



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **New study shows early literacy programs work**

PORTLAND, Ore. — A new, independent study confirms that four early-literacy programs funded by the PacifiCorp Foundation for Learning are helping improve literacy skills. In Oregon, the study concluded that the Foundation's Project Optimize literacy program successfully helps teachers rescue children who arrive at kindergarten unprepared to learn.

The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL), a nonprofit education research, development and services firm, conducted a study of the early-literacy programs' initial and long-term effectiveness.

"The results are encouraging," said Dr. Steffen Saifer, director of NWREL's Child and Family Program and Principal Investigator of the study. "Participating parents are reading to their children more often and are increasing their own reading skills. This is particularly true among immigrant parents. Participating children are more interested in books and are more ready for kindergarten than children who did not participate in PacifiCorp Foundation for Learning-funded programs."

In 2002, the PacifiCorp Foundation selected three initiatives for funding: Oregon Project Optimize, Utah Motherread/Fatheread and Raising Readers of Wyoming. In 2004, it expanded its scope to fund Idaho's Parents as Teachers Plus and Washington Motherread/Fatheread. The Foundation is the charitable arm of PacifiCorp, which operates in six western states as Pacific Power and Utah Power.

Created by University of Oregon researchers, Project Optimize provides phonologic and alphabetic instruction that prepares targeted kindergartners to be successful beginning readers. Students receive small-group instruction in a yearlong curriculum from a teacher or education assistant. The program complements the Start Making a Reader Today (SMART) reading program to provide reading support.

More than 700 children have been impacted. An evaluation by the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory (NWREL) found that 78 percent of the children in Project Optimize were reading at benchmark by the end of kindergarten, as opposed to 57 percent of the children in the comparison group.

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“This study confirms that we accomplished what we set out to do,” said Richard Walje, the Foundation’s board chair. “We targeted a need – early literacy – identified a strategy and helped implement a program that’s sustainable and easily replicated. For a corporation with a modest Foundation budget, we were able to contribute more than \$1 million and facilitate real, needed change in education.”

Oregon Project Optimize helps children close the achievement gap and become more successful readers in first grade. The six schools selected for Project Optimize were Boise-Eliot Elementary and Vestal Elementary in Portland, Little Butte Elementary in Eagle Point, Metolious Elementary in Madras, Parkside Elementary in Grants Pass, and Warm Springs Elementary in Warm Springs.

“We’re very pleased to be part of the project,” said Dawn Smith, principal of Warm Springs Elementary in Warm Springs, Ore. “This program and teacher training fits right in with our current reading program and we know it will enhance our students’ learning. This kind of initiative really sets the standard for the important work foundations can do when it comes to public schools.”

“Our first-grade teachers are elated with the program because their students come into the school year better prepared,” said James Brannon, principal of Portland’s Boise-Eliot Elementary.

At-risk children in schools with Oregon Project Optimize did significantly better on reading assessments than did children from demographically similar schools where the project was not implemented. An estimated 20 percent of entering kindergartners in low socio-economic schools are at risk of reading failure.

“This has been a phenomenal undertaking and we owe our success to many of the partner organizations and schools who implemented these initiatives,” said Isaac Regenstreif, executive director of the PacifiCorp Foundation. “It’s clear that these programs are helping kids have a better chance at succeeding in school.”

Project Optimize partners include the Oregon Department of Education, University of Oregon Start Making a Reader Today (SMART) and Multnomah County Leaders Roundtable.

All Foundation-funded programs exceeded their anticipated goals for the number of families and children served and the number of books distributed, and more than 10,000 children have been impacted.

According to Regenstreif, these programs are building sustainable partnerships and are leveraging additional dollars from other funding sources. They will all likely be sustained beyond the 3-4 years of PacifiCorp Foundation for Learning funding.

For more information about the specific initiatives, log on to [www.pacificorpfoundation.org](http://www.pacificorpfoundation.org).