



State Preschool in a Mixed Delivery System

Lessons From Five States

Karin Garver, G. G. Weisenfeld, Lori Connors-Tadros, Katherine Hodges, Hanna Melnick, and Sara Plasencia

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Executive Summary

Most states in the United States operate their public preschool programs in a mixed delivery system that serves children in local education agencies (LEAs) as well as non-LEA settings, such as Head Start agencies, child care centers, private schools, and family child care homes. A mixed delivery system has many benefits, including adding valuable capacity—in terms of both workforce and facilities—to serve children; providing families with choice in the environment they prefer for their children; and supporting small businesses. There are several challenges to operating a mixed delivery system, however, such as coordinating and supporting the participation of preschool providers across settings, from large LEAs to small private providers.

To inform state preschool administrators and policymakers as they refine their mixed delivery systems, this report describes the mixed delivery systems of five states that have taken different approaches to supporting providers across settings. All five states serve at least one third of their 4-year-old population and meet at least 7 of the National Institute for Early Education Research's 10 quality standards benchmarks, indicating that they have many policies in place to support quality preschool.

- **Alabama's First Class Pre-K (FCPK) program** has a strong, centralized system of quality monitoring and support. FCPK reaches 34% of 4-year-olds in a full-day program, with no income eligibility requirements. State funding for FCPK is provided directly to LEA and non-LEA providers.
- **Michigan's Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP)** serves about one third of its 4-year-old population and is designed to serve primarily families with low income. Funding flows from the state to 56 intermediate school districts (ISDs) that are responsible for distributing funding and providing professional development to LEA and non-LEA providers.
- **New Jersey's Preschool Expansion Program**, which builds on New Jersey's Abbott Preschool Program, serves 29% of 4-year-olds and 16% of 3-year-olds in the state. New Jersey has high rates of non-LEA participation in public preschool, with 41% of state preschool students enrolled in non-LEA settings. Preschool funding is awarded to LEAs, which are responsible for subcontracting with and providing support to non-LEAs.
- **New York state's preschool program** has two complementary funding streams: the Statewide Universal Full-Day Prekindergarten (SUFDPK) grant and Universal Prekindergarten (UPK). Together, these programs serve 46% of 4-year-olds in the state. LEAs contract directly with the state, then subcontract with participating non-LEA providers. A significant portion of state-funded slots (44%) are in New York City's Pre-K for All program.

- **West Virginia’s Universal Pre-K program** (WV Pre-K) is a universal program that serves 56% of 4-year-olds in the state. State funding flows to county boards of education. At least 50% of WV Pre-K classrooms must be “collaborative,” meaning that LEAs offer services in collaboration with non-LEAs. Eighty-two percent of classrooms are collaborative.

Key Considerations for a Mixed Delivery Preschool System

States face a variety of decisions when designing or expanding preschool programs in a mixed delivery system. Decisions about who oversees the mixed delivery system and how quality is supported have implications for the extent to which families have access to high-quality providers across settings. The five case study states have similar quality standards and offer similar access to professional development across provider settings. However, they differ in how they have approached governance and oversight of LEAs and non-LEAs, from who supports non-LEA providers to how enrollment is coordinated. They have also taken different paths when it comes to pay parity, instructional coaching, and quality monitoring.

Governance and administration

States must determine how much oversight will rest at the state level and how much will rest at a regional or local level, addressing the following questions.

- **Who is responsible for contracting with preschool providers?** State contracting structures affect how funding flows to providers and who monitors their finances, as well as how providers receive support to improve quality. Alabama’s FCPK has the highest level of state involvement; the state early education department allows both LEAs and non-LEAs to apply directly for state contracts through a statewide grant application process. In New Jersey and New York, by contrast, LEAs receive state funding and subcontract with non-LEAs. Michigan and West Virginia grant funding only to intermediary agencies, which then subcontract with LEAs and non-LEAs.
- **Should legislation require the inclusion of both LEA and non-LEA providers in the state preschool system?** States can signal the importance of non-LEA participation in their public preschool system by requiring that a certain portion of children be served in these settings. West Virginia requires at least 50% of state preschool classrooms be provided through contractual agreements with community partners, including but not limited to Head Start and child care providers. Michigan requires at least 30%, and New York requires at least 10%. Both of these states exceed their legislative requirements, serving 31% and 56% of children in non-LEA settings, respectively. New Jersey does not set a quota for non-LEA participation, but some districts are required to contract with all willing and able private preschool providers in the community.

- **How should states support non-LEA participation?** The case study states have implemented different strategies to identify and support new providers to offer state preschool, particularly non-LEAs, which might have more barriers to participation than LEAs. In Michigan, ISDs provide technical assistance to non-LEA providers to help them meet the quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) requirements necessary to offer state preschool. New Jersey offers grants to support facilities that meet state preschool standards. In Alabama, the state develops an outreach strategy to encourage program providers in underserved areas to apply for state preschool funding.
- **How will families access public preschool in a way that is equitable?** A state’s system for recruitment, outreach, and enrollment of children—often called “coordinated enrollment”—has implications for families’ ability to find the setting that meets their needs. West Virginia requires that each county develop a unified enrollment system that ensures all eligible children are offered a placement.
- **How are provider funding levels determined?** Some states develop per-child state preschool funding levels that are customized to individual program needs, since program costs vary by provider type and size. In New Jersey, non-LEAs receive higher per-child rates than LEAs, since LEAs often (but not always) have larger economies of scale than do non-LEA providers, and Head Start providers receive a supplement to federal funding. Alabama is one of a few states that provides funding by classroom; the state tailors funding levels to specific program needs.

Program quality

There are several key decisions states must make when it comes to program quality, including setting quality standards, supporting continuous improvement, and monitoring quality.

- **What standards govern quality across the mixed delivery system?** The states in this study have consistent quality standards for LEAs and non-LEAs, which could support access to a high-quality preschool experience regardless of setting. For example, all states studied require providers in both LEAs and non-LEAs to provide professional development aligned to standards and child assessments, use an evidence-based curriculum, have a class size of 20 or less, and maintain a teacher-to-child ratio of at least 1:10.
- **How do teacher qualification requirements vary by setting?** Across LEA and non-LEA settings, all five case study states require equivalent qualifications for assistant teachers and require a bachelor’s degree with early childhood education (ECE) specialization for all lead teachers. In Alabama only lead teachers in LEA settings are required to hold a teaching credential. Similarly, in West Virginia teachers in non-LEA settings may be hired with a Community Program Permanent Authorization in lieu of a teaching credential if the provider is unable to find a fully certified teacher.

- **How does teacher compensation vary by setting?** Nationally, preschool teachers tend to earn less than K–12 teachers, and preschool teachers in non-LEAs earn less than those in LEAs, making it challenging for providers to recruit and retain qualified staff. Alabama and New Jersey address this issue by requiring that state-funded preschool teachers in non-LEA settings receive salaries commensurate with their peers in LEA settings, and provide funding to meet this requirement. State preschool teachers in New York City have achieved salary parity with K–12 teachers through unionizing.
- **How do teaching staff receive coaching and professional development?** The case study states have similar requirements for teaching staff across LEA and non-LEA settings. In Alabama, coaches observe classrooms and give teachers feedback about once a month. New Jersey requires LEAs to hire at least one coach for every 20 classrooms, including in subcontracting non-LEAs. In Michigan, professional development and coaching are coordinated by the ISD, which provides coaching in each classroom at least monthly.
- **Who is responsible for program quality oversight?** To cultivate program quality in a mixed delivery system, states need to determine how providers will be held accountable for program quality. In New Jersey and New York, LEAs are primarily responsible for overseeing and supporting quality, including in subcontracting non-LEAs. Michigan requires all state-funded preschool providers to participate in a QRIS, which includes a twice-annual observation by an ISD-employed coach. West Virginia county collaboratives hold a contract with each participating LEA and non-LEA, detailing a system of oversight and continuous quality improvement, including annual classroom observations.

Recommendations

The states studied illustrate that, for some policy decisions related to mixed delivery preschool systems, there may be more than one correct path. However, there are six actions states should consider taking to support a strong mixed delivery system with consistent quality across settings.

1. **Establish strong program standards across settings so that all children receive high-quality preschool experiences.** The states studied in this report have high quality standards that are aligned across LEAs and non-LEAs to ensure that families have access to quality care in a variety of settings.
2. **Address barriers that might prevent qualified non-LEAs from participating in the state preschool program.** Non-LEAs often lack information about how to become a public preschool provider and have smaller administrative teams than LEAs to help them set up new contracts. One step some of the states in this study have taken to support non-LEA participation is to require a specific entity to identify potential providers and offer support in becoming part of the state preschool program.

3. **Ensure that both LEA and non-LEA providers receive ongoing support to offer and sustain high-quality learning environments, including coaching and professional development that is embedded in a continuous quality improvement system.** These professional development opportunities may be offered at the state, regional, or local level and should be available to all non-LEA providers. In Alabama, the state deploys coaches regionally to provide differentiated supports based on teachers' needs and annual assessments of quality. New Jersey requires all LEAs to provide coaching and professional development to the contracting non-LEA preschool providers in their district.
4. **Ensure program funding levels allow providers in all settings to meet high quality standards and retain qualified staff with compensation commensurate to their education and experience.** The cost of meeting high quality standards can vary across setting. Funding levels impact the amount providers can pay teachers and, in turn, their ability to retain qualified staff. In most states, non-LEA teachers are paid significantly less than LEA-based teachers. New Jersey has addressed cost disparities by offering non-LEAs a higher per-child rate than LEAs, and offering Head Start providers a supplement to their federal funds to support pay parity for teachers across settings and grade levels.
5. **Support coordinated enrollment across the mixed delivery system to ensure family choice and provider stability.** States can play a role in ensuring that preschool options are clearly communicated to families and enrollment processes are organized in a way that is efficient and equitable. Alabama's statewide online enrollment system simplifies preschool applications for families. West Virginia requires that each county coordinate its enrollment at the county level to ensure all eligible children are served. New York City has a single application and enrollment process for all universal preschool providers.
6. **Collect data and conduct research to understand families' access to high-quality preschool in different settings.** Enrollment data disaggregated by program setting and child demographics can shed light on the extent to which children with different abilities and from different racial and ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds are enrolling in different settings. More research is needed to better understand how families choose preschool programs and the extent to which enrollment disparities reflect family preference or other barriers that should be remedied, such as availability of full-day care.

Introduction

Public preschool has lately achieved unprecedented public and political attention. Several states and localities have made major investments, including a \$2.7 billion investment in universal preschool in California.¹ Congress's original proposal for the Build Back Better Act included language to substantially expand federal funding for early learning using a mixed delivery system. The legislation, while ultimately not successful, would have specifically earmarked funding to provide public preschool in a variety of settings to offer family choice and support current early childhood providers.²

Mixed delivery systems, in which public preschool and child care are offered in a variety of settings, are common. During the 2020–21 school year, 89% of state-funded preschool programs utilized a mixed delivery system, and at least eight states served more than half of their state-funded preschool children in preschools not operated by LEAs. For ease of exposition, we refer to these providers as “non-LEAs” throughout the report. Non-LEA settings may include Head Start agencies, private agencies, faith-based centers, family child care homes, military child care, college and university lab schools, child care centers, private schools, charter schools, and city recreation centers.

A mixed delivery system for state preschool has many advantages. It can add valuable capacity in terms of both the workforce and the space needed to serve children. Non-LEA preschool providers have directors, teachers, and assistants with experience and knowledge in working with young children and developmentally appropriate practice; these staff are more likely than teachers in prekindergarten to grade 12 (P–12) LEA settings to match the racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds of the children and families they serve.³ Finding sufficient classroom space is also often a concern when expanding access to preschool, and this challenge can be mitigated by utilizing classrooms that are already established in the community.⁴

A mixed delivery system can increase parent choice to select the type of environment they prefer for their children. Non-LEA programs established in the community often offer full-day, full-year care, which is beneficial for working families. They frequently provide wraparound care, often in the same classroom with the same teacher, providing a continuous day and minimizing unnecessary transitions.⁵ Additionally, many non-LEA programs serve infants and toddlers. Situating state-funded preschool programs in these settings allows children to transition from infancy through preschool in the same program while also allowing families with multiple young children to receive the services they need in one location.⁶

Finally, mixed delivery systems can benefit communities. Non-LEA programs, especially child care centers, are often small businesses and not-for-profit organizations.⁷ Using state preschool funding to support non-LEA providers can offer financial stability to these small businesses, which often rely solely on private tuition and child care subsidies that are unstable funding sources and are insufficient for providing high-quality care.⁸ State preschool teachers, while still earning low wages, tend to earn more than child care workers and private preschool teachers.⁹

Operating a mixed delivery system can be challenging for states, however, especially when programs braid funding from multiple sources, including federally funded Head Start, child care voucher funds, and private tuition. One of the biggest challenges is coordinating preschool providers that operate in very different contexts and settings and need different kinds of supports. Another

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challenge is funding programs in a way that maximizes early childhood funding from disparate sources without violating fiscal requirements. States may also face challenges in maintaining consistent program quality, which is especially difficult when combining state preschool, Head Start, and state and federally funded child care, which have different goals and policies governing quality. Research has found, for example, that in several large-scale preschool initiatives there are systemic differences between LEA and non-LEA preschool providers, and these differences were smallest in initiatives in which policies were similar across settings.¹⁰

The purpose of this report is to inform state preschool administrators and state policymakers as they work to meet the growing demand for public preschool. We sought to answer the following questions: What is the landscape of mixed delivery in select states' preschool programs? How are state preschool contracts awarded, and what supports are provided to non-LEAs to participate? What are quality requirements, and who monitors and is ultimately responsible for program quality?

To answer these questions, we identified five states with varying approaches to mixed delivery state-funded preschool and mapped out the major decisions these states made as they developed their systems. We employed a mixed methods research design, incorporating data from the National Institute for Early Education Research's annual *State of Preschool Yearbook*; interviews with state and local leaders that were conducted in February and March 2022; and a review of relevant state documentation, including state legislation, implementation manuals, guidance documents, and sample contracts. We compiled the information into a case study for each state to summarize their policies (available at the end of this report). We then analyzed the cases to identify the significant program design decisions states encounter when developing a mixed delivery public preschool program. Following this introduction, we provide a short overview of the five state programs. We then introduce each program design decision and use the five states to illustrate different policy choices states have made.

State Examples of Mixed Delivery Preschool

We selected five states to study—Alabama, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, and West Virginia—that represent different approaches to mixed delivery preschool. All five states serve at least one third of their 4-year-old population (see Table 1) and meet at least seven of the National Institute for Early Education Research’s (NIEER) 10 quality standards benchmarks, indicating that they have many policies in place to support quality across mixed delivery settings. However, there are significant variations across the state programs in terms of financing and supports for program quality, demonstrating that mixed delivery can be supported in a variety of ways. This section includes a brief description of each state’s program. Additional detail is provided in the following analysis and in the case studies available at the end of this report.

Table 1
State Preschool Enrollment by Setting, Totals, and Percent of Total, 2020–21

State	Total Enrollment	% of 4-Year-Olds Served	LEA	Private	Head Start	Other Public ^b
Alabama	18,906	34%	82%	10%	6%	2%
Michigan	26,775	31%	59%	11%	17%	13%
New Jersey	46,895	29%	59%	41%		-
New York	115,597	46%	44%	47%	6%	3%
West Virginia ^a	11,981	56%	100%			-

^a 82% of WV Pre-K classrooms are “collaborative,” meaning that they are operated by LEAs in collaboration with community partners, including but not limited to Head Start and child care providers.

^b Includes colleges, universities, and military child care.

Note: New Jersey operates three public preschool initiatives—the Preschool Expansion Program, Early Childhood Program Aid, and the Early Launch to Learning Initiative—and enrollment from all three initiatives is included in the table. Similarly, New York operates two public preschool initiatives—the Statewide Universal Full-Day Prekindergarten grant and Universal Prekindergarten—and enrollment from both initiatives is included in the table.

Source: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G., Gardiner, B. A., & Jost, T. M. (2022). *The state of preschool 2021: State preschool yearbook*. National Institute for Early Education Research.

Alabama First Class Pre-K

Alabama’s First Class Pre-K (FCPK) program serves almost 19,000 children across every county in the state. The state has high quality standards and a strong, centralized system of quality monitoring and support. The FCPK program meets all 10 of NIEER’s quality standards benchmarks in both local education agency (LEA) and non-LEA settings, and research demonstrates immediate and long-term benefits for children, supporting its reputation as a high-quality program.¹¹

FCPK is universal; there are no restrictions on which 4-year-old children can participate in the program. However, due to funding limitations, the program only reaches 34% of 4-year-olds in full-day classes, although the state is committed to continued expansion. Public, random drawings are conducted to select children for available slots.

FCPK funds providers on a per-classroom basis, in contrast to most other state preschool programs, which fund on a per-child basis. Per-classroom funding levels are determined based on the percentage of children in the classroom who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, the steps the provider has taken to improve classroom quality, and start-up costs for new FCPK classrooms. State funding for FCPK is provided directly to LEA and non-LEA providers.

Michigan Great Start Readiness Program

Michigan's Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) serves almost 28,000 children and is designed to serve primarily low-income families. GSRP meets all 10 of NIEER's quality standards benchmarks in both LEA and non-LEA settings and is 1 of just 14 states to require state preschool providers to participate in the state's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS).¹²

GSRP serves about one third of the state's 4-year-old population. Michigan is planning a large expansion to reach all income-eligible children and is shifting to more full-day slots.¹³ Currently, all LEAs and non-LEAs are required to prioritize children from families at or below 250% of the federal poverty level. Funding is provided via a legislatively mandated per-child rate. GSRP per-child rates are different for half- and full-day programs, but both rates are the same for LEA and non-LEA providers. Funding for GSRP flows from the state to 56 intermediate school districts (ISDs) that are responsible for distributing funding to LEAs and non-LEAs.

