Louisiana

Background

Louisiana offers three pre-K programs: The Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program (LA 4), 8(g) Student Enhancement Block Grant, and the Non-Public School Early Childhood Development Program (NSECD).

The Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program (LA 4)

LA 4, Louisiana's primary preschool program for public school students, is a full-day pre-K program for four-year-olds. All four-year-olds in the state are eligible to participate, but only slots for students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch are funded by the state. Schools and districts that elect to include higher income students in LA 4 programs must either charge parent tuition or incur costs themselves. The Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) administers LA 4 through an annual competitive process. Only local education agencies are eligible to receive LA 4 funding.[1]

8(g) Student Enhancement Block Grant

8(g) is a block grant that local education agencies can use to offer full-day pre-K to four-year-olds who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch.[2] Grant recipients can also choose to use the grant for non-pre-K initiatives, such as supporting distance learning and purchasing textbooks. The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) administers 8(g) as a competitive grant program.[3]

Non-Public School Early Childhood Development Program (NSECD)

Administered by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE),[4] NSECD provides state-funded preschool for children in private schools and child care centers rated three stars or higher on the state's Quality Start child care rating system. NSECD reimburses participating non-public schools for the costs of serving four-year-olds who are eligible for free or reduced priced lunch.[5] As of FY15, only students in full-day programs can access NSCED funds.[6]

Charter schools in Louisiana

Louisiana permits start-up and conversion charter schools. Local school boards and the state board of education may serve as authorizers. Louisiana also permits the creation of a limited number of "local charter authorizers," which are state agencies and nonprofits approved by the state board to authorize charter schools in a particular geographic area. To ensure the quality of prospective authorizers, Louisiana limits the number of local charter authorizers in

TOTAL SCORE
34/50

Louisiana's climate for charter schools to offer pre-K is **somewhat hospitable***

⊕ There are no state statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K.

⊖ Compared to K–12 funding levels, low pre-K program funding makes offering pre-K less attractive to charters.

⊕ The size of the pre-K program does not limit charter access to funding.

⊖ The funding, application, or approval process creates a barrier to charter access.

⊕ Automatic enrollment from charter pre-K to kindergarten is not prohibited in legislation or practice.

* Louisiana's score is based on all three of Louisiana pre-K programs because they are similar along the indicators that we evaluated.

each regional labor market area and requires them to have the capacity to monitor at least five schools.[7]

Process for Accessing Pre-K Funds

Schools interested in offering any of Louisiana's early childhood programs apply through the state's electronic Grants Management System. Through the application, new providers can request first-time slots and existing providers can request additional slots.[8] Existing providers must reapply annually for continued funding. Funding preference is given to existing providers, particularly to sites that serve as many or more children than the number of slots for which they receive funding.[9]

In 2012, Louisiana passed Act 3 as a way to integrate and streamline state-funded pre-K programs. Act 3 created a new system in which community networks, led by a lead organization and comprised of school districts, charter schools, and non-school early education providers, review and submit pre-K provider applications to LDE.[10] Starting in the 2015–16 school year, any provider application for state pre-K funding will have to go through a community network. The ultimate goal is for networks to provide a single point of access for families to subsidized child care and preschool programs in the community—and to direct families and funds to quality slots in the community.

Barriers

There are three state funding streams for pre-K in Louisiana; the barriers focus on all three because they are similar along the indicators we evaluated.

Are there any statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K?

➕ **No**. Charter schools in Louisiana are permitted to offer LA 4, NSECD, and 8(g).[11] Agency documents for LA 4, NSECD,[12] and 8(g)[13] indicate that charter schools are eligible to receive funding through these programs.

Louisiana's charter school legislation, however, does not explicitly allow or prohibit charter schools from offering pre-K; it states that they may not include pre-K students in their funding formula count for state Minimum Foundation Program funds, but does not prohibit them from accessing other funds to serve preschool students.[14]

Thirty-four Louisiana charter schools currently offer pre-K. Twenty-six of them offer pre-K through LA 4.

Is the funding level of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

➖ **Yes**. Low pre-K program funding, compared to K–12 funding levels, makes pre-K less attractive to charters. Charter schools that offer half-day pre-K in Louisiana receive 41 percent of the per-pupil funding amount that charters receive to serve K–12 students. Over the past several years, the number of charter schools offering pre-K has declined because the amount of money that grantees receive for LA 4 is insufficient to cover the costs of delivering a program that meets state length-of-day and quality requirements.

Is the size of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

➕ **No**. The size of Louisiana's pre-K programs is not a barrier to charters accessing state pre-K funds. The programs serve nearly 30 percent of all four-year-olds in the state.

Is the application, approval, and/or funding process a barrier to charter access?

➖ **Yes**. The funding process is a barrier to charter schools offering pre-K in the state. Funding priority is given to existing providers, which limits opportunities for new providers, including charter schools, to access funding. In practice, however, more than one-third of elementary charter schools in Louisiana offer pre-K, suggesting that this barrier is less of an issue than in other states.

Is automatic enrollment from pre-K to kindergarten prohibited in legislation or practice?

