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July 21, 2015

To: Early Learning Council Members
From: Sue Miller, Co-Chair Marion & Polk Early Learning Hub, Inc.
Brent DeMoe, Co-Chair, Marion & Polk Early Learning Hub, Inc.

Subject: Kindergarten Partnership and Innovation

Early Learning Hub, Inc. (now Marion & Polk Early Learning Hub, Inc.) was one of the original grantees to receive Kindergarten Partnership and Innovation (KPI) funds this past year. This funding has enabled us to perform as the hubs were intended – to serve as catalysts for change and to build community capacity.

Our Board of Directors identified target school catchment areas in our region based on kindergarten assessment scores, poverty, third grade reading and English as a second language. This allowed us to target the schools with the highest needs where strategic investments would enable us to build systems to better support children and families in the transition from early learning to elementary classrooms.

Our Hub used part of our KPI funds to enable our two largest school districts to each hire an early childhood system coordinator. These coordinators brought together a diverse group of partners including child care providers, Head Start teachers, pre-school programs, and K-12 kindergarten teachers, principals and administrators. In most catchment areas, these cross-sector partnerships are new and are enabling professionals to align their work and improve their outcomes.

In addition to these new partnerships, we have been able to use KPI funds to leverage other resources. We have been able to align our efforts with private foundation funds to increase parent education opportunities and other P-3 work that is occurring in these high-need areas. We have also aligned KPI funds with other public funds to support and expand the Focused Family Child Care Networks in our school communities. Child care providers have previously been underutilized partners even though they serve a majority of children birth to 5.

The KPI funds have been instrumental in enabling ELH to fulfill its purpose to convene, collaborate and catalyze action in our hub region to better align early learning services and resources. We are intent upon keeping the momentum moving forward in our wider hub region by leveraging additional support for preparing children and their families to be successful in Kindergarten.

Sincerely,

Sue Miller
Co-Chair
Marion & Polk Early Learning Hub Inc.

Brent DeMoe
Co-Chair
Marion & Polk Early Learning Hub Inc.

Oregon Early Learning Council
c/o Alyssa Chatterjee
Early Learning Division
Oregon Department of Education

July 22, 2015

Early Learning Council Members,

I am writing to express my appreciation for your advocacy for the Early Learning System in the recently completed legislative session and to provide brief local perspective as you define a new funding framework. This was a remarkable session of significant and important investments in our state's youngest children, and your leadership was visible and is appreciated. Additionally, it was refreshing to be in a position to work in a coordinated and aligned fashion with you all and with Interim Director Irwin. She was a strong and important ally in our efforts to ensure our representatives in Salem were well informed and ultimately made excellent decisions on behalf of our kids.

As you consider a framework for investing these new resources in your July ELC Meeting, I would like to provide two thoughts from my perspective as a co-convenor for the hubs in Multnomah and Washington Counties.

1. In developing the recommendations for your consideration regarding hub operations, I appreciate the degree of attention that has been placed on aligning resources with our intended and expected goals and towards balancing the real and significant needs of both our rural and our urban communities. We have important ambitions represented in our three overarching goals as a state and the focused resources will really provide a strong foundation for this critical and urgent work. Additionally, it can be elusive to effectively resource the unique but equally compelling challenges at the urban and rural level. While no formula will please everyone, I believe the ELD leadership has developed a transparent and consistent approach for thinking about this necessary balance.
2. Regarding the Kindergarten Readiness Partnership and Innovation Grant, I appreciate the ELD leadership recommendation to integrate these more fully into the new Hub infrastructure in our state. We have made a significant commitment as a state to this new system, which depends on engaged and effective regional hubs as the primary actor for change in our local communities. Ensuring that significant resourcing opportunities, such as the KPI grants, are integrated and aligned with this system is a vital lever for activating this change. I appreciate and agree with the ELC commitment to ensuring we have a high degree of accountability for student and family outcomes and for legitimate innovation in our systems. Let's build this into our hub ethos and culture by integrating KPI.

I know we can do this right for the thousands of children across Oregon who deserve the opportunity to be ready for kindergarten and to have strong connections and attachment to family and community. We can't afford to fail any longer, and please know that we share your commitment and laser-like focus at the local level.

Thank you for your attention and for your service on behalf of all of our kids and communities.

Sincerely,

Zeke Smith
Chief Impact Officer
United Way of the Columbia-Willamette



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July 20, 2015

Early Learning Council
Oregon Early Learning Division
775 Summer Street NE, Suite 300
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Curtis and Early Learning Council Members,

The High Desert Education Service District is the long standing contract holder for Healthy Families Oregon in Deschutes County, and we were strongly encouraged to work with the emergent early learning hub to regionalize the program. As you may be aware, the Healthy Families Oregon application for Central Oregon was submitted by Wellness Education Board of Central Oregon (WEBCO) and unfortunately, an error occurred in the application development. We understand why the State rejected WEBCO's application because of the incomplete application form which was submitted, but regrettably, this situation leaves us on the "sidelines" for now.

As the legacy provider of Healthy Families services in Deschutes County, we stand with our partners and current providers in Crook and Jefferson Counties ready to continue service to the children and families in Central Oregon. We and our partners strongly believe that the children and families of our area are best served by local entities that are familiar with the challenges and size differentials of our communities which are unique to our area. We know that you are aware of and appreciate the distinct issues which we face in delivering services in our Tri-County location in an effective and caring way. And in serving the best interests of the region, we believe the best interests of the State are served.

