

# Why pre-k?

A Legislative Staff Briefing Paper



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## Executive Summary

Should Tennessee provide more pre-kindergarten programs? Presently Tennessee funds 147 such classrooms in 44 counties. As early as 1963, the General Assembly permitted Tennessee school systems to use federal or local funds for pre-kindergarten programs. Pre-kindergarten was mentioned in the earliest versions of the bill that became the Education Improvement Act of 1992. More recently, Public Chapter 954 of 1996 established pilot early childhood and pre-k programs for three- and four-year olds who live below the poverty line.

Governor Don Sundquist's proposal to continue the expansion of pre-kindergarten in Tennessee is based on several factors:

- **Research showing the short and long-term impacts of quality pre-kindergarten programs, particularly for the “at-risk” population.** Many sources indicate that children who have quality preschool experiences learn to read and adapt to school better, are less likely to become juvenile delinquents, and are more likely to attend college and be successfully employed as adults.
- **The success of Tennessee’s 147 pilot pre-kindergarten classes which began in 1998.** Data collected from these sites indicates that children who have participated in the programs are performing at or above average in first grade, even though they are considered part of the “at-risk” population.
- **Other states’ successes with implementing pre-kindergarten programs.** A recent report by the RAND Corporation identified pre-kindergarten programs as one of three contributing factors in those states that had demonstrated the greatest improvements in student performance.
- **The implementation of school system grades and a “high stakes” accountability model.** Because of the requirements of the Education Improvement Act, Tennessee has one of the most comprehensive testing programs in the country. The system has made educators and policy makers more aware of student performance at earlier ages. In addition, school systems are now publicly graded on student performance, encouraging them to assist more students who need it. Children who have not had adequate early childhood experiences as young children enter kindergarten destined for failure.

This report seeks to provide lawmakers with general information on pre-kindergarten programs in other states, as well as those in Tennessee.

*“All children will begin school ready to learn.”*

Tennessee Board of Education *Master Plan*

Governor Don Sundquist’s proposed education initiative includes a recommendation to expand pre-kindergarten in Tennessee. This briefing paper, prepared jointly by staff of the Comptroller’s Office of Education Accountability and the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations

- cites research findings on the individual and societal benefits of pre-kindergarten;
- provides information from selected states that have established pre-k programs; and
- describes the success of Tennessee’s pilot pre-k programs which began in 1998-99.

## **What the Research Shows**

*Tennessee ranks low in education, income, and productivity. Research indicates that such states stand to benefit most from public pre-kindergarten programs.*

Tennessee ranks 46<sup>th</sup> among the 50 states and the District of Columbia in the percentage of the population with high school diplomas and 41<sup>st</sup> in the percentage with at least a bachelor’s degree.<sup>1</sup> Tennessee’s dropout rate is the 15<sup>th</sup> highest in the nation.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, incomes are low and poverty rates are high. The median household income in Tennessee for the years 1997-1999 was only \$34,393. That figure is more than \$5,000 below the national average and gives Tennessee a rank of 42<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>3</sup> Tennessee’s rank for the poverty rate (13.2 percent) was 19<sup>th</sup> worst.<sup>4</sup>

Given those statistics, it is no wonder Tennessee ranks 35<sup>th</sup> in economic productivity. Gross state product per capita in Tennessee was \$27,331 in 1997. Gross domestic product for the nation was \$30,260.<sup>5</sup> Only three states contiguous to Tennessee (Alabama, Arkansas and Mississippi) rank lower. Those three states also have low incomes, high poverty rates, low education levels, and high dropout rates.

A recent report by David Grissmer of the RAND Corporation entitled *Improving Student Achievement: What NAEP State Test Scores Tell Us*, however, finds that targeting educational resources in certain ways can be particularly effective for states with low socioeconomic status, such as Tennessee. Grissmer’s research cites expansion of pre-kindergarten programs in states with low socioeconomic characteristics, as one efficient method to improve gains in achievement scores.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, “Educational Attainment in the United States: March 1999 (revised December 19, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data survey and unpublished data, January 2000.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, March 1998, 1999, and 2000 (revised 26 September 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, (revised October 3, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Accounts Data, Gross State Product, Summary GSP for States and Regions, 1977-97 (revised 7 June 1999); U.S. Bureau of the Census, ST-99-3 State Population Estimates: Annual Time Series, July 1, 1990 to July 1, 1999.

<sup>6</sup> David Grissmer, et al., *Improving Student Achievement: What NAEP State Test Scores Tell Us*, RAND Corporation, July 25, 2000, p.101.

The RAND study notes that Tennessee ranks

- 33<sup>rd</sup> for the percentage of families with children eight to ten years old that have at least one college graduate parent,
- 34<sup>th</sup> for the percentage of families with children eight to ten years old that have at least one parent with a high school degree,
- 33<sup>rd</sup> in family income for those with children eight to ten years old,
- 5<sup>th</sup> highest for the percentage of births to teen mothers, and
- 8<sup>th</sup> highest for the percentage of single mothers among families with children eight to ten years old.<sup>7</sup>

***Several studies indicate that pre-kindergarten programs have a significant positive effect on children's future school performance and other life experiences, particularly those children who are "at-risk" of failure because of poverty or other circumstances.***

The RAND study identified pre-kindergarten programs as a significant factor in those states that have shown the greatest academic gains in the last decade.<sup>8</sup> Focusing on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores for the 44 participating states, the study found that widespread availability of pre-kindergarten programs was a significant contributing factor to improvement in educational performance. (Others included higher per-pupil expenditures, lower pupil-teacher ratios in lower grades, higher percentages of teachers reporting adequate resources for teaching, and decreased teacher turnover). The report shows that the state with the second-highest gains, Texas, also had the highest proportion of children in any state in public pre-kindergarten programs.<sup>9</sup> The report illustrates the benefits of addressing the state's disadvantaged populations.

