

Fostering School Success through P-3 Alignment

The education achievement gap begins early; research indicates that the first signs emerge as soon as nine months.ⁱ The gap also has a long reach, affecting graduation rates, future earnings, and health outcomes. Studies show that high-quality early learning substantially increases the likelihood of later academic success. However, universal access to preschool is not enough; fully aligned early education and elementary systems are needed to support Oregon's young learners. The early education landscape consists of myriad early childhood education programs that are typically disconnected from each other and from their local elementary schools. Programs across the country are demonstrating that aligning early education programs with elementary schools helps to ensure school readiness and future success.

Characteristics of P-3 Alignment

The term "P-3" encompasses the full spectrum of early childhood, beginning at birth and extending until grade three (or approximately eight years of age). P-3 alignment brings together two systems: early care and education, and the first years of primary school. The key is a sequential system that offers a continuum of learning in a consistent environment that builds on a child's development. This system has three primary goals:

1. Develop strong foundational skills before school entry and in the first years of elementary school (literacy/communications and math).
2. Develop social and emotional competence in very young children.
3. Establish patterns of engagement in school and learning for parents and children.

Alignment increases the likelihood that gains made in preschool will not fade out in the early grades.ⁱⁱ When teaching and learning in preschool and early grades are of high quality, are matched to children's abilities, and include interrelated experiences, children sustain and build on gains made in preschool.

P-3 alignment efforts can take many forms, but often include:

- Improving professional development and formal education for teachers across the full continuum, so that they can offer higher-quality instruction and establish a more supportive social and emotional environment for young learners
- Ensuring that all administrators (e.g., superintendents, principals, center directors) who oversee early childhood education and elementary school programs and classrooms receive professional development and formal education that equips them to be effective leaders who understand child development; to support teachers and provide them with collaborative learning opportunities; and to establish high-quality academic environments
- Creating and implementing aligned standards, curricula and assessments that support the cognitive, social and emotional development of young child
- Expanding access to programs that are not currently universally available, such as high-quality preschool
- Establishing meaningful opportunities to engage families and communities in children's learning
- Instituting organizational structures and processes that support alignment, smooth transitions, and continuity, such as governance mechanisms or longitudinal data systems that use assessment data to improve both instruction and systems

ⁱ Mead, S. (2012, June). Quality pre-K: Starting early to close achievement gaps and boost student achievement. Retrieved from <http://standleadershipcenter.org/sites/standleadershipcenter.org/files/media/VVWSF-PreKindergarten.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ Grantmakers for Education. (2006). Making the most of our investments: How PK-3 alignment can close the achievement gap from the start. Retrieved from <http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/MakingTheMostOfPK3Investments.pdf>.