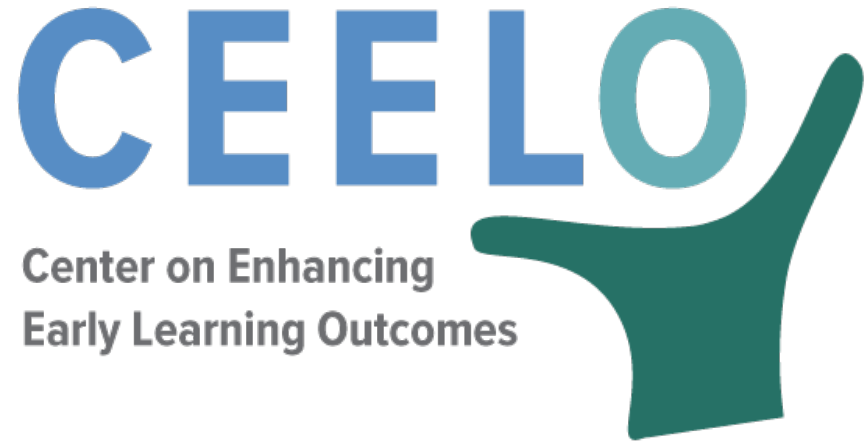




NATIONAL CONFERENCE *of* STATE LEGISLATURES

The Forum for America's Ideas



Center on Enhancing
Early Learning Outcomes

Approaches to State Pre-K Eligibility Policy: Considerations for Policymakers

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Appropriations Committee

July 21, 2015



Welcome and Introductions

- Lori Connors-Tadros
 - CEELO



- Diane Schilder
 - CEELO



- Susan Hogge
 - VA House Appropriations Committee



Overview

- What is a High Quality Program
- Access, Equity & Sustainability
- Approaches to Eligibility Policy
- Implications for Income Verification
- Virginia's New Eligibility Policy
- Considerations for Policymakers



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



Access, Equity, and Sustainability

Eligibility + Recruitment + Selection + Enrollment + Attendance

- Low-income children are less likely to participate in high-quality pre-K but they benefit greatly when they do
- However, low-income children learn more in programs/classrooms that are economically diverse (Reid & Kagan, 2015)
- Eligibility policy must work in tandem with program guidance to avoid unintended consequences



J. Reid & S.L. Kagan (2015) "A Better Start: Why Classroom Diversity Matters in Early Education" , Retrieved from http://www.prrac.org/pdf/A_Better_Start.pdf



National Overview of State Pre-K Eligibility Policy

Purpose

- Provide a snapshot of pre-K eligibility policies across states

Sample

- 53 pre-K programs in 40 states and DC

Questions addressed:

- What approaches do states take in developing PK eligibility policy?
- What risk factors have the strongest evidence of adverse outcomes for young children?
- What should policymakers consider in establishing and implementing eligibility policy?



State Approaches to Eligibility Policy

- ***Individual Family Risk Factors*** – eligibility is based on individual characteristics of the family/ child
- ***Geographic Risk Factors*** – eligibility is based on specific risk factors of residents in that jurisdiction
- ***Hybrid Model*** – eligibility is based on certain % meeting income eligibility and other risks considered



National Overview of State Pre-K Eligibility Policy

Of the 53 programs profiled:

- Age (4 year olds) is the primary criteria
- 17 have no eligibility requirements beyond age
- 36 programs use low-income status to determine eligibility



Income And Other Risk Factors

In the programs (35) that have criteria in addition to age:

- 5 programs report that income is the only risk factor used for eligibility
- In 9 programs, children must meet a designated number of risk factors *in addition* to income
- 3 risk factors are used by more than half of the programs:
 - homelessness or unstable housing
 - disability or developmental delay of the child
 - non-English speaking family



Risk Factors With Strongest Research

- living in poverty or deep poverty
- children of teen parents
- low maternal education
- homelessness or housing instability
- involvement with child welfare
- child with disabilities
- limited-English-speaking households
- migrant or seasonal families



Three State Examples

- **TN** is an example that prioritizes low-income but allows other children to be served if space is available locally
- **MI** is an example that allows some higher income children to be served and is intended to reach those not eligible for Head Start
- **NC** is an example that allows some higher income children in the county to be served if they have other risk factors



