



SB 103: A Comprehensive P-3 Approach to School Turnaround

Thank you Mr. Chair. My name is Bill Jaeger and I am the Vice President of Early Childhood Initiatives at the Colorado Children's Campaign. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 103.

Of the 2.5 million students who dropped out of high school in 2015, 1.6 million were firmly set on that trajectory when they were just 8 years old.¹ What did those 8-year-old students have in common? They received the lowest reading scores on their third-grade literacy exams. A student's ability to meet grade-level expectations in third grade plays a significant role in the likelihood of them graduating high school. A third-grade student who reads proficiently is four times more likely to graduate from high school than a third grader reading below grade level.

Developmental science has long identified the years from birth through age 8 (the age at which most children are in third grade) as a critical period during which children's educational pathways are set. Brain science tells us that it becomes more difficult—not to mention more expensive—to close gaps in populations of older children. Based on this science, as well as economic cost-benefit arguments, Preschool through 3rd grade (or “P-3”) approaches provide a compelling argument: If children are given a stronger start earlier in life, they will be more successful in grades 4-12 and beyond.

By the time they reach kindergarten, children from less-resourced backgrounds are often already more than a year behind their more affluent peers. And kids who start out behind in kindergarten have a very hard time catching up as they grow up. By the time they start preschool, children from less-resourced backgrounds have heard around 30 million fewer words than other children their age.²

In short, development during the preschool through third-grade years sets the tone for children's later educational and lifelong success. If we are serious about improving child outcomes and turning around schools with low performance, we must focus on children's experiences PreK through 8 years old.

But under our current accountability structure, the schools with the most disadvantaged students face accountability pressures that create incentives to assign stronger teachers to the upper grades and are driving a distribution of effective teachers away from the early years when they can have some of the greatest impact. ESSA provided states with significant new opportunities to address

¹ “Population 16 to 24 years old and number of 16- to 24-year-old high school dropouts (status dropouts), by sex and race/ethnicity:

1970 through 2014,” National Center for Education Statistics, 2014.

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_219.71.asp?current=yes (accessed August 30, 2016). Donald J. Hernandez, *Double Jeopardy*, (Baltimore, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012),

<http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECFDoubleJeopardy-2012-Full.pdf> (accessed August 30, 2016).

² <https://www.naeyc.org/tyc/article/the-word-gap>, Fernald, A., V.A. Marchman, & A. Weisleder. 2013. “SES Differences in Language Processing Skill and Vocabulary Are Evident at 18 Months.” *Developmental Science* 16 (2): 234–48.

low performance in schools and reverse that trend. Specific provisions create a window to allow greater flexibility for local schools and districts to direct attention to the early school years.

Specifically, from USDOE Guidance:

“A State is required to use its Statewide accountability system to identify schools for comprehensive or targeted support and improvement, and to notify each LEA of any school served by the LEA that is identified as such. LEAs with schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement must complete, in partnership with stakeholders, including principals and other school leaders, teachers, and parents (which may include early childhood educators and experts), a needs assessment for the school. They must also develop and implement a comprehensive support and improvement plan to improve student outcomes in the school. The plan must include one or more evidence-based interventions, such as, in the case of an elementary school, increasing access to high-quality preschool as part of its turnaround strategy (ESEA section 1111(d)(1)(B)).”³

One of our highest leverage and most evidence-based approaches to supporting young children’s academic achievement is high quality early learning experiences. There are a number of key features to this approach which include, but are not limited to: ^{4,5}

- 1) Establishing or expanding a high-quality preschool program
- 2) Establishing or expanding a high-quality full-day kindergarten program
- 3) Providing educators, including preschool teachers, with time for joint planning across grades to facilitate effective teaching and learning and positive teacher-student interactions
- 4) Supporting effective teachers with a deep understanding of child development
- 5) Implementing developmentally appropriate and aligned instructional tools (standards, curriculum and assessments)
- 6) Establishing positive, safe learning environments (culturally inclusive, promote relationships, and structured to support diverse learners, low staff-child ratio and small class sizes)
- 7) Using data to identify and implement an instructional program that is research-based, developmentally appropriate, and vertically aligned from one grade to the next as well as aligned with state early learning and development standards and state academic standards
- 8) Ensuring robust family engagement (prioritizing it, promoting two-way communication, and cultivating shared decision making)
- 9) Supporting continuity and early childhood program to Kindergarten transitions (access and continuity of services, PreK-3 pathway with smooth transitions)

³ <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essaelguidance10202016.pdf>

⁴ American Academy of Pediatrics. (2005). “Quality Early Education and Child Care from Birth to Kindergarten.” Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care. *Pediatrics*, 115(1), 187-191. <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/115/1/187.full#T1>; Yoshikawa, H. et al. (2013). “Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education.” Foundation for Child Development. <http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/Evidence%20Base%20on%20Preschool%20Education%20FINAL.pdf>. Fiene, Richard. (2002). “13 Indicators of Quality Child Care: Research Update.” Washington, DC: Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/ccquality-ind02>; Ounce of Prevention Fund. (n.d.). “Characteristics of Quality Early Learning Environments.” <http://www.ounceofprevention.org/news/characteristics-of-quality-early-learning.php>.

⁵ <http://ceelo.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/TurnaroundCaseStudies01-22-15.pdf>

10) Ensuring administration, especially principal leaders, understand early childhood and elementary development (leader effectiveness).

These types of robust early learning programs have been shown to produce positive effects on children's cognitive skills, behavior, and social and emotional outcomes.⁶

- Senate Bill 103 takes advantage of the flexibility in the recent federal legislation, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to give local districts greater options in addressing low performing elementary schools.
- The problem this bill addresses is that Colorado's statutes are highly prescriptive regarding what schools in our state's lowest performing categories (Priority Improvement and Turnaround) can do to improve performance. The challenge is that we have, in statute, not supported the ability of schools and districts to focus on the early elementary years as a turnaround approach, *even if their local needs assessment and the research indicates this is what would make the greatest impact for children in these schools*. We know that for many schools, focusing on the P-3 years would be among the most strategic ways to turnaround a low performing elementary school and this bill creates an opportunity (not a mandate) for this approach to be pursued.
- In short, this bill is about adding additional, research-based options for improving low elementary school performance for struggling schools and districts. As amended by L.001 and L.002, it does not loosen accountability for chronic low performance, does not deal with what happens at the end of the "accountability clock," does not mandate that the "P-3 Turnaround Approach" described in the bill be pursued by a school or district (rather, it just adds it as an option), and, ultimately, respects local decisions about how best to elementary school performance.
- Ultimately, creates the added flexibility at the local level to invest turnaround resources into strategies that we know work.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and we encourage you to support SB 17-103, as amended. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

⁶ SEDL. (2004). "Readiness: School, Family, and Community Connections." National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools. <http://www.sedl.org/connections/research-syntheses.html>.