



The Voice of Early Childhood

*Increasing Early Care and Education Opportunities in Pittsburgh:
A Review of Pre-Kindergarten Expansion in U.S. Cities*



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Executive Summary

High-quality early learning lays the foundation for future success – and cities across the nation took notice. The push for expanded early care and education now extends across social and political lines; researchers and policymakers alike tout the value of early childhood education (ECE) at federal, state, and local levels. While many may point to the potential outcomes for our children – increased capacity for educational achievement, social competence, improved health, and greater productivity throughout their lives – we cannot reach that potential without a committed investment of our time and our community resources.

While the years between birth and age eight mark many milestones in the learning continuum, pre-kindergarten (pre-k) focuses intently on the transition to elementary education. Cities often choose pre-k as a natural “first step” to engage young learners and increase the potential for future academic success.

This report details the processes and outcomes of pre-k initiatives across the country. Pittsburgh’s initial pre-k momentum mirrors that of many other cities. The Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children (PAEYC) viewed the information through a regional lens, aiming for a comprehensive overview that would highlight opportunities and identify potential challenges for Pittsburgh to consider.

To the right is a complete list of cities reviewed, and Appendix A includes a list of the resources reviewed on pre-k expansion in each of the cities.

While some cities have been working toward universal pre-k for a decade, many are still in the initial implementation phases of their plans. PAEYC reviewed outlines and reports by school districts, city government offices, and early childhood education task forces to identify the foundational objectives used to expand pre-k and establish a city-wide system: gaining public awareness and support, securing sustainable funding, establishing a governance structure, designing program characteristics to meet local needs, and monitoring quality.

Efforts to expand pre-k hinge on a well-devised outreach plan to build *public awareness and community support*, particularly among families with children eligible to enroll in seats provided by a pre-k expansion. Opportunities for *meaningful family engagement* during the pre-k experience retains and expands this support. A successful engagement plan reaffirms a commitment to the community and a willingness to remain responsive to its needs.

The expansion of city pre-k requires that we identify “who pays” and “how” early in the process. Successful pre-k implementation depends on *blended funding streams* from federal, state, and local governments – no city uses one single funding source. The cities in this report followed a plan to acquire adequate funding for an effective expansion, maximize and supplement existing revenue streams, and leverage private dollars to sustain programs.

A *governance structure* establishes authority, accountability, and cohesion among policies and services. The city decides who may make decisions on a budget, data, resource management, monitoring, and implementation. This process may present opportunities to connect with partners at the state, county, or neighborhood level and/or form public-private partnerships to support pre-k expansion. Some cities modified existing structures by adding a pre-k position to the mayor’s office or school district, while others needed to design a new structure to meet local needs.

Program characteristics refer to the broad categories and extensive options for the design of pre-k services. The process includes decisions on the delivery system, location, duration, and the particular needs of children, families, and targeted neighborhoods. Typically, cities expand pre-k in incremental phases. This approach ensures a process of continuous reevaluation, allowing the program to stay responsive and flexible while

- Boston
- Chicago
- Cleveland
- Columbus
- Denver
- Fort Worth
- Jacksonville
- Los Angeles
- New York City
- Philadelphia
- Phoenix
- Salt Lake City
- San Antonio
- San Francisco
- Seattle
- Washington, D.C.
- West Sacramento

building capacity and expanding the program scope within the birth-to-age-five continuum. Most often, these initiatives offer pre-k programs in diverse settings such as public school classrooms and community child care centers. The choice to expand pre-k within a recognized program demonstrates a willingness to meet the needs of local families and work with the neighborhood to build relationships.

An expanding body of research indicates that *high-quality* early learning environments offer young children greater opportunity to succeed in school and in life. In order to ensure efficacy, a pre-k initiative must expand access while maintaining a solid commitment to quality. The cities reviewed for this report took a comprehensive approach to quality, establishing a multi-faceted classification evaluation plan and aligning program oversight to existing state systems. Most cities identified well-trained, supportive early educators as the foundation of quality and noted the crucial role of family engagement from the initial planning phase through the implementation of the pre-k experience.

While the report focuses on efforts to expand programming for three- and four-year-olds, PAEYC acknowledges that pre-k represents just one component of the birth-through-grade-three early learning continuum. Environments including child care, home visiting/family services, and early intervention provide essential support and invaluable opportunities that impact the development of our children throughout their lives.

Summary of Key Considerations

- I. Building Public Awareness and Community Support**
 - A. Develop a formal plan to build community support and mobilize stakeholders.
 - B. Conduct direct outreach to actively engage families and encourage enrollment in programs.
 - C. Build opportunities for meaningful family engagement throughout the pre-k experience.

- II. Securing and Maximizing Funding Streams**
 - A. Blend funding sources to expand access and increase impact.
 - B. Maximize existing public funding programs and sources.
 - C. Supplement, rather than supplant, existing sources of revenue.
 - D. Consider revenue models that incorporate private funds as a supplement to public funding streams.

- III. Adopting a Governance Structure**
 - A. Use existing structures or decide if additional structures are needed to initiate and implement expansion.
 - B. Identify the most responsive governance model for the city's unique composition.
 - C. Coordinate with relevant structures at the state, county, and neighborhood levels.
 - D. Consider the potential for public-private collaboration.

- IV. Determining Program Characteristics**
 - A. Build capacity in existing programs to provide high-quality pre-k experiences across diverse settings.
 - B. Expand pre-k in incremental phases through a targeted approach to ensure:
 1. Responsiveness to the needs of children, families, and communities;
 2. Time to build capacity while maintaining continuous quality improvement; and
 3. Strong connections between pre-k and other early learning environments across the birth-through-age-eight continuum.
 - C. Design a comprehensive approach to logistical, socioeconomic, and societal factors that responds effectively to: family work schedules; cultural, economic, and linguistic diversity; and transportation barriers.

- V. Ensuring Quality Environments**
 - A. Identify a comprehensive framework for defining and constructing high-quality environments.
 - B. Apply a thorough evaluation process that promotes continuous quality improvement.
 1. Assess family engagement indicators as an essential component of quality.
 - C. Align program monitoring with existing state evaluation systems, adapting constructs to meet local needs.
 - D. Invest in early childhood education professionals as the foundation of quality.
 1. Prioritize recruitment and retention planning.
 2. Develop a comprehensive support structure for professional development, continuing education, and responsive, needs-based coaching.

Introduction

I feel that Pittsburgh must keep developing as a city of learning – a city committed to exemplary education of its citizens from birth to career and from career to life-long learning – and providing early childhood education is essential to that development.

