

# Pre-Kindergarten in Portland:

Community Perspectives & Recommendations



Produced by the Data Innovation Project  
for Starting Strong and the Portland Public School District  
Emilie Swenson, Elora Way, and Anna Korsen  
*With support from the United Way of Greater Portland and the  
Portland Multilingual Multicultural Center*  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rigorous studies have consistently demonstrated that quality preschool education programs can meaningfully enrich early learning and development for children which in turn improves their school success and social behavior long term. Not only do these impacts generate benefits for individuals well into their adult lives, they also garner significant benefits to the broader society. According to a 2016 report by The Heckman Equation, an investment in early childhood education can produce up to a 13 percent return on investment every year over an individual's lifetime. This return on investment comes in the form of savings to society from prevented criminal justice, welfare, and health care costs, and in the productivity and income of the individual. The benefits are particularly significant for children growing up in poverty. And yet, children whose parents have the lowest incomes and education have the least access to quality early childhood education. This research shows that supporting early childhood education programs is important for healthy child development as well as for the health of the overall community. The goal of this report is to inform Starting Strong and Portland Public Schools (PPS), on current reflections and experiences with preschool in Portland in order support a better understanding of how to move forward in building strong early education programming in the city.

### Methodology

In order to determine the needs of families and students and potential reach of preschool programming in Portland, a mixed methods approach was utilized, including a review of best practices from around the country regarding preschool programming; a review of Portland and PPS demographic data; analysis of Portland Public Schools data regarding public pre-K, including applications, enrollment, and reasons for declining a space in the program; interviews with parents who declined a space in the PPS program; a survey of private preschool providers; key informant interviews with preschool and social service providers; interviews with other districts with public preschool programs in Maine; and work with an advisory committee of preschool providers, Portland Public Schools staff, and Starting Strong staff to guide the research.

### Key Findings

Results of this research show that many children in Portland have had a preschool experience, however the type of this experience varies. Approximately three-quarters or 381 of Portland kindergartners (SY2017-18) attended some type of preschool programming. Approximately one quarter (26% or 133) had no prior school or program listed on their kindergarten enrollment form. It is not known if they did not have a preschool experience or it was left blank on the form. Overall, 39% attended a private program, 24% attended the PPS Pre-K program, 6% attended Head Start, and 5% attended some other type of program (either out of state, another district in Maine or through CDS).

Common challenges in accessing the PPS Pre-K program and more generally expressed challenges regarding preschool services for families were expressed. For parents, the hours of the PPS Pre-K program, transportation, acceptance into another program (mainly Head Start), and location of programs were the main reasons for declining a space in the program. Preschool providers reported that common challenges for families related to schedule or work conflicts, financial issues, and care for other siblings. In all interviews with providers, the length of the program day was cited as an important factor for families and for students. Full-day programs and programs with both before and after care may align better with working families' schedules and provide more time for developmentally appropriate practices like free play and outside time.

This report finds that less than half of preschool providers surveyed accept child care vouchers or have some type of financial aid or scholarship. Of survey respondents, the average monthly cost of preschool was \$980. Another challenge expressed by parents and providers, related to the PPS Pre-K program was that the lottery system was difficult to navigate and leaves some families and providers with uncertainty in programming.

The linguistic and cultural support provided by the Multilingual Multicultural Center is an asset to the PPS Pre-K program as families and students are able to access interpretation services and receive translated documents. Trainings are also provided, which help to enrich teacher knowledge and understanding around the needs of English Language Learners and their families. Another support to children and families, Child Development Services, was cited as a challenge by social service and preschool providers as the process from referral to evaluation to the delivery of services can be very lengthy.

Preschool providers reported that training and retaining quality teachers is a challenge due to the wage disparity between public and private preschool systems. Both private and public programs seek highly qualified and trained teachers with an Early Childhood Teacher Certificate. While some private providers support teachers in getting this certificate, it can be challenging to retain their teachers as they can easily move into the public system and earn more money. This leaves private providers in a challenging position. Some private providers interviewed also voiced concerns over the process of accreditation, as the costs are prohibitive. Since accreditation and a Step 4 rating from Maine Roads to Quality is required to become a PPS pre-K classroom site, this may be a barrier to future collaborations or partnerships with smaller programs that may be high quality, but unable to show that through an official accreditation process.

Both social service and preschool providers as well as parents reported that they believe that the public pre-K (and preschool generally) allow for smoother transitions to school. Other benefits of partnership between public and private programs include spring developmental assessments and improved transitions between preschool and kindergarten through strengthened relationships with kindergarten teachers.

Collaboration among programs, especially between the public pre-K and private preschool providers was seen as beneficial in many possible ways, including the option of full-day, year-long programming with before and after care. This can address a number of issues including decreasing the number of transitions for children throughout the day and aligning with working families' schedules.

## Recommendations

A series of eight recommendations were developed based on the findings of this report.

1. Expand the hours of the PPS Pre-K program and address child care needs
2. Hire more multilingual staff
3. Increase teacher and staff coaching/training opportunities
4. Hire a full time Pre-K Coordinator
5. Let early childhood education professionals lead with their wisdom and experience
6. Address pay disparity
7. Make decisions about the universality of the program and the lottery system
8. PPS data development around declines for spots and where students attended preschool

## INTRODUCTION

Rigorous studies have consistently demonstrated that quality preschool education programs can meaningfully enrich early learning and development for children which in turn improves their school success and social behavior long term.<sup>i</sup> Not only do these impacts generate benefits for individuals well into their adult lives, they also garner significant benefits to the broader society. According to a recent report by The Heckman Equation, an investment in early childhood education can produce up to a 13 percent return on investment every year over an individual's lifetime. This return on investment comes in the form of savings to society from prevented criminal justice, welfare, and health care costs, and in the productivity and income of the individual. The benefits are particularly significant for children growing up in poverty.<sup>ii</sup> And yet, children whose parents have the lowest incomes and education have the least access to quality early childhood education.<sup>iii</sup> This research shows that **supporting early childhood education programs is important for healthy child development as well as for the health of the overall community.**

Starting Strong is a collaborative initiative in Portland working to address issues related to early childhood education and care in Portland with a focus on birth to age eight. Starting Strong works to address school readiness, pre-K-3<sup>rd</sup> grade literacy, attendance, and summer literacy with the goal of helping children reach reading proficiency by the end of third grade. This initiative, along with the Portland Public Schools, recognizes the importance of supporting early childhood education programming and in the spring of 2017, contracted with the Data Innovation Project to conduct research on pre-Kindergarten in Portland.

**The purpose of this report is to inform Starting Strong and the Portland Public Schools on current reflections and experiences with preschool in Portland in order support a better understanding of how to move forward in building strong early education programming in the city.** This report looks specifically at preschool programming in Portland, Maine, as well as discusses promising practices from around the county regarding preschool education.

Authors of this report used a mixed-method approach to research and data collection, including: a review of research on benefits of preschool programming; a review of best practices from around the country regarding preschool programming; a review of Portland and PPS demographic data; analysis of Portland Public Schools data regarding public pre-K, including applications, enrollment, and reasons for declining a space in the program; interviews with parents who declined a space in the PPS program; a survey of private preschool providers; key informant interviews with preschool and social service providers; interviews with other districts with public preschool programs in Maine. The authors also worked with an advisory committee of preschool providers, Portland Public Schools staff, and Starting Strong staff to guide the research.

The report is structured to provide a general overview of preschool in Maine; a snapshot of Portland demographics and early childhood education locations and programs; data and information about public pre-Kindergarten in Portland, including on registration and enrollment; provide a summary of key findings from interviews and surveys with parents and providers; and review practices from Maine and beyond that may provide inspiration and aspiration for future four year old preschool programming in Portland. The report concludes with a series of recommendations generated from the research.



## TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

There are multiple ways to describe early childhood programming and terms and definitions are oftentimes used interchangeably in conversation. In order to dispel confusion of terms, definitions for this report are as follows.

**Preschool** (Encyclopedia of Children’s Health)

Preschool is an early childhood education program run by professionally trained adults. Children are most commonly enrolled in preschool between the ages of three and five. Preschools are different from traditional day care because they emphasize learning and development rather than simply relieving parents of child care for an amount of time.<sup>iv</sup>

Types: Private, Head Start, Public Preschool

**Public Preschool** (Maine State Legislature)

A program offered by a public school that provides instruction to children who are 4 years of age.<sup>v</sup>

**Pre-Kindergarten** (Portland Public Schools)

Portland uses this term in place of and interchangeably with “public preschool.”

**Head Start** (Office of Head Start)

Head Start is a federally funded program that promotes school readiness of children ages birth to five from low-income families by supporting their development in a comprehensive way. Head Start programs deliver services to children and families in core areas of early learning, health, and family well-being while engaging parents as partners.<sup>vi</sup>

**Nursery School** (Maine Child Care Choices)

Nursery Schools offer programming to children, ages 3-7, for no more than 3 1/2 hours per day, 2-5 days a week. The school programming often provides a structured curriculum to an average of 10 children in a group. Nursery schools are licensed by the Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>vii</sup>

# BACKGROUND

## PUBLIC PRESCHOOL IN MAINE

State-funded programs for four year olds were established in 2007 as the separately defined Public Preschool Program (PPP). PPP is funded through Maine’s school funding formula and funds are available to any school administrative unit (SAU) that chooses to offer preschool programming. As of the 2015-2016 school year, 135 out of 256 or 53 percent of the SAUs are utilizing the funds. The majority of PPP classrooms are located in public schools, though many SAUs also partner with community-based child care programs or Head Start agencies to offer public preschool programming.<sup>viii</sup>

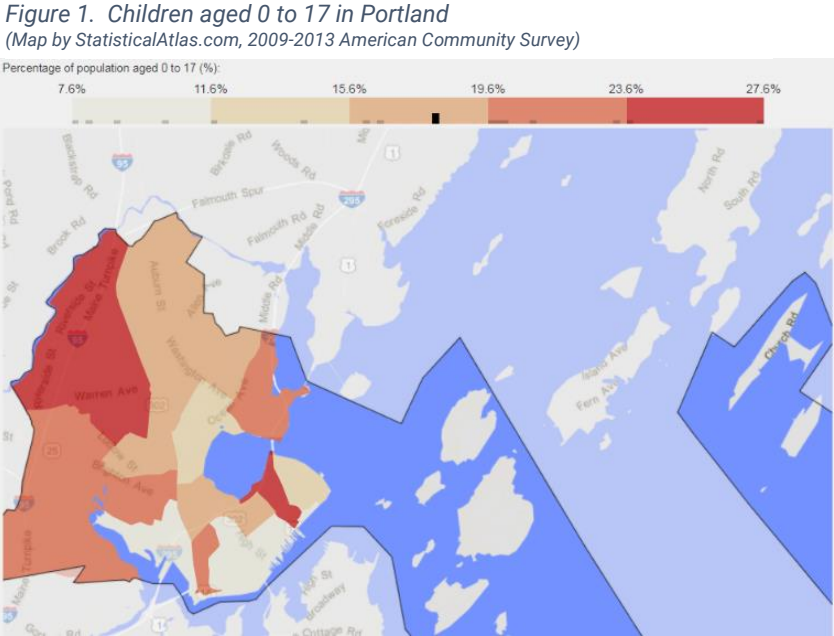
During the 2015-2016 school year, Maine’s preschool programs served 5,442 children, approximately 42 percent of Maine’s 4-year-olds. The state spent \$17.4 million on PPP in 2015-2016. This funding does not include additional state funds, federal funds, and local funds utilized by the SAUs. The estimated cost per enrolled child was \$3,201 in 2016.

## THE PORTLAND LANDSCAPE:

### Demographics and Early Childhood Education Locations

#### Demographic Snapshot

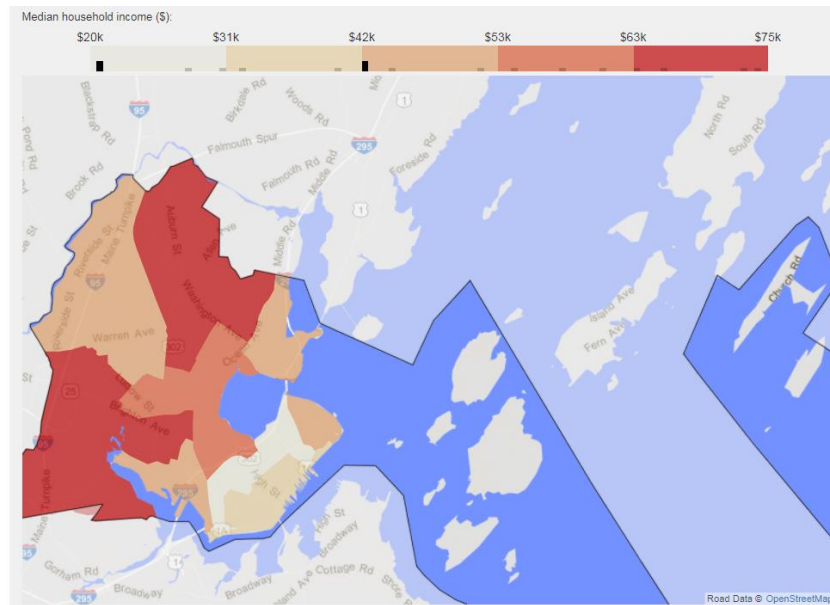
Portland has grown approximately three percent between 2010 and 2016, with the most recent estimate at 66,649 people in the city. The population of people under five has remained relatively steady over that time period and was 5.2 percent of the population in 2016. See *Figure 1* for the percentage of children aged 0 to 17 in Portland by neighborhood (darker red indicates between 23 and 27 percent).<sup>ix</sup> The Riverton and East Bayside areas have the highest percentages of children 0 to 17 in Portland.



