

# Oregon Preschool Promise<sup>1</sup>

## Background

Since 1987, Oregon has funded pre-K for three- and four-year-olds with its Oregon Head Start Prekindergarten program, which allocated state dollars to expand early education enrollment beyond what is possible with federal Head Start funding. As of the 2015-16 school year, about 7 percent of three-year-olds and 10 percent of four-year-olds participated in this program. Beginning in the 2016-17 school year, Oregon initiated an additional state pre-K program called Preschool Promise.<sup>2</sup> This discussion focuses on rules applicable to this new program.

## How is the pre-K program financed?

Preschool Promise is financed via state general funds. Early Learning Hubs (by region) apply for funding from the state, and providers are sub-contracted to deliver services.<sup>3</sup>

## What is the current status of state efforts toward compensation improvement for pre-K teachers?

**Salary:** HB 3380, the authorizing legislation for Preschool Promise, directs Oregon’s Early Learning Council to establish minimum salaries and target salary requirements for lead preschool teachers employed in Preschool Promise classrooms, regardless of setting. The legislation originally specified that “target salary requirements shall be comparable to lead kindergarten teacher salaries in public schools,” which in practice have been set based on the median salary of kindergarten teachers.<sup>4</sup>

This language has since been weakened to read “Target salary *guidelines* shall be, *to the extent practicable*, comparable to lead kindergarten teacher salaries in public schools, [emphasis added]” and the requirement for lead pre-K teachers to have a bachelor’s degree has been removed.<sup>5</sup> The targets are set regionally, rather than by school district. The current targets address starting salary and do not have a mechanism that accounts for experience. Unlike the minimum salary requirements, the target salaries are non-binding for providers; however, target salaries — rather than minimum salaries — are used to determine funding levels in the cost-modeling process.

**Benefits:** Benefits were not directly included in the legislation, although health and retirement benefits were included in the cost-modeling process. The state’s QRIS includes basic standards related to the provision of benefits, but does not specify which types of benefits must be included in the package or what value they should have (e.g., a set number of days off). The legislation does specify that pre-K providers must be 4- or 5-star level in the QRIS.<sup>6</sup>

1 All information in this profile comes from interview data, unless otherwise specified. Personal communication with David Mandell, Gwyn Bachtle, and Dana Hepper, Oregon Division of Early Learning, November/December 2016 (Follow-up: August 2017).

2 See the Oregon profile in Barnett, W.S., Friedman-Krauss, A.H., Weisenfeld, G.G., Horowitz, M., Kasmin, R., & Squires, J.H. (2017). *The State of Preschool 2016: State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

3 Early Learning Division. (2017). *Oregon Preschool Legislative Report*. Salem, OR: Oregon Department of Education, Early Learning Division. Retrieved from [https://oregonearlylearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Oregon-Preschool-Legislative-Report\\_020917.pdf](https://oregonearlylearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Oregon-Preschool-Legislative-Report_020917.pdf).

4 Enrolled House Bill 3380. 78th Oregon Legislative Assembly – 2015 Regular Session. Retrieved from <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2015R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/HB3380/Enrolled>.

5 Enrolled House Bill 2013. 79th Oregon Legislative Assembly – 2017 Regular Session. Retrieved from <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2017R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/HB2013/Enrolled>.

6 The Research Institute. (2014). *Oregon’s Quality Rating and Improvement System — Standards for Center-based Child Care Programs*. Research Institute, Western Oregon University. Retrieved from <http://triwou.org/projects/qris/earlylearning>.

*Payment for Professional Responsibilities:* Working conditions more generally are not directly addressed in the legislation. The annual hour requirement for instruction and associated funding is the same for all pre-K teachers, regardless of setting, but there are no specific guidelines about time for planning and professional development. As above with benefits, the QRIS includes standards related to professional responsibilities, but does not specify what must be included (e.g., a certain amount of paid planning time/paid professional development days).

## **What was the rationale for taking forward the issue of pay parity?**

Equity was a strong driver — there was a perception that it is not fair for teachers of younger children or teachers in certain settings to be treated differently from other teachers. In addition, there was concern that low compensation was driving Head Start teachers with bachelor's degrees to leave their positions.

## **What was the approach/strategy for moving toward parity?**

The strategy was to move incrementally, beginning with those aspects of compensation that seemed easiest to improve, namely starting salary. Legislation gave the Early Learning Council the authority to set minimum salaries for teachers funded by Preschool Promise.

## **What has been helpful in moving these efforts along?**

In their memo to the Early Learning Council, “Establishing Minimum and Target Salaries for Preschool Promise Teachers,” administrators from the Early Learning Division were able to point to data collected on Oregon’s early childhood workforce to show relationships between low wages and low retention rates.<sup>7</sup>

## **What positive outcomes have been seen as a result of the push toward parity?**

This program is very new, and so few outcomes can be assessed at present. An initial report to the Oregon Legislature describes average salary data by education level, which will help to document changes to salary levels over time.<sup>8</sup>

## **What has been challenging about these efforts?**

Pre-K administrators noted several challenges in moving toward salary parity for pre-K teachers, including:

- Preventing wage compression (higher wages for newer workers relative to older workers, given that the latter have more experience), when the funding model is not set up to take into account teacher experience over time;
- Ensuring that increases in educational qualifications do not exacerbate existing racial inequities with regard to who has access to more highly qualified, better-paid positions; and
- Implementing parity requirements in private settings, when private settings may have both pre-K and other types of classrooms and may be unwilling to implement policies that lead to salary disparities within their programs.

7 Mandell, D., & Bachtle, G. (2016). *Establishing Minimum and Target Salaries for Preschool Promise Teachers*. Salem, OR: Oregon Department of Education, Early Learning Division. For the information cited on Oregon’s early care and education workforce, see Oregon Center for Career Development in Childhood Care and Education and Oregon Child Care Research Partnership. (n.d.). *Oregon Early Learning Workforce: One Year Beyond Baseline Comparison of 2012 and 2013*. Portland, OR: Oregon Center for Career Development in Childhood Care and Education and Corvallis, OR: Oregon Child Care Research Partnership. Retrieved from <http://health.oregonstate.edu/sites/health.oregonstate.edu/files/occrp/pdf/oregon-early-learning-workforce-one-year-beyond-baseline-2015-09-02-final.pdf>.

8 Early Learning Division. (2017). *Oregon Preschool Legislative Report*. Salem, OR: Oregon Department of Education, Early Learning Division. Retrieved from [https://oregonearlylearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Oregon-Preschool-Legislative-Report\\_020917.pdf](https://oregonearlylearning.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Oregon-Preschool-Legislative-Report_020917.pdf).