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AUTHOR Mitchell, Anne
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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on pre-kindergarten programs, defined by four characteristics: the programs are supported by state funds, focused on early learning for school success or school readiness, aimed at children of pre-kindergarten age (under 5 years, usually 3 to 4 years), and designed to deliver group learning experiences at least several days a week. The paper describes general approaches to pre-K used by states; provides a brief history of state-funded programs over the last century; describes current practices; and discusses trends in the field related to growth, funding, public schools, universal provision, working families, and quality. The paper concludes with recommendations for pre-kindergarten policy: (1) commit to universal access; (2) use all available resources in the early education delivery systems; (3) commit to quality and require it with program standards; (4) engage the community in planning; and (5) allocate sufficient funds. (EV)

Prekindergarten Programs in the States: Trends and Issues

Anne Mitchell
Early Childhood Policy Research
1250 Honey Hollow Road
Climax, NY 12042
(518) 966-4585

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In this paper, I lay out a working definition of prekindergarten program, a brief history of these programs over the last century, and descriptions of current practices, trends and issues. I end with recommendations for prekindergarten policy.

Defining "Prekindergarten Program"

The focus of this paper is prekindergarten (Pre-K) programs. For purposes of this discussion, Pre-K programs have four defining characteristics, which are:

1. supported by state funds,
2. focused on early learning for school success or school readiness,
3. aimed at pre-kindergarten aged children (under 5 years old, usually 3- and 4-year olds),
4. designed to deliver group learning experiences at least several days a week.

Ideally, Pre-K is one part of a comprehensive early childhood policy agenda that aims to ensure that all children come to school ready to succeed and that families are supported as parents and as essential participants in the workforce. A comprehensive policy framework would include direct services and supportive infrastructure such as paid family leave for parents of infants; family education, support and preservation; special education for preschoolers and for infants, toddlers and their families; elementary education; quality child care for young children as well as school-age children; child and family healthcare; consumer protection and information; professional development of the early childhood workforce; economic security for families including welfare reform; family friendly tax policy. Effective state policy encompasses funding, regulating, planning,

supporting and improving these and other essential services and programs that contribute to the healthy development of children.

Pre-K Options States Use

There are essentially three ways that states have chosen to offer prekindergarten programs. Many states have more than one program, using different options, which accounts for the state numbers in the list below adding up to more than 50. (Also, the District of Columbia is considered a state here.)

1. Three states (Maine, Wisconsin, and West Virginia) permit school districts to offer "kindergarten" for 4-year olds in public schools. Pennsylvania also permits districts to enroll 4-year olds but does not appropriate state funds.
2. Nineteen states either extend or expand the federal Head Start program. Seventeen states do this along with having another prekindergarten program, while Alaska and New Hampshire only fund Head Start. In addition, two states (Delaware and Oregon) included in the next category have a distinct Pre-K program that follows all Head Start Performance Standards.
3. Thirty-seven states have created a distinct program for children younger than kindergarten entry age. Only 4 of these states limit the program to public schools (District of Columbia, Kansas, Louisiana, and one of New York's programs). Counting the 3 states in the first category that only permit public school districts to offer 'kindergarten,' this makes a total of 7 states limiting operation to public schools only.

A summary chart is attached showing current state Pre-K initiatives with 1998-99 funding levels.

State-funded Prekindergarten Programs in the 20th century

Before 1960, there were only three states with programs. Since the late 1800s, **Wisconsin** allowed public school districts to enroll 4-year-olds in kindergarten and claim state aid. In 1903 **New Jersey** did the same. In 1949, **Pennsylvania** first permitted school districts to 'maintain kindergartens for children aged 4 to 6,' but did not provide any state funding.

Between 1960 and 1970, four states created programs. In 1965, **Hawaii** appropriated state money to expand Head Start. (The same year, Pennsylvania established that school districts could claim state aid for students enrolled in their kindergartens for 4-year-olds, but did not increase state appropriations for this purpose.) In 1966, **California**[1] and **New York** established distinct half-day Pre-K programs with aims similar to Head Start. In 1968, **Connecticut** began to appropriate state funds for Head Start.

[1] Since 1943, California has appropriated state funds to support full-day child development programs.

During the 1970s, four more states created programs. In 1977, **Alaska** began a program modeled on Head Start. In 1978, **Florida** used state money to extend federal Title I Migrant Preschool programs, and both **Maryland** and **Oklahoma** started Pre-K programs.

