculum influence the preschool, but the preschool changed the elementary school.

"It's kind of what this whole project has been like," Guynes said later, reflecting on the spork decision. "In education we don't have a lot of opportunity to question our practice. And it's just hard to think outside the box sometimes. But this initiative, and the preschool, has given us a platform to look at our practice and ask ourselves, 'Why don't we do that?' and to then answer, 'There's no reason we shouldn't.'"

Growing Support from Unlikely Messengers

The awkward dance that the leadership team had to do to marry these programs continued beyond the walls of the school. Ultimately, though it took a good deal of careful choreography, it was this very process that helped the team to cultivate the allies that became the preschool's foundation of support.

An example was the early alliance the team built with the

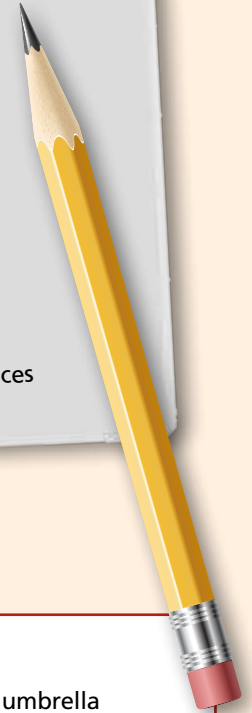


A TEAM PLANNING CHECKLIST

By March 2012, the preschool planning team composed of representatives from the Children’s Institute, Earl Boyles Elementary School and David Douglas administrations, Mt. Hood Community College Head Start, and the Multnomah Educational Service District was meeting at least once a month. The goal was to plan for the preschool at Earl Boyles to open in the fall. At the March meeting, the group produced the following list, reflected here from notes taken at the meeting.

KEY COSTS:

1. Teacher
2. Two assistants who are bilingual and can also be bus monitors
3. Transportation
4. Materials
5. Assessment costs
6. Food
7. Environmental alterations
8. However much of an FTE Head Start needs for comprehensive services



After estimating these costs, the group distributed the work among key partners. By the next meeting, the group had generated the following chart to illustrate which partner was contributing which services.



From left: Brooke O’Neil, Katie Beckett, Barbara Kienle from DDSD help plan the preschool.

David Douglas School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding, including in-kind • All teaching staff are under DDSD umbrella • Finalized job descriptions
Multnomah Education Service District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding • Professional development for ECSE specifics • ECSE-specific classroom supplies as needed
Mt. Hood Community College Head Start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding • One staff for HS monitoring under MHCC umbrella • Professional development for HS specifics
Children’s Institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination and communication among partners • Support with “technical” assistance • Documentation and evaluation • Funding for parent and community engagement coordinator at Earl Boyles

This process of dividing responsibility, costs and work was not without its setbacks. At one point, the team lost a key player when the MESD representative, who had been one of the preschool’s primary advocates, took another job at a different district. Luckily, her replacement was also enthusiastic about the project, but the loss cost the team time. It also called to their attention the fact that this was a risk for every person and organization participating. “This was definitely outside the standard job description for every person on the team,” said Molly Day, Early Works site liaison for the Children’s Institute. “It required every person leave their organizational badges at the door and collaborate.”



Preschool teacher Megan Larsen says she has seen huge gains in her students. “When they came in, they didn’t know how to sit and work on something or listen to a story,” she says. “We struggled the first month just with building stamina.”

district’s union, the David Douglas Education Association.

The preschool team knew the teacher’s position would be unique. In addition to the fact that David Douglas doesn’t generally hire preschool teachers, the teacher would be leading two half days rather than one full day, so her schedule would be an unusual one for the district.

With that in mind, months before the preschool was a reality, David Douglas Superintendent Don Grotting approached the union’s president to discuss a waiver to union rules that would allow for the creation of a unique position.

By all accounts, inviting the union to start this conversation at such an early point was a smart decision. “I never felt there were any surprises in dealing with the district on this,” said Bob Gray, who is, in addition to the union president, a high school French teacher in the district. “They were completely transparent.”

Gray also said he immediately understood the potential benefit this project could have in later years for him and his colleagues. “Helping children become more prepared for

kindergarten means they’ll be more prepared when they get to me and my colleagues,” he said. “We want to see successful kids in the classroom.”

Gray’s enthusiasm for early education was partly due to the fact that, as an informed teacher, he’d been paying attention to the research about early learning. But he had also seen the benefits firsthand. When Gray and his partner adopted their son at the age of 5, the boy had already faced many challenges in his young life; his mother struggled with substance abuse. Yet Gray could see that there had been at least one positive force at work in his son’s life before he was adopted: the Head Start program he had attended for two years.

