

A Center Piece of the PreK Puzzle:

Providing State
Prekindergarten
in Child Care
Centers



The National Women's Law Center is a nonprofit organization that has been working since 1972 to advance and protect women's legal rights. The Center focuses on major policy areas of importance to women and their families, including education, employment, health, and family economic security. Karen Schulman is Senior Policy Analyst and Helen Blank is Director of Leadership and Public Policy at the National Women's Law Center.

A Center Piece of the PreK Puzzle:

Providing State
Prekindergarten
in Child Care
Centers



Karen Schulman
Helen Blank

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the child care center directors who shared their experiences and insights for this report. They also thank NWLC Co-President Nancy Duff Campbell, NWLC Vice President for Economic Security Joan Entmacher, Libby Doggett and the staff of Pre-K Now, Eric Karolak, Danielle Ewen, Adele Robinson, and Nancy Kolben for their comments on the draft of this report, and NWLC interns Jenny Patten and Lauren Kernan and NWLC program assistant Rose O'Malley for their assistance with the interviews.

The National Women's Law Center thanks the principal funders of this report, Pre-K Now, the Early Care and Education Consortium, and the Joyce Foundation, as well the other supporters of its child care and early education work, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Beatrice R. and Joseph A. Coleman Foundation, Ford Foundation, George Gund Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, McKnight Foundation, Moriah Fund, Ms. Foundation for Women, William Penn Foundation, and an anonymous donor.

The findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the National Women's Law Center and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its funders.



Introduction	5
Benefits of Allowing Child Care Centers to Operate State Prekindergarten Programs	5
Methodology	6
Key Issues	9
Financing	9
Qualifications and Compensation for Teachers, Directors, and Other Staff	16
Relationship with School Districts	20
Curriculum, Assessment, and Other Programming Issues	25
Community Planning and Collaboration	28
Centerwide Impacts of Providing Prekindergarten	30
Strategies to Support Child Care Centers as a Piece of the PreK Puzzle	35
Conclusion	37
Endnotes	38



As state-funded prekindergarten investments continue to grow across the country,¹ it is more important than ever that policy makers take advantage of existing child care and other early childhood settings to offer families—especially families with parents in the workforce—options that can meet their diverse needs. Currently, the large majority of state prekindergarten programs are offered in public school settings. However, most states allow prekindergarten to be offered in settings outside public schools, including child care centers and Head Start programs.² One-third of children enrolled in state prekindergarten programs are served in settings other than public schools.³

To explore the most effective ways to involve child care centers in providing prekindergarten, the National Women’s Law Center conducted a series of interviews and held a meeting with selected center directors to get their perspectives on what they gained by offering prekindergarten, what barriers they faced, and how they overcame these barriers. The lessons learned through the experiences of these and other child care centers can do much to inform ongoing efforts at the state and local level to include child care centers as full partners in providing prekindergarten and to ensure that prekindergarten initiatives are effective overall.

The challenges that center directors face in providing prekindergarten include ensuring adequate resources for high-quality programs; recruiting and retaining well-qualified teachers; coordinating with school districts in allocating slots, enrolling children, and supporting children’s transition to kindergarten, among other areas; and implementing appropriate curricula and assessments. Key factors in helping center directors overcome these and other challenges are sufficient state prekindergarten funding levels as well as access to other public and private funding sources and the ability to combine the funding with prekindergarten funding effectively; the opportunity to compete on an equal footing with school districts in running prekindergarten programs;

and close collaboration with school districts and other early childhood providers on all issues of mutual concern.

This report explores the benefits and challenges for child care centers in providing state-funded prekindergarten programs, and examines the state and local policies that might better support child care centers in this role, from the crucial perspective of child care center directors. The directors’ experiences and insights confirm the effectiveness of a number of strategies that have been set forth in previous reports on state-level policies⁴ and provide additional details about the complexity of implementing these policies. They also help illustrate more fully how these policies play out in practice in individual communities, child care centers, and prekindergarten classrooms. Many of the issues raised by center directors, and strategies that worked to support them, apply to schools and other prekindergarten providers as well.

Benefits of Allowing Child Care Centers to Operate State Prekindergarten Programs

Offering prekindergarten in a child care center can help families with parents in the workforce who need full-day programs for their children. State-funded prekindergarten programs are typically not structured around the schedules of parents who need full-day, full-year services for their children. Most state prekindergarten programs are only funded for a part-day schedule—sometimes as little as two-and-a-half or three hours a day—and only during the school year.⁵ Child care centers can address this gap because they are able to offer full-day, full-year programs at a single location. Providing prekindergarten in centers can therefore be more convenient for parents, who do not have to determine how to bring their children from one location to another during the work day, as well as less disruptive for children, who do not have to be moved from one location to another each day and

**Offering
prekindergarten in
a child care center
can help families
with parents in the
workforce who need
full-day programs for
their children.**

during the summer. In addition, parents with infants and toddlers as well as prekindergarten-age children can have all of their children receive care at the same location.

Communities, too, have reasons for looking to child care centers to provide prekindergarten. In many communities, schools simply do not have the space to provide prekindergarten classes. Communities may also find it more efficient

to invest resources in existing child care centers that already have experience working with young children than to start from scratch by adding an entirely new early childhood program to the schools. This is especially true if the centers are already offering high-quality programs that meet state prekindergarten requirements, but it can also be true when the centers need help in meeting these requirements.

Indeed, providing prekindergarten in child care centers can inject needed resources into child care programs and help sustain and enhance the quality of these programs for the many families who rely on them. Participation in prekindergarten can help sustain a center both by bringing in new children who had not previously attended any early childhood program and by providing a stable source of funding for children already enrolled in the center for child care. It can enhance the quality of a center both by providing new resources and by requiring that the center meet state prekindergarten standards that are generally stronger than state child care licensing requirements in areas such as teacher credentials. Finally, participation in prekindergarten can have spillover beneficial effects that extend beyond the particular children (primarily four-year-olds) and hours funded by the prekindergarten initiative to reach the entire center, including classrooms serving infants and toddlers.

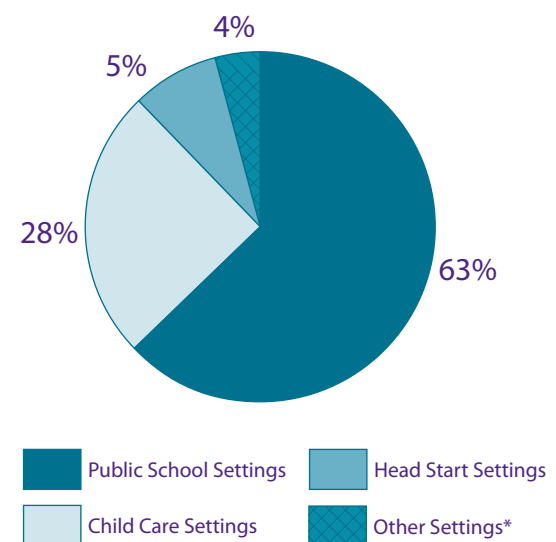
More broadly, successful involvement of child care centers in prekindergarten initiatives can promote collaboration among schools, child care providers, and other early care and education programs, enabling them all to take advantage of the expertise each partner brings and to make effective use of early childhood resources. This collaboration can lead to joint efforts not only on prekindergarten but also on the full array of supports and services that children and their families need.

Methodology

This report is largely based on a series of interviews the National Women's Law Center staff conducted with child care center directors in summer and fall of 2006 as well as a meeting of center directors in December 2006. State policy documents and other reports on state prekindergarten policies were used to provide some additional background information and context.

The center directors who participated in this project were selected based on referrals from state and local early childhood experts. While they are not necessarily representative

Children Participating in State Prekindergarten Programs by Type of Setting (Fall 2005 for States Where Data Are Available)



* Other settings include college-based, family resource centers, family child care, etc.

Source: National Women's Law Center calculations based on data from W. Steven Barnett, Jason T. Hustedt, Laura E. Hawkinson, and Kenneth B. Robin, *The State of Preschool 2006: State Preschool Yearbook* (Rutgers, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2006), 168.

of all center directors operating prekindergarten programs, they do constitute a diverse group and have a range of experiences with their prekindergarten programs. The directors are from fourteen different states (Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia, and Wisconsin) that have a substantial number of child care centers participating in their prekindergarten initiatives. They include directors from rural, urban, and suburban areas and from nonprofit, for-profit, and faith-based centers. Some directors have a single center site, while others oversee multiple sites. However, given that this is not a random sample, it is not possible to determine the overall number or percentage of center-based prekindergarten programs that face the issues examined in this report.

The report is primarily focused on child care centers offering prekindergarten programs, and not schools or other agencies and entities that may operate prekindergarten programs, such as Head Start programs and family child care providers (although a few of the directors who were interviewed operate Head Start programs in addition to child care and prekindergarten programs). Head Start programs encounter a distinct set of challenges in offering state-funded prekindergarten as they work to meet both state prekindergarten requirements and the full set of Head Start Performance Standards. Family child care programs' participation in state prekindergarten initiatives remains relatively limited. Further research is needed on the specific issues that each group of providers—schools, Head Start programs, and family child care providers—must address in offering prekindergarten.

Defining Prekindergarten

For the purposes of this report, “prekindergarten” is an initiative or program funded by the state that supports a group learning experience for preschool-age children, primarily four-year-olds, but including three-year-olds in some states. Prekindergarten does not include other federal, state, or local early childhood programs, such as child care assistance programs and the federal Head Start program, that support learning experiences for young children. It also does not include private prekindergarten programs paid for entirely by parents, although children participating in state-funded prekindergarten programs are sometimes in classrooms with children whose participation in the program is paid by their parents. Most prekindergarten initiatives are targeted to children who are from low-income families or who are considered at risk, but some are made available to all children whose families want them to participate.



The key issues identified by the center directors include: financing; qualifications and compensation for teachers, directors, and other staff; relationships with school districts; curriculum, assessment, and other programming issues; and community planning and coordination. State and local prekindergarten policies and practices in these areas determine the extent to which child care centers can participate in prekindergarten initiatives, their capacity to offer high-quality programs that meet the needs of children and families, and their ability to sustain and strengthen their programs.

Financing

Well-designed financing policies and practices enable child care centers to participate in prekindergarten initiatives and ensure that participating centers have funding for a full-day program that is stable and that supports quality enhancements.

The prekindergarten funding policies and practices that are important to child care centers are those that result in:

- Fair and efficient distribution of funds
- Adequate funding levels
- Help securing other sources of funding
- An ability to combine prekindergarten and child care funding for full-day services.

Distributing Funds

How states distribute prekindergarten funds can determine the extent to which child care centers can offer prekindergarten. In some states, funds are allocated to local school districts, either as a targeted grant for prekindergarten or as part of a school aid formula that reimburses school districts for prekindergarten enrollment as it would for K-12 enrollment. Then it is up to each local district whether to subcontract with centers to provide prekindergarten programs. In other states, centers are

able to receive funds directly from the state. In a few states, local councils are responsible for making decisions about the distribution of funds. Within any particular funding approach, there are policies and practices that can facilitate centers' participation in prekindergarten initiatives and ensure they have a fair opportunity to compete for funding with school districts and other providers. For any approach, the extent to which centers are able to participate will also depend on the particular dynamics in each community and how well centers, schools, and other early childhood providers work together. Communities that have had a long history of collaboration prior to the implementation of prekindergarten tend to provide a very favorable context for ensuring the involvement of child care centers in operating prekindergarten programs.

Subcontracting with Local School Districts

Distributing state prekindergarten funds through school districts has certain advantages, since it can allow funding for prekindergarten to be embedded with the school aid formula for K-12,⁶ which in turn provides greater stability for prekindergarten funding. School districts can receive reimbursement for each prekindergarten student they serve just as they do for students in K-12. Yet, when prekindergarten funds are distributed through school districts, it is usually up to the district to determine whether to subcontract with child care centers to offer prekindergarten.

This funding approach makes the decision to subcontract with centers dependent on



How states distribute prekindergarten funds can determine the extent to which child care centers can offer prekindergarten.

individual school administrators' leadership and initiative. For example, in Arizona, where funds are distributed through school districts, a center director suggested that one likely reason that his district, unlike many other districts in the state, allows participation by child care centers is that the person responsible for prekindergarten in his district understands early childhood education and is committed to involving centers. Similarly, center directors from a few districts in Illinois—where, until 2003, all funding was distributed through school districts—pointed to a history of community collaboration on early childhood services and programs that laid the groundwork for involvement of child care centers in providing prekindergarten.

A few states that distribute funding through local school districts have tried to make child care centers' participation in prekindergarten less dependent on individual leadership by adopting policies to guarantee that, in all communities, centers and other providers outside the schools have at least some opportunity to offer prekindergarten. For example, West Virginia requires that at least half of programs in each school district be operated in settings outside the schools when its prekindergarten initiative is fully implemented in 2012–2013.⁷ In addition, New York requires that each school district use at least 10 percent of the funds it receives through the Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) initiative to serve children in settings outside the public schools.⁸ In practice, school districts have greatly exceeded that requirement, with over half of New York's UPK funds being used outside the schools.⁹ Many schools, particularly those in New York City, turned to outside providers in greater numbers than was required because they had no space for prekindergarten classrooms, especially since schools were struggling to meet requirements to reduce class sizes for older children when the prekindergarten initiative was implemented. Yet the 10 percent requirement was an important benchmark that spurred communities to action. The fact that different entities were required to sit down at the table together to meet the initial requirement may have opened up opportunities for collaboration that ultimately fostered efforts to go beyond that minimum.¹⁰

Receiving Direct Funding from the State

In other states, child care centers apply directly to a state agency for funding. This funding

approach may give child care centers greater opportunities to participate in prekindergarten because a third party not directly involved in delivering early childhood education evaluates applications from schools and other entities alike. In addition, this approach allows centers to apply to provide prekindergarten for children from multiple school districts, rather than being constrained by district boundaries as may be the case when they are funded through school districts.

