

July 22 Conference Call on the Expansion of Prekindergarten in New York City and Michigan

Moderator: We are glad that you could join us for this call that will focus on how New York City's and Michigan's expansions of their prekindergarten programs are unfolding. We are pleased to have Susan Broman, the Deputy Superintendent with the Michigan Department of Education and Richard Lower, the Preschool and Early Elementary Program Supervisor, also with the Michigan Department of Education; as well as Nancy Kolben, Executive Director at the Center for Children's Initiatives and Betty Holman, the Center's Policy Director.. So you have some really deep and longstanding knowledge of prekindergarten that will be shared this afternoon.

If you have any questions during this call, please email me at Hblank, B-L-A-N-K, at NWLC dot-org. Again, it's hblank@NWLC.org.

So why don't we start. Susan, can you provide a brief summary of your state prekindergarten program? What did Michigan look like before the recent expansion, and what are the core elements of your revised program? And, Susan, when you finish, Nancy, please tell us about New York.

Susan Broman: Okay. Our preschool in Michigan is called the Great Start Readiness Program for four-year-old children who may be at risk of school failure, and we have served over 600,000 children since its creation in 1985. Ninety percent of the children must be at 250 percent of the federal poverty level, and the State Board of Education has adopted seven other risk factors such as low parental education and environmental risk that are used in the prioritization process.

Some core elements of the Great Start Readiness Program are a BA or higher lead teacher, 1-to-8 ratio with an 18-group cap, 30 weeks of programming at a minimum, required developmental screening, and ongoing child assessment, a comprehensive curriculum aligned with our early childhood standards of quality pre-k, and a program quality assessment required three times a year. In addition, the Michigan legislature invests \$300,000.00 a

year for the ongoing evaluation of the Great Start Readiness Program.

The changes that happened with the expansion this last year include that on the quality side we now require that all organizations that provide the Great Start Readiness Program have at least a three-star rating on the Michigan's Great Start to Quality, which is our tiered quality rating and improvement system.

Again, on a structural look, we added \$65 million this last year to our \$110 million funding, and coming up for FY 2014-2015, an additional \$65 million will be added. So, over two years of expansion, we increased from 32,000 slots to 63,000 slots funded for a three-hour part-day program. In this first year of the expansion, we moved from serving 24,500 children to over 31,000 children on an annual basis. We estimate that number going to almost 48,000 children by the end of the second year of expansion.

Additionally, we raised the per slot reimbursement from \$3,400.00 to \$3,625.00, and the legislature required that 30 percent of the slots be allocated to community-based organizations. Historically, we had always included community-based organizations in the Great Start Readiness Program, but this requirement of 30 percent increased the number of community-based organizations from 8 percent of the total funding statewide to 23 percent of the funding in the first year.

The trend is shifting from a part-day program to a school-day length program and that trend is expected to continue. Additionally, with the FY 2014-2015 allocation, there is a dedicated \$10 million set-aside for transportation from the total funding.

Moderator: That's great. That's a lot of improvements. Nancy, can you tell us about what New York's program looks like and what the revised program will look like?

Nancy Kolben: So I'm going to focus on the City, but I'm going to put it in the state context with regard to state funding and just say that we've had a universal pre-k program that began in New York State over 17 years ago. We've made great progress. There have been a lot of different ups and downs. The Center for Children's Initiative and DPI has been proud to take a leadership role from the start, and we had several core commitments that have really continued

throughout the multiple phases of implementing pre-k in New York State.

One is an absolute commitment to a universal program that would ultimately serve all children, and the second was that services would be both in schools and in early childhood programs in the community, and that there would be quality standards that needed to be met. Overall, New York State is now spending with the new infusion of \$340 million this year, over \$700 million on pre-k when you put together all the different pieces of funding that we have.

Prior to the major implementation that is going forward this year, we had in New York City – now I'm going to turn my head to New York City because most of what we're going to talk about is the work that's gone on in the City, which has been quite amazing – This school year we had 58,000 four-year olds in pre-k in the city – I know these numbers are quite significant for folks that live in states with smaller populations – 20,000 of those slots were already full day. The rest were part day. And 60 percent since the inception of this program have been in a whole variety of community-based organizations, including child care, Head Start, and other private publicly funded early childhood programs.