“It was one thing his mother did have the presence of mind to do — enroll him in Head Start,” Gray said. He credited the program in part for his son’s success; today, at the age of 15, he’s a thriving high school student. “I think early education was incredibly helpful for him — socially, intellectually and academically,” Gray said.



One question that the preschool team was frequently asked was, “How in the world did you get the union to agree to this?” The team’s interaction with Gray showed the importance of reaching out to cultivate broad support from the community, even from places where it seems at first impossible. “Had we wanted to, we could have rejected this proposal outright,” Gray said. “But we saw that it was in our interest to make it work.”

Once Gray and Grotting had agreed to collaborate, they started looking at the details of the preschool teacher’s position. Aside from building in adequate prep time and accommodating her unusual schedule, they wanted to make sure the teacher could visit the students regularly in their homes as Head Start requires. This was a new practice for the elementary school, and the union felt it important that the teacher feel safe on these visits. They included a clause explaining that the teacher could decide not to enter a home if she felt her safety was threatened.

The memorandum of understanding describing the teacher’s position was signed by the East County Bargaining Council president, the union president and the assistant superintendent on Sept. 18, 2012. For final approval, Gray presented it to the ECBC, which provides oversight to a half dozen other local unions. The agreement was approved unanimously.

“It’s been like night and day, having Luz in preschool. If my daughter wasn’t in preschool this year, she would have been bored. I’d do my best to keep her entertained, but she would have been here alone with me during the day, watching TV. It’s really changed everything.”

KARINA ARMENTA
Preschool Parent

Defining Success

By late August 2012, after more than a year of planning, the team was ready for their 34 preschool students to walk through the halls on the first day of school at Earl Boyles Elementary alongside their older classmates. Keeping in mind that they hadn’t included significant soft costs and in-kind contributions, the team figured they had pooled enough cash from their programs to spend a minimum of \$6,000 per student for the year for a total estimated classroom cost of \$190,000. But would the team get a worthwhile return on the added ingenuity, creativity and risk that they had put into it? Would it pay off for these 34 children?

From a theoretical perspective, the answer was yes. A solid body of research shows that the process of blending and braiding funding in classrooms is one of the single most effective ways to leverage resources and improve outcomes for young children. This is well articulated in a recent report on the subject from the Ounce of Prevention Fund, a nonprofit that focuses nationally on early education and policy solutions that lift children out of poverty:

When used effectively, policies that promote this kind of blending and braiding increase the efficient use of existing



Luz Karina Armenta tackles an assignment. “I feel so excited about their future,” says Larsen. “Every time I meet with the kindergarten teachers I say ‘you’re welcome,’ because I know that when they get there they will be tested on letter identification and letter sounds and my kids will be ready.”

EARLY WORKS GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The goal of the Early Works initiative is for all children to arrive at kindergarten ready to learn and achieve school success by third grade. The Children's Institute and its partners use the following list of principles to guide decision making and planning around the initiative:

Universally Available

All children in the community from birth through age 8 have access to high-quality early learning programs.

A Smart Investment

Public and private resources are leveraged and combined to fund an integrated early learning system for children from birth through third grade.



Community Based and School Connected

The school is a community hub where families access early learning programs and parenting supports while building connections with other families and community members.

Led by Committed and Supportive Local Leaders

Local leaders from the community, district, school and partner agencies commit to the goals of the project and actively participate in its governance.

Fueled by Engaged and Empowered Families

Families support children's learning, guide initiative and advocate for all children to achieve school success.

Outcome Focused and Data Driven

School staff, partners, parents, caregivers and community members use data to guide the project and reach the goal of all children achieving school success.

Integrated and Aligned Around Common Goals

Partners, early childhood services and elementary school programs share expectations with children and families, align curriculum and services, and plan transitions.

resources...support inclusion of children with disabilities in high-quality early childhood programs...and fund more comprehensive and coordinated services that contribute to healthy development.¹

In one notable example, researchers in Oklahoma found a positive impact on low-income children's language development when they attended preschool with children of mixed income levels.² In other words, children with limited vocabulary learned significantly more just from spending time with more verbally advanced children.

Moreover, the early education landscape in Oregon is ripe for improvement. Currently, many of the state's early learning programs exist only as stand-alones, which segregate children by income or risk level. This structure creates silos and limits interagency collaboration and cross-sector opportunities. (Breaking down these silos was a major objective of the Governor's early learning agenda at the time that the preschool team was working on this project, and remained so when this report was published.)