Some states using this approach have a single pool of funding for both schools and other providers. For example, in Georgia, all public and private providers—including schools, child care centers, and other agencies—apply to the state Department of Early Care and Learning to be designated as a prekindergarten site.¹¹ Other states have a separate funding stream for child care centers and providers outside the public schools to guarantee they have a chance to participate. New Mexico allocates half of its prekindergarten funding to public schools interested in delivering prekindergarten through the Public Education Department, and the other half of its funding to child care centers and other entities interested in delivering prekindergarten through the Department of Children, Youth, and Families using a competitive grant process.¹² Michigan distributes the majority of its prekindergarten funding to school districts, but also has a separate program for non-school agencies that apply for funds through a competitive grant process.¹³ This approach ensures that at least some funds will be targeted for qualified providers other than public schools.

Using Community Councils for Funding Decisions

In a few states and communities, funds are distributed through local community councils. Child care centers, along with schools and other providers, apply to the councils, which then determine which providers will receive funding and, in some cases, how many prekindergarten classrooms or children enrolled in prekindergarten will be funded for each provider. This approach can open up the prekindergarten program to a range of providers because funding decisions, rather than being made solely by the school district, are made collectively by a council that may include representatives from the school district but includes representatives of other groups as well.

For example, in Connecticut, the mayor and school superintendent in each community receiving funding must establish a School Readiness Council to guide the distribution of prekindergarten funding.¹⁴ In Florida, local Early Learning Coalitions, which were established prior to the adoption of the prekindergarten initiative to oversee a range of early childhood programs and services, are responsible for distributing prekindergarten funding to eligible providers.¹⁵ In North Carolina, the More at Four prekindergarten initiative is administered using county and regional More at Four committees co-chaired by the school superintendent (or designee) and the board chair (or designee) of the local partnership for Smart Start, a separate state early childhood initiative.¹⁶ In all of these states, children are served in a diverse range of settings, including child care centers.

Renewing Funding

The funding process consists not only of the initial funding decision but the renewal process as well. Relatively steady funding from one year to the next enables center directors to better manage their centers' budgets, anticipate enrollment, and stabilize their centers' finances. It is also administratively easier for them if they do not have to reapply each year, especially since they often do not have administrative support personnel to help with the reapplication process. At the same time, it is important to design a process that ensures accountability for prekindergarten funds.

Meeting Match Requirements

Some states require centers to provide a match in order to receive state prekindergarten funds. States may permit the match requirements to be met with in-kind contributions, which can be easier for centers to provide than cash.

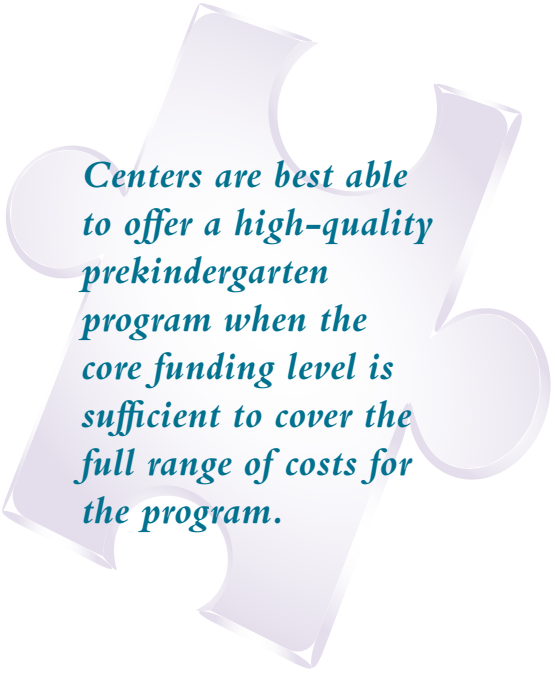
- An Arkansas center director said she does not have a significant problem meeting the state's match requirement because of the way it is structured. The state pays \$4,400 per child for the prekindergarten program, and providers must contribute a match that equals 40 percent of the total amount of funding per child. The match may be in kind, and may include expenses paid for by the center, such as transportation, or may be met through other funding sources, such as the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program.

- In Tennessee, in contrast, the way in which the state's match requirement is structured makes it difficult for a center to meet a requirement that it be responsible for one-third of the program's costs. Match requirements vary by county and, in urban areas such as the one in which the center is located, centers have to make a greater contribution than in rural areas. In some counties, the state covers the full cost. Match requirements are based on the overall wealth of the county and, as a result, do not take into account an individual center's resources and ability to provide the matching contribution. The center relies on United Way funding to help meet the match requirement and cover the shortfall in state prekindergarten funding.

Funding Levels

Centers are best able to offer a high-quality prekindergarten program when the core funding level is sufficient to cover the full range of costs for the program, including salaries for qualified teachers, facilities, supplies, materials, supplementary support services for children and their families, and other expenses. Adequate funding is essential for schools offering prekindergarten as well, but is a particular concern for centers given that they often lack the institutional capacity or economies of scale of schools. For example, unlike schools, centers typically do not have a health care plan or retirement system for teachers, or an existing transportation system. And many centers start out behind schools, operating on already-tight budgets because of inadequate funding for their early care and education programs.

Centers respond to funding challenges in different ways. Some are able to pull together other funding sources to help support their programs and are able to successfully participate in the prekindergarten initiative. Others determine that the resources available to deliver the program are not sufficient to meet the



Centers are best able to offer a high-quality prekindergarten program when the core funding level is sufficient to cover the full range of costs for the program.

higher prekindergarten standards required. A North Carolina center director reported that the majority of centers in her community dropped out of the prekindergarten program because the amount of funding was inadequate.

In some states, centers are able to negotiate their funding level somewhat, although this option is not available in all cases and there is typically a cap on the maximum amount they can receive. The negotiation of the funding level may be done by each individual center or may be district-wide. For example, in Wisconsin—where prekindergarten funding is distributed as part of the school aid formula to school districts, which decide whether to subcontract with centers or other providers for prekindergarten—each school district

works with and other community agencies offering prekindergarten to determine a reimbursement amount. That standard amount is then used across the district for all non-school-based prekindergarten programs that hire their own teachers. (As discussed below, in some cases, the school district places a prekindergarten teacher in a center and covers the teacher's compensation.) A Wisconsin center director stated that when the leadership

of the school district is supportive of early childhood programs and aware of the level of funding that is needed to support a good-quality program, the amount negotiated is typically more generous.

It is important not only for the initial funding to be adequate, but also that it keep pace with increasing costs for salaries and other expenses.¹⁷

- A center director in the Bronx reported that the funding level for the prekindergarten program had not increased in nine years—it remained frozen at \$3,322 per child for the two-and-a-half hour program for all providers.

- A Michigan center director reported that funding in that state had remained at \$3,300 per child for five years. At one point, the Michigan state senate proposed a small increase that would have been limited to school-based programs. In 2007, the state raised funding for all prekindergarten providers, but only by \$100 per child.¹⁸

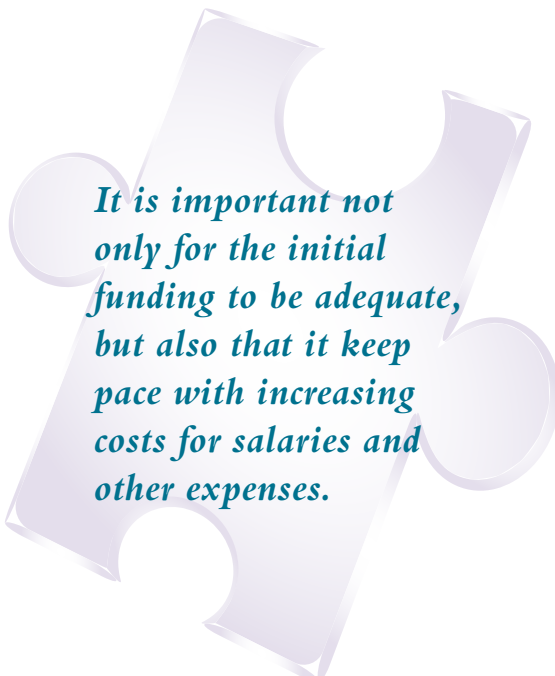
Expenses to Meet the Expectations of State Prekindergarten Initiatives

Some directors report that the prekindergarten funding is not sufficient even to cover the core program expenses. An upstate New York center director said the state funding only covers the teacher's salary and not other expenses, such as ongoing costs for supplies and equipment. In contrast, schools in her district operating prekindergarten programs receive funding to cover these types of expenses.

In some instances, a school district hires a prekindergarten teacher who is placed in a center, and the district covers the teacher's compensation, but no, or only minimal, additional costs for other core expenses. For example, one Wisconsin center offering the prekindergarten program that has a teacher placed by the district receives a "user's fee" of \$60 per semester per child to offset other expenses such as facilities costs. In contrast, other Wisconsin school districts that place teachers in centers reimburse the centers for all of their costs, including overhead.

In addition, state prekindergarten initiatives often require prekindergarten providers to offer new supports and services for children and families. For example, a center may have to provide extra support to address the needs of the low-income and at-risk children and families typically targeted by state prekindergarten initiatives. Although these supports and services increase the centers' costs, the prekindergarten funding does not always cover the increase.

- A New Mexico center director said that providing the many services and activities that are required for the state prekindergarten initiative involve costs not covered by the prekindergarten funding. For example, the initiative requires three home visits, parent events, two health screenings, and portfolios tracking children's work and progress, but the center does not receive additional funding for these services.



It is important not only for the initial funding to be adequate, but also that it keep pace with increasing costs for salaries and other expenses.

- A Connecticut center director found that the children in the center's prekindergarten program, which is targeted to low-income children, have greater needs and require more support services than other children at the center. The center does not receive extra funding for these services, so it has to use its overall operating budget and an endowment account it is starting to build to help cover the costs.

Start-Up Costs

Child care centers often have significant expenses when they first begin operating a prekindergarten program as they must purchase new curriculum materials and other supplies, fund initial training for teachers and other staff, and incur other costs to bring their programs into compliance with state prekindergarten requirements. For some centers that are not well-equipped, start-up expenses may include basics such as books. These initial start-up costs can be particularly significant and exceed the core funding amount. Centers often need funding to cover at least part of these start-up costs if they are to participate in the prekindergarten initiative.

A few states make start-up funds available as part of their prekindergarten initiatives.

- In New Mexico, the state provides one-time start-up grants of up to \$15,000 per classroom on a competitive basis to school-based, center-based, and other prekindergarten providers.
- Arkansas gives centers \$5,000 for each classroom to cover start-up expenses.

In some cases, the availability of start-up funds depends on decisions made at the local level.

- In Florida, a local Early Learning Coalition offers mini-grants for prekindergarten start-up costs funded through the quality set-aside of the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant program.
- In Wisconsin, the availability of start-up funding varies significantly across school districts. At least two districts provide up to \$5,000 per classroom to help with start-up costs, yet these funds are not available in all districts.

Transportation Costs

While most states do not require prekindergarten providers to offer transportation, some

schools provide it and center directors often want to offer it to make their prekindergarten programs more accessible to families. Yet, the costs, including not only the vehicle and driver but also insurance, make it extremely difficult for many centers to afford to provide transportation. Center directors express concern about families who are not able to take advantage of a prekindergarten program unless they have transportation, including families living in rural areas and families who cannot afford to provide their own transportation. The directors do not want to leave out the children who are most isolated and most in need of early education experiences, especially since in many states these are the very children the prekindergarten initiative is designed to serve.

- New Mexico makes some funds available for transportation through a separate competitive grant program. However, a center director reported that it would have been easier if the transportation funds were wrapped together with the general prekindergarten funding so that she could have applied for the funds together, with a single application.
- A Connecticut center director reported that her center provides transportation to children in the prekindergarten program whose families are unable to provide their own transportation. The director decided it is important to provide transportation to make her program accessible to families, even though it can add as much as \$28,000 to the expense of providing prekindergarten and is not covered by the state funding. The center, which has been in operation for decades and is connected to a college, is able to secure the resources it needs to cover these costs.

Help Securing Other Funding Sources

When state funding is inadequate or there is a match requirement, centers must seek to supplement state funding with other funding sources to support their programs. Identifying and blending various public and private resources takes initiative and innovation on the part of directors. Centers that are larger or that have a connection to an institution, such as a hospital or college, may have an easier time than smaller, unconnected centers, but in most instances centers could use help in securing and managing such funding.

