

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

The Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) was established in 2005 to improve quality, affordability, and access to preschool education services. The same year EEC was created, the state started its Universal Pre-kindergarten (UPK) initiative, which serves children beginning at age 2 years, 9 months, until they arrive at the locally determined kindergarten eligibility age. Public schools, private child care centers, Head Start programs, family child care, and faith-based centers are eligible for UPK grants if they offer full-day, full-year services. UPK is usually a competitive grant program, though renewal grants had been used in recent years during funding constraints.

Massachusetts also offers the Inclusive Preschool Learning Environments (IPLE) Grant, referred to as the Grant 391 program. The IPLE Grant is designed to support inclusive preschool learning environments serving preschool-age children with and without disabilities in high-quality, inclusive early education and care settings. This program has funded typically developing preschool-age children, since 1985. There is no income qualification for enrollment in this program.

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.

Massachusetts Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK)

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	—	●	●	○

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

Inclusive Preschool Learning Environments (IPLE)

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Political will. State funding and enrollment for pre-K has been relatively low and without notable increases for many years including an enrollment decrease in 2016-2017. In 2016-2017, Massachusetts served 12,657 children, 8% of the state's 4-year-olds and 5% of 3-year-olds in its two state-funded pre-K programs. In 2014, Massachusetts was awarded a federal Preschool Expansion Grant (PEG) which has allowed the state to work with five communities, Boston, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, and Springfield, to build partnerships and create 753 new state-funded prekindergarten openings in 2016-2017. The state has also funded and awarded preschool planning and expansion grants that supported 13 communities in the development of a strategic plan for expanded preschool based on the PEG model. LEAs and local community partners jointly developed plans to address the communities' capacity to expand access to high-quality preschool, including identifying potential funding models.

In 2015, early childhood education advocates were disappointed when Gov. Charlie Baker (R) did not support attempts to serve the estimated 17,000 children on the pre-K waiting list. Later that year, he vetoed a \$5 million reduction in funds for early childhood programs, as well as a \$17.6 million reduction for full-day kindergarten grants. Gov. Baker's FY 2017 budget includes a new Quality Improvement line item in the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) budget which would draw on funds transferred from existing line items including UPK, Early Childhood Mental Health, Services for Infants and Parents, Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative, and EEC administration.

Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh (D) is seen as very supportive of pre-K efforts. During his 2013 campaign for mayor, he called for universal pre-K and has since written opinion pieces and spoken nationally about Boston's pre-K program. Strategies for Children and other local advocacy groups and business/community leaders have been very vocal and instrumental in getting state budget line items added.

Compelling vision and strong leadership. EEC is one of three agencies within the Executive Office of Education; the other two are the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Department of Higher Education. The Executive Office of Education is one of eight Executive Offices under Gov. Baker. EEC is the lead agency for all early education and care services in Massachusetts including UPK, IPLE, and QRIS efforts. Local universities have been active in early childhood issues, influencing state policies and standards. One FTE is assigned to IPLE and one to UPK.

Education and compensation.

UPK: Only teachers in public schools are required to have a BA and early childhood certification/licensure. Lead teachers in nonpublic schools are required to have certification that requires three credits in Child Development plus nine credits in three different categories of study within Early Childhood Education. Teachers are also required to have prior experience, the amount of which varies based on their other qualifications. All UPK programs are required to be, at a minimum, Level 3 in QRIS. For Level 3 programs, 75% of classrooms must have an educator with a BA. For Level 4 programs, 100% of classrooms must have an educator with a BA. There are no salary parity policies for UPK teachers in public or nonpublic schools.

IPLE: Starting in 2016-2017, all lead teachers are required to have a BA and early childhood certification/licensure. Teachers are also required to have prior experience, the amount of which varies based on other qualifications and type of degree. There are no salary parity policies for IPLE teachers in public or nonpublic schools.

Adult-child ratio and two adults in the classroom.

