

**Study of Maine School Administrative Units' Capacity to Support
Preschool Special Education**

Prepared by:
Amy F. Johnson

June 2022

Maine Education Policy Research Institute

University of Southern Maine
Gorham, Maine



**Center for Education Policy,
Applied Research, and Evaluation**

Published by the Maine Education Policy Research Institute in the Center for Education Policy, Applied Research, and Evaluation (CEPARE) in the School of Education and Human Development, University of Southern Maine.

CEPARE provides assistance to school districts, agencies, organizations, and university faculty by conducting research, evaluation, and policy studies.

In addition, CEPARE co-directs the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI), an institute jointly funded by the Maine State Legislature and the University of Maine System. This institute was established to conduct studies on Maine education policy and the Maine public education system for the Maine Legislature.

Statements and opinions by the authors do not necessarily reflect a position or policy of the Maine Education Policy Research Institute, nor any of its members, and no official endorsement by them should be inferred.

In complying with the letter and spirit of applicable laws and pursuing its own goals of diversity, the University of Maine System does not discriminate on the grounds of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, transgender status, gender, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, national origin, citizenship status, familial status, ancestry, age, disability physical or mental, genetic information, veterans or military status in employment, education, and all other programs and activities. The University provides reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals with disabilities upon request. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding non-discrimination policies: Director of Equal Opportunity, 101 Boudreau Hall, University of Maine, Orono, ME 04469-5754, phone 207-581-1226, TTY 711 (Maine Relay System).

This study was funded by the Maine State Legislature, and the University of Maine System.

Copyright © 2022, Center for Education Policy, Applied Research, & Evaluation.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Methods.....	2
Survey Participation	2
Findings.....	4
Questions Asked of All SAUs.....	4
Questions Asked of SAUs that Offer Public Preschool.....	10
Questions Asked of SAUs that <u>Do Not</u> Currently Offer Public Preschool.....	12
Questions Asked of SAUs Participating in the CDS Pilot.....	14
Early Successes.....	14
Biggest Challenges	14
Conclusion	15
Acknowledgements	16
Appendix A: Feedback to Policymakers	17
Comments from Respondents in SAUs with Public Preschool Programs	17
Comments from Respondents in SAUs without Public Preschool Programs	19
Appendix B. Geographic Representation of Survey Respondents.....	20

Study of Maine School Administrative Units' Capacity to Support Preschool Special Education

Amy Johnson
amyj@maine.edu

Introduction

The Maine Legislature's Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs commissioned this report from the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) in the summer of 2021. At that time, policymakers were engaged in intense discussions about the best ways to structure Maine's system of special education services for children aged 3 to 5 (i.e., those governed by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Part B, section 619). Unlike the majority of states, Maine public school districts do not currently oversee these programs and only have responsibility for serving school-aged students (i.e., aged 5 to 20). Instead, the intermediate education unit called Child Development Services (CDS) has existed under the supervision of the Maine Department of Education to oversee programs for children aged birth through 5.

An external independent review of Maine's early childhood special education services was recently conducted by the Public Consulting Group pursuant to Maine Public Law 2019, c. 343, Pt. VVVV.¹ The report, issued in December 2020, included a recommendation to transfer preschool special education responsibilities to our public school administrative units. This was still a much-discussed topic at the time the annual MEPRI work plan was selected in the spring of 2021, leading to the inclusion of this topic as a top priority for our FY2021-22 studies.

Given the magnitude of this potential change, state leaders are naturally interested in understanding the impact it would have on all parties – children, families, school districts, and providers working for Child Development Services. MEPRI's charge in this report was to address the perspective of school administrative unit (SAU) administrators by "Investigating the training, resources, infrastructure or other supports schools need to provide special education services to 3 to 5 year old students." The best way to get this temperature read from a representative number of Maine SAUs was through a statewide survey.

