

## IMPLEMENTING 15 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K: Maine

Maine established its Two-Year Kindergarten initiative in 1983 by allocating resources to local districts through the school funding formula. State-funded programs for 4-year-olds have been separately defined as the Public Preschool Program (PPP) since 2007, and remain funded through the school funding formula, with distributions going directly to school districts. School administrative units (SAUs) have not been required to offer a public preschool program. However, legislation enacted in 2014 encouraged voluntary preschool throughout the state, increasing the number of public preschool programs to serve children at risk.

### 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
●	○	○	●	●	—	●	○	—	●	ND	—	—	○	—

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

**Political will.** The last three Education Commissioners have been highly supportive of preschool in Maine, as shown by putting preschool program quality standards into regulations (Chapter 124), and expanding access. Several years ago, legislation was passed encouraging all districts to open a preschool classroom by 2017. PPP is funded through Maine’s school funding formula, with distributions of funds to 139 of the 258 school administrative units (SAUs); only 186 SAUs have kindergarten. Though not required, PPP funds are available to any SAU choosing to offer the program. The state allocated just over \$18.7 million for pre-K in 2016-2017, an increase of 6.7%. This does not include federal funds, such as the Preschool Development Grant (PDG), and local funds that were blended by school districts. Enrollment held steady in 2016-2017, as PPP served 5,440 children, approximately 39% of the state’s 4-year-old population.

Gov. Paul LePage (R) is in his second and final term. It is too early to determine if preschool will be on the agenda for the next Governor.

**Compelling vision and strong leadership.** The Maine Department of Education (Maine DOE) oversees PPP with 1.5 FTEs assigned to the program. PPP has experienced stable leadership from the state.

Maine DOE and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) have worked hard in establishing relationships to create a mixed delivery system in which public schools can partner with local early childhood programs in order to maximize funding and meet community needs to serve any 4-year-old who would like to attend. Decisions to implement public preschool programs are made by SAUs, dependent upon local school board approval. Although the number of staff dedicated to the pre-k program is small, PPP is strongly supported by the DOE as shown by their participation in a CCSO High Quality Preschool Network.

**Education and compensation.** Regardless of setting, all lead teachers are required to have a BA and an 081 Certification: Early Childhood Birth-5 from the Department of Education. PPP teachers who work in public schools have the same starting salary and salary schedule as K-3 for all years of service. Salary schedule is prorated for differences in length of work day or year for these teachers as well. Teachers in nonpublic schools do not have salary parity.

**Adult-child ratio and two adults in the classroom.** PPP has a maximum class size of 16 and requires a staff-child ratio of 1:8.

**Learning time.** The number of hours and days per week a program operates is a local decision, however programs must operate a minimum of 10 hours per week to receive a per-pupil subsidy through the school funding formula.

**Age-appropriate learning standards.** Maine's Early Learning & Development Standards (MELDS) were last revised in 2014. They are comprehensive and aligned with the state's K-12 Guiding Principles. Maine DOE partnered with Maine Roads to Quality (Maine's Professional Development Network) to create and deliver training on the MELDS.

**System that ensures effective curriculum.** Maine DOE offers guidance on selecting curriculum aligned with the MELDS. The state requires programs to establish a system to ensure that curricula are being implemented with fidelity. Other curriculum supports the state offers include training; supporting materials (such as manuals, videos, or websites); a list of state recommended (not required) curricula; and on-going technical assistance on curriculum implementation.

**Support for students with special needs.** In 2016-2017, 9.3% of PPP students received special education services. The proportion of children with an IEP in each preschool classroom is limited to 50%.

**Support for dual (English) language learners (DLL).** Almost 10% of PPP students are DLLs. Maine has policies to regulate services for preschool DLLs including requiring program administrators have specific training or qualifications related to working with preschool DLLs and their families. The state monitors the quality of bilingual instruction, programs must have an approved written plan for supporting DLLs, and additional funding is available to support DLLs. Recruitment, enrollment, and outreach efforts; communication with the family about the program or child; and screening and assessment is in the child's or family's home language. Additional DLL supports include permitting monolingual non-English classes; transitional bilingual programs; dual language immersion classes; and summer language programs.



**High quality teaching.** There are not any CLASS or ECERS observations of PPP that were able to be reviewed.

**Professional development.** All lead teachers must complete six credit hours of professional development every five years. State policy does not require ongoing classroom-embedded support to be provided to teachers. The use of coaches is a local decision.

**Child Assessments.** The use of formative assessments in PPP is part of Chapter 124 regulations. Child assessments are required to be research-based and aligned with the MELDS, but programs can choose the assessment. The assessments are expected to be used throughout the school year.

**Data-driven decision-making.** Per Chapter 124, Maine DOE is in the process of conducting CLASS observations in every public preschool classroom. These observations started in 2015-2016 and will continue until 2018-2019 at which point all schools will be on a 3-year observation cycle. CLASS data will be shared with the teacher and principal/director and a plan for training and technical assistance will be developed.

No external evaluation of the program has been done, although a case study of four high-quality programs was completed in 2015. The Maine Education Policy Research Institute is involved in an ongoing evaluation of Maine's programs.

**Integrated System.** As noted above, many elements of the system are now integrated with the Maine ELDS, as outlined in Chapter 124. However, most decisions are made at the local level including the choice of formative assessment, curriculum, and use of coaches, thus making it difficult to coordinate the system from the state level.