



January 2011, Issue 21

Preschool Policy Brief

Policy Brief series edited by
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National Institute for
Early Education Research

www.nieer.org

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Graduate School of Education

Perspectives on the Impact of Pre-K Expansion

Factors to Consider and Lessons from New York and Ohio

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As state-funded pre-K programs expand—more than 1 million children currently attend such programs—there is debate about the impact of state-funded pre-K on the quality and supply of child care for low-income working families. This policy brief looks at state policies and regulations regarding pre-K expansion that have the potential to positively impact child care quality and access for low-income working families.



What We Know:

- Pre-K authorizing legislation can support a mixed delivery market in which child care and Head Start programs are partners in offering pre-K services.
- Fluctuations in state pre-K funding can have a dramatic impact on the quality and accessibility of child care programs for low-income families.
- Braiding state pre-K funds with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and child care subsidy dollars can enable states to expand and enhance pre-K services, but caution is needed to ensure stability of services.
- Coordination of state and local pre-K and child care policies and programs is important for pre-K expansion to positively impact child care quality and supply.
- State agency personnel have a key role in supporting pre-K services offered through a mixed delivery model.
- Assessment and monitoring systems are important tools for evaluating the quality of pre-K services offered.

Policy Recommendations:

- States' pre-K legislation should encourage pre-K grantees to collaborate with child care and Head Start.
- State pre-K initiatives should be funded by a formula or dedicated revenue source that is not subject to large year-to-year swings. State regulations should ensure new pre-K funding is used to enhance quality of services rather than to replace existing funding.
- States should offer technical assistance, policy guidance, and support to assist local agencies and providers seeking to expand quality and supply of services through braiding funds.
- States should provide ongoing communication and updated policy guidance to counties and school districts to ensure local pre-K and subsidy decisions are coordinated to best serve young children and their families.
- State agencies should seek guidance from personnel with a deep understanding of pre-K, child care, and Head Start regulations to ensure pre-K expansion positively affects the quality and supply of child care.
- Coordination of assessment and monitoring systems is needed to support collaboration among pre-K, child care, and Head Start providers.

Policy Debate on Pre-K Expansion

State-funded pre-K programs represent the most rapidly expanding segment of the early care and education system with more than 1 million children currently attending publicly funded pre-K.¹ In the 2008/2009 school year, the total funding for state pre-K exceeded \$5.7 billion.² Yet, debate exists about the impact of state-funded pre-K on the quality and supply of child care for low-income working families.³

The debate stems from differing opinions about how pre-K expansion will contribute to or detract from the existing market of child care, Head Start, and other early care and education providers. Some believe that child care providers, families, and children will all benefit from pre-K expansion if providers are able to access public funds to provide pre-K services. Potentially, child care providers can offer full-day services that meet the needs of working families. By participating in a state-funded pre-K program, providers could use the additional funds to offer higher quality early education services that prepare children to enter school ready to learn.⁴ In turn, parents would have more options for full-day, full-year high-quality care. Children attending these programs would benefit from enhanced educational experiences—as child care providers participating in pre-K must meet state standards that require more highly educated teachers, research-based curricula, and comprehensive services.

At the same time there is concern that state-funded pre-K expansion could lead to unintentional negative effects on the quality and supply of child care. Even though 30 of the 38 states that invest in pre-K allow for a diverse mix of public and private providers, some worry that non-school-based child care programs that offer full-day, full-year care in areas where school-based programs dominate will experience a decline in enrollment resulting in center closures and leading to fewer options for working parents.⁵ Moreover, some fear that the quality of existing child care programs might suffer if more qualified teachers move from existing child care programs to work in higher-paying school-based pre-K programs.⁶

Description of Pre-K Impact Research Project

To address questions about the impact of pre-K expansion on child care quality and supply, researchers at Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), with our colleague at Rutgers University, have been engaged in a multi-year mixed methods study. Our research has been designed to examine the impact of state-funded pre-K expansion on the quality and supply of child care in New York and Ohio. The pre-K programs are Universal Pre-K (UPK) in New York and the Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Early Learning Initiative (ELI) in Ohio. The quality of child care is primarily a matter of children's classroom experiences, which depend in part on the structural features of programs (e.g., teacher capabilities, class size, and ratio).

This policy brief presents the results of analyses of qualitative data, secondary data, and policy documents (described below) and addresses the following questions about factors that potentially impact quality and supply of child care:

- What state policies and regulations regarding pre-K expansion have the potential to positively impact child care quality and access for low-income working families?
- What promising practices and lessons have been learned in pre-K expansion efforts that can positively impact child care quality and access for low-income working families?

Study States

We selected New York and Ohio as our study states. As seen in Tables 1 and 2, New York and Ohio devote substantial public funds to pre-K, share a history of political support for pre-K, and allow local control over the delivery of services—leading to variation in child care market involvement in pre-K across communities. In the past decade, both states have supported the expansion of pre-K programs, while at the same time taking into account the impact of such expansion on the quality and supply of child care for low-income families. Each state offers pre-K programs through school-based models as well as through a *mixed-delivery system* that includes collaborative partnerships with Head Start and child care centers.⁷ Most recently, both states’ legislatures have cut funds allocated to pre-K services.

Table 1. New York Key Milestones

1966	Early support for pre-K. New York establishes the Experimental Prekindergarten (EPK) program. EPK is later renamed Targeted Prekindergarten (TPK) and offers funding that supports half-day preschool, family activities, and social services.
1985-1995	Efforts to enhance collaboration. The state forms several task forces and commissions to focus on meeting family needs for early care and learning including support for collaboration among Head Start, child care, and pre-K.
1997	UPK is launched. Legislation passes creating a 2.5 hour per day, 5-day-a-week universal pre-K (UPK) program for 4-year-olds. ⁸
1998-1999	Pre-K is implemented. New York implements its new state pre-K program; approximately 18,000 children enroll in 65 school districts at a cost of \$67 million. The program funds half-day preschool, family activities, and social services. ⁹
2000-2004	Pre-K expands. Pre-K funding grows to \$200 million. The program reaches about 60,000 children in 201 school districts, serving nearly 60 percent in non-school-based settings.
2004	Standards change. A legislative amendment exempts certain non-school-based pre-K providers, including child care providers, from some teacher education requirements until at least 2010. ¹⁰
2005	Full-day pre-K expands. An increase of \$99 million for pre-K is proposed and \$6 million is allocated to open 1,000 new, full-day pre-K spaces. ¹¹
2006	UPK increases. The 2006-2007 state budget includes a \$50 million increase in funding for the UPK program that offers services to 4-year-olds in the state, regardless of income. ¹²
2007	UPK grows substantially. Total authorized funding for UPK is \$450 million in 2007-08.
2008	UPK grows, new regulations are issued. An increase of only \$4.8 million makes the total UPK budget \$450.8 million. In the same year, the state adopts new UPK regulations that emphasize the alignment of curricula and instruction with the learning standards and assessment. ¹³
2009	Funding for UPK is reduced to \$375.2 million.

The information on the timeline is from the New York state profile from Pre-K Now and personal communication¹⁴ with leaders in New York state.

