THE STATE OF PRE-K: Realities and Opportunities in Texas
The research included in this report was generously funded by the Meadows Foundation. The Meadows Foundation is a private philanthropic institution whose mission is to assist the people and institutions of Texas in improving the quality of life for themselves and future generations. The Foundation believes that excellence in public education is the gateway to improving virtually every aspect in the quality of life for the people of Texas. For more information on the Meadows Foundation, please visit www.mfi.org.

The research included in this report was produced with the support of the Texas Education Grantmakers Advocacy Consortium. The Consortium is comprised of foundations and philanthropists from across Texas interested in ensuring that parents, educators, policymakers, media, and the general public have objective data about public education. The research contained in this report is objective and non-partisan.

Created in 2011, the Consortium is currently comprised of 25 foundations from throughout Texas and focuses its work on leveraging private resources to produce credible and necessary data on the most important educational challenges facing Texas. Local foundations and philanthropists work together to determine the Consortium’s research focus, priorities, and partners.

For more information on the Texas Education Grantmakers Advocacy Consortium please visit www.tegac.org.
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About CHILDREN AT RISK

CHILDREN AT RISK is a non-partisan research and advocacy organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for Texas’ children through strategic research, public policy analysis, innovation, legal action, community education, and collaboration. The organization began in 1989 when a group of child advocates met to discuss the lack of data on the status of children and the absence of strong public policy support for Houston’s children. Through its biennial publication, Growing Up in Houston: Assessing the Quality of Life of Our Children, CHILDREN AT RISK tracks over 140 indicators measuring the quality of life of kids in our community.

CHILDREN AT RISK has evolved from an organization researching the multitude of obstacles our children face into one that also drives macro-level change to better the future for Texas’ children. Through its Center for Social Measurement and Evaluation, CHILDREN AT RISK uses policy and legal expertise as a powerful tool to drive change for kids. In recent years, CHILDREN AT RISK has grown exponentially in its capacity to speak out and drive change for children and has become the premier resource on children’s issues among major media outlets, public officials, and the non-profit sector.

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The State of Pre-K: Realities and Opportunities in Texas
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Printed in Houston, TX
Acknowledgements

This report was prepared with the extensive participation of the public school districts across Texas. CHILDREN AT RISK thanks the school district representatives who documented their district’s experiences and status of prekindergarten programming by completing an online survey. CHILDREN AT RISK is also grateful to the school district leaders who agreed to participate in follow-up interviews for case studies. We also thank the state agency leaders, advocacy organization leaders, and public officials and their staff who participated in the development of the study’s research priorities and promotion of the survey tool. Their time and input were essential to the success of this research. Special thanks to the Texas Charter Schools Association and the Texas Education Agency for their input and guidance.

CHILDREN AT RISK formed an advisory committee to help guide survey development and research design. Membership is strictly voluntary, by invitation and is a diverse representation of school district officials and representatives from the nonprofit community. Members have provided vital input and guidance concerning areas of impact, outreach, and the development of the survey instrument. The included policy recommendations do not necessarily reflect the considered views of the advisory committee or indicate a commitment to a particular course of action.

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Funder & Supporters Acknowledgements

CHILDREN AT RISK would like to thank the consortium of supporters who have supported this study. Specifically, we give special thanks to the Meadows Foundation who graciously funded this initiative and the Texas Education Grantmakers Advocacy Consortium who provided collaborative support and guidance. The coalition of supporters represents a diverse array of the Texas philanthropic community who has prioritized public education as part of their giving portfolio and long term strategic plans. Their vision and generous support have been the driving force behind this work.

On behalf of CHILDREN AT RISK and the children of Texas, thank you all.

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- Rainwater Charitable Foundation (Fort Worth)
- United Way of Metropolitan Dallas (Dallas)
- Communities Foundation of Texas/Education Texas
Executive Summary

In 2011, Texas’ 82nd Legislature made historic cuts to the public education budget totaling $5.4 billion. In 2012, CHILDREN AT RISK conducted a comprehensive research study to provide an objective assessment of the impact on students and classrooms across the state of Texas. Through this assessment, *Doing More With Less? Public Education in a New Fiscal Reality*, CHILDREN AT RISK learned that some districts were forced to either eliminate full-day prekindergarten programs or reallocate funds to continue providing the same level of programming.

The current study, *The State of Pre-K: Realities and Opportunities in Texas*, was conducted with a mixed methods approach focused on assessing the current public prekindergarten program offerings in Texas. The main components of this study consisted of a statewide survey of school districts, case studies of innovative districts, and state policy scans to identify current prekindergarten policies in Texas and other states.

Due to the lack of publicly available state data on prekindergarten education, objective information about this critical taxpayer-funded program was lacking. The response to the survey was significant, with participating school districts representing 73% of the student population. Analysis of survey data and supplementary research yielded the following key findings:

- Many school districts are going above and beyond current state mandates to ensure that students receive prekindergarten education.
  - 47% of respondents reported offering a full-day program
  - 64% of respondents reported offering prekindergarten programs to some type of expanded population, such as 4-year-olds outside of the TEA eligibility criteria or 3-year-olds who meet the TEA requirements
- Local school districts want full-day prekindergarten to better prepare students to succeed in elementary school, but adequate funding is a challenge.
  - 78% of respondents that offer some type of expanded program reported using general operating funds at least in part to fund it
  - 50% of respondents that currently have a half-day program reported that they would prefer to allocate additional funding to expanding to a full-day program
  - 73% of respondents reported inadequate funding as a barrier to prekindergarten expansion
- Local school districts are investing in smaller classes and optimal staff-to-student ratios without a state mandate or state funding.
  - 82% of respondents reported an average class size of 20 students or fewer
  - 1:10 was the most frequently reported staff-to-student ratio.
  - 59% of respondents reported having a policy for class size, staff-to-student ratio, or both
The key findings demonstrate that while school districts are making prekindergarten education a priority, there are hurdles that are difficult to overcome without further financial support and legislative guidance from the state. Research indicates that higher quality prekindergarten, including small classes and full-day programs, produces higher returns on taxpayer money. It is essential for Texas to support districts in funding a prekindergarten program and ensure that those programs include quality instruction.

Below are three policy recommendations for maximizing the return on investment for prekindergarten education and ultimately providing a stronger academic start for Texas children.

- **Ensure transparency of prekindergarten assessments and program quality** by increasing data available to taxpayers, parents, educators, and policy makers about prekindergarten programs managed by school districts in Texas.

- **Expand funding to school districts that limit class size and/or staff-to-student ratios** by requiring new funding for prekindergarten to be contingent upon the implementation of a maximum class size of 20 and/or a staff-to-student ratio of 1:10.

- **Create incentives for school districts to offer full-day prekindergarten** by providing additional funding through the school funding formula or by establishing a sustainable grant program for districts wishing to expand to full-day.
Introduction

Texas is challenged with meeting the unique needs of a growing and diverse child population. In the 2012-2013 school year, public school enrollment topped five million after growing by more than 19% over the last decade. Over that same time period, the number of students identified as English language learners increased by 37% and the number of economically disadvantaged students increased by 39%. Currently, 60% of Texas students are economically disadvantaged and 17% of Texas students are English language learners.

In 1985, Texas established its public prekindergarten program requiring school districts to offer prekindergarten education to four-year-olds at risk for school failure. Two of the primary eligibility criteria are economic disadvantage and English language learner status. The program was designed to develop skills necessary for success in kindergarten and beyond, including language, mathematics, and social skills. Today, Texas has the largest prekindergarten program in the country with over 225,000 students enrolled. In terms of percent of children enrolled, Texas is 9th in the country with 52% of the state’s four-year-olds enrolled in public prekindergarten.

Research studies have shown prekindergarten programs to have immediate and long-term positive effects on a child’s cognitive, social, and emotional skill development. Moreover, prekindergarten programs are especially beneficial to low-income children, who tend to start kindergarten behind their peers developmentally. Numerous large scale studies have concluded that students who participate in prekindergarten programs score higher on achievement tests, are more likely to be kindergarten ready, and show increases in cognitive, motor, and language skills. Specifically in Texas, the state prekindergarten program has been shown to be associated with: increased scores on the math and reading sections of standardized tests, reductions in the likelihood of being retained in grade, and reductions in the probability of receiving special education services.

