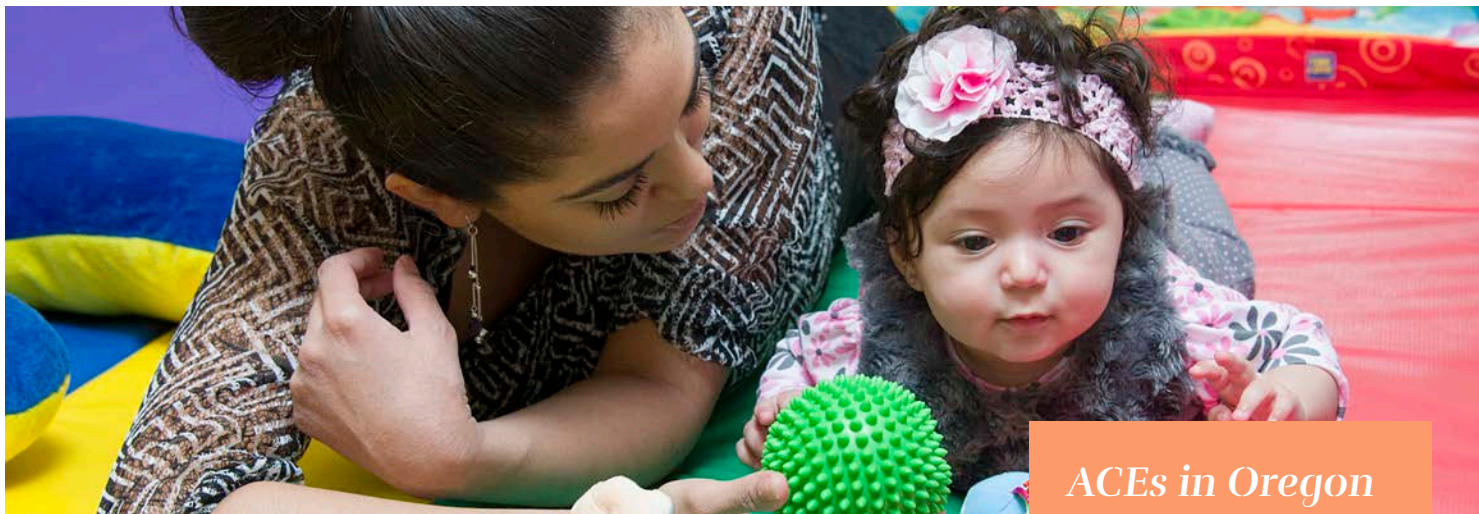


POLICY BRIEF: PARENTING EDUCATION

JULY 2018



Responsive Parenting in Early Childhood

Early childhood is a critical period of development for children. From birth to age 3, a child's brain makes 1 million new neural connections every second, reaching 80% of its adult size by age 3, and 90% by age 5.^{1,2} Parents and caregivers play a critical role in supporting children's developing brains as well as their social and emotional, physical, and cognitive development.³ In addition, research attributes up to 50% of the school readiness gap to differences in parenting with parenting style accounting for 19% of the gap in mathematics, 21% of the gap in literacy, and 33% of the gap in language.^{4,5} Numerous factors, however, can hinder a parent's ability to support children's healthy growth and development.

Parenting and Risk Factors

One risk factor for children's healthy growth and development is the presence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). ACEs relate to poor quality of life (social, mental, and physical), compromised immune systems, and reduced length of life.⁶ The impact of these stressors on families manifest in Oregon's educational outcomes and on Oregon's economic prosperity. For example, it is estimated that abuse of tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs (behaviors linked to ACEs) account for more than \$740 billion annually in costs related to crime, lost work productivity and health care. One of the strongest protective factors that buffers children against the negative impact of stress and ACEs is a stable and secure attachment relationship with a parent or caregiver.

ACEs in Oregon

64% of Oregonians have experienced one or more ACEs.

30% of Oregonians have experienced three or more ACEs.

In 2016, 11,843 children were reported to be victims of abuse and neglect.

