



### **Why the Campaign:**

The Statewide Literacy Campaign was designed to complement the \$7.6 million in investments that the legislature has made in literacy-related programs in the current biennium by heightening attention for the importance of early reading to putting students on track for 3rd grade. The Chief Education Office was charged with building awareness for the impact early literacy has on lifelong success and galvanizing Oregonians to support children and families to ensure students are proficient readers by 3rd grade.

### **Background:**

We know that families play a critical role in the development of basic skills and vocabulary development that support future success as early as birth. As early as three, children from impoverished families know an average of 30 million **fewer** words as compared to children from professional families. To complement existing state investments and literacy strategies, a communications and engagement approach that **meets families where they are** and brings important skill building into the home in ways that are **easy and culturally relevant** is critical.

### **Approach:**

To fully understand existing approaches used to communicate and engage with parents about literacy, and to learn what barriers to supporting children parents' experience, we engaged deeply with five communities experiencing some of the most significant barriers to building literacy skills. Focus sites were chosen based on the confluence of myriad data points including: low Kindergarten Assessment and elementary reading score data; high unemployment rates; high concentrations of children at risk ages 0-6 (data from DHS); and population centers where there was a high prevalence of families speaking a native language other than English. Ensuring selected counties represented both urban and rural, and included at least two tribal communities were also priorities.

### **Engagement in Focus Communities:**

Between April and June we visited each of the selected focus communities multiple times to have discussions with key education, literacy, and non-profit partners and then separate groups with families. In communities where a language other than English was prevalent, we hosted bi-lingual conversations or community-specific conversations as appropriate. Each included discussion about: programs and partnerships currently supporting parents; gaps in current literacy programs; perceptions parents had about reading; and what kinds of regionally and culturally specific support might be most useful to parents. Focus communities included:

- The Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde and Willamina Elementary School, Yamhill County
- Reynolds School District, Multnomah County
- Reedsport, North Bend & Coos Bay School Districts, Coos & Douglas Counties
- Ontario, Nyssa and Vale School Districts, Malheur County
- The Klamath Tribe, Klamath County

### **Themes Across Communities:**

- Despite really good intentions, many parents feel that they do not know how to appropriately engage their children at home and in day-to-day activities to support reading growth.
- The notion of reading to and with their children is intimidating to parents with limited education or those who do not speak English as a first language. Even the word "reading" does not feel inviting to low literacy parents.
- For parents from communities of color or those in rural Oregon there are many barriers to accessing what literacy programs exist in their community including: transportation, hours of operation, and perceptions about libraries due to immigration status etc.
- Parents need to be empowered and supported to be their child's first teacher. We found a host of **misperceptions driven by culture or family upbringing** including beliefs that: reading and/or education occurs only in school; the teacher is the authority



when it comes to a child's education and parents do not play a role; and reading should be done in English in order to be beneficial.

- Many families do not have books at home and certainly not culturally specific or relevant books that resonate with parents and students.
- For many families in poverty or those struggling with other challenges at home, reading takes a backseat to meeting basic family needs.

### **Families:**

There were consistent themes that we heard across the state in rural and urban communities and across cultures: families need easy, relevant ways to support their child(ren) that **engage them where they are** culturally, regionally, intellectually and emotionally; they universally want what is best for their children to ensure they have a better life than they have had; and families were motivated by seeing their child succeed in whatever way it made sense for them.

### **Messaging and Engagement Framework:**

Building early literacy has to feel easy. It needs to convey ease of inclusion into daily life and families need to feel confident that they can help their child(ren). **Simply telling families that reading is important is not enough.** We have to **empower families** to be their child's first teacher; convey that preparing children to read is not exclusive to picking up a book; make the connection between reading and a promising future; and demonstrate both cultural and regional relevance.

### **StORytime:**

The campaign name conveys **ease and accessibility** of telling stories, playing and talking with children in everyday life; the emphasis on the OR in the word story localizes the campaign to Oregon. Both the **name and the tagline translate well into multiple languages** and the notion of **storytelling is a central part of many cultures represented in the state.** We know that the word "reading" can be perceived as a barrier for many of our families and that reading centric logos, campaigns and communication are pervasive throughout the state. StORytime is intended to approach communication differently; it empowers parents to use myriad ways to support their children that can be incorporated into daily life, easily fit into busy schedules, allow for low-literacy levels, and encourage teaching in multiple languages. The colors in the logo were determined in part by asking families what colors they associated with family, fun, adventure etc., and in part by looking at colors represented in hundreds of culturally specific logos for statewide organizations to determine common colors that would likely resonate widely.

### **Imbedding the Campaign Ethos Statewide:**

We will use StORytime to de-bunk traditional notions of reading as being limited to a book, and instead convey the many ways that families can easily help support literacy for their children in everyday life such as through play, storytelling, grocery shopping, singing etc. We believe there are many ways a child can learn to read, and every parent has the ability to be their child's first and best teacher. A key component of our approach will be to alleviate both real and perceived barriers that parents have to developing literacy skills with their children.

Communication and engagement strategies will be developed to complement the exceptional work already being done by parents, educators and community partners through existing statewide efforts. The campaign plan will not feature glitzy ads and billboards but will instead be designed to leverage existing efforts both within the education system as well as from our community partners around the state to carry the messages and activities of the campaign. Ultimately, the initiative is being designed to knit together all of the efforts from birth to 3rd grade that are preparing students for kindergarten and 3rd grade reading.

**The power of the StORytime campaign is that it was designed to resonate with communities of color, families in poverty, our tribal communities, and in both urban and rural Oregon alike, but its accessibility, simplicity and focus on fun are attributes that will appeal to families across Oregon.**