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## My View: Praise for Preschool for All's commitment to equity

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Research shows that high-quality early education improves children's academic and social skills, increases parent labor force participation, and has a high return on investment for communities.

Courtesy photo: Wikimedia Commons, Sgt. David H. Lipp

Multnomah County has made significant investments and commitments to their young children and families by passing the landmark ballot initiative that created the Multnomah County Preschool for All program.



Dr. Stephanie Curenton

In doing so, Multnomah County joins states and locales across the country that are expanding access to high-quality early learning opportunities for 3- and 4- year-old children. Research shows that high-quality early education improves children's academic and social skills, increases parent labor force participation, and has a high return on investment for communities.

By providing full day and full year programming options to meet diverse needs of families, funding to support professional development and coaching for educators, and family navigators, Multnomah County has followed the research in these areas when designing the PFA program.

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Multnomah County has also gone a step further in prioritizing racial equity in their program design, implementation and evaluation planning. Understanding that racially marginalized children are more likely to be suspended or expelled from preschool programs with negative outcomes, PFA does not allow suspension or expulsion.

Understanding that research shows that not all families have equitable access to early learning opportunities, PFA's roll out has strategically prioritized the populations with the least access first.

While PFA is designed to be a universal program that all Multnomah families will have access to in the future, their strategic approach to prioritizing families whose children have the most to benefit from PFA first will support the success of the program.

An important part of any new program is evaluating it to make sure it is meeting its goals during the early years of the program.

The Boston University Center on the Ecology of Early Development (CEED) is honored to be partnering closely with Multnomah County's Preschool and Early Learning Division (PEL) to conduct research and evaluation activities. As a research-practice partnership, we are focusing the first few years of the project on listening to the voices of community members, families, program leaders, and educators through interviews, focus groups and surveys.

At CEED our mission is to conduct applied research that makes a difference in the lives of children and families using a racial equity framework.

In partnership with PEL we are also committed for the long-term, as we design future research and evaluation activities to better understand the long-term impacts of PFA on children, families, providers, and the community overall.

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Communities across the country have made investments in preschool, yet Multnomah County Preschool for All's explicit commitment to equity makes it a unique model for others to watch now and into the future.

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*Dr. Stephanie M. Curenton is the principal investigator of the CEED-Multnomah County Preschool for All. She is a national expert in early childhood education and the creator of the Assessing Classroom Sociocultural Equity Scale (ACSES). To learn more visit [https://www.bu-ceed.org/education-for-selfactualizationResearch & Evaluation Partnership](https://www.bu-ceed.org/education-for-selfactualizationResearch&EvaluationPartnership).*