



education direction

Center for Education Reform

Improving student outcomes through data-informed decision making

Early Grade Reading and Math Proficiency

Best Practices and Policy Recommendations

Education Interim Committee, Utah Legislature

July 15, 2015



College Readiness Starts in Pre-K

- ▶ “Research suggests failing to correct these [learning] deficiencies in the early grades has lasting repercussions. Only about 1 in 10 4th grade students who were ‘far off-track’ in reading and math were able to meet on-track college readiness benchmarks by the 8th grade, according to a 2012 study by national testing group ACT (Dougherty & Fleming, 2012). Furthermore, students who have lived in poverty and are not proficient readers by the end of 3rd grade are about three times more likely to drop out before earning a high school diploma (Hernandez, 2012).”
- ▶ Guilfoyle, C. (2013). *For college and career success, start with preschool.* ACSD Policy Priority Brief.



Pre-K and Full-Day K Just Make Sense

- ▶ The Copenhagen Consensus Center utilizes economists to conduct cost-benefit analyses of development goals and rates them from “phenomenal” to “poor.”
- ▶ The highest rated strategy in education is to “boost preprimary education, which costs little and has lifelong benefits by getting children started on learning.”
- ▶ Finn, C. (2014, July 28). *Pre-kraziness*. Thomas Fordham Institute, Flypaper Blog.



What Should the Legislature Do?

- ▶ 1. Fund competitive proposals
- ▶ 2. Fund a portfolio of options
- ▶ 3. Enact creative funding mechanisms
- ▶ 4. Insist that programs emphasize academics
- ▶ 5. Insist that programs address behavior
- ▶ 6. Provide targeted professional development



1. Fund Competitive Proposals

- ▶ “A powerful case can be made for well-crafted experimentation and innovation in this [early childhood] arena. Despite all the pilot projects, studies, and evaluations, not enough is known with certainty about the essential elements of effective pre-K education and how to make those effects last. More also needs to be learned about the key elements of program quality (concentrating, one hopes, on results rather than inputs) that can be successfully replicated and brought to scale. Nobody has yet devised the perfect pre-K program, and it’s likely that different approaches will work better for different kids and circumstances. It is therefore folly for states not to try diverse designs and evaluate them all.”
- ▶ Finn, C. (2009). *Preschool for all: Is it a good idea?* Education Next (Fall 2009), p. 19.



Competitive Funding Would Enable:

- ▶ Innovation in program design and implementation
- ▶ Creative and efficient use of facilities
- ▶ Programs tailored to the unique needs of local communities
- ▶ State-local, public-public, public-private, and community/nonprofit collaboration and partnerships
- ▶ Philanthropic investment
- ▶ School district, municipal, and county leadership
- ▶ Focus on outputs (learning outcomes)
- ▶ More rapid expansion of early childhood initiatives



2. Fund a Portfolio of Options

- ▶ Full-day, full-year pre-K
- ▶ School-day/school-year pre-K
- ▶ Part-day/part-year pre-K
- ▶ Extended day programs
- ▶ Stand alone preschool and full-day kindergarten schools
- ▶ Combination early childhood and adult education programs (to encourage adults with children to start or return to college)



3. Enact Creative Funding Mechanisms

- ▶ Maine's Public Preschool Program provides additional funding to incentivize local school districts to use their own funds for pre-K.
- ▶ The Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) for School Success Program requires school districts and communities to provide a 40% match from local sources to qualify for state preschool funding.
- ▶ Connecticut requires all pre-K programs to charge parent fees based on a School Readiness Sliding Fee Scale.



Clarify School Fees in Elementary School

- ▶ The Utah State Board of Education currently prohibits the charging of school fees in elementary school.
- ▶ Utah Admin. Code § R277-407-3 states: “No fee may be charged in **kindergarten** through sixth grades for materials, textbooks, supplies, or for any class or regular school day activity, including assemblies and field trips.”
- ▶ Yet Utah’s compulsory education statute requires school attendance only for children who are at least 6 and less than 18 years of age. See Utah Code Ann. § 53A-11-101.
- ▶ So is kindergarten part of elementary school or not? If not, school districts should be allowed to charge fees to help defray the cost of full-day kindergarten.



4. Insist That Programs are Academic

- ▶ “[D]escriptive analyses of state-funded pre-kindergarten in 11 states with well-established programs suggest that children are engaged in learning activities for slightly more than half of the school day. The rest of the school day is devoted to other activities including outdoor play, meals, hygiene, and naps. While important in a young child’s day, these activities are typically not used as times for explicit teaching of important curricular content.”
- ▶ Diamond, K.E., Justice, L.M., Siegler, R.S. & Snyder, P.A. (2013). *Synthesis of IES research on early intervention and early childhood education*. Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, p. 8.



Fund Instruction, Not Day Care

- ▶ “Although professional organizations in early childhood currently acknowledge the importance of intentionality in instruction and of children’s engagement in both child-initiated and teacher-directed activities for promoting learning, many children still attend classrooms that are organized to promote learning through play activities that each child chooses. Yet, this type of classroom organization is associated with smaller learning gains over the school year when compared to classrooms that include teacher-directed learning.”
- ▶ Diamond, K.E., Justice, L.M., Siegler, R.S. & Snyder, P.A. (2013). *Synthesis of IES research on early intervention and early childhood education*. Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, p. 8.