"This was definitely outside the standard job description for every person on the team. It required every person leave their organizational badges at the door and collaborate."

MOLLY DAY

Early Works Site Liaison, Children's Institute

By contrast, the preschool team had designed this classroom according to some of the fundamental principles of public education: it would be free, be accessible to the community and bring together a diverse group of children from a variety of backgrounds. The team hoped this commitment would set this classroom apart from the thousands of other preschool classrooms across the state of Oregon and the country. Beyond that, their goal was that the curriculum, culture and staff would be integrated and aligned with the elementary continuum at the school.

In short, what the Earl Boyles team set out to build was



a program that was more than the sum of its parts. They wanted this year to be the first of many for these children in which their education gave them a path to success in school and in life. They wanted it to be a game changer.

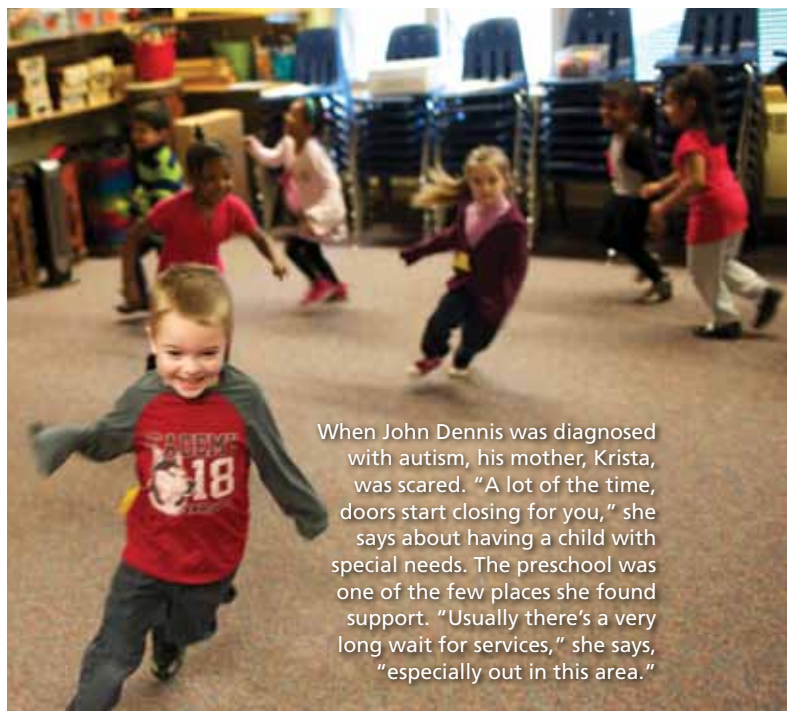
Early Indicators

On a typical Thursday morning during the second month of classes, one of the first things evident was the sense of community that this preschool classroom helped to foster at the elementary school. Many parents were also dropping off older siblings in neighboring classrooms, and the room had a sense of organized chaos with older children and parents bustling in and out.

Some students, still not used to being separated from their parents, clung and whimpered before parents left. Two teaching assistants helped other children eat breakfast around a large round table. Because the classroom needed to meet Head Start performance standards, these students, a mix of 3- and 4-year-olds, were expected not only to eat with flatware but to eat family style alongside their classmates and teachers. The students helped themselves to peaches, oatmeal bars and a container of milk.

Like many aspects of the preschool, breakfast that day was provided through a combination of formal funding streams and less formal donations of labor and time. The primary funding for the meal came through a federal meal program called the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program, which is the same program that Head Start classrooms use to provide food. The David Douglas School District accessed the program outside of their usual meal service in order to supply meals to the preschool. The District also provided the labor and staff to prepare the meals, wash the dishes, and order the food.

At about 9:30, the school's music teacher, Mari Schay, arrived to give the day's lessons, and the kids gathered round her as she played her guitar. Schay spends her days traveling from classroom to classroom in the school, where



When John Dennis was diagnosed with autism, his mother, Krista, was scared. "A lot of the time, doors start closing for you," she says about having a child with special needs. The preschool was one of the few places she found support. "Usually there's a very long wait for services," she says, "especially out in this area."

nearly all the students know her. "I like how you're feeling the beats with your bodies!" she said to the children as they sang "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." "Make your bodies grow big like stars!" she called as she strummed her guitar, and the kids stretched up their arms. This music program is part of the David Douglas curriculum, and as part of their in-kind contribution, the school built in the preschool as one more stop on Schay's schedule.