In the decade of the 1980s, 23 state programs began. In 1983, **Maine** and **West Virginia** permitted school districts to offer prekindergarten classes. In 1984, **South Carolina** and **Texas** started distinct Pre-K programs, followed in 1985 by **Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan**, and **Washington**. In 1986, **Ohio** and **Massachusetts** started Pre-K programs and **Rhode Island** began to fund Head Start. In 1987, **Florida** and **New Jersey** started new Pre-K programs in addition to the ones they already had, while **Oregon** and **Vermont** created their first programs. In 1988 and 1989, **Colorado, Hawaii** and **Iowa** started Pre-K programs and **Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire** and **New Jersey** began to appropriate state money for Head Start. In 1990, **Kentucky** launched its Pre-K program within the state's comprehensive education reform act (KERA)

In the last decade of the 20th century, 21 states took action. In 1991, **Arizona, Arkansas, Minnesota**, and **New Mexico** started Pre-K programs and **Wisconsin** began to fund Head Start. In 1992, **Nebraska** began a Pre-K program. In 1993, **Georgia** started its Pre-K program and **North Carolina** launched Smart Start. They were joined by **Delaware** in 1994 and **Virginia** in 1995. In 1996 **New Jersey** re-designed and expanded its Pre-K program and **Alabama** launched a pilot preschool program. In 1997, **Connecticut** and **Rhode Island** started Pre-K programs. In 1998, **Missouri** passed preschool legislation with funding beginning in 1999, **Tennessee** appropriated funding for its Pre-K program first legislated in 1996, and **Kansas** began a Pre-K program and appropriated funds for Head Start. Also in 1998, **Oklahoma** expanded its existing Pre-K program to all 4-year-olds. In 1999, **Nevada** appropriated funds to renovate several school buses to become mobile preschool classrooms. In 2000, **North Carolina** and **Texas** appropriated state funds for Head Start, Alabama failed in an attempt to secure lottery funding to expand its Pre-K program and legislation on preschool was introduced, but did not pass, in Mississippi.

At the beginning of 2001, only 9 states are without any state-funded Pre-K program. These are Idaho, Indiana, Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming. The Governor of Indiana has proposed to budget $50 million for activities including preschool, Head Start and full-day kindergarten.

Motivating Forces

As the history shows, PreK programs got created in waves, driven by different forces over time all related in some way to early learning and school success. In the 1960's and 70's the primary motivation was giving poor kids a Head Start. In the 1980's, education reform was the driving force (Remember A Nation At Risk?) along with research reports of positive results from longitudinal

studies of preschool interventions like the Perry Preschool Project, Abecedarian, and others. In the 1990's states were influenced by the National Education Goals, school readiness concerns generally and, more recently, by advances in neuroscience (e.g., the connection between healthy brain development in young children and capacity to learn).

Current Practices in Pre-K

In one sense there is no typical Pre-K program, given the variation already discussed. Leaving aside the state funds going to Head Start and concentrating on the distinct Pre-K programs, there are some common characteristics.

The typical Pre-K program in the 1980's was targeted to reach "at-risk" or very poor children, who were 4 years old. These programs operated for half-day sessions in a public school. Any standards for these programs were loosely enforced, usually existing as guidelines rather than regulations. Staff qualifications relied on elementary teacher certification, many of which were not ECE-specific.

By contrast, the typical Pre-K program in the 1990's serves 3- and 4-year old children and has a broader target audience than its predecessors. Eligible children are often those with educational disadvantage factors, with poverty or family income only one factor. At present, twelve states use family income and of these only five limit eligibility to families below the federal poverty level. Programs are almost as likely to be operating for the school day as half-day. Fourteen state programs specify school day or more hours, or the hours are variable by setting; 20 require a minimum half-day session.

Modern Pre-K programs can be operated in public schools and community-based early childhood programs like child care centers, nursery schools and Head Start centers. Only 7 states limit operation to public schools only – 6 of these are 'older' programs begun before 1985; the other is Kansas, which began in 1998. Quality control and accountability for results have become higher priority concerns, with some states requiring staff to have specific early childhood education qualifications and programs to meet higher standards (e.g., national accreditation, federal Head Start Performance Standards).

Trends and Issues

The first trend is obvious: **growth** – in states involved, children served and funds appropriated. By now, most states have Pre-K programs, and over time existing state programs are expanding to serve more children. In 1999, seven states were each serving more than 35,000 children. In their Pre-K programs (not counting children in federal Head Start, nursery schools, child care, etc.), these states are serving between 5% and 40% of preschool-aged children.