New Jersey Preschool Expansion Program

New Jersey is known for having high rates of non-LEA participation in public preschool due to a 1998 state Supreme Court mandate, the *Abbott v. Burke* decision, requiring mixed delivery preschool in 31 of the state's low-income, urban LEAs. The state's Abbott Preschool Program, which has high quality standards across settings and strong evidence of child outcomes,¹⁴ is now part of the state's Preschool Expansion Program, which shares the Abbott model for program quality.¹⁵

The Preschool Expansion Program meets most of NIEER's 10 quality standards benchmarks across LEA and non-LEA settings. It does not meet the benchmarks for assistant teacher degree requirements and part of the staff professional development criteria. New Jersey serves over one third of 4-year-olds and one fifth of the state's 3-year-olds in state-funded preschool. Approximately 41% of children participating in the Preschool Expansion Program are served in non-LEA settings. LEAs are responsible for contracting with non-LEAs. In situations in which LEA space is insufficient, the *Abbott* mandate requires LEAs to subcontract with all willing non-LEAs to serve preschool children. The state is in the process of expanding preschool to create more

universal access; however, newly expanding LEAs are not mandated to serve children in non-LEA settings, often limiting access within these communities. New Jersey LEAs receive per-child funding directly from the state; LEAs then subcontract with participating non-LEA providers.

New York Pre-K

New York state's preschool program has two different funding streams: the Statewide Universal Full-Day Prekindergarten (SUFDPK) grant and Universal Prekindergarten (UPK). Most standards are the same across the two programs. New York City's Pre-K for All program, which receives funding from both state programs, accounts for 44% of total state-funded slots.¹⁶ New York state provides per-child funding to LEAs, which pay participating non-LEA providers through subcontracts. New York is 1 of 6 states in which family child care providers participate in the public preschool program; however, just 0.24% of public preschoolers in New York are served in family child care settings.¹⁷

New York's preschool program meets 7 of NIEER's 10 quality standards benchmarks across LEA and non-LEA settings. It does not meet the benchmarks for assistant teacher degree requirements, part of the staff professional development criteria, and required participation in a system of continuous quality improvement. Participation in New York state's QRIS is voluntary. In New York City, the city education agency uses a quality framework separate from the QRIS to support a shared vision for quality and conducts regular site visits to assess quality.

Including Family Child Care in State Preschool Systems

Of the 62 state-funded preschool programs offered in 2019–20 in the United States, 29 programs in 24 states allowed family child care homes (FCCs) to participate in their state-funded preschool programs. Even within states where FCCs are eligible to participate in state preschool, participation is low. In Alabama, no FCCs receive state preschool funding. In New York, only 294 children, 0.24% of New York's public preschoolers, were served in FCCs. Similar to other non-LEAs in the state, FCCs enter into a contract with LEAs, and the amount of the contract is determined by the LEA. FCCs are not eligible to participate in Michigan, New Jersey, and West Virginia.

Serving children in FCCs may be more expensive than in LEAs and other non-LEAs because FCCs serve a much smaller number of children per location than center-based providers. This makes contracting more challenging and increases costs per child for facilities and staffing. It also puts greater demand on coaching and monitoring resources.

One of the promising practices that may support states in expanding the number of preschool children enrolled in FCCs is the creation of FCC networks. FCC networks typically serve as an intermediary entity between the state and FCC educators within a specified geographic area. Networks may offer professional

development opportunities such as coaching and technical assistance support. This structure helps with reducing some of the overhead costs, including monitoring, as well as making specialists available who are knowledgeable about FCC settings. The Family Child Care Association of San Francisco is one such network that, in addition to the roles noted above, represents FCC providers and their perspective on the board of local organizations such as Children’s Council San Francisco and Early Care Educators of San Francisco.

Sources: Weisenfeld, G. G., & Frede, E. (2021). *Including family child care in state and city-funded pre-k systems: Opportunities and challenges*. National Institute for Early Education Research; Bromer, J., & Porter, T. (2019). *Mapping the family child care network landscape: Findings from the National Study of Family Child Care Networks*. Herr Research Center, Erikson Institute; Bromer, J., & Weaver, C. (2016). Supporting family child care and quality improvement: Findings from an exploratory survey of Illinois child care resource and referral agency staff. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, 10(4). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40723-016-0020-8>

New York state serves half of the state’s 4-year-old population and 5% of the state’s 3-year-olds in both part- and full-day programs. With state and local funding, New York City serves about 70% of 4-year-olds. Over 50% of state-funded preschool slots in New York state and 59% of New York City’s state-funded preschool slots are in non-LEA settings.¹⁸

West Virginia Universal Pre-K

West Virginia’s Universal Pre-K program (WV Pre-K) has one of the highest rates of non-LEA collaboration in its state preschool program (82%), which is due in part to a highly collaborative preschool decision-making model, a mandate that at least 50% of classrooms are collaborative, and significant braiding of state and federal funds to support preschool enrollment. State funding flows to county boards of education, which then distribute funding to LEAs and non-LEAs.

WV Pre-K meets 9 of NIEER’s 10 quality standards benchmarks across LEA and non-LEA settings. It does not meet one criterion within the staff professional development benchmark. To support quality, each county has a collaborative team comprising local school districts and community providers that establishes a system for continuous quality improvement, and the state education department conducts a review of each county at least once every 3 years.

WV Pre-K is available in all 55 of the state’s counties, operating for a minimum of 25 hours per week. In 2019–20, the state served almost 70% of 4-year-olds and 5% of 3-year-olds. The percentage of 4-year-olds was impacted severely by the COVID-19 pandemic and dropped to 56% in 2020–21. With 82% of classrooms in collaborative settings, WV Pre-K far exceeds the legislative minimum of 50%.

Key Considerations for a Mixed Delivery Preschool System

States face a variety of decisions when designing or expanding preschool programs within the context of mixed delivery. They need to decide what level of direct involvement state, regional, or local agencies will have in program oversight, support for program quality, and recruitment of mixed delivery providers. States must decide how funding levels are determined for individual providers in different settings, what kind of fiscal monitoring takes place, and whether program standards (e.g., teaching staff qualification) will vary by setting. There also are decision points related to the coordination of enrollment across public preschool settings to meet the needs of children and families. The sections that follow explore these decisions and provide examples of how the case study states approached them.

Governance and Administration

Decisions about who oversees the mixed delivery system and how it is supported have implications for the extent to which non-LEAs participate in the program and the infrastructure needed to support quality. States must determine how much oversight will rest at the state level, how much will rest at a regional or local level, and the trade-offs of each approach. States must also determine the extent to which mixed delivery will be encouraged or required. Decisions about governance are often highly political and depend on a state's context, such as its size, local governance structures, and more. The states in this study represent several different governance structures that support high-quality programs.

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Who is responsible for contracting with non-LEAs?

State governance structures affect how funding flows to providers and how providers receive support to improve quality. A governance structure that relies heavily on direct state oversight enables the state to directly manage how all types of providers are supported to participate in public preschool and provide a high-quality program. Conversely, a governance structure that relies heavily on regional or local coordination allows for local control. The case study states represent three different approaches to governance within a mixed delivery system. (See Table 2.)

Table 2
Mixed Delivery Through Direct Contracting or Subcontracting, by State

State	Agencies Eligible for Direct Funding	Agencies Eligible for Subcontracting
Alabama	LEAs, Head Start, private agencies, faith-based centers, family child care homes, military child care, colleges and universities, child care, private schools	None
Michigan	Intermediate school districts	LEAs, Head Start, private agencies, faith-based centers (without religious content), for-profit public or private agencies, colleges and universities
New Jersey	LEAs (including charter schools)	LEAs, Head Start, private agencies, faith-based centers (without religious content)
New York	LEAs, private agencies (for SUFDPK only), faith-based centers (for SUFDPK only), other (libraries, museums)	LEAs, Head Start, private agencies, faith-based centers, family child care homes, other
West Virginia	County boards of education (public schools)	LEAs, Head Start, private agencies, faith-based centers

Note: New Jersey charter schools technically subcontract with LEAs but act as independent agencies.

Source: Learning Policy Institute. (2023).

Alabama directly contracts with all preschool providers and allows both LEAs and non-LEAs to apply through a statewide grant application process. Contractors receive funding directly from the state to provide First Class Pre-K (FCPK). This approach allows the state to identify and address concerns related to provider quality as well as to manage the geographic distribution of FCPK seats, but it requires additional administrative oversight at the state level.

In New Jersey, only LEAs are allowed to contract with and receive funding directly from the state. LEAs, in turn, are encouraged to subcontract with non-LEAs and charter schools. (See “New Jersey: Charter Schools as Public Preschool Providers.”) Similarly, in New York, the state typically contracts with LEAs, which then subcontract with non-LEAs. However, LEAs are not always interested in operating public preschool classrooms, and offering preschool is voluntary. In New York, LEAs’ lack of interest to move from half-day to full-day preschool programming led the state to allow direct contracting for the Statewide Universal Full-Day Prekindergarten (SUFDPK) program

with non-LEAs in specified areas. Interviewees in New Jersey also indicated that sometimes LEAs are reluctant to collaborate with non-LEA providers. This has been the case in New Jersey LEAs that operate outside the Supreme Court mandate for mixed delivery, which prefer to offer preschool primarily in their LEA. Where subcontracting is used as the vehicle to support mixed delivery, states should consider what steps are needed to foster the relationships needed to engage in these partnerships.

West Virginia and Michigan grant funding only to intermediary agencies: county boards of education in West Virginia and intermediate school districts (ISDs) in Michigan. The intermediary agencies subcontract with LEAs and non-LEAs. West Virginia takes a particularly collaborative approach by bringing LEA and non-LEA providers together to map out the most effective way to serve children across setting types given available funding. Michigan's ISDs are not required to coordinate funding across Michigan's Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) settings, but state policy recommends they establish a process to standardize the enrollment of children in settings across the entire ISD. At a minimum, enrollment must be coordinated between Head Start and GSRP settings. (See "Head Start in Mixed Delivery Systems.") Oversight through intermediary agencies may allow for program implementation that is more customized to individual areas of the state while providing opportunities for collaboration among LEA and non-LEA providers.

New Jersey: Charter Schools as Public Preschool Providers

When New Jersey began its Abbott Preschool Program, charter schools were relatively new and none were chartered to serve preschool-age children. In the early 2000s, one charter school in Camden, NJ, expressed interest in operating preschool classrooms. The state did not have a procedure for funding charter schools to serve preschoolers, so the charter school was permitted to serve children in a manner similar to non-LEAs—through a contract with the Camden City School District. Under this arrangement, the LEA provided the charter with funding, coaches, curriculum training, and other professional development, just as it did for other non-LEA providers.

In the mid-2000s, more charter schools in the Abbott districts expressed interest in serving preschoolers but felt some aspects of being a non-LEA provider worked against their goals. As a non-LEA provider, the schools would be required to adopt the LEA's chosen curriculum, and because preschool was not covered under their charter, preschoolers could not be automatically enrolled in the charter school's kindergarten program. This led a group of charter schools to seek to have preschool included in their charters.

As of the 2021–22 school year, there were 12 charter schools with approval and capacity to serve just under 670 preschoolers in the Abbott districts. The charter schools still receive funding through their LEA, as is standard practice in New Jersey for K–12 funding, but in the case of preschool, 100% of state funding is passed along to the charter school (i.e., LEAs are not permitted to retain any funding that is for non-LEAs). Under this arrangement, the charter schools are

responsible for meeting all program standards on their own, and they do not receive coaching, curriculum training, or professional development from the LEA. The charter schools are directly responsible for classroom quality and are subject to the same regulations as other state-funded preschool classrooms.

Other states can learn from some of the challenges New Jersey charter schools have faced in participating in the state preschool program. One issue is the difficulty small charter schools face in meeting state standards with preschool per-child rates that were built for large LEA programs. Small non-LEA providers have issues with economies of scale—for example, having sufficient funding for preschool coaching and professional development—and thus would benefit from the resources LEAs provide to other contractors. Another issue is that it can be difficult for charter schools to provide a preschool program when eligibility is restricted to certain preschool children (e.g., based on family income or LEA of residency) and when state regulations require charter schools to hold lotteries that are open to all children within their catchment area.

Head Start in Mixed Delivery Systems

In this report, we include Head Start in the category of “non-LEA provider,” along with other non-LEA providers, such as private child care. However as federal grantees, Head Start providers are often subject to different regulations, and, for this reason, some states have preschool policies that are unique to Head Start providers. For example, Head Start has specific requirements for child eligibility, staffing, program standards, and data reporting.

In Michigan, the legislature requires that children who are eligible for Head Start receive a referral to a Head Start provider before being referred to a non-Head Start GSRP provider. This way, Head Start grantees are more likely to fill their funded slots, and other GSRP providers have more slots available for children from families who do not meet Head Start income requirements. Parents whose children qualify for both programs can choose either one.

New Jersey has three distinct per-child rates, which are based on whether children are served in LEA, Head Start, or other non-LEA settings. State per-child funding for Head Start settings is lower than for other settings because the state funding is used to supplement federal Head Start funding to raise program quality to meet both Head Start and state PreK standards. In total, Head Start providers are intended to receive as much or more funding than providers in other settings. Collaborations between LEAs and Head Start grantees are viewed by the state education agency as the most cost-effective way for the state to ensure that children from low-income families receive the highest possible program quality.

In West Virginia, county collaboratives develop contracts between Head Start grantees and county boards of education to ensure that Head Start grantees are not forced to follow two sets of requirements. For example, while teachers in LEAs

are included in a statewide evaluation system, Head Start programs are permitted to follow teacher evaluation requirements already embedded in the Head Start Performance Standards. Similarly, since collaborating Head Start grantees are already required to design a system of training and professional development for all staff, the state allows this training to meet WV Pre-K requirements for professional development. The state education agency also aligned the required health and safety screener with Head Start requirements, so that programs receiving both Head Start and WV Pre-K funding only need to use one screener.

Policies in Michigan, New Jersey, and West Virginia provide some examples of how states can leverage partnerships with Head Start grantees to serve more children, provide children with stronger program quality, and align state and federal standards to operate programs more efficiently.

Should legislation require the inclusion of both LEA and non-LEA providers?

States also need to consider how they will ensure participation of non-LEAs in the public preschool system, given that LEAs often have a strategic funding advantage over non-LEAs in applying for preschool funds. To signal the state's commitment to mixed delivery, four out of the five states (all except for Alabama) require the inclusion of non-LEAs in their preschool program, and three of these states have a legislative requirement for the percentage of seats that must be offered in non-LEA settings: West Virginia requires that at least 50% of state preschool classrooms are provided through contractual agreements between LEAs and non-LEAs, while Michigan requires that at least 30% of state preschool seats are in non-LEA settings, and New York requires at least 10% of seats be in non-LEA settings.

If mandated targets are not met, Michigan requires the ISD to submit a waiver that includes measures taken to increase partnerships and explanations for why the non-LEAs chose not to participate in GSRP. A similar process is used in New York. In 2022, approximately 100 school districts in New York reported not being able to meet the collaboration requirement.¹⁹ For about 80% of these districts, it was reported that there were not any "eligible community partners."

New Jersey does not specify a percentage of children that must be served in non-LEA settings, but the 1998 *Abbott v. Burke* state Supreme Court decision required that the 31 urban, low-income LEAs covered by the court decision use all willing and able non-LEAs where capacity was needed to serve all eligible children. Since 2018, the state education department has approved over 200 additional LEAs to expand preschool. However, these LEAs do not fall under the Supreme Court mandate for mixed delivery and have expressed reluctance to collaborate with non-LEAs. Thus, as state-funded preschool enrollment grows in the state, the percentage of children served in non-LEAs is declining.

Alabama does not have a legislated mandate for mixed delivery, but LEAs and non-LEAs are eligible to receive direct state funding to serve children through the FCPK program. In 2020–21, 18% of FCPK slots were in non-LEA settings, which included Head Start agencies, private child care centers, faith-based organizations, and university-operated preschools.

How should states support non-LEA participation?

There are often differences between child care licensing requirements and state-funded preschool standards, and these differences may result in barriers that prevent non-LEA providers from participating in public preschool programs. Examples of these barriers include teaching staff qualifications, facilities standards that differ by funding stream, and varying requirements for training in specific curriculum and assessment tools. The case study states have implemented different strategies to identify and support non-LEAs to be successful contractors or subcontractors. These strategies support non-LEA provider opportunity to participate in the state preschool program.

Michigan and West Virginia provide support regionally to non-LEAs to help them become public preschool providers. Michigan supports ISDs in locating non-LEAs by providing annual information about eligible providers (e.g., contact information, QRIS rating). ISDs then help non-LEA providers meet the QRIS requirements necessary to become a GSRP provider.

Michigan and West Virginia provide support regionally to non-LEAs to help them become public preschool providers.

The state supports ISDs in locating non-LEAs by providing annual information about eligible providers (e.g., contact information, QRIS rating). West Virginia requires county boards of education to invite every licensed child care provider to join the county's full collaborative team, which provides county policymakers with resources and promotes linkages of services for children birth through school age.

In Alabama the state plays a role in encouraging participation of non-LEA providers. FCPK grantees in Alabama are required to submit data reports, which the state uses to develop an outreach strategy to encourage program providers in underserved areas to apply for FCPK funding.

New Jersey's QRIS provides support for non-LEAs to make progress toward meeting the standards required to participate in public preschool. Participation is not required, but once enrolled in the QRIS, providers receive training and professional development for staff, scholarships for teacher training, and funding for classroom materials and supplies. During fiscal year 2023, the state also committed \$150 million in federal funding to support renovations to child care facilities to help non-LEAs meet state facilities standards for public preschool, as well as to improve facilities for infant and toddler care.

Recruiting Preschool Providers in Central Alabama

In Alabama, a collective of 200 nonprofit, government, education, business, and faith community organizations formed the Bold Goals Coalition. One of the coalition's goals is to expand preschool access. The lead project partner for this initiative is the child care resource and referral agency for central Alabama, and other project partners include the state early childhood education agency, Alabama Public Television, the Alabama School Readiness Alliance advocacy group, the United Way of Central Alabama, and the University of Alabama at Birmingham. The group pools resources to help individual child care providers build the necessary capacity to provide FCPK in central Alabama and develop successful FCPK grant applications. To date, the coalition reports leveraging over \$550,000 in service to this goal. Between 2014 and 2018, the coalition tracked an increase in FCPK access from 7.9% of children in central Alabama to 21.4%. For the 2021–22 school year, the state approved 135 new FCPK classrooms, 38 of which were in central Alabama.

Source: Bold Goals Coalition. For more information about the Bold Goals Coalition, see boldgoals.org.

How will families access public preschool in a way that is equitable?

