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A Research and Policy Report

## Effective Strategies for Prekindergarten Expansion: Collaboration with Community Providers

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### Introduction

As state leaders develop or expand state prekindergarten programs, they face the challenge of how best to deliver the services to children. Decisions about prekindergarten delivery have implications for the capacity of state prekindergarten programs to expand to serve more children, how quality standards are implemented and monitored, what resources are needed to assist providers, and the availability of options for parents to choose between school or non-school settings for their children. This policy brief examines the benefits and challenges of implementing a mixed delivery system for prekindergarten that incorporates not only school-based providers but also non-school or community providers. State statutory approaches and best practices in states will also be described. Non-school providers can include private child care and Head Start, faith-based child care centers, state colleges, military bases, nonprofit organizations, tribal organizations, public housing authorities, or family child care providers.<sup>1</sup> In this policy brief, “prekindergarten” refers to programs for preschool-age children that are funded by states to promote early learning.

Early education has been a source of great interest to state leaders. In the four decades since Head Start was launched, state leaders have wrestled with how to support children’s readiness to learn. Today, 40 states and the District of Columbia offer state-funded prekindergarten, and at least 17 states provide funding supplements to Head Start. Much of state consideration of prekindergarten has come as a result of strong research findings that high-quality early education has significant short- and long-term benefits for children and society.<sup>2</sup> Recent cost benefit analyses show that early education programs are one of the best public investments available to states.<sup>3</sup> Evaluation and economic data are of interest to lawmakers who are focusing on effective investments for state funds.

In addition to findings from research, state leaders are responding to the realities of today’s family characteristics and to federal and state policy pressures. More women with young children are in the workforce than in previous decades, and many children spend full work-day hours in the care of others. As a result, early education policy options are being considered in the context of the needs of working families. In addition, state leaders face continuing pressure to meet the demands of the No Child Left Behind Act. With research, demographic and policy factors, many lawmakers have moved ahead in making prekindergarten one of the states’ priorities in early learning.

### Service Delivery Is One of Many Choices

As state lawmakers design prekindergarten programs, they may consider a number of policies to address eligibility; curriculum and child outcome standards; length of day and year; agency authority; financing and funding distribution; quality improvement and monitoring; and evaluation. A key question of design is which entities should be responsible for providing prekindergarten.

Many might picture prekindergarten as a program delivered by schools, but 33 states that offer state-funded prekindergarten include the option of delivering the service through a community provider.<sup>4</sup> These might include local child care centers, Head Start, church-based providers, community colleges, or other community settings. Recent reports show about 30 percent of all prekindergarten-age children are in non-school settings.<sup>5</sup> In nine states, more than 50 percent of prekindergarten children are in non-school settings (Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio and Oregon<sup>6</sup>). Only a few state programs are limited to public schools: Louisiana's LA4 program, Maine's Two-Year Kindergarten, and New York's Targeted Prekindergarten program.<sup>7</sup>

Taking advantage of the opportunity to use existing capacity by collaborating with child care providers would seem to make sense. Child care providers already operate in communities, serve children from varied backgrounds, and function under the auspices of a regulatory structure. However, state oversight of child care programs relies on a minimum standard licensing approach that focuses on basic safety and relies on parents to judge whether the provider meets their needs. Research and data about child care quality finds many child care settings to be only fair or minimal.<sup>8</sup> Effective collaboration with child care providers to provide high-quality early learning would need to take into account the strengths and weaknesses of the state's current child care system.

This brief focuses on state prekindergarten collaboration with center-based providers. Seven states also permit family child care providers to participate in state prekindergarten. Ensuring a high level of quality is more challenging with family child care providers who may have less access to additional resources or professional development. As states consider how to expand prekindergarten to additional community settings or rural areas, however, they will need to address whether family child care providers will be included, what standards they must meet, and how to provide support to them. Of the state programs that permit family child care providers to participate, only Arkansas and Vermont require family child care and all community settings to meet the same high standards—including education requirements—as schools.<sup>9</sup>

## **Is a Mixed Approach a Good Idea?**

Mixed delivery for prekindergarten has been shown to be largely successful in meeting state goals for early learning and in meeting the interests of community providers. Numerous benefits of collaboration have been shown in studies of New York's Universal Prekindergarten program and in a four-state study by the Government Accountability Office (GAO). Reports of concerns about market impact have been raised by providers, but insufficient data exists to substantiate significant negative effects. A discussion of the available research follows.

