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Researching universal prekindergarten: Thoughts on critical questions and research domains from policy makers, child advocates and researchers [1]

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Excerpts from the executive summary: One of the most significant education trends over the last decade has been government's expanded role in the funding of early childhood education programs. States have been in the forefront in developing innovative strategies to increase children's access to early childhood education. While most states continue to target early education resources to children believed to be at the highest risk of school failure, in recent years policy makers, educators, and advocates have begun to call for increased provision of early education programs for all children. The establishment of large-scale, publicly-funded and publicly or privately delivered Pre-K programs raises a complex series of issues and choices that policy makers must address. Universalizing access to Pre-K programs for 3- and 4-year-olds, which will require a considerable, long-term allocation of resources, has significant consequences for the existing landscape of public and private providers of early education and child care, but also has the potential to change permanently governmental responsibility for the beginning of young children's education. With education policy in this area progressing rapidly, policy-oriented research and evaluations are required to inform the development and implementation of universal Pre-K. In this context of potentially significant early education reform, Columbia University's Institute for Child and Family Policy interviewed more than 60 experts from across the country &em; federal and state policymakers and administrators, early childhood researchers, foundation executives, advocates, and representatives from national educational organizations. The semi-structured interviews were designed to (1) identify critical gaps in the research related to universal prekindergarten; and (2) identify key issues that federal and state policymakers must confront as they determine whether to establish universal Pre-K initiatives. This report synthesizes recommendations about the essential research needed to guide universal Pre-K policy and program implementation. In the first section, specific questions raised by respondents are listed according to seven critical research domains. The second section outlines themes about research and challenges to pursing a coordinated and responsive universal prekindergarten research agenda.

Region: United States [2]
Tags: pre-school [3]