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## Public Preschool Programs in Maine: Four Case Studies of Quality Programs

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# Public Preschool Programs in Maine: Four Case Studies of Quality Programs

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*June 2015*

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College of Education and Human Development  
University of Maine  
Orono, Maine





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## **Maine Education Policy Research Institute**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a follow-up to the report *Public Preschool Programs in Maine: Current Status and Characteristics*, submitted as part of the 2014/2015 EPS Commission work, as well as the 2014/2015 Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) work plan. This report presents case studies of four quality Pre-K programs identified through previous superintendent and Pre-K teacher surveys, and analysis of data from the State Longitudinal Data System. Pre-K programs were selected based on the extent to which they were already addressing the Chapter 124 standards, as well as their historical pattern of future student performance on state testing (controlling for student demographic factors such as free/reduced lunch status, ELL, special education placement, etc). Programs were also selected to reflect geographic, demographic, and programmatic variation.

Case studies were conducted by MEPRI in spring 2015 with the purpose of illustrating the characteristics and features of several quality Pre-K programs, and to present some of the challenges and solutions they have addressed. Case studies were based on site visits conducted at each school. Site visits included a classroom observation and interviews with the school principal and teacher in order to inquire about the history, implementation, challenges and perceived advantages of including Pre-K within the elementary schools.

Not surprisingly, programs are aware of the Chapter 124 regulations and are taking steps to be ready for the changes. Nevertheless, participating schools reported making trade-offs with regard to space, schedule, staffing and curriculum in order to balance resources and regulations with local community needs. In general, indoor spaces are more compliant than outdoor spaces. Special classes are available in these schools, but some teachers value the flexibility to choose which ones to access given the children in the group, the developmental demands of the classes, and the available schedule. Transportation is a concern for those programs not currently offering that service. Programs that are close to or over the 16 student class-size limit acknowledge the conflicting struggle between recognizing that smaller classrooms allow more individualized teaching and learning, and concern that limiting class size may result in families no longer being able to access Pre-K.



Administratively, principals for these schools are highly supportive of Pre-K. They see social and academic benefits for children from having the programs in the schools. They appreciate the unique characteristics of 4-year olds and the specialized skills needed by teachers.

The Pre-K teachers for all of these programs report high levels of involvement and concern regarding their students and families. This can involve exceptional extra time and energy in working with families, as well as partnering with fellow faculty regarding ongoing curriculum changes and transition into kindergarten. In this regard, professional development is taking many forms. In part this can reflect Pre-K and larger school schedules. Some Pre-K programs are scheduled in ways that support professional development opportunities for the teachers, while others are scheduled in ways that increase access for children but limit participation of teachers in school-wide planning. Similarly, some professional development supports the curriculum work of whole schools (including Pre-K) while in other schools, the Pre-K professional development is structured separately. Regardless, teachers report appreciating professional development opportunities, particularly in response to ongoing changes in K-12 that also impact Pre-K. Specifically, as schools move toward proficiency-based learning and assessment, new implications arise for how Pre-K programs collaborate with kindergarten and transition children into kindergarten. Collaboration and coordinated professional development may help in this regard.

Schools are reportedly more aware of Chapter 124 than of the new Maine Early Learning and Development Standards. Teachers and administrators will also need professional development about the new standards and guidance on assessing progress toward the standards within the context of proficiency-based assessment. All programs report high achievement of children in Pre-K but given the range of assessment measures and curricula used, it impossible to exam in depth across sites.

While highly valued, local funding will reportedly impact the numbers of children served in Pre-K. Currently, children are not turned away from the programs visited for this report. However, in order to accomplish this other district programs were used at times and in some cases class size exceeded the recommended limit of 16 children. Administrators are concerned about limiting access to families now that Pre-K is viewed as a core part of these schools. Furthermore, most

communities are experiencing some degree of budget cuts, which affects the long-term stability of Pre-K programs, even in those communities with very long-standing commitments to early childhood.

Finally, principals and teachers in both urban and rural districts expressed concern about delays between referral for screening and receipt of special education services from CDS. It was reportedly particularly frustrating for those schools that had service personnel in the school and availability in the schedule, but were still unable to have those children served.



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## INTRODUCTION

At the request of the Maine State Legislature, the *Maine Educational Policy Research Institute* (MEPRI) undertook a study of public preschool programs in Maine. This was in part related to two legislative / administrative activities: (1) Resolve 2014, Chapter 114, which established a commission to strengthen the adequacy and equity of certain cost components of the school funding formula, and (2) the proposed Chapter 124, Basic School Approval: Public Preschool Program Standards. Specifically, under Resolve 2014, Chapter 114, the commission was tasked with estimating the cost of expanding public preschool services statewide. This was to include initial start-up or expansion costs, such as renovation and construction, as well as ongoing annual operating costs. The commission was also tasked with conducting an analysis regarding the current status and potential impact of quality and consistency changes related to the proposed Chapter 124 rules. The latter information has value beyond the commission's work in helping policy makers, the Department of Education, and local school officials understand the impact and implications of these changes.

This is the second of two reports related to this work. The previous report, titled *Public Preschool Programs in Maine: Current Status and Characteristics*, summarized findings of superintendent and Pre-K teacher surveys assessing program qualities, along with cost estimates based on superintendent reports and data from the State Longitudinal Data System. That report was submitted as part of the 2014/2015 EPS Commission work, as well as the 2014/2015 MEPRI work plan.

This report is a follow-up to the superintendent and Pre-K teacher surveys, and summarizes findings from four case studies of Maine preschools conducted by MEPRI in spring 2015. The purpose of this study was to illustrate the characteristics and features of several quality Pre-K programs, and present some of the challenges and solutions they have addressed.

Programs were identified based on prior state-wide surveys completed by superintendents and Pre-K teachers, as well as through analyses conducted using information from the State Longitudinal Data System. Case studies of the Pre-K programs were based on site visits conducted at each school. Site visits included a classroom observation and interviews with the

school principal and teacher. Classroom observations involved at least an hour in the classroom observing the physical space and educational curriculum. Interview protocols, one for teachers and one for principals, were established prior to the visit to inquire about the history, implementation, challenges and perceived advantages of including Pre-K within the elementary schools.

This report first describes the methodology used in identifying schools and conducting the case studies. It then summarizes findings for each of the four Pre-K programs. The report concludes by reviewing common themes and lessons learned regarding full implementation of Chapter 124. Please note that pseudonyms are used for the names of the districts, schools, principals, and teachers.

## **METHODS**

### **SELECTION OF PRE-K PROGRAMS**

In fall 2014, MEPRI conducted online surveys of Maine superintendents and Pre-K teachers regarding Pre-K offerings by their district. The purpose of the surveys was to gather information regarding the cost and capacity of public preschool programs in Maine, as well as various characteristics and features of Pre-K programs addressed in the new Chapter 124 standards. These include the training and experience of teachers and teacher assistants, the physical space and characteristics of the preschool classroom, the children served in the preschool program, the curriculum used, services, schedules, student screening and assessment, and professional development activities.

Initial draft versions of the surveys were designed with input from Department of Education staff and incorporated feedback from the superintendents and Pre-K teachers who assisted in a pilot study. After modifications based on feedback from the pilot study, final versions of the surveys were developed and administered (see MEPRI report: *Public Preschool Programs in Maine: Current Status and Characteristics* for details regarding the methodology). Final participation was obtained from 83 superintendents representing a total of 104 districts (some superintendents reporting on multiple districts, e.g., an AOS) and 99 preschool teachers in those districts. Results of these surveys were reported in a previous MEPRI report (Mason and Porter, 2015). For reference, the executive summary from that report is included in Appendix I.

Using this survey data, Pre-K programs were ranked based on the degree to which they reported satisfying the new Chapter 124 standards, including areas such as teacher training, adult-to-child ratios, class enrollment limits, space requirements, and various service and curricula components.

In addition, child-level 2013/2014 state assessment data was obtained from the State Longitudinal Data System. This information was matched to prior enrollment in public preschool programs in Maine using additional historical SLDS data. Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) was used to identify those Pre-K programs whose children went on to perform particularly well



on their third grade assessment, controlling for various demographic factors such as free and reduced lunch status, special education placement, ELL, etc.

Data from these two sources were combined and ranked in order to identify Pre-K programs that were as high as possible on both Chapter 124 standards and future student performance (again, controlling for student demographic differences). Programs were also selected to reflect geographic, demographic, and programmatic variation.

## **METHODOLOGY FOR CASE STUDIES**

Case studies were conducted during spring 2015 by a faculty member in Early Childhood Education. Semi-structured interview protocols were established prior to a school visit to inquire about the history, implementation, challenges and perceived advantages of including Pre-K within the elementary schools. The site visitor also spent at least an hour in the classroom observing the physical space and educational curriculum.

Interviews were conducted separately with both the principal and Pre-K teacher. On average, interviews lasted approximately one hour and occurred in-person. Interviews were recorded with the permission of all participants, and subsequently transcribed. Direct quotes from the interviews are used throughout the report. Verbatim quotes are used whenever practical. Square brackets, or [ ], are used when the author has paraphrased spoken material and braces, or { }, are used to reflect other information that may be useful when interpreting the speaker's voice, such as {laughter}.

All participants gave permission to be identified and for quotes to be used in this report; however, pseudonyms are used for all districts, schools, principals, and teachers. Nevertheless, it may be possible that the source can be determined by some readers who so desire; however, as noted previously, participants gave permission to be quoted.

When reading these quotes, it is important to remember that these are verbatim statements of unprepared spoken material, largely left unedited in order to capture the speaker's "voice". The flow and grammar thus reflect a more casual and colloquial style than the one would use in prepared text or speech.

# MILTON

## SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT OF THE PROGRAM

Milton is a rural farming and industrial town with a long-standing commitment to providing early childhood services. The poverty rate is high and there are continuing budget challenges. The Milton Pre-K program is housed in a school serving children from Pre-K (called Early Childhood) to grade 6. The school is located several miles from the town center and almost all children are bussed to and from school. Mr. Miles, the school principal, reported that the Early Childhood program has been part of the school for more than 15 years. He credits the leadership of the current superintendent for the program's inception.

Very few children in this community attend formal childcare, and entry into the Early Childhood program is the first group experience most have. It serves to

- Orient the children to school
- Provide the socialization and self-help learning that was previously begun in kindergarten
- Begin teaching the skills necessary for school success

Since the program was established, every family that wants their preschooler to attend the Early Childhood program can have him or her attend, with 99% of eligible children attending. In essence, in this community families assume that school begins at age 4.

Children attend five half-days per week. Typically, the population for Early Childhood ranges from 28-30 children which allows for two half-day sessions with one teacher and one Ed Tech. However, there were only 18 students last year. The school board did not support the cost of two classes with nine children, and so a single session with 18 children was offered. An Ed Tech 1 was hired for the 2014-15 school year, and she will follow this class into kindergarten next year when an Ed Tech 2 will support Ms. McLaughlin, the Pre-K teacher, in two sessions. The decision to hire an Ed Tech 2 is reflective of Mr. Miles' looking ahead to necessary changes.