UPK: UPK requires a 1:7 to 1:10 ratio for 3- and 4-year-olds; with a maximum class size of 20.

IPLE: IPLE requires a 1:6 to 1:10 ratio and a maximum class size is 20. When the IPLE-funded session/classroom has six or seven children with disabilities, the total class size may not exceed 15 children.

Learning time.

UPK: The hours per day and operating schedule for UPK vary by type of program and setting. Programs can operate either a school-year or full-year schedule. UPK programs are required to offer or provide access to full-day, full-year services; however not all the hours are paid for with UPK dollars. The UPK Grant prorates the grant award amounts based on a UPK program providing less than full-day, full-year services. In 2016-2017, only 2% of programs operated a part-day schedule.

IPLE: Multiple operating schedules are available through IPLE preschool programs. Schedules are designed and determined locally to address local need, support parent choice, and provide educational services as outlined in a child's IEP. The majority of the IPLE preschool programs follow the public school calendar year. On average, programs operate 39 weeks of a calendar year (range 32 to 52 weeks); for a required minimum of two hours per day.

Age-appropriate learning standards. The Guidelines of Preschool Learning Experiences; Early English Language Learner Standards: Massachusetts Guidelines; Pre-K Science and Technology/Engineering Standards; and Pre-School and Kindergarten Standards in the Domains of Social-Emotional Development and Approaches to Play and Learning make up Massachusetts' early learning and development standards. They were revised in 2015 and are aligned with the state's infant/toddler standards and K-3 standards.

Both programs have access to additional support to use the ELDS, including detailed guidance and materials developed by the state made available to local providers; direct training or technical assistance by state or regional staff and vendors paid by the state; and a system of regular coaching for teachers. There are also state grants to local agencies or providers for training and other professional development: the Educator Provider Support (EPS) Grantees, the Assessment Grantee and the QRIS Measurement Tools Grantee.

System that ensures effective curriculum. EEC's EPS Grantees provide statewide professional development and coaching to both UPK and IPLE programs on how to implement the curriculum in the classrooms. A priority of this state-funded grant program is to provide professional development opportunities that align with EEC's Core Competencies, QRIS, and the early learning standards and

guidelines. EEC provides these supports to non-public school programs in the state. The majority of public school supports for preschool curriculum decision-making and implementation are determined at the local level. There is no system to ensure that curricula in either IPLE or UPK are implemented with fidelity.

Support for students with special needs.

UPK: In 2016-2017, almost 15% of UPK children were identified as having special needs. EEC Licensing Regulations require that 10% of educator's annual professional development time is focused on children who have special needs.

IPLE: The IPLE Grant is designed to support preschool learning environments serving preschool-aged children with and without disabilities in high-quality, inclusive early education, and care settings. In 2016-2017, 35% of children had an IEP; IPLE requires that at least 15% of the children enrolled in each IPLE-funded session must have IEP for the session to be considered an inclusive preschool learning environment. The number of children with an IEP in each classroom is limited to seven; and the ratio of students (and class size) is reduced when there are more than five children with IEPs in a class. IPLE teachers are required to possess specific qualifications for working with children with special needs in addition to the EEC Licensing Regulations requirement that 10% of educator's annual professional development time is focused on children who have special needs.

Support for dual (English) language learners (DLL).

UPK: Bilingual instruction is permitted in UPK and recruitment, enrollment, outreach information, and communication with the family is provided in the home language. The state is not able to report the number of DLLs enrolled in UPK.

IPLE: The state does not regulate policies for DLLs in IPLE. In 2016-2017, almost 15% of IPLE students were designated as DLLs.

High quality teaching.

UPK: CLASS, ECERS, and/or Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale assessments are collected as part of the QRIS system, however the average program scores are not reported publicly. But in order to be at the required level 3 in the QRIS system, a program must have a CLASS score of 3 or higher on Positive Climate and Teacher Sensitivity, and a score of 3 or lower on Negative Climate; or an ECERS score of 4.5 or higher (subscales of 3.0 or 4.0, dependent on the subscale).

