



NIEER Pre-K Data Snapshot:

How Well Are State Pre-K Programs Designed To Support Dual Language Learners?

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Introduction

High quality early childhood experiences are proven to have a positive impact on the educational development of young dual language learners (DLLs)ⁱ, and yet according to the 2016 National Household Education Surveys Program, 52% of children birth through age five with no parent or guardian speaking English in the house do not attend any kind of early care and education program.ⁱⁱ In terms of public preschool programs, few states are even tracking the extent to which young DLLs are served. In *The State of Preschool 2017*, NIEER reported that only 26 of 60 state-funded preschool programs could report data on the number of DLLs enrolled in public preschool programs, and only ten of those programs served DLLs in a percentage proportional to their population in the state.ⁱⁱⁱ Also, only 33 programs had policies in place to support DLLs in state preschool programs.^{iv}

According to NIEER's most recent Yearbook (2019), states still differ significantly in the extent to which policies are in place to enroll and support preschool DLLs through policies and state-level expertise. Young DLLs are present in every US state, though the percentage of children varies widely from just 2% in West Virginia to 44% in California (see Table 1). Understanding the potential benefits of attending a high quality preschool program, this data snapshot uses results from the *2019 State of Preschool* yearbook survey to explore what connections, if any, there are between states' young DLL populations and the public preschool policies and capacities in place to support DLLs.

Program Eligibility Policies

Despite the known advantages of high-quality preschool to DLLs, only 37% of state programs (23 of 62) specifically prioritize children with a home language other than English for enrollment in public preschool programs. Another 11 programs are universal (California TK, DC, Florida, Georgia, Iowa SWVPP, New Jersey Abbott, New York, Oklahoma, Vermont, West Virginia, Wisconsin 4K). However, the intent to provide universal preschool has not been realized for all of these programs, and it is unclear how well they perform at recruiting and enrolling DLL children. Many of the remaining 28 state programs specifically identify risk factors that could include children with a home language other than English (i.e. income level, migrant status, etc.), but do not directly target DLL children.

Focusing on the 12 programs in states with young DLL populations of 25% or more, only three specifically target DLL children (Texas, Nevada and Illinois, see Table 1). The remaining programs (two in California, New York, three in New Jersey, New Mexico, Florida, and Arizona, see Table 1) do not specifically use DLL as a criterion for eligibility. However, as mentioned above, Florida, New York, California's TK program and New Jersey's Abbott program are at least in principle universal. For these programs, it is not enrollment policies but rather recruitment and outreach policies that have the potential to improve DLL enrollment.

Policies to Support DLL Services

Once DLL children are enrolled in public preschool programs, states fare much better in terms of having policies in place to support them. Overall, 61% of state-funded preschool programs (38 of 62, Table 1) report having policies in place to regulate the services provided to preschool DLLs. While the majority of programs without these policies in place (18 of 24) are in states with young DLL populations of 20% or less, we still see states like Florida, Arizona, Rhode Island and Connecticut with a substantial number of young DLLs but no DLL-specific policies to regulate the programs provided to them.

Of course, even for the programs in states where preschool DLL policies exist, the nature of these policies varies considerably. Most commonly, state programs with preschool DLL policies reference having program guidelines, program standards, and/or curriculum requirements that address strategies to support DLLs in the classroom. Also common are state programs requiring the use of a home language survey and assessments conducted in each child's home language. Only California TK and Illinois go so far as to require teachers of DLL's to hold specific qualifications, but 11 additional state programs specifically require coaching and/or professional development for teachers of DLL preschoolers (Alabama, DC, Georgia, Massachusetts UPK, Minnesota Head Start/VPK, New Jersey Abbott/ELLI/ECPA, North Carolina, Tennessee). In fact, Georgia and both programs in Minnesota specifically report working with the World-class Instructional Design and Assessment consortium (WIDA) to develop a cadre of DLL coaches for preschool.

State Administrative Capacity

Although state preschool programs are expected to effectively address a large number of developmental domains, the state agencies that administer these programs are not always staffed with expertise to match. As the administrators of public preschool programs, state agencies often have a small roster of staff who are expected to cover multiple areas of expertise. Given these difficult circumstances, it is concerning but perhaps not surprising to see that less than half of state agencies overseeing public preschool programs (29 of 62, 47%, Table 1) report having individuals on staff with proficiency in bilingual education. Even more concerning is that six programs with young DLL populations of 28% or more report that they do not have bilingual expertise in the state office with oversight of the public preschool program (Texas, Nevada, New Jersey Abbott/ELLI/ECPA, Arizona). This is troubling since individual programs are in a position to look to these overseeing agencies to provide guidance.

A more perplexing view of these data emerges when looking at the state programs reporting policies in place to support preschool DLLs. Only 45% of programs with these policies in place also report having bilingual expertise at the state agency level to support implementation, while a larger percentage of programs without these policies in place (50%) do have bilingual expertise at the state level. Similarly, only 30% of state programs that prioritize enrollment of DLLs (7 of 23) have bilingual expertise at the state level, while 56% of state programs that do not specifically target preschool DLLs (22 of 29) do have state-level expertise. Clearly, the only picture forming is that the staffing of early childhood offices in state agencies with oversight of public preschool programs does not necessarily coincide with the policies in place for those programs.

Conclusion

Comparing data from the *State of Preschool 2019* with state-specific Census data on the population of young DLLs reveals a disconnect between the preschool population in need of services and the policies in place to promote their inclusion in high-quality public preschool. In many states, there is little alignment between the population of preschool DLLs, state preschool policies to enroll and support the development of preschool DLLs, and state capacity to provide informed guidance and oversight. In some cases, it appears that states with smaller percentages of young DLL have stronger provisions in place than those with larger percentages. Regardless, as the population of young dual language learners continues to grow throughout the country, states need to take a hard look at the policies and capacities in place to support preschool DLLs.