Pre-kindergarten programs also have been found to contribute to lower juvenile delinquency rates. Several studies have identified common factors regularly associated with chronic delinquency. These include lack of positive parental support and low verbal/cognitive ability.<sup>10</sup>

A special issue of the journal *The Future of Children* found solid evidence of the benefits of child-focused programs, particularly on outcomes such as lower incidence of special education placement and retention in grade. Two literature reviews included in that volume analyzed a broad array of programs and pilot projects that support investment in early childhood education programs. Among the positive effects identified were large short-term increases in children's intelligence quotients (IQs); sizable long-term effects on achievement, grade retention, placement in special education and social adjustment;<sup>11</sup> and prevention of later antisocial or delinquent behavior.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> RAND, "State Family Characteristics," pp. 124-128. Families with children eight to ten years old were the focus because RAND was analyzing the fourth grade tests. Three other family characteristics less indicative of socioeconomic status were considered: percentage black and Hispanic, percentage of mothers of fourth graders working full or part time, and percentage of fourth grade students reporting no residential relocation over the last two years.

<sup>8</sup> See David W. Grissmer, et al. RAND Corporation, *Improving Student Achievement: What NAEP State Test Scores Tell Us*, July 25, 2000, p xxvi.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.82.

<sup>10</sup> Hirokazu Yoshikawa, "Long-Term Effects of Early Childhood Programs on Social Outcomes and Delinquency," *The Future of Children*, Vol.5. No. 3, Winter 1995, pp. 2-6.

<sup>11</sup> W.S. Barnett, "Long-term Effects of Early Childhood Programs on Cognitive and School Outcomes," *The Future of Children*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Winter 1995).

<sup>12</sup> H. Yoshikawa.

The research implies that preventive early childhood programs should attempt to

- enhance parents' social support;
- foster positive parenting and family interactions;
- facilitate child cognitive development (especially verbal skills); and
- reduce family level and community level poverty.

In other words, crime prevention programs should seek to reduce or eliminate the risk factors associated with delinquency. Pre-kindergarten programs are one specific method for improving child cognitive development and preparing children for lifelong learning.

The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, a well-known study completed in 1993, followed children from the time of their participation in the preschool project at ages three or four to age 27. All of the children were African-Americans who lived in the same neighborhood in the 1960s. At the study's beginning, the children were randomly divided into a program group, which received a high-quality active learning preschool program, and a group that received no program. The study findings indicate that at age 27 the program participants had:

- Higher monthly earnings;
- Higher percentages of home ownership;
- A higher level of schooling completed;
- A lower percentage receiving social services;
- Fewer arrests; and
- Fewer out-of-wedlock births.

At age 19, program participants had significantly higher general literacy levels. Given these long-term results the program has been estimated to return \$5 to \$7 for every \$1 invested.<sup>13</sup>

***To have long-term impacts, early childhood programs must be of high quality.***

Along with success stories related to early childhood programs come warnings about the need for particular components within those programs such as qualified teachers, appropriate numbers of children per teacher and classroom, and continuity in children's experiences between home, preschool, and public school. The Winter 1995 issue of *The Future of Children*<sup>14</sup> focused entirely on this issue. The overview article pointed out that while the strongest studies indicate that early childhood programs can have substantial lasting effects, such as enhanced school achievement, higher earnings, and decreased involvement in the criminal justice system, these outcomes are not always achieved.<sup>15</sup>

Part of the inconsistency of results seems to result from the wide variation in the types of programs studied—from one-on-one tutoring to home visits with half-day programs and childcare in between.

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<sup>13</sup> L.J. Schweinhart, et al., *Significant Benefits: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study through Age 27*. Information taken from fact sheet found at [www.Highscope.org/research/Perry%20fact%20sheet.htm](http://www.Highscope.org/research/Perry%20fact%20sheet.htm).

<sup>14</sup> A semi-annual publication of The David and Lucille Packard Foundation of Palo Alto, California.

<sup>15</sup> "Long-term Outcomes of Early Childhood Programs: Analysis and Recommendations," *The Future of Children*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Winter 1995, p. 8.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has published guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice for early childhood programs.<sup>16</sup> The Association's accreditation criteria recommend that all groups have at least two teachers. Four- to five-year-olds should be in groups of 16 to 20 children. Staff should have specialized training in child development and early education. Programs should reflect a balance of indoor and outdoor activities.

