NJDOE Early Childhood Academy:
Participants’ Perspectives
Scott Bortnick, Principal of Brunner Elementary School
Kate Rosander, District Supervisor of Elementary Programs
Our Towns:
Scotch Plains & Fanwood, NJ
Scotch Plains

Population: 23,510 residents

Size: 9.1 square miles

Estimated household income in 2009: $99,891

Mayor: Kevin Glover
Fanwood

Population: 7,700 residents

Size: 1 square mile

Estimated household income in 2009: $113,327

Mayor: Colleen Mahr
Our District

...educates and empowers our community of individual learners to be successful citizens of the world
Dr. Margaret Hayes, Superintendent

Dr. Joan Mast, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Technology

11 Content Area Supervisors, K-12

Elected Board of Education
District Configuration

- District Factor Group: I
- Our Schools:
  - 5 elementary schools, PreK-4
  - 2 middle schools, 5th - 8th
  - 1 high school
- ELL services housed in one elementary school, beginning in 1st grade
- PDD programs follow students through their home school
- Multiply Disabled PreK housed in 1 school
**District Demographics**

- **Student Enrollment: 5,546 (PK-12)**
  - 172 Pre-K students, including PDD and MD classrooms
  - 298 Kindergarten students
  - 439 students in 1st grade
  - 406 students in 2nd grade
  - 431 students in 3rd grade
  - 449 students in 4th grade
  - 412 students in 5th grade

- **Ethnicity Breakdown:**
  - Asian- 7.9%
  - African American- 9.8%
  - Hispanic- 6.4%
  - Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander- 0.1%
  - White- 73.6%
  - Multi- 1.9%
  - Free/ Reduced lunch- 5.4%
  - Special Education- 14.2%
Participation in ECA
Impact of Participation

Knowledge & Understanding: Professional Development

ECA

Relationship-Building: Other Districts & NJDOE

Advocacy: Full-Day Kindergarten
Knowledge and Understanding

Best Practices in Early Childhood

Expert Presentations

Sharon Ritchie: First School Initiative

Nell Duke: Problem-Based Learning

Peer Presentations and Ongoing Conversations

Teacher Evaluation Support Document: PreK & K

Leadership

Protocol for facilitating productive PLCs
Relationship Building

- Creating Connections with Other Districts
  - Working collaboratively through similar challenges
  - Learning from those who have already navigated these challenges

- Strengthening Connections with the NJDOE and NIEER
  - Support with data and research
  - Helped us get over our own inertia
Early Childhood Leadership Series (ECLS) Tracks I and II

Kindergarten Seminar

New Jersey Kindergarten Entry Assessment (NJKEA)

Inter-District PLC with neighboring district

District Lesson Study: Preschool – First Grade Centers

Early Childhood Academy (ECA)
ECA Team

- Scott Bortnick, Principal of Brunner Elementary School
- Kate Rosander, Supervisor of State, Federal & Elementary Programs
- Mary Jean Madden, Preschool Teacher
- Laura Smoot, Kindergarten Teacher
- Heather Terantino, Kindergarten Teacher
- Dr. Margaret Hayes, Superintendent
- Dr. Joan Mast, Assistant Superintendent
- Debbie Saridaki, Business Administrator
Advocating for Full Day Kindergarten

- District level PLC: Feasibility study/ research
  - Budgeting (banked cap)
  - Space
  - Competing interests/ needs

- Supervisor/ Principal/ Teacher PLC
  - Curriculum implications
  - Assessment implications
  - Scheduling shifts

- Outcome:
  - BOE Presentation
Exploring Full-Day Kindergarten

Scotch Plains – Fanwood Public Schools
Board of Education Meeting
June 11, 2015
High-Quality Kindergarten

Caution: Children at Work
Learning Through Guided Play

- Teachers design center-based activities that allow students to...
  - Explore and discover
  - Apply skills
  - Make choices and decisions
  - Develop relationships with others
  - Gain autonomy and independence
  - Reflect on their own learning

- “Children who play more have better social skills, demonstrate better self-regulation and are more creative thinkers.” (Skolnick-Weisberg, et. al, 2015)
From Good to Great
“Every minute counts when impacting lives.”
(Ritchie, 2015)

“Recent evidence suggests that, at least for some skills, playful learning is more effective for producing student learning than direct instruction.” (Fisher, et. al., 2013)

A closer look at the Kindergarten Timeline Comparisons
Self-Regulation

- Self-regulation is the ability to “ignore distractions, to focus and attend, to delay gratification, to persist in challenging situations, to ask for help and to control emotions and express them appropriately.” (McClelland, Acock, Morrison, 2002)

- Self-regulation and perseverance develop when students have time to engage with an activity. With 60 minutes of center time (increased from 20 minutes) students would have that opportunity as well as the opportunity to extend their learning over time, share, and reflect.

- “Evidence indicates that self-regulation and impulse control do not emerge spontaneously but are learned.” (Ritchie, 2015)

- Research also shows that, “Childhood self-control is twice as important as intelligence in predicting academic achievement.” (Anthony, 2014)
Observation & Differentiation

- Longer center times would provide additional opportunities for teachers to observe students in action.

- With greater and deeper observation comes greater understanding of student thinking and learning which then provides more strategic and targeted learning for specific groups.

- Differentiation truly allows for responsive teacher rather than one-size-fits all teaching.
Foundations for Future Success
Kindergarten is Critical: Child Development

- Bridge from preschool to primary classrooms
- Cognitive Development
  - More flexible in their thinking
  - Make great strides in reasoning and problem-solving skills
- Grow confident readers, writers, thinkers, problem-solvers, scientists and citizens
Kindergarten is Critical: Curriculum

- Balance child-initiated play to explore the world with focused learning through teacher-guided experiences

- “By emphasizing this time in play based activity, kindergarten programs afford children opportunities to become deeply engaged at a complex level that supports every content area in the curriculum.” (Kindergarten Implementation Guidelines, 2011)
  - Conversations develop language skills
  - Working with manipulatives builds mathematical concepts

- Design flexible instruction responsive to student needs

- Provide opportunities for earlier interventions
Prime Time

- Quantity *and* quality

- Teachers and district administrators have participated in training provided by the NJDOE Division of Early Childhood Education around best practices in Kindergarten

- Part of the a broader initiative to align Preschool – 3rd Grade programs into a comprehensive continuum

- Potential to impact *every* child who comes into the district
NEXT STEPS:
ECA 2015-2016

To be continued…

Lesson Study to examine *First through Third Grade Implementation Guidelines*