



# Arizona

## *Early Childhood Block Grant Preschool Program*

Arizona's Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG) Preschool Program gives parents the power to select a school- or community-based pre-k provider, provided it meets licensing and accreditation standards and has chosen to participate in the program. Only a small portion of ECBG funds go into the community because the cost for community-based providers to achieve and maintain program standards (i.e., licensing and accreditation) exceeds the potential revenue from the pre-k program. Local education agencies must apply for the ECBG funds, and are given full discretion on how to divide funds among three uses: pre-k, full-day kindergarten, and K-3 support. In the past few years, the percentage going to pre-k has increased.

### **Eligibility**

**Income:** children eligible for free or reduced-price lunches

**Age:** children not yet eligible for kindergarten

**Priority:** children who will be eligible for kindergarten in the following year as determined by the local educational agency

### **Length of Program**

**Hours/day:** determined locally; majority are half-day, five days per week

**Days/year:** eight to nine months per year (academic year)

### **Eligible Providers**

Funding is directly available to public school districts and charter schools, who may subcontract with Head Start and community-based preschool providers. In 2002-03, there were 130 public schools, nine Head Start programs, and 44 private child care programs. Family child care providers are not eligible to participate.

### **Number Served<sup>1</sup>**

4,092 (2002-03): 3,598 in public schools; 205 in Head Start; and 289 in private settings, including a small number of children served in private schools

### **Total Annual Budget**

\$9,953,752 from the state's Early Childhood Block Grant; the total ECBG was \$19,406,775 (2002-03)

### **Monitoring**

Regardless of setting, all programs must be licensed by the department of health services (i.e., child care licensed). The Department of Education provides oversight of both school- and community-based programs approximately once every three years using the ECERS-R. This is used to promote quality in programs; there are no statutory requirements to do this assessment, or to defund programs if they fail to receive a certain score. Low-scoring

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

programs receive technical assistance and recommendations for improvement. (A.R.S. § 12-1251 (C)(2))

## Governance

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

State statute mandates that local education agencies (LEAs) allow all qualified community-based providers the opportunity to deliver the state pre-k program. Providers then choose whether to participate. If they do, up to 50 percent of parents can choose a participating community-based provider, and the funding follows the parent choice. LEAs receive the funds from the Arizona Department of Education and contract with federally-funded or private providers for up to 50 percent of the funds.

State statute [A.R.S. § 12-1251 (C)(3)(4)(5)(6)], as cited in ECBG Policy Manual, reads:

Provide all federally funded or private child care providers located within the school district or within 10 miles of the charter school with information necessary for them to participate in the program, including names and addresses of children selected for participation and of their parents or guardians.

Provide all parents or guardians of children selected for the program with a list of licensed federally funded or private child care providers located within the school district or within ten miles of the charter school and explain to parents or guardians that they may choose to have their child receive services under the program from any provider on the list if that provider agrees to participate.

Allow at least fifty percent of pupils selected for the program to receive preschool services from a federally funded or private child care provider of their parents' or guardians' own choosing.

Allow any eligible child care provider located within the school district or within ten miles of the charter school to participate in the program if it is willing to provide services at a unit cost similar to that paid to other providers in the area under the program.

### **Are there requirements to integrate the state pre-k and subsidized child care programs at the state or local level?**

There is no formal governance structure for integration at the state or local level, although it happens informally. The state has a School Readiness Board that serves as an umbrella to create a coordinated system of early care and education. State pre-k is not the primary focus of the Board at this time.

## Procedures and Supports for Community-based Providers

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

Every year, all federally funded and private programs that are on the state list of licensed programs and located within the school district boundaries receive a letter from the LEA inviting them to participate. This letter includes a description of the program and its requirements. Eligible

providers that are interested in participating must respond in writing to the LEA and attach proof of their licensing and accreditation in their reply. LEAs must notify parents of all eligible and willing pre-k program options in their area, and parents choose which program to use.

All pre-k programs must demonstrate they meet the same program standards (licensing and accreditation). Schools and community-based programs should be accredited prior to approval. However, the department of education may provide a provisional status to programs in the process of achieving accreditation. After 18 months, programs must be accredited, or the department of education may grant an extension if programs are making sufficient effort. At this point, most new sites coming into the program need the 18 months to meet standards. But overall, fewer than 5 percent of all sites have this provisional status.

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

No resources are specifically earmarked to help community-based providers become eligible to deliver pre-k. Classroom equipment and curriculum development are allowable expenses for grant funds.

Historically, the Arizona Department of Education provided \$40,000 for a state project helping programs achieve accreditation (the Arizona Self Study Project). The money was earmarked for programs that wanted to receive ECBG funds. ADE no longer provides support because there was dwindling interest among providers to become accredited and then participate in the ECBG program. Presumably, the cost of achieving and maintaining accreditation was more than the potential revenue from ECBG. Private providers interested in the Self Study Project are still encouraged to participate; however, ECBG funded are no longer used to support accreditation.

**Do teachers working in community settings earn comparable wages and benefits once they obtain the same credential as teachers in school-based setting?** No. The statute is silent on salaries. There is no teacher certification required for any setting other than what is required in accreditation, so some teachers in public school pre-kindergarten programs may be paid less than K-12 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?**

No.

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

There are no policies specifically targeting supports for working families. Programs are encouraged but not required to provide the following services.

- Health—medical, vision, hearing, dental, mental health, immunizations, special needs (e.g., school nurse, physical therapist, speech/language therapist, school psychologist), collaborations with community service organizations.
- Nutrition—funds may be used to provide meals and snacks, although programs should first investigate the feasibility of providing meals and snacks with federal Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) funds.

- Family Services—collaborations with educational agencies, social service agencies, health care agencies, transportation, and child care.
- Transportation.

## Funding

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

School districts determine their own rates. For example, some sub-contracts may fund a set number of children, some may cover the teacher salary, and some may cover a negotiated piece of the program budget.

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

ECBG funds are not sufficient to cover the full cost of providing preschool services, so the department of education encourages the braiding of different funding streams. Local education agencies may combine ECBG funds with federal program funds (e.g., Title I, Head Start, Even Start) and/or other state program funds (e.g., Family Literacy, other LEA funds) and/or collaborate with other programs to provide preschool services. While there is no specific guidance in this area, there is nothing to prevent providers from accessing full child care subsidies and ECBG funds. The assumption with ECBG-funded children in Head Start is that the funds provide services for children who would otherwise not receive services.

## Sources

- Interview: Karen Woodhouse
- Website: <http://www.ade.state.az.us/earlychildhood/preschool/programs/ecbg.asp>
- Legislation: Arizona Revised Statutes § 15-1251  
<http://www.azleg.state.az.us/ars/15/01251.htm>
- Program Guidelines and Requirements: Early Childhood Block Grant Policy Manual - includes pre-K program plus two other programs funded by this block grant:  
<http://www.ade.state.az.us/earlychildhood/downloads/ECBGpolicymanual.pdf>
- Sub-contracting requirements: A.R.S. § 12-1251 (C)(3)(4)(5)(6)(7).
- Arizona Department of Education Guidelines for Comprehensive Early Education Programs:  
<http://www.ade.state.az.us/earlychildhood/formsmanuals.asp>
- DHS Office of Child Care Licensing: <http://www.hs.state.az.us/als/childcare/index.htm>
- Department of Economic Security, Child Care Administration:  
<http://www.de.state.az.us/childcare/default.asp>

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](http://www.clasp.org/publications/all_together_now.pdf).