



Policy Brief

Early Learning

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Current and Emerging State Policy Trends in Early Childhood Education: A Review of Governors' 2006 State of the State Addresses

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Introduction

Over the past decade, investing in learning programs for young children has emerged as a central strategy in states' efforts to improve educational achievement and opportunity. This trend has been fueled by strong public support and a steady stream of research findings on the influence of the first few years of life on cognitive and emotional development, social adjustment, health and economic self-sufficiency.

Today, 41 states provide funding for preschool programs that collectively serve more than 800,000 of the nation's 3- and 4-year-olds.¹ States will spend an estimated \$3.5 billion this year on pre-kindergarten education, compared with just \$200 million in 1998.² In a small but growing number of states, such programs are being expanded to include not just disadvantaged children – the population they traditionally serve – but all kids, regardless of family income.

More and more states, too, are focusing on expanding access to and support for kindergarten, particularly full-day programs. Over a dozen states – most recently, South Dakota -- have passed legislation making kindergarten attendance mandatory.³

This paper looks at current and emerging trends in state early-learning policy through the prism of governors' 2006 State of the State addresses – nearly half of which included proposals relating to the availability, quality and/or structure of early learning programs. It provides a breakdown of these proposals – by topic and by state – and concludes with a brief review of three issues of growing concern and interest to policymakers: alignment, governance and quality rating systems.

What Are Governors Proposing for Early Education in 2006?

Kindergarten and Full-Day Kindergarten

In their 2006 State of the State addresses, six governors cited the potential impact of kindergarten, particularly full-day programs, on children's later school success.

Praising the state for increasing education spending by \$1.2 billion since 2002, **Pennsylvania** Governor Ed Rendell noted that full-day kindergarten is now available to more than half the eligible students in the state and more than 7,500 children are enrolled in state-funded pre-K programs. He went on to propose that \$50 million be added to the Education Accountability Block Grant to be used for a number of quality improvement activities – including the provision of additional full-day kindergarten slots.

Governor Mitch Daniels of **Indiana** promoted the Dollars to the Classroom program stating that “hundreds of millions of dollars” could go to programs like full-day kindergarten. In **Delaware**, efforts to implement full-day kindergarten across the state by 2008 were given a boost by Governor Ruth Ann Minner, who announced that her proposed budget would include money for the second phase of implementation. This phase expands funding for districts with available space as well as finances building costs for districts passing full-day kindergarten referenda last year.

Utah Governor Jon Huntsman Jr. proposed that a \$7 million voluntary full-day kindergarten program be implemented in Title 1 schools where many students are “struggling with the fundamentals of literacy and numeracy.” To make the education system in **Arizona** the “best it can be,” Governor Janet Napolitano called on the legislature to make voluntary full-day kindergarten available to “every parent who wants it for his or her children.” Governor Mike Rounds of **South Dakota** proposed a bill making kindergarten mandatory. (The measure has since been approved by the legislature and signed into law.)

Universal Pre-K

Governors in three states highlighted the importance of universal pre-K to the state's commitment to improving student achievement.

In reviewing the state's track record for supporting early education, Governor Rod Blagojevich of **Illinois** stated, “We have made early childhood education a priority and we have put our money where our mouth is. We've expanded funding for preschool by 50%, given 25,000 more 3- and 4-year-olds a chance to start school early, and Illinois is now ranked among the top three states in the nation for early childhood education.” In February, the governor presented his budget, in which he called for the creation of a universal preschool program for all 3- and 4-year-olds, making Illinois the only state in the nation to include 3-year-olds in its plan.

Citing progress made through the Strong Start initiative launched in 2005 to provide a coordinated system of early childhood education in **Iowa**, Governor Tom Vilsack called upon the General Assembly to ensure that every 4-year-old in the state has access to quality preschool this year. The governor proposed the creation of a stable long-term funding mechanism, similar to the K-12 funding formula, that would support universal voluntary access to quality preschool programs for 4-year-olds. The \$19.6 million increase to the initiative for FY 2007 includes \$15 million to build on the existing preschool system to increase access to quality preschool and \$3.8 million to create a childcare quality rating system.

Newly elected Governor Tim Kaine of **Virginia**, whose successful campaign included a plan for universal preschool, announced in his State of the State address that he had signed executive orders for the creation of the Start Strong Council, charged with developing consensus on how best to proceed with development and implementation of a universal preschool program for Virginia.

