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Testimony on House bill #551 - An Act relative to grants for high quality early education and Senate bill #265 – An Act ensuring high quality pre-kindergarten education

From: Grace Cruz

Submitted on: July 2, 2019

Good Morning (Afternoon),

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I am here in regards to - An Act relative to grants for high quality early education - House bill #551 and An Act ensuring high quality pre-kindergarten education- Senate bill #265.

I am Grace Cruz, the Community Partnership Manager for Community Teamwork in Lowell, MA. I have worked in the field of Early Childhood Education and care for over twenty years. I have had the pleasure of working in partnership with the Lowell Public Schools and Little Sprouts as the Center Director for Community Teamwork's Preschool Expansion Grant for the past 4 years. During this time, I have been able to pursue my graduate degree in Organizational Leadership. This has strengthened me as a leader and prepared me for my current position as Community Partnership Manager overseeing the Commonwealth Preschool Initiative and the Early Head Start Partnership grant work for our agency.

I feel privileged to have been part of this important work. I can confidently say that our program has had a positive impact on many children and families. The opportunity to be a part of this Preschool Expansion grant and to be able to achieve the success that we have is something we want for all Early Childhood programs across the State.

The City of Lowell has a long standing history of collaboration amongst its Early Childhood Education Providers. We are united through Lowell's Early Childhood Council (LECC). This council works to ensure that all of Lowell's children and families thrive by promoting partnerships across a mixed delivery system of care: a system that allows for services to be offered through a variety of programs and providers such as licensed family and center-based childcare, Head Start, public schools, and community-based organizations. Throughout the past ten years this group has composed a community wide definition of school readiness, aligned screening and assessment practices and strengthened family supports available within the city.

Currently 100% of infant and toddler programs, 88% of preschool programs and most after school programs are provided by private community based programs like ours.



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Providing Early Education and Care through such a mixed delivery system has several advantages for children and families. Most programs offer full-day full-year services to children birth through age 5. This is critical for working families, enabling them to maintain employment knowing that their children are in a safe environment that offers continuity and quality experiences. Another critical component of a mixed delivery system is the ability for families to choose what type of setting is best for their child to prosper. Each model of care offers a unique setting and array of services: family development, transportation, health and nutrition services, and/or mental health supports. Most importantly, the Early Childhood workforce is comprised of well trained professionals who have the training, knowledge and skills to nurture our infants, toddlers and preschoolers through developmentally appropriate practices and learning experiences that differ greatly than those they will receive throughout the remainder of their educational careers.

Today I ask you to support House bill 551 and Senate bill 265 to ensure high quality pre-kindergarten education within the State of Massachusetts. However, I also ask that you look for a strategy that leverages the existing capacity, expertise and resources that support our most vulnerable children and families. I ask you to consider how we can build upon comprehensive supports for young children and families in our existing mixed-delivery systems through better integration and coordination of the funding that would be offered through High Quality Pre-Kindergarten Education grant programs. A more flexible approach, with all entities being equal partners, will foster a stronger sense of community and collaboration.

I thank you, the Committee, and appreciate having this opportunity.

Grace Cruz

Community Partnership Manager
Community Teamwork, Inc

Edward Street Child Services

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July 2, 2019

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Peisch, Chairman Lewis, and members of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of An Act relative to grants for high quality early education (H.551), and An Act ensuring high-quality pre-kindergarten education (S.265).

We all know the research – high-quality preschool leads to greater school and life outcomes. In **Worcester, 40% of Kindergarten children enter school each year without any formal preschool experience**. That is approximately 800 children annually in a class of just over 2,000. 81% of this year’s kindergarten class are classified as high need and 40% are ELL. We have a gap.

Two years ago, I testified before this same subcommittee, and, sadly, these number are still the same.

When surveyed by the Worcester Community Connections Coalition (YOU, Inc), parents who did not enroll their preschool children in a program, cited access to affordable full-day programming with transportation as top barriers. Additional data confirms the need. Centers maintain significant wait lists compounded by staffing shortages, and our local CCR&R reports an active waitlist of 465 children (0-5), including 130 preschoolers from July 2018 alone, waiting for vouchers. So where are the children? Parents report a patchwork of care options:

- “Right now my mom watches her. If she’s in the hospital, I have to find friends or miss work.”
- “I have to stay home with my children, and not work; it’s not financially worth it.”

And, increasingly we hear:

- “I wish there was assistance for the people like me who are in the middle. Where I make too much money for some things but still struggle and live paycheck to paycheck.”(WCCC survey responses)

The Department of Early Education and Care’s strategic planning grants enabled Worcester to build plans to expand affordable, high--quality preschool programming through our robust mixed delivery system. No one partner - from district to centers to Head Start - has the physical capacity to expand to meet the need. The plan integrates investment and support across the system.

