

Early Childhood Education: Expand Pre-Kindergarten

Position Statement Approved by One Voice: November 14, 2008

Issue/Concern: Numerous studies have shown the positive and long-term benefits high-quality pre-kindergarten (pre-K) programs have on child development, academic preparedness, and sustained success. Historically, Texas has offered a half-day, free public school pre-k to children who qualify. While this option has been an enormous resource for local communities, research shows that **full-day programs**, if operated properly, offer additional benefits to families and children.

Since 1999, Texas has offered local communities the option to expand pre-K services, including the option to establish full-day programs, through participation in the Texas Pre-kindergarten Expansion Grant program. Many communities have taken advantage of this and continue to do so; however, the grant program is being drained while the demand for expanded services continues. In order to build upon our successes, we need to continue to support expansion grant programs and offer additional options and resources that reflect the priorities and needs of our communities.

To realize the potential of expanded day programs however, we must also examine the quality of the program to maximize the best results. One way to improve quality is through class sizes. Currently, Texas has no child:staff ratio or group size requirements for public pre-K classrooms. **Research has shown that staff-to-child ratios of 1:10, with a maximum class size of 18 or less, works best in terms of ensuring safety and quality.**

Specific Policy Recommendation(s):

- ★ Expand public pre-K from half day to full day.
- ★ Increase the formula funding for public pre-K, including a meaningful percentage of resources for mixed service delivery partnerships (public school, Head Start, and licensed child care) with community-based early education programs.
- ★ Expand pre-K through mixed service delivery models (public school, Head Start and child care)
- ★ Establish maximum child to staff ratios in public pre-K: 10 to 1

How does this issue/recommendation relate to prevention and early intervention or maximizing federal funds for health and human services? Investments in quality early education reduce health and human service costs for all Texans. Whenever a family cannot access an early education program at all or must accept a low quality program, that family is at greater risk of needing a wide range of social services and that child is likely to enter Kindergarten behind by up to two years. This can result in additional costs associated with remedial education, criminal justice costs, lower high school graduation rates, and lower literacy rates.

Supporting Facts/Research/Resources:

- ★ A 2006 study by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) shows that children attending full-day programs did better on mathematics and literacy tests than children in a 2.5 to 3-hour public preschool program, and the achievement gains continued at least until the end of first grade.
- ★ According to the Center for Public Education, mixed delivery models present several potential benefits, including more efficient use of space, greater access for families, and collaboration among providers, which may improve the overall quality of early childhood programs.
- ★ According to the National Education Association, students who have had the benefit of smaller classes in their early years continue to reap academic benefits through their middle school and high school years and are more likely to take college entrance exams.

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