

City of Philadelphia



Commission on Universal Pre-Kindergarten **Public Hearing – Meeting Minutes** September 30, 2015 – 4-6pm, Room 400 City Hall

Co-chairs in attendance: Sharon Easterling, Loretta Jemmott.

Commissioners in attendance: Councilmember Jannie Blackwell, Miriam Calderon, Diane Castelbuono, Donna Cooper, Catherine Blunt, Rob Dubow, Jennifer Duffy, Vanessa Garrett Harley, Alan Greenberger, Reuben Jones, Sherilynn Kimble, Pheng Lim, Councilmember Blondell Reynolds-Brown

Staff in attendance: Christie Balka, Maia Jachimowicz, David Tusio, Eva Gladstein, Mary Horstmann, Marcell Basset, Kristian Ogungbemi, Kitt Disston

1. **Welcome**

Co-chair Sharon Easterling opened the public hearing by explaining that the Commission was established through a ballot initiative in Spring 2015 and its goal is to develop recommendations for the Mayor and City Council on how to finance and implement universal pre-k in the City of Philadelphia. She thanked Mayor Nutter and City Council and recognized Council members Blackwell, Reynolds Brown and Goode. (She later recognized Councilman Squilla.)

Councilwoman Blackwell thanked all participants for attending the hearing, reminding them that the goal is to provide children with high-quality pre-k while they're young and continue to provide quality education throughout their school careers. She noted that City Council's Committee on Education will hold a hearing on October 21st to examine the current state of education in Philadelphia and encouraged participants to testify.

Co-Chair Loretta Jemmott explained the purpose of the current hearing on pre-k is to receive recommendations from the public. All testimony received in writing by will be posted on the Commission's web site, prek@phila.gov.

2. **Public Testimony**

Panel 1: Kevin Dow, James Waddington, Mark Kehoe

Kevin Dow – United Way

- United Way shares the City's commitment to ensuring every child has a high quality early education
- We need to work together to make this happen: 50% of Star 3-4 programs are graduates of Success by Six (UW professional development, technical assistance program)

- Recognize financial challenges for quality child care providers (it costs more to provide quality with same funding)

Jim Waddington – Lockheed Martin/PA Early Learning Investment Commission

- We've been missing the critical window for children before age five
- 60% of Philadelphia's children will stay in the area, entering the workforce within 20 years
- Once baby boomers retire there will be a worker gap of 25 million nationwide, especially in terms of STEM skills
 - Executive function skill learning peaks ages 3-5, brain receptive to STEM learning ages 1-4
- Universal Pre-K will save school districts money in special education, remediation, grade repetition and will save the City in juvenile justice, welfare costs later

Mark Kehoe – Brightside Academy

- Brightside serves 8,000 children in 27 locations in Philadelphia; recently all locations rated Keystone Star 3 or above
- First 1,800 days of a child's life are crucial and should be treated as such.
- What we need:
 - Dosage – amount of time in program
 - Six hours a day, full year, birth to age 5
 - Avoid the trap of putting children in half-day slots to serve more, because it doesn't work
 - Continuity of care – there's currently too much turnover (approximately 30%) in staffing
 - Most of the ECE workforce lives in poverty
 - Need a mixed system of public school and community options so families who need full day, full year care have this option
 - Intentionality of curriculum
 - Not just babysitting; credentials are not enough – teachers also need to develop skills

Questions for Panel 1:

Councilwoman Reynolds-Brown:

- Asked Kevin Dow to quantify United Way's support for early childhood education
 - Dow: UW provides financial support & technical assistance
- Asked Mark Kehoe to address the quality of care at Brightside Academy and whether it is uniform across all locations.
 - Kehoe: quality is a given but it also looks different for everyone. Brightside has a standard way of doing business, but there is variability from one location to the next and all locations don't implement quality in the same way yet. He acknowledged problems with Brightside's quality before he became CEO and said participation in Keystone STARS is requiring more uniform quality

Panel 2: Natalie Renew, Leslie Spina, Chris Ambrose, Mary Graham

Chris Ambrose – Montgomery Early Learning Center

- Commission needs to emphasize high quality settings
- Early Childhood Education cannot be one size fits all
 - Plan should be flexible and based on mixed delivery system to meet diverse needs
 - Combine private/public pay, subsidies etc.
 - Rely on donations from business through the state Education Income Tax Credit
- Need to look at sustainability of the workforce, current and future compensation needs

