

Investing in Our Future:

Recommendations to Inform City Planning for High-Quality Universal Pre-Kindergarten in Boston



A Report to Mayor Martin J. Walsh, City of Boston

Submitted by The Mayor's Advisory Committee on
Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK)

April 2016

Letter on Behalf of the UPK Advisory Committee

The Boston Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) Advisory Committee is grateful for the opportunity provided by Mayor Martin J. Walsh to inform Boston's continued role as a leader in the development of high-quality educational programming for the city's youngest learners. Our 30-member Committee played an important role in representing a broad range of stakeholders on the issue of UPK in Boston, and our committee's composition included parents, representatives from early education and care programs, and public officials, as well as leaders from Boston Public Schools (BPS) and the Boston School Committee, philanthropy, business, higher education, and nonprofit and children's advocacy organizations. These individuals contributed valuable time and perspectives in order to highlight key findings and prioritized recommendations in support of Boston's efforts to develop, scale, and manage a coordinated Universal Pre-Kindergarten system that provides high-quality preschool options to all four-year olds in Boston.

Five sub-committees identified and completed important tasks to inform findings and recommendations across the following areas:

- Data, Assessment, and Evaluation
- Facilities and Space
- Finance and Funding
- Parent Outreach and Engagement
- Quality Instruction and Capacity Building

Sub-committees conducted a wide range of activities, including preliminary documentation of the current supply of BPS and other community-based Pre-K programs, as well as robust parent and family engagement through focus groups and surveys, identification of leading challenges to various Pre-K programs, and the definition of Essential Elements of High-Quality Pre-K. Findings from these efforts are meaningful and helped inform a prioritized set of recommendations and next steps outlined in this report.

Advisory Committee efforts were also subject to resource limitations. As a result, the Advisory Committee recommends additional and comprehensive analysis to be conducted under the auspices of a formal design and implementation planning phase of work. This critical next step would be separate and distinct from activities undertaken as part of this report.

Our report reflects important context and preliminary findings related to Boston's goal of providing all of the city's four-year-olds access to high-quality Pre-K programs by 2020. The report also calls for the creation of a city-led High-Quality UPK Initiative in Boston to lead additional research and planning, as well as to design and resource a formal infrastructure dedicated to the ongoing management and growth of a diverse mixed-delivery Pre-K system. The recommendations herein are intended to inform the city's ongoing priorities and efforts, and do not specifically address subsequent needs related to model and system design, and implementation.

Achieving and sustaining a system of universal high-quality Pre-K is a multi-year endeavor that is essential to the early education of Boston's four-year-olds and the diverse needs of these children and their families. Ongoing efforts will require continued collaboration across different stakeholders, systems, and entities. We are grateful to have been able to contribute to this early endeavor, and look forward to participating in its continued progress.

Jeri Robinson and Jason Sachs, Co-Chairs, Boston UPK Advisory Committee

Executive Summary

On May 6, 2014, Mayor Martin J. Walsh announced the formation of a Universal Pre-Kindergarten (“UPK”) Advisory Committee to inform Boston’s continued role as a leader in developing high-quality educational programming for the city’s youngest learners. The Advisory Committee played an important role in representing a broad range of stakeholders around the issue of UPK in Boston. Stakeholder input— together with targeted sub-committee research and discussion— informed the findings and recommendations outlined in this report. This valuable information will be used to inform the city’s ongoing efforts to define its broader Pre-K goals and strategies for achieving such goals.

Our 30-member Committee included parents, representatives from early education and care programs, public officials, leaders from Boston Public Schools (BPS) and the Boston School Committee, philanthropy, business, higher education, and nonprofit and children’s advocacy organizations. The Committee has supported efforts to gather information, exchange perspectives, and draft preliminary findings and recommendations to inform next steps and an action plan for a high-quality Universal Pre-Kindergarten system in Boston.

Mayor Walsh’s specific charge to the UPK Advisory Committee sought to build on Boston’s nation-leading UPK efforts in order to accelerate early child development and school readiness for four-year-olds, and provide equitable access to high-quality Pre-K seats for all four-year-olds in Boston by 2020. The city also looked to inform the creation of a formal and city-led UPK infrastructure to define, inform, manage, and sustain coordinated and diverse high-quality Pre-K programming throughout Boston.

The report highlights important context, findings, and recommendations related to the goal of providing all Boston four-year-olds with equitable access to free, high-quality Pre-K options for 6.5 hours per day, 180 days per year.¹ It also underscores a compelling rationale for Boston to build upon a strong foundation of elevating Pre-K quality in order to assure equitable access to programming at levels that best support child development. Specifically:

- The city boasts a diverse provider landscape of Pre-K programs that include Boston Public Schools (“BPS”) classrooms², as well as Head Start, community-based centers, family childcare, parochial, charter, and private providers.
- Research and demonstration projects have helped codify a set of essential elements of quality for Pre-K classrooms that will inform other provider programs around the city (see Figure 1).

¹ The UPK Advisory Committee was tasked with considering free access to diverse Pre-K programs within a timeframe comparable to Boston Public Schools’ offering. For the purposes of this report, free Pre-K is recommended for 6.5 hours per day and 180 days per year, as consistent with the school day and year. Many families will require before- and after-school programming, as well as school vacation programming, in addition to other UPK options.

² BPS preschool programs include KO (three-year-olds) and K1 (four-year-olds). This report focuses on the provision of universal Pre-K to Boston’s four-year-old population.

