

Leaving Last in Line: Making Pre-K a Reality in Mississippi



**MISSISSIPPI
FIRST**

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Introduction

As any fourth grader knows, last in line is an awful place to be. But for Mississippi's public school fourth graders, last in line in reading and math achievement isn't a once-in-a-while woe, it is a recurring nightmare. Mississippi has tied for **last among the states nearly every year** on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation's Report Card.¹

Some argue that comparing Mississippi with other states is unfair because Mississippi has more poor children, and poor children, on average, have lower achievement. Among Mississippi fourth graders, for example, only 17% of poor kids were "proficient" in math in 2011 versus 47% of non-poor students; in reading, the numbers are 15% and 40% for poor and non-poor students, respectively.² As alarming as such large disparities may be, some say, comparing Mississippi to other states is like comparing apples to oranges. But when we compare apples to apples—our poor students to other states' poor students and our non-poor students to other states' non-poor students—the results are not any better. Unsurprisingly, Mississippi's poor students are at the bottom.³ Shockingly, we are not even doing a good job of educating non-poor students: they are at the bottom as well.⁴

Mississippi's problems on the NAEP do not start when our children enter the fourth grade. NAEP success is a function not only of the quality of education a child receives at the tested grade but at every point prior to taking the test. Recognizing the importance of systemic improvement, Mississippi has taken steps toward reforming K-12 public education in recent years. Mississippi First commends these efforts. But if the problem lay *only* at the door of our K-12 system, smart policy for elementary schools would be our sole focus. Research, however, indicates that kindergarten-*entry* achievement is a strong predictor of school achievement in later years.⁵ In other words,

Mississippi's cellar-dwelling performance on the fourth grade NAEP is not only about weaknesses in our K-12 system but also about the quality of preparation our children receive *prior* to school entry. When children start school without important academic skills, it becomes harder and harder for them to achieve their potential without considerable intervention. As our children progress through school, their achievement problems initiated prior to kindergarten worsen. Our students fare little better on the eighth grade NAEP than they do on the fourth grade NAEP.⁶ Is it any wonder that Mississippi has one of the lowest graduation rates in the nation⁷ and the lowest median household income?⁸ We are not equipping our children—poor or non-poor—for success from the earliest ages and, as a result, are not producing the workforce required in an age that demands highly skilled labor for a living wage.

Fortunately, as every fourth grader knows, being last in line doesn't have to be permanent. Working hard in class and being on good behavior can get any child promoted to line leader. Similarly, Mississippi can take action to solve its problem of inadequate school readiness and finally lead the achievement line: forty years of excellent research support the achievement-boosting, life-long benefits of high-quality pre-Kindergarten programs.

What the research says

Pre-Kindergarten is an educational program for children between the ages of three and five, although most children attending state-funded pre-K nationally are four years old.⁹ Since cognitive science shows that all children's brains will improve and develop if given appropriate stimuli,¹⁰ pre-K's purpose is to promote brain development directly linked to academic skills such as reading and numeracy. Quality pre-K programs often also provide care—services focused on the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of a child.

In the last several decades, researchers have amassed tremendous proof that pre-K works, especially for children born into poverty.¹¹ Data

from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study show the benefits of early reading skills appear as soon as first grade.¹² In fact, by the end of first grade, reading preparation and skill before Kindergarten explains reading achievement far better than socio-demographic variables (race, age, gender, poverty status).¹³ Furthermore, developing certain pre-literacy skills can even overcome the negative impact that poverty exerts on factors¹⁴ directly affecting a child's reading ability.¹⁵

Not all early childhood learning programs are equal to the task of building a child's skills. A review of early education studies by University of Pennsylvania researchers revealed that "intensive, high-quality, and long-lasting interventions that begin in early childhood" show the most positive results.¹⁶ The most famous examples of these types of interventions are the Perry Preschool Project and the North Carolina Abecedarian School; each showed significant and persistent effects on their students.¹⁷ Four decades of research tracking the children from these interventions into adulthood shows that the skills children learn in pre-K can have an immediate effect on their achievement trajectories when they enter school and long-lasting effects on their life outcomes when they leave the educational system and enter the adult world.¹⁸

What are we waiting for?

Despite the research and the rhetoric, Mississippi is one of only ten states without a state-funded pre-Kindergarten program. We believe the lack of forward progress on this issue is no longer about *whether* pre-K works or *why* Mississippi should invest but *how* Mississippi should promote pre-K, given state budget constraints and our political context. As a result, this issue brief focuses little on the *whether* and the *why* and more on the *how*. First, we take a brief look at the status quo in

Mississippi and explain why it is not working. Then, we examine a workable solution other rural states are using with great success. Finally, we recommend a model for Mississippi and a roadmap for getting us there.

The Problem with the Status Quo

Without state-funded early education, Mississippi relies on a fragmentary system of Head Start, local initiatives, and private childcare to prepare children for Kindergarten. In this section, we quickly detail

Mississippi's early education landscape, starting with support programs and moving to direct service programs. We further note how the direct service programs lack the design, the reach, or the capacity to serve as quality alternatives to state-funded pre-K.

Early learning support programs

Mississippi has several early learning programs that do not offer direct services to children. Instead, these early education

initiatives are designed to improve quality or coordination among *existing* providers or may raise public awareness about the importance of early education. Below, we present a representative, but by no means exhaustive, list of these programs.

Mississippi Building Blocks (MBB). MBB is a research and demonstration project designed to model how Mississippi can work with existing child care centers to improve center quality and enhance children's early learning and school readiness.¹⁹ Implemented in 100 randomly selected classrooms in licensed child care centers throughout the state, MBB provides centers instructional mentoring, classroom materials, parent education, scholarships for

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childcare workers to earn a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, and business advice to assist center directors in financial and operational management.²⁰ MBB is supported by private philanthropists, major corporate sponsors, and the federal government.

Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK). The SPARK program, funded by the Kellogg Foundation through the Children’s Defense Fund-Southern Regional Office, works with childcare centers, Head Start, and public schools in 10 Mississippi counties to increase alignment and quality among early learning programs serving children ages 3 to 8.²¹ SPARK offers professional development and curriculum resources to participating programs and facilitates local coalitions that increase community support for early learning and ensure that partnering programs work together effectively.²² SPARK staff also work with parents and help link children and families to services as needed.²³

State quality enhancement programs. The Division of Early Childhood Care and Development at the Mississippi Department of Human Services sponsors technical assistance programs which enhance quality in childcare centers and link parents to services.²⁴ The largest of these programs is the Mississippi Childcare Resource and Referral Network which offers training to childcare providers, maintains a directory of childcare programs for the public, and operates regional parent resource centers; it is managed by the Mississippi State University Extension Service.

Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative (MLICCI). MLICCI is a grassroots advocacy organization dedicated to enhancing the quality of childcare available to poor children, increasing public funding for programs which provide access to child care, and improving the policies of state programs which support child care for low-income families.

Excel By 5. Excel By 5, an initiative sponsored by Chevron, certifies applicant communities as “child-friendly” when they meet standards for early learning and care service provision.²⁵

Mississippi Learning Lab (MLL). The Mississippi Learning Lab, a project of the Mississippi Center for Education Innovation, is a Kellogg-funded early childhood coordination effort.²⁶ MLL recently launched a public awareness campaign entitled “Learning Can’t Wait” to encourage Mississippians to support early childhood programs.²⁷

State Early Childhood Advisory Council (SECAC). A Governor’s council, the SECAC’s mission is to coordinate existing early childhood services—including, but not limited to, health, social, and education services—for low-income families with children ages 0-8. The SECAC was the author of Mississippi’s 2011 Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Fund application and has worked on a variety of early childhood issues since its convening in 2008.²⁸

Head Start

Of early care and education programs providing direct services to children, the general public is perhaps most familiar with Head Start, a federal program administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services which serves children ages three to five.²⁹ (A related program known as Early Head Start serves pregnant women, infants, and toddlers.)³⁰ Head Start has the largest market share of four-year-olds of any single program in Mississippi: 15,898 Mississippi four-year-olds (37.1%) were in Head Start in the 2009-2010 school year.³¹

While the program aims to improve the school readiness of children living in poverty, it was designed with a central emphasis on comprehensive “whole child” development rather than a principal focus on education like state-funded pre-K.³² This whole child approach embraces a wide spectrum of child development activities, including those “generally associated with the fields of health, social services, and education,” as well as a strong parental involvement component.³³ The founders of Head Start believed improved social development skills and health outcomes were just as important—if not more so—to school readiness as cognitive skills.³⁴

Over time, Head Start has sharpened and strengthened its expectations for the cognitive skills children should gain through the program. In 2000, the Office of Head Start published the first-ever Head Start Child Outcomes Framework as a guide for Head Start centers.³⁵ The *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007* granted the Framework a more prominent role in Head Start by requiring local centers to align their programs to these learning standards, although centers choose their own curriculum and assessments.³⁶ In 2010, the Framework was revised and re-named the Head Start Child Development and Learning Framework; this revision further clarified and improved learning standards for Head Start children.³⁷

Despite these moves, Head Start's whole child approach remains the program's essence.³⁸ Accordingly, some research suggests Head Start centers spend less time on academic skill-building than state-funded pre-K programs due to Head Start's strong focus on health and social development.³⁹ Head Start supporters have consistently opposed shifting the program to focus on academics, and efforts to move the program to the U.S. Department of Education by two Presidents have been met with strong resistance, even as both supporters and detractors have called for quality improvements to raise the academic outcomes of participants.⁴⁰

Differences in design aside, limited access is the biggest reason Head Start can never fill Mississippi's pre-K void. Head Start is means-tested, meaning that 90% of children in any given center must meet low-income guidelines in order to participate.⁴¹ In contrast, state-funded pre-K programs are often open to all, though some states target low-income students.⁴² Furthermore, because of limited federal dollars to support the program, Head Start cannot serve every eligible low-income child. As a result, in the absence of state-funded pre-K, many children of all income levels—poor or non-poor—are left without a high-quality public option for early education.

Local pre-K initiatives

In the last decade, growing numbers of public school districts have started using federal Title I dollars to provide four-year-old pre-K. In the 2009-2010 school year, more than 11% of Mississippi's four-year-olds were enrolled in public pre-K; most of these children were regular education children in Title I-funded programs.⁴³

Data provided by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) estimate that in 2009-2010 53 of 152 districts spent a total of \$13 million in district Title I funds on pre-K programs.⁴⁴ Amounts per district ranged from less than \$10,000 to more than \$3.1 million. These amounts, coupled with enrollment figures, indicate some districts have as few as one classroom while others have more than ten; the majority of districts appear to fund less than five classrooms with district-level Title I. Additionally, some schools may choose to use their school-level Title I allocations for pre-K. At publication, school-level Title I pre-K expenditures were not available from the MDE.

Title I pre-K most closely resembles how state-funded pre-K might be designed in terms of program elements such as teacher qualifications, learning standards, and curriculum and assessment. However, Title I pre-K suffers the same problem of reach that Head Start does: there is not enough Title I money to establish these programs for all children in Mississippi. Moreover, using Title I money for pre-K is a choice and not a requirement; many districts and schools may never voluntarily choose to fund pre-K this way. Lastly, since districts and schools are required to use the money to support student learning for low-income and at-risk children across the K-12 grade span, no one can use their entire Title I allocation for pre-K, even if they so desired.

Private childcare

Together, Head Start and Title I pre-K serve less than half of Mississippi's four-year-olds. The remaining four-year-old children in center-based programs are in private childcare centers,

including for-profit, non-profit, or faith-based centers. Unlike public school pre-K and Head Start, private childcare is unregulated from an educational standpoint.⁴⁵ The Mississippi State Department of Health licenses childcare centers but it only monitors the health and safety of children at centers, rather than the centers' adherence to educational standards.

Until recently, the state attempted to gather no information about center quality at all, let alone the educational quality of centers. As part of the Mississippi Education Reform Act of 2006, the legislature established the Quality Child Care Step System (QCCSS) with the stated purpose of "improv[ing] the quality of early care and education and after school programs" by rating licensed childcare centers along five dimensions: administrative policy, professional development, learning environment, parental involvement, and evaluation.⁴⁶ Centers can earn a score of 1-5 "stars," with a 5-star rating being the highest.⁴⁷ The Department of Human Services (DHS) was tasked with QCCSS administration and contracted with the Early Childhood Institute at Mississippi State University to operate the program.⁴⁸

The QCCSS is an important step in identifying subpar centers, though the rating system does not directly measure child learning.⁴⁹ Regrettably, the ratings of participating centers have not been released publicly, although DHS reports that it is working to release scores of individual QCCSS participants on a new website.⁵⁰ According to information in the state's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Fund proposal, most rated centers scored below a 3 with a plurality scoring a 1, the lowest score.⁵¹ These results indicate that the private childcare market does not have the capacity to serve as a pre-K substitute without significant quality improvements.

