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## BUILDING SUCCESSFUL P-3 INITIATIVES

*Foundations & Catalysts for Systems Change:  
Next Steps for Oregon's Early Learning and  
Education Leaders*



### LINKING RESEARCH TO PRACTICE: STRENGTHENING P-3 INITIATIVES

Early education and K-12 systems require transformative changes to address racial, ethnic, linguistic and economic disparities in school readiness and success.

Since 2010, Oregon has made various investments in **Prenatal-through-Grade-3 (P-3) initiatives**, which address these disparities by coordinating, strengthening and aligning fragmented support systems (such as child care, elementary school and health care) for families and children from birth through third grade.

Research on P-3 efforts around the state has identified **six foundations** and **three catalysts** that are associated with the most successful P-3 initiatives. Strengthening

these essential components can improve P-3 outcomes moving forward.

- **Foundations** are the building blocks that must be in place for P-3 success.
- **Catalysts** are resources and feedback loops that drive P-3 efforts and move communities efficiently toward change.

Foundations and catalysts need more support and emphasis from education leaders if Oregon's investments in P-3 initiatives are to succeed in helping children and families to maximize school readiness and success.

### WHAT ARE THE FOUNDATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL P-3 INITIATIVES?

- 1 Stakeholders with a strong understanding of the P-3 approach.** Successful P-3 initiatives educate partners and build shared knowledge of the P-3 framework. All partners understand that P-3 is not a single program; it's about connecting the dots between early childhood programs, K-12 and other family supports.
- 2 Dedicated, willing leadership.** P-3 work is led by a collaborative team comprising committed leaders from the early learning and K-12 sectors. Success comes from identifying early champions who are

willing to take on collaborative work. P-3 leaders set the tone by working to bridge these sectors and investing their time and resources in collaboration.

- 3 Effective collaborative teams.** Effective P-3 initiatives have strong **administrative capacity** (transparent decision-making, sharing power, clear communication, logistical support, role clarity) and **relational capacity** (interpersonal sense of trust and allyship). Building these relationships takes dedicated time to learn about each organization's history, programs, practices and goals.

“*We always refer back to the plan and grant, and then we take suggestions and work on updating [the plan]. We brainstorm ideas for improvement and concepts that help meet goals. We prioritize. There are lots of good ideas as we brainstorm. We make sure we assign responsibility and follow through.*”

- 4 **A shared vision for long-term success.** P-3 initiatives must have a shared big-picture vision so that all partners can see clearly how their organization or professional role supports this vision. Otherwise, they will struggle to prioritize needs and to make implementation decisions.
- 5 **An informed action plan.** While the vision statement serves as a guiding north star, the P-3 action plan moves the work forward. This plan should be informed by data and reflect the input of multiple voices and perspectives, especially those of families, early learning providers and K-12 staff.
- 6 **Meaningful inclusion of family and staff voice.** P-3 initiatives must obtain authentic input from families and direct service providers (e.g., early learning providers and K-12 staff) and use this in planning and decision-making. Failure to invest in this step can lead to inefficient use of resources and implementation failures.

“ *The [P-3 initiative] influence on data collection was key in building the partnership for rental assistance. [Community partner] has its own county-mandated data collection, but [the P-3 initiative] helped bring some of the data collection together to describe the housing needs of the community...I don't think they would have been able to establish this partnership without data.*”

## HOW CAN EARLY LEARNING AND EDUCATION LEADERS SUPPORT P-3 INITIATIVES?

With foundations in place and catalysts providing the impetus for effective action and continuous improvement, P-3 initiatives have the potential to foster lasting systems change.

As an early learning or K-12 education leader, you have the power to support a successful P-3 initiative in your community by:

- **Creating and supporting educational opportunities** so that you and your staff understand the nature of the P-3 approach and how it relates to your work.
- **Walking the walk** by explicitly promoting P-3 in your communications, allocating adequate resources to the work and cultivating new relationships with cross-sector partners.
- **Setting aside time and resources** to develop a clear governance structure and learn about cross-sector partners' organizational history and goals.

## WHAT CATALYSTS DRIVE SUCCESSFUL P-3 IMPLEMENTATION?

- 1 **Capacity to support P-3 work.** Effective P-3 work cannot be layered on top of other organizational responsibilities. Dedicated time, staff, infrastructure and other resources are needed to support coordination, facilitation, group planning and implementation.
- 2 **Intentionality.** Intentional P-3 initiatives focus on short- and long-term objectives while responding to emerging lessons learned and contextual changes and also addressing racial, ethnic, linguistic, and economic disparities in educational outcomes.
- 3 **Ongoing, data-informed shared learning.** Data-informed shared learning can shed light on the root causes of educational disparities and the types of change that are most needed within and across sectors. It can also ensure that resources are focused appropriately, gaps are addressed, and strategies are effective.

- **Collaborating with partners** to establish a shared vision that will serve as a north star for P-3 work and prevent mission drift.
- **Developing an effective action plan** that draws from the shared vision to ensure that strategies support the initiative's goals.
- **Seeking out and embedding input** from all community perspectives — especially families and direct service staff — within your P-3 work.
- **Funding, supporting or integrating a full-time or part-time P-3 coordinator** who can facilitate communication, follow up with partners, and coordinate the implementation of planned activities.
- **Identifying a data champion** to collect, synthesize and summarize data. This should include ensuring regular opportunities to discuss and reflect on what the data means to the work.