- Mayor William Peduto

The positive impact of high-quality early care and education on the future success of young children is clear. For children with access, high-quality early environments provide a foundation for educational achievement, social competence, improved health, and greater productivity. Yet, 1,140 of Pittsburgh's income-eligible three- and four-year-olds do not have access to publicly funded, high-quality pre-k.¹ Each of our city's young children needs an opportunity to develop skills, to reach personal potential, and to contribute to our thriving community. We must expand our reach to ensure that all Pittsburgh residents, regardless of age or neighborhood, may participate in and benefit from Pittsburgh's transformation. As a resilient city grounded in grit and a strong sense of community, Pittsburgh has the opportunity to do what is in the best interest of children by providing them with love, care, and education because every Pittsburgh child is *our child*.

Then mayoral candidate William Peduto once posed this question to Pittsburgh's early childhood community: "How can Pittsburgh build a vision of success for all young children?" Once becoming the city's mayor, Mr. Peduto continued to spotlight the interests of our young children with the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Early Childhood Education (MBRPECE), a range of regional stakeholders tasked with the development of a "prenatal through pre-k" continuum of programs and services. Representatives from state and local governments, school districts, intermediate units, philanthropy, higher education, and community organizations worked with a clear vision of future ECE success for the children of the city. While emphasizing the need for quality improvement in existing programs, the panel called for increased pay and training for early care and education professionals, stronger links between early childhood programs and neighborhood safety initiatives, investment in small-business resources for early childhood providers, and increased data collection and analysis.²

Pittsburgh City Council also worked to further the cause. Its Women's Caucus galvanized support for young children and established a \$250,000 child care quality fund to seed low-interest loans and provide grants in support of early childhood providers offering high-quality care. In addition, the Women's Caucus commissioned a needs assessment of ECE providers to gather provider input on how best to use the quality fund.³

In 2015, the city's commitment to child health and development earned Pittsburgh a spot in a country-wide initiative sponsored by the National League of Cities (NLC). NLC chose Pittsburgh as one of seven communities for its "City Leadership for Building an Early Nation," a network tasked with improving outcomes for young children across the United States. By 2016, the Pittsburgh City Council, ready to expand upon this commitment, acknowledged a need for greater expertise in its administration. The council added a new role within city ranks – that of Pittsburgh's first Early Childhood Manager. The Early Childhood Manager implements the vision developed by the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Panel and finds new ways to improve early learning quality and expand ECE access.

In Pittsburgh, as in many other cities, the goal of expanded access began with a drive toward universal pre-k. ECE champions in city government pushed to make progress on pre-k access and affordability. Stakeholders from across sectors convened to identify goals within the Blue Ribbon Panel and the Early Childhood Education Task Force. These combined efforts led the city to its current task: to create a universal pre-k initiative that reflects its unique needs. The Early Childhood Manager and the Early Childhood Education Task Force led the charge, convening to develop a sustainable plan for pre-k expansion that started with a review of existing offerings.

Along with the Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center (COTRAIC), Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) currently offers the largest number of pre-k classrooms in the city. In addition, there are 214 licensed child care providers in the city, 44 of those centers currently have a high-quality rating in Keystone STARS or a national accreditation. The 2017 report *Review of the Pittsburgh Public Schools* from the Council of Great City Schools highlights some foundational aspects of quality ECE programming instituted by the district's early education program:

- a close partnership between the school district and community-based child care programs;
- regular meetings between pre-k staff and literacy staff; and
- consistent curriculum across all pre-k classrooms.

Report data demonstrates that students who participated in the district's pre-k program performed better academically through grade two than those who did not participate.

Inclusion is another strength of the PPS Early Childhood program. According to the review, 91.5% of district children ages three to five with Individualized Education Plans receive a majority of their services in general education programs – learning alongside their typically developing peers. Furthermore, the report also found young children who participated in the inclusion program exceeded state targets in achievement outcomes for appropriate behavior, acquisition/use of knowledge and skills, and positive social-emotional skills by substantially increasing developmentally or attaining developmental expectations by age six, or when they exited the program.⁴

Pittsburgh is well-positioned to expand access to its pre-k offerings. The review that follows provides insight on 17 cities that undertook this very process. It identifies the key components of other cities' early childhood initiatives to raise awareness, secure funding, establish governance, create programs, and monitor quality.

Building Public Awareness and Community Support

Efforts to expand pre-k hinge on a well-devised outreach plan to build *public awareness and community support*, particularly among families with children eligible to enroll in seats provided by a pre-k expansion.

Develop Plan and Strategies

Washington, D.C. established the Universal School Readiness Stakeholder Group (USRSG), comprised of more than 200 early childhood and K-12 organizations. The city charged the group with a single objective: build the knowledge, will, and action of the community around the issue of high-quality pre-k for all three- and four-year-olds.⁵ To achieve this goal, the USRSG built the *Road Map to Universal School Readiness*, a plan that served as the foundation for the city's pre-k movement. In 2006, the Pre-K for All D.C. campaign launched and successfully led to the passing of the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Act of 2008. The law expanded access to about 2,000 three- and four-year-olds; it also provided resources for quality improvement and credentialing for prospective teachers. Highlights from some of the successful strategies of the D.C. campaign may be found to the right.

Direct Outreach to Families

While Washington, D.C. undertook a comprehensive approach to build awareness and support city-wide, other cities specifically targeted families with pre-k-age children during the enrollment process. New

Washington, D.C.: Strategies to Build Public Awareness & Support

- Convening key ECE leaders early in the process provided the foundation for the movement.
- Utilizing e-communications allowed the campaign to mobilize more supporters.
- Developing values messages helped educate targeted groups of people about the benefits of pre-k.

Cleveland: Strategies to Promote Enrollment & Engagement

- Family recruiters assigned to a cluster of pre-k sites and stationed at a central location to assist with families receiving information and enrolling.
- Family recruiters proactively contacted families with pre-k-age children and connected them with high-quality centers.
- An annual community-wide preschool enrollment kickoff and campaign are held to educate families from birth to age five on pre-k enrollment options.

York City, for example, hired pre-k enrollment specialists to call families and canvass local business and child care sites. The New York City Department of Education also held information sessions and family fairs. The city launched media campaigns for subways, bus stations, and print outlets, and established a new text message hotline to allow families to connect to pre-k information via cell phone.⁶ Similarly, Cleveland hired family recruiters to help enroll children in high-quality centers.⁷ More detailed information on the PRE4CLE enrollment strategy and community engagement plan may be found on the left.

