



Oklahoma

Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program

The Oklahoma Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program is open to all 4-year-old children in participating school districts (510 of 541 districts opted to participate in 2003-04). Participating public school districts receive state funding according to a complex weighting scheme, with more per-child funding for disabled, bilingual, and poor children. School districts have the option of contracting with community-based providers, which often involves sending a public school teacher into the child care facility or faith-based facility.

Eligibility

Income: none

Age: children who are age 4 or 5 on September 1 and have not attended public kindergarten

Priority: none

Length of Program

Hours/day: two and a half hours per day, five days per week for half-day programs; six hours per day, five days per week for full-day programs

Days/year: academic year

Eligible Providers

School districts and private or public providers of early childhood education programs in collaboration with the school district

Number Served¹

30,180 (2003-04), which reflects nearly 79 percent of the state's 4-year-olds

Total Annual Budget

\$72,703,361 (2003-04) in state aid through the school funding formula

Monitoring

The Oklahoma Department of Education is responsible for monitoring school districts that participate in the Early Childhood Pre-Kindergarten program in the same manner that it monitors k-12 programs. Regional accreditation officers go to every school district to verify teacher certification and compliance with other standards at all grade levels. Principals are responsible for evaluating their own teachers using a statewide evaluation system. Pre-k teachers are required to have a Bachelor's degree and certification in early childhood education and receive state salary and benefits. There are also standards stipulating class size, ratios, and curriculum.

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 statute states that “a school district may contract with a private or public provider of early childhood education programs, or contract for classroom space with a licensed public or private child care provider based upon selection criteria established by the district.” Individual school districts control the funding and make decisions regarding subcontracting with community-based providers. While many programs are only in the schools, rural districts often collaborate with Head Start. Larger communities with a high number of working families have also moved toward collaboration with community-based programs. Other sites include child care, assisted-living centers, faith-based centers and tribal nation early childhood programs.

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

There is no requirement to integrate community-based programs at the state or local level. In 1980, the original standards for the program were written with the input of the child care, Head Start and pre-kindergarten communities, and representatives of these programs remain involved. The Oklahoma State Department of Education encourages collaboration.

Procedures and Supports for Community-based Providers

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

Each district determines its own policies for notifying and selecting providers. There are no state policies governing this process.

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

Some funds are available to help with start-up costs.

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

Yes. Teachers employed by a public school district in collaboration with a private or public provider in an early childhood education program shall receive in salary and fringe benefits the amount specified in the state statute.

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. State law requires parent/teacher conferences to accommodate working families schedules. State law also allows for extended day programs and after school programs to accommodate working families.

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

Pre-k children receive the same supports and services that older children in the public schools receive. This includes transportation, although school districts are not mandated to provide it. A school district may provide transportation for any child who is participating in any pre-kindergarten or early childhood program operated by the school district, or any child who is participating in any Head Start program offered within the school district.

School staff—counselors, school psychologists, child nutrition specialists, and school nurses—are responsible for offering services to children, making referrals, and providing some support services.

Funding

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

Average per-pupil spending in Oklahoma for Fiscal Year 2004 was \$6,577. This includes federal, state, and local funding sources and is based on a full-day program.

How does the state pre-k funding affect other potential sources of funds for a provider? A child can receive a full-day child care subsidy if he/she receives four or more hours of child care per day. If the pre-k program is part-day (two and a half hours per day), and the child is in care four or more additional hours, the providers receives a full child care subsidy. If the pre-k program is full-day (six hours), then the subsidy is pro-rated for the remaining hours of the day.

A part-day Head Start program can collaborate with a part-day pre-k program to extend the day. Funding must go through the local school district.

Sources

- Interview: Ramona Paul and Melissa Basse, 07/08/2004
- Program Guidelines and Requirements: <http://sde.state.ok.us/pro/4yrregs.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.