

PREKINDERGARTEN EDUCATION PROGRAMS AT THE TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY

AN ISSUE BRIEF FROM LEGISLATIVE BUDGET BOARD STAFF

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OBJECTIVE

To prepare children for success in kindergarten by providing half-day prekindergarten to eligible children and working with prekindergarten providers to improve school readiness through a high-quality research-based program.

KEY FACTS

- ◆ The Texas Education Agency funds half-day prekindergarten through the Foundation School Program to eligible three- and four-year-old children.
- ◆ The Texas School Ready! program works with prekindergarten programs in public school districts, open enrollment charter schools, Head Start Programs, and for-profit and nonprofit child care programs, to implement a high-quality research-based program.

BUDGETARY IMPACT

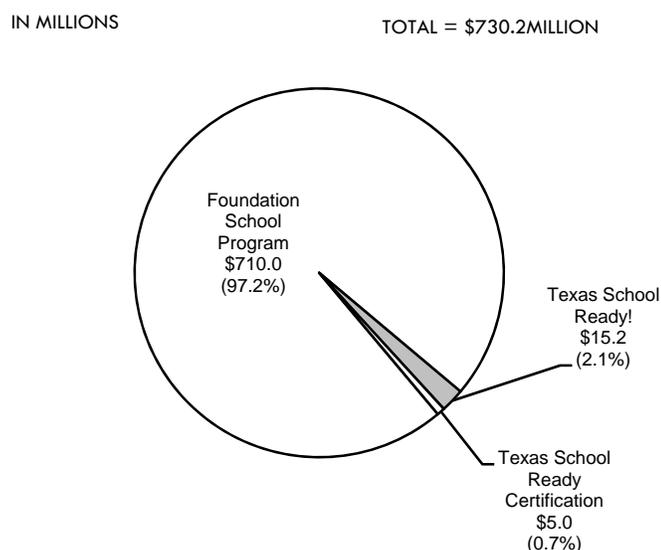
In fiscal year 2013, the Texas Education Agency is budgeted to expend \$730.2 million for prekindergarten education including \$710 million in the Foundation School Program, \$15.2 million for Texas School Ready!, and \$5 million for Texas School Ready Certification.

STATUTORY REFERENCES

Texas Education Code, Chapter 29, Subchapter E

In Texas, prekindergarten education is currently supported through the Foundation School Program and through the Texas School Ready! Programs. Prior to the 2012–13 biennium, the state also provided funding through the Prekindergarten Early Start Grants program (\$201.2 million in the 2010–11 biennium). Fig. 1 shows a funding overview of prekindergarten education programs at TEA during fiscal year 2012.

FIG. 1
PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS AT THE TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY
FISCAL YEAR 2012



SOURCE: Legislative Budget Board, Texas Education Agency.

FOUNDATION SCHOOL PROGRAM

School districts identifying more than 15 children who meet statutory eligibility requirements are required to offer at least a half-day prekindergarten program. To be eligible for prekindergarten funding, a student must be at least three years of age and:

- unable to speak and comprehend the English language,
- educationally disadvantaged (eligible to participate in the federal free or reduced-price lunch program),
- homeless,
- the child of an active duty member of the armed forces,
- the child of a member of the armed forces who was injured or killed while on serving on active duty, or
- has been in the conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services.

The state funds half-day prekindergarten for eligible students through the Foundation School Program (FSP). The FSP is the principal vehicle for distributing state aid to school districts for all students. FSP funding is influenced by many variables, including Average Daily Attendance (ADA). ADA, as a general rule, is measured by counting the days present for each child, and dividing the days present by the number of school days. For prekindergarten, since the FSP only funds half-day prekindergarten, attendance is measured on a half-day basis. Therefore, each prekindergarten student can generate one-half ADA at most in a school year.

Although only half the day is eligible for FSP funding, many school districts provide full-day prekindergarten programs funded from other sources. Additionally, state law allows school districts to serve children who do not meet eligibility criteria for FSP funding for prekindergarten on a tuition basis. In the 2011–12 school year, 37 school districts and charter schools offered tuition based prekindergarten. The Prekindergarten Early Start Grants program, which the state funded from the 2000–01 biennium to the 2010–11 biennium, provided funding for the second half of the day, in addition to the first half-day funded by the Foundation School Program.

In the 2011–12 school year, FSP funding for half-day prekindergarten was \$710 million, which is based on an ADA of 102,227. As noted above, ADA is at most 0.5 per student for prekindergarten, and the 2011–12 school year amount represents 215,922 enrolled students eligible for FSP prekindergarten funding.

TEXAS SCHOOL READY! AND TEXAS SCHOOL READY CERTIFICATION

Texas School Ready! is an early childhood program that works with prekindergarten programs in public school districts, open enrollment charter schools, Head Start Programs, and for-profit and nonprofit child care programs. The program aims to provide a developmentally appropriate and rigorous curriculum, continuous student progress monitoring, professional development for teachers, and provides assistance in implementing a School Readiness Integration Partnership. In a School Readiness Integration Partnership, a school district provides a certified teacher to a Head Start or child care classroom to provide a minimum of three hours of daily instruction to eligible students using state-adopted instructional materials. To be eligible to participate in this program, a prekindergarten program must serve at least 75 percent low income students. In the 2012–13 biennium, the Texas Education Agency was appropriated \$30.4 million for this program, including \$7.0 million in General Revenue-related funds and \$23.4 million in Interagency Contracts from the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). TWC received these funds as part of the federal Child Care and Development Funds from the United States Department of Labor. TEA has contracted with the Children’s Learning Institute of the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston to implement the Texas School Ready! program. The Children’s Learning Institute has operated the program since 2003.

Texas School Ready Certification is a voluntary program through which public and private early childhood education providers may apply to be certified as successfully preparing students to enter kindergarten. The Texas Education Agency contracts with the Region XVII Regional Education Center to implement the Texas School Ready Certification Program. In the 2011–12 school year, there were 3,152 Texas School Ready Certified classes in Texas.

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