



# Pre-Kindergarten Collaboratives in Mississippi

## What's the Difference?

December 2022

### Background: Pre-K Collaboratives in Mississippi

In order to improve educational outcomes for Mississippi's children, it is important to determine the pathways that promote positive effects from state investments. Across the US, participation in preschool programs has consistently shown to increase academic success for children as they move through elementary school and beyond. Stronger preparation for school, in the form of early literacy, math, and social-emotional skills, is commonly found in children who have participated in preschool programs, compared to those who have not.<sup>i</sup> Research also has found positive long-term effects of Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) programs such as being less likely to be suspended in high school or involved with juvenile incarceration, and being more likely to graduate from high school and enroll in college.<sup>ii</sup>

Broader access to Pre-K programs in Mississippi is relatively recent compared to other states, with legislators first allocating a \$3 million investment as part of the 2013 *Early Learning Collaborative Act*.<sup>iii</sup> This legislation established state Pre-Kindergarten programs known as "Early Learning Collaboratives" (ELCs), distinguished by the following features:

- **Local collaboration and partnerships** - Early Learning Collaboratives must have two or more partners, including at least one school district and at least one Head Start.
- **Quality** - Collaborative pre-Ks are required to meet quality benchmarks set by the National Institute for Early Education Research and show positive kindergarten-readiness results.
- **Shared Funding** - Half of the program costs is provided by the State of Mississippi, and the other half must be provided by local tax dollars, federal dollars, parent tuition, philanthropic contributions, or in-kind donations of facilities, equipment, and services required as part of the program, such as food service or health screenings.

Since the initial investment of \$3 million, the MS legislature has increased the amount of state funds allocated to the program to a cumulative total of \$70.3 million. This level of funding has allowed 35 communities statewide to have early learning collaboratives. This translates to more than 6,800 pre-K 4-year-olds being served in ELCs in the 2022-2023 school year.<sup>iv</sup> Mississippi Early Learning Collaboratives are nationally recognized for their quality. The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) named Mississippi as one of only five states in 2022 to meet all ten of NIEER's quality standards benchmarks for preschool education.<sup>v</sup>

The purpose of this brief is to examine the educational outcomes of students served in Mississippi Pre-K Early Learning Collaboratives. Examining the outcomes of children who have participated in Pre-K Early Learning Collaboratives is critical to understanding the potential benefits that early education can have on future achievement. The analysis in this brief presents findings on kindergarten readiness by type of Pre-K (Public or Collaborative). This brief also examines kindergarten readiness outcomes in the collaboratives by race.



## Mississippi Kindergarten Readiness Assessment

The Kindergarten Readiness Assessment is given to Pre-K and kindergarten students in the Fall and Spring of each school year. The assessment measures what children know and are able to do as they transition into school. The assessment provides information about how well early learning programs are preparing students for school and helps to improve the quality of instruction from birth to third grade. The kindergarten readiness assessment includes a cut score of 530; based on research, 85% of students with a score of 530 or higher are expected to be proficient readers by the end of third grade.<sup>vi</sup>

### Types of Public Pre-K

**Public Pre-K** - Pre-K programs operated by Mississippi public school districts, including charter schools, are categorized by funding source (Title I, local district, tuition-based, blended Head Start, hybrid, or externally funded). All public-school programs must follow the *MS Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Three- and Four-Year-Old Children* and are monitored by MDE when an audit is conducted.<sup>vii</sup>

**Collaborative Pre-K** - Pre-K programs funded half by the state and the other half by local matching funds such as Title I program, philanthropic contributions, or in-kind dollars. Collaboratives are required to have two or more partners, including at least one Head Start (if present in the county) and one school district. They may also include a partnering private childcare center and parochial or private schools. Collaboratives are monitored by MDE and required to meet the highest levels of quality as defined by the 10 NIEER benchmarks. Collaboratives must also show effectiveness in preparing students for kindergarten, as measured by Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) Benchmark scores of 530 or above. Annual on-site monitoring by MDE assesses adherence to program standards (NIEER benchmarks and *MS Early Learning Guidelines for Classrooms Serving Three- and Four-Year-Old Children*) and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observations.<sup>viii</sup> Effectiveness in preparing children for kindergarten is also measured by tracking growth from the fall to spring of the school year within students' Kindergarten Readiness Assessment score and in the Comprehensive Early Learning Observational Assessment, Brigance III screener.<sup>iv</sup>

