

# Preschool Education for three- and four-year-olds in Kansas and Missouri: Reflections on State to State “Laboratories of Democracy”

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*“Children who attend high-quality preschool programs are less likely to utilize special education services or be retained in their grade, and are more likely to graduate from high school, go on to college, and succeed in their careers than those who have not attended a high-quality preschool program.”<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

### The Importance and Need for Preschool Education

There is a growing recognition on the importance of education in the lives of preschoolers. Preschool is generally recognized as the years before the formal beginning of schooling in kindergarten, whether kindergarten is required by state statutes or not. For the sake of this article preschool education is focused on children who are three- and four-years-old, the pre-kindergarten years. Preschool in two mid-western states, Kansas and Missouri, are being examined, compared and reflected upon as “Laboratories of Democracy.”

It is acknowledged that, “The first five years of a child’s life are the most important for healthy development and long-term well-being. The experiences and relationships formed during this period of rapid brain development build a foundation for future learning and success.”<sup>2</sup> At birth, a child has one hundred billion brain cells (neurons) and the brain is about a quarter the size of an adult’s brain. By the time, the child is five years-old their brain has grown to 90 percent of its adult size. “The early years are also when connections between brain cells are being made at an amazing rate — at least one million new neural connections (synapses) every second, far more than at any other time in life. This inner wiring enables a very young child to control their body and start to learn about the world.”<sup>3</sup>

During these critical years of cognitive growth, it is vital that a child benefits from high-quality preschool education. It is imperative that our youngest of children participate in educational programs before entering kindergarten which boosts their development and, thus, prepares them for their future lives as adults.

Research in early childhood education is steeped in a tradition of evaluating the care and educational opportunities for all children as related to their present success and as a predictor for continuing their future success. According to an article in *The Harvard Gazette*:

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<sup>1</sup> US Department of Education, *A Matter of Equity: Preschool in America*, ERIC Number ED555741, (US Department of Education, 2015), accessed May 3, 2021, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED555741.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> “Let’s Close the Opportunity Gap,” Start Early, accessed April 28, 2021, <https://www.startearly.org/why-early-childhood/>.

<sup>3</sup> First Things First, *Brain Development*, accessed April 28, 2021, <https://files.firstthingsfirst.org/for-parents-and-families/brain-development>.

In early childhood education, the most influential research includes the Perry Preschool Study, conducted in the mid-1960s at a Michigan preschool, and the Abecedarian Project, conducted in the 1970s in North Carolina. Both studies, which followed children into their adult years, found that the children who received preschool education thrived more than those who did not. The preschool children earned more money, were more law-abiding, were more likely to graduate from high school, and even were healthier.<sup>4</sup>

In 2016, “Nationwide, state-funded preschool program enrollment reached an all-time high, serving nearly 1.5 million children, 32 percent of 4-year-olds and 5 percent of 3-year-olds.”<sup>5</sup> In 2020 there were 55,777 licensed child care slots for children in licensed centers in Kansas and a total of 138,484 slots for children in licensed child care centers in Missouri. Further information about child care in Kansas follows later in this article and child care in Missouri is shown in Table 1 below:

**Table 1.** Child Care in Missouri

Types of Child Care	Missouri
Number of Licensed Centers	2,609
Total Capacity (Slots) of Licensed Centers	138,484
Number of Nationally Accredited Centers	118
Total Capacity (Slots) of Accredited Centers	10,379
Number of Licensed Family Child Care (FCC) Programs	765
Total Capacity (Slots) of Licensed FCC Programs	7,428
Total Capacity (Slots) for Preschoolers (4 year old)	80,845

*Source: Childcare Aware of America, from Child Care Data Center & State Fact Sheets at <https://www.childcareaware.org/our-issues/research/ccdc/>.*

The need for quality educational programs for preschoolers is profound. Educational programs for children before they enter kindergarten are increasing in importance and prevalence. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the United States in 1970 12.9 percent of three-year-olds were enrolled in preschool and in 2018 it increased to 38.7 percent of three-year-old children enrolled in preschool. In 1970, 27.8 percent of four-year-olds were enrolled in preschool and this percentage grew to 67.7 percent enrolled in preschool in 2018.<sup>6</sup>

In 2019, as Table 2 shows, there were a total of 8,041,988 three and four-year-old children in the United States, with 114,937 living in Kansas and 150,798 residing in Missouri.

We must be responsive to the needs of our youngest of citizens. As Children’s Defense Fund President Emerita Marian Wright Edelman said, “Children under five are the poorest age group in America, and one in four infants, toddlers and preschoolers are poor during the years of greatest brain development.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Liz Mineo, “Gauging How Children Grow, Learn, Thrive,” *The Harvard Gazette*, February 6, 2018, accessed April 24, 2021, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2018/02/early-learning/>.

<sup>5</sup> W. Steven Barnett et al., *The State of Preschool 2017* (New Brunswick, NJ: The National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers Graduate School of Education, 2017), 8.

<sup>6</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, (Enrollment of 3, 4, and 5-year-old children in preprimary programs, by age of child, level of program, control of program, and attendance status: Selected years, 1970-2018), accessed September 6, 2021, [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19\\_202.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_202.10.asp).

<sup>7</sup> Marian Wright Edelman, president emerita of the Children’s Defense Fund, accessed May 3, 2021, [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/marian\\_wright\\_edelman\\_463717](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/marian_wright_edelman_463717).

**Table 2.** Three- and Four-year-olds in the United States and in Kansas and Missouri in 2019<sup>8</sup>

Location	Single Age	
United States	3 years old	3,998,665 children in 2019
	4 years old	4,043,323 children in 2019
Kansas	3 years old	38,289 children in 2019
	4 years old	38,359 children in 2019
Missouri	3 years old	75,116 children in 2019
	4 years old	75,682 children in 2019

In addition to advances in neuroscience and research which validate that the early years of a child’s life are a critical period of growth, the following three benefits are among many provided by a preschool education:

1. Preschool teaches children to follow directions and strengthens their social, emotional, physical, and cognitive skills.

Three and four-year-olds learn to follow adult directions as they learn to listen to and then follow the teacher’s directions, including the following: how to line-up, put away their art materials, dress themselves in their outer garments for outdoor play, and wash their hands. These are essential social skills needed to successfully navigate their current and future personal interactions in school. Preschool provides numerous opportunities for children to increase their social and emotional development, such as “learning to share and take turns, showing empathy for classmates and self-regulating their own strong emotions. Without skills like these, children will have a hard time moving on to academic achievement in later years.”<sup>9</sup> Physically, preschool provides numerous opportunities for children to strengthen their small motor control, which strengthens muscles for holding a pencil and writing needed for cognitive growth and large muscle development which gives children the ability to run, jump, balance, and dance. As Dr. Jennifer Jones, CEO and founder of the Green Ivy Schools says, “Preschool helps children make mind-body connections that not only develop these skills but boost their self-confidence as children feel physically capable and self-sufficient in their bodies.”<sup>10</sup>

2. Publicly-funded preschool programs are budget-savers for families.

The cost of a child attending preschool in the United States is often a costly endeavor for the family. Although the cost of preschool is dependent on the family’s city, state, and the quality of the preschool program, the need for federally supported programs for children before they enter kindergarten is a need shared across state lines. “Most preschool fees are comparable to the high prices charged by daycare centers. Depending on where you live and the quality of the preschool, average costs range from \$4,460 to \$13,158 per year (\$372 to \$1,100 monthly),

<sup>8</sup> Kids Count, accessed, May 6, 2021, <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/100-child-population-by-single-age>.