Continued Family Engagement

Ongoing community support also hinges on a program's commitment to relationships. Cities like Boston connected with families of enrolled children throughout the pre-k experience. Known as "Boston Children Thrive," the program created the Parents Action Planning Team to include families in the planning process.⁸ Intentionally constructing opportunities for family engagement creates a system that listens and responds to the needs of children and their families. All families who enroll in Boston Children Thrive and participate in events were

Boston: Leadership Pathway for Parents

- School Readiness Roundtable: Parents who help plan, implement, and evaluate neighborhood activities side-by-side with community organization partners.
- Parent Partners: Stipended peer-to-peer parent outreach.
- Parent-Led Projects: Parent-led community projects that support Boston Children Thrive goals. Parents receive coaching throughout project implementation and join a citywide Parent Leader Network.

considered on track for the leadership pathway. Families have the option to participate at higher levels and take on more distinct leadership roles. Key takeaways from the *Leadership Pathway for Parents* are explained further to the left.⁹

Momentum continues to build for pre-k in Pittsburgh, and it's time to maximize its potential. In 2014, the Early Childhood Education subcommittee of Mayor Peduto's transition team emphasized the importance of public engagement and support for such a movement – calling for a citywide campaign to raise public awareness of the importance of investing in young children for our city's economic development.¹⁰ The pre-k expansions PAEYC reviewed in other cities approached gaining public support and engaging families of young children in various ways.

I. CONSIDERATIONS FOR BUILDING PUBLIC AWARENESS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- A. DEVELOP A FORMAL PLAN TO BUILD COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND MOBILIZE STAKEHOLDERS.
- B. CONDUCT DIRECT OUTREACH TO ACTIVELY ENGAGE FAMILIES AND ENCOURAGE ENROLLMENT IN PROGRAMS.
- C. BUILD OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEANINGFUL FAMILY ENGAGEMENT THROUGHOUT THE PRE-K EXPERIENCE.

Securing and Maximizing Funding Streams

The expansion of pre-k requires that cities identify “who pays” and “how” early in the process. Successful pre-k implementation depends on *blended funding streams* from federal, state, and local government -- no city uses one single funding source. The cities in this report followed a plan to acquire adequate funding for an effective expansion, maximize and supplement existing revenue streams, and leverage private dollars to sustain programs.

Public Funding

Often, cities reviewed for this report built on existing public capital such as federal Head Start funding. Some cities supplemented federal and state funds with local initiatives, raising program dollars within their own community budgets. Three West Coast cities reviewed for this report -- Los Angeles, West Sacramento, and San Francisco -- pulled state dollars from California’s Proposition 10 “First 5” Early Childhood Cigarette Tax, blending the tax revenue with other funding streams in support of pre-k expansion. See below for more details on the funding streams.

Los Angeles, West Sacramento, & San Francisco: Blended Funding Streams		
<p>Los Angeles pieces together funding from multiple state and city programs including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ State tobacco tax □ Head Start □ CA State Preschool Program □ LA Universal Preschool Program □ School Readiness and Language and Development Program □ Transitional Kindergarten¹¹ 	<p>West Sacramento strategically blends sources of funding from different levels of government and supplements these with philanthropic money:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ First Five California □ First Five Yolo County □ City sales tax □ Local matches from Yolo County Office of Education □ Washington Unified School District □ Nonprofit and community-based organizations¹² 	<p>San Francisco generates local funds to blend with state tobacco tax dollars:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Prop H (2004): Public Education Enrichment Fund, allocated \$20 million a year to create Preschool for All □ Prop C (2014): Children and Families First, provided all children between ages 3-5 an opportunity to attend quality early education □ Both ballot initiatives passed by voters to increase investment in children¹³

Locally generated taxes or philanthropy dollars provide some cities with a guaranteed funding stream. San Francisco uses state tobacco tax distributions, supplementing them with revenue from property taxes. Other cities may supplement state and federal dollars with other local revenue. Denver and San Antonio generate funds from an increase in sales tax; Philadelphia uses funds from a soda tax; Cleveland receives ongoing support from the philanthropic community.

Private Funding

In addition to public funds, some cities leveraged private dollars through social impact bonds, education tax credits, and income-based credits decided on a sliding scale. Private dollars come from business and individual sources as a way to supplement, rather than supplant, public funding to increase access.

Business Sector Funding

Pay for Success (PFS) finance models, also referred to as social impact bonds, use private investments to fund public programs – with the expectation of a return on the investment. The PFS model builds on the considerable evidence for the long-term benefits of early childhood support dollars. If outcomes such as reduction in special education costs, positive results in kindergarten readiness screening, or an increase in third-grade reading scores deem the intervention successful, investors receive a payment for the sum of the initial loan amount plus a pre-arranged percentage of gained revenue. The PFS finance model in Chicago and Salt Lake City is discussed below.^{14, 15}

Business sector funds may also come from education tax credit programs. A model program, Pennsylvania's Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) successfully engages the business sector to invest in early childhood education. Through EITC, businesses may receive a tax credit equal to 75% of their contribution to an approved 501(c)3 entity – up to a maximum of \$75,000 per year. The organizations that receive these contributions must allocate at least 80% of received funds to scholarship programs that benefit low-income families.¹⁶ Pittsburgh could explore options for replicating this model on a city level or the city could promote EITC to local businesses and encourage eligible programs to apply.

Individual Tax Dollars, Donations, and Support Initiatives

Tax credits, philanthropic donations, and sliding tuition scales also contribute to private funding pools. The City of Phoenix, for example, provides credits to individual taxpayers for their contributions to public school extracurricular opportunities – donations that help to support afterschool programming and STEAM activities in school districts. The initiative also launched a promotional campaign called Kids Are Missing Out – complete with a toolkit of resources to help participants promote the program within their own companies to inspire more individual donors to contribute.¹⁷

Sliding-scale tuition credits also help cities to manage expansion financing. The sliding scale model provides assistance and support to all qualifying families who choose to enroll their child in a program. It also provides a consistent source of revenue from participating families. Denver, Seattle, and San Antonio use a sliding scale method based on family income and size. On the next page is an example of how Denver determines the sliding scale method for families.¹⁸

Chicago & Salt Lake City: Pay for Success

Chicago and Salt Lake City use PFS to expand access to high-quality pre-k. In both cities, outcomes achieved the desired benchmark, which triggered the first round of repayments. In Chicago, kindergarten readiness indicators were met, and in Salt Lake City, decreased levels of special education enrollment have signaled future savings.