Accordingly, we ask that you reopen or reissue the solicitation process for Healthy Families Oregon services in Central Oregon to best meet the needs of our children and families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J M Rexford", is written over the printed name. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

John M. Rexford
Superintendent

To: Early Learning Council
From: Dana Hepper, Director of Policy & Program at the Children's Institute
Date: July 22nd, 2015
Re: Kindergarten Partnership & Innovation Fund

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the *action item* on your agenda related to the Kindergarten Partnership & Innovation Fund (KPI). The Children's Institute was thrilled to partner with the Early Learning Division and the Governor's office to advocate for continuation of the KPI. It was always our hope and intention that the fund would extend beyond a 1-year period. The over \$9 million that has been allocated provides a real opportunity to truly test whether the innovations that have started will make an impact on children and families in Oregon and transform the state's birth to third grade systems.

In order for this opportunity to come to fruition, the Early Learning Council plays an important role in determining the thoughtful approach to rolling out the 2015-17 funding for KPI. The Children's Institute would like to offer comment on the process by which you make your decision on KPI and the content of that decision.

Process for determining KPI funding allocation

We have been impressed with the Early Learning Council's commitment to public input on decisions made by the council. In the Rules Principles presented to the Council for Thursday's meeting, the Council is being asked to "actively engage affected persons and organizations affected in rule promulgation or revision." We support this critical step in making good decisions about how to build a quality early learning system in Oregon.

We are concerned that the recommended changes in the KPI funding allocation process has lacked the public transparency we have come to expect from the Council and the Early Learning Division (ELD). While we have been in conversation with ELD staff over the past month about possible changes to KPI funds, the recommendations have not been made public prior to asking for the Council's approval. It is unclear how the recommendations will impact each of the existing KPI projects underway. This has provided uncertainty for grantees and partners.

We ask that you allow time for meaningful public input during which the public has the opportunity to review the actual recommendations before making your final decision about KPI funding. In the meantime, an extension of funds for existing projects through October 31, 2015 would provide short term certainty to existing grantees and allow them to avoid laying off key staff that have built and supported the funded projects.

Considerations for KPI funding allocation decision

The KPI was developed with two core principles at the heart of its inception:

- Local innovation is an important strategy to inform/lead statewide systems change, and
- Outcomes for children are strongest when supported by an aligned and integrated birth (prenatal) through third grade system of supports.

When the KPI was passed in 2013 with one year of funding for the 2014-15 school year, key stakeholders acknowledged that a one-year grant is not good public policy. It was always the Children's Institute's hope and intent to come back to the 2015-17 legislature for continued funding to allow the fledgling projects to really take hold in communities.

The KPI was instantly popular, with over \$10 million in requests for the \$4 million fund. Only the strongest proposals were funded. This included 6 Early Learning Hubs, 4 ESDs (some of which have since become Hubs or closely map to Hub regions), 5 school districts, and 1 non-profit. The projects had impressive geographic diversity.

Now it is our understanding that the ELD is recommending shifting all KPI funds to be distributed through formula funding to Early Learning Hubs. We ask the ELC to consider some concerns with this approach:

- **Innovation vs. Formula Funding.** Typically, formula funding does not tend to foster innovative and responsive approaches to important work. Hubs have rightly been focused on system-building as their core work, and KPI grantees have played the complimentary role of ground-up innovation. Both are needed. We encourage the ELC to further consider plans for how to structure this funding in such a way that truly fosters innovation and continuous improvement in communities.
- **Birth to Third Grade vs. Birth to 6.** The KPI was developed as a birth to third grade fund, aligned with what the research increasingly tells us about this being a critical window for rapid brain development and establishing the foundations for long-term school success. When thinking about systems transformation and alignment, it will be important that the fund also encompass first through third grades, in addition to the important work of aligning birth to 5 with Kindergarten. The Early Learning Hubs have a charge through the age of 6, suggesting needed and active partnerships with school districts and ESDs to ensure strong connections between the early years and the early grades. We encourage the ELC to further consider how to ensure a full connection to the early elementary grades with this funding stream.
- **1-year vs. multi-year grant timing.** As we near the end of the 2014-15 KPI grant year, the current 16 grantees have truly just gotten up and running. To maximize the effectiveness of the KPI funding in the first year, it is important to sustain the interventions and relationships built over a longer period of time. If the KPI funding becomes formula funding through Hubs, it will require the non-Hub grantees to quickly (between now and October 31st) address the uncertainty created by transferring the flow of dollars, changing the amount of funding, and assessing alignment with their local Hub's strategic plan. During this period, the Hubs will also be in the process of determining the best ways to invest the additional \$10.3 million Hub funding allocated in the 2015-17 session. Many will also be launching conversations about the roll-out of Mixed-Delivery Preschool, expanded Home Visiting funding, etc. We ask that the ELC consider:
 - Allowing staggered entry of Early Learning Hubs into the KPI based on readiness and completion of other priorities.

- Allowing existing grantees a full year (2015-16 school year) to continue existing work while engaging with the Hub on a plan for the increased Hub connections that the ELC/ELD desires.
- Only consider defunding existing grants if there is a clear demonstration of ineffectiveness based on the evaluation findings or ELD monitoring.
- **Equitable vs. Equal.** We understand and are very sympathetic to ensure no region of the state is left out from KPI or other funding opportunities over time. Lack of resources to some regions was certainly a challenge of the swath of competitive grants disseminated in the 2013-15 biennium. At the same time, while formula funding may ensure more equality, it will not necessarily ensure equitable outcomes for children. We encourage the ELC to consider ensuring funds remain available for culturally specific interventions, whether the dollars pass through the local Early Learning Hub or not, and evaluating the current KPI allocation to ensure it addresses inequalities and disparities, particularly with regard to children of color, children with developmental delays, children learning English, and children in rural communities.

Thank you for your consideration.