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Kindergarten as a Sturdy Bridge: Transforming the Kindergarten Year

Wednesday, June 14, 2023 | 3:00 – 4:30 PM ET
Transcript

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to today's webinar, Kindergarten as a Sturdy Bridge: Transforming the Kindergarten Year. We're happy to have you with us, and on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education, I'd like to welcome you. We have over 500 people registered for this webinar, and we expect to have more folks join us shortly. This webinar is part of our Lessons from the Field Webinar Series, which highlights the effective tools, techniques, and strategies being used by our everyday practitioners to address the hot topics that are on the top of educators' minds. You can access the recorded webinars of the series at the webpage, which is now being posted in the chat.

In today's webinar, we'll be sharing information that will ensure kindergarten year meets the developmental needs of our young people, and prepares them to successfully transition into the elementary education years. As always, if you have additional strategies that are working in your community, please reach out to the Best Practices Clearinghouse email address, which is now being shared in the chat. Our work is always better when we can share the benefits and the strategies that we're using that are effective in our communities. Please note that the content of this presentation does not necessarily represent policies or perspectives of the U.S. Department of Education, nor does it imply endorsement.

My name is Cindy Carraway-Wilson, and I'm a training specialist at the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments or NCSSLE. NCSSLE is funded by the Office of Safe and Supportive Schools at the U.S. Department of Education in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. To learn a little bit more about NCSSLE, we encourage you to visit our website to access a wide range of resources that address school climate and conditions for learning. To

give you a sense of what the website looks like, and the content it contains, we share an image here on the right-hand side of our homepage, and on the left, some popular products. You can also share the latest...

We also shared the latest resources and events coming out of the field via our social media, so please do follow us. Please note that this webinar is being recorded. All materials that you see today, including the slides, all referenced resources, and the recording of the webinar will be available on the event webpage within this website. In fact, some items such as the slides and speaker bios have already been posted to the site. Please also note, as I mentioned earlier, you can access previous lessons from the Field's sessions by visiting the series webpage, which is also listed here and posted into the chat.

Now, I'd like to briefly review the agenda for today. Once we finish with the logistics and welcome, we will be moving into the welcome from the Department of Education. From there, we'll move into our first panel on aligning instruction from pre-K through third grade. This panel will be moderated by Dr. Brenda Calderon, and we will have four practitioners in this panel. Then we will shift to the second panel. The moderator for that panel will be Dr. Shantel Meeks, and we will have three practitioners in this panel discussing how science of child development can shift the classroom practices to better meet the diverse needs of all students.

After the formal closing remarks, we will spend approximately 15 minutes responding to your questions in the live Q&A, so please, don't forget to click that Q&A icon, and add your questions. Now, it's my pleasure to introduce Ms. Swati Adarkar, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Early Learning in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education. Ms. Adarkar.

Swati Adarkar:

Thank you so much, Cindy. I'm delighted to be part of today's webinar, and so pleased that you all could join us. Over the last year, the department has developed a kindergarten center preschool through third grade agenda that includes encouraging school districts to use their Title 1 funds to expand access to high quality preschool. This agenda supports accelerated learning and a comprehensive and well-rounded education as part of the department's Raise the Bar initiative that was launched this past January. Today's webinar will shine the spotlight on the kindergarten year and how kindergarten can serve as a sturdy bridge between the early years and early grades.

We have a terrific group of panelists and two wonderful moderators who will help us to lift up effective strategies and lessons learned from coast to coast to understand how we can better meet the developmental needs of diverse young learners, support instructional alignment, and effective transitions to ensure early school success. Why are we focusing on kindergarten? Kindergarten is often the first at scale early learning opportunity for providing the supports and interventions needed to assure on-track development for our most vulnerable populations of students.

Children arrive to kindergarten from a diverse array of settings and experiences, given our mixed delivery approach to birth to five services. Children might be home with a parent or in a childcare center, Head Start program, or a state-based preschool. These settings are voluntary, parent choice, vary in quality and are not resourced at scale. Moreover, children enter kindergarten with a wide range of developmental strengths and needs, learning differences, developmental delays and disabilities. We also know that children can arrive with undetected and undiagnosed physical and behavioral health challenges.

This past school year, even when we returned to in-person instruction, we were seeing very high chronic absence rates in kindergarten, which was indeed troubling, because the kindergarten year is a time to build and nurture those important adult relationships which are essential to ongoing family engagement and routines such as everyday attendance. Kindergarten is a key inflection point for early learning, early school success and equity. The gap at the end of the kindergarten year can be substantial, and it persists into and through elementary school. This means that kindergarten is predictive of which children will experience early school success.

Kindergarten is an important foundational step on the learning journey that should afford every student multiple pathways for high school graduation and career success down the road. By focusing on the critical touchpoints in a student's educational journey, including the transition into kindergarten and the transition into first grade, and ensuring that the kindergarten year provides a strong foundation lays the path for early school success. We're so looking forward to hearing from our two panels today. Our first panel is moderated by my colleague at the department, Dr. Brenda Calderon, who will discuss the importance of instructional alignment, effective transitions, and developmentally-informed practice in the kindergarten year with our panelists from New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Oregon.

Our second panel will be moderated by Dr. Shantel Meek from the Children's Equity Project, and we'll engage our panelists on how we can better meet the unique individual developmental needs of young learners, including children with delays, learning differences and disabilities along with our English language learners. The panel will also consider how we can scale these practices and efforts to reach more children. We have folks from Arizona, Nevada, Georgia, and California. A big thank you to our panelists and moderators for what I am sure will be a very rich and lively conversation.

Now, back to you, Cindy, to begin the session. Thank you.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Thank you so much for those comments. I greatly appreciate the highlight that you put on to the kindergarten year. It's such an important year. It's now my pleasure to welcome the speakers for our first panel. As Ms. Adarkar said, the panel will be moderated by Dr. Brenda Calderon, who is the senior advisor in the office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education. Joining her in the panel will be Ms. Annie Corley-Hand, who is the

principal of Mary Kay McMillan Early Childcare Childhood Center in Berkeley Heights Public School in New Jersey, Mr. Jason Sachs, who's the executive director of the early childhood section of Boston Public School in Massachusetts, Ms. Michelle Pless-Joseph, who is the early childhood program developer at Boston Public Schools in Massachusetts, and Mr. Todd Hamilton, the superintendent of Springfield public schools in Oregon.

On this slide, you can see a little bit about the folks who will be speaking, and you can see here that we have them listed by district and urbanicity so that you have a better understanding of the types of schools and districts that our speakers are representing. Now, without further ado, I'd like to transition to Dr. Calderon to go ahead and begin our panel.

Brenda Calderon: Wonderful. Thank you so much, Cindy. It's super exciting to be with you all today to talk a little bit about the importance of kindergarten and those kindergarten transitions. Here at the U.S. Department of Education, we are committed to raising the bar for education, and that starts with our littlest learners. So, we're really excited for this wonderful panel from across the country of folks that are innovating around the space of kindergarten, and that this panel is going to give us a better chance to understand what's meant by aligned instruction from preschool to third grade, and why it's important to reduce educational inequities, and lay the path for early school success.

Some of the panelists here will talk about building a sturdy bridge between the early years and early grades with a particular spotlight on kindergarten, and that transitions into kindergarten and into first grade. So, we're going to start with Annie here who's joining us. Annie, is your camera on? There we go. Hi, Annie.