Leslie Spina – Kinder Academy

- Expectation should be that all children receive equal educational opportunities; should not be the exception
- Teachers should understand child development and early learning principles
- Not enough high quality seats currently
 - e.g. in 4 zip codes in Northeast Philadelphia alone there is a need for 10,000 more high quality seats
 - Families need full time care in order to work and break the cycle of poverty

Natalie Renew – Philadelphia Health Management Corporation (PHMC)

- Southeast Regional Key (SERK) administers Keystone Stars in this region: offers grants, technical assistance, professional development including tuition vouchers for college coursework
- Keystone Stars certifies compliance with performance standards
 - Continues to provide more resources to higher quality programs (3 and 4 STARS)
 - Provides resources to 1 and 2 STAR programs to help them move up
 - Rationale is that it costs more to run a higher quality program
- Recommends the Commission direct more resources to providers offering highest quality services
- Said data based on research about the cost of care by the Nonprofit Finance Fund (NFF) should not be used as the basis of financial projections

Mary Graham – Children’s Village

- After 40 years in the field, what’s most important is funding
 - Child Care Works (subsidy) provides lowest level of reimbursement per child/hr, Pre-K Counts provides highest reimbursement at \$8.89/hr, per child)
 - Makes finding the right teachers w/ right credentials difficult
 - Reimbursement rates can’t only fund teacher compensation; they also have to pay for children’s nutritional services, behavioral health, rent etc.
- Commission first needs to look at funding; Universal Pre-K will not be successful if you choose to sacrifice quality for quantity; Universal Pre-K cannot be done well and cheaply

Questions for Panel 2:

Donna Cooper:

- Requested that Mary Graham send a classroom budget based on the same data to the Commission
- Asked Natalie Renew to tell the Commission what figures she would use in lieu of NFF research

Panel 3 – Makeeda Holley, George Jackson, Amy Friedlander, Carol Williams Greene

Makeeda Holley – District 1199C Training Fund

- Training Fund helps adults find training, employment, services etc.
 - Includes child care
- Child care workers need access to skills training, degrees, competitive wages etc.
- Designing Registered Apprenticeship with DVACEY
 - Low cost/high return training program

George Jackson on behalf of Jerry Jordan – Philadelphia Federation of Teachers

- Philadelphia’s Pre-K system is a shell of what it used to be
 - Started when Head Start was outsourced in 2013
 - Since then Pre-k has slipped in Philadelphia
- Cuts were not for lack of resources but because of fiscal mismanagement of Title I funds
- Educators need to play a major role in design of UPK if it is to succeed

Amy Friedlander – Early Childhood Education Workforce Transformation Initiative

- Majority of ECE (Early Childhood Education) workforce is female and underpaid
 - Earn half of what Kindergarten teachers earn
- Sector is not scaled – mostly small businesses or run by small non-profits
 - Benefits often not offered
- Many ECE teachers rely on public benefits themselves
- High turnover in teachers results in poor continuity for children and undermines quality
- ECE teacher compensation is a legitimate proxy for quality

Carol Williams Greene

- Taught in school district and in Head Start, seen pre-k in Sweden, New Zealand, and Australia
- Suggests using parks/public spaces to engage families
- Often families will send children to high quality places but won’t understand importance
 - Need to involve families more in order to succeed
- Ex: getting schools (11th and 12th graders) to mentor preschoolers (nature walks)
- Need to find ways to engage families/community

Panel 4: Cherie Crosby, Shawn Towey, Rachel Honore, Quibila Divine,

Cherie Crosby – Manor College

- Professor of ECE
- Testimony called “A Cure to the Crimes we Have Committed”
- From perspective of professor – most of her students are ill-prepared
 - Lack reading, writing, math skills based in Pre-K

- Philadelphia has potential to act as a model for rest of state/country

Shawn Towey – Public Citizens for Children and Youth

- Low-income students start school a year or two behind their peers
- Local, state, and federal funds can be redirected to Universal Pre-K
- Need to provide alternatives for families who chose not to enroll in Pre-K
- Need mixed income and diverse classrooms
- Need public buy-in through an education tax

Rachel Honore – West Philadelphia Action for Early Learning

- Recognized other Parent Ambassadors from her organization in the audience
- She is based at People’s Emergency Center and conducts community outreach about the benefits of high quality pre-k
- Cannot simply create universal pre-K, must be high quality
- Teachers need to be well compensated
- Parents need to be educated about early learning and developmental milestones

Quibila Divine – Citizens Consulting Group and 11th Ward

- Uncomfortable with A Running Start’s goal to advocate for all programs receiving public funding to participate in Keystone Stars
 - Called for support of all programs in low-income communities regardless of whether they participate in Keystone Stars
 - Cannot address Universal Pre-K without discussion of Philadelphia school system because most children go on to attend chronically failing K-12 schools
- Avoid laying off good but uncredentialed ECE workers
 - Provide technical assistance
 - Match low STAR-rated programs with high STAR rated ones for mentoring
- Include communities in decision-making process