The Mayor was very committed to full implementation of a universal program in New York City to serve all four-year-old children. And he put together an implementation work group right after his election to create a really comprehensive plan for how to do this and to really look at building on what we had had already created and developed to strengthen and expand that, and to build on that experience.

The goal is within two years –by school year 2015-2016- the City will have a universal program enrolling about 73,000 children in full day pre-k. The goal for 2014-2015 is 50,000 children in full day pre- k, an increase of 30,000 full day four-year-olds enrolled. So, we have quite an expansion effort underway.

The core elements build on a lot of what existed before, but there were some really substantial increases in looking at the plan. We have developed pre-k standards in New York State based on developmentally appropriate practice and aligned with early learning guidelines in the common core. And those became the core underpinning for this program. The program is full school day/school year.

We have a requirement of certified teachers in every classroom which in New York State is more than a BA. In order to be fully certified, you have to have a Masters. The plan for the implementation of the expansion had a number of different elements that we'll talk about later, but it includes a great expansion of coaching and mentoring. It continues expanded training for lead teachers those working effectively with English language learners, inclusion of children with special needs, and it assumes full extended-day services provided in many CBO settings.

The classroom requirement of 18 children and 2 staff has been there since the beginning. So, we've got a really great foundation to build on.

Moderator:

You've both got good foundations. Now, we're going to turn to Betty and Rich. Starting with Rich, can you talk about how Michigan, and then, Betty, New York City, managed to recruit enough programs to offer preschool, particularly in the communities where the need was the greatest and that were most underserved as funding is so significantly expanding? And, how has Michigan, and then New York City, involved programs from diverse settings – Nancy touched on that, and so did Susan – including Head Start, child care, and other community-based providers.

Richard Lower:

Michigan, since its inception of GSRP back in 1985, has invested a portion of funding in community-based organizations and other entities outside of traditional school districts which really provided a foundation for a mixed delivery system from the get go to build upon for this expansion. Michigan didn't just rely on our existing school districts running the Great Start Readiness Program, but really reached out to our Head Start community as a key partner in this first year especially because they had existing infrastructure and were already a partner familiar with the Great Start Readiness Program, to be able to help assist us with such a rapid expansion.

While at the same time, we asked the intermediate school districts in Michigan who are grantees for GSRP to truly dive deep into their community context to be able to provide a much more thorough assessment of need and capacity in their communities. We utilized two other systems in partnership with that assessment

to be able to really get a sense of the need throughout the state. We utilized a prior investment in developing the Great Start Collaborative System, which is a regional system of early childhood organizations and other entities who are truly vested in being able to expand and provide support to the early childhood system within their community.

We also utilized our regional resource centers system, which links directly with the child care industry to be able to maximize perspective and input on meeting capacity in the communities. Having existing high-quality community-based organizations as part of our system already, including Head Start, provided credibility for the state as we went through this expansion. And what I mean by that is that any potential new community-based organizations could talk with the existing community-based organizations that have been either prior grantees under a prior competitive state system, or have been our partners, such as Head Start throughout the years, to really understand the history of GSRP, and understand that there's stability at the state level in working with GSRP generally speaking over the last couple decades.

So ISDs were actually able to partner in this first year of expansion with 133 brand new community-based partners above and beyond who they were currently partnering with, and that's in addition to the school districts, public school academies, and intermediate school districts who not only organize the administration at the local level, but several of them who are Head Start grantees also provided direct service of the GSRP program.

GSRP also has an extensive implementation manual that spells out all the rules and regulations and the statute requirements. And, I'll just put it out there for anyone who's interested, it just spells out www.Michigan.gov/GSRP. The manual provides guidance and tools for reaching out and establishing partners with community-based partners.

We developed two guidance documents to be able to support ISDs as grantees in reaching out to community-based partners. One of the tools is called "Questions for Potential GSRP Community Agency Partners." It's a tool to help the ISD gather information

about community partners and to assess their level of readiness to become partners either immediately or in the near future with some technical assistance and guidance.

The other one is really a PR piece, a public relations piece, about the benefits of intermediate school districts and community partnerships in order to achieve the goals and implementation of GSRP. It really spells out the benefits to the community-based child care partner, the benefits to the families, the benefits to the ISD or the intermediate school district, and ultimately, the benefits to the Great Start collaborative system as a whole on a regional level.

Moderator: Rich, can you re-mention the website that you referred to?

Richard Lower: It's www.michigan.gov/gsrp.

Moderator: Thanks. That's great. Thank you.

