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## Preschool Policy Brief

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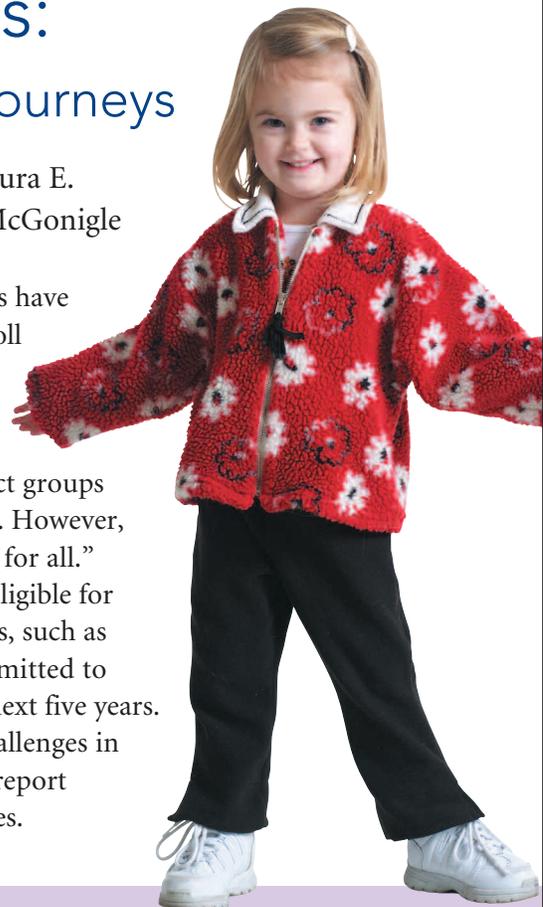
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# Providing Preschool Education for All 4-Year-Olds: Lessons from Six State Journeys

by Debra J. Ackerman, W. Steven Barnett, Laura E. Hawkinson, Kirsty Brown and Elizabeth A. McGonigle

State-funded voluntary prekindergarten programs have grown steadily over the past decade and now enroll more than one million children. While the overall trend has been one of increasing participation in publicly funded preschool education, access in most states is limited to select groups of disadvantaged or otherwise-at-risk 4-year-olds. However, Florida, Georgia and Oklahoma offer “preschool for all.” This means all 4-year-olds living in the state are eligible for state pre-K, and most actually attend. Other states, such as Illinois, New York and West Virginia, have committed to extending availability to all 4-year-olds over the next five years. To illuminate the options, opportunities, and challenges in moving toward preschool education for all, this report examines the individual journeys of these six states.



### What We Know:

- Gubernatorial, legislative, and citizen initiatives have pushed “preschool for all” on to policymakers’ agendas. Declining K-12 enrollment and broader school reform initiatives also have helped make preschool an attractive agenda item. No matter what the source, creating political momentum relied on the support of a key political figure.
- Moving from serving a limited number of 4-year-olds to pre-K for all required interrelated decisions about the pace of expansion, participating auspices, program standards, governance, and funding mechanisms.
- These six preschool initiatives vary considerably in their teacher qualifications, ties to public schools, and per-pupil funding. They are likely to vary in their educational effectiveness as well.

### Policy Recommendations:

- Use existing early childhood leadership, K-12 stakeholders, research, and the support of key state government and business leaders to move preschool for all onto the policy agenda.
- Set up a planning process to enhance collaboration among different auspices and help identify needs for funding and administration. Determine what level and types of teacher preparation and other program characteristics are needed to achieve program goals.
- Engage in a continuous cycle of planning, implementing, and reviewing to assure that preschool for all initiatives reach their intended goals. Use assessments that provide valid measures of program implementation and outcomes.
- Make educational effectiveness a priority over serving as many children as possible.

Thirty-five years ago few states provided financial support for preschool education programs.<sup>2</sup> Today spending across the country exceeds \$3 billion in state dollars alone. Yet most states still limit access to disadvantaged or otherwise-at-risk 4-year-olds and just 22 percent of children in this age group participate in a state-funded preschool program.<sup>3</sup> However, a few states have moved toward voluntary access to free preschool for all 4-year-olds.

This report draws on published reports, state web sites, and interviews with key state stakeholders to examine six state journeys toward preschool education for all 4-year-olds. Topics addressed include how preschool education rose to the top of policymakers' agendas and six key decisions that these states faced in moving toward preschool for all. It also sheds light on the challenges that have constrained implementation of preschool for all. We conclude with lessons for preschool stakeholders beginning the journey in their own states.

## The Rationale for Preschool for All

As states seek to improve children's short- and long-term outcomes, many choose to provide preschool education programs but only for those most at risk of school failure. At first glance, this approach has some appeal. The large research base demonstrating the benefits of high-quality preschool education for disadvantaged children,<sup>4</sup> as well as cost-benefit analyses showing high rates of return,<sup>5</sup> suggest a strategy of first serving those who "need it most" and are least able to purchase it on their own. Moreover, targeting the disadvantaged limits government involvement and the cost to the public, while allowing the private market for preschool to thrive.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, targeting has not always brought about its intended outcomes. Programs for disadvantaged children tend to under serve their targeted populations with respect to both availability and quality.<sup>7</sup> Many state programs remain quite small and set educational standards far below those acceptable for public education generally.<sup>8</sup> When the public funds programs for the poor rather than for everyone, the majority of voters may be unwilling to pay for a high-quality program for a small portion of the population, despite its relatively low total cost.<sup>9</sup>

Another greatly underappreciated practical problem is that poverty is transitory, and thus presents a moving target. Over the course of a school year many children will move back and forth across any set income cutoff. Compounding this problem is the difficulty of measuring family income to determine who really qualifies, as well as the administrative costs of evaluating it on an ongoing basis. These problems are sufficiently serious that by the end of a school year most of the children who are enrolled may not qualify on income grounds, while most who do qualify are not served.<sup>10</sup>

Child care subsidy policies are similarly focused on children from low-income families and emphasize moving parents from welfare to work at minimal cost rather than enhancing children's learning and development.<sup>11</sup> State regulations tend to minimize any requirements for providers that would raise costs, even when these may be necessary to ensure that programs are educationally adequate, and in turn, are cost-effective due to the benefits of early education.<sup>12</sup> In addition, state policies that end subsidies when parental income or employment status changes, often after only a few months, disrupt efforts to provide education through child care.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, there is growing evidence high-quality preschool education could bring about substantial gains if also offered to the vast majority of children who are above the poverty line. While the school readiness gap is greatest for disadvantaged children, middle-income children are frequently ill-prepared to do well in kindergarten and beyond. This is evidenced by the fact that middle-income children also experience unreasonably high rates of grade retention and failure to graduate from high school. The percentage of disadvantaged children who experience these outcomes is admittedly higher, but because the rest of the population is so much larger, the potential benefits and savings to education budgets are quite substantial.<sup>14</sup>

In short, although targeting may appear reasonable at the outset, it is problematic in many respects. Offering high-quality preschool education to all children is more likely to make a major impact on the school failure problem by reaching all those at risk of grade retention, dropout, and other academic problems. The initial cost of such a program is higher, but the increase in returns from improving the quality of services to disadvantaged children, while also adding returns for other children, can more than justify the added costs.

