

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

As part of Minnesota’s efforts to increase access to early childhood education for children birth to five years old, the state provides financial supplements to Early Head Start and Head Start. A second state-funded preschool program, Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK), was established for the 2016-2017 school year. The program serves children who are 4-years-old by September 1 and is designed to prepare children for success as they enter kindergarten through high-quality early learning programs.

### 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.

#### Minnesota Head Start (MN HS)

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	○	○	–	–

#### Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK)

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.** Minnesota Gov. Mark Dayton (D), in his second and final term, is viewed as being supportive of early childhood education. In 2015, Dayton proposed a prekindergarten for all 4-year-old children; there was pushback from child care providers concerned about being put out of business, and schools felt unprepared and were worried about space. This time, the agency worked with the Governor’s office to host listening sessions in communities and identify needs and concerns. As a result of these efforts and support from both the Governor and Legislature, VPK was established for the 2016-17 school year. This \$27 million investment is funded through general education monies as a new grade

level. Approximately 3,160 seats were allocated to 65 school districts and nine charter schools. The legislature approved an expansion of VPK that will nearly double the number of children served in 2017-2018.

In addition, Minnesota spent \$25.1 million to supplement federally funded Head Start in the state during the 2016-2017 school year. The state served an additional 1,443 3- and 4-year-olds in Head Start and 937 children under age three. The \$25.1 million allocation reflects a \$5 million increase from 2015-2016.

Minnesota has other state-supported early childhood initiatives that are not included in this scan including the Early Learning Scholarships Programs which provides scholarships to eligible families with children between the ages of 3- and 4-years-old. During 2016-2017, approximately 15,079 scholarships of up to \$7,500 were awarded using an appropriation of \$59.88 million.

**Compelling vision and strong leadership.** The Minnesota Department of Education's (MDE) Early Learning Services Division administers pre-K. Early Learning is also responsible for a number of birth through third grade strategies and programming including, the KEA, infant/toddler screenings, school readiness definition and programs, competencies for educators, family education, and the pre-K to Grade 3 Initiative. The agency division doubled staffing as a result of RTT-ELC, and is well positioned to cope with scaling up access and quality. In 2016-2017, two FTEs were responsible for overseeing the state-funded efforts.

#### **Education and compensation.**

**MN HS:** Under the Head Start Reauthorization Act of 2007, all lead teachers were required to have at least an AA in Early Childhood Development by October 2011; by September 30, 2013, 50% must have at least a BA in ECE or a related field. In a public school, teacher union rules require that teachers have at least a BA. No salary parity requirements for MN HS teachers.

**VPK:** VPK Statute requires that teachers are knowledgeable in early childhood curriculum content, assessment, native and English language development programs, and instruction. Implementation guidelines suggest that someone who is appropriately licensed (B-3<sup>rd</sup> grade/3-Pre-K/Pre-K) be hired. If a program cannot find a licensed teacher meeting the requirements, they may request a variance for another fully licensed teacher to teach outside of their licensure area. Statute also requires that VPK instructional staff receive salaries comparable to the salaries of local kindergarten through grade 12 instructional staff. VPK teachers are not required to have a BA.

#### **Adult-child ratio and two adults in the classroom.**

**MN HS:** Class sizes and staff-child ratio are defined in the Head Start performance standards; the maximum class size for 4-year-olds is 20 and requires a staff-child ratio of 1:10. Maximum class size for 3-year-olds is 15; and staff-child ratio of 2:15. In mixed-age classrooms, if the majority of children are 3, then the maximum class size is 15.

**VPK:** VPK has a maximum class size of 20 and requires a staff-child ratio of 1:10.

**Learning time.**

**MN HS:** Programs comply with the federal Head Start requirement of at least 3.5 hours per day, four days per week, for 32 weeks per year, which is the most common schedule. A formal process that approves the use of Child Care Assistance funding for Head Start Integrated full-day programming has been established. Extended-day services are also provided through collaborations with the Early Learning Scholarships program.

**VPK:** Schools have the opportunity to design the schedule including the number of days and instructional hours for the year. This leads to a variety of schedules including full- and part-day options. The program must offer at least 350 instructional hours per year.

**Age-appropriate learning standards.** The Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Standards (ECIPs) cover birth to kindergarten entrance. The ECIPs, which were revised in 2017, are aligned with the English Language Arts Common Core standards for the early grades, and the state's college and career ready standards. The ECIPs are comprehensive and in process of being aligned with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework. To support the use of the ECIPs, the state provides professional development opportunities to support use of ELDS.

**VPK:** Additional resources are provided to programs to implement the ECIPs.

**System that ensures effective curriculum.** For both pre-k programs, Minnesota offers guidance on criteria for selecting evidence-based curriculum models and has a list of state approved curricula and provides Office of Early Learning sponsored training, technical assistance, and supporting materials. There are several additional policies that vary by program.