### *Benefits of Collaborating with Community Providers*

Prekindergarten is one part of an early childhood system. Many high-quality state prekindergarten programs have key components such as standards for providers; teacher requirements; monitoring for quality and results; and year-long contract funding. These features, when included in a mixed delivery system, can promote improvements in the level of quality and expand resources for child care providers.<sup>10</sup>

Community providers report participating in prekindergarten for a number of reasons, including the opportunity to improve quality, availability of space, the opportunity to receive additional revenue, and being able to serve more children.<sup>11</sup> Providers that subcontract with a school district also report access to support services provided by the district and the opportunity to lower parent fees.<sup>12</sup>

In its four-state study of state expansion in collaboration with community providers, the GAO found benefits of participation such as increased enrollment in prekindergarten and in enrollment of younger siblings at the same site; improved quality because of greater focus on learning and access to credentialed teachers; and increased provider access to school district resources such as professional development and computers.<sup>13</sup>

Recent studies of New York's Universal Prekindergarten Program implementation found numerous benefits of incorporating community providers. These included increases in teacher salaries; more teachers seeking certification; improved services in community programs; best practices being shared across all settings; benefits for special needs children and English language learners; and reports of children better prepared for school.<sup>14</sup> Programs increased the number of children being served and incorporated curriculum changes to improve literacy and math programming.<sup>15</sup> One major reported change was greater sharing of resources with the school district.<sup>16</sup>

#### Benefits of Mixed Delivery

- Increased enrollment and enrollment of younger siblings
- Improved quality because of greater focus on learning and access to credentialed teachers
- Increased provider access to school district resources
- Increased teacher salaries
- More teachers seeking certification
- Improved services in community programs
- Best practices shared across all settings
- Improved services for special needs children and English language learners
- Children better prepared for school.

**Source:** Betty Holcomb, *A Diverse System Delivers for Prekindergarten: Lessons Learned in New York State* (New York: Child Care Inc, July 2006).

### *Concerns About the Effects of Expanding Prekindergarten*

Incorporating a mixed-delivery approach for prekindergarten has met with some concerns from community providers. Because child care centers and family child care homes operate with very small financing margins, any potential threat to business is cause for concern. However, little data beyond anecdotal evidence exists about negative effects on community providers of expanding prekindergarten.<sup>17</sup>

Four major concerns are raised from community providers. The most common is that prekindergarten will have a detrimental effect on the child care market by taking 4-year-olds out of the classrooms where they currently are being served and driving up prices for the center. Providers in a New York study were asked if they had seen surrounding community providers open or close their centers as a result of prekindergarten.<sup>18</sup> One-third of providers reported that they knew of programs that had opened as a result of the prekindergarten expansion, while approximately 10 percent reported that they knew of programs that had closed because of prekindergarten in the school districts.<sup>19</sup>

A second concern is that more stringent prekindergarten education requirements and higher pay will draw the best-trained teachers from child care to prekindergarten classrooms, causing

a shortage of well-trained teachers for children under age 4.<sup>20</sup> This concern was reflected among New York providers who rated loss of certified teachers to the school districts as a top issue.<sup>21</sup> As noted in a recent RAND study, as teachers improve their levels of training and education, they tend to move out of child care into prekindergarten programs to receive better pay and benefits.<sup>22</sup>

A third concern raised on a RAND report is the issue that prekindergarten programs would tend to serve fewer at-risk children. The New York study examined this question and found that, not only did providers increase the number of children served, they increased the number of economically disadvantaged children and English language learners served.<sup>23</sup>

