

***Evaluation of the New York City  
Pre-K for All Initiative, 2015–16***  
**Promising Practices of Sites Meeting  
the Differentiated Needs of Students**



**February 2018**

**Prepared for:**

Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity  
and the New York City Department of  
Education

**Submitted by:**

Westat  
*An Employee-Owned Research Corporation*<sup>®</sup>  
1600 Research Boulevard  
Rockville, Maryland 20850-3129  
(301) 251-1500

--and--

Metis Associates  
55 Broad Street  
New York, New York 10004  
(212) 425-8833

--and--

Branch Associates  
1628 JFK Blvd., Suite 800  
8 Penn Center  
Philadelphia, PA 19103  
(267) 232-0261

## Table of Contents

---

New York City Department of Education Pre-K for All 2015-16 Evaluation Response Memo .....	i
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	v
INTRODUCTION .....	1
PROMISING PRACTICES OF SITES SERVING STUDENTS LIVING IN POVERTY.....	4
HUMAN AND PHYSICAL RESOURCES .....	4
Program Leadership and Staff .....	5
Physical Environment and Setting .....	8
TEACHING AND LEARNING .....	10
Student Learning Experiences.....	10
Social-Emotional Development.....	12
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT .....	16
WRAP-AROUND SUPPORTS .....	19
ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES.....	23
PROMISING PRACTICES OF SITES SERVING STUDENTS LIVING IN POVERTY AND STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS .....	25
PROMISING PRACTICES FOR SERVING STUDENTS WHOSE HOME LANGUAGE IS A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH.....	29
USE OF HOME LANGUAGES IN THE CLASSROOM.....	30
Classroom Structure.....	30
Activities and Classroom Materials.....	33
TEACHING TECHNIQUES AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES .....	35
TEACHER AND STAFF PROFICIENCY TO TEACH LOTE STUDENTS.....	38
Teacher and Staff Language Ability .....	38
Professional Learning.....	41
EFFECTIVE USE OF LANGUAGE ASSESSMENTS .....	42
COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH WITH FAMILIES.....	45
Relationship-Building and Encouraging Family Engagement .....	45
Communication with LOTE Families .....	49
CONCLUSION.....	51
APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY.....	52
APPENDIX B: PROGRAM QUALITY STANDARDS.....	56
APPENDIX C: REFERENCES.....	58

## Tables

Table 1. Promising Practices Related to Program Leadership and Staff .....	5
Table 2. Promising Practices Related to Physical Environment and Setting .....	8
Table 3. Promising Practices Related to Learning Experiences .....	10
Table 4. Promising Practices Related to Social-Emotional Development .....	12
Table 5. Promising Practices Related to Family Engagement .....	16
Table 6. Promising Practices Related to Wrap-Around Supports .....	20
Table 7. Promising Practices Related to Additional Supports and Resources .....	23
Table 8. Promising Practices Related to Serving Students with Special Needs .....	26
Table 9. Promising Practices Related to Classroom Structure .....	30
Table 10. Promising Practices Related to Activities and Classroom Materials .....	33
Table 11. Promising Practices Related to Teaching Techniques and Classroom Practices .....	35
Table 12. Promising Practices Related to Teacher and Staff Language Ability .....	38
Table 13. Promising Practices Related to Professional Learning .....	41
Table 14. Promising Practices Related to Effective Use of Language Assessments .....	42
Table 15. Promising Practices Related to Relationship-Building and Encouraging Family Engagement .....	45
Table 16. Promising Practices Related to Communication with LOTE Families .....	49
Table 17. Response Rate for Site Leader Survey .....	53

## Boxes

Box 1. Spotlight on Staff Professional Growth as a Promising Practice at One Site .....	7
Box 2. Spotlight on Social-Emotional Learning as a Promising Practice at One Site .....	15
Box 3. Spotlight on Family Engagement as a Promising Practice at One Site .....	19
Box 4. Spotlight on Delivery of Wrap-Around Supports as a Promising Practice at One Site .....	22
Box 5. Spotlight on Promising Practices for Serving Children with Special Needs at One Site .....	28

## New York City Department of Education Pre-K for All 2015-16 Evaluation Response Memo

---

Pre-K for All is New York City's historic initiative to provide every four-year-old with access to free, full-day, high-quality pre-kindergarten through an expansion that began in the 2014-15 school year. Before Pre-K for All, only 19,287 four-year-olds were enrolled in full-day pre-K in New York City; as of the 2016-17 school year, enrollment was 69,510. The City's comprehensive approach was grounded in creating a sustainable, high-quality, full-day pre-K model. From its inception, the expansion focused not only on ensuring access but also on investing in pre-K quality.

Pre-K for All is currently in Year 4 (2017-18). Recognizing the value of evaluation as a component to support program improvement, the DOE, in partnership with the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity, collaborated with Westat, Metis Associates, and Branch Associates, to undertake a study to inform future years of program delivery. After their initial evaluation of [Pre-K for All in Year 1 \(2014-15\)](#), Westat has evaluated the initiative's progress in Year 2 (2015-16). The following memo responds to the Year 2 evaluation, and provides an update on the accomplishments of Year 3 (2016-17).

### **Year 2 Evaluation Overview**

#### **Promising Practices of Sites Meeting the Differentiated Needs of Students**

The analysis conducted over the course of the 2015-16 school year was based on surveys, focus groups, and interviews at a small subset of sites. As part of its commitment to continuously improve Pre-K for All, the DOE leveraged the Year 2 evaluation to produce actionable findings to understand the promising practices in high-quality sites that support students of different backgrounds and needs; in particular, which promising practices can serve students with special needs, students whose home language is a language other than English, and students living in poverty.

- In sites with a high proportion of children living in poverty, promising practices were:
  - human and physical resources such as strong program leadership and staffing as well as purposeful and thoughtful physical environment and setting
  - teaching and learning practices such as maximizing student learning experiences as well as valuing and fostering social-emotional learning
  - family engagement practices such as engaging caregivers, building relationships with families, and providing extension activities to try at home
  - wraparound supports that are catered to the holistic needs of children and families as well as working with families to resolve challenges associated with employment, physical and mental health, and education
  - additional support and resources such as applying Division of Early Childhood Education (DECE) professional learning content as soon as possible, maximizing the supports of DECE's Instructional Coordinators and Social Workers, and obtaining additional resources to supplement Pre-K for All funding
  
- In sites with a high proportion of children with special needs, promising practices were:
  - supporting families through the special education process
  - providing special education services on site

- ensuring teachers, Special Education Itinerant Teachers (SEIT) and other service providers work together to provide a continuum of services
- According to existing research literature and in sites with a high proportion of children whose home language is other than English, promising practices were:
  - practices in the sites that were part of the study were consistent with promising practices cited by research literature
  - using home language in the classroom such as in the classroom structure, activities, and materials
  - teaching techniques and classroom practices such as incorporating opportunities for play, instruction focused on helping children whose home language is other than English learn foundational concepts and ideas, using pictures, objects, and experiences to convey the meaning of words and concepts as well as strategies to teach vocabulary
  - teacher and staff proficiency to teach children whose home language is other than English
  - effectively using language assessments to assess language ability in both the child's home language and English, using language assessments that are culturally and linguistically sensitive, and receiving input from family members about children's language ability.

### **An Assessment of Professional Learning, Coaching, and Supports to Sites**

The DOE also leveraged the evaluation to understand the impact of Pre-K for All's coaching model and professional learning.

- Most site leaders report that the differentiating professional learning provided in 2015-16 was helpful and provided positive feedback about the small-group and hands-on activities from sessions
- Site leaders reported enhancing site practices in many areas aligned to the Program Quality Standards (PQS) as a result of the professional learning
- Feedback on the supports provided by DECE Instructional Coordinators and Social Workers was consistently positive. Site leaders report that support from the DECE Instructional Coordinators and Social Workers led to meaningful changes and enhancements to their practices.
- DECE Instructional Coordinators and Social Workers reported aligning their work with the sites to the PQS.

### **Year 3 Update**

The accomplishments and improvements in the third year of the expansion build on the work done in Years 1 and 2 to develop a high quality Pre-K for All system. They were informed by the results from the Year 1 and Year 2 evaluation of Pre-K for All, feedback from Division of Early Childhood Education (DECE) field staff, ongoing program assessments, and partnerships with early childhood education experts.

### **Expansion and Policy**

The Pre-K for All Quality Snapshot was created in 2017 as a resource for each pre-K site across all settings, similar to the School Quality Snapshot in kindergarten through twelve grade. The Pre-K for All Quality Snapshot provides families with information on pre-K program quality to help them make informed decisions during the pre-K application process and to understand aspects of quality at their child's pre-K program. These reports incorporate multiple measures including the family survey, ECERS-R, and CLASS. The tool supports families in determining which sites meet their needs.

## Differentiated Supports

In Year 3, the DOE continued to advance its differentiated supports to all programs, tailoring support to each program's needs in order to meet Pre-K for All's Program Quality Standards. Additional Instructional Coordinators (ICs) and Social Workers (SWs) were hired to provide on-site support to programs, and onboarding trainings for ICs and SWs were conducted during the week prior to the start of school. ICs and SWs began visiting programs during the first weeks of the school year to ensure that teachers received support in a timely manner.

Additionally, the DOE launched its Pre-K for All Instructional Tracks, providing every pre-K site with differentiated professional learning through a series of four teacher sessions and three leader sessions during the school year. The professional learning tracks build capacity at the classroom and program level by continuing to support experienced and new leaders and teachers. In response to earlier feedback, the professional learning sessions aim to meet the needs of teachers, leaders, families, and children from all backgrounds by providing strategies for teachers supporting students with disabilities and children whose home language is other than English.

DECE continued its partnership with the Office of Special Education to develop resources and professional learning opportunities so ICs, SWs, teachers, and leaders could further strengthen their work to ensure that all children are successfully supported in achieving high expectations for their learning and developmental progress.

Based on a variety of factors such as interest, demonstrated need, recommendations from Instructional Coordinators and Social Workers, site quality, and geography, sites were selected to participate in one of the following professional learning tracks:

- ***NYC Pre-K Explore***: Pre-K sites that participated in the Explore track used the evidence-based Building Blocks math curriculum together with the Pre-K for All Interdisciplinary Units of Study. Paired together, these materials provide a comprehensive, developmentally-appropriate approach to learning in pre-K.
- ***NYC Pre-K Thrive***: Pre-K sites in this track advanced ways to support pre-K learners in developing social emotional skills needed to build a positive sense of self, form positive relationships, self-regulate, and adapt to change.
- ***NYC Pre-K Create***: Pre-K sites on the Create track provide leaders and teachers with strategies to incorporate the visual arts, dance, theater, and music into instruction to provide opportunities for children to explore new concepts, express themselves, and make connections across learning domains.
- ***NYC Pre-K Inspire***: Pre-K sites on the Inspire track provide leaders and teachers with strategies that incorporate rigorous and developmentally appropriate instruction and family engagement practices aligned to the Program Quality Standards (PQS) and support children in gaining the knowledge and skills outlined in the New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core (PKFCC).

## Program Measurement and Use of Data

- Because of its commitment to consistent quality measurement through program assessments, the DOE increased its capacity to provide more frequent program assessments, the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). The DOE committed to a three-year cycle for each assessment by the 2016-17 school year for ECERS-R and the 2017-18 school year for CLASS.
- The DOE uses CLASS and ECERS-R as one of many data points to consider when differentiating support and holding programs accountable.

- Analysis of the City’s CLASS and ECERS-R results, along with other data, helps DECE prioritize the supports that are currently provided to pre-K programs and determine what additional supports will be needed in the future.
- Data is collected annually on family preference and enrollment patterns to ensure services are provided appropriately throughout the city.
- Pre-K for All’s NYC School Survey results (August 2017) continue to reflect very high family satisfaction:
  - 98 percent of pre-K parents were satisfied with how teachers helped their children adjust to pre-K
  - 95 percent reported that their child’s pre-K teacher gave them helpful ideas about how they could support their child’s learning.
  - 95 percent of pre-K parents felt their child’s pre-k teacher shares how they can make a difference in their child’s learning

### **Other Key Initiatives and Partnerships**

- The DOE partnered with researchers at New York University to develop a system of differentiated support that utilizes data on program needs and quality levels; the purpose of this system is to make decisions about the supports each program in our system receives across various aspects of the Pre-K Quality Standards. This is part of an ongoing partnership between DECE and NYU focused on the professional learning tracks.
- The DOE launched a Teacher Incentive Program to support New York City Early Childhood Education Centers (NYCEECs) in recruiting and retaining top talent. Through the Pre-K for All Lead Teacher Incentive Program, there are two types of signing incentives for certified lead teachers in Pre-K for All classrooms: the Retention Incentive Program for returning certified lead teachers and the New Hire Incentive Program for newly-hired certified lead teachers.
- An NYU study found that Pre-K for All makes it more likely that a low-income child in New York City is properly diagnosed with asthma or vision problems, and receives screening or treatment for hearing or vision problems.
- In Spring of 2017, Pre-K for All was named by the Harvard University Ash Center as one of the year’s “Top 25 Innovations in American Government” and a finalist for the grand prize. The Innovations in American Government Award is devoted to recognizing and promoting excellence and creativity in the public sector. The program highlights exemplary models of government innovation and advances efforts to address the nation’s most pressing public concerns. The grant award of \$10,000 will give DOE the opportunity to share our knowledge with other organizations to replicate universal pre-kindergarten programs.
- For the 2018-19 school year, DOE will more than double the number of dual language pre-K programs, adding 33 programs for a total of 63 programs at 59 sites. Twenty-six Spanish programs, four Chinese programs, one Bengali program and one Russian program will be added. Currently there are 29 Spanish programs and one Italian program. To select sites for new programs, communities with large numbers of students who would benefit from these programs based on their home language were identified, and Superintendents and Principals collaborated to assess interest and capacity. Eighteen of the new programs are at sites with existing K-5 dual language programs, which will create greater continuity for students, families, and educators.
- DOE will collaborate with NYU on a joint Institute of Education Sciences (IES) grant for the first randomized control study of Pre-K for All that will look at students’ 3rd-grade test scores and grade retention across sites participating in the four different professional learning tracks, both in the short and long term.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

**In the fall of 2014, New York City launched the historic *Pre-K for All* initiative with the goal of providing universal access to free, full-day, high-quality pre-Kindergarten (pre-K) programming for all of New York City’s 4-year olds.**

Demonstrating its commitment to learning and quality improvement, the City<sup>1</sup> engaged the services of three research firms—Westat, Metis Associates, and Branch Associates—to undertake a comprehensive evaluation. The Year 1 evaluation included a study of the effectiveness of the implementation process and a snapshot of student learning. In Year 2 (2015–16), the evaluation addressed the variety of supports provided to students and the professional learning (PL), coaching, and other supports provided to Pre-K for All center staff in more than 1,800 Pre-K for All sites.

This report focuses on the efforts the NYC DOE and selected Pre-K for All sites took to address the differentiated needs of students enrolled in Pre-K for All sites during the 2015-2016 school year. The second report in this series, *Evaluation of the Pre-K for All Initiative 2015-16: An Assessment of Professional Development, Coaching, and Supports to Sites*, addresses the professional learning (PL), coaching, and other supports provided to Pre-K for All center staff in 2015–16.

Of critical importance in the expansion of pre-K is the quality of the service. The DOE’s vision for high quality pre-K is defined in the New York City Pre-K for All Program Quality Standards (PQS), which “describe key practices of family engagement, rigorous and developmentally appropriate instruction, professional collaborations, and leadership that support children in gaining the knowledge and skills outlined in the New York State Pre-Kindergarten Foundation for the Common Core (PKFCC).”<sup>2</sup>

Supports and resources offered to sites included the following:<sup>3</sup>

- a variety of professional learning (PL) opportunities;
- coaching and instructional support from Division of Early Childhood Education (DECE) Instructional Coordinators to site leaders and teaching teams in all domains of instruction;
- coaching and support from DECE Social Workers to site leaders, teaching teams, families, and children in the areas of social-emotional development and family engagement practices; and
- operational support from the DOE’s central and field offices, authentic assessment and screening resources and support, instructional resources, family engagement resources, independent program assessment reports, and peer learning opportunities.

This report presents promising practices of selected Pre-K for All sites in serving the diverse needs of New York’s early learners and addresses three primary research topics based on data collected in the spring of 2016:

---

<sup>1</sup> Here “City” refers to the Mayor’s Office for Economic Opportunity and the New York City Department of Education (DOE) through the Division of Early Childhood Education (DECE), in cooperation with the New York City Administration for Children’s Services (ACS), and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH).

<sup>2</sup> New York City Department of Education, Pre-K for All Program Quality Standards.

<sup>3</sup> See the second report in this series, *Evaluation of the Pre-K for All Initiative 2015-16: An Assessment of Professional Development, Coaching, and Supports to Sites*, for more information on the professional learning (PL), coaching, and other supports provided to Pre-K for All center staff in 2015–16.



1. What promising practices can we learn from sites that serve high proportions of families living in poverty?
2. What promising practices can we learn from sites that serve high proportions of students living in poverty and high proportions of students with special needs?<sup>4</sup>
3. What does the research literature say are the promising practices for serving preschool-aged students whose home language is a language other than English (LOTE)? How well do the services provided by selected sites align with these promising practices?

The report presents findings about the instructional, operational, and family engagement practices identified by selected sites as meeting the differentiated needs of students. Three samples of sites were purposefully selected for inclusion in this study, in collaboration with the DOE, and based on assessment data,<sup>5</sup> input from DECE staff, and the characteristics of enrolled students. The first sample included sites with high percentages of children living in high-poverty census tracts or in temporary housing. The second sample included sites with high percentages of children living in high-poverty census tracts or in temporary housing, and high percentages of students with special needs. The third sample included sites with high percentages of students whose home language is a language other than English (LOTE ).

The practices highlighted in this report can serve to inform future efforts to foster student learning and development. Separate sections of the report discuss the practices of sites serving different populations of students including: students living in poverty, students living in poverty and students with special needs, and students whose home language is a language other than English.

### Research Methods

- Interviews with key DOE staff
- Interviews with site leaders and focus groups with staff and caregivers at 8 sampled sites (8 site leaders, 26 teaching staff, 68 caregivers), and interviews with 5 DECE Instructional Coordinators, & 7 DECE Social Workers assigned to these sites
- Interviews with site leaders of 6 selected sites serving students whose home language is a language other than English (LOTE)
- Survey of Pre-K for All site leaders (N=1,314; 73% response rate)
- Documentation & data review
- Review of the literature on best practices for serving pre-K LOTE students and their families.

<sup>4</sup> The DOE provides special education services to children ages 3 to 5 who have special needs or developmental delays that impact their ability to learn.

<sup>5</sup> The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) tool measures the extent to which programs are successful at reaching many of the standards related to the pre-K learning environment.

## PROMISING PRACTICES OF SITES SERVING STUDENTS LIVING IN POVERTY

Children and families living in poverty often have difficulty meeting their most basic needs, such as not having enough food, clothing, or stable housing, which may lead to challenges beyond those associated with providing these tangible resources. The challenges are varied and may impact student learning, readiness to learn, and social-emotional development, as well as family engagement. Research suggests several explanations for these impacts. For example, students from families living in poverty may lack exposure to varied experiences that support learning, such as not having access to safe playgrounds or other outdoor space. Families of children living in poverty may have trouble getting their children to school regularly because of transportation costs, responsibility for other children at home, or work schedules that are not flexible. Furthermore, social-emotional development may be affected by the precarious or stressful economic situations of children living in poverty.<sup>6</sup>

To learn about the promising practices of sites serving students living in poverty who face these and other challenges, we conducted in-depth interviews with site leaders, teachers, and caregivers at eight selected sites that had a high percentage of children living in high-poverty census tracts or in temporary housing. Two of the sites also served high percentages of students with special needs (the specific practices associated with serving these students are discussed in a [later section](#)). We also interviewed the DECE Instructional Coordinators and Social Workers assigned to the selected sites, which included a mix of district schools and NYC Early Education Centers (NYCEECs) operated by independent organizations under contract to the NYC DOE (DOE NYCEECs) or the NYC Administration for Children’s Services (ACS NYCEECs), and charter schools. It is important to note that many of the interview participants we spoke with did not highlight specific practices that they used to support children living in poverty enrolled in their sites; rather, they discussed practices that they believed to be effective for all of their children. In each section, we highlight practices that were reported to be particularly helpful in serving students living in poverty. The promising practices are categorized according to human and physical resources, teaching and learning, family engagement, wrap-around supports, and additional supports and resources.

### HUMAN AND PHYSICAL RESOURCES

#### 1. Strong program leadership and staffing

The selected sites shared several promising practices related to leadership. First, site leaders ***provided high level, hands-on support*** to staff, such as getting to know the learning community in order to better understand families’ needs, providing a welcoming environment for all families, actively participating in day-to-day activities in classrooms, and leveraging a variety of resources to ensure that all classrooms had the requisite materials and resources for effective teaching and learning. Additionally, site leaders ***fostered growth opportunities for teachers*** by providing opportunities for mentoring from experienced teachers, encouraging assistant teachers to take on classroom responsibilities, and encouraging participation in ongoing professional learning. Moreover, the sites ***hired dedicated, experienced teachers*** who attended to the holistic needs of children and their families, and ***provided opportunities for regular collaboration among teachers***.

---

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Brookings Institution, 2012; Milteer & Ginsburg, 2012; Rothstein, 2008; Saluja, Early, & Clifford, 2002.

## 2. Physical environment and setting

Physical environment played an important role in fostering development of students' academic and social-emotional learning at the selected sites. The sites identified certain resources, such as *having indoor and outdoor learning spaces and resource-abundant classrooms*, which they felt were especially important for programs serving low-income students. Site staff mentioned that many of their students who were living in poverty did not have access to such resources at home, making it particularly beneficial when sites were able to offer these resources to their students. Another way sites created an environment conducive to student learning was *positioning pre-K classrooms near each other* to facilitate sharing of materials and collaboration among teachers. Finally, sites *leveraged available resources*, such as educational materials, food and clothing pantries, and other sources of needed supplies within the school and local community to *holistically meet the needs of students and families*.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

### 1. Student learning experiences

The selected sites maximized available time and resources to ensure that all students had meaningful and deep learning experiences. They did this by *taking full advantage of classroom time* to ensure that *all* classroom activities were purposeful, including time spent in transitions. They also *offered rich and varied learning materials and diverse learning opportunities*—such as using differentiated instruction, technology resources, and thematic materials aligned with state standards—which helped teachers address the multi-modal ways in which students learn.

### 2. Social-emotional development

Social-emotional learning was integrated into the academic curriculum at the selected sites to help students develop social and interpersonal skills and prepare them to succeed academically. The sites worked to *ensure that staff understood the importance of supporting all aspects of students' social-emotional development*, including self-regulation, emotional expression, and the ability to interact with others during instructional and recreational time. They *differentiated teaching and learning strategies based on the general needs of the community and the particular needs of students*. They also worked to increase support by adjusting curriculum, instruction, and wrap-around services, thereby ensuring that staff understood the personal challenges that students were facing. In addition, they *leveraged other governmental and community resources* to address the social-emotional needs of students and their families. Finally, the sites *incorporated the social-emotional development of students into every element of the program* in a variety of ways, such as implementing restorative discipline practices, using points of transition and choice to reinforce and teach social-emotional strategies, and including social-emotional learning throughout the pre-K day.

## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

The selected sites implemented a variety of practices intended to capitalize upon and encourage family engagement. At these sites, staff *proactively worked to engage caregivers and families* through multiple simultaneous strategies based on the belief that a child's pre-K experience must include interactions with their families and caregivers. As such, sites *leveraged family engagement supports*, such as school-based parent coordinators, parent organizations, and DECE Social Workers, while working within policy frameworks that supported and required family engagement programming.

