

# Evidence on Pre-K Impacts in the U.S.

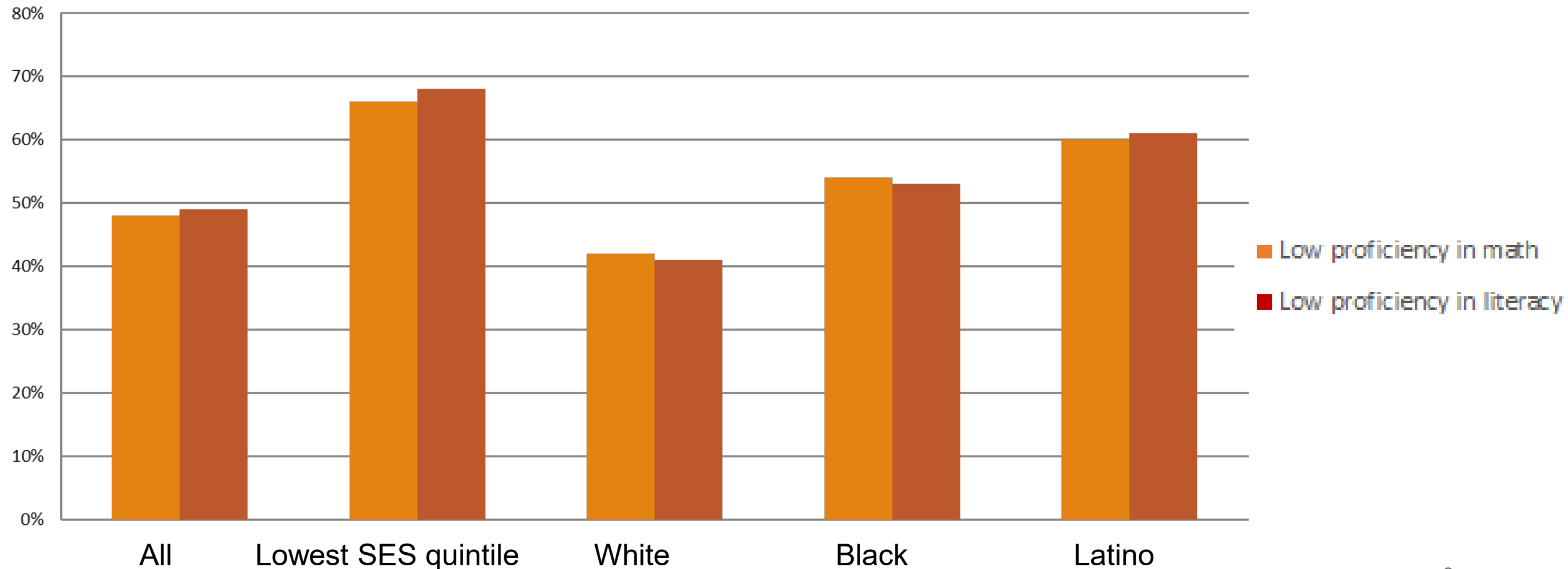
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Source: <https://www.bpsearlylearning.org/focus-on-k0-k1>

