

IMPLEMENTING 15 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K: New Mexico

State-funded New Mexico PreK (NM PreK) began in the 2005-2006 school year with enactment of the PreK Act of 2005. NM PreK is jointly administered by two state agencies and operates in programs provided through school districts, and programs operating in community-based organizations and other eligible providers. In the 2016-2017 school year, nearly 70% of school districts offered NM PreK.

A competitive process awards programs funds, though preference is given to programs in communities with public elementary schools designated as Title I. Two-thirds of enrolled children at each program site must live in the attendance zone of a Title I elementary school, though eligibility is not determined by a specific family income requirement.

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. Gov. Susana Martinez (R), currently in her second and final term, has been consistent in her support of NM PreK. There are several active advocacy groups in New Mexico including, New Mexico Voices for Children and the New Mexico Business Roundtable. There has been a steady increase in funding of the NM PreK since 2011. In prior years, NM PreK was solely funded through state funds; however, for the past three years, federal TANF funds were added to the state dollars. In 2016-2017, total NM PreK spending increased by \$1.25 million, bringing the total operating budget to \$52.3 million.

In 2014-2015, the legislature provided limited funding for an Extended-day PreK pilot to double the instructional hours to 900 per school year. Some private or nonprofit facilities use Child Care Subsidy dollars for wrap-around care to assist parents who qualify, or to offer reduced rates for private pay. PreK programs in public schools can extend the day using operational dollars or Title I funds.

Despite a significant decrease in enrollment during the 2010-2011 school year, participation and funding for NM PreK has steadily increased. In the 2016-2017 school year, there were 10,379 children (89% were 4-year-olds) participating in NM PreK; more than one-third of the state's 4-year-old population.

Compelling vision and strong leadership. NM PreK is jointly administered by two large state agencies, PED and CYFD. The University of New Mexico (UNM) also supports PD efforts. There is no one person or department identified to oversee the coordination and adherence to NM PreK standards. Expectations for collaboration are described in both PED and CYFD's administrative rules. Both departments have pre-K advocates and early childhood expertise and have leaders who are viewed as supportive of NM PreK. Eight FTEs are assigned to NM PreK at the state level.

Education and compensation. Teachers in nonpublic settings who do not yet possess a state-issued Early Childhood teaching license or BA degree must complete a minimum of six credit hours annually toward the degree or license. Teachers in public schools must hold at least a BA/BS and a teaching license in Early Childhood. If a public school teacher is hired who holds either a special education PreK-12 license or an Elementary K-8 license, that person must complete all requirements for an early childhood B-3rd grade or PreK-3rd grade teaching license within two years of hire. Only Lead teachers in public schools have the same starting salary, same salary schedule for all years of service as K-3, and salary schedules are also prorated for differences in length of work day or year.

Adult-child ratio and two adults in the classroom. NM PreK has a maximum class size of 20 for 4-year-olds and requires a staff-child ratio of 1:10. For 3-year-olds the maximum class size is 16, with a ratio of 1:8. Class sizes and staff to child ratios may be smaller in classrooms with children with IEPs, for example, one adult to four children.

Learning time. Hours and days per week vary by program, with a minimum of 450 hours per year (2.5 hours per day). In 2014-2015, the legislature provided limited funding for an Extended-day PreK pilot to double the instructional hours to 900 per school year. Some private or nonprofit facilities use Child Care Subsidy dollars for wrap-around care to assist parents who qualify, or to offer reduced rates for private pay. PreK programs in public schools can extend the day using operational dollars or Title I funds.

Age-appropriate learning standards. The New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines: Birth to Kindergarten (NMELGs) preschool section was updated in 2017; the Infant-Toddler section is currently under revision. The NMELGs are comprehensive and aligned with the state's K-3 standards. To support the use of the NMELGs, the state provides professional development opportunities, additional resources, and coaching.

System that ensures effective curriculum. Curricula are locally determined but must be aligned with the NMELGs. There is no state-approved or recommended curricula list, but additional funding is used to support curriculum implementation/training. A curriculum implementation tool developed by the state includes the Authentic Observation, Documentation, and Curriculum Planning Cycle (AODCPC) which requires each teacher to use the cycle of planning, observation, reflection, assessment, and individualization in curriculum implementation. The required coaching program includes support for AODCPC and review of the curriculum to ensure that the curriculum is being implemented with fidelity.

Support for students with special needs. In public school programs, up 40% of children may have IEPs if a percentage of those IEPs are for speech articulation only. If not, one-third of the children may have IEPs. In addition, pre-K teachers are required to possess specific qualifications and receive PD and coaching for working with children with special needs and inclusion specialists are available to support preschool teachers and/or children. In 2016-2017, 5.7% of the NM Pre-K students were identified as having special needs.

Support for dual (English) language learners (DLL). In 2016-2017, 25% of children enrolled in pre-K were DLLs. Recruitment, enrollment, outreach, and communication with family about the program or the child is in the family's home language. The PreK child assessment is observational, making it is easy to adapt to a home language. PreK Program Standards require that every effort to provide an adult who speaks the child's language is made. Guidance for serving DLLs is included in the state's QRIS and in the NMELGs. One of the essential elements of the QRIS is Culture and Language, Including the *Support of Dual Language Learners*.

High quality teaching. The ERS are used as part of the QRIS system, however the average scores received by programs are not available for review.

Professional development. All classrooms are required to receive coaching through the PreK Consultation Model which provides monthly three-hour classroom visits, including a 30- minute debriefing period with the teacher and educational assistant. New teachers may receive additional coaching as needed. Coaches have an average caseload of 15 classrooms. In addition to receiving coaching, public school teachers are required to complete 40 clock hours of PD annually; nonpublic school teachers must complete 28 clock hours of PD annually and six credit hours/year if BA/BS degree is not completed.

Child Assessments. The New Mexico Preschool Observational Assessment is required to be used by all pre-K programs, no other assessment may be used. The tool is based on the NMELGs and frequency of observations is dependent upon program setting and number of hours the program operated per year for non-public schools: annually for programs funded for 450 hours; three times a year for programs funded for 900 hours; for public schools: three times a year. To support the implementation of the tool, the state has online resources, sponsored training, and coaching.

Data-driven decision-making. State statute requires an annual report of the pre-K program. The NM PreK Annual Report provides information on student enrollment, including targeted school districts and demographic data; teacher qualifications and PD participation; child outcomes, including growth between fall and spring of the pre-K year; and funding levels over time. All NM PreK classrooms are observed annually using the ERS and data are sent to the state and used at the program level by coaches. All programs are required to participate in the state's QRIS. In addition, when children enter NM PreK they are assigned a unique identifier that is in line with the K-12 identifiers assigned to older students.

The most recent completed third-party evaluation, which was mandated by the state, was the 2010 NIEER report, *The New Mexico PreK Evaluation: Results from the Initial Four Years of a New State Preschool Initiative*, concluded that the NM PreK produced consistent benefits in language, literacy and math.



Integrated System. The NMELGs provide the foundation for the alignment of all of early childhood system components (child assessment, curriculum selection, PD, QRIS) utilized by NM PreK. The required participation in the coaching system ensures that all of the components are implemented to the degree in which they were designed.