## Findings

Figure 1 shows the percentage of students who scored at or above the kindergarten readiness cut score of 530 by their pre-k experience. In 2020, students who attended an Early Learning Collaborative were more likely to be kindergarten ready (53.1%) than students who attended other public pre-k or no public pre-k. This figure also shows that rates of kindergarten readiness were lower during the COVID-19 pandemic for all Pre-K; this was particularly true among children who attended pre-k.

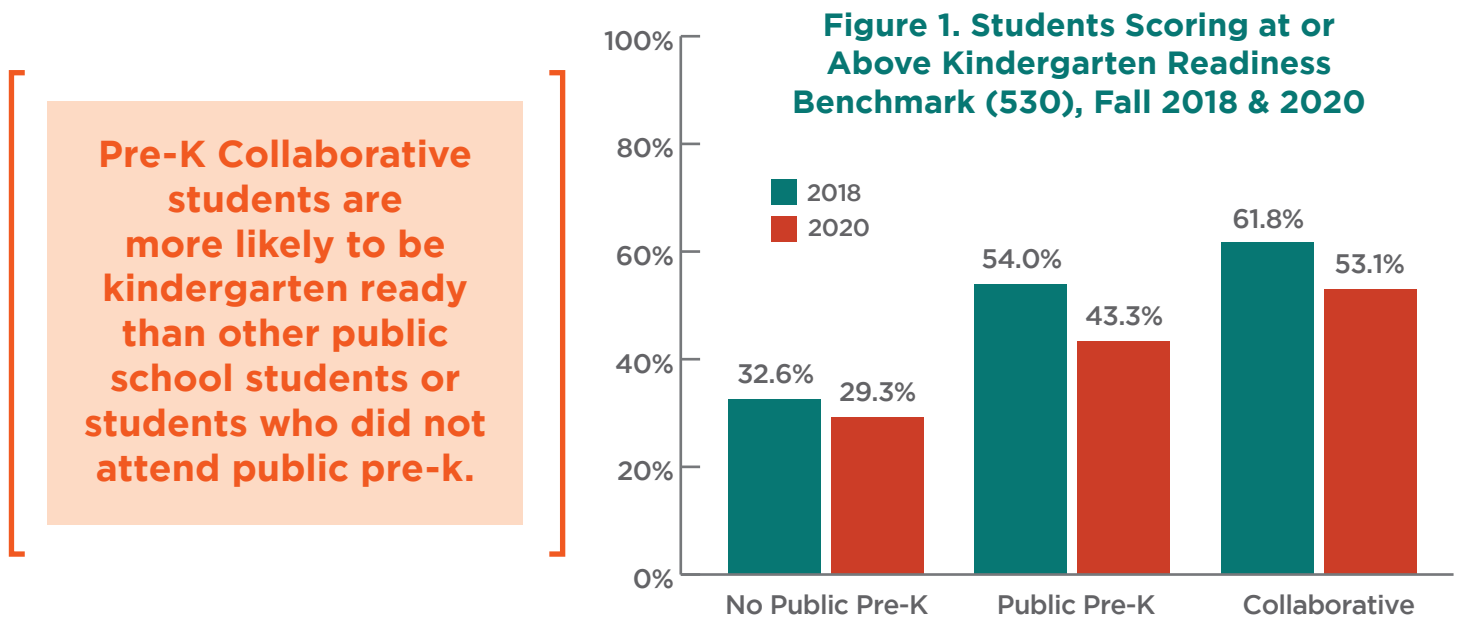


Figure 2 shows rates of fall 2020 kindergarten readiness by pre-k experience with Early Learning Collaboratives broken out into cohorts. Cohort 1 includes programs which became ELCs in 2013, Cohort 2 includes programs which became ELCs in January 2017, and Cohort 3 include programs which became ELCs in January 2019.

