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TECHNICAL REPORT

Going to Scale with High-Quality Early Education

Choices and Consequences in
Universal Pre-Kindergarten Efforts

Rachel Christina, JoVictoria Nicholson-Goodman

Supported by the Early Childhood Funders' Collaborative



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The research described in this report was conducted within RAND Education, a division of the RAND Corporation. This research was funded by The Heinz Endowments and The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, members of the Early Childhood Funders' Collaborative.

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PREFACE

High-quality early education programs can produce substantial long-term benefits for participating children, their families, and society as a whole. Several decades of rigorous research have made clear the widespread societal benefits—including reduced dependency costs, increased employment and associated tax revenue, and reduced crime—that can result from high-quality early childhood programs and that have, in some cases, far outweighed their up-front cost. Over the past decade, policymakers across the country have become increasingly aware of this favorable social calculus. Motivated by this awareness, new research on brain development, a desire to bring all children to academic proficiency, and a strong sense of social justice, many states have taken steps toward the creation of universal pre-kindergarten (pre-K) programs.

The movement toward universal pre-K presents policymakers with new challenges that were not faced by the creators of well-known early childhood programs of an earlier generation, such as the Perry Preschool Project and the Abecedarian Project. Although there is a strong base of evidence on the effects and effectiveness of high-quality early education programs, there is far less evidence about how to design a statewide system that can provide high-quality services to all participants. Indeed, the effort to go to scale with high-quality early education programs is new, and no clear road maps exist.

This report is an initial effort to describe efforts of a number of states that are seeking to create statewide systems of high-quality pre-kindergarten services, as well as some of the progress they have made in doing so. Focusing on the efforts of a sample of eight U.S. states, it examines the policy choices that states have made when implementing pre-K in an environment of fiscal uncertainty and discusses policy and practice issues identified by respondents in the sector. Funding for this research was provided by The Heinz Endowments and The David and Lucile Packard Foundation. This report should be of interest to policymakers and other stakeholders who are seeking to ensure that scaled-up pre-K is of high quality.

This research was conducted within RAND Education, a division of the RAND Corporation, and reflects RAND Education's mission to bring accurate data and careful, objective analysis to the national debate on education policy.

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SUMMARY

High-quality early childhood programs have been shown to produce broad, long-term societal benefits, including increased employment and associated tax revenue, reduced crime, and reduced dependency on social welfare systems. More individualized benefits for participating children and their families are also significant. In some cases, these benefits have far outweighed the up-front cost of the programs. This favorable balance of benefits to costs, new research on brain development, a desire to bring all children to academic proficiency, and deep concerns about social justice have led many states to move toward the provision of public, universal pre-kindergarten (pre-K) over the past decade.

States' drive for expanded care has been based on evidence from a number of well-funded, well-designed early childhood programs that showed strong positive impacts when rigorously evaluated. This strong base of evidence on the effects and effectiveness of high-quality early education programs, however, is not yet matched by equally solid information about how to effectively design, fund, and provide statewide systems of high-quality services for all participants. The effort to go to scale with high-quality programs is new, and policymakers and implementers find themselves without strong guidance on how to proceed.

This study describes efforts in eight states to create statewide systems of high-quality pre-K. It examines the policy choices involved in implementing pre-K in an environment of fiscal uncertainty, explores a variety of state efforts, and identifies significant policy and practice issues for the sector. The report findings provide valuable information for policymakers and other stakeholders who are seeking to ensure that scaled-up pre-K is of high quality.

The study addressed the following questions:

- What are the core implementation issues and policy choices facing states that are moving toward universal pre-K? How has the current fiscal climate affected these choices?
- How have states negotiated the consequences of their policy choices? What lessons might be learned from these negotiations?

- What are the effects of particular universal pre-K policy choices on other child populations, families, and communities?

The study focused on state-led programs providing public services intended to prepare children aged 3–4 for kindergarten. Literature on state implementation to date was supplemented by a review of the general early childhood literature supporting pre-K development and of policy studies in fields that might have an impact on the growth and sustainability of pre-K programs, particularly in the current fiscal climate. Forty interviews were conducted with representatives of state agencies responsible for program implementation, state chapters of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and a range of practitioner support entities in Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Washington.

FINDINGS

The majority of states currently invest in some form of public pre-K programming. However, programs vary notably from state to state. Programs range from full coverage (all children in an age range, usually 4-year-olds, although occasionally those aged 3–4, are eligible for services) to targeted interventions for limited populations of various ages (usually those who, as a group, have tended to perform least well on later educational assessments, such as poor urban and poor rural populations). Some states offer full-day options, but most offer part days. Some offer full-year programming, but most are part-year (usually corresponding to the K-12 academic year). Some tie benefits to the public assistance status of parents, while others are more flexible in their definitions of program eligibility. Some offer choices among public and private providers, while others locate programs only in public schools. Some provide comprehensive developmental services to children and families; others focus more directly on academic preparation for kindergarten.

Regardless of the type of program with which they were involved, however, our respondents identified two main challenges in implementing large-scale, high-quality, public pre-K: (1) the challenge of providing universal services, and (2) the challenge of providing comprehensive services. The following paragraphs discuss the issues of funding, auspice, access,

accountability, and staffing, which were cited by respondents as the core areas of negotiation in implementing state programs.

Funding

Fiscal necessity and the desire to integrate systems of childcare, education, and welfare have resulted (in many states) in heavy dependence on federal funding through the multiple funding streams of Head Start, the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). These funding streams have different eligibility and reporting requirements and are politically uncertain. States are using these funds creatively, mostly to expand their programming through the inclusion of Head Start and childcare providers and provide important support for staff development. However, use of these streams also creates systemic complications, presses states in the direction of particular kinds of accountability, and has potentially negative implications for the participation of the working poor in publicly funded pre-K. Some states have had success at funding pre-K as a line item in state budgets or as an element of their school formulas, but such efforts still draw on federal dollars to supplement and intensify services. Respondents reported that the ability to balance and blend federal and state funding while maintaining program consistency will be a key challenge in future program development.

Auspice

Many states demonstrate strong and committed efforts to develop pre-K as a component of an integrated social service system for children and families. Respondents reported, however, that perceived competition between education and human services agencies for limited funding can undermine these integration efforts and put educational goals and those of welfare and childcare into conflict. Multiple and segregated data systems across implementing agencies also limit the extent to which programs' outcomes can be tracked, reported, effectively analyzed, and used to target improvements.

Access

"Universal pre-kindergarten" is usually a misnomer, since targeted programming (usually serving populations deemed to be most at risk of later

school failure, and often not even reaching all students within those groups) is the norm in most states. While states have ambitions of publicly funded programs that are voluntary and accessible to all age-eligible children, access to programming is limited both by funding constraints and by the contexts of particular state efforts. Even with targeted programs, respondents voiced concerns about the extent to which rural and minority children, and those with family incomes marginally above subsidy rates, are well served. States that have come closest to achieving universal access have done so by successfully integrating childcare and Head Start providers into the state pre-K system.

Accountability

The accountability movement provides structure and opportunity for states to address quality in program development; indeed, a number of states have established standards for pre-K and for infant and toddler care that are intended to be both rigorous and developmentally appropriate. However, respondents were concerned that the current strong focus on academic standards may also press states to artificially separate cognitive achievement from multidimensional child development and prioritize the cognitive in program design, implementation, and assessment. Respondents also noted that comprehensiveness of services – reflected in the extent to which states and districts offer wraparound childcare, transportation, and referral to or connection with other social services as part of pre-K programs – may also be limited by accountability pressures to focus on academic outcomes, with potentially negative implications for access and participation.

Staffing

The quality and stability of the pre-K workforce is a key issue for states, and one with which they struggle. High standards for staff are intended to support program quality, but funding to support teacher development and smooth degree trajectories is lacking in many states. Stakeholders express significant concern that incentives for teacher migration into public pre-K may limit the supply of quality staff in programs serving younger children.

CONCLUSIONS

Significant new practices are emerging across state pre-K programs in such areas as the development of standards, creative funding, professional development, technical assistance, and partnership with diverse providers. States are working to develop the quality of their programs and their ability to provide services to all children in the targeted age ranges. This study highlights the challenges faced in moving quality to scale within presently fragmented and multilayered systems of governance and programming, and argues for more rigorous examination of current efforts to identify promising practices, along with careful coordination of policymaking to ensure that large-scale public pre-K programs more fully echo the small-scale, high-quality interventions that inspired them.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful for the insights and contributions of the many state policymakers and implementers who participated in this study. In a context in which time is at a premium, their commitment to ensuring that our questions were addressed fully, thoughtfully, and in a forthright fashion is particularly appreciated.

We also thank Michal Perlman and Susan Bodilly for their efforts to ensure that this report was clear, objective, and fully reflective of the rich and varied body of information with which we were working. Their contributions, which balanced the perspectives of a developmental psychologist and a senior policy researcher, provided important insights about how that information might best be communicated.

Finally, we are grateful to The Heinz Endowments and The Packard Foundation, which provided financial support, and the Early Childhood Funders' Collaborative, which proposed the study and provided an important multi-vocal outlet for dialogue about its content. These organizations were valued partners in this effort.

1. INTRODUCTION

The provision of early care and education (ECE) services for children under the age of 5 is emerging as a key education policy issue in the United States, influenced by research on young children's life chances, by policy pressure from the federal government, and by increasing public approval of investment in initiatives intended to promote school readiness. Research on child development and educational outcomes has identified short- and long-term benefits of pre-kindergarten (pre-K) exposure to educational environments, and programs such as Head Start have been cited as successfully narrowing, though not closing, the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students, particularly in the early years of schooling (e.g., Hart and Schumacher, 2004; Shore, 1997). In the policy realm, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) raises the stakes for early educational quality in its sanctions for schools and districts not meeting adequate yearly progress goals, and federal proposals for the renewal of Head Start envision a more clearly academic model of that program than has previously been the case. Armed with evidence of inequity and apparent evidence of remedy, parents, educators, and child advocates are pressing to extend public services to the under-5 age group as a means of ensuring that students begin school ready to learn.

One state-level response has been the development of "universal" pre-kindergarten initiatives. The majority of states (and some localities) currently invest in some form of pre-K programming. However, both "universality" and "pre-kindergarten" are differently defined across the bodies that are currently implementing or designing such initiatives, with a resultant diversity in their nature and effects (Mitchell, 2001). Programs range from full coverage (all children in an age range, usually 4-year-olds, although occasionally those aged 3-4, are eligible for services) to targeted interventions for limited populations of various ages (usually those who, as a group, have tended to perform least well on later educational assessments, such as poor urban and poor rural populations). Some states offer full-day options, while others offer half days; some offer full-year programming, others more limited time frames. Some tie benefits to the public assistance status of parents, while others are more flexible in their definitions of program eligibility. Some offer choices among public and

private providers, while others locate programs only in public schools. Some provide comprehensive developmental services to children and families; others focus specifically on academic preparation for kindergarten. The range of options is wide, and conclusions about the success of such efforts in general are therefore difficult to draw.¹

Even less clear is the way in which these programs connect with and affect programs at either end of the early childhood spectrum: with K-12 schooling, on the one hand, and with programs for children from birth to age 3, on the other. K-12 education falls within the standards and performance foci of NCLB and state and local education regulations, but programs serving children under the age of 4 (with the exception of Head Start) usually have much more limited connections to state and national education departments. Nevertheless, as research points to a critical window of child development from birth to age 3, there is increasing pressure to include these programs in a publicly funded system of early care and education as well.

While a body of research and evaluation literature on universal pre-K is beginning to develop, there is currently little comparative evidence on the lessons learned from such efforts or on the implications of pre-K program development for other social and educational programs for children. High-quality pre-K programs have existed for some time, but efforts to implement high-quality programming on a large scale are new. In many cases, emergent state programs have been caught in the recent fiscal crisis, but the effects of these crises have not been examined in depth. In addition, the unintended consequences of state pre-K implementation have not been explored in the literature.

In short, the collective knowledge base related to universal pre-K is sparse. As a result, policymakers lack a solid foundation on which to build such programs in their own states. This study addresses some of these knowledge gaps.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

States currently face three main pressures when implementing pre-K programs:

¹ For more information on the variety of programs currently in operation, see Barnett et al., 2003 and 2004.

- To expand access to services
- To raise the quality of services
- To control budgets for services.

This study examines the ways in which states are negotiating these possibly conflicting pressures as they attempt to build high-quality public pre-K programs of significant scale, and explores the implications – for pre-K children and for other populations – of particular policy choices.² We focus on state-led programs providing public services intended to prepare children aged 3–4 for kindergarten.³

The central questions we address are:

- What are the core implementation issues and policy choices facing states that are moving toward universal pre-K? How has the current fiscal climate affected these choices?
- How have states negotiated the consequences of their policy choices? What lessons might be learned from these negotiations?
- What are the effects of particular universal pre-K policy choices on other child populations, families, and communities?

Considered together, the answers to these three questions provide a multifaceted portrait of pre-K policy and a set of insights for policymakers struggling to design and implement efforts in their own contexts. They also identify areas in which further research is needed.

² This study does not evaluate the overall success of state pre-K programs in meeting particular student outcome goals. Too few data are available on these effects in the set of programs that are currently being implemented to make generalizable claims.

³ Concerns about childcare and child welfare as components of pre-K are reflected throughout this report, but efforts not explicitly state-led or without an overt kindergarten preparation goal were not explicitly examined.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

The report is organized as follows. First, Chapter 2 discusses the methods we used to collect and analyze data. Following that discussion, Chapter 3 briefly sketches the context from which universal pre-K has developed. Chapters 4–8 then identify and discuss a series of key areas of policy choice related to pre-K design and implementation: funding,⁴ auspice, access, accountability, and staffing. For each of these areas, we present a similarly organized chapter that briefly summarizes the literature, presents specific findings from our interviews, and discusses notable state efforts to resolve policy dilemmas as well as remaining concerns. We do not attempt to isolate every possible policy choice in each of these realms in our analysis; rather, we highlight key themes and explore their implications for the development of pre-K efforts. We conclude with a series of observations about the state of pre-K implementation and a set of areas in which more – and more rigorous – research and evaluation and better-coordinated policy are needed to support the development of high-quality programs.

⁴ Funding choices, particularly in the current crisis environment, have significant spillover effects on other areas of decisionmaking. We therefore address funding as a separate policy choice and embed a discussion of how reduced funding for pre-K affects other choices in those respective categories.

2. RESEARCH METHODS AND SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

Our study methods included a targeted literature review and a series of interviews with key pre-kindergarten actors in a sample of states.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Our literature review was intended to provide a context for current pre-K initiatives, identify key issues confronting the field, and frame a set of guiding questions for our interviews. We began, therefore, by exploring the early childhood research and policy literature to understand the motivations for pre-K development, focusing on brain research, outcome studies of notable early childhood interventions, and studies examining the rising demand for child care as a factor of increased maternal employment and changing welfare policies.