¹ <https://legislature.maine.gov/independent-review-of-the-states-early-childhood-education-services>

Methods

To address the goals of the study, MEPRI first engaged with the Maine Administrators of Services for Children with Disabilities (MADSEC), as well as the leadership in the MDOE’s Office of Special Services and in Child Development Services, to understand the current landscape of preschool special education. These experts were instrumental in helping us develop a draft survey instrument that would capture the appropriate types of services that we wished to investigate. MEPRI staff then gathered input on the draft survey from a few special education teachers and superintendents to ensure it was adequately clear and concise to get a sense of districts’ capacity to take on these responsibilities.

Survey Participation

The survey was launched in May of 2022 and gathered input from public school administrative unit (SAU) administrators in districts that operate elementary schools. All special education directors and superintendents that are listed in the MDOE directory as working in Maine public SAUs were invited to participate. Of that total of 262 invitations, 125 (48%) completed the survey as of 6/27/2022. The survey respondent pool consists of 79 special education administrators and 46 district administrators (Table 1).

Table 1. Job Roles of Survey Respondents

	%	N
Special education Director or Assistant Director	64%	79
Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent	36%	46

Survey respondents represented all 16 counties in Maine. Appendix A details the number and proportion of participants from each county.

The survey respondents were asked to describe the size of their district by identifying the approximate number of Kindergarten students enrolled. Results are summarized in Table 2 below. Enrollment size is an important factor in this policy conversation as it has implications for both the current size of and SAU’s special education program and the level of resources that will likely be needed to include preschool students; this affects survey responses. Overall, the response pool is representative of Maine enrollment patterns.

Table 2. Size of Kindergarten Cohort in SAUs by Respondent Role

	Special education administrators (78 Respondents)	Superintendents (44 Respondents)
District Total K Enrollment		
Fewer than 10 kindergarteners	4%	5%
10 to 24	21%	34%
25 to 49	19%	9%
50 to 99	24%	14%
100 to 199	23%	23%
200 or more kindergarteners	9%	16%

Table 2 shows that the response profiles are somewhat different between the two roles when looking at each distinct size group, but show the same general pattern. The differences are not significant due to the relatively small Ns in our respondent pools. Each role group has a similar proportion of respondents with fewer than 50 Kindergarteners (44% of special educators and 48% of superintendents). This means that the special educator and district administrator groups overall represent SAUs of roughly similar enrollments, and any differences in response patterns between the two roles is not likely to be driven by size of the SAUs they represent.

Findings

For most survey questions, the response patterns were the same for special education administrators and superintendents. The response data for these items is represented in aggregate. In items where district administrators' perceptions were notably different from special education administrators, the response data are reported by subgroup. Grey shading is used in tables throughout the report to highlight the most frequent responses.

Questions Asked of All SAUs

For context, the respondents were asked to identify whether their districts offered public preschool programs, and whether such programs started with age 3 (or younger). Response patterns were the same for special education directors and district administrators and thus their responses were combined in Table 4; any differences in response patterns on other survey items are unlikely to be attributable to the presence of a public preschool program. Over 80% of public school respondents offered public preschool.

Table 3. Youngest ages enrolled in the Respondents' SAUs

	N (124)	%
3 years old or younger	13	10%
4 years old (pre-K)	93	75%
Kindergarten (do not have public PreK)	18	15%

Table 4 below is a repeat of the enrollment data described in Table 2, but broken out instead by whether the respondent is in an SAU that offers public preschool. The data for SAUs without public PreK are challenging to interpret due to the small number of respondents in that category, but do appear to differ from the enrollment patterns in SAUs with PreK. There is a larger proportion of both very small (<10) and large (100 or more) enrollments compared to those with PreK. This may have some influence on the differences in their responses on other items in the survey.

