

# EDUCATIONAL SERVICE DISTRICT 112

## *Our WSLA Story*



# OUR PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

## Growing into Kindergarten

*"How can we develop a system for early learning that produces student growth and ensures Kindergarten Readiness through the interaction of professional learning, shared resources, and engagement of partners?"*

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### ENGAGEMENT OF PARTNERS

School districts, community organizations, state, federal and local funders, Department of Early Learning

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### SHARED RESOURCES

Blended funding, comprehensive supports, leveraged expertise

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### PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Center-based PLCs, reflective practice, training and coaching

## THREE BRANCHES: Theory of Action

## WHO ARE WE?

ONE of NINE ESDs in the state, our region encompasses the six counties of Southwest Washington and includes 30 school districts, two state schools and numerous private schools. As the ESD 112 Cabinet, we are committed to providing equal education opportunities for the 100,000+ students in our region and those we serve across the state. BUT, here's where we get interesting.

We are UNIQUE from the school districts in our WSLA Cohort (I mean, we have the finance guru, the insurance guy and legal counsel on our team!) BUT, this process has reminded us that we're actually very SIMILAR to our fellow WSLA colleagues. You see, ESD 112 directly serves 6,000 students across the state. That's like a mid-size school district! We are directly responsible for the education of kids in our Early Childhood Education Assistance Program (ECEAP), Early Head Start (EHS), Child Care, Special Education, and At-risk Students. Those 6,000 students count on us to deliver services—every single school day—that help them grow, achieve and perform at their highest potential. That's why we fit into WSLA.

## WHY THIS POP?

This is the story of how our POP evolved. Day one - "Hey, for our POP, let's make an impact on all 6,000 of our students!"

And then it got real. After we heard from our Kelso colleagues during group sharing, we learned those rock stars had a very targeted, specific and measurable POP; we did not. So, we regrouped and huddled with Coach Steve. The conversation turned increasingly toward early learning and the importance of Kindergarten Readiness. We're already serving nearly 1,000 EHS, ECEAP and Child Care students aged Birth-5. We had just received a \$2.6 million federal grant to expand EHS. The grant requirements provided the perfect opportunity to blend and integrate Early Care and Education (ECE) programs.

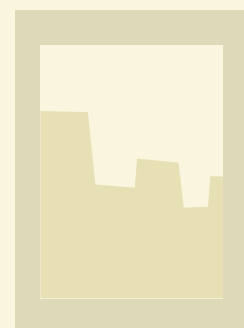
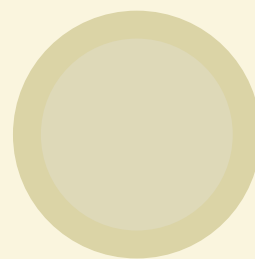
As an agency charged to equalize education opportunities for all, inequities are especially prominent in early learning. Some families can afford to pay for child care, preschool and early learning services; others cannot. The TS Gold Assessments reveal that 41% of 3-5 year olds in our region are meeting expectations for Kindergarten Readiness, compared to 47% statewide. It began making sense for our POP to focus on our littlest learners who represent our most vulnerable population. We can get good data. We can track progress. We can be very specific in our Theory of Action. And, BONUS - we have the Executive Director of ECE on our team.

But, the more we talked the more we realized we had to whittle our POP. Of the 30 early learning sites managed by ESD 112, it made most sense to pilot our POP at ONE early learning center. We chose Park Crest, our newest center, because it serves EHS, ECEAP and private pay child care families. There, we have an opportunity blend staff, professional development opportunities and instructional strategies to influence improved outcomes for vulnerable and non-vulnerable populations alike. Our POP took shape after nearly eight months of regular WSLA sessions!

## WHAT WERE OUR CHALLENGES?

Every step has been a challenge; but great things come from challenges. Working through busy schedules, communication challenges and the complexities of our organization took time. The narrowing of the POP and the wordsmithing took patience. (It took a village to narrow our POP from impacting 6,000 students across the region to just 112 youngsters housed at one early learning center!) And we still have looming questions. How will we afford to implement the POP? How will we find the resources to replicate it at other centers? Now, that will take some creative thinking!

BUT, as a resilient, determined and resourceful leadership group, we share the passion and commitment to move Kindergarten Readiness to a new level – and, along the way, become one of the premiere early learning leaders in the state. We all believe our POP is the beginning of a really great journey.



## **WSLA TEAM:**

**Steve Bodnar**, Coach

**Tim Merlino**, Superintendent

**Marnie Allen**, Assistant Superintendent,  
*Human Resources and Legal Services*

**Loy Dale**, Assistant Superintendent,  
*School And Agency Operations*

**Lori Oberheide**, Assistant Superintendent,  
*Communications and Public Engagement*

**Gavin Hottman**, Assistant Superintendent,  
*CFO, Business and Financial  
Management*

**Mike Nerland**, Assistant Superintendent,  
*Teaching and Learning*

**Mary Mertz**, Executive Director,  
*Specialized Student Services*

**Jodi Wall**, Executive Director,  
*Early Care and Education*

**Kathy Whitlock**, Executive Director,  
*Student and School Success*