Early childhood finance experts suggest that PFS should not supplant existing government investments. Instead, it should be used to increase the availability of high-quality pre-k or increase the quality of pre-k that is currently offered. An additional consideration is the need for sustained support and ongoing rigorous evaluation to gather the required data necessary to calculate the return on investment.

Denver: Sliding Scale Tuition Credits

Denver Public Schools offers tuition credits through the Denver Preschool Program, Colorado Preschool Program, and other funding sources.

Families enrolling their four-year-olds in preschool are automatically considered for the tuition credits. The amount of the credit considers a family's income, household size, hours attending, and program quality. For example, a family of four with a household gross monthly income between \$3,747 - 4,860 who enrolls in full-day pre-k pays a monthly rate of \$63 or a half-day rate of \$31. Any family of four below this income attends tuition-free based on estimates from the 2016-2017 school year.

According to the 2015 annual report, 4,370 four-year-olds attended preschool because of tuition support in the 2014-2015 school year. Denver continues to use tuition credits to support families.

Universal pre-k initiatives require serious financing. Each of the reviewed cities rose to the challenge and contributed funds to plan, implement, and sustain its expansion program. Successful programs utilized one or more funding sources discussed in this section. As Mayor Peduto's 2014 early childhood subcommittee concluded, our city's future economic development depends upon an investment in our young children. While some funding strategies may take effect almost immediately (e.g. promoting the state's EITC opportunities), others may require legislation (e.g. passage of a tax levy). While funding presents the most complex aspect of pre-k expansion, the return on investment emerges as cities produce greater opportunities for our children, increased stability for our families, and expanded economic growth for our communities.

II. CONSIDERATIONS FOR SECURING AND MAXIMIZING FUNDING STREAMS

- A. BLEND FUNDING SOURCES TO EXPAND ACCESS AND INCREASE IMPACT.
- B. MAXIMIZE EXISTING PUBLIC FUNDING PROGRAMS AND SOURCES.
- C. SUPPLEMENT, RATHER THAN SUPPLANT, NEW SOURCES OF REVENUE.
- D. CONSIDER REVENUE MODELS THAT INCORPORATE PRIVATE FUNDS AS A SUPPLEMENT TO PUBLIC FUNDING STREAMS.

Adopting a Governance Structure

A governance model provides structure for authority and accountability. The governing body assembles a group to make decisions on a budget, resource and data management, monitoring, and implementation. A governance structure also works to develop coherence among policies and services. The BUILD Initiative, an organization that works with state leaders to build an early childhood system, established values and components of effective governance to help inform this process which can be viewed to the right.¹⁹

According to BUILD, a sustainable governance structure comes in two possible configurations: coordinated and consolidated. In a coordinated model, multiple public agencies share accountability and authority. In a consolidated model, one agency assumes responsibility for the development, implementation, and oversight of programs. This review considers city initiatives from each category. Some cities had existing structures prior to the launch of their initiative, while other cities determined which model should be created to meet local governance needs.

Boston and Seattle leveraged existing consolidated models to govern pre-k programs from the school district and the mayor's office which are expanded upon below.

BUILD Initiative Values & Components for Effective Governance

- ❑ Coordination: connect different parts and programs to help support comprehensive services.
- ❑ Alignment: coherence among system-wide tasks.
- ❑ Sustainability: adapt throughout continuous political and administrative changes to continue to support programs.
- ❑ Efficiency: allocate resources wisely and reduce duplication efforts, see a return on investment.
- ❑ Accountability: be accountable to system and stakeholders, and hold programs accountable for performance.

Boston & Seattle: Consolidated Governance Models	
School District	Local Government
<p>Boston partnered with the local United Way, regional foundations, and the Massachusetts State Department of Early Learning and Care. The group launched Boston K1DS and the Preschool Expansion Grant program, with the BPS Department of Early Childhood functioning as the lead organization.</p> <p>The city's Department of Early Childhood managed curriculum, coaching, professional development, and support for instructional quality in the school and community-based programs.²⁰</p>	<p>Seattle developed a levy for early learning in the 1990s and reapproved the investment tax several times since. In 2014, the city voted to pass an additional levy for a four-year universal pre-k pilot project.</p> <p>The City of Seattle's Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL), housed in the mayor's office, manages the investment. DEEL works at the mayor's request to engage and convene stakeholders and transform community recommendations into policies.²¹</p>

Below is an example of Cleveland’s newly created coordinated model of governance structure.

Cleveland: Coordinated Governance Model

In **Cleveland**, the mayor linked representatives from education, philanthropy, and the business community to develop new strategies to transform city schools. The group included a plan for early childhood education. Praise for the model led to support from the Ohio House of Representatives and passage of a city tax levy to fund pre-k in November of 2012.

In 2013, the school district, local foundation leaders, and an early childhood task force worked to build an implementation plan. The task force established the Cleveland Early Childhood Compact to put the plan into action. Co-chaired by the CEO of Cleveland Metropolitan School District and a representative from a local foundation, the group then selected an administrative entity to manage the fiscal and program implementation: Starting Point, a child care agency in Northeast Ohio that serves families, early childhood professionals, and early learning organizations. Starting Point works with the Cleveland school district and the Ohio Department of Education to implement the program under the oversight of the Early Childhood Compact.

Cleveland’s coordinated governing body also illustrates two key efficacy points as established by the BUILD Initiative: connecting to other relevant structures at the state, county, or neighborhood levels and the potential for public-private collaboration.²² State, county, or neighborhood structures may be able to advance goals of a governance system. In Cleveland, the city worked with the state government to move the tax levy forward. Private partnerships offer the PRE4CLE program additional support. Cleveland also consistently partners with the philanthropic community, its governance structure including a co-chair seat for a representative from a local foundation.²³ The BUILD Initiative provided a framework to examine city pre-k governance structures. Key takeaways from the BUILD framework include values, components, and models for effective governance.

III. CONSIDERATIONS FOR ADOPTING A GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

- A. USE EXISTING STRUCTURES OR DECIDE IF ADDITIONAL STRUCTURES ARE NEEDED TO INITIATE AND IMPLEMENT EXPANSION.
- B. IDENTIFY THE MOST RESPONSIVE GOVERNANCE MODEL FOR THE CITY’S UNIQUE COMPOSITION.
- C. CONNECT WITH RELEVANT STRUCTURES AT THE STATE, COUNTY, OR NEIGHBORHOOD LEVELS.
- D. CONSIDER THE POTENTIAL FOR PUBLIC-PRIVATE COLLABORATION.