States need to decide how families will access public preschool and how to ensure this process is equitable for families and also for program providers. A state's system for recruitment, outreach, and enrollment of children—often called “coordinated enrollment”—has implications for families' ability to find the setting that meets their needs. Coordinated enrollment can also help ensure the equitable distribution of funding and the efficient use of available space, which are important considerations for providers who may see themselves as in competition with one another and suffer financially from fluctuations in enrollment. For example, in a system without coordinated enrollment, providers each run their own individual waiting lists. A coordinated system can help ensure that families find available slots nearby that are undersubscribed. It can also help direct children who are eligible for means-tested programs to subsidized slots, saving more flexible local funding for children who do not qualify for means-tested programs.

Alabama is the only case study state with a statewide coordinated enrollment system, asking LEAs and non-LEAs to recruit individually, but then including all locations in a statewide application process managed through an online registration platform that is accessed by prospective families. This system simplifies enrollment for families, although it does not guarantee equitable access.

West Virginia mandates a highly coordinated enrollment system within each county. Each County Collaborative Early Childhood Core Team is required by legislation to develop an enrollment process that must be used universally throughout the

county. The system must be made public and specify how applications are collected and how placements are determined to ensure that all eligible children are offered a placement.

Michigan allows ISDs to set enrollment policies, which may or may not be centralized. However, the state requires collaboration between Head Start and GSRP providers to ensure efficient use of spaces for children from low-income families. In New Jersey, LEAs are required to coordinate annual recruitment and outreach efforts to enroll eligible preschoolers across LEA and non-LEA settings, but the LEA determines whether to centralize registration and enrollment across all settings. Similarly, New York City developed a common application that families can use to register and rank their preferences for up to 12 locations, which include LEAs and non-LEAs.

To help understand how children from different racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds are accessing providers in the mixed delivery system, states can disaggregate enrollment data by child demographics and setting. Unfortunately, our research suggests that few states make these data available. Data shared by the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education for this study show that LEAs in Alabama disproportionately serve children who are white, while non-LEAs disproportionately enroll children of color. More research is needed to understand what is leading to these trends and whether they reflect parental preference or barriers to enrollment. Studies conducted by researchers in New York City's Preschool for All program additionally found that preschool classrooms were, on average, more segregated than kindergarten classes in the district, and that these disparities were driven by non-LEAs, which were much more likely to be racially homogeneous than LEA-based classrooms.²⁰ Children who are Black were also much more likely to be in lower-quality-rated classes than children who are white. Researchers suggest that these trends are at least partly driven by the geographic distribution of higher-quality-rated providers.

How are provider funding levels determined?

States must decide the funding levels for public preschool, understanding that they will impact whether LEAs and non-LEAs are able to participate in the program. Some states develop rates customized to individualized program needs, while others provide equal rates to all program providers. Having variable funding levels acknowledges that program costs will vary by provider type and supports each program to meet program standards, regardless of unique circumstances. For example, LEAs often (but not always) have larger economies of scale than small non-LEA preschool providers. Customized funding rates also afford greater opportunity to ensure that small providers have sufficient funding to offer teaching staff compensation that is commensurate with their peers in other settings.

Differentiated funding rates may be achieved in a variety of ways. Some states differentiate funding levels by offering rates that are customized to each provider's unique costs for delivering the program to meet state standards. Other states, like

New Jersey, have state-determined rates but differentiate those rates based on where children are served (i.e., an LEA, Head Start, or child care setting). Still other states, such as New York, may differentiate rates by the quality of services provided, such as a teacher's certification level. Single funding rates may be easier to administer but may also risk underfunding programs, which can be particularly challenging for non-LEAs that have smaller operating budgets and fewer economies of scale than LEAs. Regardless of funding method, programs should receive sufficient funding to meet high quality standards.

New Jersey has three distinct per-child rates, which are based on whether children are served in LEA, Head Start, or other non-LEA settings, with non-LEAs receiving more than LEAs, and Head Start providers receiving a supplement to federal funding. The state's different rates address the issue that costs vary by provider type. Base rates are increased annually for cost of living and then adjusted slightly to account for differences in the cost of living across counties in the state. LEAs are responsible for customizing the per-child rate passed on to each contracting non-LEA based on the unique needs of that program site. By allowing LEAs to customize funding rates for themselves and for individual non-LEAs, the state provides an opportunity for individualized budgets that meet the unique needs of each setting. However, this approach can be administratively challenging when LEAs and their contracted non-LEAs disagree over how the LEA allocates funding to individual sites.

Alabama is one of a few states that provide funding by classroom and tailor amounts to specific program needs, including start-up costs for new classrooms. Classroom-based rates provide greater stability at the individual program level by taking into account costs that do not vary by the number of children served, such as facilities and staff.

New York and Michigan do not have customized preschool funding levels. New York uses a funding formula to determine funding amounts under the Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) program and has two rates for the SUFDPK program, which differ only based on whether children are projected to be served in a classroom with a certified teacher. Michigan also has two rates, which are based on the length of day provided. Single per-child funding may present challenges to both LEA and non-LEA providers if the site-level cost of providing the program varies.

West Virginia requires the braiding of state dollars with other funds. County boards of education are responsible for ensuring that LEA and non-LEA providers have enough state funding to meet all preschool program requirements without causing a deficit or requiring payment from families who are eligible for universal preschool. West Virginia's approach ensures that state funding takes into consideration the unique costs of each program provider, which can support efficient use of local, state, and federal funding sources by braiding Head Start and federal child care funding with state preschool.

How will the state ensure that program funds are spent appropriately?

States must decide how to hold programs accountable for public preschool funding, including what kinds of policies the state will set and monitor, and which policies should be left up to the local jurisdiction, such as LEAs or regional hubs. These decisions have implications for the number of staff needed at each level to adequately oversee the program and manage funding equity between LEA and non-LEA settings. States may choose to establish extensive rules that are monitored closely to ensure that program funding is spent only in specific ways. Alternatively, states may allow local entities to set guidance for fiscal monitoring to ensure that funding is spent to meet local needs.

In the five states studied, fiscal monitoring is the responsibility of the contractor or subcontractor. Alabama contracts directly with LEA and non-LEA grantees, and thus the state holds responsibility for fiscal monitoring. The state has extensive budget guidance for FCPK grantees and employs monitors in every county to oversee local program expenditures.

In states where LEAs receive all state preschool funds—such as New Jersey and New York—LEAs are primarily responsible for fiscal monitoring, with some state oversight. New Jersey has extensive budget guidance but requires LEAs to monitor the expenditures of their contracted non-LEAs on a quarterly basis. This expectation is outlined in a state-developed contract that LEAs and non-LEAs are required to sign each year. LEA expenditures are audited annually by the state, and random audits of the preschool program are conducted to ensure that LEAs are following state guidance in their review of non-LEA expenditures. New York also holds LEAs responsible for monitoring the expenditures of contracted non-LEAs but allows LEAs to determine how this is done. LEAs must develop a contract with non-LEAs that addresses their role in oversight of the preschool program, including what fiscal monitoring will occur.

In states where intermediary agencies are responsible for subcontracting, these agencies are also fiscal monitors. Each of West Virginia's 55 county boards of education is required to establish a County Collaborative Early Childhood Core Team that is responsible for joint decision-making, monitoring and quality assurance, fiscal accountability, and reporting. Michigan's model requires ISDs to set and implement preschool fiscal policies specific to their designated catchment area.

Program Quality

States should consider the consistency of quality standards for providers across settings. For the most part, the states in this study have consistent quality standards across settings, which can support access to a high-quality preschool experience regardless of setting. When considering state standards for high-quality preschool programs, states should plan to provide the support and compensation necessary to ensure that non-LEAs have an equitable opportunity to participate in public preschool.

What standards govern quality across the mixed delivery system?

All five case study states have high quality standards in their state preschool program that are consistent across settings.²¹ For example, all states have early learning and development standards that address key domains of child development and provide professional development opportunities to support the use of the standards and aligned child assessments; these standards

All five case study states have high quality standards in their state preschool program that are consistent across settings.

and opportunities are consistent across settings. They also give providers criteria for selecting an evidence-based curriculum that is aligned to the state's standards. All states also meet or exceed the National Institute for Early Education Research's (NIEER) recommended benchmark of a class size of no more than 20 and a teacher-child ratio of at least 1:10 in all settings, both LEAs and non-LEAs. (See Table 3.)

Table 3
Minimum Requirements for Class Size and Teacher–Child Ratio

State	Class Size	Teacher–Child Ratio
Alabama	4-year-olds: 20	4-year-olds: 1:10
Michigan	4-year-olds: 18	4-year-olds: 1:8
New Jersey	3- and 4-year-olds: 15	3- and 4-year-olds: 2:15
New York	3- and 4-year-olds: 20	3- and 4-year-olds: 1:9
West Virginia	3- and 4-year-olds: 20	3- and 4-year-olds: 1:10

Note: In each state, these minimum requirements apply in both LEA and non-LEA settings.

Source: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G., Gardiner, B. A., & Jost, T. M. (2022). *The state of preschool 2021: State preschool yearbook*. National Institute for Early Education Research.

How do teacher qualification requirements vary by setting?

Teaching staff with specialized knowledge and training in early childhood education (ECE) are generally associated with higher-quality programs, suggesting the importance of consistent policies for preschool teaching staff, regardless of setting. Across LEA and non-LEA settings, all five case study states require equivalent qualifications for assistant teachers and require a bachelor's degree with ECE specialization for lead teachers. In Alabama and West Virginia there are differences in the specific type of credentials, licenses, or endorsements required by setting for lead teachers. (See Table 4).

Table 4
Required Qualifications for Lead Teachers in LEA and Non-LEA Settings

State Program	Minimum Degree and Degree Specialization <i>(LEA and Non-LEA Settings)</i>	Lead Teacher Credentials, Licenses, or Endorsements	
		LEA Settings	Non-LEA Settings
Alabama’s First Class Pre-K Program	Bachelor’s degree in ECE, Child Development, or Preschool Special Education	Preschool, Kindergarten, Birth–Age 3	None
Michigan’s Great Start Readiness Program	Bachelor’s degree in ECE, Child Development, Elementary Education, or Preschool Special Education	Elementary Education w/ ECE endorsement, Other	
New Jersey’s Preschool Expansion Program	Bachelor’s degree in ECE	Preschool–3rd Grade, Special Education	
New York’s State Preschool Program	Bachelor’s degree in ECE, Child Development, Elementary Education, Preschool Special Education, or Special Education	Birth–2nd Grade, Nursery–6th Grade	
West Virginia’s Universal Pre-K Program	Bachelor’s degree in ECE, Child Development, or Preschool Special Education	Preschool, Nursery, Preschool–Kindergarten, Preschool–4th Grade, Elementary Education w/ ECE endorsement, PreK Special Education	Same as LEAs, with the addition of the Community Program Permanent Authorization

Source: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G., Gardiner, B. A., & Jost, T. M. (2022). *The state of preschool 2021: State preschool yearbook*. National Institute for Early Education Research.

In some states, advocates have raised concerns about requiring teachers to have a bachelor’s degree or a credential, arguing that such a requirement will disproportionately affect teachers of color in non-LEA providers, which tend to have more teachers without a college degree.²² The National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) found that teachers in non-LEAs operating outside of public preschool programs were less likely to have a bachelor’s degree, earned lower wages, and had fewer years of experience.²³ The NSECE also found, however, that non-LEA providers operating outside of publicly funded programs had lower percentages

of non-white teachers, bilingual teachers, and teachers who were born outside the United States compared to state preschool programs, school-based programs, and Head Start.²⁴ Understanding these important characteristics of the early childhood workforce will help states identify possible barriers that prevent non-LEAs from participating in state preschool programs, and also to track the impact that expanding public preschool programs has on the teacher demographics of providers that continue to operate outside the public system.

Alabama and West Virginia have different teacher preservice training requirements for lead teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings, although both sets of requirements meet NIEER's teacher specialized training benchmark because they both include ECE content. In Alabama, teachers in all settings are required to have ECE coursework as part of their bachelor's degree, but only lead teachers in LEA settings are required to hold a teaching credential in either preschool, kindergarten, or birth–age 3.

In West Virginia, the list of state-approved credentials for teachers in non-LEA settings includes the Community Program Permanent Authorization (CPPA), which is an existing credential that applies only to teachers in non-LEA settings. When non-LEA providers are unable to find a fully certified teacher, they are permitted to employ an individual holding a CPPA. Prior to 2013, non-LEA teachers could obtain a CPPA with an associate degree along with specialized training and teaching experience, but now a bachelor's degree is required. Using a CPPA credential allows non-LEA providers to meet state requirements when the pool of fully certified teachers is low, and it creates a pathway for individuals holding a CPPA to be employed as lead teachers.

Michigan, New Jersey, and New York have requirements for lead teachers that are comparable across settings.

When equal standards are applied to teaching staff in LEA and non-LEA settings, states may need to consider how uniform standards will impact teachers and providers differently across settings. Non-LEA providers may need time and resources to meet state standards that LEA providers already meet. (See "New Jersey: Mandating P–3 Teaching Certification Across Settings in State Preschool.")

New Jersey: Mandating P–3 Teaching Certification Across Settings in State Preschool

In addition to mandating the expansion of state-funded preschool starting in the 1999–2000 school year, the 1998 *Abbott v. Burke* state Supreme Court ruling established new program standards to ensure quality. Along with standards dictating maximum class size, curriculum implementation, and child assessments, new standards required lead teachers in all LEA and non-LEA settings to hold a bachelor's degree in early childhood and a P–3 certification by no later than September 2004. This requirement was not a significant shift for teachers in LEA settings, who were already required to hold a bachelor's degree and certification upon employment. However, the majority of existing teachers in non-LEA settings

held only a high school diploma or Child Development Associate certificate and were deeply concerned about losing their employment under the rules of the new state preschool program.

To mitigate this issue, the state took steps to support non-LEA teachers in obtaining the required credentials while they continued to work as teachers in the state preschool program. Non-LEA teachers were given scholarship funding to obtain a bachelor's degree in early childhood within the time frame specified by the court, and the New Jersey Department of Education asked 2- and 4-year colleges to establish satellite classrooms strategically throughout the state so that teachers would not have to travel long distances to attend classes after work. Teachers' progress was monitored by the New Jersey Department of Human Services, which administered the scholarships through child care resources and referral agencies. As the court-imposed deadline approached, many non-LEA teachers obtained the required degree. However, some teachers had not yet met the requirement, despite making steady progress. With this information, the New Jersey Department of Education partnered with early childhood advocates to petition the Supreme Court to grant additional time for these individuals to meet the degree requirement. Additional time was granted, and many of these teachers obtained the necessary degree and remained as teachers in the state preschool program. Individuals who could not or would not meet the state requirements either chose to retire or moved into other positions within the program (typically as assistant teachers).

As the state preschool program expanded, and as more non-LEA teachers obtained a bachelor's degree, non-LEA providers expressed frustration with the level of turnover among their newly certified teachers. Advocates once again approached the New Jersey Supreme Court with evidence that newly certified teachers in non-LEA settings were regularly leaving to take positions in LEA classrooms, where compensation was much higher. Under the direction of the Supreme Court, the New Jersey Department of Education ultimately required that all certified state preschool teachers in non-LEA settings must be paid comparably to their similarly credentialed peers in LEA classrooms.

The experience of non-LEA providers in New Jersey illustrates the steps a state can take to support non-LEA providers in meeting state standards and the implications of imposing uniform qualifications across settings without also addressing compensation.

Sources: *Abbott v. Burke*, 153 N.J. 480 (1998); *Abbott v. Burke*, 163 N.J. 95 (2000); *Abbott v. Burke*, 180 N.J. 444 (June 2004); Lobman, C., Ryan, S., & McLaughlin, J. (2005). Reconstructing teacher education to prepare qualified preschool teachers: Lessons from New Jersey. *Early Childhood Research & Practice*, 7(2).

How does teacher compensation vary by setting?

Salary inequities between preschool and K–12 teachers are a significant challenge for recruiting and retaining state preschool teachers, particularly in non-LEA settings, where teachers, on average, earn less than teachers in LEAs. In addition to salary, other aspects of compensation, including health benefits and planning time, often differ between LEA and non-LEA preschool teaching staff. These differences can result in high rates of turnover in non-LEA settings, which negatively affects program quality and professional development costs and results in disruptive programming for young children.²⁵ Some states have addressed this issue with compensation parity policies or through policies governing unionization of public preschool teachers.²⁶

Alabama and New Jersey address salary parity by requiring that state-funded preschool teachers in non-LEA settings receive salaries commensurate with their P–12 peers in LEA settings, as well as paid time for professional development and other professional responsibilities. However, both states stop short of requiring equal benefits for teachers in non-LEA settings, leaving these teachers with large disparities in health benefits, retirement benefits, and paid time off compared to their peers in LEA settings. In non-LEA settings, these policies are determined by local providers and typically result in much lower benefits for non-LEA teachers. By contrast, LEAs operate with greater economies of scale that allow for more cost-effective benefit packages and often receive dedicated state funding for teacher pensions.

West Virginia requires salary parity for preschool teachers in LEA settings relative to teachers in K–12 but does not require parity for preschool teachers in non-LEA settings. Michigan and New York do not have policies to address salary parity for teachers in LEA or non-LEA settings.

Unionization is another lever to establish salary parity for public preschool teachers, although many preschool teachers are still not part of a collective bargaining unit.²⁷ The city-funded Pre-K for All program in New York City is a rare example of a program in which preschool teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings are covered by a union that has led to compensation parity. (See “New York: Unions as a Mechanism for Salary Parity.”)

New York: Unions as a Mechanism for Salary Parity

In 2015, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio officially kicked off the city’s Pre-K for All program, serving over 65,500 4-year-olds in mixed delivery locations throughout the city. Although the pace of expansion received national attention, the program’s biggest media coverage came in 2019, when thousands of city preschool teachers threatened to strike for better pay. Citing high staff turnover and difficulty recruiting new teachers, the union representing some of the city’s preschool teachers called for reforms.

In 2019, New York City supported a contract agreement between early childhood providers in non-LEA settings; the local union representing Head Start and child care employees; and the Day Care Council of New York, which is a membership organization representing over 200 child care centers in New York City. The agreement provided a pathway to pay parity between LEA and non-LEA teachers by October 2021 that would raise pay for certified teachers in non-LEAs by 30–40%. Although the agreement was negotiated by the unions, certified teachers in non-LEA settings who were not employed in a unionized program received the salary increases commensurate with their peers.