Expanded Access to and Support for Pre-K

Governors in 10 states called for increasing access to and/or funding for quality early learning programs. Proposals ranged from modest funding increases for existing programs to sweeping multimillion-dollar initiatives to establish early learning as a cornerstone of state education policy.

In setting an “agenda for strong schools,” by significantly raising the bar on expectations for students and teachers, **Michigan** Governor Jennifer Granholm promised even in tight budget times to increase the size of the state's program for four-year-olds. Governor Ed Rendell of **Pennsylvania** called for additional funding for the Education Accountability Block Grant, and identified increased access to quality pre-K programs as an option. As part of his Education Enterprise funding plan, Governor Ted Kulongoski of **Oregon** proposed to dedicate 61% of the general fund to support programming for pre-K/Head Start and K-16 with a guaranteed 10% increase every biennium. Oregon currently supports pre-K by investing general fund dollars in Head Start programs serving 3- and 4-year-olds. While calling for full implementation of universal pre-K over the next five years, Governor Vilsack of **Iowa** also called for \$15 million in FY2007 to increase access to high-quality preschool.

Two governors, Sonny Perdue of **Georgia** and John Baldacci of **Maine**, proposed returning tax dollars to families as a strategy to increase access to programs. Both called for expansions of the Child Care Tax Credit to allow more working families access to early education programs. Although not a part of his 2006 State of the State address, an executive order signed by **Maryland** Governor Robert Ehrlich created the Maryland Child Care Subsidy Coordinating Council, which is charged with increasing access by low-income families to quality early care and education programs.

Stating that quality early childhood education is tied to breaking the cycle of poverty by enabling children to “emerge from economic disadvantage to become vibrant and dynamic workers in tomorrow's economy,” Governor Jodi Rell of **Connecticut** announced that her proposed budget would call for an

increased number of preschool slots in inner cities, an increase in school readiness per-child funding, and funding to help communities add preschool programs. As part of the **Kentucky** Economic Competitiveness agenda, Governor Ernie Fletcher promised to increase funding for preschool.

In two states – Tennessee and New Mexico – governors called for significantly expanding pre-K opportunities. **New Mexico** Governor Bill Richardson proposed to expand access to pre-K and double existing funding in order to serve 3,000 4-year-old children statewide. In the final year of his first term, **Tennessee** Governor Phil Bredesen promised to add \$20 million to expand the state's voluntary pre-K program. The increase would pay for an additional 5,400 4-year-olds and bring the total number of children being served in the state to 14,000.

Improving Program Quality

Governors in 10 states identified efforts they will support to strengthen the delivery and quality of early learning programs in their states, including, in some cases, the implementation of “quality rating systems.”

Governor Vilsack of **Iowa** called for continued support of the Strong Start Initiative – introduced last year and funded for FY 2006 at \$22 million. The Strong Start initiative focuses on the provision of supports in health, education and early care for children birth to 5 years. In his 2006 proposal to the legislature, Governor Vilsack called for additional funding to increase access to quality pre-K programming and to implement a childcare quality rating system.

In his State of the State address, **Wyoming** Governor Dave Freudenthal summarized the recommendations of a group formed two years ago to study ways to address the needs of Wyoming children and families. The governor reported that the group's top priority focused on the provision of quality childcare and early education, and said his recommendations to the legislature would reflect those recommendations. To that end, in his letter to the legislature, Governor Freudenthal recommended the creation of a public-private partnership to offer merit-based incentives to licensed childcare facilities that choose to improve their quality of care and education.

Governor Kathleen Blanco of **Louisiana** focused on the need to strengthen children's education by recruiting and rewarding quality teachers. She also stated that Louisiana is building a strong education foundation, citing recent national recognition for the state's pre-K program.

Coordinating Services

In five states, governors addressed the growing issue of coordinating services or establishing governance structures for a diverse set of service-delivery models that are currently providing early care and education programming. In some cases, the call to coordinate services provides a mechanism for access to programs without the addition of state dollars to support delivery.

Washington Governor Christine Gregoire announced the creation of a public-private partnership in early childhood education supported by \$100 million in private and nonprofit sector support that will oversee efforts to ensure “every child in Washington State (age) zero to five gets the highest quality early childhood education.” She also proposed – and has since signed into law – a measure creating a new cabinet-level Department of Early Learning. The new department pulls together more than a dozen state programs that deal with aspects of early-childhood development, including day care and preschool. The agency will work with businesses, nonprofit groups and others to improve the quality of preschool and day care. The department will deal with childcare subsidies and referrals for parents, parental education and support, and training for early learning professionals. It also will establish a rating system to grade preschools.

