Public Pre-K Policy Implementation and the Early Childhood Education Workforce

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WHEN PRE-K COMES TO SCHOOL
POLICY, PARTNERSHIPS, AND THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION WORKFORCE

BETHANY WILINSKI
Foreword by Sharon Lynn Kagan
QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT HAS PROVEN BENEFITS

- Better cognitive development
- Higher earnings
- Reduced inequality

James Heckman and Paul Gertler et al.
Labor Market Returns to an Early Childhood Stimulation Intervention in Jamaica

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Expansion of public pre-K

Expansion of public pre-K

FIGURE 1: PERCENT OF 4-YEAR-OLDS SERVED IN STATE PRESCHOOL

Michigan - Great Start Readiness Program

• Serves 34% of four-year-olds in the state

• Targeted program based on income and other risk factors

• Meets 9 of 10 state preschool quality standards (National Institute for Early Education Research)

• Implemented in public school and community sites (30% of slots in each ISD must be provided in community sites)
Pre-K Partnerships

- Bring schools and community providers together to provide pre-K

- Benefits: leverage resources and expertise, expanded access, greater consistency and alignment
Partnerships: Challenges for Institutions

Pre-K exists in a fragile ECE ecosystem:

• Pre-K may make community providers vulnerable
  • Childcare centers offset the high cost of infant care by enrolling 4 year-olds
  • Regulations about which sites are qualified to provide pre-K may threaten some providers’ viability

• State funds help childcare sites with an infusion of funds, but per-pupil reimbursements may not be enough
Partnerships: Challenges for Institutions

Resources for implementation are varied:

• Policy may assume that all implementing partners (public schools and community sites) have access to the same resources

• In reality, community providers may struggle to meet requirements due to lack of economic and human resources
Implications for the Pre-K Workforce

• Compensation differences across pre-K sites
  • Same work, dramatically different pay and benefits
  • Pushes teachers out of community sites, with implications for program quality

• Varied working conditions
  • Discrepancies: amount of time “with kids,” time for planning and professional development

• Upgrading credentials can be a challenge
What policy can do

• Account for and adapt to the economic impact of pre-K

• Provide additional support for community partners to meet policy requirements

• Address issues of compensation, benefits, and working conditions for all pre-K teachers
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