



Proposed Expansion of New Mexico PreK

Community Meetings

BACKGROUND REPORT

- This report informs community and policymaker discussions about preliminary pros and cons of significantly expanding the New Mexico PreK program.

PROPOSAL DEVELOPED BY:

New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership

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Foreword

Purpose of the Report

The New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership (NMECDP) seeks to significantly expand the voluntary, state-funded New Mexico PreK program, making it available to all 3- and 4- year olds in the state. Meetings will occur throughout the state to gather feedback from stakeholders on potential benefits, drawbacks and questions regarding such an expansion. This preliminary background report provides information for community members and policymakers as they consider NMECDP's proposal. Additional information will be made available after community input is gathered.

New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership

NMECDP is a public-private partnership that works with business leaders, policymakers and early childhood professionals to provide greater access to high quality early learning opportunities for New Mexico's children. The organization is dedicated to creating the public awareness and political will for investments in early childhood education in New Mexico.

New Mexico First

New Mexico First engages people in important issues facing their state or community. Established in 1986, the public policy organization offers unique town halls and forums that bring together people to develop their best ideas for policymakers and the public. New Mexico First also produces nonpartisan public policy reports on critical issues facing the state. These reports – on topics like water, education, healthcare, the economy, and energy – are available at nmfirst.org. The state's two U.S. Senators, Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich, serve as New Mexico First's honorary co-chairs. The organization was co-founded in 1986 by then U.S. Senators Jeff Bingaman and Pete Domenici.

Special Thanks

Several experts in early learning education were interviewed or provided resources for this preliminary report. We appreciate their time and applaud their commitment to New Mexico's children and families.

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Introduction

National research confirms that early childhood education programs can improve child well-being, safety, and educational outcomes while also closing achievement gaps.¹ An estimated three-fourths of New Mexico's young children have at least one risk factor impacting health, education or development, and almost a quarter are at moderate or high risk for developmental delays or behavioral problems.² To give these children greater opportunities, the New Mexico Legislature targets resources to the assessment and expansion of early childhood programs, with appropriations increasing steadily since 2012.

Recognizing the need to better position all of New Mexico's young children for success, the New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership (NMECDP) proposes an expansion of New Mexico's state funded PreK program. They recommend providing full-day New Mexico PreK, free of charge to all three- and four-year olds whose families are interested. Expansion would occur in a variety of settings, including child care homes, child care centers, Head Start sites, and public elementary schools. As is true now, participation would remain voluntary and there would be different school-based or center-based programs from which parents could choose.

Currently 35,000 pre-K aged students lack access to pre-school. Under the draft proposal, the proposed PreK expansion would roll out over five years, at an estimated cost of \$285 million. Based on the long-term assumption that 80 percent of families would want this service, NMECDP's proposal would make PreK available to an additional 24,500 children annually.³ These numbers are preliminary and will be updated as the proposal moves forward.

Potential benefits of this proposal include increased access to quality early learning, financial savings for families, as well as the long-term economic and societal benefits that early childhood education provides. Potential challenges or drawbacks include the state government's significant fiscal limitations, training and licensing enough professionals to care for more children, and structuring any new PreK programs to support and align with existing child care, Head Start and pre-school providers.

A Few Words About Terms

People sometimes confuse New Mexico PreK with pre-school, private pre-kindergarten programs, child care or other early learning programs. There are multiple state, federal, nonprofit, for-profit and faith-based programs providing care for children birth to five:

- **Home-based child care:** Roughly 3,600 New Mexico providers offer care in their homes, falling into three categories: unlicensed but registered (max of four children), licensed (max of six children) and licensed group homes (max of 12 children).⁴

¹ (Legislative Finance Committee 2014)

² (Legislative Finance Committee 2014)

³ (New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership 2016)

⁴ (CYFD, 2014)

