

Council of the District of Columbia

Committee of the Whole

Hearing on
Bill 18-605
**"Pre-K Acceleration and Clarification
Amendment Act of 2010"**

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Written Testimony of:

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Chairman Gray and Members of the Council:

My name is Joe Weedon. I am here today on behalf of AMERICA'S EDGE, a national organization of business leaders who work to strengthen businesses and the economy through proven investments in children. We take a critical look at the knowledge, skills and abilities businesses need their employees to have in the 21st century, including the ability to be communicators, collaborators, and critical thinkers. We support proven programs that pay big dividends to businesses both today and tomorrow, strengthen communities, and get children school- and work- ready so businesses have a future workforce with the knowledge, skills and abilities we need.

I also serve as Vice President of the Hill Preschool parent board where my youngest child is currently a student. The Hill Preschool is a non-profit corporation that provides high quality education and nurturing care for young children. The Hill Preschool, the oldest pre-school on Capitol Hill, was incorporated in 1972 and currently serves more than 50 children ranging from the age of two to five years of age. The Hill Preschool is licensed by the District of Columbia. I am also a parent of a pre-k student at Maury Elementary School in Ward 6 and my son will be leaving the Hill Preschool to enroll at Maury in the fall.

I wish to begin by thanking you for your on-going support of early care and education. Your support for early education has had a dramatic impact on businesses and families across the city. Your investment helps create jobs and increases spending in our neighborhoods and it provides the foundation for our long-term economic growth. It's an honor to be here today to discuss the critical importance of the city's early care and education programs, and specifically Bill 18-605, the "Pre-K Acceleration and Clarification Amendment Act of 2010."

Fiscal Year 2011 Funding:

While this hearing is not specifically about funding for pre-K in the District, it is important to take this opportunity to, again, encourage the Council to fully fund early care and education in the upcoming budget. Without full funding, the implementation of the legislation and the quality of the program will suffer, preventing the city and its businesses from realizing the full benefit of the city's investment in early care and education. As such, even in these tough economic times, I encourage the Mayor and Council to support pre-K at the full amount called for in the fiscal note adopted with the *Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Act of 2008* – \$18.3 million dollars for the 2011 fiscal year. Additionally, I encourage the Council to extend support for programs for children from age 0 to 3, including efforts to ensure child care providers are provided the market rate for child care services and increasing child care subsidies that allow working families to remain in the workforce, contributing to our economy.

Quality & Standards Are Important:

The research confirms that investing in high-quality preschool education will generate a high return on investment and benefit children. In fact, attending high-quality early learning programs have been show to:

- Increase pre-math skills by 21%;
- Increase pre-reading skills by 52% to 74% for low-income children;
- Cut by more than 50% the number of children held back or in special education;
- Increase graduation rates by 44%; and
- Increase median earnings by more than 33%.

But, to realize these benefits and the tremendous return on our investment – up to \$16 for every \$1 invested – we must have a clear vision of what high quality programs look like.

High-quality early care and education programs include the following essential features:

- highly-qualified teachers with appropriate compensation;ⁱ
- comprehensive and age-appropriate curricula;ⁱⁱ
- strong family involvement;ⁱⁱⁱ
- small, age-appropriate class sizes;^{iv}
- small staff-to-child ratios to ensure each child gets sufficient attention;^v and
- screening and referral services for developmental, health, or behavior problems.^{vi}

Highly-Qualified Teachers with Appropriate Compensation:

A bachelor's degree requirement for teachers is critical for successful pre-K programs that demonstrate long-term outcomes for the economy and for children. No peer-reviewed, scientific research study has found an early education program with long-term benefits as strong as programs, such as the High/Scope Perry Preschool program, *without* a bachelor's degree requirement. The pre-K legislation will ensure all lead teachers in expansion classrooms have at least an associates degree in child development or related area and be on track to obtain a bachelors degree or have completed a minimum of 18 credits in early childhood development if their bachelors degree is in an area outside of the field. Additionally, the legislation requires assistant teachers to obtain at least an associate degree in addition to obtaining a Child Development Associate Certificate (CDA). Quality teaching will also be enhanced through scholarships, training, professional development and technical assistance opportunities. Additionally, the Council agrees that teachers will be paid a salary comparable to K-12 teachers, which will help reduce turnover and attract the best teachers to preschool and pre-k classrooms.

