



Networks Northwest Regional Child Care Coalition | 14 Impactful Solutions

# Regional Child Care Plan

*“If the region wants to be desirable to young families there has to be a change.”*—LEELANAU COUNTY PARENT

**Solution**  
**10**

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# Introduction to the 14 Solutions

The following 14 Solutions arise from more than 100 distinct ideas generated by the Regional Child Care Planning Coalition

The following Child Care Solution module is one of 14 Solutions that comprise the Regional Child Care Plan of the Networks Northwest Regional Child Care Planning Coalition. The 49-member Coalition represents regional and community partners in the northwest-lower Michigan counties of Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Manistee, Missaukee and Wexford.

*The work of the Coalition is funded by a Regional Child Care Planning grant awarded and supported by Michigan's Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) Child Care Innovation Fund in order to understand and address the child care crisis and to expand equitable access to high-quality, affordable child care for working families. Grants were issued to 16 regional coalitions covering every part of Michigan.*

*Regional Child Care Planning grants were issued to ECIC by the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential (MILEAP), utilizing American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.*

## Each Solution Module:


### Meets several criteria:

- **Impactful** – in the opinion of the Coalition, directly addresses one or more of the Root Causes impacting the regional child care system and will improve access, affordability and/or quality.
- **Vetted** – have proven to be successful regionally or elsewhere
- **Sponsored** – one or more regional entities or groups is presently committed to or leading implementation

### Consists of five components::

- **Primary Root Cause** addressed
- **An introductory paragraph** summarizing the solution, why it can be beneficial and how it can be implemented
- **Background and Context** – relates why the solution may be needed or beneficial, along with some historical context where applicable
- **Examples and Priorities** – showcases examples of comparable approaches implemented within the region or elsewhere and then highlights implied priorities for implementation
- **Potential Near-Term Actions** – calls out near term actions that different groups of stakeholders can take in order to move toward implementation

## The 14 Solutions are:

1. State Investment
2. Local Public Funding
3. Policy Changes
4. Local Planning & Zoning
5. Provider Incubation
6. Community Facility Investments
7. Micro-Centers
8. Credential Pathways
9. Substitute Pools
10. Universal Preschool 
11. Home-Based Universal Preschool Option
12. Employer Policies & Actions
13. Enhanced Family Navigation
14. Peer-to-peer & Community Collaboration

# Universal Preschool

**Implement universal preschool to support quality, affordability and family choice**

SOLUTION

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As a significant step toward expanding access to publicly funded free preschool for 4-year-olds, Michigan recently raised the income eligibility threshold for families wishing to participate in publicly funded preK. This change will significantly increase access to high-quality preschool for regional families but could also create challenges within the mixed-delivery child care system. Regional stakeholders should simultaneously work to 1) make the most of this opportunity, 2) lessen any resulting disruptions for families and child care providers and 3) make the change stable and sustainable.

## Background & Context

**There is a wealth of data showing that children who have access to and attend high-quality prekindergarten (preK) education programs reap lifelong benefits. Pre-K programs effectively level the field for all students entering kindergarten, regardless of their socio-economic background. Outcome data from preK programs show improved cognitive, social-emotional, and behavioral skills that better prepare children for kindergarten and then persist in later years.<sup>1</sup>**

Eight states have implemented publicly funded prekindergarten program models, but only four states—Florida, Oklahoma, Vermont and Wisconsin—plus the District of Columbia currently have “universal” preK with 70 percent or more of eligible 4-year-

olds enrolled in free programs. Whether states can achieve the 70 percent benchmark qualifying as “universal” depends on consistency of funding in addition to efforts to increase access regardless of family income, location, disability, enrollment caps or other criteria.

A 2023 effort to include national funding for preK for 3- and 4-year-olds as part of the Build Back Better proposal failed<sup>2</sup> in US congress when it was blocked by one Senator.<sup>3</sup> However, bipartisan support for funding universal preK appears to be growing across the country in recognition of the benefits of these programs.

