

IMPLEMENTING 15 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K: DC

The District of Columbia has offered funding for prekindergarten programs since the 1960s. In its current form, the Public Pre-Kindergarten program serves students in schools run by both public schools, including charter schools, and nonpublic schools, community-based organizations (CBO). The program strives to provide high-quality, universally accessible prekindergarten education services, as stated in the Pre-Kindergarten Enhancement and Expansion Amendment Act of 2008 (Pre-K Act).

Essential Elements

Fifteen Essential Elements clustered in three categories—Enabling Environment, Support for Educators and Young Learners, and High-Quality Instruction—have been identified among exemplary pre-K programs (Minervino, 2014). Note that practice in the field may vary so as to be either better or worse than might be expected based on specific policy or guidance. Consistency or quality of practice across large-scale programs is more difficult to assess than policy.

Enabling Environment		Rigorous, Articulated Early Learning Policies								Strong Program Practices				
Political Will	Strong Leaders	BA + comp	Class size	Two Adults	Hours/ Dosage	EL Standards	Effective Curriculum	Special Ed	DLL support	HQ Teaching	PD	Child Assessments	Data Driven	Integrated System
●	○	○	○	○	●	●	○	–	●	–	○	○	●	○

Key: ● Fully Met ○ Partially Met – Not Met ND Not determined

Political will. The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) provides publicly funded pre-K and is open to all D.C. residents. The move to universal pre-K for 3- and 4-year-olds has been possible through D.C.’s long history of strong political will favoring pre-K. The Pre-K for All D.C. Campaign was launched in 2006 with funding from Pre-K Now and the CityBridge Foundation, and built on prior investments by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation working through the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI). The Campaign raised additional funding from the D.C. Early Childhood Collaborative, PNC Bank and other private sources. Pre-K for All D.C. was housed at NBCDI, which also served as fiscal agent. The Campaign succeeded with the strong support of former Mayor Gray and D.C. Council’s unanimous passage of the 2008 Act that has now fulfilled its enrollment goal.

In 2016-2017, D.C. enrolled the largest percentage of 4-year-olds (88%) and 3-year-olds (66%) in the District. In addition to an increase in state spending in D.C., per child spending increased 10% to \$16,996 per child, ranking highest in the nation. DCPS receives funding at the Uniform Per Student Formula Funding (UPSFF) level for students participating in pre-K classrooms. DCPS additionally receives Head Start funding which allows them to provide comprehensive child and family support services to all students enrolled in Title I schools through implementation of the Head Start School-Wide Model.

Compelling visions and strong leadership. The Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE), the agency with authority over the majority of programs and services for young children and their families in the District, also administers D.C.'s Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion program in CBOs with 1.5 FTE. Additionally, both the DCPS and the D.C. Public Charter School Board (PCSB) have authority to oversee implementation of programs offered within these school-based settings. While public charter schools receive funding at the UPSFF level from the D.C. government, they operate independently of the traditional public school system. Charter schools are authorized and monitored by the PCBS. Due to this governance structure, there are different requirements; pre-K programs that operate in the non-charter schools are required to adhere to policies that support high-quality pre-K, including teacher requirements and class size and teacher-to-student ratio limitations.

Education and compensation. As previously described, D.C. provides pre-K programming through three sectors: D.C. Public Schools (DCPS), Public Charter Schools (PCS), and in nonpublic schools, referred to as community-based organizations (CBO). Each sector has different teacher requirements and salary parity policies:

DCPS: Lead teachers must have a bachelor's degree; pass a core Praxis test in reading, writing and math; and pass a Principles of Learning & Teaching - Early Childhood test that verifies their content knowledge. DCPS lead teachers are not required to have a specialized degree in ECE. DCPS pre-K teachers have the same starting salary and salary schedule as K-3 for all years of service.

PCS: The District gives public charter schools the authority to establish their own requirements for teacher education and credentials and salary parity.

CBO: Lead teachers must have a bachelor's degree in child development, early childhood education, or child and family studies. CBO pre-K teachers with a BA have the same starting salary and salary schedule as K-3 for all years of service and the salary schedule is prorated for differences in length of work day or year.

Adult-child ratio and two adults in the classroom.

DCPS: Maximum class size for 3-year-olds is 16 with a teacher to student ratio of 1:8. For 4-year-olds, the maximum class size is 20, with a ratio of 1:10. Ratios and group size requirements are based on the age of the youngest child in the classroom.

PCS: PCS determined.

CBO: Maximum class size for 3-year-olds is 16 with a teacher to student ratio of 1:8. For 4-year-olds, the maximum class size is 20, with a ratio of 1:10. Ratios and group size requirements are based on the age of the youngest child in the classroom.

Learning time. All of D.C.'s pre-K programs operate five days per week during the school year for a minimum of 6.5 hours per day. Wrap-around services extending beyond the school day are common.