In North Carolina, centers have the advantage of being able to supplement the state prekindergarten funds with resources from the state-funded Smart Start initiative, which provides \$204 million to local communities to support early childhood services.¹⁹ One center director said that Smart Start helps provide dental screenings and speech therapy for her prekindergarten children, and loans her center equipment for the prekindergarten program. Training for prekindergarten teachers may also be funded through Smart Start. Another center director in North Carolina said that Smart Start funds literacy facilitators, a nurse, a psychologist, speech and language screening, and parent activities for her center's prekindergarten program.

Most states do not have comprehensive early childhood initiatives such as Smart Start to help centers supplement their state prekindergarten funding, but resourceful center directors manage to find some other public and private funding sources.

- A Michigan center director said that, to compensate for the fact that the funding level for the prekindergarten program had not increased in about five years, he supplemented the funding with foundation grants, annual fundraising, private donations, and other sources. The director said he had two grant applications out to foundations for help with transportation costs, and was working on a third grant request at the time of the interview. He spends much of his time writing grants.
- A New Mexico center director relies on nine other program grants from federal, state, and foundation sources to help fund her prekindergarten program.
- A center director in Illinois is able to turn to community foundations and the Illinois Facilities Fund to help support facility improvements that she cannot

pay for with state prekindergarten funds. The Illinois Facilities Fund is a statewide community development financial institution supported with private and public funding that provides loans and facilities development assistance to nonprofit organizations.²⁰

Given the challenges involved in bringing together prekindergarten funding with other funding streams and allocating costs appropriately, center directors stated that it would be extremely helpful to have access to training on managing the budget for a prekindergarten program and support for fundraising. A few states, such as Arkansas, have offered technical assistance to help directors with these new financial responsibilities.

Combining Prekindergarten and Child Care Funding to Provide High-Quality, Full-Day Services

Many centers find that neither prekindergarten nor child care funding alone is sufficient to finance a high-quality program for part of the day, much less a full day. However, combining state prekindergarten funding with child care fees—covered either by private-paying parents or publicly funded child care assistance—can help centers support a full day of high-quality early care and education.

Child Care Fees

While states generally do not allow centers to charge parents for the prekindergarten portion of the day,²¹ centers can charge parents employed full time for child care provided before and/or after the prekindergarten day. In many cases, the hours before and after prekindergarten add up to a full day of care. For example, a parent may work eight hours a day with a long commute, while the prekindergarten program operates only two or three hours a day. Depending on a center's fee policies, and what is allowed by state and local policy, the parents may pay the same—or nearly the same—amount for full-day services that include prekindergarten as they would pay for full-day care at the center were their children not enrolled in prekindergarten.

When parents continue to pay the same amount for services that include prekindergarten as they were paying without the prekindergarten component, the state prekindergarten funds are a supplement to, rather than a substitute for, parent fees. This enables



Identifying and blending various public and private resources takes initiative and innovation on the part of directors.

centers to offer enhanced services—such as teachers with higher education credentials and specialized training, lower child-teacher ratios, additional supplies and curriculum materials, and other resources that strengthen quality—for at least the prekindergarten portion of the day, and may allow centers to make quality enhancements that affect the entire program day.

- A center director in Wisconsin charges the full-day rate if a child is in child care for at least six hours a day. Therefore, if a child attends the two-and-a-half hour prekindergarten program, but is also in child care before and/or after the prekindergarten program for a total of at least six hours, the parents are charged the full-day rate. Other directors in Wisconsin reported similar fee policies. One director said this layering of prekindergarten funding on top of child care fees makes it financially feasible for centers to have a prekindergarten teacher and a child care teacher for each class of eighteen children for the prekindergarten portion of the day—a child-teacher ratio that goes beyond what is required by state prekindergarten standards.

Child Care Assistance

Low-income parents whose children need child care before and after the prekindergarten day must rely on child care assistance to meet the cost of that care. As with parent fees, centers may be able to receive full-day reimbursement for care provided for these children for a significant number of hours before and after the prekindergarten day.

Although many states allow centers to combine prekindergarten and child care funding, there are barriers to making it work effectively. For example, even if centers receive funding through both sources, low child care reimbursement rates, which are determined by each state,²² can deprive centers of the resources they need to support a high-quality, full-day program.

- In Michigan, where child care reimbursement rates have not been increased since 1997, the amount the state reimburses child care providers falls far short of what centers charge to private-paying parents. One center in Michigan, which operates a prekindergarten program from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., charges \$75 a week if parents need care for their

children after the prekindergarten day, from 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Yet the state pays only \$45 a week for the same 20 hours a week of care for families receiving child care assistance. If parents need full-day care, from 8:00 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. before the prekindergarten day, and from 11:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. afterwards, the state reimburses the center only \$73 a week for this many hours of care, about half the \$135 per-week fee the center charges private-paying parents.

Centers also find it challenging to combine prekindergarten and child care funds when families' access to child care assistance is limited. A number of states are not able to serve all families who are eligible and apply for assistance and instead place them on waiting lists.²³ North Carolina, where many counties have long waiting lists, has tried to address this issue by giving children in the prekindergarten program priority for child care assistance.

Another obstacle to combining prekindergarten and child care funds is that families often become ineligible for child care assistance when a parent loses a job. Illinois has attempted to address this situation by granting parents a ninety-day grace period during which they can continue to receive child care assistance after losing a job. This policy can make it easier for parents to keep their children in a full-day program combining prekindergarten and child care. A parent can look for a new job without having to worry about how to afford the child care portion of the day, and the child does not have to be taken out of the program. However, center directors note that this policy is limited in the extent to which it can affect parents' decisions. Several directors said that, despite a state's grace period, parents still often take their children out of the entire program when they stop working.



Combining state prekindergarten funding with child care fees can help centers support a full day of high-quality early care and education.

Combining Two Half-Day Prekindergarten Slots for Full-Day Prekindergarten Programs

Some centers opt to combine two half-day prekindergarten slots to provide one full-day prekindergarten slot (so that rather than serving two children, each for a half day, they serve one child for a full day), if permitted by the state or school district. This approach helps centers serve low-income children with parents in the workforce who cannot take advantage of prekindergarten unless it is offered as a full-day program and cannot afford to pay a fee or obtain child care assistance.

- In Michigan, the state initially allowed only school-based programs—and not child care centers or other community-based providers—to combine two half-day prekindergarten slots to provide one full-day slot. One center director reported that she had to return funding because she did not have enough families who wanted a half-day program. Eventually, the state revised its policy to allow all programs to combine half-day slots to make up a full day of prekindergarten.

Qualifications and Compensation for Teachers, Directors, and Other Staff

Recruiting and retaining qualified teachers who are a good fit with their centers is one of the greatest challenges center directors face in providing prekindergarten. State prekindergarten programs often require higher education credentials for teachers—such as a bachelor's degree in early education—than are required for child care centers under state child care licensing regulations. Twenty-six state prekindergarten initiatives require teachers to have a bachelor's degree, including twenty-one initiatives that require a bachelor's degree in early education.²⁴ Center directors stress the importance of having the resources to provide salaries and benefits sufficient to attract teachers with these required credentials. They also emphasize the need to give special attention to blending new prekindergarten teachers with the rest of their staff.

Centers meet teacher credential requirements in one of three ways, depending on what is permitted or encouraged by state and local policies and the circumstances of each center:

- Hiring teachers who already have the required degree
- Helping existing staff receive the additional education they need to obtain the required credentials, or
- Having the public schools place degreed teachers in their centers.

Each of the three approaches can present challenges. Centers use various strategies to address these challenges and ensure not only that prekindergarten teachers have the appropriate credentials but also that they develop good working relationships with other teachers, the director, and other staff.

Recruiting and Retaining Qualified Teachers

Some center directors report that they have teachers working for them who meet the state credentialing requirements for prekindergarten or that they are able to easily recruit new teachers with the required credentials without any problem. A number of center directors, however, find it difficult to attract and retain qualified prekindergarten teachers because they do not have the resources to match the salaries and benefits—particularly health and retirement benefits—offered by the public schools.

A few states, such as New Jersey and North Carolina, require relatively generous compensation for prekindergarten teachers in all settings, including centers.

- In accordance with a court decree,²⁵ New Jersey requires centers to pay teachers based on the public school salary schedule²⁶ and provides generous funding to meet this mandate. While New Jersey also requires centers to pay teachers benefits, the state does not require that the benefits be comparable to those for public school teachers. In addition, a center's average spending on benefits per teacher cannot exceed the average spending on benefits offered by schools. Because a center does not have the large employee pool that schools have, it is hard for a center to offer the same benefits as the schools even by spending the same amount.
- North Carolina sets a target compensation package for teachers in non-public school prekindergarten programs, based on the

public school salary schedule for teachers, a retirement benefit equal to 3 percent of annual salary, and a health benefit at the North Carolina State Health Plan rate.²⁷

The state requires centers to move to the target compensation level over the course of five years. Centers are not required to offer all three components of the compensation package (a salary, retirement benefit, and health benefit), as long as the total value of the compensation is equivalent to the value of the target package. Several center directors report that it has been difficult to meet the compensation targets and have had to combine prekindergarten funding with other state and local sources for sufficient funding.

In states that do not require or provide the resources needed for centers to match schools' compensation packages, center directors often have a difficult time finding and keeping staff.

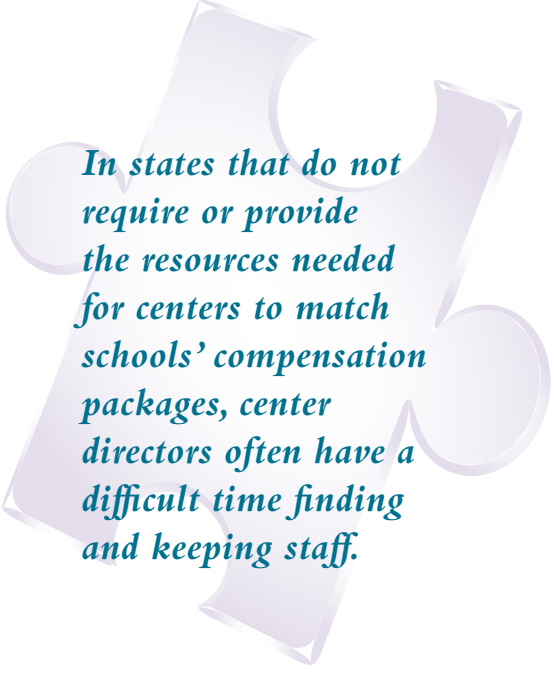
- A center director in upstate New York is only able to pay her prekindergarten teachers an annual salary of \$25,000, while the school district can pay its prekindergarten teachers \$35,000 a year.
- In Evanston, Illinois, all of the community-based providers operating state prekindergarten programs are able to offer health care and sick leave benefits, but they cannot afford retirement benefits. As a result, centers often lose teachers to the school district, which offers all of these benefits.
- A center director in Peoria, Illinois said that the center's inability to offer adequate retirement benefits is a barrier to hiring qualified staff. The center has a 401(k)-type plan that gives teachers an opportunity to make their own contributions toward retirement, but the center does not make any contribution.
- A director of another center in Illinois said that teachers who work year-round at her center are not paid more than teachers at schools who do not work the summer months. The director said it is "not always the easiest to retain staff."
- A center in Wisconsin is able to offer retirement benefits to teachers, but not health insurance. The center director said that while she can recruit teachers, it is hard to keep them. Teachers often use her

center as a "stepping stone"—they get teaching experience at her center, and then move onto jobs in the school system.

Some centers are able to offer relatively generous salaries and benefits, and successfully recruit and retain teachers, even when the state does not provide sufficient resources for teacher compensation. Yet, this is generally only feasible for those centers that start off in a strong financial position.

- A center in Wisconsin is able to offer teachers wages comparable to those offered by the school district, as well as health and dental insurance, a 401(k)-type plan with matching contributions, and a flexible spending account that provides \$300 a year to each employee for medical copayments, prescription medications, and other health care expenses. One reason the center is able to offer these benefits is its large size—it has multiple sites and has the licensed capacity for 600 children ages six weeks to twelve years. The center director said that improvements in the benefit structure have made it easier in recent years to recruit and retain teachers. The center has a teacher retention rate of approximately 90 percent.
- In Michigan, a center located in an intermediate school district²⁸ facility is permitted to participate in the district's retirement system. This retirement benefit, combined with the center's positive work environment, helps the center retain staff, according to the center director. He said all of his staff but one have been with his program for at least six years, even though lead teachers in the program are paid less than those in the public schools.

Some other centers are able to attract teachers who see advantages in working in centers, even



In states that do not require or provide the resources needed for centers to match schools' compensation packages, center directors often have a difficult time finding and keeping staff.

