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## BUILDING SUCCESSFUL P-3 INITIATIVES

*Foundations & Catalysts for Systems Change:  
Next Steps for Oregon's Policymakers*



### LINKING RESEARCH TO PRACTICE: STRENGTHENING P-3 INITIATIVES

Early education and K-12 systems require transformative changes to address racial, ethnic, linguistic and economic disparities in school readiness and success.

Since 2010, Oregon has made various investments in **Prenatal-through-Grade-3 (P-3) initiatives**, which address these disparities by coordinating, strengthening and aligning fragmented support systems (such as child care, elementary school and health care) for families and children from birth through third grade.

Research on P-3 efforts around the state has identified **six foundations** and **three catalysts** that are associated with the most successful P-3 initiatives. Strengthening

these essential components can improve P-3 outcomes moving forward.

- **Foundations** are the building blocks that must be in place for P-3 success.
- **Catalysts** are resources and feedback loops that drive P-3 efforts and move communities efficiently toward change.

Foundations and catalysts need more support and emphasis from policymakers if Oregon's investments in P-3 initiatives are to succeed in helping children and families to maximize school readiness and success.

### WHAT ARE THE FOUNDATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL P-3 INITIATIVES?

- 1 Stakeholders with a strong understanding of the P-3 approach.** Successful P-3 initiatives educate partners and build shared knowledge of the P-3 framework. All partners should understand that P-3 is not a single program; it's about connecting the dots between early childhood programs, K-12 and other family supports.
- 2 Dedicated, willing leadership.** P-3 work is led by a collaborative team comprising committed leaders from the early learning and K-12 sectors. Success comes from identifying early champions who are

willing to take on collaborative work. P-3 leaders set the tone by working to bridge these sectors and investing their time and resources in collaboration.

- 3 Effective collaborative teams.** Effective P-3 initiatives have strong **administrative capacity** (transparent decision-making, sharing power, clear communication, logistical support, role clarity) and **relational capacity** (interpersonal sense of trust and allyship). Building these relationships takes dedicated time to learn about each organization's history, programs, practices and goals.

“*[We are] thinking about how we integrate other programs and partners...how do they work together? How do we holistically meet the needs of families – not just providing programs, but how do we provide a better network of supports for families?*”

- 4 **A shared vision for long-term success.** P-3 initiatives must have a shared big-picture vision so that all partners can see clearly how their organization or professional role supports this vision. Otherwise, they will struggle to prioritize needs and to make implementation decisions.
- 5 **An informed action plan.** While the vision statement serves as a guiding north star, the P-3 action plan moves the work forward. This plan should be informed by data and reflect the input of multiple voices and perspectives, especially those of families, early learning providers and K-12 staff.
- 6 **Meaningful inclusion of family and staff voice.** P-3 initiatives must obtain authentic input from families and direct service providers (e.g., early learning providers and K-12 staff) and use this in planning and decision-making. Failure to invest in this step can lead to inefficient use of resources and implementation failures.



Together, foundations and catalysts need more support and emphasis if Oregon's investments in P-3 are to succeed in helping children and families to maximize school readiness and success.

*“When we work together with partners and parents in the decision-making process, it makes them feel more involved and have a better understanding of what we're trying to do. Before, [partners were] involved through background listening — [they were] outside looking in. Community Cafés involve them in the decision-making process.”*

## WHAT CATALYSTS DRIVE SUCCESSFUL P-3 IMPLEMENTATION?

- 1 **Capacity to support P-3 work.** Effective P-3 work cannot be layered on top of other organizational responsibilities. Dedicated time, staff, infrastructure and other resources are needed to support coordination, facilitation, group planning and implementation.
- 2 **Intentionality.** Intentional P-3 initiatives focus on short- and long-term objectives while responding to emerging lessons learned and contextual changes and also addressing racial, ethnic, linguistic, and economic disparities in educational outcomes.
- 3 **Ongoing, data-informed shared learning.** Data-informed learning can shed light on the root causes of educational disparities and the types of change that are most needed within and across sectors. It can ensure that resources are focused appropriately, gaps are addressed, and strategies are effective.

## HOW CAN POLICYMAKERS HELP LAY THE FOUNDATION FOR SCHOOL READINESS?

P-3 initiatives hold considerable promise for improving educational outcomes for children in Oregon. However, this important work cannot be accomplished quickly. Achieving transformative, lasting and effective P-3 systems change will require significant time, commitment and resources.

Policymakers and other key leaders investing in the P-3 approach need to understand its scope and complexity so that they have realistic expectations for achievable systems change.

Instead of focusing on immediate service delivery outcomes, policymakers and other leaders would do better to invest in helping communities establish P-3 foundations and catalysts that will produce lasting, meaningful impacts on school readiness and success for Oregon children.