Mr. Miles reports that he tries to "stay ahead of the curve" by working with the Chapter 124 regulations before the school is required to do so. As discussed later in this report, the changes made during the past school year with respect to physical space are one such example. Pride in

the school is evident. A banner announcing that Milton is a 2002 *Blue Ribbon School* hangs in the school entry. Upon entering the school, one hears children singing and almost everyone walking in the hall is smiling and talking to each other.

## **STAFFING**

The program is currently staffed with an Early Childhood teacher and an Ed Tech 1. The Early childhood teacher, Ms. McLaughlin, holds the 081 endorsement and received her Early Childhood and Elementary certifications in another state. She has been at the school for 10 years and in Pre-K for four years and is the only teacher holding the 081 endorsement. Nevertheless, she remains the teacher with the least seniority and is thus the first to be laid off if there are budget cuts. Her work is highly regarded by the principal who states,

*We are very fortunate to have a teacher like Ms. McLaughlin who not only believes in the importance of an EC program, but who also goes above and beyond to ensure that her students are receiving the best program possible. Most of the curricula and instructional decisions are hers.*

Ms. McLaughlin brings a strong early childhood education background to the position as well as previous experience working in another state. In addition to her 081 endorsement, she holds Elementary certification, many credits of Special Education coursework, a strong science background and experience in inquiry-based learning. She is committed to embedding readiness skills in the context of a play-based program and is highly confident in her ability to provide a content-rich emergent curriculum. She has, however, begun to work with a commercial curriculum to prepare for the Chapter 124 requirements. Finally, Ms. McLaughlin is fully integrated into the teaching community. She serves as a math coach in the RTI-proficiency based teaching that occurs in K-6 classrooms in the afternoons. She also participates in all professional development opportunities offered at the school

While the school has plans to hire an Ed Tech 2 next year, Ms. McLaughlin expressed doubt about whether this will make a difference in the classroom. She reports that it is not easy to hire qualified staff.

## PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

**Classroom Space.** The classroom measures 28' x 30', allowing 46.6 square feet per child, and there is a bathroom in the classroom and a sink. There are carpeted and tiled areas. Classroom spaces are used in different ways and Ms. McLaughlin regularly changes the classroom to better accommodate the children's interests and her curriculum. The classroom contains a sensory table, individual cubbies to store belongings, a small library area, block and dramatic play area and a space for table and chairs with shelves to serve as eating or work areas. During the site visit, at least five learning centers were evident. The classroom is accessible to children with disabilities and adults can easily supervise children visually.

For several years, the Early Childhood classroom was in a room built initially as an art room. The spacious room allowed children to spread out in play and also retreat for quiet when struggling with behavior or over-stimulation. Ms. McLaughlin reported that she loved that classroom and the pedagogical options it supported. However, the bathroom was not accessible and so the entire class took 2-3 bathroom breaks during each session. The change to the new space (i.e. with a bathroom) had some unintended consequences for Ms. McLaughlin.

*The bathroom has made a difference. But at the same time I found that I worked skills in during our bathroom time that I would forget to work in here, while they were playing.*

*[It] didn't come as naturally. We would go down and we'd have the girls wait up against the wall in the girls' room and the boys in the boys' room, and I would rotate between which side I was at. But we played [games] like "I Spy" for letters. We used the tiles to count to see who was bigger. We jumped. We did phonemic awareness skills, and we sang songs. And I noticed halfway through the year that those little pieces... weren't there.*

Ms. McLaughlin used this routine time to practice academic skills such as counting or language games and quiet book reading. She finds she needs to intentionally build these skills into the day without the bathroom time as a regular part of the schedule. Also, because there are several children in the classroom with behavioral challenges, the lack of a quiet space to learn self-regulation is difficult for the teaching staff and for children.

**Outdoor Space and Schedule.** The playground is accessible to children with disabilities. The smaller playground equipment on a designated area of the playground is reserved for children in

Pre-K-1. The Pre-K children are on the playground at a time when older children are not present. There is a fence marking one side of the playground and a visual boundary on the other. Teachers teach and reinforce the expectation that children respect the visual boundary when playing outside. Children and teachers use the trails, fields and sledding hill around the school at times when the older students are not outside. Teachers carry iPads with them to communicate immediately with the office in case they need support.

## **STRUCTURAL AND PROGRAMMATIC CHARACTERISTICS**

**Services Provided.** Early Childhood students participate in physical education twice per week and music once per week just like other classes. Ms. McLaughlin raised the concern about her planning time with her assistant (which occurs during the specials) when the new teacher-to-student ratio becomes a regulation. There is only one teacher for music and one for physical education and the ratio will not be respected during these times unless a teacher or an Ed Tech attends as well.

Transportation is provided to and from school. This year, with only a morning session offered, the regular bus-run transports all children to school, and a separate run returns them at 11:00AM. Because of the large geographical area served, some children spend over an hour each way on the bus, which has neither a bus monitor nor seatbelts.

Meals and snacks are not part of the program but the large majority of children qualify for free and reduced meals. They eat breakfast in their classrooms. Parents take turns bringing in snack, a practice Ms. McLaughlin is re-considering in light of child allergies and food scarcity challenges that many families face. When an afternoon session is offered, lunch is not included.

**Curriculum.** Ms. McLaughlin taught a literacy and math-rich emergent curriculum until this year when the school decided to adopt a formal curriculum. She was comfortable with the change, given her experiential science background. The superintendent, principal, kindergarten teacher and Ms. McLaughlin looked at the Pre-K version of their literacy curriculum and the program designed by Scholastic. They chose Scholastic program because it included math while the basal program was solely literacy, and Scholastic was also less costly. The curriculum supports a play-based program with embedded academic skills, and appears to align well with

the Early Childhood Learning Standards for English language arts (ELA) but less well for math which, according to Ms. McLaughlin, is not sufficiently challenging.

The entire school faculty has worked for a year aligning standards in math and moving toward proficiency-based teaching and assessment. Current assessment data are strong – nearly 100% of last year’s Early Childhood children, now in kindergarten, are proficient in math. For a child to be considered proficient in a skill, the teacher must supply three pieces of written evidence to document proficiency.

On a broader level, the school began with math in its effort to move toward proficiency learning and assessment. The school created what they call Power Standard using the Common Core and the old Maine Early Learning Guidelines. The principal, kindergarten teachers and Ms. McLaughlin met to choose the beginning standards for the school. The school (all except Pre-K) designates an hour every day (“Power Hour”) where students working on a proficiency with a math coach (one of the teachers). The groupings are highly dynamic. Children can be with a math coach for a week or two or for only a few days. Each math coach has a specific standard for which they are responsible for developing all materials, rubrics, and work (“Prove-its”). Children need to have three pieces of evidence showing that they have mastered standards. While every math coach is a member of the Power Math Improvement Team, Ms. McLaughlin is on the Learning Targets and Rubric team.

The Early Childhood students do not join the broader school community in Power Hour. However, because of her involvement in the K-6 effort, Ms. McLaughlin uses her understanding of the process to create individual math goals for students in Pre-K. She creates learning activities during center time and play-to-learn time, and documents their mastery through multiple means. Ms. McLaughlin is beginning to add paper-pencil tasks to the math tasks in Early Childhood, but recognizes that such assessment may not be the most developmentally appropriate way to document young children’s proficiency. The Scholastic curriculum supplies checklists but the school’s proficiency system expects three examples with paper documentation to “prove” skill mastery.

**Screening and Assessment.** There is no assessment given when children enter the program, but they are screened at the end of Pre-K using the DIAL as the Kindergarten screening instrument.

Mr. Miles recognizes the vast developmental differences in the 4-year olds who enter their program. Some have second grade skills, he explains, and others could use another year at home: *“More than any age group, 4’s are very different”*. As previously mentioned, Ms. McLaughlin has begun adding paper-pencil assessments to her math centers both to prepare children for the transition to kindergarten and to align the Early Childhood program to the proficiency based teaching in the school. The K-6 community focused on math during the 2014-15 year and will begin creating the system for ELA in the 2015-16 school year.

**Transition.** Mr. Miles describes the context of Early Childhood in the community as the beginning of school in parents’ minds.

*... [Early Childhood is where]... the parents are thinking about schooling [starting] now. They’re not thinking kindergarten through grade 6. They’re thinking early childhood through grade 6. It’s automatic now. I want to say 99 percent of the kids that come to kindergarten here also came to early childhood.*

Mr. Miles reports that Ms. McLaughlin “goes above and beyond” to make the transition to Early Childhood a positive one. They hold an open house/orientation and practice riding the bus. Ms. McLaughlin sends letters through the summer and works at the summer recreation program to get to know the children coming into her class. She gives her home phone number and email to parents as children transition. Because this is often the first experience children have away from home, the transition can be hard on some children and families.

Transition to kindergarten can be challenging in that children move from a play-based program to an academic kindergarten experience. She begins practicing skills they will need in the spring of the Early Childhood year (e.g. whispering at the snack table, waiting to be excused).

Academically, this year the single Pre-K session allows Ms. McLaughlin to work as a math coach and interventionist in the afternoon. Her participation in developing the system used in proficiency learning and participation in discussions of data collected give her a clear idea of the expectations for children in kindergarten. While remaining developmental in her teaching, she scaffolds the social and academic skills that children will need to succeed in kindergarten.

Still, Ms. McLaughlin worries about the transition to kindergarten.

*...Kindergarten right now is sitting 90% of the day. It's a very tough transition. They have a structured curriculum and a structured schedule that they have to follow. I'm worried that that's going to come my way.*

**Special Education.** Securing services from Child Development Services can be challenging. There is a waiting list for evaluation. While nearly half of the children appear to have some needs, few are served and most of those are served through the medical model at their parents' initiative. Children referred in the fall are still not receiving service in late spring. Ms. McLaughlin gave an example:

*I have one [student] that I think might be on the spectrum. I referred [him or her] in October and we had [their] initial meeting in March. In between, they did an observation. We had asked for a speech evaluation and an OT evaluation. Both the parent and I had those concerns, like sensory and speech, and they forgot to order those evaluations. So when we had the meeting in March, they hadn't ordered them. We didn't have that piece of the puzzle. They ordered them in March, and there's a waiting list now to get evaluated. [The child] will not be evaluated for those until this summer.*

Ms. McLaughlin, who believes in early intervention for children, is frustrated by the long delays and lack of assessment information to guide teaching.

## **BENEFITS AND CONCERNS**

Both Mr. Miles and Ms. McLaughlin view Pre-K as a time for children and families to become acquainted with school and to learn social skills and self-help skills. It's a time for children to increase their skills through play and embedded skill work. Mr. Miles sees "only advantages" to having an Early Childhood Program. Ms. McLaughlin emphasized the love children develop for learning. Both educators recognize that the high achievement scores for this year's kindergarten children have their roots in the Early Childhood program.

