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SLOWLY BUT SURELY

How Indiana is Building a Pre-K Program

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INTRODUCTION

First, the tiny scientists and engineers: They file into the sunny multipurpose room of the Day Early Learning Lilly Family Center in Indianapolis, ready for an experiment one Tuesday morning. These preschoolers are about to work with students from Ivy Tech Community College, who have come to lead STEM experiments. There are about 20 children in the room, and almost as many college students. One of the many tables is set up with flashlights, scissors, hole punches, different types of paper, and rubber bands so that the Ivy Tech students can investigate light with the children. They test how much light comes out of the flashlight when it is covered with different types of paper.

This non-profit child care center serves a socioeconomically diverse group of children between the ages of six weeks and five years. It is an inviting building with spacious classrooms. The pre-K classroom has a dramatic play area and a science center. The state's early learning standards are posted on the walls for all to see. All of the teachers have experience working with young children. The lead teachers at Day Early Learning hold associate or bachelor's degrees in early childhood education, while teaching assistants have associate degrees or CDA Credentials.

Next, the tiny artists: Across town at St. Mary's Child Center at Ft. Benjamin Harrison, little kids are putting on plastic shower caps and old t-shirts

that reach their feet. These pre-K students enter a classroom that has been covered in plastic from floor to ceiling and begin to channel Jackson Pollock. Using brushes as long as their arms, they fling brightly colored paint through the air.

St. Mary's, a center affiliated with the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, closely follows the Reggio Emilia approach to early learning¹ and gives children plenty of opportunities to express themselves. Walls



Students painting at St. Mary's Child Center in March 2016. Photo: Abbie Lieberman

are lined with art projects and pictures of children completing lessons that they inspired. Classrooms are stocked with natural toys, such as twigs, acorns, and dried leaves. This center serves those from lower-income families; it combines government funding and private donations so that all children are able to attend tuition-free.

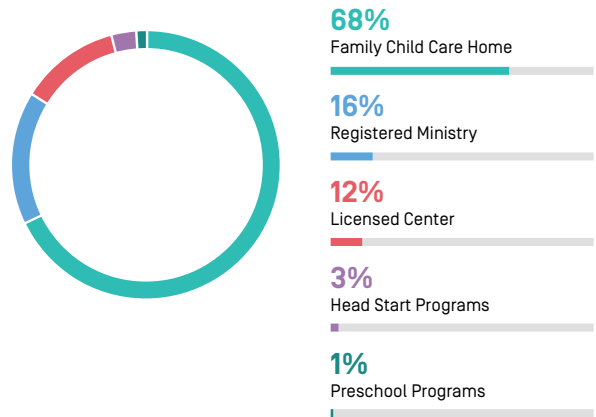
These groups of young scientists and artists are served by programs that are nationally accredited and rated highly according to state quality standards. And they are both part of Indiana’s new public pre-K program.

THE EVOLUTION OF PRE-KINDERGARTEN IN INDIANA

There are half a million children from birth to age five in Indiana. Over half of these youngsters live in low-income families and almost a quarter live in poverty.² Two out of three require care because they live in households where both parents are in the workforce. Four-year-old Hoosiers who are not at home spend their days in a variety of settings. The state relies heavily on a mixed-delivery system and takes pride in providing families with choices for the type of care that best fits their needs. (See **Figure 1.**) However, in some neighborhoods, there are still no licensed child care providers.³ Where there are options, quality is highly variable.⁴

Until recently, Indiana was one of only a handful of states in the nation without a formal state-funded pre-K program despite its large number of low-income children.⁵ About three years ago, state leaders started dipping a toe into pre-K, first with a

Figure 1 | Indiana’s Mixed Delivery System



Source: Indiana Association for Child Care Resource and Referral, December 2015.

targeted pre-K pilot for children from low-income families, known as the Early Education Matching Grant (EEMG) program, and then with a voucher-style pre-K pilot called On My Way Pre-K. While these two programs serve only a small percentage of Indiana’s young children, there is hope that successful implementation will provide momentum for a major expansion of pre-K throughout the state in the near future.

Early Education Matching Grant Program

Recognizing the need for improved access to higher quality early education, in 2013 the Indiana General Assembly enacted legislation to create an Early Learning Advisory Committee as well as

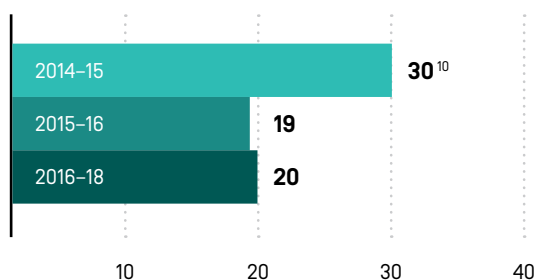
Paths to QUALITY

Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) are monitoring tools that evaluate child care and early education programs using ratings or tiers to designate different levels of quality. In addition to assessing the quality of programs, they are designed to help those programs improve their services. The quality ratings can help parents and policymakers make informed decisions about early education.