The community also understands the critical need for investment. The Together for Kids Coalition expanded its group of stakeholders (including Worcester’s Division of Public Health, City of Worcester, and The Greater Worcester Community Foundation,) to craft an early childhood plan which includes access to high quality early education as one of its four pillars. The plan is being mapped onto the Mayor’s Youth Violence Prevention Initiative which will have active governance through a newly proposed City of Worcester Cabinet for Child, Youth and Community Well-being.

Our preschool expansion plan includes strengthening existing and adding new classrooms, and incorporating innovative, research-based curriculum and comprehensive services to engage and support families. Conservative estimates demonstrate an impact to more than 1,000 children. Our plan also expands a unique pilot program with Worcester Family Partnership (our local CFCE) to bridge immigrant and refugee families into our education system through culturally-supportive playgroups.

Finally, our plan tackles the workforce crisis with stronger compensation and training to drive retention and educator development. We are creating a workforce and leadership pipeline by combining several existing pilot programs. Our plan offers a unique model where staff participate in specific degree and certificate cohorts supported by braided funding. The pipeline begins with graduates of Worcester's Technical High School who enroll in Quisigamond Community College having completed college-level courses and supports them through an AA and onto a BA degree with local higher ed partners. Our joint leadership certificate between QCC and Worcester State enables full transfer of the certificate into the Master's program, and this year alone 11 students obtained their MA in Education.

The bills before you – H551 and S265 – drive quality and will enable Preschool Expansion Plans to take root. While the state, with steadfast leadership from Representative Peisch and Senator DiDomenico, has made incremental investment, it is time to create a seismic shift. No longer should we be talking in “If or when” statements. Rather, it is now that the investment needs to happen. Each year that we sprinkle investment, we risk missing cultivating our next generation of leaders, entrepreneurs, scientists, doctors, and citizens who will ensure our Commonwealth continues to thrive and prosper.

Worcester has a plan and is ready to go. We can't afford to wait any longer. Our children deserve the strongest start possible, and affordable high-quality preschool programming is the best support to close the achievement gap before entering kindergarten.

Thank you again for your time and continued dedication to early education and care.

Kim Davenport
Managing Director, Birth to 3rd Grade Alignment

Good morning/afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to support House Bill 551 and Senate Bill 265.

My name is Dawn DiStefano and I am the Chief Finance and Grants Officer at Square One in Springfield. I have an undergraduate degree in education and a masters degree in non-profit management. My role is to secure necessary resources and manage the implementation of programs that support children and families. As a leader of an agency that serves over 600 children daily and 2,000 parents and caregivers – I know firsthand the critical nature of providing high quality early education while simultaneously supporting families – the majority of whom are living paycheck to paycheck, experiencing addiction, hunger and homelessness hoping desperately for their children to have better life outcomes.

Our PEG classrooms provided a solution for these families – one that met the needs of our children without the strict and rigorous qualifications of a subsidy or voucher. PEG funding offered resources that traditional community preschool settings only dream of affording! Tragically, many of our Square One children have experienced childhood trauma, family violence, hunger, abuse and neglect. With PEG funding, we had instant access to the mental and behavioral health services and family engagement supports that were needed to improve opportunities for growth and development for all family members.

In addition to a long list of classroom benefits and comprehensive services, PEG funding also supported the development of community partnerships. Although many of our PEG partners were neighbors in the early education field – PEG funding brought us together as a collective force. For the first time, agencies that traditionally operated independently - altered their practice to work in a blended, coordinated system of early education professionals – sharing enrollment, teaming up for family events, coordinating training and joining hands to embrace our community together.

YES - PEG funding provided resources and opportunities for children that would have otherwise missed out on a formal pre-K learning environment. But PEG funding also provided time – time for coaching, time for community collaboration, time for family engagement, time for early educators to improve their skills, and time for high quality education to a community of children that traditionally miss out on a strong start in education. PEG funding also saved administrative time – because the reimbursement model was per classroom and not per child – we could focus on more important tasks.

At Square One – we believe all children – regardless of income, race, ethnicity, or residence – deserves the same starting chance at having a strong educational experience. For some children, including many of the children in Springfield – early education is a critical stepping stone to future life opportunities. And the very future of our Commonwealth depends on our ability to improve and enhance the education and wellness of all children. As one of my PEG students explained to me – “I love school. And my school loves me. I can be anything I want to be!” Please support our children who want to be someone – doing good things – and need high quality early education to get there. Thank you again for the opportunity to come before you today.

Lisa Kuh, Ph.D., Director of Early Education
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Joint Committee on Education Hearing
In support of “An Act Relative to Grants for High Quality Early Education”
“An Act Ensuring High-Quality Pre-Kindergarten Education”
(H.551 / S.265)
Tuesday, July 2, 2019

Lisa Kuh, Director of Early Education, Somerville Public Schools

My name is Dr. Lisa Kuh, Director of Early Education for Somerville Public Schools and the City of Somerville. I have been in the field for over 30 years a preschool teacher, teacher educator, researcher, and now district leader.