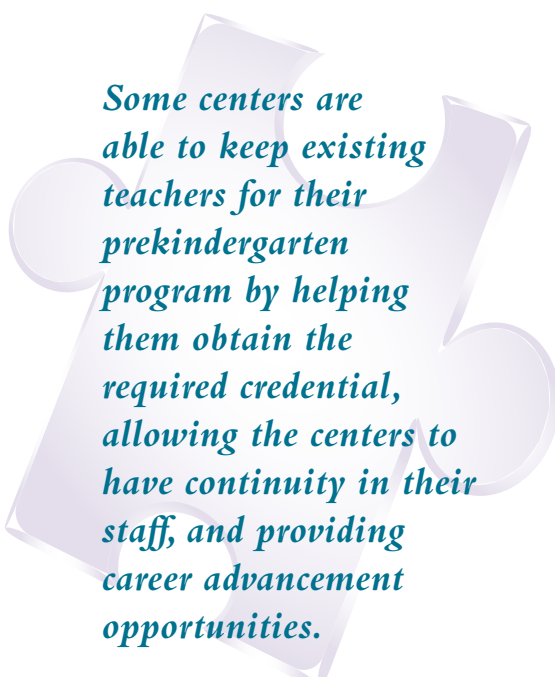
if their compensation is not comparable to what they might be able to receive in a school. For example, a center director in Michigan pointed to the positive work environment as a draw, saying that teachers stay with her center because they feel “privileged” to be in her “special program,” even though she cannot offer the same compensation as the schools. A New Mexico center was able to recruit a new teacher with a master’s degree who had been working in the public schools and wanted to be in a center-based setting. Yet, not all centers are as fortunate. Center directors cannot always count on intangible features of their work environment to attract teachers, and instead want concrete policies and resources that support their efforts to recruit and retain teachers.

Helping Teachers Obtain Credentials

Some centers are able to keep existing teachers for their prekindergarten program by helping them obtain the required credential, such as a bachelor’s degree and/or certification in early education. This approach allows centers

to have continuity in their staff, and can provide career advancement opportunities for current staff. It also addresses the gap between the growing demand for qualified teachers as prekindergarten initiatives expand and the current supply of teachers with degrees in early childhood education. However, this strategy is most feasible when there is a phase-in period for teacher credential requirements, giving teachers time to take the necessary coursework toward

their degrees. In addition, center directors find it helpful to have access to resources—either through the prekindergarten program or through a separate funding stream—to support partial scholarships for the teachers as well as substitutes to cover some hours for teachers working toward their degrees.



Some centers are able to keep existing teachers for their prekindergarten program by helping them obtain the required credential, allowing the centers to have continuity in their staff, and providing career advancement opportunities.

States that provide these types of support for teachers may do it under the umbrella of the T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) Early Childhood® Project.²⁹ T.E.A.C.H. helps child care providers receive additional education by providing scholarships that typically cover at least a portion of the costs for tuition, fees, and books and that often offer paid release time and a travel stipend. Child care providers who complete the educational requirements receive increased compensation in the form of a bonus or a raise, with the cost shared by the state and sponsoring center. They must commit to staying with their child care program or the early childhood field for six months to a year.

- In North Carolina, many centers help their teachers meet the prekindergarten credential requirements using T.E.A.C.H., which is supported with Child Care and Development Block Grant funds, state funds, and private foundation dollars.
- New Mexico requires centers and other private providers operating state prekindergarten programs to budget for one staff member to meet the prekindergarten credential requirements through T.E.A.C.H. for every eight prekindergarten slots. The center and the state share the costs of T.E.A.C.H.

Many center directors and local communities with prekindergarten programs work with higher education institutions or take other steps to support their teachers’ efforts to earn their degrees in order to meet the programs’ teacher credential requirements.

- A center in New York City collaborates with Bank Street College, Mercy College, New York University, and City University of New York to offer training, education, and mentoring opportunities using federal, state, and foundation funding as well as funds set aside by the center to support teacher training and education. For example, City University of New York provides review classes on different areas of the teacher’s certification exam supported by funding from the state Educational Incentive Program. Mercy College offers a flexible schedule for teachers who are working to complete their bachelor’s degrees and accepts direct payment from the center for the teachers’ tuition.

- A center director in New Mexico works to accommodate teachers' schedules so that they can take classes toward their degrees. The center pays teachers for their time while attending classes, and gives them salary increases when they complete their courses. The center is also opening a conference room for classes that will be taught by staff from the community college. This approach allows prekindergarten teachers to take classes in a familiar environment where they can become more confident about going to school. In addition, the director arranged to have computers donated for teachers to use at the center. She thinks that education is having a positive impact on her teachers—for example, they are giving greater attention to planning their curriculum.
- A center director in North Carolina had two teachers working on getting their birth through kindergarten (B-K) certification, with the support of T.E.A.C.H. and the center. The teachers are given opportunities to study during children's naptime and are able to use computers available throughout the center for their coursework.
- In one Wisconsin district, a professional development opportunity committee got an agreement with the community colleges and a university to offer courses for a minimal charge at locations in the community convenient for child care teachers. Seventy teachers attended the first class.

Some other center directors have been part of efforts to develop articulation agreements between colleges and universities allowing students to count previous coursework or a two-year degree program in early childhood toward a four-year degree.

One issue that several center directors face when they have teachers working toward their credentials is that some states prohibit teachers from fulfilling their practicum requirements at a child care center. Instead, they have to complete their student teaching at a school with a credentialed teacher as a mentor, which means the centers have to find someone else to fill in for the teacher during that time. The directors want an approach that allows teachers to fulfill their student teaching with a creden-

tialed teacher as a mentor while working at the center, thereby minimizing disruption.

Placing Public School Teachers in Child Care Centers

In several states and communities, teachers for center-based prekindergarten programs are hired and placed in the programs by the school district. The teacher, as an employee of the school district, receives salary and compensation from the district. This approach gives the teacher the compensation package offered by the school district, which is typically much more generous than what centers are able to offer.

Center directors think that this approach is much more successful if the director has input into the hiring and firing process. In some states and districts, directors are not allowed to decide who works in their programs, and have no recourse if they are not satisfied with a teacher's performance. In addition, they do not always have authority over the teachers in other ways. For example, a director in Illinois said that when the school district was closed for a snow day, she kept her center open, but the school did not send its teacher.

A center director in New York who is not able to hire her own teachers had an even more difficult experience. One of her classrooms had three different teachers over three years. In contrast, the teacher's assistant hired by the center stayed with the center during that entire period.

To help improve the teacher placement process, one Tennessee district brings center directors together at local advisory council meetings and allows them the opportunity to give recommendations on teachers. These recommendations are usually followed in making staffing decisions. This approach improves the chances that the teachers will be a good match for the center in which they are placed.

Relationships Between Prekindergarten Teachers and Other Center Teachers

Navigating the relationships between the degreed teachers who teach the prekindergarten classes and other teachers at the child care center requires time and care. Tensions between teachers can result from the discrepancies in pay, experience, and education level. Existing center staff sometimes have more

experience teaching young children, while new prekindergarten teachers often have more education and receive higher pay. Many centers are able to work through these issues to help teachers form good relationships and recognize what they can learn from one another. Ultimately, all teachers can benefit from their interaction. For example, teachers who have less experience in a prekindergarten classroom can learn from child care teachers about additional strategies for working with young children, and teachers who have degrees can demonstrate the teaching strategies they have learned and inspire teachers without degrees to go back to school, thereby raising the bar for all staff in the center.

A center director in Arkansas said that her existing staff has “perked up” as a result of the prekindergarten program, which requires that teachers have a prekindergarten–fourth grade (P–4) license. Four of the center’s staff are going back to school for their degrees, which the center helps support with private donations.

A center director in Wisconsin said that having the prekindergarten teachers in her program helps her child care teachers because the child care teachers have time available for curriculum planning, individual assessments of children, and training while the prekindergarten teachers lead their classes. These activities have a positive impact on the quality of their teaching.

Director Qualifications

While many states require prekindergarten teachers to have bachelor’s degrees or teacher certification, they do not always address requirements for center directors. As a result, teachers sometimes have more advanced credentials than the directors for whom they work. Directors expressed interest in opportunities for education and training, particularly on budgeting and administering a prekindergarten program. Moreover, some states require directors of prekindergarten programs to have a four-year degree. However, directors, like teachers, often need financial and other support to help them pursue additional education.

North Carolina requires the owner or director of a prekindergarten program to have a four-year degree or to be working toward it in order to operate a prekindergarten program. One center director in North Carolina who had a two-year degree has gone back to school to get her four-year degree in

business administration with a concentration in psychology in the workplace. She attends at night and on Saturdays and takes some on-line courses. Although she has to pay the tuition herself, the director supports the requirement because she thinks directors cannot expect their teachers to meet requirements that they do not meet themselves.

Relationship with School Districts

Close coordination between school districts and centers is essential for ensuring that resources are used effectively to meet the needs of children and families. Some center directors described the ways in which collaborative relationships with their school districts help their programs and the children and families they serve. The relationships are most productive when there is mutual respect and both sides have input into decisions about the prekindergarten program.

A center director in Wisconsin has a “great relationship” with her school district. She said her center leans on the district for assistance with special education, training, and other areas. For example, district staff come to the center to provide training in the evenings and Saturdays. When the program began, the district also provided funding to purchase numerous materials for the center. In addition, the district sets up monthly meetings for early childhood providers; every other month, these meetings involve a broader range of participants including representatives of the local parks and recreation department and the county library.

A center director from another school district in Wisconsin said that the district is cooperative, but is still learning about how the child care industry is organized. For example, the district has planning meetings in the middle of the day when her staff are working, and unlike the schools, the center does not have a pool of substitutes available to fill in so that the staff can attend the meetings.

Similarly, in West Virginia, center directors are often unable to participate in team meetings at the county level because these meetings are held in the middle of the day. The directors generally do not have extra administrative staff to cover for them.

The relationship between a center and a school district affects how they work together in addressing a number of important issues, including:

- Allocating prekindergarten slots among schools, centers, and other providers
- Enrolling children to fill prekindergarten slots
- Providing ongoing teacher training
- Serving children with special needs
- Helping children make the transition to kindergarten
- Ensuring that all school and center staff responsible for administering and implementing the prekindergarten program understand the importance of both prekindergarten and child care.

Allocating Slots

Center directors have varying degrees of control over the slots they are allocated each year. In some school districts, the center indicates the number of prekindergarten slots it can take based on its capacity and generally can rely on receiving funding—either directly from the state or through the district—for that number of slots. In other cases, the district determines the number of slots allocated to outside providers based on its own needs and capacity. Schools often get first priority for slots, and centers are left to meet whatever needs the schools cannot fill themselves. Some centers experience a significant change in the slot allotment from one year to the next, due to a district's decision to offer more slots itself or because of circumstances beyond the control of the district, such as state funding cuts. If there is a change in the number of slots allotted to a center, directors at least want sufficient advance notice so that they have time to notify parents who have already signed their children up for the center's program, find alternative arrangements for the parents, and fill the center's classrooms either with children of private-paying parents or children subsidized through other sources.

- One center in Arizona experienced a drastic cutback in the number of prekindergarten slots allotted to it after the district reduced overall early childhood funding. In previous years, the center had been allocated twenty to thirty

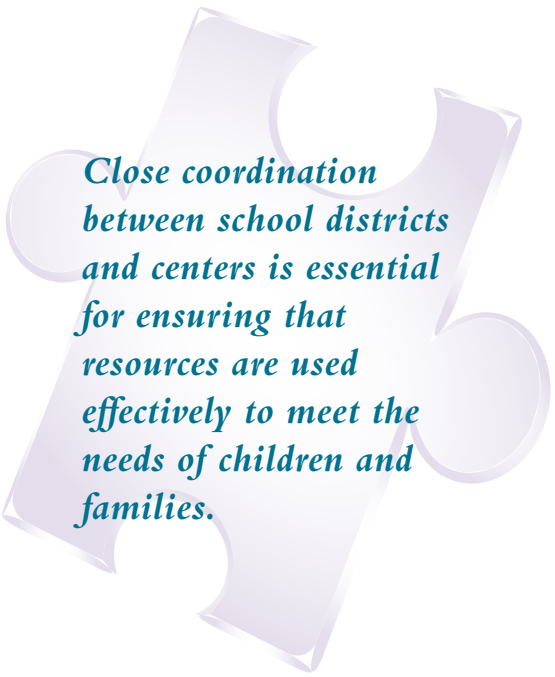
prekindergarten slots, but then for the 2006–2007 program year, without any warning, the center received only one slot. The center had parents who had already applied for the prekindergarten program and were counting on it. The parents who were eligible for child care subsidies could turn to that as an alternative, but many of the parents who were eligible for the prekindergarten program were not eligible for the child care subsidy program, which required parents to be working and had stricter income-eligibility criteria than the prekindergarten program. The loss of prekindergarten funding, an important component of the center's budget, also meant the center was not able to give pay raises to staff.

Regardless of who determines the number of slots allocated, center directors greatly appreciate it when there is stability and predictability from one year to the next so that they can plan their programming and budgets.

Enrolling Children

The enrollment process—which includes determining who is eligible for the prekindergarten slots allotted to each provider and where each eligible child will attend prekindergarten—is another area in which collaboration between schools and centers is essential for balancing multiple goals. These goals include ensuring parents have an opportunity to consider the full range of available alternatives for their children's prekindergarten, making the process simple and straightforward for parents, giving each of the different prekindergarten providers some input, and minimizing providers' administrative burdens.

States and local communities take different approaches to the enrollment process. In some cases, there is a centralized process in each district for screening children to determine



Close coordination between school districts and centers is essential for ensuring that resources are used effectively to meet the needs of children and families.

their eligibility and enroll them in prekindergarten. For example, in Florida, there is a single point of entry. Parents can go to one location to enroll their children in the prekindergarten program, and then choose among approved prekindergarten providers with available slots. In other states, the process is decentralized and there may be one or more points of entry. For example, in Wisconsin, parents in most school districts must fill out paperwork at the school, and then must fill out separate paperwork if they want their children to attend the prekindergarten program at a center.