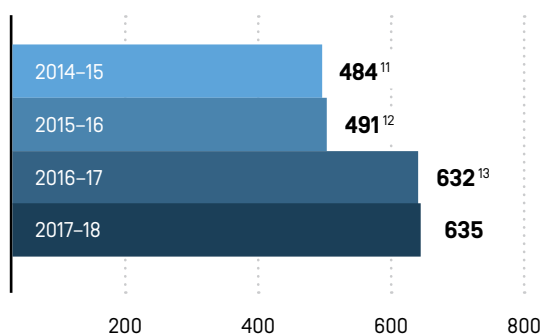
Indiana’s QRIS was piloted from 2000 to 2007 and became operational in 2008.⁹ Participating providers are evaluated and then rated at one of four levels. Each level of Paths to QUALITY builds on the foundation of the previous one, resulting in quality improvements at each stage and in national accreditation at the highest level, Level 4. [See **Figure 3**].

Figure 2 | EEMG Program Growth

Participating Programs



Children Served (per year)



establish the Early Education Matching Grant (EEMG) program.⁶ The committee was charged with conducting an annual statewide needs assessment on the quality and availability of early education programs, including the availability of high-quality pre-K for low-income children. It was also asked to assess the capacity and effectiveness of two- and four-year colleges in Indiana to prepare and support the early education workforce.

The EEMG program, designed with input from the committee, represents Indiana’s first pilot in pre-K education. Under the program, competitive grants are awarded to providers around the state who use the funds to enroll eligible children. Applicants for EEMG are required to have already achieved a Level 3 or 4 in Paths to QUALITY, the state’s voluntary Quality Rating and Improvement

System (QRIS), as described in the “Paths to QUALITY” box. Among other requirements, lead teachers at participating programs must have a minimum of a bachelor’s degree in early childhood education or equivalent as defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children,⁷ and providers must make a dollar for dollar match of state funds to participate.⁸

Figure 2 shows the breakdown of how funds were awarded through the EEMG program over the prior two school years as well as for this school year and

next. These funds allowed children from families at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty level to receive pre-K services in licensed child care centers, registered ministries, Head Start centers, and public schools in both full- and half-day formats.

Early evaluations of EEMG showed that participating children gained in receptive language, concept development, social competence, and other important school readiness skills based on tests administered at the beginning and end of the program year.¹⁴

Figure 3 | Paths to QUALITY Levels

Source: Indiana Family and Social Services Administration.

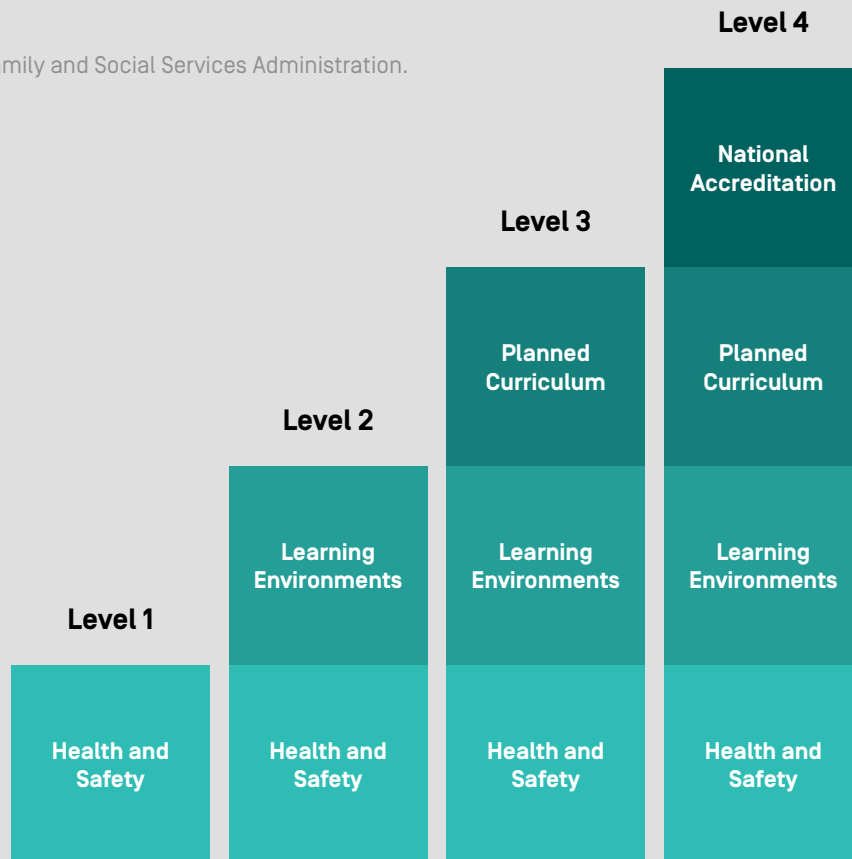
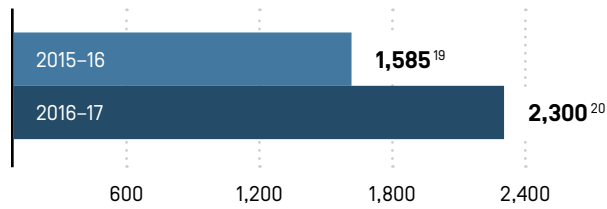


Figure 4 | On My Way Pre-K Program Growth

Children Served (per year)



On My Way Pre-K

To further increase pre-K access for four-year-olds from low-income families, Governor Mike Pence (R) signed legislation in 2014 to create On My Way Pre-K, a voucher-style pilot program for families living in five counties: Allen, Jackson, Lake, Marion, and Vanderburgh (see **Figure 5**). Indiana has one of the most expansive school choice programs in the U.S. for grades K–12, and it is unsurprising that state leaders would create a similar model for pre-K.¹⁵