<sup>9</sup> “Social and Emotional Development,” Bonnie Academy, February 11, 2021, accessed April 30, 2021, <http://www.bonnieacademy.com/social-and-emotional-development>.

<sup>10</sup> Ashley Brooks, “Shining a Light on Little-known Benefits of Preschooling,” *Rasmussen University Education Blog*, September 23, 2019, accessed May 16, 2021, <https://www.rasmussen.edu/degrees/education/blog/benefits-of-preschool/>.

according to the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA).”<sup>11</sup>

3. Preschool services for children are essential to provide equity, such as, to those children whose families have limited finances, are young dual-language learners, whose first language is not English, and for those preschoolers who have special needs.

As the United States Secretary of Education Ann Duncan said, “I believe that every single child deserves the opportunity for a strong start in life through high-quality preschool.”<sup>12</sup> However, not every family can afford a high-quality preschool education for their child. To assure that all children have access to a high-quality preschool experience, federally funded programs, such as Head Start, are crucial for academically, socially, emotionally, and physically “leveling the playing field.” In addition to Head Start, numerous other federally sponsored programs assist children who come from early experiences of economic scarcity, are dual-language learners and/or have special needs. These young children, in particular, require high-quality preschool experiences to be prepared for kindergarten like their more advantageous peers.

## Preschool Education in Kansas and Missouri

### History of Preschool in Kansas

*“If I went West, I think I would go to Kansas.”*  
(Abraham Lincoln, March 17, 1860)<sup>13</sup>

What is now recognized as the state of Kansas was once the large eastern portion of the territory of Kansas from May 30, 1854, until its admission as the 34<sup>th</sup> state in the Union on January 29, 1861. Soon after statehood was established in the early 1860s there were several recorded private preschools in the state’s capital city, Topeka. Historically, the term “kindergarten” is equivalent to the current term, “preschool.” An account of the advent of preschools in Kansas is described in the following excerpt in the publication titled, “Kindergarten in Kansas: A View from the Beginning:”

Records show, in fact, that the very first kindergarten in Kansas was founded in the early 1860s by Miss Lillian Davidson in the North Topeka Congregational Church. During this time, Miss Anna Broderick also taught a kindergarten class for several years in her home. Around 1866, sisters Miss Bertha and Miss Nellie Dick established a kindergarten in their spacious Topeka residence; in the 1880s, Miss Alice Watkins, a graduate of the Cincinnati Free Kindergarten Training School, opened one in her home. These kindergartens [preschools] were all private, available only to white children whose families paid for their schooling. Sheldon [Dr. Charles Sheldon, the Minister of the Central Congregational Church and a sociologist living in Topeka] considered it essential that Black children get a good education. He also believed, as did many others at this time, that the kindergarten could be used to bring about social reform. In 1893, as a result of his efforts, a kindergarten was opened in Tennessee Town [a neighborhood in Topeka so named since many of the residents living there had originally lived in the state of Tennessee] in Jordan Hall, known as Union Hall, while it served as a classroom.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Dana Dubinsky, “Preschool: How Much Does it Cost,” *BabyCenter*, accessed May 2, 2012, [https://www.babycenter.com/family/money/preschool-how-much-does-it-cost\\_6061](https://www.babycenter.com/family/money/preschool-how-much-does-it-cost_6061).

<sup>12</sup> US Department of Education, *A Matter of Equity: Preschool in America*.

<sup>13</sup> “Lincoln in Kansas-Part 2,” Kansas Historical Society, accessed April 20, 2021, <https://www.kshs.org/p/lincoln-in-kansas-part-2/15758>.

<sup>14</sup> Judith Lynne McConnell, “Kindergarten in Kansas: A View from the Beginning,” *Journal of Education* 177, no. 3 (1995): 9-22.

Tennessee Town kindergarten is recorded as the first kindergarten (preschool) for African-American children west of the Mississippi River. The Tennessee Town kindergarten was a segregated non-white school, as were other educational and community-wide facilities during those years in Topeka. Once the children graduated from the Tennessee Town kindergarten they continued their education at a segregated elementary and junior high school. Historically, Topeka High School did accept non-white students, although many activities such as school sports and dances were segregated.

According to *Brown v. Board of Education: Its' Impact on Public Education 1954-2004*,

The lineage of the *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education* Supreme Court case began before the historic decision in 1954 and continued sporadically for the next forty-five years until its resolution in 1999. Regarded by many as the most important Supreme Court decision of the century, historian Juan Williams said, ‘When you look at Brown you are looking at a moment so powerful it is the equivalent of the Big Bang in our solar system.’<sup>15</sup>

Subsequent to the 1954 ruling, Brown II in 1955 and Brown III in 1999 changed opportunities for schooling in Kansas and nationwide for generations of preschoolers and older students.

### History of Early Childhood Education in Missouri: The Public School Kindergarten Movement

*“If we can make children love intellectual effort, we shall prolong habits of study beyond school years.”*  
Susan Elizabeth Blow<sup>16</sup>  
(1843-1916)

In 1803, what is now the state of Missouri was part of the area France sold to the United States as part of the Louisiana Purchase, and in 1821 Missouri was admitted as the twenty-fourth state in the union. The state of Missouri has a rich history of early childhood education, in particular for what we now know as preschool education of three- and four-year-olds. In 1873, a kindergarten opened in the Des Peres School in Saint Louis, Missouri; it was the first publicly funded kindergarten in the United States.

The director of the Des Peres School, Susan Elizabeth Blow,<sup>17</sup> was strongly influenced by Friedrich Froebel (1792-1852), the “Father of Kindergarten.” He used the word “kindergarten,” which translates to “garden of children” in English, to describe the infant school he founded and directed in Bad Blankenburg, Germany, in 1837. Froebel believed that:

The teacher’s role was not to drill or indoctrinate the children but rather to encourage their self-expression through play, both individually and in group activities. Froebel devised circles, spheres, and other toys—all of which he referred to as ‘gifts’ or ‘occupations’—that were designed to stimulate learning through play activities accompanied by songs and music.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Judith Lynne McConnell, Blythe Hinitz, and Gloria A. Dye, “Implications of the 1993 Brown III Case on Topeka Public Schools,” in *Brown v. Board of Education: Its' Impact on Public Education 1954-2004*, ed. Dara Byrne (New York: Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund, 2005), 49-66.

