

# Special Report: State Preschool Administration



## INTRODUCTION

The 2018-2019 *State of Preschool* survey included supplemental questions designed to collect information about state-level administration of the preschool programs included in this report. Our goal here is to describe how states administer preschool across the country rather than judge the effectiveness of their governance structures.<sup>1</sup>

Just as state preschool programs look different in each state, the oversight of those programs looks different as well. Some states have a small staff responsible for representing a wide-range of early childhood education expertise, while other states have a larger staff where individuals hold more specialized areas of expertise. Either way, state staffing levels are rarely just a matter of the size of the program, but also depend on other program design and policy issues including the division of responsibility between state and local levels.

The supplemental survey began with questions about the number of state staff dedicated wholly or in part to the administration of the state preschool program, followed by questions addressing years of experience, areas of expertise, and required background. States provided information about unfilled positions, as well as what functions, if any, are performed by contracted (non-permanent) staff. Survey questions also asked about the extent to which state staff have access to professional learning experiences on a regular basis.

Data were then collected about the state agency with primary oversight of the state preschool program, determining whether preschool is administered through the state's education agency, child welfare agency, or elsewhere. We were interested in understanding the level of authority granted to the highest ranking state employee with oversight of the program and how that varies across states. Finally, the survey addresses the types of functions carried out by the state agency, as well as those carried out at the local level or by other state agencies.<sup>2</sup>

## FINDINGS

Responses to the 2019 *Yearbook* survey help answer important questions about how state preschool programs are administered across the country. These questions and their answers are laid out below and include information from 63 programs in 44 states, D.C., and Guam.

### Which State Agencies Have Primary Oversight of State Pre-K?

The vast majority of state preschool programs (51 of 63) are administered at least partially by the State Education Agency (SEA) (See Table S1). Twelve programs report oversight through the State's Office of School Readiness or Early Childhood, and six state programs report oversight by the State Human Services Agency.

### How Many States Share Pre-K Oversight Across Agencies?

Fifty-three of 63 state programs (84%) are administered by just one state agency, while ten are administered by more than one (16%). In all ten programs reporting shared oversight, the SEA is one of the agencies providing support.

### Which States Provide Oversight Through "Other" State Agencies?

Programs in North Dakota, New Mexico, Louisiana, and Arizona are at least partially overseen by other state agencies. In North Dakota, the Department of Commerce oversees the fiscal portion of the programs and the Department of Public Instruction sets programmatic standards. Oversight of Arizona's Quality First Scholarships program is provided through First Things First, which is an organization established by public vote to fund early childhood programs. In Louisiana, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education operates separately from the SEA to provide oversight for the Louisiana 8(g) program. New Mexico's preschool program has traditionally been jointly administered by the SEA (overseeing services in public settings) and the New Mexico Children, Youth, and Families Department (overseeing services in nonpublic settings). However, recent legislation created a new Early Childhood Education and Care Department, merging state pre-K oversight into one agency. This transition to one agency is still in process.

### Are Other Parts of the B-5 Continuum Housed Within the Agency that Oversees Pre-K?

Nearly one in three state agencies with oversight of state pre-K are housed in the same agency as the state's child care administrator, and more than half of programs are administered in the agency that also houses the State Head Start Collaboration Director.

## Who Leads the Administration of Pre-K in State Agencies?

Starting with the highest level of authority, a state agency head (i.e., a state superintendent, commissioner, secretary, or other state agency head) is the highest ranking officer with oversight of state preschool for 24% of state programs (See Figure S1). In some states these individuals are elected (e.g., California and Oklahoma), but in most states they are appointed. The highest ranking official for 21% of state programs is a direct report to the head of a state agency. For 40% of state programs, the highest ranking officer is a direct report to a senior staff member at the state agency (i.e., an individual who reports directly to the agency head) and just two state programs (3%) report oversight by an individual below this level of authority. In 9% of state programs, authority levels were somewhat more complex and did not fit into any of these categories.