Sources: Parrott, J. A. (2020). *The road to and from salary parity in New York City: Nonprofits and collective bargaining in early childhood education*. The New School Center for New York City Affairs. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53ee4f0be4b015b9c3690d84/t/5e222c2ab457e7527ddc6450/1579297836053/SalaryParity_Parrott_Jan2020_Jan17.pdf (accessed 08/01/22); New York City Department of Education. (2019, July 9). *Fact sheet: July 9, 2019 announcement on provider compensation*. https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/provider-fact-sheet-on-7_9-compensation-announcement.pdf

How do teaching staff receive coaching and professional development?

States must determine how teaching staff will receive coaching and professional development to support effective teaching practices, and whether this process will look different between LEA and non-LEA settings. These decisions have implications related to consistency of quality across settings and efficient use of coaching staff and are often driven by cost and staff capacity. The case study states have similar requirements for coaching and professional development across LEA and non-LEA settings, although there are state-by-state differences. How coaching and professional development are structured in each state depends on the state's ECE governance and contracting system. This structure has implications for the level of direct involvement the state takes in supporting classroom quality. It also affects the number of staff at the state, regional, and local level that are needed to help providers meet quality standards.

Alabama has prioritized investments in instructional coaching, which is central to the FCPK's quality improvement strategy. Lead teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings receive annual written individualized professional development plans and must complete 30 clock hours of education-related professional learning every year. Assistant teachers also receive annual written individualized professional development plans, and they must complete 20 clock hours of education-related professional learning every year. In addition, FCPK classrooms are observed by locally based state coaches about once a month, and teachers receive ongoing feedback based on data collected. Coaching staff all receive high levels of training and professional development.

In New Jersey and New York state, coaching and professional development are coordinated at the LEA level; however, New Jersey is more prescriptive about the coaching and professional development LEAs must offer to their own staff and to subcontractors. For example, New Jersey requires LEAs to hire at least one coach for

every 20 classrooms. Coaches conduct structured classroom observations at least annually and provide LEA and non-LEA teachers with feedback based on a written individualized professional development plan. Early childhood supervisors are also required to provide professional development for teaching staff in LEAs and non-LEAs, such that teaching staff receive at least 20 hours of professional development every year. In New York, lead teachers in both LEAs and non-LEAs are required to complete 175 hours of professional development every 5 years, but coaching is required only for first-year lead teachers in LEA settings. These states illustrate two different approaches for coordinating coaching and professional development at the local level. While both states give LEAs discretion to make decisions based on local needs, New York leaves almost everything to the discretion of the LEA, and New Jersey provides a basic framework for what is required.

In Michigan and West Virginia, professional development and coaching are coordinated at the regional level. All WV Pre-K teachers and assistant teachers are required to receive at least 15 hours of staff development annually, based on needs identified in the county-based continuous quality improvement process. All teaching staff are also required to have annual written individualized professional development plans. Requirements for coaching are addressed in collaborative contracts between providers and county boards of education. LEA teachers are included in a statewide evaluation system, while Head Start providers use a research-based, coordinated coaching strategy for all teaching staff, as required by the Head Start Performance Standards. In Michigan, coaching is a key part of quality improvement. All GSRP lead and assistant teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings receive a written individualized professional development plan, must complete at least 16 hours of professional development annually, and are assigned an ISD-based early childhood specialist who provides coaching in each classroom at least monthly during the program year. Oversight of coaching and professional development rests at the regional level in these states to allow customization based on local needs.

How do states oversee program quality?

To support program quality at scale, states need to develop quality assurance systems that ensure program quality standards are being met. Research shows that preschool initiatives are most effective when they have a data-driven system of continuous improvement that includes structured classroom observations.²⁸ States face a number of decisions as they develop these systems, including how providers will receive support, from whom, and how often. They must also determine what entity is accountable for ensuring that program quality standards are met, and the role of state, regional, and local agencies. In each of the states studied, the agency tasked with contracting with non-LEAs is also charged with overseeing program quality.

States face a number of decisions as they develop these systems, including how providers will receive support, from whom, and how often.

In Alabama, the state early childhood department assumes responsibility for oversight of program quality. The state hires coaches and program monitors, employed locally, who work closely with site directors to provide guidance and support to ensure that all programmatic requirements are being met through continuous coaching for improvement. Program monitors conduct planned and random on-site visits to evaluate progress, formally observing classes twice annually using a learning environment checklist aligned with the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). They complete bimonthly monitoring reports that are recorded in a state data system. Alabama's system combines the approach of continuous support provided by individuals who are embedded at the local level with the approach of situating responsibility for program quality at the state level. A large state staff is needed under this structure.

In New Jersey and New York, LEAs are primarily responsible for overseeing and supporting quality across LEA and non-LEA settings, but the state also plays a role. Education department staff in New York support overall program quality through site visits using the state's Quality Assurance Protocol. New Jersey's state education department contracts with NIEER almost annually to conduct classroom observations on a group of randomly selected classrooms using either the ECERS or CLASS. Statewide results are provided to the state to guide conversations with LEAs about how to improve program quality. State staff in New Jersey visit LEAs at least every 3 years and use the Self-Assessment Validation System to measure the extent to which the LEA is meeting state standards for program implementation.²⁹ LEAs that are new to state-funded preschool in New Jersey are additionally required to participate in the state's QRIS. The approaches used by New York and New Jersey provide continuous support for classroom and program quality that is embedded at the local level, but these states entrust local program administrators with primary oversight of program quality.

In Michigan and West Virginia, intermediary agencies are accountable for supporting program quality. Coaches employed by Michigan ISDs provide supports to ensure that local providers implement GSRP with fidelity and that a written evaluation plan is used to address all required GSRP program components. Michigan also requires all state-funded preschool providers (LEAs and non-LEAs) to participate in a QRIS, which includes a twice-annual observation by an ISD-employed coach on the CLASS or Program Quality Assessment-R. Providers must have a QRIS rating of three stars or higher to participate in GSRP, and prospective non-LEA providers receive assistance from ISDs to meet the minimum rating. West Virginia county collaboratives hold a contract with each participating LEA and non-LEA detailing a system of oversight and continuous quality improvement, which includes annual classroom observations. Oversight of program quality rests at the regional level in these two states and is customized to the needs of the local area.

Recommendations

States use a variety of policies and structures to support public preschool within a mixed delivery system. Alabama, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, and West Virginia provide examples of the similarities and differences in state approaches and illustrate that, for some policy decisions, there may be more than one correct path. For example, states can support mixed delivery through successful governance structures at the state, regional, or local level. However, there are other policy decisions that may significantly impact program quality, non-LEA participation, and family choice. These policy decisions include whether quality standards vary across settings, how funding and professional development are made available to providers, and how enrollment is coordinated to support family choice and provider stability. Based on our analysis, the following are six actions states should consider taking to foster a strong mixed delivery system with consistent quality across settings.

1. **Establish strong program standards across settings so that all children receive high-quality preschool experiences.** One of the goals of a mixed delivery system is to ensure that families have access to high-quality care in a variety of settings. The states studied in this report have high quality standards that are aligned across LEAs and non-LEAs. For example, the five states in this study require teachers in all settings to hold a bachelor's degree and early childhood specialization. They also have strong and consistent policies related to class sizes, teacher-child ratios, learning and development standards, and teaching staff degree and specialization requirements.
2. **Address barriers that might prevent qualified non-LEAs from participating in the state preschool program.** States can play a role in ensuring that many kinds of providers, particularly non-LEAs, have an opportunity to participate in the state preschool program. Non-LEAs often lack information about how to become a public preschool provider and have smaller administrative teams than LEAs to help them set up new contracts. Providers that braid funding from multiple sources may also be held to conflicting standards for teaching staff qualifications, facilities, and training that make participation in state preschool more challenging. One step the states in this study have taken is requiring a specific entity to identify potential state preschool providers and offer these providers technical assistance in becoming part of the state preschool program. In Michigan, for example, intermediate school districts (ISDs) are required to support non-LEA providers through the quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) process to help them achieve quality standards required for state preschool. New Jersey's Abbott districts are required to contract with all able and willing non-LEA providers, which has led to higher rates of non-LEA participation in state preschool than in other New Jersey districts, which are not required to contract with non-LEAs. States can also provide resources to help new providers meet quality standards. When New Jersey raised its quality standards for preschool teachers in the early 2000s, the state provided scholarships to support non-LEA preschool teachers to earn a bachelor's degree and certification.

3. **Ensure that both LEA and non-LEA providers receive ongoing support to offer and sustain high-quality learning environments, including coaching and professional development that is embedded in a continuous quality improvement system.** In addition to having consistent quality standards, it is important that all providers have access to effective professional development and learning opportunities that will allow them to be successful, including small non-LEA providers that do not have the staffing or resources to provide these opportunities themselves. Professional learning supports may be offered at the state, regional, or local level. In Alabama, the state deploys coaches regionally to provide differentiated supports based on teachers' needs and annual assessments of quality. Michigan's early childhood specialists are coaches with master's degrees who are employed by intermediate school districts to support LEAs and non-LEAs to improve their classroom practice. New Jersey requires all LEAs to offer coaching and professional development to the non-LEA preschool providers in their district.
4. **Ensure program funding levels allow providers in all settings to meet high quality standards and retain qualified staff with compensation commensurate to their education and experience.** The cost of meeting high quality standards can vary across settings. An LEA, for example, may have access to subsidized facilities and local funding sources that are not available to a small non-LEA. These funding levels impact the amount providers can pay for salaries that are commensurate with teachers' education and experience and, in turn, affect their ability to retain staff.³⁰ In most states, non-LEA teachers are paid significantly less than LEA-based teachers. New Jersey has addressed cost disparities by offering non-LEAs a higher per-child rate than LEAs and offering Head Start providers a supplement to their federal funds. These differentiated rates support pay parity for teachers across settings and grade levels in New Jersey, although LEAs are still able to offer benefits that many non-LEAs do not. West Virginia's Universal Pre-K program's (WV Pre-K) collaborative funding model requires county collaboratives to braid all available sources of funding, with state funding generated through the per-pupil funding formula to enable individual providers to implement the state's quality standards.
5. **Support coordinated enrollment across the mixed delivery system to ensure family choice and provider stability.** States can play a role in ensuring that preschool options are clearly communicated to families and enrollment processes are organized in a way that is efficient and equitable. Centralized enrollment simplifies the application process for families, who might otherwise have to identify their own preschool options and fill out several applications. Enrollment processes can also help ensure that slots are allocated efficiently. Alabama has a statewide online enrollment system for all providers that simplifies preschool applications for families. New York City provides a strong example of a highly coordinated enrollment system at the local level, in which there is a single application and enrollment process for all universal preschool providers that allows families to rank their choices. West Virginia requires that each county coordinate its enrollment at the county level.

- 6. Collect data and conduct research to understand families' access to high-quality preschool in different settings.** Enrollment data disaggregated by program setting and child demographics can shed light on the extent to which children with different abilities and from different racial and ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds are enrolling in different settings. These trends are important to analyze, as they might reveal systemic differences in who is able to access providers in different settings that need to be addressed. For example, analyses from Alabama showed that LEAs are disproportionately serving preschoolers who are white, while non-LEA providers disproportionately serve children of color. In New York City, children of color appear to be served disproportionately in programs with lower quality ratings.³¹ More research is needed to better understand how families choose preschool programs and the extent to which enrollment disparities reflect family preference or other barriers that should be remedied, such as availability of full-day care or where programs are located.

This study of five state preschool programs provides a deeper understanding of the context and implementation of mixed delivery preschool programs in these states and offers insights into how policy decisions influence the mixed delivery system. Other states can use this information as they build or revise their own mixed delivery system to provide more children with high-quality early learning experiences.

Detailed State Case Studies

This section provides the case studies used to inform our cross-state analysis. Content for the case studies was compiled through interviews with state early childhood administrators and other leaders, which was supplemented with data collected through the National Institute for Early Education Research’s (NIEER) *State of Preschool Yearbook*, and a review of state legislation, guidance documents, and implementation manuals. We start with a basic program overview and then describe program governance (including program funding and fiscal monitoring) followed by an overview of selected components of program quality. The goal of the case studies was to draw out similarities and differences in the way states approach their mixed delivery preschool system, with a specific focus on the kinds of policy decisions that impact non-LEA provider participation as state preschool providers.

Alabama

Program Overview

Mixed delivery has been a component of public preschool in Alabama since 2000, when the state started serving 4-year-olds through the Alabama Pre-Kindergarten program. In 2008–09, the program was renamed [Alabama’s First Class Pre-K \(FCPK\) program](#). FCPK has grown over time, and in 2020–21 it served almost 19,000 children across every county in the state (see Table 5). Program funding levels have increased to expand access, although a local match of 25% is still required. Alabama does not have a legislated mandate for mixed delivery, but local education agencies (LEAs) and non-LEAs are equally eligible to apply to serve children through the FCPK program. In 2020–21, 18% of FCPK slots were in non-LEA settings, which included Head Start agencies, private child care centers, faith-based organizations, and university-operated preschools.

Table 5
First Class Pre-K Enrollment by Age and Location, 2020–21

Total Enrollment	Percent of 3-Year-Olds Served	Percent of 4-Year-Olds Served	Percent of Preschoolers Served in LEAs	Percent of Preschoolers Served in Non-LEAs
18,906	0%	31%	82%	18%

Source: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G., Gardiner, B. A., & Jost, T. M. (2022). *The state of preschool 2021: State preschool yearbook*. National Institute for Early Education Research.

Alabama collects data on the enrollment of children by setting, showing how children of different races and income backgrounds are served across LEA and non-LEA settings. Non-LEAs serve a much higher percentage of Black preschoolers than LEAs, while LEAs serve a much higher percentage of white preschoolers (see Table 6).³²

Table 6
Race and Ethnicity of First Class Pre-K Participants by Setting

Delivery System	Race				
	Black or African American	White	Hispanic	Mixed Heritage	All Other Races Combined
LEA	33%	54%	6%	5%	3%
Non-LEA	60%	28%	4%	6%	2%

Source: Personal correspondence with Jan Hume, Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education (2022, September 27).

Table 7 illustrates that non-LEA settings serve a much higher percentage of children from families with income below the federal poverty line, while LEA settings are closer to an even split of children from different income backgrounds.

Table 7
Poverty Status of First Class Pre-K Participants by Setting

Delivery System	Poverty	Non-Poverty
LEA	55%	45%
Non-LEA	74%	26%

Source: Personal correspondence with Jan Hume, Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education (2022, September 27).

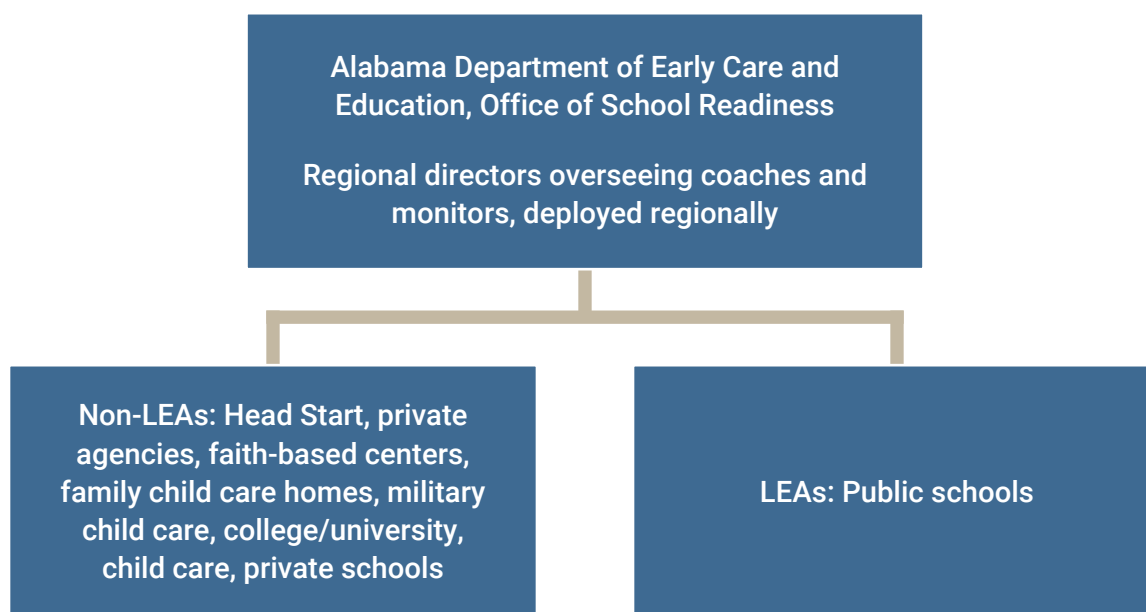
Governance and Administration

The administration of Alabama’s state preschool program happens almost entirely at the state level, and state staff members are responsible for program coaching and monitoring. This organizational structure also means that recruitment of both LEA and non-LEA providers is conducted by the state, sometimes in partnership with early childhood education (ECE) advocates.

Governance

FCPK is administered by the [Office of School Readiness](#), which is housed within the [Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education](#) (state ECE department). The Office of School Readiness oversees eight regional directors and a cadre of coaches and monitors who work directly with grantees in both LEA and non-LEA settings. The regional directors, coaches, and monitors also provide guidance to prospective FCPK grantees. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1
First Class Pre-K Organizational Chart



Source: Learning Policy Institute. (2023).

Recruitment of mixed delivery providers

The state ECE department identifies areas where program access is low and deploys the regional director to create an individualized outreach strategy to recruit more providers to apply for FCPK funding.

The state ECE department also participates in the [Bold Goals Coalition](#), a group of over 200 organizations that come together to strategize on large public policy issues. One of the coalition’s “[Bold Goals](#)” is to work toward universal FCPK access in central Alabama. The coalition provides resources to individual providers interested in applying for FCPK funding and helps them prepare to meet the quality standards required to participate in the program.

Coordinating enrollment within the mixed delivery system

The First Class Pre-K Program Guidelines outline the process for recruitment of eligible families as well as selection of children for slots. The state requires grantees to recruit widely in both English and Spanish, and sample recruitment materials are provided by the state ECE department. Recruitment notices must be posted for at least 1 month in locations such as child care centers, doctor’s offices, and news and social media platforms. Families preregister in the state’s online system, which all grantees are required to use, and families are permitted to preregister at multiple locations. If there are more children registered than a grantee has funded slots available, the grantee must hold a public random drawing to select children. Families are asked to accept or

decline the spot if their child is chosen, and they are put on a waiting list if their child is not chosen. Grantees are encouraged, but not required, to also hold a public drawing for slots that are not state funded.