<sup>16</sup> “Susan Blow,” Historic Missourians, accessed June 5, 2021, <https://historicmissourians.shsmo.org/susan-blow>.

<sup>17</sup> Susan Blow’s parents and her aunts and uncles cared for and supported those less fortunate. It was with her family’s approval and financial support that she began a public school kindergarten for children who would otherwise not have received an early education. The historical figure, Dred Scott (1799-1858) best known for the historic case *Scott v. Sandford*, 1857, was a former slave of Susan Blow’s grandfather, Peter Blow. Her father, Henry Taylor Blow, and his siblings rejected slavery and financially backed Scott in his freedom suit before the Missouri state courts. Henry Taylor Blow and his brothers purchased and freed Dred Scott in 1857. Article accessed June 2, 2021, <https://historicmissourians.shsmo.org/dred-scott>.

<sup>18</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, “Friedrich Froebel,” accessed May 25, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Friedrich-Froebel>.

The “gifts,” which were a collection of wooden blocks, and the “occupations” such as paper folding, stones, shells, chalk, wax and clay, were the instructional materials which Froebel believed guided the children to learn universal truths. During Froebel’s lifetime and through the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Froebelian kindergartens where teachers guided children’s play using “gifts” and “occupations” were established in Austria, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Hungary, Japan, Switzerland, and the United States.

Often referred to as the “Mother of Kindergarten,” Blow was born in St. Louis and educated by private tutors. She developed an interest in teaching during a family trip to Germany in 1871 and was impressed by the education of young children in Froebel’s school. Upon her return to St. Louis, she discussed the possibility of opening a kindergarten program in the local public school system with the approval of William Torrey Harris, the then St. Louis superintendent of schools. With support from Harris, the first publicly funded kindergarten program in the United States was established. Blow did not receive a salary and she paid the expenses for the school during its first year of operation. By 1880, due to Blow’s dedication to early childhood education, fifty-eight kindergartens in St. Louis had been started serving over 9,000 children. Blow was an advocate for Froebelian kindergartens and a scholar who published five books on Froebel’s philosophy of education, a book on Dante, and served as a lecturer from 1905-1909 at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York City.<sup>19</sup>

## Licensing and Regulations for Preschools and Preschool Teachers in Kansas and Missouri

### Licensing and Regulations for Preschools in Kansas

In 1919, Kansas passed the law requiring the licensure of programs providing child care services to children. The law arose from the need to protect children from poor environments in group settings which put children’s health and safety at risk. The state, by its actions, acknowledged its responsibility to protect the health, safety and well-being of children in out of home care.<sup>20</sup>

During the subsequent years licensing of child care facilities has been tested through court cases questioning their authority to so license. In 1980 the Kansas Supreme Court in *State ex rel. O’Sullivan v. Heart Ministries, Inc.*, under the doctrine of *parens patriae* (wherein the state is deemed the supreme guardian of the children), stated that the state has power to legislate for the protection of minor children within its jurisdiction. Five years later in *State ex rel. Pringle v. Heritage Baptist Temple, Inc.* it was found that the operation of a day care facility by a church is held not to be a religious practice and, therefore, is not exempt from regulation by the state.

The purpose for state licensing of facilities is to reduce the risk of predictable harm to children when they are students in a child care facility. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), Bureau of Family Health, Child Care Licensing Section administers and regulates child care licensing within the state. The total number of facilities and capacity by program type are regulated by strict licensing standards which control the following designated licensing of programs: licensed day care homes, group day care homes, child care centers, and preschools. Each of these facilities designated for young children are further described below; this info was current as of June 30, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Mary Ruth Moore and Constance Sabo-Risley, “Our Proud Heritage. Sowing the Seeds of Hope for Today: Remembering the Life and Work of Susan Blow,” *Young Children* 73, no. 5 (November 2018), accessed May 12, 2021, <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/nov2018/remembering-life-work-susan-blow>.

<sup>20</sup> Kansas Department for Health and Environment, *Child Care Licensing: The Basis for and Purpose of Child Care Regulation*, January 2001, accessed May 5, 2021, [https://www.kdheks.gov/bcclr/download/CHILD\\_CARE\\_LICENSING\\_INFORMATION\\_and\\_HISTORY.pdf](https://www.kdheks.gov/bcclr/download/CHILD_CARE_LICENSING_INFORMATION_and_HISTORY.pdf).

## Licensed Day Care Homes

In Kansas there are 2,217 licensed day care homes with a capacity of 22,147 children.<sup>21</sup> In such child care facilities a maximum of ten children under the age of sixteen is allowed, which includes children under eleven years of age who are related to the facilities' provider. Further details on licensing day care homes follow:

- The license is usually issued for the provider's own home but may be issued at a location other than the provider's home. The license identifies the address of the child care facility.
- The licensee must be eighteen years of age, have an understanding of children, and complete certified first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) as well as child care related training.
- A Kansas Bureau of Investigation (KBI) criminal history and child abuse and neglect background check is processed on all persons living, working or volunteering in the licensed day care home.
- State licensing fee is \$85. Local fees may also apply.
- The Licensed Day Care Home is inspected to check compliance with regulations to protect the health, safety and well-being of the children in care at least once every twelve months. The KDHE contracts with local county health departments or private contractors to conduct on-site inspections.<sup>22</sup>

## Group Day Care Home

Within the state there are 1,217 licensed group day care homes facilities with a capacity of 15,479 children.<sup>23</sup> The group day care home regulations are identical to the licensed day care home in all respects except care is provided for a maximum of twelve children, the yearly state licensing fee is \$87, and the licensed group day care home must be approved for fire safety.<sup>24</sup>

## Child Care Centers

Six hundred and twenty-seven licensed child care center facilities are in Kansas with a capacity of 50,717 children.<sup>25</sup> The care and education in a licensed child care center facility are provided for thirteen or more children ages two weeks to sixteen years of age for more than three hours and less than twenty-four hours per day, including time during the day, evening and nighttime. It also provides before and after school care for school-aged children. Following are specific regulations:

- A qualified program director must be employed at the center full time. Each unit must have qualified staff at all times when children are in care. Qualifications are stated by regulation and are based on the number of children in care.
- Staff caring for children must have an understanding of children, complete first aid, have a recognition of symptoms of illness, child abuse and neglect, and other child care job-related training.
- A KBI criminal history and child abuse and neglect background check is processed on all persons living, working or volunteering in the licensed child care center facility.
- State licensing fee is \$75 plus \$1 for each child in the total capacity. For example, for a capacity of sixty children, the required initial and annual fee is \$135. Local fees may also apply.

