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Pre-Kindergarten Education Funding

Studies have shown that access to full-day, quality pre-kindergarten education significantly increases the likelihood that children, especially those from low-income families, will succeed in grade school.¹ Specifically, access to quality pre-kindergarten education has been found to have beneficial effects on children's literacy, language, and math skills.²

Public funding for pre-kindergarten education in Vermont is currently regulated under Act 166. This legislation requires every school district in Vermont to provide ten hours of pre-kindergarten education per week for thirty-five weeks a year to children ages three to five who are not enrolled in kindergarten programs.³ Along with these requirements, Act 166 mandates "an annual legislative evaluation of the state's pre-K efforts."⁴ Vermont is currently one of only nine states and Washington D.C. that fund public pre-kindergarten education through the K-12 funding formula. This type of funding formula is based on a "per-student funding level," with additional funds allocated for disadvantaged students and schools.⁵ Although this system does not guarantee sufficient funding, it does mean that funding for pre-kindergarten education is somewhat

centers, public schools, and community-based programs.⁸ UPK programs vary in instructor quality, state funding, physical accessibility, and even in the amount of preschool provided.⁹ Several states, including Vermont, require as little as ten hours of pre-kindergarten education a week; other programs provide full school days that include before- and after-school care programs.¹⁰

In 2014, Building Bright Futures, Vermont's early childhood state advisory council, identified several possible areas of improvement for Act 166. Included in these areas for improvement are the need to locate sources of preschool funding other than the education fund, as well as the need to increase the "dosage" of preschool to more than ten hours a week in order to make preschools more accessible to working families.¹¹ This "dosage" presents accessibility problems, as transportation costs and the need to find additional childcare can deter many working families from enrolling children in public preschool.¹²

Currently, in order to access full-day, high quality preschool, parents in Vermont need to pay for either additional public care programs or a private preschool. The school choice system in Vermont only provides pre-kindergarten educational vouchers to children who do not have a public school operating in their school district.¹³ These school districts are required to pay full tuition to other public programs, or they can partially pay for a private institution based on the

programs, is applicable to Vermont's continued usage of school voucher programs for pre-kindergarten education funding.

standardized educational variables in a controlled study, researchers have contrasted the levels of academic proficiency between voucher and a non-voucher students.⁴²

The National Center for Educational Evaluation and Regional Assistance performed a year-long study of 1,700 students from grades K-12 within the greater Washington D.C area.⁴³ A portion of the students who were admitted to the study received their scholarships through a lottery process to enroll in a local private educational institution.⁴⁴ The findings of the study concluded that after the first year, the students who had received the scholarships had lower mathematics and reading test scores than the students who did not receive the scholarship.⁴⁵ Additionally, the study concluded that the scholarship program had no impact on the child's satisfaction with the school's fit.⁴⁶ This study resulted in no apparent correlation between students who received voucher scholarships under the program and an increase in academic performance.⁴⁷

John F. Witte, a professor in Political Science and Public Affairs from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, conducted a study on the academic performance of voucher students under The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP). Over the past forty years, Mr. Witte has conducted research focusing on the nexus between politics and education, delving into school

Scholar

Oregon

Oregon, like Maine and Vermont, is a predominately rural state.⁷⁴ The two major pre-kindergarten funding models in Oregon are Oregon Prekindergarten (OPK) and Preschool Promise. OPK was established in 1987 by the Oregon legislature and it was modeled and designed in accordance to federally funded Head Start programs.⁷⁵ Oregon's 28 grantees include school districts, educational service districts, and community action programs. By Oregon law, 20% of the children who benefit from this program are to come from families not in poverty, another 10% must be children who have identified disorders, and the remaining 70% must be children from impoverished families.⁷⁶

