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Burlington School District
H.935 Testimony

I am here today to talk about the challenges of having two agencies oversee the Public PreK programs.

As a public school we rely on our School budgets to pay for our HQ programming. In Burlington, we currently serve over 500 children in BSD. We run 8 District classrooms and partner with 48 Early Learning Programs.

Our Program was founded more than 30 years ago and was primarily focused on serving children with Special Education needs. Now fast forward our focus is serving all children. That being said we are still overall enrolled with children on IEPS, children who have experienced ACES, children who are EL, children whose families are homeless or struggling to meet basic needs. As a result our district classrooms require a high degree of resources, because we tend to serve the neediest children and families.

I am a member of the VPA and VCSEA and agree strongly with their recommendations, who you will hear from soon. I believe our focus should be on:

1. Quality- The AOE already oversees K-12 Education and we are part of that larger system. We are now having to jump through multiple hoops and report to two agencies. Many support staff who are offered positions can not afford the cost of getting fingerprinted twice for two agencies. For Quality I think we need to focus on supporting and emphasizing that our Community Programs support more needy children. A group of us are talking and working on this but Suspensions and Expulsions are still happening. Currently public schools are required to have licensed teachers in each classroom where partner programs need a teacher "on-site" for 10 hours. This can result in a huge discrepancy in quality curriculum, Developmentally Appropriate Practice, and overall support for children. The accountability for prequalified programs should be monitored more closely by AHS.
2. Equity- I currently have a waitlist and have maintained one for the past 4 years. We do not have enough space and/or resources to expand. Money could be reallocated directly to classroom and program needs rather than duplicative compliance requirements in reporting to two agencies for health and safety.
3. Simplicity- We already have a regional agreement that includes 12 SU's/SD's. This allows us to simplify the payments to our Programs. We have a strong collaboration with our ELPs' and make changes when given feedback. We have unified paperwork and procedures. For example, next year we will move from 4 payments to 3 to save money and time on both ends. We currently have regularly scheduled ELP partner meetings

Commented [1]: Can you add a piece about inequity of access for children with special needs and ELL?

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where the SD's meet with the ELPs to plan and guide topics that are timely and relevant to the field.

I would be satisfied if the two agencies are able to work together behind the scenes but then we have one agency to report directly and in my opinion this should be the AOE. As a public school, we are working closely with our Kindergarten teams to align curriculum and philosophy to address the best possible outcomes for children.

In regard to the notification requirement. I think if this is expected of public schools than private centers and child cares should also be mandated to share their plans to expand or decrease as well. In many cases I do hear about this based on close relationships but recently was surprised and had no idea that Head Start would be leaving several programs to expand and work more with birth-3. This is great for the overall community and I support that but leaves our school district and others scrambling to serve more children since we were told well after the budget was developed. This will leave me short 3 teachers and 30 families not receiving this service.

X

Commented [3]: perhaps close by restating your support of the bill as it begins to address quality, equity and simplicity