

All Together Now: State Experiences in Using Community-Based Child Care to Provide Pre-Kindergarten

By Rachel Schumacher, Danielle Ewen, Katherine Hart, and Joan Lombardi

State pre-kindergarten programs have grown dramatically in the last two decades, and states are paying much more attention to the school readiness of children. In 1980, there were only 10 state programs; now at least 38 states and the District of Columbia have one or more pre-kindergarten initiatives. By one estimate, these programs serve about 740,000 children, at a cost of over \$2.5 billion. Most state programs are part-day, part-year and targeted to a limited number of four-year-olds based on family income or other risk factors for school success. Six states—Georgia, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, West Virginia, and Wisconsin—have policies in place or a goal to move toward universal access to

About the Authors

Rachel Schumacher is Director of Child Care and Early Education, Danielle Ewen is a Senior Policy Analyst, and Katherine Hart is a Research Associate at CLASP. Joan Lombardi is a consultant to CLASP.

pre-kindergarten, and other state leaders are contemplating universal access as well.

In delivering their pre-kindergarten programs, states are taking one of two principal approaches. States are choosing to offer pre-kindergarten programs: 1) exclusively in public schools; or 2) in schools and other settings, including community-based child care. The vast majority (29) of states with a program are delivering pre-kindergarten according to this latter mixed delivery model that includes schools and community-based settings, which may include privately operated child care and federally funded Head Start providers, among others. States may contract directly with these providers or may allow schools or other entities to subcontract with them to provide the pre-kindergarten program. States vary in the extent to which children in state pre-kindergarten are in non-school settings. All six states that offer or are working toward offering universal pre-kindergarten allow delivery of pre-kindergarten in

ABOUT THE BRIEF

This brief is based on the 61-page report of the same name. This paper, commissioned by the Brookings Institution, studies the emergence of the mixed delivery model, in which pre-kindergarten is delivered in community-based settings and schools. It describes findings of a state survey CLASP conducted to understand the policy choices, opportunities, and challenges of including community-based child care providers in pre-kindergarten programs.

At the conclusion of our study period for this paper (November 2004), we found at least 29 states that are currently operating at least one pre-kindergarten program using a mixed delivery approach. Those states are: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Other states, for example Florida, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, are considering or expanding pre-kindergarten policies but were not yet established enough to be included in our study.

In this policy brief we describe principal approaches to state implementation of the mixed delivery model but do not provide examples of state policies. See the full report at www.clasp.org/publications/all_together_now.pdf for details about state policy choices.

community-based settings, and four of the six have or plan to have most children in community-based pre-kindergarten settings.

This policy brief studies the emergence of the mixed delivery model, in which pre-kindergarten is delivered in community-based settings *and* schools. We focused our research specifically on the policies associated with implementing pre-kindergarten programs in community-based child care settings rather than Head Start programs, colleges, and other types of programs.

Why Is Mixed Delivery Important?

The emergence of the mixed delivery model is significant to the future of early childhood education because it has the potential to:

- 1) break the traditional barrier between early education and child care policies and address the needs of children in working families in a coordinated way; and,
- 2) strengthen the quality of community-based child care programs by requiring high early education program standards and pairing them with additional resources, supports, technical assistance, and monitoring.

While not every family needs a full-day, full-year pre-kindergarten opportunity, it is important that families who do need such programs have choices for

obtaining them. This is especially true for low-income working parents, many of whom must rely on state child care subsidy programs to find arrangements for their children when they work. Integration of child care and pre-kindergarten programs is especially important in this context, as many state child care programs have suffered cuts in recent years, limiting access for low-income working families. According to the Government Accountability Office, at least 23 states have limited child care assistance for some families since 2001, and many have also made cuts in their activities to improve child care quality. States can design their pre-kindergarten programs to coordinate and augment the efforts of their state child care subsidy systems and assure access to high-quality pre-kindergarten for low-income working families in need of extended day and year programs.

Coordinated planning and implementation between state pre-kindergarten and child care programs, as well as ongoing monitoring and technical assistance and increased resources to integrate early education standards in child care, have the potential to lead to a system in which children can experience the same level of program quality whether they spend their days in a school, a child care program, a Head Start program, or some combination. Integrated policies could also

increase linkages and ease transitions between early care settings and elementary school entry, and better align curriculum expectations for cognitive and social development. These linkages will benefit children as they grow from infancy to their preschool years, and on through their time in elementary school.

What Are Key State Policies in Implementing Mixed Delivery?