## Overview of Six State Preschool for All Programs

Six states—Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New York, Oklahoma and West Virginia—have already decided that offering preschool education to all 4-year-olds is an efficient use of public funds. These six states vary in terms of when their programs began. They also differ in the percentage of preschoolers enrolled in public pre-K, a measure that should include those in publicly funded preschool special education and federal Head Start programs. It also should be noted that some children may be enrolled in more than one program.

As seen in Table 1, Georgia and Oklahoma have been offering access to all 4-year-olds since 1995 and 1998, respectively. While each serves more than half of the eligible population in their pre-K programs, Oklahoma takes a commanding lead when Head Start and special education are taken into account (final column in Table 1). Georgia ranks fourth despite making the earliest commitment. The state’s program remains limited by the availability of lottery funds, its dedicated funding source.

Table 1. Publicly Funded Education Programs for 4-Year-Olds, FY 2007<sup>15</sup>

| State | Year Program Began | Percent in Public School | Number Served | Percent Enrolled | Total Percent Served Including Head Start and Special Education |
|-------|--------------------|--------------------------|---------------|------------------|---|
| GA    | 1995               | 43%                      | 74,155        | 53%              | 65%   |
| NY    | 1997               | 42%                      | 83,505        | 35%              | 55%   |
| OK    | 1998               | 72%                      | 34,375        | 68%              | 90%   |
| WV    | 2003               | N/A                      | 9,586         | 46%              | 76%   |
| FL    | 2005               | 18%                      | 124,490       | 57%              | 71%   |
| IL    | 2006               | N/A                      | 47,108        | 27%              | 45%   |

New York initiated a prekindergarten program aimed at all 4-year-olds around the same time as Georgia and Oklahoma, but has no guaranteed funding stream and experienced flat or reduced funding for many years. In fiscal year 2007, 35 percent of age-eligible children participated in the state's publicly funded education program. Counting Head Start and special education, the total percent of 4-year-olds served in fiscal year 2007 was 55 percent. Florida's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) program began in September 2005 and was already serving 57 percent of the state's prekindergartners in fiscal year 2007. An additional 14 percent of all prekindergartners in the state were enrolled in Head Start or special education.

Two recent additions to the preschool for all movement show promise for reaching their enrollment goals. In fiscal year 2007, 46 percent of 4-year-olds in West Virginia were enrolled in the state's Early Childhood Education program, which began in 2003 and is an expansion of the public school prekindergarten program. An additional 31 percent participate in Head Start or are enrolled in preschool special education classes. The Early Childhood Education program aims to serve all age-eligible children by the 2012-2013 school year.

In the spring of 2006, Illinois established the Preschool for All initiative. The program is open to 3- and 4-year-olds and is an expansion of the state's former targeted program, which served 67,000 children in 2005-2006.<sup>16</sup> This figure jumped to more than 85,000 3- and 4-year-olds in fiscal year 2007. Another 18 percent of 4-year-olds were enrolled in Head Start or special education classes. Policymakers expect to serve 190,000 3- and 4-year-olds once Preschool for All is fully implemented.<sup>17</sup>

As can be seen, the percentage of children served in these programs is not strongly related to when programs started. Much depends on the policies and politics within each state, including how programs got started.

## **The Role of Context in Bringing About Increased Access to Preschool Education**

New initiatives often reflect an unpredictable and dynamic convergence of leadership, news-worthy events, and other policy-relevant contextual factors.<sup>18</sup> The first early education programs open to all 4-year-olds were launched in the 1990s, a decade that saw an increased focus on children's school readiness and early brain development and included publication of the Carnegie report<sup>19</sup> and passage of The Goals 2000: Educate America Act.<sup>20</sup> These trends and events may have helped set the stage for expanded access in these six states, but additional contextual factors also played a key role.

All 4-year-olds have been eligible for state-funded pre-K in Georgia since 1995. The initiative originated from a gubernatorial campaign and a subsequent constitutional amendment to create a lottery-funded, targeted program. In the 1980s, perpetually low state educational rankings provided a strong justification for improving education in the state. During the 1990 gubernatorial election, then-Lieutenant Governor Zell Miller pushed for a state lottery that would generate revenues for three specific education programs, including a preschool program for low-income 4-year-olds. Despite organized opposition to the lottery, state citizens voted to amend their constitution and institute the lottery in 1992. In the 1992-1993 school year, Georgia piloted a targeted program that served approximately 750 children. In 1993-1994, enrollment rose to 8,712 4-year-olds, and the next year 15,588 children enrolled.<sup>21</sup>

Georgia's targeted program expanded to all age-eligible children through a second set of events. By 1994, the lottery was generating more than \$240 million dollars for education programs. In addition, research on the state-funded preschool program had shown positive results for early academic skills. Middle-income families began to ask their state representatives when their children could enroll in the program. In 1995, the governor announced that Georgia's lottery-funded program would be open to all 4-year-olds, regardless of family income.<sup>22</sup> It was the country's first publicly funded, voluntary preschool education initiative to extend eligibility to all 4-year-olds.

New York has a long history of state-funded preschool education, starting with a targeted preschool program known as Experimental Prekindergarten (EPK) that began in 1966.<sup>23</sup> However, New York did not establish its larger Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) program until 1997. The stage was set one year prior when then-Lieutenant Governor Betsy Ross called for the expansion of EPK to all at-risk 4-year-olds. Speaker of the Assembly Sheldon Silver was planning a major educational reform bill that year as well. In addition, New York's economy was thriving.<sup>24</sup>

To take advantage of this policy context, in early 1997 a group of early childhood stakeholders held a forum that was attended by Assembly staff and other interested parties.<sup>25</sup> The agenda included an overview of the recently released Carnegie report<sup>26</sup> highlighting children's learning between the ages of 3 and 10. In addition, a guest speaker discussed Georgia's recently instituted prekindergarten program. Members of this stakeholder group then began to collaborate with legislative staff to draft a universal preschool bill.<sup>27</sup> UPK legislation passed in August 1997 as part of a broader reform and funding package spearheaded by Assembly Speaker Silver. The package also promoted full-day kindergarten, smaller class sizes in the early primary grades, teacher training, hi-tech equipment purchases, and bonds for school construction.<sup>28</sup>

Oklahoma's first 4-year-old program was a grant-based pilot program which ran from 1980 to 1990. As a result of a K-12 funding discrepancy, declining K-12 enrollments, and an awareness of the benefits of early education, the legislature made targeted pre-K for 4-year-olds more widely available in 1990 as part of a larger education reform package. Although the bill was passed by a narrow margin,<sup>29</sup> this reform secured pre-K a place in the state aid funding formula.<sup>30</sup> By 1992-1993, about 10 percent of all 4-year-olds were enrolled in public school pre-K classrooms.

