

Second Year Summary Report to Funders on Early Childhood Education (ECE) Project September 2015- September 2016

The following events took place during the 2015-2016 preschool year and are related to, or were supported by, funding from the four early childhood education “investor/funders” (that means you!):

- **The original goal of universal access**, for at least 12 hours a week, for all children ages 3-5, **was maintained**. The preschools are operating pretty much at capacity and thus far are still able to accommodate all who show up to attend.
- **The goal to have all staff working with children certified at the Childhood Development Accreditation (CDA) certificate level, or higher, was achieved**. During 2016, ECE monies supported modest payroll increases as a reward to staff that completed the yearlong certification process. Maintaining these higher pay levels will be the responsibility of the schools and should attract more qualified staff going forward.
- The Orcas preschool program directors, along with Jim Connell and his staff from the Institute for Research and Reform in Education collaborated to **establish “measures of success” for students and have agreed upon goals and assessment procedures to verify results**.
- These are now in operation and the target is for 95% of “our kids” to be at grade level upon entering kindergarten and for the 5%, who may have development delays to have a record of steady progress toward individually appropriate goals.
- **Children are assessed regularly during the year to track individual progress as are classroom practices. The ECE work group directs additional funds toward improving student outcomes, and teaching practices, three times a year. At kindergarten all children go through a State mandated comprehensive assessment**.
- The first group of our ECE kids entered kindergarten in September 2015. The data indicates they were doing well in both social and emotional development areas. Literacy scores, however, needed work. While there remain some reporting challenges on the data from the public school we expect to continue to get meaningful data of use in improving school readiness for all kids.

- **Three of our preschools participate in the Early Achievers Program, a first ever attempt by the State to assess every licensed, early learning center in Washington. The first round of ratings were conducted in 2015 and early 2016. Due to the timing of the rating cycles, and some controversy over the process, only one of our schools, Children’s House, had the opportunity to complete two rating cycles earning a rating of 4 (out of a possible 5). The two remaining schools, Kaleidoscope and Montessori, are just now entering their second rating cycle. (Salmonberry is not state-licensed, receives no state money, and therefore is not included in Early Achievers assessment process.)**
- **If the State resumes reassessment as planned, ECE will aim for a score of 4, or more, for each of the Orcas preschools.**

The outcomes-for-kids assessment used in our preschools is aligned with the same evaluation topics used by the public school for kids entering kindergarten. Every child is rated for their proximity to grade level readiness in social, emotional and literacy development. We (ECE) are directing funds toward improved literacy in 2016-17.

Research indicates that literacy in young children is directly related to “enhanced teacher preparedness” and “improved instructional support” by teachers. High quality time, with a highly qualified teacher translates reliably into better literacy scores for kids.

In this context, enhanced teacher preparedness means teachers have time to prepare lessons and time to collaborate with others. Instructional support refers to practices, by teachers, in front of children, that are known to support learning in children. For example, a good teacher is skilled in extending conversations with a child. The ability to get a child directly involved in questioning or in responding productively to an inquiry (engagement skills) takes practice for a teacher to get right. Something called “self-talk”, when practiced consistently and well by a skilled teacher has been proven to reliably boost literacy in kids.

Toward improved literacy, in 2016-17, ECE funds will continue to support access and will:

- **Help fund lesson-planning time for teachers during the school day.**
- **Help cover the cost of classroom “subs”, one hour per week in each school, for teachers to meet together to coordinate planning and lesson strategies on behalf of individual kids and classes.**
- **Help free up time for “master” teachers to spend actual classroom time, observing another teacher, to provide feedback and coaching to enhance teaching skills.**

The program/facility assessment of Early Achievers focused mostly on program attributes, not on outcomes for kids. It quantifies, in great detail, very specific items and practices. Things like the quality and amount of materials per student available, the quality of record keeping, documentation of time spent in teacher preparation, and even the quality of the outdoor and indoor spaces. All of these are just a tiny fraction of what is surveyed.

Program facility improvements are generally not the ultimate focus of ECE funds; outcomes for kids are. However, the workgroup concluded that some money could go toward facility improvements in areas where the improvements were “low hanging fruit”. They were the improvements that the workgroup felt were affordable, would strengthen student learning if completed and thus improve state funding going forward. Long-term sustainability for the early childhood sector is a goal of ECE.

In conclusion:

We are now transitioning from getting kids into school and teacher certification to changing what goes on every day that affects students’ outcomes. We are about to start a process where we hope good teachers will help other teachers get even better. This level of cooperation, skills building, accountability and thoughtfulness, across all preschools in a single school district, may be a one-of-a-kind accomplishment.

None of this is the norm in early childhood education. Universal access to preschool for all who want it is not “normal”. All staff working with children, with at least a CDA, is an achievement. Stated outcomes for kids, and what constitutes effective practices in teachers and teaching, are now agreed upon. Measured and targeted success is now the norm. In the second half of 2016 we move on to taking responsibility and being accountable for delivering “readiness” to 95% of an entire population of kids. That will be an incredible achievement!

Donors like you, our amazing educators, school directors, program staff and professional advisors ALL have been vital players in the success thus far. None of this would have been possible without your sustained financial commitment over the past two years. Thank you very much! Onward to Year Three.