

IMPLEMENTING 15 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K: South Carolina

South Carolina’s two state-funded preschool programs: the public-private Child Early Reading Development and Education Program (CERDEP) and the Education Improvement Act Child Development Program (EIA 4K). A total of 61 school districts participate in CERDEP, and there are an additional three school districts that are eligible based on the 70% or higher poverty level but elect not to participate. The remaining districts do not meet the poverty level to participate in CERDEP, but they must offer, at a minimum, one half-day EIA 4K class.

State funding for EIA 4K is allocated to districts based on the number of Kindergartener’s qualified for free or reduced-price lunch in each district. Most children are served in public schools, but districts may also partner with Head Start programs. CERDEP was established in 2006, as a result of Abbeville County School District v. South Carolina court ruling. Funding for CERDEP was codified with the approval of the Read to Succeed legislation in June 2014 with passage of Act 284.

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 Early Reading Development and Education Program (CERDEP)

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	○	●	○	○

Education Improvement Act Child Development Program (EIA 4K)

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○	○	●	●	●	–	●	○	○	○	ND	○	●	○	○

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

Political will. Former Gov. Nikki Haley (R) was viewed as a supporter of quality preschool programs by advocated. Her successor, Gov. Henry McMaster (R), is in his first year and it is too early to determine his pre-K interest. The Institute for Child Success (ICS) in Greenville is a research and policy organization that fosters public and private partnerships to align and improve resources for the success of young children in South Carolina (and beyond). Philanthropies engaged in supporting early education in South Carolina include: the Mary Black Foundation, BCBS foundation and corporation, the Duke Endowment, and United Way. The Greenville and Charleston United Ways jointly engage a contract lobbying firm, which is same one used by ICS. Three statewide organizations—Children’s Trust of South Carolina, the Institute for Child Success, and United Way Association of South Carolina—and a long list of statewide partners have agreed to one 2015 Early Childhood Common Agenda for South Carolina that offers specific recommendations to build a comprehensive early childhood system for children, birth-5 years old.

EIA 4K was initiated in 1984 as part of a one-cent sales tax created to support public education projects. CERDEP, the state’s second early education initiative, was created in 2006 in response to Abbeville County School District, et. al. v. South Carolina school equity funding lawsuit brought by rural school districts. EIA was originally delivered in all SC school districts prior to the creation of CERDEP, now it is only offered in 25% of districts. In 2016-2017, 24,079 children were served in pre-K programs; enrolling 41% of the state’s 4-year-old population. South Carolina spent over \$71 million on pre-K in this same year. Funding per child was \$2,970 per child, ranking 38th out of the 43 states, Guam, and D.C. operating pre-K programs.

Compelling visions and strong leadership. South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) recently created the Office of Early Learning and Literacy (OELL). OELL oversees both EIA 4K and CERDEP. In addition to OELL, CERDEP is co-administered in private preschool settings by South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness (First Steps), the state’s school readiness initiative. SCDE has five FTEs in OELL for CERDEP and three FTEs for Early Learning and Literacy. In addition, there are 19 literacy specialists from the Read to Succeed Office in the OELL that support EIA 4K. First Steps has 10 FTEs. In the past few years there has been some leadership changes within OELL.

First Steps was legislatively created as a nonprofit organization, with a State Board of Trustees that govern the First Steps initiative and created the Office of First Steps to administer and monitor funding for local programs including CERDEP (not operating in public schools), ensure programmatic success, provide technical assistance, receive and analyze data from approved and funded programs, provide oversight for the approval of programs, and provide a standardized fiscal accountability system. Each county in South Carolina is served by a First Steps Partnership.

Education and compensation.

CERDEP: CERDEP teachers located in public schools are required to have a BA and early childhood specialization; nonpublic school teachers need to be working toward an AA. Only teachers in public schools have the same starting salary and schedule as K-3 for all years of service.

EIA 4K: The EIA 4K program only operates in public schools; teachers are required to have a BA plus an early learning credential. They EIA 4K teachers have the same starting salary and



schedule as K-3 for all years of service. Their salary schedule is prorated for differences in length of workday or year.

Adult-child ratio and two adults in the classroom. Both programs have a maximum class size of 20 and require a staff-child ratio of 1:10.

Learning time.

CERDEP: CERDEP programs operate a minimum of 6.5 hours per day, five days a week, for at least 180 instructional days. Eligible students may not be charged an enrollment fee, tuition, or any other fees for any portion of the required instructional day. A state budget proviso for the 2017-2018 school year will permit both the SCDE and First Steps to extend the school day up to 8.5 hours per day.