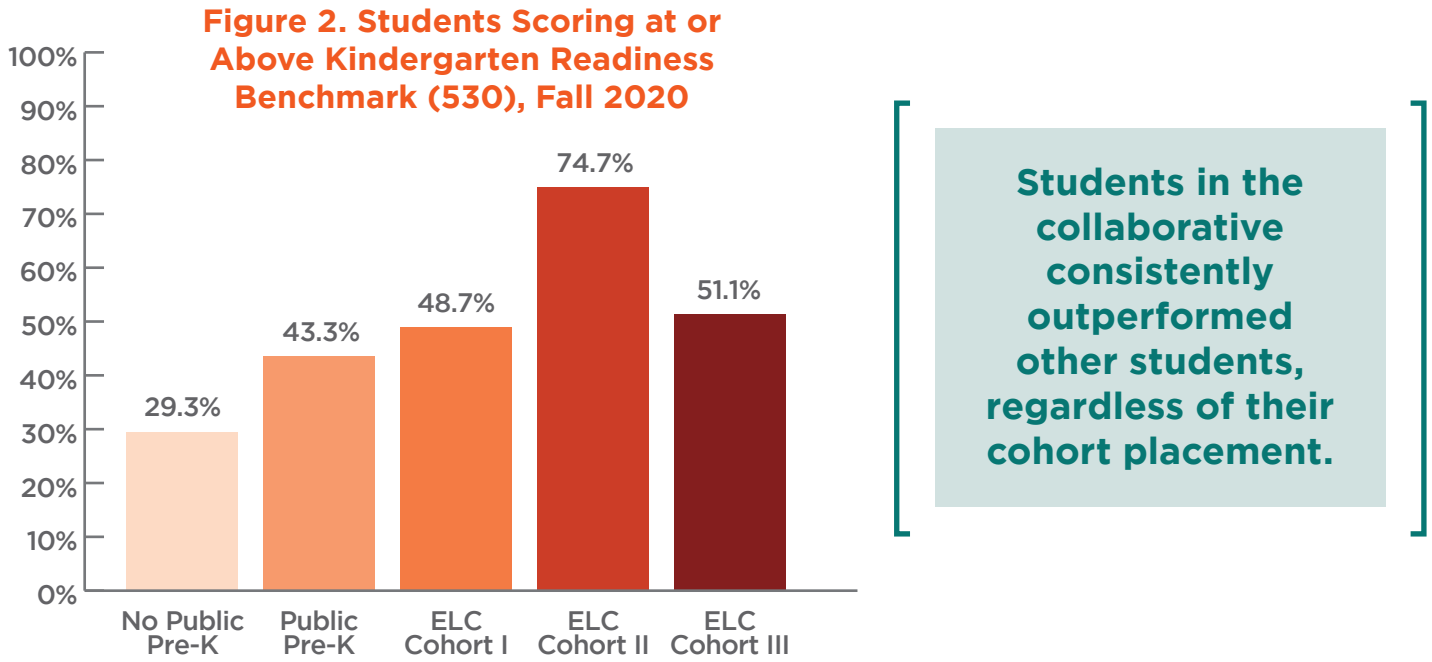
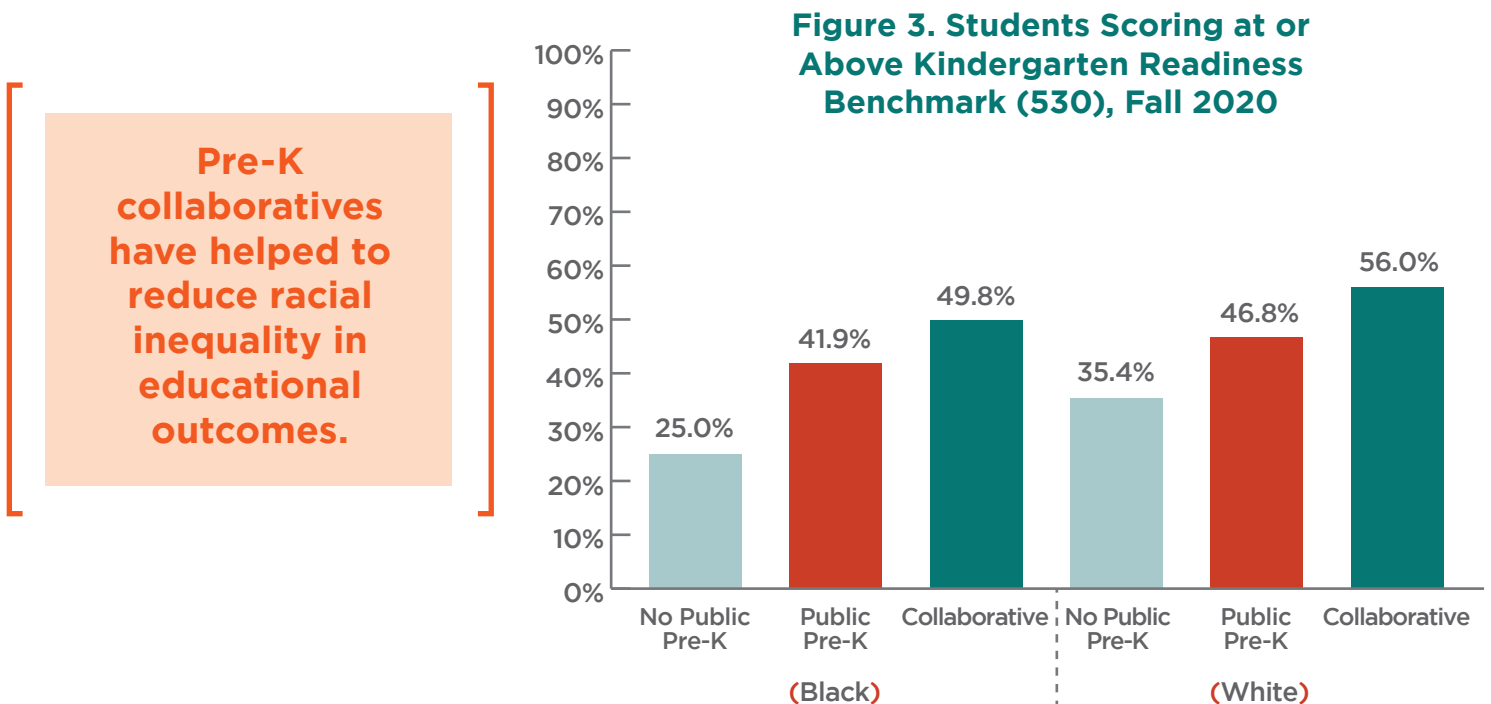


Figure 3 shows rates of kindergarten readiness by pre-k experience and student race. Overall, readiness levels are higher for both Black and White students who attended ELCs. Racial differences in kindergarten readiness are also not as large among students who attended Early Learning Collaboratives. Black and White students attending ELCs showed a difference of 6% in rates of kindergarten readiness, and among children who did not attend any type of public pre-K, the Kindergarten Readiness gap between Black and White students was 11%.



## ► Recommendations

- Invest in system for long-term tracking of children to understand child outcomes and program effectiveness.
- Standardize reporting and include data on Head Start and daycare attendance for Mississippi's education data electronic collection and storage system: MS Student Information System (MSIS).
- Increase funding for Pre-K in Mississippi to provide early education access to more children.

## ► Data and Methodology

This analysis uses student-level data from the Mississippi Department of Education's Mississippi Student Information System (MSIS). These data were obtained through a data sharing agreement. The analysis includes a cohort of 28,994 kindergarten students who took the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment. Pre-K collaborative participation in public school districts was determined through MSIS based on whether students had an enrollment record at a school that was part of the early learning collaboratives. Pre-K collaborative participation in Head Start and childcare programs could not be determined.

## ► References

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*Support made possible by funding from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation*

