



# Characteristics of Approved Universal Prekindergarten Programs in Vermont in 2018/19

In efforts to better understand program availability, quality, and characteristics related to family choice among universal prekindergarten (preK) programs in Vermont, this study examined the characteristics of approved preK programs overall, public school and private programs separately, and programs in local education agencies with different population sizes and poverty levels. The current study builds on a previous study on the characteristics of children enrolled in universal preK programs in Vermont in 2016/17<sup>1</sup> and helps Vermont stakeholders consider requirements for approved preK programs. The results can inform stakeholders in Vermont and other states about differences in characteristics across preK programs. In conjunction with the previous study, this study can inform conversations about changes to Vermont’s preK legislation that might increase equity and access in the state.

## Key findings

- Private preK programs operated for more hours per day and for more weeks per year than did public school preK programs.
- The number of preK programs varied by local education agency population size. Some less-populated areas had only one approved program within the local education agency’s geographic boundaries.
- Program hours and program quality rating were not associated with local education agency population size or poverty level.
- Local education agencies serving communities with high poverty levels had higher percentages of preK programs designed to serve low-income families, but they also had a higher percentage of programs that were at capacity. Head Start serves low-income families, and the state provides subsidy payments for families that are below certain income thresholds and that need child care. High-poverty local education agencies had higher percentages of preK programs that were at capacity as of May 2019 (69 percent), accepted subsidy payments (90 percent), were Head Start grantees (17 percent), and had received accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (24 percent). Although it is encouraging that there were higher percentages of programs aimed at serving low-income populations in the areas with the highest need, the findings suggest that the availability of these programs might need to be expanded.

### Program hours, number of children and of licensed teachers, and STep Ahead Recognition System (STARS) rating of approved prekindergarten (preK) programs in Vermont, by local education agency poverty level

Program characteristic, 2018/19	Poverty level, 2017		
	Low Mean	Average Mean	High Mean
Hours open per day	8.4	8.1	8.4
Weeks open per year	39.1	40.9	43.3
Number of preK children per program	27.2	21.7	27.8
Number of licensed teachers per program	1.6	1.6	2.3
Total STARS rating	4.4	4.5	4.7
Years in STARS	7.2	7.7	9.2

Note: See the main report for definitions of poverty levels and STARS ratings (box 1) and the *n* values associated with each characteristic (table 5).

Source: Authors’ analyses based on Vermont Agency of Education survey and administrative data (2018/19) and U.S. Census Bureau. (2017). 2017 American Community Survey data file. Retrieved March 19, 2020, from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>.

<sup>1</sup> DeMeo Cook, K., Irwin, C. W., & Gallo, A. (2020). *Enrollment rates of children in universal prekindergarten programs in Vermont in 2016/17* (REL 2020–015). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast & Islands. <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>