

Creating a High-Quality PreK-3rd Education System in New York State

Testimony to New York Education Reform Commission

October 16, 2012

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Executive Summary

High-quality PreK-3rd education leads to long-term improvements in student success that yield large returns on the investment to the broader society. The fragmented system of Prekindergarten and early elementary schooling in New York State poses a serious barrier to ensuring that children receive the most effective education beginning with their earliest and most critical years of learning. This testimony documents the need to reform education in New York State to create a fully integrated PreK-3rd educational system, describes key features which this system should have, and presents recommendations for moving toward the educational system that all children in New York State deserve.

Third Grade is an important pivot point in a child's education, the time when students shift from learning to read and begin to use their reading skills to learn more challenging academic content. Not surprisingly, then, children who do not read proficiently by Third Grade are four times more likely to not graduate from high school than are children who do read proficiently, at 16 percent versus 4 percent. The share not graduating from high school is even larger if children live in low income families that have fallen below the poverty threshold for at least one year. Thus, school readiness for low income children is particularly important. Overall, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NEAP) finds that nearly two-thirds of children in New York State are not reading proficiently by Fourth Grade.

It is important for children to begin their education with high-quality Early Care and Education (ECE) to build a strong foundation in the early language and literacy skills that undergird Third Grade reading proficiency, but nearly two-thirds of children in New York State are not enrolled in early education programs. Further, researchers have long known that without sustained follow-up, the gains from ECE can fade during the elementary grades. Thus, continuity in the educational experiences of children from Prekindergarten through Third Grade is essential to ensure that the enormous potential long-term returns to society of early education are realized. Recent research on a high-quality integrated PreK-3rd program shows that for every \$1.00 invested in the Prekindergarten years, the total long-term return to society is \$10.83.

Two key features of the educational system needed to ensure continuity of educational experiences from Prekindergarten through Third Grade are (1) alignment of standards, curriculum, and assessments, and (2) the existence of a state longitudinal data system to provide accurate and timely information for research and decision-making.

Continuity in the educational experiences of children through PreK-3rd also requires attention to the unique needs and abilities of specific populations of children, including English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. Further, it is important that Prekindergarten and Elementary School settings effectively implement technology-based educational innovations, particularly for ELLs and children in low-income communities.

RECOMMENDATION 1

New York State should take steps to improve continuity in the educational experiences of children in PreK-3rd by coordinating funding streams.

RECOMMENDATION 2

New York State should take steps to improve continuity in the educational experiences of children in PreK-3rd by encouraging collaboration within and across ECE and Elementary School settings.

RECOMMENDATION 3

New York State should take steps to improve continuity in the educational experiences of children in PreK-3rd by ensuring equal access to technology-supported high quality PreK-3rd education.

RECOMMENDATION 4

New York State should take steps to improve continuity in the educational experiences of children in PreK-3rd by creating a state longitudinal data system that meets the needs of all stakeholders.

Full Testimony

Creating a High-Quality PreK-3rd Education System in New York Stateⁱ

High-quality PreK-3rd education leads to long-term improvements in student success that yield large returns on the investment to the broader society. The fragmented system of Prekindergarten and early elementary schooling in New York State poses a serious barrier to ensuring that children receive the most effective education beginning with their earliest and most critical years of learning. This testimony documents the need to reform education in New York State to create a fully integrated PreK-3rd educational system, describes key features this system should have, and presents recommendations for moving toward the educational system that all children in New York State deserve.

Children who do not read proficiently by Third Grade are four times more likely to not graduate from high school than are children who do read proficiently.

Third Grade is an important pivot point in a child's education, the time when students shift from learning to read and begin to use their reading skills to learn more challenging academic content. The first-ever national estimates of high school graduation rates for children who differ in their third-grade reading proficiency found the following.ⁱⁱ One-in-six children who are not reading proficiently by Third Grade fail to graduate from high school on time. They are four times more likely to drop out of school before graduation, at 16 percent versus 4 percent.