The percentage of people who are foreign born has also increased by approximately two percent between 2010 and 2016 and foreign born residents make up approximately 13 percent of the population. Racially, Portland is also becoming more diverse. Approximately 16 percent of residents are people of color (compared to 2010, where 14 percent of residents were people of color). The largest increase in a

minority population has been among Black or African Americans, with an increase of over two percent between 2010 and 2016.<sup>x</sup>

*Figure 2. Median Household Income by Portland Neighborhood  
(Map from StatisticalAtlas.com, 2009-2013 American Community Survey)*



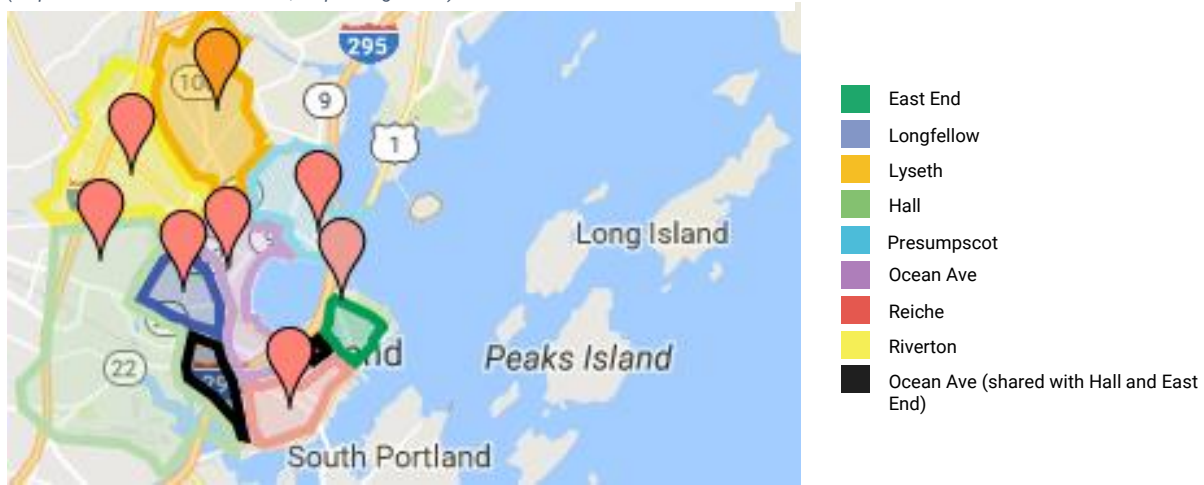
Income in Portland has increased slowly and steadily between 2012 and 2016. *Figure 2* shows the median household income by Portland neighborhood (darker red indicates a median income of \$63,000 to \$75,000).<sup>xi</sup> The North Deering, Stroudwater, and Rosemont neighborhoods have the highest median household incomes.

American Community Survey data from 2016 finds that the median family income in the past 12 months for families with children in Portland was \$59,118, having increased an average of 1.9 percent per year since 2012. However, although overall income has increased slightly, for families in Portland with related children in the household under the age of 18, the poverty level has slightly increased (from 20.6% in 2010 to 22.6% in 2016). Interestingly, over that same time period, more parents of young children (under the age of six) were in the labor force, an increase from 65 percent in 2010 to 73 percent in 2016.<sup>xii</sup>

### **Portland Public School District Boundaries and Demographics**

There are ten Portland elementary schools (including two island schools—Cliff and Peaks). *Figure 3* shows the non-island districts (East End, Longfellow, Lyseth, Hall, Presumpscot, Ocean Ave, Reiche, and Riverton). Pairing this district map with previous maps about income and age of Portland residents, shows that the areas with the higher median household incomes (North Deering, Stroudwater, and Rosemont) overlap with Lyseth, Hall, and Longfellow schools. Areas with lower median household incomes overlap with Riverton, Reiche, and East End schools. In regards to age, the median age of the Riverton area is very young (19.6) and has one of the highest concentrations of children between 0 and 17 in Portland.<sup>xiii</sup> Similarly, East Bayside has a high percentage of children 17 and under—this neighborhood falls under the East End school district.

Figure 3. Portland Public Schools: Elementary School Districts  
(Map from Portland Public Schools, Maps.Google.com)



### Preschool Locations in Portland

This report examined 47 preschool locations in Portland. Of these locations, 29 are private center-based (62 percent), eight are home-based (17 percent), four are Head Start sites (nine percent), and six are in Portland Public schools (13 percent). See Appendix C for list of locations.

The majority (21) of the center-based sites have child care options for younger children in addition to a preschool program. Quality for ME, a Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) voluntary program has a rating system to evaluate quality of early childhood education programs. A rating of four is the highest. Maine's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) Level 4 means that programs meet the requirements for the following standards: Compliance History/Licensing Status; Learning Environment and Developmentally Appropriate Practice; Program Evaluation; Staffing and Professional Development; Administrative Policies and Procedures; Parent/Family Involvement; Family Resources; and Authentic Assessment.<sup>xiv</sup> Within Portland, 13 of the 29 (45 percent) of centers have a Quality for ME rating, including eight centers with a rating of four. Of the home-based sites, five of the eight (63 percent) have a rating. Important to note, per the Maine Public Preschool Program and PPS Pre-K, in order to be a partner community site, the center must have a Step 4 QRIS rating. See Table 1.

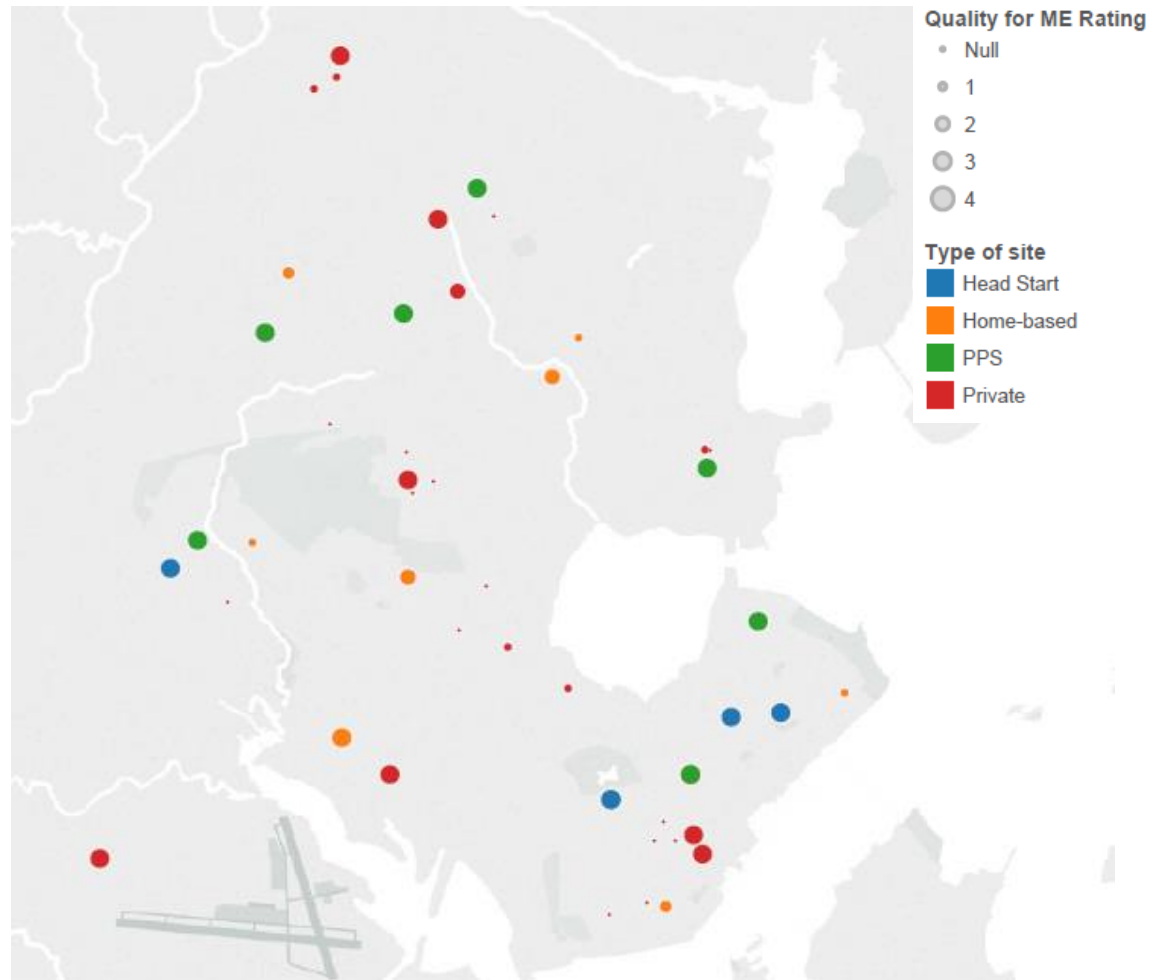
**Table 1. Quality for ME Ratings of Center and Home-Based Preschools in Portland**

Step Rating	4	3	2	1	Total
Center-Based	8	1	0	4	13
Home-Based	2	1	0	2	5
<b>Total</b>	10	2	0	6	18

Figure 4 shows a map of where the 47 preschool sites are located in Portland. Larger dots indicate a higher step rating (sites with no rating are the smallest, or "Null"). From the map it is possible to see that preschool sites are scattered throughout the city, with a higher concentration of preschools on the peninsula and along Forest Avenue, toward Riverton and North Deering and down Woodford Street and

Brighton Avenue toward Rosemont. The Reiche, Hall, Riverton, and Lyseth districts have the most preschools. Presumpscot, East End, and Ocean Avenue districts have the fewest.

Figure 4. Location of Preschools in Portland by Step Rating and Type of Site  
 (Map prepared by the Data Innovation Project based on gps location data of sites)



### Head Start in Portland

Head Start is another type of preschool program in Portland that is a federally funded and serves low-income students and their families. Maine data on Head Start shows that 11 percent of four year olds are served by Head Start (including 25 percent of low-income four year olds) and that 93 percent of families enrolled in Head Start receive at least one support service through the Head Start program.<sup>xv</sup> In Portland, approximately six percent of students are served by the Portland Head Start program.<sup>xvi</sup> This program is delivered through The Opportunity Alliance and has four locations in Portland (two sites also include Early Head Start, which serves infants and toddlers). One classroom located in the Parkside Neighborhood Center is in partnership with PPS and serves children in the Reiche School district. Head Start offers a half day program with mixed-age classroom for three and four year olds, with the exception of the PPS pre-K classroom, which is just four year olds per the PPS pre-K/Maine public preschool model.

Built into the Head Start model are supports for families to address needs and connect people to services that address a vast array of issues such as health, nutrition, mental health, counseling, and housing. The

Head Start model also incorporates developmental screenings and assessments for children and refers students to CDS as necessary. The Portland Head Start Director estimates that approximately one quarter or more of students have been referred to or already have CDS supports and approximately one quarter of students are working with a play therapist through The Opportunity Alliance.<sup>xvii</sup> The program regularly incorporates interpreters into the classroom and work with families to ensure that both students and parents have the understanding that they need.

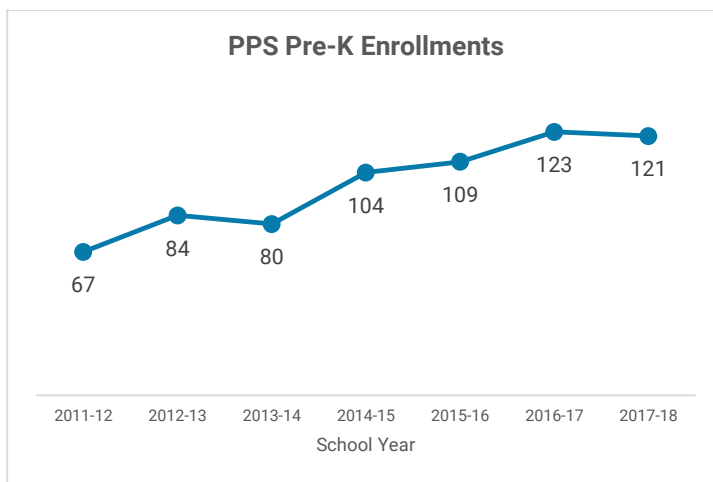
## PUBLIC PRE-KINDERGARTEN IN PORTLAND

Public pre-K has grown in Portland over the past seven school years. The purpose of this section is to better understand the PPS program generally and to identify who is (or is not) being served by the program. Specifically, this part of the report examines at the status of the current program, including partnerships and enrollment; the registration and enrollment process for students; why families decline a space in the program; and what the current student population looks like. This section also looks at where current PPS kindergartners attended preschool in order to provide a greater understanding of preschool experiences for Portland children.

### Current Classroom Status

Between 2010 and the 2016 school year, the pre-K program has grown by approximately one classroom per year. Currently the program has the capacity to serve around 22 percent of Portland’s four year olds with 121 students enrolled (as of January 2018).<sup>xviii</sup> PPS pre-K operates eight classrooms at seven sites throughout the city. Five classrooms are located within public elementary schools—Riverton, Presumpscot, Hall, and East End; two are operated through partnerships with private preschool providers Catherine Morrill Day Nursery and Youth and Family Outreach (YFO); and one is operated through a partnership with The Opportunity Alliance’s Head Start program (this program serves children who live in the Reiche school district).

Figure 5. PPS Pre-K Enrollment Numbers



### PPS Registration and Enrollment Process

The pre-K application period spans two weeks in the late winter. Applicants who apply after this time are placed on a waiting list. In order to attend, children must turn four on or before October 15<sup>th</sup>. Children living in the neighborhoods of the four elementary school pre-K sites (East End, Hall, Presumpscot, Riverton) get priority for those slots, while children from the Reiche district get priority for the Head Start partnership location at the Parkside Neighborhood Center. Children living in the neighborhoods of other PPS elementary schools enter a district-wide lottery and those who are accepted are placed in one of the two other community partner sites (located at YFO or PATHS).

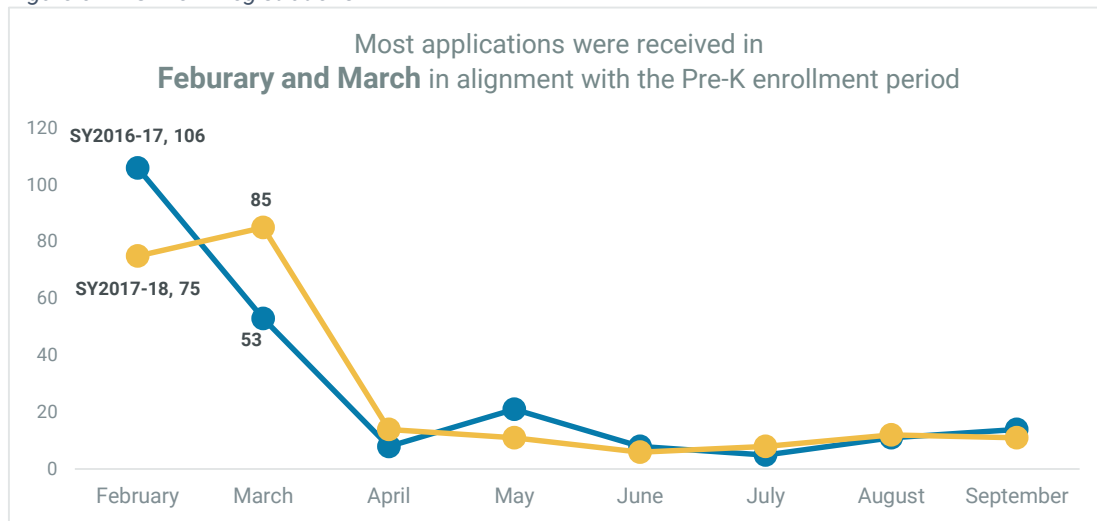
PPS has designated 70 percent of the available spaces for children from families with incomes below the federal poverty level, and the remaining 30 percent of spaces for children whose families do not fall under



this designation. Of students in the Head Start partnership classroom, 70 percent of students must meet the Head Start federal income guidelines.