Insist on Phonics Instruction

- ▶ A new study by Stanford Professor Bruce McCandliss of the Graduate School of Education and the Stanford Neuroscience Institute provides some of the first evidence that teaching letter-sound relationships, or phonics, increases activity in the area of beginning readers' brains that is best wired for reading.
- ▶ “[T]o develop reading skills, teaching students to sound out C-A-T sparks more optimal brain circuitry than instructing them to memorize the word ‘cat.’”
- ▶ Wong, M. (2015, May 28). *Stanford brain wave study shows how different teaching methods affect reading development*. Stanford Graduate School of Education News; Yoncheva, Y.N., Wise, J. & McCandliss, B. (2015). *Hemispheric specialization for visual words is shaped by attention to sublexical units during initial learning*. *Brain & Language* 145-146, pp. 23-33.



Insist on Math Instruction

- ▶ “IES-supported research suggests that there is very little instruction in mathematics and science occurring within early childhood classrooms. Most preschool teachers limit mathematics instruction to naming common shapes and counting up to relatively small numbers (e.g., 10 or 20). This focus is much more restricted than what preschoolers can learn, as shown by preschool programs in other countries and by intervention research focused on early mathematics and funded through IES.”
- ▶ Diamond, K.E., Justice, L.M., Siegler, R.S. & Snyder, P.A. (2013). *Synthesis of IES research on early intervention and early childhood education*. Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, p. 10.



5. Insist that Programs Address Behavior

- ▶ “Data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten (ECLS-K) indicate that teachers report 10 percent of children begin kindergarten with persistent problem behavior. For younger children with disabilities or those with other risk factors, including living in poverty, prevalence estimates are higher, with one study suggesting that between 10-23 percent of young children enrolled in Head Start exhibited persistent problem behaviors. Without early prevention and intervention, social, emotional, and behavioral challenges are likely to persist or even worsen beyond the early childhood years and lead to negative outcomes, including poor academic achievement, problems with socialization, and mental health concerns.”
- ▶ Diamond, K.E., Justice, L.M., Siegler, R.S. & Snyder, P.A. (2013). *Synthesis of IES research on early intervention and early childhood education*. Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, pp. 26-27.



Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports

- ▶ Insist that funded programs include an evidence-based approach to student behavior.
- ▶ For example, “IES-supported investigators have developed an intervention known as *Best in Class* that organizes teaching practices designed to increase childrens’ engagement, prevent problem behavior, and improve the classroom learning environment. . . . The strategies included in the *Best in Class* intervention include (a) pre-correction of problem behaviors coupled with close supervision and monitoring; (b) increased instructional pacing and opportunities for children to respond; (c) increased rates of praise by teachers; and (d) provision of feedback, error correction, and progress monitoring.”
- ▶ Diamond, K.E., Justice, L.M., Siegler, R.S. & Snyder, P.A. (2013). *Synthesis of IES research on early intervention and early childhood education*. Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, p. 27.



6. Provide Professional Development

- ▶ “Classroom instruction can be improved by providing professional development to teachers. IES has supported research that develops and evaluates interventions to improve teaching of important language and literacy skills. Although somewhat different in scope and implementation, each of these projects uses individualized coaching or mentoring from a more experienced individual and, in some cases, feedback on childrens’ learning, to help teachers learn to use more effective strategies for teaching early literacy skills in their own classrooms. **Results tend to suggest that coaching improves teachers’ instruction when compared with teachers who do not receive coaching.**”
- ▶ Diamond, K.E., Justice, L.M., Siegler, R.S. & Snyder, P.A. (2013). *Synthesis of IES research on early intervention and early childhood education*. Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, pp. 33-34.



Prosperity Through Education 5-Year Plan

- ▶ Utah's business community has proposed a minimum investment of \$65 million over the next 5 years to support early childhood literacy instruction (including the expansion of voluntary pre-K and full-day kindergarten programs), \$10 million over the next 5 years to support early grades math instruction, and \$30 million over the next 5 years for prioritized professional development activities.
- ▶ Education Direction endorses these investment recommendations, and urges legislation that would establish ongoing funding to support these priority initiatives.



Over 5 Years, Education First Advocates:

- ▶ \$5 million per year for K-3 targeted reading and support
- ▶ \$3 million per year for expansion of voluntary pre-K
- ▶ \$4 million per year for expansion of voluntary full-day K
- ▶ \$1 million per year for elementary school professional learning communities
- ▶ \$2 million per year to provide technology for both instruction and assessment in math in early grades
- ▶ \$6 million per year in targeted professional development (all grades)



SUMMARY

- ▶ 1. Fund competitive proposals
- ▶ 2. Fund a portfolio of options that include public-public, public-private, and community school/non-profit models
- ▶ 3. Enact creative funding mechanisms
- ▶ 4. Insist that programs emphasize academics (reading & math)
- ▶ 5. Insist that programs address school readiness behavior
- ▶ 6. Provide targeted professional development
- ▶ 7. **Incorporate all of these elements into an early childhood education bill with ongoing funding of at least \$15-\$20 million annually for 5 years**



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THANK YOU

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