Annie Corley-Hand: Hi.

Brenda Calderon: Annie, so New Jersey committed to reducing educational inequities starting through the creation of the Abbott districts in 1999 that mandated high quality preschool in the lowest income school districts through a famous court case Abbott v. Burke. Can you share with us why it has been and still is critical to build on the foundation of preschool into the early grades, and some of the implications and strategies for kindergarten specifically?

Annie Corley-Hand: Sure. So, we know that kindergarten serves as a bridge between preschool and the early grades and formal schooling. So by building on that foundation that's established in preschool, we can experience a smooth transition for kids. One of the most important things, I think, is the idea that preschool lays the groundwork for social emotional development of children, while kindergarten provides an opportunity to further nurture these skills, and promote those positive relationships with peers and teachers. So when we think of strategies that we want to employ, things like cooperative learning activities, fostering a supportive classroom environment, and promoting social interactions that can enhance children's social and emotional growth in kindergarten, we know that

we're seeing lots of behaviors as we've come out of COVID with our youngest learners.

I know certainly, it's persistent throughout the grades, but the social and emotional development is such a huge piece for us, and making sure that we're building upon those preschool experiences. We know that preschool fosters early literacy, numeracy, and cognitive skills, and kindergarten can build upon these skills by introducing more structured and formalized instructions such as developmentally appropriate curriculum, individualized instruction, and hands-on learning. That often goes away when they enter the big schools, the elementary schools. We have to think about children entering our programs. As Swati said, children come in with a great deal of variety of skillsets, and we have to...

In preschool, we're always observing and looking to understand the unique needs of each child. We need to carry that forward with us into kindergarten, and help teachers to individualize instruction and support based on students' strengths, their interests, and various in need of growth. So, another big piece that we see disappearing in kindergarten and primary classrooms is an emphasis on play-based learning, where we can foster creativity and problem solving skills and social interactions. I know we've had people come to observe in our school, come see a preschool class or a kindergarten class, and have actually said things like, "I'll come back when they're not... when they're doing something other than play," so educating everyone about that.

So, always having hands-on materials available, and integrating play into academic activities to support that developmentally appropriate and engaging environment. They always say, "If we did what we do in preschool in all of our grades, we'd have much more enthusiastic and engaged learners."

Brenda Calderon: Absolutely. How fun is that?

Annie Corley-Hand: I'm sorry?

Brenda Calderon: No, I just say how fun would that be?

Annie Corley-Hand: Oh, I know. So project-based learning, all of those things that we can be incorporating, so we want to move that forward. New Jersey, in addition to their preschool initiative, they have a very big P3 initiative going on right now too. Then the transition, we know that it's a significant milestone for children to enter from preschool into kindergarten, and it's crucial to make sure that we have transition practices in place, orientation sessions, collaborative meetings between preschool and kindergarten educators, welcoming parents whether they have concerns or just want to discuss their child before they enter our programs. All of those things can facilitate a smooth transition for children.

Brenda Calderon: Great. Thanks so much, Annie. Can you actually just share a little bit more about what are the essential elements to support a child's development-informed practice?

Annie Corley-Hand: I think from an instructional standpoint, we really need to look at alignment, and consider how well our teaching practices are meeting the learning needs of children. We need to establish goals about what students should know and be able to do, and then coordinate all those other programs and policies to line up with those goals. Are we looking at children's individual skills? How well does that instruction match children's learning needs? How do we best support teachers and learning opportunities that match individual children's skills? Something as simple when we look at child enter in kindergarten, you can have a child that turned five on September 30th.

I mean, we have a cutoff in most New Jersey districts, so October 1st, and then we can have a child that is turning six October 2nd. So, it's important to look at chronological age and expectations, and that's where that developmental continuum is so important. So, we need to make sure that teachers and staff are well versed in what expectations and the child development continuum looks like. Research supports that the concept that more gains in literacy and math skills are achieved when instruction is aligned to individual children's needs rather than taught in a large class setting. We say we have to be ready for students.

Students don't have to be ready for our kindergarten, because it can't be something that's predefined. It has to be something where we can scaffold children's learning, and make sure we are addressing their needs. We've moved at our school to a station-based approach to almost all content area instruction, moving the needle each year to decrease that whole group large group instruction where we know kids don't thrive, and then data-informed decision making. We really have to look at data, and determine what kids' needs are, and target those specific skills. So, I think there are some of the key elements that are necessary to make them successful.

Brenda Calderon: Thanks, Annie. I love that. We need to be ready for students. Now, let's turn to Boston, which has been doing a lot of this work, primarily focused on a single district transformation. So, Jason, turning it over to you, can you tell us from a data perspective why it's so critical to build on a foundation of high quality preschool into the early grades and into kindergarten specifically?

Jason Sachs: So, when I was hired in 2005, basically it was to think about implementing a universal preschool for four-year-olds across the city. It started in the public schools, but quickly moved to expansion in the community-based programs as well. What we found was that we could make a scaled preschool program that was high quality, and that it would have a pretty strong effect on student outcomes going into kindergarten. So basically, if a child experienced preschool that was using our curriculum, had our coaching, and the teacher got the same starting salary as the Boston Public Schools and or in the public schools, and

they used the curriculum with 70% fidelity, and I'll get to that in a minute, you would see a six-month gain compared to students who did not have that experience.

That was roughly in effect size of 0.5. Then you would see that in both vocabulary and in the Woodcock Johnson applied math skills. Then we saw smaller findings, but significant and some substantial findings on executive functioning and self-regulation. So okay, preschool makes a difference, but then what we quickly saw was that we would lose about a half of those gains each year a child was in school. So, sitting in my department sits within the public schools, and so I had a fair amount of time doing NAYC accreditation work in schools, which allowed us to see kindergarten classrooms. It wasn't surprising that we saw some of these losses. So, it wasn't the boost in pre-K that was fading, that it was repeat teaching and not really strong developmentally appropriate instructional practices.

So, what we decided to do was write a kindergarten curriculum, and then later a first and second grade curriculum. They are based on the district standards, the state standards. They're also based on developmentally appropriate practice, a lot of science reading, culturally sustaining practices, and UDL, which is Universal Design for Learning. So, it's really thinking about students with disabilities. So, we took all of those things, and have spent the last 12 years creating our own curriculum. It's called focus. So, then we went because of my research background basically with our partners from University of Michigan, Chris Weiland, and Megan McCormick from DRC, and Catherine Snow from Harvard and others.

There's been many who worked on this, basically did a longitudinal study to look at, "Well, if you have a high quality, a high fidelity experience of a curriculum doesn't make a difference in child outcomes." So, what you are looking at in the first slide basically is blue is the blue slide shows you that not everybody is high quality. Not everybody does quality and or adherence in fidelity. So, that's the first truth about this is that quality across the district is hard to sustain. But when you do get it... So in this slide, you're looking at about maybe 55% are of high quality pre-K, K and first grade.

Then the rest, you can see it's 35%, 40% are mixed fidelity, and then about 25%-ish are lower, meaning the child did not have an experience that was aligned. Then once you get that, you begin to see that when you have a high fidelity experience, both in math and in literacy, students do better. So, alignment matters in student incomes and in the students we care most about. So, the next slide which you go to really starts looking at the difference in race. When we often talk about the achievement gap, it's black and Latin students do well, and white students do well, and never do the lines meet, meaning the slopes stay about the same, and so the gap exists.