Comprehensive and Age-Appropriate Curricula

Classrooms should utilize an age-appropriate curricula that is aligned with the District of Columbia Early Learning Standards and prepares children for their elementary school experience. Additionally, programs should be accredited by an independent, national accrediting body to ensure quality and effectiveness.

Strong Family Involvement

Family members must be included as partners in all aspects of the educational program, and efforts must be undertaken to ensure parental involvement. Families should be welcomed into the program, be allowed to participate and observe, and be consulted about the interests, abilities, and preferences of their children. Partnerships with relevant agencies should also be developed and strengthened to encourage parents to improve their educational and parenting skills.

Small Class Size and Staff-to-Child Ratios to Ensure Each Child Gets Sufficient Attention

America's Edge endorses the efforts to ensure small class sizes and adult-to-child ratios of one-to-eight for children 30 months to three years and one-to-ten for children four years of age and older. Research has shown these factors contribute significantly to the development of positive relationships between the adults and children that are essential to the learning process.

Screening and Referral Services for Developmental, Health, or Behavior Problems

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, high quality evidence-based developmental screening tools can help identify children in need of services so that they can receive the treatment they need. High quality developmental screening tools are those that have been rigorously peer-reviewed to ensure that they are standardized, reliable, valid, and accurate.

Implementation of Early Education in the District:

The number of children in District-supported three- and four-year-old programs has increased dramatically. According to the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), 86 percent of all three- and four- year-old children residing in the city are currently enrolled in programs a high rate of participation. Further, DC Public Schools (DCPS) and DC Public Charter Schools are operating at approximately 96 and 98 percent capacity, respectively, for three-year-olds and at 95 and 96 percent for four-year-olds. Additionally, in December 2008, the District of Columbia State Board of Education approved the *District of Columbia Infant and Toddler and Pre-Kindergarten Early Learning Standards*. The standards are grounded in widely accepted theories of child development and research and represent a solid standard for pre-k students. The program requirements, based upon nationally recognized quality indicators of best practice include, but are not limited to, (1) significant progress bringing the District's requirements for adult-to-child ratios closer to the national recommendations; (2) a comprehensive curricula; and (3) teacher qualifications, professional development and training for teachers and assistant teachers.

Even with these accomplishments, there is work to be done in implementing high-quality programs across the District. There are nearly 2,000 children not enrolled in a pre-K program, and there are parts of the city where demand for spaces does not match the current availability of spaces, especially in relationship to the availability of slots within DCPS.

Efforts specifically need to be undertaken to improve outreach to and involvement of community-based organizations (CBOs) in the implementation of the legislation to ensure that new slots are being created and supported through that delivery mechanism. Additionally, the overall communication of OSSE to program administrators in all three delivery sectors – DCPS, DC Public Charter Schools, and CBOs – needs to be improved. Outreach to parents and plans to promote parental support and involvement must also be enhanced and communicated to the community.

OSSE has also previously acknowledged that the quality of pre-K slots must be improved. While DCPS has adopted standards for early learning, OSSE has not formally articulated a comprehensive curriculum that aligns with the DC Early Learning Standards as required under the original Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Act of 2008. Rather they have identified several curricula that can be utilized by programs, some of which are not comprehensive. Further clarification and guidance from OSSE is needed, especially in the CBO sector.

While efforts to implement professional development opportunities and support early education providers in obtaining their professional qualifications got off to a rough start under the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Act, the progress the University of the District of Columbia has made in developing a career and compensation plan for teachers in the CBO sector since the adoption of the Emergency Pre-K Acceleration Act earlier this year should be commended. While there is still ground to cover, we believe the District is now on the right path to ensure that teachers have access to the educational opportunities needed to meet these requirements.