- **Child care centers:** About 700 licensed child care centers operate in New Mexico, many of them also offering some form of pre-school.⁵ Depending on how they are accredited, they may also provide New Mexico PreK or Early PreK. The centers may be nonprofit, for-profit and/or faith-based.
- **Pre-school or private pre-kindergarten programs:** These programs exist within child care centers. They may be half-day or full-day, depending on the center. Children transition between parts of the day that are pre-school and child care.
- **Head Start and Early Head Start programs:** Approximately 6,700 New Mexico children are served by Early Head Start and Head Start programs. There are 32 Head Start providers, of which 18 are associated with Native American tribes, and 125 centers, including three migrant/seasonal centers. Only low-income families are eligible for these programs.
- **New Mexico PreK and Early PreK programs:** This state-funded, voluntary pre-school program serves three- and four-year-olds. While not income-based, two-thirds of enrolled students must live in a Title I elementary school district. CYFD administers the program in 148 child care centers. The PED administers the program in 145 schools.⁶
- **Child Care Assistance Program:** The Child Care Assistance Program subsidizes the cost of child care for low-income families (at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty level). Only families whose parents can prove that they are working and/or in school and have a need for child care can qualify. The average monthly enrollment, as of 2015, was 16,825 children. About a quarter of them were in four- or five-star care.⁷

⁵ (CYFD, 2014)

⁶ State of New Mexico PreK Program

⁷ LFC report special review: early childhood service accountability report card, gap analysis and spending plan 1/15

New Mexico Pre-K & Pre-Schools

Economic Overview & Impacts: New Mexico

In 2014, 59 percent of New Mexico children age six and under were from low-income families, compared to 47 percent of young children nationally.⁹ The National Center for Children in Poverty rated New Mexico well on its indicator for funding a pre-kindergarten program and/or supplemental Head Start.¹⁰

These indicators matter because most of the state's children are affected by poverty. Just over 80 percent of New Mexico schools are designated as Title I due to the high number of students who are low-income or in poverty.¹¹ According to the new PARCC assessment, three of four New Mexico students do not demonstrate readiness for the next grade level in reading or math.¹² In many families, these challenges start early; children living in low-income homes can be exposed to more risk factors that impair brain development and academic growth.¹³ Partly as a result, over three-quarters of New Mexico low-income and well over half of all other children are behind on the first day of school, unable to reach the benchmark for early literacy skills.¹⁴

2015 New Mexico Quick Facts on Child Care ⁸	
Children under age 5	140,098
% living in poverty	35%
In state-funded PreK	5,156
In Head Start	7,369
Not attending preschool	35,000
Students eligible for free/reduced lunch	55%
Children ages 6-17 who repeated one or more grades since kindergarten	43,000
High school students not graduating on time	26%

New Mexico PreK State Funded Program

The New Mexico PreK program was established in 2005 to address some of the challenges above. It is a voluntary, state-funded program with the goal of ensuring that every child in New Mexico has the opportunity to attend a high quality early childhood education program before going to kindergarten.¹⁵ It aims to:

- Increase access to voluntary high-quality pre-kindergarten programs
- Provide developmentally appropriate activities for New Mexico children
- Expand early childhood community capacity
- Support linguistically and culturally appropriate curriculum
- Focus on school readiness

⁸ (Early Care and Education Consortium 2014)

⁹ (National Center for Children in Poverty copyright 2016) Note: A family of four with two children living on \$24,000 were defined as "poor," whereas the same family living on twice that was defined as "low-income." Research suggests that \$48,000 annually, which research is the minimum income to ensure basic needs are met.

¹⁰ (National Center for Children in Poverty 2014)

¹¹ (New Mexico Early Childhood Development Partnership 2016) Note: "Title I" is the federal program that provides funding to local school districts to improve the academic achievement of disadvantaged students. It is a commonly indicator of poverty within a community.