What we're seeing here is that in this slide, overall when you do have aligned experience on vocabulary, you can see that you can actually close the slope so

that black and Latin students are catching up to white, and actually in our world Asian students as well, they start catching up, and so that this does indeed have an impact when you have that aligned experience. Then the next slide just breaks it out so that you can see the slopes do close for math, but it's a little bit harder. Then the other one was literacy, and then the last slide, which I think there's a last slide... No. No, I guess this is for math. So, the first one was literacy. The second was for math.

But basically, it's just showing you that an aligned experience makes a difference for math and literacy, but alignment is not an easy thing. So, by creating a fidelity where we're actually measuring teacher's quality, both adherence to the curriculum, which has these instructional practices, which Michelle's going to talk about, and also the adherence and quality, you can begin to make changes classroom by classroom, and measure it. Then look at its outcomes, and actually make a difference. So, that's the big punchline to this. I'll leave it to Michelle, and then we can get deeper into the curriculum.

Brenda Calderon: Thank you so much for sharing that, Jason. Building off of that, Michelle, can you tell us what kind of professional development supports are needed for early grade teachers and particularly those that have been most effective for kindergarten teachers?

Michelle Pless-Joseph: Thank you, and thank you, Jason, for setting me up for the curriculum, because that is so important. That is one of the professional developments that we feel is important that all teachers know the curriculum, and when they know it, they can find ways to adjust it to meet the needs of their students. So, we offer that to all of our teachers. We also think that it's important that teachers have professional development around social emotional learning. As previous speakers have said that coming out of the pandemic, we've seen some challenges with behavior, and we want our teachers to be able to meet the needs of those students.

So when we have professional development in that area, student teachers are able to find ways to support children, build community in their classroom. When children are seen and heard, they're able to grow and learn. So, that's a little bit of some of the professional development that we offer our teachers.

Brenda Calderon: Great. Thanks so much, Michelle. We'll touch a little bit more on that later. Todd, I'm going to turn it over to you, and introduce a superintendent's perspective into this conversation. We know how important the transitions are for all students, but particularly for our youngest learners, can you please tell me a little bit more about the kindergarten and transition program in Oregon that has been around now for almost two decades?

Todd Hamilton: It's my pleasure to talk about the kids in transition to school program that was developed by a group of researchers out of the Oregon Social Learning Center. This is an evidence-based school readiness intervention. We heard Swati and Annie talk a little bit earlier about the nature students coming into kindergarten

classroom, and that diverse array of preparation. Kits is really intended to target students who haven't had any formal educational experiences prior to kindergarten. So, they created a program that's 24 sessions long, and the sessions start before school begins, and then continue into the school year.

What the sessions do is they focus on priming these entry kindergartners with early literacy skills, early numeracy skills, thinking in terms of students that have had no formal experience. Self-regulation is something that we need to explicitly teach. So, they have experiences to learn about sitting still and raising their hands. They learn social skills, cooperating with others, recognizing the emotions of other students and peers in their classrooms. So, this program really targets students who don't have those prior experiences, giving them those experiences so that when school starts, it's a familiarity that other students who have preschool experiences already have. So, we're starting to level the playing field for students as they're coming in, and it really happens in the school.

So, we've made intentional efforts for the KITS programs to operate within our elementary schools and as much as possible in the kindergarten classrooms. So, the kids have an early experience to come in, see what school is like, see what it's like to be with other students, have those positive adult experiences, and really set the stage for them to be successful before school starts, as school starts, and continue to support them in into the school year.

Brenda Calderon:

Thanks, Todd. Can you share a little bit about how that supports early school success in Springfield?

Todd Hamilton:

Yeah, so because this program has been happening for a great amount of time in our county and in our school district, we've really had a chance to see how the approach that emphasizes prevention and redirection strategies has allowed us to really also promote positive cooperative classroom behaviors. It has given us a chance to see students experience what embedded practice of academic and social emotional skills looks like for them to be successful. We have data in our system to show that once school begins, and students who are involved in these programs, the positive behavior support strategies allow them to be successful as they transition into school.

It gives them individualized problem solving skills that, again, allow them to successfully interact with other students, navigate the school, interact with adults, and it again sets them up for that future success. So, it starts to take the disarray of preparation, and minimize the impact that that has had because we're giving the students the skills that they need to be successful early on, setting that groundwork for success as they're coming into kindergarten, embedding social emotional skills for them to be successful all throughout their educational career.

Brenda Calderon:

That sounds wonderful. Taking a systems approach to early school success, I'm going to try to just change the conversation a little bit around supporting

alignment or the role of leadership in supporting alignment and continuity. Annie, from your standpoint, what is the role of the principal in supporting alignment from preschool until the early grade?

Annie Corley-Hand: We know that greater alignment between preschool, kindergarten and the primary grades can result in decreasing that achievement gap. So as a principal, it's my responsibility to provide the necessary leadership structures and resources to create this educational ecosystem so that kids can seamlessly move through school. I think some of the... We're tasked with fusing practices that are academically rigorous as well as developmentally appropriate. So, we need to make sure that we are well-versed in what child development the continuum looks like, expectations look like when we need to create these school structures and policies that optimize children's learning.

So, one of the things that we did find with the preschool expansion in New Jersey was that we were finding that people were being assigned these roles as running these preschool centers when they didn't necessarily have the experience. So, one of the things as a principal and as an early childhood educator, for me, it's not just educating myself and staying informed. It's about educating those people that are not necessarily as versed in what early childhood programming should look like. So, we don't have administrators doing observations and saying things like, "I'll come back when they're not playing."

Brenda Calderon: Exactly. Thanks, Annie. Todd, from your standpoint as a superintendent, what do you feel is the role of that leadership in supporting this alignment and continuity?

Todd Hamilton: So, this is a great question because superintendents are in a fantastic position to set if needed, and support the vision of supporting every student every day. Really recognizing that birth to K is one transition time that is a key building block for all of the future transitions in our schools really helps us be successful in our system. The superintendent is positioned to support that alignment not only within the system, but the superintendent in many cases is often in the best position to seek and align with community-based organizations. So in our area, we work closely with other school districts in our county.

We work with our regional childhood hub, which is led by our local United Way. We work with our university partners. We work with our social service agencies, and we work with other community-based partners to support students and families through this early transition, which allows us to set the stage for those future transitions as well. Kit is a great example of supporting the transition to school and setting students on the path to future success. As a superintendent, I get to be in that position to network with others outside of our organization, and bring those resources within the organization.

Brenda Calderon: That sounds wonderful, this community approach to alignment. Jason, bringing in now the district office role, can you share a little bit about how you work to support alignment and continuity?

Jason Sachs:

Sure. I think it's important that we sit in the Office of Academics, so we are connected with all the instruction that happens for math, science literacy. That has not always been an easy partnership, but over time, we have been able to really work with and collaborate. We also, because we're in academics, can work with the Office of Special Education and the Multilingual Language Office. So, being in central office allows us to begin to align our efforts throughout the district. Again, Boston is a challenge, because it's an autonomous school district, meaning each school chooses its own curriculum. So, it's taken a while to get to a place where people have bought into our curriculum.