The Preschool Promise program was instituted in 2015 and similar to a Maine program, it focuses on families whose incomes are at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.⁷⁷ This program allows for flexibility to be delivered in a way that supports parent's choice of the education provider setting. This method of allowing families freedom of choice is often dubbed a "mixed delivery" system because it recognizes parent preference given the assessment that high quality early learning experiences can take place in a wide variety of settings.⁷⁸

These two Oregon programs have many similarities with regard to how benefits are distributed. Both target disadvantaged families and aim to fulfill some series of goals related to academic and familial success. An important difference is that OPK operates under a federal framework, whereas Preschool Promise was created and is managed by state agencies. Another noteworthy distinction is that OPK has significantly more overall funding in comparison to Preschool Promise, yet the funding per student is lower. For instance, the 2015-17 legislatively approved budget for OPK was \$8,900 per child of funding for 8,156 children. Preschool Promise's average cost per child in its first year was \$11,458 per child for 1,300 children (these numbers do not reflect funding that went into teacher salaries and other costs).⁷⁹ Another notable aspect of Preschool Promise that differs from OPK is that Preschool Promise funds "hubs," which are educational centers operated in low-income areas. This method resolves problems of transportation by maintaining high quality program centers in proximity to lower-income neighborhoods.⁸⁰ In general, OPK takes on a geographically and demographically holistic approach, whereas Preschool Promise uses an area-focused approach, indicating that the two programs are compatible, if not mutually reinforcing.

⁷⁴ United States Department of Commerce: US Census Bureau, *Quick Facts: Oregon*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/OR> (last updated 2018).

⁷⁵ Oregon Department of Education, *Oregon Preschool Legislative Report*, 5, https://oregonearlylearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Oregon-Preschool-Legislative-Report_020917.pdf (last updated 2017).

⁷⁶ Oregon Department of Education, *Oregon Preschool Legislative Report*, 4.

⁷⁷ Oregon Department of Education, *Oregon Preschool Legislative Report*, 4.

⁷⁸ Oregon Department of Education, *Oregon Preschool Legislative Report*, 4.

⁷⁹ Oregon Department of Education, *Oregon Preschool Legislative Report*, 9.

⁸⁰ Oregon Department of Education, *Oregon Preschool Legislative Report*, 20.

likely that the issues facing New York's pre-kindergarten programs are similar to problems in Vermont. Therefore, the same potential remedies regarding pre-kindergarten access and assistance programs also apply.

Washington D.C.

Currently, Washington, D.C. leads the nation in providing three- and four-year-old children with quality pre-kindergarten education.⁸⁹ According to a 2017 report from the National Institute for Early Education Research, Washington D.C. provides the highest percentage of children with access to quality pre-kindergarten education.⁹⁰ Along with this, Washington, D.C. leads the nation in resource rankings and per child spending.⁹¹ Washington, D.C. provides public pre-kindergarten education for all three and four-year-old children for 180 days a year, five days a week, for 6.5 hours a day. Thus, the amount of instructional time provided for pre-kindergarten students equals that of students in grades K-12.⁹² Funding for public preschools in Washington, D.C. is allocated using the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula, a formula that adjusts spending to take into account the costs of different grade levels and community needs.⁹³ This funding is drawn from the DC General Education Fund, as a large portion of pre-kindergarten programs in Washington D.C. are housed within public elementary schools and charter schools.⁹⁴

Although Washington D.C. is markedly different from Vermont in regards to population density, certain aspects of Washington, D.C.'s pre-kindergarten program could benefit pre-kindergarten education programs across the country.

Council to help provide a voice to early childhood education stakeholders.¹⁰⁰ This emergency legislation significantly improved the pace at which the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Act

possible through directed and diverse funding cycles, quality education standards, and vulnerable population outreach.

This report was completed on April 20, 2018 by Brian Angel, Noah Boland, and Elie Jordi under the supervision of Professor Jack Gierzynski and Professor Robert Bartlett with the assistance of Research Assistant Catherine Curran-Groome in response to a request from Rep. Kate Webb.

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