



Supporting Mixed Delivery State Pre-K: Findings and Considerations

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Background

The Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) engaged SRI to gather information to inform the development of mixed delivery state prekindergarten (pre-K) policies and practices. In the context of state-funded pre-K programs, mixed delivery refers to providing those programs across diverse settings, which may include public schools, Head Start, private or nonprofit child care centers, and family child care (FCC) homes. Minnesota's existing voluntary pre-K (VPK) program served around 7,000 four-year-olds in public and charter schools in 2024–25. Additional funding will increase pre-K spaces to 12,000 in 2026 (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2025). While Minnesota's state funded pre-K does not directly fund mixed delivery, statute allows for a district or charter school to contract with a community-based partner to provide services and gives priority weighting of funding allocation for districts with formal mixed delivery agreements.

During the 91st legislative session in 2019, the Minnesota Governor's budget and legislators proposed mixed delivery in VPK as an amendment to an existing statute. This bill would have required public and charter schools to subcontract 40% of all new pre-K spaces in programs operated by a charter school, Head Start, child care center, licensed FCC, or other community-based organization (Minn. House File 2480, 2019). Although the bill did not advance, it shows an ongoing interest in intentionally expanding mixed delivery pre-K in Minnesota.

DCYF is conducting work to support a robust mixed delivery system in the early care and education (ECE) community more broadly. In 2023–2024, DCYF partnered with SRI to lead mixed delivery action labs (MDALs) in seven communities to build local capacity for partnerships and provide a structured approach to address community-identified priorities. Using Preschool Development Grant funds, DCYF (n.d.) is developing a mixed delivery coaching and technical assistance (TA) network for programs and individuals.

DCYF charged SRI with reviewing and summarizing information from other states that have successfully implemented state-funded, mixed delivery pre-K programs. Specifically, DCYF is interested in the following questions:

- To what extent do states with mixed delivery pre-K have statutory or policy requirements about the percentage of spaces allocated to each setting?
- What practices do states use to build the relationships required for successful mixed delivery systems in state pre-K?
- How do states align roles across state-funded, mixed delivery pre-K settings with regard to pay parity?

DCYF and partners can use the information in this brief to inform future efforts to expand and strengthen the Minnesota ECE mixed delivery system to include VPK. SRI conducted a scan of national data sources to identify examples of legislation and policy guiding the allocation of

spaces across mixed delivery settings. These sources included the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) database of enacted bills from 2019 to present, and state-submitted survey and narrative data from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) 2024 State of Preschool Yearbook. SRI also reviewed literature on mixed delivery and conducted internet searches to identify practices supporting cross-setting relationships and ensuring pay parity.

Key Takeaways from Across States

In 2024, mixed delivery pre-K was the norm across the nation, with 46 states implementing 65 state-funded pre-K programs with mixed delivery settings. Of these, 44 programs (68%), including Minnesota’s VPK, allowed local education agencies (LEAs) to subcontract with community-based providers,¹ and 36 programs (55%) allowed direct funding of community-based providers. Many states allowed both direct contracting *and* subcontracting, although they typically prioritized one model in implementation. Thirty-five programs² reported enrollment numbers in both public schools and community-based settings; the average percentage of children in community-based settings was 45% (based on all children enrolled in state pre-K) and ranged from 3% to 94% (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2025).

Statutory and Policy Guidelines on Allocation of Spaces

Generally, legislation and policy included language that enabled mixed delivery and described which settings were eligible to receive funding. Examples of specific targets in legislation and policy were less common, but present in some states.

Some states provide direct funding to community-based providers:

- **Maryland** served 5% of children in mixed delivery settings in 2024. That same year, Maryland shifted its pre-K system by amending the pre-K statute to require that community-based providers offer 50% of pre-K spaces. The requirement will phase in through the 2028–29 school year (Md. House Bill 1441, 2024).
- **New Mexico** statute requires an equal distribution of funds to programs administered by the public schools (50%) and other programs (50%). New Mexico reported serving 53% of children in non-public school settings (N.M. Senate Bill 22, 2019).