Figure 1: Essential Elements of Pre-K Quality

- Degreed, highly-trained, and well-compensated teachers
- High-quality curriculum with a focus on literacy and math, as well as supports for students with additional needs (English Language, Special Education, etc.)
- Environments that are safe and age-appropriate to promote learning
- Maximum teacher-to-child ratios (2:22 in BPS, 2:20 in community-based centers)
- Accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and/or participation in Massachusetts' Quality Rating and Improvement System
- Ongoing coaching and professional development for teaching staff
- Strong communication and support to engage families
- Ongoing assessment and evaluation of program quality and child-level outcomes to promote continuous improvement
- Stable infrastructure to administer and oversee UPK

- Research also shows that informed investments in quality yield positive results for children and contribute to efforts to close the achievement gap.
- The scaling of quality requires a significant commitment of resources and formal infrastructure to develop and support a robust mixed-delivery system for high-quality Pre-K.

Findings and prioritized recommendations—summarized below and discussed in greater detail in the body of the report—provide a strong basis for Boston's next steps. Collectively, an emerging understanding of Boston's current UPK context will help articulate a clear vision for a future system of high-quality Pre-K for all Boston four-year-olds.

Summarized Findings

- Boston has achieved near universal access to Pre-K across a diverse mixed-delivery system of school and community-based providers with wide variations in quality. The city's main issue is one of quality and access, not supply.
- Additional landscape analysis is required to understand the number and location of different Pre-K sites across the city, and to ensure that supply and demand are aligned around the city's geographic distribution of four-year-olds and their respective needs.
- Boston has a clear understanding of quality requirements, and should now focus on scaling universal quality across Pre-K providers.
- Parental voice and engagement is essential to informing and sustaining a system of high-quality Pre-K options throughout Boston.

- Boston’s diverse Pre-K landscape supports a network of providers that address diverse family and child population needs, but also presents challenges to equity of access and quality.
- Lack of a clear infrastructure or entity to support Boston’s ongoing management of a multi-dimensional Pre-K landscape is a significant barrier to continued progress.
- Additional research into the costs to develop and sustain consistent high-quality Pre-K is an essential next step for Boston to plan appropriately for a viable and sustainable mixed-delivery system.

Prioritized Recommendations

(1) Create a formal Boston High-Quality UPK Initiative structured as a city-led and resourced public-private partnership. Such an initiative should ensure that all Boston children can participate in Pre-K programs at the level of quality that best supports their development and school readiness. The initiative should also be inclusive of both school- and community-based Pre-K programming (i.e., “mixed-delivery” system).

(2) Invest in deliberate design and implementation planning for a Boston High-Quality UPK Initiative that will provide appropriate leadership, authority, and accountability. Design and implementation planning would include considerations for the following needs to:

- Shift from a diverse landscape of different provider types and models to a robust mixed-delivery system that promotes and manages consistently high-quality Pre-K for four-year-olds.
- Invest in quality improvements across all mixed-delivery models, so that every four-year-old in Boston has access to a high-quality Pre-K option.
- Align supply and demand in order to ensure that access to high-quality Pre-K options is consistent with the city’s geographic distribution of four-year-olds and their developmental needs.
- Prioritize parental engagement and voice across a mixed-delivery system.
- Create a formal UPK infrastructure under which an integrated mixed-delivery system is defined, managed, and sustained by a designated entity.
- Ensure equitable and *free* access to Pre-K (6.5 hours per day, 180 days per year).

(3) Conduct a targeted and in-depth assessment of current Pre-K quality and cost across the full range of provider models as an initial priority undertaking of a formal Boston High-Quality UPK Initiative.

(4) Adhere to a meaningful set of Guiding Principles to inform ongoing UPK efforts:

- Use research and data as evidence for decision-making
- Expand opportunity—act on the premise that “all means all”
- Focus on achieving and sustaining high-quality Pre-K programs
- Act with urgency, and commit to a long-term, sustained implementation process

- Tap Boston leadership within higher education, philanthropic, cultural, community, and civic institutions to leverage valuable insights and resources

Boston has a tremendous opportunity to act upon a strong history of UPK growth and success. An important next step is to ensure the allocation of formal resources and support for design and implementation planning that will advance a formal high-quality UPK Initiative in Boston.

Context

Boston is a national model for UPK across many dimensions. With over 90% enrollment among Boston's population of approximately 6,000 four-year-olds,³ access to Pre-K is nearly universal across a diverse landscape of different providers and models that are largely independent of one another (with the exception of BPS).

The system has strong pockets of high quality and a measurable track record of improving quality, although this is varied both across and within different provider types. Notable progress across multiple measures of quality has been reported consistently in Boston Public School K1 classrooms. The Boston Quality Inventories⁴ ("BQI") conducted in 2007, 2010, and 2013 also reported improvement across some—but not all—measures of quality in a subset of community-based centers and family childcare programs. Significant drivers in performance gaps across different program types are the stark differences in the resources and capacity of community-based centers and family childcare programs, which lack both the financial and professional development/training resources of Boston Public Schools. While the BQI provides valuable information about a targeted subset of community-based and family childcare programs, a broader quality inventory is required (see *Key Findings and Prioritized Recommendations* sections of this report).

As Boston continues to strive toward a goal of providing all four-year-olds access to high-quality Pre-K, it must consider an important shift from a diverse but loose landscape of providers to a more robust and formal mixed-delivery system of high-quality Pre-K options. This more formal system will provide a valuable path to improving quality, ensuring equitable access to quality, and meeting the diverse needs of children and families.

The city's diverse provider landscape parallels its diverse population and the distribution of children and families across the city. Nearly half (47%) of four-year-olds live in three neighborhoods—Dorchester, Roxbury, and East Boston—with another 25% in the four western neighborhoods of West Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, Roslindale, and Hyde Park. Many are in homes where languages other than English are spoken, with 45% of Boston's four-year-olds living with at least one foreign-born parent. Additionally,

³ Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, 2014.

⁴ Marshall, NL, Robeson, WW, and Roberts, J 2013. "Boston Quality Inventory 2013: Community Early Care and Education Programs." Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA.

