

Research Notes

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Staffing and Stability in State-Funded Prekindergarten Programs

Policymakers interested in implementing universal preschool or expanding state-funded pre-K programs for at-risk children will find the recently released report *Inside the Pre-K Classroom: A Study of Staffing and Stability in State-Funded Prekindergarten Programs* most useful.¹ The report documents the current status of staff qualifications, compensation, turnover, and stability in state-funded prekindergarten programs in five states, identifying the conditions that promote a more skilled and stable early childhood workforce.

The study, conducted by the Center for the Child Care Workforce, found variations in staffing depending on whether pre-K programs were housed in publicly operated or privately operated settings. The following summarizes the key findings of the study as well implications and recommendations for policy and practice.

Finding 1: Teaching staff in publicly operated prekindergarten programs had higher educational qualifications than staff in privately operated programs.

All of the study sites—California, Chicago, Georgia, New York, and Texas—have set consistent educational requirements for teaching staff regardless of program auspice. The study found, however, that the actual level of education attained by teachers in publicly operated programs was significantly higher than that of teachers in the privately operated programs.

- In California, for example, teachers are required to have 24 units of college-level early childhood education courses and 16 general education units. The study revealed that 82% of teachers in the California publicly operated prekindergarten programs had earned at least an associate degree and 30% had earned at least a bachelor's degree. Only 8% of the teachers in privately operated programs had attained an associate degree.
- In Chicago, prekindergarten teachers are required to have a bachelor's degree and an early childhood teaching credential. The study found that while 99% of teachers in Chicago's publicly operated programs had attained at least a bachelor's degree, only 66% of teachers in Chicago's privately operated programs had met this requirement.

Finding 2: Teaching staff in publicly operated prekindergarten programs receive higher pay and better benefits than teaching staff in privately operated programs.

- In all study sites, prekindergarten teachers employed by public school districts received higher wages and better benefits than did prekindergarten teachers employed by community-based, privately operated programs.
- In general, teachers in privately operated prekindergarten programs receive wages comparable to that of assistant teachers in publicly operated prekindergarten programs.
- Public school pre-K teacher salary levels were comparable to salary levels of kindergarten teachers in all study sites except California. (The lower pre-K teacher salary in California reflects the lower pre-service educational requirements for pre-K teachers).
- In all study sites, higher levels of teacher educational attainment were associated with higher salaries.

Finding 3: There is greater teaching staff stability in publicly operated prekindergarten programs than in privately operated programs.

- In California, Georgia, and New York, the stability of teachers in prekindergarten programs operating in the public schools was comparable to the stability of the national K-12 teacher workforce (6%).
- In Chicago, turnover among public school prekindergarten teachers (20%) was significantly less than the turnover among prekindergarten teachers employed in privately operated prekindergarten programs (52%).

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Finding 4: Publicly operated and privately operated programs appear to be evolving into a two-tiered prekindergarten system.

- Privately operated, community-based programs tend to serve as training sites for newly qualified teachers to develop their skills before being employed in publicly operated programs.
 - The wage differential between privately operated and publicly operated prekindergarten programs has resulted in a labor shift of skilled prekindergarten staff from the private to the public sector.
 - In all five states, directors of privately operated prekindergarten programs cited inadequate state funding as the reason for lower teacher salaries and higher turnover in their programs.
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Finding 5: Prekindergarten programs, both publicly operated and privately operated, have had mixed success in integrating their teaching staff into existing service delivery systems.

- In public schools, the principal plays a critical role in determining whether pre-K teachers are given professional recognition from their K-12 colleagues. School principals who remove the best teachers from pre-K programs and reassign them to teach in higher grades reinforce the belief that teaching young children is of less value than teaching school-aged children.
 - Within privately operated programs, center directors play a critical role in determining whether pre-K staff are resented for having additional classroom resources and earning better wages or viewed as bringing additional resources to the program and contributing to the overall effectiveness of the team.
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Policy Implications and Recommendations

This CCW study found a marked disparity between the staffing and stability of publicly operated and privately operated prekindergarten programs in the participating states. This disparity is clearly evident in states that house pre-K programs both in public schools and community-based organizations. In general, pre-K programs housed in public schools have been able to maintain a stable, well-trained workforce. However, these programs have been less successful in meeting the needs of families for full-day, year-round services. Pre-K programs housed in community-based organizations have been better able to meet the needs of working families but have been less successful at recruiting and retaining highly skilled teaching staff. Both service sectors are needed to provide high-quality early care and education for young children.

The following policy recommendations will help reduce the disparities between the two sectors of care:

- Set equal standards for all settings within states' prekindergarten service delivery systems and provide sufficient resources for programs to implement them—particularly regarding the qualifications and compensation of teaching staff.
 - Integrate pre-K programs more fully into the larger public or private systems in which they operate.
 - Provide adequate training for directors of pre-K programs in privately operated settings.
 - Ensure appropriate access and support for teachers in meeting state pre-K training requirements.
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1. Bellm, D., Burton, A., Whitebook, M., Broatch, L., & Young, M. (2002). *Inside the pre-K classroom: A study of staffing and stability in state-funded prekindergarten programs*. Washington, DC: Center for the Child Care Workforce.
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