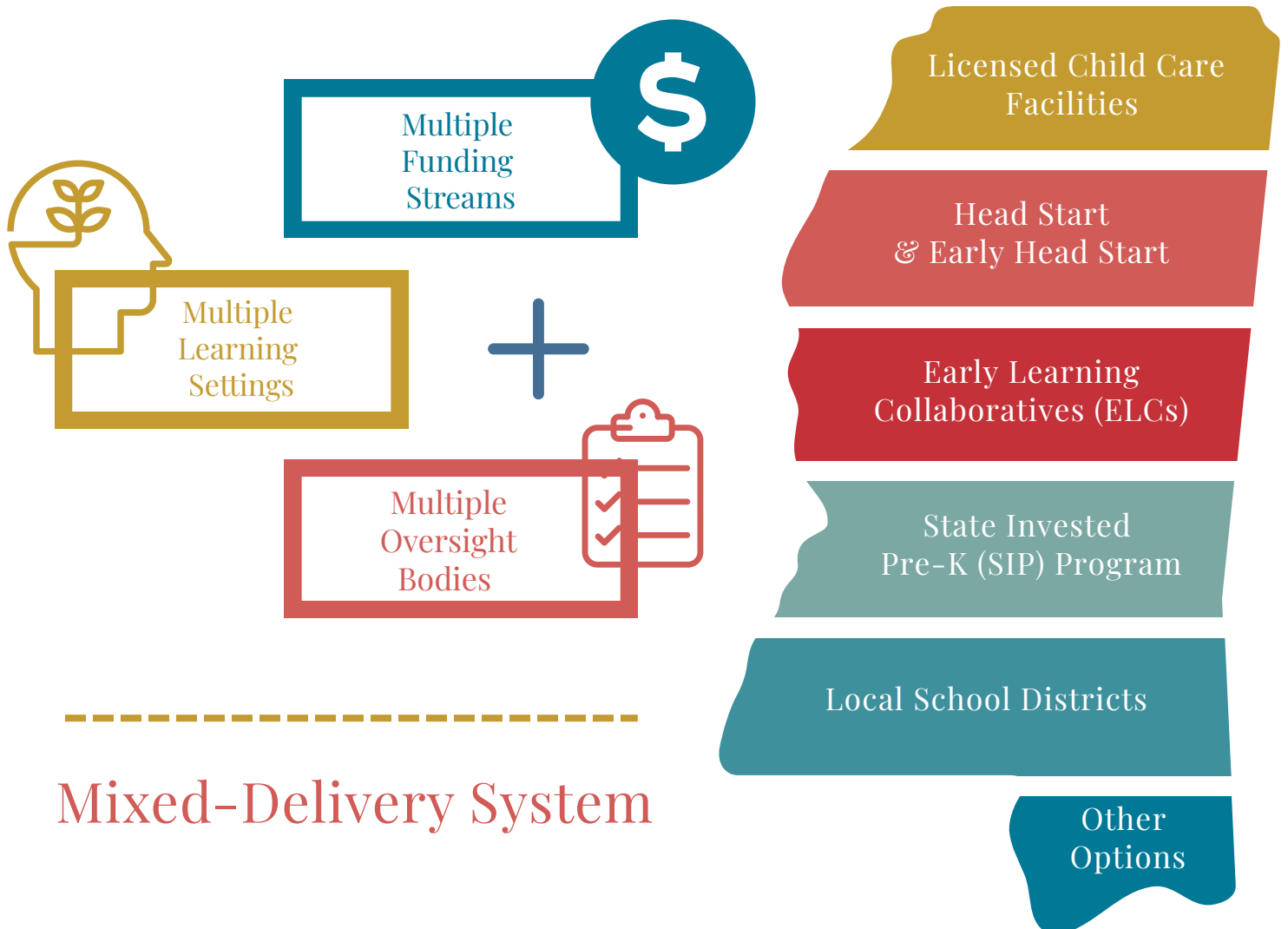


# MISSISSIPPI'S EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION MIXED-DELIVERY SYSTEM

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This brief serves as a quick guide to the key features of Mississippi's early education programs.

Mississippi's early childhood education **mixed-delivery system** brings together multiple and sometimes overlapping learning settings, funding streams, and oversight bodies that work together to support early learning. This blended approach expands access to high-quality early education while giving families the flexibility to choose programs that best meet their needs.