In his legislative proposal for 2006-07, Governor Haley Barbour of **Mississippi** called for the coordination of all early childhood services through one agency as part of his Upgrade Education Reform Act.

The **South Dakota** 2010 Education plan, as outlined by Governor Mike Rounds, includes an early childhood component called Starting Strong that provides access to preschool screening and the coordination of preschool opportunities for all 4-year-olds on a voluntary basis. Through the Starting Strong plan, eligible 4-year-olds have access to preschool through a “blended approach” that includes

partnerships between local school districts, Head Start and private preschool providers who meet accreditation requirements.

Under court order stemming from a school funding equity lawsuit to provide quality early care to young children in his state, Governor Mark Sanford of **South Carolina** urged lawmakers to begin to address the issue by taking stock of existing programs and the private sector, and the capacity to develop new programs. The governor also signed a bill to reauthorize the First Steps School Readiness Act. This program coordinates early childhood education programs across the state and currently receives annual funding to expand or develop early childhood initiatives. The governor did not rule out increased funding when he signed the bill, but said more information is needed before that can be considered.

Prior to her State of the State address, in which she outlined a number of budget proposals designed to increase the quality of early education in **Connecticut**, Governor Jodi Rell issued an executive order creating the Governor's Early Childhood Research and Policy Council. The council was charged with serving as an advisor to the Early Childhood Education Cabinet whose job is to facilitate the delivery of quality early childhood education services. The council was also charged with activities designed to increase quality programming. These include providing information and strategies related to investments in early childhood, helping build a network of researchers across the state, and engaging in a review of program evaluation research and the design of a longitudinal study of readiness.

Other Proposals

Governor John Baldacci of **Maine** proposed establishing a \$1.5 million scholarship program to support student enrollment in courses leading to degrees in the childcare profession. As part of the **New Mexico** 2006 Year of the Child, Governor Bill Richardson proposed funding to support professional development, technical assistance and program evaluation, plus start-up funds for instructional materials, equipment, transportation and safety improvements.

Governor Jodi Rell of **Connecticut** addressed issues of quality and teacher turnover by proposing to increase childcare subsidies to stabilize the finances of many struggling programs; create a scholarship fund to enable childcare workers to improve their credentials; and to allocate funds to begin the process of creating a kindergarten readiness assessment tool.

Governor Tim Pawlenty of **Minnesota** encouraged the legislature to pass early childhood education initiatives he introduced previously. The governor recommended using \$10 million in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds to improve and align early care and education programs, and give incentives to child care providers to promote kindergarten readiness. The initiatives are based on a survey and subsequent recommendations for reforming early childhood programs. Much of what the governor proposed focused on the need to improve the quality of licensed and unlicensed childcare. Recommendations to the legislature included training for center-based and home-based childcare providers; tying the kindergarten readiness assessment to all service delivery options (Head Start, friend, family and neighbor care); integrating services; and creating a curriculum aligned with the Minnesota Early Learning Guidelines.

What's on the Horizon? Issues to Watch

While proposals to increase access and funding for pre-K and kindergarten programs dominated the early childhood focus in the 2006 State of the State addresses, many governors' agendas also provided some insight into issues that are likely to grow into key policy considerations. States with established pre-K and kindergarten initiatives have begun to identify potential challenges to implementation and to consider policy options to avoid problems. Issues to watch include:

P-3 Alignment

With the push for universal pre-K and full-day kindergarten continuing to gain momentum and the level of state investments increasing come concerns about the long-term benefits of these programs. While the research predominantly points to short-term benefits of quality early learning experiences, the findings on long-term academic outcomes are mixed, and some findings regarding "fade out" in academic gains made in the early years are beginning to surface.⁴ Many educators are now calling for increased attention to the development of a continuum of educational programming from pre-K through 3rd grade (P-3) as an

answer to this concern. By aligning standards, curriculum, instructional practices and assessment within and across grade levels, P-3 advocates maintain that learning will be reinforced and gains will be sustained.⁵ Several governors this year alluded to issues of aligning systems, many states have created P-16 councils and task forces, and some legislation is being considered that further aligns standards and performance outcomes for pre-K and public K-12 programs. As interest in the possibility of creating a true P-3 continuum continues to grow, it likely could become a key policy “next step” for states with large investments in pre-K and full-day kindergarten.

