OPTIMIZING EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SERVICES IN A RURAL COUNTY: COLLABORATIONS BETWEEN STATE PRESCHOOL AND COMMUNITY BASED PROGRAMS

BY

EMILY A. DORSEY

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Special Education in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2015

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Susan Fowler, Chair
Professor Michaelene Ostrosky
Professor Emerita Jeanette McCollum
Assistant Professor Stephanie Smith
Abstract

Collaborations between public early care and education programs and private childcare centers offer families of young children high quality education and comprehensive services in addition to full-day, full year care. This case study examined early care and education collaborations in a rural county in a Midwest state. Major research questions focused on the strategies programs used to maximize existing resources as well as the strategies they used to meet the needs of young children with disabilities. Using an instrumental case study design, interviews and relevant documents yielded data that was analyzed using the constant comparative method. Study results indicate that programs maximize resources by: (a) screening and enrolling collaboratively, (b) using existing programs and available space to expand options, and (c) acknowledging program constraints and working creatively within them. Programs serve young children with disabilities through: (a) self-contained early childhood special education classrooms, and (b) dual enrollment in an early education program. Results also highlight perspectives about collaboration and inclusion held by early care and education stakeholders at the state level. A discussion of study results considers placement options for children with disabilities, implications for change at multiple system levels, and factors that facilitate successful collaboration. Directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: early care and education, collaboration, dual enrollment, inclusion
To my family - Bob, Ozzie, and Alma
Acknowledgments

A dissertation is not a project that one can tackle alone. Several individuals, groups, and communities have helped me complete this journey, and I wish to express my gratitude.

This study would not be possible without my willing participants. Many individuals who have devoted their careers to early care and education took time out of their busy schedules to share their thoughts, ideas, and opinions with me. I have learned so much from each one of them.

I am grateful for the financial support I received to complete my graduate program, up to and including this dissertation study. During my time in the doctoral program, I was fortunate to have participated on two great projects. I ended my studies working on the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education, Project Blend (H325D110037). I started my program as research assistant for the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Special Friends study (R324A080071).

I am grateful for my committee members, who all provided valuable insight and advice about my study, offering suggestions, guidance, and encouragement throughout the process.

I am grateful for all of the faculty and staff members in the Department of Special Education, who have become a family to me.

Thank you to everyone who supported me in this work. I appreciate the help of Jeanette McCollum, who let me ride along with her to state committee meetings and helped me understand the lay of the land. Thank you to Dawn Thomas and Bernadette Laumann for being pilot participants for my interviews and for helping me with numerous requests for data and advice. Thank you to Kathy McCormick for transcribing so many interviews. Thank you to Marcia Ciders for ordering incentives for my participants. Thank you to Shari Hopkins and Deserai Miller for helping me analyze my data. Thank you to my good friend Natalie Danner
who was one step ahead of me in this process and was willing to share her wisdom and experience with me.

It is easy to get lost in the dissertation process, but it helped to remember that there was a light at the end of the tunnel. Thank you to Micki Ostrosky for supporting me with reference letters and editing of my job application materials so I could focus on my career in the middle of all this. Thank you to my own cohort in the doctoral program, who got out into the working world a year ahead of me and served as great role models. Thank you to so many individuals at the University of Illinois, too many to name, who have prepared me for the next step.

Thank you to Susan Fowler for all of your help over the years. You have devoted countless hours of your time to my growth as a scholar. You have helped me develop projects, become a better writer, given me access to wonderful opportunities at the state level and within the university, and you have always worked hard to make sure that my work was really mine. Along the way, you have celebrated life’s many milestones with me and have become a true friend. I am so grateful.

Thank you to my family. My mom, Cassie and brother, John have cheered me on during this journey; even though my dad is not with us anymore, I know he is as proud as can be. Thank you to Bob’s parents, who supported us along the way - a special thank you to “Paga” for his countless hours of babysitting while we worked. Thank you, Bob; you have believed in me every step of the way and have never complained when you had to take over all of our household and parenting responsibilities so I could finish this degree. Coming home to you and our children every night, no matter how late, makes it all worth it.
Table of Contents

Chapter 1—Statement of the Problem ........................................................................... 1
Chapter 2—Review of the Literature .............................................................................. 9
Chapter 3—Methods ........................................................................................................ 59
Chapter 4—Results: Research Question 1 ...................................................................... 91
Chapter 5—Results: Research Question 2 ..................................................................... 129
Chapter 6—Discussion .................................................................................................... 158
References ....................................................................................................................... 180
Appendix A ....................................................................................................................... 218
Appendix B ....................................................................................................................... 219
Appendix C ....................................................................................................................... 220
Appendix D ....................................................................................................................... 232
Appendix E ....................................................................................................................... 234
Appendix F ....................................................................................................................... 242
Appendix G ....................................................................................................................... 250
Appendix H ....................................................................................................................... 252
Chapter 1—Statement of the Problem

There are a variety of early care and education programs in the United States. Major state and federal initiatives developed to serve typically developing children and children with disabilities, ages 3-5 include: state preschool programs, Head Start, early childhood special education (ESCE), and subsidized childcare. Each of these programs has developed separately over time, creating an early care and education system in which individual programs operate independently of one another. Each program is guided by specific goals about service provision and target population (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012). Historically, these programs have existed in silos, acting independently of one another. The overall landscape of early care and education throughout the country has often been described as disjointed and lacking unification. “Rather than representing a coherent early care and education system, they are a patchwork of disjointed programs with different emphases, requirements, and funding mechanisms” (Flynn & Hayes, 2003, p. 3). Not all parties collaborate and those that do often encounter obstacles on their way to success. Program differences exist in aspects of program design, community involvement, human resources, staff training, and quality assurance (Beneke, Ruther, and Fowler; 2009).

This case study is based upon several premises. First, given the variety of early care and education programs in the U.S., collaboration is beneficial. Second, given that families of young children need education and comprehensive services in addition to full-day, full-year care, collaboration between public pre-K programs and private childcare programs is necessary. Third, because children with disabilities should be educated with their typically developing peers, collaborations between early care and education programs should include children with disabilities. Fourth, although early care and education initiatives are determined at the federal
and state level, programming is delivered at the local level. Thus, there is a need to understand how policies are translated from the federal and state level to local communities

**Early Care and Education Programs**

**State Preschool Programs**

*State preschool programs* are developed by individual states, and thus vary greatly across the country. The major focus of these programs is early childhood education. To determine children who are eligible for programming many states use criteria including: income; developmental delays; exposure to drug or alcohol abuse; low parent education levels; and a history of family violence, neglect, or abuse (Barnett, Carolan, Squires, & Clarke Brown, 2013).

Although states have autonomy in creating their programs, The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has established a quality standards checklist to encourage states to meet a set of criteria in their programs. These criteria are: (a) addressing comprehensive early learning standards; (b) lead teacher with a bachelors degree, at minimum, (c) lead teacher with specialized training in preschool; (d) assistant teacher with CDA or equivalent; (e) 15 hours per year of professional development for lead teachers; (f) maximum class size of twenty; (g) ratio of ten children to one teacher, or lower; (h) screenings and referrals for vision, hearing, health, and at least one additional service for families; (i) at least one meal provided daily; and (j) site visits for the purpose of monitoring adherence to state program standards (Barnett et al., 2012). State preschool programs are funded in a variety of different ways, including general revenue, state lottery, and sin taxes (Stone, 2008).

**Head Start**

*Head Start* is an early care and education program that was developed at the federal level. It is designed to provide comprehensive services (education, health, nutrition, parent
involvement, and family support) to children at or below 100% of the federal poverty level, while reserving 10% of its enrollment for children with disabilities (National Head Start Association, 2011; Thomas, Fowler, Cesarone, & Rothenberg, 2011).

Head Start was founded in 1965 as part of the Economic Opportunity Act (Illinois Facilities Fund, 2000). The Johnson Administration created Head Start as one element in a collection of programs (including the Job Corps, the Community Action Program, and the Volunteers in Service to America program) to fight the war on poverty (Zigler & Muenchow, 1992). Head Start requires all teachers to have an AA degree (Stebbins & Scott, 2007), and as of Fall 2013, Head Start also requires that at least 50% of its teachers have a BA degree or higher (National Head Start Association, 2013).

Head Start is funded by federal and local contributions, and is implemented at the local level by agencies that obtain grants. The federal government provides 80 percent of the funding needed to operate Head Start programming, while the remaining 20 percent comes from “local match” or “in-kind” contributions, in the form of monetary contributions, donations of goods or services, or volunteer hours (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). While Head Start funds are administered directly from the federal government to local grantees, states do have a role in this process via their state’s Head Start Collaboration Office. The Head Start State Collaboration Office (HSSCO) is tasked with facilitating collaboration, coordination, and planning of Head Start services at the state and local levels; and serving as a point of contact for information about Head Start services in a state (Illinois Head Start Association, 2014).

**Early Childhood Special Education**

*Early childhood special education* (ECSE) targets children who have been diagnosed as having a disability or developmental delay. These services may be provided in a variety of
settings, and are based on the implementation of an individual education program (IEP) (Illinois State Board of Education, 2009). The first initiative influencing education for preschool-aged children with disabilities was the introduction of public law (PL) 94-142, called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975. This law marked the most significant increase in the role of the federal government in special education. It required that states develop policies to assure that all school-aged children with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). The federal government provided funding which supplemented state and local funds for special education services. These funds were funneled first to the states and then to local educational agencies that ultimately provided educational services (Yell, 2006).

While this law did not require services for children younger than six, it did provide financial incentives to states that chose to provide preschool education.

In 1986, EAHCA was amended and passed as P.L. 99-457. With this amendment came the passage of the Handicapped Preschool Program, mandating that all states provide special education and related services to all preschoolers (ages 3-5) with disabilities within five years, or lose all special education funding for that age group. It specified the provision of services in inclusive environments whenever possible (Illinois Facilities Fund, 2000; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1986).

**Child Care and Development Funds**

Many families that need full-day, full-year care rely on childcare centers or home childcare. To support childcare programs, each state has several Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&R); each CCR&R serves a specific region of the state. According to Child Care Resources, Inc. (2105),
In the broadest sense, the field of community-based CCR&R defines its mission as ‘doing whatever it takes to make child care work for families and communities’ from within the community served. The specific services that each CCR&R offers as it pursues this mission are determined by community needs and by the kinds of structures and activities that local leaders and planners envision and develop.

Child Care Resource and Referral agencies accomplish their mission through four main activities: supporting families; compiling, analyzing, and sharing information; supporting individuals and programs that care for children; and building connections in communities and states (Child Care Resources, Inc., 2015). A major role of the CCR&R is to administer Child Care and Development Funds (CCDF), which are allocated through the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act and Section 418 of the Social Security Act. States determine eligibility criteria to qualify low-income families for funds to obtain childcare while they attend work or education. States can administer subsidies through vouchers or through grants and contracts with providers. States may choose to administer all CCDF money under the rules of the CCDBG Act, or they can coordinate with Head Start, pre-K, or other early childhood programs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012).

**Benefits of Program Collaboration**

While these four early care and education services and programs (state preschool, Head Start, ECSE, CCDF) vary in mission and scope, it has become increasingly beneficial for programs to collaborate. Key benefits of collaboration include: more comprehensive services for families (Harris, 2012; Schilder, Kiron, & Elliot; 2003; Wat & Gayl, 2009); increased program efficiency (Harris, 2012; Schilder et al., 2003; Selden, Sowa, & Sandfort; 2006); improved quality at childcare centers (Harris, 2012; Holcomb, 2006; Schilder et al., 2003; Schumacher,
Ewan, Hart, & Lombardi, 2005), and staff benefits such as increased pay, improved professional development opportunities, and greater levels of satisfaction (Harris, 2012; Selden et al., 2006; Wat & Gayl, 2009). These benefits are described in more detail in Chapter 2.

Given that families of young children often need full-day, full-year care, in addition to education and comprehensive services, collaboration between public pre-K programs and private childcare programs is necessary. State preschool programs are often offered for two-and-a-half to three hours per day only during the academic school year (Barnett et al., 2013). Head Start services are provided for three to six hours per day, and may be offered year round or only during the academic school year (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). School districts offer early childhood special education programs during the academic year, and during the summer months for students who qualify for extended school year (ESY) programming. Individual education plans (IEPs), however, are not the same for all students. Rather, they are determined based on each student’s needs, and are described in terms of frequency (i.e., how often) and duration (i.e., number of minutes) of services (Illinois State Board of Education, 2009).

Home-based and center-based licensed childcare is generally the only early care and education program option that offers full-day, full-year care, which many families need to accommodate parents’ full time work or school schedules (Glynn, 2012). Licensed childcare on its own, however, does not provide the same educational, health, mental health, or family services provided by state preschool or Head Start (National Association of Childcare Resource and Referral Agencies, 2009). To prevent families from having to choose between full-day, full-year licensed childcare and other early care and education services, there is a need for collaboration. In some instances, Head Start or state preschool programming is embedded into
childcare programs, enhancing the childcare environment. In other instances, children are dually enrolled in childcare and a state preschool or Head Start program, thus attending more than one program per day (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.).

**Least Restrictive Environments**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that children with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment; to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities must be educated with children who are not disabled (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). “The IDEA presumes that the first placement option considered for each child with a disability is the general education classroom in the school that the child would attend if he/she did not have a disability” (Illinois State Board of Education, 2009, p. 52). In many communities, typically developing children attend collaborative early care and education programs, which are programs that include more than one early care and education initiative or funding source (e.g., state preschool in a childcare center, Head Start in a childcare center). Children with disabilities, along with their typically developing peers, can benefit from these collaborative programs. Their families, just like the families of other children in their community, may also require full-day, full-year care. Thus, it is essential for the partners in early care and education collaborations to consider how they can include ECSE services in those relationships.

**The Case**

The issues described in the preceding paragraphs set the stage for this case study, which is the story of one Midwestern rural county’s use of multiple funding streams to provide early care and education services for children with and without disabilities. The literature review in Chapter 2 examines collaborations and inclusion in early care and education, with a focus on
how federal and state initiatives, as well as local program efforts, can influence both of these practices. Literature related to rural concerns in early care in education is also reviewed.

The county at the center of the case was chosen for several reasons. First, the county includes the array of early care and education programs described in this chapter (state preschool; Head Start; early childhood special education; and subsidized licensed childcare). Second, the early care and education programs have built a unique web of collaborations in an effort to serve young children. Third, early care and education programs have worked creatively within the constraints of a rural community to maximize their existing resources. Lessons learned from this community may inform early care and education programs in other rural counties who are collaborating to provide services for young children and their families.

**Research Questions**

This study is guided by two main research questions.

1. How do early care and education programs (state preschool, Head Start, early childhood special education, and licensed childcare) in one rural county work together to maximize existing resources?

2. How do early care and education programs (state preschool, Head Start, early childhood special education, and licensed childcare) in one rural county collaborate to meet the needs of young children with disabilities and other diverse needs?
Chapter 2—Review of the Literature

A Fully Integrated Early Care and Education System

Currently, major public policy trends promote the development of an integrated system of early care and education that would support programs delivered in schools, private and community childcare centers, and family childcare settings, and that would combine multiple funding resources (e.g., state education dollars; available state, federal, and private funding streams). While a few states have taken first steps toward building a fully integrated early care and education system, no states have completed that task (National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, 2009).

States interested in building a fully integrated system have the support of a major organization in the field. The National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), believes that children in classroom-based settings should have comparable early learning opportunities whether they attend state-funded prekindergarten, Head Start, or a childcare program, and makes the following recommendations to states: (a) improve state requirements to ensure that all children, regardless of setting or parent work status, receive high-quality early learning opportunities; (b) continue to work toward an integrated system of care and education for all children - birth to age 5 - to support all programs delivered in schools, private and community childcare centers, part-day preschool programs, and family childcare settings; and (c) tie Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funding to greater accountability for the quality of childcare (NACCRRA, 2009, p. 2).

While NACCRRA’s (2009) report makes recommendations directly to states, another report suggests that a fully integrated system must be created through the coordinated efforts of state-level planning structures and local governance. A study commissioned jointly by the State
Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network (SECPTAN) and the BUILD Initiative found that state and community leaders had a variety of reasons for establishing community-level planning and governance structures. Key reasons included the need to develop more coordinated local service delivery across health, early care and education, education, and other service systems and the need to develop systems contoured to address the unique needs, cultures, and strengths of local communities. (Coffman, Stover-Wright, & Bruner, 2006).

The SECPTAN/BUILD study surveyed six states (Colorado, Iowa, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Vermont) that had demonstrated leadership in developing both state level and community level planning structures for their early learning systems. Coffman et al., (2006) concluded that community planning and governance can contribute to developing an early learning system; that ongoing communication platforms between state and local communities is valuable; that community ownership helps produce sustainability, particularly during times of change for state political leadership; and that reducing fragmentation of services is not usually about consolidating funding or breaking rules, but rather about “re-contouring the elements to be coordinated to better meet young child needs” (p. 13). The SECPTAN/BUILD study revealed nine major roles of local communities in establishing an integrated early learning system. These roles, along with an example of how communities have fulfilled those roles, are described in Table 1.

The creation of a fully integrated early care and education system is an especially challenging task, as current early childhood programming lacks unification. Kagan and Kauerz (2012) describe divisions in the field:

Early childhood has been a splintered field since its emergence. Responsibility for programs and services has been episodic and divided across different political and
administrative jurisdictions. With the federalist political system of the United States, for example, early childhood has been partitioned vertically, with the federal government holding responsibility for some programs (e.g., Head Start, Child Care and Development Block Grant, and Medicaid), state governments responsible for other programs (e.g., state funded pre-kindergarten, the administration of child care subsidies, and state children’s health insurance programs), and local communities for still others (e.g., resource coordination and referral services for parents). Early childhood also is split horizontally, with different departments over-seeing different components of services. Often departments of health administer early intervention and home-visiting programs. Not surprisingly, education departments usually administer early childhood services more directly related to education, including family literacy efforts and education services for children with disabilities. (pp. 4-5)

Experts in the field of early care and education have begun to realize that that the provision of separate services is problematic. While each service on its own provides benefits for children and families, so much more could be accomplished if programs came together to coordinate services. Kagan and Kauerz (2012) call attention to the urgent need to attend to systems building. They encourage a shift in thinking from asking narrow questions about one program or funding stream to asking overarching questions that transcend individual programs, stating, “This profound shift gets to the essence of a new way of thinking about service delivery and policy formation by focusing on how the systems impacting children intersect and how they work together more effectively and efficiently” (p. 7).

Various leaders in the field have begun to conceptualize an integrated system and describe how it would work. In their book, *Early Childhood Systems: Transforming Early*
Learning, Kagan and Kauerz (2012) highlight the visions of six leaders, providing readers with a range of plans to consider. “A collection of short essays, together they reveal interesting and sometimes stark contrasts in systems conceptualization and operationalization. There is no singular notion of what a system is, whom it should serve, or how to go about building it” (p. 13). The viewpoints shared reveal different ideas about aspects of the system such as the scope of services provided, the age range of children served, the role of federal and state government, and the importance of family participation. These exemplars highlight the rich diversity of perspectives and priorities that co-exist in the field of early care and education.

In 2005, the Early Childhood Systems Working Group (ECSWG) created a promising framework describing an integrated early childhood system. The ECSWG is a volunteer group comprised of national leaders in early care and education, representing a variety of prominent organizations, including: the Alliance for Childhood Finance, BUILD Initiative, Center for Law and Social Policy, Children’s Project, Council of Chief State School Officers, National Center for Children in Poverty, National Child Care Information Center, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Governor’s Association Center for Best Practices, Smart Start National Technical Assistance Center, State Early Childhood Technical Assistance Resource Center, United Way of America, and Zero to Three. The ECSWG’s visual framework described the public sector’s role in ensuring young children’s healthy development and readiness for school, and essentially represents a system of systems working together (Bruner, 2012). In 2011, the ECSWG updated its original framework, commonly known as “The Ovals” (ECSWG, 2011).

The ECSWG framework, shown in Figure 1, illustrates how three components (early learning and development; family leadership and support; and health) intersect to result in the desired outcome of thriving children and families. Within this framework, the ECSWG also
described and defined six functions necessary to support each component of the system, as well as the system as a whole. These functions are: *define and coordinate leadership*, *finance strategically*, *enhance and align standards*, *create and support improvement strategies*, *ensure accountability*, and *recruit and engage stakeholders*.

Based on data gathered from states adopting the original version of the “Ovals” framework, the ECSWG (2011) also added a list of guiding values and principles to accompany the framework. These seven principles are:

(a) Reach all children and families and as early as possible with needed services and supports, (b) Genuinely include and effectively accommodate children with special needs, (c) Reflect and respect the strengths, needs, values, languages, cultures, and communities of children and families, (d) Ensure stability and continuity of services along a continuum from prenatal to school entry and beyond, (e) Ease access for families and transitions for children, (f) Value parents as decision makers and leaders, and (g) Catalyze and maximize investment, and foster innovation. (pp. 2-3)

The second principal in the list provided by the ECSWG (2011), encouraging states to create systems *that genuinely include and effectively accommodate children with special needs*, makes this framework especially relevant and timely for application to this particular study, which aims to understand how children with disabilities and the services provided to them exist within already complex early care and education partnerships and systems. The ECSWG’s original framework was comprised of four ovals, rather than three (Bruner, 2012). The fourth oval was titled *Early Intervention/Special Needs*, and was drawn with a dotted line rather than a solid line to indicate that these services were applicable to only a subset of the full child population. In the revised framework, the ECSWG (2011) stated, “Accommodating children
with special needs should not be a system unto itself. Children with special needs are part of all the ‘ovals’ and appropriate linkages and services should be integrated throughout the system of systems” (p. 2). In removing the original oval for early intervention and special needs, the ECSWG had two intentions. The first was to expand the understanding of special needs so that it not only encompassed children served under IDEA, but also included the needs of other “special populations” (e.g., English language learning families, homeless families and children, or children in the child welfare system). Its second intention was to articulate a vision of early childhood systems in which support services for children and families in any “special population” would be systematically integrated into all service areas.

The framework proposed by ECSWG is ambitious, and is currently supported in several states (ECSWG, 2011). While the ECSWG itself is an independent, voluntary collaboration, it is comprised of many member organizations. One of those organizations, the BUILD Initiative, works intensely with ten state partners to accomplish its stated mission: “The BUILD Initiative supports state leaders in their work to develop a comprehensive system of programs, policies and services that meet the needs of young children and their families. This systems building approach effectively prepares our youngest children for a successful future, while carefully using private and public resources.” (BUILD Initiative, 2014).

**State Preschool Collaborations with Community Partners**

According to the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), in 2013, forty-one states offered state preschool programs for young children (Barnett, Carolan, Squires, & Clarke Brown, 2013). There are two types of models for state preschool programs. These are: (a) programming provided exclusively in public schools, and (b) *mixed delivery* models in which programming is provided in public schools and in a variety of other settings, including
community-based childcare centers and Head Start programs. According to Schumacher, et al., (2005), the mixed delivery model is significant to the future of early childhood education because it has the potential to “break the traditional barrier between early education and child care policies and address the needs of children in working families in a coordinated way; and strengthen the quality of community-based child care programs” (p. 4). Mixed delivery models provide families the opportunity to select the location and program that best meets their needs, which is especially important for families that require wraparound care, and thus this model combines the dual goals of promoting early learning and supporting working families (Harris, 2012).

Just as various stakeholders and groups hold different beliefs about the purpose of integrated early care and education systems, there is also some variance in the definition of collaboration. Wat and Gayl (2009) state,

At a minimum, collaborations involve school districts subcontracting with qualified private providers to deliver a pre-k program. Other partnerships build upon this basic framework to integrate core operations like professional development and curriculum, share the cost of implementation, expand services and/or improve quality. (p. 2)

In their study of collaboration and subsidized early care and education programs in Illinois, Spielberger, Zanoni, and Barisik (2013) acknowledge that collaborations can be especially hard to define because they may vary along several dimensions, including: (a) provider organization (e.g., school districts, non-profit and for-profit childcare centers, family childcare providers); (b) setting (e.g., childcare centers, public housing cites, schools, family childcare homes); (c) duration (e.g., full-day, full-year); (d) demographics (e.g. city vs. urban; children of diverse race, ethnicity, age); and (e) leadership (e.g., partnership managers, directors, education coordinators).
While recognizing that not all scholars define collaboration in the same way, the next section of this chapter addresses collaborations in early care and education in a broad sense, with a focus on the benefits of collaboration, potential drawbacks of collaboration, factors that facilitate collaboration, and factors that act as barriers to collaboration.

Benefits of Collaboration

While the opportunity to choose state preschool programs offered in a variety of locations is an advantage for families, as well as an improvement for the field, each collaborative relationship is unique. As partnerships between childcare centers and public preschool programs have been studied, scholars have discovered numerous benefits. Holcomb (2006) summarizes these advantages.

It’s easy to understand why systems that incorporate diverse sites are so popular. They hold the promise of accomplishing many critical goals at once, including broader access, faster start-up time, more efficient use of public and private investments, and improved quality across all settings. (p. 5)

The following paragraphs provide more information about these particular benefits of collaboration: (a) more comprehensive services for families, (b) increased program efficiency, (c) improved quality at childcare centers, and (d) staff benefits.

More comprehensive services for families. A major benefit of partnerships among early care and education programs is increased capacity to meet families’ needs (Schilder et al., 2003). Working together, programs may be able to expand services to reach a larger number of low-income children and families (Schilder et al., 2003; Wat & Gayl, 2009). Some families require full time care to accommodate their work schedules; thus, half-day programs are problematic. Programs working in collaboration, however, use wraparound services to provide a full day of
care and education (Harris, 2012; Wat & Gayl, 2009). Collaborations may also be able to provide additional days of service per year (Schilder et al., 2003).

Collaborative programs may yield benefits for families who do not even qualify for certain aspects of the partnership. For example, children enrolled in a program collaborating with Head Start may experience “spillover” benefits and enhanced education simply by attending a classroom that embeds Head Start programming, even though they technically do not qualify for Head Start services (Schilder et al., 2003). Collaborations also have the potential to increase parent participation before children enter kindergarten; many early childhood programs provide parent activities and other opportunities for parents to become involved in their children’s early education (Schilder et al., 2003; Wat & Gayl, 2009).

**Increased program efficiency.** When public preschool programs partner with childcare centers, they make good use of facilities that have been designed specifically for young children. Childcare centers offer age appropriate services such as naps, snacks, and preschool sized toileting facilities, and often operate full day/full year programs, easily allowing for wraparound services to supplement state preschool programs (Harris, 2012; Selden et al., 2006). These partnerships ensure the maximization of existing infrastructures and expertise; for example, programs can share the costs and responsibilities of maintaining one facility and staff body instead of several (Schilder et al., 2003, Wat & Gayl, 2009). The National Child Care Association (NCCA) explains the cost effectiveness of using existing childcare centers to house state preschool programs.

Using private sector infrastructure, existing capacity is utilized and the costs of developing start up programs is minimal, contrary to the start up of school-based programs which oftentimes involve construction of new facilities using scarce taxpayer
dollars. Utilization of the 17 to 25% average vacancy rate in the private sector is a win-win for all concerned and provides a rapid start up for preschool initiatives without further investment of public funds. (NCCA, 2001, pp. 5-6)

Working together to effectively combine resources, early care and education programs can bridge the gaps between two or more programs (Harris, 2012; Schilder et al., 2003). Partnerships may shed light on program discrepancies when administration and staff are faced with the challenge of meeting differing, sometimes even conflicting, program requirements. Collaborations may provide a much needed opportunity to create a cohesive partnership. “In the process of coming together to implement quality programs, schools and community partners can begin to align program standards, curricula, and teaching practices across different early childhood settings” (Wat & Gayl, 2009, p.6).

**Improved quality at childcare centers.** When state preschool programs provide services to young children in childcare centers, there is potential for improved quality across all settings and all program levels (Holcomb, 2006; Schilder et al., 2003). There is increased accountability for student outcomes because the state preschool program takes responsibility for ensuring that all children enrolled reach or exceed academic proficiency (Harris, 2012; Schilder et al., 2003; Schumacher et al., 2005). Improvements in curriculum and instruction may take a variety of forms, including: (a) the introduction of a more formalized, less ‘watered-down curricula’, enhancing children’s skills in areas such as language, literacy, social development, and early math; (b) more attention paid to individual child learning styles; and (c) more focus on age appropriate skills (Harris, 2012; NCCA, 2001; Schilder et al., 2003; Selden et al., 2006).

Programs also may be enhanced by improvements to the overall classroom environment. When collaborating partners contribute monetary resources to a program, funds can be used to
purchase furnishings and materials for developmentally appropriate activity centers. In their comparative case study of 20 early care and education sites that were part of collaborative relationships, Selden et al. (2006) found that the addition of these materials significantly improved Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) scores, especially in the domains of furnishings, activities, and program structure. “These findings are explained by the fact that collaborations in early care and education provide resources and knowledge to providers, allowing them to improve the quality of services they provide and the physical setting in which services are delivered” (p. 420). The ECERS-3 is the most recent version of the rating scale, used to evaluate programs’ abilities to meet children’s developmental needs in cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and health and safety domains (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2014).

Resources obtained through collaboration may also be used to improve program quality via the addition of more staff members and expertise (Harris, 2012, Wat & Gayl, 2009). Childcare centers may gain access to a certified teacher, which they otherwise would not have. Whitebook, Ryan, Kipnis, and Sakai (2008) share the experience of one childcare director who partnered with the state preschool program in New Jersey, “They have provided a lot for us. We have a master teacher that’s always here to provide the support for the teaching staff and for myself as well” (p. 18). State pre-K or Head Start programs may be able to provide a childcare center with an on-site nurse, a family worker to provide parent education and conduct home visits; and additional social, medical, and mental health services (Selden et al., 2006; Whitebook et al., 2008).

**Staff benefits.** When a childcare center obtains additional resources through a partnership, it can use those resources to better support staff. Monetary resources can be used to increase staff pay (Harris, 2012; Selden et al., 2006). Collaborative relationships also offer the
potential for improved professional development opportunities. In some cases, state preschool programs invite childcare teachers to in-service trainings. These trainings provide education for teachers, but also allow them to network and become part of their larger professional community (Harris, 2012; Selden et al., 2006). In other cases, programs combine funds to maximize professional development opportunities for staff (Wat & Gayl, 2009). Increased pay and quality professional development opportunities often promote higher levels of staff satisfaction (Selden et al., 2006).

**Potential Drawbacks of Collaboration**

Collaborative relationships between publicly funded state prekindergarten programs and private childcare centers have yielded positive outcomes for the field, individual programs, and families. There are also, however, some potential drawbacks to collaboration. These potentially negative outcomes include: (a) threats to the private sector of early care and education, and (b) teacher turnover.

**Threats to the private sector of early care and education.** That National Child Care Association (2001) has expressed these concerns: (a) public preschool programs do not fully utilize the existing infrastructure of the historically private early childhood sector, and (b) public sector providers will diminish the capacity of the private sector to provide quality care and education for young children. NCCA’s major concern about potentially negative impacts of public preschool education on the historically private services are based on the fact that centers often subsidize the high cost of providing infant and toddler care (due to lower student to teacher ratios) with fees from older children.

Because of the delicate economic balance of a child care center’s fiscal operations and the well known fact that fees for older children subsidize care for infants and toddlers,
broadening the public sector’s involvement in the four-year-old market by including school based providers could have an effect on a center’s ability to continue this subsidy. Therefore, short of raising infant and toddler fees dramatically to compensate for the lost internal subsidy, centers would struggle to continue to provide care for younger children at an affordable cost. (p.2)

When state preschool programming is offered at no cost, and tuition from four-year-olds is lost, centers may struggle financially or be forced to raise fees to compensate for lost revenue (Morrissey, Lekies, & Cochran, 2007; NCCA, 2001).

Public preschool partnerships with childcare centers may also threaten the private sector of early care and education in two other ways. First, standards required by state preschool programs may drive up childcare centers’ costs. For example, state preschool teacher-to-student ratios may be lower than those required by childcare licensing standards. In implementing a lower teacher to student ratio, the childcare center is improving its quality, but is also raising its costs. Added expenses will likely result in increased parent fees, which may drive some families away. Second, partnerships between state preschool programs and childcare centers can result in competition, not necessarily between each other, but between childcare centers that do partner with state preschool and those that do not. Parents may be drawn to programs that offer free state prekindergarten, and thus programs that do not may lose families (Morrissey et al., 2007).

**Teacher turnover.** State preschool programs often have more stringent requirements for teachers than those required by childcare centers. In Illinois, for example, a Preschool for All (PFA) teacher must have a Bachelors degree and a state teaching license, but the state does not require that of lead teachers in childcare settings (NACCRRA, 2009; Stebbins & Scott, 2007). Childcare centers implementing a state preschool program may not be able to offer salary and
benefit packages comparable to those offered by public schools; thus, qualified teachers are more likely to seek employment with a local school district (Morrisey et al., 2007).

Professional development opportunities offered through a partnership, and previously described as a benefit of collaboration, may also result in the negative outcome of increased teacher turnover at childcare centers. Pre-K teachers who work for childcare centers may be exposed to state pre-K teaching opportunities within the school system through shared professional development. Finding those positions more favorable to their position at a childcare center, they may use the connections they forge to seek employment within the school setting. According to Selden at al. (2006),

Because nonprofit child care providers often operate on tight budgets with low salaries and benefits, collaboration may open a career door for teachers with high qualifications and experience, allowing them to move into the other institutional sectors of early education and care that provide better salaries and benefits, such as kindergarten programs provided through school districts. (p. 421)

Morrisey et al. (2007) reiterate that teachers perceived work at childcare centers as lower status than work through public school districts, and thus were eager to make a move when a job became available.

Factors that Facilitate Collaboration

Although the benefits of collaboration appear to outnumber the drawbacks, it can be hard for programs to form successful collaborations. Research has shown that certain factors act as facilitators to the creation of partnerships in early care and education. Two factors that facilitate collaboration occur at the federal or state policy level: (a) mandates and policy guidance, and (b)
systems building efforts, while three additional factors occur at the program level: (c) incentives and help, (d) willingness to collaborate, and (e) logistics.

**Mandates and policy guidance.** According to Schilder et al. (2003), “Enacting legislation, issuing policy guidance, and providing policy clarification are actions to support and promote partnerships, according to state stakeholders and numerous existing studies” (p. 42). To encourage partnerships, some states mandate that at the local level, state preschool funds are used in collaboration with community-based programs. New York requires that a minimum percentage of state pre-kindergarten programs are delivered in community based settings (Harris, 2012). West Virginia policy mandates that collaborative partners such as licensed childcare providers and Head Start centers provide at least 50% of state preschool classrooms, and that collaboration exists in every county in West Virginia (Miller, 2011).

When policies are in place to support collaboration, additional guidance on these policies may expand partnership opportunities (Schilder et al., 2003). State leaders report that policy guidance frequently results from questions or issues raised by early childhood providers; their questions often lead to clarification of policy.

For example, some states have acted on federal guidance clarifying that families whose children are served through child care/Head Start partnerships can have an extended timeframe for determining eligibility for child care subsidies. Extending the timeframe allows programs that serve children in child care/Head Start partnerships to maintain consistent enrollment for a specified period of time, thus creating a more stable environment for children. (Schilder et al., 2003, p. 47)

**Systems-building efforts.** Systems-building efforts are attempts to better coordinate early care and education programs and services. According to Stebbins and Scott (2007), better
coordination “can increase efficiency, streamline service delivery, and help develop a higher-quality, more-responsive system for families and children” (p. 4). Systems building efforts include federal systems building initiatives, intergovernmental agreements, and state governance structures.

**Federal systems building initiatives.** Several ongoing federal initiatives have boosted collaboration efforts in the states. The Head Start Reauthorization Act of 2007 mandated that governors designate an Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC) to develop a coordinated system of early education and care. Guidance from the Department of Health and Human Services lists nine members that must be on each state’s ECAC. These members represent Head Start, departments of health and education, local schools, and the Interagency Coordinating Council for the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) Part C. Governors are allowed to add members as they see fit (Stebbins & Scott, 2007). One example of an ECAC is Illinois’ Early Learning Council (ELC), whose mission statement is as follows:

The early childhood framework is based on the vision of every child entering kindergarten safe, healthy, ready to succeed and eager to learn. We celebrate diversity and partnering with community stakeholders who value a bright future for all young children in Illinois. We are committed to universal access for all children birth to age eight, to high quality programs and services, prioritizing children with high needs and families that are hard to reach. When Illinois’ vision is realized, we will see all young children's needs being met, including early childhood education, physical and mental health, and family support. (Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development, 2012)

The 2004 re-authorization of the IDEA is also considered a federal systems building initiative because it mandated states to establish an Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) to
advise them on IDEA Part C services (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012; Satkowski, 2009).

**Intergovernmental agreements.** Intergovernmental agreements can provide support for partnerships in early care and education. These agreements can formalize roles, responsibilities, and actions step for each member of a collaboration. They can address issues such as training, monitoring, sharing data, guidance, partnership strategies, and incentives for participating in collaborations (Schilder et al., 2003).

**State governance structures.** Some states choose to restructure their governments to focus on developing a more coordinated and effective early learning system (Harris, 2012; Schumacher et al., 2005). The creation of state level coordinating bodies can lead to support at the provider level because these bodies ensure that information about early education programs is well coordinated, provided efficiently, and models a “one-stop-shop” approach for families (Schilder et al., 2003). These coordinating bodies identify opportunities for, and barriers to, collaboration and coordination among state and federally funded early care and education programs (Kagan & Kaurez, 2012). In Illinois, for example, the ELC assumes many functions of coordinating collaborative initiatives (Spielberger et al., 2013).

Some states go further than creating a governing body to coordinate the different programs in early care and education. Three states (Georgia, Massachusetts, and Washington) combine administrative responsibilities within a single agency or entity. Called *stand alone administrative integration*, these state agencies have powers similar to other state departments (e.g., a secretary or commissioner with responsibilities similar to those of gubernatorial cabinet members; their own staff; and their own monitoring, regulatory, fiscal, and enforcement duties). Another type of state government restructuring is called *subsumed administrative integration*, in which a subunit (e.g., division or department) of an existing agency with a broader scope, is
given authority for early care and education (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012).

**State collaboration initiatives.** Although federal and state mandates may prompt states to improve collaboration between early care and education programs, states can initiate collaboration efforts independent of mandates. State initiatives come in a variety of programs and plans.

*Programs.* Several state programs exist to support collaboration in early care and education. According to Spielberger et al. (2013)

Within each model, there are further variations in implementation. For example, one provider can blend or braid funds from multiple sources at a single location, or two or more providers may partner to serve children at a single site. In addition, providers may just share space or they may share funding and programming, and costs of collaboration may be handled in a variety of ways (e.g., subcontracts, purchase of services, or other interagency agreements).

Some state collaboration programs involve bringing together providers from different programs to discuss how to plan and achieve common goals. These groups may take a variety of forms, including: within government cabinets (e.g., Children’s Cabinets), within government management teams established to support Children’s Cabinets; state level task forces or councils (called to address a single legislative issue or strategic plan); managing partnerships (called to oversee long-term programs); and state-local partnerships (in which a local entity coordinates specific responsibilities with a state-level entity). A common feature of these groups is that they generally have no legal authority.