I am here in support of An Act relative to grants for high quality early education - H.551, and An Act ensuring high-quality pre-kindergarten education - S.265.

Our newly named mixed delivery system, the Somerville Partnership for Young Children, is fueled by the Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative these bills will sustain, is a collaboration between Head Start, center-based programs, and public schools. Mixed delivery is about access and quality – and the bills before you keep both in play. The CPPI grant has allowed us to more directly impact the 177 children, over 32 teachers, across 9 classrooms in our partner centers (and that will grow in the coming year) Not to mention the 21 SPS preschool teachers and 19 Head Start teachers.

But not every family knows or understands the importance of early education and care. Bills like these signal its import. This year, with grant funding, Somerville will embark upon a city-wide campaign about the importance of early education and care, with a single point of entry system that assesses income and need criteria along with resource and referral information for entry into our partner centers. Even those enrolled struggle with access - one family needed just \$11 more a day to sustain full day care, our tuition assistance fund has been able to support a pilot to aid current families and will launch more comprehensively this fiscal year. The House and Senate Bills mention the physical structures for the education of the students and learning environments. As a researcher I know that environment matters, but in early childhood, we are used to getting by with less – old tables,

rusty chairs, wobbly legs. Creating beautiful, welcoming environments was an easy win for us as part of the CPPI grant – as were getting dumpsters to take things away. I happened to be in a classroom the day after the tables and chairs were delivered, and watched and listened as a child carefully carried her snack to the table, smoothed her hands over it and said, “it is nice to have new furniture, these are our new tables.” She is 3. It meant someone cared and she does too.

The CPPI Grant will allow us to provide 96K in director and teacher stipends from March 2019-July 2020. It also provoked candid, transparent conversations about salaries and we are working on a Somerville salary scale. As a result two of our centers have made a commitment to, with our support, increase wages to between 18-20/hour. Still very low but better than the 12-15/hour many are making. And, Finally, Somerville maintains a relentless focus on curriculum – interesting, essential practices rooted in inquiry. The grant also supports a 3rd instructional coach, which research shows is one of the most impactful strategies to boost teacher practices. Our coaches impacted over 400 children this year alone.

In closing, Funding for our children and families must be based on money needed, not just money available. In the current climate, we plan - spending valuable time justifying the need over and over, then we wait to be chosen. As a recipient of the current Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative grant we felt like we had won the lottery. But why must we wait to be chosen - to get lucky, when support for quality early education and care should be a civic right?

When the state funds bills like these, our city leaders sit up and take notice. In Somerville, Mayor Joseph Curtatone and Superintendent Mayor Skipper are watching and supporting our work. Philanthropists are watching and supporting our work. You are a mixed delivery system too, and communities need the state to take the lead so that our communities and other funders can collaboratively support young children and families.

Please support the bills with a favorable report out of committee.
Thank you for this opportunity to share our work



Joint Committee on Education Hearing

In support of “An Act Relative to Grants for High Quality Early Education”

“An Act Ensuring High-Quality Pre-Kindergarten Education”

(H.551 / S.265)

Tuesday, July 2, 2019

My name is Clifford Kwong. I’m an educator in the South End Community. I’ve been working in different school settings ever since my senior year at B.C. High. I have given back to every school system that has taught me and helped me grow.

I’ve seen both sides of the spectrum, one as a student, and the other as a teacher. Now recalling what I learned in the classroom as a student, to where the curriculum is today. The way students think in these P.E.G. classrooms, is far more sophisticated than the expectations of students in the past. In the past, A’s, B’s and C’s were the ultimate goal, but today, we realize we can do better. We can go beyond that.

A teacher once taught me, if you aim for the sky, the moon or the stars, she said even if you miss your goal, you will end up higher than one could ever imagine. You’ll be at the top of a mountain wondering how you climbed so high.

I was an educational coordinator at Ellis, and I would help come up with new ideas and blueprints for a student’s success. To plan the next 10-20 years in hope that students make it. Now that’s kind of what you’re doing today. You’re presented with a plan, a Bill, two Bills, and your decision is going to affect the next 10-20 years. Not just one life, but many lives. Students, Families, Educators and Schools.

I’m proud to say that I gave back. I hope one day, you can say, you did too.

Today, I’m here to take a stand and support Bill 551 and Bill 265. I support them because I know of the great changes they make. In our society, we need more of these great changes, and we need human beings like yourself to support them.

P.E.G. is giving us a chance to improve society, to improve the next generation, to give them the tools they need to succeed and build a better world. That’s the quality education that’s better than the par.

