

Your Question:

A state education leader asked for information on states' pre-K programs.

Our Response:

Our responses are grouped across the following issues: assessment, best practices for special populations, county/local collaboratives, data, eligibility, funding mechanisms and transitions into kindergarten.

Assessment

States vary significantly in the assessments used for pre-K and kindergarten students as well as how those results are used. See this [50-State Comparison](#) for statutory information. This National Institute for Early Education Research ([NIEER](#)) [resource](#) looks specifically at kindergarten entry assessments and how information can be used to inform instruction, families and state policy. An [additional NIEER resource](#) looks at both pre-K and kindergarten assessments.

Best Practices for Special Populations

Best practices and policy examples are presented for dual language learners (DLLs), refugee students and students with disabilities. For DLLs, cited examples are pulled from [a DLL special report](#) from the National Institute of Early Education Research and [a report on DLL identification](#) from Migration Policy Institute.

- Dual language learners — State pre-K programs vary tremendously in their supports for DLLs, with most states having very few policies in place. Policy examples include: approved written plans for supporting DLLs, extra funding allocated, permitting bilingual instruction, home language screening and assessment, supporting families (translated outreach and documentation, communication in native language) and staff training/qualifications related to working with DLLs (bilingual staff, certifications, etc.). Very few states have policies in place, but **Illinois** and **Pennsylvania** provide good examples, specifically for identification and subsequent steps (see Migration Policy Institute resource above).
- Refugee students — [Minnesota](#) is a state that serves a relatively large proportion of refugee students (who are often also DLLs) and does a nice job of data collection and disaggregation. Minnesota also provides several supports outlined above, including making English learner status an eligibility factor for pre-K.
- Special education students — This NIEER [needs assessment](#) of pre-K special education in **Connecticut** provides a concise summary of findings in the discussion and conclusion sections, which may prompt an examination of implementation.

County/Local Collaboratives

Several states have taken a more regional approach to coordinating their pre-K systems. Three state examples are presented, along with a new policy approach.

- **Colorado** — As part of the [universal pre-K recommendations](#) related to infrastructure, local leads will “organize the local early childhood landscape and serve as the singular local level coordinator on early childhood.”
- **Mississippi** — The [Early Learning Collaboratives](#) are overseen by the state department of education and receive state funding to operate full- or half-day programs. [Senate Bill 2395](#) (2013) requires the collaboratives to match state funds through various sources.
- **Oregon** — [House Bill 2013](#) (2013) established [Early Learning Hubs](#), which are coordinating bodies that collect resources focused on children and families in its defined service area to provide direct, effective and family-centric services. In 2021, Oregon enacted [H.B 2055](#), expanding the early learning hub model to serve tribal communities.
- **Early Childhood Districts** — In 2021, Education Commission of the States collaborated with Elliot Haspel of the Robins Foundation to unpack [a new vision](#) he created for implementation of early care and education programs and services.

Data

This FutureEd [report on data](#) highlights how states struggle to report and disaggregate data on access to quality programs and connect it to K-12, while offering a case study of **Virginia**. The Early Childhood Data Collaborative at Child Trends also published [a resource](#) in July 2022 “Using Integrated Data to Increase Equitable Access to Early Childhood Programs.”

Eligibility

States’ pre-K programs vary significantly in their eligibility requirements, which may be based on state policies or a combination of both state and local policies. See more information below and in this [ECS Policy Outline](#).

- Out of 33 state pre-K programs with income requirements, 12 (36%) use income as the sole criterion for eligibility (although there may be exceptions if programs are not able to fill all available slots).
- Twenty (61%) programs use income as one of many criteria in determining eligibility (English learner status, disability status, etc.). The exact determination of how these factors relate to eligibility varies. Some states include income along with other factors, any one of which qualifies a student for eligibility. Other states allow local school districts or entities to identify which factors beyond income are prioritized. Still others require all students to meet the income requirement but may prioritize students with additional eligibility factors.
- Among states with income requirements, **Utah**’s program is the only that requires an additional characteristic beyond income to establish initial eligibility.
- **South Carolina** has [an innovative webpage](#) designed to support families in determining their eligibility, not just for pre-K but other birth-to-age-five programs and services.

Funding Mechanisms

Several state examples of funding pre-K are presented with the caveat that certain taxes or other funds may diminish over time or significantly [fluctuate](#) based on legislative appropriations or other factors. Some states fund pre-K through the state’s [school funding formula](#).

- [Pre-K Tax Credit](#) — Individuals or corporations in **Mississippi** who contribute to the local matching fund of an approved early learning collaborative may be eligible to receive a 1:1 state tax credit for the donated amount up to \$1 million dollars. In 2021, the Legislature appropriated \$16 million for this fund.
- Lottery Funds — [Georgia](#), [Nebraska](#), [North Carolina](#) and **Tennessee** all use a portion of proceeds from lottery funds to support pre-K programming in their state, in addition to other uses. These states vary in the logistics of appropriating and disbursing funds.
- Sports Betting Taxes (tax rates range from 7% in **Nevada** to 51% in **Rhode Island**) —
 - In **Massachusetts**, H.D. 4069 (2021, Pending) would deposit 60% or more of revenue into early education and care provider funding to fund universal early education programs.
 - **New York** is still determining the tax rate (not less than 12%), of which a percentage will go the general fund, supporting grant programs through the Office of Children and Family Services.
 - In **Tennessee**, the Lottery for Education account (listed above) inherits 80% of the sports betting tax funds.
- Tobacco Taxes —
 - **Arizona** created the [Early Childhood Development and Health Fund](#), consisting of revenues generated by a state tax on tobacco products.
 - **California's** [First 5 California](#) imposes a tobacco tax to fund early learning, in addition to other areas.
 - In **Colorado**, [Proposition EE](#) imposes a tax on nicotine liquids used in e-cigarettes and other vaping products to enhance/expand the voluntary Colorado Preschool Program.
 - **Connecticut, Kansas, Kentucky** and **Missouri** all leverage funding from the [Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement](#) to finance early childhood programs.
- State examples of appropriating federal funds —
 - ESSER 1 & 2:
 - **New York** used \$195M for multi-year extension of expansion grants for new, full-day pre-K.
 - **North Dakota** funded an additional 800 slots in the state's Upstart program.
 - **Oregon** dedicated \$11M for expanding existing programs in Summer 2022.
 - Fiscal Recovery Funds (American Rescue Plan) on Pre-K:
 - **Connecticut** dedicated \$27M to child care subsidies, home visiting and access/expansion.
 - **Michigan** dedicated \$121M to access/expansion of state pre-K and Head Start programs.
 - **North Carolina** dedicated \$20M in grants to pre-K classrooms in high-poverty districts.
 - **Washington D.C.** dedicated \$47M to access/expansion of pre-K, workforce supports and child care subsidies.

[Transitions into Kindergarten](#)

In 2021, Education Commission of the States led five states — **Maine, Mississippi, South Carolina, Utah** and **Wyoming** — by providing targeted technical assistance to improve their transitions into kindergarten. Please find links to a report on the outcomes of the technical assistance project and other kindergarten transitions resources below.

- [A Systems Focus to Improve School Readiness](#)
- [Transition to Kindergarten: Findings From Recent Research](#)
- [State Policies to Enhance Transitions Into Kindergarten](#)