

2018

## When Pre-K Comes to School: Policy, Partnerships, and the Early Childhood Education Workforce

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### Recommended Citation

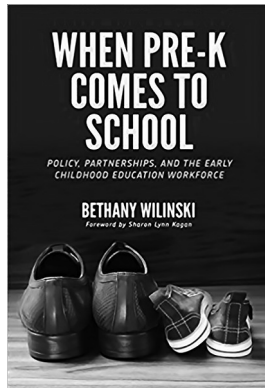
Shedd, Meagan (2018) "When Pre-K Comes to School: Policy, Partnerships, and the Early Childhood Education Workforce," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 50 : Iss. 2 , Article 14.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol50/iss2/14>

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# When Pre-K Comes to School: Policy, Partnerships, and the Early Childhood Education Workforce

by Meagan Shedd, Ph.D.

Wilinski, B. (2017). *When Pre-K comes to school: Policy, partnerships, and the early childhood education workforce*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.  
ISBN 978-0-8077-5823-6



Wilinski presents a compelling account of the implications of policy on a complex system of integrating early childhood education into traditional K-12 settings with far-reaching effects beyond the “access and outcomes for children” (p. 99). Presented in six chapters, she begins with helpful historical context of the uneven distribution of resources in early childhood education and subsequent policy implications, followed by the second chapter, which outlines sweeping educational reform intended to ameliorate discrepancies among the nation’s youngest learners. Highlighting long-standing issues in early childhood education including targeted versus universal pre-K, educator qualifications, and debates about setting (center- versus school-based), Wilinski creates a context for Chapter 3, in which she examines the importance to successful childhood outcomes of relationships among schools, early childhood educators, and the communities in which both reside. Short of describing it as a “turf war”, she characterizes the tension between K-12 and early childhood education as difficult, setting the stage for the remaining chapters in which she describes her study of a local community’s implementation of universal pre-K.

The final three chapters of the text provide a helpful discussion of the financial implications of implementing 4K, a universal preschool program, to the neediest



Meagan Shedd

families of Lakeville, Wisconsin, including the complexity of economic implications for early childhood educators and the school district. Perhaps most notably, Wilinski observes the local early care and education system needs that beg to be understood, with the intricacies of the budgets and all potential variables, in order to identify and account for potential impacts and strains often unaccounted for in universal pre-K discussion. One example is the increased number of children requiring special education and English language learner services that may not be addressed in an already strained budget. Further, she describes the idea of “competition” created among settings, some of whom were participating in the 4K program while others were not, which resulted in devastating financial implications.

Equity among participants, the impetus for 4K, is also addressed. In considering accessibility of 4K to the neediest Lakeville families, Wilinski writes that those who could access the program financially or navigate the intricacies were able to do so, while others were left out, essentially negating the purpose of the program. Similarly, she highlights discrepancies among teacher perspectives, noting differences in how teachers were perceived based on the context of the institution in which they were teaching. In theory, 4K is a policy-driven endeavor, but nuances at the local level drove practices, including teacher salary, benefits, and

perception of worth. This perspective offers a thoughtful reflection of additional variables for consideration in implementation of policy.

Wilinski stresses the complexity of 4K in terms of continuity rather than a dichotomy as a means to inform policy, noting that implementation of a policy without careful attention to all variables and the underlying framework create caution to explore impact over intent with respect to universal pre-K. She carefully highlights the opportunities, including economic benefits and needs of all families, juxtaposing the challenges of implementation of early childhood education with a K-12 framework. Above all, she stresses the importance of relationships in developing policy for successful implementation, including the need for additional research involving pre-K partnerships and what works

as much as what doesn't work to build an effective universal pre-K system. Wilinski's recommendations in this regard are not only plausible, they are crucial in addressing the inequities that persevere in early childhood education.

## Author Biography

**Dr. Meagan Shedd** is an Academic Specialist in Early Care and K-12 Education with the Center for Regional Food Systems at Michigan State University, with degrees in Dietetics (BS), Community Services (MS), and Educational Psychology (Ph.D.). She has almost 20 years of experience in early childhood education, working in public health, Extension, and institutions of higher education. She can be reached at [mshedd@anr.msu.edu](mailto:mshedd@anr.msu.edu).

