

NIEER Pre-K Data Snapshot:

State Policies that Support Curriculum in Preschool

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The [National Institute for Early Education Research \(NIEER\)](#) researches and disseminates an annual [report](#) profiling state-funded prekindergarten programs throughout the United States. NIEER's *State of Preschool* yearbook is the only national report on state-funded preschool programs with detailed information on enrollment, funding, teacher qualifications, and other policies related to quality, such as the presence of a qualified teacher and assistant, small class size, and low student-to-teacher ratio.

In 2016, NIEER introduced a new quality standards benchmark which assesses whether states have policies to support programs in curriculum selection and implementation, such as training or ongoing technical assistance. This new benchmark reflects emerging evidence that use of comprehensive and integrated curriculum models, when implementation is supported to ensure fidelity, has positive effects on children's learning¹.

To meet this new curriculum supports benchmark, states are not expected to require programs use a specific curriculum--but restricting options may be one avenue for ensuring the state can provide adequate support. The benchmark focuses on *supporting* programs in first choosing a curriculum and then implementing it with fidelity. See Table 1 for a list of programs meeting the curriculum benchmark in 2016-2017.

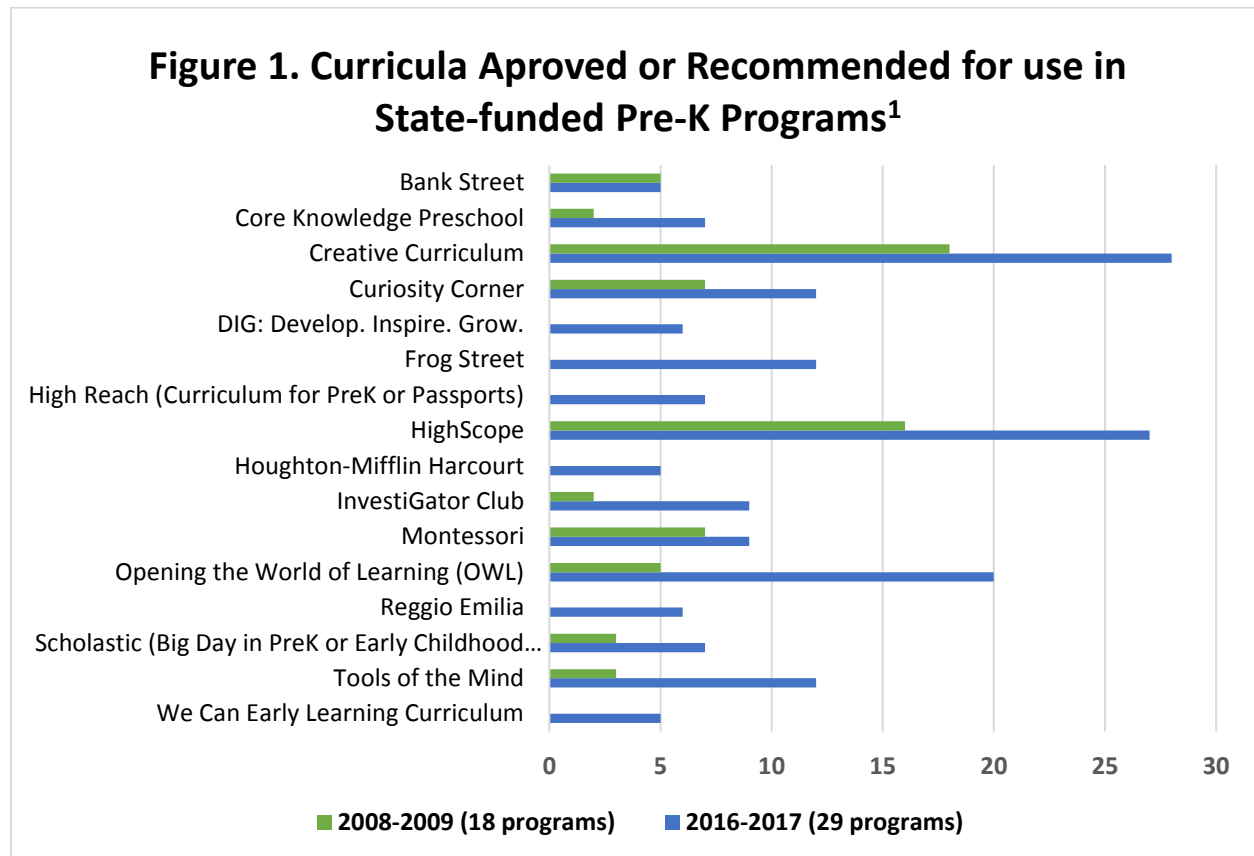
Identifying Specific Curricula for Use

Although not addressed by the new curriculum supports benchmark, NIEER has collected information on whether states require programs to use specific curricula. According to the [State of Preschool yearbooks](#), the number of programs requiring specific pre-K curricula has increased over the past decade. In 2008-2009, NIEER found 18 out of 51 state-funded pre-K programs (35%) had at least one state-approved comprehensive curriculum for use in pre-K. In 2016-2017, this increased to 48% of pre-K programs, 29 out of 61 programs located in 23 states and D.C. An additional six programs had a list of

¹ Research has demonstrated that the use of domain general and specific curricula, when implementation is supported, has positive effects on children's learning, see: Clements, D.H., & Sarama, J. (2008). Experimental evaluation of the effects of a research-based preschool mathematics curriculum. *American Educational Research Journal*, 45, 443-494. Minervino, J. (2014). *Lessons from research and the classroom: Implementing high-quality pre-k that makes a difference for young children*. Seattle, WA: Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Phillips, D. A., Lipsey, M. W., Dodge, K. A., Haskins, R., Bassok, D., Burchinal, M. R., Duncan, G. J., Dynarski, M., Magnuson, K. A., & Weiland, C. (2017). *Puzzling it out: The current state of scientific knowledge on pre-kindergarten effects: A consensus statement*. Brookings and Duke Center for Child and Family Policy. Yoshikawa, H., Weiland, C., Brooks-Gunn, J., Burchinal, M., Espinosa, L. M., Gormley, W. T., Ludwig, J., Magnuson, K. A., Phillips, D., & Zaslow, M. (2013). *Investing in our future: The evidence base on preschool education*. Ann Arbor, MI: Society for Research in Child Development.

recommended comprehensive curricula; and 11 pre-K programs required all pre-k providers in any setting to use a specific comprehensive curriculum.

The curricula on the list of approved or recommended curricula between 2008 and 2016 remained somewhat consistent with Creative Curriculum and HighScope being the two most common choices in both years. These are also the two most common curricula used in Head Start programs². Curricula that were on the recommended/approved lists for at least 5 programs in either 2008-2009 or 2016-2017 are listed in Figure 1. In the past eight years, curriculum options have expanded. In 2016-2017, 30 new curricula were included on approved or recommended lists, some only by one or two programs. In addition to new curricula, there was a substantial increase in the percentage of state approved lists including Opening the World of Learning (OWL) (28% in 2008-2009 vs. 69% in 2016-2017) and Tools of the Mind (17% vs. 41%).



¹These curricula were on approved or recommended curriculum lists for at least five pre-K programs in either 2008-2009 or 2016-2017.

Number of Curriculum Choices

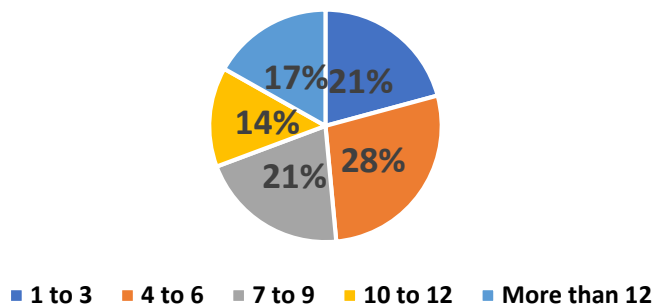
For the 29 programs reporting the names of approved curricula in 2016-2017, the number of choices varied from a low of one curriculum to a high of 22, *see Figure 2*. But the more curriculum choices a

² Moiduddin, E., Bush, C., Manley, M., Aikens, N., Tarullo, L., Malone, L., & Lukashanets, S. (2017). A portrait of Head Start classrooms and programs in spring 2015: FACES 2014-2015 data tables and study design. OPRE Report 2017-101. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

state approves, the more challenging it becomes to support implementation with state-developed materials, professional development and technical assistance—prompting some states to reconsider.

