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Executive Summary

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**An Evaluation of K-3 Plus Implementation:
Signs of Success, Areas of Challenge and
Lessons for the Future**

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The authors are solely responsible for the findings and interpretation contained in this report.

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Introduction

The following narrative summarizes the results of a one-year external evaluation of the New Mexico Kindergarten-Grade 3 (K-3) Plus Program. Staff at the Early Intervention Research Institute, Utah State University was contracted by the New Mexico Office of Educational Accountability (OEA) to do the evaluation. The report summarizes data obtained with the help of OEA and NM Public Education Department (PED) staff. This summary begins with a short description of the legislation followed by signs of success that the program is being implemented as intended. Other sections include areas of challenge and lessons for the future in the K-3 Plus pilot program implementation. Additional data and findings are described in the complete final report for the evaluation.

This is an implementation evaluation. It is not an evaluation of the efficacy of the K-3 Plus Program. The existing data are not sufficient to evaluate whether or not the K-3 Plus Program has a significant effect on student academic achievement. The data in this report are designed to describe the implementation status of the program, the policies and procedures by which the program can be monitored and evaluated over time, and to describe the methods and data that are needed for a rigorous evaluation of the program's effect on the student achievement gap.

The focus of the evaluation is best understood by first reviewing key components of the K-3 Plus Legislation. The legislation specifies the target population, the intensity of the program and the process by which schools will be selected for funding. Specifically, the legislation states that:

“K-3 Plus” is created as a six-year pilot project that extends the school year for kindergarten through third grade by up to 2 months for participating students and measures the effect of additional time on literacy, numeracy and social skills development.... K-3 Plus shall be conducted in high poverty public schools. For the purposes of K-3 Plus, high poverty public school means a public school in which eight-five percent or more of the students are eligible for the free and reduced-fee lunch program at the time the public school applies for the program.... K-3 Plus shall be administered by the department and shall provide the funding for approved full-day kindergarten and grades one through three to be extended by at least twenty-five instructional days, beginning up to two months earlier than other classes.... The department shall establish reporting and evaluation requirements for participating schools, including student and program assessments.”

Specifically 22-13-28. K-3 Plus; pilot project; eligibility; application; reporting and evaluation. (2007) states that “K-3 Plus shall be administered by the department and provide the funding for approved full-day kindergarten and grades one through three to be extended....and D. The department shall determine application requirements, procedures and criteria for evaluating the applications. The department is to give priority to schools with Kindergarten plus programs that received one or more satisfactory evaluations.”

The department was charged with getting the program up and running less than three months after the legislation passed during the first year of the program—during 2007-08. Data to describe the first year of implementation are consequently somewhat limited.

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Signs of Success

The applications for program funding suggest that in both 2007-08 and 2008-09, all K-3 Plus participating schools met the legislation's low-income eligibility requirement. The K-3 Plus program participating districts and schools are increasingly successful at recruiting students and teachers to participate in the program. Enrollment in the K-3 Plus program grew significantly over this time period—approximately 2.5 times from 2007-08 to 2008-09. School applications estimated that large percentages of their anticipated students would be from homes with primary language other than English.

All applying school districts planned to serve students at least 25 extra days and all reported that they planned to use the DIBELS to measure early literacy skills. Specific implementation dates varied according to the regular school year and family habits in each district. Most schools planned to implement the full 25 day session in one block during the summer of 2008. A few planned to offer staggered session schedules, with 2 weeks in the summer, and the other days offered as one week blocks during scheduled breaks in the regular school year.

Parent Involvement strategies at all schools were considered consistent with the strategies used during a regular school year. The Parent Involvement strategies that were listed most often in the 2008-2009 applications were Sending Home Materials such as newsletters, event calendars, and/or progress reports (49% of schools) and Having Family Night(s) at School (47% of schools).

All 92 application forms contained assurances that the school or district would require the K-3 Plus professional development as part of their expectations for teachers. Most of the professional development topics listed by teachers who participated in the in-depth survey were related to specific curricula (for example Avenues, Singapore Math, or Everyday Math). Appropriately, for the student populations being served, many teachers accessed training in dual language, English Language Learning strategies, and Early Childhood strategies.

