

IMPLEMENTING 15 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K: West Virginia

West Virginia’s preschool program was first established in 1983 for 3- and 4-year-olds. West Virginia passed legislation in 2002 requiring the state to expand access to preschool education programs available to all 4-year-olds in the state by the 2012-2013 school year. WV Universal Pre-K is available in all 55 counties. West Virginia requires that a minimum of half of the programs operate in collaborative settings with private prekindergarten, child care centers, or Head Start programs in order to facilitate expansion of the 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
●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	ND	○	●	●	●

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

Political will. West Virginia began offering preschool programs in 1983, but the will to make it universal became possible with legislation that passed in 2002, requiring universal pre-K by 2012. In 2016-2017, approximately 65% of the state’s 4-year-olds and 11% of 3-year-olds were enrolled in WV Universal Pre-K. Programs are permitted to use additional funding from IDEA and federal Head Start. The state has implemented many changes in recent years to improve program quality.

West Virginia benefits from a reasonably strong enabling environment formed by the collaborative work of elected officials, including Gov. Jim Justice(R), who is in his first term; state agencies; and the early childhood community with some interest from philanthropy. The declining school-age population provides a pathway forward on funding that is unavailable to most other states and creates pressure within the public-school community to expand pre-K within the school finance system rather than to view pre-K as competing for funds.

Compelling vision and strong leadership. The West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) is responsible for the West Virginia Board of Education (WVBE) Policy 2525 overseeing WV Universal Pre-K. The WVDE Office of Early Learning works collaboratively with the West Virginia Department of Health

and Human Resources (WVDHHR) and the West Virginia Head Start State Collaboration Office to implement WVBE Policy 2525. The Office of Early Learning is housed within the Division of Teaching and Learning and has 5.5 FTEs assigned to pre-K.

Education and compensation. Teachers are required to have a BA degree in Early Childhood or a related field. A small percentage of teachers hired before 2003 have an AA and the remainder of teachers have a BA. Teachers in public schools have the same salary schedule as K-3 for all years of service, while those employed by nonpublic schools do not have salary parity.

Adult-child ratio and two adults in the classroom. West Virginia has a maximum class size of 20 for 3- and 4-year-olds and requires a staff-child ratio of 1:10. Even though the maximum staff to child ratio is 1-10, two adults must be present with children regardless of class size.

Learning time. West Virginia has increased the duration of its preschool program, increasing instructional days per year and hours per week since 2012. Beginning in the 2016-2017 school year, each pre-K classroom must provide at least 1,500 minutes of instruction per week and 48,000 minutes of instruction annually, and programs must operate no fewer than four days per week to meet annual and weekly operational requirements of 25 hours per week. However, in 2016-2017, 90% of programs operated a school-day program, exceeding the minimal requirement.

Age-appropriate learning standards. The Early Learning Standards Framework: Content Standards and Learning Criteria for West Virginia Pre-Kindergarten (WV ELSF) are the state's ELDS. They were revised in 2015, are comprehensive, and aligned with the state's K-3 standards, infant/toddler standards, and the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework. The West Virginia Pre-K Early Learning Standards Framework Professional Development System supports the implementation of the WV ELSF.

System that ensures effective curriculum. WV Universal Pre-K programs are required to use an approved comprehensive curriculum. The curriculum adoption cycle for approved pre-K curricular frameworks was last completed in 2011 and is slated for completion again in 2019. As a result of this adoption, three frameworks are approved from which county collaborative early childhood teams choose: The Creative Curriculum, HighScope, and High Reach. Additional funding, TA support, and supporting materials are available to assist with curriculum implementation. The state requires programs to establish a system to ensure that curricula are being implemented with fidelity.

Support for students with special needs. In 2016-2017, 16.7% of pre-K children were identified as having special needs. To support these children, inclusion specialists are available to support teachers and/or students and the proportion of children with an IEP in each preschool classroom is limited to no more than 50%.

Support for dual (English) language learners (DLL). Only 1% of WV Universal Pre-K students were identified as DLLs while the state has a DLL population of 3%. The state provides extra funding for serving DLLs. Bilingual instruction is permitted and there is monitoring focused on the quality of bilingual instruction. Children are assessed in their home language and recruitment, enrollment, outreach, and communication with the family about the program or child is in the family's home language.

High-quality teaching. CLASS or ECERS scores were not able to be reviewed.

Professional development. State policy requires all county WV Pre-K staff, including teachers and teacher assistants/aides/paraprofessionals to participate in 15 hours of staff development annually, based on the needs determined in the county continuous quality improvement process. The WV Educator Evaluation System was developed using The Framework for Teaching (Danielson Group). All public school principals must complete the ongoing annual process with teachers. All classroom staff employed by collaborating child care centers must have a professional development plan that includes staff evaluation. The state does not require teachers to participate in coaching or ongoing classroom-embedded support.

The West Virginia Pre-K Early Learning Standards Framework Professional Development System is a statewide professional development system designed for all early childhood educators, administrators and families as part of WV Universal Pre-K. The system provides content that is research-based, aligned with the WV ELSF and the WV Pre-K Child Assessment System.

Child Assessments. Children are assessed three times per year using the Early Learning Scale, part of the WV Pre-K Child Assessment System. The information is applied to track child and program outcomes over time, guide teacher professional development and coaching, make adjustments to curricula, and measure kindergarten readiness. As previously described, there is PD to support the implementation of the assessment.

Data-driven decision-making. The West Virginia Universal Pre-K Health and Safety Checklist must be conducted in all pre-K classrooms within 45 calendar days of the first day of school annually. Additionally, state policy requires each county to develop and maintain a continuous quality improvement process that utilizes annual classroom observations such as ECERS or CLASS, and aggregated child assessment data in programmatic decision-making. Some use their curriculum implementation checklists (High/Scope PQA or the Creative Curriculum Fidelity Tool Administrator Checklist) and alternate years with CLASS or ECERS. Classroom observation tools are locally determined.

Results from classroom quality self-assessments are collected through each county's continuous quality improvement process and reviewed by the state pre-K steering team during WV Universal Pre-K Program Reviews. WV Universal Pre-K Program Reviews are conducted once every three years in every county.

NIEER and Marshall University are conducting a multi-year study designed to assess the effects of participation in the state pre-K program from 2015 to 2020, called the WV Universal Pre-K Longitudinal Study.

Integrated System. West Virginia's system is integrated in all components, including the alignment of the ELDS with the required curricula and child assessment tool. Structured classroom observation data are collected and used at the program and state level. The PD system provides support for the implementation of all of these items (curriculum, child and program assessment, and ELDS), but would be strengthened with a coaching system.