Table 2. Ohio Key Milestones

1990	<p>Early support for state-funded pre-K. Ohio establishes the Public Preschool Program (renamed the Early Childhood Education (ECE) program) to provide partial-day, school-year education through school- and community-based programs to 3- to 4-year-olds living in low-income families.¹⁵</p> <p>Ohio launches a state-funded Head Start initiative that provides state general revenue funds to Head Start providers to offer services to more low-income children.¹⁶</p>
1990-2000	<p>Increases in funding. The state offers supplemental funding to Head Starts that partner with child care to offer full-day, full-year services. By 1999, Ohio serves a high percentage of low-income children through federal and state Head Start supplemental funding.¹⁷</p>
2001	<p>Funding Cuts. As the state faced budget deficits, funding for Ohio Head Start is reduced by more than 12 percent.¹⁸</p>
2003	<p>Changes in funding, declines in enrollment. A shift to using Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds for the state Head Start supplement results in a large drop in enrollment between 2004 and 2006¹⁹ due to TANF's more stringent eligibility requirements and a new authorization process. The new program is referred to as Ohio Head Start Plus.</p>
2004	<p>Programmatic changes. Ohio replaces state-funded Head Start with a TANF-funded Early Learning Initiative (ELI) offering full-day, full-year pre-K to 3- to 4-year-olds from families at or below 185 percent of federal poverty level. Schools, Head Starts, and child care providers are eligible and can subcontract with like agencies or family child care providers.²⁰</p>
2006	<p>Advocates make recommendations. The School Readiness Solutions Group (SRSRG) recommends the creation of a coherent, effective system of early learning as Ohio's voluntary child care quality rating system, Step Up to Quality, expands statewide.²¹</p>
2007	<p>New gubernatorial support. Governor Strickland's executive order increases the child care provider market rate and creates an Early Childhood Cabinet and director position.</p>
2008	<p>Increases in funding. Ohio's FY08-09 budget includes an additional \$270 million for early care and education that allows nearly 8,000 children to have access to high-quality pre-K.</p>
	<p>Elimination of eligibility restrictions. The work requirement for ELI program eligibility is removed; program eligibility is assessed yearly rather than every six months.²² ELI serves 13,049 children (average cost of \$8,491/child) and is available in 91 percent of the counties.</p>
2009	<p>Major cuts as a result of budget woes. The state eliminates the ELI program and cuts ECE program funding by \$11.5 million. Subsidy eligibility is reset at 150 percent of the federal poverty level; provider reimbursement rates are cut by 15 percent. Separate from ELI, 9,400 children are projected to lose services due to changes in child care eligibility.²³</p>

The information on the timeline is from the Ohio state profile from Pre-K Now, personal communication²⁴ with key stakeholders in Ohio, and reviews of existing documents.

Data Sources

The data for the study are from interviews, reviews of existing documents, and secondary analysis of existing datasets (see Table 3). We conducted interviews with key stakeholders in the Ohio and New York state departments of education, child care administrators' offices, Head Start state collaboration offices, resource and referral associations, advocacy organizations, and counties overseeing pre-K efforts, as well as with school district representatives and local providers. We also interviewed leading national early care and education experts.

Table 3. Data Sources

Source	Description	Number of Interviews
State agency leaders and stakeholder interviews	Director of state pre-K program Director of state child care subsidy agency Director of state coordinating agency/council Head Start State collaboration director* Director of state child care resource & referral association	New York: 5 Ohio: 4
Early care and education provider interviews	School-based prekindergarten directors Child care center directors Head Start agency directors Assistant directors responsible for partnership/coordination	New York: 4 Ohio: 11
Other community stakeholder interviews	District personnel (superintendents and pre-K coordinators) Local child care resource & referral agency directors	New York: 4 Ohio: 3
National expert interviews	Prekindergarten researchers, child care advocates, early care and education policy experts	5
Child care resource & referral data	Secondary data from the Ohio child care subsidy agency from child care providers	Data from 2004-2009
Secondary sources	National Institute for Early Education Research yearbooks, Pre-K Now state summaries, policy briefs and analyses, state early care and education budget documents, and state early care and education policies and regulations	All sources cited in text with references in bibliography

*In New York State the chair of the state coordinating council is also the Head Start state collaboration director.

We reviewed the following documents: a) published academic literature on the impact of pre-K expansion on child care quality as well as research on the impact of blended funding on early care and education program quality and supply; b) state funding documents; c) state policy reports; d) state legislation; e) regulations; f) policy guidance; and g) data reported to the federal government. We performed secondary analysis of data collected by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER). We examined changes in the number of children served, the dollars devoted to pre-K, quality indicators, and eligibility rules over time.

Our qualitative methods were guided by Miles and Huberman’s framework of creating an initial coding schema, refining the codes after preliminary analysis, and exploring emerging themes and trends. Qualitative data were coded based on a schema that examined the relationships among actors (such as governors, state legislative bodies, state agency directors, and advocates), actions (such as changes in state pre-K laws and regulations, budgets, and policy directives), and outputs (such as changes in numbers of children served and numbers of providers participating in pre-K) and desired outcomes (such as reported changes in child care quality and supply). We performed simple descriptive analysis of secondary data to address questions about changes in pre-K funding and enrollment.²⁵

Factors to Consider for Pre-K Expansion to Positively Impact Child Care Quality and Supply

State early care and education leaders and local child care and pre-K providers in New York and Ohio and national experts reported that as states expand pre-K a number of factors potentially impact the quality and supply of child care. These factors include authorizing legislation and related regulations, stability of funding, braiding funding sources, state and local level coordination, expertise and staff capacity at the state level, and alignment of program standards and assessments.

Authorizing Legislation and Related Regulations

New York’s and Ohio’s state-funded pre-K programs support a mixed delivery market, but the nature of the programs differs. The authorizing legislation establishing New York’s UPK program creates a part-day, part-year program designed to support young children’s early learning and requires that at least a portion of services are offered through non-school-based settings. By contrast, Ohio has supported a number of different pre-K programs over the years that have required child care and Head Start partners. These programs are described below.

New York. Ever since New York pioneered state support of preschool the state’s pre-K authorizing legislation has focused specifically on providing young children with high-quality educational services. When UPK was created, the authorizing language called for a universal program, as state leaders planned to phase in the program to eventually reach all eligible 4-year-olds. Yet high-need and larger districts were given first priority, with the aim that the neediest children would be given initial priority. Consistent with the focus on education, the program funds part-day, part-year services through grants to school districts.²⁶

The legislation and accompanying UPK regulations require that districts employ a lottery to select children if the demand for slots exceeds the supply in order to maintain the universal aspect of the program.²⁷ Some state and local leaders in New York pointed out challenges experienced by child care and Head Start providers in randomly selecting children to participate in pre-K when funding was not sufficient to fund all eligible children. Two New York early childhood leaders noted that child care and Head Start providers cannot randomly select some participating children to receive a “pre-K” portion of the day while others in attendance are denied the service. By contrast, part-year school-based programs can maintain waiting lists prior to the beginning of the school year and can randomly select from the list children to participate in the school-year long program. Some districts in New York that have attempted to meet the 10 percent requirement currently have school-based pre-K only since child care and Head Start programs are not participating in UPK given the funding problems. The state allows districts to seek an exemption from the 10 percent rule if districts reach out but cannot find non-school-based partners.

Statewide, approximately 60 percent of UPK classrooms have been operated by non-school-based providers, including child care centers and Head Start programs, since the program’s inception.²⁸ This far exceeds the UPK legislation’s mandate that at least 10 percent of the capacity be in non-school-based settings through contracts with local school districts. Currently, the percentage of pre-K services offered in school-based settings varies substantially within counties and districts across the state.²⁹ For example, the percentage of children served in school-based settings in Albany and Niagara Counties in the 2008-2009 academic year compared with community-based settings varied both within the counties and districts, as shown in Table 4.³⁰

Table 4. Percent of Children in School-Based and Community-Based Settings

COUNTY	Example District	Percent of total UPK enrollment that is School-Based		Percent of total UPK enrollment that is CBO based	
		Half-time	Full-time	Half-time	Full-time
ALBANY	Albany City School District	0%	47%	0%	53%
	South Colonie Central School District	100%	0%	0%	0%
	Ravena-Coeymans-Selkirk Central School District	100%	0%	0%	0%
	Cohoes City School District	0%	0%	0%	100%
	Lewiston-Porter Central School District	76%	0%	24%	0%
NIAGARA	Lockport City School District	41%	3%	56%	0%
	Newfane Central School District	81%	0%	19%	0%
	Niagara Falls City School District	0%	80%	0%	20%

Source: New York State Department of Education

The diverse delivery system provides access to full-day and year-round programs in some districts in New York. The approach is designed to enhance the relationship between schools and community-based child care and Head Start pre-K providers, smoothing the transition to kindergarten.³¹ It permits localities to design a service delivery strategy that they believe best meets the needs of their community. One UPK director of a district that serves the majority of students through school-based pre-K reported:

There are some pros to being in the [the same building.]... children get to familiarize themselves with the buildings they will be in for elementary.