<sup>21</sup> Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Bureau of Family Health, Child Care Licensing Section. "FY 2020 Total Facility Count and Total Capacity June 30, 2020," accessed May 6, 2021, [https://www.kdheks.gov/bcclr/facilities/Facility\\_Count\\_&Capacity\\_FY2020.pdf](https://www.kdheks.gov/bcclr/facilities/Facility_Count_&Capacity_FY2020.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> Kansas Department of Health and Environment, *Licensing and Regulation for Child Care Facilities: Definitions and Requirements*, accessed May 6, 2021, [https://www.kdheKS.gov/bcclr/lic\\_and\\_req.html](https://www.kdheKS.gov/bcclr/lic_and_req.html).

<sup>23</sup> Kansas Department of Health and Environment. "FY 2020 Total Facility Count and Total Capacity June 30, 2020."

<sup>24</sup> Kansas Department of Health and Environment, *Licensing and Regulation for Child Care Facilities*.

<sup>25</sup> Kansas Department of Health and Environment. "FY 2020 Total Facility Count and Total Capacity June 30, 2020."

- The child care center is inspected to check compliance with regulations to protect the health, safety and well-being of the children in care at least once every twelve months. The KDHE contracts with local county health departments or private contractors to conduct on-site inspections.<sup>26</sup>

## Preschools

Preschools in Kansas enroll children who are too young to attend kindergarten as stated in K.S.A. 72-1107(c) and who are thirty months of age or older. A preschool might have thirteen or fewer children enrolled. A preschool's session cannot not be longer than three hours, a child can only be enrolled in one session per day and the facility is not permitted to serve meals to the children. The term "preschool" includes educational preschools, Montessori schools, nursery schools, church-sponsored preschools and preschool cooperative programs. If the facility meets the preschool regulations it may have fewer than thirteen children enrolled and in attendance. If a preschool operates in the same building as a private kindergarten through sixth grade, then it is governed by private school Kansas statutes. The license for the preschool states the maximum number of children that can be in care at any one time. It also regulates the maximum number of children that can be in care at any one unit in the preschool by age group. Staff-to-child ratios are regulated. Following are additional regulations:

- A qualified program director must be employed at the preschool for all hours of operation. Each unit must have qualified staff at all times when children are in care. Qualifications are stated by regulation and are based on the number of children in care. Staff caring for the children must have an understanding of children, complete first aid training, have a recognition of symptoms of illness, child abuse and neglect and other child care job-related training.
- A KBI criminal history and child abuse and neglect background check is processed on all persons living, working or volunteering in the licensed child care center facility.
- The annual state licensing fee of \$35 plus \$1 for each child in the total preschool's capacity not to exceed \$75. Local fees may also apply.
- The preschool is inspected to check compliance with regulations to protect the health, safety and well-being of the children in care at least once every twelve months. The KDHE contracts with local county health departments or private contractors to conduct on-site inspection.<sup>27</sup>

## When Licensing of Facilities is not Required for Preschool-Aged Children

In Kansas there are four instances where licensing for preschool home-based care is not required, as follows: (1) child care is provided for children in their own home; (2) children who are all relatives of the child care provider; (3) children whose care is arranged between friends or neighbors on an irregular basis; and (4) two or more children who are unrelated to the child care provider and cared for less than twenty care hours a week. The total hours of provided child care is determined by adding the hours each child is cared for during a week.

## Licensing and Regulations for Preschools in Missouri

In the state of Missouri there are several statutes licensing facilities for preschool-aged children. These licensing regulations are described as follows.

<sup>26</sup> Kansas Department of Health and Environment, *Licensing and Regulation for Child Care Facilities*.

<sup>27</sup> Kansas Department of Health and Environment, *Licensing and Regulation for Child Care Facilities: Preschools*, accessed September 5, 2021, [https://www.kdheks.gov/bcclr/lic\\_and\\_req.html](https://www.kdheks.gov/bcclr/lic_and_req.html).



**Licensed**

- Family Child Care Home: child care program where care is given by a person licensed as a family day care home provider to no more than ten children not related to the provider for any part of the twenty-four hour day.
- Group Child Care Home: child care program where care is given by a person licensed as a group day care home provider for eleven but not more than twenty children not related to the child care provider.
- Child Care Center: a child care program which is defined as being conducted in a location other than the provider's permanent residence, or separate from the provider's living quarters, where care is provided for children not related to the child care provider for any part of the twenty-four hour day.

**License Exempt**

- Child care program that is not required by statute to be licensed, but is required to be inspected pursuant to Missouri statute, which includes nursery schools and child care programs operated by a religious organization.

**Exempt**

- Programs that qualify for a statutory exemption for licensure and are not required to be inspected or regulated. These include: an individual providing care to four or fewer children who are not related to them, a school system that operates a child care program, a business that provides care as a convenience for its customers or employees for no more than four hour per day, a summer camp, any private or religious organization elementary or secondary school, and a religious organization academic preschool or kindergarten.<sup>28</sup>

**Licensing and Certification for Teaching Preschool in Kansas and Missouri****Teacher Licenses to Teach Preschool in Kansas**

Preschool teachers who work with children in settings such as licensed day care homes, group day care homes, and child care centers and preschools, are licensed and regulated by the KDHE as previously described. Preschool teachers in these settings must be at least eighteen years of age, and have first aid and CPR training as well as some child care training. In addition, a preschool teacher in these facilities must pass a KBI criminal history and child abuse and neglect check, have a negative tuberculosis (TB) skin test and s/he might be required to have a Fingerprint Card.

All preschool teachers who teach in a public school system in Kansas are regulated by the Kansas Department of Education (KSDE). Preschool teachers must have a minimum of a bachelor's degree and complete an approved in-state educator preparation program in a university or college. If a preschool teacher candidate has graduated from a teacher preparation program in another state and if that state accepts their program of study then the state of Kansas will accept it. If a preschool teacher candidate is from another country then it is procedural to have a course-by-course evaluation done of their course credits to see if s/he qualifies for licensure.

All seeking Kansas preschool teacher licensure must meet Kansas' residency requirements. Those requirements are for the preschool teacher candidate to complete either eight credit hours of coursework or one year of teaching experience during the past six years prior to applying for a teaching license.<sup>29</sup> In addition, The KSDE requires all who wish to become preschool teachers to pass the Praxis I basic skills test if it is not part of their educator

<sup>28</sup> Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, *PDG Project Narrative*, accessed May 12, 2021, <https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/pdg-project-narrative>.

<sup>29</sup> "How to Become an Early Childhood Educator," *PreschoolTeacher.org*, accessed May 10, 2021, <https://www.preschoolteacher.org>.

education program. Candidates for the licensure must also pass both a pedagogy assessment written test and a content assessment written test administered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS).

