

Early Learning Pathway Update

Background

In the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District we understand the earlier we invest in our children, the greater the dividend and the less need for intervention as those young children mature and age over time. The RAND report of 2013 shared that students who are in the highest areas of need are best served by quality preschool programs as they begin their educational journey. These successful early learning experiences will help best prepare our students for a successful journey through the K-12 academic pipeline.

As shared in a recent grant application jointly submitted by SMMUSD, the City of Santa Monica and Connections for Children, the Santa Monica and Malibu communities have long placed an emphasis on early childhood matters. Most recently, kindergarten readiness was denoted as a Santa Monica City Council priority under the strategic goal of Learn + Thrive. The development of the Santa Monica Early Childhood Task Force (formerly Childcare and Early Education Task Force) occurred as a result of a deep interest in collaboration between residents, advocacy groups, agencies such as Connections for Children, local institutions such as Santa Monica Malibu Unified School District (SMMUSD), Santa Monica College (SMC), and our local government entities. This group has nurtured early childhood efforts, including the annual administration of the Early Development Instrument (EDI).

To better measure children's early development, a small EDI pilot began in a few SMMUSD classrooms in 2010-2011. Subsequently, in 2012, the city of Santa Monica began annual EDI data collection across all SMMUSD kindergarten classrooms in Santa Monica and Malibu. This undertaking has been facilitated through partnership with SMMUSD, the City's Human Services Grants Program, Connections for Children, and the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families & Communities. The initial data revealed surprising findings, such as the number of children who were not on track for kindergarten. As a result, multiple steps were taken, including the launch of an early learning pathways concept in SMMUSD; the Cradle to Career Initiative made kindergarten readiness a key goal area; and, in collaboration with the Santa Monica Early Childhood Task Force, a Building Blocks for Kindergarten Workgroup was formed to turn data into action.

The multiple conversations over the last few years eventually led to the belief that providing early learning pathways at a child's school of residence fosters strong relationships among families, community, and educators, limits transitions from school to school for the youngest students, and ensures kindergarten readiness. The SMMUSD Seaside and Bridges programs were then piloted in the 2016-2017 school year and are designed to provide exceptional early childhood education for district students by establishing neighborhood preschools and transitional kindergarten programs throughout the district.

The decision made by SMMUSD to develop the Seaside neighborhood preschools meant the district needed to make a fiscal decision to support this development. Calling on the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) workgroup, the decision was ultimately made to include early learning in both the goals of the LCAP and in the budgetary prospects of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). This decision indicated a commitment to early learning that has sustained the work since that time. This will continue to need to be an area of focus, given the many programs our Child Development Services and Early Learning support. Below is a grid denoting the multiple programs and locations we have in our Early Learning programs:

Site	Program Type	Funding	Hours	Extended Hours?
Cabrillo	Seaside/Special Education Collaborative	Full Fee and State Subsidy	8:15 – 2:15	2:15 – 3:00
Edison	Seaside	Full Fee and State Subsidy	8:45 – 2:45	8:15 – 8:45 and 2:45 – 5:15
Franklin	Part Day AM and PM	Full Fee and State Subsidy	8:00 – 11:00 11:30 – 2:30	No
Grant	Seaside	Full Fee and State Subsidy	8:30 – 2:30	8:15 – 8:30 and 2:30 – 5:15
Adams (3 classes)	Full Day/Extended Day	Full Fee and State Subsidy	8:00 – 5:00	7:30 – 8:00 5:00 – 6:00
Lincoln Child Development Center	Part Day AM	Full Fee and State Subsidy	8:30 – 11:30	No
McKinley (2 classes)	Head Start Full Day	Head Start qualified	8:00 – 2:30	No
Muir	Head Start Full Day	Head Start qualified	8:00 – 2:30	No
Pine Street	Part Day AM and PM	Full Fee and State Subsidy	8:00 – 11:00 11:30 – 2:30	No
Rogers (2 classes)	Head Start Full Day	Head Start qualified	8:00 – 2:30	No
Washington West (3 classes)	1)Part Day AM 2)Head Start Full and 3) Extended Day *Full and Extended Day	1) Full Fee and State Subsidy 2)Head Start qualified 3)Full Fee and State Subsidy	8:30 – 11:30 8:00 – 2:30 8:00 – 5:00	7:30 – 6:00
Woods	Head Start Full Day	Head Start qualified	8:00 – 2:30	No