¹² (New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee 2016)

¹³ (National Center for Children in Poverty copyright 2016)

¹⁴ (Legislative Finance Committee 2014)

¹⁵ (New Mexico PreK 2016)

The program is administered jointly by the Public Education Department (PED) and the Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD). CYFD-run programs are located in child care centers, child care homes, or Head Start centers. The PED-run PreK programs are located in public schools. New Mexico PreK costs roughly \$3,000 dollars per student, and received close to \$40 million total for the 2014-2015 school year.¹⁶ Both CYFD and PED prioritize program applicants serving large numbers of at-risk students, and two-thirds of enrolled students must live in a Title I elementary school zone.¹⁷

Curricula for New Mexico PreK falls under the New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines. Developed by educators from a variety of programs and settings, “the Guidelines reflect current brain development research and early childhood education best practices. They represent the growing consensus among educators that a greater emphasis be placed on young children’s conception learning, social and emotional development, and active participation in culturally and linguistically relevant and meaningful learning experiences.”¹⁸

Additionally, the New Mexico PreK program provides consultation and training to teachers, educational assistants and administrators for the “implementation of an authentic observation, documentation, planning, assessment, and curriculum process.”¹⁹ In the 2014-2015 school year, roughly 1,100 early childhood professionals received training in the PreK program and 181 scholarships enabled teachers to take college courses for additional degrees and licensure.²⁰

NEW MEXICO PRE-K OUTCOMES

From 2005-2010, the National Institute for Early Education Research used a set of ten regulatory benchmarks to evaluate New Mexico PreK, concluding that the program “produced statistically significant positive impacts in language, literacy, and mathematics – the three areas most critical to long-term academic success.”

The LFC reports that New Mexico PreK consistently and significantly improves math and reading proficiency.²¹ This outcome applies to both public school and child care center programs; 94.5 percent of children in PED’s PreK programs and 94.2 percent of children in CYFD’s PreK program showed measurable progress overall.²² Additional impacts include a 43 percent reduction in special education participation and a 100 percent reduction in third grade retention.²³ Based in part on these positive outcomes, in 2015 New Mexico PreK was expanded to serve more of the state’s four-year-olds. A pilot program to extend PreK to 3-year-olds also began.²⁴

Other Pre-School Programs in New Mexico

¹⁶ PED received \$19.3 million and CYFD received \$20.4 million -- \$14.3 million in state general funds and \$6.1 million in Temporary Assistance to Needy Family funds.

¹⁷ (Legislative Finance Committee 2014)

¹⁸ (Early Learning New Mexico 2015)

¹⁹ (Children, Youth and Families Department; Public Education Department 2015)

²⁰ (Children, Youth and Families Department; Public Education Department 2015)

²¹ (New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee 2016)

²² (Children, Youth and Families Department; Public Education Department 2015)

²³ (Legislative Finance Committee 2014)

²⁴ (O'Donnell 2015)

HEAD START

The largest public pre-school program in New Mexico, Head Start is a direct federal program – meaning the money received is not channeled through a state organization.²⁵ Along with offering both pre-school and PreK classes, Head Start provides health, dental, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families. The program's services are designed to foster stable families, enhance children's physical and emotional well-being, and develop strong cognitive skills.

The programs exist throughout the state, and are recognized for providing a wide array of wrap-around services for families in need. However, a recent LFC report noted that New Mexico Head Start data was falling behind the nation in some outcomes, such as the number of teachers with Bachelor's degrees.²⁶

Concerns about “variation in quality” has fueled an ongoing debate about the long-term impact of Head Start. In response, new standards were created and will go into effect November 2016. The first “comprehensive” revision of Head Start rules since their publication in 1975, changes include extending hours and new curriculum and assessment requirements. These regulations “put social and emotional and big-picture cognitive skills on an equal footing with academics.”²⁷

PRIVATE PRESCHOOLS

There are over 700 licensed child care centers in New Mexico, most of which offer various forms of pre-school. Some are secular. Others are faith-based, such as the Jewish Community Center in Albuquerque or Clovis Nazarene School. Other types of pre-schools, including those accredited in Montessori or Waldorf, are based on the specific educational philosophies of their founders. Depending on their curricular model, some private preschools can apply to offer the New Mexico PreK program. While federal and state funded preschool programs have recent data on outcomes, private preschools in New Mexico offering curricula outside of the scope of the PreK program lack such information.

