

The road to high-quality early learning: Lessons from the States ^[1]

Author: Wechsler, Marjorie; Kirp, David; Tinubu Ali, Titilayo; Gardner, Madelyn; Maier, Anna; Melnick, Hanna & Shields, Patrick M.

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AVAILABILITY

Full report PDF ^[2]

Overview

Early education has emerged as a critical issue for state policymakers, who during the 2015-16 fiscal year alone invested nearly \$7 billion in programs for our country's youngest learners.¹ Support for preschool is broad and diverse, present in large and small states, in those densely and sparsely populated, and in states led by both Republicans and Democrats. Although there is considerable research on the elements of high-quality preschool and its many benefits,² there is little information available to policymakers about how to convert their visions of good early education into on-the-ground reality. This report fills that gap by describing and analyzing how four states—Michigan, West Virginia, Washington, and North Carolina—have built high-quality early education systems. It is based on reviews of policy documents, studies, and data in each state, as well as observations of programs and interviews with 159 individuals, including policymakers, program administrators, providers, teachers, parents, advocates, and researchers. These states exemplify an array of promising practices that are designed to meet a state's needs and to satisfy its priorities. Despite their differences, these states share a common commitment to advancing foundational elements of a quality preschool education. To make engaging, age-appropriate programs a reality, each of the states relies on common overarching strategies: establishing standards for quality and systems that incentivize improvement; investing in knowledgeable and skilled educators; coordinating and aligning early education programs; seeking sufficient funding sources and mechanisms; and building broad-based support.

Related link: Strengthening the early childhood workforce to assure high-quality early education ^[3]

Region: United States ^[4]

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