

## 2025 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

FROM

# CAPITOL TO CLASSROOM:

MAKING AN IMPACT



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS ON PRE-KINDERGARTEN:

- ▶ Directly fund pre-K with full-day Average Daily Attendance (ADA) versus half-day ADA
- ▶ Expand the Early Education Allotment to include eligible pre-K students (currently kindergarten through third grade)
- ▶ Increase access to pre-K by raising the income eligibility cap
- ▶ Extend pre-K eligibility to the children of public school educators

### Where We Stand on Pre-Kindergarten

Pre-Kindergarten, also known as pre-K, forms the educational foundation of our youngest Texans. High-quality, full-day pre-K offers immediate and lasting educational benefits, such as improving third-grade reading and math proficiency, and increasing college, career, and military readiness. Texas lawmakers recognized these benefits in HB 3 (86th Session) by requiring school districts to offer full-day pre-K and establishing the Early Education Allotment to support early learning interventions. However, despite these changes, the state continues to fund pre-K only on a half-day basis while various kindergarten through third-grade interventions compete for limited Early Education Allotment dollars. Consequently, budget-limited school districts are left to cover the additional costs of high-quality, full-day pre-K.

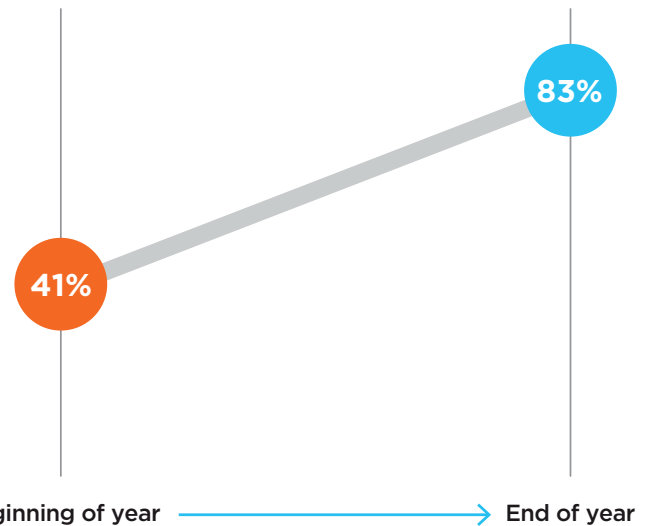
### The Benefits of High-Quality, Full-Day Pre-K Programs Are Clear and Salient

High-quality pre-K has a remarkable impact on children's reading skills. Texas assesses pre-K reading proficiency by examining students' motivation to read, phonological awareness, and understanding of the alphabet and text. At the start of the 2022-23 school year, only 41% of pre-K students in Texas demonstrated reading proficiency. By the end of the school year, that number jumped to 83%.<sup>1</sup> Through the development of emergent literacy skills, pre-K programs improve kindergarten readiness and long-term learning. A 2016 study of nearly 50,000 Texas students found that low-income children who attended high-quality full-day pre-K were 40% more likely to pass the third-grade STAAR reading test – a crucial benchmark for student success.<sup>2</sup>

The benefits of pre-K go beyond the early grades and impact more than just academics. Research shows children who attend pre-K

### High-quality Pre-K Creates Strong Readers

% of reading proficiency improvement among pre-K students in 2022-23 school year



Source: TPEIR Texas Public Prekindergarten Assessment Results for 4-Year-Olds - Statewide

are more likely to graduate from high school and pursue higher education opportunities, whether at two- or four-year colleges. Early childhood education also helps prevent severe disciplinary actions, like juvenile incarceration, creating a safer learning environment. Additionally, studies indicate children who attend pre-K are less likely to need special education services or be held back a grade in their later school years.<sup>3</sup>

*"It's far more efficient to invest in younger kids to prevent the achievement gap from ever growing than it is to spend money on remediation."*