Table 1. Public Pre-K Policies and Capacities in Place to Support Young Dual Language Learners

State Preschool Program	Percent DLL ¹	Agency Expertise in DLL	Policies for DLL Services	DLL is an Eligibility/Recruitment Criterion
Alabama	7%	Yes	Yes	No
Alaska	14%	No	No	No
Arizona	28%	No	No	No
Arkansas	10%	No	No	Yes
California CSPP	44%	Yes	Yes	No
California TK	44%	Yes	Yes	No*
Colorado	21%	Yes	Yes	Yes
Connecticut CDCC	22%	Yes	No	No
Connecticut Smart Start	22%	Yes	No	No
Connecticut SR	22%	Yes	No	No
Delaware	16%	Yes	Yes	Yes
District of Columbia	22%	Yes	Yes	No*
Florida	28%	Yes	No	No*
Georgia	16%	Yes	Yes	No*
Hawaii	19%	No	Yes	Yes
Illinois	25%	Yes	Yes	Yes*
Iowa Shared Visions	10%	No	Yes	Yes
Iowa SWVPP	10%	No	Yes	No*
Kansas PA AR	15%	No	Yes	Yes
Kansas Preschool Pilot	15%	No	Yes	Yes
Kentucky	7%	Yes	No	No
Louisiana 8(g)	7%	No	No	Yes
Louisiana LA 4	7%	No	No	No
Louisiana NSECD	7%	No	No	No
Maine	5%	No	Yes	Yes
Maryland	20%	Yes	No	Yes
Massachusetts Chapter 70	24%	Not reported	Yes	No
Massachusetts UPK	24%	Not reported	Yes	No

*These “universal” preschool programs are open to all age-eligible children, but the percentage of children enrolled varies widely. In these states, it is not eligibility policies but rather recruitment and outreach policies that have the potential to impact the percentage of DLL children enrolled in public preschool.

¹ Proxied by percent of children 5-8 in homes where a language other than English is spoken in the home as this is not reported for children under 5. Data accessed on June 30, 2019 from Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) files.

Michigan	11%	No	Yes	Yes
Minnesota HdSt	15%	Yes	Yes	Yes
Minnesota VPK/SRP	15%	Yes	Yes	No
Mississippi	5%	Yes	No	No
Missouri PP	7%	No	No	No
Missouri Pre-K FF	7%	No	No	No
Montana	4%	No	No	No
Nebraska	14%	No	Yes	Yes
Nevada	32%	No	Yes	Yes
New Jersey Abbott	31%	No	Yes	No*
New Jersey ECPA	31%	No	Yes	No
New Jersey ELLI	31%	No	Yes	No
New Mexico	29%	Yes	Yes	No
New York	31%	Yes	Yes	No*
North Carolina	16%	No	Yes	Yes
North Dakota	3%	No	No	No
Ohio	8%	No	Yes	No
Oklahoma	12%	Yes	Yes	No*
Oregon Pre-K	21%	Yes	Yes	No
Oregon Preschool Promise	21%	Yes	Yes	No
Pennsylvania HSSAP	12%	Yes	No	No
Pennsylvania K4 & SBPK	12%	Not reported	Yes	Yes
Pennsylvania PKC	12%	Yes	No	No
Pennsylvania RTL	12%	No	Yes	Yes
Rhode Island	22%	Yes	No	No
South Carolina	9%	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tennessee	10%	No	Yes	Yes
Texas	35%	No	Yes	Yes
Vermont	6%	No	No	No*
Virginia	17%	No	No	Yes
Washington	24%	Yes	Yes	Yes
West Virginia	2%	No	Yes	No*
Wisconsin 4K	13%	Yes	No	No*
Wisconsin HdSt	13%	Yes	No	No

Data Source

The [National Institute for Early Education Research \(NIEER\)](#) produces an annual [report](#) profiling policies of state-funded prekindergarten programs throughout the United States. NIEER's *State of Preschool* yearbook survey provides detailed information on enrollment, funding, teacher qualifications, and other policies related to quality. The *2019 State of Preschool* includes a supplemental report focusing on the state-level administration of public preschool programs. State agencies were asked about staffing levels, areas of expertise, roles and responsibilities, areas of oversight, and opportunities for professional development.

Included in the *2019 State of Preschool* are data on 63 state preschool programs across 44 states, Washington, D.C. and Guam. Six states did not fund a state preschool program, and 12 states had multiple programs. The information contained in this brief represents data for the 62 distinct state preschool programs outside Guam. In some cases, policies differ between programs within the same state.

About NIEER

The National Institute for Early Education Research ([NIEER](#)) at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education, New Brunswick, NJ, conducts independent, objective research to inform early childhood education policy promoting physical, cognitive and social development for all young children to succeed in school and later life.

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ⁱ Buysse, V., Peisner-Feinberg, E., Paez, M., Hammer, C. S. & Knowles, M. (2014). Effects of early education programs and practices on the development and learning of dual language learners: A review of the literature. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 29 (4), 765-785. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2013.08.004>

ⁱⁱ Corcoran, L., Steinley, K. & Grady, S. (2017). Early childhood program participation, results from the national household education surveys program of 2016. National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017/2017101REV.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Weisenfeld, G. G., Kasmin, R., DiCrecchio, N., & Horowitz, M. (2018). *The State of Preschool 2017: State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

^{iv} Ibid.

