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A DESCRIPTIVE POLICY ANALYSIS OF STATE-LEVEL
UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL ADOPTION

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Holly Higgins Wilcher

June 2018

Advisor: Kristina Hesbol, PhD.

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Abstract

Presently, the United States does not have a publicly funded, comprehensive, universal ECE system. The fragmented and piecemeal approach to providing ECE creates social injustice and inequity for many young children (Kagan & Roth, 2017; Kagan, 2009). With the absence of comprehensive and streamlined federal ECE policy, several states have attempted to at least provide universal preschool to all four-year-old children. For states that aim to adopt universal preschool, it is critical to understand the factors, political conditions, and policy environments conducive to creating preschool policy change. Although many states would like to provide universal preschool, very few have been successful in overcoming barriers to its policy adoption (Azzi-Lessing, 2009; Bushouse, 2009; Rose, 2010; Ackerman, 2004). While many studies focus on the effectiveness of preschool, to date little attention has been paid to how universal preschool policies are being adopted by states. This descriptive policy analysis used a multi-case study approach to examine how ten different states - large and small, “red” and “blue”, rich and poor - successfully adopted universal preschool. Findings indicate the presence of key policy conditions, strategies, and themes found across states with universal preschool policy on the books. Implications for states’ development of universal preschool policy are discussed.

Keywords: universal preschool, policy, early childhood education

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Chapter One: Introduction

Cultural, societal, political, economic and philosophical changes over the past several decades have made a tremendous impact on how and where very young children spend their days. In the United States, there are over 20 million children from birth to age six (Fraga, Dobbins & McCready, 2015). Of those younger than the age five, more than 11 million receive some portion of their early care and learning outside of their homes (Child Care Aware, 2017). This early care and learning/education (ECE) takes place in a wide array of settings, from private preschool programs and family child care homes to city or state-funded child care initiatives to federally funded early childhood programs (e.g., *Early Head Start* or *Head Start*). With the increase in the number of parents joining the workforce over the years, the demand for out-of-home child care/preschool has steadily increased. Unfortunately, the quality of at least half of the ECE environments where very young children spend their days is poor to mediocre at best (Burchinal, Vernon-Feagans, Vitiello, Greenberg, & The Family Life Project Key Investigators, 2014; Center for Law and Social Policy, 2016; Zaslow, Anderson, Redd, Wesse, Tarullo, & Burchinal, 2010; Zaslow, Anderson, Redd, Wessel, Daneri, Green, & Martinez-Beck, 2016). This is in part due to the lack of strong state or federal infrastructure for early care and learning/education (ECE). Presently, the United States does not have a publicly funded, comprehensive, universal ECE system. It funds ECE targeted at children and families with disadvantages through programs with separate funding streams like *Head*

Start and Early Head Start and the *Child Care Development Fund* (CCDF). With the absence of comprehensive and streamlined federal ECE policy, several states have attempted to approach the provision of universal ECE systems through adoption of policies that provide universal preschool to all four-year-old children.

At the federal level, there has been a growing financial investment in and commitment to preschool funding, changes that have drawn considerable interest from educators, politicians, and parents across the United States. In 2011, preschool education made national headlines when federal officials announced a new competitive grant program, the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC), aimed at building integrated statewide systems of early childhood education and care for children from birth through age five (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Through the competition, 35 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico created plans to increase access to high-quality programs for children from low-income families, providing more children from birth to age five with a strong foundation they need for success in school and beyond. In December 2011, the White House announced that nine states (California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island and Washington) would receive grant awards from the \$500 million Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge fund (The White House, 2011). The number and list of winners was determined both by the quality of the applications and the funds available. In March 2012, The Obama administration announced that Colorado, Illinois, New Mexico, Oregon, and Wisconsin – states that were finalists in the earlier competition –

would be able to compete for a share of \$133 million in new *Race to the Top* funding (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

In 2016, eighteen states received competitive federal Preschool Development Grants (PDG) that contributed nearly \$210 million in 2015 and 2016. Just over \$108 million of the federal PDG spending supported increased enrollment or quality enhancement in state preschool, while the remaining funds supported children in preschool programs outside of state-funded programs. In 2016, nearly 1.5 million children attended state-funded preschool, including nearly 1.3 million 4-year-olds. Almost five percent of 3-year-olds and 32 percent of 4-year-olds were served in state-funded preschool. In 2017, total state funding for preschool programs grew to almost \$7.4 billion, an increase of more than \$564 million or about eight percent across the 43 states and D.C. that offered preschool during the 2015-2016 year.

Universal preschool policies lay the foundation for providing voluntary participation for all young children. Unlike targeted programs such as *Head Start*, universal preschool programs provide government-funded preschool to all children regardless of economic backgrounds or other qualifying characteristics. The universal preschool movement has shifted the dialogue of education to one of P-12 rather than K-12. In doing so, this movement has presented governmental bodies, primarily states, with the challenge of deciding what role they should serve in expanding access to public education to children under five-years-old.

Despite the body of research citing the importance of early childhood brain development to public awareness of the importance of ECE, and the number of large-

scale studies showing that quality early experiences are crucial for later success in school and life (Fenech, Sweller, & Harrison, 2010), the United States federal government has not seen fit to provide a universal ECE system. This is due in part to the focus on ECE programmatic fiscal earmarks and the lack of attention on infrastructure and systems building efforts. Although many states would like to provide universal preschool, very few have been successful in overcoming barriers to its policy implementation (Gallager and Clifford, 2000; Azzi-Lessing, 2009). While many studies focus on the effectiveness of preschool, to date, little attention has been paid to how universal preschool policies are being adopted by states.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this descriptive policy analysis is to examine how states have successfully adopted universal preschool. The universal preschool being examined in this study is the state-wide provision of voluntary early care and education/preschool for all four-year-old and some three-year-old children. This study focused specifically on the strategies states employed to successfully secure universal preschool adoption and how these states overcame barriers to this policy enactment. The subjects in this study are all states that offer universal preschool. While implementation is certainly an important characteristic of a policy, the purpose of this study is to identify factors that predict universal preschool policy development.

Problem Statement

Given the impact a child's earliest years has on her school readiness, lifelong academic success and ability to compete in the 21st century global workforce, intentional and responsive early learning experiences in quality settings are vital for very young children. Despite the resurgence of the universal preschool conversation at the federal level, the United States does not have a universal preschool system serving all children birthday to five years of age. Furthermore, many states that would like to provide universal preschool to at least all four-year-old children are unable to, primarily due to fiscal limitations (Rose, 2010; Kagan & Roth, 2017). Unfortunately, this means, depending on the fiscal opportunities of the family, the quality of early care and learning experiences young children have with a parent(s) working outside of the home, is largely left to chance.

The United States' fragmented and piecemeal approach to providing ECE creates social injustice and inequality for many young children (Kagan, 2009). While ten states have been able to adopt universal preschool for four-year-old children, no universal ECE system (public state-funded preschool for children ages birth to five) exists in the United States, or in any state in the United States. For states that aim to adopt universal preschool, it is critical to understand the factors, political conditions, and policy environments within the states that have successfully enacted universal preschool as law.

Significance of Problem

Child development research, neuroscience, and early childhood program evaluation all confirm the long-lasting effects that high-quality early childhood experiences have on individual human and societal outcomes, including school readiness and persistence, economic vitality, workforce preparation, and mental health (Phillips & Shonkoff, 2000, Shonkoff 2010). A child's earliest learning experiences happen within the context of relationships between that child and adults who care for and educate her (Gilliam & Marchesseault, 2014). Research shows a consistent positive association between the quality of a child's earliest care and learning experiences and his or her longitudinal cognitive development (Yoshikawa, Weiland, Brooks-Gunn, Burchinal, Espinosa, Gormley, Zaslow, 2013; Phillips & Shonkoff, 2000), social and emotional competence and executive functioning (Huston, , Bobbitt, K. C.z, & Bentley, A. 2015; Mortensen & Barnett, 2015), and overall academic success and life experiences (Laser & Fite, 2011). There is now ample evidence that high quality, developmentally appropriate preschool services provide numerous benefits to children and their families (Yoshikawa, et al., 2013). The most positive outcomes, however, have been found in countries with a national policy of providing universal ECE to all children and enforcement of regulations to safeguard the quality of preschool services (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012), services not present in the fragmented state of publicly-funded ECE in the United States.

Research on the benefits of ECE, brain development, and the economic return on investment in early childhood human capital consistently points to the need for quality early learning experience for all young children. However, without a sound universal

ECE infrastructure, this need will not be met. This study analyzes ten states' universal ECE systems' policies to gain a better understanding of what conditions and policy implementation are essential for the United States to develop and deliver a universal ECE system.

Over the last 40 years, various government agencies have authorized multiple federal ECE programs. *Head Start* and *Early Head Start* were established to assist children of families living in poverty (Cohen, 1996). Early Intervention (Part B and Part C) serves children with developmental delays up to six years (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 1975). The Child Care and Development Fund Block Grant (CCDBG) assists working families with the cost of child care and is the primary source of federal funding for child care assistance (Cohen, 1996). With the exception of *Head Start*, funding from these sources, as well as from individual states, is channeled through a variety of state agencies, including departments of education, health, child protection, and public welfare.

The unfortunate nature of these federal programs is that they are authorized to serve only very small segments of the population, such as children living at a very low poverty level or children with disabilities. Moreover, families eligible for these federal programs often do not receive services because of inadequate program funding (Rose, 2010). Families and children who do not qualify for the program requirement are forced to find and finance early care and education options on their own. Unfortunately, the funds available from all sources have been inadequate in proportion to what is necessary

to promote, sustain, and ensure a system of high-quality early care and education (Azzi-Lessing, 2009; Gallagher, 2000).

One of the most striking characteristics of current programs for young children outside the home is the absence of a comprehensive infrastructure or support system to stand behind the delivery of services to the child and family (Gallagher, 2000, Azzi-Lessing, 2009, Kagan & Roth, 2017). Without a publicly funded, universal ECE system or widespread delivery of state-funded universal preschool, many families find quality early environments difficult to secure and even more difficult to afford. As a result, their children end up in unlicensed, unregulated, and sometimes unsafe environments (Child Care of Aware, 2012). Without an adequate ECE support system, it is difficult to guarantee that a child has the experience he or she needs for optimal development and the groundwork for school readiness. Moreover, with lack of direction in the form of clear and comprehensive policy formulation, many states across the country lack the template, guidance, and funding allocation required to fully and successfully implement high quality universal preschool programming (Hardee & Kirkpatrick, 2013).

Only in the last two decades have the terms *infrastructure* and *systems* been brought into ECE policy conversations. This is due in part to the focus on ECE programmatic fiscal earmarks and the lack of attention on infrastructure and systems building efforts. Furthermore, this fragmentation of ECE funding and program implementation has perpetuated considerable inequities in ECE program access, equity, and quality. There are many barriers to universal preschool adoption and universal ECE system actualization in America. Despite research citing the importance of early

childhood brain development, public awareness of the critical window of importance of ECE, and a number of large-scale studies showing that quality early experiences are crucial for later success in school and life (Fenech, Sumsion, & Shepherd, 2010), universal preschool policies remain an anomaly.

As the United States struggles to maintain relevance in the world economy with a workforce that can thrive in the global market, policy makers urge school systems to consider reforms, intervention approaches, and turnaround efforts to produce these desired results. The importance of children entering public school with a solid foundation to become 21st century learners has gained increased attention. Research shows that ECE is one of the most effective means to ensuring school readiness and subsequent positive academic and life outcomes. Yet, in spite of ample research regarding the importance of early brain development, the quality of early care and learning experiences, and the consequences of failing to meet young children's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical needs, the United States has failed to realize the need for an infrastructure to deliver and sustain an ECE system. Without cohesive and sound state and/or federal systems, it is impossible to ensure ECE provides maximum benefits to the children and, that public dollars are wisely spent (Kagan & Roth, 2017; Kagan, 2009; Kagan & Reid, 2008).

Researchers have linked improved child outcomes, and thus school readiness, to the provision of high quality early childhood educational experiences in studies that considered the impact of early childhood education from birth to age five (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002; McLaughlin, Campbell, Pungello,

& Skinner, 2007; Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield, & Nores, 2005). These benefits surpass the immediate positive impact for children, their families, and society. Supplied with strong evidence regarding the myriad of ECE benefits, some states and countries developed delivery systems to provide universal ECE for young children. Undeniably, assuring children's success in public school and their eventual contribution to a global workforce begins before kindergarten, as achievement gaps and lack of school readiness are established in early childhood years.

Research has associated the lack of school readiness with the quality of a child's earliest care and learning experiences (Campbell & Ramey, 1994; Hart & Risely, 1995; Franko, 2015; Lee & Burkham, 2002; LoCasale-Crouch, Konold, Pianta, Howes, Burchinal, Bryant, & Barbarin 2007). As research findings on brain development and the impact of caregiver-child interactions are disseminated to an ever-broadening audience, the public has become increasingly savvy regarding the issue of ECE quality (Azzi-Lessing, 2009). This is a very positive development; however, it also places additional pressure on programs to demonstrate that they provide sufficient quality and truly benefit participating children (Stoney et al., 2006). It is ironic that the United States — the nation that has made the largest investment in rigorous research on the effects of early childhood programs — should have one of the world's most fragmented systems for administering those programs (Kagan, 2013).

Although federal and state governments have seen fit to universally provide a K-12 system for education (although some states do not support kindergarten) (Barnett, 2014), no universal ECE system exists for children under five years of age. Policies of

universal preschool lay the groundwork for providing unrestricted access to early childhood education programs without cost to the consumer. Unlike targeted programs such as *Head Start*, universal preschool programs provide government-funded preschool to all children regardless of race, economic background, or other qualifying characteristics. While it is common for policy makers to embrace the concept of public school systems, understanding, embracing and subsequently funding an ECE system is much less common. Although federal and state ECE investments have continued to substantially increase over the last few decades, during their optimal period of cognitive development and school readiness, the majority of children four-years-old and younger are unable to access, participate in, and afford quality ECE programs (Barnett, 2015).

Summary

Changes in family situations, communities, work lives, and public policy have made a tremendous impact on the number and types of environments where young children spend their days. With the increase in the number of parents joining the workforce, the demand for out-of-home care has steadily increased. Yet, the quality of at least half of the environments where young children spend their days is poor to mediocre at best (Burchinal, et al., 2009; Zaslow, et al., 2010) in part due to the lack of a sound ECE systems (Kagan, 2009). During the most critical developmental period of their lives, the quality of environments where young children spend their days is left largely to chance due to their family's socioeconomic status.

Research on the benefits of ECE, specifically universal preschool, on brain development and the economic return on investment in early childhood human capital

consistently points to the need for quality early learning experiences for all young children. However, without sound universal preschool systems, this need will not be met. The research of state-wide universal preschool adoption has thus far focused on quality and policies in programs. Very little research has been done to date on universal preschool adoption in the United States and most of that is focused on the cost of a system and outcomes of targeted preschool – preschool publicly provided for children who are at risk for not being ready for school/K-12. Research opportunities exist for exploring contributions to universal preschool policy adoption through the use of qualitative methodologies and mixed-methods approaches (Curran, 2015). This qualitative, state-level descriptive policy analysis reveals a better understanding of the types of policy strategies and environments most conducive to statewide universal preschool adoption, how states were able to overcome barriers to universal preschool policy adoption, and other lessons learned regarding successful adoption. As a result of this study, other states hoping to launch a universal preschool/adopt universal preschool policy for four-year-old children might have a better understanding of how to approach the policy adoption process.

Research Questions

The research question posed in this study was: How were ten states, some of the richest and poorest, “red” and “blue,” able to achieve early childhood policy innovation by enacting universal preschool law?

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this paper, key words and concepts are defined as follows:

- **Early care and education** (also known as child care, day care, early childhood education, early childhood learning, pre-kindergarten, and preschool) refers to programs of all settings that provide early care and learning for children from birth to age five, all of which share the goal of nurturing young children’s learning, and development. It is delivered across a variety of settings: center-based, home-based, or at the local public school in urban, suburban and rural communities.
- **Universal Preschool:** sometimes referred to as universal pre-K or universal early care and education, is the publicly funded provision of early care and education to all children regardless of family income, a child’s abilities, or other risk factors (e.g., living in poverty, exposure to violence, child abuse). Universal preschool relies on state-wide adoption.
- **Policy Entrepreneurs** Kingdon (1984) defines these as, “advocates who are willing to invest their resources – time, energy, reputation, money – to promote a position in return for an anticipated future gain in the form of material, purposive, or solidary benefits” (p. 179).
- **Policy Window** Policy windows are defined by Kingdon (1994, 1995) as a critical time when a problem, policy alternatives, and political opportunities intersect to shift the direction of policy.

Chapter Two provides a review of literature relevant to this study. Chapter Three provides the design of the descriptive policy analysis to include data collection and analysis. Chapters Four and Five include findings of the study and a discussion of those findings in light of their implications for future universal preschool policy development.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

The purpose of this study was to understand how states come to adopt universal preschool policy. This chapter reviews and discusses universal preschool within the larger context of ECE, a brief history of ECE in the United States, traditional barriers to policy adoption, and the use of *Large Leaps* (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010) and *Policy Windows* (Kingdon, 1995) theories as a framework for this study.

Early Care and Education

Significant variation exists in how policymakers, researchers, and scholars define ECE. In part, such discrepancies are a function of the age range that early childhood includes (Kagan, & Reid, 2008). Early childhood has been described to encompass:

- Pre-natal to age eight;
- Birth to age five; and
- Preschool.

ECE is based on the idea that learning begins at birth and that children are born “wired” for learning through the context of relationships (Shonkoff, 2010). Much of the philosophy of ECE is based on the idea that children learn through relationships and play (Fung & Cheng, 2012). By supporting different types of children’s play, early childhood teachers and parents can support domains of child development that influence lifelong learning and academic success. ECE also supports construction of the “self” (Harter, 1999), a central component of education in which children learn about who they are,

shape their relationships to and with others, and inform their cultural and linguistic background and environment.

There are specific developmental domains impacted by ECE. All domains are interrelated and serve as the basis for learning and development. The *social* and *emotional* aspects of development are interconnected. The *social* component pertains to a child's ability to develop healthy relationships and to cooperate and get along well with others. The *emotional* aspect of development relates to a child's ability to identify their own emotions and feelings as well as the emotions and feelings of others. The *physical* element focuses on development of gross and fine motor skills, while *intellectual* development relates to how young children reconcile the world around them. Finally, *creative* development helps children learn through music, art, dramatic play, dance and reading.

Universal Preschool

The term *universal preschool*, also often referred to universal pre-K or preschool for all, means that ECE programs are available to any four-year-old child in a given state, regardless of family income, children's abilities, or other factors. A total of eight (15%) states have established state-wide universal preschool (Barnett, 2014). Some states have state-funded preschool programs that are not universal, but rather have targeted audiences – either children from families with low incomes or children from families with various risk factors that could affect their learning. In Arkansas, for example, in addition to family income level, eligibility is based on children having one or more of the following risk factors: a teen parent, developmental delay, low birth weight, limited English

proficiency, placement in foster care, a parent on active military duty, or family violence (Barnett, 2014). Eligible families can choose to send their child to a universal preschool program, use other early care and education options, or keep their preschoolers at home. Although the term *preschooler* generally refers to a child at the age of four-years-old or younger (NAEYC, 2008), of the ten states with universal preschool, eight provide universal preschool exclusively to four-year-old children and only two states, Illinois and Vermont, provide universal preschool for children both at the age of three and for years old (Barnett et al., 2017).

Universal Early Care and Education

Universal ECE is the comprehensive provision of early care and learning for all children five years old and younger. Like universal preschool, it is a voluntary service available to all families with young children regardless of a preschooler's age or potential risk factors. To some, the term "universal" may evoke connotations of "mandatory." There is also a strong ideological bias within some groups of the American population against government intervention in the lives of young children and their families (Kagan, 2009). On the contrary, universal ECE and universal preschool do not replace parental responsibility, or require that a child attend preschool. Instead, universal ECE builds upon and incorporates parental responsibility along with providing voluntary early care and learning programs. No state currently offers publicly funded universal early care and education to all preschool-age children (Barnett, 2016).

The development, implementation and sustainability of quality universal ECE relies on a sound infrastructure (Kagan & Roth, 2017; Azzi-Lessing, 2009; Gallagher &

Clifford, 2004; Kagan, 2008). The term *infrastructure* refers to the supports and foundation that supply ECE programs with what they need to deliver early childhood care and education and related services to children and their families (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012). These supports – often unseen by consumers – include finance, governance, accountability, professional development and training, appropriate regulations, quality-assurance mechanisms, and dissemination of information (Azzi-Lessing, 2009; Gallagher & Clifford, 2004; Kagan, 2008).

The term *system* is a broader term that encompasses both the infrastructure of ECE supports and the direct ECE services that children and families receive. Effective systems function by eliminating redundancies and maximizing efficiencies. Without a sound federal universal preschool infrastructure for early care and education, achieving the desired outcomes for all children is a challenge (Kagan, 2013). The current U.S. “non-system” for promoting and ensuring high-quality, state-funded universal preschool or ECE, as well as other federally-funded early care and education programs (e.g., *Early Head Start* and *Head Start*), has evolved over time, with a myriad of financing strategies and goals (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012).

In recent years, there has been movement within the executive branch of government to provide federal support to states with the development of a universal ECE system and the provision of quality universal preschool. During his first and second terms in office, President Obama promoted several competition-based early learning grants to support states in their efforts to adopt universal preschool (Barnett, 2014). In 2014, Obama launched an agenda to provide universal preschool for every four-year-old in the

United States (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2014). The proposal involved a state and federal government partnership, with a federal match of state funds with program administration located at the state level.

Currently, ten states have laws requiring the provision of universal preschool/ programs for preschool for all children four-years-old (Barnett, 2017). However, none have achieved it. The disconnect between the states' universal preschool mandates and their ability to meet the law's precedent is due largely to funding shortfalls in states' budget allocations for universal preschool. For example, in recent years, New York passed a "preschool for all law," however today less than 14 percent of four-year-old children whose families have applied for a preschool "slot" are attending a universal preschool program, due to a budget shortfall. In addition, the waiting lists in states with universal preschool sometimes numbers in the thousands (Barnett, 2014).

Brief History of Early Care and Education in the United States

The 1800s

ECE existed in United States long before its services were publicly recognized, regulated, or financed (Cahan, 1989; Youcha, 2009). America's earliest ECE efforts began with Infant Schools in the 19th century (Cahan, 1989; Read, 2006). These schools were privately funded and catered to children living in poverty. Infant Schools were driven by a moral imperative to remove children from poverty and improve their social condition by placing them in healthy environments (Palmer, 2011). Although originally designed for children living in poverty, Infant Schools evolved to serve families in the middle and upper-class, the rationale being that what was good for children in poverty

might also benefit all children (Beatty, 1997). Infant Schools closed as a result of criticism they received from scholars of the time and from the 1830s revival of Puritan ethics, which focused on the importance of mothers staying in the home to provide care for their children during the day (Palmer, 2011).

At the turn of the 20th century America experienced a growing economy and an influx of immigrants. Once more, American educators turned to serving the children of families in poverty. The day nursery movement developed in the mid- to late nineteenth century as a means of caring for the children of low-income families while their parents worked or sought employment. Services were typically organized by charities, private donors, community service organizations, or settlement houses. They were supported by parent-paid tuition and, in some instances, by state funds (Kagan, 2009). The primary purposes of this supervisory form of care were to permit maternal employment, to protect children from the potential danger of being left alone, and for many day nurseries, to help immigrant children adapt to the American culture (Vandenbroeck & Lazzari, 2014). The day nursery was the direct predecessor of what became known as day care and, later, child care.

