

I want to thank Senator Harkin and Senator Alexander for inviting me to present information about the innovative approach to early childhood programming taken by the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). DCPS is proud of what we have achieved.

The growth of high quality early childhood programming in DCPS and across the District of Columbia is due to the leadership of Mayor Vincent Gray and Chancellor Kaya Henderson. Both have shown tremendous vision and dedication to ensure that young children at-risk of school failure have access to the resources and supports they need to be successful.

Today I am going to briefly outline the risk factors faced by young children in the District, describe our pre-kindergarten system, then focus on the blended funding model that has been implemented in DCPS, known as the Head Start School-Wide Model. Finally, I will share some exciting data on children's outcomes.

Research has documented the academic risk faced by children in poverty, and those risks are faced by thousands of District children. Despite the increase in median income over the past decade, 19 percent of the DC population continues to live below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) (\$22,350 for a household of 4), as compared to 15 percent nationally (IFF, 2012). District children are far more likely to live in poverty than adults: 15 percent of children ages 0-3 and 21 percent of children ages 3-5 live in extreme poverty (at or below 50 percent of FPL) while 26 percent of children ages 0-3 and 32 percent of children ages 3-5 live in families with incomes at or below 100 percent of the poverty line (Young Child Risk Calculator, 2012). Wards 5, 7 and 8 are most affected by child poverty and almost 60 percent of all young children in Ward 8 live in poverty. Wards 7 and 8 also have the highest unemployment rate, lowest median income, and the most children receiving TANF, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (DC Action for Child Kids Count, 2012b).

The National Center for Children in Poverty has noted that children who face three or more risk factors are the most likely to experience school failure and other negative outcomes, including maladaptive behavior. They define risk factors as low-income, single parent, teen mother, low parental education, unemployed parents, residential mobility (one or more move in last 12 months), households without English speakers, and large family size (families with more than 4 children) (Young Child Risk Calculator, 2012). Of children ages 3-5 in DC, 69 percent experience at least one risk factor; 40 percent experience 1-2 risk factors; and 29 percent experience three or more risk factors. In addition to experiencing a large number of risk factors, DC has the highest rate of children (17 percent) living in extreme poverty in a single-parent household compared to all other states.

These troubling statistics impact our success as a city; for example, nearly 4 in 10 students in DC schools do not graduate on time (NCES, Jan 2012).

In 2008 the City Council and the Mayor convened a working group to identify solutions to change outcomes for children in the District. The working group noted first, that research has clearly documented the impact high quality early childhood programs have in increasing success for children at-risk, and second, that many children who could benefit from these programs did not have access to them.

As a result, in 2008, the District of Columbia passed the Pre-K Enactment and Expansion Act, mandating universal pre-k for three- and four- year-olds. This Act extended the Uniform Per-Student Funding

Formula (UPSFF) to three-year-olds, and established a goal of making high quality services universally available within five years. The Act also invested in the quality of community-based providers as another component of universal access.

According to the District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent for Education (OSSE), 70 percent of families with three- or four-year-old children have enrolled their children in full school day and school-year programs in either DCPS or in a public charter school. There is now an early childhood classroom in every elementary school throughout the District, meeting quality standards including Bachelor's degreed teachers. Across the city, we have now achieved universal access for three- and four-year-olds, with families having a choice of traditional public schools, charter schools or community-based providers. DCPS is currently providing nearly half of all early childhood seats for three- and four-year olds children in the District.

For DCPS, implementation of the Act was a critical turning point in our efforts to improve outcomes for our children. We are now both the largest single provider of services for three- and four-year-old children and of Head Start-eligible children in the District of Columbia.

The implementation of the Act also allowed us to be innovative in our approach. As a Head Start grantee, DCPS was already committed to ensuring our children most at-risk of school failure got a comprehensive array of services to meet their needs both for high quality educational opportunities and for supports for their healthy development. However, we did not have the resources to serve all Head Start eligible children.

To serve those children, in 2010, we designed the Head Start blended model, which is in all 57 "Title I" elementary schools in DCPS. The Head Start model, like many blended funding models in school districts and community-based settings around the country, combines Head Start funds with local funding. In our case, the local funding comes through the Uniform Per-Student Funding Formula (UPSFF). The local dollars pay for teachers, aides and other infrastructure costs while the Head Start funds allow us to provide comprehensive supports for families and coaching and other professional development for teachers and to meet the Performance Standards. This approach allows DCPS to provide the Head Start experience to nearly 5,000 children each day in neighborhood schools meeting Title I eligibility. Prior to the Head Start model, DCPS served 1,782 children.