The share is much larger at one-in-four for Hispanic children (24 percent) and Black children (25 percent), but even among White children a large one-in-eight (13 percent) do not graduate if they are not reading proficiently by Third Grade. Low family income poses an additional challenge. Among children with family poverty experience who are not reading proficiently by Third Grade, the share not graduating from high school is 26 percent overall, about one-in-four for White Children (22 percent), and about one-in-three for Hispanic children (33 percent) and Black children (31 percent). Evaluation data also have shown that the potential for technology to enhance education often is not realized in Prekindergarten and Elementary School settings.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NEAP) finds that nearly two-thirds of children in New York State are not reading proficiently by Fourth Grade.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress, also known as "The Nation's Report Card", found in 2011 that nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of children in New York State do not read proficiently by 4th grade.ⁱⁱⁱ More than one-half of White children (54 percent) in New York State are not proficient readers, and the share is about the same at 51 percent for Asian and Pacific Islander children, while this rises to an enormous 84-86 percent for Hispanic children and Black children. These proficiency rates are essentially the same as the corresponding national rates. Further, English language learners (ELL) represent a growing proportion of the New York student population and are highly vulnerable to low achievement levels with only 5% reading proficiently by Fourth Grade.

It is important for children to begin their education with high-quality Early Care and Education (ECE) to build a strong foundation in the early language and literacy skills that undergird Third Grade reading proficiency, but many children in New York State are not enrolled in early education programs.

By the end of Third Grade some children have spent four years attending formal educational programs. But if children attend comprehensive ECE beginning at age 3, they increase their total to a much longer 6 years in school. This greatly expands the amount of time available for teachers, families, and children to work together on developing children's language and literacy skills.

The U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey found that 42 percent of children ages 3-4 in New York State were not enrolled in Prekindergarten in 2008-2010. The share was nearly two-in-five (38 percent) for White children and for Black children, and this increases to 45 percent for Asian children and 51 percent for Hispanic children. For our youngest ELLs, 50 percent were not enrolled in an organized ECE program, although these children have been

shown to experience the greatest benefits from Prekindergarten participation.^{iv} Further, few Prekindergarten and Elementary School settings effectively implement technology-based educational innovations, particularly for ELLs and children in low-income communities.

Continuity in the educational experiences of children from Prekindergarten through Third Grade is essential to ensure that the enormous potential long-term returns to society of early education are realized.

Researchers have long known that without sustained follow-up, the gains from ECE can fade during the elementary grades.^v But a high-quality integrated PreK-3rd grade approach leads to sustained long-term improvements. An important study which recently evaluated the integrated PreK-3rd approach in the Child-Parent Centers in Chicago found that by age 26 students in the program experienced greater high school graduation and years of education, higher occupational prestige, greater health insurance coverage, and lower rates of felony arrest and incarceration, substance misuse, and depressive symptoms.^{vi} As a result, for every \$1.00 invested in Prekindergarten, the total long-term return to society is \$10.83.

Two key features of the educational system needed to ensure continuity of educational experiences from Prekindergarten through Third Grade are (1) alignment of standards, curriculum, and assessments, and (2) the existence of a state longitudinal data system to provide accurate and timely information for research and decision-making.

To achieve the goal of alignment spanning Prekindergarten to Third Grade, teachers across the PreK-3rd years must work together to coordinate their curriculum, assessment, and teaching. This will require coordination across the various ECE sectors including Head Start, private child care, and family child care networks, as well as alignment from Prekindergarten to Third Grade. For this coordination to occur, school districts and ECE providers must provide administrators and all staff with on-going professional development and with a schedule and planning time that allows staff in different sectors and teachers across grade levels to meet and plan with each other regularly. For high-quality education, the instruction will involve a balance of child-centered approaches with teacher-directed approaches on specific aspects of language and literacy, as well as a whole-child focus on cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development for children. For ELLs, it will require an approach that maximizes opportunities for English language development (ELD) while also supporting home language development. Finally, an effective PreK-3rd approach will require policies that develop appropriate outreach strategies for all families that lead to active parent engagement.

