

## Early Learning Ad Hoc Committee

### **Mission:**

Create a tangible network of early learning care options within our community, supportive of working families, the Ashland economy, and most importantly our children.

### **Goal:**

Support Ashland working families with affordable early learning childcare solutions that focus on attracting and retaining Ashland's workforce, strengthening Ashland School District enrollment, and preparing our youngest citizens for kindergarten, independent of economic status.

### **City of Ashland Value Statements Supported by this Ad Hoc Committee**

- Community affordability, including in available housing and childcare
- Belonging through mutual respect and openness, inclusion, and equity
- Quality of life that underpins the City's economic vibrancy

### **Committee Charge:**

Define the existing early learning environment in Ashland including total number of early learning seats, both private and non-profit, composition of programs (in home, centers, other) and economics of existing programs (Head Start, Preschool Promise, Private Tuition, annual costs to family and caregivers).

Assess and define Ashland's unaddressed early learning requirements.

Identify resources capable of contributing to an early learning solution including, but not limited to:

- Physical Assets (Brick and Mortar, tangible supplies to provide service, etc)
- Business Partners
- Non-Profit Partners
- Coordination of Service Expertise

Consider and plan for the needs of the care providers, specifically:

- Living wage positions,
- Appropriate benefits,
- Training opportunities, and
- Recruitment of educators and staff.

**Develop a strategic plan capable of tangibly providing for Ashland's unaddressed early learning needs.**

**Scope of Authority:** The Early Learning Ad Hoc Committee will provide strategy recommendations to the Ashland City Council and its' community partners.

**Membership:** The Early Learning Ad Hoc Committee will be comprised of representatives from the following:

- Ashland School District
  - *Representatives from the District will provide subject matter expertise on where they are seeing deficiencies in preschool education in preparing children for kindergarten and provide insight, support, and suggestions for how to overcome.*
- City of Ashland
  - *The representative from the City of Ashland will aid in convening partners, monitor relevant state legislation/funding opportunities, and advise on possible local policy that will further support the creation of sustainable and affordable early learning programs for Ashland families.*
- Chamber of Commerce
  - *The representative from the Chamber will provide member feedback regarding early learning needs as it pertains to workforce recruitment and help connect community partners as we seek a viable solution for early learning and childcare, supportive of an economically vibrant Ashland.*
- Hospital System
  - *Representatives from our hospital systems will provide insight into childcare efforts affecting their workforce and service delivery, at a time when attracting and retaining hospital/ healthcare employees is challenging.*
- Key Local Business Leaders
  - *Representatives from local business will provide specific feedback into childcare efforts affecting their workforce and provide insight and suggestions on what supporting early childhood education would mean for working individuals and the success of their businesses.*
- Community Members
  - *Representatives from the community will provide a mix of perspectives including but not limited to: feedback on lived experience, early learning education expertise, and non-profit expertise, specific to development and continued operation of early learning programing.*

### **Why Solving for Early Learning Matters for All Ashlanders:**

(Information supplied by Rene Brandon, Southern Oregon Early Learning Hub)

**Continued workforce shortages across all sectors.** The overall workforce is comprised of families who need childcare to work. 53% of families with children 0-5 are in poverty and could be staffing local businesses except they cannot afford childcare due to the gap between entry level wages and the cost of providing childcare. Businesses will continue to struggle to recruit and retain staff without financial support for childcare.

**Continued Decline and Destabilization of Child Care workforce.** We have 18% fewer childcare programs than we had pre-Covid. Many of those programs have empty classrooms because they cannot find qualified teachers willing to work for low wages and also due to families being unable to pay for child care without assistance.

**Childcare is called out as a key stabilizer for education, health and economic prosperity of our state:**

- Oregon Business Council Strategic Plan includes “make child care and early learning more accessible”.
- Our workforce board and ODHS self-sufficiency partners have identified that soft skills – those directly tied to early social-emotional development - as the key ingredients needed for a successful employee. Employees can be trained to do the function of a job, but an employer cannot teach self-regulation and pro-social skills on the job.
- Southern Oregon’s Community Health Assessment has identified families having access to childcare as a Community Health Improvement Plan Goal. Investment in the next generation. Our K-12 research/science has identified high quality early learning prior to kindergarten as an indicator of SE regulation and subsequent academic success. Cost SAVINGS over time. 7-10% return on investment over the lifetime of children who experience high quality preschool.