**Memorandum**

| | |
|---|---|
| To: | Molly Loomis, Facilitator, Vermont PreK Education Implementation Committee |
| From: | Lori Connors-Tadros, Senior Research Fellow, NIEER, and GG Weisenfeld, Senior ECE Policy Specialist, NIEER |
| Date: | March 12, 2024 |
| Re: | Resources to support the VT PreK Education Implementation Committee |

**Technical Assistance Request**: Molly Loomis is providing support to the VT PreK Education Implementation Committee. She has asked for resources and examples on the following:
1. How do we understand the cost of a mixed delivery system?
2. How could administration for PreK be shared across LEA/State?

**1. Understanding the Costs of a Mixed Delivery Program**

The costs of any program, regardless of setting, begin with identifying the quality standards of the program. As you are aware, the largest drivers of costs are the number, qualifications, and compensation of staff. Other key cost drivers that impact the number of staff are the adult-child ratio, length of day/year, facilities, instructional resources, and professional development also impact total costs. For a mixed delivery program, this may involve developing multiple cost estimates if the quality standards are different, or administrative costs vary by program setting. Care must be taken to estimate the full cost including facilities and state and local support and administration.

It will depend on how you design the program; whether you hold the same quality standards in all settings (which we recommend to ensure quality in all settings) and whether and how much costs vary by setting. Typically, costs may be higher in smaller programs (e.g. small community-based settings or family child care) because you don't have the economy of scale or built-in facilities or administrative costs. Some states, e.g. New Jersey, provide 3 different per-child rates depending on the setting to address these differences in the total cost to implement the program. (see Mixed Delivery study report below for more information).

NIEER estimated the cost per child of expanded access to quality for Vermont in 2020 to be $13,626, meeting all 10 quality standards, offering the program 6 hours per day/school year, and staff paid on parity with public school teachers. We used the Cost of Preschool Quality & Revenue (CPQ&R) tool to develop the cost estimates for Vermont (see below). We used a pared-down version of the tool to create the estimates, which did not account for cost variations by setting. That said, the pared-

down version uses all the same data to make estimates. The following cost categories and associated per-child rates are included in the total annual cost per child:

Teaching Staff Salaries & Benefits: $9,745
Non-Teaching Staff Salaries & Benefits: $864
Staff Professional Learning & Support: $25
Child Assessments and Screening: $378
Child Transportation: $279
Facilities Costs: $1,106
Education Supplies and Equipment: $377
Office Supplies and Equipment: $244
State-Level Administration: $608
Total Cost per Slot: 13,626

Additional Resources:

**Ensuring Adequate Resources for Expanding High Quality**- https://nieer.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/Pre-K-Expansion-Support-Guide-Series-Resources.pdf

**The Cost of Preschool Quality and Revenue Tool**- https://nieer.org/research/research-instruments/cpqr.  This website has lots of resources to help you understand how to conduct a cost study.

**State Preschool in a Mixed Delivery System: Lessons Learned in Five States** provides a lot of information on how the states in the study determined the costs of preschool, how they leveraged funding streams, and how they distributed funding.  Lots of good ideas and lessons here- https://nieer.org/research-library/state-preschool-mixed-delivery-system

2.  **What is best practice in building an infrastructure between state and local PreK implementers?**

**Shared Governance Model at the State and Local Level.** Finance and governance are inextricably linked and the role of local governance in early childhood systems is critical. Changes happen most significantly locally, directly impacting children and families. While early learning, or prekindergarten program policy specifically, is set at the state level, efficient and effective implementation is best operationalized locally.   We recommend a hub and spoke approach to governance, such that the lead state agency sets state-wide policy for preschool programs and a local governance structure implements policy.