The five counties, which intentionally included a mix of urban and rural areas, were chosen based on child poverty level and readiness to implement the program.¹⁶ On My Way Pre-K was funded at \$10 million per year with dollars reallocated from the Family and Social Services Administration’s existing budget, combined with 10 percent matching funds from each county. The 10 percent matching amount, much lower than the dollar for dollar match required by the EEMG program, made it financially feasible for additional programs to participate.¹⁷ The legislation also included \$1 million for a longitudinal study to track student outcomes through the third grade.¹⁸

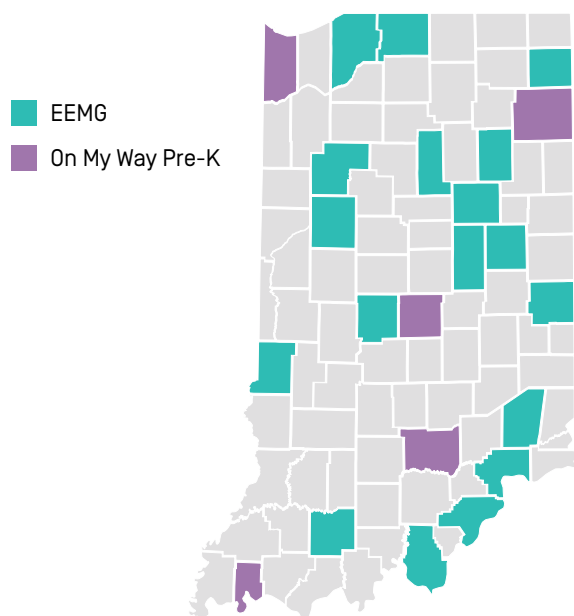
Figure 4 shows how many children the On My Way Pre-K program serves.

As with EEMG, families can use the On My Way Pre-K funds for licensed centers, registered ministries, Head Start centers, and public school programs in both full- and half-day formats as long as those providers have achieved a Level 3 or 4 in Paths to QUALITY.²¹

Table 1 | Eligibility, Mechanisms, and Amount

	On My Way Pre-K	EEMG
Who is eligible?	127% of Federal Poverty Level [\$30,861 for family of four] ²²	100% of Federal Poverty Level [\$24,300 for family of four]
Where does funding go?	To families; families choose eligible provider	Directly to providers
How much?	From \$2,500 to \$6,800 per child depending on program and hours of care selected by the family ²³	Up to \$3,400 per eligible child for full-time pre-K and \$2,400 for part-time pre-K ²⁴

Figure 5 | Counties Participating in Public Pre-K



On My Way Pre-K differs from EEMG in a few significant ways, including eligibility, funding mechanisms and amount, as outlined in **Table 1**.

Governor Pence had the opportunity in late 2014 to further expand access to pre-K for children in low-income families by applying for the federal Preschool Development Grants program. But in a move that surprised legislators and early childhood advocates, he declined, at the last minute, to submit the application. The Democratic leader in the Indiana Senate, Tim Lanane, said in a statement that, “the idea that we would, at this point, abruptly throw this opportunity away is hard to fathom.”²⁵ In defending his decision not to submit the grant application, Pence noted that the state had just recently enacted legislation to launch the five-county On My Way pilot and he decided “not to seek federal funding that would have required us to expand our pre-K pilot before it is even up and running.” Pence stated that he did not believe it was wise policy to expand the pilot before the state had a chance to study and learn from the program.²⁶

This state investment in pre-K is a positive step, but with such limited funding its impact on the state might be limited. Indianapolis, on the other hand, might have something more to show.

Indianapolis’s Twist on On My Way Pre-K: Indy PSP

In 2014, Indiana’s state capital (and largest city) was experiencing a surge in crime. That year Indianapolis earned an unwanted spot on the top ten list for cities with the highest murder rates.²⁷ Mayor Greg Ballard, who served from 2008 to 2016, called for greater local investment in pre-K as part of a long-term strategy for crime prevention.²⁸ High-quality pre-K programs have been shown to reduce children’s behavioral problems and decrease their chance of committing crime in the future.²⁹ The state dollars for the On My Way Pre-K pilot were predicted to fund only about 700 scholarships in Marion County, home to Indianapolis. There are over 27,000 three- and four-year-olds in Marion County. One in three children in the area live in poverty.³⁰ On its own, the On My Way Pre-K pilot would only serve a sliver of the children in need. With the backing of the local business community, the Indianapolis City-County Council agreed to fund its own pre-K program to build on the state’s efforts.

This state investment in pre-K is a positive step, but with such minimal funding its impact might be limited.

Indianapolis leaders believed an investment in pre-K could create a stronger workforce pipeline in the metropolitan area.³¹ Eli Lilly and Company, the Fortune 500 international pharmaceutical company headquartered there, gave \$2 million and pledged to raise an additional \$8 million for pre-K scholarships from the business community.³² The United Way of Central Indiana pledged to raise another \$10 million and the city devoted \$20 million more.³³ Added to its portion of the \$10 million coming from the state

through On My Way Pre-K, this came to a total of almost \$50 million over five years to support pre-K scholarships in the Indianapolis area.³⁴ (As a point of comparison, the state On My Way program is funded at a total of \$50 million over five years for all of its pilot sites.)