A fourth concern is that prekindergarten would create an incentive for providers to move away from serving young children under age 3 in favor of providing more prekindergarten classes.<sup>24</sup> Both the New York study and the GAO report examined this issue. In New York, a very small number of providers reported serving fewer infants and toddlers, about the same number as those who reported serving more in that age group.<sup>25</sup> The GAO report was more mixed. The report found some Head Start grantees reported serving more 3-year-olds “to offset the loss of 4-year-olds” who participated in prekindergarten programs at another program but reported that little data was available about the effect on availability or child care prices.<sup>26</sup>

Policymakers who are considering prekindergarten expansion with community providers may wish to consider these issues as they develop or expand prekindergarten programs. They can request that state agencies collect data about the effects of prekindergarten expansion by examining changes in provider services, teacher turnover, the demographics of children being served, and the adequacy of the incentives and supports for community providers to participate. Policymakers can address teacher migration to public schools by focusing on comparable compensation and benefits between preschool teachers in community settings and those in public schools.

## Current State Approaches to Incorporating Community Providers

### State Approaches to Mixed Delivery

- Funding distributed directly to community providers.
- School district subcontracting.
  - Requiring contracting.
  - Encouraging or permitting contracting.
- Local decisions.

In 33 states, prekindergarten services are operating in school and community settings,<sup>27</sup> and in nine states, more than half of prekindergarten children are in non-school settings.<sup>28</sup> States that achieve high levels of non-school provider participation have taken varied approaches, but no one approach emerges as more effective than another. A number of factors affect whether community providers can effectively participate in prekindergarten. Three main approaches are used to distribute funding to community providers.

- Distribute funds directly to school districts and community providers.
- Distribute funds to school districts that can contract with community providers.
- Distribute funds to local councils that decide funding.

One of the three main approaches is to deliver funding directly to community providers through a competitive grant process. A second, more common approach is to distribute funds to school districts that then may be authorized to subcontract with community providers. States

that distribute funding to programs in school districts include: Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.<sup>29</sup> State statutes may require, encourage or be permissive about whether schools contract with community providers.

A third approach is to allow local decision making where local councils play a role in choosing providers and/or distributing funds. Statutory language can influence state implementation efforts so that they focus on successfully incorporating community providers.

### *Direct Funding to Community Providers*

States such as Arkansas, Georgia, Illinois and Michigan provide funding directly to both school districts and non-school providers. Arkansas' prekindergarten program, which was rated one of the highest quality programs in the country by the NIEER *State of Preschool* report,<sup>30</sup> allows a variety of private providers to participate in prekindergarten including nonprofit and for-profit child care providers, Head Start, family child care providers and faith-based providers. The Department of Human Services accepts applications from any approved provider or partnership that can meet the standards for the Arkansas Better Chance Program.<sup>31</sup>

Illinois limited distribution of prekindergarten funds to public schools until the 2003-2004 school year, when the state began accepting applications directly from community providers.<sup>32</sup> In addition, if a school district and a child care provider collaborate, the application is given extra consideration.<sup>33</sup> Michigan distributes funds to both schools and community providers, using two different processes. School districts receive funds through the school funding formula, and community providers may apply for school readiness competitive grants.<sup>34</sup>

### *Subcontracting with Community Providers*

States with mixed delivery of prekindergarten may authorize school districts or other entities to subcontract with community providers. State laws may require, authorize or permit community providers to deliver prekindergarten. Three approaches to subcontracting are most common:

- State law requires that a percentage of prekindergarten be provided by community providers.
- State law encourages schools to contract with community providers.
- State law permits contracting with community providers.

### **State Requirement for Mixed Delivery**

One effective way to ensure that community providers are incorporated into prekindergarten is to require that a specific percentage of community providers participate. Arizona, New York and West Virginia include a minimum requirement for community providers. In New York, this has driven a successful collaboration between school districts and community providers. As a result, more than 60 percent of preschool age children are being served in community settings.<sup>35</sup>

New York's Universal Prekindergarten program requires school districts to set aside not less than 10 percent of prekindergarten funding for subcontracts with a variety of child care and early education providers, including Head Start and private child care providers that meet the standards for prekindergarten.<sup>36</sup> The collaboration is designed to effectively serve eligible children through school districts and qualified agencies.