Determining Program Characteristics

Program characteristics refer to the range of options for the design and delivery of city-wide pre-k expansion. The Education Policy Center at American Institute for Research published *Ten Questions Local Policymakers Should Ask About Expanding Access to Preschool*, and dedicated nearly half of the ten policy considerations to program characteristics: “preschool for all” versus classrooms for targeted groups; age eligibility; days per year; hours per day; and setting (location of program).²⁴ Across the cities reviewed for this report, program development focused on higher-level features such as delivery system, location, and duration.

Responsive programming requires more than logistical processes, however, and pre-k planning in each city revolved around the needs and realities of its families accordingly. Expansion planning also factored in cultural and developmental considerations, including pre-k’s synergistic relationship to the early learning continuum (birth-through-age-eight).

Delivery Systems in Diverse Settings

Nearly all of the cities reviewed operate programs in a mixed-delivery system, offering pre-k classrooms in public schools, charter schools, community-based centers, family child care homes, and private providers. Initially, some programs operated successfully in one setting and then expanded the model to another; other programs chose to add seats in existing mixed-delivery organizations. Below is a closer look at Boston, New York City, and Cleveland.

Boston, New York City, & Cleveland: Building Capacity in Diverse Settings		
<p>Sharing Successful Models</p> <p>Boston’s efforts began with the Thrive in 5 movement, designed to extend Boston Public Schools’ nationally recognized pre-k model (called K1) to working families through a public-private partnership.</p> <p>Boston K1 in Diverse Settings (Boston K1DS) expanded and replicated the K1 model to 14 community-based classrooms in targeted neighborhoods. The partnership included funding for instructional materials, classroom support, and assessment. The program placed heavy emphasis on educator preparation and compensation, allocating funds to classroom coaching, professional development, and salary increases to teachers.²⁵</p>	<p>Expanding Existing Models</p> <p>New York City invested in existing pre-k programs based in public schools and community organizations to expand the number of high-quality, full-day seats.</p> <p>The process required the addition of new classrooms, as well as a conversion of half-day seats to full-day (school hours) seats. Two types of community-based organizations offered pre-k: Department of Education CBOs are contracted directly with the city’s school system; and Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) CBOs provide pre-k under contract through ACS, using funding from the state education department’s Universal Pre-K (UPK) grant.²⁶</p>	<p>Expanding Existing Models</p> <p>Cleveland’s existing model included public, private, charter school partners, and community-based providers.</p> <p>Cleveland expanded the capacity of pre-k classrooms from 14 to 20 students by adding a teacher’s aide. The district also increased integrated classrooms serving special education and typically developing children. The city also worked with existing child care centers to expand the number of seats or add additional classrooms in community-based centers. Additionally, they were able to enroll 385 children in unused slots in high-quality community settings.²⁷</p>

While most city-wide pre-k programs operate a mixed-delivery model, we also reviewed the Fort Worth Independent School District, which expanded pre-k to all four-year-olds through a single-delivery model within district buildings. While teachers from the school district provided instruction for three hours per day in nine community-based programs (deemed “satellite centers”), a child care center teacher provides instruction and

care for the remainder of the day. In anticipation of the expansion of district pre-k, a local organization did a study on the impact of the initiative on private providers. The study expressed concern of unintended consequences for expanding pre-k seats in a single-delivery system, which could result in the closure, increased prices, or reduced quality of service for students and families utilizing private centers, especially infants through three-year-olds.

Only expanding access through school district classrooms does not address the role of pre-k in the birth-to-five continuum or the needs of working families. The study recommended more collaboration among schools and centers offering pre-k, as well as a plan for sustaining already-existing pre-k programs.²⁸ Moving forward, Fort Worth is making efforts to collaborate as part of the National League of Cities’ Educational Alignment Initiative, which includes the school district, community-based child care providers, and private child care centers. High-quality child care is the foundation of pre-k; not only does it help working families by providing extended care beyond school-day hours, but in Pennsylvania, child care centers provide half of the pre-k classrooms in the state.

Pittsburgh Public Schools Early Childhood Programs currently provide family supports through a partnership model – managing both Pre-K Counts and Head Start grants to fund slots in high-quality child care centers throughout the city. These slots allow for high-quality wrap-around care outside of the pre-k hours. The 2017 *Review of Pittsburgh Public Schools* highlighted this close relationship as one of the model’s promising practices. Families eligible for publicly funded pre-k who also need full-day, full-year care receive both services in a center that provides extended hours beyond the school day. This arrangement also boosts financial

support for child care center operations and shifts some of the burden of managing public funds to administrators within the school district. Similarly, the Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center (COTRAIC), partners with child care providers to offer Early Head Start slots on site while providing professional development and coaching support to program staff members.

In addition to supporting families, these connections provide a strong foundation for kindergarten transition partnerships, increasing communications between child care centers and the school district throughout a child’s pre-k years and into elementary life.

Incremental Expansion through Targeted Approach

Many expansion programs start with a targeted approach with plans to scale up to city-wide pre-k. Increasing access to pre-k in increments acknowledges that cities may not have the capacity to meet the needs of all families right away. Beginning smaller with gradual phase-in allows for more flexibility as state and federal funding becomes available. More importantly, programs can start small and focus on quality improvement along with expansion.²⁹

Targeted approach plans in most cities started with a focus on individual family risk factors and/or underserved neighborhoods. These factors are determined based on the needs of the families the program is aiming to serve and varied across cities.

An example of the “at-risk” factors used in Philadelphia and San Antonio’s targeted approaches are listed to the left. Specific neighborhoods in several cities often housed high concentrations of families with “at-risk” factors, which pushed the focus to geographic regions rather than a case-by-case review. Cleveland targeted two underserved city neighborhoods to create new high-quality slots;³²

**Philadelphia & San Antonio:
Family-Level “At-Risk” Factors**

Philadelphia

- Lead exposure
- DHS involvement
- Homelessness
- Low birth weight
- Teen parents
- Low maternal education
- Inadequate prenatal care³⁰

San Antonio

- Low-income
- ELL status
- Foster care
- Homelessness
- Parent military involvement³¹

Boston K1DS focused on a five-mile radius of the most distressed city neighborhoods, including East Boston and Circle of Promise;³³ Seattle prioritized three- and four-year-olds living in a neighborhood with a low-performing elementary school.³⁴

Age Eligibility and the Birth-to-Five Continuum

Many programs prioritized four-year-olds for preschool to ensure successful transitions to kindergarten the following year. These cities included New York City, Denver, San Antonio, Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Washington, D.C.'s program extended openings to three- and four-year-olds; yet enrolled mostly the latter. Other programs continue to work towards serving both, including Cleveland and Philadelphia.