Development of the DAC

Subsequently, SMMUSD also developed an Early Childcare and Development District Advisory Committee to support the work of the Early Learning pathway. With two school board member liaisons, and community members who represent Santa Monica College, the City of Santa Monica, The Early Childhood Task Force, Family Services of Santa Monica and private early learning entities in Santa Monica and Malibu, the DAC is a wonderful representation of great minds working together. The DAC has developed charges for this school year that are detailed and complex. However, rather than take the “easy road”, the DAC asked what the district needed from them and how they could serve in an advisory and supportive capacity. As such, considering the needs of the Early Learning pathway throughout the cities, the DAC developed charges that coincide with the work of the Early Childhood Task Force and our district Early Learning Team goals.

First, the DAC has chosen to research if there are preschool eligible students in our community who are currently not attending preschool. The DAC felt it was important to improve our understanding of the types of challenges that may impede attendance, as well as the resources needed to support all families so children can successfully attend preschool. If resources were determined, we felt it would also be important to see whether those resources are currently available and accessible.

Second, the DAC has chosen to consider the types of data to gather from preschool, Transitional Kindergarten and Kindergarten. This data will be used to help SMMUSD maintain quality programs that best prepare our youngest students and their families to be successful in elementary school and beyond.

Since SMMUSD already collects data in early learning (the Desired Results Developmental Profile [DRDP] in preschool and Transitional Kindergarten; as well as the Early Development Instrument [EDI] in Kindergarten) our role will be to consider how to best utilize existing data, what additional data would be helpful, and what the challenges might be to collecting any additional data.

Development of the Early Learning Team

As the district was developing the DAC, the Early Learning Team was also being formed. Just as the district felt it was important to gather community support and knowledge, we also felt it essential that we hear the voices of our staff. This voluntary team was formulated so that the educational expertise and understanding of child development practices within Preschool, TK and K were recognized in early education.

We sent an invitation to every preschool, TK and kindergarten teacher in our district and shared that we were looking for a group of interested SMMUSD educators to develop a mission and vision statement for Early Learning in SMMUSD. We have now had three meetings and have teachers representing Preschool, TK and Kindergarten. In addition, we have teachers from general education, special education, part and full day preschool; Seaside, Head Start and State preschool are all represented as well. This group has begun the conversation around Early Learning visioning and vertical alignment and will be the core group to help us as we develop the district wide vertical alignment conversations among all our early learning teaching staff. The strength in this team is that we have all areas of interest in early learning, so if there are questions or needs, we have representatives from whom we can ask questions and learn together.

RGK - Reissa Foundation Grant

As the Early Learning has developed over the last few years, SMMUSD applied for, and received a two year grant from the Reissa Foundation (formerly RGK Foundation). The grant was geared specifically towards early learning, and provided with the understanding that SMMUSD was along the path to strengthening our early learning work for our students. Five goals were developed, with the hope that all would either be completed or in good progress by the end of the two-year period.

***Goal 1: Early learning pathway teachers will develop a common STEAM curriculum guide that aligns vertically for Seaside Preschool, Bridges Transitional Kindergarten and Kindergarten.**

Current status: We are on track to meet this goal. All Seaside and Bridges teachers are generating documentation panels to communicate the STEAM learning that is occurring in their classrooms. The Early Learning Coach has created a series of provocations around engineering and ramp play that have been shared with all PK and TK teachers across the district to test and provide feedback. These provocations serve as the beginning of our Early Learning STEAM Curriculum Guide work.

***Goal 2: Early learning pathways teachers and assistants will acquire STEAM skills by participating in a minimum of 24 hours of professional development.**

Current Status: Goal Met. Teachers have continued to engage in professional development opportunities around Reggio Emilia and STEAM. In August, all PK and TK teachers including special education preschool teachers, the Early Learning Coach, and administrators attended an all-day STEAM workshop. During this session, teachers

gained an understanding of the six (6) types of provocation styles and strategies, types of play, and the fundamentals of physics.