However, pre-K funding was only \$1,000-\$1,200 per child, as opposed to \$3,500 per child funding for kindergarten enrollees. Also, K-12 enrollments were declining in some areas of the state. Some districts responded to this funding discrepancy and classroom availability by enrolling 4-year-olds in kindergarten. At the same time, key lawmakers and community leaders became convinced of the benefits of early education for school readiness. In 1998, Representative Joe Eddins introduced a voluntary pre-K bill for all 4-year-olds that equalized funding for pre-K and kindergarten. The bill was subsequently passed and signed into law by then-Governor Keating.<sup>31</sup>

Declining K-12 enrollment in West Virginia played a role in promoting expanded access in that state as well. Targeted public school preschool had been available in the state since 1986. However, the school aid funding formula was based on K-12 enrollment. To compensate for declining enrollments in the late 1990s and early 2000s, some school districts began enrolling 4-year-olds in kindergarten. There was a growing awareness of the number of children who were eligible for free and reduced-price lunch and were also starting school behind their higher-income peers. Policymakers also developed a greater appreciation for the potential for early education to ameliorate this problem.<sup>32</sup>

During the 2001-2002 legislative session, the Senate finance committee created an advisory group to examine how existing early care and education resources and services might be mobilized to better meet the needs of the state's children.<sup>33</sup> In early 2002, the legislature voted to approve an education reform bill sponsored by Senator Lloyd Jackson that increased education funding by \$2.9 billion. Most of the increased funding was for K-12 teacher salaries, but one additional provision was that each county-based board of education was required to provide preschool for all 4-year-olds by the 2012-2013 school year.<sup>34</sup>

In 1999, the Florida Legislature passed the School Readiness Act,<sup>35</sup> which established the gubernatorially appointed Florida Partnership for School Readiness. The Partnership developed a system for assessing children's kindergarten readiness, currently administers all early childhood programs and their respective funding streams, and passes funding onto county-level coalitions.<sup>36</sup> However, the Legislature also eliminated Florida's targeted program for low-income preschoolers.<sup>37</sup>

David Lawrence, Jr., the chairman of the Florida Partnership and the retired publisher of *The Miami Herald*, subsequently joined forces with Alex Penelas, the executive mayor of Miami-Dade County, to raise awareness of early childhood education issues in their region of the state.<sup>38</sup> They successfully brought together large numbers of early childhood stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds and were convinced to press for legislation that would implement preschool for all in Florida. However, bills introduced by legislators in both 2001 and 2002 never advanced. The pair then decided to pursue a voter initiative to amend the state constitution to require the provision of voluntary preschool for all 4-year-olds. By implementing a focused media campaign, enlisting the support of prominent citizens, and using the services of pollsters, lawyers, and an experienced petition gathering firm, they garnered more than 700,000 petition signatures to place a constitutional amendment question on preschool for all on the fall 2002 ballot. That ballot initiative passed by a margin of 59 to 41 percent.<sup>39</sup>

Illinois' Preschool for All initiative, which became law in 2006, reflects the efforts of many different stakeholders. More than two decades of early childhood advocacy raised policymakers' awareness of issues related to young children.<sup>40</sup> Because of the wide variety of efforts in the state aimed at children ages 5 and under, the Illinois Early Learning Council was established by statute in 2003. The purpose of this advisory group was to design a comprehensive system of early care and education, including preschool for all.<sup>41</sup> Additional support came from then-Governor Rod Blagojevich, who campaigned on a preschool for all platform, and while successfully running for re-election, called for the state to become the first to offer voluntary preschool for all to both 3- and 4-year-olds.<sup>42</sup>

Preschool for All in Illinois builds on a state-funded prekindergarten program in existence since 1985. During the 2006-2007 school year the program served more than 47,000 4-year-olds.<sup>43</sup> The new Preschool for All initiative aims to serve 190,000 3- and 4-year-olds by the time it is fully implemented in the fall of 2011.<sup>44</sup>

In summary, the manner in which preschool for all came to be seems to vary considerably across these six states. Different combinations of gubernatorial, legislative, and citizen initiatives, as well as K-12 contexts, pushed preschool education onto policymakers' action agendas and into law. Yet, while the initial context within each state is unique, policymakers have had to grapple with many of the same issues as they have moved to implement preschool for all.

## Preschool For All Decision Making: Six Key Issues to Consider

The decision to offer access to all age-eligible preschoolers was just the first of many. Additional decisions were required in each state regarding program standards and where classrooms would be located, issues of program governance and funding, and the pace of program expansion. Among the first decisions policy-makers faced was how soon the program could be opened up to all children.

### Expanding Access to Preschool Education: Issues to Consider

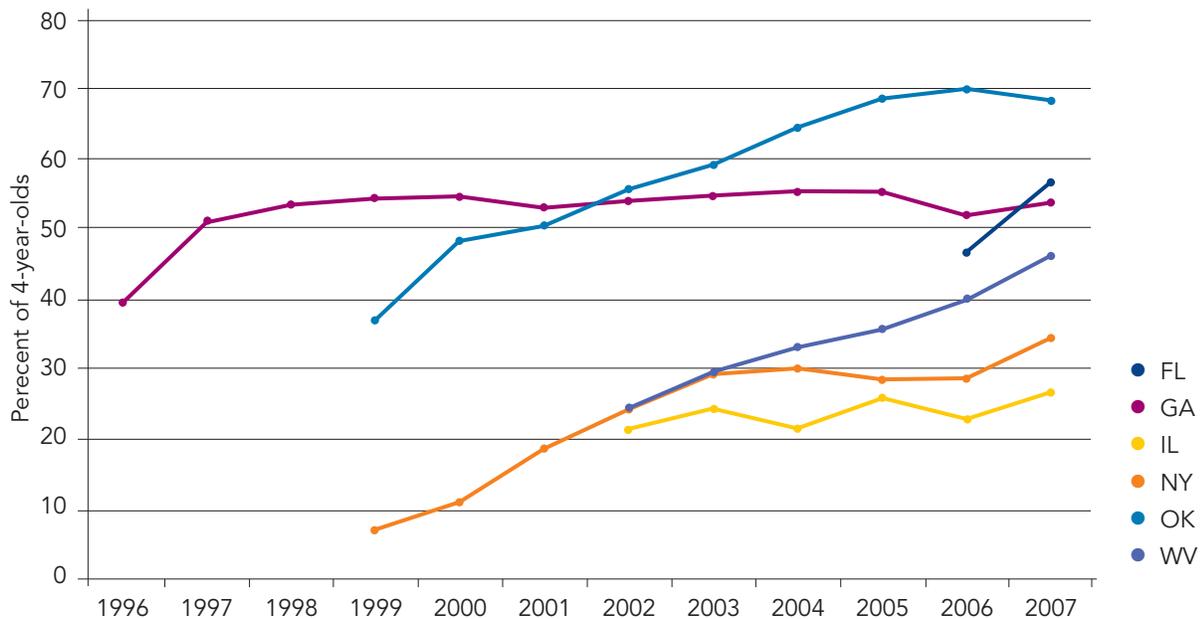
1. Should a program gradually expand or immediately be open to all age-eligible children?
2. Which auspices should be involved?
3. How might collaboration between auspices be enhanced to promote options for families and best use all resources?
4. What type of governance and funding stream is best?
5. What level of educational effectiveness is desired?
6. Is there an adequate supply of sufficiently credentialed teachers to staff programs throughout the state?

#### 1) Start small or open to all?

While policymakers may be committed to expanding access to preschool education, such a commitment must be juxtaposed against the realities of their capacity to do so. Therefore, one of the issues states need to consider is how quickly they can “ramp up” to preschool for all. Should they start relatively small and gradually expand access, or try to serve all eligible children right away?

The states profiled in this report fall on different points of the access continuum (see Figure 1). An example of a “fast start” is Florida, which despite implementing the VPK program in September 2005 was already serving 124,390 4-year-olds in its school-year program in fiscal year 2007.<sup>45</sup> This figure represents 57 percent of all of the state’s prekindergartners.<sup>46</sup>

Figure 1. Percent of Children Enrolled, FY 1994-2007<sup>47</sup>



While Florida’s VPK program has sought to provide immediate access to as many 4-year olds as possible, Georgia, Illinois, Oklahoma, and West Virginia gradually expanded access to preschool education. New York’s efforts have been stymied by past flat funding.