EIA 4K: EIA 4K operates a minimum of 4 hours per day.

Age-appropriate learning standards. Good Start Grow Smart Early Learning Standards, South Carolina's Early Learning Standards (SC-ELS) were revised and approved by the SC State Board of Education in August 2017. SC-ELS are comprehensive and provide strategies for how teachers and caregivers can support children's development and learning. They have been aligned with the state's K-3 standards and alignment is in progress with Head Start standards. OELL along with the Office of Standards and Learning offer PD opportunities and provide materials to support the implementation the SC-ELS. In addition, the state supported districts in creating a leadership team to coordinate the district roll out plan, including intensive PD for the SC-ELS.

System that ensures effective curriculum. Act 284 (Read to Succeed) mandated that SCDE, the Read to Succeed Office, and First Steps, develop a list of approved (not mandated) research-based preschool curricula that address all domains of the whole child for use in the pre-K programs based upon the SC-ELS, and provide training and TA to support its effective use in classrooms. In order to meet the requirements of Act 284, the OELL conducted a review process to approve curricula that meet the criteria outlined in legislation. The approved, research-based preschool curricula list was the result of a comprehensive and rigorous review, including review of What Works Clearinghouse website, other states preschool approved curriculum lists. The following curricula were approved: Big Day by Scholastic; Creative Curriculum, HighScope, InvestiGators, Montessori, and Worlds of Wonder. To ensure that curricula are being implemented with the fidelity, SCDE conducts monitoring visits using the ELLCO.

Support for students with special needs. For both programs, inclusion specialists are available to support preschool teachers and/or children. Implementation of DEC policies is not required as a compliance monitoring effort, but the Office of Special Education Services encourages districts to follow developmentally appropriate and DEC best practices. The number of children with identified special needs in each program is unknown.

Support for dual (English) language learners (DLL). Both CERDEP and EIA 4K are required to collect and use information on language inputs in the home. Children are screened and assessed in their home language. The SC-ELS supporting materials provide strategies that can be used to promote the learning and development of all children including strategies to provide ideas for teachers who are working with English Language Learners (ELLs).

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

Professional development. In addition to the 15 clock hours of PD annually for CERDEP and EIA 4K, lead teachers in public schools are required to take six credit hours every five years. The 15 clock hours per year must be approved by the Center for Child Care Career Development, and must include at least five hours in curriculum, five hours in child development, and five hours in health and safety, guidance, or other related topics. Act 284 puts in place a comprehensive system of support, including 19 literacy specialists and over 600 reading coaches across the state that provide job-embedded, ongoing professional learning for teachers and administrators, including at the preschool level.

Child Assessments. Districts must select a preschool child assessment on the approved list of tools aligned with the SC-ELS. Pre-K teachers are required to conduct ongoing assessments to gather information about each child's growth and skill development across domains, as well as to inform instruction. To support the use of the assessments, SCDE's website provides information on the three assessments including implementation support and contacts for teaching assistance.

Data-driven decision-making. Data collected during monitoring visits are analyzed for teaching patterns and professional learning needs across the state. Data are also analyzed for compliance trends and supports needs from state level literacy specialists. There are several evaluations being funded by the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee using various classroom observation tools, including ECERS, CLASS, and ELLCO.

CERDEP: The SCSDE conducts monitoring visits to all CERDEP school districts using ELLCO. In 2016-2017, the team generated a monitoring visit monthly calendar giving priority to the thirty-three plaintiff trial districts and to the twenty new CERDEP classrooms. A formal evaluation (2015) measured the impact/child outcomes of CERDEP.

EIA 4K: Low performing EIA 4K classrooms are also observed by the Regional Literacy Specialists using a portion of the ELLCO assessment. There has not been a formal evaluation of EIA 4K.

Integrated system. The state's early care and education system is partially integrated, led by the Good Start Grow Smart Early Learning Standards which are aligned to the approved curricula and required child assessments. Full coordination of this system is challenging due to multiple programs administered by multiple agencies. EIA 4K is administered by the Office of Early Learning and Literacy, SCDE. CERDEP currently is administered in partnership by the SCDE, which oversees participating public school district programs, and First Steps for School Readiness (a non-profit organization), which oversees private and other non-district providers. There has been movement to integrate the system, led by the implementation of Act 284, however the emphasis is on literacy an improving the state's reading scores.