

HB 3 & SB 4 Funds Full-Day Pre-K and Boosts Early Literacy

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee on HB 3 and SB 4

We thank Senator Larry Taylor for sponsoring HB 3 and filing SB 4, which ensure more Texas kids can benefit from full-day, high-quality pre-k and other early literacy strategies. State funding currently only supports half-day (3-hour) pre-k despite the fact that full-day (6-hour) programs have a greater impact on student learning. Full-day, high-quality pre-k is the best way for kids to be kindergarten-ready and strong readers by third grade. HB 3 and SB 4 will allow Texas to harness the power of a well-funded early childhood education, putting more children on the path to lifelong success and saving taxpayer dollars.

HB 3 and SB 4 provide sustainable investments in early childhood education

- Although 72 percent of districts currently provide some full-day pre-k programming, the state only funds half-day pre-k. If districts choose to operate full-day programs, they are currently required to tap other local funds, including funding intended for other grades.
- The Senate substitute for HB 3 dedicates \$780 million per year for an “Early Reading Allotment,” enough for districts to fund full-day pre-k, and requires districts to provide full-day, high-quality pre-k for four-year-olds who meet the current pre-k eligibility requirements.
- Districts can leverage these investments to partner with private child care and other early learning programs, ensuring families with young children have access to more high-quality early education options.

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- Research from Texas and across the U.S. shows that effective pre-k programs help students start kindergarten with the skills they need to succeed, boost early literacy and academic achievement, and reduce both grade retention and provision of special education services.¹

¹Texas Commission on Public School Finance (2018). Funding for Impact: Equitable Funding for Students Who Need It The Most. Retrieved from:

https://tea.texas.gov/Finance_and_Grants/State_Funding/Additional_Finance_Resources/Texas_Commission_on_Public_School_Finance/

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

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

² Texans Care For Children and Commit Partnership (2018). Next Steps for Texas Pre-k: A Survey of School Districts' Pre-K Priorities & Challenges. Retrieved from: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5728d34462cd94b84dc567ed/t/5c0fed66aa4a99fb4c33be79/1544547691993/PreK-Survey-Report.pdf>

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

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