9% live in a household headed by a grandparent, and approximately 56% of Boston’s four-year-olds live in households that are either below or just above the poverty line, the latter approaching \$48,000 for a family of four.⁵

Children in poverty and with multiple risk factors are more likely to experience developmental delays. However, children who participate in high-quality Pre-K—safe, nurturing environments led by skilled educators using rigorous curricula and emphasizing healthy child development, including creativity and play—are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college; they earn more and make larger tax payments; and they experience better health.⁶ High-quality Pre-K, nationally and here in Boston, is counteracting the effects of poverty and racial disparities on child learning, and closing achievement gaps in K12 schooling.⁷

A critical finding of the UPK Advisory Committee’s efforts is the clarification that one of Boston’s greatest UPK challenges is not one of supply—90% enrollment⁸ is a significant achievement—but is instead a question of quality. While quality Pre-K exists across different program types in the city, quality is varied both across and within program types. As the city sets its sights on the goal of *universal quality* across Boston’s Pre-K options, efforts should focus on activities that:

- **Shift from a diverse landscape of different provider types and models to a robust mixed-delivery system** that promotes and manages consistently high-quality Pre-K for four-year-olds.
- **Invest in quality improvements across all mixed-delivery models**, so that every four-year-old in Boston has access to a high-quality Pre-K option.
- **Align supply and demand** in order to ensure that access to high-quality Pre-K options is consistent with the city’s geographic distribution of four-year-olds and their developmental needs.
- **Prioritize parental engagement and voice** across a mixed-delivery system.
- **Create a formal UPK infrastructure** under which an integrated mixed-delivery system is defined, managed, and sustained by a designated entity.
- **Ensure equitable and free access to Pre-K** (6.5 hours per day, 180 days per year).

The following report represents findings and recommendations of the UPK Advisory Committee’s 2014–15 efforts, submitted respectfully to Mayor Walsh and the City of Boston in April 2016.

⁵ “Profile of 4-Year-Old Population in Boston.” Boston Redevelopment Authority Research Division, April 2014.

⁶ Rolnick, A. & Grunewald, R. (2003). “Early childhood development: Economic development with a high return,” https://www.minneapolisfed.org/publications_papers/pub_display.cfm?id=3832; The Heckman Equation, <http://www.heckmanequation.org/>.

⁷ Christina Weiland and Hirokazu Yoshikawa, “Impacts of a Pre-Kindergarten Program on Children’s Mathematics, Language, Literacy, Executive Function, and Emotional Skills,” Society for Research in Child Development, Inc., 2013.

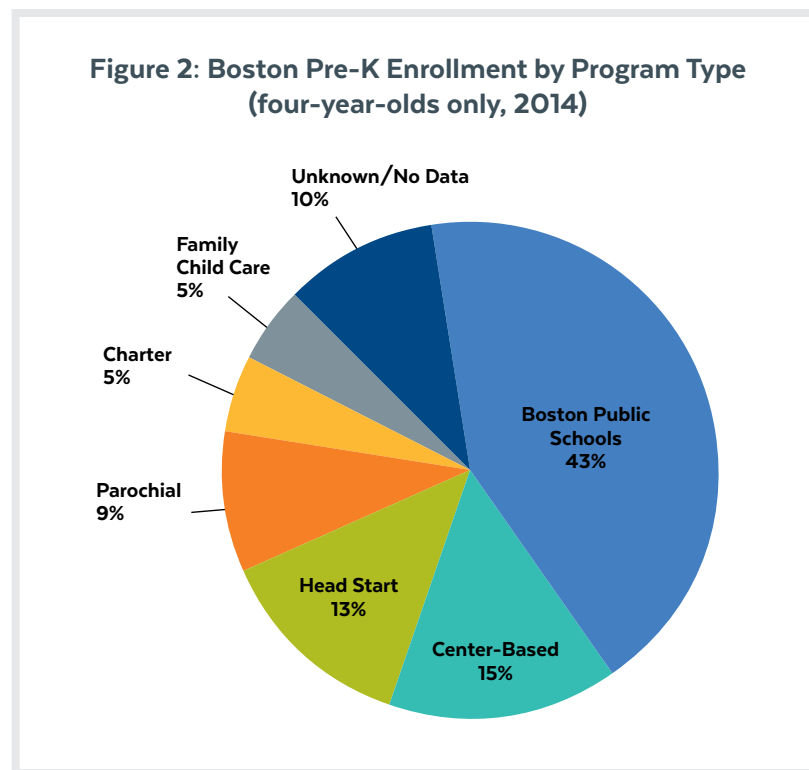
⁸ Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, 2014.

Key Findings

The UPK Advisory Committee’s assessment of Boston’s diverse Pre-K landscape highlights a number of important findings that should inform ongoing efforts to provide high-quality educational options to all four-year-olds in Boston. Specifically:

(1) Based on current enrollment, Boston has achieved near universal access to Pre-K across a diverse mixed-delivery system of school- and community-based providers. However, there is wide variation in the quality of programs. Our main issue is one of quality and access, not supply.

A critical finding of the UPK Advisory Committee is that 90% of the city’s 6,000 four-year-olds are enrolled in early education and care programs.⁹ Boston has achieved almost universal Pre-K enrollment through a diverse mix of providers that include BPS, community-based centers, Head Start, charter and parochial schools, and family childcare programs.



Committee findings also show that 81% of Boston’s enrolled four-year-olds receive public support to participate in Pre-K programs,¹⁰ and BPS’s 2014 Pre-K waitlist of 852 four-year-olds implies significant demand within the city for access to free, high-quality Pre-K.

⁹ Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, 2014.

¹⁰ Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, 2014.

Broader program enrollment data are outlined in the above chart. Additional research is needed to better understand the 10% of children for whom data is unknown and whether appropriate mechanisms exist to connect high-needs children to Pre-K programs. Particular attention must also be paid to whether existing services meet the broad range of options that working families in a majority-minority city like Boston need, including before-school, after-school, and vacation hours as well as programming in languages other than English.