Figure 6 shows the registration trends for the two most recent school years. For SY2016-17, 257 families registered their child for the PPS Pre-K program between February of 2016 and September of 2017.<sup>xix</sup> The majority of applications were received in February and March of 2016 (159), which aligns with the designated enrollment period (however families may apply throughout the year). After September of 2016, an average of three applications per month were received through April of 2017. Comparatively, for SY2017-18, 227 families had registered their child within the same time period. The majority of applications were received in February and March of 2017 (160), similar to trends in 2016. See Figure 6.

Figure 6. PPS Pre-K Registrations



In both years, the schools with the highest number of applicants were Riverton, Reiche, and Lyseth. Of families who registered, for SY16-17, 58 were listed as needing an interpreter (23 percent) and 44 percent of families indicated that they spoke a language other than English at home (Somali, Arabic, French, Portuguese, and Spanish were the largest language groups). Similar to the previous year, of families who registered for the 2017 school year, 49 were listed as needing an interpreter (22 percent) and 42 percent of families indicated that they spoke a language other than English at home (again, similar to the previous year, Somali, Arabic, Portuguese, French, and Spanish were the largest language groups).

### Reason for declining a PPS Pre-K spot

Table 2 shows that **the most prevalent reason families have declined a space since SY2014-15 has been because they moved, which occurred for 40 percent of the families (42) who stated a reason for decline.** Secondary to moving, **29 percent of families (30) declined a space because they wanted another program** (due to the need for child care or wrap around services or because they had made other arrangements). Twelve percent of families enrolled their child in Head Start and eight percent stated that transportation was the main reason for declining. It should be noted that of the 220 total declines since SY2014-15, in 53 percent of the cases, the reason for decline was unknown (either because it was not recorded or not asked) or the family was unable to be reached. The highest number of declines for a space (79) occurred for SY2016-17.

<b>Table 2. Reasons for declining a spot in the PPS Pre-K program</b>					
<b>Reason for decline</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>Total</b>
No response/unknown	28	43	36	9	116
Moved	3	5	22	12	42
Wants another program (due to need for daycare/wrap around care or other arrangements)	2	7	11	10	30
Head Start		7	2	3	12
Transportation		1	1	6	8
CDS or special needs			3	4	7
Decided not to enroll / age of child			4	1	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>220</b>

*Note: Data for SY2016-17 and 2017-18 is the most comprehensive and reliable.*

Of those who registered in SY2016-17, 79 declined a space in the program when offered (31 percent of those offered a space). Schools with the highest percentage of declines were Hall (53 percent), East End (41 percent), PATHS (41 percent), and Riverton (36 percent). Comparatively, as of the end of September of 2017, 45 had declined a space in the program when offered (20 percent). Schools with the highest percentage of withdrawals were East End (33 percent), Presumpscot (32 percent), and Hall (27 percent).

To gain a more complete picture of why parents declined their space, interviews were conducted with 23 parents of children who declined a space for SY2017-18 (out of 45 possible families). Families who moved out of district were not included in the contact list to be interviewed. Eight interviews were conducted by the United Way of Greater Portland with English speaking parents and 15 interviews were conducted by the PPS Multilingual Multicultural Center’s Parent Community Specialists in languages other than English.

Similar to what was seen in Table 2, families cited **the hours of the program, transportation, acceptance into another program (mainly Head Start), and location of programs as the main issues.**

Working parents expressed a need for full day pre-K, before and/or after care, or other child care arrangements due to their work schedule. As one parent stated, *“The time difficulty with my work schedule. I can’t drop him off and pick him up four hours later. If there were a childcare solution it would help.”*

Families also raised the issue of transportation in relation to the hours of the program. One parent said, *“It was difficult to turn down but with the 1pm stop time it was almost impossible to arrange for travel to another program for the rest of the day.”* Immigrant parents also stated the greatest reasons for declining a space was transportation. Many families have just one car and therefore parents do not always have the ability to drop off and pick up their children, especially at the times needed for the pre-K program.

Parents also expressed concerns about the location of the school where their child was placed. This mainly occurred due to the lottery system. As one parent stated, *“We’re still struggling with our location and the school he’s allotted for.”* The majority of families interviewed applied for other preschool programs and found that because many of these have longer hours or additional child care options, they were better for their schedules.



Getting a space and enrolling in Head Start was another reason why parents reported declining the space. This may be due to the wrap around services offered which have the dual purpose of providing educational programming for the child as well as supports for families.

In addition to sharing their reasons for declining a spot, parents were also clear that they appreciate preschool and value its role in their child’s life. Similar to findings from the Maine Education Policy Research Institute’s (2016)<sup>xx</sup> research, parents expressed positive views about preschool, emphasizing that preschool is an important part of their child’s socialization and acclimation to school. Parents also responded that they felt that it was important for their child to get an early start with their education.

### PPS Pre-K Student Population

For the most recently completed school year (SY16-17), there were a total of 123 students enrolled in PPS pre-K programs. Of those students, 45 percent were Black or African American, 37 percent were White, 11 percent were Hispanic, four percent were more than one race, and three percent were Asian. The majority, 67 percent, qualified for Free and Reduced Meals through the schools (low-income). See Figures 7 and 8.

Figure 7. Race and Ethnicity of Students Enrolled in PPS Pre-K

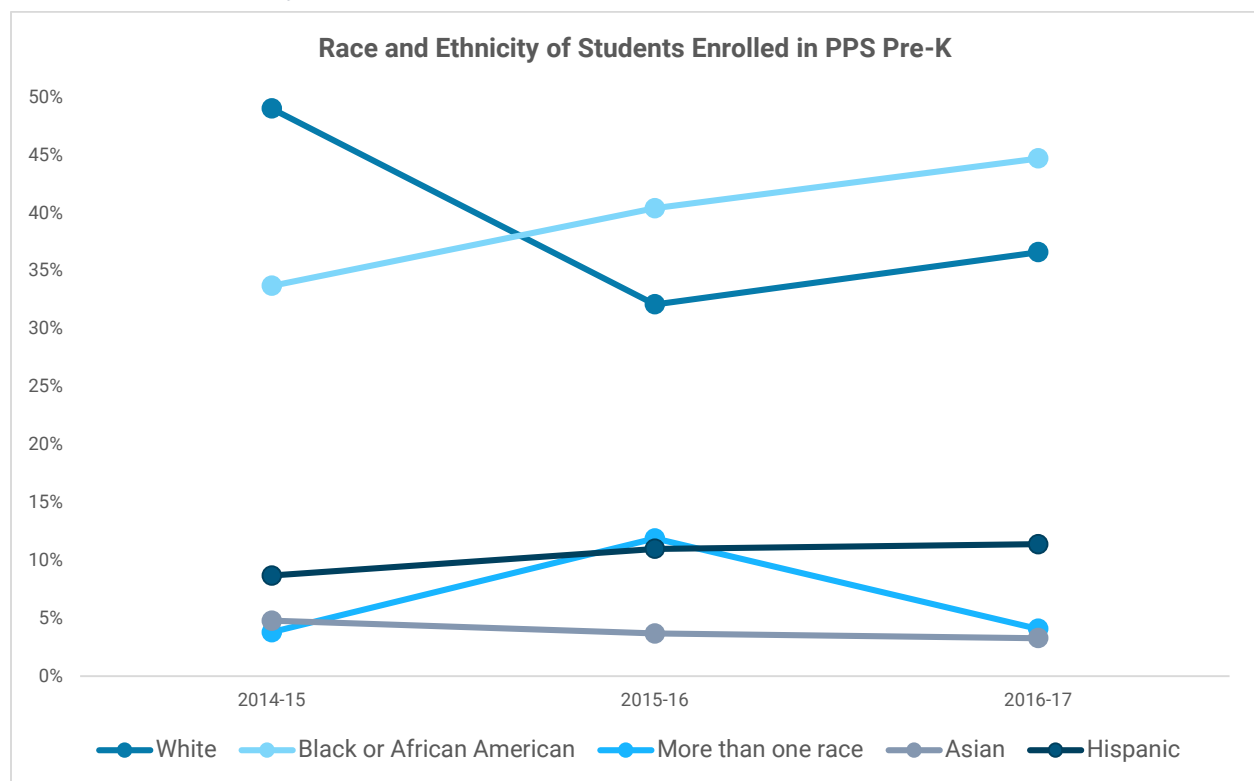
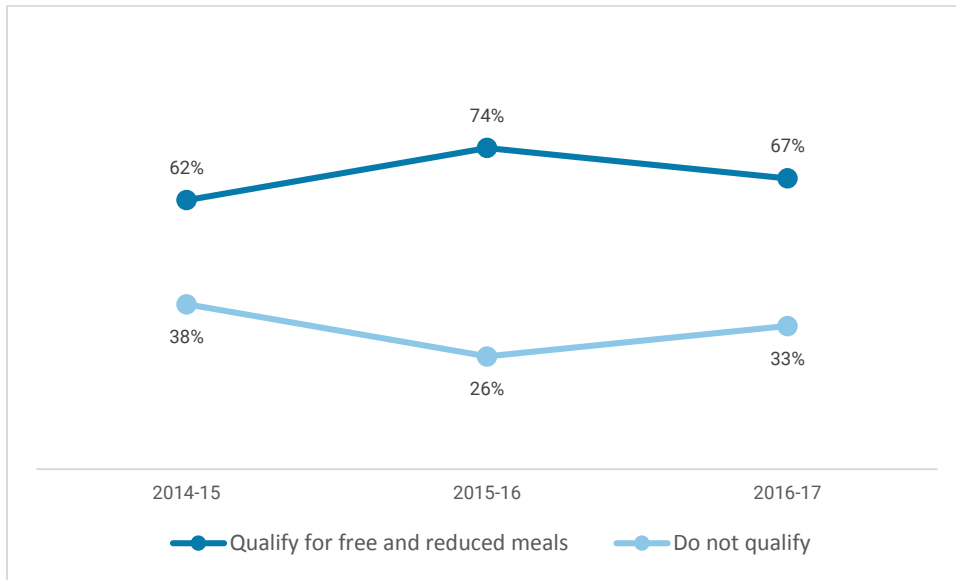


Figure 8. Income level of students enrolled in PPS Pre-K



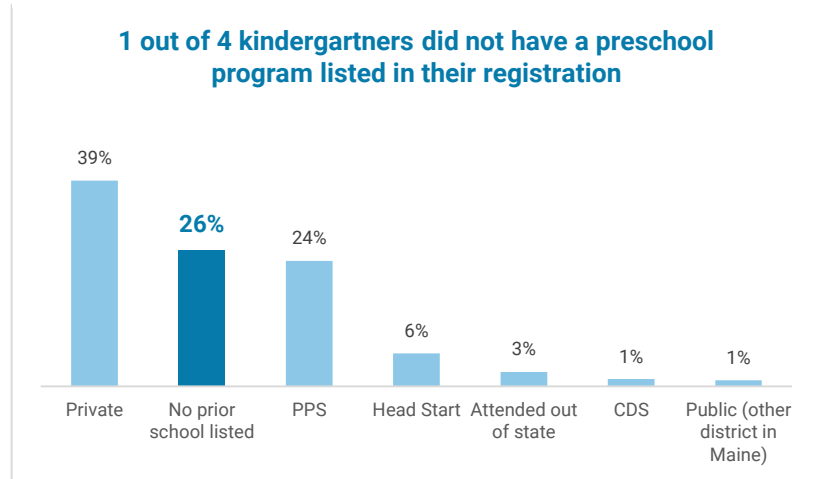
### Where PPS Students Attended Preschool

In the fall of 2017, the Portland Public Schools collected and entered data from kindergarten registration forms on where current kindergarteners (SY2017-18) attended preschool programs prior to the 2017-18 school year in order to better understand the experiences of PPS students before entering kindergarten. Data was entered by school secretaries at each of the Portland Elementary schools and cleaned and analyzed by the Data Innovation Project. A total of 514 students' data was analyzed.<sup>1</sup>

A majority (74 percent) of kindergartners (381) attended some type of preschool program before entering school as indicated by their registration form. Twenty-six percent of students (133) had no prior school or program listed. It is unclear whether this number represents the true number of students who did not have a preschool experience or if this was left blank by the person filling out the registration form.

Overall, students attended 62 different programs—from sites in Portland to others in Maine to locations around the globe. Thirty-nine percent of students attended a private preschool program (200) and of those students 63 percent (125) attended program with a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) Quality for ME Step rating.

Figure 9. Where current kindergartners attended preschool



<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that as this was the first time this data has been entered and was entered by 10 different schools, there was some variation in the entry process. All efforts were made to clean the data in order to deliver an effective analysis.

Fifty percent of students who attended a private preschool site (99) attended a Step 3 or 4 rated site (19 percent of students overall).

Twenty-four percent of students attended a Portland Public Schools pre-K site; six percent attended a Head Start program; and five percent attended a program out of state, through Child Development Services, or another public program in Maine (including Governor Baxter’s School for the Deaf).

Interestingly, particular racial groups were more likely to have no prior school or program listed, as shown in *Table 3*. Specifically, among Asian students, 63 percent had none listed, while 38 percent of Hispanic or Latino students did not have a listed school or program.

**Table 3. Percentage of students who had no prior school/program listed**

63%	of Asian students
38%	of Hispanic or Latino students
26%	of students who are two or more races
25%	of White students
19%	of Black or African American students

Of English Language Learners (ELL), 39 percent attended the PPS Pre-K program, 31 percent had no program listed (34 students), and 14 percent participated in Head Start. Only seven percent of ELL students attended a private preschool (compared with 48 percent of non-ELL students).

Of lower-income students (who qualify for free and reduced lunch), 32 percent (79 students) had no prior school listed, compared with higher-income students, where 20 percent students had no prior school listed.

Of Special Education students, most attended a private program (44 percent), while 19 percent attended the PPS program, and 16 percent had no prior school listed.

When examining by elementary school, which in Portland is representative of neighborhoods, the schools that had the highest rates of students who had no previous program listed were Presumpscot (36 percent of Kindergartners had no program listed) and Riverton (34 percent of Kindergartners had no program listed) or a total of 39 students between the two schools. These schools also had the lowest rate of students who attended a private program. As previously discussed, the Presumpscot district has relatively few preschool options. Longfellow and Ocean Avenue had the highest rates of private preschool enrollment, with 75 percent of Longfellow Kindergartners having attended a private program and 44 percent of Ocean Avenue students attending a private program. East End Community School had the highest rate of students who attended a Head Start program (16 percent). All other schools had less than 10 percent of their students who attended Head Start, with an average of three students per school from a Head Start program. In alignment with where PPS Pre-K sites are, Riverton, Presumpscot, East End, and Lyseth all had the highest percentages of students who attended a PPS Pre-K site. See *Table 4*.