Specific recommendations related to the structure of child-focused programs included small group sizes, high ratios of staff to children, trained and well-supervised teachers, developmentally appropriate curricula, and quality parent involvement. Finally, “[t]o ensure that large-scale programs created and funded by public dollars provide services of the quality required to produce long-term positive outcomes, they should be supported at levels commensurate with the funding levels devoted to the demonstration programs that yielded the long-term benefits to children.”<sup>17</sup>

Pre-kindergarten programs need to include one-on-one instructional approaches in addition to more group-oriented ones. Although the Georgia program is still young, the Applied Research Center of Georgia State University conducted a longitudinal study of the types of pre-k classes that were most successful. The study found that those children who had been in pre-kindergarten programs deemed to be “child-centered” (as opposed to academically directed or a combination) were more likely than others to have higher entry ratings in kindergarten. Those children were rated higher in all three sub-areas: communication, behavior, and academic skills. The Georgia State study also found that the majority of kindergarten teachers believed their students were better prepared as a result of the pre-kindergarten program in seven out of eight skill areas. These included pre-reading and pre-math skills, fine and gross motor development, independence and initiative, and interacting with adults and other children.<sup>18</sup>

The strongest recommendation of the Georgia study was that “[g]iven the research that documents benefits for children and the dramatic disparity of enrollment rates in preschool programs across income levels, policymakers at the federal, state and local levels should allocate sufficient funds for child-focused programs to ensure their availability to all disadvantaged children.”<sup>19</sup> The report further recommended that “[g]iven the likely importance of the school environment in sustaining gains made in preschool, additional resources should be dedicated to improve the quality of schooling received by disadvantaged children, especially in the early grades.”<sup>20</sup>

***Pre-kindergarten programs, particularly for economically disadvantaged children, seem to have the best results when they are supplemented by high intensity “family support” activities such as home visits, parenting classes, and family resource centers.*** Regardless of the impact of targeted programs, family and community characteristics such as income, minority status, teen births, single parents, mothers working, and residential stability of the home environment explain most of the variance in

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<sup>16</sup> See [www.naeyc.org/accreditation](http://www.naeyc.org/accreditation).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-18.

<sup>18</sup> *Prekindergarten Longitudinal Study, 1997-1998 School Year Annual Report*, Applied Research Center, School of Policy Studies, Georgia State University, April 1999, Summary of Findings, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

achievement.<sup>21</sup> Thus, coupling targeted programs with those that also affect family characteristics may provide the greatest success.

Programs that demonstrated long-term effects on crime and antisocial behavior tended to be those that combined early childhood education and family support services.<sup>22</sup> Some call these “two-generation” programs. They combine programs aimed at children to enhance their cognitive and social skills with programs aimed at parents to help them be the most effective teachers of their own children in the home. Three key services of this type of program include: a developmentally appropriate early childhood program; a parenting education component; and an adult education, literacy, and job skills and training component.

## **Pre-K in Tennessee**

Providing pre-kindergarten in the public school systems is not a new idea. Since at least 1963, the General Assembly has addressed the issue in various pieces of legislation including:

- Public Chapter 292 of 1963 permitted Tennessee school systems to use federal or local funds for pre-kindergarten programs.
- House Joint Resolution 736 of 1990 directed the State Board of Education to convene a task force “for the purpose of developing and proposing a state plan for establishment of a comprehensive system of early childhood and parent education programs for at-risk children and their parents.”<sup>23</sup>
- Pre-kindergarten was mentioned in the earliest versions of the bill that became the Education Improvement Act of 1992.
- More recently, Public Chapter 954 of 1996 established pilot early childhood and pre-k programs for three-and four-year olds who live below the poverty line.

The State Board of Education revised its guidelines for pre-kindergarten programs in 1995 in the areas of staffing, facilities, and transportation.<sup>24</sup> Since the 1996 legislation, the Department of Education has provided grants for 147 pre-k classrooms in 44 counties. Six more have been approved and are ready to start if funding becomes available. (See Table 1.)

The State Board identifies six strategies to ensure that all children start school ready to learn:

1. Expand funding and implement the Board’s Early Childhood Education Plan for all eligible three- and four-year-old children and their parents during the regular school day and school year.
2. Provide technical assistance and professional development to early childhood education programs to help them meet national standards.
3. Provide a continuum of services to children as they move from early childhood to primary school programs, consistent with the Board’s Early Childhood Education Plan and Parent Involvement Policy.
4. Sustain the existing 104 family resource centers serving preschool and school age children and their families.

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<sup>21</sup> See Peter Rydell, *Investing in Our Children*, RAND Corporation, p. 123.

<sup>22</sup> Yoshikawa, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> The plan was approved by the State Board on November 15, 1991.

<sup>24</sup> See the State Board of Education’s website at [www.state.tn.us/sbe/14ec](http://www.state.tn.us/sbe/14ec).



5. Provide a network of accessible early childhood development training for childcare providers and parents in collaboration with other agencies and school systems.
6. Increase family literacy and parent involvement by participating in the Tennessee Family Literacy Consortium and increasing participation in Adult Basic Education and Even Start family literacy programs.

The State Board's recently revised Early Childhood Education Policy establishes guidelines in seven basic areas:

- Staff Organization and Development
- Facilities and Transportation
- Developmental Learning Programs
- Parent Involvement and Family Services
- Health/Mental Health/Nutrition Services
- Services for Children with Disabilities
- Governance and Administration

Staffing requirements include a director or supervisor; a lead teacher for each "group" of children with a maximum of 20 children per teacher; sufficient educational assistants to maintain an adult-to-child ratio of 1:10 or 1:8 if more than half of the children are three-year-olds; one parent involvement and family services counselor for every 60 children; and sufficient staff to provide for transportation, health and nutrition services, and special services for children with disabilities. In addition, the policy requires facilities to meet the state fire safety and health standards for child care programs and the federal Head Start requirements. And services are to be coordinated with existing programs for children ages zero to five with disabilities.