Schay is an enthusiastic teacher, and even though in her 10 years of teaching music she had never worked with this age group, she was excited when she found out she would be teaching preschoolers. After studying several different music curriculums for 3- and 4-year-olds, she designed her own to focus on sensory integration in order to help the students identify every body part and work on purposeful movement. The end goal was to develop both fine and gross motor skills.

"Had we wanted to, we could have rejected this proposal outright. But we saw that it was in our interest to make it work."

BOB GRAY

President, David Douglas Education Association



“In education we don’t have a lot of opportunity to question our practice. And it’s just hard to think outside the box sometimes. But this initiative, and the preschool, has given us a platform to look at our practice, and ask ourselves, ‘Why don’t we do that?’ and to then answer ‘There’s no reason we shouldn’t.’”

ERICKA GUYNES
Principal, Earl Boyles
Elementary School



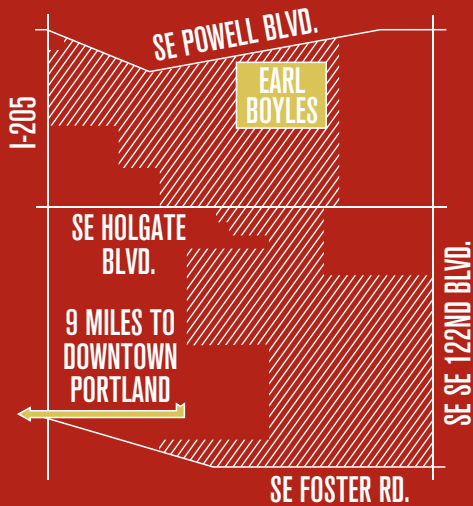
Principal Ericka Guynes early on embraced the idea of having a preschool in her elementary school.



“We talk in here a lot about careers,” says preschool teacher Megan Larsen. Stuffed animals are used in the pretend veterinarian’s office, where students learn to “take care” of dogs and cats.



Earl Boyles Elementary School Catchment Area



A COMMUNITY IN NEED

- Schoolwide, students and families speak more than 17 different languages.
- More than 80% of children qualify for free and reduced-price lunch.
- 40% of children live in poverty — almost double the overall rate in Multnomah County.
- Unemployment is at 12% — significantly higher than both the national and state averages.
- 24% of adult residents have not completed high school — double the overall rate in Multnomah County.
- The median household income is \$29,457, compared to \$49,049 in Multnomah County overall.
- 68% of children have never been in any preschool or formal child care arrangement prior to kindergarten.
- 49% of Earl Boyles students do not meet third-grade reading benchmarks; the statewide average is 30%.
- 53% do not meet third-grade math benchmarks; the average is 36% statewide.

“I did a lot of reading about what’s appropriate for students at this age,” she said. “I think some kids are behind in their development from too much time sitting in car seats or watching television.” Schay’s observations were supported by the community needs assessment conducted at the beginning of this initiative. The researchers hired to evaluate this community found that, on average, children at Earl Boyles spent almost three hours a day watching TV or playing video games. This kind of musical learning about movement, Schay said, helps kids catch up.

There was a good deal of shared curriculum between Schay’s lesson plan and the one preschool teacher Megan Larsen put to use that day. It was clear the teachers and teaching assistants — and the programs they represent — were reinforcing each other. Like Schay, Larsen was concentrating on fine and gross motor skills, and working toward goals such as holding pencils, sitting still and walking in a line.

In the years before this, Larsen had been a kindergarten teacher and had seen firsthand how arriving unprepared for kindergarten can set a student down a destructive path.



What do you like to do at school?
I like to _____ at school.

There are more than a dozen languages spoken in the Earl Boyles catchment area. Many kindergarten students arrive with little to no proficiency in English. A year of preschool, their teachers say, will tremendously improve the chances that non-English speaking children will meet kindergarten benchmarks.



“When it comes to literacy, kindergarten now is incredibly rigorous,” Larsen said, “but many students aren’t ready to learn to read. Every year I would have kids that came in without knowing how to write even one letter, or to sit on their bottoms for a few minutes. You try your best to help these kids, but the reality is they never catch up. And you watch them stay behind for the whole school year.”

It was also clear that in the few weeks they had been in school, these students had already learned a good deal about interacting with each other and with other adults. In the first few days of school, when she instructed them to “play,” Larsen noticed that many of these students would simply take the toys off the shelf and throw them on the floor. Now they were learning to engage with the plastic pots and pans in the mini kitchen, to take books off the shelf and turn the pages. They were also beginning to articulate their needs instead of crying or hitting others.