**Table 4. PPS Elementary Schools and Where Students Attended Preschool**

	<b>No prior school listed</b>	<b>Attended PPS Pre-K</b>	<b>Attended private program</b>
East End	19%	30%	25%
Hall School	27%	19%	42%
Lyseth	28%	28%	42%
Reiche	29%	21%	41%
Longfellow	8%	10%	<b>75%</b>
Ocean Avenue	26%	13%	<b>44%</b>
Presumpscot	<b>36%</b>	<b>33%</b>	18%
Riverton	<b>34%</b>	<b>41%</b>	16%

# KEY FINDINGS

While the previous section provided an overview of what the preschool landscape in Portland looks like, this section goes into greater depth detailing more about the needs, describing both public and private preschool experiences. This section draws out themes from interviews and surveys to highlight successes and challenges of pre-K in Portland and in Maine. These results are not necessarily indicative of all families’ experiences with pre-K, merely of those included in this research study. The purpose of speaking with both preschool and social service providers and parents was to better understand what the needs are around preschool, what is available, and what critical elements need to exist in order to best serve students, families, preschool providers, and the public schools.

A mixed methods approach was taken through surveys and interviews with private providers, Portland Public School staff, and Portland pre-K collaborating partners. Of the 47 providers that the DIP reached out to, a total of 19 providers (from Portland, South Portland, and Falmouth) responded to the survey on their program and common challenges for families who they work with. In addition, the DIP conducted nine interviews with social support service providers, Head Start, PPS partners, and PPS staff in Portland. Responses from 23 parent interviews are also included in this section when relevant. A number of themes emerged related to: preschool curriculum and structure; availability and access to student and family supports; training and retaining teachers; the challenges around accreditation; concerns about children not reached by services; and the benefits of collaboration.

## Support for Students and Families is Key

Interviews and survey results indicate that the children and families of Portland have a diverse range of needs and challenges. Helping a young child transition into early schooling can be very stressful even for families with many resources and some familiarity with the American education system. Providers that were surveyed and interviewed articulated many barriers they have witnessed as families attempt to access their early learning services and identified several opportunities to develop supports and foster positive school experiences for students and families.

### Family factors

Private providers were asked to report common challenges for families related to obtaining and accessing child care. The most consistently reported challenge was schedule or work conflicts (10 providers reported this challenge), similar to what parents reported through interviews. This was followed by financial issues (8), and care for other siblings (6). Six providers reported that none of the challenges listed were issues with their families, nor did they write in any other potential issues. See *Table 5*.

Challenge	n
Schedule/Work conflicts	10
Financial Issues	8
None of these	6
Care for other siblings	6
Transportation	1
Other (response: “Single parents” and “working with the DHHS/social service system”)	2

Interviews with social support service providers, Head Start, PPS partners, and PPS staff in Portland revealed that a number of challenges exist in regards to families’ ability to access preschool or pre-K programs. As some families struggle to support their basic needs like stable housing, food, health care, mental health or substance use services, their ability to access child care or educational services is also hindered. One provider also wondered whether or not families understand their options regarding preschool programming and that the public program is one of many options.

### High financial costs of private preschool

As reported by private providers, costs ranged from \$195 per month (three mornings per week) to \$1,700 per month (five full days 7:30am-5:30pm from September through June). Eleven sites (58 percent) offered full day programs (approximately 6:00am-6:00pm), four offered mornings only (approximately 8:00am-noon), and three offered the option of before and after school child care (approximately 8:30am-3:00pm, with the ability to drop off children around 7:30am and stay until 5:30pm). Based on survey results, the average monthly cost of preschool was \$980<sup>xxi</sup> per month or almost \$12,000 per year. American Community Survey data from 2016 finds that the median family income in the past 12 months for families with children in Portland was \$59,118. Based on this income level, this means that families could spend at least 17 percent of their income on preschool programming. Additional research on the costs of child care show that more than a quarter of Maine families with children under six may spend more than ten percent of income on child care.<sup>xxii</sup>

Maine has a voucher program for low-income families to help cover the costs of child care, however, as reported by the Bangor Daily News in 2017, “between 2007 and 2015, the number of Maine child care providers accepting state-funded vouchers dropped more than 60 percent...a parent with a voucher can sign up her child at just half of the state’s 1,900 licensed child care providers, assuming they have openings.”<sup>xxiii</sup> Not only are fewer providers accepting vouchers,- only about six percent of eligible children are using a voucher.<sup>xxiv</sup> It is important to note here that a program must have a QRIS rating in order to accept a subsidy or a voucher; only 18 providers in Portland have a QRIS rating. While a statewide issue,<sup>2</sup> this problem also affects Portland families and may affect their decision on whether or not to enroll in the public pre-K program. Results from the survey with private providers showed that 42 percent (eight providers) accept financial aid or scholarships and 42 percent (eight) accept child care vouchers (while the number was eight for each of these types of support, they were not all the same providers). Six providers (32%) do not provide financial aid or scholarships *nor* accept vouchers. Three providers (16%) provide financial aid or scholarships *and* also accept child care vouchers. See *Table 6*.

<b>Table 6. Financial Support Available from Private Preschool Providers</b>		
	%	<i>n</i>
Financial aid or scholarships	42%	8
Child care vouchers accepted	42%	8

Also important to note is that in Portland, **for families with related children in the household under the age of 18, the poverty level was 22.6 percent in 2016. Of families with a female householder with no husband present and related children under 18, that rate was 44 percent; for those with children under**

<sup>2</sup>As the Bangor Daily News reported, in the latest data from 2016, Maine left \$4.8 million unspent that could have been used for vouchers and cover other critical costs for child care providers such as state licensing inspectors and child care staff training. Based on 2015 data, the amount left unspent could have covered vouchers for approximately 1,600 children based on the state’s average voucher amount.

**five years only, it was 56 percent.** As one provider noted, if families choose to enroll in the public program for which they would not need a voucher, they would lose their voucher that helps them to pay for seamless full day, year-round programming for their child. Many families may not want to chance losing that voucher in order to enroll in the PPS pre-K program. As noted by both the Bangor Daily News and providers in Portland were challenges with enrolling families in the voucher program and ensuring that families maintain their eligibility for the voucher. Both report the tediousness of the application process can be time consuming for families and providers.

### **Wait list and lottery system**

PPS staff noted in interviews that they do not always fill the 70 percent of slots designated for low-income families, and that the 30 percent of slots for children who do not meet income requirements fill quickly. They noted that more of those children are on the waiting list and that often, there are no children from families living below the poverty line on the pre-K waiting list. In an interview, one social service provider wondered the extent to which families in Portland are aware of public pre-K. This may be one barrier facing enrollment.

Another barrier to enrollment may be the lottery system. The lottery system puts some families in a tricky position as they wonder what their status is and need to make critical, time sensitive decisions about enrolling or staying in another program or waiting and hoping that they get in to the PPS program, with the chance of losing a space in another program. One provider wondered whether families do not know about or fully understand the process. They may have worries about getting a space in time and may also struggle with having to make a decision. This provider shared that parents need to be able to secure a space for their child in a program and if they are placed on the wait list or have to go through the lottery, they may in the meantime find another place for their child to attend that is more of a guarantee of care. Another PPS partner provider also noted that at the beginning of the current school year (2017-18), they had four open slots in the first month due to a backlog in the registration system. They “had dozens of families trying to enroll, but had to go through the lottery,” even though they had open spaces. This provider also expressed concern that this lost a whole month of routine building, learning, and consistency.

### **Providing linguistic and cultural support**

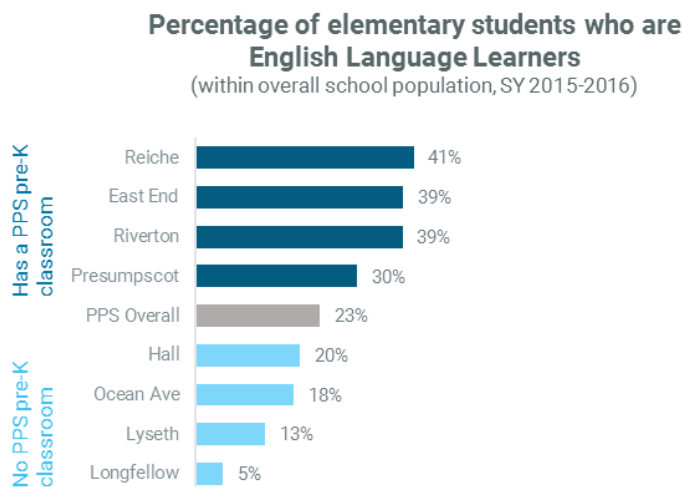
Data shows that in four of the five school district sites where PPS pre-K classrooms are located there is a higher percentage of ELL students than PPS percentages overall. See *Figure 10*.

This linguistic and cultural diversity has led to a number of important additions to the pre-K work, including involving the Multilingual Multicultural Center (MLMC) in both interpretation and translation for families as well as training for teachers. One partner provider noted that this is a welcome addition to their program and enhances the services that they can offer as they are able to work with MLMC to provide linguistic support to children and their families.

Providers also identified a need for cultural brokerage in the schools, as many families new to Maine do not understand the expectations of parents and families with children in public schools in the United States.

There has been one multilingual teacher working with PPS pre-K staff to provide professional development for teachers to engage with families, support students, and identify language versus academic issues for students. Classroom visits have been a part of this in order to support teachers and students and their work together.

Figure 10. Percentage of elementary students who are English Language Learners



### Importance of Creating Positive School Experiences and Transitions

Providers interviewed also acknowledged the importance of relationship development with families. As noted by one PPS partner provider, for private preschool programs, transportation is provided by parents and caregivers, which allows connection and relationship to grow between caregiver, teacher, and educational institution. They noted this as an important facet of development and that the private sector can have a lot to teach the public program. As stated by the provider, placing the onus on families to provide transportation to PPS pre-K sites, like in the private centers, there is potential for relationships to be fostered and to enhance positive connections to school early on in a child's life. Private providers did not note transportation as an issue for families, as it is the expectation for centers that students will be dropped off and picked up. However, PPS staff and parents interviewed reported that transportation is an issue for families. Some families may not have access to transportation, but if they had a way to get their children to school, the student would be able to attend a pre-K program even if it was not in their neighborhood.

The public pre-K program also allows for transitions to formal schooling for both parents and their children. As moving to kindergarten can also be a big change for children, the experience of pre-K programming in the schools helps to expose children to a gentle transition into school. One partner provider noted that the transitions have improved since partnering with PPS and that collaboration with kindergarten teachers has increased.

Another benefit of the public pre-K program is that students participate in developmental screening in the spring, which allows teachers and families to better understand how their children are doing developmentally. This also means that students can more quickly be referred to intervention programs before the start of kindergarten, including the Kindergarten Jump Start program offered through PPS



during the summer. By incorporating the screening and transition process into the program, it allows for a more fluid shift to kindergarten and connects students to important resources.

For parents, as noted by social service and preschool providers, the pre-K program also allows them to reconnect with school, which may in the past have held negative associations, and allows for the child to be exposed to the elementary school environment, allowing for a smoother transition into kindergarten. This is important as one social service provider noted that many low-income families feel judged and stigmatized by the schools because of their circumstances, and so they avoid contact with teachers and staff.

One issue according to three of the providers interviewed, is that many private preschool programs in Portland are not equipped to handle the needs of at risk families. They suggest increased collaboration between the public school system, private preschool providers, and community based organizations as a solution to share resources to better address the needs of these families and to provide more opportunities for quality programming for their children.

### **Differing Views on Curriculum**

Of the private preschool providers surveyed, the largest percentage (37 percent) use custom curricula designed by the preschool center or staff. See *Table 7*. The second most common curriculum was the Emergent Curriculum by BrightHorizons (32 percent). One uses Opening the World of Learning (OWL), the curriculum currently utilized by the Portland Public Schools pre-K program and Head Start classrooms.

<b>Table 7. Curricula Used By Greater Portland Private Preschool Provider Survey Respondents</b>		
Curriculum	%	<i>n</i>
Self or center-created curriculum	37%	7
Emergent Curriculum	32%	6
Creative Curriculum or Teaching Strategies Gold	11%	2
Other	10%	2
Montessori	5%	1
Opening the World of Learning (OWL)	5%	1

During interviews, four Portland providers (public partners and private) expressed concerns with the OWL curriculum. One partner provider thought that it is not developmentally appropriate, that it is too restrictive for teachers, and requires significant time and resources to implement. They also voiced concern over the lack of play-based learning time as a result of the restrictive nature of the OWL curriculum and the limited hours of the PPS pre-K school day. This included an observation that because of the restrictive nature of the curriculum, it is more challenging for teachers to learn to adapt it to other things that may be happening outside of the classroom that students could benefit from learning from (for example if there is a construction site nearby, students could learn from that within the confines of a curriculum, but that for OWL teachers, this type of adaptation is more challenging and takes a great deal of skill and experience to do so). In regards to teacher time, this provider noted the OWL curriculum also requires a lot of planning time each week (up to 4-5 hours), which for PPS partner sites can pose a challenge when working to balance classroom coverage and ensure that prep time is granted. However, they did also note that with a longer day (e.g. at East End School or in partner sites where child care after school hours is offered), there is greater flexibility with time and allows for the potential to include more play and ability to adapt the curriculum to current events or classroom needs.

Another private preschool provider echoed this sentiment, and chooses to use a play-based curriculum for the four year olds in their program. This provider saw OWL as too strict and not easily adapted to meet the individual needs of young learners, and worried that a focus on kindergarten readiness overlooks the unique experience of being four. They believed that play provides students with the opportunity to practice and develop social emotional skills which are critical for school readiness in a developmentally appropriate way. In the opinion of this provider, teaching literacy and math to children before they are ready creates unneeded stress for both the child and the teacher. They reported consistently seeing that once a student is ready to learn these concepts they come easily and quickly. Another private preschool provider also chooses not to use the OWL curriculum because they feel it is too prescriptive, agreeing that it doesn't offer enough flexibility for teachers to adapt the curriculum to meet the diverse needs and learning styles of different students.

Positive elements of the OWL curriculum do exist, and two partner providers expressed that when implemented with fidelity it is a great curriculum. Part of implementing with fidelity involves intense training and continued professional development. One provider noted that in other programs in the state, such as Educare (Waterville), they have day long trainings four to five days per year on OWL. As noted previously with the critique of OWL, providers state the importance of having more training on the curriculum so that teachers can use it effectively and students get the maximum benefits. One partner provider noted that recently training had been made optional and therefore classrooms were not as accountable to the curriculum.

