

Summary of Discussion
Early Learning Workgroup Meeting
June 4, 2013, 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
DOE, Room 1706 Turlington Building

Here, is what Commissioner Bennett and I captured in our notes, is where we stand after Tuesday's meeting in Tallahassee:

We identified four basic themes:

- 1: Alignment for college and career – understanding that what happens with and for children in the earliest years leads to excellence throughout the school years, and beyond. How do the earliest years ultimately fit with the Common Core years?
- 2: Quality control – that is, the imperative that only real quality leads to excellent outcomes for children.
- 3: Access for the most disadvantaged children, and children with special needs and disabilities.
- 4: Parent skill-building and engagement – built from what we've long known (that nothing is more important in a child's future success than a caring and knowledgeable parent). How to involve parents as fully as possible. How to help them have the skills to do the best possible for and by their children.

We agreed that whatever recommendations we arrive at, our central focus will be: What is best for the child?

We raised these issues and questions:

- What is the meaning of “kindergarten ready”?
- The importance of pre- and post-assessments in all VPK programs – with all results shared with parents in a fully trusting and collaborative spirit.
- How can the state provide incentives for high-quality, high-impact early learning (most especially in the most disadvantaged areas)?
- Might parents of children now in VPK and not really “ready” for the next step at the end of the “school year” be able to put their children in an additional VPK program (summer or “school year”)? (That is not permissible now.)
- When holding a child back in third grade or whenever, what are workable solutions that would result in the least possible hurt to that child's psyche, and give him or her the best chance of success? (A subset: Might an elementary school child move to another school, and who would need to pay for transportation?)
- What can we affect? VPK is obvious. But even more children are involved in School Readiness programs in the three first years when 85 percent of brain growth occurs. What value can we be vis-à-vis the latter? Are there recommendations we can and should make here?
- The crucial nature of principal leadership in public schools.

We agreed to:

- Focus on a handful of recommendations rather than trying to “fix everything” (which we couldn’t do anywhere).
- Be aware that recommendations would probably involve statutory changes as well as additional dollars (both of which would need to involve the governor and the Legislature).

At our Tuesday, July 23 meeting – Orlando Airport Hyatt from 1-4 – we need to begin to move toward consensus on the sorts of recommendations that would mean the most in children’s lives and futures – and align with all else the state is doing to educate children.

It will be good to see all of you.

Thanks.

Dave Lawrence