

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

Connecticut serves prekindergarten children in three state-funded programs: Child Day Care Contracts (CDCC), School Readiness Program (SRP), and Smart Start. As of July 2013, the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC) provides oversight for these programs and has been working to better align them.

Connecticut has provided funding for CDCC for 40 years through a purchase-of-service contracting system, which has been administered by OEC since 2013. All CDCC enrollment is in nonpublic schools, which may be Head Start, publicly operated programs, or private programs. SRP was founded in 1997 to increase access to early childhood programs for 3- and 4-year-olds. Financial support is available to 21 Priority School Readiness districts, as defined by legislation, and 46 Competitive School Readiness municipalities that have one or more schools in which 40% or more of the children are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch or are one of the communities identified within the 50 lowest wealth-ranked towns in the state, as defined by legislation. Smart Start was created during the 2014 legislative session with the intent of expanding publicly funded pre-K for 3- and 4-year-olds in public school settings. Enrollment increased to 483 children in 2016-2017.

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.

Child Day Care Contracts (CDCC)

Enabling Environment		Rigorous, Articulated Early Learning Policies								Strong Program Practices				
Political Will	Strong Leaders	BA + comp	Class size/ Ratio	Two Adults	Hours/ Dosage	EL Standards	Effective Curriculum	Special Ed	DLL support	HQ Teaching	PD	Child Assessments	Data Driven	Integrated System
○	●	—	●	●	●	●	○	—	—	ND	—	—	—	○

School Readiness Program (SRP)

Enabling Environment		Rigorous, Articulated Early Learning Policies								Strong Program Practices				
Political Will	Strong Leaders	BA + comp	Class size/ Ratio	Two Adults	Hours/ Dosage	EL Standards	Effective Curriculum	Special Ed	DLL support	HQ Teaching	PD	Child Assessments	Data Driven	Integrated System
○	●	—	●	●	○	●	○	—	—	ND	—	—	—	○

Smart Start

Enabling Environment		Rigorous, Articulated Early Learning Policies								Strong Program Practices				
Political Will	Strong Leaders	BA + comp	Class size/ Ratio	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. Dan Malloy (D) is seen as supportive of pre-K efforts. His commitment has been seen in the Smart Start program that was signed into law in 2014 (Act 14-41), which is a 10-year initiative designed to expand access to pre-K in public schools and improve and upgrade early childhood classrooms. Funds for the initiative come through a combination of state bonding for capital improvements and resources from the Tobacco Settlement Fund for operations. Despite the support articulated by elected officials, Connecticut has repeatedly postponed planned expansions of enrollment and requirements for higher program standards, mainly due to state budget shortfalls. State funding for all pre-K efforts totaled \$115.5 million in 2016-2017, a 3% reduction from the previous year, when adjusted for inflation.

In 2016-2017, SRP enrolled 12,043 children, a small decrease from the previous year; CDCC served 2,252 preschool-aged children; and Smart Start 483 children. In total, 30% of the state’s 4-year-olds, and 19% of 3-year-olds were served in state funded pre-K programs.

In 2014, Connecticut was awarded a competitive federal Preschool Development Grant-Expansion. In 2016-2017, there were a total of 730 PDG-funded preschool spaces in the state, 439 were new preschool slots that operated separately from the three state-funded preschool programs, 256 spaces were dually funded in combination with SRP, and 35 spaces were dually funded with CDCC. These dually funded spaces are included in the programs’ total enrollment counts. In addition to the \$2.4 million in

state funds (Tobacco Settlement dollars) for Smart Start operations, \$1.1 million in state bonds were used for capital improvements.

There are several advocacy groups working on childhood issues, including the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, and foundations including the Grossman Family Foundation which has supported pre-K issues, particularly in workforce development; and the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund.

Compelling vision and strong leadership. Act 14-39 (2014) established the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) and transferred duties, roles, and responsibilities of early care and education from various state departments to the OEC, including administration of the CCDF and administrative authority over SRP, rather than the State Department of Education. OEC operates under the direction of the Commissioner of Early Childhood. OEC is made up of four divisions: Early Care and Education; Licensing; Early Intervention; and Family Support Services. The Division of Early Care and Education (DECE) **is made up of four** units: Workforce Development, Program Improvement and Support, Standards and Assessment, and Grants and Subsidies. The Division of Early Care and Education has a staff of 16, plus 104 contractors. CDCC has 1.2 FTE assigned to its administration; SSRP 1.45 FTE and Smart Start .6 FTE.

Education and compensation.

CDCC: Lead teachers are required to have at minimum a CDA plus 12 Early Childhood credits. There are no salary parity requirements.

SRP: Lead teachers are required to have at minimum a CDA plus 12 Early Childhood credits. Only salary schedule is prorated for differences in length of work day or year for SRP teachers, there are no other salary parity requirements.

Smart Start: Lead teachers are required to have a BA and the State Department of Education certification, which must include pre-K or early childhood specialization. Smart Start teachers have the same starting salary and schedule for all years of service as K-3 teachers.

Adult-child ratio and two adults in the classroom.

CDCC: CDCC has a maximum class size of 20 for 3- and 4-year-olds and requires a staff-child ratio of 1:10.

SRP: SRP has a maximum class size of 20 for 3- and 4-year-olds and requires a staff-child ratio of 1:10.

Smart Start: Smart Start has a maximum class size of 18 for 3- and 4-year-olds and requires a staff-child ratio of 1:9.

Learning time.

CDCC: CDCCs are jointly funded through state funding and the Social Service Block Grant (SSBG) and must operate for at least 10 hours per day.