¹ This report defines “community-based” as all non-public school providers.

² This calculation excludes data reported for programs that were serving children in only school-based settings, or in only community-based settings. Here and in all sections below, data referencing enrollment rates in mixed delivery were calculated based on state data in NIEER’s 2024 State of Preschool Yearbook and were calculated based on the reported total number of children enrolled in state pre-K.

Some states provide funding to LEAs, which subcontract with community-based providers:

- **Michigan** statute requires 30% of funds provided to LEAs be allocated to community-based organizations. The state reported that in 2024, 33% of children enrolled in community-based settings (Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential, 2024).
- **West Virginia** policy requires 50% of funded classrooms to be in community-based settings (West Virginia’s Universal Access to a Quality Early Education System, 2022). The state did not report 2024 enrollment data.

Some states provide both direct funding to community-based providers *and* funding to LEAs to subcontract with community-based providers:

- **New York** statute requires 10% of funds provided to school districts to be set aside for mixed delivery (New York Education Law, 2024). The state reported serving 61% of children in mixed delivery settings in 2024. While children were primarily enrolled in community-based agencies, more than 4,600 children were enrolled in FCC homes, the highest count nationally.

Practices Supporting Mixed Delivery Relationships

A variety of factors may influence the provision of mixed delivery within a state, and SRI’s review revealed a diversity of program governance models, contracting approaches, and support systems. This section focuses on a high-level review of practices that support relationship-building (both within local ECE communities and between mixed delivery communities and the state agency administering pre-k programs), although a 2023 Learning Policy Institute [case study report](#) on mixed delivery implementation in five states provides additional detailed information about system implementation (Garver et al., 2023). SRI recommends that DYCF review this report.

Contracting Considerations

States use varying contracting models, with each method presenting opportunities to support a thriving mixed delivery system.

LEA contracting exists in states that contract with one or more LEAs, which then subcontract with non-LEA programs (e.g., community-based programs).

- **New Jersey** supports mixed delivery through LEA contracts by providing priority points to applications that “include collaboration with private providers” (i.e., licensed providers in non-public settings), and LEAs must include information documenting “due diligence in partnering with local licensed providers” (New Jersey Department of Education, 2025, p. 2).

Intermediary contracting uses local collaboratives, coalitions, or hubs as the contractual entity. These collaboratives may serve other functions in the state pre-K program or in the ECE

community broadly. In some states, a lead organization may be the contractual point of contact for a broader intermediary group.

- The **Florida** voluntary pre-K program partially supports early learning coalitions across the state, which administer mixed-delivery programs (Division of Early Learning, 2024). The coalitions are legislatively mandated and have a charge more comprehensive than just state pre-K.

Direct community-based contracting allows for individual community-based programs to apply directly to the state for funding.

- **Oregon's** Preschool Promise introduced “direct granting,” allowing “small, woman-owned businesses and nonprofits the opportunity to grant directly with the State and providing greater oversight for program administration” (Oregon Early Learning Division, 2023, p. 2).

Note that these contracting approaches are not mutually exclusive. Some states may allow joint non-LEA programs to apply directly for funding in joint applications with other programs, *or* to subcontract with an LEA/intermediary.

Multiyear contracts are a potential method to support the mixed delivery system. They provide community-based providers with greater funding stability, consistent enrollment, and greater perceived return on the additional administrative requirements of participating in state pre-K.

- The **Pennsylvania** Pre-K Counts program awards 5-year contracts (The Pennsylvania Key, n.d.).
- **Oregon** moved to offering 2-year contracts in 2023–24, which “resulted in a significant increase in enrollment compared to previous years” (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2025, p. 136).

Technical Assistance and Support

TA and program support are essential for engaging with community-based providers that lack the staffing, infrastructure, and scale of LEAs to implement pre-K programs. Below is a summary of strategies that states used to increase the capacity of community-based organizations to apply for and successfully participate in mixed delivery pre-K.

Leveraging existing support systems can build trust with community-based providers and disseminate information through established channels.

