Minnesota

A total of 2,641 children were served in the state's Pre-K programs in 2002-2003. This number includes 1,951 children in state Pre-K and 690 children in Head Start programs. Funding for state Pre-K programs is provided by the state's Department of Education and the Department of Human Services. Head Start funding is provided by the federal government through the Department of Health and Human Services.

In this report, Minnesota's School Readiness Program is viewed as a funding stream supporting a variety of locally selected services for preschool-age children and their families. During 2002-2003, the program supported 2,641 children, including 1,951 children in state Pre-K and 690 children in Head Start programs. This funding is provided by the state's Department of Education and the Department of Human Services.

In addition to preschool education, other services include parent education through the Early Childhood Family Education program, home visits, and supplementary services for children with special needs. In 2002-2003, 96 percent of Minnesota's school districts offered services funded by the School Readiness Program. Individual school districts determine how they will use their funds and what types of services will be offered. If School Readiness funds are used in support of prekindergarten programs, programs are expected to follow standards specified at the state level, including maximum class sizes of 20, staff-child ratios of 1:10 or better, and several family support services. Children are prioritized for services based on needs identified through a comprehensive Early Childhood Health and Development Screening.

In this report, the School Readiness Program is viewed as a funding stream supporting a variety of locally selected services for preschoolers rather than as a separate, statewide preschool education initiative. During 2002-2003, a total of 5,043,469 in state funds was used to support all components of the School Readiness Program. The state is not able to provide an unadjusted count of the number of children attending center-based preschool education programs or specific information about the amount of School Readiness funds used for such programs.

Though funding for early childhood programs has declined, Minnesota has also seen some recent positive developments, including the alignment of its Early Learning Standards (Early Childhood Indicators of Progress) with Minnesota Kindergarten Standards and Head Start outcomes.

In 2003, state and local governments dedicated $18,375,000 to the School Readiness Program. This funding supported 2,446 Head Start slots for 3- to 5-year-olds and Early Head Start services for 195 infants and toddlers. Funds were appropriated to 27 private, nonprofit agencies; seven Tribal Governments; and one public school district. Only federal Head Start grantees that existed prior to 1989 are eligible to receive state funds. Programs supported through this initiative are required to follow standards and provide comprehensive services as specified in the federal Head Start Program Performance Standards.

Funding for state Head Start has declined in each of the last three fiscal years. The state Legislature originally appropriated $39,791,000 for fiscal year 2003, but programs were only authorized to spend $37,620 million. The reduction in available funds reduced per-child spending and included the "unallocation" of innovative grants that had already been awarded on a competitive basis. Further, budget cuts in fiscal years 2004 and 2005 reduced state Head Start funding by a total of $3.2 million, resulting in fewer available slots. The statute passed for 2004 eliminated innovative grants as well as set-aside grants that had supported services for children under 3 years of age. Funding in fiscal year 2004 was $35,475,000, providing 2,060 slots designated for 3- and 4-year-olds.

Though not the focus of data in this profile, Minnesota's School Readiness Program is a separate initiative supporting more than 22 types of services for preschool-age children and their families. In addition to preschool education, other services include parent education through the Early Childhood Family Education program, home visits, and supplementary services for children with special needs. In 2002-2003, 96 percent of Minnesota's school districts offered services funded by the School Readiness Program. Individual school districts determine how they will use their funds and what types of services will be offered. If School Readiness funds are used in support of prekindergarten programs, programs are expected to follow standards specified at the state level, including maximum class sizes of 20, staff-child ratios of 1:10 or better, and several family support services. Children are prioritized for services based on needs identified through a comprehensive Early Childhood Health and Development Screening.

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