The collaborative pre-K solution

Considering current early education opportunities in Mississippi, too many of our children will enter school without essential skills. Mississippi First believes the solution is a collaborative delivery model for pre-K, which

the second half of this brief explains.

We propose this idea knowing that a version of the concept has existed quietly in state law since 2007 when the legislature established a fund for voluntary collaborative pre-K efforts. Money for this fund was never appropriated and the conversation about collaborative pre-K efforts stagnated. Renewed interest in pre-K from political leaders, including 2011 gubernatorial candidates, and high-profile efforts to improve childcare quality show that the time is right to publicly and fully discuss a robust and rigorous collaborative delivery model.

Better Together

A smartly designed collaborative delivery model could overcome many of the obstacles that face a state-funded program offered exclusively through public schools. Nearly all states with pre-K programs utilize collaborative models in order to provide or expand access to high-quality pre-K.⁵² In fact, according to Pre-K Now, approximately 30% of children in state-funded pre-K programs are in collaborative settings outside of public schools.⁵³

What is a collaborative delivery model?

A collaborative delivery model is a method of providing pre-Kindergarten services to four-year-olds that incorporates all available providers into one, state-funded system. These providers may include public schools, private childcare centers, and Head Start. In collaborative systems, states set program standards, operate a process to approve providers, and monitor providers' adherence to the standards. State collaborative systems may also require coordination of services at a local level, such as within a school district or county. Funding flows directly from the state to approved providers on a per-pupil basis or may be distributed through an intermediary such as a school district or local pre-K council.

Benefits to stakeholders

Collaborative models offer benefits to a variety of stakeholders. Opponents' foremost fear of state pre-K is that it may force current providers—particularly private childcare centers—out of the four-year-old market. Some center owners in Mississippi claim that the 1982 advent of public Kindergarten had a deleterious effect on their businesses and that any further expansion of the K-12 system would be fatal to them. Many legislators supportive of early education but attuned to these stakeholders' concerns have been leery of championing state-funded pre-K.

Through collaboration, childcare centers would no longer have a financial interest in viewing state pre-K as dangerous competition. In fact, private childcare centers in other states have recognized many benefits to collaborating with their states' pre-K programs, such as:

- Access to better curricular materials, professional development, and social services for special populations;
- Additional income from larger enrollments and state support; and
- Improvements in program and teacher quality.⁵⁴

Head Start centers also stand to gain as Mississippi does not currently invest in their programs in contrast to other states. With state support, Head Start centers could expand enrollment, lengthen the program day, and improve teacher quality.

Collaborative delivery models present opportunities for public schools as well. Since a collaborative model will unify the currently fractured system, public schools will have greater direct knowledge of the needs and early experiences of children entering school.⁵⁵

Collaboration also increases trust and goodwill between school districts and community-based providers.⁵⁶ Moreover, public schools avoid the costs of building new pre-K facilities because partners already have the space for programs.⁵⁷

Finally, collaborative delivery models have tremendous benefits for participating children and families. Most importantly, children involved in a high-quality pre-K program will be

better prepared to succeed in Kindergarten. With more providers offering high-quality services, parents win not only *access* to high-quality programs but also a great deal of *choice* in determining where to send their child for pre-K. Working families in particular benefit from collaborative models. Two-thirds of preschool children with working mothers need full-time, full-year care,⁵⁸ yet some programs including public school pre-K or Head Start may not offer full-day or full-year services, requiring parents to arrange for wraparound childcare or to reduce their working hours to care for their children. Collaboration with private providers who offer full-day, full-year childcare allows more parents to choose quality pre-K without needing to disrupt their work day.⁵⁹

Further benefits to rural communities

Collaborative models effectively and economically serve impressive percentages of geographically dispersed children, making collaboration particularly well-suited for rural areas which are more likely to suffer from a “marked shortage of high-quality pre-K programs.”⁶⁰ Offering pre-K through a variety of providers enables parents to keep their children closer to home, reducing the cost and burden of transportation to far-flung public school classrooms.⁶¹ Furthermore, collaborative delivery models are more cost-effective, an especially important consideration in rural areas due to their relative poverty. Resource sharing in a collaborative model not only saves the state money by reducing the need for new pre-K facilities, it also stretches investment further by enabling existing centers to meet the quality benchmarks of a pre-K program, thus increasing high-quality pre-K availability at a lower cost.

Reaping the rewards of collaboration

In order to achieve these benefits, Mississippi must carefully design its policies. The only positive aspect to being “last in line” in developing state pre-K is that Mississippi can learn from other states with successful models. In the next section, we profile three states that offer models and discuss the elements critical to their success.

Models of Success

Georgia, Oklahoma, and West Virginia, three states with large rural populations, boast successful collaborative delivery pre-K programs. Though the three states' programs have some important differences, the states share key features in the areas of program quality, accessibility and affordability, and monitoring and oversight that Mississippi should emulate.

Program quality

Each year, the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) ranks the quality of state pre-K programs based on ten research-based benchmarks crucial to program effectiveness. These benchmarks are

1. Comprehensive learning standards,
2. Teacher degree (a minimum of a B.A.),
3. Teacher training in early childhood education,
4. Assistant teacher degree (a Child Development Associate credential or equivalent),
5. Teacher in-service (at least 15 hours of

- professional development annually),
6. Maximum class size of 20,
7. Staff-child ratio of 1:10 or better,
8. Screening/referral and support services,
9. Meals (at least 1 per day), and
10. Monitoring (annual site visits to every participating classroom).

Georgia, Oklahoma, and West Virginia earned NIEER scores of 9, 9, and 8, respectively (see Figure 1) in 2010. Below, we highlight how our three example states are addressing two key issues in program quality.

Teacher qualifications

Of all the NIEER benchmarks, the most important relate to teacher quality, generally measured by the credentials held by the lead teacher. Pre-K children taught by teachers with a bachelor's degree and specialized training (i.e., a major or a minor) in early childhood education experience the most learning gains.⁶² If Mississippi is to adopt a truly high-quality program, requiring these two qualifications is essential, no matter how challenging it would initially be to staff classrooms.