At the same time, many stakeholders reported that the requirement for child care or Head Start program options is beneficial in expanding full-day services to families in need of full-day care. A number of pre-K directors reported benefits of offering pre-K services through other community-based providers. For example, the same director who primarily runs the school-based program stated:

We have many parents who request their children attend [the community-based local program] because we run a half-time UPK. Parents don't have to worry about transportation and it is a smooth transition for the students. Parents feel they are getting full-day day care for half costs, which they are. The other community-based program offers half-day programs and has two phenomenal teachers who are certified.

Yet, other factors have contributed to the relative distribution of school-based versus non-school-based UPK according to some stakeholders. One state leader noted:

Many of the smaller districts lacked the resources to manage external contracts, while still others did not know who could partner with them and or reported that there were not viable partners. In addition, some districts are facing under-enrollment because of changes in the districts' population bases.³²

Ohio. Ohio was an early supporter of pre-K funding and services. Over the past two decades, a number of pre-K programs were authorized, designed to provide high-quality educational services to children in Ohio's lowest income families: the Ohio Head Start program, the Ohio Head Start Plus program, the Early Learning Initiative (ELI) program, and the Early Childhood Education Program (ECE). Each of these programs has supported mixed delivery approaches but in different ways and to slightly different target groups. These programs are described below.

The legislation authorizing the Ohio Head Start program was designed to ensure all eligible children in Ohio had access to Head Start services. Similar to the federal Head Start program, this program provided grant funds to Head Start agencies to support high-quality comprehensive services to children living in families with incomes below the federal poverty line. Participating programs were required to follow federal regulations regarding quality of services. Unlike the federal program, this program required grantee agencies to partner with child care and other early education programs—leading to a significant increase

in the number of Head Start agencies partnering with other district- and community-based providers. As a result, in 1999 Ohio's Head Start enrollment was quite high, and the number of Head Start programs in partnerships with child care was among the highest in the nation.³³

Between 2000 and 2005 a number of changes occurred in Ohio's pre-K programs. The state created the Ohio Head Start Plus program that allowed child care and pre-K providers to receive grant funds directly—rather than simply as partners to a lead Head Start agency—and at the same time expanded income eligibility to families above the 100 percent of poverty threshold used by the federal Head Start program. The nature and name of the program were ultimately changed with the creation of the ELI program. With a dual goal to enhance children's school readiness and to improve parents' workforce participation, the ELI program offered full-day, full-year services and allowed consortia of child care and early education providers to offer pre-K and supplementary services to low-income children.³⁴ In a departure from the previously authorized early education programs, the ELI program was administered through the state Department of Education, eligible agencies could apply for contracts, and the contracts were then administered by county welfare agencies. The agencies that initially received contracts and provided services over the life of the ELI program represented the mixed market—each year between 2005 and 2009, services were provided through federal Head Start programs (50 percent), licensed child care centers (38 percent), and school districts and Education Service Centers (12 percent).³⁵

School-based, child care, and Head Start pre-K providers in Ohio reported benefits of the mixed-delivery approach. One school-based ELI director reported some benefits for a partnering child care program:

One child care provider came to us to ask if their program could participate in our ELI consortium. Their program had no formalized curriculum and no professional development plan, but she was a nice person with a good heart. She went on to get Star Rated. [Star rating refers to participation in the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System.] She increased wages for her staff, and for the first time ever in her history she put together a plan for professional development including college coursework...

The director of a large community action agency participating in ELI also remarked upon the potential quality pay-offs for the children of low-income working families:

One of the benefits of ELI was the expectation around continuous improvement. That allowed programs to come in that were "not already there." As a child care program you aren't there yet because they aren't paying you enough to be there. However, you had to be working toward improvement to participate. It allowed some that weren't just the cream to get on the path to quality.

In sum, child care, Head Start and pre-K stakeholders reported that New York's and Ohio's pre-K laws and regulations that required coordination with child care and Head Start agencies have led to some positive impacts on the supply and quality of child care, consistent with the findings of Whitebook et al.³⁶ Child care providers reported that participation in the pre-K program has led to quality improvements

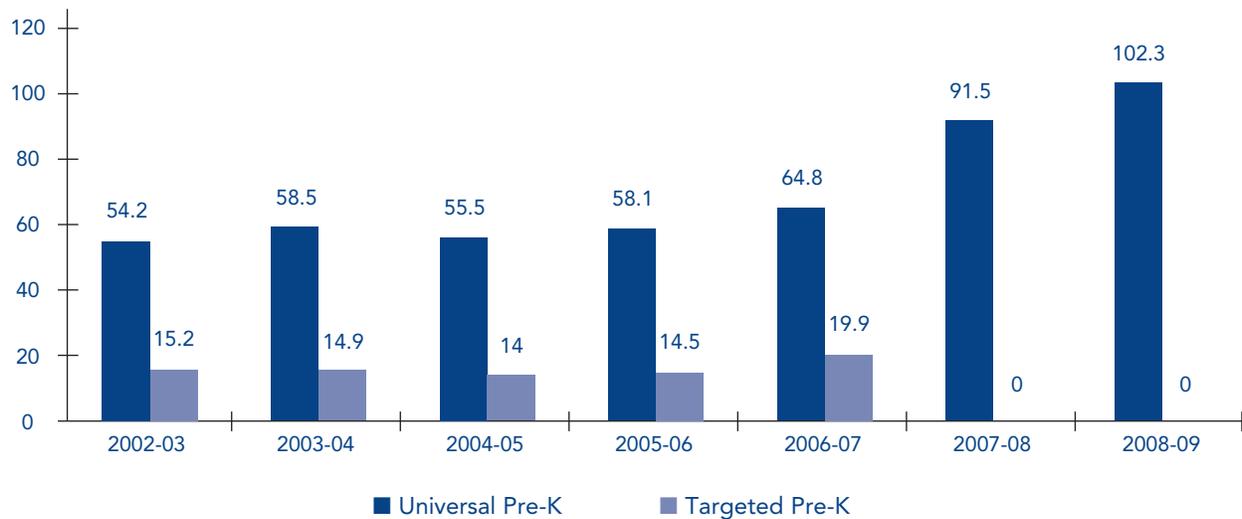
and school-based programs have reported that coordination has led to improvements in the transition to kindergarten. Some stakeholders reported that in some communities, the full-day pre-K program offers improved access for parents who need full-time child care and want quality pre-K services for their children.

Stability of Funding

New York and Ohio have each experienced increases in state pre-K funding, but have been affected by changes in funding related to the recession. In New York, state funding for UPK is projected to increase in the 2010-2011 school year, but local providers reported challenges in offering pre-K services as school district budgets have been cut. In Ohio, state pre-K funding increased through 2008, but the recession has had a significant impact on state funding for pre-K and local providers reported that the quality and accessibility of services have suffered.