### ***Length of School Day Does Not Meet Needs of All Families***

In all but two locations, the pre-K program runs from 8:45am to 1:30pm. One location has full school day hours, which runs until 2:50pm. YFO has an extended day option should families choose to participate through their child care services, which run both before school (starting at 6:30am) until after school (ending at 5:30pm). Child care vouchers can be used at this site to help families pay for the extended care hours. Transportation is not provided by PPS at any of the pre-K sites nor is this a common practice in any child care or nursery school center in Portland.

In all interviews with providers, the length of the program day was cited as an important factor for families and for students. The survey with private providers also revealed that schedule and work conflicts were the number one cited challenge for families. As seen with parent reasons for decline, hours of the program were a major factor. Full-day programs and programs with both before and after care may align better with working families' schedules and provide more time for developmentally appropriate practices like free play and outside time. Providers and PPS staff voiced some concern that the current public pre-K schedule is not meeting the needs of working families, and that the lack of before and after care means that families have to piece together child care if they are working full-time. PPS staff did note however that the extension of the pre-K day to mirror the K-5 school day does seem to ease some of the burden on caregivers who may have children in pre-K and in the upper grades as it allows them one singular drop off and pick up time. One private provider also stated that they believe it is important to have options for families with differing schedules and needs, as not all families work full time or want their children enrolled in full-day programs five days a week.

### Accessing Child Development Services is a challenge

In interviews conducted with both preschool and social service providers, each person expressed concerns about the difficulty in accessing Child Development Services (CDS). According to interviews, the process from referral to evaluation to the delivery of services can be very lengthy, which places a greater burden on providers, especially classroom teachers and other students. One provider described a student who was referred in the fall and did not yet have services in place more than six months after the referral. They continued to stress the importance of time, especially in the lives of young children and the missed opportunity to provide much needed interventions. One social service provider described their experience that even once services have been established, the limited capacity of both CDS and the schools inhibits effective communication and collaborations between schools and CDS therapists. This causes difficulties in meeting the needs of children and families utilizing those services. A benefit of working with CDS, as one provider pointed out, is that once services are in place, they are conducted in the school setting and not in a private clinic, which makes them accessible. In theory, this would allow for better communication between CDS therapists and teachers, however, the aforementioned capacity issue and long waitlist for therapists remains a problem. Outstanding questions remain about the incorporation of CDS into the public schools.

Over half (56 percent) of private providers report that they provide additional support services for students with special needs and/or learning disabilities and estimate that approximately 11 percent of students have an IEP from CDS. Some students may require additional support in the classroom, however are ineligible for CDS services (approximately three percent of students as reported by private providers). See Table 8.

**Table 8. Access to Child Development Services (CDS) Among Pre-K Students Enrolled at Respondents' Private Preschools (n = 429)**

	%	n
Pre-K Students with IEP from Child Development Services	11%	46
Pre-K Students Ineligible for Child Development Services Who Require Additional Support	3%	11

As previously stated, PPS and private providers often refer students to The Opportunity Alliance or other therapy providers to participate in play therapy or other therapeutic modalities if CDS services are not available or appropriate.

### Training and Retaining Quality Teachers is a Challenge

Interviews with PPS partner providers revealed concerns over the disparity in pay between preschool teachers in the private sector and those working in public pre-K classrooms. This is a common theme in discussions about child care and preschool staff. A recent New York Times article stated, "If teachers are crucial to high-quality preschool, they are also its most neglected component."<sup>xxv</sup> One partner provider explained that this is an issue not only for the teachers in private sector positions who are making less than their public sector peers but also for the private programs who employ those teachers. Raising teacher wages in private preschool settings requires either increasing child care fees or fundraising (or both), which places a greater burden on families and on providers who must seek out additional funding for their programs. Private providers raised this issue of working to balance affordability for programs as preschool programs help to balance higher costs of infant programs and allow their business model to be financially viable. While the Head Start program reported adjusting their wage scale to increase teacher pay, the teachers in this program still make less than those who teach in the public school. The wage gap

between what teachers in elementary schools make and preschool teachers is substantial. In Maine, the median wage for elementary school teachers is \$52,380, for Kindergarten teachers is \$51,540, and for preschool teachers is \$30,240.<sup>xxvi</sup>

### Teacher qualifications

Another major concern regarding teacher pay and training relates to the Early Childhood Teacher Certificate (081) from the State. This is a necessary certification for teachers within the public system. Private and Head Start providers have supported numerous teachers in achieving this certification and reported multiple experiences of teachers leaving their classrooms to teach in the public schools (both to Portland and other districts). While the goal of supporting teachers to get this certificate is to increase the quality of teachers and improve their knowledge and skills in working with young children, it becomes a drain on their resources when teachers leave their programs in search of higher wages provided by the public programs.

Of the 19 private providers surveyed, there was a total of 12 teachers with an 081 Certificate (sites ranged from having zero to two teachers, with 12 not having any and seven with one or more). The majority of providers (58 percent) require that their lead teacher has a Bachelor's Degree. See *Table 10*.

**Table 10. Minimum Educational Qualifications for Lead Teachers at Greater Portland Private Preschools**

	%	<i>n</i>
Bachelor's Degree	58%	11
Associate's Degree	26%	5
High School Diploma (including GED or HiSET equivalency)	16%	3
Number of teachers at surveyed private preschools with an Early Childhood Teacher Certificate (081) from the State of Maine		12

Not only is the 081 certificate training important, but training more generally is also a critical part of teacher professional development and ability to appropriately deliver curricula and programming to students. PPS and partner providers noted and praised the amount of staff training that had occurred previously with PPS pre-K program teachers. Early on in the program, there had been weekly professional development sessions on curriculum and what each classroom was doing. This was similar to the model of grade level meeting implemented in elementary schools. One partner provider noted how helpful this was for teachers and how important it was for ensuring that teachers had a place for feedback and discussion on the curriculum.

### Accreditation Can be Time Consuming and Expensive for Private Providers

Two providers voiced concerns over the process of accreditation, especially for small private programs. For one provider, the amount of time and resources they would need to dedicate to the accreditation process is prohibitive given the small size of their program. They do, however, see its value for larger programs to ensure quality and consistency across multiple classrooms. Since accreditation and a Step 4 rating from Maine Roads to Quality is required to become a PPS pre-K classroom site, one provider who has partnered with Portland Public Schools sees that process as a potential barrier to future collaborations or partnerships with smaller programs.

Results of the survey of private providers shows that 44 percent were not accredited. Accrediting bodies included the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 37 percent), the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (16 percent), and the National Association for Family Child Care (5 percent). See *Table 11*.

<b>Table 11. Accreditation Among Greater Portland Private Preschool Provider Respondents (n=18)</b>		
Accrediting Body	%	n
No accreditation	44%	8
National Association for the Education of Young Children	37%	7
New England Association of Schools and Colleges	16%	3
National Association for Family Child Care	5%	1

### **Three-year-old Students Need Quality Too**

Two of the PPS partner providers voiced concerns over the implications of pre-K programming for three year olds. As noted in the survey responses, 74 percent of respondents reported that they have mixed age classrooms. For partner providers, their other classrooms include three year olds. Therefore, with a focus on just four year olds in the public pre-K classroom, providers worry that three year olds may be left out of consideration in programming. One provider also acknowledged the importance for early childhood education and ensuring that children receive quality care from an early age.

### **Collaboration Provides Benefits to Students and Strengthens Programs**

Interviews with providers revealed that public-private collaborations have many benefits, including the option of full-day, year-long programming with before and after care. This reduces the number of transitions for children throughout the day and aligns with working families’ schedules. Collaborations with community based programs like The Opportunity Alliance offer the opportunity for shared resources and services that benefit families with increased needs.

Advisory Committee members and PPS partner providers also stated the importance of the Pre-K Leadership Team that had met monthly and included PPS and partner site staff. Through this meeting, program leaders have been able to discuss a variety of issues and coordinate programming effectively. The PPS Pre-K Coordinator role was also discussed as an important part of the process as this role is able to hold a large quantity of knowledge related to how the various partner sites and public school sites function. Since teachers are on a variety of contacts, it is important for someone to understand these processes so that meetings and trainings are scheduled effectively in a manner that attends to the variety of needs and permissions of different teacher roles. This role is also important to ensuring that there is consistency among sites and that there is ample communication to work through the many steps of partnership. Interviews with partner providers found that collaboration throughout the process of developing the public-private partnership has been key. There have had to be many discussions of how services are delivered and how costs are covered, which require ongoing negotiation.

# PUBLIC PRESCHOOL IN MAINE: WHAT OTHER DISTRICTS ARE DOING

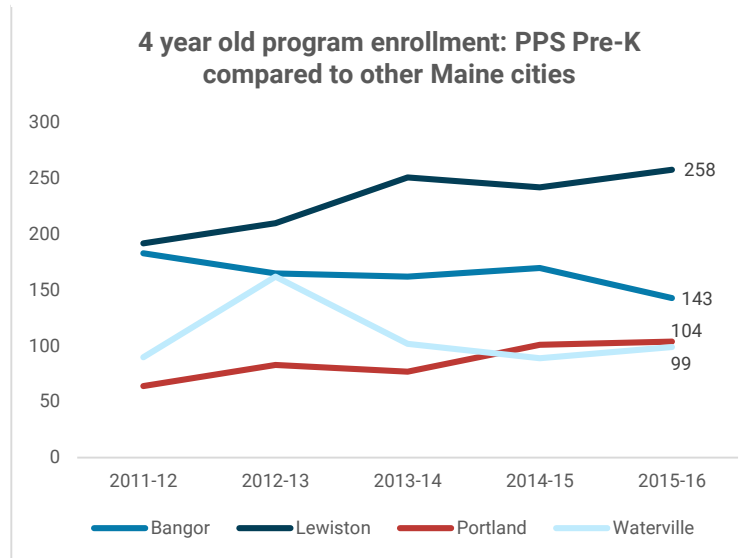
This section takes a brief look at what three other Maine school districts are doing for public preschool programming that involve both public-private partnerships and public programs as well as highlights previously conducted research in Maine around preschool choices made by parents. Interviews were conducted with school staff in Bangor, Bath, and Lewiston regarding the structure of their programs (time, curriculum, partnerships, outreach, common challenges for families, and challenges for implementation of the program).

Figure 10 shows the enrollment data for four-year-old preschool programming for cities in Maine.

## Bangor

Bangor currently has five pre-K classrooms, one in each of their five elementary schools. Students are placed in classrooms according to which neighborhood they live in, on a first-come first-served basis. Bangor’s pre-K program is funded through state and local school funding.

Figure 11. 4-year-old program enrollment in Maine cities



### Program structure

There are currently around 90 slots, with 16-18 pre-K students per classroom. (This was less than in previous years as shown in Figure 11 with data from the Department of Education on 4 year old enrollment). There is one pre-K teacher and one Ed Tech II in each classroom. This year they applied for a waiver from the state because they went over the number of students allowed per classroom. The program is comprised of half-day sessions (some schools have two half-day sessions). The program day includes dramatic playtime, curriculum time, free play and outside time and specials. Specials are taught by the school’s art and music teachers. Bangor utilizes the Big Day for Pre-K curriculum. Snacks and lunch are provided.

### Transportation

Transportation is provided by BPS. Pre-K students ride the bus with other elementary school students in the morning and at the end of day and with only other pre-K students in the middle of the day. BPS buses will deliver children to any daycare facility within the Bangor city limits, and the Bangor Rec Department provides before and after care at the elementary schools.

### Recruitment and outreach

The program is advertised in a newsletter to families, in the newspaper, through signage about registration, and by word of mouth. Bangor Public Schools contracts with CDS, and CDS promotes the pre-K program to families utilizing their services.

### ***Policies and support***

Bangor Public Schools has a policy to address absenteeism, students are not expelled for lack of attendance but the school will conduct outreach through letters home or phone calls to families if there are a number of absences or tardiness is reoccurring. Social workers or principals will sometimes conduct home visits.

Bangor Public Schools provides translation and interpretation services to students and families on an as-needed basis, but as staff report, they do not currently have a high level of need in that area. Social work and guidance services are available for students at all five elementary schools.

### ***Challenges for families***

BPS staff report that schedule and work conflicts are the most common issue experienced by families that need full day care for their children.

## **Bath**

Maine's Regional School District (RSU) 1's CHOICES Pre-K program began in 2004 with a collaboration between a public school teacher and a specialist who had identified unmet needs in incoming Kindergarten students. In 2006, the district started with a pilot pre-K classroom in the Phippsburg Elementary School with 14 slots for four year olds. By 2009 there were 64 children enrolled in four sites. Today, the program has expanded to include eight pre-K classrooms divided between six sites. CHOICES Pre-K classrooms are located in three public elementary schools, and in partnerships with the Bath YMCA, Head Start, and the Children's Schoolhouse, a private preschool. Children are placed in classrooms through a lottery system, and no preference is given based on income.

### ***Program structure***

CHOICES Pre-K runs from 8:30am to noon, Monday through Friday, and meets for 35 full weeks during the school year. Full-day options are available at the YMCA and Head Start, but there are some additional costs to families and are not covered by funding from RSU 1. The curriculums used vary between sites. The three public school sites use the Tools for the Mind Curriculum. Head Start has recently implemented the OWL Curriculum, and the YMCA and the Children's Schoolhouse both use the Creative Curriculum. In order to ease the transition into kindergarten, CHOICES is beginning to incorporate aspects of curriculum used in the RSU 1 kindergarten classrooms, like Handwriting without Tears and Everyday Math. Children enrolled in CHOICES are assessed three times throughout the year using the Children's Progress Academic Assessment (CPAA) tool. All CHOICES Pre-K teachers hold an 081 State of Maine Certificate in Early Childhood Education. The required student to teacher ratio is 8:1.

There are two Head Start pre-K classrooms that receive \$10,000 per classroom from RSU 1, in addition to their own state and federal funding. The two pre-K classrooms at the YMCA and the classroom at the Children's Schoolhouse each receive \$125 per student from RSU 1 for 35 weeks of school. This per-student amount will increase to \$130 per student in the 2017-2018 school year, with the goal of reaching \$135 per student by 2018-2019. This would match the amount charged at private preschools.

### ***Transportation***

Transportation is not provided by RSU 1 for this program.



### **Challenges for families and the program**

RSU 1 staff reports that issues for families include a lack of transportation and before and after care.

### **Programmatic challenges**

CHOICES Pre-K has found it difficult to address the disparity in teacher pay between public and private schools, and a high rate of turnover among pre-k teachers has become an issue as investments are made in teacher training and RSU 1 does not see the return on their investment. There is an ongoing conversation about the best way to support student transitions from pre-K into kindergarten, and different approaches are tried every year.

While RSU 1 has been able to provide pre-K for almost all the 4 year olds in the district who seek placement, they are still working toward the goal of universal pre-K.

