

Ready to Read Now and Then

by Greta Bergquist
Youth Services Consultant,
State Library of Oregon
greta.bergquist@slo.oregon.gov
[@bookquist](https://twitter.com/bookquist)



GRETA BERGQUIST has worked in public libraries, schools, and afterschool programs from the East Coast to the Pacific Northwest. She holds a Master of Arts in Teaching from Johns Hopkins University and an MLIS from the University of Washington. Bergquist greatly enjoys working with public library staff in her role as the Youth Services Consultant at the State Library of Oregon.

The Ready to Read project at your local public library is building literacy skills in early learners and summer readers, even as I write these words. Oregon libraries use Ready to Read funds in their daily work to support visiting Head Start classrooms with storytimes, to offer teen or foster parent literacy classes, to implement summer food site reading programs, and more—all to ensure that as many Oregon kids as possible have the opportunity to build literacy skills in their communities.

The reach of this program is broad and deep. In 2019 alone, public libraries used Ready to Read funds to meet the needs of 252,397 young learners from ages zero to five. Along with these early learning services, libraries worked to implement summer reading programs serving over 211,000 kids from ages zero to 14, partnering with an incredible number of 750 community organizations across the state to help ensure young learners have safe spaces and resources they need to keep learning over the summer months.

It can be challenging to capture the commitment, energy, expertise, and joy that goes into running and implementing children's services at any public library. Ready to Read annual applications and reports tell one part of the story. Another piece of this story is found in Oregon's laws, amended over time, and State Library Board meeting minutes, detailing Ready to Read's trajectory over time. (Minutes cited prior to 2012 can be found in the State Library's stacks on the fourth floor, while more recent minutes are available online. Should you be interested in viewing the older print editions, we'd be happy to assist you in your research!)

The beginning of this non-competitive grants program looked a bit different from the way Ready to Read is implemented today. In 1977, the Oregon Legislature enacted SB 23, intended to offer financial assistance to public libraries supplementing any (if at all) funds received from local government, with an initial allocation of \$300,000 for the biennium. The original purpose of these funds was to broaden access to existing information resources, reach Oregonians not currently served by a local library, and foster new library services. This



bill passed after much work from Oregon Library Association members in 1975 and 1976. They proposed how such a program would work and shared with the library board how it would greatly support Oregonians in accessing necessary library services in their communities (1976).

Over time, changes were made as Oregon grew and so did Oregon libraries. In 1985, grant amounts became connected to the number of people libraries served, as well as geographical areas, to help ensure that rural areas would receive funds. Areas not served by local public libraries were the responsibility of the State Library. Also, in this biennium, the general funds allocated to Library Development “per capita” grants grew by 50 percent. According to board meeting minutes, this was the result of the Oregon Library Association working with the legislature to present the importance of this program to libraries (1987).

In State Library Board meeting minutes from 1990–1991, there are a few mentions of work being done to focus these grant funds towards serving children. In 1993, the law was amended so that per capita library support grants were specifically directed towards youth: “The grants shall be expended to develop public library services for children, with emphasis on preschool children” (SB 22, 1993). Also in this amendment, the State Library stopped being responsible for Oregonians not currently served by a local library. All grant funds were allocated on a per-child basis to city, county, or district libraries. The State Library had been reserving about \$32,000 for unserved populations, and the board notes that this amount should be included in future distributed funds (1992).

Also in 1993, Ellen Fader became the Public Library Consultant at the State Library. With her service on several Association for Library Service to Children committees and as a book reviewer for the Horn Book and School Library Journal, she was uniquely positioned to support libraries transitioning to focus their grant funds on serving children and youth. State Library Board Meeting minutes note Fader’s work began with an emphasis on library services for children and youth and the “per capita” grant program became known as the “Children’s Services Improvement Grant” (1993).

In the fall of 1993, B. J. Quinlan, who at the time was serving as Children’s Services Coordinator for the Salem Public Library, presented about children’s services at a State Library Board meeting. She included her perspective that given Oregon’s “ready to learn” approach for children entering school, public libraries offer critical services and excellent opportunities to ensure children are ready for kindergarten. Descriptions of proposed Children’s Services Improvement Grant projects from other libraries were also shared at this meeting, including Eugene Public’s plan to serve unhoused children and Coos Cooperative Library Services’ plan to increase their Spanish language children’s collection (1993).

Included in this meeting’s notes are a report on the State Library’s 1993–1995 biennium goals, one of which was assisting public libraries in improving services to children. The report includes an increase in consulting hours focused on youth services, working with regional associations of children’s librarians, offering training with a focus on children and youth, and providing recognition to exemplary children’s services projects.

This work hums along throughout the rest of the 90s, and in 2007 there is a minor amendment to the law focusing specifically on early literacy (HB 2116, 2007). Then we see in 2012 new laws establishing the Early Learning Council, as well as multiple amendments and changes to early learning support structures across the state. As part of this larger early learning-focused re-write, there is a small change to Ready to Read to focus on birth to age six. (Previously the focus was up to age five.) (HB 4165, 2012)



In meeting minutes from April 2014, there are significant notes on State Library-led work to propose changes to the current Ready to Read program, with efforts led by then Youth Services Consultant, Katie Anderson. Anderson worked with a Reimagining Ready to Read committee of 12 members to evaluate all aspects of Ready to Read and propose changes to be made starting in the next biennium. Some of these changes included raising the age limit for summer reading, increasing minimum grant amounts, and changing the name of the grant program. The State Library Board voted to approve these proposed changes in order to better align with state-level education goals (2014).