➕ **No**. Louisiana's charter school legislation does not explicitly allow charter schools to enroll pre-K students directly into their kindergarten program. In practice, however, Louisiana charter schools that offer pre-K automatically enroll students from pre-K to kindergarten.

Recommendations

To address these barriers to charter access, Louisiana should:

- Increase the funding level for LA 4 to cover the costs of delivering a program that meets state requirements.
- Revise the state's charter school legislation or release guidance to state explicitly that charter schools may directly enroll students from their pre-K program into their kindergarten.
- Make the Louisiana "school readiness" tax credit, which provides businesses a tax credit for contributions to child care providers, available to charter schools, as well as child care providers.

	The Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program (LA 4)	Non-Public School Early Childhood Development Program (NSECD)	8(g) Student Enhancement Block Grant	Charter schools in Louisiana
Year created	Launched in 2001	Launched in 2001	Launched in 1993[15]	Charter law enacted in 1995[16]
Children in state	128,430 three- and four-year-olds in Louisiana[17]			927,736 school-age children in Louisiana[18]
Children served	16,283 seats allocated[19] 0 percent of three-year-olds 25 percent of four-year-olds	1,568 seats allocated 0 percent of three-year-olds 2 percent of four-year-olds	2,634 children served 0 percent of three-year-olds 4 percent of four-year-olds[20]	58,691 students served 6.3 percent of school-age population 117 charter schools[21]
Charters offering pre-K	Thirty-four charter schools in Louisiana offer pre-K.[22]			Ninety-two charter schools in Louisiana offer elementary programs.[23]
Funding	Districts receive $4,580 per pupil to offer LA 4.[24]	Nonpublic schools and child care providers receive $4,580 per pupil to offer pre-K.[25]	Grantees receive $7.78 per pupil in the districts (grades P–12) to offer pre-K, in addition to a $60,000 base funding per district.[26]	Charter schools receive $11,134 per pupil to serve K–12.[27]

Endnotes

1   Louisiana Department of Education (LDE), "Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program Guidelines and Implementation Handbook," Winter 2011, http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/uploads/18623.pdf, 6–7.

2   LDE, "2014–2015 Requirements and Guidelines for Public School and Nonpublic School Early Childhood Development Prekindergarten Programs," https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/early-childhood/2014-15-requirements-and-guidelines.pdf?sfvrsn=10, 18.

3   LDE, "Louisiana Believes" welcome page, http://www.louisianabelieves.com/early-childhood/early-childhood-programs.

4   Ibid.

5   LDE, "2014–2015 Requirements and Guidelines," 19.

6   LDE, "Summary of 2014–15 Requirements and Guidelines: Updates," https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/early-childhood/summary-of-2014-15-prek-updates.pdf?sfvrsn=2.

7   National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS), "Measuring Up: Louisiana," http://www.publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/law-database/states/LA/.

8   LDE, "2014–15 Early Childhood Competitive eGrant Application for LA 4, NSECD, and 8(g) Programs" (webinar), https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/early-childhood/2014-15-prek-competitive-app-webinar-la-4-8(g)-nsecd.pdf?sfvrsn=2.

9   LDE, "2014–2015 Requirements and Guidelines."

10   LDE webinar.

11   Louisiana State Legislature, LSA-R.S. 17:24.10, https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/links-for-newsletters/2014la4-rsdtype2-orleans-app-addendum.pdf?sfvrsn=2.

12   LDE, "2014–2015 Requirements and Guidelines," 22.

13   LSE, "2014–2015 Guidelines for the Submission of 8(g) Competitive Grant Proposals," February 17, 2014, http://bese.louisiana.gov/docs/8(g)-competitive-grant-program-2014-15/8(g)-competitive-guidelines.pdf?sfvrsn=2.

14   Louisiana State Legislature, LSA-R.S. 17:3995 (6)(b)F, https://www.legis.la.gov/legis/law.aspx?d=80980.

15   W. Steven Barnett et al., "The State of Preschool 2013: State Preschool Yearbook" (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2013), http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2013.pdf.

16   NAPCS, "Measuring Up: Louisiana."

17   State population data calculated using ACS 2012 five-year estimates; U.S. Census Bureau, "American Community Survey," www.census.gov/acs.

18   Ibid., all children in households, three to seventeen years old.

19   Interview with LDE representative, January 11, 2015.

20   W. Steven Barnett et al., "The State of Preschool 2013."

21   NAPCS, "Measuring Up: Louisiana."

22   Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools, school directory page, http://lacharterschools.org/charter-schools/school-directory.

23   Ibid.

24   LDE, "2014–2015 Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program Handbook," https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/early-childhood/2014-15-la-4-handbook.pdf?sfvrsn=2.

25   NSECD providers that are rated three stars or higher receive the same funding, per pupil, as LA 4.

26   Interview with LDE representative, January 11, 2015. Charters can only access the per-pupil amount, not the base funding. The per-pupil amount is for all enrolled students in K–12, not just pre-K students.

27   Larry Maloney et al., "Charter School Funding: Inequality Expands," Louisiana section (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Department of Education Reform, School Choice Demonstration Project, April 2014), http://www.uaedreform.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/charter-funding-inequity-expands-la.pdf.