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

Pennsylvania funds four pre-K programs: Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP); Kindergarten for Four-Year-Olds and School Based Pre-K (K4/SBPK); Pre-K counts (PAPKC); and the Ready to Learn Block Grant (RTL).

PAPKC and HSSAP are the larger and more conventional early childhood education programs. PAPKC is designed for children from families with income up to 300% FPL. Approximately 83% of Pennsylvania school districts offer PAPKC programs, with half- and full-day programs operated by school districts, child care centers, or Head Start programs. HSSAP provides additional funding to the federal Head Start program to create additional Head Start slots as well as provide extended-day services for part-day programs. K4/SBPK and RTL are smaller and more flexible programs, to the extent local education agencies have much more discretion as to how funds for these programs are spent and who is eligible to receive funding.

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.

Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP)

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	—	●	○	—

Kindergarten for Four-Year-Olds and School Based Pre-K (K4/SBPK)

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

Pre-K counts (PAPKC)

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	—	●	○	—

Ready to Learn Block Grant (RTL)

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. Support for state pre-K has been relatively strong since Ed Rendell's session as Governor; and looks to continue under Governor Tom Wolf (D), who has expressed support for increasing funding for preschool. In 2016-2017, state pre-K spending for all programs increased by more than $31 million from the previous year. Pennsylvania ranked seventh in state spending out of 43 states, D.C. and Guam operating pre-K programs. There is strong business community and foundation support for early childhood programs in Pennsylvania.

In 2016-2017, Pennsylvania's four pre-K programs enrolled more than 28,000 children (5598 is HSSAP; 2868 in K4/SBPK; 18,315 in PAPKC; 2052 in RTL), more than 13% of the state's 4-year-olds and 6.5% of 3-year-olds. This 8% increase in enrollment from the previous year was accompanied by a 17% increase in state spending; which had followed a 2016 budget impasse. In addition to the state programs, there is strong political support for the newly created Philadelphia pre-K program funded with a soda tax.

Compelling vision and strong leadership. The PA Department of Education provides oversight for state pre-K programs. Policy for the PAPKC and PAHSSAP is developed by the Department of Education, but the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL), an office jointly accountable to the Departments of Education and Human Services, administers and monitors these programs with 12 FTEs for PAPKC and 8 FTEs for HSSAP.

The K4/SBPK programs, which are funded through the state's general fund, are available to districts wishing to offer these programs, and in the 2016-2017 school year, 19% of school districts offered pre-K through the K4/SBPK program. Many of the policy decisions for this program are decentralized to individual school districts at the local level, .5 FTE is assigned from the state level. RTL is funded through a state aid formula, with 75% of funds targeted to serving children who have not achieved proficiency on

the PA System for School Assessment test. School districts can opt to offer this pre-K program or choose from a list of other approved services. Similar to K4/SBPK, most decisions are made at the local level. One FTE from the state is assigned to RTL. Fiscal monitoring is required of each grantee in all four programs and is conducted by the state.

Education and compensation.

HSSAP: Under the Head Start Reauthorization Act of 2007, all lead teachers were required to have at least an AA by October 2011; by September 30, 2013, 50% must have had at least a BA. By September 30, 2013, all assistant teachers must have had at least a CDA or be enrolled in a program to receive a CDA, AA, or BA within two years. If teachers are employed by a school district, ECE certification is required. There are no salary parity policies for HSSAP teachers.

K4/SBPK: SBPK/K4 requires lead teachers to have a BA, however Elementary (K-6) certification without ECE specialization or endorsement is allowed for teachers in public school settings. There are no salary parity policies for K4 or SBPK teachers.

PAPKC: Lead teachers in all settings were required to have a BA and ECE certification by December 2011. The N-3 certification will no longer be issued, though teachers who currently have it will still be able to work in the program. Teachers who do not meet this requirement are considered not in compliance, which can lower the program score on the Program Review Instrument and affect future funding. There are no salary parity policies for PAPKC teachers.

