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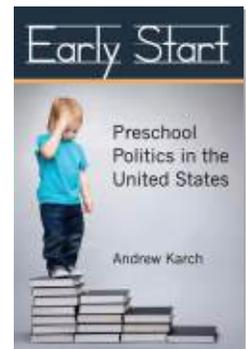
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8 | The Contemporary Preschool Movement in the States

During the last two decades, many states have expanded access to and increased public spending on preschool education. Some recent initiatives built on the publicly funded programs that were established during the 1970s, while other states created new programs. One source of heightened state-level activity in the late 1990s and early 2000s was the absence of policy action at the national level and reformers' effort to find a more favorable institutional venue (Bushouse 2009, 8), but the venue shopping of the contemporary period was not a recapitulation of what occurred in the 1970s. Increased enrollment in such government programs as Head Start and in private-sector programs meant that many service providers had a strong stake in the status quo. Policy change required accommodating or at least addressing the concerns of these stakeholders. Some states provided favorable terrain for reformers, while others did not due to the relative political strength of these invested constituencies. This chapter combines secondary evidence, case studies of developments in individual states, and an original quantitative analysis of preschool funding decisions in all fifty states to illustrate how the existing slate of service providers affected early childhood policymaking.

In keeping with a primary theme of this book, the existing policy repertoire constrained reformers' options. Most of the state-level policy shifts of the late 1990s and early 2000s built on or combined existing public and private programs. Accommodating multiple providers was necessary both politically and logistically. It was a political necessity because the early childhood policy community consisted of constituencies who disagreed with one another about the purpose of preschool, teacher certification requirements, program eligibility, and other fundamental issues. Teachers unions, Head Start supporters, private service providers, and other groups advanced competing visions of the future. Some of them viewed expanded

public programs as a threat to their survival and lobbied against any proposed changes. As a result, major policy shifts often necessitated granting these groups a continued role in providing early childhood services. Accommodating multiple providers was a logistical necessity because program growth required additional facilities and personnel and a supporting infrastructure. The policy changes of recent years have consequently furthered, not mitigated, the fragmentation of early childhood policy in the United States.

The New Politics of Early Childhood Education

In 1999, the Education Commission of the States asked over three hundred attendees at its annual meeting to identify the most important education issues facing their state. Early childhood ranked tenth, mentioned by only 37 of the 388 respondents to the survey.¹ Things changed very rapidly, however. Governor Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) made early care and education the focus of her term as chair of the ECS in 2000–2001, and the organization launched a two-year initiative entitled *Early Learning: Improving Results for Young Children*. The initiative emphasized two aspects of early childhood policy that the ECS believed had received insufficient attention. It sought to engage the business community as a full partner, portraying early learning as an investment in the development of the future workforce, and to establish systematic connections between early learning and elementary education.² Each of these goals testified to the increasingly dense array of stakeholders in this policy arena.

The political tactics of the Early Learning initiative resonated with those the ECS pursued in the early 1970s. The organization hoped to have a national impact, but it initially planned “to bring the national dialogue home to 20 or so states . . . by sponsoring workshops designed to jump-start or accelerate state-level strategy development on early learning.”³ This venue shopping would become more targeted over time, as the ECS hoped to “establish and maintain a longer-term collaborative relationship with three to five states committed to carrying out an ambitious early care and learning agenda.”⁴ Within a year, the initiative had engaged twenty states through regional workshops and state-specific technical assistance, and it had plans to offer workshops to representatives from all fifty states within months.⁵ Thus the Early Learning initiative illustrates both the increased salience of early childhood policy and the significance of venue shopping in facilitating policy change.

The profile of early childhood policy continued to rise in the early 2000s. One sign of its increased prominence was the frequency with which governors mentioned it in their State of the State addresses. For example, sixteen of the forty-four governors who had given their addresses by March 17, 2003, talked about early learning issues. Democrat Janet Napolitano of Arizona said, “The more we learn about the importance of early childhood learning, the more obvious it is that voluntary all-day kindergarten and universal pre-K should be standard offerings in our schools.” Democrat Jennifer Granholm of Michigan cited brain development research as she advanced a program called Great Start to increase learning in the years from birth to age five. Democratic governors were especially enthusiastic, but the issue’s appeal crossed party lines. For example, Republican Mark Sanford of South Carolina described teacher quality and early childhood education as high-priority areas and promised to ensure that they received an infusion of public funds.⁶ Various initiatives launched by officeholders and national organizations produced state-level activity, leading some scholars to identify the emergence of a preschool “movement” by the middle of the decade (Fuller 2007, 5; Kirp 2007, 100).

In terms of its membership and leadership, the contemporary preschool movement bears a superficial resemblance to the child development movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Bruce Fuller (2007, 5) describes it as “led by earnest elites who work from within foundation offices, state governments, and universities.” There is an element of truth in this portrayal. The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, and the Schott Foundation for Public Education have actively promoted universal preschool,⁷ and policy entrepreneurs in state government have been indispensable to the policy changes of the past decade. Many academic research centers are active in early childhood policy. For example, the National Institute for Early Education Research at Rutgers University publishes research and an annual report card on state preschool programs.

Preschool supporters consciously sought to expand the breadth of their coalition, however. As a result, the contemporary preschool movement includes several constituencies who previously had not been very involved in early childhood policy. Multiple analysts credit the Pew Charitable Trusts with developing this strategy. The foundation recognized that its campaign would achieve minimal results unless it was supported by children’s advocacy groups and “unanticipated sources” (Kirp 2007, 161). It therefore cultivated support in the business and law enforcement com-

munities as well as the media, engaging such organizations as the Committee for Economic Development, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, and the Education Writers Association. Pew “successfully expanded the range of actors advocating for universal preschool” (Bushouse 2009, 116). The inclusion of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids was especially savvy. The organization “predicated its support on statistics showing that children of low economic circumstances who attend pre-K are less likely than peers to become delinquents and engage in antisocial behavior” (Maeroff 2006, 214). As a result, the universal preschool movement has been called “a big-tent coalition [that] includes politicians and pedagogues, philanthropists, pediatricians, and police chiefs” (Kirp 2007, 3).

