



# Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative

Helping parents raise  
children who thrive



THE COLLINS FOUNDATION  
THE FORD FAMILY FOUNDATION  
MEYER MEMORIAL TRUST  
THE OREGON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION  
OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

**Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative**

Helping parents raise children who thrive

BY BILL GRAVES

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# Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative

## Helping parents raise children who thrive

*A statewide effort supported by  
The Collins Foundation, The Ford Family Foundation,  
Meyer Memorial Trust, The Oregon Community Foundation,  
OCF Donor Advised Funds, Oregon State University*

### FOREWORD

**Christy Cox**

The Ford Family Foundation

**Mary Louise McClintock**

The Oregon Community Foundation

Whenever we use the acronym for the Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative — OPEC — we either get a chuckle or a strange look. Hearing “OPEC” makes one think of petroleum, a prized commodity upon which we put a high dollar value. But the acronym may not be so far off. What if we acknowledged *parents* as our most precious national resource and invested in them accordingly?

As of this printing, foundation funders have invested \$8.25 million; communities have added an additional \$12.3 million to the effort. With that investment, we have reached thousands of parents with young children through high-touch services like multi-week parenting classes and home visiting. And we’ve reached tens of thousands through lower-touch offerings such as one-time workshops and family-fun events. Even with these impressive numbers, we know we have a ways to go to make parenting education a community norm that is universally available and accessible.



What if we acknowledged *parents* as our most precious national resource?

We hope this research-based report helps tell the story about the significance of parenting skills on children’s lives and how OPEC is building a statewide system to increase access to high-quality parenting education. We hope it encourages you and your organization to get involved with your local OPEC Hub or join the funder collaborative.

And if you’re from outside our region, we encourage you to use this information to assess and develop parenting programs and systems support in your area.

“Parents are their children’s first and most important teachers” is a common refrain for those working with children, youth and families. On behalf of all the OPEC funders and our incredible partners at Oregon State University’s Hallie Ford Center for Healthy Children and Families, we have the privilege to help make that saying more than a cliché.

OPEC and its community-based partners are equipping parents with the tools and supports they need and deserve as our nation’s—and their children’s—most precious resource. ■

**“I went from a spanking parent to a strategizing and thinking parent.”**

—An OPEC Parent

**THE OPEC PARENTING SERIES:**

OPEC requires use of evidence-based parenting education curricula. Weekly sessions for 7-12 weeks cover information such as:

- Child development (ages and stages of development for young children)
- Specific, practical parenting skills (e.g. positive discipline)
- Promotion of positive adult-child interactions (e.g. daily reading)
- Parental self-care

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**BILL GRAVES**, a freelance journalist, worked 35 years as a daily newspaper reporter, the last 23 at The Oregonian in Portland. He



has written mostly about education, health care and other social issues. He is co-author of a book on education reform, *Poisoned Apple*, published by St. Martin’s Press, and

is now writing a book on Oregon Health & Science University. Graves grew up in Port Orchard, Wash., earned degrees in English at the University of Puget Sound and Western Washington State University and was selected for a 1998-99 Nieman Fellowship at Harvard University. He and his wife, Karin, live in Beaverton, Ore.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report summarizes the work of the Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative during its first five years, 2010-2015. OPEC is a multi-year initiative led by The Oregon Community Foundation, The Ford Family Foundation and Oregon State University. Financial supporters include The Oregon Community Foundation, The Ford Family Foundation, the Meyer Memorial Trust, The Collins Foundation, and OCF Donor Advised Funds. The initiative supports expanded access to best practice parenting education programs, with a focus on reaching parents of children prenatal to age six, and supports efforts to develop and strengthen regional parenting education “Hubs.” OPEC is unique in its collaborative, foundation-led approach to building a statewide infrastructure for parenting education through community-based non-profits and public agencies. The OPEC initiative was launched in July 2010 with the funding of six regional parenting Hubs serving 12 counties, and nine Small Grant projects providing evidence-based classes and/or home visiting for specific groups of parents. As of fall 2015, 15 Hubs reach 26 Oregon counties and Siskiyou County, Calif., and OPEC has provided Small Grant funding to 17 additional Oregon organizations. OPEC has achieved strong outcomes in the building of regional infrastructure and parenting education partnerships, as well as increasing positive parenting capacities.

**BY THE NUMBERS**

2010-2015:

**1,600**  
7- to 12-week parenting education series

**365,800**  
Family members participated in parenting education activities

**1,000**  
Parent Workshops

**28,200**  
Parents who attended workshops

**5,100**  
Families reached through home visiting

**66,500**  
Home visits

**\$8.25 million**  
in foundation funds invested

**\$12.3 million**  
Total funds (and in-kind) leveraged

# Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative

## Helping parents raise children who thrive

**N**ot so long ago, Jessie Michaelson would often engage in a stressful battle of wills with her 3-year-old daughter, Kallie, who dawdled in the morning before preschool as her mother worried about getting to work.

But now Michealson, 31, who lives in Joseph in Northeast Oregon's Wallowa Mountains, prepares Kallie for her morning regimen by talking about it the night before. She reminds Kallie that she can go to preschool only after she dress-

es, brushes her teeth and helps her mom feed the dog and pack a lunch. With that clarity about what is expected of her, Kallie now moves faster in the morning, and the battles are over.