Both Mr. Miles and Ms. McLaughlin recognize the unique needs of 4-year olds, and the challenge of staffing a program without knowledge of these needs is evident. Stronger connections with CDS or a model that allows the school support staff to provide services were cited as possible solutions. While the classroom in this school meets the requirements of Chapter 124, the setting does not allow for the quiet space needed when children with special needs are included in the program. When asked about professional development needs, Ms. McLaughlin



spoke of the need for professional development for the school and community about what Pre-K is – and isn't.

## **SUMMARY**

The Early Childhood program in Milton is an integral part of the elementary school. While the needs of 4-year olds are regarded as unique, there is widespread community support for the program with almost all eligible children attending. The town has been able to serve all families by increasing group size when the population flexes. Milton is meeting most of the standards put forth in Chapter 124, but if budget decreases and/or the population of 4-year olds increases, there will be difficult decisions to make.

## **BUCHANAN**

### **SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT OF THE PROGRAM**

The Buchanan Elementary School, located in an urban area in Maine, is one of five PK-3 schools in the city. The district established the Pre-K program more than twelve years ago in order to support kindergarten readiness. The initial goals included introducing children and families to school routines and expectations, as well as teaching social skills and introducing academic learning.

Mr. Bailey, the principal, reported that families are thrilled that the school offers Pre-K. He reports that the children who attend Pre-K enter kindergarten without the separation anxiety previously prevalent during the early weeks of school, and academic learning begins sooner. Each school has one Pre-K program, capped at 20 children per session (2:20 ratio). The school offers a registration period when families enroll, and when a program fills, parents have the option of enrolling in another program in the city. Transportation is only provided within the neighborhood boundaries, but if families can transport to another school their children can attend. As of now, all families who want Pre-K for their children have received it. Neither the principal nor the teacher knew how many of the current kindergarten children attended Pre-K in the district, possibly because the city has a very high mobility rate.

The administrators and teachers remain committed to keeping Pre-K accessible for all families who desire it. Children who do not participate tend to be those needing full-day childcare, but some parents manage to coordinate arrangements with neighbors or family to transport children to childcare before or after the session. The program operates in two sessions of 20 children, with a teacher and an Ed Tech 3. Ms. Baker, the teacher in the Pre-K program, noted that decreasing the class size to 12-15 would allow for more individualized teaching.

### **STAFFING**

Since the program's start, there have been several Pre-K teachers at Buchanan. According to Mr. Bailey, it is becoming easier to hire a fully certified Pre-K teacher. In the early years, they hired conditionally certified teachers, although proximity to an early childhood teacher preparation program has helped with staffing.

The hiring process for Pre-K teachers is identical to the hiring process for all teachers, and Pre-K teachers have comparable salary and benefits. Ms. Baker holds the 081 endorsement for birth-5 and a degree in human services. While this is her first year at Buchanan, she taught Pre-K for three years elsewhere and Head Start for 11 years. Her Ed Tech holds a degree in Early Childhood Education, a K-3 certificate and the 081. Ms. Baker jokes that her Ed Techs all leave for teaching jobs in the district. It appears that the relationship between teacher and Ed Tech is highly collaborative with obvious mutual respect.

Ms. Baker is an integral staff member at the Buchanan School. She participates in professional development and curriculum work at the school and district. Given that her certification is Birth-5 (081), the professional development is especially beneficial, particularly the literacy and writing workshops conducted by literacy coaches and attended by the K-3 teachers. While she does not teach K-3, she reports that she brings what she learned in the workshops into her Pre-K program.

On the day of the site visit, there were four adults in the classroom: the teacher, an Ed Tech, a tutor hired by CDS as a 1:1 support for a child with an IEP, and a speech therapist.

## **PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS**

**Classroom Space.** The Buchanan Elementary School was built during the 1970's and has no interior walls, so movable dividers mark classrooms. The Pre-K classroom is at the end of a wall, and as such, has only one shared divider with another classroom. The classroom feels small, but the school staff carefully measured the square footage and distance to the bathroom and sink to ensure the space will satisfy the new regulations. The sink is outside the delineated classroom space but directly across from the classroom. There are two bathrooms within 35 feet, but both are outside the classroom defined space. Ms. Baker reported that it first seemed as though the bathroom was “*9 miles away*”, but supervision was not problematic once a routine was in place. Storage is in short supply, which creates challenges for the teachers, and children do not have cubbies or places to store their belongings.

The open space requires planning by the teachers. Buckets of sand are placed on worktables, easels are brought out and put away, and blocks are stored in a movable cart on wheels. There is an interactive white board and projector in the group area, and at least five planned centers were

evident on the afternoon of the site visit. As this suggests, the Pre-K program is not quiet. Students sing and dance, and there are children on behavior plans who have tantrums, but the noise level is not problematic. Ms. Baker reports that she was skeptical about how well the open space would work for her teaching style when she first arrived at Buchanan. But she has been pleasantly surprised and spoke of how strong the sense of community is among staff and children from the increased interaction.

**Outdoor space and schedule.** There is a clearly defined, gated playground space accessible for the Pre-K children. The morning session shares the playground with the kindergarten but the afternoon session typically has the space alone. Swings, climbing equipment and a small hill and grassy area allow for active play, private retreat and exploration. Both teacher and Ed Tech supervise children's outdoor play.

## **STRUCTURAL AND PROGRAMMATIC CHARACTERISTICS**

**Services Provided.** Children within the neighborhood are provided their own bus from door to school. As stated previously, families living in other parts of the city must transport their children if they are to attend a program that is not in their neighborhood school. Morning children can access breakfast and the afternoon children can access lunch. Ms. Baker questioned how family style meals could work in this program, as there are only paper products and no dishwasher.

Pre-K children have music, physical education and library each week, and art every other week. The regulations suggest that the special classes be eased into the schedule but Ms. Baker thinks that such a decision should vary based on the class. At Buchanan, the open nature of the space makes movement easy and part of how they "do school".

**Curriculum.** The curriculum was established years ago, and neither the teacher nor principal know of the process that was used to adopt it. The K-3 programs use a *Scott Foresman* math curriculum, which is also used by the Pre-K program. The K-3 literacy program is a highly scripted basal program (*Treasures*), which was piloted by select Pre-K teachers and was ultimately not adopted by Pre-K. *The Land of the Letter People*, previously used in kindergarten, became part of the Pre-K curriculum and assessment, along with *Handwriting without Tears*. Ms. Baker recently completed a class in writers' workshop and another in early literacy. She embeds

early literacy seamlessly in her interactions with children and the learning centers. Ms. Baker appreciates the freedom to adapt the schedule and curriculum to meet the needs of the children in her groups. Having worked with the previous standards and the *Head Start Performance Standards* for many years, Ms. Baker is confident that she can easily adapt her curriculum to the new *Maine Early Learning and Development Standards* while being mindful of the kindergarten Common Core.

**Screening and Assessment.** Formative assessment is ongoing. Ms. Baker adapts the curriculum based on the children's interest and skill. The Buchanan district tracks student achievement data carefully. Children are assessed three times a year using a tool associated with the *Land of the Letter People* (includes literacy, math, listening, social studies, and science). The first assessment in October precedes parent conferences in November. Mr. Bailey believes that children leave Pre-K with a "solid foundation" for kindergarten, and many leave as readers.

**Transition.** Ms. Baker spoke of the first six weeks of school as being the transition time for children to learn routine and become comfortable with the separation from parents. An Open House is held after enrollment. Ms. Baker sends a newsletter home every week and makes herself available to communicate with parents. Parent conferences are held during Thanksgiving week. Ms. Baker noted the distinct differences in parent involvement between the Pre-K program and Head Start (where she made home visits, regularly held parent meetings and communicated regularly with parents).

Mr. Bailey reported that the transition to kindergarten is very easy for both children and families because of Pre-K. The half-day nature of Pre-K seems to be less stressful for parents sending their children to school for the first time. Children enter kindergarten ready to learn and are knowledgeable about how the school operates and who the teachers are.

Mr. Bailey is clearly committed to creating a sense of community in the school. There are at least quarterly school-wide events for families and the Pre-K families are active from the beginning. Some families, who attend Buchanan because their neighborhood Pre-K program was full, choose to stay at Buchanan for K-3. Other families with older children tend to move their children back to the neighborhood school for kindergarten.

**Special Education.** Children in Pre-K are served through Child Development Services. There are children who come to the program with IEPs stipulating 1:1 support. A tutor, hired by the teacher but paid for by CDS, is in the classroom full-time in such cases. According to Ms. Baker, it is more difficult to secure services for children whose needs become apparent once they are in the program. She described the process for securing services as “lengthy”. Referrals in October did not result in services until March. Ms. Baker would like to see Pre-K children in need of special education served by the school rather than through CDS. Similarly, Mr. Bailey reported that obtaining services for children with special needs is “*an area we could improve*”.

## **BENEFITS AND CONCERNS**

Both the principal and the teacher see social, emotional and academic value to Pre-K. The advantages of Pre-K are clear to Mr. Bailey.

*[The children]...seem so much more prepared for kindergarten. It's a half a day program that we can introduce what school is about. This is how we do things. I think they become familiar with the structure of the school, the setup of the school, and most important, the people within the school. [Pre-K can alleviate] a lot of the transitions and separation issues that you have with young children at times... We find that there's a lot of learning that goes on... Things that seem simplistic [such as] letter ID or letter sounds -- we have a lot of kids that come in that weren't part of the Pre-K program who don't have those skills.....*

Mr. Bailey's greatest concern is keeping Pre-K accessible for all families who want it. Pre-K is now seen as part of the school and the caps on class size and teacher-student ratio may impact access.

*“If the numbers became such where we had to deny people, that would be a challenge and a difficult, difficult piece. ...It would be a shame. It's so valuable”.*

## **SUMMARY**

The Buchanan School's Pre-K program is one of five Pre-K programs in a district with a long-standing commitment to Pre-K. The teacher and Ed Tech 3 serve 40 children in two sessions. Transportation and meals are provided. The unconventional classroom space meets the new regulations. The teacher and Ed Tech are included in school-wide and district-wide professional development. Pre-K is clearly regarded as part of the school by staff and parents. Questions

about how the new regulations will affect access are a major concern. Currently, all families who want Pre-K can access it. Kindergarten test scores show Pre-K is clearly affecting K-3 achievement.

# AMES

## SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT OF THE PROGRAM

The Ames School is one of five elementary schools in an urban district, and the district has supported Pre-K program for ten years. The program began in two schools and now exists in each of the elementary schools. Ames School serves a multicultural, multilingual population and is designated as the ESL Pre-K. Fifty percent of the slots are held for children learning English. The population of the school is highly mobile. Nearly 1/3 of the children move in or out of the school each year. The program serves 16 children each in morning and afternoon sessions with a teacher and an Ed Tech 2. Children attend the program four half-days a week and teachers have one day a week for professional development.