Age-appropriate learning standards. The District of Columbia Early Learning Standards (DC ELS) were last revised in 2013. They are comprehensive and aligned with D.C.'s Common Core Early Learning Standards from birth-Kindergarten; K-3 standards; and D.C.'s college and career ready standards for the

early grades. D.C. provides professional development opportunities to support use of the DC ELS. In addition, CBOs receive additional funds totaling \$1,500 per child for technical assistance which may include implementing the DC ELS.

System that ensures effective curriculum. D.C. has a list of state-approved curricula. Programs do not have to select one of the nine different curricula on the list in 2016-2017, but must align the chosen curriculum with the DC ELS. OSSE offers sponsored training and on-going technical assistance and funding for curriculum implementation. OSSE requires DCPS and CBO programs to establish a system to ensure that curricula are being implemented with fidelity.

Support for students with special needs. In 2016-2017, 9.4% of pre-K students received special education services. There are no state policies related to providing supports for preschool children who have special needs enrolled in inclusion classrooms in this preschool program.

DCPS initiatives at the preschool level include: inclusion classrooms, using the Tools of the Mind curriculum, staffed with a teacher certified in both early childhood education and special education, and two trained classroom instructional paraprofessionals. The Early Learning Support Program (P-2) is staffed with special education teachers and classroom instructional paraprofessionals. Teachers are trained to meet the educational needs of students with developmental delays and classroom instructional paraprofessionals also receive training and support in the area of data collection and meeting individual student needs. Specially trained and certified related service providers provide supports to students and classroom staff.

Support for dual (English) language learners (DLL). D.C. is not able to report the number of DLLs enrolled in preschool. However, there are supports, including additional funding, allocated to preschool programs to serve DLLs. Children are screened and assessed in their home language if available in the home language. To support families, recruitment, enrollment, outreach information, and communication with the family about the program or child is in family's home language. DCPS requires preschool programs have an approved written plan for supporting children who are DLLs.

High quality teaching. 2015-2016 CLASS scores were reported for 334 DCPS pre-K classrooms, 325 PCS classrooms, and 143 CBO classrooms (43 serving pre-K students). Mean scores were 5.83 for Emotional Support, 5.62 for Classroom Organization, and 2.62 for Instructional Support.

Professional development.

DCPS: DCPS requires pre-K teachers to participate in six days of professional development annually as well as ongoing classroom-embedded support such as coaching and mentoring. Coaching is only required for lead teachers; however, many schools require teaching teams to be coached together.

PCS: Public Charter Schools do not mandate a specific number of training hours and the schools determine the type of training teachers receive.

CBO: Since 2008, D.C. has awarded Pre-K Incentive Program Grants to private providers to help them meet the quality requirements of the Pre-K Act. These requirements include providing technical assistance and coaching support for educators. Lead teachers are expected to complete 30 clock hours of professional development per year.

Child Assessments. Child assessments are required to be aligned with the ELDS, but other policies vary by setting. Professional development opportunities on assessing children are available to all teachers through the District's Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) system.

DCPS: DCPS classrooms are required to use Teaching Strategies GOLD.

PCS: Public Charter Schools have the authority to select their own child assessment.

CBO: The District requires that children enrolled in a CBO pre-K program be assessed using a curriculum-aligned tool at least three times during the program year and the assessment results for each child be submitted to OSSE.

Data-driven decision-making. Pre-K programs from all three sectors (DCPS, PCS and CBOs) are assessed on an annual basis using CLASS by an external evaluator. Each CBO and school receives individualized classroom and program level reports identifying areas of strength and areas needing improvement. Additionally, D.C. convenes program administrators and education leaders for data engagement meetings annually to review and use their own CLASS data to inform decisions such as professional development training, classroom instruction, and other program improvements.

There have been two data system integration efforts. The District's Statewide Longitudinal Education Data Warehouse (SLED) is a single repository of student and education-related data needed to improve education planning, management, reporting, instruction and evaluation. The District has invested greatly into this system and it provides a robust, centralized platform of information from early childhood through K-12, post-secondary and into adult education and employment. In addition to the SLED, the District began implementing in 2014 the Early Development Inventory (EDI) tool, a population-based measure that provides a snapshot of children's health, development, and school readiness. OSSE contracted with UCLA's Center for Healthier Children, Families, and Communities to assist with administration of the EDI. Data are reported every two years.

Integrated System. The QRIS system aligns quality standards including the DC ELS across D.C.'s three-sector system. However, only CBOs participating in subsidized child care or providing public pre-K are required to be part of the QRIS system. DCPS and PCS have to be part of an accountability system that is aligned with the state's QRIS. Having three settings with different programmatic requirements makes it challenging to integrate the pre-K system.