

FCD Policy to Action Brief No. 2

PreK-3rd: What is the Price Tag?

Supplementary Material

Making Strategic Use of Existing Resources

Montgomery County: For the Montgomery County (Maryland) School District (MCSD), moving toward a seamless PreK-3rd approach, known as the Early Success Performance Plan, meant rethinking curriculum and instruction across the K-3rd Grade, as well as phasing in expansion of PreK for four-year olds and full-school-day Kindergarten. In short, MCSD overhauled every aspect of early childhood education from PreK-3rd Grade. “The PK-3 roll-out lead by Superintendent Jerry Weast required him to allocate additional dollars in his annual operating budget,” says Janine Bacquie, Director of Early Childhood Programs and Services. Start-up expenditures identified by the Superintendent included: research; curriculum development; the design and benchmarking of aligned assessments; at least 100 hours of initial professional development (PD) beginning with every Kindergarten teacher; and PD for instructional support staff such as staff developers and reading specialists. Because successful implementation of PreK-3rd depends to a great extent on school leadership, a summer institute session for principals was another start-up cost.

“Over time, however, we have kept costs down by making more strategic use of existing resources,” Bacquie adds. This happens in several ways:

- *A district-wide “rethink” of professional development:* A district-wide, cross-functional staff development team, which sets priorities, outcomes, and budgets for professional development, has brought a sharp focus to PreK-3rd, concentrating on cross-grade alignment of curriculum, instruction and assessment.
- *Mandatory site-level sessions:* Schools have made time for teachers to meet not only in grade-level teams, but also in cross-grade articulation teams. According to Bacquie, while sites take different approaches to organizing and scheduling these sessions, they share a commitment to analyzing data on children’s progress and skill mastery to glean cross-grade trends, and to looking in depth at how particular issues (such as oral language development or social competence) play out across PreK-3rd grades and sites.
- *Voluntary professional development within or across sites:* Additional sessions, offered on a voluntary basis, focus on issues that teachers prioritize in surveys. According to Bacquie, in 2008-09, Prekindergarten and Head Start teachers met one evening per month to discuss strategies for working with children with challenging behaviors. In past years, volunteers received dinner and a small stipend.
- *Ongoing new educator support:* When teachers and other instructional support staff are hired by the district, they participate in New Educator Orientation sessions designed to familiarize them with the PreK-3rd approach.

Bremerton: The Bremerton (Washington) School District began working on a seamless PreK-3rd initiative in 2000. Budget reallocations allowing a rigorous focus on alignment of standards, curricula, and assessments from PreK-Grade 3 began with the deliberations by a community-wide task force. A key feature of Bremerton's PreK-3rd initiative is the use, across grades, of a consistent literacy curriculum, resulting from broad consultation.

In contrast to Montgomery County, Bremerton did not allocate additional dollars for PreK-3rd. Instead, says Linda Sullivan-Dudzic, "we worked hard to pry loose federal and state dollars from areas where they were not being effectively spent and use them for what those programs were intended to be used for." She stresses that districts are supposed to use federal resources (Head Start, Title I, Special Education) and state funding (early childhood funding; Prekindergarten investments; and Title I "lookalike" funds) for exactly the functions that are at the heart of PreK-3rd: enhancing the quality of early childhood programs; aligning curricula between PreK and elementary education; and providing joint professional development. The problem, in her view, is that many districts are so strapped for general education funding that they use those funding sources to pay for core services, and then have to look elsewhere for dollars to cover PreK-3rd integration.

Sullivan-Dudzic acknowledges that achieving a seamless PreK-3rd approach does entail some costs — though not many — that existing resources cannot cover. These include:

- *Assessment support:* PreK-3rd requires a "tight assessment system above and beyond what the state requires — so we can monitor progress and feed information from the primary grades back to PreK programs." For this purpose, Bremerton has allocated funds for assessment coaching, equivalent to one full-time employee (FTE). These funds pay for assessment support at each school.
- *Cross-grade meetings:* Teachers meet twice a year with colleagues in adjacent grades to align curricula and ensure a smooth hand-off of children from one year to the next. These two-hour sessions are budgeted at \$35 per hour per teacher.
- *Consulting staff developers:* On an as-needed basis, Bremerton brings in curriculum area specialists on a per diem basis to work with PreK-3rd teachers on curriculum mapping and instructional problem-solving.
- *Aligned PreK materials:* The district buys PreK materials that are aligned with its K-3rd curricula, at a cost of approximately \$2,000 per classroom, and lends the materials to community-based classrooms that are located in public school sites, but do not operate under the aegis of the school district. Sullivan-Dudzic notes that each student who uses the materials and does not need remedial support when he/she reaches the elementary grades more than pays for this investment.
- *Aligned curriculum and enrichment materials:* The district also purchases materials for children who progress more quickly through curriculum than most of their classmates. Before this issue surfaced, teachers would respond to those children's needs by bringing in whatever materials they could lay hands on. This haphazard approach undermined the curriculum coherence that has been fundamental to Bremerton's PreK-3rd model.