Almost half of whom were younger than age 6. More than a quarter were under age 3.

Oregon ranks third worst in the U.S. in high school graduation rates at 77%.

Less than half of third graders meet proficiency benchmarks in reading and math.



Protecting Children and Families from Risk: The Value of Parenting Education

Ensuring that all parents have the skills that they need to effectively promote children's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development is critical to creating a safe, healthy, and self-sufficient society.

Parenting is learned and can be practiced and improved. Families are more likely today than in the past to live away from extended family and many miss out on traditional learning opportunities or lack social support. Importantly, social support has been identified as one of the strongest predictors of resilience.⁷

Research and knowledge of parenting practices associated with positive child outcomes has grown exponentially in recent decades and it is essential that we share this information with those who need it most: parents.

Parenting education refers to programs, support services, and resources for parents and caregivers that are designed to provide them with knowledge, skills, and strategies related to parenting, child development, and positive parent-child relationships. Parenting education provides families with research- and evidence-based information, parenting skills, and the social support they need to thrive. Studies have shown that participation in programs ranging 3-6 months in duration relate to a range of positive outcomes with effects persisting after six months for most families and after two years for families who participated consistently.¹³

Parenting education relates to:⁸⁻¹²

Increases in:

- positive parenting practices
- positive child and parent mental health outcomes
- increased health-promoting behaviors

Decreases in:

- child problem behaviors
- parenting stress
- incidences of child abuse and neglect

Parenting Education in Oregon: Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative

In response to the compelling research supporting the benefit of parenting education, the **Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative** (OPEC) was established in 2010.

OPEC is a partnership between The Oregon Community Foundation, The Ford Family Foundation, Meyer Memorial Trust, The Collins Foundation, and Oregon State University.

OPEC was established to create a statewide infrastructure to support parenting education, and expand access to evidence-based and culturally responsive programs.

Oregon State University serves as the technical assistance and evaluation partner for OPEC, providing ongoing evaluation and research support, as well as professional development for OPEC grantees.

The **Mission** of the Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative is to support the delivery of high quality parenting education programs and collaborative efforts to strengthen regional parenting education systems through coordination and planning.

With a goal to be statewide by 2020, OPEC has currently established 15 parenting education Hubs, which support parenting education coordination and programming in 32 of Oregon's 36 counties as well as in Siskiyou County, CA.

OPEC also provides funding to non-Hub agencies to support culturally-responsive/culturally-specific parenting education programs as well as to facilitate innovative parenting education partnerships, such as with the healthcare sector.



Since 2010, OPEC has significantly increased the availability of and access to parenting education programs in Oregon.

With OPEC funding support, from 2010-2017:

- **20,705** families completed multi-week evidence-based parenting education series,
- **45,098** parents attended single event parent workshops,
- **219,146** families participating in family activities, and
- **7,744** new families being reached through home visits.

OPEC grantees also supported workforce capacity building efforts, training **918** OPEC grantee organization staff in evidence-based parenting education curricula as well as an additional **896** individuals at partner agencies.

Ongoing evaluation is embedded into the OPEC initiative. From 2010-2017, data were collected by Oregon State University from 20,888 families who participated in OPEC-funded programs.

Families Reached by OPEC.

OPEC funds parenting education programs for universal as well as targeted groups of parents.

From 2010-2017, the average age of participating parents was 35, 69% were female, 62% were parenting with a partner, and 62% had children 0-6 years.

Parents participating in OPEC Hub programs were: 66% White, 18% Hispanic/Latinx, 4% Native American, 1% Black/African-American, 1% Asian, and 10% other/not specified.

Parents participating in OPEC programs through non-Hub agencies were: 31% White, 43% Hispanic/Latinx, 9% Black/African-American, 7% Asian, 2% Native American, and 8% other/not specified.

For OPEC Hub programs: 37% of participating families accessed WIC, 43% used Oregon Health Plan, and 27% used the free-reduced lunch program. For non-Hub agencies, 50% of families accessed WIC, 66% used Oregon Health Plan, and 36% used the free-reduced lunch program.

