

Superintendent's District Advisory Panel for Exceptional Student Education
Early Childhood Subcommittee Meeting
Tuesday, February 25, 2025, 10:30 – 11:15 am

MINUTES

Attendees: Sabrena Bishop, Tiombe Bisa Kendrick Dunn, Dr. Josee Gregoire, Katie Hart, Laurie Malman, Julio Suarez, Delsey Yancoskie, Meaghan Chaplin, Victoria Quintanilla, Patricia Ortega, Lynn Miskiel

• **Welcome/Introductions:**

- The meeting was called to order at 10:33 a.m.
- Introductions

I. Review/Approval of Minutes and Agenda:

- Dr. Gregoire shared the meeting agenda and minutes. Ms. Malman made a motion to accept the minutes with corrections and agenda. Mr. Suarez seconded the motion to accept the minutes with corrections. Ms. Yancoskie seconded the motion to accept the agenda. The motion to accept the agenda and minutes was approved with corrections.

II. Committee Goals:

- Dr. Gregoire shared the committee goals with the team.
 - 1) Supporting Families
 - 2) Supporting Pre-K ESE Programs Awareness and Participation
 - 3) Expanding and Supporting Inclusive Opportunities

III. Review/Update Committee Goals:

- Dr. Gregoire asked questions or comments related to the committee goals. The Committee agreed to keep the goals as presented.

IV. Head Start/ Early Head Start Presentation by Patricia Ortega:

- Ms. Ortega introduced herself and her position with the Head Start and Early Head Start programs within her department. She gave a short overview of what Head Start and Early Head Start is and its connection with Pre-K ESE.
- Head Start is a federally funded early childhood education program designed to serve 3-4- year-old children, while Early Head Start focuses on infants and toddlers across six district locations. Both programs are funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and aim to provide comprehensive support to families, ensuring that children's medical needs are addressed as a priority, recognizing that health is foundational to meeting other developmental needs.

Head Start primarily serves children from families with incomes at or below the federal poverty level, which is currently set at \$32,000. Additionally, children experiencing homelessness and those in foster care are automatically eligible for the

program. Head Start operates within 29 elementary schools and partners with community organizations such as the Chapman Partnership in Miami and Homestead to extend its reach and resources. To further support families, case managers are on staff to help connect them to vital community resources. The program actively recruits children with disabilities when appropriate, ensuring they have opportunities to engage in general education environments alongside their peers.

Head Start employs a Standards-Based Learning approach, aligning with Florida's early learning developmental standards to prepare children for kindergarten by age five. The program also utilizes the Pyramid Model, which focuses on building a strong foundation for social-emotional development. This model emphasizes nurturing and responsive relationships, creating high-quality learning environments, teaching social-emotional skills, and using positive reinforcement strategies.

As an early intervention program, Head Start is required to screen children within 45 days of enrollment to identify potential developmental concerns. Federal regulations mandate that 10% of Head Start placements be allocated to children with disabilities. The program actively recruits within the community, seeking referrals from birth-to-two agencies and current students to meet this requirement. Currently, 5% of enrolled children are identified as having disabilities, determined through Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs). To ensure cohesive support, Head Start and Early Head Start collaborate closely with Pre-K Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs, sharing resources and maintaining a joint website for managing cases and referrals.

V. **Early Childhood Update:**

- Patty then presented information about the Department of Early Childhood Programs, which oversees a variety of initiatives designed to support young learners. These programs include Head Start (HS), Early Head Start (EHS), Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK), and the Pre-K Network. The Pre-K Network is a new initiative aimed at aligning the district's various early childhood programs to create a cohesive system of support. This network includes specialized programs such as learning labs, the teenage pregnancy program, and the COPE program, among others.

Currently, the VPK lottery is underway and will close on March 7. Parents will be notified about their selection status for their preferred school approximately a week after the lottery closes. A major change this year is the transition from a paper-based lottery system to an online platform, which aims to streamline the process and hopefully reduce the risk of losing potential applicants. It is essential to spread this information throughout the departments and the broader community to ensure maximum participation.