In order to create an effective PreK-3rd system it also is essential to measure children's educational progress in a continuous fashion, from the beginning of ECE through Third Grade. A fully-implemented and effective state longitudinal data system would meet the needs of teachers, principals, and parents to assess the progress of their individual students, and the need for research studies to provide information that teachers, principals, parents, and policymakers require for the evaluation and continuous improvement of schools.

Continuity in the educational experiences of children through PreK-3rd requires attention to the unique needs and abilities of specific populations of children, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities.

Among children ages of 3-8 in New York State in 2010, four-in-ten (40 percent) live with at least one parent who speaks a language other than English in the home, one-in-five (20 percent) live with at least one parent who does not speak English fluently, and nearly as many, about one-in-seven (15 percent), have no parent in the home who speaks English fluently.^{vii} Similarly, in the 2009-2010 school year students reported by New York State as having disabilities accounted for 17 percent of all students.^{viii}

In order to improve the long term educational achievement of ELLs, policies and practices must incorporate the latest scientific evidence that illuminates best practices and underscores the benefits of dual language abilities. Children with disabilities also must be appropriately assessed and identified as they enter ECE settings. It is equally important that both groups of children be provided with the individualized educational services and experiences that capitalize on their existing language and cognitive strengths and supports their long-term school success and civic participation. Finally, school readiness for low-income children is particularly important as they enter Prekindergarten, because children with family poverty experience are especially likely not to graduate from high school if they are not reading proficient by Third Grade.

Recommendations: New York State should take steps to improve continuity in the educational experiences of children in PreK-3rd by (1) coordinating funding streams, (2) encouraging collaboration within and across ECE and Elementary School settings, (3) ensuring equal access to technology-supported high quality PreK-3rd education, and (4) creating a state longitudinal data system that meets the needs of all stakeholders.

The funding and delivery of ECE services in the U.S. is fragmented. Sources of Prekindergarten education include state and locally funded public school programs, federally funded early education programs like Head Start and Even Start, and private early education providers, all with differing funding mechanisms, program standards, and accountability requirements. Since 2009, the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) under the leadership of Governor Cuomo has been developing a coordinated early childhood Quality Rating Improvement System, has developed the framework for the New York Early Learning Data System, has developed New York State's Early Learning Guidelines, has revised its Core Body of Knowledge Framework (CBK), and has developed plans for establishing statewide systems of developmental screening and mental health consultation. While these are important steps in building a coordinated PreK-3rd system, additional support is needed to overcome historical system fragmentation. (See <http://fcd-us.org/whats-new/prek-12-state-longitudinal-data-systems>.)

New York State should promulgate regulations that allow and encourage diverse funding streams to be blended in a fashion which increases coordination across various ECE, Kindergarten, and Grades 1-3 programs. New York State also should promulgate a consistent state-wide system of accountability requirements as represented in the New York ECE QRIS that apply to all early childhood, Kindergarten, and Grades 1-3 programs. School districts where early education and K-3rd funding streams have been successfully blended, such as Washington, DC, will provide

valuable models for fruitful approaches to accomplishing these goals. These new coordinated standards and accountability systems must explicitly attend to the language and literacy needs of all vulnerable students including ELLs and reflect the latest scientific knowledge about dual language development.

Data for individual students beginning with ECE and continuing through Third Grade are not available for the purposes of assessing the progress of individual students or of monitoring, evaluating, and improving programs. More specifically, there is a lack of definition for what data are needed and a lack of electronic access to the data across sectors. There also is no agreement on what information specific stakeholders need, or on developing access to that information. As a result, and not surprisingly, the collection of child assessment data spanning the PreK-3rd years is limited and haphazard. In addition, high rates of residential mobility and transiency of PreKindergarten and Elementary School students point to the need for a state-wide data collection system.