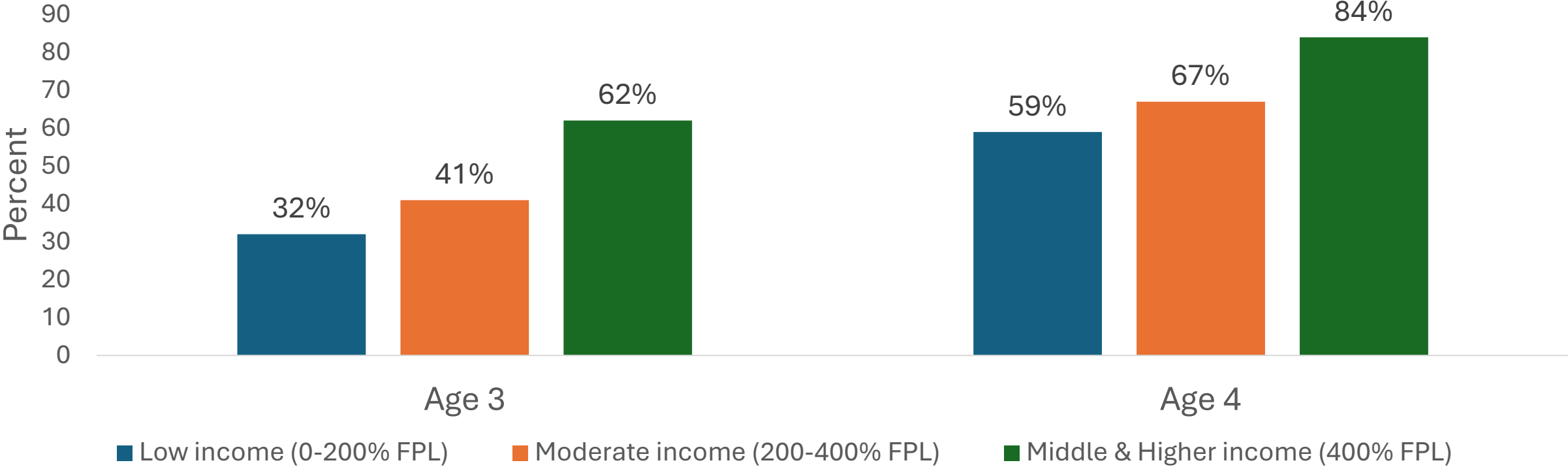
# Too many children are entering kindergarten without the skills they need to thrive.

Percentage of students low proficiency in math and literacy, 2010 ECLS-K kindergarten cohort



# Large disparities by family income in preschool enrollment

Preschool enrollment rates by family income and child age (2011)



Source: Chaudry, Morrissey, Weiland, and Yoshikawa (2021)

# Pre-K improves kindergarten readiness



- Pre-K programs improve children’s language, literacy, math, executive function, and social emotional skills at kindergarten entry  
  
(Casco, 2024; Phillips et al., 2017; Sawhill & Welch, 2023; Yoshikawa et al., 2013; Yoshikawa et al., 2016)
- Effects are larger for children from families with low-incomes, children of color, dual language learners, and children with disabilities.
- Key to understanding the evidence: Pre-K programs and their counterfactuals vary greatly across studies.
  - E.g., 34% of control group in other preschool programs in TN Pre-K (Lipsey et al., 2018) vs. nearly 100% in Boston Pre-K (Weiland et al., 2020) vs. 0% in Tulsa Pre-K (Gormley et al., 2018)

# K-12 academic, grade retention, and special education

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- **Academic and cognitive skills:** Comparison group tends to catch up – sometimes partially and sometimes fully – in K-12 (Cascio, 2024; Phillips et al., 2017; Yoshikawa et al., 2013; Yoshikawa et al., 2016)
- **Grade retention and special education:** Wide range of early education programs reduced special education placements and grade retention by about 8 percentage points each (McCoy et al., 2017)

# Other K-12 outcomes

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- **Other outcomes (less commonly examined):**

- **Attendance:** Null effects in Boston, New Haven, Tulsa Pre-K in middle school (Gormley et al., 2018; Humphries et al. 2024; Weiland et al., 2025); Improvements in Tulsa CAP Head Start in middle schools (Phillips et al., 2016); Positive effects in high school for Tulsa Pre-K but not Tulsa CAP (Amadon et al., 2022); Negative effects in 6<sup>th</sup> grade (Durkin et al., 2022).
- **Accelerated coursework:** In Tulsa Pre-K, positive effects on being enrolled in honors courses in middle school (but not in gifted program enrollment and null effects in Tulsa CAP Head Start; Gormley et al., 2018; Phillips et al., 2016). In high school, positive impacts of Tulsa Pre-K (but not CAP) on taking AP/IB courses (Amadon et al., 2022). In Boston Pre-K, positive impacts on enrolling and passing Algebra I in middle school (Weiland et al., 2025).
- **Discipline:** Null effects on suspensions in Tulsa Pre-K in middle school (Gormley et al., 2018); Positive effects on discipline/behavior in high school in Boston Pre-K (Gray-Lobe et al., 2024) and on suspensions in 7<sup>th</sup> grade (Weiland et al., 2025); Increases in disciplinary incidents in TN (Durkin et al., 2022).
- **Enrollment in public schools:** Large effects on enrollment in the public schools in DC and Boston (Braga et al., 2024; Weiland et al., 2020; 2025).
- **Parent earnings:** Large, persistent effects on parent earnings in New Haven UPK (Humphries et al. 2024) – 22% increase in Pre-K, gains persistent for 6 years and gains largest for middle-income families.