## How Many Staff do State Agencies Dedicate to Pre-K Oversight?

### *What Makes this Information so Illusive?*

Across programs, there is tremendous variation in the number of state staff providing oversight for publicly funded pre-K. Some variation is due to the different ways in which states approach oversight of public preschool programs. Some variation is due to reporting differences. Some states provided a thorough count of every staff member even marginally associated with program oversight. Other states reported only staff with significant program responsibilities. Three states with multiple programs were not able to report the number of full-time equivalents (FTEs) for all of their programs (Louisiana, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania). In three other states with multiple programs (New Jersey, Kansas, and Connecticut), the same staff have oversight over one or more programs, requiring data to be combined across those programs.

### *How Many FTE's Do States Report?*

Six programs report fewer than one full-time equivalent assigned to provide program administration, while two report well over 30 FTEs (See Figure S2). Many state programs (29) report somewhere between one and 5.5 FTEs dedicated to the state preschool program. Wisconsin Head Start has one of the smallest state staffs, with just 0.2 FTEs providing program oversight (although it is a small program and has additional oversight provided through federal Head Start). Georgia and Alabama report the largest staff, with 83 and 115 FTEs providing program oversight, respectively.

And yet this still does not provide the full picture of capacity in terms of state staff numbers. When we examine the size of state programs versus the number of state FTEs dedicated to the program, we see ratios that range from one state staff member for every 43 children in Montana, to one state staff member for nearly 100,000 children in California's TK program (See Table S2). These two extremes illustrate some of the determinants of state level staffing. Montana has a very new, and very small, pilot program with much to learn. California's TK program is huge and built on existing public kindergarten with much of the decision making, monitoring and support for increasing quality at the local (county and school district) level. Another insight is suggested by three of the four states meeting all ten of NIEER's quality standards benchmarks being among the ten states with the lowest ratios of state staff to children enrolled.

### *Delving into the Details*

To investigate the potential determinants of the number of state FTEs we conducted a simple multivariate statistical analysis to examine the relationships between the number of FTEs and the number of children enrolled, number of quality standards benchmarks met (or whether all four new process quality benchmarks are met), level of funding per child, and whether the program is funded through the school funding formula. All but spending per child predict the number of state FTEs, and together they predict a substantial percentage of the variation across states in the number of FTEs administering preschool. FTEs increase with the number of children enrolled but not linearly, indicating economies of scale with the rate of increase in state FTEs declining as the number of children served becomes large. It appears that states with higher standards for quality have more staff at the state level, not surprising as the state staff play an important role in supporting continuous quality improvement. Finally, the connection with the funding formula suggests that states in which the program is more integrated into the K-12 system rely more on the substantial infrastructure that public education has at local (and sometimes regional) levels for program support and administration.

### *How Many States are Operating with Unfilled Positions?*

Thirteen programs reported having at least one vacant position during the entirety of the 2018-2019 school year, and in at least four of these instances the unfilled FTEs were included in the total FTE reported for the program. This suggests that, for the majority of state preschool programs, reported state staffing levels are as large as they are currently intended to get.

## Which Aspects of Pre-K Programs do State Agencies Oversee?

Twenty-six programs reported sharing programmatic oversight between state and local education agencies, 29 reported sharing fiscal oversight and 20 reported sharing responsibility for the assessment of program quality (See Table S3). As may be expected, local education agencies are at least partially responsible for oversight of pre-K child assessments in the vast majority of programs (87%), whereas only 21% of programs have child assessments conducted via the state. States are most likely to contract out for program quality assessments and least likely to contract out for fiscal oversight and child assessments.

### What Kinds of Expertise do State Agency Staff Hold?

Despite the relatively small number of staff administering most publicly-funded preschool programs, programs report a wide variety of areas of expertise covered by state agency staff. Research suggests that effective early learning leaders have expertise and a strong understanding of child development and learning, pedagogy that includes pre-K content, supports for dual language learners, professional development strategies and early educator competencies, leadership and management of pre-K programs, and early childhood policy.<sup>3</sup> Over 96% of state agencies with oversight of public preschool report having staff with expertise in child development. The two programs that do not (Missouri Pre-K Foundation Formula and Pennsylvania RTL), each have less than half an FTE dedicated to the preschool program, and reported expertise only in data/policy analysis and finance; both of these programs are quite small.