Table 4. Size of Kindergarten Cohort in SAUs by Availability of Public PreK

District Total K Enrollment	SAUs with Public PreK	SAUs without Public PreK
Fewer than 10 kindergarteners	1%	19%
10 to 24	29%	13%
25 to 49	17%	6%
50 to 99	23%	13%
100 to 199	20%	25%
200 or more kindergarteners	10%	25%
	104	16

Next, survey participants were asked to share how closely they had been following the state-level policy conversations about shifting responsibility for preschool special education from CDS to public school SAUs. Special education administrators and superintendents had comparable response patterns and thus their results are combined.

Table 5. Level of Awareness among Special Education Administrators and Superintendents about Preschool Special Education Policy Conversations

	N	%
This is the first time I am hearing about it.	1	1%
I have heard that there are some conversations happening but I do not know much about it.	4	3%
I am aware of the types of changes that are being considered (though I may still have lots of questions).	100	83%
My district is currently participating in the pilot program to collaborate with CDS to provide services for preschool students who live in our SAU.	16	13%
Total	121	

Participants were then asked the key question of whether they felt confident that their SAU could adequately manage taking over responsibility for preschool special education from CDS (Table 6). On this item, superintendents had a slightly different response pattern from special education administrators. While patterns were similar for very high, high, and medium confidence levels, superintendents were three times as likely as special education administrators to rate their confidence level as “very low.”

**Table 6. Level of Confidence in Districts' Capacity for Oversight of
Preschool Special Education**

	Special education director		Superintendent	
	<i>N</i>	Percent	<i>N</i>	Percent
Very high. We welcome the opportunity to serve our preschool aged children with special education needs.	<i>13</i>	17%	<i>7</i>	18%
High. We will have issues to work out but I am confident we will be able to manage them.	<i>11</i>	15%	<i>6</i>	15%
Medium. I have concerns about our capacity; we will need planning time and additional resources to manage these responsibilities.	<i>30</i>	40%	<i>15</i>	38%
Low. Even with planning time and additional resources, I think it will be a challenge for us to manage these responsibilities adequately.	<i>16</i>	21%	<i>3</i>	8%
Very low. Even with additional planning time and resources, we could not adequately serve our preschoolers with special education needs.	<i>5</i>	7%	<i>9</i>	23%
Total Ns	<i>75</i>		<i>40</i>	

Moreover, just slightly less than a third of all respondents (28% of special education directors and 31% of superintendents) had **low or very low confidence** in their districts' capacity to manage the responsibility for preschool special education. This is a sizeable minority and should be an ongoing topic for consideration. Response patterns to this question were the same for respondents in districts that had public preschool and those that did not.

The next series of questions provided more insight into the specific areas where school leaders believe they have capacity (or not) to take on responsibility for preschool special education. Table 7 summarizes the responses for both superintendents and special education directors because their responses were similar; the most common response for each item is shaded in grey. Table 8 provides analysis of the same survey questions as Table 7 but comparing the responses of districts with an existing public preschool program compared to districts without preK (either operated by the SAU or in partnership with another provider).

**Table 7. Superintendents' and Special Education Directors'
Perceptions of SAU Capacity in Selected Areas
(N = 115 Respondents)**

	Inadequate	Partially Adequate	Adequate	Don't know or N/A
Classroom facilities	25%	39%	35%	1%
Appropriate spaces for providing IEP services	23%	41%	35%	1%
Processes for conducting screening (Child Find)	8%	29%	63%	1%
Ability to evaluate children in a timely manner when identified through Child Find as potentially having a special education disability	18%	41%	40%	1%
Mechanisms for parent communication	1%	19%	79%	1%
Student transportation	24%	34%	40%	2%
Classroom teachers' knowledge and skills to work with preschool children with special needs	21%	38%	40%	2%
Classroom teachers' familiarity with Maine's Early Learning and Development Standards	12%	34%	51%	3%
Number of special education teachers on staff with the credentials to provide services to preschoolers (282 certification for Birth to 5)	59%	23%	16%	2%
Interest level among elementary special education teachers (those with 282 certification for grades K to 8) in becoming eligible to provide services to preschoolers	39%	28%	19%	14%
Caseload capacity for special educators to serve preschoolers with IEPs	51%	34%	15%	0%
Capacity for special education administrators to oversee preschool services	23%	41%	35%	0%
Availability of therapists to provide related services (speech, PT, and OT)	37%	42%	21%	0%