Prekindergarten not only prepares children to succeed in kindergarten, but also contributes to success later in life. Studies monitoring long-term effects found that children who attended prekindergarten were more likely than their peers to complete high school or attend college and less likely to be incarcerated or unemployed. Consequently, median income is higher for prekindergarten participants, and that is not the only economic benefit. Texas-specific studies have shown that each dollar invested in high quality prekindergarten programs can generate $3.50 in benefits to the state. Other less conservative cost-benefit analyses predict a return on investment as high as 7:1.

Clearly, prekindergarten has significant and measurable benefits for children that can last a lifetime and Texas is poised to make large gains with its prekindergarten program. In 2012, CHILDREN AT RISK conducted an assessment of the impact of historic public education cuts on students and classrooms across the state. Through that assessment, Doing More With Less? Public Education in a New Fiscal Reality, CHILDREN AT RISK learned that some districts were forced to either eliminate full-day prekindergarten programs or reallocate funds to continue providing the same level of programming. The
The following report focuses on assessing current public prekindergarten offerings in Texas, as well as the policies and practices impacting them across the state.

Methodology

CHILDREN AT RISK developed the research framework for this study in conjunction with the Advisory Committee and other key stakeholders who helped identify research priorities and refine the school district survey instrument. The goal of the survey was to better understand policies and practices impacting access to and the quality of public prekindergarten programs across the state. Research priority areas included: prekindergarten program offerings, funding, class sizes and ratios, and barriers to expansion.

The qualitative and quantitative research for this report is comprised of two primary components: the school district survey and qualitative interviews.

School District Survey: The 17-item survey was distributed to representatives from 1,013 independent school districts. Alternative and charter districts were excluded from the sample. In order to maximize the validity of the responses, researchers targeted prekindergarten program supervisors at the district level or superintendents as survey respondents. Survey recipients were permitted to transfer the survey to a more appropriate colleague if they did not feel adequately knowledgeable to answer the questions. Ultimately, only one survey was collected and analyzed from each district.

The survey was administered electronically through the online software program Qualtrics. Respondents received an email link and submitted their responses through the Qualtrics website. The survey was open for approximately 12 weeks from February 24, 2014 through May 14, 2014. Follow up phone calls and emails were conducted by CHILDREN AT RISK staff and key external partners after the initial distribution. Participation was completely voluntary and no incentives were offered.

A version of the school district survey was revised to be more relevant to charter schools, and distributed to the 174 charter school campuses in the state that are recorded by the Texas Charter Schools Association or Texas Education Agency as having prekindergarten enrollment. Data and information received from the charter school survey was not aggregated with the data from the traditional school district survey; it was analyzed separately and described in this report independently.

School District Phone Interviews: To form a richer narrative, follow-up phone interviews were conducted with a subset of survey respondents to learn more about the prekindergarten programs in their districts. A sample of districts offering full-day programs was selected by researchers based on diversity in geography, size, and funding model. Fourteen districts were invited to participate in phone interviews; ultimately, 12 were completed. These interviews filled the narrative gaps from the school district surveys and publicly available data. Drafted case studies were sent to the districts for review prior to publishing.

As is the case with all self-reported survey data, there remains an inherent risk of inconsistent data reporting and the validity of all responses cannot be guaranteed.
School District Survey Findings

Snapshot of School District Survey Respondents

CHILDREN AT RISK surveyed 1,013 traditional independent school districts for the statewide findings presented in this report. A total of 631 school districts responded, yielding a 62% response rate. Responding districts account for approximately 73% of students enrolled in traditional school districts in the state. The demographics of school district survey respondents generally match the overall demographics of school districts in the state. It should be noted that while 631 districts submitted a survey, some districts did not answer all questions; consequently, the total number of respondents for each question varies.

Table 1: Snapshot of Survey Respondents by Key Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variable</th>
<th>Responding Districts</th>
<th>All Texas Districts</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80% or more</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 80%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City/Suburb</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/Town</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrollment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large (&gt;30,000)</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Size (&gt;10,000)</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small (&gt;500)</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Small (0-500)</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Type of Prekindergarten Program Offered and Eligibility

A school district must offer a prekindergarten program if it identifies 15 or more 4-year-olds who are eligible. The state will fund a half-day program for eligible students; however, districts may opt to offer a

“We fund our Pre-Kindergarten program through district general operating funds. We have no local Head Start program or day care program in our community. The board of trustees, superintendent, administration, teachers, and community are supportive of the program because the program has made such a difference in the school readiness of our Kindergarten students, especially the ESL and economically disadvantaged.” – Principal
full-day program or enroll ineligible students using additional funding sources. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) defines the length of a half-day program as a minimum of 3 hours and the length of a full-day program as a minimum of 7 hours.

The TEA eligibility requirements include being: unable to speak English, educationally disadvantaged (meeting the family income guidelines established for the national free or reduced-price lunch program), homeless, a child of a member of the armed forces (or a child of a member of the armed forces who was injured or killed while serving on active duty), and under the conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services. A district may offer prekindergarten classes if the district identifies 15 or more eligible children who are at least three years of age.

Districts were asked if they offer a half-day or full-day prekindergarten program. The vast majority of responding districts reported offering some type of program, with 47% of districts reporting a full-day program, 41% of districts reporting a half-day program, and 4% of districts reporting both. A small number of districts reported “other,” noting circumstances such as providing a full-day for 4-year-olds and a half-day for 3-year-olds, offering a 6-hour program, or undergoing a transition from a full-day program to a half-day program.

Approximately 4% of responding districts reported not having a prekindergarten program. Of these 28 districts, 25 districts are small (less than 1,000 students enrolled total), 2 districts have very low rates of economic disadvantage, and one is a magnet district only serving middle and high school students. Districts that reported not having a prekindergarten program were also asked how they identify and monitor the number of eligible children in the district. The most common responses included distributing community surveys and placing advertisements in local papers and the district website. Several districts reported holding “round-ups” of parents in the community, and one district publishes information on the water bill.
Districts were asked if they offer prekindergarten programs to additional children outside of the TEA eligibility requirements and whether they charge families for this service. Overall, 64% of responding districts reported offering prekindergarten to some type of expanded population. These responses included 40% of districts enrolling 4-year-olds outside of TEA requirements, 15% of districts enrolling 3-year-olds who meet the TEA requirements, and 7% of districts enrolling 3-year-olds outside of TEA requirements. Districts are permitted to charge tuition for ineligible children; 17% reported charging tuition and 23% reported offering programs at no additional cost to the family. “Other” responses included offering prekindergarten to the children of district employees, children with disabilities, or all children universally. Many districts indicated that once they serve all eligible children, they will serve other children on a first-come, first-served basis until they reach capacity.

Prekindergarten Program Funding

The state funds a half-day prekindergarten program for eligible students through Average Daily Attendance (ADA) from the Foundation School Program (FSP). However, districts may use other federal,

“Our district knows that quality education for young children cannot be accomplished in half day sessions. You can pay in the beginning of a child’s life or pay later when they are behind academically, at risk of dropping out, or incarcerated. [Our] ISD has chosen to fund full day PK because it is best for kids.”

– Assistant Superintendent
state, and local funding sources to implement an expanded program. Districts may offer prekindergarten classes to children who are not eligible on a tuition basis or using other funds. Serving those who are ineligible may not interfere with serving eligible students.

![Figure 3: District Funding Sources for Expanded Pre-k Programs (n=429)](image)

Districts that reported offering a full-day program or serving populations outside of the TEA eligibility requirements were asked how they fund their expanded prekindergarten program. Many districts stated that they simply make prekindergarten a priority and work it into their budget, as confirmed by 78% of districts reporting that they use general operating funds. In addition to general operating funds, districts reported utilizing a variety of funding sources including grants (29%), public/private partnerships (2%), and local tax increases (1%).

The most common specific funding sources mentioned by districts were general operating or local funds, federal funds including Head Start and Title I/Title II, tuition, and state compensatory education funding. Of the 16% of districts that chose “other,” the majority indicated utilizing tuition. District tuition rates may not be higher than necessary to cover the added costs or providing the program. Some districts utilize a fixed tuition rate, while other districts utilize a sliding scale. It should be noted that tuition was not a possible selection for this survey question; consequently, districts that charge tuition may have selected general operating funds to reflect that. Many districts also mentioned having to make up for lost state grant funding that previously covered costs.