Staff at selected sites *developed relationships with families* and *used strategies that encouraged families to extend learning at home through formal and informal enrichment activities at home*. They did this by informing caregivers about what students were learning at school and providing explicit activities and projects for students to do at home. Through these means, caregivers had opportunities to support their children. The support of the staff and organizations described above also had the potential to increase caregivers' own capacity to support their children independently. Caregivers' capacity was also developed through workshops on topics such as general parenting, at-home literacy, arts and crafts, and the transition to kindergarten.

As a means of building community, *developing family support and resource networks* was a key practice of family engagement at selected sites. The nature of these supports and networks varied, and included whole-school parent-teacher associations (PTA) that involved families from all grade levels, rooms within the building designated for caregivers, and web-based parent and caregiver groups and resources. Other promising practices used by these sites to foster family engagement included *using multiple methods to communicate with families, establishing open-door policies that supported family engagement*, and *hosting events that bring families into the classroom*.

## WRAP-AROUND SUPPORTS

The selected sites provided a variety of wrap-around supports to help students and their families address challenges that could impact learning and academic growth for low-income children. They *met the holistic needs of students and their families by providing extensive wrap-around programming*. These included using multiple strategies to provide food and clothing to students and families in need, and reducing families' out-of-pocket costs related to field trips and supplies by covering or subsidizing the costs of trips for students and their caregivers<sup>7</sup> as well as making sure students were provided, for free, any materials they needed for in-class or at-home activities. The sites also *provided wrap-around supports for adult family members to help resolve challenges associated with employment, physical and mental health, and education* by acting as advocates for families, leveraging partnerships with outside providers to augment programming, and offering extended-day services and programs for younger and older siblings.

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES

Professional learning (PL), DECE resources, and additional funding sources were essential to supports offered by the selected sites. The sites worked to *apply relevant professional learning content soon after staff participated* to facilitate integration of the information into instruction. Additionally, they *maximized use of the DECE Instructional Coordinator and Social Worker supports* in providing wrap-around and educational services to families by flexible scheduling of support activities and involving DECE Instructional Coordinators and Social Workers in program planning and meetings. Lastly, sites understood that addressing the challenges of working with low-income communities requires a variety of resources; as such, they worked to *obtain additional resources to supplement the Pre-K for All funding*.

---

<sup>7</sup> Pre-K for All policy is that participation in Field Trips should always be free. Program are allowed to make a general request for donations but families may not be excluded if they are unable to make a donation. The cost of field trips should fit within the program budget.

## PROMISING PRACTICES OF SITES SERVING STUDENTS LIVING IN POVERTY AND STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Two of the eight sampled sites that served a high proportion of students living in poverty also served students with special needs. We used the same methods described above to learn about promising practices used by these sites.

The DOE provides special education services to children ages 3 to 5 who have special needs or developmental delays that impact their ability to learn. Children may be eligible for special education services if they show a significant delay in any of the five areas of development: cognitive (thinking and learning), communication (understanding and using language), physical/motor (vision, hearing, and movement), social/emotional (getting along with other people), and adaptive/self-help (independent living skills, such as toileting, eating, and dressing).<sup>8</sup>

A number of promising practices were used by the selected sites to address the complex needs of low-income students with special needs. These sites engaged in a variety of activities such as *supporting caregivers who were going through the process of identifying and assessing their children for special education services* by offering encouragement and assistance in navigating the process. In addition, sites *provided special education services directly on-site*, including offering Special Class in an Integrated Setting (SCIS) classes that have a lower student to teacher ratio and specialized supports, allowing for more individualized attention.<sup>9</sup> The on-site supports also included ancillary services such as physical, occupational, or speech-language therapy ensuring that students received needed services and that the services were integrated into students' regular learning environment and supported by their teachers. Furthermore, these sites emphasized collaboration among staff, *ensuring that teachers, Special Education Itinerant Teachers (SEITs), and other service providers worked together to provide a continuum of services* for a seamless and consistent approach to meet the needs of students with special needs

---

<sup>8</sup> Advocates for Children of New York (AFC). AFC'S GUIDE TO Preschool Special Education Services, 2015, 1-36.

<sup>9</sup> Students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that recommends a SCIS receive support from the Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) to enroll in a program with an available SCIS placement.

## PROMISING PRACTICES OF SITES SERVING STUDENTS WHOSE HOME LANGUAGE IS A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH

To learn about promising practices for serving pre-K students whose home language is a language other than English (LOTE students), we conducted a comprehensive review of the literature, analyzed documentation and data provided by DOE, talked with early childhood education (ECE) experts, and interviewed site leaders at six sites that were rated highly on the ECERS-R and that also served high percentages of LOTE students. We also administered a survey to all Pre-K for All sites to gather information about site leaders' perspectives on the supports the DOE provided to Pre-K for All sites serving LOTE students. Promising Practices are reported in the following categories that arose from our review of the literature around best practices for serving pre-K LOTE students: use of home languages in the classroom, teaching techniques and classroom practices, teacher and staff proficiency to teach LOTE students, effective use of language assessments, and communication and outreach with families.

Overall, the practices employed by sites to serve their LOTE students and their families were consistent with the promising practices cited by the literature. In general, as would be expected, surveyed sites serving high percentages of LOTE students were more likely to report using specific practices than sites serving low percentages of LOTE students. It is important to note that many of these practices are also part of the PQS, which are intended to address the needs of LOTE students and of their peers whose home language is English.

### USE OF HOME LANGUAGES IN THE CLASSROOM

#### 1. Classroom structure

Because many LOTE students face significant linguistic and cultural barriers as they begin pre-K, research indicates that educators should provide a welcoming social setting that supports growth in their home language. To do this, a portion of sites *formally structured the pre-K classroom to include home languages*, with the goal of developing skills in English and in students' home languages—or in a formally designated target language (in the case of sites that were formally designated as Pre-K for All Dual Language, DL, or Enhanced Language Instruction, ELI, sites). According to the survey, most Pre-K for All sites that reported serving any LOTE students did not follow a specific model (e.g., dual language or ELI) for formally incorporating home language into classroom instruction, which is consistent with the fact that relatively few sites whose leaders responded to the survey were designated DL (n = 6) or ELI (n = 55) in the 2015-2016 school year. However, interviewed sites did *allow flexibility in the use of home languages in the classroom*, which was in line with research that indicates that bilingual pre-K students may benefit from flexible classroom rules related to the use of home languages and English.

#### 2. Activities and classroom materials

Research emphasizes the importance of incorporating home languages into instruction whenever possible,<sup>10</sup> and highlights the value of *providing group activities and classroom materials in home languages*.<sup>11</sup> For example, practices recommended in the literature include teaching pre-K students rhymes, songs, letters, and numbers in their home

<sup>10</sup> Goldenberg et al., 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Espinoza, 2013b; Goldenberg et al., 2013; Nemeth, 2016.

languages. Research also highlights the key practice of *making home languages a visible part of the pre-K environment*, by doing such things as labeling furniture, making signs identifying parts of the classroom and play materials, and placing artifacts on bulletin boards in English and students' home languages.<sup>12</sup> All six interviewed site leaders described incorporating games, songs, books, or activities in students' home languages or cultures. DL sites that responded to the survey also indicated following such practices. Non-DL sites reported less use of home languages in activities and instruction, as might be expected depending on the nature of their student populations.

## TEACHING TECHNIQUES AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES

The literature identifies many ways teachers of pre-K LOTE students can *use teaching strategies specifically designed to actively engage pre-K LOTE students in learning*, including:

- incorporating opportunities for LOTE students to learn through play and activity (rather than through language);
- focusing instruction on helping pre-K LOTE students learn foundational concepts and ideas that can be understood in either their home language or in English; and
- using pictures, real-world objects, and concrete experiences to convey the meaning of words and concepts to LOTE students.

For vocabulary instruction in particular, teachers can *use proven strategies to teach vocabulary to pre-K LOTE students*, such as encouraging LOTE students to talk and practice vocabulary in whichever language feels comfortable to them, and reading to LOTE students, using some of the strategies above and previewing vocabulary, bearing in mind that students may become frustrated if they cannot understand the book. Site leaders we talked with described using strategies like the ones outlined above with their LOTE students, and around two-thirds of the surveyed site leaders also reported using such strategies to support learning and language development among their LOTE students.

## TEACHER AND STAFF PROFICIENCY TO TEACH LOTE STUDENTS

### 1. Teacher and staff language ability

Research has found that LOTE students fare better when paired with teachers or staff who speak their home languages, so staff should *speak students' home languages with LOTE students whenever possible*.<sup>13</sup> If that is not possible, some ways teachers and staff can support LOTE students is by *reaching out to families at the beginning of the year to learn basic words in the home language to communicate with the students* and *inviting families into the site to share aspects of their culture*. An important part of supporting LOTE students' learning and development is to *create a predictable environment that facilitates learning*, such as using routines and classroom organization techniques, using the LOTE students' names during activities, repeating key words and phrases, setting up the classroom to provide "safe havens" where LOTE students can play without needing to use language, and encouraging other students to play with LOTE students.<sup>14</sup> In all six interviewed sites, leaders reported having at least some teachers and/or teaching assistants who spoke the most common language of the LOTE students attending these sites. However, a few sites served students from multiple linguistic backgrounds, so they generally relied on a teacher assistant or paraprofessional onsite to work

---

<sup>12</sup> Goldenberg et al., 2013, California Department of Education, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Espinosa 2013a, Chang et al., 2007; Goldenberg et al., 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Tabors, 2008.

with these students. When there were multiple languages present, or more rare languages, even this became a challenge.

## 2. Professional learning

The literature encourages *offering ongoing professional learning and training to teachers of pre-K LOTE students*.<sup>15</sup> One study found that offering professional learning (PL) opportunities to pre-K teachers improved LOTE students' phonological skills in their home language, while students of teachers who did not receive PL did not show similar improvements.<sup>16</sup> Importantly, *PL for pre-K teachers of LOTE students should be aligned with instructional goals and curriculum and teachers should be given ongoing feedback*.<sup>17</sup> Specifically, professional learning for preschool teachers and staff should provide a strong knowledge base in six content areas: (a) understanding of language development, (b) understanding the relationship between language and culture, (c) developing skills and abilities to effectively teach LOTE students, (d) developing abilities to use assessment in meaningful ways for LOTE students, (e) developing a sense of professionalism, and (f) understanding how to work with families.<sup>18</sup>

Most surveyed site leaders reported no challenges or mild challenges accessing PL related to LOTE students. However, around half of surveyed site leaders wished for more PL to work with their LOTE families—specifically in the area of engaging LOTE families. Finally, all six site leaders we interviewed reported having staff participate in PL offered by the DOE or other sources.

## EFFECTIVE USE OF LANGUAGE ASSESSMENTS

Researchers *recommend that assessments of pre-K LOTE students' language abilities be done in both their home languages and in English*.<sup>19</sup> More specifically, assessments of language ability should be conducted in the dominant language first, followed by English, to gain an understanding of students' age-appropriate language abilities. Furthermore, *assessments should be culturally and linguistically sensitive to LOTE students' unique needs*.<sup>20</sup> For example, assessments should take into account the fact that bilingual students may learn vocabulary thematically (e.g., school-related words in English and home-related words in the home language).<sup>21</sup> Another important practice is to *use multiple methods, observational assessments to assess LOTE preschool students, and repeated measurements*.<sup>22</sup> This can be done, for instance, through daily classroom interactions with a bilingual teacher, or use of structured assessments or work sampling approaches. Finally, teachers and staff can *get input from family members about LOTE students' language development*.<sup>23</sup>

Pre-K for All sites are required to conduct an initial diagnostic screening on all eligible students using a valid and reliable developmental screening tool to help identify potential developmental delays and language acquisition needs at the

---

<sup>15</sup> Buysee, Castro, & Peisner-Feinberg, 2010; Castro et al., 2011; Espinosa, 2013a; Goldenberg et al., 2013; Zepeda, Castor, & Cronin, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Buysee, et al., 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Zepeda, et al., 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Espinosa 2013a; Espinosa & Gutiérrez-Clellen, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Espinosa & Gutiérrez-Clellen, 2013; National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Bandel, Atkins-Burnett, Castro, Wulsin, & Putnam, 2012.

<sup>22</sup> NAEYC, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Espinosa & Gutiérrez-Clellen, 2013; Tabors, 2008.



beginning of the school year.<sup>24</sup> The tools are designed to assist educators in learning about the various aspects of a child’s development such as language, cognition, perception, and motor development. All sites are also required to adopt and implement an approved, valid, and reliable authentic assessment system that covers all the development domains as outlined in the New York State Pre-K Foundation for the Common Core (PKFCC). *Pre-K for All* sites are not required to screen pre-K students specifically for English or home language abilities.

Site leaders we interviewed reported using various methods to gauge LOTE students’ language proficiency. Some used informal language “assessments” that generally occurred informally and arose organically out of classroom activities, such as gauging students’ understanding of directions in English to see which students needed interpretation in a home language or using weekly show-and-tell sessions in English as a marker of students’ English abilities. A few site leaders described using slightly more formal processes to assess LOTE students’ English proficiency, such as work sampling approaches or teacher-made language assessments.

## COMMUNICATON AND OUTREACH WITH FAMILIES

### 1. Relationship-building and encouraging family engagement

The literature recommends *making pre-K sites warm and welcoming environments in which LOTE families feel comfortable participating* (Note: This practice is aligned with PQS #1 *Strong Relationships*).<sup>25</sup> This can be done, for example, by inviting LOTE families to participate on program boards, sharing ideas on how to support LOTE families, and creating leadership roles for family members. Another key practice identified by the literature is *emphasizing to LOTE families that they are their children’s first and primary teachers, and that collaboration with the pre-K site is critical to supporting their children’s development*. Some strategies to do this include inviting LOTE families to share their knowledge and interests with site staff and incorporating activities that highlight or explore LOTE families’ home languages, cultures, and interests in program planning.<sup>26</sup>

Another important practice is *collaborating with LOTE families to set developmental-related goals for their children* (Note: This practice is aligned with PQS #3 *Capacity-Building*).<sup>27</sup> Finally, sites should *offer supports and suggestions to LOTE families on how to foster their children’s learning and development*<sup>28</sup> and *emphasize to families the value of learning multiple languages*.<sup>29</sup>

All six interviewed site leaders reported that their sites regularly communicated with and held meetings with families. Leaders also described creating a welcoming environment for LOTE families by, for example, having open-door policies for parents and regular teacher-parent conferences. A majority of surveyed site leaders reported incorporating families’ culture into site activities, such as asking them to share traditional foods, songs, or celebrations. Finally, all six interviewed site leaders reported that they encouraged LOTE families to be active participants in their children’s

---

<sup>24</sup> Approved screenings include: Early Screening Inventory—Revised (ESI-R), provided by DOE free of charge; Ages and Stages Questionnaires – Third Edition (ASQ-3), and Brigance Inventories System II.

<sup>25</sup> Halgunseth, Gisela, & Barbarin, 2013; Gelatt, Adams, Huerta, & Urban, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Halgunseth et al., 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Gelatt et al., 2014; Halgunseth et al., 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Halgunseth et al., 2013; Restrepo & Towle-Harmon, 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Tabors, 2008; HHS/ED & US DoED, 2006.

education. One way sites did this was by creating home-language activities that parents could do at home with their children.

## 2. Communication with LOTE families

Research recommends **establishing processes and procedures that foster positive communication among LOTE families and students and site staff** (PQS #2 *Two-Way Communication*), including asking LOTE families at the beginning of the school year to indicate their preferred language of communication, developing a language and communication policy that informs LOTE families about the modes in which they can communicate with staff, and providing interpreters and translations of printed materials to LOTE families.<sup>30</sup>

The large majority of surveyed sites reported that they often had staff on site who spoke languages other than English with families and who could meet with families and provide additional supports. All six interviewed site leaders relied on bilingual staff to communicate with families who spoke languages that were common at the sites and to provide interpretation at family events as needed. Also, DOE offers a Language Line that sites can use to obtain translation or interpretation support when they are having difficulty communicating in a family's home language.

---

<sup>30</sup> Goldenberg et al., 2013; Halgunseth et al., 2013; HHS/ED & US DoED, 2016.

## INTRODUCTION

---

**In the fall of 2014, New York City launched the historic Pre-K for All initiative with the goal of providing universal access to free, full-day, high-quality programming for all of New York City’s 4-year olds.** Demonstrating its commitment to learning and quality improvement, the City<sup>31</sup> engaged the services of three research firms—Westat, Metis Associates, and Branch Associates—to undertake a comprehensive evaluation. The Year 1 evaluation included a study of the effectiveness of the implementation process and a snapshot of student learning. In Year 2 (2015–16), the evaluation addressed the variety of supports provided to students and the professional learning (PL), coaching, and other supports provided to Pre-K for All center staff in more than 1,800 Pre-K for All sites.

Pre-K for All strives to ensure the delivery of high-quality pre-K education for all students. The DOE’s vision for high quality is defined in the New York City Pre-K for All Program Quality Standards (PQS), which “describe key practices of family engagement, rigorous and developmentally appropriate instruction, professional collaborations, and leadership that support children in gaining the knowledge and skills outlined in the New York State Pre-Kindergarten Foundation for the Common Core (PKFCC).” The PQS are organized into five overarching areas: Strong Family-Community Ties, Supportive Environment, Rigorous Instruction, Collaborative Teachers, and Effective School Leadership. Appendix B lists all 14 program quality standards.

To address these standards, Pre-K for All sites offer services and receive supports designed to help ensure that students gain the skills and knowledge to thrive as they transition into kindergarten. In 2015–16, supports and resources for the more than 1,800 Pre-K for All sites included:

- a variety of professional learning (PL) opportunities;
- coaching and instructional support from Division of Early Childhood Education (DECE) Instructional Coordinators to site leaders and teaching teams in all domains of instruction;
- coaching and support from DECE Social Workers to site leaders, teaching teams, families, and children in the areas of social-emotional development and family engagement practices; and
- operational support from the DOE’s central and field offices, authentic assessment and screening resources, family engagement resources, independent program assessment reports, and peer learning opportunities.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to the supports outlined above, sites receive additional support for students with special needs. The DOE provides preschool special education services to children ages 3 to 5 who have special needs or developmental delays that impact their ability to learn. Children may be eligible for preschool special education services if they show a significant delay in any of the five areas of development: cognitive (thinking and learning); communication (understanding and using language); physical/motor (vision, hearing, and movement); social/emotional (getting along with other people); and adaptive/self-help (independent living skills, such as toileting, eating, and dressing). Following an evaluation process, children exhibiting developmental delays may receive special education services including speech

---

<sup>31</sup> Here “City” refers to the Mayor’s Office for Economic Opportunity and the New York City Department of Education (DOE) through the Division of Early Childhood Education (DECE), in cooperation with the New York City Administration for Children’s Services (ACS), and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH).

therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and support from a Special Education Itinerant Teacher [SEIT], according to an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

**This report explores the myriad supports provided to students living in poverty, students with special needs, and students whose home language is a language other than English (LOTE students).** In addition, we review the best practices cited in the literature for serving LOTE students, and provide a link between these best practices and the services provided by Pre-K for All centers. Our work was framed by three primary questions:

1. What promising practices can we learn from sites that serve high proportions of families living in poverty?
2. What promising practices can we learn from sites that serve high proportions of students living in poverty and high proportions of students with special needs?
3. What does the research literature say are the promising practices for serving preschool-aged students whose home language is a language other than English (LOTE)? How well do the services provided by selected sites align with these promising practices?

The Year 2 evaluation used multiple methods and data sources, including interviews with key DOE staff from various offices including the DECE and a review of DOE documentation and available data, such as materials describing the various supports provided to sites and information about instruction and services for students whose home language is a language other than English (LOTE) and for students with special needs. We also administered a survey to gather information about site leaders' perspectives on the supports the DOE provided to Pre-K for All sites as well as ongoing needs for support.

Three samples of sites were purposefully selected for inclusion in this study in collaboration with the NYC DOE, and based on assessment data,<sup>33</sup> input from DECE staff, and the characteristics of enrolled students. The first sample included sites with high percentages of children living in high-poverty census tracts or in temporary housing. The second sample included sites with high percentages of children living in high-poverty census tracts or in temporary housing, and high percentages of students with special needs. The third sample included sites with high percentages of LOTE students.

To answer the first and second evaluation questions outlined above, in the spring of 2016 we visited a sample of eight Pre-K for All sites serving high proportions of students living in poverty and, in some cases, high proportions of students with special needs. We conducted in-depth interviews with site leaders, teachers, and caregivers at each site. We also interviewed the DECE Instructional Coordinators and Social Workers assigned to the sampled sites. To answer the third evaluation question, we surveyed site leaders, conducted a comprehensive review of the literature, analyzed documentation and data provided by DOE, talked with early childhood education (ECE) experts, and interviewed site leaders at six sites that were rated highly on assessment data<sup>34</sup> and also served high percentages of LOTE students. When we refer to Instructional Coordinators and Social Workers in this report, we are referring to DECE staff who provided support to sites, and not staff hired by the sites themselves (for example, district schools could have their own school social workers).

---

<sup>33</sup> The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) tool measures the extent to which programs are successful at reaching many of the standards related to the pre-K learning environment.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

[Appendix A](#) provides more detail on the evaluation methodology. It is important to note that, due to the small number of individuals selected for participation in the interviews and focus groups, the findings that come from them cannot be considered representative. Nevertheless, they provide interesting insights into the ways sites are working to meet the needs of the City’s pre-K students living in poverty, students with special needs, and LOTE students.

In the sections that follow, findings related to each evaluation question are presented in the following order (Note: clicking on one of the bullets below will take you to the corresponding section):

- [Promising practices of sites serving students living in poverty](#)
- [Promising practices of sites serving students living in poverty and with special needs](#)
- [Promising practices of sites serving students whose home language is a language other than English](#)

## PROMISING PRACTICES OF SITES SERVING STUDENTS LIVING IN POVERTY

Data collected from our sample of sites suggest that they share some promising practices related to operations and fostering student growth. Specifically, the sites demonstrate common strategies for a) using human and physical resources, b) fostering academic and social-emotional learning, c) engaging with families and the community, d) providing additional wrap-around supports for their families, and e) leveraging other resources and funding sources to produce positive outcomes among their students.

In this section, we describe these key strategies and provide examples of how the sites included in our study implemented them. This information can inform future efforts by other sites to foster the learning and development of their own students. Based on our analysis of the data, we have organized the promising practices into five categories:

- human and physical resources,
- teaching and learning,
- family engagement,
- wrap-around supports, and
- additional supports and resources.

In each section, we note challenges that students and families living in poverty face via call-out boxes. These boxes highlight the issues that our data suggest may be challenging for the students and families in sampled sites. These areas, and others that emerged from the data, are addressed in the promising practices that site staff engaged in to help meet the needs of students attending their programs.

### HUMAN AND PHYSICAL RESOURCES

#### Addressing the Needs of Students and Families Living in Poverty: Human and Physical Resources

Children and families living in poverty often have difficulty meeting their most basic needs, such as not having enough food, clothing, or stable housing. Staff at sites we visited noted that this may lead to a variety of challenges beyond those associated with obtaining these tangible resources. For example, staff observed that students from poverty backgrounds are less likely to have access to safe playgrounds and outdoor spaces outside of the Pre-K program. Indeed, as noted in a report from American Academy of Pediatrics, “the neighborhoods in which [low income families] live lack community resources, such as community centers, parks, and fully equipped supervised playgrounds that offer safe places for children to play and to gather. Children have fewer opportunities to participate in organized sports. Because of fear of violence, families do not venture outside with their children for fun physical activities, such as walking, bike riding, swinging, swimming, playing tennis, or jogging” (Milteer & Ginsburg, 2011). For some students, this may result in a decrease in gross motor skills. One teacher we interviewed commented that in their site they focus a great deal on “...physical development, we find it very important, because a lot of the children don't get a lot of outside time”. Yet, not all pre-K programs have access to safe outdoor space, which presents additional challenges serving these students.