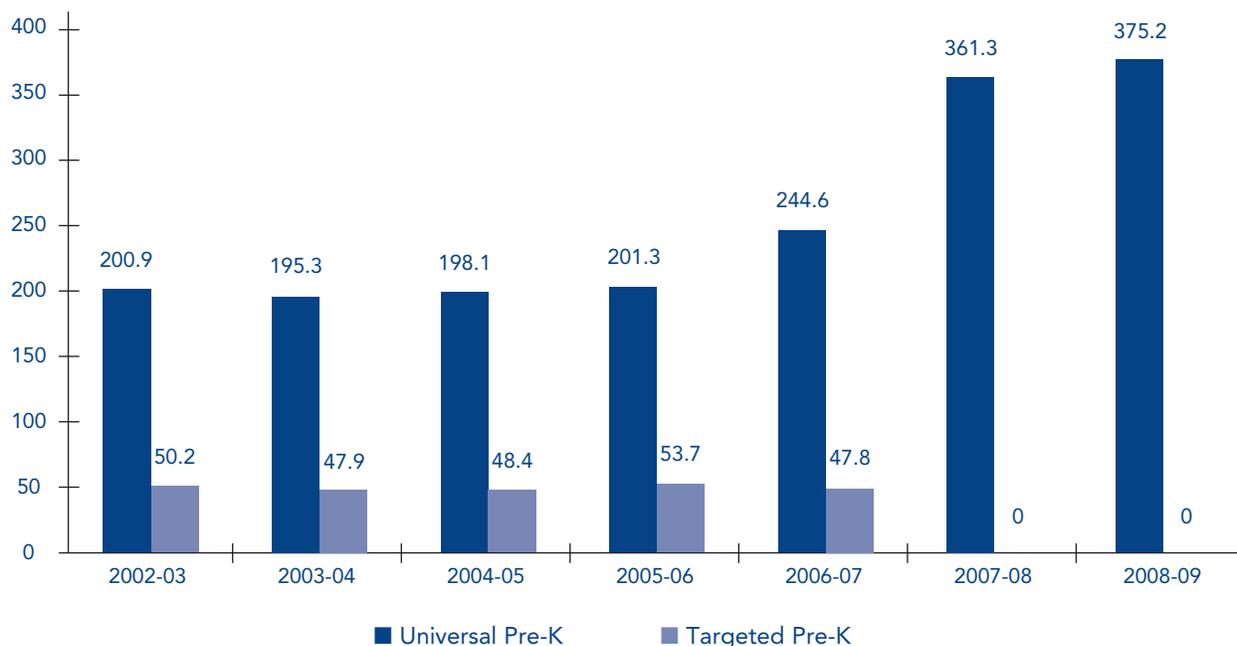
New York. In New York, funding for UPK increased steadily between 2000 and 2005 and jumped between 2006 and 2008 (see Figures 1 and 2). During this period, funding for federally funded Head Start remained relatively constant with between about 48,000 and 49,000 children served annually in New York.³⁷

Figure 1. The number of children (in thousands) enrolled in Universal pre-K and Targeted pre-K in New York.



Data for the figure is compiled from 2003-2009 NIEER Yearbooks.³⁸ Note: Targeted pre-K was merged into the Universal Prekindergarten program in the 2007-2008 school year.

Figure 2. The amount of funding (in millions of dollars) provided for Universal pre-K and Targeted pre-K in New York.



Data for the figure is compiled from 2003-2009 NIEER Yearbooks³⁹. Note: Targeted pre-K was merged into the Universal Prekindergarten program in the 2007-2008 school year.

As seen in the timeline of New York pre-K milestones in Table 1 (p. 3), a considerable expansion of pre-K services occurred—with a large increase in funding and a shift in the funding structure—during the 2007-2008 school year.⁴⁰ The UPK budget authorization increased in 2007 to \$450 million, but only \$354 million was spent on UPK during the 2007-2008 academic year.⁴¹ Subsequently, the state increased funding.⁴² Yet continued underspending of the allotted amount has resulted in a projected fiscal year 2011 allocation that is based only on what had been spent. Therefore the allocation is now \$375.2 million.⁴³

Some early care and education leaders reported that even when investments in pre-K increase, shifts in funding policies create challenges that can ultimately limit families’ access to and options for high-quality early childhood education.⁴⁴ One leader stated:

When the Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) was implemented, school districts’ concerns about the sustainability of the funding and the lack of program space caused many districts to develop contracts for the provision of services far beyond the 10 percent rate required in the legislation. Contracting out for the provision of services continued in the 2007-2008 school year, when a significant expansion of services occurred. However, a change that year in how funding was allocated to a formula-driven process has provided greater assurance on the stability of the funding and has caused some districts to reconsider their position on contracting for UPK programming.

Stakeholders also reported some challenges recruiting sufficient numbers of students when UPK was first implemented, which affected subsequent district level funding. In several cases, relying on previous years' enrollment figures and insufficient funding levels meant that programs were unable to fully meet their goals to serve families. One district UPK director reflected:

We received a significant amount of money in a short timeframe. We were funded with an allocation to meet 274 students based on the previous fall enrollment. By the time we did our enrollment and recruitment, we were at 197. The state funds at per pupil rate so the next year we were funded at 197 as opposed to 274. That sort of cuts your funding for future years. We wish we would be able to use that money either statewide or regionally to expand to support full-day programs. But it costs twice as much to have a full-day program because you are serving half as many students. We personally can't support a full-day program based on numbers because then our numbers would significantly drop and our funding would significantly drop. It costs the same to serve 40 children half-day or 20 full-day, but if I only serve 20 they won't give me the allocation double of what they gave me, they don't look at it as a .5 allocation. We would love to have full-day programs. We are pretty much at capacity.

A separate funding issue that has affected pre-K delivery at the local level is the contraction in local school district budgets. While funding in New York has increased steadily over the past decade, some early childhood leaders at the local level reported that the recent recession has had an impact on UPK in their districts. One district UPK director noted:

We have sustained cuts in our district budget for the last two to three years. In the fiscal climate we live in, that is very difficult. In the last two years, we [our district] have had cuts of over \$100,000. This district is a small urban district. The district looks to pre-K to make sure it is self-sufficient. I don't want to make it look like our board is not supportive. In the process of closing the budget gap for the school program we had to close two elementary schools and one of those was repurposed into an early childhood center. We lost money, but now we have one facility of our own.

A community-based child care director who participates in the state UPK program also reported challenges from funding fluctuations related to the recession and related to changes in state spending:

Every year parents are held hostage with the concern: will UPK be available to us? It is often the first time that parents have heard the word free, especially in the economic climate we are in now.

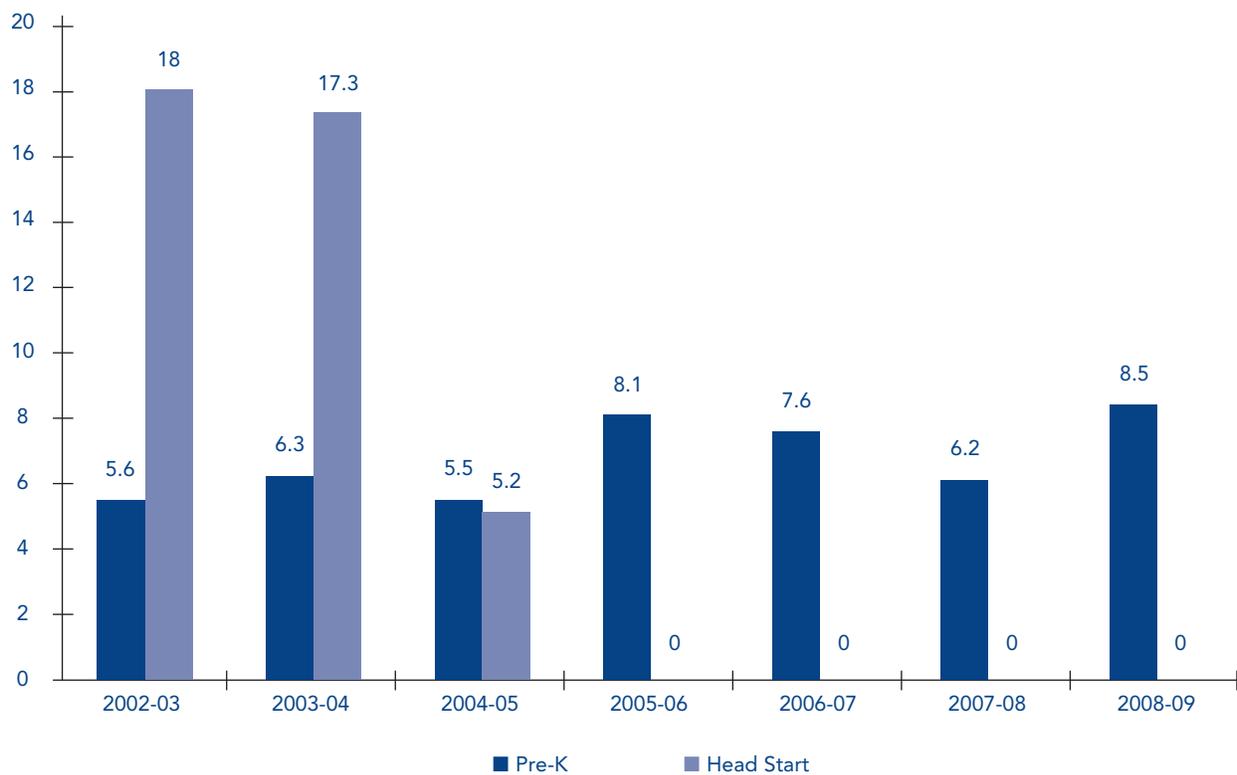
This child care director noted that her center has difficulty determining staffing and budgets to plan for the year when decisions about UPK funding are uncertain. She stated that with the recession many parents are not sending their children to centers because of the cost. Parents who are both eligible for

child care subsidies and have access to free UPK have informed her that they want to send their children, but will not do so if the UPK portion of the day is not “free.”

