

# Community News

*Achieving Excellence in Education through High Standards of Teaching and Learning*

## A Call to Action



**The first five years** of life is a critical period of physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development in children. In the first five years of life, a child’s brain develops more—and more rapidly—than at any other time of life. In fact, during the early years of life, 700 to 1,000 new neural connections are formed every second, shaping the brain’s architecture in ways that influence learning, health, and behavior for a lifetime.

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### Publicly-Funded Pre-K Research Summary

- A study of New York public pre-k found that students who attended pre-k had significantly better attendance rates in 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> grade than students who did not attend public pre-k.
- A study of public pre-k in Maryland found that pre-k participants had statistically significant gains in reading and math proficiency in 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

*Center for Public Education, 2018*

Because of the magnitude of the potential impact of early learning on individual lives and society as a whole, educators, researchers, and political leaders have increasingly begun advocating for publicly-funded universal pre-k. Universal pre-k is defined as ‘publicly-funded

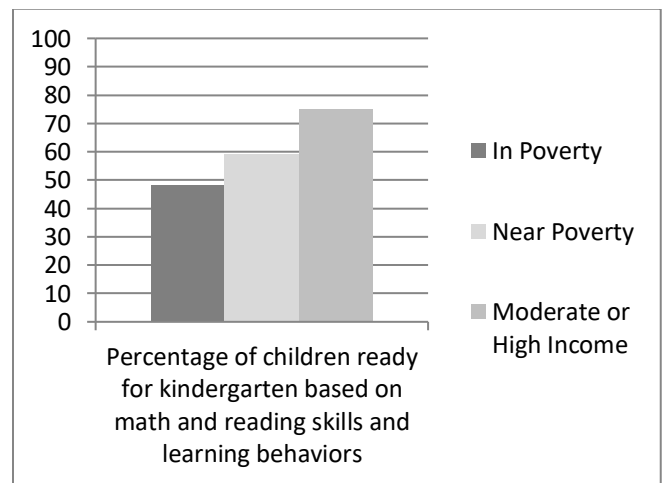
high-quality, pre-k programs available to any child in a given state, regardless of family income, children’s abilities, or other factors.’

**Oregon’s four-year-olds** are less likely to attend pre-k than youngsters in all but 5 other states in the nation.

Currently, 44 states provide state-funded pre-k for most or some four-year-olds. Only 4 states—Florida, Georgia, Wisconsin, and Oklahoma, plus the District of Columbia—provide universal pre-k for all four-year-olds.

Pre-k has been found to have the greatest long-term impact on economically disadvantaged students. Fewer than half (48%) of low-income children, nationally, are ready for school at age five, compared to 75% of children from families with moderate and high incomes.

Research has documented that children from middle- and upper-income families, in which one or both parents have a college degree, are exposed to 45 million words by age four. Children from low-income families only hear about 22 million words. Children living in poverty are exposed to a scant 13 million words. The size of a child’s vocabulary at age two can predict the child’s academic and behavioral abilities at the start of kindergarten. Further, more than two-thirds of households in poverty do not possess a *single* book that is developmentally appropriate for a child under five.



Among all investments in public education, pre-k has the greatest real-rate-of-return on investment. For every \$1 invested in pre-k, long-term studies have shown that between \$8.74 and \$10.15 is returned in benefits to the pre-k participants and the public

(Committee for Economic Development, 2006). Such a high return on investment is realized through reduced crime and criminal justice costs, reduced demand for social services ('welfare'), reduced need for special education services, and higher lifetime earnings that result from increased educational attainment.

#### Publicly-Funded Pre-K Research Summary

A study of educational outcomes for state-funded pre-k participants across 5 states found:

- Pre-k participants performed 31% higher than children who did not attend pre-k on an assessment of literacy and vocabulary.
- Pre-k participants demonstrated an 85% increase in print awareness, including letter recognition, letter sounds, and book concepts.
- Pre-k participants experienced math gains of 44% compared with non-participants.
- By the end of kindergarten, pre-k participants overcame the achievement gap they faced prior to pre-k participation.
- Pre-k participants from extremely poor families experienced the strongest gains in reading and math, gaining an average of 8-9 percentiles.
- Pre-k participants, overall, equaled or exceeded national norms in eight of nine standardized assessments.
- Hispanic children exhibited a 79% gain in letter/word recognition and a 54% gain in applied problem-solving.