**MN HS:** Programs are required to implement one of the ECIPs aligned curricula on the state approved list. The state also has a system to ensure that curricula are being implemented with fidelity in the HS program.

**VPK:** Funding is available to support curriculum implementation/training. Curricula selected must be aligned with the ECIPs.

**Support for students with special needs.**

**MN HS:** Approximately 17% of total enrollment are children identified with special needs. The programs work closely with IDEA Part B and C staff. Often there is co-teaching but it is not a requirement. Coaching of MN HS teachers about children with special needs is required.

**VPK:** Programs are encouraged to design classroom membership (capped at 20 students) to be inclusive of children with IEPs. Children who receive special education services may attend state preschool classrooms, but are not counted in state preschool enrollment. Co-teaching models are required in preschool inclusion classrooms; the maximum number of children with IEPs in an inclusion classroom is capped at 50%. VPK teachers are required to possess specific qualifications and participate in PD that addresses working with children with special needs. In addition, coaching of preschool teachers about children with special needs is required.

**Support for dual (English) language learners (DLL).** Minnesota is not able to report the number of DLLs enrolled in pre-K.

**MN HS:** To support DLLs, the following program options are available: monolingual non-English classes; transitional bilingual programs; DLL immersion classes; and summer language programs. MN HS staff have training/qualifications related to working with DLLs. Monitoring that is focused on the quality of bilingual instruction is required. Children are screened and assessed in their home languages. Communication with the family about the preschool program and child are required to be presented in the family's home language, including recruitment, enrollment and outreach as well as child progress and other regular communications.

**VPK:** Extra funding is allocated for serving DLLs and staff have training/qualifications related to working with DLLs. Recruitment, enrollment, and outreach information is provided in the family's home language.

**High quality teaching.** CLASS or ECERS scores for either program were not available for review for either program.

**Professional development.**

**MN HS:** The requirement for in-service professional development is 2% of total work hours (this is greater than the HS requirement of 15 clock hours/year). Per Head Start performance standards, programs are required to implement a research-based, coordinated coaching strategy for education staff. Many programs utilize CLASS to support teacher professional development and Practice Based Coaching.

**VPK:** By statute, VPK sites are required to provide high-quality coordinated professional development, training, and coaching for both school district and community-based early learning providers. The PD content is informed by a measure of adult-child interactions (e.g. Danielson, Marzano, CLASS, TPOT) but should address early childhood curriculum, assessment, native and English language development programs, and instruction. The frequency of coaching visits varies by district/charter school established practices.

**Child Assessments.** Minnesota state policy provides an approved list of child assessments aligned with the ECIPs and the Kindergarten Entry Profile. The approved assessments include: Teaching Strategies GOLD, WSS, DRDP, HighScope COR, and Developmental Milestones.

**MN HS:** Assessments are determined locally and must comply with federal Head Start requirements. Programs are not required to submit data to the state. Assessments are expected to be used throughout the year to adjust curricula, track child and program level outcomes over time, and make changes to state policies regarding MN HS.

**VPS:** Districts and charter schools are encouraged to use the selected assessment tool according to publisher recommendations; however, they are only required to report the data to MDE when the child enters and again before the child leaves the program. Child assessment data are used to adjust the curricula, track child and program level outcomes over time, and may also be used by school districts for their annual reports to the Commissioner of Education. As previously noted, PD should address assessments.

**Data-driven decision-making.**

**MN HS:** State policy does not require the use of structured observations of classroom quality, however many programs use CLASS to support PD. The results of observations are not collected by or reported to the state. As part of the federal monitoring system, ACF conducts observations of multiple classes operated by the grantee based on a random sample of all classes using CLASS. Monitoring is based on federal Head Start regulations. Programs submit an annual Head Start program plan when applying for state funding. This program plan also serves as the application for the state's QRIS (Parent Aware). MN HS programs are expected to participate in Parent Aware, with the exception of American Indian and Alaska Native programs.

The University of Tulsa (2015) evaluated MN HS and found benefits for children who participated. Child Trends evaluated Child Aware that included MN HS programs. However, how any particular sector in Minnesota, such as Head Start, performs could not be determined.

**VPK:** VPK programs are expected to use a measure of adult-child interaction as a tool to provide formative feedback. As previously mentioned, the four tools that are encouraged to be used are: CLASS, Danielson, Marzano, and TPOT (only for schools that have completed Pyramid Model training). The state does not receive the results of the observations. The state has offered training opportunities on becoming a reliable CLASS observer. Districts can use PD funds to seek training and other supports to assure accurate use of the tools. Although not required, a high percentage of schools are participating in Parent Aware.

An evaluation of the newly created VPK program is being planned by MDE.

**Integrated System.** There are elements of the system that are integrated, led by the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota's Early Learning Standards. However, the role of the state in coordinating or overseeing the implementation of the coaching program; the use of the structured classroom observations; or the selection and use of child assessments is limited.