1. Does the State Allow or Require Inclusion of Community-Based Child Care Providers?

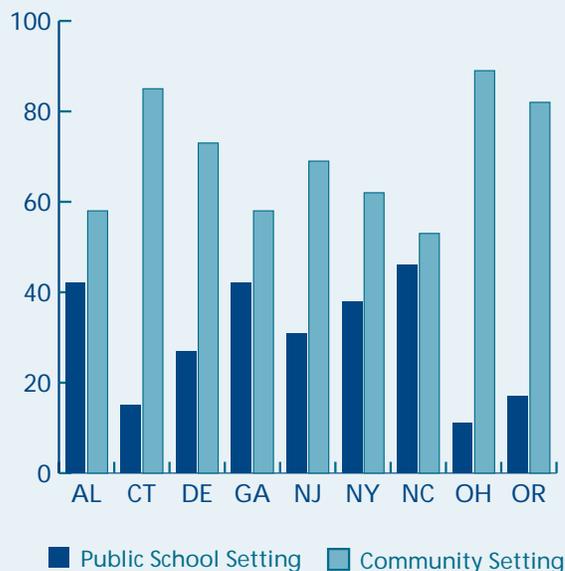
Twenty-nine states have legislation or regulations that specify that community-based child care programs can be pre-kindergarten providers, but not all of them require that such providers be included in the program. We identified three principal models for including community-based providers:

- Require that a certain percentage of pre-kindergarten programs operate in community-based child care settings.
- Allow community-based providers to participate, without requiring that a specified percentage be allowed.
- Establish a separate program that contracts with community-based child care programs to provide pre-kindergarten.

Although not all states can report the share of children

FIGURE 1

States with More than Half of Pre-kindergarten Children in Non-School Settings (Percentage)



served in school-based and non-school settings, the majority of children are in non-school settings in nine states (see Figure 1).

2. Which Type of Providers Are Eligible to Participate?

The 29 states identified as allowing community-based providers to participate in a pre-kindergarten initiative have adopted a wide range of definitions for which entities can apply for this funding. For example, states may include:

- *Center-based providers.* All studied states allow center-based providers.

- *Family child care providers.* Thirteen states explicitly named family child care providers as eligible providers, although they may not be eligible directly but rather as subcontractors and are generally not widely participating in pre-kindergarten programs.

3. Who Decides Which Community-Based Providers Receive Funds to Participate?

States use a variety of mechanisms to distribute funds from the state to local to program level. These choices tend to drive where and how decisions are made about whether community-based child care is integrated in pre-kindergarten

systems and the extent to which non-school entities have an opportunity to make important decisions about the pre-kindergarten program. We identified five main funding mechanisms that place decision-making power in very different places:

- State agency funds community-based providers directly.
 - Local school districts decide whether to include community-based child care with required input from the community.
 - Local school districts have the authority to subcontract with community-based providers.
 - Local community councils or boards administer funds and set policy to determine whether and how local providers participate.
 - Local city officials determine the agency that administers the funds with the input of a representative community advisory council.
- ## 4. Who Hires the Teachers?
- The relationship between the pre-kindergarten teacher, the school, and the community-based provider can vary at the local level, even within an individual state. The entity responsible for hiring the teacher is responsible for ensuring that the teacher meets applicable teacher education standards. We identified two principal approaches:
- The school district hires the teacher to provide the pre-kindergarten part of the day

in the community-based setting.

- The community-based provider hires the teacher.

More research is needed to better understand the implications of these decisions for children in need of full-day, full-year services and for how teachers are managed and paid.

5. Does the Pre-kindergarten Program Pay for a Full Working Day?

Most pre-kindergarten programs are not designed or funded to provide early education services for the full workday through the pre-kindergarten program funding stream. Most states reported that the pre-kindergarten funding was designed to fund less than a full school day, which is much less than the standard of at least 10 hours offered by most child care centers. Very few states report requiring the maintenance of pre-kindergarten program standards for the full day of services, regardless of funding source. These policy choices mean it is less likely children in need of full-day, full-year can access such a program, or that they will experience a similar level of quality all day and year. We found the following state policies:

- State policies require that the pre-kindergarten program address the needs of working families in some way, either by allowing state pre-kindergarten funds to be used to

meet this goal or through state-level coordination to help programs combine multiple funding streams.

- The state requires that pre-kindergarten address working families, but does not provide all the funding needed to make these services available nor does it coordinate state policies to assure working families have access to these services.
- State policies encourage programs to address the full-day, full-year needs of families through coordination, but do not require, coordinate, or fund these activities.
- State policies do not specifically address working families' needs.

6. Are Pre-kindergarten Program Standards and Teacher Qualifications the Same for Community-Based and School-Based Providers?

