

## Olivia Healy

**Project Title:** The Effect of Targeted Public Pre-K on the Broader Child Care Landscape in Illinois

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### **Project Abstract:**

Policymakers increasingly turn to public pre-Kindergarten (pre-K) programs as a strategy to improve children's access to high-quality early education (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2018). While a proliferation of research supports public pre-K as a means to boost children's academic skill development (Phillips et al., 2017), we know less about how new public pre-K programs impact the broader set of early care and education options available to families. Emerging evidence suggests that *universal* pre-K, which is made available to all 4-year-olds in a state, does create new pre-K slots, but at the same time crowds out preexisting private child care providers, thus tempering net expansion (Bassok, Fitzpatrick, & Loeb, 2014; Bassok, Miller, & Galdo, 2016). One study suggests universal pre-K may undermine the availability and quality of private child care for infants and toddlers too young to attend (Brown, 2018). However, we do not yet know whether there are unintended market-level consequences of a *targeted* public pre-K program offered for only a limited subset of preschool-aged children in a state, particularly in terms of price, quality, and availability of care for young children birth through age 5.

My proposed dissertation study tests this potential, considering the market-wide consequences of a targeted public pre-K program available only to socioeconomically disadvantaged families. My research focuses on Illinois' public pre-K initiative that began in 2007 and was geared toward low-income and academically at-risk 3-and-4-year-olds. I examine the quantity, price and quality of the overall set of child care options available within a given community after public pre-K enters the market. I also consider the consequences of targeted public pre-K on these same outcomes for child care options available to younger children (infants and toddlers). Illinois' public pre-K program offers an ideal case study for this analysis, as it serves a sizeable share of 3-and-4-year-olds in the state – 20 and 26 percent respectively (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2018) – but does not come close to universal coverage, nor does it enroll more advantaged families who might otherwise have access to early education in the absence of public intervention.

The study was designed in partnership with the Illinois Department of Human Services' Office of Early Childhood (responsible for CCDF administration) and the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies. Findings from the study will inform the following CCDF research topic priorities; *issues related to increasing access to high quality care (topic 2), increasing access to, and quality of, care for infants and toddlers (topic 4), and factors promoting or hindering partnerships among child care providers and other early childhood systems (topic 11)*. The results of the research will be relevant to policymakers at all levels of government as they consider how and for whom to fund early care and education services in order to lower barriers and address gaps in child care access.