In addition, all children, and those living in poverty in particular, need teachers who both understand and are able to address student needs. According to Saluja, Early, and Clifford (2002), “...teachers in high-quality settings tend to have more specialized training in early childhood education and child development, and they are more informed about developmentally appropriate practices and teaching strategies for use with young children.” The sites we visited had strong staff with high levels of training to support the academic and social-emotional growth of students through a variety of activities, such as creating welcoming environments for families, collaborating to meet student needs, and facilitating high caliber learning experiences for children.

Two aspects of human and physical resources are discussed in this section: program leadership and staff, and physical environment and setting.

## Program Leadership and Staff

The sites we visited used their staff to support teaching and learning through the promising practices outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1. Promising Practices Related to Program Leadership and Staff**

Promising Practices	Associated PQS
<p><b>Have strong leaders who:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide high level, hands-on support.</li> <li>• Foster growth opportunities for teachers.</li> <li>• Hire dedicated, experienced teachers who attend to the holistic needs of children and their families.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for regular collaboration among teachers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong Relationships (<i>Strong Family-Community Ties</i>)</li> <li>• Two-Way Communication (<i>Strong Family-Community Ties</i>) Equity and Individualization in Education (<i>Supportive Environment</i>)</li> <li>• Creating a Positive Classroom Culture (<i>Rigorous Instruction</i>)</li> <li>• Physical Resources for Learning (<i>Rigorous Instruction</i>)</li> <li>• Cultivating Professional Practice and Leadership (<i>Collaborative Teachers</i>)</li> <li>• Shaping a Vision (<i>Effective School Leadership</i>)</li> <li>• Resource Management (<i>Effective School Leadership</i>)</li> <li>• Program Quality Improvement (<i>Effective School Leadership</i>)</li> </ul>

Note: The PQS are not listed in a specific order related to the promising practices, as they may apply to more than one practice.

**Promising Practice: Provide high level, hands-on support.** Whether a principal (or a designee) at a district school or a program director at a NYCEEC, all of the site leaders we interviewed were supportive of Pre-K for All. Site leaders at the sites we visited were involved in all program activities and projected a positive attitude to the staff, students, and families.

*“[The site leader] knows every child by name. She knows their background. She can come in, in an instant, to provide support and get everything back on track.. So she’s a very strong director.”*

Instructional Coordinator

Pre-K teachers also noted that site leaders supported effective teaching and learning through a variety of approaches and activities, such as:

- **Getting to know the learning community to understand families’ needs and providing a welcoming environment.** Site leaders made concerted efforts to communicate with all stakeholders, including caregivers, as well as to keep open lines of communication with staff with an open-door policy for families. For example, site leaders may have met with families at open houses, welcomed families when they drop off their children, or attended classroom activities. This helped to ensure that they provided the needed supports and set an overall positive tone and environment in the site.

- **Participating in the day-to-day activities in classrooms,** offering advice and support to teachers on an ongoing basis while still allowing for flexibility among teachers and classrooms. Leaders of the sampled sites stayed involved in the teaching and learning process and provided feedback to teachers. For example, one site leader met with teachers on a bi-weekly basis, conducted classroom observations, and held coaching sessions with the staff to provide feedback on their teaching. Another site leader noted that she spent time in classrooms specifically engaging in activities she learned during the PL provided by the DOE,<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> See the second report in this series, *Evaluation of the Pre-K for All Initiative 2015–16: An Assessment of Professional Development, Coaching, and Supports to Sites* for additional details about these supports.

commenting, “[The PL brought] me into the rooms more, to do my own observations. Even if it's informal, and I'm not writing down everything... [I am also] discussing it with the teachers.”

*“[The site leader] is very enthusiastic and hands-on. You seldom find her in the office. She’s always walking around classrooms, and seeing how everything is going on.”*

Instructional Coordinator

- **Leveraging a variety of resources to provide extra materials and resources to further enhance teaching and learning.** Leaders pointed out that they combined resources whenever possible to ensure that teachers and classrooms have a variety of extra resources to support student learning and development. This included using resources from grants and other school- or community-based funding to help support instruction and address the full scope of child and family needs across classrooms. As one site leader commented,

*I think making sure that classrooms are fully equipped with all the resources that a teacher needs is a really huge thing. You want to have all of those resources there, ready for children to touch, explore, to learn how to navigate. And that is a major piece that I think is very important [for a site leader]. And we work very hard to make sure no classroom looks different, [due to] limited resources.*

**Promising Practice: Foster growth opportunities for teachers.** Site leaders encouraged professional growth for teachers and assistant teachers to facilitate high-level learning experiences for students and help decrease teacher turnover. They foster staff growth by:

- **Providing opportunities for mentoring** from experienced teachers. The leader at one site organized a mentoring program that was described by teachers as being very helpful.

*When I started last year, what I liked was that all of us that came in new, we were assigned a mentor teacher, a teacher that had been here. So if we had anything I needed to know, or if I needed to observe in a class or whatever the case may be, I would go to her, and she always made time to sit down and talk to me.*

- **Allowing assistant teachers to take responsibility** for daily classroom activities under the supervision of lead teachers so they can grow and learn while still having oversight to ensure a quality learning experience. For example, at one site a teacher indicated that they ran their program as if it were a “residency,” saying,

*Instead of the head teacher always taking responsibility, I feel that the assistants and the aides are a part of that responsibility. Because that's how everyone learns. Like a doctor, they learn when they're residents. And that's the best place for them to learn, with someone who already knows.*

- **Encouraging participation at DOE and other site-based professional learning.** Site leaders used PL opportunities to encourage their teachers to continue to learn and develop. Site leaders noted that they “always make sure the teachers go to professional learning...[and] offer a lot of professional learning [on site].”

**Promising Practice: Hire dedicated, experienced teachers who attend to the holistic needs of children and their families.** Site leaders believed that the teachers themselves were a defining aspect of the quality of the programs. Pre-



K teachers we interviewed said they understood the unique needs of their students and families in their programs and had a clear understanding of child development.

**Promising Practice: Provide opportunities for regular collaboration among teachers.** Staff we interviewed pointed out that collaboration among staff was a very important part of the success of a site, both from an instructional and staff development perspective. For example, one teacher commented,

*The way we work together is a big part of [the site's success]. Collaboration...we plan our units of study as a group. Everybody shares their ideas...this planning piece of it is very helpful. To be able to plan together, and to bounce ideas off of each other, and to know what's worked for one person and what I think I should try –it makes my teaching better.*

*"For me, it comes down to my staff... I have a really committed staff, dedicated, that definitely will go above and beyond. I was very particular in hiring...and letting [potential teachers know] the expectations. This can't just be, walk in and out. You have to be able to provide more than that. If you can't, that's fine, there are plenty of schools where you may not have to, but in this one, you do. [It was important to be] very up front with that, from the hiring process."*

Site Leader

### Box 1. Spotlight on Staff Professional Growth as a Promising Practice at One Site

A central component of this Pre-K for All site is its investment in staff professional growth and commitment to collaborative teaching. It is a well-established program, having served pre-K students for more than 15 years and offering a full-day program for the past 3 years. The site serves approximately 120 pre-K students, of whom roughly 60 percent are living in poverty and 30 percent are living in temporary housing. There are eight pre-K classes with three staff each—a lead teacher, teacher aide, and a teaching assistant. A majority of the pre-K teachers have 10 or more years of experience in early childhood education. The site leadership is strongly committed to fostering an **environment of professional learning and growth** among its staff. In the 2014–15 school year, all teachers participated in intensive training on the site's new curriculum. The school leader also participated in the training to become well-equipped to support teachers in implementing the curriculum.

Teachers are also supported through informal professional **mentoring** teams. Each new teacher is paired with an experienced teacher to help guide her in learning the curriculum and developing effective instructional practices. One novice teacher said of her mentor, "I asked her opinion about things, and even now, a year later, she's still mentoring. A lot of programs don't have things like that. But here, I thought [that was] was fantastic. And that helped a lot, a lot, lot."

**Collaborative teaching and a culture of professional teamwork** were reported by staff to benefit all teachers and students. Teachers said they frequently worked together through formal collaborative meetings and informal conversations. They said this benefited students by creating an environment of "shared responsibility"—one in which teachers view the program as one learning environment rather than a group of separate classrooms. Teachers highlighted the value of collaboration in the following remarks:

*There has been a tremendous amount of teamwork. You can see it. You can feel the growth; you could see the interest, the love, the friendliness, the openness – open to change. Nothing is etched in stone, which is good. There's flexibility, there's diversity. And there's honesty. And that seems to be allowed to transpire, in the way that the staff want it to...That's a good thing. I feel happy to be a part of that." Another teacher added "You know, you get to see how every classroom does have the support, and no one is going to have a perfect day. But you see that even in those days when someone does need to talk, or a resource, it's not like people have to go looking for it. It's just here. So that's a very important part; that makes a difference."*

## Physical Environment and Setting

At the Pre-K for All sites we visited, the physical environment was reported to play an important role in providing young children, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, with a safe and comforting place where their academic and social-emotional learning are nurtured. High-quality sites in our study used the practices outlined in Table 2 to create supportive physical environments for their students.

**Table 2. Promising Practices Related to Physical Environment and Setting**

Promising Practices	Associated PQS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have physical spaces that support the academic, physical, and social-emotional development of students.</li> <li>• Position pre-K classrooms close to each other to facilitate sharing of materials and collaboration among teachers.</li> <li>• Leverage all available resources to meet the needs of students and families.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical Resources for Learning (<i>Rigorous Instruction</i>)</li> <li>• Cultivating Professional Practice and Leadership (<i>Collaborative Teachers</i>)</li> <li>• Resource Management (<i>Effective School Leadership</i>)</li> </ul>

Note: The PQS are not listed in a specific order related to the promising practices, as they may apply to more than one practice.

**Promising Practice: Have physical spaces that support the academic, physical, and social-emotional development of students.** The physical environment, including having both classroom/indoor spaces and outdoor spaces, was reported to be an essential aspect of students’ learning experience, although the sizes and types of spaces varied by site. Teachers and site leaders we spoke with pointed out that resource-abundant classrooms are particularly important in serving low-income students who may have little exposure to reading materials or enriching experiences at home (e.g., visits outside their community or time to play outside). Although the classrooms at each of the eight sites were organized differently from one another, all were set up to foster learning and support the social-emotional needs of students. One site, for example, maximized space by creating a cozy loft for reading, with a dramatic play area underneath, thereby providing students a place to collect themselves and learn to regulate their emotions. In addition, many of the sampled sites had access to outdoor spaces that staff said was especially important for low-income students. As one site leader explained,

*A lot of the children don't get a lot of outside time. So our goal is to have them get [outdoor time] every day. We're always looking at new equipment, new ideas. They either go outdoors, in our playground... [or] recently we had a week where they went to the park every other day.*

Teachers and caregivers mentioned that providing time for pre-K students to play outdoors helps encourage gross motor and social-emotional skill development. Additionally, they said that having private outdoor play spaces that are accessible to students and families after school hours can help foster community building and family engagement. To facilitate this, some classrooms had doors that led directly to outdoor play spaces. One caregiver commented,

*We have those back doors, the back doors that open right up to the back playground. So our little kids are very segregated from the inside of the school and the big crazy dismissal stuff. And that little playground in the back, it just has built such a nice little community for our kids. Because they come out of school, and we see all of our pre-K friends...it really lent itself so beautifully to the community-building for [my son], and comfort.*

**Promising Practice: Position pre-K classrooms near each other to facilitate sharing of materials and collaboration among teachers.** As part of the practice of having physical spaces that support student learning and development, staff at sites we visited mentioned that having pre-K classrooms close together fosters staff collaboration and support. Teachers especially appreciated the ability to collaborate with one another to share ideas and assist each other when needed. Having classrooms physically close to one another, and even connected (sometimes via an adjoining bathroom), helped facilitate this relationship. As noted by one teacher, “it’s so great that we have our own wing, and it’s very easy for us to go into each other’s rooms, and see something, and, ‘Oh, I’m going to do that,’ or, ‘That’s a great idea.’”

*“We don’t see [Pre-K for All] as a separate unit. We see the pre-K as part of the entire school community. So they participate in all of the activities and experiences that we offer throughout the building... Because we do have so many wrap-around services... [we can] get some ideas or techniques to try to address some issues that young people may be grappling with, as they participate in [the Pre-K for All] program.”*

Site Leader

**Promising Practice: Leverage all available resources to meet the needs of students and families.** Exposure to a variety of print materials and life experiences (e.g., books, extracurricular activities, and different environments) may be lacking for children from families with limited resources. Some teachers mentioned that this might present itself as children having limited background knowledge to apply to learning experiences, which can result in students entering the program with limited language and content knowledge skills. The sites we visited worked to leverage resources available within the local community, organization, or school to provide a variety of supports essential to addressing the holistic needs of low income children and families. Two examples are presented below.

- Students benefitted from the availability of additional staff, such as counselors and mental health professionals that provided social-emotional services, and other learning opportunities (e.g., music programs) provided by the school at-large or partner organizations brought in to provide assistance.
- Sites that were located near homeless shelters facilitated access to food pantries.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

### Addressing the Needs of Students and Families Living in Poverty: Student Learning Experiences

Students living in poverty face challenges that may impact their learning. Research suggests that this may result from poor health, unstable housing, or other situations that affect school attendance and limit opportunities for enrichment. An analysis of literature by The Brookings Institution (2012) identified two areas that influence learning outcomes for students living in poverty: “poor children do worse in school partly because their families have fewer financial resources but also because their parents tend to have less education, higher rates of single and teen parenthood, poorer health, and other characteristics that place their children at risk for less successful outcomes.” Furthermore, families living in poverty may confront prohibitive transportation costs, lack of childcare for younger children who are not yet enrolled in school, and inflexible work schedules. Notably, according to staff, children at the study sites were not always from the surrounding community. Some site staff commented that having to travel long distances to allow their children to attend the program “put a lot more stress on families as a whole.” Staff also believed that some caregivers were less likely to bring their children to school regularly because they felt that, “since this is only pre-K, it’s optional.” For instance, teachers and staff reflected that sometimes families viewed the program as childcare rather than an educational program. They said this was particularly true for families for whom Pre-K for All was the only way they could get affordable childcare.

Staff at the study sites addressed inconsistent attendance in several ways, such as offering food to parents at drop off time or during meetings (to encourage them to bring their children to the program), and having teachers and other staff communicate with caregivers about the importance of daily attendance and emphasizing how the program helps children meet developmental milestones.

Students in families living in poverty may also lack exposure to varied experiences that support learning. This was especially apparent at the study sites that attracted an economically diverse set of families. For example, when using a curriculum that included descriptions of locations, such as the beach, which all students may not have a reference point for teachers sought to bridge the children’s different experiences by modifying instructional materials to meet the needs of all students.

The sections below include a discussion of student learning experiences and social-emotional development.

### Student Learning Experiences

The sites we visited worked to maximize the available time and resources to ensure that all students received meaningful and deep learning experiences and used data to assess the impact of those experiences on student learning. They employed the practices outlined in Table 3 to achieve this.

**Table 3. Promising Practices Related to Learning Experiences**

Promising Practices	Associated PQS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take full advantage of the time allotted.</li> <li>Offer rich and varied learning materials and environments.</li> <li>Use assessment data to inform instructional decisions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong Relationships (<i>Strong Family-Community Ties</i>)</li> <li>Equity and Individualization in Education (<i>Supportive Environment</i>)</li> <li>Developmental Screening &amp; Authentic Assessment (<i>Rigorous Instruction</i>)</li> <li>Curriculum Planning Cycle (<i>Rigorous Instruction</i>)</li> <li>Engaging Children in Meaningful Activity (<i>Rigorous Instruction</i>)</li> <li>Creating A Positive Classroom Culture (<i>Rigorous Instruction</i>)</li> <li>Physical Resources for Learning (<i>Rigorous Instruction</i>)</li> <li>Cultivating Professional Practice and Leadership (<i>Collaborative Teachers</i>)</li> <li>Shaping a Vision (<i>Effective School Leadership</i>)</li> <li>Resource Management (<i>Effective School Leadership</i>)</li> <li>Program Quality Improvement (<i>Effective School Leadership</i>)</li> </ul>

Note: The PQS are not listed in a specific order related to the promising practices, as they may apply to more than one practice.

**Promising Practice: Take full advantage of the time allotted.** Teachers in the selected sites we visited strove to ensure that *all* classroom activities were purposeful, including time spent in transitions. This required teachers to have excellent curricular and planning skills, and an ability to modify lessons on the spot. It also required that teachers know their students well to effectively plan for what their students needed. While working to maximize learning, the teachers we spoke with highlighted that play is an integral part of the learning process, so they used play to foster additional student learning opportunities.

**Promising Practice: Offer rich and varied learning materials and diverse learning opportunities.** At the sites we visited, the classrooms were designed to facilitate learning via use of thematic materials aligned with state standards and to address the multi-modal ways in which students learn. Staff felt this type of classroom environment was inviting to students and could help with student learning. One site leader described the curricular materials as “high-interest and hands-on. They are Common Core aligned with the pre-K standards, cross-curricular, [and] multi-sensory. The kids love them.”

*“We have resources that are accessible, one that is designed by the staff, the thematic approach, as well as other resources and materials. So that children have exposure to a lot of tactile materials that they can explore and navigate. So those pieces put together are very much a part of what makes [our program] successful.”*

Site Leader

Perhaps not surprisingly, offering a variety of materials and having an ability to modify curriculum to differentiate instruction were stated to be important for meeting the needs of general education students and students with special needs. Staff we interviewed reported using a variety of curricular materials to meet student needs and allow for individualization and differentiation of learning experiences. This included using packaged and locally developed curricular materials. Many teachers used the DECE’s Interdisciplinary Units of Study as a primary source of content or to supplement other packaged curricula (e.g., Creative Curriculum). When using locally developed curricular materials, teachers used themes and tried to ensure that they used appropriate materials to meet varying student needs. One site leader commented that general education students and students with special needs often have similar struggles (albeit on a different scale), and said that both groups can benefit from teachers using a variety of approaches to learning, such as using visual, oral, and written stimuli or engaging in language development activities with visual aids..

Some staff we interviewed used technology to supplement the available resources. For example, in some sites, teachers used technology to expose students to things that they were not otherwise able to do, such as go on field trips. One site leader commented,

*Every classroom has a SmartBoard, which is not something that five years ago would have been in the pre-K classroom. And so the teachers have also now taken advantage of that tool, to bring more resources to a child who may not have been to [for example] Niagara Falls, but can see a waterfall in a presentation through this technology. For the child who's never been there, here, that's my opportunity to see it. For the child who has, it's re-visiting, "Oh yeah, that's what you're talking about!" And it allows that openness, so that more children can be a part of the conversation. And so I think those [technologies] are helpful, specifically to those children who we [know are living] in poverty.*

Families we spoke with also valued the use of technology in the classroom. One parent mentioned that having such access is particularly important for children who don’t have access to technology at home, “I would have to say [one of

the things that most influenced my child’s growth was], the computers. And I'm glad, because at home, I don't have a computer. There's no electronics for him to learn like that, so it was really cool.”

## Social-Emotional Development

### Addressing the Needs of Students and Families Living in Poverty: Social-Emotional Development

Healthy social-emotional development may be a challenge for children from families with a precarious economic situation, in which parents or caregivers are focused on responding to ongoing or immediate short-term crises and needs (such as securing food and housing). According to a report published by the National Center for Children in Poverty (Cooper, Masi, & Vick, 2009), research shows that children from low-income environments are more likely than their peers who do not come from such environments to struggle with behavior problems that can impact their social-emotional development.

Interviews and focus groups with staff at the selected sites revealed that they worked hard to address the social-emotional development of their students living in poverty. As one DECE Instructional Coordinator commented, “Some of these parents are dealing with challenges—could be money, medical, or housing. So their energy is being poured into all those things...[and] the little ones [get] less of the support that they should be getting at home.” In addition, during the interviews staff noted that stresses like a “lack of permanent housing” may lead to behavior problems and difficulty self-regulating more often among children living in poverty. In some communities served by the sites we visited, opportunities for organic (spontaneous) and planned social experiences among families outside of the classroom were limited due to a lack of safe spaces to play in or because of family obligations.

Because of these and other issues, staff noted that students may be entering pre-K without having acquired the basic social-emotional skills that are critical to success in school. As explained by one teacher, many students have limited opportunities to interact with other children their age; they are “not having to think about taking turns...they're not learning how to lose. That's a big thing [when they lose at school or have to take turns] they get really, really upset.” In addition, some teachers noted that children from families living in poverty had difficulty adjusting to classroom routines. Overall, challenges students face at home can result in varied behaviors in the classroom, requiring increased attention from teachers and staff to address the unique needs of each child.

The sample of sites highlighted in this report incorporated social-emotional learning opportunities into the curriculum to help students develop social and interpersonal skills and prepare them to succeed academically. These sites also offered supports and services related to students’ and their families’ social-emotional development. The practices they used are outlined in Table 4.

**Table 4. Promising Practices Related to Social-Emotional Development**

Promising Practices	Associated PQS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that staff understand the importance of supporting all aspects of students’ social-emotional development.</li> <li>Differentiate strategies based on the general needs of the community and the particular needs of students.</li> <li>Incorporate the social-emotional development of students into every element of the program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong Relationships (<i>Strong Family-Community Ties</i>)</li> <li>Two-Way Communication (<i>Strong Family-Community Ties</i>)</li> <li>Capacity-Building (<i>Strong Family-Community Ties</i>)</li> <li>Equity and Individualization in Education (<i>Supportive Environment</i>)</li> <li>Curriculum Planning Cycle (<i>Rigorous Instruction</i>)</li> <li>Cultivating Professional Practice and Leadership (<i>Collaborative Teachers</i>)</li> </ul>

Note: The PQS are not listed in a specific order related to the promising practices, as they may apply to more than one practice.

**Promising Practice: Ensure that staff understand the importance of supporting all aspects of students’ social-emotional development.** The sites we visited had staff who understood the importance of supporting all aspects of the emotional development of their students, including self-regulation, emotional expression, and the ability to interact with others during instructional and recreational time. The latter was described as especially critical for students who have not had much exposure to social interactions (with peers or adult family members) at home.

Families affirmed the importance of social-emotional development and expressed satisfaction with their children’s programs, saying that their children were “becoming more outgoing” and learning how to “play with others.” One caregiver described how her child “came out of her shell.... Now she sings, she dances. She knows her teacher, everybody in her classroom. It’s really good.”

**Promising Practice: Differentiate strategies based on the general needs of the community and the particular needs of students.** Staff at the sites we visited recognized that the low-income populations they serve may have greater social-emotional needs, so they increased their support by making adjustments to curriculum, instruction, and wrap-around services. At the same time, site leaders and teachers also focused on addressing the particular challenges specific to each student. Three practices emerged from our visits that were seen to be particularly helpful for learning about and addressing the needs of students and their families.

- **Staff should recognize that students come to school each day emotionally primed by their home experiences.** Teachers should understand that it is important to identify the sources of students’ emotions, validate student’s emotional expressions, and respond to them appropriately. To do this, teachers at one site created a chart so “kids [could] come in and move their name to a picture that illustrated how they were feeling that morning, and so that would be like a signal to the teacher, a heads-up, that someone is sad, or upset, or angry, and then maybe take a few minutes out of their morning to quietly talk to the student to see what’s going on, and let them know that they care.”

*“Our philosophy here is that this has to be their little utopia. So no matter what’s going on outside, in here they have to feel safe, confident, and respected. That’s how we build up their characters.”*

Site Leader

Staff also pointed out that it is important for teachers to recognize the challenges some students face at home. One teacher explained, “We’ve had kids, they’ve seen some pretty horrific things. Especially if they’re in a domestic violence shelter. So it might be something that, yes, we can support the child in school, social-emotional-wise, but would also be a benefit for them to get outside counseling.”