Every state pre-kindergarten program establishes program standards—for example, teacher-to-child ratio, group size, teacher qualifications, curriculum requirements, and other service requirements—that all providers must meet in order to be eligible to participate in the pre-kindergarten program. These standards typically exceed state child care licensing requirements for program quality but in general are only required during the hours funded by the pre-kindergarten program.

Most states required all pre-kindergarten providers to meet the same program standards regardless of setting for the time period that is considered pre-kindergarten, but many have phase-in periods that allow programs extra time to meet the standards or may allow for different standards for different settings. Phase-ins likely make it easier for community-based providers to enter the pre-kindergarten system. Requiring that all programs ultimately meet similar standards can assure that children across the state all have a defined pre-kindergarten experience. We found four principal approaches:

- All programs—including community-based child care and schools—are required to meet the same program and teacher standards as soon as they begin to receive pre-kindergarten funds.
- All programs are required to meet the same standards, but some are allowed a grace period to comply with specific standards. We found two major policies for which some states allow phase-in: for achieving accreditation and for meeting teacher education and certification requirements.
- Different standards are in place for some settings.
- Local communities establish their own standards, with no requirement that they be the same across settings.

7. Are There Resources and Supports In Place to Help Programs Meet State Pre-kindergarten Standards?

Many states recognize that it can be challenging for some programs, especially community-based providers, to meet the higher standards of the pre-kindergarten initiative. In order to facilitate the participation of a range of providers, some states have developed policies to help providers start programs and meet standards, and states make resources available in addition to those from the state child care subsidy system. Most states provided one or two of the supports, although usually funding could not meet all potential demand in the state. Of particular concern to states are the difficulties community-based child care providers have in meeting the pre-kindergarten teacher education requirements where bachelor's degrees and/or teacher certification are required. Yet, less than a handful reported that they had pre-kindergarten funding available and policies designed to give community-based providers access to higher education and higher wages specifically so that they can teach in the pre-kindergarten system. Rather, many states rely on pre-existing state scholarship programs for child care teachers, such as T.E.A.C.H.[®], that are available in some states; but these initiatives only meet a proportion of potential demand in the child care workforce. The following

are examples of state strategies to help pre-kindergarten providers meet the program standards:

- Provide classroom start-up funds.
- Provide funds for professional development.
- Require that salaries be the same across settings.
- Create monitoring systems combined with ongoing, responsive state-level technical assistance.
- Provide funds for supplies or curriculum materials.
- Provide supports to help programs become accredited.
- Allow pre-kindergarten funds to help adapt facilities.

8. How Are Pre-kindergarten Payments to Programs Set?

Some states assure that the same amount per child is paid to all providers regardless of setting; others look more closely at what resources are needed by that particular provider or type of provider to provide the pre-kindergarten program. Some states reported that the amount provided was not intended to cover the full cost of providing pre-kindergarten. This policy choice may make it more difficult for community-based programs to deliver pre-kindergarten that meets state standards, since child care tends to have less infrastructure and overhead support than public

school systems. We found the following approaches:

- Funding level is set by state agency uniformly per child or per classroom.
- Funding level is set by a central agency and varies based on specific criteria, such as teacher qualifications, geographic location of program, or type of setting.
- Funding level is set through negotiation with each eligible contracted provider, either at the state or local level.

9. Can Community-Based Providers Add Pre-kindergarten Funds to Child Care Subsidies?

Each pre-kindergarten program that includes community-based providers must determine the relationship between pre-kindergarten payments and child care subsidies. Will a provider be eligible for both, and, if so, will the child care subsidy amount that the provider can receive be reduced when a provider also receives pre-kindergarten funds? The issue is important for community-based providers trying to meet pre-kindergarten program standards, since they most often lack the resources available to public school-based pre-kindergarten and may need additional funding beyond what they can capture from parent fees or state child care subsidies. None of the state pre-kindergarten programs reported that they would prohibit a child participating in pre-

kindergarten from also receiving a child care subsidy, but some states report that child care subsidies are reduced below the full-day rate for families participating in the pre-kindergarten program.

- State child care assistance policies allow programs to receive both pre-kindergarten and child care subsidy funds for the pre-kindergarten portion of the day.
- States adjust how providers combine pre-kindergarten and child care subsidy funds.

10. Are State Child Care and Pre-kindergarten Agencies Required to Coordinate Policies?

The locus of control for state-level pre-kindergarten policymaking is most often in the state department of education. There are variations in the level of involvement and coordination between departments of education and state child care agencies. Most states reported informal collaboration, which may be productive under current leadership and staff but could cease to occur as the people holding education and child care administrator positions change over time. This may place the agency not administering pre-kindergarten funds at a disadvantage in developing coordinated policies.