## STAFFING

Ms. Anderson has been the Pre-K teacher at Ames for nine years. Her background in Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education from another state did not translate into an Early Childhood credential when she moved to Maine. She taught Head Start for a year but couldn't afford to stay in that role. Ms. Anderson then taught first and second grade in the district before getting her Early Childhood background recognized by the State and has taught Pre-K since. Ms. Arbuckle, the Ed Tech in the classroom holds a B.A. in psychology and has worked in Special Education as an Ed Tech. At the Ames School, all Ed Techs except those in the library are classified as Ed Tech 2, regardless of educational background or experience. Ms. Anderson and Ms. Arbuckle function as a team.

## PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

**Classroom Space.** Children enter the classroom through the main school entrance and descend a flight of stairs to the ground level classroom, although there is an elevator for accessibility. The Pre-K classroom is large and well equipped with a sink in the classroom and a door to the outdoors. When the school was built nine years ago, the space was originally designed as a "Discovery Room" for the entire school with a stove, refrigerator, washer and dryer, and a tile floor for messy projects. It was used as a Discovery Room for one year before the Pre-K program moved into the space. The classroom works well for Pre-K, but there are still bittersweet feelings



among other staff members due to losing a space they once shared. Ms. Anderson is generous with the staff that wants to use the appliances or schedule space when the Pre-K children are not in session.

The classroom is well equipped with designated areas for library, dramatic play, construction, and sand/water. Children are exposed to print throughout the classroom. There are sufficient tables serving as teaching and work areas. Each child has a private cubby space for belongings and there is ample space allowing teachers to store materials. The bathroom outside the classroom is just within the new regulation limits. With two adults in the classroom, one of them supervises a child in the bathroom. The arrangement is not ideal but workable, according to the teachers.

**Outdoor Space and Schedule.** Pre-K children share a large, open playground fenced to the outside. Pre-K has a designated and separate time to play outside. Separate space contains playground equipment with swings and climbing structures for older children. Natural boundaries separate the spaces and teachers reinforce the geographical limits to the play space. Children learn quickly to stay within the permitted areas. There is play space on top of a hill that could be challenging for a child in a wheelchair, but the Ames School is not designated as a Special Education Pre-K.

## **STRUCTURAL AND PROGRAMMATIC CHARACTERISTICS**

The Pre-K program serves children four half-days a week, with Wednesdays designated for professional development and planning. The work involving school-wide initiatives such as setting individual learning targets and intentionally reinforcing the school's core values is clearly shared by the entire teaching community, including Pre-K.

Group size is capped at 16 with one teacher and one Ed Tech. The Pre-K enrolls on a first-come, first serve basis, and most families who want public Pre-K have access to it. The program is currently not fully enrolled for next year. When the program fills, Ms. Adler refers the families to community options. There are many options in the community, and some families opt for private programs while others need full-day programs. Ms. Adler, the principal, reported that most kindergarten children have had some type of preschool experience and she feels it is clearly evident which children entered without such experience.

**Services Provided.** All specials (i.e. art, music, physical education and library) are available to the program but Ms. Anderson only accesses the library. Some years she includes physical education, but it has not included this year due to a scheduling problem. Given that children are only in session for a limited amount of time, and art and music are highly integrated in the curriculum, Ms. Anderson opted for more in-classroom time. Some of the Pre-K programs in the district include art and P.E. but she values the flexibility to provide that content in a way she feels best serves the children.

Special Education services are provided through Child Development Services and children entering with the lowest English proficiency are exposed to the “Pocket” program for which Ms. Anderson is trained.

**Transportation and Meals.** All children in the school are provided free meals which they eat in the classroom. Children in the morning program ride the bus with K-6 children and sit in the front of the bus without seatbelts. The children are provided breakfast and a healthy snack funded by a grant. The morning children go home (or to afternoon care) on their own bus, which then picks up the children for the afternoon program. These children are provided lunch and a healthy snack. They return home on the K-6 bus, where they sit in front without seatbelts. The Chapter 124 bus requirement presents an area for concern. The district reports that they tried seatbelts and a bus monitor in the past, but found them to be unsuccessful.

**Curriculum.** A Pre-K curriculum team meets twice each month and makes program and curriculum decisions. The Pre-K team developed the curriculum, selected professional development opportunities and develops report cards for the Pre-K programs. Additionally, the Pre-K teams worked with an early literacy consultant for a year to support the integration of literacy into the curriculum. A Pre-K coordinator, hired by the district, facilitated all professional development until this year. With her retirement, the responsibility will fall to a teacher/coordinator.

OWL (Opening Windows to Learning) was initially selected as the curriculum, but teachers found it too limited. Ms. Anderson summarizes the evolution of the curriculum below:

*When you're looking at public school settings, there are some public school things that you need to implement into your curriculum that OWL wasn't really allowing. And so...we took the OWL program. We took all the literature. We took some of the ideas of science, some of those pieces of the dramatic play, and we put it into our program... But the district uses Everyday Math, so we needed to incorporate that. We wanted to incorporate some kind of writing program, so the district uses Zaner-Bloser, but we're using Handwriting Without Tears...we've tried to implement Music Together in there [as well].... We kept a lot of what OWL offers, but I think we just made it a little bit more tailored to what public education needs.*

The district Pre-K report card uses indicators from the *Maine Early Learning Guidelines*. With the new standards, the Pre-K team will revisit both the curriculum and report card. The curriculum in Pre-K is also well integrated with the K-3 curriculum. School-wide Wednesday afternoon professional development supports common language and coordination.

A commitment to supporting parents as partners in their children's education is evident. Ms. Anderson conducts home visits in the beginning of the year and hosts parent literacy events with childcare for families.

**Screening and Assessment.** The Brigance (for 4-year-olds) is given within the first 30 days of school. Teachers created a checklist of skills with about half of the items based on the Brigance and half based on kindergarten expectations. Teachers use the checklist to create individual goals, and goal setting is an integral part of family conferences held in November. A written assessment is then sent home in December and another parent meeting is scheduled in spring to discuss progress. The final report, including results of kindergarten screening is sent home at the end of the school year.

Teachers regularly monitor progress throughout the school year. Ms. Anderson reported, "I wish I got paid for progress!" According to her, nearly all children made meaningful progress on the checklist.

**Transition.** It is unusual in a public Pre-K model, but Ms. Anderson makes home visits before the school year begins. Ms. Adler describes the importance:

*"Well, I think it's also an advantage for the families because they are able to see school as a fun, supportive place for learning. Sometimes we have families that*

*are not comfortable walking into a school. And it does help them to begin to develop that trust in school personnel. Not all parents want a home visit, but I would say the majority do because you're really going into the home on their territory, and that comfort level is much different. And the children can be all excited to show their teacher their stuffed animals, their whatever..."*

During the spring, Kindergarten teachers come and spend time in the classroom getting to know the children. The Pre-K teacher conducts kindergarten screening as she knows children best and can also use the results to communicate with families.

Pre-K is integrated into the rest of the school socially and academically. The school's core values are supported throughout the school. In addition to the professional development initiatives by the Pre-K team, the Pre-K teacher is actively involved in the school's other professional development efforts. Ms. Anderson describes the curriculum integration with kindergarten and beyond:

*...We try really hard to feed into kindergarten. And then [there's] Wednesday afternoons, where we're always in professional development in a building that's Pre-K through 6. So I'm constantly sitting in meetings about what third grade is doing, and what 6<sup>th</sup> grade's doing. And so we always try to tailor it down, like [when] we did professional development on vocabulary... We're constantly working.*

The district is engaged in Mass Customized Learning and so are the Pre-K programs. The commitment to Mass Customized Learning affects daily practices in Pre-K that will continue into kindergarten. Ms. Anderson describes:

*In Mass Customized Learning they're trying to become more transparent for children -- trying to make them more internally wanting to learn. So what we've done is have our learning boxes, and we've set learning goals. And those are the goals that I met with the parents about. That's something new that we're trying this year... And they go over their learning goals and if they get their learning goal, they get a star. And so that's what the last progress report card will include.*

**Special Education.** Ames School is a designated ESL site and as such, does not typically serve children entering with IEPs. However, when Mrs. Anderson suspects a problem, she assesses with the Brigance, meets with the parents, completes a referral and works with CDS to obtain parental cooperation. She reports that securing services for children can be a challenge. She referred a child in November and still had no service as of late spring.

## BENEFITS AND CONCERNS

Both the principal and teacher report tremendous benefits to children and families because of Pre-K. Children learn school behaviors and social skills. Their academic progress is striking, with some children enter kindergarten reading. Ms. Anderson notes...

*It's a great introduction for families – not just the children, but families – to understand what school is like now, compared to when they were in school... We do have high standards and we do have a lot of guidelines – there's still a lot of play – ...[but] kindergarten is a lot of pressure to write and read by the end of the year... And I think when a lot of our parents remember going to school; their first year was a lot of play. So I think the advantage is not only for the children to get used to the school, but to get the parents used to coming back in school and understanding that school's a little bit different now. I don't see any disadvantages, really, other than some kids may be just be too young. But, I think with Mass Customized Learning that you just teach where the kids are at. If they're young, they play more, or you tailor the lesson so that they don't have to be at a level of someone who is reading and writing.*

In addition, both the teacher and principal at Ames would like to see a CDS be in a better position to serve children in a timely way. Flexibility for teachers to access services across the school would also help meet the needs of children at the Ames School.

The principal and teacher, both with extensive experience in this school and in Pre-K, credit flexibility as being key to the program's success. They are concerned that too many regulations may interfere with the ability for individual programs to build upon their own success. They felt that one example of building on their own success has been their creation of programs that blend Pre-K and K for five year-olds who need it. They feel that as the school (and the State) move away from grade levels toward proficiencies, allowing flexibility for teachers in Pre-K will be important. When asked what changes would support her school's program, Ms. Adler summarizes:

*I would just say flexibility. I think we are...on the path to moving away from grade levels. I mean we can have a child in 1<sup>st</sup> grade that's performing on a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level academically. We could have a child that's in 4<sup>th</sup> grade performing on a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level academically. But I'd like to be able to have that flexibility with being able to access a part of [the Pre-K's program] for some kindergarten students that need that.*

## **SUMMARY**

The Ames School, a designated ESL program in a district with a long history of supporting public Pre-K, has stable leadership and teaching staff. The Pre-K program adopts a research-based curriculum, and has near-optimal space. Furthermore, the Pre-K program is fully integrated with the K-5 curriculum and the larger school community. A strong commitment to both parent involvement and professional development help to make this program stand out.

## **RIVERVIEW**

### **SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXT**

The Riverview School is one of four PK-5 elementary schools in a school union composed of rural schools proximate to a small urban area. Some families commute to work and access services in the city. The district has a long-standing commitment to Pre-K.

The Pre-K program, from the beginning, has been a public school/Head Start partnership. One teacher is hired by the district and one by Head Start. There are two sessions but only the morning program (9:00-12:30) is a Head Start partnership. Eight of the 16 morning slots are Head Start slots. The afternoon program is a community program with eight children and one teacher. The afternoon program runs from 1:00-4:00 and children are not provided transportation. However, the district school board recently voted to add bus services for all students (a separate bus with seatbelts) beginning in 2015-2016.