In contrast to the day nursery, the nursery school (Beatty, 2009) movement, established in the early twentieth century, concentrated on the role ECE played in supporting early childhood physical, social, and emotional development. Nursery school advocates viewed this form of care as a means of fostering the future success of very young children (Kagan, 2009). They praised their approach as providing high-quality educational and socialization experiences for those who could afford them. This practice

therefore reinforced the beginning of a two-tiered inequitable ECE delivery system—one for families with wealth and one for families in poverty. This form of care, a catalyst for current ECE programs, served mostly middle- and upper-middle-class families and was typically funded by parent fees (Palmer, 2011)

1900s

With the occurrence of two national crises, Kagan and Reid (2008) describe how the federal government shifted its attention to ECE. The Great Depression and World War II elicited federal ECE intervention, and this crisis-driven ECE engagement added to the inequity in access and decreased program quality. In 1941 Congress passed the Lanham Act, which was intended to create community facilities in “war-impact areas,” but it was not until 1943 that this was interpreted as authorizing support for child care (Levy & Michel, 2002). Unfortunately, the quality of the programs was inequitable (Kirp, 2007). “Depression emergency nursery schools” were developed and administered by the Federal Emergency Relief Agency (FERA) (Cohen, 1996). Because the government viewed ECE as only needed during times of national crisis, most Depression nursery schools closed by the year 1943 (Cohen, 1996). Both the Depression nursery schools and the World War II ECE programs confirmed that only national crisis legitimated early care and education interventions, as these programs disappeared when the crises ended. Their conclusion was only the beginning of national ECE involvement with a fragmented administration and low-to-modest ECE program quality (Kagan & Reid, 2008).

From the end of World War II to the mid-1960s, national ECE policy was dormant. Half-day kindergarten was the only blip on the radar. Although several ECE

related bills emerged during this period, none passed. Major ECE policy initiatives were nonexistent until President John F. Kennedy arrived to office. With Kennedy's advocacy, Congress designated \$800,000 for child care in 1963. These discretionary funds marked the first federal financial assistance in almost twenty years. Policy enthusiasm for young children grew with legislation that created *Head Start* and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965). For the first time, the United States witnessed a sustainable federal commitment and policy agenda for young children.

In 1971, child care advocates supported the *Comprehensive Child Care and Development Act* (United States Congress House Committee on Education and Labor Select Subcommittee on Education, 1971). Designed to support child wellbeing by focusing on quality, the bill set a sliding-scale of assistance to families and provided funds for the development of an ECE system, declaring it a "matter of right" (Cohen, 1996). Initially, the bill looked to have support from all government branches. However, after receiving pushback on the bill's implications for creating too much federal presence in the home – a private place – President Nixon vetoed the bill. The veto signified the last act to date of a political dialogue related to a federally funded, systematic, universal approach to ECE in the United States.

Title XX of the *Social Security Act* was signed into law by President Ford in 1975 as part of the *Social Services Amendments* of 1974. The program was intended to compliment the *Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)*, enacted in August 1974, in providing states a flexible source of funding for social services like child care and prevention of child abuse and neglect (Cahan, 1989). In 1981, the *Social Services Block*

Grant (SSBG) replaced *Title XX*; the funding authorization level fell by almost 20%, from \$2.9 billion to \$2.4 billion; and the \$200 million earmarked for child care was eliminated (Roberts & Clark, 1988). Several federal funding streams were combined into this single block grant, which gave states the power to decide how funds would be used. This was in accordance with the prevailing view that the federal bureaucracy was too large, inflexible, and inefficient (Cahan, 1989). Earlier federal provisions, which had required that dollars earmarked for child care be tied to regulatory standards, were eliminated. Reporting requirements were reduced, leaving the government and the public with limited information about SSBG's use for child care. However, there is no question that the portion of the SSBG that states spent on child care after 1981 was drastically cut, particularly because child care was now pitted against other needs viewed as more pressing, such as foster care (Cohen, 1996). Between 1977 and 1994, total SSBG funding was cut by 58%.

Congress amended the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* in 1986, adding Part B, targeted for children from ages three to five, and Part C, focused on infants and toddlers. The amendment required states receiving funding to ensure free and developmentally appropriate public education for all children with disabilities from ages 3 to 18. The Act contained a directive to support localities, as they provided individualized education and services for children with disabilities. During reauthorization in the 1990s, the Act was given a new name, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA). IDEA was innovative in calling for an integrated and

systemic approach to serving children and adults with special needs and/or developmental disabilities.

Legislation in the 1990s established two new child care grant programs: the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and the At-Risk Child Care Program (Title IV A) (Lombardi, 2003; Cohen, 1996). CCDBG requires that states set aside four percent for what the ECE field calls “quality dollars” (Boller & Maxwell, 2015). These are funds intended to improve child care quality (Cohen, 1996). This funding is often spent on quality improvement initiatives like early childhood professional development systems building, Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS), and developing elegant and integrated data systems for subsidy administration. A QRIS is a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care and education programs. Similar to rating systems for restaurants and hotels, QRIS awards quality ratings to early and school-age care and education programs that meet a set of defined program standards. Standards are the agreed upon markers of quality established in areas essential to effective programming and child outcomes. Taken together, standards are used to assign ratings to programs that participate in quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS), providing parents, policymakers, funders, and the public with information about the components and levels of quality (National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, 2015). States typically use licensing standards as the base of the system, a foundation on which to build higher levels of standards. Every QRIS contains two or more tiers or levels of standards beyond licensing, with step-wide progressions to the highest level of quality, as defined by the state. Systems vary in the

number of rating levels and the number of standards identified in each level (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). Most QRIS award readily recognizable symbols, such as stars, to programs to indicate the levels of quality. Standards used to assign ratings are based on research about the characteristics of programs that produce positive child outcomes (Lugo-Gil, Sattar, Ross, Boller, Tout, & Kirby, 2011). By participating in their state's QRIS, early and school-age care providers embark on a path of continuous quality improvement. Even providers that have met the standards of the lowest QRIS levels have achieved a level of quality that is beyond the minimum requirements to operate a licensed program. (United States Administration for Children and Families Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, 2011).

Under the 1996 *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act* (PRWORA), *Temporary Assistance to Needy Families* (TANF) replaced *Aid to Families with Dependent Children* (AFDC) program. AFDC was a federal assistance program in effect from 1935 to 1996 created by the *Social Security Act* (SSA) and managed by the United States Department of Health and Human Services that provided financial support to children whose families had low or no incomes (Cahan, 1989). TANF shifted the focus of welfare from the previous AFDC program cash assistance, to supporting a family's individual workforce entry. The TANF legislation also limited states' ability to sanction recipients for failing to work due to a lack of child care (Greenberg, 1998). Seventy percent of states now use TANF money to subsidize child-care expenses, as allowed under the legislation. TANF was scheduled for reauthorization in 2010; however, Congress did not work on legislation for program reauthorization and instead extended

the TANF block grant multiple times. The most recent extension was part of the 2017 Consolidated *Appropriations Act* and would extend TANF funding until September 30, 2018,

In the late 1990s, policy makers began to understand and view child care as an opportunity for early childhood education and family support rather than a simply a support for working mothers (Lombardi, 2003). This shift was reflected in the 1995 establishment of the Child Care Bureau (now the Office of Child Care) in the Department of Health and Human Services. This action consolidated the design, financing, and administration of federal child care policy.

Recent History

The expansion of publicly-funded preschool education is the trend in ECE policy within the last decade. In 2011, preschool education made national headlines when federal officials announced a new competitive grant program, the *Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge* (RTT-ELC), aimed at building integrated statewide systems of early childhood education and care for children from birth through age five (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The RTT-ELC grant competition focused on improving early learning and development programs for young children by supporting states' efforts to:

1. Increase the number and percentage of low-income and disadvantaged children in each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers who are enrolled in high-quality early learning programs;
2. Design and implement an integrated system of high-quality early learning programs and services; and

3. Ensure that any use of assessments conforms to the recommendations of the National Research Council's reports on early childhood.

A momentous bipartisan bill was introduced in 2013 – the *Strong Start for America's Children Act*. This proposal was a decade-long initiative to expand and improve early learning opportunities for children from birth to age five. The bill funded preschool for four-year-old children from families earning below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and encouraged states to commit their own funds to support preschool for young children with family incomes above that income level. Under this model states provide sub-grants to quality, local early childhood programs, including local educational agencies (LEAs) and community-based providers (such as Child Care and *Head Start* programs) that have partnerships with LEAs. The bill also authorized a new *Early Head Start* partnership with Child Care to improve the quality of infant and toddler care.

According to the *Strong Start for America's Children Act*, states will continue to invest over time in preschool to draw down the federal grant. States must provide matching funds equal to ten percent of federal funding in the first and second years, 20 percent in the third year, 30 percent in the fourth year, 40 percent in the fifth year, 50 percent in the sixth year, 75 percent in the seventh year, and 100 percent in the eighth and following years (Strong Start for America's Children Act of 2013, H.R. 3461, 2013). States that serve at least half of their eligible four-year-old children qualify for a reduced match rate. Up to ten percent of existing state preschool funding already being provided by the state at the time of legislation enactment may count toward the state match. Since

2013, 34 states have increased funding for their preschool programs, amounting to over \$1 billion in new state resources dedicated to early education (White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2017).

Federal preschool activity is still in very early stages, and Department of Education spending to date has focused on driving state efforts to expand preschool, especially in public schools. In 2014, the Department of Education launched the Preschool Development and Expansion Grants, a competitive grants program that awarded \$250 million to selected states to increase public preschool, aiming to establish state models for “expanding preschool to all four-year-old children from low- and moderate-income families.” Development Grants are designed for states that currently serve less than 10 percent of four-year-old children and have not received a RTT-ELC grant. States with Development Grants have plans to implement and sustain high-quality preschool programs that can reach and serve additional eligible children in one or more high-need communities. Up to 35 percent of the Development Grant award may be used for state-level infrastructure and quality improvements. Expansion Grants are for states that currently serve 10 percent or more of four-year-old children or have received a RTT-ELC grant. States with Expansion Grants have plans to implement and sustain high-quality preschool programs that can reach and serve additional eligible children in two or more high-need communities. Up to five percent of the Expansion Grant award may be used for state-level infrastructure and quality improvements. In 2014, Congress also reauthorized the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) program for the first time in 18 years. The bipartisan reauthorization—passed in the Senate with an overwhelming

majority of 88 to 1—strongly promotes state leadership in providing young children with high-quality learning opportunities while simultaneously supporting their working parents. In total, the federal government funds 45 programs that provide or support early learning and child care services. Of these, *Head Start* and *Early Head Start*, CCDF, and TANF are by far the three major federal funding streams, together expending close to \$17 billion for services to young children in 2015 (Stevens, 2015)

Child Development

There are potentially multiple ways to help support the development of young children (e.g., responsive caregiving, universal health care); however, the most consistent evidence for supporting children’s school readiness skills points to the experience of quality early care and learning experiences. Decades of research confirm the ability of quality ECE to support children’s school readiness and other positive developmental outcomes (e.g., social emotional, health, cognitive). Although much of this evidence comes from U.S. studies, there is also a substantial global research base including rigorous randomized trials, some with long-term follow-up (Barnett, n.d.; Kagitcibasi, Cigdem, Sevda, Baydar, & Cemalcilar, 2009; Nahar, Hossain, Hamadani, Ahmed, Grantham-McGregor, & Persson, 2012). Studies show one or more years of high-quality, developmentally appropriate ECE improves a range of children’s outcomes, including language, literacy, and numeracy skills, when measured at the end of the program or soon after (Magnuson, 2013; Campbell, et al., 2012) These findings are consistent across small demonstration programs, such as the well-known Perry Preschool (Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993; Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield & Nores, 2005) and

Abecedarian (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling & Miller-Johnson, 2002) studies, which have shown very large effects, as well as among large-scale public programs such as public pre-K and *Head Start* programs (Camilli, Vargas, Ryan, & Barnett, 2010).

However, scientific evidence regarding the impacts of early childhood education has progressed well beyond exclusive reliance on the Perry Preschool and Abecedarian studies. A recent analysis integrating evaluations of 84 preschool programs concluded that, on average, children gain about a third of a year of additional learning across language, reading, and math skills (Fuhs, Farran, & Nesbitt, 2015). At-scale preschool systems in Tulsa and Boston have produced larger gains of between a half and a full year of additional learning in reading and math. Benefits to children's socio-emotional development and health have been documented in programs that focus intensively on these areas (Yoshikawa, et al., 2013)

Many research studies link children's high-quality preschool experiences and success in school and later life. Recently researchers from Georgetown University studied Oklahoma's universal pre-K program. The researchers found significant benefits for children from both low-income and middle-income homes. As a group, Oklahoman children attending pre-K programs had better reading, math, and writing skills than children who attended *Head Start* programs or did not go to a public preschool program (Gormley et al. 2008). Likewise, an ongoing evaluation of New Mexico Pre-K programs found significant gains in children's math and early literacy skills (Hustedt et al., 2008). Other studies show similar positive results. For example, one study found that children attending state-funded pre-K programs in five states (Michigan, New Jersey, Oklahoma,

South Carolina, and West Virginia) gained significantly in early language, literacy, and math development (Barnett, Jung, et al., 2007).

Research also demonstrates that *Head Start* and *Early Head Start* have had positive longitudinal impacts on children and families. In 2002, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released the results of a long-term study that used random-assignment to determine the impact of participation in *Early Head Start* for low-income children and their families (United States Administration for Children and Families Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, 2002). The study found that two-year-old children with at least one year of *Early Head Start* performed better on measures of cognitive, language and socio-emotional development than their peers who did not participate in the program. Children who attended *Early Head Start* continued to outperform children in the control group at age.

Research on universal preschool programs in Tulsa, Boston, and Tennessee suggests that attending high-quality ECE benefits not only children targeted for participation because of risk factors, but all children, including children of all racial, ethnic, and income groups (Gormley et al., 2011). At the same time, preschool attendance is especially beneficial to children with the most disadvantages and children from certain ethnic-minority groups (Yoshikawa. et al., 2013). For example, in Tulsa, compared to their control group peers, children from families with low incomes were 11 months ahead of children from families with slightly higher incomes, ten months ahead of children from middle-class families, and seven months ahead of children from the entire control group population entering kindergarten after attending preschool (Gormley et al., 2011).

Some researchers point to “fadeout” of initial cognitive gains. This can sometimes be interpreted by pundits to mean that ECE has no meaningful long term cognitive benefits. If the initial benefits are small, for example due to participation in low quality early learning environments, this is likely true. However, a loss of cognitive effects after children leave ECE is only partial; ECE that produces large initial gains can have significant lasting impacts (Barnett, 2011). Effects about half the size of initial effects should be expected to continue throughout the school years and into adulthood (Camilli et al., 2010). Some of the “weakening” in cognitive effects found in the literature appears to be the consequence of increased remediation efforts by public schools for children who did not benefit from high-quality ECE (Barnett, 2011). This partial offset of the initial gains from ECE by later compensatory efforts for children who did not attend high-quality ECE is, in fact what accounts for much of the education cost savings documented by cost benefit analysis studies (Heckman, 2011).

A recent paper by Bassok and colleagues (2015) is the first to examine both kindergarten cohorts of the nationally representative early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS), 1998 and 2010, to describe the extent to which preschool effects fade over time. The authors explain that the association between preschool participation and cognitive outcomes fades more rapidly in the 2010 kindergarten cohort than in 1998. Whereas in the 1998 data, a statistically significant “preschool advantage” is evident in both reading and math at the end of first grade; in the more recent cohort no differences are observed by the end of the kindergarten. The rapid fade-out is observed for children who attended both full and half-day preschool programs and does not depend on several proxies of

kindergarten classroom quality. Interestingly, across both kindergarten cohorts, the authors document a persistent positive association between preschool participation and first grade cognitive outcomes for black children (Bassok et al., 2015).

Patterns of fade-out have been documented in studies of early childhood interventions that still realize long-term improvements in important outcomes. For instance, Deming (2009) found large, long-term benefits of *Head Start* despite fade-out of the test-score benefits. Ludwig and Miller (2007) found that *Head Start* increased students' educational attainment, despite having no measurable effect on 8th grade test scores. In addition, Chetty, Friedman, Hilger, Saez, Schanzenbach, & Yagan (2011) found effects of high-quality kindergarten on earnings and employment despite fade-out of effects on test scores. These studies suggest that the lack of persistent associations between preschool and child outcomes observable at the end of first grade does not necessarily mean that preschool participation does not yield important long-term outcomes. There is a lack of research in general regarding whether and how patterns of fade-out are related to longer-term outcomes.

Impact of Early Childhood Education

School Readiness

School readiness is defined as the preparedness of young children to enter kindergarten and the preparedness of schools to receive young children into public educational settings (Franko, 2015). Current school readiness trends take a broad approach to preparedness which looks at contributions of communities, schools, and families to children's readiness to learn across developmental domains. As a result, there

is little consistency across school readiness initiatives. Various strategies, including comprehensive health and social services to young children, early learning programs for disadvantaged children, pre-academic skill assessments of children, and efforts to smooth a child's transition into kindergarten, have all been identified with "school readiness."

School readiness involves more than just children. School readiness, in the broadest sense, is about children, families, early environments, schools, and communities. Children are not innately "ready" or "not ready" for school. Their skills and development are strongly influenced by their families and through their interactions with other people and environments before coming to school (Maxwell & Clifford 2004). Children enter school with a range of academic and social skills, with children from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., low-income and/or single parent households) lagging behind their more affluent peers on a range of outcomes (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Lee & Burkham, 2002; Reardon, 2011). This gap in school readiness emerges early, is evident even before kindergarten (Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Halle et al., 2009), and is predictive of academic trajectories through later schooling (Entwisle & Alexander, 1999).

An evaluation of state-funded Pre-K programs by the National Institute for Early Education Research (Wong, Cook, Barnett, & Jung, 2008) found that children who attend high-quality state-funded preschool programs in Michigan, New Jersey, Oklahoma, South Carolina and West Virginia increase their school readiness in language, literacy and mathematical development. According to NIEER, children who attend state-funded Pre-K programs experience a 31% growth in vocabulary skills, a 44% growth in early math skills, and an 85% increase in print awareness (NIEER, 2015). Preschool programs in

Michigan, New Jersey and South Carolina target at-risk children while Oklahoma and West Virginia have a universal program. School readiness gains made by young children who attend high-quality early childhood education programs persist as they progress in school (Barnett et al., 2014). Nine-year-old children nationwide have greatly increased their math and reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) since 1999 (Kristapovich, 2014). Recent research shows that these gains are closely associated with the increased availability and quality of preschool programs. A large body of research shows that high quality preschool programs can lead to increases in not only school readiness, but also higher test scores, fewer school dropouts, higher graduation rates, less special education and even lower crime rates. The impact of quality ECE on both the academic and social elements of school readiness benefits not only children, but also supports the public school system – allowing for costly remediation funds to be spent in other school-wide goals (Heckman et al., 2010).

Return on Investment

Economic studies in dozens of states and counties and in longitudinal studies demonstrate that the return on public investment in high-quality childhood education is substantial (Council of Economic Advisors, 2014; Jenkins, 2014; Kilburn & Karoly, 2008). Moreover, quality early education benefits children of all social and economic groups. Research shows there are both immediate (e.g., maternal employment and earnings purchase of goods and services) and long-term (e.g., lower cost for remedial education, reduction in criminal justice and prison costs) benefits of ECE to children and communities. One of the greatest immediate returns on investment of ECE is when

families have access to affordable ECE programs, working parents can then focus more on meeting work responsibilities. Therefore, quality ECE is an essential investment for a productive 21st century. While quality early childhood education helps prepare young children to succeed in school, it also prepares them to become better citizens that earn livable wages, pay more taxes, maintain higher standards of health, and commit fewer crimes (Heckman, 2010).

Rigorous labor to estimate whether the economic benefits of ECE offset the costs of providing these early learning opportunities show they are a wise financial investment today and in the future (Jenkins, 2014). Research shows every dollar invested in quality early care and education saves taxpayers up to thirteen dollars in future costs. The consistent finding of benefits that substantially exceed preschool program costs indicates that high-quality early childhood education programs are among the most cost-effective educational interventions and are likely to be profitable investments for society as a whole (Yoshikawa, et al., 2013, p.13). Finally, while it has been clear for some time that high-quality preschool education yields more in benefits to society than its initial costs, the most recent work indicates that there is a positive return on investment for a range of differing preschool programs, from those that are more intensive and costly to those that require less initial investment. In sum, quality preschool education is an investment in our future (Yoshikawa, et al., 2013).

A Human Right

Traditionally, support of ECE is focused on a cost-benefit analysis of outcomes, rather than overall child wellbeing (Brown, 2006; Lazzari & Vandenberg, 2012). Some proponents of early childhood education believe access to quality ECE is more than simply an issue of mitigating the risks of poverty and more than an option or privilege. Rather, it is a human right that should be afforded to all children (Brown, 2006; Polakow, 2008; Smith, 2007; Woodard, 2005). Woodard (2005) argues that the right to development (early childhood) is one of the basic conventions of the UN Convention of Rights of the Child. Channeling Vygotsky and Woodard (2005), Polakow (2008) contends that as long as children are dependent on an adult for participation in society and in acquisition of competence into adulthood, their development should be of the utmost priority to society. Polakow stresses that children's rights to ECE raises a fundamental issue to be grappled within the "capitalistic fundamentalism" that shapes a current American childhood. His philosophy supports universally accessible ECE within a broader framework of human rights. In a report for the Global Campaign for Education, Munoz says:

The failure to recognize young children as rights-holders is central to perpetuating these gaps. Without a rights framework, the pressure on governments to meet their responsibilities is weak or lacking. This leads both to a relative dominance of the private sector in early childhood provision, creating a cost barrier for the poorest and most vulnerable, and to a reliance on economic justification for providing early childhood education, with dangerous implications for the content and curricula of early childhood care and education as well as the distribution of provision (Munoz, n.d, pg.4).

Lack of Infrastructure

Only a stable infrastructure can sustain and ensure quality preschool programming in states. Many states have taken important steps to create stable and effective governing structures for the myriad early education programs that serve their young children. Often, they have done so with the critical understanding that a coherent systemic framework for funding and governing early education programs is a necessary foundation for programs that are consistently high-quality. History shows across centuries that piecemeal policymaking in times of crisis, inconsistent and inadequate funding, and little or no attention to outcomes for children and families yields a landscape in which high-quality early childhood programs are the celebrated exception, rather than the rule. If an overarching goal for early childhood policy is a system of high-quality voluntary early education programs, then only a well-funded, coherent, and stable infrastructure will achieve that end. Early development and learning is a cross-domain, integrated, and dynamic process that does not fit into a single silo called education. Sporadic early childhood policymaking has aggravated these challenges, producing disparate and unstable funding streams, uneven quality, and a lack of accountability for child outcomes. Without strong federal leadership, this costly “non-system” will endure (Kagan, 2008; Kagan & Roth, 2017).

Many early childhood advocates have posited strategies for how states should pursue the adoption of a statewide preschool as a priority to policy makers and citizens. The many different contexts and forces at work in different states make it impossible to

provide a simple recipe for such actions, however there seem to be some general strategies state early childhood innovators have employed for other states to consider.

Need for the Study

Research is clear that early childhood education is a wise return on investment for both economic and short and long term child outcomes. Universal preschool policies lay the foundation for providing free and equal access to early childhood education programs for all children. Different from targeted preschool programs like *Early Head Start* and *Head Start*, universal preschool provides publicly-funded preschool to any four-year-old child regardless of economic background, disability, risk factors or other qualifying characteristics. Universal preschool adoption across states has shifted the education paradigm from K-12 to P-12. This has challenged states to determine their role – if any – in providing/expanding entrance to public education to younger children – children from as young as three years old. Many factors influence this popular policy conversation – the increasing cost of providing and participating in *quality* child care, the steady participation of mothers in the workforce, and issues of equity in education (Zigler, Gilliam, & Barnett, 2011). These pressures have resulted in much attention to universal preschool policies, from heavy investments on the part of advocacy groups such as the Pew Charitable Trusts to explicit calls for national expansion by former President Obama (Rose, 2010).

To date, research on most state-wide preschool programs has focused on their efficacy. In addition, the development of universal preschool policy and/or legislation is limited to what happened and has not addressed why. Types of related studies that exist

primarily focus on the cost of state-wide universal preschool implementation, results of preschool assessments focus, or the impact of program level and/or quality elements of universal preschool (Baxter, 2012). Little empirical work has been done to understand how early intervention policies like universal preschool, are being adopted. Using a theoretical framework of policy diffusion and event history analysis methodology, Curran (2015) attempted to explain the extent to which states' adoptions of universal preschool policies reflect an influence of interstate pressures such as regional neighbor adoption of similar policies as well as intrastate conditions such as political party control or school enrollment.