Preschool teachers in Kansas may be licensed in “Birth through Kindergarten” and “Birth through Third Grade.” The “Birth to Third Grade Unified” (the term “unified” refers to Special Education) licensure, which some university education programs offer as an optional endorsement area to the “Kindergarten to Grade 6” teaching Kansas board license, is best known as the elementary teaching license.

A decision in 2015 by the Kansas Board of Education (KBE) has definitely affected preschool teachers and licensure. In response for some school systems’ need to fill Pre-K teaching vacancies, the KBE decided that elementary licensed teachers could teach in Pre-K (preschool) classrooms. Many school systems in Kansas have taken advantage of the KBE’s decision and elementary education licensed teachers in their school system are teaching in the schools’ Pre-K programs. Many of these teachers graduated from elementary education teacher education programs, not early childhood teacher education programs, and may not have benefitted from course work focusing on the development of preschoolers, nor had experience teaching in practicums or student teaching with preschool-aged children.

## **Teacher Licenses to Teach Preschool in Missouri**

### **Child Development Associate Certification and ECE Teacher Licensing in Missouri**

The Child Development Associate (CDA) credential is a nationally recognized professional credential administered by the Council for Professional Recognition. A CDA is obtained without a university degree. Rather, some preschool teachers first obtain a CDA as a high school graduate before pursuing a university degree program in early childhood education. There are four categories that the council offers for CDA credentials: Center-Based, for which candidates receive endorsements to work with infants and toddlers or preschoolers, Family Child Care, and Home Visitor. In Missouri, educators who have a CDA credential can work as a preschool teacher and provider in a group day care home. A CDA is accepted as the equivalent of twelve months of experience plus six college semester hours in child-related courses toward the education and experience required for directors of any size facility.<sup>30</sup>

An Initial Professional Certificate (IPC) is the first certificate a new preschool teacher receives. A teacher candidate must have a baccalaureate degree from a college or university having a teacher education program approved by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. This certification allows the preschool teacher to work in a public or private school setting with young learners from birth to grade three, which includes three and four-year olds. The preschool teacher must meet the following requirements: a recommendation for certification from the designated official at the institution where the program was completed, a minimum 3.0 GPA in both content area coursework and professional education coursework, and Missouri’s passing score on the appropriate assessments.<sup>31</sup> Besides having the IPC, there are other cases in which teacher certification can be issued in Missouri, such as completing teacher preparation program in other states or countries.

<sup>30</sup> The Care Courses School Inc., Missouri CDA, accessed June 8, 2021, [https://www.carecourses.com/PublicPages/States\\_Missouri\\_CDA\\_Credential.aspx](https://www.carecourses.com/PublicPages/States_Missouri_CDA_Credential.aspx).

<sup>31</sup> Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Become Certified Teacher, accessed June 8, 2021, <https://dese.mo.gov/educator-quality/certification/become-certified-teacher>.

## Early Learning Standards and Preschool Curricula in Kansas and Missouri

The Kansas Early Learning Standards (KELS) provide guidance to early childhood professionals including preschool teachers when developing activities including lesson plans for teaching three- and four-year-olds. They were designed to guide the developmental sequence of learning for pre-kindergarten-aged students, linking standards with programming decisions. The KELS were developed in 2006 and have been subsequently revised over the years. The standards focus on the seven developmental areas of physical health and development, socio-emotional development, communications and literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, and the creative arts. Although individually listed, the developmental areas are interrelated and a foundation for children's current and future learnings. They are not a curriculum, rather the standards are a guide for appropriate curriculum development whether a preschool is a Montessori school, High Scope, uses the "Creative Curriculum," is play-based or any among many different curricula. The KELS are a tool which assist in planning activities for preschool-aged children, assist in selecting an appropriate preschool curriculum and are a base to construct a high-quality preschool program.

Missouri Early Learning Standards (MELS) are a comprehensive set of developmental expectations for young children from infancy to kindergarten entry. MELS consist of the descriptions of standards and correspondent scaffolding strategies in seven developmental domains: Approaches to Learning, Social-Emotional Development, Language & Literacy, Mathematics, Science, Physical Development, and Expressive Arts. In each domain, there are several components which describe details of statements of developmental standards according to age spans (i.e., infant, toddler, and preschooler). Originally the MELS were developed from 2001 to 2005, and over the last several years they have been updated to provide more practical information such as examples of activities for teachers and parents. The standards are used by public and/or private school teachers, by parents and parent educators. The purpose of developing the standards is to share a set of expectations which link to children's growth and development.<sup>32</sup>

## Preschool Programs and Funding in Kansas and Missouri

### Funding Sources for Preschool Programs in Kansas

In Kansas there are several potential funding sources to support preschool programming which include, but are not limited to the following:

- At-Risk Education Funding may be used to serve qualified preschool students
- School District General Fund
- Preschool-Ages At-Risk Fund
- Preschool-Aged student with disability base state aid
- Early Childhood Block Grant (Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund)
- Kansas Special Education Categorical Aid
- Head Start (Federal Administration for Children and Families)
- Child Care Development Block Grant (Child Care Subsidy, Kansas Department for Children and Families)
- Child and Adult Care Food Program
- Kansas Preschool Pilot
- McKinney-Vento
- ESEA Title I
- ESEA Title II to support early educators' professional development and to provide programs and activities to increase the knowledge and ability of principals or other school leaders to support teachers, teacher leaders,

<sup>32</sup> Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Missouri Early Learning Standards Birth to Age 5, accessed September 7, 2021, <https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/missouri-early-learning-standards>.

- early childhood educators, and other professionals to meet the needs of students through age eight, which may include providing joint professional learning and planning activities for school staff and educators in preschool programs that address the transition to elementary school.

- IDEA Part B
- Parent fees/tuition
- Kansas Parents as Teachers
- Local Grants/Funding (private funders). The Kansas Preschool Pilot program requires at least 50% of the students served by the grant meet one of the at-risk qualifiers. This could be an avenue to fund general education students who do not meet at-risk qualifiers.

## Funding Sources for Preschool Programs in Missouri

An overview of Missouri's Funding Sources for Preschool Programs follows:

### State Level

- Missouri Preschool Program (MPP) (State dollars from tobacco settlement)
- Foundation Formula (appropriated by Legislature, public school foundation formula funding)
- ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education ) Special Education Funds (IDEA, Part B 3-21)
- PAT (foundation formula & tobacco settlement funds)
- Children's Trust Fund (dedicated funding from state license fees and tax)
- Early Head Start through DSS (The Department of Social Services): mix of federal and state funds
- Subsidy from DSS: a mix of federal and state Child Care Subsidy for Low Income Families.

