

EARLY WORKS

at Yoncalla Elementary

An innovative approach to education and healthy development for young children and their families.

Envisioning a Different Kind of School

From the moment they enter the world, children embark on the lifelong journey of learning. By the time children start kindergarten, their brains are already 90 percent developed. Children's Institute believes our education system can do more for kids during this critical period of development. Neighborhood schools *can* serve children long before they enter kindergarten and provide meaningful support to parents and families before and during elementary school.

Our Early Works initiative demonstrates what happens when school districts, community partners, parents, and funders come together with a shared vision to support the early learning and healthy development of young children: kids arrive at kindergarten ready to learn, parents feel welcome at the school and empowered to support their children's learning, and the school community flourishes.

A Peek Inside Yoncalla Elementary

Located near Interstate 5 in Douglas County, approximately 1,100 residents call Yoncalla home. The elementary school has been a focal point in the community since 2013 when Yoncalla Early Works first began. Thanks to the resilience and tireless efforts of community members from the region, Yoncalla is thriving, and the school community has committed to a thoughtful, caring, and engaging early childhood experience for children and their families.

The story of Yoncalla is one of transformation through community resilience. A group of parents, families, and educators with a commitment to community driven education regenerated an entire district. In the past decade, family driven early learning, including expanded high-quality, no cost preschool, has grown and evolved into an essential opportunity for children in the community and now serves every 3- and 4-year-old in the district. Today, Yoncalla's investment in early education creates the foundation for an ecosystem of care for children, families, and future generations.

A Public ELEMENTARY SCHOOL That Offers More



Early Learning

High-quality learning programs and supports from birth.



Engaged Families

Programs and services that empower parents.



Health & Other Social Services

School-based supports and referrals that ensure healthy development for kids.

STRATEGIES That Drive CHANGE

“Early Works aims to be a catalyst for change in Oregon. By expanding available resources and working together to create solutions, we can fight for better outcomes in partnership with communities across the state. This program thrives thanks to the ingenuity and dedication of families and educators endeavoring to create equitable futures for the children in their care. Through fostering collaboration and implementing diverse programs in the early years, we are reshaping the state’s learning landscape, paving the way for children’s futures in Yoncalla and beyond.”

Kali Thorne Ladd
CEO of Children’s Institute

We know that preschool alone is not enough to close opportunity gaps and prepare all children for success in kindergarten. Informed by research and guided by local data and community input, Early Works demonstrates an alternative approach to supporting families and young children. This includes offering early learning experiences that are aligned with elementary school so that kids transition seamlessly from preschool into kindergarten and beyond.

The initiative provides early learning and health supports while engaging families and sharing leadership amongst a variety of stakeholders.

The ongoing evaluation conducted by Portland State University allow for continuous improvement of this approach.

SHARED LEADERSHIP

- Preschool Governance
- Yoncalla Engaged Parents
- Curricula Review Teams
- Monthly Leadership Meetings
- Community Health Survey Committee

EARLY LEARNING

- Infant and toddler play groups
- School-based preschool
- Early Kindergarten Transition program
- Summer literacy program
- Professional development

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

- Ongoing program evaluation that looks at child and family outcomes and system-level changes
- Community needs and health assessments

HEALTH

- Connections to health and dental care
- Developmental screenings and referrals
- Food resources
- Early Childhood Special Education Services
- Immunization Clinics

ENGAGED FAMILIES

- Programs that develop parent leaders
- Parent-teacher home visits
- Culturally relevant and inclusive services
- Family partnerships to reduce chronic absence
- Family-friendly community events
- Parent leadership coaching

FALL 2013 — FALL 2014

- Community Needs Assessment focused on Early Learning / Ages 0-5
- Initial school conversation about how to prepare for elementary before age 5
- First community-partner sponsored event: Dr. Suess Night
- Yoncalla Engaged Parents established- a parent group dedicated to supporting teachers, children and families at the elementary level