Tennessee has about 77,500 four-year-olds. The federal program Head Start serves about 15,000 of these. The state-funded Early Childhood Education Pilot Program serves 1,200 children. For the 2000-01 fiscal year, the state was permitted to use an additional \$9 million in non-recurring funds from the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program which allowed 1620 more children to participate.<sup>25</sup> (Please note that TANF funds may be used only for children who qualify based on poverty.)

Even in states such as Georgia, which has implemented universal pre-kindergarten, the participation rate is about 70 percent of the total eligible four-year-olds. The Governor's Initiative proposes to phase-in a universal pre-k program beginning with the most educationally disadvantaged children. Based on a 70 percent participation rate, including those children presently served by Head Start and the state's pilot programs, the Governor's Initiative projects Tennessee would need to add classes for about 7,370 children per year, which includes the 1800 children funded by TANF in 2000-2001.

Based on the RAND analysis, an investment of \$120 per public school student in pre-kindergarten by a state with a disproportionate number of low socioeconomic status

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<sup>25</sup> Per direct correspondence with Jan Bushing, Director of Early Childhood Education, Tennessee Department of Education.

students (such as Tennessee) could boost test scores by five points in math and reading.<sup>26</sup> Considering Tennessee's relatively low investment in early childhood education, and the relatively low socioeconomic status of many of its children, it is likely that increases in the program would produce measurable benefits in student performance.

## **A Look at Other States<sup>27</sup>**

Most states recognize the need and the benefits of early childhood education. In October 2000, a North Carolina court in the case *Hoke County Board of Education, et al vs. the State of North Carolina State Board of Education*, commonly known as the "Leandro Case," ruled that the state must provide pre-kindergarten services to at-risk children. The judge listed some of the characteristics that worked to place a child in the "at risk" category, including

- Poor health
- Poverty
- Family break up or instability
- Low parental education
- Inadequate or unstable housing
- Racial or minority status
- Lack of English language proficiency
- Criminal activity in the school or neighborhood
- Parental unemployment or underemployment

Although the case is under appeal, the ruling may indicate a trend toward including pre-kindergarten programs as part of a "public education."

According to a 1998 report published by the Families and Work Institute, 39 states fund at least one kind of pre-kindergarten program, and 37 appropriate state funds or have funding mechanisms for programs for four-year-olds. (See Table 2.) State investments range from \$1 million to well over \$200 million annually and serve anywhere from a few hundred to tens of thousands of children.<sup>28</sup>

At the time of the Families and Work Institute study, Tennessee's investment in early childhood education was just over \$3 million in a pilot program that served about 600 three- and four-year-olds who were eligible for Head Start, but were not served because of a lack of funds. Those amounts were doubled for fiscal year 2000-01, but the need still far outstrips the capacity of these programs.

Below are brief summaries of programs in states selected because of well-developed pre-kindergarten programs.

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<sup>26</sup> Estimate of additional expenditures per pupil to achieve 0.10 standard deviation gain in achievement (RAND, Chapter 8, "Assessing the Cost-Effectiveness of Different Resource Utilizations," p. 91). One standard deviation equals 50 points.

<sup>27</sup> States were selected from a table in *Prekindergarten Programs Funded by the States: Essential Elements for Policy Makers*. Families and Work Institute, New York, New York, September 1998. Additional information was obtained from individual states' websites and telephone interviews with department personnel.

<sup>28</sup> A. Mitchell, C. Ripple, and N. Chanana, "Pre-Kindergarten Programs Funded by the States: Essential Elements for Policy Makers." Families and Work Institute, September 1998.

### ***Georgia***

Georgia established a voluntary pre-kindergarten program in 1993 to provide four-year-old children with high quality preschool experiences. The Georgia Pre-kindergarten Program's goal is to provide a developmentally appropriate program emphasizing growth in language and literacy, math concepts, science, arts, physical development, and personal and social competence.

Any child who is four years old by September 1 and whose parents are Georgia residents are eligible to attend. Both private child development centers and public schools may participate. The program is completely state-funded by the Georgia Lottery for Education and is one of a few nationwide that allow all children to attend. (Local providers are responsible for space.) In 1999-2000 about 62,500 children enrolled in Georgia's program. The Georgia program is voluntary for both families and communities. As a result not every community has enough spaces for all four-year-olds who wish to participate, but department officials indicate that they try to establish providers when that happens. Some places have both public and private providers.

The requirements of Georgia's program are similar to those in Tennessee's State Board of Education Early Childhood Education Plan: a minimum of 6½ hours per day, (Tennessee requires 5 ½ hours per day) 5 days per week, 180 days per year; adult to child ratios of 1:10 with a class size limit of 1:20; similar staff and instructional guidelines; and a parental involvement element. The cost of the program in 1999-2000 was \$220 million.<sup>29</sup>

### ***New York***

New York is in the third year of a five-year phase-in of universal pre-kindergarten. The state has had a separate pre-k program targeted at the at-risk population for 33 years. The universal program is completely state-funded. School districts are required to sub-contract at least 10 percent of their programs with private providers. In the program's first year 54 percent of school districts responding to a state survey described their community's response to universal pre-kindergarten as "very enthusiastic."<sup>30</sup> In the top two reasons for electing to implement universal prekindergarten in the first year, more than half of the districts responded that the community felt a need for universal pre-kindergarten. No districts reported community opposition.

