

## Preschool Issues from Existing Research

October 31, 2018

### Targeting / Service Population Definition

Preschool programs across the country have defined the target population across two domains: age of child and financial capability. Most programs define eligibility based on age as of September 1st. Some programs serve 3- and 4-year-olds, while others only serve 4-year-olds. Although high-quality programs serving youth over two years have seen increased impacts over a single year of treatment, programs serving only 4-year-olds have seen significant impacts from only one year of treatment, while focusing primarily on expanding coverage and increasing the quality and alignment of curriculum.

Similarly, many programs offer universal preschool—with no income-based eligibility criteria—while others rely on income thresholds similar to that of Head Start. Currently, Preschool Promise and Oregon’s expanded state-funded Head Start (OPK) generally, with exceptions, use income thresholds of 200 and 100 percent of the federal poverty level, respectively. Some states have established aspirational universal preschool as well—West Virginia successfully stipulated a very gradual phase over ten years, with pre-k coverage for 4-year-olds increasing from 24 percent to 61 percent over the 10-year time period. This approach was less successful in New York, where growth was not supported and did not move significantly without political support almost 14 years after setting the goal.

One additional strategy tried in New Jersey and, to some degree, in Boston, is to target low-income schools rather than families. This approach has the benefit of providing mixed socioeconomic learning environments and reducing the kinds of administrative overhead associated with individual income determination eligibility models or other hybrid models.

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## Workforce Training and Coordination

As of 2017, NIEER uses a ten-policy checklist to assess the quality standards of 60 state-run preschool programs operating across the county. Oregon's two primary programs, Oregon Head Start/PreK and Preschool Promise meet eight and six of these standards, respectively. One standard not met by both is the requirement of a bachelor's degree for preschool classroom teachers. Currently, 34 of the 60 national programs have this requirement. Additionally, Oregon's programs are two of only 18 programs requiring a CDA (Child Development Associate) credential, or equivalent, for all teacher assistants.<sup>i</sup>

Although most programs require a bachelor's degree for preschool classroom teachers, there is no definitive research on the optimal level of education to both maximize classroom quality and experience and ensure a strong pool of teacher candidates. Studies looking at the impact of education have found some cases where more education leads to higher quality interactions with students, but results across states found small or insignificant effects for a bachelor's degree on student outcomes.<sup>ii</sup>

Many programs collaborate with local community colleges and universities to help education systems support new program mandates and incentivize early learning educators to obtain credentials or degrees. Collaborative activities include:

- Designing curriculum to meet the new preschool program curriculum and training requirements
- Defining pathways between credential levels, including pathways for individuals with training unrelated to early childhood education
- Defining new credentials for teaching preschool-aged children
- Providing financial and professional development supports as educators seek higher levels of education, much like the Oregon Registry<sup>iii</sup>
- Developing articulation agreements to ease pathway transitions specifically for early education pathways

Many of the changes were due to changes in educational requirements, but several programs, like Abbott, made an effort to engage postsecondary education stakeholders as part of the program development process to ensure workforce supply could keep up with program implementation.

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## Education System Coordination

### Impacts on Existing Preschool and Child Care Programs

Ohio and New York identified areas of concern relevant to the labor market dynamics in a mixed delivery model<sup>iv</sup>:

- Initial implementation, if not gradual, can limit a site's ability to meet demand in an area, resulting in a large share of underutilized slots.
- Unstable funding means grantees are more likely to rely heavily on community-based contractors.
- Requiring coordination of child care and Head Start agencies positively affects the supply and quality of child care. Specifically, coordination led to improvements in the transition to kindergarten.
- In communities where the district opted to maximize the allowable enrollment in school-based settings, community child care providers were permanently affected. Community providers who invest in integrating into preschool mixed delivery models rely on consistent sources of funding to remain stable.
- Multi-service and mixed delivery approaches eliminate potential competition between education programming and child care. Ohio and New York use subsidy dollars to provide additional child care hours, delivering full-day, full-year services. Both states provided proactive guidance and technical assistance on braiding funding and eligibility, which stakeholders reported as being particularly helpful.

### K-12 System Coordination

Key elements of ensuring positive effects of preschool continue into public K-12 are the alignment of content and monitoring with local school districts. Specifically, researchers assessing the long-term impact of preschool programming frequently identify a need to consider educational support and conditions beyond the preschool classroom.

Some programs, like Chicago's Child-Parent Centers, successfully provide P-3 support by extending family engagement and teacher support through grade three. These types of efforts provide opportunities to reinforce learning by building on preschool learning and maintaining family connections to school.

Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland took advantage of its unique position, a Head Start grantee, to blend preschool and K-12 funding sources to support all teachers under the same professional development support, academic standards, and curriculum models. To design the model, leadership worked with community and K-12 stakeholders to describe how all curriculum, including preschool curriculum, should align to support college readiness requirements.<sup>v</sup>

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## Funding Methods

In addition to program-specific funding, states, local government, and school districts leverage existing and new federal, state, and local funding streams to improve quality, extend program days and years, and add program slots.