The main rhetorical claims of the contemporary preschool movement match those of earlier periods. In the early 2000s, supporters of increased public investment cited recent trends in the labor market and the resultant need for early childhood services. They profiled scientific research that seemed to imply that environmental influences in the early years affected long-term cognitive development. They advanced arguments about “school readiness” and educational equity, justifying their position on both moral and cost-effectiveness grounds. Their arguments resonated with those of their predecessors. Despite this rhetorical overlap, however, the tone of the debate shifted in a subtle yet crucial way. The debate of the late 1960s and early 1970s had been about “child development,” an umbrella term incorporating educational, nutritional, and other family services. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the focus had been on child care and its availability. The debate of the early 2000s, in contrast, emphasized the provision of educational services for young children.⁸

Supporters hoped that an educational frame would lead to greater public support. Policymakers and advocacy groups used such terms as *early childhood education and care*, *early learning and care*, or *educare* to emphasize cognitive development.⁹ This rhetorical shift was crucial in the United States, where child care is often viewed as a social welfare issue or a parental responsibility, while education usually connotes a public role and public responsibility (L. White 2004). Surveys suggested that the public viewed early childhood education more positively than child care, leading one scholar to conclude that “promoting early childhood care and education as part of comprehensive education reform efforts is a promising approach” (Beatty 2001, 181). Preschool supporters therefore separated policy for preschool-aged children from policy for infants and toddlers. This split enabled reformers to align preschool with education and to frame it as a program worthy of public investment (Bushouse 2009, 155–56).

Reframing early childhood education was not only important in shifting public attitudes. It also affected policymakers' views. Like the public, policymakers perceived a "big difference between prekindergarten and child care" (Kirp 2007, 137). The former was regarded as preparing young children to succeed in school, and the latter was regarded as not really preparing infants and toddlers for anything. This distinction was not novel. It resonated with the early twentieth-century divide between day nurseries and nursery schools. What differed about the rhetorical shift of the early 2000s was that proponents of increased public investment in early childhood programs generally coalesced around a single issue frame.

Changes in national education policy reinforced the appeal of an education frame. Passage of the No Child Left Behind Act was especially significant even though those involved in the education and care of young children disagreed about its implications. Some early learning professionals viewed NCLB's emphasis on annual assessments with concern. They questioned whether it was possible or desirable to assess preschoolers' progress and worried about "the trickle down of inappropriate testing of young children."¹⁰ In their opinion, assessments promoted an emphasis on academic achievement at the expense of other developmental goals. Standards should therefore "include all of the dimensions of children's development that contribute to their well-being as well as their academic success" (Stipek 2006, 463). They argued that school readiness was best viewed as a multidimensional concept incorporating "language and cognition, social and emotional development, general knowledge, and skill development. [It should] be considered as a process that occurs over time and is not complete by the first day of kindergarten."¹¹

Other practitioners, in contrast, viewed NCLB as an opportunity for expanded public support. By tying federal funding to school performance and focusing on educational quality, the legislation "put pressure on state legislatures to ensure that children entering primary school are 'ready to learn' so . . . their test scores do not drag down the school and affect school funding" (L. White 2004, 672). They argued that NCLB reinforced the focus on school readiness that had been part of the debate over early childhood policy since the late 1980s. In addition, some of them claimed that assessments would be useful for "identifying atypical patterns of development that warrant closer scrutiny by educators and parents, determining whether children are learning the content and skills that their district and school have set as goals, and ensuring that the education institution is responsible for its responsibilities."¹² While the early childhood policy community coalesced around an educational frame in its push for program

expansion, early childhood specialists and elementary school educators disagreed about the implications of NCLB.

Program cost continued to affect the possibility of major reform. Universal, high-quality programs were costly, and state governments faced significant budget constraints. Many preschool supporters argued that all children needed opportunities to learn, but most state programs were narrowly targeted because universal programs were out of reach financially. For example, California's State Preschool Program enrolled three- and four-year-olds living in families at or below 60–65 percent of the state median income. Four-year-olds who met the Head Start income eligibility standards could participate in Delaware's Early Childhood Assistance Program. The Kentucky Preschool Program was available to four-year-olds who were eligible for free lunch and to all disabled three- and four-year-olds. Seventy percent of the funds for Early Childhood Projects in Nebraska were targeted to serve children eligible for Head Start, those in families with incomes less than 150 percent of the federal poverty line, those born premature or with a low birth weight, and those whose primary language was something other than English.¹³ Funding concerns affected eligibility and quality provisions and represented one of policymakers' "key challenges" at both the national and state level (Clifford et al. 2005, 141).

Despite the aforementioned similarities between the universal preschool movement and its predecessors, the debates of the early 2000s occurred on distinct political terrain. The universe of actors who perceived themselves as having a stake in early childhood policy had changed considerably over the years. The debate over universal preschool was not simply a reprise of what had occurred previously. New interest groups and organizations became involved, as has already been discussed, and the positions advanced by some long-term participants shifted in important ways. These political changes represent the state-level heritage of Nixon's veto and the by-product of the reactions and counterreactions it produced. This policy feedback facilitated the development of programs that accommodated multiple providers, adjusting to, rather than addressing, the fragmentation that characterized this policy sector.

Fragmentation, Coordination, and the Politics of Early Childhood Education

By the early 2000s, early childhood policy in the United States had taken on its two most distinctive characteristics. The private sector was a cru-

cial provider of services, and public-sector activity was highly decentralized. Commentators, practitioners, and advocates often described these attributes of the existing system as shortcomings. Preschool education consisted of “a hodgepodge of providers offering uneven services for young children and having no connection to the public education system that children enter at age 5 or 6.”¹⁴ One analysis concluded that the “elements of a system are in place, but the pieces are not designed to fit together in a cohesive way.”¹⁵ Another described the status quo as a “patchwork of diverse programs, each with its own infrastructure and no overarching policy framework encompassing a whole system of care and education.”¹⁶ A complex conglomeration of providers and funding streams existed.

