

**League of Women Voters NH research on Public Pre-K Education in New Hampshire.**

**Consensus questions are at the end of this document.**

**Any current League members who wish to participate in the consensus should read the background and updates below. There are additional materials on the [LWVNH.org](http://LWVNH.org) website.**

**Deadline for submission of answers via email is April 15, 2020.**

Background

In the Fall of 2017, a subset of the LWV Kearsarge/Sunapee education study committee began to research the issue of Public Pre-Kindergarten in NH. This group studied the rationale for early education and gathered research on the efficacy of early education for three- and four-year-old children. We looked at issues of educational inequality beginning at birth, the status of full day kindergarten in NH, the status of public Pre-K in NH, and appropriate curricula for Pre-K and kindergarten. We held meetings with individuals in NH who were knowledgeable about Pre-K and visited a public Pre-K program in Vermont and the Child Study and Development Center at the University of New Hampshire.

On May 19, 2018 the LWV NH held a conference on Pre-Kindergarten Education and Charter Schools in Contoocook. Speakers for the Pre-K part of the conference included Kimberly Nesbitt, Asst. Prof of Human Development and Family Studies at UNH, Jackie Cowell, Early Learning New Hampshire, Christiana D'Allesandro, NH State Director of MomsRising, Kate Rogers, Early Learning Program Manager, VT Agency of Education, Rebecca Woitkowski, Early Childhood Policy Coordinator, New Futures/Kids Counts and Lindsay Hanson, Government Relations Manager, Save the Children Action Network, NH. Several NH legislators were also present and participated in a panel on Pre-K in NH.

In the fall of 2019, the group conducted a survey of all of NH's school districts to assess whether or not they were involved in providing any type of public Pre-K to students in their districts. We also visited the Public Pre-K program in Bartlett, NH which had just begun to provide a full day program for all three- and four-year-old children in the district. Early childhood leaders in Bartlett provided extensive preparation to the town about the benefits of Pre-K and the town voted overwhelmingly to support the program through their school budget.

All of the background materials gathered by this group can be found on the LWV NH website.

After the conference in 2018, the state LWV decided that there was not sufficient interest to pursue consensus meetings on the issue of public Pre-K in NH. However, since this time there

have been several developments and we believe that a survey of League members might be helpful. We have done a brief update on the research and status of public Pre-K nationwide and in NH, as well as provided information on changes in other aspects of NH early childhood issues, such as full day kindergarten and appropriate curricula for early childhood that were addressed in our original study.

Full Day Kindergarten in NH. In July, 2017 Governor Sununu signed legislation to provide additional funds to school districts to begin to implement full-day kindergarten. The Department of Education announced that in the fall of 2018 the state provided close to \$11 million to towns and cities across the state. Specific community data is available on the Department of Education website and it is estimated that in 2018, 87.2 percent of towns were offering full-day kindergarten. By March of 2019 an article in the Monadnock Ledger-Transcript, *Local Districts Say Full-Day Kindergarten Showing Benefits*, 3/11/19 reported that the Wilton-Lyndeborough School District saw a big bump in enrollment after adopting full-day kindergarten and that statistical comparisons of kindergarten children found that 58 percent of the children are at national benchmarks vs 36 percent the previous year. The percentage of children needing urgent intervention has dropped from 7 percent to 2 percent and the percentage of children needing intervention has dropped from 34 percent to 27 percent.

NH passes Legislation for Play-Based Kindergarten Curricula. In 2018, NH amended the Substantive Educational Content of an Adequate Education Law. The bill, HB 1499, added a provision specific to the course content and teaching of kindergarten, which is structured upon a play-based model. Before the school year started Dr. Kimberly Nesbitt of UNH held workshops with educators to discuss instructional strategies and begin implementation of this new approach.

The NH Department of Education website: Division of Educational Improvement/Accountability/Curriculum/Early Childhood Education documents the resources made available to NH teachers to support the implementation (Kindergarten Toolkit).

### Early Childhood Research Update

A brief review of recent early childhood research provides support for the benefits of Pre-K.

Washington, DC is one example of a city that has fully embraced Pre-K and tried to answer some of the questions about what, exactly, is a quality early childhood program and what can it accomplish. Washington, DC introduced universal Pre-K in 2008 and in the 2017-2018 year 73 percent of three-year-olds and 85 percent of four-year-olds were enrolled. "With the Pre-K participation rates that we have across the city, I think we can truly say that our public education system starts at age three," stated Miriam Calderon who was the school district's

early childhood education during the program's early years. The program runs all day and a study by the Center for American Progress found that it had increased mothers' participation in the labor force. Washington has also fused their Pre-K with Head Start, incorporating Head Start's holistic approach to child development, but also allowing them to use federal Head Start funds. Research results are positive. In 2018, the district reported that 86 percent of children were finishing Pre-K ready for kindergarten on the cognition skills measured by the city's early childhood assessment.

*When Public School Starts at Age 3, The New York Times, July 9, 2019.*

A study that included more than 1,500 children in a Chicago-based program called Child-Parent Centers (CPC) shows children reached a higher level of education by age 35 than did ones enrolled in other preschool programs. Previous smaller research projects have shown structured education programs for young children are beneficial in the short term but this study is the first to assess a large, publicly funded program and track participants into their 30s. Students who started the CPC program in preschool were 47 percent more likely to earn an associate's degree and 41 percent more likely to earn a bachelor's degree. The longer students participated in CPC, the stronger the benefit. The study found a "return on investment to society" of \$10.83 per dollar for children who participated through preschool.