More than 90% of programs also indicated having expertise in curriculum and professional development. In 80% to 90% of preschool programs, state staff have expertise in child assessment, social-emotional development, approaches to learning, English language arts, and data analysis. Between 68% and 77% of programs report having expertise in preschool inclusion/special education, social studies, math, science, policy analysis, and finance. Finally, just half of state programs have state staff with expertise in bilingual education. This is particularly concerning considering that many of our state programs directly or indirectly target children who are English language learners. Focusing on the nine states with the largest populations of dual language learners, five reported having staff with bilingual expertise (California, Florida, Illinois, New Mexico, and New York) and four did not (Arizona, Nevada, New Jersey, and Texas).

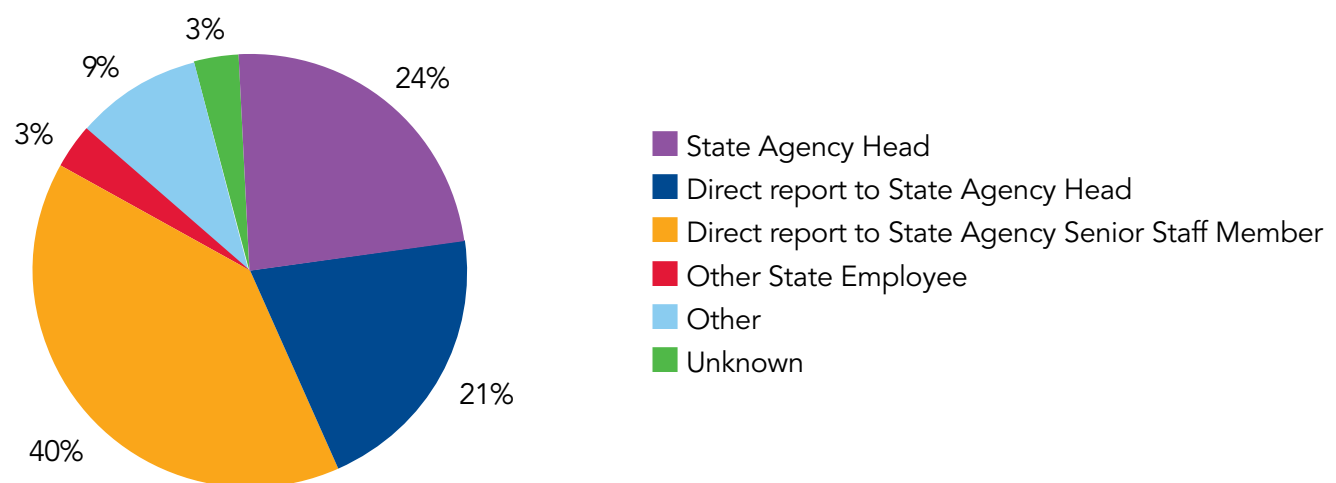
### What Kind of Background or Training are State Agency Staff Required to Hold?

Of the individuals represented by the state FTEs reported previously, almost 79% have a formal background in early childhood education, which may include a bachelor's degree or higher in early childhood education or experience as an early childhood education teacher. All but two programs (Missouri Pre-K Foundation Formula and Pennsylvania RTL) reported that state staff overseeing the public preschool program are either required to have a background or training in early childhood education prior to employment or are provided with training through formal or in-formal on-the-job training. Again, the two outlying programs are small, with small state staff.

