Early Learning Kindergarten Readiness Partnership & Innovation Award Committee Recommendations

Background

The Early Learning Kindergarten Partnership & Innovation grant fund was established during the 2013 legislative session as part of House Bill 2013. The purposes of this grant are to create opportunities to increase the connection between early learning and K-12 education by investing in innovative and promising models for early learning/K-12 integration across the state; to build a body of evidence that Oregon can use to create stronger alignment between its early learning and K-12 education systems; and to promote community and school partnerships that result in measurable increases in children's readiness for kindergarten.

Additionally, prior to the development of the Request for Applications (RFA), the Early Learning Council (ELC) and Oregon Education Investment Board (OIEB) identified this grant fund as a key opportunity for collaboration across the early learning and K-12 systems, and mutually adopted several priorities and criteria, including:

1. Improving children's kindergarten readiness, as measured by the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment;
2. Increasing opportunities for shared professional development between providers of early learning services and K-3 teachers;
3. Authentically engaging families and forming a three-way partnership between schools, the early learning community, and families;
4. Investing in serving a significant number of children in communities with a high concentration of poverty, underserved racial or ethnic groups, non-native English speakers, or rural and remote communities.

The RFA was developed with significant stakeholder input, and was designed to reflect a commitment to innovation and equity. In order to maximize opportunities for innovation, there were no minimum or maximum amounts placed on funding requests, and few restrictions were placed on how funds may be used. Eligibility requirements included the demonstration of a formal partnership between at least one provider of early learning services and at least one elementary school. Additionally, applicants were required to demonstrate that their proposal had the potential to reach as scale significant enough to be transformative at the local level, be sustainable beyond the 2013-15 biennium, and be replicable in other communities throughout the state.

Following an eight week open RFA period, the Early Learning Division received forty applications from a diverse group of applicants, including Early Learning Hubs, school districts, ESD's providers of early learning services, and non-profit organizations from throughout the state.

The total allocation for this grant fund is $4 million.

Award Recommendation Process

The process for recommending awards to the ELC consisted of multiple steps. First, ELD staff assembled a group of preliminary readers to review, comment on, and score each application using the evaluation criteria and rubric included in the RFA. The group of readers consisted of approximately 15 people, including ELD staff, other staff from the Oregon Department of Education, as well as external stakeholders representing higher education and the non-profit community. Following this preliminary review period, scores and comments were compiled and presented as initial guidance to the Award Committee, which served as *ad hoc* subcommittee of the ELC. This committee was chaired Lynne Saxton, and included Eva Rippeteau of the ELC; Duke Shepard, Senior Policy Advisor to Governor Kitzhaber; and Jada Rupley, Early Learning System Director. The committee was staffed by Brett Walker and Megan Irwin of the Early Learning Division.

The Award Committee thoroughly reviewed the applications, and reached agreement on a recommended status for each application. The Award Committee identified several key factors, aligned with the evaluation criteria in the RFA, on which they based their recommendations. These included:

- Prioritizing **innovation over infrastructure**;
- Maximizing **return on investment**;
- Promoting **scalable models**;
- Maintaining a strong **commitment to equity**;
- Identifying opportunities for partnership between schools and **broad range of providers of early learning services**, including informal care providers;
- Ensuring **coordination and alignment with Early Learning Hubs**;
- Seeking **financial innovation and sustainability**; and
- Achieving measurable **results for children**.

Award Recommendations

The recommended applications clearly demonstrated an innovative approach to connecting early learning and K-12, alignment with the criteria and priorities reflected in the RFA, the ability to use data to drive strategic decision-making, and a commitment to serving children in their communities who are most at-risk for entering kindergarten unprepared to be successful in school.

These recommendations also reflect significant geographic diversity, and will allow for innovative approaches to linking early learning and K-12 to be seeded in a wide range of communities throughout the state.

In some cases, the Award Committee is recommending that only part of a proposal receive funding. These are reflected in the table below with the designation **(partial)**, and the component(s) of the application that are being recommended for funding are included in the column titled 'Key Innovation(s).' In other cases, the Award Committee has requested that ELD staff follow up with applicants to explore the potential for expanding the reach of their proposal. For each of the recommended applications, staff will work closely the lead partner to finalize a budget that is appropriate for the proposed set of grant-related activities.

The Award Committee recommends the following applications for funding based on the strength of their proposals:

Early Learning Hubs

Early Learning Hub	Service Area	Target Population	Key Innovation(s)
Early Learning, Inc.	Marion County	Children in 15 elementary school catchment areas characterized by high poverty, high numbers of English Learners, and a disproportionate number of children scoring below state standards on the 3rd grade OAKS assessment	Pre-K instructional framework aligned with Common Core; School Readiness Toolkits; professional learning communities; staffed family child care networks; kindergarten transition and family engagement activities
Early Learning Multnomah	Eastern Multnomah County	Children in two elementary school catchment areas characterized by generational poverty, recently arrived immigrants, and communities of color displaced by gentrification	Community Education Worker model; Early Childhood Positive Behavioral Intervention & Supports (EC-PBIS)
Frontier Services Early Learning Hub	Grant, Harney Counties	Children in two remote elementary school catchment areas with high percentages of children living in poverty	Aligned curriculum between Pre-K and Kindergarten; Shared professional development and transition planning; Kindergarten teacher home visiting program; transition activities for children and families
Lane Early Learning Alliance (partial)	Lane County	Children and families whose race, ethnicity, and/or socio-economic status is disproportionately represented by the achievement gap in kindergarten readiness and 3rd grade reading and math assessments with a focus on children	Expand Access to Kids in Transition (KITS) Program; expand access to effective early learning services in rural communities; Pilot Supporting Early Engagement and Development in STEM (SEEDS) Program

