

## Participation in State-Funded Prekindergarten in Oklahoma

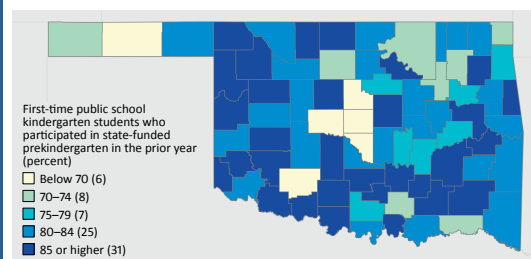
Oklahoma offers state-funded prekindergarten (preK) to all four-year-olds. The Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest Early Childhood Education research partnership in Oklahoma requested more comprehensive evidence on disparities in student participation in state-funded preK that might indicate challenges in program access or use. The study used Oklahoma State Department of Education administrative records to calculate the percentages of first-time public school kindergarten students in the 2014/15–2018/19 school years who participated in state-funded preK in the prior year, overall and for subgroups defined by geographic locale<sup>1</sup> and student characteristics. Statistical models were used to estimate the relationships between student and district characteristics and local availability of preK options (measured as estimated travel time) and students' participation in state-funded preK.

### Key findings

- **A large majority of public school kindergarten students had attended state-funded preK.** Of first-time kindergarten students in five recent cohorts, 74 percent had attended state-funded preK the prior year.
- **Participation in state-funded preK varied by geographic locale.** Participation in state-funded preK ranged from 61 percent to 93 percent across counties and from 21 percent to 100 percent across school districts (see map). Students in rural school districts participated at a substantially greater rate (82 percent) than students in nonrural districts (71 percent).
- **Participation in state-funded preK was greater among some student subgroups and differed by race/ethnicity.** Public school kindergarten students identified for special education services participated in state-funded preK at a substantially greater rate (87 percent) than students not identified to receive such services (73 percent), and English learner students participated at a greater rate (77 percent) than non-English learner students (74 percent). Students eligible for reduced-price lunch participated at a moderately greater rate (80 percent) than students eligible for free lunch (74 percent) and students not eligible for the national school lunch program (73 percent). Compared with participation by White students (74 percent), participation was moderately greater among American Indian students (79 percent), substantially smaller among Pacific Islander students (52 percent), and moderately smaller among Black students (69 percent). Some student subgroups, such as students eligible for free lunch and Black students, are more likely than their peers to participate in Head Start programs,<sup>2</sup> which might affect these findings.
- **Participation in state-funded preK was related to estimated driving time to preK sites and Head Start sites.** Kindergarten students who lived farther from a state-funded preK site were less likely to participate in state-funded preK, and those who lived farther from a Head Start site were more likely to participate.

1. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). Elementary/Secondary Information System. Retrieved July 8, 2019, from <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/>. Wong, V. C., Cook, T. D., Barnett, W. S., & Jung, K. (2008). An effectiveness-based evaluation of five state pre-kindergarten programs. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 27(1), 122–154.
2. Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center. (2019). Program information report. Retrieved April 24, 2020, from <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/data-ongoing-monitoring/article/program-information-report-pir>.

### Participation in state-funded prekindergarten in Oklahoma, by county, five years combined, 2014/15–2018/19



Source: Authors' analysis of data from the Oklahoma State Department of Education and U.S. Census Bureau (2018) Delineation files. <https://www.census.gov/geographies/reference-files/time-series/demo/metro-micro/delineation-files.html>.