Panel 5 – Heather David-Jones, Suzanne Morris, Ellen Ramage

Heather Davis-Jones – FACTS Charter School

- Daughter is currently a Pre-K Counts student
 - Last year program was cancelled for lack of funding
 - Cannot find enough Pre-K Counts teachers
 - Program requires higher quality teachers with advanced degrees but they’re not compensated well enough to attract them
- Cited Oklahoma as a best practice example
 - All pre-k teachers have college degrees and receive same pay as K-12 teachers
- Urged Commission not to use taxes as funding source – not sustainable

Suzanne Morris – DVAEYC

- Many middle income parents are skeptical that plan is not designed to include them
- Waitlists for many quality programs are over a year long and finding good child care is challenging - not enough transparency for parents going through process

- Family pays a large portion of gross yearly income towards child care for one child (make too much to qualify for subsidies)
 - Many move out of Philadelphia to find more affordable options

Ellen Ramage – Refugee Resettlement Center

- We need full-day, full-year care
- Will enable two-parent households to have two-wage earners, including her clients
 - Need to keep in mind importance of providing for trauma-impacted children by creating stable, consistent environments for children
- Quality, affordable ECE is needed to create economic opportunity for families

Panel 6 – William Capers, Dolores Shaw, Karel Kilimnik

William Capers – Olde City Day School

- Noted the disparity in what people could afford for ECE between different neighborhoods
 - Many Philadelphia residents simply cannot afford quality programs
- Need to create consistency for children, no matter how much a parent can pay

Dolores Shaw- Parent

- Her children and grandchildren benefitted from high-quality pre-k even though, in grandson’s case, had to travel outside of the neighborhood to obtain it
- Retain skilled, high-quality teachers and staff who might not have degrees and certification
 - They cannot be fired for sake of new standards
 - Find a way to help them get certified
- Current salary for ECE teachers and staff does not allow them to stay in their jobs

Karel Kilimnik – Alliance for Philadelphia Public Schools

- Commission should withhold money if pre-k programs are outsourced by School District of Philadelphia (SDP)
- Pre-k funding should be coming in from federal government and hopefully soon from the state
- Reason given for outsourcing SDP Head Start slots in 2013 was that certified teachers cost too much.
 - Requirement for community-based agencies to receive funding for outsourced Head Start slots from School District was STAR 3 or 4 rating - Who is providing the oversight for divvying of 2,000 slots?
 - ASPIRA is a private agency that got slots but owes the School District money
 - Compared outsourcing crisis to outsourcing K-12 education to charter schools
- Noted that there are no ECE teachers on the Commission

Questions for Panel 6:

Donna Cooper:

- Requested that William Capers send center cost information

Panel 7 – Marvin Dutton, Beth Joseph, Steven Honeyman

Marvin Dutton – Marvin’s Education Services

- Works in Kensington – poorest community in Philadelphia
- Wants Commission to focus on oversight and accountability
- Noticed that there are not millennials on the Commission
 - Commission needs to engage newer organizations as well
- Urged Commission not to “throw money” at the same institutions that already receive it
- Noted that primarily Black and Latino communities are in poverty and require these services

Beth Joseph – Early Childhood Environments, Inc.

- Has experience developing, implementing Keystone STARS in various settings including a bilingual ECE program in South Philadelphia
- Understands the need for high-quality, developmentally appropriate facilities
- Offered services to help Commission

Steven Honeyman – Community Organizer

- Urged equity and quality Pre-K throughout Philadelphia
- Plan needs flexibility to account for diverse needs of neighborhoods
- Need to consider race, class, and culture to create a system that works
 - Ex: some families might want to keep children at home
 - Ex: take into account issues of transportation/work schedule
- Asked for a study of each neighborhood, similar to statewide education costing out study, to determine the needs of each neighborhood and resources already in place to meet these
 - Lift up (rather than eliminate) low quality programs
 - Leadership of programs should reflect and be part of the community
- Extend view beyond Pre-K => to third grade
 - Contribution from City creates political buy-in. Should be a targeted tax, not just a part of the operating budget

3. Final Remarks

Commission Co-Chairs thanked all for their participation. It was noted that all submitted written testimony will be posted online on www.phila.gov/universalprek and reminded all that comments and feedback are always welcome and can be submitted via email at prek@phila.gov