

## Early Childhood Education

**Early Childhood Education (ECE)** is the starting point for a high quality education. Starting at age 3, children enrolling at St. Louis Public Schools can receive an academically aligned Pre-K education that will prepare them for the core concepts taught at the elementary level as well as teach them the critical thinking skills necessary to succeed in secondary schooling and beyond.

More specifically, investment in ECE pays off in the long-run because its effects have the ability to:

- Increase vocabulary development;
- Provide developmentally appropriate practices for young children;
- Foster school readiness and an easier transition to kindergarten;
- Provide positive behavior support for children with challenging behaviors;
- Promote health and nutrition awareness; Including health screening for all children – hearing, vision, developmental, articulation and behavior;
- Encourage parental involvement;
- Promote positive relationships among all children and adults;
- Implement a curriculum that promotes learning and development for years to come;
- Provide a healthy/safe learning environment for children;
- Recruit and retain effective ECE teachers and provide on-going, research-based professional development teaching approaches;
- Create an on-going systematic, formal and informal assessment process; and
- Decrease special education referrals.

Unlike grades kindergarten through 12, the district does not receive per student state funding for Pre-K enrollment. However, the return on investment in early childhood education to our students, the district, and the community is indisputable. According to the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance (2008), Early Childhood Education results in successful students:

- In Chicago, children who attended an early childhood education program were 29% more likely to graduate from high school than their peers who did not attend. Moreover, those who attended an early childhood education program were 41% less likely to require special education services than their peers who did not attend.
- In Michigan, fourth graders who attended ECE programs passed the state's literacy and math assessments at higher rates than their peers who did not attend.
- In Maryland, fifth graders who attended an ECE program were 44% less likely to have repeated a grade than peers who had not attended.

Early Childhood Education also results in stronger communities. Every \$1 invested in high-quality education programs saves tax payers \$7. The savings are found in reduction of remedial and special education, welfare, and criminal justice services. According to RAND (2008), "Well designed early childhood interventions have been found to generate a return to society ranging from \$1.80 to \$17.07 for each dollar spent on the program. Programs with better-trained teachers and smaller child-to staff ratios appear to offer more favorable results."

## Early Childhood Education: The SLPS Proposal

During the 2010-11 school year the St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS) operated 77 preschool classrooms in 43 elementary schools reaching children age 3 to 5 years old. Thirty are Head Start collaborative classes, twenty-one are Title One funded, twenty-seven are in magnet sites and thirteen schools have 20 classrooms that serve children with developmental delays including three at Gateway Michael School for medically fragile preschoolers. Enrollment as of January, 2011 is 1,607. Preschool children receive a quality full-day, five day a week experience at no cost to families. Due to capacity constraints and funding there are approximately 472 children on waitlists at various sites. Five hundred fifty seven families applied for magnet preschool slots but were unable to be placed. Additionally, 327 developmentally delayed children are served by itinerant early childhood special education teachers in area daycares and Head Start centers.

**SLPS is proposing 25 additional Early Childhood Education Classrooms (ECE) classrooms and two additional Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) classrooms.** Under this proposal, approximately 350 children can be served in these classrooms at no cost to parents, and accommodate most children and families on the district's current waiting list for early childhood education. **Simultaneously, the district is assessing the demand, cost and feasibility of adding even more ECE classrooms in current schools or opening a building as a dedicated early childhood center.**

As previously stated, the benefit of early childhood education to our youngest students will be seen in their academic achievement almost immediately and experienced by the community throughout their adult years. Because of the direct return on investment, SLPS will continue to provide these services for students and their families at no cost.

## Early Childhood Education: Request for Funding

The St. Louis Public School district is providing:

- \$10 million in school building improvements made possible by Proposition S to prepare classrooms for use by students ages 3 to 5
- Free, full-day, early childhood education classrooms for students ages 3 to 5
- Salaries and benefits for additional early childhood education certified teachers for the new classrooms

The district is requesting \$15,000 per classroom to purchase the following classroom supplies:

- Drama Center
- Kitchen Center
- Science Center
- Tables and Chairs
- Books-Classroom Libraries
- 1 Teacher Computer
- 5 Children Accessible Computers
- 1 Interactive Board
- 20 Cots