RTL: Lead teachers are required to have a BA when located in public school RTL programs; but an AA when in nonpublic school settings. However, lead teachers have to have ECE specialization. There are no salary parity policies for RTL teachers

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

HSSAP: Maximum class size is 20 with a staff-child ratio of 1:10.

K4/SBPK: K4 programs follow kindergarten requirements so there are no class size limits, but most programs have 20 children and a 1:10 staff-child ratio. School-Based Pre-K (SBPK) follows the school board regulations for pre-K that require a maximum class size of 20 and staff-child ratio of 1:10.

PAPKC: For PAPKC, maximum class size is 20, and staff-child ratio is 1:10, and a class size of 17 students is recommended. The recommended staff-child ratio is 2:17; if the 1:10 ratio is used, other qualified staff must be present on site in case of emergency.

RTL: Maximum class size is 20 with a staff-child ratio of 1:10

Learning time.

HSSAP: Programs must operate according to federal Head Start Performance Standards, which require a minimum of 3.5 hours per day, four days per week. Collaboration with other agencies and programs is required per program regulation, but implementation is locally determined.

K4/SBPK: K4/SBPK classrooms operate a minimum of 2.5 hours per day.

PAPKC: School-day programs operate for at least five instructional hours per day; part-day programs operate at least 2.5 instructional hours per day. In 2016-2017, 85% of PAPKC children attended a full-day program.

RTL: RTL classrooms operate a minimum of 2.5 hours per day.

Age-appropriate learning standards. The Pennsylvania Learning Standards for Early Childhood (PA ELS) were revised in 2014, are comprehensive, and aligned with K-3 and in the process of being aligned with the newly developed English Language Development Standards and the state's Career Education and Work Standards. The state provides professional development opportunities to support the use of the ELDS.

HSSAP: The PA ELS must be aligned to the curriculum and child assessments. Face-to-face and asynchronous trainings on the PA ELS are also available to HSSAP programs.

K4/SBPK: Child assessments are not required to be aligned with the PA ELS.

PAPKC: The PA ELS must be aligned to the curriculum and child assessments.

RTL: All of the identified supports for using the PA ELS are available to districts, but districts need to request the services. Curricula are not required to be aligned with the PA ELS.

System that ensures effective curriculum. The state provides a list of curricula (13 comprehensive curricula are currently on the list) that has been aligned with the PA ELS. Curriculum companies may choose to submit an alignment at any time. The state aligned list reflects those who have voluntarily undergone the alignment process. There is not a system in the state to ensure that curricula are implemented with fidelity.

HSSAP: HSSAP programs are encouraged to use curricula on the state-approved list.

K4/SBPK: School code requires that pre-K curriculum and instruction be standards-based but decisions about curricula are locally determined. The state curricula list is not required to be used by K4 or SBPK.

PAPKC: PAPKC programs are encouraged to use curricula on the state approved list.

RTL: The curriculum must be standards-based, but it is decided upon locally.

Support for students with special needs. OCDEL released an inclusion policy in 2017, yet not all programs are required to follow it.

HSSAP: In 2016-2017, 5.4% of the children in HSSAP were identified as having special needs. HSSAP classrooms must follow the new inclusion policy.

K4/SBPK: Although K4 and school-based PK programs are not required to follow the newly released inclusion policy; the information and supports are available if requested. The number of children with special needs enrolled in K4/SBPK is unknown.

PAPKC: PAPKC providers must follow the 2017 inclusion policy. Classrooms are expected to reflect the naturally occurring ratio of students with and without developmental delays and disabilities; and should not contain more than 20% of students who have been identified by the start of the program as having a developmental delay or disability. However, in attempting to promote inclusion, approved providers may not deny a student's admission to a classroom based on a disability or delay. In 2016-2017, 9.6% of PAPKC students were identified as having special needs.

RTL: Children who receive special education services may attend state preschool classrooms, but are not counted in state preschool enrollment. Although, RTL programs are not monitored by OCDEL like other state-funded programs, the supports for the policy are accessible by RTL classrooms (e.g. CONNECT hotline, site visits, coaching).

