

Checking in on Pre-K and the 2017 Texas Legislature

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As Texas Senate and House committee hearings pick up, it's worth checking in on early childhood education, specifically Pre-K.

Helping kids start school ready to learn is one of the best ways to ensure all Texans have the chance to compete and succeed in life. Investing in Pre-K also means significant [short and long-term returns](#) on investment for the state. Texas has long recognized the value of early education, and since 1985 has offered a state-supported Pre-K program that provides a half-day of educational instruction.

Governor Abbott declared Pre-K an emergency item for the 2015 Legislative session, signaling to the Legislature that a bill to improve Pre-K quality and funding was a priority. [In the end](#), the Legislature created a \$118 million biennial grant program, tied to enhanced quality measures, that was \$90 million less than what was in the previous Pre-K grant program eliminated in 2011.

CPPP viewed the 2015 grant program as [a good step](#) that demonstrated the importance of Pre-K. However, we voiced concerns that the funding was not enough to implement the required quality enhancements and lacked the stability districts need to make long-term investments. These concerns were validated when over 20 approved districts turned down the funding. Districts receiving grant funds have reported the funds were used for one-time investments in materials and trainings, instead of expanding to a full-day program or hiring additional teachers and aides to reduce class sizes.

Now in 2017, the Texas House and Senate have released their [draft budget proposals with different approaches for how to support Pre-K](#). The House proposal combines the funding originally dedicated to the "High Quality Pre-K Grant Program" with the \$30 million already set aside for Supplemental Pre-K funding. The Senate proposal keeps the Supplemental Pre-K and "High Quality Pre-K" funding as separate line items.

The proposal in the House budget to add the "High Quality Pre-K Program" funding to the Supplemental Pre-K funding means that every student in a Pre-K class would get some additional funding without their district having to apply for grant funds or meet the enhanced quality improvements. That is a more equitable approach than the current Pre-K Grant Program though still less effective than funding Pre-K through existing school funding formulas.

Supplemental Pre-K was created in 2013 and described as a down payment to improve Pre-k funding after \$208 million in Pre-K grant funding was eliminated during the 2011 session. Both the "High Quality Pre-K Grant Program" and Supplemental Pre-K funding are considered to be unreliable funding sources because they are "[outside the formulas](#)" and require the Legislature to make an appropriation each session to maintain funding.

- The best approach would be to fund Pre-K through the school funding formulas, because formula funding is predictable and harder to cut than line-item appropriations.
- There are two ways to increase Pre-K funding through the formulas:
 1. Provide full-day funding by increasing the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) count for Pre-K students from 0.50 to 1.0 for districts currently providing a full-day program. Nearly half of districts are already providing a full-day program with half-day funding. This additional funding would allow districts to make long-term investments in Pre-K quality.
 2. Create a Pre-K allotment, similar to the High School Allotment, which is triggered when districts meet certain quality measures.

For more background on Pre-K funding, read our 2016 policy brief, [Texas Pre-K: Looking ahead to the 2017 legislative session](#).

Working closely with lawmakers and advocates, we will promote policies that help kids start school ready to learn.

For more information or to request an interview, please contact Oliver Bernstein at bernstein@cphp.org or 512.823.2875.

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