We also go straight to teachers. We have a structure which allows us to do a kindergarten conference, which means that we get to stand in front of all the kindergarten and pre-K teachers, and we've invited the community-based teachers as well so that going directly to teachers and designing our curriculum with and for them and then revising it and for them has been a tremendous partnership in getting us to a place where we push each other's practice, and we learn a lot. Then structurally, I also have had the pleasure and honor to have a direct line to the mayor's office and also to the superintendent. So, that has elevated early childhood status so that you can't just ignore it.

Generally, my feeling at schools is they're usually high school heavy with leaders, and so early childhood is not often a place that they know a lot about. So, they either just completely ignore it or try and do it in a way that that doesn't necessarily work for our youngest learners. Also, when we first got the job, principals were taking teachers that were some of the weaker teachers, because it was the furthest place away from this testing scores, and so enlightening them that this is actually a really important year, and then beginning to articulate the importance of this. Then the other thing I would say is that generally, special education classrooms in Boston, I'm sure not anywhere else, they often get the worst classrooms, and are often just looking for space to do some of this work.

So, there's a lot of opportunity to really think through special education, inclusion, and really thinking about curriculum development, and so at NAYC, the process of early childhood accreditation has been a method for us to go into a school and really develop a three-year relationship with that school. Michelle also has done NAYC accreditation work, so just building systems and relationships with schools, and being in it for the long haul in partnership with teachers has really made a difference, but it's been a bumpy but now smoother road. I don't know, Michelle, if you want to add anything to that.

Michelle Pless-Joseph:

I think we have another question coming up, but I would like to add something real quick, because I didn't get a chance to share some of the work that's done to help with that alignment. It's the professional development that I work along with the other coaches in our department to support teachers. So, I just want to name quickly some things, because I think this is important just for people to know that we offer multiple opportunities to support teachers with curriculum, having professional development at the beginning of the year, and also having it

before each unit throughout the year, having face-to-face formats, interactive webinars, office hours, so teachers can come together and share best practices, and ask questions of colleagues and coaches.

Having a weekly email that goes out to all kindergarten teachers, and there's staff members that support them, letting them know about a variety of opportunities coming up, and also offering one-to-one coaching of new teachers or other teachers who need support going into classrooms, modeling, side-by-side teaching and video coaching when we can't get into the classroom. So, I just wanted to share that, because I think it's important to know how to support teachers so we can get this work done.

Brenda Calderon: Thanks, Michelle. I think we were talking about supporting teachers and the importance of community partnerships. I think one key stakeholder here, especially with our littlest learners, is families, engaging families and caregivers. Michelle, since we have you here, can you share a little bit about your work with parents, families, and caregivers to support students' developmental needs and their growth?

Michelle Pless-Joseph: Yes. So, Jason has explained that we have a curriculum called FOCUS, and along with that curriculum, we have a component called Home Links and Home Links are... The Home Links component is aligned with the curriculum, so families will be aware of what children are doing in classrooms, ways to support them at home with that. So, it's not totally something that's separate. It's not busy work. It's completely aligned with what they're doing in the classroom. As a district, we also have another opportunity for families called Parent University, where families are supported around how to support their child with a variety of skill-based things, social emotional supports, all of those. So, having that as a district is important for families.

Again, back to our department, we have a program called Countdown to Kindergarten, which just helps families across the entire city on how to navigate the Boston Public School system, which is very large, but also how to support them in that transitioning into kindergarten. So, those are just some of the ways that we support families with their children.

Brenda Calderon: Thanks, Michelle. I'm actually just going to open this question up to Annie and Todd as well if you'd like to provide a perspective of how this is working in your communities.

Annie Corley-Hand: At the school level, we have parents coming from a variety of preschool programs. We have a preschool program, but many children go to other providers, and they enter, and it's such a shift in what the expectations are. We're a public school. Nobody gets in the front door. It's a very different environment, so we try to manipulate that kind of situation, and have teachers outside greeting kids and parents so that they feel like they have that connection, because so much of it is about building relationships with families. So, we share resources with families like you all do in a number of ways.

We have weekly messages. We have PTO meetings where I use as an opportunity to perhaps do a little learning for them, having realistic expectations, not worrying about what basket they're in, and talking about the developmental expectations for kids. I shared a link with Cindy about the New Jersey division of Early Childhood website, and they have created a K3 resource packet that you will have the link to support those homeschool partnerships, and it provides a wide range of topics to extend student learning beyond the classroom. So, we use those materials as a jumping point for a conversation with families. We offer parent workshops.

Unfortunately, they're not always very well attended, but most importantly, we have parents involved in classroom activities. I think when parents are in and seeing what it's really like in those classrooms, they come in for library, art, whatever it might look like. I think it helps build... Certainly, relationships would build an understanding of what's actually happening in classrooms. So when they're coming in, and they're seeing centers in kindergarten, and they see the learning that's going on, it helps to push our agenda forward when it comes to those things. So, we really do try to involve parents.

We have a care to share program that provides opportunities for families to come in, and they can share a skill, teach kids how to do something, share a talent, and a cultural like a tradition, because we do have a diverse community, and we want kids to learn about each other. So, a lot of those things we try to do to build relationships between families.

Brenda Calderon: Thank you. Todd.

Todd Hamilton: So with the KITS program, it really reinforces what Michelle and Annie just shared about the importance of making the connection with caregivers. So, when a parent agrees for their child to be in the KITS program, they also agree to participate in the workshop for caregivers, and so there's a two-hour workshop each week. Those workshops include time to focus on how parents can support early literacy and numeracy skills at home, help prepare students for the transition to school by establishing those routines at schools. I mean, when we're thinking about students that are coming in without preparation, a lot of times, they're coming from families where it's maybe their first child.

So, they're learning these skills with us as their child comes into the system, and so we also focus on how to initiate those communications with schools. Annie talked about building those relationships. We want to empower parents to feel comfortable initiating those communications with schools, and so we practice scenarios with the parents and the caregivers to make sure that they're successful. Then we also share with them positive behaviors and how to reinforce those behaviors at home. Because when we see issues with students at schools, oftentimes, parents are having those issues at home, and we want to make sure that students are getting similar experiences at school, at home.

So, by embedding this within the KITS program, we're setting the students up to be successful at school, for the students to be successful at home, and for the parents to be successful with their students as they interact with them at home, and then help them transition to school.

Brenda Calderon: That's wonderful, Todd. I think it really speaks to the value of parent partnership and welcoming the voices of families into the decision-making process in education. So, I'm... It's time for us to transition to the next panels. I just want to just give my deepest gratitude to our expert panelists here who've been able to bring in their perspectives from working across all over the country. Back to you, Cindy.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Excellent. Thank you so much. I want to add my gratitude. That was some wonderful information. It's now my pleasure to introduce the next panel that's going to be focusing on transforming the kindergarten year through meeting the developmental needs of diverse learners, and that's science-based approach. Moderating this panel will be Dr. Shantel Meek, professor of practice, founding director of children equity project at the Arizona State University in Arizona. The panelists joining her will be Ms. Connie Hall, a kindergarten teacher of Diedrichsen Elementary School in Nevada, and also the Nevada Teacher of the Year, Ms. Ryan, or excuse me, Dr. Ryan Lee-James, the chief academic officer at Atlanta Speech School, director of Rollins Center for Language Literacy, and its Cox Campus in Georgia, and Miss Amy Boles, the assistant superintendent at the Oak Grove School District, and the Sobrato Early Academic Language or SEAL program in California.