The curricula and strategies planned for literacy and numeracy instruction showed similarities across application years. The most frequently discussed literacy curricula in 2008-2009 applications was a Guided Reading program, with the Houghton Mifflin curriculum also a popular choice. Several curricula and instructional strategies were planned to teach numeracy skills in the K-3 Plus programs. About two-thirds of the schools mentioned Mathematics Investigation or Everyday Math as their curricula planned for numeracy.

The analysis of K-3 Plus planned expenditures and funding awards showed that the average amount awarded per student planned was \$1,001 per school district and the amount awarded per student actually served was \$1,536 per school district. These amounts do not reflect the 2.5% reduction that was taken during the 2008-09 year. Most of the difference between the per student planned and actually served were attributable to small class sizes during the early years of program implementation—where recruitment of students was below the targeted number and classrooms could not be combined because of grade or language differences. The amount per student actually served should continue to decrease and come closer to the \$1,001 per student planned as the program is more fully implemented since there is evidence that schools and school districts are coming closer to recruiting their planned numbers of students for K-3 Plus.

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Measures of success in implementing a high quality program include focus group findings from parents and teachers and the results of the K-3 Plus Head Classroom Teachers survey from the five in-depth school districts (Albuquerque, Gadsden, Gallup-McKinley, Roswell, Taos). The focus group participants, for the most part, reported that the K-3 Plus program delivered high quality services to students and that the program is improving over time as it is implemented. Parents reported that the K-3 Plus experience enriched their students' lives during the time they attended the program. Teachers reported that more teachers want to participate as they see the positive impact that it has on student performance and learning retention. Most reported that the small classes allowed a unique focus on students that they do not achieve during the school year.

A K-3 Plus Head Classroom Teacher survey was administered in selected schools within five districts chosen for in-depth study. Based on the results of 118 teacher surveys that were returned, there is evidence that the K-3 Plus program was able to attract qualified Head Teachers to work the extra 25 days. All Head Teachers who responded to the survey reported having at least a Bachelor's Degree; just over one-third of them had also earned a Master's Degree. Because of the diversity in languages spoken by students in New Mexico's classrooms, teachers were asked about their own language fluency. All of those responding said they are fluent in English; 41% also reported being fluent in speaking Spanish. Two teachers were fluent in Navajo and one in Swahili languages.

Stakeholder perceptions of the program were largely obtained from focus groups held with K-3 Plus participating families and head teachers in the five in-depth school districts. Perceptions of the program were overwhelmingly positive. Many participants reported that students would have spent the time in, at best, childcare or summer camps and at worst on the streets and in potentially dangerous environments. Families and teachers reported that students had fun, and improved their academic and social skills. With fewer students and without the presence of the oldest students in the school, kindergartners were able to get to know their teacher and school environment better. Many parents suggested that the program be extended more days. Some families suggested that it be extended to serve older students and did not understand why the cutoff for eligibility was third grade. Teachers perceived the program as an opportunity to provide differentiated instruction in smaller classrooms, to get kindergartners ready for school, to help students with self-esteem and accelerate learning. Teachers and parents liked the variety offered during the K-3 Plus time—including music, theater, social studies and science, in addition to the usual literacy and math curriculum. The focus group results suggest that once teachers and parents participate in K-3 Plus they are likely to continue to participate.

There were no measures of student achievement for the evaluation that would be considered as providing scientific evidence about the efficacy of the K-3 Plus Program. The measures of student academic achievement are limited in at least three major areas: the assessment measures that were available are not recommended for high stakes testing or evaluation; there is no measure of how students were doing prior to entry into the K-3 Plus program and there is no matched comparison group of students for this evaluation. With those limitations in mind, the DIBELS is the primary assessment measure collected for the K-3 Plus students and this is useful primary for progress monitoring by teachers in the classroom. The DIBELS data was analyzed for the evaluation and comparisons of students at K-3 Plus schools who did and did not attend the K-3 Plus program suggest that Kindergartners who attended K-3 Plus begin the school year

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more likely at Benchmark at the beginning of the school year compared with kindergarten students at K-3 Plus schools who did not attend the program. The statewide data show the trend for the state and for the majority of school districts—kindergarten students who participated in K-3 Plus were more likely to be at Benchmark at BOY compared with non-K-3 Plus kindergarten students and less likely to be strategic. The comparisons of students at K-3 Plus schools who did and did not attend K-3 Plus were mostly equivocal for the other grades.