***Goal 3: An early learning pathway coach will visit each classroom once weekly to provide non-evaluative pedagogical and curriculum support to her teachers and instructional assistants.**

Current status: Goal Met. The Early Learning Coach continues to provide job embedded professional development on a weekly basis. Teachers work on observing and listening to children, asking questions that challenge their thinking and encourage them to go deeper with their understanding, and plan intentional opportunities for children to engage in the inquiry cycle and long-term studies based on their interests.

***Goal 4: Early learning pathway students will participate in 30 weeks of arts instruction that integrates with the STEM curriculum.**

Current Status: Goal Met. Seaside and Bridges students continue to receive a combination of visual arts, theater, and/or music for 30 weeks each year as funded by the Santa Monica-Malibu Education Foundation (SMMEF). The teachers continue to plan and communicate with the PS Arts teachers and extend the learning into the classroom where longer-term projects and studies can occur.

***Goal 5: Early learning pathway staff will showcase their skills and knowledge to all SMMUSD at the annual Teaching and Learning Conference (TLC) or other similar venue**

Current Status: Goal Met. All preschool and TK teachers attended Reggio training together where they were able to collaborate and share their STEAM skills and knowledge gained over the past year. Rather than creating a showcase experience, the TLC became a collaborative discussion where teachers had the opportunity to listen and learn from one another. TK teachers attended a workshop around intentional teaching and the inquiry cycle.

Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Grant Opportunity with First Five LA

SMMUSD is excited about the development of our work over the last few years, and how this has allowed us another grant opportunity moving forward. In conjunction with the city of Santa Monica and Connections for Children, SMMUSD proposes to focus on alignment of early learning with the K-12 learning system to build further momentum on existing EDI work and community engagement. Specifically, the short-term goal is to conduct a pilot program starting with SMMUSD preschool, Transitional Kindergarten and Kindergarten educators. In this program, educators will receive release time to participate annually in dialogues around Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) and EDI results in order to make recommendations on classroom and system-wide practices related to early learning alignment.

The theory of change driving this goal is that if educators have dedicated time to review DRDP and EDI data, they will share their expertise and insights on classroom and system interventions to address concerning trends. Transitional practices between teachers would supplement existing family engagement events and materials, as well as support the development of an early warning and intervention system that addresses children's developmental progress. Under this model, preparation to support the whole child occurs on a teacher, family, community, City, and District level and a common set of measures monitoring developmental progress informs preparation efforts.

The overarching vision for this pilot program is to use families and educators' insights and recommendations to achieve the following long-term goals:

1. Implement identified family and community engagement strategies around the EDI
2. Develop an early warning indicators system for community-wide preschools to screen and link children to supports

3. Ensure children experience supported progression from early childhood education and care to kindergarten through the expansion of transitional practices between preschool teachers/early child care providers and kindergarten teachers

In the future, the intent is to expand the community EDI engagement plan to include an Early Learning Systems Alignment Tool Kit. The purpose of the tool kit will be to sustain conversations between preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, and families in private and public, informal and formal settings. Recommendations made by SMMUSD and non-SMMUSD early educators will inform the tool kit development. The tool kit could include EDI presentation templates, EDI maps, screening tools and instructions, strategies on facilitating exchanges with kindergarten teachers, as well as strategies to empower parents to ask questions, share information about their child with the new kindergarten teacher, and ultimately, feel confident in their involvement in children's learning and development.

Next Steps

In the spring, we plan to have the Early Learning Update focus on our current programs, fiscal and academic impact as well as plans for continued vertical alignment and program expansion. We continue to consider the needs of all our families. Currently we have Seaside preschool programs at three of our elementary schools. The current thinking is that we will maintain this for the upcoming school year so we can continue to grow our programs together (the CDS state, full fee and Head Start programs with Seaside programs). Our ultimate hope would be to create co-located programs including all forms of funded programs in the same classroom environment. In addition, conversations around developing our special education programs with general education continue to take place. It is our goal to bring a more thorough staffing report to present in the spring as we consider the 2018-2019 school year and beyond.