### **Lewiston**

Lewiston Public Schools (LPS) has a public pre-K program that staff report is currently able to provide slots for all four year olds who register for pre-K. Because of years of expansion, they do not currently maintain a waiting list. Lewiston's pre-K program has grown rapidly over the last decade, doubling in size. LPS is opening a new elementary school in the next two years, closing two smaller schools and consolidating students. LPS staff anticipates that this may provide an opportunity for pre-K expansions and more wrap-around care programming for pre-K students.

Lewiston's pre-K program has 3 different formats:

- 1. Head Start / Lewiston Public Schools partnership in LPS buildings:** four classrooms that are run in partnership with Promise (the Androscoggin County Head Start program). This is a full day program (8:00am-1:30/2pm) that operates five days per week. It is run by Head Start staff and housed in Lewiston public elementary schools. It is funded through the state pre-K expansion grant.
- 2. Head Start / Lewiston Public Schools partnership in Head Start buildings:** There are also two classrooms run in partnership with Head Start, separate from the pre-K expansion grant. These are full day, five days per week classrooms housed at Head Start facilities and funded through a combination of Head Start and Lewiston Public School funding.
- 3. Lewiston Public Schools:** seven half-day sessions housed in elementary schools run by Lewiston public schools. There are two half-day sessions per day and the program operates four days per week. It is funded through state and local school funding.

### **Program structure**

There are 16 pre-K students per classroom, with one teacher and one Ed Tech in each classroom. The program day structure is dependent on the teacher and school, but all classrooms have structured curriculum time, free play, outside time, lunch and snacks. Meals are provided for pre-K students in public elementary schools by the LPS lunch program. Pre-K students eat family style with their teacher in the cafeteria. LPS have had conversations about the possibility of additional public-private partnerships, but currently do not feel need to expand. They report that the Head Start partnership works well because of the other services and resources that are available for students and families. Lewiston pre-K classrooms utilize OWL and Building Blocks curriculums.



### ***Transportation***

Transportation is provided for all students attending pre-K programs housed in LPS elementary schools, however not provided for the two Head Start classrooms housed at Head Start facilities. The majority of pre-K students attend pre-K classrooms in their neighborhood school, if there is overflow than students are sent to another elementary school. Parents can arrange for pre-K students to be dropped off at a daycare center by LPS buses. The YMCA and YWCA run vans to and from their before and after school programs as well.

### ***Policies and support***

Lewiston Public Schools pre-K program does not have a formal policy to address absenteeism, but there is an informal practice that attendance is important and teachers and guidance counselors will conduct outreach to families if attendance is becoming an issue.

Lewiston Public Schools provides interpretation and translation services for all students, and contracts out to CDS for social work and case management. Students and families who need help connecting to housing and other basic needs and resources are assisted through the guidance department or the McKinney-Vento advocate.

### ***Recruitment and outreach***

Recruitment and outreach is conducted through notices in the newspaper, fliers sent home, social media, word of mouth, and through older siblings. Head Start partnership classrooms attract kids already in the 3-year-old program, and these slots tend to be easier to fill. Lewiston struggles to fill all of the pre-K slots because of other private programs that fit families' scheduling needs where pre-K and full-day child care are provided.

### ***Challenges for families***

LPS staff reports that scheduling conflicts are the most common issues for families, as public pre-K does not provide wrap-around care or child care. Whole-day vs. half-day programs are an ongoing conversation, and the partnership with Head Start alleviates scheduling conflicts for many families.

### ***Staffing and coordination***

There is one staff person who is designated as the quarter time pre-K coordinator. The four classrooms run by the pre-K expansion grant in partnership with Head Start are required to have a full-time coordinator who is solely responsible for the grant funded classrooms. LPS reports working closely with Head Start to coordinate the two programs that are separate from the expansion grant.

### **Highlighting Maine research: Parent decisions on public pre-K enrollment**

Also helpful in the discussion of programs and structure, is research conducted in 2016 by the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) with parents of kindergarteners and first graders in Maine about their decision to enroll their child in an early childhood educational experience the year before kindergarten.<sup>xxvii</sup> This research looked at: 1) Potential barriers to participation in public Pre-K programs for 4 year olds in Maine; and 2) Factors that influence parents' decision to use public Pre-K programs in Maine.

### ***Most important considerations for parents***

They found that the **most important considerations for parents when choosing an early childhood education program for their children included classroom environment, teacher quality, and convenience of program hours and location.** Whether or not a program provided transportation or meals was a less significant factor in parents' decisions when enrolling their children. A major factor for parents who chose a public pre-K program for their children was cost-reduction.

### ***Reasons not to enroll in public pre-K***

The most significant factors that determined a family's decision **not to enroll their child in a public pre-K program included personal preference, a desire to avoid multiple transitions throughout the child's day, and the necessity of a full-day program when only a half-day program was available.** Another common reason for not enrolling children in public pre-K programs was a **lack of available slots.**

### ***Parent concerns***

Areas of concern for parents included the availability of slots and the availability of full-day programs or half-day programs with wrap around care. Principals and teachers expressed concerns about the delays in referrals for screening and delivery of special education services to children from CDS.

### ***Parent views on preschool***

A majority of the respondents reported positive views on early childhood education, agreeing that preschool fosters social skills, exposes children to classroom routines, increases children's' readiness for kindergarten, helps to build academic skills, and that children benefit from daily attendance. Most respondents also felt that schools should provide ample pre-K slots for families who wish to send their children.

# SUMMARY OF NATIONAL BEST PRACTICES FOR PUBLIC PRESCHOOL

The following is a summary of national best practices for public preschool, with a look at public-private partnerships throughout the country on both a state and district level. The purpose of this section is to inform and inspire both Starting Strong and PPS on what other places are doing and what ideas and lessons Portland may use from other places.

## National Institute for Early Education Research Standards

The National Institute for Early Education Research has developed a 10-point quality standard checklist for evaluating pre-K programs and publishes an annual yearbook documenting state-funded pre-K programs. These standards include teacher education, training, class size, staff to child ratio, screenings, meals, and state monitor site visits. In 2016, five states (Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and West Virginia) and one program in Louisiana met all 10 current benchmarks for minimum state preschool quality standards.<sup>xxviii</sup> While all but seven states have public preschool programs, the quality varies drastically between states (Arizona, Florida, and Indiana all met only three benchmarks). Maine achieved of nine of ten benchmarks in 2016 (in comparison, in 2002, the first year that NIEER published its yearbook, Maine only met three benchmarks).<sup>xxix</sup>

### NIEER 10-Point Quality Standard Checklist for Evaluating Pre-K Program

- Comprehensive early learning standards
- Lead teacher must have a BA degree
- Lead teacher must have a specialization in ECE
- Assistant teachers must have a CDA equivalent
- Teachers must complete at least 15 hours of in-service training each year
- Maximum class size of 20
- Staff to child ratio of 1:10 or better
- Vision, hearing, and health screening and referral are required, along with at least one family support service
- At least one meal per day is offered
- Required site visits by state monitors

## Public-Private Partnerships

Public-private partnerships (PPP) are a frequently used model for delivering pre-K services and provide many benefits to partners and the students they serve. Benefits to a pre-K collaboration with community-based partners, include the ability to share resources and expertise, to offer full-day programs and wrap-around care, the alignment of expectations across settings (between preschool and elementary settings), increase family involvement, and increase capacity to connect families to services.<sup>xxx</sup>

According to research from the PEW Center on the States, effective pre-K collaborations support three core elements: 1) Basic program features such as duration, target population, location, and budget; 2) Quality standards such as curriculum, classroom environment, staffing, assessments, and professional development; and 3) Comprehensive and supportive services such as family involvement, before and after care, transportation, screenings, referrals, and other interventions.<sup>xxxi</sup> PEW states that effective collaboration should start with a Partnership Agreement that outlines formal arrangements and clarifies roles and responsibilities around a common vision and goal, shared planning and decision making, and funding sources.<sup>xxxii</sup>

While many benefits exist, PEW research also identifies a number of barriers to collaboration, including: gaps in attitudes, beliefs, and cultures between public school systems and community-based providers; and mechanical (logistical) obstacles such as funding, administering programming, the types of assessments to use, and curriculum choices. Suggested steps to overcoming barriers to collaboration

include: conducting visits to community based programs; surveying the landscape to determine need and capacity; creating a vehicle to engage a broad set of stakeholders in developing, monitoring, and sustaining collaborations; investing in personnel to oversee collaboration efforts; and developing a collaboration agreement, such as a Memorandum of Understanding.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

### **State supported programs**

There are many examples of state supported public preschool programs in the United States, including programs in Alabama, Oklahoma, West Virginia, and Florida. The most common element of programs is that they are developed and run collaboratively between public and private providers, however as noted in the following section, variety exists among states as to how those partnerships develop and work.

#### **Alabama**

Alabama's First Class Pre-K Program is grant funded through the Alabama Office of School Readiness, and currently provides spots for 25 percent of eligible four year olds in Alabama. Pre-K sites are a mix of public school classrooms and private partnerships with private childcare and preschool programs, Head Start, community-based programs, faith based programs, and military based programs. The program has received the highest quality rating by NIEER, meeting all ten benchmarks, with an average cost per child of \$4,290.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

#### **Florida**

Florida has offered free pre-K for all four year olds regardless of family income since 2005. Today, nearly 80% of Florida's four year olds attend public pre-K. Classrooms are a mix of public schools and public/private partnerships. While Florida has done well to provide access to four year olds, the quality and effectiveness of the programming have been criticized, with some hypothesizing that lack of sufficient funding has led to a lack of quality.<sup>xxxv</sup> In 2016, Florida spent an average of \$2,353 per pre-K pupil and met only three of the ten NIEER benchmarks.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

#### **Georgia**

Georgia has the oldest public preschool program in the US, beginning with a pilot in 1992 and in 1995 became the first state-funded universal preschool program for four year olds.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Based on a gubernatorial election promise, a referendum was passed to create the Georgia Lottery for Education to fund the program. The program is voluntary, free, and open to all children regardless of income, which has remained a key element of the program that helps it to maintain positive political appeal across both Republicans and Democrats, allowing it to remain a politically popular program.<sup>xxxviii</sup> It serves approximately 58 percent of four year olds in Georgia and spends an average of \$3,891 per student.<sup>xxxix, xl</sup> It uses a "center-based" strategy, with all pre-K classrooms housed in public/private partnerships. Each pre-K program applies directly to the state to receive funding. In this way, Georgia utilizes existing infrastructure and capitalizes on the use of shared resources.<sup>xli</sup>

#### **Oklahoma**

Oklahoma has offered universal pre-K to children since 1998 and enrolls 74 percent of all four year olds in public pre-K programming through public schools, Head Start partnerships, and public/private partnerships.<sup>xlii</sup> Public schools are incentivized to add pre-K classrooms by receiving more state funding for all of their programs. Quality, not just access, was also written in to the program so it must adhere to rigid standards: All pre-K teachers must have a college degree, a certificate in early childhood education, must be paid the same wage as K-12 teachers; student-teacher ratio must be 10:1 with class sizes not

exceeding 20.<sup>xliii</sup> Studies with students in Tulsa have shown that students' math and reading skills have seen great gains and were especially helpful for ELL students.<sup>xliiv</sup> Funding has shown to be important to the success of the Oklahoma model, contributing to its quality—meeting nine out of ten of the NIEER quality benchmarks. In 2016, the state spent \$3,476 per pupil.<sup>xliv</sup>

### **West Virginia**

In 2002, West Virginia passed legislation to offer state funded pre-K. It currently serves approximately 66 percent of four year olds in the state.<sup>xlvi</sup> To facilitate expansion of the pre-K program, the state requires that a minimum of half of all pre-K classrooms operate in collaborative settings with private providers, child care centers, or Head Start.<sup>xlvii</sup> In working to improve quality, West Virginia has made changes to teacher requirements, requiring that all new lead teachers in nonpublic settings have at least a BA in Early Childhood or a related field, and all assistant teachers need a CDA or equivalent. In the 2016-2017 school year, programs will increase their hours to 25 hours per week minimum.<sup>xlviii</sup> Due to its work in increasing standards, in West Virginia's most recent NIEER rating, it met ten out of 10 of the current standards and spends an average of \$6,472 per student.<sup>xlix</sup>

### **District Supported Programs**

Looking at other models from the Northeast, some towns, cities, and school districts have also worked to develop public pre-K programming. This section will look at New York City and Boston. Other cities with innovative programs, not featured in this report include: Durham, North Carolina, San Antonio, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio.

### **Universal Pre-K**

#### **New York City**

New York City is a model of a city-wide expansion of pre-K programming. When Mayor Bill de Blasio was running for office in 2013, he promised to create a universal pre-K program with free, full-day slots for all four year olds in New York City. After his election, an effort entitled Pre-K for All launched and expanded NYC's pre-K program from 20,000 four year olds enrolled in a full day program in 2014 to over 68,000 enrolled during the 2015-2016 school year. In the 2016-2017 school year, there were over 70,000 children enrolled.<sup>i</sup>

In order to accommodate this expansion, the city had to recruit 2,000 new teachers and create 3,000 new public pre-K classrooms.<sup>ii</sup> Additional classrooms were added through a competitive process during which existing private sites applied to add publicly funded pre-K classrooms to create public-private partnerships with the New York City Department of Education.<sup>iii</sup> Standards implemented include the requirement that the lead classroom teacher have a minimum of a Bachelor's degree as well as a New York State certificate in Early Childhood Education,<sup>liii</sup> and that the curriculum and programming include play-based best practices.<sup>liiv</sup> Because many of the new teachers and veteran preschool teachers were without proper training, the city contracted with three local colleges to provide intensive summer training and ongoing professional development during the school year.<sup>liiv</sup> Recruitment of students was also crucial. To promote the program, outreach workers were hired and trained to make phone calls and canvas door-to-door, speaking with families about the benefits of early childhood education and how to enroll.<sup>livi</sup>

In order to accomplish the goal of providing high quality education to all four year olds in the city, NYC DOE spends between \$10,000 and \$12,000 per pre-K student.<sup>lvii</sup> The total cost of the program is around \$400 million a year, with \$340 million of that funding coming from the state every year for five years.<sup>lviii</sup>

While many exemplary universal pre-K programs around the country are touted for their success at providing early childhood education for at-risk populations, **NYC's Pre-K for All initiative is for all four year olds regardless of need or income. The largest increase in enrollment in Pre-K for All has been from students from middle-class families.**<sup>lix</sup> Mayor de Blasio sees this approach as a “social leveler,” a model that will “lift all boats” as children from varying backgrounds and socio-economic situations have an equal opportunity to learn together.<sup>lx</sup>

Pre-K for All has been criticized by some policy analysts, who feel that this model is not a good example to use nationally. They are concerned that providing free pre-K for wealthy and middle-class families that can afford the costs of private programs is equivalent to subsidizing the rich, and that spreading the money out between everyone doesn't leave enough for students who really need it.<sup>lxi</sup> There is debate over whether this significant public investment will have the same well-researched return to society that providing free quality early childhood education has for those students at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.<sup>lxii</sup>

There are many lessons to be learned from the rapid expansion of public pre-K in New York City. Bright spots of the expansion have been: engaging the community through intensive outreach and education; building on existing infrastructure by creating public/private partnerships; investing in teachers; incorporating evaluation at the onset of the initiative; and garnering strong political support for the effort.<sup>lxiii</sup> Some challenges and areas for improvement are the complicated and often confusing enrollment process, and the absence of transportation for those students who are placed in schools outside of their neighborhoods.<sup>lxiv</sup> Another issue is a lack of socio-economic diversity within individual classrooms, which could be solved by gathering more in-depth demographic data on enrolled students and by incorporating blended funded models like those used in Head Start programs.<sup>lxv</sup> In addition, there is a significant disparity in teacher pay between private and public providers. While NYC DOE has pledged to bridge this gap, it is still an issue.<sup>lxvi</sup> A final challenge lies in the quality of the programming and long-term student outcomes. While the Pre-K for All classrooms are considered high quality, many students who attend those programs live in neighborhoods where they will then be filtered into failing K-12 schools.<sup>lxvii</sup> This is especially true for low-income students, so despite Pre-K for All's intention of leveling the playing field, these students may remain disadvantaged while their more affluent classmates are filtered into better quality public and private K-12 schools.