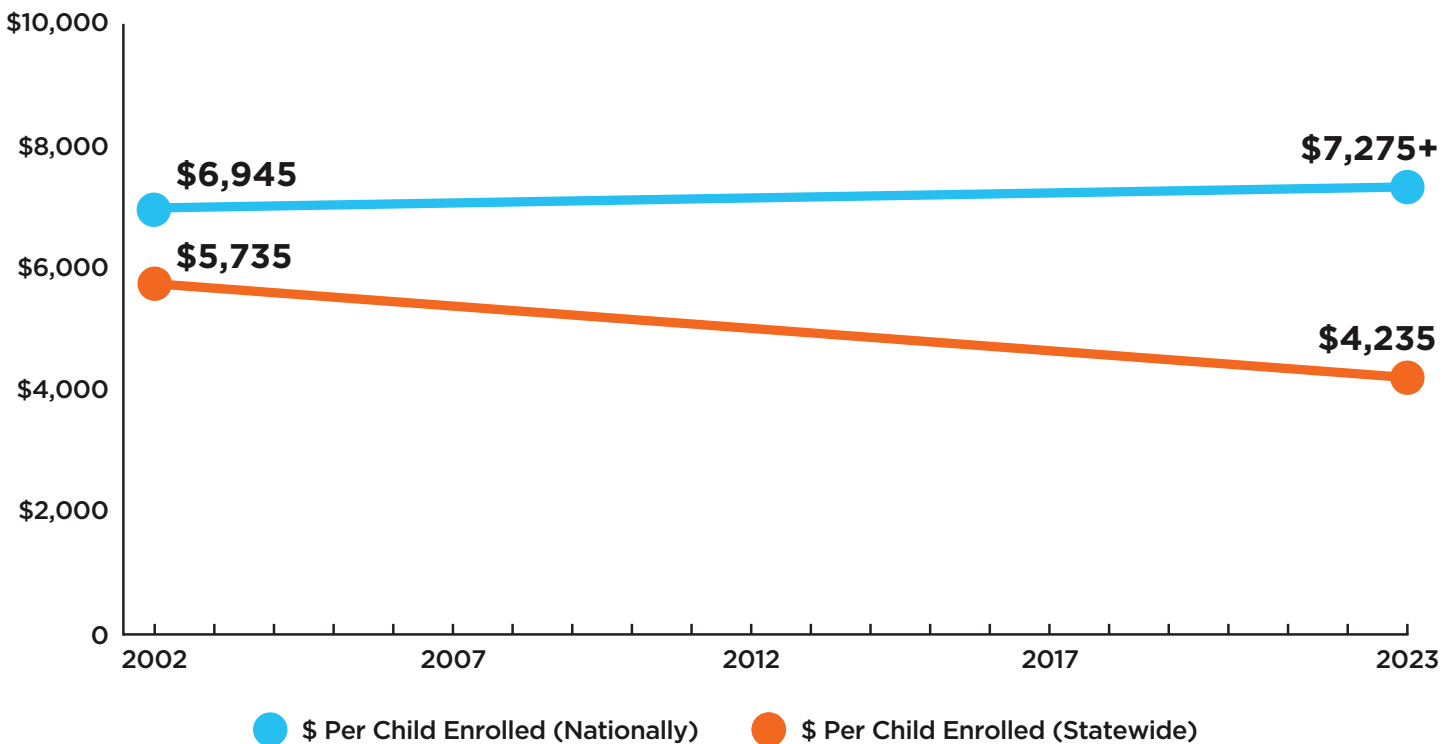
– Mike Morath, Texas Commissioner of Education

## Texas Trails Other States in Pre-Kindergarten

Texas lags behind other states in pre-K. Texas ranks 39th in the nation for pre-K spending, falling more than \$3,000 per student below the national average. This low ranking is almost entirely attributed to Texas' half-day funding model. Texas also struggles to compete with itself, as pre-K spending has decreased by \$1,500 per student, when adjusted for inflation, since 2002. Moving Texas' youngest learners into a full-day funding model will ensure Texas is investing competitively in pre-K and giving students the resources to make significant gains for years to come.

Funding fuels quality. Texas only meets four of 10 NIEER nationally recognized benchmarks for high-quality pre-K.<sup>4</sup> Investing in pre-K will improve the early learning environments of our youngest students and help expand access to high-quality programs. To compete with other states, Texas must invest more in reducing class sizes, lowering student-teacher ratios, offering professional development for educators, and providing curriculum support.

### Texas is Falling Behind in Pre-K Spending



Source: National Institute of Early Education Research State of Preschool 2023 Yearbook



Visit our website to learn more about Texas' pre-K issues.

### Sources

- <sup>1</sup> Texas Education Agency. (2024). Texas Public Education Information Resource: Texas Public Prekindergarten Assessment Results for 4-Year-Olds. Retrieved from <https://www.texaseducationinfo.org/Home/Topic/Prekindergarten%20Assessments?br=PK-12>
- <sup>2</sup> Sanborn, R. et al. (2016). Pre-K in Texas: A Critical Component for Academic Success. *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk*. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1188501>
- <sup>3</sup> Feigen, D. (2019). The Research is Clear: High-Quality Pre-K Pays Off. *Texans Care for Children*. Retrieved from <https://txchildren.org/the-research-is-clear-high-quality-pre-k-pays-off/>
- <sup>4</sup> Friedman-Krauss, A. et al. (2024). *The State of Preschool 2023*. National Institute for Early Education Research. Rutgers University. Retrieved from <https://nieer.org/yearbook/2023>