Georgia, Illinois, Oklahoma and West Virginia gradually expanded access. When Georgia’s program began in 1995, the targeted program upon which it was built had been serving a little more than 15,500 children in the previous year. Enrollment almost tripled to 44,000 in 1995-1996, and 63,613 children were served in more than 1,600 sites in 2001-2002.<sup>48</sup> In fiscal year 2007, more than 74,000 4-year-olds were served.<sup>49</sup> Enrollment in Oklahoma grew even more gradually. In 1998—the first year of implementation—fewer than 17,000 4-year-olds were served.<sup>50</sup> The most recent data shows an enrollment of 34,375 children, representing 68 percent of the state’s 4-year-olds.<sup>51</sup>

In Illinois’ Preschool for All program, at-risk children are receiving first priority, followed by children from families earning up to four times the federal poverty level. After serving children from the first two categories, the program will be open to any 3- and 4-year-old living in the state.<sup>52</sup> In fiscal year 2007, West Virginia’s preschool program had a total enrollment of 10,659, 90 percent of whom were 4-year-olds. This represented 46 percent of all eligible prekindergartners.<sup>53</sup> Given that 50 percent of slots within any county must be in classrooms in collaborating non-public school settings, stakeholders hope that a 10-year phase-in period will provide these programs with sufficient time to meet the quality standards for the state’s UPK initiative.<sup>54</sup>

New York also instituted a gradual approach when its UPK program began. While the overall goal was to achieve pre-K for all in all school districts by the 2002-2003 school year,<sup>55</sup> first targeted were the largest districts with the highest percentage of residents living in poverty,<sup>56</sup> including Buffalo, New York City, and Rochester.<sup>57</sup> In 1998—the first year of operation—more than 18,000 4-year-olds in 68 districts were served. About 75 percent of these students were in New York City alone.<sup>58</sup> In 1999 funding was increased to \$100 million and 99 school districts participated, serving a total of 27,277 4-year-olds. Enrollment rose to 58,984 through 2003, with funding reaching more than \$200 million.<sup>59</sup>

Yet, while funding was initially anticipated to reach \$500 million annually once fully implemented,<sup>60</sup> the program served a little more than 58,000 in fiscal year 2006 due to several years of flat funding. Not counting those children served in the state's targeted pre-K program, preschool special education, and Head Start, this represented 23 percent of all 4-year-olds overall, with programs in just 29 percent of all school districts.<sup>61</sup> However, the election of former Governor Eliot Spitzer, who supported investing more in UPK,<sup>62</sup> as well as the infusion of private funding to expand advocacy efforts,<sup>63</sup> resulted in \$146 million more UPK dollars in 2007. The program is now available to every school district as well. In fiscal year 2007, 35 percent of 4-year-olds were enrolled in state-funded early education. It is anticipated that the program will be available to all families who wish to enroll their prekindergartners within three years.<sup>64</sup>

Of course, the gradual nature of expansion in Georgia, Illinois, Oklahoma and West Virginia may also be due in part to initial limitations in funding. No matter what the motivation, it is clear that meeting any access timeline's goal is reliant on having a sufficient number of classrooms. K-12 schools may already be filled to capacity, as was the case when Georgia began its pre-K program in the mid-1990s.<sup>65</sup> Providing enough classrooms and teachers is twice as difficult if states or districts wish to have full-day rather than half-day programs.<sup>66</sup> Bringing Head Start and private providers into the state pre-K system allows for the use of existing space and teachers. It also offers parents a choice of providers who may be most convenient for them or aligned with their personal child-rearing philosophies. In addition, the comprehensive services offered by Head Start centers may be beneficial for at-risk preschoolers. However, deciding which auspices should be involved requires additional decisions about facilitating collaboration and the level of program quality desired.

## 2) Which auspices should be involved?

Of the 38 states with publicly funded preschool initiatives, only Kansas reports using one *auspice*, or type of setting, such as a state's public schools or private child care centers, for all of its programs. For the states profiled in this report, the percentage of children enrolled in public, private, and Head Start settings varies. Oklahoma relies primarily on a public school model, with 72 percent of children enrolled in this auspice. The opposite is true in Florida, where 82 percent of VPK participants are in private child care centers, Head Start programs, and other private programs. Georgia and New York lie in between, with 43 and 42 percent of enrollees, respectively, in public school sites.<sup>67</sup>

These differences reflect legislation, K-12 space issues, and preschool funding within each state. For example, county school districts in West Virginia are legislatively mandated to have at least half of their UPK slots in private centers and Head Start programs.<sup>68</sup> New York is statutorily required to set aside only 10 percent of funds for nonpublic school programs,<sup>69</sup> but has 58 percent of enrollment in these settings.<sup>70</sup>

In Oklahoma, school districts may voluntarily collaborate with Head Start programs and child care centers.<sup>71</sup> Georgia and Florida encourage—rather than require—collaboration with Head Start agencies and child care centers. However, Georgia’s K-12 system was already operating at capacity at the time its pre-K for all program began; thus they have used some nonpublic school settings from the start. Florida has also relied heavily on private settings since the program began. As will be explained in more detail below, the high percentage of nonpublic school classrooms in Florida may be attributed to a lack of K-12 space and the relatively low amount of per-pupil funding available.

While using public school, Head Start, and child care classrooms can expand program capacity, these entities have traditionally not had experience working under one common set of standards, much less working together as part of a single initiative. Private child care centers, in particular, may be accustomed to greater autonomy, particularly when making hiring and programmatic decisions and expelling children who exhibit disruptive behavior. Facilitating collaboration among all these groups is therefore another key issue for preschool education stakeholders.

### **3) How might collaboration among auspices be facilitated?**

Georgia’s experience as the first state to implement a preschool for all program illustrates the ramifications of combining previously separate auspices to form a single pre-K system. The state’s targeted pre-K program was initially viewed as competition that would take away students from Head Start and fee-based providers. Even after the program offered equal access to private settings and Head Start programs in 1995, there were additional disagreements over required standards, including curriculum, pedagogical approaches, teacher professional development, and monitoring.<sup>72</sup>

If policymakers seek to integrate public schools, Head Start programs, and private child care providers into a single pre-K system, they must also give thought to how they might mitigate distrust, enhance cooperation, and build collaborative partnerships between these different auspices. In Georgia, during the three years preceding UPK implementation, the Early Childhood Division of the state’s Department of Education required local pre-K coordinating councils, which were responsible for enhancing collaboration between different service providers, to include members of the Head Start community.<sup>73</sup> After the program opened to all 4-year-olds, the Division held conferences and trainings to further enhance collaboration between auspices.<sup>74</sup> In addition, to better facilitate coordination between Head Start programs specifically and other services, the Head Start Collaboration Office was administered by the former Office of School Readiness, which also was responsible for the state’s pre-K program at the time.<sup>75</sup>

Illinois attempted to address these potential challenges by sponsoring numerous seminars to highlight various private-public collaborations and provide guidance prior to the launch of Preschool for All. They also developed collaboration training and a web site for accessing information about the initiative.<sup>76</sup> In addition, the state established an Early Learning Council (ELC) in 2003 to focus on creating a statewide early childhood system.<sup>77</sup> While officially a new group, the ELC actually builds on two decades’ worth of relationships between the state Board of Education, the Department of Human Services, advocates, child care stakeholders, and Head Start programs.<sup>78</sup>