Moderator: Betty, can you talk about those issues as well in New York City?

Betty Holcomb: Sure. In New York City, I can echo a bit about what's been said in Michigan in terms having a strong base and long experience in having universal prekindergarten provided both in public schools and community settings. As Nancy mentioned, there were 60 percent even before we began the expansion, of the services that were offered in community programs. In addition, we'd gone through several previous expansions, so we had quite a bit of experience in addressing gaps and building full-day models, both full school day and extended day for working parents. In addition, the Mayor has really brought together a team at city hall that's really focused on creative solutions. So, we're doing a lot of work around expansion of community schools that I know many of you are familiar with.

So, that was the backdrop. And then it was a combination in terms of attracting programs through a deliberate plan that was called "Ready to Launch." I think that Helen has posted it as part of this, but we certainly can make sure everybody gets a copy of it. We used survey work, and drew on the data that we had so that we could capitalize and move forward on what we had. We've started by building on current capacity so the city reached out to

507 programs and that included many more sites that were already contracting to provide the universal prekindergarten, and asked about additional capacity interest and engaged them in helping the expansion.

We also engaged with a group of several hundred programs that contract directly with the city that do a blended funding of child care, Head Start, and pre-k already, and we wanted to build that out. We started with that in terms of getting from them ideas about additional capacity and how we might engage more programs. That was done very quickly after the Mayor came into office. And then through the winter, the city did several RFPs based, again, on previous experience. We had had several expansions. We did significant outreach through non-profit partners to let programs know about the funding opportunity and the service expansion and what they could do. Through that process, we identified potentially thousands of seats and then hired a team to do site visits and review what that space looked like.

The City has also really brought together some folks to look at the capacity expansion issues related to quickly bringing capacity up to standards and making the site right for serving young children. So, there have been a lot of efforts, and the outcome is that we're adding tens of thousands of seats this fall, and we've already started enrollment. A huge part of that expansion will be with our community partners that include not only the traditional sort of child care and Head Start programs but we also have settlement houses city-wide that have been providing pre-k. And in this expansion, we've got libraries and museums that have identified space to do direct service, and are also participating in the outreach to communities to bring in programs and to let families know about the expansion.

Moderator:

Good. Starting with Richard, and then Nancy, what have Michigan and New York City done to help the new preschool providers meet the quality standards, including the standards for teacher credentials?

Richard Lower:

All GSRP providers must meet all of the GSRP requirements as outlined in the implementation manual, which I mentioned earlier. Also, all the programs must meet the State Board of Education adopted early childhood standards of quality for prekindergarten, which are comprehensive and drive all the decisions related to GSRP as well as our broader our Great Start to Quality tiered reimbursement system.

In particular, around teacher credentials, knowing that many more community-based organizations will be coming into the GSRP mixed delivery system, Michigan worked to align the two previous separate credential requirements which were differentiated by if the program was administered through a school district versus a community-based organization, into one streamlined system of allowing both a bachelor's degree in early childhood development with a focus on preschool teaching, or an elementary teaching certificate with an early childhood endorsement. Previously, we only let community-based organizations utilize the bachelor's degree option while we required all lead teachers in school districts to have the elementary teaching certificate with an early childhood endorsement.

At this point with all the partnerships and the blending with Head Start, as well as partnerships with other child care entities, we really believe that it's not necessarily about the credential, but it's more about the content of those credentials, and so we felt that either credential would be appropriate in any setting for GSRP. This definitely was helpful, and especially so in this first year for expansion, when we needed to really rely on our GSRP/Head Start-blended classrooms to be able to take on a big chunk of the expansion. Moving into next year, it definitely will continue to assist us with broader outreach to the child care industry.

Now two other important pieces that assisted in the expansion, \$130 million more over two years, were around the capacity issue of teachers' availability to meet requirements in law and an early childhood specialist position. Our statute allows for a two-year compliance plan for lead teachers to come into compliance if they do not currently have the allowable credentials. You obviously cannot achieve a full credential degree within two years, so the real intent behind the law and how we implement it is that, ultimately that individual must be within a couple semesters or even one to three classes away from the degree to be able to take advantage of the compliance plan to be able to do that within two years.

And two, we have early childhood specialists, which are individuals employed as mentor coaches to the teaching teams, the lead teacher and the assistant teacher, and every intermediate school districts, every local school district, every community-based partner, has an early childhood specialist assigned to the classroom teaching team.