Table 8. Perceptions of SAU Capacity for Preschool Education, Disaggregated by SAUs with and without Public PreK Programs*

	SAUs with PreK		SAUs without PreK	
	Inadequate	Adequate	Inadequate	Adequate
Classroom facilities	14%	35%	59%	19%
Appropriate spaces for providing IEP services	22%	32%	40%	20%
Processes for conducting screening (Child Find)	6%	66%	13%	44%
Ability to evaluate children in a timely manner when identified through Child Find as potentially having a special education disability	17%	38%	25%	31%
Mechanisms for parent communication	0%	77%	0%	81%
Student transportation	22%	43%	50%	31%
Classroom teachers' knowledge and skills to work with preschoolers with special needs	23%	42%	31%	6%
Classroom teachers' familiarity with Maine's Early Learning and Development Standards	18%	49%	19%	19%
Number of special education teachers on staff with the credentials to provide services to preschoolers (282 certification for Birth to 5)	65%	9%	75%	13%
Interest level among elementary special education teachers (those with 282 certification for grades K to 8) in becoming eligible to provide services to preschoolers	46%	18%	44%	19%
Caseload capacity for special educators to serve preschoolers with IEPs	26%	37%	56%	6%
Capacity for special education administrators to oversee preschool services	23%	40%	31%	13%
Availability of therapists to provide related services (speech, PT, and OT)	37%	22%	69%	13%

*Data points in **bold** are significantly different between subgroups ($p < 0.05$)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, SAUs that have current experience with public preschool, either operated by the district or operated by a community partner or Head Start, were more likely to rate their capacity as “adequate”.

All SAUs were also asked two questions for general understanding. First, they were asked “What is your perception of the differences between 3 year old and 4 year old students with IEPs?” The purpose of this question is to gauge whether practitioners are likely to have different feelings about their capacity based on the ages of the students served. The responses are broken out by the ages already served by the SAUs, with the expectation that perceptions may vary depending on whether the respondent already has experience working with 3 and/or 4 year olds.

Table 9. Perceptions of 3 yr olds with IEPs, based on Earliest Grade Served

	3 Year Old Pre-K		4 Year Old Pre-K		Kindergarten (no public PreK)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
3 year-olds would be much more challenging to serve than 4 year olds	1	8%	22	25%	3	19%
3 year-olds would be somewhat more challenging to serve than 4 year olds	5	42%	46	52%	6	38%
Serving 3 year olds would be roughly the same level of challenge as serving 4 year olds	6	50%	20	23%	7	44%
3 year-olds would be somewhat less challenging to serve than 4 year olds	0	--	0	-	0	-
3 year-olds would be much less challenging to serve than 4 year olds	0	--	0	-	0	-
Total	12		88		16	

Interpreting the responses in Table 9 is challenging because of the small response pools in both SAUs who currently serve 3 year olds (N=12) and SAUs without public PreK (N=16). It appears that practitioners who already have experience working with 3 year olds are less likely to report them as more challenging than 4 year olds. However, these differing responses are not statistically significant due to the small Ns. It is very clear that the field overall believes 3 year olds are at least somewhat more challenging as 4 year olds; there were no respondents who felt they would be easier to work with.

The last question that was asked of all SAUs regardless of their current status with offering public preK was related to tuitioning of students from other SAUs. The reason for asking this question is that tuition arrangements for students with IEPs can bring additional policy complications, because the sending (resident) SAU is responsible for the student’s IEP. This is not a new policy issue but may need to be discussed in considering implementation of preschool special education in SAUs.