*Plans.* In order to better coordinate early care and education services, states may execute specific plans to promote collaborations. Schilder et al. (2003) describe a plan called: review,
research, and dissemination. In this plan, state leaders first review the current status of early care and education by investing time in learning about their current programs’ goals and services, regulations, and policies. “State leaders noted that the time they invested in learning about policies and regulations that govern early education programs led to a greater understanding of similarities and differences in quality regulations” (pp. 27-28). Research and dissemination activities go hand in hand as stakeholders use what they have learned to inform and improve the field of early care and education in their state.

By sponsoring, conducting, and disseminating research on partnerships, some states identify partnership challenges and areas for change, examine partnership structures, and devise strategies to address challenges as they arise. Some states commission studies and surveys and review practices at the community level, and some produce documents about high-quality early education to be used by providers working to develop partnerships that offer comprehensive, high-quality services. Still other states disseminate information about partnerships on a regular basis. (p. 30)

States may execute other plans with the goal of coordinating early care and education services. Some states work toward aligning professional development standards at the state level by bringing together representatives from state agencies that oversee higher education, early education licensing, early education professional development programs, and specific early childhood programs (e.g., state preschool, Head Start, childcare). Some states promote partnerships by designating childcare subsidy slots for children in partnership programs, developing contracts with Head Start to receive state childcare subsidies, or creating sample partnership agreements for providers to use in their collaborations (Schilder et al., 2003). Still other states work with the BUILD Initiative, a national organization supported by philanthropic
funds that helps states develop coordinated systems of early care and education (Satkowski, 2009).

Incentives and help. Executed at the federal and state levels, mandates and policy guidance, in addition to systems-building efforts, can provide a supportive context for the formation of integrated early care and education systems and successful collaborations. There are additional factors that can facilitate collaboration at the program level. The first of these, incentives and help, can come in the form of grants that require or encourage partnerships.

Grants that encourage or require partnerships. Several grants exist that encourage or require partnerships for funding. Head Start Collaboration Grants “are intended to support the development of multi-agency and public/private partnerships at the state level and to encourage collaboration among Head Start, Early Head Start, and other agencies and entities that benefit low-income children from birth to school entry and their families” (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012, pp. 90-91). States use Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grants funded by the Maternal Child and Health Bureau to build and integrate comprehensive early childhood systems that increase access to health and mental health services (Kagan & Kauerz, 2012).

Many states encourage partnerships between early care and education programs by awarding additional grant points to applicants that are partnering. For example, Illinois commits $10 million each year to Partners in Care and Education, an initiative designed to support collaborations between Head Start and childcare. This has resulted in high-quality, full-day programs for 2,000 children, created through three unique forms of collaboration (collaboration within one organization, collaboration between two organizations, and collaborations between an organization and family childcare homes) (Schilder et al., 2003).
participate in collaborative relationships is incentives. The most common type of incentive is monetary. Money obtained in a collaboration may come in the form of start-up funds (Harris, 2012), increased reimbursement rates for providers that meet quality standards (Schilder et al., 2003), funds for professional development and continuing education (Schilder et al., 2003), funds for curricular materials (Harris, 2012), or funds to provide teachers with better salaries and benefits (Harris, 2012; Whitebook et al., 2008). Funds to increase teacher salaries and benefits, in particular, lead to greater staff satisfaction and a reduction in staff turnover (Harris, 2012). In addition to money, other incentives include actual materials and supplies (Harris, 2012), as well as designated partnership slots (Schilder et al., 2003).

**Technical assistance and professional development.** A third major incentive for programs to participate in collaborations is increased technical assistance and professional development. Technical assistance and professional development can make partnering easier, and comes in a variety of forms, such as: trainings for childcare center directors to learn more about various state regulations and requirements (Whitebook et al., 2008); frequently asked question documents (FAQs) provided by the state (Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, 2010); state-sponsored partnership information sessions (Schilder et al., 2003); and professional development provided directly to childcare providers, with the aim to address and reduce differences in professional development standards across programs (Schilder et al., 2003). Stakeholders who are invested in collaboration typically provide technical assistance and professional development.

Those involved in sponsoring, supporting, accessing, or providing T/TA [training/technical assistance] to support early education partnerships include people who have responsibility over early education services. Depending on the state, these
individuals can include the Head Start-State Collaboration director; the state child care administrator or director of the agency that oversees child care; the president of the Head Start Association; the pre-K director; chief state school officer; resource and referral agencies; Head Start-Quality Improvement Centers; QUILT [Quality in Linking Together early childhood projects] staff; and other existing T/TA providers as well as regional Administration for Children and Families staff. (Schilder et al., 2003, p. 39)

**Willingness to collaborate.** The willingness of a program and its staff members to collaborate plays a key role in the successful execution of a partnership (Harris, 2012; Miller, 2011). Shared educational philosophies, a common vision, mutual respect, and trust create strong relationships among partners (Schilder et al., 2003). An organizational culture of collaboration allows participants to work together successfully. In her study of Universal pre-K collaborations in West Virginia, Miller (2011), describes how an organizational culture geared toward collaboration impacted staff attitudes:

Throughout the interviews I held with collaborative participants, I discovered that the participants spoke freely of the process that allowed them to collaborate successfully. They frequently referenced their former mindset as individualistic service providers and compared that mindset to their current collaborative attitudes and behaviors. (p. 103)

**Logistics.** It is important for collaborations in early care and education to be strongly supported by federal and state initiatives and sufficient funding, and it is essential for programs and their staff members to be motivated and willing to collaborate. For collaborations to run smoothly, however, logistical issues need to be addressed. Key logistical issues for collaborations are: (a) the review and waiver of unhelpful regulations, (b) strong communication among collaborative partners, and (c) leadership and managerial skills.
Some state leaders have put in place procedures to systematically examine regulations or state policies that may become barriers to collaboration, and to determine appropriate actions to resolve those barriers. To ensure that quality is upheld, states require proof that specific regulations are indeed barriers. Schilder et al. (2003) describe this process in one state:

In Colorado, communities that participate in the Consolidated Child Care Pilot Programs...are eligible to receive waivers of state regulations that are viewed as partnership barriers. Pilot communities must demonstrate how the state regulations prevent them from achieving their goals. For example, pilot communities might apply to use funds for infant/toddler care which are currently targeted to preschool-aged children, if they can establish that most preschool-aged children are receiving high-quality services and that the community lacks infant/toddler care. The entire first round of communities participating in the project applied for and received waivers. (p. 52)

In order for collaborations to operate successfully, partners must communicate well. Communication of ideas and issues must occur within and across organizations, and program staff should be involved at all levels of the partnership (Schilder et al., 2003). Communication should be open and frequent, with an underlying tone of compromise and flexibility (Miller, 2011). Written communication should include partnership agreements, which clarify roles and expectations (Schilder et al., 2003). These agreements should include the following key elements: a mission, goal or purpose statement; roles and responsibilities of each agency; parameters of collaboration (e.g., joint activities, shared resources); programming responsibilities (e.g., building maintenance, transportation); maintenance of student records; staff issues (e.g., staff supervision, joint planning time); timelines; financial responsibility (e.g., insurance coverage, space rental); definitions and/or common uses of terminology; and dispute resolution
procedures (Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, 2010). Finally, collaborations are not possible without skilled leadership. In early childhood collaborations between state preschool programs and childcare in particular, leadership skills include the ability to address staff pay differentials and financial know-how (e.g., understanding subsidy eligibility and reimbursement issues, blending funding streams, anticipating budget implications, and managing financial incentives) (Schilder et al., 2003).

Potential Barriers to Collaboration

Research has shown that certain factors may act as barriers to successful collaboration. These barriers can be categorized as: resistance to collaboration, conflicting program elements, financial issues, and salary and staffing issues.

Resistance to collaboration. Resistance to collaborative preschool programs, as well as to state preschool programs in general, stems from some school staff members’ attitudes that preschool education is not an integral part of the public school mission. “Whether operated out of a school building or in a community-based setting, school staff may consider pre-k an ‘add-on service,’ which takes up resources or staff time and energy, rather than as integral to the school’s mission,” (Wat & Gayl, 2009, p. 9). In other cases, K-12 leaders unfamiliar with community based providers may not recognize the private childcare sectors’ history of early education or understand that private childcare organizations may be very knowledgeable about children’s cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. Childcare directors themselves, sensing this resistance, may feel that school district personnel allow them to give only minimal input into programming (Whitebook et al., 2008). Finally, childcare centers may be wary of state preschool efforts in general, as these can pose a threat to their enrollment.

Conflicting program elements. A second barrier to successful collaboration is when
programs have conflicting program elements. Stebbins and Scott (2007) describe how programs with different missions may have difficulty finding a common ground. “Bridging differing missions is perhaps the most difficult challenge to overcome because it relies on effective relationships between individuals in positions to promote collaboration and on a commitment to integrate the missions of both programs without compromising standards (p. 5). Programs also encounter problems when partners have different eligibility requirements for entry (Stebbins & Scott, 2007), different regulations (Whitebook et al, 2008), different monitoring and reporting requirements (Wat & Gayl, 2009; Whitebook et al., 2008), different program standards in areas such as transportation and facilities (Wat & Gayl, 2009), and different personnel expectations in areas such as teacher credentialing requirements (Stebbins & Scott, 2007).

**Financial challenges.** Managing multiple funding streams is no small task, and programs that enter into a collaboration must become skillful at securing and overseeing a variety of funds. An inability to do this can be a barrier to successful partnerships. To illustrate the delicate balance of funding collaborative programs, Lloyd and Joseph (2013) offer an example from Evanston, Illinois.

Many community-based service providers operate on a very thin financial margin, and even small changes in enrollment can create problems for an organization’s budget. In recent years, the Childcare Network has provided two of its preschool partners with emergency loans to meet payroll obligations. These community agencies were facing a “perfect storm” of delayed payments from the state, declining numbers of full-pay families, reduced private giving, and increased family needs.

Funding challenges may be compounded by a variety of factors, including: lack of communication among funding agencies (Whitebook et al., 2008); the change from a contract
system of childcare subsidies to a voucher system, which adds considerable paperwork requirements for providers (Whitebook et al., 2008); lack of strategies for dealing with low-enrollment periods at childcare centers (e.g., summer, when many families go on vacation) (Whitebook et al., 2008); the need to meet costly requirements established by state preschool programs (e.g., paying for more highly qualified staff); financial trouble at the state level (e.g., budget cuts, delayed ECBG payments) (Lloyd & Joseph, 2013); and stringent budgeting requirements from a partnering agency (Whitebook et al., 2008).

**Salary and staffing issues.** A fourth barrier to collaboration is difficulty with staffing and salaries. State pre-K teachers often receive higher salaries than teachers hired by childcare centers. State pre-K teachers may also have union-negotiated provisions (e.g., work hours, professional development requirements) that are dissimilar to those of childcare staff (Wat & Gayl, 2009). Salary and job disparity can result in salary competitions among providers (Harris, 2012), tension among program staff (Whitebook et al., 2008), and teacher turnover (Harris, 2012).

**Collaboration Framework and Policy Recommendations**

Many states are taking steps to develop and implement a fully integrated early care and education system, but most are not there yet. States are, however, making progress toward building a more cohesive set of early care and education services by forming collaborations between programs at the state and local levels. Recognizing these partnership efforts, Pre-K Now has developed a collaboration framework to guide partnerships between state pre-K programs and community-based partners such as childcare centers (Wat & Gayl, 2009). Pre-K Now was a advocacy group for universal pre-K programs for 3- and 4-year-olds. It was operated by the Pew

In the diagram shown in Figure 2, Wat and Gayl (2009), of Pre-K Now, describe three core elements: (a) *basic program features* such as duration, target population, location, and budget; (b) *quality standards* related to curriculum, classroom environment, staffing, assessments, and professional development; and (c) *comprehensive and supportive services* including: family involvement, before and after care, transportation, screenings, referrals, and other interventions. Supporting elements hold the core elements together to allow the system to work. Supporting elements include: a common *vision and set of goals for early education*, a *vehicle for shared planning and decision making*, opportunities to explore the appropriate mix of *funding sources*, and a *partnership agreement* which clarifies the roles and responsibilities of all parties in the collaboration.

This framework recognizes some of the key facilitators and barriers to collaboration that were previously described. The three segments in the center of the model reflect an understanding that conflicting program elements can be barriers to collaboration; thus the model depicts a program with common program elements. The supporting elements shown on the outer ring of the diagram reflect an understanding of key facilitators of collaboration. For example, a federal initiative, such as the mandate that states create an Early Childhood Advisory Council (ECAC), may lead to a *vehicle for planning and decision-making*. *Vision and goals for early education* are related to *partnership agreements*; both may be the result of intergovernmental agreements (at the federal or state policy level), or of good communication at the program level (e.g., memorandums of understanding). *Funding sources* may be provided via grants that encourage or require partnerships, or may come in the form of additional resources provided to
centers involved in collaboration (e.g., start-up funds, increased reimbursement rates, funds for professional development and continuing education, or salary assistance and funds for benefits).

**Guidance and Recommendations**

Given the vast array of opinions about the definition and goals of an integrated early care and education system, along with the variety of viewpoints on collaboration in early care and education, it makes sense that policy and practice recommendations for the field vary in scope and content. Several prominent organizations in the field [Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP), 2005, 2012; Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, 2008; National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), 2009; National Child Care Association (NCCA), 2001; National Governor’s Association Center for Best Practices, 2010; Pre-K Now, 2006, 2009; and Pre-K Now/CLASP, 2007] have published guidelines. Based on her dissertation study of childcare providers’ perceptions of prekindergarten partnerships, Harris (2012) also contributed a list of recommendations to the field. As a whole, these recommendations address: (a) creating and funding a comprehensive early care and education system, the implementation of a mixed delivery system for state preschool initiatives, (b) the creation of successful partnerships between state pre-K and private childcare, (c) the role of community programs within the broader early care and education system, and (d) the ability of the early care and education system to better meet the needs of working families. Recommendations target states as well as local early childhood proprietors. A selection of key recommendations from each source is presented in Table 2.

**Early Care and Education Issues Faced by Rural Communities**

As described in Chapter 1, this study will focus on the unique collaboration efforts of early care and education programs in a rural county in a Midwestern state. Thus, a discussion of
issues faced by early care and education programs in rural areas is relevant to this study, as those issues may impact collaborations and systems building initiatives. The provision of early care and education services for preschool aged children is impacted by complex challenges that are often unique to rural areas of the United States. According to Coffman et al. (2006), “Rural areas have far fewer services and greater distances in getting children and families to services, without economies of scale to develop many services that exist in metropolitan areas” (p. 6). Key challenges for rural communities include: poverty, limited early care and education options, and threats to high quality programming.

**Poverty**

According to Smith (2010), families in rural communities are more likely to be living in poverty and thus experience difficulty accessing affordable, high quality childcare. Because parents in rural communities are less likely to be college graduates, they are often part of a group known as the “working poor,” making just enough money not to qualify for CCDF. Employment opportunities in rural areas further complicate childcare issues.

Rural work is more likely to be part-time, seasonal, or temporary and dominated by one employer, making childcare a major obstacle. The lack of formal childcare options, distances to work sites, lack of transportation, and irregularity of work schedules reduces the childcare options available. (p.2)

**Limited Early Care and Education Options**

Even when families can afford it, high quality programming may be scarce or simply unavailable in rural areas. Childcare centers may have trouble maintaining sufficient enrollment. The population of working-age families in rural communities is declining, and working age families who do live in rural areas are often unable or unwilling to drive to a centrally located
center due to limited transportation resources. Centers in rural areas serve such few children that they are not often profitable; they can quickly go out of business when income is lost because families leave or have difficulty paying tuition. Additionally, centers may face financial difficulties, making it difficult for them to stay in business. For example, safety standards designed for larger centers in urban contexts may be difficult or unnecessary for rural centers, yet centers must spend money to meet these standards (Smith, 2010).

Even when the population is large enough to support early care and education centers, families may not rely on these centers for childcare. Most families in rural areas choose home-based childcare for their preschool-aged children. Defined as informal non-relative care, this can include family childcare providers, in-home nannies or babysitters, neighbors, friends or other non-relatives providing care in the provider’s home or in the child’s home (Smith, 2006). Licensed childcare homes and centers may face competition from the abundance of illegal, unlicensed, and underground care in rural areas. Illegally operating and unlicensed childcare homes sometimes accept high numbers of children and do not incur costs associated with licensing and professional development, and thus offer care at lower rates than licensed childcare homes are able to offer. This problem often goes unrecognized or unreported. Smith (2010), shares this quote from a member of one of the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies:

I also have no one in the County Attorney offices of any of my counties that are willing to pursue the underground/illegal child care. Licensing is not a strong issue within our state. Providers are very frustrated to lose children to these caregivers and parents just do not care if their provider is licensed or not. We continue to educate and campaign for quality care but this is a struggle for my CCR&R agency and for the providers who really
want to improve the quality of care. (p. 17)

Options in general are very limited, and options to meet the specialized needs of children with disabilities are fewer. Thus, parents of children with disabilities face even more obstacles in finding care (Smith, 2010).

**Threats to High Quality Programming**

Centers in rural areas may experience threats to maintaining high program quality due to staffing problems and lack of professional development and technical assistance. Research has shown that public early education programs, special education programs in particular, face a variety of staffing obstacles in rural communities. These include: (a) problems attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers, related service providers, and para-educators (McClaren & Rutland, 2013; Purcell, East, & Rude, 2005); (b) lack of career advancement among practicing teachers due to distance from higher education opportunities (Collins, Menlove, & Salzberg, 2004; McLaren & Rutland, 2013); (c) frequent changes in assignment due to the small number of children receiving special education services (Purcell et al., 2005); and (d) teacher frustration due to isolation caused by great distances between schools (Lock, 2001; McLaren & Rutland, 2013).

Program quality often suffers due to lack of professional development and technical assistance (Lock, 2001; Smith, 2010); professional development and technical assistance providers are often unable or unwilling to travel long distances to work with such small numbers of childcare providers. Some rural programs lack technology resources such as Internet access and computers, making online assistance unavailable as well (Smith, 2010).

**Inclusive Services for Young Children With Disabilities**

This case study will explore the unique collaborative efforts among early care and education programs in one Midwestern rural county. One goal of this investigation is to
understand the extent to which inclusive services are provided to children, ages 3-5, who are enrolled in collaborative programs. Despite the work that has been done in the area of providing inclusive services for young children, there is still progress to be made. According to Barton and Smith, “In 27 years, the practice of providing special education and related services in regular early childhood settings to preschoolers with disabilities has increased only 5.7% and many young children with disabilities continue to be educated in separate settings” (p. 1). In 2011, 62.4% of children, ages 3-5, served under IDEA Part B, spent some amount of their educational time in a regular early childhood program (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Buysse and Hollingsworth (2009) also state, “Universal access to inclusive programs for children with disabilities is far from a reality” (p. 21).

**Defining and Describing Inclusive Early Childhood Environments**

The Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) have written a joint position statement on early childhood inclusion (2009). This statement describes three defining features of inclusion (access, participation, and supports), which can be used to identify high quality early childhood programs. *Access* refers to providing access to a wide range of learning opportunities, activities, settings, and environments. *Participation* refers to the additional accommodations and supports that some children may need to participate fully in play and learning activities with peers and adults. *Supports* refers to the infrastructure of systems level supports necessary to undergird the inclusive service efforts of individuals and organizations.

Schwartz, Sandall, Odom, Horn, and Beckman (2002) also provides a list of four characteristics of inclusive early childhood programs. These characteristics should not be used as a checklist to determine whether or not a program is inclusive, but rather as a common
framework for comparing and contrasting inclusive programs. Program philosophy refers to: the extent to which inclusion is seen as a starting point vs. having to be “earned” by a child; the values placed on family beliefs, culture, and involvement; and the proportion of children with disabilities to typically developing children enrolled. Scheduling refers to: whether children with disabilities are enrolled in a class with typically developing peers, and whether children with and without disabilities follow the same schedule. Curriculum refers to the extent to which the curriculum is: high quality; developmentally appropriate; meets the needs and challenges of all children; supports the active participation of children with disabilities in routines and activities; is adapted and modified appropriately; provides specialized supports to meet the needs of children with disabilities, and supports opportunities for social interactions. Adult issues refers to: support for adults (e.g., training, appropriate staffing); involvement of family members on the team; and collaboration among all team members.

Legislation Supporting Inclusive Services

The major legislative act supporting inclusive services for young children with disabilities is the 1975 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA guarantees children with disabilities the right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). While the law does not name use the word “inclusion,” it offers many provisions that support inclusion, including placement in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (McCollum, 2005). “The United States Department of Education explained that the term encompasses regular classrooms and other settings in schools such as lunchrooms and playgrounds in which children without disabilities participate” (Kunz & Eulass, 2009). An important aspect of the LRE is that inclusion does not simply mean physical integration, but participation in the general education curriculum. Within states, the local education agency (LEA) is responsible for the education of 3-5 year olds.
with disabilities (McCollum, 2005). Kunz & Eulass (2009) describe a placement continuum that identifies a variety of educational settings and the order in which they should be considered:

1. General education with no supplementary aids or services
2. General education with supplementary aids and services
3. Resource support (i.e., placement in a special education classroom less than 40% of the school day)
4. Self-contained placement (i.e., placement in a special education classroom more than 40% of the school day)
5. Separate special education day school

In addition to IDEA, other legislation supports inclusion. The Head Start Performance Standards of Services for Children with Disabilities provides comprehensive developmental services for young children and their families. The Americans with Disabilities Act protects the rights of individuals with disabilities from discrimination in public accommodations including public and private childcare programs. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs or activities that utilize federal funding (McCollum, 2005).

**Professional Support for Inclusion**

In additional to legislation, the practice of including young children with disabilities has received strong support from prominent organizations and scholars in the field of early care and education. The DEC/NAEYC joint position statement on inclusion (2009) validates inclusive practices.
The notion that young children with disabilities and their families are full members of the community reflects societal values about promoting opportunities for development and learning, and a sense of belonging for every child. It also reflects a reaction against previous educational practices of separating and isolating children with disabilities. (p. 1)

Other prominent scholars have drawn powerful conclusions about inclusion, demonstrating the value they place on the lives of individuals with disabilities as well as their understanding of the research about inclusive services. Strain (2014) states that all children with special needs deserve inclusion, despite the severity of their disability. Citing evidence that inclusion works best to produce desired outcomes only when young children are included at least several days per week in social and educational environments with typical peers, Strain also cautions against a “continuum of services” that may be too broad to ensure that level of inclusion. Barton and Smith (2014) declare, “The individual outcomes of preschool inclusion should include access, membership, participation, friendships, and support” (p. 1).

Understanding Inclusion From a Systems Perspective

Inclusion in early care and education is a complex endeavor, which can be influenced by activity in a context as small as a child’s home and as large as federal legislation. To effectively tackle the variety of settings that impact inclusive services for young children, Odom (2002) established the tradition of considering inclusion from a systems perspective. Relying on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems framework, he used the following categories to organize research on inclusion:

1. **Microsystem** level studies address individual contexts in which a student participates (e.g., home, school, playground).
2. *Mesosystem* level studies address the interactions between two microsystems or the influence that one microsystem has on another microsystem (e.g., what happens to a child at home can impact performance at school).

3. *Exosystem* level studies address the ways in which social policies at the local, state, and federal level impact inclusive services for young children.

4. *Macrosystem* level studies address the ways in which cultural and societal values and expectations impact inclusive opportunities for young children.

Information about inclusive early childhood education related to each systems level is discussed in the following paragraphs. As there is a growing body of research on the topic of inclusion in early care and education, as well as ongoing work to improve inclusive services, the information discussed is not comprehensive, but highlights selected ideas to illustrate how an ecological systems perspective can be applied to this topic. This study, however, will target an understanding of inclusive services for young children primarily through the lens of program level administrators and state-level stakeholders, and thus is considered an exosystem level study. Teachers and therapists who work directly with children will be interviewed about inclusion as well, shedding some light on the case from a microsystem perspective.

**Microsystem**

An understanding of how programs are organized (e.g., program models), an understanding staff responsibilities (e.g., personnel roles), and an understanding of frameworks for developing and delivering content (instructional strategies) are all important components to consider when studying individual inclusive classrooms (i.e., microsystems).

**Program models.** McCollum (2005) describes three types of program models that can be used to organize a program. In an *itinerant model*, teachers travel to inclusive settings to provide
special education services. In a **blended model**, personnel with different expertise and potentially funded differently, work together in one setting. In a **team-based model**, a lead teacher works with a team that may include another teacher, therapists, and associate staff; the team plans services together but may spend varying amounts of time implementing services.

**Personnel roles.** McCollum (2005) also explains that a variety of professionals provide services to young children in inclusive settings, including early childhood special education teachers and related service providers such as therapists. An understanding of the qualifications and responsibilities of each professional is a key component of providing individualized services in inclusive environments. In addition to developing and delivering instruction, the primary role of the early childhood special education teacher is to establish solid, lasting relationships with other members of the team, including families. In their study of three communities moving from self-contained special education programs to inclusive programs, DeVore and Russell (2007) described how professionals entering into a teaming relationship were able to build trust over time. “As team members recognized each others’ skills, professionals began to create a sense of trust, equality, and team building. Preschool teachers and therapists increasingly shared information in a reciprocal way” (p. 194-195).

**Instructional strategies.** In their 2014 *Recommended Practices*, DEC identified several components needed to provide specialized instruction for young children with disabilities. Three key practices regarding instruction are:

1. Practitioners plan for and provide the level of support, accommodations, and adaptations needed for the child to access, participate, and learn within and across activities and routines.
2. Practitioners use systematic instructional strategies with fidelity to teach skills and to promote child engagement and learning.
3. Practitioners use coaching or consultation strategies with primary caregivers or other adults to facilitate positive adult-child interactions and instruction intentionally designed to promote child learning and development.

DeVore and Russell (2007) emphasize the importance of team members working together to design and embed instruction based on a child’s IEP goals, within and across routines. In their work with the National Professional Development Center on Inclusion (NPDCI), Wesley and Buysse (2008) name several promising strategies that early childhood educators can apply in inclusive environments. These include: (a) Universal Design for Learning (UDL), (b) tiered models for early intervention [e.g., Recognition and Response, the Teaching Pyramid from the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL)], and (c) evidence-based practice to support sound decision making.

**Mesosystem**

Mesosystem studies address the interactions between two or more microsystems. In their study of the development of inclusive programs, DeVore and Russell (2007) describe how inclusive services were initiated by parents' requests to move special education services from a school setting to a community setting. Their study illustrates the importance of communication between one inclusive environment and another when planning for students’ transition from preschool to kindergarten.

In their chapter related to family perceptions of inclusion, Beckman, Hanson, and Horn (2002) describe several themes that influence parents’ perspectives about community programs. Two themes are especially relevant to mesosystem level issues. The theme *the match between the program and the perceived child and family needs* addresses logistical concerns (e.g., location, program cost), availability of specialized services (e.g., individualized instruction,
therapy), and relative class size (e.g., child to adult ratio that permits individual attention).

“Family members reported good experiences with inclusive programs when the services the program provided matched their child’s needs” (p. 103). The theme *support for families* highlighted the importance of key individuals (e.g., teachers, administrators) providing the important information and resources needed to make inclusive opportunities a possibility for families.

**Exosystem**

Exosystem level influences on inclusive early care and education include social policies at the local, state, and federal levels. An important factor to consider, relevant to the exosystem, is the organizational context for service provision. McCollum (2005) defines the organizational context as, “those agencies or systems that put together systems of service, gain sufficient resources to support the system, and ensure that intended services are delivered” (p. 19) and she goes on to list a variety of educational contexts, including: public school early childhood programs, private preschools, Head Start programs, public or private childcare programs, and agency services. Some organizational contexts have requirements for providing services to children with disabilities. For example, Head Start requires that inclusive services are provided and that at least 10% of enrollment must consist of children with disabilities. Pre-k programs also may serve children with disabilities, based on decisions made by an IEP team.

State-wide and community wide groups often convene for the purposes of improving federal, state, and local policies related to inclusive early childhood services. In their study of a rural Midwestern community transitioning from self-contained early childhood special education services to inclusive services, DeVore and Russell (2007) describe how a group of community stakeholders representing early care and education programs came together with the task of
planning and creating inclusive environments for preschoolers with developmental disabilities. The school district supplied underlying supports such as grant budget management services and opportunities to convene monthly meetings at a community center.

**Macrosystem**

Factors impacting inclusion in early care and education at the macrosystem level are factors that exist at a societal level, often related to cultural beliefs and values. According to Odom, Buysse, and Soukakou (2011), “Inclusion has multiple meanings but is essentially about belonging, participating, and reaching one’s full potential in a diverse society” (p. 347). Hanson (2002) states, “The cultural and linguistic background of children and their families exerts a major influence on children’s access to and participation in educational services” (p. 147). She recommends that educators: (a) provide culturally sensitive services, (b) meet children’s learning needs by providing services for children, and communicating with parents, in the family’s native language, (c) philosophically value diversity in language and culture, (d) facilitate the coordination of various service systems (e.g., early education, special education, and bilingual education), and (e) provide family support and services by being family-centered and encouraging meaningful family participation.

Cheatham and Santos (2009) describe how *locus of control* and *self-orientation* can impact teaming interactions among early learning professionals and parents. An *internal locus of control* perspective is characterized by ideas such as: little in life is pre-determined, every problem has a solution, and success comes from individual’s actions. In contrast, an *external locus of control* might be characterized by ideas such as: certain things in life cannot be changed and must be accepted, some problems do not have solutions, and life is what happens to you. Problems and misunderstandings may arise when early childhood professionals approach service
delivery from an internal locus of control perspective while working with parents whose perspective represents an external locus of control. Similarly, tensions may arise between educators and families when there are differences in self-orientation. Educators may emphasize an individualist perspective, in which independence and self-reliance are valued. Some families with diverse cultural backgrounds may embody collectivist views that place value on conformity to group norms, harmony, and interdependence. To bridge these differences, Cheatham and Santos suggest that educators learn more about families’ cultural practices and focus on how those practices can contribute positively to their child’s learning. Educators can then develop and implement meaningful interventions that incorporate family goals and perspectives.

**Benefits of Inclusive Services for Young Children with Disabilities**

Numerous scholars have discovered the benefits of providing inclusive services for young children with disabilities. Research has not yielded drawbacks to inclusion, but scholars do acknowledge that inclusive services need to be comprised of high quality components (e.g., effective collaboration, carefully planned classroom environments and instructional strategies, qualified administration and other personnel) in order to be effective (Barton & Smith, 2014; Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; McCollum, 2005; Purcell, Horn, & Palmer, 2007; Strain, 2014). Two major positive outcomes of inclusion are discussed in the following sections. These are: (a) benefits for children with and without disabilities and (b) high-quality programming.

**Benefits for Children With and Without Disabilities**

Inclusion is not a strategy aimed only at improving the educational experience of children with disabilities. Children with a range of disabilities can benefit from participating in inclusive settings, and families of children with and without disabilities generally hold positive views of inclusion (Barton & Smith, 2014; Odom, et al., 2011). Typically developing children experience
positive developmental, educational and attitudinal outcomes from inclusive experiences (Strain, 2014). Buysse and Hollingsworth (2009) state, “Inclusion likely helps these children develop tolerance and acceptance of individual differences in their peers” (p. 22). In inclusive settings, children with disabilities are able to build friendships with their same-age, typically developing peers (Strain, 2014) and have the potential to develop skills in the area of social competence (Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009). Strain (2014) states that children are more likely to maintain newly learned skills after initial teaching within the context of an inclusive environment versus a segregated environment. He also cautions against offering inclusive placements only to children who have mild or moderate disabilities. “There is no evidence that children with particular types or severity of disabilities are poor candidates for inclusion” (p. 1).

**High-quality Programming**

Some scholars have linked high quality programming to inclusive environments. Strain (2014) states, “Programs that are characterized by inclusive service delivery tend to be state-of-the-art on a variety of other dimensions, including: extensive parental involvement; highly-structured scope, sequence, and method of instruction; and attention to repeated outcome assessments” (p. 1). In their brief summary of the literature on inclusion in early childhood, Barton and Smith (2014) write, “The quality of preschool programs including at least one student with a disability were as good or better than preschool programs without children with disabilities” (p. 1). Buysse and Hollingsworth (2009) reiterate these ideas. “The quality of early childhood programs that enroll children with disabilities is as good as, or slightly better than, the quality of programs that do not enroll these children” (p. 29).

These emphatic statements that link inclusive environments to quality must be read with caution, as measures used to assess quality in early childhood environments [e.g., the Early
Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS)] may not be sufficient to measure quality in inclusive environments (Barton & Smith, 2014; Odom et al., 2011). Odom et al. (2011) found promise in the development of assessment tools such as the Quality Inclusive Experiences Measure (QIEM; Wolery, Pauca, Brashers, & Grant, 2000) and the Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP; Soukakou, 2012) that are designed to specifically measure the quality of inclusive programming. The authors, however, emphasize the importance of innovations in teaching as the most effective tool for improving program quality.

The most promising ideas for achieving program quality for children with and without disabilities in the future likely will come not through increasing program monitoring and accountability but through innovations that fundamentally change current structures and ways of thinking about program quality to ensure that each and every child succeeds. (p. 351)

Factors that Facilitate Inclusion in Early Childhood Environments

Research on inclusive services in early care and education has shown that certain factors act as facilitators to implementing and maintaining inclusive practices, while other factors act as barriers. In the following sections, four key facilitators are described: collaboration, high quality programming, competent personnel and shared vision.

Collaboration

Collaboration is a key factor necessary for inclusion to work (Odom & Schwartz, 2002). In one respect, this pertains to collaboration among individuals from different disciplines, who hold different underlying philosophies, and who implement different roles (e.g., teacher, therapist, parent) (Barton & Smith, 2014; Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; McCollum, 2005).
Collaboration among adults is not easy; trusting relationships must be built and nurtured over time. Joint training events and team building activities may be helpful in bridging philosophical gaps and bringing individuals together (McCollum, 2005).

In another respect, collaboration must occur at the agency level when a variety of organizational contexts are working together to provide inclusive services. McCollum (2005) describes several platforms that bring agencies together for the purposes of collaboration. At the national level, the Federal Interagency Coordinating Council (FICC) coordinates federal resources, legislation, and policy in relationship to IDEA Part C services. In the Midwest State selected for this case study, the Head Start Collaborative Project facilitates the sharing of training and resources, and promotes collaboration among agencies at the local level. At the local community level, programs such as Head Start, public schools, and community preschools create interagency agreements.

**High Quality Programming**

High quality individualized intervention can only occur within the context of a high quality program. McCollum (2005) describes the building blocks of high quality programs. First, programs must create a good early childhood environment with appropriate spatial arrangements, materials, and interpersonal interactions to support the learning of all children. Next, adaptations and modifications such as individualized supports must be put in place to give children with disabilities access to materials and learning opportunities. Next, embedded opportunities to practice and improve behavior and skill development must be provided to children with disabilities throughout the day. Finally, explicit intervention must be provided to target goals not easily addressed in regular classroom routines.
Strain (2014) also describes key elements of high quality early childhood programming necessary to fully realize the potential of inclusive service delivery. These include: (a) provisions for early screening, referral, and programming, to insure a minimal delay between problem development and intervention, and (b) provisions for the assessment of family strengths and skill needs, along with supports that reflect those strengths and needs. Purcell et al. (2007) also emphasize the importance of having organizational structures in place to support the continuance of inclusive programs. These supports include a plan for teaming, the establishment of relationships with community programs, and informal mentoring plans.

**Competent Personnel**

Personnel in inclusive early care and education programs work at both the classroom level and the administrative level. At the classroom level, educators must have skills in key areas, including: (a) assessing the educational needs of all children; (b) planning instruction that is relevant to early learning standards; (c) planning instruction for large groups, small groups, and individuals - including specialized, individualized, and embedded instruction; (d) coordinating interactions among peers that are socially meaningful and educationally relevant; (e) monitoring child outcomes and adjusting instructional goals as needed; (f) planning for transitions to new educational environments; and (g) communicating with families (Barton & Smith, 2014; Strain, 2014). Administrators in early care and education play an important role in improving services for young children with disabilities. As leaders, they are often in a position to influence change and may be considered *key personnel* in ‘making inclusion happen’ (Lieber et al., 2000; Purcell et al., 2007). Administrators in inclusive early care and education settings must also be competent in a variety of skill areas. They must understand the systems involved in early care and education well enough to work towards eliminating state and local policies and
procedures that promote separation rather than integration of all children (Strain, 2014). They shoulder the responsibilities of providing personnel with training, materials, and planning time. They can encourage innovation in models of service delivery and facilitate staff arrangements such as consultation, coaching, and team teaching (Odom & Schwartz, 2002; Strain, 2014).

**Shared Vision**

When all parties involved have a shared vision of services, inclusive programs run more smoothly. A shared vision is, at minimum, an agreement between administrators and teaching staff that inclusion is the best plan for a program and the children enrolled in it (Purcell et al., 2007). Developing a shared vision may take effort but will yield benefits. “Inclusion, by its very nature, involves teachers, programs, and agencies that approach instruction from different philosophical and educational orientations. Time devoted to ensuring that all participants share, or at least respect, the others' vision is a major influence on successful implementation” (Lieber et al., 2000, p. 97)

**Factors that Hinder Inclusion in Early Childhood Environments**

Some factors may act as barriers to the successful implementation of inclusive early care and education environments. Major barriers include: policy issues, lack of resources and adequately prepared personnel, and lack of shared vision.

**Policy Issues**

McCollum (2005) describes a variety of policy-related barriers to inclusive preschool environments. Many of them are especially problematic when programs attempt to collaborate with one another. Barriers include: differences in program standards for personnel (e.g.,
qualifications, certification), differences in eligibility requirements for enrollment, restrictive funding, restrictive transportation guidelines, and differences in the schedule (daily, yearly). Even when policies themselves are not necessarily problematic, policy changes can present challenges for programs. In their study of five programs that initiated and maintained inclusive early childhood programs, Purcell et al. (2007) described this difficulty. “When a federal program such as Head Start changed regulations, the district or cooperative would work to adapt the preschool program regulations just in time for regulations of another federal program, such as IDEA, to change” (p. 94).

**Lack of Resources and Adequately Prepared Personnel**

Inclusive programs sometimes experience difficulty due to lack of resources and lack of adequately prepared personnel. McCollum (2005) identified various barriers due to the lack of key resources, including: an adequate number of high-quality early childhood programs, the provision of technical assistance for programs and staff, and funding for supports such as assistive technology and professional development. In some cases, programs experience problems due to high staff turnover, especially in childcare environments (McCollum, 2005; Purcell et al., 2007). In other cases, issues arise because staff members are not prepared to implement inclusive services. This may be due to inadequate training at 2- and 4-year institutions of higher education, especially in terms of learning how to work with children who have disabilities (Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; Chang, Early, & Winton, 2005; Early & Winton, 2001). Staff may also be unprepared to implement inclusive services because they feel uncomfortable with their roles and responsibilities, or because they are not provided the necessary training and technical assistance (Buysse & Hollingsworth, 2009; McCollum, 2005).

**Lack of Shared Vision**
Just as a shared vision can facilitate the implementation of quality inclusive early care and education environments, lack of shared vision can hinder that process. In their study of the initiation and continuation of inclusive early education programs, Purcell et al. (2007) found that during the program initiation phase, inclusion was often supported by special education personnel, while other parties, including parents, initially expressed concerns. McCollum (2005) lists attitudinal barriers, including philosophical differences across settings and personnel, as well as a lack of “ownership” of providing services for children with special needs, as factors that may contribute to a lack of shared vision.