Across the country, only half of states with a pre-K program require every lead teacher in a

Figure 1. NIEER Ratings of Example States

NIEER	Georgia	Oklahoma	West Virginia
1. Comprehensive early learning standards	✓	✓	✓
2. Teacher degree (B.A.)		✓	
3. Teacher training in early childhood education	✓	✓	✓
4. Assistant teacher degree (C.D.A.)	✓		
5. Teacher in-service (professional development)	✓	✓	✓
6. Maximum class size (20 or lower)	✓	✓	✓
7. Staff-child ratio (1:10 or better)	✓	✓	✓
8. Screening/referral and support services	✓	✓	✓
9. Meals (1 per day, at least)	✓	✓	✓
10. Monitoring (site visits)	✓	✓	✓

Source: National Institute of Early Education Research. The 2010 State Pre-School Yearbook.

pre-K classroom to hold a bachelor's degree *and* have specialized training in early childhood education, such as a college major in the field or a state teacher certification in early childhood education.⁶³ Of our three example states, Oklahoma alone required these two credentials for every pre-K teacher in 2009-2010, but both West Virginia and Georgia are transitioning to these requirements for all lead teachers.

West Virginia has required public school pre-K teachers to hold both a B.A. and specialized training in early childhood education since the state's pre-K program began. At that time, though, the education and training levels of staff in community collaborative partners such as private childcare and Head Start were rarely at the level of public school staff. As a compromise, the state permits current teaching staff in community partners' centers to hold an "alternative certification" if the staff member has an A.A. and at least 18 hours of specialized training (a course concentration in early childhood education, child development, or a related field).⁶⁴ At the end of the 2012-2013 school year, any staff member in a community setting holding this alternative certification can remain in the system; all teachers newly hired in 2013 in any setting must hold a B.A. and specialized training.⁶⁵

In the 2009-2010 school year, Georgia only required teachers to have at least an A.A. and specialized training in early childhood education, which Georgia defined as a relevant degree and state certification in early childhood education or a Montessori diploma.⁶⁶ Beginning in 2010-2011, all teachers in Georgia are required to hold a B.A. in early childhood education; teachers not meeting this standard at the end of the 2009-2010 school year had to apply for a waiver, and all newly hired teachers, including waived teachers who stop work or move to a new position, will be required to meet the standard without exception.⁶⁷

Learning standards

To facilitate great learning, teachers need high-quality, developmentally appropriate learning standards that are linked to K-12

education standards. NIEER requires that a state have "comprehensive" learning standards, which they define as covering five domains:

- **Physical well-being and motor development:** a child's "physical development," "physical abilities," and "the conditions under which development takes place;"
- **Social/emotional development:** a child's "self-concept," "ability to express their own feelings and manifest sensitivity and empathy to the feelings of others," and "ability to form and sustain social relationships with adults and friends;"
- **Approaches to learning:** "the inclinations, dispositions, or styles rather than skills that reflect the myriad ways that children become involved in learning and develop their inclinations to pursue it;"
- **Language development:** a child's "acquisition of linguistic forms and procedures, and social rules and customs for acts of expression and interpretation;" and
- **Cognition and general knowledge:** a child's "grasp of physical, logico-mathematical, and social-conventional knowledge."⁶⁸

The learning guidelines of each of the example states cover these five domains.⁶⁹ Furthermore, the example states require all participating centers in the pre-K program to use the state guidelines.⁷⁰



BRIGHT IDEA: The 10 NIEER

benchmarks are widely accepted markers of quality that are achievable for rural states and should be incorporated into any pre-K program.

Access and affordability

All three programs earn top marks in access and affordability. In 2010, NIEER ranked Oklahoma, West Virginia, and Georgia first, third, and fourth, respectively, in accessibility.⁷¹

The Oklahoma Early Childhood Four-Year-Old Program, the oldest of the three, has expanded accessibility since its inception in 1980. For the past eight years, Oklahoma has served the highest percentage of four-year-olds in the

country; the program is now open to all four-year-olds in 98% of school districts and served an impressive 71% of Oklahoma’s four-year-olds in 2010.⁷²

Though their programs are far newer, West Virginia and Georgia have used collaborative delivery to scale-up rapidly. 100% of counties in each state offer the program.⁷³ In 2010, each state served approximately 55% of four-year-olds.⁷⁴

Furthermore, all three states’ programs are open to all children regardless of income,⁷⁵ and since the states combine state and federal funding sources, the programs are also free to children and their families.⁷⁶



BRIGHT IDEA: Although accessibility can take time to achieve, a state-funded pre-K program should be available to every child wishing to participate, regardless of income, and should also be free to families if possible.

Monitoring and oversight

All of our example states have developed robust monitoring and oversight procedures through the state agency designated to administer the pre-K program. Each state administers its program through a different agency and has tailored oversight to meet program needs. Nevertheless, commonalities exist. For example, regardless of the designated agency, state pre-K offices serve the same function: to facilitate providers’ compliance with state standards in order to maintain consistent and high program quality statewide. All of the example states also meet NIEER’s recommendation that the monitoring agency conduct annual site visits to participating centers. This section briefly describes the ways each of the example states provide monitoring and oversight.

Oklahoma

In choosing to operate its pre-K program through the Oklahoma Department of Education (ODE), the Sooner State has the most common structure for monitoring and oversight.⁷⁷ Regular site visits from ODE staff

determine fulfillment of quality standards outlined by the State Board of Education. Evaluators review child learning, program facilities, safety procedures, and program records.⁷⁸ Oklahoma issues an annual accreditation report for each pre-K site.⁷⁹

Georgia

Georgia established a new agency called the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) to oversee all state programs for children ages zero to five, including the state’s pre-K program. DECAL employs “staff consultants” to work with providers year-round. These staff members conduct announced and unannounced on-site monitoring visits and implement the state’s Program Quality Assessment. Staff consultants’ visits are more technical assistance-oriented than strictly for accountability purposes,⁸⁰ but the agency annually provides data generated from the Program Quality Assessment to the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement for the generation of “report cards” for each pre-K site.⁸¹

West Virginia

West Virginia has the most unique pre-K governance structure of our three examples. A state advisory council known as the “Pre-K Steering Team” is responsible for oversight of the West Virginia program. This team is comprised of representatives from the Department of Health and Human Resources, the Department of Education, and the Head Start Collaboration Office and completes on-site audits which include reviewing classroom observations and interviewing parents, teachers, and other administrators to determine if the state standards have been met.⁸² Although West Virginia does not currently have a “report card” system, it is designing an annual report system.



BRIGHT IDEA: Site visits and a transparent reporting system ensure that participating programs are providing high-quality pre-K.

Important Choices

Differences among the states' models reflect efforts to design a pre-K program that works within each state's context. Below, we provide a description of each state's model. We also describe how choices about the type of collaboration allowed in each state's program leads to differences in the way state funding is allocated to participating programs.