### **STAFFING**

Ms. Rainey was the first Pre-K teacher at Riverview School. She has worked in the district for nine years, seven of them in Pre-K. Ms. Rainey holds a master's degree in literacy and K-8 certification. She was grandfathered into 081 when that endorsement was first offered. While Ms. Rainey is hired by the school district, Ms. Ramos is the Head Start teacher, hired by the area CAP agency. She holds an Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education and worked extensively in Childcare and Head Start prior to joining this program. This is her first year at Riverview. Mr. Roberts, the school principal, has been a principal for 15 years and is in his second year at Riverview.

### **PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS**

**Classroom Space.** The classroom is large, spacious and well equipped with developmentally appropriate materials. There are defined areas for meeting, eating, art, dramatic play and centers, and cubbie space provided for children. The classroom is on the first floor with outdoor access and a sink in the room. Carpeted and easily cleaned surfaces cover the floor. The bathroom is within 40 feet of the classroom and a teacher supervises children when they go. Literacy is

embedded throughout the classroom space: Labels, writing tools for each child, and a classroom library are all evident.

Children attend either in the morning or afternoon five days a week following the school schedule. The classroom schedule includes several instructional meeting times, academically embedded choices, and free play. It also includes family-style meals allowing interactions between teachers and children

**Outdoor Space and Schedule.** The spacious playground is shared by Pre-K and K-5 but used at different times of day. The Pre-K children are not allowed to use the climbing structures but instead, have a shed with developmentally appropriate equipment (e.g., tricycles with helmets, balls, wagons). A paved space is used by tricycles and a small hill is used for sledding in winter. A large field supports imaginary play and running games.

## **STRUCTURAL AND PROGRAMMATIC CHARACTERISTICS**

Group size is 16 children although it has been extended to 18 in the past, which Ms. Rainey described as “a lot!” The morning class has 16 children with two teachers while the afternoon class has eight children with one teacher. Program decisions are made jointly between the district and Head Start. Because Head Start has more regulations than the public school for Pre-K, the Head Start regulations typically form the basis of the program. Professional development occurs for Head Start personnel on Wednesday afternoons. Ms. Rainey is invited but cannot attend because of her afternoon teaching schedule. Professional development and curriculum work conducted by the Riverview School community typically occurs after school. Again, because the afternoon session runs from 1:00-4:00, Ms. Rainey is unavailable to participate in those efforts.

**Services Provided.** The teachers value specialty classes, but children’s participation largely depends on the schedule. This year, art was dropped from the morning session because it involved too much sitting and was integrated into the regular class time. However, children were able to access physical education, music and the library. Unfortunately, it was more difficult for children in the afternoon program to access specialty classrooms because the Pre-K program runs from 1:00-4:00, but the teachers for the specialty programs leave at 2:30.



Breakfast and snack are part of the morning program. While Head Start children and those with free and reduced lunch are provided meals, other families may purchase meals or send their own. The morning class has lunch in the cafeteria before going home. The afternoon class brings their own snack. The teachers have made arrangements to have extra snacks for children who forget to bring them.

Transportation is provided in the morning. Families in the afternoon program transport their own children. However, the recently approved 2015-2016 budget allows for both morning and afternoon buses. It also provides bus service for children in the town without a Pre-K program to attend another program in the district.

**Curriculum.** Head Start and the district superintendent jointly determine the curriculum. Head Start programs operated by the CAP agency use OWL (Opening Windows to Learning). While the district teachers like the curriculum and the flexibility it affords, they supplement it with Handwriting Without Tears (also used in kindergarten) and Project Wild. To accommodate Head Start requirements, routines such as family style meals and tooth brushing are integrated into the morning program. The Kindergarten program uses the CAFÉ Daily 5 program as part of literacy and while not formally part of the Pre-K curriculum, elements are clearly evident – for example, children have designated writing time.

Professional development opportunities are available to the district Pre-K teachers once every two months on an early release day. They meet with each other and the district math coach or curriculum coordinator when available. Head Start teachers do not typically participate. Likewise, Head Start Professional Development opportunities occur in the afternoon. Ms. Rainey is welcome but cannot participate due to the afternoon schedule. The school curriculum work and staff meetings occur after school. Again, because of the afternoon class being on a different schedule (1:00-4:00), Ms. Rainey does not participate in those activities. Instead, she learns informally about the curriculum and staff discussions.

**Screening and Assessment.** Screening is conducted in the spring by Head Start, and results are shared with the school and CDS. Families are recruited to screening and enrollment through newspaper advertisements and word-of-mouth. Head Start slots can be hard to fill because of income eligibility.

Pre-K children are assessed through portfolios and progress reports are sent home three times a year. Head Start children are assessed using Teaching Strategies Gold but teachers report “*it is too long for everybody*”. The report uses indicators from the (old) Early Childhood Learning Guidelines, a format created by the district Pre-K teachers.

**Transition.** Prior to the start of school, children and families are invited to an Open House where they can explore the classroom and meet the teachers. Approximately 75% of incoming kindergarten children have had some form of Pre-K experience. Experience in the school-based Pre-K program serves as a transition tool for kindergarten. As Ms. Rainey sums it up, “It’s the whole point of being here”. By being in Pre-K, routines in the kindergarten are all familiar.

There is little formal interaction between the Pre-K and kindergarten teachers. When Ms. Rainey was asked about her work and interaction with kindergarten teachers, she described it as “*Not very much... our schedules are very different.*” That said, she believes the Pre-K is well aligned to the kindergarten program based on the achievement data being tracked, but is unsure about the curricular articulation.

**Special Education.** Riverview School works well with Child Development Services. Ms. Rainey reports good communication and comfort collaborating with therapists who work either in the classroom or the hallway. Ms. Rainey is invited to IEP and kindergarten transition meetings. The children served through CDS this year all started with IEPs, and Ms. Rainey did not make any new referrals this year.

## **BENEFITS AND CONCERNS**

Both Pre-K teachers and the principal concur that children who have been in the Pre-K programs enter kindergarten ready for the curriculum. The children understand how school works, how to follow rules, to take turns, and how to get ready to learn. Mr. Roberts commented on the academic and social advantages to the program. Participating children are socially and emotionally ready for kindergarten at the beginning of the year and the Pre-K curriculum aligns well with kindergarten, allowing children to begin learning right away.

Mr. Roberts’ concerns about the program mainly focus on accessibility for families. With a half-day program and many parents working outside the community, it is difficult to serve all

families. He believes it is hard from many parents' perspective to access the program because of their personal logistics. He stressed the importance of having flexibility in the regulations to allow schools to meet the unique needs of their own communities. The recent district budget change will allow for transportation both in the morning and in the afternoon, which should help some families. Ms. Rainey also voiced this concern, wishing the program were easier for working families. She would also like to minimize the number of transitions the Pre-K students experience in a day.

*If we could make it easier for the kids, for the parents who are working, it would be great if there was like a daycare right at school afterwards. I think it would be too much to have Pre-K all day. But some kind of [formal coordination] with a good, quality daycare that would take the kids for the afternoon [would be valuable]. There is a daycare for the K through 5 children called aftercare. The kids can be here until 5:00, and they get a snack and they go outside and play.*

## **SUMMARY**

Riverview School supports a morning program in partnership with Head Start and an afternoon community-based program. The curriculum is shared by both programs which orient children to school and promote social, emotional, physical and academic learning. Group size, number of teachers and participation in specialty classrooms vary between sessions. Transportation is provided only for the morning group this year but will change next year when both groups receive transportation. The Pre-K schedule does not coordinate with the school schedule, which impacts the degree to which the teachers can participate in school-wide professional development and curriculum alignment.

## **SUMMARY OF THEMES ACROSS SITES**

In summary, programs are aware of the Chapter 124 regulations and are taking steps to be ready for the changes. Nevertheless, participating schools reported making trade-offs with regard to space, schedule, staffing and curriculum in order to balance resources and regulations with local community needs. Some children receive transportation and meals and some do not, even within the same programs. In general, indoor spaces are more compliant than outdoor spaces. Special classes are available in these schools, but some teachers value the flexibility to choose which ones to access given the children in the group, the developmental demands of the classes, and the available schedule.

Principals are highly supportive of Pre-K. They see social and academic benefits for children from having the programs in the schools. These leaders appreciate the unique characteristics of 4-year olds and the specialized skills needed by teachers.

The Pre-K teachers for all of these programs report high levels of involvement and concern regarding their students and families. This can involve exceptional extra time and energy in working with families, as well as partnering with fellow faculty regarding ongoing curriculum changes and transition into kindergarten. In this regard, professional development is taking many forms. In part this can reflect Pre-K and larger school schedules. Some Pre-K programs are scheduled in ways that support professional development opportunities for the teachers, while others are scheduled in ways that increase access for children but limit participation of teachers in school-wide planning. Similarly, some professional development supports the curriculum work of whole schools (including Pre-K) while in other schools, the Pre-K professional development is structured separately. Regardless, teachers report appreciating professional development opportunities, particularly in response to ongoing changes in K-12 that also impact Pre-K. Specifically, as schools move toward proficiency-based learning and assessment, new implications arise for how Pre-K programs collaborate with kindergarten and transition children into kindergarten. Collaboration and coordinated professional development may help in this regard.

Schools are reportedly more aware of Chapter 124 than of the new Maine Early Learning and Development Standards. Teachers and administrators will need professional development about the new standards and guidance on assessing progress toward the standards within the context of proficiency-based assessment. All programs report high achievement of children in Pre-K but given the range of assessment measures and curricula used, it impossible to exam in depth across sites.

While highly valued, local funding will reportedly impact the numbers of children served in Pre-K. Currently, children are not turned away from the programs visited for this report. However, in order to accomplish this other district programs were used at times and in some cases class size exceeded the recommended limit of 16 children. Administrators are concerned about limiting access to families now that Pre-K is viewed as a core part of these schools. Furthermore, most communities are experiencing some degree of budget cuts, which affects the long-term stability of Pre-K programs, even in those communities with very long-standing commitments to early childhood.

Finally, principals and teachers in both urban and rural districts expressed concern about delays between referral for screening and receipt of Special Education services from CDS. It was reportedly particularly frustrating for those schools that had service personnel in the school and availability in the schedule, but were still unable to have those children served.

**APPENDIX I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FROM MEPRI REPORT  
TITLED “PUBLIC PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS IN MAINE:  
CURRENT STATUS AND CHARACTERISTICS”**

A Report for the Joint Standing Committee on Education and  
Cultural Affairs of the Maine State Legislature.

Report submitted by the *Maine Educational Policy Research Institute* (MEPRI) in March, 2015

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Public Preschool Programs in Maine: Current Status and Characteristics

March 2015

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A nonpartisan research institute funded by the Maine State Legislature, the University of Maine, and the University of Southern Maine.

