



# Brief: Pre-Kindergarten Programs

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## Key Points:

- 1. The loving relationship of parents for their children cannot be delegated.**
- 2. Teachers ennoble their profession when they mirror the care of parents.**
- 3. We support expanded access to PK for vulnerable children in HB3 & SB4.**

**A Catholic perspective:** We support parents having the option of enrolling their children in Pre-Kindergarten (PK) and before- or after-school child care. The roots of this position can be found in the Catholic tradition's perspective on the proper role of parents, whose respect and affection for their children are expressed in the care and attention they devote to providing for their physical and spiritual needs. As St. John Paul II wrote, parents' natural care and attention is critical:

*Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it. For it devolves on parents to create a family atmosphere so animated with love and reverence for God and others that a well-rounded personal and social development will be fostered among the children. Hence, the family is the first school of those social virtues which every society needs.*

Education and care of children are the primary duty and right of parents.<sup>[1]</sup> Through their care, parents commit themselves to a good that is common to themselves and their family.

As applied to PK, it is true that the loving relationship of parents for their children cannot be delegated, but PK teachers ennoble the education profession when they mirror the care of a parent by teaching children kindness, good-

ness, service, and self-sacrifice. Such teachers support parents and help them fulfill their obligations. For these reasons, we support the state's, school districts' and private schools' efforts to offer parents the option of enrolling children in high-quality PK.<sup>[2]</sup>

**Texas law and policy:** In the 2017-18 school year, 7,000 Texas children were enrolled in PK programs in Catholic schools, while 232,177 were enrolled in public school PK.<sup>[3]</sup> School districts are required to offer a PK program if they identify more than 14 eligible children, and they must also notify eligible families of the availability of their programs in both English and Spanish. To be eligible, a child must be at least four years old by September 1 of the current school year, and be at least *one* of the following:

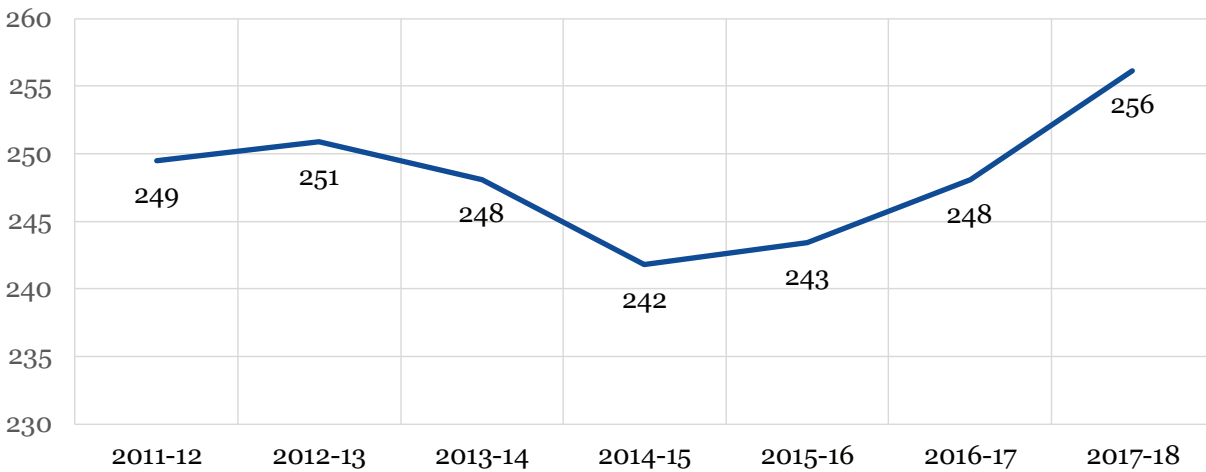
- be an English Language Learner (ELL),
- educationally disadvantaged,
- homeless,
- a child of active, injured, or killed military member,
- in the conservatorship of CPS, or
- a child of a Star of Texas Award recipient.<sup>[4]</sup>

Figure 1 (next page) illustrates public PK and early education enrollment since 2011.<sup>[5]</sup>

However, PK is not always accessible, especial-

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Figure 1: Texas students enrolled in public PK and early childhood education, in thousands (1990-2018)



Texas Education Agency, [PEIMS Standard Reports: Student Enrollment Reports](#). (1990-2018)

ly for low-income and non-English speaking students, which contributes to poor academic outcomes.<sup>[6]</sup> In 2017, the Texas legislature recognized the need to improve public school funding and established the Texas School Finance Commission (TSFC) to recommend improvements and we support their proposals.

*First*, TSFC recommended public schools receive funding for each student in grades K-3 who is low-income or ELL.

*Second*, TSFC recommended outcomes-based funding for grades PK–3. For example, public schools may receive an additional \$3,400 for every low-income student achieving 3<sup>rd</sup> grade

reading proficiency and \$1,450 for every non-low-income student achieving proficiency. The additional would also be modified to provide increased support for campuses with high concentrations of poverty.

*Third*, TSFC recommended allowing public school teachers’ three- and four-year-old children to attend free full-day PK.<sup>[7]</sup>

**Call to action:** To support improved access to PK in HB 3 and SB 4, the school finance reform bills, visit [txcatholic.org/education](http://txcatholic.org/education) to find and contact your lawmaker. Please also pray for Texas and for our legislators!

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## Endnotes

1. Catechism #2228, 2221-2.; John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio [On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World]* November 22, 1981. § 36.
2. Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia [On Love in the Family]*, March 19, 2016. § 83-84.
3. Texas Education Agency, *Enrollment in Texas Public Schools 2017-18*. 15. Another 24,000 children are enrolled in early childhood education programs in a public school.
4. Texas Edu. Code § [29.153](#). cf. 85 RS [HB 357](#); 80 RS [SB 758](#); 79 3CS [HB 1](#).
5. Texas Education Agency, *PEIMS Standard Reports: Student Enrollment Reports*. (1990-2018)
6. Texas Commission on Public School Finance, *Funding for Impact: Equitable Funding for Students Who Need It the Most*, December 31, 2018. 64-65, 11.
7. *Ibid.* 132-3.

