

Massachusetts

Background

Massachusetts offers two state-funded pre-K programs: Universal Pre-K (UPK) and the Inclusive Preschool Learning Environment grant, also known as IPLE or Grant 391.

Universal Pre-K (UPK)

UPK is a full-day program open to three- and four-year-olds who have two or more risk factors associated with poor academic or social outcomes later in life, such as living in a low-income household, being an English language learner or a recent immigrant, or having parents with less than a high school education.¹

The Department of Early Education and Care administers UPK as a competitive grant program. The UPK statute permits a range of different providers to apply for funding: public or private, nonprofit or for-profit preschools, child care centers, and Head Start agencies. Charter schools are also permitted to apply for UPK funding.²

Inclusive Preschool Learning Environments (IPLE or Grant 391)

IPLE provides supplemental funding for preschool centers and public schools to enroll typically developing three- and four-year-olds alongside children with disabilities in pre-K inclusion classrooms, with the goal of providing preschool services to children with disabilities in an inclusive learning environment. At least 15 percent of children enrolled in an IPLE classroom must have a documented disability. Programs are offered on the district's schedule and can include half- or full-day programs. Participating children do not need to meet any income eligibility criteria.

EEC administers IPLE funding as a competitive grant program. Public schools, Head Start agencies, and licensed early education and care providers can apply for funding and offer IPLE services.³ Charter schools are also eligible to offer IPLE.⁴

Charter schools in Massachusetts

The state board of education is the only charter school authorizer in Massachusetts.⁵ There are two types of charter schools in Massachusetts: Commonwealth and Horace Mann charter schools.⁶ Commonwealth charter schools must have their charters approved by the state board of education. Horace Mann charter schools are required to have their charters approved by the local school board and, in some cases, the local teachers union, in addition to the state board of education.⁷ Most charter schools in the state are Commonwealth charter schools.



TOTAL SCORE

33/50

Massachusetts's climate for charter schools to offer pre-K is **somewhat hospitable***

- + There are no state statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K.
- + Compared to K-12 funding levels, pre-K program funding is sufficient to attract charters.
- The size of the pre-K program limits charter access to funding.
- The funding, application, or approval process creates a barrier to charter access.
- + Automatic enrollment from charter pre-K to kindergarten is not prohibited in legislation or practice.

** Massachusetts's score is based on the process that charters go through to receive state per-pupil funding for pre-K from students' home districts, rather than their Universal Pre-K (UPK) or Inclusive Preschool Learning Environments (IPLE) programs, because these per-pupil funds are the only funding stream charter schools currently access to offer pre-K.*



Process for Accessing Pre-K Funds

Charter schools interested in offering pre-K must first be approved by the state board of education to include pre-K in their charter. Because funding for charter pre-K programs comes out of the local district's budget, the state board will only authorize a charter school to offer pre-K if the district in which the charter is located already makes pre-K widely available to its own students. This policy allows charter schools equitable access to pre-K funding in districts that offer pre-K to most of their students, but prevents districts that do not offer pre-K widely from having to pay charters tuition for pre-K students.

In Massachusetts, school districts must pay tuition for resident pupils attending charter schools. If pre-K is widely available in a school district, it must also pay tuition for resident pupils in pre-K who attend charter schools. The state provides districts reimbursement funds to compensate for these tuition costs (in addition to the regular state formula funds).⁸

The state board of education has approved fourteen charter schools in Massachusetts to offer pre-K, and thirteen currently do so. These fourteen charter schools are “one-district” charters that serve primarily children from a single sending district. Sending districts that widely offer pre-K may use a variety of funding sources to do so, including UPK, IPLE, federal, local, and other state funds.

Charter schools are also technically eligible to receive UPK and IPLE funds directly from the state, but none currently do so.⁹ To receive UPK funding, potential providers must apply to the EEC.¹⁰ Preference is given to UPK providers in underperforming school districts or districts in which a majority of families earn less than 85 percent of the state median income.¹¹ In FY14 and FY15, only renewal grant applications were considered (new providers were last permitted to compete in FY13). Providers must also submit an application to EEC to receive IPLE funding. IPLE funding has only been available as a renewal grant for existing providers since FY12.¹² Both IPLE and UPK grants must be renewed annually. EEC expects to revise both its UPK and IPLE grant processes in FY16.