To specifically explore pre-K within this broader ECE context, we reviewed single and multistate studies of pre-K initiatives. However, this literature proved to be limited in a number of ways. First, it is far more descriptive than analytical. Second, it has a strongly normative tone, arguing for varying visions of what ECE *should be* rather than exploring the potential of state programs to live up to those visions. Indeed, much of the implementation literature to date addresses what programs hope to accomplish, rather than their actual nature in practice; that is, these studies are more focused on the goals and impetus behind programs than on their actual engagement. The picture portrayed across this body of work is thus likely to be rosier than the reality of programming at present.

Few methodologically rigorous evaluations of extant programs have been conducted—largely, but not entirely, because state efforts are so new. In some cases, evaluation has simply not been a well-funded program priority. Few longitudinal data sets on children participating in initiatives are available. Some programs that have been evaluated have changed dramatically since their evaluation, to the extent that the evaluations no longer actually represent the program as it currently operates. Finally, few studies report data collected after 2001, and those dated more recently tend to address whether or not funding *is* an issue without capturing the impact of any reduction, the overall effect being that

the impact of the fiscal crises of 2001 and later is not deeply explored in the literature (e.g., Hinkle, 2000).

To address some of these limitations in the implementation literature, we therefore supplemented our review with policy studies in the larger arena of ECE that might have an impact on the implementation and sustainability of pre-K programs and that appear to be of particular significance given the current fiscal climate. This collection of literature includes a range of work on welfare reform (specifically on the effects of welfare reform on families' need for and ability to access child care), early childhood standards and assessment, early childhood professional development and staffing (including both the literature on professional development per se and that on staff characteristics and stability), and early childhood system financing (including literature on managing multiple funding sources and on marketing pre-K to diverse audiences).

Finally, we searched a variety of sources for updated or confirmatory data on research dated prior to 2001. These sources included the publicly available documentation on state programs (Web sites and paper sources, both of state programs themselves and of external agencies monitoring pre-K development nationally) and media reports on program developments across the United States in the past three years.

INTERVIEWS

To both complement and supplement the findings from our review of the literature, we conducted a series of interviews with key players in state pre-K efforts in eight states: Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Washington. Our sample was designed to capture as rich and diverse a pool of experiences as possible, while focusing largely on states where system-building efforts are ongoing. All of the states on which we report are partners in the Build initiative, an effort to develop "coordinated systems of programs, policies and services" (BUILD, 2004) for children and families. The sample represents a broad range of program structures, motivations, and connections to other institutions, as well as a varied record of attributed success. While we recognize that this is a purposive sample and so results cannot be generalized across the set of states, we believe that the variability across the

sample offers important lessons learned for other states attempting to implement pre-K programs.

We selected an initial group of informants that included representatives of state agencies responsible for program implementation, representatives from state chapters of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and key agents in a range of practitioner support entities. This initial purposive sample was augmented by a limited chain sample of key informants as identified by other participants, with an overall objective of identifying individuals with intimate knowledge of the workings of particular programs and a solid understanding of their decisionmaking and implementation processes.

The research team conducted 39 semi-structured telephone interviews with informants, ranging in length from one to two hours. One additional response to the interview instrument was collected in writing. Interview questions drew on our findings from the literature review and were intended to explore in greater depth a set of apparent trends and concerns about future implementation that emerged in our analysis of the research documentation.

Interviews were audiotaped and fully transcribed. Content analysis of transcripts enabled the grouping of data thematically into matrices for each sample state,⁵ with matrix content representing (1) core policy choices involved in program implementation, (2) rationales for policy choices, and (3) perceived consequences of particular choices. Consistency across same-state respondents was the core criterion for thematic grouping, although significant outliers were also noted. Data were then further analyzed for consistency across states and across respondent categories (e.g., education departments, human services departments, providers) to identify sets of cross-cutting issues and to examine whether or not particular groups of stakeholders were particularly affected by or concerned about given policy choices. Transcripts were analyzed separately by two researchers; findings were then compared. Matrices and supporting textual evidence were compared and reviewed in the few cases where there was disagreement, with a consensus achieved and entered as the final interpretation in each case.

⁵ While our sample included Louisiana, we were not able to obtain representation from the full range of stakeholders in that state and have therefore not included those more limited results in the analysis for this report.

Our interviews with key players in state pre-K efforts were richly informative about both the current state of the field and the directions in which it may be moving in the near future. While the data represent the perspectives of only a small segment of the pre-K community, they speak to the efforts and frustrations from the classroom level to the highest levels of state policymaking. While much of what we heard could not be verified numerically, we have triangulated findings within our sample and across data sources to provide the greatest level of data reliability possible in a context of so much uncertainty.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS FOR SAMPLE STATES

To set the context for the remainder of the report, we present below brief descriptions of the initiatives being undertaken by the states in our sample as well as the current climate in those states. As noted above, our sample was designed to represent a variety of state efforts in pre-K. Data in this section, except where footnoted, are drawn from Barnett et al. (2004, 2003).⁶

Illinois

Illinois' Pre-Kindergarten Program, funded since 1998 through the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG), serves at-risk 3- to 5-year olds, with an 11% set-aside for birth to age 3. Pre-K participants are identified through individual screening, with the local community determining eligibility. Enrollment rose from '02-03 to '03-04, with 30% of 4-year-olds enrolled. Greater resources were invested to reach more children, so that cost per child (which had been \$3,094 for '01-02 and dropped to \$2905 in '02-03) rose slightly to \$2969 in '03-04. 2002-03 figures can be compared with a cost per child of \$6,636 for Head Start enrollees and a general expenditure of \$231 per child in the 3-year-old population⁷.

Illinois' pre-K program utilizes a mixed-setting scenario in which the program can be located in either school-based or community-based sites,

⁶ W. Steve Barnett et al. (2004), *The State of Preschool: 2004 State Preschool Yearbook*, Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) [Online], available: www.nieer.org; W. Steve Barnett et al. (2003), *The State of Preschool: 2003 State Preschool Yearbook*, Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) [Online], available: www.nieer.org.

⁷ This is a NIEER estimate, based on "proportions of enrollees who were ages 3 and 4 in states that served 3 year olds and provided age breakdowns for 2002-03" (Barnett, et. al., 2004: 89).

including childcare centers and Head Start. Although locally determined, in most cases the program is half-day, 5 days a week, aligned with the academic year. A range of services is offered, including parenting skills education, parent involvement activities, and social service referrals. Screening/referral requirements include vision, hearing, health, and developmental screenings. Full-day programs include lunch and a snack, and some programs use federal funds to include breakfast as well. Half-day programs provide a snack. Class sizes are at or under 20 and the staff-child ratio is 1:10 or lower. Lead teachers are required to have a bachelor's degree with early childhood certification; teacher aides (assistant teachers) are required to have completed 30 semester hours of college credit⁸. There is a teacher in-service requirement of at least 15 hours per year (120 clock hours every 5 years).

Salary disparity existed as of 2003, when preschool teachers earned an estimated average annual salary of \$22,760, while Kindergarten teachers in Illinois were paid on average about \$36,080.

Louisiana

Louisiana funds four pre-kindergarten initiatives: the 8(g) program, LA4, Starting Points, and NSECD. The 8(g) programs are offered in public schools and supported by the Student Enhancement Block Grant. Programs determine eligibility by screening 4-year-olds for kindergarten readiness, with a low-income priority. LA4, established in 2001, is administered by the Department of Education and located exclusively in public schools. Serving 4-year-olds from households at or under 185% of the federal poverty level (FPL), enrollment is also open to families making more who pay tuition. LA4 provides 6 hours of daily instruction but also requires that before- and after-school programs be offered, for a total of 10 hours per day. Starting Points (SP), a similar program, provides services for 6 hours per day and is funded at a lower level through TANF and tobacco settlement funds. The governor's office has also administered the Non-Public Early Childhood Development (NPECD) Program since '01-02, for 4-year-olds below 200% FPL. This parental choice program includes private and religious institutions, reimbursing the providers for services. The funding is drawn from TANF monies.

⁸ http://www.isbe.net/certification/pdf/paraprofessional_requirements.pdf

Enrollment in all combined state pre-K programs rose from 21% of 4-year-olds in '02-03 to 24% in '03-04 (a sum total of nearly 13,000 children that year)⁹. Average funding across programs declined from \$3,922 per child in '02-03 to \$3,877 per child in '03-04. For that year, \$9 million in state funds supported the 8(g) programs, \$35 million in TANF funds supported LA4, \$5 million in TANF and tobacco funds were used for Starting Points, and \$8.5 million in TANF funds were used for NSECD.

For the 8(g) programs, hours of operation are locally determined, although full-day is recommended; the programs operate on a school calendar year basis; and there is no income eligibility requirement. Teachers are required to have a bachelor's degree and certification in N (nursery) or K. The assistant teacher requirement is determined locally, and there is a requirement for 150 clock hours per 5 years of teacher in-service. Maximum class size is 20, and the staff-child ratio is 1:10. There is no vision, hearing, and health screening or referral requirement, but referrals are made if needs are identified. Meal requirements include breakfast, lunch, and snack.

For LA4 and SP, teachers are required to have a bachelor's degree plus Nursery, Kindergarten, or Early Intervention certification, along with 18 clock hours of in-service. Lunch and a snack are provided, along with vision, hearing, and health screening/referrals, and support services for parents. The NSECD program requires teachers to have a degree in EE, K, or N, or 12 credits in child development. Breakfast, lunch, and a snack are provided, along with vision and hearing screening/referrals, two parent conferences and transition to Kindergarten activities.

Salary disparity existed in Louisiana as of 2003, when preschool teachers earned an estimated annual average salary of \$20,120, while Kindergarten teachers earned on average about \$36,080.

Michigan

The Michigan School Readiness Program (MSRP) serves 4-year-olds at risk in 2 of 25 factors, including low income, language minority, and single-parent status. At least 50 percent of those served must be eligible for the free or reduced lunch

⁹ Some children are served by more than one program, so this figure is high (Barnett, et. al., 2004).

program (185% FPL). Michigan operates on a formula basis for school funding, determined by the number of children eligible, size of the district, the number of eligible children not being served by other programs, etc. Remaining state pre-kindergarten dollars are provided to private nonprofits, childcare providers, and Head Start programs through a competitive grants process. Providers may also subcontract with schools receiving formula funds. State Standards of Quality are undergoing revision, and an accountability system is being implemented to assess program quality.

Total pre-K spending was \$85 million for '03-04. Enrollment was flat from '01-02 to '02-03 and '03-04 at 19 percent of 4-year-olds served, while state appropriations have been steady at \$3,300 since 2001¹⁰. Pre-K may be located in public schools, childcare centers, or Head Start programs, with all providers competing for grants. Most programs offer four half-days, but some operate two full days and operate a minimum of 30 weeks per year. Service provisions include family referral services and four parent conferences (two of which are in-home visits), developmental assessment over the course of a child's attendance in the program, and a snack. Class size is at or under 18, with a staff-child ratio of 1:8. Public school-based program lead teachers are required to have a bachelor's degree with an early childhood endorsement. Non-public school-based programs require an associate's degree plus a Child Development Associate's degree (CDA) for the lead teacher (most, however, have a bachelor's degree)¹¹ and a CDA or 120 clock hours for the assistant teacher, with the requirement that assistant teachers must have a CDA within two years. There is no in-service requirement.

Salary disparity existed as of 2003, with preschool teachers in Michigan earning an estimated annual average salary of \$25,070, while Kindergarten teachers earned on average \$45,950.

¹⁰ Slight differences in figures from 2001-04 as reported in Barnett, et. al. are related to whether or not administrative costs are included in calculations (personal communication with Lindy Buch, Director of the Michigan Office of Early Childhood Education and Family Services, 7/7/05).

¹¹ *ibid*

Minnesota

The Minnesota School Readiness Program (MSRP) is a funding stream for 22 types of services (e.g., home visits, special needs services, transportation assistance, and parent education). The 2005 legislative session revised program requirements for the school readiness program. A school readiness provider must assess each child's cognitive skills when the child enters and again before the child leaves the program to inform program planning and promote kindergarten readiness. The program content must be based on early childhood research and professional practice that is focused on children's cognitive skills and development and prepares children for transition to kindergarten¹². Minnesota has mandatory health and development screening for 3 and 4-year-olds¹³.

Minnesota also provides state funds for Head Start to serve additional children, an initiative that supported almost 2,500 state-funded slots in '02-03 when funding was reduced to \$17.6 million. State funding was reduced again in '04-05 by \$3.2 million over the biennium, resulting in a reduction to 2,160 slots for 3-and 4-year olds. Funds were appropriated to one public school district, seven tribal governments, and twenty-seven private non-profit organizations.

Hours of operation are locally determined, but must align with federal Head Start Program Performance Standards, operating a minimum of 3.5 hours a day, 4 days a week, and 32 weeks a year. The Head Start programs offer family support services and at least two home visits, along with vision, hearing, health, and dental screening and at least one meal, breakfast and/or lunch. Class size is at or under 20 for 4-year-olds and 17 for 3-year-olds, and the staff-child ratio is 1:10. Head Start teachers must meet federal Head Start qualifications plus state licensing requirements for in-service training.

Salary disparity existed in Minnesota as of 2003, when preschool teachers earned an estimated average annual salary of \$26,370 while Kindergarten teachers earned on average \$42,770.

¹² Minnesota Statutes 2004, section 124D.15, subdivision 3

¹³ Minnesota Statutes 2004, section 121A.17, subdivision 1

New Jersey

New Jersey has two pre-kindergarten programs: the Abbott program, which is court-mandated for its 31 highest-poverty districts (6 percent of school districts, or 14% of 3-year-olds and 18% of 4-year-olds), and non-Abbott Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA) for another 102 districts where 20–40 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch. The Abbott programs are full-day, full-week programs that operate year-round and serve 3- and 4-year-olds in public schools, Head Start programs, and childcare centers in these districts. Regardless of location, the Abbott programs must meet standards related to teacher qualifications, class size, curriculum, facilities, and comprehensive services dictated by the New Jersey Supreme Court. The ECPA programs are half-day services operating on an academic calendar basis, and generally located in public schools, but a small number may be offered in private care settings.

The state's Department of Education funds six hours per day of Abbott, while the New Jersey Department of Human Services funds extended operations to make up a ten-hour day. In '02–03, Abbott programs enrolled 36,465 children at a total budget of \$472,704,925, with per pupil funding at \$12,963. In '03–04, \$479.5 million served about 37,765 children. ECPA programs received approximately \$30 million to serve another 7,213 4-year-olds.

Service provisions for the Abbott programs include vision, hearing, health, and developmental screening; community referrals, education, and support; and breakfast, lunch, and a snack. Class size is 15 for both 3- and 4-year olds, with a staff-child ratio of 2:15 for either age. The teacher degree requirement is a bachelor's with an early childhood certificate, and teachers in center-based programs have until 2006 to complete the requirements.¹⁴ Assistant teachers must have a high school diploma.

The ECPA programs also offer vision, hearing and health screenings, but with no meal or snack and no class size limit or staff-child ratio required. Requirements for lead teachers are a bachelor's degree and either early

¹⁴ As of June, 2005, the percentage of teachers without the degree was less than 1% (personal communication with Ellen Frede, Assistant to the Commissioner, Office of Early Childhood Education, New Jersey Department of Education, 7/3/05)

childhood or elementary education certification, and for the assistant, a high school diploma.

