



Pittsburgh Bon Air Early Childhood Center

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House Education Committee Hearing

May 26, 2010

Good morning Mr. Chairman and committee members. My name is Amber Straub. I am the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts Partnership Coordinator within the Early Childhood Program of Pittsburgh Public Schools. Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) has been and is a leader in Early Education programs, having Head Start since 1965 and full day Kindergarten since 1997. Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts was a natural extension of our continued effort to reach as many preschool children as possible in the district to provide high quality early learning programs prior to school entrance, given our resources. Our efforts have always started with the neediest children first.

Thank you to Chairman Clymer for scheduling this hearing. Thank you all for hearing our testimony today on Pre-K Counts, a program that has helped our district's young children come to school with the skills they need to be successful in Kindergarten and beyond. I'll present our data later in this testimony.

Currently, Pittsburgh Public Schools has 11 Pre-K Counts classrooms in school district buildings serving 140 children and 8 community partners serving an additional 140 children in facilities that meet the Pre-K Counts standards in our Pittsburgh neighborhoods. In addition, we have 91 additional school-based early childhood classrooms, using Head Start and Accountability Block Grant funds in our program. Further information can be accessed at the Pittsburgh Public Schools website at www.pps.k12.pa.us.

We work with families and children to provide a comprehensive, educational program to reinforce and respond to the unique strengths and needs of the individual child and family. We provide a wide range of services for children and families, including: Education, Social Services, Health, Nutrition, Disabilities, and Parent Involvement. We participate in continuous quality improvement and rely on the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale to support increased classroom quality. The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) rates multiple areas of the environment on a scale of 1-7 (7 being the highest). In general, the ECERS looks at the room arrangement, displays of children's work, types and amount of toys and materials available to students, areas of health and safety, as well as language and literacy (including talking to and having discussions with children). Through use of the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, teachers are affording children more opportunities to access learning materials throughout the day. Teachers have also become more intentional in the ordering of materials for the classroom based on environmental needs.





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We use the PA Early Learning Standards for Pre-Kindergarten from the Office of Child Development and Early Learning, knowing that these standards reflect best practices. These standards are part of the PA continuum from Infants and Toddlers to Pre-Kindergarten to Kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd grade. This is what constitutes the definition of Early Childhood, from Birth to Grade 3. Pittsburgh Public Schools Early Childhood staff participated in writing these standards and brought our experience providing high quality early learning to this effort. We support the use of these standards, which are also based on more than 30 years of research defining what is necessary to promote a child's healthy growth and development in all domains of learning.

These are the Key Learning Areas in the Pennsylvania Early Learning Pre-Kindergarten Standards that assure each child's holistic development:

- Approaches to Learning Through Play: Constructing, Organizing and Applying Knowledge
- Creative Thinking and Expression: Communicating through the Arts
- Mathematical Thinking and Expression: Exploring, Processing, and Problem Solving
- Scientific Thinking and Technology: Exploring, Inquiry, and Discovery
- Social Studies Thinking: Connecting to Communities
- Health, Wellness, and Physical Development: Learning about My Body
- Language and Literacy Development: Early Literacy Foundations; Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening
- Partnerships for Learning: Families, Learning Environments, and Communities
- Social and Emotional Development: Learning about Myself and Others

We understand that it is the quality of the teachers coupled with a curriculum that incorporates these standards and other factors that will give us the results of children being successful.

We understand that OCDEL is committed to building and enhancing a pre-kindergarten program that is high quality and will in fact support all school districts and community partners as they strive to maximize the development of skills for each child enrolled in order to ensure positive progress.

We participated in the "Pre-K Counts in Pennsylvania: A Public-Private Partnership for Educational Success" research which was an independent program evaluation by Early Childhood Partnerships program of the University of Pittsburgh and affiliated with Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh. During this research, "high-risk and vulnerable children showed significant gains in development and early learning skills across numerous domains: spoken language, reading, writing,





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math, classroom behavior, and daily living skills” (Bagnato, 2009). We know that because all participating programs in Pennsylvania followed consistent standards, the measurement of the Pre-K Counts Program is valid and helps to paint an accurate picture of the success of Pre-K Counts in Pennsylvania.

We follow the progress of our children with our own data in to Kindergarten.

- Transitioning preschool children given the Kindergarten Readiness Checklist showed that 90% of the children mastered cognitive, physical and social-emotional goals by the end of July 2009.
- PPS Early Childhood children who entered Kindergarten in 2008-09 performed better in Letter Naming Fluency and Initial Sound Frequency than their non-PPS Early Childhood counterparts in the entry assessment of Reading Readiness from the DiBELS.
- Thirty-four percent (34%) of Early Intervention children that received inclusive services in 2008-09 PPS Early Childhood classrooms no longer required special education services in Kindergarten. This is a consistent trend for the past three years.
- At the end of the 2008-09 school year, 3.2% of the district Kindergarten children were retained. While only 1% of those children who attended PPS’s Early Childhood program were retained. This trend is consistent with 2006-07 and 2007-08 school years.

In conclusion, we know from independent research and our own data that children enrolled in Pre-K Counts are doing better than their non-Pre-K Counts peers.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on this most significant early education program benefitting our children and families in Pittsburgh.

Respectfully Submitted,
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