- **Staff can gain important details about students’ lives through relationships with families.** Site leaders and teachers we interviewed reported leveraging relationships with families to gain a better understanding of their student’s needs. As noted by one site leader, teachers are “very, very sensitive to the kids’ needs. They know their kids...they work on creating, or gaining a really close relationship with the families.” Here too, as mentioned earlier, a site leader who is highly involved can have a positive impact on the social-emotional learning that takes place in the classroom. At one site, the site leader served as a central resource for teachers who wanted to know what their students were facing at home. The site leader was described by a Social Worker as “working with the families a lot.

She gets to know some of these families intimately...if there's a particular child acting up that day, she may know a little bit more about what's happening at home."

- **Teachers and site leaders should work closely with other staff and the Social Worker to identify and address the needs of their students and families.** Collaboration among staff at all levels was identified as essential for supporting students' social-emotional learning (as well as classroom instruction). Staff we interviewed pointed out that the Social Worker provided essential support in this area, acting as a liaison with caregivers and helping to inform the delivery of differentiated supports to students. Assistant teachers and teacher's aides can be another important resource. As stated by one site leader, "[These staff] are vital in the classroom" because they may have the closest relationship with a student.

**Promising Practice: Incorporate the social-emotional development of students into every element of the program.**

Site leaders and teachers across the eight sampled sites recognized that social-emotional learning is a critical, if not the primary, element of their work. In addition, they emphasized the importance of addressing the social-emotional well-being of students' families. Sites addressed this element of well-being in a variety of ways, ranging from helping families with their basic needs (and therefore reducing family stress), to staff presenting themselves to families as supportive allies and providing families with low-stress opportunities to interact with their children (e.g., hosting arts and crafts events for families).

An important part of this is **encouraging staff to incorporate social-emotional learning into their classrooms.** From classroom design to classroom management, teachers we interviewed considered the implications for their students' social-emotional development. For example, across sites, teachers integrated social-emotional learning into instruction through the choice of read-alouds, students' self-selection of centers, daily conversation with students, modeling good behavior, and encouraging students to play together and express themselves. According to one Instructional Coordinator, this integration demonstrates how the sites in our study may better grasp the DOE's Program Quality Standards.

*I think that this school understands the teaching quality standards a lot more than a lot of the other schools in my portfolio. They know what the pre-K guidelines are, and they meet them. They understand that it's not always about academics, as opposed to the social-emotional development of the whole child.*

**Promising Practice: Paying attention to fostering self-regulation.** Across the sites, staff emphasized the importance of giving students the necessary resources to support self-regulation. The creation of "cozy corners" within each classroom was cited to be particularly important. As described by one teacher, "if [a student] needs time to just kind of self-regulate, we have a cozy area, which is a little area of quiet space, with a beanbag, and soft animals, teddy bears, a few books. And sometimes children just need to sit there and gather themselves" before returning to the class activities. Teachers also work to model self-regulation for their students. One teacher described how "we do a lot of modeling for them – what it looks like to be respectful, what it looks like to ask, 'Can I join you?' What it looks like to say, 'I'm feeling sad.' And we give them the words to use."

**Promising Practice: Introducing practices that allow students to be collaboratively involved in developing class rules and in social problem solving.** The key element here is for teachers to allow the students the opportunity to feel ownership over their environment. At one site, for example, students were always given space to work things out with each other in a constructive and supportive manner before a teacher stepped in. A Social Worker described the



teacher's practice this way. "If it's a problem with two children, maybe biting, pulling things, she'll let them talk to each other and work it out. So I feel like it's effective. That's why I haven't seen any behaviors when I'm there...She uses words that they understand, [and] they helped create the rules. So I feel like, when you help create those rules, you're more likely to follow them, because you look at it and say, "Hey, you're right."

### Box 2. Spotlight on Social-Emotional Learning as a Promising Practice at One Site

An emphasis on social-emotional learning and a personalized approach to family communication are integral components of this school and its one Pre-K for All classroom. More than 80 percent of the students are low-income and 25 percent are transient. The staff at this site are experienced—the site leader and pre-K teacher both have more than five years of pre-K experience, though pre-K has been offered at the site for much longer. In addition, there is an on-site Social Worker who provides direct support to students.

**Social-emotional learning** is integrated into the fabric of the school and extends down into the pre-K program. The whole school is engaged in a character- and skill-building program that uses a nationally recognized curriculum to foster development of 21<sup>st</sup> century leadership and life skills in all students. Aligned with national and state standards, the curriculum teaches students valuable skills for academic success, including critical thinking, goal setting, listening and speaking, self-directed learning, teamwork, responsibility, integrity, and collaboration. In pre-K this means involving students in academic and recreational games that challenge them to follow rules, take turns, and learn how to lose gracefully. Teachers introduce important skills through literacy units on topics about sharing and learning to be empathetic of others' feelings. Learning to be responsible and independent are cornerstones of the pre-K program. As described by the pre-K teacher, "children are learning how to be...independent; they're learning how to help. So they have jobs in the classroom, and at breakfast, during center time. They're learning routines. They know how to move from one activity to the next, smoothly, transitioning." Staff also work hard to model the positive behaviors they are teaching students. The site leader noted, "When I see parents coming to bring their kids in the morning, I say 'Oh, thank you for bringing your child to school.' I don't say where were they yesterday? That's just giving everybody ownership of everything." She also works hard to develop personal relationships with families to support social-emotional development and build family engagement. She makes personal phone calls to caregivers, invites them to school events at least four times a month, and interacts with individual students every day at lunch time.

## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

### Addressing the Needs of Students and Families Living in Poverty: Family Engagement

Research suggests that building relationships between parents in low-income families and teachers may be challenging. For example, Waanders, Mendez, and Downer (2007) found that parents who perceived themselves as important agents in the education of their children were more likely to be involved in educational activities as a whole. But parents who believed that education of their children was solely the job of the teacher and the school tended to be less involved. Although staff at sites we visited commented that it was important for caregivers to be involved in their children’s learning, they noted that it was difficult at times to foster the types of relationships with families that they believed were important to help facilitate a high level of engagement.

Relatedly, sites may struggle with creating trusting relationships with children and families from poverty backgrounds, thus contributing to a low level of family engagement. Site staff noted that trusting relationships between caregivers and school staff were essential to strong family engagement. However, they also commented that there were times when the experiences of families and children outside of pre-K (e.g., with social services) may have contributed to a lack of trust or comfort with classroom teachers. For example, one teacher said, “[I think that one of the major challenges is] the families having that trust in us. Because we have such a high percentage of [children living in] poverty and children in shelters and homelessness, I think that restricts them from feeling comfortable with us and just building that trust [that is needed for a successful learning experience.]”

Living in poverty may contribute to other challenges related to family engagement. Families who do not have the resources to volunteer in the classroom, families who cannot linger during drop-off or pick-up times, or families who do not have other such occasions for interaction (such as attendance at family nights) may have limited opportunities to engage with the program, with staff, and with each other.

The sites we visited implemented a variety of practices intended to capitalize upon and encourage family engagement. The family engagement practices stemmed from two related, but independent, expectations of families. Namely, that families should be (1) engaged in their children’s education at home through both formal extended learning activities and general enrichment and exposure to informal learning experiences, and (2) engaged with the pre-K program itself through regular communication with program staff and demonstrating interest in their children’s experience at the site. The practices are outlined in Table 5.

**Table 5. Promising Practices Related to Family Engagement**

Promising Practices	Associated PQS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proactively work to engage caregivers and families through multiple simultaneous strategies.</li> <li>Build relationships with families.</li> <li>Build community as a means of developing family support and resource networks.</li> <li>Use multiple methods to communicate with families, with an emphasis on convenience and accessibility.</li> <li>Encourage families to extend what happens in the classroom through formal and informal enrichment activities at home.</li> <li>Institute an open-door policy that provides families with access to teachers and classrooms and conveys a sense of transparency.</li> <li>Host positive events to bring families into the classroom.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong Relationships (<i>Strong Family-Community Ties</i>)</li> <li>Two-Way Communication (<i>Strong Family-Community Ties</i>)</li> <li>Capacity-Building (<i>Strong Family-Community Ties</i>)</li> <li>Health, Safety, and Well-being (<i>Supportive Environment</i>)</li> <li>Equity and Individualization in Education (<i>Supportive Environment</i>)</li> <li>Shaping a Vision (<i>Effective School Leadership</i>)</li> </ul>

Note: The PQS are not listed in a specific order related to the promising practices, as they may apply to more than one practice.

Almost unanimously, staff at the sites we visited indicated that they believed a child’s pre-K experience includes interactions with their family and caregivers that occur outside of the classroom. Family engagement was cited as a strategic priority for the sites and staff worked to leverage their community partnerships and other resources for this purpose.

**Promising Practice: Proactively work to engage caregivers and families through multiple simultaneous strategies.**

Examples of simultaneous strategies include the pairing of both printed and electronic mailings, the pairing of informal engagement during drop-off and pick-up with structured meetings. Sites were found to enact strategies that combined different modes of communication, formality, setting, and timing, in an attempt to reinforce messaging and interaction.

**Promising Practice: Build trusting and positive relationships with families.** Staff at selected sites felt it is important to develop strong personal ties with family members and caregivers. Further, they said that family engagement is most effective when families viewed the pre-K program as a trusted resource and one that worked in their best interests. Staff we interviewed made efforts to engage in positive communication with families and focus on celebrating student achievement in addition to communicating about behavior or academic challenges.

**Promising Practice: Encourage families to extend what happens in the classroom through formal and informal enrichment activities at home.** Site staff discussed several specific strategies to foster participation in at-home activities.

- **Regularly inform caregivers about what students are learning.** Program staff at the sites we visited made an effort to keep families aware of what their children were learning so family members could build upon these lessons and topics at home. In addition, staff identified student challenges for families, and gave concrete next steps that families could follow to address those challenges. As described by one caregiver, “they send a newsletter home every month, so that you know what’s in the unit, so you can help at home.”
- **Provide caregivers with explicit activities and projects to do at home with their children.** At one site, each at-home assignment gave caregivers suggestions on how to build upon a topic. For example, as one described it, take-home materials included the suggestions on how to tie at-home activities or conversations to what is being taught within the program. This could include activities such as taking a sensory walk to find items children can see, smell, or hear; counting together; or sorting laundry together and talking about the different colors of the clothing.
- **Design classroom activities to excite students, so they want to do further enrichment activities at home.** Staff at the sites we visited said a motivated student is an important catalyst for getting families engaged in the learning process. When students are motivated, they transfer the pre-K routines home and exuberantly shared with family members their accomplishments in class. A caregiver captured this experience when describing her child’s transformation around reading:

*Before... he wouldn't want to know nothing about books. Now he tells me, 'Mommy, you have to read to me. I can't go to sleep if you*

*“[The teacher is] very attentive. When you come in in the morning and drop off the child, she’ll let you know a lot of important things. Even when you pick them up, she’s not afraid to have a conversation with you. She’s not quick to want to rush [you] out the door. She’ll give her time to whatever is important for you.”*

Parent

*don't read. If you don't read to me, I can't fall asleep.'...And you know, it made it much easier for him to learn at home.*

*"I have people that stop me in the hallway to tell me about my daughter. Even the security downstairs, she tells me how she was behaving when she saw her in the hallway and everything. I'm like, 'Oh, that's really nice.' So I don't know who's part of the program, but everyone informs me of what she's doing."*

Parent

**Promising Practice: Build community as a means of developing family support structures and resource networks.**

Staff we interviewed recognized the importance of building community, especially among families who otherwise may not have an opportunity to interact with other families. They used a variety of strategies to achieve this. For example, at one site, a sense of community is encouraged through a whole-school parent-teacher association (PTA) that involved families from the pre-K program. Through this PTA, family members had opportunities to attend monthly meetings and get to know other families, meet the school leaders, and participate in extracurricular activities such as bake sales and movie nights. According to one actively engaged parent, participation in the whole-school PTA offered opportunities for families to enter the broader school community and served as another means of interacting with program staff. This model

was also being used at NYCEECs, with one site developing a "parent board" that, according to the Social Worker, "would be a great way for the families to get to know each other, and also the program staff."

Some sites had a room designated for caregivers to wait for their children, meet, and access parenting resources. According to one site leader, the goal is to "always make the families and students feel comfortable." Describing the room in more detail, the leader explained how:

*sometimes we just have families hanging out there. And it's families from all different grades...It's nice for them to get together informally, and kind of talk and hang out and drink coffee...I think that it creates a closer community [not only] within the school building, but also in the larger sense, outside...We want to make sure that they know, and also feel comfortable, that they can come to us, and we can try to support them in anything that they need.*

Other sites used technology to cultivate interactions between caregivers. At one school, for example, families were given a cell phone app that allowed them to contact one another. It was reported that the app helped foster relationships between lower-income families living nearby and middle- or upper-class families living farther away.

**Promising Practice: Use multiple methods to communicate with families, with an emphasis on convenience and accessibility.** Communication techniques used by the sites we visited included letters to families, regular newsletters, and handouts—often supported by technology. At one site, teachers used a cell phone app that allows for real-time texting between caregivers and teachers. Overall, the frequency of communication was deemed important, with very frequent communication reported to be better. As one caregiver said, "Any question I have to ask, they'll answer it. Even if it's kind of silly, they answer."

**Promising Practice: Institute an open-door policy that provides families with access to teachers and classrooms and conveys a sense of transparency.** At various sites we visited, site staff reported encouraging caregivers to visit the classrooms and stay with their children and/or participate in class activities. Open-door policies were deemed important

because of their ability to help families better understand the pre-K experience. According to one Instructional Coordinator, it is critical that pre-K programs are located in a “friendly building,” and that families are made to feel welcome and are supported.

**Promising Practice: Host positive events to bring families into the classroom.** In addition to offering families informative workshops and individual meetings about student progress, sites we visited reported offering deliberately fun events designed to engage families in their child’s educational experience. One program held monthly, themed, “family fun nights.” At these events, according to the site leader, “there’s a book read, there’s a read-aloud, there’s discussion, and then there’s an activity that the child does with their family. And more recently, we’ve tried to do something where they’re now taking something with them, too, to use at home.” These types of activities, and those like them, were reported to be integral to the buy-in from families and help to increase family engagement.

### Box 3. Spotlight on Family Engagement as a Promising Practice at One Site

At the site discussed in the Spotlight on Social-Emotional Learning (p. 15), staff also placed considerable emphasis on **family engagement**. This is fostered by the pre-K teacher, who holds weekly “office hours” so caregivers can meet with her individually to discuss issues or learn about their child’s pre-K experience. She also engages caregivers in their child’s learning at home. One caregiver mentioned that each home activity provided by the site includes a tip, such as asking children to find shapes, count as they walk, look for colors, and identify different sounds while they are outside. Another caregiver described a project that had caregivers and students make family trees, which were then collected and published in a classroom book and shared among the children. The teacher invites caregivers to volunteer in the classroom, attend monthly character education assemblies and cooking classes, and participate in field trips. One caregiver said about the school, “They always make a big effort for the parents to participate. They hand out a lot of flyers, letting us know that there are assemblies, to please come join for field trips or even just to volunteer.”

## WRAP-AROUND SUPPORTS

### Addressing the Needs of Students and Families Living in Poverty: Wrap-Around Supports

As noted previously, families living in poverty may have difficulty meeting the most basic needs of their children. Staff at sites we visited noted that this reality may lead to a variety of challenges. As stated by one site leader, “if a student comes to school hungry or with inappropriate clothing, then it has a big impact on their learning. We want to make sure [students] come well fed and well dressed.” One program director commented that “one of the challenges facing this program is our ability to provide more resources for the family, getting workshops for them, health workshops, and free screenings. We offer a lot of workshops for them but mainly they have limited access to free resources.”

Another challenge faced by some families that have relocated to another neighborhood, but who want to maintain their child’s enrollment at a particular site, is a long commute to the program. According to another interviewed site leader, “once families are displaced they still try to keep their children with us, so we have children who are coming to us from [far away].” These long commutes also may interfere with families’ ability to focus on educational activities at home.

Staff at the sites we visited understood that many low-income students come to pre-K with a variety of needs that can interfere with learning and academic growth. The sites we visited provided a variety of wrap-around supports to help students and their families address challenges that can impact learning. Promising practices that selected sites used to provide these needed services are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6. Promising Practices Related to Wrap-Around Supports**

Promising Practices	Associated PQS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet the holistic needs of students and their families by providing extensive wrap-around programming.</li> <li>• Provide adult family members with services to help resolve challenges associated with employment, mental and medical health, and education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong Relationships (<i>Strong Family-Community Ties</i>)</li> <li>• Two-Way Communication (<i>Strong Family-Community Ties</i>)</li> <li>• Capacity-Building (<i>Strong Family-Community Ties</i>)</li> <li>• Health, Safety, and Wellbeing (<i>Supportive Environment</i>)</li> <li>• Equity and Individualization in Education (<i>Supportive Environment</i>)</li> </ul>

Note: The PQS are not listed in a specific order related to the promising practices, as they may apply to more than one practice.

**Promising Practice: Meet the holistic needs of students and their families by providing extensive wrap-around services and supports.** Site leaders and teachers we interviewed stressed that their responsibilities extended beyond the classroom. This belief was substantiated by the amount of time and resources they invested in providing additional services to students and families. Some services were offered through affiliated programs, while others were small, but reportedly impactful, tweaks of existing policies or practices. Furthermore, program staff recognized the relationship between meeting families’ basic needs, their involvement in the program, and student attendance. Finally, program staff believed the wrap-around services had an added urgency because of their impact on children’s social-emotional well-being. Staff saw the site’s role as a “point of stability” in the lives of their students and students’ families. The sites demonstrated several practical solutions to addressing families’ basic needs:

- **Use multiple strategies to provide food to students and their families.** The staff we interviewed recognized that the food provided through Pre-K for All may be the only consistent meal available to some students. Program staff also realized the emotional component related to students knowing they would be fed, so they made sure students did not miss the opportunity to have a meal, even if they arrived late in the morning. Staff encouraged students to eat until they were full; additional meals were provided whenever possible, such as offering dinner to students staying late or breakfast to students on arrival.

*“One of the parents stopped coming...[so] the teacher and I went and we made a home visit. And we found out that one of the reasons she wasn't coming was because she didn't have money for a snack for her child. And he wanted to bring snacks. So we walked him to the neighborhood store and we bought a bag of apples and chips. And the kid came to school the next day. Because it may not mean very much for you and I not to have snack, but it's a big deal to the children... So once he got this bag of apples [he] came to school. And you know what? The next year, when that mother needed something, she came to that school looking for me.”*

Teacher

Other times, program food was supplemented with food purchased through other means. Staff at one site were aware that the Friday meals were especially important. As described by the site leader, “...on Fridays, we try to make sure that the lunch is a heavy lunch, the snack is substantial, because we don't know when that child is going to be eating again.” At least one site used an outside grant to maintain a food pantry, which offered food to pre-K families on a monthly basis. Some sites also included nutrition as a topic of family workshops. At one site the workshop included the distribution of donated food so that families not only learned about healthy cooking but were able to take home the ingredients.

- **Provide families with clothes when necessary.** Staff we talked with described the importance of making sure students are adequately clothed. At one site, for example, pre-K families were able to take advantage of school-wide clothing drives for coats and shoes. At another, uniforms were offered to families that needed them.
- **Reduce the associated costs of attending the Pre-K for All program (if possible).** While attendance at a Pre-K for All site is free for students, there are other costs associated with the experience. These include costs related to transportation, participation of family members in field trips, and supplies for at-home activities.<sup>36</sup> The sites we visited tried to identify these costs and minimize them for low-income families, whenever possible.

**Promising Practice: Provide adult family members with services to help resolve challenges associated with employment, physical and mental health, and education.** Sites we visited anchored their family engagement efforts with workshops on topics such as health, parenting skills, job readiness, and English as a Second Language. Sites also gave families access to physical resources such as computer labs as well as referrals to service providers such as job placement organizations. The sites used several strategies to help caregivers address their personal needs.

- **Act as advocates for families.** Staff at the sites we visited reported making referrals to outside organizations and lining up necessary resources for families. Staff believed this helped teachers gain caregivers' trust, which in turn could lead to caregivers seeking teachers' involvement in resolving crisis situations. For example, one teacher shared how she helped a parent escape from domestic abuse by walking with her to a local service provider. An Instructional Coordinator described the importance of teachers taking this role, explaining that high-quality teachers are "receptive, and sensitive to the needs of the families."
- **Use partnerships with outside providers to augment programming.** Site staff we interviewed said the broader availability of services within each neighborhood drives the development of partnerships, which can help to address families' needs. At sites where community assets were described as minimal, staff looked outside the community for other non-profit providers, such as hospitals (offering mobile asthma, medical, dental, and eye clinics), libraries (offering bookmobiles), and youth- and adult-serving nonprofits. One site partnered with a chapter of a national volunteer organization to provide field trips for students and families, a local mental health organization to provide mentoring for families, and a city-funded Jobs Plus program to deliver resume-writing and computer skills workshops to adult family members.<sup>37</sup>
- **Offer extended-day services and programs for younger and older siblings.** Site staff mentioned that they offer an array of extended-day services—such as afterschool, summer, and vacation programs—and programs for siblings (such as daycare or after school for older grades) to their families. The services that expanded the hours for pre-K students were reported to be important for working caregivers and/or families with other children, as they allowed families to better balance their employment or other responsibilities with the pre-K schedule. Additionally, offering services for children of other ages allowed caregivers to send siblings to the same site—again easing the burden on families. It is important to note that the costs for parents and caregivers differed for these extended-day programs, although across sites we visited there was an effort to reduce the financial burden as much as possible. At ACS sites,

<sup>36</sup> Pre-K for All policy is that participation in Field Trips should always be free. Program are allowed to make a general request for donations but families may not be excluded if they are unable to make a donation. The cost of field trips should fit within the program budget.

<sup>37</sup> For more information see: <http://opportunitynychs.org/workforce-development/jobs-plus/>

the “minimal” fees were set by the ACS. At other sites, the extended-day opportunities were additional programs made available to families at a set cost.

#### Box 4. Spotlight on Delivery of Wrap-Around Supports as a Promising Practice at One Site

This site takes a holistic service delivery approach to meet the complex needs of low-income students and, in particular, children living in a family shelter. The site, which serves children from the shelter as well as the broader community, has 18 students in one class that is staffed by one teacher and two assistants. Within the community, 71 percent of the children are living in poverty.

A critical component of the services offered by the site is the provision of **wrap-around services** designed to address various student and family needs to help ensure that all students come ready and prepared to learn. These services include social services provided through ACS, and other supports such as a mobile medical unit, a full-day meal program, asthma prevention and treatment workshops provided by the health department, educational enrichment opportunities through the public library, social-emotional supports, and extended-day services.

The wrap-around services offer students the **basic supports** that higher-income families take for granted, but that many families living in poverty are unable to afford. As the site leader explained, “We start with breakfast. Very necessary, in the mornings. We go buy breakfast, because we don't know what that child has eaten. And even though we do ask, ‘Has he eaten?’ 99% of the time, the answer would be, ‘No.’ So we provide breakfast for those children. We provide sheets and blankets for those children, when it's rest time, nap time. When we're going on trips that we have, that there's a fee, the agency pays for those children, as well as any parent who might want to accompany us on that trip, at no cost to them.”

In addition to these services, the site ensures that children have access to **caring and stable adults** to help address social-emotional challenges that many children living in poverty face on a daily basis. For teachers, this means understanding that a child's behavior can be a reflection of the stresses that he or she faces at home, and that these students need extra comfort and attention to cope with those challenges. As one teacher remarked, “Well first, we have to comfort the child. Because you see when the children come in, they're hungry, they haven't slept well. You never know what happened the night before. And so, the teachers are placed in a role as a parent as well, a parent-teacher. So they have to comfort the children, make them feel comfortable, well-fed. So that they are ready to work along in the day. We have a cozy corner, we send them in to recuperate, to get themselves back together.”



## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES

In addition to the wrap-around supports described earlier in this report, the sites we visited provided a variety of other supports to help students and their families. Promising practices that selected sites used to provide these needed services are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7. Promising Practices Related to Additional Supports and Resources**

Promising Practices	Associated PQS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apply relevant content soon after staff participate in professional learning activities.</li> <li>Maximize use of the Instructional Coordinator and Social Worker supports.</li> <li>Obtain additional funding and resources to supplement the Pre-K for All contract.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong Relationships (<i>Strong Family-Community Ties</i>)</li> <li>Two-Way Communication (<i>Strong Family-Community Ties</i>)</li> <li>Capacity-Building (<i>Strong Family-Community Ties</i>)</li> <li>Health, Safety, and Wellbeing (<i>Supportive Environment</i>)</li> <li>Engaging Children in Meaningful Activity (<i>Rigorous Instruction</i>)</li> <li>Creating A Positive Classroom Culture (<i>Rigorous Instruction</i>)</li> <li>Cultivating Professional Practice and Leadership (<i>Collaborative Teachers</i>)</li> <li>Shaping a Vision (<i>Effective School Leadership</i>)</li> <li>Resource Management (<i>Effective School Leadership</i>)</li> </ul>

Note: The PQS are not listed in a specific order related to the promising practices, as they may apply to more than one practice.

**Promising Practice: Apply relevant content soon after staff participate in professional learning activities.** Staff at sites we visited employed a “use it or lose it” approach to PL. As one teacher mentioned: “When we go to the workshop, whatever we learn there, we try to implement it right away in our classroom.” Site leaders agreed that PL is most effective when it is relevant to classroom learning and timely. In addition, teachers agreed that PL sessions were a valuable opportunity to communicate with teachers from other sites. One teacher enjoyed “...the activities, the different ways of doing things. You always look through another lens to see how it is done, in the other sites.” This points to the desire of teachers to collaborate not only with their own colleagues, but also with teachers at other similar sites throughout the city through, for example, inter-visitations or other opportunities to share resources and materials across sites. Notably, while most site staff commented that they appreciated the PL offered by the DOE,<sup>38</sup> they noted that the sessions were not always as useful as they had hoped. They may not have been assigned to the Track or Lane they had requested and therefore they felt the sessions did not address their needs, and/or they said the groups were too large.

**Promising Practice: Maximize use of the Instructional Coordinator and Social Worker supports.** Across the board, staff said they were grateful for the support they received from the Instructional Coordinators and Social Workers and were open to their suggestions related to their teaching and learning environments. It is important to note that, even though they had been identified by DOE as sites that were successfully serving students living in poverty, site staff still found DECE staff support to be helpful. Further, staff from sites where support had been scaled back from the previous year reported some frustration.<sup>39</sup> The Social Workers provided teachers with technical assistance designed to help them effectively support students and families (which could be scaled back once teachers learned the skills), and worked with families and students. Site staff worked to capitalize on this support by having the Social Worker participate in or host

<sup>38</sup> See the second report in this series, *Evaluation of the Pre-K for All Initiative 2015–16: An Assessment of Professional Development, Coaching, and Supports to Sites* for additional detail about the PL and other supports provided to sites.

<sup>39</sup> DECE allocated these supports to staff based on each site’s need relative to the need of other sites.

family engagement activities and events for caregivers. Sites that had access to other Social Worker support (e.g., district schools) leveraged this support to ensure student and family needs were met.

Sites used some strategies that allowed them to maximize the support provided by Instructional Coordinators and Social Workers, such as:

- **Accept and implement advice.** Site staff we talked with welcomed the advice given to them by Instructional Coordinators and Social Workers and tried to implement their suggestions. For example, one Instructional Coordinator commented that, “whatever program quality [issue] you express to [this site], or ideas that you give them, they take them, and they move on with them, and you see that they take the advice.”
- **Be flexible in scheduling support.** Site staff maximized the impact of the supports by being flexible in their application and use of those supports offered by Social Workers and Instructional Coordinators. This was amplified by the flexibility and responsiveness of these staff members who often went above and beyond their stated duties. As one Instructional Coordinator commented “[I visited] this school initially once a month. And I just said, ‘Well, nothing’s going to happen if I go just once a month.’ And so, the DOE was open to the change, and said, ‘Okay, by all means, go twice a month. Go put it in your portfolio.’ So things like that [are important]—being open to meet them where they’re at, and to give them the level of support that they need [are important].”
- **Involve Instructional Coordinators and Social Workers in program planning and regular meetings.** Sites ensured that the assigned Instructional Coordinators and Social Workers were fully steeped in the program so they could understand student and family needs as well as work with staff. As one site leader commented [Our Instructional Coordinator is] “part of the meetings when I meet with the teachers. She knows when we’re talking about instruction, she gives feedback and visits the classrooms and provides feedback to the teachers.”

*“[At this school I] was scheduled for just once a month, for me to support. And basically when I came in, I spoke to the site leader [and] we scheduled some parent engagement activities /events for the parents...so I would support that. But the past two months, my visits have increased [to address specific issues]...So I end up being there once a week, half a day.”*

Social Worker

**Promising Practice: Obtain additional resources to supplement the Pre-K for All funding.** Site leaders, teachers, and DECE staff we talked with agreed that addressing the challenges of working with low-income communities, in particular, requires additional resources beyond those provided by DOE. The sites that were described by stakeholders as doing the most for students and their families benefited from outside funding that provided extra supports such as wrap-around services, more support staff, and additional classroom materials.

For example, one program saw several improvements funded through an education-focused crowd-funding platform. Staff at other sites said they benefited from the support of PTAs and family volunteers. Site leaders and teachers also paid for supplies, software, and materials out of pocket (although this practice may not be sustainable). Certain sites were also supported by their larger organizations’ budgets, allowing for additional flexibility to enhanced services.

## PROMISING PRACTICES OF SITES SERVING STUDENTS LIVING IN POVERTY AND STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The DOE provides special education services to children ages 3 to 5 who have disabilities or developmental delays that impact their ability to learn. Children may be eligible for special education services if they show a delay in any of the following areas of development: cognitive (thinking and learning), language and communication (understanding and using language), motor (physical development, including delays or disorders regarding vision, hearing, and movement), social-emotional (getting along with others, expressing feelings), and adaptive/self-help (independent living skills, such as toileting, eating, and dressing).[1]

The Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) is responsible for coordinating special education evaluations for preschool children. Parents can contact the Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) to request an evaluation to determine if a child is eligible for special education services. If a child is found eligible for preschool special education services, the CPSE will work with the parent to create an Individualized Education Program (IEP). There is a range of education and related services available to support preschool students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

*“Most of [our students], come from low income families. Mainly, less privileged families. At the beginning of the year we tend to identify and help parents with the referral procedure...We work with the parents to aid in addressing the weaknesses and needs of the child. There are still students that I think can benefit from services.”*

Site Leader

### Addressing the Needs of Students and Families Living in Poverty: Students with Special Needs

Families living in poverty who have children with special needs face an additional set of challenges over and above those identified earlier in this report. For example, the process of assessing students for special education services can be daunting for all families, but especially so for families with limited resources. Site staff we talked with gave several reasons for this, some of which could apply to any family, such as unfamiliarity with child developmental milestones and concern about the child being labeled or stigmatized. An additional barrier for low-income families may be a lack of time or resources to attend to the parent-led process. The caregivers we interviewed confirmed that it could be difficult to navigate the DOE’s special education identification and assessment process.

In addition, staff noted that it was challenging to address the social-emotional and academic needs of students with special needs who were also living in poverty. This finding is underlined by Barnett and Frede (2010), who noted that teachers need to regularly assess the social-emotional and academic progress of all children, but that it is particularly important to do so for English language learners and children with disabilities, and that teachers need to revise activities accordingly. Staff at the sites we visited worked to address these challenges through the myriad of supports offered through the Pre-K for All program as well as other supports available at their sites and in their communities.

Our discussions with site leaders and teachers at our sample of sites, and with the Instructional Coordinators and Social Workers assigned to those sites, identified a number of practices that selected sites serving high proportions of students with special needs used to foster their students’ learning and development. These are outlined in Table 8.

**Table 8. Promising Practices Related to Serving Students with Special Needs**

Promising Practices	Associated PQS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support caregivers who are going through the process of identifying and assessing their children for special education services.</li> <li>• Provide special education services directly on-site.</li> <li>• Ensure that teachers, SEITs, and other providers work together to provide services to students with special needs.</li> <li>• Offer integrated co-teaching Special Class in an Integrated Setting (SCIS) classes with lower ratios and specialized supports.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong Relationships (<i>Strong Family-Community Ties</i>)</li> <li>• Two-Way Communication (<i>Strong Family-Community Ties</i>)</li> <li>• Capacity-Building (<i>Strong Family-Community Ties</i>)</li> <li>• Health, Safety, and Wellbeing (<i>Supportive Environment</i>)</li> <li>• Equity and Individualization in Education (<i>Supportive Environment</i>)</li> <li>• Creating A Positive Classroom Culture (<i>Rigorous Instruction</i>)</li> <li>• Physical Resources for Learning (<i>Rigorous Instruction</i>)</li> <li>• Cultivating Professional Practice and Leadership (<i>Collaborative Teachers</i>)</li> </ul>

Note: The PQS are not listed in a specific order related to the promising practices, as they may apply to more than one practice.

**Promising Practice: Support caregivers who are going through the process of identifying and assessing their children for special education services.** Staff at the sites we visited worked hard to support caregivers through the identification and assessment process by offering encouragement and assistance in navigating the process. For example, one teacher commented,

*We know what is developmentally appropriate, and [about] the stages of development. [Sometimes] this is [the caregiver’s] first indicator that [their child] could use some support, and [teachers] have to do that through a lot of observation, documentation, and then kind of guide [caregivers] in the right direction... I try to be very supportive, and just say, ‘This is the best thing you could do for your child. Give them all that they need early, because you’re going to see such a significant growth as they get older.’*

**Promising Practice: Provide special education services directly on-site.** Caregivers we interviewed expressed appreciation that their children were able to receive special education services at the pre-K site, including those from SEITs and other service providers (e.g., physical, occupational, or speech-language therapists). On-site delivery helped to ensure that students received needed services and that the services were integrated into students’ regular learning environment and supported by their teachers. For example, one parent commented,

*[The special education identification process] went well for me. I mean, his teacher evaluated [him] in class. I had already known he needed services, so we had a meeting, one-on-one, me and her, and then she told me where I can go. And I went. And they all come over here. So he gets speech in his classroom, SEIT – he has a SEIT that comes every day for an hour. He gets occupational and physical therapy. All here.*

**Promising Practice: Ensure that teachers, SEITs, and other providers work together to deliver high-quality services to students with special needs.** In the sites we visited, teachers said they collaborated with Social Workers, SEITs, and other service providers to provide a continuum of services using a seamless and consistent approach. For example, a teacher commented,

*[Collaboration] works well. [The SEIT and I] have a discussion [when she arrives], and she tells me the hours that she has to service [the child]. She sets up a schedule, and I confer with my schedule, to make sure which time of the day – if he’s not napping, or having lunch, and he’s available. And it works well. We coordinate.”*

Caregivers also highlighted the benefits of this type of collaboration. For example, one parent noted that all the services were provided at the site and that the services were useful to her child in part due to the collaboration between providers.

*[Special education services are provided] in-house, and [my child] goes out to [the provider's] office – out of the classroom, to her office, twice a week. And then there's also a sensory gym here. So he uses that as she feels he needs. It's been outstanding services that he's gotten here. Absolutely outstanding. We recently had his turning five evaluation...and we had a meeting with his occupational therapist and his teachers, and it seemed that they very much were in communication about my child, and who he is, and it seemed like there's a good flow of communication between everybody.*

**Promising Practice: Offer Special Class in an Integrated Setting (SCIS) classes with lower ratios and specialized supports.**<sup>40</sup> SCIS classes are defined by the DOE as “classrooms [that] include students with and without special needs and have two teachers—a general education teacher and a special education teacher.”<sup>41</sup> Some sites we visited followed this model and worked to integrate general education students and students with special needs in one class along with general and special education teachers. Staff said this arrangement allowed for a lower student-teacher ratio—something that, Instructional Coordinators noted, allowed for more individualized attention—and also provided an opportunity for students to learn from each other. Caregivers also found the SCIS classes at their sites to be helpful to their children:

*My son has an IEP and some special education needs, [such as] weekly occupational therapy. So he was actually placed here by the DOE for their special education services. And the smaller class sizes here were very appealing to us, so we were happy with our placement, because the classes are smaller. And basically the focus on the special education needs was huge for us.*

---

<sup>40</sup> Students with an IEP that recommends a SCIS receive support from the Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) to enroll in a program with an available SCIS placement.

<sup>41</sup> <http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/SpecialEducation/programs/environment/ict.htm>.

### Box 5. Spotlight on Promising Practices for Serving Children with Special Needs at One Site

This program benefits from a strong relationship with the district elementary school in which it is based by tapping into a range of resources including on-site special education services, partnerships with external educational organizations, and a wealth of technology. A long-standing program that has served students for more than 15 years, the site has five pre-K classes, including one dual language Spanish/English class and one SCIS classroom. Close to a third of the students are living in poverty.

According to site leaders, teachers, and caregivers we interviewed, a major strength of the program is its ability to address individual needs of students through **on-site special education and other support services**. Through a partnership with the elementary school, pre-K students have on-site access to speech, occupational, and physical therapy services, including a sensory gym. Students benefit from the low teacher-student ratio and diverse learning environment offered in the SCIS classroom. As one caregiver explained,

*“My son is in the SCIS classroom, so he has two teachers, one special education teacher and one general education teacher. And that, I think, has been so fantastic, because they're two fantastic teachers...and he also has three paraprofessionals in the room, and they're all fantastic and just very loving and nurturing.”*

The site leader and teachers reported that having the services on-site is a major benefit because they are able to identify student needs more quickly and provide the services more reliably. As stated by the site leader,

*“We have an intervention team here, where pre-K teachers can ask for help with specific children...For example, if they feel they need speech, we will ask the speech provider to take them up. Or they need occupational therapy. Or it's an academic [need] – you know. People will come and do some observations first. And then, we'll see...we'll put in a six-week, or eight-week trial program.”*

A teacher added,

*“This was the first year that pre-K was able to use in-house providers. Prior to that, they had to have people coming from agencies. And I found that it was not always as reliable a situation, because they were busy running from school to school and place to place. And so, they were not able to adjust their schedules to meet the needs of the children, or they would come in and find a child absent and then they would leave.”*

Pre-K students with special needs also were reported to benefit from access to a **variety of other resources offered through the school**, including partnerships with arts education organizations and a plethora of technology tools. For example, the pre-K students participate in art residencies that help support students' academic development via an array of arts-based learning modalities that can be particularly helpful for students with special needs. As described by one teacher,

*“It's a really wonderful thing to have in this school the art and music residencies, and dance residencies, and drama, and all these artists that are able to come into the school, and provide us with additional time... the children are working with artists, and the kids love it. And it just makes everything a very rich environment.”*

Additionally, the pre-K classes have access to various on-site technology, such as SmartBoards and other tools, which were seen by teachers and families to be very helpful in providing access to resources that students may not have otherwise (e.g., computers, iPads). The technology resources were reported by parents to be especially helpful for students with special needs by facilitating differentiated instruction and helping to address their students' individual needs, for example related to speech and language.

## PROMISING PRACTICES FOR SERVING STUDENTS WHOSE HOME LANGUAGE IS A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH

---

In an era of tight budgets and an ongoing focus on accountability, school districts across the country face the challenge of providing effective services and support for students whose home language is a language other than English (LOTE students).<sup>42</sup> This issue is of particular interest in New York City, where half of all city residents speak a language other than English at home,<sup>43</sup> as do more than 30 percent of students enrolled in the city’s Pre-K for All program.<sup>44</sup>

Without effective interventions and support, pre-K LOTE students are likely to lag behind native English speakers in reading and mathematics proficiency. However, well-designed pre-K programs can help reduce this gap.<sup>45</sup> Hence, programs and policies that support LOTE students enrolled in Pre-K for All are of critical importance, and the DOE is continually striving to improve supports for this group.

This section is designed to assist DOE in these efforts by summarizing promising practices for serving LOTE students found in the literature. This section also describes how Pre-K for All sites included in our study served LOTE students in the 2015–16 school year, drawing from surveys of 987 Pre-K for All sites serving LOTE students and whose site leaders responded to the survey (Note: Throughout this section we will refer to these respondents as “surveyed site leaders”), and interviews with site leaders at six Pre-K for All sites that were identified by DOE as being high-quality and that served high percentages of LOTE students (Note: Throughout this section we will refer to these interviewees as “interviewed site leaders”). [Appendix A](#) includes more detail about the study methodology. To this end, this section organizes the promising practices for working with LOTE students into five categories:

- use of home languages in the classroom,
- teaching techniques and classroom practices,
- teacher and staff teaching ability,
- effective use of assessments, and
- communication and outreach with caregivers.

As we discuss each topic, we first present the results of a comprehensive review of literature related to delivery of services to pre-K LOTE students, followed by the findings from our interviews with site leaders at selected sites and surveys of site leaders. Additionally, we highlight any challenges identified in the literature or in our communications with site leaders.

---

<sup>42</sup> DOE refers to these students in pre-K as students whose home language is a language other than English (LOTE students), as pre-K students are not formally assessed and classified as English Language Learners (ELLs) in NYC. In the research literature, other terms used are dual language learners (DLL) or English learners (EL), depending on the population of students. However, we will use the term LOTE students consistently throughout this section, since that is the term used by DOE. Throughout this section, we also use the term ‘home languages’ to describe all languages other than English that are spoken by these students and their families at home.

<sup>43</sup> Source: <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/data-maps/nyc-population/population-facts.page>.

<sup>44</sup> Hamilton & Lammert, 2016.

<sup>45</sup> Collier, 2002; Goldenberg, 2008; Goldenberg, Nemeth, Hicks, Zepeda, & Cardona 2013; National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA) and Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2011; Thomas & Collier, 2002; Severns, 2012; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS/ED) & U.S. Department of Education (ED), 2016; Weiland, C. & Yoshikawa, H., 2013.

# USE OF HOME LANGUAGES IN THE CLASSROOM

## Classroom Structure

Table 9. Promising Practices Related to Classroom Structure

Promising Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Formally structure the pre-K classroom to include home languages.</li><li>Allow flexibility in children’s use of home languages in the classroom.</li></ul>

### Findings from the Literature

**Promising Practice: Formally structure the pre-K classroom to include home languages.** Incorporating the home languages of LOTE students into the pre-K classroom benefits LOTE students in multiple ways. Instruction in the home language does not negatively influence later English abilities and improves students’ fluency in the home language.<sup>46</sup> Exposure to multiple languages also provides preschoolers with other cognitive advantages later in life, such as better executive functioning, working memory capacity, or inhibitory control.<sup>47</sup>

Because many LOTE students face significant linguistic and cultural barriers as they begin pre-K, research indicates that educators should provide a welcoming social setting that supports growth in their home language. Time and space should be set aside for adults and students to interact in home languages.<sup>48</sup> Two options to integrate home languages into the classroom at the pre-K level are maintenance and transitional programs.<sup>49</sup> Each type of program has different goals for students:

- Maintenance or developmental pre-K programs** incorporate both English and a target language extensively in the classroom, with the goal of developing skills in both languages. Dual language programs are an example of this type of program. This type of pre-K program can either include only LOTE students or both LOTE and English-speaking students.<sup>50</sup>
- Transitional pre-K programs** also incorporate both English and a home language in the classroom. However, the goal of these programs is to develop skills in English and to prepare LOTE students for an English-speaking environment in kindergarten.<sup>51</sup>

Depending on the goal educators would like to achieve with LOTE students, **pre-K programs can incorporate varying ratios of English to home language in the classroom.** Options include: 1) instruction delivered predominantly in English with home language supports (such as a teacher occasionally using a home language word or phrase to help a particular student understand), 2) instruction divided evenly between English and a home language, and 3) instruction delivered

<sup>46</sup> Barnett, Yarosz, Thomas, Jung, & Blanco, 2007; Center for Early Care and Education Research—Dual Language Learners (CECER-DLL), 2014; Espinosa, 2013a; Goldenberg, 2013a; 2013b; HHS/ED & US DoED, 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Espinosa, 2013a; Sandhofer & Uchikoshi, 2013; HHS/ED & US DoED, 2016.

<sup>48</sup> Goldenberg et al., 2013.

<sup>49</sup> It is important to note that these are broad categories that encompass a variety of other types, including bilingual, dual language, etc.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Goldenberg et al., 2013; Tabors, 2008.



predominantly in the home language with English being gradually introduced. A dual language program is an example of a program in which LOTE and English-speaking students participate together in a classroom in which instruction is evenly divided between the two languages.<sup>52,53</sup> As a forthcoming book by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Mathematics points out, research on how much and what types of supports are most effective in helping LOTE students is limited.<sup>54</sup> However, some research suggests that dual language programs provide more opportunities for LOTE students to reach higher levels of academic achievement than other programs.<sup>55</sup>

**Promising Practice: Allow flexibility in the children’s use of home languages in the classroom.** Regardless of the formal program structure, researchers caution against strictly enforcing which language pre-K students should speak in the classroom. Espinosa and Gutiérrez-Clellen<sup>56</sup> pointed out that bilingual students frequently mix languages when speaking (e.g., code switch), and rigid classroom rules about which languages LOTE students choose to use should not be enforced. Similarly, bilingual students frequently “code-switch” (i.e., mix languages in one sentence), which is developmentally normal for pre-K students.<sup>57</sup>

### *Study Findings: Practices in Pre-K for All Classrooms*

**The pre-K sites serving LOTE students who participated in our study and formally incorporated home language into the classroom did so using two primary structures.** In the 2015–16 school year, DOE formally designated a few Pre-K for All sites as “Dual Language programs” (DL) or “Enhanced Language Instruction” (ELI) programs.<sup>58</sup> In addition, some sites informally incorporated elements of home language instruction without being officially designated as DL or ELI. These approaches are briefly described below.

- **Dual Language Pre-K for All sites.** According to DOE, sites designated as DL had a goal of enabling all students to become bilingual and should serve *both* LOTE and non-LOTE students.<sup>59</sup> Requirements for Pre-K for All DL sites included evenly dividing language instruction between English and the site’s designated target language, and having a lead teacher with current New York State certifications in early childhood education and a current bilingual extension.<sup>60</sup> According to the 2015–16 survey, 1 percent of sites that served LOTE students and whose leaders responded to the survey were designated DL (6 out of 987 surveyed sites).<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> For practical tips on choosing between these options based on student population, staff language abilities, and other factors, see the Head Start guide *Classroom Language Models: A Leader’s Implementation Manual*, available at <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/planned-language-approach/docs/pps-language-models.pdf>.

<sup>53</sup> Barnett et al., 2007.

<sup>54</sup> National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Mathematics. (2017). *Promoting the educational success of children and youth learning English: Promising futures*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

<sup>55</sup> Valentino & Reardon 2014; Gomez 2013; Lindholm-Leary & Block 2010; Marian, Shook, & Schroeder 2013; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass 2005; Marietta & Brookover, 2011; Goldenberg, 2008.

<sup>56</sup> 2013.

<sup>57</sup> California Department of Education, 2009; Nemeth, 2016; Sandhofer & Uchikoshi, 2013.

<sup>58</sup> According to an interview with a DOE representative, this term will change in the 2016–17 school year, and ELI sites will be known as “Enhanced Language Instruction” (ELI) sites.

<sup>59</sup> DOE, 2016a.

<sup>60</sup> DOE, 2016b.

<sup>61</sup> Importantly, not all LOTE students participated in the DL or ELI program at each site. To meet DOE’s definition of a DL or ELI site, at least one classroom at the site had to follow the model. At the DL site whose leader was interviewed for this study, only one classroom at the site offered the DL program, and that classroom served less than 10 percent of the site’s students.

