



Mixed Delivery Evaluation Final Report - Executive Summary

Evaluation of Virginia's Mixed Delivery Preschool Pilot Program

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Positive experiences during the early years can dramatically change a child's life. Decades of robust research suggest high-quality early childhood programs can have substantial impacts on children's academic achievement in school and positive long-term outcomes later in life. As a result, momentum has continued to grow supporting the expansion of early education opportunities. However, despite increasing investment, demand has outpaced these efforts, resulting in too many families today without access to the benefits of affordable high-quality programs. Moreover, many providers of early childhood programming are also facing real challenges. Lack of funding results in community-based centers having to navigate and weave together multiple sources of funding to support quality programming. Even so, many centers are required to operate on thin margins, struggle to adequately compensate teachers, and must work with limited administrative capacity. In comparison, public schools often have more central office capacity leading to greater resources supporting teacher and programming needs. At the same time, many families find the school-day hours limited, or value the smaller and more specialized setting community-based centers can offer. For these reasons, many states have adopted "mixed delivery models," which offer publicly funded pre-K slots in both public schools and private child care centers. Mixed delivery allows families to consider publicly funded settings that provide year-round care and flexible hours that align with work schedules and are responsive to family needs and preferences about what type of environment they desire for their children.



Recently, Virginia has taken bold steps to explore the potential benefits of mixed delivery. In 2016, with support from the governor and the Virginia General Assembly, the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) launched the Mixed Delivery Preschool Pilot Program. The Mixed Delivery Preschool Pilot Program was created in response to the recognition that local community innovation can shed light on building a more robust system of delivery that will benefit families with young children across the state. The pilot program was developed to be an innovative grant program that provides the opportunity for the state to explore locally driven lessons about how to maximize the use of public pre-K investments. To that end, the pilot program awarded grants to local communities throughout Virginia to test replicable innovative strategies to increase the number of publicly funded pre-K slots in private child care centers. As a key part of this initiative, a rigorous evaluation of Cohorts 1 (Mixed Delivery grantees in 2016-17) and 2 (Mixed Delivery grantees in 2017-18) was conducted to examine the implementation and outcomes of the program. The study examined four research questions:

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the language, literacy, numeracy, and self-regulation outcomes of children who attended programs that participated in the Mixed Delivery Preschool Pilot Program and how do those outcomes compare to outcomes achieved by students in public school VPI classrooms?
2. What is the relationship between teacher qualifications and child developmental outcomes among preschool children in mixed delivery and public school classrooms?
3. What are the program quality and teaching practice outcomes for programs participating in the Mixed Delivery Preschool Pilot Program?
4. What were the experiences of grantees that implemented the Mixed Delivery Preschool Pilot Program?

The results of the study show a significant amount of promise for the Mixed Delivery Preschool Pilot Program and for the broader implementation of a mixed delivery public preschool model in Virginia, as demonstrated by both impact outcomes and also implementation findings. Overall, the state investment in communities' exploration of this important option helped to highlight:

- The positive impact that mixed delivery programs can have on children's developmental outcomes
- The effectiveness of classroom teachers across a range of settings and qualifications, leading to important benefits for children's school readiness outcomes
- Important quality improvement and systems-building efforts taken on by mixed delivery communities in their work to increase quality and meet the range of needs and desires of families in their efforts to access high-quality public preschool options

Key Findings

1. Children in mixed delivery classrooms showed substantial growth in literacy skills during their preschool year and had Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS)-PreK scores that met or surpassed developmental milestones at the end of preschool.
2. The majority of children in both mixed delivery and public school Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) classrooms had language, literacy, and math scores that met or exceeded typical scores for their age group in the spring of their preschool year.
3. Matched children in mixed delivery and public school VPI classrooms had similar spring scores, on average, in math, literacy, language, and self-regulation.
4. Teacher qualifications varied across mixed delivery classrooms and public school VPI classrooms, yet children achieved similar outcomes across the different settings.
5. Lead teacher qualifications were not significantly related to children's literacy, language, or self-regulation outcomes, though having a bachelor's degree and having a CDA were positively associated with children's math outcomes.
6. In a one-year period, many mixed delivery programs progressed to higher Virginia Quality ratings.
7. Teachers in public school VPI programs and in private settings may have different strengths and supports for instruction and interaction, including children's social-emotional development and child assessment.
8. Mixed delivery communities all advanced in formalizing shared governance, establishing partnerships, increasing access and using data, building workforce capacity, and leveraging funding.

The pilot project provides evidence that mixed delivery approaches hold great promise for Virginia. The outcome evaluation shows that the majority of pupils in both VPI and mixed delivery classrooms achieved outcomes that met or exceeded outcomes typical for their age group and that pupils in mixed delivery classrooms achieved outcomes comparable to those of pupils in VPI classrooms. Teacher credentials varied across both settings, yet, except for math scores, there was no association between credentials and child outcomes. The implementation evaluation demonstrates that mixed delivery communities produced many essential systems-level changes, including improved quality in mixed delivery classrooms after one year of participation, and observable improvements in public-private collaboration needed to support the expansion of mixed delivery. These positive outcomes strongly suggest that expanding mixed delivery can be a viable and desirable public policy option for the Commonwealth.