### Prekindergarten Class Sizes and Ratios

In Texas, there is no state policy regarding prekindergarten class size or staff-to-student ratio. By law, kindergarten through 4th grade classes are capped at 22 students and districts are encouraged to maintain staff-to-student ratios that do not exceed this 1:22 ratio.
Districts were asked if they keep a record of prekindergarten class sizes, and 97% of responding districts reported that they do. Similarly, 84% of districts reported keeping a record of staff-to-student ratios. Districts also reported their most recently recorded average prekindergarten class size. The most frequently reported class size was 20 students, and 82% of districts reported an average class size of 20 students or fewer. The largest class size reported was 42 students. Overall, 38 districts (7%) reported average class sizes over 22 students, 16 districts (3%) reported average class sizes over 24 students, and two districts (0.4%) reported average class sizes over 30 students.

Table 2: Average Prekindergarten Class Size Reported by District Enrollment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Enrollment</th>
<th>Average Pre-K Class Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Districts</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Districts (&gt;30,000)</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-size Districts (&gt;10,000)</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Districts (&gt;500)</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Small Districts (0-500)</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“We fund the full-day program from our district’s general operating fund. In the past, when pre-kindergarten grants were available through TEA, we used a portion of that grant to help expand to a full-day. Now, without those grants, we use our general budget to cover these costs so that our students can have pre-k all day.” – Principal
The state average for all responding districts was approximately 17 students per class, but this number varied depending upon the overall district size. Average class size tended to increase as district total enrollment increased.

Figure 5: Average Ratio of Students to One Staff (n=460)

Districts were asked to provide the most recently recorded prekindergarten staff-to-student ratio. The most frequently reported ratio was 1 staff to 10 students, and 45% of districts reported an average ratio of 1:10 or better. The largest ratio reported was 1 staff to 25 students. Overall, 155 districts (34%) reported average ratios of 1:11 to 1:15, 71 (15%) districts reported average ratios of 1:16 to 1:20, and 29 districts (6%) reported average ratios greater than 1:20.

Figure 6: District Policies or Practices on Class Sizes and Ratios (n=596)
Districts were asked if they have a policy or practice to cap prekindergarten class sizes or staff-to-student ratios. Overall, 55% of responding districts reported having a policy or practice for class sizes, while 37% of districts reported the same for ratios. Approximately 32% of districts reported having a policy for both, while 41% of districts reported having a policy for neither. Many districts described soft policies, in which target numbers are set but not enforced.

Prekindergarten Expansion Challenges

![Figure 7: Barriers to Pre-k Expansion (n=623)](image)

Districts were asked what barriers or challenges they currently face in expanding their prekindergarten programs to serve additional children. The most common response was inadequate funding, as 73% of districts reported this to be a barrier. Other responses included physical space (39%), limited classroom staff (33%), student transportation (18%), and parent outreach (7%). Only 9% of districts reported that they have no unmet needs related to prekindergarten. All of these districts were small (less than 10,000 total enrollment).

“We pay for this program through our general operating fund. We offer open enrollment and have many students that are not economically disadvantaged enrolled in the program. We have not instituted a tax increase and do not have any grants to help fund this program. We offer this program at a financial loss to the district because we believe this program is important to the future of our students.” – Principal
Districts were asked where they would most prefer to allocate additional funding specific to prekindergarten education, if they were to receive it from the Texas legislature. Of the responding districts that currently have half-day programs, 50% reported that they would like to expand to a full-day program. Of the responding districts that do not currently offer programs to children outside of TEA eligibility, 26% reported that they would like to expand access to more children. Other responses included additional classroom staff for the current program (27%), parent outreach (3%), curriculum (8%), and other (14%). Responses from districts selecting “other” included universal prekindergarten, adding 3-year-olds to the program, parenting classes, lowering tuition, funding the current program, and transportation.

**Snapshot of Charter School Survey Respondents**

As of the 2012-2013 school year, TEA reported 76 charter school districts in Texas with prekindergarten enrollment. CHILDREN AT RISK received survey responses from a total of 30 charter district or campus representatives. The most common responses from charter school survey respondents described full-day programs for 4-year-olds with the same eligibility requirements as TEA. Like traditional school districts, charter districts were most likely to use general operating funds for expanded prekindergarten programs. Responding charter districts most frequently reported the primary factors attracting students to their prekindergarten programs as their program’s activities and curriculum, and the fact that they offer a full-day program while the local traditional district offers a half-day program.
Despite only receiving state funding for a half-day prekindergarten program, there are many districts that go above and beyond state mandates to give young learners a strong start. Of the 47% districts in the survey sample that provide a full-day program, 11 districts are highlighted here. In order to ensure that a diverse sample is presented, the districts were filtered and selected by researchers based on the following criteria:

- Type of program
- Program eligibility
- Program funding
- Geographical location
- Enrollment size

Phone interviews were conducted with at least one school district representative in order to gain a deeper understanding of the prekindergarten program offered.
Pre-K Program

Aldine ISD offers a full-day prekindergarten program for all TEA eligible 4-year-olds. Currently, the district serves approximately 5,600 students in eight different pre-k centers. Four of the pre-k centers utilize a classroom partnership with Head Start in some classes and the other four centers exclusively provide the district’s pre-k program.

Rationale

In 1997, Aldine ISD operated a half-day pre-k program in four centers dedicated specifically to pre-k. In 2000, the district reached capacity at the centers and decided to expand the half-day program in order to increase the number of children served. That expansion included four additional pre-k centers and the transition from a half-day to full-day program. Through Head Start partnerships and additional district pre-k centers, Aldine ISD has been able to ensure that all eligible 4-year-olds are being served in a full-day program, and there is currently no waiting list.

Community

According to district officials, the Aldine ISD community was very supportive of the expansion of the pre-k program, which was confirmed by voters approving the bonds that allowed for the expansion. After the first year of expansion, student enrollment increased and pre-k registration at the most desirable centers became very competitive among parents. Parents wanted to take advantage of all the benefits of a full-day program – longer instruction time, convenience for working parents, and transportation to three after-school childcare centers.

Funding

Aldine ISD utilized bonds to finance the initial expansion of its program. In addition to those funds and the half-day state school funding formula, the district also uses general operating funds and federal funding generated through the Head Start partnerships. After the historic Texas public education budget cuts in 2011, Aldine had to make adjustments to its program in order to continue providing the full-day instruction to students. Those adjustments included increasing the class size from 22 to 24 children. Each classroom has a teacher and a half-day paraprofessional.

Curriculum and Assessments

Aldine ISD uses DLM Early Childhood Express curriculum by McGraw-Hill but each pre-k center has the flexibility to supplement with various resources to tailor instruction to the students’ needs. Two of the centers follow the Montessori curriculum and those teachers are appropriately trained in that curriculum.

Regarding assessments, the district uses Bracken’s School Readiness Assessment and develops its own assessment for report cards. Pre-k students are not typically tracked longitudinally, but some individual campuses have conducted their own studies. These studies have shown that pre-k has a strong impact through 2nd grade, especially for bilingual children, and through 3rd grade specifically for reading results. When transitioning children from a district pre-k program and into a kindergarten classroom, teachers in both grade levels are required to have a transition meeting to facilitate a smooth transition.
Pre-K Program

Columbia-Brazoria ISD offers full-day pre-k to TEA eligible 4-year-olds, and the district is in the process of creating a tuition option for ineligible 4-year-olds. The district collaborates with Head Start by utilizing a Head Start teacher at district facilities, who is supported by district staff. This year, the district is also establishing a system to reduce relearning time and familiarize students with classroom routines as they transition from pre-k to kindergarten. In response to challenges in collaboration between district and Head Start programs, Columbia-Brazoria ISD established monthly video conferences for all pre-k staff and daycare community members to set the pre-k agenda, review student concerns, provide curriculum and testing updates, highlight special projects, and make announcements. The district reports that this method of communication has enhanced the classroom experience for teachers and students.

Rationale

When Columbia-Brazoria ISD first started a pre-k program in 2000, the district immediately invested in full-day pre-k. Initially offering two classes at two elementary schools, the district now offers six pre-k classes at three elementary school campuses. The enrollment expansion started seven years ago when a Head Start partnership added two classes to each campus. Students who were already enrolled in Head Start began attending pre-k at a district facility with a Head Start teacher and the district's support staff.

