

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

Kansas has two state-funded preschool programs, the Kansas State Prekindergarten Program (KSPP) established in 1998, and the Kansas Preschool Program (KPP), which started in the 2006-2007 school year. KSPP is available to 4-year-olds who meet one of eight state-determined risk factors: eligibility for free lunch (130% FPL), academic or developmental delay based upon validated assessments, English Language Learner status, migrant status, a parent lacking a high school diploma or GED, having a single parent, having a teen parent, or having a referral from the Department for Children and Families agency. KPP requires that at least 50% of children enrolled must meet either one of the program risk factors listed above or one of the alternate risk factors; alternate factors include being referred by an early childhood organization, qualifying for reduced price lunch (185% percent FPL), or having a parent on active military duty. The other half must be eligible according to standards set by local programs. KSPP is the larger preschool program, enrolling 6,984 students in 2016-2017, while the KPP enrolled 1,027 children.

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.

Kansas Preschool Program (KPP)

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
–	○	–	●	●	–	●	–	–	●	ND	–	●	–	–

Kansas State Pre-Kindergarten Program (KSPP)

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
–	○	–	–	●	–	●	–	–	●	ND	–	–	–	–

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

Political will. Gov. Sam Brownback (R) who assumed office in 2011 and is in his final term, has supported full-day kindergarten but has been less supportive of pre-K efforts. Kansas has experienced some budget challenges brought on by eliminating business taxes and cutting taxes across the board, resulting in funding cuts (\$13 million) to the Children’s Initiative Fund (CIF). CIF is funded by money from the tobacco settlement. In 2016, Gov. Brownback proposed using the entire CIF to backfill budget shortfalls, but was stopped by the legislature with advocacy efforts led by the Kansas Action for Children.

In 2016-2017, state pre-K spending was \$17.5 million, a five percent decrease (almost \$1 million) from the previous year. Per-child spending in Kansas was \$2,195, ranking it 43rd out of the 43 states plus DC and Guam offering state-funded pre-K. Kansas pre-K enrollment peaked in 2009-2010 (23% of the population) and then fell and has remained relatively flat, enrolling more than 8,000 children in the two programs, 20% of the state’s 4-year-old population.

Compelling vision and strong leadership. The Division of Learning Services housed in Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE), has four “teams,” including the Early Childhood, Special Education and Title Services (ECEST). ECEST is charged with providing effective, evidence-based technical assistance to districts and schools across the state, serving students from early childhood through secondary school. Members of the Early Childhood team have responsibilities including coordinating the many early childhood programs, including pre-K, located in KSDE, providing Technical Assistance to early childhood personnel in programs across the state, and participating in meetings, coordinating councils, and conferences that occur across Kansas. Early childhood is defined as the continuum of birth to age eight (3rd grade). One FTE is assigned to KPP and one FTE to KSPP.

Education and compensation. For both programs, Kansas requires each classroom to have a lead teacher with a BA and ECE specialization, however Kansas pre-K teachers are not guaranteed salary parity with K-3 teachers.

Adult-child ratio and two adults in the classroom.

KPP: Maximum class size is 20 with a teacher to student ratio of 1:10.

KSPP: Maximum class size is 25. For classes with 21 to 25 students, a third teacher must be added; the teacher to student ratio maximum allowed is 1:10.

Learning time. Both pre-K programs must provide 465 hours per year of education. The actual schedule is determined at the local level, with most programs operating approximately three hours per day, five days per week, but some programs operate four days per week.

Age-appropriate learning standards. The Kansas Early Learning Standards (ELS) were last revised in 2013, are comprehensive and aligned with the state’s K-12 College and Career Ready Standards. The state provides professional development opportunities and additional resources to support use of the ELS.

System that ensures effective curriculum.

KPP: Selection of curriculum is a local decision in KS Preschool, but the KSDE provides supporting materials and TA for aligning curriculum according to the standards. The state requires programs to establish a system to ensure that curricula are being implemented with fidelity.

KSPP: The Early Childhood Special Education program has a state approved/recommended curriculum list for use in KSPP and provides curriculum TA support and additional funding to support implementation. There is not a system to ensure that curricula are implemented with fidelity.

Support for students with special needs. Children who receive special education services may attend state preschool, but are not counted in state preschool enrollment. The state does not have policies to support children with special needed in inclusion classrooms in either program.

Support for dual (English) language learners (DLL). The number of DLLs enrolled in pre-K programs is unknown. Kansas requires that there is an approved plan for supporting DLLs and extra funding is allocated. Bilingual instruction; monolingual non-English classes; transitional bilingual programs; DLL immersion classes; summer language programs; and having DLLs pulled out for ESL are program options to support DLLs. The quality of bilingual instruction is monitored. Children are required to be screened and assessed in their home languages. To support families, recruitment, enrollment, outreach, and communication with the family about the program or child is done in home languages.

High-quality teaching. CLASS and ECERS observations of pre-K classrooms were not available for review.

Professional development. All pre-K teachers are required to complete 15 clock hours of PD per year.

KPP: The state does not require ongoing classroom-embedded support to be provided to KPP teachers.

KSPP: New teachers are required to participate in ongoing classroom-embedded support.

Child Assessments.

KPP: In KS Preschool, the Kansas Early Learning Inventory for Fours (KELI-4) is administered two times per year; MyIGDI (Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDIs)) is administered three times per year. Data are used to adjust curricula, to track child and program level outcomes over time, and to provide a measure of kindergarten readiness. KSDE has created an online SANDBOX training website with lessons about how to use the Foundations for School Success which includes training on KELI-4 and MyIGDI.

KSPP: Policy provides an approved list of child assessments aligned with the Kansas ELS on the Foundations for School Success, a website that provides resources to use assessments. It is not clear if there are any requirements to conduct specific child assignments.

Data-driven decision-making.

KPP: Low performing and randomly selected classroom are observed using the Classroom Practices Survey, one time per year. The state does not receive the results of the observations. A 2016 external evaluation was conducted to measure impact/child outcomes.

KSPP: All classrooms are observed using the Classroom Practices Survey. It is unclear if the state receives the results of the observations and the frequency in which they are collected. The state does not collect information for monitoring purposes. An external evaluation of KSPP is currently being planned.

Integrated System. The state establishes a broad framework for programmatic requirements, but specific policies related to implementation (curriculum selection, PD content, coaching, analysis of structured classroom observations) are set at the local level, thus making it difficult to ensure an integrated system.