	Number served 1998-99	Ages of children eligible	% of age cohort served (est.)
New York	38,000	4's	7-9%
California	49,000	4's	5-7%
Illinois	50,000	3's and 4's	8-10%
Florida	37,000	3's and 4's	5-7%
Georgia	61,000	4's	35-40%
Ohio	30,000	4's	8-10%
Texas	124,000	3's and 4's	21-23%

The issue is making sure the capacity is built in the early childhood system to handle this magnitude of growth – availability of qualified staff, facilities, etc..

Funding

The amount of state funding appropriated for all types of Pre-K programs has grown dramatically over time. Before 1970, the best estimate I can make is that total annual investment across the seven states with programs was less than $25 million.[2] By 1988, there were 28 states involved, spending an annual total of $190 million.[3] By 2000, there were 42 states (counting DC) spending close to $2 billion annually. That's a dramatic increase in overall investment – from $190 million to nearly $2 billion in ten years. The issues are making the funding level per child sufficient to pay for a really high quality program that will produce the desired school readiness results and ensuring that the necessary infrastructure also gets funded, such as professional development so teachers can get early childhood degrees and certification.

Public schools AND...

The second trend is the move toward using all the early education resources to offer Pre-K programs – not public schools only, but public schools and child care centers, Head Start and nursery schools. Better use of available resources is efficient. While it was arguably sensible in 1965 to use only public schools, since other settings were not widely available, in the 1990's there are many options. When quality early education is the goal, designing Pre-K programs to use and improve community early care and education resources, supporting them to meet the higher standards associated with the concept of prekindergarten, makes sense. The vast majority of states allow agencies other than public schools to provide their Pre-K programs.

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[2] Marx, Fern and Michelle Seligson. (1988) *Final reports of the Public School Early Childhood Study: The State Survey.* New York: Bank Street College.

[3] Mitchell, Anne, Michelle Seligson and Fern Marx. (1989). *Early childhood programs and the public schools: Between promise and practice.* Westport, CT: Auburn House/Greenwood Press.

The issue is how to forge mutually respectful partnerships among community-based early childhood programs and schools so that schools that can contract for Pre-K do so. New York's legislation is unique in that it requires that at least 10% of the Pre-K funds be in non-public school programs – in fact, more than 50% are. Other states with more than 50% of their Pre-K programs operating in settings other than public schools are Arkansas, Connecticut, Georgia, Iowa, Nebraska, New Mexico and Vermont.[4] Local planning and advisory councils appear to be one effective way to accomplish this – Pre-K programs in Connecticut, New York and Massachusetts offer good examples.

Another part of this issue is quality: we know from recent research that many community-based early childhood programs are not offering a high quality learning experience for children. Schools are understandably concerned about letting organizations that don't have certified teachers or well-planned curricula operate Pre-K programs. This disparity argues for setting higher standards for staff qualifications in state's child care regulations, regulating nursery schools, and improving the basic financing of these programs so that they can meet higher standards.

Moving toward 'universal'

The third trend is the expanding target population of children (both 3- and 4-year olds, with fewer eligibility restrictions) and the growing interest in moving toward 'universal' preschool. At present, the only state that has committed sufficient funds to reach universal access is Georgia whose has been open to all 4 year-olds, without regard to income or any other criteria except age, since 1995. New York's second Pre-K program (1997) is called 'universal Pre-K' and the legislation expresses commitment and a funding formula to move toward universal access by the 2002-3 school year. In 1998, Oklahoma's preschool program, originally for at-risk 4 year-olds, was expanded so all 4-year-olds are eligible.

A different sense of universal characterizes Pre-K in Connecticut and New Jersey, where the state program is focused on access for all children in selected geographic areas (certain cities/towns in Connecticut and specific school districts in New Jersey). New Jersey's program is the result of a state supreme court decision on the adequacy and fiscal equity of public education which ordered preschool to be provided in the lowest wealth school districts to all preschoolers. Connecticut's program was also influenced by an education equity lawsuit.

A California Task Force in 1998 recommended universal preschool for 3's and 4's. Vice President Gore's election campaign agenda included a proposal for universal preschool (although not well-defined). In 2001, the Illinois State Board of Education launched a task force on universal preschool. The issues are defining 'universal' preschool carefully so that existing programs have

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[4] Karen Schulman, Helen Blank and Danielle Ewen. (1999) *Seeds of success: State Prekindergarten Initiatives 1998-99.* Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund.

both the opportunity and the resources to meet the higher standards, that education and other sources of funds are blended so Pre-K provides are not forced to replace one source of funds with another, and that all resources are used wisely.