# Evidence in adulthood

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- **Head Start**

- Participants in the 1960s and 1970s: positive effects on adult outcomes (HS completion ↑, college going ↑, earnings ↑, and crime ↓)
  - Anders et al. (2023), Barr and Gibbs (2019), Bailey et al. (2020), Thompson (2018)
- Participants in the 1980s and 1990s: mixed evidence (↑↓) for effects on adult outcomes (education, earnings, crime, health)
  - Deming (2009), Pages et al. (2020)

- **State and City Pre-K programs**

- Participants in the 1990s and 2000s: positive effects (HS completion ↑, college going ↑, teen pregnancy ↓, crime ↓)
  - Anders et al. (2023) [North Carolina], Berne (2024) [Georgia], Gormley Jr. et al. (2023) [Tulsa], Gray-Lobe et al. (2023) [Boston], Sauval et al. (2025) [North Carolina]

# Snapshot of Pre-K quality (Weiland & Guerrero-Rosada, 2022)





# Getting quality right – recommendations from *Cradle to Kindergarten*

Chaudry et al. (2021) recommend:

## Eligibility

Universal

## Structural quality provisions

BA minimum for teachers

CDA minimum for assistants

Pay parity with K-12 teachers

Full school day, Full week

Class size: 20, ratio 1:10

Universal screening

Inclusion model

Dual language supports

Continuous quality improvement approach

Mixed-delivery system equity

Chaudry et al. (2021) recommend:

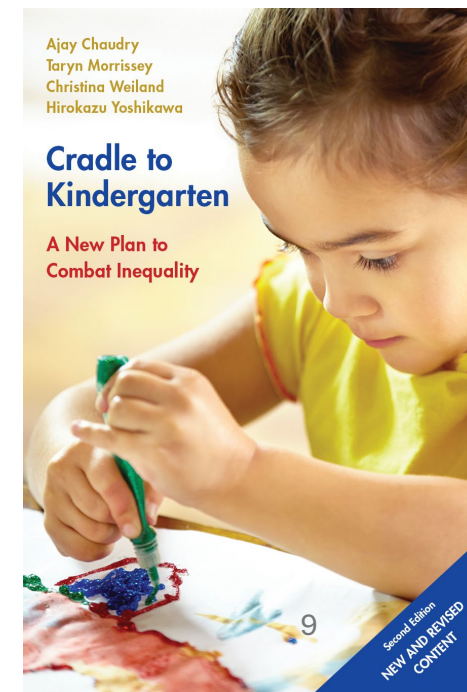
## Teaching and learning quality provisions