New York promoted collaboration through legislative means. Districts were required to provide a minimum of 10 percent of their UPK services outside of the public school system and set up local advisory councils to implement UPK programs across the different providers. This approach fostered collaborative workgroups to tackle key “across system” issues, such as funding, regulations, and program standards.<sup>79</sup>

To promote collaboration in West Virginia, the secretary of the state’s Department of Health and Human Resources (which has jurisdiction over licensed child care centers) and the state superintendent of schools established and convened the Partners Implementing an Early Care and Education System (PIECES) advisory council. The council consists of 21 members from child care, Head Start, K-12, and special education communities, as well as legislative staff. The purpose of PIECES is to create a unified system of ECE for children ages 0-5 in West Virginia. It also focuses on five key areas: collaboration, curriculum, professional development, standards and regulations, and child well-being.<sup>80</sup>

#### **4) What type of governance and funding stream would work best?**

In addition to making collaboration-enhancing decisions, policymakers intent on providing preschool programs also must consider issues related to governance and funding. Public schools, Head Start programs, and child care centers are traditionally under the jurisdiction of different governmental agencies, such as the state department of education, children’s cabinet, department of human services, governor’s office, and federal government. They are financed through equally different methods. For example, states generally use a formula to calculate how much K-12 money will be paid to each school district, with the final amount varying based on actual enrollment. In contrast, Head Start programs usually operate on a set budget that funds a specified number of enrollment slots. Child care centers are accustomed to relying on a mix of federal and state funding and fees from individual parents. When states decide to provide services through all of these auspices, they must designate departments, agencies, or other entities to set preschool education policy, ensure all auspices meet program standards, and disburse funds.

Illinois’ Preschool for All program is administered by the state Board of Education. The board also directly funds participating providers. Oklahoma administers its UPK program through the state education department and funds programs through the K-12 state aid funding formula.<sup>81</sup>

New York initially used its local advisory boards—consisting of stakeholders from public schools and the larger community—to determine program needs, providers, and parental involvement.<sup>82</sup> Now local school districts determine whether they will contract with Head Start programs or private child care settings.<sup>83</sup> In the past, New York has relied on a line item in the state budget to fund UPK in individual school districts.<sup>84</sup> In 2007 the state began a process of shifting funding from a grants program to a state aid formula that would mirror the state’s newly drafted Foundation Aid formula. Baseline funding is still available to each school district, but now UPK policymakers must determine what percent of funding is the state’s responsibility and how much localities should contribute.<sup>85</sup>

The governance of Georgia's Pre-K program has changed since its inception in 1995. Initially it was administered by the state Department of Education. In 1996, a newly created Office of School Readiness took over. Stakeholders felt this move helped maintain a focus on early childhood rather than K-12.<sup>86</sup> Giving the administrative agency this name also helped mitigate opposition to using public funds for "babysitting."<sup>87</sup> The academic focus of Pre-K was further solidified in 2004 when the state instituted "Bright from the Start." This program combined all early childhood programs that were formerly under the jurisdiction of the Office of School Readiness, the Department of Education, the Department of Human Resources, and the Georgia Child Care Council into the new Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). This, too, has been viewed as a beneficial move, as now one state agency operates all early childhood programs. In addition to increased coordination and communication among programs, administrators perceive that they can implement policy changes and address problems in a more efficient manner.<sup>88</sup> DECAL contracts directly with collaborating Head Start programs and child care centers, rather than first going through school districts.<sup>89</sup>

In Florida, several entities work together to administer the VPK program. The Office of Early Learning, which is part of the Agency for Workforce Innovation, is the lead administrative agency. The Agency is part of Florida's state government, with the agency director reporting to the governor. The Florida Department of Children and Families is responsible for licensure and the enforcement of child care standards and ensures that private VPK providers comply with state regulations. The state Department of Education is responsible for establishing VPK educational standards and providing guidance and assessment of school readiness and program success. Florida has 31 Early Learning Coalitions throughout the state that register providers, determine child eligibility, disseminate information and applications to parents, and ensure program implementation in all 67 counties. The coalitions themselves are run by local boards that consist of 18 to 35 unpaid members.<sup>90</sup> Three of the members are appointed by the governor, Senate president, and speaker of the House of Representatives, respectively. Coalition staff is provided by the Agency for Workforce Innovation.<sup>91</sup>

Funds for Florida's VPK program also flow through these entities before being disbursed at the program level. The Department of Education budget, which is based on general revenue, transfers dollars to the Agency for Workforce Innovation, which in turn disburses funds to the Early Learning Coalitions. The coalitions are in charge of paying the public and private providers.<sup>92</sup>

West Virginia also administers its Public School Early Childhood Education program through a collaborative effort. County school boards are responsible for assembling a local planning team, which is in charge of analyzing county demographic information and filing plans for meeting their respective facilities and personnel needs. The plans must first be approved by the state Department of Health and Human Resources and then are forwarded to the state Board of Education for final authorization.<sup>93</sup> Day-to-day oversight is at the county school board level as well. State funds flow through county school districts before being passed along to individual schools and private providers.<sup>94</sup>

In summary, the preschool education governance structures in these six states vary considerably. Georgia, Illinois and Oklahoma each use one state agency. Florida, New York and West Virginia administer their programs through several state and local entities. In addition, program funding in Illinois and Georgia is more direct than in the other states. It is not clear if these differences reflect the political norms within each state or compromises from the norm as a means for increasing buy-in among many stakeholders. It is also unclear which model of governance and funding offers more pros than cons. No matter what the impetus and level of overall benefits, such governance and funding structures may also play a key role in additional decisions related to the quality of state-funded preschool education programs.

### 5) What level of educational effectiveness is desired?

Preschool for all decisions do not end after choosing participating auspices, funding mechanisms, and the timetable by which age-eligible children will have access. Stakeholders must also think about the level of educational effectiveness desired. To use a restaurant analogy, a restaurant owner intent on producing a top-notch meal cannot merely find a facility, identify a financial backer, and set up a target opening date. Instead, he or she must carefully consider which factors inside the restaurant—such as personnel, equipment, and food supplies—are key for reaching that goal. Similarly, enhancing children’s early learning and social/emotional development is highly reliant on the quality of children’s experiences inside the classroom.<sup>95</sup>

While using a mix of public school, Head Start, and private child care classrooms can increase a program’s capacity to serve more children right away, complications can arise since these auspices are often governed by different regulations with differing standards for teacher qualifications, student-teacher ratios, and curricula. As a result, using a variety of auspices may also mean expanding into settings where facilities, teacher qualifications, and classroom experiences will not support an equal level of educational effectiveness. Unless state policymakers are prepared to settle for uneven expectations for what children should learn, they must either lower their inside the classroom quality standards or bring existing facilities and teachers up to the levels necessary to produce educationally effective programs.