In addition, the children were benefiting from a much

smaller teacher-student ratio than they would have when they got to kindergarten. At Earl Boyles, there were about 29 students in each of its kindergarten classes this year. In contrast, these two classes of 17 students each were staffed with two full-time teaching assistants and a Head Start family worker supporting the teacher and working with parents and family members.

There was also a group of support staff that came regularly to the classroom to help students with special needs. A bilingual parent and community engagement coordinator — funded by the Children’s Institute as part of the Early Works initiative — offered translation and family support, and a number of occupational and physical therapists, speech



pathologists, and behavior specialists came to the classroom to work with children as part of the IDEA program.

With all these adults in the classroom, the children were getting the kind of individual attention necessary to address their needs. “I feel like this year is a huge gift for these kids,” Larsen said, “that they will be walking in next year academically, socially and emotionally prepared.”

One of the students, a small Hispanic girl named Denese, has five older brothers and sisters who also attend school in the district. Her mother, Maria Elena Cazares, was grateful for the preschool because it teaches her daughter things she wouldn't be able to at home. “She can learn colors, work on her English,” Cazares said. “She even sings the cleanup song!”

The Path to Sustainability

In late September 2012, the preschool team found themselves back in the Earl Boyles library. Principal Ericka Guynes opened the meeting by reminding the group that as part of the Early Works initiative, one of the group's goals was to create a template that could hopefully be replicated. “Megan is an excellent educator,” Guynes said of Megan Larsen, the teacher. “She's exceptional. She's willing to do what it takes to make this classroom work. But chances are if we wrote her job description as it is and hired for multiple classrooms, I would have a hard time finding others like her.”

“If we want to make this sustainable,” Guynes said to the group, “we have to have this conversation.”

The issue Guynes referenced had become increasingly apparent in the early weeks of school. As a federal preschool program, Head Start was not designed to function as part of an elementary school. Likewise, elementary schools in Oregon were not designed to accommodate early learning programs within their educational continuum. Though the team was able to solve many of the resulting problems on a case-by-case basis, addressing the clash of programs at a fundamental level was beyond their scope.

Larsen's schedule, for example, was turning out to be daunting. Head Start requires home visiting, which often takes place in the evenings to accommodate parents' work schedules. But the elementary school schedule wasn't designed with this schedule in mind. Guynes said she feared Larsen would burn out if she had to keep up these hours.

The group considered having Larsen visit some of the kids in their homes and conduct group visits with the other kids. It was a solution that no one seemed pleased with, as it would mean treating some of the children in the classroom differently than others. “That's not how I like to treat my students,” Larsen said. It's also incongruent with the idea of public education.

Despite the challenges of including home visiting, the preschool team felt strongly that home visiting, as part of a larger strategy to engage parents in their children's education, was one of the Head Start curriculum's greatest strengths and a critical part of the preschool. Head Start students are generally in the classroom for only a short time during the day. By involving them in their child's learning, engaging parents both helps them have a sense of ownership and pride over their child's development and reinforces the learning the student has done in the classroom during the hours he or she is not there.

“Helping children become more prepared for kindergarten means they'll be more prepared when they get to me and my colleagues. We want to see successful kids in the classroom.”

BOB GRAY

President, David Douglas Education Association

Josette Herrera was a good illustration of the results that this kind of parent engagement can yield. Her son Diego, the youngest of six, was in the preschool at Earl Boyles. Three of Herrera's older children went through Head Start programs, and she said she could see the tremendous difference preschool had made for them. Much of this benefit

she attributed to her own increased involvement with their learning, including the year at Earl Boyles with Diego.

For example, Herrera had a conversation at the beginning of the year with the teaching assistants in Diego's classroom about what would be expected of Diego when he got to kindergarten the following year. "I couldn't believe it," she said. "Reading, writing, colors...I mean, it's kindergarten!" Herrera realized how much work her son would need to do in order to be prepared in one year, both at home and at school.

As a result, Herrera put up the alphabet on poster board at her house, and she quizzed Diego every day. The fact



Teachers say students came into the preschool not being able to recognize their own names. Before the end of the school year many could recognize not only their names, but those of classmates.



The teaching staff tries to make every moment of the day a moment for learning.

that her son's preschool was located at the school, she said, made it even more rewarding. She had participated on a parent committee, for example, that made decisions around issues like hiring teachers and scheduling. She found the responsibility empowering. "Just the other day, I sat in on an interview for a teacher," she said. "Honestly, I was kind of nervous. It was an experience I hadn't had before."

But despite these clear benefits for families, the kind of parent involvement that Head Start promotes isn't part of standard K-12 practice. Guynes makes her relationships with parents and their involvement a top priority, but what the school needed in order to integrate parent engagement into both the preschool and the other grades was a cultural shift in thinking and priorities.