In 2009, Abt Associates evaluated the UPK implementation and collected CLASS scores during 2008-2009. Average CLASS scores for the UPK classrooms observed were 5.63 in Emotional Support, 5.00 in Classroom Organization, and 2.54 in Instructional Support.

IPLE: ECERS or CLASS scores were not able to be reviewed.

Professional development.

UPK: Teachers in public schools are required to complete 150 clock hours of PD every five years; those in nonpublic schools must complete 20 clock hours per year. All UPK programs are

required to be at Level 3 in the QRIS, which requires Individualized PD plans. The state does not require ongoing classroom-embedded support to be provided to teachers.

IPLE: Teachers in public schools are required to complete 150 clock hours of PD every five years; those in nonpublic schools must complete 20 clock hours per year. Written individualized annual professional development plans are required for public school lead teachers and educators working in programs that are participating in QRIS at Level 2 or higher. Coaching or mentoring opportunities are available for public special education preschool through professional development opportunities that are provided by ESE in collaboration with EEC. Nonpublic employees' opportunities for coaching and mentoring are available through the EEC's Educator Provider Support Grant, but not required.

Child Assessments.

UPK: State policy provides an approved list of child assessments aligned with the ELDS. PD must address the components of the child assessment process, including screening, observation, use of assessment tools and IDEA processes.

IPLE: Child assessments are not required in IPLE. However, IPLE-funded programs must have a system in place that provides multiple opportunities throughout the year to: measure developmental growth and progress of all children enrolled in the IPLE-funded sessions; gather input from families and other caregivers; and ensure that all educators and family members are aware of the strategies necessary for supporting children across home and learning environments.

Data-driven decision-making.

UPK: The UPK Grant does not require structured observations of classroom quality, however all UPK grantees must be enrolled in the state's QRIS and be at a level 3. Level 3 requires a site visit to conduct an ECERS observation. When a program has multiple preschool classrooms, the classrooms observed are randomly selected. QRIS requires all programs, regardless of QRIS level, to observe their classrooms using the required measurement tools (Environment Rating Scales, CLASS, Strengthening Families, BAS, PAS) each year to develop/update their Continuous Quality Improvement Plans (CQIPs). The state receives copies of the ECERS scores and QRIS rating.

A validation study conducted by researchers from Wellesley College and UMass Donahue Institute of the QRIS program from 2012-2016 included UPK programs. The study found the state's QRIS has distinguished levels of quality among the different levels and the children in the upper tiers of QRIS (levels 3 and 4) showed better outcomes.

IPLE: The IPLE Grant does not require structured observations of classroom quality as a grant requirement. IPLE grant-funded program monitoring is conducted three times a year. Information is collected as part of the grant application process to determine eligibility for grant renewal. The information collected includes enrollment information and QRIS ratings, programs only need to be at a level 1.

In 2016-2017, the state reviewed self-reported observation results for programs participating in QRIS at levels 2 and 3. A site visit using ECERS is required as part of the QRIS verification process at Level 3. The state's Program Quality Specialists receive the results. In addition, the following other instruments are used as part of the current MA QRIS Program Administration Scale (PAS); Strengthening Families Program Self-Assessment; and Arnett-Caregiver Interaction Scale (Arnett/CIS) or CLASS.

Monitoring data collected are used by the state to make funding decisions and to make changes in grant requirements. At the local level, the information is intended to be used to identify PD/TA/mentoring needs; create program improvement plans including any corrective actions; adjust curricula; and provide feedback to parents.

There has not been a formal evaluation of IPLE.

Integrated System. UPK is more integrated into the early learning system than IPLE. However, even within UPK there are differences between programs operating in public school settings versus nonpublic schools. The QRIS is more of a rating system with no coaching component, making it difficult to support the improvement efforts necessary to implement curriculum effectively.