## What are the options for early childhood education in Mississippi?



### Types of Care by Age

0 to 3-year-olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Licensed Child Care</li> <li>• Early Head Start</li> </ul>
4-year-olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Licensed Child Care</li> <li>• Head Start</li> <li>• Early Learning Collaboratives (ELCs)</li> <li>• State Invested Pre-K (SIP) Program</li> <li>• Local School Districts/Title I</li> </ul>
5-year-olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head Start</li> <li>• Licensed Child Care</li> <li>• Public or Private School Kindergarten (if age eligible)</li> </ul>
6 to 12-year-olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Licensed Child Care After-School Programs</li> </ul>



# LICENSED CHILD CARE

## What is Licensed Child Care?

- Licensed child care in Mississippi is child care that has been formally approved and regulated by the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH). These are usually non-government-operated programs that provide daily care and early learning for children, usually from birth through age 5, and sometimes for school-age children before and after school.<sup>1</sup>
- This type of care may be located in churches, stand-alone centers, businesses, or private homes.

## Funding Source:

- Licensed, private early childhood education facilities in Mississippi are funded by tuition paid by families. Families earning at or below 85% of the State Median Income (SMI)<sup>2</sup> may receive federally and state-funded tuition assistance, which some licensed child care providers opt to accept. Tuition assistance is administered by the Division of Early Childhood Care and Development (DECCD) at the Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS). Some licensed child care facilities may participate in Early Learning Collaboratives (ELCs) and may receive additional public or private funding.<sup>3</sup>

## Ages Served : 0-12 years

MISSISSIPPI CHILDREN SERVED IN LICENSED CHILD CARE BY AGE		
Age Group	Number of Children <sup>4,5</sup>	Percent of Age Group <sup>4,5</sup>
0 to 3-year-olds	48,901	35.40%
4-year-olds	16,462	46.60%
5-year-olds not yet in kindergarten	4,919	13.80%
6 to 12-year-olds (After-School Care)	24,972	9.70%

## Quality Requirements :

- Facilities must meet the minimum acceptable health, safety, and program operations as set by the Child Care Licensure Bureau. This is monitored through inspections. Additional, elective trainings are available through the Child Care Licensure.
- All programs accepting public tuition assistance must be licensed and participate in MDHS ELEVATE: a Quality Support System program, which provides coaching on developmentally appropriate practices and observes facilities to ensure quality practices.<sup>1</sup>

## State Agency Oversight :

- Mississippi’s Child Care Licensure Bureau and Mississippi Department of Human Services Division of Early Childhood Care and Development

## Number of Children Served:

- There were 95,254 children served through 1,505 Licensed Child Care Programs in 2024.<sup>4,6</sup>



# HEAD START & EARLY HEAD START

## What are Head Start and Early Head Start?

- The federally funded Head Start (serving preschool ages three to five) and Early Head Start (serving families from pregnancy through a child’s third birthday) programs have a “whole child” approach to preparing children for school readiness. They provide a range of additional individualized services such as early childhood development supports, family engagement, and health supports (medical, dental, mental health, and nutrition).<sup>7</sup>
- These programs reserve 90% of their seats for children of families with incomes at 100% of the federal poverty line or below.<sup>8</sup>
- The Mississippi Head Start Association supports Head Start programs across the state through training, coordination, and advocacy, helping programs that serve young children – from birth through five years of age – and their families provide services such as education, early childhood development supports, family engagement, and health services (medical, dental, and mental health and nutrition).

**Funding Source:** Federal Funds

### Ages Served :

- Early Head Start 0-3 year olds; Head Start: 3-5 year olds

### Federal Oversight :

- Head Start grantee oversight is under the Office of Head Start within the Administration for Children and Families.

### Quality Requirements :

- Head Start programs in Mississippi must meet the full set of federal Head Start Program Performance Standards which include minimum instructional hours, teacher to child ratio, teacher qualifications, and much more.<sup>9</sup>
- Additionally, when they partner with public schools they must align with Mississippi’s early learning guidelines and quality expectations for pre-K.