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At the request of the Maine State Legislature, the *Maine Educational Policy Research Institute* (MEPRI) undertook a study of public preschool programs in Maine, with the goal of addressing three broad questions:

- (1) What are the general operational characteristics of public preschool programs in Maine? For example, to what degree are programs full- or half-day? To what degree are programs operated directly by a school district versus contracted to a community agency? What are the characteristics of children being served?
- (2) To what degree do programs currently meet the proposed Chapter 124 standards, including areas such as teacher training, adult-to-child ratios, class enrollment limits, space requirements, and various service and curricula components?
- (3) What are the projected one-time start-up or expansion costs associated with implementing universal public preschool for all four-year-old children in Maine? What is the projected annual operating cost associated with statewide universal public preschool?

To accomplish this, two surveys were conducted during the fall and winter of 2014. These surveys targeted Maine superintendents and public preschool teachers. Survey data were further informed by supplemental data available in the *State Longitudinal Data System* (SLDS). The final survey samples consisted of 83 superintendents representing a total of 104 districts serving 2,792 preschool students, and 99 preschool teachers representing 81 different schools serving 2066 preschool children. In comparison, state enrollment data suggests that there are approximately 5,004 students enrolled in public preschool programs throughout Maine. A comparison of SLDS data for districts included in this study to non-participating districts suggested that respondents tended to be larger districts with lower free and reduced lunch rates. They were also more likely to have a preschool program – and more likely to have a larger preschool program – than non-responding districts.

## **General Operations and Student Enrollment**

More than half (58%) of responding superintendents reported that their district operated a preschool program either alone (47%) or in partnership with a community agency (11%), while



12% indicated that their district entirely contracted out preschool services to a partner agency. In contrast, 16% of responding superintendents indicated that their district had no preschool program, but was in the process of planning for one; with the balance indicating that their district had no preschool program and no current plan to add one.

For districts working with partner agencies, superintendents reported an average direct annual payment of \$69,802 to their partner, increasing to \$118,701 when other district costs were included. However, multiple superintendents report that it was difficult or impossible to definitively differentiate partner versus district costs due to factors such as fundamental overhead expenses, in-kind support, or existing district services that the partner was able to leverage.

Preschool teachers reported that nearly all (90%) programs operate four or five days per week. Two-thirds of teachers (68.4%) reported that their preschool was a half-day program, versus a full-day program. With some schools offering two half-day sessions each day, this translated to 80.3% of the preschool students attending half-day programs.

## **Program Status Related to Proposed Chapter 124 Standards**

The surveys and analysis also examined the current status of public preschool programs in relation to specific areas targeted within the proposed Chapter 124 standards.

**Class Size.** Section 3.01 of the proposed Chapter 124 standards sets a maximum class size of 16 children. Currently, teachers reported that 29.5% of their classrooms included more than 16 students; however, given that larger classes also serve more students, this translates to 38.2% of children being enrolled in a preschool classroom with more than 16 students.

**Adult: Child Ratio.** Section 6.01.A.(1) of the proposed Chapter 124 standards sets a maximum adult-to-child ratio of 1 adult to 8 children. Overall, 32.4% of the teachers reported that their class did not have one adult for every eight children. This resulted in 38.4% of the preschool children being in a classroom with more than 8 children per adult.

**Curriculum.** Section 4.01 of the proposed Chapter 124 standards requires the use of an evidence-based written curriculum aligned with the *Early Learning and Development Standards*. Nearly all responding preschool teachers (98.9%) indicated that their current curriculum does in

fact align with these standards. In addition, section 4.02 identifies a variety of activities that need to be included in preschool programs, with activities ideally held in the classroom in order to minimize transitions. However, half of teachers indicated that their program did not participate in art, while over 40% did not participate in music or physical education, and one-third did not involve students in library activities.

**Screening.** Section 4.03.A.(1) of the proposed Chapter 124 standards requires that all children receive a valid and reliable research-based screening tool within the first 30 days of the school year. Nearly all preschool teachers in the sample (90.5%) reported that their program currently satisfies this goal, with 36.8% screening children during the summer or spring prior to the start of preschool.

**Assessment.** Similarly, Section 4.03.B of the proposed Chapter 124 standards calls on programs to provide periodic and ongoing research based assessment of children’s learning and development. Currently, 79.8% of responding teachers reported conducting such assessments.

**Teacher Training.** Section 7.01 requires that teachers hold an *Early Childhood 081 (B-5)* endorsement and be enrolled in the *Maine Roads to Quality* registry. Nearly all teachers in this sample had either a full (77.5%) or conditional (16.9%) *Early Childhood 081 (B-5)* endorsement; however, only 36.7% were registered with *Maine Roads to Quality*.

**Assistant Teachers.** Section 7.01.B requires that assistant teachers hold a minimum of an Educational Technician II Authorization and be enrolled in *Maine Roads to Quality*. Teachers reported that most assistant teachers were an Ed Tech II (25.7%) or an Ed Tech III (61.4%), although only one-in-four (26.0%) were enrolled in *Maine Roads to Quality*.

**Meal and Transportation Services.** Sections 8.01 and 14 of the proposed Chapter 124 standards address meal and transportation services. To a large degree, whether preschool programs offered transportation was related to whether the program was operated by the district itself or whether it was contracted out through a partner agency. For example, while superintendents reported that 72.7% of district-operated public preschool programs offered transportation (at an average annual cost of \$36,381), they reported that transportation was offered by only 10.5% of programs operated by a partner agency. A similar, albeit weaker trend,

was observed for meal services. While meals were provided by 57.1% of programs directly operated by a school district (at an average annual cost of \$6,930), meals were provided by only one-third (33.3%) of programs operated by a partner agency.

**Classroom Physical Size.** Section 9.01 of the proposed Chapter 124 standards establishes a minimum classroom space of 35 square feet per child. Based on teacher surveys, 16.3% of classrooms serving 21.0% of preschool students in this sample do not currently meet this standard.

**Indoor Space and Accessibility.** Section 9.01 calls for preschool classrooms to be accessible to all children and designed to allow proper monitoring at all times. Over 93% of teachers reported that their classroom was accessible to children with disabilities, had an accessible bathroom located in or within 40 feet of the classroom, had a water source available in the classroom, and was structured so that staff can supervise children by sight and sound at all times.

**Outdoor Space.** Section 9.02 addresses accessibility and related developmental features of the outdoor play space. While 90.7% of teachers reported that their outdoor space was accessible to children with disabilities, one in five (20.6%) indicated that this space was not protected by a fence or natural barrier, which can raise safety issues for younger children.

**Transition Planning.** Section 13.02 of the proposed Chapter 124 standards requires a transition process between four-year-old and the kindergarten programs. At this time, 78.5% of preschool teachers reported that their program included this type of formal process for student transitions.

## **Statewide Expansion: Operating Costs**

Responding superintendents estimated that preschool program operating costs were approximately \$4,204 per student, with salary and benefits constituting two-thirds of this amount. This information was combined with data in the *State Longitudinal Data System* in order to estimate the total statewide operating cost if public preschool was expanded universally across Maine. The number of *potential* preschool students was estimated to be 13,448 preschool children (including 5,004 already enrolled). The number of potential preschool programs was estimated using two approaches: A *school-based model*, which assumed that every school

currently offering kindergarten would also offer public preschool for all four-year-old children in the local community, and a *district-based model*, which assumed that every district currently offering kindergarten would also offer preschool at a capacity that would serve all four-year-old children in the district (although not necessarily in every elementary school). An inverse function was used to estimate per-student operating costs in order to reflect the higher per-student costs observed in smaller programs, with costs “leveling off” for larger programs.

**School-Based Model.** Analyses estimated that if every school currently offering kindergarten also offered preschool at a capacity that could serve all four-year-old children in the local community, the annual operating costs for Maine would be approximately \$50,194,206. Of this amount, approximately \$31,986,459 reflected costs associated with new or expanded programs and \$18,207,747 reflected costs associated with existing preschool programs.

**District-Based Model** Analyses estimated that if every district currently offering kindergarten also offered public preschool at a capacity that could serve all four-year-old children in the district, the statewide operating costs would be approximately \$47,267,868. Of this amount, approximately \$29,116,288 reflected costs associated with new or expanded programs and \$18,151,580 reflected costs associated with existing preschool programs.

### **Statewide Expansion: Start-up / Expansion Costs**

Expansion cost estimates were based on per-student expansion costs reported by those superintendents currently planning to expand their preschool programs (\$1,036 per additional student). Three-fourths of this expansion cost reflected “hard” renovations, such as moving structural walls, wiring, or plumbing. Unlike operating costs, this value was fairly consistent regardless of program size, and so the mean per-student expansion cost was used in analyses. As with the operating costs, expansion costs were estimated using both a school-based model and a district-based model.

**School-Based Model.** The estimated one-time expansion/start-up cost required to expand public preschool to every Maine school currently offering kindergarten was \$9,260,483. This was based on each of school having the capacity to serve all four-year-old children in the local community.

**District-Based Model.** The estimated one-time expansion/start-up cost required to expand public preschool to every school district in Maine that currently offers kindergarten was \$8,846,995. This was based on each district having the capacity to serve all four-year-old children in the district boundaries.

### **Expansion Cost Estimates: Limitations**

While these extrapolations were (1) based on superintendent-reported estimates of expansion and operating costs for existing preschool programs, and (2) incorporated the higher costs associated with smaller programs, there are several reasons to suspect that if universal preschool was fully implemented in Maine the ultimate costs may be greater than these estimates. First, the proposed Chapter 124 standards may lead to higher operating and expansion costs. For example, programs may need additional space or features, and larger programs may need to hire additional staff in order to satisfy smaller class size requirements. Second, given districts are not required to offer public preschool programs, one may anticipate that schools with higher expansion costs (e.g., requiring extensive new physical space, etc.) would be less likely to have already undertaken such work. This may also lead to underestimating costs. Finally, while the model used to estimate operating costs is weighted by program size, survey respondents were disproportionately from districts with larger preschool programs than non-responding districts. Consequently, actual per-student costs in small districts may be greater than those estimated in this report.

**APPENDIX II. CHAPTER 124: BASIC APPROVAL STANDARDS:  
PUBLIC PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS**

**Chapter 124: BASIC APPROVAL STANDARDS: PUBLIC PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS**

**SUMMARY:** This rule establishes school approval standards governing the school administrative units which are implementing public preschool programs and adopts procedures for ascertaining compliance with all applicable legal requirements, as authorized by Title 20-A, Maine Revised Statutes, Chapters 203 and 206. By July 1, 2017, all preschool programs must comply with the program standards contained in this rule. Any new public preschool programs implemented for the 2015-2016 school year must be approved prior to opening.

**Section 1. GENERAL OBJECTIVES**

1.01 This rule establishes the substantive school approval standards pertaining to school administrative units which operate a public preschool program. Its intent is to provide a framework for planning and growth with local flexibility as influenced by local conditions. This rule establishes procedures for comprehensive reviews of school administrative units which operate a public preschool program by which the Commissioner will determine compliance with applicable standards and methods of enforcement for ensuring compliance.

1.02 School administrative units may operate a public preschool program or provide for children to participate in such programs in accordance with 20-A §4271 and shall meet all school approval requirements of Title 20-A, Maine Revised Statutes (20-A MRSA), other statutes, and rules applicable to the operation of public preschool programs, and the requirements of this rule.