### ***Minnesota***

Minnesota began its School Readiness program in 1991. The program is open to all Minnesota children aged three-and-one-half to four-years and their families. By 1998, nearly all school districts had a school readiness program and the program had enrolled 67,779 children. Services are offered at a nominal fee, which may be waived for families unable to pay. School districts offer programs and services unique to the needs and resources of their communities. The program lists two goals:

- To help preschoolers enter school with the skills and behaviors necessary to be successful, and

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<sup>29</sup> James J. Gallagher et al, *Education for Four-Year-Olds: State Initiatives*, National Center for Early Development and Learning, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, p.2.

<sup>30</sup> New York State Education Department, *Universal PreKindergarten Takes Off in New York State: Preliminary Findings* at [www.emsc.nysed.gov/universe](http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/universe).

- To involve parents in their child's learning and education.

The program is offered through public school districts only.

### ***South Carolina***

South Carolina passed legislation in 1993 known as the Early Childhood Development and Academic Assistance Act (Act 135), which contained components for structured pre-kindergarten programs for four-year-olds, and also family literacy programs that teach parents activities that enhance their children's learning skills. The four-year-old program is mostly state-funded although school systems may add Title I or local dollars. No state money may go to private providers. The director estimates that the program serves about 30 percent of the state's four-year-olds. The program is geared toward children with the greatest need. These include children with limited English proficiency, low income, low parental education levels, and children referred by health care providers.

More recently the state passed the "First Steps" program, which requires counties to develop a plan for young children in collaboration with health service providers, schools, private providers, and others.

### ***Wisconsin***

Wisconsin has had a public four-year-old kindergarten program for many years, but has been slowly expanding it. A Wisconsin Department of Education official<sup>31</sup> estimates that about one-third of the state's eligible four-year-olds participate in the program. The four-year-old kindergarten is optional, but once a school district elects to provide the service, it becomes part of the state's funding formula. Unlike many other states, there is no preference for at-risk children, and no option for contracting with private providers. Programs are a half-day, but many districts provide a full-day program to accommodate the needs of working parents.

### ***Texas***

Texas began a pre-kindergarten program in 1984 and targets high-risk four-year-olds. Even though it is not a universal pre-k program, it served 140,639 children in 1999-2000. Any school district may offer pre-k programs, but school districts are required to offer them if there are at least 15 eligible three- and four-year-olds. Children who are unable to speak or comprehend English, are educationally disadvantaged (eligible for free- - reduced price lunch), or homeless receive priority. The program is half-day, and districts are not required to provide transportation. If they do, however, it is included within the regular transportation system.

### ***Florida***

Florida's program, like Texas', serves a more high risk population than Georgia's, and as a result, serves fewer children (about 30,000 in 1997). However, Florida requires about the same number of hours, similar staff and instructional standards, and some degree of parental involvement. The program has been in place since 1987 and was funded at \$97 million in 1998.<sup>32</sup> Based on the RAND report, despite the fact that Florida had a much smaller percentage of its children in pre-kindergarten than Texas,<sup>33</sup> its fourth and eighth

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<sup>31</sup> Telephone Interview with Jim McCoy, Early Childhood Consultant, Wisconsin Department of Education, August 21, 2000.

grade students demonstrated the seventh highest overall gains in reading and math on the 1990 through 1996 National Assessment of Education Progress.<sup>34</sup>

***California***

California has a Universal Preschool Task Force that is considering a publicly funded universal preschool within ten years for all three- and four-year old children.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-26.

<sup>33</sup> RAND, "State Education Characteristics," Appendix A, pp. 132.

<sup>34</sup> RAND, Chapter 5, "Trends in State Scores," pp. 60-63.

## Questions to Answer in Tennessee

In order to consider what a pre-kindergarten program might look like in Tennessee, a number of questions would have to be answered. Some of these are identified below.

### *What children would be eligible for the pre-kindergarten program?*

The Governor's Initiative proposes to make pre-kindergarten available to all four-year-olds in five years. The most educationally at-risk children would be served first.

Eligibility options used in other states include:

- Pre-k available to all four-year-olds (GA) (NY) (WI)
- Pre-k available to all four-year-olds, with priority to at-risk districts (CT)
- Pre-k provided only to children meeting certain pre-determined "at-risk" characteristics such as poverty, mother's education level, homelessness, limited English proficiency (TX, KY, SC).

### *How would public and private pre-kindergarten programs be coordinated?*

Many preschool and daycare providers in Tennessee already provide services to four-year-olds; however, many may not meet the state's requirements for pre-k programs. Of the states that have pre-kindergarten programs, few (seven) limit their funding to only public schools. The majority (30) allow a variety of community-based organizations to receive funds either directly or through a contract with a local public school system. Only ten states limit eligibility based on family income levels; five of these apply the Head Start eligibility criteria. Nearly half of the states (14) limit their programs to four-year-olds. About the same number (13) also serve three-year-olds. Two states include five-year-olds who are not yet eligible for kindergarten, and three states include all children from birth to kindergarten.

