



Participation in state-funded prekindergarten programs



High-quality early childhood education (including prekindergarten [preK] programs) can help address inequities between low-income and higher income children by closing learning gaps early on.^{1,2} The Oklahoma State Department of Education is a national leader in providing and funding universal preK for all 4-year-olds.³ Studies on state-funded preK in Tulsa, Oklahoma, found that students who attended the program demonstrated significantly greater short and longer term outcomes than children who had not attended the program.^{4,5,6}

Early education outcomes



Higher early literacy skills

Higher early math skills

Long-term outcomes



Higher middle school math scores

More likely to enroll in honors classes

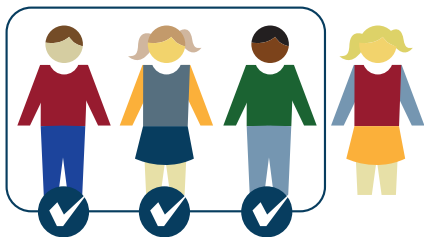
Less likely to repeat a grade

Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest's Early Childhood Education Research Partnership with the Oklahoma State Department of Education and other early childhood stakeholders in the state conducted a study to learn more about the children who participate in Oklahoma's state-funded preK program.^{7,8,9}

Some of the findings and strategies from the study are highlighted here.



What do we know about preK participation in Oklahoma?

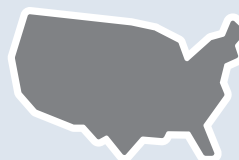


Between the 2014/15 and 2018/19 school years, **three out of four** kindergarteners had attended the state-funded preK program.⁶

Children not participating in state-funded preK may have participated in Head Start or licensed child care providers. Up to 87% of 4-year-old children were enrolled in state-funded preK or Head Start.¹⁰



State-funded preK (in partnership with K-12 school districts)



Head Start (national program)



Licensed child care centers and early learning programs, faith-based programs, and private early childhood programs

What do we know about preK participation in Oklahoma? (continued)

Some children were more likely than others to attend a state-funded preK program between 2014/15 and 2018/19:



- ▶ **Hispanic and American Indian children were more likely to attend state-funded preK** than non-Hispanic White children. However, White children were more likely to attend than Asian, Black, Multiracial, or Pacific Islander children.



- ▶ **Children who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in kindergarten were more likely to attend** than children who were not eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.



- ▶ **English learners were more likely to attend** state-funded preK than children who were not English learners.



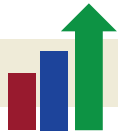
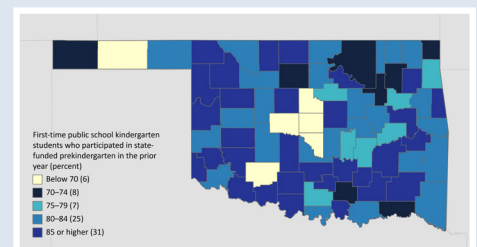
- ▶ **Students who were identified for special education supports in kindergarten were more likely to attend** than students who were not identified for special education supports.



- ▶ In both rural and nonrural counties, **students who lived farther from a state-funded preK site were less likely to participate.**

PreK participation by locale

Children living in rural counties were more likely to attend state-funded preK than children in nonrural counties. Between 2014/15 and 2018/19, **82 percent of children in rural counties attended state-funded preK**, as compared with **71 percent of children in nonrural counties**.¹¹



Promising strategies to increase preK enrollment¹²

Variation in state-funded preK participation rates may indicate barriers to participation as well as different preferences and needs across communities. The study shows that geographic distance from a state-funded preK program may be a barrier to enrollment. Other explanations may include the need for extended child care hours and uncertainty about how to enroll. The following strategies may help address barriers.



- ▶ Consider developing and using communication tools (a recorded phone message, printed flyers, text message, email, or social media posts) to reach families with preschool-age children in your community. Briefly share that a state-funded preK program is available in their area, how families can get more information, and how to enroll.

- ▶ Ask other local organizations and individuals to share information about state-funded preK, such as:

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| o Pediatricians and other healthcare providers. | o Prenatal and postnatal parent education programs. | o Park departments. |
| o Home health and wellness programs. | o Community health centers. | o Places of worship. |
| | o Libraries. | o Neighborhood associations. |
| | | o Community leaders. |



- ▶ Use culturally inclusive strategies to have two-way conversations with families. Giving families a voice helps families feel welcome and allows you to be more responsive.¹³ For example, enrollment counselors, other staff, or parents who speak the same native language as families (and are connected to families) should be available to share information, answer questions, and help with enrollment.