To provide the basis for monitoring the progress of individual students, for assessing the effectiveness of specific ECE and K-3rd programs, and to track progress in creating integrated PreK-3rd systems, New York State should create a state longitudinal data system including the educational experiences of all children from Prekindergarten onward (PreK-12).^{ix}

The longitudinal data system should include a microdata portal, a systems-indicators portal, and a student-indicators portal. The microdata portal would provide electronic access to microdata, that is, to raw data for individual students, but without individual student identifiers, allowing researchers and evaluators to conduct statistical analyses and create system-indicators and student-indicators. The systems-indicators portal would meet the needs of parents, teachers, schools, and policymakers for evaluation and continuous improvement of schools. This portal would provide electronic access to aggregated indicators developed by researchers and evaluators related to the effectiveness of curricula, teachers, and schools. The student-indicators portal would meet the needs of teachers, principals, and parents to assess the progress of their individual students. This portal would provide electronic access to student-indicators measuring the skills of specific students only to those people with immediate responsibility for the education of the student.

To guide the creation of the state longitudinal data system, New York State should convene an advisory group with the following mandates.

First, the advisory group should develop detailed guidelines regarding the full range of content to be included in the longitudinal data system and available through the microdata portal. The group should develop guidelines on the structure and format of the microdata with particular attention to the need for all data to be included in a single, integrated dataset. The KIDS Integrated Data System provides an example of a fully functional integrated data system, including data from a wide range of programs and agencies, in the Philadelphia metropolitan area.^x

Second, the advisory group should develop guidelines regarding the structure and format for system-indicators. This will involve defining “pre-populated tables”, and it also could involve

the development of a system for creating special used-defined tables. Both approaches have been developed and refined over the years by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Third, the advisory group should develop guidelines regarding the types of information for individual students including ELL and special needs students which are needed, or not needed, by principals, teachers, and parents. Parents will require specific types of information only for their own children, while teachers will need access to a broader array of information for each of their students, and principals will need access to information for all students in the school.

Fourth, the advisory group should develop guidelines for safeguarding the confidentiality of the data and for creating common standards to ensure confidentiality among the currently fragmented legislation, regulations, rules, and procedures. Data should be easily available in a timely fashion to researchers, evaluators, teachers, principals, school districts, other policymakers, and parents.

ⁱ Prepared by Donald J. Hernandez, Hunter College, City University of New York, and Linda M. Espinosa, University of Missouri, Columbia.

ⁱⁱ Donald J. Hernandez. (2011). Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation. Baltimore: Annie E. Casey Foundation.

ⁱⁱⁱ Calculated by Donald J. Hernandez, from NAEP Data Explorer, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>

^{iv} William Gormley, Jr. (2008). "The Effects of Oklahoma's Pre-K Program on Hispanic Students." *Social Science Quarterly* 89: 916-36.

^v Ruby Takanishi and Kimber L. Bogard. (2007). Effective Education Programs for Young Children: What We Need to Know" *Child Development Perspectives* 1(1): 40-45; Rima Shore (2009). The Case for Investing in PreK-3rd Education: Challenging Myths about School Reform. PreK-3rd Policy to Action Brief. Number One. New York: Foundation for Child Development.

^{vi} Arthur J. Reynolds, Judy A. Temple, Barry A.B. White, and Suh-Ruu. (2001). "Age 26 Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Child-Parent Center Early Education Program," *Child Development* 82(1): 379-404.

^{vii} Calculated by Donald J. Hernandez from U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey.

^{viii} Janie Scull and Amber M. Winkler. (2011) "Shifting Trends in Special Education". Washington, DC: Thomas Fordham Institute.

^{ix} Donald J. Hernandez. (2012). PreK-3rd: Next Steps for State Longitudinal Data Systems. PreK-3rd Policy to Action Brief, Number Eight. New York: Foundation for Child Development.

^x Penn Child Research Center. (2011). KIDS Integrated Data System. Penn Graduate School of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.gse.upenn.edu/child/projects/kids>.