Lead Applicant	Service Area	Target Population(s)	Key Innovation(s)
		living in rural or remote communities.	
South Central Early Learning Hub	Douglas, Lake Counties	At-risk children ages 3-6, with an emphasis on poverty hot spots.	Scale up Yoncalla Early Works demonstration site, including participatory needs assessment process; expansion of Pre-K through 3rd grade approaches, including transition activities and vertically and horizontally aligned professional development.
Yamhill Early Learning Hub (partial)	Yamhill County	Children living in poverty; Spanish speaking English learners	Shared professional development and professional learning communities; family engagement activities and parent trainings; kindergarten transition activities

School Districts, ESD's, and Non-Profits

Lead Applicant	Service Area	Target Population(s)	Key Innovation(s)
David Douglas School District	Outer Southeast Portland	Low income children, children of color, English Learners, children not enrolled in child care/Pre-K	Early Childhood Response to Intervention; Partnering w/ Child Care Resource & Referral; Parent Learning Communities; Shared professional development and professional learning communities for Pre-K and K-3 educators
Echo School District	Echo	Children in poverty	Pre-K classroom instructional technology
Forest Grove School District	Forest Grove	Children in four elementary school catchment areas characterized by high percentages of English learners and significant achievement gaps on 3rd grade OAKS assessment	Aligning instructional standards, practices, and curricula; shared professional development; data-driven instruction/decision-making; engaging families in decision-making and capacity building

High Desert ESD	Bend, LaPine, Redmond, Warm Springs	Children in six elementary school catchment areas characterized by high poverty, high percentage of English learners, chronic absenteeism, and low 3rd OAKS and Kindergarten Assessment scores	Integration of the Growth Mindset; differentiated and tiered professional development for Pre-K and K-3 teachers focused on approaches to learning, social/emotional development, and early literacy; family engagement linked to promoting school readiness
Intermountain ESD	Baker, Morrow, Umatilla, and Union Counties	At risk pre-school age children	Professional Learning Communities spanning Pre-K and K-3
Malheur ESD	Baker, Malheur, Wallowa Counties	Children living in poverty, Hispanic children, and children living in remote communities.	Shared professional development for Pre-K and K-3 educators using a 'train the trainer' model
Neah-Kah-Nie School District	Neah-Kah-Nie	Children not eligible for Head Start and/or cannot afford private preschool.	Early Childhood Response to Intervention; aligned literacy and math instruction between Pre-K and K—3; Brain/Sensory Gym activities to promote self-regulation skills; Partners in Print family engagement program;
NW Family Services	Oregon City, Gladstone	Children living in poverty	Family resource management model aligned with strengthening kindergarten readiness
Oregon City School District	Oregon City, Gladstone	Children living in poverty and English learners.	Supporting Early Engagement and Development in STEM (SEEDS)
Southern Oregon ESD (partial)	Jackson, Josephine Counties	Six elementary school catchment areas with high percentages of children who are at-risk of entering kindergarten unprepared to succeed in school.	Universal Lab Classroom

Taken together, these projects have the potential to impact over 20,000 children across the state, and provide Oregon with a body of evidence for a set of practices that have the potential to transform children's early educational experiences.

Applications Not Recommended for Funding

The Award Committee recommends that the following applications not be awarded funds through this grant program:

Benton County Health Services, Coquille School District, Crawmers Critterz Preschool, Impact Northwest, LaGrande School District, Lincoln County School District, Multnomah ESD, North Central ESD, North Wasco School District, North Clackamas School District, Northwest Regional ESD, Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries, ORI Community & Evaluation Services, Oregon Trail School District, Oregon Virtual Academy, Pendleton School District, Portland Children's Museum, Portland Public Schools Head Start, Sherwood School District, Silver Falls School District, Strengthening Rural Families, Warner Pacific College, Warrenton Hammond School District, and Western Oregon University.

While areas of strength were present in many of these applications, the Award Committee concluded that each did not successfully demonstrate one or more of the following:

1. Evidence of a partnership between at least one provider of early learning services and one elementary school;
2. Evidence of an innovative approach to linking early learning and K-12;
3. Evidence of potential for both sustainability and scalability; and
4. Evidence of return on investment.

Proposed Next Steps

- ELD staff will prepare grant agreements and follow up with all recommended applicants to finalize budgets and launch projects.
- ELD staff will identify a partner to develop and administer an evaluation of the grant program.
- ELD staff will establish an initial reporting cycle and will prepare to report back to the ELC on grantee activities and outputs within the first 90 of the grant cycle.
- Finally, ELD staff will prepare a technical assistance plan to ensure that grantees are supported and can engage in shared learning experiences.