Table 10. Tuitioned IEP students

Question	SAUs with Pre-K (N=99)		SAUs without public PreK (16)	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Yes	25	25%	2	13%
No	72	72%	14	87%
Not sure	2	2%	-	-

Questions Asked of SAUs that Offer Public Preschool

Respondents that indicated they had public preschool in their SAU were asked a series of questions to describe the structure of their programs. Tables 11 through 13 below summarize their responses, separated out based on the earliest age of children served in their programs. First, Table 9 captures the variety of formats that SAUs used to offer public preschool. Each SAU can offer more than one type of public preschool. Table 11 describes the scheduling formats for the programs offered; again, an SAU could report multiple available options.

Table 11. Types of Public Preschool Provider Arrangements

	3 years old or younger		4 years old (pre-K)	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Operated directly by the SAU	7	32%	63	54%
Operated by Head Start	4	18%	16	14%
Operated with CDS	10	45%	25	22%
Operated by a private community partner	-	-%	5	4%
Other	1	5%	7	6%
Total	22		116	

Table 12. Program formats

	3 years old or younger		4 years old (pre-K)	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Full day program, 4 or 5 days per week	9	50%	47	43%
Full day program, 1 to 3 days per week	2	11%	8	7%
Half day program, 4 or 5 days per week	6	33%	47	43%
Half day program, 1 to 3 days per week	1	6%	3	3%
Extended hours available	-	-%	1	1%
Total	18		109	

Table 11 demonstrates that SAUs offering programs for children younger than 4 are more likely to do so in partnership with CDS or Head Start, but are not likely to partner with private providers. More traditional preK programs for four year olds are more likely to be operated directly by the SAU. The schedule formats for both 3 year-old and 4 year-old programs are similar, with full-day full-week programs being the most common followed by half-day full-week programs (Table 12).

Table 13 describes the SAUs' reported capacity (total number of available slots) in their preK offerings. The prior data on total Kindergarten enrollment in SAUs with preK programs (from Table 4) is also included again for comparison.

Table 13. Total PreK Capacity vs Kindergarten Enrollments in SAUs with Public PreK

	Pre-K Capacity	Kindergarten enrollment
Fewer than 10 students	2%	1%
10 to 24	39%	29%
25 to 49	28%	17%
50 to 99	20%	23%
100 to 199	9%	20%
200 or more students	2%	10%
Total N	103	104

These response patterns indicate that preschool capacity is lower than total Kindergarten enrollment, as is expected based on Maine's known landscape for public Pre-K offerings (as Maine does not have a mandatory system of universal pre-K). This does not necessarily imply that public preschool programs are not meeting parent demand, as not all families seek publicly-funded preschool. However, the relative size of preK and Kindergarten enrollments in a given district does have relevance in this policy discussion. It is generally assumed that if an SAU is responsible for preschool special education, then the most likely first option for a school placement (the "FAPE offer", for the free and appropriate public educational setting where special education will be provided) will typically be in the district's public preschool program. Preschool capacity should thus be adequately sized to ensure that they are the least restrictive environment and resemble the district's typical student demographics. If there are far fewer public Pre-K slots than would be needed to serve their preschool-aged student population, then the SAU would not be able to provide public PreK seats to most students with IEPs without creating classrooms with a disproportionately high number of students with disabilities.

Questions Asked of SAUs that Do Not Currently Offer Public Preschool

Districts that selected Kindergarten as their earliest grade (i.e. those without public preschool enrollments) were given a short series of separate questions. Because the number of SAUs without public preschool has become smaller and there are relatively few respondents in this category (N=19), analysis is limited.

First, SAU leaders were asked for their temperature read on the likelihood that their district would expand to include publicly-funded preK in the future. Table 12 summarizes their responses. It appears that there is medium to high interest in preK expansion among SAUs that do not already have that offering; the proposed policy changes for preschool special education are likely to further accelerate that trend.

