

Maine

Background

Maine Public Preschool Program

The Maine Public Preschool Program (PPP) subsidizes part-day pre-K for four-year-olds. Funds are distributed through the state school funding formula to local school districts, school administrative units (groups of school districts), and charter schools. Participating districts can choose to contract with Head Start, private centers, and family child care homes to provide pre-K. Enrollment eligibility criteria for children are determined locally.

The State Agency Interdepartmental Early Learning (SAIEL) team administers PPP through its early childhood consultant, who approves all PPP applications. Offering preschool is voluntary, and school districts interested in offering preschool must obtain prior approval from the Maine Department of Education.

Charter schools in Maine

Maine permits start-up and conversion charter schools. Local school boards, a collaborative of local boards, or the State Charter Schools Commission can authorize charter schools. Only the State Charter School Commission can serve as an authorizer for virtual charter schools.

Process for Accessing Pre-K Funds

Charter schools interested in offering pre-K must first be approved by their authorizer to include pre-K in their charter contract. Maine follows a “money-follows-the-child” approach to charter school funding, in which the district or school administrative unit (SAU) in which a child resides must transfer the per-pupil allocation for that child to the charter school. If a district chooses to offer preschool, those funds (including both state and local funds) follow pre-K children to charter schools in the same way as for grades K–12.¹ However, a charter school can only receive pre-K funding for students whose home SAU offers pre-K. A charter school will not receive pre-K funds for children who live in a district that does not serve pre-K, because districts only transfer funding for students in grades they serve.



TOTAL SCORE

45/50


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

- + There are no state statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K.
- + Compared to K–12 funding levels, pre-K program funding is sufficient to attract charters.
- + The size of the pre-K program does not limit charter access to funding.
- + The funding, application, and approval processes do not create barriers to charter access.
- + Automatic enrollment from charter pre-K to kindergarten is not prohibited in legislation or practice.




Barriers

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


 **No.** The state’s pre-K legislation, which was passed before the charter law, does not mention charter schools, but Maine’s charter school legislation explicitly allows charter schools to offer pre-K. The legislation defines a charter school as “a public school formed pursuant to this chapter that... provides a program of education [for] one or more of the following: preschool, prekindergarten and any grade or grades from kindergarten to grade 12.”

Only one charter school in the state, the Fiddlehead School of Arts and Sciences, offers pre-K. Fiddlehead receives per-pupil preschool funds from its students’ home school district.


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

 **No.** The funding level is not a barrier to charters offering pre-K in Maine. Charter schools that offer half-day pre-K services receive between 52 and 126 percent of the amount they receive for K–12 students, depending on the student’s characteristics (for example, free- or reduced-price lunch eligibility, English-language learner status).


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

 **No.** The size of the program is not a barrier to charters accessing state pre-K funds. The program serves more than a third of all four-year-olds in the state. Charter schools can receive per-pupil pre-K funds for students whose home district offers pre-K, and 63 percent of Maine districts that offer kindergarten offer pre-K.

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

 **No.** Charter schools approved by their authorizer to offer pre-K automatically receive per-pupil pre-K funds for students whose home district offers pre-K.

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

 **No.** Charter schools can directly enroll pre-K students into their kindergarten program.²

Recommendations

Although Maine currently poses few barriers to charters’ ability to offer pre-K, additional barriers may arise as the charter sector in Maine grows and more charter schools seek to offer pre-K.

Maine should:

- Increase the percentage of Maine school districts that choose to offer pre-K.
- Revise the state’s pre-K legislation (which was passed before the charter law) to list charter schools as potential pre-K providers.



	Public Preschool Program (PPP)	Charter schools in Maine
Year created	Launched in 1983 ³	Charter law enacted in 2011 ⁴
Children in state	28,774 three- and four-year-olds in Maine ⁵	233,044 school-age children in Maine ⁶
Children served	5,088 children served 0 percent of three-year-olds 34 percent of four-year-olds ⁷	400 students served <1 percent of school-age population Five charter schools ⁸
Charters offering pre-K	One charter school in Maine offers pre-K. ⁹	Two charter schools in Maine offer elementary school programs. ¹⁰
Funding	Charter schools receive between \$3,784 and \$8,212 per pupil to offer pre-K. ¹¹	Charter schools receive \$6,509 per pupil to serve K–12 students. ¹²

Endnotes

1 Maine Department of Education, Charter School Founders & Operators, <http://www.maine.gov/doe/charterschools/founders.html#fund>.

2 20-A M.R.S.A. § 2404.

3 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>.

4 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS), “Measuring Up: Maine,” <http://www.publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/law-database/states/ME/>.

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

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

7 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013.”

8 NAPCS, “Measuring Up: Maine.”

9 “FAQ,” Fiddlehead School of Arts, <http://fiddleheadschool.org/about/f-a-q/>.

10 “Authorized Schools,” Maine Charter School Commission, 2012, <http://www.maine.gov/csc/schools.html>.

11 Interview with MDE representative, December 14, 2014. This funding range is for how much charter schools may receive to offer pre-K, per pupil, based on the state funding formula (Essential Programs & Services). The EPS formula is weighted for various student identifications (e.g., low-income, special education, limited English proficiency, pre-K to second grade attendance), <http://www.maine.gov/doe/eps/>.

12 Interview with MDE representative, December 14, 2014.