Abbott now funds teacher salaries, providing qualified Abbott teachers with salaries comparable to their counterparts in public schools. However, salary disparity existing as of 2003 may remain in non-Abbott districts. In 2003, preschool teachers in New Jersey earned an estimated average annual salary of \$28,240, while Kindergarten teachers earned on average about \$47,920.

Ohio

Ohio has two pre-Kindergarten programs: the Public School Preschool (PSP) program and a much larger state Head Start program. The latter was supported by state revenues until recently, when Ohio shifted to greater dependence on TANF funding for the program. The PSP programs are funded through public schools, but districts may subcontract with Head Start and private childcare centers for additional services. These programs serve 3- and 4-year-olds with family incomes below 185% FPL (PSP participants may pay fees on a sliding scale), although children from families above this cutoff point may also enroll. State funding for PSP programs in '03-04 was \$19 million, which funded services for 5,500 children. An additional 3,000 children were funded by local districts, through local tax revenue, grants, or parent fees, at an average district contribution of \$343 per child.¹⁵ State spending was \$3,475 per child in '03-04 for PSP programs. \$97 million in TANF funds were appropriated for state Head Start in '03-04.

The PSP programs operate at least 3.5 hours a day, 4 days a week, and 32 weeks a year. Service provisions include vision, hearing, and health screenings, a range of family support services including two parent conferences, and breakfast or lunch. Class size limits are 24 for 3-year-olds, 28 for 4-year-olds, and the staff-child ratio is 1:12 and 1:14, respectively. Teachers in school-based settings are required to have an associate's degree and pre-K certification as of 2003, and must attain it by 2007. Teachers in non-public school settings are required to have a CDA. Assistants are required to have a high school diploma. Fifteen clock hours of in-service training are required for teachers.

¹⁵ Personal communication with Sandy Miller, Director, Office of Early Learning School Readiness, Ohio Department of Education, 6/29/05

The Head Start programs in Ohio follow federal program performance requirements in programs where 90% of enrollees are at 185% FPL. They operate for at least 3.5 hours a day, four days a week; and are required to operate for at least 32 weeks a year. Service provisions include vision, hearing, and health screening; a range of family support services and two home visits; and lunch and/or breakfast. Class size is limited to 17 for 3-year-olds and 20 for 4-year-olds; staff-child ratio is 2:17 and 1:10 for these age groups, respectively. Teachers are required to have a CDA, but they must be working toward an associate's degree as of 2003 and must attain it by 2007. Assistants are required to have a high school diploma. Teachers are required to have 15 clock hours of in-service training.

Salary disparity existed as of 2003, when preschool teachers earned an estimated average annual salary of \$19,110 in Ohio, while Kindergarten teachers earned on average \$44,480.

Oklahoma

Oklahoma's Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program is a voluntary, universal pre-kindergarten program for 4-year-olds funded on a state equity formula basis. Funding flows through public schools, but these schools may subcontract with Head Start¹⁶, childcare, and other community organizations to provide additional services (state funding is not sufficient to cover additional staff or comprehensive services). In '03-04, funding increased to \$72.7 million (from about \$64 million in '02-03), and enrollment increased to 30,180 (up from about 28,000 children in '02-03). Enrollment has risen steadily from 56% of 4-year-olds in '01-02; to 60% in '02-03; to 64% in '03-04. Spending per child rose slightly, from \$2,368 in '02-03 to \$2,409 in '03-04. Programs operate either for 2.5 hours a day or 6 hours a day, 5 days a week, with many districts offering both.

Service provisions include those generally offered by public schools: enrollees have access to school nurses, speech therapists, and counselors. Screenings are determined locally, and children are provided breakfast, lunch, and a snack. Class size is limited to 20, and the staff-child ratio is 1:10. The lead teacher must have a bachelor's degree with early childhood certification. The

¹⁶ Most Head Start programs are larger than the public schools and serve a larger area and more children (more than one district may be served by one HS program).

assistant teacher may have a high school diploma or simply a General Educational Development certificate (GED). The in-service requirement for teachers is 15 clock hours.

Public preschool teachers in Oklahoma are paid on the public school salary scale, with parity between public pre-K and K. Salary disparity may still exist between public and non-public preschool teachers in childcare settings..

Washington

Washington's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is designed to serve low income and at-risk 3- and 4-year old children and families and was modeled after the Federal Head Start program. ECEAP is locally designed -- within the limits of the ECEAP Program Standards -- and provides Pre-K services to high-density areas as well as remote communities.

ECEAP serves 4-year-olds in families with incomes at or below 110 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. After eligible 4-year olds are enrolled, 3-year olds may be enrolled if they meet the same poverty guidelines. Up to 10% of slots can be filled by children from higher income brackets that are at-risk because of developmental or environmental factors. The program is funded by grants to contractors from public schools, Educational Service Districts, colleges, cities, counties, childcare centers, and non-profit migrant and other community organizations. ECEAP has 33 contractors that support 238 sites located in 36 out of 39 counties.

In 2004-05, funding for ECEAP was \$30.5 million (reduced from \$30.9 million in 2003-04) to serve 5,800 3- and 4-year-olds. This figure includes a state match of 5.1 million per year in CCDF/MOE dollars for '03-04 and '04-05. In addition to state funding, an additional 9.8 million¹⁷ was leveraged through in-kind contributions, private sector dollars, grants, and other state, local, and federal dollars¹ in 2003-04 and 9.5 million in 2004-05. Statewide average funds per child were \$5,259 per child in 2003-04 and 2004-05. The 2005 Legislature appropriated \$28,848,000 for 2005-06 and \$29,941,000 for 2006-07 funding to serve more children and provide a 4% vendor rate increase. These dollars do not

¹⁷ State sources note that these figures may be low, due to underreporting (personal communication with staff in the Washington State Department of Community Trade and Economic Development, Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program 8/11/05).

include a state match for CCDF/MOE. The CCDF/MOE dollars are appropriated through interagency agreement between the state of Washington Departments of Social and Health Services and Community, Trade and Economic Development.¹⁸ Current interagency agreement appropriated \$1,285,498 from July 1 to September 30, 2005.

The hours of operation and yearly operating schedule are locally determined with a minimum of 240 hours for at least 30 weeks per year. Most programs operate at least 2.5 hours a day and 3 to 4 days a week on an academic calendar basis.

Service provisions include vision, hearing, health, and developmental screenings; nutritious meals and snacks; and a range of family support services including parent-teacher conferences, family goal-setting and parent involvement. The average program offers one meal and one snack during a half-day class -- at least ½ to ¾ of a child's nutritional needs must be met. Families are offered support in accessing community resources such as: social services, adult education opportunities, English as a Second Language, Adult Basic Education, parenting classes, career counseling, and job skills training. Parents are offered leadership opportunities through input into services and the parent policy council.

Class size is 18 children per group setting. Where a group size of 18 children cannot be maintained, the design must maintain a group setting of no more than 24 children and maintain an adult to child ratio of 1:6. Best practice is an adult to child ratio of 1:6 and in no case should it fall below 1:9.

Teachers are required to have an AA degree with at least 30-quarter units in Early Childhood Education and two years experience with adults/parents and young children; assistant teachers are required to have one year of experience and a one-year Early Childhood Education Certificate or Child Development Associate (CDA) certificate. Public school teachers have the same requirements as non-public school teachers.

¹⁸ Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 6090, CHAPTER 518, LAWS OF 2005, SECTION 127, <http://www.leg.wa.gov/pub/billinfo/200506/Pdf/bills/session%20law%202005/60>

Salary disparity existed as of 2003, when preschool teachers in the state earned an estimated average annual salary of \$23,710 while Kindergarten teachers earned an average of \$40,710.

3. SETTING THE STAGE: IMPETUS AND CONTEXT FOR UNIVERSAL PRE-KINDERGARTEN

An analysis of the challenges of public pre-kindergarten implementation requires an understanding of the context from which such programs emerged. Current efforts and controversies continue a pattern of debate and development that has been emerging for the past 30 years. In this chapter, we briefly examine the impetus for and history of public pre-K, as background for our more detailed exploration of present conditions.

A number of factors converged to motivate the development of state pre-K programs at the end of the last century. These factors included developmental brain research findings; high-profile successes in a number of model ECE programs across the country; public familiarity with and general support for Head Start; and a dramatic rise in the number of mothers working full-time (some impelled to work due to changed welfare-to-work regulations), which further increased the demand for childcare.

Results of developmental brain research with young children made it clear that what happens to children in the first few years of life is critical to their later development into healthy and productive citizens (National Research Council, 2000; Shore, 1997). When paired with evidence that some high-quality interventions made measurable differences in a variety of child outcomes (Karoly, 2005; Karoly et al., 1998; Schweinhart, 2004; Schweinhart and Weikert, 1997; Masse and Barnett, 2002; Reynolds et al., 2001), these studies provided significant support for greater attention to early care and education programming.

The studies also contributed to the framing of pre-K as both a school readiness and an equity issue. Rising awareness of educational failure, both of schools and of students, included an acknowledgement of the gaps in achievement by race/ethnicity and family incomes of students. Research demonstrated that the populations most at risk of falling on the wrong side of the achievement gap also had great need for high-quality childcare (Schumacher, Greenberg, and Lombardi, 2001: 6-7). As the number of U.S. children living in poverty or near poverty rose dramatically – with 42 percent and 40 percent, respectively, of infant/toddlers and preschoolers qualifying as low-income by

2002 (NCCP, 2004)¹⁹ – demand for these high-quality early childhood programs became even more pressing. However, assessments indicated that about three-fourths of available U.S. child care was mediocre to poor, as measured by characteristics believed to promote child development (Helburn and Bergmann, 2002; Helburn, 1995).

Meanwhile, an increasing number of mothers in the workforce, and new welfare-to-work provisions that forced even single parents to work a greater number of hours, increased demand for full-day/full-year child care across the nation. Given high levels of demand, research indicating ameliorative effects of high-quality programming, and clearly differential readiness of children for school entry by race and income, support developed for public “remedies” (NIEER, 2002; Gallagher, Clayton, and Heinemeier, 2001: 50-51; Rolnick and Grunewald, 2003).

Head Start, the most significant public effort to provide such resources to families in need, enjoyed widespread popular approval, but reached only limited numbers, and there were concerns about its quality and consistency and its sustainability as a federal program. Beginning in the 1980s, and more extensively in the 1990s, a number of states moved toward developing their own pre-K initiatives linked with their systems of public schooling, either for targeted “at risk” populations or, in a few cases, as voluntary programs for more “universal” populations (e.g., in Georgia, New York, and Oklahoma [Gormley and Gayer, 2003; Gormley, Phillips, and Dawson, 2004; Henry et al., 2002 and 2003; Lekies and Cochran, 2001]). Early leaders in this arena (e.g., Georgia, Illinois, New York, South Carolina, and Texas) had a number of factors in common that appeared to promote their programs’ establishment and development. These included strong political leadership, general public approval (although usually tacit rather than proactive), and the mobilization of many kinds of groups and individuals collaborating for a common purpose (Gallagher, Clayton, and Heinemeier, 2001). As other states have experienced similar confluences of factors, the movement toward universal pre-K has expanded. Today, 40 U.S. states offer some form of

¹⁹ Estimates prepared by Ayana Douglas-Hall and Heather Koball of NCCP based on the Current Population Survey, March supplement 2003; see also Gershoff (2003); West, Denton, and Germino-Hausken (2000, February); and Bernstein, Brocht, and Spade-Aguilar (2000).

pre-K program, although the nature and content of these programs vary widely (Shore, 2002; Gilliam and Zigler, 2004).

Efforts to expand programming continue to draw on equity arguments and on claims of long-term academic and social benefits. The benefits claimed for universal pre-K are generally based on those demonstrated by three longstanding, rigorously evaluated programs: the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, the Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention, and the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Centers (Reynolds et al., 2002; Masse and Barnett, 2002; Schweinhart, 2003; Schweinhart and Weikert, 1997). Indeed, many state programs claim some similarity to these interventions in their goals, approaches, or policy frameworks. These programs were, however, high-cost, high-intensity, and small-scale.²⁰ Whether scaling them up to universal, state-led programs is possible, especially in a period of economic decline, remains to be seen. Can state pre-K programs aimed at “universal” populations be economically and structurally sustainable? Will they have to reduce the comprehensiveness of services, or the intensity of service provisions, to scale up and be cost-effective? As they move from targeted populations to more universal access, will those who need the programs most benefit the least? What about services and provision for populations not included in pre-K (e.g., infants and toddlers)?

Ultimately, states faced with pressures to expand access, improve quality, and limit cost must make policy compromises. In what follows, we examine the compromise choices made by states along the dimensions of funding, auspice, access, accountability, and staffing, and the effects of those choices on various child and family populations.

²⁰ The Chicago Child-Parent Centers, while much larger in scale than Perry or Abecedarian, were still much higher-intensity than state pre-K efforts.

4. THE HEART OF THE MATTER: IMPACT OF MULTIPLE FUNDING SOURCES

Of the issues of concern to our sample states and to the development of public pre-kindergarten more generally, funding of state systems is clearly the most significant. In this chapter, we examine the trends in financing for state pre-K and discuss the pattern of choices made by our sample states, along with their consequences.

The literature highlights a number of funding-related factors that complicate pre-K implementation at the state level. Most notable is the fact that the largest share of funding for state early learning initiatives (including pre-K) comes from federal programs, with states' actual early childhood allocations constituting a minimal percentage of their budgets (less than 1 percent in many states [Bruner et al., 2004: 1]). Indeed, the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) are the primary supports for many state pre-K efforts. Both of these funding streams are subject to ups and downs as political environments change, and neither is particularly attentive to unique issues of pre-K program quality. These characteristics complicate state efforts in a number of ways, as we discuss below.

Greenberg and Schumacher (2003, May) provide an overview of the use of CCDF and TANF to finance universal pre-K and highlight the challenges states face when accessing these sources. Both streams are available for providing childcare services, and their use in universal pre-K initiatives includes the following:

- States may use CCDF funds to pay per-child costs for children whose families are eligible.
- States may also use CCDF funds to pay costs that help pre-K programs “meet and maintain state standards,” as long as those costs can be shown to improve childcare quality.
- States may use TANF funds for eligible children in childcare, which may include low-income children in a pre-K program.

CCDF is the principal source of federal funding for childcare subsidies and for state efforts to improve childcare quality. Using these funds allows pre-K programs to incorporate childcare providers as program partners, expanding access and potentially increasing the comprehensiveness of services. Indeed, activities to improve the quality of care may include children from non-subsidy-eligible families, a plus for state programs aiming at universality. However, CCDF and TANF funds are fixed, so that “use of funds for higher-income families has the effect of shifting the funds away from services and benefits to low-income families” (ibid: 2).