West Virginia requires that “no less than 50 percent of the classrooms of eligible children must be provided through contractual agreements with community programs, including, but not limited to, Head Start and child care, unless the county collaborative team can document that those programs do not exist in that county, can never meet the mandates of this policy, or choose not to participate.”<sup>37</sup> Community providers, selected through a county collaboration planning process, must meet or exceed the program requirements.<sup>38</sup> In addition, counties are required to provide supports so that community providers are able to participate, even including providing certified teachers, if necessary. West Virginia currently is serving 42 percent of 4-year-olds and plans to phase in all 4-year-olds by the 2012-2013 school year. According to West Virginia administrators, six counties in the state are universal and another eight to 10 are one to two years away.<sup>39</sup>

Arizona focuses on parent choice by requiring schools to contract out for prekindergarten services for at least 50 percent of students if their parents choose a setting such as child care or Head Start.<sup>40</sup> In addition, parents must receive a list of community providers and can choose any provider that agrees to participate and meets the requirements.

### **Encouraging Community Providers**

Three states—New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Tennessee—include statutory or administrative language to encourage contracting with local providers without specifying a percentage requirement. New Jersey law states that the local board of education “...shall contract with a child care center provider or its local Head Start program to implement required preschool programs and shall not duplicate programs or services otherwise available in the community.”<sup>41</sup> New Jersey has aggressively worked with community providers in its Abbott program and serves almost 70 percent of its prekindergarten children in community settings.

Pennsylvania department guidelines state, “PDE encourages school districts to identify existing, community-based, high-quality prekindergarten programs, such as Head Start, early intervention, licensed child care sites or private academic nursery schools, in order to collaboratively establish new prekindergarten programs. Experience from across the nation suggests that community providers would deliver at least 30 percent to 40 percent of the prekindergarten services on a statewide basis. Districts should use at least 10 percent to 20 percent of their prekindergarten funds to facilitate these partnerships.”<sup>42</sup> Tennessee’s law states, “LEAs are encouraged to collaborate with non-school system entities where such collaboration provides an efficient means for expansion of prekindergarten classrooms.”<sup>43</sup>

### **Permitting Community Providers**

In the states where school districts receive the funds, state law may permit contracting. In such cases, less incentive exists for districts to engage with community providers unless district capacity is an issue. Examples of states with permissive language include Ohio and South Carolina. The Ohio Early Childhood Education program provides funding to high-poverty school districts that can either provide the program or subcontract with child care, Head Start or chartered non-public schools.<sup>44</sup> Ohio has a long history of encouraging community partnerships between prekindergarten and child care providers.

South Carolina’s statute authorizes school districts to contract for all or a part of the services with child care providers or Head Start.<sup>45</sup> If there is a local council, the district is required to consult with the group and to make maximum use of existing resources and avoid duplication of effort. The district that chooses to subcontract becomes responsible for monitoring providers.

## *Local Decision Making*

Another way states authorize mixed delivery systems for prekindergarten is through local decision making outside the school district leadership. States may allow local entities to distribute funds or act in an advisory capacity. Three states—Connecticut, Massachusetts and North Carolina—use local councils. Both Connecticut and North Carolina serve a majority of their prekindergarten children in community settings.<sup>46</sup>

North Carolina's More at Four Program is designed to build on the existing system in the state. Local More at Four committees are charged with identifying a contractor, developing policies and procedures, and providing ongoing program feedback. The committee is co-chaired by the school superintendent (or designee) for the local education agency and the board chair (or designee) for the local Smart Start partnership.<sup>47</sup> State data show that 50 percent of children are served in public schools and 50 percent in non-school settings such as child care and Head Start.<sup>48</sup>

Connecticut's local decision making is targeted to priority schools and low-wealth towns. The chief town official and the school superintendent convene a local or regional school readiness council. The council has broad, comprehensive duties, including conducting a needs assessment, making recommendations for grants, promoting coordination, and submitting reports.<sup>49</sup>

Massachusetts' Community Partnerships for Children is designed to promote community collaboration to provide the services needed by families. A Community Partnership Council develops a plan, chooses a lead agency, and submits an application on behalf of the town. The lead agency then distributes funds through contracts with providers to deliver the services.<sup>50</sup> The statutory language encourages providers to work together to provide an array of services to the community.

