

Research supports the idea that creating and expanding early childhood programs is a sound educational and economic investment. The scope and design of these programs is subject to considerable debate. Policy issues include whether prekindergarten programs should serve only a targeted group of children or all children and how to coordinate resources among existing prekindergarten programs, such as Head Start and state-funded prekindergarten programs.

This *Dialog Brief* informs this policy debate for practitioners, researchers, and policymakers by examining how the state of Oregon is using Head Start as the basis for building an eventual universal state prekindergarten system to provide more children with a prekindergarten experience. The current Oregon Head Start PreKindergarten system will be described and recent efforts by key political actors to expand the number of children served by this system will be explained. Finally, several lessons about the possibility of building a universal state prekindergarten system using the Head Start model will be presented.

Oregon Blazes a Path for Head Start Expansion¹

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Introduction

Substantial research demonstrates that 90 percent of a child's brain develops by age 5 and that investing in quality early childhood programs can help to reduce the achievement gap in test scores and develop human capital needed for American business to compete in a global economy. These research findings, along with the accountability pressures placed upon elementary

and secondary school teachers and administrators from the implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, have persuaded policymakers to spur the creation and expansion of state-funded prekindergarten programs across the country. Many policymakers, practitioners, and researchers are now contemplating the creation of universal prekindergarten programs in states across the country. In fact, Oklahoma, Florida, and Georgia have or are close to having state universal prekindergarten systems in place (Barnett, Hustedt, Friedman, Stevenson Boyd, & Ainsworth, 2007).

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¹ All views expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not represent the policy and research positions of the National Head Start Association.

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Many in the Head Start community are considering the relationship between Head Start programs and universal prekindergarten systems. The state of Oregon is defining that relationship through an innovative partnership between the federally funded Head Start and Oregon state-funded prekindergarten programs. Together these programs are currently known as the Oregon Head Start PreKindergarten (OHS PreK) system to reflect the state-federal partnership. In this partnership model, both programs follow the *Head Start Program Performance Standards* (Ford, 2008). Many Oregonian lawmakers and early education advocates view this partnership model as the foundation for the eventual creation of a universal OHS PreK system.

What Is the Oregon Head Start PreKindergarten Partnership Model?

Oregon provides a collaborative federal Head Start and state prekindergarten model for developing a universal prekindergarten system in each state. Although not yet universal due to a lack of federal and state funding, this partnership model is a beginning step toward the development of a universal system in Oregon. The partnership model targets low-income at-risk children first, with a plan to then incrementally establish service targets for higher income families. The federal Head Start and Oregon state-funded prekindergarten programs work seamlessly to meet Oregon's legislative goal of serving all 3- and 4-year-old children and their families.

The federal government founded Head Start in 1965. Twenty-two years later, Oregon lawmakers, with the support of the Oregon Head Start Association, created the Oregon prekindergarten program which follows the Head Start model. Those lawmakers were aware of the research that demonstrates the educational and health benefits of Head Start and wanted to ensure that this state prekindergarten program produced the same benefits.

A state-federal intergovernmental agreement between the Oregon Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Region X Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start provides guidance for the collaborative administration of jointly funded grantees that serve eligible children using

federal Head Start and state prekindergarten resources. Included in this agreement — which is updated and approved biannually by the Region X Office of Head Start and the Oregon Department of Education and endorsed by the Oregon Head Start Association — is a provision for the formation of a state-federal team responsible for implementing a seamless, collaborative, cost-effective, and non-duplicative system, thereby helping to ensure that state and federal funds are used in the most efficient manner. The 2004-2007 agreement outlines a joint monitoring review process and report, joint interpretation of guidance and regulations, coordination of the schedule and events, coordination of funding and service areas, coordination and sharing of training, joint planning for special initiatives and priorities, and joint problem solving (Oregon Department of Education & the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2004). This agreement is currently in the process of being updated to reflect new requirements mandated in the recently enacted *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007*.

The OHS PreK system is funded by the federal and state governments. The Office of Head Start provides federal funds directly to grantees, and the Oregon Department of Education also disburses state funds directly to grantees. For grantees receiving funds from both sources, the Oregon Department of Education seeks to provide state prekindergarten funds at the same cost-per-child as the federal Head Start program. Due to a state funding crisis during the late 1990s, however, the state prekindergarten cost-per-child is currently slightly less (Oregon Department of Education & the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2004). Grantees receiving funds from both sources can blend their federal and state funds at the local level to serve the total number of children for which they are funded. This approach eliminates the administrative burden of having to put federal- or state-funded children in separate classes. State prekindergarten funds can be used to meet the 20-percent non-federal match that Head Start programs are statutorily required to raise (Oregon Department of Education & the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2004).