The early childhood specialist position is considered an expert to be able to mentor, assess, and do reflection throughout the year to

ensure that quality is being achieved in the classroom even if a lead teacher is on a compliance plan and has not met full credentials.

Nancy Kolben:

It is important to recognize that we were building on a base that we had multiple years to develop with research-based curriculum program assessment, appropriate child assessments, etc. What was really significant this year, so I want to be sure to talk about it, were several things with regard to teacher compensation and professional development. And just as a baseline, in New York City, unlike any other place in the country you have certified teachers at the head of every early childhood classroom, whatever you call it, child care, pre-k, Head Start, etc.

And, so we had that base in the early childhood community, although it was challenging, obviously, because of the compensation differences.

What we were able to achieve with this expansion this year with the \$300 million in new money that's being spent in New York City, was to get comparable salaries for teachers in community-based settings. This is a huge, huge breakthrough--- an important step in terms of the compensation challenges that we've had in the field. We talked about increasing the number of coaches and that was embraced in the plan.

The other pieces that I think are really important is that we have a new fast-track teacher recruitment initiative to allow 400 people to be fully certified and credentialed within a year-and-a-half period. They're obviously coming in with a bachelor's degree – with some grounding, and not beginning to achieve their higher education levels.

The other effort that's going on is that the City is doing a Teacher Institute for a week this summer in which all pre-k teachers, whether they're in the public schools or in community-based settings, will participate and participate together building a continuum of support and understanding. There's been a lot of coverage in *the New York Times* about this work, and new teachers coming into the field.

The other initiative that I wanted to mention is that the Department of Education started last year putting together a teacher registry for individuals with appropriate certification looking for positions. We have identified many more teachers than we thought were available in New York City, and that listing is now available, not

only to the public schools, but to the community-based organizations.

Moderator: Rich and Betty, what are Michigan and New York City doing to make sure that the families who don't speak English, parents working non-standard hours – there's an increasing number of them – families living in public housing or shelters, families who lack Internet access and other families including families whose hours are constantly changing to make sure that these children have access to pre-k and that their families are aware of the program?

Richard Lower: A significant piece of this expansion is that the legislature has dedicated a two-percent set aside of the total GSRP funding to outreach, recruitment and enrollment efforts. Each intermediate school district is able to utilize that two percent for these purposes. Of course, there have been prior activities that existed, but up until now, we didn't have a dedicated funding mechanism just for these efforts. And this has provided for more innovative strategies beyond the more traditional activities around outreach, such as going door to door, holding community forums, posting fliers and so forth at the most common locations, but we've had entities actually be able to pool this money at a regional intermediate school district level to be able to actually put ads on the sides of buses and to be able to raise awareness much, much more broadly across the community.

Some have created TV ads. Others have been able to implement on a much broader range a cross entity coordinated kind of a kindergarten roundup at the pre-k level. The materials that are provided at these events in some communities have been translated to meet the needs of the populations that are in the communities, whether that be Spanish or Arabic or, in some cases, German, depending on the area of the state.

Also in the first year, three intermediate school districts led by one of our pioneers in thinking about how to best do outreach to families and really think about the customer service aspect of focusing on those families, created a centralized online and phone recruitment and enrollment system administered at one ISD that then two others bought into so that there could be a common centralized 800 or 877 whatever that number may be, to be able to do a centralized intake across all the three ISD regions.

And what would happen is no matter where they were, they were trying to maximize the use of these two-percent dollars so that when families called in or emailed in or did the online form, one ISD would ultimately process the request and push it directly back to the communities in which those families were looking for services. All the inquiries could be much more effectively tracked and forwarded onto the most appropriate ISD that would serve the family and the family would get faster and more direct service.

We also had a policy change in law that provides for exemptions for some children and families from the income eligibility factors as part of this new expansion. We're exempting children and their families from the income eligibility requirements who fall into three categories: if they're homeless, if their child is in foster care, or if the child has an IEP that actually has written into it an emphasis on placement in GSRP. We prioritize these children when we're looking at the overall enrollment population. We always have done this for foster care, but the change in law going into next year emphasized these additional needs and we're putting children who are homeless and children who have an IEP on the same level as children in foster care.

Moderator: Great. Betty, I know you're doing work on outreach as well.