Overall, the broader enrollment finding is a tremendous accomplishment that should be acknowledged and celebrated, in Boston and beyond.

(2) While Boston’s supply of Pre-K seats is largely sufficient, further landscape analysis is required to understand the number and location of different sites across the city, and to ensure that supply and demand are aligned around the city’s geographic distribution of four-year-olds and their respective needs.

A strong understanding of Boston’s four-year-old population is essential to understanding how Pre-K access and delivery can best serve different needs, including those related to geographic access and cost.

Nearly half (47%) of Boston four-year-olds are located in three neighborhoods—Dorchester, Roxbury, and East Boston—with another 25% located in the four western neighborhoods of West Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, Roslindale, and Hyde Park. Almost a third of four-year-olds (31.6%) live in households whose incomes are below the poverty line. Another quarter of four-year-olds live in households that are just above poverty, at 101-200% of the poverty line (\$48,000 for a family of four).¹¹

A greater understanding of the number and location of different Pre-K model types and sites across geographies is required in order to conduct a meaningful assessment of supply and demand alignment in Boston. Similarly, a better understanding is needed of the supply and demand for supports that appropriately address the needs of English Language Learners and children with special learning needs. An additional landscape assessment should also take into account charter and parochial school providers, as well as private Pre-K providers, which were not included in data efforts related to this report (with the exception of overall enrollment figures, above). More details around the proposed landscape assessment are outlined in the *Prioritized Recommendations* section.

(3) Boston has a clear understanding of quality requirements, and should now focus on scaling universal quality across Pre-K providers so that there is no “wrong door” for families, regardless of the program they choose. All four-year-olds in Boston deserve equitable access to high-quality options that support healthy child development and strong school readiness outcomes.

¹¹ “Profile of 4-Year-Old Population in Boston,” Boston Redevelopment Authority Research Division, April 2014.

The good news is that significant public and philanthropic investment in Boston over the last decade has identified the essential elements of quality needed to yield measurable positive gains for children. We know from research that a focus on program quality is requisite to achieving measurable positive changes in child outcomes. These quality components have been tested in the current BPS K1 (Pre-K) model and are endorsed by experts in the field.

Essential Elements of Pre-K Quality

- Degreed, highly trained, and well-compensated teachers
- High-quality curriculum with a focus on literacy and math, as well as supports for students with additional needs (English Language, Special Education, etc.)
- Environments that are safe and age-appropriate to promote learning and healthy child development
- Maximum teacher-to-child ratios (2:22 in BPS, 2:20 in community-based centers)
- Accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and/or participation in Massachusetts' Quality Rating and Improvement System
- Ongoing coaching and professional development for teaching staff
- Strong communication and support to engage families
- Ongoing assessment and evaluation of program quality and child-level outcomes to promote continuous improvement
- Stable infrastructure to administer and oversee UPK

Furthermore, Pre-K quality continues to improve across many delivery models in the city, as measured by Boston Quality Inventories conducted by the Wellesley Centers for Women in 2007, 2010, and 2014. In addition, a 2013 Harvard study documented that BPS's K1 program has shown the largest effect on language and math to-date among public programs in the country.¹²

Despite progress on defining quality and improving traction in scaling quality across program types, many programs still do not offer the level of excellence needed to support school readiness effectively. Many programs would benefit from a more targeted focus on literacy and mathematics curriculum and instruction, as well as an increased focus on supporting the social and emotional development of children. More intentional efforts to partner with families are also essential to program success.

Additionally and importantly, the success of UPK will hinge on the Pre-K workforce. New and vibrant pipelines of skilled educators and leaders are critical to increase the quality of community early education and care centers, and to develop qualified staff in all programming. Boston must commit to supporting and compensating a well-educated, highly-trained, stable, and diverse Pre-K workforce throughout the city.

¹² Christina Weiland and Hirokazu Yoshikawa, "Impacts of a Pre-Kindergarten Program on Children's Mathematics, Language, Literacy, Executive Function, and Emotional Skills," Society for Research in Child Development, Inc., 2013.

While BPS, Head Start, center-based, and family childcare programs have been included in past quality assessments, the full population of classrooms were not reviewed, nor were parochial and charter school programs part of those assessments. Additionally, no central body exists to manage and coordinate the ongoing assessment and dissemination of quality across Pre-K programs in the city.

Furthermore, the strategic use of data and assessment is required to support the definition and scaling of high-quality Pre-K in Boston. Assessment at every level—child, classroom, and program—is an essential component of citywide Pre-K efforts. Boston Pre-K leaders agree that assessments are most valuable when they are useful to educators as formative tools for the continuous improvement of programming and instruction. In Boston, BPS KI and community-based Pre-K programs currently make use of a wide variety of assessments, but their application to program improvement varies both within and across program types.

Despite the widespread use of assessment data across different Pre-K program types in Boston, the city lacks a comprehensive and unified assessment system and database to support, inform, and improve early education of four-year-olds. The development of a centralized and integrated citywide data and assessment system should be a top priority of a formal high-quality UPK initiative.

While Boston can confidently claim to have a sound understanding of essential quality elements of a successful Pre-K program, it now needs the resources and organization to help provide quality programs to more of our city's four-year-olds.

(4) Parental voice and engagement is essential to informing and perpetuating a system of high-quality Pre-K options throughout the city.