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Fully funding OHS PreK is Oregon's first major step toward creating a universal prekindergarten system (Ford, 2007). Full funding is considered as serving 80 percent of the eligible 3- and 4-year-children (Ford & Ryan, 2008, slide 7). As mentioned earlier, the program's first priority is to serve children from low-income families. Once these children are served, the program will incrementally serve children and families with higher incomes (Castillo, 2007).

The state of Oregon has rapidly expanded the OHS PreK program during the 2007-2009 biennium. The Oregon state prekindergarten program began during the 1987-1989 biennium with a budget of \$1 million to serve 360 children, and by the 2006-2007 biennium, the program was funded to serve 3,846 children. During the 2007-2009 biennium, Oregon's state prekindergarten funding will support 3,068 additional children, resulting in a total of 6,554 children that will be served by the end of this biennium (personal communication with Dell Ford, October 22, 2008). When state prekindergarten and federal Head Start funding is combined, 12,661 children and their families receive services through OHS PreK system. Oregon is still currently short of its 80-percent goal because there are more children living in poverty (Wong, 2008).

Why and How Did Oregon Rapidly Expand Enrollment?

This brief will now explain why and how Oregon pursued a path toward the creation of a universal prekindergarten system by rapidly expanding the enrollment of children and their families through its high-quality state-funded prekindergarten program and how supporters of the Ready for School campaign and Oregon lawmakers played key roles in propelling Oregon down this path.

Ready for School Campaign Supporters

In 2003, a group of Oregon business and community leaders launched the Ready for School public awareness campaign to ensure that all children will eventually have access to high-quality preschool. While this campaign espouses that investing in high-quality preschool is the moral thing to do, it also champions that investing in high-quality preschool is cost-effective and yields multiple benefits for society (Adarkar, 2007).

Richard C. Alexander, founder of Viking Industries, chairs the Ready for School campaign. Alexander, a conservative Republican, became a believer in early childhood education's value after serving on the Citizens Crime Commission. In that capacity, he learned that investing in a quality early childhood education program such as Head Start can reduce the likelihood that the children will commit crimes when they are older (personal communication with Richard Alexander, January 2008).

Alexander argues that there are moral and economic reasons to help at-risk children succeed in life by providing them with access to a quality early childhood program such as Head Start or the Oregon state prekindergarten program. The moral imperative is to prevent at-risk children from falling behind and finding themselves in the criminal justice system. The economic necessity is to ensure that these children can be productive members of society and can help America succeed in the 21st century international economy (personal communication with Richard Alexander, January 2008).

Alexander also chairs the Ready for School Leaders Panel (RSLP), an independent group of business, civic, and philanthropic leaders who have been crucial to the success of the Ready for School campaign. These leaders have direct access to Oregon lawmakers and are a completely independent and dynamic group of leaders who have no personal financial interest in the expansion of Oregon's state-funded prekindergarten program. These leaders offered moral and economic arguments to expand this program in their hundreds of individual and collective meetings with Oregon policymakers.

RSLP members work for organizations such as Bank of America, The Campbell Group, the Children's Institute, Comcast, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Oregon, Innovation Partners, Jubitz Family Foundation, Nike, Northwest Health Foundation, Portland General Electric, Portland Trail Blazers, Stand for Children, and Viking Industries. Several state and local leaders serve on RSLP, including James Sager, policy advisor to Governor Theodore "Ted" Kulongoski, and two former governors of Oregon: Victor Atiyeh and Barbara Roberts. The Associated Oregon Industries,

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Oregon Business Association, Oregon Education Association, and Portland Business Alliance all supported Ready for School's work, although they do not have representatives on RSLP.

Conspicuously absent from the RSLP roster are the OHS PreK system providers. This omission is intentional on the part of Ready for School leaders, who believe that they would be more effective advocates if the providers who would benefit financially from expanding the Oregon state prekindergarten program are not leading the advocacy efforts (personal communication with Richard Alexander, January 2008).

One of the key Ready for School campaign drivers is the Children's Institute. Founded in 2003 as a nonprofit organization, the Children's Institute uses research to promote public policies that can help at-risk children in Oregon. Based in Oregon, the Children's Institute provides expertise in research and communications and works closely with RSLP and Dell Ford, the Oregon State Head Start Collaboration director — who was dubbed the “silent quarterback” by Richard Alexander. During this campaign, Ford has served as a resource person by providing her expertise and technical information about the OHS PreK system to Ready for School campaign members and Oregon policymakers (personal communication with Richard Alexander, October 21, 2008).

