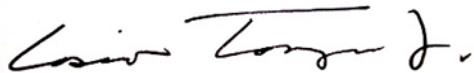




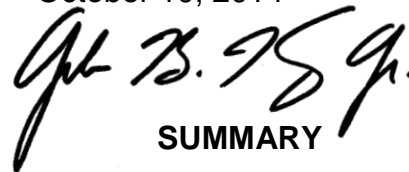
TO: P-12 Education Committee

FROM: Cosimo Tangorra, Jr. 

SUBJECT: English Language Learners and Dual Language Learners
in Prekindergarten

DATE: October 10, 2014

AUTHORIZATION(S):


SUMMARY

Issue for Discussion

The Office of Bilingual Education and Foreign Language Studies and the Office of Early Learning support the creation of high-quality prekindergarten programs. These programs strengthen the language and literacy skills of all students and lead to narrowing academic achievement gaps. Should the Board of Regents consider the formulation of protocols and procedures to meet the language and literacy needs of all young children in this cohort?

Proposed Handling

This item will come before the P-12 Education Committee for discussion at the October 2014 meeting.

Background Information

The benefits of prekindergarten programs are well documented. Research links preschool education to positive outcomes in both social and academic measures. New York State has recently significantly invested in expanding its prekindergarten programs in an effort to serve as many of the State's four-year olds in high-quality programs as possible. The Universal Prekindergarten Program has been in existence since 1998 and serves approximately 100,000 children across 444 school districts with an annual budget appropriation of \$385 million. The 2013-14 State Budget enacted the Priority Prekindergarten program which expanded prekindergarten by serving approximately 6,000 children with an annual budget appropriation of \$25 million. To continue the expansion of prekindergarten programs, the 2014-15 State Budget enacted the Statewide Universal Full-Day Prekindergarten program, which estimates serving 37,000

children with a budget appropriation of \$340 million. This unprecedented attention on early childhood education brings the total annual investment in prekindergarten to \$750 million. Research has shown that one out of five children is determined to be English Language Learners and emerging bilinguals. As such, it is critical that the Department focus its attention to the needs of children who are English Language Learners in prekindergarten programs throughout the State.

The Department established a committee comprised of educators and advocates who share the importance of promoting English Language Learners' receptive and productive oral and literacy development, as well as the advantages of multilingualism. The Committee on Bilingual Education in PreKindergarten Programs was established in May of 2014 and continues to meet on a regular basis. One of the most important issues that the committee works on is the incorporation of bilingualism into prekindergarten classrooms. In order to help promote this effort, the committee is creating a set of protocols and procedures to meet the needs of all children which coincide with the Department's efforts to support the language and literacy development of all students.

In order to incorporate academically and linguistically relevant instruction into the prekindergarten curriculum and program, it is critical to identify linguistically diverse children as they enter each program. For New York State, the design of an identification process in prekindergarten must be informed by sound knowledge of developmentally-appropriate practices for young children, and be responsive to the unique cross-system structure of all four existing prekindergarten programs¹. However, there are notable challenges that are summarized below.

Cultural Responsiveness

Linguistic diversity is accompanied by cultural diversity. The many values, traditions, and styles represented in our prekindergarten programs manifest in children's behavior in a myriad of ways. It is important to consider that many children, in their first introduction to formal group settings such as a prekindergarten classroom, may not be socialized to respond appropriately to adults. A child's silence or reticence can be misinterpreted and impact negatively on a first assessment. For this reason, it is recommended that an identification process that reflects and incorporates culture and family values into the results will greatly impact the outcome and increase the accuracy of initial assessments to create conditions where bilingual and bicultural individuals can proceed respectfully in the identification process. A detailed social history and a supportive interview with the parent/guardian should be incorporated into the process to offer insights into how to best differentiate instruction for the child.

Language Barriers

Given the sheer number of languages spoken in New York State, it is difficult to find appropriate assessments in all the languages spoken in each school district.

¹ The four existing prekindergarten programs are: 1) Targeted Prekindergarten Program 2) Universal Prekindergarten Program 3) Priority Prekindergarten Program and 4) the Statewide Universal Full-day Prekindergarten Program.

Sometimes this leads to the misuse of translations or interpreting assessments in English. As it is important to discourage these practices, the prekindergarten identification process will be strengthened if it considers a child's full linguistic repertoire and does not rely on one monolingual instrument.

First Screenings

There are many standardized instruments currently in use with young children. In fact, Commissioner's Regulations require initial screenings for all children upon entry into a prekindergarten program. Currently, initial screening instruments tend to measure specific or discrete skills (e.g. knowledge of vocabulary, letters, colors, and numbers) that correspond to age or general school readiness. While they may be useful, these do not tend to capture a child's proficiency in a language or the child's capacity to meet the demands of academic language in a school setting. If results of these types of screenings are regarded as measures of language proficiency, the conclusions can be inaccurate or misleading.

Panel Presentation

To help present the work of the Committee on Bilingual Education in PreKindergarten Programs, there will be a panel discussion. The following presenters will discuss the importance of including the need for bilingual programs and services in prekindergarten programs as well as ways to effectively assess the needs of English Language Learners in prekindergarten programs, including issues of equitable access and the importance of providing necessary and appropriate supports and services to students and families.

Melanie Pores is an Education Assistant for the New York State United Teachers.

Luis Reyes is a Research Associate and Director of Education Programs at Center for Puerto Rican Studies/Centro for the City University of New York at Hunter College.

Dr. Zoila Tazi is an Associate Professor & Department Chair of the Childhood Education Department at Mercy College.

Ana Banda-Wemple is a Dual Language Program UPK Teacher for the Albany City School District.

Susan Grecco is the Director of Second Language Programs for Freeport Public Schools.

Next Steps

It is recommended that the Board of Regents direct staff to draft and develop protocols and procedures to reflect the needs of emerging bilingual children in prekindergarten programs, which will include items such as an at-home questionnaire, professional development curricula for prekindergarten administrators and teachers, and the creation of resources for families.