Evidence-based, play-based, content-rich curricula

Regular, in-classroom coaching tied to curricula

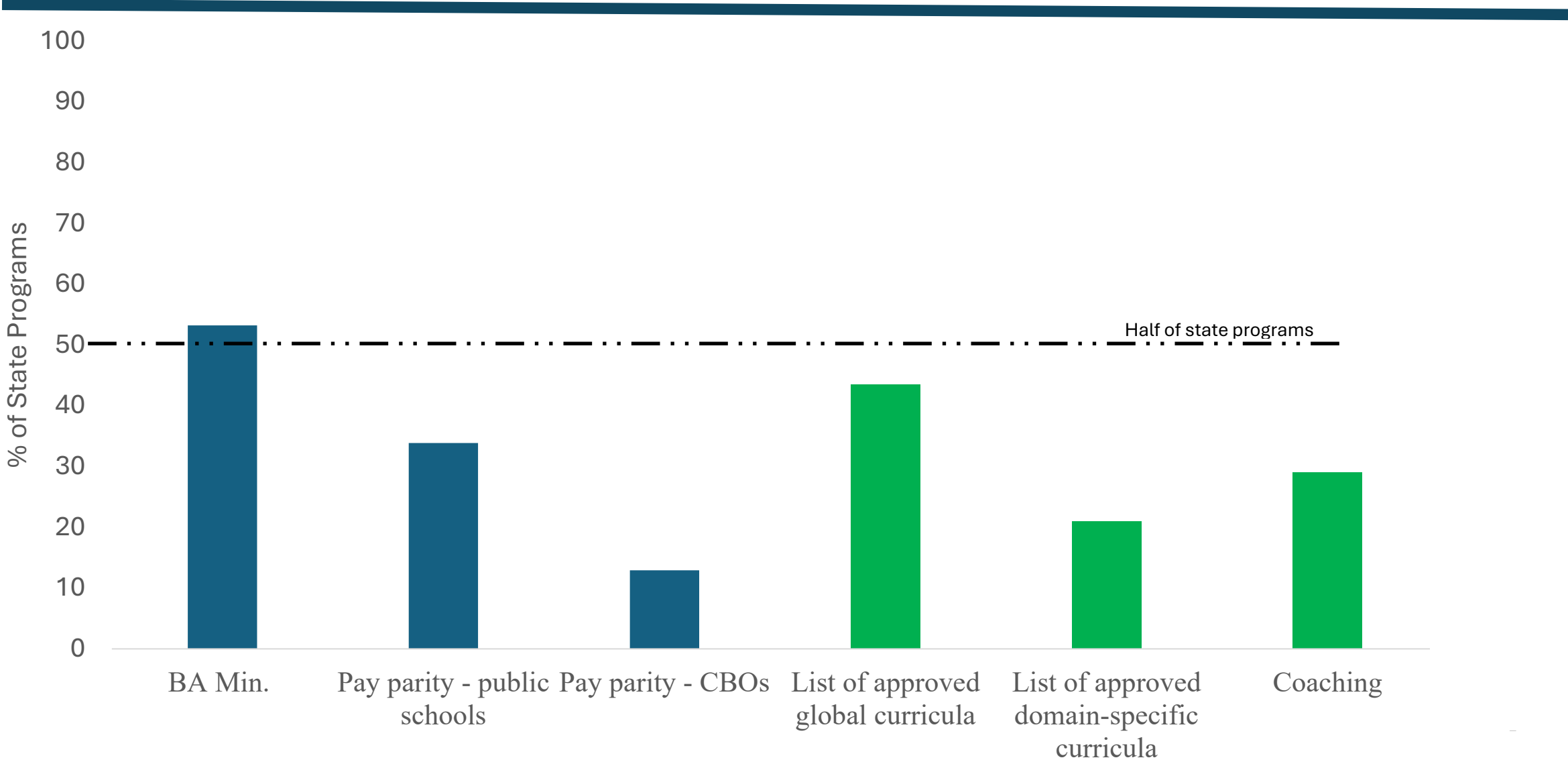
Assessments that inform instruction

Alignment with K-3



# Selected “active ingredients” in state-funded Pre-K

(Friedman-Krauss et al., 2022; 2023)



# Mixed-delivery Pre-K requires policy attention

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- Nearly every state delivers Pre-K via classrooms in public schools and community-based preschools
- Long-standing concerns about a “two-tiered” system, with inequitable resources across tiers (Whitebook, 2003)
- Evidence of lower resource investments in CBOs, more disadvantaged children in CBOs, lower quality in CBOs, and lower gains in children’s learning CBOs (Weiland et al., 2024)

