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Philadelphia Commission on Universal Pre-Kindergarten

Recommendations Report Executive Summary
February 2, 2016

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Executive Summary

Philadelphia is a more diverse, safe, educated, and thriving city than it has been in decades. But its potential for future progress will be held back until all children are ready to learn when they enter kindergarten.

Quality Pre-K programs can make it happen. In the long term, the programs result in fewer children in special education classes, higher graduation rates, increased earning potential, better health, and shrinkage in achievement gaps rooted in income and other factors. Quality Kindergarten programs also have been shown to support parents' efforts to enter into and thrive in the workforce. The benefits ripple through the workforce, economy, and community. Yet only one in three of Philadelphia's 42,500 three- and four-year-olds have access to affordable quality Pre-K.

On May 19, 2015, Philadelphians voted overwhelmingly (80 percent) to create the Philadelphia Commission on Universal Pre-Kindergarten. Its charge: propose a universal Pre-K program that provides quality, affordable, and accessible services to three- and four-year-olds throughout Philadelphia. The Commission was tasked with providing recommendations for sustainable funding for Pre-K *that does not reduce existing K–12 funding.*

Beginning work on June 30, 2015, the 17-member Commission assessed the current state of early learning in Philadelphia. It found a sizable gap between the current situation and the basic requirements for quality Pre-K—in particular, a gap in funding and coordination. While the actual cost of quality Pre-K is well over $12,000 per child, depending on how much time the child spends in care, current subsidies are well below that. Insufficient funding limits the ability to provide the basic tenets of quality Pre-K: a stable workforce with adequate training, quality facilities in convenient locations, and recurrent funding for families who cannot otherwise afford quality Pre-K.

The Commission reviewed scientific research, evidence-based practices, and past local and state efforts. It garnered input from experts in the field, as well as 150 members of the public, through a hearing, three community meetings, and an online survey.

Recommendations

To provide quality universal Pre-K programs in Philadelphia, the Commission recommends that the City:

- Build and manage expanded Pre-K using a mixed-delivery system, developed over multiple years, consisting of the School District of Philadelphia, as well as nonprofit and private providers. Such a system would leverage and bolster existing small businesses and community-based organizations.

- Create a Pre-K system that is available to **all** three- and four-year-olds in Philadelphia. Give early priority to children with the highest risks of not being ready for kindergarten,

both academically and socially: children with special needs, low-income children, children of immigrants, English-language learners, and homeless children.

- Assure that all Philadelphia Pre-K programs are quality programs with rigorous standards, regular child assessment, monitoring by outside observers, and reporting on outcomes.

- Construct a universal Pre-K program that operates all day (eight hours) throughout the year (260 days), with a minimum of 180 days of instructional time, as well as child care during other times of the year.

- Philadelphia leverage our existing quality programs by using a variety of child care models, including center-based, group, family, and school-based settings that meet the standard for quality.

- Blend funding from multiple sources including federal Head Start, state-funded Pre-K Counts, and local private funding. Coordinate the accountability, enrollment, and funding policies among the different sources.

- Establish a Pre-K curriculum that meets Pennsylvania's early learning standards, which include developing curiosity; literacy; math; scientific thinking; and physical and emotional development. Choose a smaller number of curricula from those currently in wide use locally that meet standards for quality, cost and alignment with the K-12 system.

- Tie the assessment and outcomes reporting requirement to an existing monitoring system based on teacher observations and outcomes reporting. Set system-wide goals and measure child outcomes according to the percentage of children with proficient language and literacy skills, mathematical thinking skills, social and emotional skills, and scientific thinking.

- Improve quality by increasing participation in the Keystone STARS rating program. Develop an outreach strategy to allow Pre-K providers to learn about STARS and help providers gain access to currently existing supports that address two major barriers to Pre-K quality: lack of facilities and adequately trained teachers. Work with philanthropic organizations and higher education institutions to increase these resources.

Funding

The Commission is evaluating three proposed models for local investment in quality:

- Philadelphia Pre-K Supplemental where The City funds a predetermined amount of new quality slots at an amount pegged to the Pre-K Counts per child rate.
- Quality Supplement where the City funds a per child amount to be combined with other sources of state and federal funding. The local supplement amount is intended to address the gap between current revenues and the cost of quality care.

- A hybrid of the two options to both fund additional quality slots as well as provide supplemental funding to help providers fill the revenue gap between existing funds and the cost of quality care.

Moving Forward

To move forward quickly and efficiently, the Commission also recommends that the City of Philadelphia:

- Adequately prepare Pre-K teachers by removing logistical and financial barriers to higher education, and supporting teachers and staff through pre-service training, technical assistance and classroom coaching.

- Explore various models of governance for Philadelphia's universal Pre-K, including more thorough coordination among the City, the School District of Philadelphia, and state agencies with additional dedicated City personnel to oversee coordinated distribution of funds.

- Devise a comprehensive approach to kindergarten transition, preparing all young children and their families to move into kindergarten by aligning curriculum and instruction, supportive services, and operations from Pre-K through the third grade.

Next Steps for the Commission

- Present the plan to the public, particularly those most impacted by it, such as low-income parents and child care providers. Revise the plan based on the feedback.

This is the first draft of the Philadelphia Commission on Universal Pre-Kindergarten's Recommendations Report to City Council, Mayor Kenney, and the public. There will be a public hearing on February 22, 2016, in City Council Chambers followed by community meetings in February and early March. The Commission will hear feedback from parents, providers, and the general public about the first draft of the report. All comments will be collected by March 15th, 2016. The Commission will release its final Recommendations Report on April 15, 2016.

Universal Pre-K is a smart investment in growing minds, preparing children to be skilled learners at the time when they are primed for it. If done right, universal Pre-K will provide deep and lasting benefits for the families and residents of Philadelphia.