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HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE

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House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE ROUNDTABLE

Topic: Pre-K Reimbursement Rates and Early Education

SPIN – Philadelphia, PA

January 17, 2020

AGENDA

10:00 a.m. Welcome and Opening Remarks

10:10 a.m. Discussion with Panelists:

- Tracey Campanini
Deputy Secretary, Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning
- Kathy McHale
President & CEO, SPIN
- Fred Wright
President, AFSCME Local 1739
- Ann O'Brien
CEO, Wonderspring
- Maddy Malis
President & CEO, Federation Early Learning Services
- Donna Cooper
Executive Director, Public Citizens for Children and Youth
- Tyrone Scott
Director of Government and External Affairs, First Up

11:30 a.m. Closing Remarks



1/17/2020 Public Roundtable with State Rep. Mike Driscoll & PA House Democratic Policy Committee on PreK Reimbursement Rates and Early Childhood Education

Testimony:

Good Morning Representative Driscoll, Chairman Sturla, legislators and concerned families and citizens. I am Kathleen McHale, the President and CEO of SPIN.

There are over 870,000 children under the age of six in Pennsylvania and approximately 70% of their mothers' work outside the home. Who cares for them and how has a profound impact on each child's and Pennsylvania's future. More than two decades of research has clearly concluded that experiences in the first five years of life shape us in profound ways and for the rest of our lives. Consistent caregiving interactions with loving, supportive adults is what builds a healthy brain. By age 5, a child's brain is 90% of an adult's. There is no way to make up for lost time if we fail to do the right thing in educating young children. With every dollar invested in early childhood saving \$13 to \$17 in future costs, it is an investment that can't be argued.

Yet, Pennsylvania has no comprehensive plan to calculate and understand the real cost and sufficiently invest in quality early childhood education. Despite notable and promising practices such as Pennsylvania's early childhood registered apprenticeship career pathway and a 10-year expansion in the number of children in PreK programs, The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California, Berkeley, noted Pennsylvania's policies and investment in early childhood care and education has "stalled". While standards for care and qualifications for staff have increased, payment rates, which were inadequate to begin with, have been virtually stagnant for years. Every day in Pennsylvania, quality early care and education is underfunded. The result is a serious threat to the viability of high quality programs and a workforce so severely underpaid for its qualifications and responsibilities to render a career in early childhood education as non-viable.

Even with important initiatives such as the state's PreK Counts and PHL PreK, the rates paid to providers, currently at \$8,750 per child, are less than half of what is needed to pay the state-required certified teachers a wage that is consistent with school districts and to pay teacher assistants a living wage. The result is a profession benchmarked by excessive turnover and teacher vacancies that threatens the well-being of young children, their families and the providers of these services.

Make no mistake – just about everyone cares about this issue - the Governor, the Mayor, legislators, business leaders, the military, families, educators, universities, the community. Yet,

A Life of Possibilities

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there remains no comprehensive plan to address the growing problem. It seems we don't pay attention until there is a direct threat of services going away; It is a silent crisis.

At SPIN, we are doing everything we can to invest in and pay our teachers and teacher assistants as well as possible, but with such low per child payment rates the result is that teachers and other necessary staff are very underpaid and we have growing deficits that threaten our program's viability. This year alone, in providing quality early education to 489 three to five-year olds, SPIN expects to incur a loss of over \$600,000. This is not sustainable.

Estimates are that paying early childhood professionals adequately would cost close to \$25,000 per child per year, about 3x the current rate. While it is understood we will not get all the funds we need right now, we must have a plan to invest in high quality early education by eliminating the payment gap, at least over the next 5-years. The current gap with no strategic plan is unjustifiable if we value the well-being of Pennsylvania's future – its children.

Imagine what Pennsylvania could be if every child got the right start as a little one. Pennsylvania's young children and their families deserve better.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kathleen McHale
January 14, 2020

A Life of Possibilities

Our Daughter and Son have both been privileged to attend SPIN in their Early Childhood Education Programs.

Our daughter Charley was class of 2018 and she is currently excelling in the 1st grade, she is reading above target and her math skills are amazing. I would love to take full credit for this but I would be a complete fraud, without the amazing teachers and curriculum at SPIN I know that this would not be possible.

Our son Carter is currently in his first year at SPIN his number and letter recognition for a 3 year old absolutely blows my mind (Once again I would love to take 100% responsibility but I am no fraud!) The teachers and staff at SPIN are the best in their fields and just like any other profession they deserve to be compensated accordingly.

I know of many instances where early childhood educators have left the profession that they love so dearly because they could not afford their own childcare costs. We all know that you do not get into education for the money but when you cannot afford to take care of your own family and do what you love something needs to change.