New and existing federal funding streams and their purposes include the following:

- Title I funding develops new programming or extends half-day to full-day programs.
- Title II funding supports professional development for early learning educators.
- Competitive federal Preschool Development Grants support expanding state programs.
- TANF funds provide services to low-income, at-risk children, but are subject to parents' employment status.
- Child Care and Development Block Grants (CCDBG) support preschool for children in low-income families.

Most remaining new funding mechanisms have been used primarily at the state level, including:

- Expanded school funding formulas to include preschool (general fund appropriations). This approach could ensure that preschool funding keeps up with K-12 funding increases. As with most school funding models, local school districts would match state funds with local revenue sources.
- "Sin" taxes, such as lottery, tobacco, and gambling.

Local funding tools have been more diverse, including:

- Soda taxes (Philadelphia)
- Sales taxes (Denver and San Antonio)
- Property taxes (Seattle)

Additionally, public-private partnerships have been used in several states to jump start expansion programs and as part of long-term solutions to fund preschool.<sup>vi</sup> Funding mechanism pros and cons are summarized the following table.

**Figure 1. Preschool Funding Strategies: Summary of Pros and Cons**

**Pre-K Funding Strategies:  
The Pros and Cons**

Source of Funding	Pros	Cons
<b>General Revenues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potentially stable</li> <li>• Can increase with need</li> <li>• Flexible</li> <li>• Thrives in economically sound times</li> <li>• Substantial amounts available</li> <li>• Politically popular if tied to K-12 funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subject to political whims</li> <li>• Vulnerable to swings in states' economic health</li> <li>• Competes with other critical children's programs</li> <li>• Must be regularly reauthorized by legislatures</li> </ul>
<b>Distribution through the School Funding Formula</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assured funding source</li> <li>• Receives equal priority with K-12</li> <li>• May promote quality with teacher-certification requirements</li> <li>• Allows growth commensurate with enrollment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May result in restrictions on how pre-k is delivered or by whom</li> <li>• Local match usually required</li> <li>• Swings with K-12 budget</li> </ul>
<b>Lottery Funds or Gaming Revenues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large amount of revenue raised</li> <li>• Does not require new taxes</li> <li>• When proceeds are dedicated, doesn't compete with other priority children's programs</li> <li>• Doesn't require repeated legislative approval</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual revenues are unpredictable</li> <li>• Regressive "tax"</li> <li>• Promotes gambling</li> </ul>
<b>Tobacco Settlement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not require new taxes</li> <li>• Provides substantial, easily quantified, dedicated funds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-renewable at some point in the future</li> </ul>
<b>"Sin" Taxes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated amount doesn't compete with other priority children's programs</li> <li>• Doesn't require repeated legislative approval</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unpredictable level of funding</li> <li>• Targets individual industries</li> <li>• Likely to dry up as discouraged behavior decreases</li> <li>• Regressive tax</li> </ul>
<b>Dedicated Percentage of Sales or Income Tax</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potentially large source of funds</li> <li>• Dedicated amount doesn't compete with other priority children's programs</li> <li>• Doesn't require annual legislative approval</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires voter/legislature-approved tax increase or allocation</li> <li>• Subject to economic health of state or local residents</li> </ul>
<b>Public-Private Partnerships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engages private sector in making pre-k a priority</li> <li>• Potential catalyst for innovative pilots</li> <li>• Flexibility in distribution of funds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May not be sustainable</li> <li>• Requires continual fundraising efforts</li> <li>• Hard to raise substantial amounts</li> </ul>

Source: Pre-K Now. "Funding the Future: State's Approached to Pre-K Finance 2008 Update."

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## Accessibility and Meeting Family Needs

### Language

Most efforts around culturally specific preschool are focused on respecting and supporting students' home language. Many programs identify competencies for working with dual language children and emphasize those with early childhood educators. Most programs allow local-level decisions around the instruction model used to support home language, ranging from dual-immersion or two-way programs with varying support (e.g., Sheltered English Immersion). Although the research in this area is thin, some meta-analyses of impacts to early developmental measures show benefits to dual language learners over native English speakers.<sup>vii</sup>

Many programs, like Seattle's, have stated preferences for dual language classrooms in selecting sites, and provide professional development to support them. This is the most common structural support for dual language programs, which can adapt to existing dual language education capacity in the larger community.

As of 2017, 26 of 60 state-run public preschool programs perform recruitment, enrollment, and outreach information in children's home language, and 20 programs communicate with the family about the program or child in the family's home language. Although OPK collects data on children's home language, it does not currently implement either of these two approaches.<sup>viii</sup>

An assessment of dual language Head Start classroom environments suggested incorporating some of the following practices<sup>ix</sup> to support dual language classrooms:

- Asking families to contribute resources in their home language
- Incorporating home language into classroom rituals and routines, as well as in signage throughout the classroom
- Inviting families into the classroom to communicate with children in their home language
- Viewing children as experts in their home language

### Hours of Operation and Physical Access

Logistics, such as operating schedules and transportation, pose regular barriers to initial enrollment and continued attendance in preschool.