Centralized and decentralized enrollment processes each have advantages and disadvantages. A centralized process can make it simpler for parents and enable them to avoid additional paperwork. However, it is important that even if parents enroll at a single location, they are

made aware of the multiple locations where their children can attend prekindergarten. A decentralized process can be more convenient for some parents. For example, if a parent already has a child enrolled at a child care center where the child will be able to attend prekindergarten when reaching age four, it may be easier to fill out the paperwork at the center rather than having to go to a separate site. However, to ensure that a decentralized process is not

more cumbersome for parents and providers, it is essential for schools, child care centers, and prekindergarten providers to work closely together and share information.

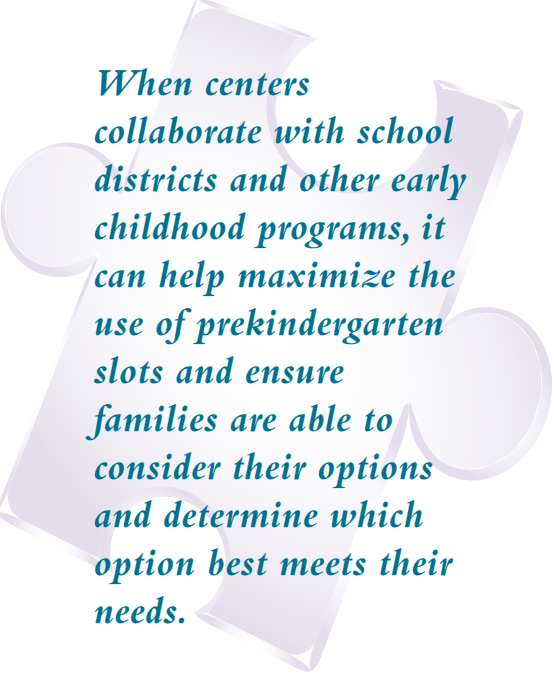
When centers collaborate with school districts as well as other early childhood programs, it can help maximize the use of prekindergarten slots and ensure families are able to consider their options and determine which option best meets their needs. For example, a center in Michigan works with the two school districts in the county receiving state prekindergarten funding to ensure that parents know about the various prekindergarten settings available to

them. The center conducts its own eligibility determination using a questionnaire required by the state, which allows centers to handle intake themselves. The questionnaire is used to determine whether children have a sufficient number of risk factors to meet the criteria to qualify for the prekindergarten program. When the center has a waiting list and cannot serve additional families, it refers them to other prekindergarten programs, including Head Start if their incomes are low enough to qualify.

In some cases, staff responsible for enrolling children need time and information to become more knowledgeable about the availability of different types of prekindergarten providers so that they are able to let parents know about the full range of options. For example, in one district in Illinois, the referral staff work for the schools and initially did not understand that the child care centers were offering the same prekindergarten program as offered by the schools. A center director said that the referral staff were starting to understand this better.

Enrolling children in the prekindergarten program may also involve educating parents about the program and its benefits—a process that can take time. A center director in Peoria, Illinois said that at first most parents did not understand how prekindergarten worked and that the program the center offered would be the same as that offered at the school. Parents chose to enroll their children at the center because they were looking for child care, not because they were looking for prekindergarten. Some parents who knew about Illinois' prekindergarten program, which is targeted at children with risk factors, often initially did not want their children to participate because they thought their children would be labeled as “at risk,” which they equated with a learning disability. The director had to make the case that it was not a program for “at risk” children, but an “enhanced” program. By the end of the first year, a father was so eager to have his child participate in the program that he was asking how his child could qualify as “at risk.”

Sometimes, it is helpful not only to have collaboration within school districts, but also among school districts so that centers serving children from multiple districts do not have to adapt to multiple sets of enrollment policies and procedures and so that districts can learn from each other about which processes work best. In Connecticut, a center that subcontracts with two districts deals with two very different



When centers collaborate with school districts and other early childhood programs, it can help maximize the use of prekindergarten slots and ensure families are able to consider their options and determine which option best meets their needs.

enrollment processes. One district identifies children eligible to participate in the prekindergarten program, conducts the home visit, gathers information about the family, and passes on the information to the center, and then the center takes as many children as it can. The other district leaves it up to the center to fill its slots by word of mouth or other means.

Providing Ongoing Teacher Training

Most states require prekindergarten teachers to receive annual training to learn about the latest research and keep their skills up to date. In a number of states and communities, schools and centers work together to make ongoing training available to teachers to help them meet these requirements. Some schools provide training that is available to prekindergarten teachers from all settings, including centers. The training may be supported with school district or state funds and provided to all participating teachers free of charge, or centers and other providers may cover the costs of training their teachers.

Center directors appreciate it when schools open up training to all prekindergarten teachers, including those in schools, child care centers, and other settings. Directors also find that training is much more accessible for their teachers when school districts hold sessions during evenings or weekends when their centers are closed or when the school districts provide substitute teachers for sessions held during the weekdays.

- An Arizona center subcontracts with a school district that works to accommodate the needs of the center. The center director said that the district contacts his program about when it would be convenient to offer training so that his staff can attend.
- Peoria, Illinois provides funding for substitutes so teachers from centers can attend training.
- A center director from another community in Illinois said training is offered during evenings and weekends. The director pays her teachers time and a half while they are attending training classes.

Some school districts open their training not only to prekindergarten teachers in centers and other settings, but also to all teachers in centers offering prekindergarten, including

teachers in infant or toddler classrooms. School districts can be even more inclusive, opening up training to all early care and education teachers in the community, including teachers in child care centers, Head Start programs, and other early childhood programs that do not receive state prekindergarten funds. In a few cases, training is open to the entire community, including parents. The training for teachers who are not participating in the prekindergarten program may be supported by funds other than the prekindergarten program, or it may be covered by the prekindergarten program when having additional teachers attend a training adds minimal if any extra costs.

A center director in Wisconsin said that her school district allows all teachers, including both prekindergarten and other staff, to attend district training sessions.

However, in Arizona, one center director reported that her school district offers training sessions that are only open to teachers from her center who are teaching the state-funded prekindergarten classes, and not to other teachers at the center. This policy meant that when the number of prekindergarten slots allocated to the center suddenly dropped from twenty or thirty to just one, it affected the ability of her teachers to participate in the training, since most no longer had prekindergarten children in their classes.

Serving Children with Special Needs

Schools and centers often coordinate to serve children with special needs and provide them with supplemental services with minimal disruption. In some school districts, children with special needs primarily attend prekindergarten at school sites. However, in many districts, children with special needs can also attend prekindergarten at child care center sites. In some of the latter cases, the additional services the children need—such as speech therapy, physical therapy, or other services—are provided at the center. The therapists and other specialists may visit the center during the day to provide the services so the children can stay at one location. To make this a feasible alternative, there must be sufficient specialists available to travel to locations outside the schools.

In Clinton County, Michigan, a center director coordinates his prekindergarten program with a special education program that is operated by the intermediate school district and with a Head Start program, both located in the same building as his prekindergarten program. Two days a week children from the prekindergarten program, Head Start, and special education program are brought together. In the first year after Head Start moved into the building, it did not participate in these sessions, but once it was clear how well this initiative was working, Head Start joined the effort. The prekindergarten program also has some children with mild disabilities and minor delays who are in the class and who receive services from therapists who come into the prekindergarten classroom. The center director thinks that previous collaborative work on a parenting education program laid the groundwork for the current collaboration between the center and the intermediate school district in serving prekindergarten children with special needs.

For some centers, ensuring children with special needs receive supplementary services while minimizing disruption can be more complicated. A center in Connecticut is outside of the boundaries of one school district with which it contracts, so the district will not

transport children with special needs from the location where they receive additional services to the center. In one case, the center was able to provide the additional services for a child with special needs, with the support from the school district, which evaluated the child, provided consultation, and developed a list of strategies to give to the center. This enabled the child to remain at the center for the whole day. Another district with which the center contracts

has its own site for delivering special needs services. Children typically leave the center for part of each day to receive their supplementary services at the separate site, but speech and

language specialists sometimes come to the center if multiple children at the center need services.

Close coordination between schools and centers is essential to ensure that children with special needs are able to participate in prekindergarten in the setting that works best for them and their families and that they receive all of the supplementary services they need—ideally by delivering the supplementary services at the center site, or, if that is not feasible, by providing transportation between the center and the site where the child receives the services.

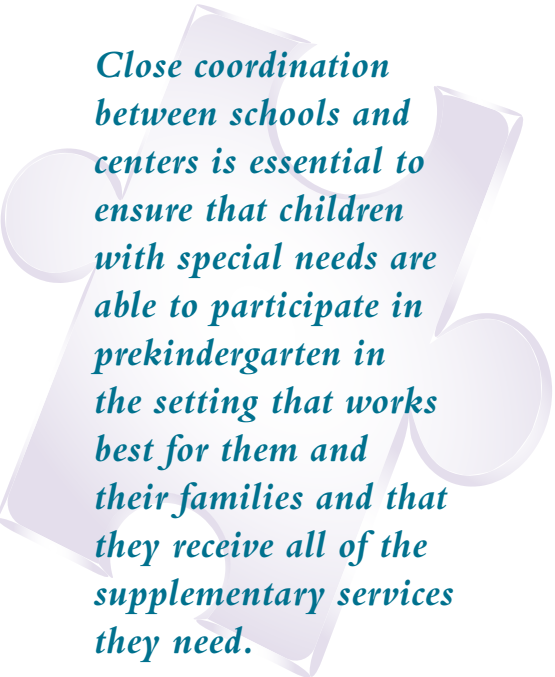
Helping Children's Transition to Kindergarten

Some center directors find that collaboration with schools is useful in coordinating activities to help children make the transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten. These activities, such as visits by prekindergarten children to the schools they plan to attend and meetings between prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers, are designed to enable children to have continuity from their prekindergarten program into kindergarten and to help kindergarten teachers build on the progress children have made prior to kindergarten. The activities help children feel more comfortable entering kindergarten and help teachers gain an understanding of each child's strengths and the areas where each child might need additional support.

Some center directors report that it is useful when their prekindergarten teachers prepare portfolios of children's work for children and their families to show their kindergarten teachers. The portfolios are intended to give the kindergarten teachers a better understanding of the children's skills and interests at the beginning of the school year.

Other communities have additional strategies to address the transition to kindergarten that center directors think are valuable.

- In Evanston, Illinois, the school district sends out a locally developed Kindergarten Readiness Inventory to all early childhood programs. Prekindergarten teachers and parents fill it out on a voluntary basis. With the parent's permission, the completed inventory is given to the child's kindergarten teacher so that the teacher is informed about the child's development.



Close coordination between schools and centers is essential to ensure that children with special needs are able to participate in prekindergarten in the setting that works best for them and their families and that they receive all of the supplementary services they need.

- A Connecticut center works with a School Readiness Council that organizes an annual kindergarten transition meeting for all center teachers and kindergarten teachers. The council also offers a transition meeting for all families in the town to answer their questions. In addition, the center organizes its own kindergarten meeting for families with a panel that includes kindergarten teachers, parents, and principals.
- In New York, a center director said her school district had a meeting with principals and directors in which they talked about their philosophies on early education. Kindergarten and prekindergarten teachers also visit each other's programs.

For centers serving children from multiple districts, the task of coordinating transition activities can be particularly complicated. Many centers are still working to overcome the logistical challenges involved in working with several different districts to address the transition to kindergarten.

Ensuring Partners Understand the Importance of Prekindergarten and Child Care

Center directors find that it strengthens the collaboration when all partners are well-informed about the importance of early childhood education, what a high-quality prekindergarten program should look like, how prekindergarten is distinct from kindergarten and the early elementary grades, and the diverse settings that are capable of providing high-quality prekindergarten. They think it is particularly helpful when there are opportunities for school superintendents, principals, and other key school personnel to learn more about the role of centers in the early childhood system and for center staff to learn more about how schools operate, and for other interactions between school district and center representatives that lead to greater mutual understanding.

Center directors report that in some cases, it is useful, as a starting point, to take school administrators to visit a few child care centers to help them recognize that high-quality centers can provide a learning environment. A few states have more extensive strategies. These activities not only help school administrators gain an appreciation of the role centers play in the early education system, but also help center

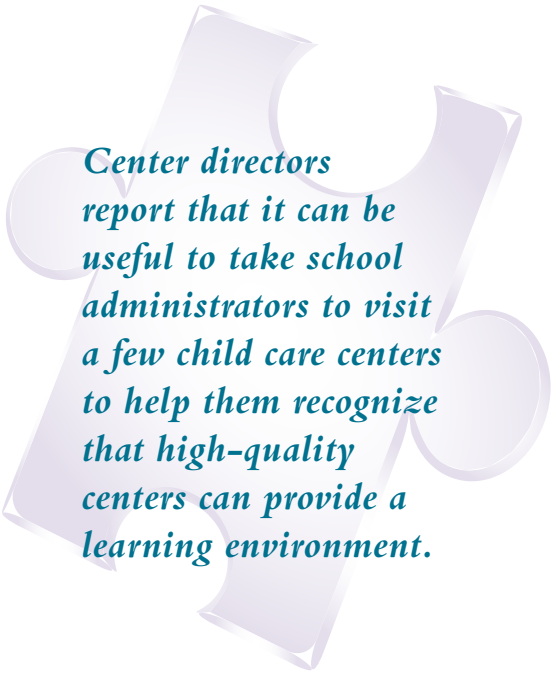
staff gain a better understanding of the schools' perspective.

