



FEBRUARY 2017 LEGISLATIVE BRIEFING: PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM

WHAT IS IT?

The early years of a child's life are a crucial time for brain development, making exposure to early language skills, numeracy skills and social interactions vital for young children. Oklahoma's Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) program is committed to providing all 4-year-olds access to developmentally appropriate classrooms so they can attain the academic and personal skills necessary to be ready for school.

HOW DID IT COME ABOUT?

In 1980, the State Funded Grant Program funded the first Pre-Kindergarten classrooms in Oklahoma. Ten districts participated in the pilot program.

In 1993, SB 183 (70 O.S. §11-103.7) authorized school districts to offer 4-year-olds Pre-K child development programs. In 1998, HB 1657 (70 O.S. §1-114) provided that all Oklahoma children who turned 4 on or before September 1 would be entitled to attend half-day or full-day Pre-K, and funding was included as part of the State Aid Formula. Pre-K is not a mandatory grade, and attendance is voluntary.

In 2003, Georgetown published the first study on Pre-K in Oklahoma. The report showed significant gains in language development for children attending a Pre-K program. At that time, Oklahoma's Pre-K program was cited as the best in the nation by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER). More recently, the 2015 NIEER State of Preschool Report ranks Oklahoma 4th in the nation for access to Pre-K programs, with 75% of 4-year-olds attending statewide.

WHAT'S NEW?

In 2016, the Oklahoma Academic Standards (OAS) included Pre-K for the first time, supporting a seamless education from Pre-K through 12 (70 O.S. §11-103.7). The OAS provide learning standards and objectives for classroom learning.

The Standards for Accreditation for Oklahoma Schools (p. 258) outline the standards for an Early Childhood classroom, and are monitored by Regional Accreditation Officers (RAOs) from the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE).

OSDE is currently exploring the use of an Early Learning Inventory to help educators and communities understand and support the unique characteristics of their young children. In addition, the agency is developing a tool to engage families as they work with their preschoolers before and during the critical preschool learning years.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How many students are enrolled in Pre-K in Oklahoma?

According to the Oct. 1, 2016, FY16-17 report, 5,105 students attend half-day Pre-K, and 33,976 attend full-day Pre-K. In total, 99% of Oklahoma districts offer public school Pre-K.

Are districts required to provide Pre-K for all 4-year-olds?

Districts make decisions about their Pre-K programs based on available resources and the needs of their community (70 O.S. §1-114). Some districts are able to accommodate all 4-year-olds, while others use a first-come, first-served or lottery system to determine which 4-year-olds are able to enroll. If a district does not have space available, it can collaborate with child care providers, Head Start, faith-based organizations, technology centers or universities to house Pre-K classrooms.

How is Pre-K in Oklahoma funded?

Pre-K programs are primarily funded by state and local dollars. In FY92, Oklahoma began allocating money for Pre-K as a grade weight in the funding formula. In FY99, the grade weight was increased and divided into different amounts for half-day and full-day Pre-K. Oklahoma does not receive federal funding specifically for Pre-K; however, districts are able to, and do, use their Title I dollars to pay for the cost of Pre-K. Total Pre-K funding in FY16 was \$141,394,474.07.

Is there a class size limit for Pre-K programs?

Yes. The Oklahoma Administrative Code states, "The number of children in an early childhood education class shall not exceed 20. The child:adult ratio shall not exceed 10:1. Any enrollment that exceeds 10 shall require the employment of a teacher assistant" (OAC 210:35-5-41).

How do Pre-K programs provide for the needs of 4-year-old students with disabilities?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) guarantees that eligible preschoolers, ages 3 to 5, can have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and special education services through the public school system [34 CFR §300.8(b)].

How do Pre-K programs provide for 4-year-olds facing homelessness?

Each district has a homeless liaison to assist families dealing with homelessness.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

- NIEER 2015 Report: <http://nieer.org/state-preschool-yearbooks/the-state-of-preschool-2015>
- Research on Pre-K effect on academic and personal outcomes for young children: <http://digitalprairie.ok.gov/cdm/ref/collection/stgovpub/id/16170>; <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2011.01648.x/full>
- Oklahoma Academic Standards for Pre-K: <http://sde.ok.gov/sde/oklahoma-academic-standards>
- Accreditation Standards: <http://sde.ok.gov/sde/documents/2015-09-21/2014-15-accreditation-standards>
- Special education assessments: <http://sde.ok.gov/sde/early-childhood-special-education>
- Homeless liaison directory: <http://sde.ok.gov/sde/documents/2016-11-07/2016-2017-homeless-liaison-directory>
- More information on Pre-K in Oklahoma: <http://sde.ok.gov/sde/four-year-old-program>