



Support Full-Day High-Quality Pre-Kindergarten Programs with an Emphasis on Local, Integrated Community Based-Partnerships

The Problem

Texas school districts need the option to voluntarily expand high quality pre-kindergarten programs from a half-day to a full-day for currently eligible four-year old children. Due to recent changes in the Texas Pre-kindergarten Expansion Grant Program, now known as the Early Start Grant Program, many districts need funding to provide high quality pre-kindergarten programs. According to Texas' own Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University, these programs lead to fewer children entering the juvenile justice system, decreased special education referrals, less grade retention, decreased dropout rates, and reduced child welfare costs, just to name a few.

SB 21 / HB 130
(Zaffirini/Patrick)

The Solution

The passage of SB 21 and HB130 during the 81st Legislative Session.

Half Day to Full Day- Several studies demonstrate that full-day programs produce benefits to Texas' most vulnerable children. These benefits include enhanced vocabulary, mathematics, and literary skills which are essential for school readiness and early success.

Enhanced Quality- Research supports that a staff to child ratio of 1:11 with a maximum class size 22 enhances quality. Reductions in class size represent a key structural quality indicator that allows pre-kindergarten professionals to engage in the quality "process" that produces the best results for young children.

Integrated Partnerships- SB 21 / HB 130 would require local public school systems to form partnerships with Head Start programs and/or community child care centers to deliver quality pre-kindergarten programs. These partnerships would increase access to quality pre-kindergarten programs for Texas children. Further, the development of collaborative efforts to provide the pre-kindergarten service would allow districts to expand services without draining their limited resources. Districts would have access to existing infrastructure of the community partners and can eliminate the high costs associated with the construction of new infrastructure. Additionally, districts would have greater flexibility related to staffing needs, equipment use and maintenance, and access of materials needed for program delivery.

Background

Across the state, mandatory district pre-kindergarten services are available to slightly more than 50% of the nearly 362,000 four year old children living in the state of Texas. School districts in Texas are required to offer half day pre-kindergarten programs where a minimum of 15 eligible four year old children reside. Eligible children include educationally disadvantaged, English Language Learners, homeless, the child of a member of the armed forces of the United States, and a child that has ever been in the foster care system.

Since 1999, the Texas Prekindergarten Expansion Grant Program has enabled local communities to expand pre-kindergarten services into full-day programs. Many communities have benefited through their participation, but the grant program has reached its resource limits forcing communities to seek other options.

Families, communities, and schools have raised their voices and indicated their need for more high-quality pre-kindergarten options.

Why does Texas need SB21/HB130 AND the Texas Early Start Grant Program?

These two programs complement each other in the scope of their purpose; namely, preparation of young children for the start of school. The Early Start Grant Program, which is scheduled to undergo significant changes, was designed primarily to improve the quality of struggling programs, while providing resources for expansion of other programs. This program now includes a 2-5 year limit on participation by local ISD's. Programs seeking to improve may continue to make beneficial adjustments to their programs supported for a limited time by the Early Start Grant Program.

Existing pre-kindergarten programs, with proven records of success and quality care, have either lost their eligibility for additional Early Start funding or will roll off the grant program in the next 3 years. These programs would be supported by SB21/HB130 and would have access to resources that could be used to promote expansion and improve on programs that currently enjoy recognition for their high quality services to children and families.

Cost Estimates

The bill is designed to work with the amount of funding appropriated. The higher the appropriation, the more children served.

For additional information

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