



Columbus City Schools Pre-Kindergarten Expansion Proposal

Mission: Each student is highly educated, prepared for leadership and service, and empowered for success as a citizen in a global community.

The Columbus City Schools Pre-Kindergarten Expansion Proposal

According to Dr. Ronald Ferguson of Harvard University, “achievement gaps do not exist at birth, but are created early in life.” The readiness between children who do and those who do not have access to services for healthy development and opportunities for knowledge development in stimulating and appropriate ways is becoming wider (Giving Our Children a Fighting Chance: Poverty, Literacy, and the Development of Information Capital, 2012). At age one, children of all racial groups display roughly the same achievement curve; however, by age three, due to an array of family conditions and opportunities, differences in language and cognitive skills are evident (Inequality at the Starting Gate, November 2002). Access to high quality Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) services is becoming an essential factor to school readiness, particularly for children living in poverty.

Ohio’s measurement of school readiness is the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment—Literacy (KRA-L). This short screening of essential early reading skills provides teachers with information to select strategies for instruction and/or early intervention. Although language and early reading are not the only markers of school readiness, the KRA-L provides a standardized measure of the language and early reading (essential to school success) abilities of children entering kindergarten. For the past six years of the administration of the KRA-L, 34% or more of children entering Columbus City Schools (CCS) kindergarten have scored in the lowest score band. These children need targeted and at times, sustained intervention, in reading development to assure school success.

The district’s Pre-Kindergarten services, now available in 33 Pre-K and 58 Special Needs Pre-K classrooms, have demonstrated that high quality Pre-K programs can make a difference in the students’ readiness for the kindergarten curriculum. Based on KRA-L scores, approximately 89% of incoming CCS Kindergartners who have received CCS Pre-K services do not require intervention.

Not only do high quality Pre-K services enhance success in kindergarten, it can impact student success through the third grade as was recently reported (The Effects of Texas’ Pre-Kindergarten Program on Academic Performance, 2012; Education week, Sara Mead’s Policy Notebook as retrieved from http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/sarameads_policy_notebook/2012/11/researchers). Currently only 40% of Columbus Schools’ students are reaching proficiency in reading at the third grade level (fall 2012 administration of the Ohio Achievement Assessment). By expanding high-quality Pre-K services, the district will not only improve readiness at Kindergarten but will be able to accelerate student learning and academic performance beyond Kindergarten.

Highlights from the Pre-K Expansion Committee

Since July 2012, the district has convened a committee (Pre-K Expansion Committee) of experts in Early Childhood education to explore the criteria of and options for expanding high-quality Pre-K services. The committee reached consensus on the following as essential and necessary elements of a high-quality Pre-K program:

- Assuring parent and family engagement practices
- Appropriate curriculum aligned with Ohio's Early Learning Content Standards & Academic Standards
- Transition to Kindergarten services
- Enriched learning environment
- A full range of Professional Development opportunities
- Regular and systematic monitoring of learning progress
- Respect for and honoring of diversity (i.e. abilities, language, culture)
- Partnering/community engagement

In addition, the committee reviewed the research on the structural elements of a high-quality Pre-K. The key elements to program quality as reported in the literature include the following:

- A class size of up to 20 children
- A 1:10 teacher-child ratio
- Linkages and access, by families, to comprehensive services when needed
- Partnerships with families
- Knowledgeable, competent teachers who have specialized training in early education and on-going support
- Improved student achievement through specific teacher professional development activities

Expansion of Pre-K Services

Columbus City Schools initiated Pre-K Services in 1990. Since that time, CCS Pre-K programs have received a number of recognitions for their high quality services (Irene Bandy-Hedden Early Childhood Program and Leadership award, Ohio's BEST and Martha Holden Jennings Lighthouse awards). In addition, CCS Pre-K programs are working toward national accreditation (National Association for the Education of Young Children) for each classroom.

CCS recognizes that the preschool through grade 3 is a distinct period of development and learning, building on the research of how young children develop and learn (Building and Supporting and Aligned System: A Vision for Transforming Education Across the Pre-K Grade Three Years, National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2010). Therefore, CCS leadership acknowledges that the educational approach, preschool through grade 3, must be viewed as a developmental unit (CCS: Early Childhood Education, Philosophy of Early Childhood Education). High quality Pre-K services are an essential foundation for this developmental unit.