## Boston

Boston's public pre-K program, also known as K1, has been recognized as an effective, high quality program. A 2013 study found that Boston Public School (BPS) pre-K education had “moderate-to-large effects on children's language, literacy, and mathematics skills, which are specifically targeted by the programs curriculum.”<sup>lxviii</sup> While enrollment in Boston preschools overall is incredibly high (90 percent of four year olds in are enrolled in preschool programming), research shows that there is a variation in the quality of programs. The public program seeks to close this quality gap and provide students with high quality, free early childhood education for all four year olds in Boston by the year 2020.<sup>lxix</sup>

Boston's director of early childhood education department states that the key elements of quality are “A great curriculum and ongoing, effective staff support,” and success has come from “well educated, well

paid teachers, strong unions, a population willing to pay significant amounts in taxes to fund education, and relatively small class sizes.<sup>lxx</sup> As of 2016, the district estimated that it spends about \$12,450 per K1 student each year (which does not include the costs of teacher coaching, curriculum improvements, and ensuring NAEYC accreditation standards—funding to support this important work comes from private foundations such as the Barr Foundation).<sup>lxxi</sup> **Success has also been attributed to the rigorous, developmentally appropriate curricula that are evidence-based and target specific skills; coaching for pre-K teachers to help them improve their instruction; pre-K teachers are paid the same as elementary school teachers; and that the program is available to any child regardless of income.**<sup>lxxii</sup>

Plans for the future of the program include operating five days a week for 6.5 hours a day. Boston’s Universal Pre-K Advisory Committee’s role is to create a formal universal pre-K infrastructure to be used across a variety of program options, including Boston Public School classrooms, Head Start partnerships, community-based centers, family child care providers, and parochial, charter, and private schools. Universal access and universal quality are both included in the work to develop this program. This would require a shift from a diverse landscape of different provider types and models to a robust mixed-delivery system, with an investment in quality improvements and a prioritization of parental engagement and voice.<sup>lxxiii, lxxiv</sup>

All programs would adhere to essential elements of pre-K quality outlined by the committee, including degreed, highly trained, and well-compensated teachers, high-quality curriculum and supports for students with additional needs, a 22:2 student to teacher ratios or less, NAEYC accreditation and/or Massachusetts Quality Rating and Improvement System ranking, and ongoing assessment and evaluation of program quality and outcomes.<sup>lxxv</sup> NAEYC accreditation is seen as an important element to retaining quality among programs as research shows that BPS schools engaged in the NAEYC accreditation process had “significantly higher vocabulary score gains from fall to spring.”<sup>lxxvi</sup>

**Boston’s example shows that political will, strong leadership advocating for preschool education, and a visionary advisory committee are critical elements to this program and its continuous funding and momentum.** As reported in a 2016 article in the *Atlantic*, “Steven Barnett, the director of the National Institute for Early Education Research, thinks that **cities, not states, are leading the way to the idea that preschool should be a right guaranteed to every 4-year-old in America.**”<sup>lxxvii</sup>

Despite a budget deficit in 2016, Mayor Marty Walsh committed \$3.1 million to public preschool for the 2016-2017 fiscal year.<sup>lxxviii</sup> Federal money through the Preschool Expansion Grant has also supported expansion through increasing spots in community-based preschools and increasing teacher salaries who use the public school curriculum to be at the same level as a starting salary for a BPS teacher (\$52,632 for a teacher with a bachelor’s degree), again, noted as an important part of success.<sup>lxxix</sup> Community programs report that the BPS programs have been strengthened through partnership with community-based organizations and that CBOs have been strengthened by the work with BPS.

### **Ensuring access to low-income and at-risk populations**

Because quality early childhood education is proven to improve the lifetime outcomes of low-income children,<sup>lxxx</sup> it is important to ensure pre-K access to this population. Some examples of public pre-K programs that excel at serving low-income and at-risk children are found in Detroit, Michigan, and Nashville, Tennessee. These programs not only serve the educational needs of students, but also provide additional services in innovative ways to families.



## Detroit

Detroit, Michigan has three public pre-K programs targeted at the neediest children in the city, served through Title I, Head Start, and the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP). The GSRP is state-funded, and serves four year olds who meet risk factors such as extremely low or low family income; have a diagnosed disability or developmental delay; exhibit severe or challenging behavior; speak a primary home language other than English; have parents with low educational attainment; are the children of teen parents; or are victims of abuse, neglect, or live in an area identified as an environmental risk. Classrooms in the Great Start Readiness program have 16-18 students, and classes meet four days a week. The program provides family supports such as health care, social work, mental health, and parent involvement services.<sup>lxxxix</sup> Recognizing the barriers and challenges associated with recruiting children from this at-risk population, the Michigan Department of Education created a Great Start Readiness Program Implementation Manual, with a section dedicated to Recruitment and Enrollment. Suggestions include the creation of a well-developed plan for recruitment with efforts including informational packets given to home visit specialists (staff from the school district, community mental health agencies, and other providers) and posters or information displayed at local health departments, doctors' offices, hospitals, libraries, and post offices, as well as in businesses frequented by young families like laundromats and grocery stores. **They also recommend using one application and creating one waiting list to be shared between Head Start and the GSRP as a way to ensure that all eligible children have access to pre-K programming.**<sup>lxxxii</sup>

## Nashville

The Metro Nashville Public Schools Pre-K program has many options to provide quality early education to low-income and at-risk four year olds. Programs include Early Learning Centers, school-based pre-K classrooms, Montessori programs, and community-based classrooms. In partnership with Catholic Charities of Tennessee, many of these programs provide support services for children and their families, such as before and after care; nutrition services; Family Engagement services; and Family Empowerment Services. Family Engagement services are provided by **Family Involvement Specialists, who coordinate opportunities like parent workshops, foster communication between parents and schools, connect families to social services, and assist with school navigation.** Family Empowerment services promote stability and well-being through crisis support, counseling, access to community services and resources, and behavior interventions and support for students. All pre-K classroom in the Metro Nashville Public school system follow the Creative Curriculum and conduct ongoing student assessments.<sup>lxxxiii,lxxxiv</sup>

## National Challenges and Proposed Solutions

Research on national best practices for public preschool programming reveals a number of common challenges faced by programs. Two of these challenges revolve around funds. The first is lack of sufficient funding, which means that quality of programs may vary, as well as that many programs are unable to provide transportation, meals, or wrap-around care. The second is disparity in teacher pay between public and private preschool sites.

### Sufficient program funding

As seen with the example of Florida, while access and enrollment may be high for public pre-K programming, quality is lacking. Funding is a critical element to the ability to provide high quality educational programming and many different models exist. Cities who have implemented public preschool programs throughout the United States have tried a variety of different methods including



increasing sales tax (Denver, San Antonio, West Sacramento); increasing property taxes on home values over \$400,000 (Seattle); earmarks from local governments (San Francisco, District of Columbia); pay for success model, which encourages partnerships between investment firms, government, and other non-profits who pay for social intervention programs up front and the government returns the money with interest after the programs begin to provide savings in other areas (Salt Lake, Australia, United Kingdom); family fees or a sliding fee (Denver, Los Angeles, San Antonio, San Francisco, Seattle, West Sacramento); federal Title I money; CDBG funds; bond money; and private and foundation grants.<sup>lxxxv</sup> Exploring a variety of methods is key to obtaining funds.

Both state and district level program examples show that political will, especially the drive of elected officials who advocate for preschool programming and follow through with working with government to provide investment are critical to creating quality public preschool programming that supports students, families, and teachers.

### **Addressing teacher pay disparity**

While pay disparity between private and public preschool teachers is well-documented, there are not many examples of successful ways to address this issue. A 2016 report from the US Department of Education discusses the importance of supporting quality teachers in order to support better outcomes for students. Research shows that when there is low teacher turnover and higher wages, children spend more time engaging in “positive interactions and developmentally appropriate activities with peers and teachers” and therefore contributing to healthy development and school readiness.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> The same report also finds 94 percent of early learning staff are employed in private community based settings with a difference of \$6.70 per hour in the median wage between being employed in a public school sponsored program compared to a private community based setting for employees with a Bachelor’s degree or higher (a gap of \$13,936 per year).<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015) as cited in the DOE report show that in Maine the child care median earnings are below 150% of poverty for a family of three.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> With increases in quality preschool programming and increased numbers of students being enrolled in preschool, the demand for high quality teachers to deliver the high quality programming that is being expected of states is every more apparent. As one early childhood teacher stated, “Right now if you graduate from college with a degree in early-childhood education, you have the lowest projected earnings of all college graduates. This is not a recruitment strategy.”<sup>lxxxix</sup>

Solutions to this problem include the recommendation that that quality rating and improvement systems include teacher compensation as an indicator of quality.<sup>xc</sup> State and district specific program policies for how to address pay disparity may also help. Boston has addressed this through acknowledging the role of quality teachers to deliver quality programming and the need to support that financially. Pre-K teachers are paid the same wage as other elementary school teachers. NYC has also worked to address this through a policy for salary parity between starting teachers in both public and community based settings and provides funding for community based centers to raise salaries for certified teachers with bachelor’s degrees. NYC is also addressing the issue of teacher quality through professional development opportunities for all teachers (private community based or public school based) to obtain certifications and more advanced coursework or education through partnerships with local universities.<sup>xcii</sup>

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC PRE-K IN PORTLAND

Based on the research conducted regarding pre-K in Portland and beyond, there are a number of recommendations that have been developed. One place to start is the *10 questions local policymakers should ask about expanding access to preschool* from the Education Policy Center at American Institutes for Research. See *box to the right*. These questions are a helpful starting place and guide for thinking about future program development and implementation and are reflective of many of the questions, thoughts, and ideas from interviews and surveys collected from this research.

Eight major recommendations are recorded here, however, we hope that the information on national, district, and other Maine programs will help to inspire thoughts and ideas on pre-K in Portland.

These include **seven program recommendations and one PPS data development recommendation:**

1. Expand the hours of the PPS Pre-K program and address child care needs
2. Hire more multilingual staff
3. Increase teacher and staff coaching/training opportunities
4. Hire a full time Pre-K Coordinator
5. Let early childhood education professionals lead with their wisdom and experience
6. Address pay disparity
7. Make decisions about the universality of the program and the lottery system
8. PPS data development around declines for spots and where students attended preschool

## Hours of program and child care

Based on the data analysis between parent interviews and recorded responses from the schools, we recommend PPS consider adding before and after care to better meet the needs of working parents or parents with limited transportation access. Looking at models that other Maine schools employ regarding transportation to other care centers or creating classrooms within the school locations that foster developmentally appropriate before and after care settings may be beneficial for both families and students. Partnering with additional Portland preschool locations may also help to expand the program and the offerings available to students and families.

### Ten questions local policymakers should ask about expanding access to preschool

1. Should preschool be for all, or only the neediest?
2. Should local initiatives focus on four year olds or three and four year olds?
3. What about teachers' qualifications and pay, adult to child ratios, and other quality factors?
4. When should preschools be open?
5. How much does preschool cost?
6. How do cities pay for preschool?
7. How long does it take to serve the target population?
8. What settings work best for preschool?
9. Who should run preschools?
10. How can cities win public support?

*from the Education Policy Center at American Institutes for Research*

Another part of this regards examining in greater depth how to work with community providers so that families might retain vouchers for before, after, and summer care, so that hours, scheduling, and costs can match parent needs.

### **More multilingual staff**

One suggestion from PPS staff includes hiring more multilingual staff (including teachers), particularly those who speak the languages spoken by large populations new to Portland. New Mainers are less likely to be well established in the city and have fewer connections to services and community members who can help them navigate the school system (as noted by staff, due to a recent influx of families from Angola, there is an increased need for Portuguese language interpretation and translation services; however, based on waves of immigrants, the primary language need tends to shift from year to year and in previous years there have been higher demands for other languages such as French or Arabic).

Head Start programming also incorporates interpreters into the classroom during the first few days and weeks of school. This can help communication among students, families, teachers, and program administrators, and may also ease comfortability with school settings. With increasing diversity from students and families from all over the globe, it is critical that PPS pre-K and its community partners have access to interpreters, translators, and appropriate training to work with a diverse student population. Training from the MLMC for teachers should continue.

### **Teacher and staff coaching**

Teacher and staff coaching came up in two different ways during interviews with preschool and social service providers.

### **Working with at risk families**

To support communication and cooperation between school staff and at risk families, one provider suggested that teachers and school staff receive coaching to better understand and work with these families, and for schools to partner with outside organizations that have the resources to engage families to assist with this process. To this end, one Portland elementary school is taking part in a Family Support Team pilot program. Through a partnership with a community provider, a family advocate is placed in the school to work with at risk families, connecting them to services and helping them to navigate the school system. The advocate also works with staff and teachers to coach them through working with these families and to help with collaborations with community partnerships. This provider suggests establishing the same model in the public pre-K program, to assist with outreach and communication with families who face greater barriers to accessing preschool or pre-K programming. A family advocate may also help families overcome some of the barriers they face, easing the trauma and stress and helping them to engage with the schools. According to a PPS partner provider, these advocates can also help to ease the transition from pre-K to Kindergarten. This is similar to the model developed in Nashville with Family Involvement Specialists.

Another issue according to two of the providers interviewed, is that many private preschool programs in Portland are not equipped to handle the needs of at risk families. They suggest increased collaboration between the public school system, private preschool providers, and community based organizations as a solution to share resources to better address the needs of these families and to provide more opportunities for quality programming for their children.