Types of collaboration

Among states with collaborative delivery models, "collaboration" can mean very different levels of interaction between public schools and other providers. At one end of the spectrum is Georgia, which neither requires nor facilitates any interaction between public schools and other providers in order for either to participate in the program. Rather, eligible providers, regardless of type, apply directly to DECAL for the right to participate in the

program. In addition to public schools, Georgia allows Head Start centers, private childcare facilities, faith-based centers, military facilities, and colleges and universities to participate—so long as the specific provider can meet state standards.⁸³ As a result, a 2005 report found that Georgia was one of nine states in which more private centers participate in the state program than public schools.⁸⁴

In the middle of the spectrum is Oklahoma. Although Oklahoma encourages collaboration between public schools and other providers, it places the decision about whether to collaborate in the hands of the local public school district which can choose to partner with other providers or act as the exclusive provider of state-funded services in their district.

Districts are empowered to make this choice independently of other providers or the public:⁸⁵ if others wish to participate in the state system, their only option is to persuade public schools to collaborate. Districts consider factors such as available space within the public schools, demand for quality pre-K in the area, and the number of available teachers before deciding whether to partner.⁸⁶ Partners can include federal Head Start centers, faith-based centers, tribal nation programs, or assisted living facilities.⁸⁷ By far, most Oklahoma collaborations occur with stand-alone Head Start centers. In 2010-2011, 39% of Oklahoma districts reported collaborating with an external partner to provide pre-K services.⁸⁸

Collaboration most often occurs in rural districts or large communities with a high number of working families.⁸⁹

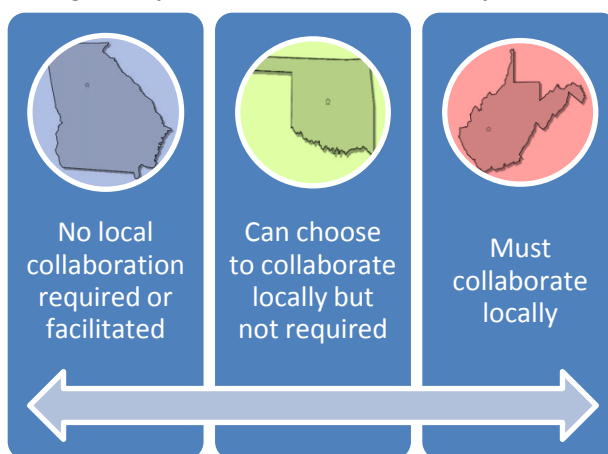
West Virginia is at the opposite end of the spectrum. To participate in the state program, both public schools and other providers are required to collaborate locally. By law, 50% of pre-K services in each county

in West Virginia must be offered by community-based providers, in accordance with a county plan.⁹⁰ This plan, which must be approved by the state's Pre-K Steering Team on an annual basis, describes how the county will implement high-quality pre-K.⁹¹ A local county collaboration "council" writes the plan. The composition of the council is dictated by statute, although it can be expanded to include additional service providers.

Funding mechanisms

Our three example states employ different methods of granting money to pre-K providers, driven by the state's collaborative delivery model.

Figure 2. Spectrum of Collaborative Delivery Models



Because Georgia neither requires nor facilitates local interaction of providers, individual programs are granted money directly based on a funding formula that accounts for teacher credentials, number of students enrolled, and whether the program is in a metropolitan area.⁹² Classrooms are also eligible for a one-time, start-up grant of \$8,000 to cover costs of approved equipment, supplies, and materials.⁹³

In Oklahoma, state dollars are allocated exclusively to school districts based on enrollment numbers and a formula which accounts for student characteristics (individualized education plan status and poverty) as well as program characteristics (the length of the pre-K day, teacher qualifications and years of experience, and district size).⁹⁴ Districts may then choose to subcontract with approved external providers.⁹⁵ “Subcontracting” sometimes takes the form of a much closer collaboration than mere outsourcing: some public schools hire teachers to place in community preschool classrooms.⁹⁶ These teachers, who remain public employees, can teach on-site with the community provider for a half- or full-day, depending on the school district’s program.⁹⁷ In this way, the school district is assured of the teacher’s qualifications while the community provider does not have to spend money to hire a new full-time staff person with the appropriate credentials.⁹⁸ Oklahoma districts with this practice also hire a “collaboration principal” to oversee teachers placed in partner settings.⁹⁹


West Virginia represents yet a third option: the West Virginia Department of Education provides money to the school district which serves as the fiscal agent of its county collaboration council.¹⁰⁰ In contrast to Oklahoma’s model, the money is not the school district’s to do with as it pleases. Rather, the school district must distribute the money based on the council’s collaborative county plan.¹⁰¹ Local collaboration councils must have an approved annual plan before the state will disburse money.¹⁰²

A Pre-K Proposal

Next, we present a collaborative delivery pre-K proposal for Mississippi. This proposal takes into account program components from all three of our example states and Mississippi’s current context. While many aspects of this proposal will need to be debated and sharpened in the coming months, we believe the idea set forth here presents a workable framework for a state-wide pre-K program in Mississippi.

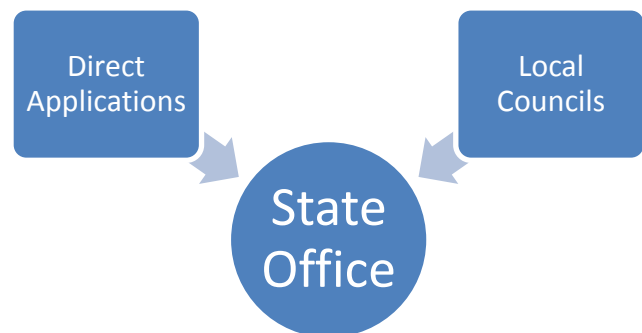
Collaborative model

Our collaborative model begins with a simple premise: provide four-year-olds with high-quality pre-K wherever they are, whether in public school, center-based childcare, or Head Start. Therefore, we propose a collaborative delivery model with two delivery methods: 1) contracting directly with non-school providers who can meet state standards, as in Georgia’s model, and 2) funding collaborative councils led by public schools which must collaborate with private providers as in West Virginia’s model. This second method also borrows Oklahoma’s practice of placing of public school teachers in partner settings with oversight from another school district employee.



RECOMMENDATION: Allow eligible providers two methods of participation in the pre-K program: a direct application method and a collaborative council method.

Figure 3. Governance of the proposed Collaborative Model



Method 1—Direct applications

Contracting directly with independent providers makes sense for states with high-capacity private providers or providers who could develop the necessary capacity quickly with state investment. In Mississippi, especially in rural communities, private providers who serve low-income children often find meeting basic quality standards a struggle. Even providers catering to middle- and high-income children may find meeting new, rigorous program standards daunting. As a result, the number of providers able to qualify unaided may be very small. Nonetheless, we believe Mississippi should keep this option open for high-capacity providers (such as university centers, larger faith-based centers, and high-quality Head Start centers). While these providers may voluntarily participate in local Collaborative Councils, they would not be reliant on them for funding or other resources.

