Approaches to State Pre-K Eligibility Policy: Considerations for Virginia Policy Makers

Lori Connors-Tadros, Ph.D. Project Director, Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes Joint Subcommittee on the Virginia Preschool Initiative June 11, 2015
Overview

- What is a High Quality Program
- Access, Equity & Sustainability
- Approaches to Eligibility Policy
- Research on Risk Factors
- Considerations for Virginia
Critical Features of High Quality Programs
Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education (2013)

- Developmentally Focused Instruction/Curricula
- Intensive Job-embedded Professional Development
- Regular Monitoring of Children’s Progress to Inform Practice

Teacher Qualifications, Group Size, Adult-Child Ratio
### QUALITY STANDARDS CHECKLIST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POLICY</th>
<th>STATE PRE-K REQUIREMENT</th>
<th>BENCHMARK</th>
<th>DOES REQUIREMENT MEET BENCHMARK?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early learning standards</td>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher degree</td>
<td>BA (public); HSD (nonpublic)³</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>❑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher specialized training</td>
<td>Early Primary, Elem Ed,²</td>
<td>Specializing in pre-K</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant teacher degree</td>
<td>HSD or equivalent (public); CDA or equivalent</td>
<td>at least 1 support service</td>
<td>❑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher in-service</td>
<td>15 clock hours/years</td>
<td>At least 15 hours/year</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum class size</td>
<td>20 or lower</td>
<td>20 or lower</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-year-olds</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>3-year-olds</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year-olds</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4-year-olds</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff-child ratio</td>
<td>1:10 or better</td>
<td>1:10 or better</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-year-olds</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>3-year-olds</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year-olds</td>
<td>1:9</td>
<td>4-year-olds</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screening/referral</td>
<td>Vision, hearing, immunizations³</td>
<td>Vision, hearing, health; and at least 1 support service</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals</td>
<td>No meal required⁴</td>
<td>At least 1/day</td>
<td>❑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>Other monitoring</td>
<td>Site visits</td>
<td>❑</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL BENCHMARKS MET**: 6
Access to Preschool in VA
State of Preschool 2014, Virginia Profile, National Institute for Early Education Research

VPI & Head Start Enrollment of 4 Yr Olds In VA

- Pre-K: 71%
- Head Start: 18%
- SpecEd: 8%
- Other/None: 3%

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Access, Equity, and Sustainability
Eligibility + Recruitment + Selection + Enrollment + Attendance

- Low income children are less likely to participate in high quality PK and when they do, they benefit greatly.
- However, low income children learn more in programs/classrooms that are economically diverse.
- Eligibility Policy must work in tandem with program guidance to avoid unintended consequences.
National Overview of State Pre-K Eligibility Policy

Of the 53 programs profiled:

- 17 (32%) have no eligibility requirements beyond age
- 28 programs (58%) use low-income status to determine eligibility
- 21 programs (40%) report that age is the only enrollment factor
- Five (9%) programs reported that income was the only risk factor used for eligibility.
Income And Other Risk Factors

35 programs identify other risk factors, plus income.

- In 9 programs, children must meet a designated number of risk factors in addition to income
- In 19 programs, income counts as 1 risk factor
- The average program considers 5 risk factors
- 3 risk factors were used by more than half of the programs:
  - homelessness or unstable housing;
  - disability or developmental delay of the child; and
  - non-English speaking family.
State Approaches to Eligibility Policy

- **Individual Family Risk Factors** - eligibility for the program is based on individual characteristics of the family/child.
- **Geographic Risk Factors** - based on specific risk factors of residents in that jurisdiction.
- **Hybrid Model** - Certain % served must meet income eligibility; other risks considered.
Tennessee: Individual Risk Factors

- Income eligibility is first priority; other risk factors are considered when space is available.
- Tier 1: Economically disadvantaged, as based on income levels set annually by the Department of Health and Human Services.
- Tier 2: “Students with disabilities, students identified as English Language Learners (ELL), students in state custody, or those identified as educationally at-risk due to abuse or neglect.”
- Tier 3: If space is still available after serving children in Tiers 1 and 2, children who meet age and eligibility requirements set by the respective Community Pre-K Advisory Council (C-PAC) may be enrolled.
Michigan: Individual Risk Factors