Dr. Meek. Oh, pardon me, we also have the chart here for these speakers as well so that you can see their affiliation of school or district and also their urbanicity. We have two suburban school districts and one urban school district in this panel. Dr. Meek.

Shantel Meek: Thank you, Cindy. Happy to be here with you and with everybody, and moderating such a great panel. I have to say that I'm here taking professional and personal notes as my firstborn is heading into kindergarten this fall. So, I'm thinking of her and I'm thinking of all of the learners that we think about at the Children's Equity Project, and listening to my smart colleagues here, and moderating the panel. This next panel is going to allow us to understand how kindergarten classroom practices can shift informed by the science of child development, and grounded by equity to better meet the development of kids who arrive at kindergarten, especially those who have been historically marginalized.

We're going to be focusing specifically on kids with disabilities and delays and emerging bilingual kids who speak a language other than English or in addition to English at home. I'm going to go ahead and start with Connie. Congratulations on being a Nevada Teacher of the Year.

Connie Hall: Thank you.

Shantel Meek:

Huge honor there. I understand you've been a teacher working with kids across a wide range of ages from birth through the early grades. We understand that Nevada has a new state policy supporting developmentally-appropriate practices in kindergarten. How does that policy influence your classroom practices, and why is the kindergarten year so important?

Connie Hall:

Oh, thank you for that. It's an honor to be here. The kindergarten year is so important, and when I started out in the late '80s with my undergrad, and I wanted to go into early childhood, I saw, even though I didn't have an opportunity to go to kindergarten, and I was in a small little house in a prairie school, but I just saw the importance and the need of kindergarten. So, I started working, and I've gone from nursery up until third grade working with kids, but what I started seeing were the different states. I started off teaching in Philadelphia and Exton, Pennsylvania.

I was starting to see that some of the ages, the kids could come in younger and younger for kindergarten. That was disturbing me because having that early childhood background, understanding how kids developed, I decided in good conscious, I can't not do this to kids knowing how they need to. Everything was getting more structured. They were taking the play out of kindergarten. So, I actually in around '95, I stepped away from kindergarten. I started teaching in other grades, and it hurt my heart because I loved kindergarten. In the 2020, '21 school year, our school went to distance learning. The principal said, "Connie, you're good in technology. I need you to do DL for K1."

I was like, "Okay, that's interesting," but I made it work, and I found ways to make it work. I started seeing, "Okay, I love kindergarten." Then I started getting emails from the Department of Education about we're going to developmental practices, and we're having a special cohort, and kindergarten, we can have play again. I was like, "Wait, what is going on?" I signed up for the first cohort, and they had the expert, Dr. Eva Phillips. She's out of South Carolina, and she did a session with us with kindergarten teachers statewide in Nevada.

It was so amazing connecting with other teachers, hearing that the play during the developmental practices that kids can learn during structured play and all of this. I was like, "Okay, this is really good." Immediately after seeing the direction the Nevada Department of Education was going with early childhood, I got on the phone to my principal, and I said, "Next year, I want to come back to kindergarten. I love the way our state is going." Sorry. I said, "I love the way the direction that our state is going, and I want to be a part of this since I'm a lover of kindergarten. I want to be..."

Excuse me, this is our last day of school, and they're announcing, but that has just been a joy scene that our state has gotten on board supporting teachers in kindergarten and early childhood across the state.

Shantel Meek:

That's so exciting. I'm going to private chat you if you have room in your classroom for next year. Not too far. Ryan, I'm going to move to you. We know

that the Rollins Center and Atlanta Speech School does a lot to support kids with disabilities and across a wide range of abilities. How do you explain the importance of the kindergarten year for kids with developmental delays, disabilities, or learning differences, and how is kindergarten critical for the long-term success of these kiddos?

Ryan Lee-James:

Thank you. Thank you for that question, and thank you for facilitating this. I'm delighted to be here, as you said with our intelligent colleagues because I've been over here scrambling, writing down notes, all this good information. So, I'll just start by saying I'm a speech language pathologist by original training with expertise in early language development, literacy or reading disabilities and language disorders. So, I very much approach this work from a clinical lens, but also from a lens that is really grounded in the importance of oral language development in all its relationships to executive functioning, later literacy skills and other academic skills.

So when I think about the importance of the kindergarten year and how it really sets kids up for long-term success, in an earlier meeting, where I was on a panel with Swati, she referred to kindergarten as a universal access point. Though every state does not require children to go to kindergarten, or every family does not choose kindergarten for their children, we do know that an overwhelming majority of children in our country attend public kindergarten. So, just when we think about that from a data and statistics standpoint, we can see the major opportunity that we have to influence the long-term trajectory of all kids or majority of kids in our country.

So, we think about kindergarten as a universal entry point and really being, in many instances, children's first opportunity to what we consider a formal learning environment. As one of my colleagues said earlier, it's not just an opportunity to show kids or help kids along with how to do school in terms of following rules, and being respectful of your neighbor. We don't hit. We don't bite, those kinds of things. It's also an opportunity to instill the joy of learning in students, because that should be an ultimate goal of learning. So yes, we want kids to achieve fourth grade reading, but we want them to experience joy, creativity, and pursue learning for personal satisfaction, not just for tests.

Excuse me, and so kindergarten is an opportunity and time for us to do that. Also, I think about from my position as a speech language pathologist, knowing the importance of oral language communication, and how academic skills really stem from having those early abilities, kindergarten is a time for us to investigate progress monitor. Usually, like now, for example, many states are passing literacy legislation, dyslexia legislation, screening legislation that requires us in many states to be screening children when they enter kindergarten several times a year. That's critical, because it provides an opportunity in the domains of oral language, emergent literacy, vocabulary, all of those critical components to understand where children are.

I think, and I know others will talk more about children who speak English as a second language or come to school having a first language other than English. Of course, in our country, majority of our schools are teaching in English. I think also for children who are non-standard dialects speakers, children who come with different home literacy experience, it's an opportunity to understand, especially in that first semester. Who is struggling, struggling because of a difference, and who is really struggling because of a neurobiological difference or developmental delay? So, really in the first semester of kindergarten, if we have all the proper infrastructure in place, we are really able to identify with a whole lot of specificity who is going to need long-term...

Who might need long-term support, and who needs early intervention right away? I'm sure I'm getting close to my time on this question, but I just want to end by saying something important that as we think about children with differences that are coming to school, whether it be a linguistic difference or developmental difference, it's important to know that those two things can coexist, so often... I know we're going to talk about professional development later, but often, as a professional, I'm asked, "Well, do you think this child is presenting with a language disorder, or is this their first language difference?" I'm often telling practitioners that it's not either or. Sometimes it's either or, and sometimes it's both.

So from an equity standpoint, kindergarten is really, in many instances, a first opportunity for us to get that right, and recognize that it's not either or for many children. That binary thinking has led to some children being excluded from receiving early intervention that they need, because we say, "Oh, it's a language difference," or, "Oh, they didn't have early rich literacy experiences at home." We know that, again, as one of my colleagues said, school families and kids don't get ready for us, we get ready for them. Kids come with exactly what they need.

