

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

State and Community Support for PK-3

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What is the state doing to promote PK-3?

JIM HINSON: I can tell you what's currently going on in Missouri. There are about 40 school districts in Missouri that are doing a pretty good job with early -education. We have a state -task force that's been appointed by our Commissioner of Education to try to take early -education to all the school districts in the state. Currently we are not receiving any legislative support at all. We hope that will change.

We are seeing, however, school districts as far as Superintendents or Boards of Education that are expressing a tremendous amount of interest in early-education, partially in relation to No Child Left Behind. We are also seeing our statewide Chamber of Commerce become extremely interested in early-education or businesses that, I think, are really going to make this happen in our state.

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We could see some legislation in Missouri this session, not to mandate it, but provide support for school districts to really move forward in this regard. We are one year away from seeing NCLB really hammer some schools districts in Missouri so school districts are really scrambling now to try to find a way to meet those standards and a lot of them are looking to early -education.

EDITH ALLEN-COLEMAN: And in Illinois, I think the desire is to make changes. But we are the 49th state in terms of funding. So the funds are not there to make it possible in Illinois.

ADRIANA BIRNE: In the state of New Jersey for the past two years, the Department of Education has developed a grant for non-Abbott districts. The funding has been awarded to those districts that have been interested in providing early-childhood education. Of course, the funding is not 100%, but the state of New Jersey has made the initiative to provide funding for these districts.

JIM HINSON: A follow-up answer. Currently, our biggest hurdle in the school districts in Missouri has been all of the different standards and accreditation issues. We've been trying to align city and state health departments and county or parish health departments, the state fire marshal, the county and the city, because they don't agree on anything but yet we're trying to meet all of their standards. That's really been the biggest struggle in the school districts. Now we're not going to fight this battle, it isn't worth it. So right now we have a group that's trying to get everyone to agree on the same standards, which has been a huge obstacle for us.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What community support do your PK-3 programs receive?

EDITH ALLEN-COLEMAN: There are two organizations that have been very instrumental and have adopted our school. We're also a community school and the funding received over the past three years has helped implement the literacy projects we have at school. These organizations have also done enormous work for us in terms of support with professional development for our teachers; provided supplies and additional textbook services, general support and funds for our after-school and weekend programs. Because of them, we've been able to stay open and keep our status quo as a CPC and maintain our K-8 program.