Governance Structures

Several governors alluded to the variety of service delivery approaches and infrastructures that currently make up the early care and education systems in their states. Governor Gregoire of **Washington** described a system “where half-a-dozen early learning programs in state government are spread across numerous agencies and have no clear vision.” **Oregon** Governor Ted Kulongoski described early education as one of five railroad cars on a train, “each with its own budget, its own mission, its own advocacy groups, its own engineer, its own data and record keeping and its own track.”

The need to maintain consistent levels of quality and performance has led states and governors to consider creating governance structures with the authority and accountability to coordinate service delivery. Currently six approaches to governance have been implemented in states, including: (1) a new agency in state government, (2) a unit or office within the executive branch, (3) a cabinet, (4) a management team or office, (5) a public-private organization and (6) a collaborative, task force or council.⁶ The creation of governance structures and other coordinating mechanisms began to gain momentum in 2005 when six states created P-16 councils and eight states created early childhood councils, offices or task forces. It is likely that more governors will begin to address governance issues associated with the growth of state-supported programs and services.

Quality Rating Systems

Quality rating systems are a method to assess, improve and communicate the level of quality in early care and education systems. Such systems typically address standards, accountability, professional development, finance and parent outreach and support. Currently 10 states (and the District of Columbia) operate statewide quality rating systems,⁷ and others are in the process of phasing in programs or offering them in local communities. Three governors – of **Iowa**, **Washington** and **Wyoming** – this year proposed the implementation of quality rating systems in their FY 2007 budget proposals.

Summary of Governors’ 2006 Proposals

| State and Governor | Full-Day Kindergarten | Universal Pre-K | Increased Funding and Access for Pre-K | Improve Pre-K Program Quality |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---|--|
| Alabama Bob Riley | | | | |
| Alaska Frank Murkowski | | | | |
| Arizona Janet Napolitano | Proposed \$105 million to expand FDK | | | |
| Arkansas Mike Huckabee | | | | |
| California A.Schwarzenegger | | | | |
| Colorado Bill Owens | | | | |
| Connecticut Jodi Rell | | | Increase the number of inner city children in preschool by 500 and provide additional funding to five more communi- | Increase child care subsidies to stabilize financial situations and providing scholarships to child care workers for additional training |

| State and Governor | Full-Day Kindergarten | Universal Pre-K | Increased Funding and Access for Pre-K | Improve Pre-K Program Quality |
|--|--|---|---|---|
| | | | ties to add pre-school programs | Proposed funds to begin to create a kindergarten readiness assessment tool. Created the Governor's Research and Policy Council |
| Delaware Ruth Ann Minner | Proposed phase 2 of plan to fully implement FDK by 2008 | | | |
| Florida Jeb Bush | | | | |
| Georgia Sonny Perdue | | | Called for expansion of the Child Care Tax Credit to provide more working families with access to childcare | |
| Hawaii Linda Lingle | | | | |
| Idaho Dirk Kempthorne | | | | |
| Illinois Rod Blagojevich | | Proposed the creation of UPK for all 3- and 4-year-olds | | |
| Indiana Mitch Daniels | Promoted the Dollars to the Classroom program stating funds could go to programs such as FDK | | | |
| Iowa Tom Vilsack | | Continue to expand the Strong Start Preschool Initiative Begin a five-year effort to implement UPK | Called for additional funding to increase access to quality pre-K programs | Called for funding to implement a quality rating system for childcare |
| Kansas Kathleen Sebelius | | | | |
| Kentucky Ernie Fletcher | | | Increase funding to preschools as part of the Kentucky Economic Competitiveness agenda | |
| Louisiana Kathleen Blanco | | | | |
| Maine John Baldacci | | | Called for expansion of the Child Care Tax Credit to provide | Proposed the establishment of a \$1.5 million scholarship fund |