Legislation passed in 2015 included many changes to the State Library's governance as outlined in House Bill 3523. The 2014 Reimagining Ready to Read proposed changes were not included in this bill, and no other significant changes to Ready to Read were made. The only amendment to Ready to Read was in the wording of Sections 26, 27, and 28 to declare the State Library Board as the entity libraries apply to, where previously this had been trustees. However, since that 2015 session, many of the Reimagining Ready to Read ideas that came from the 2014 committee have been incorporated into the application and reporting process, including outcome measurement and a focus on working with community partners and underserved families.

In 2018, Ready to Read process improvements continued to make the grant application and reporting more streamlined and accessible. Staff including myself, Tamara Ottum, and Ross Fuqua collaborated with other state agency grant-makers at Oregon Parks, Travel Oregon, the Arts Commission, and Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs to research, evaluate, and acquire an online grants platform that would allow libraries to create one online profile and apply for both Ready to Read and LSTA grants from that profile. All three of us shared our work around this with the State Library Board last fall (2019).

In 2019, the State Library started a Strategic Planning process for 2020–2023 that incorporated Ready to Read with an initiative designed to support one of our Agency's proposed Key Performance Measures. This measure assesses statewide participation in a Ready to Read project. As part of this work over the next three years, we plan to better align Ready to Read Program goals to other statewide early literacy initiatives from the Early Learning Division, such as Raise Up Oregon. The State Library Board approved the proposed Strategic plan on April 29, 2020.

Of course, the Law, subsequent amendments, and State Library Board meeting minutes do not tell the whole story of Ready to Read's impact on children across our state. These small pieces of documented work are important snapshots in time of the labor State Library staff have done and continue to support public libraries carrying out Ready to Read projects. These brief snippets help us understand we are deeply indebted to local library staff past and present. We know the Ready to Read mission of ensuring Oregon children have access to quality library services, are ready for kindergarten, and have a safe and joyful place to learn in the summer months is greatly strengthened by local library staff who bring energy and expertise to this work every day. We are grateful to be stewards of this program supporting children and families across our state. We look forward to continuing our work with Ready to Read into the future. 



References

Oregon. Chapter 543. Division 40. (1993). Oregon Administrative Rules. Retrieved from <https://secure.sos.state.or.us/oard/viewSingleRule.action?ruleVrsnRsn=134394>

- Oregon. Chapter 291, SB 23. (1977). Oregon Revised Statutes, Compiled. Retrieved from <https://digital.osl.state.or.us/islandora/object/osl:68680>
- Oregon. Chapter 257, SB 488. (1985). Oregon Revised Statutes, Compiled. Retrieved from <https://digital.osl.state.or.us/islandora/object/osl:68680>
- Oregon. Chapter 92, SB 5009. (1987). Oregon Revised Statutes, Compiled. Retrieved from <https://digital.osl.state.or.us/islandora/object/osl:68680>
- Oregon. Chapter 602, HB 3497. (1991). Oregon Revised Statutes, Compiled. Retrieved from <https://digital.osl.state.or.us/islandora/object/osl:68680>
- Oregon. Chapter 20, SB 22. (1993). Oregon Revised Statutes, Compiled. Retrieved from <https://digital.osl.state.or.us/islandora/object/osl:68680>
- Oregon. Chapter 191, HB 2116. (2007). Oregon Revised Statutes, Compiled. Retrieved from <https://digital.osl.state.or.us/islandora/object/osl:68680>
- Oregon. Chapter 37, HB 4165. (2012). Oregon Revised Statutes, Compiled. Retrieved from <https://digital.osl.state.or.us/islandora/object/osl:68680>
- Oregon. Chapter 328, HB 3523. (2015). Oregon Revised Statutes, Compiled. Retrieved from <https://digital.osl.state.or.us/islandora/object/osl:68680>
- Oregon. Chapter 357. (2019). Oregon Revised Statutes. Retrieved from https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/bills_laws/ors/ors357.html
- Oregon Early Learning Department. (2019). Raise Up Oregon, 2019-2023. Retrieved from <https://oregonearlylearning.com/raise-up-oregon>
- Oregon State Library. (2014, 2019, 2020). Proceedings and Reports of the Trustees of the Oregon State Library, 2012 to present. Board of Trustees. Retrieved from <https://digital.osl.state.or.us/islandora/object/osl:67180>
- Oregon State Library. (1976, 1987, 1993) Proceedings and Reports of the Trustees of the Oregon State Library, 1914-present. Board of Trustees. Specific meeting dates referenced: 08/06/76, 01/16/1987, 10/23/92, 3/31/93, 08/27/93, 10/28/1993 Printed holdings available: <https://tinyurl.com/y5fv26mv>
- State Library of Oregon. (2019). Ready to Read Annual Reports. Retrieved from <https://digital.osl.state.or.us/islandora/object/osl:67418>