### Federal Level

- Title I (can be used for preschool-ESSA: Every Student Succeeds Act)
- Head Start Federal Funding (ACF-OHS: Administration for Children and Families - Office of Head Start )
- ECCE Special Education Funds (IDEA, Part C B-3)
- ECCE Special Education Funds (IDEA, Part B 3-21)
- EHS (Early Head Start) Federal (ADF-OHS)
- EHS/CC Partnership (ACF, OHS)
- MIECHV (Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting) HHS (Department of Health and Human Services)
- Title V (Maternal Child Block Grant, HHS)
- Early Head Start through DSS: mix of federal and state funds
- Subsidy from DSS: mix of federal and state Child Care Subsidy for low income families

### Foundation and Local

- Private Foundations
- Saint Louis City Public Schools-using property tax
- Children's Services Fund (public funded regional sources, STL, KC, Columbia)<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, PDG Project Narrative, accessed May 12, 2021, <https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/pdg-project-narrative>.

## Head Start and Early Childhood Special Education in Kansas and Missouri

### Head Start: A Program for Preschoolers since 1965

In his State of the Union address, former US President Lyndon Johnson declared a “war on poverty” in January 1964. During the 1960s there was a growing amount of research on the effects of poverty and the need for educating the youngest of citizens. Sargent Shriver was asked to lead a panel of experts to develop a comprehensive child development program that could help preschool-aged children. The result was “an eight-week demonstration project designed to help break the cycle of poverty. It provided preschool children from low-income families with a comprehensive program to meet their emotional, social, health, nutritional, and educational needs.”<sup>34</sup> According to Head Start, the program has:

. . . served more than 30 million children since 1965, growing from an eight-week demonstration project to include full day/year services and many program options. Currently, Head Start is administered by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the Department of Health and Human Services. Head Start serves over a million children and their families each year in urban and rural areas in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. territories, including American Indian, Alaska Native, and Migrant and Seasonal communities.<sup>35</sup>

As a nation-wide early childhood program, Head Start promotes school readiness for children in low-income families by offering free-of-charge education, nutrition, health, social and other services. The US Congress authorizes the amount of federal spending for Head Start each year. According to the Administration for Children and Families:

Head Start and Early Head Start programs are administered by the Office of Head Start, within the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Office of Head Start (OHS) administers grant funding and oversight to 1,600 public and private nonprofit and for-profit agencies that provide Head Start services. OHS also provides federal policy direction . . . to assist grantees in delivering comprehensive services to eligible young children and their families.<sup>36</sup>

The US Congress authorizes the amount of federal spending for Head Start each year. \$10,028,460,690 was appropriated to the Office of Head Start in 2019. According to Head Start’s Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center:

Of that amount, \$9.65 billion was awarded directly to public agencies, private nonprofit and for-profit organizations, tribal governments, and school systems to operate Head Start programs in local communities. To improve the quality of services provided by grantees, more than \$239 million was directed to Training and Technical Assistance (TTA). Half that amount was awarded directly to grantees to be used for local TTA and the other half funded the regional and national systems.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Office of Head Start, *Head Start History*, accessed May 6, 2021, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/about/history-head-start>.

<sup>35</sup> Head Start, Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, *Head Start History*, September 18, 2021, <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/article/head-start-history#:~:text=Head%20Start%20has%20served%20more,of%20Health%20and%20Human%20Services>.

<sup>36</sup> Office of Head Start, *What We Do*, accessed May 21, 2021, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/about/what-we-do>.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

Head Start appropriated \$75,832,939 in federal funding to 7,060 centers in Kansas and \$1,998,314 was appropriated as American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) funding to Kansas for 109 centers.<sup>38</sup> These monies were allocated to Kansas Head Start Centers which included the three and four-year-old children being served in each of the centers.

### **Early Childhood Special Education, Section 619 of Part B of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**

On November 19, 1975, Congress enacted Public Law (PL) 94-142 (also known as The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. P.L. 94-142). This was the legislation that preceded legislation to the IDEA, one of the largest grants administered by the US Department of Education. It provides federal funding for the education of children with disabilities and requires, as a condition for the receipt of such funds, that states agree to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to every eligible child three to twenty-one years of age. IDEA, most recently reauthorized by P.L. 108-446 in 2004, was appropriated for approximately \$13.45 billion in 2019.

The largest portion of IDEA is Part B which focuses on special education for those between the ages of three and twenty-one. Part B, Section 619 of IDEA authorizes supplementary grants to states for preschool programs serving children with disabilities between the ages three through five. While not mandatory, all states are currently providing IDEA service to preschool-aged children.<sup>39</sup> Section 619 is a fairly small section of the law and works with the states and sub-state funding for the preschool program grants. Part B, Section 619 of IDEA promulgates the principle of education equality for preschool children with disabilities through this broad-scale federal assistance program.

### **Special Education for Preschool Children in Missouri**

For eligible children with a disability, FAPE should be available and also an IEP must be in effect by the child's third birth date. According to the IDEA, students from ages three to twenty-one who are evaluated as follows are defined as students with disabilities.<sup>40</sup>

- Intellectual Disability
- Hearing Impairments and Deafness
- Speech or Language Impairments
- Visual Impairments including Blindness
- Emotional Disturbance
- Orthopedic Impairments
- Autism
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Other Health Impairments
- Specific Learning Disability
- Deaf Blindness
- Multiple Disabilities

<sup>38</sup> Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, *Head Start Program Facts: Fiscal Year 2019*, accessed September 5, 2021, <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/hs-program-fact-sheet-2019.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> Congressional Research Service, "The Individual to Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Funding: A Primer," August 29, 2019, accessed May 13, 2021, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R44624.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *State Plan for Special Education - Part B*, accessed June 4, 2021, <https://dese.mo.gov/governmental-affairs/dese-administrative-rules/incorporated-reference-materials/IDEAPartB-2014>.

## Preschool-Aged at Risk in Kansas, the Child Care Development Fund Grant in Missouri, the Kansas Preschool Project, and Parents as Teachers Program

### Preschool-Aged at Risk in Kansas

The KSDE administers and provides funding for a variety of programs for preschoolers. One of these programs is the Preschool-Aged at Risk program. According to the Kansas State Department of Education:

The Preschool-Aged At-Risk Program (also known as the State Pre-K 4 Year Old At-Risk Program and the State Pre-Kindergarten Program) provides school districts with funding for preschool-aged students. Each preschool-aged at-risk student who is enrolled in a school district and receiving services is counted as 0.5 FTE in calculating a district's enrollment and accompanying weightings. Districts are encouraged to create integrated programs that include all students and to develop strong community partnerships.<sup>41</sup>

According to the Kansas State Department of Education, Kansas school districts which operate approved Preschool-Aged At-Risk programs calculate enrollment in the following manner:

“Each preschool-aged at-risk student who is enrolled in a school district and receiving services is counted as a ½ student (0.5 FTE) in calculating a district's enrollment and accompanying weightings. In districts operating approved programs, 4-year-old students who meet an at-risk criterion for Preschool-Aged At-Risk students and who are enrolled and attending on September 20, 2020 will automatically count as a ½ student (0.5 FTE) in calculating a district's enrollment and accompanying weightings.”<sup>42</sup>

### The Child Care Development Fund Grant in Missouri

The Child Care Development Fund Grant is designed for public schools and colleges/universities to grant financial support in providing high-quality early childhood programs for children from ages six weeks to kindergarten entry. The funding opportunity is to provide safe learning environments as well as to meet working parents through extended hours five days a week and typically open year-round. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) receives the fund from the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) Grant that originates from the US Department of Health and Human Services. DESE also administers the fund to support the following:

- establishment of early learning services within the school setting;
- technical assistance, consultation and training for programs;
- early childhood accreditation within public school programs; and,
- collection and distribution of information on existing programs in early learning settings.<sup>43</sup>

### Kansas Preschool Project

The Kansas Preschool Pilot (KPP) program provides school districts and their community partners with funding to provide preschool services.

