

DATE: May 29, 2014

TO: Council President Tim Burgess
Council Member Sally Bagshaw
Council Member Sally Clark
Council Member Kshama Sawant
Council Member Jean Godden
Council Member Bruce Harrell
Council Member Nick Licata
Council Member Mike O'Brien
Council Member Tom Rasmussen

CC: Mayor Edward B. Murray

FROM: Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission

RE: Mayor's Action Plan for the Seattle Preschool Program

Dear Council President and Councilmembers,

We understand that the Select Committee on Preschool for All will be reviewing legislation for the Seattle Preschool Program beginning May 30, 2014. As you may know, our commission has an Education Subcommittee that has been following this Plan closely and has sent a liaison to internal meetings on the Seattle Preschool Program for the past few months. We have several thoughts and concerns that we would like to share with you all as you deliberate.

The commission is very supportive of expanding pre-school options for our youngest learners in the city and we are pleased that the city has taken significant steps towards doing so and presenting a plan for eventually offering pre-school to all three and four year olds in Seattle.

We are supportive of many aspects of the plan, and feel it will benefit immigrant and refugee communities in closing the educational opportunity gap. Specifically we were pleased to see:

- Emphasis on dual language programs that are reflective of Seattle's demographic and focus on increasing the number of bilingual teachers;
- Giving priority to settings located in low academic achievement areas or areas with high concentrations of low-income, English language learners and incoming kindergarteners;
- A Family Child Care (FCC) Pilot supporting FCC's in becoming early learning teachers given the high diversity in this workforce. With this approach, Seattle has the opportunity to grow and test workforce innovation;
- Significantly raising early learning teacher pay and thereby cultivating a field with livable wages;
- The zero-expulsion policy.

We were happy to see use of Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) toolkit for certain provisions moving forward as stated on page 10 of the blueprint; however, we would like to see a guarantee of the RSJI toolkit's application and integration of changes in the pre-school program pending the results. We believe that in addition to RSJI analysis being an internal process, there should be external community members at the table identifying race and social justice impacts of the plan on their communities along with other city offices such as the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs and the Seattle Office of Civil Rights to help ensure accountability.

Our other concern is that this Plan runs the risk of leaving out our immigrant and refugee kids in Seattle. Given the contracting priorities laid out in the plan, the children served under the pilot will potentially be children who already have access to some form of early learning programs. The most vulnerable children in family, friend, and neighbor care (FFN) or family child care (FFC) settings, where many immigrant and refugee children are, may miss out. Furthermore, we have concerns that if the 'pilot' is built around populations already engaged in formal early learning, outcomes and learnings may not be relevant and scalable to more vulnerable populations.

We are worried about cultural relevance and contracting standards. The Plan is anchored in Early Achievers and evidence based practice, which in this pilot, favors providers with more infrastructure, classrooms and funding. Contracting priorities have some inherent institutional racism based on who has access to navigating city processes and we are concerned this pilot will continue to give priority to institutions that are not necessarily reflective of our student demographic. We also have concerns that the approved curricula will not be culturally relevant.

Furthermore, staff education requirements of requiring a Bachelor of Arts (BA) and a P-3 endorsement for early learning teachers inherently disadvantages certain groups from entering the workforce and as a result, we run the risk of building an early learning workforce that is not reflective of the demographics of Seattle's diverse children. Due to a myriad of structural barriers within the higher education system the requirement of a bachelor's degree creates unintended disproportionate access for bilingual and educators of color which we feel was not adequately addressed in the Plan.

Before this requirement is set, we believe it is important for the city to better understand the nature and demographics of the current early learning workforce and phase in raising requirements based on the data. This data can potentially be obtained from the state Department of Early Learning (DEL). Also, the city should develop alternate ways, such as certifications or prior-learning assessments, to develop or demonstrate competency in the area of early learning that is not necessarily commensurate with a degree but displays a proficiency in early learning care and curricula. With specific regard to immigrant and refugee communities, certifications and prior learning assessments would enable qualified providers to enhance diversity among the early learning workforce and provide culturally competent services to Seattle's most underserved children and families. To ensure this, we would like to see an articulated commitment and plan for ongoing monitoring of diversity of the workforce to ensure that it is reflective of young children and families in the community.

We were disappointed by the family engagement piece of the plan and noted many weaknesses. What we saw does not address the multitude of issues immigrant and refugee, people of color, and low income families may face including holistic family supports such as: access to basic needs, health care, food, adult education and economic/career mobility. We strongly recommend integrating a dual generation model of parent engagement and incorporating strong family supports. We recommend looking at the federal Head Start PE guidelines for an example of strong family engagement as well as the RSJI toolkit for inclusive community voice in city provisions. We also recommend allocation of family engagement/support staff in the proposal to fill this role.

The commission looks forward to working with you further to integrate these changes and build and implement a pre-school program that meets the needs of all of Seattle's diverse families.

Sincerely,



Jeniffer Calleja, Co-Chair
Immigrant and Refugee Commission



Shree Ram Dahal, Co-Chair
Immigrant and Refugee Commission