Michaelson learned that technique in a 10-week parenting course called *Make Parenting a Pleasure*, offered at the Winding Waters medical clinic that she manages in nearby Enterprise. She learned other lessons, too, like making sure she has a little down time each day for herself

and thinking more about what Kallie can learn from daily experiences.<sup>1</sup>

Michaelson's parenting series is one of more than 1,600 that have emerged over the last five years as the result of the Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative (OPEC),

**OPEC is working to build a statewide network with the capacity to make high-quality parenting education available to a broad range of Oregon parents. It is on its way to meeting that goal with a presence in 26 of the state's 36 counties, plus Siskiyou County in northern California.**



## OPEC launched in July 2010, in the depths of the Great Recession, with six regions (Hubs) collectively serving 12 mostly rural counties. Five years later, OPEC now supports 15 Hubs.

an initiative led and sponsored by The Oregon Community Foundation (OCF), The Ford Family Foundation and Oregon State University. The initiative also receives support from the Meyer Memorial Trust, The Collins Foundation and OCF Donor Advised Funds.

Patches of parenting education occur here and there across the country, but nowhere in the nation have foundations come together to build a statewide structure for parenting education as OPEC is doing in Oregon, says Denise Rennekamp, outreach coordinator for the Hallie E. Ford Center for Healthy Children & Families at Oregon State University.

"This is very unique," says Rennekamp, who also leads the ongoing evaluation of OPEC.<sup>2</sup>

The collaborative aims to convince parents like Michaelson that parenting series benefit *all* mothers and fathers, not just those with low incomes or court orders to attend, says Mary Louise McClintock, director of education programs for The Oregon Community Foundation, which administers OPEC funds.

"We want it to be a community norm in much the same way childbirth classes are," she says.<sup>3</sup>

OPEC is working to build a statewide network with the capacity to make high-quality parenting education available to a broad range of Oregon parents and is close to meet-

ing that goal with a presence in 26 of the state's 36 counties.

Research shows high-quality parenting education boosts parents' confidence by increasing their knowledge about child development, strategies for discipline, and sensitivity to their children's emotions. And most parents, 86 percent, say they could use guidance in raising their kids, reports the National Commission on Children. Parents are their children's first and most important teachers, and when they are at their best, their children thrive.<sup>4</sup>

OPEC launched in July 2010, in the depths of the Great Recession, with six regions collectively serving 12 mostly rural counties. Each Hub is based at a host agency, which can vary from the nonprofit Family Resource Center of Central Oregon to Linn-Benton Community College. In the second year, OPEC added six more Hubs serving nine counties, including Siskiyou County in northern California. By the fifth year, the total number of Hubs was 15.

In its first five years, OPEC Hubs collectively offered 1,600 7- to 12-week parenting education series. That means more than 14,000 parents in Oregon and Siskiyou County, Calif., are more likely to read more to their children, spend more time with them, and look for chances to turn their activities into lessons on numbers, sizes, shapes and positive behavior.<sup>5</sup>

### Parents study parenting

Nine parents show up one May evening for classes led by Sierra Demo at Cascades Elementary School in Lebanon, a town of 16,000 people in the heart of the Willamette Valley 20 miles east of Corvallis.<sup>6</sup> The class is offered through the Parenting Success Network, the OPEC Hub based at Linn-Benton Community College to serve those two counties.



**Parents learn they can turn just about any activity into an opportunity to teach numbers, words, shapes, sizes and skills.**

The parents — five moms and two dads from Lebanon and nearby Sweet Home and Corvallis — have been learning ways to understand their children. Demo gives each parent a glass marble, a symbol of a child's uniqueness. She urges the parents to "see that uniqueness and know how to bring out its beauty." She describes how to detect a child's confidence waning and how to use the child's successes to build it back up.

Kathleen Blackburn, 29, mother of two girls and a boy from nearby Sweet Home, recalls how her young daughter struggled one evening to

*(continued, page 8)*

**... nowhere in the nation have foundations come together to build a statewide structure for parenting education as OPEC is doing in Oregon.**

—Denise Rennekamp  
Outreach Coordinator  
for the Hallie E. Ford Center for  
Healthy Children and Families  
Oregon State University

*What the research says:*

## Children get the payoff from parenting education

**H**igh-quality parenting education gives parents skills that boost their confidence and lower the stress of being a parent. But the biggest benefits go to their kids. Children thrive when they have early relationships with responsive parents who give them a stable home, consistent attention, affection, and guidance and encouragement as the children learn new skills. In fact, nothing influences a child's growth and development more than reliable, responsible and sensitive parenting, say experts.<sup>1</sup>

"Young children experience their world as an environment of relationships, and these relationships affect virtually all aspects of their development – intellectual, social, emotional, physical, behavioral and moral," report researchers at Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child. "Nurturing and stable relationships with caring adults are essential to healthy human development beginning from birth."<sup>2</sup>

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**Nurturing and stable relationships with caring adults are essential to healthy human development beginning from birth.**

—Researchers at  
Harvard University's Center  
on the Developing Child

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Differences in parenting are one big source of the school achievement gap that divides American children along lines of family race, ethnicity, and income, according to a Brookings Institution paper. Researchers measure parents on a scale that looks at how they discipline, read, nurture and spend time with their kids. Higher-scoring parents tend to be more affluent, educated and white.

One study shows that 75 percent of children with the higher-scoring parents graduate high school with a C average or higher and avoid crime or becoming a teen parent, says the Brookings report. By contrast, only 30 percent of children with the lowest scoring parents meet that standard.<sup>3</sup>

Differences in parenting practices account for up to 50 percent of the gaps in school readiness, according to another study.<sup>4</sup>

Even the amount parents speak to their children has enormous impact. One landmark study found that a child

typically hears about 600 words per hour in a disadvantaged family compared to 2,100 words per hour in an upper-income family. The means that by age 3, the child in the disadvantaged home has a vocabulary of about 500 words, or less than half the 1,100 word vocabulary of the child from the more affluent home.<sup>5</sup>

James Heckman, economist, Nobel laureate and strong advocate for early childhood education, says children get powerful benefits from parenting education.

