

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

The Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2013 established Mississippi’s first state-funded, pre-K program which provides funding to local communities to establish, expand, support, and facilitate the successful implementation of quality early childhood education and development services. Implementation began in January 2014, with capacity to serve 1,774 children. Pre-K programs in Head Start centers, licensed child-care facilities, and public, parochial, or private schools formed and maintained a stakeholder council called an Early Learning Collaborative (ELC), involving a minimum of two of those program auspices. The Early Learning Collaborative designated a Lead Partner of either a public school or other nonprofit entity with the instructional expertise and operational capacity to manage a Collaborative’s Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) 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.

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
●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	—	—	○	—	—	●	○

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

**Political will.** Gov. Phil Bryant (R) who is in his second and final term, is seen as supportive of early childhood issues. He is currently serving as the Chairman of the Education Commission of the States, and has been vocal on early childhood, including the benefits of participating in pre-K.

In 2013, the Early Learning Collaborative Act established Mississippi’s first state pre-K program, funded through a 1-to-1 state tax credit for individuals and businesses who donate to the Pre-K program, resulting in up to a \$3 million state match per fiscal year. The bill was co-authored by Sen. Brice Wiggins(R) and former Rep. Toby Barker(R) who currently serves as mayor for Hattiesburg. For 2013-2014, \$630,918 came from philanthropic matches some from those that had not supported early learning initiatives in the past, including the Gilmore Foundation, Tallahatchie River Foundation, and the Petal Education Foundation. In 2016-2017, state funding increased by almost 25% to \$4 million. The W. H. Kellogg foundation has actively supported Mississippi’s early education reform efforts with a particular emphasis on developing an expanded, highly effective workforce.

Dr. Carey Wright, State Superintendent, is very supportive of Pre-K and the Board of Education includes the goal of every child having access to a high-quality early childhood program in its vision. Currently serving as President of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), Dr. Wright promotes the value of early learning on a national level.

**Compelling vision and strong leadership.** In 2013, Mississippi passed the Early Learning Collaboratives Act that created 11 pre-K ELCs throughout the state (subsequently reduced to 10). In January 2017, an additional four ELCs were funded by an additional \$989,000 to serve 460 more children. ELCs encourage school districts, nonprofit groups, Head Start centers and private child care providers partner to deliver high-quality early childhood education to 4-year-olds in their communities. Each ELC is responsible for designating a Lead Partner, which can be a public school or other nonprofit entity with the instructional expertise and operational capacity to manage an ELC's Pre-K program. In response to increased demands for early education administration and accountability, the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) was established within the Office of Elementary Education and Reading in the MDE in 2015. At the state level, 1.25 FTEs are responsible for overseeing Pre-K. New foundation funding will increase the number of FTEs at the state who can support Pre-K quality efforts.

Dr. Cathy Grace, Co-Director of the Graduate Center for the Study of Early Learning, University of Mississippi was a former ELC Director, and has been active in supporting MS's pre-K efforts.

**Education and compensation.** Mississippi requires each Pre-K classroom in all settings to have a lead teacher with a BA plus early childhood specialization. Only pre-K teachers working in public schools 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.** Pre-K has a maximum class size of 20 for 4-year-olds and requires a staff-child ratio of 1:10. Maximum class size for 3-year-olds is 14 and staff-child ratio of 1:7. In mixed-age groups, the maximum class size is 14, with a ratio of 1:7.

**Learning time.** The state funds Pre-K programs to operate six hours a day (1080 hours per year). ELCs may provide extended day options, 54% of children attended an extended day program in 2016-2017, but the state allocation does not increase.

**Age-appropriate learning standards.** The Mississippi Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Old Children (ELDS) were revised in 2013, are comprehensive, aligned with the state's infant/toddler standards; K-3 standards; career and college readiness standards; and the Head Start framework. The state provides PD and additional resources to support the implementation of the ELDS.

**System that ensures effective curriculum.** As a result of a curriculum review process, Opening the World of Learning (OWL) was identified as the sole approved Pre-K curriculum, effective January 1, 2017. Any ELCs in existence prior to that date were allowed to continue to use one of the four curricula previously approved by the MDE until they purchased and updated their curriculum. ELCs can use state Pre-K funding to pay for training offered by the curriculum developers to support its implementation. The fidelity is monitored annually through onsite visits, including classroom observations.

**Support for students with special needs.** In 2016-2017, 8.9% of Pre-K students were identified as having special needs. The proportion of children with an IEP in each preschool classroom is limited to less than 50%.

**Support for dual (English) language learners (DLL).** Mississippi is not able to report the number of DLLs; nor are there state policies to support DLLs enrolled in Pre-K.

**High quality teaching.** All classrooms are observed using CLASS. In 2016-2017, CLASS scores improved dramatically over the previous year. During 2016-2017, 73% of the sites met or exceeded the Instructional Support domain 2.80 minimum score (as identified by MDE).

**Professional development.** Mississippi requires at least 15 hours of annual professional development of all teachers. State policy does not require job-embedded support of the teachers, however each ELC designs its PD system, which may include varying combinations of providing master teachers who mentor, coaching, supporting the attendance at conferences, and providing technical assistance. There are plans to coordinate the coaching system using foundation funds.

**Child Assessments.** The Learning Accomplishment Profile, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (LAP-3) was used by all Pre-K sites in both January and May 2017 to measure child growth. ELCs received training and LAP-3 kits in the fall of 2016. The ELCs use the Mississippi Kindergarten Readiness Assessment Support System (MKAS<sup>2</sup>) to assess cognition and kindergarten readiness; it is aligned to the ELDS. These required assessments are used primarily to measure student growth and kindergarten readiness.

In addition to assessments, all programs are provided with developmental checklists, which are aligned with the ELDS.

**Data-driven decision-making.** All Pre-K classrooms are observed at least once annually using CLASS. MDE provides annual observer reliability training on CLASS to ELC staff members and the MDE team who conduct the annual quality observation visits. Reliability for each member of the observation team is renewed annually to ensure consistent scoring. Additional observations may occur with teachers in classrooms that are on probation, newly hired teachers, teachers who are new to CLASS, or upon request by the ELC administrator. ELC administrators receive the results of the observations to create staff PD plans. Teachers have access to myTeachstone, which provides on-demand PD resources for teachers based on their most recent CLASS observation.

State monitoring processes are used to support programs that are on probation. Effectiveness Evaluation Plans are used to support programs in having the resources needed in order to make appropriate progress on corrective deficiencies identified in prior year monitoring reports.

MDE annually assigns each Pre-K site a “rate of readiness” based on CLASS scores; the MKAS<sup>2</sup> child assessment scores at kindergarten entry; and positive child growth on the Comprehensive Early Learning Assessment during Pre-K. Based on the readiness scores for 2016-2017, 48 sites (94%) were successful; two sites (4%) were placed on probation; and one site (2%) is no longer eligible to receive funding. For the two sites placed on probation, PD plans were developed with the ELCs, the site administrators, and teachers.



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**Integrated System.** There are components of the system that are integrated, including using child assessment and class observation data to make funding and PD decisions. Specifically, CLASS observations have been used to support quality in the system with targeted PD. Having a coordinated coaching system will strengthen this process. Assessments are used primarily as a measure of student outcomes, not as a formative tool to support instructional or curriculum differentiation.