*Long-Term Gains: Pre-K Programs Lead to Furthered Education Later in Life. Scientific American. March 22, 2018.*

The Learning Policy Institute (LPI) reviewed evaluations of 21 large-scale public preschool programs and found that children who attend these programs are more prepared for school and experience substantial learning gains in comparison to children who do not attend preschool. "The research suggests that the main issue is not whether preschool works but how to design and implement effective preschool programs that deliver on their promise." Preschool programs that demonstrate the strongest positive effects have well-qualified teachers, use developmentally appropriate methods, engage families and support English learners and students with special needs.

*What Does the Research Really Say About Preschool Effectiveness? Learning Policy Institute. January 31, 2019.*

A task force of interdisciplinary scientists reviewed the evidence on the impact of state-funded Pre-K programs and issued a report and consensus statement on findings, conclusions and recommendations. They agreed that economically disadvantaged children achieve greater improvement in learning at the end of Pre-K. Not all Pre-K programs are equally effective; effective programs have a well implemented, evidence-based curriculum and well-trained teachers. Children who attend Pre-K are more ready for school than children who do not attend, particularly in academic areas. "In conclusion, the scientific rationale, the uniformly positive evidence of impact on kindergarten readiness, and the nascent body of ongoing inquiry about long-term impacts lead us to conclude that continued implementation of scaled-up Pre-K

programs is in order as long as the implementation is accompanied by rigorous evaluation of impact.”

*The Current State of Scientific Knowledge on Pre-K Effects.* Brookings Institute and Duke University, May 17, 2017.

The Status of Public Pre-K nationwide. In 2019 the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University published the 16<sup>th</sup> edition of *The State of Preschool*. Since 2002 when NIEER began tracking preschool enrollment, states have added more than 882,000 seats in state-funded preschool, mostly for four-year-olds. But progress has been uneven both across states and over time. Preschool enrollment grew steadily up until the Great Recession and hit a low point in 2012 when the number of children enrolled decreased; recovery in state Pre-K growth has been anemic from 2013 to the present. However in many places, cities have stepped up to the challenge and have emerged as leaders—examples include New York City, Austin, Boston, Philadelphia, Seattle, San Antonio, Denver, Columbus, Cleveland, Cincinnati and San Francisco. There has also been a movement toward increasing enrollment in school-day or longer programs to accommodate the needs of working parents.

In 2018 total state funding for preschool programs was more than \$8.15 billion across the 44 states and DC that offered preschool. States enrolled almost 1.58 million children in state-funded preschool – one-third of all four-year-olds in the country. Ten states served nearly 50% or more of four-year-olds in their state. Four states served more than 70%. Only three states met all 10 of NIEER’s benchmarks for minimum state preschool standards. In addition to enrollment and funding, states vary widely in teacher requirements. Federal Preschool Development grants have supported enrollment of low-income four-year-olds in high quality preschool, but these grants are only available to a state for three years. Only six states have no state-funded Pre-K programs and one of these is New Hampshire.

NH Secures Preschool Development Grant. On December 23, 2019 the Concord Monitor reported that NH had received a \$26.8 million Preschool Development Grant from the US Department of Health and Human Services. The University of New Hampshire will serve as the lead agency administering the grant, in collaboration with the New Hampshire Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. The press release states that the grant will build capacities for learning and well-being at home, in child care, and community-based settings for children from birth to age 5. This would include a Welcome Families website, support for New Hampshire’s Family Resource Centers, expanded coaching of play-based learning and best practices, development of an Early Childhood Center of Excellence at UNH, and also provide grants directly to New Hampshire communities. However, there is no specific mention that any of these funds are to be directed toward the establishment of public Pre-K classrooms in NH. The US Department of Education states that the purpose of the Preschool Development Grants is to support states in their efforts to develop an infrastructure to support high quality pre-school education.

The national League of Women Voters position on education begins thus:

“The League of Women Voters believes that the federal government shares with other levels of government the responsibility to provide an equitable, quality public education for all children pre-K through grade 12. A quality public education is essential for a strong, viable, and sustainable democratic society and is a civil right.” *Impact on Issues* <https://www.lwv.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/LWV%202018-20%20Impact%20on%20Issues.pdf> p. 76

**The questions below are in lieu of in-person consensus meetings.** They offer League members an opportunity to register their opinions on the issue of public pre-K education in NH. From the results of the survey, the state board will develop an amended education position.

**Members have until April 15 to send their answers via email to**  
**[LWVNewHampshire@gmail.com](mailto:LWVNewHampshire@gmail.com)**

Only current League members may participate in this consensus survey.

Send an email listing each question number and your response of choice: Agree, Disagree, or No Opinion.

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#### **Four Questions**

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1. The League of Women Voters recognize New Hampshire’s recent progress in early childhood education. Although we lag behind many other states, 87.2 percent of towns offered full-day kindergarten in 2018. That number has steadily increased as state funding for kindergarten has increased. Kindergarten attendance in NH is not mandatory.

The 2019 bill requiring play-based learning in kindergarten is one that should be fully implemented throughout New Hampshire.

AGREE

DISAGREE

NO OPINION

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2. The League of Women Voters encourages New Hampshire to use its new Preschool Development Grant to support local school districts that want to initiate a Pre-K program by using the model that Bartlett, NH developed to educate citizens on the benefits of a quality public Pre-K education or a similar evidence-based model.

AGREE

DISAGREE

NO OPINION

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3. The League of Women Voters should urge New Hampshire policy makers and legislators to join the 44 states that are already committed to providing public Pre-K for three- and four-year-old children.

AGREE

DISAGREE

NO OPINION

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4. The League of Women Voters should support legislation to provide state funding for the establishment of high-quality public Pre-K for all three- and four-year-old children in New Hampshire.

AGREE

DISAGREE

NO OPINION