Funding

Funding for the FCPK program comes through an annual legislative appropriation from the state's Education Trust Fund budget.³³ Revenue for the Education Trust Fund comes from a dozen different sources, including individual income taxes, sales taxes, and corporate income taxes.³⁴ Prospective grantees (LEAs and non-LEAs) apply to participate in FCPK through a competitive grant process, and grantees receive funding directly from the state through an annual memorandum of understanding.³⁵

State funding is not intended to support the full cost of operating an FCPK classroom. All grantees are required to provide a supplemental 25% match to state funding and are also permitted to charge parent fees. The primary sources of the matching funds are federal and local funding sources. The state ECE department provides an [annual scale](#) that providers must use if they choose to charge parent fees, but the guide stipulates that providers may not exclude children based on a family's inability to pay.³⁶ The pay scale also dictates that providers show how revenue from parent fees is invested back into the program.

Each new grantee receives a "New Classroom" funding award in their first year, up to \$150,000 per classroom, to support the cost of materials, equipment, furnishings, and general operating expenses. Providers are permitted to start the year with 16 children in a class, but they must be fully enrolled with 18 children within 2 weeks of the start of the school year.³⁷ In each subsequent year, grantees receive either an Excellence Grant of up to \$50,400 per classroom or a Tiered Grant of up to \$100,008 per classroom, including a small allocation for each child enrolled. Excellence Grants are intended to help providers meet high quality standards but are not meant to serve as a provider's primary source of funding. The state ECE department periodically seeks feedback on the Excellence Grant amount to make adjustments for increasing costs, such as teacher salaries. Tiered Grants are awarded for classrooms serving a high percentage of children from low-income families and are intended to be the primary (but not sole) source of classroom funding.³⁸

Fiscal monitoring

To demonstrate fiscal solvency, grantees are required to have 1 to 2 months of operating expenses in reserve at all times.³⁹ Under the supervision of the regional director, a program monitor is assigned to each grantee to ensure that all fiscal reporting requirements are met.

The Office of School Readiness has detailed guidance for grantees regarding the allowable use of FCPK funding. For example, FCPK grantees are permitted to use no more than 6% of their overall grant to support administrative costs. The state also

has imposed limits on other specific costs, such as utilities and advertising. Providers are expected to adhere to a list of required classroom equipment, materials, and supplies and must also keep an inventory of any furniture or equipment valued at \$3,000 or more.⁴⁰

Program Quality

Alabama has equivalent quality standards, teaching staff qualification requirements, and professional development supports for LEA and non-LEA settings within the FCPK program, with the exception of credential requirements for teachers in non-LEA settings. The state also has policies in place to ensure salary parity for teaching staff.

Quality standards

FCPK has high program standards that apply to grantees regardless of whether they serve children in an LEA setting or a non-LEA setting (see Table 8). Taken together, these requirements earn Alabama all 10 of NIEER's quality standards benchmarks.

Lead teacher qualifications

FCPK lead teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings are required to have at least a bachelor's degree in early childhood, child development, or preschool special education, including 18 hours of coursework in early childhood or child development. A new certificate was implemented during the 2016–17 school year resulting in a Class B Pre-K Certificate (birth to age 4). To qualify, the candidate must have a bachelor's degree from a 4-year institution and pass the Praxis II 5025, Early Childhood Education.⁴¹

The state ECE department provides required preservice training for lead and assistant teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings, including a state-developed new teacher training module, Teaching Strategies GOLD Assessment training, Classroom Assessment Scoring System training, Ages and Stages Questionnaire-3 Developmental Screener training, and Strengthening Families training.⁴² In addition, the state hosts an annual conference where professional development is provided to over 2,000 FCPK staff.

Although the same minimum degree and specialization is required of all lead teachers, there are differences in the requirements for lead teacher licenses in LEA and non-LEA settings. Teachers in LEA settings are required to hold a license in either preschool, kindergarten, or birth through 3rd grade, but there is not a licensure requirement for teachers in non-LEA settings.

Table 8
Program Requirements for First Class Pre-Ks

Class Size	4-year-olds: 20
Teacher–Child Ratio	4-year-olds: 1:10
Minimum Degree for Lead Teachers	Bachelor’s degree
Minimum Length of Day	6.5 hours/day
Family Income Requirement	None
Degree Specialization for Lead Teachers	ECE, Child Development, PreK Special Education
Credentials, Licenses, or Endorsements for Lead Teachers	LEAs: Preschool, Kindergarten, Birth–Age 3 Non-LEAs: None
Qualifications for Assistant Teachers	Child Development Associate or 9 college credits in ECE/ Child Development
State Standards for Curricula	Alignment with Early Learning and Development Standards required
State Supports for Curricula	Criteria for selecting curricula, list of state-recommended curricula, state-sponsored training, ongoing technical assistance, funding to support curriculum implementation
Requirements for Structured Observations of Classroom Quality	All classrooms observed at least annually with the CLASS and ERS/ECERS; providers receive feedback, and data are used at the state and local levels
In-Service Professional Development	30 hours/year required for lead teachers 20 hours/year required for assistant teachers
Ongoing Classroom-Embedded Support	Required for all lead and assistant teachers
Annual Written Individualized Professional Development Plan	Required for all lead and assistant teachers
QRIS Participation	Not required

Notes: Requirements apply to LEA and non-LEA settings unless noted otherwise. CLASS = Classroom Assessment Scoring System. ERS = Environmental Rating Scale. ECERS = Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale. QRIS = Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Source: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G., Gardiner, B. A., & Jost, T. M. (2022). *The state of preschool 2021: State preschool yearbook*. National Institute for Early Education Research.

Assistant teacher qualifications

Assistant teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings are required to hold at least a Child Development Associate credential or 9 college credits in early childhood education or child development.⁴³

Professional development

Lead teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings must complete 30 clock hours of education-related professional learning every year to meet in-service professional development requirements. Assistant teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings must complete 20 clock hours of education-related professional learning every year.⁴⁴ Ongoing professional development is done in consultation with a state FCPK coach who evaluates progress throughout the year to ensure that each teacher is acquiring and maintaining skills for high-quality teaching.⁴⁵

FCPK coaches support classroom teachers through observation and coaching of classroom practices. The state ECE department implements a systematic coaching model that it has developed over the past 10 years. Coaches are employed by the state and provide the same level of coaching to teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings. The state uses a tiered model of coaching in which teachers are continuously setting goals and self-reflecting throughout the year. The majority of teachers are visited at least once per month, either virtually or in person, per the Alabama Early Childhood B-8 Coaching Framework.

Teacher compensation

Lead teachers in the FCPK program receive salaries commensurate with their K-12 peers, regardless of setting, as well as paid time for professional development and other professional responsibilities. The [state ECE department's 2020 annual report](#), the most recent annual [Legislative Budget Presentation](#) (January 26, 2021), and the [FY 2022 Legislative Report](#) all reference the state's dedication to salary parity between similarly credentialed K-12 teachers and teaching staff in the FCPK program.

During the 2020-21 school year, FCPK teachers in LEA settings earned an average salary of \$49,866 and FCPK teachers in non-LEA settings earned an average salary of \$42,734.⁴⁶ According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, kindergarten teachers in Alabama earned an average annual salary of \$49,100 in 2021.⁴⁷ It is not clear whether factors such as years of experience are the reason for differences between LEA and non-LEA preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers.

Only FCPK teachers in LEAs receive the same health benefits, retirement benefits, and paid time off as their K-12 peers. In non-LEA settings, these policies are determined by the local grantee.⁴⁸

Policies for assistant teachers are the same across settings, except that FCPK grantees are only required to pay assistant teachers based on a rate for holding a Child Development Associate credential. If an assistant teacher holds a higher credential, the Office of School Readiness recommends but does not require that grantees pay a higher salary.⁴⁹

Oversight of program quality

FCPK program monitors work closely with site directors to provide guidance and support to ensure that all programmatic and fiscal requirements are being met. Through both planned and random on-site visits, the monitors evaluate provider progress and complete bimonthly monitoring reports that are recorded in a state data system.⁵⁰

Coaches formally observe classes twice annually using a learning environment checklist aligned with the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale and Classroom Assessment Scoring System. To support teacher growth, program coaches informally observe each classroom with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System multiple times per year. To inform statewide evaluation and research, state ECE department staff conduct a pretest and post-test in the Classroom Assessment Scoring System in every classroom over the course of a 3-year cycle.

If teachers are not meeting expectations, their contracts can be terminated. According to the [First Class Pre-K Program Guidelines](#), “If one-year in a funding cycle has transpired without a teacher showing satisfactory progress towards quality instruction based on coaching observations, child assessment results, and adherence to both program/classroom guidelines, the program may be defunded unless said teacher(s) are replaced.”⁵¹

The Future of FCPK in Alabama

The legislature committed additional funding for almost 100 new classrooms in 2022–23, an increase to the 1,375 classrooms funded in 2021–22. Alabama’s ultimate goal is to reach at least 70% of 4-year-olds in the state. Together with the Alabama School Readiness Alliance, the state ECE department developed a [road map](#) for each county to enroll 70% of 4-year-olds in FCPK. The road map indicates that, in addition to increased state funding, federal and local funding sources should be leveraged to reach enrollment goals. County-based profiles are a significant piece of the road map. Each profile indicates the percentage of existing FCPK classrooms by setting type, highlighting where the program would benefit from increased mixed delivery.⁵²

Michigan

Program Overview

Michigan has two state-funded preschool programs: the [Great Start Readiness Program](#) (GSRP) and the Developmental Kindergarten (DK) Program. Because Michigan DK is only offered in public schools, this report focuses solely on GSRP, which mandates a mixed delivery system.

Formerly known as the Michigan School Readiness Program, GSRP was established in 1985. GSRP is intended for low-income families, and 90% of families served must be at or below 250% of the federal poverty level, with some exceptions for families up to 300%.⁵³

At least 30% of all GSRP slots statewide must be offered in non-LEA settings. During the 2020–21 school year, 31% of GSRP slots were in non-LEAs (see Table 9). GSRP offers a minimum of 3 hours of preschool per day, 4 days per week. However, 94% of slots are for extended-day programs (at least 6.5 hours per day).

Table 9
Great Start Readiness Program Enrollment by Age and Location, 2020–21

Total Enrollment	Percent of 3-Year-Olds Served	Percent of 4-Year-Olds Served	Percent of Preschoolers Served in LEAs	Percent of Preschoolers Served in Non-LEAs
26,775	0%	31%	59%	41%

Source: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G., Gardiner, B. A., & Jost, T. M. (2022). *The state of preschool 2021: State preschool yearbook*. National Institute for Early Education Research.

Governance and Administration

The administration of Michigan’s GSRP falls primarily on the state’s intermediate school districts (ISDs), but with strong state support from the [Michigan Department of Education](#) (state education department).

Governance

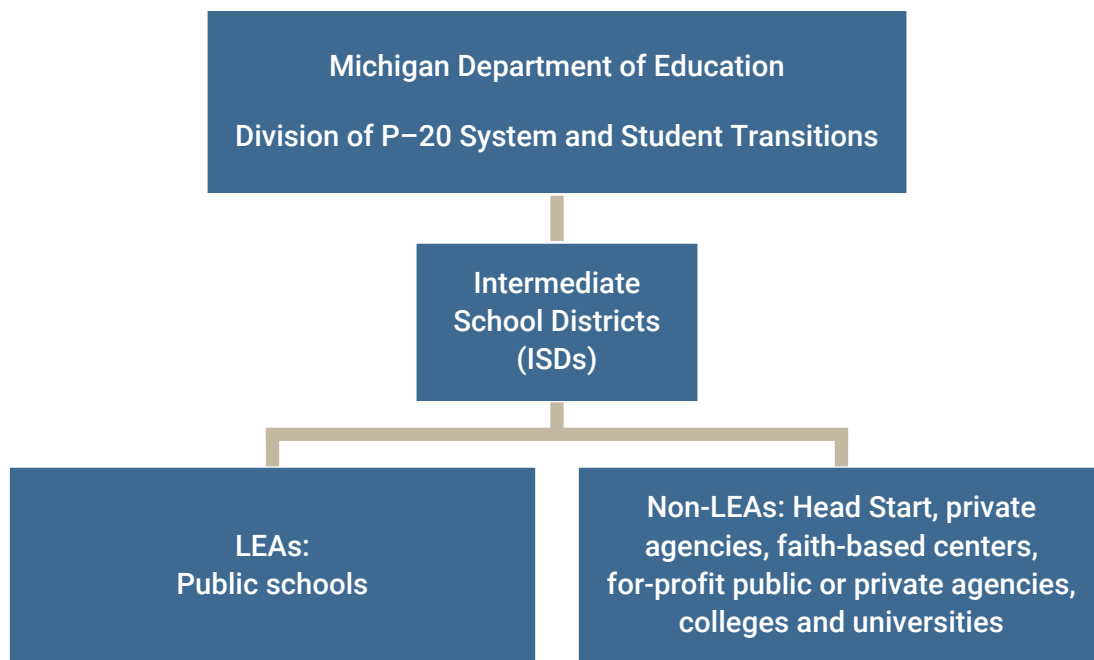
GSRP is overseen by the state education department within the [Office of Preschool and Out-of-School Time Learning](#) in the [Office of Great Start](#) (see Figure 2). The Office of Great Start also oversees all early childhood programming from birth through age 8, including preschool, child care, and Head Start collaboration.

[Michigan’s 56 ISDs](#) are regional educational service agencies (similar to county offices of education in other states), which are overseen by a board that provides administrative and instructional services to local school districts. In Michigan, ISDs serve as GSRP grantees that may serve preschoolers directly and may also subcontract

with LEAs and non-LEAs to serve preschoolers. LEAs and non-LEAs that receive subcontracts from ISDs are known as subrecipients. To support GSRP, the Office of Great Start employs education consultants, who are assigned to approximately 18 ISDs each. These consultants meet with ISD staff regularly to address GSRP implementation issues, including data reporting, funding, and contracting.

Each ISD is required to identify an early childhood contact who serves as the GSRP lead for sites across the entire ISD and who works in conjunction with early childhood specialists to conduct and/or oversee program evaluation. The early childhood specialists are coaches with master’s degrees who are employed by ISDs to help maintain high-quality programs. In 2022, there were approximately 250 early childhood specialists across the state.

Figure 2
Great Start Readiness Program Organizational Chart



Source: Learning Policy Institute. (2023).

Recruitment of mixed delivery providers

Recruitment of mixed delivery providers occurs at the ISD level. Each ISD is required to establish a written policy outlining a process for outreach to prospective LEA and non-LEA providers. ISDs receive a list of all licensed child care centers in their area each year. ISDs must work with stakeholders to determine the best timing and approach for contacting any licensed child care center that is not already a GSRP subrecipient and provide potential partners with information about program requirements and the application process.

When GSRP was established, each ISD was required to fill 30% of slots in non-LEA settings. The legislature later changed that provision to require an average of 30% of slots statewide in non-LEA settings to accommodate ISDs with child care deserts, particularly in rural areas. If unable to meet the requirement to place 30% of GSRP slots in non-LEAs, the ISD must submit a “request of waiver from penalty for noncompliance.”⁵⁴ The waiver requires ISDs to explain all steps taken to meet the 30% requirement, including recruitment methods used and any reasons non-LEAs give for not wanting to participate in GSRP. If the state education department finds the ISD’s explanation unacceptable, it is required by legislation to reduce the ISD’s GSRP allocation to make up the difference between the percentage being provided to non-LEAs and the 30% requirement.⁵⁵

The state education department is required to submit a legislative report each year that includes both the number and percentage of each ISD’s allocation to non-LEAs by type, including private for-profit and nonprofit, college or university, Head Start grantee or delegate, and LEA or ISD.⁵⁶

Coordinating enrollment within the mixed delivery system

Enrollment policies, such as whether to centralize enrollment, are determined by each ISD. All ISDs and subrecipients must prioritize enrollment for children in families with the lowest income.⁵⁷ To mitigate competition among subrecipients, the GSRP Implementation Manual recommends that ISDs establish a process to standardize the enrollment of children in settings across the entire ISD.⁵⁸

The GSRP Implementation Manual also outlines the requirement for GSRP and Head Start providers to collaborate in recruitment and enrollment activities. Due to the overlap in GSRP and Head Start’s enrollment criteria, the state recommends that ISDs utilize one preschool application for all state- and federally funded programs and share one waitlist for eligible children.⁵⁹ GSRP legislation requires that eligible children receive a referral to Head Start to save GSRP slots for children from families who do not meet Head Start income requirements.⁶⁰ Parents whose children qualify for both programs can choose either.⁶¹

Funding

Funding for GSRP comes through an annual legislative appropriation of state general funds.⁶² Funding flows from the state to the ISDs. LEAs are not required to offer the program, but the ISD must provide funding to any LEA that chooses to offer GSRP.⁶³

GSRP funds providers on a per-child basis. The legislatively mandated per-child rate for the 2021–22 school year was \$8,700 per child for a full-day program and \$4,350 per child for a part-day program.⁶⁴ The rate is the same across all LEA and non-LEA settings. GSRP providers may use this funding to cover facilities and/or equipment needs in excess of \$5,000, but they must submit a [capital outlay request](#) to the ISD, which then must be approved by the state education department.

ISDs may retain up to 4% of the grant amount for administrative costs or 10% for federal grantees, though in practice none take this much.⁶⁵ In addition, an ISD may dedicate up to 2% of the total grant amount for outreach, recruiting, and public awareness of the program.

Michigan also uses additional funding sources to support GSRP. For example, the state appropriates \$10 million in state funding annually to support transportation for GSRP in all settings.⁶⁶ In recent years, subrecipients could apply to ISDs for funding to reimburse costs related to public transportation.⁶⁷

Fiscal monitoring

ISDs serve as the fiscal agent for all GSRP funding provided by the state and must keep track of all state funding used to support GSRP classrooms. Subrecipients are required to submit an annual budget to the ISD accounting for their use of all state funding.⁶⁸

ISDs are required to monitor subrecipient spending and, if needed, review documentation before payment is made.⁶⁹ The ISD must also provide professional learning opportunities for the subrecipients' fiscal and program staff.⁷⁰

Fiscal monitors from the state education department conduct fiscal reviews of each ISD every 3 years, which includes reviewing documentation from a sample of subrecipients.⁷¹ If an ISD is found to be out of compliance, the state education department may require a corrective action plan or provide technical assistance to ISD staff.⁷²

Program Quality

GSRP has consistent requirements for quality standards across LEA and non-LEA settings, including standards for teacher-child ratios, teaching staff credentials, and professional development. Salary and benefit parity policies are determined at the ISD level and are not mandated by state policy.