"Ensuring that parents have the knowledge and resources for providing a stimulating home environment is just as important, if not more important, as anything that happens in the classroom," he says.<sup>6</sup>

High-quality parenting education that has been shown to be effective by research can help all parents learn skills they can use in guiding their children to success in school and life. Most parents want to be the best parents they can possibly be. Fifty-four percent say they want more information on how they can help their children learn.<sup>7</sup> And most, 86 percent, say they are unsure what is right in raising their kids, according to the National Commission on Children.

Parenting education has been linked to multiple benefits for kids, including drops in child abuse and neglect rates, better physical, cognitive and emotional development in children, and reduced youth substance abuse, research shows.<sup>8</sup>

The Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative (OPEC) has documented benefits in its initiative to provide more series and workshops for Oregon's parents. An evaluation of parents who completed OPEC's parenting series showed they believed they were better equipped to show love and affection, listen to their children, understand their kids' feelings, give them reasonable behavior limits and find positive ways to discipline.

"Parents indicated they felt more confident in their ability to parent effectively and discipline positively," OSU researchers reported. "Parents said they had an increased understanding of age appropriate behavior, were better able to manage stress, could communicate more effectively and had more patience."<sup>9</sup>

What's more, parents reported their children were better able to show concern for others, follow limits and rules, and get along with others.<sup>10</sup>

These gains for parents and their kids "are protective factors for families," says Denise Rennekamp, OPEC evaluator and outreach coordinator for the Hallie E. Ford Center for Healthy Children and Families at Oregon State University.<sup>11</sup>

Strong parents raise strong kids. ■

(continued from page 6)

decipher syllables for her reading homework.

“She had no confidence,” says Blackburn. “She had a meltdown.”

The mother says she reminded her daughter that she had learned to read, and if she could do that, she could learn to understand syllables, which the girl soon did. “She was like a light bulb,” Blackburn says.

Demo, a Head Start teacher from Springfield who has been teaching parenting education for more than 15 years, asks her class who could remember a time when a parent or other adult gave them a boost of confidence. None raises a hand.

The two-hour class is part of a 10-week series called *The Incredible Years* that gives parents that boost of confidence. It is among seven

parenting series offered in Albany, Sweet Home and Lebanon with support from InterCommunity Health Network, the local coordinated care organization, which pays for child care and Demo’s instruction. The school offers space and snacks. The Parenting Success Network organized the class and paid Demo to lead a family event promoting it.

Linn-Benton Community College has provided parenting classes for 40 years, says Cyrel Gable, a parenting facilitator at the college and coordinator for Parenting Success Network.<sup>7</sup> But the Hub, she says, has increased and spread parenting education in the region.

### Roots of OPEC

The Ford Family Foundation and The Oregon Community Foundation

independently sponsored parenting education on a smaller scale for years before OPEC emerged. Both saw that after completing parenting series, especially those shown by research to be effective, parents were less stressed, less isolated and had a better grasp of child development and positive discipline, Rennekamp says.<sup>8</sup> The two foundations compared notes and decided to pool resources for a more comprehensive initiative.

“Both foundations had been convinced that these programs were really making a difference in these families,” McClintock says.<sup>9</sup>

Before creating OPEC, they commissioned Rennekamp and other Oregon State University researchers to look at parenting education across Oregon. The 2009 study found that parenting education was provided in all counties, but concentrated in populated areas; offered through public and nonprofit agencies, usually with public funds; varied in quality; and targeted to groups such as high-risk parents and low-income families.<sup>10</sup>

The foundations launched OPEC in 2010, focusing first on rural counties that were “most ready” — counties that had been receiving more than five years of funding for parenting education from previous foundation-supported programs.

The initiative spilled over the border into Northern California’s Siskiyou County because The Ford Family Foundation’s service area includes that county. The foundation supported Siskiyou County’s first evidence-based parenting classes before OPEC arrived, so it made sense to to convert that initiative into an OPEC Hub, says Karen Pautz, Siskiyou project director.<sup>11</sup>

The Hubs receive OPEC funding only for parenting series shown by research to be effective and taught by trained professionals called facilitators. They also organize and sponsor one-time parenting work-

## Changes in parent skills and children’s behavior:

Increasing positive parenting capacity among parents is the primary objective of the OPEC initiative. Parents participating in parenting education series have completed evaluations and show statistically significant improvement in the following areas:

- Know normal behavior for my child’s age level
- Show my child love and affection frequently
- Listen to my child to understand his/her feelings
- Help my child feel good about himself/herself
- Set and stick to reasonable limits and rules
- Know fun activities to help my child learn
- Find positive ways to guide and discipline my child
- Play with my child frequently
- Protect my child from unsafe conditions
- Talk with other parents to share experiences
- Deal with the day-to-day stresses of parenting
- Understand my goals and values as a parent

Parents also reported significant improvement in their children’s ability to:

- Show concern for others
- Follow limits and rules
- Get along with others

shops, family events and, in some cases, maternal/early childhood home visits. They each have an advisory council composed of representatives from partner organizations. Their mission is not only to expand parenting education, but also to build a system that can sustain that education after foundation support ends.

“Foundations can always subsidize a few good programs, like hot house flowers. But our goal is for a statewide system to take root,” says Christy Cox, senior program officer for early child development at The Ford Family Foundation.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, since 2010 OPEC has provided Small Grants to 17 organizations to offer parenting classes and workshops to targeted groups of parents.<sup>13</sup>

All aspects of OPEC are being documented by Rennekamp, who has overseen parent focus groups, parent surveys and site visits, pro-

## The Hubs offer only parenting series shown by research to be effective and taught by trained professionals called facilitators.

ducing a rich body of data on OPEC’s impact. “We want to tell that story of changed lives,” she says.<sup>14</sup>

### Recruiting struggles

Some Hubs still struggle to recruit parents to their series, OPEC leaders say, and some parents miss classes after they enroll because they are so busy with work and family demands.