Barriers

There are multiple state funding streams for pre-K in Massachusetts; the barriers focus on all three programs because charters can access funding through each.

Are there any statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K?

 **No.** Neither the pre-K nor the charter school legislation in Massachusetts explicitly addresses whether charter schools can offer pre-K. Charter schools may offer pre-K if they are authorized in their charter to do so. The state allows charter schools to apply for UPK and IPLE funding, but none currently do.

Is the funding level of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

 **Tuition from districts with widely available pre-K: No.** The amount of funding is sufficient to attract charters to offer pre-K. Charters that offer pre-K receive the same per-pupil funding amount that districts receive to serve preschoolers.

 **UPK/IPLE: Yes.** Low pre-K program funding, compared to K-12 funding levels, makes offering full-day pre-K through UPK or IPLE less attractive to charters. Charter schools that offer UPK services receive 74 percent of the per-pupil funding amount that charters receive to serve full-day K-12 students. This amount is close to our cutoff of 75 percent. IPLE is a flat grant amount intended to subsidize inclusion classrooms and, used alone, is not sufficient to cover the full cost of offering pre-K.

Is the size of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

 **Tuition from districts with widely available pre-K: Yes.** Relatively few districts in Massachusetts offer widely available pre-K, and as a result relatively few charter schools are able to access pre-K funds in this way.

 **UPK/IPLE: Yes.** The small size of the program is a barrier to charters accessing state pre-K funds. The programs serve less than 10 percent of all four-year-olds in the state.

Is the application, approval, and/or funding process a barrier to charter access?

 **Tuition from districts with widely available pre-K: Yes.** Charter schools are only able to receive tuition payments for pre-K students in districts with widely available pre-K.

 **UPK/IPLE: Yes.** The funding process is a barrier to charter schools offering UPK or IPLE. For the past several years, UPK and IPLE funds have only been available to



existing providers through renewal grants, precluding new providers, including charter schools, from accessing these funds.

Is automatic enrollment from pre-K to kindergarten prohibited in legislation or practice?

+ **No.** There is no enrollment preference in Massachusetts’s legislation. In practice, a student must enter a charter school pre-K program via an enrollment lottery and can automatically enroll from pre-K into the school’s kindergarten program.

Recommendations

To address these barriers to charter access, the state should:

- Release guidance that explicitly allows charter schools that are not located in districts with widely available pre-K to apply for UPK or IPLE grant funding.
- Re-compete existing UPK and IPLE slots on a regularly occurring basis—such as every three to five years—and allow both new and existing providers to compete on an equitable basis, based on student need, proposed or existing program quality, and track record of improving student outcomes. Staggering the grant periods would allow for an open competition every year, while maintaining a level of continuity for programs and families.
- If policymakers decide to expand access to preschool in Massachusetts, they should ensure that the expanded program enables charter schools to access preschool funds, either through the current tuition payment system or by applying for funds directly.

	Universal Pre-K (UPK)	Inclusive Preschool Learning Environments (IPLE)	Charter schools in Massachusetts
Year created	Launched in 2005	Launched in 1985 ¹³	Charter law enacted in 1993 ¹⁴
Children in state	150,896 three- and four-year-olds in Massachusetts ¹⁵		1,194,844 school-age children in Massachusetts ¹⁶
Children served	7,242 children served 4.7 percent of three- and four-year-olds served	6,093 children served 4 percent of three- and four-year-olds served	35,353 students served 3 percent of school-age population ¹⁷ Eighty charter schools ¹⁸
Charters offering pre-K	Thirteen charter schools in Massachusetts offer pre-K. ^{19,20}		Thirty-eight charter schools in Massachusetts offer elementary programs. ²¹
Funding	Providers receive \$3,009 per pupil to offer UPK, up to \$15,045 per classroom.	Providers receive a flat grant amount, between \$6,197 and \$648,707 to offer IPLE. ²²	Charter schools receive \$14,140 per pupil to serve K–12 students. ²³