- **New Jersey** offers a mixed delivery toolkit with a suite of resources through Child Care Aware of New Jersey (n.d.).
- **Maryland** introduced a “Push to Pre-K” campaign in 2025 to educate community-based providers about the state mixed delivery system and support them during the application process. Pre-K specialists in the Department of Education are available for individual help (Maryland State Department of Education, n.d.).

- **Washington** Department of Children Youth and Families (2024) reported having a staff of 33 individuals dedicated to supporting state pre-K providers in five areas: readiness, innovation, and capacity; continuous quality improvement; data; operations; and management. Staff expertise includes early learning, comprehensive pre-K implementation, experience as state pre-K or Head Start parents, and specialized experience (e.g., data analysis or continuous quality improvement).

Coordination collaboratives, coalitions, or hubs can foster partnerships, address community-identified gaps, and offer shared functions that decrease the burden on programs.

- Both **Florida** and **Mississippi** have legislatively enabled early learning collaboratives designed to support local ECE communities. Florida’s collaboratives provide child care resource and referral, professional training, and other services (e.g., Classroom Assessment Scoring System [CLASS] training, guidance on inclusion, training for programs to ensure they meet state pre-K standards; Florida Admin. Code, 6M-9.120, 2022). Mississippi’s collaboratives provide access to quality supports to ensure consistency across the pre-K system (Miss. Senate Bill 2556, 2024).
- Collaboratives in **Oregon** and **Colorado** manage recruitment, intake, and enrollment of families in pre-K, thereby centralizing an activity that would otherwise require program resources (Colorado Department of Early Childhood, 2025).

Supporting the Inclusion of Family Child Care in Mixed Delivery Pre-K

Including FCC providers in state pre-K could increase the capacity of mixed delivery programs, although foundational work may be required to equip FCC providers with the resources needed to participate in mixed delivery systems. The inclusion of FCC providers in mixed delivery is relatively uncommon: Only 11 of 65 programs (17%) reported serving children in FCC homes (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2025). This result is likely due to challenges in meeting state pre-K requirements in small, home-based settings, such as enrollment and attendance targets, facility needs, and quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) participation (Weisenfeld & Frede, 2021). Formalized FCC inclusion in publicly funded programs is more common at the city or regional level, where there is some evidence that supporting FCC is more costly given the small scale of FCC homes (Hurley & Butel, 2018). There is relatively little information about concrete, statewide practices or support used by programs that allow FCC participation in pre-K. Nevertheless, emerging efforts are present:

- NIEER and Home Grown, an FCC think tank, are currently piloting the **Enriching Public Pre-K Through Inclusion of Family Child Care** initiative with four states: Alabama, Michigan, Nevada, and North Carolina. The model includes tailored support and funding in the form of \$25,000 planning grants (NIEER, 2024).

- **Maryland's** “Push to Pre-K” campaign, described above, provides outreach and tailored supports through the Department of Education to FCC providers seeking to apply for state pre-K funding (Maryland State Department of Education, n.d.). Additionally, the state funds the Growing Family Child Care Opportunities pilot program, which supplies cohort-based, intensive training and coaching for individuals opening FCC programs. Providers agree to business practices that can encourage participation in state pre-K, such as enrollment in the state QRIS. In 2024, the program reported facilitating the creation of 1,200 FCC slots (Loewenberg, 2024). Lastly, the 2024 legislation enabling the state’s mixed delivery system also created an “experience-based” qualification for providers with child care experience who agree to work toward a Child Development Associate credential or early childhood degree. FCC advocates supported this widening of eligibility criteria as a way to increase FCC providers’ participation in state pre-K (Md. House Bill 1441, 2024).
- Across all states, the **Oregon** Preschool Promise program reported the highest percentage (20%) of children served in FCC homes—a large increase over previous years and a rate much higher than any other state. SRI’s review of publicly available resources did not indicate FCC-specific supports. However, based on data from the Department of Early Learning and Care’s dashboard, the program currently serves 867 children at 84 sites, an average of 10 children per site (Oregon Early Learning Division, n.d.). Thus, Oregon may be encouraging FCC participation by supporting higher capacity in FCC homes.