The resulting Indy Preschool Scholarship Program, or Indy PSP, set out to double the number of scholarships in the state's Marion County pilot. While the program still only serves a fraction of the area's eligible children, it is now the most developed public pre-K program in Indiana.

Indy PSP differs in some ways from the state's On My Way Pre-K. First, it serves both three- and four-year-olds. Local legislation mandates that 25 percent of scholarship recipients be three-year-olds.³⁵ Research shows that children benefit more from two consecutive years of pre-K than one.³⁶ Second, parents receiving scholarships must agree to send their children to kindergarten, which is not mandatory in Indiana. It would be very difficult for children to sustain the gains they made in pre-K if they did not attend kindergarten the following year. Families earning up to 185 percent of the federal poverty line (\$44,955 for a family of four) can apply for Indy PSP scholarships; however, the scholarships must be prioritized for families at the On My Way Pre-K threshold of up to 127 percent. So far, Indianapolis's program has not been able to meet the needs of all children up to the 127 percent threshold, so access has not expanded to include children from higher-income families.

The state's On My Way Pre-K and the city's Indy PSP interact almost seamlessly. The United Way of Central Indiana, which administers the Indy PSP program, helped create a common application for the two programs so that parents do not need to fill out multiple forms. Parents receive the same scholarship amount, whether the money is coming from the state or the city-county government. Programs do not differentiate between those who have a scholarship from On My Way Pre-K or Indy PSP in how they serve children.

However, even with the additional funding from the local government and private and philanthropic centers, thousands of children from low-income families still do not have access to affordable, high-quality pre-K in Indianapolis. More than 4,200 children applied for scholarships for the 2016–17 school year and only about 1,600 scholarships were expected to be available.³⁷

Existing funding for Indy PSP is only intended to last until 2020.³⁸ Leaders, including Eli Lilly and Company and United Way of Central Indiana, have made clear that these corporate and philanthropic donations for the pilot program are only temporary.³⁹ Andrew Cullen, former Vice President of Public Policy for United Way of Central Indiana, told us, “there's a strong feeling in the community that funding pre-K is the state's responsibility.”⁴⁰

THE SCHOLARSHIP MODEL FOR PRE-K: PARALLELS WITH MINNESOTA

Funding public pre-K through a voucher-type system is uncommon; Minnesota is the only other state that uses a similar scholarship model. Minnesota's Early Learning Scholarship program has been expanding for the last few years and is available statewide.⁴¹ Since Minnesota is a few years ahead of Indiana, Hoosiers should consider looking to the North Star State for guidance.

There are both benefits and drawbacks to financing early education through this type of mechanism. The primary benefit is that the scholarships allow for substantial school choice for parents. A significant percentage of children in both Indiana and Minnesota attend pre-K in center-based or home-based programs that are not associated with school districts.⁴² Instead of rapidly expanding school-based pre-K, both states have been focused on improving the quality of all types of programs, aiming for a true mixed-delivery system. Minnesota and Indiana have large populations of children living in rural areas. In Minnesota, many children in rural communities cannot easily access center-based programs so it is crucial that home-based providers are part of the scholarship system.⁴³ In contrast, public school-based pre-K is often the only option for many rural Hoosiers.⁴⁴

Socioeconomic integration is another potential benefit to allowing families to choose where they

send their children. Scholarships allow recipients to access programs they would not otherwise be able to afford. The achievement gap is present long before children enter the pre-K classroom and some research suggests that racial and socioeconomic diversity in early learning programs can lead to better outcomes for children from low-income families.⁴⁵ Program integration varies in Indianapolis, largely based on neighborhood. The Day Early Learning Lilly Family Center (site of the flashlight experiments mentioned earlier) serves racially diverse children from a wide range of income levels. About half of the children at the center receive assistance through the scholarship program, the federal Child Care Development Fund, or Day Early Learning's own Tuition Assistance Program. The other half of the families pay full tuition.⁴⁶ However, integration is not guaranteed. At Day Early Learning Center at Eastern Star Church, a new center located in a more impoverished part of town, 89 of the 91 children receive assistance, mostly in the form of scholarships.

Unfortunately, both Minnesota and Indiana are serving only a small percentage of eligible children with the scholarship model. Even though Minnesota's program is available statewide, it only serves about 17 percent of children from low-income families.⁴⁷ With Indiana's On My Way Pre-K and

Indy PSP just starting out, less than four percent of four-year-olds in the state are enrolled in publicly funded pre-K.⁴⁸ Using the lottery system, both states turned away thousands of applicants this school year who may not otherwise have access to pre-K. Without a stable source of funding, the number of scholarships available to children is likely to fluctuate from year to year. The scholarship model may be more susceptible to funding cuts because it is not funded through the state school funding formula in either state. State leaders have expressed a desire to grow the programs but it is unclear where the funding for more scholarships will come from.

Funding public pre-K through a voucher-type system is uncommon; Minnesota is the only other state that uses a similar scholarship model. Since Minnesota is a few years ahead of Indiana, Hoosiers should consider looking to the North Star State for guidance.