Another obstacle that the preschool team struggled with as they worked to put all three programs to use in one setting was tracking students' developmental progress. Each of the three programs used an entirely different system. Making sure that the information was thoughtfully and accurately input into each of these made for a significant amount of redundancy and work for the staff and the other preschool

"Just the other day, I sat in on an interview for a teacher. Honestly, I was kind of nervous.

It was an experience I hadn't had before."

JOSETTE HERRERA

Preschool Parent

team members. Moreover, since these three data systems didn't align, the team quickly realized that much of the information they were spending a great deal of time collecting would be of limited value to the students' kindergarten teachers the following year. This issue helped the team see that in this first year, the classroom was not aligned and integrated with the rest of the school the way they would've liked it to be.

Despite its awkward collaboration and balancing, the preschool's very existence was a victory for the team. No



one had expected that it would be without challenges. And many parents said the preschool was giving their children something they alone could not provide.

“It’s been like night and day, having Luz in preschool,” said Karina Armenta, whose daughter is 3. “If she wasn’t in school, she would have been bored. I’d do my best to keep her entertained, but she would have been here alone with me during the day, watching TV. It’s really changed everything.”

Postscript

Since the fall of 2012, when research for this report concluded and the preschool opened, many new questions about the preschool’s future and sustainability have been raised. Still, at the time of this writing more than eight months later, the team was hard at work addressing many of those questions and planning for the second year of the preschool. They were hopeful that it would continue indefinitely as a feature of the Early Works initiative. Researchers from Portland State University will continue to evaluate these children and the academic progress they make over 10 years.

The larger Early Works initiative has also grown at Earl Boyles. Plans are now under way to construct a \$7 million early learning wing at the school, and the community in the David Douglas School District voiced their support for the project by passing a bond that earmarked \$3.5 million for the wing’s construction. Blueprints for the site include several new preschool and kindergarten classrooms.

The initiative has also expanded to include programmatic features that work hand in hand with the preschool to help children meet academic benchmarks by third grade. This list includes a summer learning program, professional development for the school’s teachers, and a home-visiting program that enables the school’s kindergarten teachers to meet their students in their homes



At first, preschool students had to hold onto ropes as they walked down the hall. Within a few months, they could do it independently.

before they arrive at school for the first time.

But for every one of these meaningful developments, there are many questions and uncertainties about the path ahead for this initiative and what it would take to truly change the equation for these students. What is clear is the significant need for improving educational outcomes across the state and the country, beginning with preparation for kindergarten. At Earl Boyles, for example, more than a third of incoming kindergarteners scored below average across multiple domains of early numeracy. Almost half scored below average in problem solving.³ This lack of preparation sets the trajectory for the rest of these students’ education: by fourth grade 69 percent of Oregon children have not met literacy benchmarks.⁴ Only 68 percent of Oregon high school students go on to graduate in four years.⁵

In order to have a real impact on these issues, policymakers and educators will need tangible examples that provide important information about how to effectively include early learning in the educational continuum. It is the hope of the preschool and Early Works team that in this first year, the preschool classroom has provided just that. 🍌

For more information on the Early Works initiative and the progress at Earl Boyles, see early-works.org.

¹ “Blending and Braiding Early Childhood Program Funding Streams Toolkit,” Ounce of Prevention Fund, July 2012

² “Preliminary Evidence for the Impact of Mixed-income Preschools on Low-income Children’s Language Growth” *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 22 (2007) 137–146

³ “Earl Boyles Fall 2011 Kindergarten Readiness Assessments: Key Findings, Center for the Improvement of Child and Family Services,” Portland State University

⁴ National Association of Educational Progress, 2011 state profile

⁵ Oregon Department of Education 2011 graduation rates

RECIPE FOR A BLENDED AND BRAIDED CLASSROOM

This is not the first initiative of its kind. And since any school or district trying to implement a project like this will face different obstacles, there is no single recipe or instruction manual for this sort of project.

The following is a list of nine “ingredients” that the Children’s Institute has identified as critical to its own process and that may be helpful for others working on similar initiatives.

A Common Goal or Vision

As part of the larger Early Works initiative, the Children’s Institute and the preschool planning team agreed upon a list of principles to help govern the initiative. (See guiding principles on page 12.) This list includes principles such as “neighborhood based and school connected,” and “fueled by engaged and empowered families.” This list was helpful when the team was grappling with tough decisions around the preschool. It has also helped the team to establish future goals for the classroom.