2013 — 2014

SPRING 2015 - FALL 2016

- School-based preschool launched B4 Early Learning Center co-located at Yoncalla Elementary School
- Regional Health complexities research with PSU began
- Parent Child Playgroups established
- Parent Education Series
- Increased number of families engaged in decision-making with school district through community meetings
- Pre-K and kindergarten teachers offer universal home visits

2015 — 2016

An Initiative Based On PARTNERSHIPS

“ A pivot point was asking families to engage in conversations that explored resistance to preschool programming and then create a governance committee to help guide school administration in co-creating a program. We needed to listen to the community and respond to its needs and values. Many people were engaged in that work of problem solving, planning, and collaboration. ”

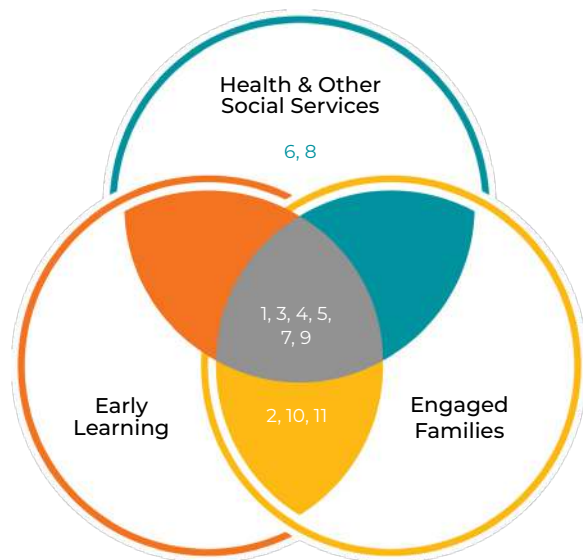
Erin Helgren

Principal, Yoncalla Elementary School

The Early Works initiative brings together parents, schools, and communities to meet the needs of children from birth to age 8.

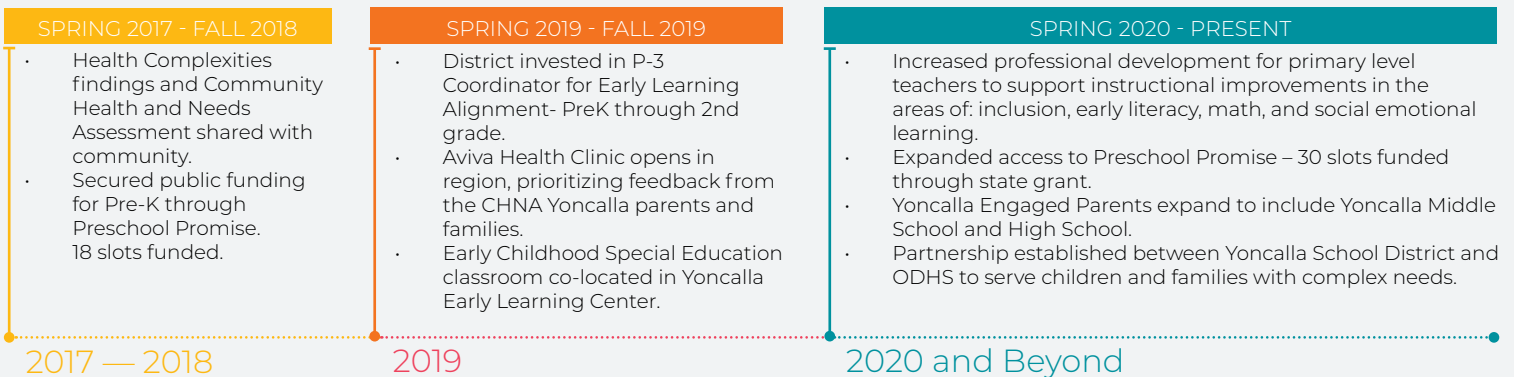
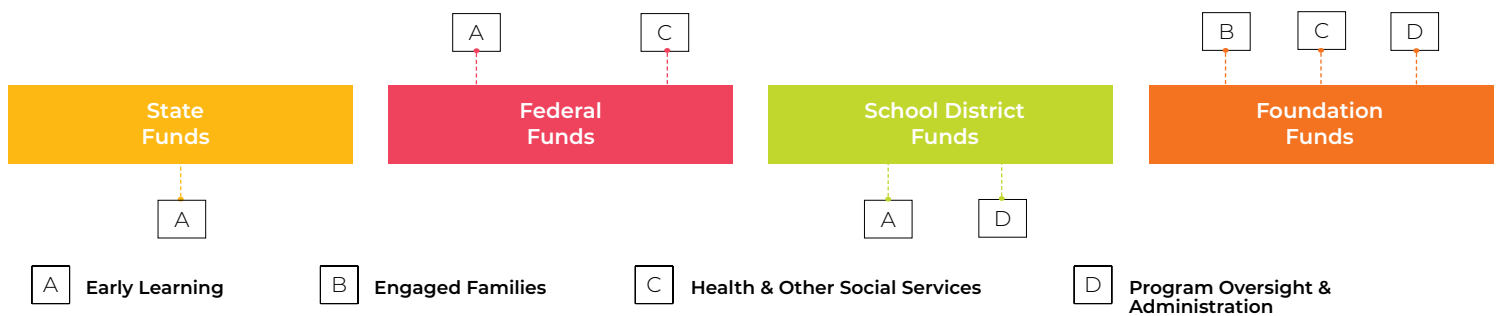
Many partners, including Yoncalla School District, the Ford Family Foundation, and the South Central Learning Hub, have come together to provide high-quality early learning programs and supports starting at birth, parenting education to engage families, and health supports and other social services for families.