I’ve seen lives change for the better, and I know a big part of that involves what we are discussing here today.

P.E.G. has given students a reason to dream and jump higher. It has made learning more sophisticated, and changed the way young minds think. Sometimes thinking outside of the box is exactly what we need. The P.E.G. team is terrific. Constantly helping teachers and community schools thrive. A flow of learning gets passed on from one individual to another, and so on. Students form epiphanies on a daily basis. The lightbulbs turn on, and their engines keep on running.

I feel as though we are all here to help. At one point in your life, you probably were the one who needed help, and that's possibly why you sit where you are today.

If you ask students today, what do they know about Teamwork? Teamwork, Makes The Dream, Work. It's all about the dream.

If not now, then when? If not you, then who? Marcus Aurelius once said, "What we do now, echoes in eternity."

I hope to know, that our decision to be here, along with your most righteous decision, to continue helping us, families, students, teachers, the future. I hope that by what you all decide today, becomes the best domino effect, the best ripple effect, I hope today becomes one of the greatest ways, that we, echo in eternity.

Thank you very much for your time, and it's been an honor to be here in this building.



Monday, July 8, 2019

Dear Members of the Joint Committee on Education,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Tuesday, July 2. This document is a summary of my testimony and includes additional research as requested by Representative Alice Peisch.

Introduction

- Hello and thank you for your service on the early education committee. I'm here in support of H.551 and S.265 to promote and ensure high-quality pre-kindergarten education. I also encourage the members to support the reforms to Chapter 70 funding for public schools and the use of Chapter 70 funding, in combination with EEC funding, for preschool.
- My name is Erin Linville and I am the Chief of Strategy and Turnaround for Holyoke Public Schools.
- I have been in education for 10 years, the four most recent being in Holyoke.
- I am also a mother of three children - 8 years, 6 years, and 6 months. My two oldest children were fortunate enough to attend a high-quality preschool, which has greatly contributed to their ability to be ready for kindergarten and be successful in school.

My work in Holyoke Public Schools

- As you may know, Holyoke Public Schools is in receivership from the state due to years of chronic underperformance. Expansion of full-day preschool is a key component of our turnaround plan, which was written in 2015 and renewed for another three years in 2018. Research shows - and we see it in our own results - that students who attend preschool are more likely to be ready for the academic, social emotional and behavioral expectations of kindergarten and beyond.
- We have been fortunate that since before receivership, pre-k enrollment has nearly doubled. This includes students who are ages 3 and 4, although our expansion efforts have focused on students who are 4 years old in the Fall. In SY14-15 (the year prior to receivership), we served 288 students total - many of those were part-time, so we served the equivalent of 181 full-time students. In this past year, we served 407 students - some are part time, so it's the equivalent of 272 full-time students. We only serve about 50% of the eligible 4-year-old population, and many are served through half-day programs. We estimate that we need an additional 180 full-time slots to meet the demand to serve interested 4-year-old children and their families.
- The most significant contributor was funding for four PEG classrooms.
- We have also been able to expand through a foundation providing the year 1 funding for the expansion of our dual language preschool classroom and then we were able to get funding in future years through Chapter 70, since those students were recognized as HPS students.
- We were also able to leverage braided funding through the EEC (through our partner, Valley Opportunity Council) and a grant from DESE to provide funding for another full-day classroom this year. This classroom was particularly exciting for us because the students are officially HPS students but the classroom operated through a partner. This partnership wouldn't have been possible without the foundation of trust that was built through the PEG partnership.
- We would greatly like to expand preschool further - the demand from families and the need for high quality early education is high. However, with the expiration of the PEG funding and in the absence of other identified funding, we are concerned that we won't even be able to maintain the current number of classrooms, much less expand further.

The Holyoke Public Schools Experience with the Preschool Expansion Grant (PEG)

- The expansion of preschool, including the PEG classrooms, has had a tremendous impact across the City.
- We were thrilled last year the two PEG classrooms at Morgan and Sullivan, which are operated by Valley Opportunity Council, achieved the highest designation in MA for quality.
- Even more important than a rating though is that parents see this impact as well. Here are two quotes:
 - Ms. Henderson, parent of a Sullivan School student: “The VOC PEG program at Sullivan has made a tremendous difference in [my son’s] life. From his first day until now he has made remarkable progress.”
 - Ms. Alvarez, a mother of a Morgan School student: “The program does many activities that involve the parents and the children. I never had that in a classroom. It’s nice to be able to spend time in the class and do things with my daughter that I know she is learning.”
- The PEG classrooms also have an impact beyond the student served. The VOC-classrooms are open 10 hours a day and year round, so it allows parents and guardians to work, provide for their family, and contribute to the community outside of their household... while feeling confident that their children are in good hands.