Many reformers argued that the status quo was unacceptable because many American children lacked access to high-quality early childhood programs. They recognized, however, that policy change would require the mobilization of a wide range of constituencies. One report concluded, “Filling the gaps and building a high-quality system of early care and education require the attention, investment, and action of many people—parents and families, business leaders and philanthropists, teachers and preachers, senior citizens and students, media and policymakers.”¹⁷ Those who hoped to establish a cohesive system rather than “sprinkling more unconnected programs on the landscape” realized that they needed substantial commitments from the business, political, philanthropic, and faith communities.¹⁸ The inherent difficulty of merging these constituencies into a cohesive coalition was exacerbated by the fact that they lacked a formal, common language to describe their objectives.¹⁹ Diverse terms like *preschool*, *prekindergarten*, *nursery school*, and *early care and education* suggested agreement that early childhood programs should feature educational content, but they hinted at more politically significant divisions among potential supporters.

The unsystematic creation and growth of early childhood programs since the 1970s meant that even though reformers agreed on the need for policy change, many of them had a stake in a particular element of the status quo. As a result, it was difficult for them to work together, because they had distinct bureaucratic and programmatic turf to defend. In other words, policy feedback represented a critical obstacle to policy change, because it produced constituencies who mobilized to defend specific programs. When state officials sought to merge existing initiatives into a single program, they often found that “turf battles and different funding sources impede[d] those efforts” (Cohen 2001, 275). Those who agreed

that change was desirable advanced different goals and sometimes found themselves in opposition to one another.

The status of Head Start is illustrative. One report on early childhood policy described a “striking disconnect between Head Start, the more general world of early care and learning, and the K–12 education system.”²⁰ Another report noted that such states as Mississippi, Wyoming, and North Dakota lacked state-funded preschool programs but had high enrollments in Head Start and programs for children with disabilities. It seemed to imply the existence of a “crowding out” effect, at least in certain states. For example, it juxtaposed Mississippi and New York. In the former, 35.9 percent of the state’s three- and four-year-olds attended a preschool program funded by Head Start or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. In New York, a state with a large state preschool program, 35.2 percent of the state’s three- and four-year-olds attended a state or federal prekindergarten program.²¹ This comparison seemed to suggest that a large Head Start program substituted for a large state preschool program.

The relationship between Head Start and the “more general world of early care and learning” was one of many tensions within the early childhood community. Proponents continued to debate the appropriate role of the public school system. Some warned that “early care and education cannot be constructed as a simple extension of K–12 learning.”²² They claimed that children under the age of five had developmental needs that would not be well served by the public schools and charged that teachers unions were more interested in generating jobs for their members than in providing preschool services. In 2004, for example, the California Teachers Association helped draft a ballot initiative that would have generated \$1.5 billion for preschool. It did not consult other preschool operators in the state, so the measure was “widely perceived as a full-employment act for the teachers’ union” (Kirp 2007, 211). Eventually the union withdrew its proposal.

The diverse and cross-cutting cleavages involved in early childhood policy led one analysis to conclude, “While nearly every level of government and sector of society has a stake in improving early care and learning, the responsibilities are so fragmented that no single actor holds enough of the levers for change to get it done.”²³ The range of interests with a stake in the existing “nonsystem” was an obstacle to governance reform. Constituencies that nominally shared the same objectives regarded reform warily when it seemed likely to move the status quo in a direction that did not suit their interests. Reform advocates recognized that they faced significant hurdles and called for the “transcendence of selfish interests in the higher pursuit of a more integrated system.”²⁴ Policy

change required the mobilization of diverse constituencies. Their identities and the prospects for reform “var[ied] from state to state according to the history and political will of each.”²⁵ Despite these formidable obstacles, the early 2000s were a period of significant reform. The most dramatic changes took place in states where officials developed programs that accommodated multiple providers and came to terms with this legacy of fragmentation.

Overcoming the Obstacles to Reform

Historically, statewide early childhood programs targeted children who were of low socioeconomic status or who were otherwise considered to be “at risk.” Beginning in the 1990s, however, states like Georgia and Oklahoma developed programs that allowed children from middle- and upper-income families to receive a free preschool education. Given the historical trajectory of early childhood policy in the United States, the adoption of universal preschool represented a noteworthy shift (Barnett and Hustedt 2003, 54). Many scholars closely examined these state-level episodes of policy change, attempting to understand how the political barriers that had frustrated past reform efforts had been surmounted (Bushouse 2009; Fuller 2007; Kirp 2007; Maeroff 2006; E. Rose 2010). Their case studies suggest that divisions within the early education policy community were a hurdle that could be cleared by designing programs that accommodated multiple providers. Most state-level initiatives built on or combined existing public and private programs.

Incorporating multiple service providers into the expanded state preschool programs was a logistical necessity, because rapid expansion necessitated additional classroom space and teachers and the existence of a supporting infrastructure. Space and personnel constraints in public facilities meant that partnerships with the private sector were the only way that many states could meet their enrollment objectives. Every state subsidizing preschool therefore included such providers as day care centers, licensed family child care homes, faith-based agencies, and private schools. The exact mix varied from state to state, but according to the National Center for Education Statistics, nearly 30 percent of the institutions operating state preschool programs were not affiliated with the public school system as of 2002.²⁶ Relying on this spectrum of providers led to concerns about uneven program quality and sparked controversy about the importance of teachers’ educational credentials.

The rapid expansion of Georgia's ambitious preschool program illustrates the internal tensions among the early childhood community. The program's origins dated to the gubernatorial campaign of Democrat Zell Miller. Miller pledged to create a lottery for education and proposed earmarking some of the funds it generated to preschool. After his election, the idea was endorsed by the state legislature and a citizen referendum. The referendum campaign focused on the lottery itself, with preschool receiving "virtually no attention" (Bushouse 2009, 29).

