

Annual Forum October 20, 2005
Making the Most of our Early Education Investments

Financial Support for PK-3

GENE MAEROFF: Edith, What effects have financial cutbacks had on your parent program?

EDITH ALLEN-COLEMAN: Well, it has had a direct effect. Even though we are still doing what we're supposed to do, there are things we are not able to do. In order for the children to succeed, the parents have to feel comfortable with themselves and their progress in the world. So we still have literacy and math classes in our parent program.

GENE MAEROFF: What aspect of what you had before with the parents been lost?

EDITH ALLEN-COLEMAN: I think the key aspect is funding.

GENE MAEROFF: But what aren't you able to do now versus before?

EDITH ALLEN-COLEMAN: One of the things that we're not able to have is space. I think if we did not have the Chicago Child-Parent Centers, we would have been able to have another building for our parents. I have a building where we are combined together and we are considering having a stand-alone building where we could make our space larger. Right now, every available space we have has to go to the children first, so that has a direct effect on what we can need to do. Also, because we do not have enough funds, there are some things that we'd like to involve the parents in but cannot anymore. For example, there are conferences -- parent conferences -- that we would like our parents to attend but we can't afford the expense.

GENE MAEROFF: Jim, what does the braided approach mean in Independence, and when added together, what are you spending on these children?

JIM HINSON: We don't receive any funding from our state for early -education. The exception would be early-childhood special education. That's why when we talk about our federal sources, grants, or parents fees for K-12, it's another story. It's currently being litigated but Missouri provides \$1,700 per student in each school district across the state, 522 school districts. But there is no allocation for early -education at all in our state.

What we are spending per child varies dramatically. We will have some parents that will choose to have their children at centers from 6:30 am until 6:00 pm, five days a week, 12 months a year. We have other parents that will choose partial services, 4.5 hours a day for five days a week. If they want before and after care for school or other arrangements, that's on an hourly basis. But currently we're spending less in our early -education per student than we're spending for our K-12 population.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Ms. Birne, what does your PK-3 program cost?

ADRIANA BIRNE: In Union City, compared to the other Abbott districts, our tuition rate is a little bit lower. The average per-child ranges from \$8,000 to \$8,500. The wrap-around is a flat fee, which is over \$3,700. Actually, it's \$3,767. If I'm correct, this is the cost per child and this is for every single child that participates in the wrap-around program. So, roughly, if you have a classroom of fifteen children and your rate per child is \$8,000 plus the \$3,700, you can see what the cost is.

GENE MAEROFF: In general, I think the \$8,000 figure is probably a little low for the state. The average cost of tuition plus wrap-around is around \$13,000, I believe. For those who don't know, this is a result of a State Supreme Court order. Therefore, the school districts had no choice and the legislature had to make the money available. It's now the lion's share of the state's aid.

ADRIANA BIRNE: In Union City, every child receives a set amount for trips, which is \$75 per child. The funding also calls for \$4,000 per classroom; this year it has been dropped to \$2,000. However, the district takes these funds away from the center and we do the purchasing of the materials and supplies for the centers to ensure that the materials of the curriculum are in place, and that's why our tuition rate is a little bit lower than other Abbott Districts. In other words, the district purchases all of the materials and supplies for the centers.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: How can the federal government support PK-3?

JIM HINSON: I have a mixed reaction to your question. I don't believe we should ask the federal government to legislate anything they don't fund. I think that's critical because they'd receive tremendous resistance from school districts if that occurs. Since we've been implementing Head Start services, we've had phenomenal success. Head Start services work extremely well for us. I don't want any additional federal policy for early -education. I really believe that should come from the state level and the state should fund it.

GENE MAEROFF: There's certainly the possibility of using Title 1 monies in ways that can help beyond what's being done now.

JIM HINSON: And that's a huge issue. Most school doesn't realize that Title 1 funds can be spent on early -education.