The programs highlighted in this report limit group sizes to 20 and have teacher-child ratios of 1:10 or better, which also applies to all participating auspices (see Table 2). These maximum class sizes and ratios reflect the recommendations for effective programs.<sup>96</sup> Classrooms in Oklahoma and Illinois also must be staffed with teachers who have a BA and specialized certification related to teaching preschool-aged children. Studies of preschool education programs in Tulsa, Oklahoma suggest that children experience greater learning gains than is typical of other programs for preschoolers when their teachers are well-educated, have specialized training, and are paid a public school salary.<sup>97</sup>

**Table 2. Group Sizes and Teacher Qualifications**

| State | Class Size Limit | Minimum Teacher Credential <sup>98</sup> |
|-------|------------------|--|
| GA    | 20               | AA + Pre-K Specialization                |
| NY    | 20               | Master’s + Pre-K Specialization          |
| OK    | 20               | BA + Pre-K Specialization                |
| WV    | 20               | AA + Pre-K Specialization                |
| FL    | 18 <sup>99</sup> | CDA                                      |
| IL    | 20               | BA + Pre-K Specialization                |

New York's case is interesting because standard teacher certification requires a master's degree and UPK legislation calls for each classroom to be headed by a certified teacher. Yet, due to the strong demand for degreed teachers in certain areas of the state, waivers have allowed some teachers without bachelor's degrees to teach in nonpublic school UPK classrooms. However, these teachers are required to have a written plan to obtain certification. There must also be an onsite education director who has a valid teaching license or certification and is responsible for program implementation.<sup>100</sup>

Florida, Georgia, and West Virginia do not require all publicly funded preschool teachers to have a BA and specialized certification. In each case, teachers in public school programs are required to have at least a BA, but those in non-public school settings, such as private child care centers, are not. West Virginia requires teachers in non-public school programs to have a two-year degree. Teachers in Georgia must have at least a two-year associate degree or Montessori diploma. Florida requires all teachers working during the school year only to attain a 120-clock hour Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or its equivalent. This issue is of greatest concern in Florida, as most VPK attendees are enrolled in private classrooms during the school year.

Of course, some teachers working in child care settings and Head Start programs in Florida, Georgia and West Virginia may possess the same credentials required to work in a public school. In fact, in a 2003 study, researchers found that 56 percent of Georgia Pre-K teachers had attained a BA, and an additional 21 percent had a master's degree.<sup>101</sup> However, having a two-tier level of necessary teaching qualifications may result in uneven levels of educational effectiveness throughout a preschool program. Furthermore, no matter what the state, it seems unlikely that the best quality teachers with bachelor's degrees can be consistently recruited and retained to work in non-public school settings if they are not paid on par with their public school teacher counterparts.<sup>102</sup> Determining whether there is a ready, willing, and able supply of teachers to staff programs in classrooms within all auspices throughout the state is another critical issue for preschool policymakers.

## **6) Is there an adequate supply of sufficiently credentialed teachers to staff programs throughout the state?**

As just discussed, one key difference in these six preschool education programs is their required teacher qualifications. The preschool research base makes clear that teacher training helps to prepare teachers to provide the type of interactions that enhance children's development and early learning.<sup>103</sup> Yet, while requiring all teachers in publicly funded preschool programs to have a BA and specialized training is likely to help promote educational effectiveness, such a requirement also means policymakers will need to ensure that such teachers are available.

One obvious source of teachers for an expanded preschool education program is the pool of individuals already working in K-12, child care, and Head Start classrooms. Another source is teachers who have left the field. They may consider the chance to work with young children at adequate salaries as a suitable incentive to return to the classroom. There is also a future supply of individuals who are currently enrolled in college. It cannot be overemphasized that the supply of teachers from all these sources depends on the salaries and benefits offered.

However, not all members of this potential workforce may possess the degree or teaching credential necessary to work in a state's preschool for all program. This is especially the case for those currently working in child care centers and Head Start programs. As a result, state policymakers must consider what type of additional training or coursework these potential teachers will need, as well as how long it will take for them to complete it. For example, K-12 teachers may need to add an early childhood endorsement to their current certification. Those who have left the teaching field may need refresher training or upgraded professional development. Those currently enrolled in college may need opportunities to participate in student teaching internships. A related issue is assessing the capacity of institutions of higher education to enroll more applicants in degree and/or certification programs. Once again, preschool education salaries need to be increased to serve as an adequate incentive for obtaining a degree or working in a child care setting.<sup>104</sup>

Policymakers must also be mindful of the time and family constraints faced by teachers already working in child care and Head Start programs. As non-traditional college students, working towards a degree might be difficult without access to evening or distance learning opportunities. College-based child care might also be needed for these teachers' own children.<sup>105</sup>

The larger child care and K-12 context played a role in how policymakers in these states dealt with these issues. In Oklahoma, teachers in the Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program must attain at least a BA. Shifting K-12 enrollment, a concurrent surplus of classrooms and early childhood-certified teachers, and a focus on administering and funding the program through the public school system helped ameliorate the short-term challenges of requiring preschool teachers to have a four-year degree. Bachelor-degreed teachers who had certification in non-early childhood areas were also allowed to add early childhood to their certificates if they could pass the state early childhood tests. In addition, Oklahoma initially allowed Head Start teachers who held a CDA and had five years of teaching experience and were working in public school programs to receive a credential for teaching 4-year-olds and younger if they could pass the state tests for teaching. Now, Head Start teachers working in public school programs must have a BA or BS. While their degree can be in any area, these teachers still must demonstrate five years of experience and pass the state subject area and general education teaching tests.<sup>106</sup>

As a result of both space constraints and concern within the Head Start and child care communities about losing enrollees, Georgia Pre-K relies heavily on a mixed auspice approach. To enable all sites to quickly begin participating in the initiative, policymakers originally decided to require teachers to have a minimum of a CDA. Teachers were subsequently required to attain at least an associate degree. From the perspective of key preschool policymakers, not requiring a bachelor's degree over the course of implementation has facilitated Georgia Pre-K expansion at a lower cost. It also allowed the program to use the early childhood-focused programs already available at the state's two-year technical colleges.<sup>107</sup>

In West Virginia, districts must collaborate with outside entities so that at least half of all classrooms will be located in private centers. Having a two-tiered system of teaching credentials was therefore viewed as a means for ensuring there would be an adequate supply of teachers. More specifically, policymakers were concerned that if all teachers were required to have a BA, community partners would not have been able to take part in the system.<sup>108</sup> Being left out would have also meant opposition from the child care community to the initial preschool legislation.<sup>109</sup>

Florida also faced an array of K-12 and child care factors that influenced its decisions regarding VPK teacher standards. When the program started in 2005, rising K-12 enrollment and a legislatively mandated class-size reduction plan caused an increased demand for certified teachers and classroom space. Combined with a decision to launch VPK within a four-month time span and limited per-child funding, stakeholders realized they would need to rely heavily on non-public classrooms. Requiring teachers to have only a minimum of a CDA or its equivalent was viewed as critical for ensuring that these settings could hire enough staff to meet projected enrollment figures.<sup>110</sup> However, this does raise questions about whether the program's ultimate goal of high-quality education was sacrificed to attain the goal of merely getting the program up and running.