Conclusion

- Please support the bills with a favorable report out of committee. Please support the reforms to Chapter 70 funding for public schools and the use of Chapter 70 funding, in combination with EEC funding, for preschool.
- Thanks for this opportunity to speak on behalf of our youngest learners and their families in Holyoke.

Impact

- Representative Alice Peisch requested additional information as to the impact of pre-school classes in our community.
- Research states the importance of Pre-K to help students:
 - Develop social emotional and academic readiness for Kindergarten (Center for Public Education’s Learning to Read: Reading to Learn, Michigan State University’s Kindergarten Readiness)
 - Be proficient readers by the end of 3rd grade (a critical year, when students move from learning to read to reading to learn) (Center for Public Education’s Learning to Read: Reading to Learn, Michigan State University’s Kindergarten Readiness)
 - Boston Public Schools research shows that students attending BPS preschool outperformed peers in Math in grade 5 and in ELA in grade 3
- We have also seen the impact of our full-day preschool programs on Holyoke students (see enclosure).
 - HPS and PEG full-day Pre-K students have stronger attendance (93%) than those who attend half-day preschool at HPS (88%).
 - HPS Pre-K students are nearly 2 more prepared for Kindergarten, based on the Kindergarten beginning of year assessment. Only 20% of students who were not enrolled in HPS preschool in SY17-18 were kindergarten ready compared to 37% of students who were enrolled in HPS preschool. We recognize that the majority of incoming kindergarteners are still not kindergarten ready, which further emphasizes the need for high quality early education options.
 - (Please see attachment for a visual representation of these two points.)
- I also encourage you to contact EEC for the full PEG evaluation.

Thank you for your support and advocacy.

Sincerely,



Erin Linville

Chief of Strategy and Turnaround

Enclosed: Impact of our full-day preschool programs on Holyoke students (graphs)



Good Afternoon, Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I am here in support of An Act relative to grants for high quality early education- House Bill #551 and An Act ensuring high quality pre-kindergarten education- Senate Bill #265

My Name is Jessica Merrill. I work for Square One in Springfield as the Lead Teacher/Director. I have a Bachelor's Degree in Education and majored in Special Education with over 19 years' experience in the Early Education Field.

PEG has made an impact on every teacher who has participated in the program. It has given each of us the opportunity to grow in our profession. I have gained knowledge by the vast professional development training I received during the last four years. I feel I am on the top of my game because of the resources and experiences I have been given through the PEG program.

PEG has given the opportunity for me to help both children and families in my classroom. The children that I interact with on a daily basis have received a strong foundation to start kindergarten and also a stability that they would not have had if they were not a part of a PEG classroom. PEG is not a babysitting service but a superior educational program.

My families have been supported by a Family Engagement Specialist. The Family Engagement Specialist offered trainings and different events to my families. These trainings helped the families gain insight on parenting and how to help their own families succeed. Some of my parents were able to rejoin the workforce and some of these parents were single mothers. This has given my families more financial stability. Giving my students a better start for their young lives.

Another wonderful opportunity PEG granted me was the ability to have a Mental Health Consultant be a part of my classroom team. She helped children who have had traumatic experiences and challenging behaviors. She gave us strategies to use with these children so they could succeed in our classroom. In my second year of PEG I had a very challenging child. He had a potty mouth and was very physical. Our Mental Health Consultant started working with both the child and our teaching team, providing us with behavior modification strategies. When we implemented these strategies, we started to see a difference in his behavior. At the end of the school year, he was a different child. He enjoyed being with us in the classroom. His huge smile would appear when he entered our room. In another program or classroom this child would have been expelled. PEG made it possible to not only to retain him but help him succeed.

PEG has impacted every part of my classroom. My teachers have more experience and feel valued. My children are more prepared both socially, emotionally, and academically for kindergarten. Our families have gained empowerment and now feel they can provide for their children. Early education is so important to young children and families. The first five years are where children learn and grow the most. In this preschool program my children come in as very young four year olds and leave with the ability to join the kindergarten class in public school.

Please support this bill and continue to support our Commonwealth children. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today.

JOINT COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION HEARING

In support of “An Act Relative to Grants for High Quality Early Education- House Bill #551” & “An Act Ensuring High-Quality Pre-Kindergarten Education- Senate Bill #265”

Tuesday, July 2, 2019

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. My name is Abisola Ogunseye, a parent of 4kids, the youngest of whom turned 5 on July 1. My family and I live in the city of Lowell. I am a member of Lowell Early Childhood Council and also a member of Lowell City wide Parent Leadership Group. I am an accountant by profession.

I am here in support of [An Act relative to grants for high quality early education – House bill #551](#) and [An Act ensuring high-quality pre-kindergarten education – Senate bill #265](#).