Method 2— Collaborative Councils

Blending Oklahoma’s collaboration model with the West Virginia council-driven collaboration model may be the best strategy for many Mississippi communities. The following elements will make this collaborative model structured, substantive, and successful.

Lead Partner. At the center of this method is the Lead Partner, a public school district that has the instructional expertise and operational capacity to manage the programmatic aspects of the collaboration. These include employing Lead Teachers, facilitating a Professional Learning Community, and leading the local Collaborative Council. The Lead Partner must operate model pre-K classrooms which implement best practices in pre-K instruction

and serve as a learning laboratory for teachers. The Lead Partner establishes a curriculum and assessments that align with state standards. The Lead Partner also guarantees the curriculum and assessments are used uniformly across the Collaborative.

Partner Providers. Connected to the Lead Partner are Partner Providers, including Head Start, church-based centers, and private childcare. Partner Providers give the Lead Partner access to the children in their centers and space in their facilities for instruction. Partner Providers also allow their staff to work as assistants to the Lead Teachers who teach the pre-K curriculum.

Collaborative Council.

A key structure of this method is the local Collaborative Council composed of the Lead Partner, the Partner Providers, and other partner organizations central to the collaborative, such as evaluators or human services providers. This Council enables its members to manage relationships, share information and practices, discuss policies

and implementation, and review program evaluation data.

Lead Teachers. The linchpins of this method are the Lead Teachers who travel to Partner Providers each day to deliver instruction. Since Lead Teachers will be employees of the local school district, they must be state certified in early childhood education. Because of their close connection to the K-12 system, Lead Teachers play a liaison role in easing the students’ transition to public Kindergarten from private childcare. They also play an important role in connecting students and families to social services when the need arises.

Professional Learning Community. Facilitated by a Master Teacher employed by the Lead

Figure 4. The Collaborative Council Method



Partner, the Professional Learning Community (PLC) will provide job-embedded professional development and foster staff collaboration. Through the PLC, the Master Teacher will coach Lead Teachers one-on-one as well as facilitate peer learning. The PLC will also enable Lead Teachers to design lessons together, engage in group problem-solving, and share materials and practices. This collaboration will reduce isolation of in-field teachers in very rural areas. Lead Teachers will have scheduled time to participate in the PLC.

Preliminary capacity building

The power of collaborative delivery is that it helps improve and equalize the educational quality of services offered by all participating providers, but to participate in the Collaborative Council method, some childcare providers may need 12-to-18 months of capacity building in order to “be of sufficient quality to facilitate effective program implementation,” as suggested by Title I pre-K guidance. To address this need, Mississippi should set a baseline level of quality necessary to enter the collaboration. This will ensure the best chance for dollars to be used effectively upon receipt. This baseline level of quality does not refer to educational quality, since the collaboration will offer educational expertise and resources. Rather, this baseline level should establish that centers provide adequate and safe care, are financially stable, and have the organizational leadership and capacity to cooperate fully and effectively with the collaboration’s lead partner.

We believe this quality level should be measured using standardized criteria. One potential measurement might be a provider’s rating on Mississippi’s Quality Child Care Step System which would also ensure that prospective participating centers are licensed. Centers not meeting this quality baseline should participate in a state-approved capacity building program designed to help centers improve their quality. Programs such as Mississippi Building Blocks or SPARK are poised to provide this type of service. This explicit role for current initiatives would nicely connect many of

Mississippi’s early learning improvement programs into a cohesive system of services for both providers and families.



RECOMMENDATION: Set a quality baseline for participation using a standardized measure and utilize existing capacity building programs to help low-quality centers reach the baseline.

State office

To establish and facilitate the program, including a state-funded pilot, we propose a state office for early learning to be housed in the Mississippi Department of Education. Like other states’ pre-K offices, Mississippi’s office would accept applications for participation in the state program, monitor adherence to program standards, provide technical assistance, and report to the public the effectiveness of the program. Each of these responsibilities is incredibly important to a high-quality system.

First, the state office must design a thorough and rigorous application. The process should begin with a paper application and progress to a site visit once initial standards are met. The two pathways we have described will require slightly different processes. We recommend that as part of the application, the office should require applicants to demonstrate enough capacity to implement the program as designed, agree to a series of assurances regarding program standards, and demonstrate financial stability and competence.

Secondly, the state office must play a critical role in ensuring strong oversight for both the pilot program and the eventual statewide program. Part of this job must involve providing training and technical assistance to participating providers. Furthermore, we recommend the office publish an annual report on the state of the program as well as maintain an updated website for the public’s benefit as part of its oversight duties. The advent of pre-K, like Kindergarten before it, will be a watershed moment in Mississippi history. Not only will the public be curious about the status of the

program, the public’s knowledge and understanding of the pilot are critical to the future support they will give to the program. As the entity charged with oversight, the state office must be accountable to the public.

We recommend this state office to be housed at the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE). Situating this program within the MDE has many benefits, not the least of which is that the office could take advantage of the existing expertise of MDE staff in areas such as teacher quality, curriculum and instruction, special education, and assessment. This placement would also put Mississippi in line with most states, which give responsibility for the program to the state agency charged with overseeing public education.¹⁰³



RECOMMENDATION: Establish a new state office for pre-Kindergarten in the Mississippi Department of Education.

Program standards

Program standards are a very important component of the collaborative delivery system. Since a collaborative system brings all players to the table, different actors will bring very different standards from their existing services. Childcare centers, for example, are primarily concerned with licensure rules and, to some extent, the standards given by the QCCSS. Head Start centers are responsible for meeting the Head Start Performance Standards written into federal law. Title I-funded pre-K classrooms must follow Title I guidance.

The state pre-K program should hold the highest standards. As a nationally recognized measure, the NIEER standards should serve as the framework for the Mississippi program standards which would then be maintained by the state pre-K office.



RECOMMENDATION: Adopt the 10 NIEER standards as a framework for Mississippi’s program standards.

Pilot

As with any major investment, the state should conduct a pilot program before planning for statewide implementation. This pilot should include participants using both delivery methods as well as participants needing preliminary capacity building. The pilot should also balance county and municipal districts as lead partners and include both private childcare and Head Start. It must serve enough children for results to detect statistical significance and must feature a carefully designed evaluation with longitudinal follow-up to present a compelling body of evidence that the program works. During the pilot, the state pre-K office should also be tasked with planning for statewide scalability, should the program be fully funded by the legislature.