### How Many Years of Experience do State Staff Have?

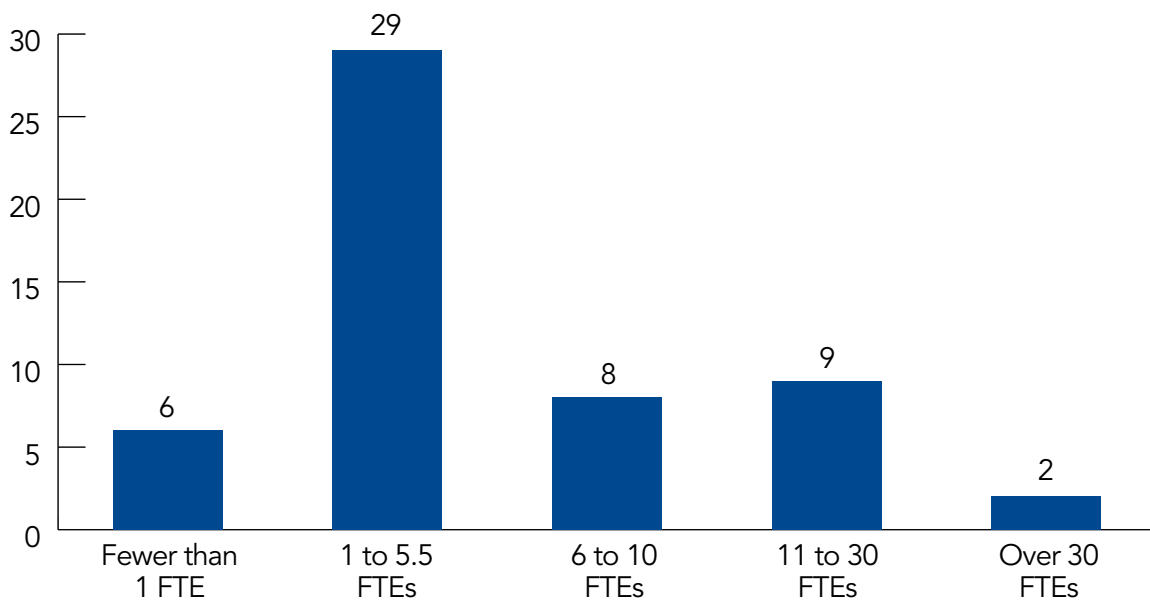
Not surprisingly, the average number of years individuals with oversight of public preschool have worked in their state agency is relatively low at just 5.3 years, although averages ranged from one year (in Alaska and the Missouri Pre-K Foundation Formula Program) to 14 years (across New Jersey's three programs). We also asked states about the greatest number of years an individual overseeing the state pre-K program has worked in the state agency. Across all programs, the average was 10.5 years, with eight states reporting an employee working 20 or more years in the state agency. Guam took the record, reporting an employee with 35 years of state administrative experience (though it should be noted that Guam's preschool program has only been around since 2015).

