

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

New York’s preschool program began in 1966 as the Experimental Prekindergarten Program (EPK) with the goal of offering preschool education to all 4-year-olds in the state. In 1998, it was merged with a 50% increase in funding to become New York’s Universal Preschool Program (UPK). Although intended to be universally available to all 4-year-olds, only a small number of children were being served. In 1997, the New York legislature voted to make universal preschool available to all by the 2002-2003 school year which resulted in increased enrollment. Spurred on by NYC Mayor Bill DiBlasio’s pre-k initiative funding, enrollment has increased again but insufficient funds continue to impede universal enrollment.

### 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.** Governor Cuomo (D) is a proponent of preschool, advocating quality early education as critical for long-term success. Under the Governor’s administration, the state committed to investing \$1.5 billion over five years to build the Statewide Universal Full-Day Preschool Program. In his 2018 State of the State address he included the expansion of pre-K, including 3-year-olds, in a mixed delivery system. The Blue Ribbon Commission on ECE was created by the NY Board of Regents in 2017 to provide advice in the areas of budget investments, educational policy and legislative initiatives.

NYS has several separate pre-K funding streams, five of which are competitive awards. UPK is administered by school districts via an allocation grant award that is non-competitive. However, the funds and awardees for this program have been frozen for nearly a decade. For the last four years, school districts have been able to compete for additional funding for five-year grant awards. In 2016-2017, state pre-K spending served 122,871 children, 51.6% of the state’s 4-year-olds and 1.5% of 3-year-olds. New York was also awarded a federal Preschool Development Grant (PDG). In 2016-2017, \$25

million was used to support the enrollment of 2,350 low-income 4-year-olds in five school districts in both new slots and in enhancing existing slots.

In New York City, Mayor DeBlasio (D) demonstrates strong political will to provide universal access to high-quality preschool to all 3- and 4-year-olds in its Pre-K for All (PK4A) program. NYC enrolled 53,000 4-year-old children in PK4A in 2014, approximately 51% of the city's 4-year-old population. Enrollment in PK4A grew steadily over the next two years to 68,647 children in 2015-2016 (66.6%); and 70,430 children (68.3%) in 2016-2017.

There are numerous advocates at both the state and local level who are vocal on the importance of pre-K, including K-12 advocacy groups. Many of the advocates are working together to spearhead a campaign to acknowledge access to high-quality preschool for all children as a basic constitutional right.

**Compelling vision and strong leadership.** UPK is administered by the Office of Early Learning (OEL), within the New York State Department of Education (NYSED). OEL's staff of 13 is tasked with implementing over \$800 million per year in state and federal grants for prekindergarten programs including UPK and the Voluntary Registered Nursery Schools and Kindergartens.

At the New York City Department of Education (NYCED), the Office of Early Childhood Education (OECE) is charged with implementing the universal preschool program and integrate preschool into a P-12<sup>th</sup> grade system. The Center for Children's Initiatives provides specialized training and technical assistance to programs serving birth-through-school-aged children.

**Education and compensation.** New York requires teachers to hold a BA as well as a teacher specialization certificate in early childhood. Pre-K teachers do not have salary parity with K-3 teachers, except for those teaching in public school preschool.

**Adult-child ratio and two adults in the classroom.** New York has a maximum class size of 20 for both 3- and 4-year-olds and requires a staff-child ratio requirement of 1:9. For classes of 19 or 20 students, there must be one teacher and two paraprofessionals assigned to each class.

**Learning time.** Funding is for a minimum of 2.5 hours per day, but many programs opt to run a school-day or extended-day program using local funds or other funding sources. Programs must operate five days per week for a minimum of 180 days per year. All school districts can elect to provide prekindergarten programming in the summer if they wish, using the same prekindergarten funds. Approximately 75% of children served in 2016-2017 were in in full-day programs.

**Age-appropriate learning standards.** In 2011, the New York Board of Regents adopted the revised early learning standards, the New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core. These comprehensive, multi-domain ELDS are aligned with state K-3 standards, state college and career ready standards, and the New York State Common Core Learning Standards. The New York State P-12 Learning Standards for the Arts will be fully implemented in the 2018-2019 school year. To support the use of the ELDS, the state provides professional development opportunities and additional resources.

**System that ensures effective curriculum.** New York does not have a list of approved or recommended curricula for the state funded pre-K programs, but programs must select and adopt a curriculum that is

aligned with the ELDS. Supports for curriculum implementation include the updated Planning for High-Quality Prekindergarten Programs; Summer Institute for Programs serving 3-year-olds (held in July 2017); guidance for school districts operating Prekindergarten programs for 3-year-olds; website resources, including tip sheets for setting up the environment and checklists to ensure curriculum addresses opportunities across all domains. The state also offers ongoing TA and OEL sponsored training on curriculum. Curricula is reviewed and discussed through periodic monitoring of programs.

**Support for students with special needs.** In 2016-2017, 12.7% of UPK students were identified as having special needs. To support these children, co-teaching models are required in preschool inclusion classrooms. Preschool teachers are required to possess specific qualifications and receive PD on working with children with special needs. Some regions/programs provide coaching of preschool teachers about children with special needs, however, this is not required or defined by the state. The proportion of children with an IEP in each preschool classroom is limited to no more than 50%.

**Support for dual (English) language learners (DLL).** NYS policy permits monolingual non-English classes, transitional bilingual programs, dual language immersion classes, summer language programs to support DLLs, pull-out instruction for English language instruction and dual language Pre-K programs. NYS policy requires monitoring at either the program or state level that is specifically focused on the quality of bilingual instruction. NYS policy requires preschool programs to screen and assess children in their home language if valid screening and assessment methods are available in the home language. Programs are required to collect and use information on language inputs in the home. Guidance, including the New York State Blueprint for English Language Learners, has been released conveying that home language support is best practice and programs are required to ensure that children with limited English proficiency are provided equal access to the prekindergarten program and opportunities to achieve the same program goals and standards as other children. Preschool programs are required to provide recruitment, enrollment, outreach information, and communication to the families in their home language. The number of DLLs in pre-K is unknown.

**High quality teaching.** ECERS and CLASS are used by UPK programs, but scores are not available for review.

**Professional development.** Pre-K teachers are required to complete 175 clock hours of PD every five years. State policy does not specifically require ongoing classroom-embedded support, but local districts can decide to provide it.

**Child Assessments.** Child assessments are determined locally; but must be aligned with the state's ELDS. School districts are required to establish a process for assessing the developmental baseline and ongoing progress of all children participating in the program in at least language, cognitive, and social skill development. Data from preschool child assessments are not used by the state agency.

**Data-driven decision-making.** Two prekindergarten grant funding streams require annual visits; other structured observations are determined locally. The state does not receive the results of the observations; but does require that assessments used are research-based, valid, reliable, and include environmental quality and teacher/child interactions. Specific instruments are chosen at the local level. There has not been a formal evaluation of UPK.



**Integrated System.** There is some alignment in the system, mostly around the New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core. However, curriculum, child assessments, program assessments, and PD requirements are decided at the local level. Data collected may be used at the local level, but the state does not collect this information.