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Governor Kate Brown Announces Healthy Early Learners Council

July 06, 2020

Council will advise programs serving children, birth to eight, on safely reopening and staying open

Portland, OR—Governor Kate Brown today announced that she will be convening a Healthy Early Learners Council to advise her and the Early Learning Division (ELD) on guidance for the reopening and ongoing operation of early learning and child care programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The work of this Council will align with the work of the Early Learning System strategic plan, Raise Up Oregon (https://oregon.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=41b11f32beefba0380ee8ecb5&id=72d48e3295&e=8b2ce66d7f) , the Governor's Early Learning Council, and the Joint Taskforce on Access to Quality Affordable Child Care.

The early childhood education sector, including early learning and child care programs, faces unique challenges in the midst of COVID-19, given the limited ability for children and staff to maintain physical distancing, the potential child development implications of staff wearing face coverings in this environment, and the increased cleaning protocols that programs must implement without professional support.

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"As anyone with young children at home knows, Oregon's early learning educators and child care providers have their work cut out for them tending to health, safety, and learning during this pandemic," said Governor Brown. "Through the work of the Healthy Early Learners Council, we will help ensure the health and well-being of Oregon's young children returning to early learning and child care programs – as well as the dedicated professionals who serve them."

The Council, which will meet over the next several months, will be charged with:
• Aligning reopening guidance for children birth through age 8 – including child care, preschool/pre-kindergarten, and Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education programs – grounded in equity and the science of child development;
• Informing revised guidance issued by the Early Learning Division and the Oregon Health Authority to support early childhood program operations with health and safety in mind;
• Advising on policies to support providers' and children's developmental, physical, and mental health needs, including addressing challenging behaviors when returning to care and preventing increases in suspension and expulsion, particularly for young children of color; and
• Recommendations for the health and well-being of young children and their families during COVID-19, in collaboration with the Early Learning Council.

The Council will include elected officials, child care providers, early learning providers, public health experts, and parents, with a focus on ensuring that a wide and diverse range of community voices are represented. A full roster of members will be available prior to the Council's first meeting in July.

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