Currently, the district is able to adequately serve only a fraction (approximately 20%) of its incoming Kindergarten population with high-quality Pre-K programming. A major goal of the district is to significantly expand its capacity to reach up to 50% of incoming Kindergartners with high-quality Pre-K services. To reach 50% of incoming Kindergartners with Pre-K services the district will need to:

- Expand current Pre-K capacity by at least 1,500 students to include areas of highest need evidenced by KRA-L data

- Identify appropriate expansion space in existing buildings and vacant buildings
- Utilize existing available classroom space where feasible
- Include expanded Pre-K offerings in future Facility Segments
- Provide 21st century Pre-K learning space
- Explore partnerships with other Pre-K providers

The district estimates that the annual academic costs to expand Pre-K programs to be approximately \$8,750 per student based upon a class size of 20 students per unit. These costs include a classroom teacher, instructional aides, and materials, supplies and furniture. The facilities costs to provide Pre-K classrooms can be broken down into cost options ranging from \$250 per student to furnish existing classroom space to \$22,500 per student to renovate vacated buildings with 10 Pre-K classrooms (Regional Centers). For newly constructed school facilities with Pre-K classrooms, the cost is approximately \$27,250 per student. The facilities cost options are typically a one-time capital expense and do not impact annual operating costs.

However, one alternative is to consider partnerships with child care providers as an option for expanded services. Further analysis will be required to determine a reasonable cost per student to expand Pre-K services through partnerships with non-CCS center based child care service providers.

Pre-K Partnership Model

In November 2012, CCS, committee members, and Learn4Life held a community conversation with 25 early learning leaders in Columbus to explore opportunities to partner with the child care community to in expand Pre-Kindergarten services. Feedback was gathered and consensus was reached on a number issues. The following recommendations for partnering are based on the feedback received:

- Expand Pre-K in two approaches:
 - CCS expansion in high need neighborhoods where there is limited center based care; and
 - Launch a full partnership model to be launched in selected neighborhoods;
 - NOTE: Under the full partnership model CCS enters into a partnership with a community based Pre-K provider, who hires and supervises teachers providing Pre-K services under the agreement. The Pre-K provider would agree to all other provisions as identified in an RFP (e.g. use CCS curriculum).
- Use CCS Kindergarten Readiness Assessment—Literacy (KRA-L) data/school to identify locations for CCS and Pre-K expansion;
- Require days/times of operation to be identical;
- Require teachers working in community based child care to have BA degree (to be hired by the program);
- Phase in requirement for BA with license and work with ODE to make possible for teachers to obtain a license while working in a “sanctioned CCS Pre-K setting”;
- Require adoption of CCS language arts/reading and math curriculum with CCS professional development and support for implementation;
- Require monthly meetings of key Pre-K administrators and teachers to assure implementation of curriculum and evidence based instructional strategies are being followed; and
- Create a Pre-K advisory committee, to be made up of representatives of the selected child care Pre-K programs and CCS preschool programs, with direct reporting to the CCS Superintendent

A portion of district levy funds will be set aside for expansion of Pre-K programs in two ways: in high need CCS locations where space is available and through partnerships between CCS and community-based child care providers, pending CCS Board of Education proposal approval.

A. Advisory Committee

The district will establish a Pre-K Advisory Committee to provide assistance to the Superintendent and Board of Education in determining high priority areas for expansion; if expansion is to be accomplished through a partnership model, establish criteria for a Request for Proposals; develop a RFP process; review proposals from providers for partnering with the district to provide high quality Pre-K services; review progress monitoring reports; and evaluate and hold programs responsible for student progress and quality standards; and fiscal stewardship of the program.

The advisory committee will be comprised of district professionals, selected Pre-K service providers, and Early Childhood experts. The exact makeup of the committee is yet to be determined.

B. Locations for Expansion

Using information gained from the KRA-L and asset mapping of child care providers in Columbus, the district in consultation with the advisory committee will identify locations for expansion of CCS Pre-K programs and other Pre-K programs through partnerships.

Note: The district is currently considering expansion of Pre-K classrooms beginning in FY14 within high need district schools with available space through reprioritization of current appropriations.

C. Proposal Process

The district and the advisory committee will develop a Request for Proposal for services with required criteria for partnering with CCS to provide high quality Pre-K services for Columbus students.

D. Program Quality Criteria

The district and advisory committee will determine a program quality rating as identified by NAEYC, Step Up to Quality, or other quality standards to which partnering Pre-K providers must adhere.

E. Partner Requirements

The district and advisory committee will determine partnership requirements such as program supervision and monitoring; cost per child; reimbursement schedule; and reporting requirements (i.e. attendance, child assessments); outline child find and enrollment process and responsibility.

F. Partnership Support

The district and advisory committee will develop an agreement and/or plan for community base Pre-K providers to access substitute teachers; access additional training opportunities for teachers and staff; and develop a continuous improvement process to enhance program quality.