“We’re finding parents don’t always want to commit to a 12-week series, yet are interested in topics commonly covered by parenting education classes such as ways to support early learning,” says Holly

Mar-Conte, director of education for United Way of Lane County, which hosts LaneKids, the Lane County OPEC Hub.<sup>15</sup>

So OPEC coordinators are trying and testing different ways to recruit and retain parents and fill their series. Siskiyou County enlists the help of 10 family resource centers located across the large, rural county to recruit families and promote classes, which regularly fill with 15 or more parents, says Pautz, the project director.<sup>16</sup>

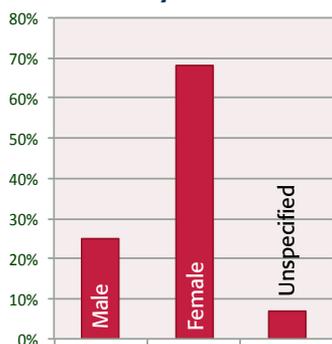
The Lane Hub has shined at using the web and social media such as Facebook to lure parents. Traffic

## Who attends OPEC series?

OPEC series and workshops reach a very diverse audience when compared to Oregon demographics. Non-Caucasian participants, for example, have higher representation than state demographics would predict.

An evaluation of about 14,500 parents in series and workshops (2010-2015) revealed the following demographics.

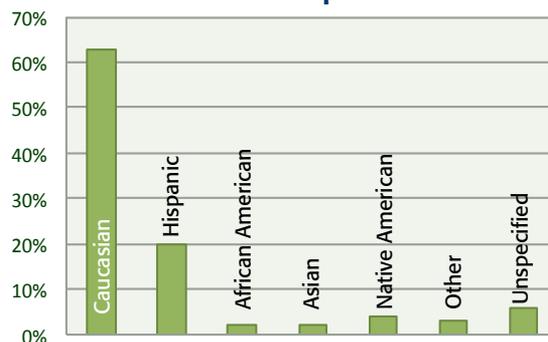
### Mostly women



**Ages:** Parents ages ranged from 14 to 87 with an average age of 34.

**Children:** Parents collectively had more than 25,800 children ages 18 or younger, with an average of 2 children per household.

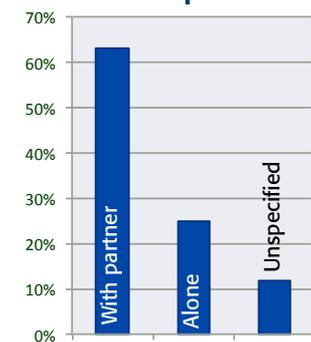
### Mostly Caucasian and Hispanic



**Young Children:** 80% of parents had a child age 6 or younger.

**Social services:** 68% reported using one or more services for low-income households, such as WIC benefits or Oregon Health Plan.

### Mostly parents with a partner



keeps climbing on the LaneKids web site, and its Facebook page draws more than 1,200 followers, says Rebecca Sheffield, former Hub coordinator.<sup>17</sup> The web site includes an activity calendar with up to 35 listings per day, parent support articles, and a LaneKids Blog with tips such as “Five simple recipes kids can cook for mom.”<sup>18</sup>

Siskiyou and many other Hubs also have discovered they can use one-time workshops or family activities, such as a Saturday picnic or a math night, to build relationships with parents and warm them to taking a full series, Rennekamp says.<sup>19</sup>

Building Healthy Families developed *Friday Family Fun*, a popular 90 minutes of activities that promote school readiness and family communication twice a month in Enterprise.<sup>20</sup> The Douglas County Hub offered four workshops in Roseburg on particular topics such as early math or nurturing a spirited child, says Kat Wolcott, parent engagement facilitator.<sup>21</sup>

Northwest Parenting, an OPEC Hub for Clatsop and Columbia counties since 2011, offered two *Kinder Ready* workshops to help parents prepare their children for kindergarten. At one in early May, Lori Wilson Honl stands before nine parents and their young children in the Warrenton Grade School library near Astoria and threads a black pipe cleaner through some uncooked pasta noodles.<sup>22</sup>

“What skill am I working on when I poke this pipe cleaner through this noodle?” she asks.

“Fine motor skills,” says Cheyanne Marohn, 32, who is attending the two-hour workshop with her husband, Jeremy Marohn, 25, and their 3-year-old boy, Ethan.

After the demonstration, parents guide their children as they thread noodles. Honl and Angelina Salis-



**Research shows that parenting education has been linked to multiple benefits for children, including drops in child abuse and neglect rates, better physical and cognitive and emotional development in children, and reduced youth substance abuse.**

bury, Head Start teachers trained to provide the workshop, lead the group through other exercises using items purchased at a dollar store.

Parents play number games with big spongy dice and with colored plastic cubes that kids can stack and count. Children learn to grip crayons and pencils and page through a Big Bird book full of rhymes. The children dance the Hokey Pokey, sing, and learn how to hold scissors, cut paper and use glue sticks. The parents learn they can turn just about any activity into an opportunity to teach numbers, words, shapes, sizes and skills.