Table 14. Level of SAU Interest in expanding to Offer Publicly Funded Pre-K

Interest Level	Frequency	
	N	Percent
Very high. We are planning to add a preschool classroom(s) next year.	6	33%
High. We still have some issues to work out but most stakeholders are in favor of adding Pre-K.	1	6%
Medium. There is some interest in expanding, but also some obstacles.	8	44%
Low. There is little interest in adding public Pre-K in this catchment area.	3	17%
Very low. Many stakeholders in the SAU oppose the idea.	-	-

A separate follow-up question asked “Has your SAU explored applying for a preschool expansion grant? (Another round of funding will be available; applications will be available in early fall for the 2023-24 school year).” Of the 19 respondents, two reported already having an expansion grant (with plans to begin in the fall), an additional seven indicated they have explored applying, seven said they had not considered it, and three were not sure or not applicable.

Next, the SAUs without public preK were asked a series of short questions about the current landscape of preschool in their region and their established communication practices. These practices are deemed by MDOE staff to be helpful pre-conditions for being able to successfully coordinate special education for preschoolers in their region.

Table 15. Questions Related to Public PreK Special Education Readiness (N=19)

	Yes	No	Not Sure or N/A
Are you familiar with most of the private pre-K providers in your catchment area?	95%	-	5%
Do you communicate with pre-K providers about your incoming students who are receiving services under an IEP?	90%	5%	5%
Do you have a process for communicating with pre-K providers to get their perspectives on the individual needs of all of your incoming students (including those without an identified disability)?	80%	10%	10%
Are you familiar with Child Development Services (CDS) in your region (points of contact, staff, processes etc.)?	95%	5%	-

Questions Asked of SAUs Participating in the CDS Pilot

An earlier survey item about level of awareness of these policy conversations (Table 5) allowed us to identify whether the survey respondent belonged to an SAU that was participating in an ongoing pilot project and collaborating with CDS to provide services for preschool students who live in the SAU. That information was used to ask specific follow-up questions to those respondents: “What are the greatest successes your SAU has experienced so far in the pilot project with CDS?” and “What are the biggest challenges your SAU faces in becoming ready to take over responsibility for Pre-K special education from CDS?” Their full responses are provided here for policymaker consideration.

Early Successes

- Providing the necessary ed tech services in a efficient manner.
- Sharing Ed. Tech. costs and screening tools
- The educational service center has a greater ability to hire and employees can work year round.
- Transition to K is less stressful on parents as most of the providers are known.
- Meeting the students’ needs earlier.
- Good collaboration
- Collaboration and communication. We have too many CDS students coming to us with unmet needs and compensatory education plans.
- I am proud of our staffing
- Starting new PreK program with grant from DOE
- We are starting PreK in our school during the 22-23 school year and will be providing all 4-year-olds services at the school

Biggest Challenges

- We don't have the capacity from staff to building space.
- Added OT and Speech coverage.
- Cost and having a school psychologist trained and with enough space to finish evaluations. If we add 3 year olds we have no space. Also concerned about what our specialist teachers are supposed to have for credentials to deliver art, PE:adapted PE etc.
- Space, staff, funding, admin support
- Funding.
- Increasing demand for special education services
- Resources from the state and CDS to financially support the obligations of service.
- Money as the additional work will cost.
- Administrative oversight
- As one of the districts in the pilot, I do not see any challenges.

Conclusion

This initial statewide exploration of school districts' capacity to take over responsibility for preschool special education in Maine yields several key findings. First, respondents have been paying attention to the policy conversations happening at the state level: 97% of respondents indicated at least a general awareness of the types of changes being considered.