### **Curriculum and classroom coaching**

Based on interviews with preschool providers on curriculum, the demands of the currently used OWL curriculum require intensive, ongoing training in order for teachers to feel confident in using it and adapting classroom experiences with fidelity to the model. PPS partner providers recommended that there be continued training and coaching on the curriculum. One partner provider suggested that every new teacher in the program have a coach that can work with them through reflective processes to learn and grow in their professional skills. This was noted as a practice previously implemented when the program started with the OWL curriculum. While training is important, it is also necessary for teachers to have adequate time for planning. This can be challenging due to ensuring classroom coverage and teacher contracts about hours. Some of these challenges may be met through the following recommendation as a full time pre-K coordinator could help to navigate these scheduling issues in order to ensure that teachers are prepared and confident to lead their classrooms.

### **Full time pre-K coordinator**

Interviews from PPS partner providers made clear that the strength of the collaboration is critical to the success of the program. We recommend that PPS hire or dedicate at least one full time staff person to the role of Pre-K Coordinator (one provider recommended even 1.5 staff people) to coordinate the program and act as a liaison between partner sites and PPS. If the schools want to expand the public program, increased collaboration with private providers will be necessary and therefore it will be crucial to have at least one dedicated person to support it. As one provider stated about the beginning of the current school year, they were “left to figure it out on their own” in regards to getting support, coordinating screenings, working with the MLMC, and processing paperwork regarding registrations and enrollment.

With someone in this role, there would also be the ability to have consistency, constant collaboration, and communication, which multiple partner providers described as key to making the partnership work and providing quality programming to students. Advisory committee members and PPS partner providers also stated the importance of the Leadership Team, which met monthly and was coordinated through this role. It is important to continue these meetings as providers were able to have the time and space to discuss how services are delivered and how costs are covered. Providers emphasized that these conversations are ongoing and need continued negotiation and checking in. This person, as one provider stated, would have to be a bridge between early childhood education and elementary education, with an understanding of both worlds (the public system and private system).

### **Let early childhood education professionals lead**

PPS also needs to ensure that they, as one preschool provider stated, “Honor our professional background,” and the school district listens to and understands the early childhood perspective. With many decades of experience in caring for and educating children during their most critical years of development, partner and other preschool sites in Portland provide invaluable knowledge and wisdom regarding the development and sustainability of programming. We recommend that PPS ensure that early childhood education professionals, community programs and partners direct the work of how and where programs are structured and consider, as one provider stated, “What is the best practice related to the best interest of the child and how can we meet that?” This means a meeting of early childhood education and elementary education and finding the balance of bringing best practices of early childhood education up to the elementary venue, ensuring the developmental appropriateness of programming (rather than imposing elementary standards onto younger and younger children who are not developmentally ready for that type of environment).

If PPS wants to expand programming, private providers and community partnerships are possible ways to make this happen. Therefore, PPS must be sure to consider and respect the work that providers are already doing in the community. With few additional potential partners due the requirement of needing a QRIS rating of 4, PPS should approach with care to other potential partners and ensure that there is a strong coordinator who can work to build relationships and smoothly bring new partners in to the process.

### **Addressing pay disparity**

Pay disparity between private and public preschool teachers remains a major challenge in Portland and around the county. As previously stated by private providers in Portland, there is a lot of investment both in time and in money that goes into teacher training, oftentimes with an outcome where all of that investment is lost to public programs who have not made the investment. While there is no easily solution to this issue, Portland should continue to address this challenge head on, acknowledging the problem and working on creative solutions. Some efforts and attempts at solutions have been made (e.g. the Head Start program's adjustment of wages) and models in other places are working to address this (e.g. Boston, where public preschool teachers will make the same as elementary teachers), however large gaps still exist.

### **Decisions about universality and the lottery**

As discussed in best practices from around the country, there are many different models of public preschool programming. Some states and districts follow a universal model, where everyone is eligible for the program and some follow a more targeted approach for recruitment based on income or risk. Portland needs to decide if it wants to stay with its goal of offering 70 percent of its spaces to low-income students or if it wants to open it to be universal. We recommend this as a continued discussion point, as it has been noted that oftentimes there are unfilled spaces for low-income students. If there is to be continued preference for low-income students, then we recommend increased outreach and messaging to families in order to fill those spaces. Following other recommendations related to hours and working with other providers to provide child care, or adding transportation may help to address this issue as well.

The lottery system was also described as challenging for families as they were not always able to send their children to a school in their neighborhood or they had to wait to find out if they would get a spot. This puts families in a tough position regarding preschool and child care. We recommend that PPS evaluates the lottery system and works with outreach and recruitment to ensure that families have the information they need regarding the process.

### **PPS data development**

Two main issues related to PPS data emerged when conducting this research. First, is that there has not been consistency in data entry regarding parent declines to the pre-K program. This is important to address in order to understand what parents may be looking for in a program and how to remedy this within the PPS system. We recommend Portland Public Schools adapt one consistent data collection method regarding parent declines for preschool. When PPS staff connects with a parent to offer a slot, there should be a consistent recording system, which will allow for smoother tracking of factors contributing to parent declines.

The following are our suggested themes to code each parent decline once received: age, child has special needs, prefers another program, needs wrap around care, Head Start, decided not to enroll, moved, transportation, no response. In order to code as specifically and accurately as possible, we recommend asking clarifying questions to a parent to reach the root of their decline. For example, if a parent says they prefer another program, asking about the appeal of that program may lead to the underlying reason such as the parent's work hours do not match the hours of the PPS program and therefore wrap around care is needed. This data could then be recorded in the data collection system and analyzed to better evaluate what PPS needs to do to meet family and student needs.

Second, is that there has not been a systematic entry of where student attended preschool programming (if they did so) in the PPS database. This data is important for understanding where students attended programming and who may be missing out on valuable preschool educational opportunities. We recommend that as kindergarten registration forms arrive to PPS that the location of where they attended preschool be added to Infinite Campus with both the name of the program and the delineation of whether it was a public, private, or Head Start program be added as a separate field. This will also allow for future tracking of outcomes related to preschool experiences.

## CONCLUSION

As stated previously, "Steven Barnett, the director of the National Institute for Early Education Research, thinks that cities, not states, are leading the way to the idea that preschool should be a right guaranteed to every 4-year-old in America."<sup>xcii</sup> Portland should continue to vision how it can be a leader in Maine and in the country regarding creativity and innovation in preschool—thinking about partnerships and community collaboration that promote a healthy and strong start to education.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Methodology

This research was designed to inform Starting Strong and Portland Public Schools about the landscape of preschool programming in Portland. A mixed methods approach was utilized. Below is a list of data collected and analyzed for the purposes of this report.

#### **Portland and PPS demographic data**

Collection and analysis of Portland demographic data and PPS demographic data regarding pre-K enrollment patterns and school enrollment.

#### **Analysis of application and enrollment data for PPS Pre-K program**

Analysis of application and enrollment data for PPS Pre-K collected by PPS staff.

#### **Analysis of reason for parent declining a space in PPS Pre-K program**

Analysis of data collected by PPS staff regarding why families declined a space in the PPS Pre-K program.

#### **Interviews with parents**

A total of 23 interviews were conducted in the fall of 2017 with parents who declined a space in the PPS program for the 2017-18 school year. This part of the project was designed to inform Portland Public School (PPS) administrators, Portland School Board, and Starting Strong about why parents make certain choices regarding pre-kindergarten programming. Eight phone interviews were conducted by the United Way of Greater Portland (UWGP) with English speaking parents. Fifteen phone interviews were conducted through the PPS Multilingual Multicultural Center's (MLMC) Parent Community Specialists (district's interpreters/cultural brokers).

In order to recruit parents for the interview, an email and letter signed by Superintendent Xavier Botana were sent out to the families. The email informed parents of the research and potential interviews. They were told that the interview would last no more than 15 minutes and they could opt out of any question or the entire interview at any time. Parents were also promised that neither their nor their child's name would be connected to the interview. Two parents responded by email that they would be willing to participate in the interview. After a reminder email was sent, UWGP staff began to call parents who received the email but who did specifically decline to be interviewed. Three calls were made to each family in an attempt to reach parents. For English speaking parents, a voicemail stating the purpose of the call and callback number was left for each call. Six families did not speak English and attempts to reach them were made through a Language Line interpreter. Eighteen families who spoke English were called. Families who indicated that the reason for the decline was a move out of the school district were not contacted.

The interview consisted of nine questions including questions such as:

- You were offered a slot in the PPS pre-k program but decided not to enroll your child. Can you tell me about your choice?
- You named a few issues that played a role in your decision, was there one reason that was more important than the others?
- What could the school system do differently to better meet your family's needs for pre-school?



### **Survey of private providers**

In the spring of 2017, staff of the Data Innovation Project conducted an online survey of the private preschool providers in Portland and a few from the surrounding areas (Falmouth and South Portland). The survey was sent to 47 private center based providers (30 in Portland, ten in South Portland, and seven in Falmouth) and nine home based sites in Portland. Centers in South Portland and Falmouth were included in order to acknowledge that some Portland residents may attend preschool sites outside of Portland proper. All private center based preschool providers were sent the survey via e-mail if the provider had a listed e-mail address on their website. If they did not have listed e-mail, they were contacted via phone and e-mailed the survey. Phone calls were made to all home based sites. One week after the initial contact, providers were contacted via phone to follow up to ensure that they had received the survey and to introduce it in a more personal way, answering any questions that may have arisen. The survey was resent to providers who requested it again over the phone. Respondents had the option to join a voluntary raffle of two gift cards as an incentive to participate in the survey.

In addition to informing future collaborations, the goals of the survey were to gain a better understanding of: 1) Availability and offerings of preschool programming for students the year before they enter Kindergarten; and, 2) Any needs or service gaps for preschool programming in the greater Portland area. Respondents were asked about their center's capacity, tuition, staffing, general demographics about the children they serve, and barriers they see for families accessing their services.

### **Interviews with preschool and social service providers**

Eight key-informant semi-structured interviews were conducted with private providers, PPS partner providers, and public pre-K staff, and relevant social service agency staff over the phone or in person. The goal of the interviews was to understand the main issues related to pre-K in Portland from the perspective of providers and programs that work closely with families who have young children. Interview questions differed based on participant role, but were related to partnerships, collaboration, and student and family challenges and barriers.

### **Interviews with other Maine districts**

Three key-informant semi-structured interviews with three other school districts (Bangor, Bath, Lewiston) in Maine to learn more about how they have implemented public preschool programming.

### **Pre-K research project advisory committee meetings**

Three pre-K research Advisory Committee meetings were also held (see Appendix B for list of committee members). These meetings involved five community members who work in the field of early childhood education, including both private and public providers and foundation and community based organization staff. This group provided guidance on the research process.

### **Best practices research**

Finally, research was also conducted on best practices for public preschool programs within the United States. The goal of this research was to better understand what is working well in other districts, cities, and states, and how Portland may be able to incorporate some of those learnings into future practice. Research on the benefits of preschool programming was also included.



## APPENDIX B

### List of private providers contacted for survey

Portland	South Portland	Falmouth
Art Play Nursery School	Casco Bay Montessori School	Falmouth Center Co-op Preschool
Arwo Learning Center	Discovery Center Preschool First	Friends School of Portland
Breakwater	Congregational Church	Governor Baxter School for the Deaf Preschool
Bright Horizons	Lighthouse School	Little Hands Daycare and Learning Center
Catherine Morrill	Mainly Childcare	Little Red Caboose Day Care
Child Development Center Easter Seals Maine	North Atlantic Montessori School	Pine Grove School
Children's Odyssey	Roots and Fruits Preschool	Winfield House
Children's House	Shining Star Child Development Center	
Circle Time Preschool	Spring Point Children's Center	
First Lutheran Children's Program	Toddle Inn Child Care	
Grammy's House Nursery School	Wishing Tree Preschool	
Heartfelt School		
Hug a Bug Child Care Center		
Jewish Community Alliance (JCA) Preschool		
La Petite Ecole		
Peaks Island Children's Workshop		
Portland Nursery School		
Portside Learning Center		
Rosemont Nursery School		
St. Brigid's School		
St. Elizabeth's Child Development Center		
The Academy for Active Learners		
The Children's Center		
The Childrens Adventure Center		
The Children's Nursery School		
The Creative Playhouse		
Trinity Day School		
Waynefleete		
Youth and Family Outreach		
<b>Home based</b>		
Sasha Shunk		
Joan Naigle		
Lynn Rutter		
Lucille Trudeau		
Brandi Lawrence		
Lori and Joel Harrison		
Gina Kostopoulos		
Lisa Christian		
Joanne Anania-Queen		

### Pre-K Research Advisory Committee

Angela Atkinson-Duina, Portland Public Schools, Director of Data, Research and Assessment  
 Katie Camplin, Director of Starting Strong  
 Jean Cousins, Director of Head Start at The Opportunity Alliance  
 Lori Moses, Director of Catherine Morrill Day Nursery  
 John Shoos, Executive Director of Sam L. Cohen Foundation  
 Beth Spinney, Portland Public Schools Pre-K Coordinator (former)

## APPENDIX C

### List of preschool locations in Portland

<b>Site name</b>	<b>Type of site</b>
Art Play Nursery School	Private
Arwo Learning Center	Private
Brandi Lawrence	Home-based
Breakwater	Private
Bright Horizons	Private
Catherine Morrill	Private
Child Development Center Easter Seals Maine	Private
Children's Odyssey	Private
Children's House	Private
Circle Time Preschool	Private
East End Child Development Center	Head Start
East End Community School	PPS
First Lutheran Children's Program	Private
Grammy's House Nursery School	Private
Hall Elementary School	PPS
Heartfelt School	Private
Hug a Bug Child Care Center	Private
Jewish Community Alliance (JCA) Preschool	Private
Joan Naigle	Home-based
Joanne Anania-Queen	Home-based
Kennedy Park	Head Start
La Petite Ecole	Private
Lisa Christian	Home-based
Lori and Joel Harrison	Home-based
Lucille Trudeau	Home-based
Lynn Rutter	Home-based
Lyseth Elementary School	PPS
Parkside Development Center	Head Start/PPS
PATHS (Catherine Morrill)	PPS
Peaks Island Children's Workshop	Private
Portland Nursery School	Private
Portside Learning Center	Private
Presumpscot Elementary School	PPS
Riverton Elementary School	PPS
Rosemont Nursery School	Private
Sagamore	Head Start
Sasha Shunk	Home-based
St. Brigid's School	Private

St. Elizabeth's Child Development Center	Private
The Academy for Active Learners	Private
The Children's Center	Private
The Children's Adventure Center	Private
The Children's Nursery School	Private
The Creative Playhouse	Private
Trinity Day School	Private
Waynelete	Private
Youth and Family Outreach	Private/PPS

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