

The Florida Migrant Education Program (FMEP) conducted a town hall meeting on June 16, 2016 at the Rosen Centre Hotel in Orlando, FL. The event was promoted as the *Preschool Initiative Round Table Discussion: Charting the Course of the Future*. We had 34 participants; 11 are from the FMEP including Ms. Sonya Morris, Bureau Chief for the Bureau of Federal Educational Programs at the Florida Department of Education and Ms. Chandra Hayes, Program Specialist/State Evaluator for the FMEP; 23 participants are from non-MEP agencies including: Head Start, Department of Children and Families, Early Learning Coalition, Office of Early Learning, Florida Association for the Education of Young Children, Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System, the University of South Florida, Kaplan Early Learning, and several school district administrators.

Kaplan Early Learning graciously offered to sponsor a networking brunch and donated a number of educational materials, which we gave away as door prizes. Many of the winners plan to give the items to families in need.

In order to guide the discussion, the FMEP Pre-K Task Force presented a number of data sets.

- Status check on the 2013/14 (most current data we had available) Measurable Program Outcomes (MPOs) as identified in the current Service Delivery Plan.
- State-level Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (VPK) aggregated data (migrant and non-migrant) as well as district-level data that provided a good representation of district pre-k data across the state.
- District data - One district shared aggregate data and migrant-specific data. The other district shared migrant-specific academic progress for two migrant pre-k schools. These data are typical for most of our local MEPs.

The participants were put into small groups and asked to use their knowledge and expertise to reflect on these data sets. We used a guiding worksheet that broke down the concerns into four categories – accessibility to services, services provided, kindergarten readiness, and attendance.

A number of common issues/concerns were identified in all the small groups.

- Transportation – This is an issue in some districts and not in others. Some districts have been able to come up with a work around in order to provide transportation for migrant pre-k. These districts shared their practices when we came back to whole group. One solution is to ask if the school district will allow migrant pre-k to ride the same bus to school with older migrant students provided seats are available on the bus.
- Enrolling migrant children in VPK – This is another area where we have inconsistency among districts. Some district Early Learning Coalitions allow for the Certificate of Eligibility (COE) to be used as a proof of residency when the parent attempts to register their children in VPK; other coalitions do not consider the COE to be a valid proof of residency. One of the participants in the town hall is director of VPK at the state level. She shared that their office is bringing this issue up at the upcoming board hearing. They are proposing and asking approval to allow the COE to be added to the list of valid forms of residency. If approved, this directive will be sent to all the coalitions.
- Pre-k assessment – Migrant pre-k often miss the assessment testing period at the start of school year. This creates a problem with the accuracy of assessment data. The Pre-K Task Force plans to continue exploring possible solutions.

- Hours of service – All the small groups agree that VPK hours for 3-5 year olds has to increase. There is not enough instructional time to impact kindergarten readiness as much as it should. The Pre-K Task Force plans to continue exploring possible solutions.
- Sharing information – We had several preschool service agencies participate in the town hall and we quickly realized that we do our best to offer quality services, but we are not sharing information with each other effectively. The Pre-K Task Force thought of creating a directory as a way to at least begin sharing agency information. The department of education participants were asked to find out if there is a way for agencies to share student data. One idea is to create a unique ID number for each pre-k child that could be used across agencies.
- Parent involvement/engagement – The groups agreed that schools have to do a better job of creating welcoming environments for migrant parents. This actually crossed over into child engagement. We agreed that migrant children in particular are better served in pre-k settings that they can relate to. Classrooms should have elements that migrant children are familiar with – things they see at home and in their culture or things they see when they are with their parents at the local “bodega” or neighborhood Walmart.
- Cross training / professional development – We believe this can be enhanced by promoting more exposure to organizational events in the state. We want to see if folks from agencies that are focused on pre-k services can attend events from other agencies. Each agency typically has local, regional, or statewide events annually.
- Parent portal – We would like to create a universal system that crosses programs, so that parents can complete one set of information for all the programs that are trying to enroll in. Common fields would be populated for each form and parents would not have to enter duplicate information for each program. This also ties with the possibility of trying to create unique student identification numbers for migrant pre-k that each program would recognize.

The first step to building coordination and collaboration opportunities is the creation of a Florida Preschool Initiative Directory. This tool will collect the following information:

- Organization name, location(s) served
- Contact name, title, email address
- Ages served and enrollment requirements
- Population served (is program for migrant and non-migrant or migrant-specific)
- Hours of operation
- Services provided (academic and support services)
- Waitlist (Y/N)
- Current collaborations
- Organization’s connection to preschool

The tool will likely remain a live document for some time in order to collect as much useful information as possible.

After everyone returns for the new school year, the Pre-K Task Force plans to review the small group comments and identify ways to address the recommendations and concerns of the group.

Everyone that participated in the town hall expressed great interest in coming together in the near future and continue networking. We are exploring options and opportunities to hold another event.