In sum, the fluctuation in pre-K funding has an impact on both school-based and non-school-based pre-K providers, but in different ways. Some report that sudden increases in pre-K funding has resulted in pre-K services offered through community-based organizations as such organizations have flexibility to hire and enroll children more quickly than school-based programs.

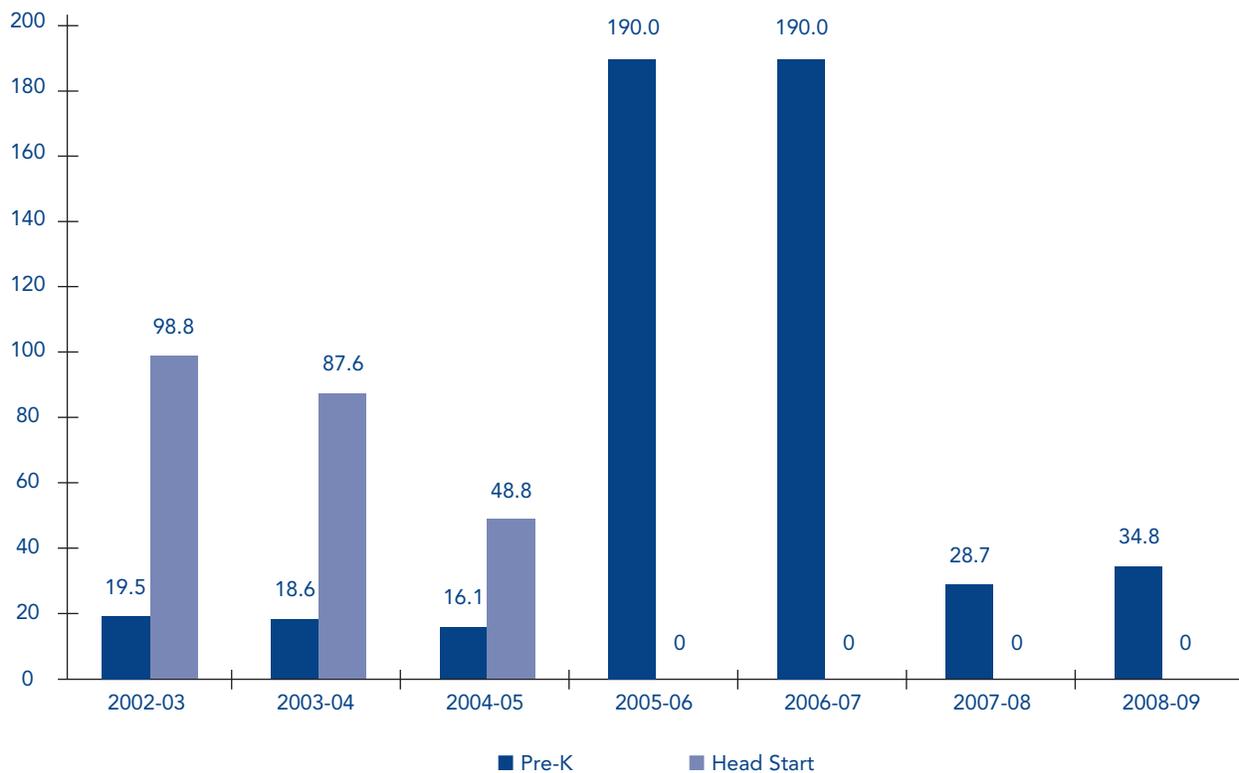
Ohio. For more than 20 years, Ohio governors and legislative leaders have championed early childhood education. Funding and related enrollment have, however, declined when the state has experienced state budget deficits (see Table 2 on page 7). The past decade has been marked both by periods of strong state support for pre-K and by precipitously declining support and funding (see Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3. The number of children (in thousands) enrolled in pre-K and Head Start from in Ohio.



Data for the figure is compiled from 2003-2009 NIEER Yearbooks.⁴⁵

Figure 4. State funding (in millions of dollars) for pre-K and Head Start in Ohio.



Data for the figure is compiled from 2003-2009 NIEER Yearbooks.⁴⁶

In 2000, Ohio was considered an exemplar in providing Head Start to most eligible children in the state, but funding and support declined over the next four years. Moreover, between 2003 and 2009 federally funded Head Start remained relatively constant with between about 37,000 and 38,000 children in Ohio served annually.⁴⁷

In 2005 and 2006, and again in 2008, the state expanded pre-K funding. According to some local stakeholders, the funding increases had an impact on the supply of child care—but the mixed delivery approach led to substantial differences across communities.

The director of a school-based ELI program reported that the creation of ELI led to changes in the configuration of the child care market in her district.

Some providers had to relicense to accommodate the numbers of preschool children versus infant and toddlers. There was a six-month period [after ELI's implementation] where 3- to 4-year-old enrollment in our community declined dramatically and then the child care providers weren't getting the 3- to 4-year-olds. So they said they would take more infants and toddlers.

A director of a community-based child care center reported that her program had not experienced problems with declining enrollment because her program was participating in ELI as a partner. While she stated that ELI funding allowed her program to offer higher-quality services to the preschool-aged population while maintaining infant/toddler care, she also observed: “From a business perspective infants/toddlers are a loss leader. You end up living off of reserves.”

Another director of a large child care program reported:

If you take the preschool-aged kids out of child care and serve them only in school-based settings, you could collapse the child care industry. One of the strengths of ELI is that it didn't matter if you were a school district, a Head Start program, or a child care program. ELI allowed for that so you didn't have this issue of competition between schools and community-based programs. In some communities now you have pre-K only through school district; this has hurt community-based programs.

Thus, some early care and education leaders in Ohio reported that the design of ELI as a mixed-delivery approach addressed the potential negative impact of pre-K expansion on the supply of child care. By contrast, shifts and declines in state funding (see Table 2, p. 4) appear to have had a profoundly negative impact on the quality and supply of child care. The most recent example of this impact is the state's 2009 reduction in pre-K funding and services. Despite political and advocate support throughout the state, the state—faced with a budget deficit—eliminated the ELI and reduce funding for the ECE program by \$11.5 million in the summer of 2009.⁴⁸ As a result of the funding cuts, there was a sharp decline in enrollment in pre-K during the 2009-2010 academic year. The 12,000 ELI slots were eliminated⁴⁹, and the cuts to ECE funds potentially resulted in elimination of services for another 2,000 children. In an effort to ameliorate the impact on enrollment, the Ohio Department of Education reduced the per child funding levels for ECE, with anticipated enrollment reduced by only 1,400 children.⁵⁰

According to state and community leaders, the elimination of all ELI funding has reconfigured the child care market in ways that might threaten both quality and supply.⁵¹ Community leaders from child care, Head Start, and school-based pre-K programs reported that both school-based and non-school-based programs have closed classrooms, cut teaching positions, and reduced services. Moreover, state and local stakeholders reported that the elimination of funding is resulting in some child care providers closing their doors. One noted:

It was almost the demise of my organization. We had 146 ELI slots and of course there were more children than that. When ELI was eliminated we had to make major cuts. We had a dual problem for it (ELI) was eliminated at the same time there were major cuts in subsidized child care. We laid off 20 teachers, laid off people in the corporate office, and took huge pay reductions. Employees had hours cut. The people who got cut first were the people who impact quality. Professional development providers and people overseeing quality assurance lost their jobs in this process. We had to make cuts to the program and curriculum, reduced the

amount of assessments we were doing, and reduced support services for families. All capital improvements are on hold. It's been dramatic. At this point our goal is to hang on longer than our competitors can. That is the reality of what has happened when this cut was made.