- The KPP program grant supports children aged three through five; children age-eligible for kindergarten (age five on or before August 31) may not be served with these funds. A four-year-old is a child who is four

<sup>41</sup> Kansas State Department of Education, *Preschool-Aged At-Risk (State Pre-K 4 Year Old At-Risk)*, accessed September 4, 2021, <https://www.ksde.org/Agency/Division-of-Learning-Services/Special-Education-and-Title-Services/Early-Childhood/Preschool-Programming>.

<sup>42</sup> Kansas State Department of Education, *Preschool-Aged At-Risk (State Pre-K 4 Year Old At-Risk) Program Application 2020-2021 Application*, accessed September 5, 2021, <https://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/Early%20Childhood/grants/Preschool-Aged%20At-Risk%20SY2020-2021%20Application.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *CCDF Program Guidelines 20-21*, accessed May 29, 2021, <https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/ccdf-program-guidelines-20-21>.

years of age on or before August 31 of the current school year. A three-year-old is a child who is three years of age on or before August 31 of the current school year.

- At least 50 percent of the children enrolled in the KPP program must meet at least one of the at-risk criteria listed on page 3. Note that students who qualify for reduced-price meals qualify as at-risk for the purposes of the Kansas Preschool Pilot.
- The grantee shall maintain classroom rosters for all children enrolled in the KPP program and ensure that student data is entered into required KSDE data collection systems.<sup>44</sup>

The vision of the KPP program is to provide community-based and school-based educational environments for preschoolers that are successful evidence-based, safe and high-quality learning experiences. It provides school districts and their community partners with funding to provide preschool services, further described as follows:

- The KPP program grant supports children aged three through five; children age-eligible for kindergarten (age five on or before August 31) may not be served with these funds. A four-year-old is a child identified as one who is four years of age on or before August 31 of the current school year. A three-year-old is a child identified as one who is three years of age on or before August 31 of the current school year.
- At least 50 percent of the children enrolled in the KPP program must meet at least one of the at-risk criteria. Note that children who qualify for reduced-price meals qualify as at-risk for the purposes of the KPP.
- The grantee shall maintain classroom rosters for all children enrolled in the KPP program and ensure that student data is entered into the required KSDE data collection systems.<sup>45</sup>

Each KPP program is required to provide a minimum of 465 classroom hours of developmentally appropriate activities (DAP) for each child during the school year. In a classroom the teacher-to-child ratio is required to be 1:10, with not more than twenty-five preschoolers in a classroom. Each classroom teacher is required to have a current Elementary Education license, although preferred is an Early Childhood Education license.

### Parents as Teachers

A parent is a child's "first teacher." A preschool program which recognizes this important connection between parent and child while equipping the parent to improve their child's readiness for kindergarten was begun in Missouri. According the Parents as Teachers (PAT) organization:

... Parents as Teachers began in 1981 in Missouri as a pilot project for the first-time parents of newborns. Recognizing the program's benefits and cost effectiveness, the Missouri legislature provided state funding in 1985 to implement Parents as Teachers programs in all Missouri school districts. Since 1985, Parents as Teachers has expanded to all 50 states and six other countries.<sup>46</sup>

PAT includes home visits, group parent meeting, a variety of health screenings for the child and a community support connection for the parents.

The Parents as Teachers (PAT) evidence-based affiliate model provides parents with the skills and knowledge they need to help make informed decisions regarding their child's education. The program includes personal visits, group connections, health, vision, hearing and developmental screenings, and supports family connections with other community services.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Personal communication with Natalie McClane, Kansas Department of Education Program consultant, June 2, 2021.

<sup>45</sup> Kansas State Department of Education, *Kansas Preschool Pilot (KPP)*, accessed September 18, 2021, <https://www.ksde.org/Agency/Division-of-Learning-Services/Special-Education-and-Title-Services/Early-Childhood/Preschool-Programming>.

<sup>46</sup> Parents as Teachers, *Who We Are*, accessed September 5, 2021, <https://parentsasteachers.org/who-we-are>.

<sup>47</sup> Kansas State Department of Education, Kansas Parents as Teachers, accessed September 18, 2021, <https://www.ksde.org/Agency/Division-of-Learning-Services/Special-Education-and-Title-Services/Early-Childhood/Kansas-Parents-as-Teachers>.



The PAT program is available to any parent or caregiver of a pre-kindergarten child within a participating school district. In Kansas, the KSDE serves as the PAT's state office and as of February 2021 supports eighty-four local programs, which is an increase from the sixty-two local programs in 2019.

Missouri Parents as Teachers Programs are supported through a collaborative partnership that includes the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the Parents as Teacher National Center (PATNC), and the local school district. Each partner has specific roles and responsibilities that collectively ensure that families in Missouri have access to quality parent education services through this program.<sup>48</sup>

In 2020, nationwide PAT served 186,426 families and 221,711 children; the program had made 1,857,278 home visits and 171,545 child developmental screenings.<sup>49</sup> In Missouri, PAT serves families who have children of pre-kindergarten age to help educate the parents with guidance for their child toward school readiness. PAT programs were re-supported (renewed) in a collaborative partnership among the local school district, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and PATNC (Parents as Teachers National Center). As a voluntary parent education program, PAT provides multiple services that include 1) Family personal visits, 2) Developmental screenings, 3) Group connections, and 4) Resource networks.<sup>50</sup>

## Looking Forward from State to State

### Moving Forward: Preschool in Kansas and Missouri Reflections on State to State 'Laboratories of Democracy'

Kansas and Missouri serve as "Laboratories of Democracy," a phrase popularized by former US Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, who served from 1916-1939. He used this phrase in the court case *New State Ice Co. v. Liebemann* in 1932 to chronicle how, "a single courageous State may, if its citizens choose, serve as a laboratory, and try novel social and economic experiments without risk to the rest of the country."<sup>51</sup> As defined by this phrase, Kansas and Missouri have experimented with innovative economic and social policy ideas in their education of three- and four-year-olds. A few of these "Laboratories of Democracy" are described as follows.