SRP: SRP's operating schedules are locally determined. Extended-day programs operate 10 hours per day, 50 weeks per year, while school-day programs operate 6 hours per day, 180 days per year. Part-day programs operate 2.5 hours per day, 180 days per year. Funding from another

source can be used to extend programs. In 2016-2017, 68% of children attended an extended-day program.

Smart Start: In 2016-2017, 17 school districts received Smart Start funding to offer, at minimum, a six-hour, five-day-a-week program that operated for at least 1,080 hours per year.

Age-appropriate learning standards. The Connecticut Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS) were revised in 2013, are comprehensive, and aligned to the state's K-3 standards and the Next Generation Science Standards and CT's new Social Studies Framework. A crosswalk to document alignment with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework has been completed and will be available in 2018. Connecticut has developed a series of videos and resources for both families and educators that are connected to the CT ELDS, including research-based strategies related to the environment, materials, scheduling and adult interactions. The state is currently field testing a new assessment based on the CT ELDS.

System that ensures effective curriculum. Connecticut does not provide a list of approved curricula but instead provides guidance that helps programs make decisions about curriculum based on available research, program philosophy, adult supports, and the children and families served. The state has developed a curriculum self-assessment tool that guides programs to adopt and implement curriculum practices based on research about how young children learn and ensure the curriculum is implemented in an intentional, responsive and reflective manner. The guide also shares the available implementation supports. The state is piloting a QRIS that includes criteria related to curriculum.

CDCC: Currently CDCC programs are required to meet NAEYC Accreditation or Head Start standards related to curricular practices.

Support for students with special needs. The state has policies to support children with special needs in inclusion classrooms of state-funded preschool.

CDCC: The number of CDCC children who received special education services is unknown.

SRP: In 2016-2017, 7.3% of the children enrolled in SSRP had special needs.

Smart Start: In 2016-2017, 99 children, or 20.5% of the total Smart Start enrollment, received special education services.

Support for dual (English) language learners (DLL). The legislative requirements regarding DLLs begin at kindergarten.

CDCC: The number of CDCC children who were DLLs is unknown.

SRP: The number of SSRPP children who were DLLs is unknown.

Smart Start: In 2016-2017, 16.8% of enrollment DLLs.

High quality teaching. All three programs must achieve NAEYC accreditation by the third anniversary of the first day children attend the program. In order to help prepare programs that are not accredited, annual ECERS self-assessments are required. The scores themselves are not turned into OEC, but the name of the consultant who conducted the assessment and the date completed. Because ECERS scores

are not available for review, and CLASS use is not required by OEC, we could not determine the extent to which high quality teaching takes place in the programs.

Professional development.

CDCC: CDCC programs are required to be licensed, which requires PD for staff that totals 1% of the total annual hours worked, approximately 20 clock hours per year. Content may include, but is not limited to, early childhood education and child development, licensing and regulations, health issues, nutrition, first aid, social services, child abuse laws, and programming for children with disabilities or special health care needs. Programs are required to develop, implement, and maintain a written PD plan and to document and maintain the PD plan for each program staff member and make it available for review. If teachers seek scholarship funds from the state, they must also have a formal plan of study from an institution of higher education. State policy does not require ongoing classroom-embedded support to be provided to teachers.

SRP: Teachers are required to complete nine clock hours of PD per year. State policy does not require ongoing classroom-embedded support to be provided to teachers.

Smart Start: PD is locally determined. Lead Teachers are certified by the State Department of Education and must meet SDE professional learning requirements and professional learning plans. State policy does not require ongoing classroom-embedded support to be provided to teachers.

Child Assessments. The State is in the process of field-testing the CT Documentation and Observation for Teaching System (CT DOTS), a framework for documenting children's progress on the skills abilities and behaviors in the CT ELDS. Child-level assessment information is not collected or used by the state; assessment information may be used in these ways at the local level.

CDCC: State policy does not require CDCC to assess children's learning and development during preschool nor are child assessments required to be aligned with the CT ELDS.

SRP: State policy requires SRP to assess children's learning and development during preschool. Child assessments are required to be aligned with the CT ELDS, but programs can choose the assessment. There is no state policy regarding how the pre-K assessment data are used. Communities have been known to use this data to guide teacher training and professional development, make decisions about kindergarten enrollment, to adjust curricula and track child and program outcomes over time.

Smart Start: State policy does not require Smart Start to assess children's learning and development during preschool nor are child assessments required to be aligned with the CT ELDS.

Data-driven decision-making. All three programs must be NAEYC accredited or Head Start approved. If they are not, they are required to have an ECERS by a state approved, reliable ECERS rater. State approved evaluators are trained by ERSI staff.

CDCC: Programs that are not yet accredited by NAEYC or Head Start approved are required to have an ECERS rating by a reliable evaluator. The state also conducts monitoring visits and

provides written feedback and referrals for technical assistance. There has not been a formal evaluation of CDCC.

SRP: Structured observations are required for programs that are not NAEYC Accredited or Head Start approved. In addition, Local School Readiness Liaisons are required to observe programs/classrooms at least annually and provide feedback to the programs. The state also conducts monitoring visits and provides written feedback and referrals for technical assistance. In 2016, there was a regression discontinuity study that found on average that children who participated in SRP did better in early literacy and early numeracy.

Smart Start: Programs that are not yet accredited by NAEYC or Head Start approved are required to have an ECERS rating by a reliable evaluator. There has not been a formal evaluation of Smart Start.

Integrated System. Through the creation of the Office of Early Childhood, programs that were originally housed in other agencies, were moved to OEC. Including those in departments of Social Services; State Department of Education, Board of Regents; and Department of Public Health. All three programs need to be NAEYC accredited; however, variations within levels of quality are not collected by the state. Essential element components are determined locally including curriculum and child assessment selection, coaching, and use of data collected during ECERS observations; making it difficult to create an integrated system.