

## Handout B: 2010 State-Funded Pre-K Program Eligibility Requirements

Note: NIEER's *State Preschool Yearbook* series focuses on state-funded preschool education initiatives meeting the following criteria:

- The initiative is funded, controlled, and directed by the state.
- The initiative serves children of preschool age, usually 3 and/or 4. Although initiatives in some states serve broader age ranges, programs that serve *only* infants and toddlers are excluded.
- Early childhood education is the primary focus of the initiative. This does not exclude programs that offer parent education but does exclude programs that mainly focus on parent education. Programs that focus on parent work status or programs where child eligibility is tied to work status are also excluded.
- The initiative offers a group learning experience to children at least two days per week.
- State-funded preschool education initiatives must be distinct from the state's system for subsidized child care. However, preschool initiatives may be *coordinated* and *integrated* with the subsidy system for child care.
- The initiative is *not* primarily designed to serve children with disabilities, but services may be offered to children with disabilities.
- State supplements to the federal Head Start program are considered to constitute *de facto* state preschool programs if they substantially expand the number of children served, and if the state assumes some administrative responsibility for the program. State supplements to fund quality improvements, extended days, or other program enhancements or to fund expanded enrollment only minimally are not considered equivalent to a state preschool program.

Eligibility Criteria	States
No state-funded prek program meeting NIEER definition	Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming
Universal (voluntary for any child within a certain age range)	Alabama, Florida, Iowa*, Louisiana*, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri*, New Jersey, New York*, Oklahoma, Rhode Island (in 4 urban areas), West Virginia, Wisconsin*, DC*
Head Start eligibility criteria	Alaska, Delaware, Minnesota, Oregon, Illinois (but will go up to 400% of FPL** with other risk factors)
110% of FPL**	Washington
Free or Reduced Lunch (130-185% of FPL)	Arizona, , Colorado, Iowa*, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Nebraska, Tennessee, Texas
Up to 200% of FPL	Louisiana*, Ohio
Up to 300% of FPL	Michigan (lowest income, plus one other risk factor are top priority)
Up to 400% of FPL	Illinois (with one other risk factor)
75% of SMI	California, Connecticut, North Carolina
Locally determined based on risk factors	Nevada, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia
Military	North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas

\* goal to serve all children when funding available;

\*\*FPL = Federal Poverty Level

## **Detailed Eligibility Requirement Information**

### **Alabama**

There are no specific eligibility requirements for the program beyond meeting the age criteria and being a resident of the state of Alabama.

### **Alaska**

Eligibility requirements mirror federal Head Start guidelines.

### **Arizona**

In order to be eligible for an Arizona Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG) funded prekindergarten program, children must come from a family with an income at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level.

### **Arkansas**

Children from birth to age 5 from low-income families are eligible to receive early childhood services through the Arkansas Better Chance program. Other risk factors, such as being in foster care, developmental delay, family violence, having a parent on active overseas military duty, having a teen parent, low birth weight, low parental education level, or non-English speaking family members can also determine eligibility.

### **California**

Unless children are receiving protective services or have been referred as at risk of abuse, neglect, or exploitation, families must have an income of 75 percent of the SMI to be eligible for the program.

### **Colorado**

To be eligible for participation in the program, 4-year-olds must meet at least one risk factor; 3-year-olds must have at least three. Risk factors include eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch, being in foster care, a family history of abuse or neglect, homelessness, low parental education levels, parental substance abuse, or having a teen parent, as well as locally determined risk factors.

### **Connecticut**

To be eligible to participate in this program for free, children must come from families with household incomes less than 75 percent of the state median income. Families are required to go through a redetermination of fee every six months, and families may have to pay a fee or drop out of the program if income has increased significantly. Due to the redetermination process, this program does not meet the NIEER definition of a state-funded preschool program.

### **Delaware**

In 1994, Delaware's Early Childhood Assistance Program (ECAP) was established, aiming to expand access to comprehensive early childhood services for 4-year-olds who are income-eligible for Head Start. Ninety percent of children enrolled in ECAP must come from families with an income at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty level and 10 percent of available slots must be allocated for children with disabilities. Due to new mandates in the Head Start Reauthorization Act of 2007, the Early Childhood Assistance Program now allows programs to take up to 35 percent of their funded enrollment from children living in households with incomes at 100 to 130 percent of the federal poverty level and count those children as income-eligible.

### **Florida**

Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Program was established as a result of a 2002 state

constitutional amendment requiring prekindergarten access for all of the state's 4-year-old children.

### **Georgia**

Established in 1993, Georgia's Pre-K program became the nation's first universal preschool program for 4-year-olds in 1995.