OPEC Research Results

Results from retrospective pre/post surveys show that families participating in OPEC programs report significant increases in:

- child development knowledge
- positive parenting practices
- knowing activities to promote learning
- stress management skills
- positive child behaviors

These results were seen for families across gender, race/ethnicity, and income with strongest effects found for families from low-income backgrounds.^{14,15}

Participating families overwhelmingly report feeling satisfied with their experience. Of the 18,208 participants completing surveys, 97% reported that the information and resources in group parenting classes or home visits were somewhat or very helpful. In addition, 97% of the parents responded that they were likely to recommend the classes to others.^{15,16}

Foundation Investment in Parenting Education

To date, approximately \$12.7 million have been invested in OPEC by foundation partners. OPEC Hubs have leveraged these funds to bring an additional \$20.9 million in cash and in-kind support for parenting education from community partners.

The current **annual investment** in OPEC is approximately:

- \$1.4 million from Foundation partners to support 15 OPEC Hubs (including evaluation and technical assistance through OSU)
- \$222,000 from Foundation partners to support nine additional parenting education programming grants for Hub and non-Hub agencies
- \$100,000 from Foundation partners to support professional development for parenting educators
- \$100,000 of in-kind/direct support from Oregon State University to support evaluation and professional development infrastructure

Recommendations for Practice and Policy

Parenting education is being recognized as a critical and often missing component of state and federal efforts to support children and families across the United States. In 2016, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine released a report: “Parenting Matters: Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8.”¹⁷

The report documents the evidence-based consensus of the authoring committee, highlighting the strength of research on parenting education, and concludes with the following recommendations for policy and practice:

- 1) scaling effective parenting education interventions (evidence-based, culturally-responsive/culturally-specific programs) as widely and quickly as possible;
- 2) communicating evidence-based parenting education information;
- 3) addressing gaps in the research-to-practice/practice-to-research pipeline; and
- 4-6) strengthening evidence on strategies for supporting parents with special needs, fathers, and diverse populations.

Most states are not as well positioned as Oregon to pursue these recommendations. With the strength of the existing parenting education infrastructure established by the Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative, Oregon can serve as a national model in these efforts.

Next Steps for Investment in Parenting Education

Recommendation 1: Expand availability of and access to evidence-based and culturally responsive parenting education programs.

An existing infrastructure for parenting education in Oregon exists through OPEC. Currently, evidence-based parenting education series are only available for an estimated 3.1% of the population of families with children 0-6 in Oregon.

Through partnership with OPEC, expansion of evidence-based parenting education programs is easily scalable with funding support for enhanced programming, accompanied by funding support for expanded coordination efforts, and to support best practices to reduce barriers to participation (e.g., providing high-quality childcare and meals, hosting relationship-building community events).

Recommendation 2: Support ongoing research and evaluation efforts.

With support from Oregon State University, ongoing research and evaluation is conducted to track programming numbers, parenting education participation, parent and child outcome data, and evaluation to assess quality of programming, including fidelity. A significant expansion of parenting education programming would require additional support to ensure data were being collected to assess long-term progress and outcomes.

Recommendation 3: Support professional development opportunities to ensure a highly-qualified and well-prepared parenting education workforce.

A growing need for parenting education programming will require professional development support, including evidence-based curricula trainings and high-quality professional development opportunities for parenting educators. Partnership with OPEC provides opportunities to leverage an existing professional development network and opportunities (e.g., conferences, curriculum trainings, learning communities) and to extend these opportunities to a larger parenting education workforce.

Parenting education has the potential to significantly enhance Oregon’s efforts to promote positive outcomes for children and families. The Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative provides a statewide infrastructure for parenting education and is positioned to serve as a partner to expand access to high-quality parenting education programs for Oregon families. With a robust evaluation system, expansion efforts could be monitored over time to ensure quality programming and assess impact. Together, through foundation-, university-, and state-level partnership, Oregon is well-poised to serve as a national leader in supporting thriving children and families.

References and Contact

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**To learn more about the
Oregon Parenting Education
Collaborative, visit:**

orparenting.org

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