Center for Public Education, 2018

**Among McMinnville and Lafayette children** ages birth to five, 32.6% live below the poverty line. Among five- to seventeen-year-olds, about 20% live below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). For the vast majority of district families, access to high quality preschool is dependent on a family's ability to pay for it, something families in poverty and many working families simply cannot afford. The average annual cost of center-based early learning in the mid-valley is \$12,249 per year, more than the average annual cost of in-state college tuition (OregonLive, 2017). When access to early childhood education is based on parent income, inequities between and within communities can become vast.

**What the district is doing:** Since the implementation of the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment in 2013—which tests school readiness, literacy, numeracy, and self-

regulating behaviors during the first two weeks of school to assess the skills with which students enter kindergarten—incoming district kindergarteners have performed below state average in all tested areas. In response to that assessment data, the McMinnville School District (MSD) initiated a half-day pre-kindergarten for four-year-olds. Currently, half-day pre-k is offered at three locations: Buel, Washer, and Newby elementary schools. Children do not have to be within the attendance boundaries of those particular schools to be eligible to attend the district pre-K program, so long as they live within the district.

The state provides no additional funding for districts that provide pre-K. Despite the lack of state funding, the district is committed to early learning because it is our greatest opportunity to have a positive, long-term impact on students' academic achievement, school success, and life success.

Additionally, for the last seven years, the district has provided the Ready for Kindergarten program, which features child development instruction, coaching, and developmentally-appropriate resources for parents of children ages birth to five. Ready for Kindergarten is grant funded and relies on the support of volunteers.

**There is no better time than the present** to rally the state and our community, in particular, around a common cause: Providing funds for pre-K for four-year-olds. Poverty does

not impact all children equally. Children of color are significantly more likely to be affected by poverty than white children. Nationally, 12.8% of white children under age five live in poverty. However, for children of color, poverty rates

increase dramatically: 30.2% of Hispanic children, 45.5% of African American children, 39.1% of American Indian and Native Alaskan children, and 30.4% of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander children under five live in poverty.

#### The Impact of Poverty

- Economically disadvantaged students experience significantly higher rates of academic failure.
- Children from poor families are about 10 times more likely to drop-out of school.
- These outcomes are likely due to the fact that poverty disadvantages children at perhaps the most critical time in their lives.

Currently, 40% of students enrolled in the district are students of color. As racial disparities in early childhood poverty expose increasingly larger segments of the young child population to poorer outcomes, it becomes ever more urgent that our state and our community address funding for universal pre-K.

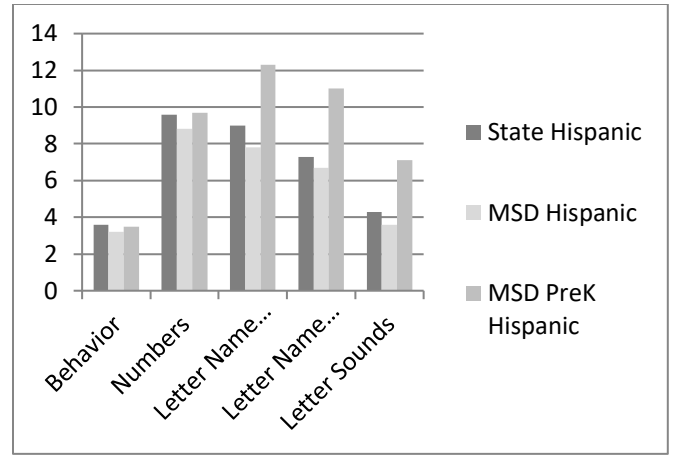
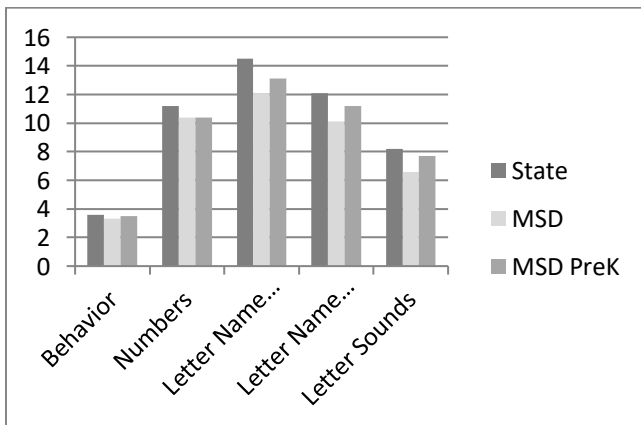
It is time that our community rally together around the critical need for funded pre-kindergarten in McMinnville and Lafayette. Early childhood is the single most prolific period of development for children. Ninety percent (90%) of a child’s brain growth occurs between birth and the age of three.