**Section 2. DEFINITIONS**

2.01 Administrator: "Administrator" means any person certified by the Commissioner as an administrator and employed by a school administrative unit in an administrative capacity.

2.02 Assessment: "Assessment" means an educational instrument or activity designed to gather information on a child's knowledge and skill to make instructional decisions.

2.03 Commissioner: "Commissioner" means the Commissioner of the Maine Department of Education or a designee.

2.04 Curriculum: "Curriculum" means the school administrative unit's written document that includes the learning expectations for all children for all domains of development as indicated in the Early Learning and Development Standards.

2.05 Department: "Department" means the Maine Department of Education.

2.07 Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS): "Early Learning and Development Standards" means what should children know and be able to do at kindergarten entry.

2.08 Elementary school: "Elementary school" means that portion of a school that provides instruction in any combination of grades pre-kindergarten through grade 8.

2.09 Essential Programs and Services: "Essential Programs and Services" means those programs and services, as defined by the State Board of Education or adopted by the Legislature, that a school administrative unit offers for each student to have the opportunity to meet the content standards of the system of Early Learning and Development Standards/Learning Results.

2.10 Instructional day: "Instructional day" means a school day during which both students and teachers are present, either in a school or in another setting.

2.11 Instructional time: "Instructional time" means that portion of a school day devoted to the teaching-learning process, but not including extra-curricular activities, lunchtime, or recess. Time spent on organized field trips related to school studies may be considered instructional time, but the instructional time counted for extended field trips shall not exceed a normal school day for each day of the field trip.

2.12 Kindergarten: "Kindergarten" means a one or two-year instructional program aligned with the system of Learning Results, immediately prior to grade one.

2.13 Parent: "Parent" means the parent or legal guardian of a student, or the student if of majority age.

2.14 Provisional Approval: "Provisional Approval" means an approval for a specified period of time during which a school administrative unit must take corrective action to the public preschool program to comply with this rule.

2.15 Public Preschool Program: "Public Preschool Program" means a program offered by a public school that provides instruction of children who are four years of age by October 15th.

2.16 School: "School" means an individual attendance center within a school administrative unit including any combination of grades pre-kindergarten through 12. In this rule, an



educational program located in or operated by a juvenile correctional facility, an educational program located in the unorganized territories and operated by the Department of Education, the Maine School of Science and Mathematics, and the Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing shall be considered schools.

2.17 School administrative unit: "School administrative unit" means the state-approved unit of school administration and includes a municipal school unit, school administrative district, community school district, regional school unit or any other municipal or quasi-municipal corporation responsible for operating or constructing public schools, except that it does not include a career and technical education region. Beginning July 1, 2009, "school administrative unit" means the state-approved unit of school administration and includes only the following:

- A. A municipal school unit;
- B. A regional school unit formed pursuant to chapter 103-A;
- C. An alternative organizational structure as approved by the commissioner and approved by the voters;
- D. A school administrative district that does not provide public education for the entire span of kindergarten to grade 12 that has not reorganized as a regional school unit pursuant to chapter 103-A;
- E. A community school district that has not reorganized as a regional school unit pursuant to chapter 103-A;
- F. A municipal or quasi-municipal district responsible for operating public schools that has not reorganized as a regional school unit pursuant to chapter 103-A;
- G. A municipal school unit, school administrative district, community school district, regional school unit or any other quasi-municipal district responsible for operating public schools that forms a part of an alternative organizational structure approved by the commissioner; and
- H. A public charter school authorized under chapter 112 by an entity other than a local school board.

2.18 School calendar: "School calendar" means the schedule of school days adopted in advance of the school year by the school board.

2.19 School day: "School day" means a day in which school is in operation as an instructional day and/or a teacher in-service day.

2.20 School personnel: "School personnel" means individuals employed by a school administrative unit or under contract with the unit to provide services to the children enrolled in the schools of the unit.

2.21 School year: "School year" means the total number of school days in a year as established by the school administrative unit.

2.22 Screening. "Screening: means utilizing a standard or norm-referenced screening tool designed and validated to identify a child's level of performance overall in developmental areas (i.e., cognition, fine motor, gross motor, communication, self-help/adaptive, and gross motor skills). The screening is a brief check (10-15 minutes) of the child's development and is not diagnostic or confirming in content.

2.23 Student records: "Student records" means those records that are directly related to a student and are maintained by a school or a party acting for the school.

2.24 Teacher: "Teacher" means any person who is regularly employed for the instruction of students in a school and who is certified by the Commissioner for this position.

2.25 Teacher in-service day: "Teacher in-service day" means a school day during which a majority of teachers and professional staff report for work, but students are not present for instruction. These days may include days devoted to in-service educational programs, administrative meetings, parent-teacher conferences, record-keeping duties, curriculum preparation, and other similar activities related to the operation of school programs, and may take place in a school in the school administrative unit.

### **Section 3. CLASS SIZE**

3.01 Maximum class size: 16 children

### **Section 4. CURRICULUM AND COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM**

4.01 Each school administrative unit shall have an evidence-based written curriculum aligned with the Early Learning and Development Standards. The school administrative unit shall inform parents and students of the curriculum, instructional expectations, and assessment system.

4.02 Public preschool programs must demonstrate curriculum practice that aligns with the Maine Early Learning and Development Standards and is appropriate for the age and

developmental level of the students. Teachers must organize space and select materials in all content and developmental areas to stimulate exploration, experimentation, discovery and conceptual learning.

A. A variety of activity areas are offered every session including, but not limited to: block building, dramatic play, writing, art, music, science, math, literacy, sand/water play, manipulatives, gross motor activities and mealtime routines , which allows teachers to eat with children.

B. Equipment, materials and furnishings are available and are accessible to all children, including children with disabilities.

C. A daily schedule is posted that includes:

(1) Opportunities for individual, small group and whole group activities. The amount of time spent in large group, teacher directed activity is limited to short periods of time – 10-20 minutes depending on the time of the year.

(2) Opportunities for physical movement, fresh air and access to drinking water are provided to the children.

(3) Opportunity for rest in a full-day program (more than 5 hours) is provided for the children. Cots or mats are provided for each child.

(4) The schedule and program activities minimize the transitions that children make from one classroom space to another, including school “specials” especially during the first half of the school year. Most special supports or therapies are provided in-class to minimize transitions for children with disabilities.

(5) Program development and services to any and all English learners are overseen by an English as a Second Language-endorsed teacher.

#### 4.03 Screening and Assessment

##### A. Screening

(1) All children must receive a valid and reliable research-based screening tool within the first 30 days of the school year (or prior to school entry) which includes: early language and literacy/numeracy/cognitive; gross and fine motor; personal/social; social/emotional development- to identify those who may be in need of additional assessment or to determine eligibility for special education services unless the child has an existing Individualized Education Program-IEP). All children must receive a

hearing, vision, and health screening upon entry to the public preschool program. The health screening must include information pertaining to oral health and lead poisoning awareness. If hearing, vision, and health screening has been done in the public preschool, the screenings do not have to be redone in kindergarten, unless there is a concern.

(2) Each preschool program shall develop a written Child Find referral policy consistent with the State of Maine Unified Special Education Rules 05-071 Chapter 101 Section IV. 2(D)(E).

(3) Administration of a home language survey is undertaken to identify possible English learners.

B. Assessment. Programs provide periodic and ongoing research based assessment of children's learning and development that:

(1) Documents each child's interests, needs and progress to help plan instruction, relying mostly on demonstrated performance of authentic activities.

(2) Includes: children's work samples, observations, anecdotal notes, checklists and inventories, parent conference notes, photographs, video, health screening reports and referral records for support services.

(3) Communicates with families regularly to ensure connection between home and school, including providing interpreters and translators, as needed.

(4) Aligns with the Early Learning and Development Standards and are used to inform curriculum and instruction.

(5) Is informed by family culture, experiences, children's abilities and disabilities, and home language.

(6) Is used in settings familiar to the children.

(7) Informs activities to support planning for individual children.

4.04 Child Development Reporting. Parents shall have the opportunity to meet individually with their child's teacher about their child's development at least twice during each school year using the research based assessment (providing interpreters and translators as needed).

## **Section 5. INSTRUCTIONAL TIME**

5.01 School Year. A school administrative unit shall make provision for the maintenance of all its schools for at least 180 school days. At least 175 school days shall be used for

instruction. In meeting the requirement of a 180-day school year, no more than 5 days may be used for in-service education for teachers, administrative meetings, parent-teacher conferences, records' days and similar activities.

5.02 Public Preschool Instructional Time. Instructional time for public preschool program shall be a minimum of 10 hours per week for 35 weeks and shall not include rest time. Public preschool programs shall schedule within the 175 school days that the school administrative unit has designated as instructional time, but does not have to use all days, allowing flexibility as to numbers of days per week. Extended public preschool program Day: A school administrative unit is encouraged to schedule public preschool for more than 10 hours per week to improve child outcomes and to reduce the risk of later school failure.

## **Section 6. SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT ORGANIZATION AND SCHOOL SIZE**

### 6.01 Personnel Ratios

#### A. Classroom student-teacher ratios

(1) Maximum adult to child ratio is 1 adult to 8 children

(2) Ratios include, at a minimum, one teacher holding appropriate teacher certification from the Maine Department of Education (as per current statute) and a support staff with a minimum of an Educational Technician Authorization II from the Maine DOE. These ratios are maintained during both indoor and outdoor activities and during mealtimes.

## **Section 7. QUALITY OF EDUCATION PERSONNEL**

### 7.01 Specific Requirements

A. Teacher degree requirement: Teachers must hold (as per current statute) the required Maine DOE Early Childhood 081 (B-5) endorsement.

B. Assistant teacher requirements: An assistant teacher must hold (as per current statute), at a minimum, an Educational Technician II Authorization from the Maine DOE who obtains a Level 4 status on the Maine Roads to Quality Registry within 3 years.

C. All preschool staff must join the Maine Roads to Quality Registry.

## **Section 8. NUTRITION**

8.01 General Requirements. The program shall serve well-balanced meals and/or snack that follow the U.S. Department of Agriculture guidelines in all programs.

8.02 Specific Requirements. A. The program shall serve at least one meal and/or snacks at regularly established times. Meals and snacks are not more than three hours apart.

B. Each child is given sufficient time at mealtimes and snacks to eat at a reasonable, leisurely rate.

C. Classroom ratios will be maintained during mealtimes.

D. Meals and or snacks are culturally responsive to participating families.

E. The meal and snack time offers opportunities for interactions between adults and children.

## **Section 9. SCHOOL FACILITIES**

9.01 Indoor: Minimum requirement shall be 35 square feet per child. Areas not to be calculated as usable space include but are not limited to: hallways, lockers, cubbies, door swings, closets, supply cabinets, corridors, bathrooms, teacher spaces, food preparation areas and offices.

A. All classroom spaces must be accessible to all children, including children with disabilities.

B. There shall be a water source in the classroom for hand washing, and drinking water is readily available to children throughout the day.