**Hawaii, Idaho** do not have NIEER defined state pre-K programs.

### **Illinois**

At-risk children are the first funding priority of Illinois's pre-K program. Programs locally determine criteria for at-risk status based on needs identified by agencies and districts in their grant proposals. Common risk factors include exposure to drug or alcohol abuse in the family, low parent education levels, poverty, developmental delays, and a history of abuse, neglect, or family violence. Programs that serve families earning up to four times the federal poverty level are the second funding priority.

**Indiana** does not have a NIEER defined state pre-K program.

### **Iowa**

Iowa has two state-funded preschool programs. At least 80 percent of children in the "Shared Visions" program must be eligible to receive free lunch. Eligibility for up to 20 percent of students in each "Shared Visions" classroom can be based on risk factors, including developmental delay, homelessness, low birth weight, having a teen parent, or having a parent who has a substance abuse problem. A sliding payment scale may be applied for children from over-income families depending on the local needs of the grantee. The State Voluntary Preschool Program (SVPP) was launched in the 2007-2008 program year to provide prekindergarten access to all 4-year-olds in the state. All 4-year-olds who live in Iowa are eligible for SVPP, and they do not have to be a resident of the district in which they attend preschool.

### **Kansas**

Eligibility is determined by meeting at least one of eight risk factors: eligibility for free lunch, having a single parent, academic or developmental delay based upon validated assessment, having a parent lacking a high school diploma or GED, English Language Learner status, having a teen parent, migrant status, or referral from the Social and Rehabilitative Services agency.

### **Kentucky**

The program is available to 4-year-olds from low-income families as well as 3- and 4-year-olds with disabilities. In the 2006-2007 school year, the number of children eligible for the program increased when the income eligibility requirement was raised from 130 percent of the federal poverty line (FPL) to 150 percent of FPL. Children who do not meet these eligibility requirements may participate based on space availability, though they are funded by district money or tuition rather than state dollars.

### **Louisiana**

Louisiana operates three state pre-K programs. One program is available to children who are at risk of being "insufficiently ready for the regular school program," with priority being given to children from low-income families. Eligibility for a second program is granted to 4-year-olds who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, though children from families with higher incomes may also attend using local funds or tuition. The third program has the goal of providing tuition reimbursement to families with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level that send their 4-year-olds to qualifying preschools. Louisiana has mandated voluntary preschool access for all 4-year-olds regardless of income by the 2013-2014 program year.

**Maine**

Maine has a voluntary two-year kindergarten program for 4- and 5-year olds.

**Maryland**

Maryland serves 'economically disadvantaged' four-year olds with a goal of offering voluntary pre-K to all four year olds. Maryland also provides supplemental funds to Head Start to increase enrollment and to improve quality.

**Massachusetts**

All children may enroll in participating Massachusetts Universal Pre-Kindergarten programs regardless of income, though programs must serve or be willing to serve children from families with income levels at or below 85 percent of the state median income (SMI). UPK accepts children ages 2 years, 9 months until they reach the locally determined kindergarten eligibility age.

**Michigan**

At least 75 percent of the children enrolled in the program must come from families with an income below 300 percent of the federal poverty line (FPL), which was increased in the 2008-2009 program year from 250 percent FPL. Eligibility is also based on meeting other risk factors for educational disadvantage. In the 2009-2010 year, the Michigan State Board of Education adopted revised risk factors that updated and collapsed many of the previous risk factors into eight categories, with the goal of streamlining the enrollment process and targeting the most at-risk children and families. A prioritization process was adopted along with the revised risk factors, allowing extremely low family income to automatically qualify a child/family. Priority is then given to children from families with low income plus two risk factors, followed by children from families with low income plus one risk factor. In addition, children from families with incomes above 300 percent FPL must have at least two risk factors to be eligible for the Michigan program.

**Minnesota**

Minnesota provides state funding to both Early Head Start and Head Start in order to increase access to these programs for children from birth to age 5.

**Mississippi** does not have a NIEER defined state pre-K program.

**Missouri**

The Missouri state pre-K programs uses sliding payment scales, which use criteria including free or reduced-priced lunch eligibility. However, the goal is to eventually provide access to all families regardless of income.

**Montana** does not have a NIEER defined state pre-K program.

**Nebraska**

At least 70 percent of grant funding received by each participating preschool program must be used to serve children with one of the following four risk factors: eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch, having teen parents or parents who have not completed high school, living in a home in which English is not the primary language, or being born prematurely or with a low birth weight.

**Nevada**

The program offers preschool access to 3-, 4-, and 5-year olds using eligibility criteria based on each program's assessment of local community needs. Four- and five-year olds who will be eligible for

kindergarten the following year receive first priority, though children also may be eligible if they are English Language Learners, are from low-income families, or if they have an IEP.