Parents (or other caregivers) are primary decision-makers when it comes to children's Pre-K access and options. Accordingly, it is essential to communicate and engage with families both before and during a child's participation in Pre-K. The Advisory Committee's 2014-15 efforts included primary research and engagement of over 1,600 Boston parents via focus groups (approximately 110 parents across 12 locations) and a multi-community survey (approximately 1,600 parents in over 20 neighborhoods). Feedback from this outreach and engagement included the following key points, which prioritize a desire for **quality, affordability, and access**:

- **Parents place a high value on early education and care, have high expectations of programs, and experience frustration in navigating the system.** Boston parents of four-year-olds overwhelmingly agree on the value of universal Pre-Kindergarten and on the importance of providing it to families for free. Ninety-five percent (95%) of parents responding to the UPK survey felt that it is extremely or very important that families have access to Universal Pre-K. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of responding parents felt extremely or very strongly that Universal Pre-K should be free.¹³

¹³ Boston UPK Parent Survey, September–November 2014.

- **Program quality and a child’s experience in a program are high priorities for parents.** Some parents will travel and pay for quality. Parents also want teachers and school personnel who can deliver on many fronts: they want people who are qualified; bi-lingual where necessary; compassionate; willing to partner with parents; culturally competent; knowing and respectful of the diverse backgrounds of their students; skilled and knowledgeable about educating children with special needs; and willing to support children who have social/emotional issues and who are developing their executive function skills.¹⁴
- **Parents of English Language Learners and children with learning challenges feel a powerful set of concerns about access and opportunity.** English Language Learners represent approximately 49% of BPS K1 students. Approximately 17% of BPS K1 enrollments are children with special needs.¹⁵ If Boston wants to be successful in supporting the school readiness of its high-needs children and closing the achievement gap, significant attention must be devoted to assuring sufficient access to the programs and supports that meet children’s needs. More work needs to be done in order to address these two critical subjects for the implementation of UPK in Boston.
- **Parents and providers worry about the number and quality of transitions in the daily lives of young children—and the forms and quality of transportation they use.** Parents and providers report that children experience too many transitions on a day-to-day basis. Busing and transportation options for children vary widely, and the safety and quality of the transportation experience is inconsistent. Access to out-of-school time is limited for many students in BPS K1 programming, and often requires additional transportation.
- **Parents report that they do not understand Pre-K options, and seek easier access to more and better information.** Parents want information and guidance on Pre-K access and choices from people who are easy to reach, supportive, and able to explain the importance of early childhood education and how to secure it for their children. Parents also want to understand the full range of Pre-K options, including: Head Start, center-based, family childcare, private, parochial, charter, METCO (the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunities), and district public schools.
- **The cost of Pre-K and out-of-school-time care places significant economic burden on many families.** Despite the availability of subsidies and 2,561 K1 seats in BPS, many parents struggle with the financial demands of early education and care. Parents often need to secure and pay for care for their children when Pre-K programs are not in session. Some working parents, ineligible for assistance, put a large percentage of their income toward pre-school or out-of-school time costs, or they place their children in informal, unlicensed settings that may not sufficiently support children’s development.

¹⁴ “Executive function and self-regulation skills are the mental processes that enable [individuals] to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully.” <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/>.

¹⁵ Boston Public Schools enrollment snapshot data, December 2015.

- **Parents face tough choices and trade-offs when choosing programs for their four-year-olds.** Parents want access to high-quality Pre-K/K1 programs. They also want fair access to quality schools, K-5 or K-8, in BPS. These two goals are sometimes linked, and sometimes in conflict. Many parents view enrollment of their four-year-old in K1 programming as a way to gain access to a K-5 or K-8 BPS school of their choice. Parents report that they see enrollment in community-based Pre-K programming as potentially jeopardizing their child’s access to preferred BPS K-5 or K-8 schools. Overall, parents are deeply skeptical about the BPS school assignment system because of experiences where they often do not gain access to the K1 program or school of their choice. Survey and focus group teams repeatedly heard parents characterize the K1 and elementary school assignment process as “a chance for choice.” Rather than offering a set of viable choices among high quality Pre-K, K-5 and K-8 options, the system is experienced as a kind of lottery, leaving too much to chance.

(5) Boston’s diverse Pre-K landscape supports an important network of providers that addresses diverse family and child population needs, but also presents challenges to equity of access and quality.

Diversity of providers is a valuable aspect of Boston’s Pre-K landscape, especially where various community-based centers and other Pre-K models provide viable alternatives to a BPS K1 program that is operating at full capacity and reporting a significant waitlist. Further expansion of K1 seats in BPS is currently constrained by facilities limitations. A diverse provider landscape also taps into a broad network of community organizations in Boston that help meet the diverse needs of families.

Strengths of a diverse provider landscape are multifold. BPS has the resources and capacity to support high quality at large scale, including: degreed, highly-trained teachers who can implement a rigorous yet developmentally appropriate curriculum; professional development and coaching to support classroom practice; and data and assessment for continuous improvement. Despite resource limitations, many community-based programs bring holistic approaches to Pre-K that are inclusive of social and emotional development, as well as academics. Community-based centers often provide full-day/full-year neighborhood (“close to home”) options at a single site with strong family engagement and supports that are highly valued among parents. Many programs offer bilingual or multilingual staffing, with culturally sensitive programming for immigrant and minority families.

At the same time, community-based Pre-K centers face distinct challenges, often an inadvertent result of the growth in scale and quality of BPS programs. For example, community based programs have difficulty attracting and retaining highly qualified staff, given significant compensation differentials relative to Boston Public Schools. Focus on mathematics and literacy curriculum and instruction—a core element of quality Pre-K—is varied and often lacking across community-based centers. Many of these challenges are exacerbated by the fact that funding streams for community-based centers—including parent fees, public subsidies, and private funding—are insufficient to support the delivery of high-quality programs.

BPS K1 classrooms also face a unique set of challenges. The duration of BPS K1 programs—6.5 hours per day—is not long enough for many families, which presents an additional burden on parents to secure before- and after-school care, as well as childcare during school vacations and summer. Given licensing constraints that prohibit four-year-olds from attending after-school programs in their school building absent a licensing waiver, BPS has limited options to address this need. Community-based programs also face similar constraints with respect to providing after-school programs for four-year-olds.

