



EARLY LITERACY SUCCESS ALLIANCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 29, 2015

Media Contact:

Dawn Myrah

503-757-7487

dawn@weinsteinpr.com

Oregon Literacy Nonprofits and Public Libraries Band Together to Build Successful Futures for At-Risk Children

- Early Literacy Success Alliance (ELSA) urges Oregon Education Leaders to invest, not invent -

Portland, OR — Reading is the gateway to learning; yet right now in Oregon, thousands of children aren't prepared to meet an educational milestone essential to learning success: third-grade reading. The 2014 Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills shows that 34 percent of Oregon's third-grade students are not meeting state reading standards, which for low-income children, quadruples their risk of school drop out. There is also a concerning and growing achievement gap among students at greater risk for falling behind.

With the 78th Oregon Legislative Assembly focused on early childhood education and literacy, several local literacy nonprofits have come together to form the Early Literacy Success Alliance (ELSA). The first group of its kind in Oregon, ELSA is a coalition of area nonprofits and public libraries with proven track records in providing at-risk children with the access, support, resources and instruction needed to establish a strong foundation of literacy.

ELSA is an established network and series of partnerships rooted in research-based methods for improving early literacy in Oregon. Rather than reinventing the wheel to address these issues, the group urges the Oregon Legislature and Education leaders to take advantage of effective collaborative systems like ELSA, which are already in place. The focus and message of ELSA is clear: invest, don't invent.

ELSA partners support Oregon public schools in reaching literacy goals by providing coordinated, deliberate and culturally responsive early-literacy strategies along a spectrum of ages and needs. ELSA Members Include:

- Black Parent Initiative
- The Children's Book Bank
- Oregon Public Libraries

- Reach Out and Read Oregon
- Reading Results
- The Shadow Project
- SMART (Start Making A Reader Today)

“Oregon’s successful achievement of its 40-40-20 educational goal will hinge upon improving the reading rates of all our students,” said Chris Otis, Executive Director of SMART. “It is the focus of ELSA to encourage policy makers who are designing the state’s investment strategies to use the proven programs of these established literacy nonprofits when implementing Oregon’s education initiatives.”

Collectively, ELSA organizations serve over 1.2 million children in Oregon each year, targeting those most at-risk—from low-income homes, children of color, English language learners, and those with special education needs. Each year ELSA sends home over 380,000 books with families to build home libraries for daily reading, as well as providing literacy education for over 99,000 parents and caregivers while serving nearly 10,000 children with reading tutoring sessions or one-on-one reading time during the school day — and over 66,000 children during well-child visits in doctor’s offices.

“ELSA offers a unique opportunity for state and local leaders to access and support a range of proven early-literacy strategies designed to keep children from falling behind,” said Danielle Swope, Executive Director of The Children’s Book Bank. “In addition to being eager to serve more underserved children and families, we stand ready to offer our experience and insights to make the investment in early literacy success.”

“An alarming achievement gap exists among children of color within our community and across Oregon, making them at greater risk for falling behind or dropping out entirely,” said Charles McGee, President and CEO of the Black Parent Initiative. “Through our work with ELSA, it is our goal to narrow the gap, focusing on the success of these students in school, at home and in life. By doing this we ensure that all children have a fighting chance.”

“Improving education rates in Oregon starts early with a solid focus on literacy. We know that students who are reading at grade level by third grade are more likely to enjoy and succeed in school, and significantly more likely to graduate from high school,” said Nancy Golden, Oregon’s Chief Education Officer. “Increasing the number of students who are proficient at an early age will take communities around the state linking arms to ensure that reading is a priority in Oregon, and I’m thrilled to see ELSA doing just that. I am in full support of the work ELSA is doing and see them as valuable allies in our overall efforts to improve reading rates in Oregon.”

ELSA urges Oregonians and their legislators to invest further in the proven, award-winning strategies and systems that are already in place through ELSA and its members. To learn more about ELSA and how to be involved, please visit: earlyliteracysuccessalliance.org.

About ELSA

The Early Literacy Success Alliance (ELSA) is a coalition of Oregon nonprofit partners and public libraries with proven track records in providing at-risk children and their families with the access, support, resources and instruction they need to establish a strong foundation of literacy. ELSA's vision is that all Oregon children—across social, economic and racial strata—receive the access, support and resources they need to succeed in reading and learning.

Collectively, ELSA serves as a valuable ally to the public education system, supporting families, educators, schools and school districts by applying mutual skills and resources to help ensure children are prepared for successful futures. ELSA was launched with support from the United Way of the Columbia Willamette's Catalyst Fund, which provides one-time investments to increase the effectiveness of the service networks that support the most underserved populations in the region. earlyliteracysuccessalliance.org.

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