Options:

- Give funds to school districts, which may provide the service themselves, or contract with other providers (FL)
- State disbursement of funds to all providers, whether school districts or others (GA)
- Provide funds only to school districts (with no private participation) (WI)
- Collaborative programs between school systems and higher education institutions (Baltimore County, MD)

(See Table 3 for a summary of state funding structures.)

### *What would be included in a pre-K program? Would the program be full-day or half-day?*

The current State Board policy provides for 5.5 hours exclusive of naps. Many pre-kindergarten programs in other states are half-day. Presently, even kindergarteners are not required to attend for a whole day, although it is available. If pre-k lasted only a half day, child care for the other half would probably still be needed.

### *If school systems offer pre-kindergarten to everyone, wouldn't that take business away from private and non-profit providers?*

Private providers who meet the State Board of Education's criteria for pre-kindergarten programs would be eligible to apply for program funding. This is particularly helpful in high-growth systems that may have trouble finding adequate space. Most states that have undertaken far-reaching pre-kindergarten programs have found partnerships with

community providers to be a good way to provide the service and build on existing community resources.

***Wouldn't this be setting up an "entitlement" program?***

The Governor's Initiative expands the present program. It would not be available to all Tennessee children until after the fifth year. It would not even be able to serve all "educationally at-risk" children unless the General Assembly provided funding through at least two years.

Tennessee's Constitution, Article XI, Section 12 states,

*The State of Tennessee recognizes the inherent value of education and encourages its support. The General Assembly shall provide for the maintenance, support and eligibility standards of a system of free public schools.*

It is the General Assembly's prerogative to define what Tennessee's system of free public schools will include. For the past several years, public education has been defined to be kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. But the implementation of high-stakes testing and an elaborate accountability system have made educators and policymakers painfully aware that many of the youngest students enter school without the developmental skills they need to succeed. Although that has been the case for decades, the emphasis on school performance and a lack of low-skill jobs has caused school administrators to seek more assistance for those who start at a disadvantage. Providing pre-kindergarten would help thousands of Tennessee's students to prosper in grades K-12, who otherwise will not.

In addition, the recent North Carolina ruling in the "Leandro Case" discussed above and other states' efforts to create P-16 systems (preschool through college) indicate movement toward an expectation of preschool as part of a public education.

***If school districts could subcontract with private providers, could church space be used?***

- New York allows any providers to contract, but if they are religious, they must cover any religious icons while the public program is present and cannot use any of the instructional time for religious teaching.
- Georgia sets a statewide curriculum for all pre-kindergarten programs that must be followed. There can be no religious instruction during the 6 ½ hour state-funded program; however, churches and other religious institutions may contract to provide pre-kindergarten programs. In addition, school systems may lease church space to provide their programs.

***What will it cost? Should funds be distributed through the BEP?***

Estimated costs should be based on projected participation rates. Other states have experienced anywhere from about one third to 75 percent of the four-year-old population, depending on the program eligibility requirements. Participation rates for a voluntary pre-kindergarten program would likely be much lower than for kindergarten, which is mandatory.

The Governor's Initiative is based on a 70 percent participation rate after five years. It projects a cost of \$4,900 per pupil which covers the licensed teacher's salary and benefits, a certified assistant, materials and supplies, transportation, and parental

involvement (home visits.) It does not include cost of space, which is provided locally. Some have noted that this cost appears high compared to costs reported in other states. A recent Southern Regional Education Board publication, for example, reported “state per-child funding” and showed Tennessee to be the highest in the southeast. Further investigation, however, reveals that Tennessee’s programs are completely state-funded while other states require a local match, not reflected in the comparison. And because Tennessee requires a licensed teacher, it likely appears higher than some other states. In addition, Tennessee’s program is very small so it has not yet achieved some of the economies of scale that other states have. For comparative purposes, for 2000-2001, Georgia indicates its budget is \$232 million for 63,500 four-year olds or \$3,654 per child. (This program is completely state-funded, but does not include space which is provided locally.)

The Governor’s Initiative proposes to include the pre-kindergarten program in the BEP in the sixth year, after it becomes available in all school systems. Whether pre-kindergarten should be funded through the BEP depends on the statewide availability and the extent to which local governments are expected to contribute. Presently, the pilot programs are funded through a state-administered grant program outside the BEP. If the program stays limited, it is appropriate to keep it outside the BEP. If, however, every school system is expected to offer pre-kindergarten services, then it should be included in the BEP to allow school systems to adapt funding to their local situations. Even if the program stays targeted at the at-risk population, funding it through the BEP as an “identified and served” population would allow the cost to be allocated across both the state and the local tax bases. When the state funds programs at 100 percent of the cost, wealthier systems are more able to use their own resources on other items; poorer systems cannot, exacerbating inequities among the systems.