Bushouse (2009) examined under what policy conditions Georgia, Oklahoma and New York states adopted universal preschool and the impact the *Pew Charitable Trusts* had on policy adoption in three states. Bushouse examined these state's stories by investigating the policy conditions under which all six states were able to adopt universal preschool. This study builds upon the work of Bushouse (2009) and others by focusing on the successful adoption of preschool policies by all states with universal preschool policy. Curran states that, "opportunities exist for exploring other contributors to universal preschool policy adoption through the use of qualitative methodologies" (Curran, 2015, pg.18). This study aims to enhance our understanding of the factors, settings, policy environments, and other critical variables that forecast states' adoption of universal preschool policies. It will do so by examining how these states were able to adopt universal preschool through the lens of two policy change theories - *Policy*

Windows (Kingdon, 1995), as Bushouse used with her examination of six states and *Large Leaps* (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010).

Universal Preschool Policy Adoption: A Place to Start

Universal preschool is defined as the public provision of early care and learning/education to young children age four and sometimes age three. Universal preschool programs tend to be quite effective, with studies demonstrating impressive gains in all developmental and academic domains (Burchinal et al., 2014). In Georgia, children who attended the universal state preschool program performed five language and cognitive skills as well as children who attended private preschool once they got to kindergarten; they exceeded children who had attended *Head Start* on three of these measures (Henry, Henderson, Ponder, Gordon, Mashburn, & Rickman 2003). Furthermore, kindergarten teachers rated children from state-funded preschool programs higher than private preschool children on social behaviors and higher than children participating in *Head Start*, on school readiness, academic skills, and communications (Henry et al., 2003).

The universal preschool program in Oklahoma had similarly positive effects, increasing Tulsa attendants' scores on letter-word identification, spelling, and applied problems assessments by 53%, 26%, and 18%, respectively, compared with students who did not attend the program (Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson, 2005). While the program benefited all participants, its effects were stratified by race and income (as measured by school lunch eligibility). Hispanic and Native American children increased their scores on all assessments (letter-word identification, spelling, and applied problems)

well beyond the average increases for all universal pre-k children. White children scored above the average spelling test increase, and black children's average scores fell slightly below the average increased for all Pre-K participants, though their scores were 17% higher than children from a similar background who did not attend the state Pre-K program (Gormley et al., 2005; Gormley & Phillips, 2005).

While all children participating in Oklahoma's universal preschool program showed greater language and cognitive skills than their peers upon kindergarten entry, the size of children's gains on language and cognitive assessments was associated with family income along with race. Children eligible for reduced price lunches (those from families with an annual income of 185% of the federal poverty level) benefitted the most from Pre-K. These children improved more than all students attending the program on two out of three assessments. Children receiving free lunches (whose families earned below 130% of the federal poverty level) had greater improvement than all Pre-K participants on one of the three assessments. Children from families with an annual income above 185% of the federal poverty level showed improvement near the program average (Gormley et al., 2005; U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2005).

Data from Oklahoma and Georgia's universal preschool programs show that universal preschool adoption can effectively improve children's cognitive abilities; moreover, it makes substantial headway in reducing race- and income-based achievement gaps. As such, universal preschool appears to be a solid reform approach for reducing inequities. Despite its effectiveness, universal preschool efforts suffer from several important limitations.

Universal preschool programs have appeal; however, they afford great flexibility to states and locales – with the result being that there is great variation in terms of which children are served, and in how and where they are served (Barnett, 2015). In a few states, programs are provided in public schools only; other states delegate large portions of their programs to community-based providers. Although physically located outside schools, some of these efforts are linked to public education through their alignment with school standards and curricula. Some of the efforts provide half-day services; others provide full day services. The appeal of this approach is that it has the distinct goal, like public education, to be available to all children. The premise for this approach is that, except for a small fraction of efforts, programs for children who are poor will generally remain poor in quality. By providing all children with what society sanctions for its middle and upper class children, not only is equity assured, but higher quality is more likely to be achieved.

“Recognizing that developing individual programs is not sufficient to address the multiple needs of young children and families, state policy makers are increasingly attending to early childhood system development—developing the infrastructure, resources, and leadership necessary to create a coordinated system of services and supports to address the many needs of young children and their families” (Cauthen, et. al, 2000, p. 8).

Currently, ten states offer universal preschool in some form. However, states with universal preschool/Pre-K typically extend participation to only three- and four-year-old children. Therefore, a “universal” preschool provision is defined in this study as a state program in which all children of a particular age are eligible regardless of income or other risk factors. The ten states currently providing universal preschool programs allow all four-year-olds to participate; and some states, like Illinois, also offer participation to

three-year-olds (Barnett et.al, 2012). States with universal preschool programs are: Florida, Georgia, Oklahoma, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New York, Vermont, and West Virginia.

Some universal preschool programs began as pilot initiatives targeted toward children in poverty or children with specific risk factors. Their expansions welcoming all four-year-old children came along a few years later. Both the Georgia and Oklahoma programs have extensive evaluation data on their efficacy and impact, which found the programs are successful in improving school readiness and children's cognitive and language skills when they enter kindergarten. They also found that the pre-school programs are particularly effective for children in poverty and minority children.

An explanation of the evolution of each state's ECE policies will be provided by using the lens of the policy change theories employed in this study. Describing how the theories are used to frame this study can help explain states' ECE policies. The two theoretical models employed in this study will also be used to help explain why ECE policies have evolved in certain patterns and to identify political, media/problem awareness, and policy windows across the various states in question.

Theoretical Frameworks

Two major policy change theory frameworks structure this review. *Large Leaps* (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010), a global change theory and *Policy Windows Theory* (Kingdon, 1996) are used to better understand what strategies states use to successfully adopt universal preschool. *Policy Windows* will be used to analyze how states are able to enact universal preschool during a "window of opportunity," as well as if and how ECE

advocates or policy entrepreneurs are able to leverage states' political climates surrounding ECE to enact universal preschool. *Large Leaps* (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010), will help frame the analysis by supporting the identification of what significant changes in policy occur when the "right conditions are in place" for states to enact universal preschool. For example, there may be critical moments in a state – like proposed K-12 educational budget changes – where the media brings attention to an issue and policy entrepreneurs capitalize on a problems stream and open a new policy "window," creating the right conditions necessary for universal preschool adoption.

Large Leaps Theory

Advocates of *Large Leaps Policy Change Theory* (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010), contend that when "conditions are right", change can happen in sudden large bursts that represent significant departures from the past, as opposed to small incremental changes that do not radically change the status quo (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010). Frank Baumgartner and Brian Jones (2010) developed this model and have used it in longitudinal studies of agenda setting and decision making.

Large Leaps Theory (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010), *holds* that conditions for large-scale change happen when:

- An issue is defined differently or new dimensions of the issue get attention (typically a fundamental questioning of current approaches);
- New "actors" get involved; and
- The issue becomes more salient and receives heightened media and broader public attention (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993).

According to *Large Leaps Theory* (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010), while these conditions set up the environment in which large-scale change can occur, they do not predict or guarantee it. For example, an issue such as universal preschool may achieve increased attention and focus; however, the heightened attention may not result in universal preschool policy change. According *Large Leaps Theory* (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010), when all of the “right conditions” occur simultaneously, change is exponential, not incremental (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010).

Policy Windows Theory

Another theory employed in this study is the *Policy Windows Theory*. This theoretical approach aims to explain the design and development of policies as described by Kingdon (1996). There are three streams flowing through a system: problems, policies, and politics.

Ideas are the beliefs we develop and use to understand and interpret the world. Some beliefs are so deeply ingrained in our psyche that we generally take them for granted. Others are more visible – our beliefs about policy problems help us argue for particular solutions. Indeed, ‘policy solution’ is closer to the intuitive meaning of ‘I have an idea’. Kingdon grapples with this dual role for (or meaning of) ‘ideas’ by considering how policy solutions are received within government or wider policy networks. His starting point is the phrase ‘an idea whose time has come’, which implies ‘an irresistible movement that sweeps over our politics and our society, pushing aside everything that might stand in its path’. He argues that such notions are misleading because they ignore the conditions that have to be satisfied – during a brief ‘window of opportunity’ – before

a policy will change significantly. Three separate ‘streams’ must come together at the same time:

- *Problem stream – attention lurches to a policy problem.* Problems are policy issues which are deemed to require attention. There are no objective indicators to determine which problems deserve attention, and perceptions of problems can change quickly. Problems get attention based on how they are ‘framed’ or defined by participants who compete for attention – using evidence to address uncertainty and persuasion to address ambiguity. In some cases, issues receive attention because of a crisis or change in the scale of the problem. Only a tiny fraction of problems receives policymaker attention. Getting attention is a major achievement which must be acted upon quickly, before attention shifts elsewhere. This might be achieved by demonstrating that a well thought out solution already exists.
- *Policy stream – a solution to that problem is available.* While attention lurches quickly from issue to issue, viable solutions involving major policy change take time to develop. Kingdon describes ideas in a ‘policy primeval soup’, evolving as they are proposed by one actor then reconsidered and modified by a large number of participants (who may have to be ‘softened up’ to new ideas). To deal with the gap between lurching attention and slow policy development, they develop widely-

accepted solutions in anticipation of future problems, then find the right time to exploit or encourage attention to a relevant problem.

- *Politics stream* – policymakers have the motive and opportunity to turn it into policy. They have to pay attention to the problem and be receptive to the proposed solution. They may supplement their own beliefs with their perception of the ‘national mood’ and the feedback they receive from interest groups and political parties. In some cases, only a change of government may be enough to provide that motive.

Kingdon draws on the Cohen et al. ‘garbage can’ model of policymaking in organizations. It contrasts with ‘comprehensively rational’ policymaking in which – *in this order* – policymakers identify problems (or their aims), bureaucracies perform a comprehensive analysis to produce various solutions (or ways to meet those aims), and policymakers select the best solution. Instead, policymaker aims and policy problems are ambiguous, and bureaucrats struggle to research issues and produce viable solutions quickly. Sometimes, people wait for the right time to present their ready-made solutions. Sometimes, aimless policymakers just want to look busy and decisive. So, Cohen et al. suggest that the problem identification, solution production, and choice are ‘relatively independent streams.’ The ‘garbage can’ is where a mix of problems, solutions, and choices are dumped.

Kingdon applied this reasoning to the U.S. political system, which magnifies some of these problems. Many people, with different perceptions and aims are involved; and, some actors (such as the President) may be effective at raising issues up the public

and government agenda, but not producing solutions. Since policymakers do not have the time (or longevity) to devote to detailed policy work, they delegate it to civil servants who consult with interest groups, think tanks, and other specialists to consider ideas and produce policy solutions. The groups most involved in producing solutions over the long term may struggle to get attention or buy-in from policymakers. Therefore, the likelihood of significant policy change is difficult to predict since it requires sustained and high attention, an acceptable solution and some spirit of compromise in the political system. A perception of infrequency and unpredictability may also influence behavior: when new, major legislation looks likely to be adopted, there is a deluge of interest and a range of participants keen to jump on an idea's bandwagon – adding further to the metaphor of the 'garbage can' of ideas and the messy nature of politics.

Kingdon's work was developed from case studies of U.S. federal policymaking. Compared to other policy theories, its insights have been applied less frequently or systematically in other countries. Yet, the potential to compare messy policymaking in the U.S. and Europe is promising. Zaharias (2016) has shown the comparative value of Multiple streams (Kingdon, 1995; Kingdon & Thurber, 1984) analysis to identify very different experiences and windows of opportunity in countries such as the UK, France, and Germany. There are, in each of these experiences, 'universal' elements in the agenda-setting process:

- Ambiguity (there are many ways to frame any policy problem);
- Competition for attention (few problems reach the top of the agenda);

- An imperfect selection process (new information is difficult to gather and subject to manipulation);
- Limited time (which forces people to make choices before their preferences are clear); and a departure from ‘comprehensive rationality’ and a linear decision-making process – identifying problems, formulating solutions and making a choice.
- ‘Softening’, as some issues take time to become accepted within government or policy networks.

Both theories will support data collection analysis to help identify the streams, entrepreneurs, conditions, actors, and other theoretical constructs and variables that influenced universal preschool adoption and/or for each state in question. For example, both theoretical approaches will help identify what and when entrepreneurs begin involvement in agenda setting or when large “bursts” happened in a state’s policy conditions or environment that open windows for universal preschool enactment.

Policy Analysis

In conducting policy analysis, it is important to understand the “how” and “why” an initiative came to pass. Within the larger policy environment, the policy process, political mood, and role of key people can help shed light on the field of public policy. The purpose of the case study approach is to actively examine the contextual factors applicable to the phenomena under study (Yin, 2009). Although exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive case studies all seek to provide a better understanding of a situation; they vary in how the information gathered is used.

Exploratory case studies allow for the researcher to develop a better understanding of a situation, and allow the researcher to refine a hypothesis or to define a future study. Explanatory case studies examine a situation and a cause-effect relationship between variables (Yin, 2009).

Conceptual Framework

The following conceptual framework (Figure 1) will guide this descriptive policy analysis to explain how states came to adopt universal preschool. Specifically, it will examine if and how *Large Leaps* (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010), and *Policy Windows* (Kingdon, 1996) theories contribute to understanding the evolution of a states' universal preschool adoption by using their constructs and elements as lenses to answer the study's research question.

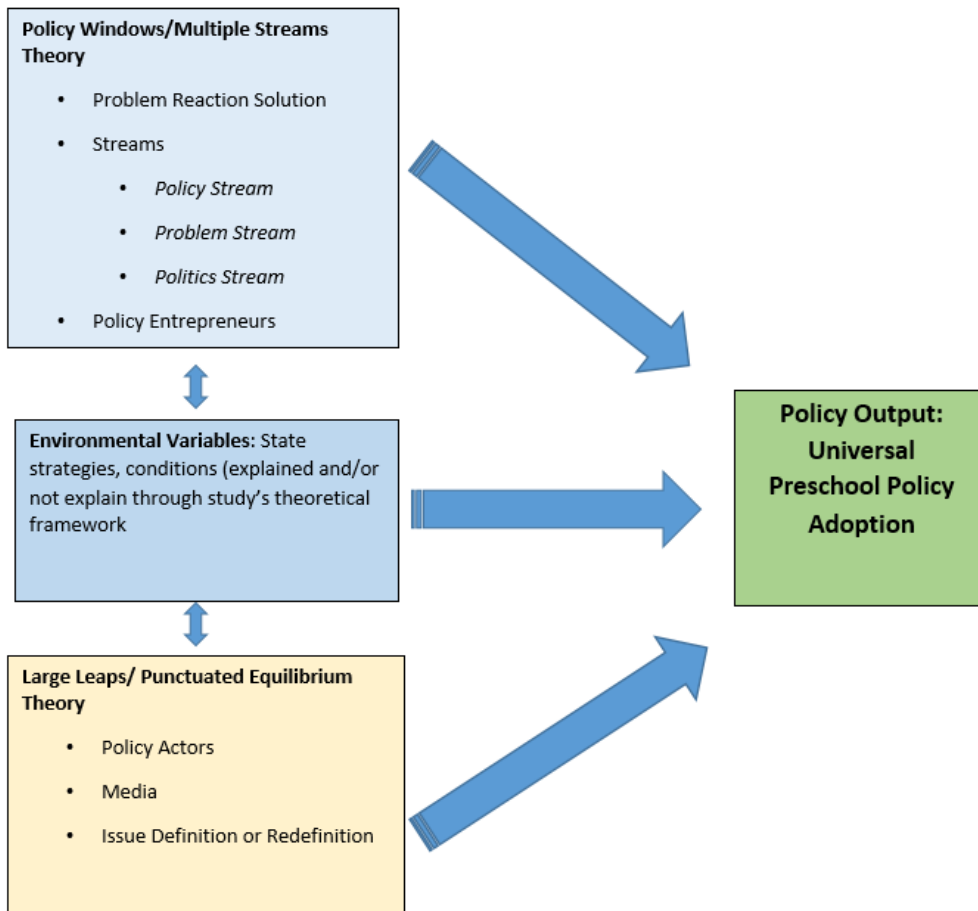


Figure 1. Visual representation of the proposed relationship between (Baumgartner & Jones *Large Leaps* (2010) and Kingdon's (1995) *Policy Windows/Multiple Streams* policy change theories and factors impacting states' universal preschool policy adoption.

This chapter has provided a review of the literature relevant to this study, and the way in which theoretical constructs contained in the research literature will frame the study. Chapter Three provides the design of the proposed study of states' universal preschool adoption

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

The goal of this study was to understand the policy change process of states that have successfully passed laws for the provision of universal preschool. This goal will be achieved through a descriptive policy analysis of states' evolution of universal preschool policy adoption. This chapter describes the research question, study design, state selection, data collection, data analysis, limitations, and researcher bias. Seeking to understand this phenomenon, the study addressed the research question: How did ten states rise to the front of the preschool/Pre-K movement universal preschool?

A descriptive policy analysis was selected to gain insight into the passage of universal preschool in ten states. The goal of a descriptive policy analysis is to present the complete description of a phenomenon within its context. A variety of methodological techniques is used to harvest information from multiple sources. Document analysis is a type of qualitative research generally used to study research problems requiring "an exploration and understanding of a central phenomenon" (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 50). Quantitative data are generally used to study research problems requiring "a description of trends or an explanation of the relationship among variables" (Creswell and Clark, 2007, p. 50).

This descriptive policy analysis allows for the employment of a variety of research methods to trace the development of universal preschool across the ten cases.

This will involve the collection of primary and secondary sources. Lugg (2006) has identified historians' main sources of data to be: artifacts or primary sources such as diaries; personal and professional correspondence; newspaper accounts; government documents, including memos, minutes of meetings, arrest reports and criminal complaints, health and safety data, public health records, and court decisions; church, synagogue, and mosque records; as well as unedited sound and video recordings (p. 176, emphasis in original). Researchers also make use of secondary sources produced by other scholars, such as "biographies; political, social, and/or legal histories; film and audio documentaries; and also autobiographies and memoirs" (Lugg, 2006, p. 177).

Rationale

The topic is explored using a descriptive policy analysis with a case study design. Descriptive policy analysis was chosen as the method for this study in order to discover and better understand the phenomenon of universal preschool policy adoption across each case/state, what policy conditions contributed to the development of a universal preschool in states, and any other factors, especially those related to elements identified in Figure 1, that lead to the policy enactment. In addition, the ideal case study is one in which the case is unique, of general public interest, and relevant to national importance in terms of policy (Yin, 2013). This study of the policy change process in ten states that provided universal preschool fits these criteria.

The goal was to gather data related to each states' policy change process to provide a deeper and richer understanding about the development of universal preschool across a variety of states, from socially and fiscally conservative, to wealthy and humble

states. Merriam (1998) notes that qualitative research can be considered “an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (p. 5). The driving force of this qualitative research was to understand how legislators, state officials, and early childhood advocates and leaders worked to make decisions about early childhood education in ten states in the years leading up to universal preschool policy adoption.

For this study, qualitative research was an appropriate method to take “apart a phenomenon to examine component parts, qualitative research can reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). Furthermore, examining the publicly available details regarding each states’ universal preschool story to better understand how they came together is the desired outcome for this study. Maxwell (1996) suggests that qualitative research studies are particularly suited for:

understanding the particular context within which the participants act... identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences, and generating grounded theories about the latter... it helps to expose the process by which events and actions take place...and, it can be useful in developing causal explanations (pp. 19-20).

A thorough review of state documents such as legislative bills, national reports and briefs, newspaper articles, and a variety of other documents was conducted. These documents served as a valuable groundwork of data collection as the researcher attempted to answer the study’s research question. As Merriam (1998) notes, “documentary data are particularly good sources for qualitative case studies because they ground an investigation in the context of the problem to be investigated” (p.126).

State Selection

In identifying states with universal preschool policies, several ambiguities arose. First, some states passed preschool legislation with the intent of expansion to universal status but phased universal status in over a period of time. Others passed legislation that was called ‘universal,’ but that came with income stipulations or limitations that were not intended to be lifted in the foreseeable future. This study sought to identify states that had adopted a policy of providing free preschool to all students in the state regardless of income level or other eligibility criteria; however, it was not a requirement that such a policy was immediately implemented given that such immediate large-scale implementation is unrealistic. The identifying element chosen for this study was that, at the time of adoption, the state intended for the plan to be phased into a universal program.

To identify such states, the NIEER State of Pre-K yearbooks, Pre-K Now state profiles, state legislation, and resource details state-funded universal preschool were read to identify universal preschool policy. The *2016 State Preschool Yearbook* is the newest edition of the annual report profiling state-funded preschool programs in the United States. This latest *Yearbook* presents data on state-funded preschool during the 2015-2016 school year and documents over a decade of progress since the first *Yearbook* collected data on the 2002-2003 preschool year (Barnett et al., 2017).

Examining state profiles further, states were removed if the policy passed had limitations on participation by income or other child characteristics (making the program not open to all children). For instance, Missouri – which implemented a sliding scale to charge students – was excluded. Other states were removed if the policy did not indicate

a goal of expansion to all children. For example, Pennsylvania and Maine offer programs for four-year-old children; however, their policies did not indicate a goal of expansion to universal access when passed. Alabama, which has a robust preschool program and a governor who has advocated to make the program universal, was excluded because universal expansion was not part of the legislation. Wisconsin has a specific constitutional provision for preschool and will fund school districts to serve all children, but does not require all districts to participate. Finally, two states have unique policies that also come close, but miss this study's definition of universal preschool. In California, Transitional K (TK) serves children who turn five between September 2 and December 2 of the school year. As these children then attend kindergarten the following year, TK is effectively pre-K. TK is available to all children who meet the age cutoff. In New Jersey, a state Supreme Court order mandated universal pre-K in 31 high poverty districts serving about one-quarter of the state's children. The process of going through each state's legislation on record and official descriptions resulted in the identification of the ten states with universal preschool to be evaluated in this study. A list of these states is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Timeline of states' universal preschool adoption

| State | Year of Enactment | Initiative Name | Source of Enactment |
|---------------|-------------------|---|--|
| Georgia | 1995 | <i>Georgia's Preschool Program</i> | Lottery funded preschool begun as a targeted pilot program in 1993 was expanded to universal access in 1995. |
| New York | 1997 | <i>Universal Pre-K (UPK)</i> | Passage of UPK as part of Chapter 436 of the Laws of 1997. |
| Oklahoma | 1998 | <i>Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K)</i> | Passage of a bill - Oklahoma Statute Annotated 18-201.1 |
| Florida | 2002 | <i>Voluntary Pre-K (VPK)</i> | Passage of the Florida Pre-Kindergarten (Amendment 8) through election ballot approval |
| West Virginia | 2002 | NA | Passage of Senate Bill 247 |
| Vermont | 2005 | <i>Universal Pre-K</i> | Passage of an amendment to Act 60 |
| Illinois | 2006 | <i>Preschool for All</i> | Passage of Preschool for All legislation |
| Massachusetts | 2006 | | Passage of Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) legislation. |
| Iowa | 2007 | <i>Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four-Year-Old Children</i> | Passage of Statewide Voluntary Four-Year-Old Preschool Program (House File 877) |
| Louisiana | 2008 | <i>LA4</i> | Passage of legislation to expand LA4 to a universal program. |

Data Collection and Analysis

Materials Review/Sources of Data

Document Review

State-level universal preschool adoption policy data was collected through a process of materials and document review. Materials were gathered via web searches; document retrieval; exploration of relevant media sources; examination of legislation, legislative documents, and testimony; and other relevant data sources. As data was gathered, the results further shaped the ongoing data collection and data collection search terms used. The dataset used in this study was restricted to information on ten states for reasons previously mentioned. These states are Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New York, Oklahoma, Vermont, and West Virginia. The average number of documents used in the review per state from the web and university library electronic resources searches was eight, with the minimum being four and the maximum being eleven. However, not all of these documents revealed information relevant to answering the research question. The document review for this study focused on resources and materials describing the events leading up to states' universal preschool adoption. This focus was intended to uncover information about how states achieved the policy. Documents were located for review in two ways. First, a web search of public documents was conducted. Search terms included (a) the name of each state's universal preschool program as obtained from the states' preschool website and legislations; (b) the name and of the state and the terms *universal preschool*, *prekindergarten*, and/or *Pre-K*; and (c) the terms *universal preschool*, *prekindergarten*, and/or *Pre-K policy development*

and/or enactment, preschool for all policy formation. Additional links to relevant documents and websites about states' universal preschool formation were often found after visiting national early childhood related organizations' websites. In addition, this search was repeated and resulted in journal articles, books and newspaper articles and editorials using *University of Denver's Libraries' electronic resources.*

A total of 156 documents were located from the initial web and university library electronic resources searches. This number included web pages that were not PDFs or Word documents, but that provided relevant information linked to the research question. After the initial document review, a total of 86 documents from the web and university library's electronic resources searches were deemed relevant to answering the research question. Key words that generated the most findings were: *Universal preschool, universal prekindergarten development, pre-kindergarten, pre-k adoption, universal prekindergarten policy, universal pre-kindergarten legislation, pre-k enactment, statewide prekindergarten, pre-k legislation, preschool for all policy development and formation.*

The following data sources were collected over the course of the study:

- Journal articles;
- These and dissertations;
- Newspaper articles;
- Secondary histories of the development of universal preschool (books and journal articles);
- Legislative documents;

- State preschool websites; and
- National preschool reports.