Child care providers throughout Ohio reported that pre-K funding instability has had a negative impact on both the supply and quality of child care. They also noted that other factors, including changes in the child care subsidy rates and eligibility and the recession, have had a negative impact. A number of child care directors reported that it was their perception that the combination of the recession, changes in child care subsidies, and the elimination of ELI have led to major reductions in child care quality and supply.

Braiding Funding Sources

While braiding pre-K and child care subsidy dollars can help states meet the dual goals of promoting young children's school readiness and supporting parents' workforce participation, state and local leaders pointed to the importance of understanding how to support braided funding at the point of service delivery. Many noted that pre-K should be viewed as one important component of the mixed market of early care and education. In the absence of a comprehensive vision, some local providers reported that pre-K and child care providers see one another as rivals for limited dollars rather than viewing one another as integral players in a system that can meet the needs of children and their parents. Support for braided funding and mixed delivery approaches can eliminate this potential competition and result in more options for low-income working families. One school-based pre-K director reported:

Our district had a master plan that required a preschool in each building. I also pulled in my child care partners and asked if they wanted to be in the building. The child care partners are now in the building. They offer full-day services and eligible families can use child care subsidies. It is a community-based school. But we also have partners in the community that offer on-site child care and pre-K. This approach can meet the educational needs of kids and the work needs of their parents.

For states to use braided funding to foster the growth of pre-K systems that function as effectively as the one described above, it is essential to establish and clearly articulate state-level policy guidance regarding braided funds, to be aware of the challenges that can arise from restrictions in funding sources that impact braiding of funds, and to ensure that funding covers costs of high-quality services regardless of program setting.⁵²

- **State-level policy guidance regarding braided funds.** In New York and Ohio, pre-K providers have the potential to deliver full-day, full-year services by offering additional child care hours using child care subsidy dollars. Both states have issued policy clarification that can assist pre-K providers to combine funds at the point of service delivery to offer full-day, full-year services. With the ELI program, the state combined TANF funds with CCDF dollars for eligible families to create a full-day, full-year program and the state regularly posts clarification in response to appeals from providers and families regarding

eligibility for both child care subsidies and ELI services.⁵³ In New York, the state has issued policy guidance to districts regarding child care subsidy eligibility and provides answers to questions from communities regarding braiding subsidy dollars with pre-K funds.⁵⁴ Providers in both states have viewed this specific guidance regarding blending funds favorably, but some suggest that pro-active guidance and technical assistance is particularly helpful in the administration of the programs.

Both Ohio and New York have provided technical assistance and guidance on braiding funding and eligibility, which providers report has been particularly helpful in administering services. One district UPK director stated that the ongoing communication from the state pre-K director helped her to craft local policies to best serve the children and families in her district:

It will be a really, really sad day when [the state pre-K specialist] retires. She is phenomenal. She is an advocate for early childhood, for pre-K, for our programs, and our students. I know program directors feel comfortable calling her as a colleague. We have monthly conference calls on the first Friday of every month and she participates with her team. We can ask her questions and raise concerns; we talk about issues, problem solve, and communicate. In this era of fiscal crisis it is a great way to address challenges as they arise to more efficiently provide services to children and families.

In Ohio, policies regarding braiding funding changed in the past decade, and ongoing technical assistance was viewed as critically important for local providers attempting to jointly deliver pre-K services that were funded through federal Head Start, TANF, and other funds. One Head Start agency director stated:

The technical assistance that came through Ohio Department of Education... the knowledge base and supports were so incredibly valuable. There were a lot of detailed reporting requirements built into the system. Professional consultants kept you in good stay.

- **Challenges encountered when funding streams include restrictions.** Reliance on multiple funding streams can leave programs less vulnerable to declines or changes in funding from a single program. However, substantial declines in one funding source, such as TANF, can affect the quality and accessibility of services received by families from providers using that funding source. Further, state leaders and pre-K providers in both states reported that changes in subsidy eligibility can affect children's access to services as well as the quality of services offered.

As noted above, TANF funding has played an unfortunate role in restricting, as well as expanding, pre-K services for many children from low-income working families in Ohio—most recently in 2009, when Ohio terminated the TANF-funded ELI program because its funds were viewed as essential for cash assistance for needy families. Some stakeholders reported that the simultaneous substantial reduction in income eligibility for accessing child care subsidies has further affected access for such children and affected providers' ability to offer pre-K programs that had been braided with subsidy dollars to offer full-day services to low-income children.⁵⁵

Ohio stakeholders also noted that the reliance on TANF funds during the early years of the ELI program—and concomitant need to follow TANF’s stringent eligibility requirements and authorization process based on parents’ workforce participation—presented child care providers with a significant challenge. They struggled to offer services to children who were potentially cycling in and out of eligibility. Some ELI directors reported that children’s subsidy eligibility could change from month to month; this created problems for children whose educational services were disrupted, management challenges in terms of hiring the appropriate number of qualified teachers, and administrative challenges in terms of budgeting for services.⁵⁶ One superintendent of a large urban school district reported that changes in pre-K funding can affect school-based programs, but changes—such as reductions in the number of pre-K classrooms—are made on an annual basis rather than a monthly basis. She reported that decisions regarding school budgets are made annually, based on assumptions regarding revenue that will be received. She reported that child care providers can have more flexibility in adapting to changes in funding on a monthly basis—by reducing staff or services, but she surmised that because their overall budgets are much smaller than school district budgets and the changes could affect all children attending the program, such changes could have a more dramatic overall impact. Based on these past and very recent experiences, Ohio state stakeholders cautioned other states to carefully consider the consequences of relying on TANF dollars for pre-K expansion.⁵⁷

New York leaders also reported that blending child care subsidy dollars with pre-K could create challenges. For example, New York City has had a policy of encouraging providers to offer full-day, full-year accessible services. Prior to 2009, for a child in full-day care that included a pre-K portion of the day, New York City allowed providers to access pre-K funds to support the quality enhancements offered during the pre-K portion of the day and the full-day child care subsidy. However, due to budgetary constraints, the city began “backing out” the pre-K dollars—and reducing subsidy dollars in the amount of the pre-K funding. As one state early care and education leader noted, “Whereas programs initially had been enriched by the receipt of UPK dollars, that is no longer the case. For the city, it’s become a zero-sum game.” This practice affected child care providers to a greater degree than school-based providers as child care providers were faced with a decision of either reducing the hours of care offered to families or reducing the quality of services offered.

- *Ensure funding covers costs of high-quality services regardless of program setting.* To ensure that braiding funding sources succeeds as a strategy to expand pre-K services and to offer high-quality pre-K services to all children, regardless of program setting, leaders noted that sufficient funding is vital.⁵⁸ Sufficient, dedicated funding will also meet several of the challenges raised in the discussion of stability of funding above. However, due to the complexity of the early childhood education landscape, some questions will still need to be addressed by state policymakers. These questions include: Should child care programs receive a different amount of funding so that teachers can receive similar payment in a similar structure as school-based pre-K teachers? Should child care providers receive a different amount of funding to address differences in capital expenses, transportation, and related costs or should these be considered separately? Should one-time funds be provided so that child care and Head Start providers can meet quality and program criteria? How can states develop policies and regulations to ensure that child care subsidies are not reduced by the amount a program receives for pre-K?⁵⁹

One community child care provider reported some specific challenges in offering families care that meets both the children's and the parents' needs:

We've looked for grants to help with transportation and none are available. We have a part-time grant writer here and she speaks the language. I don't. I taught kindergarten all those years. I'm in the real world thinking about what this means for families and especially the kids. We are losing the only grant from the middle school that provides busing. We would be golden if we could provide these services. It isn't for lack of trying. We have tried to connect children with other parents, but people are really leery about having other parents drive their children.

In sum, braiding funding can lead to both opportunities and challenges. TANF funding offered Ohio an opportunity to expand services, but restrictions in state TANF policies led to reduced access to families whose parents lacked stable employment. Pre-K, child care, and Head Start stakeholders report that braided funding can allow programs to enhance quality and accessibility, but if one leg of the funding stool is reduced, programs scramble and are faced with making difficult choices between quality and accessibility. Some argue that ongoing steady revenue for full-day, year-round pre-K could address this problem, but at the same time express concern that one single funding stream might be more vulnerable in times of fiscal crisis than multiple funding streams.