Tennessee: Individual Risk Factors

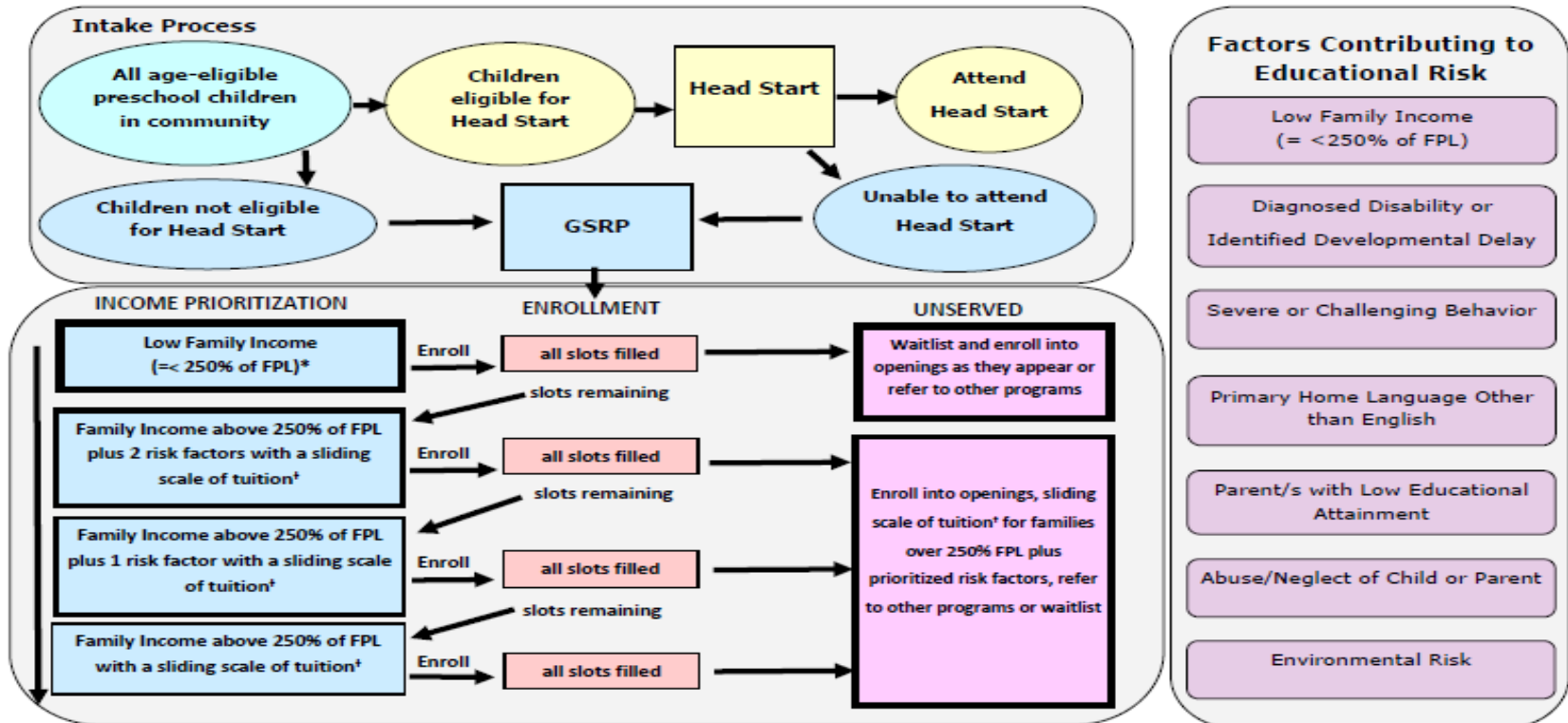
Income eligibility is first priority and other risk factors are considered when space is available

- 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



- ### 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

*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 as 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



Implications of Complicated Eligibility Requirements

Income eligibility requirements that are not aligned to other existing programs (such as those used to determine eligibility for Head Start or Free Lunch):

- Can create burdens on administrators at the district or community level
- Can lead to disruptions in pre-K
- Can result in fragmented services
- Can result in children receiving pre-K that varies in quality



Ways to Simplify Verification of Eligibility

States are Attempting to Ease Process of Verifying Eligibility by:

- Allowing families to demonstrate eligibility with documents from another similar program
- Creating single process of applying for multiple programs (not just pre-K)
- Creating systems of sharing data
- Creating some flexibility in eligibility criteria for children served in programs that use multiple funding streams



Virginia's Revised Preschool Enrollment Eligibility Policy

Effective July 1, 2015, school divisions must prioritize these specific risk factors above any locally defined factors used for enrollment eligibility:

- Family income at or below 200% federal poverty level
- Homelessness
- Parents/guardians are school dropouts
- Family income is less than 350% of FPL for students with special needs

FY2016 is also a transition year - local risk factors may continue to be used in enrollment eligibility in the Virginia Preschool Initiative – however effective FY2017, only the state's four risk factors shall be used



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 the state'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 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 the policy 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.



Questions for Discussion

- Do you know, for your state:
 - the number and types of risk factors experienced by preschool children?
 - how many children, age 4, have access to preschool by auspice?
- How would this data determine your approach to PK eligibility?
- What capacity does your state have at the local or state level to use the data produced by eligibility policy to inform decisions?
- Do you have any lessons learned or advice for how to ensure that eligibility policy promotes access & quality for all children?





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- NCSL's Early Care and Education 50-state bill tracking database:
<http://www.ncsl.org/research/human-services/child-care-and-early-education-legislation-databas.aspx>
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