In Gadsden school district the Developmental Reading Assessment 2 (DRA2), another assessment tool recommended for low stakes (not high stakes) assessment, was analyzed and some statistically significant differences between students who attended and did not attend the K-3 Plus program were found, particularly for first grade students. Positive, if not statistically significant trends were found for students who attended K-3 Plus in all three grades served by K-3 Plus in Gadsden School district: First, Second and Third grades. There was a measure of DRA2 performance prior to K-3 Plus service delivery available for some of the students in the DRA2 evaluation. The analysis using the pre assessment on the DRA2 showed that first graders who attended K-3 Plus scored significantly higher on the DRA2, controlling for their DRA2 scores prior to participation in the program, compared with first graders who attended high poverty schools who did not attend the K-3 Plus program.

Areas of Challenge

Many of the challenges identified in this evaluation relate to data that are needed to conduct a more comprehensive evaluation of the K-3 Plus Program. First, there is no systematic method, within the PED's Student Teacher Accountability Reporting System (STARS) or the Wireless Generation database, to identify individual K-3 Plus participating students and teachers. While the school and school district applications show the number of students, teachers and classrooms that were planned there is no consistent reporting of the actual number of students, teachers, and classrooms that actually took place as a result of K-3 Plus program funding. While some schools and school districts track the attendance of students in the program it does not occur across all programs. The amount of funding awarded to schools and school districts also needs to be more carefully evaluated to insure that differences in the amounts across participating programs are due to differences in the cost of implementing the program. The amount of K-3 Plus funding per student planned and served should be evaluated by the department to insure that inequities in funding do not occur. Also, assessment data needed to evaluate the effect of the K-3 Plus program on student academic achievement is not currently available. Accurate counts and student identification ensure that key statutory requirements for program implementation and progress reporting for K-3 Plus have occurred. These data are not currently collected in a way that can verify that the reporting is accurate or complete nor will the changes adopted by PED for the 2009-10 school year resolve these issues. Specific recommendations for data collection to improve implementation and outcome evaluation are included in the last section of this report.

There were a number of specific program areas that present challenges for K-3 Plus program implementation. First, the ethnic and language diversity of K-3 Plus participating teachers did not always reflect the student composition well as reflected by data from the five in-depth districts. More complete data from STARS are needed to provide a more comprehensive description of this issue and possible solutions.

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Second, parent and teacher perceptions of the purpose of the K-3 Plus program varied—with teachers more likely to say that it was designed as an enrichment program and to accelerate learning, whereas parents were more likely to say that it was a remediation program targeted for many students who were behind in class. While the program is targeted toward high poverty schools all students at those high poverty schools are encouraged to participate in the program and it appears that this does not always happen.

Challenges related to how to keep the K-3 Plus students and teachers intact during the school year were discussed in depth between PED and district program staff without resolution. Many students are not placed with the K-3 Plus teacher during the following school year and even when they are placed together the classroom almost always has non-K-3 Plus students included as well. Teachers said that they either have to slow down the K-3 Plus students and have them review what was covered during the K-3 Plus calendar or risk losing the non-K-3 Plus students who are in the classroom. Also with high mobility in these schools there are inevitably new transfer students into the classroom during the school year who must be accommodated who did not have the benefit of K-3 Plus. These challenges make it difficult to maintain the progress that teachers perceive was made as they enter the beginning of the academic year.

There is currently no way to rigorously examine the effects of the K-3 Plus program on student academic achievement. The DIBELS and other assessment measures obtained are not recommended for high stakes assessments. There is no matched comparison group of students for the students that attended K-3 Plus. There also was no measure of how students were doing just prior to the delivery of K-3 Plus services to use as a control in such an evaluation. The measures and methods for a reliable evaluation of the K-3 Plus program effects on student academic outcomes were not possible in this evaluation. One of the questions for the evaluation is what would be expected with regard to the DIBELS data for students in the K-3 Plus Program. One of the expectations is that students will have less loss related to what they learned during the previous school year because of K-3 Plus participation. Therefore, their Beginning of [school] Year benchmarks would be higher than they would be if they had not had the K-3 Plus program. Unfortunately, we do not know where the students in the K-3 Plus program would be testing at Beginning of Year (BOY) without the program. As explained in the full report, we also did not have access to complete DIBELS results for all participating students from all schools.