²⁵ (Legislative Finance Committee 2014)

²⁶ (New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee 2016)

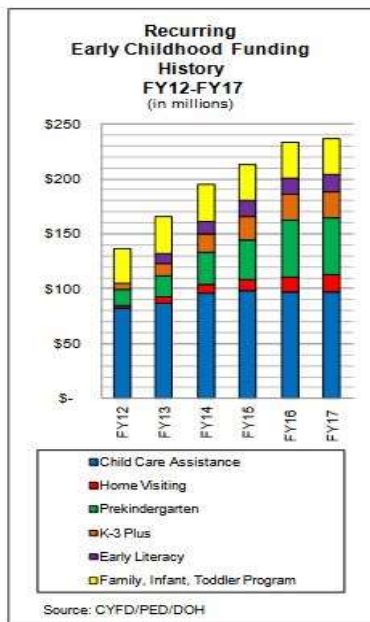
²⁷ (Kamenetz 2016)

Challenges to Expanding PreK

NMECDP's proposal to expand New Mexico PreK will be reviewed and refined in the coming months. Initial interviews identified preliminary hurdles, including: financing, workforce, and mutually supportive alignment with other early learning programs.

Financing Issues

New Mexico ended the budget year on June 30, 2016 with a budget deficit of roughly \$131 million. The projected shortfall for the 2016-2017 budget is \$458 million.²⁸ While our state currently faces financial challenges, the legislature has a strong history of year-over-year increases in early childhood investments. Appropriations to the early childhood system as a whole have increased by more than \$100 million since FY 2012.



Given New Mexico's history of investment and the state's current budget deficits, some early childhood advocates question the wisdom of advancing a PreK expansion at this time. Concerns exist around the state's fiscal health as well as lawmaker receptivity.

Other early childhood champions suggest that New Mexico's budget deficit can provide momentum for refocusing efforts behind the Child Care Assistance Program and Head Start, both of which are largely federally funded. A strong, high quality Head Start, they argue, can increase the number of children receiving pre-school without costing the state nearly as much as expanded PreK. There is a significant concern that New Mexico is leaving federal dollars "on the table," while turning to the legislature for more state funding. Unnecessary competition between Head Start and PreK, a 2013 Legislative Finance Committee evaluation report found, resulted in a loss of roughly \$1 million in federal funds.²⁹

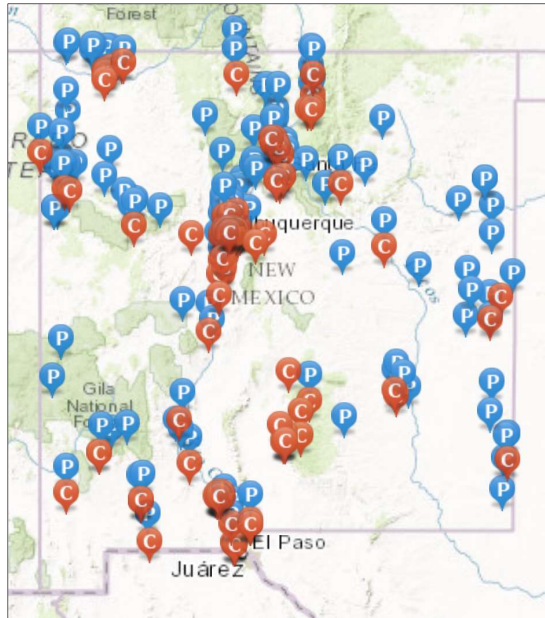
Cooperative, Not Competitive, Structures

Currently, PreK slots are split between public schools and private centers. Structured to provide parents with choice, this system has worked well in communities that previously lacked enough quality pre-school options. However, in other communities, competition has occurred between privately run child care centers, public school centers and Head Start programs. In at least one community, the public school district is reported to have used "robo-calls" to send automated messages to families urging them to enroll their children in the

²⁸ (Baker 2016)

²⁹ (Legislative Finance Committee 2013)

school-based PreK program. This strategy further strained existing tensions with the local center-based PreK as well as Head Start.