- Illinois sponsored a conference for school principals on curriculum, early learning standards, and services for children birth to age three.
- In New Mexico, school principals participated in a conference for all sites offering state-funded prekindergarten. The conference was funded by the state prekindergarten initiative and organized by the New Mexico Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Wisconsin supports training on early learning standards as well as regional coaches that consult with schools on prekindergarten and encourage them to involve child care providers.

Exchanges of information between schools and centers sometimes affect not only the prekindergarten program, but kindergarten and elementary school as well. For example, in Illinois, one center director noted that an increasing number of kindergarten classrooms, copying a developmentally appropriate practice seen in early childhood programs, are using learning centers—separate areas in a classroom where children can do different activities that allow them to explore and learn.

Curriculum, Assessment, and Other Programming Issues

As previously described, state prekindergarten policies that require centers to adopt a well-designed curriculum³⁰ and assessment can help ensure a high-quality learning experience for children. Many center directors find state requirements addressing curriculum and assessment helpful in giving them guidance, yet flexible enough that they can choose a curriculum and assessment



Center directors report that it can be useful to take school administrators to visit a few child care centers to help them recognize that high-quality centers can provide a learning environment.

that best fits with their center's approach. Directors are most supportive of curriculum and assessment options that can be adapted for a diverse group of children and that can be blended with other curricula and assessments that some centers offer to align with requirements for other programs, such as Head Start. Some directors are able to use the prekindergarten curriculum throughout the day, rather than only the prekindergarten portion of the day, an approach that offers children continuity and consistency.

Centers are able to implement most effectively the curriculum and assessment when they have funding for related training and materials. Oversight and monitoring to ensure appropriate implementation is essential as well.

Considering the Appropriateness of a Curriculum

Many center directors are content, or at least accepting of, the required prekindergarten curriculum because they think that the curriculum is appropriate or they are given sufficient options to select an appropriate curriculum. Some think that they are allowed enough leeway so that the curriculum they use for their prekindergarten program is the same, or similar to, a curriculum they had already been using. Other directors appreciate that the prekindergarten program requires them to take a more deliberate approach with their curriculum or adopt a stronger curriculum.

- A director in New Mexico, which requires prekindergarten programs to select a curriculum from among an array of options, thinks the options offered are good. The director chose the Creative Curriculum, which she had already been using along with some elements of the High/Scope curriculum. The state requires each prekindergarten provider to settle on a single curriculum, but the Creative Curriculum offers enough flexibility so that the center can still use elements of other approaches.
- In Michigan, too, programs are allowed to choose which curriculum and assessment they will use from among several options. A Michigan director uses the High/Scope curriculum, mixed with some elements of the Creative Curriculum. He thinks that the curriculum works very well, because it is child-centered. His program also uses the

Child Observation Record (COR), which is the assessment aligned with the High/Scope curriculum.

- A center director in Arkansas said that before the prekindergarten program, her center was “hit and miss” and did not follow any specific curriculum. Once the center started participating in the prekindergarten program, which requires programs to use one of the curricula that have been approved by the state, it began using the Creative Curriculum.

Some directors believe that certain curricula being used for prekindergarten programs are not always age-appropriate, do not sufficiently encourage child-initiated activities, or are not adapted to meet the needs of English language learners.

- One center director in Wisconsin cited a curriculum created by school district teachers for the prekindergarten program that is too much like a curriculum for five-year-olds, rather than being geared to four-year-olds.
- In New Mexico, one center chose not to participate in a national research project in which many prekindergarten providers were participating because it would have required the center to use a curriculum that was too heavily focused on teacher-directed activities, and did not give sufficient opportunity for child-initiated activities.
- The New Mexico center director also gave an example of a curriculum recommended by the state that includes a lesson on rhyming where the English words are simply translated into Spanish even though they do not rhyme in Spanish.

The directors want an opportunity to provide input to ensure that they are able to use a curriculum that does not have such shortcomings but instead is appropriate for young children, geared to the way young children learn, and designed to address diverse groups of children.

Coordinating the Prekindergarten Curriculum with Other Curricula

Centers sometimes must juggle multiple curricula because they receive funding from additional sources that require different

curricula than those required by the prekindergarten program. For example, if centers receive funding from Head Start, they must use a curriculum that also allows them to meet Head Start Performance Standards. One center in Tennessee running a prekindergarten program and a Head Start program also received funding through a United Way initiative that required a particular curriculum that differed from the curricula required by either program.

To comply with conflicting requirements, centers often have to determine how to meet multiple, different curriculum requirements at the same time, or use different curricula for different children or classrooms or portions of the day. Flexibility in state and district prekindergarten curriculum requirements can make it much easier for centers to comply with both prekindergarten requirements and any other curriculum requirements to which they are subject.

Some centers or communities have demonstrated ways to adopt an integrated, coordinated approach.

- A Wisconsin school district worked with a center to “mesh” the curriculum the center had been using—the Creative Curriculum—with the district’s own curriculum and benchmarks.
- In Peoria, Illinois, all prekindergarten programs, including those operated by schools, share curriculum materials and collaborate in determining which curricula to use.

Some centers must deal with competing curriculum requirements because they serve children from multiple school districts, each of which uses a different prekindergarten curriculum. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction has taken a step to address this situation and encourage greater coordination across districts by publishing a list of what each district uses for its curriculum on its website. In other states, early learning standards—a set of state guidelines that outline what young children can be expected to learn and do and what can be done to encourage learning—provide a unifying guide to districts so that they all adopt, if not exactly the same curriculum, curricula that share certain common principles and thus are easier for programs to coordinate.

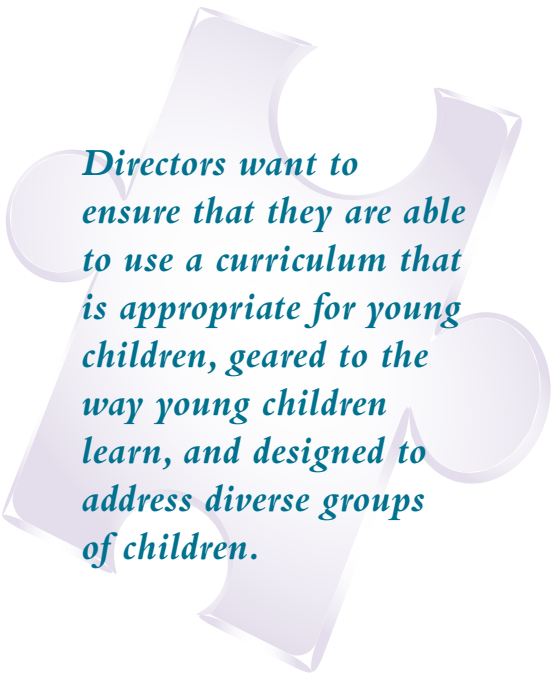
Implementing Assessment Requirements

In addition to curriculum requirements, many centers are required to use a particular assessment—determined at the state level, or selected by the district or individual program, generally among state-approved options—for their prekindergarten children.

Many center directors think that the assessment requirements are reasonable and appropriately aligned with the curriculum. Many also think that the assessments are used in an appropriate way—to evaluate children’s progress so that teachers can learn what areas they need to work on with each individual child, and not to rate programs or determine funding. A Michigan director said it is “fun” at the end of the year to compare where the children are to where they were at the beginning of the year. He does this himself because he enjoys seeing how the children are progressing.

In some cases in which the center directors had objections to the curriculum and/or assessment, the state switched to a different curriculum or assessment. These changes sometimes resulted, in part, from input provided by directors.

- In New Mexico, feedback from center directors helped convince the state to replace the assessment initially required for the prekindergarten program with a new assessment that was seen as more developmentally appropriate. A director said she thinks that the experience demonstrates that the prekindergarten program is in an experimental stage in which the state is testing various approaches to determine what works best and is open to input.
- An Arizona center director reported that the state had previously required the program to administer a particular test



Directors want to ensure that they are able to use a curriculum that is appropriate for young children, geared to the way young children learn, and designed to address diverse groups of children.

for prekindergarten children he thought had not been useful. The state subsequently switched to a portfolio system for assessment. The school district planned to provide the materials and training needed to implement this new assessment system. The director approves of the portfolio system, and in fact, expects to use it for all children at the center, including those not enrolled in the prekindergarten program.

Just as centers must often deal with multiple curricula, they must also often deal with multiple assessments. Some centers have to use a different assessment for each group of children, depending on which funding streams are used to support their prekindergarten or child care program, and some children

have to go through multiple assessments. Implementing multiple assessments can be time-consuming and costly, and can place a burden on teachers and children.

For example, a center director in New York said her children are assessed three different times at the beginning of the year and three times at the end—using Head Start’s National Reporting System, the Creative Curriculum assessment, and the school district

assessment—in addition to ongoing assessment.

Some states and communities offer assistance to communities to help them with the assessment requirements. In West Virginia, the prekindergarten provider selects a curriculum from among three state-approved options, and then the county must provide training to each provider on implementing the assessment system that goes with the chosen curriculum.

Allowing centers the opportunity to give input into the development of assessments and selection of assessment options, giving them flexibility in choosing an assessment among acceptable options, and providing resources and support to help them implement assessments

enables centers to have assessments that can be coordinated with other assessment requirements, that are appropriate for young children, and that provide useful information for teachers.

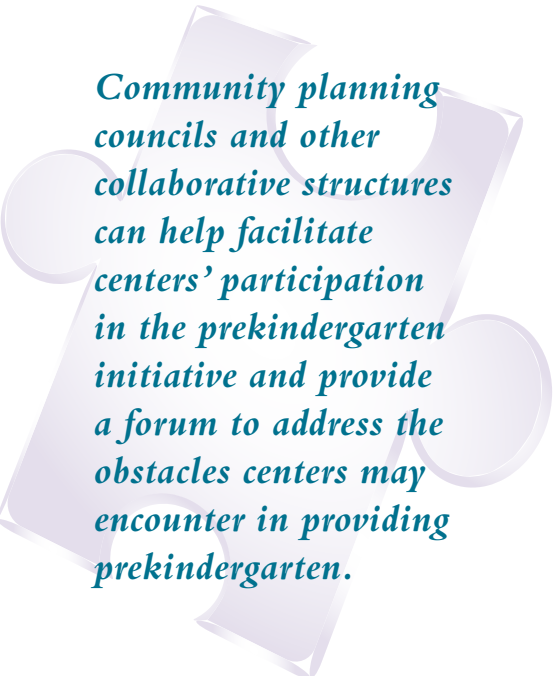
Community Planning and Collaboration

One of the major challenges to effective participation of child care centers in prekindergarten initiatives is the lack of a coordinated child care system. Center directors report that community planning councils and other collaborative structures can help facilitate centers’ participation in the prekindergarten initiative as well as provide a forum to address the obstacles centers may encounter in providing prekindergarten. Local councils can also offer an opportunity to coordinate the prekindergarten initiative with a broader range of early childhood programs and services.

Establishing Local Councils

Some states, such as California, Florida, Iowa, North Carolina, and South Carolina, supported or required local councils prior to and/or separate from the implementation of their prekindergarten initiatives.³¹ Other states, such as Connecticut, required the creation of local councils as part of the prekindergarten program.³² In some states, councils have developed at the initiative of individual communities rather than as a result of any state requirements or incentives. Local councils typically include representatives of centers, schools, and other prekindergarten providers, and may include representatives of the business community, health care providers, parents, and others.

Even when councils are required by the state, there will be differences across communities in what roles councils play and how effective they are, depending on local leadership and resources. However, state policies can at least ensure that a council exists in each community, that certain groups and interests are represented on the council, and that the council takes responsibility for certain tasks. When councils are not required by the state but instead must be initiated at the local level, there are even greater differences across communities. One center director in Tennessee reported that the extensive collaboration in his community is not replicated in many other communities in



Community planning councils and other collaborative structures can help facilitate centers’ participation in the prekindergarten initiative and provide a forum to address the obstacles centers may encounter in providing prekindergarten.

the state. This variation across communities in the use of councils can lead to variation in the extent to which child care centers are involved in providing prekindergarten, since councils can provide an important forum for centers to provide input into decisions about the prekindergarten initiative.

The Role of Local Councils

The role that the local council plays depends on the particular state and community. Councils can be important even if they only provide an opportunity for discussion and information-sharing, but they can have a particularly significant impact if they have authority over decisions on funding and policy.