BPS' transportation system also creates unintended adverse effects on parent engagement at the K1 level: providing transportation to most K1 children means that very few K1 parents have the opportunity for regular daily engagement with their child's school and teachers. Many current and prospective BPS parents report difficulties navigating BPS as a system, especially at the outset of families' contact with BPS. Finally, BPS' aspiration to employ a diverse workforce notwithstanding, BPS K1 staffing does not yet reflect the linguistic, racial, and cultural diversity of its students.

An important goal of developing an integrated mixed delivery Pre-K system in Boston will be to help leverage strengths and mitigate challenges of existing programs. Promoting a collective approach to managing different delivery models can provide significant mutual benefits across the system. Similarly, consideration of Pre-K models in the next phase of planning must include an assessment of possible unintended effects on the broader early childhood field and on the availability of services that families need.

(6) Lack of a clear infrastructure or entity to support Boston's ongoing management of a multi-dimensional UPK landscape is a significant barrier to continued progress.

No agency or program has a firm grasp on the entire Pre-K landscape in Boston. Provider quality, program costs, and funding mixes across public and private sources must be better understood in order to ensure the effective delivery of high-quality Pre-K throughout Boston. Significant progress has been made in identifying essential elements of quality, and demonstration projects have helped understand how to elevate program quality quickly and effectively. However, these advances have not occurred with the central organization, leadership, and authority necessary to ensure that all four-year-olds in Boston benefit.

The Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care ("EEC") has established licensing standards and developed a Quality Rating and Improvement System for statewide programming. Additionally, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has adopted EEC's Pre-K standards within Massachusetts' curriculum frameworks. Yet, at the local community level, there is significant need for city-resourced leadership, accountability, and advocacy to manage ongoing quality metrics and program assessment, conduct thorough and relevant financial analysis, manage common enrollment, support parent education and engagement, etc. The development of a formal structure with clear leadership, authority, and accountability is needed to advocate for and support quality expansion in an effective system, and to act upon the broader recommendations of the UPK Advisory Committee.

Central management of a mixed-delivery UPK system in Boston is needed to provide critical leadership and guidance necessary to scale quality across the city. Specifically, a formal infrastructure is needed to support the design and implementation planning for an official Pre-K Initiative and system that would:

- Establish and implement formal qualifications for participation by mixed-delivery providers
- Define and uphold quality standards (based on Essential Elements of Pre-K Quality and potentially others, to be determined)
- Define and administer data, assessment, and evaluation requirements
- Provide professional and workforce development
- Formalize and support authentic and meaningful parental/family engagement
- Develop sustainable funding models and revenue sources
- Provide operational and fiscal management, as well as oversight of contracts and partnerships
- Assure alignment with state and federal requirements

(7) Finally, additional research into the costs to develop and sustain consistent high-quality Pre-K is an essential next step for Boston to plan appropriately for a viable and sustainable mixed-delivery system.

Further research into the costs of developing and providing consistent and universal high-quality Pre-K in Boston is needed. Preliminary analysis indicates that annual per-student costs vary considerably (\$10,000 to \$16,000),¹⁶ based on a number of factors. Given significant variations in the provision of Pre-K programming across Boston, it was beyond the scope of this report's analysis to determine a definitive and comprehensive cost of implementing a UPK system in Boston. However, Advisory Committee efforts identified critical cost drivers and considerations for further analysis (to be conducted in a subsequent Design and Implementation Planning phase of work, per this report's recommendation). For example:

- Teacher salaries—a key driver of cost—vary significantly between BPS and community-based programs.
- Programmatic components that support quality have associated costs. Such components include the cost to acquire and sustain National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation, the cost of high-quality curriculum, and ongoing teacher coaching and professional development needed to ensure consistent instructional quality.
- Program duration—both hours per day and days per year—have a direct effect on the cost of services (e.g., 6.5 hours per day, 180 days per year in BPS versus up to 10 hours per day in year-round community-based programs).
- The provision of safe and age-appropriate facilities and resources across different program types, including appropriate indoor and outdoor learning environments.

¹⁶ Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, 2014.

In addition to the above, each of the Essential Elements of Pre-K Quality identified in this report has an associated cost. The next phase of Design and Implementation Planning will need to take into account both funding and policy needs required to support a high-quality Pre-K model that incorporates the essential elements of quality. Certain costs are one-time expenditures and may lend themselves to philanthropic support, while other ongoing costs will require sustainable revenue streams that could combine municipal, state and federal resources. Based on analysis to-date, it is clear that new revenue must be identified and secured in order to support both the start-up and ongoing costs of a formal and robust UPK system in Boston. A preliminary review of how other cities and states fund their respective UPK efforts indicates many different approaches that include systems funded primarily by local sales tax (Denver, CO and San Antonio, TX), other local revenues, such as a dedicated public fund, (San Francisco, CA), and state revenues (New York, NY).¹⁷

A comprehensive and robust analysis of expenditures across different Pre-K program types is necessary and will be an essential component to the Design and Implementation Planning (see *Prioritized Recommendations* section). Doing so will provide a better understanding of fixed and variable costs across programs, as well as funding levels required to establish and maintain UPK at quality levels that best promote strong outcomes for children. This analysis will also inform the costs associated with a centralized infrastructure to manage and oversee a citywide UPK system and may include (but not be limited to):

- Costs of required facilities improvements (in BPS & community-based programs) to meet quality standards
- Total costs associated with recommended assessment protocols, at both the child level and program level
- Costs of third-party evaluation of any new UPK system
- Costs to develop and maintain a UPK infrastructure to ensure effective implementation and quality
- Costs associated with developing a Career Pathway model to help community-based teachers acquire BA degrees and to augment teacher credentials and training
- Costs of improved parent outreach, communications, and engagement
- Costs of increasing the capacity of programs to serve children with special needs and children who are English language learners

Parents in Boston seek free, high-quality Pre-K programs for their children. Many Boston families with young children also need full-day, full-year services that include before- and after-school and summer programs to accommodate work schedules and broader childcare needs. As the cost of living in Boston continues to rise, families are increasingly challenged to find affordable options that will allow them to continue to live and work in the city. As a growing body of research continues to indicate, investing in high-quality Pre-K provides a measurable return on investment that—over time—outweighs the costs of implementation.