Enrolling Jemimah, the youngest of my kids in the full Day program in Lowell Public School was a saving grace for us and her educational background. In the past 2 years of her enrollment in a full day program, Jemimah acquired a lot of skills both in communication and social interaction. Through this program, Jemimah’s strength was discovered, accentuated and put to good use.

I got to know about the program after Jemimah’s doctor introduced me to the Play Group organized by the Lowell Public School. The coordinator introduced me to the early intervention program because we saw the need to improve my daughter’s social and communication skills, then she was accepted into the full day program which went up to age 4. But with the timely introduction of the *Preschool Expansion Grant (PEG), Jemimah would have had a break in her educational pathway.

You will agree with me that years 0-5 are crucial in getting a good foundation in the educational and social skills of a child. Jemimah demonstrated a lot of these skills because of the full day school she was privileged to be enrolled in. As a result of this opportunity we have no anxiety over her transition to Pre-K in September 2019.

Prior to the introduction of the full day program, we tried looking for schools where she could attend since we never wanted her to stop going to full day school, but the cost was not affordable. With my experience and the impact which the full day program has had on my daughter, I sincerely advocate for a full day/ year for children from age 3-5.

Every parent aspires and desires their children to have solid foundation for lifelong success as this will help in averting future social and educational problems. The cost of this program cannot be compared to the future benefits to the child, family and community. The opportunity granted to Jemimah provides a valuable support to us and the impact cannot be overemphasized.

Over the years I have seen an improved social skill in my daughter, as she engages better with other children and adults as well. She has rapidly acquired a lot of social and physical skills.

At this juncture as a parent, it will be my utmost joy to see the favorable consideration and eventual approval for high quality early education and pre-kindergarten education.

On this note, I appreciate the committee for giving me the golden opportunity to share my experience. Thank you!

Joint Committee on Education Hearing
In support of “An Act Relative to Grants for High Quality Early Education”
“An Act Ensuring High-Quality Pre-Kindergarten Education”
(H.551 / S.265)
Tuesday, July 2, 2019

Nicole Penney, Teacher, GLCAC

Good morning, thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I am here in support of House bill # 551 and Senate bill #265.

My name is Nicole Penney and currently I am a lead preschool teacher at Greater Lawrence Community Action Council in Lawrence Massachusetts. I have been teaching preschool for the past six years after obtaining a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education and Sociology.

For the past three years I have been teaching at GLCAC’s Lawrence early achievement program or LEAP. This school is just one of the PEG programs in Lawrence.

To ensure children are able to learn, our program offers breakfast, lunch and snack at no cost to parents. This program which is completely free to parents offers schooling for a full twelve months, not only to support children with their academic needs, but to help them in every aspect of their lives, We work on social skills, self-help skills, friendship skills, literacy, mathematics, as well as learning and understanding English.

When this school year started in August, my classroom of just ten children, six were Spanish speaking only, I am extremely proud to say that now all ten of my children can speak and understand English.

We also offer monthly engagement activities. At these events we provide child care and dinner so the children and parents can share a positive experience together. We don’t just support the children that we teach but we also support their families. We offer them support with mental health, finding housing, jobs, food, clothing, furniture and help them continuing their own education.

One of our success stories is a child from my class. He has been staying with his grandmother’s house with his mother, father and sister. We gave the family applications for new housing and they were finally were accepted into their own home. We also assisted helping them to furnish their home, from kitchen supplies, linens to even furniture.

The impact on my salary was a substantial increase, thirteen thousand dollars more than what I was making from my prior preschool teaching job. Higher salary means less turnover and higher quality teachers giving higher quality care.

I believe in ensuring high quality early education is first by letting children learn through play. When you have enriching materials throughout the classroom, from literacy, numbers and literature, a child can explore as they're learning.

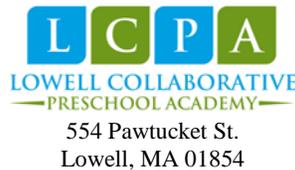
Teachers also receive support from staff, fellow educators, extensive training, support from public school and professional development. This extra support lets us collaborate and create a strong foundation and a great team of teachers to achieve these goals of high- quality education.

Finally what will happen when the PEG funding has ended?

For me this is a reality, our PEG program is dissolving. We unfortunately were unable to find additional funding to keep this program to continue. So regrettably for me I will have to leave the field of teaching preschool to find a salary that is comparable to what I currently make.

In addition fourteen other teachers and staff at our school will lose their jobs and will have to find other opportunities elsewhere. There are also sixty five potential children and families in our program that we will be unable to help annually in the future.

To the committee, I thank you for this opportunity and I ask you to support the bills on higher quality education.