This descriptive policy analysis involves the collection of primary and secondary sources. Lugg (2006) has recognized historians' main sources of data to be: artifacts or primary sources such as diaries; personal and professional correspondence; newspaper accounts; government documents, including memos, minutes of meetings, arrest reports and criminal complaints, health and safety data, public health records, and court decisions; church, synagogue, and mosque records; as well as unedited sound and video recordings. (p. 176, emphasis in original). However, historians also make use of secondary sources produced by other scholars, such as "biographies; political, social, and/or legal histories; film and audio documentaries; but also autobiographies and memoirs" (Lugg, 2006, p. 177).

This study used a process of sifting and sorting between both primary and secondary sources. A careful reading and analysis of primary and secondary sources helped to begin to piece together a narrative of how each state's universal preschool policy developed. In order to form the narrative, the researcher created a chronological timeline of the key events that precipitated the creation of universal preschool in each state. The newspaper stories, legislative documents, and policy briefs assisted in creating this timeline. From there, the researcher situated this timeline in context. This means I referenced primary and secondary sources to understand public sentiments regarding preschool education from the 1940s to 2008. An analysis of the data provided credibility to a policy story by bringing to light the events, key actors, and all the other elements of

this study's theoretical framework, that led to states' adoption of universal preschool. Document analysis provided both qualitative and quantitative information. For example, as trends emerged across states, a count of common variables arose, along with the story and history of the policy formation. Manual thematic coding of the document data helped to identify trends respective to the legislation's rise on a state's agenda and the corresponding "problem" definition, considerations states gave to different policy alternatives, and the political and problem factors that were catalysts for the universal preschool policy formation and eventual adoption. Each search for data on states' universal preschool policy formation and adoption triggered new search terms that resulted in additional data. For example, a search for "universal preschool policy adoption" would reveal results that references periodicals entitled "voluntary statewide Pre-K legislation." Each new key word search using terms common across previous data searches resulted in a variety of nuanced phrases connected to publicly available data. This data generated newspaper articles, blogs, and legislation. Data was gathered on each state, coded according to overall major themes, and then kept in a separate file for each state. As I went back through the state data, I charted out and continued to refine major themes and created tables to organize commonalities and differences between states. Then, using a Word document, I developed a bulleted policy summary for each state. Following the individual case summaries, a constant comparative analysis (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) and cross case synthesis was conducted (Yin, 2013). First, individual case studies were reread (Stake, 1995). Having identified a common feature that united each

of the states across the phenomenon, I refocused on differences within themes and categories in order to be able to identify potential emerging subcategories.

Evidence supporting common data categories and sub-categories was then compiled into word tables (Miles & Huberman, 1994) from findings in all ten individual states' descriptions. This allowed for the clear display of differences and commonalities between the findings and across cases (Stake, 1995). Commonalities were identified when findings across cases shared similar features. Differences were identified when findings across cases had dissimilar features. A review of the word tables (Miles & Huberman, 1994) helped to produce tentative assertions based on the findings. Decisions on all final assertions were made based on the ability of the assertion to connect to the research question guiding the study (Stake, 2010). In order to further explore each state's development of universal preschool policy, states were grouped by some of the features of each state's preschool policy development landscape in order to look for patterns. To accomplish this, each states' description of the policy development, universal preschool policy conditions, and strategies used to develop preschool policy were placed into word tables with the identified major features. Next, a review of the word tables (Miles & Huberman, 1994) looked for patterns across the policy development landscapes to form assertions.

Limitations

This study relied on publicly available data. As a result, state stories are limited to the narrative available via this source. In addition, the amount of data regarding preschool policy development and adoption in each state varied. Furthermore, I had to interpret

meaning and analyze data collected for each state without the same amount of information or context for each case.

Researcher Bias/Positionality

Research requires a great deal of interpretation, and so it is important for the researcher to keep in mind his or her own biases. I am a White female, who was born and raised in the small rural town of Farmville, Virginia. I have a B.A in Psychology and an M.S in Child and Family Development. I lived in the southeastern United States for most of my life. I have taught in preschool classrooms, supported states' development of early childhood programs, and provided national technical assistance to states on child care/preschool quality improvement related issues. My experiences have made me a firm believer in the power of high quality early care and learning experiences and of policy to ensure their successful delivery and sustainability. These experiences as an ECE teacher and consultant provide me with a better understanding of state and federal ECE funding, as well as government and educational contexts. However, I also recognize that these experiences have the potential to limit my understanding of why universal preschool came to be in these ten states. Furthermore, I may have implicit bias in favor of certain states' approaches and inferred what they meant due to my more intimate understanding of some states' cultures. Finally, I identify as being an advocate of voluntary, universal preschool for all children from birth to age five years old. Therefore, it is possible that I have interpreted data from information gathered with more of an "insider" perspective than that of an objective observer.

Summary

This section describes the methodology that the researcher used in the study and provided specifics on the study's research design, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Chapter Four will help tell the story of how ten states came to pass universal preschool initiatives by highlighting the events and circumstances that led to the adoption of this policy in each state.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

The goal of this study is to better understand the type of policy environments that have proven critical for state-wide universal preschool adoption. This goal was achieved through a thorough and descriptive policy analysis of the processes states went through to actualize universal preschool policy. The theoretical lenses that framed this study are *Large Leaps* (Baumgartner and Jones, 2010), and *Policy Windows* (Kingdon, 1995).

Large Leaps Theory (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010), developed by Frank Baumgartner and Brian Jones (1995), recognizes that when conditions are right, change can happen in abrupt, large bursts that represent a significant departure from the past, as opposed to small incremental changes over time that usually do not reflect a radical change from the status quo (Stachowiak, 2013). This theory also is referred to as *Punctuated Equilibrium Theory* (True, Jones, & Baumgartner, 1999). Baumgartner and Jones (1991), major thinkers in the policy change arena, developed the model and have used it in longitudinal studies of policy and agenda-setting and decision making. The theory posits that conditions for large-scale change are ripe when the following occur:

- An issue is defined differently or new dimensions of the issue gain attention (typically a fundamental questioning of current approaches);
- New “actors” get involved in an issue; or

- The issue becomes more noticeable and receives heightened media and broader public attention.

According to *Large Leaps Theory* (Baumgartner and Jones, 1991), while these conditions set up the environment in which large-scale change can occur, they do not predict or guarantee it. For example, an issue may achieve increased attention and focus (e.g. brain development, early childhood education, school dropout), but the heightened attention may not result in policy change. However, when all of the right conditions occur simultaneously, change is exponential instead of incremental.

The *Policy Windows Theory* (Kingdon, 1995), espoused by John Kingdon regarding policy-making or agenda-setting, attempts to explain why some issues receive attention in the policy process and others do not (Stachowiak, 2013). He identified three “streams” related to the policy system:

- *Problems* are how social conditions become defined as “a problem” to policy makers, including a problem’s attributes, its status, the degree of social consciousness of the issue, and whether the problem appears solvable with clear alternatives.
- *Policies* are ideas generated to address problems.
- *Politics* are political factors, including the “national mood” (e.g., enthusiasm for “large government”), campaigns by interest groups and advocates, and changes in elected representatives (Stachowiak, 2013).

According to this theory, to increase the likelihood that an issue will receive thoughtful attention or be placed on a policy agenda, at least two of the streams need to join at critical moments or “windows.” *Policy Windows* are windows of opportunity that materialize when there is a possibility for policy change.

The research question in this study was: How did ten states, poor and rich, “blue” and “red,” come to join the vanguard of early childhood innovation and pass laws to establish universal preschool policy? This chapter will detail policy conditions, political settings, cultural environments and other intervening variables leading up to the passage of legislation and/or other policy approval processes that precipitated states’ adoption of universal preschool.

Georgia

Georgia’s targeted preschool began in 1992 with a pilot program. In 1995, the program became the nation’s first state-funded universal preschool program for four-year-old children. Funding is generated through state lottery revenues, and the program is available across a variety of settings to include public schools, private child care centers, faith-based organizations, *Head Start* agencies, institutions of higher education, and military facilities.

Establishing a lottery for education was the idea of former Georgia Governor Zell Miller, a Democrat turned Republican. Following Miller’s first bid for governor in 1990, he looked for a way to support education without increasing taxes and alarming conservative voters (Raden, 1999). Many Georgians played the Florida lottery. A Georgia lottery would mean their money would remain in-state. Miller proposed creating a lottery

with proceeds that would benefit two causes – preschool and college scholarships. Miller campaigned for governor on these two issues alone and won (Johnson, 2014). The targeted preschool program served nearly 1,000 social and/or economically disadvantaged/at risk four-year-old children, mostly within local school systems across Georgia.

By 1994, Georgia’s preschool/prekindergarten program was serving about 15,000 children. The Georgia Lottery also turned out to be far more fruitful than anyone could have imagined. In 1994, Miller narrowly won reelection and was in the enviable position of deciding what to do with a funding surplus. He decided on universal access to *Georgia Pre-K*. Mike Volmer, a top aide for Miller, explained the reasoning in Elizabeth Rose’s (2010) book, *The Promise of Preschool: From Head Start to Universal Prekindergarten*. Volmer said “With the political conservative environment that we are living in, if we come out and try to push a program for poor kids, we’re not going to get a whole lot of support.” A referendum passed in which a small margin of funds was included for the expansion of the targeted program to serve an additional nearly 200 sites, allowing Georgia’s 159 counties to serve almost 9,000 at-risk four-year-old children (Bushouse, 2009). The initiative was paired with a budget allocation that included a very publicly popular higher education program in Georgia called the *HOPE Scholarship* program. Available to any Georgia high school graduate with a 3.0 grade point average or better who attends a state college, The *HOPE Scholarship* was established in 1993. By 1994, the Georgia preschool program was serving about 15,000 children. It was the intentional

coupling of the targeted preschool program with a higher education scholarship initiative that won the favor of the public and allowed successful adoption.

Despite increasing numbers of four-year-old children enrolled in publicly-funded preschool in Georgia, political support for the program was weak because of a frail infrastructure and some remaining dichotomous public views of early childhood education – seen by some as a babysitting service, by others an intrusion of family, and still by more as a wise return on investment. Georgia was becoming more conservative in the 1990s (Raden, 1999). Political conditions and the social environment were not conducive to supporting a program focused on children living in poverty. Free school in Georgia was being labeled as a social welfare program in an increasingly anti-welfare environment (Rose, 2010). In 1994, Governor Miller decided to remove the income limits on the preschool program to open it to every four-year-old because the lottery revenues were skyrocketing and additional funding was available to make the preschool program universal without the necessity of additional funds requested from state government. The allowance of the preschool program to serve all four-year-old children was a critical factor in its survival of Georgia's program (Shue, 2007).

The adoption of universal preschool required an alteration in the role of local preschool program implementation. In the targeted pilot program years, the focus of the program was on providing comprehensive integrated services to all children in participating families. This was achieved in part through Georgia's local coordinating councils. Local coordinating councils included parents, representatives from public and private providers, health officials, educators, and representatives from business

communities. The purpose of the councils was to facilitate sharing of resources and information. Local coordinating councils' public services for participating families engaged at least one parent of a child enrolled in a target preschool program, as well as the cross-sector representatives from health and human services. These councils also had the power to determine the kinds of providers who could participate in the target preschool program (e.g. *Head Start*, family child care, center-based programs). The expansion of Georgia from targeted to universal preschool reduced the need for the coordinating councils' role, since now not all families would need this kind of coordinated wraparound service.

Even though the expansion to universal preschool was changing the image from a social welfare program to that of an early education-for-all program, there was opposition attempting to halt the expansion of universal access. Conservative Christian organizations issued advice to parents to keep their children out of universal preschool, citing the destruction of family values and social norms. They claimed that state preschool would promote gender blurring with shared bathrooms and that it would teach women to enter the workforce and abandon their role as child nurturers. Even with the caution advised from conservative Christian groups, *Georgia's Pre-K Program* tripled its expansion efforts from 15,500 children in 1994-95 to 44,000 slots during the 1995-96 school year. During this time, the private sector became an integral part of the program, allowing it to expand quickly without using funds for capital outlay on new buildings or expansion facilities. A public/private partnership of this magnitude was a first in Georgia and the nation. In March 1996, the Georgia General Assembly created the Office of School

Readiness to be a one-stop children's department administering *Georgia's Pre-K Program*, federal nutrition programs, and some early intervention services.

New York

Unlike Georgia, where preschool had a modest warming up period, there was a long softening period for state-funded universal preschool in New York. Also, unlike Georgia, In New York's universal preschool program was built on years of work by a number of outspoken advocates and came into being as a legislative compromise, encompassed by a larger education reform bill (Bardige, 2005, p. 176).

New York has a long history of state-funded preschool education, starting as early as 1946 when public schools were allowed to establish nursery school, even though no state funds were provided (Mitchell, 2004). Public funding for preschool began in 1958 when the legislature provided funding for "experimental" programs for disadvantaged children (Raden, 1999). By 1964, many districts in New York had created programs for at-risk or disadvantaged children. The United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare (now known as the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education) began studying these programs in the mid-1960s and found positive child development outcomes. When the federal *Head Start* program was launched with funding bypassing state departments, going instead straight to local grantees, Governor Rockefeller opposed this decision and responded by launching the statewide targeted preschool program which became known as Experimental Prekindergarten (EPK) (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2016). EPK programs were located in public schools and publicly funded.

The New York Board of Regents had called for universal preschool 30 years earlier and had proposed the incorporation of preschool into the state's school funding formula many times during the 1980s. In addition, the New York State school board association recommended expanding preschool to all areas of the state in 1986. Although these efforts had fallen short, they helped build significant and incremental support for preschool expansion.

To take advantage of this policy context, in early 1997, a group of early childhood stakeholders held a forum that was attended by legislators and other interested parties. The stage was set one year prior when then-Lieutenant Governor Betsy Ross called for the expansion of EPK to all at-risk 4-year old children. The agenda included an overview of a recently released report by the Carnegie Foundation, highlighting children's learning between the ages of three and ten (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1994). New York brought in a guest speaker to this forum who discussed the significance of the report's connection of brain development and early learning and Georgia's recently instituted universal preschool program. Unlike Governor Zell Miller, who made prekindergarten an admissible and well-known part of his agenda in Georgia, Governor Pataki was not a huge fan of universal preschool. New York would struggle to keep the prekindergarten program alive in the face of opposition from the governor.

In 1997, Speaker of the Assembly Sheldon Silver planned a major educational reform bill. Democratic Assembly Leader Silver and his staff incorporated the idea of universal preschool into the larger education bill they were working on packaging and the funding for full day kindergarten, which reduced class sizes in grades K-3. The bill's

passage in 1997, as part of a budget deal between Assembly Democrats and Governor George Pataki, traded increased funding for education from local property tax cuts. After intense negotiations, Governor George Pataki signed the legislation (Weiss, 2011). The approach was attractive to both Democrats and Republicans; and with the luxury of a budget surplus, but both parties could take credit for increasing school funding and restraining property taxes. In addition, New York's economy was thriving in August of 1997 when *UPK* legislation passed as part of a broader reform and funding package spearheaded by Assembly Speaker Silver, and both Democrats and Republicans wanted to claim victory of the passage prior to the 1998 election year. The package also promoted full-day kindergarten, smaller class sizes in the early primary grades, teacher training, hi-tech equipment purchases, and bonds for school construction. With the 1998 election looming Pataki wanted to soften his image, and what better way than embracing universal preschool. In the end, both Republicans and Democrats got what they wanted – property tax cuts and increased educational spending. Passage of *UPK* in New York was the result of a prosperous economy that allowed for diametrically opposed policies to be passed simultaneously. There was opposition to public spending in general, however public opposition to universal preschool in New York was virtually nonexistent. Although there was some opposition at the time by child care providers “grumbling” about *UPK* (Rose, 2010), they did not organize to oppose it. According to Nevil's research on policy environments in New York (2007), policy formation and adoption, along with budget negotiations, are often hostile and contentious processes in New York State. The establishment of universal pre-

k was certainly no exception. At the same time, New Yorkers were unaware that the phased-in universal preschool implementation would not occur for over two more decades. A drastic change was about to happen that created a long-term struggle for the state to achieve universal preschool access for children in New York.

Oklahoma

Unlike Georgia and New York, where the development of universal preschool was connected to a popular election and received lots of media attention, the development of universal preschool in Oklahoma evolved quietly through small, incremental changes. The preschool program began in 1980 with a small pilot funded by the state legislature. Children were enrolled on a first-come, first-served basis. Ramona Paul, who retired in 2012, was the state's Assistant Superintendent of Public Education at the time and was the first to get preschool up and running in 1980. She stated, "I still remember, it was one o'clock on a Thursday and my boss walked into my office and said, 'Ramona, what would you like to see for four-year-old children'? You just write the model, and I'll get it funded" (Krehbiel, 2010). Paul's pilot program was launched that same year. But it was only a half-day, and its small budget limited it to certain parts of the state. The creation of the pilot preschool program was not without opposition. Some legislators opposed the program because of its implications for women returning to the workforce (Bushouse, 2009). However, the opposition did not prevent the program being funded as a line item by the legislature. Twenty-four sites in urban and rural areas were selected, based on a competitive grant program open to public schools. In the first year, only ten districts participated in the program.

While there was no coverage of the pilot program in the newspaper for the capital region, the *Oklahoman* covered a small portion in 1984. State Superintendent of Education Dr. John Folks advocated for making kindergarten mandatory and creating school-centered early childhood education. Folks said to the press, “we could eliminate many of our problems in school if we identify the education needs of our students at an early age” (Killackey 1984, p.1). Opposition was from those who believed young children would be better cared for at home instead of outside care settings, and that universal preschool was a threat to the family (Rose, 2010).

The pilot program continued to operate with annual appropriations until 1990. A statewide 1989 conference on education resulted in a task force dedicated to looking at early childhood education within K-12 reform. The conference and task force report contributed significantly to a statewide awareness that early childhood education was critical for economic development and therefore would result in an improved quality of life for Oklahomans (Oklahoma Academy for State Goals, 2005).

The Governor’s Task Force continued to gain momentum for education reform and support for preschool changes from the education and political communities, however opposition to public education for four-year-old children was still present in the state (Bell, 2013). Many Oklahomans believed that young children should be at home with their mothers. Because of the consistent tone of opposition to publicly-funded preschool, politicians with strong conservative constituent bases led reform advocates to propose a bill that would provide free preschool only to *Head Start*- eligible children and families, and allow school districts to set a sliding-scale fees for families who did not

meet the *Head Start* income limits (Bell, 2013). The entire bill received only a few paragraphs in the Oklahoma City newspaper after the Senate passed its revisions. This was one more step in small incremental changes to eventually establish universal preschool in Oklahoma.

In 1993, a legislative change created an incentive system for kindergarten programs that would prove instrumental in bringing the case for expanded preschool in Oklahoma. That year, the legislature, under pressure from rural school districts with declining enrollments, passed an amendment that enabled school districts to be reimbursed for four-year-olds in kindergarten. This change came to be known as “4s in K” (Bell, 2013). This program allowed rural areas with more capacity in kindergarten classrooms to admit four-year-olds and receive the same funding formula they did for five-year-olds. Superintendents, particularly in rural Oklahoma counties, began creating kindergarten classes they knew would be empty. This move proved to be very beneficial for universal preschool advocates who framed the “4s in K” practice as a “bad” choice for children and non-developmentally appropriate. Child advocates instead lobbied in favor of increasing the reimbursement rate for preschool in order to provide the incentive for public schools to expand preschool programs for four-year-olds – a “good” and developmentally responsible choice. This practice is known in the field as pushing “up” from birth- early childhood with an early learning approach appropriate for four-year-olds instead of pushing “down” from a K-12 perspective.

About the time of the “4s in K” debate, Joe Eddins, a key advocate for universal preschool policy in Oklahoma came on to the scene. Eddins was elected to the Oklahoma

House of Representatives in 1995. He was a Democratic legislator who had worked as a rancher and high-school biology teacher. He had spent his first few years in the legislature learning about early education. The freshman legislator partnered with Senator Harbison for support to understand early childhood (Bell, 2013). Bushouse states (2009) that Eddins credits Harbison with everything he knows about early childhood education. Eddins turned to him because Harbison had become a strong early childhood advocate after undertaking some early childhood research for the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce in the 1990s.

Eddins and Harbison would become a steady pair in the quest for universal preschool in Oklahoma. Eddins, like Romana Paul, was well suited to advancing early education. Eddins was also successful in engaging the business community in his newfound passion. He took members of the Chamber of Commerce to Yale University to meet with Dr. Edward Zigler and tour his first 21st Century school. Dr. Zigler is considered by many to be the “father” of *Head Start* (Peart, 2015). In 1970, Dr. Zigler was named by President Nixon to become the first Director of the Office of Child Development and Chief of the U.S. Children’s Bureau. Dr. Zigler also helped bring to fruition the Family and Medical Leave Act, the *Early Head Start* program, and the large network of Schools for the 21st Century. The School of the 21st Century (21C) or 21st Century School is a community school model that incorporates child care and family support services into schools. Its overall goal is to promote the optimal growth and development of children beginning at birth. After touring Zigler’s 21C school, the

Chamber of Commerce members become convinced that early childhood education was the answer to social and economic success in Oklahoma (Bell, 2013).

Eddins had tried for three years to change the education of four-year-olds in Oklahoma through amendments to raise the reimbursement rate for full and half-day preschool programs. During the first two years, opposition to amendments was posed by representatives of rural school districts that benefited from the “4’s in K” program (Bushouse, 2009). Eddins tried to persuade school leaders that placing four-year-olds in kindergarten was developmentally inappropriate. He also told them about the negative impact of the policy when some of the bigger school districts started enrolling 4s in K. This was because of the overall decrease in per pupil aid for all schools (Glass, 2012). Eddins’ arguments had slowly become persuasive. His past years of advocating for more developmentally appropriate preschool programs for four-year-olds, instead of the “bad” choice of “4’s in K”, was no longer falling on deaf ears. “I introduced that bill just to get the four-year-olds out of kindergarten,” Eddins said. “There was enormous support because you aren't just supposed to put a 4-year-old in a classroom with a 5-year-old and teach them properly” (Rolland, 2011).

Eddins and Harbison continued their efforts to promote preschool in Oklahoma; at the beginning of the 1998 session, they advocated for increasing the preschool reimbursement rate from 50% of what schools received per pupil for K-12 students to 75% of what they received for K-12 pupils, as they had tried to promote the prior two years. This time they were also supporting an increase in the income eligibility from 150% to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), and elimination of the 4’s in K

program. It is important to note that Eddins and Harbison were not advocating for universal preschool in 1998, they were simply trying to gain support for an increase in the reimbursement rate, income eligibility level, and to eliminate the “4’s in K” program (Glass, 2012). To gain support for the amendment, Eddins talked to each of the 101 Oklahoma House legislators about the importance of replacing the “4’s in K” program with a more developmentally appropriate choice, preschool program (Bell, 2013). He told them that if they supported the amendment, public schools in their districts would get reimbursed for half or full day preschool programs, which would allow them to end the practice of placing four-year-olds in kindergarten without incurring losses in state aid (Bushouse, 2009).