Source: State of New Mexico, PreK Locations Map

The challenge of school-based and center-based PreKs existing in the same community is at least partly attributed to limited coordination between CYFD and PED regarding locations of programs. Earlier this year, the LFC warned that “evidence of a lack of state-level coordination in the prekindergarten expansion process may lead to misdistribution, unnecessary competition among programs, and wasted resources.”³⁰ Some Head Start program directors agree. One shared that his community lost half a million federal Head Start dollars when he was forced to close three classrooms after PreK programs were established in the local schools. These closures shifted the funding from federal to state dollars.

For these reasons, some PreK advocates support an expansion, but within established child care and Head Start centers so that existing systems are strengthened – rather than through the public schools, which they allege can undermine existing centers and destabilize their staffs. Critics of school-based PreK programs also voice concerns about continuity for small children. When PreK is located in child care centers, children spend the entire day in one location. By contrast, when PreK is located in public schools, some children start the day in a child care center, ride a bus to the school's PreK program, eat lunch in a school cafeteria, and ride a bus back to the child care center.

Despite these concerns, a school-based option can be a good solution for some families and a perfect fit for communities without existing and high quality early learning programs.

Workforce Issues

Early childhood professionals provide an essential service to society, families, and the economy as a whole. In a study of child care professionals, education and training were the strongest predictors of quality care. However, child care providers generally earn low wages and receive few benefits. Women dominate the field, comprising about 95% of the child care workforce. The wages child care employees earn are often close to the poverty line.³¹

³⁰ (New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee 2016)

³¹ (Institute of Medicine; National Research Council 2015)

U.S. Hourly Wages, Professional Serving Children Birth-5, by Educational Attainment³²

Highest Degree Received	Mean Hourly Wage of Center-Based Teachers and Caregivers
High school or less	\$9.60
Some college, no degree	\$10.50
Associate degree	\$12.90
Bachelor degree or higher	\$17.30

New Mexico Median Hourly Wages, Selected Occupations 2013³³

Occupation	Median Hourly Wage
Customer service representatives	\$13.60
Bakers	\$11.20
Cosmetologists	\$11.14
Retail sales persons	\$10.32
Building cleaners	\$9.99
Home health aides	\$9.81
Teacher assistants	\$9.47
Baristas	\$9.02
Child care workers	\$8.83

Given these wages, it is no surprise that preparing and retaining a highly qualified early childhood workforce remains a sizable challenge. If New Mexico PreK enrollment expands significantly in the next five years, as proposed by NMECDP, major efforts will be needed to prepare enough professionals to meet the need.

The issue of wages also surfaces in the issue of school-based versus child care center-based PreK (described in previous section). Public schools are often able to pay PreK teachers more (up to \$10,000 more in some communities) than child care centers and offer a broader benefits package. Consequently, once an early learning educator becomes fully trained (often at a child care center center), she or he understandably wants to pursue the highest possible salary.

However, when a child care center's highest trained professionals shift to a public school PreK program, it can destabilize the faculty and hurt quality. Center directors report that staffing disruptions affect the entire facility, influencing infant and toddler care, as well as pre-school or PreK children.

³² (Whitebook 2014)

³³ (New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions 2014)

Conclusion

This report provides an overview of the benefits of high quality preschool as well as the advantages and complexities of NMECDP's proposal to expand the New Mexico PreK program. It is clear that quality early learning experiences narrow the achievement gap and set students up for lifelong success, and that New Mexico's PreK programs consistently meet or exceed expectations.

Less clear is the measured impact of other types of preschools or the benefits of a young child staying at home with an engaged parent. The lack of data collected for private pre-schools adds to the challenges of having PreK and Head Start measure different outcomes. Ultimately this reality renders an incomplete picture of the full range of options available and the impacts of each. Further complicating the potential expansion is New Mexico's current budget shortfall, a limited workforce, and competition challenges between early learning programs.

The purpose of this report, and the meetings it will inform, is to allow community members and policymakers to delve into the complexities of NMECDP's proposal and share ideas about the best way to proceed. Arguing against the expansion at this time does not preclude it from happening at some future point. Just as advocating for the proposal does not guarantee that it will be adopted by the Legislature. And there are many options in between that could result in much needed services to our youngest constituents.

Fundamentally, informed citizen voices will help ensure that lawmakers follow the best available course on this important policy question.

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