



Borough of Freehold Public Schools

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Pre-Kindergarten: A district and classroom perspective

Tomazic: Good morning, Senator Ruiz. My name is Rocco Tomazic and I am the Superintendent in Freehold Borough. Accompanying me this morning is Freehold Borough Kindergarten teacher Randee Mandelbaum. We have come before you today as practitioners, seeking to provide some insight from the district and classroom level on the efficacy of Pre-Kindergarten for our overall academic aims.

In 2011, I had the opportunity to be on a dissertation defense committee at Kean University for Danny Robertozzi, currently the Superintendent in Linden, who had studied the effect of PK on DIBELS reading readiness scores in Kindergarten. His dissertation, entitled *The Impact of Prekindergarten Duration on the Early Literacy Skills of Kindergarten Students* was a wide ranging study, but the salient point of his work found a statistically significant difference in October Kindergarten DIBELS scores between those students who had some PK, full day or half, and those who had none. These are results on New Jersey students, in New Jersey programs, performed by a New Jersey educator. It echoes well what we know nationally.

Ms. Mandelbaum and I want to use our time to present some anecdotal information about the differences between former PK students and those without PK as they enter Kindergarten. Ms. Mandelbaum used a readiness benchmark given her students just two weeks ago at the start of school. Her purpose was to see how well the students knew to write their name, distinguish their colors and do basic counting. We have redacted some of the letters in the student names so you can't identify the student, but you can still see how well they are writing their letters. Now let me turn it over to Ms. Mandelbaum so she can walk you through what you are looking at.

Mandelbaum: Good morning Senator Ruiz. Thank you for allowing me to speak today. My name is Randee Mandelbaum. After teaching Kindergarten for 20 years, I truly understand the importance of children attending Pre-K. Pre-K benefits children both academically and socially. I have witnessed the difference between children who have attended Pre-K and those who have not. I believe the skills they learn in Pre-K provide them a solid foundation for future learning. Even in the first few days of the Kindergarten year, I can identify learning gaps between children with and without Pre-K experience.

I would like to share a packet of assessments I administered to my class the first week of school this year. I have the children complete a self-portrait, writing, and two math assessments. I will



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administer these assessments each month to monitor growth and progress. I also use the data from these assessments to drive my instruction, and create lesson plans to teach every child at their learning level.

On the first page you will notice the self-portrait with 2 students, student A and student B. There is a vast difference. Student A did not attend Pre-K while student B did. As you look through the packet all of the students on the left did not attend a Pre-K program, while all of the students on the right completed a Pre-K class. Another comparison is on page 4. This shows the biggest gap. You can see that student G does not know any letters, cannot write any letters and does not know how to write her name, while student H writes his name and can write most of the letters of the alphabet comfortably.

As you can imagine, I need to differentiate, scaffold and tier my lessons based on the children's ability. While I must catch up the children without Pre-K experience, I still need to teach and reach all children at their level and challenge the children who have already mastered the Pre-K skills. I would not have this dilemma if all the students had a Pre-K experience.

There are also many other issues that slow down the level of learning in Kindergarten during September and October due to children who did not attend Pre-K. Here are just a few:

- separation from parent
- bathroom routines, buttoning & unbuttoning clothing, bathroom independence
- sharing 1 teacher's attention with 25 other children
- raising your hand and waiting your turn, not calling out
- writing and reading their name
- following 2-3 step directions
- using a scissor and glue properly
- stamina to stay in school for a full day
- problem solving
- gain a sense of self
- cooperate and collaborate with peers

The children with Pre-K knowledge and experience nearly always come into my class with the essential social, emotional, and academic skills, ready to launch a successful year in Kindergarten.



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Tomazic: Senator, we don't want to take more than our allotted time, but we hope this brief exposure will give you a sense about how former PK and non PK students look as they enter Kindergarten.

Lastly, from the superintendent level, I think I can speak for all my members in the New Jersey Association of School Administrators and express our desire for policy consistency in this area. We are very mindful to plan our resources in personnel and facilities. It is difficult to reap the benefit of PK if we cannot have a reasonable reliance on a steady revenue stream for this purpose. As part of the recent Preschool Expansion grant, Freehold Borough has been delighted to offer 61 full day PK seats where last year we had none. Beside Kindergarten readiness, we know our English language acquisition challenge will be improved as well. Full day PK is an educational model that we want to continue consistently over the years.

Thank you for listening. Both Randee and I are open to any questions you may have.

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