

**Testimony Concerning Support SB500 Child Care and Professional Development Fund-Alterations****Submitted to the Education, Energy and Environment Committee**

Our early learning educator community often does not reflect the rich and diverse tapestry of the communities served. The lack of teacher diversity is evident in K-12 classrooms as well as in the early learning workforce. In K-12 classrooms, 79% of teachers are White, Non-Hispanic, 9.7% are Hispanic, 6.7% are Black and 2% are Asian (Schaeffer, 2020). Yet, the students are 47% White, Non-Hispanic, 27% Hispanic and 15% Black. As we look specifically at early learning (birth-age 5), the demographics of the teacher workforce are more reflective of the children in their programs, with nearly 40% of early learning staff identified as a person of color (Whitebrook et al., 2018). However, early learning staff of color and those that are culturally and linguistically diverse often lack the resources and time to pursue a higher education certificate or degree. We need to provide college pathways in languages other than English to meet the needs of our workforce.

In Oregon, where my college is located, just as with many states across the nation, there has been a recent push for early learning providers to begin earning college credits, not just community-based training hours, in an effort to encourage them to start their journey along a college pathway. However, for providers who do not have academic levels of verbal and written English skills, this has been a challenge. Thus, in 2016, a local Head Start program reached out to our college to inquire if we could provide a course, on-site, for their Spanish-speaking staff who needed college credit hours. Over the next several years, interest in the Spanish language ECE courses continued to go. Thus, when the Oregon Department of Education announced a grant opportunity, Grow Your Own Teacher Pathway, to diversify the teaching pipeline, we submitted our grant proposal to create an Associate of Applied Science degree program in Early Childhood Education and Family Studies entirely available in Spanish.

As we developed the program, we eliminated as many barriers as possible for the Spanish-speaking students to be able to successfully complete the degree. The first barrier we focused on was the language barrier. We developed all of the required courses, including general education courses such as math, writing and communications, into Spanish in addition to the ECE courses. Another barrier we wanted to eliminate was lack of accessibility. Most of our students are already working full-time in

early learning settings, sometimes 12 hours a day for family child care providers. In addition, they often live in remote areas that make in-person classes difficult, if not impossible to attend. Thus, to increase accessibility to all of our students, we offer all of the courses online, with synchronous class meetings held via Zoom every other week. The classes meet on a weekday from 6:00-8:00 pm or on Saturday mornings. The third barrier we focused on eliminating was cost. We first began minimizing costs as we developed the courses. We utilized Open Education Resources (OERs), which are free, online books developed by college faculty across the nation.

Our degree program in ECE in Spanish was the first in the nation and now there are other colleges that are following suit, as they see the need to offer college pathways for linguistically diverse students. We now have over 270 Latinx, first-generation Spanish-speaking students in our program. Because our program is accredited through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and is all online, we have students from outside of Oregon as well, including a partnership with City University of New York to offer cohort courses to their Spanish-speaking students. We are able to offer that collaboration with Maryland as well to provide courses in Spanish to their ECE workforce and would also welcome the opportunity to share with their institutions of higher education that they might develop similar programs. Our first cohort of students graduated last year with their Associates of Applied Science degree and we will have about 35 more students graduate this June, with their ECE degree fully in Spanish.

In closing, opportunities for native language instruction, as identified in Senate Bill 500, are crucial to continue developing our early learning workforce and meeting the diverse needs of children and families in our society.

Best regards,

*Dawn Hendricks*

Dr. Dawn Hendricks  
Faculty, Early Childhood Education and Family Studies  
Dawn.hendricks@clackamas.edu  
503.679.0731