The Georgia program served nine thousand at-risk children when it opened its doors in September 1993. The number of enrollees doubled in its second year, and forty-five thousand children were signed up in its third year. A key change occurred during its fourth year of operation. All four-year-olds in the state were eligible for enrollment, and sixty thousand of them were signed up to enroll. The rapid expansion of the program spurred the state to incorporate both public and private providers in order to find adequate facilities and qualified teachers. Logistical challenges meant that "the state needed [private providers] to make the experiment of universal prekindergarten work" (E. Rose 2010, 107). In 1996–97, over half of its enrollees attended publicly funded private programs, even some based in churches.²⁷

Incorporating multiple service providers was also a political necessity. After the referendum passed, various groups expressed concerns about how the preschool program would be implemented. The program sparked numerous battles "among a narrow set of actors, mainly within the child care industry" (Bushouse 2009, 67). For-profit preschool providers wanted to ensure their place in the expanded program, and Head Start providers worried that the state planned to take over Head Start. The fears of the latter group existed because many of the local coordinating councils for the state program, which initially focused on at-risk children, did not involve Head Start in program planning. The program guidelines were subsequently modified so that coordinating councils were advised to include Head Start representatives.²⁸ The implementation of universal preschool in Georgia required both strong gubernatorial support and a willingness to accommodate existing stakeholders.

The development of Oklahoma's universal preschool program provides similar lessons about the political necessity of accommodating multiple providers. In contrast to Georgia, where universal preschool was linked to a high-profile gubernatorial campaign and a lottery referendum, universal preschool "quietly emerged" in Oklahoma through a complex series of incremental changes (Bushouse 2009, 47). In 1980, the state legislature

funded a small pilot program. A decade later, a technical change in the school finance formula enabled local school districts to be reimbursed for educating four-year-olds (Kirp 2007, 181). In 1998, legislation creating a universal preschool program was signed into law without significant controversy or media coverage. The program accommodated established preschool service providers, including Head Start operators and faith-based programs (Finn 2009).

Head Start supporters in Oklahoma viewed the expansion of public preschool as a threat. Two factors contributed to winning their support in 1998. First, the architect of the proposal convinced Head Start leaders that expanding the preschool program would increase revenues to Head Start, because its centers would be eligible for public funding if they established “collaborative” relations with their local school districts. This legislative language allowed Head Start to “create partnerships with the public schools, either to run preschool classrooms or to offer wrap-around programs for children attending a half-day class within an elementary school” (Fuller 2007, 111). Second, the revised school finance formula had led many districts to place four-year-olds in kindergarten, a trend that the Head Start community viewed with alarm. It was hoped that expanding the public preschool program would end or at least limit this practice (Bushouse 2009, 43). Once these concerns were addressed, the expansion of the state preschool program did not face any significant opposition. Framed as an incremental shift and buttressed by national praise and favorable evaluations (Gormley and Phillips 2005; Gormley, Phillips, and Gayer 2008), the Oklahoma program boasts “a stable institutional structure and a cohesive policy image. It has attained a policy monopoly with no challengers on the horizon” (Bushouse 2009, 86).

The uneasy relationship between Head Start and public preschool programs was also evident in West Virginia. When universal preschool legislation gained enactment in 2002, it constituted only four pages of a fifty-one-page bill and was the handiwork of a small inner circle of legislators and political appointees. Its main opposition came from the state’s House Education Committee chairman, who feared that state funding would displace federal Head Start funding for preschool services. That competitive dynamic had emerged when one of the poorest counties in the state began to offer preschool but failed to coordinate with Head Start. The West Virginia bill required public schools to collaborate with county Head Start agencies in order to address this concern (Bushouse 2009, 48).

In Tennessee, legislation with the potential to establish universal preschool was adopted in 2005, only after the concerns of the Head Start

community were addressed. The original bill required all preschool programs to comply with the standards of the State Board of Education, including a requirement that each classroom have a certified teacher. Head Start operators feared that their programs would not be able to participate in the state program, because Head Start does not require a certified teacher. Their concerns were addressed in a meeting between Head Start representatives and the State Board of Education. The final legislation placed a strong emphasis on collaboration, even though it did not mandate it (Bushouse 2009, 127–33). The tension between Head Start and public programs is often due to concerns about enrollment and funding, but developments in Tennessee highlight that integrating Head Start into state programs is generally difficult due to the extensive federal standards that regulate program governance, performance, and accountability. In some cases, these regulations must be modified or waived to enable Head Start centers to enter contracts with state programs (Barnett and Hustedt 2003, 56–57).

The relationship between Head Start and state preschool programs is only one manifestation of the policy feedback that characterizes early childhood policy. Head Start supporters are one of many stakeholders interested in maintaining the status quo or directing policy change in a particular direction. Such service providers as nonprofits, churches, for-profit firms, and local schools are also inclined to view proposed changes and one another suspiciously. In Texas, for example, “the public schools, Head Start centers, and child care centers viewed one another with disdain” (Kirp 2007, 198). Head Start leaders and for-profit child care providers feared the expansionist tendencies of the public schools and “were antagonistic to an expansion of state prekindergarten because it threatened their survival” (Kirp 2007, 206). In Texas, policy reform was possible only after state policymakers offered something of value to each of these constituencies.

Developments in California illustrate a similar dynamic. Tensions between teachers unions and other preschool providers are another obstacle to developing a cohesive coalition. Bruce Fuller (2007, 10) describes a June 2002 conference call during which participants discussed the wide-ranging groups that already served three- and four-year-olds in Los Angeles. They agreed that coalescing around a single model of service provision would be challenging because “this patchwork quilt of child care organizations would be difficult to move in any one direction.”

The organizational pluralism that characterizes early childhood programs represents an obstacle to policy change. Tensions exist even in states where advocacy groups have a better working relationship. In Illi-

nois, organizations including Voices for Illinois Children, the Ounce of Prevention Fund, and Illinois Action for Children, which typically join forces to lobby, fight in private over the appropriate policy approaches and political strategies to pursue (Kirp 2007, 21).

Tensions among service providers also affected initiative campaigns. In 2002, Florida voters amended the state constitution to guarantee high-quality prekindergarten for every four-year-old in the state. The operators of for-profit preschools and faith-based schools feared that the initiative would drive them out of business but were reassured by promises that any prekindergarten, public or private, that satisfied state standards would be able to participate. Critics viewed the reassurances as obstacles to genuine reform and a more cohesive system, but they demonstrate the political necessity of accommodating existing stakeholders. They also suggest that “this powerful lobby will seek to protect private providers and incorporate them into any system of universal prekindergarten” (Maeroff 2006, 40). This resistance continued during implementation, leading one analyst to describe the program as “a classic example of how a diffuse majority, those who voted for the constitutional amendment, lost out to a concentrated and determined minority, the operators of private and faith-based preschools” (Kirp 2007, 188). Private and faith-based service providers enroll most four-year-olds, and the regulations governing the Florida program largely reflect their preferences.