**Linking Inclusion to Collaboration**

In their synthesis of research on preschool inclusion, Odom and Schwartz (2002) offered recommendations for teachers and administrators currently working inclusive environments. They also offered suggestions for programs that were starting and maintaining inclusive preschool classrooms. A common thread running through their advice is the importance of collaboration.

Collaboration is the cornerstone of effective inclusive programs. Collaboration among adults, including professionals and parents, within and across systems and programs is essential to inclusive programs. Collaboration among adults, from different disciplines and often with different philosophies, is one of the greatest challenges to successful implementation of inclusive programs. (p. 156)

**Conclusion**

As demonstrated in this chapter, there is a growing body of literature about the creation of comprehensive early care and education systems, as well as literature related to the maintenance of successful collaborations in early care and education. One major gap within in
this body of literature, however, is research about the ways in which integrated and collaborative early care and education systems and programs can address the needs of children with disabilities. Although the idea of including services for children with disabilities within a comprehensive system has been embraced by the “Ovals” framework (ECSWG, 2011) and adopted into statewide systemic efforts, such as ExceleRate, Illinois’ Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) (Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, n.d.), more research is needed on this topic. We must start with an understanding of how ECSE services are currently integrated into early care and education collaborations and move towards an understanding of the factors needed to facilitate the inclusion of ECSE services within an integrated system of early care and education.

As mixed delivery models of state preschool programming are found in a majority of states (Schumacher et al., 2005), a second gap in the literature is research about partnerships between state preschool programs and community programs such as childcare centers and childcare homes. Whitebook et al. (2008) call for research that aims to understand best practices in promoting positive relationships between school districts and community-based childcare, while Holcomb (2006) calls for research related to launching, monitoring, and maintaining high-quality pre-K in a system that spans school and community classrooms. Finally, Harris (2012) calls for research that specifically addresses state preschool partnerships with community programs in rural communities. The county chosen for this case study uses innovative strategies to build a community-wide collaboration of early care and education programs. Young children with disabilities reside in this rural county, and are impacted by the ability of the collaboration to provide special education services. Thus, this case study seeks to add to the body of literature on collaborations between state preschool programs and community programs, while contributing
knowledge specifically related to ECSE services and the unique challenges faced by rural communities.
Chapter 3—Methods

The subject of this instrumental case study was defined as the early care and education programs in Thompson County, a rural county in a Midwestern state. Emphases were placed on understanding the collaborative nature of service provision for students with and without disabilities, and the ways in which programs collaborated to maximize resources. Many of the programs in the county work closely with one another to provide services for young children and their families. A few other programs do not work in strong collaboration with the central partnership, but still play an important role in serving young children. In this Midwestern state, most policies and funding decisions for early care and education services are determined at the state level. As Thompson County is situated within this Midwestern state, state-level activity and the perspectives of key stakeholders provided a backdrop of contextual information for the case.

An instrumental case study was an appropriate methodology for this investigation. Unlike an intrinsic case study, in which the case itself is of primary interest, an instrumental case study serves the purpose of gaining understanding on larger issues. “For instrumental case study, the issue is dominant; we start and end with issues dominant” (Stake, 1995, p. 16). In this case, the larger issues were: collaboration in early care and education; collaborations specifically between public preschool programs and private childcare programs; the ways in which these collaborations do, or do not, serving young children with disabilities; and the ways in which programs work together to maximize resources.

Researcher Identity

Maxwell (2005) states, “Qualitative researchers have long realized that in this field, the researcher is the instrument of the research” (p. 38). He suggests that a researcher identity memo can be a valuable tool at any point in a study, helping a researcher explore his or her assumptions.
and experiential knowledge on a topic, which may influence a study. A researcher should be
conscious of such information and use it as part of the inquiry process. Schwandt (2007)
emphasizes the importance of critical reflection on one’s own actions and predispositions. He
encourages researchers to distinguish *enabling prejudice* from *disabling prejudice*, but points out
that judgment is inherently necessary in research. “Our understanding of ourselves and our world
depends upon having judgment” (p. 21).

I have spent my entire career in roles that relate in some way to early care and education.
I have worked in private childcare centers; taught in self-contained early childhood special
education programs in public schools; worked as a self-employed consultant to provide inclusive
services in private schools and after school programs; studied early care and education during my
undergraduate, Master’s, and doctoral programs; and participated in state level committees on
early care and education.

While I have both book knowledge and experiential knowledge about most, if not all, of
the topics that I investigated in this dissertation, a few experiences in my past have been very
powerful in shaping my views on collaboration and inclusion in early care and education. I
continually brought these views to the forefront of my conscious when collecting and analyzing
data to ensure that they did not distort my understanding of participants’ words and actions.

One key experience was teaching in a self-contained early childhood special education
classroom. The program I worked for, which operated about a dozen classrooms, was part of a
local school district. The program had obtained Head Start funding, state preschool funding, and
also served children under IDEA. The program was also NAEYC accredited.

Every classroom, with the exception of mine, included children supported by each of the
funding streams. All of my students were served with special education funds, as the district had
decided to maintain one self-contained ECSE classroom for students with the most severe needs. To meet funding stream regulations, every classroom followed the guidelines of the state preschool program, Head Start, and NAEYC. For teachers of inclusive classrooms, this was a cumbersome, but relevant endeavor, as all of the programs had guidelines geared toward meeting the needs of children in inclusive environments. For me, this was a nightmare. I was creating and operating a classroom based on the principles of developmentally appropriate, inclusive education without the benefit of an inclusive environment.

Structured, teacher directed activities were discouraged. I was instructed to schedule large chunks of time for free play each day; I believed that the children in my class needed shorter periods of time with systematic instruction in play skills. I also believed they needed typical peers as role models to make significant gains in play skills. Preventative strategies were discouraged. For example, I had a student who dumped out any container without a lid. To prevent this behavior, I placed lids on containers of toys and supplies. While children could easily remove the lids, I was instructed to remove them because they impeded children’s access to materials. Creating daily schedules based on individual student’s needs was discouraged. For example, I was required to schedule two hours of naptime per day. Parents of several children with autism told me that their child had not taken a nap in years and asked me to provide instruction during that time. I was not allowed to do that.

My experience teaching within the context of a program that used multiple funding streams has made me highly skeptical that this type of program can adequately meet the needs of children with disabilities. This skepticism had the potential to impact my understanding of participants’ reports about how collaborative programs are able to serve children with disabilities.
A second key experience was working as a self-employed consultant for several years. Families of children with disabilities hired me to provide special education services in private childcare, school, or after school environments. My services included curriculum development, lesson planning, direct instruction, environmental arrangement and supports, and extensive collaboration and consultation with program staff. I worked with many teachers and assistants who had never worked with a child with a disability and had never studied special education. In my experience, however, if the staff members were willing and eager to include the child with a disability, we could always create an inclusive placement that worked. Those experiences shaped my belief that attitude is an essential component in determining whether or not inclusion will be successful and have made me highly optimistic that inclusive placements can work if staff members just “have the right attitude.” This optimism had the potential to impact my understanding of participants’ reports about factors that act as facilitators and barriers to high quality inclusion.

**Context of the Case**

This case study is situated in Thompson County, a very rural area in a Midwest state. The population is almost exclusively Caucasian and English speaking. The average poverty level in Thompson County is relatively similar to the average poverty level throughout the state. In addition to private childcare programs, three types of early care and education services are provided in Thompson County: state preschool, Head Start, and Early Childhood Special Education. Four main entities provide these services, often working together and with other community partners. The Regional Office of Education and Thompson County School District provide state preschool programming. The Prairie Valley Agency (PVA) provides Head Start programming. The North Central Special Education (NCSE) Cooperative provides early
childhood special education services. These programs have evolved over time, often expanding their options based on identified gaps in service throughout the county. See Table 3 for details about each program.

**State Preschool Programs**

State preschool is available throughout this Midwest state. While intended eventually to be universal (i.e., serving all three and four-year-olds), budget constraints only allow service to a percentage of the population. Local entities, including school districts, Head Start programs, private childcare centers, or other community agencies apply for state preschool grants. Programs may differ along a variety of factors, including: classroom location, transportation options, specific eligibility criteria, and provision of services to children with special needs. All state preschool programs, however, adhere to a common set of guidelines and are required to participate in the statewide QRIS. The state visits state preschool programs every few years to monitor them for compliance. Following those visits, programs develop performance plans to target their areas of weakness.

At each state preschool location, 80% of the children enrolled must individually qualify for state preschool services. In order to qualify, children must be at least three years old, but not yet five years old, at the start of the school year. Classroom-based state preschool sessions are 2.5 hours per day, in either the morning or the afternoon. In most cases, enrollment is 20 children per session, and programs are expected to keep programs full to capacity, filling slots from the waiting list or community if children exit mid-year.

State preschool classrooms have several requirements related to instruction. Teachers must be state licensed early childhood education teachers, while teaching assistants must have a para-educator license. Programs must address the state’s early learning and development
standards through the use of state approved curriculum and assessment tools. All state preschool programs in Thompson County use the *Creative Curriculum*, accompanied by the *Teaching Strategies Gold* assessment. In addition to classroom programming, state preschool programs host one family night per month.

State preschool is an entirely free program. Parents cannot be asked to pay tuition or to contribute money for supplies, equipment, or field trips. If families want to contribute, they can donate time or services to the classroom. Two entities in Thompson County provide state preschool programming, the Regional Office of Education, and Thompson County School District.

**Regional Office of Education State Preschool Programs.** The Midwestern state in this case is divided into approximately 50 regions, each with its own Regional Office of Education. Each regional office serves a specific geographical area, ranging in scope from a portion of a county to multiple counties, depending on the population of those counties. Each regional office assumes responsibilities for educational administration; cooperation management; financial, health, and life safety; public relations; and transportation needs of their catchment area. In most cases, the services of a regional office are designed to complement and support the services of individual school districts. Both regional offices and school districts, however, can apply for and implement state preschool programming.

The regional office began providing state preschool services about nine years ago. At that time, the regional office superintendent investigated the provision of early care and education services throughout the entire region, which included twelve school districts in five counties, recognizing that while many individual school districts had state preschool programs in place, gaps in service still existed. The superintendent approached each of the school districts in the
region with this concern, and asked if they would mind if the regional office applied for additional state preschool programs to serve their community. Most school districts were fine with this plan, as they did not have the space to house more programs.

Over the course of a few years, the regional office did receive funding for six additional state preschool programs, which were placed in four of the five counties served by the regional office. Three of those state preschool programs were placed in Thompson County, which is served by only one unit school district, Thompson County School District. These three new programs supplemented the one previously existing state preschool program in the county, which was operated through the school district and housed in a district building. Thompson County is the largest county, in terms of area, in the state, and has the lowest population density of all the counties served by the regional office. Thus, the goal of these three new programs was to serve children who were scattered in small pockets throughout a very large geographical region.

While each of the three regional office state preschool programs in Thompson County is unique, they share some common characteristics and activities. With a few exceptions related to teacher in-service days, regional office state preschool programs follow the same academic calendar, which matches the school district calendar, and spans from August to May. The regional office programs collaborate with one another on joint field trips and parent nights.

The regional office can generally keep its programs full with 20 children per session. Due to mobility across counties, numbers dip from time to time, but have never gone below 17. All types of children, including those with special needs, are technically eligible for the regional office’s state preschool programs. In practice, children with broad developmental delays or significant disabilities are not enrolled in these programs. Children with speech only IEPs, however, are routinely served in these programs; itinerant speech services are provided via pull
out model by a school district speech therapist. If children in regional office state preschool programs have IEPs, or are referred for special education services, the state preschool teacher attends the IEP meeting to contribute information about the child’s present level of performance.

**Regional office state preschool program at Children’s Castle.** Children’s Castle is a private childcare facility. It is located in the town of Harper, which is by far the largest community in Thompson County. Harper has about 3,000 residents. Children’s Castle serves children six weeks to twelve years old. It is open from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. year round. The regional office funds a classroom teacher and aide for the 20 children enrolled in the state preschool program at Children’s Castle, but does not provide transportation. This program operates in the morning only (8:00 – 10:30 a.m.). The state preschool classroom is housed in a classroom that is also used by the childcare center. As part of this arrangement, the teacher must navigate using space and materials that are used by the childcare center for the remainder of the day.

The partnership between the regional office and Children’s Castle was initiated based on the idea that it was better to have children stay in one place all day to receive both childcare and education, rather than bus them back and forth between two programs. A few children enrolled in this program have speech-only IEPs and receive itinerant speech therapy. Children with more significant delays are not enrolled. About half of the children enrolled in the Children’s Castle state preschool program are enrolled in the childcare center before and/or after the state preschool session; the center director gives those families a discount of $15.00 per week because the state preschool program is intended to be free. Many of the families enrolled in this state preschool program are familiar with Children’s Castle because older siblings have attended in the past. The director estimates that about 75% of the children enrolled in the center live in the

Licensing and accreditation standards are very significant to the regional office state preschool program at Children’s Castle. First, because Children’s Castle is a licensed childcare center, mandatory DCFS licensing requirements play a part in how the regional office state preschool program is implemented. Second, Children’s Castle has voluntarily earned accreditation through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Third, Children’s Castle has earned the highest possible level in the statewide QRIS system, which is voluntary for childcare centers. If a center with a QRIS rating houses another program, that program takes on the center’s rating. Thus, the regional office state preschool program is also considered to be a top-ranking program.

**Regional office state preschool program at St. Patrick.** St. Patrick is a private Catholic school. It serves children from Kindergarten to eighth grade. It is open from 8:05 a.m. to 3:10 p.m. and follows the same academic calendar as the school district. The regional office funds a classroom teacher and aide, who work at St. Patrick full time to provide two state preschool sessions per day. The morning session is from 8:15 to 10:45 a.m. The afternoon session is from 12:30 to 3:00 p.m. The regional office rents classroom space in the basement of St. Patrick and pays the school a janitorial fee. The regional office state preschool program does not share classroom space or materials with any other programs.

The program at St. Patrick started about nine years ago, as the regional office’s inaugural state preschool program. Some of the children enrolled have siblings enrolled at St. Patrick and may themselves attend St. Patrick for kindergarten. In the most recent school year, approximately one-third of the 20 students in each session intended to enroll at St. Patrick for kindergarten; the others will attend the school district program.
The regional office state preschool program at St. Patrick does not encounter the same licensing challenges as the one at Children’s Castle. Because the program at St. Patrick is arranged through a simple rental of space, and because St. Patrick is a private school, not a licensed childcare center, the program does not participate in DCFS licensing. It does, however participate in the state’s QRIS system, which is mandatory for all state preschool programs.

Transportation arrangements at the St. Patrick state preschool program are noteworthy. Technically, neither the regional office nor St. Patrick provides transportation. Children in this program can, however, benefit from one-way transportation provided by the school district. As long as children live along an existing bus route, a public school district cannot deny its residents transportation to a private school. As a result, children who attend the morning state preschool session may benefit from one-way transportation to school, while those attending the afternoon session may benefit from one-way transportation home from school. This option is not applicable mid-day as no bus routes are running.

**Regional office state preschool Home Provider program.** The regional office state preschool Home Provider program counts as one “class” for the sake of the state preschool grant, and officially serves 20 children in 11 licensed childcare homes throughout Thompson County. While the licensed childcare homes can serve children from birth to age 12, at least two children in each home must individually qualify for state preschool in order for the childcare home to participate in the Home Provider program.

The Home Provider teacher arranges to visit each childcare home one time per week, for two hours. She visits three homes on Wednesdays and two homes (one in the morning and one in the afternoon) on all other weekdays. She works with all preschool aged children in each childcare home, not just those enrolled in the program. Thus, while 20 children are enrolled,
approximately 30 children receive services.

The program is delivered via small group instruction. The Home Provider teacher brings some items with her, but also relies on the materials available in each childcare home for lessons and activities. Because childcare homes do not often have the resources found in state preschool programs, the regional office has incorporated a resource room of educational materials and supplies into the state preschool grant for the Home Provider program.

This program was created for children who were enrolled in licensed childcare homes; due to rural isolation and limited transportation options, they could not attend a center-based program. Classroom-based state preschool programs in Thompson County prioritize enrollment of four-year-olds. The Home Provider program, in contrast, regularly enrolls children who are three years old. Those children are generally offered a space in a state preschool classroom the following year.

Because the Home Provider program is based entirely on itinerant services, communication between the Home Provider teacher and childcare providers is a significant issue. At the beginning of the school year, the Home Provider teacher works with providers to collect parent paperwork. Throughout the year, she meets with them once per month in the evening to provide trainings they need to maintain licensure (e.g., CPR, first aid), help them with paperwork needed for credentialing, and brainstorm about instructional strategies. Because the Home Provider teacher does not have face-to-face contact with families, she uses communication folders and an educational app to keep them informed of their children’s progress.

**Thompson County School District state preschool program.** The Thompson County School District has only ever had one state preschool program. It was grandfathered in as a state preschool program in 2012, having been sponsored through an earlier version of state-funded
early childhood education since 1995. The school district program is currently housed at Spring Brook Elementary, a public elementary school that also houses all of the kindergarten classrooms for the district, along with an Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) classroom run by North Central Special Education (NCSE) Cooperative.

Spring Brook Elementary School follows the school district academic calendar, and is open from 8:15 a.m. to 2:40 p.m. It is located in the very small community of Spring Brook (population approximately 250) located ten miles away from Harper, the largest town in the county that houses all of the district’s other schools, Children’s Castle, and St. Patrick. Due to financial struggles, Spring Brook Elementary School was closed for several years, but was recently re-opened as the district’s early childhood center. Prior to its location at Spring Brook Elementary, the school district state preschool program was located in the high school in Harper.

The Thompson County School District state preschool grant funds one classroom. It has a morning session and an afternoon session, with 20 children enrolled in each. Children with speech only IEP’s are enrolled in this program. They are served by a school district speech therapist housed at Spring Brook Elementary School. Speech therapy delivery nearly always is delivered via pull out model. The state preschool teacher attends IEP meetings for students with speech only IEPs.

Children in the school district who are four years old and who have been diagnosed with a developmental delay are very often also enrolled in this state preschool program. It is considered their secondary placement, while enrollment in the special education cooperative’s ECSE classroom is considered their primary placement. The practice of enrolling children with special needs in the state preschool program began about four years ago. After attending a conference, the school district’s state preschool coordinator and special needs coordinator felt
they could be doing more to comply with state preschool implementation guidelines.

Because several of the cooperative’s ECSE students are dually enrolled in the district program, the district has added extra staff members to its classroom. In the morning session there is one additional aide; in the afternoon, there are two. The district’s special education department supplies these aides for students who have challenging behavior or who need help with independent skills such as toileting. No direct services, neither push in nor pull out, are provided to these students during the portion of that day that they are enrolled in the state preschool program. However, staff members from their ECSE team regularly provide consultation and collaboration to staff members from the district preschool team. The district preschool teacher does attend IEP meetings for all students who are dually enrolled in her program and the ECSE program.

While children with developmental delays are included in classroom curriculum and assessment activities, the district preschool teacher is not responsible for their academic progress; that lies with the ECSE program. The purpose of their enrollment in the district classroom is to provide a social experience and to help teachers and staff members gauge how they are likely to handle the busier kindergarten environment.

The district preschool program is unique among state preschool programs in Thompson County because it provides two-way transportation to all of its students. Transportation is not funded by the state preschool grant; the district provides additional funds to cover that cost. Because Spring Brook Elementary is located 10 miles out of town, transportation arrangements are complex. In the morning, district preschool students ride a bus from their home into the town of Harper. Each bus makes stops at the public elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as at St. Patrick Catholic School. Students enrolled in Kindergarten (which is full day) and in the
morning district preschool session debus at the elementary school. From there, they board a shuttle bus to Spring Brook. At the end of the morning session, mini busses take the preschool students directly to their home. In the afternoon, mini busses pick up students enrolled in afternoon preschool session and take them directly from their home to Spring Brook. At the end of the school day, students enrolled in Kindergarten and afternoon preschool ride shuttle busses into the town of Harper and debus at the high school. From there, they board the appropriate bus to ride back to their home. Parents in the community indicate their preference of state preschool program (choosing among all that are offered in Thompson County) during the preschool screening process. The school district program is often selected first because of the transportation it provides.

**Prairie Valley Agency Head Start at Children’s Castle**

Like state preschool, Head Start is a free program. Head Start provides comprehensive services for families, including dental, hearing and vision services. The Prairie Valley Agency (PVA) provides Head Start programming to nine counties; this encompasses 28 different school districts. In Thompson County, PVA has two Head Start programs, both in Harper. One is a standalone Head Start center. The other is embedded in Children’s Castle, a childcare center that also collaborates with a regional office state preschool program. Only the Head Start site at Children’s Castle was investigated for this study.

The Head Start program at Children’s Castle enrolls 15 children in a 6.5-hour school day (8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.). The Head Start school year runs from the first week in September through the middle of May; and is slightly shorter than the calendar followed by the Thompson County School District. Head Start is not open on Mondays, which are reserved for planning, training, and meetings. Like the state preschool programs in Thompson County, Head Start uses
the Creative Curriculum and Teaching Strategies Gold.

The Head Start collaboration site at Children’s Castle is in its first year. The PVA Head Start program lost funding during the 2013 federal government sequestration, and eliminated some children from the program to reduce costs. When funds were reinstated, PVA wrote a grant for a collaboration site. The Children’s Castle location was a good fit because: 1) there were enough children in the community who qualified for and could benefit from Head Start, 2) Head Start already had a successful collaboration with a Children’s Castle program in another location; 3) a collaborative program is less expensive than a traditional Head Start program; and 4) enrolling children who qualified for Head Start into this program would open up more slots in the state preschool programs in Thompson County. Collaboration sites are appealing for Head Start programs because the childcare center provides the DCFS licensed building and hires the staff, removing those burdens from Head Start administration. Collaborations also ease the process of enrollment; as the childcare center likely already enrolls children who are eligible, Head Start only needs to do an application on them.

The collaborative arrangement between Head Start and Children’s Castle is based on the provision of a stipend that Head Start pays Children’s Castle to fund a teacher and aide to work in the Head Start collaboration classroom. That lump stipend is also used for a variety of other purposes, including insurance, utilities, food, and family services provided via the Head Start family advocate. Head Start also pays the center $2.00 per day per child for general expenses and $30.00 per year per child for supplies. Some services that are already in existence without the collaboration (e.g., a cook to prepare the meals) are not reimbursed through the stipend, and can be considered in-kind donations to Head Start. Children’s Castle and Head Start have a contract that requires them to meet every year to go over what is working and what is not working.
Many families enrolled in the Head Start program at Children’s Castle are working families and single families. Of the 15 children enrolled, only three stay for childcare outside of the Head Start day. Those who stay get wrap-around care by relying on Child Care Development Funds (CCDF). While not entirely free, monthly co-pays may be as low as $40.00 per month. Head Start does not currently provide any transportation to this program or the other Head Start program in Thompson County. Head Start’s ability to provide transportation in Thompson County has fluctuated over time due to funding levels.

Children with speech only IEPs are routinely enrolled in the Head Start collaboration classroom at Children’s Castle. A school district speech therapist provides itinerant speech therapy via pull out model. Children with developmental delays are sometimes enrolled in Head Start; this is considered as secondary placement to supplement their primary enrollment in the cooperative’s ECSE program. Children attend the Head Start program at Children’s Castle in the morning when most instruction occurs, and are transported by the school district to Spring Brook in the afternoon. Head Start does take responsibility for addressing the academic progress of children with special needs. The Head Start teacher incorporates children’s IEP goals into her lesson plans. Head Start also employs a Special Services Manager who works to meet the needs of children with disabilities.

Program requirements are a significant factor for the Head Start collaboration classroom. First, Head Start programs, like childcare centers, are required to be licensed by DCFS. Second, while Head Start programs are not required to be part of the statewide QRIS system, any program inside a childcare center takes on the rating off that center. Since Children’s Castle has earned the highest level of quality, the Head Start classroom is considered to be that level as well. Third, the program must meet all of the Head Start Performance Standards, which are
comprehensive and often more stringent than any of the other guidelines.

**North Central Special Education Early Childhood Program**

Early Childhood Special Education services are provided free for any child who qualifies under IDEA. In Thompson County, these services are provided through the North Central Special Education (NCSE) Cooperative, a joint agreement district organized to provide education for children with disabilities, from pre-K through high school graduation. The cooperative provides a variety of special education services to all of the school districts in a five county region, covering the same counties and school districts as the Regional Office of Education. An executive board (comprised of superintendents from all participating school districts) and a governing board (comprised of representatives from each of the districts’ school boards) convene regularly to make decisions about NCSE’s services.

Early childhood special education services are all delivered via self-contained early childhood special education (ECSE) classrooms, which are scattered throughout the five counties. The cooperative places its classrooms where there is a critical mass of children who need services. When one county or school district does not have enough children to form a complete program, those children are bussed to a program in another county or district. In the past, ECSE services for Thompson County residents were provided in a neighboring county. Two years ago, there were enough children in Thompson County to warrant a program, and the classroom was placed in Spring Brook Elementary; this was the only ECSE program investigated for this study.

The ECSE classroom follows Thompson County School District’s academic calendar. The ECSE program provides two-way transportation for children. If separate transportation is needed, the cooperative will provide it. However, about half of the students ride regular school
district busses. There is a morning session and an afternoon session of ECSE, which align with the morning and afternoon session of district preschool at Spring Brook Elementary. Enrollment fluctuates throughout the year as children qualify for services. The ECSE classroom enrolls children in Thompson County who have a primary diagnosis more significant than speech only needs. Children are generally found eligible with a developmental delay, but may also have a primary diagnosis of deafness, hearing impairment, other health impairment, or vision impairment (including blindness). Towards the end of the school year, there were eight students in each of the ECSE sessions.

In addition to the teacher, the cooperative provides two full time aides to the ECSE classroom. The cooperative employs a speech therapist, occupational therapist (OT), and physical therapist (PT) to serve the classroom. The speech therapist spends two full days in the classroom. The OT and PT each spend one day per week in the classroom. Therapists reported that their services are provided almost exclusively in the classroom environment, embedded within classroom routines and activities.

Multiple curriculums are used in the ECSE classroom. The math curriculum is *Numbers Plus*. The language curriculum is *Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS)*; it addresses rhyming and alliteration. *Second Step* is a social skills curriculum. *Handwriting Without Tears* supports penmanship. *Strategies for Teaching Based on Autism Research (STAR)* is an autism support curriculum. Classroom instruction time includes both free play and direct instruction for individuals and groups. Activities are organized around a theme.

Children who are four years old or older and who are enrolled in the ECSE program are almost always dually enrolled in another early education program during the other half of their day, usually the Thompson County School district preschool classroom, also located at Spring
Brook. For children who participate in this arrangement, the school provides staff coverage for the children during the 50-minute gap between sessions. However, both of the Head Start programs in Thompson County are also options for a secondary placement. In those instances, transportation is provided between programs. If the team feels it is the most appropriate option, ECSE services can be extend to a child through age 6. In rare cases when that occurs, the child is dually enrolled in Kindergarten, also housed at Spring Brook. Although the ECSE teacher works for cooperative and thus the early childhood education director at NCSE is her boss, she turns to the principal of Spring Brook Elementary (who is also the state preschool grant coordinator for the school district) with building concerns or concerns about children who are dually enrolled in her program and the district preschool program.

**Other Early Care and Education Supports**

While not the central focus of the study, two other early care and education programs were explored for this study. The first was Children First, the Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency serving Thompson County. Children First, like all other CCR&R’s in the state, has a mental health consultant. She provides training and individual consultation to childcare centers that need assistance to support children with challenging behaviors and other diverse needs, with the goal of preventing their expulsion from a childcare program. She emphasizes social emotional development and relationship building. She helps childcare providers makes referrals to special education eligibility testing, and screening for at-risk programs such as state preschool and Head Start.

Early Outreach (EO) #15 provides early intervention services to children birth to age three in several counties in the state. Children qualify for early intervention services by having a 30% delay in at least one developmental area. Thirteen different services can be provided
through early intervention: assistive technology, aural rehab, developmental therapy, consultation, nursing, nutrition, occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech, psychological and other counseling, social work, transportation, and vision. Before a child turns three years old, the school district and special education cooperative work with the family and early intervention program to determine the services that will be put in place on a child’s third birthday.

**Participants**

**Program Level Participants**

Participants in this case represented two distinct systems levels, the program level and the policy level. Participants at the program level included individuals associated with early care and education services in Thompson County. This included administrators, teachers, therapists, and teaching assistants for multiple early care and education programs that serve young children in, or from, Thompson County. Representatives from the programs themselves (e.g., state preschool teachers, Head Start teachers), as well as representatives from partner sites (e.g., principal of St. Patrick, licensed home childcare provider) were included. For programs that serve an area larger than Thompson County, only those individuals who provide services in Thompson County, or for children and families that live in Thompson County, were included. Participants contributed information about their programs through individual interviews. Table 4 provides information about program level participants, including the length of their interview and the protocol used.

**Policy Level Participants**

The second group of participants was comprised of key stakeholders in early care and education at the state level. The purpose of interviewing individuals at the policy level was to
highlight the extent to which state level perspectives are understood by local communities, as well as the extent to which state level goals and objectives are reflected in local programming. Participants were purposefully selected to represent a variety of programs and issues in early care and education, including: state funded early childhood education, Head Start, child care, early childhood special education, and inclusion. Eight individuals participated in interviews, representing:

- The statewide umbrella agency for early care and education
- The state department of public instruction early childhood education services
- The state Head Start Association
- The state Department of Human Services
- The state Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies
- The state department of public instruction early childhood special education services
- A state initiative to promote early childhood inclusion
- A state technical assistance group to support inclusion

Table 5 provides information about policy level participants, including the length of their interview. A policy interview protocol was used with these participants.

**Recruitment Procedures**

Participants at the program and policy levels were recruited using different strategies, which are described in the following sections.

**Recruitment at the Program Level**

I began recruitment efforts at the program level in Fall 2013. As I attempted to identify a case that illustrated collaboration between public and private early care and education programs, I conducted a search using a statewide database to locate state preschool programs that were
housed in private childcare centers. I identified a specific Regional Office of Education that was a grantee for state preschool programs located in several private community locations. I called the coordinator of the regional office’s state preschool programs to introduce myself and to learn more about the structure of its programs. I determined that an investigation of the early care and education programs in Thompson County would address my underlying research goals and continued to pursue the case.

The state preschool coordinator for the regional office served as the main “gatekeeper” for this investigation. A gatekeeper is a key person who helps a researcher gain access or negotiate entry into a setting (Mawell, 2005). After speaking with the state preschool coordinator for the regional office, I visited Thompson County in November 2013 to deepen my relationship with the program. In preparation for my study, I maintained contact with the state preschool coordinator through periodic phone calls and emails. She was eager to share information about and access to her program, knowing that research about innovative collaborations may benefit the larger early care and education community. She provided access to the regional office’s preschool classrooms and made introductions to her program’s staff members. She also made introductions (in person, via phone, or via e-mail) to other early care and education program administrators (e.g., state preschool coordinator for the school district, the cooperative’s early childhood education director) who serve children in the county. Those administrators, in turn, provided introductions to their programs’ staff members. Individuals at the program level who were invited to participate in interviews received a recruitment letter with information about the study (See Appendix A.)

**Recruitment at the Policy Level**
I recruited participants at the policy level through direct e-mail contact. Through my work with early care and education groups, I had established professional relationships with several individuals who were invited for interviews. Contact information for all of the individuals at the policy level was available through their organizations’ websites. Individuals at the policy level who were invited to participate in interviews received a recruitment letter with information about the study (See Appendix B.)

Data Collection

This case study drew on two main forms of data. Interviews targeted the stories and perspectives of individuals who work in early care and education at the local and state levels. Document analysis was used to triangulate information gained in interviews. Documents such as grant proposals, interagency agreements, and programs’ promotional materials provided a more complex picture of the logistics involved in collaborating. According to Maxwell (2005), triangulation of data collection methods is a strategy that “reduces the risk that your conclusions will reflect only the systematic biases or limitations of a specific source or method, and allows you to gain a broader and more secure understanding of the issues you are investigating” (pp. 93-94). Yin (2009) reinforces that idea:

In case studies, the richness of the phenomenon and the extensiveness of the real-life context require case study investigators to cope with a technically distinctive situation: There will be many more variables of interest than data points. In response, an essential tactic is to use multiple points of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion. (p. 2)

Interviews
The main data sources for this investigation were individual interviews at the program and policy levels. Interviews are an efficient tool for gathering relevant information in an organized manner. Yin (2009) states:

> Overall, interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs or behavioral events. Well-informed interviewees can provide insights into such affairs or events. The interviewees also can provide shortcuts to the prior history of such situations, helping you to identify other relevant sources of evidence. (p. 108)

Stake (1995) identified interviews as the path to understanding multiple realities, allowing each respondent to share his or her own story and perspective. Interviewing allows the researcher to target data collection in a way that is not often possible by observing. “What is observed usually is not controlled by the researchers…What is covered in the interview is targeted and influenced by the interviewers” (p. 66). According to Maxwell (2005) interview questions yield the understandings necessary to answer a study’s research questions.

**Interview protocols.** All interviews were semi-structured and comprised of a series of open-ended questions. Consent for participating in the interview, as well as consent for the interview to be audio recorded, was obtained prior to each interview. There were unique consent form versions for: (a) program level participants interviewed in person, (b) program level participants interviewed over the phone, (c) policy level participants interviewed in person, and (d) policy level participants interviewed over the phone (See Appendix C.) Four different interview protocols (with some variations according to participant group) were used for this study. These protocols are described in the following sections. When necessary, interview protocols were adapted to suit individual participants. For example, questions designed for early
childhood special education providers were re-worded for presentation to the early intervention service coordinator (i.e., changing IEP to IFSP).

In all cases, interviews were conducted during January through May 2015, at a time and location convenient to participants. Interviews were conducted using protocols that included major questions and relevant follow up probes. Several days prior to the interview, participants were emailed a handout containing the main questions that would guide the interview. In appreciation of their time, participants at the program level were offered the chance to select an item or items from Lakeshore Learning, valued up to $40.00. Twenty of the twenty-two participants did select an item. Participants at the policy level were not offered an incentive.

**Introductory interview.** The regional office state preschool coordinator participated in an introductory interview (See Appendix D.) The purpose of this interview was to update and expand upon my prior knowledge of the collaboration in Thompson County, as well as to obtain contact information for the various programs in the area. Although the interview protocol had many questions, several of them were answered with a very short response (e.g., What calendar do services follow?, Who is responsible for hiring at each of the locations?). A separate handout was not created for this interview; the coordinator was given the entire protocol. This phone interview lasted one hour and ten minutes and took place before all other interviews.

**Standard interview for program level participants.** Administrators and staff members for early care and education programs targeting typically developing children (exclusively or in addition to children with special needs) in Thompson County participated in a standard interview that addressed key topics related to early care and education collaborations, as well as special education services, in Thompson County. The portion of the interview addressing early care and education collaborations in Thompson County included questions related to: individuals and
programs in Thompson County, the history of collaborations in Thompson County, forming and maintaining partnerships, state level collaboration initiatives, and reflections on local collaboration. The portion of the interview addressing special education services included questions related to: services for children with disabilities, inclusion, and general reflections about special education services.

All thirteen standard interviews conducted were in person and lasted between twenty-two minutes and one hour forty-five minutes. Administrator interviews were longer than staff interviews, likely because the focus of interviews was more heavily placed on issues at the administrative level. See Appendix E for the interview protocol and associated handout for program level administrators. See Appendix F for the interview protocol and associated handout for program level staff.

Special education interview. Administrators and staff members who provide special education services for young children with disabilities were invited to participate in an interview related specifically to special education services. Participants included administrators and staff members from the special education cooperative, the local school district, and early intervention. Their interview protocol addressed the following topics: child find, assessment procedures, creating and implementing IEP’s, placement decisions, and service delivery.

Nine special education interviews were conducted, seven in person and two via phone. Interviews ranged in length from thirty-four minutes to one hour and twenty-seven minutes. A separate handout was not created for this interview; participants were given the entire protocol. See Appendix G for the interview protocol for special education participants.

Standard interview for policy level participants. Key stakeholders in early care and education who participated in the study were interviewed using a standard interview protocol for
policy level participants. Interviews addressed two key topics: (a) collaboration in early care and education, and (b) special education services. The section on collaboration in early care and education included questions related to: early care and education programs in the state, history of collaboration in the state, forming and maintaining partnerships, state level collaboration initiatives, and reflections on collaboration in the state. The section on special education services included questions related to: services for children with disabilities, inclusion, and reflections on special education services for children in the state. Issues in these interviews mirrored the issues addressed in program level interviews (e.g., facilitators and barriers to collaboration, benefits of inclusion), but from a more global perspective.

Eight policy level interviews were conducted, one in person and seven via phone. Interviews lasted between fifty-five minutes and one hour twenty-seven minutes. See Appendix H for the interview protocol and associated handout for policy level participants.

**Interview development and pilot testing.** Stake (1995) recommends that interview questions should be developed in advance and should aim to address the underlying research questions of the study. Maxwell (2005) emphasizes the importance of pilot testing interview protocols prior to data collection. “You should pilot test your interview guide with people as much like your planned interviewees as possible, to determine if the questions work as intended and what revisions you may need to make” (p. 93). I worked collaboratively with Dr. Fowler to create interview protocols that: (a) yielded information which would inform the underlying research questions of the study, (b) were appropriate and relevant to each participant group (program level administrators, program level staff, and policy level participants), and (c) were aligned across participant groups to facilitate comparison during data analysis.
After interview protocols were finalized, they were piloted. A colleague with many years of experience as the administrator of a collaborative early care and education program was an appropriate candidate to pilot the standard administrator interview. As a result of her role as an administrator, as well as her later role as a teacher educator, this colleague was aware of the knowledge and experiences of program staff; she also served as a pilot participant for the standard staff interview. Another colleague had done extensive work with a statewide early childhood education database and had experiences with early care and education at the state level. She served as a pilot participant for the standard interview for policy level participants.

During the pilot testing process, feedback was offered related to interview items, subsequent probes, and the organization of the protocol. Based on participants’ feedback, several items were rearranged, added, deleted, or re-worded. Interview protocols included in the appendices reflect these changes.

**Conducting interviews.** Data collection for interviews included several key components. With permission, all interviews were audio recorded. Notes about key points were taken during each interview. A paid staff member transcribed each interview verbatim. In addition to myself, three other researchers (including one faculty member and two doctoral students in Special Education) have IRB approval to participate on the research team. A member of the research team listened to 100% of the interviews while reading the transcripts, to ensure accuracy.

First level member checks were offered to each participant. Following the check for accuracy, transcripts were emailed to participants who were offered a two-week period to make revisions or additions to their transcript. Nine of the total participants replied to either confirm that their transcript was accurate or to make corrections, clarify a point, add information, or offer other feedback. Hard copies of field notes, hard copies of transcripts, and consent forms were
stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office. Electronic copies of audio files and interview transcripts were stored on a password-protected computer on a secure server.