I know that if we looked long and hard we should be able to find the additional funding for these amazing individuals, there really isn't a price tag that we could put on this! What these educators provide is priceless!

Thank you for your time.



Courtney Nicholas

[Redacted contact information]

Good Morning,

My name is Michele Dwyer, and I am a Director of SPIN's Preschool Program. I have worked here for 20 years. All three of my sons attended SPIN, and these amazing teachers set the foundation for my sons by providing them with a high quality early education. My youngest son, Kane, at the age of three, came home from preschool one day "educating" his parents and older brothers all about the concept of buoyancy. My three-year-old son was not only counting and saying his ABC's, but now knew grade school concepts. Who taught and laid down the foundation of science, among all other developmental areas of learning, to my three-year-old son? I can tell you who. His preschool teacher, Miss Jill, as well as all of his preschool teachers. Unfortunately, Miss Jill had to leave the job she loved and was great at.

In this profession, management is getting used to losing astounding Early Childhood Educators because they cannot afford to live on this pay rate and support their own families. I watch our assistant teachers struggle with only making minimum wage. They are not able to survive on their own, with or without government assistance, and often have no choice but to live with family members to survive. We lose many teachers to the School District because the pay rate is much higher. I ask you why investment in public school are valued while early educators who hold the same degrees and do the same work, are not. Let us also remember that preschools are required to have a lower staff-child ratio, which increases cost. This means that we not only receive less money per child but it is divided between a larger number of staff.

This lack of funding causes a chain reaction. The high teacher turnover rate creates many struggles for providers and the families we support.

Hiring new teachers is a yearly undertaking and we often begin the school year not fully staffed. Other struggles include, but are not limited to

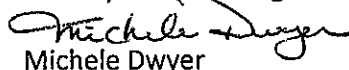
- juggling coverage to maintain appropriate teacher/child ratios when staff call out and no qualified subs are available
- hardship for the children in our care when they have to transition to a new teacher as their familiar trusted teacher moves on, which can cause any number of setbacks (comfortable, nurturing relationships at this age are everything)
- Family members concerned about mid-year changes in staff after months of building a relationship with a caregiver and educator

I would also like to add that most funders also require that teacher and assistant substitutes hold equivalent degrees. Please tell me – how can we be expected find qualified substitutes if we are struggling to staff our regular classrooms?

Eventually, families have to leave preschool when their child is kindergarten age, and let me tell you, they always ask, "Why? Why can't they stay another year? Or, why don't you have a kindergarten?" The families trust us; we are their "FIRST" school experience. We wow them. We set the educational foundation for their children both developmentally and socially, and they value our Early Educators, in a way that should be reflected in our funding!

Investing in early childhood educators is investing in not only the children we serve, but also our society, our economy, and our country!

Thank you for coming out and listening to us today!

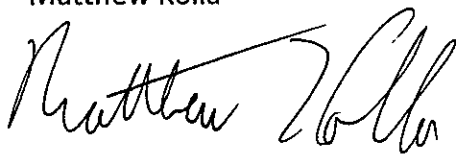

Michele Dwyer



Hello, my name is Matt Kolla and I am currently an Assisting Director with SPIN Pre-K. I am the parent of 3 children currently benefiting from SPIN's early childhood programs. I have also spent 8 years in the classroom as a Teacher Assistant and a Head Start Teacher and I can speak directly to the daily hardships facing those who chose early education as a career. Professionals in this field spend the same amount of time earning an education degree as an elementary school teacher. They spend the same amount of effort achieving certification as a middle school teacher. They pay the same amount of college tuition as those teaching in school district unions. They incur the same amount of debt through student loans. Early educators are required to write the same lesson plans, individualize objectives for the same students, and track the same outcomes. These teachers have to manage the same behaviors and meet with the same parents. They are constantly assessing the children in their class as well as evaluating their own performance. At this age, the expectations around safety and supervision are even greater than those in a grade school setting. And what do these professionals get for the hard work of building caring relationships and creating a positive learning environment? Pre-K Teachers in this city get half the pay of an equally qualified school district teacher, the discrepancy is even greater in the surrounding counties, and Teacher Assistants get the Philadelphia minimum wage if they are lucky. Most in this field receive no health benefits.

In a school week, my own children spend more waking hours at school than they do at home with me and my wife. I trust the quality of care at these centers and I trust these WOMEN. And let's not kid ourselves, women are the vast majority of these workers and this is a reason why this profession is not valued or funded appropriately. The trust and confidence our community has in our early educators cannot be calculated in dollars but I do know it is worth more than the minimum wage! People choose this career because they love kids and they want to make a difference but they leave this profession because they need to make tough decisions for their own families. I am sick of seeing the men and women, those that care for our children every day as if they were their own, not be able to provide for their own families. This cannot continue.