While preparing four-year-olds for success in elementary school acted as the driving force for many cities, it's important for stakeholders to consider pre-k as one stage in a developmental continuum that begins at birth. Brain research shows that in the early years of life, 700 neural connections form each second;³⁵ the brain reaches nearly 80% of its adult size by the time a child turns three.³⁶ High-quality early learning opportunities offered at each stage build the potential for children to experience greater success throughout life. In recognition of this early learning continuum, some cities cast a wider developmental net. San Francisco's plan considered expansion of early learning opportunities to children from birth through age three.³⁷ West Sacramento focused its initial process on four-year-olds but later broadened the goal to provide services for children from birth to age five.³⁸ New York City recently announced an initiative that acknowledges learning begins at birth – the city plans to expand its Pre-K for All program to three-year-olds and submitted a proposal for its Department of Education to oversee early learning programs that serve children as young as six weeks old. While this plan has potential to serve as an example of a city serving children beginning at birth, early childhood advocates urge caution of focusing too much on academics in the early years. It is an opportune time to focus on social and emotional learning, and ensure programs are developmentally appropriate for the city's youngest learners. See details on the proposal below.³⁹

New York City: Birth-to-Five Early Learning Continuum Proposal

- 3-K for All plan extends structure of Pre-K for All to include all three-year-olds.
- Proposal shifts responsibility for the EarlyLearn programs – for 20,000 children from birth to age three – from the Administration for Children's Services to the Department of Education.
- Department of Education aims to support smooth transition to elementary schools and enlist parents as partners early in the education process.
- Budget proposal includes \$20 million+ to improve programs serving infants and toddlers.
- Engaging children beyond academics to emphasize social and emotional learning during the early years.

Reflecting the Needs of Families

A targeted approach to enrollment allows cities to recruit children and families with the greatest need while allowing time to build capacity and quality components. Expansion plans must also consider family needs, as issues like hours of operation, cultural relevancy, and transportation barriers greatly impact access and participation levels.

While some programs offer only half-day programs, a longer day doesn't necessarily promote equitable enrollment. For many pre-k only programs, the term "full-day" refers to six hours. These "school-day" operations often require drop-off and pick-up by a parent/guardian and simply don't accommodate the schedules of working families. In addition, most of the reviewed programs run only during the school year,

leaving families without access to affordable care and learning environments during the summer. In order to build a pre-k program that truly offers expanded access and promotes equity, stakeholders must consider the logistics from the perspective of all eligible families: Will adult work schedule hinder enrollment? What accommodations exist for before- and after-school care? What opportunities does the program offer during the summer months?

On the right are highlights from the programs that have attempted to address the issues of operating hours. As previously mentioned, mixed-delivery partnerships with child care providers may help to address the needs of working households while providing high-quality experiences. Responsive, effective programming also requires a focus on developmental needs, cultural characteristics, and linguistic factors. Jacksonville Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten

(VPK), for example, offers specialized instructional service providers to four-year-olds with special needs.⁴³

Seattle's implementation plan for preschool expansion heavily focuses on cultural relevancy of programming, particularly through dual-language options. Components of the program are highlighted to the left.

Cleveland's plan addresses transportation as a factor that drives a family's choice of where to send a child to pre-k, or if they will enroll at all. Limited public transportation combined with work schedule demands add an extra layer to enrollment and attendance barriers. Such an awareness prompted Cleveland to consider establishing a system of transportation, public transportation stipends, or grants for providers to purchase vans.⁴⁵

Program characteristics may make or break service viability and access. In order to implement a successful expansion, our stakeholders must consider not only logistics, but the needs of our 90 neighborhoods, in the plan.

Denver, San Antonio, & Jacksonville: Beyond Normal Operating Hours & Days

Denver offers full-day and half-day options depending on the provider; offers summer preschool in years with available funding.⁴⁰

San Antonio provides six hours plus an additional three hours and 45 minutes of extended care hours for families who need wrap-around services during the school year.⁴¹

Jacksonville offers 300 instructional hours of summer programming for families.⁴²

Seattle: Cultural Relevancy

- Culturally and linguistically appropriate programming as a guiding principle through programming that responds to the needs of low-income families and English Language Learners.
- Participating providers must execute a culturally relevant annual plan for partnering with their families as a way to improve child outcomes.
- Seattle Preschool Program prioritizes programs offering Dual-Language curriculum representative of the population, including the support of teaching staff to earn bilingual certification and for professional development in dual language and cultural relevancy.⁴⁴

IV. CONSIDERATIONS FOR DETERMINING PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

- A. BUILD CAPACITY IN EXISTING PROGRAMS TO PROVIDE HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K EXPERIENCES ACROSS DIVERSE SETTINGS.
- B. EXPAND PRE-K IN INCREMENTAL PHASES THROUGH A TARGETED APPROACH TO ENSURE:
 - 1. RESPONSIVENESS TO THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES;
 - 2. TIME TO BUILD CAPACITY WHILE MAINTAINING CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT; AND
 - 3. STRONG CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PRE-K AND EARLY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS ACROSS THE BIRTH-THROUGH-AGE-EIGHT CONTINUUM.
- C. DESIGN A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO LOGISTICAL, SOCIOECONOMIC, AND SOCIETAL FACTORS THAT RESPOND EFFECTIVELY TO FAMILY WORK SCHEDULES; CULTURAL, ECONOMIC, AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY; AND TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS.

Ensuring Quality Environments

An expanding body of research suggests that early learning environments offer young children greater opportunities to succeed in school and in life – if they provide a high-quality experience. This section explores the concept of “quality” and its role as a driver in the development, expansion, and maintenance of a city pre-k program and the features most likely to correspond to positive child outcomes. Defining and describing high-quality early learning environments can be difficult.

When you walk into a high-quality pre-kindergarten program, you immediately see learning occurring. Children are engaged in small groups reading books, building interesting structures with blocks, and determining what sinks and what floats at the water table. The teachers are asking questions, pointing out children's successes and guiding learning. The room has a sense of purpose, organization, and excitement.

- The PEW Charitable Trusts

Features of Quality

Those working in the field of early childhood often refer to the essence of quality as the “feel” of an early learning environment – a supportive, exploratory atmosphere considered as essential as any checklist compilation of characteristics. Yet the standards, indicators, and checklists add the observable, quantifiable components and criteria that influence pre-k quality and demonstrate its value to stakeholders, new and prospective.