Eddin’s bill won a unanimous vote for the amendment. He was calculated in winning support for universal preschool, as he presented the legislation as an amendment to the school law merely designed to fix the “4’s in K” problem – a problem that had bipartisan agreement (Bushouse, 2009). His bill addressed the unpopular “4’s in K” practice and created a statewide four-year-old program that allowed school districts to partner with outside entities on preschool, so the programs could be housed in a variety of settings, including tribal programs, churches, and assisted-living facilities (Bell, 2013). That shift paved the way for a massive partnership between public schools and *Head Start* providers. This approach might have raised red flags for some Republicans (Bushouse, 2009) however Eddins had the trust and admiration of his peers and glossed over this detail to prevent alarm from his peers (Bell, 2013). Indeed, few of his fellow legislators felt the need to actually read the legislation (Economic Opportunity Institute,

2013). Instead, he summarized it for them. When he did, he chose his words carefully. “I didn’t explain that we’d have this huge collaboration with *Head Start*, and I emphasized the part that said you could contract with private providers. Republicans have always loved that” (Economic Opportunity Institute, 2013). Superintendent Gerrit was also a partner in the development and advocacy of the bill. He was careful never use the term ‘universal’ because he believed that would not garner the necessary political support (Rose, 2010). This proved to be a successful strategy because the term “universal” translated to “mandatory” for some in political arena (Bushouse, 2009). In 1998, education officials and legislators used a K-12 time of crisis to leverage education reform as a whole and embed universal preschool – what would essentially become an additional grade level integrated into the K-12 funding formula (Rose, 2010).

Eddins’ bill also dodged several potential problems that likely simultaneously contributed to its successful passage. It maintained preschool as voluntary for parents, thus removing it from the disapproval of conservatives who believed that mothers should be at home with their children. In addition, by building its cost into the larger public-school funding formula, rather than funding early education separately in the state budget, it also protected preschool from fiscal conservatives who might object to it as part of a “nanny state” (Lerner, 2012).

This seemingly small detail may have been the key difference separating Oklahoma from other states, such as Arizona and Illinois, where preschool funding was slashed during the 2008 recession (Barnett, 2009). Indeed, in Oklahoma, preschool essentially “just another grade level” and unlikely to be singled out as 5th or 11th. “In so

many other states, you have huge fights over whether preschool funding should be cut,” says Lisa Guernsey, director of the Early Education Initiative at the New America Foundation. “It’s forever seen as an extra line at the bottom of the spreadsheet” (Lerner, 2012).

Florida

In 1987, Florida established its *Pre-Kindergarten Early Intervention* program to serve three and four-year-olds (Barnett, 2017). Florida’s universal preschool movement was largely possible because of the commitment and determination of early childhood advocates David Lawrence and Alex Penelas. Lawrence retired as publisher of *The Miami Herald* in 1999, to devote his time to advocating for high-quality early childhood education. He was engaged in practically any children's issue in Florida since 1999 (Hampton, 2004). The same year he retired, Lawrence approached and persuaded Alex Penelas, the executive mayor of Miami-Dade County, Florida's largest county, to undertake political leadership in advancing early childhood education. Penelas, a Miami-born Cuban-American Democrat, had served six years as a county commissioner when he was elected to the then-new position of executive mayor (Hampton, 2003). Lawrence joined forces with Penelas to raise awareness of early childhood education issues in their region of the state. That year, convinced by Lawrence of the need and opportunity, Penelas launched a countywide campaign to promote children's issues. That same month, Lawrence went to Paris to observe the French system, *ecoles maternelles* – translated in English to mean "maternal schools.” Lawrence went on to visit Sweden to learn about its early childhood education programs. He came back from that 1999 visit and declared,

"I've seen the new world," (Hampton, 2004) and was unwavering in his effort to make Florida part of it.

In 1999, after trying for two years, the Florida Legislature passed the *School Readiness Act* (Florida Statute 411.01), which established the gubernatorial appointed *Florida Partnership for School Readiness*. The Partnership was developed to administer all early childhood programs and their respective funding streams, and passed funding onto county-level coalitions (Bassok, et al., 2014). This law combined under the governor's office all child care, health, and educational programs for children from birth to age five. The *School Readiness Act* also created the Florida Partnership for School Readiness to administer these programs and to divide these funds among local School Readiness Coalitions, which the Act also authorized (Hampton, 2004). A 20-member board sets the Partnership's policies. Its members include six designated state officials and 14 citizen members appointed by the governor (Florida Statute 411.01). Several smaller rural counties, principally in North Florida, have multi-county coalitions. Each coalition contracts with local service providers, public and private, under statewide rules and regulations. The Act also required that more than one-third of the coalition must be from the private sector, and neither they nor their families may earn an income from the early education and child care industry. To meet this requirement a coalition must appoint additional members from a list of nominees presented to the coalition by a chamber of commerce or economic development council within the geographic area of the coalition (Florida Statute 411.01). After a year of planning and start-up, the local coalitions were up and running in 2000.

Today, 30 such coalitions serve Florida's 67 counties (Association of Early Learning Coalitions, 2017).

On September 30, 1999, Penelas convened Miami-Dade County's first-ever Mayor's Children's Summit. It drew nearly 5,000 people, to include educators, parents, doctors, child care providers, and community leaders. The summit's purpose: to find ways "aimed at improving the health care, nutrition, education, social skills, and quality of life of children from infancy to age 5, which are considered the most important years in a child's development" (Hampton, 2004).

Lawrence asked for the help of both Democrats and Republicans in Miami-Dade County to make universal preschool a reality in Florida. At Lawrence's request, Miami-Dade County legislators in 2001 and 2002 introduced bills in both Houses to have the legislature pass a law implementing universal preschool. In both sessions, legislative leaders did not support the bill. Lawrence said later that legislative leaders shunned the idea of universal preschool because they feared creating a new, expensive entitlement program (Hampton, 2004). Preschool services in Florida in 2002 were "highly inequitable" (Segal, 2003.) There were some pockets of very good, high-quality early learning, and then lots of places that were more like babysitting (Segal, 2003)

After failing to pass a universal preschool bill in 2001 and 2002, Lawrence and Penelas decided to pursue a voter initiative to amend the state constitution to require the provision of voluntary preschool for all four-year-olds. The first thing they did was to identify potential public support. To do this, Penelas turned to Keith Frederick. From late August to early September 2001, Frederick polled 800 likely voters statewide to test their

potential willingness support universal preschool. Their response proved promising to Penelas and Lawrence (Hampton, 2004). Through their polling results, they found about two-thirds of likely voters statewide supported the idea of state-funded, voluntary preschool. Even among conservative Republicans, a majority supported UPK. Support among Blacks and Hispanics was strongest – 85 and 77 percent, respectively (Hampton, 2003). Among parents with children under five-years-old, support was 75 percent. Among parents of school-age children, support was a still strong 64 percent (Frederick Polls, 2001). Just as important, the poll detected no apparent electorate against the idea of universal preschool in Florida (Hampton, 2003). With that reassuring data in hand, Penelas and Lawrence figured they easily could trump the recalcitrant legislature if they could develop a constitutional amendment that would pass the Florida Supreme Court’s strict muster – and, of greatest importance, if they could raise the money to collect the signatures necessary to put the proposed amendment on the 2002 ballot (Hartle & Ghazvini, 2014) Those efforts began promptly.

To raise enough money to finance a constitutional amendment campaign, Penelas turned to his fundraising aide, Fred Menachem (Hampton, 2004). Menachem had a base of people who had helped for years with Penelas’ own campaigns. Menachem’s task was eased somewhat because Florida law places no limits on donations to constitutional amendment campaigns. Care Plus Health Plans, Inc., a Florida HMO, donated \$200,000 to the UPK drive (Hampton, 2003). Miami-based Carnival Cruise Lines donated \$110,000. The largest personal contribution, \$150,000, came from millionaire Miami auto dealer Alan Potamkin (Hampton, 2003). With Menachem’s help, the two politicians

ended up raising over \$1.8 million, and \$1.4 million of that was spent just on the petitions, or about \$2 for each of 722,000 petitions collected (Hampton, 2004). With the remaining \$400,000 generated by their fundraising, they flooded the media market. Next, Penelas asked Lee Albright, a principal of National Petition Management, to help him with the petition process (Hampton, 2003).

Florida law required Constitutional-amendment petitions to be signed by voters in at least half the state's congressional districts equal to 8 percent of the votes cast statewide in the last 2000 Presidential election. Some six million votes were cast in 2000, so Albright needed 488,700 valid signatures. The petitioners were also required to submit valid signatures to the Florida Supreme Court from at least three congressional districts. Albright began his petition gathering in February 2002 and was finished by late July (Hampton, 2004). He focused primarily in Hollywood, in Broward County, and sent in four of his firm's employees from three other states. He advertised for petition gatherers and signed up some 600 as independent contractors. In Florida, once a sufficient number of petitions are gathered in a given county, petitioners must submit the signatures to that county's supervisor of elections. The supervisor charges 10 cents per signature to validate (or invalidate) the signature (Hampton, 2003).

The Florida Constitution required some 488,700 valid petitions, but petition gatherers typically try to obtain almost twice the required number to allow for invalid petitions. Florida's attorney general first must certify to the Florida Supreme Court that the ballot language meets the single-subject test (Florida Department of State Division of Elections, 2016). For example, had the Florida legislature passed the proposed

Constitutional amendment that Georgia’s legislature passed in 1992, the Florida Supreme Court would have struck it down because the Georgia proposal did three things: It established a lottery. It directed certain lottery funds to UPK. It directed other lottery funds to HOPE college scholarships for Georgia high school graduates. That three-pronged initiative instantly would have failed to meet Florida Constitution’s “single-subject rule.” That rule says that proposed amendments to Florida’s Constitution must address only one subject. For example, a proposal to establish UPK and to increase teachers’ salaries would address two subjects. The Florida Constitution required that the office ballot language of proposed amendments must be clear, unambiguous, and consist of no more than 75 words (Florida Department of State Division of Elections, 2016). If the court agrees, the proposal is approved for the ballot. The UPK ballot language cleared both hurdles, and it beat the 75-word structure by 11 words (Hampton, 2003). On their November 5, 2002 ballots, voters saw these 64 words as Constitutional Amendment 8:

Every four-year-old child in Florida shall be offered a high quality Pre-Kindergarten learning opportunity by the state no later than the 2005 school year. This voluntary early childhood development and education program shall be established according to high quality standards and shall be free for all Florida four-year-olds without taking away funds used for existing education, health and development programs " (Supreme Court of Florida, No.SC02-868, 2012).

After successful petition gathering and ballot approval, Lawrence and Penelas began to crisscross Florida to promote the universal preschool amendment. Individually and together, they held rallies and informational meetings – and Penelas held numerous focus groups – all summer and fall in virtually every city of any size in Florida (Hampton, 2003). Phyllis Kalifeh, president of the Florida Children’s Forum, supported Penelas and Lawrence. Some private providers had concerns about how universal

preschool would impact their profitability. Kalilfeh took the time to speak to child care providers and explain that access would be universal and if they met the quality standards – yet to be determined – they would be included in the provision of universal access (Hartle & Ghazvini, 2014).

The message the two politicians and advocacy groups spread across the state was always the same: preschool would be free for families. No parent would be compelled to participate; preschool would be completely voluntary (Hartle & Ghazvini, 2014). The public schools, private child-care providers, home-based providers, and faith-based institutions would all be able to apply. All providers who met statewide standards would be eligible to participate. Over the summer, the message got through (Hartle & Ghazvini, 2014). By Election Day on November 5, 2002, any organized opposition to UPK was undetectable (Hampton, 2003). Even so, some 40 percent of Florida's voters still voted against the amendment (Hartle & Ghazvini, 2014). Historically, a 40 percent “No” vote is not unusual in Florida – especially on issues that involve spending considerable money. Florida has a high proportion of elderly retirees, many of them on stringent fixed incomes. Any issue that could cost them money, therefore, tends to trigger a “No” response. No one conducted exit polling to ask. The Lawrence-Penelas camp was out of money, said fund-raiser Fred Menachem by telephone (Hampton, 2003).

The 2003- 2004 Florida legislators faced a \$4 billion budget shortfall. It had to be overcome to produce the constitutionally required balanced budget. Moreover, the House and Senate were divided over raising taxes and fees, or cutting programs and services, to balance the budget. Given these challenges, they deferred to the 2004-2005 legislature to

craft the law to implement Florida's universal preschool (Hartle & Ghazvini, 2014). In 2003, the legislature passed a bill mandating that the Florida Board of Education, the Auditor General, and the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) do a thorough study of universal preschool to guide the governor and 2004 Legislature and to report back to the Board of Education by December 31, 2003 (Hampton, 2003). OPPAGA is Florida government's equivalent of the U.S. government's nonpartisan General Accounting Office. In addition, The Florida State Board of Education chartered a *Universal Prekindergarten Education Advisory Council* in April 2003 composed of Lt. Governor Toni Jennings and a group of early education policy experts, including David Lawrence (Hampton, 2003).

In October 2003, the Advisory Council released its recommendations (Florida State Board of Education Universal Prekindergarten Education Advisory Council, 2003). Several proposals for the design of the new constitutionally-mandated program were crafted and debated before the final authorizing legislation was signed into law in January 2005. These are worthy of highlighting, as they emphasize the difference between the initial vision for the universal preschool program and the program that ultimately passed. The Florida legislature took these recommendations into consideration as it negotiated CS/HB 821 (Ackerman, et al., 2009), the bill it sent to the governor to enact universal preschool. However, that bill differed significantly from the Council's recommendations on several key issues. The number of contact hours was cut in half for school year programs and by almost 75 percent for the summer program (Bassok et al., 2014). The law required only one assessment, to be administered by public schools upon the

student's enrollment in kindergarten (Hampton, 2003). It also lowered the performance benchmark from 90 to 85 percent of program completers assessed to be ready for school. Governor Jeb Bush vetoed the bill in July 2004 explaining that the bill's regulatory framework was too lax and failed to fulfill many of the Council's guidelines (Finn, 2009). Specifically, the governor objected that CS/HB 821 did not include staff-to-child ratios for all types of programs, had lenient staff qualifications and training requirements, and lacked specific accreditation requirements for providers (Bassok et al., 2014). A new bill emerged during a special session of the Florida Legislature, which convened that fall. It allayed some of these concerns, but still differed substantially from the vision that the Universal Prekindergarten Education Advisory Council put forth, particularly around length of day and assessment practices. The bill, HB 1-A, was sent to the governor in December 2004 who signed the *Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program* into law in January 2005 (Bassok et al., 2014).

West Virginia

West Virginia public preschool began in 1983. With a new piece of legislation, local school boards were given the ability to offer preschool to three- and four-year-old children. This resulted in the formation of the Public School Early Childhood Education Initiative (West Virginia Division of Teaching and Learning Office of Early Learning, 2015). In 2000, the West Virginia State Legislature made \$1 million available to the Governor's Cabinet on Children and Families in the 2001 budget for the states' targeted preschool program. The program was modelled after the *Educare* initiative, which was intended to enhance existing early childhood programs and encourage quality

improvement (West Virginia Department of Education, 2015). Funds were awarded through a competitive grant process to collaborative community groups that included core partners representing *Head Start*, Child Care, public preschool, birth to three, and parents of preschool children.

West Virginia might be considered the state that passed universal preschool on the fastest track. Like Oklahoma, West Virginia was also experiencing declines in K–12 enrollment—a circumstance that made the school funding formula a particularly attractive means of expanding toward universal preschool (Barnett & Hustedt, 2011). A very small group with an inner circle of political appointees and legislators were responsible for the abrupt passage of legislation (Bushouse, 2009). Preschool was included in *Senate Bill 247*, which was introduced by Senator Lloyd Jackson, Chairman of the Senate Education Committee. Much like Georgia and New York’s bills, this bill included attractive items, like pay raises for teachers. The preschool element of the legislation was mentioned in only four pages of the 51-page bill. Senator Jackson, who wrote the legislation with three of the staff members, gained support from key members of the Senate and House to ensure passage of the bill at literally the eleventh hour of the very last day of the legislative session (Bushouse, 2006). According to Bushouse’s 2006 research, legislation was passed without the knowledge of statewide early childhood advocates, those responsible for implementing the program, and to the great surprise of those currently implementing the state’s targeted preschool program.

Senator Jackson built relationships with top political appointees at the West Virginia Departments of Health and Human Services (WVDHHR) and Education, and

worked to persuade them to support universal preschool. He did this by giving the WVDHHR the power of first review of all county preschool plans (Bushouse, 2006). In West Virginia, all school districts are county-level governments (West Virginia Department of Education, 1990).

Primary opposition to the bill was from House Education Committee Chair Jerry Mezzatesta. His concern was based on state universal preschool funding replacing and potentially reducing federal *Head Start* funding for preschool services (Bushouse, 2009). West Virginia's population had been declining since the 1960s, and some public schools had started providing preschool to boost enrollments. Unfortunately, the schools and *Head Starts* did not always collaborate across counties, and so many Head Start programs lost funding due to increased school district preschool enrollment. To address this concern about *Head Start*, Jackson's bill required public schools to collaborate with *Head Start* agencies. If the *Head Start* agency refused to sign the plan to collaborate, it would prevent the public school system from receiving the state preschool funding (Bushouse, 2009).

Like Oklahoma, declining K-12 enrollment in West Virginia played a role in promoting expanded access in that state (Rose, 2010). Targeted public school preschool had been available in the state since 1986. However, the school aid funding formula was based on K-12 enrollment. To compensate for declining enrollments in the late 1990s and early 2000s, some school districts began enrolling four-year-olds in kindergarten. There was a growing awareness of the number of children who were eligible for federal Free and Reduced Lunch and were also starting school without the same pre-literacy and

school readiness skills as their higher-income peers (Wong, et al., 2007). Policymakers developed a greater appreciation for the potential for early education to ameliorate this problem. The Senate Finance Committee created an advisory group to examine how existing early care and education resources and services might be mobilized to better meet the needs of the state's children. In early 2002, the legislature voted to approve an education reform bill, sponsored by Senator Jackson that increased education funding by \$2.9 billion. Most of the increased funding was for K-12 teacher salaries, but one additional provision was that each county-based board of education was required to provide preschool for all four-year-olds by the 2012-2013 school year (Bushouse, 2006).

Illinois

Deep social spending cuts occurred in the 1980s during the Reagan administration. These cuts were beginning to impact children's services nationwide. It was at this time that leadership of the three big and powerful child advocacy organizations in Illinois – *Voices for Illinois Children*, *The Ounce of Prevention Fund* and *Action for Children* - realized they should work together and formed an alliance that would prove critical to actualizing universal preschool in Illinois a couple of decades later. State-funded preschool began in Illinois in 1985 with enactment of the Prekindergarten Program for Children at Risk of Academic Failure, which developed into Early Childhood Block Grants by 1997 (Barnett, 2012). In 1999, Governor Ryan convened the *Early Care and Education Assembly*. It was comprised of members from the three big advocacy organizations as well as some others invested in early childhood in Illinois (e.g. Chicago Metropolis 2020 and Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois)

(Ackerman, et al., 2009). The McCormick Tribune foundation provided staff support to summarize recommendations made from the Assembly. The Assembly identified universal preschool for three and four-year-olds as its top topic policy priority (Rose, 2010).

Consequently, in 2001 a task force on universal access to preschool was created and tasked with producing a blueprint for a universal preschool plan for Illinois. The task force released its report with recommendations for a universal preschool implementation plan in early 2002 (Rose, 2010). In late 2002, Illinois business groups also convened with one message - Illinois needed a huge expansion in quality preschool programs to close the academic achievement gap and keep the state's workforce competitive. This was a group of very influential community and business leaders (Weiss, 2011). They noted parental demand for programs such as *Head Start*, child care, and preschool still exceeded supply in Illinois (Olszewski, 2002). From 1997 to 2005, federal funding for state child care was increased for Illinois; however, it wasn't enough to keep pace with Illinois' growing early childhood population. Illinois faced serious state budget shortfalls following 2001, causing priority for universal preschool to fall to the wayside. The group's momentum turned instead to the establishment of a comprehensive early learning system in Illinois (Rose, 2010).

Luckily for Illinois early childhood advocates, in 2002 Rod Blagojevich, a gubernatorial candidate who campaigned on universal preschool as his platform, was about to win the state's election. Governor Blagojevich became an early childhood champion through a number of life experiences including exposure to early brain

development research, a visit to an Educate program (a model facility run by the Ounce of Prevention Fund), and his own daughter's experience in a Montessori preschool.

According to many sources, Blagojevich believed that if his own daughter benefited so much from preschool that every child should have the opportunity. (Rose, 2010).

Slow and incremental funding increases helped prime Illinois for universal preschool adoption. Ninety million dollars of increases between 2003 and 2006 raised total spending for state-funded preschool to \$318 million. A total of \$145 million was allocated to moving toward universal access. Illinois' crime rate was rising and was easily amongst the highest in the country. In 2005, citing solid research statistics, Fight Crime: Invest in Children Illinois, a member of the alliance of early childhood advocacy organizations, authored an editorial in the *Rockford Register Star* that made the case that no traditional crime-fighting weapons are as effective as investing in children through various programs targeted at various ages (Rockford Register Star, 2005). They had been publicly calling for accessibility of quality early care and learning for all children since 1999. They were a valuable asset in the universal preschool conversation because they represented law enforcement, an "unusual" yet likely suspect, and were calling for greater investment in early childhood to reduce juvenile delinquency and reduce future correctional budgets.

Despite Illinois' tight financial situation, Governor Blagojevich remained committed to his campaign promises for universal preschool and approved a \$30 million increase that took state spending on early childhood initiatives to \$184 million. Of this, \$1.2 million was designated to create 11 early childhood classrooms. In early 2003, six

Illinois communities were chosen to roll out the state's universal preschool initiative (Rose, 2010). This six-city pilot plan originated from the Governor's *Task Force on Universal Access to Preschool* (Evanston Review, 2003). In the fall of 2004, Illinois legislation created the *Illinois Early Learning Council*, which was charged to coordinate state programs and services for children from birth to five years of age. Illinois was the first state in the country to include three and four-year-olds in its legislation (Ackerman, et al., 2009). More than two decades of early childhood advocacy raised policymakers' awareness of issues related to young children. Because of the wide variety of efforts in the state aimed at children age five and under, the *Illinois Early Learning Council* was established by statute in 2003. This was a group comprised of policymakers, advocates, and early education experts, including NIEER Scientific Advisory Board member Dr. Samuel J. Meisels of the Erikson Institute for Advanced Study in Child Development (Barnett, 2006). The purpose of this advisory group was to design a comprehensive system of early care and education, including *Preschool for All*, the name for the universal preschool initiative that would later become law.

With the Council's recommendations in place and support from the General Assembly, the *Preschool for All* bill passed with great bipartisan support in May of 2006. Universal preschool legislation passed in large majorities in both houses of the legislature (Preschool for All, 94th General Assembly, 2006). Universal preschool would officially become a fully funded crime-fighting strategy in Illinois. Senate Bill 1497, *Preschool for All*, enabled every community to offer state-funded preschool in a variety of settings, including public and private schools, child care centers, and other community-based

agencies. There is a depth of early childhood advocacy and expertise in Illinois that is unparalleled among states with universal preschool programs (Rose, 2010). Indeed, leaders of the large early childhood advocacy organizations in Illinois had been individually and collectively working on this issue for decades. In 2006, with little to no media attention and no push back from the child care industry, their *Preschool for All* dream became a reality for Illinois children

Vermont

The 1987 *Vermont Early Education Initiative* (EEI) was created as an annual competitive grant program to finance early education opportunities for at-risk 3- to 5-year-olds (Weiss, 2011). In addition, a program called *Essential Early Education*, to help children with disabilities who later enter special education programs, had been in existence for many years before that. EEI-eligible children had to have family income at or below 185 percent of the FPL, limited English proficiency; a history of mistreatment or neglect, a developmental delay, and/or social isolation in order to participate (Barnett, 2003). School districts and community early care and education programs were required to partner for an EEI grant, though either entity. EEI funds could be used to provide preschool education services to 3- and four-year-olds (Barnett, 2012). *Act 60*, the court-ordered Education Finance Act of 1997 (Laws & Regulations: *Act 60* Links & Resources, 2017) provided money from the new education fund to school districts to aid "at-risk" children (from low-income families or with limited English proficiency) through preschool or early-grade mentoring programs. *Act 60* did not, however, authorize universal preschool programs for all children (Sawyers, 2014).

