

To Pre- or Not to Pre-: Children in Mississippi Gain Pre-K Option

Southeast Comprehensive Center
Supports School Readiness Work



Challenge: Provide Expertise for Launch of New Early Childhood Initiative

Mississippi was long one of the few states without a state-funded pre-kindergarten program. Recognizing an urgent need for school readiness, the state enacted just such a program with the Early Learning Collaborative Act of 2013, a move to offer children voluntary access to high-quality pre-kindergarten experiences. In 2014, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) set up the pilot program to serve 2,000 children at 66 sites.¹ The MDE turned to the [Southeast Comprehensive Center \(SECC\)](#) for support with implementation.

According to MDE Early Childhood Director, Dr. Jill Dent, SECC support of "... the Mississippi Department of Education Office of Early Childhood with peer-to-peer mentoring, meeting facilitation, document review and assistance with research on specific topics, ... has been extremely helpful to MDE ... to accomplish many tasks so quickly."



Strategy: Scaffolded Technical Assistance Based on Research

SECC experts, including early childhood specialists with classroom teaching and school administration experience, came to the table with MDE leaders to map out next steps and develop research-based guidance and tools to launch high-quality pre-K.

Staff from SECC provided research and tools that include [Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships](#) from SEDL and [A Developmental Continuum from Early Infancy to Kindergarten Entry](#) from the California Department of Education. They also

- ▶ Aided selection and rollout of teaching [strategies](#) for 3- and 4-year-olds and provided examples of mastery for social studies and social and emotional learning domains, including the Three- and Four-Year-Olds Guidelines, the Mississippi Kindergarten Guidelines Review, and the Pre-K Early Learning Collaborative Monitoring Tool.
- ▶ Facilitated several review meetings culminating in revision of the Three- and Four-Year-Olds Guidelines and the Mississippi Kindergarten Guidelines.
- ▶ Served as a thought partner and provided feedback on revisions of the Pre-K Early Learning Collaborative Monitoring Tool.
- ▶ Assisted with design of early childhood stakeholder monthly planning meetings and with implementation of the MDE Early Childhood Strategic Plan.
- ▶ Provided analyses to ensure alignment of the 3- and 4-year-old Early Learning Standards with the curriculum standards of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Child Development and Early Learning Framework of Head Start, a partner in MDE's initiative.
- ▶ Established and maintains a multistate Early Childhood Community of Practice, which includes an interactive online site where members can "Ask an Expert," share research and practice insights, and access a monthly newsletter to deepen awareness of regional and national early childhood education developments.



Students attend class at the Tallahatchie Early Learning Alliance in the Mississippi Delta, one of 11 state-funded pre-K learning collaboratives. Photo Credit: [Mississippi School Spotlight](#), Mississippi Department of Education.

¹ Gates, J. (2014, August 12). State's pre-K pilot program to operate in 66 states. *The Clarion-Ledger*. Retrieved from <http://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/2014/08/12/states-pre-k-pilot-program-operate-sites/13954685/>



System Change: Improved Agency, Stakeholder Collaboration

Since hiring its first director of early childhood in 2014, MDE has established its leadership of early childhood programs. This includes furthering development of 11 pre-K learning collaboratives and engaging with various state agencies and stakeholders to coordinate delivery of early childhood services, such as those highlighted in the annual [Mississippi Early Childhood Association \(MsECA\) conferences](#).



Impact: SECC Supports MDE in Building Foundation for Statewide Pre-K Programs

SECC's reviews of MDE policies and practices, including supports such as the Pre-K Early Learning Collaborative Monitoring Tool and the Mississippi Kindergarten Guidelines Review, enhanced the agency's development of a rigorous foundation for early childhood programs.

"Their quick responses and feedback to the documents we have created have been invaluable to gain a national and regional perspective," said Dr. Dent. "I do not think we would have come so far in such a short time. We appreciate their support and look forward to a long relationship!"

After 1 year, through the leadership of MDE and its work with the learning collaboratives, 59% of 4-year-olds in Mississippi's ELCs met or exceeded the kindergarten readiness performance level.



What's Next?

SECC plans to work with MDE to develop a comprehensive assessment system for early childhood education, implementation of a statewide Kindergarten Transition Plan, and webinar presentations on use of early childhood data.

For more information, please contact
Beth Howard-Brown, SECC Director,
bhoward-brown@air.org, 803.936.0752, or visit southeast-cc.org

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Comprehensive Center
at American Institutes for Research ■