In summary, program expansion typically reflected the logistical and political necessity of accommodating multiple service providers. Most of the changes described in this section of this chapter sought “to build on and combine existing private and public programs into a more coordinated system with consistent standards” (Barnett and Hustedt 2003, 56). A May 2006 report described state officials as “grappling with the challenges of accommodating existing programs and services while at the same time maintaining some uniformity of quality, outcomes, and coordination across programs.”²⁹ This effort also reflected a growing consensus that such coordination would lead to more-effective programs. Dozens of states established governance bodies designed to give greater priority to children and family issues and to improve program operations.³⁰

These programmatic benefits were exceeded, however, by the political benefits of incorporating multiple service providers. In many states, reformers faced opposition from stakeholders who believed their survival was at risk. They responded by emphasizing public access to programs (rather than the direct provision of services) and by encouraging participation by public and private preschools, because the “existence of a large

lobby group for private preschools [left] little space for a unilateral approach” (Beatty 2001, 182). In many states, policy change became possible only when the concerns of Head Start centers, faith-based preschools, and other providers were addressed. Incorporating multiple providers also offered rhetorical benefits. Supporters could then plausibly claim that they were not offering a “big government” solution that usurped parental rights and responsibilities.³¹

Policy Feedback and Preschool Funding at the State Level

The developments profiled in the previous section of this chapter suggest that accommodating the preferences of existing providers, including Head Start, is often a prerequisite for major policy change. It is insufficient, however, to examine only states in which the creation of a universal program or the expansion of an existing program occurred. Only by examining both successful and unsuccessful attempts to change the status quo is it possible to isolate the political sources of early childhood policy. This section describes a quantitative analysis of contemporary preschool education across all fifty states. Its goal is to extend and reassess existing case study research. By examining all fifty states, including many where major policy change did not occur, its systematic analysis acts as a tentative validity check on the conclusions drawn in the preceding section.³²

Turning to the state level offers the added benefit of providing a largely untapped venue in which to assess the impact of policy feedback. Most studies of policy development examine national politics. This focus is understandable given the scope of national programs like Social Security, yet it means that scholars must be cautious about developing broad generalizations about the policymaking process. The underlying similarity and manageable variation of the American states makes them a propitious venue in which to evaluate hypotheses about policymaking (Gray 2008; Mooney 2001). State-level analysis can assess the conditions under which the conclusions drawn from national studies “travel” to other venues, thereby producing more-robust generalizations. The quantitative analysis presented in this section therefore represents a robustness check accompanying the historical evidence presented elsewhere in this book. It simultaneously evaluates the impact of policy feedback and several other political and economic factors on early childhood policy.³³

The outcomes of interest are whether and how states fund preschool education. During the 2006–7 school year, forty-one states dedicated pub-

lic funds to preschool (Rigby 2007). These state-funded programs come in three basic forms. States may fund freestanding preschool programs, supplement Head Start, or combine the two approaches. In 2006–7, thirty states funded freestanding programs, Oregon dedicated all of its preschool spending to a Head Start supplement, and ten states used a combined approach.³⁴ Nine states did not dedicate public funds to preschool.

The long-standing tension between Head Start supporters and other members of the early childhood policy community suggests that interest group politics might affect the category into which a state falls. If Head Start supporters feel threatened by a freestanding preschool program, they may press state officials not to create one. As a result, states with a strong Head Start community may be especially likely not to fund preschool education. The first outcome on which the analysis focuses is therefore a dichotomous variable indicating whether a state does not dedicate any public funds to preschool. A positive relationship between the strength of the Head Start community and this outcome is expected. The second outcome examined is a dichotomous variable indicating whether a state dedicates all of its public preschool spending to a freestanding program. A negative relationship between the strength of the Head Start community and this outcome is expected.³⁵

The strength of the Head Start community is the key factor in the analysis that follows. The proxy used to assess its strength is the percentage of preschool attendees in the state who are enrolled in Head Start.³⁶ This proxy captures the potential strength of the Head Start community because it emphasizes its size. State Head Start organizations possess divergent views on many issues, and the political effectiveness of their leaders also varies. The chief limitation of the proxy employed here is that it does not account for these important differences. Its main advantage, however, is that it offers an objective measure of Head Start's reach relative to other early childhood programs. The Head Start percentage ranges from a low of 9.2 percent in New Hampshire and New Jersey to a high of 65.3 percent in Mississippi. Based on the historical episodes and case study evidence profiled in this book, states in which a relatively high percentage of preschool enrollees are enrolled in Head Start are likely not to fund preschool education and unlikely to dedicate all preschool spending to a freestanding state program. Head Start supporters are often reluctant to support the creation or expansion of state-funded preschool programs, and state officials will presumably be more attentive to their preferences when they represent a larger proportion of existing stakeholders.

Many state characteristics might affect decisions about preschool

funding. One potential demographic influence is the age profile of the population. The issue might resonate more strongly in states with a relatively high proportion of young children, where policymakers might perceive a greater need for publicly funded programs. The logic of this relationship is analogous to the idea that policy adoption is driven by underlying societal conditions or needs (Nice 1994). The analysis that follows therefore includes the proportion of the state population that is under five years old.³⁷ States with a younger population base might face stronger demand for preschool services and therefore be especially likely to fund them.³⁸

State wealth also has the potential to affect preschool funding decisions. Its potential impact is related to both the population served by Head Start and the general impact of state wealth on policymaking. Most Head Start enrollees live in low-income families, though the correlation between income and enrollment is imperfect, because Head Start does not reach the entire eligible population. Including a proxy for state wealth therefore ensures that a significant relationship between the strength of the Head Start community and preschool funding decisions is not due to states' socioeconomic profiles. In addition, wealthy states may have more resources to devote to preschool, while less wealthy states may be reluctant to use their scarcer resources for that purpose. Political scientists have long noted a general relationship between wealth and policy outcomes (Dye 1966; Tweedie 1994; Walker 1969).³⁹