| State and Governor | Full-Day Kindergarten | Universal Pre-K | Increased Funding and Access for Pre-K | Improve Pre-K Program Quality |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------|---|--|
| | | | more working families with access to child care | for students entering the childcare field |
| Maryland Robert Ehrlich | | | | |
| Massachusetts Mitt Romney | | | | |
| Michigan Jennifer Granholm | | | Invest in greater support for ECE | |
| Minnesota Tim Pawlenty | | | | Proposed using TANF dollars to increase quality of preschool programs and provide incentives to focus on kindergarten readiness Proposed measures to more closely align state-supported early childhood education and childcare systems |
| Mississippi Haley Barbour | | | | Called for continuation of the early childhood development proposals through the Upgrade Education reform Act Coordinate all ECE services through a single agency |
| Montana Brian Schweitzer | | | | |
| Nebraska Dave Heineman | | | | |
| Nevada Kenny Guinn | | | | |
| New Hampshire John Lynch | | | | |
| New Jersey Jon Corzine | | | | |
| New Mexico Bill Richardson | | | Proposed doubling the annual state appropriation for pre-K in 2007 to \$10 million – doubling the access to 3,000 or 12% of all 4-year-olds | Proposed funding to support professional development, technical assistance and program evaluation Proposed start-up funds for instructional materials, equipment, transportation and learning materials |
| New York George Pataki | | | | |
| North Carolina Mike Easley | | | | |
| North Dakota | | | | |

| State and Governor | Full-Day Kindergarten | Universal Pre-K | Increased Funding and Access for Pre-K | Improve Pre-K Program Quality |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| John Hoeven | | | | |
| Ohio Bob Taft | | | | |
| Oklahoma Brad Henry | | | | |
| Oregon Ted Kulongoski | | | Under the Education Enterprise funding plan, 61% of general fund dollars dedicated to pre-K, K-12 and post-secondary education with a guaranteed 10% increase in funding every biennium | |
| Pennsylvania Ed Rendell | Proposed increasing amount of funding available under the state accountability block grant to fund programs like FDK | | Proposed increasing amount of funding under the state accountability block grant to fund programs like pre-K | |
| Rhode Island Donald L. Carcieri | | | | |
| South Carolina Mark Sanford | | | Made no promise to expand state supported pre-K programs in spite of recent court order Urged lawmakers to consider use of private sector providers as a way to increase access to pre-K | Bill extends life of First Steps School readiness Act to coordinate ECE programs |
| South Dakota Mike Rounds | Proposed to make kindergarten mandatory | | | Through "Starting Strong" part of the 2010 Education Plan, pre-K services coordinated across providers |
| Tennessee Phil Bredesen | | | Called for additional funding for Tennessee voluntary pre-K to raise enrollment to 14,000 | |
| Texas Rick Perry | | | | |
| Utah Jon Huntsman Jr. | Proposed \$7 million to fund FDK in all Title 1 schools | | | |
| Vermont James H. Douglas | | | | |
| Virginia Tim Kaine | | Created the Start Strong Council to | | |

| State and Governor | Full-Day Kindergarten | Universal Pre-K | Increased Funding and Access for Pre-K | Improve Pre-K Program Quality |
|--|-----------------------|------------------------------------|--|--|
| | | create a plan for implementing UPK | | |
| Washington Christine Gregoire | | | | Announced the creation of a public-private partnership backed by \$100 million to oversee delivery of quality services for children 0-5 years old Proposed the creation of a Department of Early Learning and the implementation of a quality rating system |
| West Virginia Joe Manchin III | | | | |
| Wisconsin Jim Doyle | | | | |
| Wyoming Dave Freudenthal | | | | Proposed the creation of a public-private partnership to oversee a quality rating system |

This policy brief was written by Mimi Howard, early learning program director at the Education Commission of the States.

Endnotes

¹ Pre-K Now, *Votes Count: Legislative Action on Pre-K Fiscal Year 2006*. (Washington, DC: Pre-K Now, November 2005.)

² Ibid.

³ Education Commission of the States, *ECS StateNote*, "Access to Kindergarten: Age Issues in State Statutes." (Denver, CO: ECS, 2005). Available from ECS, <http://mb2.ecs.org/reports/Report.aspx?id=32>, Internet.

⁴ Kristie Kauerz, *Ladders of Learning: Fighting Fade-out by Advancing PK-3 Alignment*. Issue Brief #2. (New York, NY: New America Foundation Early Education initiative, January 2006.)

⁵ Bill Graves, *Getting There: PK-3 as Public Education's Base Camp*, Report from the Foundation for Child Development. (New York, NY: October, 2005.)

⁶ Sharon Lynn Kagan, Kristie Kauerz and Kate Tarrant, "Governance for Early Childhood Systems," *A Policy Tool of the Policy Matters Project*. (New York, NY: National Center for Children and Families, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2005.)

⁷ National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC), *Quality Rating Systems: Definition and Statewide Systems*. Retrieved online March 2006 at www.nccic.org/pubs/qrs-defsystems.html.

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