One of the principles, for example, is that high-quality early learning programs be universally available. While this classroom is free for the families of the participating students, it does not satisfy the demand in the entire catchment area. It is the team’s goal, therefore, to eventually replicate this classroom in order to be able to serve all the eligible children in the Earl Boyles catchment area.

A Catalyst and Convener

There were many players involved in this endeavor, each with a different role. Many of these players contributed funding, and all of them contributed time. The Children’s Institute’s primary contribution was not a monetary one, but by playing the role of catalyst, the staff helped to guide the process.

Though the Children’s Institute initiated the process and often helped facilitate problem solving, it also acknowledged the importance of the team collectively making and owning decisions. When it came to choosing a curriculum for the classroom, for example, the Children’s Institute provided research and guidance that helped to inform the decision-making process but did not weigh in on the final decision.

Expertise

Each of the team members involved in this process brought a good deal of their own expertise. The Head Start representatives, for example, spent many hours explaining the intricacies of the Head Start performance standards. Without an expert in each of the funding streams and programs used, it would have been difficult to incorporate any one of these programs.

Authority and Leadership

The Early Works team would not have been able to make the decisions it did without a certain level of author-



ity and access to the necessary people. Basic decisions, such as placing the classroom at Earl Boyles Elementary and including it in the larger school structure, were facilitated by the principal and the superintendent; cooperation and access to the union wouldn't have been possible without the preexisting relationship between the school district and the union representative.

Facility or School

On a very fundamental level, this program would not have been possible without a facility at which to house the classroom. In this particular case, the site was a school, but successful early learning initiatives have been implemented in a range of different facilities in Oregon that have been adapted to meet the unique needs of children. The Gladstone Center for Children and Families, for example, is housed in a former grocery store.

Community Receptive to Services

As part of the larger Early Works initiative, the Children's Institute worked with a team of researchers at Portland State University to conduct a community needs assessment early in the initiative's life span. This assessment provided critical data to the team, including demographic information and a detailed picture of the community need for services. It showed, for example, that more than half of

the incoming kindergarteners at Earl Boyles had not had any preschool experience, while 68 percent had not been in any formal childcare arrangement. Kindergarteners at Earl Boyles were arriving at school significantly underprepared, both socially and academically.

The assessment also showed a desire on the part of both the parents and the staff at the school for more early education opportunities. "A common theme across both parent focus groups and interviews with Earl Boyles staff was the considerable enthusiasm expressed for the idea of using the neighborhood as a 'hub' for resources and activities for parents, and particularly for a community preschool," the report stated.

By starting with an understanding of both the deficit and the desire in the community, the preschool team felt confident that they were addressing a real need rather than imposing upon the community their own assumptions.

Pre-existing Services in the Area

There are a number of funding streams that could potentially be used as sources to blend and braid, and a good way to assess their availability is to look at what resources the community is already accessing. In this instance, there were a number of existing Head Start classrooms in the greater Portland area, and funds were already being put to use through MESD to serve children under 5 years old. This gave the team a jumping-off point for the discussion about how to access funding.

ADDITIONAL READING

"Blending and Braiding Funds to Support Early Care and Education Initiatives,"
from the Finance Project, January 2003

- http://www.financeproject.org/Publications/fp%20blending%20funds%201_24.pdf

"Putting it Together: A Guide to Financing Comprehensive Services in Child Care and Early Education,"
from CLASP, August 2012

- <http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/A-Guide-to-Financing-Comprehensive-Services-in-Child-Care-and-Early-Education.pdf>

POLICY SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It has become clear throughout the process of creating the preschool that change at a fundamental policy level would be one of the most helpful ways to facilitate the use of blended and braided funding.

In fact, the current moment is particularly auspicious for tackling many of the policy barriers that make it difficult to work across funding streams and promote cross-program collaboration.

At the broadest level, in February 2013 President Obama announced plans for an ambitious early learning program in the United States that would provide pre-K programs through joint state and federal partnerships. In addition, with the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge fund, the federal government has made an investment in connecting early learning programs as part of a single system organized around common goals for all children. These two developments signal a new era at the federal level.

As part of this new package of policies, the Obama administration has also made clear its intention to reward states that have already been working to build an early learning infrastructure. Since major reforms are under way in the state, Oregon should be well positioned. Gov. John Kitzhaber's recent recommendation (pending legislative approval) for the creation of a new Early Learning Division within the Oregon Department of Education is a critical step toward building an educational continuum that starts at birth.

Kitzhaber's plan calls for housing early childhood programs under one roof. Currently spread across state agencies, these programs will greatly benefit from central

administration and oversight in achieving shared goals in areas including kindergarten-readiness assessment, a quality rating system for childcare providers, third-grade benchmarks, and nutrition and health services for children.