The accountability structure for VPK has seen significant changes in recent years. VPK is a state-funded voucher program, and its quality is assessed using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), a holistic observation tool. Observers from the Early Learning Coalition (ELC) conduct two-hour observations and rate classrooms on a scale of 1 to 7, with scores above 4 considered passing. As of January 30, no schools scored below a 4.0. Specifically, 13 schools scored between 4.0 and 4.9, 140 schools achieved scores between 5.0 and 5.9, and 14 schools scored 6.0 or higher.

In addition to CLASS observations, the Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST) using STAR Early Literacy is administered to monitor student progress. Teachers create progress monitoring plans for students who score below the 25th percentile. The second progress monitoring period (PM2) recently closed.

The state is also implementing a new VPK Performance Metric and Designation system that evaluates program quality based on three components: 50% from the CLASS composite score, 30% from student learning gains, and 20% from student achievement as measured by the FAST STAR Early Literacy assessment. Based on this system, schools can earn one of five designations: **Excellent** (61 points or higher), **Above Expectations** (46-60 points), **Meets Expectations** (28-45 points), **Below Expectations** (16-27 points), or **Unsatisfactory** (0-15 points).

- Dr. Gregoire mentioned inclusion classrooms are part of the early childhood department. Pre-K ESE and the Department of Early Childhood work collaboratively to ensure students are meeting expectations. Inclusion classrooms include half typically developing students and half children with disabilities.

VI. Pre-K ESE Update:

- Dr. Gregoire announced that Meaghan Chaplin has joined the Pre-K Exceptional Student Education (ESE) team as the new Instructional Supervisor, replacing Dr. Jovani Wilcox. In addition, Dr. Gregoire highlighted the start of the articulation process, which was initially communicated through a Weekly Briefing sent out in November. Last week, Dr. Gregoire attended articulation meetings across all three regions to ensure that teachers have the necessary resources to facilitate a smooth transition to kindergarten for students. The Pre-K ESE team has been actively supporting this process by providing valuable resources on Schoology, offering teacher training sessions, and sharing examples to guide educators through the process. The articulation process officially begins in March and will continue through May 30. During this period, some meetings are conducted by staffing specialists, while others are handled by local school site LEA (Local Education Agency) teams. Historically, approximately 800 students transition from Pre-K ESE programs to kindergarten each year, underscoring the importance of thorough planning and support to ensure a successful transition for all students.

VII. Community Agency Updates:

- Ms. Miskiel shared that the Special Olympics has been successfully launched at the Debbie School for age-appropriate children, and the program has been very well received.
- Ms. Yancoskie reported that the recent Family Fest was a great success and announced that the upcoming Family Resource Day will be held at the Hialeah Hub on March 8. She also mentioned that she would distribute the event flyer to share more details.
- Ms. Hart provided an update on open enrollment for summer programs specifically designed for students with challenging behaviors who are transitioning to kindergarten. Currently, there are 15 fully funded spots available at the Florida International University (FIU) location and an additional 45 funded spots at the Thena Crowder site. She also noted that her department hired a child psychologist a year ago

who is shared with the FIU College of Medicine. This psychologist, Dr. Carlos A. Salgado, has no waitlist and is covered by most commercial insurance plans. Dr. Salgado is known for his excellent bedside manner and his holistic approach to care, considering both the psychosocial and medicinal needs of the children.

- Dr. Gregoire recognized Sabrena Bishop for her outstanding efforts in organizing Special Olympics events for classrooms across the district. She expressed her enthusiasm for continuing a collaboration with both Mr. Thompson and Sabrena to further expand opportunities for students.

Q & A:

- There were no additional questions.

VIII. Next Meeting:

- Tuesday, April 22, 2025; Time 10:30 a.m.
- Dr. Gregoire asked all in favor to adjourn the meeting. The committee agreed to end, and the meeting was adjourned at 11:15 a.m.