**Documents**

Selected relevant documents can contribute valuable information to an investigation. Data from documents can compliment, expand upon, or reveal contradictions in data obtained from other sources. Stake (1995) states, “Gathering data by studying documents follows the same line of thinking as observing or interviewing. One needs to have one’s mind organized, yet be open for unexpected clues” (p. 68). Documents relevant to collaboration were collected and reviewed. These documents included: program implementation manuals, eligibility guidelines and checklists; and program brochures. Documents relevant to inclusion were also collected and reviewed. These documents included: agreements between the school district and regional office regarding special education services; agreements between the school district and the special education cooperative regarding special education services, data collection forms regarding the early childhood outcomes, sample lesson plans with IEP goals embedded, and IEPs with identifying information removed. Participants at the policy level also shared relevant documents, including reports about early care and education legislation and policy, websites with program rules and regulations, and program brochures. Document collection occurred throughout the data collection process, within the context of interviews. For example, after the school district special needs coordinator discussed the online IEP format her program uses, she provided a hard copy of the form with the child’s name removed.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis procedures followed the steps outlined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013): data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. Several of the trustworthiness
measures outlined by Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klinger, Pugach, and Richardson (2005) were incorporated into the study. The use of interviews and relevant documents demonstrated triangulation of sources. The development of a researcher identity statement, along with periodic revisiting of biases during data collection and analysis, demonstrated researcher reflexivity. Data analysis procedures, described in the following sections, also include: collaborative work; second level member checks; an audit trail; peer debriefing; and thick, detailed description.

Data Reduction

**Interview transcripts for program level participants.** At least two members of the interview team read a small subset (2-4) of the interviews to begin the coding process. Some coding categories were determined *a priori*, based upon the literature review (e.g., benefits and drawbacks to collaboration; facilitators and barriers to inclusion). Each member of the team read interviews independently and met to discuss categories and themes that emerged from the data. Sometimes, research team members worked together, taking turns reading portions of interview transcripts aloud. This collaborative, brainstorming activity helped the team discuss and identify salient themes and issues. Team members worked together to develop and reach consensus on an initial list of codes.

After an initial subset of codes had been established, team members continued to code additional interviews. When individual members of the team coded interviews independently, they shared results with one another and met regularly to discuss the master list of codes. The constant comparative method, a dynamic process, was used to code interviews. Codes were collapsed, expanded upon, and refined. As the code list was developed and changed, members of the research team met to reach consensus on the coding list; they also revisited relevant portions of the data that needed to be re-coded based on code revisions. Continually comparing the data to
the revised set of codes is a key aspect of using the constant comparative method (Bernard & Ryan, 2010).

Each version of the code list was dated and saved as data analysis progressed; this is known as an audit trail. The final coding list included sixteen major codes, each with several subcodes. For example, the code called Rural Issues had the following sub codes: isolation, transportation concerns, benefits of rural life, population density, limited resources, and poverty. See Table 6 for a list of major codes. At the program level, interviews were coded in the following order:

1. Introductory interview
2. Standard interviews for program level administrators
3. Standard interviews for program level staff
4. Special education interviews

**Interview transcripts for policy level participants.** Interview transcripts for policy level participants were coded after all program level interviews had been analyzed. Using the list of major codes that was created to identify salient themes and issues at the program level, policy level interviews were reviewed for chunks of data that could best shed light on the extent to which policy level perspectives were mirrored at the local level and the extent to which policy level initiatives were implemented at the local level. This data from policy level interviews was used to illustrate: (a) similarities and differences in perspective at the state level and the local level; (b) local actions that capitalized on state policy or showed a misunderstanding of state policy; and (c) instances when state policy did or did not meet the specific needs of a rural community. Two members of the research team worked collaboratively to identify the most relevant issues found in policy level interviews. After relevant portions of text had been
excerpted from the transcripts, another research team member wrote summaries of participants’ main ideas.

**Document review.** Relevant documents were collected and reviewed throughout the data collection process. Documents were not coded, but were examined for their ability to: (a) offer more detailed information about a topic that was discussed in an interview (e.g., provide exact dates that a program is in session, define the borders of a program’s service area); or (b) reveal or resolve potential discrepancies in information provided through other means (e.g., two participants describe conflicting eligibility criteria; the state preschool eligibility checklist resolves the issue).

**Data Display and Conclusion Drawing**

After data was reduced through the coding process, data was organized visually. Data displays contributed to answering the study’s central research questions. “Valid analysis requires, and is driven by, displays that are focused enough to permit a viewing of a full data set in the same location, and are arranged systematically to answer the research questions at hand” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 91-21). Examples of relevant data displays included tables highlighting key program characteristics and tables illustrating the steps leading to enrollment in early childhood programs. The process of creating data displays often revealed missing data or contradictions in the data. In those instances, appropriate participants were contacted with follow up questions. After results were analyzed and displayed in ways that best answered the study’s main research questions, the researchers continued to meet for the purpose of peer debriefing. Working collaboratively, the team used the results to generate implications for policy and practice related to collaboration and inclusion in early care and education.
Chapter 4—Results: Research Question 1

As indicated in the program descriptions provided in the Methods, early care and education collaborations in Thompson County are complex. Three main early care and education programs are provided in Thompson County. State preschool programs are provided by the Regional Office of Education as well as the Thompson County School District. Head Start programs are provided by the Prairie Valley Agency. Early Child Special Education services are provided by the North Central Special Education Cooperative. In addition, services provided at center based licensed childcare programs allow families to take advantage of Child Care and Development Funds (CCDF). Services are often co-located with one another and are delivered in a variety of community locations, including licensed childcare centers, licensed childcare homes, private schools, private childcare centers, and public schools.

The first research question addressed by this study was: 1) How do early care and education programs (state preschool, Head Start, early childhood special education, and licensed childcare) in one rural county work together to maximize existing resources? Participant responses during interviews revealed three main strategies that programs used to maximize existing resources: (a) screening and enrolling collaboratively; (b) use existing programs and available space to expand options, and (c) acknowledging program constraints and working creatively within them. Policy level participants shared their perspectives on these themes and issues; some perspectives mirrored local perspectives, while others differed.

**Collaborative Screening and Enrollment**

A community-wide preschool screening event is a major strategy that programs in Thompson County use to maximize their existing early care and education resources. During this process, programs screen children to determine individual eligibility for state preschool or
Head Start programs. Administrators strategically place children in programs with the goal of filling all programs while providing services to as many children as possible. This process takes place one time per year during the late spring and summer. See Table 7 for a description of the preschool screening process. While this joint screening event is the major strategy for screening and enrolling children, it is not the only strategy. Programs maintain waiting lists and are prepared to conduct individual screenings throughout the year to ensure that programs remain full.

**Joint Screening Event**

In the spring of each school year, a joint screening event is held in Thompson County. The main purposes of the preschool screening are to: (a) identify and recruit children for state preschool programs, and (b) identify children who may need further assessment to determine eligibility for special education services. The previous special needs coordinator for Thompson County School District, in conjunction with the current regional office state preschool coordinator, initiated this event several years ago. In the past, the school district has used space at a church to complete screenings in March. This year, preschool screenings will be done in conjunction with kindergarten pre-registration screenings and will take place at Spring Brook Elementary School, which houses the district’s state preschool program and kindergarten classrooms, along with the NCSE ECSE program. School will dismiss three days early, in mid-May, to accommodate that event.

The screening event is play based, and uses the Dial 4. Staff members from many early care and education programs in Thompson County facilitate this event. The school district state preschool coordinator and special needs coordinator, along with the regional office of education state preschool coordinator, run the event. They meet after the event to review student eligibility.
and determine placement. The Family and Community Engagement Specialist from Head Start, and occasionally, the principal of St. Patrick also participate in making placement decisions. The secretary for the school district Special Needs department compiles the spreadsheet of results for administrators to review. Staff members, including state preschool teachers for the regional office and the school district, and special education teachers from the school district, administer different portions of the Dial 4 by playing games that assess a variety of developmental areas. Speech therapists from the school district facilitate the speech and language portions of the assessment. One regional office of education preschool teacher reported that teachers enjoy this event, as it is one of the few times during the year that everyone works together.

In addition to program leaders and staff members who administer and score the Dial 4, other agencies are in attendance. The Head Start program attends the event as a way to reach out to families who may benefit from its services. The Health Department conducts hearing and vision screenings. Early Intervention is in attendance for families who may bring a child that will not yet be three years old at the start of the upcoming academic year. A local parent training and information center whose mission is to empower the families of children with disabilities also sets up a resource and information table.

During the screening event, parents participate in activities while their children complete the Dial 4. Parents complete a three-page questionnaire and are interviewed by program staff. They also indicate a preference for state preschool programming in Thompson County. The state preschool Home Provider program is not ranked by parents as that program will only serve children whose families have chosen to enroll them in licensed home childcare. Parents indicate a preference for the Thompson County School District program, the regional office program at Children’s Castle, or the regional office program at St. Patrick.
Determining Eligibility

**Eligibility for state preschool.** In every state preschool program, at least 80% of students enrolled must be eligible for state preschool programming. Information collected at the screening event is used to determine eligibility for state preschool programs. The Thompson County School District state preschool coordinator reported that about four years ago, she and the special needs coordinator attended a conference that alerted them that they needed to be in better compliance with state preschool implementation guidelines. Following that conference, they updated their weighted eligibility checklist.

The eligibility checklist now reflects state guidelines as well as local concerns. The regional office preschool coordinator described the importance of adapting eligibility for local communities. She stated, “We have an eligibility checklist and that is managed by each district...because what works best for our community is going to be totally different than what works best for somebody in [a large city].” The school district preschool coordinator described the nuances of their local eligibility checklist.

[The special needs coordinator] and I also tweak it with things that we see in our district. We want to make sure that we get the kids maybe who have had somebody incarcerated, you know, Mom or Dad [is] incarcerated, and [consider] how many points we give for that. But we still follow the guidelines, but we see those kids that really need some help. So, we want to make sure that they get a lot of points for that. Those kinds of things we stuck in there [while] still following the guidelines from the state.

While individual children are deemed eligible or ineligible for the state preschool program based on a weighted point system, the programs as a whole refer to a flow chart that describes eligibility priorities for the entire program. These priority groups include: children
who meet the state definition of homeless, children who have been in the birth to three program, children who have an IEP, and children who were previously enrolled in state preschool and are still age eligible. The regional office preschool coordinator stated, “If they were in your program at age three, they remain in your program at age four, because that would be silly [to remove them]. They are there for a reason and so you are going to keep them there.”

The unique arrangement between the regional office state preschool program and Children’s Castle necessitates another priority group for eligibility: children who are enrolled in Children’s Castle. While Children’s Castle is a private childcare center that enrolls children from six weeks to twelve years old, it does not have any programming for preschool aged children separate than the state preschool program and Head Start programs embedded in the center. This means that when children age up through the center, they must be enrolled in these programs, as they cannot stay in a classroom with their younger peers. The regional office preschool coordinator describes this scenario.

DCFS requires that [a] four-year-old move to the four-year-old program, which happens to be now us [regional office preschool]. So, we have to take that child even though we might have to count him as the 20% [of children who are not eligible for state preschool]. He doesn’t really have that need, doesn’t meet all the criteria, [but] that one criteria [he does meet] is that he is there and you are not going to leave him in a three-year-old classroom. You need to take him into the fours. So, in working with DCFS and the daycare centers you have to have that [flexibility] in order to make their program work and stay on DCFS rules. We have to accommodate those kids too.
After all of those priorities are accounted for, a spreadsheet is created that ranks children in order of need, based on the number of points earned on the eligibility checklist, with four-year-olds given priority over three-year olds.

**Eligibility for Head Start.** While eligibility for Head Start is entirely different than eligibility for state preschool programs, it is heavily considered during the preschool screening event in Thompson County. Head Start eligibility requirements are more stringent than those for state preschool. If a child is eligible for Head Start, administrators consider that option first, because it may open up a slot in state preschool for another child.

The director of PVA Head Start described eligibility guidelines. Income is the main factor in determining eligibility. Families must be at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Thirty-five percent of children can be slightly above that level (between 100% and 130% FPL). Ten percent of children can be anywhere above the income guidelines. Children must be at least three years old at the start of the school year, and cannot be over kindergarten age unless there is documentation from the school district that Kindergarten is not an appropriate placement. Ten percent of children enrolled need to be children with special needs, but if there was competition for an individual slot, the child who was income eligible would take priority. The Head Start director stated,

> If we have a child with disabilities who is over income and we have a child who is categorically income eligible, whether they are on Public Aid or they are [in] foster [care] or they are homeless, we have to take the categorically eligible one before we take the child with disabilities.

Along with determining if a child is income eligible for Head Start, a weighted points system is used to determine highest need. Some factors that earn children points include: single
parent family, teen parent, incarcerated parent, referral from a preschool, referral from a doctor, or speech delay. The Head Start staff member conducting the screening also has the option to assign points for “miscellaneous special needs”, which can include factors such as: child has suspected speech delay (i.e., suspected by the screener but not the parent); child is a twin, part of a multiple birth set, or an only child; child has many siblings; child is being raised by grandparents; or child has known, but not reported, family difficulties. The director of Head Start explained the last factor.

If I just knew, and you just discover these things, living in a community, [but] if I knew that that child’s biological dad or biological mother was say, a sex offender, a registered sex offender, there is nowhere on the point system to put that, and I wouldn’t put that on the application, but if I just knew that, I would put a note in the file and I would give them an extra miscellaneous point.

After all of these factors have been considered and children have been assigned points, older children are given priority over younger children.

**Determining Placement**

After eligibility for state preschool programming and Head Start programming in general has been determined, administrators from the regional office, school district, and Head Start meet to determine specific placement. Administrators have approximately 80 individual student folders to compare. The information gathered helps administrators determine if red flags in a child’s folder indicate the need for further testing for special education services. The regional office preschool coordinator reported that parents are quickly approached and encouraged to move forward with that assessment. She stated,
If there definitely are red flags, then special ed is right there to pick right up and say, ‘Okay, we are believing that we may need further testing,’ to the parents in a very nonjudgmental, helpful way. [Special education staff members say], ‘Would you be okay with that?’, and that testing then goes to the special ed department.

The process of moving forward with the testing and qualifying children for services is described in a later section of the Results, in relationship to the study’s second major research question.

After identifying children who show red flags for special education, program administrators consider the placement of eligible children in the pool of early care and education programs. Parent choice is taken into consideration. Participants reported that the Thompson County School District preschool program was often families’ first choice, largely due to its two-way transportation. Participants also reported that Children’s Castle was often selected last because it provided no transportation, and because parents were “turned off” by the daycare environment. In all cases, parent preference is factored into the decision making process, but is not guaranteed.

It is common practice to identify Head Start eligible children first. When administrators begin to make assignments, placement of children in Head Start is determined first because of Head Start’s more stringent income eligibility guidelines. Filling the two Head Start programs in Thompson County first opens slots for more children in the three classroom-based state preschool programs.

There are also common placement practices for each of the three classroom-based state preschool programs in Thompson County. The regional office program at Children’s Castle prioritizes placement of children who are already enrolled at Children’s Castle or who intend to enroll there in the fall, and likely excludes children who have been diagnosed with a
developmental delay. The regional office program at St. Patrick prioritizes placement of children who have siblings enrolled at St. Patrick or who intend to enroll there for elementary school, and likely excludes children who have been diagnosed with a developmental delay. Additionally, because the basement of St. Patrick School where the preschool classroom is located is not wheelchair accessible, children with physical disabilities are also likely excluded.

The Thompson County School District program prioritizes placement of children who have all three of these characteristics: (a) are four years old, (b) have been diagnosed with a developmental delay, and (c) are enrolled in the cooperative’s ECSE program. This program also prioritizes children who have been flagged for special education services, but were later determined ineligible, as the school district can provide response to intervention [RTI] services if necessary. Finally, this program prioritizes children who would not be able to attend a program without transportation.

While dual enrollment is almost always considered for children with developmental delays who are four years old (with primary placement is in the cooperative’s ECSE classroom and secondary placement is in the school district preschool program or in one of the Head Start programs), dual enrollment is also occasionally considered for typically developing children. Sometimes a child will qualify for more than one program due to at-risk status. In those cases, if programs are filling up, the dilemma becomes whether it is better to give one child two opportunities, or to give two children one opportunity. The regional office preschool coordinator stated, “You know, we talk about dually enrolling [a particular child] and then we decide, ‘No, let’s not go that route. Let’s give this other child the opportunity too.’”

Sometimes the various programs in the community do work together to dually enroll a child because administrators know that due to a particular situation at home, a child needs to be
out of the house all day. In other instances, a child is dually enrolled to overcome the constraints of limited transportation. For example, Head Start does not provide transportation. Thus, if a child is enrolled only in Head Start, his family would be required to transport him both ways. If the family is unable to do that, they would have to forfeit enrollment entirely. If, however, the child is dually enrolled in Head Start and the school district preschool program, his parents only need to transport him to Head Start in the morning. The district will then transport him mid-day from Head Start to the district preschool program, as well as back to his home at the end of the day. When this particular situation arises in Thompson County, the Head Start Family Engagement Specialist advocates for dual enrollment during the placement decision process.

**Enrolling Children**

Although screening takes place, eligibility is calculated, and likely placements are determined in the late spring, the process of notifying families of their program assignment and officially enrolling children in state preschool programs does not occur until late July. Placement in Head Start is finalized earlier, as Head Start completes as much of its fall recruitment as possible in the spring. The delay in enrollment for state preschool programs is designed to ensure that students who are flagged for special education assessment, but are eventually determined to be ineligible for special education services, still have a program to attend in the fall. The regional office preschool coordinator explained,

The reason for [sending out placement letters late in the summer] is that [the] special ed [department] knows that they have say, eight kids that they are going to screen for special ed, and if they don’t make it into special ed, they are going to want a spot for them...Because of the ages of the children they have to wait until right before school starts to finish their possible entrance for special ed. When special ed says they didn’t
qualify, then we [state preschool programs] take them back and put them back in the pile and take them.

When state preschool assignments are distributed to families in late July, some families do not get their preferred program. The school district preschool coordinator explained how she discusses placement options with parents who do not get their first choice, stating,

Parents may be little put out because, let’s say that they put they wanted the district, but for whatever reason they were placed at St. Patrick and they may say, ‘Well, we really wanted to go to Spring Brook because they have a brother or sister that is a Kindergartener and that is so much handier for us.’ And we will say, ‘We have a wait list and right now you have a spot at St. Patrick. If you want to give up that spot and come on our wait list you are more than welcome to do that. So, that’s your choice. You decide what works best for you.’ And, most of them keep their spot and they make it work. The transportation is really a big deal for some families and sometimes they can make it work and sometimes they can’t, but that would probably be the biggest drawback [is] that they don’t get their first choice.

**Issues with the Collaborative Screening Process**

The joint screening event and subsequent placement decisions and enrollment procedure are very collaborative in nature. Although participants generally reported that everyone gets along well during those processes, they did identify a few issues. First, while the Head Start program does participate in the joint screening event, a few participants acknowledged that its presence was somewhat ambiguous. The Head Start director described Head Start’s role in the event, saying,
It’s not that we are invited to the table, [but] we sort of make ourselves invited. We sort of go to them and say, ‘You are having your preschool screening. We also are trying to do recruitment. Can we join forces? And, can we come to your preschool screening and set up a table and take applications?’ I would say in Thompson County that works pretty well. It doesn’t work really well in all other places.

Second, while teachers may have more up to date information than administrators on family status and preference, they are not invited into the decision making process. The regional office preschool coordinator stated, “The coordinators are trying to decipher who gets what kid, [and a parent may have already told the teacher], ‘My kid is in daycare so they just need to stay at the daycare center.’”

The third issue related to the actual distribution of student assignments in late summer. State preschool teachers for regional office of education, as opposed to the regional office’s central office, are responsible for sending out letters to families to welcome them to their individual programs. By late summer, some families have changed their mind about a preference. After receiving their letter of assignment, they tell the teacher that they will not be attending the program. The teacher then has to go to the school district office to get the names of new students to invite into her program. This is because the school district houses the files of all children who did not get into any program and maintains the waiting list for all state preschool programs. The teacher sends more welcome letters home; again, families decline placement. This cycle can happen repeatedly until all 20 slots are filled. The regional office preschool coordinator described the dilemma, saying,

[My teachers say], “It’s such a hassle [for] you to hand me twenty folders and then three of [the families] say, ‘No, I am not going to do Children’s Castle.’” So, there is three if
not more folders that that teacher then takes back to the district, who is in basic charge of all the folders. The district gives her three more that are on the wait list and she takes those and sends a letter out to them and then if they choose not to come...then she has got to go back and get more folders. So, all of that...creates a lot of hassle for the teacher as she is starting her year.”

The regional office preschool coordinator speculated that there might be a better way to do this, such as sending out the files herself.

Use of Existing Programs and Available Space

Collaborating to use existing programs and available space is a second major strategy that early care and education programs use to maximize services for young children in Thompson County. Programs do this by: 1) collaborating to build individual programs, 2) collaborating to bridge programs, and 3) conducting other actions that support collaborations. The descriptions of collaboration that follow are intended to shed light on the reality of partnerships, highlighting the successes of relationships as well as the challenges. See Table 8 for information about early care and educations collaborations in Thompson County.

Collaborations that Build Individual Programs

One way that collaboration is used in Thompson County is to bring more than one agency or organization together for the purpose of providing one program to children. In Thompson County, many programs exist because of collaboration. The regional office preschool program at Children’s Castle, for example, would not be able to operate without the space and children provided by Children’s Castle. In these cases, collaboration is not an “add on.” Programs do not, for example, exist independently and come together for something extra, like a fundraiser or parent activity. Four programs in Thompson County are collaborations that build individual
programs. They are: the regional office program at Children’s Castle, the regional office program at St. Patrick, the regional office Home Provider program, and the Head Start collaboration classroom at Children’s Castle. Brief descriptions of these collaborative relationships are outlined in upcoming sections.

**Regional office program at Children’s Castle.** At Children’s Castle, the regional office collaborates with Children’s Castle to provide a half-day state preschool program for 20 children. The regional office identifies children from the community for enrollment in the program and provides the teacher, aide, and classroom supplies. Children’s Castle provides space for the classroom, maintains licensure requirements, and recruits children who are enrolled in Children’s Castle to participate in the state preschool program. The Thompson County School district special needs department also participates in this collaboration by providing itinerant speech therapy to children enrolled in this program. A unique aspect of this relationship is that the state preschool teacher is expected to meet childcare licensing requirements, which would not apply to a state preschool program located in a school.

When participants described this particular collaboration, they identified a positive relationship between the regional office preschool coordinator and the owner/director of Children’s Castle. The two administrators maintain ongoing communication, often related to the DCFS licensing requirements that have the potential to impact state preschool programming. The owner/director of Children’s Castle stated,

> There is a lot of communication between [the regional office preschool coordinator] and I. If something needs to be adjusted or if there is a new rule we are aware of, we let her know, that way we can try to work out and find a happy medium. That way the teacher is not going crazy trying to meet everything.
While the relationship between administrators was described as constructive and positive, the relationship between the state preschool classroom and the center was described as separate and estranged. The owner/director of Children’s Castle stated, “It’s a very separate program. The only thing that is together is because they are in our building. It’s not like it used to be.” She went on to describe her disappointment that the state preschool program no longer holds parent nights in collaboration with the other families enrolled at the childcare center, stating,

We just got uninvited [to doing joint parent nights]. [To me, doing them together made sense] because you have children who are birth to three, [and] they are going to be, I don’t mean to use this word, but grooming them for this pre-k program...To me it just helps having that one family night.

**Regional office program at St. Patrick.** At St. Patrick, the regional office collaborates with St. Patrick to provide two half-day state preschool programs, serving 40 total children. The regional office identifies children from the community for enrollment in the program and provides the teacher, aide, and classroom supplies. St. Patrick provides the rented classroom space and shares the school gym and playground. The Thompson County School District special needs department also participates in this collaboration by providing itinerant speech therapy to children enrolled in this program.

Participants involved in this collaboration all described the relationship as easy-going, pleasant, and mutually beneficial. Unlike the regional office program at Children’s Castle, the state preschool teachers at St. Patrick do not have to meet any licensing requirements on top of state preschool implementation guidelines. The building principal appreciated that the program exposed older students in the building to preschoolers, thus developing their love of children at an early age. She described the program as “great advertising”, noting that several families who
would not normally choose a Catholic school enrolled their children in St. Patrick for elementary school after exposure through the preschool program.

The regional office preschool staff members reported that they felt included as members of the larger school community, benefitting from such things as having the office take phone calls and find substitutes for them, eating with other teachers during the lunch hour, and being included in the school wide weekly email from the principal. The preschool classroom is also included in the larger school community. The principal sends her weekly newsletter home with preschool families, and invites the preschool classroom to school wide events such as visits from Santa Claus. She also takes steps to ensure that the preschool classroom has priority in scheduling time on the playground and in the gym, without older children present.

**Regional office Home Provider program.** Throughout the rural portions of Thompson County, the regional office collaborates with licensed home childcare providers to provide state preschool services through a small group instruction model. Twenty children are officially enrolled in this program, but about 30 participate in services. The regional office provides the teacher, program supplies, and a resource room for the licensed home childcare providers. Home childcare providers provide a licensed home childcare environment, enrolling at least two children who are eligible for state preschool services.

Participants involved in this collaboration described it as very beneficial for licensed home childcare providers. They are very eager to participate in the program, knowing that the additional programming is valuable in preparing children for preschool and Kindergarten. The Home Provider teacher maintains ongoing contact with home childcare providers through text messages and emails. She brings them supplies from the resource room and tries to be flexible by rescheduling with providers who request a change. She also helps providers meet basic licensing
requirements by providing CPR and first aid training, as well as by helping them understand changes in licensing requirements (e.g., paperwork) implemented at the state level.

**Head Start collaboration classroom at Children’s Castle.** Children’s Castle and Head Start collaborate to provide full-day Head Start programming to 15 children. Head Start provides Children’s Castle with stipends, which go toward the salaries of program staff, supplies for children, and other program expenses. Children’s Castle hires staff for the program and implements Head Start performance standards. The programs work together to enroll children. The Thompson County School District special needs department also participates in this collaboration by providing itinerant speech therapy to children enrolled in this program.

The director of Head Start explained that all Head Start collaborations are unique, stating, “Every collaboration is going to be different. You could find collaboration in [another county] that looks way different from ours.” The director also emphasized the importance of meeting Head Start performance standards, noting that childcare centers may need some guidance to shape their practices. One example she offered related to Head Start’s nutrition guidelines. She said,

> People that provide food for our programs don’t always follow the same [standards]. We try to make them. We try to educate them. We are always very conscious of - you try to have something crispy, you try to have something fresh, you try to have your meat, your components of [each of] the food groups.

Participants reported that in this collaboration, Children’s Castle assumes heavy responsibility for implementing the Head Start program. This includes ensuring that the building is DCFS licensed, which is essential for Head Start. Unlike state preschool programs, Head Start programs are considered to be childcare options and must maintain licensure. Children’s Castle
also hires and pays staff members; this includes the classroom teacher, aide, and family advocate. Because the teacher technically works for Children’s Castle, the director can ask her to work additional hours outside of the Head Start day; at Children’s Castle the Head Start teacher provides wrap around care for the three children who stay at the center beyond the Head Start day.

Head Start does, however, play an active role in the collaboration. This includes providing Head Start training to staff members, negotiating a fair stipend amount with Children’s Castle, meeting with the owner/director of Children’s Castle one time per month to discuss the collaboration, and when possible, providing a substitute teacher for an absent staff member. The Head Start Education Manager and the owner/director of Children’s Castle are both viewed as the boss of the Head Start teacher and aide.

**Collaborations that Link Programs**

As described in the preceding paragraphs, several early care and education programs in Thompson County are built upon the collaborative efforts of multiple agencies. Sometimes, however, a child’s *individual* programing is created when two separate programs come together to form a more sophisticated package of services. To some extent, this occurs in three of the programs described in the previous section (regional office preschool at Children’s Castle, regional office preschool at St. Patrick, and Head Start at Children’s Castle), as well as at the standalone Head Start program in Thompson County, in relationship to the provision of itinerant speech therapy services. Those services are not mutually dependent on the program where they are provided; a child in Thompson County can receive speech therapy from the school district *outside* of an early care and education program. The school district offers a “walk-in” option, in which a family brings their child to the district for a weekly speech therapy appointment.
When programs provide dual enrollment to students, they are also building collaborations that link programs. This is most frequently done for students with developmental delays who are enrolled in the cooperative’s ECSE program (and will be described in more detail in relationship to the second major research question). For typically developing children, dual enrollment can occur by offering a child Head Start programming for one half of the day and state preschool programming for the other half of the day. That option is most effective when the state preschool program is the school district program because transportation is also provided. While a child enrolled in the regional office program at St. Patrick would be eligible to receive one-way transportation, participants reported that it is practice, but not official policy, to avoid dually enrolling children who attend the St. Patrick program.

**Actions That Support Collaborations**

In Thompson County, early care and education programs rely on a few key actions to support their collaborations: sharing events and developing written agreements. These actions stabilize collaborations across the entire early care and education community and solidify partnerships between specific entities. The following paragraphs highlight some examples of events and written agreements in Thompson County. Participants also reflect on the consequences of omitting these actions from their partnerships.

**Sharing events.** Described in detail in earlier sections of the *Results*, the joint preschool screening event is the most significant collaborative event for early care and education providers in Thompson County. The director of Head Start described the importance of this type of an event, for any community, noting its significance in ensuring that young children received programming. Because PVA Head Start provides services in several counties, it takes extra steps
to get children to preschool screening, sometimes collaborating with childcare centers for this purpose. The director of Head Start described this process, saying,

> In the different school districts they will do preschool screening. We always try to get our Head Start kids there. So, if we have parents’ permission what we will sometimes do is take kids as a group and say, ‘Okay, today our field trip is we are going to go get preschool screened.’ And, we will take all fifteen [children] or whatever it is over to preschool screening. That doesn’t happen everywhere. Some districts [say], ‘No, the parent has to bring them,’ and we abide by that. At the very least what we would do is send a flyer home that says, ‘Preschool screening is next week. Make sure you get your child in to preschool screening.’

Occasionally, opportunities will arise for programs to share other events. In one example, the parent group for Head Start and the parent group for all children at Children’s Castle joined forces in a fundraising event. In other instances, professional development opportunities arise. When the state released new guidelines about English Language Learner (ELL) endorsements for state preschool, the regional office preschool coordinator invited a speaker from the regional public university to talk about forming a cohort in Thompson County and the surrounding area. Staff members from the school district preschool program were invited to that presentation as well. Each year, several state preschool teachers and other early care and education professionals in Thompson County attend a statewide prekindergarten and kindergarten conference. Shared professional development opportunities occur at the conference, and travel time is used to build relationships. The regional office preschool coordinator stated, “When we are going to conference we try to go with them at the same time. Then we switch rides and we all know each other.”
**Developing written agreements.** Written agreements impact the larger early care and education community in Thompson County. The Regional Office of Education, Prairie Valley Head Start, Thompson County School District, and the North Central Special Education Cooperative all maintain Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with several community partners, including the local health departments, the school district, and mental health agencies. Leases and contracts are other examples of written agreements. Children’s Castle has a contract with Head Start, which outlines the stipend amounts that Head Start will provide to Children’s Castle and stipulates that the programs meet monthly to discuss the collaboration.

In a few of the interviews, administrators reported that they were unaware of written agreements. For example, in the collaboration between the regional office and St. Patrick, the school principal said that she was initially unaware that the regional office paid rent for the space at her school, stating, “I really didn’t even know they paid rent. I thought they just stayed here. But I did some research and found that out.” During interviews, neither administrator mentioned an official lease agreement for the space. When pressed about the existence of a contract or lease, the principal of St. Patrick stated, “Basically, at the end of the school year I send a letter to the regional office that says this is how much the rent is and this is what the janitorial fees are, and they send us a check.”

While the lack of written agreement between the regional office and St. Patrick was not an issue for those programs, it was a concern at Children’s Castle. The owner/director of Children’s Castle reflected on the lack of a written agreement between her program and the regional office, noting that one might be helpful. She said,

> Actually, we have nothing written down, not a contract or anything that I am even aware of...I am sitting here thinking, ‘Why in the world didn’t I ever think of that before?’”
would take care of a lot of these problems that I listed such as miscommunication, understanding that whoever they [the regional office] hires has to meet both set of guidelines [DCFS and state preschool]. They are expected to do training that is required on both ends. They are expected to be a part of our staff meetings because they are a part of us. A contract would serve; it would just solve a lot of that.

**Working Creatively Within Constraints**

A third strategy that early care and education programs in Thompson County use to maximize resources is to work creatively within existing constraints. Participants reported that focusing on children and families is what allowed them to move beyond constraints to pursue a common good for young children. The school district preschool coordinator described this frame of mind, saying,

> We really work well together, I think, on what’s best for the kids. That is why we are all there. Nobody is really selfish about, ‘This is my program’ [or] ‘I want this or that’...I really think that everybody that sits at the table, I really think their goal is to help these kids and get as many kids as we can service, and with that being your philosophy, you really don’t have any room for attitudes.

The ways in which programs work creatively within constraints include: (a) using funding and non-monetary resources strategically, (b) dealing with rural issues, (c) providing transportation in innovative ways, (d) navigating conflicting or confusing rules, and (e) managing logistics such as calendars, schedules, and shared space. See Table 9 for information on overcoming constraints.

**Strategic Use of Funding and Non-monetary Resources**
Participants shared the opinion that the federal and state government should provide more funding for early care and education. Stable funding, at higher levels, is needed to cover the cost of services and related expenses, including: professional development, stipends for collaboration, transportation, building space, supplies, and equipment.

Many participants in Thompson County had firsthand experience of financial challenges to their program. First, the director of Head Start reflected on the difficult decision to cut some children from the Head Start program when the sequester occurred a few years ago. Second, the school district preschool coordinator acknowledged that if state preschool funding levels for her program dropped, the district would likely have to stop providing transportation, often used to get children to and from other early care and education programs, as well as their homes. Third, the regional office preschool coordinator discussed the problem of childcare centers not receiving CCDF payments on time, because in a partnership between a childcare center and a state preschool program, the state preschool program cannot exist without the childcare center. The regional office preschool coordinator explained this dilemma, saying, “[If] they close down, then we have no place to be either. It is just a domino effect, so, the collaboration between them and us is crucial.”

Despite recognizing these funding challenges existing in the past, present, and potentially in the future, participants in Thompson County shared several strategies for maximizing funding. For example, the school district preschool coordinator reported that her program scraped together all of its leftover funds to put toward transportation, stating, “Any money that we have left over from salaries, supplies, professional development, food for their snacks, we put that towards transportation.” The director of Head Start described how she and the owner/director of
Children’s Castle had honest and candid discussions about program budgets when deciding on the stipend that Head Start would pay Children’s Castle. She stated,

What we do is we work out a dollar amount that is reasonable for her, also reasonable for us, at a level that the owner won’t feel that she is having to donate a whole bunch of stuff to Head Start, or donate a whole bunch of time and materials, etcetera.

Programs also relied on non-monetary resources to keep costs down. First, the school district preschool program accesses support and resources from the school district’s special education and transportation departments. Second, while Head Start and state preschool programs cannot charge families for anything, they can post a classroom wish list and accept parent donations. These programs can also accept help from parent and community volunteers. Third, Head Start benefits from required in-kind donations of goods and services, matching 25% of its total budget. These in-kind donations often constitute large items such as office supplies or valuable services such as speech therapy or dental work. Finally, childcare centers such as Children’s Castle benefit from money and supplies acquired through partnerships with state preschool and Head Start programs. The regional office preschool teacher at Children’s Castle explained how supplies from her program are incorporated in the childcare center over time, saying,

[The Regional Office of Education] pays for a lot of their [Children’s Castle] things...

Almost everything in here is ROE’s even if it’s not in our classroom because it was handed down to them. So, whenever we got something new, [or] we didn’t want something, it got handed down to another person.
Dealing With Rural Issues

During interviews, participants described the constraints of living in a rural community, including isolation, limited resources, and providing coverage to a large geographical area. Despite posing some challenges, participants speculated that the rural nature of the community facilitated better relationships among program staff. The regional office preschool teacher at St. Patrick stated, “I think we get along fine. This is a small community so everybody knows everybody. Everybody gets along pretty good.” Participants also reported that in a rural area, program staff members were more in touch with family concerns. The regional office preschool coordinator stated,

Thompson County does very well with that. Those girls [early care and education teachers and administrators] live over there. They know those kids. [At the joint preschool screening event], when we’re partitioning kids out into the [program] we feel is best for them, they know more about the families.

The Home Provider program is a major strategy used in Thompson County to meet the needs of children in rurally isolated communities. The Home Provider program funds a resource room for providers; they can access materials themselves or ask the Home Provider teacher to bring materials to them on her weekly visits. The program also allows for continuity of care by bringing programming to children. The model is not traditional, and is not necessarily preferred by the state, but the grant proposal was initially accepted and is annually renewed because it does provide programming to children who need it. The regional office preschool coordinator stated,

[The state department of public instruction] is letting us do this because the teacher is meeting with her student at least once a week for two-and-a-half hours and she is going into the home provider’s home and working with the rest of those kids in there too. But,
the real reason for state preschool is to get those kids into a classroom setting and so they
[the state] would much rather see those kids in a classroom.

While acknowledging the benefits of classroom-based programming for all students, participants
were unsure if it is the best option for children enrolled in the Home Provider program, who are
often three years old. Most parents, especially those that rely on childcare, would not be able to
drive a child into town and back for a half-day program. If the necessary transportation were
provided, children would spend considerable time on the bus each day.

Early care and education programs in Thompson County take other steps to overcome the
constraints of a rural community. The regional office state preschool program takes children and
their parents on a joint field trip each year, visiting a children’s museum a large nearby city to
provide a different cultural experience. The rural environment also lacks many opportunities for
face-to-face continuing education. Staff members take advantage of online degree programs.
The regional office explored gathering enough adult learners for a cohort, so that the closest
public university would come to their region to provide the courses for a Masters degree and
ELL endorsement; unfortunately; they were not able to gather enough students to qualify.

Providing Transportation in Innovative Ways

Due to limited funds and the rural nature of the area, transportation arrangements in
Thompson County are noteworthy. Because Thompson County is so big, bus routes are very
long. Children do not ride busses according to school (e.g., busses serving the elementary school,
busses serving the middle school, etc.). Rather, buses pick up all of the children in one area of
the county, and make several stops in town to drop students off at the elementary school middle
school, high school, and St. Patrick Catholic School. Because Spring Brook Elementary, the
early childhood building that houses Kindergarten classrooms and the Thompson County School
District preschool program, is actually several miles outside of Harper, the main town that houses the other schools, preschool children transfer busses on their way to school or on their way home.

In general, participants were satisfied with this arrangement. The school district preschool coordinator stated, “It is very involved, but it all works. It works really well...Our transportation director is pretty amazing...Our transportation department is incredible.” Classroom teachers did report that when programs had a change in schedule that resulted in changes to transportation arrangements, dealing with those situations was a burden. The cooperative’s ECSE teacher, who shares many students with the school district preschool program through a dual enrollment arrangement, explained the logistical challenge of altering transportation arrangements on days when the district preschool program is not in session but her program still holds class. She stated,

I have to send, usually a few reminders home to say, ‘Your kid is coming home today. Don’t expect them home at three [o’clock]. They are going to be home at eleven thirty.’ Also, calling the bus garage and reminding them...Those are the biggest headaches.