In late 2002, Commissioner Ray McNulty was determined to lead Vermont into the new world of universal preschools (McClaughry, 2005). McNulty's talk of a vision for universal preschool fell on eager ears within the educational field. The people running Vermont's schools were very much aware that the state's public school attendance was declining, like West Virginia's, while school spending was sharply increasing. Preschool for three- and four-year-olds can be provided at half the cost of serving elementary school children due to a number of factors, namely lower teacher compensation and curriculum costs. Like West Virginia and Oklahoma leaders, McNulty saw an obvious solution of bringing in more children into the system (McClaughry, 2005).

In 2003, the Senate Education Committee took up Commissioner McNulty's initiative. On April 2, 2003, after the Senators fought down the effort on the floor to inject a small amount of parental choice into the program, the Senate passed Bill 166 on a 28-0 vote. In the House, however, the bill faced tougher consideration. Some representatives raised concerns about putting private child care centers out of business or driving up their costs in order for them to get to a quality level that would allow them to collaborate with public schools in preschool delivery (McClaughry, 2005). Other Representatives believed that the new public school preschool programs would put church-based preschools out of business. Eventually, *Senate Bill 166* expired in the House Education Committee (McClaughry, 2005). A designated preschool program was established, however, in 2003, allowing school districts to subsidize preschool education and include 3- to 5-year-olds in their school census. The program, which was initially called the Publicly Funded Prekindergarten using Average Daily Memberships (PFP-

ADM), underwent significant changes in 2007 with the passage of *Vermont Prekindergarten Education-Act 62* (An Act Relating to Prekindergarten Education, H. 534, 2007). Prior to *Act 62*, local agencies could include 3- to 5-year-olds in their school census, but there were few policies for implementing services. With *Act 62*, preschool programs were supported through the state's Education Fund in the same way as K-12 (An Act Relating to Prekindergarten Education, H. 534, 2007).

Between 2003 and 2005, the Vermont Department of Education had been actively encouraging districts to create programs that went far beyond the long-established assistance for at-risk children. Acting on the authority of its own rule, the Department of Education had approved education fund reimbursement for those programs (McClaghry, 2005).

In January of 2006, Commissioner Cate sought the approval of the State Board of Education to adopt an amended preschool rule. The proposed rule spelled out conditions for collaboration with independent providers, and reaffirmed the inclusion of preschoolers in the pupil count to qualify for education fund spending. Realizing the far-reaching nature of the proposed program expansion and its contested legality, the board balked and Cate withdrew the proposed rule. Senator Jim Condos then reintroduced *Senate Bill 166* (newly numbered Senate Bill 132) to get the legislature to solve the problem. On April 13, 2006, *Vermonters for Better Education* and the *Ethan Allen Institute* briefed Gov. Douglas and Administration Secretary Charlie Smith to explain the effects of *Senate Bill 132*. They argued that S.132 could drive hundreds of independent preschool providers out of business by attracting most of their clients into "free" public

programs. Gov. Douglas and Secretary Smith clearly understood the issue, but made no commitments (McClaughry, 2005).

By mid-May, it was obvious that Senator Collins was not going to be able to push *Senate Bill 132* through the Senate, let alone the House, in 2005. On May 20th, Senator Collins took the key provision of Senate Bill 132 -- the inclusion of preschoolers in the *Act 62* pupil count formula -- to the Appropriations Committee. Strategically describing the provision as a technical amendment to ratify current practice, he persuaded the committee to add it to the Senate version of the FY 2006 appropriations bill. His appeal met with no resistance from the committee and, apparently, no objection from the Douglas administration (McClaughry, 2005).

On May 25, the Senate passed the bill and sent it off to conference with the House. Now the Senate was asking the House Appropriations Committee members to accept a brand-new provision. This provision created an open-ended, universal, education fund-financed preschool program, not just for at-risk children, but rather for all four-year-old children, despite the fact that the House had never before considered the issue (McClaughry, 2005). House members agreed to the Senate provision and the Governor signed the appropriations bill into law on June 21st. It is not clear why, however during this month of intense Statehouse activity on this issue, the usually aggressive Vermont news media did not find the matter worthy of mention (McClaughry, 2005). At the time, Vermont became the seventh state to enact universal preschool. Like, Georgia and many states who followed with legislation, Vermont acted without floor debate in either chamber of its legislature or voter approval through initiative. This sweeping measure

was quietly slipped through by Senator Collins and the Senate Appropriations Chair Susan Bartlett and House Appropriations Chair Martha Heath (McClaughry, 2005).

Without legislative debate, Vermont school districts had the approval to create and expand universal preschool. This Act defined “publicly funded prekindergarten education” as six to ten hours per week of preschool education services for children ages three to five; “full-time” preschool is ten hours per week during the school year (Act No. 62 Relating to Prekindergarten Education, 2007)

With the signature of Gov. Douglas on the FY 2006 appropriations bill, Vermont's tax-supported public school system grew by two more grade levels. Few legislators clearly understood this was happening. It was accomplished completely below the radar of public and legislative debate, with almost no attention from the news media.

In 2014, Vermont passed *Act 166*, which established universal access to publicly funded preschool for all three, four and five-year-olds who are not enrolled in Kindergarten. *Act 166* currently mandates funding for 10 hours of universal preschool for all 3 to 5-year-olds in Vermont in a prequalified program for 35 weeks in a school year (Agency of Education and the Agency of Human Services, 2016). Regardless of parental income or circumstance, all children who are age 3-5 on or before September 1 are eligible to receive high quality early learning experiences.

Massachusetts

As part of the Massachusetts School Improvement Act of 1985, the state established the Community Partnerships for Children (CPC) initiative, which was legislatively directed to provide coordination for early care and education programs in communities receiving state preschool funding (Barnett, 2009). Massachusetts delivers preschool funding to local CPC councils, which consist of parents, public school officials, and community representatives. The councils use state preschool funds to expand and coordinate preschool services based on community needs and resources, distributing funds to local preschool providers that demonstrate compliance with the Massachusetts *Early Childhood Program Standards* and the *Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences* (Department of Early Care and Education Learning 2003). Funded providers include private child care centers, public school preschool education programs, *Head Start* agencies, and family child care homes (Barnett, 2011).

In 2002, Massachusetts State Representative-elect Bob Coughlin signed on as a co-sponsor of legislation aimed at making full-day kindergarten available across the state. The stated 10-year goals of the *Early Education for All* bill included ensuring that every preschool-age child had access to a high-quality education staffed by trained educators and delivered through the existing mixed system of public and private programs (Hartzel, 2002). This would be the first attempt at providing universal early childhood education in Massachusetts, and would not gain traction for House consideration until some statewide business and early childhood leaders in the state convened to examine the economic benefits of early learning in 2003.

Some of the state's top business and education leaders launched a lobbying effort in October 2003 to build support for universal preschool, claiming that the future Massachusetts workforce depended on early education (Wen, 2003). The legislative proposal was flaunted in a novel and ambitious campaign using the language of economics and expensive television advertisements. Business and early childhood supporters tried to appeal to the public's intellect, rather than to pull heartstrings, by emphasizing that the vitality of the state's economy depends on reaching children as early as possible (Wen, 2003). Arthur Rolnick was a keynote speaker at the October 2003 summit gathering of approximately 250 early childhood stakeholders. He was at the time the research director for the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. Rolnick also cited longitudinal research findings (Schweinhart, et al., 1993) from the famous 1962 early childhood Perry Preschool study from Ypsilanti, Michigan. This study tracked the children for more than two decades who attended a preschool program. Researchers found that those who received a half-day of early childhood education, as well as home visits, had far higher high school graduation rates, achievement test scores, and future earnings than those in a control group who did not receive such early intervention (Schweinhart et al., 1993).

The nonprofit group spearheading the summit, *Early Education for All* – the same name as the bill - had already received \$2 million in private donations to begin a lobbying strategy, including a \$300,000 media campaign of television commercials ads in newspapers around the state. A Boston advertising firm produced a *pro bono*, 30-second TV spot showing a preschool boy talking to classmates about changing the world. The ad

highlighted recent research showing that the majority of a child's brain develops by age five (Wen, 2003).

The early childhood education bill would come up for the legislature's education committee consideration in late October 2003, almost a year after Senator Coughlin introduced it as a co-sponsor. At that time, Massachusetts required communities to provide only half-day kindergarten, and roughly half of the state's cities and towns provided full-day programs. Margaret Blood, director of *Early Education for All*, said she knew taxpayers needed an intellectually forceful pitch to choose to publicly fund all early childhood education. Blood said, "We need to make the case that learning starts before the bell rings for first grade," (Wen, 2003).

Like Florida's advocates, Blood and the *Early Education for All* group began a polling effort to gauge taxpayers' reaction to the universal preschool campaign, including whether they would support a tax increase to foot the bill. This was the year that many states, like Illinois, received severely reduced federal allocations from the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) and Massachusetts was hit hard – going from \$84 million the year before to \$74 million in 2003. Legislative advocates encouraged supporters of the universal preschool approach to stress the long-term economic benefits, rather than emotional, feel-good themes (Wen, 2003). Double digit op-eds appeared in the Boston Globe from 2004 to 2007.

In early 2006, a Massachusetts universal preschool feasibility and cost analysis study (Belfield, 2006) was published in a national report. The report summarizing the study described in detail the full cost of universal preschool implementation. It also

described the potential immediate and long term economic and social return on investments in Massachusetts. Clive R. Belfield was the report's author. At the time of the report, he served as Assistant Professor of Economics at Queens College, City University of New York and Associate Director for the National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education at Teachers College. He had also conducted economic analyses of pre-schooling programs for a number of other states.

Massachusetts' broad coalition of advocates, led by the group *Early Education for All*, worked hard to push for the legislative policy adoption for nearly three more years. Their case finally won over the lawmakers in 2006. The House paved the way for the hope of universal preschool when in April of 2004, they passed a budget amendment that would fund a targeted preschool program for thousands of Massachusetts three- and four-year-olds. In 2005, Massachusetts took another major step toward providing sound, responsible governance for its targeted preschool and other early childhood programs when it called for combining the functions of the Office of Child Care Services and the Early Learning Services Division of the Department of Education under the new *Department of Early Education and Care (EEC)*.

The EEC was to be governed by an independent board of directors and administered by a commissioner, appointed by the Board of Education. By establishing the EEC, the state consolidated oversight, delivery, and accountability for all center, family childcare, infant, toddler, preschool and school-age providers under one agency, a first-of-its-kind move in the country with the aim to streamline, enhance, and accelerate delivery of high-quality preschool to Massachusetts children.

Massachusetts' *Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program* (UPK) began as a pilot initiative in 2007, with \$4.6 million appropriated by the state legislature. Pilot grants were awarded to providers in a competitive process, and criteria focused on the ability of providers, which could be based in a variety of settings, to provide high-quality and developmentally appropriate programming in accredited settings (Fountain & Goodson, 2008). Programs that would serve at-risk children and those from low-income families were prioritized for the 2007 pilot year. For the first round of grant funding (2007), 131 programs received grants, and 105 additional sites were awarded grants in 2008 (Fountain & Goodson, 2008). The UPK pilot expanded in 2008 with \$7.1 million in state funding, and again in 2009 with \$10.9 million (Barnett, 2010).

Iowa

Iowa has two state-funded preschool programs: *Shared Visions* and the *Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program* (SWVPP). The *Shared Visions* program has provided services to 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds since 1989 through competitive grants to public schools, licensed non-profit child care centers, other public non-profit agencies, and *Head Start*. *Shared Visions* serves children in part-, school-, or extended-day programs, and all programs are required to meet the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Standards (Barnett, 2017).

In 2007, Iowa began the SWVPP to increase four-year-olds' access to preschool. All four-year-olds in the state are eligible to attend SWVPP. Funding for SWVPP is based on a formula in which four-year-olds are funded at 50% of the K–12 student aid amount. SWVPP operates at least 10 hours per week, and programs may collaborate with

Head Start, other preschool programs, or child care programs to offer full-day services (Barnett, 2009).

An important difference between the two state-funded preschool programs concerns how child eligibility is determined. *Shared Visions* is a targeted program, where at least 80% of the children are required to meet income eligibility guidelines (family income at or below 130% FPL). Children can also qualify for the program based on other risk factors, however they may be required to pay a fee on a sliding scale. Services within this program are provided in 32 locations, which represent less than seven percent of school districts. In addition, services are provided in 35 other community-based locations, representing 16 organizations. In contrast, SWVPP is available in 96% of school districts and all children in the state who turn four by September 15 are eligible to attend the program (Iowa State Department of Education, 2017).

If there is a name that might be synonymous in Iowa with universal preschool, it is “Vilsack.” One of Governor Vilsack’s first big moves towards universal preschool adoption in Iowa was in 2003. That year, the Governor developed an education council and appointed himself chairman. The council included educators from various levels, and its charge was to determine how to implement a preschool through 16 education system in Iowa (McWilliams, 2003). Vilsack told an early childhood and child welfare stakeholder group in 2004 that Iowa’s children should be able to attend preschool if the state wants its educational system to remain competitive (Eby, 2004). At the time, only fifteen percent of Iowa’s children had access to preschool, even though research shows that children who attend preschool start kindergarten more prepared Governor Vilsack

promised these nearly 300 Iowa early childhood professionals that his budget proposal to the legislature that year would include a considerable increase in funding for early childhood programs. Vilsack also proposed improvements to children's dental care, a rating system to monitor the quality of child-care facilities and accreditation programs for more of Iowa's preschools (Graham, 2004). He was certain, and assured other constituency groups in the fall of 2004, that tax increases would not be needed to make quality preschool available to almost all of Iowa's children and to improve their health and education services (Campbell, 2004).

Governor Vilsack's commitment to the issue was relentless and he wrote an op-ed in the *Des Moines Register* in early 2005. He said Iowans can "pay now for education, or pay later in high social costs" and that "early childhood funding is an investment, not an expense" (Vilsack, 2005). When Vilsack addressed lawmakers in early January 2005 regarding how expanding and improving preschool education across Iowa would be at the top of his priority list, Republican legislators asked for more details regarding the governor's proposal, namely the cost (Hawkins, 2005). Taking a page from Oklahoma, West Virginia, and Vermont, Vilsack provided them with the funding solution when he shared a proposal to pay for preschool with Iowa's regular school-aid formula. Perhaps legislators were intrigued enough to consider this approach further because in the fall of 2005, Vilsack signed legislation opening the door to expand early childhood education with a policy commitment of adopting a rating system for preschools and child care centers. Vilsack called the legislation "a start" (Beaumont & Higgins, 2005).

In September of 2005, the *Pew Charitable Trusts* hosted the *Pew Regional Invitational Seminar on the Coverage of Pre-Kindergarten Issues* in Chicago. This two-day seminar hoped to illuminate Midwestern journalists on important topics in early childhood education. It is important to note that no state west of the Mississippi River, besides Oklahoma, had yet to adopt universal preschool. Speakers included *National Institute on Early Education Research* (NIEER) Director, Steve Barnett, as well as NIEER Scientific Advisory Board members Barbara Bowman, Samuel Meisels and Deborah Stipek. Their keynote speaker was diligent preschool advocate, Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack. Journalists in Iowa “got it.” At the end of 2005, the *Des Moines Register* editorial board wrote its own preschool “call to action,” telling its readers that as Vilsack suggested, Iowa should make universal preschool a part of school aid formula and that it just “made sense” (*Des Moines Register* Editorial Board, 2005).

The 2006 state budget did not offer fertile soil for the seeds planted by Vilsack and Iowa early childhood advocacy coalitions. The holdup with preschool expansion was financial. “It costs about \$100,000 to start up a preschool classroom,” said Judi Cunningham, the Des Moines school district’s Executive Director of Early Childhood and Elementary Programs (The Iowa Associated Press, 2007). As if to add insult to the injury of there being no movement in the effort, news of declining preschool enrollment in Iowa came from NIEER’s national *State of Preschool* report in early 2006 (Barnett, 2007). Vilsack would not be in office to see his vision come to pass.

Carrying Vilsack’s torch for universal preschool was a priority of Governor-elect Chet Culver. He continued to engage universal preschool advocates and the Council and

pledged in early 2007 to spend \$4 million toward a goal of having an accredited preschool program in every district (Boshart, 2007). Culver toured western Iowa in February of 2007 to promote his educational package in his first budget, which included \$20 million in additional spending for early childhood education. His early education spending was geared to have it available to all Iowa students, and Culver also pledged to direct another \$4.8 million to restore federal cuts to *Head Start* (Rohwer, 2007).

Rob Grunewald, a Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis economist who studied early childhood education, visited Iowa before the 2007 legislative session. He touted the fiscal benefits of investing in high-quality preschool (Lynch, 2007). Grunewald encouraged his audience to think of early childhood education as an “economic development program.” After Grunewald’s visit, legislators became proponents of a universal preschool program. They were powerfully impacted by research (Lynch, 2007) indicating the long-term fiscal value of a high-quality preschool program (Iowa Policy Project, 2011).

Iowa legislators also listened to their constituent base. Their voters wanted to keep their jobs, and yet they also needed affordable early childhood education for their young children - these two factors co-existing was not a reality for Iowa’s workforce with young children (Iowa Policy Project, 2011). At the time, the average cost of full-time preschool for a 4-year-old in the state was \$588 a month, or over \$7,000 annually (National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, 2007), higher than four-year college tuition in Iowa.

Costs of quality preschool education strained budgets for many thousands of Iowa families, and put preschool out of reach for thousands more. Other Iowa families, isolated by geography, lacked access to any preschool, let alone quality preschool (Iowa Policy Project, 2011). Finally, stars aligned for Iowa's four-year-olds in the second quarter of 2007 when Governor Culver signed into law (*Iowa House File 877, 2007*) the *Iowa Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP)*, making preschool available to all four-year-olds in Iowa. The bill promised \$13.5 million over three years and \$16.2 million during the fourth year of the program). *Iowa House File 877* was signed by Governor Culver on May 10, 2007.

The establishment of Iowa's universal preschool came in part due to challenges recognized by state leadership faced by thousands of Iowa families (Iowa Policy Project, 2014). Moreover, Iowa's preschool for all four-year-olds came from Vilsack's vision, the Council members, and other early childhood partners to include the Iowa Department of Education, local Empowerment Boards (comprised of some legislative membership), *Head Start*, and public and non-public preschool providers. Despite the uncertainty of universal preschool and financial factors that would impact the timeline of Iowa's universal preschool policy adoption, these early childhood partners maintained their collaborations and planning for universal preschool.

Louisiana

Louisiana has a considerable recent history of providing state-funded preschool. *Act 619* of the 1984 Louisiana legislative session initiated the State-Funded Program for High-Risk Four-Year-Olds, which was intended to improve the school readiness of preschool students (Barnett, et al., 2016). Before *Act 619*, Louisiana had funded preschool for some children with disabilities as early as 1979 (Barnett, et al., 2016). The state first offered prekindergarten in 1988 through the *Model Early Childhood Program* (Barnett, 2008). In 1993, when the state discontinued annual appropriations to the initiative, local school districts began using the *8(g) Student Enhancement Block Grant* program to provide preschool for children at-risk of not being prepared for school entry (Barnett, 2008). The *8(g)* programs were and are still offered today in public schools and supported by the Student Enhancement Block Grant. Programs determine eligibility by screening four-year-olds for kindergarten readiness, with a low-income priority.

Louisiana secured 60% of its \$3.8 billion share of the national tobacco settlement in 2001. That year, State Treasurer Kennedy called for the state's 64 school districts to put the estimated \$102 million they received from the sale into a trust fund. Interest from that fund could then be used to fund preschool programs (DeSue, 2001). Treasurer Kennedy wanted preschoolers in the state to benefit from the proceeds of the \$1.2 billion tobacco bond sale. Like other state advocates, the Treasurer cited studies showing that preschool-age children benefit from the programs, learning social skills and gaining knowledge that will help them later in school (DeSue, 2001). In 2001, Louisiana funded

preschool with federal *Child Care Development Fund* (CCDF) dollars, but provided no additional funding to support preschool provision (Barnett, 2003).

The *Cecil J. Picard LA4 Early Childhood Program*, which combined *LA4* and *Starting Points* programs, began in 2002, still operates today and is designed to provide early childhood education to children in families whose income fall below 185 percent of the FPL. In 2008, 13,668 students participated in the program through state funding. In addition, 438 students from families who did not meet the income requirements paid tuition to attend the program, which operated in 67 districts in 2008. Also established in 2001, the *Non-Public Schools Early Childhood Development Program* (NSECD) still operates today and reimburses preschool tuition for enrolled children from families with incomes below 200% of the FPL.

From 2000-2003, Louisiana state law required that 10% of the tobacco funds collected be appropriated to school districts for educational programs. During 2001, Governor Mike Foster's office worked on policies to set up the preschool trust fund, which also had to be accepted by the state's Association of School Superintendents, who would subsequently present a spending plan to be approved by the Legislature (Scott, 2003). In 2002, as part of Louisiana's efforts to expand and improve the quality of its early childhood programs, a committee of educators from across the state collaborated to develop standards for programs serving four-year-olds (Picard, 2003).

In the spring of 2003, Louisiana economic development officials presented an updated master plan for creating jobs and improving the state's economy that called for more preschool classes for children living in poverty and enhanced technical training to

meet the needs of business. The name of the strategic plan was *Vision 2020*, written by a special group from Governor Foster's office known as the Louisiana Economic Development Council. This strategic plan for the state mandated by the legislature in 1996 outlined how expanding preschool could provide an economic benefit to Louisiana in the short and long term (Scott, 2003). In June of 2003, a report from the Louisiana Department of Education indicated the number of northeastern Louisiana children who repeat kindergarten was on the rise. Kindergarten retention rates concerned the *Northeast Louisiana Children's Coalition*. The coalition began conducting a public awareness campaign aimed at informing parents how to prepare their children for academic success (Wilson, 2003). Fortunately, unlike like Massachusetts and Oklahoma in 2004, Louisiana chose not to cut its preschool funding. Only two other states increased their preschool funding that year – Illinois, who would two years later enact universal preschool, and New Jersey (Barnett, 2009). That year, Louisiana also shifted a greater percentage of their CCDF to preschool. New Jersey operated a court mandated targeted preschool program for children who meet risk factors. The *Abbott Preschool Program* was created as a result of the New Jersey Supreme Court's 1998 decision in *Abbott v. Burke* (Abbott v. Burke 100 N.J. 269, 495 A.2d 376, N.J.,1998) that ruled that children in economically disadvantaged districts must have access to high quality early childhood programs (Rose, 2010).

In 2005, *Pre-K Now*, funded by the *Pew Charitable Trusts*, conducted an analysis of the economic returns on expanding state-funded prekindergarten in Louisiana (Lussier, 2005). The analysis identified opportunities for Louisiana's children to enroll in

preschool and how much state funding was being invested. That assessment followed with a proposal to expand preschool availability in Louisiana.

For over two decades, Louisiana preschool was the mission of one central leader – State Superintendent of Schools, Cecil Picard. Throughout his career, Superintendent Picard educated policymakers about how early childhood changes outcomes for children. After a catastrophic hurricane devastated Louisiana, a \$20 million increase in 2005 for the *LA4* preschool program helped strengthen Louisiana’s recovery (*Pre-K Now*, 2005). Picard gained enthusiastic support from many legislators. In the storm’s aftermath, Superintendent Picard suggested that by getting displaced children back on the educational track, preschool could help mitigate the disaster’s long-term impact. At the December 2005 State Board of Education meeting, Superintendent Picard noted, “*LA4* works; it’s an investment for our future and it should be offered to every child....” (*Pre-K Now*, 2005). The *Bring Back New Orleans Commission*’s recommendation to launch a preschool for all program for three to five-year olds was a testament to Superintendent Picard’s dedication to this issue. Louisiana would soon learn about data collected over the course of 2005-2006 showing the positive effect its preschool programs were having on children in the state (Barnett, 2007).

