

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

Louisiana operates three state-funded preschool programs as well as the federally funded Preschool Expansion Grant. Louisiana’s largest pre-K program, The Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program (LA 4) was established in 2001 and serves children in public schools, charter schools, child care centers, and one tribal school. Also established in 2001, the Nonpublic Schools Early Childhood Development program (NSECD) supports high-quality pre-K for 4-year-olds in nonpublic schools or in child care. NSECD has the same eligibility and reimbursement as the LA 4 program. Programs operate in 14 parishes throughout the state, though all parishes have the opportunity to participate.

The 8(g) Student Enhancement Block Grant Program (LA 8(g)) was created to compensate for the loss of the Model Early Childhood Program when matching annual appropriations for that program ended. At that time, local school districts began using the 8(g) Block Grant Program to offer preschool programs to at-risk 4-year-olds. Enrollment priority is given to children from low-income families, but children also qualify for the program if they are screened and deemed “developmentally unprepared.”

In 2012, the Louisiana legislature passed the Early Childhood Education Act (Act 3) that mandated by 2015, all publicly funded early care and education programs be aligned and have higher quality standards. Therefore, in this scan, the three programs are ranked once. Any programmatic differences are noted.

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. Gov. John Edwards (D) was elected in 2016 and seen as supportive of early learning. He was preceded by Gov. Bobby Jindal (R) who in his tenure implemented early childhood education reforms stating his plans to streamline the governance of early childhood programs and align the

standards and regulations governing the pre-K programs were needed to better utilize resources and improve quality. Funding for pre-K had been relatively flat since 2010, spending was \$89.6 million in 2016-2017; a decrease of 1.3% (\$1.2 million, inflation adjusted) from the previous year.

The Legislature is supportive of early education reform efforts in general, including school choice and reforming pre-K specifically. There is significant political support for Louisiana's Act 3 to improve both quality of and access to early childhood education. Bulletin 140: Louisiana Early Childhood Care and Education Network (2015) defines the implementation of Act 3, including how to move toward a unified early childhood care and education system. Questions have been raised about adequacy of funding to support many of the elements that Act 3 is expected to put in place.

Leadership also extends to business, philanthropy, and advocates. Foundations are actively involved in communities, including W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Stranahan Foundation, the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, and Bayou District Foundation.

Compelling vision and strong leadership. Louisiana's Department of Education (LDE)'s Office of Early Childhood (OEC) administers multiple early childhood programs in a restructured agency better designed to address cross-sector services, including the three state-funded pre-K programs, child care, and Head Start. Until recently, OEC was led by Jenna Conway (Asst. Supt.) who brought a strong business/systems background to the position. The office has restructured in recent years to address accountability and coordinated enrollment as required in Act 3. There are two FTEs across the LA 4 and NSECD programs; and five FTEs for LA 8(g).

Staffing capacity at OEC has been strengthened by the Child Care Development Fund administration becoming a part of the department's work, and receipt of a federal Preschool Development Grant (PDG) to increase OEC capacity.

On a local level, LEAs have stepped into leadership roles, serving as "lead agencies" for their local early childhood community networks. More than 90% of local networks are led by LEAs. Superintendents have become community leaders of early childhood (not just pre-K) and are dedicating district resources to partnering with Head Start and child care to improve teaching, coordinate enrollment, increase access and ultimately, improve child outcomes.

Education and compensation. Louisiana's 3 pre-K programs require each classroom to have a lead teacher with a BA plus an early learning credential. Teachers that work in public schools (LA 8 (g) and LA 4) have the same starting salary and are on the same salary schedule as K-3 teachers.

Adult-child ratio and two adults in the classroom. Louisiana has a maximum class size of 20; and requires a staff-child ratio of 1:10.

Learning time. The minimum number of operation hours using state funds is six per day. Many programs offer before- and after-school programs, but the state does not track or subsidize this activity.

Age-appropriate learning standards. The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) approved the new Birth to Five Early Learning and Development Standards in April 2013. Some schools chose to implement immediately; full implementation occurred in the 2013-2014 school year. The ELDS

are comprehensive and aligned with the state's K-3 standards. To support the use of the ELDS, the state provides professional development opportunities; additional resources; and collaborative sessions are conducted several times a year to support programs in implementation of assessment, observations, and ELDS utilization.

System that ensures effective curriculum. In Louisiana, all districts are able to purchase instructional materials that are best for their local communities. LDE provides guidance by reviewing instructional materials online and determining the degree of alignment with state content standards, resulting in assigning curricula to one of three tiers ranging from meeting all "non-negotiable criteria" as well as scoring the highest on all indicators of quality to "not representing quality." On the Louisiana Believes website, LDE provides detailed guidance and materials. In order to ensure curricula are implemented with fidelity, direct training or technical assistance is conducted by state and regional staff; a system of regular coaching which includes curriculum implementation is provided to programs; and funding is provided to conduct training and offer/identify other professional development opportunities at the local level.

Support for students with special needs. The state does not have specific policies to support children with special needs in inclusion classrooms in any of the three programs.

LA 8(g): The number of children with special needs in this program is not able to be reported.

LA 4: In 2016-2017, 4.4% of children in LA 4 had an identified special need.

NSECD: Children who receive special education services may attend state preschool classrooms, but are not counted in state preschool enrollment.

Support for dual (English) language learners (DLL). Louisiana is not able to report the number of DLLs in any of its pre-K programs nor does it have state policies to support DLLs in pre-K. School programs with large DLL populations perform screenings and assessments on a local level and address each child's needs individually.

High quality teaching. As a requirement of Act 3, all classrooms are observed annually using CLASS. Total average CLASS scores for 2016-2017 by domain were Instructional Support (3.68); Emotional Support (5.74); and Classroom Organization (5.53).

Professional development. Louisiana's pre-K teachers are required to receive a minimum of 18 hours of professional development annually. All teachers are required to participate in required ongoing classroom-embedded support. How often teachers receive coaching visits and the size of the coaches' case loads are determined locally.

Child Assessments. Providers are required to assess children using Teaching Strategies GOLD or they may submit a request to use an alternative assessment, which must be approved by the state. Children receive completed assessments in October, February, and May. The state provides TA and PD to support the implementation of Teaching Strategies GOLD.

Data-driven decision-making. Coordinated observation is the local process by which each community network ensures that each pre-K classroom receives two CLASS observations each school year. All observers must be reliable, and maintain inter-rater reliability and fidelity. The community network



must conduct inter-rater reliability observation checks for 10% of all classrooms observed. Teachers, programs, and the state receive the results of the observations.

Information collected during monitoring processes/activities is used at the state and/or at the local level for program improvement.

Evaluations are conducted annually for districts by independent evaluators to measure the impact on student outcomes. In June 2013, the Cecil J. Picard Center for Child Development and Lifelong Learning conducted a longitudinal report entitled, Longitudinal Study: Longitudinal Impacts on Academic Achievement for Participants in Louisiana LA 4, NSECD, and 8(g) Early Childhood Programs.

Integrated System. The implementation of Act 3 created an integrated early system in Louisiana. There is a coordinated system to align the ELDS, curricula, child assessments and structured classroom observations. The PD system supports this alignment, but could be enhanced by the coordination of the coaching system.