Betty Holcomb: Absolutely, and I can be pretty quick and succinct. In New York City since we've had universal prekindergarten available for many years, we had a lot of the strategies already in place that you heard about from Michigan. We're a big fan of buses and bus shelters and every way you can find people where they are in their communities.

I would just add that our program is part of our public education funding, and so it's free and open to all children. A lot of immigrant families know that this is like public education open to all children, even those coming from undocumented situations.

For the expansion, the city has approached this as a campaign, really, and they've done two big things. One is to develop some messages, and they also have done an outreach plan with Boots on the Ground in targeted neighborhoods where we know we especially want to reach families. We have a coordinator who's

working with 35 outreach workers going to targeted neighborhoods, and also working with a range of non-profits, labor, women's group, United Way, all sorts of folks, and with the child care resource and referral agencies to make sure we do our best to reach families.

And to reach the particular groups you mentioned, Helen, we do have everything in 13 different languages, and we've made special efforts with a SWAT team to work with families, homeless families, and families in public housing, and in other kinds of neighborhoods where we know that there are groups especially respected and trusted in reaching out to them. We think that we have done pretty robust outreach and we are still working to make families aware of the additional opportunities that I know a lot of people on this call care about for working families. Some programs have the additional extended hours, morning hours and services that many of these families need in addition to the full school day service.

That relates to some of our next two questions. I'm going to put these together for Nancy and Richard. Richard, how has Michigan, and then New York City, gathered input from parents and the public on implementing your expansions and did this lead to any notable changes in policy or implementation? And I think Betty and Nancy have touched on this, and so has Richard, but what different program options are you offering to meet the needs of families who work full-time?

Richard Lower:

GSRP has always had, as part of its focus on quality, a parent engagement requirement for grantees to establish a GSRP local advisory committee that require parents' participation in an authentic and engaged manner. One thing with this expansion, and over the last year or two, we've been working to increase the quality of parent and public input in other early childhood systems building efforts. With the establishment of the Great Start Collaborative system, came parent coalitions as well. Each Great Start Collaborative has a parent coalition.

So, in addition to parent participation on the GSRP local advisory committees, there's parent participation on the Great Start Collaboratives and the parent coalitions also ensure parent points of view are considered in all aspects of the system. One thing that past legislation has also done has been to align the GSRP advisory committee role and the Great Start Collaborative and parent coalition roles so that each is informing the others of not only the

Great Start Readiness Program, but also the greater early childhood needs in the community.

Talking about the program, options that we didn't mention earlier in terms of being able to meet the needs of families, GSRP has a couple of different models. We have a part day model, which is a three-hour minimum length program per day, four days a week model; in addition, we have a school-day model, which is the same length of time as a first grade session day in Michigan, which is typically six and a half or seven hours, and also is required to meet four days a week minimum. Then we also have a GSRP/Head Start Blend model, which has the same time and day length requirements as the school-day model, but what sets it apart from the school-day model is that in the blended model, the highest requirement of either GSRP or Head Start must be met in that setting. So, it's the same group of children and the same teachers, but in terms of requirements, it really takes advantage of the best of both programs for all children in the classroom.

And in this first year of expansion, we also added two special options. We added a migrant and a summer option, and for those, they needed to meet the total hours equivalency requirement rather than the total days/weeks. It was these two other options, two ways to be able to expand to special populations that assisted us in the rapid expansion in the first year. These two options were only for children who may have been on waiting lists during the traditional program year that could not be served or the traditional school year models did not meet particular needs of certain populations. In addition, we also connect GSRP to food and nutrition programs in all of the GSRP classrooms so that we're able to really maximize on federal and state dollars. So in talking about meeting the needs of family, nutrition is a big emphasis for us, and we require all the programs to either use the National School Lunch Program if it's a school-day length model or CACFP, to be able to maximize dollars and ensure that the children get several well-rounded, nourishing meals/snacks each day.

And then there's another important piece that is important here and that is how child care subsidy can augment funding to achieve a full day option of care for families. Child care subsidy administration is also within our Office of Great Start here in Michigan. The legislature has made some adjustments going into this next year that enhances opportunities for full-day wrap around. They went from allowing programs to have 80 hours to 90 billable hours in a 2-week block and this really helps to pay for those

driving hours before and after a working parents' day. In addition, they added additional financial incentives for any child care provider who is utilizing child care subsidy in that if they are participating in Great Start to Quality at a star rating level of three, four, or five. These providers will receive additional financial income related to those three tiers to incentivize their participation in the Great Start to Quality system, but also that makes them eligible partners, if they are licensed centers, for GSRP.