For those families fortunate enough to receive scholarships, the maximum scholarship amount in both states often does not cover the cost of full-day programs. In Minnesota, where the maximum scholarship amount was recently increased to \$7,500, families who select more expensive programs cover the remainder of the cost.⁴⁹ In Indiana, the burden instead falls on the program. The maximum scholarship amount in Indiana is \$6,800 for a full day (which is defined as 1,190 hours per year or roughly 30 hours per week for 40 weeks), and programs accepting scholarships agree to accept that amount of compensation and not charge families additional fees.⁵⁰ Some advocates say this model is not sustainable. At Day Early Learning Lilly Family Center in Indianapolis, which accepts a handful of students with scholarships, the cost for a full year is approximately \$10,000.⁵¹ Since this is well above the scholarship amount,

the center subsidized the additional cost of children receiving scholarships this year. The state does allow providers to charge families for care that extends beyond 1,190 hours. Many programs offer extended care and run through the summer months, so families are often asked to pay for hours that go beyond the traditional school day and year.

Both Indiana and Minnesota only allow the scholarships to be used for programs rated by the state's QRIS. Because the scholarships dictate where children can attend pre-K, the effectiveness of the scholarship programs largely depends on the validity of the QRIS. Up until last summer in Minnesota, any program rated by Parent Aware,

Why Are Observational Tools Important For Measuring Quality in Early Learning?

High-quality interactions between adults and children are an essential component of early learning. Supportive relationships between early childhood educators and their students foster both academic and social-emotional development. Unfortunately, many teachers and caregivers do not know how to engage in these types of interactions with children. Classroom observations allow evaluators, both internal and external, to see what kinds of interactions occur. While measures such as class size, adult-child ratios, and curriculum use can help determine program quality, it is how the teacher interacts with the children that matters most. Observational tools like CLASS can measure the quality of interactions and the results can be used to inform professional development and teacher practice.

the state's QRIS, could receive an Early Learning Scholarship, but only the highest rated programs (those with four stars) were able to receive the full scholarship amount. Effective July 2016, Minnesota programs must have and maintain a three- or four-star rating to continue to receive scholarship students.⁵² In Indiana, programs also must have a Level 3 or 4 rating to receive scholarship students.

While it might seem like Minnesota's policy is now more in line with Indiana's since scholarships are given to programs rated in the two highest tiers in both states, this is not necessarily the case. Because of differences in their QRISs, a three-star program in Minnesota might look different than a Level 3 program in Indiana. In Indiana, any licensed program wishing to join Paths to QUALITY immediately receives a Level 1 rating. In Minnesota, even a one-star rating is an indication that the program has gone above and beyond licensing requirements.⁵³ Center-based programs aiming to earn three or four stars in Minnesota are evaluated using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) tool, which measures the quality of teacher-

child interactions. These interactions are crucial to early learning and can reveal program quality. Three- and four-star rated providers in Minnesota also must use a curriculum aligned to the state's early learning standards and provide educator training on how to implement curricula and approved assessments.⁵⁴

Paths to QUALITY does not require Indiana programs to be rated on CLASS or any other observation tool that deeply measures adult-child interactions. To earn a Level 3 rating, Indiana programs simply need to use a curriculum, but there is no guidance around which one they choose. Assessment is not addressed in Paths to QUALITY, but children receiving scholarships must participate in a pilot kindergarten readiness assessment.⁵⁵ Programs participating in Paths to QUALITY do receive free assistance to enhance quality through professional development opportunities, such as one-on-one coaching. Neither Paths to QUALITY nor Parent Aware requires teachers in publicly funded programs to have a bachelor's degree, but both tie rating levels to educator professional development.⁵⁶

CHALLENGES TO PRE-K ROLLOUT AND EXPANSION

Indiana's pre-K program is still in its earliest stages of development and expansion, and growing pains are expected. Leaders are thinking strategically about how the program can be improved to best meet the needs of the community and prepare young children for kindergarten. In interviews with advocates, policymakers, teachers, and school leaders, two primary challenges emerged.

1. The QRIS Needs Strengthening

Since Indiana's pre-K is strongly tied to the state's QRIS, it is essential that a high Paths to QUALITY rating is actually associated with a quality program that supports learning and development. An initial study of Paths to QUALITY by Purdue University in 2011 found that the tool does effectively differentiate quality: programs with a Level 4 rating are higher quality than programs with a lower level rating. Yet, there is significant variation in quality *within* each level. Researchers used the Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS) and the University of North Carolina Environment Rating Scales (ERS) to measure program quality. They also found that the quality of teacher-child interactions was positively related to rating levels, although the relationship was small.⁵⁷ However, they did not find strong, consistent associations

between rating level and child development outcomes.⁵⁸ In general, across the country, there is limited research available on whether QRIS ratings effectively predict child outcomes.⁵⁹

Paths to QUALITY includes standards that are less stringent than those in some other states. Certain dimensions are missing from the tool that would allow it to better identify quality programs, such as the use of an observation tool like CLASS. The 2011 validation study recommended that "future revisions of Paths to QUALITY standards and training/technical assistance goals consider greater emphasis on personal care/health, early childhood curriculum, and teaching quality."⁶⁰