Georgia uses state lottery revenue to fund preK for all 4-year-olds. In November 2022, New Mexico voters overwhelmingly approved (with 70 percent voter support) Constitutional Amendment 1, which allocated additional funding from the state’s Land Grant Permanent Fund for early childhood education and public schools, and which

PRIMARY ROOT CAUSE  
ADDRESSED:

**Few Affordable  
& High-Quality  
Options  
for Families**

<sup>1</sup> Shapiro, A., “The Benefits of Prekindergarten Programs: Strong Findings and Open Questions,” Phi Delta Kappa Magazine, 1 October, 2021

<sup>2</sup> Simba, A., “Universal Pre-K Is Harder Than We Thought,” The Progressive Magazine, April 3, 2024

<sup>3</sup> Cassidy, J., “Joe Manchin Kills the Build Back Better Bill,” The New Yorker, December 2021

*“Bipartisan support for funding universal preK appears to be growing across the country...New Mexico voters overwhelmingly approved additional funding from the state’s Land Grant Permanent Fund for early childhood education and public schools, and which guaranteed universal preK as a constitutional right.”*



guaranteed universal preK as a constitutional right.<sup>4</sup> Colorado residents voted in 2023 to fund their pre-school program for 4-year-olds using nicotine taxes.<sup>5</sup>

The increasing number of states offering universal prekindergarten programs may suggest an overall increase in support among elected officials and citizens to fund child care programs from birth to four-years-old across the mixed-delivery child care system. That is yet to be determined.

### Michigan GSRP & PreK Expansion

Michigan first introduced its Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) nearly 40 years ago,<sup>6</sup> marking the beginning of Michigan's long-term commitment to high-quality early childhood education. The program has proven to be very effective at positively impacting educational outcomes. A 2012 meta-analysis conducted by the HighScope Educational Research Foundation and the Michigan Department of Education confirmed that GSRP participants showed better performance compared to non-participants throughout their K-12 education,<sup>7</sup> including positive impacts at kindergarten entry, better educational attainment

throughout the K-12 years, reduced grade retention and higher graduation rates.

Subsequent program evaluations have confirmed not only that GSRP participants continue to outperform comparison groups on school success indicators but also that despite rapid expansion, GSRP has maintained consistently high quality.

GSRP historically works in concert with Head Start, the federal prekindergarten that targets the lowest income families in any community. GSRP income and qualification guidelines generally “sit on top” of Head Start guidelines, and the two programs at times operate blended classrooms where students of both programs receive comparable instruction.

In January 2023 Governor Gretchen Whitmer announced a new push for “PreK for All” that would dramatically increase enrollment in GSRP, Head Start and other prekindergarten programs.

## Examples & Priorities

### Michigan’s PreK for All Expansion in Implementation

The initial goal stated by the PreK for All Action Team (convened by MiLEAP with technical support from Policy Equity Group)<sup>8</sup> was to entirely remove the eligibility cap for PreK for All, potentially increasing

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.k12dive.com/news/New-Mexico-guarantees-pre-school/636356/>

<sup>5</sup> “Publicly funded pre-kindergarten programs”, County Health Rankings and Road Maps Division, Population Health Institute, University of Wisconsin, 2024

<sup>6</sup> The program was initially known in 1985 as the Michigan School Readiness Program

<sup>7</sup> “Michigan Great Start Readiness Program Evaluation 2012: High School Graduation and Grade Retention Findings”, Lawrence J. Schweinhart, Zongping Xiang, Marijata Daniel-Echols, Kimberly Browning, & Tomoko Wakabayashi

<sup>8</sup> “Making the Vision a Reality: A Roadmap for Implementing PreK for All” <https://www.michigan.gov/mileap/-/media/Project/Websites/mileap/Documents/Early-Childhood-Education/PreK-For-All/PreK-For-All-Roadmap.pdf?rev=3e3787419ca5402a8e389219d-b3577a3&hash=397AD3E5956EA07DF68DA5CD47586517>



enrollment of all Michigan 4-year-olds in publicly funded early learning settings from 41 percent to 75 percent. However, this approach was not fully adopted and funded in 2024<sup>9</sup> and has been modified for fall 2024 enrollment.