During the Ready for School campaign in 2006, the Children's Institute published a research report describing how the Head Start and Oregon state prekindergarten programs serve children most at-risk for school failure and, as a result, who have the most to gain from having access to those quality early childhood education programs. This report demonstrated the educational, societal, and economic impacts of increasing funding for the Oregon state prekindergarten program. It drew upon statistics and assessment results collected by the Oregon Department of Education and studies conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the RAND Corporation, as well as other studies that documented how quality prekindergarten programs reap net economic benefits to society (Mandell, 2006).

The Oregon Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services conducted studies that demonstrated the cognitive and socio-emotional benefits of Head Start. The Oregon Department of Education reported that 570 children in five Oregon Head Start programs demonstrated huge gains in language and literacy, early math, and socio-emotional development (Oregon Department of Education, 2005). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' *Head Start Impact Study* found that Head Start dramatically reduced the achievement gap in pre-reading skills by cutting it by 47 percent among 3-year-olds and 45 percent among 4-year-olds (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005).

The RAND Corporation found in its student achievement study that states that invested in prekindergarten programs demonstrated improved fourth grade math and reading scores from 1990 to 1996 (Grissmer, Flanagan, Kawata, & Williamson, 2000). The RAND Corporation's study was not limited to prekindergarten programs that only served at-risk children. Since the Oregon state prekindergarten program is currently serving at-risk children, the Children's Institute contended that this program would have greater impacts on fourth grade math and reading scores than were found in this RAND Corporation study (Mandell, 2006).

One of the research arguments made by the Children's Institute that the business community and Oregon lawmakers found to be most compelling was that expanding the Oregon state prekindergarten program within the OHS PreK system was an intelligent economic development strategy for Oregon. The Children's Institute and the Ready for School campaign touted the human capital research of Dr. James J. Heckman, Nobel laureate in economics at the University of Chicago. Heckman calculated that quality prekindergarten programs have the highest return on investment in human capital or workforce development when compared with the returns of elementary, secondary, and post-secondary educational programs (Heckman, 2006).

The basis for Heckman's calculations were cost-benefit studies of model early childhood programs. The Children's Institute highlighted the findings of two of these studies:

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The Title I Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC) Study and the *High/Scope Perry Preschool Study*. For every dollar invested, the Children’s Institute reported the returns to society were \$7.14 for Chicago CPC and \$17 for the Perry Preschool programs (Mandell, 2006; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2002; Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield, & Nores, 2005). These programs were not Head Start programs, but they shared some similarities with Head Start, such as the provision of comprehensive services. While many of the early childhood studies referenced by the Children’s Institute and other supporters of the Ready for School campaign did not specifically examine Head Start programs, these studies still demonstrated that the Oregon state prekindergarten program within the OHS PreK system could improve the lives of at-risk children and their families if sufficient resources were provided.

Another important supporter of the Ready for School campaign has been Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Oregon, which represents 126 police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys, and violence survivors in Oregon (Schaefer, Kass, Brooks, & Kirsch, 2006). Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Oregon communicated to Oregon policymakers its research findings showing that Head Start and other quality early childhood programs reduce criminal activity. Using crime reduction data from the *Title I Chicago CPC Study*, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Oregon estimated that fully funding Head Start in Oregon could prevent at least 500 at-risk children from becoming criminals each year, which could mean a reduction of 5,000 future criminals over 10 years (Schaefer et al., 2006).

With this substantial research, Ready for School supporters focused on persuading Oregon lawmakers to fully fund the OHS PreK system. Ready for School supporters developed a clear and consistent message for Oregon lawmakers, media, and public at-large: “We want the legislature to fully fund OPK [Oregon prekindergarten program]” (Adarkar, 2007). Ready for School chair Alexander consistently asserted that none of the Ready for School members would benefit financially to expand the OPK program [Oregon prekindergarten program] (Adarkar, 2007; personal communication with Richard Alexander, January 2008) When lawmakers asked how they would pay for it, Ready for School responded that

that the lawmakers would have to figure it out (personal communication with Richard Alexander, January 2008).