Indiana's QRIS also places almost no emphasis on teacher education requirements or credentials; only 50 percent of staff need to have a minimum of a CDA Credential for a Level 3 rating. In efforts to improve the quality of teaching in early education programs, there is a national trend towards requiring all lead teachers to have bachelor's degrees in early childhood education or a related field. Head Start already requires this for a portion of its pre-K teachers and the seminal *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8* report released last year by the National Research Council and the National Academy of Medicine

recommends that all programs begin transitioning towards requiring bachelor's degrees and specialization in early childhood education for lead teachers of young children.⁶¹ Other states, such as Massachusetts, already require bachelor's degrees as part of their QRIS. Center-based programs in Massachusetts must have at least one educator in every classroom with a bachelor's degree or higher and specialization in early childhood education or a related field to earn a level four rating.⁶²

Early Learning Indiana, a provider of and advocate for high-quality early education in Indiana, is working on improving Paths to QUALITY. The organization is interested in strengthening standards around teacher-child interactions, social-emotional skills development, and program implementation. President and CEO Ted Maple told us that he is concerned that the rating system “does not fully align with the research around what constitutes high quality early childhood education,” such as the lack of strong requirements around teacher quality.

2. The Early Education Workforce Needs More Support

An important component of a strong early education system is a stable, well-qualified workforce. Because of this, the Early Learning Advisory Committee's Workforce and Professional Development Workgroup spent much of 2015 seeking to understand Indiana's child care workforce supply and estimate future demand. The report found that 25,227 people were employed throughout the state in licensed programs serving children from birth to age five and that approximately 27 percent of this workforce possesses a bachelor's degree.⁶³

The low wages paid to the early education workforce can make it difficult to retain high-quality teachers. The median wage for child care workers in Indiana in 2015 was \$9.36 an hour.⁶⁴ For comparison, the median hourly wage for an animal trainer in Indiana in 2015 was \$9.51. Pre-K teachers,⁶⁵ which the Bureau of Labor Statistics categorizes separately from child care workers,

made \$11.79 per hour, or an annual median wage of \$27,910, compared to \$49,870 for elementary school teachers.⁶⁶ This low pay is partly to blame for a turnover rate among early education teachers of 33 percent in 2014.⁶⁷ Maple pointed to staffing as being an even bigger challenge than funding when it comes to expanding access. He said, “if you can pay a teacher \$50,000, that teacher is staying” in a pre-K setting.⁶⁸ Factoring in the turnover rate as well as the expected growth of public pre-K programs, the Early Learning Advisory Committee projects a teacher shortfall of 8,043 by 2022.⁶⁹

An important component of a strong early education system is a stable, well-qualified workforce. Because of this, the Early Learning Advisory Committee's Workforce and Professional Development Workgroup spent much of 2015 seeking to understand Indiana's child care workforce supply and to estimate future demand.

Indiana is taking steps to increase the supply of high-quality early education teachers in the state, however. Since 1999, the Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children, with funding from the Family and Social Services Administration, has offered educators the option to pursue further education through the T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) Early Childhood INDIANA scholarship program. This program offers scholarships to eligible early childhood educators pursuing a Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential, associate degree, or bachelor's degree in early childhood education or child development.⁷⁰ The scholarships cover the majority of tuition and book costs, include a travel stipend, and provide a bonus for successful program completion.⁷¹ Maple said that Early Learning Indiana is hoping that all lead teachers working in its centers have bachelor's

degrees by 2020. In 2014, 74 percent of licensed child care center and ministry directors reported that at least one staff member had received a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship. The median hourly wages of teachers who have received a scholarship are higher than those who have not participated in the program.⁷²

Despite these efforts to increase the education and compensation levels of the state's early childhood workforce, the lack of pay parity in most districts between early education teachers and teachers that are part of the formal K–12 system is a large barrier to retaining high-quality pre-K teachers. Many teachers with bachelor's degrees leave early education to work in a K–12 school district due to the significant difference in compensation levels.

In order to maintain its mixed-delivery system with qualified educators, Indiana will need to continue to provide scholarships to defray the costs for teachers who choose to pursue additional education. Additionally, the state will need to increase its financial investment in early education so that non-school providers are able to pay their teachers a wage comparable to those received by teachers that are part of the formal K–12 system. One way of accomplishing this would be through adding pre-K to the state's school funding formula. This would not only recognize the educational value of pre-K, but would also make pre-K programs less susceptible to elimination, as well as allow funding to increase as enrollment grows.⁷⁶

The Example Set by Wayne Township Preschool

Some school districts in Indiana have been able to increase retention of pre-K teachers by achieving pay parity between pre-K and K–12 teachers. In the Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township, for instance, the district ensures that pre-K teachers are on the same pay schedule as K–12 educators, making a first-year salary of \$41,934.⁷³ As a result, Wayne Township Preschool, the district's centralized pre-K center which serves 360 children ages three to five, is able to retain the vast majority of its pre-K workforce.⁷⁴ Wayne Township Preschool is accredited by National Association for the Education of Young Children and is therefore a Paths to QUALITY Level 4 program. All of the school's lead pre-K teachers possess the minimum of a bachelor's degree. The school is open from 6:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. in order to accommodate the work schedules of parents in the community. Fifty-four percent of the students do not pay any tuition other than child care before and after regular school hours as needed. Of the 360 children served by Wayne Township Preschool, 86 children attend thanks to the On My Way Pre-K program and 52 percent receive special education services. In order to serve those with special needs, the school provides four on-site speech language pathologists, two occupational therapists, and a physical therapist. The school also employs a social worker as well as a school psychologist who performs over 200 student evaluations each school year. The school is able to supplement its own teaching corps with students gaining field experience through partnerships with Marian University, Butler University, and Purdue University. In order to encourage parent engagement, the school hosts a monthly parent night in which teachers present different ways to work with children at home. Each April, a kindergarten readiness night is held for parents, attended by representatives from all 11 elementary schools that Wayne Township students will eventually attend. The school's social worker calls all the parents of On My Way Pre-K participants to encourage attendance at the meeting.⁷⁵

WHAT'S NEXT FOR INDIANA PRE-K?

