

PEW REPORT: TEXAS LAWMAKERS STAND OUT AS LEADERS FOR INVESTING IN HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K

Texas' Legislature does the Right Thing for Kids and the State's Bottom Line

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Texas lawmakers approved the fourth largest dollar increase in the nation this year for pre-kindergarten funding – \$12.5 million – according to a state-by-state analysis from Pre-K Now, a campaign of the Pew Center on the States. A bipartisan legislative effort to raise the program's quality standards was stopped only by a veto from the governor.

“Focusing resources on helping our kids enter school ready to learn and succeed is the way to build a better, more prosperous future for us all,” said Marci Young, project director of Pre-K Now. “The Texas legislature understands that high-quality pre-k is important to the vitality and economic growth of the state.”

The non-partisan annual report, “Votes Count: Legislative Action on Pre-K Fiscal Year 2010,” evaluates state budgets to determine which legislatures count voluntary, high-quality pre-k among their top education reform strategies. Using this information, Americans can determine whether their elected leaders are committing the resources necessary to develop the successful students and workers central to economic recovery.

Even as they confronted large budget gaps of up to 35 percent, twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia chose to increase or hold steady funding for pre-k programs in the coming fiscal year. “Votes Count” also sheds light on one particular funding strategy for early education – the school funding formula. States that include pre-k in their school funding formula allocate per-child funding for 4 year olds based on enrollment, just as they do for K-12 schools.

In Texas, the targeted Early Childhood and Pre-Kindergarten initiative is included in the state's school funding formula but suffers from inconsistent quality. State lawmakers moved to improve quality through bipartisan bills aimed to increase grant funding and institute important new quality standards. The governor kept the lawmakers \$25 million two-year increase for the grant program, but vetoed the quality-improvement provisions, which would have required higher standards for class size, child-adult ratios, and teacher qualifications. Research shows that these quality standards are necessary in early education programs to generate significant fiscal and educational benefits.

Highlights of this year's analysis include:

- Twenty-three states and the District of Columbia increased or are projected to increase pre-k investments by a total of more than \$187 million.
 - Thirteen legislatures increased investment in existing programs by nearly \$130 million: Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia.
 - Two states that previously had no state pre-k programs approved pilot initiatives: Alaska and Rhode Island.
 - Nine states and the District of Columbia anticipate increases through the school funding formula (Texas is included in this group as well but counted only once in the tally of 23 states with increased investments).
- Six states maintained investments at FY09 levels: Delaware, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri Nevada and Pennsylvania.

- Among the states suffering the 10 worst budget shortfalls (measured as a percentage of the budget), only Connecticut and New York approved a cut to early education programs.
- Ten states decreased funding: Connecticut, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina and Washington.
- Ohio's cut is estimated to deny pre-k to the largest number of children, at least 12,000.
- Arizona had not finalized its pre-k budget at press time.

Pre-k is one of the most well-researched public education strategies of the last forty years. The vast body of evidence shows that quality early learning helps children succeed in school and in life, and results in savings to states for every dollar invested. Children who complete quality pre-k programs are more academically and socially prepared when they enter school, less likely to be held back or need special education services, and more likely to complete high school and contribute to their community as adults. For more details about “Votes Count,” please visit www.pewcenteronthestates.org/preknow.

About the Pew Center on the States and Pre-K Now

Pre-K Now, a campaign of the Pew Center on the States, collaborates with advocates and policymakers to lead a movement toward high-quality, voluntary pre-kindergarten for all three and four year olds.

The Pew Center on the States (www.pewcenteronthestates.org), a division of The Pew Charitable Trusts, identifies and advocates effective policy approaches to critical issues facing the states. The Pew Charitable Trusts is driven by the power of knowledge to solve today’s most challenging problems. Pew applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public and stimulate civic life.

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