## **Best Practices in Promoting Mixed Delivery**

State experience suggests that several issues need to be addressed to effectively implement mixed delivery of prekindergarten. These include:

- Addressing different requirements and higher standards,
- Helping providers meet standards,
- Meeting the needs of families,
- Understanding institutional challenges, and
- Addressing information technology.

Some of these issues can be addressed by prekindergarten policies, while others relate to the necessary funding levels and infrastructure that would be needed for effective participation by community providers. The range and complexity of the issues that arise demonstrate the challenging nature of implementing mixed delivery.

### *Addressing Different Requirements and Higher Standards*

One barrier that community providers face is managing the various regulations that govern prekindergarten and child care. State prekindergarten programs have program requirements and standards—such as teacher education and training requirements, class size, and teacher ratios—that differ from and are more stringent than child care licensing requirements. Child

care regulations include both licensing of providers—that focuses primarily on health and safety—and regulation of the state’s child care subsidy program. A provider that participates in both prekindergarten and child care must navigate and reconcile the different requirements.

High-quality prekindergarten programs have requirements for bachelor-degreed teachers, curriculum requirements, class size and teacher-to-student ratios, and other services. States that are focused on quality require that all participating providers meet the same standards. For community providers, the most challenging requirement often is teacher education and training. Currently, 17 states require prekindergarten teachers in public and non-public settings to have a bachelor’s degree, and 10 states require a specialized early childhood certification or license in addition to a bachelor’s degree.<sup>51</sup>

In contrast, child care licensing regulations have few, if any, teacher education requirements: 36 states have no teacher education requirements for child care centers, although a few states require specific hours of course work or a Child Development Associate credential.<sup>52</sup> Many states are focusing on improving the professional development of their child care workforce, but many of the teachers have significant formal education and training gaps that would need to be addressed to meet higher prekindergarten standards. Several studies have considered workforce issues in specific states to examine the challenges surrounding teacher preparation.<sup>53</sup>

A second challenge for providers is the need to increase staffing to meet more stringent staff-child ratios and smaller group sizes in prekindergarten.<sup>54</sup> Many states’ child care regulations have ratios and group sizes that are above the recommended levels of no more than 10 children per teacher and group sizes no larger than 20 children.<sup>55</sup> These factors are relevant in determining appropriate funding levels and timelines for community providers to meet standards.

### *Helping Providers Meet Standards*

To meet the challenge of supporting community providers in meeting higher standards, state leaders are focusing on strategies such as teacher education and scholarship programs, teacher compensation, funding levels, curriculum training, funding for start-up or materials, facilities renovation or construction, and training in financial management.

Many states that use a mixed delivery system require all providers to meet the state prekindergarten standards.<sup>56</sup> Some allow a period for phase-in or extra time to meet the requirements. States are using a combination of strategies and funding to help community providers meet the higher prekindergarten standards.

To meet teacher education requirements, states are using scholarships to raise the level of education and training of child care teachers. States also are using in-service programs and grandfather provisions to allow current child care teachers to participate in prekindergarten while they obtain additional training.<sup>57</sup> New Jersey rapidly phased-in prekindergarten teacher education requirements in community settings as it implemented the Abbott Preschool Program. By 2004, 83 percent of teachers in community settings had obtained a bachelor’s degree, up from 35 percent in 2000.<sup>58</sup>

States also assist providers by supplying start-up funds; funds for professional development and salary; intensive technical assistance and monitoring; funds for supplies and curriculum materials; and support for facilities.<sup>59</sup> Start-up funds may be part of the prekindergarten

budget, may be awarded to new classrooms, or can be incorporated into the contract with the provider.<sup>60</sup> Professional development assistance may be structured as a percent of a grant award or as funds for scholarships or other expenses.