NIEER reported in 2007 that 2005-2006 data showed Louisiana four-year-olds were making great strides toward readiness for kindergarten and increasing scores on high stakes testing in elementary school (Barnett, 2007). Year-end reports for 2005-06 indicated that although children in the *LA-4/Starting Points* preschool program started the school year scoring in the lowest quartile for performance in math, language and print,

these students showed strong progress by the end of the school year, raising scores to above the national average for preschool students (Barnett, 2007). This data lit fuel to the fire of an already receptive House and Senate who would soon undertake a critical dialog on how to make an even greater impact on the increase in scores.

Act 876, legislation to expand *LA4* to a universal program, was introduced to the Louisiana House and Senate, through leadership of Republican Representative Trahan, in the spring of 2008 (Early Education and Child Care Tracking Database, 2008). It did not make it past the House Committee before lawmakers took a session break. Several letters to the editor appeared in the capital paper across 2008 and were in support of universal preschool adoption. In June of 2008, just two months before the passing of *Act 876*, Trahan passed an initiative for the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to study the extent to which there was collaboration among the various early childhood education programs provided to children. The House and Senate requested that the BESE report its findings and recommendations to the House and Senate Committees on Education prior to the 2009 Regular Session. *Public Act 876* was reintroduced by Democratic Senator Duplessis as *Senate Bill 286* in the late spring of 2008. The piece of legislation saw no opposition from lawmakers or the public opposition while it was passed back and forth for revisions across the Senate and House committees (Early Education and Child Care Tracking Database, 2008). In the end, *Senate Bill 286* and its twin in the House (*HB 722*) would become law and allow preschool to be available to every Louisiana 4-year-old by the year 2013. On July 9, 2008 Governor Bobby Jindal signed the law that would provide for phased-in universal access to the *Cecil J. Picard*

LA 4 Early Childhood Education Program and for participation by non-school system providers of early childhood education (Early Education and Child Care Tracking Database, 2008).

Summary

Chapter Four examined the events that led to the passage and/or enactment of universal preschool in the ten states with laws on the books for the provision of statewide universal preschool. The stories surrounding the successes of Georgia, New York, Oklahoma, Florida, Illinois, West Virginia, Massachusetts, Vermont, Iowa and Louisiana in achieving early childhood policy innovation are described based on publicly available resources. States' stories were told through the process of examining data from universal preschool legislation, newspaper articles, research and policy analysis and briefs, national and state preschool reports, second-hand interviews, books, thesis and dissertations. Chapter Five follows with an analysis of states' universal preschool policy adoption through the theoretical policy change lens of *Policy Windows/ Multiple Streams* (Kingdon, 1995) and *Large Leaps/Punctuated Equilibrium* (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010). It concludes with implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Five: Discussions

Most studies on universal preschool have examined impacts of program implementation on child outcomes or evaluated preschool participation as an indicator of school readiness. Very few studies exist analyzing the policy adoption process of states that have enacted universal preschool. The purpose of this study was to examine the story of each state with a law requiring the provision of universal preschool. The goal was to identify policy environments, strategies that states employed, and other factors critical to the successful adoption of universal preschool policy. The research question that guided this study was: How did ten states, both “red” and “blue,” rich and poor, small and large, come to adopt innovative early childhood policy by enacting universal preschool for all four-year-old children? Two policy change theory frameworks were used in the study to frame and understand the analysis of findings – *Large Leaps* ((Baumgartner & Jones, 2010) and *Policy Windows* (Kingdon, 1995) theories. These two policy change theories were used as framing techniques to bring to light the stories of states, their policy entrepreneurs and actors, critical windows and streams.

Large Leaps/Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010) states that conditions for large-scale change happen when:

- An issue is defined differently or new dimensions of the issue get attention (typically a fundamental questioning of current approaches).
- New “actors” get involved.

- An issue becomes more salient and receives heightened media and broader public attention (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010).

Policy Windows/Multiple Streams Theory (Kingdon, 1995) aims to explain the design and development of policies, Kingdon's theory explains why some issues and policies gained attention during the policy agenda setting process and some did not.

Kingdon noted the following three streams related to policy systems:

- *Problems*: how social conditions become defined as "a problem" to policy makers, including a problem's attributes, its status, the degree of social consciousness of the issue, and whether the problem appears solvable with clear alternatives.
- *Policies*: ideas generated to address problems.
- *Politics*: political factors, including the "national mood" (e.g., enthusiasm for "large government"), campaigns by interest groups and advocates, and changes in elected representatives (Stachowiak, 2013).

Figure 2 illustrates how states' specific strategies and environmental conditions found in this study connect with Kingdon's *Multiple Streams* (1995) and Baumgartner & Jones *Large Leaps* (2010) policy change theories and subsequent universal preschool policy adoption. The number of states that employed a specific strategy and/or experiences a certain condition associated with universal preschool adoption are also identified. The blue squares in the figure represent *Multiple Streams Theory* (Kingdon, 1995) constructs and the yellow squares represent *Large Leaps Theory* (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010) constructs and concepts. A discussion follows related to how strategies, themes, and conditions/environmental variables associated with states' universal preschool policy adoption relate and can be understood through the theoretical lens of this study.

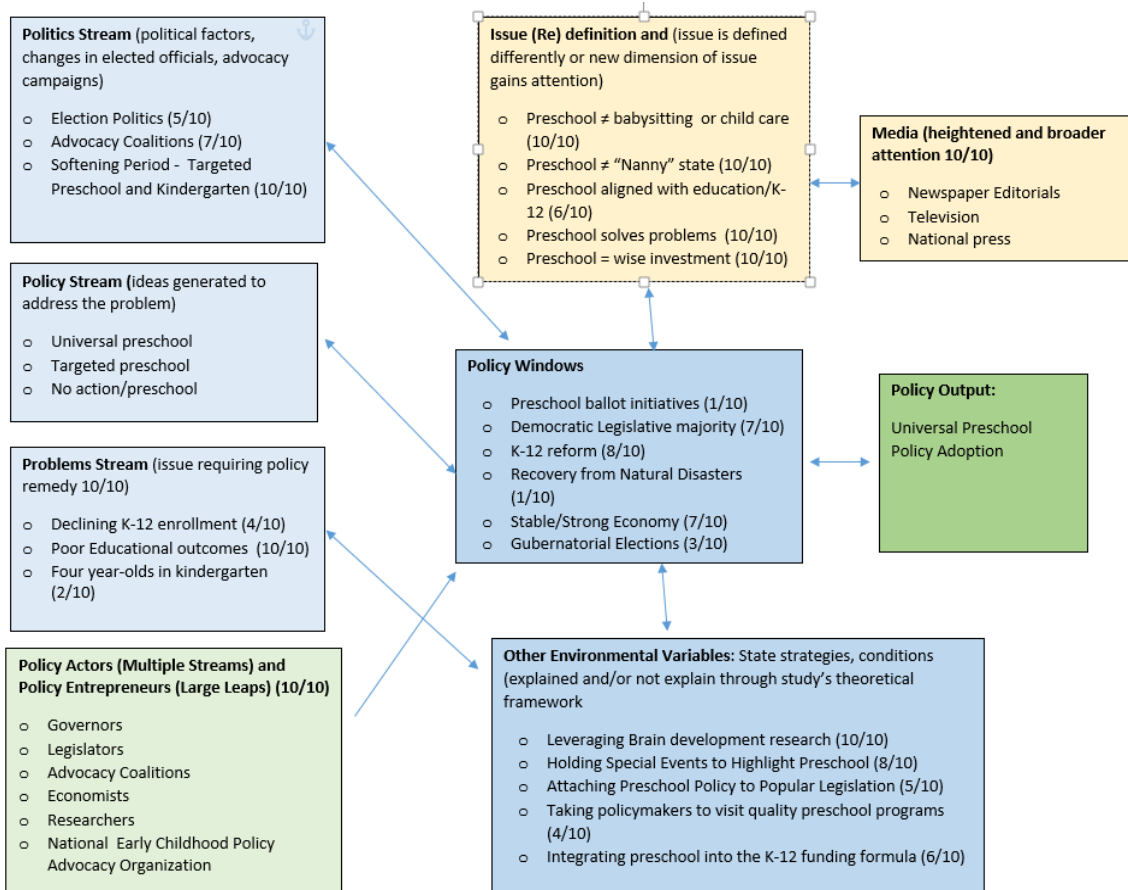


Figure 2. Visual representation of the connection between states’ universal preschool adoption and *Multiple Streams* (1995) and Baumgartner & Jones (2010) *Large Leaps* policy change theories, and the states’ strategies and additional environmental variables.

Summary of Findings

Universal preschool policies and programs have emerged in both Democratic and Republican-dominated, small and large, rich and poor states, as well as in non-regionally contiguous states such as Oklahoma and Florida. This study’s research question asked how ten states were able to establish universal preschool policy. The ten states examined in this study achieved universal preschool policy adoption using targeted strategies in the

midst of specific state environments and conditions. *Table 1* illustrates strategies states used to form universal preschool policy. *Table 2* illustrates the policy conditions and environments associated with universal preschool policy development. States' common approaches to universal preschool policy development included the use of policy champions, or *actors* and *entrepreneurs* to open and leverage policy *windows* with the support of historical *softening of policy conditions* while framing universal preschool as a wise economic, educational, and social investment as well as a *policy solution* to solve a variety of *issues* and *problems*

The most common policy *actors* and *entrepreneurs* were elected officials, specifically governors and senators. The most common open policy *windows* were K-12 education reform, democratic legislative majority, and the presence of a problem solvable with the adoption of preschool policy. The most common factor associated with the *softening up of policy conditions* was the presence of targeted preschool and kindergarten. The most common framing strategies states used were preschool as a positive *solution* to *problems* in education and society, and universal preschool as a wise financial and economic investment. Two of the most popular messaging strategies states used were the communication of the importance of early brain development and research on the economic return on investment in early childhood. Finally, the strategies of intentionally separating the concept of *preschool* from *child care*, and instead aligning it with early childhood *education*, and embedding preschool into the K-12 budget as another grade level were also popular strategies linked to preschool policy adoption. An

in-depth examination of states' policy conditions and strategies associated with preschool policy formation are discussed further in this chapter.

State Analysis

This section examines strategies, trends, themes, and policy environment landscapes that this study found to be conducive to the successful adoption of universal preschool in Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New York, Oklahoma, Vermont, and West Virginia. These state contexts were identified through qualitative data analysis conducted of publicly available resources described in Chapter Three. A variety of qualitative data analysis tactics were used, including: sifting and sorting, noting patterns and themes, seeing plausibility, clustering, making contrasts/comparisons, finding intervening variables, building a logical chain of evidence and making conceptual/theoretical coherence (Miles, et al., 2014).

Framing

The theme of “framing” emerged through constant comparative analysis of the data. Examining how the policy of universal preschool was framed revealed common themes that emerged across all states examined in this study – universal preschool was a key policy solution to solve a problem. Furthermore, the creation of a narrative by policy actors and entrepreneurs was common across all states in this study regarding positive outcomes associated with commitment to early care and education. In all ten states, policy entrepreneurs emphasized research showing investment in early care and

education linked to positive economic, social, and academic outcomes. Some positive results that all states linked to creation of universal preschool adoption include:

- Improved short term and long term state economic development;
- Decreased incarceration rates;
- Increased school readiness of students entering K-12;
- A more well-educated society; and
- Decreased reliance on social services.

Intentional Separation

Another critical element to successful framing of universal preschool programs in all ten states was the separation of policy for preschool-age children from the policy for infants and toddlers/ children under three years old. In each case, distance was made between preschool policies for four-year-old children and child care policies for children younger than four-years-old. Only Illinois included four-year-olds and three-year-olds in its legislation for voluntary preschool for all young children. Furthermore, states framed preschool more as an “early education” issue than one of providing “child care,” breaking up the sometimes publicly synonymous images of “day care” and “child care” with the image of preschool. Baumgartner and Jones (1991) discuss how policy actors purposefully change policy images by discussing them in positive or negative lights in relation to the selection of an appropriate venue. Although early childhood education is synonymous with child care, in that both entail the provision of care and learning from children under five-years-old, Georgia, Louisiana, Massachusetts, and Illinois had success in disconnecting the overlap of the two terms. With this separation between early

childhood education and child care, policy actors and entrepreneurs were able to frame universal preschool as an approach worthy of societal commitment and therefore a popular political posture for politicians. Bushouse (2009), Rose (2010) and Bell (2013) found in their research on Oklahoma that it was important for Senator Eddins to separate the term “universal” from providing preschool for all because of the association some groups were making with “universal” being synonymous with “mandatory.” Universal preschool in Oklahoma was simply understood as an opportunity for all four-year-olds, and that made a difference to policy makers’ approval.

In some states, public perceptions and sometime negative associations with preschool were barriers for states to overcome in actualizing universal preschool. In such states as Georgia and Oklahoma, there were public perceptions of preschool as “babysitting” and of lawmakers creating a “nanny state”. Advocacy groups who opposed public preschool as an infringement on family rights, along with lackluster interest on the part of key policy makers, were challenges states had to overcome in order to create universal preschool. A successful strategy to overcome this barrier was associating universal preschool with “early education.” Some states even named their programs with connotations emphasizing the “education” nature of the program (e.g. *Universal Pre-K [UPK]*, *Pre-Kindergarten [Pre-K]*, *Voluntary Pre-K [VPK]*) as opposed to highlighting the “preschool” nature, in their name. This strategy of intentionally choosing education-focused language added to states’ abilities to link and align universal preschool as part of learning that happens along the K-12 continuum, as opposed to providing “child care” and intruding into the perceived role of family. Framing of universal preschool as a

positive policy solution to improving educational and societal outcomes was a successful strategy necessary for universal preschool passage.

A Wise Investment or Solution

In all states analyzed in this study, preschool was framed as a “wise public investment,” and policy actors made sure to promote this idea. In addition, for each case, the process of framing preschool as a wise return on investment and commitment to positive social and educational outcomes for children took several years. This happened through sharing research on the associated positive developmental, educational, financial, and societal benefits. It also transpired by taking stakeholders on out-of-state visits to witness model programs first-hand, as well as by hosting national experts to speak to stakeholders. Some states (Georgia, Oklahoma, Illinois, and New York) brought in national economic experts and/or brain development experts to share their research with political and early childhood advocacy groups about the return on investment of preschool.

A key strategy that policy actors and entrepreneurs employed to overcome challenges to garnering sufficient support was framing universal preschool policy adoption as a “solution” to a widely identified “problem.” *Policy Windows Theory* (Kingdon, 1995) states that policy can be changed during a window of opportunity when advocates can successfully connect two or more components of the policy process (e.g., the way a problem is defined, the policy solution to the problem, and/or the political climate of their issue). In Oklahoma, a trusted legislator, child-development experts, education policymakers, and a handful of business leaders came to see early education as

key to the state's economic salvation, and successfully framed it as such to the legislative majority. In Louisiana, lawmakers promoted it as a prime opportunity to help rebuild a state after a devastating natural disaster. Research from this study found that Iowa, West Virginia, Oklahoma and Illinois, state lawmakers identified universal preschool as a solution to declining enrollment across school districts.

White, et al., (2015) state that:

a key mechanism for transforming policy debates...is to shift the language used to describe the policy, either to substitute a negative principled belief for a positive one, or to substitute a principled belief with instrumentally rational reasons rooted in perceived benefits of policy change, particularly those grounded in evidence.

Policy entrepreneurs in all ten states successfully linked desirable societal and educational outcomes, as well as education-related problems (e.g. declining K-12 enrollment, *4's in K*) to a policy solution of publicly funded universal preschool for all four-year-old children. In all ten states, universal preschool as a solution for improving educational and societal outcomes was persuasive and effective; universal preschool was framed as a long-term investment rather than a short-term expense. In Iowa, early childhood advocates went so far as to describe universal preschool as an “economic development program” (Iowa Policy Project, 2011).

One of the reasons for unanimous support of universal preschool in Oklahoma was that the House of Representatives did not realize the impact of the changes of transitioning from their current targeted program to a universal model. Furthermore, the changes were incremental and framed as correcting the “4's in K problem” – a problem that was presented as a win-win for early childhood advocates (more developmentally appropriate early learning environments for four-year-olds) and for school districts

(additional sustainable funding and reduction of teacher-child ratios). Table 2 highlights some of the specific strategies states used to achieve universal preschool policy.

Table 2. Strategies Used by States Facilitating and/or Leading Up to Universal Preschool Policy Enactment

| | GA | NY | OK | FL | WV | VT | IL | MA | IA | LA |
|--|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Leveraging Brain Development Research | x | x | x | x | x | X | X | x | x | x |
| Separation Preschool from Child Care | x | x | x | x | x | X | X | x | x | x |
| Framing of Preschool as Solution to Educational Outcomes | x | x | x | x | x | X | X | x | x | x |
| Framing of Preschool as Wise Economic Investment | x | x | x | x | x | X | X | x | x | x |
| Inserting Preschool into the K-12 state-funding formula | | x | x | | x | X | X | | x | |
| Leveraging Election Politics | x | x | | x | | | X | x | | |
| Holding Special Events to Highlight preschool | x | x | x | x | | | X | x | x | x |
| Leveraging Advocacy Coalitions | | x | | x | | | X | x | x | x |
| Taking Policy Makers to Visited Quality Preschool Programs | | | x | | | | X | x | x | |
| Attaching Preschool Policy to other Popular Legislation | x | x | | | x | | X | | x | |
| Creating a Ballot Initiative | | | | x | | | | | | |

Streams

In all ten states examined in this study, a key stimulus for universal preschool came from publicly elected officials. Contrary to Kingdon's (1995) *Multiple Streams Framework*, only Florida and Illinois had a separate policy stream in which non-elected policy entrepreneurs were also waiting for an opportunity to advance universal preschool. Early childhood advocacy entities who supported child care policies had not previously separated preschool policy from policies for infants and toddlers or child care in general. However, once publicly elected officials supported preschool, early childhood advocates

easily rallied to the cause. At the same time, there were no separate advocacy policy streams for universal preschool. For example, in Oklahoma, early childhood advocates asked for preschool expansion; however, they were not advocating for universal access. There were no official advocacy organizations in Oklahoma for the issue of universal preschool - only individual advocates, so the adoption of universal preschool came to the surprise of many early childhood advocacy groups (Bell, 2013; Bushouse, 2009; Rose, 2010). In Georgia, West Virginia, Illinois, Iowa, and Vermont universal preschool policy was shepherded directly by each state's governor.

Policy streams were leveraged in several states by policy makers forming coalitions, holding special legislative events with guest speakers or breakfasts, and hosting summits for a broad base of supporters. During these events policy advocates brought in experts on finance, brain development, economics, and child development to talk to stakeholders about the importance and evidence-based outcomes of investing early childhood. Georgia, Iowa, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and New York all engaged in policy advocacy related activities. Illinois leveraged a long-time coalition of early childhood stakeholders that had formed in the early 1990s to support their final push in preschool policy adoption. New York brought in a Georgia preschool policy actor to speak to legislators about the success of Georgia's universal preschool program. This actor sparked momentum for New York legislators to move forward in advancing their own preschool policy. Iowa brought in an economist who spoke of the strong positive economic impact preschool, and this had a lasting favorable impact on legislators.

Actors and Entrepreneurs

As Chapter Four highlights, no state would have actualized universal preschool without the presence and persistence of policy actors (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010) and entrepreneurs (Kingdon, 1995) carrying the torch and/or blazing the path for universal preschool. In each state, actors and entrepreneurs were elected officials who framed preschool as a policy solution a variety of different problems (e.g., Oklahoma's "4's in K", West Virginia's declining school enrollment). Key actors and entrepreneurs often shepherded the idea from conception to a ballot (Florida) or bill. Some key actors never got to see their policy actualized (e.g., Iowa's Governor Vilsack, Illinois' Governor Edgar) while in office, however they handed a torch to other elected officials who were able to see the policy come to fruition because of ground work laid by other early childhood actors and entrepreneurs. In all cases, key actors and entrepreneurs were political figures who did not necessarily start out with in-depth content knowledge or expertise in early childhood. However, they used their position to advance preschool policy. One curious case of an "accidental" actor would be the Senate Education Committee Chair in Oklahoma. According to research conducted by Bell (2013), the original legislation that Eddins and Harbin sponsored was for expansion of targeted preschool. Furthermore, universal preschool was not originally part of Eddins' plan when he authored House Bill 165. As mentioned previously, he sought to address the four-year-olds in kindergarten issue and to create a state-wide targeted, full-day preschool program. It was only after someone else said the program should be for all children, during an

Appropriations Committee meeting, that the idea of universal preschool was even considered.

Pew Charitable Trusts/ Pre-K Now and NIEER

Another policy advocate/actor that arrived on the scene to the benefit of later adopters of universal preschool was the Pew Charitable Trusts. This organization brought national and researched-focused attention to preschool from 2002-2011. The *Pew Charitable Trusts* completed its ten-year campaign, *Pre-K Now*, to advance high-quality, voluntary preschool for all three- and four-year-olds in 2011. *Pre-K Now* changed the national conversation about preschool education by providing funding and technical assistance to states who wanted to advance their preschool agenda. Illinois is the one state in this study that received funding and technical assistance from *Pew*. *Pew's Pre-K Now* challenged the nation's policy makers to transform public education by moving their current K-12 system to "pre-K-12" system.

Another national advocacy effort that helped support states' preschool agendas was the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER). While *Pew* provided funding and technical assistance, *NIEER* provided the data from each state on all things preschool. The *State Preschool Yearbook* is an annual publication that tracks the funding, access, and policies of state-funded preschool programs since the 2001-2002 school year. The *Yearbook* provides understanding of state efforts to expand the availability of high-quality early education to young children. The report is designed to serve as a resource for policymakers, advocates, and researchers to make more informed decisions about state-funded preschool. This report contained data which states that adopted after 2002

needed to leverage their preschool agendas. Later universal preschool policy adopters like Massachusetts and Vermont would use the data from other state-funded preschool programs to show their policy makers, advocacy groups, and constituents evidence to support adoption. They could point out the great progress states like Georgia, Oklahoma, New York, and Florida had made on this issue. Data from these reports allowed them to put pressure on their own states to advance preschool policy because they had ample state comparison data to leverage their policy rationale. However, as Curran noted in his (2015) study using *Policy Diffusion Theory* to examine states' universal preschool policy formation, the policy process literature does not address the role of foundations or public charities.

Packaging

Another factor that impacted the reception of, response to, and ultimate passage of preschool in some states was the manner with which the law was “packaged.” Georgia, Oklahoma, Vermont and New York each had a unique manner with which preschool legislation was coupled, nested, and even buried in a legislation or a larger policy issue. As Rose (2010), Shue (2007), and Bushouse (2009) noted in their studies, Georgia crafted a package that gained bipartisan attraction when it coupled universal preschool policy with popular legislation for free college/higher education through the *HOPE Scholarship*. In marrying these two initiatives, Georgia put a “face” on the legislation of a four-year-old who would benefit from free preschool and go on to benefit from free college. In Georgia, the volatility of the policy making process was not at all due to the preschool entitlement program or college scholarships, but rather the lottery that would

fund both. In New York, the Governor took a page from Georgia and coupled universal preschool with property tax cuts. In doing so, he won the favor of Republicans. For these two states, joining universal preschool with popular bipartisan policy was a successful strategy for preschool legislative success. Lastly, in West Virginia, Senator Jackson included a popular addition in the education reform bill that ushered in universal preschool, an increase in teacher salaries.

In West Virginia, Illinois, Vermont, Iowa, and Oklahoma, funding for preschool was added into the K-12 funding formula in order to pass through the state legislature. These states capitalized on the K-12 policy window opened by the education reform movement of the late 1990s. This practice allowed for preschool to be considered just another grade level. In aligning preschool to K-12 funding, these states also brought preschool into the “education tent” (Rose, 2010). In these states, universal preschool, the education of four-year-olds (as well as three-year-olds in Illinois) became synonymous with public education. This practice opened windows for conversations in these states about how to make preschool part of the larger education system. In addition, Oklahoma used another strategy for moving preschool through the policy adoption process.