*Kinder Ready* “has taken off and really flourished,” says Teresa Crouter, Northwest Parenting coordinator.<sup>23</sup> The Hub, based in the prevention division of the Clatsop Juvenile Department in Astoria, expanded last year into Tillamook County. In collaboration with other agencies, OPEC has supported 86 workshops

and 77 parenting class series in the region over the last four years.<sup>24</sup>

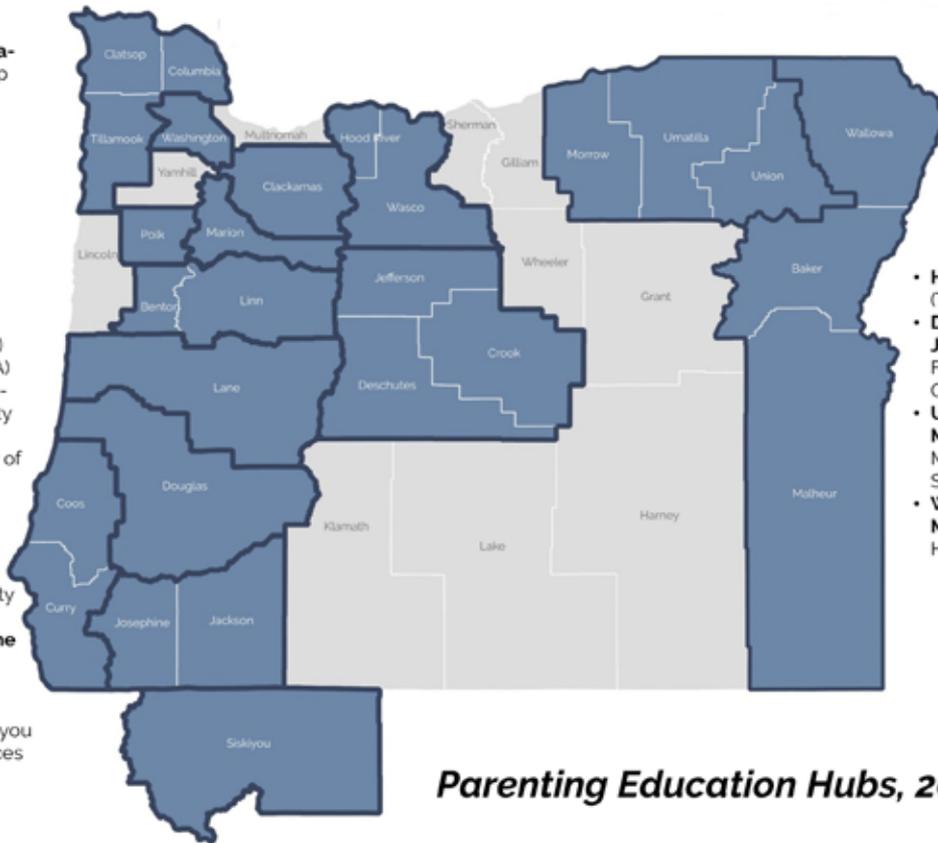
### Rural Reaches

As OPEC spreads, it is taking parenting education into far-flung communities of rural Oregon. In Wallowa County, Building Healthy Families of Enterprise, which is remote itself, has added staff in Baker County to the south. During the winter of 2014-15, the Hub reached Monica Thomas, 21, in Baker City. She enrolled in *Make Parenting a Pleasure* while pregnant, missed one class for her son’s birth, and then completed the course. Thomas, a single mom who works at a gas station, says she’s learned discipline does not mean punishment. So when she sees her son pull all of the tissues out of a Kleenex box, she doesn’t spank him, she says, but gives him something else to play with. She’s a more confident parent, she says.<sup>25</sup>

“I’m going to be more understanding of (his) developmental

## Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative: Geographic Reach

- **Clatsop-Columbia-Tillamook** (Clatsop Co. Juvenile Department)
- **Washington** (Washington Co. Health & Human Services)
- **Clackamas** (Clackamas Co. Children, Youth & Families)
- **Marion** (Early Learning Hub, Inc.)
- **Polk** (Polk Co. HSA)
- **Linn-Benton** (Linn-Benton Community College)
- **Lane** (United Way of Lane County)
- **Douglas** (Douglas ESD)
- **Coos-Curry** (Southwestern Oregon Community College)
- **Jackson-Josephine** (Southern Oregon Child and Family Council)
- **Siskiyou, CA** (Siskiyou Community Services Council)



- **Hood River-Wasco** (The Next Door, Inc.)
- **Deschutes-Crook-Jefferson** (Central OR Family Resource Center)
- **Union-Umatilla-Morrow** (Umatilla-Morrow County Head Start)
- **Wallowa-Baker-Malheur** (Building Healthy Families)

*Parenting Education Hubs, 2015-16*

### OPEC Hubs

The Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative is organized into 15 regions, or Hubs, many with multiple counties and each with a host agency. Some Hubs have adopted names and the rest are named by the area they serve.



HUB	COUNTIES	HUB HOST
Central Oregon	Deschutes, Crook, Jefferson	Family Resource Center of Central Oregon
Pathways to Positive Parenting	Coos, Curry	Southwestern Oregon Community College
Eastern Oregon	Wallowa, Baker, Malheur	Building Healthy Families
Parenting Success Network	Linn, Benton	Linn-Benton Community College
Columbia Gorge	Hood River, Wasco	The Next Door
Douglas County	Douglas	Douglas Education Services District
LaneKids	Lane	United Way of Lane County
Northwest Parenting	Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook	Clatsop Juvenile Department
Mid Valley Parenting of Polk County	Polk	Polk County Health and Human Services
Umatilla, Morrow and Union Counties	Umatilla, Morrow, Union	Umatilla-Morrow Head Start Inc.
Siskiyou County, Calif.	Siskiyou, Calif.	Siskiyou Community Services Council
Clackamas County	Clackamas	Clackamas County Children, Youth and Families Division
Marion County	Marion	Early Learning Hub Inc.
Parenting Together Washington County	Washington	Washington County Health and Human Services
The Family Connection	Jackson, Josephine	Southern Oregon Child and Family Council, Inc.

milestones,” she says.