There are complex limits on the extent to which states may access CCDF funds for pre-K use, however.²¹ These restrictions are largely related to equity concerns: They are intended to preserve the availability of childcare for workforce support as states use CCDF funds to fulfill their maintenance of effort and matching fund obligations. Indeed, the part-day or part-year nature of many state pre-K programs is problematic for many working families, and there is concern that increasing development of pre-K could further limit the services available to such families. As Greenberg and Schumacher note:

an excessively broad approach to counting pre-K expenditures might result in a real reduction in full-day child care services to potentially eligible working families. The potential exists for a state with a sufficiently large pre-K program to divert all state funds away from other child care programs and fulfill its MOE and matching requirements solely through pre-K expenditures. (ibid: 8)

TANF funding is broader than CCDF and is officially available for the following purposes:

²¹ (1) If the state’s CCDF plan describes how it will ensure that public pre-K programs provide workforce support for parents, then the state’s expenditures may be eligible for federal matching funds; (2) if the state has not lowered amounts spent on full-day/full-year childcare services, then the money spent by a state for its public pre-K programs may be used to meet maintenance of effort requirements [MOE: the minimum amount of state spending required for a state to receive its full federal allocation]; and (3) a state may use its expenditures on public pre-K programs to satisfy up to 20% of its MOE obligations and may use other public pre-K funds for up to 20% of expenditures serving as the state’s matching funds (but if the state plans to use public pre-K funds for more than 10% of its MOE obligations or of its state matching funds, its CCDF plan must describe how it will coordinate pre-K programs with childcare services to make childcare more available). (ibid: 7)

- To provide assistance to needy families for childcare
- To promote job preparation, work, and marriage in order to end parental dependency on government benefits
- To establish annual goals (numeric) for preventing and reducing out-of-wedlock pregnancies
- To encourage needy parents to form and maintain two-parent families.

These broad uses for TANF may be creatively manipulated to fund state pre-K, however. The specific guidelines for TANF use in state pre-K initiatives are that (1) a state may transfer up to 30 percent of its TANF grant to its CCDF programs; (2) a state may use TANF funds to pay pre-K costs for low income families; or (3) a state may choose to view its pre-K program as an “early education program,” in which case it may pay the costs for all families and argue that these costs do not serve as “assistance” per se for any family (ibid, p. 17).

Greenberg and Schumacher, for instance, assert that

If a state wished to use TANF funds for all children in the [pre-K] program, ...the state might try to assert that the expenditures in the pre-K program should not be viewed as child care, but rather should be considered “early education” program costs. A state taking this approach would need to identify a TANF purpose that would justify use of TANF funds... One possible approach is to argue that there is evidence (from evaluations of the High Scope/Perry Preschool and the Abecardian [sic] Project) that high-quality early education programs are associated with subsequent reductions in the likelihood of out-of-wedlock births. Thus, the state could assert that expenditures for early education programs further the third purpose of TANF (i.e., reducing out-of-wedlock pregnancies), and are therefore allowable not just for needy families, but for all families. (ibid: 18)

It is essential to note, however, regardless of how these funds are used, that federal funding for childcare has been relatively flat for several years. TANF reserves have diminished or are exhausted in many states, leading to cuts in state childcare programs. This has resulted in many eligible low-income families being

prevented from applying for assistance or put on a waiting list (Mezey, 2004a; 2004b). Indeed, while the recent economic downturn has substantially increased demand for ECE, funding remains stagnant and operating costs are increasing. This exacerbates funding problems that already prevent states from effectively expanding programs for ECE in general and pre-K in particular (Gallagher, Clayton, and Heinemeier, 2001).

In fact, funding crises at the state and federal level appear to be threatening pre-K across the country. While some states are making the choice to increase their investment, most are not (TEE, 2004). Indeed, with states experiencing what Schumacher et al. (2003) refer to as “the worst budget crisis since World War II,” pre-K programs have been repeatedly challenged.

This fiscal context has significant implications for program coverage and quality. A U.S. General Accounting Office’s report (2004), *Supports for Low-Income Families*, notes that not only may program expansions be at risk but that “without sufficient TANF funds to continue these efforts, some support programs face elimination” (39). The report notes that “planned changes were particularly prevalent for ... subsidized child care programs [an important partner to or component of pre-K in many states].” These changes “included reducing the number or type of services offered, changing the eligibility criteria to limit the number of families eligible for supports, decreasing payment amounts made to service providers, increasing the co-payment amounts that families pay, and decreasing outreach efforts” (ibid: 39).

FINDINGS FROM THE FIELD: CONFLICTING AND MIXED INCENTIVES AND THE IMPACT OF OVERALL FUNDING DECLINE

In general, our interview findings corroborate the concerns about the impact of blended and limited funding on program implementation that appear in the literature. Our sample states have generally low levels of capacity to allocate revenue to early childhood in general and to pre-K programming in particular, and have therefore developed a variety of blended funding formats.²² These approaches represent a creative and resourceful response to the various fiscal

²² Federal funds are used both for core programming and for supplementary services in all of our sample states except Illinois, although their actual allocation by purpose varies widely. Even New Jersey, which has by far the highest level of state appropriations, supplements that money with federal funds (and struggles with the issues we discuss in this section).

and policy pressures at the state level, and have enabled the expansion of services, both quantitatively and qualitatively. However, the differences in federal regulations for allocation and application of dollars from each of these sources and the tenuous availability of funds create conflicting incentives for program development and undermine continuity.

Key tensions related to blending funds are those around varying income eligibility standards and requirements for work. One particular issue is the level of comprehensiveness and family involvement that can be supported by programs using TANF funding. Head Start, now TANF-funded in some states, is a particular problem, which one respondent summarized this way: “This was never intended. It’s a square peg in a round hole – trying to match the funding requirements and conditions for clients.” Head Start’s parent governance committees and participation standards, in particular, are challenged by the work requirements of TANF. States that hope to build strong, Head Start-like parental support and involvement components into their pre-K programming thus often find their efforts at odds with federal employment pressures on families.

The fact that TANF transfers into CCDF become subject to CCDF regulations but that TANF dollars used directly for childcare do not²³ is a further complication. Managing and integrating the various uses of TANF and CCDF funding to create smooth service provision for families is a challenge to states using these funding sources. Nevertheless, states do have discretion about the definition of CCDF eligibility and in setting income limits for services. They may to a certain extent count childcare spending under CCDF toward TANF maintenance of effort requirement, with the result that actual spending at the state level to access federal matching may be significantly lower than that reported because of double counting.

In a climate of reduced funding, competition among state agencies and departments for TANF dollars also requires a negotiation of priorities, and policymaking can become a zero-sum game. “Do you fund childcare at the expense of Head Start?” asked one respondent. “Do you fund Head Start at the expense of childcare?” Another raised the stakes further: “Do we have to make

²³ They are, however, subject to the time limits, work, and child support requirements of TANF assistance more generally.

the choice between children and old people?” Indeed, social and human service programs that are intended to provide a lifelong support system are instead pitted against each other for funding, thus fragmenting the continuum of care at the state level and building interdepartmental tensions not supportive of integrated pre-K program development. Even in states where system-building is a stated priority, as in our sample, these tensions are significant, as we discuss in the chapter of this report on auspice.

Perhaps most importantly, the uncertainty of federal approval of funding undermines long-term growth and stable planning at the state level. With federal funding in limbo, states must of necessity develop dual planning processes (best-case and worst-case scenarios). This fragmented planning has both immediate effects on populations served and long term implications for the willingness and ability of providers to participate in the system. As one respondent put it, the central issue “is really the whole funding stream from Washington, D.C., that’s been so tied up in reauthorizations. ... from our childcare dollars, to TANF, to Head Start, it’s played a lot on the minds of people this past year. And it hasn’t been resolved, so... for a lot of people the wheels are spinning ... we’re really doing everything we can, but the bottom line is funding.”

The alternatives to federal funding are private nonprofit or for-profit funding and state budget appropriations. Private funding is typically short term and low level, and none of our sample states has been able to elicit any substantial, sustained commitments to date.²⁴ While one priority has been the building of relationships, both financial and political, with the business community, those ties are in most cases still developing and are not yet reflected in notable corporate or industry funding support for state efforts.

The structuring of the state appropriations component of pre-K funding also has significant effects on the shape of programming and on its comprehensiveness. Oklahoma’s decision to allocate funding to universal preschool as a component of the state school funding formula, for instance, has protected it from cuts even in the face of a budget crisis. Since the funding is by-student weighted and not line-item-based, the program cannot be specifically

²⁴ It should be noted that foundation funding is not *intended* to be long term or broad based. While it provides important supports for research and experimentation, it does not (and should not be expected to) cover repeating per-pupil costs or salaries for large-scale public pre-K.

targeted for cuts, a benefit in a national environment where early childhood programs are often in the first line of cuts in a budget crisis. As a respondent from that state put it: “[Pre-K is] not at risk of being singled out and chopped off. It’s not designed so they can point the finger at the 4-year-old program and say, if we cut that one out, we could save millions, because it’s integrated with the formula.”

The disadvantage of such an arrangement, according to Oklahoma stakeholders, is that it is difficult to track the actual application of pre-K funds at the district level, because they are folded into the funding formula. Where local budgets are tight, K–12 needs may be met at the expense of pre-K services, with strong community partnerships being relied upon to make up the difference. While juggling of funds in this way is beneficial to districts, it has the potential to undermine the consistency of programs across sites and hamper efforts to provide equitable services to all participants.

Block grant or line-item funding for pre-K, on the other hand, can cover large parts of a program or each of its components separately. Both approaches have their advantages, with the former guaranteeing a general fund (as in Illinois, where federal funding is not used, although Head Start providers are eligible for grant dollars to implement the public pre-K program) and the latter protecting particular parts of a system from cuts to other elements. Both also have disadvantages, with the most obvious being that stand-alone budget elements are vulnerable. Indeed, our respondents reported that the program components that have been hardest for them to preserve in the face of state funding crises are often closely linked to quality (Barnett et al., 2003). As referred to in Appendix A, these cuts include monitoring and technical assistance to providers (including support for the implementation of standards), continuous professional development, subsidization of teacher salaries and career ladders, and incentives for building quality in childcare through professional development and accreditation.

Indeed, the fiscal crisis at the state level seems to have blunted the impact of research and activism on the actual development of high-quality pre-K programming. While public discourse around the importance of early childhood is increasing, dollars to follow those statements are still limited. The Trust for Early Education’s survey of FY2005 budgets (2004b) notes that 15 states increased investment in pre-K for that period, while 17 held spending flat and 7

decreased.²⁵ In fact, as a number of our respondents noted, flat funding is in and of itself a cut, as costs of service provision and costs of living for program participants continue to rise. It is notable that the state with the highest sustained per-student funding levels and the most support for all program elements is New Jersey, where the extent and duration of base funding is court mandated. While the New Jersey experience seems to indicate that funding can be found if necessary, it does not yet appear to be a priority for most states.

DISCUSSION

The variety of state efforts to manage funding shortfalls is worthy of note: Our sample states are developing unique and creative approaches to this problem, with attention to the needs and potential of their particular contexts. Of significant interest, given the problems of competition and fragmentation that are highlighted as results of funding shortages, are the choices by several of our sample states of funding arrangements that promote greater coherence and consistency within programs and view pre-K as a subset of broader early childhood efforts, rather than a stand-alone initiative. These efforts may forestall potential service gaps and improve system-building, if they can be sustained. Examples include:

- Illinois' 11 percent set-aside from the state's early childhood block grant to support birth-to-3 programming is intended to ensure that infant and toddler programming remains an integrated, quality element of early care and education systems. This effort is a core component of systemic initiatives in Illinois.
- Washington's 2004 citizens ballot initiative to increase the sales tax by a penny for education improvement would have set aside specific funds for early childhood (including pre-K) and supported expansion of that state's innovative comprehensive pre-K programs. However, the measure did not pass.

²⁵ The remaining states either have no programs, fund through state school formulas, or are in the process of proposing programs to support pre-K.

Although not successful, the Washington initiative is also an example of significant mobilization of public will in support of pre-K efforts and reflects the choice by a number of our sample states to seek out support in nongovernmental arenas. Several states are intentionally developing partnerships with agencies and actors not traditionally involved with preschool provision, in efforts to both develop more sustainable funding and expand public understanding of and support for these initiatives. Some examples of these efforts include

- Michigan's Ready to Succeed Partnership, which builds support for early childhood efforts across the business and policy community by engaging them in discussions with pre-K and other early childhood actors
- Minnesota's School Readiness Program, which is designed to provide strong links to community social service providers and to individualize provision within networks of care in specific communities
- Washington's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, which has provided a vision of comprehensive, community-driven services that has encouraged communities like Spokane to mobilize resources to fill in the gaps in programming left by state funding cuts and to build longer-term sustainability into their local programs

These efforts notwithstanding, funding remains the core dilemma for states hoping to achieve universal pre-K, and one of the primary barriers to the success of state efforts. Heavy reliance by pre-K programs on federal funding for both core and supplementary program elements is a significant barrier to sustainability and coherence of implementation. Even in states (like New Jersey and Illinois) with significant alternative funding sources, these revenues do not cover the full cost of universal, high-quality programming, and they are threatened by budget pressures. Federal financing, with all its attendant woes, is therefore likely to remain a significant component of these programs. In what follows, we note the effects of this dependence and of restrictions in funding overall as a subset of our discussion of other key arenas for policy choice.

5. WHOSE BABY IS THIS? AUSPICE AND AEGIS

A second pervasive concern across the pre-kindergarten literature is that of authority: Who controls program design, implementation, and accountability, and what are the effects of choices about program auspice? These choices appear to be simple, but the literature indicates significant downstream implications of the location of control for pre-K programs. The general trend is for “school readiness” foci²⁶ to encourage the location of pre-K in the realm of education, although some states (like Georgia) have chosen to site their efforts in independent offices or (as in Washington) in economic development departments. Wherever they are located, however, programs cannot operate in isolation from other state efforts if they are to attain a modicum of comprehensiveness.

Unfortunately, smooth implementation of cross-departmental efforts appears to be largely absent in state pre-K efforts. Significant structural challenges are posed by the independent and nonaligned systems of education and welfare. Even where collaboration is intended or attempted, the kind of integrated infrastructure and the reporting systems necessary to take quality to scale tend to be either underdeveloped or, in some cases, nonexistent. Where funding is blended, coordination and management become even more of a challenge.

The problem of systemic development, while not new,²⁷ is increasingly of concern where fiscal constraints exist, since collaboration and coordination can be undermined by interagency and cross-population competition. Because the funding for childcare derives in large part from social services agencies, using these funds for pre-K programs located in public schools under the ultimate leadership of state departments of education sets up tensions between those

²⁶ We elaborate on this point in the sections of this report that discuss access and accountability

²⁷ See Hinkle (2000). Hinkle makes an important distinction between preschool and pre-K, looking at the divergence between an increased emphasis on early schooling in the public school sector and the increased need for early care for child development and workforce support, and argues that schools should play a role in serving as part of a seamless system of care and education, in coordinating community resources, and in helping families to develop social capital.

departments, as well as between agencies and various providers. As CCDF and TANF funds are fixed funds, use of funds for one purpose usually means loss of funds for another, and this aggravates conflicts of culture and rivalries already existing between different agencies. These problems are further reinforced by conflicting accountability requirements, which make collaboration and coordination difficult to maintain.