The inequalities that exist across our state and our community are startling, and this disadvantage—which occurs even before birth—is further compounded by a lack of access to quality preschool education. It is hardly surprising, then, that in low-income communities like ours, in which about 60% of students are economically disadvantaged, children enter school an average of 12 to 14 months behind their peers from higher-income brackets. To make certain our community continues to thrive, we need to come together and commit to ensuring high-quality early learning for all four-year-olds.

*Maryolui Russell*

**Oregon Kindergarten Assessment**

The chart below compares the performance of current kindergarteners, on the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment—taken during the first two weeks of school to assess the skills with which children enter kindergarten—across the state to those in the district and to those in the district who participated in the district pre-k program. The table above/right compares Hispanic students in the same three categories.



**National Child Abuse Prevention Month**

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month. Recognition of the month began in 1983, as part of a Presidential proclamation to raise awareness of the alarming rate at which children were being abused and neglected. The Oregon Dept. of Human Services, in an April 2017 report, found that 76,668 reports of child abuse or neglect were made in 2015 in Oregon, representing an increase over the prior year of 9.6%. About 77% of reports of abuse/neglect were made by “mandatory reporters”—those required by law to report suspected abuse/neglect. Among that group of mandatory reporters, about 20% of reports made last year came from public school employees.

The district is dedicated to the task of improving the quality of life for all children and families through child abuse prevention education.

- Every child deserves to grow up in a healthy, safe, and nurturing environment.
- Child abuse and neglect causes psychological, emotional, and physical harm which can create lifelong problems for victims.
- Child abuse and neglect impacts our entire society and our society’s future.
- Parents, families, and community can help reduce child abuse and neglect by recognizing the prevention starts with each of us.

April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month



## School Safety in the News

In the tragic aftermath of recent school shootings, and as a result of the activism and engagement of the school shooting survivors and of students all over the country, the national spotlight and conversation has become intensely focused on school safety.

The staff and students of MSD routinely train for and discuss practices to enhance school safety. Just as schools train for fires, earthquakes, and other natural disasters, staff and students train for a lock down situation in which a threat is posed from inside or outside the building. However, the most essential component of creating and sustaining safe schools is to ensure that we build strong relationships with students and that the culture and climate in our schools is welcoming and nurturing. That has been, and remains, the nature of our work, day in and day out: Teaching, learning, and relationship-building.

Parents/guardians and community members can help keep our schools safe by regularly talking with children about the importance of breaking the code of silence.

If a student sees something, reads something on social media, hears something in the halls, or is concerned about the mental health of a friend or peer, they must **say something**. Students are most often the first to become aware of a threat to school safety posed by another student or a former student. Therefore, it is critical that students immediately report anything they perceive as a threat to their safety or to the safety of others to a school authority, trusted adult, law enforcement, or by **calling the statewide tip line at 844-472-3367**.

The district hosted a school safety meeting for the public on March 14<sup>th</sup> at MHS. Presenters included Superintendent Maryalice Russell, Safety Manager Jack Crabtree, Asst. Principal Mark Hinthorn, Sheriff Tim Svenson, Police Chief Matt Scales and a team from McMinnville Police Department, and School Resource Officer Toby Carver. About 130 community members attended the meeting.

Students, parents/guardians, and community members who become aware of a potential threat to students and schools can call the statewide threat reporting tip line at 844.472.3367

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