#### Kansas, the "Sunflower State" Evidence of "Laboratories of Democracy"

Kansas is developing a statewide plan to strengthen the early childhood system within the state. This plan was spurred by the findings of an initial grant and evolved into support by a substantial federal grant.

In 2019 a representative group of 6,100 parents, early childcare and education professionals, civic and business leaders, and community members provided input on a comprehensive statewide needs assessment. This needs assessment focused on what was needed and wanted by Kansans in the state's early childhood education and care programs. The findings of this initial grant provided the foundation for the application and subsequent award on May 11, 2020, of a \$8.9 million grant received from the Administration for Children and Families to continue efforts in strengthening the early childhood system in Kansas.

<sup>48</sup> Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Parents as Teachers Program Information, accessed September 18, 2021, <https://dese.mo.gov/childhood/home-visiting/parents-teachers/program-information>.

<sup>49</sup> Parents as Teachers, *2020 Parents as Teachers Annual Report*, accessed May 13, 2021, <https://online.fliphtml5.com/vjjae/sxjq/#p=9>.

<sup>50</sup> Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Missouri Parents as Teachers Parent Information*, accessed May 13, 2021, <https://dese.mo.gov/early-learning/parent-education/parents-teachers/parent-information>.

<sup>51</sup> Beth Noveck, "Open Government Laboratories of Democracy," November 19, 2009, accessed June 13, 2021, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2009/11/19/open-government-laboratories-democracy>.

This funding was the first installment of a three-year renewal of the Kansas Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five (PDG B-5) initiative. As Kansas Governor Laura Kelly said, “These funds will be imperative in helping to keep up our current momentum as we work to improve our state’s early childhood system. This grant is particularly welcome now, as the COVID-19 pandemic has caused an additional degree of stress on early childhood in Kansas. With it, we will continue to fight for the health and safety of children and families in our state.”<sup>52</sup> States can assess the early childhood education systems within their states and strengthen early childhood offerings, including those for three- and four-year-olds. Whether supported by a federal grant or not, states can assess the early childhood system within their state and based on the findings make efforts to improve their early childhood programming.

## Missouri, the “Show Me” State, Shows “Laboratories of Democracy”

### A Prestigious History of Early Childhood Education in Missouri

As mentioned previously, Susan Blow was the founder of the first public kindergarten in the United States in 1873 in St. Louis, Missouri. As the “Mother of Kindergarten,” she directed the kindergarten for more than ten years without receiving any pay in order to give the young children in her charge a good start in their education. Her innovation to provide education to all kindergarten children in St. Louis was a policy replicated by all states in the United States.

Likewise, in the state of Missouri, the main concept of the PAT program where parents are the “first teacher” of their children was developed in 1981. This initially experimental program which was funded by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and The Danforth Foundation provided the example in 1981 and grew to all Missouri school districts in 1985. As a “Laboratory of Democracy” PAT has expanded to all fifty states and six other countries. It is recognized as a positive parent involvement program which successfully contributes to young children’s school readiness including their reading and writing abilities. PAT has been supporting vulnerable parents in a relationship-based approach and has demonstrated children’s enhanced learning abilities.

## In Conclusion

### Moving Forward State to State: Sharing a Common Need for Universal Preschool in Kansas and Missouri

There is an immediate need in Kansas and Missouri for Universal Preschool. According to the National Institute for Early Education Research, in 2017 Missouri was ranked low among states on spending for preschool education, which was about \$9.7 million for 2,600 children.<sup>53</sup> In 2018, only 1 percent of three-year-olds and 2 percent of four-year-olds were enrolled in state-funded preschool. Comparatively, 36 percent of four-year-olds in the state of Kansas were enrolled in state-funded preschool.<sup>54</sup> There is a necessity for high quality preschool for all children in both states.

Universal Preschool operates similarly to other forms of public school with all children having access to a publicly funded high-quality preschool program, regardless of the family’s income. Currently, states offer some form of

<sup>52</sup> The Kansas Governor’s Office, *Kansas Receives Grant to Transform the Kansas Early Childhood System*, May 11, 2020, accessed June 15, 2021, <https://governor.kansas.gov/kansas-receives-grant-to-transform-the-kansas-early-childhood-system/#:~:text=Governor%20Laura%20Kelly%20and%20other,early%20childhood%20system%20in%20Kansas>.

<sup>53</sup> Parents as Teachers, *Who We Are*, accessed June 11, 2021, <https://parentsasteachers.org/who-we-are>.

<sup>54</sup> Ryan Delaney, “Missouri Lawmakers Say They Want To Expand Pre-K But Not How They’d Pay For It,” *St. Louis Public Radio*, January 21, 2019, accessed June 11, 2021, <https://news.stlpublicradio.org/education/2019-01-21/missouri-lawmakers-say-they-want-to-expand-pre-k-but-not-how-theyd-pay-for-it>.

government-funded pre-kindergarten program to families based on income. Universal Preschool would guarantee that all children have an opportunity to begin their education on “a level playing field” with their more affluent classmates in high-quality early childhood education programs. On April 28, 2021, US President Joe Biden proposed a \$1.8 trillion American Families Plan which includes a provision for Universal Preschool insuring free, quality preschool for all three- and four-year-olds. This provision, if passed by the US Congress, would be a boon for all preschoolers and their families.<sup>55</sup> The prospect of a federally sponsored Universal Preschool is enticing; meanwhile, as advocates of Universal Preschool we cannot be complacent, rather we must remain vigilant and active in providing high quality preschool for all children in Kansas and Missouri.

Generating state revenue is one of the challenges to expand education for preschool children in Kansas and Missouri. Kansas City, Missouri’s former Mayor Sylvester “Sly” James (mayor from 2011-2019) proposed a sales tax to benefit pre-K programs only to have it rejected by voters in 2019.<sup>56</sup> The demand for a funding mechanism to develop and sustain education for all preschoolers in Kansas and Missouri continues. We can learn from the “Laboratories of Democracy” in other states such as Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, New York, and Wisconsin, which have “mostly Universal Preschools” and Oklahoma and West Virginia, which have some universality in their preschool programs. The examples of Universal Preschool in other states targeting programs for three- and four-year-olds provide frameworks, “Laboratories of Democracy,” which we in Kansas and Missouri can learn from and emulate, state to state.

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<sup>55</sup> The White House, *Fact Sheet: The American Families Plan*, April 28, 2021, accessed May 14, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/28/fact-sheet-the-american-families-plan/>.

<sup>56</sup> Elle Moxley, “Kansas City Kids Don't Just Need Pre-K, Experts Say — They Need Education Starting At Birth,” *KCUR – NPR in Kansas City*, July 25, 2019, accessed June 11, 2021, <https://www.kcur.org/education/2019-07-25/kansas-city-kids-dont-just-need-pre-k-experts-say-they-need-education-starting-at-birth>.