Working families

A fourth trend is the increasing attention paid to family realities in the design of Pre-K programs. Clearly, a ½ day for the school year doesn't work for the majority of families. States are addressing this by extending part-day to school day, and blending funding through partnerships with programs that already have longer hours. Massachusetts' Pre-K program is aimed at working families with incomes up to state median income and is required to provide full-day, full-year programs. Connecticut's program is required to be full day/full year. Tennessee's Pre-K program is a minimum of 5½ hours per day and required to offer extended day programming to meet child care needs using child care funds. New York's universal Pre-K legislation requires that the needs of working families be taken into consideration in planning local programs.

The issues are how to design programs that work for families in terms of hours and do not move children around to much within a given day (continuity), how to fund the full-day/full year, and whether parents should pay fees– most do for child care, but don't for Pre-K.

Quality

The fifth trend I see is a deepening commitment to quality. This is expressed in program standards, program accreditation requirements, and staff qualifications requiring early childhood credentials. Now, most of the states with Pre-K programs have specific Pre-K standards (although only 16 have the force of regulation, the others are guidelines that are encouraged or recommended). Six states require programs to become nationally accredited; 3 states with distinct Pre-K programs (Delaware, Ohio and Oregon) require that these programs meet Head Start Performance Standards. The vast majority of states require their Pre-K program teachers to have credentials: ranging from a Child Development Associate credential in 9 states to teacher certification – many in ECE – in 29 states. Georgia requires its Pre-K programs to use one of several proven curricula. Using a range of quality control mechanism and accountability measures has become much more central to program designers and seems to be understood and supported by policymakers more now than in the past.

Design Recommendations for Expanding or Creating a State-funded Prekindergarten Program

Based on the wisdom of practice (and a few PreK evaluations), I offer five recommendations to those who would create or refine a prekindergarten program.

1. Commit to universal access – all children are eligible, both 3's and 4's
2. Use all the available resources in the early education delivery (sub)systems – child care, Head Start and public schools.

3. Commit to quality and require it – program standards with the force of regulation that address teacher quality, class size and curricula; early childhood education credentials for staff; program accreditation. Include and fund professional development and other necessary supports in the design of the program.
4. Engage the community in planning – this appears to be the best way to fill gaps, avoid duplication and create a climate for success at the local level (both top-down and bottom-up). New York's PreK Advisory Boards and Connecticut School Readiness Councils offer models.
5. Allocate sufficient funds (per child) to achieve a high-quality program and ensure funds are additive (not replacing child care or Head Start or existing education dollars).

State Investments in Prekindergarten Programs 1999-2000

		Type of program		Annual Budget FY1999 (unless noted)[5]
		State Pre-K Program	*Head Start Supplement*	
1.	**Alabama**[6] *School Readiness(preschool pilot sites)*	X		 $ 690,000
2.	**Alaska** *Alaska Head Start*		X	 $ 5.5 million
3.	**Arizona** *Early Childhood Block Grant (Prekindergarten component)*	X		 $ 10 million
4.	**Arkansas** *Arkansas Better Chance*	X		 $ 10 million
5.	**California** *State Preschool Program*	X		 $ 271 million (FY2001)
6.	**Colorado** *Colorado Preschool Program*	X		 $ 8.9 million
7.	**Connecticut** *Head Start* *School Readiness & Child Care Initiative*	X	X	 $ 5.1 million $ 39 million
8.	**Delaware** *Early Childhood Assistance Program*	X		 $ 3.6 million
9.	**District of Columbia** *Head Start* *Public School Prekindergarten Program*	X	X	 $ 2.6 million $ 14.6 million
10.	**Florida** *Prekindergarten Early Intervention* *Title I Migrant Prekindergarten*	X		 $ 97 million $ 3.3 million
11.	**Georgia** *Prekindergarten for Four-Year-Olds*	X		 $ 217 million
12.	**Hawaii** *Open Doors Preschool* *Head Start*	X	X	 $ 2.7 million $ 387,387
13.	**Illinois** *Early Childhood Block Grant (Prekindergarten component)*	X		 $ 136 million
14.	**Iowa** *Comprehensive Child Development*	X		 $ 7.6 million
15.	**Kansas** *Four-year-Old At-Risk Preschool* *Head Start*	X	X	 $ 3 million $2.5 million
16.	**Kentucky** *Kentucky Preschool Program*	X		 $ 39.7 million
17.	**Louisiana** *Preschool Block Grant*	X		 $ 6.6 million

[5] FY 1999 unless a more recent fiscal year is noted. Derived from *Seeds of Success*, Children's Defense Fund, 1999; *Prekindergarten Programs Funded by the States*, Families and Work Institute, 1998; *Map and Track* 2000 edition; *Financing Child Care in the United States*, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, 2001

[6] The Governor of Alabama has proposed increasing the appropriation to $2.6 million for the next fiscal year.

