

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Building the Case for Culturally Specific P-3 Strategies in Oregon

Listening to Voices From the Field

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The Center for Improvement of Child & Family Services at Portland State University integrates research, education and training to advance the delivery of services to children and families. The CCF research team engages in equity-driven research, evaluation and consultation to promote social justice for children, youth, families and communities. Individuals from the following organizations participated in interviews for this brief and provided feedback on the outline, interview questions and draft brief:

ORGANIZATION	OUTLINE REVIEW	INTERVIEWS	DRAFT REVIEW
Adelante Mujeres	✓	✓	✓
Black Parent Initiative	●	✓	✓
Coalition of Communities of Color	●	●	✓
Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs	●	✓	✓
Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization	✓	✓	●
KairosPDX	✓	✓	✓
Latino Network	✓	✓	✓
Native American Youth & Family Center	●	✓	●
Oregon Child Development Coalition	✓	✓	✓
Oregon Community Foundation	✓	●	✓
Oregon Community Health Workers Association	●	✓	✓
Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality	✓	✓	●

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Building the Case for Culturally Specific P-3 Strategies in Oregon

Oregon's early learning and K-12 systems require transformative changes to address racial disparities in school readiness and success. Prenatal-through-Grade-3 (P-3) initiatives are an innovative way to align, strengthen and expand supports for this goal.¹

Culturally specific organizations (CSOs) are uniquely poised and expertly prepared to meet the needs of communities of color while helping Oregon achieve its goals for reducing disparities in kindergarten readiness and other educational outcomes.

The proposed Early Childhood Equity Fund, which is included in the governor's recommended 2019 budget,² would move Oregon closer to eliminating the opportunity gap in kindergarten readiness and school success by investing in culturally specific early learning and family support programs and allocating more resources to CSOs that are implementing school readiness strategies.

CSOs & P-3 PROGRAMMING

CSOs provide a wide range of supports across Oregon's P-3 system:

- Parenting education and supports for caregivers with children of all ages.
- Prenatal and perinatal supports, including doulas and healthy pregnancy classes.
- Infant-toddler supports (0-3 years), including home visits, parent-child groups, and breast-feeding and nutrition supports.
- Preschool and early learning supports (4-5 years), including preschool, Head Start, play groups, school readiness and transition programs.
- K-3 supports (6-8 years), including classroom instruction, youth leadership development, and after-school and out-of-school programs.
- Additional family supports, including adult education, employment assistance, housing assistance and transportation assistance, as well as facilitated referrals to other systems and supports (e.g., health and mental health providers).
- Other community-building efforts, including civic engagement training, promoting advocacy and leadership, supporting communities of practice, convening learning communities and providing professional development pathways to employment.
- Community outreach and awareness-raising activities to connect with other early learning, K-12 and family support organizations.

CSO CHARACTERISTICS

Effective CSOs have the following characteristics:^{3,4}

- The community being served recognizes the organization as culturally specific.
- Mission and outcomes align with expressed community needs.
- Services reflect the values, beliefs, practices and worldview of the community served.
- Meaningful community engagement occurs at all levels of the organization.
- Recognition of the impact of systemic racism is embedded throughout the organization's strategies and programming.
- Interventions are designed or adapted by and for members of the community.
- Services and materials are provided in the first language of the community served.

- People in leadership positions (e.g., directors, managers and board members) belong to the community served.
- Programming sustains shared history, identity, language and pride.
- The culture, language, identity and lived experience of community members and staff are honored as assets.
- Staff and leadership see themselves and their organization as accountable to the communities they serve.

BENEFITS OF INVESTING IN CSOs IN THE P-3 SYSTEM

- **Increased engagement and improved outcomes for children of color.** Examples include improved kindergarten readiness, increased school attendance and decreased exclusionary disciplinary practices.
- **Increased family engagement and community involvement.** With the support of CSOs, parents build confidence to support their child's learning at home and are prepared for discussions with service providers, teachers, school boards and elected representatives.
- **Improved ability to address opportunity gaps in access to culturally relevant supports.** Communities of color should have equitable access to educational and service options that reflect their culture and language, such as those provided by CSOs.
- **More inclusive decision-making.** By shifting resources and sharing power so that CSOs are more frequently and authentically involved in decision-making alongside mainstream institutions, Oregon's P-3 system can become more effective, equitable and culturally responsive.
- **Increased capacity to communicate impact and establish culturally specific evidence-based practices.** Research in partnership with CSOs could help both to address the gap in the evidence base for culturally specific P-3 supports and to document program outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Allocate adequate public funds to support CSOs engaging in P-3 work.** The state can learn from entities already allocating funds using a racial equity framework to increase public funding of CSOs that provide robust programming within the P-3 system.
- **Scale up culturally specific P-3 programming.** CSOs that are positioned to expand and support culturally specific work across the state can help address unmet needs by providing equity-driven and culturally specific services.
- **Build the evidence base for CSOs and P-3 programming.** Additional resources should be allocated to design and carry out culturally

“The Equity Fund is a step toward expanding access statewide and transforming Oregon’s system to make it more inclusive and equitable.”

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responsive evaluation of CSO services. Funders should also expand the definition of “evidence” to include smaller-scale and qualitative evaluations that describe the culturally relevant components and impacts of CSOs. To ensure that the process of building evidence is culturally responsive, CSOs should be involved in designing and implementing these evaluations and in defining the evidence and outcomes of success.

- **Deepen mainstream organizations’ understanding of systemic racism.** Mainstream educational and service organizations must continue working toward cultural responsiveness, using a racial equity analysis framework to identify the root causes of inequities and disparities so they can move beyond superficial understandings and responses.

SUMMARY

Through the Equity Fund, Oregon’s policymakers and education leaders have a pivotal opportunity to address early learning and education inequities by investing in the vital work of culturally specific organizations within the P-3 system of supports.

Families of color across Oregon deserve access to culturally specific early learning and K-12 experiences that can ensure their children have the opportunity to thrive.

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References

- 1 Patterson, L., Green, B. L., Lambarth, C. H., Burton, M., & Reid, D. (2018). *Building successful P-3 initiatives: Foundations and catalysts for systems change*. Portland, OR: Center for Improvement of Child & Family Services, Portland State University.
- 2 Brown, K. (2018). *Turning point: An agenda for Oregon's future: Governor's recommended budget and policy agenda*. Salem, OR: Office of the Governor.
- 3 Curry-Stevens, A., Cross-Hemmer, A., Maher, N., & Meier, J. (2011). The politics of data: Uncovering whiteness in conventional social policy and social work research. *Sociology Mind*, 1(4), 183–191.
- 4 Multnomah County Culturally Specific Work Group. (2015). *Culturally specific workgroup recommendations - 10/2015*. Retrieved from <https://multco.us/file/48046/download>



“Kids of color are Oregon’s kids. Investing in culturally specific orgs is an investment in our future. No one is better positioned to support kids of color than leaders in their own communities.”

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