



Tennessee

Early Childhood Education Pilot Project

Tennessee's Early Childhood Education Pilot Project provides preschool services to low-income and at-risk children. Although most children are in public school settings, Head Start programs and nonprofit child care centers are also eligible providers. Programs are full-day and run through the school year. Teachers are required to have a Bachelor's degree (B.A.) and pre-k certification.

Eligibility

Income: eligible for free or reduced-price lunch

Age: 3- and 4-year-olds

Priority: children with an IEP who do not meet the income requirement, and those in foster care or at risk of being taken into state custody

Length of Program

Hours/day: a minimum of five and a half hours per day, excluding naps

Days/year: 180 days (academic year)

Eligible Providers

Public schools, Head Start programs, child care centers operated by institutions of higher education, and nonprofit organizations (for-profit organizations are not eligible)

Number Served¹

3,200 (2002-03): 2,700 in public schools; 180 in Head Start; 300 in private settings; 100 programs run by institutions of higher learning

2,500 children were served in 2004-05

Total Annual Budget

\$10 million (2004-05) from the state general fund; \$6 million in federal funds were provided in 2002-03, but these are no longer available; lottery funds are also provided to the state preschool program, which could generate up to \$8 million in funding

Monitoring

The Tennessee Department of Education and Department of Human Services are responsible for monitoring programs. The Department of Education conducts site visits once per year to verify the scope of services and conduct teacher evaluations. Sites must also submit monthly attendance reports and annual reports documenting the services provided. All facilities must meet fire, safety, and health standards. Child assessments are not required, but most sites do them and report results to the state. Teachers must have a B.A. with a pre-k endorsement, or be pursuing pre-k certification.

¹ For updated figures on the program budget and number served, please see the NIEER State Preschool Yearbook at: <http://nieer.org/yearbook/states/>

Governance

How are state pre-k programs integrated into community-based settings?

The legislation authorizes, but does not mandate, pilot programs based in community settings. Decisions to promote integration are made at the local level through informal channels with strong encouragement from the state. The quality of the integration depends on the strength of the local networks of people.

Are there requirements to integrate pre-k and Child Care at the state or local level?

At the state level, the statute requires collaboration among the state departments of education, health, children's services, and human services. However, the collaboration occurs through informal meetings as needed. There is no formal committee established to address integration issues. The department that is initiating a program or event takes the lead in the collaborative process. For example, the Department of Education took the lead in the development of the standards, and the development of "Smart from the Start."

Integration is not required at the local level. Community-based programs and public schools decide independently whether to participate in the program. In general, public school systems and community agencies are encouraged to develop interagency agreements that focus on the delivery of services to eligible children and families. The extent to which this occurs varies by locality. The state encourages collaboration and requires pre-k program providers to report on their collaborative efforts in their monitoring report.

Procedures and Supports for Community-based Providers

What are the rules/guidelines for notifying and selecting pre-k providers?

When new funds are available to solicit new program providers, the Commissioner of Education posts the information on the department of education website. Information is also posted on a listserv to all schools. Child Care Resource and Referral agencies notify their child care constituents and consultants, and the Head Start Collaboration Coordinator notifies all Head Start grantees.

Providers are selected through a competitive application process. An on-site visit is not required, but the Department of Education checks the program's licensing compliance history. All program standards must be in place, although some exceptions are made if a teacher has a four-year degree and is working toward pre-k certification. The application process is the same, regardless of the type of program applying.

What resources are available to help providers become eligible to deliver pre-k services?

Both the education and human services departments have early childhood consultants available to go into programs before they begin to provide services and help get classrooms set-up. There are also plans underway to incorporate some form of start-up funds for new grants allocated with lottery funds. Tennessee's has a professional development program (TECTA), but this is not specific to the pre-k program.

Do teachers working in community settings earn comparable wages and benefits once they obtain the same credentials as teachers in school-based settings?

No. The department of education does encourage community-based pilots to meet the public school salaries in order to retain teachers.

Supports for Working Families

Is there any explicit discussion in the legislation or regulations of extending the day, coordinating with the child care subsidy program, or helping working families?

Yes. The regulations state that pilot programs must provide wraparound services for families in Families First (Tennessee's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program) and those transitioning from the welfare program before other families receive this service. Other funds, such as child care subsidies, may be used to pay for this service. Programs are strongly encouraged to provide wraparound for other families as well.

What policies help working families access pre-k and other supports?

The legislation prioritizes wraparound child care for families that need full-day, full-year services. Local programs are required to provide or give access to transportation services, health and nutrition services, and special services for children with disabilities.

Funding

What is the per-child payment for the pre-k program?

The per-child rate is \$3,250 (2003-04). However, the rate was \$4,900 per child when TANF funds supplemented the program.

How does the state pre-k funding affect other potential sources of funds for a provider?

Pre-k funds cannot supplant other funding sources, but blending funds with other programs is permissible and recommended. Prior to 2003, pre-k programs could only receive a part-day child care subsidy to pay for the hours after the pre-k program ended. Now they are eligible for full-day child care subsidies in addition to the pre-k payment. Pre-k programs may also blend funds with Head Start (this was not permitted prior to 2003) to offer a full-day program. This change in policy reflects an understanding that the 2003 pre-k rate was insufficient and must be layered upon other funding sources.

Sources

- Interview: Sandra Williamson, Director, Early Childhood Education State-funded Preschools
- Legislation: ECE Pilot 49-6-101.doc (Word Document)

- Program Guidelines and Requirements:
Tennessee State Board of Education Rules for Operating child care in local schools
<http://www.state.tn.us/sos/rules/0520/0520-12/0520-12.htm>

For information about national trends, read CLASP's *All Together Now: State Experiences in Using Community-Based Child Care to Provide Pre-kindergarten* at http://www.clasp.org/publications/all_together_now.pdf.