



West Virginia

West Virginia Pre-k

West Virginia passed state legislation mandating that all 4-year-olds have access to state preschool by 2012-13, and that 50 percent will be served in community-collaborative settings. In 2003-04, about 9 percent of children were served in collaborative settings.

Eligibility

Income: universal

Age: 4 years old by September 1 of the program year

Priority: universal; counties may prioritize children while the universal program is phased in

Length of Program

Hours/day: locally determined; many operate two or three days per week and state policy requires at least 12 hours per week

Days/year: a minimum of 12 hours/week during the 180-day school year

Eligible Providers

Child care, private preschools, Head Start, county school systems, and community-based programs that meet program standards; family child care providers are also eligible

Number Served¹

7,761 (2004): 8 percent in community-based settings

Total Annual Budget

\$56 million (2003-04): \$34 million in state aid, \$8.268 million in Title I funding, \$3.6 million in federal IDEA funding, and \$10,000 in Head Start funding

Monitoring

The West Virginia State Board of Education and Department of Health and Human Resources jointly oversee programs. Local oversight will be specified in the collaborative agreements of each program. All programs must adhere to the West Virginia Department of Education's Early Learning Standards Framework, which is aligned with the Head Start outcomes framework and kindergarten content standards. In addition, lead teachers must be certified in early education, Preschool Special Education, or birth to age 5.

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?

By 2012, at full implementation of the program, at least half of classrooms must be provided through contractual agreements with community program unless they do not exist, cannot meet the standards, or choose not to participate. By 2004-05, every county was required to have at least one community-based setting.

Each county school board must submit a collaborative plan on behalf of the local collaborative planning team with “details of how the county board will cooperate and collaborate with other early childhood programs.” All community-based providers must be invited to the local collaborative meetings, and have the opportunity to be engaged in the conversations as the pre-k program evolves in the initial years of implementation.

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

At the state level, integration of pre-kindergarten is part of a larger effort to create a more coordinated system. The Secretary of the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR) and the state superintendent of schools established the Partners Implementing an Early Care and Education System Advisory Council, (“PIECES Advisory Council”) to assist with the planning for programs for young children. The PIECES Steering Technical Assistance Team includes four representatives from DHHR, three from the Department of Education, and the Head Start Collaboration Director. All are state employees; they work collaboratively to educate counties on the implementation of the pre-k program and to respond to requests for technical assistance.

The PIECES Advisory Council has a broader mission of establishing a vision for the early care and education system in West Virginia for children from birth through age 5. Its specific charges are to (1) develop a comprehensive plan of early care and education which coordinates early care and education programs including child care, head start, birth-to-three, public early childhood education programs, and other programs serving families with young children throughout the state; (2) establish rules for programs that participate in the provision of universal pre-kindergarten services for 4-year-olds; and (3) develop a process and guidelines for DHHR and the department of education to approve county plans for universal pre-kindergarten programs.

At the local level, a county collaborative planning team makes decisions about the local implementation of the pre-kindergarten program. The team must include, at a minimum, representation from: the county school system preschool program and special needs program, a licensed community child care program not operated by the county school system, the Head Start program, the local department of health and human resources, and a parent/guardian of a preschool child. In addition, every licensed child care program must be extended an invitation to participate on the planning team. The procedural rule also identifies other recommended members for the team—for example, a member of the county Birth to Three Program, etc.—and encourages the county to utilize an existing early childhood collaborative if one already exists in the county. There are no requirements for a minimum number of meetings.

The county school board negotiates each contract individually based on the needs and resources of the grantee. Contracts may include funding for materials, improve quality, and staff development based on the individual resources and needs of the program. For example, Head Start programs will need less money for professional development than child care centers.

Procedures and Supports for Community-based Providers

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

Local school boards are responsible for soliciting and selecting providers, and must invite every licensed child care provider to participate on the local collaborative planning team. The local school board may decide to send a needs assessment survey to all potential providers asking for information on their capacity to meet the pre-k standards. Standards must be met prior to approval, although the law allows for a phase-in of teacher standards. Child care providers who are interested in becoming pre-k providers and meet the minimum standards are given a second checklist of requirements. The county collaborative planning team then decides who to recommend as a provider in their plan.

The state education and health and human services departments jointly approve local plans. Upon approval, school districts negotiate individual contracts with community-based providers.

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

At this point, the state does not have sufficient resources to help providers become eligible, and there have been insufficient numbers of qualified providers to meet the need in the early stages of implementation. There are professional development efforts for the broader early care and education community, but none that specifically target the pre-k program. This will likely change as the program grows.

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

Not necessarily. Some counties seek to provide pay equity on an hourly basis, but it is a local decision.

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. There is discussion about maximizing existing resources, including Head Start, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and child care funds. The program is intended to become universal, but there is no explicit discussion on prioritizing who receives services first.

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

There are no policies intended to help working families access pre-k programs. Transportation is an allowable expense, but not mandated. Programs are required to have two face-to-face meetings with parents, and this is an opportunity to identify problems and potential assistance. Children also receive several screenings in the first six weeks of the program. These requirements are similar to K-12 requirements.

In several counties (Cabell, Mingo, Taylor), the local school board is working with Head Start to provide its comprehensive services (i.e., social services) to all pre-k students and families in public school settings, regardless of income eligibility. There are plans in the future to extend this to the pre-k programs in child care centers.

Funding

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

The per-child payment is approximately \$3,500. This assumes 24 hours of the program per week, and is different from the full-day k-12 rate. Schools or programs that offer full-day programs must supplement the cost.

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

The pre-k supplement does not alter the base source of funding for child care or Head Start programs. Pre-k allocations are negotiated individually, and each county uses different procedures for determining sub-contract amounts. In Cabell County, for example, school aid funds supplement the hourly cost of care in community-based settings based on the teacher credentials. The supplement is the difference between the teacher's hourly salary at the community-based setting, and the hourly salary of an equivalently qualified teacher in the local public school. In general, parents who pay for child care will see no change in the cost of care due to the pre-k supplement. Pre-k is provided as an enhancement to existing services.

Sources

- Interview: 03/17/2005, Gerry Sawry and 03/22/2005, Cathy Jones
- PIECES website: <http://www.wvdhhr.org/oss/pieces/>
- Program Guidelines and Requirements: (Procedural Rule) West Virginia's Universal Access to Early Education System (2525) http://wvde.state.wv.us/policies/p2525_ne.html

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.