Indeed, across the pre-K provider spectrum, funding sources are likely to be jealously guarded in difficult financial times. Hinkle (2000) highlights these tensions, noting that “schools and Head Start programs are funded separately and work hard at justifying their funds, making some leaders hesitant to coordinate their limited resources with other programs” (ibid: 31–32) and that “Head Start agencies ... receive limited funding to serve only a portion of eligible children and may feel threatened by better-funded public schools” (ibid: 32). Further, private early care and education programs “see public school pre-Kindergarten as a threat to their businesses, and many early childhood leaders worry about the impact of public school pre-Kindergarten on the supply of infant and toddler care” (ibid: 32).

Although many states are making strong efforts to promote collaboration and coordination, the literature suggests that differences of culture make this work difficult. Schumacher et al. (2001) argue that

The different missions, administrative structures, and regulations governing early care and education programs have given rise to distinct cultures and sometimes rivalries among various program types. ... Some may feel they provide a higher quality program, while some believe that other providers do not recognize the needs of working parents. ... In addition to barriers in thinking, real programmatic differences make meaningful coordination difficult (e.g., differences in teacher education and salary levels, curricula, applicable regulations, staff/child ratios, hours of operation, provision of ancillary services, etc.). (23–24)

Lack of agency integration also leads to problems with collecting, reporting, and analyzing data, and thus with understanding the actual effects of pre-K programs. Karoly et al. (1998) caution that “where governments see fit to initiate large-scale public programs on the basis of current knowledge, *careful*

evaluation should be a component" (xxi). Where data are not shared (or even simply collected according to different regulations) and cultures are divided, the potential success of such evaluation efforts is dubious (Gilliam and Zigler, 2004). Funding constraints that force cutbacks in technical assistance and in program monitoring and evaluation further contribute to a scenario in which agencies and individuals strive to improve their programming, but with few indications about what is actually working and what is not (ibid: 39).

Gill, Dembosky, and Caulkins' (2002) study of the Early Childhood Initiative, an effort that targeted low-income children from birth to the age of five in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, also questions the possibility of scaling up without clear theoretical and institutional support. These authors argue that a successful early intervention program requires, among other things, "a well-designed theory of action" and matching implementation strategy, and "a coherent organizational structure" (xv). As the organizational structures of many state initiatives are currently characterized by multiple and overlapping programs, there is little apparent support for effective and efficient program administration.

FINDINGS FROM THE FIELD: OVERLAPPING AND CONFLICTING AUTHORITY

Interviews in our sample states bear out the literature's concerns about system-building and location of control in pre-K programming. Federal influences on state actions appear to have a particularly strong and cumulative effect on the aegis of state programs, by emphasizing academic outcomes as the benefit of early investment, prioritizing trained teaching staff, and measuring performance against school-readiness standards (see our discussion of accountability for more detail on these pressures). One result of this push is that state education agencies, in our sample and more generally, tend to be the responsible parties for the implementation of preschool programs, or at least the dominant actors in their design (with rare exceptions like Washington, in which efforts are directed from within the Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development).²⁸ Human services agencies, with their broader focus on child and family

²⁸ Our sample did not include any states that operate completely separate departments for this service, as in the case of Georgia.

development, are often the junior partner in state efforts, and several of our respondents asserted that this imbalance of authority complicates the goals, processes, and outcomes of pre-K programming.

In some cases, education departments are seen by other actors as imposing structures and not considering alternatives, whether from other government agencies or from other stakeholders. Resentment and resistance to perceived edicts, in contexts like these, may impede the implementation of programs, no matter what their actual quality.

In other cases, the different backgrounds of education and human services personnel in the field complicate services, but the relationship is one of negotiation and awareness-building rather than open contention. Describing the evolution of her state's efforts, one human services officer argued that her agency's foci enrich programs that might otherwise be narrowly focused on schooling: "We don't think that one part of a child is more important than others, or than other parts of the family. This is how early childhood professionals think about children, but not necessarily how schools have. So we are trying to change that, ...to help understand the culture and the context within which children live, rather than educate them out of context."

Even where cooperation and collaboration are goals that are actively pursued, however, the funding crises facing states appear to undermine the building of effective early childhood systems of which pre-K can be a part. Summarizing the dissonance between system-building efforts and budgeting processes, one respondent described an environment in which "Head Start was pitted against childcare, who were pitted against the resource and referral agencies, who were pitted against the advocacy groups." In her words, "we want to bring [system-building] to the table and talk about it, but I got burned a couple of times by a few folks around my table, so it was really hard to want to partner with [them]. That's where I think we've been dysfunctional, it's because people have to still stand up for their individual programs, but we're trying to create a system."

Restructuring institutionally also has personnel costs, and fear of job loss appears to be a significant inhibiting factor to system building. As one respondent put it: "There's a whole infrastructure of people out there who've been working in this their whole lives. You change the program and change the auspices and there's a response: what about my job?" Without significant

funding and creative organization of administration to retain qualified professionals, resistance to systemic realignment is likely to remain high.

DISCUSSION

As with other core policy tensions, our sample states demonstrated a variety of responses to issues of auspice and control. All, with the exception of Louisiana, are participants in the Build Initiative, and take that effort seriously as an opportunity to develop and integrate their systems of childcare, education, and welfare. This study does not attempt to evaluate the success of those efforts at the level of individual states, nor to generalize about them across our sample. Nevertheless, willingness to participate in such an initiative marks an acknowledgement of the problem of system fragmentation and an appreciation of the benefits of system integration that may be an important step toward ameliorating that concern.

It appears, however, that the absence of system coordination, at the essential level of practice, is still very much an issue. The separation of system elements at the federal level is compounded by similar fragmentation of state systems responsible for the provision of pre-K. These agencies, like their federal counterparts, were not intended to integrate or cooperate, and efforts to meld their activities into a smoother whole are challenged by bureaucratic tradition and conflicts over turf.

Of particular concern is the fact that these fragmented state systems also lack integrated evaluation functions. Multiple agencies maintain multiple data systems on program participants, funding, staffing, and outcomes. Independent evaluation and research on outcomes of pre-K programs is also limited, although this is partly a feature of the newness of many state efforts (certainly, more is planned across our sample). As a result, the judgments on which many states are basing their current pre-K policy decisions appear to be rather ad hoc – shaped by findings from noncomparable cases or by pressures from federal and state accountability movements, rather than by systematic and systemic research and analysis.

The implications of this data gap and the continued fragmentation of state systems supporting pre-K are serious, and we explore them throughout the remaining sections of this report.

6. APPROACHING “UNIVERSALISM” AND ENSURING ACCESS

While funding and auspice concerns emerge as cross-cutting challenges to pre-K implementation, state choices in other arenas are also important in shaping the programs and determining their eventual impact. In this chapter, we explore choices related to program access as discussed in the literature, and as reflected in the experiences of our sample states, with particular attention to the outcomes of those choices for target and other populations.

State decisions related to access begin with choices about the *purpose* of pre-K programming. This has obvious implications for secondary choices about the populations that will be served, the providers that will be included, and the locations utilized for program delivery.²⁹ Access decisions thus address the following questions:

- Access for whom?
- Access to what?
- When?
- Where?
- Why?

On the surface, there is little agreement on the “why.” The literature indicates a lack of common vision for pre-K, both within and across states. Universalizing provision involves the merging of efforts across three communities (childcare, welfare, and preschool) that have been historically separate and that have different goals and priorities. As a result, the various participants in state efforts are often at odds about the appropriate focus and direction for programming, and tension—between human service and education goals, between welfare and economic development—is rife (Gallagher et al., 2001a; Schumacher et al., 2001; Scott-Little et al., 2003; Lekies, Heitzman, and Cochran, 2001; Bellm et al., 2002).

²⁹ Multiple providers does not necessarily equate to multiple service locations, as Head Start or childcare providers may use school space, or—more rarely—the opposite.

Despite these deep tensions, however, state pre-K programs do share a common feature. All, to some extent, promote themselves as agents of “school readiness,” a stance that has both benefits and limitations.

The early childhood literature argues for a comprehensive vision of school readiness that incorporates multiple developmental domains. The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) categorized readiness attributes into five domains: (1) physical well-being and motor skills development, (2) social and emotional development, (3) cognition and general knowledge, (4) approaches toward learning, and (5) language and communication (Kagan, Moore, and Bredekamp, 1995; see also Scott-Little et al., 2003, and Ramey, 2001). More generally, brain research indicates that early care and education has a decisive and long-lasting impact on how children develop, their ability to learn, and their capacity to regulate their own emotions, and that the first three years of life are the most crucial in determining brain development (Shore, 1997). This research also indicates that the environment in which children are raised and the ways that children’s contact with that environment are mediated by those who care for them (parents, families, and caregivers) deeply affect their early development (ibid: x, Thompson, 2002).³⁰

The literature highlights the importance of this broadly defined school readiness for disadvantaged pre-K populations. A CLASP study of pre-K initiatives in Georgia, Massachusetts, and Ohio, for example, notes that “provision of comprehensive health, family, nutrition, and social support services are necessary to promote school readiness for poor children” and that “[a] focus on comprehensive services is particularly important for disadvantaged children who have less access to health care and nutrition and whose families may need additional social services or help accessing them” (Schumacher et al., 2001: 5).

Such a premise implies a broader conception of the “what,” “when,” and “where” of access than is typically found in state pre-K programming. Blank, Schulman, and Ewen’s 1999 “blueprint” for pre-K quality embodies this broader vision, spelling out four essential components of an ideal program:

³⁰ This latter set of findings from the research is particularly notable, because it highlights the importance of rich and stimulating early learning environments and of comprehensive, multidimensional programming as a support for development in cognitive and other domains.

- *Availability*: funded well enough to provide two years for every eligible child; made available to as many communities as possible, as well as to a range of providers; and maintains an adequate supply of safe facilities.
- *Quality*: ensures safe environments; sufficiently small class sizes and teacher-child ratios; highly qualified teachers; social services supports for children and their families; extensive parental involvement; technical assistance and quality set-asides for the program; and consistent program monitoring and evaluation.
- *Accessibility*: attends to workforce needs, providing full-day/full-year programs; transportation; staff with linguistic capabilities; inclusion and support services for special needs children.
- *Integration*: coordinates with existing ECE providers; supports community planning through technical and financial assistance; and is developed and implemented collaboratively across agencies to pool resources.

However, this blueprint is an ideal that is far from realized in most contexts. State pre-K programs typically target particular communities or child populations (usually those deemed “at risk” of school failure by various criteria), are located in only some areas, and prioritize early learning over broader service provision to children and families.³¹ Where programs state more comprehensive goals, actual practice often does not match policy aspirations. In fact, with the exception of Oklahoma and Georgia, which have explicitly adopted and pursued universal strategies, “universal” pre-K is a misnomer for efforts in U.S. states. Access to comprehensive, integrated programming for all children whose families choose it is simply not an option for most states in the current climate.

Funding constraints are an important source of pressure to reduce rather than expand program visions, but they are not the only factor. Equally important is public will, or a lack thereof. Indeed, researchers have consistently noted that

³¹ Schumacher et al., *State Initiatives to Promote Early Learning*, points to Georgia’s pre-K message, for instance, as clearly framed in terms of school readiness, fostering an “early learning” image, complete with logo, “Little Engine That Could” giveaways and a requirement that providers, regardless of setting, call themselves “early learning centers” (25).

more holistic understandings of school readiness do not appear to be shared by the public, which limits popular support for their inclusion as components of state-funded initiatives (TEE, 2004a: 10; Gallagher et al., 2001; Vechiotti, 2001). When limited public will translates into limited public investments, a circle of constraints on achieving universality is closed.

FINDINGS FROM THE FIELD: SETTING AND MANAGING ACCESS PRIORITIES

With the exception of Oklahoma, our sample states have all chosen to prioritize populations determined to be “at risk” of later school failure, although the definitions of risk and the components of programs needed to support “school readiness” differ across states. In most cases, poverty is a primary risk factor, but states like Michigan, Illinois, and Minnesota consider multiple factors or require particular configurations of factors to guarantee access, and others, like Washington, leave determination of priority access after poverty status to local communities.

Targeted programs are typically marketed to stakeholders as investments to secure the welfare of these particularly challenged populations. Oklahoma’s program, however, aims to serve all age-eligible children, and was initially proposed as a means of reducing underage enrollment of children in kindergarten and ensuring that these younger children were provided with developmentally appropriate services. Respondents in states with targeted programs noted some resentment and resistance among non-eligible populations (Our respondents reported that New Jersey is expanding services to its ECPA districts partly as a result of political pressure to better equate those areas with the high levels of quality, access and funding in the Abbott districts), but most argued that serving the most in need first is an important equity choice. With the exception of Minnesota, where efforts were described as intended to develop organically at the local level, all of our sample states had universality of voluntary pre-K as an ultimate access goal. Few, however, could envision achieving this universality in the near future, given constraints on funding.

As indicated above, federal funding is a key component of many states’ efforts to expand their pre-K services, both in terms of numbers served and in terms of the range of services provided. As also noted, states do have the freedom to manipulate federal dollars in a number of ways, allowing them access

to additional matching funds, for instance, or reallocating to areas in which service needs cannot be met by state appropriations. While access to these dollars has allowed for more extensive programs in all of our sample states than would otherwise have been possible, ineligibility for federal support limits access for some segments of the population.

The literature indicates that many of the families accessing state pre-K services are classified as working poor, and our state interviews corroborate this trend. However, the states we surveyed have also implemented a range of cost-saving policies over the past two to three years that are likely to most significantly impact this particular population; indeed, efforts to serve them affordably through state budgets alone necessarily limit the numbers that may be served. The effects of reductions in childcare subsidies in all of our sample states, movements to or extensions of co-payment for services in six states, and scaled or selective reimbursements in all cases for pre-K programs that include childcare outside the regular “school day” have not yet been documented within and across states, but there were significant concerns among our respondents that access for marginal populations may be jeopardized by these policies.

Increasing access is also challenged by a lack of facilities and staff, and one state response has been the inclusion of non-school providers (childcare and/or Head Start) or the expansion of their participation. Such arrangements have multiple benefits: they not only allow for more places for students but expand the comprehensiveness of programming, as well. As one respondent summarized such a choice: “[S]tate pre-Kindergarten is almost exclusively focused on academic readiness. There is no provision for social and emotional development other than what certified teachers are able to provide. There is no funding for support staff. There is no workforce support. So the Head Start partnerships provide the social development and the childcare partnerships provide the wraparound full-day care.” However, the extent of partnership varies widely across states. The representation of non-school actors in the programs reflected in our sample ranges from partnerships intended from program startup to more difficult incorporation at later stages as access problems emerged. All of our sample states interact with Head Start and childcare to some extent, but the shape of that coordination varies. Washington, Minnesota, and Oklahoma encourage and foster participation by Head Start and childcare, both in primary service provision and in wraparound care. In Illinois and Ohio, Head

Start is evolving into a core provider of significance. New Jersey is working to build connections with and confidence in its community childcare and Head Start partners, not initially viewed as key players but now seen as essential to program success (although the extent to which they provide core versus supplemental services varies by district).

The funding shortfall, however, can place significant pressure on community-based implementers, and issues of capacity remain notable across our sample of states. Managing and reporting on the multiple funding streams that support programs is challenging for providers without a history of such activities, and many community actors lack the funds to support professional staff dedicated to such issues. In many states, providers are also encouraged to apply for grants for supplemental funding or to solicit community investment in particular pre-K settings. These pressures may have a limiting effect on the participation of particular kinds of providers, as the dollars available through state pre-K may not balance the costs providers face in accepting these moneys.