**FIGURE S1: HIGHEST RANKING INDIVIDUAL WITH OVERSIGHT OF STATE PRE-K PROGRAM**





**FIGURE S2: NUMBER OF STATE PROGRAMS, BY NUMBER OF FULL-TIME EQUIVALENTS (FTEs)**





**TABLE S1: STATE AGENCY WITH PRIMARY OVERSIGHT OF STATE PRE-K**

STATE	AGENCY WITH DIRECT OVERSIGHT OF STATE PRESCHOOL					WHERE AGENCY IS HOUSED	
	Department of education	Office of school readiness or early childhood	Head Start collaboration office	Human services agency	Other	Same agency as state's child care administrator	Same agency as state's Head Start collaboration director
Alabama		✓					✓
Alaska	✓						✓
Arizona					✓		
Arkansas	✓			✓			
California CSPP	✓					✓	✓
California TK	✓					✓	✓
Colorado	✓						
Connecticut CDCC		✓				✓	✓
Connecticut SR		✓				✓	✓
Connecticut Smart Start		✓				✓	✓
Delaware	✓						✓
District of Columbia	✓					✓	✓
Florida	✓	✓					✓
Georgia		✓				✓	✓
Hawaii		✓					✓
Illinois	✓						
Iowa Shared Visions	✓						✓
Iowa SWVPP	✓						✓
Kansas Preschool Pilot	✓						
Kansas State Pre-K	✓						
Kentucky	✓						
Louisiana 8(g)					✓		
Louisiana LA 4	✓						
Louisiana NSECD	✓						
Maine	✓						✓
Maryland	✓					✓	✓
Massachusetts UPK	✓					✓	✓
Massachusetts Ch 70	✓						
Michigan	✓					✓	✓
Minnesota HdSt*	✓	✓	✓				✓
Minnesota VPK/SRP	✓	✓					✓
Mississippi	✓						
Missouri Preschool Program	✓						
Missouri Pre-K FF	✓						
Montana				✓		✓	✓
Nebraska	✓						✓
Nevada	✓	✓					✓
New Jersey Abbott	✓						✓
New Jersey ECPA	✓						✓
New Jersey ELLI	✓						✓
New Mexico	✓				✓	✓	✓
New York	✓						
North Carolina				✓			
North Dakota					✓		
Ohio	✓						✓
Oklahoma	✓						
Oregon Pre-K	✓					✓	✓
Oregon Preschool Promise	✓					✓	✓
Pennsylvania RTL	✓						
Pennsylvania HSSAP	✓					✓	
Pennsylvania K4 & SBPK	✓					✓	
Pennsylvania PKC	✓					✓	
Rhode Island	✓						
South Carolina	✓ (SCDE)	✓ (First Steps)					
Tennessee	✓						✓
Texas	✓	✓					
Vermont	✓			✓			
Virginia	✓						
Washington				✓		✓	✓
West Virginia	✓			✓		✓	✓
Wisconsin 4K	✓						✓
Wisconsin HdSt*	✓						✓
Guam	✓						
	51	12	1	6	4	20	36

\* These state programs provide supplemental funding to Head Start programs, and primary oversight for these programs is at the federal level.

**TABLE S2: STATE PRE-K ENROLLMENT IN RELATION TO SIZE OF STATE AGENCY ADMINISTRATION (2018-2019)**

STATE/PROGRAM	Children per state staff FTE	2019 pre-K enrollment	State agency FTEs	2019 Yearbook benchmarks
Montana	43	340	8	6
Guam	72	72	1	6
Hawaii	83	415	5	8
Alabama	163	18,756	115	10
Delaware	423	845	2	9
Nevada	428	2,139	5	7
Louisiana 8(g)	560	2,296	4.1	7
Washington	562	13,491	24	8
Rhode Island	720	1,080	1.5	10
Mississippi	850	1,954	2.3	10
Iowa Shared Visions	866	1,299	1.5	6
Oregon Preschool Promise	875	1,531	1.75	5
Missouri Preschool Program	887	1,330	1.5	9
Georgia	970	80,493	83	8
South Carolina	1,180	28,622	24.25	7
Minnesota HdSt	1,202	1202	1	8
New Mexico	1,250	11,251	9	9
Alaska	1,304	1,304	1	1
Connecticut CDCC	1,341	2,481	1.85	5
Pennsylvania HSSAP + PKC	1,540	32,332	21	7.6
Arkansas	1,682	20,186	12	8
North Carolina	1,762	29,509	16.75	8
Arizona	1,803	5,410	3	3
Connecticut Smart Start	1,860	651	0.35	6
West Virginia	2,461	13,534	5.5	9
North Dakota	2,655	1,062	0.4	2
Oregon Pre-K	2,900	7,829	2.7	8
Vermont	2,987	8,962	3	7
Maine	3,058	6,115	2	9
Wisconsin HdSt	3,075	615	0.2	7
Kentucky	3,559	21,351	6	8
Colorado	3,657	21,944	6	4
Michigan	4,111	37,140	9.04	10
Maryland	4,580	32,062	7	7
Minnesota VPK/SRP	4,690	7,035	1.50	5
California CSPP	4,793	140,920	29.4	6
Virginia	5,045	17,657	3.5	6
District of Columbia	5,505	13,763	2.5	4
Nebraska	5,939	13,957	2.35	8
Ohio	5,957	17,870	3	5
Connecticut SR	6,090	11,876	1.95	5
Illinois	6,211	81,161	13.07	8
Pennsylvania RTL	7,066	3,533	0.5	5
New Jersey (all programs)	8,085	52,553	6.5	8
New York	9,716	126,302	13	7
Iowa SWVPP	11,613	26,710	2.3	8
Florida	14,469	173,633	12	2
Tennessee	17,879	17,879	1	8
Kansas (all programs)	18,433	11,060	0.6	4
Wisconsin 4K	20,401	51,003	2.5	3
Oklahoma	21,303	42,606	2	9
Texas	23,892	238,921	10	3
Missouri Pre-K FF	44,580	4,458	0.1	5
California TK	95,176	104,694	1.1	3