Defining Community-based Organization:

The "Pre-K Acceleration and Clarification Amendment Act of 2010" would amend Section 101 (D.C. Official Code §38-271.01) as follows:

"(1) "community-based organization" or "CBO" means a Head Start or early childhood education program operated by a nonprofit entity, faith-based organization, or organization that participates in federally funded or District-funded early childhood programs, including the child care subsidy program funded by the federal Child Care and Development Fund."

While the intent of this new language is to ensure priority is given to serving children and families that receive child care subsidies, this provision could be interpreted to exclude programs that do not currently serve children receiving federal or District subsidies. Thus, I would recommend the following language to clarify the intent of the Council and ensure that all organizations be eligible to apply for and receive the benefits of this legislation.

Recommended language for Section 101 (D.C. Official Code §38-271.01)

“(1) “community-based organization” or “CBO” means:

- (a) Head Start program,
- (b) early childhood program operated by a nonprofit entity,
- (c) early childhood program operated by a faith-based organization, or
- (d) early childhood program operated by a for-profit entity that serves children who participate in federally funded or District-funded early childhood programs, including the child care subsidy program funded by the federal Child Care and Development Fund.”

Conclusions

Business leaders in DC from all sectors and sizes recognize a key to their success is quality early learning for our children. *America’s Edge* and its members strongly support the District’s efforts to expand early learning, including high-quality curriculum and standards for programs across the city.

America’s Edge and its members are proud to be here today to speak on the importance of continued expansion and enhancement of early learning in the District. We are grateful for the leadership of Chairman Gray and the rest of the Council on this effort that will help provide the foundation for learning to ensure our city’s economy can continue to grow.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

i Several studies show that high quality early care and education teachers have at least a four-year degree, partake in on-going training, and are paid well. Whitebook, M. (2003). Early education quality: Higher teacher qualifications for better learning environments—A review of the literature. Berkeley, CA: Institute of Industrial Relations. Retrieved on February 25, 2010 from <http://iir.berkeley.edu/csce/pdf/teacher.pdf>

ii Katz, L. (1999). Curriculum disputes in early childhood education. Champaign, IL: Clearinghouse on Early Education and Parenting. Retrieved on February 25, 2010 from <http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/eeearchive/digests/1999/katz99b.html>; Goffin, S. G., & Wilson, C. (2001). Curriculum models and early childhood education: Appraising the relationship (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall.

iii Some examples of a strong parent-involvement component include the home visits in the High/Scope Perry Pre-kindergarten and Syracuse University Family Development programs, the intensive parent coaching in Chicago Child-Parent Centers, and the parent volunteers in Head Start. For Perry Pre-kindergarten see: Schweinhart, L. J., Barnes, H. V., & Weikart, D. P. (1993). Significant benefits: The High/Scope Perry Pre-kindergarten study through age 27. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press. See also D. R. Powell (Ed.). (1988). Parent education as early childhood intervention: Emerging directions in theory, research, and practice (pp. 79-104). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing.

iv Barnett, W.S., Epstein, D.J., Friedman, D.J., Boyd, J.S., & Hustedt, J.T. (2008). The state of preschool 2008: State preschool yearbook. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute of Early Education Research.

v For preschool classrooms, the staff-to-child ratio should be not more than 10 children per teacher. In early learning settings for infants, the child-staff ratio should be not more than three children per teacher, and for toddlers, not more than four children per teacher. American Academy Of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, and National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education (2002). Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care Programs, 2nd edition. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics and Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.

Barnett, W.S., Epstein, D.J., Friedman, D.J., Boyd, J.S., & Hustedt, J.T. (2008). The state of preschool 2008: State preschool yearbook. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute of Early Education Research.

vi Dunkle, M., & Vismara, L. (2004). Developmental checkups: They're good, they're cheap and they're almost never done. What's wrong with this picture? Retrieved on February 25, 2010 from <http://www.child-autism-parent-cafe.com/child-development.html>