C. The indoor environment shall be designed so staff can supervise children by sight and sound at all times. Supervision for short intervals by sound is permissible, as long as teachers check frequently on children who are out of sight (e.g., independent toileting).

D. Toilets, accessible for use by all participating children, must be within 40 feet of the indoor areas that children use. It is preferable to have them within the classroom.

E. Electrical outlets in public preschool classrooms shall be protected by safety caps, plugs or other means.

F. Natural light must be present in any classroom used for four-year-old program activities.

G. Easily accessible and individual space shall be made available for children's outside clothing and personal possessions.

9.02 Outdoor: The program must have access to an outdoor play area with at least 75 square feet of usable space per child and with equipment of a size suitable to the age and needs of four-year-old children as dictated by the National Safety Standards for playgrounds in public schools.

- A. The outdoor play area must be protected by fences or natural barriers.
- B. Surfaces used under climbers, swings and at the bottom of slides are energy-absorbing materials such as mulch, sand or bark. Concrete or asphalt shall not be used.
- C. Outdoor play areas provide both shade and sun.
- D. There are established protocols for emergencies.
- E. The playground areas and equipment are accessible to all children.
- F. Preschool classrooms schedule outdoor time by themselves, with other preschool classrooms, or with kindergarten children.

**Section 10. FAMILY ENGAGEMENT**

10.01 Programs identify how they will engage in a process of partnership-building with families to establish mutual trust and to identify child strengths, goals, and necessary services and supports.

10.02 Programs have written policies and procedures that demonstrate intentional practices designed to foster strong reciprocal relationships with families, including, but not limited to: application information, family orientation, parent conferences, parent education-specifically around literacy and numeracy, newsletters, PTA participation, home visits, family events, program evaluations, and these policies and procedures are to be translated in a language understandable to parents/guardians.

**Section 11. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Programs establish relationships with community-based learning resources and agencies, such as libraries, arts education programs, and family literacy programs.

**Section 12. COORDINATED PUBLIC PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS**

12.01 Any school administrative unit that wishes to develop an early childhood program for children 4 years of age must submit a public preschool program implementation plan for children 4 years of age for submission to and approval by the department. Evaluation of the proposal must include consideration of at least the following factors:

- A. Demonstrated coordination with other early childhood programs in the community to maximize resources;
- B. Consideration of the extended child care needs of working parents; and

C. Provision of public notice regarding the proposal to the community being served, including the extent to which public notice has been disseminated broadly to other early childhood programs in the community. [20-A MRSA §4502(9)]

D. Demonstrated coordination with Child Development Services.

12.02 Schools offering a public preschool program in partnership with a community agency must submit a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), signed by all involved parties, on a yearly basis. The elements of the MOU shall, at a minimum, include:

A. Roles and responsibilities of each of the partners;

B. A budget, including the amount of resources that each partner will provide for the implementation of the plan;

C. Describe the organizational capacity and the existing infrastructure of the SAU and the partners to deliver a high quality program;

D. The methods and processes for making different types of decisions (e.g., policy, operational);

E. How the partners will coordinate, but not supplant, the delivery of the public preschool program with existing services for preschool –aged children including, if applicable, programs and services supported through Title I of ESEA, the Head Start Act, and Child Care Development Block Grant;

F. How the partners will coordinate with Child Development Services (under Part B, Section 619 of IDEA) regional site to ensure access for CDS for conducting its statutory obligations under IDEA and Maine law/regulations; and

G. A description of the responsibilities and process of sharing child records that meets Section 16 of this chapter.

12.03 Beginning with 2015-16 school year the Commissioner may provide start-up funding as set forth in 20-A MRSA §4271 to school administrative units to implement or expand public preschool programs for children 4 years of age as required by 20-A MRSA §4502(9).

### **Section 13 TRANSITION**

13.01 Enrollment transition into the public preschool program. Public preschool programs will have a process for enrollment transition from home and or other early childhood programs. The process will involve parents/legal guardians, including parental consent for transition of the pertinent educational records.



13.02 Public preschool to kindergarten transition. Public preschool program will have a process to provide transition between four-year-old programs and the kindergarten program. This includes links, by the elementary school, with other area Head Start and early childhood programs serving young children who will be entering kindergarten. The process will involve parents/legal guardians, including parental consent for transition of pertinent educational records.

#### **Section 14 TRANSPORTATION**

14.01 If a school transports public preschool children, it is recommended that the standard of care offered to public preschool students meet the standard of care as defined by “Guideline for the Safe Transportation of Preschool Age Children in School Buses,” which is provided by the National Highway Transportation Safety Agency, as follows:

- A. Children should be in a child safety restraint system appropriate for the age, weight and height of the student.
- B. There should be at least one aide on board the bus to assist with loading, unloading, correct securement and behavior/emotional support.
- C. There will be training, communication and operational policy items for drivers, aides, parents, students and routes.

NOTE: Pursuant to 20-A MRSA §5401(3-A) school administrative units are not required to provide transportation for public preschool children.

#### **Section 15. RECORDS AND REPORTS**

If the public preschool program operates within the school administrative unit (SAU), the SAU addresses these provisions within the basic school approval. If the public preschool program operates in an external facility and/or under a contract with the SAU, the contract between the SAU and the contractor must address the provisions of this section.

15.01 Student Records. Each school board shall adopt a policy in accordance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) that establishes the procedure for changing a student record by adding or removing items, and for controlling access to records.

- A. Each school administrative unit shall maintain accurate and up-to-date education records on each enrolled student. Education records shall be defined as in FERPA and shall include academic records, disciplinary records, and other information including directory information.

(1) Academic records include information relating to the student's educational performance including student performance on the local assessment system and on other assessments as may be required for an individual student.

(2) Disciplinary records include, but are not limited to, a record of suspensions and expulsions, and other violations of the Student Code of Conduct adopted by the school board.

B. Records shall be entrusted to designated personnel who shall be knowledgeable about the confidentiality provisions applicable to the records. All records shall be safeguarded from unauthorized access. Either student records will be kept in fireproof storage at the school or a duplicate set will be kept off site.

C. Upon request of the parent or school officials, a student's education records, including special education records, shall be forwarded to any school in which the student is enrolled or is intending to enroll. The school administrative unit shall notify parents that all records, including disciplinary records, must be sent to a school administrative unit to which a student applies for transfer.

D. Parental Access Rights: Confidentiality. Each school administrative unit shall adopt a policy describing the access rights of parents, students, and educational personnel to student records and the applicable confidentiality rights of parents and students. Student records shall be made available to the parents, or to the student of majority age, for inspection and copying. A copy of the policy shall be posted in each school and parents shall be notified annually of the policy. The school administrative unit shall maintain records in accordance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

## **Section 16. PUBLIC PRESCHOOL APPROVAL**

### **16.01 Approval Procedures**

A. A school administrative unit shall obtain approval from the Commissioner prior to opening a new public preschool program. All new public preschool programs implemented in the 2015-16 school year must be approved prior to opening. By July 1, 2017 all public preschool programs implemented before 2015-16 must comply with programs standards contained in this rule.

B. A school administrative unit seeking approval status for any public preschool program shall make this intention known to the Commissioner in writing at least nine months prior to the school year. School units that have received school construction approval from the State Board of Education shall be deemed to have met this notice requirement.

C. An Implementation Plan for initial approval status shall be made on forms provided by the Commissioner and available on the Maine Department of Education Public Preschool website. The superintendent of the school administrative unit is responsible for supplying all information necessary for a determination that the school is entitled to approval. The implementation plan application form must be signed by the superintendent of the school administrative unit in which the school is located, certifying that the form contains information that is accurate at the time of reporting. Prior to receiving approval from the Commissioner, the facility shall be approved for safety by the State Fire Marshal or local municipal fire department official, and certified as sanitary by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

D. Two months prior to the initial opening the applicant school must arrange for an on-site inspection by a representative of the Commissioner.

E. Approval status shall be awarded when the Commissioner determines that the school is likely to comply with all approval standards.

F. Upon obtaining approval by the Commissioner, the school administrative unit shall be entitled to operate the public preschool program and to receive state subsidy aid to which it is otherwise entitled.

G. Six weeks after student occupancy, representatives of the Commissioner shall visit the public preschool program while it is in session to determine if all applicable school approval standards are being met. If school approval standards are not being met, approval status shall continue until compliance is demonstrated or until the end of the school year, whichever is the earlier date.

#### 16.02 Provisional Approval

A. Any public preschool program that is determined by the Commissioner not to comply with applicable school approval standards shall be placed on provisional approval. Failure to submit School Approval Reports, other than financial reports, in a timely manner, in accordance with Section 15.05 of this rule, shall result in provisional approval

status. Failure to submit financial reports in a timely manner shall result in a withholding of state subsidy in accordance with Section 16.03.B.

B. When placing a school on provisional approval status the Commissioner shall take the following action:

(1) The Commissioner shall notify, in writing, the superintendent responsible for any public preschool programs placed on provisional approval status and shall include a statement of the reasons for provisional approval status.

(2) Representatives of the Commissioner shall meet with the superintendent and shall determine a reasonable deadline for achieving compliance with school approval standards.

(3) A school or school administrative unit on provisional approval status shall be required to file with the Commissioner an acceptable written plan of corrective action.

(4) Failure to file a required plan of corrective action shall result in enforcement action by the Commissioner, pursuant to Section 16.03 of this rule.

C. The Commissioner shall restore full approval status upon the Commissioner's determination of compliance with school approval standards.

#### 16.03 Enforcement Measures

##### A. Notice of Failure to Comply

The Commissioner shall give written notice of pending enforcement action to the superintendent of any school or school administrative unit that fails to comply with school approval standards by the established deadlines in statute or in the plan of corrective action established in Section 16.02.B.(3). Such notice shall include a statement of the laws and regulations with which the school or school administrative unit fails to comply. School administrative units failing to comply with school approval standards shall be given notice and the opportunity for a hearing.

##### B. Penalties

The Commissioner may impose the following penalties on school administrative units until compliance is achieved:

(1) Withhold state subsidy and other state funds from school administrative unit;

(2) Refer the matter to the Attorney General, who may seek injunctive relief to enjoin activities not in compliance with the governing statute or seek any other remedy authorized by law; or

(3) Employ other penalties authorized in statute or authorized or required by federal law.

### **Section 17. PRESCHOOL PROGRAM MONITORING**

17.01 Public preschool programs, including partnerships, will complete the electronic Public Preschool Program Annual Report online and submit to the Maine Department of Education no later than 30 days after the end of the school year.

17.02 Each public preschool program, including partnerships, will receive a site visit by the Department no less than once every three years.

17.03 The review will utilize observational instruments, implemented by qualified individuals with demonstrated reliability, that assess:

- A. Compliance with the program standards,
- B. Classroom quality, and
- C. Multiple dimensions of teacher-child interactions that are linked to positive child development and later achievement.

17.04 The results of this classroom evaluation will be shared with the teacher and principal and a plan for training and technical assistance will be developed.

**STATUTORY AUTHORITY: 20-A MRSA §4271(4)**

**EFFECTIVE DATE:**