Teacher compensation is a significant issue for state policymakers who are planning prekindergarten expansions. Compensation affects cost and can affect teacher recruitment and retention in mixed delivery prekindergarten. Compensating teachers in school-based prekindergarten classrooms at higher levels than teachers in community settings raises fairness concerns and potential problems for teacher recruitment and retention in community settings. These issues also can arise within the context of a child care center if teachers in the preschool classroom are compensated at a higher level than teachers of other age groups.

States that require community providers to be paid at parity with salaries of prekindergarten teachers in public schools can face varying cost implications, depending on how teachers are hired and paid. In some states, the school hires the teachers who work in a community setting, and they are compensated at the same rate as if they were in the school. Another approach is to allow the child care provider to hire the teacher, which can result in higher teacher costs if salaries are on par with public school salaries.

Another way states are helping providers meet standards is to provide technical assistance to individual providers. Some states help providers with the application process through workshops. New Jersey provides assistance with financial management to help providers manage the prekindergarten, child care and other quality funding streams. New Jersey also has a mentor teacher who visits classrooms and works with teachers on curriculum and classroom practice.

When policymakers are considering funding levels to community providers, they also may need to take into account the differences in access to resources that exist. School districts have "...economies of scale, greater capacity for program administration and management, and access to facilities."<sup>61</sup> Some states structure their funding to providers according to applicant's proposed budgets, but adequately addressing resource differences remains a challenge for states.

Facilities also are a significant issue in expanding prekindergarten. Although many prekindergarten efforts are examining mixed delivery because of the advantage of building on existing capacity, state leaders who are expanding prekindergarten can continue to face challenges in meeting classroom needs in communities and rural areas. Some states are addressing capacity needs by providing funds for facility renovation or construction.

### *Meeting the Needs of Families*

Designing effective mixed delivery also requires consideration of families' needs. Two major issues are the need for full-day services and maintaining child eligibility. One factor families consider in choosing a provider is whether it can meet their schedule. Child care centers generally provide care for a full day, up to 10 hours, which is important to many working families. Most prekindergarten programs are offered part-day, or the hours are set locally.<sup>62</sup> Only seven states require providers to deliver a school-day or longer program. Coordinating prekindergarten with child care or Head Start can be an effective way to expand full day opportunities for working families.<sup>63</sup> Hours and transportation issues were identified as factors

in Oklahoma, according to a study that found that the half-day nature of the program affected participation among low-income and working families, and the combination of part-day and lack of transportation reduced participation.<sup>64</sup>

In mixed delivery programs, states distribute prekindergarten funds and child care subsidy funds to providers to fund a full day of services for low-income working parents. Some state child care subsidy programs reimburse community providers that participate in prekindergarten for a full-day child care subsidy in order to maintain quality in the classroom for the full day. Parents often pay a portion of the cost of the non-prekindergarten part of the day.

Eligibility can be another challenge for families in the child care subsidy system. In the child care subsidy system, states base eligibility on income, the need for child care and, for those families on welfare, the parent's participation in a TANF work activity. A family may lose eligibility for child care because of changes in work status, income or nonperformance in a welfare-related activity. Some states that operate a mixed delivery system for prekindergarten authorize children's continuing eligibility for prekindergarten so that the child can participate for the full duration of the program.

### *Understanding Institutional Challenges*

Institutional challenges to mixed delivery include agency structure and mission and information technology capacity. Promoting mixed delivery of prekindergarten can be challenging because two or more agencies often are involved in administering prekindergarten and child care. Most child care subsidy programs are housed in the state human services agency, while many prekindergarten programs are administered through departments of education. In addition to maintaining separate authority for programs, the departments historically see themselves as having different goals and missions.<sup>65</sup> Human services departments are focused on parents' participation requirements in welfare and child care's role in supporting work engagement. The department of education is focused on children's school readiness.

States have responded to institutional challenges in several ways. Arkansas, Connecticut and West Virginia designed their prekindergarten structure in a joint governance model with the human services and education agencies. Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts and Washington combined services for children into one agency.<sup>66</sup> Some states promoted effective collaboration by housing prekindergarten in the governor's office. These approaches were designed to promote coordination, reduce barriers and encourage better service delivery.