The owner/director of Children’s Castle suggested that transportation arrangements could be even more innovative, and that programs could find a way to provide that service to even more children. She said,

I think it would be helpful to all parents and all programs if they could pick up every student that was going somewhere [and take them to their destination] and....pull your money from this [state preschool program] and from this Head Start and give it to the school [district] and help some of their transportation costs. They are not going to have
anymore [costs]. Maybe their insurance [will] go up some, but being so rural, transportation is a big issue for families.

Navigating Conflicting or Confusing Rules

Funding streams supporting early care and education programs in Thompson County have a variety of rules and regulations associated with them. Participants reported that important aspects of collaboration included: knowing about other programs’ rules, understanding how those rules could add challenges or extra responsibilities to their own work load, and being aware of conflicting rules and developing strategies for dealing with those conflicts.

Participants described the ways in which differences in programs’ missions; monitoring and reporting practices; personnel expectations; and standards for licensing, facilities, and other program elements can create challenges for collaborations. Administrators acknowledged that implementing only one of the programs in a collaboration was potentially more difficult than implementing both. For example, in the collaboration at Children’s Castle, the owner/director implements the licensed childcare program while the regional office preschool coordinator administers the state preschool program. The owner/director of Children’s Castle stated,

One of the hardships is not administering our own grant. She [regional office preschool coordinator] administers the grant and oversees the teacher, but then there are things that I see that I would like done differently. It’s in my program. I would like to see more family communication. I would like to see the environment switched up a little bit. Makes it hard because it is not my teacher to maybe let off for two days without pay, when she is doing something. That makes it hard.

Teachers at collaboration sites experienced this frustration as well, reporting difficulty in knowing which administrator’s directions to follow. The Head Start collaboration classroom
teacher at Children’s Castle stated, “Sometimes it is a little bit of a confusion of which rules you have to follow, because the building itself has rules and then you have daycare rules.”

When programs encountered problems related to conflicting program guidelines and expectations, they were most effectively dealt with at the administrative level. Here are a few key examples of that practice. In one example, the owner/director of Children’s Castle reported that her strong relationship with the regional office preschool coordinator is what helps them through difficult moments. She stated,

The communication that [the regional office preschool coordinator] and I have [is key]. The relationship. We share the same values, goals, philosophy. We both understand developmentally appropriate practices. We can share our frustrations, our problems, but instead of doing it in a way that it is just gossiping or harmful, we do it in a constructive way where it is, ‘Let’s figure this out’. The relationship that is the only thing that has made it successful. That open communication.

In a second example, administrators from Head Start and Children’s Castle had different ideas about whether substitute staff members had to attend required Head Start trainings. The administrators responded to that dilemma by scheduling a “check-in” meeting to clarify the finer details of the collaboration, still in its first year. In a third example, the regional office preschool coordinator was notified by one of her teachers, in another county, that the director of her collaboration site was often pulling the classroom aide out of the classroom to maintain ratio requirements. The regional office preschool coordinator dealt with the issue by talking to the center director, reminding her of the rules of the state preschool program. She stated,

I have to go back to the Director and say, ‘Okay, you know we can’t do this. We have got to have her [classroom aide] in there. You can’t name her [acting director] because
you and the owner take off and go to a conference or whatever. You can’t leave my aide in charge. If she is in charge then you need to give me another aide.

**Managing Logistics Such as Calendars, Schedules, and Shared Space**

Participants in this study reported logical challenges related to calendars, schedules, and sharing space. In order to collaborate effectively, participants had to be aware of the logistical challenges and find strategic ways to overcome those challenges.

**Calendars.** The early care and education programs that collaborate to provide service to typically developing children in Thompson County have some variance in their academic calendars, which can impact families and programs. Here are a few examples. One example is the collaboration between the regional office and Children’s Castle. The regional office provides a classroom teacher and aide for four-year-olds on days when the preschool program is in session. About half of the children in the preschool program are also enrolled full time at Children’s Castle; the childcare center provides staffing for those children outside the preschool day. On days when the preschool program is not in session but Children’s Castle is open, the owner/director needs to find additional staff members to care for the children who attend the center full time. This challenge also applies to the Head Start collaboration classroom at Children’s Castle. Three of the fifteen children in that program are also enrolled in the childcare center. Head Start does not have programming on Mondays. On those days and other days when Head Start is closed, Children’s Castle must provide staff to care for those children. It is important to note that while the owner/director can *ask* the Head Start teacher to work those hours, the teacher is not required to work any hours outside of her Head Start program.

A second example is that while the school district preschool program follows the school district academic calendar most of the time, there is a practice of not having preschool on days
when there is a monthly parent night. There is also a practice of not holding the afternoon preschool session on days when the school district has an early dismissal. These minor calendar changes impact the students who are dually enrolled in other programs, the staff members associated with those other programs, parents, and the bus garage. Similarly, for children who are dually enrolled in Head Start and the school district preschool program, the school district provides transportation from Head Start to the school district program. If Head Start is not in session, the bus has to pick up children at their homes. Classroom teachers for the school district preschool program and the cooperative’s ECSE program reported that they send reminders to all parties, making sure they are aware of the change in schedule.

In some instances, conflicting calendars do not cause many logistical challenges. For example, the Home Provider teacher does not visit licensed childcare homes on days when regional office programs are closed. While she does make an effort to remind providers of those schedule changes, her absence does not have an impact home providers’ staffing or ratios.

**Scheduling and sharing space.** In some early care and education collaborations in Thompson County, a logistical challenge for programs is sharing schedules and space. The regional office teacher at Children’s Castle described several challenges related to sharing space and materials with the childcare center, including: (a) having to use classroom cubbies to store belongings that children use outside of the preschool program (e.g., blankets and pillows for nap time), (b) children and teachers at the center “using up” classroom supplies such as paint and paper when she is not at the center, and (c) equipment getting damaged or broken. She deals with the last logistical challenge by locking up materials or making them less accessible in her absence. She stated,
There is a lot of my things that I have to think, ‘Okay, do I want to leave this out or is it going to get broken?’...It’s just they have school age kids in that room and in the past, [my things] have gotten broke....I like to get all my stuff out for tomorrow and keep it out [but] they keep getting into it. So, you pretty much just have to put everything away and some things, we even have locked cabinets. My iPads have passwords on them because I really don’t want them playing with them. You have to be careful because you don’t know what is going to happen to your things. I used to have colored paper all the time, but then the daycare kids use it after I leave, so I was constantly replacing paper. I just got to the point where I am like, ‘You know what, I can’t go replace paper every day.’ I know that is just a little thing and it is not that big of deal but I could easily do it, but I am like, ‘We are going to go through paper like crazy so I just tell my kids, ‘Hey, if you want a colored piece of paper I will go get it for you.’ Other than that I am not going to keep replacing paper every single morning.

The building principal at St. Patrick and the regional office staff members at St. Patrick also described the logistics of housing a state preschool classroom within an elementary school. The principal schedules recess and P.E. for the preschool program first, to ensure that those children are not sharing gross motor time with older children. She also re-routes foot traffic within the building, to ensure that older students are not walking by the preschool classroom and disturbing their work. During morning pick up, parents of children in the preschool program have to walk through the space that the elementary school uses for recess. Children have been instructed to stop playing as the parents come through.

During interviews, all participants shared some aspects of logistics related to collaboration. The degree to which these logistics seemed problematic to participants varied. For
example, when the principal of St. Patrick described the process of scheduling around the regional office preschool program, she said,

Logistically, we run into issues with when [the preschool teacher] wants to have gross motor like recess. It is just recess, but we have to schedule around that. I don’t let my elementary teachers have recess or my older kids have recess when her kids are having recess. We only have one playground and one gym. So, that was a logistic that we had to deal with, but it was no problem. We figured it out. It was fine.

When participants seemed to be very bothered by logistical challenges, the examples they offered sometimes related to complex challenges that involved more than one logistical issue (i.e., a change in schedule that led to a change in the already complicated transportation arrangements). Other times, the examples reflected an overwhelming number of challenges.

Describing the logistical challenges of her collaboration, the regional office teacher at Children’s Castle stated, “So, it is mostly just the little things and it shouldn’t be such a big deal but when you just add them all up then it kind of gets kind of frustrating.”

**Policy Level Perspectives About Collaboration**

Policy level participants shared many thoughts and ideas about collaboration in early care and education. Noteworthy ideas reflected ways in which policy level perspectives mirrored local perspectives, as well as ways in which policy level perspectives reflected a different focus than that at the local level.

**Policy Level Perspectives that Mirror Local Perspectives**

**Components of high quality local collaborations.** Policy level participants and program level participants shared ideas about the essential components of partnerships. High quality local collaborations have certain key elements, including: willing participants, trust, a coordinated
intake process, shared resources, and shared professional development. Partners need to be open-minded about working together, but knowledgeable about their own program requirements. As described throughout the Results, these elements are in place in Thompson County. The director of the state wide Head Start association described the importance of these elements in a local collaboration. She stated,

We have a continuum of collaboration at the local level. What I mean by that is we have some really excellent models or examples [of] that where local communities are doing an excellent job of collaborating and then we have some mediocre and then we have some things that are not so good...So, those that are doing great things, they do a coordinated intake process, they are sharing resources, they are doing professional development together. There is a lot of great things going on within those communities.

A representative from a statewide technical assistance program to support young children with special needs shared her thoughts, stating,

They [partners] have to trust each other. They have to see value in each other’s programs and they have to honor the mandates of each other. And, they have to be knowledgeable because sometimes somebody will say, ‘No, we have to do this,’ and really they don’t have to do that. They are not knowledgeable enough in their grant; they just think they have to [do certain things]. So an open mindedness to see another way to do it and still be within the mandates of your funding agent.

The importance of child care subsidy payments. Participants at the local level and state level shared concerns about the stability of child care subsidy payments (i.e., CCDF). Families rely on these subsidy payments to fund childcare. Programs rely on subsidy payments to stay in business. Indirectly, state preschool collaborations rely on subsidy payments to keep childcare
centers open; if childcare centers close, state preschool programs housed within them may close as well. At policy level, participants understood the factors that could impact childcare subsidy payments. These factors include legislation (e.g., reauthorization of the Child Care Development Block Grant) and political climate (e.g., a new state governor, a shift in party affiliation within the state). A representative from the state department of Human Services described the potential impact of budget cuts on the child care subsidy program. She stated,

The best I can tell you is what the Governor shared in his budget address when he announced that the funds would need to be cut. He indicated we would achieve that savings by increasing parent co-payments, by eliminating payments to relatives for childcare, and by restricting access to the program to children under the age of six. So, those were the three things that the Governor suggested. And, there is much debate about that going on right now in the General Assembly as to whether or not that is the appropriate way to achieve the savings.

At the local level, participants expressed an understanding that the situation was dire, but did not demonstrate a clear grasp of the issue. The regional office preschool coordinator stated,

Well, like right now, the childcare issue is huge. They are lacking in millions of dollars to fund them. And, what most people don’t know is that those daycare centers don’t just function on parent pay. They have to have state funded resources and they have a lot, but when the state has no money and they don’t know how to divvy that fund[ing] up, and get it to those daycare centers, [it is a critical problem].

**Policy Level Perspectives That Differ From Local Perspectives**

**Over-saturation of services for four-year-olds.** Policy level participants reflected on federal and state initiatives that had the potential to impact early care and education
collaborations. Many interviewees were keenly aware of a federal initiative for programming, delivered through the state, specifically targeting four-year-olds from low-income households. Participants thought that this initiative would over-saturate communities with programs for four-year-olds, thus pitting programs against each other in a competition for students and reducing the likelihood of positive long-term collaborations between programs. The director of the state Head Start Association explained the threat this type of program would have on Head Start. She stated,

> What we know about some of those communities [that will be getting classrooms for four-year-olds] is that they are already saturated with services to four-year-olds. In those communities where they are already over saturated with services to four-year-olds, the collaboration is going to be hard because they [new four-year-old classrooms] are going to be fighting for those four-year-olds because they are serving the same kids we [Head Start] are.

A representative from the state-funded preschool program, delivered through the department of public instruction, echoed this concern. She stated,

> I think we have to watch that [potential over-saturation of services for four-year-olds]. I think it could happen. I know Head Start programs are worried about losing kids to the [new four-year-old classrooms], so we do have to keep a good eye on it, [and] make sure that it doesn’t happen. There is a perfect example of how collaboration needs to work. [When] we have a new project, we want it to succeed, but we don’t want to hurt anybody else in the process.

At the local level, however, participants showed no concern for potential competition between programs. When asked what they would change about early care and education program in their community, many participants expressed a desire for more services, enough to serve all
children. The school district preschool coordinator stated, “Well, [if I could change something], everybody would get served.” Some interviewees thought that community should provide more programming and that it should be mandatory.

**Dosage of service.** Policy level participants were concerned about giving children the right “amount” or “dosage” of service (e.g., comprehensive Head Start services vs. education only state preschool services). Describing the ideal process for coordinated intake and enrollment, a representative from the state Head Start Association said,

You have a coordinated intake process where you are actually working together looking at what you know about the child and the family, and saying, ‘I think this family really needs the dosage and intensity and comprehensive services that Head Start provides’ or ‘I think this family would thrive in our [state preschool] environments. They don’t need that intensive dosage; they just need a light touch,’ [or], ‘They need wrap around childcare.’

At the local level, however, participants were focused on giving everyone an opportunity to attend a program, often reporting that the main purpose and benefit of any preschool program was kindergarten readiness. In Thompson County, placement of children in programs often related to keeping all programs filled with children who qualified (rather than ensuring that each individual child was assigned the best match for his particular needs). The school district preschool coordinator described this perspective, as it related to preschool screening and enrollment, stating,

Let’s say that when we are all together and we are talking about these preschool students and let’s say that we have a student who has a pretty high need and let’s say that the parents said that they wanted district pre-k, but the Head Start lady says, ‘I know that
family and I know that they qualify for Head Start and I know that we are going to have transportation this year.’ Their transportation depends on their funding. So, some years they have more transportation than others. Let’s say that she says, ‘I know that we are going to have transportation to pick them up.’ And, so we will say, ‘Then you take that child because then that will open up one [slot] for us [for a family] that may have a high need that their family wouldn’t qualify for Head Start, so by doing that I think we get more kids in more programs.

**Awareness of state-level initiatives.** During interviews, participants at the policy level demonstrated a firm grasp on policy initiatives, changes in legislation, and new regulations (e.g., changes to the statewide QRIS system, the implementation of a grant that would increase programming for four-year-olds, and the creation of an early care and education umbrella agency within the state government structure). They reflected upon these initiatives, often considering the potential positive and negative consequences for communities, programs, and families. At the local level, however, participants expressed a lack of awareness of government initiatives. For example, the school district preschool coordinator stated, “I have heard a little bit about [how] the preschool grant could become competitive. I have not heard this directly, myself. This came through the grapevine. Participants also expressed frustration that government initiatives were not communicated to local communities in a timely and effective way. The regional office preschool coordinator stated, “Sometimes I wish that [the state department of public instruction] would [better explain] their good ideas of what they want to do.”
Chapter 5—Results: Research Question 2

The second research question for this study was, ‘How do early care and education programs (state preschool, Head Start, early childhood special education, and licensed childcare) in one rural county work together to meet the needs of young children with disabilities and other diverse needs?’ Major strategies used to meet the needs of young children with developmental delays and significant disabilities in Thompson County are: (a) enrollment in the cooperative’s ECSE program, and (b) dual enrollment in the cooperative’s ECSE program and another community location. Other services for children with diverse needs provided in Thompson County include: speech only IEPs, 504 plans, Head Start services (facilitated by the Specialized Support manager), and mental health consulting (provided by the CCR&R).

Policy level participants shared thoughts and ideas about the practices and issues involved in serving young children with disabilities and other diverse needs. Some perspectives mirrored the local point of view, while others differed.

Self Contained Early Childhood Special Education

Background and History of the ECSE Program

With the exception of children who have speech-only IEPs, children in Thompson County who have special needs are provided services through the North Central Special Education (NCSE) cooperative. Education services are delivered in a half-day, self-contained special education classroom. Speech therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy are provided during instructional time; therapies are delivered via push-in model and are embedded in classroom routines and activities. Children can enter the program as early as their third birthday. Most children exit the program at age five to attend kindergarten; however, the team can choose to keep a student through age six.
During their most recent vote, the superintendents from the 12 districts that comprise the NCSE executive board decided to leave ESCE services under the control of the cooperative. Some individual districts do not have enough students to financially support these services; when the cooperative provides ESCE services, however, they can be shared across counties and districts. Each year, the cooperative: (a) estimates the number of children in each community who will likely qualify for ECSE the following year, and (b) surveys school districts to see what, if any, space they have available to house a classroom. The cooperative uses this information to strategically place ECSE classrooms throughout the five county region. Some years, individual school districts have enough children to fill an entire program (i.e., two half-day sessions); this has been true in the Thompson County School District for the past two years. When districts do not have enough children to support a program, classrooms are shared by two or more school districts.

In recent years, members of the cooperative’s executive board have discussed having school districts assume responsibility for providing ECSE services. This would be a way to reduce the fee that districts pay the cooperative. Following the most recent conversation about this option, the vote on the issue was negative (i.e., school districts will not take over ECSE services). Administrators think that the discussion will come up again, and are hopeful about moving toward a blended model. The cooperative’s early childhood education director stated,

I think [the] bottom line with the discussion that has taken place this past few months [is] even though the district has decided that we [the cooperative] would go ahead and keep the early childhood programs for this coming year, I think it [the topic] will come up again. But I think that [during discussions] we were able to give that information [about
blended programs] and say, ‘This is what we really need to be doing and these are the different ways it [can] look.

Until programming is handed off the individual school districts, however, service provision will be constrained by the package of services that the cooperative offers, which is a comprehensive model in which all special education and related services are provided within the context of a self-contained classroom.

**Qualifying for Early Childhood Special Education Services**

Children who qualify for early childhood special education services in Thompson County progress through the typical steps involved in the special education eligibility process. They are located through Child Find efforts and during the process of transitioning out of Early Intervention. A team uses standardized assessment measures to determine eligibility. If the child is found eligible, the team creates an initial IEP and determines placement. See Table 10 for more information about the special education eligibility process.

**Child Find.** During interviews, participants reported that it was important to identify children with special needs and begin providing services as early as possible. The cooperative and school district employ several strategies to locate children with disabilities. The first vehicle is Early Intervention (EI). The local Early Outreach (EO) agency and school district have a transition agreement. For each child enrolled in EI, the EO makes a referral to the school district that results in a transition conference between EI and the school district special needs coordinator, when the child is between 30 and 33 months of age. This meeting provides initial introductions between the family and the school district. At the meeting, EI service providers share information about the child, his services, and his current progress. The school district
special needs coordinator provides information about the upcoming transition. The school district special needs coordinator described the value of this meeting, stating,

I always meet them [families in EI]. Six months out we have a transition meeting in the home. I go into the home and I can meet and hear about the kiddo and see them and meet the parents. I love it. [The EI service coordinator] says there [are] several coordinators that don’t go and I just can’t imagine not [going] because then I feel like when we come to the table here [at the district], I don’t know the history. I am not connected. I have that little bit of rapport build already and I love to go.

The state also has built in a safeguard to ensure that children enrolled in early intervention are referred for early childhood special education. The state sends the school district a list with the names of all children in the district who have received early intervention services and are now twenty-seven months old. The cooperative double-checks the list to confirm that all of those children have gotten a referral to the school district from EI.

In addition to referrals from EI, the school district relies on several other Child Find strategies. First, pamphlets about Child Find are distributed to the families of all children in school district classrooms (grades K-3) and all cooperative classrooms, as well as at preschool screening events. Second, the school district special education department sets up an information table at events such as the joint preschool screening and Kindergarten registration. Third, each year, the school district holds a required Child Find meeting for home school providers and private schools, to ensure they are aware of special education services available from the district. Fourth, a parent, doctor, or current early care and education provider can make a referral. Fifth, results of the Dial 4, obtained at the joint preschool screening event, may lead to a referral to special education.
Finally, school district professionals constantly keep their eyes open for any child they meet who might benefit from EI or ECSE services. The school district special needs coordinator shared an example of ‘spotting’ a child during a meeting for her sister, stating,

This morning I was in a meeting on a Kindergartener and the younger sister [was there]. There was some obvious developmental concerns and so I gave her [the mom] the contact number for [the] EI Coordinator and I am going to call the EI Coordinator to tell her to call mom, because mom [won’t] call her. That [kind of thing] happens a lot when we have those younger siblings that come with the parents to meetings. I can count on one hand, this year, the number of referrals we have made to EI.

Assessment and determining eligibility.

Domain meeting. Once a child has been referred for services, there is a two-part assessment process to determine a child’s eligibility. The purpose of the first step, a short (30-60 minute) domain meeting, is to review available information about a child in each of several domains (e.g., academic achievement, social/emotional status) and to decide what additional assessments are necessary to determine eligibility. A team gathers to determine the assessment path that will be followed. This team is comprised of individuals from EI, the school district, the special education cooperative, and the child’s family. If a child received EI, the EI service coordinator and EI direct service providers attend the meeting. From the school district, the special needs coordinator and nurse attend the meeting, along with the district preschool teacher (as a representative of a regular education placement). Several individuals from cooperative attend. The psychologist leads the meeting, presenting the information that is known about each domain, and discussing what other information needs to be gathered. The social worker, early childhood education director, and ECSE teacher attend. Direct service providers also attend if the
child was receiving those services through EI (e.g., if a child received PT through EI, the cooperative’s PT attends).

If the team determines that the child likely has global delays, or significant delays in two or more developmental domains, the child is then referred to the second step in the assessment process for ECSE services, a play-based assessment and full case study. If the team determines that the child likely has minimal needs, or needs in only one area, the team does not do a full case study or play based assessment. Instead, the child may be referred to the school district for possible development of a speech-only IEP. When appropriate, the child may be referred to the cooperative or school district for possible development of a 504 plan. Those services are described briefly in a later section of the Results.

**Play-based assessment and full case study.** A play-based assessment, the Developmental Assessment of Young Children (DAYC), second edition, is used. The assessment takes place in the school district special needs department conference room. The ECSE teacher facilitates play with the child while other professionals take notes on a child’s actions relevant to specific domains (e.g., the speech pathologist records information about the child’s use of language). Parents are interviewed during the DAYC to comment on whether the child’s behavior is typical. Although several professionals record data, the psychologist ultimately scores the assessment. In addition to the results of the DAYC, other information is gathered to complete the full case study. All existing EI reports and medical reports are reviewed. The social worker also conducts a Social Developmental Study (SDS) prior to the DAYC.

**Developing an IEP.** Since many of the cooperative’s staff members cover a very large geographical area, rescheduling direct services for their students is difficult. Therefore, the school district and cooperative designate entire days for the assessment and eligibility process. In
the morning, the team completes a play-based assessment, briefly dismisses parents to score the assessment and determine eligibility, and then reconvenes for an IEP meeting. If the child was found ineligible, the subsequent meeting is short; parents are told that their child did not qualify for services. If the child is found eligible, the team shares proposed goals and objectives with the family; the family shares baseline information about a child’s progress toward the early childhood outcomes, which will be reassessed two times per year. The cooperative’s speech pathologist described the meeting process, saying,

We are trying. We are typing. If they don’t qualify, it’s really fast. All we have to type is eligibility paperwork. But if they qualify then we are trying to type in [the IEP] because we would really like to have the paperwork done [when] the parents get back, but we never really do. So, we are trying to type up our eligibility paperwork. We are talking about what kind of goals we are going to write. We have the parents come back usually within thirty minutes. And at that time the school [psychologist] starts going over the eligibility information and I go over my [speech and language] part and then we flow right into, ‘Okay, now they qualify. This [ECSE classroom] is what we are recommending.’ If the parents agree, we usually have all the paperwork almost completed by that point and [the ECSE teacher] starts going into the goals that she is proposing, I go into the goals that I am proposing, and we are hopefully done by noon. This same sequence occurs in the afternoon for another child and family. Although the process is fast, participants thought that it was the best option for families. Many parents work, and this plan prevents them from missing work on two different days.

**Placement decisions.** In nearly all cases, services will be delivered in the cooperative’s ECSE classroom. Exceptions occur, but may become complicated by a lack of viable placement
options. For example, a child may be found eligible for ECSE services mid-year. The team determines that the district preschool classroom is the most appropriate placement because the child’s developmental delay does not include a cognitive deficit, but that option is not available because the district preschool classroom is full. This example illustrates how the cooperative’s ability to recommend a regular early childhood program as a primary placement is restricted by the availability of space in state preschool programs, which try to fill enrollment at the start of the school year.

Occasionally, an issue arises surrounding placement decisions. The cooperative’s team makes the final decision regarding who is eligible for services in its ECSE classroom. The cooperative’s speech pathologist commented, "Sometimes, there is some hard feelings towards [the cooperative] when a kid who the district feels very strongly about, [who needs] a more restrictive placement does not get placed there. They feel animosity toward [the cooperative].” The local school district is dependent on the cooperative to provide placements that are more restrictive than the regular district preschool classroom.

**Service Delivery**

Service delivery for the ECSE program takes place in a half-day, self-contained early childhood education classroom, five days per week. The classroom teacher and two classroom aides are always present. The speech therapist is in the classroom full time, two days per week. The OT and PT are in the classroom full time, one day per week. The ECSE teacher has a chance to collaborate with her team during the lunch period. All direct services are provided in this context. In addition to direct services, services providers do some “behind the scenes” work to support their students (e.g., working with the Department of Specialized Care to purchase a wheelchair for a child to use at home.)
If a child is dually enrolled in the ECSE classroom and another preschool program, consultative services from related service providers are indicated on the child’s IEP. Related services, however, are never provided through direct service in another context. The early childhood education director for the cooperative explained the reason for this policy, stating, OTs and PTs will still stop by pre-k, but it is more of a consultative [service]. Because the child is developmentally delayed and we [the cooperative] are providing those [special education] services in our program, they [OTs and PTs] would have to provide service as a related service to our special education teacher.

**Dual Enrollment**

In almost all cases, dual enrollment is the only inclusive option for children with developmental delays in Thompson County. Children can be enrolled in the cooperative’s ECSE classroom *in addition* to a regular education classroom (state preschool or Head Start). Special education services are only provided in the ECSE classroom. Therefore, children cannot be enrolled *only* in a state preschool or Head Start program and still receive special education services. As previously noted, exceptions can occur if a child has a developmental delay but no cognitive deficits.

At the program level, all participants shared a common belief about the main purpose of dual enrollment, which is to provide children with disabilities a large group social experience. This gives the child practice handling a busier environment and gives the team an idea of what supports the child will need in kindergarten. The school district preschool teacher described how children with disabilities participate in nearly all classroom activities, but was clear that academics were not her responsibility. She stated,
The number one reason why they are in here is to see how well they do socially in a large group. That is that main focus. Not to say I don’t work on academics, but that is not my goal. [The ECSE teacher] writes them; she works on them. We are more of a transition to have some basis of how they perform in a large group.

At the program level, no participants reported that access to the general curriculum was a reason for dual enrollment.

Dual Enrollment Arrangements

**Thompson County School District program.** There are three types of dual enrollment available to students in Thompson County. The first arrangement is primary enrollment in the cooperative’s ECSE classroom and secondary enrollment in the school district preschool program. A child attends one program in the morning and the other program in the afternoon. Three children from the ECSE classroom are enrolled in the morning session of district preschool; four children are enrolled in the afternoon. Children receive transportation to school in the morning and home from school in the afternoon. The school provides childcare during the 50-minute gap between sessions.

The district preschool teacher and the ECSE teacher work collaboratively to educate children who are dually enrolled by ensuring that children have the same supports across environments. The district teacher described her relationship with the ECSE teacher as a team teaching arrangement, stating, “I would consider us more team teachers even though we are not in the same room.” The teachers stay in frequent contact with each other, talking to each other over the lunch hour almost every day. If the district teacher has a pressing question about a child during a session, she sends a text to the ECSE teacher. Before IEP meetings or other meetings
with parents, the teachers meet to get “on the same page” and compare notes about a child’s progress across environments.

The district teacher and ECSE teacher collaborate when a dually enrolled child has difficulty. If a child seems to need extra support, the teachers may informally pull together a team to brainstorm strategies. The district teacher offered an example, stating, “On Friday, we are going to come together on another [dually enrolled] student with [the cooperative’s early childhood education director], the OT, [the ECSE teacher], and myself because we can’t get any academic [work from the child].” In other instances when a child is struggling, the ECSE teacher may visit the district classroom to observe a child and provide some onsite consultation; therapists and classroom aides cover the ECSE classroom in her absence.

Although the district preschool teacher works hard to ensure the success of dually enrolled students, she is not certified to teach special education. She stated, “I am not a special ed teacher.” She does not take part in creating supports such as behavior plans or schedules. The ECSE team develops and implements these supports first, and then teaches the district preschool team how to use them. The district teacher described the process, stating,

For example, if they [ECSE] are going to implement a schedule with a child, I have them get it down pat for that child first because they know how to implement it and then they come in and teach us [district preschool classroom]. So that child is already familiar with it. We don’t throw [it at the child in both environments at once]. If there is some new behavior technique, or even if it is just a first-then [schedule], they implement it, we follow.

The school district special needs department provides additional classroom aides (one in the morning, two in the afternoon) to support children who are dually enrolled in the district
preschool classroom. The aides’ roles include helping students with independent skills (i.e., toileting) and helping to manage challenging behaviors. The district teacher said that while having four adults in the room makes for a crowded space, sometimes it is not enough support.

The major issue associated with this dual enrollment arrangement is that the collaboration is built upon daily, in person communication between the ECSE teacher and district preschool teacher. The ECSE teacher described how this arrangement facilitates collaboration, stating,

I think that makes it so much easier when you are so close to everybody and you are able to talk [any time]. You can just pop into a room and say something. I think that has made it a lot easier to talk about things.

Because neither program is guaranteed a permanent space at Spring Brook Elementary, the arrangement is not stable. The ECSE program can be moved if Thompson County does not have enough students to support its own ECSE classroom, or if Spring Brook needs the classroom for another program, such as an additional Kindergarten classroom. The district program can be moved if the school district needs the space. In fact, the district classroom was located in the high school in the past. Both the ECSE teacher and the district preschool teacher were concerned about a change in the arrangement. The district teacher stated, “I just hope that she doesn’t move out of our building.”

**Head Start collaboration classroom at Children’s Castle.** A second dual enrollment arrangement for children with special needs in Thompson County is primary placement in the ECSE classroom and secondary placement in the Head Start collaboration classroom at Children’s Castle. Two children participate in this arrangement. While children may also be dually enrolled in either the morning or afternoon session at the standalone Head Start center in
Thompson County, details of that arrangement are not provided because that program was not investigated for this study.

The school district relies on Head Start as a dual enrollment site when there are more children who need dual enrollment than the school district preschool program can accommodate. The district special needs coordinator explained how having Head Start as a second dual enrollment option supported the school district. She stated,

It helped our numbers at Spring Brook [Elementary] because we were getting too many [students who needed dual enrollment]. This was a big class again. We had four in the morning and four in the afternoon in the pre-k and with some higher needs it was getting difficult to have the right amount of staff. To balance all that, it was great that Head Start was willing to work with us.

Children who participate in this dual enrollment arrangement are enrolled in the full day Head Start collaboration classroom in the morning. Families provide transportation to Children’s Castle because Head Start does not offer transportation. Mid-day, children are transported by the district to Spring Brook to attend the ECSE program. At the end of the day, children are provided transportation back home.

To coordinate services for children who are dually enrolled, the Head Start teacher and the ECSE teacher communicate through e-mails and phone calls every few weeks to let each other know what is going on in their classrooms and to share information about children’s progress. The Head Start teacher stated, “We let each other know if the kids had a great week.” The Head Start teacher is intentional about addressing children’s goals. She attends IEP meetings for children who are dually enrolled in her classroom and her lesson planning form has a place to incorporate IEP goals and objectives.
**Kindergarten.** If a child has a developmental delay and his IEP team decides to keep him enrolled in the ECSE classroom through his sixth birthday, the team still encourages a dual enrollment placement. A state preschool program would not be an eligible secondary placement because a child who has already turned five by the start of the school year cannot attend state preschool. The child would be eligible to attend Head Start, as the upper age limit for Head Start is five years unless the school district provides documentation that Kindergarten is not an appropriate placement. In Thompson County, however, Kindergarten is the most logical choice for a student who remains in the ECSE program for an additional year, because the purpose of dual enrollment is to predict how a child will do in a Kindergarten environment. The ECSE director described this arrangement for a current student, stating, “He is doing dual enrollment in Kindergarten and in early childhood because he was of age to go to Kindergarten, but the team felt that we just needed to keep him another year and really look at that Kindergarten transition.”

**Inclusion**

When discussing the practice of dual enrollment, participants in Thompson County shared their perspectives about inclusion. There was a wide range of ideas. Some ideas reflected a positive view of inclusion. Other ideas reflected concerns about inclusion.

**Positive views of inclusion.** Participants at the administrative level expressed the belief that all children should be welcomed into programs. For example, the Thompson County School District preschool coordinator thought that all children in the district were entitled to the school district program because they were part of the community. She said, “All of those kids are our kids. They are Thompson County kids. We should have them in our preschool program.” The owner/director of Children’s Castle described her program’s inclusiveness of all children, saying,
“Every kid is welcome. We had a parent once say to us, ‘Do you take kids like her?’ and she had Down syndrome and I [said], ‘Like what? Like a kid?’”

At the classroom level, teachers in dual enrollment classroom expressed the opinion that including children with special needs in a classroom was a good thing. Acknowledging that teaching in an inclusive environment could sometimes be frustrating, the district preschool teacher thought that it was important to have a strategy for addressing diversity, stating,

All children are unique. We talk at the very beginning of the year that not everybody is the same. Not everybody looks the same. Not everybody talks the same. Not everybody is the same at all. I always say, ‘How boring would it be if I had everybody [in class] the same? That would be boring.’ If they have that mindset from the early on then they are not going to have any problems. They know that certain kids need special stuff. They may [even] say, ‘You forgot his schedule.’ I hope that I create that atmosphere that [it is good that] everybody is different.

The teacher in the Head Start collaboration classroom at Children’s Castle thought that it was not a big deal to include children with diverse needs and described the importance of giving each child an equal opportunity, stating,

[Children with disabilities don’t have a different classroom experience]. They do everything the same as everybody else. It might take us longer to do get it done, but they get to do everything just like everybody else. We just include all the children in every activity. We don’t ever segregate one child.

Concerns about inclusion. As previously described, a dual enrollment arrangement in Thompson County includes the ECSE classroom as a primary placement, and the district preschool classroom or a Head Start classroom as a secondary placement. Although the regional
office’s state preschool programs are heavily involved in collaborations for typically developing children, they do not enroll children with developmental delays. Participants from the regional office at both the administrative level and classroom level expressed somewhat pessimistic views of inclusion. The regional office preschool coordinator shared her concern that state preschool classrooms could “turn into” special education classrooms. She stated,

You know there is an overload of kids in special ed. [There are] way many more than there used to be and so now you have got an overload in [state preschool]. When does that state preschool program turn into a special ed program because she [the teacher] has got so many kids [with special needs]?

The regional office teacher at Children’s Castle shared her personal preference not to work with children who have special needs, having forgotten the strategies she learned in college and knowing that she lacked the required patience. She stated,

I did have to take a lot of special education classes when I was in college. However, I feel like I don’t remember anything I learned in college. I feel like I need to be reviewed on many things. When I went to college you had a choice [to pick] early childhood with a special education endorsement and I did not choose that. My reasoning is…I don’t have the patience as much for those children.

The regional office teacher at St. Patrick had an ambiguous attitude about inclusion. She first expressed her belief that the regional office programs would take any children with disabilities who wanted to attend, and would be happy to have them. She then stated, “Luckily, I have not had a lot of kids with disabilities.”

**Issues With Dual Enrollment**
Although dual enrollment is essentially the only strategy used to create inclusive placements for children with developmental delays in Thompson County, participants had concerns about the plan. For example, the ECSE teacher shared her perspective that the decision to dually enroll a child should be determined individually, rather than automatically accepted as common practice. She stated,

I think we need to look at each child individually to see if they are capable of handling that [secondary placement] and [decide] what the end goal is for that child. I think sometimes, maybe, we will just kind of put them in there. But, what is going to be the end goal? Are they going to increase speech or are they going to increase socialization? We have to have some kind of goal at the end for them to be able to reach and that’s where I have seen [sometimes] it works fantastic and sometimes it’s just frustrating on the child, frustrating on the teacher. It’s frustrating on the other kids in the room and I hate to see that.

Many participants reported that while dual enrollment works relatively well in Thompson County, it is not stable. As described earlier, the co-location of the ECSE classroom and the district preschool classroom at Spring Brook is precarious; either program can be moved at any time. This is especially worrisome to the teachers in both programs, who described constant communication as a key factor in their programs’ success.

Several participants offered alternative suggestions to a dual enrollment arrangement. Most of those ideas, however, were not possible due to various constraints. First, participants at the administrative level were in favor of a fully blended model. This is currently prohibited by the decision of the cooperative’s executive board to keep ECSE services as the cooperative’s responsibility. Implementing a blended model is also limited by teacher qualifications. The
current Thompson County School District preschool teacher is not licensed to teach special education, and does not intend to be, stating, “I not going back to school again.” Therefore, the school district would have to add a special education teacher to the classroom or hire a different person for the job.

Second, some participants thought that a full-year dual enrollment plan was too hard on children who still benefitted from an afternoon nap. The ECSE teacher suggested enrolling children in district preschool only during the second half of the school year. This plan is not feasible because state preschool programs are directed to fill enrollment at the start of the school year. The district preschool classroom does this and maintains a waiting list to immediately fill spaces that open up mid-year. Fourth, some participants thought that at least some of a child’s related services (e.g., speech, OT, PT) should be delivered in the dual enrollment placement. This option is restricted by the cooperative’s decision to provide all services within the context of the ECSE classroom.

A final issue with the current dual enrollment process is that regional office preschool programs are not currently viable options as secondary placements for children who receive primary services in the ECSE classroom. Several barriers stand in the way of making regional office classrooms accessible to children with special needs. First, the regional office preschool coordinator shared her understanding that a state preschool classroom that includes children with disabilities has to be co-taught, and that it is an entirely different type of program than a state preschool program for typically developing children. She stated,

I was talking about having the state preschool teacher and the special ed preschool teacher together in a classroom. You have to write for that, explain why you are doing
that, how many kids are in need of that and, how will that look when you do that. That is
totally different than just a state preschool program.

Second, the current regional office teachers may present a barrier to providing regional office
programs as dual enrollment options. Teachers do not need special education licensing in a
secondary placement. However, these teachers’ less than enthusiastic attitudes about working
with children who have disabilities could be problematic. Third, St. Patrick, which houses a
regional office preschool program, is not handicapped accessible, and the classroom is located in
the basement. The principal of St. Patrick described the dilemma, stating,

We are not handicapped accessible. So if they [children] have a physical handicap we
would more than likely turn them away. We do not [have to change] because we are a
private school and it is not that we don’t want to but our building physically can’t handle
what it would take...We have a ramp right out here. [A child] could get in and out of the
building fine. They can’t go downstairs.