**New Hampshire** does not have a NIEER defined state pre-K program.

**New Jersey**

The state Department of Education (DOE) funds school districts to provide the program to all 3- and 4-year-olds who wish to enroll.

**New Mexico**

There is no specific income requirement to be eligible for the program, except that two-thirds of enrolled children at each program site must live in the attendance zone of a Title I elementary school.

**New York**

While New York's Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) is meant to be universal, funding has not been sufficient to achieve this goal. In 2009-2010, about 45 percent of the state's 4-year-olds were enrolled in the program. UPK slots are filled through district-operated lotteries.

**North Carolina**

NC Pre-K (formerly More at Four) serves "at-risk" four-year olds. Children are defined as "at risk" if they come from families with incomes at or below 75 percent of the state median income or have another risk factor, such as educational or developmental delay, an identified disability, a chronic health condition, or limited English proficiency. Children whose parents are active duty military personnel are automatically eligible for the program.

**North Dakota**

North Dakota does not have a NIEER defined state pre-K program.

**Ohio**

The program serves 3- and 4-year old children from families with incomes up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). A sliding fee scale is applied for families above 100 percent of FPL, and families above 200 percent of FPL may enroll their children with support from district funds or through parent tuition.

**Oklahoma**

Oklahoma offers free, voluntary access to preschool programs for all 4-year-olds, becoming the second state in the nation to do so.

**Oregon**

Oregon provides comprehensive education and child development services to 3- and 4-year-olds from low-income families. All programs are held to the federal Head Start Performance Standards and must meet monitoring requirements.

**Pennsylvania**

Children are eligible for pre-K programs two years before meeting the locally determined kindergarten eligibility age, although districts can choose additional requirements such as low-income status or a lack of academic readiness.

Pennsylvania also provides supplemental funding to Head Start for additional slots and increased quality.

**Rhode Island**

Rhode Island launched its pre-K program in 2009. The program is available to 4-year-old children in four of the state's most urban communities and was in seven other sites.

**South Carolina**

Each school district can determine its own eligibility requirements according to local need and based on a list of state-specified risk factors, including child history of foster care, homelessness, low family income, low parent education level, or teen parent.

**South Dakota** does not have a NIEER defined state pre-K program.

**Tennessee**

There are three tiers of priority for enrollment. Top priority is given to 4-year-olds who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. Pending availability of space, additional children who have an IEP, are in state custody, have a history of abuse or neglect, or are English Language Learners may enroll. Children who meet locally determined risk factors such as single-parent families, low parent education level, teen parents, or a parent on active military duty, may enroll only if spots are still available after children meeting the state-specified risk factors have enrolled.

**Texas**

Children are eligible if they meet one of a number of risk factors: free or reduced-price lunch eligibility, homelessness or unstable housing, limited English proficiency, participation in foster care, or parent on active military duty or who has been injured or killed on duty. If parents pay tuition, non-eligible children may enroll at a district's discretion.

**Utah** does not have a NIEER defined state pre-K program.

**Vermont**

Children are eligible for Vermont's preK program if their families have incomes below 185 percent of the federal poverty level or if they have other risk factors, including a history of abuse or neglect, developmental delay, limited English proficiency, or social isolation.

**Virginia**

Program eligibility is based on locally determined risk factors which include, but are not limited to, homelessness, limited English proficiency, family unemployment, parents with limited education, poverty, and parent incarceration.

**Washington**

This state's initiative primarily serves 4-year-olds from families at or below 110 percent of the federal poverty level, though up to 10 percent of slots may be filled by children whose families are over the income cutoff if there are developmental and environmental risk factors present. Enrollment is also available to some 3-year-olds who meet other risk factors. Starting in the 2010-2011 school year, children who qualify for special education due to a disability will be eligible for Washington's pre-K initiative, regardless of the family's income level.

**West Virginia**

The state expanded preschool education in 2002 and set the goal of including all 4-year-olds in the state by the 2012-2013 school year.

**Wisconsin**

Since Wisconsin became a state in 1848, there has been a commitment to provide free education to 4-year old children in its constitution. Number of children served is limited by amount of funding. Wisconsin also provides supplemental funding to Head Start program for increased access and quality.

**Wyoming** does not have a NIEER defined state pre-K program.

**District of Columbia**

All 3- and 4-year olds in the District of Columbia are eligible to attend the pre-K program, but the number of available slots limits actual enrollment.

**Source:** *National Institute for Early Education Research 2010 State Preschool Yearbook*  
<http://nieer.org/yearbook/pdf/yearbook.pdf>