Vermont might look to other states, including the **West Virginia** Universal PreK program.  Legislation (WV Code 4) and state policy (WVBE Policy 2525) require a shared governance model at both the state and local levels. At the state level, an interagency team with representatives from early learning, preschool special needs, childcare, and Head Start makes all policy and funding decisions, blends funds to support the County Collaborative team, and develops policy and supports for county-level pre-k implementation. (more information on West Virginia, Alabama, and Michigan's approach to shared state and local governance can be found in the Mixed Delivery Report referenced above).

**Examples of Local Systems of Accountability and Supports.** Local entities are best suited to convening stakeholders, collecting and analyzing local data on needs and resources, and contracting or funding programs that best meet the needs of the families in their communities. We suggest that states allocate some portion of state funds and other federal funds to build a comprehensive support structure for local entities that is intentionally aligned and integrated with the state system that work in tandem to drive the system (*visualize a hub and spokes on a whee*l).  There are a number of examples across the country:

**In West Virginia,** at the county level, early childhood collaborative teams manage local implementation based on the state requirements as discussed earlier.  County boards of education are primarily responsible for the provision of state preschool. State policy requires county boards to contract with community partners such as Head Start grantees, center-based childcare providers, and private preschool providers to provide at least 50% of preschool program services collaboratively.  County-level teams create collaborative contracts and improvement plans based on an assessment of local needs and priorities, and target resources to support program improvement. Counties also are responsible for providing professional development for pre-k teachers based on local data. See here for more information.

**Oregon** utilizes separate entities for local administration functions and quality improvement functions. The 16 regional Early Learning Hubs are generally tasked with working with multiple sectors to coordinate their local early learning system, which generally consists of 1-3 counties depending on the density of the population. As part of this work, Hubs are tasked with coordinating enrollment at the regional level. Hubs coordinate recruitment, eligibility, and enrollment into publicly funded programming (currently, this includes Head Start and state-funded preschool). This means that Hubs convene local partners to first determine priority populations for enrollment and develop recruitment materials and methods to outreach to families. These priorities also inform which children and families receive additional weights for local selection. In addition, Hubs are responsible for verifying eligibility for programming, finalizing selection into programs, and keeping waiting lists. Child Care Resource and Referral entities, which align nearly 1:1 with the 16 Hub regions, operate the state's coaching and other quality improvement functions for programs and receive funding and support from the state to do so.

 **North Carolina** has implemented a "single portal of entry" for its state pre-k program.  Operated by the county level NC PreK Contract Administrator (analogous to a community hub), child/family demographic data are entered into this web-based platform (NC Pre-K APP) to identify child program eligibility as well as facilitate assignment/placement.  For those children eligible and enrolled in NC Pre-K, child/family data are exported into the "NC Pre-K Kids" data system.  These data are stored and linked to the North Carolina Early Childhood Integrated Data System (NC ECIDS) and are used to inform reports and data requests submitted by the NC General Assembly and multiple research institutions studying program effectiveness.

 A companion system "NC Pre-K Plan" contains data specific to NC PreK sites and classrooms. Primarily used to facilitate the approval of sites/classrooms to participate in the state-funded program, this system links with "NC Pre-K Kids" allowing for the generation of attendance reports

used to inform policy and abate chronic absenteeism.  Like "NC PreK Kids," NC PreK Plan" stores data to inform reports and research. Developed in the early years of the program to limit both family and administrator burden, these companion data systems have created efficiencies and strengthened accountability at the classroom, district, and state level.  It is recommended that Colorado move in a similar direction as they align and consolidate prekindergarten in the state.

 **Louisiana Community Networks** are required to coordinate enrollment and funding, in addition to other requirements. The lead networks develop a plan to identify all eligible children, help families determine what services/programs they are eligible for, and develop a coordinated funding request. Families complete an eligibility worksheet, which is used by the Community Network to determine what programs they are eligible for, and counsel's families to identify what best meets their needs. In addition to aligning governance, access and quality, community networks are able to access a "super app" for LEAs to access all their federal funding through one application, including early childhood funding, and complete a coordinated funding request to the state.   See here for more information- https://www.louisianabelieves.com/early-childhood/coordinated-enrollment-and-funding