- **Enhanced Language Instruction Pre-K for All sites.** The goal of sites designated as ELI was to assist LOTE students by offering supports in home languages (e.g., incorporating books in the home language and encouraging families to share aspects of their culture).<sup>62</sup> The requirements for ELI programs included having one instructional staff or administrative member fluent in English and the site’s designated target language (but this person was not required to have a bilingual extension), offering readily accessible classroom materials in both English and the target language, and providing regular opportunities for family members to share language and other cultural artifacts.<sup>63</sup> According to surveyed site leaders, 6 percent of programs serving LOTE students were designated ELI (55 out of 987 surveyed sites).
- **Other Pre-K for All programs serving LOTE students.** Most Pre-K for All sites that served LOTE students in 2015–16 (94 percent of surveyed sites) were not formally designated DL or ELI. This finding is unsurprising, as DOE indicated that these designations only began in the 2015-16 school year. However, some sites offered home language supports even though they did not have official designations: in interviews with leaders of three such sites, two leaders indicated that they offered instruction in home languages.<sup>64</sup> One of these site leaders explained that the site had followed a dual language model at the beginning of the year and shifted to an enhanced language model by the end of the year (e.g., delivering instruction mostly in English and offering home language supports). [Note: The site leader’s definitions of “dual language” and “enhanced language model” may have differed from the formal DOE designations.]

Additionally, a few of the interviewed site leaders described **allowing for flexibility in how home languages were used in pre-K activities and instruction.**<sup>65</sup> For example, as described above, teachers at a few sites reported using a home language at the beginning of the year and increasing the use of English gradually during the school year. Similarly, teachers at a few sites used a language other than English at their discretion based on their assessment of each student’s language ability,<sup>66</sup> and a few sites encouraged students to use whatever language they preferred in the classroom. As one site leader put it:

*...It’s really the kid’s choice... They choose, “Oh, today I want to read books in English” ...they understand that there are two languages, and both of them have their benefits.... We have the students all conversing in whatever language they are most comfortable with...*

---

<sup>62</sup> DOE, 2016a.

<sup>63</sup> DOE, 2016b.

<sup>64</sup> The third site offered English-only instruction with interpretation support and materials in a home language.

<sup>65</sup> Although a semi-structured protocol guided the interviews with site leaders, interviewees were also encouraged to volunteer information on various topics. In addition, not every question was asked of every interviewed site leader, due to time constraints or the applicability of certain questions to site leaders’ experiences. For this reason, systematic information was not available on all topics from all site leaders. Throughout this section, statements such as “two site leaders reported...” does not imply that the other remaining site leaders did not also engage in this practice.

<sup>66</sup> Note: Information about the specific methods these teachers used to assess students’ language abilities was unavailable.

## Activities and Classroom Materials

Table 10. Promising Practices Related to Activities and Classroom Materials

Promising Practices from the Literature
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide group activities and classroom materials in home languages.</li><li>• Make home languages a visible part of the pre-K environment.</li></ul>

### Findings from the Literature

**Promising Practice: Provide group activities and classroom materials in home languages.** Regardless of the formal structure of the pre-K classroom (e.g., in the case of Pre-K for All, whether it is designated as DL or ELI), researchers and educators emphasize the importance of incorporating home languages into instruction whenever possible.<sup>67</sup> Practices recommended in the literature include teaching pre-K students rhymes, songs, letters, and numbers in their home languages.<sup>68</sup> When selecting songs and stories in home languages, it is important to choose materials with commonly used vocabulary from students' day-to-day life.<sup>69</sup> The literature also suggests teaching students greetings in each of the home languages represented in the classroom.<sup>70</sup>

*"We have every toy and supply labeled in both the [home language] and in English. We have all the classroom signs and centers labeled in both languages as well. We have our libraries full of [the other] language. We have our language corner. We have both alphabets: English and [home language] alphabets hanging. So students get a lot of just regular print and exposure in both languages."*

Site Leader

**Promising Practice: Make home languages a visible part of the pre-K environment.** The literature recommends that site staff integrate home languages into the overall preschool environment, such as when labeling furniture, making signs identifying parts of the classroom and play materials, and placing artifacts on bulletin boards.<sup>71</sup> Tabors<sup>72</sup> suggested labeling objects in different colors for each language. Overall, the pre-K classroom environment should reflect the languages, cultures, and family practices of the students.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Goldenberg et al., 2013.

<sup>68</sup> Espinoza, 2013b; Goldenberg et al., 2013; Nemeth, 2016.

<sup>69</sup> Nemeth, 2016.

<sup>70</sup> Espinoza, 2013b; Goldenberg et al., 2013.

<sup>71</sup> Goldenberg et al., 2013, California Department of Education, 2009.

<sup>72</sup> 2008.

<sup>73</sup> Espinosa, 2013a; Figueras-Daniel & Barnett, 2013.

## *Study Findings: Practices in Pre-K for All Classrooms*

**All six interviewed site leaders described incorporating into instruction games, songs, books, or activities in students' home languages or cultures.** The leader at one site said the teachers were from the same country as the LOTE students, so they incorporated traditional games into activities. Similarly, all six leaders reported offering books in home languages, including the site that used English-only instruction. In addition, among the five sites that used another language in instruction, all five had visual aids such as alphabets and classroom signs in students' home languages. Finally, two study sites created visual zones for each language in the classroom (one DL and one ELI site). At the DL site, as students stepped from one area of the classroom to the other, the language changed:

*If you look at the class, the classroom is divided, half and half...the red area is the [home language] and then the blue area is the English area. When it's [home language] time, you're sitting in the red area. Everything, all visuals, all instructions, even the flow of the day, is all in [home language]...*

Some sites—especially those serving LOTE students speaking a diversity of languages—may have difficulty finding and having the resources to purchase materials in other languages. Several of the interviewed site leaders reported challenges finding books in home languages, and three sites struggled to find age-appropriate books in home languages.<sup>74</sup>

**Among all Pre-K for All sites whose leaders responded to the survey and who served any LOTE students—regardless of whether the sites were designated DL or ELI—there was less consistency in the use of home languages in activities and instruction.**<sup>75</sup> Only 51 percent of surveyed sites reported incorporating the sites' most common home language or designated target language during whole group activities (e.g., story time, music, and movement).<sup>76</sup> Similarly, 53 percent of surveyed sites reported providing classroom materials (e.g., schedules, books, and labels) in both English and the site's most common home language or designated target language.

**Some types of sites were significantly more likely to incorporate home languages into activities than others, according to the survey.** Specifically, 58 percent of sites serving high percentages of LOTE students (defined for our purposes as having 25 percent or more of LOTE students) incorporated home languages in whole group activities, compared to 47 percent for sites serving low percentages of LOTE students (e.g., 1 to 9 percent of students). Similarly, among sites serving LOTE students, those operated by ACS NYCEECs were significantly more likely to report incorporating home languages in whole group activities (69 percent of these sites) versus other sites (e.g., DOE NYCEECs or public schools).<sup>77</sup> Sites run by ACS NYCEECs were also more likely to provide classroom materials in both English and the site's most

---

<sup>74</sup> According to our interview with a DOE representative, in 2015–16 the DOE provided books in the target language to all sites designated as DL or ELI. DOE also provided PL to sites through workshops and coaching from Instructional Coordinators. The second report in this series, *Evaluation of the Pre-K for All Initiative 2015–16: An Assessment of Professional Development, Coaching, and Supports to Sites* provides additional detail about these supports.

<sup>75</sup> It might be expected that surveyed sites would show less consistency than the sites whose leaders we interviewed since the surveyed sites had not been specifically selected because they were high-quality sites serving large proportions of LOTE students. We asked site leaders responding to the Year 2 survey to indicate whether their sites served LOTE students and then asked them questions about their practices at the sites. Again, throughout this section, all percentages are reported out of surveyed sites that served LOTE students.

<sup>76</sup> Throughout this section, to preserve confidentiality due to the very low numbers of DL and ELI sites responding to the survey, their survey responses are not broken out separately.

<sup>77</sup> Throughout this section, responses from pre-K sites administered by ACS NYCEECs were compared against those administered by DOE NYCEECs or public schools. Generally, pre-K sites administered by ACS NYCEECs were more likely than other types of sites to report using practices that the literature has identified as best practices for LOTE students. This finding is highlighted throughout this section, as appropriate.

common home language or designated target language (71 percent) than sites run by DOE NYCEECs or district schools (53 percent and 48 percent, respectively).

## TEACHING TECHNIQUES AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Table 11. Promising Practices Related to Teaching Techniques and Classroom Practices

Promising Practices from the Literature	
•	Use teaching strategies designed to engage pre-K LOTE students in learning.
•	Use proven strategies to teach vocabulary to pre-K LOTE students.

### Findings from the Literature

**Promising Practice: Use teaching strategies specifically designed to engage pre-K LOTE students in learning.** The literature identified a number of ways teachers of pre-K LOTE students can help their students learn and engage with instruction.

- **Incorporate opportunities for pre-K LOTE students to learn during play and other activities.** To facilitate LOTE student’s oral language development through play, several techniques may be used. First, teachers can employ a running commentary during activities, actively describing what they are doing (e.g., “I’m opening the can of red Play-Dough. Would you like some?”). Second, teachers can group LOTE and English-speaking preschool students together during free play, as they will often teach each other words in context through role-play or simple games such as “Duck, duck, goose.” If teachers are concerned that students are not playing together due to language differences, they can introduce *scripted dramatic play* (e.g., providing students with roles and vocabulary for their roles).<sup>78</sup>
- **Focus instruction on helping pre-K LOTE students learn foundational concepts and ideas that can be understood in their home language or in English; do not focus solely upon English acquisition.** Supporting home languages in the classroom will make concepts more accessible in either language.<sup>79</sup> One way to do this is to **use pictures, real-world objects, and concrete experiences, which can be particularly helpful to convey the meaning of words and concepts to LOTE students.**<sup>80</sup> Discussing objects found in the local environment can help LOTE students by focusing on a restricted range of vocabulary words, and providing useful context.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, teachers can link visual cues, physical gestures, and signals to specific vocabulary words to convey meaning.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Tabors, 2008.

<sup>79</sup> Espinoza, 2013a; Nemeth, 2016.

<sup>80</sup> Espinoza, 2013a; California Department of Education, 2009; Goldenberg, 2008; 2010; Restrepo & Towle-Harmon, 2008.

<sup>81</sup> Tabors, 2008.

<sup>82</sup> California Department of Education, 2009; Espinosa, 2013a; Tabors, 2008.

**Promising Practice: Use proven strategies to teach vocabulary to pre-K LOTE students.** Presenting vocabulary thematically can help LOTE students make associations between words and scaffold students' learning.<sup>83</sup> Teachers also should consider summarizing or providing key phrases of a story in a book or song in the student's home language before introducing it in English.<sup>84</sup> Teachers are also encouraged to point out cognates and similarities between words in home languages and English.<sup>85</sup>

- **Encourage LOTE students to talk and practice vocabulary in whichever language feels comfortable to them.** For example, teachers can use open-ended questions, or questions that can have multiple answers, to help LOTE students learn to expand their utterances (rather than giving simple, short answers). Similarly, LOTE students will benefit from extended opportunities to speak with teachers on a single topic and engage in one-on-one discussions that use rich vocabulary as often as possible.<sup>86</sup> Students can also be encouraged to share words or phrases in their home language during individual and group settings.<sup>87</sup> Other best practices include encouraging students to talk by providing prompts when students need help in expressing themselves.<sup>88</sup> Teachers can also facilitate conversations between LOTE and non-LOTE students by providing them with phrases as needed ("Ask Larry, 'May I use this truck?'").<sup>89</sup>
- **Read to LOTE students, bearing in mind that students may become frustrated if they cannot understand the book.** To avoid this issue, Tabors<sup>90</sup> suggested several practical approaches when reading books to preschoolers in an unfamiliar language: 1) choose short books or read longer books in sections; 2) choose books carefully with an eye for repetitive and simplified texts; 3) modify text while reading if needed to facilitate understanding; 4) read books more than once; and 5) encourage students to "read" and explain books to other students.

The Sobrato Early Academic Language Program (SEAL) in California emphasizes oral language development by asking questions that engage LOTE students in describing their feelings and experiences, and teaching LOTE students the alphabet and phonics of home languages (Sobrato Early Academic Literacy, n.d.).

### *Study Findings: Practices in Pre-K for All Classrooms*

**A few interviewed site leaders described using the best practices outlined above in teaching LOTE students.** For example, a few site leaders stated that their sites used pictures and visual cues to teach students vocabulary words. Similarly, a few site leaders described using physical gestures or acting to convey meaning to LOTE students. A few interviewed site leaders specifically described using hands-on or inquiry-based teaching strategies with their students, and one site leader said that using hands-on techniques helped to teach LOTE students difficult vocabulary concepts. At this site, students built fans to learn vocabulary related to wind.

<sup>83</sup> Restrepo & Towle-Harmon, 2008.

<sup>84</sup> Goldenberg et al., 2013.

<sup>85</sup> California Department of Education, 2009; Espinosa, 2013a; Goldenberg et al., 2013.

<sup>86</sup> Castro, Páez, Dickinson, & Frede, 2011.

<sup>87</sup> Figueras-Daniel & Barnett, 2013.

<sup>88</sup> Castro et al., 2011.

<sup>89</sup> Tabors, 2008.

<sup>90</sup> 2008.

**Further, around two-thirds of surveyed Pre-K for All site leaders reported encouraging peer interactions among LOTE students.** Specifically, 69 percent of surveyed site leaders reported building on students' most common home language or the site's target language by encouraging peer interactions during small group and learning center time to help students share ideas and understand new concepts. Again, surveyed sites serving high percentages of LOTE students were more likely to report using this practice (75 percent of these sites), compared to 59 percent of sites serving low percentages of LOTE students.

Similarly, interviewed site leaders at high-performing sites described various efforts to encourage conversation and shared talk among all students, including LOTE students. For example, one site deliberately mixed LOTE students with non-LOTE students to promote conversation. At other sites, teachers actively facilitated students' conversations in English, providing vocabulary as needed:

*A student might make a comment in [home language] and the teacher will repeat it back in English and say, "Is that what you meant?" That way they get that language and the next time they repeat it to their friends, they're more likely to give it a shot at English.*

Teachers at another site asked open-ended questions to encourage students to talk. In addition, two sites asked students to make presentations or talk in front of other students:

*...[LOTE students] are encouraged to be the teachers. They are called to the middle of the rug and teach us how to count the numbers in their language... And they feel very proud about speaking and teaching in some other language and their culture.<sup>91</sup>*

**Finally, a few sites reported that they taught LOTE students concepts that translated across languages.** As one site director stated, the site followed best practices in allowing students to learn in whichever language they preferred:

*...it doesn't matter what language [is used] as long as the skill is understood and grasped... as they learn more English over the years, they're able to adopt that knowledge and learn the correct English terminology while practicing and reviewing their skills.*

---

<sup>91</sup> We should note that this site did not discuss whether all students were required to participate in this activity. To avoid putting children on the spot, Tabors (2008) recommends that LOTE students should be allowed to respond to teachers' questions in English in unison or on a voluntary basis during circle time.

### Addressing the Needs of LOTE Students: Finding the Right Curriculum

Twenty-two percent of surveyed Pre-K for All site leaders reported severe or moderate challenges implementing a curriculum suitable for LOTE students. Although the survey did not ask site leaders to specify the types of challenges they encountered, our interviews with site leaders provided some insights. For example, site leaders mentioned that LOTE students often need extra time at the beginning of the year, making it a challenge to follow a set curriculum. One site leader spoke about the general curricular challenges related to providing services to students in multiple languages:

*... we're trying to juggle a double curriculum, because we want them to be ready for kindergarten, know their ABCs, get all those pre-reading concepts and skills. But at the same time, the parents also want them to be reviewing their home language and reading in [it] as well. So, it's definitely a challenge...*

## TEACHER AND STAFF PROFICIENCY TO TEACH LOTE STUDENTS

### Teacher and Staff Language Ability

Table 12. Promising Practices Related to Teacher and Staff Language Ability

Promising Practices from the Literature
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Speak students' home languages with LOTE students whenever possible.</li><li>• Create a predictable environment that facilitates learning among LOTE students.</li></ul>

#### *Findings from the Literature*

**Promising Practice: Speak students' home languages with LOTE students whenever possible.** Research has found that LOTE students fare better when paired with teachers or staff who speak their home languages. For example, one study found that preschool teachers who did not speak Spanish were less likely to interact with their Spanish-speaking students and more likely to label these students' behavior as disruptive.<sup>92</sup> In addition, bilingual teachers send an important signal to students and families about how the site values the home language and LOTE students.<sup>93</sup> In preschool classrooms where the teacher spoke Spanish, Spanish-speaking students were less likely to be bullied by their peers over the course of the school year.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Chang et al., 2007; Goldenberg et al., 2013.

<sup>93</sup> Tabors, 2008.

<sup>94</sup> Chang et al., 2007.



### Addressing the Needs of LOTE Students: Multiple Languages Being Spoken in One Classroom

Early education programs throughout the country are reporting diversity in the languages represented among their families (NCELA, 2011). For example, similar to NYC, the Los Angeles County Office of Education’s preschool program serves students speaking 224 different languages and dialects (Tully, 2015). When students come from multiple linguistic backgrounds, many of the best practices discussed here become challenging to implement. Teachers and aides may not speak all of the languages represented in their classroom, and programs may need additional resources to purchase materials in multiple languages. Goldenberg et al. (2013) argue that maintenance preschool programs (e.g., DL) are particularly challenging to implement in an environment in which students speak multiple home languages.

Pre-K for All sites in our study reported challenges serving the needs of LOTE students from multiple linguistic backgrounds. In fact, 73 percent of surveyed sites that served LOTE students reported serving more than one linguistic population. Moreover, several interviewed sites served two linguistic groups other than English and provided activities in both languages. Several sites viewed this diversity of languages as a strength as well as a challenge. As one site leader put it, “...if you walk into the classroom, you are going to see this rich variety ...You can see that [kids who speak one language] are learning also how to speak in [another language].” However, one site leader described another challenge related to serving multiple linguistic populations: some LOTE parents did not wish their children to learn a *second* language other than English due to concerns such as not being able to help the students at home with that language.

### Addressing the Needs of LOTE Students: Instructional Staff Inability to Speak Students’ Home Languages

**Many preschool teachers and staff working with LOTE students are not bilingual** (Figueras-Daniel & Barnett, 2013). In some cases, a teacher may speak a language other than English, but it may not be the language spoken by the students in a particular site. Or, the teacher may speak a language spoken by a few of the students, but not all. As mentioned above, this can be the case when sites serve students from multiple linguistic populations.

Teachers at the sites we interviewed did not always speak the languages of the LOTE students at the sites. A few teachers had bilingual certifications, but most did not. One of the site leaders we interviewed stated that the cost of the bilingual certification represented a challenge for teachers, since they have to pay for this training themselves. Another site leader mentioned that it was difficult to hire teachers with this certification due to low salaries in community-based organizations and competition with DOE for credentialed teachers. These challenges have implications for sites’ ability to be formally designated as DL sites, as sites must have at least one lead teacher with a bilingual extension certification to obtain this designation.

Despite some challenges, it is still possible to support the learning needs of LOTE students who speak languages that are not common at the site, or not spoken by staff. Espinosa<sup>95</sup> argued that English-only instruction is not the only option for sites serving multiple linguistic populations, adding that supports in multiple home languages can still be offered in these contexts. For example, teachers and other staff can use songs and videos in home languages to communicate with LOTE students. Tabors<sup>96</sup> offered several practical tips, including:

- **reaching out to families at the beginning of the year to learn basic words in the home language to communicate with the students** (e.g., “listen,” “bathroom,” “eat”). Doing so conveys respect to the families as well as facilitating the relationship with the student.

<sup>95</sup> 2013a.

<sup>96</sup> 2008.

- **inviting families into the site to share aspects of their culture** (for more information on engaging families, see the [Communication and Outreach With Families](#) section below).

**Promising Practice: Create a predictable environment that facilitates learning among LOTE students.**<sup>97</sup> The use of routines and classroom organization techniques has been found to help LOTE students predict the sequence of events and required responses, thereby facilitating their adaptation and learning. This can be particularly helpful if a LOTE student does not speak the language commonly spoken by teachers. Other ways staff can create an environment conducive to LOTE student learning include:<sup>98</sup>

- Using the LOTE student’s name during activities to make the child feel welcomed (e.g., “Would you like to help, Sook-whan?”);
- Repeating key words and phrases to facilitate learning;
- Setting up the classroom to provide places where LOTE students can play without needing to use language (e.g., including images and opportunities for hands-on learning in all areas); and
- Encouraging other students in the classroom to play with LOTE students, pointing out that some students speak a different language, and it will take time for them to learn, and providing ways for other students to help in the process (such as approaching LOTE students and establishing eye contact, speaking slowly with good enunciation, repeating themselves if a LOTE student doesn’t respond, requesting clarification, or using different words to restate something they said).

*“For the LOTE students speaking rarer languages, we don’t have another interpreter in the class. What we do is we use teachers who are trained on how to use their physical behavior, how to act things out, how to show things used such as cues in order to support them...so the [language minority students] may not understand the words ‘Sit down,’ but if I’m sitting down and say ‘Sit down,’ and I’m also motioning for him to do it, that’s how they learn to connect the words with the action.”*

Site Leader

### **Study Findings: Practices in Pre-K for All Classrooms**

**In all six interviewed sites, leaders reported having at least some teachers and/or teaching assistants who spoke the most common language of the LOTE students attending these sites.** At least some teachers, assistant teachers, or paraprofessionals were fully bilingual in common languages at each site.

**However, as described above, a few Pre-K for All sites served students from multiple linguistic backgrounds.** To instruct students who spoke a language in the minority at the site, these sites generally relied on a teacher assistant or paraprofessional on-site to work with these students. However, when there were multiple languages present, or more rare languages, even this became a challenge.

<sup>97</sup> California Department of Education, 2009; Castro et al., 2011; Tabors, 2008.

<sup>98</sup> Tabors, 2008.

The six interviewed site leaders also reported variation in the extent to which teachers and/or teachers’ assistants had bilingual extension certifications. This certification is required of at least one lead teacher in a DOE-designated Dual Language site, but is optional for other types of Pre-K for All sites.<sup>99</sup> Per DOE requirements, the DL program in our sample of interviewed sites had a teacher with this certification. In the five other non-DL sites we interviewed, two sites reported that some of their teachers had this certification, and three sites reported that none of their teachers did. Two sites also reported that some teachers were working on these certifications.

## Professional Learning

Table 13. Promising Practices Related to Professional Learning

Promising Practices from the Literature
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer ongoing professional learning and training to teachers of pre-K LOTE students.</li> </ul>

### Findings from the Literature

**Promising Practice: Offer ongoing professional learning and training to teachers of pre-K LOTE students.**<sup>100</sup> One study found that offering PD to pre-K teachers had measurable effects on student learning compared to a control group: in classrooms of teachers who had received the PD, LOTE students’ phonological skills in their home language (e.g., rhyming) improved, and teachers were more likely to implement activities to address the LOTE students’ language and literacy needs (e.g., incorporating Spanish books and other Spanish print materials).<sup>101</sup> Professional learning for preschool teachers and staff should provide a strong knowledge base in six content areas: (a) understanding of language development, (b) understanding the relationship between language and culture, (c) developing skills and abilities to effectively teach LOTE students, (d) developing abilities to use assessment in meaningful ways for LOTE students, (e) developing a sense of professionalism, and (f) understanding how to work with families.<sup>102</sup>

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS)’s pre-K program provides targeted PL via seven instructional specialists that each work with a group of six to ten schools. Each instructional specialist is ESOL-certified by the state and holds an advanced degree in second language acquisition. Instructional specialists provide a summer training session and in-school training at least four times per year to teachers of LOTE students. The training is adapted to teachers’ needs and may focus on topics such as research-based practices, the LOTE curriculum, instructional models, benchmarks, supports, and assessments (Marietta & Brookover, 2011).

