

To Harness the Power of Early Childhood Education, Legislature Must Fund Full-Day Pre-K

Testimony to the House Public Education Committee on the
School Finance Commission's Recommendations to the 86th Legislature

We urge lawmakers to follow the School Finance Commission's lead by ensuring full-day, high-quality pre-k is one of the centerpieces of the school finance plan approved this session. Following on the State Board of Education's call for full-day pre-k funding, the Commission's call for a \$1.4 billion investment in improving early literacy is just another example of the rapidly building momentum for boosting pre-k funding this session. Although there will be debate about how to best distribute funding among districts, there should be no debate about the need to make this investment in early education.

The evidence is clear: high-quality pre-k pays off

- Research from Texas and across the U.S. shows that effective pre-k programs help students start kindergarten with the skills they need to succeed, boost early literacy and academic achievement, and reduce both grade retention and provision of special education services.¹
- According to the Texas Education Agency, Texas pre-k programs help more children show up to the first day of kindergarten ready to learn. Among eligible children who attend public pre-k programs, 58 percent are kindergarten ready, while only 42 percent of those who do not attend pre-k are considered ready.²
- These benefits persist in the third grade. According to a 2016 report from Children at Risk and the Meadows Foundation, economically disadvantaged third graders who attended full-day pre-k had 40 percent higher odds of reading at a college-ready pace in third grade.³

State funding decisions have hampered efforts to make high-quality pre-k accessible to more kids.

- Unlike in other grades, Texas funds only three hours of half-day pre-k for a limited population of mostly low-income students and English Language Learners. Yet, for many working families, 3-hour programs do not meet their needs.

- To help close the gaps, lawmakers have made short-term investment to boost funding for pre-k. Unfortunately, last session, the state cut nearly \$150 million by defunding the High-Quality Pre-k Grant Program created in 2015 and the supplemental funding provided since 2013.
- Since those funding streams were cut, our research shows districts have been forced to scale back professional development opportunities, slow support for new instructional materials and technology, and even lay off early childhood focused personnel.⁴
- In 2018, 53 percent⁵ of incoming students were not deemed kindergarten ready and 59 percent⁶ of students were not meeting 3rd grade reading standards.

The Legislature should commit to sustainable investments in early literacy and full-day, high-quality pre-k

- The State Board of Education recently called on lawmakers to fully fund and support full-day prekindergarten programs, adding that programs should be recognized as “the building blocks to future academic and social success.”⁷
- The Commission on Public School Finance recommended a substantial (\$1.4 billion) increase in funding for early childhood education, including full-day pre-k programs.
- The Commission offered different strategies to boost pre-k funding this session, including new weighted funding for English language learners and low-income students that will be used to support full-day pre-k. Although there will be debate about how to best distribute funding among districts, there should be no debate about the need to make this investment in pre-k and other early literacy strategies.

Conclusion

Pre-k is already a great investment, but to accrue even stronger outcomes, the Texas Legislature will need to increase the long-term investment in full-day programs. To give our students a stronger start and improve student outcomes, we ask that you support a \$1.4 billion investment in early childhood education, including high-quality, full-day pre-k.

¹ Texas Commission on Public School Finance (2018). Funding for Impact: Equitable Funding for Students Who Need It the Most. Retrieved from: https://tea.texas.gov/Finance_and_Grants/State_Funding/Additional_Finance_Resources/Texas_Commission_on_Public_School_Finance/

² Texas Commission on Public School Finance (2018). Funding for Impact: Equitable Funding for Students Who Need It the Most. Retrieved from: https://tea.texas.gov/Finance_and_Grants/State_Funding/Additional_Finance_Resources/Texas_Commission_on_Public_School_Finance/

³ Sanborn, Robert et al. (2016). Pre-K in Texas: A Critical Component for Academic Success. Children at Risk. Retrieved from: <https://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/childrenatrisk/vol7/iss2/7/>

⁴ Texans Care For Children and Commit Partnership (2018). Next Steps for Texas Pre-K: A Survey of School Districts' Pre-K Priorities & Challenges. Retrieved from: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5728d34462cd94b84dc567ed/t/5c0fed66aa4a99fb4c33be79/1544547691993/PreK-Survey-Report.pdf>

⁵ 2017-2018 TPEIR Texas Education Reports (2018). Retrieved from: <http://www.texaseducationinfo.org/>

⁶ 2017-2018 TEA TAPR Report (2018) Retrieved from: <https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/perfreport/tapr/2018/index.html>

<file:///C:/Users/TCFC/Downloads/1%20Overview%20of%20Commission%20Final%20Report%20for%20Ed%20Stakeholders.pdf>

⁷ SBOE adopts new Long-Range Plan for Public Education (2018). Texas Education Agency. Retrieved from: https://tea.texas.gov/About_TEA/News_and_Multimedia/News_Releases/SBOE_News/SBOE_adopts_new_Long-Range_Plan_for_Public_Education/