Children’s Institute provides the vision and leadership for the initiative and Portland State University conducts ongoing assessments.



1. Children’s Institute
2. South Central Early Learning Hub
3. Family Relief Nursery
4. The Ford Family Foundation
5. Portland State University
6. Adapt
7. Umpqua Valley Breastfeeding Coalition
8. Aviva Health
9. Head Start / Early Head Start
10. Yoncalla School District
11. Yoncalla Library

How is Early Works at Yoncalla Elementary Funded?



A Closer Look at Yoncalla Elementary

96%

of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

73%

of incoming kindergarteners had formal preschool.

17%

of students meet math benchmarks.

25%

of students meet English benchmarks.

41%

of students are absent on a regular basis.

The Impact of Early Works: 2011–19 Evaluation Highlights

+ Yoncalla entering kindergartners have made steady gains over the past three years in early literacy skills, despite the pandemic.

Yoncalla teachers reported a 55% increase in getting supports for their professional growth and 83% of staff report feeling engaged in their work (up from 62%).

+ Parents report feeling welcome in the school, and parents have more leadership opportunities and influence on school and district decisions.

+ Stronger early literacy skills at kindergarten entry predicted higher third grade literacy, math, and writing scores, underscoring the effectiveness of preschool.

+ Students report feeling challenged at school and that teachers are setting higher expectations compared to previous years.

+ 60% of 3rd graders are now at or above their grade reading level per the DIBELS literacy assessment.

What's next at Yoncalla



Early Learning

- + Improve school attendance. Consistent attendance improves reading, writing, logic, and social skills.
- + Improve math skills over the summer. Preventing the loss of math skills between kindergarten and first grade helps kids stay on track in school.



Engaged Families

- + Improve the social emotional well-being of children. Supporting social-emotional growth and development helps kids succeed through elementary school.
- + More teachers will receive training in culturally responsive teaching and family engagement practices.



Health & Other Social Services

- + Improve access to local medical and dental services. Improving the health of children and families helps kids stay in, and succeed at, school.
- + Improve food and nutrition resources. Expanding community gardens, food pantries, and nutrition classes supports health and learning for kids.