Community

The community was supportive of Columbia-Brazoria ISD's dedication to ensuring that students had full-day pre-k. Over time, the demand for pre-k increased and the district currently operates at full capacity. To investigate expanding capacity, especially for children with disabilities, the district pursued a collaboration with a private daycare center. However, the private provider was ultimately not interested in partnering.

Funding

Columbia-Brazoria ISD utilizes a variety of funding sources to provide full-day pre-k. In addition to the half-day state school funding formula, the district uses Title I funding, state compensatory education funding, and some grant funding, as well as general operating funds to cover the remainder. The district is currently developing a tuition option, but has yet to implement it. Although partnerships with local childcare providers have not been successful, the district will ensure that its pre-k tuition is comparable and competitive with local private providers. After the historic state budget cuts in 2011, the district struggled to maintain full-day pre-k programs. However, the district conducted a cost-benefit analysis which determined that it would be more beneficial to continue its full-day program than cut the program down to a half-day.

Assessments

Columbia-Brazoria ISD is in the process of phasing out TPRI and phasing in ISIP. The district plans to first provide ISIP for higher grades and then add it one grade level at a time down to pre-k, but has encountered technology issues. The district will use the same pre-k assessment tool in its Head Start collaborative and district classes so student results originate from the same instrument. The district also tracks pre-k outcomes by examining TAKS and STAAR data in later grades.
DALLAS ISD

158,680 enrolled students
89% economically disadvantaged

Pre-K Program

Dallas ISD provides full-day pre-k for TEA eligible 4-year-olds. The district also partners to provide higher quality private childcare through the School Readiness Integration (SRI) model. In this model, a full-day teacher with at least a bachelor's degree is placed into private providers’ classes to incorporate Dallas ISD’s instructional curriculum. Since its initiation, the full-day pre-k program has grown significantly and participation rates have increased. District officials attribute this in part to working parents’ needs for a full-day program.

Rationale

In 2011, the district transitioned to a full-day pre-k program across all campuses. Prior to this, select campuses offered a full-day program, but those campuses were the exception and not the norm. The decision to expand the program sent a clear message across the district that the Dallas ISD leadership was willing to invest in early childhood because they believed that there was real value in pre-k.

Community

Dallas ISD had strong support from the administration, school board, and general community for the expanded pre-k program. In order to continue facilitating community support and participation, the district initiated a strong marketing effort to promote pre-k in the community. As Dallas has a high population growth rate for children ages 0-5, the district relies on GIS and Census data for research such as mapping how many seats are needed to serve each child in a neighborhood. Due to funding constraints and inability to provide school buses, the district is unable to fully serve all TEA eligible students.

Funding

Dallas ISD funds its expanded pre-k by pulling all funding (except for Title I funds) into one large general operating pot and then redistributing funds to each campus. Some funding sources that are collected into the district’s operating budget include the state’s half-day school formula funds and compensatory education funds.

Curriculum and Assessments

Currently, the district utilizes the OWL pre-k curriculum. Furthermore, the district is making an effort to provide individualized instruction based on a child’s need level by incorporating technology that maximizes the effectiveness of the learning process. The district also improving pre-k quality by hiring over 20 Pre-K Specialist Coaches. The coaches will each service 15 classrooms, visiting every class at least once biweekly to model instruction for teachers and provide ongoing assistance and monitoring.

The adopted OWL curriculum includes a data element to assess students. Results indicate that students are 350% more likely to be kindergarten-ready if they attended Dallas ISD pre-k than if they attended either other early childhood programs or had no pre-k instruction at all. To get a more qualitative perspective regarding assessments, the district informally surveys teachers and assistants to evaluate pre-k instruction and student learning. To identify objective quality measures, the district used Adaptive Quality Checklists and took panoramic pictures in pre-k classrooms to conduct analyses of several core components of excellence. Results indicated that the average classroom score is only 41/100, but Dallas ISD’s investment in Pre-K Strategy Coaches is to enhance the quality of instruction.
Pre-K Program

Dripping Springs ISD offers a full-day pre-k program for TEA eligible 4-year-olds. Ineligible 4-year-olds can also take advantage of the full-day program on a tuition basis, dependent upon space. Dripping Springs ISD offers transportation for most pre-k students, which district officials state is an attractive benefit for parents enrolling their child in a public pre-k program.

Rationale

Dripping Springs ISD moved to a full-day pre-k program in 2011 after seeing a significant increase in enrollment of primarily Spanish speaking students. The district recognized that these children could benefit more from a full-day program. It was also in response from parents seeking to have their students attend a tuition-based pre-k program at the same schools as their older children and have certified teachers providing instruction.

Community

Parents were very excited about a full-day pre-k program, but a small minority wanted their tuition-based children to be in separate programs from the TEA eligible children. However, after extensive public relations efforts from the district and demonstrated enthusiasm from other parents, most parents became very supportive of Dripping Springs ISD’s mixed pre-k program. In an effort to increase overall access to quality pre-k programs, Dripping Springs ISD’s Elementary Facilitator of Learning and Innovation collaborates with private providers to facilitate communication between the district and private providers concerning pre-k programming.

Funding

Dripping Springs ISD funds the expanded program by utilizing a tuition-based approach for ineligible children. The annual tuition of $5,600, a competitive average of local daycare and private provider prices, can be paid by year, semester, or month. These tuition payments in turn mostly offset the additional costs of the TEA eligible students. Approximately 60-65% of the children enrolled in pre-k across the three campuses are tuition-based; however, there is one campus that has almost entirely tuition-based students, while other two campuses have over 60% TEA eligible students.

Curriculum and Assessments

Teams of teachers from across Dripping Springs ISD design the curriculum with support and guidance from the district. It is revised every year and focuses on rigor and relevance. The curriculum is designed from the top-down beginning with expectations for high school graduates and working back through first grade, kindergarten, and pre-k.

Because the district did not collect data on private pre-k attendance, Dripping Springs ISD does not use a written assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of the pre-k students’ kindergarten readiness. Instead, teachers monitor growth using a standards-based model and if appropriate, recommend students for additional acceleration programs in reading, math, or both. Anecdotally, district pre-k students are better prepared for kindergarten because the pre-k curriculum is aligned with kindergarten curriculum and has clear expectations.
Pre-K Program

Fort Worth ISD currently offers a full-day pre-k program for TEA eligible 4-year-olds, but is gradually rolling out universal pre-k for all 4-year-olds after a community effort passed a bond last year. During the soft roll-out of universal pre-k, select schools with classroom capacity are offering additional spots. Fort Worth ISD expects an additional enrollment of approximately 4,000 students after its universal pre-k program becomes fully implemented over the next few years.

Rationale

Fort Worth ISD has had full-day pre-k for TEA eligible 4-year-olds since the program’s inception, but is currently transitioning to a universal pre-k program after passing a bond in 2013. The bond initiative was originally district-driven by the former superintendent, who was a strong advocate for early childhood education.

Community

The community was supportive of universal pre-k, but parents had many questions about what it meant for their children in terms of accessibility. The district hosted well-received town hall meetings to address constituent questions. The community ultimately responded positively to the program, as confirmed by the bond passage.

The district has also participated in multiple community collaborations over the last 10 years, including working with for-profit, non-profit, faith-based, and corporate childcare centers, as well as Head Start facilities throughout the Fort Worth community. The district places certified teachers in these off-campus facilities, where instruction is coordinated through a co-teaching team with the partnering facility’s teaching staff. Children are dually enrolled, allowing the partners to braid resources and provide combined classroom materials, district curriculum, and enhanced professional development for teachers. Fort Worth ISD emphasizes the need for a passionate and driven director to make such collaborations work. A successful integration of services such as described, requires one to be continually proactive, addressing challenges such as childcare center staff attrition or ensuring student eligibility and other collaborative services are a win-win for both partners.

Funding

The district funds its pre-k through a bond and general operating funds derived from state and Title I funds. The bond, raised through a property tax increase, will allow funds for new classroom construction and fixed furnishings.
Houston ISD

**Snapshot**
- Pre-K program is cost neutral for the district
- Collects data on kindergarten readiness of pre-k students
- Partners with Head Start
- Is considering pre-k expansion to serve more students

**202,586 enrolled students**

**80% economically disadvantaged**

**Pre-K Program**

Houston ISD provides a full-day pre-k program to TEA eligible 4-year-olds, as well as to ineligible 4-year-olds on a tuition basis and up to five 3-year-olds per campus depending on space availability. Recently, Houston ISD unveiled a proposal to enact a universal pre-k program for all 4-year-olds. This program is still in the development phase and is awaiting approval from the school board.

