

Hi, my name is Lillian Dean, and I am a Speech and Language Pathologist with the Burlington School District Early Education Program. This is my seventh year with Early Education and I just love it. The children are *delightful* and my colleagues are brilliant, hard-working, creative and collaborative. We all of us recognize how fortunate we are to do the work we do. I am here today to speak to that work, and the vital importance of early education, also known as preschool.

Decades of research demonstrate that children who experience consistent, high quality early education show long lasting gains in their cognitive, social and emotional development. The lifelong positive impacts for success in school and adult life are *particularly* clear for children from lower socio-economic backgrounds (which is 43% of our student body in Burlington) and for children for whom English is not their first language (17.3% of our Burlington students). The potential of universal preschool to close the achievement gap is significant but is unlikely to be realized without an emphasis on program quality. The research is also clear that children who attend early childhood programs with a high turnover of unlicensed, underpaid staff do not experience these gains.

All Burlington School District preschool classrooms are taught by licensed teachers with graduate level training in early childhood education and early childhood special education. Our work is guided by a deep understanding of child development and the value of age-appropriate curriculum that is challenging, play-based, language-rich, hands-on and addresses all aspects of child development. Our teachers collaborate closely with Speech Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists and a Physical Therapist to provide services, accommodations and differentiated instruction that supports all students in our inclusive classrooms. Ongoing professional development informs teachers' awareness of evidence-based practices in early childhood education and supports the creation of warm, culturally responsive classroom environments that welcome all children and their families.

In the 2015-2016 school year, we served 149 students in our Burlington preschool classrooms and another 286 children through our Community Preschool Partnership programs (with Act 166 funding). We also supported and delivered Special Ed services to eligible children in partner programs within Burlington. Through a combination of our own district classrooms, community partner programs and clinic-based services, we delivered special education services to a total of 108 students. Additionally, last year, we received 63 new special education referrals from the community. In 2015-2016, 38 children already receiving Special Education services also transitioned from Children's Integrated Services (Birth to 3) into Essential Early Education.

Based on surveys of Burlington School District kindergarten teachers, we know that despite the vulnerabilities of the population we serve, when students graduate from our school district and high quality partner program preschools they demonstrate increased elementary school readiness skills and behaviors when compared to many of their peers. We also know that English Language students who graduate from our classrooms have a reduced need for English Language services when they enter

elementary school. Each year a number of students arrive in our district classrooms having been expelled from other early childhood programs due to behavioral challenges. (School expulsion is a national equity issue that disproportionately impacts preschool age children, boys, and children of color.) Our teachers have the professional training and resources to ensure that we can commit to successfully supporting all children in our classrooms. In addition, our program routinely collaborates with Howard Center clinicians, and local pediatricians, to provide additional supports and services for children and families experiencing significant emotional and mental health challenges. Our consistent, high quality, individualized and family-centered programming means that children from our classrooms are also less likely to need special education services when they enter elementary school. A 5 year old child with educational risk factors (such as poverty, trauma or English Learner status) will be 2 years delayed when entering kindergarten, if that child has not participated in high quality preschool. And children who do need special education services benefit from early identification and services during the key early childhood years when intervention produces the greatest benefits.

Participation in high quality preschool reduces special education placements by 39%. And for every \$1.00 we spend in preschool, we save \$8.60 in future costs: aside from fewer special education placements, and better testing results, long term, fewer students are involved in crime and more students graduate from high school and college.

In 2007, the Burlington School District had 3 early education classrooms and 11 partner programs. Ten years later, we have 7 classrooms and over 40 partner programs. We are opening an eighth preschool in the fall. But there are still more children on our waitlist, and on the waitlists of our community partner programs, than there are available spots in high-quality preschools.

Thank you.