



# Pre-K Initiatives: A Selected Overview

## States Implementing Universal Pre-K Initiatives

From Oklahoma to New Jersey and from Florida to New York, states across the nation are recognizing the benefits of universal early childhood education. Many states established innovative programs over the last decade and in other areas, new efforts are underway to implement universal early childhood education.

- **Florida** voters passed a constitutional amendment endorsed by the Governor in 2002 to provide state-funded, universal, voluntary pre-kindergarten programs for all four-year-olds by September 2005. The State Board of Education (SBE) established an Advisory Council to make recommendations to the Legislature for the implementation of a quality program. The Legislature passed an initial bill, which Governor Jeb Bush vetoed, citing lack of provisions to ensure high-quality programming. The Legislature met in a special session in December 2004 to re-design the program, and passed a universal pre-k bill where children may attend either a school year or intensive (300 hours) summer session. The school year program would offer about three hours a day of instruction. Class sizes may be as large as 18 children with one teacher, who would be required to have an AA in 5 years and a BA in 8. The bill passed by the Legislature does not appropriate funding, estimated to cost the state approximately \$400 million. The bill was advocated for and signed by Governor Jeb Bush in January of 2005.
- **Georgia** was the first state to offer publicly funded universal pre-k to all four-year-olds, thanks to the leadership of former Governor Zell Miller and revenues from the state lottery. A constitutional amendment was passed by voters in 1992; legislation creating universal pre-k passed in 1993 (beginning with pilots; open to all four-year-olds in 1995). The program expanded under the Office of School Readiness (OSR) to reach 63,500 children in the 2001-02 school year. The six-and-a-half hour per day program serves (with Head Start) over 70% of Georgia's four-year-olds. Last year, Governor Sonny Perdue pushed for the creation of a newly organized state department called Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, a state agency responsible for overseeing child care, nutrition and pre-k for children 0-5 and their families.
- **New Jersey** was the first state in the nation where the courts decided that educationally "at-risk" children are entitled to an early education. The 1998 Abbot v. Burke decision formally established "well-planned, high-quality preschool" as a constitutional right for all three-and four-year olds in New Jersey's 30 poorest school districts. The Abbott program serves approximately 29,000 children during school hours through public schools and community-based programs. In addition, state legislators designated an additional 100 low-income school districts as part of the Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA) system, requiring full-day kindergarten and half-day preschool for 4-year-olds.

- **New York** established a Universal Pre-K (UPK) program through 1997 legislation authored by Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver. Phase-in process began in the 1998-99 school year, with full implementation planned for 2002. A budget battle in the legislature left the program with \$225 million for 2001, instead of the planned \$500 million. Any school district in the state can apply for UPK funding to deliver two-and-a-half hours of services per day. Fifty-five thousand children are currently served in a quarter of the state's school districts through a mixed system of public and private programs. 188 low-income districts are funded through the UPK system, while 240 districts continue to await funding.
- **Oklahoma's** legislature initiated a universal pre-k program in 1998 by financing it as part of the K-12 funding formula. More than half of four-year-olds participate in the program, which is offered by 85% of Oklahoma's 544 school districts. Teachers must be certified in early childhood education. While school districts are the grantees, districts can subcontract with community-based providers to offer the program. The program runs for a minimum of 2 ½ hours/day, but can offer up to 6 hours per day and receive a higher reimbursement rate.
- **West Virginia** Pre-K, created through Policy 2525, was adopted in January 2003. The program requires all 55 counties to submit plans to the Board of Education for a system of high-quality programs that will comply with the Policy's requirements. Full implementation is expected by 2012-2013 with the first plans submitted in June of 2003. The Policy was developed by a team of state-level partners, with feedback from an Advisory Council, Committees and public comment. The program is financed through the school funding formula and features a requirement that at least 50% of the classrooms in each county must be provided through community programs.

### Highlights of Recent Developments

- Governors from several states – including **Tennessee, Iowa, Illinois, New Mexico** and **Hawaii** – have proposed early childhood education initiatives to create or expand pre-k programs in their State of the State addresses.
- **Vermont's** State Board of Education has drafted a set of rules that promotes a statewide, publicly funded early education system. The new rules clearly spell out how much money districts can expect to get from the state, and also clarify educator licensing and program quality standards. The proposed rules come as the state is considering restructuring its early education system under the name Building Bright Futures.
- **California** advocates and legislators spent months providing input and building consensus around a "Preschool for All" bill. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed the bill last year. Nonetheless, momentum is building around the state for universal, voluntary pre-k. Los Angeles School District already offers pre-k universally to all children.