By not offering regional office preschool classrooms as secondary placements in a dual
enrollment arrangement, options for families of children with disabilities are more limited than
options for all other families. At the annual joint preschool screening event in Thompson County,
parents indicate their preference of state preschool program. Each program in the community is
unique. The regional office’s classroom-based programs each have key features that are desired
by certain families (i.e., St. Patrick is often preferred by families who send their children there
for elementary school; Children’s Castle is often preferred by families that want wraparound
childcare). While parent preference is considered in making placement decisions for typically
developing children, it is not a factor in determining a dual enrollment placement for children
with IEPs.
Other Services for Children with Diverse Needs

The second research question for this study, *How do early care and education programs (state preschool, Head Start, early childhood special education, and licensed childcare) in one rural county work together to meet the needs of young children with disabilities and other diverse needs?* was primarily answered by describing services for children with developmental delays or other significant disabilities. Thompson County, like all communities, has children with a wide variety of needs. The upcoming paragraphs briefly describe other services for young children with diverse needs. These services include: speech only IEPs, 504 plans, specialized support provided by Head Start, and mental health consulting.

**Speech Only IEPs**

Many young children in Thompson County receive speech therapy through speech only IEPs. The state does not view children who receive speech only services as children who have a disability. Thus, if a program is reporting the percentage of their enrollment filled by children with special needs, children with speech only IEPs would not contribute to that total.

Children with speech only IEPs are identified through the same Child Find strategies that lead to other special education services (e.g., preschool screening, parent referral). The school district speech therapist housed at Spring Brook described the importance of locating children as early as possible. She stated,

> We have worked really hard to catch them [children with speech and language delays] early so that we get those services provided just as quickly as we can and as early on as we can. It is just more advantageous for them.

Speech only services are always provided through the school district, and can be delivered in one of three ways. First, children who are enrolled in the school district program at
Spring Brook receive speech therapy from a speech therapist housed on site. Children visit her speech room for pull out services, usually provided to pairs of students. Second, children who are enrolled in regional office classroom-based programs or Head Start classrooms receive speech therapy from an itinerant speech therapist. Pull out services are usually provided to pairs or small groups of children. Third, children who are not enrolled in a program receive speech therapy through a “walk-in” model. They visit the speech therapist housed at Spring Brook for individual sessions one or two times per week.

504 Plans

Some children have needs that do not qualify them for services under IDEA. For example, a child may have a physical disability that does not impact his ability to access education services. In those instances, a 504 plan is developed. The physical therapist for the cooperative described one scenario, stating,

I do have some [children] that are in regular ed and they are just children who are not able to walk. They use walkers and crutches or braces and they are in regular pre-k. That is when we step in with the 504 plan.

In Thompson County, 504 plans are often delivered via consultation with the regular education teacher. Consultation visits occur on a regular basis, but the regular education teacher can contact the service provider more frequently via e-mail or phone call.

Head Start Specialized Support

Head Start has its own support system for children with special needs. Some children who are already identified with a disability are enrolled in Head Start. All children who are enrolled participate in a developmental screening within 45 days of their start date. The Brigance
is used. This screening may identify additional children who need to be referred for special education services.

All Head Start programs employ a Specialized Support Manager who handles any issues related to children with disabilities. This can include actions such as coordinating with the school district to set up speech therapy services, working with community agencies to secure funding for adaptive equipment, or attending a child’s IEP meeting. When a Head Start classroom enrolls one or more children who need extra support, a special services aide may be provided. The director of Head Start described this service, stating,

We have special services aides in our program. They are sometimes one-on-one, [for example], if you have [a child with] CP, you might have a one-on-one [aide] because you might need assistance with mobility. But if we have [for example] five boys that all have behavior challenges, we might have a special services aide that is sort of assigned to those five boys.

**Mental Health Consultant Provided by the CCR&R**

The Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (CCR&R) serving Thompson County provides a mental health consultant that is available to all licensed childcare providers. The mental health consultant provides trainings on topics such as social emotional development and dealing with challenging behaviors. She works with individual programs that request her help dealing with a difficult classroom or supporting an individual child who is demonstrating challenging behaviors or experiencing other problems. With parent permission, she observes the child, provides suggestions to childcare staff, and facilitates meetings with parents. Her main goal is to get children the services and supports they need, whether those are provided within the childcare environment or in addition to childcare, and to prevent children from being expelled.
from childcare. She stated, “The reason [mental health consultant services] were developed is because so many children were being kicked out of child care centers one right after the other, and, it still happens but my whole main goal is to prevent that.” Participants in Thompson County spoke highly of the mental health consultant but acknowledged that her services were not sufficient. She serves 12 counties spread across a large geographical area. Programs may have to wait a long time for her to visit. Although she encourages them not to expel a child during that wait time, many centers do that anyway.

**Policy Level Perspectives About Inclusion**

Participants at the policy level shared their views about key issues that were addressed in the second research question: inclusion and dual enrollment practices. Participants at the policy level often reflected on big ideas (e.g., the benefits of inclusion for society in general), while program level participants focused more on the details of their own arrangements. However, participants at both levels sometimes reported similar goals (e.g., moving toward a blended model of early childhood education). Three examples of ways that policy level perspectives compare and contrast with program perspectives are provided.

**The Purpose of Inclusion**

First, participants at the program level expressed limited points of view about the purpose of inclusion. The main purpose of inclusion at the program level was purely functional; it was to see how a child performed in large group setting, in preparation for Kindergarten. Some participants at the program level described secondary purposes. For example, the school district administrator indicated that it was the school district’s responsibility to educate its own students, and the school district preschool teacher shared her view that children who are exposed to diversity early on will not think that disabilities are a big deal.
Some participants at the program level, however, did not see many benefits of inclusion. The regional office teacher at Children’s Castle discussed some potential problems associated with including a child with disabilities in a state preschool program, saying,

I feel sorry for those children [with disabilities], but in the same sense I [also] feel sorry for the other 19 [children]. Maybe they [children with special needs] are making distractions, like they are sitting at the carpet making noises or something. And then they [other children] can’t really understand a story because you have this [distraction].

At the policy level, however, participants thought that the significance of providing inclusive placements was much bigger. One representative from a statewide technical assistance program to support young children with special needs shared her thoughts about inclusion providing opportunities for students to learn together. She stated,

My heart and soul is about including kids with disabilities. I have a hard time even observing in a self-contained classroom. I cry because I just think kids need opportunities to be together and learn from each other and if we can’t do it at early childhood, mercy, where can we do it. That is the easiest place to include kids.

A policy level participant representing a statewide umbrella agency for early care and education reiterated that sentiment and stressed the importance of inclusion in community placements to ensure that families were supported and welcomed in their community. She stated,

[Inclusion is] just so right for families. Working Mom’s, working families, need that extended day that schools don’t have. They need to have something close to home [so] they are not driving so far away. It’s learning along side your typical peers. It’s the best way to learn and everyone learns. Typical peers [learn from] students with disabilities. All the research just supports it completely. So, I just see there is a win-win. [Childcare
centers] are knowing the families in their community and they are welcoming them. The child doesn’t have a stigma.

**Appropriate Inclusive Environments**

Second, participants at the policy level stressed the importance of providing services in the least restrictive environment (LRE). They often defined the LRE as the place a child would be if he was not receiving special education services, which was not limited to a classroom with typically developing peers. Sometimes, their vision of what should happen extended beyond what the state currently provides (e.g., allowing for home delivery of special education services for children ages three to five). The director of ECSE services for the state department of public instruction reflected on providing a wider variety of inclusive environments. She described good collaboration as the key to making that work, stating,

My own personal view of a successful collaboration, but taken to a more philosophical level, is that kids would get their services where they would be if they didn’t have a disability. Let’s say they are at home with grandma [or] they are in the daycare where the parent works. Wherever they would be if they didn’t have a disability, that is where they would get their services. That is what I would say would the best collaboration you could ever have. [But] you have to have that philosophy, because if you don’t have the philosophy you can make up all kinds of reasons not to do it.

The director of a statewide initiative to support inclusion also shared her view that each child with a disability would be provided services in an environment of the family’s choosing, including a childcare center or their home. She stated,

I am hoping that children get to go where they would go if they didn’t have a disability.

So, if their brother or sister goes to Toy Box Preschool then that is where they are going
to go because that is what their family does. I would hope that when they went to sign up their little child for their daycare or preschool that they were greeted with enthusiasm and [by a program that is] excited to invite all children into their program, [a program] willing to work with the family and say, ‘Tell me about your little one,’ and ‘We do want to make their experience good. What have you learned that works? Do you have other resources that support you? Tell us about the care and education of your child already. Can we link with those? Can we implement some of those in our programs?’ And so families would feel welcome. Children would feel welcome and staff would know where to go to get support and be excited to have those children in their programs.

Participants at the program level also expressed their desire to place each child in an appropriate setting, not necessarily determined by parent choice, but nonetheless a suitable location for helping the child achieve his educational goals in the least restrictive environment. At the program level, this was not always easily accomplished. For example, the cooperative’s speech therapist described a situation in which a child technically qualified as having a developmental delay, but the team did not recommend a self-contained ECSE classroom. She stated,

Just because two [developmental] areas are below average doesn’t mean we are for sure going to recommend the early childhood [special education] classroom. We really want that cognitive [domain], those pre-academic skills, to be below [average] because that’s really a lot of our [population in the ECSE classroom]. It just might not be the best placement for a kid who has very strong academic skills. We had one [like that] the other day. [He] was just really, really shy and had some very poor speech and language. It really seemed completely correlated. The shyness was very much related to speech and
language. And so, even though we had two areas below [average] we did not recommend early childhood because we really felt like that classroom wasn’t going to help him be less shy.

The dilemma created by this type of situation is that the cooperative only has control of the ECSE classroom; if the cooperative makes the recommendation for a child to be placed in another setting, there is no guarantee that the other program will enroll him.

**Self-Contained Classrooms**

Finally, many participants at the policy level wanted to eliminate all self-contained special education environments. Self-contained ECSE classrooms are the foundation upon which dual enrollment arrangements are built in Thompson County because of the district’s participation in the cooperative. Many participants at the program level, especially administrators, pondered the possibility of a blended program. For example, the school district special coordinator stated, “If the superintendents would have voted yes, that the district take that responsibility [for ECSE] then what we [were] going to look at was a blended program where our kids would be serviced within the [state preschool program].”

Despite an openness to change, however, participants at the program level were not upset about the idea of a self-contained program, and many discussed the benefits that it yielded for students. For example, the Head Start collaboration teacher at Children’s Castle said that the services her students received in the ECSE classroom were better than what Head Start could provide. She stated,

I think they get more from going to [ECSE] than they are from getting a special service aide. I don’t think they would be able to get both of [those services] and I think [ECSE]
is the better option at the moment because the kids that go there have developed so much more, since starting.

By contrast, one participant representing a statewide technical assistance program to support young children with special needs shared her view that self-contained classrooms should be used on a very limited basis or abolished entirely. She stated,

I would like to see zero self-contained special ed rooms. I really think there are very, very few children who need that. Although there are some, I think you could have a little sensory room or a spot for the child to have a break rather than all day have to be in there. I do have a program in mind. [They have a plan] if they have a child [who] they feel can’t start in [state preschool] their first day of school and they are three and they have never been in a large group and they have some severe sensory processing issues. This program does start them in an early childhood special ed classroom and slowly integrates and supports them moving into the [state preschool] classroom. That is their goal [from the start]. So I like that as an idea as long as we all know our goal is to get them back into general ed.

The director of a statewide initiative to promote inclusion described how dual enrollment was better than a self-contained placement alone, but it was still not ideal because a blended model more is even more inclusive. She stated,

I think any step closer to a least restrictive environment [i.e. dual enrollment] is better than one away from a least restrictive environment. I think we are always just looking for [more inclusion]. So [we are] just always getting closer to what we want. My hesitation when people do that [provide dual enrollment] is [that it is not enough]. We won’t stop
telling them, ‘You are so far, but you can do more.’ We are like a dog with a bone. We are going to keep going for it.
Chapter 6—Discussion

This research study investigated two main research questions. The first was: How do early care and education programs (state preschool, Head Start, early childhood special education, and licensed childcare) in one rural county work together to maximize existing resources? Results indicated that major strategies used included: (a) screening and enrolling collaboratively, (b) using existing programs and available space to expand options, and (c) acknowledging program constraints and working creatively within them. The second research question was: ‘How do early care and education programs (state preschool, Head Start, early childhood special education, and licensed childcare) in one rural county work together to meet the needs of young children with disabilities and other diverse needs?’ Major strategies used were: (a) enrollment in the cooperative’s ECSE program, and (b) dual enrollment in the cooperative’s ECSE program and another community location. This chapter will provide a discussion of the significance of these results. Three key issues will be explored. First, services for children with disabilities represent a menu, rather than a continuum, of services. Second, actions at the local level are constrained by factors at multiple systems levels. Third, partnerships at the local level reflect the use of factors that are known to facilitate successful collaboration. The chapter will end with a discussion of the study’s strengths and limitations, as well as directions for further research.

A Menu of Services for Children with Disabilities

In Thompson County, educational services for children with disabilities and other diverse needs are best described as a menu of options, rather than a continuum of services. This metaphor will be explained further. A menu is a finite number of pre-determined choices (e.g., a teacher provides separate containers of red, blue, and yellow paint during art class; children can
use one or more colors but cannot mix them). A continuum, in contrast, contains an infinite number of points within a range (e.g., a teacher provides containers of red, blue, and yellow paint during art class; children can mix the colors any way they choose to create entirely new colors). Avoiding taking this metaphor too literally, the idea of providing a continuum of services for children with disabilities reflects the idea that a child’s needs can fall anywhere within a broad spectrum. Each child’s needs may not be met best through the current practice of providing dual enrollment in an ECSE classroom and a district or Head Start classroom. Many children may need something else along the continuum of possibilities that could truly exist (which is different than the limited choices the school district identifies as possibilities).

In their 2014 Recommended Practices, the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) identified several practices for serving young children with disabilities and their families. Many of them cannot be implemented within the rigid framework offered in Thompson County. Here are some key examples:

• **Environment Practice 1** – Practitioners provide services and supports in natural and inclusive environments during routines and activities and promote the child’s access to and participation in learning experiences.

• **Family Practice 3** - Practitioners are responsive to the family’s concerns, priorities, and changing life experiences.

• **Instruction Practice 4** - Practitioners plan for and provide the level of support, accommodations, and adaptations needed for the child to access, participate, and learn within and across activities and routines.

In order to comply with these practices, administrators in Thompson County would need to: (a) provide special education services and supports within inclusive settings, (b) ensure that full day,
full year care was an option for families that needed it, and (c) collaborate to ensure that a child’s education and supports were carried across all educational environments.

Perhaps the most restrictive aspect of the menu of options for young children with developmental delays is that it greatly limits family choice. In Thompson County, inclusive services are built upon a foundation of providing services in the cooperative’s self-contained ECSE classroom, supplemented by inclusive opportunities in a secondary environment. Administrators, rather than families, choose the inclusive placement, using a strategy largely based on trying to exhaust the dual enrollment potential of the school district program first before enlisting Head Start’s help.

This menu of options is particularly limiting to the family of a child who is three years old, and is assigned primary placement in the ECSE classroom. The state preschool programs in Thompson County prioritize enrollment of four-year-olds and are able to fill their classrooms with children in this age range. Head Start also gives priority to the enrollment of older children. Thus, due to limited space, only in rare cases is a three-year-old child dually enrolled in a secondary program. This dynamic essentially eliminates choices for parents of three-year-old children, aside from choice of whether to accept or decline services.

Options for children who are four years old and have a developmental delay are somewhat less restrictive because dual enrollment is assigned in either the school district preschool classroom or a Head Start classroom. Many participants discussed how dual enrollment is a “given” for four-year-olds. While parents would certainly have the right to decline a secondary placement, the assumption is that they will accept it. This limited menu, however, often ignores an individual student’s specific needs. For example, if a child is four years old and still benefits from taking an afternoon nap, arguably the best option for that child is
to provide all of his services, as well as interactions with typically developing peers, during one half of the day. This would mean that special education and related services would be delivered to the child in the morning while he is enrolled in a Head Start classroom or a state preschool classroom. Since the school district and cooperative currently do not provide services outside of the self-contained program, the child is forced to “fit” into a scenario that is not the best match.

Children with speech-only IEPs also are similarly somewhat constrained by a menu of predetermined options. The menu does offer more choice in venue, as services can be delivered to children who attend the district preschool program, a community based Head Start program or regional office preschool classroom, or no program at all. Speech services, however, are delivered via pull out model only. Thus, if a child needs support speaking up in circle time, requesting help from friends or teachers, or inviting a favorite peer to play, that child will not receive speech services in the classroom setting at the actual times of day when support is needed most (e.g., at circle time, at the start of centers). As Buysse & Hollingsworth (2009) found, when instruction is provided in inclusive settings, children have the potential to make progress in the area of social competence. Strain (2014) confirmed that children are more likely to maintain newly learned skills after initial teaching within the context of an inclusive environment versus a segregated environment.

For inclusive speech therapy to happen in Thompson County, however, the school district speech therapist would need to build enough flexibility into her schedule to work with a child during relevant times of the class day. As motivation to making that change, speech therapists would likely need to move away from a philosophy that favors pull out instruction. The speech therapist at Spring Brook shared her reasons for preferring pull out therapy, stating,
Well, largely we can do [speech therapy using] a pull out basis. The large thing would be
the area we are working on. If you are looking particularly [at] articulation or
phonological [skills] and they’re at the level of trying to get sounds established or some
significant training, we may be at the level [of] using manipulatives, tongue depressors,
whatever, to actually stimulate those sounds. For one thing, it is not very nice to do it in
the Kindergarten or the pre-k classrooms. There is just too many eyes [on the child]. It is
not a comfort zone for them and you have a lot of “help” too, that you don’t need.
Sometimes we can pull out and do that type of a situation more advantageously here [in
the speech room] versus keeping them in the classroom...Some of that can be met within
that classroom, and maybe it’s more me than them. I don’t feel like I get as strong
services within that classroom. It is a more natural environment. I get that. But I feel
like I don’t necessarily get the opportunities like I do when I can structure play here. I
feel like I am being more useful in my services.

As Odom et al. (2011) explained, benefits for children who receive supports in inclusive
environments are two-fold. First, children experience “sociological” outcomes, including
engagement, social acceptance, and friendships. Second, they experience “psychological”
outcomes, including the acquisition of developmental, academic, and social skills. Similarly, in
their study of LEAP (Learning Experiences and Alternative Program for Preschoolers and their
Parents) Strain and Bovery (2011) found that implementation of an inclusive curriculum model
resulted in improved child outcomes in measures of cognitive, language, social, problem
behavior, and autism symptoms. In order to ensure that children in Thompson County receive
these important benefits associated with education and supports provided specifically within
inclusive environments, administrators in Thompson County need to move away from providing supports only within a self-contained environment.

The menu of speech-only services is also restrictive in relationship to who can access each of its options. Children who are three years old who qualify for speech only services can only access the “walk-in” model, in which parents bring a child to Spring Brook for individual speech services. Because these services are only delivered during school hours, this could be a hardship for working families. Finally, although speech therapy services are delivered itinerantly to four-year-old children who are enrolled in a regional office preschool classroom or Head Start classroom located inside a childcare center, services are not delivered to children who are enrolled only in childcare centers. Changing this particular policy could open up options for families of children that rely on full day, full year childcare.

As Beckman, Hanson, & Horn (2002) discovered, families report good experiences with inclusive programs when the services actually match the child’s needs and the family’s needs. For some families, neither one of those programs, or perhaps the combination of these two programs, may reflect the family’s actual preference or meet a family’s needs. Consider other families in Thompson County. Some choose a half-day program at St. Patrick; others choose full time childcare in a licensed childcare home or center. Ideally, early childhood special education services would be delivered to children in whatever environment they would be in if they did not have special needs; under this premise, a self-contained ECSE classroom would not even exist.

**Systems Level Factors that Impact Inclusion**

The reasons behind these limited options are explained only partially by factors that occur at the local school district level. Constraints that exist at multiple systems levels, and actions that could impact systems change, are described in this section. As Kagan and Kaurez
(2012) have suggested, there is an urgent need to consider early care and education from a systems perspective, looking beyond the actions of individual programs in order to consider the overarching issues, at all systems levels, that impact the field.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems model is often used as a framework for considering inclusive environments. The theory was used by Odom (2002) to categorize research on inclusion. The theory, applied by Odom, is summarized below.

1. **Microsystem** level studies address individual contexts in which a student participates (e.g., home, school)

2. **Mesosystem** level studies address the interactions between two microsystems or the influence that one microsystem has on another microsystem (e.g., how a school district’s decisions can impact a family)

3. **Exosystem** level studies address the ways in which social policies at the local, state, and federal level impact inclusive services for young children (e.g., a school district’s choice to participate in a special education cooperative, state preschool guidelines requiring full enrollment at the start of the school year)

4. **Macrosystem** level studies address the ways in which cultural and societal values and expectations impact inclusive opportunities for young children (e.g., whether a community sees value or burden in including children with disabilities in general education classrooms)

Odom’s use of Bronfenbrenner’s theory will be applied in this discussion.

**Exosystem Level Influences**

As events at each system level impact other system levels, creating a cyclical effect, a discussion of system level factors impacting inclusion can begin almost anywhere and come full circle. This discussion will start, somewhat arbitrarily, at the exosystem level (i.e., federal, state,
and local policies). At that level, a major factor constraining full inclusion is the fact that Thompson County School District relies on a cooperative for special education services. Pulling out of the cooperative probably is not financially feasible for a district of its size, as it would not have a way to serve many of its kindergarten through high school aged students with special needs. An itinerant teacher who covers several counties usually serves children with low-incidence disabilities (e.g., vision impairment, hearing impairment). It would be very expensive for a small district to fund several of these specialized teachers. In a very rural area, however, the need goes beyond low incidence disabilities. For example, because of the low population density in Thompson County, the district does not have enough students to support other services such as autism support, delivered through itinerant teaching and self-contained classrooms. Thus, the school district is reliant upon, and benefits from, the cooperative for several key programs.

Because the school district is a member of the cooperative, it is also bound by the decisions that the cooperative makes. Sometimes these decisions are drawbacks or barriers to progress. For example, administrators in Thompson County stated that they are ready and willing to begin serving early childhood students though a blended model (i.e., children with disabilities served within the context of the school district’s state preschool program). In order for this to happen, all 12 of the cooperative’s member school districts have to vote to take on this responsibility. Because the cooperative will not provide ECSE services for a subset of districts, the vote is an “all or nothing” decision. This constraint at the exosystem is currently a barrier to change.

A similar barrier to change, also at the exosystem level, exists with the regional office of education, which serves the same counties and school districts as the cooperative. About ten years ago, staff members at the regional office took the initiative to expand early childhood
education services for the children in their region by applying for a state preschool grant. In Thompson County alone, this grant has provided services to 80 additional children per year, tripling the number of children in the county served by the state preschool program. This has benefitted many children and families. In contrast, particular characteristics of the regional office’s preschool programs are also barriers to progress. These programs do not enroll children with developmental delays or other significant disabilities and thus do not expand the pool of options for children with disabilities. This results in an unbalanced dynamic in Thompson County, in which placements (other than self-contained classrooms) for typically developing children are spread across the school district, the regional office, and Head Start; while placements for children with developmental delays are restricted to options provided by the school district or Head Start.

Structures in place at the exosystem level (related to the cooperative and the regional office) are acting as barriers to the school district providing a blended model of services, as well as to children with disabilities attending a wider variety of programs. A third barrier, also tied to the cooperative’s ECSE classroom, but more strongly linked to state preschool funding, exists at the exosystem level. Currently, children with developmental delays who are three years old are served only in the ECSE classroom, in large part because the school district fills its preschool program with four-year-olds. If the school district moves to a blended model, while maintaining its existing offerings, all of the three-year-olds served in ECSE would move to the district’s one preschool program, resulting in a two-fold consequence.

First, the percentage of children with disabilities enrolled in the district program would be higher than ideal; based on current numbers, it would be close to 50%. Second, many typically developing four-year-olds would be turned away from programming; based on current numbers,
eight to ten four-year-olds might be displaced. This two-fold challenge could be successfully overcome if the school district applied for, and received, an additional state preschool classroom. This would provide coverage for the four-year-olds who were displaced, and would lead to a more ideal distribution of children with developmental delays across programs. Funding from the state, however, is competitive and not guaranteed.

The problem does not stop there. If the school district chooses to serve its children through a state preschool program, or even a blended model program in which some of the slots are funded by the school district special education department, that only accounts for children who are identified at the beginning of the school year. While the school district could do its best to estimate the number of children who would enter mid-year and “hold” spaces for them, problems could result if even one more child than expected qualifies for services. The current funding structure and regulations for state preschool (i.e., full enrollment on the first day, maximum class size rules) do not offer the flexibility that a small, rural school district such as the one in Thompson County may need to accomplish the dual tasks of maintaining solid program offerings while allowing for the gradual enrollment of children with special needs across the school year.

**Macrosystem Level Influences**

As described, multiple factors at the exosystem level constrain the school district’s ability to provide inclusive services. Constraints also exist at the macrosystem level, which includes cultural and societal values and expectations, in this case related to the values promoted by early education and the expectations for early childhood teachers. Thompson County is not experiencing a lead teacher shortage in its early education programs. Five state-licensed early childhood teachers were interviewed for this study; all had been working for their organization
(school district, regional office, or cooperative) for several years. Of those five, only one (the cooperative’s ECSE teacher) was licensed to instruct children with special needs. The reason this relates to the macrosystem is because of the values and expectations behind that statistic.

In this Midwestern state, many degree programs offer an early childhood certification with special education endorsement as an optional add-on. The teachers in Thompson County went through programs like this. During interviews, two teachers discussed their very deliberate decisions not to get this endorsement because they did not intend to work with children who have disabilities. The school district and regional office hired teachers without the add-on special education endorsement; this decision is accepted in the state’s eyes. Although programs must hire teachers with an early childhood certificate, special education endorsement is not required.

These actions (options in higher education programs, administrative hiring choices, and state policy) create a cycle at the macrosystem level that perpetuates a message about including children with disabilities in all programs. That message is that inclusion is a choice. It is a choice for professionals to work with children who have diverse needs. It is a choice for programs to be available to all children. It is a choice for the state to ensure that all children are welcome in state-funded preschool. Thus, the message to families of children with disabilities is they are not inherently welcome; if they are lucky, some programs will choose to welcome them. As Buyssse and Hollingsworth (2009) confirm, for children with disabilities, universal access to inclusive environments is not yet a reality.

Microsystem Level Influences

Events that happen at the macrosystem level (i.e., the practice of preparing and hiring teachers who specifically identify themselves as “non special education teachers”) impact events in the classroom (i.e., the microsystem level). Teachers who are prepared to welcome and
instruct only typically developing children in their classroom may lack a few essential characteristics. As illustrated in interviews for this study, they may lack a positive attitude about working with children who have disabilities. This will not create an ideal learning environment for any child, but especially a child with disabilities.

A teacher’s attitude can change. Without an appropriate educational background, however, a teacher cannot provide the elements of high quality programs. As McCollum (2005) described, these building blocks are: (a) a good early childhood environment with appropriate spatial arrangements, materials, and interpersonal interactions to support the learning of all children; (b) adaptations and modifications such as individualized supports; (c) embedded opportunities to practice and improve behavior; and (d) explicit intervention to target goals not easily addressed in regular classroom routines.

A Plan for Systems Change

The previous paragraphs described a process in which events at the exosystem promote events at the macrosystem that promote events at the microsystem, and the cycle continues. There is potential for systems change, and even small actions have the potential to result in long-term progress for children with disabilities. One possible scenario that could lead to change is provided.

We start, again somewhat arbitrarily, at the exosystem, level. Thompson County School District, its associated Regional Office of Education, or any local entity with a state preschool grant could decide to hire only teachers who are prepared and willing to work with both children who are typically developing and children who have special needs. If prepared and willing teachers staff all programs, then all programs become viable options for all children. If the state sees examples of communities taking steps like this, it could recognize the need to make changes.
of its own. For example, it could adjust funding rules and regulations, allowing for the financial stability of programs but providing the enrollment flexibility programs need to enroll children throughout the school year. It could make changes to teacher licensing, eliminating early childhood certification options that are regular education only. These changes could spur reform in higher education; colleges and universities would stop offering early childhood education degrees without special education components because they would not be relevant to the field. This example is not meant to oversimplify change; like any example that could be construed, there may be flaws in the logic or unforeseen consequences. This example is provided to suggest that a change in actions at one system level can ultimately lead to significant change for the field.

Barton and Smith (2015) reflect a similar notion of systems change in their 2015 book, *The Preschool Inclusion Toolbox: How to Build and Lead a High-Quality Program*. The authors identified attitudinal barriers and policy barriers and offered solutions that would lead to positive changes. One example of an attitude barrier, relevant to Thompson County, is lack of awareness and understanding (i.e., general education administrators and teachers do not support inclusion or think that special education is a job for other teachers and programs.) To address that challenge, the authors offer solutions such as: (a) developing an inclusion booklet to explain the benefits of inclusion to early care and education directors, community members, and parents; and (b) encouraging superintendents to publicly state that children with disabilities should be served in regular education classes and that support will be given to teachers in those classrooms. One example of a policy barrier relevant to Thompson County is that staff training (i.e., higher education) is not available at the community level. To combat this challenge, Barton and Smith suggest that: (a) states offer dual licensure (early childhood and ECSE) so that teachers are prepared to serve all students, (b) states build training and technical assistance into the state
career ladder to ensure that staff members are equipped with necessary knowledge and skills, and (c) school districts invite non-district personnel to district trainings to widen their sphere of influence. Thompson County could benefit from these suggestions to increase inclusive offerings within their community.

**Successful Collaboration**

The first two ideas explored in the *Discussion* highlighted aspects of early childhood education, especially those relevant to children with special needs, which could benefit from updating. Much of what was learned through this case study, however, related to innovative collaboration at the local level. As Selden et al. (2006) found in their study of interagency collaboration in early care and education, children who are involved in collaborative early care and education programs experience benefits such as increased school readiness. In Thompson County, multiple organizations work together effectively. They do this by conducting a joint screening and enrollment process, using existing resources and available space to expand options, and acknowledging programs’ constraints while working creatively within them.

Participants at the program level were aware of the elements that contributed to successful collaboration in Thompson County. They identified and reflected upon multiple factors that facilitate collaboration between programs. The literature review for this study identified three such factors at the program level: incentives and help (Harris, 2012; Kagan & Kauerz, 2012; Schilder et al., 2003; Whitebook et al., 2008), willingness to collaborate (Miller, 2011; Schilder et al., 2003), and logistics (Miller, 2011; Schilder et al., 2003). Due to the number and complexity of participants’ responses about this issue, a new, slightly reorganized list of facilitators was created to best capture participants’ ideas.
Participants identified four factors that facilitate collaboration at the local level: (a) good relationships, (b) willingness to collaborate, (c) focusing on children and families, and (d) starting with high quality programs. While incentives and help was identified as a facilitator of collaboration in the literature review for this study, participants more often identified incentives and help as benefits, rather than facilitators, of collaboration.

**Good Relationships**

Participants emphasized the importance of strong relationships. These relationships exemplified what Miller (2011) defined as an “organizational culture of collaboration” built upon shared values and open communication, with an underlying tone of compromise and flexibility. The owner/director of Children’s Castle described how her strong relationship with the regional office preschool coordinator facilitated a successful partnership, even though some elements of the collaboration were difficult. She stated,

> The communication that [the regional office preschool coordinator] and I have [is key]. The relationship. We share the same values, goals, philosophy. We both understand developmentally appropriate practices. We can share our frustrations, our problems, but instead of doing it in a way that it is just gossiping or harmful, we do it in a constructive way where it is, ‘Let’s figure this out.’ The outlook and the relationship [are essential]. The relationship, that is the only thing that has made it successful, that open communication.

Participants identified several factors that contribute to building strong relationships. First, time is a facilitator, as partnerships are built gradually. Second, living in a small community is an asset to relationships. As described by the preschool teacher at St. Patrick, “I think we get along fine. This is a small community so everybody knows everybody and
everybody gets along pretty good. [Working together] is not a big deal.” Third, stronger relationships are formed when programs and staff members turn to one another for advice and support. For example, Head Start teachers at the new collaboration site at Children’s Castle relied on advice from teachers at the previously existing Head Start program in Thompson County. Finally, participants built stronger relationship by interacting outside the realm of work (e.g., eating lunch together, attending holiday and social events).

**Willingness to Collaborate**

Participants identified actions that demonstrated a willingness to collaborate as facilitators to collaboration. These actions included strong leadership skills guiding a collaboration, flexibility, and inclusiveness. The regional office preschool coordinator explained how she demonstrated a collaborative leadership style when working with preschool teachers, childcare staff members, and parents. She stated,

> You need to have somebody in charge that is collaborative. That is where I come in. I need to educate the [childcare center] director and help the teacher understand she is there to help educate everybody in the building besides the kids because she knows [best practice]. [I also need to] reach out to the parents and help them understand [best practice] so that we are all on the same page. And, getting on the same page is not easy all the time.

Programs can show a willingness to collaborate by activity flexibly. Programs can share space and materials when partners need them most (e.g., lending a school gym to a preschool program for hosting a parent night). Programs can prioritize a partner’s needs when scheduling activities (e.g., ensuring that the preschool classroom has gross motor time separate from older children.)
Programs can also show a willingness to collaborate by including everyone in plans and discussions. Here are a few key examples. In Thompson County, the school district prepares the space and materials for the joint preschool screening event, ensuring that other partners are invited to the event and have ways to participate meaningfully. The principal of St. Patrick sends preschool staff members her weekly email newsletters and includes them in other school wide events. Classroom staff members who work for the regional office preschool classrooms appreciate having a voice. The classroom aide at St. Patrick described her boss’s openness to feedback, saying, “She wants everybody to be involved and she wants you to be on the same level. You all have an opinion. Even if it is not hers, she wants to hear it.” Practices such as these emphasize the importance of including program staff in a partnership, as reported by Schilder et al. (2003).

**Focusing on Children and Families**

Many participants described that a major facilitator to collaboration was to focus on the needs of children and families. Doing this prevented programs and staff members from having a “selfish” outlook that would hamper collaboration. The school district preschool coordinator described this frame of mind. She stated,

> We really work well together on what’s best for the kids. That is why we are all there. Nobody is really selfish about, ‘This is my program’ [or] ‘I want this or that’...I don’t think that anybody has the attitude of, ‘Our program is so much better than yours.’ That mentality just doesn’t exist. I think everybody is willing to work together and I think that all of our philosophies are pretty strong - the play based philosophy and getting the kids to understand what school is...[For] everybody that sits at the table, I really think their
goal is to help these kids and get as many kids as we can service, and with that being your philosophy, you really don’t have any room for attitudes.

**Starting With High Quality Programs**

When participants were asked to identify factors that facilitated collaboration, many of them described the importance of partnering with a program with strong leadership, strong teachers, and a good reputation in the community. The principal of St. Patrick stated that she never had to interact with the regional office preschool coordinator, because the preschool teacher in her building did such a good job interacting with her, parents, and students. She explained,

One of these [interview questions] said, ‘What factors have facilitated successful partnership?’ [The preschool teacher at St. Patrick] is the best teacher. She is awesome. She is amazing and she does a great job with the kids, but also with the parents...some of the parents are young people and she is very good at dealing with them. And I think that’s why it works for them to be in our building. I don’t even know [her boss]. I have met her one time. Real nice lady, but I don’t need to [know her] because I have [the teacher]. [The teacher] just keeps me in the loop if she needs anything. So, I think that is why it works so well.

The director of Head Start thought that the newly formed Head Start collaboration classroom at Children’s Castle was a success because Head Start already had a strong reputation in Thompson County.

Programs in Thompson County rely on several factors at the local level to facilitate strong collaborations. They have learned to work creatively within the existing constraints and show an enthusiasm to present a united front to the community. The caution for these programs,
however, is that program leaders often stated that they did not have a strong awareness of actions at the state level. Changes in funding or regulations do have the potential to impact their community. Programs would have a better chance of dealing with changes if they had time to prepare. This leads to questions for consideration: Whose responsibility is it to ensure that actions at the state level are communicated to the local level? What systems are in place to funnel information from the state to its communities? In order for change to happen smoothly, key players at the state and local level need to understand the answers to these questions. The regional office preschool coordinator shared her frustration with the process and indicated a need for more leadership. She stated,

[The state department of public instruction], they seem to get the cart before the horse so often and say, ‘Okay, do this. You are going to have to do this and then we are going to have to teach you how. But first you have to do it yesterday.’ Could somebody just get in charge of that? I don’t want to do it, but couldn’t somebody with some insight have an understanding of that is how it is coming down the tubes?

**Strengths of the Study**

This study demonstrated strengths in the area of research design and implementation. Data collection was thorough and included interviews with multiple individuals at both the program level and the policy level, ensuring that a wide variety of perspectives were represented. Data analysis was methodical and rigorous, following the three-step process of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana; 2013). Several trustworthiness measures (Brantlinger et al., 2005) were incorporated into the study. Triangulation of data sources (interviews, relevant documents) contributed to a richer understanding of the case. Researcher reflexivity, peer debriefing, and collaborative work were
jointly incorporated into research team meetings; this provided opportunities for reflecting upon and addressing the ways researcher bias was influencing data analysis, and also allowed multiple team members to interact with the data and share fresh ideas. First level member checks ensured that participants had the opportunity to review interview transcripts prior to analysis. Finally, an audit trail was kept to document data collection and data analysis.

This study adds to the literature base in early care in education. Results of this study will be disseminated through conference presentations and journal articles, targeting local program administrators and individuals at the policy level. Results demonstrate a deeper understanding of the need for change at multiple venues in multiple system levels (e.g. local hiring practices, state teacher certification policies, and higher education degree offerings) and provide rational for why those changes are necessary. Administrators and policy makers can apply the lessons learned in this case study to their own states and local communities. These lessons can inform leaders as they advocate for change, ensuring that children with disabilities have a true continuum of services available to them, that the continuum includes options in all of a community’s early care and education programs, and that those programs and the collaborations between them grow stronger.

**Limitations of the Study**

This case study had three major limitations. The first was that observations were included in the original study design but were not conducted. These observations were to take place in the school district preschool program and the cooperative’s ECSE program, to see how staff worked with children who were dually enrolled in both programs. I did obtain IRB approval for observations and received tentative verbal commitment from participants. However, a lengthy delay occurred while the special education cooperative’s lawyer reviewed my study proposal.
Following this delay, the only available option for classroom observations was during the last week of the school year. One of the classroom teachers did not feel comfortable with this timing and so observations were not conducted. Because much of this study focused on dual enrollment as a strategy to provide inclusive experiences, observations of dual enrollment would have added valuable data.

A second limitation of the study was that parents were not interviewed. Study results indicated that parent choice is prioritized in determining placement for typically developing children but not for children with disabilities. Thus, interviewing a small set of parents representing each group would have been a helpful strategy to understand potentially contrasting experiences. A third limitation of this study is that it is very specific to a particular context. While instrumental case study research is intended to shed light on core issues through the exploration of an individual case (Stake, 1995), there is a chance that some of the lessons learned in Thompson County can be attributed to specific characteristics of that community. This caution also holds true at the state level, as policies and practices in early childhood education vary by state.