- ▶ Focus on building trust. Trust is essential for empowering families to ask questions, share feedback, and take action.¹⁴ For example, building trust might mean developing relationships so families feel comfortable talking about challenges that they are facing. Families will feel more confident about enrolling their child if they feel welcome, respected, and confident in the school's administrators, teachers, and staff. Gather feedback from a diverse group of parents through informal conversations or formal survey collections to better understand their questions, needs, and perceptions of the school community.



Participation in preK can set up children for success. By using these strategies, your district or state can help families learn more about the benefits of state-funded preK and feel more confident in their decision to enroll.

The Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest, funded by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education, works in partnership with educators and policymakers to develop and use research that improves outcomes for students.

References and Notes

- ¹ Dickinson, D. K., & Porche, M. V. (2011). Relation between language experiences in preschool classrooms and children's kindergarten and fourth-grade language and reading abilities. *Child Development*, 82(3), 870–886. <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=EJ928912&id=EJ928912>
- ² Henry, D. A., Betancur Cortés, L., & Votruba-Drzal, E. (2020). Black–White achievement gaps differ by family socioeconomic status from early childhood through early adolescence. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 112(8), 1471–1489. <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=EJ1272162&id=EJ1272162>
- ³ National Institute for Early Education Research. (2020). *Oklahoma makes strong progress serving preschool children, COVID-19 threat looms: State moves into 3rd for access to 4-year-olds*. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/YB2019_Oklahoma.pdf.
- ⁴ Gormley, W. T., & Phillips, D. (2005). The effects of universal pre-k in Oklahoma: Research highlights and policy implications. *Policy Studies Journal*, 33(1), 65–82. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED482858>
- ⁵ Gormley, W. T., Phillips, D., & Anderson, S. (2018). The effects of Tulsa's pre-K program on middle school student performance. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 37(1), 63–87. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1163976>
- ⁶ Gormley, W. T., Phillips, D., & Gayer, T. (2008). Preschool programs can boost school readiness. *Science*, 320(5884), 1723–1724.
- ⁷ Dahlke, K., Karoly, L. A., Perera, R., Little, M., Henry, C., Lasserre-Cortez, S., & Gerdeman, D. (2020). *Participation in state-funded prekindergarten in Oklahoma* (REL 2021–044). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southwest/pdf/REL_2021044.pdf.
- ⁸ Please note that this study focused on participation in Oklahoma's state-funded preK program, so preK participation rates do not include 4-year-olds who were enrolled in Head Start or another type of preschool or child care program.
- ⁹ The study examined data collected before COVID-19, so the study does not capture pandemic-related shifts in preK enrollment.
- ¹⁰ Dahlke, K., Karoly, L. A., Perera, R., Little, M., Henry, C., Lasserre-Cortez, S., & Gerdeman, D. (2020). *Participation in state-funded prekindergarten in Oklahoma* (REL 2021–044). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest. Retrieved June 17, 2021, from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.
- ¹¹ REL Southwest report authors' analysis of data from the Oklahoma State Department of Education and the U.S. Office of Management and Budget September 2018 Metropolitan–Micropolitan Statistical Areas delineation files [U.S. Census Bureau. (2018). *Delineation files*. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from <https://www.census.gov/geographies/reference-files/time-series/demo/metro-micro/delineation-files.html>.
- ¹² These strategies were not selected systematically and not all of the suggested strategies are grounded in a rigorous research base. Strategies were selected from REL resources and input from expert staff because they are relevant to state and local education agencies.
- ¹³ Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific. (2020). *Culturally responsive leading and learning: Addressing equity through student and family voice*. Retrieved May 3, 2021, from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/pacific/blogs/blog27_culturally-responsive-leading-and-learning_addressing-equity.asp
- ¹⁴ Garcia, M. E., Frunzi, K., Dean, C. B., Flores, N., & Miller, K. B. (2016). *Toolkit of resources for engaging families and the community as partners in education: Part 3: Building trusting relationships with families and the community through effective communication* (REL 2016–152). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED569112.pdf>



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This work was funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) under contract 91990018C0002, administered by American Institutes for Research. The content of the infographic does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.