### Number of Children Served:<sup>5,6</sup>

- Early Head Start: 4,039 (3.9% of total population of given age group in MS)
- Head Start: 14,421 (13.6% of total population of given age group in MS)





# EARLY LEARNING COLLABORATIVES (ELCS)



## What are Early Learning Collaboratives (ELCS)?

- Early Learning Collaboratives (ELCs) are established to expand access to high-quality early childhood education across Mississippi. They can be comprised of public schools, Head Starts, private child care centers, and private or parochial schools to deliver comprehensive early learning experiences in the form of full-day or half-day pre-K programs.
- ELCs prioritize areas with higher academic needs and lower pre-k access. Communities must have program capacity and demonstrate a commitment to serving young children.
- Their curricula and assessments are aligned with Mississippi's Early Learning Standards, ensuring that all participating programs deliver consistent, developmentally appropriate education that supports school readiness and long-term success.<sup>10</sup>

## Funding Source:

- Collaboratives receive funding through a 1:1 cost-sharing model. The State of Mississippi provides half of the total funding, while the remaining half must be covered through local matching funds. Local matches may come from various sources, such as local tax revenues, eligible federal funds, parent tuition, philanthropic contributions, or other approved funding sources.<sup>3</sup>

## Ages Served :

- | • 4 year olds

## State Agency Oversight :

- | • Mississippi Department of Education (MDE)

## Quality Requirements :

- Mississippi Early Learning Collaboratives (ELCs) must adhere to quality standards set by the Mississippi Department of Education, primarily meeting all 10 benchmarks from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) for high-quality pre-K programs.
- In order to meet the NIEER quality standards, MDE provides coaching to ELC educational staff.

## Number of Children Served:<sup>5</sup>

- | • 6,799<sup>13</sup> (19.2% of total population of given age group in MS)



# STATE INVESTED PRE-K (SIP) PROGRAM

## What is the State Invested Pre-K (SIP) Program?

- SIP programs offer half- or full-day preschool within public school districts that are recipients of grants administered by MDE. The programs implement curriculum and assessments that align with comprehensive early learning standards.
- Children utilizing this option are sitting in public school districts.

## Funding Source:

- State Special Funds (lottery funds)
- Unlike ELCs, funding for SIP is provided per classroom rather than per student.<sup>11</sup>

## Ages Served :

- 4 year olds

## State Agency Oversight :

- Mississippi Department of Education (MDE)

## Quality Requirements :

- While SIP programs are not statutorily mandated to meet any specific quality standards, they are currently voluntarily meeting all 10 of the National Institute for Early Education Research's (NIEER's) quality standards.
- In order to meet the 10 NIEER high-quality standards, MDE provides coaching to SIP educational staff.

## Number of Children Served:<sup>5</sup>

- 1835<sup>13</sup> (5.2% of total population of given age group in MS)





## LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

### What are local school district Pre-K programs?

- The programs implement curriculum and assessments that align with comprehensive early learning standards.

### Funding Source:

- Some classrooms rely solely on local school district funding, but most benefit from additional support by blending funds from the other early childhood programs outlined in this brief such as Title I (see below).

### Ages Served :

- 4 year olds

### State Agency Oversight :

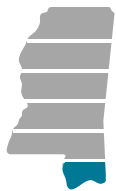
- Mississippi Department of Education (MDE)

### Quality Requirements :

- These classrooms must meet Mississippi Early Learning Guidelines and other public school requirements as well as any requirements connected to contributing funding sources.

### Number of Children Served:

- Due to the mixed delivery of funds, this number could not be clearly identified.



## ADDITIONAL OPTIONS FOR EARLY EDUCATION IN MISSISSIPPI

**Title I Pre-K** in Mississippi is not a separate program, but a use of federal Title I, Part A funds to help local education agencies provide high-quality early education for the four-year-olds of under-resourced families. Title I funds are often combined with other state, federal, and local sources to enhance preschool services. MDE oversees these funds. (Number of Children Served: 8,553 (24.2% of eligible children in MS). <sup>5,6</sup>

Mississippi's **Blended Head Start**, **Hybrid**, and **Tuition-Based** pre-K programs all serve preschoolers through different funding and oversight structures. Blended Head Start classrooms combine federal Head Start funds with school district and/or Title I dollars to operate unified classrooms that meet both Head Start and state public school standards. Hybrid programs are also funded from different sources but do not include Head Start dollars. Instead, they rely on sources such as Title I, IDEA, district funds, or tuition, with oversight from the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) and local districts. Tuition-Based programs operate in both public and private school settings. They are funded partly or fully by parent tuition. Public tuition-based classrooms must follow state early learning guidelines, while private pre-K programs are self-regulated and not bound by MDE standards unless they receive state support. Across all three models, the mixed-delivery funding systems make determining exact enrollment numbers challenging. <sup>12</sup>

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