Quality standards

GSRP has high quality standards that earn Michigan all 10 of NIEER's quality standards benchmarks. Table 10 provides a summary of the program requirements GSRP grantees and subrecipients agree to follow. The same requirements apply to grantees regardless of whether they serve children in an LEA setting or a non-LEA setting.

Lead teacher qualifications

GSRP lead teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings are required to have at least a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or child development (with a specialization in preschool teaching) or an elementary teaching certification with an early childhood endorsement. Teachers who have not yet achieved the

required credentials must be enrolled in a program and be in compliance within 2 years. The early childhood specialist is responsible for approving and monitoring compliance plans.⁷³

Assistant teacher qualifications

GSRP assistant teachers (referred to as associates in Michigan) in LEA and non-LEA settings are required have an associate degree in early childhood education or child development. Similar to lead teachers, an individual can be hired if they have not achieved the required credential, but they must have completed at least one credit-bearing course in child development prior to hiring and must complete the requirement within 2 years.⁷⁴

Professional development

All GSRP lead and assistant teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings must complete at least 16 hours of professional development annually. Certified lead teachers must complete 6 semester credit hours or 150 hours of education-related professional learning every 5 years to renew their teaching certificate.⁷⁵ Additionally, newly certified lead teachers must complete 6 semester credit hours of reading methods coursework and 3 semester hours of reading diagnostics before they can renew their certification for the first time.⁷⁶

Each GSRP teaching team (lead and assistant teacher) in LEA and non-LEA settings is assigned an early childhood specialist who provides coaching to each classroom at least monthly during the program year.⁷⁷ These are the same specialists who work with the ISD early childhood contacts responsible for program evaluation. Classrooms with new lead teachers and those that have lower scores on their program evaluation receive more frequent visits.⁷⁸ The content of the coaching sessions may include modeling strategies with children, observing and providing immediate feedback on techniques or interactions, attending home visits and conferences, and having informal conversations based on self-assessments and areas in which teachers desire additional support.

Teacher compensation

Salary and benefits are determined locally for LEAs and non-LEAs, and parity with teachers in grades K–3 is not required.⁷⁹ During the 2020–21 school year, GSRP reported the average salary for a lead teacher in an LEA setting was \$43,505, while the average in a non-LEA setting was \$33,051. These salaries are significantly lower than the average salaries for kindergarten and elementary teachers, which were \$59,910 and \$65,760, respectively.⁸⁰ The average salary for an assistant teacher in an LEA setting was \$17,624, while assistant teachers in non-LEA settings had an average salary of \$21,432.⁸¹ Decisions to unionize are determined locally.

Table 10
Program Requirements for the Great Start Readiness Program

Class Size	4-year-olds: 18
Teacher–Child Ratio	4-year-olds: 1:8
Minimum Length of Day	3 hours/day
Family Income Requirement	250% of the federal poverty level
Minimum Degree for Lead Teachers	Bachelor’s degree
Degree Specialization for Lead Teachers	ECE, Child Development, Elementary Education, PreK Special Education
Credentials, Licenses, or Endorsements for Lead Teachers	Elementary Education w/ ECE endorsement, other
Qualifications for Assistant Teachers	Child Development Associate (CDA) or associate degree in ECE/Child Development
State Standards for Curricula	Alignment with Early Learning and Development Standards required
State Supports for Curricula	Criteria for selecting curricula, list of state-approved curricula, funding to support curriculum implementation
Requirements for Structured Observations of Classroom Quality	All classrooms observed at least annually with the CLASS and Program Quality Assessment-R; providers receive feedback, and data are used at the state and local levels
In-Service Professional Development	16 hours/year required for lead and assistant teachers
Ongoing Classroom-Embedded Support	Required for all lead and assistant teachers
Annual Written Individualized Professional Development Plan	Required for all lead and assistant teachers
QRIS Participation	Required for all settings

Source: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G., Gardiner, B. A., & Jost, T. M. (2022). *The state of preschool 2021: State preschool yearbook*. National Institute for Early Education Research.

Oversight of program quality

ISDs are responsible for ensuring that local providers implement GSRP with fidelity. They must have a written evaluation plan that addresses all required GSRP program components.⁸² Program evaluation includes annual developmental screenings, child assessments, and classroom observations.⁸³ During the 2020–21 school year, the state education department approved two classroom observation instruments for use in GSRP: the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and Program Quality Assessment-R (PQA-R).⁸⁴ Early childhood specialists are required to ensure that these observations are completed annually in LEAs and non-LEAs and that results are entered into online systems.⁸⁵

At the local level, classroom observation results may be used as part of staff and parent data advisory group discussions or as part of presentations to superintendent groups and school boards to help further their understanding of the value of the program. The state education department and the GSRP evaluator, Michigan State University, use the data in annual reports, in presentations to the state board of education and the GSRP Evaluation Advisory Committee, and in discussions with GSRP ISD grantees about program improvement.

The Future of GSRP in Michigan

At the request of the governor, the state legislature passed a significant increase in GSRP per-pupil funding for the 2021–22 school year, from \$7,250 to \$8,700 for a full-day slot, the first increase since 2013–14.⁸⁶ Additionally, the state plans to use \$121 million in federal recovery funding to expand the program to serve the approximately 17,000–22,000 remaining eligible children over the next several years.⁸⁷

New Jersey

Program Overview

New Jersey currently supports three state-funded preschool programs: the Preschool Expansion Program, non-Abbott Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA), and the Early Launch to Learning Initiative (ELLI). The state is in the process of phasing out the ECPA and ELLI programs, so this study focuses on the Preschool Expansion Program, which incorporates the state’s “Abbott Preschool Program.”

The Abbott Preschool Program was established through a series of [New Jersey Supreme Court cases](#) (*Abbott v. Burke*) challenging the constitutionality of the state’s school funding formula for low-income communities. In 1998, the court ruled that all 3- and 4-year-old children in the state’s 28 poorest urban LEAs should have access to free, high-quality preschool. These 28 LEAs (later increased to 31) became known as the “Abbott districts,” and the resulting preschool program is widely known as the Abbott Preschool Program. A notable piece of the court ruling was a mandate for LEAs to collaborate with all Head Start grantees and child care providers who wanted to participate in the program and could meet program standards.

Since 2018, New Jersey has permitted other, primarily low-income, LEAs to apply to join the Abbott districts in providing a high-quality state-funded preschool program. Together with the Abbott districts, these LEAs make up the state’s Preschool Expansion Program.

Table 11 includes enrollment from all three of New Jersey’s preschool programs, but over 95% of children are served in the Preschool Expansion Program. New Jersey serves the fifth-highest percentage of 3-year-olds in the country, and over 40% of children are served in non-LEA settings.

Table 11
New Jersey Preschool Enrollment by Age and Location, 2020–21

Total Enrollment	Percent of 3-Year-Olds Served	Percent of 4-Year-Olds Served	Percent of Preschoolers Served in LEAs	Percent of Preschoolers Served in Non-LEAs
46,895	16%	29%	59%	41%

Source: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G., Gardiner, B. A., & Jost, T. M. (2022). *The state of preschool 2021: State preschool yearbook*. National Institute for Early Education Research.

Governance and Administration

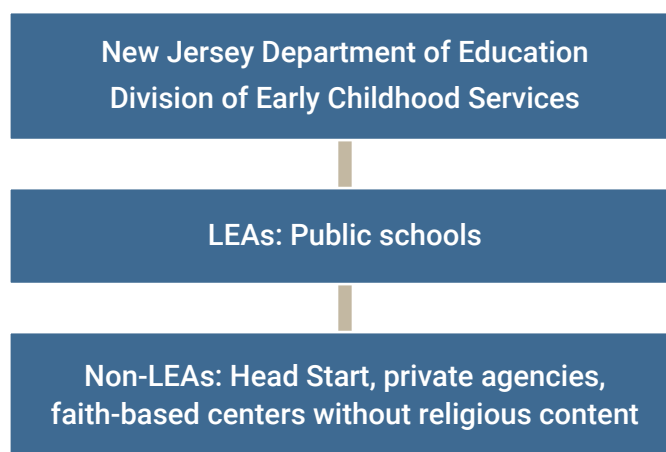
The state education department has guidance and regulations in place to support mixed delivery preschool in New Jersey, but the day-to-day administration of state preschool programs happens almost entirely at the LEA level, with LEA staff responsible for program oversight in both LEA and non-LEA settings. LEAs are responsible for engaging with non-LEA providers to gauge their willingness and ability to participate as subcontractors in the state preschool programs.

Governance

The [Division of Early Childhood Services](#) (state ECE division) in the New Jersey Department of Education (state education agency) is responsible for state oversight of New Jersey’s public preschool programs. [County offices of education](#) occasionally serve as intermediaries between LEAs and the state ECE division for issues related to preschool, but primary oversight sits within the state ECE division. (See Figure 3.)

LEAs are assigned a state specialist from the state ECE division who serves as a liaison to assist with implementation-related questions or issues. The liaisons review and provide feedback on the program plan and budget that LEAs are required to submit each year. The state liaison’s primary point of contact is the LEA early childhood supervisor, a position each LEA is required by regulation to fill.⁸⁸

Figure 3
New Jersey Preschool Organizational Chart



Source: Learning Policy Institute. (2023).

Recruitment of mixed delivery providers

LEAs are responsible for engaging with non-LEAs in their area that can add capacity to the state preschool program while meeting all state standards. The state education agency does not directly recruit non-LEA providers.

The *Abbott v. Burke* cases required that, where LEA space was insufficient to serve all eligible children, Abbott districts collaborate with any “willing and able” non-LEAs in an effort to serve all 3- and 4-year-olds in those districts as expediently as possible. As of 2002–03, all but three Abbott districts contracted with non-LEA providers, and 69% of preschoolers were being served in non-LEA settings.⁸⁹

Since 2018, non-Abbott LEAs have been permitted to apply for state funding to initiate or expand public preschool.⁹⁰ These districts are encouraged, but not required, to collaborate with non-LEAs. The state education agency incentivizes mixed delivery by awarding automatic points in the state funding application to LEAs that apply with the intention of contracting with non-LEAs.⁹¹ Despite incentives from the state education agency, the rate of non-LEA contracting within these LEAs is low and has started to decline in the Abbott LEAs as well. As a result, during the 2020–21 school year, the percentage of children served in mixed delivery settings declined to 54% in the Abbott districts and 41% across all New Jersey LEAs.⁹²

New Jersey’s quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), Grow NJ Kids, provides support for non-LEAs to make progress toward meeting the standards required to participate in public preschool. Once enrolled in the QRIS, providers receive training and professional development for staff, scholarships for teacher training, and funding for classroom materials and supplies. Also, the state has committed \$150 million in

fiscal year 2023 federal funding to support renovations to child care facilities in an effort to help non-LEAs meet state facilities standards for public preschool as well as to improve facilities for infant and toddler care.

Coordinating enrollment within the mixed delivery system

State preschool enrollment is coordinated entirely at the LEA level. The LEA early childhood supervisor is required to develop a recruitment and outreach plan to engage families of preschool-age children from across the LEA's catchment area. LEAs determine how to coordinate registration and child placement in LEA and non-LEA locations. In some cases LEAs allow registration and enrollment to take place at individual sites, and in other cases LEAs coordinate through a centralized system.

Funding

Funding for public preschool in New Jersey comes from the state's general fund and is distributed by the state education agency to LEAs along with state funding for K-12 education. LEAs are required to hold state preschool funding in a separate, restricted account and may only use these funds to support approved costs associated with serving preschool-age children.⁹³

Preschool funding levels vary by county and where children are served. The following base per-pupil rates were set as part of the [School Funding Reform Act of 2008 \(SFRA\)](#): \$11,506 for preschoolers served in LEAs, including charter schools; \$7,146 for preschoolers served in Head Start; and \$12,934 for preschoolers served in child care settings. The base rates are multiplied by county-specific geographic cost adjustments to determine rates for each county.⁹⁴ State funding for Head Start providers is significantly lower because it is used to supplement federal Head Start funding to raise the program quality to the state PreK standards.

For any charter schools approved to serve preschoolers, state funding is directed to the LEA, but regulations require that 100% of funding be passed from the LEA to the charter school (unlike K-12 funding, where the LEA is permitted to hold back a fixed percentage). Aside from this pass-through, there is no required collaboration between the charter school and the LEA; the LEA is not required to provide preschool monitoring or oversight.

The base per-pupil rates include funding for LEA oversight of the program in all settings outside of charter schools. LEAs are expected to withhold a portion of funding from each of the three per-child rates (district, Head Start, and other private child care) to support the cost of the LEA early childhood supervisor, nurse, master teachers, preschool intervention and referral specialist, professional development, and other services that directly benefit the overall operation and quality of the program.⁹⁵ The amount withheld varies across LEAs based on their unique costs and circumstances, as well as the estimated costs for each provider.⁹⁶

Fiscal monitoring

LEAs are required to submit an annual audit to the state education agency accounting for all state P–12 funding. LEAs complete a district audit that includes preschool expenditures, although the preschool line items are not detailed enough to specify whether preschool funding is misspent.

The state education agency primarily relies on the LEA preschool fiscal specialist to monitor expenditures in non-LEAs through quarterly expenditure reports. However, the state ECE division deploys a team of auditors each year to review financial records from a sample of non-LEAs across the state. The results of these reviews are used to recover misspent funding from providers and to rectify situations in which LEAs are being unnecessarily harsh in their enforcement of state guidance with respect to their non-LEA partners. When warranted, review findings may direct the LEA to return withheld funding to a non-LEA.

LEAs are required to submit an annual budget projection to the state ECE division along with an annual program plan. LEA budget projections must follow state guidelines and are required to include per-child rates for non-LEA providers. The state ECE division liaison reviews the LEA budget and program plan for reasonableness, including non-LEA rates, before final approval.

Non-LEAs are required to submit an annual budget to the LEA using templates provided by the state ECE division. The approved budget is memorialized in an annual state-developed contract, which then specifies when payments are made, how expenditures are tracked, and what happens if funding is misspent. The contract specifies that non-LEAs must submit quarterly expenditure reports to the LEA and may have future payments adjusted based on underenrollment and/or unapproved expenditures.

Program Quality

New Jersey has consistent requirements for program standards and teaching staff in LEA and non-LEA settings across the state preschool program. The state also has policies in place to ensure salary parity for teaching staff.

Quality standards

Table 12 provides a summary of the program requirements LEAs and non-LEAs agree to follow in New Jersey’s Preschool Expansion Program, which are modeled after the Abbott Preschool Program and are applied consistently across settings. These requirements earn New Jersey 8 of NIEER’s 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Teaching staff qualifications

Teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings have the same requirements: a bachelor’s degree in early childhood education and a Preschool–3rd grade certification.⁹⁷ During the initial expansion of the Abbott Preschool Program, individuals holding a Nursery

or Kindergarten through 8th grade certification who had at least 2 years of experience teaching in a preschool setting were permitted to continue teaching without obtaining the Preschool–3rd grade certification. Assistant teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings are required to hold a high school diploma or equivalent.⁹⁸

Professional development

Lead and assistant teachers in all settings are required to complete 20 hours of professional development every year. Coaching is required for all teachers and assistants; teachers are required to have annual individualized professional development plans, but assistants are not.⁹⁹ Professional development topics are determined at the LEA level by the early childhood supervisor and coaches. The state requires that non-LEA providers are included in all professional development provided by the district. Funding is built into both LEA and non-LEA budgets to support the cost of substitutes so that teaching staff can attend professional development sessions.¹⁰⁰ Depending on the topic, professional development is held in a large session for all teachers or in small groups led by master teachers.

Teacher compensation

The *Abbot* decision requires salary parity with public K–3 teachers for lead teachers in both LEA and non-LEA settings. Non-LEA teachers receive the same starting salary, salary schedule, paid time off, pay for professional responsibilities, and paid time for professional development as teachers in their contracting LEA.¹⁰¹ Salaries must also be prorated based on the length of school year (meaning if teachers work past the approximately 180-day school year, they are paid more).¹⁰² Preschool teachers in LEA settings also receive the same health care and retirement benefits as their K–3 peers, but state policy does not require benefit parity in non-LEA settings.¹⁰³

Assistant teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings are not required to receive the same paid time for professional responsibilities or professional development days as their K–3 peers, but they are provided with the same starting salary, salary schedule, paid time off, and salaries prorated for longer school days and years.¹⁰⁴ In terms of benefits, only assistant teachers in LEA settings receive the same retirement and health care benefits as their K–3 peers.¹⁰⁵

Table 12
Program Requirements for New Jersey Preschool

Class Size	15
Teacher–Child Ratio	2:15
Minimum Length of Day	6 hours/day
Family Income Requirement	None
Minimum Degree for Lead Teachers	Bachelor’s degree
Degree Specialization for Lead Teachers	ECE
Credentials, Licenses, or Endorsements for Lead Teachers	Preschool–Grade 3, Special Education
Qualifications for Assistant Teachers	High school diploma
State Standards for Curricula	Alignment with Early Learning and Development Standards required
State Supports for Curricula	Criteria for selecting curricula, list of state-recommended curricula, funding to support curriculum implementation
Requirements for Structured Observations of Classroom Quality	All programs are observed annually using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool, and Danielson Framework or Marzano; providers receive feedback, and data are used at the state and local levels
In-Service Professional Development	100 hours/5 years for lead and assistant teachers
Ongoing Classroom-Embedded Support	Required for all lead and assistant teachers
Annual Written Individualized Professional Development Plan	Required for all lead teachers
QRIS Participation	Participation is required for newly expanding programs; not required for Abbott districts

Source: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G., Gardiner, B. A., & Jost, T. M. (2022). *The state of preschool 2021: State preschool yearbook*. National Institute for Early Education Research.