Eligibility and Enrollment

Intake Process
- All age-eligible preschool children in community
- Children not eligible for Head Start

Children eligible for Head Start
- Head Start
- Attend Head Start
- Unable to attend Head Start

Factors Contributing to Educational Risk
- Low Family Income (= <250% of FPL)
- Diagnosed Disability or Identified Developmental Delay
- Severe or Challenging Behavior
- Primary Home Language Other than English
- Parent/s with Low Educational Attainment
- Abuse/Neglect of Child or Parent
- Environmental Risk

INCOME PRIORITIZATION
- Low Family Income (= <250% of FPL)
- Family Income above 250% of FPL plus 2 risk factors with a sliding scale of tuition
- Family Income above 250% of FPL plus 1 risk factor with a sliding scale of tuition
- Family Income above 250% of FPL with a sliding scale of tuition

ENROLLMENT
- Enroll all slots filled
- Enroll slots remaining

UNSERVED
- Waitlist and enroll into openings as they appear or refer to other programs
- Enroll into openings, sliding scale of tuition for families over 250% FPL plus prioritized risk factors, refer to other programs or waitlist

*Each child’s household income is ranked from lowest to highest and divided into quintiles based on how far child’s household income is below 250% of FPL, and then enrolling children in the quintile with lowest household income before enrolling children in the quintile with the next lowest household income.

A maximum of 10% of enrolled children may be from families above 250% of FPL. These families must pay tuition calculated on a sliding scale based on family income. November 2013
North Carolina: Hybrid Approach

- 80% of children in a program must meet income and age requirements.
- 20% of county’s “slots” can be above income if they have one of the following risk factors:
  - Child disability or developmental delay;
  - Non-English speaking family members;
  - Risk that child will not be ready for kindergarten;
  - Parental active military duty;
  - Chronic health condition and/or child has an IEP.
Geographic Risk Factors

- Often driven by court orders:
- New Jersey Former Abbott Preschool Program - only certain districts eligible
- Texas -- based on numbers of eligible children in a district
- South Carolina - based on percent of FRL in a county and rural counties
Risk Factors With Strongest Research

- children of teen parents
- living in poverty or deep poverty
- low maternal education
- homelessness or housing instability
- involvement with child welfare
- child with disabilities
- limited-English-speaking households
- migrant or seasonal families
VA's Preschool Children & Risk
Improving the Odds for Young Children, National Center for Children in Poverty (2013)

Exposure to Multiple Risk Factors

- 49%: 0 Risks
- 42%: 1-2 Risks
- 12%: 3 more

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VA’s Families with Preschool Children & Risk
Young Child Risk Calculator, National Center for Children in Poverty, 2013

Preschool Children Experiencing Risk Factors and Low-Income

- Limited English: 4%
- Low Parent Education: 6%
- Residential Mobility: 9%
- Teen Mom: 5%

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Considerations for State Policy

- What individual factors have the strongest research evidence for placing children at risk?
  - Consider role of clustering of risk factors from child, family, community perspective

- What are the options for weighting or ranking risk factors that represent the greatest needs of VA’s children and families?
  - Assigning greater weight (points) to factors that place children at greatest risk

- What is the optimal “number” or combination of risk factors that would result in the greatest likelihood of serving the most vulnerable of VA’s children?
  - Consider the impact on program staff and families for documenting risk factor and utilize state/county data where possible
Considerations, continued

- Which approaches to eligibility balances the goals of serving the most vulnerable children while considering the peer effect on children in classrooms?
  - Mixed income classrooms ameliorate impact of low resourced families or communities

- How can VA balance statewide eligibility priorities with local flexibility?
  - Hybrid models or weighting of some risk factors allow flexibility to meet local needs

- What capacity is needed to implement eligibility policy effectively?
  - Very critical to success of policy and to “do no harm” to children and families; staff and organizational capacity is impacted by the complexity of policy and level of proof required for income and other risk factors.
Contact Information:
Lori Connors-Tadros
ltadros@nieer.org

www.ceelo.org
info@ceelo.org