

**Testimony of Susan Castillo, State Superintendent of Public Instruction**  
**Senate Education Committee**  
**Wednesday, April 14, 2004**

Thank you Chair Starr and Co-Chair Morrisette for inviting me to be here today. I appreciate the work you are doing this interim on important issues related to Oregon's kids and look forward to a productive working relationship during the next legislative session.

I am sorry I could not be at your last committee meeting when you discussed the extended-day and full day Kindergarten component of my **Ready for School** initiative. This priority is an important one as we work to close the achievement gap in Oregon, and I am excited about the efforts already underway at the Department to help our students enter school ready to be successful.

Because I could not be here at your last meeting, I would like to take a couple of minutes to clarify some of the details about this initiative, if I may.

In January I announced six initiatives for Oregon's students and schools, including the Ready for School initiative. This priority is focused on helping increase access to the kind of quality early childhood programs that we know make a difference in a child's development of both social and cognitive skills, and their success later on in life.

Part of this focus includes increasing the number of eligible children served through the Oregon Pre-Kindergarten Program, enhancing early childhood content standards, and promoting extended day *or* full day kindergarten for **Title I** schools.

The Kindergarten proposal received the majority of the media coverage and generated a great deal of interest among parents, teachers and districts. This excitement perhaps indicates the level of need for such a program. But given the current funding challenges our schools are facing, I made a conscience effort to provide districts guidance on ways to provide extended or full day Kindergarten through the use of federal Title I dollars.

I have been clear that one of my top priorities as State Superintendent is to close the achievement gap in Oregon. And if we are to make meaningful gains in creating success for all students – not just some – we must adopt a variety of strategies that help level the playing field for the students who currently are entering first grade already behind.

Moving from half-day kindergarten to an extended *or* full day education program in Title I schools is a powerful early intervention tool that we know can help prepare students for a successful educational experience. As I travel the state, I have seen first-hand the difference a few extra hours in a day can make in the long-term academic success of a student.

In Prineville:

- In third year of full day, full week Kindergarten;
- Principal Dane Danforth;
- Can demonstrate fewer referrals to special education programs; better prepared for reading; social benefits.

In Oregon City:

- Gaffney Lane Elementary;
- Targets lowest performers only in full day (only one class of full day kindergarten);
- Debbie Zimel (teacher) – “These kids end up at the top of their class by the end of the year.”

In McMinnville:

- Cook Elementary School;
- Had full day Kindergarten but had to cut it for the beginning of year;
- Reinstating it because they noticed a significant difference;
- Making available for the 15 students who need the most help.

We proposed this because we know that if a student isn't a proficient reader by the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, the gap in achievement continues to increase, as does the cost to help that student catch up. An investment in Kindergarten is an investment in early success rather than trying to remediate failure in the upper grades.

We also proposed this because we know Title I eligible school districts have the authority to target their federal dollars to establish an extended day or full day Kindergarten program, which does not require additional state dollars.

So I asked staff to move ahead and provide guidance to districts about how to apply Title I funding and other federal grants for this effort, which I have a copy of for you today.

Also, while preparing this information for districts, my staff was able to learn more about the districts *who do not* qualify for Title I funds, but do have extended day and full day Kindergarten programs. This information is also included in the guidance we distributed to districts, so that other non-Title I districts can also explore ways to establish an expanded Kindergarten program.

As I stated earlier, I am excited about the work we are doing and I will make sure my staff and I continue to communicate with you as we make progress on this important effort.

Thank you for the opportunity to clarify this proposal for you today. I am happy to take any questions that you might have.