A key priority for Illinois' Preschool for All program is ensuring a sufficient supply of BA-degreed teachers in all classrooms, no matter what the setting. Their approach to facilitating this priority even before the program started can serve as a good example for other states contemplating preschool expansion. First, researchers examined how many teachers already hold the state's early childhood teaching certificate, but were not working in a public school or child care center and would be willing to staff a Preschool for All classroom.<sup>111</sup> The study also projected where these teachers live and whether their geographical distribution was aligned with the state's preschool demographics. In addition, in an effort to help the currently employed child care and Head Start workforce attain a BA and early childhood certification, scholarships were made available, particularly for those who were bilingual.<sup>112</sup> Then-Governor Blagojevich also signed Senate Bill 2022, which enables those who are pursuing a teaching credential to receive credit for student teaching in their child care center or Head Start, provided the experience meets the criteria of their college or university.<sup>113</sup>

## The Funding Issue

No matter what policymakers may decide about all of the issues described above, program funding must be consistently sufficient to support these decisions, or they will be moot points. For example, the amount of funding available drives the number of children served. Just as important, funding levels determine the quality of children's preschool experiences by establishing teacher salary levels and the amount of materials, staff professional development, administration, and technical assistance available to programs.<sup>114</sup>

Total state spending for these prekindergarten initiatives varies among the programs described in this report. In fiscal year 2007 it ranged from \$47.3 million in West Virginia, which does not yet offer access to all age-eligible children, to \$309.6 million in Georgia (see Table 3).<sup>115</sup> Of course, variation in total spending is due to the number of children served, the relative cost of providing services in each state, whether a program is half- or full-day, and the quality (and associated cost) of the program. In addition, state spending in Georgia, Oklahoma and West Virginia is supplemented by federal and/or local contributions.

Table 3. Preschool for All Spending Totals, FY 2007<sup>116</sup>

|               | State         | Local and/or Federal | Total         | Per Eligible 4-Year-Old* | Per Enrolled 4-Year-Old |
|---------------|---------------|----------------------|---------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Florida       | \$290,406,902 | Not reported         | \$290,406,902 | \$1,890                  | \$2,335                 |
| Georgia       | \$309,579,333 | \$170,179            | \$309,749,512 | \$3,176                  | \$4,111                 |
| Illinois      | \$283,020,000 | \$0                  | \$283,020,000 | \$2,292                  | \$3,322                 |
| New York      | \$244,605,812 | \$0                  | \$244,605,812 | \$1,448                  | \$3,776                 |
| Oklahoma      | \$118,003,070 | \$113,375,499        | \$231,378,569 | \$6,576                  | \$6,731                 |
| West Virginia | \$47,338,791  | \$24,332,325         | \$71,671,116  | \$4,896                  | \$6,724                 |

\*Defined as 70 percent of all 4-year-olds in each state.

Spending in each state per child enrolled provides another view of spending patterns (see last column in Table 3). In fiscal year 2007, the average amount of per-child state spending across all state-funded preschool programs in the U.S. was \$3,790. In fiscal year 2007, the per-enrolled-child spending amount in Illinois, which has a half-day program, was slightly less than the national average at \$3,322. West Virginia's per-enrolled-child amount represents \$4,441 of state money and an additional \$2,283 of local and federal contributions. Programs must operate between 12 and 30 hours per week and for a total of 108 instructional days. Oklahoma's per-enrolled-child spending amount totaled \$6,731 (\$3,433 in state funds and \$3,298 from local and federal contributions). Providers in this state must operate 5 days per week but may offer either a 2.5- or 6-hour instructional day program. In fiscal year 2007, Florida spent \$2,335 per enrolled 4-year-old. The average school-year operating schedule is 3 hours per day for 180 days per year.<sup>117</sup>

State per-enrolled-child spending amounts in Georgia (\$4,111 for a full-day program) and New York (\$3,776 for 2.5 or 5 hours per day, 5 days per week) may be somewhat lower because these programs have been in operation much longer and thus have fewer start-up costs for items such as curriculum materials, supplies, and equipment.<sup>118</sup> The need to buy such items can easily raise per-child costs by \$1,000 if classrooms are starting from scratch.<sup>119</sup> While Illinois' Preschool for All program is relatively new, as highlighted above, it builds on a state-funded prekindergarten program in existence since 1985, with a funding structure that has been in place since the late 1990s. However, Florida is one of the country's newest programs. While the average operating schedule and more affordable cost of living in the state may play a role in lower per-enrolled-child spending, it may also reflect the choice of serving as many children as possible over program quality.

The amount of per-pupil funding is a key support for program quality, but a related issue that can challenge expanded preschool programs is sufficient budget increases to support increased enrollment. In looking at Table 3, one can see that if total spending levels remained flat and enrollment rates in each state reach 70 percent, the per-pupil amount available would decrease between \$155 in Oklahoma (which already served 68 percent of all eligible 4-year-olds in fiscal year 2007) and \$2,328 in New York.

Steady growth in funding as enrollment increases is most likely related to how states fund their preschool for all programs. For example, the funding for Georgia's program has more than tripled from \$78 million in fiscal year 1995 to almost \$310 million in fiscal year 2007.<sup>120</sup> Georgia's program has been funded from the start by a state lottery. Illinois' early childhood services have been funded since the late 1990s by a state Early Childhood Block Grant.<sup>121</sup> Oklahoma includes its preschool for all program in its school funding formula. West Virginia has also adopted this approach.<sup>122</sup> While not necessarily a guarantee of sufficient funds to offer a high-quality program, use of a state's school funding formula at least guarantees a potential growth in dollars as enrollment rises.

The consequences of relying on grant funding from the state legislature on a year-to-year basis can be seen through an examination of New York's preschool funding since the initial year of implementation. Originally, the state legislature aimed to serve all eligible children by the 2001-2002 school year. New York's funding expanded in the first three years of implementation from \$67 to \$225 million.<sup>123</sup> However, while the legislature approved a \$50 million increase for fiscal year 2007, this was the first increase since 2001.<sup>124</sup> The lack of new funding was due to both politics and the financial aftermath of 9/11 in the state.<sup>125</sup> Then-Governor George Pataki eliminated UPK from the 2003-2004 budget, which included a \$1.5 billion cut to education overall. Preschool education advocates and other members of the community petitioned legislators to restore the cuts. The legislature's budget restored UPK and almost half of the broader education budget cuts, with the governor's subsequent veto also overridden by the legislature.<sup>126</sup> As a result, until recently the program served just 23 percent of all eligible children. As previously discussed, it is now open to all districts, meaning the program is poised for major expansion.

## The Importance of Planning and Reviewing

Getting a preschool for all program up and running can involve other decisions and challenges that affect the experiences children have in their classrooms, which in turn will affect their educational effectiveness. For example, stakeholders must choose which curriculum best fits their preschoolers' needs.<sup>127</sup> Teachers will need access to professional development and technical assistance. Issues of classroom supervision and opportunities for teachers and supervisors to engage in reflective thinking about classroom practice must also be considered.<sup>128</sup> States need to determine how they will monitor whether individual providers are meeting program standards.