Last year, the Hub reached even further south to Malheur, a 9,900-square-mile county in the state’s southeastern corner where only 30,000 people live. The Hub gave Malheur a half-time OPEC coordinator who is training facilitators and organizing the county’s first parenting education series available to all parents, says Maria Weer, executive director of Building Healthy Families.<sup>26</sup>

In Southern Oregon, the Douglas County OPEC Hub is providing parenting education in small towns such as Riddle, Drain and Yoncalla, usually in elementary schools. The Hub even plans to offer a parenting series in Glide, where poverty is high and the homeless population large, with many families living in area campgrounds.

“Some areas are so poverty-stricken, it is hard to find partners,” says Gillian Wesenberg, director of the state’s South Central Early Learning Hub, based in the Douglas County Education Service District and host for the Douglas OPEC Hub.<sup>27</sup> The Hub, created in 2010, is working with partners in Lake and Klamath counties to expand east with parenting classes in each county, Wesenberg says.

### Targeted outreach

Other OPEC Hubs are offering parenting education to targeted groups of parents. The Siskiyou County Hub provides workshops and classes for dads, parents on probation and adjusting to life out of jail, parents going through divorce and relatives raising children in foster care.<sup>28</sup> Many of the Hubs, including Central Oregon, Siskiyou and Lane, provide classes for teen parents.

One of those classes unfolds one sunny May morning at Lane Community College in Eugene, where Shae Donnelly leads three teen-age



**One-day workshops or family activities, such as a Saturday picnic, help build relationships with parents and warm them to the idea of taking a full course.**

moms through their last two-hour session in the *Nurturing Parenting* course.<sup>29</sup> She passes out three paper scraps each to the young mothers, all high school seniors from Eugene, and asks them to write an emotion on each slip and then fold it small as a dime. The moms stand and spread out in the carpeted classroom.

“Put one of the papers (which is to say one of your feelings) under one foot,” Donnelly instructs, and try to move a ways across the carpet. The moms move slowly as they drag one folded feeling under one foot.

“Put one under the other foot,” Donnelly instructs.

Now each shuffles both feet to move. The instructor tells them to put their third feeling under one hand, so now the women are crawling across the carpet. Donnelly then drives home her point.

“It is always OK to have these feelings,” she says, “but hiding them just makes it harder to get through life.”

The students get credit for this parenting class through Echo High

School, an alternative school operating a half-day program at the college. OPEC’s LaneKids Hub pays \$1,000 toward Donnelly’s salary and \$2,500 for child care during the class; the Eugene School District provides the space, supplies, food and incentives at a cost of about \$1,100.<sup>30</sup>

It’s just one example of how OPEC Hubs strive to braid, blend and bundle funds to create strong programming through partnership — ultimately leading toward long-term sustainability.

During class, the young mothers discuss ways to toilet train, deal with tantrums, use time outs, ignore bad behavior and respond to suggestions from parents, whom they all still live with.

As the class concludes, the mothers express their appreciation for what they’ve learned.

“I like being able to come here and talk about our kids and learn we are not the only ones going through these things,” says Sabrina Sorensen, 18, mother of 16-month-old Ava.

*(continued, page 14)*

# Small Grants expand parenting education for underserved parents

## Small Grant sites offer evidence-based, culturally specific curricula aligned with their targeted audiences

**A**s the Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative (OPEC) works to make parenting classes a universal norm in Oregon, it also is using its Small Grants program to reach distinct and sometimes isolated groups of parents.

Latino migrant workers in Hood River County, Burmese refugees in Portland and Somali immigrants in Beaverton are learning how to strengthen their parenting skills in series offered in their first languages.

Ten non-profit agencies in Portland and the surrounding metro area provided parenting series in 2015 with OPEC grants, usually of about \$30,000 each.

"This is a way to meet families where they are," says Lauren Christianson, parenting education coordinator for Youth Contact, an organization supporting children and families in Washington County. The agency uses part of its OPEC grant to offer Somali parents a seven-week course called *Nurturing Parenting*. The parents meet for classes weekly during the day in the community room of their apartment complex near the Merlo Station MAX train stop in Beaverton.

"They recognize the value," says Christianson. "They trust our facilitator."<sup>1</sup>

The OPEC Small Grants program, which began in 2010, also reaches other specific populations such as teen parents at the Rosemary Anderson alternative high school, African American parents served by Self Enhancement Inc., and Native American parents connected with the Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA), all in Portland.

Most participating agencies are getting Small Grants in three-year cycles to provide parenting education to low-income, culturally diverse and highly stressed families.

### Series in Spanish, Burmese, Somali

Since 2010, agencies have used Small Grants to provide 170 OPEC-funded parenting series and tracked another 63 paid for through other funds, reaching more than 2,400 parents. In the current grant cycle, 75% of the parents report their race/ethnicity as a person of color with more than a third of the series offered in Spanish and 6% in Burmese or Somali.<sup>2</sup>

Agencies have used their Small Grants to buy parenting

series curricula, train class facilitators and build partnerships that give them a foundation for offering parenting education even after the Small Grant ends. In addition, some agencies used grants to offer parenting workshops and to conduct home visits.