**Rationale**

There are currently not enough pre-k seats for 4-year-olds in some areas of Houston ISD, so families may have to compete for first-come, first-served seats in other neighborhoods. Houston ISD does not provide transportation for pre-k students, so if a child cannot get into a nearby school it is up to the caregiver to provide transportation to a school with an open seat. To meet the needs of families who want to send their kids to a pre-k program at nearby schools, the district is currently considering a proposal to expand its pre-k to additional populations in the future. Over 300 additional classrooms are needed, so the district is also investigating potential partnerships with private childcare providers.

**Community**

Houston ISD has yet to obtain feedback from the community about its current and future pre-k programs, but is planning on soliciting feedback later this year. With regard to collaborations, there are some established partnerships with Head Start. In addition, the district is exploring the idea of collaborating with private childcare providers. HISD has also partnered with a consulting firm to further enhance instruction.

**Funding**

Houston ISD’s program is approximately equally funded by both state half-day ADA and federal Title I funds. The federal funding is deposited into the district’s general operating funds and then redistributed to campuses. The district also utilizes a tuition approach for ineligible children. The tuition is just enough to cover the cost of a teacher’s salary and is a flat fee for anyone over the income limit.

**Curriculum and Assessments**

Houston ISD authors its own curriculum, but uses Frog Street Press as a curriculum guide which makes for easy alignment with the classrooms that utilize Head Start partnerships. Houston ISD utilized the assessments that are provided in the Frog Street Press curriculum, but was wary of children receiving the same assessment from both the district and Head Start. For the 2014-2015 school year Houston ISD is replacing Frog Street Press with CPALLS+ Assessments, administered three times per year. Existing data on the effectiveness of the district’s pre-k programs indicates that 83% of students who attended Houston ISD pre-k are on level for literacy and math in kindergarten. In addition, Houston ISD pre-k students consistently outscore those who did not attend a district pre-k program.
**LANCASTER ISD**

**Snapshot**
- Offers pre-k for TEA eligible 3- and 4-year-olds.
- Partners with private providers by offering professional development in-services.
- District values data collection of both teacher and student progress.

**6,536 enrolled students**

**83% economically disadvantaged**

**Pre-K Program**

Lancaster ISD offers a full-day pre-k program for TEA eligible 4-year-olds, and a half-day pre-k program for TEA eligible 3-year-olds. The district partners with Head Start in order to increase the number of children served. Although the district’s pre-k enrollment significantly increased after expanding to a full-day pre-k program and enrolling 3-year-olds five years ago, the district has not yet reached its maximum capacity.

**Rationale**

Lancaster ISD moved from half-day to full-day pre-k for 4-year-olds because the district believed that early intervention was critical for its large population of economically disadvantaged students. Furthermore, as the local community does not offer many public transportation options, expanding to full-day pre-k allowed many more working parents to utilize the program.

**Community**

The Lancaster ISD community generally has been extremely supportive of early childhood education. Some parents were initially unaware of the importance of pre-k, but once the district educated the community on the significant benefits that children could gain, those parents became very supportive. Lancaster ISD’s collaboration with private providers primarily involves inviting private providers to participate in the district’s professional development. Local children who attend private pre-k programs will likely become Lancaster ISD students eventually, so the district uses every opportunity to provide support and coordinate with private childcare providers as early as possible.

**Funding**

Lancaster ISD primarily funds its expanded pre-k program through budgeting more of its general operating funds directly towards the pre-k program, in combination with using the state’s half-day ADA funding. The district is committed to investing in early education in order to achieve better outcomes in later grades.

**Curriculum and Assessments**

The pre-k curriculum at Lancaster ISD follows the state’s recommended curriculum standards. The district also aligns its pre-k curriculum with its kindergarten curriculum, focusing on horizontal and vertical alignment to increase the quality of education.
Lubbock ISD

**Snapshot**
- Moved from early childhood centers to elementary campuses due to budget cuts
- Classrooms mix TEA eligible, Head Start, and tuition students
- Two-thirds of campuses have Head Start partnerships

**28,929 enrolled students**

**67% economically disadvantaged**

**Pre-K Program**

Lubbock ISD offers a full-day pre-k program to TEA eligible 4-year-olds and allows ineligible 4-year-olds to enroll on a tuition basis. The district also utilizes a partnership with Head Start in about two-thirds of its schools. Most classrooms have tuition, Head Start, and TEA eligible children blended into the same pre-k classrooms.

**Rationale**

While the district has always offered a full-day pre-k program, Lubbock ISD previously only had four dedicated early childhood centers. Due to recent funding challenges, the district experimented with opening eight pre-k classrooms on its elementary campuses. This was very successful, resulting in an increase of more than 500 students once the pre-k program moved to elementary schools. Eventually all the district pre-k programs were relocated to elementary campuses because it facilitates an easier transition for pre-k students into kindergarten and is more family friendly for all of a household’s elementary-aged children.

**Community**

Even with substantial budget cuts, all levels of Lubbock ISD's leadership have been supportive of full-day pre-k, and the community recognizes full-day pre-k is vital to academic success. The district does not collaborate with private providers in terms of facilities, but does provide early childhood coaches to private child care centers in order to improve instruction and care from birth until school entry. The district’s philosophy is that school readiness does not just start when children enter a Lubbock ISD school, and it is essential to be proactive and ensure a solid start from the beginning.

**Funding**

Lubbock ISD’s funding primarily comes from district operating funds and is supplemented by partnerships with Head Start. Funds from Head Start are focused primarily on campuses with the most need. Revenue from the students who utilize the tuition option goes primarily towards teacher salaries. The tuition amount is a set fee that only covers costs to run the program.

**Curriculum and Assessments**

The district has a set curriculum...
PHARR-SAN JUAN-ALAMO ISD

**Snapshot**

- Expanded to full-day universal pre-k program by 2005
- Extensively collaborates with Head Start, Migrant Seasonal Head Start, and private childcare providers to provide 3- and 4-year-olds with pre-k opportunities

**32,025 enrolled students**

89% economically disadvantaged

**Pre-K Program**

Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD currently offers a universal full-day pre-k program, allowing any 4-year-old to enroll without tuition. In 2009, the district began to follow the School Readiness Integration model and partnered with local Head Start Centers to service dually-enrolled 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds. The district sends certified teachers to Head Start facilities to act as co-teachers, who provide 3 hours of cognitive development per class. As of the 2014-2015 school year, the district serves 9 Head Start Centers for 3- and 4-year-olds. Three of the partnerships are with Migrant Seasonal Head Start Centers (also known as Teaching and Mentoring Community Centers), which specifically provide education and support services to low-income children of migrant and seasonal farm workers. Currently, the district is working to move the Head Start Program for 4-year-olds to its own public school campuses, making more room for 3-year-olds at the Head Start Centers.

**Rationale**

In 2000, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD began offering half-day pre-k for TEA eligible 4-year-olds. By 2005, the district decided to transition to full-day pre-k and include ineligible 4-year-olds at no cost to the families. This accommodated working parents who had difficulties transporting their children to and from half-day pre-k. Prior to expansion, the district conducted research to ensure that there would be enough classrooms for the additional expected enrollment. Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD also estimated that the ADA generated from the expanded eligible enrollment and TEA Pre-K expansion grant would be sufficient to cover most expenses, while the district sought its own additional funding for staff salaries.

**Community**

The community has been very supportive of Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD’s pre-k expansion efforts. After the expansion, enrollment increased and the district was able to provide instruction to more students. In addition to the already established partnerships with Head Start, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD has also recently started to collaborate with private childcare providers in the area, currently working with 18 licensed daycares in the Trinity Area. The total enrollment in all of the district’s pre-k partnership initiatives, including Head Start and private providers, is about 950 students.

**Funding**

The district utilizes multiple funding streams, including general operating funds, state compensatory education funding, Title I, and Title III funds to offset loss of state pre-k grant funding. Because the majority of its student population is eligible for half-day state ADA funding, the district does not have to charge pre-k tuition for ineligible children.