State and Local Level Coordination

Stakeholders in New York and Ohio reported their belief that coordination of state and local pre-K and child care policies and programs is essential to ensuring that pre-K expansion positively impacts child care quality and supply. To promote coordination, both states have created cabinet-level coordinating bodies. Brief descriptions of these bodies, the state and local governance structures of New York and Ohio, and county and district roles follow. (Detailed information about the importance of governance structures in supporting pre-K can be found in the NIEER policy brief *Providing Preschool Education for All 4-Year-Olds: Lessons from Six State Journeys*.⁶⁰)

In New York, the agency that administers the Head Start Collaboration Project—the Council on Children and Families—provides staff support to the governor's Children's Cabinet. The Head Start Collaboration director also serves as the co-chair of the Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC), a subgroup of the Children's Cabinet. These relationships help strengthen the linkages between Head Start, pre-K, and the work of the Children's Cabinet and the ECAC. While the State Education Agency (SEA) which oversees pre-K is not required to participate on the ECAC, it has been an active participant. Stakeholders reported that regular meetings between and among the offices that oversee pre-K and child care surface issues and result in new administrative policies that can address challenges to service delivery at the local level.⁶¹

In Ohio, as of 2009, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) oversaw the school-based ECE pre-K program, and the ODE and the child care subsidy office within the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) jointly administered the ELI program. ELI had a statewide advisory council—composed of child care, Head Start and school-based providers, county administrators, and state leaders. The ELI

advisory council regularly reviewed policies, procedures, and funding to address barriers to coordination and service delivery at the program level.

One local child care program director who participated in the ELI program reported that she had experienced the positive impact of the state-level coordination:

We have seen the benefits of the marriage between ODJFS and ODE. ODE brought the credibility and public schools valued it. You had to do your work to meet the requirements of both state agencies.

The director noted that her program met the higher quality standards and was able to participate in ELI. Thus, the state supports enhanced both her program's quality and, by allowing her program and other child care centers to provide pre-K, the supply of care she was able to provide expanded.

State leaders reported a number of forthcoming changes that they believe will facilitate linkages between child care and pre-K that can lead to benefits at the provider level. To increase coordination and alignment among all early education programs, the child care subsidy office is slated to relocate to the ODE as part of a larger state reorganization and the state is creating a Center for Early Childhood Development designed to increase coordination and alignment of all funding and policies for early childhood education.⁶²

Stakeholders in both states reported that it is imperative to actively engage district and county leaders in decision-making regarding pre-K and pre-K expansion. Both groups play vital roles in ensuring that pre-K expansion improves the quality and accessibility of early childhood services for low-income working families. Further, variations in state- and county-level contexts and policies can affect low-income working families' access to pre-K services.

- ***County child care subsidy role.*** State and local stakeholders in New York and Ohio pointed to the importance of coordination between the entities administering pre-K and county child care subsidy offices.⁶³ In both New York and Ohio, the child care subsidy policies are determined at the state level, but subsidies are administered at the county level. As one Ohio leader noted, "We have one state policy, but 88 different interpretations of that policy. If we as a state have a policy like we did during Head Start expansion to extend the eligibility period for families receiving child care subsidies, there might be 88 different interpretations of that policy. As a result, a family in one county might receive full-day, full-year services, but in another county the services might not be available as the county figures out how long the eligibility period should be."

New York policies also differ substantially by county, leading to difference in child care programs' ability to offer consistent high-quality pre-K services. For example, child care providers in a few communities receive higher rates if they have been accredited by a national organizations. Consequently, resources for higher quality child care varies by community. Similarly, families are affected by subsidy policies as New York families can pay from 10 to 35 percent of their incomes over the poverty level in child care subsidy copayments. Thus, in one county a family might pay substantially more for a full-day of combined pre-K and child care than in another county or might be eligible for subsidies in one

county, but not in another.⁶⁴ One state leader reported, “Parents are making logical decisions to move closer to work or to a more affordable residence but find that they are no longer eligible for child care or that their co-payment increases to the point that they can no longer send their children to child care and often their children lose out on the pre-K portion of the day as well. This can create immense instability for the parents and for the children.”

District role in pre-K. In New York, the UPK program is administered by the state, and grants are awarded directly to school districts. Ohio’s ECE program is administered by school districts. In both states, districts have a role in determining the relative priorities of the pre-K program. Some might prioritize full access and therefore might encourage child care providers to braid pre-K funds with CCDF subsidies. By contrast, other districts might focus on assessment, curriculum, or teacher professional development and encourage providers to put resources in these areas. Thus, the priorities of the school district can affect the quality of services or the supply of pre-K funds for child care and Head Start programs.

- *Community coordination.* Within both New York and Ohio, the mechanisms for local coordination and the types of coordination vary within the states and providers reported that the mechanisms are very important to address barriers to seamless services. Providers who have been actively engaged in community-level coordinating bodies report that these groups can identify barriers to collaboration, make recommendations to county subsidy agencies and districts about policies that can address the barriers, and help providers address cultural barriers to coordination of pre-K, child care, and Head Start services. New York’s UPK program initially used local advisory boards—consisting of stakeholders from public schools and the larger community—to determine program needs, providers, and parental involvement. As of 2009, some districts continued to receive advice from local boards, but the districts were primarily responsible for running the program following the receipt of grant funds. Similarly, some communities in Ohio have a long history of relying on collaborative boards for advice but the ECE program does not, and the ELI program did not, require community-based boards to be involved in running the day-to-day operations of the programs once funds are received.

In sum, stakeholders noted as a result of county, district, and community variability, the supply of high-quality, accessible pre-K services for children and families can differ from community to community. To ensure access and quality are consistent within each state, leaders in Ohio and New York reported that it is essential to maintain regular communication with pre-K providers and child care subsidy agencies by conducting visits to pre-K providers to hear about challenges and promising approaches and to provide ongoing training and technical assistance.⁶⁵ Moreover, it is important for state leaders to carefully consider different interpretations of state policies across counties and districts. Some state leaders and local providers reported that support for ongoing coordinating bodies can create a shared vision at the community level that can lead to improved quality and access across programs. Yet with funding fluctuations, support for such ongoing efforts can be threatened.

Expertise and Staff Capacity at the State Level

In Ohio and New York, state pre-K decision-makers have decades of experience working on pre-K and other early education issues across multiple systems. The individuals administering programs, working on state-level committees, and assisting with program implementation have experience navigating policy and regulatory differences among programs. Stakeholders reported that this cross-sector acumen—featuring experience working inside and outside of government and across multiple programs, experience managing different funding streams, and a deep understanding of early childhood research—is vital to advancing state pre-K goals.

- *Experience inside and outside of government.* In Ohio, state leaders have experience with child care, Head Start, and pre-K as well as with foundation-funded initiatives. Similarly, in New York the directors of the state’s early childhood education initiatives have experience working across programs including special education, pre-K, and child care.⁶⁶ Stakeholders from both New York and Ohio reported that they believed these pre-K decision-makers’ “big picture view” of early childhood education has been responsible for the momentum and success of their states’ efforts to balance pre-K expansion with issues of quality and supply. Stakeholders from both states also noted that state leaders’ experience working with programs and understanding administrative barriers at the point of service delivery has provided them with insights about how to best administer programs to meet the needs of children and families. Furthermore, the involvement of community-based pre-K and child care leaders has informed state policies about how to best reduce barriers and support coordinated service delivery at the provider-level. One state leader noted:

There is a real skill set that is needed to work within big organizations to get big initiatives off the ground. Some people see the challenges in trying to create a system as a brick wall. You must have some superbly nimble people who can work things through the system. To bring the systems into alignment, you need people who see the broader picture and who know why they are here. We have kids in seats that we need to pay attention to and staff and I am fortunate that we have the experience and we are able to do to just that.⁶⁷

Another early care and education leader who has worked closely with pre-K, child care, and Head Start providers at the community level and across states echoed this point:

You have to understand that the regulations are different, the funding requirements are different and the culture is different. Child care, Head Start, and school-based pre-K programs each have its own unique strengths, but their culture is so, so very different. The constraints—whether it is funding, eligibility for services, union rules and requirements, you name it—it is different. To have people in positions at the state level who understand this is extremely valuable. You have the ability to get to the bottom of differences that are very real constraints and you find that you aren’t spending lots of time talking around one another and not really understanding. Instead, you can figure out where there are barriers and how to get past them to create truly seamless services for the kids and families we are all trying to reach.