Todos Juntos, a Clackamas County nonprofit that supports activities for Latino and other underserved children, used its OPEC grant to provide four 10-week series, two in Estacada and two in Sandy, said Shawna Johnson, site coordinator for the parenting classes.<sup>3</sup> Two of those were *Abriendo Puertas*, or *Opening Doors*, a Spanish course for Latino families. The agency also presented four two-hour workshops focusing on topics such as brain development and positive discipline, Johnson says, "a great way to recruit families" to the longer series.<sup>4</sup>

NAYA has used its three-year Small Grant to repeatedly  
*(continued, next page)*



**Children of Latino migrant workers in Hood River County, Burmese refugees in Portland and Somali immigrants in Beaverton are benefiting as their parents take parenting series offered in their first languages.**

# Small Grants

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offer a parenting course designed for Native Americans called *Positive Indian Parenting* and to expand from one to three times a week a play group for parents and their children called *Chxi San*, which means New Day, says Alise Sanchez, child and family services manager for the Portland organization.<sup>5</sup> The play group teaches parents about child development and age-appropriate activities, she says. *Chxi San* and the parenting course are helping NAYA “build some really robust early childhood programming,” Sanchez says.

Northwest Family Services, a Portland non-profit devoted to family stability and reducing poverty, has used OPEC grants for two years to give parenting education to Latino families in Gladstone and Oregon City, where poverty rates have climbed in recent years.

“In this area, the Latino community is disenfranchised,” says Rose Fuller, executive director of the agency. “We have been able to engage parents and have had really good success.”<sup>6</sup>

Among parents attending Small Grant series, more than 1,400 completed evaluations and shared how the education changed their behavior and that of their children. Parents reported they were less stressed, better at listening to their children and more knowledgeable about how their kids de-

velop, say Oregon State University researchers who compiled the survey results.

Parents also said they made gains in understanding their children’s feelings, finding positive ways to guide them and setting reasonable limits. Their children, in turn, show more concern for others, get along with others better, and are more willing to follow rules.<sup>7</sup>

In Hood River County, Small Grant parenting series taught in Spanish in Parkdale and Odell have given parents “confidence in raising their own kids,” says Jennifer Ericksen De Heredia, the county’s program director for the Oregon Child Development Coalition, which organizes Head Start preschool for migrant families. Parents also have established supportive relationships with one another, she says.<sup>8</sup>

Latino parents in Clackamas County reported that parenting series changed the way they looked at their children and one another, says Johnson of Todos Juntos.

“It has improved marriages,” she says. Some families even said “that class saved their marriage.”<sup>9</sup>

Many of the agencies receiving OPEC money have taught parenting classes in the past. But with the Small Grants, they report, they have expanded parenting education and improved its quality.

“It got us into the world of parenting education,” says Meghann Darne, director of transitions programs for the Rosemary Anderson alternative high school. “It took us to the next level.”<sup>10</sup> ■

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The parenting series is one of 29 offered throughout Lane County and paid for by LaneKids since 2011, says Holly Mar-Conte, director of education.<sup>31</sup>

## Building capacity

Hub leaders say that by training more course facilitators and forging partnerships with other agencies such as school districts and health-care agencies, they are building the capacity to continually offer high-quality parenting series, workshops and other family events. Hubs receive significant grants (\$90,000-\$110,000) in the first three years; grant sizes step down in subsequent years.

Ongoing assessment by Oregon State University indicates that Hubs

are leveraging additional resources to help support their OPEC work and have plans for sustaining the initiative when foundation support ebbs. To date, the Hubs have leveraged more than \$12.3 million from their communities in cash and in-kind resources.<sup>32</sup>

Building Healthy Families in Enterprise has blended OPEC funds with state grants and other support and shared costs with partner agencies. Since 2010, the agency leveraged over \$2.7 million in cash and in-kind services from partners.<sup>33</sup>

Several agencies pitch in for parenting education in the Community Services Council Siskiyou County parenting Hub and its director, Karen Pautz. In addition, Pautz is executive director of First 5 Siskiyou Children and Family Commission, part

of a California network investing in programs for helping young children and families. OPEC, the council and the commission all contribute to Pautz’s salary. Family resource centers host the Hub’s parenting courses, and OPEC trains local clinicians, educators and councilors as parenting education facilitators. The Hub does not spend OPEC money on mandated parenting classes, instead promoting classes for “good parents who want to be better parents” in keeping with OPEC’s goal of normalizing parenting education, Pautz says.<sup>35</sup>

OPEC Hubs also are finding support from Oregon’s regional early learning systems and health-care networks. Both are good prospects for OPEC partners because these organizations are beginning to seek

parenting education for the families they serve.

### Tracking progress

OPEC leaders carefully track parenting education as it unfolds across Oregon. Rennekamp, OPEC's team leader from Oregon State University, traveled this year to every Hub to meet with coordinators and representatives of partner agencies.

She makes her final site visit one April afternoon in Redmond, where she joins 10 people involved in the Central Oregon OPEC Hub serving Deschutes, Jefferson and Crook counties.<sup>36</sup> They include representatives of the Family Resource Center of Central Oregon, a non-profit serving as Hub host that has long provided parenting education. Other partners represented at the table include the Latino Community Association, the Early Learning Hub of Central Oregon, the High Desert Education Service District (ESD), the Mountain Star Family Relief Nursery and the Kids Center.

The representatives meet around a square table in the High Desert ESD's Manzanita Building, where Rennekamp and Mary Louise McClintock, the education director for The Oregon Community Foundation, have come to talk with them about their work.

"How would you describe what you have accomplished?" McClintock asks.

The OPEC partners say they've not only expanded parenting education in all three counties, but significantly raised its quality.

"We have all risen to this professional level," says Dee Ann Lewis, director of education and outreach for the Hub. The Hub has connected with 25 partner agencies, which together have trained more facilitators for high-quality parenting education, raised their pay and recruited parents to classes, more of which



**Evaluations from more than 100 parents in the Siskiyou, Calif., Hub show that after attending a parenting-education multi-week series, parents who once read to their kids three times or less a week are nearly all reading to them five times a week; three out of four are reading daily.**

are offered in Spanish than in the past, the representatives say.

