

Support HB 3 to Fund Full-Day Pre-K and Give Kids a Strong Start

Testimony to the House Public Education Committee

We thank Chairman Dan Huberty for filing HB 3, a robust school finance plan that ensures more Texas kids can benefit from full-day, high-quality pre-k. State funding currently only supports half-day (3-hour) pre-k despite the fact that full-day (6-hour) programs have a greater impact on student learning. Full-day, high-quality pre-k is the best way for children to be kindergarten-ready and strong readers by third grade. HB 3 will give Texas the opportunity to harness the power of a well-funded early childhood education, putting more children on the path to lifelong success and saving taxpayer dollars.

HB 3 provides sustainable investments in full-day pre-k

- Although 72 percent of districts are currently providing some full-day pre-k programming, the state only funds half-day pre-k. If districts choose to operate full-day programs, they are currently required to tap other local funds.
- HB 3 dedicates \$780 million for an “Early Reading Allotment,” enough for districts to fund full-day pre-k, and requires districts to provide full-day, high-quality pre-k for four-year-olds who meet the current pre-k eligibility requirements.

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- 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

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/

- According to a survey from Texans Care For Children and the Commit Partnership, school districts overwhelmingly cited expanding pre-k programs to full-day as their top early childhood priority.²
- E3 Alliance data for Central Texas show that kids enrolled in full-day pre-k with low student-teacher ratios see significantly greater kindergarten readiness, leading to better outcomes across a child's education.³
- Only providing state funding for half-day pre-k limits the effectiveness of pre-k programs and forces many eligible families to miss out on pre-k because parents' work schedules cannot accommodate a half-day program.
- According to a recent poll from Raise Your Hand Texas, 79 percent of Texans believe at-risk students should have access to full-day pre-k.⁴

HB 3 supports other important strategies to strengthen children's early learning opportunities

- Requires school district boards of trustees to adopt an early childhood literacy plan that sets specific annual goals for the following five school years to improve reading proficiency by third grade.
- Funds an incentive for districts to provide additional instructional days to reduce the summer slide and need for expensive child care during summer for working families.
- Dedicates more money for dual language immersion programs to boost educational outcomes for multilingual and native English speaking students.
- Allocates resources to more effectively identify and support young students with dyslexia.

Pre-k is already a great investment, but to accrue even stronger outcomes, the Legislature will need to provide long-term support to full-day programs, as envisioned in HB 3. This bill gives our students a stronger start by making a transformative investment in early childhood education, including high-quality, full-day pre-k.

² 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>

³ E3 Alliance (2016). Quality Pre-K Matters. Retrieved from: <https://e3alliance.org/2016/02/10/quality-pre-k-matters/>

⁴ Raise Your Hand Texas (2019). Texas Public Education Perceptions Poll. Retrieved from: https://www.raiseyourhandtexas.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Texas-Public-Education-Perceptions-Poll_web.pdf