With the blended model, we are able to provide high quality comprehensive services to many more children who can benefit, with the same level of grant funding. This has created a unified early childhood system where all children in our classrooms receive the same quality of programming regardless of whether the program is called Head Start or pre-kindergarten.

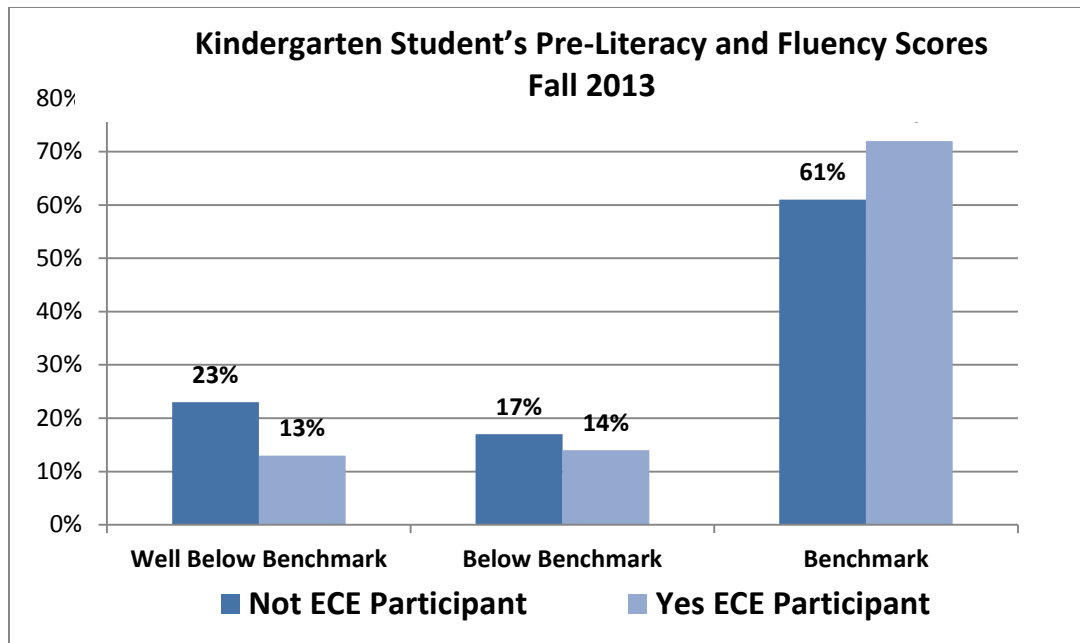
Every child in the Head start model receives the services that meet Head Start standards, including screening and diagnostic assessment, high quality early childhood classroom settings for the full school-day and school-year, and access to family support services. And we are doing it well: in a federal review in 2011, we were found to meet all standards.

The program supports the needs of our families, and is also providing a warm, supportive environment that helps young students develop social and emotional skills. Children also develop academic skills and knowledge they need to succeed in Kindergarten. Each of our classrooms has at least two staff members, including a teacher and paraprofessional, so that students can learn in small groups and with

one-on-one instruction and support. We require every teacher to have **at least** a Bachelor's Degree. Every classroom uses a research based curriculum, and families can choose the school and curriculum that best meets their needs, whether it is Montessori, Reggio-Emilia, Tools of the Mind or Creative Curriculum. All early childhood staff receive extensive and regular professional development and training throughout the year. Paraprofessionals have been supported to gain their Child Development Associate (CDA) credential as well. Some of the key components of the Head Start model are:

- All early childhood classrooms in Title I schools are fully supplied with high-quality early childhood materials and equipment in all content areas (literacy and language development, math, science/sensory, gross motor, art, drama, music/movement) that meet all children's specific development and learning needs.
- Every classroom has a teachers with a bachelor's degree and specialized training in early childhood who receive eight days of professional development, weekly collaborative meetings with trained coaches to identify strengths and areas of improvement for teachers and aides and provide best practices, resource materials and peer-to-peer learning and individualized professional development through intensive coaching each quarter for teachers to meet identified goals and improve instructional practices.
- All classrooms in the Head Start blended model use a research-based curricula that is aligned with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) Early Learning Standards (revised March 2013), the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework and GOLD child assessment system, as well as with the Common Core standards.
- Inter-departmental and -agency collaboration provides high-quality support to Dual Language Learners and students with special needs.
- Staff resources are dedicated to improving services and supports for children with special needs and to support teachers as they implement children's IEPs.
- Master's level mental health specialists provide individualized clinical services to children and families.
- Opportunities for family engagement in the school, classroom and at home while promoting parent education of child development through a comprehensive parent curriculum.
- Children from high-need families, especially those that are homeless or in foster care are supported on an as needed basis through intensive case management and family outreach services.
- Assessment of health and dental needs of families, and partnerships with dental screening programs, school nurses, and local universities to provide dental, health and nutrition services to children and families.
- Participation in a universally free School Breakfast and the National School Lunch Program, meeting high nutrition standards.

We are excited that data show that together, these program components are working and helping our students to grow and learn. In fact, in Kindergarten, children who attended pre-K at DCPS had stronger pre-reading skills than their classmates who did not attend the program.



How are these skills measured?

The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) is a reading instrument that helps teachers better understand their student's literacy needs. DIBELS testing is done three times a year. Teachers use the data from the tool to help monitor students' progress, guide literacy instruction and identify students who may need extra help.

DCPS is committed to providing a high quality program for all early learners. We use a number of assessments to gain a better understanding of what works for students and to be sure our classrooms are high quality. To help students learn and grow, DCPS uses classroom observations, teacher quality assessments, teacher evaluations and other measures of children. Our data show clearly that our programs meet benchmarks for quality and that our teachers and classrooms have the needed supports to help students do their best.

The DCPS early childhood program uses the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), a widely-used and researched tool that looks at the quality of the classroom and how the teacher and students interact. When compared to other programs across the country where CLASS is widely used, DCPS programs are meeting national trends and the quality levels of other programs.

Additionally, our early childhood classroom teachers participate in the DCPS teacher evaluation system, known as IMPACT. In the 2012-2013 school year, 82 percent of early childhood teachers were rated Effective or Highly Effective on the IMPACT teacher evaluation system. This means that most early childhood students have teachers who have been recognized and rewarded for their work. The IMPACT system also gives teachers opportunities to work with and learn from their peers, which ultimately leads to better instruction.

The DCPS early childhood program also looks at student's development and progress over the school year using a tool called Teaching Strategies GOLD. GOLD uses teacher observations to look at how a child is progressing to meet grade-level expectations in six developmental and content areas (see chart below for a list of areas). We know that children are making progress throughout the year on this assessment, as 35% enter the year below these benchmarks and then make gains throughout the year. At the end of the last school year, 97% of our early childhood students met or exceeded the GOLD expectations for their grade-level. This means that most students finish the program with the skills needed to enter and succeed in Kindergarten.

In addition to GOLD, DCPS has taken a closer look at the classrooms in the HSSWM to examine the quality of the early childhood program at a deeper level. Students in those rooms are assessed using several measures that look at pre-reading, pre-math, problem solving, and social-emotional development. The results give us reasons to be very optimistic and very proud of our students. We've learned that our students are gaining important reading and math skills, as well as self-regulation and working memory skills. These results reaffirm our commitment to a high quality, comprehensive approach that meets the needs of all our students.

Because of the implementation of the blended model with Head Start and the number of students and families we are now reaching, we are truly excited for the future. We are proud of what our teachers and our students have achieved, and we are committed to continuing to improve the quality of our programs so that every child has what he or she needs to be successful.

But don't take my word for it. Here are the words of LaToya Smith, a parent at Langdon Education Campus:

My child is in a Montessori program, at Langdon Education Campus. Socially, he's thriving in a group of friends. Emotionally, he's maturing as a scholar who excels. Cognitively, he's secure in the basics (alphabet, counting, shapes, and colors). He's already learning to read! His teacher's goal is for him to be reading and writing sentences by the end of the year. At home, he tells me about different cultures and continents. He speaks of space, astronauts, and the galaxy He is *so* into learning and experiencing life! And I'm happy for him, for us.