Support for dual (English) language learners (DLL). The PA State Board of Education passed English Development Standards in 2017. OCDEL has partnered with WIDA Early Years to provide support, resources, and PD for English language instruction for young children. New DLL policies go into effect in 2017-2018. In 2016-2017, the state provided guidance but not regulation on ELL/DLL supports and services; which are primarily locally determined, with the exception for PAPKC; described below. The number of DLLs enrolled in all the state funded pre-K programs is unknown.

    PAPKC: Preschool programs are required to provide recruitment, enrollment, and outreach information to families in their home languages. Other program options to support DLLs include: monolingual non-English classes; transitional bilingual programs; DLL immersion classes; summer language programs; and DLLs pulled out for ESL.

High quality teaching. CLASS or ECERS scores are not available for review for any of the programs.

Professional development.

    HSSAP: Teachers are required to complete 15 clock hours of PD per year. State policy does not require ongoing classroom-embedded support to be provided to teachers.

    K4/SBPK: The 180 hours of PD are required of teachers with Instructional Certification in public school classrooms (SBPK) but not nonpublic schools (K4). An induction plan is required for teachers with Instructional Certification. New teachers are required to participate in coaching.

    PAPKC: Lead teachers are expected to complete 180 clock hours of PD every five years. First-year teachers are required to have induction plans and participate in coaching; teachers in child care centers are required to have PD plans as part of the QRIS requirement.

    RTL: Lead teachers are expected to complete 180 clock hours of PD every five years. First-year instructionally certified teachers located in public schools are required to participate in induction that includes coaching.

Child Assessments.

    HSSAP: Programs choose an assessment system from among a list of state-approved tools which are required to be aligned with the PA ELS. Child assessments are considered formative with reporting twice a year. Data from the assessments are also used to guide teacher training,

professional development, or technical assistance; and to make changes to state policies regarding the program. To support the use of the assessments, OCDEL's website has information on child assessment and links to training and materials for each of the approved tools.

K4/SBPK: State policy does not require K4/SBPK to assess children's learning and development during the preschool year. If programs do select an assessment; it is not required to be aligned with the PA ELS.

PAPKC: Programs choose an assessment system from among a list of state-approved tools which are required to be aligned with the PA ELS. Child assessments are considered formative with reporting twice a year. Data from the assessments are also used to guide teacher training, professional development, or technical assistance; and to make changes to state policies regarding the program. To support the use of the assessments, OCDEL's website has information on child assessment and links to training and materials for each of the approved tools.

RTL: Child assessments are required to be aligned with the PA ELS, but programs can choose the tool.

Data-driven decision-making.

HSSAP: Low-performing, new, and randomly selected classroom are observed, one time per year using ERS, CLASS, or a locally developed tool. The state has established a cohort of reliable ERS and CLASS observers who must demonstrate reliability on the tools. Participation in the state's QRIS is required for state funded HSSAP programs that are located within child care centers. The state receives the results of the observations and other information collected during monitoring processes/activities; all of which is used at both the state and local level for program improvement. In addition, the state uses results from approved child assessments systems to inform decision making.

K4/SBPK: The use of structured observations of classroom quality is determined locally. Information collected during monitoring processes/activities is not used at the state and/or at the local level for program improvement.

PAPKC: The state conducts reliable observations annually for PAPKC public school sites, and on the QRIS schedule when PAPKC is housed in child care locations. Specialists conduct assessments of classroom quality on an on-going basis and programs are required to conduct a self-assessment at least once a year. In addition, teacher evaluations using Danielson are conducted annually. Reports are generated from external assessments and used at both the state and local level for program improvement. In addition, the state uses results from approved child assessments systems to inform decision making. The state has developed a cadre of reliable ERS assessors. An external evaluation of PAPKC is currently being planned by an outside funder.

RTL: The use of structured observations of classroom quality is determined locally. Information collected during monitoring processes/activities is not used at the state and/or at the local level for program improvement.

Integrated System. The programs under the auspices of OCDEL, HSSAP and PAPKC, are more integrated within the state than K4/SBPK and RTL that have more locally decided policies in terms of child assessments and curricula. PD is integrated for new teachers in some of the programs; but again, it is not consistent across the state for all state funded pre-K programs