Lessons for the Future

The lessons for the future are captured in the recommendations listed below. These are the culmination of information obtained through the evaluation—from participating family members, teachers and administrators who participated in the K-3 Plus program and in the evaluation. These lessons include those related to the data needed to better describe program implementation and outcomes for the future and specific program lessons that could substantively improve the student and teacher K-3 Plus experience.

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Improving Data to Inform Program Implementation and Outcomes:

- PED convene a workgroup that: develops program guidelines related to reporting, evaluation, student assessment and program assessment including new data points for STARS. Also, evaluate the options for DIBELS data tracking and evaluation and resolve issues related to K-3 Plus student tracking and pre-assessment DIBELS data collection.
- For high stakes evaluation consider other standardized child assessment measures and methods through an external evaluation that will provide better comparisons of student achievement using measures designed for program evaluation and controlling for issues like selection bias among students and teachers.
- Administer a true pre- and post-K-3 Plus program assessment. Consider the student assessment schedule carefully so that the timing and frequency of assessments do not confound results and conclusions about student progress, especially in comparisons of K-3 Plus and non-K-3 Plus students.

K-3 Plus Program and Policy Recommendations:

- Consider changing the K-3 Plus funding formula to provide an amount on a per student basis. This would create a stronger incentive for districts and schools to recruit students to “fill” K-3 Plus classrooms and also to track individual students served by the program.
- Develop program standards related to the number of teachers, students and teaching assistants in each classroom in conjunction with new funding requirements.
- Institute specific guidelines for funding and deny funding requests that violate those guidelines.
- Student attendance policies should be developed and enforced. Student K-3 Plus attendance data should be reported to PED—preferably in both STARS and on class rosters.
- Increase efforts to recruit teachers that meet the dual language needs of students who enroll.
- Provide guidance to teachers about how to transition to the regular school year curriculum taking into account classroom composition that may include K-3 Plus and non K-3 Plus students.
- Make funding available earlier in the spring and during the winter of the prior school year.
- Request statute change to allow for K-3 Plus funding to be included in the Public School Support section of the PED budget instead of the Related Appropriations section so that funds are more flexible and available when needed.
- Survey teachers who participate in the K-3 Plus professional development about what

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worked, what did not work and where time could be better spent.

- Facilitate discussion between K-3 Plus experienced administrators and teachers and newly established programs about ways the former improved their implementation of the program—such as successful ways to recruit and maintain students, families and teachers.
- Address and resolve the issues related to how to better maintain placements of K-3 Plus participating students with their K-3 Plus teachers during the school year.
- More clearly define the purpose of the K-3 Plus program to serve all students at high poverty schools.

An Evaluation of the K-3 Plus Program Implementation: *Signs of Success, Areas of Challenge and Lessons for the Future*

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Introduction

- ▶ This is an implementation evaluation.
- ▶ It is NOT an evaluation of the efficacy of the K-3 Plus program.
- ▶ The existing data are not sufficient to evaluate whether or not the K-3 Plus program has a significant effect on student academic achievement.
- ▶ This report describes:
 - The implementation status of the program;
 - The program policies and procedures; and
 - Methods and data needed for a rigorous evaluation of the program's effect on student achievement .

The K-3 Plus Legislation...

- ▶ Extends the school year for kindergarten through third grade by up to 2 months to: enhance literacy, numeracy and social skills development....
- ▶ K-3 Plus shall be conducted in high poverty public schools. Eighty-five percent or more of the students are eligible for the free and reduced-fee lunch program at the time the public school applies for the program....
- ▶ PED: K-3 Plus shall be administered by the department and shall establish reporting and evaluation requirements for participating schools, including student and program assessments.

K-3 Plus Program Successes

- ▶ **Participating programs met key legislative requirements:**
 - Participating schools met the low-income eligibility requirement;
 - All applying school districts planned to serve students at least 25 extra days; and
 - All school districts reported that they planned to use the DIBELS to measure early literacy skills.

- ▶ **Improving implementation over time:**
 - Participating districts and schools are increasingly successful at recruiting students and teachers;
 - Enrollment in the K-3 Plus program grew significantly over this time period approximately 2.5 times more students were served in 2008-09 than in 2007-08;
 - A large percentage of students served were from homes with primary language other than English.