**Curriculum and Assessments**

Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD uses the Frog Street Press curriculum in pre-k and kindergarten to enhance alignment between the two grade levels. The district uses C-PALLS tests three times a year in its 3- and 4-year-old pre-k programs and in its collaboration efforts. Comparison of results from the beginning-of-the-year tests to the end-of-the-year tests indicates about 30-40% growth over the course of one pre-k year. This year, the district will also begin longitudinally tracking its first cohort of 600 Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD pre-k students as they start taking the STAAR test.
PRINCETON ISD

Snapshot

- Expanded from a half-day pre-k to a full-day pre-k program
- Transports pre-k students with district school buses
- Teachers write their own units of instruction using district’s curriculum resources

3,433 enrolled students

58% economically disadvantaged

Pre-K Program

Princeton ISD offers a full-day pre-k program for TEA eligible 4-year-olds. The program has expanded from two teachers on one campus to currently twelve teachers on three campuses. Students enroll at the elementary campuses they are zoned to and the district provides transportation for pre-k students, who ride with a sibling, on a regular bus route.

Community

From the beginning, the district sought buy-in from the community by surveying parents of pre-k students. The results of the survey indicated a strong preference for a full-day program over a half-day program, and the leadership also consulted with the district site-based committee. Final approval for full-day pre-k was granted from the district’s Board of Trustees. Once the program expanded, enrollment doubled within the first year.

Rationale

Princeton ISD found half-day programs to be too short for effective instruction after time spent on various transition times (e.g., breakfast, arrival in classroom, preparing for pick-up, etc.). Taking into account the needs of working parents, the district expanded to full-day pre-k with bus transportation provided for students to and from home. Providing transportation created several new challenges, including making sure that children board the right buses every time and are not dropped off to empty homes.

Curriculum and Assessments

Princeton ISD purchases a variety of curriculum sources, but the pre-k teachers write their own units of instruction, primarily using Scholastic resources. The pre-k and kindergarten teachers also align their curriculums at multiple points throughout the school year, and designated pre-k and kindergarten reading lists are coordinated to make sure books do not overlap. Princeton ISD does not currently have a formal assessment tool for pre-k.
Pre-K Program

Spring Branch ISD offers a full-day pre-k program to both TEA eligible and ineligible 4-year-olds using a sliding scale tuition approach. Spring Branch ISD’s pre-k program is housed in five district centers specifically dedicated to pre-k. The district collaborates with private providers by providing transportation before and after school for students who utilize a private childcare’s services.

Rationale

Facing overcrowded elementary schools, Spring Branch ISD considered moving 3rd graders to intermediate schools and building pre-k centers. Because there was strong evidence for early intervention and education, parents and the school board supported building pre-k centers for every child to attend. Due to the district’s dedication to expanding its pre-k program, a committee was formed approximately two years prior to the expansion in order to plan and coordinate the process.

Community

Spring Branch ISD passed two bonds to fund the creation of dedicated pre-k centers throughout the district. The first bond passed while the economy was healthy, and the community still supported the passage of a second bond during the recession. In fact, the more affluent parents pushed for full-day, universal pre-k the most.

Funding

While the initial expansion of pre-k was funded through a local bond approved by voters, Spring Branch ISD uses a mixture of state and Title I funds and its tuition program to fund the current program. The district used the free-and-reduced lunch level as a baseline metric for the sliding-scale tuition, then added $10,000 to the baseline as the maximum annual household income (based on the previous year’s tax return) for a student to attend pre-k at no cost. The sliding-scale tuition rate increases in $100 increments for every $10,000 over the full-scholarship household income requirement, up to $550/month. In addition, the district takes on the full cost of bus transportation by allocating district operating funds.

Income | Tuition
--- | ---
< Free-and-reduced lunch baseline + $10k | Free
< baseline + $20k | $150/month
< baseline + $30k | $250/month
< baseline + $40k | $350/month
< baseline + $50k | $450/month
> baseline + $50k | $550/month
Policy Scan

Introduction

There is no denying that Texas is a unique state with its own set of advantages and challenges. Texas leads the way and serves as a national example in some issue areas, but prekindergarten is one area where Texas could gain insight by looking to other states. Through conducting a nationwide policy scan, four focus states were chosen for their innovative policy decisions and dedication to improving prekindergarten education through building bipartisan relationships and utilizing unlikely partnerships. Florida, Georgia, West Virginia, and Oklahoma’s journeys to increased access to quality prekindergarten education are highlighted in this section.

Class size

For legislative sessions stretching back for more than a decade in Texas, legislation has been proposed that would mandate a cap on class size or establish a staff-to-student ratio in public prekindergarten classrooms. While there is a maximum class size of 22 for kindergarten through fourth grade,\(^1\) Texas is one of only four states that does not have a state policy dictating a maximum class size for prekindergarten classrooms\(^2\). Research shows that the class size for a prekindergarten classroom should be capped at 20 students in order to maximize the effectiveness of the instruction and investment of taxpayer funds.\(^3,4,5\) Forty-five of the 53 state funded prekindergarten initiatives across the nation follow that optimal class size recommendation and have instituted a class size cap at 20 students or below.\(^6\) A small class size not only boosts the overall quality of the program,\(^13,14,15\) but also offers health and safety benefits and
can contribute to increased cost benefits.\textsuperscript{16,17,18} Quality improvement efforts implemented in small classes are more like to produce positive returns and results.\textsuperscript{19,20}

**Staff-to-student ratio**

Multiple early education research institutions recommend not only that prekindergarten class sizes be capped at 20 students, but also that a staff-to-student ratio of 1:10 be enforced.\textsuperscript{21,22,23,24} Currently, 46 of the 53 state funded prekindergarten initiatives have followed that recommendation.\textsuperscript{25} Florida, West Virginia, and Oklahoma are among those states that have both capped class sizes and followed the recommendations for staff-to-student ratio. It should be noted that an immediate reduction in class sizes or ratios could become an unintended burden for districts with limited capacities, but certain states have mitigated that issue by phasing in the requirement through a class size reduction program. Florida is one state that gradually reduced the class size by two students each year until the reduced class size limit was reached\textsuperscript{26}. Districts that may not have an extra classroom to accommodate the reduced class sizes can still make an effort to enhance quality by improving the staff-to-student ratio.

**Public/Private Partnerships**

In order to facilitate rapid expansion of prekindergarten programs without burdening school districts and taking away potential clients from the private providers, several states have incorporated public/private partnerships. These partnerships should not be confused with a voucher system; in these collaborations school districts can choose to share resources, including facilities and qualified teachers, with private providers within the community in order to maximize the amount of children served with quality programs. West Virginia mandated that at least 50% of school districts collaborate with private prekindergarten programs, childcare centers, or Head Start programs as the state phased in the expansion.\textsuperscript{31} Those partnerships have become so successful that the state now boasts a 74% collaboration rate.\textsuperscript{32} Georgia also found success in collaborating with private providers, establishing local coordinating councils in certain counties throughout the state to assist in developing and maintaining those partnerships. The councils include parents, public and private providers, health officials, educators, and representatives from the business community.\textsuperscript{33} Oklahoma and Florida also participate in collaborative models.
Oklahoma’s prekindergarten initiative continues to be supported by prominent members of the business community, resulting in a 40% collaboration rate which helps to extend the reach of the program. Florida also encourages collaboration with the private sector, requiring that private providers receiving public funding ensure at least 70% of their students are kindergarten ready upon completion of the program. Florida established Early Learning Coalitions (ELC) that have the responsibility of distributing the state funds to public and private providers. Texas already encourages consideration of public/private partnerships under TEC §29.1533, but the implementation process is not easy to navigate for districts and involves multiple state departments.

**Funding**

During the 82nd Legislative Session, massive cuts to Texas public education systems impacted prekindergarten programs across the state. More than $200 million was cut from a discretionary grant program, forcing many districts to either eliminate full day programs or reallocate district funds in order to continue providing an expanded program. School funding is a complex issue and is one that can vary widely from state to state. While prekindergarten programs in Texas are eligible to receive a half-day of funding through the school funding formula, expanded prekindergarten programs are still vulnerable to major cuts as evidenced in the 82nd legislative session. Oklahoma’s prekindergarten program also receives funding through the state school funding formula, but the weighting provides a larger proportion of funding: half day prekindergarten is funded at .7 average daily attendance (ADA) and full-day prekindergarten is funded at 1.3 ADA. In comparison, Texas funds a half-day program at only .5 ADA. This additional bump in funding that Oklahoma provides contributes to the overall quality of an attractive program for Oklahoma’s early learners. Like Oklahoma and Texas, West Virginia’s funding for the state’s prekindergarten program is part of the state funding formula. The formula funds from .5 full time equivalency (FTE) for 12 hours/week of instruction to 1 FTE for 24 hours/week of
In Georgia, prekindergarten is funded primarily through the state lottery program and linked to the number of children enrolled and the lead teacher credentials. In many states, including Texas, school districts also utilize federal funding (e.g., Title I funds) in order to specify target and provide additional academic assistance to low income, at-risk children.