**Directions for Future Research**

While every study has limitations and cannot include all types of data or represent every perspective, studies can build upon each other to produce a stronger overall research base. Future research on the key topics explored in this study (collaboration and inclusion in early care and education) can be explored in different contexts. Conducting a similar study in an urban setting would be useful in understanding how a community with more key players, more children, and potentially more resources, navigates a collaboration. Conducting several mini case studies in another state would be useful approach for understanding if, and how, local communities with
various characteristics interact with state-funded preschool. Finally, future studies should include a stronger emphasis on children and families; observations, focus groups, or short surveys can supplement case studies that are based primarily on administrator interviews.
References


University Press.


http://www.ncdae.org/resources/articles/personnedev.php

Division for Early Childhood. (2014). *DEC recommended practices in early intervention/early childhood special education 2014.* Retrieved from
http://www.dec-spied.org/recommendedpractices


Demma, R. (2010). *Building ready states: A governor’s guide to supporting a comprehensive, high-quality early childhood state system.* Retrieved from the National Governor’s Association website:
http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/1010GOVSGUIDEEARLYCHILD.PDF


Hanson, M. J. (2002). Cultural and linguistic diversity: Influences on preschool inclusion.


http://newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/Early_Childhood_Advisory_Councils_Nov_09_0.pdf


http://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/osep/index.html


Websites

Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/

Table 1

**Local Communities’ Roles in Establishing a Fully Integrated Early Learning System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of local communities</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Administer and make decisions that are best made at the local level, including the consolidation of funding streams but also better collaboration across systems.</td>
<td>In North Carolina, local partnerships have worked to create a solid infrastructure of services and to consolidate and integrate different parts of the system (such as co-locating services to increase access and provide one-stop shopping).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Contour overall services to better meet unique local needs and cultures.</td>
<td>In Iowa, the Community Empowerment Initiative provides local control for systems building. For example, local sites can use discretionary funding to support initiatives such as professional development, emergency childcare, wrap-around services, health supports, and childcare conferences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Draw in voluntary support networks and systems to help young children and families get what they need to support early learning.</td>
<td>In Iowa, at least 51% of community empowerment boards (see example in box 2) must be citizens or elected officials; boards must include consumers; members of the faith and business communities; and representatives from human services, health, and education systems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Create local awareness of the importance of early learning, foster community energy, and change the early learning culture.</td>
<td>Vermont, has “branded” its early care and education system, called <em>Building Bright Futures</em>. This branding will boost public awareness efforts about the importance of early learning and reduce confusion about the variety of available services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Leverage local resources to support aspects of the early learning agenda.</td>
<td>In Oklahoma, state-funded <em>Smart Start</em> requires local sites to get a 10% community match to supplement state funding; this can be in-kind or cash-based.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Provide guidance back to the state on how to effectively manage resources and ensure quality.</td>
<td>In Colorado, a waiver system is used to promote the flow of information to the state on needed changes to regulation and policy. Local pilots can petition the state to waive existing state rules and regulations that are barriers to achieving local goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of local communities</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Serve as “laboratories” to test new ideas and aid in technology transfer across communities.</td>
<td>In Minnesota, the Department of Education partnered with several early childhood coalitions; together, they selected school districts for a pilot project to train Kindergarten teachers to assess incoming students for school readiness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Address particular issues of diversity and cultural congruence</td>
<td>In all states, early learning systems must be culturally competent. Local governance structures should play a prominent role in embracing and reflecting the diversity of their communities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2

**Recommendations for Successful Systems and Partnerships in Early Care and Education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization/author and year</th>
<th>Noteworthy policy recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) (2012)  
  • Authored by Johnson-Staub | Regarding funding comprehensive early childhood services, states should consider a variety of funding sources*, including: |
  |  
  | U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Administration for Children and Families)  
  • Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) - States are required to spend a minimum of 4 percent of CCDBG funds on initiatives that improve childcare quality. Childcare administrators have creatively used CCDBG dollars to support the delivery of comprehensive services. |
| U.S. Department of Education (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education)  
  • Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title I -Partnerships between public schools, childcare, and early education agencies may form funding partnerships using Title I funds. |
| U.S. Department of Agriculture  
  • Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) - A portion of SNAP funds is allocated for nutrition education (referred to as SNAP-Ed). Many states use SNAP-Ed funds in partnership with early childhood and other community-based settings by conducting outreach to potential SNAP recipients through those settings. |
| Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
  • Funding Stream: Project LAUNCH (Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children’s Health) - Grantees use workforce development activities to provide training for childcare and early education staff (on issues related to social/emotional development; behavioral health). Sites incorporate regular developmental screenings, which often take place at childcare and early education settings, or in partnership with childcare and early education providers. |
| Housing and Urban Development (HUD)  
  • Funding Stream: Community Development Block Grant - Eligible communities receive funds based on a federal formula that considers socio-economic factors (poverty, population, overcrowding in housing, age of housing, population growth). Local use of the funds is flexible and determined by local governments. Some communities designate funds to provide childcare for low-income children. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization/author and year</th>
<th>Noteworthy policy recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Note - this short list offers only one funding example for each government office; the author provides a comprehensive list</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Regarding considerations for designing a finance strategy, states should:**

- Consider the full range of funding streams available—federal, state, local, and private
- Look for short-term and small funding streams to get partnerships started; seek long-term funding to sustain services
- Use models from other states to avoid reinventing the wheel
- Invest in coordinated solutions and align systems while layering funding; this makes financing initiatives more sustainable
- Pay attention to silos and the targeted populations they serve; silos may exist to meet the needs of specific, underserved populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harris (2012)</th>
<th>Regarding having a voice in productive partnerships, local early childhood proprietors should:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get involved on a local early education council</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice concerns early to community and education leaders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Regarding staffing issues in early care and education (salary disparity, staff inequalities, under qualified staff, under-staffed programs) states should:**

- Design infrastructure safety networks to eliminate salary competitions and “center hopping” (teachers moving from center to center in search of the best pay and benefits)
- Use school district funding (saved from partnering with childcare proprietors’ facilities instead of building new facilities) to pay for the hiring of all prekindergarten teachers
- Prevent uncertified teachers from taking advantage of the licensed prekindergarten teacher shortage and seeking employment with the highest bidder even if it means breaking signed contracts
- Give early childhood providers in collaborative programs access to the substitute public academic prekindergarten teachers’ pool
- Use state funding to provide incentives for childcare teachers to obtain prekindergarten college degrees
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization/author and year</th>
<th>Noteworthy policy recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Governor’s Association Center for Best Practices (2010) • Authored by Demma</td>
<td>Regarding building a comprehensive, high-quality early child system, states must take the following six actions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Coordinate early childhood governance • Install a state early childhood advisory council (ECAC) that represents the full range of early childhood programs and implements a strategic plan for comprehensive services.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Build an integrated professional development system • Create and align research-based professional development standards • Use a professional development registry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Implement a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) • A QRIS should measure different aspects of program quality; apply a common metric to all early care and education programs, and promote program improvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Develop a coordinated, longitudinal data system • Links information among and between programs and other state systems (e.g., K–12 education system) • Protects child and family privacy and maintain accountability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Align comprehensive early learning guidelines and standards • Align early learning guidelines for children (0-8) with K–3 content standards to bridge early childhood experiences with the early elementary grades</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Integrate funding sources to support system development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRRA) (2009)</td>
<td>Regarding educational qualifications for teachers:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do not require early childhood teachers to have a bachelors degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instead, • Require teachers to have a CDA credential or Associate’s degree in early childhood education or a related field; provide specific training in child development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization/author and year</td>
<td>Noteworthy policy recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K Now (2009)</td>
<td>Regarding overcoming barriers to collaboration, state leaders should take five critical steps:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Authored by Wat &amp; Gayl</td>
<td>5. Visit community-based programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Assess quality of available programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Scout potential partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Survey the landscape to determine need and capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Seek input from parents and community providers to identify underserved populations and existing capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Create a vehicle to engage a broad set of stakeholders in developing, monitoring and sustaining collaborations. Vehicle models include:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Local collaboration councils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Public-private ventures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Early childhood conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Invest in personnel to oversee collaboration efforts (i.e., Designate staff to handle regulatory, budgetary and philosophical issues that arise in collaborations). Staff positions include:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Collaboration coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• School readiness coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Collaboration principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pre-K consultants, supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Develop collaboration agreements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center for the Study of Child Care Employment (2008)</td>
<td>Regarding staff parity and equity, early childhood agencies should:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Authored by Whitebook et al.</td>
<td>• Minimize inequities among teaching staff within and across preschool centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide ongoing mentoring and support for center directors about staff development and equity issues within centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regarding professional preparation and development of teaching staff, early childhood agencies should:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop a training and professional development system that is accessible to working adults and leads to a skilled and diverse early childhood teacher workforce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization/author and year</td>
<td>Noteworthy policy recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PreK Now/CLASP (2007)</td>
<td>Regarding partnerships between Head Start and state pre-K, the pathway to success includes the following key elements:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| • Authored by Stebbins & Scott | 6. State-federal collaboration  
• Partnerships should be built by leaders at the federal and regional level |
|                              | 2. Advisory councils  
• These build relationships among representative from state pre-K and Head Start at the state and local levels |
|                              | 3. Application requirements  
• Encourage or require programs to work together by listing collaboration as a criteria for receiving state pre-K funds |
|                              | 4. Joint professional development  
• Head Start and state pre-K can co-sponsor professional development opportunities |
|                              | 5. Shared monitoring  
• This streamlines administrative costs and minimizes classroom disruption |
|                              | 7. Cost allocation  
• Convene the fiscal experts from each program to answer questions and give detailed examples of how to allocate costs appropriately |
|                              | 8. Collaboration coaches or facilitators  
• Hire a trained coach or facilitator to help the two sides come together |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization/author and year</th>
<th>Noteworthy policy recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-K Now (2006)</td>
<td>Regarding supporting a diverse (mixed) delivery system, states should heed the following lessons (learned by studying New York’s Universal Pre-K program):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authored by Holcomb</td>
<td>5. Require delivery in both schools and community settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Set a minimum percentage for inclusion of community programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Flow funding through school districts to ensure that pre-k is seen as a core educational service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ensure sufficient funding for planning and initial implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Plan for facilities and capital expansion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Ensure consistent and sustainable funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use the school funding formula for preschool services (rather than categorical grants from general revenue funds); this is more predictable and less vulnerable to yearly changes in the state budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ensure that community partners have equal resources to pre-K programs in public schools; otherwise, a two-tier system of early education may evolve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Develop a qualified workforce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Address workforce issues (e.g., teacher shortages caused by poor compensation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide equal access to professional development across all settings, including teacher mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Develop an Infrastructure of support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Rely on government leadership to ensure quality when programs blend funding streams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide ongoing technical assistance to all providers across all settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Remember that infrastructure needs vary by community; adjust accordingly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Lay the groundwork for productive collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Practice mutual respect – the cornerstone of successful collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Give community-based providers their own voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Rely on local control to spark innovation and commitment to pre-k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Tap local expertise to create technical assistance centers to support all providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization/author and year</td>
<td>Noteworthy policy recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **CLASP (2005)**            | *Regarding better coordination of early education with the needs of working families, states should:*
| • Authored by Schumacher et al. | • Require that a minimum proportion of pre-K be delivered in childcare, creating capacity to provide full-day, full-year services  
• Identify and eliminate state childcare subsidy policies that may prevent participation of community-based providers in the pre-K program  
• Redesign state governance structures to formalize policy and planning coordination among agencies responsible for early education and childcare |

|   | Regarding strengthening the quality and program standards of community-based childcare settings, states should: |
|   | • Set equivalent program standards for all communities and pre-kindergarten settings  
• Invest in the community-based childcare teacher workforce (provide targeted resources to help teachers meet pre-K teacher education standard and receive comparable wages) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Child Care Association (NCCA) (2001)</th>
<th><em>Regarding the provision of early education services:</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Public policy should include all at risk children from the ages of zero to four in early education programs (in order to better prepare children for school)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Regarding community programs in early care and education, the following six principles should be upheld:*

1. Parent choice  
• Parental choice is the highest value and paramount in program planning, development, and implementation  
• Preschool initiatives should ensure parent choice by providing assistance with the cost of quality early education in a variety of community-based program settings (including quality programs in the private sector)  
• Reimbursing childcare centers that care for funded children at a legitimate market rate will enhance quality and maximize the number of childcare choices for parents

2. Community planning partnerships and collaboration  
• Careful and deliberate community planning is essential to success
3. System structure
   • Continue collaboration and partnerships with the private early care and education community to ensure the maximization of existing infrastructures, expertise, and “instant” capacity
   • Build programs on existing agency structure, funding streams, and quality measures

4. Program structure
   • The settings where services are offered must be equal in order to let the market operate. Strategies must be developed to establish a level playing field in the case of public and private childcare services. Fair competition among programs can ensure greater service and quality.

5. Funding
   • Public-private partnerships must be adequately funded. Inadequate funding will exacerbate quality and affordability issues
   • Qualified teachers must be compensated for experience and education
   • In order to maximize the use of resources and infrastructure - multiple, blended funding streams; coordinated eligibility requirements; and open eligibility to all segments of the childcare and early learning delivery system for grants and funding is essential
   • Parent co-pays should become part of collaboration funding models; leveraging parent contributions funds more services. Parents should pay according to their abilities; families able to should pay close to full cost for programming

6. Accountability
   • Policymakers, government agencies, and the early care and education community must develop tools to measure outcomes of early care and education programs, ensuring that they lead to school readiness
Table 3

*Early Care and Education Program Characteristics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Program details</th>
<th>Staffing</th>
<th>Funding Source(s)</th>
<th>Enrollment details</th>
<th>Children with IEPs</th>
<th>Program requirements</th>
<th>Transportation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Preschool Regional Office of Education program at Children’s Castle</td>
<td>Children’s Castle</td>
<td>Morning session only State preschool program embedded within childcare program</td>
<td>State-licensed early childhood teacher Classroom aide</td>
<td>Regional office funds teacher, aide, and program expenses</td>
<td>20 children Mostly 4 year-olds About half attend Children’s Castle outside of state preschool session</td>
<td>Children with speech only IEPs receive itinerant, pull out services</td>
<td>DCFS Licensing Statewide QRIS (rating earned by Children’s Castle) State preschool requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Patrick</td>
<td>St. Patrick</td>
<td>Morning and afternoon sessions State preschool program in rented space (otherwise vacant)</td>
<td>State-licensed early childhood teacher Classroom aide</td>
<td>Regional office funds teacher, aide, and program expenses Regional office pays rent and janitorial fee to St. Patrick</td>
<td>40 children • 20 a.m. • 20 p.m. Mostly 4 year-olds About a third will attend/have siblings at St. Patrick</td>
<td>Children with speech only IEPs receive itinerant, pull out services</td>
<td>Statewide QRIS (rating earned by regional office) State preschool requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Program details</td>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>Funding Source(s)</td>
<td>Enrollment details</td>
<td>Children with IEPs</td>
<td>Program requirements</td>
<td>Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State Preschool Regional Office of Education Home Provider Program</strong></td>
<td>11 licensed childcare homes</td>
<td>11 two-hour small group sessions per week, one per licensed childcare home</td>
<td>State-licensed early childhood teacher</td>
<td>Regional office funds teacher, Regional office funds resource room for licensed home childcare providers</td>
<td>20 children Mostly 3 year-olds Many will attend a classroom based state preschool program the following year</td>
<td>No children with IEPs</td>
<td>DCFS licensing for home childcare Some state preschool requirements (not all applicable in homes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State Preschool Thompson County School District</strong></td>
<td>Spring Brook Elementary</td>
<td>Morning and afternoon sessions</td>
<td>State-licensed early childhood teacher, Classroom aide, Special education classroom aides</td>
<td>School district (through state grant) funds teacher, aide, and program expenses School district (general budget) funds transportation School district (special education department) funds additional classroom aides</td>
<td>40 children Mostly 4 year-olds Priority for: a. Families who need transportation, b. Children who are four years old and are enrolled in the ECSE classroom</td>
<td>Children with speech only IEPs receive pull out services in school building Children with developmental delays are enrolled, but do not receive direct services during the district preschool portion of their school day</td>
<td>Statewide QRIS State preschool requirements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Head Start**  
**Prairie Valley Agency (PVA)**  
**Head Start program at Children’s Castle** | **Location** | **Program details** | **Staffing** | **Funding Source(s)** | **Enrollment details** | **Children with IEPs** | **Program requirements** | **Transportation** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Children’s Castle | Full day program  
Head Start programming implemented in collaboration with Children’s Castle using one classroom full time | Head Start teacher  
Head Start classroom aide | PVA Head Start pays Children’s Castle stipends to cover staff salaries, supplies, and other expenses | 15 children  
Range of 3-5 year-olds  
Head Start sometimes dually enrolls children who attend the ECSE program | Children with speech only IEPs receive itinerant, pull out services  
Children with developmental delays are enrolled, but do not receive direct services during the Head Start portion of their school day | DCFS Licensing  
Statewide QRIS (rating earned by Children’s Castle)  
Head Start performance standards | None |

| **ECSE**  
**North Central Special Education (NCSE) Cooperative ECSE Program** | **Location** | **Program details** | **Staffing** | **Funding Source(s)** | **Enrollment details** | **Children with IEPs** | **Program requirements** | **Transportation** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Spring Brook Elementary | Morning and afternoon sessions | State-licensed early childhood teacher with special education endorsement  
Two classroom aides  
SLP (two days per week)  
OT, PT (one day per week) | NCSE cooperative is contracted by district to provide ECSE services.  
NCSE rents space at Spring Brook | Enrollment fluctuates (16 children at the end of the year)  
Range of 3-6 year olds  
Children in their last year of ECSE are dually enrolled in a regular education placement (state preschool, Head Start, Kindergarten) | All children have IEPs with concerns more significant than speech only, most often developmental delay | Special education standards | Two-way  
Special transportation only provided if necessary; otherwise regular district transportation used |
Table 4
Program Level Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Length of interview(s)</th>
<th>Interview Protocol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional Office of Education state preschool</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administrators</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State preschool coordinator</td>
<td>1:10:10</td>
<td>INTRO**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:25:07</td>
<td></td>
<td>STND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff members</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool teacher [at St. Patrick]</td>
<td>30:44</td>
<td>STND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool teaching assistant [at St. Patrick]</td>
<td>37:06</td>
<td>STND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool teacher [at Children’s Castle]</td>
<td>55:06</td>
<td>STND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool teacher [Home Provider program]</td>
<td>1:04:01</td>
<td>STND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thompson County School District state preschool</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administrators</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State preschool coordinator/ principal of Spring Brook</td>
<td>1:14:03</td>
<td>STND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff members</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs coordinator*</td>
<td>52:55</td>
<td>SPED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool teacher</td>
<td>52:20</td>
<td>STND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLP serving Spring Brook Elementary *</td>
<td>49:07</td>
<td>SPED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLP serving community programs *</td>
<td>34:23</td>
<td>SPED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>North Central Special Education Cooperative (NCSE) ECSE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administrators</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood education director*</td>
<td>1:26:32</td>
<td>SPED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff members</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECSE teacher *</td>
<td>47:35</td>
<td>SPED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLP serving ECSE program*</td>
<td>44:20</td>
<td>SPED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OT *</td>
<td>51:46</td>
<td>SPED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT *</td>
<td>56:19</td>
<td>SPED**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>St. Patrick Catholic School</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administrators</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building principal</td>
<td>42:13</td>
<td>STND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children’s Castle Childcare Center</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administrators</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner/Director</td>
<td>47:44</td>
<td>STND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children First CCR&amp;R</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff members</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health consultant</td>
<td>54:12</td>
<td>STND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Licensed Home Childcare Providers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff members</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home childcare provider</td>
<td>21:42</td>
<td>STND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prairie Valley Agency Head Start</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administrators</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Start director</td>
<td>1:45:31</td>
<td>STND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Start teacher at Children’s Castle</td>
<td>33:53</td>
<td>STND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Early Intervention</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff members</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Intervention service coordinator *</td>
<td>58:08</td>
<td>SPED**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
* Indicates that individual participated in Special Education interview protocol
** Indicates phone interview
Key for interview column: INTRO = Introductory interview protocol, STND = Standard interview protocol, SPED = special education interview protocol
Table 5

*Policy Level Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program or Agency</th>
<th>Length of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State umbrella agency for early care and education</td>
<td>1:19:01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State department of public instruction early childhood education services</td>
<td>1:00:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Head Start Association</td>
<td>1:18:53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Department of Human Services</td>
<td>1:04:02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies</td>
<td>1:22:06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State department of public instruction ECSE services</td>
<td>55:29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A state initiative to promote early childhood inclusion</td>
<td>1:01:54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A statewide technical assistance service to support young children with special needs</td>
<td>1:27:30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6

Major Codes

1. Background/context information about program
2. Funding
3. Non-monetary resources
4. Staffing
5. Professional development/continuing education
6. Knowledge/beliefs about pre-k/early care and education services
7. Benefits of pre-k services/buy-in to programming
8. Screening/enrollment in programs
9. Collaboration/partnerships
10. Transportation
11. Rural issues
12. Inclusion
13. Special education services
   a. Child Find
   b. Assessment and eligibility
   c. Creating and implementing IEPs
   d. Placement decisions
   e. Service delivery
14. Other supports for children with diverse needs
15. Dual enrollment
16. Early intervention services
### Table 7

*Enrollment of Children in Early Care and Education Programs in Thompson County*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Joint Screening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children who will be age 3 or 4 at the start of the school year:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participate in Dial 4 activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participate in hearing and vision screening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are interviewed by program staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identify their program preference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 2</th>
<th>Eligibility Determination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program administrators review information and determine program eligibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eligibility for Head Start
- Most stringent income guidelines (100% FPL)
- Potentially eligible children are screened using a point system, to determine children with highest need
- Older children have priority over younger children
- In a competition for one slot, a child who is categorically income eligible takes priority over a child with special needs

Eligibility for state preschool programs*
- Eligibility determined by weighted point system
- Eligibility has priority groups
  - Children who meet the state definition of homeless
  - Children who have been in the birth to three program
  - Children who have an IEP
  - Children who were previously enrolled in state preschool and are still age eligible

*In the special case of Children’s Castle, in which the state preschool program is the only program option at the center for four-year-olds, children who are enrolled at the childcare center are a priority group
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 3</th>
<th>Determining Placement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrators meet to determine placement of all children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are placed in Head Start programs first (in order to free up state preschool slots for other children)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent preference is taken into consideration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each program prioritizes enrollment of children with certain characteristics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Head Start</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prioritizes enrollment of children who are income eligible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prioritizes enrollment of children who are four years old and have a developmental delay (as a secondary placement to ECSE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional office program at Children’s Castle</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prioritizes enrollment of children enrolled for childcare at Children’s Castle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Likely excludes children with developmental delays</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional office program at St. Patrick</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prioritizes enrollment of children with siblings at St. Patrick/families who intend to enroll child in St. Patrick</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Likely excludes children with developmental delays</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Likely excludes children with physical disabilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thompson County School District program</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prioritizes enrollment of children who are four years old and have a developmental delay (as a secondary placement to ECSE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prioritizes enrollment of children who were assessed, but deemed ineligible, for special education services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prioritizes enrollment of children who require transportation to attend a program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 7 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Step 4</strong></th>
<th><strong>Enrollment</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programs must maintain enrollment guidelines when filling programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Head Start**
- 35% of children can be slightly over-income (100-130% FPL); 10% can be anywhere over income
- 10% of children enrolled must be children with disabilities

**State preschool**
- 80% of children enrolled in each state preschool program must be individually eligible for state preschool services

Head Start slots are offered to families, and filled, in the late spring

State preschool slots are offered to families, and filled, in late July

If a family declines the slot it is offered, the family can be placed on the wait list for a state preschool program at another site. (The family cannot keep its assigned space AND join the wait list).

When families decline slots, state preschool programs invite children from the wait list into the program. This process continues throughout the school year so that programs remain at capacity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Additional Steps</strong></th>
<th><strong>Ongoing Screening and Enrollment</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head Start programs and state preschool programs are prepared to screen individual children at any time during the school year (e.g. when a child moves into the district, if a child turns three during the school year and the family has concerns).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the screening indicates that the child is eligible for services, he will be offered a space in one of the programs. If all programs are full, he will be added to the wait list.
### Early Care and Education Collaborations in Thompson County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Key players</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborations that build individual programs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional office program at Children’s Castle</td>
<td>Regional office preschool program • Children’s Castle</td>
<td>Provides early education program for 20 additional students in Thompson County, meeting the needs of students who may also need full-day/full-year care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional office program at St. Patrick</td>
<td>Regional office preschool program • St. Patrick</td>
<td>Provides early education program for 40 additional students in Thompson County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional office Home Provider program</td>
<td>Regional office preschool program • Licensed home childcare providers</td>
<td>Provides early education program for 20* additional students in Thompson County, meeting the needs of students who are unable to travel from their licensed home childcare program to a classroom-based program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Start Collaboration classroom at Children’s Castle</td>
<td>PVA Head Start • Children’s Castle</td>
<td>Provides early education program for 15 additional students in Thompson County, meeting the needs of students who need comprehensive services and full-day/full-year care</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| <strong>Collaborations that bridge programs</strong> | | |
| Itinerant speech therapy services, provided in community locations | Thompson County School District speech therapist • Early childhood programs in community | Provides speech therapy services for children (with speech-only IEPs) during the time they are enrolled in an early education program. This prevents them from having to come to the district for a separate “walk-in” speech therapy appointment |
| Dual enrollment (for typically developing children) | PVA Head Start • State preschool programs | Provides a full day of early care and education for children that may need more than what a half-day option can provide. It is often necessary when a child needs comprehensive services (only provided by Head Start), in addition to transportation (only provided by the Thompson County School District program) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Key players</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actions that support collaboration</td>
<td>Sharing events</td>
<td>Shared events provide opportunities for various early care and education professionals to understand and meet the needs of the entire community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All early care and education programs</td>
<td>Examples:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>At preschool screening, all program administrators review student files and help make assignments that best meet everyone’s needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>During continuing education opportunities, staff from various programs learn together and build relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing written agreements</td>
<td>Written agreements outline the parameters of collaboration, helping each partner know what is expected. Lack of written agreements can lead to confusion and frustration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All early care and education programs</td>
<td>Examples:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• MOUs allow programs to share information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Contracts and leases outline expectations related to requirements and payment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9

Strategies for Working Creatively Within Constraints

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies for Working Creatively Within Constraints</th>
<th>Examples of funding challenges and potential consequences</th>
<th>Examples of strategies to overcome challenges and constraints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategically use funding and non-monetary resources</strong></td>
<td>Loss of funds due to sequester may result in serving fewer children</td>
<td>Pool together leftover funds to support “extra” services like transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drop in funding levels may not allow programs to provide transportation</td>
<td>Be frank and candid when discussing payment amounts for stipends and rent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Late or missing CCDF payments may close childcare centers, and thus partner state preschool programs as well</td>
<td>Make a classroom wish-list so parents can contribute useful supplies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents cannot contribute money to free programs, thus restricting potential incoming funds</td>
<td>Take advantage of in-kind donations of goods and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deal with rural issues</strong></td>
<td>Family isolation (the result of a large geographical area coupled with low population density) leads to difficulty in accessing programming</td>
<td>Take advantage of the close relationships built in rural communities. This includes staff members’ relationships with each other and staff members’ relationships with families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited opportunities for continuing education lead to difficulty in staff obtaining degrees and endorsements</td>
<td>Tailor services to meet the constraints of rural life (e.g., offer a home provider program)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide cultural experiences though field trips to other communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Take advantage of online degree programs and onsite cohort programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provide transportation in innovative ways</strong></td>
<td>Large geographical area results in long bus routes</td>
<td>Pick up all children in one part of the community and make several stops to drop them off at all schools (rather than designating bus routes according to individual school)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Because children in multiple programs and schools ride the same busses, changes in schedule result in changes to already complex transportation arrangements</td>
<td>Use shuttle busses to get children from a central community to a satellite program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maintain good communication among programs, the transportation department, and families; send alerts on days that arrangements change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Include as many children and programs as possible in transportation arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples of funding challenges and potential consequences</td>
<td>Examples of strategies to overcome challenges and constraints</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Navigate conflicting or confusing rules</strong></td>
<td>Be familiar with partner programs’ rules, and understand how those rules can add challenges or extra responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having multiple administrators involved in a collaboration is difficult for administrators, who may have trouble defining their individuals role and knowing what to do when they are frustrated about a program that is not their responsibility.</td>
<td>Maintain strong relationships and good communication at the administrative level, so that problems are solved quickly and constructively.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having multiple administrators involved in a collaboration can be a navigation challenge for teachers</td>
<td>Check in often to clarify and refine the parameters of the relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manage logistics such as calendars, schedules, and shared space</strong></td>
<td>Be aware of rule violations (e.g., when a required staff member is pulled out a classroom to meet ratio requirements elsewhere in a center) and assertively insist that rules are followed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When children are dually enrolled in programs, differences in calendar or calendar changes can impact families and programs</td>
<td>When dealing with calendar changes, collaborate to ensure that families maintain services (e.g., childcare center provides coverage on days when state preschool program is not in session)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When programs share space, materials may be used during one program’s absence</td>
<td>Be sure that families and transportation departments are aware of calendar changes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When preschool children attend programs in environments with older children, they are not allowed to share some activities (e.g., gross motor).</td>
<td>Lock up or put away materials that a partner program does not have permission to use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schedule preschool activities (e.g., recess) first to ensure they occur without older students present.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 10

**Steps in the Special Education Eligibility Process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1: Child Find</th>
<th>The cooperative and school district use several strategies to find children who may need special education:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Transition from EI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• EI 27-month list (provided by the state)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pamphlets for families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Information tables at community events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Child Find meeting for home schools and private schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Individual referrals from parent, doctor, teacher, or childcare provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Dial 4 results (obtained during preschool screening)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• District personnel ‘spot’ potential children during typical interactions and make referrals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 2: Assessment and determining eligibility</th>
<th>Step 2a: Domain meeting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Team (EI, cooperative, school district, parents) meets to determine what information to gather, what assessments are needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• If the team determines that a child likely has global delays, the ECSE team conducts a full case study and play based assessment (see Step 2b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• If the team determines that a child likely has minimal delays or delays in only one area, the team refers student to the school district for development of a speech only IEP, or to the cooperative or school district (depending on the service needed) for development of a 504 plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 2b: Assessment and determining eligibility</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Team (cooperative, school district, parents) conducts full case study and relevant portions of the DAYC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• If the child is determined eligible (i.e., has a developmental delay), eligibility meeting/initial IEP meeting is held (see Step 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• If child is determined ineligible (i.e., does not have developmental delay), eligibility meeting is held to share results with family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 3: Developing an IEP</th>
<th>Team (cooperative, school district, parents) meets to develop an IEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Eligibility for services is discussed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Goals and objectives are determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Placement is determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• In most cases placement is in the cooperative’s ECSE classroom*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The team may recommend additional placement in a state preschool or Head Start classroom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Exceptions can occur if the child has a developmental delay (delay in two or more domains, but one of those domains is not cognitive)
What are the Functions of a Comprehensive Early Childhood System?

Appendix A

*Recruitment Letter for Program Level Participants*

Hello,

My name is Emily Dorsey. I am a doctoral student in Early Childhood Special Education at the University of Illinois. My research focuses on ways that programs in early care and education can collaborate to optimize services for young children.

I am interested in learning more about state preschool collaborations in your community. I think that the field of early care and education could benefit from research about unique collaborations, such as the one here in Thompson County.

I would like to interview you about your program, at a time and place that is most convenient to you. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes to one hour.

In appreciation for your time, you may choose an item for your classroom or program, up to $40.00, from Lakeshore Learning (http://www.lakeshorelearning.com/). I will provide you with hard copy of the catalog, or you can choose from their website.

Feel free to contact me at any time with questions or comments.

I am working under the direction of Dr. Susan Fowler, my academic advisor at the University of Illinois. You may contact her with any questions, comments, or concerns about the study. She can be reached via e-mail (safowler@illinois.edu) or phone (217-244-6178)

I look forward to speaking with you soon to learn more about your experience with preschool programs in Thompson County.

Sincerely,
Emily Dorsey
(217) 493-6613
edorsey@illinois.edu
Appendix B

Recruitment Letter for Policy Level Participants

Hello __________ (name of person),

My name is Emily Dorsey. I am a doctoral student in Early Childhood Special Education at the University of Illinois. My research focuses on ways that programs in early care and education can collaborate to optimize services for young children.

I am beginning my dissertation study, in which I will be attempting to learn more about collaborations in early care and education in a Midwest state, from local perspectives as well as from statewide perspectives. I think that the field of early care and education could benefit from research about unique collaborations, and I’d like to hear more about your experiences with collaborative efforts in our state.

I know that you are involved in early care and education at the state level, and I am aware of your work with __________ (agency or organization).

I would like to interview you about your experiences with collaboration in the state, as well as hear your ideas about how our state can improve collaborative efforts at the state level and in local communities. The interview will last approximately one hour.

For participants in a county close to the university:
I would like to interview you in person at a time and place that is most convenient to you.

For participants in other areas of the state:
I would like to interview you over the phone at a time that is most convenient to you.

Please feel free to contact me at any time with questions or comments.

I am working under the direction of Dr. Susan Fowler, my academic advisor at the University of Illinois. You may contact her with any questions, comments, or concerns about the study. She can be reached via e-mail (safowler@illinois.edu) or phone (217-244-6178)

If you are interested in participating in my study, I look forward to speaking with you soon. I will follow up this email with a phone call in about a week.

Sincerely,
Emily Dorsey
(217) 493-6613
edorsey@illinois.edu
C.1

Consent for Program Level Participants Interviewed in Person

Date________________

Dear ______________________,

My name is Emily Dorsey. I am a doctoral student in Special Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I am studying under the direction of Dr. Susan Fowler, a faculty member in Special Education at the University of Illinois.

I am interested in learning more about how early care and education programs collaborate to best serve the needs of children in local communities. I would like to learn more about the collaborations between state preschool programs and other early care and education programs here in Thompson County, as well as possible collaborations that serve children with disabilities or developmental delays.

I would like to interview you about your experiences with early care and education collaborations in Thompson County. This interview will be arranged at a time that is convenient for you and will take place at a location of your choosing. If needed, follow up interviews or conversations for clarification will also be scheduled at your convenience. The initial interview will last approximately one hour and will be audio taped with your permission.

It is my hope that this study will benefit the field of early childhood education by contributing valuable information about how communities can combine a variety of early care and education programs (including universal preschool programs such as state preschool programs, private school programs, center based childcare, and home based childcare) to best meet the needs of young children and their families.

There are no identifiable risks to participating in this study other than the risks encountered in normal daily life. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from participating in the interview at any time, without penalty. You may skip questions that you do not wish to answer. You are free to review your interview transcript for accuracy following the interview. Your decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will not affect your staff record in any way. The information that you share in your interview will be kept strictly confidential.
Information from this study will be kept secure in password-protected computers and will be stored on secure University of Illinois servers. Members of the research team and a transcriptionist will be the only individuals who listen to the recorded interviews. Only members of the research team will read the interview transcripts.

Your privacy will be maintained. During data analysis, all identifying information will be replaced with pseudonyms for you and for your program. The key to the pseudonym code will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my research office and only I will have access to it. Audio recordings of your interview and electronic copies of transcripts will be stored on password-protected computers on secure servers at the University of Illinois. Paper copies of interview transcripts and signed consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office at the University of Illinois.

Sincere effort will be made to ensure confidentiality. Results of the study will be used for a dissertation and may be submitted as an academic conference paper or journal article. Any sharing or publication of the research results will not identify the state, Thompson County or the municipalities within Thompson County, specific early care and education programs, or any of the individual participants, by name.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact us using the information below. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu.

In appreciation of your time, we would like to provide you with educational materials for your program or classroom. Following your interview, I will supply you with a copy of the Lakeshore Learning Catalog. You may choose an item or items, up to $40.00 in value.

Thank you so much for taking the time to consider your participation in this study.
Sincerely,

Emily Dorsey        Susan Fowler
(217) 493-6613        (217) 244-6178
edorsey@illinois.edu safowler@illinois.edu

A second copy of this form is included for you to keep with your records.
Please check the appropriate boxes and sign and date this form.

☐ I have read and understand the above consent form and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
☐ I agree to being audiotaped during the interviews.

_________________________________________  _________________________
Name of Participant                        Date
My name is Emily Dorsey. I am a doctoral student in Special Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I am studying under the direction of Dr. Susan Fowler, a faculty member in Special Education at the University of Illinois.

I am interested in learning more about how early care and education programs collaborate to best serve the needs of children in local communities. I would like to learn more about the collaborations between state preschool programs and other early care and education programs here in Thompson County, as well as possible collaborations that serve children with disabilities or developmental delays.

I would like to interview you about your experiences with early care and education collaborations in Thompson County. This interview will be arranged at a time that is convenient for you and will take place at a location of your choosing. If needed, follow up interviews or conversations for clarification will also be scheduled at your convenience. The initial interview will last approximately one hour and will be audio taped with your permission.

It is my hope that this study will benefit the field of early childhood education by contributing valuable information about how communities can combine a variety of early care and education programs (including universal preschool programs such as state preschool, private school programs, center based childcare, and home based childcare) to best meet the needs of young children and their families.

There are no identifiable risks to participating in this study other than the risks encountered in normal daily life. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from participating in the interview at any time, without penalty. You may skip questions that you do not wish to answer. You are free to review your interview transcript for accuracy following the interview. Your decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will not affect your staff record in any way. The information that you share in your interview will be kept strictly confidential.

Information from this study will be kept secure in password-protected computers and will be stored on secure University of Illinois servers. Members of the research team and a transcriptionist will be the only individuals who listen to the recorded interviews. Only members of the research team will read the interview transcripts.
Your privacy will be maintained. During data analysis, all identifying information will be replaced with pseudonyms for you and for your program. The key to the pseudonym code will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my research office and only I will have access to it. Audio recordings of your interview and electronic copies of transcripts will be stored on password-protected computers on secure servers at the University of Illinois. Paper copies of interview transcripts and signed consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office at the University of Illinois.

Sincere effort will be made to ensure confidentiality. Results of the study will be used for a dissertation and may be submitted as an academic conference paper or journal article. Any sharing or publication of the research results will not identify the Midwest state, Thompson County or the municipalities within Thompson County, specific early care and education programs, or any of the individual participants, by name.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact us using the information below. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu.

In appreciation of your time, we would like to provide you with educational materials for your program or classroom. Following your interview, I will supply you with a copy of the Lakeshore Learning Catalog. You may choose an item or items, up to $40.00 in value.

Thank you so much for taking the time to consider your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Emily Dorsey                     Susan Fowler
(217) 493-6613                  (217) 244-6178
edorsey@illinois.edu            safowler@illinois.edu

Please indicate verbally, your consent to the following items.
☐ I have read and understand the above consent form and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
☐ I agree to being audiotaped during the interviews.

_________________________________________  _________________________
Name of Participant                             Date
Dear ______________________,

My name is Emily Dorsey. I am a doctoral student in Special Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I am studying under the direction of Dr. Susan Fowler, a faculty member in Special Education at the University of Illinois.

I am interested in learning more about how early care and education programs collaborate to best serve the needs of children in local communities. I would like to hear your perspectives on collaborative efforts in early care and education in this Midwest state, at the state level and at the local level. I am especially interested in your thoughts about how these collaborations meet the needs of young children considered at risk for school problems and children with disabilities.