- *Experience managing different funding streams.* To ensure that subsidy dollars can be accessed in addition to the pre-K funds, state leaders emphasized the importance of understanding eligibility rules and reimbursement policies. This is not always easy, given the occasional lack of clarity at the federal level and complexity in the involvement of county government. For example, although states have the ability to extend the eligibility period for children who are served by child care subsidy dollars and Head Start, leaders reported that there is a lack of clear federal guidance encouraging an extension of CCDF eligibility for children who are also served by state pre-K programs.⁶⁸ Staff in New York and Ohio have experience working across systems to create policies that will assist providers and local coordinating bodies in braiding funds so that full-day, full-year services can be offered to children and their families. The current child care administrator in Ohio worked closely with the ODE staff to oversee the issuance of guidance for the former ELI program so that the program could meet the dual goals of supporting children and their parents. In New York, the state pre-K director has worked across systems including the special education system and understands the administrative and regulatory barriers to collaboration. First-hand knowledge has helped leaders in both states identify the specific challenges and potential solutions to combining funds at the local and provider levels.⁶⁹
- *Deep understanding of early childhood research.* New York and Ohio stakeholders use published research, evaluation reports, and analysis of early childhood education and early education quality as well as collaboration to inform their policy decisions and guide their training and technical assistance efforts. Leaders from both states have reported that these reports have provided them with data on how to improve program implementation (thereby increasing quality) and have provided information about the impact of the program on some desired outcomes.⁷⁰ For example, the Ohio Department of Education and Department of Job & Family Services report using research on collaborations between child care and Head Start to improve training and technical assistance activities and inform the development of guidelines for supporting collaborations between child care and other early education providers.⁷¹

In sum, state child care and early education leaders play a critical role in crafting and implementing regulations and practices that support high-quality pre-K services that are accessible to families.⁷² Creating and implementing policies that support seamless services that meet the needs of young children and their families requires a deep understanding of the complex nature of pre-K, child care, and Head Start administration, regulations, culture, and practices. State and local leaders in both New York and Ohio report that the state expertise has been critically important in their state's efforts to implement pre-K policies that positively impact children and families. This expertise enables staff to hit the ground running and support thoughtful pre-K expansion when funding increases, and to regroup and strategize when funding dries up.

Alignment of Program Standards and Assessments

To enhance the quality of services to all children, New York and Ohio leaders reported taking steps to create a network of support to help pre-K providers be compliant with standards and understand child assessments and use of data. Both states view the alignment of standards as a cornerstone of efforts to coordinate pre-K with other early education programs. Moreover, both states have offered training and technical assistance to organizations participating in the pre-K program to assist with the use of data for program improvement and instructional planning. Leaders noted that each state is taking steps to develop systems and articulate goals for the entire early care and education system in the years to come.⁷³ Both states have worked to establish common program standards and use of valid classroom and child assessments, and both states have also faced challenges in creating a data and assessment system for all programs.

- ***Common program standards and use of valid classroom and child assessments.*** New York and Ohio both require participating programs to meet state standards with regard to program delivery and to assess classrooms and children using valid assessments. For example, both states require pre-K providers to participate in regular assessments and have specific monitoring requirements.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, in both New York and Ohio, some standards for non-school-based providers have been less rigorous than for school-based providers. The UPK program in New York and the ECE program in Ohio have allowed teachers working in child care centers to have lower levels of education than teachers in school-based settings. In New York, teachers working in non-school based settings must have an education plan that will lead to obtaining New York State teacher certification for Birth – Grade 2 within five years, allowing programs to meet the more rigorous standards over time.⁷⁵

Ohio and New York differ in their approaches to assessments of classroom quality and child development.⁷⁶ Ohio's ELI program requires all providers to use the *Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation* toolkit (ELLCO) to assess classroom quality and the *Get it, Got it, Go!* assessment to measure children's language and literacy outcomes.⁷⁷ The state uses the ELLCO results to provide tailored technical assistance to providers as part of a continuous improvement process. New York's UPK requires each participating program to select a curriculum aligned with the state's early learning standards and to regularly evaluate children using valid assessments of their choice. Some localities have made strides in aligning assessments across settings. For example, Rochester requires child care providers to use the same assessments as school-based pre-K programs.⁷⁸

- ***Challenges in creating a data and assessment system for all programs.*** State and national leaders noted the importance of creating a robust data system for progress monitoring and assessment. They stated their belief that strong data systems should include program, classroom, teacher, and child level data. Such systems would allow state-level decision-makers to reach better decisions regarding funding and resource allocation for programs across the systems.⁷⁹

One challenge of creating robust data systems is that the majority of non-school-based settings do not have the same capacity to collect and manage data on teachers and children as school-based programs. Schools collect student and child data that are part of the school system's records, making such analysis easier. Consideration of how to merge data from child care and Head Start programs into statewide systems was recommended by stakeholders in both states.⁸⁰

Some leaders suggested that state Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) might serve as a vital backbone for an early care and education data system, but others believe QRIS are not currently designed for educational purposes and therefore urge caution.⁸¹ Since many states collect and report program, classroom, teacher, and child data through QRIS, some stakeholders suggested that building onto the existing efforts might be one way of creating systems that could be used across school-based and non-school-based settings. Others noted that such systems have been created primarily for child care programs and might lack the types of data that would be needed to understand quality pre-K programs. For example, many QRIS systems measure global child care classroom quality, but do not include measures of the language and literacy environment, other specifics of teaching, or children's learning and development. Stakeholders in both states pointed to the importance of including state and local pre-K and other early education representatives, including preschool special education providers, in the process of developing such systems.⁸²

In sum, the alignment of program standards and assessments and the creation of a data collection system that provides useful formative and summative data is important for states in measuring success toward desired goals. Separate standards and assessments can lead to an ongoing problem for programs attempting to provide seamless pre-K services in child care settings. New York and Ohio are both in the process of planning systems that potentially address this gap and point to the importance of such systems in supporting seamless services for young children and families.

Conclusion

Nationwide, states are investing in pre-K programs to prepare young children to thrive in school. To date, little is known about the impact that this expansion in state-funded pre-K might have on the quality and accessibility of child care for low-income working families. Our analyses of qualitative data, secondary data, and policy documents suggest that six factors can potentially impact the quality and supply of child care for low-income working families as states expand pre-K programs. The experiences and lessons learned of stakeholders in New York and Ohio, two states with long histories of taking action to improve children's school readiness, provide compelling examples of the roles these six factors can play in the lives of low-income families.

New York and Ohio stakeholders point to the paramount importance of authorizing legislation and funding policies that take into account low-income families' needs; stable pre-K funding; and clarity and support for braiding funds to improve the accessibility and quality of services. When legislation and funding policies do not respond to the needs of all families, when pre-K funds are cut, and when barriers to braiding funds arise, low-income working families and their children can suffer from loss of child care and diminished child care quality. New York and Ohio stakeholders also identified several factors that directly relate to the complexity of the early childhood education landscape, with its constellation of district- and community-based programs, and that can positively impact child care quality and access for low-income working families: state and local level coordination, expertise and staff capacity at the state level, and alignment of program standards and assessments. All six of these factors have important implications for state and local early childhood education leaders as they pursue effective pre-K policy-making and program implementation.

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[Perspectives on the Impact of Pre-K Expansion](#) is issue 21 in a series of briefs developed by the National Institute for Early Education Research. It may be used with permission, provided there are no changes in the content.

Available online at nieer.org.

This document was prepared with the support of The Pew Charitable Trusts. The Trusts' *Advancing Pre-Kindergarten for All* initiative seeks to advance high quality prekindergarten for all the nation's three- and four-year-olds through objective, policy-focused research, state public education campaigns and national outreach. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Pew Charitable Trusts.



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