Endnotes

- 1 Massachusetts Executive Office of Education, “FY2014 Universal Pre-K Renewal Grant,” May 2013, <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/financial-assistance/funding-opportunities/open-renewal-grants/fy2014-universal-pre-kindergarten-renewal-grant.html>.
- 2 Interview with representatives from the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, February 13, 2015.
- 3 IPLE FY15 grant application, <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/financial-assistance/funding-opportunities/open-renewal-grants/fy-2015-inclusive-preschool-learning-environments-grant.html>.
- 4 Interview with representatives from the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, February 13, 2015.
- 5 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS), “Measuring Up: Massachusetts,” <http://www.publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/law-database/states/MA/>.
- 6 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, “Massachusetts Charter Schools Fact Sheet,” <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/factsheet.pdf>.
- 7 <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/app/NewOperators.pdf>
- 8 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, “Massachusetts Charter Schools: Understanding District Aid for Commonwealth Charter School Tuition,” October 2013, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/finance/tuition/Reimbursements.html>.
- 9 Massachusetts Executive Office of Education, “FY 11 Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) Grantee List,” <http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/eec/programs-licensing/20110222-fy11-upk-granteelist.pdf>.
- 10 ABT Associates, “Massachusetts Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) Pilot Program, FY08 Evaluation: Executive Summary” (Cambridge, MA: ABT Associates, August 2008), <http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/eec/programs-licensing/2008-upk-evaluation-summary.pdf>.
- 11 Education Justice, “Massachusetts,” <http://www.educationjustice.org/states/massachusetts.html#stgr895>.
- 12 Massachusetts Executive Office of Education, “FY 2015 Inclusive Preschool Learning Environments Grand Fund Code 391,” <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/early-education-and-care/financial-assistance/funding-opportunities/open-renewal-grants/fy-2015-inclusive-preschool-learning-environments-grant.html>.
- 13 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013: State Preschool Yearbook” (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2013), <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2013.pdf>.
- 14 NAPCS, “Measuring Up: Massachusetts.”
- 15 State population data calculated using ACS 2012 five-year estimates; U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey,” www.census.gov/acs.
- 16 Ibid., all children in households, three to seventeen years old.
- 17 NAPCS, “Measuring Up: Massachusetts.”
- 18 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, “Massachusetts Charter Schools: About Charter Schools,” <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/about.html>.
- 19 Massachusetts Charter Public School Association, “Find a Charter School,” <http://www.masscharterschools.org/schools/>; Boston Public Schools, “Baldwin Early Learning Pilot Academy,” <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/Page/771>. Thirteen charter schools currently offer pre-K, but fourteen are approved to do so. Prospect Hill Academy is approved to offer pre-K, but does not currently serve preschoolers.
- 20 Examples: UP Academy Charter School of Dorchester (<http://upeducationnetwork.org/up-academy-charter-school-of-dorchester/>), Conservatory Lab Charter School (<http://conservatorylab.org>), Lawrence Family Development Charter School (<http://www.lfdcs.org>), Neighborhood House Charter School (<http://www.thenhcs.org>).
- 21 Massachusetts Charter Public School Association, “Find a Charter School.”
- 22 Massachusetts Executive Office of Education, “FY 2015 Fund Code 391 Grant Eligibility Amount,” <http://www.mass.gov/edu/docs/eec/financial-assistance/funding-opportunities/open-renewal-grants/fy15inclusiveenvironments/appendix-d-fy2015-391-grant-eligibility-amount.pdf>. The state determines how much funding lead agencies are eligible to receive.
- 23 Meagan Batdorff et al., “Charter School Funding: Inequality Expands,” Massachusetts section (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Department of Education Reform, School Choice Demonstration Project, April 2014), <http://www.uaedreform.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/charter-funding-inequity-expands-ma.pdf>.