Act Now for Our Future

2019 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

#ActNowForOurFuture

INVEST

Fund Pre-K the Right Way

Raise Your Hand Texas® believes all children, regardless of family background, deserve a fair shot at success in school and in life. Full-day, high-quality pre-kindergarten gives them that opportunity.

How can Texas fund pre-K the right way?

Texas educators know the value of full-day, high-quality pre-K, and overwhelming evidence confirms it can pave the way for student success. In the 2016-17 school year, more than 211,000 eligible three- and four-year-old Texas students were enrolled in optional public school pre-K. Yet our system only funded these students halfway. In the past, the state made up for this lack of full support by funding numerous pre-K expansion grants, but that funding was inconsistent and is now nonexistent. Now is the time for the state to fund pre-K the right way, with consistent, formula funding for a full-day, high-quality program.

Districts Already Know the Value of Full-Day Pre-K

Over 750 districts offer full-day pre-K. These districts make the commitment to supplement the half-day state program with local funding, at the expense of other district programs and budget demands.

The Yo-Yo Effect: Inconsistent Investments in Pre-K Expansion

Optional half-day pre-K for eligible students has been funded through the Foundation School Program since 1985. Despite the success of pre-K and calls to expand it, the state has been inconsistent in its support of pre-K expansion grant initiatives in the past 20 years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pre-K Expansion Grant</th>
<th>Supplemental Funding</th>
<th>HB 4 High-Quality Grant</th>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>$200M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
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<td>2017</td>
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* Not all school districts offer full-day pre-K at all campuses.
Why is it important to start early with full-day, quality pre-K?

To build a strong future, you have to invest in a strong foundation. For eligible students, a half-day in the classroom is simply not enough. Decades of research concludes high-quality pre-K has a measurable, positive impact on kindergarten readiness. It also acclimates young learners to the school environment and provides early literacy and math skills. In addition, pre-K provides opportunities for working families to access quality pre-K for their children, and a full-day program is essential to these families.

For low-income children, those for whom English is not spoken at home, or children who are significantly behind, more exposure to high-quality pre-K is critical to achieving learning gains. That is, more dosage of pre-K, particularly when it meets standards for quality, is more likely to close skills gaps than smaller doses.

— Dr. Robert Pianta, Dean, Curry School of Education, University of Virginia

What makes a pre-K program high quality?

Quality programs typically consist of at least 6-6.5 hours per day, 5 days a week, for at least 180 days. Additional funding for pre-K would allow districts to provide lower adult/student ratios, appropriate professional development, and quality progress monitoring. Since pre-K standards are not currently part of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), adoption of quality curriculum standards is also critical.

References

1 TPEIR (Texas Public Education Information Resource) Texas Public Pre-Kindergarten Programs State Data 2016-17. http://www.texaseducationinfo.org/
3 Legislative Budget Board, General Appropriations Acts, 76th - 85th Legislatures.
4 Eligible students include children who are economically disadvantaged, English language learners, children of military, in foster care, homeless, and children of Star of Texas recipients. Texas Education Code, §29.153.

Policy Recommendations

Provide formula funding for high-quality, optional full-day pre-K for currently eligible students.

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