On My Way Pre-K is only funded through the 2017–18 school year. Policymakers in Indiana have important decisions to make about the future of the program. Through the implementation of On My Way Pre-K, Early Education Matching Grants, and the Indy Preschool Scholarship Program, Indiana has made early education available to about 2,800 low-income children in the past year.⁷⁷ The majority of Hoosier children are not in known programs, meaning they are receiving care in informal settings such as from a family member, friend, or neighbor. Among those who are in known programs, a minority receive high-quality services.⁷⁸ During the 2014–15 school year alone, the state spent \$22 million on kindergarten remediation for 3,921 students who were behind in math and literacy skills.⁷⁹

Governor Pence made clear when he turned down the opportunity for federal pre-K funding that the next steps concerning potential expansion would be largely determined by the results of the longitudinal study of the On My Way Pre-K program.⁸⁰ The study, conducted by Purdue University and spanning six and half years, will examine the progress on both academic and social-emotional measures made by children in the On My Way Pre-K program compared to children not enrolled in the program. Preliminary results of the study were expected this past summer, but there is not currently a timeline for public release of the data.⁸¹

Governor Pence surprised many in June when he expressed support for expanding the state's pilot program with the help of the federal Preschool Development Grants program.⁸² In a letter to Sylvia Burwell, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Pence stated that the grant program could be a good fit for the state “now that ‘On My Way Pre-K’ has had the opportunity to build the necessary foundation to support future program expansion.”⁸³ While the newly codified federal education law includes a somewhat watered-down version of the 2014 Preschool Development Grants, this decision to seek federal funding before the completion of the longitudinal study may have been influenced by a competitive gubernatorial race in November.⁸⁴ Democratic rival John Gregg was pushing for universal pre-K. Along with Superintendent of Public Instruction Glenda Ritz, Gregg outlined a plan to fund universal pre-K for all four-year-olds in the state with funding of \$150 million per year (see box on page 16).⁸⁵

Regardless of the outcome of the gubernatorial race, early childhood advocacy groups are planning a push for increased pre-K funding during the 2017 legislative session.⁸⁷ Study results showing significant academic gains for children enrolled in On My Way Pre-K would certainly add momentum to the lobbying effort that is already being planned with help from the state's business community and national advocacy groups such as

Highlights of Glenda Ritz and John Gregg's Plan: Hoosier Community Pre-K

- All four-year-olds would be eligible for pre-K; by 2020 the state would provide funding to support 50 percent participation among the state's four-year-olds
- Eligible providers must meet Level 3 or 4 in Paths to QUALITY
- Eligible providers must offer full-day pre-K for at least 180 days per year
- Eligible providers must employ lead teachers with bachelor's degrees and specialized training in early childhood education and assistant pre-K teachers with CDAs
- Eligible providers must make pay parity between pre-K teachers and K-12 teachers "an important consideration"
- Multiple state agencies would coordinate efforts to expand pre-K infrastructure, which includes developing a planned curriculum
- The program is estimated to cost \$144.6 million in the first year and \$172.3 million in the second year
- The program would be paid for without opening any new revenue streams by using existing resources, redirecting budget allocations, using federal dollars, and reprioritizing budget appropriations

From a working document released in June by the Indiana Department of Education.⁸⁶

the Ounce of Prevention Fund.⁸⁸ Andrew Cullen, formerly of the United Way of Central Indiana, said, "we've learned a lot from the pilot. That's what the pilot was there for, so it's time now to talk significantly about an expansion."⁸⁹ Judy Reidt-Parker, Senior Manager of the Ounce of Prevention Fund National Policy Team, who has been working with advocates in the state, described the Indiana early childhood education advocacy community as "incredibly skilled and very focused on the 2017 legislative session."⁹⁰

Specific goals of the 2017 lobbying campaign are still being formulated but could include asking for between \$80 and \$100 million in additional state funding in order to expand the pre-K pilot beyond the initial five counties, enabling it to reach into all counties in the state.⁹¹ In August, a group of companies and community organizations announced the launch of the "All IN 4 Pre-K" campaign in order to make the case for increased funding during the 2017 session.⁹² Advocates, led by Early Learning Indiana, also released a roadmap for pre-K expansion. It outlines key principles and recommendations to guide expansion, including a renewed commitment to a mixed-delivery model, expanding family income eligibility to 200 percent of the poverty line, and eliminating burdensome match requirements for pre-K programs and communities.⁹³

While the future of early education in Indiana remains unclear, there are several reasons for optimism. In the past five years, the state has nearly doubled the number of highly rated early education programs available, as measured by Paths to QUALITY.⁹⁴ While it is one of the last states in the nation to establish a state-funded pre-K program, Cullen pointed out that "one advantage of this delay is that we can learn lessons from other states."⁹⁵ And while state investment in early education is currently limited, the amount of political support and private investment lining up to push for increased state funding prompted Lori Connors-Tadros of the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes to deem Indiana "an untold hero" in fighting for high-quality early education.⁹⁶

In order for Indiana to best serve its future scientists and artists, it should pay attention to eight key considerations as it builds up its pre-K programs:

1. If Indiana stays with a scholarship model for funding pre-K, it should raise the scholarship amount to meet the full cost of early education.