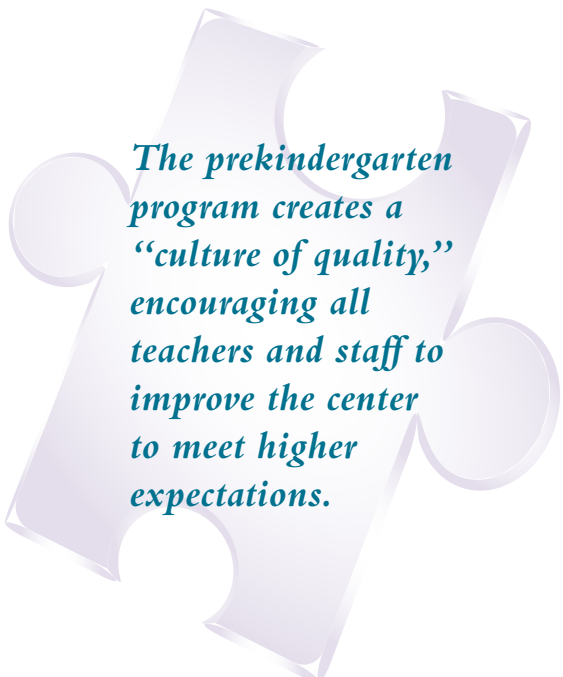
As discussed earlier, in some states, the council is responsible for distributing funds among prekindergarten providers, including schools, child care centers, and other agencies. The council can serve as a neutral party in making funding decisions, increasing the likelihood that both schools and centers receive funds. For example, in Connecticut, the state provides funding to local councils, which in turn allocate funding to grantees. One challenge with this approach is that a center may serve children from communities covered by more than one council. As a result, the center must deal with multiple councils, each with its own set of procedures and approaches.

Even if funds are distributed by a state agency or school districts rather than the council, the council may have responsibility for making decisions in other areas that affect prekindergarten programs and sometimes other early childhood programs as well. Child care centers, as members of the council, can have input into these decisions. In a number of Illinois and Wisconsin communities, councils have emerged to help shape their early childhood systems.

- In Illinois, an early childhood coalition for the Quad Cities formed as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that includes the public schools, Head Start, child care centers, and other partners. Although the centers apply to the state for prekindergarten funding separately from Head Start and the schools, coalition members collaborate on other issues. The coalition members each contribute a portion of their prekindergarten funding to support a manager for the coalition.

All seventeen prekindergarten directors participating in the coalition work together to schedule training. A center director describing the collaboration said she thinks that it also has indirect benefits, including the camaraderie, networking opportunities, trust-building, and sharing on issues beyond prekindergarten.

- In Eau Claire, Wisconsin, an early learning initiative council helped establish the prekindergarten program in the community. The council continues to play a coordinating role, reviewing contracts and encouraging ongoing quality improvement. It provides third-party evaluations twice a year for all centers, develops action plans based on the findings, conducts surveys of parents and teachers, and carries out research.
- In La Crosse, Wisconsin, a collaboration committee with representatives from child care centers, Head Start, and the public schools meets once a month to coordinate enrollment and recruitment efforts. For example, if Head Start has a waiting list, the committee directs families to the state's prekindergarten initiative. The different programs work together to recruit families and inform them of all available options. The collaborative committee also makes site visits to assess programs that are members of the committee.
- Other Wisconsin districts have local councils that determine which types of program models—such as placing a teacher employed by the schools in a child care center and/or having centers receive prekindergarten funding to hire their own teachers—will be used.
- One Tennessee community has an advisory group that meets three or four times a year to help set policy, review the application to the state requesting new prekindergarten classrooms, and consider where the new classrooms will be placed. A second group, which includes public school staff, Head Start and center directors, and principals from the schools that provide prekindergarten, helps make decisions about hiring and firing teachers and meets as needed to address other issues related to the prekindergarten program.



The prekindergarten program creates a “culture of quality,” encouraging all teachers and staff to improve the center to meet higher expectations.

Some states provide funding for councils to help them carry out their responsibilities. For example, in Wisconsin, state prekindergarten funding is available to support the councils. Florida also allows a portion of state prekindergarten funds to be used to support councils, although these funds are not always sufficient to cover the costs of the councils’ multiple responsibilities, such as recruiting children to participate and monitoring programs. When the state does not provide funding for councils, council members must provide the funding themselves and contribute their own staff, time, and other resources to support the council’s operations.

Centerwide Impacts of Providing Prekindergarten

As previously described, having a prekindergarten program can help to lift the overall quality of a center. It can affect not only the four-year-olds (and, when eligible, three-year-olds) enrolled in the program at a center, but also the other children and teachers in the center and the center as a whole. As one center director said, the prekindergarten program creates a “culture of quality,” encouraging all teachers and staff to work to improve their center to meet the higher expectations set by the prekindergarten program. Teachers without degrees are inspired by the example of degreed teachers to go back to school for additional education and credentials. The prekindergarten program also offers a new source of funding to support the center. But having a prekindergarten program can also create additional demands on the center and strain its resources.

A number of center directors spoke about the positive impacts that prekindergarten has throughout their centers.

- A director in Arizona, who until recently received state funding for twenty to

thirty prekindergarten children, said that her whole center benefited from the resources the school district provided as a result of the center’s participation in the prekindergarten program. The district had early childhood specialists who visited the center, worked with the center on meeting the prekindergarten standards, and provided materials, supplies, resources, and teacher training. Children in the prekindergarten program were placed in the same classrooms with children who were funded through other public or private sources, which allowed both groups of children to take advantage of the additional materials and resources.

- An Arkansas center director believes that the prekindergarten program has helped improve her center’s quality. To offer the prekindergarten program, her center had to be evaluated using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and make improvements to increase the center’s score. The center received technical assistance to help it improve in areas where it received lower scores, such as in interactions between the teachers and children.
- An Illinois center used state prekindergarten funds to support a lending library that benefits the whole center. The prekindergarten funds also were used for an activity room, which is particularly important for the many children at the center with delays in their large motor skills. In addition, the center used prekindergarten funds to create a music room out of a coatroom. Although these rooms were created based on the needs demonstrated by children in the prekindergarten program, they are available to all children in the center.
- A center director in New Mexico said that the prekindergarten program enables her center to work with children and families that otherwise would not have an opportunity to participate in an early learning program. She said the program exposes these children to literacy and problem-solving skills.
- Similarly, a center director in North Carolina said that the prekindergarten program “diversified” her center’s population, because it brought in Spanish-

speaking families that the center had not served previously.

- The prekindergarten program enabled another center in North Carolina to take advantage of classrooms in the center used for after-school care that would have otherwise remained empty during the school day. Now the center is able to use a classroom for prekindergarten children during the school day and for an after-school program when those children leave.

In some cases, the prekindergarten program not only helps improve the quality of child care centers, but also makes the public more aware that many centers were already providing high-quality early care and education. A center director in Wisconsin said that the program had shown the community that the center had provided “a high level of care for a long, long time.”

However, some center directors expressed general concerns about the competition for limited resources—between prekindergarten classrooms and other classrooms within their centers and between prekindergarten and child care within the larger early childhood system.

- A center director in New Mexico worries that state funding for a quality initiative that helped centers such as hers get accredited is going to be concentrated on prekindergarten programs, rather than being used to help a wider range of child care providers.
- A center director in North Carolina said that there was some tension when her center started offering the prekindergarten program because teachers in the other classes felt that the prekindergarten classes were getting more attention.

Prekindergarten funding is most helpful to centers when it supplements—rather than supplants—other early childhood resources and programs.

Impact on Other Preschool-Age Children Attending Centers

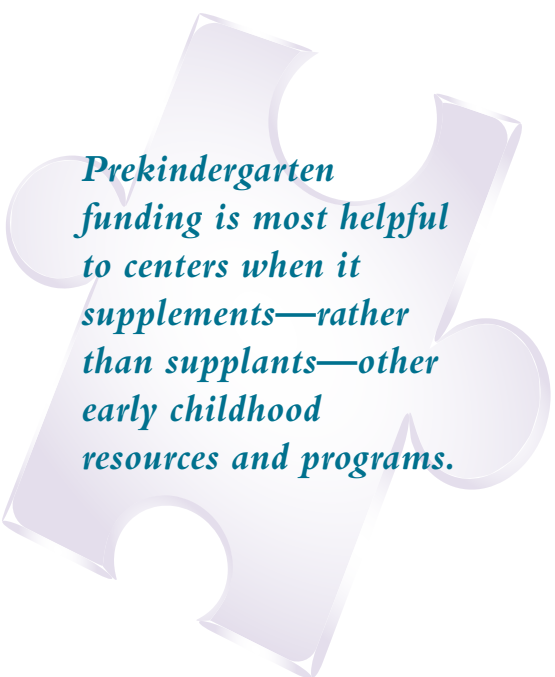
There are various ways in which a center’s prekindergarten program can affect children at the center who are the same age as those participating in the program but who are unable to enroll in the program (because they do not meet the income or other eligibility

criteria of the program, or there are not sufficient slots available to serve them). Some states and communities allow these children to be served in prekindergarten-funded classrooms, with funding for these children provided by parent fees or other private or public funding sources. As a result, even though a state chooses to focus its limited prekindergarten resources on serving children who are low-income or at risk, all children at the center benefit to at least some extent from the additional resources of the prekindergarten program.

- An Arkansas center is able to have mixed classrooms with children funded by prekindergarten, child care assistance, and private-paying parents. The director said that you “can’t tell by looking at [the children] which are funded by which.”
- In Evanston, Illinois, one center avoided creating a separate classroom for prekindergarten children by using a “roving” teacher. For a period of the day, the teacher works individually with children who meet the risk criteria to qualify for prekindergarten. For the rest of the day, the children eligible for prekindergarten are in integrated classes with other children who do not qualify for prekindergarten.

In other states and communities, children eligible for prekindergarten and children who are ineligible cannot be served in the same classroom. This often occurs when a school district places a teacher in a child care center for prekindergarten, because the district is funding the teacher only to serve prekindergarten-eligible children.

When prekindergarten children must be served in a separate classroom, it can create logistical challenges for a center. For example, centers often serve children from multiple school districts, some of which fund prekindergarten in centers and other that do not fund



Prekindergarten funding is most helpful to centers when it supplements—rather than supplants—other early childhood resources and programs.

prekindergarten in centers (or do not fund prekindergarten at all). If a center cannot place prekindergarten children with children who are not enrolled in the prekindergarten program, it must figure out how to juggle its classrooms. The center must separate the two groups while ensuring that the classes are large enough to be financially viable yet not larger than permitted under applicable prekindergarten and/or child care licensing requirements.

Policies that do not allow eligible children to be served with children who are ineligible can also result in segregating classrooms by income, if—as is the case in the majority of states—the prekindergarten program is only open to low-income children. Many center directors indicate that they had worked to avoid this situation prior to receiving state prekindergarten funding. In some cases, families whose children qualify for the prekindergarten program feel stigmatized when their children are placed in a separate class. On the other hand, some families whose children do not qualify may be envious of the families whose children do qualify once they see the benefits of the prekindergarten program.

Center directors have other concerns about not being able to serve all children together, regardless of their eligibility for prekindergarten. One Arizona center is able to divide its preschoolers into two classrooms not based on whether they qualify for prekindergarten but rather based on whether they have later or earlier birthdays. However, the center director is not sure whether he will be able to maintain this approach. In 2009, when all prekindergarten teachers are required to have early childhood certification, all of the eligible children may have to be placed in one classroom, since the center has only one teacher that meets the credential requirements. The director is concerned that he will not be able to offer the compensation needed to recruit a second teacher with the required credentials.

Even if the children cannot be served in the same classrooms, center directors report that it is still possible for children not enrolled in the prekindergarten program to benefit indirectly. For example, the prekindergarten teachers and curriculum often provide an example to follow for other classrooms. Teachers in other classrooms sometimes adopt new approaches or techniques based on what they learn from their peers.

Impact on Infants and Toddlers

The effects of prekindergarten programs often extend to classrooms serving infants and toddlers. Teachers in infant and toddler rooms can learn from degreed prekindergarten teachers. In some cases, centers are able to use prekindergarten funding for training, materials, supplies, libraries, or activity rooms that are available to the entire center, including infants and toddlers. Some centers are also able to attract infants and toddlers because older siblings are enrolled in the centers' prekindergarten programs.

- A center director in North Carolina said having the prekindergarten program motivates the teachers in classrooms with two- and three-year-olds, because the teachers see the prekindergarten classes and want to ensure that their children are ready for prekindergarten.
- A center director in New York City makes any training that is offered to prekindergarten teachers available to infant and toddler teachers as well. In addition, when parent education programs are held for parents of prekindergarten children, parents with infants and toddlers at the center are also invited.

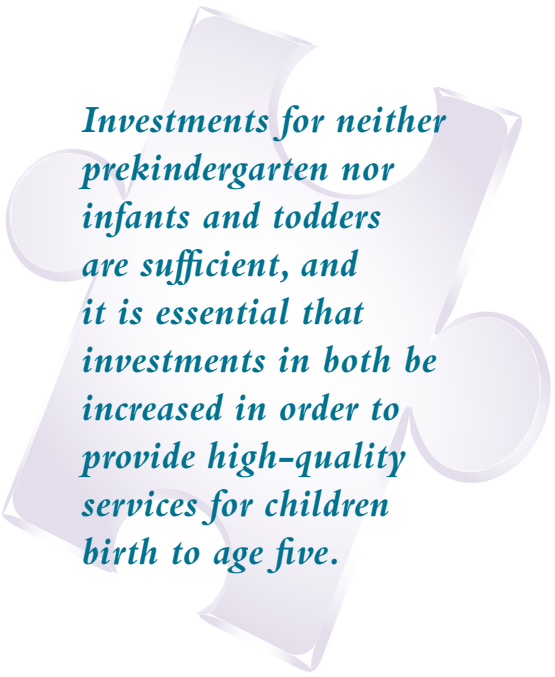
Yet, prekindergarten programs can also have some negative consequences for infant and toddler rooms. Some centers have moved teachers with bachelor's degrees and other credentials required by the prekindergarten program from infant or toddler rooms to prekindergarten classrooms, and cannot find or cannot afford the salary for an additional teacher with a bachelor's degree. Some centers have to devote additional energy and resources to the prekindergarten program in order to meet various new requirements associated with the program, at the expense of infant and toddler programs. Several directors said that they have to spend more time on administration for the prekindergarten program, leaving less time to spend on programming for other children. In some cases, centers choose to eliminate their infant and toddler classrooms altogether and offer prekindergarten classrooms instead. A number of Florida centers replaced infant and toddler rooms with prekindergarten classes because the prekindergarten program brought in more resources relative to the cost of providing the classes.