In order to take full advantage of all potential avenues for change, the Children's Institute recommends the following steps.

Federal Level

Though the Obama administration's announcement is a milestone, the fact remains that most of the federal funding streams that support early learning are not easily integrated into a blended and braided funding model. Since so much of the funding for early learning programs is federal, it's critical that these funding streams become more flexible while still maintaining their commitment to quality and best practices.

The federal government needs to change how regulations for such programs as Title I, Head Start, Early Childhood Special Education, Child Care and Development Block Grants, and federal home-visiting programs can best support blending and braiding of funding.

State Level

The Early Learning Council and the Oregon Department of Education should continue to build a common set of standards, outcome measures, assessments and data systems that operate across funding streams and programs. Such a common framework would greatly facilitate alignment and collaboration between early learning programs



and the existing public education system, in addition to collaboration between early learning programs that are working toward similar objectives. The creation of a new Early Learning Division within the Department of Education will provide a new opportunity to look at how Oregon's early learning programs should function together and to develop these common standards.

The Oregon Department of Education should actively provide encouragement, support, guidance and professional development opportunities for schools that are interested in using their Title I dollars for early learning programs. Schools and districts cannot do this work alone. If Oregon wants its schools and districts to embrace early learning, it needs to actively support and encourage those that are trying to do this hard work.

The Legislature needs to create more flexible funding streams that would increase collaboration between schools and early childhood programs, making it possible for schools to offer preschool education to children and families. The creation of an Early Learning Kindergarten Readiness Partnership and Innovation Fund (being considered by the 2013 Legislature) is an important first step in the right direction. This fund would support partnerships between schools, early learning programs and childcare to provide preschool and other early learning strategies.

District and Local Levels

Changes won't happen without local champions who have firsthand knowledge of the barriers that current policy creates to improving outcomes for children. Superintendents, principals, teachers and parents should demonstrate to the state and government that there is a demand not only for increased early learning opportunities, but for policies that support blending and braiding of resources.

Local elected officials eager to improve graduation rates and reform schools can work toward these goals by being local champions, as well as creating supportive funding streams.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Children's Institute would like to thank the following individuals who have been invaluable, tireless partners in establishing the preschool at Earl Boyles Elementary as part of the Early Works initiative:

BARBARA JORGENSEN, *Multnomah Education Service District*

BARBARA KIENTLE, *David Douglas School District*

BETH GREEN, *Portland State University Center for Improvement of Child and Family Services*

BOB GRAY, *David Douglas Education Association*

BROOKE O'NEILL, *David Douglas School District*

DAWN BARBERIS, *Mt. Hood Community College Head Start*

DON GROTTING, *David Douglas School District*

EARL BOYLES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STAFF

ELIZ ROSER, *Portland State University Center for Improvement of Child and Family Services*

ERICKA GUYNES, *Earl Boyles Elementary School*

JEAN WAGNER, *Mt. Hood Community College Head Start*

JEANETT SEALY, *Multnomah Education Service District*

KATIE BECKETT, *David Douglas School District*

MEGHAN GABRIEL, *Metropolitan Family Service*

NANCY ANDERSON, *Clackamas Education Service District*

PAM GREENOUGH CORRIE, *Mt. Hood Community College Head Start*

PAT MOFFITT, *Multnomah Education Service District*

The Children's Institute would like to thank the following partners for funding its Early Works initiative:

- The Annie E. Casey Foundation
- AT&T Foundation
- The Bill Healy Foundation
- Birth to Five Policy Alliance
- The Collins Foundation
- The Ford Family Foundation
- Foundation for Child Development
- The Harold & Arlene Schnitzer CARE Foundation
- James F. & Marion L. Miller Foundation
- Lora L. & Martin N. Kelley Family Foundation Trust
- Maybelle Clark Macdonald Fund
- Meyer Memorial Trust
- Nike Employee Grant Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation
- Northwest Health Foundation
- Oregon Community Foundation
- The Oscar G. & Elsa S. Mayer Family Foundation
- The Renaissance Foundation
- Rose E. Tucker Charitable Trust
- Silver Family Foundation
- Spirit Mountain Community Fund
- United Way of the Columbia-Willamette
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation



**Children's
Institute**

1221 SW Yamhill St, Suite 260 • Portland, OR 97205
Phone: (503) 219-9034 • Fax: (503) 517-8993
Websites: childinst.org; early-works.org



**EARLY
WORKS**

Transforming Education Together