### Study Findings: Practices in Pre-K for All Classrooms

The DOE provided all Pre-K for All sites in 2015–16 with three types of professional learning supports: access to PL through Summer Institutes and ongoing citywide training days, and coaching from Instructional Coordinators and Social

<sup>99</sup> Due to the low numbers of DL sites answering our survey (6 sites), we do not report their responses separately due to confidentiality concerns.

<sup>100</sup> Buysee, Castro, & Peisner-Feinberg, 2010; Castro et al., 2011; Espinoza, 2013a; Goldenberg et al., 2013; Zepeda, Castor, & Cronin, 2011.

<sup>101</sup> Buysee, et al., 2010.

<sup>102</sup> Zepeda, et al., 2011.

Workers (see the second report in this series, *Evaluation of the Pre-K for All Initiative 2015–16: An Assessment of Professional Learning, Coaching, and Supports to Sites* for additional detail about these supports).

**Most surveyed site leaders reported no challenges or mild challenges accessing PL related to LOTE students.** According to the survey, 72 percent of sites reported no challenges or mild challenges in accessing needed PL on serving students whose home language is a language other than English. On the other hand, 28 percent of these sites reported severe or moderate challenges accessing this type of PL. **However, around half of surveyed site leaders wished for more PL to work with their LOTE families.** Specifically, 50 percent of site leaders whose sites served LOTE families reported a high or moderate need for PL or support in engaging LOTE families, and 50 percent reported little or no need in this area.

**All six site leaders we interviewed reported having staff participate in PL offered by the DOE or other sources.** Three of these site leaders said that the DOE trainings had positively influenced teachers, but they also offered some suggestions for improvement (see the second report in this series for more information). All six site leaders also reported that their teachers received support from Instructional Coordinators. Of those who described their experiences with the Instructional Coordinators, feedback was uniformly positive. Two interviewed site leaders also mentioned non-DOE trainings that teachers received. For example, one site received support from a lesson planner at its affiliated school. At a second site, teachers were sent to local conferences and workshops and visited other schools to observe other teachers' best practices.

## EFFECTIVE USE OF LANGUAGE ASSESSMENTS<sup>103</sup>

Table 14. Promising Practices Related to Effective Use of Language Assessments

Promising Practices from the Literature
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assess pre-K LOTE preschool students' language abilities in both their home languages and in English.</li><li>• Use assessments that are culturally and linguistically sensitive to LOTE students' unique needs.</li><li>• Use multiple methods, observational assessments to assess LOTE preschool students, and repeated measurements.</li><li>• Get input from family members about LOTE students' language development.</li></ul>

### *Findings from the Literature*

**Promising Practice: Assess pre-K LOTE students' language abilities in both their home languages and in English.**<sup>104</sup> Espinosa and Gutiérrez-Clellen<sup>105</sup> pointed out that bilingual pre-K students typically have a dominant language—generally the home language. **Assessments of language ability should be conducted in the dominant language first, followed by English,** to gain an understanding of students' age-appropriate language abilities. If delays are observed in the home language, students should be referred for further evaluation in their home language. However, it is important

<sup>103</sup> At the pre-K level, several types of assessments can evaluate students' needs including developmental assessments (e.g., screenings for special needs), assessments for instructional decision making (e.g., assessing students' understanding of concepts), and assessments of students' language abilities (Espinosa & Gutiérrez-Clellen, 2013). In this section, we focus on one type of assessment that is particularly applicable to LOTE students: namely, assessments of LOTE students' language abilities in English and in their home languages.

<sup>104</sup> Espinosa, 2013a.

<sup>105</sup> 2013.

to distinguish between speech delays and normal language differences observed among young bilingual students; typically, bilingual students may know fewer vocabulary words in each language.<sup>106</sup>

**Promising Practice: Use assessments that are culturally and linguistically sensitive to LOTE students' unique needs.**<sup>107</sup>

Assessments should take into account the fact that bilingual students may learn vocabulary thematically (e.g., school-related words in English and home-related words in the home language), and that students' total vocabulary across the two languages may be higher than in each language separately.<sup>108</sup> As part of this, **researchers recommend comparing pre-K LOTE students' fluency in their home language and in English.** For example, students could be asked to describe past events or retell stories in their own words, first in their home language and then in English.<sup>109</sup> Results could then be compared across the two languages to gain an understanding of students' abilities in both languages.

In Illinois, state regulations require that screening procedures seek information and insights from the families of LOTE students to help guide the screening process. But families are not involved in the formal assessment or interpretation of results (Soltero, 2014).

**Promising Practice: Use multiple methods, observational assessments to assess LOTE preschool students, and repeated measurements.**<sup>110</sup>

Typically, a bilingual teacher will be able to assess a LOTE student's home language and English proficiency through day-to-day interactions in the classroom.<sup>111,112</sup> Alternatively, structured assessments, such as the Bilingual Early Language Assessment (BELA) or work sampling approaches may be used to assess abilities in each language.<sup>113</sup> However, Espinosa and Gutiérrez-Clellen<sup>114</sup> cautioned that assessing any preschool students' language abilities can be challenging (regardless of their LOTE status), and suggest that using authentic assessments in the classroom may be more effective than using standardized tests of language ability. An additional challenge can be a lack of bilingual staff members to assess students in all home languages.

**Promising Practice: Get input from family members about LOTE students' language development.**<sup>115</sup> If teachers do not speak the student's home language, it can be particularly informative if they communicate with the student's families to learn about student's language skills in the home language.<sup>116</sup> In addition, studies have shown that parents are more accurate than teachers in estimating LOTE students' English language abilities.<sup>117,118</sup> However, families should not conduct assessments or interpret findings.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Espinosa, 2013a, 2013b.

<sup>107</sup> Espinosa & Gutiérrez-Clellen, 2013; National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 2009.

<sup>108</sup> Bandel, Atkins-Burnett, Castro, Wulsin, & Putnam, 2012.

<sup>109</sup> Espinosa & Gutiérrez-Clellen, 2013.

<sup>110</sup> NAEYC, 2009.

<sup>111</sup> For a sample checklist that teachers can use to assess LOTE students' English abilities, please see Tabors, 2008, p. 217.

<sup>112</sup> Espinosa & Gutiérrez-Clellen, 2013; Tabors, 2008.

<sup>113</sup> Tabors, 2008.

<sup>114</sup> 2013.

<sup>115</sup> Espinosa & Gutiérrez-Clellen, 2013; Tabors, 2008.

<sup>116</sup> Tabors, 2008.

<sup>117</sup> For a sample questionnaire that can be given to parents of LOTE students to provide information about their child, including their English language abilities, please see Tabors 2008, p. 211.

<sup>118</sup> Bandel et al., 2012.

<sup>119</sup> NAEYC, 2009.

## Study Findings: Practices in Pre-K for All Classrooms

Pre-K for All sites are required to conduct an initial diagnostic screening on all eligible students using a valid and reliable developmental screening tool to help identify potential developmental delays and language acquisition needs at the beginning of the school year.<sup>120</sup> The tools are designed to assist educators in learning about the various aspects of a child's development such as language, cognition, perception, and motor development. All sites are also required to adopt and implement an approved, valid, and reliable authentic assessment system that covers all the development domains as outlined in the New York State Pre-K Foundation for the Common Core (PKFCC). *Pre-K for All* sites are not required to screen pre-K students specifically for English or home language abilities.

**Site leaders we interviewed reported using various methods to gauge LOTE students' language proficiency.** Five interviewed site leaders described the ways they determine the English ability of their site's LOTE students.<sup>121</sup> Some used informal language "assessments" that generally occurred informally and arose organically out of classroom activities. For example, leaders reported that teachers at one site assessed students' understanding of directions in English to see which students needed interpretation in a home language. At another site, teachers used weekly show-and-tell sessions in English as a marker of students' English abilities:

*We just ask them in English, all the kids...to bring the show and tell. So they bring something from home, and they describe what they bring to school. They learn more vocabulary and they learn to express themselves in front of the kids, in front of all the other people.*<sup>122</sup>

A few site leaders also described using slightly more formal processes to assess LOTE students' English proficiency. Two sites used approved DOE authentic assessments such as work sampling to gather information about students' English abilities. One site also interviewed students in English and in their home languages at the beginning and end of each school year. At another site, teachers created their own teacher-made assessments to gauge students' understanding of shapes and colors in English and in their home languages.

### Addressing the Needs of LOTE Students: Assessing Language Ability for Speakers of Less-Commonly Spoken Languages

One site leader we talked with said it could be challenging to use developmental screeners when the assessment was not available in LOTE students' home languages. In such cases, some LOTE students could not be screened. This leader also reported challenges finding speech therapists to work with these language minority LOTE students:

*We have problem finding speech therapists that speak the language of the students. That's a big, big problem. We have parents that have been waiting since September to get services but they cannot get them... because they want somebody that speaks only [home language], and it's difficult to get those kinds of services. Then I explain to them and they switch to English until we find somebody.*

<sup>120</sup> Approved screenings include: Early Screening Inventory—Revised (ESI-R), provided by DOE free of charge; Ages and Stages Questionnaires – Third Edition (ASQ-3), and Brigance Inventories System II.

<sup>121</sup> The sixth site delivered instruction in English, and this site director stated that all LOTE students at the site were already proficient in English.

<sup>122</sup> Again, we should note that this site did not discuss whether all students were required to participate in this activity. To avoid putting children on the spot, Tabors (2008) recommends that LOTE students should be allowed to respond to teachers' questions in English in unison or on a voluntary basis during circle time.

## COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH WITH FAMILIES

### Relationship-Building and Encouraging Family Engagement

Table 15. Promising Practices Related to Relationship-Building and Encouraging Family Engagement

Promising Practices from the Literature
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide warm and welcoming environments in which LOTE families<sup>123</sup> feel comfortable participating.</li><li>• Emphasize to LOTE families that they are their children’s first and primary teachers, and that collaboration with the pre-K site is critical to supporting their children’s development.</li><li>• Collaborate with LOTE families to set developmental-related goals for their children.</li><li>• Offer supports and suggestions to LOTE families on how to foster their children’s learning and development.</li></ul>

#### Findings from the Literature

**Promising Practice: Provide warm and welcoming environments in which LOTE families feel comfortable participating.**<sup>124</sup> For example, sites could invite LOTE families to participate on program boards, share their ideas on how to support LOTE families, and create family leadership roles.<sup>125</sup> Including families in sites’ activities can have positive effects. For example, family engagement in classroom activities facilitates relationships between families and staff, and can also increase LOTE students’ confidence and comfort.<sup>126</sup>

**Promising Practice: Emphasize to LOTE families that they are their children’s first and primary teachers, and that collaboration with the pre-K site is critical to supporting their children’s development.**<sup>127</sup> There are a number of ways sites might do this.

- **Invite LOTE families to share their knowledge and interests with site staff.** When possible, it can be helpful for teachers to meet early in the school year with LOTE families to learn important information about the child and family.<sup>128</sup>

MCPS provides key supports to parents and families of LOTE students, including:

- An ELL/Bilingual Advisory Committee (EBAC) that works to ensure that the needs of LOTE students and their families are reflected in district policies and practices. The panel comprises six members of the community who speak languages other than English and advocate for the interest of LOTE students.
- Sixteen Parent-Community Coordinators (PCCs), who provide assistance to families by helping with communication, keeping them informed of their rights, explaining the workings of the American school system, and aiding parents to resolve concerns. Often PCCs offer trainings for parents of LOTE students on subjects like how grading works or helping with homework (Marietta & Brookover, 2011).

<sup>123</sup> Throughout this section, we use the term “LOTE families” to refer to families whose home language is a language other than English.

<sup>124</sup> Halgunseth, Gisela, & Barbarin, 2013; Gelatt, Adams, Huerta, & Urban, 2014.

<sup>125</sup> Gelatt et al., 2014; Halgunseth et al., 2013.

<sup>126</sup> Tabors, 2008.

<sup>127</sup> Halgunseth et al., 2013.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

In San Antonio, Texas, pre-K centers also hold many planned events to engage with parents and families, such as breakfasts, Grandparents Days, field trips, family literacy nights, and onsite farmer's markets. The pre-K centers also offer activities designed to help families develop their abilities to foster their children's learning at home. These free training sessions cover a range of topics including bedtime rituals, healthy eating, and parenting skills. In addition, local companies and nonprofit organizations have partnered with centers to promote parents reading to their children (Williams, 2015).

- **Incorporate activities that highlight or explore LOTE families' home languages, cultures, and interests in program planning.**

Some sites may find it useful to develop a mission statement that expresses the site's appreciation of cultural and linguistic diversity, and share the statement with staff and LOTE families.<sup>129</sup> Sites can encourage LOTE families to participate in the program by sharing something they like to do—such as quilting, cooking, or gardening—and talking about these activities in their own languages. Social opportunities such as cooking and sharing a meal help strengthen connections between staff and LOTE families.<sup>130</sup>

**Promising Practice: Collaborate with LOTE families to set developmental-related goals for their children.** The literature recommends that pre-K sites invite LOTE families to participate in joint goal setting and decision making about their children's education.<sup>131</sup> Ideally, sites will develop a system of ongoing two-way communication in which teachers and families exchange information about their children's academic progress and well-being.

**Promising Practice: Offer supports and suggestions to LOTE families on how to foster their children's learning and development.** It is important that pre-K sites work with LOTE families to help them support their children's learning and development. Research suggests that teachers should encourage parents to talk and read to their children in their home language as a way of strengthening children's home language skills. In particular, teachers can ask families to introduce key vocabulary in the child's home language so that families can build concept knowledge in the home language before students are exposed to these concepts in English.<sup>132</sup> If training is provided to families, it should be provided in a culturally appropriate manner.<sup>133</sup> Finally, it might be helpful to conduct home visits to help guide families in literacy-building activities such as talking, singing nursery rhymes, or narrating stories in the home language.<sup>134</sup>

An important part of this is **emphasizing to families the value of learning multiple languages.**<sup>135</sup> Some families may not be aware of the benefits of exposure to multiple languages when young, or may be concerned that students will not learn English as quickly in a bilingual environment. Outreach to families about the value of maintaining the home language and the importance of bilingualism can alleviate these concerns.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>129</sup> Halgunseth et al., 2013.

<sup>130</sup> Gelatt et al., 2014; Halgunseth et al., 2013.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Halgunseth et al., 2013.

<sup>133</sup> Restrepo & Towle-Harmon, 2008.

<sup>134</sup> Halgunseth et al., 2013.

<sup>135</sup> Tabors, 2008; HHS/ED & US DoED, 2006.

<sup>136</sup> Tabors, 2008; HHS/ED & US DoED, 2016.



## Addressing the Needs of LOTE Students: Issues that May Affect LOTE Family Engagement

Sites may encounter several challenges when working with families of LOTE students. One challenge can be cross-cultural differences; however, training for staff can help bridge these divides. Training for families can also help parents understand aspects of the school culture in the United States, such as expectations related to homework and achievement (Restrepo & Towle-Harmon, 2008). Another challenge can be incorporating parents and families of LOTE students that speak multiple languages. Finally, LOTE families may face obstacles to participation in site activities, and providing LOTE families in need with childcare and transportation resources to attend school events can be helpful (Freedberg & Frey, 2016; Gelatt et al., 2014; Halgunseth et al., 2013).

One of the interviewed site leaders reported facing challenges related to cross-cultural differences with LOTE families at her site. The leader felt that parents from other cultures whose children were enrolled at the site often had different expectations and customs for their pre-K students (e.g., such as whether students should be expected to go to the bathroom independently at that age). This site leader emphasized the importance of clear communication with parents and suggested that a workshop about disciplinary customs in this country be provided to parents; in particular, this leader wished to discourage LOTE parents from using corporal punishment.

Another interviewed site leader reported that a few LOTE families could not read or write in their home languages. To address this issue and foster family engagement, this site offered extra supports to these families, helping them with the Pre-K for All applications and encouraging them to participate in site activities. As this leader stated:

*... we have a mom who told us, "I don't know how to read well" [but wanted to participate in a read aloud with students]. I said, "Don't worry, as long as you want to do it, it's all right. We can help you..." So the mom was there, reading the books to the students... She did it slowly, but she did it. I'm glad that she worked with us to read to the students when she didn't know how to do it.*

## Study Findings: Practices in Pre-K for All Classrooms

**All six interviewed site leaders reported that their sites regularly communicated and held meetings with families.** For example, site leaders reported holding regular family-teacher conferences, having open-door policies for parents, and hosting websites for families. One site also described soliciting feedback from families on how to improve the website via questionnaires in multiple languages. All six interviewed sites reported offering parental engagement activities such as workshops or family nights for all families, including LOTE families. One site took advantage of a city-wide program that offers museum tours with interpreters for LOTE parents:

*"Cool Culture" is an opportunity for our parents to go to different museums...[so] they can get exposed to what the city has to offer and talk about what they've learned [with their children]...[Parents] love it because they have an opportunity to go to the city, escorted by someone, because some of them are fearful. They don't know where to go. They don't speak the language to be able to ask for a ticket, so we have the parent coordinator with them...*

**Leaders also described creating a welcoming environment for LOTE families.** A majority of surveyed site leaders reported incorporating families' culture into site activities. Seventy-six percent of site leaders reported encouraging families to share language, stories, food, music, and additional aspects from their culture. Sites serving high percentages of LOTE students were more likely to encourage families to share their cultures (79 percent) than sites serving low percentages of such students (64 percent). There were no significant differences among sites by administrator of site (e.g., ACS vs. DOE).

**A few interviewed site leaders stated that their sites deliberately created a friendly atmosphere** in which families could feel comfortable talking with teachers about any concerns. Leaders specifically described incorporating families' cultures into activities, asking families to share traditional foods, songs, or celebrations. These activities included cultural holidays, potluck parties, and demonstrations of cultural dances.

**Finally, all six interviewed site leaders reported that they encouraged LOTE families to be active participants in their children's education.** A few sites offered workshops to families to help them understand ways to help their children at home. One site sent out weekly newsletters with details about what students were learning and suggested home-language activities LOTE families could do with their children. Another site asked LOTE families to come into the classroom to demonstrate aspects of their jobs for the students, with the goal of teaching students new English vocabulary words:

*... one parent was working in a pizzeria. He brought dough for all the kids and he taught them and gave explanation and instructions in English. So the kids listened very carefully and they started to catch [English words]...they finished their own pizza and they put it in the oven. So they ate the pizza that they made... after that we asked them what did you like about the pizza, and which ingredients did you use to make the pizza?*

Another site hosted a "day in a life of a preschooler" event for families, giving families a chance to participate in their child's daily routine and activities. This site leader stated that this event was particularly helpful for immigrant families who might not be familiar with pre-K environments in the United States. The activity showed families that students were not just playing while they were at pre-K, but were also actively *learning through play*, and it gave families tools to help their children learn at home as well.

*"I know what it is like to come here to this country and [not] know a word of English and try to communicate...it's very frustrating. It's embarrassing and you feel ashamed. So I've been through all of that...[we] try to make this transition as smooth as possible, and make them feel welcome, and make them feel accepted, and safe. That's our main concern. That's why I'm very passionate about this because I went through this so I know how it feels."*

Site Leader

## Communication with LOTE Families

Table 16. Promising Practices Related to Communication with LOTE Families

Promising Practices from the Literature
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establish processes and procedures that foster positive communication among LOTE families and students and site staff.</li><li>• Make home languages a visible part of the pre-K environment.</li></ul>

### *Findings from the Literature*

**Promising Practice: Establish processes and procedures that foster positive communication among LOTE families and students and site staff.** Some ways sites can do this include:

- **Asking LOTE families at the beginning of the school year to indicate their preferred language of communication,** and obtaining supports (e.g., interpretation and translation services) to facilitate communication in that language whenever possible.<sup>137</sup>
- **Developing a language and communication policy that informs LOTE families about the modes in which they can communicate with staff** (e.g., providing e-mail addresses, names of bilingual staff, telephoning hours, and comment boxes).<sup>138</sup>
- **Providing interpreters and translations of printed materials to LOTE families.** For example, sites should consider offering bilingual or multilingual newsletters and multilingual telephone lines to LOTE families.<sup>139</sup> The literature also recommends providing books and materials that authentically represent the cultures and languages of students and their families, and encouraging students, families, or volunteers to help understand and read them.<sup>140</sup> To foster communication with LOTE families, DOE offers a Language Line that sites can use to obtain translation or interpretation support when they are having difficulty communicating in a family’s home language.

MCPS provides five internal translators to pre-K sites. These translators translate all school district information into the five languages spoken most often by LOTE students and their families (Spanish, Chinese, French, Vietnamese, and Korean). In the district, schools with more than ten students who speak a specific language other than English can request that all school documents be translated into the home language. The school district also contracts with four on-call interpreters to provide interpretation services for small meetings such as parent conferences and larger meetings like PTA meetings as well. Any staff person can ask for the services of an interpreter to help assist communication with a family (Marietta & Brookover, 2011).

<sup>137</sup> HHS/ED & US DoED, 2016.

<sup>138</sup> Halgunseth et al., 2013.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Goldenberg et al., 2013.

## Study Findings: Practices in Pre-K for All Classrooms

**Eighty-two percent of the surveyed sites reported that they often had staff on-site who spoke languages other than English with families, and 70 percent of sites reported having regular on-site availability of at least one staff member who spoke the site’s target language to meet with families and provide additional supports.** In addition, 74 percent of site leaders serving LOTE students reported that they often provided interpretation services in languages other than English for meetings or events.

In Illinois, pre-K programs are required to provide and document opportunities for parent education and engagement, as well as provide ongoing, two-way communication with parents and guardians of LOTE students (Illinois State Board of Education).

**Similarly, all six interviewed site leaders relied on bilingual staff to communicate with families who spoke languages that were common at the sites and to provide interpretation at family events as needed.** The sites described offering interpretations at events and when speaking to families informally. One site hired an interpreter to work in the office and interact with families (as well as assisting non-bilingual teachers in the classroom). At the beginning of each year, two sites also asked families to indicate their preferred language of communication.

### Addressing the Needs of LOTE Students: Communicating with LOTE Families

Most surveyed site leaders reported that communication with LOTE families was not a challenge or was only a mild challenge (80 percent). On the other hand, 20 percent of site leaders serving LOTE families reported severe challenges or moderate challenges in communicating and engaging with these families. Additionally, a few interviewed site leaders noted challenges when communicating with LOTE parents. One site leader described a few issues with communicating with LOTE families who spoke a different dialect of the home language than site staff. At another site where an interpreter worked with families, the site leader wished for more interpretation assistance, since the interpreter occasionally was not available to work with families.

With regard to providing materials in home languages, 71 percent of surveyed site leaders reported translating written documents into languages other than English. However, only 40 percent of site leaders reported that the sites often had books or educational games and activities in languages other than English to send home. Sites serving high percentages of LOTE students were more likely than other sites to have books or educational games and activities in languages other than English to send home (47 percent). There were no differences between different types of sites in this area (e.g., ACS NYCEECs versus other sites).

*“It’s terrific...that [NYCDOE] is translating notices to go home to families. It takes the burden off of us...we do have the staff here to do it, but it is time consuming ... [I wish] they could give us parent engagement activities that have already been translated as a resource. [So] if we wanted it, it’s there, it’s available. You just pull from that.”*

Site Leader

All six interviewed site leaders stated that their high-performing sites provided materials in languages other than English to families, including books, activities, and/or translated materials such as newsletters, homework, and announcements in various languages. The sites also provided lending libraries or activities for family participation in languages other than English: one site sent books home every Friday in the home language.