On the other hand, the number of infant and toddler slots can also be diminished when centers choose *not* to offer prekindergarten programs. Classrooms for three- and four-year-olds have long enabled centers to cross-subsidize infant and toddler classes, which—given the lower child-teacher ratios required by child care licensing regulations—are more costly to operate. A number of center directors report that if they had not offered prekindergarten, they would have lost most of their four-year-olds to school-based prekindergarten programs, and it would have been financially infeasible to maintain their infant and toddler rooms.

Some states have begun to examine ways that they can support infant and toddler care, ensuring that centers—as well as other early childhood programs—have the resources they need to support it and have as much of an incentive to offer infant and toddler care as to offer prekindergarten, even as prekindergarten funding increases. In 2007, Tennessee considered a proposal to provide an infusion of funds to child care programs serving infants and toddlers to ensure that these programs are able to be sustained.³³ The state's final fiscal year 2008 budget did not include the funding

the governor had proposed for the initiative, but that funding is expected to be proposed again next year. Oklahoma, whose prekindergarten initiative is available to all four-year-olds whose families wish to participate, is now combining public and private funds for a pilot initiative that supports comprehensive early childhood services for children birth through age three in low-income families.³⁴

Given that current investments for neither prekindergarten nor infants and toddlers are sufficient, it is essential that investments in both be increased so that centers as well as other early childhood providers are able to provide high-quality services for children birth to age five.



Investments for neither prekindergarten nor infants and toddlers are sufficient, and it is essential that investments in both be increased in order to provide high-quality services for children birth to age five.



Strategies to Support Child Care Centers as a Piece of the PreK Puzzle

The experiences of the child care center directors interviewed for this report offer a number of lessons for policy makers interested in establishing or expanding prekindergarten initiatives in their states and communities. The following state and local policies, practices, and leadership strategies can be effective in both increasing opportunities for child care centers to offer state-funded prekindergarten programs and ensuring that centers' participation as prekindergarten providers has maximum benefits for children, families, teachers, and centers.

Financing for High-Quality Prekindergarten in Child Care Centers

- State funding for prekindergarten that is sufficient to cover a child care center's full range of expenses for a high-quality program—including start-up costs, supplies and materials, transportation, administration, facilities, and teacher and director salaries and benefits that are comparable to those offered for prekindergarten teachers and supervisors employed by the public schools.
- A funding distribution system that ensures that child care centers and other providers outside the schools can fairly compete to offer prekindergarten programs. Strategies for achieving this objective may include having a state-level agency, community council, or independent entity determine which providers receive prekindergarten funding or reserving a minimum percentage of state prekindergarten funding for providers outside the schools.
- Stable, predictable prekindergarten funding that allows child care centers to plan ahead for their budgets and programs—as opposed to funding and slot allotments that fluctuate drastically from year to year.
- Flexibility in meeting any requirements for matching funds.
- Training for center directors on administering, budgeting, and—when prekindergarten funding is insufficient—fundraising that helps them to effectively operate their programs and efficiently use resources.
- The ability to combine state prekindergarten funding, child care assistance funding, and parent fees in ways that enable child care centers to offer full-day, high-quality programs. Policies that support effective blending of funds include setting adequate child care reimbursement rates and reimbursing centers for a full day of care when they provide a substantial number of hours of care before and after the prekindergarten day.

Supporting Teachers

- Supports and incentives to help child care center teachers obtain the training and education needed to meet prekindergarten credential requirements and receive salaries and benefits comparable to those offered by the public schools. These supports may include scholarships to cover tuition, books, and transportation to school and financing for substitutes while teachers are attending classes.
- Input by center directors into the hiring and firing of prekindergarten teachers placed by school districts in child care centers and assistance as needed in helping centers forge good relationships with these teachers.

Promoting Collaboration and Coordination

- Close coordination between schools, districts and child care centers in allocating prekindergarten slots, enrolling children, providing ongoing teacher training, serving children with special needs, helping children make successful transitions from prekindergarten to kindergarten, and educating each other about the importance

and role of both prekindergarten and child care.

- Encouraging and providing funding for community coalitions as a mechanism for helping to remove obstacles child care centers may encounter in providing prekindergarten and collaborating on strategies for successfully implementing prekindergarten.

Ensuring Appropriate Curriculum and Assessment

- Flexibility in curriculum and assessment requirements so that child care centers are able to choose a curriculum and assessment from acceptable options that can be coordinated with curricula or assessments that may be required for other programs—such as Head Start—offered by the centers.

- Opportunities for child care centers and other prekindergarten providers to provide feedback about curriculum and assessment options and encourage changes if necessary to ensure curricula and assessments that are appropriate for young children and responsive to the needs of children from diverse backgrounds.

Supporting the Broader Early Care and Education System

- Increased investments in infant and toddler care to make it financially feasible for child care centers and other early childhood providers to offer high-quality early care and education to children birth to age five.



With the rapid growth of state prekindergarten initiatives, it is important to strengthen and expand efforts to involve child care centers in providing high-quality programs, using strategies that have already been shown to work. It is also essential to continue to evaluate these strategies and

explore new approaches as prekindergarten initiatives develop and as states, communities, child care centers, and other prekindergarten providers continue to learn from experience about the most effective ways to make high-quality prekindergarten accessible to children and families.



- 1 Thirty-eight states invest in one or more prekindergarten initiatives (for a total of forty-eight different state prekindergarten initiatives). W. Steven Barnett, Jason T. Hustedt, Laura E. Hawkinson, and Kenneth B. Robin, *The State of Preschool 2006: State Preschool Yearbook* (Rutgers, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2006), 4.
- 2 All but three of the forty-eight state initiatives allow prekindergarten to be offered in settings outside public schools. Barnett, et al., 196–7.
- 3 Barnett, et al., 8. These settings are primarily child care centers and Head Start programs, but also included are other settings such as family child care homes and family resource centers.
- 4 See, e.g., Rachel Schumacher, Danielle Ewen, Katherine Hart, and Joan Lombardi, *All Together Now: State Experiences in Using Community-Based Child Care to Provide Pre-Kindergarten* (Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy, 2005), *available at* http://www.clasp.org/publications/all_together_now.pdf (last visited May 11, 2007); Betty Holcomb, *A Diverse System Delivers for Pre-K: Lessons Learned in New York State* (Washington, DC: Pre-K Now, 2006), *available at* http://www.preknow.org/documents/DiverseDelivery_Jul2006.pdf (last visited Apr. 9, 2007).
- 5 Barnett, et al., 169–171.
- 6 States that incorporate prekindergarten funding into their school funding formula generally distribute the prekindergarten funding through the schools. However, states that distribute prekindergarten funding through the schools do not all make this funding part of their K–12 funding formula.
- 7 Title 126 Procedural Rule Board of Education, Series 28 West Virginia’s Universal Access to a Quality Early Education System, 2007 WV 5015.
- 8 N.Y. COMP. CODES R. & REGS. tit. 8, § 151–1.4 (2007), *available at* <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/nyc/UPK/2007-08/151-1terms.doc> (last visited Nov. 7, 2007).
- 9 Barnett, et al., 112.
- 10 Holcomb, 8.
- 11 Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, 2007–2008 School Year Pre-K Providers’ Operating Guidelines (Atlanta, GA: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, 2007), 26–27, *available at* <http://www.decal.state.ga.us/Documents/PreK/Guidelines.pdf> (last visited Nov. 7, 2007).
- 12 N.M. STAT. ANN. § 32A–23–1 (2007), *available at* <http://www.ped.state.nm.us/earlyChildhood/dl08/preK/NM%20PreKAct.pdf> (last visited Nov. 7, 2007).
- 13 Michigan Department of Education, Office of Early Childhood Education and Family Services, “Early Childhood Funding” (2006), 2–3, *available at* http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Early_Childhood_Funding_160478_7.PDF (last visited Nov. 7, 2007).
- 14 Connecticut Department of Education, “Overview of the School Readiness Program,” *available at* <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Readiness/sroverview.pdf> (last visited Nov. 7, 2007).
- 15 FLA. STAT. § 1002.71 (2007), *available at* http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=Ch1002/SEC71.HTM&Title=->2007->Ch1002->Section%2071#1002.71 (last visited Nov. 7, 2007).
- 16 North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Office of School Readiness, *More at Four Pre-Kindergarten Program Guidelines and Requirements* (2007), 2–1, *available at* http://www.osr.nc.gov/_pdf/programGuidelines.pdf (last visited Nov. 7, 2007).
- 17 A national study demonstrates that in many states, prekindergarten funding has not kept pace with inflation. After adjusting for inflation, spending per child enrolled was lower in 2005–2006 than in 2001–2002 in twenty-five of the thirty-seven states with prekindergarten initiatives in both years. National Women’s Law Center analysis of data from Barnett, et al., 40–154.
- 18 Michigan Department of Education, Michigan School Readiness Program Legislative Update, October 31, 2007 (2007), *available at* http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Legislative_Update_10-30-07_214250_7.pdf (last visited Nov. 7, 2007).
- 19 North Carolina Partnership for Children, “Smart Start Frequently Asked Questions – FAQs,” *available at* <http://www.ncsmartstart.org/about/faqs.htm> (last visited Apr. 16, 2007).

- 20 Illinois Facilities Fund, “About the IFF,” *available at* <http://www.iff.org/content.cfm/aboutiff> (last visited Apr. 16, 2007).
- 21 Barnett, et al., 177. A few states provide free prekindergarten to families up to a certain income eligibility limit, and then allow families with higher incomes to participate in the program but require them to pay based on a sliding fee scale.
- 22 Karen Schulman and Helen Blank, *State Child Care Assistance Policies 2007: Some Steps Forward, More Progress Needed* (Washington, DC: National Women’s Law Center, 2007), 7 and 21-25, *available at* <http://www.nwlc.org/pdf/StateChildCareAssistancePoliciesReport07Web.pdf> (last visited Nov. 7, 2007).
- 23 Schulman and Blank, 5-6 and 16-17.
- 24 Barnett, et al., 18.
- 25 *Abbott ex rel. Abbott v. Burke*, 790 A.2d 842 (N.J. 2002).
- 26 New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Early Childhood Education, *Abbott Preschool Program, Private Provider One Year Budget Instructions and Guidance, School Year 2007-2008*, 6-7, *available at* <http://www.state.nj.us/education/ece/abbott/provguide.doc> (last visited June 4, 2007).
- 27 *More at Four Pre-Kindergarten Program Guidelines and Requirements*, 6-4-6-7.
- 28 In Michigan, intermediate school districts are comprised of several local school districts in a region. The intermediate school districts pool resources across local school districts to address areas such as early childhood education, special education services, professional development, school improvement, administrative services, technology, and partnerships with business, county agencies, and other groups and organizations. Information about Michigan Intermediate School Districts (ISD) from the Michigan Association of School Boards, *available at* <http://www.masb.org/page.cfm/964/> (last visited June 11, 2007).
- 29 Child Care Services Association, “T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Project,” *available at* <http://www.childcareservices.org/ps/teach.html> (last visited May 7, 2007). Twenty-one states use the T.E.A.C.H. model.
- 30 In discussing curriculum issues with center directors, the National Women’s Law Center did not define the term “curriculum” for them. Depending on the context, curriculum may be used to refer to a specific outline of content a teacher is expected to teach, or may be used to refer more broadly to teaching practices and teaching approaches. In general, most states do not require prekindergarten providers to follow a specific curriculum, but instead offer options or set out overall principles with which a program’s curriculum must align.
- 31 Laurie Miller, Atelia Melaville, and Helen Blank, *Bringing It Together: State-Driven Community Early Childhood Initiatives* (Washington, DC: Children’s Defense Fund, 2002).
- 32 CONN. GEN. STAT. § 10-16r (2007), *available at* <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2007/pub/Chap164.htm#Sec-0-16r.htm> (last visited Nov. 7, 2007).
- 33 Email from Phil Acord, President/CEO, Children’s Home/Chambliss Shelter, to Helen Blank, National Women’s Law Center, Sept. 24, 2007.
- 34 Email from Nancy vonBargen, Executive Director, Smart Start Oklahoma, to Helen Blank, National Women’s Law Center, Sept. 25, 2007.



11 Dupont Circle NW Suite 800
Washington, DC 20036
202.588.5180
202.588.5195 (fax)
www.nwlc.org