(continued...)

K-3 Plus Program Successes

- ▶ **Parental Involvement:**
 - Strategies consistent with the strategies used during the regular school year.
 - Strategies included: Sending home materials such as newsletters, event calendars, and/or progress reports and having family night(s) at school.
- ▶ **Professional Development:**
 - All programs included professional development as part of their expectations for teachers.
 - Professional development included those related to specific curricula: Avenues, Singapore Math, or everyday math.
 - Many teachers accessed training in dual language, English Language Learning strategies, and early childhood strategies.

(continued...)

K-3 Plus Program Successes

▶ Program Funding:

- The average amount awarded per student planned was \$1,001 per school district and the amount awarded per student actually served was \$1,536 per school district.
- Amounts do not reflect the 2.5% reduction that was taken during the 2008-09 year: results in \$976 per student planned and \$1,498 per student actually served.
- Small class sizes during early years of program implementation increased the average amount per student served.
- Recruitment of students was below the targeted number and often classrooms could not be combined because of grade or language differences.
- The amount per student served will decrease as the program is implemented since there is evidence that schools and school districts are coming closer to recruiting their planned numbers of students for K-3 Plus.

(continued...)

K-3 Plus Program Successes

- ▶ Stakeholder Perceptions—Focus Groups:
 - Perceptions of the program were overwhelmingly positive.
 - Students would have spent the time in, at best, childcare or summer camps and at worst on the streets and in potentially dangerous environments.
 - Students had fun and improved their academic and social skills.
 - With fewer students and without the presence of the oldest students in the school, students, especially kindergartners, were able to get to know their teacher and school environment better.
 - Many parents want more days of K-3 Plus.
 - Some families want it to serve older students and did not understand why the cutoff for eligibility was third grade.

(continued...)

K-3 Plus Program Successes

- ▶ Stakeholder Perceptions—Focus Groups (continued):
 - Teachers said that the K-3 Plus program is an opportunity to:
 - Provide differentiated instruction in smaller classrooms;
 - Get kindergartners ready for school; and
 - Help students with self-esteem and accelerate learning.
 - Teachers and parents liked the variety offered during the K-3 Plus time (including music, theater, social studies, and science) in addition to the usual literacy and math curriculum.
 - Parents and teachers said they are likely to continue to participate.

(continued...)

K-3 Plus Program Successes

- ▶ Stakeholder Perceptions—Program Quality:
 - Parents and teachers said that...
 - The K-3 Plus program delivered high-quality services to students.
 - The program is improving over time as it is implemented.
 - Parents reported that the K-3 Plus experience enriched their students' lives during the time they attended the program.
 - Teachers reported...
 - More teachers want to participate as they see the positive impact that it has on student performance and learning retention.
 - Small classes allowed a unique focus on students that they do not achieve during the school year.

(continued...)

K-3 Plus Program Successes

- ▶ **Teacher Survey:**
 - All reported having at least a Bachelor's degree.
 - Over one third of them had also earned a Master's degree.
 - 41% reported being fluent in speaking Spanish.
 - Two teachers were fluent in Navajo and one in Swahili languages.
- ▶ **Student Achievement:**
 - Measures of student achievement were limited in at least three major ways:
 - The assessment measures that were available are not recommended for high-stakes testing or evaluation.
 - There is no measure of how students were doing prior to entry into the K-3 Plus program.
 - There is no matched comparison group of students for this evaluation.

(continued...)

K-3 Plus Program Successes

▶ DIBELS—Statewide:

- Kindergartners who attended K-3 Plus were more likely at Benchmark at the beginning of the school year compared with kindergarten students at K-3 Plus schools who did not attend the program.

▶ Comparison using DRA2 in Gadsden:

- Positive, if not statistically significant trends were found for students who attended K-3 Plus in all three grades served by K-3 Plus in Gadsden School district: first, second, and third grades.
- First graders who attended K-3 Plus scored significantly higher on the DRA2, controlling for their DRA2 scores prior to participation in the program, compared with first graders who attended K-3 Plus high-poverty schools who did not attend the K-3 Plus program.