Full-day programs are a common model and have been found to better meet the needs of working families, but one study found fiscal constraints meant program administrators had to decide between half-day programming or full-day programming for half as many children.<sup>x</sup>

The same study found that parents are interested in varied site options, with some families interested in programs closer to home and some closer to work. Transportation was a top

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priority for many of these parents, just above school quality. Although transportation was a common cause of chronic absenteeism among preschool students, many administrators note a benefit to engaging with parents on a daily basis when they dropped and picked up their children, and that many available transportation solutions would loosen the ties between home and school.<sup>xi</sup>

Not all preschool expansion projects include transportation; if they do, it may not be for all participants. Most leave transportation logistics up to each provider, and often school-based sites had better access to transportation resources to provide transportation.

Providing a variety of transportation, siting, and hours of operation options to meet the needs of preschool children and their families will increase the chances of initial and persistent preschool engagement.

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## Recent key studies and papers aimed at synthesizing existing research for policymaking

Eric A. Hanushek. 2015. *The Next Urban Renaissance*. Chapter 3 *The Preschool Debate: Translating Research into Policy*. Manhattan Institute for Policy Research.

Deborah A. Phillips, Mark W. Lipsey, Kenneth A. Dodge, Ron Haskins, Daphna Bassok, Margaret R. Burchinal, Greg J. Duncan, Mark Dynarski, Katherine A. Magnuson, and Christina Weiland. April 20, 2017. *The Current State of Scientific Knowledge on Pre-Kindergarten Effects*. Brookings Institution and the Duke Center for Child and Family Policy.

Susan Muenchow, and Emily Weinberg. May 2016. *Ten Questions Policymakers Should Ask About Expanding Access to Preschool*. Education Policy Center at American Institutes for Research.

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<sup>i</sup> National Institute for Early Education Research. “The State of Preschool 2017”. [http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/YB2017\\_Executive-Summary.pdf](http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/YB2017_Executive-Summary.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> Deborah A. Phillips, Mark W. Lipsey, Kenneth A. Dodge, Ron Haskins, Daphna Bassok, Margaret R. Burchinal, Greg J. Duncan, Mark Dynarski, Katherine A. Magnuson, and Christina Weiland. “The Current State of Scientific Knowledge on Pre-Kindergarten Effects. Brookings Institution and the Duke Center for Child and Family Policy”. April 20, 2017.

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.pdx.edu/occd/oregon-registry-educators>

<sup>iv</sup> Diane Schidler, Stephanie Kimura, Kim Elliott, Stephanie Curenton. “Perspectives on the Impact of Pre-K Expansion, Factors to Consider and Lessons from New York and Ohio”. NIEER. *Preschool Policy Brief*, January 2011, Issue 21. <http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/22.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> Geoff Maietta. “Lessons in Early Learning: Building an Integrated Pre-K-12 System in Montgomery County Public Schools”. The Pew Center on the States, *Pre-K Now*. Education Reform Series, August 2010. [https://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs\\_assets/2010/mcpsreportpdf.pdf](https://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2010/mcpsreportpdf.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> Diana Stone, J.D. “Funding the Future: State’s Approaches to Pre-K Finance 2008 Update”. The Pew Center on the States, *Pre-K Now*. Research Series, February 2008.

[https://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs\\_assets/2008/pewpknfundingthefuturefeb2008pdf](https://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2008/pewpknfundingthefuturefeb2008pdf)

<sup>vii</sup> Tamara G. Halle, Jessica Vick Whittaker, Marlene Zepeda, Laura Rothenberg, Rachel Anderson, Paula Daneri, Julia Wessel, Virginia Buysse. “The Social-Emotional Development of Dual Language Learners: Looking Back at Existing Research and Moving Forward with Purpose”. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, Volume 29, Issue 4, 4th Quarter 2014, Pages 734-749.

<sup>viii</sup> National Institute for Early Education Research. “Special Report: Supporting Dual Language Learners in State-Funded Preschool”. [http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/YB2017\\_DLL-Special-Report.pdf](http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/YB2017_DLL-Special-Report.pdf)

<sup>ix</sup> Megiana Baker and Mariela Paez. “The Language of the Classroom: Dual Language Learners in Head Start, Pre-K, and Private Preschool Programs”. Migration Policy Institute. March 2018.

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× Erica Greenberg, Molly Michie, and Gina Adams. “Expanding Preschool Access for Children of Immigrants”. Urban Institute. February 15, 2018. [https://www.urban.org/research/publication/expanding-preschool-access-children-immigrants/view/full\\_report](https://www.urban.org/research/publication/expanding-preschool-access-children-immigrants/view/full_report)

xi Erica Greenberg, Molly Michie, and Gina Adams. February 15, 2018.