### *Addressing Information Technology*

Reliable information is key to informing policy and funding decisions. As states that are expanding prekindergarten focus on program data, evaluation and research, having reliable data is essential. In many cases, due to the fragmentation of programs and the multiple agencies that oversee early childhood programs, problems arise because data systems cannot communicate across agencies and are unable to track the number of children served in different settings.<sup>67</sup> Some states have focused on improved tracking by creating a unique student identification number so that children participating in all types of prekindergarten settings can be tracked both during preschool and later when they enter kindergarten. An identifier makes it possible to collect basic program participation data and monitoring information and also can help provide data for research and evaluation purposes.

Massachusetts, for example, is taking on information technology challenges. A budget item for the new executive level Department of Early Education and Care called for a study of the information technology needs of the department and focused specifically on a database concerning children and waiting lists for programs and on a database of early childhood educators and providers.<sup>68</sup> The report identified four weaknesses in the system that are likely to be factors in other states.

- Multiple, uncoordinated systems exist to perform similar functions for different segments of the agency's clients.
- Much of the data is not stored centrally, and much of it is not stored electronically.
- Existing data often is inconsistent and incomplete and a range of additional data that should be available is not, both for internal use and to inform and support families, providers and other stakeholders.
- Virtually no business is conducted electronically; almost all transactions rely on expensive and inefficient paper-based processes.<sup>69</sup>

Recommendations from Massachusetts' study included major changes to improve the state's infrastructure, including upgrading and expanding the network, centralizing data on providers, children and families, waiting lists, and workforce data; collecting more detailed provider data and child-level child identifier data; connecting to other agencies systems for data sharing; and expanding on-line capacity.<sup>70</sup>

Policymakers who seek reliable state-level data can encourage and fund development of integrated data systems. Prioritizing data can ensure that policymakers have access to accurate information about program activities and the capacity to conduct program evaluation and other research.

## Conclusion

State policymakers who seek to expand prekindergarten programs by collaborating with community-based providers may need to resolve a number of issues. Important policy considerations about the role of community providers, the authority of state agencies in supporting community providers, how resources are distributed, and the types of supports for providers to meet higher standards will make a difference in whether community providers can participate or have an incentive to participate. Available research suggests these are important components for a successful mixed delivery program. More can be learned from best practices, however, as states gain greater experience with this approach.

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## Notes

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5. W. Steven Barnett, et al., *The State of Preschool: 2004 State Preschool Yearbook* (New Brunswick, N.J.: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2004), 34.
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13. U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Prekindergarten: Four Selected States Expanded Access by Relying on Schools and Existing Providers of Early Education and Care to Provide Services* (GAO-04-852) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GAO, September 2004), 24.
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16. *Ibid.*, 49; see also, GAO, *Prekindergarten*, 4.
17. See, for example, GAO, *Prekindergarten*, 4.
18. Lekies, *Raising All Boats*, 49.
19. *Ibid.*, 49.

20. Rachel Christina, JoVictoria Nicholson-Goodman, *Going to Scale with High-Quality Early Education: Choices and Consequences in Universal Prekindergarten Efforts* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2005), 60-66.
21. Lekies, *Raising All Boats*, 50.
22. Christina, *Going to Scale with High Quality Early Education*, 60, citing Bellm et al., 2002.
23. Lekies, *Raising All Boats*, 46.
24. Christina, *Going to Scale with High Quality Early Education*, 44.
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26. GAO, *Prekindergarten*, 4, 25-27
27. This number includes the research study conducted by the Center on Law and Social Policy reported in Schumacher, *All Together Now*, plus research by NCSL that adds Florida, Louisiana, Maryland and New Mexico.
28. Schumacher, *All Together Now*, 17.
29. Barnett, *The State of Preschool 2005*, 197. Arkansas was recently rated nine out of 10 for quality; see <http://nieer.org/mediacenter/index.php?PressID=66>, retrieved Nov.27, 2006.
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33. [http://www.startingat3.org/state\\_laws/statelawsILdetail.html#toc5b2323510](http://www.startingat3.org/state_laws/statelawsILdetail.html#toc5b2323510), retrieved Oct.18, 2006.
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