

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An effective childcare system benefits the entire economy. In Oregon, we have not done a good job of prioritizing child care needs and developing a strategic, coordinated childcare plan. Usually, the term “child care” suggests a picture of preschoolers in a classroom. This is quite different from the reality of what today’s parents need so they can make ends meet and contribute to society.

Oregon has an elaborate K-12 education system. While the state has made piecemeal attempts to address early learning through Healthy Families, Pre-K (Oregon Pre-Kindergarten), Early Head Start, Head Start, PreK Promise, and Preschool Promise, the needs of young children before they start school are not being met before they start school. Families must bridge the gap between needs and availability on their own. The result is inequitable child care access. In addition, once children start in the K-12 system, they spend more time outside school than inside. Little coordination or support exists for after-school or summer care. In this realm, families are totally on their own. We see the consequences of this inattention in low academic performance (Hammond, 2022) and teen anxiety and suicide ideation (Perrine, 2022).

This report updates and expands on a 1988 League of Women Voters of Oregon (LWVOR) child care study – 34 years ago. Not only does this update focus on child care for young children, but it also focuses on the needs of school-age children during after-school and summer hours when they still need support and would benefit from additional opportunities for positive

engagement. While there has been progress since 1988, the challenges are very much the same as they were over thirty years ago.

A history of child care and other out-of-school time (OST) programs in the United States and Oregon is included in Appendix C. A patchwork of mixed level of attention to the needs of children and families is apparent. History matters because it offers a context for what is currently in place and what was attempted but not realized. It also illustrates the current web of misaligned programs that families and providers are forced to navigate.

This report also summarizes research on the effects of child care and after-school and summer programs. Research shows that out-of-school-time (OST) programs influence the participants’ success academically and in future careers. The programs even benefit future generations. The investment is worth it. Key findings indicate that although the current emphasis is on the benefits of early childhood programs during the period of most rapid brain development, the second most rapid period of development is during adolescence. The absence of programs and support during