Shantel Meek:

Thank you so much. I want to underscore so many of the things that you said, and you got a lot of emojis as you were speaking, and particularly about child joy, about that being a priority for all of us, not just because that's going to lead to greater learning, but because kids deserve to be happy as we all do in what we're doing. So, I love that and everything you said. I think it was a really good bridge actually to my next question, thinking about emerging bilingual students. Amy, we know that kids can learn and comprehend as many languages as they're exposed to before they can even speak.

So, SEAL, Sobrato Early Academic Language, supports young learners from preschool through third grade in several districts in California. Can you tell us how it benefits kids who are emerging bilingual children, and children who are classified as English learners?

Amy Boles:

Yes, absolutely. Thank you, Dr. Meek, and thank you, everyone. It's such an honor to be here today in such esteemed company, and welcome the opportunity to speak to our experience around supporting emerging bilinguals

in Oak Grove School District out here in San Jose, California. I think first and foremost, to your question, anytime we're talking about practices that benefit students, it's important to have intentionality around mindset and the foundation about what we're doing. I think SEAL does that in the sense that it is deeply rooted in educational equity for students who are emerging bilinguals. Language is recognized. Home language is recognized as assets.

I think just to what some of our colleagues spoke to, it's about affirming what students come in with, and the practices in SEAL, and one of the pillars that they have in creating and affirming a rich environment really just lends that foundation to all of the practices that I'm excited to talk about. In my experience as an emerging bilingual in schools, it was really this mindset about leave my home language at the door. I really didn't have opportunities to speak Korean in the classroom other than just curiosities maybe on a high level, but SEAL really doesn't do that.

I think it's changing the narrative about really honoring and affirming, like I said, the assets that are emerging bilinguals are coming in the door with. Now on top of that, language or that foundation and those pillars. Then we have practices that really focused through SEAL strategies on pedagogy that supports rich and powerful and precise academic language. So, when we build upon the assets of what students bring, we also then add to that these precise and academic learning strategy practices. So, units in SEAL are not watered down. It's not like what we may have used to have seen in past decades for emerging bilinguals, where you water down language. You water down the content. You water down what is given to students.

It's really about raising that up. Academic vocabulary is rigorous, and it is precise. We have kindergartners using vocabulary, and talking about collision force, atmospheric rivers, adaptation, oviparous. I'm walking through a classroom, and we're seeing students in the pond unit using this impermeable skin. The language is precise, and we acknowledge that they can do that, so we lift the bar in these units so that they can do that. It's inclusionary. I think as colleagues have talked about, it's really centered in joy. I think when all students, but especially emerging bilinguals, experience learning through joyful practices, engaging with peers in that dramatic play, they got their microscopes out, and their magnifying glasses, and they're pretending they're in the pond.

That's what really raises that experience for students, because when they're engaged that way, then they're learning more. Even our research shows California, actually, I think in 2019, 2020, EdSource shared that long-term English learner rate. So, the state of California, we're 46%. Here in Oak Grove, we are almost half of that at 24%. So, not only do we see it in practice in the classrooms, but we see that in our data as well.

Shantel Meek:

Thank you so much, Amy. It's an area of huge interest for the Children's Equity Project and for me personally with my emerging kindergarten also being an emerging bilingual kindergartner. So I'm going to go back to Connie. What kinds

of supports and tools do, you think would be most beneficial for kindergarten teachers to meet the unique needs of every child entering into kindergarten?

Connie Hall:

First of all, I think for the fact that my state is on board, and they're focusing on our early learners, and they have their developmentally appropriate practice policy statement that's out there. The others, we have a early childhood advisory council. They have a think tank, a kindergarten think tank. That has just been key, because when I started out back in the day, kindergarten was just, "Oh, you're just playing," and they didn't take teachers seriously of what they were doing. So, those are supports, having that support at the state level, having that support at the district level and then even in the schools. That's one of the important things.

I am fortunate now to have an administrator that taught kindergarten. He taught kindergarten. He's taught first grade. He's taught all the grades. So having that understanding and now that the state is coming in with the programs that they're doing to support that, I have a support system. So when I'm bringing things in, he not only has a knowledge base because he taught the grade level, but he's supportive and not as some admin that are telling people to take out your dramatic play center, take out the sand tables, and doing those things, and just putting the students down with pencil and paper. That is something that's very important.

Last week, I was literally jumping up and down in my classroom. I got the words that our governor had signed the new bill that our kindergartners should be age five by August 1st starting. That was one of my things because... Somebody mentioned, "I put a post on my social media about that, and they're like, "Well, does it make a difference, and kids are starting later." I said... Sometimes I said, "In starting with this over 30 years ago, that time period can make a difference for some of the kids, and they can be stronger learners." I have literally sat and cried over my four-year-olds, because I'm just thinking if the parents just waited another year, if they just gave them that time to grow and develop, what a difference that it would make.

I said, "We want... We say we want to keep our kids younger, but then we're rushing them to grow up, and to get in kindergarten really quick." Then I just see the detriment of that, but having that has just been one of the excited things I'm looking forward to next year about having those kids. At least when they're starting with me, they're going to be five. If it's a younger five, but it's five, and it's been... I've seen the difference over the years. People ask, but I've seen the difference. The other support is the smaller class sizes. I think that is something helpful, because I worked in the learning centers, and I've had pre-K.

You have smaller class sizes. You have an aide to be in there to support you. When I worked with the toddlers, and I worked with others, you have an aide. Then all of a sudden, you're bridging the kids into the elementary setting, and then you're stuck with... You're placed in a classroom with large numbers. You get no aide. You get no support. People are like, "Oh, well, Mrs. Hall, well, you

have an aide." I was like, "Where are they?" I'm like, because I see myself doing all of those different things with my octopus arms across the classroom. That is another support with that as well.

So getting with the age, the class sizes, getting our administrators on board as a teacher right there with the kids each day, that is a big help.

Shantel Meek:

I love that. I love all those structural variables that you brought up. We have to set the conditions for teachers to be able to do what they know and love, and be successful at doing that, making sure that those conditions are right. So, running a little bit behind, but I'm going to go back to Ryan. We know that truly inclusive classrooms allow all kids to thrive and learn. What have been the most effective professional development supports to ensure inclusive kindergarten classes in your perspective?

Ryan Lee-James:

Thank you for that question. I think for... When I think of inclusive classrooms, I think of classrooms that are equitable and that all children are getting what they need. So, we've talked a little bit about children who come to school, and their first language is not English, or have less familiarity with academic English. We also know... I think the CDC producer report maybe a few years ago that said developmental disabilities, the prevalence had significantly increased, and so we know that children are coming to school with various levels of ability and different knowledge, and agree with my colleagues who have already said that in many ways, those differences are assets.

We need to leverage those assets to be able to help students get the information that we need for them to learn in order to be successful. We know that kindergarten really puts kids on the track for that. So, I would say in terms of professional development, I think one thing that I have seen be really successful as a speech language pathologist is interprofessional education and interprofessional practice. I think sometimes in the school setting, we actually don't have time to realize that as much as we would hope. There is not a lot of Inservice time where we can hear from occupational therapists in our district or physical therapists in our district, or speech language pathologists to really understand how to support all children in a general education setting.