Pay Parity for Teachers Working in Mixed Delivery Pre-K

In 2024, only 9 of 65 programs (14%) reported providing the same starting salary to lead teachers in LEAs and community-based settings, indicating a key challenge in mixed delivery systems (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2025). In the examples below, parity is based on equivalent education across settings, although how states document or verify professionals’ education varies. While DCYF expressed interest in learning how states formally cross-walked roles and responsibilities to determine pay parity across settings in instances where teaching qualifications vary, SRI did not find examples of states that aligned or expanded pay parity for community-based pre-K teachers who held differing qualifications from those of public pre-K teachers.

- **North Carolina** requires teachers in community-based settings to provide documentation of teacher licensure. There are several approved licenses for community-based teachers, including “lateral entry” licensures for teachers who have professional experience but may need to meet educational requirements prior to receiving full licensure. Once documented, teachers are eligible for compensation according to the statewide public teacher salary schedule (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, 2025).
- **New Mexico** offers a preschool pay parity program for teachers and administrators in state-funded, community-based settings. The program pays the difference between individuals’

actual salary and the statewide salary scale for public school pre-K teachers. Individuals are eligible to apply once they have obtained an associate degree in ECE as verified by a third-party vendor (New Mexico Early Childhood Education & Care Department, n.d.).

- **Nevada** requires teachers to obtain a bachelor's degree. Teachers in community-based settings verify education through their placement on the Nevada Registry Career Ladder, which the state licensing entity uses to process licensure. All teachers are eligible for salaries aligned with K–12 teachers (Nevada State Board of Education, 2021).

Considerations for Minnesota

As DCYF continues to strengthen its existing ECE community and looks toward expanding mixed delivery in state pre-K, SRI provides the following considerations:

Conduct more comprehensive discussions with states of interest. Publicly available legislation, policy, reports, and guidelines rarely include the process and rationale used to develop mixed delivery targets, intentionally support mixed delivery communities, and ensure pay parity. Further discussions with states can provide important insights and lessons learned.

Assess the capacity of Minnesota's existing systems and programs to serve the heightened needs of a mixed delivery workforce. Minnesota offers numerous programs and initiatives that could work in tandem to support the implementation of mixed delivery state pre-K:

- *Workforce support programs:* Assess the extent to which DCYF can tailor or scale-up the TEACH scholarship program, REETAIN bonuses, and Great Start Compensation to meet modified educational requirements or support pay parity. Understanding the extent to which current workforce programs support increased pay and qualifications can inform the design of a state mixed delivery system and provide an opportunity to garner support from community-based providers.
- *Develop registry:* Assess the potential use of Develop to verify education of community-based providers and provide workforce data relevant to state pre-K. Determine how career lattice designations align with upcoming changes to licensure requirements in school-based pre-K classrooms. Understanding this alignment can position DCYF to support teaching quality in mixed-delivery expansion.
- *Mixed delivery action labs:* At the formal conclusion of the MDALs, participants reflected on their progress toward community-established goals, deepened cross-setting relationships, and expressed a desire to continue participating in collaborative work. SRI recommends following up about the ongoing impact of the MDAL work in these communities and the status of relationship-building efforts. In the future, MDAL communities could act as mixed delivery pilot sites or provide input and expertise around the establishment of local collaboratives.

- *Mixed delivery coaching and technical assistance network:* Although the network is in an early stage of development, it establishes a strong basis for collaboration, coordination, and quality. SRI recommends assessing if and how DCYF can tailor the resources and support of this network to support the implementation needs of state pre-K, including mixed delivery. This assessment can position DCYF to formalize and expand supports for mixed delivery pre-K.

Engage with the broader ECE community to identify perceived barriers to participation in state-funded pre-K based on existing VPK guidelines and determine if there are opportunities to alleviate common challenges experienced by providers (e.g., using a centralized enrollment system to address under-enrollment). Facilitate conversations with FCC providers to understand what other support may be necessary to encourage their participation in mixed delivery and assess the potential additional capacity available through FCC homes.

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