***In conclusion, other states’ experiences indicate that Tennessee would reap long-lasting, cost-saving benefits by expanding its pre-kindergarten program.***

It is widely understood that the earliest years of a child's life are essential to predicting ultimate success in school and in life. It is not as common to make the further link between strong early childhood education, whether at home or in a more formal environment, and a strong economy that benefits all citizens. Tennessee is an example of a state with relatively low educational levels, relatively low household incomes, and relatively low economic productivity. Yet, the connections between and among those factors are rarely acknowledged. Pre-kindergarten programs have brought significant benefits to other states as part of a system of lifelong learning. It is likely that Tennessee could also benefit considering that:

- Tennessee is at or near the bottom among the states in providing early childhood education programs.
- Tennessee ranks poorly in education levels, income levels, and economic productivity.
- Tennessee has a disproportionately large number of lower socioeconomic status students who could benefit from early childhood education.
- Public pre-kindergarten programs have a measurable, statistically significant positive effect on math and reading proficiency.
- Public pre-kindergarten programs are one of the most cost-effective strategies for improving math and reading proficiency.



- Participation in child-focused programs benefits students by reducing the likelihood of placement in special education programs, retention in grade, and dropping out of high school.

Pre-kindergarten children are the workforce of the future. Failure to invest in pre-kindergarten education now will likely jeopardize Tennessee's competitiveness for "new economy" jobs.

**Table 1: Tennessee Early Childhood Education Pilot Program**

# Counties	County	# Agencies	Agency	Total # classes	Total Contract
1	<b>Anderson</b>	1	Anderson County Schools	2	\$206,000.00
2	<b>Bledsoe</b>	2	Bledsoe County Schools	1	\$103,000.00
3	<b>Blount</b>	3	Blount County Schools	3	\$309,000.00
	<b>Blount, Jefferson, Sevier</b>	4	Douglas Cherokee Economic Authority*	3	\$309,000.00
4	<b>Bradly</b>	5	Family Resource Agency	3	\$309,000.00
5	<b>Carter</b>	6	Elizabethton City	3	\$309,000.00
6	<b>Claiborne</b>	7	Claiborne County Board of Education	3	\$309,000.00
7	<b>Coffee</b>	8	Coffee County Board of Education	2	\$206,000.00
8	<b>Davidson</b>	9	Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County By and Through Metro Action Commission Head Start	1	\$103,000.00
	<b>Davidson</b>	10	Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County By and Through the Metropolitan Board of Public Education	9.5	\$854,500.00
	<b>Davidson</b>	11	Vanderbilt University	1	\$103,000.00
	<b>Davidson</b>	12	Wayne Reed Christian Child Care Center	1	\$51,500.00
	<b>Davidson</b>	13	Martha O'Bryan Center	0.75	\$72,100.00
	<b>Davidson</b>	14	Schrader Lane Child Care Center	3	\$245,450.00
9	<b>Dekalb</b>	15	Dekalb County Schools	1	\$103,000.00
10	<b>Dyer</b>	16	Dyer County Board of Education	4	\$412,000.00
11	<b>Fayette</b>	17	Fayette County Schools	3	\$118,000.00
12	<b>Franklin</b>	18	Franklin County Board of Education	3	\$309,000.00
13	<b>Gibson</b>	19	Humboldt City Schools	2	\$206,000.00
	<b>Gibson</b>	20	Gibson County Schools	2	\$206,000.00
	<b>Gibson</b>	21	Milan Special School District	3	\$309,000.00
14	<b>Greene</b>	22	Holston United Methodist Home for Children	3	\$206,000.00
	<b>Greene</b>	23	Greeneville City Schools	2	\$206,000.00

# Counties	County	# Agencies	Agency	Total # classes	Total Contract
16	<b>Hamilton</b>	25	Hamilton County Schools	5	\$515,000.00
17	<b>Hancock</b>	26	Hancock County Schools	2	\$206,000.00
18	<b>Hawkins</b>	27	Hawkins County Schools	1	\$103,000.00
19	<b>Haywood</b>	28	Haywood County Schools/Anderson Early Childhood Center	1	\$103,000.00
20	<b>Henry</b>	29	Henry County School System	2	\$206,000.00
21	<b>Humphreys</b>	30	Humphreys County Schools	1	\$103,000.00
22	<b>Jefferson</b>		See info on Douglas Cherokee*		
23	<b>Knox</b>	31	Knox County Schools	2	\$206,000.00
	<b>Knox</b>	32	Montgomery Village Ministry, Inc.	2	\$206,000.00
24	<b>Lauderdale</b>	33	New Beginnings Center	1	\$103,000.00
25	<b>Lawrence</b>	34	Lawrence County Board of Education	5.5	\$566,500.00
26	<b>Lincoln</b>	35	Lincoln County Schools	1	\$103,000.00
27	<b>Loudon</b>	36	Lenoir City School System	3	\$309,000.00
	<b>Loudon</b>	37	Loudon County Schools	1	\$103,000.00
28	<b>Madison</b>	38	Jackson-Madison County Schools	3	\$309,000.00
29	<b>Maury</b>	39	Maury County Schools	3	\$309,000.00
30	<b>McNairy</b>	40	McNairy County Schools	1	\$103,000.00
31	<b>Perry</b>	41	Perry County Schools	1	\$103,000.00
32	<b>Putnam</b>	42	Putnam County Schools	4	\$412,000.00
33	<b>Rutherford</b>	43	Murfreesboro City Schools	3	\$309,000.00
	<b>Rutherford</b>	44	MTSU	1	\$103,000.00
34	<b>Obion, Weakley</b>	45	Northwest TN Economic Development Council*	2	\$206,000.00
35	<b>Rhea</b>	46	Rhea County Schools	1	\$103,000.00
35	<b>Scott</b>	47	Scott County Board of Education	4	\$412,000.00
36	<b>Sequatchie</b>	48	Sequatchie County Schools	1	\$103,000.00

