

Maintaining the Current Level of Annual Funding for Pre-k Grants

Testimony to Senate Finance Committee

The state's new pre-k grant program, established by HB 4, is off to a strong start in its first year. However, the introduced budget bill falls short of maintaining the current \$118 million per year, putting the program at risk just as it is getting started and undermining efforts to ensure that students enter kindergarten with the skills they need to succeed. We recognize that the Committee faces a difficult task in writing the budget, and that the current bill is a starting point. We look forward to working with the Committee to fully fund the grant program and ensure children have the support they need.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify to the Committee on the need to fully fund the state's new pre-k grant program. We thank the Committee members, staff, LBB, the Lt. Governor's office, and Governor's office for all the hard work that has gone into crafting the budget with limited revenue available.

Research we have conducted in partnership with the Texas Education Grantmakers Advocacy Consortium (TEGAC) confirms there is high demand for the state's new pre-k grant program all across the state and that with proper support from the Legislature it can make a real difference in improving student success in Texas. Our research also shows that districts need reliable, sustainable funding for pre-k quality improvement efforts.

Texas schools are currently in the first school year of the grant program, receiving \$734 per pre-k student, or about half of the \$1,500 per student originally envisioned for HB 4. That funding was provided thanks to a \$118 million appropriation from the Legislature. As you know, the Senate appropriations bill provides \$75 million per year, cutting funding from \$734 per student to less than \$500, assuming program participation continues at the same level. If only \$75 million per year is appropriated in the final budget, it would be bad news for Texas kids and a huge setback for the new pre-k grant program just as it's getting off the ground.

Nonetheless, we recognize that this budget bill is the start of the budget process, not the end. We are optimistic that the Committee will fully fund the pre-k grant program and support high-quality pre-k. We appreciate the hard work that has gone into crafting this budget proposal and we look forward to working with the Committee as the budget process continues.