Areas of Challenge

- ▶ Many challenges relate to data that are needed to conduct a more comprehensive evaluation of the K–3 Plus program.
- ▶ Data needed:
 - A systematic method, using Class rosters, STARS and the Wireless Generation database, to identify individual K–3 Plus participating students and teachers;
 - Attendance data for all K–3 Plus participating students;
 - Evaluate per–student funding awards across participating programs;
 - Assessment data to evaluate effects of program student academic achievement gap:
 - DIBELS and other assessment measures currently obtained are not recommended for high–stakes assessments;
 - There is no matched comparison group of students to compare with the students that attended K–3 Plus.

(continued...)

Areas of Challenge

- ▶ Accurate student counts and student identification ensure that key statutory requirements for program implementation and progress reporting for K-3 Plus have occurred.
- ▶ The ethnic and language diversity of K-3 Plus participating teachers did not always reflect that student composition well as reflected by data from the five in-depth districts.
- ▶ Parent and teacher perceptions of the purpose of the K-3 Plus program varied:
 - Teachers were more likely to say that it was designed as an enrichment program and to accelerate learning.
 - Parents were more likely to say that it was a remediation program.

(continued...)

Areas of Challenge

- ▶ Program challenges:
 - How to keep the K-3 Plus students and teachers intact during the school year.
 - How to address differences in progress for K-3 Plus and non-K-3 Plus students during the school year in the regular school year curriculum.
 - Need to address these challenges to maintain student academic progress that teachers perceive was made as K-3 Plus attending students entered the beginning of the regular academic school year.

Lessons for the Future

- ▶ Improving Data to Inform Program Implementation and Outcomes:
 - PED will convene a workgroup that:
 - Develops program guidelines related to reporting, evaluation, student and program assessment including new data points for STARS.
 - Evaluates the options for DIBELS data tracking and evaluation and resolves issues related to K-3 Plus student tracking and preassessment DIBELS data collection.
 - For high-stakes evaluation, consider other standardized child assessment measures and methods that will provide better comparisons of student achievement:
 - Consider a Regression Discontinuity design for comparisons so that students compared are similar on key demographic, SES and achievement traits and do not confound the outcome results.
 - Obtain a valid and reliable measure of student achievement just prior to the delivery of K-3 Plus services for those who do and do not attend the program.
 - Administer the same measure of student achievement after K-3 Plus program services have been delivered.
 - This combination of measures and methods will provide valid and reliable analysis of the effect of K-3 Plus program services on student academic achievement.

(continued...)

K-3 Plus Program & Policy Recommendations:

- ▶ Consider changing the K-3 Plus funding formula to provide an amount on a per student basis. This would create a stronger incentive for districts and schools to recruit students to “fill” K-3 Plus classrooms and also to track individual students served by the program.
- ▶ Develop program standards related to the number of teachers, students and teaching assistants in each classroom in conjunction with new funding requirements.
- ▶ Institute specific guidelines for funding and deny funding requests that violate those guidelines.
- ▶ Student attendance policies should be developed and enforced. Student K-3 Plus attendance data should be reported to PED—preferably in both STARS and on class rosters.
- ▶ Increase efforts to recruit teachers that meet the dual language needs of students who enroll.
- ▶ Provide guidance to teachers about how to transition to the regular school year curriculum taking into account classroom composition that may include K-3 Plus and non K-3 Plus students.

(continued...)

Recommendations

- ▶ Make funding available earlier in the spring and during the winter of the prior school year.
- ▶ Request statute change to allow for K-3 Plus funding to be included in the Public School Support section of the PED budget instead of the Related Appropriations section so that funds are more flexible and available when needed.
- ▶ Survey teachers who participate in the K-3 Plus professional development about what worked, what did not work and where time could be better spent.
- ▶ Facilitate discussion between K-3 Plus experienced administrators and teachers and newly established programs about ways the former improved their implementation of the program—such as successful ways to recruit and maintain students, families and teachers.
- ▶ Address and resolve the issues related to how to better maintain placements of K-3 Plus participating students with their K-3 Plus teachers during the school year.
- ▶ More clearly define the purpose of the K-3 Plus program to serve all students at high poverty schools.

In Summary

- ▶ **Program generally well received by districts, staff and parents;**
- ▶ **Implementation progress documented;**
- ▶ **Program administration guidelines would improve overall service delivery and data collection; and**
- ▶ **Implement achievement measures and methods to determine the impact of K-3 Plus on student achievement.**

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