Moderator: Thanks, Richard. Nancy, can you talk about those two issues?

Nancy Kolben: The planning around Ready to Launch included broad outreach to get input from a variety of different parents, organizations, and organizations representing and working with parents. The input was really taken into account in trying to craft this plan for this major expansion.

There was a focus in the planning on English language learners and the steps that really needed to be taken to support families in feeling comfortable in providing the language support, engaging families, better training, and introducing teachers to ELL, and to do a language learner strategy. There's a major commitment that's been put into the implementation of the expanded whole day pre-k program to take this into account.

We mentioned that there were special approaches and outreach to families particularly in transitional shelters and children with special needs. We realized, obviously, there's this need. The full school day does not cover the needs of many working families, and while we've taken some steps, we have more steps to take as well. Pre-K funding is embedded in our publicly subsidized child care and Head Start, and that provides year-round, full-day services. A number of other community-based organizations provide year-round services, and so the goal is to support parents in meeting the variety of needs that they have.

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Moderator: Well, let's do this last broad question, and we'll have Susan and Nancy answer it, and then we'll get to all your questions and come up with a strategy to continue this dialogue.

Can you touch, Susan first, on how your pre-k expansion offers your state the opportunity to make changes in the early childhood system, and, Nancy, the same question?

Susan Broman:

As you can tell by our description of the Great Start Readiness Program, one of the major pluses is tying the preschool expansion to the quality rating system. And our quality rating system is like most other states where it's voluntary. Well, in this situation, it is very clear that having a three-star rated program allows you to be considered as a GSRP site.

Additionally, we talked about the tiered reimbursement for three-, four-, and five-star programs that are receiving child care subsidy. Again, trying to tie these pieces together so that the people actually can see payoff for going through the work of becoming rated in our quality rating system. The other tie in is that our Great Start Collaboratives which are our local early childhood systems building entities across the state of Michigan, have to sign off on the Great Start Readiness Program community needs assessment and resource assessment, as well as the slots distribution plan that each ISD has to develop. So that ties them into this work, and looking at, well, where are we providing the services and what are the diversity of providers in our area, as well as for parents, this allows a level of quality across a diversity of different providers, and not just one size fits all.

Additionally, part of the whole positive piece in all of this is that it's very clear that all communities across the state of Michigan are not created equal, and do not have the same level of resources across the state. In some parts of Michigan, we did not have enough three-star rated or above community organizations, and so this starts targeting our quality efforts at building the capacity across the entire state of Michigan to have quality early learning programs.

Moderator:

That's really helpful. Nancy, can you touch on how this is affecting the whole early childhood system?

Nancy Kolben:

From the very beginning, we've envisioned pre-k as a bridge between the early childhood community and the public education system, and we think that is extremely significant going forward as we look at school readiness goals.

This effort builds on incredible years of experience, bringing

together the various city agencies that engage around early childhood. And we've now reached a new level which is good, and that means that within the Mayor's office there is a cabinet of organizations that have come together to look at what you need to do, ultimately, to really align these systems that are responsive to different funding streams and different histories in the city and state. We're making some great progress and breakthroughs on a number of issues. Compensation is clearly one that is really important.

We've made a move towards looking at how we really most effectively provide comprehensive services and leverage the resources that we have in the city to make that happen. We are building these bridges between the early childhood community and public education, and that is important both at the citywide level, but extremely important at the neighborhood level. We've really created a commitment to early childhood as a core underpinning foundation for our public education system, and since we are moving towards universal, we see that there's a real opportunity to build those kinds of alignments.

One of the things that's happened that has been quite helpful in this systems building is that the new full-day pre-k money also allows the city to invest in improving the quality of existing programs in all settings. What we're trying to do is build a common platform across schools and early childhood programs in the community, and be sure that wherever a child is, they are receiving the same services and, therefore, the choices for families need to be what's going to work best for them.

We're beginning to really address a very complex enrollment process in New York City, and I think this effort over the past year will help us to realign and look at that. And we also are investing for the first time in a major evaluation effort that will start out by looking at both what's happening in terms of aligning these processes, the quality goals and how we are meeting them as well as look at child outcomes. .

So there's much more that we could say, but I really want to open this up for our last few minutes.