### The following changes will be implemented in the 2024-25 program:

- As of the time of this writing, families with incomes up to 400 percent of the federal poverty level will now be eligible, up from 300 percent and 250 percent in prior enrollment periods
  - For a family of four, this means households earning up to \$124,800 could qualify
  - If slots are still available after enrolling lower-income students, even higher-income families may be able to participate.
- Intermediate school districts around the state are planning to provide free preK to over 57,000 children, up from about 41,000 the previous year
- The new state budget includes \$85 million in additional funding to support preK expansion.
  - This includes \$63.5 million to serve an additional 6,800 children starting Fall 2024
  - \$42.8 million to increase the full-day per-child allocation to \$10,342
  - \$35 million to open new classrooms in underserved areas

- In addition, Michigan's PreK for All initiative includes several measures to ensure quality improvement as it expands access to pre-kindergarten education, including quality standards and indicators, professional development programs for staff, improved compensation to attract and retain qualified staff, ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement processes

### The key strategies envisioned for implementing PreK for All in the 2024-25 academic year include:

- Through the intermediate school districts, the state is working to increase capacity by recruiting more teachers and opening new classrooms
- Efforts are underway to convert some tuition-based programs, both school-based and community-based, to free preK slots

## Issues & Implications

**The expansion of a successful program that improves access to high quality, affordable preK for all Michigan families with 4-year-olds is clearly a good thing. However, there are some potential consequences for families and for the rest of the mixed-delivery child care system<sup>10</sup> that should be mitigated if possible:**



- Many GSRP programs operate on 4-day-a-week schedule during the regular K-12 academic year, so an expansion of GSRP and PreK for All programs will likely create additional demand for before and after school care and for summer care. If that demand is not met by available options, it will intensify what is already a significant challenge for working parents
- The push to open new GSRP and other Michigan-funded classrooms could impact classroom availability for Head Start programs
- The push to hire more teachers to staff GSRP and Michigan-funded classrooms could pull educators out of other home-based and center-based programs

<sup>9</sup> "Michigan touts 'free pre-K for all.' It's more complicated than that" Bridge Magazine, August 13, 2024

<sup>10</sup> 10-County Regional Child Care Planning Coalition meeting minutes and interviews

*“To make the most of this opportunity, balancing the significant investment being made in preschool with the need for investment across Michigan’s mixed-delivery child care system, is needed—especially for infants and toddlers.”*

- For tuition-based programs that do not participate in PreK for all, either out of choice or because their programs don’t meet the criteria, a net loss of 4-year-old children in care can put even more pressure on a challenged business model, potentially driving some providers to close their operations and potentially eroding capacity that serves 0- to 3-year-olds
- At present, the expansion of PreK for All is vulnerable to changing priorities and leadership in Michigan’s state government

## Maximizing the Benefit & Minimizing the Harm

Conversations within the Regional Child Care Planning Coalition generally focused on three broad areas, with several potential approaches mentioned

### 1. Making the most of this opportunity (much of this is already under way)

- Reaching out to existing licensed center-based providers to participate in PreK for All and access start-up grants designed to help them add capacity
- Presenting clear information to families with 4-year-olds about the new opportunity and where and how it can be accessed for those who are interested and disseminating this information

through a variety of information sources, partners, hubs and navigators (*see Solution 13: Enhanced Family Navigation*)