¹⁷ Thrive in 5, “*Cities and States: UPK and Targeted Pre-K*,” March 2014.

Prioritized Recommendations

The UPK Advisory Committee's work helped inform the following prioritized recommendations that are necessary to build the foundation for a sustainable citywide initiative to support the ongoing provision of universal high-quality Pre-K in Boston.

Specifically, the UPK Steering Committee recommends the following:

(1) Create a formal Boston High-Quality UPK Initiative, structured as a city-led and resourced public-private partnership that will ensure that all Boston children can participate in Pre-K programs at quality levels that best support their development and school readiness. The cost of both establishing a formal initiative and expanding and sustaining quality is a priority that needs further assessment under the auspices of a formal initiative body or entity. Recognizing that the Boston-focused Initiative would operate within the broader context of the state and federal early education system, Boston should coordinate and advocate with other community-based efforts to promote increased state and federal investment in early care and education, with a particular focus on statewide high-quality Pre-K.

(2) Invest in the deliberate design and implementation planning for a Boston High-Quality UPK Initiative. The city should invest in the design and establishment of an infrastructure that provides leadership, authority, and accountability to implement and oversee the critical functions of a mixed-delivery Pre-K system focused on high quality. Such efforts should include:

- A more detailed assessment of quality and cost (see *Recommendation (3)*, below)
- Assessment of the current policy landscape
- Consideration of findings and recommendations from the Boston Public Schools' Facilities Master Plan (currently in-process)
- Review of feeder system needs to ensure equitable elementary school access and choice for families with children enrolled in community-based Pre-K programs
- Appropriate availability of supports for English Language Learners and children with special learning needs
- Assessment of the possible unintended effects of a UPK system on the broader early childhood field and availability of services needed by families

The UPK Steering Committee understands that members of the local philanthropic community have indicated strong interest in supporting such planning efforts. So that a Boston High-Quality UPK Initiative appropriately reflects the diversity of programs serving young children across the city, a design and planning advisory is recommended, whose composition should be determined in partnership with the Mayor and leading stakeholders.

Ideally, ongoing design and implementation planning activities would include an assessment of the following needs identified by the UPK Advisory and Steering Committees (as well as other priorities identified by a design and planning advisory):

- **Shift from a diverse landscape of different provider types and models to a robust mixed-delivery system** that promotes and manages consistently high-quality Pre-K for four-year-olds.
- **Invest in quality improvements across all mixed-delivery models**, so that every four-year-old in Boston has access to a high-quality Pre-K option.
- **Align supply and demand** in order to ensure that access to high-quality Pre-K options is consistent with the city’s geographic distribution of four-year-olds and their developmental needs.
- **Prioritize parental engagement and voice** across a mixed-delivery system.
- **Create a formal UPK infrastructure** under which an integrated mixed-delivery system is defined, managed, and sustained by a designated entity.
- **Ensure equitable and free access to Pre-K** (6.5 hours per day, 180 days per year).

(3) Conduct a targeted and in-depth assessment of current Pre-K quality and cost across the full range of provider models. This should be an initial priority undertaking of a formal Boston High-Quality UPK Initiative. The analysis should include BPS, parochial, and charter schools, Head Start, center-based and family childcare programs. Attention should be paid to understanding the supply and demand of programs that are equipped to meet the needs of English Language Learners and children with special needs. A Pre-K Landscape Assessment and Quality Inventory would provide a critical baseline for all Pre-K in the city, which can be used to help prioritize future investments in high-quality Pre-K in Boston.

(4) Adhere to a meaningful set of Guiding Principles to inform ongoing UPK efforts. The UPK Advisory Committee articulated the following Guiding Principles around which our 2014-15 efforts were structured. We offer these for the consideration of any ongoing UPK efforts and/or a formal UPK Initiative by the city:

- **Use research and data** as evidence for decision-making
- **Expand opportunity**—act on the premise that “all means all”
- Focus on **achieving and sustaining high-quality** Pre-K programs
- **Act with urgency, and commit to a long-term**, sustained implementation process
- **Tap Boston leadership** within higher education, philanthropic, cultural, community, and civic institutions to leverage valuable insights and resources

Conclusion

Boston has a tremendous opportunity to act upon a strong history of Pre-K growth and success. Similarly, we cannot afford to not act, given what we now know about the need for greater and equitable access to quality. We believe that Boston has a strong foundation—clear demonstration points, strong capacity, and community will—to shift from its current landscape of diverse provider models and types to a more unified and robust mixed-delivery system that will provide access to high-quality Pre-K options to all four-year-olds in Boston. In doing so, we should celebrate and build on Boston’s progress and its important place in leading the nation on the equitable delivery of high-quality Universal Pre-K.

Report Appendices

Appendix A - Acknowledgments

Appendix B - Boston UPK Advisory Committee

Appendix C - Boston UPK Sub-Committees

Appendix D - Provider Focus Groups: Organizational Participants

Appendix A – Acknowledgments

Many individuals and organizations contributed greatly to Boston’s UPK planning process and the preparation of this report.

Members of the UPK Advisory Committee brought thoughtful perspectives and worked diligently through participation in both Committee and sub-committee meetings. Jeri Robinson and Jason Sachs, Advisory Committee Co-Chairs, contributed their vast knowledge and experience in early childhood education and development, and continuously challenged the Advisory Committee to prioritize the needs of Boston’s children and their families.