At our school, for example, the Atlanta Speech School, we have a really integrated model and approach, and we have SLPs, and OT is serving an audiologist right alongside the general classroom teacher in a real interprofessional practice model. But obviously, that is not the norm everywhere. What we see from that is that the general education teacher is learning skills from the speech language pathologist, for example, on how to support a child who's struggling with language and therefore struggling with executive function. So, how can the general ed teacher provide more support to that child who is struggling to regulate themselves in the classroom? So, that interprofessional practice and education is really an opportunity for us to learn from one another in terms of how to best support all students.

Another opportunity that, I think, is really good that can be realized through rigorous professional development is supporting our general education teachers around becoming more diagnostic in their approach to all children. Not that our teachers would become clinicians, so to speak, but there is a level of diagnostics that's involved in serving students. So, I think more professional development centered on helping understand how early risk indicators overlap between different populations or folks or children from different backgrounds. I saw the question in the chat, and I know we'll get to it around how to identify children young.

It's not always about identification in terms of eligibility for an IEP, but a more prescriptive intervention or learning plan for that child depending on where they enter school, so I think opportunities for interprofessional practice as well as helping teachers. The more I learn about teacher prep programs, the more I understand that there are so many differences between what we're learning in speech path programs, early childhood programs in our preparation. So, I think the piece around being diagnostic is very critical.

Shantel Meek:

Thanks so much, Ryan. I think y'all's answered really complimented each other from the structural down to the professional development pieces. So, I'm going to turn to Amy for the last question. One of Secretary Cardona's key priorities in the Department's Raise the Bar initiative is really viewing and realizing the fact that multilingualism is a superpower. How do we make this vision a reality for all emerging bilingual kids? How do we scale SEAL and dual language approaches for every emergent bilingual child in this country?

Amy Boles:

I think that's a great question, Dr. Meek. I think, again, as I mentioned with the first question, it's really about the intentionality around the mindset and around training our staff from classroom teachers to administrators, so anybody who supports students and families around the fact that second language learning or emerging bilinguals, they do have superpowers. It is a gift that they bring into the classroom, and not this deficit model, or the fact that it has to be the zero-sum game, right? That if they're learning English as a proficiency or becoming proficient in English, that they have to give up their home language and their connection to family and all of those things that are such rich and deep and beautiful things that students bring into the classroom.

So, I think it starts with that mindset work, some of the inside-out work addressing implicit bias around multilingual learners. In Oak Grove especially, we have over 50 languages that are spoken in our district, and so realizing that that is in addition to then this trajectory of bilingualism, but it's not a swamping out of. So, I think the mindset work, the equity work, the courageous conversations to be had when we're hearing deficit language around emerging bilinguals is key. I think also the community support, school board support around these efforts is also huge.

We are very fortunate in Oak Grove to have a board that recognizes the beauty of bilingual and multilingualism with passing board resolutions, giving space for

different pathways, whether it be in sheltered English immersion classrooms, or we still honor home languages or dual language classrooms where they're learning a second language alongside native Spanish speakers or in the target language.

So, I think that it is... Then additionally just increased funding at the state level for pathway programs to get more credentialed teachers in bilingual education, and just continuing the efforts in classrooms in higher education and universities, and preparing teachers for that mindset before they even come into the classroom. So, I think it's a collaborative effort both inside and outside the classroom as well as in the community and at the state level.

Shantel Meek: Thank you so much, Amy. I think with that, we're wrapping up the second panel. Thank you so much to all of our panelists. I'm going to hand it back to Cindy now.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Again, thank you all. I'll add my gratitude to that. Dr. Meek, thank you so much for moderating that so well with great information. Now, I'd like to welcome back Dr. Calderon who will talk to us a little bit about some of the funding opportunities that are available to support the work.

Brenda Calderon: Thanks so much, Cindy. I have the honor to work in our office of elementary and secondary education within the Department of Education. We are very fortunate to be able to compete millions and millions of dollars each year on a range of programs. This, year we're really excited to share that our full service community schools program not only opened applications last week, but also includes an invitational priority around kindergarten as a sturdy bridge. As you know here at the Department of Education, we are very committed to raising the bar on education. That also means taking a systems of approach to meeting the whole needs of children, including through supporting their social, emotional, physical and mental health as well as their academic needs.

So, our full service competition this year, it's a total of \$73.8 million. We are hoping to grant about 45 grantees. I do encourage this audience to take a look at the application process. It is due August 8th. Again, we are prioritizing kindergarten through an invitational priority this year, and particularly that alignment that we spoke about in the first panel, and meeting those critical transition points into kindergarten and into the early grades. Another grant opportunity I also want to flag for you is our education innovation and research grants. These grants support local efforts to develop, implement, and take to scale entrepreneurial and evidence-based projects that have the potential to improve academic achievement for underserved students.

So, we've heard today about the research and the importance of that aligned curriculum to support our earliest learners into kindergarten and through the early grades. So, this funding can also support the kindergarten as a sturdy bridge agenda. Just flagging for folks that this one has a little bit of a longer application process. It has three sets of grants based on different stages of

evidence. The early phase grants are open through October 2nd, and the mid-phase and expansion grants are due September 11th. So, I encourage you to take a look at that funding available at the Department of ED.

There are different sorts of types of requirements whether a CPO can apply, or is it through the district. So, I encourage you to take a look at the eligibility there. We are super excited to review the applications, and see how our federal funding can support this critical transition point into the early grades. Thanks, Cindy.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: Excellent. Thank you. It's wonderful to know that there's a financial support for these endeavors, so please, everybody look into those opportunities. Now, I'd like to close the formal content delivery section of the webinar. Again, we want to thank all of you for your participation and the questions that you have been sending in to us via the Q&A. That's been wonderful. We also want to remind you that if you have best practices that are working for you and your community, you can feel free to contact us at the Best Practices Clearinghouse, and to let us know what you're using.

We encourage you to go to the NCSSLE website to see the additional resources for this webinar and the other lessons from the field webinars that we've got up there in recording and in that webpage. We have several webinars coming up we wanted to bring to your attention. On June 28th, we have a webinar from our human trafficking series focusing in on building protective factors to minimize student risk of human trafficking. On July 12th, we will be exploring teacher apprenticeships. July 26th, we will be talking about English learners and immigrant students and how we can best support those students.

Then in August 9th, we'll be launching our miniseries on supporting students' social, emotional, behavioral, and academic wellbeing of success. It's a miniseries that is connected to a series of fact sheets that were just published. That fact sheet link will be going in just a moment. We'd also like to encourage you to take a few moments and complete the feedback form. The feedback form is really important. We do take what you tell us seriously, and we use your information to guide future content in our webinar series. That link will be going back in to the chat several times before we close out the webinar.

Now, I'd like to go, again, back to Dr. Calderon, who is going to moderate our Q&A. Please feel free to enter more questions into that Q&A box.

Brenda Calderon: Great. Thank you so much, Cindy. I know we've just touched on a couple of topics here, and so appreciate the audience feedback. Jason, we have our first question for you. If you could talk a little bit about the impacts of the traditional academic calendar year and the summer gap.

Jason Sachs: Sure. So again, I don't quite understand why we're still stuck on an agrarian day for our education. When you really boil down a school day, it's about two and a

half hours of instructional time between all the comings and goings. So, I think that if you really want to do early childhood well, we really should think of a 12-month or at least 11 and a half month eight to 10-hour day, and get off of the agrarian day. That's 0.1. We through, our partnerships with community-based programs, because parents sometimes are put in the choice, "Well, if I need to work, then I'm going to use a community-based setting for preschool. If I don't need to work, and I can afford wraparound services, or piece together my own stuff, I'll use the public schools."