Moderator:

Thanks. This is really exciting to hear. I think it's really valuable to hear so many strategies on so many issues.

So, a question came up regarding a key issue that what we didn't ask is either one of you having challenges finding high-quality

classroom facilities, and how are you dealing with the facilities issue?

Nancy Kolben: Well, I can just say that facilities in a city like New York is always a challenge. I think that one of the things we've learned from this expansion and previous expansions is that there is more flexible capacity in the system than you could not identify unless you go out and ask and look. And we're hoping in Year Two – because this is a two-year implementation – that we can leverage capital funding and other financing strategies to really create new capability, and the city is committed to doing that work.

Richard Lower: For Michigan, the facilities issue was one of those early identified potential barriers to a rapid expansion, and there are a couple different aspects of that. One, we really worked with our Department of Human Services Bureau of Children and Adult Licensing to streamline the process for being able to expand existing licenses to new classrooms within an existing site. Another factor in Michigan is that we have had population decline over time and so with that came consolidation of schools. Some schools were recently closed elementary buildings and others were facilities that were available to be licensed in a relatively fast manner, and so we took advantage of that as well for the expansion.

Where facilities were really outdated, obviously, those weren't used, but the ones that were able to be brought up to code and pass all licensing, also contributed to the expansion. And then the final piece is that in some instances, communities actually had to open up brand new sites and with enough notice they were able to accomplish that with our more streamlined process with licensing. Some grantees were able to open brand new locations. And, of course, again, we took advantage of our existing partnerships with Head Start. in our expansion efforts.

Moderator: There's questions around preschool children who have IEPs and are IDEA eligible and if the most appropriate, least restricted environment would be in a general early childhood program, either in public school building or in a community-based organization how will children receive their special ed and related services? We came upon this when we were doing a preschool child care report years ago when child care center directors reported that some of the children had to leave the community-based organization to get those services. Any experience yet in Michigan and New York City about this?

Richard Lower: In Michigan, there are a couple different scenarios. One, in some areas of the state, our preschool special education program is a half-day program and so although it's not ideal in some areas of the state, it is allowable to spend a half-day in a segregated preschool classroom and then another half-day integrated with their peers in a GSRP, Head Start classroom, or other child care program.

We have some funding and special ed administrative rule challenges related to how preschool special ed is funded in Michigan that we are working through related to these new opportunities for children with IEPs. Current rules incentivize segregated classrooms rather than inclusionary settings. But, we do have two options within the existing special ed rules. Besides funding exclusive preschool special ed classrooms, we have been able to fund auxiliary services in other settings, and that is what's being taken advantage of primarily to be able to pay for the services that are integrated into the GSRP, Head Start, or child care classrooms.

Moderator: Nancy or Betty.

Nancy Kolben: We've been working on this for a number of years. The goal is to have children, obviously in the most appropriate setting. So, two things could happen. One is that preschool special education programs have moved much more to also have inclusionary classrooms and they've been able to demand that their pre-k funding is adjusted to be sure that that happens.

We have a stated goal of the services following the child so that children can be in inclusionary settings. And so the goal is to have those services come to the setting where the children are. Does it work 100 percent of the time? No. There's constantly more work that needs to be done on this. We're paying special attention this year to be sure that by getting many children enrolled in pre-k who've never had an early childhood experience before, we believe that there could well be an expansion of children who need additional services and support, and we're doing everything we can working with other partners to be sure that those processes are in place and to track what happens.

Moderator: Great. Now we have a long list of questions, so let me just say first that the transcript and the questions that were answered will be on our website after we get it together and it gets reviewed by our four great early childhood leaders, and that will be at

www.nwlc.org, as well as some references to the website that Richard mentioned and some materials that Nancy has sent. We will put that all up both under the prekindergarten and the Strong Start section of our website, and we'll send those of you who are on the call the links.

And I will talk to Richard, Susan, Nancy, and Betty, who we can't thank you enough for your extraordinary wisdom and commitment today, about the possibility of answering some of the questions that we did not have time to answer so we can add them to the transcript.

But, again, thank you for giving not only us and people all around the country all of this time and for all the time that you have spent in making these pre-k expansions work for so many children in so many parts of your communities. So stay tuned and look for the transcript on our website, and next time we need a two-hour call on this topic!

Thanks, everybody. Have a great rest of the day.

[End of Audio]