Efrain Ponce

State House Speech

July 2, 2019

My name is Efrain Ponce and I am a master teacher at the Lowell Collaborative Preschool Academy in Lowell MA. I've been in the field of early education for 10 years. I have a Bachelors degree in Liberal Arts and early education was not my first career choice. I sort of fell into the field after I graduated college and was looking for a better job. Once I started my career in early education I feell in love with teaching.

The job that I do with my kids and families is important because I help lay the foundation for the children to grow and learn in a safe and caring environment. I also help my parents become advocates for their children. I often spend time providing parents with ideas for educational things they can do to encourage their child in efforts to extend the learning from school to home.

Assisting families in advocacy for their children also includes providing guidance as they transition to kindergarten. We have been able to support families on an individual basis through our parent teacher conferences and home visits, in choosing public school options that may be best for their child and family. The collaboration with the public schools, assists in the efforts as we are familiar with the process that all families go through in registering for kindergarten. This gives families a sense of alignment and helps with a smoother transition, because we all know that this is a giant step in their lives and it can be hard for everyone to adjust to.



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My experience with the PEG program has been a great one. The three teacher model we have in each of our classrooms, allows us to run educational small groups in the classroom, set up parent teacher conferences outside of the classroom, and implement curriculum effectively. In previous programs that I have worked in, our classrooms met the state regulations of 2 teachers to 20 children. PEG funding has allowed this possibility for the three teacher model of 3:20.

Our program also has coaches that help us grow as educators and family support specialists that work with our families and support them when needed. Before I worked under this grant I was a director for another program and I was underpaid for running a school. I decided to leave that program and start working for an insurance company but soon after I found that I was not happy with my new job and wanted to go back to the classroom. My old director reached out to me and convinced me to work for the PEG program. When I became the master teacher in a classroom my yearly pay increased significantly and I began to make more money as a teacher than I was making as a director. The PEG grant allowed me to do what I love and get a decent living salary for it.

Lastly, the PEG program has also helped several families in our community by providing a free, high quality early education program. The families are always so grateful for the work that we do in our classrooms and they have seen how much their children have grown and learned under our care. I hope that MA continues to invest in early education and care so we can continue to help families and children. Thank you for your time and this opportunity.

LOWELL PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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July 1, 2019

Chairwoman Alice Peisch
Joint Committee on Education
State House, Room 473
Boston, MA 02133

Chairman Jason Lewis
Joint Committee on Education
State House, Room 511-B
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Members of the Joint Committee on Education,

My name is Lisa Van Thiel and I am the Early Childhood Coordinator for Lowell Public Schools. Lowell was the LEA agency on one of the federally funded preschool expansion grants and is now a recipient of the new Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative Grant. We thank you for investing in the children of Lowell.

I have been in the field for over 35 years and worked as a center-based owner director, special educator, liaison at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Department of Early Education and Care, and as principal investigator on several federal grants at the University of Massachusetts Boston. I am also one of those educators that took many years to complete my degree. As a director, owning a small center-based program in Medfield, MA, I spent 8 years pursuing my Masters in Education Leadership, Policy, & Administration at Wheelock College and recently returned to school for a second Master's degree in Organizational Management at Endicott College.

During the 2018-19 school year Lowell provided preschool programming to 664 children and the LCPA provided programming to 135 children. The district currently has twelve full-day classroom serving 135 children with Autism, 21 half-day integrated preschool classrooms providing 42 sessions of preschool each week and two full- day preschool classrooms each serving 9 peer models and 6 children on IEP.

The district is only able to provide 24% of its students with access to a full-day programming. Thanks to the Commonwealth Community Partnership Initiative we will be able to provide 15 additional students with access to full-day program next year. Moving forward, legislators may

want to consider changes to Chapter 70 to permit school districts to fund a full-day of preschool. There is precedent for this as it took a legislative change to full-day kindergarten in 2016.

A mixed delivery system including the public schools and community programs is needed to serve all children. If our end goal is to close the opportunity and achievement gaps that exist in our urban communities, we must increase access to all families. In Lowell, we have a strong Early Childhood Council. The council's vision and mission: *promotes partnerships across agencies and organizations so that all Lowell's families and children thrive*". This mission was achieved through PEG funding but did not include all agencies or families, but provided our community with the opportunity to explore how strong partnership and high-quality early education can improve our community and change the lives of children and their families.

In Lowell, we are working as a council to explore a birth to 3rd grade framework. In my role as Early Childhood Coordinator, I oversee several grants including the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Grant – which provides families of young children 18 months to five years of age access to free playgroups and home visiting program called Parent Child + a national model for improving literacy in the home. The Inclusive Preschool Learning Environment Grant, Early Childhood Special Education Allocation, PEG, and CPPI. Each grant is a stone in the pathway to children's later school success.

The public school relies on our community partners to meet the needs of families. Many families need longer days or year round programs for their children. Through the PEG grant in partnership with Little Sprouts and Community Teamwork our community has provided children access to full-day year-round preschool over the last four years. A critical component for some children in accessing preschool has been the availability of transportation to and from school for families with no transportation.