So, there's academic consequences to that, and so we have created strong community-based programming to support programs that are open longer than the public schools. So, that's also another mindset. Then the third thing we've done is we've created summer school programming within the public schools, and then also have partnered with our community-based programs that do summer school where we provide a five-week session with professional learning on extensions to our curriculum. It's usually a slower time, meaning that it's time for kids to explore more, more inquiry and project based, or a curriculum is project based.

This is even more time, and it's usually two adults to 15 to 20 children, and usually more around the 15 so that it's, again, a time for kids to find the joy of learning again, and be in a place where they're more valued. You have... What's also nice is it's a good professional development opportunity to pick a newer teacher with a more experienced teacher, which is another opportunity. So, oftentimes, we have two teachers rather than a teacher and an assistant teacher. Again, it's another professional learning opportunity for summer, and so we've researched this, and found that, of course, that it makes a difference.

We've also, in the past, I don't think we do it anymore, do partnerships with families so that we do three seminars with families so that they get an experience during the summer and also orientation. We do this preschool through second grade, and these are kids who've never experienced school, sometimes two kids who have been identified by the school district. We serve about 500 kids. So, again, we use our Title 1 money, which for those of you are trying to figure out how do you find funding for the summer? That's one of the places we did it, because often, summer school is dumb for kids who failed their MCAS, or they failed their state test for third grade, but this is an opportunity to take resources, and intervene early, and reset the child's experience in the school, and reset the experience for teachers.

So, I think it's been good. Then also, it's allowed us to partner with the YMCAs and other programs that do summer programming. There's a lot of hands-on materials and a lot of visits by beekeepers, and the zoo come to the classrooms. There's a really good opportunity. The one thing I would say is make sure you have places that have air conditioning, or bring a lot of fans, because schools often are old and craggy, but it's a good thing to do. We partner. Again, we have students with disabilities. There is an ESY program specifically for special ed, but

we found that parents are starting to choose our program as well. So, we're trying to figure out how to combine those.

I don't know. I said a lot fast, but it's a good opportunity to do it.

Brenda Calderon: Wonderful. Thanks so much, Jason. Turning over to Connie, what special services or supports are needed for children entering kindergarten who are having difficulty with social and emotional development?

Connie Hall: Well, one of our district has really been focused on the SEL competencies the last few years. I've just seen the benefits of it within our school. As they're coming in with one of our early childhood advisory councils, we were in different subcommittees, and so our... The particular subcommittee I'm in, we're working on different things that the families can do to working with the kids at home. In our district, we also have somebody else had mentioned about a parent university, and we have those other resources where the families can go, and I'm always directing them to the website for parent university and their videos, or they have different things throughout the community for the parents to go, and as in our school, trying to let them find those resources.

Those things are helpful. I know in our district, and I'm talking to other teachers around the state that that's been a helpful part in helping parents understand how to get their children ready and connected for school.

Brenda Calderon: Thank you so much, Connie. Amy, we have a really interesting question here about training of teachers, particularly training teachers to identify learning differences at this early age. I'm actually going to open up to anyone on the panel. What resources or tools can you all share that you have found effective?

Ryan Lee-James: Thank you for that question. I can jump in real quick on that. I think that certainly at this age in kindergarten under IDEA, there's an entire process that we know has to be executed in order for a child to be evaluated, and then potentially qualify. I think what I was speaking to around identification, I guess, I should clarify by saying like identification of risk factors. Who has the risk factors, and as educators or teachers, how do we identify them? What are the risk factors? How do we identify them? What screening tools are we using in our district and our schools? How valid, reliable? What are the psychometric considerations for our populations that we're serving?

We know that all tools are not appropriate for all children. So, looking at the screening tools we use in terms of the content and how valid and reliable they are for different populations, once we identify or determine, "Okay, we think we have some kids who may be at risk." I hate even using that terminology, but I know it's the terminology of the field. Then we, from there, follow up with diagnostics. For example, in the domain of phonemic awareness or oral language, we can follow up with more measures to get a better idea of where this child needs to be in instruction, and from there follow up with very timely

frequent measures of progress monitoring, because there are some early indicators, for example, like rapid automated naming or retrieval challenges that we know show themselves very young in children with dyslexia.

So, those are things that we want educators to be aware of, realizing that they will not be the one to diagnose, but certainly instrumental in getting that process started. Since I'm just on, I just want to say one thing, because I mentioned Joy at the beginning of this. I just want to say that I'm definitely influenced by Dr. Gholdy Muhammad. I probably said something almost spot on directly from her book. So, I want to be clear that that line... I can't remember exactly what I said, but certainly credit to Dr. Gholdy Muhammad in her work on joy.

Brenda Calderon: Awesome. Thank you, Ryan, and happy to share credit where it's due. Annie, do you want to provide your insight into this question?

Annie Corley-Hand: Yeah, I just wanted to add. As you said, we have kindergartens come in, and it's hard to determine, right? Is it a lack of exposure, no preschool, whatever it might be? So, we have a system in place where we provide a wind block throughout the course of the day. For one full hour, we have this what I need period. So, from early on, we start putting kids into small group based on some informal assessments and getting a sense of where they might be lacking some skills. We provide them with direct instruction, and target those specific skills, and see if kids respond.

Because I'm a preschool through second grade school, I have kids for a bit. I also have a learning consultant that lives in my building, and hey, school psychologists. We have lots of people doing observations and things, and trying to make sure we get a handle on kids really early.

Brenda Calderon: Thanks, Annie.

Ryan Lee-James: Dr. Calderon, can I just share something else really quick?

Brenda Calderon: Of course.

Ryan Lee-James: Because I think the links were put in the chat, but at my own organization, the Rollins Center and Cox Campus, we develop free online learning materials for teachers. So, I think that we shared the link to coxcampus.org, and we have a host of free assessments, diagnostic assessments that can be administered group or individual for children, and a lot of materials for English language learners and others as well.

Brenda Calderon: Super helpful. I see here that Shoshana has dropped those in the chat as well for folks that are interested in those additional resources. So, we did have another question here around the grant opportunity. I believe Shoshana has also dropped those links in the chat, but the first one is the full service community

schools program, and that one we are competing about \$73 million. The second one was the education and innovation and research program. That one, we are competing \$287 million. So please, I encourage you to take a look at those applications, and submit them to the Department of Education so we can better serve our earliest learners.

Now, I'm going to turn it over back to Cindy.

Cindy Carraway-Wilson: It feels like this conversation can continue for another half an hour or so. There's so much valuable information here, and we have so many gifted individuals in these panels. I want to, again, thank our panelists and our moderators for all of your information today. It's been amazing. You have been getting lots of praise in the Q&A as well as a lot of gratitude from the audience about the focus on that early learning, the kindergarten year. I also want to do one more thank you to the audience. Your participation is absolutely essential, and we appreciate the questions and the reaction icons and the comments in the Q&A.

We want to encourage you one more time to go ahead and click that link, and give us some feedback on this webinar. If you had other comments, we will be leaving the webinar open for five minutes after we close to be able to give you the chance to get the link, and also to ask more questions or provide more comments. We hope you all have a wonderful day. Thank you so much for being here, and we hope to see you at our next Lessons from the Field webinar.