**Quality Improvement Initiatives**

All 53 state-funded prekindergarten initiatives meet the NIEER benchmark regarding comprehensive early education standards. This benchmark is based on the vital areas identified by the National Education Goals Panel: children’s physical well-being and motor development, social/emotional development, approaches toward learning, language development, and cognition and general knowledge. While certain states keep the standards broad, some states take it a step further and align the early education standards for prekindergarten with the state kindergarten standards. Two examples of this approach are Georgia’s Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) and West Virginia’s early learning standards, which are both aligned with kindergarten standards. Currently, Texas does not align the prekindergarten standards with kindergarten Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), but instead has a broad set of standards that are given to districts. In some states there are also grant opportunities for districts meeting certain quality criteria. In an effort to clearly identify quality programs, independent early childhood education groups such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) offer accreditations for programs that meet specific quality standards. Broad early education standards are certainly a step in the right direction when it comes to ensuring a quality prekindergarten education, but there are multiple areas for improvement.
11 Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. Program targets rising Kindergarten students who did not attend Pre-K or need additional support. 2014.
33 Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning.
37 West Virginia Department of Education. West Virginia Universal Pre-K Partnerships Collaborating with Community Programs: Funding, Contracts and Budgets. Office of School Readiness. 2012.
39 West Virginia Department of Education. West Virginia Universal Pre-K Partnerships Collaborating with Community Programs: Funding, Contracts and Budgets. Office of School Readiness. 2012.


Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning.


West Virginia Department of Education. *Building Intentionality in a Collaborative Design and Implementation for West Virginia Universal Pre-K*. n.d.


Policy Recommendations

The Foundations of Pre-K Quality in Texas

Prekindergarten has arrived as a policy issue in Texas. Across the political spectrum, Texas leaders are clamoring not only for expanded access to prekindergarten, but also for investments that prioritize quality.

The research is clear on the components of a quality program. Experts, educators, and advocates also have strategies at hand to improve the quality of prekindergarten in Texas. If Texas is to truly improve the quality of its prekindergarten program, it must go directly to the source to find out what is already working in Texas and what can be replicated easily and efficiently.

Despite budget constraints, Texas communities are doing all they can – and then a little more – with the resources at their disposal to expand access to prekindergarten. Across Texas, hundreds of school boards, thousands of classrooms and teachers, and hundreds of thousands of families have made the decision to invest in a solid academic foundation for the state’s young learners.

Texas school districts and locally elected school boards know best when it comes to how to use investments in prekindergarten to reduce remedial expenses and boost academic achievement. As this study examined school districts’ best practices and collected statewide data, common themes emerged in the choices local school districts are making.

As this report and particularly its case studies demonstrate, every school district can choose to expand its prekindergarten program. Huge urban, fast growth suburban, impoverished border, and small rural school districts have all embraced prekindergarten. More importantly, these districts are achieving results with their prekindergarten programs. Moving forward, three key themes are essential for all districts to achieve a high return on prekindergarten investments:

- **Ensure Transparency of Pre-K Assessments and Program Quality**
- **Expand Funding to School Districts that Limit Class Size and/or Staff-to-Student Ratios**
- **Create Incentives for School Districts to Offer Full-Day Prekindergarten**
Ensure Transparency of Pre-K Assessments and Program Quality

**Policy Recommendation:** Increase data available to taxpayers, parents, educators, and policy makers about prekindergarten programs managed by school districts in Texas.

The high response rate for this voluntary survey highlights the importance of data and that school districts are open and willing to report data about their prekindergarten programs. Texas can do much more to support this interest and ensure the collection of consistent information about prekindergarten programs and assessments statewide.

Texas parents and taxpayers have many questions about prekindergarten in Texas. However, the state requires only limited information to be reported by school districts. The private sector supported this research project, but foundations are unable to support such efforts indefinitely.

There is a lack of readily available data from the state to answer the following basic questions about prekindergarten:

- How big are our children’s prekindergarten classes?
- How many students does each teacher have? Do they have teacher aides?
- What assessments are administered to students and why?

Under TEC §29.153, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) requires certain data be reported by any Local Education Agency (LEA) that provides a prekindergarten program. The data that is already required to be reported through a LEA’s Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) report includes student demographic information, the number of half-day and full-day prekindergarten classes offered, and the sources of funding for those prekindergarten programs. Despite mandatory reporting of this information, it is not readily available to the general public. Moreover, there are additional data points that could be useful in monitoring the quality and effectiveness of the programs if added to the current reporting requirements:

- Class sizes and staff-to-student ratios
- Type and results of assessments administered during prekindergarten school year

By either incorporating these new data points into the reporting requirements outlined in TEC §29.153 or including them in the new Early Childhood Education Data System that TEA is currently implementing, additional data reporting could come at little or no cost to the state and districts. Making this information readily available to the general public would further increase accountability and transparency.
Pharr San Juan Alamo ISD utilizes student and program data to measure the longitudinal effectiveness of its prekindergarten program. This year, the first 600-student cohort the district has been tracking since prekindergarten will take the STAAR test for the first time, providing the district with additional data on the effectiveness of their programming [see Case Study on Page 29].

Reward School Districts that Limit Class Size and Staff-to-Student Ratio

Policy Recommendation: Require new funding for prekindergarten to be contingent upon the implementation of a maximum class size of 20 and/or a staff-to-student ratio of 1 to 10.

The school districts that chose to participate in this project were often justifiably proud of their prekindergarten programs. There will always be outliers, but the majority of Texas school districts surveyed are doing everything they can to keep prekindergarten class sizes small and teacher ratios optimal.

Although the state has established a maximum class size of 22 students for kindergarten through fourth grade, there is currently no state policy that establishes a class size for public prekindergarten programs. Texas school districts do not have to keep prekindergarten class sizes and ratios at research-based levels, but they see the wisdom in attempting to do so without a mandate. Eighty-two percent of districts report having an average class size of 20 students or fewer, with the most commonly reported staff-to-student ratio being 1:10 [see Figures 4 and 5]. Would school districts make this choice if it did not produce results and contribute to the overall quality of instruction?

Multiple research institutions, including the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), have recommended that class size for prekindergarten be capped at 20, with a minimum staff-to-student ratio of 1:10. Research demonstrates that establishing these limits can increase time spent on task with the students and the quality of instruction. The state should consider mandating a maximum class size of 20 with a staff-to-student ratio of 1:10 in order to align with established research recommendations. As an interim step, Texas could require that only districts receiving supplemental, quality improvement dollars meet one or both recommendations. Efforts to improve prekindergarten quality will achieve bigger results and returns if implemented within evidence-based parameters.

Through the survey conducted as part of this research study, 41% of districts indicated that they do not have a policy or practice to cap prekindergarten class sizes [see Figure 6]. Many districts could not immediately reduce class sizes due to capacity constraints. In order to reduce the burden on districts, TEA could add a one-year approved waiver option for select districts.
that are unable to meet the class size requirement. Alternatively, class size and staff-to-student ratio changes could be phased in over a period of time.

Investments in prekindergarten quality that are implemented in crowded classrooms will be diluted and not be a wise use of taxpayer funds. The research is clear that as the state considers efforts to expand access to and the quality of prekindergarten, class sizes and ratios must be considered.

- **Lubbock ISD** has both a class size cap of 20 and a staff-to-student ratio of 1:10. If there is a possibility of the class size or ratio exceeding the limit, the district will send students to another classroom or campus where there is room [see Case Study on Page 28].