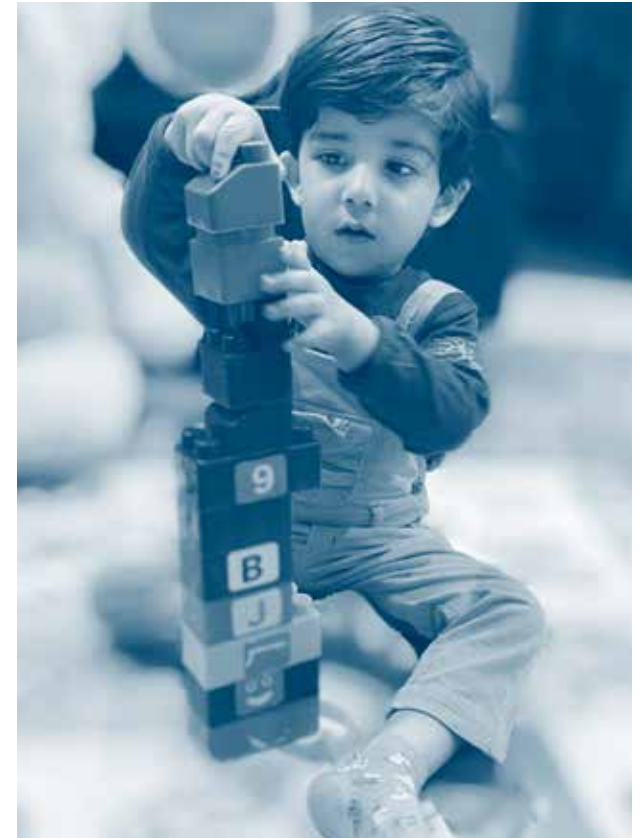
- Supplementing available transportation so that all eligible students can have access to the nearest available PreK for All

### 2. Lessening any resulting disruptions for families and child care providers

- Encouraging school-based programs and other providers to offer 5-day-a-week preK programming
- Working with community partners, identify providers who are willing to expand before and after school care as well as summer programs
- Implementing a home-based provider component to offer preK options to parents (*see Solution 11: Home-Based Universal Preschool*)

*Note: Colorado’s publicly funded PreK program offers parents a mixed-delivery child care system to choose from that includes community-based programs, school districts, and home providers.<sup>11</sup>*

- Balancing the significant investment being made in preschool with the need for investment across Michigan’s mixed-delivery child care system so that full day/full year early care and learning remains accessible to those families who need it, and especially for infants and toddlers



### 3. Working to make the change stable and sustainable.

- As the program is successfully implemented within the mixed-delivery child care system, supporting the vision to provide PreK for All to 75 percent of Michigan 4-year-olds by 2027
- Advocating for modifications to the funding and enabling of the programs that are broad-based, nonpartisan and sustainable, similar to the approaches taken by other states

<sup>11</sup> “Publicly funded pre-kindergarten programs”, County Health Rankings and Road Maps Division, Population Health Institute, University of Wisconsin, 2024

## Potential Near-Term Actions

The success and potential expansion of PreK for All in Michigan and within the region will depend on community support and involvement.

### Community members should:

Stay informed about the program's progress by signing up for updates at [greatstarttoquality.org/find-free-quality-preschool](https://greatstarttoquality.org/find-free-quality-preschool)

Advocate for continued funding and resources to support the program's goals, such as facilities and start-up grants

Advocate with school-based and center-based providers to offer convenient extended day and summer care for PreK children at reasonable rates

Advocate for and support other solutions to lessen disruptions for families and child care providers associated with PreK for All

### Policy makers should:

Maintain and increase funding support for the PreK for All program including

*“Policy makers should maintain and increase funding support for the PreK for All program including identifying funds to support a home-based version of the program.”*

identifying funds to support a home-based version of the program

Support efforts to attract and retain early childhood workers through better compensation, career pathway support and other workforce development efforts

Support other solutions to lessen disruptions for families and child care providers associated with PreK for All

### PreK for All program administrators should:

Work with child care providers, schools and stakeholders to ensure accessible transportation to programs and create solutions for extended day and summer care for 4-year-olds enrolled in prekindergarten programs

Spread awareness about the program and its benefits to parents of 4-year-olds

Direct families to [MiFreePreschool.org](https://MiFreePreschool.org) to check eligibility and apply

Remind people that applications are accepted on a rolling basis, and families can apply in spring or summer for fall enrollment



**Networks Northwest Coalition**

**Regional Child Care Plan 2024**