



Perspectives on the Impact of Pre-K Expansion

Factors to Consider and Lessons from New York and Ohio

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As state-funded pre-K programs expand there is debate about the impact of state-funded pre-K on the quality and supply of child care for low-income working families. This fact sheet looks at state policies and regulations regarding expansion that have the potential to positively impact child care quality and access for low-income working families.



What We Know:

- Pre-K authorizing legislation can support a mixed delivery market in which child care and Head Start programs are partners in offering pre-K services.
- Fluctuations in state pre-K funding can have a dramatic impact on the quality and accessibility of child care programs for low-income families.
- Braiding state pre-K funds with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and child care subsidy dollars can enable states to expand and enhance pre-K services, but caution is needed to ensure stability of services.
- Coordination of state and local pre-K and child care policies and programs is important for pre-K expansion to positively impact child care quality and supply.
- State agency personnel have a key role in supporting pre-K services offered through a mixed delivery model.
- Assessment and monitoring systems are important tools to evaluate the quality of pre-K services offered.

Policy Recommendations:

- States' pre-K legislation should require pre-K grantees to collaborate with child care and Head Start.
- State pre-K initiatives should be funded by a formula or dedicated revenue source that is not subject to large year-to-year swings. State regulations should ensure new pre-K funding is used to enhance quality of services.
- States should offer technical assistance, policy guidance, and support to assist local agencies and providers seeking to expand quality and supply of services through braiding funds.
- States should provide ongoing communication and updated policy guidance to counties and school districts to ensure local pre-K and child care subsidy decisions are coordinated to best serve young children and their families.
- State agencies should seek guidance from personnel with a deep understanding of pre-K, child care, and Head Start regulations to ensure pre-K expansion positively affects the quality and supply of child care.

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Policy Recommendations: *(continued)*

- Coordination of assessment and monitoring systems is needed to support collaboration among pre-K, child care, and Head Start providers.
- States should coordinate professional development trainings among pre-K, child care, and Head Start staff that will lead to a skilled and diverse workforce.
- States should support parity in compensation and benefits for teachers across pre-K, child care, and Head Start.
- States should invest in leadership development that supports building collaboration among child care, Head Start programs and school district staff.

Policy Debate on Pre-K Expansion

Debate stems from differing opinions about how expansion of state-funded pre-K will contribute to or detract from the existing market of child care, Head Start, and other early care and education providers. Even though 30 of the 38 states that invest in pre-K allow for a diverse mix of public and private providers, some worry that child care programs will experience a decline in enrollment resulting in center closures and leading to fewer options for working parents. Another fear is that the quality of child care might decline if more qualified teachers move to school-based pre-K programs.

Description of Pre-K Impact Research Project

A multi-year mixed methods study of Universal Pre-K (UPK) in New York and Early Childhood Education (ECE) and the Early Learning Initiative (ELI) in Ohio addressed the following questions:

- What state policies and regulations regarding pre-K expansion have the potential to positively impact child care quality and access for low-income working families?
- What promising practices and lessons have been learned in pre-K expansion efforts that can positively impact child care quality and access for low-income working families?

Data for the study are from interviews, reviews of existing documents, and secondary analysis of datasets. Interviewees included key stakeholders in state departments of education, child care administrators' offices, Head Start state collaboration offices, and resource and referral associations.

Study States

New York and Ohio both offer pre-K programs through school-based models as well as through a mixed-delivery system that includes collaborative partnerships with Head Start and child care centers. These states allow local control over the delivery of services, leading to variation in child care market involvement in pre-K across communities.

How Pre-K Expansion Affects Child Care Quality and Supply

As states expand pre-K, six factors potentially impact child care: (1) authorizing legislation and related regulations, (2) stability of funding, (3) braiding funding sources, (4) state and local level coordination, (5) expertise and staff capacity at the state level, and (6) alignment of program standards and assessments.

Authorizing Legislation and Related Regulations

The authorizing legislation establishing New York's UPK program creates

a part-day, part-year program funded through grants to school districts but requires that a percentage of pre-K be offered in non-school-based settings. Statewide, non-school-based providers have operated approximately 60 percent of UPK classrooms since the program's inception. However, the percentage varies substantially across districts.

Legislation requires that districts employ a lottery to select children if the demand for slots exceeds the supply. Some state and local leaders in New York pointed out that child care and Head Start providers cannot randomly select some participating children to receive a "pre-K" portion of the day while others in attendance are denied the service. Part-year school-based programs can maintain waiting lists and randomly select children from the list to participate. Some districts in New York have only school-based pre-K as child care and Head Start programs are not participating given the funding problems.