A comprehensive approach to quality considers both operational characteristics (e.g. qualifications of the classroom teacher, classroom ratios and class size, physical structure) and daily practice (e.g. quality of interactions between adults and children, organization of the daily routine), often in the context of a nationally recognized and/or state-initiated quality framework. The city pre-k expansions reviewed for this report guided development of policies and standards through one or more nationally recognized/commonly used tools: Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS),⁴⁶ National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC),⁴⁷ National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER),⁴⁸ and brain research. Common elements of these quality standards include:

- Positive interactions;
- Social-emotional support;
- Family engagement;
- Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) and financial supports to promote CQI;
- Integration of support services for children and families;
- Staff coaching and ongoing support;
- Low student-teacher ratios and developmentally appropriate classroom size;
- Child-centered programming; and
- Inclusion.

Positive Interactions

Research affirms that educators who maintain stable, responsive “serve and return” relationships set the groundwork necessary for children to develop the communication, social, and self-help skills they need to succeed through school and beyond.

When early educators receive the tools to create a receptive and nurturing tone, children show greater initiative, demonstrate more classroom involvement, and stay more persistent when faced with challenging situations and/or materials.

Most city pre-k programs pursued quality with the objective of expanding social equity and gaining high economic returns on ECE investments. While all made reference to the expanding data supporting these goals, some initiatives also emphasized the role of neurological research in shaping quality standards. The cities of Columbus and San Francisco, in particular, cited key findings in brain development to support considerations essential to the developmental needs of young children, including:

- Close, trusting relationships between children, families, and educators/caregivers;
- Acute impact of the physical setting;
- Print- and language-rich environments (to promote language development), and
- Active, “hands-on” engagement with the world around them.^{49, 50}

In April 2016, the city of Boston released a report prepared by the city’s universal pre-k advisory group: families; early care and education providers; representatives from Boston Public Schools (BPS) and the Boston School Committee; and representatives from the philanthropy, business, higher education, nonprofit, and advocacy sectors. The group compiled a report titled *Investing in Our Future*, with recommendations for establishing the fundamental components of quality outlined below.⁵¹

Boston: Essential Elements of Pre-K Quality

- ❑ Degreed, highly trained, and well-compensated teachers.
- ❑ Engaging curriculum with a focus on literacy and math, as well as supports for students with additional needs (English Language, Special Education, etc.).
- ❑ Safe and age-appropriate environments that promote exploration and healthy child development.
- ❑ Accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and/or participation in Massachusetts’ Quality Rating and Improvement System.
- ❑ Ongoing coaching and professional development for teaching staff.
- ❑ Strong communication and support plan to encourage family engagement.
- ❑ Ongoing assessment and evaluation of program quality and child-level outcomes to inform continuous improvement.
- ❑ Stable infrastructure to administer and oversee UPK.

Early Learning Professionals: The Foundation of Quality

Nearly every city pre-k initiative emphasized one overarching factor as the foundation of high-quality programming: the classroom educators. Policies, procedures, and curriculums simply cannot produce positive outcomes for children without well-trained teachers to drive them forward. Successful early learning environments require educators with a solid grasp of child development, age-appropriate expectations, and an understanding of supportive interactions as essential to learning. Boston Public Schools (BPS) offers one of the most detailed examples of a city prioritizing the role of the early childhood professionals in the pre-k process.

In 2010, BPS earned a designation for the highest level of instructional quality in the country. BPS channeled the components of that commitment to quality in its pre-k program, BPS K1DS. The city’s implementation team knew that high levels of teacher training and support could greatly advance outcomes for pre-k students. To that end, BPS K1DS provided classroom educators with instructional materials; support for language, literacy,

and mathematics curricula; professional development sessions in conjunction with the city’s public school teachers; monthly one-on-one coaching meetings; and salary and benefits supplementation.⁵²

New York City implemented universal pre-k with a particularly sharp focus on classroom educators. In order to ensure a strong early childhood workforce, the city committed to heavily investing in recruitment, support, and retention. One of the New York City Pre-K For All standards specifically focuses on cultivating collaborative teachers through professional practice and leadership development. Components of this process include teacher observation, classroom intervisitation, and educator training to specifically address the needs of English Language Learners (ELLs) and children with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). More details are highlighted on the right.⁵³

In addition to common elements of quality, nearly all of the cities reviewed in this report operated within a statewide QRIS. QRIS design includes alignment, assessment, and monitoring of program/professional standards, professional development, financial, and public education supports. The following section reviews the monitoring and evaluation of quality standards.

Monitoring and Evaluating Quality

The viability of high-quality pre-k initiatives depends upon a strong foundation, an organized infrastructure, and responsive oversight. In order to maintain quality, most of the country’s universal pre-k programs commit to a multifaceted quality assessment plan in which the programs and each individual classroom must undergo comprehensive periodic assessment. During monitoring and evaluation, assessors ensure a responsive, appropriate, goal-oriented environment for children. They also certify foundational components such as program management, business practice, and family engagement. Assessments typically include some or all of these commonly recognized measures listed below.

New York City: Hiring & Retaining High-Quality Teachers

New York City prioritizes early education professionals through workforce investment:

- Pay levels to attract and retain “the best certified teachers”
- Professional development based on New York state pre-k learning standards (New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core)
- On-site instructional coaches
- On-site professional development sessions

Measures of Quality

- Environmental Ratings Scale: A 43-item measure that boasts proven reliability and validity to evaluate physical environment, basic care, curriculum, interaction, schedule and program structure, and parent and staff education.⁵⁴
- QRIS Designation: A tool that identifies state performance standards across several domains (learning program, business practices, staff benefits, physical space, etc.). Programs must meet and document each achievement in order to attain and maintain designation.⁵⁵
- NAEYC Accreditation: A four-step system designed to increase accountability for children, families, and stakeholders. The process ensures that programs meet each of NAEYC's ten Early Childhood Program Standards, which represent NAEYC's definition of excellence for an early childhood program, built on a set of principles that stress quality and access.⁵⁶
- Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS): An observational tool used to evaluate teaching strategies and interactions within the classroom.⁵⁷
- Teaching Strategies Gold: An interactive assessment, aligned with state and national guidelines, that consecutively tracks early childhood development.⁵⁸

San Francisco adapted California's statewide QRIS evaluation to meet the needs of its local classrooms and families. The three core categories of the local adaptation evaluation cover child development and school readiness, teachers and training, and program environment. San Francisco uses both the CLASS and Environmental Ratings Scale, in addition to other methods of program monitoring such as child observational assessments, developmental checkpoints, and health screenings.⁵⁹

The Philadelphia Commission on Pre-Kindergarten uses an existing monitoring system from Pennsylvania's Pre-K Counts program to evaluate city pre-k classrooms. This decision ensures cohesion for each set of quality standards and certification visits while subsequently reducing costs and maximizing the number of children served by funding slots through a combination of state and local programs.⁶⁰ The city's adoption of the state quality system also earned its stakeholders a space at the Pennsylvania's UPK Commission, which formed a collaborative relationship between program administrators and state-level stakeholders.