The explanation of the change in policy in Oklahoma was described using complicated code. The legal code included in its universal preschool bill was complex and difficult to understand. For example, the section on child reimbursement rates read, “multiply the membership of each sub paragraph of this paragraph by the weight assigned to such sub-paragraph of this paragraph and add the totals together to determine the weighted pupil grade level calculations for school district” (70 Oklahoma Statute

Annotated §18-20). Similar to staying under the radar was the strategy of “burying” universal preschool language in other popular legislation (New York, Vermont, Oklahoma, and West Virginia) and/or controversial and potentially distracting legislation – (Georgia) to advance policy agendas.

Windows

Kingdon’s (1995) *Policy Windows/Multiple Streams Theory* states that policy change happens when individuals have the internal capacity to create, identify, and act on policy windows (Kingdon, 1995). *Table 3* shows how policy champions or *entrepreneurs/actors* in several states were able to create, develop, and/or leverage windows of opportunity to craft policy change. In Florida, policy actors created the window of a ballot initiative through the steps they took to place universal preschool policy in the decision-making hands of voters. Through polling, petitioning, and raising funds, they were able to successfully create a ballot initiative for voters to decide on preschool policy adoption. Louisiana used a period of state recovery from a natural disaster to highlight the opportunity universal preschool would bring to strengthening the well-being of the state. The governors of Georgia and New York used a booming economy in the 1990s and a state budget surplus as windows of opportunity. Massachusetts, Illinois, and Iowa acted on school funding formula revisions to create policy windows and add preschool as another grade level in the K-12 funding formula for school districts. Oklahoma, Iowa, Illinois, and West Virginia identified the problem stream of declining school enrollment as an open window to merge the policy stream of universal preschool as a solution. New York, Georgia, and Illinois gubernatorial elections

served as open windows to pass universal preschool law. In New York, it was an issue both parties clung to, seeking to claim victory before the coming elections. In Georgia, Governor Miller was facing another gubernatorial election, and his universal preschool/*HOPE Scholarship* platform was a very popular bipartisan issue. Finally, seven states' windows appeared to be open through the presence of democratic state legislative majorities. Only New York, Georgia, and Florida did not have this window open. However, they were able to leverage other windows of opportunity as a result of multiple streams converging, as well as leveraging election politics.

Table 3. State Conditions Associated with or Leading up to the Passage of Universal Preschool

| | GA | NY | OK | FL | WV | IL | VT | MA | IA | LA |
|--|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Presence of Policy Actors and/or Entrepreneurs | x | x | x | x | X | x | x | x | X | x |
| Presence of Targeted Preschool | x | x | x | x | X | x | x | x | X | x |
| Presence of Kindergarten | x | x | x | x | X | x | x | x | X | x |
| Presence of Problem Solvable with Preschool | x | x | x | x | X | x | x | x | X | x |
| Stable/ Strong Economy | x | x | x | | | x | x | x | X | |
| Declining K-12 Enrollment | | | x | | X | | x | | X | |
| Media Presence | x | x | | x | | x | | x | | |
| K-12 Reform of the 1990s | x | x | x | | X | x | x | x | X | |
| Gubernatorial Elections | x | x | | | | x | | | | |
| Democratic Legislative Majority | | | x | | x | x | x | x | x | x |

History and Presence of Targeted Preschool - a “Priming” for Universal Preschool

In each case, preschool policy change was driven by elected officials and supported by advocates who had “softened up” public opinion. This softening occurred through political campaigns, a history of some form of targeted preschool, and the presence of kindergarten. All states in question had some type of predated form of targeted preschool, along with some prior investment in kindergarten. This allowed for a priming or softening of the public prior to a request for public expenditure on universal preschool. For example, New York had the longest history of public provision of preschool dating back to state funding of public preschool in the 1940s and had actually pushed for universal preschool twice before successful universal preschool policy adoption. Moreover, Oklahoma and Illinois began targeted preschool programs in the 1980s, while West Virginia and Georgia had some public schools providing preschool individually supported by state funds.

According to Kingdon’s (1995) *Multiple Streams Theory*, successful advancement of universal preschool adoption happened because of this window of softening or priming where the public was able to warm up to the idea because of the successful history of kindergarten and targeted preschool. In New York, Governor Cuomo attempted to create a universal program in the 1980s, as did state education officials and legislators in the 1990s (Rose, 2010). In the 1990s, Illinois Governor Edgar tried to enact universal preschool. In these two cases, the governors were unsuccessful (Rose, 2010). However, over the next decade with the softening of public opinion towards preschool through targeted programs, newly engaged champions/policy actors and entrepreneurs, the

framing of universal preschool as a wise public investment and a solution to several problems (e.g., societal and education outcomes), and new and ongoing brain development research, preschool as a policy issue shifted rapidly with the right conditions in place, as described by Baumgartner and Jones' (2010) *Large Leaps/Punctuated Equilibrium Theory*. This study found that across all states except Florida, universal preschool was embraced by legislative majorities and early childhood advocates, resulting in the legislative adoption of universal preschool. However, without this window of softening where earlier policy entrepreneurs promoted the preschool agenda, the concept of preschool as a wise public investment for improving societal and educational outcomes may not have been widely accepted. Moreover, policy actors and entrepreneurs took advantage of critical windows of opportunity and the convergence of problem, politics, and policy solution streams (Kingdon, 1994; Kingdon, 1995; Kingdon & Thurber, 1984) to advance universal preschool agendas. Finally, it is certainly plausible through both of the study's theoretical lenses to suggest the passing of universal preschool itself was a "large leap" that occurred because of multiple streams that opened the window for policy adoption.

Conditions and Policy Environments

Baumgartner and Jones (2010) note that if policy is novel, its creation may be violent. On the other hand, when policy is closer to status quo or already familiar to society in construct or concept, policymaking will be incremental. Incremental policy change is unlikely to experience challenges in its adoption because the familiar concept is in place. Except for New York, which adopted in 1997 but had seen proposals for

preschool in the 1980s and early 1990s, the concept of preschool for all children was new. Therefore, the policymaking process should have been volatile. Across all states, expanding to universal preschool access was a shift from the status quo / targeted preschool required policy actors to come together to form a new policy image of “preschool for all.” The exception to this is Georgia, where the governor had initially advocated for targeted preschool expansion, and then later expanded his platform to advocate for universal preschool in order to gain necessary support for the program.

Bushouse (2009) noted commonly cited factors that contributed to the rise of universal preschool in pioneer states of Georgia, Oklahoma and New York:

- Absence of federal policy intervention;
- Research on the importance of early brain development; and
- Publicity surrounding longitudinal preschool studies (e.g., Perry, Abdecarian).

To these factors, this study adds a number of variables or conditions present in states that are associated with preschool policy formation. These are discussed in this chapter. One of these is a flourishing economic environment. In these three states, as well as others examined in this study, economic conditions were also very good. Georgia, Oklahoma and New York’s policy champions opened the window to all three factors and helped launch and successfully pass legislation for universal preschool programs for four-year-olds in a strong economic environment. These three states were also able to capitalize on another policy condition/open window they all shared– outcomes-based K-12 education reform of the 90s. The 1990s brought a strong focus to states and school

districts on Outcome-Based Education (OBE). A state would create a committee to adopt standards, and choose an instrument to assess whether the students knew the required content or could perform the required tasks (Miller, 2002). The standards-based reform movement culminated in the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Lastly, three common environmental variables my research adds to Bushouse's 2009 findings are the:

- Presence of active policy entrepreneurs;
- A societal or educational problem in which universal preschool was a policy alternative; and
- Presence/provision of both targeted preschool and kindergarten.

In addition, heightened media presence regarding preschool policy was a condition present leading up to the passing of legislation for Georgia and New York.

Figure 2 illustrates the various state conditions, settings, environments, this study found to be associated with the passage of universal preschool legislation across the ten states.

Role of Media

While some large-scale media attention (pro-preschool articles in such prominent national newspapers as the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*) for preschool policy occurred at the national level during later state adopters' advocacy for preschool, strong media presence was not entirely common within/across the ten states in this study and was not a factor in any of the states' universal preschool agenda setting processes. This finding did not correspond with Baumgartner & Jones (2010) *Large Leaps Theory* on agenda setting. The majority of media presence in this study's sample came from Florida, Georgia, Massachusetts, and Iowa. While many editorials pushing for universal preschool

in Louisiana papers appeared for months leading up to enactment, few other media sources covered the issue. At the same time, presence of media attention regarding the importance of early brain development was prolific leading up to the passage of universal preschool in Georgia, Oklahoma, New York, and Florida (Bushouse, 2009). The lack of state media presence for preschool continued throughout the 1990s and could be considered an advantage to those seeking to expand to a universal approach in states with generous opposition to the policy (Oklahoma). Bushouse proposes from her research (2009), that preschool supporters stayed beneath the radar and out of the focus of potential opponents who still strongly held the belief that younger children should be at home with their mothers, regardless of the shifting maternal workforce participation in Oklahoma. For Florida, media was a strength for the movement because the message of universal preschools, highlighting its benefits and the prolific brain research findings of the time, was shared with voters across the state via television and radio in an effort to have them vote “yes” on a universal preschool ballot initiative. This could have contributed to the softening of the policy and served as a primer for acceptance by the public.

Democratic Majority

A common theme for seven out of the ten states in this study was the presence of a democratic legislative majority during the time the policy was adopted. This is consistent with the idea of government programs being championed by Democrats rather than Republicans. While the presence of a democratic legislative majority at the time of policy adoption was a factor in seven of the ten states in this study, Georgia

(split), Florida (Republican) and New York (split) successfully achieved the public provision of preschool without it. This is consistent with Curran's (2015) preschool policy diffusion study findings. Specifically, Curran's quantitative study found that percentage of Republicans in the state legislature demonstrated statistical significance in a Cox regression model predicting the hazard ratio for adoption of universal preschool.

Of note once again is Florida, who did try to pass universal preschool legislation with a Republican majority and failed. Florida's voters of course later passed universal preschool on a ballot initiative. The predominant political climate for universal preschool in this study was democratic. From Kingdon's (1995) Multiple Streams' perspective, the presence of democratic policy makers was a policy stream that led to an open policy window for eventual universal preschool policy adoption

An Outlier

Until Florida, no state's voters had ever mandated universal preschool by themselves. Georgia's voters, of course, in 1992 had become the nation's first to institute free kindergarten via Constitutional amendment; and their universal preschool followed a few years later. However, that amendment originated with the Georgia Legislature, as Georgia's constitution requires. Georgia's voters then ratified it, but they lacked the constitutional means to initiate amendments themselves by petition. Thwarting their legislature's headstrong leadership, Floridians placed a constitutional amendment on the ballot by securing 722,000 petition signatures in support of state-paid, voluntary, universal preschool education (UPK) for all four-year-olds. On Election Day in 2002, the proposed amendment passed with 60 percent of the vote.

Jack Levine, a seasoned veteran of Florida children's issues and Tallahassee politics, suggested a possible factor for the high "no" vote (Hampton, 2004). Based on his 25 years of observations, Levine said that on any issue or candidate, one can count on "40 percent supporters, 40 percent opponents, and 20 percent persuadable voters" (Hampton, 2004). The key to victory, he hypothesized, is to persuade a majority of that 20 percent to support you in the election. Levine called the 40 percent who didn't vote "yes" on the universal preschool ballot, "CAVE people – Citizens Against Virtually Everything" (Hampton, 2004). The lesson for universal preschool advocates in other states that would emulate Florida's example is: determine which vested interests – possible *UPK* providers, public schools, parents, or whomever might be apprehensive about what *UPK* might mean for them individually. After learning this information, attempt to allay their fears in every possible forum. Then hope for the best (Hampton, 2004).

After their state's embarrassing ballot relative to the presidential election of November 2000, Floridians in November of 2002 had occasion to celebrate what they had done for their four-year-old children. While their unique *UPK* acquisition was an achievement in and of itself, it promises potential beyond Florida. According to the *Initiative and Referendum Institute (2016)* 23 states besides Florida allow constitutional amendments by voters' petitions. Thus, for at least some of these states, Florida may be a proxy to guide like-minded states in universal preschool formation through constitutional amendment.

Implications

Many states are eager to adopt universal preschool (Baxter, 2012, Barnett, 2016). However, for a variety of reasons with varying levels of complexity, most state efforts have either never gotten “off the ground” or they have been unsuccessful (Barnett, 2017). As a result, only ten states have adopted universal preschool policies and to date, a smaller number of them are actually implementing a statewide universal preschool program. The purpose of this study was to better understand the story of each state’s journey to develop universal preschool. States in this study show it takes time, patience, leveraging of resources, and a degree of strategic sophistication to make major changes in policy, but that it can be done. For some states, their promotion of universal preschool began several decades prior to successful policy adoption. Massachusetts and New York are a testament to the “slow and steady wins the race” mantra as they both tried and failed to pass universal preschool for decades before actualizing the state-funded entitlement program for four-year-olds. Groundwork laid by policy advocates and entrepreneurs allowed for the softening of topic and the right conditions for preschool policy windows to open. *Large Leaps* (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010) and *Multiple Streams* (Kingdon, 1995) theories employed in this study lend themselves to helping explain the story of each states’ journey towards adopting universal preschool policy, as well as the relationship between various state strategies and policy environments/conditions and their policy adoptions. By closely examining each state’s story, this study uncovered common themes, policy conditions, and strategies or “lessons learned” that states considering universal preschool adoption may want to consider. While these experiences are specific

to these states' journeys, they may provide useful information to some states where policy conditions and environments are similar. Furthermore, specific environments and conditions may serve as universal preschool adoption "climate" predictors.

Implications for Research

The question raised and methods used within this study should be reapplied to the study of adoption of universal preschool policies after more states have adopted the policy. Additionally, opportunities exist for exploring other factors that contribute to universal preschool policy adoption through the use of quantitative methodologies and mixed-methods approaches. Finally, the use of the event history analysis methodology to study more established policies of early childhood education such as targeted preschool, universal kindergarten, and compulsory kindergarten would be worthwhile as they might yield insights into expectations for adoption of future early childhood policies.

Absence of Recent Universal Preschool Policy Implementation

One area that might be of interest to study is the absence of universal preschool policy adoption in the last ten years. No state, since Louisiana in 2008, has passed laws to enact universal preschool. Which states have tried and why were they unable to succeed? When data is greater than ever about the benefit of early childhood education, and state economies have recovered from the 2008-2009 'Great Recession,' and states put more money into preschool, why have more states not expanded their targeted preschool programs to universal?

Impact of Adoption Approach on Policy Implementation

Another area of research this study raises is the connection between policy adoption process and efficacy of policy implementation. Are there strategies that states employ in their journey to policy formation that translate to good or bad policy implementation? For example, Florida voters, through successful passing of an election ballot, handed their legislation an unfunded state entitlement program. There are lessons to be learned from states like Florida, which was an anomaly in this study in regard to the way it achieved universal preschool provision. Furthermore, are the states that fund preschool within their K-12 funding formula experiencing greater program stability and/or successful program implementation than states that used a different funding approach? Gaining clearer understanding related to the connection between states policy adoption “journeys” and their eventual policy implementation is a critical endeavor for states with a preschool policy agenda. This clarity will provide states with preschool agendas, knowledge of successful strategies they might use to achieve universal preschool policy adoption and moreover, successful policy implementation. What are the specific processes (e.g., ballot initiative, attaching the policy to popular legislation, and ‘flying under the radar’) associated with a state’s likelihood of universal preschool program sustainability? What are universal preschool adoption processes associated with success in universal preschool implementation? Finally, what are the universal preschool adoption policies associated with the various and popular child *outcomes* related questions predominant in early childhood care and education research? Answering these

questions will highlight the roadmap states may want to take to increase the likelihood of successful pursuit *and* implementation of universal preschool programs.

Lastly, how does aligning preschool with K-12, and its culture and climate, impact the ability of states to deliver universal preschool that is developmentally appropriate – a major tenant of high quality early childhood programs? It has only been over the last century that the worlds of public education and early childhood education intersected over the inclusion of kindergarten as a part of the publicly funded education system. While some states still do not offer universal kindergarten, the connection can be made between states’ current preschool efforts and the previous movement for universal kindergarten. Furthermore, researchers may want to examine whether aligning preschool with K-12 narrows its focus to “academic outcomes” and away from meeting the developmental needs of three- and four-year-olds.

This study also found separating universal preschool from the idea of providing child care, and instead, linking it to K-12 education, was a successful strategy for preschool policy adoption. However, does the intentional connection of universal preschool to K-12 impact a state’s ability to provide developmentally appropriate universal preschool for four-year-olds? Future studies may want to examine what connections exist between the placement of universal preschool in K-12 settings or as Rose (2010) calls it, “joining the education tent” and the ability of these programs to deliver the important program quality element of “care” that research and evidence-based early childhood practices indicate young children under the age of five still very much need for healthy developmental outcomes (Rose, 2010).

Implications for Policy and Practice

These results have implications for early childhood policymakers and those engaged in discourse for/against universal preschool policy adoption. The “roadmaps” to universal preschool for each state proved unique in some ways, while sometimes also revealing shared paths across states. States like Florida showed that it’s possible for early childhood champions, with opportune political appointments and just enough public will, to chart their own course for children’s entitlement programs. Policy implications from Florida’s findings are that states without political will for universal preschool can instead leverage the will of the public to support children’s issues, and achieve the same outcome. States can take notes from the turn-by-turn driving directions Florida used to achieve preschool for all of their four-year-old children. Florida demonstrated this approach when a few champions with “enough” power took the temperature of their citizens on universal preschool provision and found there was enough support to pursue a ballot initiative. This is significant for any state with a preschool policy agenda because research shows there is current nationwide public will in favor of universal preschool.

Public Will and Policy Making

Existing national survey data and research indicates that most Americans support the public provision of preschool (Kahn & Barron, 2015; Page & Jacobs, 2009; Sylvester, 2001). Furthermore, as taxpayers, they favor spending existing revenues on early learning and would even be willing to pay more in taxes to support preschool programs (Page & Jacobs, 2009). In one state, respondents favored funding preschool over tax and spending

cuts (Nagle & Goidel, 2007). Therefore, a universal preschool ballot initiative, like the one in Florida, may in theory easily pass in almost any state.

According to Kingdon (2011), public opinion has a substantial impact on policy and appropriations. As measured through polling, as shown in Florida, public opinion helps define electoral incentives for public officials in democratic governments. Although special interest groups, political parties, and influential individuals also play a role, public opinion is an independent and important determinant of the scope and content of policymaking.

A recent preschool survey study done by Greenberg (2018) found that preschool preferences are conditioned by financial self-interest and egalitarian values. Greenberg went on to conclude that a “savvy policymaker” should not necessarily endorse universal over targeted preschool. In her 2018 survey, she found that Americans facing the possibility of tax increases to fund public preschool, and those who prioritize equality of opportunity, both prefer a targeted preschool approach. This finding is interesting in light of the states in this study whose champions initially pushed for a targeted preschool agenda and incidentally ended up establishing universal preschool in their states (Georgia and Oklahoma). This shift came from stakeholders who believed the policy would be better received if it was for “all” instead of some.

Policy Change

For the sake of future states interested in pursuing universal preschool provision, it is important to note that all the states in this study did so through the process of policy *change* as opposed to policy *reform*. Bennet and Howlett (1992) refer to policy change

as incremental shifts in existing structures, or new and innovative policies, while reform usually refers to a major policy change. This study's findings show that incremental policy change is closely associated with successful universal preschool policy adoption. Interestingly, two states in this study (Oklahoma and Georgia) found that the policy *reform* they sought – to allow their targeted preschool programs to serve even more children with disadvantages – was better received by stakeholders when it was transformed during the policy formation process. When Oklahoma and Georgia promoted the policy of “preschool for all”, policy makers were more receptive to the idea, as made evident through their legislative support.

Learning through Diffusion

The study of policy diffusion is a process in which policy innovations spread from one government to another (Shipan & Volden, 2008). Moreover, Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) claim that the knowledge about policy formation and development and practices within specific settings in one time and/or place can be used in the development of policies, in another time and/or place. According to Shipan and Volden (2008), there are four functions of policy diffusion: learning from earlier adopters, economic competition, imitation, and coercion. Learning is the process that leads states – this could also be systems or schools – to be called “laboratories of democracy” (Shipan & Volden, 2008; Brandeis, 1932). Policymakers in states with universal preschool policy agendas can learn from experiences of other state governments. Other states with preschool agendas can examine states in this study as “learning laboratories” and those with a similar “makeup” of policy conditions and variables (e.g. population, cultural climate, history,

education background) and potentially mirror successful policy development in their comparable culture. While Curran (2015) found that policy diffusion theory did not fully explain universal preschool policy adoption by states, there is potential for the “diffusion” of learning across states related to this issue.

Grounded Theory

When Glaser and Strauss (1967) were unhappy about the way in which existing theories dominated sociological research, they developed *Grounded Theory* in 1967. This theoretical approach provides researchers a method that allows them to move from data to theory, so that *new* theories could emerge. Glaser and Straus intended for such theories to be specific to the *context* in which they had been developed. In other words, they would be ‘grounded’ in the data from which they had emerged as opposed to relying on analytical constructs, categories or variables from pre-existing theories. *Grounded Theory* (Glaser & Strauss, 2017), therefore, was designed to open up a space for the development of new, contextualized theories

This study found *Multiple Streams (Kingdon, 1995) Theory* and *Large Leaps Theory* (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010) were useful theories for explaining the phenomenon of universal preschool adoption. It also supports the development of a grounded theory for how universal preschool policy is achieved in states.

Conclusion

The majority of research on preschool to this point has been aimed at assessing outcomes of targeted and universal preschool programs. There is very little research to shed light on understanding how a universal entitlement program is successfully achieved

in states. The results presented in this study provide groundwork for understanding the relationships between state characteristics, strategies they employ in their preschool agendas, and their likelihood of adopting a policy of universal preschool. While not causal in nature, several relationships were illuminated. With only ten percent of states adopting universal programs, it is critical to understand and articulate how they were able to create the public provision of preschool for all four-year-olds. As more states gravitate towards the preschool movement and with the potential of renewed federal interest, it is important to understand what stories states can tell about their successes and failures of not only adopting universal preschool as a policy, but also the lessons we can learn from the process of preschool program development, implementation, sustainability, and evaluation. Advocates of universal preschool policies may use these results to identify states with similar environments that make them ideal candidates for adoption of the policy.

This study has traced the emergence of universal preschool policy for ten states that made a promise to all four-year-olds and their families. Paying attention to the legacies of these states can help us know the questions to ask about current preschool related policy choices and better understand the implications of strategies states use to shape their universal preschool agendas. While this study cannot answer all the questions states may have about the potential of preschool for their four-year-old children, these state stories can shed some light on how states with preschool policy ambitions can successfully chart a similar path and develop a useful blueprint for pursuing universal preschool for their four-year-olds.

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Appendix A

STATE PROFILES AT TIME OF UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL ADOPTION

| State | Number of Four-Year-Olds | Four-Year-Old Percentage of Population | Dominant Party During Enactment | Year of Targeted Preschool Adoption | Time Between Targeted and Universal Preschool | Time from bill introduction to enactment | Year of Universal Preschool Enactment |
|-----------|--------------------------|--|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| GA | 113,330 | 1.7% | Split | 1985 | 10 years | 6 months | 1995 |
| NY | 278,783 | 1.9% | Split | 1946 | 51 years | 8 months | 1997 |
| OK | 46,663 | 1.5% | Democratic | 1980 | 18 years | 4 months | 1998 |
| FL | 192,993 | 2.3% | Republican | 1987 | 18 years | 24 months | Ballot 2002 & Enactment in 2005 |
| WV | 21,417 | 1.2% | Democratic | 1983 | 19 years | 9 months | 2002 |
| IL | 184,258 | 1.4% | Democratic | 1985 | 21 years | 2 months | 2006 |
| VT | 6,883 | 1.1% | Democratic | 1987 | 23 years | 6 months | 2007 |
| MA | 75,027 | 1.2% | Democratic | 1985 | 22 years | 6 months | 2007 |
| IA | 38,296 | 1.3% | Democratic | 1989 | 18 years | 5 months | 2007 |
| LA | 86,105 | 2.2% | Democratic | 1979 | 29 years | 4 months | 2008 |