

Enrollment rates of children in universal prekindergarten programs in Vermont in 2016/17

Vermont passed universal prekindergarten (preK) legislation in 2014 (Act 166) in an effort to increase access to high-quality preK programs for all young children in the state. Act 166 provides state-funded preK to all 3- and 4-year-olds (and to 5-year-olds who are not eligible for kindergarten). Families can enroll their children at no cost in any prequalified preK program across the state regardless of location. The Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast & Islands partnered with the Vermont Agency of Education and the Agency of Human Services to examine the characteristics of children enrolled in universal preK programs in 2016/17, which was the first year of full implementation.

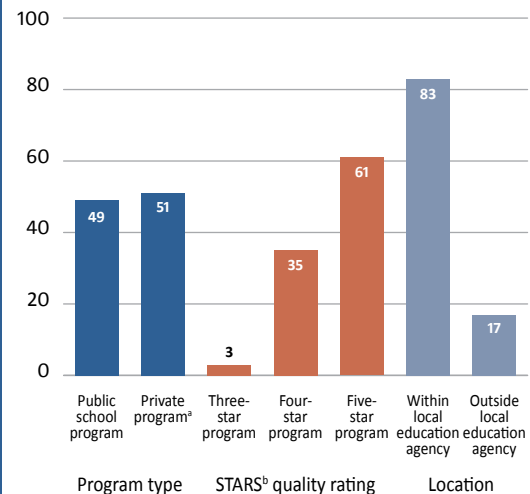
Key findings

In the first year of full implementation of universal preK in Vermont (2016/17), children were enrolled in public school programs (49 percent) and private programs (51 percent) at similar rates. This result confirms that families were enrolling their children in both types of programs, which aligns with the mixed-delivery design in the legislation.

PreK children with an individualized education program and children eligible for the national school lunch program were more likely than their counterparts to be enrolled in a public school program and in a program with a higher quality rating. Vermont's universal preK legislation provides children who have an individualized education program and children eligible for the national school lunch program access to higher quality educational environments, as measured by the STep Ahead Recognition System (STARS), the state's quality rating and improvement system.

PreK children with fewer prequalified programs within the boundaries of their local education agency were more likely to be enrolled in a public school program and in a program outside their local education agency. Families may be enrolling their children in preK programs that are farther from their home in situations where they do not have as many choices within the boundaries of their local education agency. In future efforts to examine how changes to Act 166 may affect families' access to preK, Vermont could conduct additional research on how families make decisions about enrolling their children in different types of preK programs.

Percentage of children in Vermont enrolled in preK programs, by program type, quality rating, and location, 2016/17



a. Includes private childcare centers and family childcare homes.

b. STARS (STep Ahead Recognition System) is the state's quality rating and improvement system.

Note: $n = 5,622$.

Source: Authors' analysis of Vermont Agency of Education data for 2016/17.