# Counties	County	# Agencies	Agency	Total # classes	Total Contract
37	<b>Sevier</b>		See info on Douglas Cherokee*		
38	<b>Shelby</b>	49	Memphis City Schools	10	\$1,030,000.00
	<b>Shelby</b>	50	Shelby County Head Start, Inc.	2	\$206,000.00
	<b>Shelby</b>	51	Southwest Tennessee Community College	2	\$206,000.00
	<b>Shelby</b>	52	Little Heritage Enrichment Program	3	\$309,000.00
	<b>Shelby</b>	53	Lebonheur Children's Medical Center, Inc.	0.5	\$51,500.00
	<b>Shelby</b>	54	Primary Preparatory, Inc.	3	\$309,000.00
	<b>Shelby</b>	55	St. Luke Learning Center	2	\$206,000.00
	<b>Shelby</b>	56	Shelby County Schools	1	\$103,000.00
39	<b>Sullivan</b>	57	Kingsport City Schools	1	\$103,000.00
	<b>Sullivan</b>	58	Bristol City Schools	1	\$87,550.00
	<b>Sullivan</b>	59	Sullivan County Schools	2	\$206,000.00
40	<b>Unicoi</b>	60	Unicoi County Schools	2	\$206,000.00
41	<b>Van Buren</b>	61	Van Buren County Board of Education	1	\$103,000.00
42	<b>Washington</b>	62	Children First Development Center / Johnson City Housing Authority	1	\$103,000.00
	<b>Washington</b>	63	East Tennessee State University	1	\$103,000.00
43	<b>Wayne</b>	64	Wayne County Schools	3	\$309,000.00
44	<b>Weakley</b>	65	Weakley County	1	\$103,000.00
	<b>Weakley</b>		See info on Northwest TN Economic Development Council*		
44 Counties		65 Agencies		147.25	\$14,613,100.00

\* Administers programs in more than one county

**Pending/Waiting List**

<b>Jackson</b>	Jackson County Schools	1
<b>Hardeman</b>	Hardeman County Schools	1
<b>Dickson</b>	Highland Rim	Possibly 2
<b>Carroll</b>	South Carroll Special School District	1
<b>Gibson</b>	Bradford Special School District	1

**Source:**  
**Department of Education**

**Table 2. States that Fund Pre-kindergarten and/or Head Start**

	<b>State funding for Pre-k Programs</b>	<b>State funding for HeadStart</b>	<b>No state funds for Pre-k or HeadStart</b>
Alabama			X
Alaska		X	
Arizona	X		
Arkansas	X		
California	X		
Colorado	X		
Connecticut	X	X	
Delaware	X		
Florida	X		
Georgia	X		
Hawaii	X	X	
Idaho			X
Illinois	X		
Indiana			X
Iowa	X		
Kansas			
Kentucky	X		
Louisiana	X		
Maine	X	X	
Maryland	X		
Massachusetts	X	X	
Michigan	X		
Minnesota	X	X	
Mississippi			X
Missouri	X		
Montana			X
Nebraska	X		
Nevada			X
New Hampshire		X	
New Jersey	X	X	
New Mexico	X		
New York	X		
North Carolina	X		
North Dakota			X
Ohio	X	X	
Oklahoma	X	X	
Oregon	X		
Pennsylvania	X		
Rhode Island	X	X	
South Carolina	X		
South Dakota			X
Tennessee	X		
Texas	X		
Utah			X
Vermont	X		
Virginia	X		
Washington	X	X	
West Virginia	X		
Wisconsin	X	X	
Wyoming			X
Totals	37	13	11

Source: *Pre-kindergarten Programs Funded by the States: Essential Elements for Policy Makers, Families and Work Institute, September 1998.* (Used with Permission)

**Table 3. Agencies Eligible to Offer Pre-kindergarten Programs**

	<i>Public school districts only</i>	<i>School districts &amp; other agencies via subcontracts with local school districts</i>	<i>School districts &amp; other agencies via direct contracts from state agency</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Arizona		X		also to charter schools
Arkansas			X	
California		X	X	
Colorado		X		
Connecticut			X	
Delaware			X	
Florida		X		
Georgia			X	
Hawaii			X	Funds go to parents
Illinois		X		
Iowa		X	X	
Kentucky		X		
Louisiana	X			
Maine	X			
Maryland	X			
Massachusetts		X	X	
Michigan		X	X	
Minnesota	X			
Missouri			X	
Nebraska		X		
New Jersey		X		
New Mexico			X	
New York		X		
North Carolina			X	via county Partnership boards
Ohio		X		
Oklahoma		X		
Oregon		X	X	
Pennsylvania	X			
Rhode Island		X		
South Carolina		X		
Tennessee			X	
Texas		X		
Vermont			X	
Virginia		X		Also directly to local govts.
Washington		X	X	
West Virginia	X			
Wisconsin	X			
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>16</b>	
		Unduplicated count = 30 states		

Source: *Pre-kindergarten Programs Funded by the States: Essential Elements for Policy Makers, Families and Work Institute, September 1998.* (Used with permission.)