Oversight of program quality

The LEA early childhood supervisor is ultimately responsible for program quality across all settings, and they work in collaboration with master teachers (coaches) and preschool intervention and referral specialists to monitor program quality through classroom and teacher observations.¹⁰⁶ LEAs are required to use a reliable assessment of classroom quality at least annually in every classroom and use the resulting data to support programwide improvements and to inform professional development plans for teaching staff. Providers are also required to implement a curriculum-based assessment aligned with their chosen curriculum as well as classroom teacher observations. Non-LEAs agree to program monitoring and evaluation from the LEA through an annual contract provided by the state ECE division that lays out the roles and responsibilities for both parties.¹⁰⁷

LEAs receive a monitoring visit from their state ECE division liaison every 3 years, though additional site visits occur when requested by the LEA or when unique circumstances arise (e.g., to approve a new preschool site, to resolve conflicts between LEA and non-LEAs). The primary objective of the site visit is to validate the LEA's documentation for the state's Self-Assessment Validation System (SAVS). The SAVS is New Jersey's continuous improvement system and evaluates the extent to which LEAs, and their contracted non-LEAs, are following state regulations.¹⁰⁸ The validation visit is typically a full-day meeting during which the early childhood supervisor and the state ECE liaison review documentation supporting the LEA's self-assessment. The state ECE division liaison sends a letter identifying the LEA's rating, including areas in need of improvement and areas where progress was made, and LEAs are required to respond with an improvement plan.

In an effort to more closely align with other ECE programs, the state ECE division now requires LEAs recently approved to start or expand a preschool program to enroll in [Grow NJ Kids](#), the state's QRIS.¹⁰⁹ Once an LEA is enrolled in Grow NJ Kids, they have access to state-sponsored trainings and technical assistance. The Abbott districts are not currently held to this requirement due to the maturity of their programs.

The Future of State Preschool in New Jersey

In September 2021, the state announced a commitment to universal preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds. The details for how preschool will expand and the role of the state in financing and overseeing public preschool are expected in a forthcoming Strategic Plan, but the state's announcement clearly indicates a future for mixed delivery preschool in New Jersey.

New York

Program Overview

New York is one of the larger states to fund a universal public preschool program, and it is now reaching almost 50% of 4-year-olds due to the rapid expansion of free preschool in New York City (see Table 13). New York state's preschool program has two different funding streams: Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) and the Statewide Universal Full-Day Prekindergarten (SUFDPK) grant. UPK is a noncompetitive award received by 650 of New York's 731 school districts. SUFDPK is competitively awarded to 80 LEAs to incentivize full-day programs, and all but 3 of these LEAs already have funding through a UPK allocation.

UPK and SUFDPK are generally held to the same program standards, including teacher qualifications and program monitoring, with a few exceptions. UPK allows for half-day (a minimum of 2.5 instructional hours per day) or full-day programming; SUFDPK and full-day UPK programs operate at a minimum of 5 instructional hours per day. Children must be 4 years old to attend SUFDPK, but 3- and 4-year-olds may enroll in UPK.

New York City's preschool program comprises about 44% of total state-funded slots, reaching about 70% of the city's 4-year-olds by 2000.¹¹⁰ New York City began its push for universal preschool in 2014 with the city's Pre-K for All initiative. One of the initial and key design elements of the program was a rapid scale-up through classrooms in mixed delivery settings. Almost 59% of New York City's preschoolers are served in non-LEA settings.¹¹¹

Table 13
UPK Enrollment by Age and Location, 2020–21

Total Enrollment	Percent of 3-Year-Olds Served	Percent of 4-Year-Olds Served	Percent of Preschoolers Served in LEAs	Percent of Preschoolers Served in Non-LEAs
115,597	6%	46%	44%	56%

Source: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G., Gardiner, B. A., & Jost, T. M. (2022). *The state of preschool 2021: State preschool yearbook*. National Institute for Early Education Research.

Governance and Administration

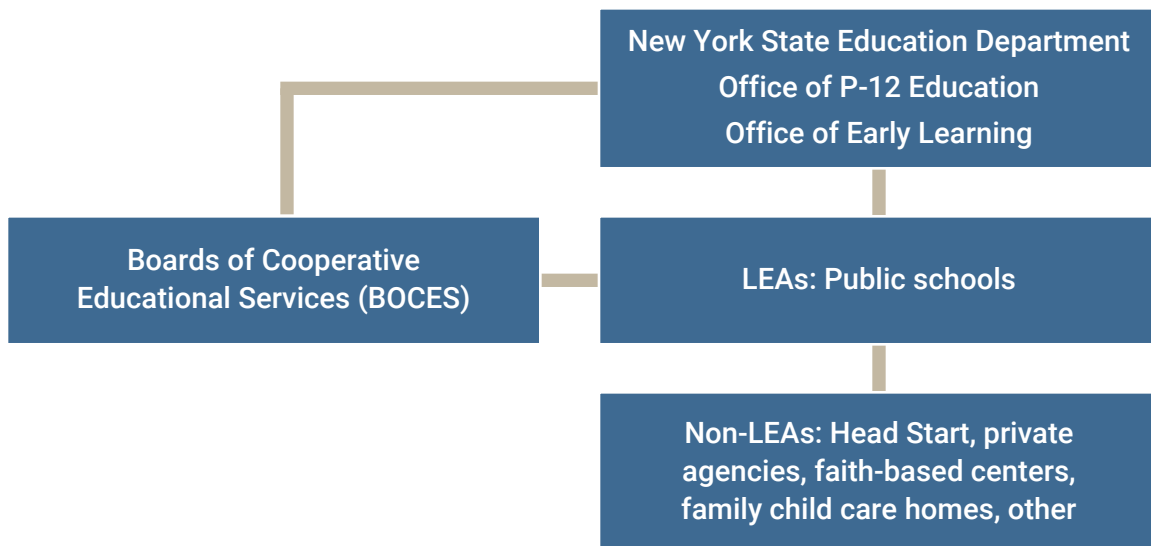
LEAs are primarily responsible for administering New York state's preschool programs, including recruiting and engaging non-LEA providers, although state staff are responsible for some program monitoring and evaluation. The state also contracts with 12 non-LEAs that sought funding in cases where their LEAs chose not to apply for SUFDPK funding. These non-LEAs bypass the LEA and interact directly with the state education agency.

Governance

State oversight for public preschool sits in the [Office of Early Learning](#), which is housed within the [P-12 Education](#) office of the [New York State Education Department](#) (state education agency). The Office of Early Learning supports LEAs in implementing and evaluating programs and policies for children in preschool through 3rd grade. New York has another governance structure, the [Boards of Cooperative Educational Services \(BOCES\)](#), a public organization that provides shared educational programs and services to LEAs and supports communication between the districts and the state, similar to a county office of education in other states. In 2022, there were 37 BOCES throughout the state. (See Figure 4.)

In New York City, the city education agency’s Division of Early Childhood Education oversees public preschool in all settings. Because the city’s preschool program is funded with multiple funding streams, other city agencies also support the governance and implementation of preschool.

Figure 4
New York Preschool Organizational Chart



Source: Learning Policy Institute. (2023).

Recruitment of mixed delivery providers

LEAs are responsible for recruiting non-LEAs and must set aside a minimum of 10% of their total state preschool funding for collaborations with eligible agencies. To meet this requirement, LEAs must put out a formal request to non-LEAs for proposals to collaborate.¹¹² The state encourages LEAs to use the “Find Child Care” function on the New York State Office of Children and Family Services website to assist them in identifying potential non-LEA collaborators.¹¹³ LEAs are also expected to conduct at least one site visit to prospective non-LEA programs prior to contracting for services.

State legislation specifies that eligible agencies must be within the boundaries of the LEA. However, LEAs can request a collaboration waiver to partner with a non-LEA outside district boundaries if there is a feasible way for families to access the program. This exception is especially important in rural areas of the state.

The state commissioner of education may waive the 10% requirement if the LEA is unable to find non-LEAs that will collaborate.¹¹⁴ In 2022, approximately 100 LEAs submitted variances due to not being able to meet the collaboration requirement. In most of these cases (an estimated 80%), the LEA reported that there were not any eligible non-LEAs available. One of the challenges for non-LEAs may be the regulation prohibiting programs from charging fees to the families of children participating in the state program.¹¹⁵ Unlike LEAs, non-LEAs may not have other funding sources to rely on if state per-child funding is not sufficient to cover all program costs or, in the case of SUFDPK, when funding is provided on a reimbursement basis at the end of the school year.

In New York City, the city education agency has established a readiness process for all preschool programs at the beginning of any new contracting cycle. The city's preschool administrator explained that this process gives individual preschool program providers the opportunity to learn and ask questions about program expectations while also making connections with other providers and city staff. The city has also established a Community Based Organization Council that meets with the LEA's preschool leadership and the city's Head Start Parent Policy Council.

Coordinating enrollment within the mixed delivery system

New York state does not require coordinated enrollment in its preschool programs, but LEAs are required to develop a written policy, approved by their school board, outlining lottery procedures if more children register than there are seats available.¹¹⁶ Selection of children must be random, even for children who have attended preschool as a 3-year-old in a collaborating child care center. Children who are not selected in the lottery are placed on a waiting list.

In New York City, the Pre-K for All admissions process allows families to apply for Pre-K for All programs utilizing the same application for both LEA and non-LEA settings.¹¹⁷ Families may rank up to 12 programs on the application in order of preference. The city's coordinated enrollment system has enabled families to find programs that meet their needs.¹¹⁸ However, research shows that racial and ethnic segregation tends to be worse in preschool in New York City than in K–12. LEA preschool classrooms tend to mirror the racial and ethnic diversity of their kindergarten classrooms, while non-LEAs tend to serve primarily children from low-income families and are less racially and ethnically diverse.¹¹⁹

Funding

Funding for the UPK program comes through an annual legislative appropriation from the state's general funds. UPK funds flow from the state to LEAs via a noncompetitive per-child allocation based on a formula defined in legislation.¹²⁰ During the 2021–22 and 2022–23 fiscal years, the UPK funding allocation rose by \$190 million, bringing New York state's investment in UPK to roughly \$780 million.

For the past 2 years, LEAs have been able to apply for funding on a competitive basis for the SUFDPK grant, which was established to incentivize LEAs to provide more full-day preschool seats.¹²¹ SUFDPK is typically awarded to LEAs, but a small number of non-LEAs also receive funding directly from the state.¹²² Eighty districts and 12 agencies currently receive this award. Roughly \$300 million of the \$380 million in funding is awarded to the New York City Department of Education. Of the 80 districts that receive an SUFDPK award, all but 3 already have funding through a UPK allocation.

LEAs receive UPK payments in two installments and specify via contract a schedule for payments to non-LEAs. SUFDPK funding comes from a separate legislative appropriation, and award amounts are intended to supplement, not supplant, other state preschool funding; grantees are reimbursed at the end of the year.

Per-child funding for UPK varies based on an LEA's wealth, with a minimum of \$5,400 per full-day student. SUFDPK awards are \$10,000 per child in classrooms in which the teacher is certified and \$7,000 per child in classrooms in which the teacher is uncertified. Per-child funding for non-LEAs is determined during the contracting process between the LEAs and non-LEAs. New York City passes nearly all the per-child funding for UPK to non-LEA programs.

Fiscal monitoring

LEAs are responsible for overseeing non-LEAs' budgets and submitting budgets to the state for review and approval.¹²³ UPK grantees who receive funding directly from the state must request prior approval from the state education agency for certain budget modifications prior to the end of the grant.¹²⁴ The state does not have a cap on indirect rates.

In New York City, the city education agency oversees subcontracting and provides monitoring and support for all preschool providers. Since contracts are supported by multiple funding sources, there are multiple city agencies that monitor or audit subcontractors directly.¹²⁵

Program Quality

New York state has mostly consistent program quality standards and requirements for teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings, but requirements are different for assistant teachers.

Quality standards

Table 14 provides a summary of UPK program requirements. In all but one case (qualifications for assistant teachers), the same requirements apply to LEAs and non-LEAs. New York's preschool program meets 7 of NIEER's 10 quality standards benchmarks.

Table 14
Program Requirements for New York UPK

Class Size	3- and 4-year-olds: 20
Teacher–Child Ratio	3- and 4-year-olds: 1:9
Minimum Length of Day	2.5 hours/day (UPK) 5 hours/day (SUFDPK only)
Family Income Requirement	None
Minimum Degree for Lead Teachers	Bachelor’s degree
Degree Specialization for Lead Teachers	ECE, Child Development, Elementary Education, Preschool Special Education, Special Education
Credentials, Licenses, or Endorsements for Lead Teachers	Birth–Age 2, Nursery–Grade 6
Qualifications for Assistant Teachers	Level I Teaching Assistant Certification (LEA) High school diploma (non-LEA)
State Standards for Curricula	Alignment with Early Learning and Development Standards required
State Supports for Curricula	Criteria for selecting curricula, state-sponsored training, funding to support curriculum implementation
Requirements for Structured Observations of Classroom Quality	Some classrooms are observed with locally selected observation tool; programs do not receive feedback from the state, but data are used for decision-making at the local level
In-Service Professional Development	175 hours/5 years required for lead teachers Determined locally for assistant teachers
Ongoing Classroom-Embedded Support	Required for some lead teachers
Annual Written Individualized Professional Development Plan	Not required for lead or assistant teachers
QRIS Participation	Participation is voluntary

Note: Requirements apply to LEA and non-LEA settings unless noted otherwise.

Source: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G., Gardiner, B. A., & Jost, T. M. (2022). *The state of preschool 2021: State preschool yearbook*. National Institute for Early Education Research.

Lead teacher qualifications

New York state requires LEA teachers (preschool to grade 12) to earn a master's degree to maintain licensure. Since 2004, preschool programs in non-LEA settings have been required to meet the same certification requirements as those in LEAs.¹²⁶ All newly hired lead teachers in both LEA and non-LEA settings are required to have a bachelor's degree in ECE or a related field and a written plan to earn a New York state teaching license or certificate valid for services in the early childhood grades within 5 years, which includes the completion of a master's degree.¹²⁷

Assistant teacher qualifications

Assistant teacher qualification requirements vary by setting. Assistant teachers in LEAs must have a Level 1 Teaching Assistant Certification, which includes health and safety training and a certification exam that is not specific to early learning, but rather to being an assistant in an LEA.¹²⁸ Assistant teachers in non-LEAs are required to have a high school diploma or meet the standards of the licensing or registering agency.

Professional development

Lead teachers in both LEAs and non-LEAs are required to complete 175 hours of professional development every 5 years. Those who have not yet obtained their teaching licenses or certificate must receive mentoring in their first year of teaching. For assistant teachers, professional development is locally determined. However, LEA-based assistant teachers with a Level III Teaching Assistant certificate must complete 75 hours of professional development every 5 years.

Teacher compensation

New York does not require preschool teachers to be paid at parity with teachers in grades K–12. Preschool teachers in New York City are paid at parity with K–12 teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings due to union negotiations (see “New York: Unions as a Mechanism for Salary Parity”).

Oversight of program quality

LEAs are responsible for ensuring that preschool programs operated by their non-LEA subcontractors are in compliance with state regulations. The LEA is also responsible for assessing all preschool children and for resolving any issues regarding program delivery.¹²⁹ Prior to working with a non-LEA program, LEAs must develop a contract to outline program operation and evaluation.

The state education agency's Office of Early Learning conducts annual site visits and completes a [Quality Assurance Protocol](#) to review the quality of preschool services provided in both LEA and non-LEA settings.¹³⁰ These visits are focused on program quality rather than contracting or fiscal practices. New York state has a quality rating and improvement system, [QUALITYstarsNY](#), but preschool programs are not required to participate.

In New York City, the city education agency’s Division of Early Childhood Education uses the [Early Childhood Framework for Quality \(EFQ\)](#) to align the standards and regulations that apply to all preschool settings. In addition, the office monitors classrooms using either the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) or Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS).¹³¹

The Future of UPK in New York

New York state continues to increase funding allocations to implement a universal preschool program, building upon the recommendations of the New York State Board of Regents Early Childhood Workgroup’s Blue Ribbon Committee.¹³² One of the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Committee includes requiring a larger percentage of UPK slots to be offered in non-LEAs. New York City is also continuing to expand its early care and education services to 3-year-olds through its 3-K for All program. Similar to the program for 4-year-olds, it is built on utilizing non-LEA providers within the city.

West Virginia

Program Overview

West Virginia’s preschool program, West Virginia Universal Pre-K (WV Pre-K), was established in 2002 when legislation was passed requiring that by 2012 all 55 counties provide preschool for all 4-year-olds and 3-year-olds with disabilities. The legislation requires county boards of education to collaborate with Head Start and child care in the delivery of WV Pre-K in the county to maximize use of existing resources. A minimum of 50% of preschool classrooms must be “collaborative,” meaning that there is a contractual agreement in place between LEAs and community programs, including but not limited to Head Start and child care providers.¹³³ WV Pre-K served 68% of 4-year-olds in 2019–20, and about 6% of 3-year-olds with an individualized education plan. However due to the pandemic, the percentage of children served dropped to 56% and 5%, respectively, in 2020–21 (see Table 15).¹³⁴ WV Pre-K offers a full-day program for 4 days or 5 days weekly.¹³⁵

Table 15
West Virginia Pre-K Enrollment by Age and Location, 2020–21

Total Enrollment	Percent of 3-Year-Olds Served	Percent of 4-Year-Olds Served	Percent of Preschoolers Served in Collaborative Classrooms
11,981	5%	56%	82%

Source: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G., Gardiner, B. A., & Jost, T. M. (2022). *The state of preschool 2021: State preschool yearbook*. National Institute for Early Education Research.