Provider capitalization on the availability of funding for pre-K as it expands may also reduce the supply of high-quality infant and toddler care. Centers with limited space may opt to increase their pre-K services, which are more generally state-subsidized and less costly to provide than infant-toddler care. While smaller centers, unable to meet economies of scale needed for program implementation, may retain their young child services, the fear in the human services community in particular is that most families will be served by largely unregulated friend, family, and neighbor sources. Currently available data do not provide systematic evidence of such a shift, but if this is occurring, quality concerns arise. Non-center sources of care can be high quality; however, with public investment flowing mostly to institutional pre-K, there may be fewer resources available to support their development.

Even in the three states from our sample where respondents argued that school districts are not intended to dominate the provision of pre-K services, they typically do, with potentially important effects on actual student access to programming. Economies of scale, greater capacity for program administration and management, and access to facilities privilege districts over stand-alone Head Start or childcare programs in competition both for students and for funds. In most cases, it is up to districts to choose whether to offer a pre-K program or not. New Jersey is one notable exception, with mandated provision in the Abbott

districts, and Washington is another, as districts are only one of a broad range of possible primary partners with the state in program organization and provision. Districts usually control the actual number of children served, the locations in which they are served, some eligibility criteria, and transportation to and from sites, although in some cases these decisions are made in greater partnership with community partners than in others. Recruiting and marketing are also typically coordinated through school districts.

This local control effect is not well represented in much of the discussion about pre-K implementation. Participation is typically described at the district level (X% of districts participate). However, our respondents acknowledged that the actual extent of “participation” might be more limited – for example, to one pre-K classroom in a district with high numbers of eligible children. Across the states in our sample, rural districts and districts with high numbers of minority residents were reported to be particularly underrepresented as a result of district control, for reasons related to cultural or ethnic mismatch between staff and families or distance among population centers coupled with a lack of transportation for pre-K (populations removed from district centers by distance or culture may not be able to reach district-provided services, even if there is demand). Several of our respondents expressed concern that even their targeted programs were not reaching the most in need: “I’m concerned that our participation rates represent a lot of higher-income children who certainly benefit from the program, but those children who could really benefit from it the most, that really need it, aren’t getting it.” Clearly, aspirations to universality of access are challenged not only by pressures from above, but by local choices and constraints as well.

DISCUSSION

Our sample states have adopted a variety of strategies to maximize access to programming. These generally involve a prioritization of need in the population and efforts to expand coverage incrementally. All, with the exception of Minnesota, have universal coverage as an ultimate goal. However, goals for comprehensiveness of services varied, as did those for the inclusion of non-school actors in pre-K efforts.

Unfortunately, funding constraints appear to be contributing to a basic tension between quantity and quality in the implementation (though not in the

design) of state pre-K. This is particularly true in cases where programs that have been piloted are moving to scale. In general, the costs of expanding the number of children served by pre-K seem to be balanced against those of enriching programs, providing nonacademic services to families, and upgrading teacher qualifications and compensation. In cases where this tension is particularly acute, the possibility exists for access to trump quality.

Funding is not the only oppositional pressure, however. Accountability trends that narrow the foci of the programs are another important factor, as we discuss in the following chapter. The absence of systems needed to effectively take small programs to scale also reinforces pressure to cover quantity first. When agencies are not integrated, data are not coherent, and technical support for efforts is largely absent, systems default to maximizing intake rather than systematically addressing quality. Such an approach does not allow state pre-K to live up to the potential demonstrated by smaller-scale efforts to change the life trajectories of children. As we discuss below, program development and expansion need to be far better informed by research and evaluation than they currently are, if state pre-K programs are to achieve their generally ambitious goals.

7. ENSURING HIGH-QUALITY OFFERINGS THROUGH ACCOUNTABILITY

As states are pressed to offer pre-kindergarten programs of high quality, choices about the accountability mechanisms to be used become increasingly important. States must determine the extent to which they will set standards for programs and students, how they will measure attainment of those standards, and how they will support their implementation. Predictably, funding and auspice issues often complicate these decisions.

The broader educational policy shift toward standards and accountability has had both positive and negative effects on the field. Although *program* standards are intended to (and often do) support high-quality developmental environments for children, a trend toward student *outcome* standards appears to be pressing state pre-K programs in the direction of more narrowly defined academic preparation,³² and this may limit their potential for meeting the early childhood community's broader school readiness goals.

Schumacher et al. (2003) offer insights into the effects of the standards movement on pre-K, by comparing standards and services in a range of early childhood programs: state pre-K in Georgia, New Jersey, and New York; Head Start in Ohio, Oklahoma, and Oregon; and childcare centers in California, where the use of contracts was to include required program standards. These standards were "designed to ensure a holistic approach to early care involving both parental training and linkages to support services," which include "physical, dental, and mental health referrals; nutritious meals; vision and hearing tests; immunizations; onsite family caseworkers; and home visits" (ibid: 22). Health factors were particularly important, as

Preschool children from families with limited economic resources are more at risk for developmental delays, and they require services beyond educational enrichment in order to combat the effects of

³² These concerns were particularly voiced by childcare resource and referral interviewees in Lekies, Heitzman, and Cochran (2001); see also Bellm et al. (2002), who offer that while school readiness is the prime motivator behind pre-K programs, this single-goal focus is complicated by the intrusion of social and economic needs that may neither be met by nor reflected in the goals of some state pre-K initiatives.

poverty on early childhood development and detect delays as soon as possible. ...The National Center for Children in Poverty has identified risk factors associated with poverty that may impair children's development, including: inadequate nutrition, environmental toxins, diminished interaction due to maternal depression, trauma and abuse, lower quality child care, and parental substance abuse. Poor children are more likely than children from higher income families to experience low birth weight and infant mortality, stunted growth, and lead poisoning – all factors that are linked with cognitive and emotional problems. (ibid: 21)

Schumacher et al.'s findings suggested that the state Head Start initiatives included a "specific scope and intensity of comprehensive services," since they were tied to federal Head Start Program Performance Standards, whereas the pre-K programs may have required some services but tended not to be comprehensive and to be "more limited in intensity" (ibid, p. 22). Childcare centers offered the least comprehensive services, because they were not required to by basic state childcare licensing standards.³³

The location of pre-K toward the lower end of the comprehensiveness scale becomes more of a cause for concern as the pressure to implement performance standards builds. With even the Head Start Program Standards under scrutiny for not being academic enough, the balance may be tilting in favor of outcomes over process and context. Scott-Little et al.'s study of the use of child-based outcome (CBO) standards in pre-K provides insights into the power of the accountability movement. The authors noted the high variability among states as of 2002: 19 states had official standards; another 8 states had unofficial standards in at least one developmental domain; and 12 more states were in the process of developing standards at that time (2003: 17–18). They further argue that the political environment within which pre-K programs are implemented cannot be lightly dismissed, given "close links with public education and the pressure for accountability being felt there" (ibid: 105).

If greater efforts are not made to clarify that the early years are the starting point of school readiness, and that child wellness and nutrition, family and workforce support, and parent education are all integral to ensuring healthy and

³³ This is another effect of limited funding; indeed, Schumacher et al. argue that "perhaps the greatest barrier to integrating high program standards in childcare is financial" (36).

positive child development, pre-K initiatives, the literature indicates, may make attention to the cognitive development of 4-year-olds their primary focus. In such an environment, components of pre-K programs that are intended to support other elements of school readiness may be less easily justified, particularly in the face of reduced federal, state, and local resources. Extended day or extended year programs and transportation, in particular, or programs with significant health and development components, may be considered too costly to implement and sustain.

Attention to infants and toddlers, whose care costs more, and to related issues of workforce support may also be reduced. Schumacher, Greenberg, and Lombardi (2001) offer an instance of this concern in Georgia's pre-K program, where "children under four may still experience low quality early care and education services; families needing full-day/full-year programs still have to navigate the array of other early care and education services in the state in order to cobble together services that support their work schedules" and where "some observers suggested... that the attention to Georgia's Pre-K program diverted resources and attention that could have been directed at younger and more disadvantaged children" (8).

FINDINGS FROM THE FIELD: ACCOUNTABILITY AS BOTH SUPPORT FOR AND INHIBITOR OF QUALITY

Our sample states demonstrated a wide variety of accountability choices, but, as expected from the literature, indicated that financial and institutional complications made both policymaking and implementation difficult. As in the struggle to determine appropriate access to programs, these choices are also significantly influenced by understandings of "school readiness" embodied in overall program visions.

Dependence on federal dollars influences the accountability components of efforts in these states both directly and indirectly, as federal policies have notable effects. Responding to a downward push from K-12 systems implementing testing under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is a concern for all of our respondents. Integrating state efforts with the evolving accountability framework for Head Start is another key challenge for states whose programs include Head Start components. The Good Start-Grow Smart voluntary early childhood standards for all states are a third set of influences. Acting together and

separately, these federal policies create a particular climate within which states must operate, and limit the choices they are able to make.

In some senses, the increased emphasis on accountability may have worked to states' advantage. Among our interview respondents, staff in education offices almost unanimously asserted that policy choices intended to support quality and consistency of services have been enabled by the accountability movement and argued that a greater sense of responsibility on the part of program providers is in all cases a good thing. As one respondent put it: "Everyone's looking to where kids are coming from to see whether they have adequate preparation. So I think it has just heightened awareness, along with all the research, that what happens before school is really important. It's ... providing an opportunity in a way to heighten awareness of the importance of investment in early childhood education."

One result of this long look backward to early childhood is an increased interest in assessment (linked to standards) in the preschool years; this was true at the policy level in all of our states. However, the perceived impact of such a move was less consistent. Much criticism has been leveled at NCLB and the accountability movement for its emphasis on testing, and serious concerns about the ways in which states and districts employ assessments in the early years have been raised, but our respondents were fairly evenly divided on whether these concerns were of much import in their particular contexts.

In four of our sample states, respondents expressed a frustration with what they perceived as a downward academic push from the early elementary grades, reflected in inappropriate testing and unrealistic outcome expectations for children in pre-K. Such pressure was often attributed to a lack of public awareness of developmentally appropriate practice in pre-K. One summarized these concerns in this way: "Public support for school readiness is what pushed the program through. For the public mind, this means academics. There's not much awareness of other elements of programming... Research does not support academic school readiness separate from comprehensive services, but unfortunately what we're asked to do in our programs is not linked to brain research."

Indeed, while our respondents acknowledged the potential of quality early care and education to contribute to children's preparation for school, many feared that strong emphasis on schooling preparation may interfere with

attention to those elements of programming more commonly considered to be “care,” both at the pre-K level and in programming for younger children as well. Sources of particular concern across our sample were perceived neglect of noncognitive elements of pre-K (raised mostly by human services respondents in four of our states) and infant-toddler programs (also mainly a concern of human services personnel in five states).

While sharing the concern that elementary expectations and standardized tests not be levered down to early childhood, respondents in five states argued that NCLB and other accountability movements provide a stimulus for efforts to develop valid, reliable, and developmentally appropriate standards and assessments for the early years. For these stakeholders, the trend to increase assessment cannot be ignored, but rather it places pressure on the early childhood community to develop appropriate measures of program and student outcomes for that age range and defend them against downward pressures from the elementary grades.

Most states seem to be moving toward the establishment of both program and performance standards, although these concepts were frequently blurred in our discussions with respondents from our sample of states. Respondents variously referred to their “standards,” “expectations,” and “desired outcomes” and had differing views about the extent to which they represented particular school readiness goals in an academic sense or simply outlined natural developmental progressions in a range of domains.

Program standards, as described by our sample, typically address multiple developmental domains and align with general understandings of quality practice for children aged 3–5. Respondents in five states identified the NAEYC guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice as a key referent for their program standards, whether as a starting point or a goal in and of themselves, while respondents in six states referenced the Head Start performance expectations. In this sense, there is a certain consistency in the understandings across states of what constitutes quality programming for young children, and an intention to see that quality broadly reflected in pre-K classrooms.

Student performance standards, however, are more varied. Literacy outcomes are a key concern for most states, and school readiness was frequently presented in literacy terms, a discourse that was again attributed to national

policy pressures. This national movement is seen as being largely academic, and as often moving state choices in that direction as well.

A desire to make academic preparation developmentally appropriate was clear across all of our sample states, although the extent to which our respondents felt that was possible was quite mixed. One respondent represented the dilemma of incorporating pre-K into public education particularly clearly: “Our relationship with public school institutions is to provide the other half of the debate, and say this is developmental, versus a more behavioral approach to having children learn skills. This will always be debated throughout the national agenda, but that’s fine ... it’s an important discussion.” However, as data on the effects of these efforts at the pre-K level are quite limited, this public debate is based more on hopes than on actual results.

At the other end of the spectrum from those who prioritized academic readiness, respondents in four states reframed pre-K as a public health issue, identifying school readiness as primarily dependent upon health and safety as the basis for early literacy, numeracy, and social/emotional development, and proposing standards that prioritized physical and mental health expectations over academic outcomes. Surprisingly, education staff as well as human services personnel made similar arguments in this respect, although all of our sample state education department representatives also acknowledged a strong academic emphasis in their approaches. As one state leader put it, “When you’re talking about having children being ready to learn and academically ready, we have to look at the whole child, and those providers in the classroom know that if they have children with teeth hurting, or poor health conditions, they’re not going to be ready for school.”

The disparate presentations of appropriate expectations or outcomes for children in pre-K programs are representative of debates within the field more broadly, but they appear likely to be short-lived in state policy circles. Across our sample, respondents indicated that early childhood standards were moving toward alignment with those for K–12 education programs, either by choice or by necessity. In some cases, this alignment results in joint efforts by early elementary professionals and pre-K teams to work upstream against academic pressures; in others, concerns about downward flow are very strong. Again, as suggested by the literature, the marketing of pre-K as school readiness, and the limited public and policy understanding of what “readiness” means, appear to

limit the extent to which states can manipulate the standards movement in more holistically developmental directions.

There was also concern across our sample about this linkage trend. Although efforts are being made in some states to better integrate pre-K with services for children aged 0–3, the primary connection to other efforts is at the other end of pre-K, to K–12 education. This focus, although expected given public pre-K’s “school readiness” justification, raised concern for human services stakeholders in five of our states, and education staff in an additional two states, about the extent to which the expansion of pre-K may affect services for infants and toddlers.

An up-the-chain focus on standards development may, they argued, divert attention from the quality of services for 0–3 at present or translate into a downward push of cognitive/academic expectations into that age range in the future. In the end, many children under 4 may end up “not prepared” for pre-K, by pre-K standards.

While standards may be moving toward more commonality at the policy level, there is significant variation in the extent to which they are mandated, enforced, and supported by professional development, and as a result in the ways they are or are not applied at the classroom level. Across our sample, it was clear that local implementation varies widely in terms of curricula (which are usually neither standard nor necessarily comparable, even in states with performance standards and assessments that are mandated for local use). Variation internally within the school-day portion of programs is compounded by the fact that states allow districts to choose whether or not to offer additional components and services that may lengthen the day or year of a program, resulting in uneven application of state program standards as well.