### Changing lives

There's evidence OPEC is changing the lives of families. Evaluations from more than 100 parents in the Siskiyou Hub show that parents who once read to their children three or fewer times a week are nearly all now reading to them five times a week, with three out of four reading daily, says Pautz, the director.<sup>37</sup>

"Parents said they had an increased understanding of age-appropriate behavior, were better able to manage stress, communicate more effectively and had more patience," OSU researchers reported.<sup>38</sup>

Despite these successes, this Hub and others say they've faced challenges in dealing with staff turnover, recruiting parents, communicating with partners and connecting with coordinated care organizations, which are new and often pre-

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**The Siskiyou County, Calif., Hub provides workshops and classes for dads, parents on probation and adjusting to life out of jail, parents going through divorce and relatives raising children in foster care.**

occupied with putting their health services in order.

OPEC has added Hubs in Washington County and in the region of Jackson and Josephine counties for the 2015-2016 grant year and could expand statewide as soon as 2016-17 and well before the original target of 2020, says McClintock.

The goal is to have a permanent statewide system of parenting education that all parents know about and have access to, she says.<sup>39</sup>

OPEC classes and workshops so far have reached only a fraction of the parents who could benefit from them, she says, yet they have connected with thousands of parents.

“Those are lives that are potentially being changed,” she says.<sup>40</sup>

One belongs to Michaelson, the mother from Joseph. It took discipline to carve out time in her busy life for evening parenting classes in neighboring Enterprise, she says, but the effort paid off.

“The parents in our group didn’t want it to end,” she says.<sup>41</sup>

And it’s not going to end for Michaelson. She has been trained to facilitate the *Make Parenting a Pleasure* course at her clinic. In the fall, she’ll lead her first class as part of OPEC’s growing network of parenting education in Oregon. ■

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Ongoing assessment by Oregon State University indicates that Hubs are leveraging additional resources to help support their work and had plans for sustaining the initiative when foundation support ebbs.



Parents who completed the training said “they had an increased understanding of age-appropriate behavior, were better able to manage stress, communicate more effectively and had more patience,” OSU researchers reported.

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- 11 Karen Pautz, OPEC project director for Siskiyou County, Calif., in a telephone interview, April 23, 2015.
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- 14 Denise Rennekamp, outreach coordinator for the Hallie E. Ford Center for Health Children & Families at Oregon State University, in a telephone interview on April 2, 2015.
- 15 Holly Mar-Conte, telephone interview on April 23, 2015.
- 16 Pautz interview, April 23, 2015.
- 17 Rebecca Sheffield, telephone interview on April 23, 2015.
- 18 See LaneKids at <http://lanekids.org/>
- 19 Rennekamp interview, June 4, 2015.
- 20 OPEC report, p. 120
- 21 Kat Wolcott, telephone interview on April 30, 2015.
- 22 Kinder Ready workshop at Warrenton Grade School, May 2, 2015.
- 23 Teresa Crouter, telephone interview on April 15, 2015.
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- 25 Monica Thomas, 21-year-old single parent in Baker City, in a telephone interview, May 22, 2015.
- 26 Maria Weer, telephone interview on April 13, 2015.
- 27 Gillian Wesenberg, director of the state's South Central Early Learning Hub, which is based in the Douglas County Education Service District and host for the Douglas OPEC Hub, in telephone interview on April 20, 2015.
- 28 Karen Pautz, Siskiyou County, Calif., OPEC project director, in telephone interview on April 23, 2015.
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- 39 McClintock interview, June 8.
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- 3 Shawna Johnson, site coordinator for parenting classes at Todos Juntos, in telephone interview on May 27, 2015.
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- 5 Alise Sanchez, child and family services manager for the Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA), in Portland, in a telephone interview, May 22, 2015.
- 6 Rose Fuller, executive director, Northwest Family Services, Portland, in telephone interview, May 27, 2015.
- 7 Sektnan, Rennekamp, pp. 177-179.
- 8 Jennifer Ericksen de Heredia, program director, Hood River and Wasco counties, Oregon Child Development Coalition, in telephone interview, May 27, 2015.
- 9 Johnson interview, May 27.
- 10 Meghann Darne, director of transitions programs, Rosemary Anderson High School/Portland OIC, in a telephone interview on June 4, 2015.



**By training more course facilitators and forging partnerships with other agencies, such as hospitals, Hub leaders are building the capacity to continually offer high-quality parenting series, workshops and other family events.**

## **ORGANIZATIONS THAT RECEIVED SMALL GRANTS**

*Small Grant sites offer evidence-based, culturally specific curricula aligned with their targeted audiences.*

Adelante Mujeres (Forest Grove)  
 Catholic Community Services of the Mid-Willamette Valley and Central Coast (Salem)  
 El Programa Hispano (Gresham)  
 Family Tree Relief Nursery (Albany)  
 Harney Count ESD (Burns)  
 Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (Portland)  
 Janus Youth Programs (Portland)  
 Metropolitan Family Service (North Clackamas)  
 Native American Youth and Family Center (Portland)  
 Northwest Family Services (Portland)  
 Oregon Child Development Coalition (Hood River)  
 Pathfinders of Oregon (Portland)  
 Relief Nursery (Eugene)  
 Rosemary Anderson High School/Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center (Portland)  
 Self-Enhancement, Inc. (Portland)  
 Todos Juntos (Canby)  
 Youth Contact (Hillsboro)

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Oregon Parenting  
 Education Collaborative  
[orparenting.org](http://orparenting.org)

OPEC evaluation reports:  
[www.oregoncf.org/opec](http://www.oregoncf.org/opec)  
 Look under  
 "Evaluation and Outcomes"

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