Most special education directors and superintendents had a medium to high level of confidence that their districts were going to be able to adequately manage preschool education. However, a concerning 28% of special education directors and 31% of superintendents have low or very low confidence in their ability to oversee preschool special education. As shown in Table 7, SAU leaders are most concerned about their **capacity** in the following areas:

- Number of special education teachers on staff with the credentials to provide services to preschoolers (282 certification for Birth to 5)
- Interest level among elementary special education teachers (those with 282 certification for grades K to 8) in becoming eligible to provide services to preschoolers
- Caseload capacity for special educators to serve preschoolers with IEPs
- Availability of therapists to provide related services (speech, PT, and OT)

Importantly, we found that districts that already have experience working with young students in their public preschool programs are ahead of the pack in feeling ready to support the children in their regions. And those who have further participated in the CDS pilot have substantial wisdom to share about their experiences – both successes and challenges.

These findings indicate a need for additional communication and support for school administrative units to build the resources that will be needed in order to provide adequate preschool special education services. Some concerns (staffing, providers, funding) are universal; others are particular to each SAUs circumstances. The next phase of work that MDOE has planned will involve more detailed work with individual SAUs to better understand and respond to their unique needs. The MDOE will also need additional resources to be able to adequately support the SAUs in implementation of future changes.

This early and candid feedback from Maine SAUs suggests that districts are aware of the rationale for transferring oversight of preschool special education to the SAUs that will be responsible for their future K-12 education, and are sincere in wanting to be sure that they are

able to adequately serve their students when that change comes. It is clear that this will require substantial new investments—start-up funding, ongoing funding, and professional learning—as well as increasing the existing supply of educators and service providers.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the following individuals for the considerable time and effort they contributed in the planning and development of the survey used in this study: Gay McDonald, MADSEC; Erin Frazier, Jaci Holmes, and Barbara McGowen, MDOE; Roberta Lucas, CDS; and Katie Hawes, MSAD 6. We are also grateful to MADSEC and the Maine School Management Association for their support in disseminating the survey to their members and encouraging participation.

Appendix A: Feedback to Policymakers

“(Optional) Are there additional comments you would like to share with policymakers about the types of resources that you would need in order to take on responsibility for Pre-K special education?”

Comments from Respondents in SAUs with Public Preschool Programs

- In our district we currently need special education teachers and ed techs and have difficulty finding people to fill these positions. I currently transport students for physical therapy because I can not find a physical therapist that is willing to travel. I am unable to find a speech therapist willing to travel so some of my speech services are provided via telehealth. My biggest concern is if I am unable to staff the k-12 needs how am I suppose to staff the preschool needs?
- From a small district standpoint, it appears that my district is more capable of providing services for students than the CDS system in our area. Often times our Pre-K kids go unserved when we could provide services if our district had control.
- I currently have difficulty finding staffing to meet the needs of the k-12 IEPs in the district. One way that this is done is through telehealth services, which will not be ideal for pre-k
- The biggest concern I have is where will our district get the funding AND available providers to provide services? We are already short staffed. CDS was unable to provide related services to students this year. This will also impact our district negatively moving forward.
- Staffing is an issue in all district positions(since mid 2020). Finding and keeping staff in education.
- We need more \$, social workers to case manage, and a new structure that supports wrap around community services.
- I mentioned earlier we would have adequate transportation. We do transport 4 year olds now attending our pre-K program. We are not able to transport student from around our district for short therapeutic sessions. This highlights the fact that the challenges CDS has had to provide services to children in our area are the same challenges we will face. That said, we welcome taking on 3 and 4 year olds, knowing it increases the likelihood of a successful transition to K and is in the best interest of students and families.
- Staffing and speech and OT services are inadequate and already maxed out with current caseloads. Our special ed teachers are also at capacity for services and case management responsibilities
- I was a special education director in several communities in MA. We provided special education beginning the day the child turned 3. It’s doable. It works!
- Buildings, facilities, three year olds may need assistance with toileting