Other demographic factors might affect preschool spending decisions. Formal education levels might affect societal attitudes toward preschool and the willingness to fund it. Individuals with higher levels of formal education might be more sympathetic to public spending on education in general and on preschool education in particular, leading to a positive relationship between state education levels and preschool spending. The analysis that follows uses the percentage of the state population with a high school diploma or higher as its proxy for state education levels.⁴⁰ Another potential influence is racial diversity. Scholars have linked racial heterogeneity to policy choices (Fellowes and Rowe 2004; Soss et al. 2001) and educational outcomes at the state level (Hero and Tolbert 1996). They have found that states with larger minority populations tend to implement less generous policies. The analysis that follows uses the percentage of the state population identified as non-Hispanic white as a proxy for homogeneity and, based on prior research, expects a positive relationship between population homogeneity and preschool funding.⁴¹

Preschool funding decisions might also be influenced by the state po-

litical environment. Party control of government institutions (Roh and Haider-Markel 2003; Spill, Licari, and Ray 2001) and the ideological environment (Berry et al. 1998; Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993) have been linked to various public policies. Democrats tend to be more enthusiastic than Republicans about publicly funded preschool. Democratic control of the governorship or state legislature might therefore make it more likely that a state will devote public funds to preschool, while Republican control might make such funding less likely. The analysis that follows therefore includes a dichotomous variable that indicates whether Democrats exercise unified party control of state government.⁴² The potential relationship between preschool funding and ideology is based on similar logic. Conservatives generally prefer to reduce the scope of government activity, while liberals typically support its expansion. Many conservatives characterize publicly funded preschool as an undesirable intrusion on parental autonomy. States in which residents hold relatively liberal political views might be more likely to dedicate public funds to preschool. The analysis therefore includes an annual estimate of citizen liberalism (Berry et al. 1998). Both Democratic control and citizen liberalism are expected to have a positive effect on preschool funding.

To evaluate the aforementioned relationships, the following analysis examines five years of cross-sectional data on state preschool spending from 2001 to 2005 (Rigby 2007). The unit of analysis is a state-year. The outcomes of interest, whether a state chose not to dedicate funds to preschool and whether a state funded only a freestanding state program, are examined in two separate models. Each model includes the variables described in this section and indicator variables for each year of the analysis. Both dependent variables are dichotomous, so standard logistic regression methods are used to evaluate the determinants of preschool funding.

Why do some states not dedicate public funds to preschool? Table 2 displays the results of a logistic regression model examining this decision.⁴³ As expected, the division within the early childhood policy community seems influential. The size of the Head Start community has a significant positive effect on the likelihood that a state will not allocate public funds to preschool. When other independent variables are fixed at their central values, moving from a state with a small Head Start community (12.95 percent of total preschool enrollment) to a state with a large one (35.30 percent) increases the likelihood that it will not fund preschool, by 12.72 percentage points. In combination with the evidence presented throughout this book, this result suggests that some Head Start supporters perceive other publicly funded preschool programs as a potential threat.

State officials appear to respond to their preferences when they represent a large proportion of those with a stake in preschool.

The decision not to fund preschool also seems to be influenced by other factors. As predicted, there is a significant negative relationship between state wealth and this decision. Wealthy states are more likely to allocate public funds to preschool.⁴⁴ When other independent variables are fixed at their central values, moving from a wealthy state to a poor one decreases the likelihood that it will fund preschool, by 12.57 percentage points. Resource availability appears to facilitate preschool funding. Citizen ideology has the expected effect. Liberal states are more likely to dedicate public funds to preschool. When other independent variables are fixed at their central values, moving from a liberal state to a conservative one decreases the likelihood that it will offer publicly funded preschool, by 6.53 percentage points. The presence of unified Democratic government also appears to increase the likelihood that it will fund preschool education, but this relationship does not achieve conventional levels of statistical significance.⁴⁵

Table 3 displays the results of a model examining the decision to devote all public preschool funds to a freestanding state program. The division within the early childhood policy community has the expected impact.

TABLE 2. Determinants of the Decision Not to Fund Preschool Education

Variable	First Difference	Confidence Interval
Head Start Enrollment (+)	12.72**	[3.12, 30.31]
Population under Five (-)	0.71	[-5.26, 7.88]
Per Capita Income (-)	-12.57*	[-31.53, -2.02]
Education Level (-)	15.20**	[4.54, 33.01]
Population Homogeneity (-)	2.71	[-4.82, 14.40]
Democratic Government (-)	-3.15	[-9.05, -0.14]
Citizen Ideology (-)	-6.53**	[-17.21, -1.17]
2002	-0.49	[-6.42, 6.15]
2003	0.88	[-6.13, 8.33]
2004	5.61	[-3.13, 18.47]
2005	4.82	[-3.26, 16.13]
Number of observations	250	
Log likelihood	-65.368	
Chi-square	98.79	
Prob. chi-square	0.000	
Pseudo R ²	0.430	

Note: Expected directions in parentheses. All tests of statistical significance are two-tailed.

*Significant at the .05 level; **significant at the .01 level.

The size of the Head Start community has a significant negative effect. When other independent variables are fixed at their central values, moving from a state with a small Head Start community to a state with a large one reduces the likelihood that a state will fund only a freestanding preschool program, by 43.25 percentage points. Like the analogous result in table 2, this finding seems to imply that some Head Start supporters feel threatened by freestanding preschool programs and that their political strength affects whether state officials respond to their preferences. As anticipated, interest group politics seems to influence state decisions about whether and how to fund preschool.