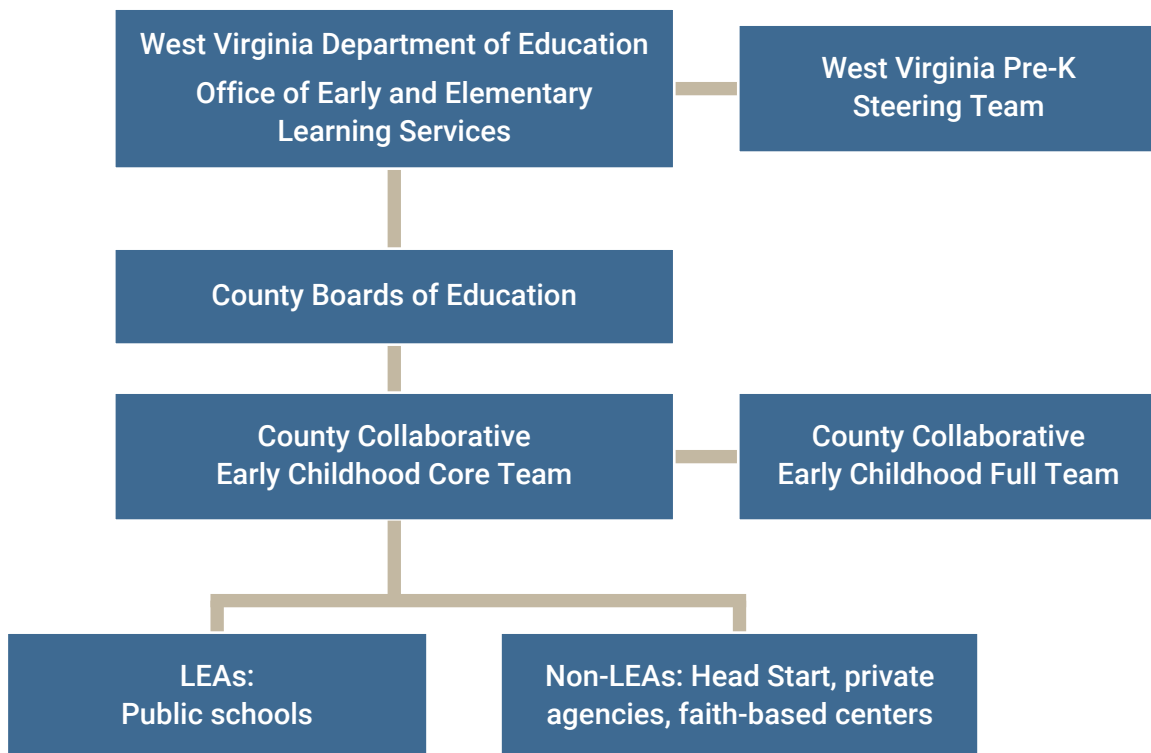
Governance and Administration

The state establishes policy and guidance for local county boards of education to implement the preschool program, including requirements for data, reporting, and fiscal oversight. County boards of education, in turn, establish local collaborative teams. Mixed delivery is legislatively mandated, and the state provides resources to support enrollment and budgeting for non-LEA programs.

Governance

West Virginia's Department of Education Office of Teaching and Learning¹³⁶ (state education agency) oversees the WV Pre-K program (see Figure 5). However, WV Pre-K policy is determined by a state leadership team, the [WV Pre-K Steering Team](#), with input from statewide stakeholders. The state leadership team includes representatives from the WV Department of Health and Human Resources' Division of Early Care and Education; the WV Department of Education's Pre-K coordinator and preschool special needs coordinator; and the Head Start state collaboration director. (See Figure 5.)

Figure 5
West Virginia Pre-K Organizational Chart



Source: Learning Policy Institute. (2023).

The state team structure is mirrored at the county level. The county board of education is the fiscal agent for the funds that flow to districts from the school aid funding formula.¹³⁷ Each of the 55 county boards of education are required to establish a [County Collaborative Early Childhood Core Team](#) (core team) that includes representation from the county school system PreK provider, the county school system preschool special needs provider, a licensed community child care provider, and Head Start.¹³⁸ The county superintendent names and employs a preschool coordinator and a special education representative. These positions are paid for with state funds and may have other coordination duties within the county. Core teams have specific responsibilities for joint decision-making, monitoring and quality assurance, fiscal accountability, and reporting.

In addition, each county must identify a [County Collaborative Early Childhood Full Team](#) (full team) with various representatives of county services and agencies. Full team membership includes the parent or guardian of a preschool child; representatives from the West Virginia Birth to Three Regional Administrative Unit, local Department of Health and Human Resources, and/or child care resource and referral agency; school health representative; classroom teachers; family resource networks; family resource centers; faith-based early childhood providers; and others.¹³⁹ Every non-LEA in the county must be invited to join the full team, which is charged with establishing a comprehensive system for public preschool that is linked to programs and services for children and families from birth through school age.

Recruitment of mixed delivery providers

The core team, in collaboration with the full team, is responsible for recruiting non-LEA providers, to ensure that at least 50% of classrooms operate as a collaboration between LEA and non-LEA providers.

Coordinating enrollment within the mixed delivery system

Each County Collaborative Early Childhood Core Team is required to develop an enrollment process that must be used universally throughout the county. The system must be made public and specify how applications are collected and how placements are determined to ensure that all eligible children are offered a slot. The state education agency has a list of questions that must be addressed on the county application (e.g., birthdate, residency, family characteristics).¹⁴⁰

Funding

The WV Pre-K program is included in the state's school aid funding formula, with district funding determined by enrollment. School aid funding is generated for each eligible child enrolled by October 1 of each school year.¹⁴¹ The state provides an estimate in the previous year of the number of children expected to be served and the number of personnel to be supported with state aid funds, including salary increments.¹⁴²

As part of the contracting process, each county collaborative must complete a [Collaborative Classroom Budget and Cost Allocation Worksheet](#) for all of the preschool providers operating in the county. The worksheet is designed to illustrate costs and

resources provided by each partner. Parents and guardians may only be charged for hours outside the WV Pre-K designated time in non-LEA settings. Providers also use federal and state funding, such as Head Start and the Child Care and Development Fund, to support eligible children. The state offers technical assistance to support county boards of education in braiding funding from Head Start, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and state funds.

Fiscal monitoring

County Pre-K coordinators verify contracts and program budgets, report annually on finances, and input classroom data in the statewide early learning reporting system. Each county is required to annually submit WV Pre-K program data and a comprehensive WV Pre-K fiscal report to the state education agency. The report reflects funding and resource contributions from all sources for the previous school year.

Program Quality

West Virginia has the same quality standards for LEA and non-LEA settings and has mostly consistent requirements for program teaching staff within the WV Pre-K program. Degree qualifications for lead and assistant teachers are identical across settings; however, the route to certification may be different for LEA and non-LEA preschool teachers. LEA teachers have compensation parity with their K–3rd grade colleagues, whereas non-LEA preschool teachers receive compensation based on their employer’s salary schedule.¹⁴³

Program quality

Table 16 provides a summary of the program requirements of the WV Pre-K program. All requirements are applicable to LEA and non-LEA programs, with two exceptions: certification of non-LEA preschool teachers and compensation for preschool teachers employed by non-LEAs. West Virginia meets 9 of NIEER’s 10 quality standards benchmarks. The state does not fully meet the benchmark regarding staff development because ongoing classroom-embedded support is provided only to teachers in Head Start settings.

Lead teacher qualifications

A bachelor’s degree is required for WV Pre-K teachers in LEA and non-LEA settings. WV Pre-K teachers are also required to have an additional 6 credit hours of preservice specialized training in either ECE, child development, or preschool special education and certification in ECE or elementary education (see Table 16). In LEAs, preschool teachers may apply for a temporary certification. In non-LEA settings, teachers have the option of fulfilling the WV Pre-K certification requirement by obtaining the [Community Program Authorization](#), which enables teachers who are working toward their credentials and certification by the state to continue teaching in a PreK classroom with initial, renewal, or permanent authorization.¹⁴⁴

Table 16
Program Requirements for West Virginia Pre-K

Class Size	20
Teacher–Child Ratio	1:10 ^a
Minimum Length of Day	25 hours/week; 4 days/week
Family Income Requirement	None
Minimum Degree for Lead Teachers	Bachelor’s degree
Degree Specialization for Lead Teachers	ECE, Child Development, Preschool Special Education
Credentials, Licenses, or Endorsements for Lead Teachers	LEAs: Preschool, Nursery, Preschool–Kindergarten, Preschool–Grade 4, Elementary Education w/ ECE endorsement, Preschool Special Education Non-LEAs: Preschool, Nursery, Preschool–Kindergarten, Preschool–Grade 4, Elementary Education w/ ECE endorsement, Preschool Special Education, Community Program Permanent Authorization
Qualifications for Assistant Teachers	Child Development Associate or state equivalent
State Standards for Curricula	Alignment with Early Learning and Development Standards required
State Supports for Curricula	Criteria for selecting curricula adoption of specific curricula required, list of state-approved curricula, ongoing technical assistance, funding to support curriculum implementation
Requirements for Structured Observations of Classroom Quality	All classrooms are observed at least annually with a locally selected observation tool; programs receive feedback, and data are used at the state and local level
In-Service Professional Development	15 hours/year for lead and assistant teachers
Ongoing Classroom-Embedded Support	Required for some lead and assistant teachers
Annual Written Individualized Professional Development Plan	Required for all lead and assistant teachers
QRIS Participation	State does not have a QRIS

^a WV Pre-K requires two adults in the classroom at all times.

Note: Requirements apply to LEA and non-LEA settings unless noted otherwise.

Source: Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G., Gardiner, B. A., & Jost, T. M. (2022). *The state of preschool 2021: State preschool yearbook*. National Institute for Early Education Research.

Assistant teacher qualifications

WV Pre-K assistant teachers in LEAs and non-LEAs must obtain the [Early Childhood Classroom Assistant Teacher authorization](#). To obtain the authorization, individuals must either complete Child Development Associate certification; the West Virginia Apprenticeship for Child Development Specialist program; or three required courses, which may be taken online.¹⁴⁵

Professional development

All county WV Pre-K staff, including teachers and assistant teachers, must participate in at least 15 hours of staff development annually, based on the needs identified in the county continuous quality improvement process. County service personnel staff development councils, which oversee grades P–12, provide guidance for the support and delivery of professional development for service personnel, including WV Pre-K assistant teachers.¹⁴⁶

Lead and assistant teachers in both LEA and non-LEA settings are required to have annual written individualized professional development plans. Assistant teachers must have a professional development plan that is linked to predetermined needs, reflects program goals and policies, and includes a systematic evaluation process. All classroom staff employed by non-LEAs must also have a professional development plan, designed by non-LEA site directors, that includes staff evaluation in accordance with state child care licensing regulations. Collaborating Head Start providers follow the Head Start Performance Standards, which require grantees to design a system of training and professional development for all staff. Almost 70% of WV Pre-K classrooms are provided by LEAs in collaboration with Head Start.

Requirements for classroom-embedded support or coaching are based on the employing organization's requirements. LEA preschool teachers are included in the West Virginia Educator Evaluation System, which requires goal setting and evaluator observations.¹⁴⁷ In Head Start classrooms, a research-based, coordinated coaching strategy for education staff is required by the Office of Head Start Performance Standards. Coaching requirements are addressed in collaborative contracts between Head Start providers and county boards of education.

Teacher compensation

Lead and assistant teachers in LEA settings are required by state code to receive the same salary and fringe benefits as their peers in K–12. Salary increments and step increases for teachers in LEA settings are based on regional factors and are determined by the state.¹⁴⁸ State policy does not require compensation parity for non-LEA lead and assistant teachers with their peers in LEA settings.

Oversight of program quality

County collaboratives are required to provide program oversight of WV Pre-K, defined in the contracts between providers and the county board of education. County collaboratives are also required to implement a [continuous quality improvement process](#) that includes an annual plan for collecting and analyzing program assessment data from multiple sources.¹⁴⁹ Three data sources must be utilized annually: the WV Universal Pre-K Health and Safety Checklist (administered within 45 days of the first day of school), county-aggregated child outcomes, and classroom observation data.¹⁵⁰ The health and safety screener is aligned with Head Start requirements so that providers receiving both Head Start and WV Pre-K funding only need to use one screener. County collaboratives are also required to use a Pre-K Observation Walkthrough tool to observe portions of the preschool day and to collect other child outcome data, through the [Early Learning Reporting System for Pre-K](#).

The state conducts a review of the preschool programs in each county collaborative at least once every 3 years. The [WV Universal Pre-K Program Review](#) includes a review of documents, classroom visits, parent surveys, and core team interviews. State teams are assigned to conduct the reviews, and they typically include cross-agency and cross-division representatives.

The Future of WV Pre-K in West Virginia

Enrollment in the WV Pre-K program was impacted by the pandemic, especially in non-LEA providers. The state is working to ensure that enrollment and quality implementation return to pre-pandemic levels. The state is collecting data on access to preschool for 3-year-olds, and on the developmental trajectory of children who participated in the WV Pre-K program, to inform future planning.

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115. New York Compilation of Codes, Rules & Regulations Title 8 § 151-1.2(a) (2021). [https://govt.westlaw.com/nycrr/Document/I36610ef2c22211ddb29d8bee567fca9f?viewType=FullText&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=CategoryPageItem&contextData=\(sc.Default\)](https://govt.westlaw.com/nycrr/Document/I36610ef2c22211ddb29d8bee567fca9f?viewType=FullText&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=CategoryPageItem&contextData=(sc.Default))
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117. Preschool in New York City operates in three types of settings: (1) New York City Early Education Centers (NYCEECs). These providers are not public schools, but they are expected to partner with the New York City DOE to provide preschool programs. These settings may offer a longer program day (up to 10 hours) and operate year-round. (2) District schools. These are public elementary schools that operate preschool programs. (3) Preschool centers. These are run by NYC DOE staff and only offer grades before kindergarten. New York City Department of Education. (n.d.). *Pre-K*. <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/enrollment/enroll-grade-by-grade/pre-k>
118. Kashen, J., Toribio, L., Vadehra, E., Powell, C., Hackett, J., Potter, H., Park, N., & Bartholomew, A. (2021). *Building a high-quality child care and early learning infrastructure for New York City*. Century Foundation. <https://tcf.org/content/report/building-high-quality-child-care-early-learning-infrastructure-new-york-city/>
119. A 2020 study of the New York City preschool program also found racial disparities in the number of children enrolled in higher-quality settings, citing the geographic availability of high-quality settings as a contributing factor. Latham, S., Corcoran, S. P., Sattin-Bajaj, C., & Jennings, J. L. (2020). *Racial disparities in Pre-K quality: Evidence from New York City's universal Pre-K program* [EdWorkingPaper: 20–248]. Annenberg Institute at Brown University. <https://www.edworkingpapers.com/sites/default/files/ai20-248.pdf>; Potter, H. (2016). *Diversity in New York City's universal pre-K classrooms*. Century Foundation. <https://tcf.org/content/report/diversity-new-york-citys-universal-pre-k-classrooms/?agreed=1>
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121. For a more complete description of the public preschool programs offered in New York state, see: New York State Education Department. *State-administered prekindergarten programs*. <http://www.nysed.gov/early-learning/state-administered-prekindergarten-programs-applications>
122. New York Education Code § 3206-EE (2022). <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/EDN/3602-EE>
123. For information about the Monitoring & Vendor Performance System (MVPS), see: New York State Education Department. (2015). *A quick guide: Entitling users to SED Monitory & Vendor Performance System*. <https://www.p12.nysed.gov/seddas/guides/monitoring-vendor-performance-system-mini-guide.pdf>
124. Breslin, J. (2021, January 12). *Reminder to submit FS-10-A Amendments for the 2020–2021 school year*. [Memorandum]. New York State Education Department, Office of Early Learning. <http://www.nysed.gov/memo/early-learning/reminder-submit-fs-10-amendments-2020-2021-school-year>
125. New York City's prekindergarten program is funded through UPK state dollars, federal Child Care Block Grant funding that is administered by New York City's Office of Children and Family Services, federal Head Start funds that are administered by the Office of Head Start, and New York City tax levy dollars.
126. A legislative amendment allowed certain organizations to be exempt from this requirement until at least 2013.
127. Under certain circumstances, a waiver can be requested to extend that 5-year period.
128. New York State Education Department. (2020). *Requirements Teaching Assistant - Level I Certificate*. <https://www.highered.nysed.gov/tcert/certificate/teaching-assistant-level-1.html>
129. New York Compilation of Codes, Rules & Regulations Title 8 § 151-1.3(f) (2021). [https://govt.westlaw.com/nycrr/Document/I36610ef5c22211ddb29d8bee567fca9f?viewType=FullText&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=CategoryPageItem&contextData=\(sc.Default\)&bhcp=1](https://govt.westlaw.com/nycrr/Document/I36610ef5c22211ddb29d8bee567fca9f?viewType=FullText&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=CategoryPageItem&contextData=(sc.Default)&bhcp=1)
130. New York Education Code § 3206-E and § 3206-EE (2022).
131. For more information about program assessments and other implementation policies in New York City, see: NYC Department of Education, Division of Early Childhood Education. (n.d.). *Birth-to five policy handbook for New York City Early Education Centers (NYCEECs)*. https://infohub.nyced.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/3kforall_and_prekforall_nyceec_policy_handbook_2018.pdf

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135. W.Va. Code §18-5-44 was amended in 2016 to require that programs operate on a 4- or 5-day model, providing 1,500 minutes of instruction weekly and 48,000 minutes of instruction annually. West Virginia Education Code § 18-5-44 (2023). <https://www.wvlegislature.gov/wvcode/ChapterEntire.cfm?chap=18&art=5§ion=44>
136. The West Virginia Department of Education recently reorganized and moved oversight of the WV Pre-K program from the Office of Early and Elementary Learning Services to the Office of Teaching & Learning.
137. West Virginia Department of Education. (n.d.). *Funding, collaborative contracts, and classroom budgets*. <https://wvde.us/early-and-elementary-learning/wv-universal-pre-k/universal-pre-k-collaborative-system/funding-collaborative-contracts-and-classroom-budgets/> (accessed 08/15/22).
138. A representative from the local department of health and human resources and/or child care resource and referral agency are included in the County Collaborative Early Childhood Core Team if there is no licensed community child care representative. West Virginia Department of Education. (n.d.). *WV Pre-K Collaborative System: County Collaborative Early Childhood Core Team*. <https://wvde.us/early-and-elementary-learning/wv-universal-pre-k/universal-pre-k-collaborative-system/wv-pre-k-collaborative-system/#fusion-tab-countycollaborativeearlychildhoodcoreteam> (accessed 08/15/22).
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The Learning Policy Institute conducts and communicates independent, high-quality research to improve education policy and practice. Working with policymakers, researchers, educators, community groups, and others, the Institute seeks to advance evidence-based policies that support empowering and equitable learning for each and every child. Nonprofit and nonpartisan, the Institute connects policymakers and stakeholders at the local, state, and federal levels with the evidence, ideas, and actions needed to strengthen the education system from preschool through college and career readiness.



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