



Why did TEGAC Commission Texans Care for Children to Research School District Participation in the State's New High Quality Pre-K Grant Program?

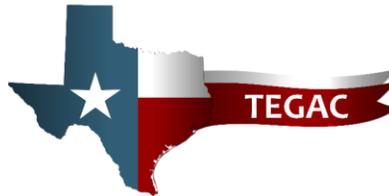
When the Governor and Legislature created the new pre-k grant program in 2015, the legislation and appropriated \$118 million reflected a broad consensus that high quality early childhood education is a powerful tool for ensuring more children start school with the skills to succeed in elementary school and beyond. While HB 4 funding does not fully restore the 2011 pre-k cuts, Texas school districts now have more money and support for quality programs.

According to the 2016 Meadows Children at Risk Pre-K report, *Pre-K in Texas: A Critical Component for Academic Success*, economically disadvantaged third graders who attended full day Texas Pre-K had **40% higher odds of reading** at a college-ready pace in 3rd grade than economically disadvantaged students who did not attend Texas Pre-K. These same students also scored **approximately 80 points higher on the 3rd Grade STAAR Reading** exam when they had both quality Texas Pre-K and a quality K-3 education, further proof that quality pre-K works.

The goal of the Texans Care project was to explore whether there is sufficient local demand for state-supported pre-k quality improvements to warrant increased pre-k investments in the 2017 legislative session. *Texans Care for Children* collaborated with six regional partners to explore school district demand for HB 4 pre-k grant funds, barriers and challenges affecting school district application decisions, and how districts plan to spend the additional pre-k dollars.

What Were the Findings of Texans Care for Children's Pre-K Research and Regional Pre-K Reports?

- There was high demand across the state for the new pre-k grant funds. Texas school districts representing a whopping 85% of students in pre-k are receiving new funding.
- HB 4 grants are serving pre-k students in school districts across the economic spectrum. Eighty-three percent of pre-k students in lower poverty districts (<40 percent disadvantaged) will benefit from the grants compared to 87 percent of those in higher poverty districts (>60 percent disadvantaged).
- The relatively low level of per-student funding provided to districts through HB 4 may limit the effectiveness of the grant program. The two tranches of HB 4 funding provided to school districts to use during the 2016-2017 school year totaled \$734 per student, approximately half of the amount originally envisioned in the Governor's proposal.
- Many districts hoped to use HB 4 grant funding to expand the number of full-day pre-k classrooms or hire aides to reduce teacher-student ratios but the lower amount of per-student funding, combined with the uncertainty about whether the Legislature would maintain strong support for the grant program in the 85th Legislative Session, led most districts to expend the dollars on one-time or short-term expenditures, such as professional development and purchase of technology for classrooms.



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- The new pre-k grant program is off to a solid start but state leaders have more work to do to ensure that the new grant program is successful and that Texas pre-k is effective in preparing children for school success.

What Policy Recommendations Were Included in the Report?

- The state should offer school districts more certainty by providing pre-K grant funding (HB 4) through the state's education formula funding system.
- The Legislature and TEA should support community and school district priorities for expansion of quality pre-k, whether the priorities are increased access for three-year-olds, offering more full-day options, strengthened parent engagement, additional partnerships with child care or Head Start, or other efforts.
- The Legislature should establish a statewide limit on pre-k class size and pre-k student-teacher ratios as recommended by national standards, the 2016 study commissioned by TEA, and the recently released Children at Risk study commissioned by the Meadows Foundation.
- The state should identify opportunities for additional pre-k program improvements using the data on class size, student ratios, student progress, and other program characteristics that all districts will submit to TEA under new HB 4 requirements.
- Finally, TEA should monitor the implementation of HB 4 to ensure districts comply with the law's requirements.

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