		Type of program		Annual Budget FY1999 (unless noted)[5]
		State Pre-K Program	*Head Start Supplement*	
18.	**Maine**	X	X	
	Two-Year Kindergarten (4-Year-Olds)			$ 1.3 million
	Head Start			$ 2.3 million
19.	**Maryland**	X	X	
	Head Start			$ 3 million (FY2000)
	Extended Elementary Education			$ 19.3 million
20.	**Massachusetts**	X	X	
	Community Partnerships for Children			$ 94.5 million (FY2000)
	Head Start			$ 6.9 million
21.	**Michigan**	X		
	Michigan School Readiness Program			$ 67.1 million
22.	**Minnesota**	X	X	
	Head Start			$ 18.7 million
	Learning Readiness			$ 10.3 million
23.	**Missouri**	X		
	Early Childhood Development, Education & Care			$ 21 million (FY2000)
24.	**Nebraska**[7]	X		
	Early Childhood Projects			$ 500,000
25.	**Nevada**	X		
	Pre-K Classroom on Wheels (COW buses)			$ 180,000
26.	**New Hampshire**		X	
	Head Start			$ 230,000
27.	**New Jersey**	X	X	
	Early Childhood Program Aid (preschool only)			$ 99 million (FY2000)
	Head Start			$ 1.4 million
28.	**New Mexico**	X	X	
	Child Development Program			$ 1.3 million
	Head Start			$ 5 million
29.	**New York**	X		
	Experimental Prekindergarten			$ 52.2 million
	Universal Prekindergarten			$ 225 million (FY2001)
30.	**North Carolina**	X	X	
	Smart Start			$ 220 million (FY2000)
	Head Start			$ 148,000 (FY2000)
31.	**Ohio**	X	X	
	Public School Preschool			$ 17.7 million
	Ohio Head Start			$ 90.6 million
32.	**Oklahoma**	X	X	
	Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program			$ 36.5 million
	Head Start			$ 3.3 million
33.	**Oregon**	X		
	Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten			$ 16.3 million
34.	**Rhode Island**	X	X	
	Head Start			$ 1.97 million
	Early Childhood Investment Fund (preschool only)			unknown
35.	**South Carolina**	X		
	Early Childhood Program			$ 22.3 million
36.	**Tennessee**[8]	X		
	Early Childhood Education Pilot Program			$ 3.1 million

[7] In January 2001, Nebraska's governor proposed to increase funding to $1 million for FY 2001 and $2 million for FY2002.

		Type of program		Annual Budget FY1999 (unless noted)[5]
		State Pre-K Program	*Head Start Supplement*	
37.	**Texas** *Public School Prekindergarten Program* *Head Start*	X	X	 $ 235 million $ 7.5 million (FY2000)
38.	**Vermont** *Early Education Initiative*	X		 $ 1.32 million
39.	**Virginia** *Virginia Preschool Initiative*	X		 $ 23.5 million
40.	**Washington** *Early Childhood Education & Assistance Program* *Head Start*	X	X	 $ 28.9 million $ 470,000
41.	**West Virginia** *Kindergarten for Four-Year-Olds*	X		 $ 6.2 million
42.	**Wisconsin** *Four-Year-Old Kindergarten* *Head Start*	X	X	 $ 19.8 million $ 4.95 million
	Total all states:	**40**	**19**	**$ 1.98 billion**

To date, 42 states (including DC) invest in prekindergarten either by funding their own program, supplementing the federal Head Start program or both. Forty states fund their own prekindergarten programs, including Oregon, Ohio and Delaware that have a distinct state-funded Pre-K program that follows Head Start Performance Standards. In addition, 19 states add state funds to supplement the federal Head Start program. Only 9 states invest no state funds in either prekindergarten programs or Head Start. These are Idaho, Indiana, Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming. The Governor of Indiana has proposed to spend $50 million in FY2001 for full-day kindergarten, preschool programs and supplementing Head Start.

Revised 7/3/01

[8] Governor Sundquist proposed $42 million in his FY2002 budget to expand the program to serve all educationally at-risk 4-year-olds and described this as a step toward a program for all 4-year-olds and some threes within 5 years.

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Printed Name/Position/Title: Anne Mitchell

Organization/Address: *Early Childhood Policy Research*
1250 Honey Hollow Rd.
Climax, New York 12042

Telephone: 518-966-4585 FAX: 518 966-5503

E-Mail Address: awmitchell@aol.com Date: 7/3/01

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