The experience of two of these states speaks to the value of engaging in a cycle of planning, doing, reviewing, and acting, similar to the management model advocated by W. Edwards Deming.<sup>129</sup> Illinois placed a large emphasis on planning ahead before launching the Preschool for All program. As previously mentioned, research shed light on how many certified teachers in the state would be willing to teach in the Preschool for All program. In addition, the Early Learning Council met nine times over two years prior to the program legislation being enacted in 2006. During this time they grappled with budget estimates and, should funding be limited, program quality priorities. Other issues included program administrator qualifications, salary parity across auspices, and the criteria for service provider eligibility.<sup>130</sup> One particularly difficult issue was ensuring access across the state, as their already-in-place targeted program did not consistently map onto where eligible families lived.<sup>131</sup>

As an already-established program, Georgia provides an example of the value of reviewing and tweaking past decisions. DECAL’s “plan, do, review” model has continued to be helpful for making mid-course policy and practice corrections, particularly as they have expanded their monitoring efforts. For example, local feedback has shown that monitors need to be certified in early childhood education in order to truly be able to assess program quality. Changes have also been made in response to population increases and changes in the K-12 context, including reduced class sizes and the resulting need for additional K-12 classrooms.<sup>132</sup>

One final important focus of the continuous review cycle is determining the educational effectiveness of preschool providers by ascertaining whether individual children’s needs are being met. At the same time, states must ensure that the measure chosen can reliably provide such information. For example, Florida assesses the effectiveness of individual preschool programs by testing children’s early learning skills at kindergarten entry.<sup>133</sup> While it is useful for teachers to know which skills a child brings to school, the results of a single child assessment administered at the beginning of kindergarten do not provide any information about how much has been learned in preschool, much less present a clear picture of the quality of a child’s preschool experience.<sup>134</sup> Furthermore, because the results of kindergarten readiness assessments are strongly related to parental income, education level, and home language, such assessments can unfairly penalize providers that enroll large numbers of at-risk preschoolers and reward those who only enroll more affluent children.<sup>135</sup> Given that a primary purpose of many preschool education initiatives is to improve the short- and long-term outcomes of all children who are at risk for school failure, this policy may be a better lesson about what to avoid if states hope to implement an effective continuous review cycle.

## Lessons for Preschool Stakeholders

The purpose of this report was to review six state journeys in expanding access to publicly funded preschool education. While each state pursued a unique approach to offering preschool for all 4-year-olds, these programs also share some similarities. The choice to offer access to all age-eligible children was just the first of many. Choices in one category have resulted in ramifications in one or more of the others. Such ramifications have also differed depending on each state’s unique context. As is the case with any policy initiative, policymakers have had to balance program goals with fiscal concerns and political and capacity realities.<sup>136</sup>

While Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New York, Oklahoma and West Virginia still have room for improvement in the areas of educational effectiveness, access, and funding, their experiences are instructive for other states that wish to embark upon their own preschool for all journeys. The lessons these states offer include taking advantage of the larger K-12 educational context as a means for moving policy agenda, the importance of capacity for program expansion, and the value of having time to both plan ahead and review how programs might be improved.

*Moving the policy agenda.* The way preschool education was placed on the policy agenda in each state varies, but some themes emerge from these individual state journeys. First, whether the result of a legislative or grass roots initiative, it seems clear that having support from a key political figure like a governor, state superintendent, or legislative leader is important for political momentum. Secondly, it is helpful to have all stakeholders pushing toward the same goal. For instance, advocacy groups in Illinois united behind the Early Learning Illinois initiative for the purpose of advancing preschool for all. Seizing unusual opportunities, such as declining K-12 enrollments and funding discrepancies, can also be useful, as can tying preschool into a broader school reform package.

Preschool for all also may be an attractive agenda item when state per capita education levels and income are low. Parents may lack the financial capacity to pay for preschool on their own, which not only makes the move from targeted to preschool for all access less controversial, but also makes a stronger argument for why expanded access to preschool education could be a wise investment. This may be the case especially when the rate of grade retention, special education placement, and high school dropouts is significant among middle-class families. Finally, providing state-specific or more general research findings on the educational and economic benefits of preschool education, as well as a focused media campaign, can help create the context for turning the idea of expanded access into a “we need this” reality.

*Increasing access requires creating capacity.* The journeys of these six states also demonstrate that *making* the decision to offer preschool education to all 4-year-olds may be easy compared to *delivering* on that decision since an array of other issues require policymakers’ attention. For example, how quickly children can be offered a seat in a state’s program is dependent on the number of classrooms available. However, classroom capacity is dependent on the ability to recruit, hire, and pay the salaries of teachers who can support the desired level of educational effectiveness. Using a mixed-delivery approach can increase classroom capacity, but teachers in private settings and Head Start programs may not have the same credentials as public school staff.

If time and funds are available, states considering expanded access should ascertain both the availability of suitable facilities and if there are sufficient quantities of appropriately qualified teachers throughout the state who are willing to teach preschool. Should the results show insufficient numbers of teachers, the decision to require less rigorous teacher qualifications needs to be balanced against the educational goals of a preschool program. In short, prioritizing classroom capacity over program quality requires careful analysis of the consequences of settling for quality that is too low to enhance children’s early learning versus slower growth in program enrollment.

*Collaboration has benefits and challenges.* While stakeholders in these six states have recognized the benefits of collaborating between historically separate auspices, their experiences demonstrate the challenges of collaboration. Stakeholders must determine who should be in charge when programs currently operate in different state departments or receive different funding streams. They must also decide if K-12 superintendents should oversee private programs in their district, or whether some sort of joint governance is preferable. Differences in outcomes expectations and learning standards must also be resolved.<sup>137</sup>

*Increasing capacity requires consistent political support and funding.* As the case of New York’s UPK program demonstrates, any plan to gradually increase access risks the waning of political momentum and future policymakers stalling the process. On the other hand, reaching the desired level of quality will most likely take time. Expansion that is too rapid may sacrifice quality. Consistent political support and a reliable funding mechanism are therefore critical to sustain expansion efforts.

One additional issue that might constrain implementation of “open to all” preschool programs is how many layers of administration are required before funds are disbursed. These states do not share the same funding approach. Stakeholders might therefore wish to review the pros and cons of having programs deal directly with the state or instead receive their funds from a district or a local council. Of additional interest is whether policies make blending different funding streams an administrative headache or even preclude blending altogether.<sup>138</sup>

Policymakers must also decide if funding will be based on a per-child or per-classroom calculation, as well as whether it should include initial start-up costs, facilities costs, and technical assistance needs, particularly for private settings.<sup>139</sup> While different funding mechanisms may all appear to promote somewhat equal end results, if the result is under-funded, low-quality programs, attaining a preschool initiative’s goals can be stymied. This is particularly true if participating child care centers and Head Start programs cannot provide teachers with the same benefits and salaries they might earn working in a public school.<sup>140</sup>

*Provide time and opportunities for pre- and post-implementation decision making.* Opportunities to hash out the particulars of a program ahead of time can help ensure that limited public dollars are used efficiently. Once a program is up and running, policymakers need to ascertain how their preschool education initiative might be tweaked to improve its educational effectiveness and better serve children and their families. For example, Pre-K stakeholders in Georgia have found that centralizing oversight has enabled their program to be part of a larger system of services aimed at improving children’s outcomes.<sup>141</sup> Having a centralized administrative structure may also help resolve the type of implementation snags that arise when preschool programs use agencies, facilities, and personnel that historically have not worked together as one entity and with one common goal.

## Conclusion

Most Americans agree that children’s school success is an important issue and support the idea of enhancing children’s outcomes through participation in preschool education.<sup>142</sup> Ideology and opinions about who bears responsibility for educating prekindergartners plays a large role in the debate over whether states should offer all 4-year-olds access to publicly funded preschool.<sup>143</sup> However, a more practical issue may be states’ political, fiscal, and infrastructure-related realities.

Getting from here to there in terms of expanded access can be especially arduous if policymakers lack a blueprint for the key issues that need to be considered. The preschool education journeys in Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New York, Oklahoma and West Virginia suggest at least six key questions that help frame the task. Their respective journeys are also instructive for putting the issue of expanded access on the policy agenda and emphasizing the importance of consistent funding. In addition, these states’ stories highlight the value of balancing access with educational effectiveness, both before the journey begins and once stakeholders have embarked on efforts to improve outcomes for all of their prekindergartners.

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