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EARLY SUCCESS IN P-3 FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

*Evidence and Next Steps for
Oregon's Policymakers*



OREGON'S P-3 INITIATIVES

Prenatal-through-Grade-3 (P-3) initiatives are an innovative approach to improving school readiness for Oregon's children. P-3 work recognizes that:

- **Early childhood experiences are key to school success.** Growing scientific evidence on early brain development shows that it's critically important to give children the support, education and resources they need during the first years of life.
- **Strengthening supports for children who are disadvantaged in the early learning system** — including economically disadvantaged students, students of color, and English language learners — is necessary to reduce disparities in school readiness, reading and mathematics skills, and high school graduation rates.
- **Positive outcomes happen when schools, families and early childhood programs work together** from the critical prenatal period through third grade.

WHAT DOES P-3 FAMILY ENGAGEMENT LOOK LIKE?

Family engagement is at the heart of effective P-3 strategies. A growing number of Oregon communities are implementing family engagement work that supports parents in promoting children's learning at home, partnering with teachers and schools, and playing leadership roles in their communities.

Yamhill County provides an example of high-quality P-3 family engagement work. Parents of students poised to enter school participate in a series of workshops that prepare the entire family for kindergarten.

- **Family engagement is foundational** to improving children's readiness for kindergarten and to fostering later school success.

To address kindergarten readiness and school achievement gaps in Oregon, the Children's Institute (since 2010), The Oregon Community Foundation (since 2014) and the Oregon Early Learning Division (since 2015) have provided seed funding for P-3 initiatives and research that support these innovations and document their effectiveness.

- **Initial investments show positive outcomes,** but effective P-3 work requires significant further support to fulfill its potential for transformative impact.
- **P-3 progress in Oregon is hampered** by insufficient funding, infrastructure, and agency and policy commitments both to P-3 work and to focusing resources on the most effective strategies for closing kindergarten readiness gaps.

These workshops exemplify the following best practices for family engagement:

- **They see families as children's first teachers** and strengthen parents' skills to support early learning.
- **They offer information, activities and materials** in the language families use at home.
- **They bring families together with school staff,** allowing them to develop partnerships to better meet children's academic and social needs.

WHAT RESULTS ARE WE SEEING?

Since 2010, researchers at Portland State University have evaluated many of Oregon's P-3 initiatives and their effects on family engagement. Survey results from more than 2,400 parents in schools with P-3 funding highlight **important improvements** in these key areas:

- **Reading more frequently** to their child at home
- **Feeling more confident** in their ability to support their child's learning at home
- **Expecting more frequent communication** with their child's teacher
- Experiencing the school as **more welcoming**

These gains were strongest for families of color and families whose primary language is not English. The figure below shows the change in frequency of parents reading with their child in P-3 communities. Despite improvements for all families, we still see profound disparities between groups. Eliminating these disparities will require more focused and culturally specific supports and investments.

HOW CAN POLICYMAKERS SUPPORT FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN P-3 WORK?

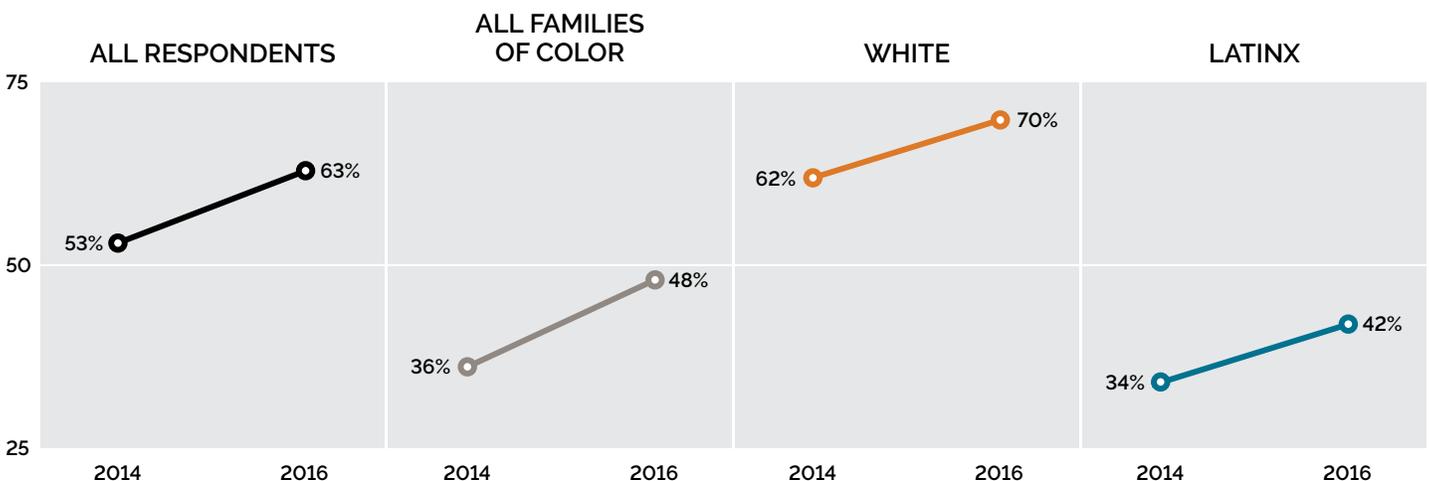
There is tremendous potential for transformative P-3 work to impact family engagement and foster early childhood experiences that improve educational outcomes and reduce achievement disparities.



To support this work, policymakers need to:

- **Task state agency leadership** to adopt and promote a cohesive and aligned family engagement blueprint that lays out **a shared vision for family engagement** across the early learning and K-12 systems.
- **Strategically invest resources** to support effective, **culturally responsive family engagement** in the communities most impacted by inequities.
- **Increase and sustain funding** that supports the innovative and collaborative work needed for P-3 systems to **reduce educational disparities** and to ensure that all children in Oregon enter school with the skills they need to succeed.

More families are reading at least three times a week to their children, although disparities persist*



*Significant difference in proportions for all groups over time ($p < .01$).