The UPK Steering Committee—comprised of Kimberly Haskins, Jeri Robinson, Jason Sachs, Abby Shapiro, Peg Sprague, and Jane Tewksbury, and assisted by Kimberly Burson, ex-officio staff member on the Steering Committee—deserves extraordinary credit for their guidance and willingness to take on so many planning tasks that would not have been accomplished without their steadfast efforts. Five sub-committees were also co-chaired by Steering Committee members in shared leadership with sub-committee co-chairs Renee Boynton Jarrett, Michael Loconto, Marie St. Fleur, Robert Triest, and Eleonora Villegas-Reimers.

Alvaro Lima of the Boston Redevelopment Authority Research Division, together with Jeff Bernstein and Noah Berger of the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, assisted the planning process in gathering critical data about Boston’s four-year-olds and their families. MassBudget also prepared the preliminary documentation of four-year-old involvement in Pre-K, as well as preliminary assessments of supply, demand, and per-pupil costs of providing programming.

We offer a special debt of gratitude to Renee Boynton Jarrett and her incredible team of Boston Medical Center students who helped to organize many parent focus groups, translate and upload online parent surveys, and provide a theme analysis of feedback from parents who participated in focus groups. They are truly awesome!

We appreciate the many parents who took time to participate in one of the twelve focus groups or to respond to the parent survey. Many community-based organizations contributed to the UPK planning process by participating in provider focus groups and by helping to organize parent focus groups.

We are particularly grateful for the thoughtful contributions and guidance of Rahn Dorsey, Chief of Education for the City of Boston. Rahn immediately jumped into this effort, beginning on his first day on the job. Many other individuals in the Mayor’s Office also helped to support this work over the course of the planning process.

Finally, and importantly, the planning process and preparation of this report would not be possible without the generous funding provided by the Barr Foundation, The Boston Foundation, Jessie B. Cox Trust, United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley, and Verizon.

Appendix B – Boston Universal Pre-K Advisory Committee

Steering Committee

Jeri Robinson*, Vice President for Education and Family Learning, Boston Children’s Museum

Jason Sachs*, Director of Early Childhood, Boston Public Schools

Kimberly Haskins, Senior Program Officer, Barr Foundation

Mary Kinsella, Vice President of Early Childhood Education and Care and School Age Programs, Boys and Girls Clubs of Dorchester

Abby Shapiro, Director, Early Childhood Education Strategies, Thrive in 5

Peg Sprague, Senior Vice President for Community Impact (Former), United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley

Jane Tewksbury, Esq., Executive Director (Former), Thrive in 5

Advisory Committee Members

Noah Berger, President, Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center

Danubia Camargos Silva, Parent

Michelle Cannon, Parent

Sharon Scott Chandler, Executive Vice President, Action for Boston’s Community Development (ABCD)

Ana Crowley, Parent

Anne Douglass, Assistant Professor, Early Education and Care, UMass Boston

Betsy Drinan, Co-teacher, Boston Teachers Union School

Linda Dorcena Forry, 1st Suffolk District, Massachusetts Senate

Dominique Graham, Parent

Renee Boynton Jarrett, M.D., Sc.D., Founding Director, Vital Village Community Engagement Network

John Kelly, Executive Director, East Boston Social Centers

Suzanne Lee, Principal (Retired), Boston Public Schools

Michael Loconto, Member, Boston School Committee

Susan McConathy, Director, Deloitte Consulting, LLP

Todd Rainville, General Partner, Symmetric Capital

Marchelle Raynor, Director (Retired), Head Start

Ayesha Rodriguez, 0-5 Manager, Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative

Nejat Sirag, Parent

Marie St. Fleur, President and Chief Executive Officer, Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children

Robert Triest, Vice President and Economist, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston

Eleonora Villegas-Reimers, Ed.D., Associate Professor of Education, Wheelock College

Pat Xavier, Early Childhood Consultant

*Co-Chairs

Appendix C – Boston UPK Sub-Committees

Data, Assessment and Evaluation

Kimberly Haskins, Co-Chair
Robert Triest, Co-Chair
Linda Dorcena Forry
Ayesha Rodriguez
Anne Douglass
Brian Gold
Joanne Roberts
Monica Yudron

Facilities and Space

Michael Loconto, Co-Chair
Jane Tewksbury, Co-Chair
Ann Crowley
Carlton Jones
Mav Pardee
Marchelle Raynor

Finance and Funding

Marie St. Fleur, Co-Chair
Peg Sprague, Co-Chair
Noah Berger
John Kelly
Amy Kershaw
Suzanne Lee
Amy O’Leary
Todd Rainville
Mark Reilly
Robert Triest

Parent Outreach and Engagement

Renee Boynton Jarrett, Co-Chair
Jeri Robinson, Co-Chair
Morgan Brockington
Danubia Camargos Silva
Sharon Scott Chandler
Nicole Economou
Simone Ellis
Genevieve Guyol
Hannah Harp
Laura Ha
Theresa Lynn
Angela Martinez
Susan McConathy
Kim Rice
Kerri Schmidt
Nejat Sirag
Molly Zielenbach

Quality Instruction and Capacity Building

Jason Sachs, Co-Chair
Eleonora Villegas-Reimers, Co-Chair
Michelle Cannon
Anne Douglass
Betsy Drinan
Dominique Graham

Appendix D – Provider Focus Groups: Organizational Participants

ABCD Head Start and Children’s Services

Boys and Girls Club of Dorchester

Catholic Charities

College Bound Dorchester

Copper Beech Montessori

Crispus Attucks Children’s Center

East Boston Social Centers

Ellis Memorial

Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA)

Nurtury

Paige Academy

Project Hope

South Boston Neighborhood House

United South End Settlements

Viet AID

Village Preschool

Wesley Education Center

YMCA of Greater Boston