Many of the choices states are making in these respects appear to be related to the funding constraints described above. As one respondent noted, “[E]nforcing mandatory standards means you’re increasing the per child cost, and is politically difficult.” Mandating standards is impractical when there is little funding for staff time to monitor their use and enforce sanctions for noncompliance. Not doing so can have negative consequences, however, as it leaves the decision about whether and how to implement them in the hands of local providers, with uneven results. Indeed, the rough sampling of providers to which most states are financially limited as an oversight process provides

insufficient evidence of standards usage in the classroom and contributes to inconsistent quality across state-funded sites, according to our respondents. As one noted, “[E]veryone thinks the standards are good, but if they’re not mandatory, it’s still a big issue about whether they are being adhered to or not.”

Mandating standards is also further complicated by the multiple layers of providers involved in many state programs. Representatives from our sample states were divided on the extent to which childcare providers can and should be held to the same standards as public schools offering pre-K programs, and state personnel are limited in the influence they have over their federally-accountable Head Start partners. Linking pre-K standards to those for K–12 further pushes them into the province of state Departments of Education, while childcare providers are most commonly overseen by the equivalent of a state Department of Human Services. Interagency tensions may hamper smooth implementation of standards across authorities, and budget restrictions may mean that DHS employees are not available to monitor their use in childcare settings. In the case of Head Start, federal regulations trump those of the states, and their inclusion in state standards programs requires a negotiation of content and monitoring that minimizes additional pressure on providers. An alternative is to develop state standards that more closely parallel those of Head Start, but such processes are complicated by federal debates over Head Start restructuring and reauthorization.

Professional development related to standards is also uneven across our sample. Budget constraints on support for standards implementation seem to have resulted in efforts that fall largely in the realm of the passive (through efforts such as toolkits, websites, and informational packets to providers) rather than the active (although New Jersey’s master teacher program and efforts by Oklahoma to increase provider-based technical assistance are exceptions). With research (see, for example, Scott-Little et al., 2003) pointing to a need for sustained and intensive support for standards implementation to succeed, such efforts may not be effective in meeting goals, regardless of their financial manageability.

Indeed, in three of our states, the financial auditing of providers was acknowledged as more important and as carrying much more weight in the public eye and with policymakers than concerns about the quality markers that are or are not represented in standards. These audits are important instruments

for understanding the use of public funds, especially in programs with significant provider networks outside the public schools, but the information they provide about program quality is extremely limited. While audits and standardized assessments may be easier for states to carry out than more intensive programs of technical assistance and monitoring of program quality, they should ultimately be only one component of systems that help sustain high-quality programming.

DISCUSSION

A number of our sample states have made accountability choices that attempt to address the full range of program quality and child outcomes, while also integrating pre-K programs better with services for both younger children and K-12 schools. These efforts include the development of innovative standards and assessment systems that aim to build developmental appropriateness into accountability from the bottom up, cover all developmental domains, and reach across early childhood (from birth to age 8). Some specific examples include

- Illinois' training for pre-K staff on authentic assessment and its development of birth-to-3 standards that are developmentally appropriate and set the stage for pre-K expectations
- Michigan's early learning standards, designed precisely to "prevent push-down," and the systems of care collaboration between that state's Department of Education and Department of Human Services, which supports attention to multiple developmental domains, particularly to child health
- New Jersey's pre-K administration's proactive leadership, which deliberately and assertively keeps the focus of the Abbott programs developmental and the instruments for understanding performance appropriate
- Washington's infant-toddler standards initiative (in process), which seeks to build early understandings of developmentally appropriate practice that link to later efforts
- Minnesota's birth-to-3 standards (in development), which view services to this age group as the foundation for later success and an

important developmental support for services for children in 4-year-old programs.

These efforts at standards are often undermined by the fact that technical assistance for accountability has been a frequent victim of funding cuts (see Appendix A). However, some of our sample states have made choices about the provision of technical assistance that not only allow them to continue to serve the needs of the sector but to do so more effectively. Decentralizing technical assistance and embedding it in provider contexts are particularly interesting examples of efforts intended to provide effective, lower-cost supports for quality. Examples of such efforts include the following:

- Oklahoma’s pre-K teachers are employed by school districts but often teach in childcare settings. Their presence in these contexts is explicitly intended to provide professional development extension to their colleagues who serve children not within the age range for the pre-K program and are not trained in early childhood education.
- New Jersey’s master teachers in pre-K programs support quality in the classroom by providing direct, routine, and consistent support to their colleagues.

Nevertheless, there is a fundamental tension between cognitive outcomes that can be measured by standardized instruments and a more comprehensive focus on child development in the pre-K field. This tension is closely tied to the definition of program purposes discussed in the previous chapter and reflects tight linkages between issues of accountability and access.

It should be noted that this tension is not unresolvable; high-quality, developmentally appropriate ECE can and does balance the cognitive and other domains across the curriculum. Implementing such programming at scale, however, requires a mix of public will and funding that does not presently appear to be available in most of our sample states. While nearly all of our respondents framed the concept of “school readiness” as multi-dimensional, and advocated accountability systems that reflect that view, they acknowledged that their perspective is not fully shared by the public or by many legislators.

The broader early childhood literature that comprehensive, multidimensional programming is of most benefit to children and families, and particularly to those most disadvantaged, deserves more public attention. In addition, cost-benefit analyses indicate that the benefits that accrue from ECE are as much or more about crime reduction and other social outcomes than about schooling. As a result, a strongly academic focus may be misplaced, and raising public awareness about these findings is essential, if state pre-K efforts are to best address the needs of their participants.

8. THE HUMAN FACTOR: DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING QUALITY STAFF

State choices related to pre-kindergarten staffing and professional development have implications not only for pre-K in the present, but also for the extent and quality of services provided to all young children over the long term. In a context of increased accountability and limited funding for program support, the condition of the early childhood workforce is a particular cause for concern. This chapter examines the state of the early childhood staff pool, as discussed in the literature, and the reality on the ground in our sample states.

The literature demonstrates that early childhood workers are among the lowest paid in the nation, and among the least educated (Bellm et al., 2002; Gilliam and Marchesseault, 2005; Lekies et al., 2001; Vecchiotti, 2001). The literature also raises serious questions about the extent to which states are likely to be able to ameliorate core workforce issues, particularly as they move toward greater universality of service.

States can have significant control over the staffing configurations of their pre-K programs, depending on whether or not they choose to include Head Start and childcare as providers of all or some services. Where these providers are included, standards for preparation become more difficult to define, but the general trend is toward more, and more focused, credentialing for staff across all sectors. While they are grounded in general education research on the characteristics of teachers that may correlate with higher student outcomes and overall program quality, these requirements present unique challenges in the context of pre-K.

Vecchiotti (2001) examined qualifications, turnover, diversity, and compensation of the early childhood workforce; the bachelor's degree as the entry-level requirement for pre-K; characteristics of the workforce and opportunities for career development; current career initiatives; and recruitment and retention. The conclusions have significant implications for pre-K:

- Institutions of higher education are not ready to meet the current or projected need for early educators with B.A. degrees.

- Career ladders should but often do not incorporate multiple pathways for individuals to obtain higher qualifications.
- In states operating large-scale pre-K programs, there were few systemic efforts to address workforce issues.
- Further research was needed on how the B.A. improves teaching and affects child outcomes.
- Concerns about the potential displacement of early care and education workers should be addressed as the B.A. becomes an entry-level requirement.
- K-12 systems needed to be better informed about issues related to early care and education and workforce preparation in order to partner more effectively. (5-6)

Funding also complicates these issues. Childcare providers often lack the means to improve the educational qualifications of their teachers (see, e.g., Lekies et al., 2001), and poorly paid teachers are hard pressed to fund their own advanced training. In pre-K programs that intentionally integrate childcare, teacher certification requirements thus limit the pool of providers and staff that are able to participate. One result, as Bellm et al. (2002) note, is an emerging “two-tiered system” of high-quality public pre-K (incorporating some childcare providers) and lower-quality private childcare, which accounts for the rest of the field.

When CCDF or TANF funds are used to build capacity in the pre-K workforce, other problems emerge. As staff improve credentials through subsidized programs such as TEACH, they either tend to migrate to or are recruited by public pre-K programs, where pay, benefits, and status are higher (Bellm et al., 2002; Lekies et al., 2001; Vecchiotti, 2001). The long-term benefit of this phenomenon may be greater diversity in public school staff, at least in pre-K programs. However, the short-term result is that childcare faces problems of retention and recruitment as higher credentials improve the employment prospects of their staff elsewhere. The implications for children not in pre-K (but in childcare) are troubling: If increased demand for pre-K staff siphons off talented, high-quality staff, what kind of care will infants and toddlers, or children not meeting targeted pre-K eligibility criteria, ultimately receive?

FINDINGS FROM THE FIELD: AMBITIOUS GOALS AND STRAINED CAPACITY

Consistent with trends in the literature, most states in our sample are setting high standards for teacher preparation. Four-year degrees and certification for lead teachers are the norm, and there is a strong preference for formal qualifications for assistant teachers as well. In all of our sample states, respondents cited teacher quality as key to the quality of programming and referenced credentialing as the primary marker of quality for these purposes.

Federal requirements through Head Start and NCLB have both direct and indirect bearing on state pre-K staffing. In most cases, our state sources regarded these pressures as beneficial, because they support state-level efforts to raise the quality of teaching in pre-K classrooms. The 108th Congress's proposals on Head Start reform³⁴ included a House bill (H.R. 2210) that would have required 50 percent of all center-based teachers to have a bachelor's in early childhood education or related field by September 2008, and a Senate bill (S. 1940) that would have required 50 percent of teachers in *each* center to have a bachelor's in early childhood education or related field by September 2010. The House bill would also have required that all new teachers hired have an associate's in early childhood education or related field within three years of the bill's enactment; whereas the Senate version would have required that all teachers have an associate's degree by September 2009 (Schumacher, 2004).³⁵ State credentialing requirements actually set higher standards than these in some cases, but both versions of the federal policy proposal were seen as important complements to state efforts by most of our respondents. However, the fact that the final bill is still awaiting passage complicates and constrains programs dependent on its contingent funding.

³⁴ These proposals did not pass. Similar legislation has been introduced in the 109th Congress: HR 2123 again would require all new Head Start teachers to have at least an associates degree in early childhood education or a related field within three years, and 50 percent of Head Start teachers nationwide to have at least a bachelors degree within 3 years (no Senate equivalent has yet passed out of committee) See <http://edworkforce.house.gov/issues/109th/education/headstart/2123billssummary.htm>.

³⁵ The issue is further exacerbated by a lack of any new funding for pre-K teacher preparation and education and by minimal cost-of-living increases for Head Start (see Trust for Early Education, 2004, February 2).

Timelines for NCLB implementation also pressure states and local providers and raise concerns about the public perception of program quality and the comprehensiveness of programming. With pre-K in public schools, teacher qualifications are counted in district reporting for NCLB. The lack of four-year degrees among the staff incorporated through Head Start and childcare partnerships skews the reporting toward the negative, which schools and districts may perceive as a cost they are not willing to bear. “This will label schools as having unqualified staff,” one respondent affirmed, noting that the situation “is driving a loss of partnerships ... these schools are trying to do it alone, which is a tragedy because without Head Start dollars they can’t provide comprehensive services.”

Indeed, accessing a pool of teachers who meet the new definitions of “highly qualified” in the movement to scale has proven to be a challenge for many of our sample states. In only two of our states did respondents claim to have higher education systems that are aligned across two- and four-year institutions, and even those respondents noted that their states’ systems are not designed to meet the staffing needs of an extensive public preschool system. The addition of the Head Start teacher population to those needing professional development for public pre-K raises the stakes for state higher education systems even further. When higher teacher standards for pre-K are combined with NCLB requirements for highly qualified teachers, the early childhood segment (defined as those serving children from birth to age 8) of the professional development arena notably expands, but state higher education systems in our sample, at least, appear to be struggling to address current and imminent demand.

In five of our sample states, new certification and degree programs have been or are being developed to focus pre-K teacher preparation on the developmental needs of children in this age range and provide training in appropriate practice. Reframing the state school system and related training programs as P-12 or P-16 supported these efforts in five states. However, there was significant disagreement among our sample about the relative value of early childhood certification versus special certification or endorsements for preschool and about the need to separately prepare staff for work with still younger children. Human services professionals in four of our sample states, in particular, argued that the preparation usually received by teacher candidates does not meet the developmental needs of infants and toddlers, focusing rather on the more

academic components of school readiness. They worried that focusing expansion of early childhood teacher preparation on pre-K might only contribute to the downward push of inappropriate academic practices as staff move among age groups within the birth-to-8 range.

Indeed, the overlap between childcare and pre-K was a concern for staff development in a number of ways. Many of our sample states' programs incorporate childcare providers, and others draw on childcare staff to meet demand for new pre-K teachers. However, the educational levels of these professionals are typically the lowest of any early childhood employees. Grandfather clauses and in-service programming have therefore been developed in all but one of our states that are upgrading teacher credential requirements to allow current practitioners to remain in the system for a limited period while receiving additional training. Phasing out these transitional programs, however, as higher education systems adjust to increasing demand, is a goal for most states that currently offer them.

Accessing the resources to support staff improvements, however, can prove to be difficult for states. Indeed, in five of our states, respondents argued that "the biggest obstacle is funding to make sure that we provide training to staff." Federal programs do not fully fund either credentialing of current teachers or the sustained professional development efforts that states argue are necessary to support the quality of teaching in pre-K classrooms. Two of our sample states have been able to allocate CCDF moneys in ways that provide for the development of career ladders and strong incentives for upgrading teaching credentials; most others, facing budget crises, have not been able to support the language of the federal teacher qualification mandates with dollars. Five of the sample states reported implementing or planning to implement TEACH programs or providing other sources of subsidy for childcare staff professional development, but in most cases (with the notable exception of New Jersey) the primary cost burden of pre-K credentialing was on staff. While this is not the preferred mechanism in most states—it was attributed regretfully by our respondents to the funding crisis—it does raise additional questions about the extent to which the demand for teachers can be met as programs expand.

Meeting demand may be particularly difficult if salaries of all pre-K staff are not adjusted to public sector scales. As one respondent put it, "[I]t's nice to get that degree, but people who get those degrees want to be paid for them."

Early childhood workers are typically the lowest-paid teaching staff in the country, and retention of qualified personnel is a significant issue.

Implementing public pre-K typically includes the linking of school-based staff's salaries to those of the public education system and the provision of benefits in line with those of other teachers. While pre-K teachers have yet to be incorporated actively into unions in most of our sample states, they do fall into most collective bargaining arrangements and benefit as a result (Illinois, where salaries are covered by the block grant, is an exception; its pre-K teachers have not received the cost-of-living adjustments available to other public school staff).

Some states (in our sample, Oklahoma and New Jersey) have chosen to expand salary parity to non-school providers. However, this rise in salary and accompanying benefits is the exception rather than the rule across our sample and more generally (Barnett et al., 2003), and even in cases where state statutes mandate salary parity, non-school providers typically do not and cannot provide non-salary benefits to their staff that are comparable to those offered by public school systems. This leaves a gap in practice if not in policy and is a lingering incentive for qualified staff to migrate to public school pre-K. Parity across institutions also does not address staff in non-pre-K classrooms in childcare, even when those centers provide public pre-K as part of their services.

