

Research Notes

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Meeting the Demand for Early Childhood Teachers in Illinois Universal Pre-Kindergarten Efforts

Illinois recently enacted *Preschool for All*, an initiative to provide all 3- and 4-year olds with the opportunity for a high-quality early childhood education by 2011. To accomplish this goal, Illinois will need to serve approximately 10,000 additional preschool children in each of the next five years, largely in early childhood centers rather than schools. In anticipation of *Preschool for All*, the Illinois Education Research Council (IERC) received a grant from the National Institute for Early Education Research to examine whether the supply would be adequate to meet the demand for state certified early childhood teachers. Illinois is potentially well-placed to meet the increase in demand because it has had an early childhood state certification (Type 04) for instruction of birth to grade 3 for many years. In this study, IERC researchers examined both the pipeline for preparing certified early childhood teachers and the potential of a reserve pool of qualified teachers.

Research Design and Methodology

The IERC reports¹ are based on data from the national Integrated Postsecondary Data Analysis System and the state's Teacher Certification Information System and Teacher Service Record databases. The study identified a potential reserve pool of 5,400 qualified early childhood teachers who were not working in the Illinois public schools in 2002-03 and randomly selected 4,000 individuals to survey regarding their characteristics and the conditions under which they might be willing to teach in an early childhood center. The survey was administered using a website tool, followed by a mailing of the paper survey after a follow-up reminder. Usable surveys were returned from 1,664 individuals for a 46% response rate. The results from the sample were generalized to the potential reserve pool of 5,400 qualified early childhood teachers.

It is the salary not the setting that makes it hard to recruit certified teachers to Illinois early childhood centers.

Findings

Overall, if teachers' annualized salaries reflect their professional training, Illinois will be able to meet the demand of *Preschool for All* (PFA) for additional certified early childhood teachers through a combination of recruitment from the qualified reserve pool and the current production pipeline of new certificants. Chicago, however, is the exception to this finding. The study assumed a 25% local recruitment rate from the reserve pool of qualified early childhood teachers. While Chicago represents almost one quarter of the state's population, only 11% of the reserve pool resides in Chicago. Chicago would need to recruit 79% of the local reserve pool to meet the PFA demand for certified teachers.

Pipeline refers to the new teachers prepared each year in Illinois' institutions of higher education. The study found that while there are more than 2,600 students per year enrolled in early childhood programs, with more than half of them in Chicago institutions, the pipeline from enrollment to program completion is "quite leaky."

- Only 620 early childhood degrees (annual average of 467 bachelors and 153 masters) are awarded each year by Illinois institutions of higher education. However, the number of certificates awarded is increasing, reaching 1000 in 2005.
- Some higher education institutions include in their program statistics students who are enrolled in their institutions and have expressed an interest in an early childhood teacher preparation program.
- The discrepancy between the interest and graduation rates is likely due in part to the fact that admission to teacher preparation programs has become more stringent and now requires passing the state's Basic Skills test.

(over)

Pool refers to the 3,402 Type 04 certified teachers (who are not retired and who are not currently working in an early childhood center) that indicate they would consider working in an early childhood center setting under certain conditions.

- When asked to identify their top three incentives, items related to compensation (higher salaries; better pension and retirement benefits; and better health care) topped the list.
- Higher salaries trump all other incentives with 72% choosing salary within their top three choices.
- Regional differences exist as to the minimum salary required to attract individuals to take a full-year position in an early childhood center. While 45% of the total reserve pool said they required less than \$40,000, more than 80% of the Chicago reserve pool said they required more than \$40,000.

Policy Implications

The IERC reports provide important information regarding certified teacher supply and demand for Illinois policymakers implementing *Preschool for All* over the next five years.

Illinois should be able to meet the demand for additional early childhood teachers working in early childhood centers through a combination of recruitment from the qualified reserve pool and the production pipeline of newly certified teachers if teachers' salaries for full-year employment in an early childhood center become competitive with teaching opportunities in the local public schools and the program is phased in.

The new-teacher pipeline is leaky but robust.

- **Commentary:** The regional differences in public school teachers' salaries provides a rationale for why a salary under \$40,000 would attract the majority of qualified teachers from the reserve pool in southern Illinois but less than 20% of the qualified teachers from the reserve pool in Chicago. Even if early childhood centers provide comparable beginning salaries, it is unlikely that they will be able to achieve parity with the public schools in regards to health and retirement benefits or maintain parity in salaries over time.

Meeting the demand for qualified teachers in Chicago, where approximately one quarter of the eligible children but only 11% of the reserve pool reside, requires significant improvement of the pipeline.

- **Commentary:** Because of its proportionately smaller reserve pool, Chicago will be more reliant on the pipeline than other regions of the state. Chicago institutions of higher education that offer early childhood teacher preparation programs will need incentives to develop cohort models for practicing professionals, particularly for bi-lingual teaching staff, and to develop student supports that will move more students from "interest" to program completion. Chicago students will need incentives to complete their degrees in early childhood education. Past experience addressing other teacher shortage areas has shown that providing for student loan forgiveness and/or subsidizing tuition in a teacher preparation program are successful strategies for strengthening the pipeline.

The IERC model is based on an assumption of one certified teacher for every 40 children (two half-day classrooms of 20 children) when the staffing pattern at many early childhood centers is one certified teacher for every 20 children (one full-day classroom).

- **Commentary:** The pipeline of new certificants is likely to be more important across the state to meeting the demand for qualified teachers than anticipated. If even half of the proposed expansion is in centers with a staffing pattern providing for one certified teacher for each full-day classroom of 20 children, than the assumption that the reserve pool will be adequate to meet demand is questionable not only in Chicago but in every region of Illinois.

While the reserve pool will be an important element of meeting the demand for qualified early childhood teachers in *Preschool for All*, more research is needed to understand which strategies will improve the pipeline of newly certified early childhood teachers.

1. Klostermann, B. K., White, B. R., & Presley, J. B. (2006). *The Illinois early childhood teacher reserve pool study* (IERC 2006-4). Edwardsville, IL: Illinois Education Research Council. Presley, J. B., Klostermann, B. K., & White, B. R. (2006). *Pipelines and pools: Meeting the demand for early childhood teachers in Illinois* (IERC 2006-3). Edwardsville, IL: Illinois Education Research Council. .

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