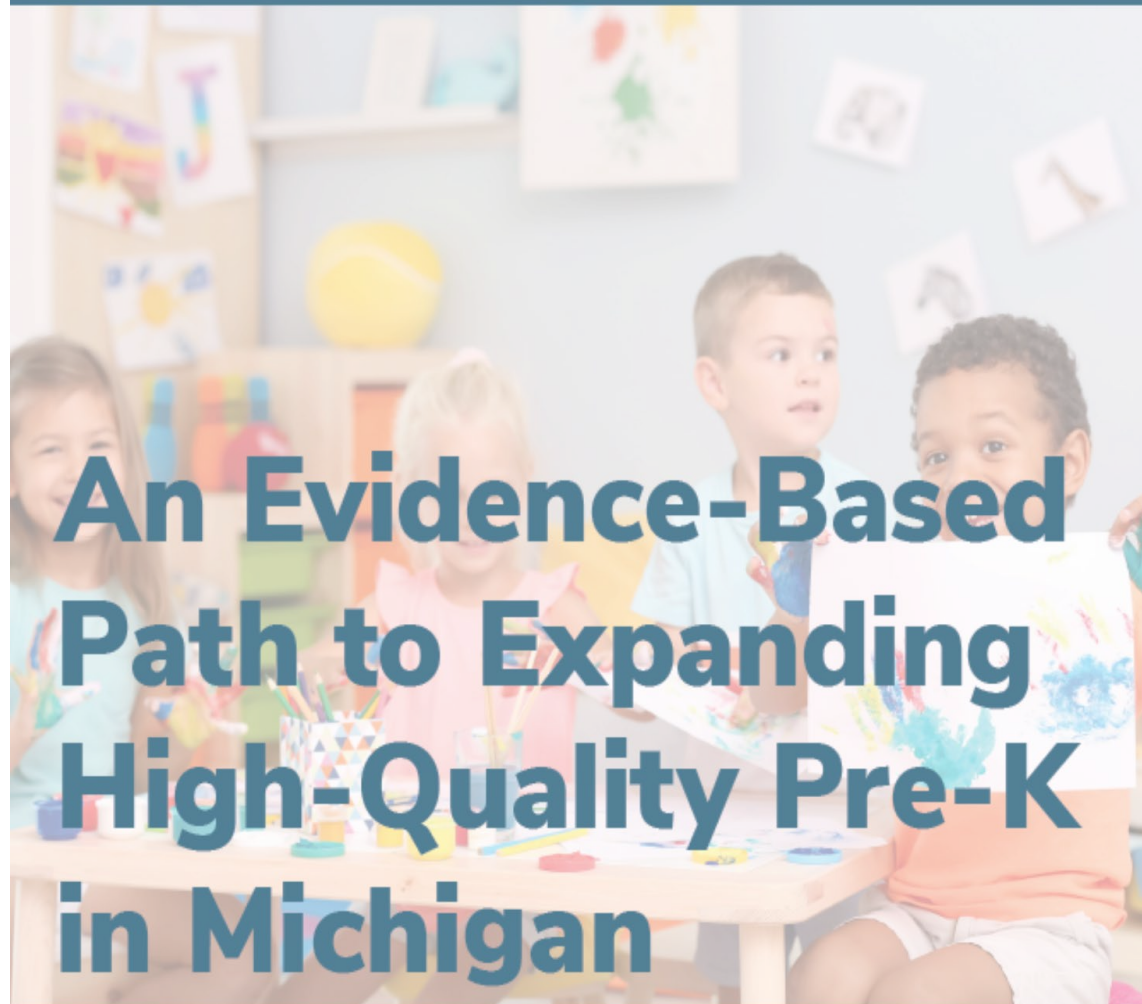
# Investing in research

- Research-practice partnership model: Use research as a tool to build strong programs (not just to grade them)
- Research we most need: Rigorous studies of the impact of different program elements and implementation studies.





# Preschool for All: A Strong Start for Washington State's Children



# An Evidence-Based Path to Expanding High-Quality Pre-K in Michigan