These pay and benefits gaps between public school and non-school staff, and between pre-K and non-pre-K, were perceived by many of our respondents as creating incentives for staff to prefer positions in public schools and potentially diluting the pool of stable, highly qualified employees in community institutions and working with other child populations, at least until near-universality is reached and total need for staff is relatively set. Services for infants and toddlers were a particular worry, especially for human services personnel in four of our sample states, who were adamant that a notable drift of "better" staff upward and "less-qualified" staff downward into the less-regulated realm of infant and toddler care was occurring. Even in states where traditional upward mobility is encouraged by TEACH and other career development programs, the concurrent downward shift of teachers who are not able to meet those program's standards into infant and toddler care was a concern.

There was also concern in seven of our eight sample states that staff diversity would suffer as credentialing increased (the high percentage of racial

and linguistic minority staff in childcare is not paralleled in public school settings, even in kindergarten), perhaps limiting use of pre-K by minority populations who prefer early childhood environments that reflect their cultures. As these populations are often among those deemed most in need of services, discouragement in this manner was seen as potentially limiting the impact of pre-K programming overall. One response to this concern has been for states (notably Washington) to work more closely with family childcare providers on the development of high-quality practices for the pre-K age range and to consider building those providers into public pre-K networks. Doing so requires a rethinking of pre-K program content and “curricula,” and of the credentialing standards for staff, and is probably less possible in environments with more structured programs than in states where pre-K is negotiated at the community level among a variety of stakeholders.

DISCUSSION

While many states are choosing to cut professional development funding as a result of financial pressure, a number of others are choosing to dedicate specific funding to the building of greater capacity in the workforce as a support for quality. Some examples of efforts in this direction include

- Illinois’ efforts to prepare a subsidized career lattice for staff serving children from birth to age 8
- New Jersey’s investment in rethinking teacher education for staff serving children from birth to age 8, and the provision of paid professional development to all staff who choose to access those services
- Ohio’s intentional training in a infant-toddler curriculum, joint professional development efforts between ODE and ODJFS including the development of early literacy toolkits, and Early Language and Literacy specialists³⁶, which are intended to integrate childcare staff into the early childhood professional community more fully and support a more coherent system of 0–5 provision.

³⁶ These positions are jointly funded by ODE and ODJFS to serve the early education and child care community

Nevertheless, staffing of pre-K programs is dependent upon choices made in other policy realms. Emerging accountability systems place pressure on states to raise teacher standards as well. Choices about access and the extent of non-school involvement in pre-K influence the pool of available staff and have direct implications for the extent of training that will be needed to allow teachers to meet those new accountability standards. Finally, funding for improving the quality and stability of this poorly paid, poorly protected segment of the workforce is extremely limited. Without greater commitment to the funding of training and professional development and to incentives to draw highly qualified staff into the workforce, it will be difficult to significantly improve the effectiveness of the early childhood workforce. While pre-K teachers may improve their status and security, their doing so may come at a cost to other early childhood programs. Greater attention to the development of the early childhood workforce as a whole is important, to support pre-K as a component of a broader system of care, education, and welfare.

9. CONCLUSION

In general, as our report has shown, states have approached efforts to design and implement pre-kindergarten programs with energy and innovation.

Determination and commitment are evident in the multiple communities involved in shaping and implementing pre-K programming, and creative solutions to difficult problems were evident across our sample of states.

Significant new practices appear to be emerging, in such areas as the development of standards, creative funding, professional development, technical assistance, and partnership with diverse providers. However, state pre-K programs continue to face complex policy choices and implementation challenges. These are briefly discussed below.

Scope and Purpose of Programs

Pre-K programs vary considerably in terms of their ability to provide services to children in their target age ranges, and concerns remain about their ability to serve their intended purposes when taken to scale. The absence of a shared definition of “pre-kindergarten” as a stage of bundled services for children and the use of funding streams that combine diverse purposes contribute to implementation difficulties. In general, however, broad educational and social service policy shifts, combined with the marketing of pre-K to constituents as “school readiness” programs, seem to be encouraging a strong academic focus. While this focus may have academic benefits for program participants, some voice concern that it might also detract from the developmental appropriateness of pre-K programs.

Lack of Rigorous Research on Scale-Up and Limited Translation of Research into Practice

A body of high-quality research is beginning to take shape (focused and longitudinal examinations of programs in Oklahoma, Georgia, and New Jersey are important efforts). The field has not, however, yet reached the stage where the particular components of programs that most contribute to quality *at scale* have been clearly identified. Many of the elements of high-quality, small-scale programming that appear to contribute to success (such as workforce support for

participating families, social services connections, family involvement, and embedded and sustained staff development) are not widely acknowledged by the public or by the political establishment as worthy goals for universal pre-K, and pressure to include and fund them is lacking in many states. Without that pressure, there is less incentive for the growth of high-quality programs for all children whose families wish them to participate.

Insufficient and Unstable Funding

Funding instability is a significant barrier to the achievement of universal, high-quality pre-K. Unless and until state, local or other funding sources are fully mobilized, claims or ambitions of “universality” on the part of states will depend on significant federal dollars. Reliance on federal funding for many components of state pre-K programs, however, limits state agencies’ options for building coherent and effective programs. Even with federal pass-throughs, budgets are and will remain tight. Implementation of programs under fiscal constraints, particularly in the movement to scale, might lead to the reduction or elimination of important nonacademic, family and workforce support components, the absence of which could in turn affect equitable services within pre-K and across populations.

Need for Collaboration Across State Agencies

Despite important efforts at collaboration and cooperation, systemic development of large-scale pre-K appears to be hindered by the fact that child and family care, education, and development are usually addressed independently in multiple state agencies. Maintaining the quality and stability of the workforce—central to program success—is a significant challenge for agencies that are not well integrated with each other. Monitoring and supporting implementation are likewise difficult, particularly in constrained financial contexts. Within this environment, collaboration among public schools, community childcare providers, and Head Start is an important contributor both to universalizing pre-K access and to maintaining program quality. Managing this collaboration appears to be one of the key challenges for states that wish to move toward “universal” pre-K.

Efforts to address all of these concerns are ongoing. They reflect an energy, flexibility, and creativity that distinguish state pre-K efforts, and if maintained and supported by reliable funding and informed public and legislative support, bode well for the sector.

However, it is important that public pre-K be developed not in isolation but as a key component of a broader system of care, welfare, and education for children and families. Child outcomes in all developmental domains are subject to influences from a variety of sources, and pre-K experiences, particularly those more limited in scope, may not be the most important of those factors. An emphasis on pre-K as the solution to problems of child achievement, which is often emphasized in public outreach and in the related literature, may raise expectations for its success beyond what is possible without changes in other areas affecting children's well-being and performance.

This study highlights the choices and challenges faced in moving quality to scale within presently fragmented and multilayered systems of governance and programming. While states are working to develop the quality of their programs and their ability to provide services to all children in the targeted age ranges, more rigorous examination of current efforts is needed to identify promising practices, and policymaking must be carefully coordinated to ensure that large-scale public pre-K programs more fully echo the small-scale, high-quality interventions that inspired them. Activities that may support the quality of current and future efforts include the following:

- Raise public awareness that the benefits of high-quality early childhood programs are not entirely or even primarily academic and that full readiness for school – and realization of long-term benefit – may require comprehensive, developmentally appropriate programs.
- Base new efforts to develop state infrastructure for taking pre-K to scale on evidence from successful practices, where it exists, and examine ongoing efforts more closely to determine where and why they are and are not successful.
- Integrate efforts across state bureaucracies – if necessary, reorganizing to reduce turf wars and silo effects.

- Expand state efforts to engage linguistic and cultural minorities in pre-K as both *consumers* and *providers*, and examine present efforts to do so that appear to be meeting the needs of these generally marginalized groups.
- Work toward standards that are developmentally appropriate, support program quality, and balance performance expectations across all developmental domains.
- Develop measures of pre-K teacher and administrator quality other than simple certification, and encourage their adoption as a support for quality and staff stability.
- Increase the extent to which professional development and technical assistance efforts focus on upgrading teacher and administrator quality in non-school settings, and develop a base of evidence on successful practice in these arenas.
- Examine more rigorously the effects of school district dominance on access to, demand for, and utilization of programs, and consider restructuring programs so that populations most in need can be provided with services.
- Focus outcomes research on the effects of particular program components over time, once programs are taken to scale, as a support for the adoption of quality practices in other states.

APPENDIX A

Program Cuts by State

Source: Except where noted, data are from Barnett, 2003

State	Program/Auspice	Sources/Stability of Funding for Pre-K	Budget Status (Additions/Cuts for '03 -'04)	Impacts of Status for 03-04 (as reported by respondents)
<i>Illinois</i>	<u>*Illinois Pre-Kindergarten Program</u> in public schools, childcare programs, Head Start (through grant process)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Early Childhood Block Grant: \$164 million (with 11% set-aside for 0-3) in '01-'02 •Annual state appropriations through legislature stable over time •Spending per child flat from '01-'02 to '02-'03: at \$3,094 •Enrollment flat from '01-'02 to '02-'03 	'03-'04: State funding up \$29.4 million (includes funds for initiatives other than pre-K)	Cutting comprehensiveness to achieve expansion means "diluted" programs, meeting fewer needs of program clients
<i>Michigan</i>	<u>*Michigan School Readiness Program</u> in public schools on formula basis, but childcare and Head Start may participate through competitive grants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Up to 50% non-eligible children may be enrolled •Enrollment flat, but spending per child up from \$3,205 in '01-'02 to \$3,300 in '02-'03 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •State funding stable, but need and costs have increased •Reauthorization battles have them "on hold" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •State funding is stable, but need and costs have increased •Reauthorization delays have put programs "on hold" 	Eliminated or reduced programs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •0-3 secondary prevention funds cut •ASAP-PIE¹ eliminated •mental health prevention services "decimated" •professional development and training cut •family services and support cut •administrative funds (program evaluation) cut

¹ Parents in Education (PIE) component of All Students Achieve Programs (ASAP)

State	Program/Auspice	Sources/Stability of Funding for Pre-K	Budget Status (Additions/Cuts for '03 -'04)	Impacts of Status for 03-04 (as reported by respondents)
<i>Minnesota</i>	<p><u>*Minnesota School Readiness</u> in public schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •No data available for enrollment or spending per child <p><u>*State-funded Head Start</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Spending per child in Head Start \$7,362 (above federal Head Start level) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •School Readiness Program received approximately \$9.5 million from state in '02-'03 •Head Start received \$17.6 million to add 2,500 slots 	<p>*School Readiness cuts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •FY '04 base reduced from \$10.395 million to \$9.536 million •FY '05 base reduced to \$9.258 million 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Without data on enrollment, not possible to assess percentage of eligible being served by School Readiness ("accused of being a middle-class program") •Head Start lost slots •Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) cut 20% •childcare subsidies "slashed" •childcare centers downsizing/closing •return to welfare indicated for eligible families
<i>New Jersey</i>	<p><u>*Abbott</u>: court-mandated for 30 poorest urban districts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •In public schools, but Head Start or childcare programs also if they meet certain requirements •Spending per child: \$12,963 <p><u>*Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Spending per child: \$4,385 	<p>*Abbott programs have stable combined state funding from DoE and DHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •\$472 million in '02-'03 <p>*ECPA received \$30 million in '02-'03</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Administrative and program funds were increased for FY '04 above the cost of living (Barnett, 2003, July 21) •Added approximately \$30 million for Abbott pre-K •TANF and childcare subsidies uncertain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Concerns about effects of prioritizing Abbott on other providers, market in general, effects of having program overseen by DoE.

State	Program/Auspice	Sources/Stability of Funding for Pre-K	Budget Status (Additions/Cuts for '03 -'04)	Impacts of Status for 03-04 (as reported by respondents)
<i>Ohio</i>	<p><u>*Ohio Public School Preschool</u> may contract with Head Start, childcare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •State spent \$19.5 million in '02-'03 <p><u>*State-Funded Head Start</u> programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Approximately \$96 million TANF in '02-'03 plus \$25 million in general revenues for 2002-03 biennium •Enrollment flat from '01-'02 to '02-'03 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •State funds for Head Start were replaced with TANF funds (unstable) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •FY '04 state budget cut 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •TANF funding interferes with Head Start parent relationship and programming •No funding for quality bonus to providers in tiered system; quality improvement based on 'voluntary incentive' •Partnering with childcare providers to provide more services to clients is problematic, since childcare providers are often incapable of meeting Head Start standards
<i>Oklahoma</i>	<p><u>Oklahoma Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Voluntary, universal pre-K uses state equity formula •State spent \$64 million in '02-'03 •Enrollment rose; spending per child fell from \$2,428 in '01-'02 to \$2,285 in '02-'03 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Funding formula is strength for pre-K program •Partnering makes for mixed funding: TANF, CCBG, Title I, Head Start funds (unstable) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •CCBG and TANF are "drying up" •Not all state money for pre-K goes to pre-K •Title I funds also not highly "trackable" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Partnerships with childcare are in "great jeopardy," "dire need" •Layering of programs may occur with mixed funding •Data collection difficulties need to be resolved •Not enough state money for comprehensive services or additional staff

State	Program/Auspice	Sources/Stability of Funding for Pre-K	Budget Status (Additions/Cuts for '03 -'04)	Impacts of Status for 03-04 (as reported by respondents)
Washington	<p><u>*Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Contractors apply through grant process (may include public schools, local governments, childcare providers, non-profits, Head Start and Early Head Start applicants) •State spent \$30.7 million in '02-'03 •Enrollment flat as spending per child fell from \$4,908 in '01-'02 to \$4,442 in '02-'03 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •State ECEAP funding stable •I-728², TANF, Title I, childcare subsidies used to supplement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local funding, grants and in-kind resource vary from year to year • State match for CCDF/MOE varies depending on children served and average cost per child – mostly stable. State match is appropriated through the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Budget cuts in K-12 overall have occurred regularly: \$75 million in 2001; \$98 million in 2002³ •Head Start state supplement cut also after 2002 (no state match now) •I-728 on hold, TANF and Head Start on hold •Quality set-aside reduced from 12% to 4% in 2002 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Funding cuts “deeply impacted childcare providers and those who partnered with them” •Total impact of cuts across early learning community: \$67.5 million •In 2002, \$1.5 million cut from ECEAP staff training and quality projects •Program features cut or eliminated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •career & wage ladder cut •recruitment & retention contracts •outcomes project cut •bonus for odd-hour care cut •support for special needs, after school programs cut •training for childcare providers cut •workforce support for TANF clients moving to childcare jobs cut •on-site consultations and mentoring cut •administrative and professional development funds cut •slots decreased (1,196 cut '01-'03) •no increase ever in per child cost reimbursement

² I-728 was a class size initiative passed in November, 2000, which provided funds to local school districts for “class size reduction, extended learning opportunities, more training for educators, preschool and kindergarten programs, and construction” (Pascall, 2002, December: 26).

³ These overall cuts kept I-728 from fulfilling its purpose overall and prevented it from providing aid to preschool programs (ibid: 27).

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