I would like to interview you at a time that is convenient for you. The interview will take place at a location of your choosing. If needed, follow up interviews or conversations for clarification will also be scheduled at your convenience. The initial interview will last approximately one and a half to two hours and will be audio taped with your permission.

It is my hope that this study will benefit the field of early childhood education by contributing valuable information about how communities can combine a variety of early care and education programs (including universal preschool programs such as state preschool, private school programs, center based childcare, and home based childcare) to best meet the needs of young children and their families.

There are no identifiable risks to participating in this study other than the risks encountered in normal daily life. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from participating in the interview at any time, without penalty. You may skip questions that you do not wish to answer. You are free to review your interview transcript for accuracy following the interview. Your decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will not affect your staff record in any way. The information that you share in your interview will be kept strictly confidential.

Information from this study will be kept secure in password-protected computers and will be stored on secure University of Illinois servers. Members of the research team and a transcriptionist will be the only individuals who listen to the recorded interviews. Only members of the research team will read the interview transcripts.
Your privacy will be maintained. During data analysis, all identifying information will be replaced with pseudonyms for you and for your program. The key to the pseudonym code will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my research office and only I will have access to it. Audio recordings of your interview and electronic copies of transcripts will be stored on password-protected computers on secure servers at the University of Illinois. Paper copies of interview transcripts and signed consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office at the University of Illinois.

Sincere effort will be made to ensure confidentiality. Results of the study will be used for a dissertation and may be submitted as an academic conference paper or journal article. Any sharing or publication of the research results will not identify the state. If you mention specific communities, organizations, programs, or individuals in your interview, they will be given pseudonyms if relevant information about them is included in a publication or presentation. The organization or program you are associated with, and you personally, will not be identified in any presentations or publications.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact us using the information below. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu.

Thank you so much for taking the time to consider your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Emily Dorsey               Susan Fowler
(217) 493-6613              (217) 244-6178
edorsey@illinois.edu       safowler@illinois.edu

A second copy of this form is included for you to keep with your records.

---

Please check the appropriate boxes and sign and date this form.
☐ I have read and understand the above consent form and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
☐ I agree to being audiotaped during the interviews.

________________________________________  ________________________
Name of Participant                        Date
My name is Emily Dorsey. I am a doctoral student in Special Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I am studying under the direction of Dr. Susan Fowler, a faculty member in Special Education at the University of Illinois.

I am interested in learning more about how early care and education programs collaborate to best serve the needs of children in local communities. I would like to hear your perspectives on collaborative efforts in early care and education in a Midwest state, at the state level and at the local level. I am especially interested in your thoughts about how these collaborations meet the needs of young children considered at risk for school problems and children with disabilities.

I would like to interview you at a time that is convenient for you. The interview will take place at a location of your choosing. If needed, follow up interviews or conversations for clarification will also be scheduled at your convenience. The initial interview will last approximately one and a half to two hours and will be audio taped with your permission.

It is my hope that this study will benefit the field of early childhood education by contributing valuable information about how communities can combine a variety of early care and education programs (including universal preschool programs such as state preschool, private school programs, center based childcare, and home based childcare) to best meet the needs of young children and their families.

There are no identifiable risks to participating in this study other than the risks encountered in normal daily life. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from participating in the interview at any time, without penalty. You may skip questions that you do not wish to answer. You are free to review your interview transcript for accuracy following the interview. Your decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will not affect your staff record in any way. The information that you share in your interview will be kept strictly confidential.

Information from this study will be kept secure in password-protected computers and will be stored on secure University of Illinois servers. Members of the research team and a transcriptionist will be the only individuals who listen to the recorded interviews. Only members of the research team will read the interview transcripts.
Your privacy will be maintained. During data analysis, all identifying information will be replaced with pseudonyms for you and for your program. The key to the pseudonym code will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my research office and only I will have access to it. Audio recordings of your interview and electronic copies of transcripts will be stored on password-protected computers on secure servers at the University of Illinois. Paper copies of interview transcripts and signed consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office at the University of Illinois.

Sincere effort will be made to ensure confidentiality. Results of the study will be used for a dissertation and may be submitted as an academic conference paper or journal article. Any sharing or publication of the research results will not identify the state. If you mention specific communities, organizations, programs, or individuals in your interview, they will be given pseudonyms if relevant information about them is included in a publication or presentation. The organization or program you are associated with, and you personally, will not be identified in any presentations or publications.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact us using the information below. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu.

Thank you so much for taking the time to consider your participation in this study.
Sincerely,

Emily Dorsey                Susan Fowler
(217) 493-6613             (217) 244-6178
edorsey@illinois.edu       safowler@illinois.edu

A second copy of this form is included for you to keep with your records.

________________________________________________________________________

Please indicate verbally, your consent to the following items.
☐ I have read and understand the above consent form and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
☐ I agree to being audiotaped during the interviews.

_________________________________________  ____________________________
Name of Participant  Date
Appendix D

Introductory Interview Protocol

1. Please share a brief overview of the structure of state preschool programs here in Thompson County.

2. Tell me about the different locations that host state preschool programming (e.g., community programs, childcare homes)

For each program location:

   a. Who is the administrator that I should contact to learn more about this program?
   b. What is the best way for me to get in contact with this administrator?
   c. Who are the staff members for this organization that provide state preschool services or instruction related to the state preschool program?
   d. What is the best way for me to contact those staff members?
   e. Who are the regional office staff members that work in this location?
   f. What is the best way for me to contact those staff members?

3. Describe the nature of services provided by the Regional Office of Education’s collaboration with other community programs.

   a. What calendar do services follow?
   b. How many hours per day are services provided?
   c. Do services differ according to location? If so, please describe the variations.

4. Tell me about how you staff your programs.

   a. Who is responsible for hiring at each of the locations?
   b. What educational requirements do you have for staff members in various roles?

5. Tell me about the enrollment of children in each of the locations.

   a. What strategies do you use to recruit children for your programs?
   b. Do you have trouble filling your enrollment? Do you have a waiting list? Does that vary by location?
   c. How many children attend each location?
   d. At each location, how many children individually qualify for state preschool services?
   e. How many children at each location have an IEP?
   f. Are special education services provided at any of the locations? What is the nature of those services (e.g., education, speech, OT, PT, etc.)?
   g. How many children at each location are dually enrolled in another program (e.g., ECSE, Head Start, private childcare)?
6. Tell me about your role as program coordinator.
   a. What are your roles in working with your own staff (i.e., state preschool teachers)?
   b. What are your roles in working with administrators and staff from your partnering organizations?

7. Tell me a little bit about your experiences prior to this job.
   a. What education or work experiences helped you to prepare for this unique experience as state preschool coordinator in a highly collaborative environment?
   b. Do you wish you had had other experiences or knowledge before entering this role? If so, what would those have been?

As I have shared with you in prior conversations, I am excited to study the collaborations here in Thompson County because I recognize that you are doing something innovative and unique. I think that other programs and communities could benefit from learning about experiences like yours. My interviews with participants will focus on two main topics:

- Collaboration between the Regional Office of Education’s state preschool programs and other community locations here in Thompson County
- Services for children with disabilities

8. Do you have any additional information that you think would be helpful for me to know before I begin my study?
   a. Are there any programs or individuals who should be invited to contribute their perspective?
   b. Is there any additional information that I should be aware of before I begin my study?
   c. Do you have any additional questions for me?
   d. Do you have any additional comments for me?
Appendix E

E.1

*Standard Interview Protocol for Program Level Administration*

**Standard Interview Protocol for Program Level Administration**

**Part I - Early Care and Education Collaborations in Thompson County**

1. **Introduction to individuals and programs in Thompson County**
   
a. Tell me about your role as an early care and education administrator here in Thompson County.

   **Probes:**
   - Describe the early care and education organization or program that you run.
   - How long have you been in your current role?

   b. Tell me about the different funding sources that contribute to your organization or program, as they relate to early care and education or early childhood special education.

   **Probes:**
   - Do your partners contribute to indirect costs such as renting space, utilities, or phone service?
   - Do your partners contribute teaching resources such as a copier, laminator, or office supplies?
   - Does your program receive the following funds: tuition, state preschool, Head Start, CCDF, Child and Adult Care Food Program, special education funding?
   - What percentage of your enrollment/how many children (ages 3-5) access each funding source? How many children pay tuition?
   - Describe the relative importance of each funding source to your overall programming.

   c. Tell me about any additional non-monetary resources that contribute to your organization or program, as they relate to early care and education or early childhood special education.

   **Probes:**
   - Does your program access the following resources: additional staff members, volunteers, training/technical assistance/professional development, or health/mental health/family support services?
   - What percentage of your enrollment/how many children (ages 3-5) access each resource?
   - Describe the relative importance of each resource to your overall programming.

2. **History of collaboration in Thompson County**
   
a. Tell me about the history of the collaborations started by the regional office to expand state preschool services here in Thompson County.
Probes:
• What prompted the regional office to consider the need for additional state preschool services in Thompson County?
• Which individuals were involved in writing the grant and establishing new state preschool programs?
• How was the grant tailored to meet the unique needs of Thompson County?
• How did you develop your eligibility checklist? How did you decide how to weight particular factors? Is the eligibility checklist unique to Thompson County or used throughout your region?
• Describe the groups or types of children that the regional office most wanted to serve, and tell why.
• How did existing early care and education programs in the county, including the school district state preschool program, respond to the addition of the regional office’s new programs?

3. Forming and maintaining partnerships

a. The regional office has placed state preschool programs in a variety of locations in Thompson County. Tell me more about the regional office’s partnership with _______________ (community program)*.

[*Note - Participant will only answer questions related to the program he or she administers.]

Probes
• Which groups or types of children are served through this partnership?
• When was the partnership formed?
• Which individuals have been involved in starting and maintaining this partnership?
• Describe any formal (written) or informal agreements that outline the parameters of the partnership.
• Describe any logistical issues (academic calendars, scheduling, staffing, pay, transportation) you have encountered in creating this partnership.
• Tell me about the joint activities your program participates in on a daily/ongoing basis (e.g., consulting, sharing space, professional development), as well as the activities that occur annually (e.g. screening, assessment).

b. What do you believe it takes to create a successful partnership between the regional office and _______________ (community program)?

Probes:
• Have the following supports made collaboration easier? If so, how?
  o Funding (at the federal, state, or local level)
  o Resources or support such as technical assistance
  o Shared goals and philosophies among programs
  o Specific program characteristics
Specific leaders or other individuals

c. What do you believe have been the benefits of collaboration - for your program, its staff members, and families in your community?

d. What factors, do you believe, have made collaboration more difficult?

Probes:
- Have the following factors made collaboration more difficult? If so, how?
  - Lack of government funding at the federal, state, or local level?
  - Lack of non-monetary resources such as technical assistance
  - Different goals and philosophies among programs
  - Specific program characteristics (e.g., full-day or half-day, hiring and supervision procedures, transportation)

e. If, in your opinions, there have been any drawbacks to collaboration, please describe those as well.

4. State level collaboration initiatives

a. Are you involved with early care and education networks at the local level (e.g., local birth to five councils, ECSE provider networks)? If so, describe that experience.

b. Have you participated in any state level networks related to early care and education (e.g., state preschool administrator’s forum)? If so, describe that experience.

c. If you are aware of any, briefly describe current or ongoing initiatives at the state level that have facilitated early care and education collaboration here in Thompson County.

Probes:
- [If participant asks for an example] Race to the Top has all made an effort to increase collaboration among early care and education programs.
- How did you become aware of this initiative?
- In what ways has this initiative facilitated collaboration at the local level?
- How well does this initiative meet the needs of a rural county?

5. Reflections on local collaboration

a. If you could change anything about early care and education services in your community, what would it be?

b. If you could start from scratch and redesign early care and education services in your community, what would they look like?

c. If you could offer words of wisdom to early care and education program leaders in other rural communities, what would you tell them?
Part II - Special Education Services in Thompson County

1. Services for children with disabilities

a. Describe your program’s role in providing care and education to young children with disabilities in your community.

Probes [if applicable based on participant answer]:
• What percentage/how many children with disabilities (ages 3-5) are enrolled in your program?
• Describe your program staff’s role in the assessment of children who may have disabilities or developmental delays.
• Describe your program staff’s role in writing IEPs for children who qualify for special education services, including determining placement.

b. Describe your program’s role in developmental screening events in your community.

c. If children with disabilities are enrolled in your program, tell me more about their experiences.

For example:
• Describe their educational setting. How is it the same or different than that of their typically developing peers?
• How much time do children spend with their typically developing peers? What are they doing during other times?
• If children are enrolled in multiple programs, describe transportation arrangements.

d. If children with disabilities are enrolled in your program, tell me more about the staff members who work with them.

Probes:
• Describe the staff members (preschool teacher, childcare provider, aide, ECSE teacher, paraprofessionals, related service providers) that work with children who have special needs.
• Describe any education (degree) or training (professional development) requirements that you have for staff members who work with children who have disabilities.
• Describe how staff members collaborate (including using coaching/consultation) to address IEP goals.
• Do teachers and related service providers provide “push-in” or “pull-out” services?

2. Inclusion

a. Describe your program’s philosophy regarding the inclusion of young children who have disabilities with their typically developing peers.

Probes:
• Is this philosophy documented on any program materials?
• How was this philosophy developed?
• Does this philosophy reflect the opinions of all program administrators and staff?
• Do you have any written policies to support your philosophy?
• Tell me about how you ensure your philosophy is carried out in programming (e.g., support from infant mental health specialist, staff training).

b. What does an inclusive early childhood environment look like to you? Paint a picture of the type of environment you are envisioning.

c. What do you see as the benefits of including young children with disabilities in early care and education programs and throughout the community? What do you see as the benefits of including young children with disabilities in other community settings and events (e.g., story hour, summer camps)?

Probe:
• Consider benefits for programs and their staff members, families, children with disabilities, as well as their typically developing peers.

d. Do you see any potential drawbacks to including young children with disabilities in early care and education programs throughout the community?

e. In your opinion, what supports make it easier for a program to provide inclusive experiences for young children with disabilities?

Probes:
• If your program has provided inclusive experiences, describe the supports that made it possible (e.g., training, additional staff, supportive parent community).
• If your program has not provided inclusive experiences in the past but may in the future, describe the supports you would need.

f. In your opinion, what factors make it difficult for a program to provide inclusive experiences for young children with disabilities?

Probes:
• If your program has provided inclusive experiences, describe the factors that made it difficult.
• If your program has not provided inclusive experiences in the past, describe the barriers that have prevented it.

3. Final reflections

a. Reflect on services for young children with disabilities throughout Thompson County. In your opinion, what is going well? What, if anything, would you change?
1. Introduction to individuals and programs in Thompson County

a. Tell me about your role as an early care and education administrator here in Thompson County.

b. Tell me about the different funding sources that contribute to your organization or program, as they relate to early care and education or early childhood special education.

c. Tell me about any additional non-monetary resources that contribute to your organization or program, as they relate to early care and education or early childhood special education.

2. History of collaboration in Thompson County

a. Tell me about the history of the collaborations started by the Regional Office of Education to expand state preschool services here in Thompson County.

3. Forming and maintaining partnerships

a. The Regional Office of Education has placed state preschool programs in a variety of locations in Thompson County. Tell me more about the regional office’s partnership with ____________ (community program).

b. What do you believe it takes to create a successful partnership between the regional office and ____________ (community program)?

c. What do you believe have been the benefits of collaboration - for your program, its staff members, and families in your community?

d. What factors, do you believe, have made collaboration difficult?

e. If, in your opinions, there have been any drawbacks to collaboration, please describe those as well.

4. State level collaboration initiatives

a. Are you involved with early care and education networks at the local level (e.g., local birth to five councils, ECSE provider networks)? If so, describe that experience.
b. Have you participated in any state level networks related to early care and education (e.g., state preschool administrator’s forum)? If so, describe that experience.

c. If you are aware of any, briefly describe current or ongoing initiatives at the state level that have facilitated early care and education collaboration here in Thompson County.

5. Reflections on local collaboration

a. If you could change anything about early care and education services in your community, what would it be?

b. If you could start from scratch and redesign early care and education services in your community, what would they look like?

c. If you could offer words of wisdom to early care and education program leaders in other rural communities, what would you tell them?

Part II - Special Education Services in Thompson County

1. Services for children with disabilities

a. Describe your program’s role in providing care and education to young children with disabilities in your community.

b. Describe your program’s role in developmental screening events in your community.

c. If children with disabilities are enrolled in your program, tell me more about their experiences.

For example:
• Describe their educational setting. How is it the same or different than that of their typically developing peers?
• How much time do children spend with their typically developing peers? What are they doing during other times?
• If children are enrolled in multiple programs, describe transportation arrangements.

d. If children with disabilities are enrolled in your program, tell me more about the staff members who work with them.

2. Inclusion

a. Describe your program’s philosophy regarding the inclusion of young children who have disabilities with their typically developing peers.

b. What does an inclusive early childhood environment look like to you? Paint a picture of the type of environment you are envisioning.
c. What do you see as the benefits of including young children with disabilities in early care and education programs and throughout the community? What do you see as the benefits of including young children with disabilities in other community settings and events (e.g., story hour, summer camps)?

d. Do you see any potential drawbacks to including young children with disabilities in early care and education programs throughout the community?

e. In your opinion, what supports make it easier for a program to provide inclusive experiences for young children with disabilities?

f. In your opinion, what factors make it difficult for a program to provide inclusive experiences for young children with disabilities?

3. Final reflections

a. Reflect on services for young children with disabilities throughout Thompson County. In your opinion, what is going well? What, if anything, would you change?
Appendix F

F.1

Standard Interview Protocol for Program Level Staff

Standard Interview Protocol for Program Level Staff

Part I - Early Care and Education Collaborations in Thompson County

1. Introduction to individuals and programs in Thompson County

a. Tell me about your role as an early care and education provider here in Thompson County.

Probes:
• Describe the early care and education organization or program where you work.
• How long have you been in your current role?

b. [For home childcare providers only] Tell me about the different funding sources that contribute to your home childcare program.

Probes:
• Does your program receive the following funds: tuition, state preschool, CCDF, Child and Adult Care Food Program?
• What percentage of your enrollment/how many children (ages 3-5) access each funding source? How many children pay tuition?
• Describe the relative importance of each funding source to your overall programming.

c. [For home childcare providers only] Tell me about any additional non-monetary resources that contribute to your home childcare program.

Probes:
• Does your program access the following resources: additional staff members, volunteers, training/technical assistance/professional development, or health/mental health/family support services)?
• [If applicable] What percentage of your enrollment/how many children (ages 3-5) access each resource?
• Describe the relative importance of each resource to your overall programming.

2. History of collaboration in Thompson County

The regional office has placed a variety of state preschool programs throughout in Thompson County.

a. If you were present during the creation of those programs, describe your knowledge and experience of how those programs were developed.
Probes:
• What prompted the regional office to consider the need for additional state preschool services in Thompson County?
• Describe the groups or types of children that the regional office most wanted to serve, and tell why.
• How did existing early care and education programs in the county, including the school district state preschool program, respond to the addition of the regional offices’ new programs?

3. Forming and maintaining partnerships

a. The regional office has placed state preschool programs in a variety of locations in Thompson County. Tell me more about the regional office’s partnership with ______________ (community program)*.

[Note - Participant will only answer questions related to the program that employs him or her.]

Probes
• Which groups or types of children are served through this partnership?
• Which individuals have been involved in maintaining this partnership?
• [For home childcare providers only] Describe any formal (written) or informal agreements that outline the parameters of the partnership.
• Describe any logistical issues (academic calendars, scheduling, transportation) you have encountered in this partnership.
• Tell me about the joint activities your program participates in on a daily/ongoing basis (e.g., consulting, sharing space, professional development), as well as the activities that occur annually (e.g. screening, assessment).
• Tell me what it has been like to work with staff members from other programs. What has gone smoothly? What has been difficult?

b. What do you believe it takes to create a successful partnership between the regional office and ______________ (community program)?

Probes:
• Have the following supports made collaboration easier? If so, how?
  o Funding (at the federal, state, or local level)
  o Resources or support such as technical assistance
  o Shared goals and philosophies among programs
  o Specific program characteristics
  o Specific leaders or other individuals

c. What do you believe have been the benefits of collaboration - for your program, its staff members, and families in your community?
d. What factors, do you believe, have made collaboration difficult?

Probes:
• Have the following factors made collaboration more difficult? If so, how?
  o Lack of government funding at the federal, state, or local level?
  o Lack of non-monetary resources such as technical assistance
  o Different goals and philosophies among programs
  o Specific program characteristics (e.g., full-day or half-day, hiring and supervision procedures, transportation)

e. If, in your opinions, there have been any drawbacks to collaboration, please describe those as well.

4. Reflections on local collaboration

a. If you could change anything about early care and education services in your community, what would it be?

b. If you could start from scratch and redesign early care and education services in your community, what would they look like?

Part II - Special Education Services in Thompson County

1. Services for children with disabilities

a. Do you provide services for children with disabilities?

b. If children with disabilities are enrolled in your program, tell me more about their experiences.

For example:
• Describe their educational setting. How is it the same or different than that of their typically developing peers?
• How much time do children spend with their typically developing peers? What are they doing during other times?
• If children are enrolled in multiple programs, describe transportation arrangements.

c. Describe your program’s role in providing care and education to young children with disabilities in your community.

Probes [if applicable based on participant answer]:
• Describe your staff members’ roles in the assessment of children who may have disabilities or developmental delays.
• Describe your staff members’ roles in writing IEPs for children who qualify for special education services, including determining placement.

d. Describe your role in developmental screening events in your community.
e. If children with disabilities are enrolled in your program, tell me more about the staff members who work with them.

Probes:
• Describe the staff members (preschool teacher, childcare provider, aide, ECSE teacher, paraprofessionals, related service providers) that work with children who have special needs.
• Describe any education (degree) or training (professional development) requirements for staff members who work with children who have disabilities.
• Describe how staff members collaborate (including using coaching/consultation) to address IEP goals.
• Do teachers and related service providers provide “push-in” or “pull-out” services?

2. Inclusion

a. Describe your program’s philosophy regarding the inclusion of young children who have disabilities with their typically developing peers.

Probes:
• Is this philosophy documented on any program materials?
• How was this philosophy developed?
• Does this philosophy reflect the opinions of all program administrators and staff?
• Do you have any written policies to support your philosophy?
• Tell me about how you ensure your philosophy is carried out in programming (e.g., support from infant mental health specialist, staff training).

b. What does an inclusive early childhood environment look like to you? Paint a picture of the type of environment you are envisioning.

c. What do you see as the benefits of including young children with disabilities in early care and education programs and throughout the community? What do you see as the benefits of including young children with disabilities in other community settings and events (e.g., story hour, summer camps)?

Probe:
• Consider benefits for programs and their staff members, families, children with disabilities, as well as their typically developing peers.

d. Do you see any potential drawbacks to including young children with disabilities in early care and education programs throughout the community?

e. In your opinion, what supports make it easier for a program to provide inclusive experiences for young children with disabilities?
Probes:
• If your program has provided inclusive experiences, describe the supports that made it possible (e.g., training, additional staff, supportive parent community).
• If your program has not provided inclusive experiences in the past but may in the future, describe the supports you would need.

f. In your opinion, what factors make it difficult for a program to provide inclusive experiences for young children with disabilities?

Probes:
• If your program has provided inclusive experiences, describe the factors that made it difficult.
• If your program has not provided inclusive experiences in the past, describe the barriers that have prevented it.

3. Final reflections

Reflect on services for young children with disabilities throughout Thompson County. In your opinion, what is going well? What, if anything, would you change?
Standard Interview Protocol for Program Level Staff

Part I - Early Care and Education Collaborations in Thompson County

1. Introduction to individuals and programs in Thompson County

a. Tell me about your role as an early care and education provider here in Thompson County.

b. [For home childcare providers only] Tell me about the different funding sources that contribute to your home childcare program.

2. History of collaboration in Thompson County

The Regional Office of Education has placed a variety of state preschool programs throughout in Thompson County.

a. If you were present during the creation of those programs, describe your knowledge and experience of how those programs were developed.

3. Forming and maintaining partnerships

a. The regional office has placed state preschool programs in a variety of locations in Thompson County. Tell me more about the regional office’s partnership with ________________ (community program).

b. What do you believe it takes to create a successful partnership between the regional office and ________________ (community program)?

c. What do you believe have been the benefits of collaboration - for your program, its staff members, and families in your community?

d. What factors, do you believe, have made collaboration difficult?

e. If, in your opinions, there have been any drawbacks to collaboration, please describe those as well.
4. Reflections on local collaboration

a. If you could change anything about early care and education services in your community, what would it be?

b. If you could start from scratch and redesign early care and education services in your community, what would they look like?

Part II - Special Education Services in Thompson County

1. Services for children with disabilities

a. Do you provide services for children with disabilities?

b. If children with disabilities are enrolled in your program, tell me more about their experiences.

For example:
- Describe their educational setting. How is it the same or different than that of their typically developing peers?
- How much time do children spend with their typically developing peers? What are they doing during other times?
- If children are enrolled in multiple programs, describe transportation arrangements.

c. Describe your program’s role in providing care and education to young children with disabilities in your community.

d. Describe your role in developmental screening events in your community.

e. If children with disabilities are enrolled in your program, tell me more about the staff members who work with them.

2. Inclusion

a. Describe your program’s philosophy regarding the inclusion of young children who have disabilities with their typically developing peers.

b. What does an inclusive early childhood environment look like to you? Paint a picture of the type of environment you are envisioning.

c. What do you see as the benefits of including young children with disabilities in early care and education programs and throughout the community? What do you see as the benefits of including young children with disabilities in other community settings and events (e.g., story hour, summer camps)?

d. Do you see any potential drawbacks to including young children with disabilities in early care and education programs throughout the community?
e. In your opinion, what supports make it easier for a program to provide inclusive experiences for young children with disabilities?

f. In your opinion, what factors make it more difficult for a program to provide inclusive experiences for young children with disabilities?

3. Final reflections

Reflect on services for young children with disabilities throughout Thompson County. In your opinion, what is going well? What, if anything, would you change?
Appendix G

Special Education Interview Protocol

Special Education Interview Protocol

Hello. I am interested in studying pre-K services for children with disabilities here in Thompson County. I am specifically interested in learning about the role of the local school district, as well as the role of the local special education cooperative, in finding, assessing, placing, and serving young children with special needs.

1. I’d like to know more about your role in child find.

a. What strategies do you use to locate children with disabilities?

b. Describe if and how you work with early intervention services during this process.

c. Describe if and how you collaborate with other programs or organizations during this process (e.g., if you are a staff member in the school district program, how do you collaborate with the special education cooperative?)

2. I’d like to know more about your role in assessment procedures.

a. Describe the types of assessment you use with children in determining if they have special needs.

b. Tell me about the roles of different staff members in this process.

c. Tell me about if/how you work with other organizations during this process.

d. Using your assessment instruments, what disability categories are you able to identify (e.g., developmental delay vs. one of the 13 specific disability categories under IDEA, or both)?

3. I’d like to know more about your role in creating and implementing IEPs for preschool children.

a. Describe the different information and/or data sources that you refer to when writing IEPs (e.g., doctors’ reports, assessment completed by the team, assessments provided by early intervention, parent report, etc.)

b. Tell me about the different staff members that make up the IEP team. Describe each person’s role.

c. Tell me about the different ways that parents are involved on the IEP team.
d. Where do IEP meetings generally occur?

e. Are you the only program or organization that writes IEPs for children in your community, or do other programs also write them?

4. I’d like to know more about your role in making placement decisions.

a. Describe the decision-making framework that you use to make placement decisions.

b. Describe the existing program options that your program or organization is able to offer to families. What does your continuum of services include?

c. Have you ever served children in programs that are not part of your organization? If so, describe the types of factors you considered in making those individual decisions. If not, share a little more about constraints on providing services to children in other programs.

5. I’d like to know more about service delivery.

a. Tell me about the different contexts/environments in which service delivery occurs.

b. Does your program provide services in self-contained classrooms? If so, describe the types of educational supports and related services that are provided in those programs.

c. Does your program provide services in inclusive classrooms? If so, describe the types of educational supports and related services that are provided in those programs.

d. Does your program provide services in community settings such as private schools, private childcare centers, or childcare homes? If so, describe the types of educational supports and related services that are provided in those programs.

e. Please share any other comments or insights you have about service delivery in your community.
Appendix H

H.1

Standard Interview Protocol for Policy Level Participants

Standard Interview Protocol for Policy Level Participants

Part I - Early Care and Education Collaborations in a Midwest State

1. Introduction to early care and education programs in a Midwest State

I wanted to speak with your regarding your work with ________________ (early care and education organization or program).

a. Describe the goals of your organization or program.

Probe:
• Describe the types of communities, programs, and families in the state that benefit from your funds, services, and other resources.

b. Describe your particular role within this organization or program.

Probes:
• Describe the development of this initiative.
• How long have you been in your current role?

c. Tell me about the funding, services, and other resources that your program provides to the field of early care and education in the state.

Probes [If applicable to the program]:
• Is your worked funded by: federal, state, or local money; tax dollars; and/or private contributions?
• How does funding from your program or organization impact early care and education programming at the state or local level?
• Describe the direct services that your program or initiative provides to children (e.g., classroom programs).
• Describe any training, technical assistance, or professional development that your organization provides to programs and their staff.

d. Tell me about the ways you participate in shaping early care and education in the state, through your role with ________________.

Probes [for clarification, if necessary]:
• Describe how your organization or program participates in creating or reforming early childhood programming for young children and their families throughout the state (e.g.,
serving on councils or committees, acting in an advisory capacity, creating legislation or policy, developing QRIS or professional development tools).

e. Describe how your organization participates in advocacy for early childhood education (e.g., lobbying, outreach).

2. History of collaboration in a Midwest state

This Midwest state has been making collaboration in early care and education a priority, especially since Race to the Top funds have become available to the state.

a. Share your knowledge of the history of collaboration in early care and education in this Midwest state.

For example:
• Who were the early leaders in this movement?
• What were some early examples of collaboration at the state level?
• Describe how key legislation or policies have influenced collaboration throughout the state.

Probes:
• What has been the response to collaborative efforts at the state level?
• What types of responses to collaboration have you seen at the local level?

3. Forming and maintaining partnerships

Early care and education collaborations are becoming more prevalent in local communities throughout the state. Programs such as Head Start, state preschool, licensed childcare (home and center-based), and early childhood special education are coming together to serve children.

a. What are you seeing in terms of collaboration at the local level?

Probes
• What have you learned from working with/learning about a variety of local communities?
• Have you noticed any trends or patterns in collaborations around the state?
• Describe the types of children who are being better served through collaboration.
• Are any populations being missed in these collaborations?
• What do you think local communities are doing well?
• What do you think local communities could be doing better?

b. What does it take to create successful collaborations in early care and education, at the local level? Describe what a successful collaboration might “look like”.

Probes
• What types of individuals should be involved in starting and maintaining collaborations?
• Describe how formal (written) or informal agreements help programs outline the parameters of their partnership.
• Describe any logistical issues (academic calendars, scheduling, staffing, pay, transportation) that programs must navigate.
• Describe the types of daily/ongoing activities (e.g., consulting, sharing space, professional development) that are ideal for programs to work on jointly.
• Describe the types of annual activities (e.g., screening, assessment) that are ideal for programs to work on jointly.
• Have the following factors made collaboration easier? If so, how?
  o Government initiatives (at the federal, state, or local level)
  o Incentives or support such as money or technical assistance
  o Shared goals and philosophies among programs
  o Specific program characteristics
  o Specific leaders or other individuals

c. What are the benefits of local collaboration in early care and education - for programs, their staff members, and families?

d. What factors, if any, have made collaboration difficult?

Probes:
• Have the following factors made collaboration more difficult? If so, how?
  o Lack of government support at the federal, state, or local level?
  o Lack of incentives such as money or technical assistance
  o Disparate goals and philosophies among programs
  o Specific program characteristics
  o The actions of specific leaders or other individuals

e. Taking a step back to look at the broader picture of collaboration, do you see any drawbacks to collaboration in early care and education?

Probes [if participant asks for an example of a drawback]
Literature on collaboration has reported these drawbacks to collaboration:
• Threats to the private sector of early care and education
• Teacher turnover

4. State level collaboration initiatives

a. Describe two or three of the most relevant initiatives, at the state level, that are influencing early care and education collaborations in the state.

Probes:
• [If participant asks for an example] Race to the Top has made an effort to increase collaboration among early care and education programs.
• What factors prompted this initiative?
• Who spearheaded this initiative?
• Describe your involvement with this initiative.
b. Based on your knowledge, describe how local leaders in early care and education can use these initiatives to their advantage, to improve early care and education services in their communities.

Probes:
- How might local administrators become aware of this initiative?
- In what ways has this initiative facilitated collaboration at the local level?
- How well does this initiative meet the needs of the individual communities in the state - which includes urban communities and rural communities?

5. Reflections on collaboration in a Midwest state

a. If you could change anything about early care and education services in the state, what would it be?

b. If you could start from scratch and redesign early care and education services in the state, what would they look like? Talk about what you would put in place at the state level as well as at the local level.

c. What are your thoughts on a comprehensive system of services for young children - that is, a system that includes not only early care and education services, but also health and family support services?

Part II - Special Education Services

1. Services for children with disabilities

a. Describe your organization or program’s involvement with young children with disabilities.

Probes [if applicable (e.g., state preschool, Head Start)]:
- What is your target percentage of children with disabilities who are enrolled in your programs?
- What does your program do, at the state level, to require/encourage/promote/oversee developmental screening events at the local level?
- What does your program do, at the state level, to require/encourage/promote/oversee the assessment of children who may have disabilities or developmental delays, at the local level?
- What does your program do, at the state level, to require/encourage/promote/oversee the development of IEPs for children who qualify for special education services, including determining location of services, at the local level?

b. If children with disabilities are enrolled in your programs, tell me more about their experiences.

Probes:
- Describe their ideal educational setting. How is it the same or different than that of their typically developing peers?
• Ideally, how much time do children with disabilities spend with their typically developing peers? What are they doing during other times?
• Do children with disabilities enrolled in your program ever have dual enrollment with another program? If so, describe how transportation arrangements are determined.

c. If children with disabilities are enrolled in your local programs, tell me more about the staff members who work with them at the local level.

Probes:
• Describe the types of staff members (preschool teacher, Head Start teacher, childcare provider, aide, ECSE teacher, paraprofessionals, related service providers) that work with children who have special needs.
• Describe any education (degree) or training (professional development) requirements that you have for staff members who work with children who have disabilities.
• Describe how staff members from your program and partnering programs collaborate (including using coaching/consultation) to address IEP goals.
• Do teachers and related service providers provide “push-in” or “pull-out” services?

2. Inclusion

a. Describe your organization or program’s philosophy regarding the inclusion of young children who have disabilities with their typically developing peers.

Probes:
• Is this philosophy documented on any program materials?
• How was this philosophy developed?
• Does this philosophy reflect the opinions of all program administrators and staff?
• Do you have any written policies to support your philosophy?
• Tell me about how you ensure your philosophy is carried out in programming (e.g., support from infant mental health specialist, staff training).

b. What do you see as the benefits of including young children with disabilities in early care and education programs in local communities?

Probe:
• Consider benefits for programs and their staff members, families, children with disabilities, as well as their typically developing peers.

c. Do you see any potential drawbacks to including young children with disabilities in early care and education programs in local communities?

d. What factors make it easier for local early care and education programs to provide inclusive experiences for young children with disabilities?
Probe:
• If local programs that you know of provide inclusive experiences, describe the factors that make that possible.

e. What factors make it difficult for local early care and education programs to provide inclusive experiences for young children with disabilities?

Probe:
• If local programs that you know of provide inclusive experiences, describe the factors that make it more difficult.

f. What state level supports have facilitated inclusion at the local level?

g. Is there a lack of state level supports when it comes to facilitating inclusion at the local level? If so, what is missing?

3. Final reflections

a. Reflect on services for young children with disabilities throughout the state. In your opinion, what is going well? What, if anything, would you change?
Standard Interview Protocol for Policy Level Participants: Handout

Standard Interview Protocol for Policy Level Participants

Part I - Early Care and Education Collaborations in a Midwest State

1. Introduction to early care and education programs in a Midwest State

I wanted to speak with you regarding your work with ____________ (early care and education organization or program).

a. Describe the goals of your organization or program.

b. Describe your particular role within this organization or program.

c. Tell me about the funding, services, and other resources that your program provides to the field of early care and education in the state.

d. Tell me about the ways you participate in shaping early care and education in the state, through your role with ________________.

e. Describe how your organization participates in advocacy for early childhood education (e.g., lobbying, outreach).

2. History of collaboration in a Midwest state

This Midwest state has been making collaboration in early care and education a priority, especially since Race to the Top funds have become available to the state.

a. Share your knowledge of the history of collaboration in early care and education here in the state.

For example:
- Who were the early leaders in this movement?
- What were some early examples of collaboration at the state level?
- Describe how key legislation or policies have influenced collaboration throughout the state.

3. Forming and maintaining partnerships

Early care and education collaborations are becoming more prevalent in local communities throughout the state. Programs such as Head Start, state preschool, licensed childcare (home and center-based), and early childhood special education are coming together to serve children.

a. What are you seeing in terms of collaboration at the local level?
b. What does it take to create successful collaborations in early care and education, at the local level? Describe what a successful collaboration might “look like”.

c. What are the benefits of local collaboration in early care and education - for programs, their staff members, and families?

d. What factors, if any, have made collaboration more difficult?

e. Taking a step back to look at the broader picture of collaboration, do you see any drawbacks to collaboration in early care and education?

4. State level collaboration initiatives

a. Describe two or three of the most relevant initiatives, at the state level, that are influencing early care and education collaborations in the state.

b. Based on your knowledge, describe how local leaders in early care and education can use these initiatives to their advantage, to improve early care and education services in their communities.

5. Reflections on collaboration in a Midwest state

a. If you could change anything about early care and education services in the state, what would it be?

b. If you could start from scratch and redesign early care and education services in the state, what would they look like? Talk about what you would put in place at the state level as well as at the local level.

c. What are your thoughts on a comprehensive system of services for young children - that is, a system that includes not only early care and education services, but also health and family support services?

   Part II - Special Education Services

1. Services for children with disabilities

a. Describe your organization or program’s involvement with young children with disabilities.

b. If children with disabilities are enrolled in your programs, tell me more about their experiences.

c. If children with disabilities are enrolled in your local programs, tell me more about the staff members who work with them at the local level.
2. Inclusion

a. Describe your organization or program’s philosophy regarding the inclusion of young children who have disabilities with their typically developing peers.

b. What do you see the benefits of including young children with disabilities in early care and education programs in local communities?

c. Do you see any potential drawbacks to including young children with disabilities in early care and education programs in local communities?

d. What factors make it easier for local early care and education programs to provide inclusive experiences for young children with disabilities?

e. What factors make it difficult for local early care and education programs to provide inclusive experiences for young children with disabilities?

f. What state level supports have facilitated inclusion at the local level?

g. Is there a lack of state level supports when it comes to facilitating inclusion at the local level? If so, what is missing?

3. Final reflections

a. Reflect on services for young children with disabilities throughout the state. In your opinion, what is going well? What, if anything, would you change?