The Pre-K Counts assessment includes a minimum of one formal compliance visit annually. The Program Review Instrument reviews multiple sources of evidence based on the Pre-K Counts statute, regulations, and policies that indicate areas which are exemplary and those that need additional effort. Site visits include classroom observation, review of the findings, and an interview/discussion with the program administrators. See how program monitoring of Pre-K Counts works below.

Philadelphia: Program Monitoring of Pre-K Counts ⁶¹

- Program Review Instrument: review of each of the regulations and policies for compliance.
- Best Practices Rubric: describes teacher implementation of classroom practices in the areas of lesson planning, instruction, and ongoing assessment, all of which are observed and incorporated in the Program Review Instrument.
- Environment Rating Scale: external and self-assessments focused on space and furnishings, language and literacy, learning activities, interaction, and program structure.
- Instructional Observation Checklist: provides teachers with additional higher-level feedback that was developed using elements of the Danielson Framework, ECE Rubric, PA Pre-K Standards for Early Childhood, Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, and NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practices.
- Continuous Quality Improvement Plan: ongoing process involving staff, family, and stakeholders in identifying goals and objectives for program improvement, reviewed annually, that takes other components of program monitoring into account.
- Early Learning Network Data Entry: ongoing updates of demographic and child outcomes information.

V. CONSIDERATIONS FOR ENSURING QUALITY ENVIRONMENTS

- A. IDENTIFY A COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK FOR DEFINING AND CONSTRUCTING HIGH-QUALITY ENVIRONMENTS.
- B. APPLY A THOROUGH EVALUATION PROCESS THAT PROMOTES CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT.
 - 1. INCLUDE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT INDICATORS AS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF QUALITY.
- C. ALIGN PROGRAM MONITORING WITH EXISTING STATE EVALUATION SYSTEMS, ADAPTING THE CONSTRUCTS TO MEET LOCAL NEEDS.
- D. INVEST IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS AS THE FOUNDATION OF QUALITY.
 - 1. PRIORITIZE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PLANNING.
 - 2. DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT STRUCTURE THAT INCLUDES PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, CONTINUING EDUCATION, AND RESPONSIVE, NEEDS-BASED COACHING.

Conclusion

The cities reviewed in this report – despite differences in size, scenery, and social construction – share one notable value: they recognize the strength of children and families as the key to regional growth. These cities raised awareness and support, secured funding, and developed structures to build equity for their youngest citizens, helping them to learn and thrive in high-quality early learning environments regardless of socioeconomic status. Through collaborations with stakeholders in early childhood education, school districts, community-based organizations, philanthropic associations, and families, these cities made a commitment to community and an investment for their children. Together, they built a process that not only works to reduce future costs, but also fosters a measurable change in the quality of life for city residents – now and for generations to come.

Our community also recognizes that continued regional growth rests with our future leaders, and Pittsburgh's initial steps to expand access to high-quality early education (outlined below) mirror the early stages of successful pre-k expansion across the country.

- Mayor Peduto and the Pittsburgh City Council continue to champion the needs of children, their families, and those across the community who work to support the development of our youngest citizens.
- The Early Childhood Education Task Force convened a group of diverse stakeholders to develop an implementation plan for pre-k expansion.
- The Pittsburgh Public Schools Office of Early Childhood Education provides pre-k in district schools and partners with community-based child care programs to meet the needs of families. A recent report highlights promising practices of the early childhood education program such as inclusion, consistent curriculum, and convening of teachers and literacy staff.

Still, an estimated 1,140 three- and four-year-old income-eligible children lack access to early education. Yet, as a city known for its small-town feel, Pittsburgh boasts a truly unique spirit of connectedness and shared hope for prosperity unmatched by any other. As Pittsburgh continues to demonstrate its resilience, we will work as a progressively vibrant city to ensure the success of our children. The progress of the pre-k initiative, and its great potential for community impact, depends on our ability to arm these children, in all 90 neighborhoods, with the cognitive, social, and emotional skills they need to keep the city growing and thriving. Pittsburgh is Kidsburgh. Let's continue to stand apart as the city that puts the best interests of its children first.

Afterword: Pre-K-3 Alignment

Learning does not begin or end with pre-k. Throughout this report, we considered pre-k within the context of the birth-to-five continuum and with an emphasis on partnerships between school districts and community-based child care centers. The benefits of high-quality pre-k include cognitive, physical, social, and emotional skills. In order for the impacts of high-quality pre-k to reach their full benefits – and for children to continue to reach their full potentials – high-quality early education experiences must continue throughout the educational journey, particularly in kindergarten through third grade.

Although exciting, the transition from pre-k to kindergarten can be stressful for children and families. Successful transition plans enhance social and emotional skills, improve academic growth, and encourage family involvement. Coordination between preschool teachers, providers, kindergarten teachers, and principals is essential in this process.

Pre-k-3 alignment focuses on the policies and practices designed to set children on a positive developmental pathway. A successful journey for each child compels early elementary grades to build on what children learned in preschool – to sustain the gains made in pre-k and lead to better developmental and learning outcomes overall.⁶²

Grounded in research and evidence-based practice, the Pre-K-3 Framework (from the University of Washington College of Education) provides approaches for planning, implementing, and evaluating early childhood education.⁶³ In Pennsylvania, we have resources to support this approach such as the Early Childhood Executive Leadership (ECEL) Institute. ECEL is a curricular option for principals through the Principal Inspired Leader program and is also available for child care center directors and educators. It follows the Pre-K-3 Framework in providing guidance on alignment and continuity throughout the early grades.

Educational effectiveness in early education requires educators to meet children where they are and not just push down practices from older elementary grades. Developmentally appropriate practices are grounded in research on child development and learning. These child-centered goals are challenging and achievable, embrace children's individual differences, encourage active learning, and promote deep understanding. Developmentally appropriate practices set children up to succeed and must be considered in pre-k-3 alignment.

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