Tennessee had 22 comprehensive curricula on their approved list in 2016-2017. This year, after engaging in a thorough curriculum review process with a rubric to guide decision-making, the state settled on three curriculum choices that met the criteria. In Mississippi, OWL was identified as the single approved curriculum effective January 1, 2017. The four curricula previously approved (Creative Curriculum, Big Day for PreK, Galileo, and Frog Street) by the Mississippi Department of Education may still be used until the programs have purchased and updated their curriculum.

Figure 2. Number of Approved Comprehensive Curricula for Pre-K Programs in 2016-2017 (29 Pre-K Programs)



Curriculum Options

Many states provide guidance or mechanisms for selecting a curriculum model rather than mandating specific ones. For example, the Louisiana Department of Education provides guidance by reviewing instructional materials online and determining the degree of alignment with state content standards, resulting in [assigning](#) curricula to one of three tiers ranging from “not representing quality” to meeting all “non-negotiable criteria” as well as scoring the highest on all indicators of quality.

Even when states have approved curriculum lists, some allow pre-k providers to submit an alternative curriculum for approval. Rhode Island has a list of [reviewed curricula](#) where an alignment has been done based on a variety of indicators, but the state has avoided labeling the curricula “approved.” Connecticut also does not provide a list of approved models but instead offers guidance to help programs choose curriculum based on available research, program philosophy, adult supports and the children and families served. Similarly, the California Preschool Curriculum Framework, although not a curriculum, does provide guidance for implementing subject-specific curricula in social-emotional development, language and literacy, English language learners, mathematics, visual and performing arts, physical development, health, history-social science, and science. In several states the selection of a pre-K curriculum is a local decision with the State Education Agency provides support for aligning selected curriculum to state early learning and development standards.

Many states review the approved curricula list regularly. For example, Georgia’s Department of Early Care and Learning completes a full curriculum review every three to five years to identify curriculum models that best support its pre-K program. In Pennsylvania, curriculum companies may choose to submit an alignment request at any time. Distinct from approving comprehensive curricula, six programs

in four states and Guam require or recommend subject-specific curricula (i.e. math, literacy, social-emotional) for the pre-K program.

Supporting Curriculum Implementation

All states reported, at minimum, supporting or setting policies for curriculum decision-making *and/or* implementation in 2016-2017 (see Table 1). Most (38 states, D.C. and Guam) offered pre-K providers guidance on selecting curriculum aligned with the state's early learning and development standards. Once a curriculum was selected, more than half of states provided opportunities to participate in state-sponsored curriculum training (61%) or on-going technical assistance on curriculum implementation (67%). In Michigan, pre-K providers are encouraged to be trained directly by a certified trainer of their chosen curriculum. A few states provided coaching or mentoring focused on curriculum implementation. A less expensive curriculum support, offered by 36 states (59%) includes access to guidance materials such as curriculum frameworks, web-based resources, and implementation videos. Some states utilize their Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) to assist in curriculum selection and implementation supports. See Table 1 for a summary of policies that assisted programs in receiving supports for curriculum implementation.

Finally, NIEER asked how states ensure that curricula are implemented with fidelity. Twenty-eight programs in 22 states and D.C. have either established systems to ensure curricula are being implemented through required training, on-going monitoring, and provision of feedback to teachers, or required programs to develop such systems, see Table 1.

Conclusion

Through collection of *State of Preschool* survey responses, NIEER researchers have found an increasing number of pre-K curricula being selected by states. With expanded curriculum choices, states face the challenge of developing policies to best support programs in both selection and implementation (with fidelity) of pre-K curricula aligned with early learning and development standards and formative assessments.

About NIEER

The National Institute for Early Education Research ([NIEER](http://nieer.org)) at the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, conducts independent, objective research to inform early childhood education policy promoting physical, cognitive and social development for all young children to succeed in school and later life.