RECOMMENDATION: Conduct a pilot program with Mississippi school districts and a diverse group of partner providers.

Financing Pre-K

Funding has always been an obstacle to instituting a state pre-K program in Mississippi. Adequately supporting a large-scale pre-K program with state funds will require Mississippi to appropriate millions of dollars annually to the program. Almost certainly, Mississippi would need to identify a new source of income for this purpose. We plan to write an entire issue brief just on this topic. However, we would be remiss not to introduce some ideas that have worked in other states.

Generally, other states use two main methods of paying for pre-K: special revenue sources or their general funds. Additionally, states may also require a local match in order to supplement state funding sources. Each of these methods is described below.

Special revenue sources

Earmarks from gaming and lotteries are the best known special revenue sources for funding pre-K. Georgia, Tennessee, and North Carolina use proceeds from their state lottery systems to fund pre-K.¹⁰⁴ Missouri uses a tax on gaming to support pre-K.¹⁰⁵ Using these revenues allows for a large, initial investment without new general taxes. These funds also are dedicated solely to PK-12 and do not require annual legislative approval where competition with other programs is present. However, using gaming revenues as an income stream tends to be unstable over time as revenues are subject to economic fluctuations and public opinion may not always favor this source of funding.¹⁰⁶ Gaming revenues are also regressive, meaning that they target lower-income customers.

Increases in sin taxes on items like cigarettes, beer, or liquor have also been used. Arkansas increased taxes on sales of packaged beer in order to fund its program.¹⁰⁷ Proponents of sin taxes see them as a way to discourage less socially desirable behavior and create a source of funding that is not tied to legislative renewal. However, like gaming revenues, many sin taxes are regressive. Also, if the theory of discouragement works correctly, funding will eventually decrease as more customers are deterred from purchasing the products, and supplemental funding will need to be found.

General Fund

The second method of paying for pre-K—state general appropriations—is employed by both Oklahoma and West Virginia. In fact, all states with pre-K programs except Georgia, Missouri, and South Dakota use funding from some form of state general revenue, which is comprised of taxes levied on sales and income.¹⁰⁸ However, using a state’s general fund as the sole source of pre-K financing makes programs subject to flat or minimally increasing allocations, which ultimately contributes to problems of access and quality, especially when the pre-K program is not adequately funded at the outset.¹⁰⁹

Other sources

In addition to special revenue sources and general appropriations, some states require local communities to share the cost of the state pre-K program. According to NIEER, at least 11 states require a local match in order to draw down state funds.¹¹⁰ This match requirement varies by state and can also vary by the locality’s ability to contribute.¹¹¹ Depending on the state, match requirements can be fulfilled using local property taxes or in-kind resources such as facilities, utilities, or staffing.¹¹²

Initial recommendations


As we stated above, we intend to publish an entire issue brief on funding pre-K in Mississippi. Here, we would like to take the opportunity to present a few initial recommendations for moving forward with pre-K funding issues.

Pilot funding sources

Just as Mississippi should implement a pilot program to study the model proposed, Mississippi should also pilot funding sources for the program. Given the variety of funding sources other states have used, Mississippi could consider a combination of these sources to fund a pilot and then decide whether to continue all sources or rely on only one. We believe Mississippi should consider funding a pilot program by combining a new sin tax (such as a tax on packaged beer) and a local contribution requirement (which could be met by dedicating district-level Title I dollars to pre-K). Over time, pre-K should become part of the Mississippi Adequate Education Program, the state education funding formula, rather than a special program that can be eliminated on a whim. Revenue sources which support the pre-K pilot can be re-directed to the general fund to help support the state’s pre-K-12 education system.


Importantly, Mississippi does not have to fund full implementation of the program immediately. A smarter course of action may be to spread out implementation over a period of years, as did West Virginia with its ten-year implementation timeline, in order to minimize the impact of the program to the state budget

in any one year.¹¹³ This phase-in approach also gives the program the opportunity to improve its design as it scales.

 **RECOMMENDATION:** Pilot funding sources for pre-K before making a decision about long-term financing. Consider a phased-in approach to implementation of the program statewide.

Cost-benefit analysis


Mississippi is in dire need of an updated cost-benefit analysis for pre-Kindergarten. Many advocates continue to cite a 2002 report sponsored by the Entergy Foundation which concluded that for every dollar Mississippi invests in pre-Kindergarten, the state would receive a \$6.90 return.¹¹⁴ Although this report was an important milestone in our state's journey towards overcoming questions of *why* Mississippi should invest in pre-K, the authors used national Head Start expenditures to calculate the costs that Mississippi would incur in implementing a pre-K program instead of the more comparable figures of a state-funded pre-K program such as Oklahoma's. Moreover, the report is now nine years old. At the very least, the numbers should be updated to 2011 dollars, but we believe a new report with new calculations based on actual Title I pre-K expenditures from a Mississippi school district would be best.

 **RECOMMENDATION:** Complete a new cost-benefit analysis for pre-K in Mississippi using actual expenditures for Title I pre-K programs in Mississippi.

Credible fiscal note

Every state-funded policy proposal needs a credible fiscal note, or an estimate of the costs of the program. Mississippi needs a pre-K fiscal note to give policymakers and the public a realistic cost estimate of 1) a pre-K pilot program using the model that we have recommended and 2) the expansion of the pilot to a statewide endeavor. Only with a viable

proposal on the table will anyone worthy of this task find it productive—or possible—to create such a fiscal note. We believe we have outlined such a proposal and will be searching for the right partner to help us develop a fiscal note to be published with our second issue brief on pre-K funding options.

 **RECOMMENDATION:** Prepare a fiscal note to quantify the cost of both a pilot program and a fully funded statewide program.

The Starting Line

Mississippi has already taken tentative steps toward a state-supported, pre-K program based on a collaborative model. With a little focused effort, Mississippi could set the stage for a pilot pre-K program to begin as early as Fall 2012. Here, we outline Mississippi's starting point in a few key areas and how these factors could affect how quickly Mississippi may get a pilot off the ground.

State law

In 2007, the Mississippi Legislature established the Early Learning Collaborative Fund to provide grants to collaborations among public school districts, private childcare centers, and Head Start agencies. These local collaborations were charged with designing and implementing "mutually agreeable" early education service delivery models. Regulations governing the distribution of funds, including the educational standards of collaborative programs, were to be written by a new state-level early childhood council. Unfortunately, the legislature has never appropriated money for the Collaborative Fund, so the regulations were never completed or distributed to the public, although the council was created by the *Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007*, as discussed previously. With a new legislature in January 2012, Mississippi has a prime opportunity to make needed changes to the law to align it to our recommendations. If

the legislature acts quickly, a Fall 2012 implementation timeline will become feasible.



