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MEMORANDUM

November 25, 2015

TO: Senator Beth Martinez Humenik
FROM: Lisa Gezelter, Research Analyst, 303-866-3264
SUBJECT: Kindergarten Curriculum Information

Summary

On August 17, 2015, superintendents from Adams 12 Five Star Schools, Aurora Public Schools, Denver Public Schools, and Douglas County School District spoke to the Early Childhood and School Readiness Legislative Commission (ECSRLC) about transitioning students from preschool to kindergarten. This memorandum responds to your request for information about the kindergarten curricula in use in those four school districts, and the districts' efforts to share curricular information with private and nonprofit child care centers and preschools within the boundaries of the school districts.

Adams 12 Five Star Schools. According to Early Childhood Director Nancy Vendegna, Adams 12 Five Star Schools relies on the state's academic content standards and Early Learning and Development Guidelines (ELDGs) to assist nondistrict preschools and childcare centers with information about what children should know and be able to do in order to be successful in kindergarten. The state's academic content standards provide teachers with a list of the academic knowledge that each child should have mastered by the end of preschool. These standards, sorted by subject and grade level, are available on the Colorado Department of Education's (CDE's) website at <http://cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction/GradeLevelBooks>. The state's Early Learning and Development Guidelines, which provide information about the developmental and cognitive skills that each child should have attained at the end of preschool, are appended to this memorandum (Appendix A). Adams 12 relies on its local Early Childhood Council to publicize the standards and guidelines to private and nonprofit child care centers and preschools.

Aurora Public Schools. Aurora Public Schools (APS) uses a variety of curricula in the elementary grades. For children in the community outside of APS preschools, APS offers five

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“Getting Ready for Kindergarten” nights for parents and families. These nights are open to area providers to come learn about getting ready for Kindergarten, but the district reports it has not typically had a large response outside of currently enrolled preschool families and within its already connected community sites. APS partners with eight community sites and contracts with them to offer Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) classrooms at their sites. During these events, APS staff members provide parents with resources to support their children at home in the areas of social/emotional learning; cognitive development; language; literacy and math. APS does not share particular curriculum or titles; it focuses on the skills children should have. These events are hosted by APS’ Early Childhood Education Instructional Coordinator, its Early Childhood Education Coaches, and preschool and Kindergarten classroom teachers. APS also shares what a typical day in Kindergarten looks like. Flyers are created and distributed to all APS elementary sites and APS’ eight community partners.

APS is currently in year two of a grant the district was awarded from the Buell Foundation that is specific to supporting transition to kindergarten. District officials report that their goal in this year’s work is to implement a broader range of advertising and communications about kindergarten throughout the district.

Denver Public Schools. DPS houses curriculum, assessments, and resources for all grade levels on the district’s electronic platform Schoolnet. DPS is a district that relies on site-based decision making. School sites may opt into district supported curricula or choose an option that they feel addresses a community need or educational niche. The majority of the district preschool and kindergarten classrooms use the district supported curricula. Preschool age three and four classrooms use the commercially produced Teaching Strategies Creative Curriculum, available online at <http://www.creativecurriculum.net/>. Currently, the majority of kindergarten classrooms are using the district literacy curriculum created nine years ago and Every Day Mathematics (<http://everydaymath.uchicago.edu/parents/k/>). It is anticipated that commercial curricula will be chosen for the next year for both literacy and mathematics for kindergarten through third grade. There are several school sites currently piloting the literacy curricula from Benchmark and Mondo.

Community and charter school preschool sites choose their own curriculum. However, it is DPS’ practice to purchase Creative Curriculum for those who have the desire to use it.

According to DPS officials, the unifying factor that allows for the seamless transition to kindergarten from Denver area preschools is the use of the same comprehensive assessment system by almost the entire preschool community, regardless of educational philosophy or curriculum. The comprehensive assessment system used is Teaching Strategies GOLD (<http://teachingstrategies.com/assessment/>). According to DPS officials, Colorado’s Results Matters was the initiative that allowed for this shift in preschool to kindergarten readiness that focused all programs on learning outcomes grounded in research based on developmental continuums in the areas of physical, social/emotional, cognitive, language, literacy, and mathematics.

DPS reports that curriculum is only the vehicle to the child’s learning. Teaching to standards and working within children’s zones of proximal development to advance their learning is of primary importance to the district.

Douglas County School District. The Douglas County School District reports that its curriculum for preschool and kindergarten students is called the Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum (GVC). It consists of four elements: World Class Outcomes (WCOs), 4 Cs, 21st Century Skills, and Content. At this time, the Preschool GVCs and WCOs are posted on the district website at <https://www.dcsdk12.org/world-class-education/gvcs>. The Early Childhood Education department has created a collection of curricular resources to assist teachers that are aligned with the GVCs, WCOs, the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) Developmentally Appropriate Practice, the Colorado Early Learning Guidelines, and CDE's Preschool Academic Standards. Unit plans are developed using these resources and personalized by each classroom staff based on student needs. While nondistrict preschools and child care centers have access to the GVCs and WCOs, the preschool curricular resource has not been shared outside the district. District staff has presented certain parts of it, by invitation, to groups such as the Douglas County Early Childhood Council General Membership and the Douglas County Child Care Association. To date, the district has not had requests to share its curriculum or resources on a larger scale, nor have any nondistrict preschools or child care centers requested information on an individual basis.