**TABLE S3: ENTITIES RESPONSIBILITIES FOR SPECIFIC OVERSIGHT OF PUBLICLY-FUNDED PRE-K PROGRAMS**

FUNCTION	State agency with oversight of pre-K	Another state agency	State contractors	Local education agencies	Other	Not required
Child Assessments	20.9%	0.0%	7.5%	89.3%	11.8%	15.6%
Programmatic Oversight	87.3%	5.0%	15.4%	66.7%	6.1%	6.5%
Fiscal Oversight	94.5%	7.7%	7.7%	70.2%	6.3%	3.2%
Program Quality Assessments	67.3%	12.2%	40.0%	70.8%	23.5%	14.7%
Development of Learning Standards	90.9%	22.5%	13.2%	29.3%	3.1%	6.5%

Note: Many programs report multiple entities responsible for specific functions. Therefore, percentages add up to more than 100%.



**REFERENCES**

<sup>1</sup> To date, research has not determined which structure is more effective, however the importance of coordinating services within the state has been documented. For more information, see: Wechsler, M., Kirp, D., Tinubu Ali, T., Gardner, M., Maier, A., Melnick, H., & Shields, P. (2016). *The road to high-quality early learning: Lessons from the states*. Palo Alto: Learning Policy Institute. [https://learning-policyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Road\\_to\\_High\\_Quality\\_Early\\_Learning\\_REPORT.pdf](https://learning-policyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Road_to_High_Quality_Early_Learning_REPORT.pdf); and Kagan, S. L., & Kauerz, K. (2012). Looking forward: Four steps for early childhood system building. In S. L. Kagan & K. Kauerz (Eds.), *Early childhood systems: Transforming early learning* (pp. 283-302). Teachers College Press.

<sup>2</sup> Key functions have been identified in terms of what a state office responsible for the oversight of preschool should ideally do to coordinate and support implementation. These functions include the development of preschool standards, allocation of funds and accountability mechanisms, using data for decision making, and supporting programs to achieve the highest level of quality. For more information, see: Ponder, K. (2012). A state vision for an early childhood system: Meaningful governance. In S. L. Kagan & K. Kauerz (Eds.), *Early childhood systems: Transforming early learning* (pp. 41-46). Teachers College Press; and Bruner, C., Stover Wright, M., Gebhard, B., Hibbard, S. (2004). *Building an early learning system: The ABCs of planning and governance structures*. State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network.

<sup>3</sup> Most research on the characteristics of effective preschool leaders has focused on school principals, preschool center directors, and other site-based administrators who oversee pre-K programs. For more information, see: Institute of Medicine (IOM) & National Research Council (NRC) (2015). *Transforming the workforce for children birth through age 8: A unifying foundation*. The National Academies Press. <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/19401/transforming-the-workforce-for-children-birth-through-age-8-a>; Sakai, L., Copeman Petig, A., & Austin, L.J.E. (2017). *Early Childhood Preparation for School Leaders: Lessons from New Jersey Principal Certification Programs*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley; and Szekely, A. (2013). *Leading for early success: Building school principals' capacity to lead high-quality early education*. National Governors Association. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED583163.pdf>