Ohio has supported a number of different pre-K programs over the years that have included child care and Head Start partners. The ELI program offered full-day, full-year services and allowed consortia of child care and early education providers to offer pre-K to low-income children. Each year between 2005 and 2009, services were provided through federal Head Start programs (50 percent), licensed child care centers



(38 percent), and school districts and Education Service Centers (12 percent).

Child care, Head Start, and pre-K stakeholders reported that some of New York's and Ohio's pre-K laws and regulations requiring coordination with child care and Head Start agencies had a positive effect on the supply and quality of child care. Child care providers reported that participation in the pre-K program led to quality improvements, and school-based programs reported improvements in the transition to kindergarten. In some communities, full-day pre-K improved access for parents needing full-time child care.

Stability of Funding

In New York, the fluctuation in pre-K funding can affect both school-based

and non-school-based pre-K providers but in different ways. Some report that sudden increases in pre-K funding favored community-based organizations as such organizations have flexibility in hiring and enrolling children more quickly than school-based programs.

In Ohio, some report that the declines in state funding have had a profoundly negative impact on the quality and supply of child care. In particular, the elimination of all ELI funding in 2009 reconfigured the child care market in ways that might threaten both quality and supply with leaders from child care, Head Start, and school-based programs reporting closed classrooms, cut teaching positions, and reduced services. The elimination of funding resulted in some child care providers closing their doors altogether.

Braiding Funding Sources

In the absence of a comprehensive vision, pre-K, Head Start, and child care providers can see one another as rivals for limited dollars rather than as partners in a system meeting the needs of children and their parents. Braided funding and a mixed-delivery approach can eliminate this potential competition and increase options for low-income working families. Stakeholders reported that it is essential to establish and clearly articulate state-level policy guidance regarding braided funds, to be aware of the challenges that can arise from restrictions in funding sources that impact braiding of funds, and to ensure that funding covers costs of high-quality services regardless of the program setting.

In New York and Ohio, pre-K providers have the potential to deliver

full-day, full-year services by offering additional child care hours using child care subsidy dollars. Both states have issued policy clarification that can assist pre-K providers combining funds at the point of service delivery with the aim of offering full-day, full-year services. And, providers in both states have viewed this specific guidance regarding blending funds favorably.

However, reliance on multiple funding streams can pose unique challenges. For instance, in Ohio, stakeholders reported that the reduction in income eligibility for child care subsidies affected providers' ability to offer pre-K services in combination with full-day child care. Ohio stakeholders also noted a disadvantage in relying on TANF funds during the early years of the ELI program: the mandate to follow TANF's stringent eligibility requirements and authorization process based on parents' workforce participation created a challenge for child care providers who were attempting to offer consistent services to children. In some cases, children's eligibility could result in disruptions in educational services, and child care providers faced challenges hiring the appropriate number of qualified teachers and budgeting for services.

State and Local Level Coordination

Stakeholders in New York and Ohio reported that coordination of state and local pre-K and child care policies and programs is essential to create a shared vision at the community level that can lead to improved quality and access across programs. To promote coordination, both states have created

cabinet-level coordinating bodies. Regular meetings between and among offices that oversee pre-K, Head Start, and child care programs can help to surface issues, address challenges to service delivery at the local level, learn about promising approaches, and provide ongoing training and technical assistance.

Expertise and Staff Capacity at the State Level

State pre-K decision-makers have decades of experience working on pre-K and other early education issues across multiple systems. The individuals who administer programs, work on state-level committees, and assist with program implementation have experience navigating policy and regulatory differences among programs. This cross-sector acumen is vital to advancing goals that positively impact children and families with seamless services through pre-K, child care, and Head Start.

Alignment of Program Standards and Assessment

To enhance the quality of services to all children, New York and Ohio have worked to establish common program standards as a cornerstone of efforts to coordinate pre-K with other early education programs. Both states have offered training and technical assistance on the use of valid classroom and child assessment data for program improvement and instructional planning.

Conclusion

To date, relatively little is known about the impact that the expansion of state-funded pre-K may have on the quality and accessibility of child care. Our analyses suggest that six factors can potentially affect child care as states expand pre-K programs. The experiences and lessons learned from stakeholders in New York and Ohio—two states with long histories of taking action to improve children's school readiness—provide compelling lessons for state policies relating to those six factors that can improve the quality of early care and education available to children from low-income working families.