The performance of the other variables examined in the model is disappointing. As expected, unified Democratic government makes it more likely that a state will fund only a freestanding program. When other independent variables are fixed at their central values, moving from a state without unified Democratic control to a state with it increases the probability that the state will fund only a freestanding preschool program, by 24.50 percentage points. Citizen ideology also has the anticipated effect. Liberal states are more likely to fund only a freestanding program, but this relationship does not attain conventional levels of statistical significance.⁴⁶

TABLE 3. Determinants of the Decision to Fund Only a Freestanding Preschool Program

Variable	First Difference	Confidence Interval
Head Start Enrollment (-)	-43.25**	[-61.90, -23.32]
Population under Five (+)	-5.48	[-25.95, 15.49]
Per Capita Income (+)	-15.47	[-39.27, 7.32]
Education Level (+)	-50.21**	[-65.52, -32.60]
Population Homogeneity (+)	-3.97	[-21.87, 15.08]
Democratic Government (+)	24.50*	[2.18, 43.45]
Citizen Ideology (+)	3.23	[-17.16, 21.65]
2002	4.57	[-17.20, 27.60]
2003	-0.34	[-22.67, 22.61]
2004	21.82	[-0.68, 43.31]
2005	24.48*	[2.87, 46.09]
Number of observations	250	
Log likelihood	-132.611	
Chi-square	75.55	
Prob. chi-square	0.000	
Pseudo R^2	0.222	

Note: Expected directions in parentheses. All tests of statistical significance are two-tailed.

*Significant at the .05 level; **significant at the .01 level.

The results presented in this section suggest that the size of the Head Start community may influence whether and how states fund preschool education.⁴⁷ A large Head Start presence seems to make it more likely that a state will not fund preschool education and seems to decrease the likelihood that it will only fund a freestanding public program. The chief limitation of the preceding analysis is that it cannot identify the precise mechanisms through which the Head Start community affects preschool funding. Its impact may be due to supporters' political activity, worries about the financial implications of policy change for Head Start, or a feeling among state political leaders that large Head Start enrollments obviate the need for state activity. Additional case study research comparing successful and unsuccessful attempts at major policy change would add greater depth to the results presented here, and they might illuminate the impact of factors like inertia and individual leadership that are not addressed in the preceding analysis. Furthermore, Head Start is a national funding stream and a disparate, intensely local collection of programs. It is important to recognize that Head Start supporters may have blocked the growth of other preschool programs in some states but not others.⁴⁸

Despite its limitations, the preceding analysis supports one of this book's key assertions. The impact of the Head Start community is consistent with the concept of policy feedback. Supporters of policy change often must overcome the opposition of constituencies who benefit from the status quo, and the clout of program beneficiaries can constrain the options that policymakers possess. Existing policies affect the possibilities for future policymaking by shaping the identities, interests, and incentives of key actors (Skocpol 1992). The mobilization of existing stakeholders has been an obstacle to comprehensive change in such areas as retirement security and health care (Campbell 2003; Hacker 2002; Mayes 2004; Walker 1991), and a similar dynamic seems to have affected the state-level impact of the contemporary preschool movement.

State Programs and the "Great Recession"

The preceding analysis examined a period of extensive state government activity in early childhood policy. In 2005 and 2006, thirty-one states increased preschool funding by a total of more than one billion dollars, Illinois and West Virginia endorsed programs to make preschool available to all children whose parents want it, and several states established task forces to examine the issue. A strong economy in South Carolina, for ex-

ample, made possible a project that distributed \$23.7 million in new funding to schools, child care centers, Head Start, and faith-based providers.⁴⁹ Shortly thereafter, however, the economic context changed dramatically and effectively removed major programmatic expansions from the political agenda. Beginning in 2007, the United States entered a recession that “caused the largest collapse in state revenues on record.”⁵⁰ Increased demand for public programs accompanied these revenue declines, as residents lost jobs, income, and health insurance. States had experienced recessions in the early 1980s, early 1990s, and early 2000s, but the recession of the late 2000s was unusually severe. Sluggish economic growth and high unemployment persisted well after its official conclusion in June 2009, and state officials continued to face major fiscal challenges into 2012.⁵¹

Unlike the national government, virtually all states are required to balance their operating budgets every year or biennium. Plunging revenues and the increased need for government services opened sizable budget gaps that state officials were forced to close. The combined shortfalls for 2009 through 2012 totaled more than \$530 billion.⁵² States met this challenge by drawing down the record reserves they had accumulated heading into the recession,⁵³ using the roughly \$140 billion in funds provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and adopting a combination of tax increases and spending cuts. The spending cuts affected nearly every domain of state government activity, including early childhood education. Arizona eliminated preschool services for 4,328 children and funding for schools to provide additional support for disadvantaged children from preschool to third grade. Massachusetts reduced spending on early intervention services for children with special needs by 16 percent. Rhode Island reduced the number of children served by Head Start and similar services.⁵⁴

Ongoing fiscal challenges slowed but did not stop state-level activity in early childhood policy. During the 2008–9 school year, the percentage of three- and four-year-olds enrolled in state prekindergarten programs rose in twenty-nine states and fell in nine states. Total funding rose, albeit at a slower pace than in previous years, and state funding per child declined in twenty-four of thirty-eight states, after adjusting for inflation (Barnett et al. 2009, 4). According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, the number of bills on early care and education fell from 2008 to 2009, but “a number of states protected investments in young children and avoided cuts to early childhood programs; some states even increased their commitment.”⁵⁵ Alaska and Rhode Island, two states that previously did not

have publicly funded prekindergarten programs, provided new appropriations to pilot programs.⁵⁶ Even so, some observers worried that the reduced pace of change foretold more-dramatic shifts as state budgets more fully bore the brunt of the recession. Acknowledging that it would be inappropriate to read too much into a one-year dip in real spending, they nevertheless speculated that “given states’ budgetary problems this could be the start of a new downward trend that will erode the value of these programs and turn them into ineffective, cheap substitutes for real education” (Barnett et al. 2009, 13).

States continued to cope with difficult economic conditions in 2010 and 2011. Their actions drew mixed reviews. One sanguine report concluded that fiscal challenges had not kept state governments from finding “innovative ways to increase availability and even create new programs aimed at improving the accessibility and quality of early childhood services.”⁵⁷ A handful of states enacted legislation to address student readiness and assessment standards and to expand access to existing facilities, while Minnesota and Washington expanded state-funded programs for educationally at-risk children.⁵⁸ Other observers highlighted what they viewed as more-troubling trends. One study concluded, “The grim fiscal climate makes dramatic program expansions unlikely and impractical in the near term.”⁵⁹ Due to the recession, total enrollment in state prekindergarten programs barely increased, total spending by the states decreased, and spending per child declined in inflation-adjusted dollars during the 2009–10 school year. The slow economic recovery and the exhaustion of federal stimulus funds caused some observers to speculate that these trends would have a significant negative impact on the quality of state programs over the longer term. They concluded, “Funding levels in some of the states have fallen so low as to bring into question the effectiveness of their programs by any reasonable standard” (Barnett et al. 2010, 10).