Oregon Lawmakers

Governor Kulongoski and a bipartisan group of Oregon state legislators were very receptive to the Ready for School’s research-based arguments and, as a result, championed the passage of a \$39 million-increase for the Oregon state prekindergarten program within the OHS PreK system during the last legislative session. They were more receptive to advocacy efforts of the Ready for School campaign than they would have been if Oregon had not already had the OHS PreK system because it had a positive track record of serving Oregon’s at-risk children and families. In fact, Governor Kulongoski endorsed the Ready for School campaign (Ready for School Fact Sheet, 2007). In announcing his commitment to fully funding the Oregon state prekindergarten program within the OHS PreK system, Governor Kulongoski said, “Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten programs are some of the most important tools we have for closing the achievement gap and leveling the playing field for all children” (Governor Kulongoski announces plan to fully fund Head Start, September 12, 2006). Moreover, Governor Kulongoski lauded the cost effectiveness of Head Start and explained, “That’s why Head Start is such a smart investment – it means less money spent on holding kids back, less money spent on criminal justice, less money spent on public health care, jails, and unemployment payments” (Governor Kulongoski announces plan to fully fund Head Start, September 12, 2006).

Meanwhile, State Representatives Vicki Berger (R), David Edwards (D), Larry Galizio (D), Dave Hunt (D), Chip Shields (D), and Senators Kate Brown (D), Kurt Schrader (D), Vickie Walker (D), and Jackie Winters (R) all played critical roles shepherding the \$39 million measure through the Oregon House of Representatives and Senate, respectively (personal communication with David Mandell, October 9, 2008). Governor Kulongoski signed the measure on June 28, 2007 (Governor Kulongoski Signs Historic Education Budgets, June 28, 2007).

What Lessons Does Oregon Provide?

Having explored why and how Oregon pursued a path toward building a universal OHS PreK system by rapidly expanding the enrollment of children and their families through its high-quality state prekindergarten program, what lessons does this case study tell us about the possibility of building a state universal prekindergarten system using the Head Start model? There are four key lessons.

First, Oregon provides a path that other states can follow to develop a state- and federally funded universal prekindergarten system modeled after Head Start. For example, the state of Washington's House of Representatives and Senate unanimously approved a bill that was signed by Washington State Governor Chris Gregoire earlier this year directing the Department of Early Learning to develop a plan by December 1, 2009, to implement an integrated statewide Head Start program that would align the state's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program with the program criteria and program performance standards of the federal Head Start program (Ford & Ryan, 2008).

Second, children and families would benefit if their state adopted the Head Start model. Twelve states lack a state-funded prekindergarten program (Barnett *et al.*, 2007) and could benefit from the Oregon approach. Because Head Start ensures that children and families receive Head Start's comprehensive services and encourages significant parent and family involvement in their child's education, states that have pre-existing prekindergarten programs could also benefit from this approach. Moreover, the Oregon partnership model would ensure that the Head Start and state prekindergarten programs are maximizing the efficient use of resources through collaboration and coordination of services and programming.

Third, state Head Start Collaboration directors can provide a useful role. These professionals can act as a resource for advocates, lawmakers, and practitioners who must find technical information needed to design and build a collaborative prekindergarten system including Head Start. In Oregon, the director educated lawmakers and practitioners about how the partnership between the Oregon Department of Education and the Office of Head Start worked.

Finally, practitioners can successfully expand their early childhood programs by finding community allies who have greater access to and influence with state lawmakers and who would not benefit financially from efforts to expand access to early childhood services. A large part of the successful efforts to expand the Oregon state prekindergarten program within the OHS PreK system was the involvement of local business, civic, and law enforcement leaders who were part of RSLP and would not financially benefit but who had more access to influence Oregon lawmakers than the researchers and practitioners did. Compelling early childhood research findings and the Head Start program have been around a long time. Yet, it was the RSLP members who were the catalyst in persuading Oregon lawmakers to expand the Oregon state prekindergarten program (personal communication with Richard Alexander, October 21, 2008).

Regarding this last lesson, Richard Alexander (the architect and leader of the Ready for School campaign) is willing to travel to states at his own expense to help groups of business leaders devise a legislative strategy to create or expand state-funded prekindergarten programs that follow the Head Start model. His only condition is that interested parties must first put together a small group of high-level business executives from major industries located in their state who can serve as a catalyst.

Conclusion

Oregon demonstrates how a state is using the Head Start model to construct the foundation of an eventual universal state prekindergarten system. This innovative state-federal partnership conveys to practitioners, researchers, and policymakers that a path exists to address the question of whether an early childhood program should be targeted or universal and to ensure that resources among existing early childhood programs can be coordinated in an efficient manner for the benefit of the children and families that they serve.

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