- The labor shortage is impacting even well-paying districts ability to hire skilled workers. Incentive programs to promote education programs and credentialing is needed in the area of special education.
- Space is a huge issue in our school.
- funding and training
- I would like to have the opportunity to collaborate with CDS for the provision of services for 4 year olds.
- Space and staff are the highest concern
- Financial Resources up front to pay the salary of the special education teachers, ed techs, and Special Education Director. Financial resources would also be needed up front to cover the cost of renovating classrooms and for teaching supplies.
- clear need to outline funding mechanism and sources. Maine care billing capacity. Transportation needs
- My concern is beyond a financial concern. I have heard that the state would look at fully funding SAUs to take this on. It's not simply about the money. CDS hasn't been able to fully serve their population because they lacked the staffing. Public schools are also struggling with staffing shortages within the are of special education and related services. It's worse now more than ever before. This is just shifting the staffing burden over to public schools that already have this issue for 5-22 year olds.
- I believe our school department can provide special education services, but would need funding in order to do so
- Funding.
- In order for SAUs to take on 3 year olds, we need more qualified staff, funded at 100% percent.
- This move makes sense but it may have to be more of a regional solution than just SAUs
- Additional administrator, special education teachers, ed techs, space, therapists, equipment, materials
- Additional special education teachers, service providers, and administration, along with classrooms, supplies, and transportation to serve these students.
- 3 year olds have different requirements- serviced in home, if transported to school -not rooms available, no therapists available, if serviced in another setting-no therapists available
- There are many barriers to our SAU taking on 3 year olds, including transportation, space, and providers...as well as funding.. 4 year olds would be easier.
- As a Director, I would love to advance our programming for Pre-K. I am concerned about the shortage of qualified professionals applying/not applying in Wiscasset. I am open to any conversation anybody at DOE has about special education programming for 3-5 year olds. We do have space and some very talented educators. It's numbers and

being able to hire enough staff to serve all children appropriately. I have noticed that many children in the CDS system has been on waiting lists. Having further funding to support preschoolers would be beneficial. I believe that serving 3-5 year olds in district is what is best for the children with appropriate supports. Covid hurt us in a variety of ways.

- We would need speech/language pathologists, special education teachers, regular education teachers, ed tech IIIs and space. Transportation may also be an issue. Given the times there are shortages in all of these areas and our location makes it extremely difficult to find staff.
- Staffing resources; Resources for appropriate playground equipment
- Physical space, traveling to service 3 year olds, staff

Comments from Respondents in SAUs without Public Preschool Programs

- We would need an additional administrator to oversee this age group and we would need more space or alternative space as we currently have zero space in our school to add preschool. Some of our special educators are doubled up in rooms.
- The concern I have is securing appropriate staffing for the pre school.
- Our current staff are at capacity, so we know that we would need to hire teachers and all support service providers to provide IEP services. We are also hoping to have monetary support in having a PreK Strategist position to case manage child find and help develop the programs.
- I used to work in a state where all districts were required to serve 3-22 for special education services. I understand the entire process. I think the biggest hurdle is the transition and financing to getting the needed space and staff.
- It is unfortunate that the 282 certification was not extended to include PreK. I have teachers who would be willing to take on the extra responsibility, but are not willing to go back to school to get another certification.
- I am concerned about the potential travel that could be involved to serve 3 & 4 year-olds wherever they may have decided to attend school. For example, if a parent works 45 minutes away and decides to enroll their child near their workplace, it makes it impossible for us to service that student when a provider would need to travel that kind of distance.
- universal public pre-school should come first!
- We are a small elementary school with no cars space and no full time therapists. We have one sped. teacher.
- space, staffing, funding

Appendix B. Geographic Representation of Survey Respondents

County	Frequency	
	N	%
Androscoggin	3	3%
Aroostook	12	10%
Cumberland	11	10%
Franklin	4	3%
Hancock	5	4%
Kennebec	10	9%
Knox	6	5%
Lincoln	3	3%
Oxford	6	5%
Penobscot	21	18%
Piscataquis	2	2%
Sagadahoc	1	1%
Somerset	6	5%
Waldo	2	2%
Washington	10	9%
York	13	11%
Total	115	