According to state estimates, the average cost of high quality pre-K is approximately \$8,400 per child. The maximum scholarship, however, is set at \$6,800.⁹⁷ To Indiana's credit, it does not allow pre-K programs to pass the remaining cost to families, but it is not reasonable to expect centers to take a loss to offer pre-K. This compromises the quality of pre-K and options for families. Many programs have been able to combine funding streams from other sources to cover the full cost of care, but this is a burden. For instance, many children receiving scholarships also receive subsidies through the federal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF). However, the waitlist for CCDF in Indiana has more than 10,000 children on it. For children without CCDF, participating child care centers that are already struggling financially must cover the additional cost of care themselves.

2. Broaden family eligibility criteria by increasing state investment during the 2017 legislative session.

Increased state funding would make it possible to expand the eligibility criteria to at least 200 percent of the federal poverty level. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services defines affordable child care as no more than 10 percent of a family's income, and a family earning 200 percent of the federal poverty level would still need to spend well over this amount on high-quality care, according to state estimates. Currently, Indiana's various pre-K programs each use a different poverty threshold, ranging from 100 percent to 185 percent of the federal poverty level. Creating a common eligibility floor across programs would make it easier for families and providers to navigate the options. Additional state funding would also enable all counties to participate in state programs.

3. Fund pre-K through the state school funding formula.

Sixteen states and the District of Columbia currently include pre-K in some way in their school funding formulas. Including early education in the state school funding formula can be one of the most effective strategies available for more secure and sustainable funding. As of 2013, the majority of Indiana districts spent around \$10,000 per pupil for elementary and secondary education—far exceeding the pre-K scholarship amount.⁹⁸ State formulas are likely to be more generous and stable than sources such as state lotteries or taxes on tobacco or other goods. Including pre-K in the state's school funding formula sends the message that pre-K is an essential part of formal education. Additional dollars could also enable participating pre-K programs to compensate teachers equivalently to their peers in the early grades with similar qualifications. This does not mean that pre-K must be offered only in public school settings. Other states, such as New Jersey, have been able to include pre-K in their funding formulas and still maintain a mixed-delivery system.

4. Reform Paths to QUALITY to improve program quality by including a teacher observation tool, providing guidance around curricula use, and tying ratings to higher teacher qualifications.

Observational tools can measure the quality of teacher-child interactions and the results can help teachers ensure that warm, high-quality interactions are taking place on a daily basis. Since the quality of curricula varies greatly, the state should provide specific guidance to ensure that only evidence-based curricula are used. Paths to QUALITY should also strengthen requirements around teacher qualifications.

5. Require districts to offer full-day kindergarten and make kindergarten compulsory in order to build upon student gains made in pre-K.

While school districts offering full-day kindergarten are banned by statute from charging tuition, Indiana statute does

not require school districts to offer full-day kindergarten. Currently, the compulsory school age in Indiana is age 7, making Indiana one of only 16 states nationally to set the compulsory school age above age 6. Attention to kindergarten, not only requiring a full-day program, but also ensuring that time is used to offer an appropriate mix of instruction and inquiry, will go a long way in helping sustain gains made in pre-K and giving children more opportunities to build the developmental and academic skills needed for later success. A full-day program enables students to have sufficient time to engage in developmentally appropriate activities, including a mix of inquiry-led instruction and child-centered play.

6. Support seamless transitions from pre-K to kindergarten and the early grades of elementary school. Transitions between pre-K programs and kindergarten can be rocky, especially when pre-K programs are not part of the elementary school system. One way to smooth transitions is to provide professional learning opportunities for elementary school principals around PreK–3rd grade alignment. As Indiana’s pre-K expands, state policymakers should look to Minnesota as an example for how to ramp up principals’ knowledge and understanding of how to support pre-K, whether it is housed in the elementary school building or not. The Minnesota Department of Education has been working closely with the Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association to teach principals how to build strong PreK–3rd grade programs in their schools and communities. The new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) encourages states to use dollars for this purpose.

7. Increase investments aimed at enabling teachers to earn further credentials, such as a bachelor’s degree and specialization in early childhood education as recommended by the National Academy of Medicine, in order to build a stable, well-educated early education workforce. A bachelor’s degree is now a requirement for lead teachers of publicly funded pre-K programs in 26 states. Sixty-seven percent of Head Start lead teachers currently possess a BA. Increasing the number of early educators with bachelor’s degrees will require building the capacity of two- and four-year colleges and universities to serve the current and future early educator workforce. Because the cost of obtaining additional credentials will be burdensome for much of this workforce, the state should consider increased investment in incentives for obtaining a degree, such as TEACH scholarships and salary bonuses.

8. Focus on implementation and continuous improvement. This is a crucial aspect of any high-quality pre-K program. The program must be implemented with fidelity and data must be used to foster a culture of improvement. This can be achieved through implementation of a cycle of observation, coaching, and reflection for teachers combined with ongoing professional development concerning topics such as child development and appropriate classroom management techniques.

Notes

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