Matthew Kolla



1/17/20



Veronica Acevedo

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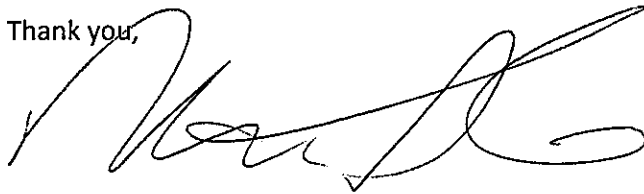
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To Whom it may concern,

My name is Veronica and I consider myself as both a parent and a teacher at SPIN. I have three children that attended preschool which helped them transition easier to kindergarten. The teachers at the preschool worked hard every day to teach each child how to write their names, identify letters and numbers and also explore more through using hand on activities. Throughout time, I realized many staff left to find higher paying jobs, leaving children coming into a new year with a new teacher.

As teachers we work towards getting a degree or CDA which qualifies us as teachers, teachers at other schools with the same degree receive higher pay than preschool teachers, we as hard and have the same requirements, so why are they receiving higher pay. Today I am a teacher and working towards my bachelors majoring Early Childhood Education and I believe I deserve to get paid more.

Thank you,

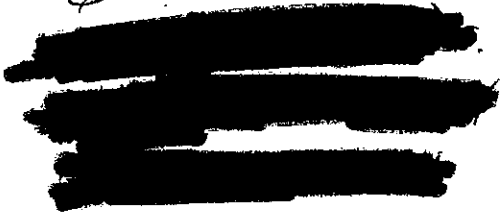
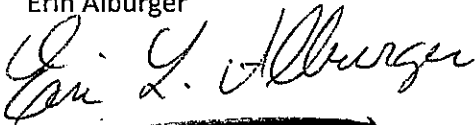
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Veronica Acevedo', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Veronica Acevedo

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this letter on behalf of the wonderful teachers and administrators of SPIN. My second child is currently in her second year of pre-K at SPIN. My daughter has blossomed socially as well as academically. I know this is a direct result of the high quality education she receives there. Her teachers are experienced, highly qualified and go above and beyond to treat each child with individual care, while still adhering to a comprehensive lesson plan that combines learning with play. I drop her off each morning confident she is in very capable hands, in a clean and mentally stimulating environment. I know not all parents are so lucky, as these programs aren't available everywhere, and I don't take that for granted. Early childhood education is imperative to success in elementary school and beyond. My son, who also attended the program for 2 years, is currently excelling in 2nd grade. I know it is because of the amazing education and preparation he received at Spin. These teachers give it their all, every day, and deserve not only our recognition and appreciation but the stability and compensation they earn with each lesson, each parent conference, each mealtime, each art project, each story, each growing mind.

Erin Alburger



To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to express my concerns regarding the future of Early Childhood Education. I have had the pleasure of being an Early Childhood Teacher for over twenty five years in Philadelphia. I have taught in typical pre – school classrooms along with early intervention. I am currently an Autistic Support Teacher at Special People In The Northeast.

Early Childhood Programs are vital in today's world. They set the foundation for all learning to occur. Children not only learn pre academic skills but how to be successful members of our society. Turn taking, interacting with peers, working as a team, and expressing emotions appropriately, are skills needed to be successful in school, work, and the community. I have had the opportunity to teach a kindergarten class in an inner city neighborhood in Philadelphia. The children who were the most successful in the classroom were children who came from a head start/pre K counts program. They were far more prepared for kindergarten than their peers who did not complete a pre - kindergarten program.

Early childhood teachers will often jokingly state, “we are not in it for the money”. We truly love our jobs! We have the opportunity to shape the development of young minds every day. I must say though in my twenty five years of teaching, there has been little change in the recognition of early childhood education as being important. Early childhood educators continue to demonstrate the significance of our program. We are asking for appropriate funding for our programs and staff salaries. It is frustrating knowing I have a bachelor's degree in my field and my salary does not reflect that of a professional.

Let this be the year that Early Childhood Education receives the overdue recognition and credit it deserves!


Michele Crandley





Good morning everyone first I want to say is thank you to the
staff I sit at spin Perwood Park. You are a
big help to us with our children to achieve
Kumburgarten

more preschools like spin out here
from separate in the state of WA
open preschool staff and teachers
Just to teach our children keep
in better way for our children to
open like spin and to keep staff

Erin O'Leary