As state officials grappled with a challenging fiscal environment, they also sought to coordinate existing programs more effectively through the creation of early childhood advisory councils. The goal of this administrative reform was “to guide investments and ensure that resources are used efficiently and toward the greatest effect.”⁶⁰ National legislation spurred and facilitated state activity. The 2007 Head Start reauthorization mandated the creation of the councils and required them to identify opportunities for and barriers to coordination among extant national and state programs. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided one hundred million dollars in grants to states to establish the councils. The need for better coordination “across early childhood programs” was “an

underlying thread in all state early childhood advisory councils' applications for federal funding."⁶¹ The councils built on existing state initiatives and drew their membership from public agencies and private stakeholders in the business, philanthropic, and other communities.

Responding to contemporary fiscal challenges requires striking a balance among several competing priorities. In addition to allocating public funds, state policymakers must also determine the eligibility requirements, curricular standards, personnel credentials, and classroom regulations that govern state-funded programs. Such decisions are substantively significant because they determine who gains access to the programs and what type of services they will receive. In an era of resource scarcity, preschool advocates must carefully consider how changes will affect the effectiveness or quality of public programs. Despite general agreement about the deficient quality of existing programs (Barnett and Hustedt 2003; Henry, Gordon, and Rickman 2006), different constituencies within the early childhood community offer competing prescriptions for improvement.

The conflict over teacher certification requirements is illustrative. In recent years, many organizations and politicians have recommended that all preschool teachers hold a bachelor's degree with specialization in early childhood education. They argue that highly credentialed caregivers produce stronger academic performance and "yield significant improvements in program effectiveness for all children, especially those from low-income families."⁶² Representatives of Head Start and other community-based programs tend to be less enthusiastic. The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act, signed into law by President George W. Bush in December 2007, established new educational goals for Head Start teachers. Many program administrators expressed misgivings about this change, arguing that additional funds would be necessary to provide "tuition and book scholarships, provide release time and substitute teachers while teaching staff were in school, and increase compensation once credentials were earned."⁶³ The National Head Start Association characterized it as an "unfunded mandate" that failed to recognize the fiscal realities involved in hiring, training, and retraining teachers with advanced degrees.⁶⁴

The fiscal impact of higher certification requirements does not end once a degree has been earned. Many Head Start centers find it "impossible to keep highly qualified teachers because there are better opportunities in the public schools."⁶⁵ One study found that Head Start directors and private program providers feared that teachers took positions in their pro-

grams “only as stepping stones to more lucrative jobs in the public schools” (Barnett and Hustedt 2003, 56). Many Head Start leaders and private-sector providers fear that more-stringent certification requirements will exacerbate this competition for personnel. The acquisition of more formal education may even lead staffers to seek employment outside the early childhood field, which has historically offered very low wages.⁶⁶ Although these concerns are not new, they resonate especially strongly in an era of resource scarcity. Whereas some members of the early childhood policy community favor higher credentials as a way to promote program quality, others worry about their considerable financial implications.

Fiscal challenges also threaten to exacerbate the ongoing controversy surrounding program eligibility. The contemporary debate invokes both the long-standing question of the age at which children should begin their formal education and the question of whether public programs should be targeted or universal. The universal preschool movement has gained momentum since the 1990s and has received considerable popular and scholarly attention (Bushouse 2009; Fuller 2007; Kirp 2007; E. Rose 2010). Universal programs are expensive, however, and program cost is a serious concern in an era of limited resources. In addition, some critics have questioned whether universal programs are responsive to the needs of all parents, especially if they are run by the public schools. Such programs may not appeal to parents who prefer less institutional forms of care, and they may be inappropriate for parents with unusual work schedules (Fuller 2007, 16). The claim that early childhood initiatives must accommodate parental preferences is also not new, but the contemporary policy landscape, with more American children enrolled in a diverse array of public- and private-sector programs, highlights one of reformers’ central challenges: programmatic diversity represents a political obstacle for those who hope to construct a more collaborative and less fragmented system.⁶⁷

Conclusion: Early Childhood Policy at a Crossroads

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, supporters of increased public investment in child development believed that they were living through a critical moment. Contemporary supporters view themselves as being in a similar situation, and their rhetoric bears a striking resemblance to the proclamations of Harold Howe II and Albert Quie with which this book began. In 2002, Georgia governor Roy Barnes echoed Howe’s optimism by predicting “that within ten years early childhood will be as accepted (and

be state funded) as kindergarten is today.”⁶⁸ In contrast, David Kirp (2007, 266) channeled Quie’s wariness with his assessment that the preschool movement “has arrived at a crossroads. Even as more states are offering preschool, more children are enrolling, and more public dollars are being spent, the quality of instruction remains mixed and the amount of money being spent on each child has declined.” Their contrasting perspectives hint at a potential tension between improved preschool access and better program quality.

Other observers approach the future with a combination of optimism and wariness. One survey of the contemporary landscape concludes, “Eventually, public school will begin for most children at age three or four. [Prekindergarten], in many ways, is at a crossroads, caught between early child care programs, Head Start, and schools” (Clifford et al. 2005, 141). Its abrupt shift from confidence to wariness is noteworthy, and its observation about competing constituencies resonates with the evidence presented in this chapter. Existing policy arrangements, rather than being the foundation on which reforms can build, sometimes represent an obstacle to policy change. Stakeholders like teachers unions, Head Start supporters, private-sector providers, and others endorse expanded access to early childhood programs but offer distinct visions of how best to accomplish that goal. Moving the fragmented system of early childhood policy in a single direction is both a political and a logistical challenge. Regardless of whether reformers focus their attention on the national level or the fifty states, they confront a policy landscape that is significantly more complicated than the one their predecessors faced four decades ago. The accumulated policy choices of the intervening years privileged a diverse array of stakeholders, and accommodating their preferences is often a prerequisite for major policy change.