GREEN LIGHT: Amendments to the existing law could easily provide statutory authority to begin the pre-K pilot that we have outlined as early as Fall 2012.

Executive agency support

Currently, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) has neither an office nor a single staff member dedicated solely to pre-K learning. Furthermore, the Legislature has given the MDE no mandate or funding to work in the pre-K space and, in fact, has cut the Department of Education's operating budget in an era of massive budget shortfalls for schools. These circumstances have prevented the MDE from playing a large a role in pre-K advocacy, although the MDE's Office of Federal Programs encourages school districts to use Title I funds for pre-K.



YELLOW LIGHT: Mississippi would be creating a pre-K office from the bottom up.

Learning standards

In November 2011, the State Board of Education began the process of adopting Common Core-aligned early learning standards. The process to create these standards, which was facilitated by the Early Childhood Institute with funding from the Mississippi Department of Education, engaged early learning practitioners from around the state to re-write Mississippi's previous Early Learning Guidelines relating to math and literacy in order to improve them and align them to the Common Core. The new Early Learning Standards for Classrooms Serving Four-Year-Old Children were approved by the State Board in January 2012. These standards will be available for use by public school pre-K programs, accredited non-public schools with pre-K programs, and all early learning providers participating in the Quality Child Care Step System.



GREEN LIGHT: Aligning the Early Learning Guidelines for four-year-olds with the Common Core readies them for a pre-K pilot in Mississippi to launch in Fall 2012.

Current pre-K efforts

On-going efforts to provide pre-K by public schools present an important advantage. Several Title I pre-K programs are ripe for a collaborative pilot since they have been working in partnership with local Head Start affiliates or sharing professional development opportunities with private childcare centers for some time. Meridian Public Schools, for example, signs an annual Memorandum of Understanding with local Head Start centers in order to coordinate enrollment dates so that Head Start can enroll eligible children before the school district begins its enrollment. Meridian shares professional development opportunities as well. The Emerson Family School in Starkville Public Schools hosts a monthly meeting of community providers to share best practices and foster cooperation across the sector. They have also completed grant initiatives leveraging the expertise of Emerson School staff to provide literacy training and one-on-one coaching to local childcare staff.

In some areas, foundation work has set the stage for a collaborative pre-K pilot. For several years, the Gilmore Foundation in Amory has taken on a Lead Partner role in Monroe County by actively funding and facilitating collaboration amongst public schools, Head Start, and private childcare centers in the county. Similarly, work by the Kellogg-funded SPARK project in several Delta counties has laid groundwork that could be useful in establishing collaborative delivery.



GREEN LIGHT: Several Mississippi communities have the right foundation for the collaborative model to succeed.

Forward...Finally

While there is still more work to be done before a pilot can move forward, we believe Mississippi can make pre-K a reality with a few key next steps:

1. **Pre-K Working Group:** Form a special Pre-K Working Group (PKWG) of practitioners, policymakers, and policy organizations to further sharpen the collaborative model proposal with the intention of proposing legislation and regulatory policies and procedures that form the basis of a pilot program. As many worthy task forces fail to produce actionable recommendations in a timely manner, the goals and the scope of work of the PKWG—to establish a pre-K pilot—must be crystal clear. Because the group’s work should span both legislative and regulatory functions, we believe the group could be credibly created by one of a variety of entities or persons such as the legislature, the governor or lieutenant governor, or the Mississippi Department of Education. A foundation interested in supporting the pilot may also create this working group. We further recommend that the group be advised by independent technical experts from states with leading pre-K programs and national organizations. These independent voices will help the PKWG see the forest rather than merely the individual perspective of each representative.
2. **Pre-K Financing Task Force:** Form a legislative task force to develop funding recommendations and to draft legislation to this end. While we envision the Pre-K Working Group to concern itself with the substance of how the program would work, we envision this task force to be narrowly focused on the question of funding. Since we intend to write a second brief on funding options which will include a fiscal

note on the implementation this program, it may seem redundant to charge a second task force with studying this same issue. We believe the benefits are two-fold: firstly, it is natural for people who have gone through a process of examining options, debating the consequences of each choice, and formulating a recommendation to be more likely to feel invested in seeing that idea succeed. Heavy lifts—like authorizing new revenue for a state-funded program—need champions and a committee process builds these champions organically. Secondly, we strongly believe this second task force should be established by the legislature and filled by legislators. Legislators are ultimately the only ones able to pick a course of action on pre-K financing and to follow-through with that decision.

Going for it

We submit this brief to policymakers and the public in the hopes that it will spur Mississippi to move beyond dialogue to action on pre-K. After all, “last in line” is the last place we want to be.

Special thanks

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Endnotes

¹ In 1994, Louisiana alone held the dubious distinction of last place in reading, and in 2005, New Mexico earned it in mathematics. Mississippi's scores on the 2011 4th grade reading and math tests are different to a statistically significant degree from scores before 2005 but are no different compared to 2007 or 2009: in other words, Mississippi's NAEP achievement hasn't moved in four years. Furthermore, while Mississippi's scale scores have usually increased in the last two decades, national scores have as well, meaning that even when our score increases are statistically significant, they are not enough for us to outpace our other bottom-of-the-barrel peers.

See the U.S. Department of Education, Institute for Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP State Profiles for trends and other state data: <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states/>.

² "Proficient" is an achievement standard set by NAEP to denote an adequate amount of mastery of a particular subject at a particular grade-level.

See U.S. Department of Education, Institute for Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment for Educational Progress. (2011). *Math, 2011 State Snapshot Report: Mississippi—Grade 4*. Retrieved November 2011 from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/stt2011/2012451MS4.pdf>.

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- ¹⁴ Poverty status is most strongly associated with reading preparation, most likely because poverty prohibits participation in pre-school (see Magnuson, K.A., & Waldfogel, J. Early Childhood Care and Education: Effects on Ethnic and Racial Gaps in School Readiness. *Future of Children, 15(1), 171*) or access to children's literature (children of parents in the highest quintile of income have three times as many books as children of parents in the lowest quintile; see Duncan, G., Ludwig, J., & Magnuson, K. A. (Fall 2007). Reducing Poverty through Preschool Interventions. *Future of Children, 17(2), 144*). However, it is the concerted effort to develop literacy skills in one's child—not a parent's income—that matters most.
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