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Acknowledgements

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This publication is a product of the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), a unit of the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. NIEER supports early childhood education policy by providing objective, nonpartisan information based on research.

Table 1. State Policy Requirements Related to Curriculum Implementation (2016-2017)

STATE/ PROGRAM	Offers guidance on criteria for selecting evidence-based curriculum models	Requires alignment of curricula with ELDS	Provides SEA/Office of Early Learning sponsored training	Provides funding to support curriculum implementation or training	Develops and/or provides supporting materials	Delivers on- going technical assistance on curriculum implementation	Other supports	There is a system to ensure that curricula are being implemented with fidelity	MEETS 2016-2107 CURRICULUM BENCHMARK
Alabama	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Alaska	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√
Arizona		√				√		√	√
Arkansas		√	√	√	√		√	√	√
California State Preschool Program	√		√		√	√			√
California Transitional Kindergarten (TK)			√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Colorado	√		√			√			√
Connecticut Child Day Care Contracts	√		√		√	√	√		√
Connecticut School Readiness	√	√	√		√	√	√		√
Connecticut Smart Start	√	√	√		√	√	√		√
Delaware	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√
D.C.	√	√	√	√		√		√	√
Florida*	√							Not reported	
Georgia	√	√		√			√	√	√
Hawaii	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√
Illinois	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Indiana									
Iowa Shared Visions	√	√	√	√				√	√
Iowa Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program	√	√		√				√	√
Kansas Preschool Program	√				√	√		√	√
Kansas State Pre-Kindergarten Program	√			√		√			√
Kentucky	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Louisiana 8(g) Student Enhancement Block Grant Program			√	√	√	√	√		√
Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Louisiana Nonpublic Schools Early Childhood Development Program (NSECD)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Maine	√	√	√		√	√		√	√
Maryland		√	√	√	√	√		√	√
Massachusetts Inclusive Preschool Learning Environments Grant (IPLE) - Fund Code 391	√	√	√	√	√	√			√
Massachusetts Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK)	√	√		√			√		√
Michigan	√	√		√			√	√	√
Minnesota Head Start	√	√	√		√	√		√	√
Minnesota Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten	√	√	√	√	√	√			√
Mississippi	√	√		√				√	√
Missouri		√		√		√			√
Nebraska		√	√						√
Nevada	√	√	√		√	√			√
New Jersey Former Abbott Preschool Program	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√
New Jersey Former Non-Abbott Early Childhood Program Aid	√	√	√	√	√	√			√
New Jersey Former Early Launch to Learning Initiative	√	√	√	√	√	√			√
New Mexico	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√
New York	√	√	√		√		√	√	√
North Carolina	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√
Ohio	√	√	√			√	√		√

National Institute for Early Education Research

STATE/ PROGRAM	Offers guidance on criteria for selecting evidence-based curriculum models	Requires alignment of curricula with ELDS	Provides SEA/Office of Early Learning sponsored training	Provides funding to support curriculum implementation or training	Develops and/or provides supporting materials	Delivers on- going technical assistance on curriculum implementation	Other supports	There is a system to ensure that curricula are being implemented with fidelity	MEETS 2016-2107 CURRICULUM BENCHMARK
Oklahoma	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√
Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten	√		√	√	√	√			√
Oregon Preschool Promise	√	√		√					√
Pennsylvania Ready to Learn Block Grant									
Pennsylvania Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program	√	√							
Pennsylvania Kindergarten for Four-Year-Olds and School-Based Pre-K		√							
Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts	√	√		√			√		√
Rhode Island	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√
South Carolina	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√
Tennessee	√	√							
Texas									
Vermont		√						√	
Virginia	√	√	√		√	√			√
Washington	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
West Virginia	√	√		√	√	√		√	√
Wisconsin Four-Year-Old Kindergarten (4K)	√		√		√	√	√		√
Wisconsin Head Start State Supplement	√				√		√		√
Guam		√	√	√	√	√			√
TOTAL	48	46	37	37	36	41	23	28	53

*Data on Florida's quality standards and policies are from the 2013-2014 school year. Publicly available documents were reviewed for any policy changes and answers to new questions.