### Addressing the Needs of LOTE Students: Providing Materials in Home Languages to LOTE Families

DOE provides translated notices for LOTE families on its website, but some site leaders reported issues providing home-language materials to LOTE families. Specifically, one site leader we interviewed mentioned that the site held workshops for LOTE families, but all workshop materials were in English. This site leader observed that LOTE families had difficulty in the workshops, so she decided that in the 2016-17 school year, workshop materials would be translated for LOTE families. Site leaders expressed appreciation that the DOE provided translated notices for LOTE families on its website but requested additional translation support.

## CONCLUSION

---

This report focused on the efforts the NYC DOE and selected Pre-K for All sites took to address the differentiated needs of students enrolled in Pre-K for All during the 2015-16 school year. Specifically, the report presented findings about the instructional, operational, and family engagement practices identified by selected sites as meeting the differentiated needs of students. Separate sections of the report discussed the practices of sites serving different populations of students including: students living in poverty, students living in poverty and with special needs, and students whose home language is a language other than English.

Overall, we found that sites faced similar challenges related to serving these student populations to those that were identified in the literature. In the same way, many sites reported using practices and strategies that research has shown to be effective in addressing the diverse needs of students—and the needs of their peers in the classroom. We hope the promising practices highlighted in this report can serve to inform future efforts to foster student learning and development.

## APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

---

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, drawing from multiple data sources and respondent groups, including a survey of all Pre-K for All site leaders, interviews and focus groups with staff at eight sites, review of DOE documentation and data, and interviews with DOE staff. These are briefly described below.

### In-Depth Qualitative Study at Eight Sampled Sites Serving Students in Poverty

To gather detailed information about the practices of sites serving students living in poverty, we worked with the DOE to select eight sites based on (1) the percent of children living in high-poverty census tracts and living in temporary housing; (2) their ECERS-R scores; and (3) feedback from Social Workers and Instructional Coordinators. Of those selected sites, two of them also served high percentages of students with special needs. To select these sites, DOE provided a list of recommended sites that served a high percentage of students living in poverty, as well as having ECERS-R scores that were in the higher range compared to other sites, including district schools, DOE NYCEECs, and ACS NYCEECs in various locations throughout the city. We then selected eight of the sites (with representation across program type) and attempted to recruit them to participate in the study. If a site declined participation, the next site in the category was recruited. Each site was offered an incentive of \$200 for participating in the study. Caregivers that participated in a focus group received a \$25 gift card. The eight sites selected to be part of our qualitative study helped provide an in-depth understanding of the promising practices they engaged in that contributed to their work in serving these populations. The final sample included:

- Sites located where the percent of children living in high-poverty census tracts ranged from 13 percent to 83.3 percent.
- Sites where the percent of students living in temporary housing ranged from 8.6 percent to 33.3 percent.
- Sites with the average ECERS-R scores ranging from 4.2 to 5.1.
- Five district schools, 2 DOE NYCEECs, and 1 ACS NYCEEC.
- Five sites assigned to an Instructional Coordinator, seven sites assigned to a Social Worker, and four sites assigned to both an Instructional Coordinator and Social Worker.

Visits at each site included an interview with the site leader, a focus group with staff (mostly teachers and some teacher assistants), and a focus group with caregivers. Initial information was gathered from each of the site leaders during a short telephone interview followed by a more detailed hour-long, in-person interview. Focus groups with staff and parents were conducted at each location and lasted between 30 minutes and an hour. For each of the conversations, two evaluators were present, one conducting the interview and another taking notes on a laptop. All conversations were recorded. In addition, telephone interviews were conducted with the five DECE Instructional Coordinators and seven DECE Social Workers assigned to the eight sampled sites. Each of these interviews was about 45 minutes to an hour in length and was recorded.

Following the interviews and focus groups, each audio recording was fully transcribed. We then developed a coding protocol to help guide the data analysis. Throughout the analysis, codes were added to the protocol as themes emerged

and ongoing discussions among coders were held to ensure consistency in analysis and reporting. Following the analysis, we reviewed all coded data and summarized emerging themes, including quotations when useful. Throughout the report, quotes have been lightly edited to improve readability without changing the interviewees' meaning.

## Survey of Pre-K for All Site Leaders

The survey addressed site leaders' perspectives on the supports the DOE provided to Pre-K for All sites as well as ongoing needs for support. Leaders of sites enrolling children whose home language is a language other than English were also asked about supports being provided to those children.

Data collection for the web-based survey was conducted over a six-week period in May and June 2016. DOE staff provided a list of 1,802 centers with the names and email addresses of the site leaders who should be asked to participate in the survey. On May 12, 2016, the study team sent emails to the site leaders. The emails included a brief description of the purpose of the survey and a personalized link to the online instrument. Site leaders were asked to complete the survey within 3 weeks. The study team sent four reminder emails to prompt leaders to complete the survey. DOE staff also sent two reminder emails encouraging site leaders to participate. Site leaders who did not respond after 5 weeks were sent a final email and asked to respond within one week. Once that date had passed, the survey was closed. The field results for the site leader survey are shown in Table 17. Response Rate for Site Leader Survey Eight site leaders responded to the survey request but did not agree to the consent form and did not complete the survey. These individuals are coded as refusals in Table 17. The final response rate, excluding refusals, is 73 percent.

**Table 17. Response Rate for Site Leader Survey**

Response Code	Site Leader Sample
Ineligible	3
Complete	1,314
Refusals	8
Nonresponse	477
Total eligible	1,799

Note: Sites were deemed ineligible if they reported they were no longer part of the Pre-K for All Program

When reporting the results from the survey, please note that all percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number and therefore may not sum to 100 percent. Throughout the text, all comparisons described as "significantly different" met statistical threshold for significance (e.g.,  $p < 0.05$ ) using standard analytic techniques (e.g., t-tests).

Finally, one survey item was not included in this report (question 14). This item was asked to site directors who indicated that their sites were DL or ELI (N=419). Unfortunately, data from this item did not align with the data provided by DOE. In addition, Q14 had a large amount of missing data and illogical data and was excluded on these grounds.

## Qualitative Data on LOTE Sites

To gather more information about best practices serving LOTE pre-K students, we interviewed site leaders at six sites that were rated highly on the ECERS-R and that served high percentages of students whose home language is a language other than English. We also spoke to a DOE staff member to learn about the Pre-K for All program’s approach regarding serving LOTE students and families.

To select these interviewed sites, DOE provided a list of 16 recommended sites that served a high percentage of LOTE students, as well as having ECERS-R scores that were in the higher range compared to other sites. No ACS sites were included. We then selected six sites based on the high percentage of LOTE students they served, as well as their quality as rated by ECERS-R scores. To ensure variation across sites in terms of size (i.e., number of seats), administrator of site (e.g., DOE NYCEEC, district school), and borough, the list was divided into four groups: DOE NYCEECs with a relatively small numbers of seats (10 to 18), DOE NYCEECs with a medium number of seats (20 to 32), district school sites with a small-to-medium number of seats (18 to 36), and DOE NYCEECs with a large number of seats (45 to 98). One site from each of the four groups was selected for recruitment. In addition, two sites outside those groups were selected with certainty: one was the only site in one borough and a second that was the only district school with a large number of seats (125). The study team contacted all six of the sites to recruit them for participation. Each site was offered an incentive of \$75 for participating in the study.

The first district school with a small-to-medium number of seats refused to participate or did not return our calls, as did its replacement. Because that group initially only had two sites, we replaced the sites with a DOE NYCEEC with a medium number of seats. The final interviewed six sites varied in terms of their size, population served, and other distinguishing characteristics.<sup>141</sup>

In the final sample, we interviewed one dual language (DL) site, two Enhanced Language Instruction (ELI) sites, one site offering English-only instruction, and two sites without formal designations that used home languages in the classroom. The DL site had one DL classroom serving a small number of students, and the remaining students at this site were not part of the DL program.

All interviews with site leaders were conducted over the phone, and we analyzed the interviews using standard qualitative analysis procedures. Interviews ranged in length from 30 minutes to an hour: three site leaders were interviewed twice, and three were interviewed once. First, each audio recording was transcribed. Next, we developed a coding scheme to reflect prevalent responses to each question in the protocols. Coders reviewed this coding scheme on an ongoing basis and made adjustments when necessary. Finally, we reviewed the coded data and summarized responses to each topic in the protocol, including quotes when these were helpful. Quotes have been lightly edited to improve readability without changing the interviewees’ meaning.

---

<sup>141</sup> Some sites had multiple languages spoken by students. In addition, we also interviewed a seventh site that met our study criteria. However, although this site served a LOTE population, the site leader reported that all of the sites’ students were highly proficient in English, and no services were provided in other languages. Because this site would not be a useful representation of potential best practices, we replaced this site with another interviewed site, and information from this interview is not included in this report.



## Study Limitations

**This study had a few limitations that are important to discuss.** First, participants in the interviews and focus groups were not randomly selected, and their responses cannot be generalized to larger populations. Participating site leaders, teachers, and caregivers could choose whether to participate in the study, and individuals with stronger points of view may have been more motivated to participate. It should also be noted that although a semi-structured protocol guided the interviews, interviewees were also encouraged to volunteer information on various topics. In addition, not every question was asked of every interviewed site leader due to time constraints or the applicability of certain questions to employers' experiences. Some interviewees may also have been reluctant to be candid about their experiences despite our assurances of confidentiality. For this reason, systematic information was not available on all topics from all interviewees. Throughout this section, statements such as "two site leaders reported..." do not imply that the other remaining site leaders did not do so. Despite these limitations, this study provides a unique window into the experiences of these Pre-K for All sites.

## APPENDIX B: PROGRAM QUALITY STANDARDS<sup>142</sup>

---

### Strong Family-Community Ties

1. **Strong Relationships:** Programs foster mutual respect, trust, and connection with and among families and the community in order to build strong relationships.
2. **Two-Way Communication:** Programs promote two-way sharing of information between program staff and families, in a culturally and linguistically responsive manner, to support children’s well-being, academic success, and developmental progress.
3. **Capacity-Building:** Programs recognize families’ essential contribution to their child’s development and support families in enacting their role as their child’s:
  - a. **Primary Teacher:** Programs partner with families to develop their capacity to enrich their child’s academic, social, emotional, and behavioral skills that are foundational to learning.
  - b. **Primary Advocate:** Programs partner with families to develop their capacity to advocate for their child’s holistic needs and drive program improvement.

### Supportive Environment

4. **Health, Safety & Well-being:** Program leaders ensure a safe and healthy learning environment that supports positive experiences for children, families, and program staff.
5. **Equity & Individualization in Education:** Leaders and teaching staff tailor the practices of teaching and learning and family engagement to each child, so that all children are successfully supported in achieving high expectations for their learning and developmental progress.

### Rigorous Instruction

6. **Developmental Screening & Authentic Assessment:** Teaching staff deepen their shared understanding of children’s development and learning across domains to inform instruction.
7. **Curriculum Planning Cycle:** Teaching staff integrate and respond to knowledge of children, child development, and content across the domains of learning to plan and adapt the curriculum, aligned to the Pre-K Foundation for the Common Core.
8. **Engaging Children in Meaningful Activity:** Teaching staff engage children as active learners and interact with children using a range of effective, developmentally appropriate strategies to create connections and extend children’s learning across domains and in a variety of contexts and experiences.
9. **Creating A Positive Classroom Culture:** Programs empower and support children to develop a positive self-concept and intentionally guide children to interact respectfully and constructively with the peers and adults of their community, and their environment.
10. **Physical Resources for Learning:** Program staff cultivate the physical space and resources in the classroom and outside to facilitate children’s learning and development through purposeful play.

---

<sup>142</sup> New York City Department of Education, Pre-K for All Program Quality Standards.

### **Collaborative Teachers**

11. Cultivating Professional Practice and Leadership: Leaders and teaching staff improve the quality of the classroom and program experience as partners in continual professional learning, collaboration, and leadership development.

### **Effective School Leadership**

12. Shaping a Vision: Leaders foster a shared vision and theory of action with and among their staff and families, and build a positive organizational culture and community to support that vision.
13. Resource Management: Leaders manage the organizational and human resources in a sustainable and strategic manner to advance the goals of the program.
14. Program Quality Improvement: Leaders collaborate with their staff and families to evaluate and improve classroom and program quality, relying on well-managed data to set instructional, family engagement, and organizational goals, increasing the coherence of policies and practices.

## APPENDIX C: REFERENCES

---

- Bandel, E., Atkins-Burnett, S., Castro, D. C., Wulsin, C. S., & Putnam, M. (2012). *Examining the use of language and literacy assessments with young dual language learners (Final report)*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute, CECER-DLL.
- Barnett, W. S., & Frede, E. (2010). The Promise of Preschool: Why We Need Early Education for All. *American Educator*, 34(1), 21.
- Barnett, W. S., Yarosz, D. J., Thomas, J., Jung, K., & Blanco, D. (2007). Two-way and monolingual English immersion in preschool education: An experimental comparison. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 22(3), 277-293.
- Buyse, V., Castro, D. C., & Peisner-Feinberg, E. (2010). Effects of a professional development program on classroom practices and outcomes for Latino dual language learners. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 25(2), 194-206.
- California Department of Education. (2009). *Preschool English learners: Principles and practices to promote language, literacy, and learning: A resource guide*. Sacramento, CA: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/psenglearnersed2.pdf>
- Castro, D. C., Páez, M., Dickinson, D., & Frede, E. (2011). Promoting language and literacy in dual language learners: Research, practice and policy. *Child Development Perspectives*, 5(1), 15-21.
- Center for Early Care and Education Research—Dual Language Learners (CECER-DLL; 2014). Research brief #11. *The cognitive development of young dual language learners: A critical review of the research*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute, Author. Retrieved from <http://cecerdll.fpg.unc.edu/sites/cecerdll.fpg.unc.edu/files/imce/documents/3015-Research-Brief-11.pdf>
- Chang, F., Crawford, G., Early, D., Bryant, D., Howes, C., Burchinal, M., Barbarin, O., Clifford, R., & Pianta, R. (2007). Spanish-speaking children's social and language development in pre-kindergarten classrooms. *Early Education and Development*, 18(2), 243-269.
- Cooper, J.L., Masi, R., & Vick, J. (2009). *Socio-emotional Development in Early Childhood: What Every Policymaker Should Know*. New York: Columbia University, National Center for Children in Poverty. Retrieved from [http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text\\_882.pdf](http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_882.pdf).
- Espinosa, L. M. (2013a). *PreK-3rd: Challenging common myths about dual language learners*. (Pre-K–3rd Policy to Action Brief No. 10). New York: Foundation for Child Development. Retrieved from <https://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/Challenging%20Common%20Myths%20Update.pdf>
- Espinosa, L. M. (2013b). *Promoting school readiness and early school success*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. Retrieved from [www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/.../COI-EspinosaFINAL.pdf](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/.../COI-EspinosaFINAL.pdf)
- Espinosa, L. M., & Gutiérrez-Clellen, V. F. (2013). *Assessment of young dual language learners in preschool*. (Paper no. 5, pp. 172-207). In F. Ong & J. McLean (Eds.), *California's best practices for young dual language learners: Research overview papers*. Sacramento, CA: Governor's State Advisory Council on Early Learning and Care. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ce/documents/dllresearchpapers.pdf>
- Figueras-Daniel, A., & Barnett, S. (2013). *Preparing young Hispanic dual language learners for a knowledge economy*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, National Institute for Early Education Research. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277555738\\_Preparing\\_Young\\_Hispanic\\_Dual\\_Language\\_Learners\\_for\\_a\\_Knowledge\\_Economy](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277555738_Preparing_Young_Hispanic_Dual_Language_Learners_for_a_Knowledge_Economy)

- Freedberg, L., & Frey, S. (2016). *Promoting success for dual language learners: The essential role of early childhood education programs*. Oakland, CA: EdSource. Retrieved from <https://edsources.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Promoting-Success-For-Dual-Language-Learners-2016.pdf>
- Gelatt, J., Adams, G., Huerta, S., & Urban, I. (2014). *Supporting immigrant families' access to prekindergarten*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Goldenberg, C. (2008). Teaching English language learners: What the research does—and does not—say. *American Educator*, Summer 2008, 8-18. Retrieved from <http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/goldenberg.pdf>
- Goldenberg, C. (2010). Reading instruction for English language learners. In M. Kamil, P. D. Pearson, E. Moje, & P. Afflerbach (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research, Vol. IV*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. Retrieved from <https://people.stanford.edu/claudeg/sites/default/files/GoldenbergHandbook2010FINAL.pdf>
- Goldenberg, C. (2013a). Unlocking the research on English learners: What we know—and don't yet know—about effective instruction. *American Educator*, 37(2), 4.
- Goldenberg, C. (2013b). Dual language learners: Effective education in early childhood. *American Educator*, 37(2), 4.
- Goldenberg, C., Nemeth, K., Hicks, J., Zepeda, M., & Cardona, L. M. (2013). Program elements and teaching practices to support young dual language learners (Paper no. 3, pp. 90-118). In F. Ong & J. McLean (Eds.), *California's best practices for young dual language learners: Research overview papers* Sacramento, CA: Governor's State Advisory Council on Early Learning and Care. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ce/documents/dllresearchpapers.pdf>
- Halgunseth, L. C., Gisela, J., Barbarin, O.A. (2013). Family engagement in early childhood programs: Serving families of dual language learners (Paper no. 4, pp. 119-170). In F. Ong & J. McLean (Eds.), *California's best practices for young dual language learners: Research overview papers*. Sacramento, CA: Governor's State Advisory Council on Early Learning and Care. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ce/documents/dllresearchpapers.pdf>
- Hamilton, J., & Lammert, J. (2016). *Pre-K for All: Snapshot of student learning*. Rockville, MD: Westat. Retrieved from: [http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/688449CA-8003-46F0-BE1E-E2AB5F649CE2/0/Westat\\_Metis\\_BranchPreK\\_Study\\_Snapshot\\_of\\_Student\\_Learning\\_Finalrm.pdf](http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/688449CA-8003-46F0-BE1E-E2AB5F649CE2/0/Westat_Metis_BranchPreK_Study_Snapshot_of_Student_Learning_Finalrm.pdf)
- Isaacs, J. B. (2012). *Starting School at a Disadvantage: The School Readiness of Poor Children*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution. Retrieved from: [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/0319\\_school\\_disadvantage\\_isaacs.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/0319_school_disadvantage_isaacs.pdf)
- Marietta, G., & Brookover, E. (2011). *Effectively educating pre-k-3rd English language learners (ELLs) in Montgomery County Public Schools*. New York: Foundation for Child Development. Retrieved from <http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/FCDCaseStdyMntgmryCtyELLS.pdf>
- Milteer, R. M., & Ginsburg, K. R. (2012) *The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bond: Focus on Children in Poverty*. 129; e204; Council on Communications and Media Committee On Psychosocial Aspects Of Child And Family Health and Deborah Ann Mulligan Pediatrics. Originally published online December 26, 2011; DOI: 10.1542/peds.2011-2953 Retrieved from: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/129/1/e204.full.pdf>
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (2009). *Where we stand: On assessing young English language learners*. Washington DC: Author. Retrieved from: <http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/WWSEnglishLanguageLearnersWeb.pdf>
- National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs. (2011). *Key demographics & practice recommendations for young English learners*. Washington, DC: The George Washington University. Retrieved from <http://www.ncela.us/files/uploads/9/EarlyChildhoodShortReport.pdf>

- Nemeth, K. N. (2016). Dual-language learners in the preschool classroom. *Highscope: Extensions*, 30(1). Retrieved from: [http://www.highscope.org/file/NewsandInformation/Extensions/Ext\\_Vol30No1\\_weblink.pdf](http://www.highscope.org/file/NewsandInformation/Extensions/Ext_Vol30No1_weblink.pdf)
- New York City Department of Education (DOE). (2016a). *Pre-kindergarten directory: Manhattan (2016)*. New York: Author. Retrieved from <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/CD72B5C2-5DE1-4B51-AFCD-9C3DC601C0E5/0/2016NYCPreKDirectoryManhattanENGLISH.pdf>
- New York City Department of Education. (2016b). *NYCDOE full-day universal pre-kindergarten (UPK) contract 2015-2018 (2016)*. New York: Author, provided upon request.
- Restrepo, M. A., & Towle-Harmon, M. (2008). Addressing emergent literacy skills in English-language learners. *The ASHA Leader*, 13(13), 10-13. Retrieved from <http://leader.pubs.asha.org/article.aspx?articleid=2289717>
- Rothstein, R. (2008). "A Nation at Risk" twenty-five years later. Retrieved from: <http://www.cato-unbound.org/2008/04/07/richard-rothstein/a-nation-at-risk-twenty-five-years-later/>
- Saluja, G., Early, D. M., & Clifford, R. M. (2002). Demographic characteristics of early childhood teachers and structural elements of early care and education in the United States. *Early Childhood Research & Practice*, 4(1).
- Sandhofer, C., & Uchikoshi, Y. (2013). Cognitive consequences of dual language learning: Cognitive function, language and literacy, science and mathematics, and social-emotional development (paper 2, pp. 52-88). In F. Ong & J. McLean (Eds.), *California's best practices for young dual language learners: Research overview papers*. Sacramento, CA: Governor's State Advisory Council on Early Learning and Care. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ce/documents/dllresearchpapers.pdf>
- Severns, M. (2012). *Starting early with English language learners: First lessons from Illinois*. Washington, DC: New America Foundation. Retrieved from [https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/7424-growing-research-consensus-on-effective-strategies-for-dual-language-instruction-in-early-childhood/Starting\\_Early\\_With\\_English\\_Language\\_Learners.b6f98ba325b349de9326081842d8af75.pdf](https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/7424-growing-research-consensus-on-effective-strategies-for-dual-language-instruction-in-early-childhood/Starting_Early_With_English_Language_Learners.b6f98ba325b349de9326081842d8af75.pdf)
- Sobrato Early Academic Literacy (SEAL; n.d.). *A closer look*. Retrieved from <http://sobrato.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/SEAL-CloserLook.pdf>
- Soltero, S. (2014). *English language learners—Early childhood teacher & leadership guide*. Chicago, IL: Logan Square Neighborhood Association. Retrieved from <http://www.isbe.net/earlychi/preschool/ell-ece-guide.pdf>
- Tabors, P. O. (2008). *One child, two languages: A guide for early childhood educators of children learning English as a second language*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing Co.
- Thomas, W. P., & Collier, V. P. (2002). *A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement*. Santa Cruz, CA: Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence, University of California-Santa Cruz. Retrieved from [http://repositories.cdlib.org/crede/finalrpts/1\\_1\\_final](http://repositories.cdlib.org/crede/finalrpts/1_1_final)
- Tully, S. (2015). *Preschool programs face challenge of preparing staff to teach English learners*. Oakland, CA: EdSource. Retrieved from <http://edsource.org/?p=91816>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start. (n.d.). *Classroom language models: A leader's implementation manual*. Washington, DC: National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness. Retrieved from [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/dll\\_policy\\_statement\\_final.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/dll_policy_statement_final.pdf)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education. (2016). *Policy statement on supporting the development of children who are dual language learners in early childhood programs*. Washington, DC: Authors. Retrieved from [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/dll\\_policy\\_statement\\_final.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ece/dll_policy_statement_final.pdf)

- Waanders, C., Mendez, J. L., & Downer, J. T. (2007). Parent characteristics, economic stress and neighborhood context as predictors of parent involvement in preschool children's education. *Journal of School Psychology, 45*(6), 619-636.
- Weiland, C. & Yoshikawa, H. (2013). Impacts of a Pre-Kindergarten program on children's mathematics, language, literacy, executive function, and emotional skills. *Child Development, 84*(6), 2112-2130.
- Williams, C. (2015). *Boomtown kids: Harnessing energy and aligning resources for dual language learners in San Antonio, Texas*. Retrieved from <http://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/policy-papers/boomtown-kids/>
- Zepeda, M., Castro, D. C., & Cronin, S. (2011). Preparing early childhood teachers to work with young dual language learners. *Child Development Perspectives, 5*(1), 10-14. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4612351/>