### Create Incentives for School Districts to Offer Full-Day Pre-K

*Policy Recommendation: Create incentives for school districts to offer full-day prekindergarten by providing additional funding through the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) allocation, increasing the basic Tier I allotment in the school funding formula, or by establishing a sustainable grant program for districts wishing to expand to full-day.*

Currently, the state of Texas funds a half-day prekindergarten program for school districts that have at least 15 or more 4-year-olds in the district that meet the following eligibility requirements:

- Unable to speak and comprehend the English language; or
- Educationally disadvantaged; or
- Homeless, as defined by 42 U.S.C. Section 1143a, regardless of the residence of the child, of either parent of the child, or of the child's guardian or other person having lawful control of the child; or
- Child of an active duty member of the armed forces of the United States, including the state military forces or a reserve component of the armed forces, who is ordered to active duty by proper authority; or
- Child of a member of the armed forces of the United States, including the state military forces or a reserve component of the armed forces, who was injured or killed while serving on active duty; or
- Is or ever has been in the conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services following an adversary hearing held as provided by Section 262.201, Family Code.
Through the survey conducted as part of this research study, 47% of Texas school districts indicated that they have gone above and beyond state mandates by expanding to a full-day program [see Figure 1]. Many districts have chosen to take this cost burden upon themselves and have had to reallocate funding from other areas in order to adequately fund a full-day prekindergarten program. Seventy-three percent of participating districts reported inadequate funding as a barrier to prekindergarten program expansion [see Figure 7]. Furthermore, of the responding districts that currently offer half-day programs, 50% reported that they would want to expand to a full-day program if the state provided additional funding [see Figure 8]. It’s clear that if Texas were to encourage further expansion of prekindergarten programs, school districts would be on board, but they need additional funding to incorporate higher quality standards.

There are several different funding options that Texas could consider, including requiring that any additional funding allocated to districts for prekindergarten be tied to certain quality benchmarks. For example, if funding were to be increased through the state funding formula, districts could only receive that additional funding if they comply with optimal class size and staff-to-student ratio requirements, report comprehensive data, and provide a full-day program to eligible children. This eases the financial burden on school districts while ensuring that state dollars are being used for quality programs.

- **Dallas ISD** offers a full-day program to TEA eligible 4-year-olds by combining all funding, with the exception of Title I funds, into a large general operating fund and then allocating that larger group of funding to each campus. Funding sources include half-day program funding from the state school formula and state compensatory education funding [see Case Study on Page 23].

- **Lancaster ISD** offers a full-day program to TEA eligible 3 and 4-year-olds. In addition to using half-day program funding from the state school formula, the district supplements the remaining balance with general operating funds [see Case Study on Page 27].

There are several different avenues for increasing funding for districts to expand the current prekindergarten program from half-day to full-day, including:

- Increasing the state funding formula from .5 to 1 for districts providing full-day
- Increasing the state funding formula from .5 to .7 for districts providing full-day
- Increasing the state funding formula for districts meeting certain quality benchmarks
- Increasing the state funding formula for districts providing a full-day program and meeting certain quality benchmarks
- Increasing the state funding formula to assist districts with meeting certain quality benchmarks in their current programs
• Adding prekindergarten as a specified program allotment under Tier I funding in the Foundation School Program (FSP)
• Increasing the Tier I basic allotment of $4,765
• Establishing a grant program for districts to provide full-day programs
Additional Resources

Data

- **Texas Prekindergarten Data.** Texas Education Agency. 2013.

Effectiveness

- **Class Size and Academic Results, With a Focus on Children from Culturally, Linguistically and Economically Disenfranchised Communities.** Monash University. David Zyngier. 2014.
- **Pay for Success Financing for Early Childhood Programs: A Path Forward.** The Institute for Child Success. Megan Golden and Joe Waters. 2014.
- **A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Universally Accessible Pre-Kindergarten Education in Texas.** The Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University. Lori Taylor. 2006.
- **Texas Early Childhood Workforce Compensation Study.** Texas Early Learning Council.
Policy

- **Transforming Public Education: Pathway to a Pre-K-12 Future**. The Pew Center on the States. Allison de la Torre, Jennifer V. Doctors, Masooma Hussain, Matthew Mulkey, Albert Wat, and Marci Young. 2011.
Appendix

School Districts that Participated in the Survey (n=631)

Abbott ISD
Abernathy ISD
Abilene ISD
Academy ISD
Agua Dulce ISD
Alamo Heights ISD
Alba-Golden ISD
Aldine ISD
Aledo ISD
Alice ISD
Alief ISD
Alvarado ISD
Alvin ISD
Alvord ISD
Amarillo ISD
Amherst ISD
Anahuac ISD
Anderson-Shiro CISD
Angleton ISD
Anna ISD
Anson ISD
Anthony ISD
Apple Springs ISD
Aquila ISD
Aransas County ISD
Aransas Pass ISD
Archer City ISD
Argyle ISD
Arlington ISD
Athens ISD
Aubrey ISD
Austin ISD
Avinger ISD
Axtell ISD
Azle ISD
Baird ISD
Balmorhea ISD
Bandera ISD
Bangs ISD
Barbers Hill ISD
Bastrop ISD
Bay City ISD
Beeville ISD
Bellevue ISD
Bells ISD
Belton ISD
Ben Bolt-Palito
Blanco ISD
Big Sandy ISD
Birdville ISD
Bishop CISD
Blackwell CISD
Blanco ISD
Bland ISD
Blanket ISD
Bloomington ISD
Bloomington ISD
Blum ISD
Boles ISD
Boling ISD
Bonham ISD
Booker ISD
Bosque ISD
Bowie ISD
Brady ISD
Brazosport ISD
Breckenridge ISD
Bremont ISD
Bridge City ISD
Bridgeport ISD
Broaddus ISD
Bronte ISD
Brooke ISD
Brookeland ISD
Brownsboro ISD
Brownwood ISD
Bryan ISD
Buckholts ISD
Bullard ISD
Burkburnett ISD
Burkville ISD
Burleson ISD
Burnet CISD
Bushland ISD
Bynum ISD
Calallen ISD
Calhoun County ISD
Callisburg ISD
Calvert ISD
Cameron ISD
Campbell ISD
Canadian ISD
Canutillo ISD
Canyon ISD
Carrollton-Farmers
Branch ISD
Castleberry ISD
Cayuga ISD
Cedar Hill ISD
Celeste ISD
Celina ISD
Center ISD
Center Point ISD
Central ISD
Channing ISD
Chapel Hill ISD
Charlotte ISD
Chester ISD
Chico ISD
Childress ISD
Chillicothe ISD
Chilton ISD
China Spring ISD
Chireno ISD
Chisum ISD
Clarksville ISD
Cleburne ISD
Clint ISD
Coldspring-Oakhurst
CISD
Coleman ISD
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Sierra Blanca ISD
Silsbee ISD
Silverton ISD
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Sivells Bend ISD
Slaton ISD
Slocum ISD
Smithville ISD
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Snook ISD
Snyder ISD
Socorro ISD
Somerset ISD
Somerville ISD
Sonora ISD
South San Antonio ISD
South Texas ISD
Southside ISD
Southwest ISD
Spearman ISD
Spring Branch ISD
Spring Hill ISD
Spring ISD
Springlake-Earth ISD
Stafford MSD
Stanton ISD
Star ISD
Stephenville ISD
Sterling City ISD
Stockdale ISD
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Sudan ISD
Sulphur Bluff ISD
Sulphur Springs ISD
Sundown ISD
Sunnyvale ISD
Taft ISD
Tahoka ISD
Tarkington ISD
Teague ISD
Terlingua CSD
Terrell County ISD
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Texas City ISD
Thorndale ISD
Thrall ISD
Three Rivers ISD
Tidehaven ISD
Tioga ISD
Tom Bean ISD
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Trent ISD
Trenton ISD
Trinity ISD
Troup ISD
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Tuloso-Midway ISD
Turkey-Quitaque ISD
Tyler ISD
Uvalde CSD
Van Alstyne ISD
Van Vleck ISD
Vernon ISD
Victoria ISD
Vidor ISD
Waco ISD
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Walcott ISD
Wall ISD
Waller ISD
Walnut Bend ISD
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Waxahachie ISD
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Wellman-Union CISD
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West Hardin County CISD
West Orange-Cove CISD
West Sabine ISD
Westbrook ISD
Westphalia ISD
Westwood ISD
Wharton ISD
White Settlement ISD
Whiteface CISD
Whitehouse ISD
Whitesboro ISD
Whitewright ISD
Whitney ISD
Wichita Falls ISD
Wildorado ISD
Willis ISD
Wills Point ISD
Wilson ISD
Windthorst ISD
Winfield ISD
Winsboro ISD
Winters ISD
Woden ISD
Woodson ISD
Woodville ISD
Wylie ISD
Yantis ISD
Ysleta ISD
Zapata County ISD