

Delivering on the promise of New York City's Pre-K for all^[1]

Author: Wallack, Josh

Source: Education Week

Format: Article

Publication Date: 16 Aug 2017

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EXCERPTS

In 2014, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña launched Pre-K for All — more than tripling the number of four-year-olds enrolled in free, full-day, high-quality pre-kindergarten from just 19,000 to nearly 70,000.

New York City's investment in pre-K — which I've supported as a Deputy Chancellor at the New York City Department of Education — is based on years of research. We know that high-quality pre-K works.

As we've tripled the size of pre-K, we constantly ask ourselves: What can we do to make pre-K better? How do we optimize our investment? Now that the program's at scale, if we answer these questions the right way, we have a unique opportunity to positively impact the lives of 70,000 children every year.

Pre-K for All has been driven by a focus on quality from Day 1. We have an extraordinary team of coaches, social workers, and educators who consistently work to evaluate and strengthen our pre-K programs. We've had robust partnerships with early education researchers, including with the Steinhardt School at New York University (NYU), with whom we've met weekly for several years to develop and improve a strong quality monitoring infrastructure.

Now, we're taking the next step in pre-K quality through a second, innovative partnership with NYU. With NYU's Pamela Morris and myself as joint principal investigators, we've received a five-year, \$5 million award from the Institute of Education Sciences for a partnership that connects research and practice and will allow us to collaboratively study and improve professional development for the educators in our pre-K programs.

Using the grant, we'll monitor the progress of children in programs using our four Pre-K for All professional development tracks. Each pre-K program's educators receive training and curricula in one of the four tracks, which delve into specific focus areas while encouraging learning through play. Pre-K Explore focuses on math, Pre-K Thrive on socio-emotional learning and family engagement, and Pre-K Create on the arts. Pre-K Inspire allows sites to choose their own focus.

Over the next five years, we'll evaluate and compare outcomes of students who attended programs using these tracks — both in the short and long term — to inform future professional development and quality investments across Pre-K for All. In the short term, we'll look at students' language, pre-reading, pre-math, and self-regulation skills and their behavior and social interactions twice during their pre-K year and at the start of kindergarten. To analyze long-term impact, we'll measure the standardized test scores, attendance, and grade retention of students who attended pre-K in 2016-17 when they are in 3rd grade, in 2020-21.

As we look at student outcomes, we'll also be in constant communication with NYU about our pre-K programs' fidelity to the professional learning tracks, and areas for improvement within the training, curricula, and materials offered in each track. With this combination of analyses, and true partnership with NYU, we'll determine how students' learning is impacted and supported by our different professional development tracks, and how we can use and improve those tracks to better serve 70,000 kids every year.

We believe in data, and having the opportunity to track and support the progress of our students and programs in this way is a game-changer. A commitment to quality and continuous improvement — with real-time research as our guide — will ensure Pre-K for All is successful and sustainable, and offer best practices for other cities and states as they invest in early childhood education expansions of their own.

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