- State-level coordination is required.

- Informal state-level coordination occurs, but there is no statutory requirement.

11. Are Pre-kindergarten Program and Evaluation Data Collected from Community-Based Child Care and Are that Data Used to Improve Program Quality?

In pre-kindergarten programs that are using a mixed delivery system, program evaluation is particularly important to ensure that every setting is providing a high-quality program that meets the established standards and that resources and technical assistance are in place to help providers continue to improve the quality of their programs.

- Most states do collect some descriptive information on programs and/or children participating, including family characteristics, demographic information, and program characteristics. Where states are doing such data collection, they include data from all settings, including community-based providers.
- Some states use program quality and child outcomes data to provide assistance for ongoing program improvement regardless of type of setting.

Recommendations

In this research, we were interested in two fundamental areas of opportunity presented by the community-based pre-kindergarten

model. Specifically, do states implementing the model:

- Address early education for children and needs of working families in a coordinated way?
- Strengthen the quality and program standards of community-based child care programs?

While there are important potential advantages in the community-based model, there is no guarantee that implementation will result in policies and programs that meet the model's potential. The process of engaging multiple public and private providers from a range of settings in service delivery can present significant challenges for state policymakers. It may be more difficult to encourage or require consistent standards, compensation, and benefits for teachers across multiple settings in a mixed delivery model. And, expansion of pre-kindergarten in community-based settings requires support services and ongoing monitoring that is targeted to these types of settings.

For every policy lever that we examined, we saw instances in which states were working toward these goals as well as where states were creating barriers or missing opportunities. More research is needed to determine how implementation of these policies has impacted children, families, and programs in communities, since our review focused on formal state policies. We recommend that states do the following:

Address Early Education and the Needs of Working Families in a Coordinated Way.

States interested in improving access to early education for working families through a mixed delivery system should:

- Require that a minimum proportion of pre-kindergarten be delivered in non-school settings and require that a proportion of settings have the capacity to provide full-workday and -year services.
- Identify and eliminate state child care subsidy policies that may prevent participation of community-based providers in the pre-kindergarten program.
- Allow pre-kindergarten funding to augment other child care funding without reducing existing resources to assure full workday coverage for low-income families in a setting that maintains consistent pre-kindergarten quality all day.
- Redesign state governance structures to formalize policy and planning coordination among agencies responsible for early education and child care.
- Require and support joint planning at the local level to bring together early education and child care constituencies.
- Conduct thorough outreach and disseminate information to all potential community-based providers.

Strengthen Quality and Program Standards and Provide Resources in Community-Based Child Care Programs.

States interested in strengthening the quality and program standards of community-based child care settings in a mixed delivery model should:

- Set pre-kindergarten payments and provide dedicated funds that cover the cost of providing a high-quality early education program.
- Set equivalent program standards for all communities and pre-kindergarten settings.
- Invest in the community-based child care teacher workforce by providing targeted resources to help teachers meet pre-kindergarten teacher education standards—and receive comparable wages to similarly educated school teachers.
- Make resources and technical assistance available to improve the content of early education services in community-based child care programs.
- Provide resources and technical assistance to improve child care quality for children who are too young to be eligible for pre-kindergarten.
- Link policies to enhance program quality across pre-kindergarten and child care.
- Collect data and evaluate program quality and impact across settings to encourage ongoing program improvement.

Conclusion

Including community-based child care in state pre-kindergarten programs presents an important opportunity to bring together the dual goals of promoting early learning and supporting working families. In some instances, state policies have been designed to build on potential advantages of this approach, although there is also ample evidence of missed opportunities.

Whether the community-based model fulfills its potential ultimately depends on the vision, planning framework, funding, design choices, and whether there are adequate supports to reach and maintain quality program standards. The model provides an important opportunity to bridge the historic gap between early education goals and addressing the work support needs of families; the next step for researchers and policymakers is to learn from and build on the initial experiences of state implementation.

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The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), a national nonprofit organization founded in 1968, conducts research, legal and policy analysis, technical assistance, and advocacy on issues related to economic security for low-income families with children. CLASP's child care and early education work

focuses on promoting policies that support both child development and the needs of low-income working parents and on expanding the availability of resources for child care and early education initiatives. CLASP examines the impact of welfare reform on child care needs; studies the

relationships between child care subsidy systems, the Head Start Program, pre-kindergarten efforts, and other early education initiatives; and explores how these systems can be responsive to the developmental needs of all children, including children with disabilities.

CLASP POLICY BRIEF
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1015 15th Street, NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20005
202.906.8000 main
202.842.2885 fax
www.clasp.org