Since PEG began, we have seen a reduction in the number of children entering kindergarten without prior preschool experience in our district. We estimate that roughly 33% of all incoming preschoolers in Lowell still come to kindergarten with no prior preschool experience. As part of our collaborative work through PEG and with DESE we are working on improving our data collection procedures in order to collect information on children's prior preschool experiences upon enrollment for kindergarten, we hope more SIMS fields related to early education will be added so that we have a centralized way of measuring our impact.

In Lowell the PEG program provides an additional 156 slots for preschool programming prior to kindergarten. Given the income guideline exceeds those of Head Start and Vouchers many families who might not have qualified in the past have been given access to quality early education for their child.

Our kindergarten teachers report there are noticeable difference among children entering kindergarten that have attended the PEG program. The fact that PEG classrooms have aligned their curriculum to Lowell Public School means that children enter kindergarten with shared experiences and opportunities.

In Lowell, many families cannot access preschool because it is a substantial drain on the family. "Without taxpayer support, Massachusetts families pay between \$12,000 and \$18,000 per child for preschool. And while low-income families receive subsidies through programs, such as Head Start, advocates argue it's not enough it is often carried on the back of underpaid early educators. For families that don't qualify, there's little support." (Sherman, 2018). In Lowell according to the census 22.4% of the community is living in poverty and pre capita income is \$23,768 with the median income in 2017, \$48,581. Not quite enough to afford housing and access to early education programming.

There is a need to expand access to preschool programming in our community and across the state. Families should have the choice regarding the length of the day and school year. Access to preschool is an equity issue. If we are serious about closing the achievement gap in our state, we need to increase access. Research has shown that access to preschool increases reading and mathematics scores in third grade. Researchers have identified skills predictive of later school success. All children deserve access to rich experiences that prime their brain for later learning, nurture their curiosity and foster a love of books and learning.

The Nation Center for Education Statistic reports, "In 2017, the percentage of 3-5 year olds enrolled in preschool programs was higher for children whose parents' highest level of education was a graduate or professional degree at 46% or a bachelor's degree 47% than children whose parents highest education level of education was an Associate's degree 36%, some college but not degree 34%, a high school credential 33% or less than a high school credential 26%. I have seen this with my own eyes. There is a difference between the preschool programs in Medfield and Lowell. The differences are due to funding. In Medfield families can and will pay for access to quality early education. In Lowell, many families are unable to afford both housing and access to early education leaving their only option for preschool in the luck of a low lottery number and getting universal access to a two and a half hour public preschool program. For many of our working families this is clearly not an option.

I have also seen firsthand how the PEG programs and classrooms have changed the learning trajectory of young children. Lowell Collaborative Preschool Academy provides high quality education and care daily, through a three-teacher model. This model ensures frequent adult child interactions and provides time for educators to plan and prepare materials. All classrooms have at least one educator with a Bachelor's degree who is paid on the public-school salary scale. Increasing access to books, conversations, and other learning materials as well as in house field trips builds background knowledge and language while exposing children to rich content in history, science, and mathematics. I can admit to at times being jealous of the

resources the PEG classrooms were afforded through federal funding. Additional supports to community programs were additionally funded that provide public schools with the capacity to provide additional comprehensive services such as onsite developmental and language screenings, access to mental health services, transportation, and speech and language pathologist to model language facilitation skills to educators by providing every other week visits classroom to provide small group instruction.

Initially, many members of our Early Childhood Council were upset that they were not included in PEG and for that reason were reaching out to our community programs and providers through the CPPI grant to include them as much as possible in programs and services that do not cost extra to expand our net. We however continue to dream of a day when we have the capacity and funds to include all center-based programs in Lowell in the CPPI grant so that all center based preschool classrooms can be staffed by an educator with a bachelor's degree. We believe in parent choice and want all families in Lowell to have access to preschool.

Both PEG and CPPI help families and the Lowell community place children on a pathway to school success. Access to full-day preschool improves the lives of children and their families by affording them the opportunity to seek employment. Most of all a full-day of preschool provides children with opportunities to gain the prerequisite social emotional, language, and cognitive skills to begin school ready to learn.

This year our full-day preschool was able to provide 26 children with IEP access to a full-day of preschool in the public school.

I ask the committee to support both An Act relative to grants for high quality early education – H-551 and An Act ensuring high quality pre-kindergarten education S. 265 to close the opportunity gap before it begins and to ensure high need communities can provide universal access to preschool for all children. Additionally, please support changes in legislation to support full-day funding for Chapter 70 in public schools were access to early education is equity issue.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Lisa Van Thiel', written over a circular stamp or mark.

Lisa Van Thiel