



Input on Early Literacy and Numeracy Outcomes

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The **Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE)** offers the following input on evaluating opportunities to improve students' early literacy and numeracy outcomes in prekindergarten through third grade.

Research consistently shows that high-quality pre-k programs for 3- and 4-year-olds are crucial in helping children develop foundational skills in early literacy, pre-math, and socialization, all of which are essential for long-term academic success. These programs not only prepare children for kindergarten but also reduce the likelihood of grade retention and the need for special education services as they progress through school.

Nationwide, improvements in literacy and numeracy are the most commonly observed benefits of pre-k programs.

In Texas, data reveals that students who attend pre-k are significantly more likely to be kindergarten-ready, particularly in early literacy skills. Those students who will eventually benefit from special education services are also more likely to be identified and diagnosed earlier if they have attended pre-k within a public school district and are thus able to begin receiving special education services and/or extra help sooner. This is imperative because students are expected to acquire enough reading ability by third grade for the STAAR test.

Identifying students with special education needs and getting them services as early as possible via Child Find is key to those students successfully meeting early literacy and numeracy goals.

Sadly, before HB 1886 was passed in 2017, many students in Texas were not identified with dyslexia or other co-occurring issues until they failed the STAAR test in third grade, if they ever were identified. **It's important to note that 20% of the population (one in five people) has dyslexia.** Students with dyslexia, including dyscalculia, may have specific difficulties with certain areas of math that require reading such as fractions and decimals, long division and multiplication, multiplication tables, money, time and math problems that require reading of course but not with number skills. Many students with dyslexia also have issues with processing speed and executive function. Thanks to HB 1886, all kindergarteners and first graders must be screened for dyslexia, but we still have work to do. HB 3928, passed last session, also required the State Board of Education to revise its Dyslexia Handbook and school districts to improve the way they support and educate their students with dyslexia and related disorders. These efforts will help, but their impact will not be immediate, and they represent a largely unfunded mandate to school districts. Dyscalculia, a learning disorder that

The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) has been a strong voice for Texas educators since 1980 and represents the state's largest community of PK-12 educators. With its strong collaborative philosophy, ATPE speaks for classroom teachers, administrators, future, retired and para-educators and works to create better opportunities for the more than 5 million public schoolchildren in Texas.

affects a person's ability to understand number-based information and math, is another concern. More effort should be made to help students with dyscalculia by hiring more math interventionists.

Legislators should work to expand access so more students may enroll in high-quality pre-k programs that offer continuity for children in trusted care environments and smoother transitions to kindergarten.

Barriers to expanding pre-k include insufficient financial support, a lack of policies and funding that encourage school districts to expand programs, and/or collaboration between school districts and childcare providers. Additional funding is needed to help districts recruit and retain effective teachers, reduce class sizes, expand partnerships with childcare providers, and provide transportation for students.

Texas has made considerable progress in enhancing pre-k programs and identifying students with special education needs, including dyslexia, earlier. Schools are employing certified teachers, engaging families, and using research-based tools to monitor student progress. Although there is a cap on class sizes (limiting them to 22 students) to ensure teachers can effectively address individual student needs and manage classroom dynamics, waivers are often granted, and districts use District of Innovation status when necessary to eliminate class-size requirements. Ideally, if the state added more funding to the Basic Allotment, districts would be able to hire more highly qualified, certified teachers to reduce pre-k and early grade class sizes. The majority of school district maintenance and operations budgets (usually around 80%-85%) goes toward paying salaries. The state could also fund reading and math interventionists directly if adding money to the Basic Allotment is not preferred.

The expansion of high-quality pre-k and the addition of more certified educators/intervention teachers and diagnosticians would allow Texas educators to identify and assist struggling students sooner. By addressing these areas, Texas can continue to build on its progress in early childhood education and ensure that more children succeed.

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