



PreK Today
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Chairman Buckley and honorable members of the House Public Education Committee,

My name is Amity Halstead. I am the Director of PreK Today, here to testify on House Bill 2 and the provisions related to public-private prekindergarten partnerships.

PreK Today is an innovative program, housed within the non-profit organization Child Care Associates in Tarrant County, that supports high-quality child care programs to engage in Pre-K Partnerships with public schools. Since 2021, we have partnered with ResponsiveEd—a statewide charter operator—to deliver high-quality prekindergarten in what is today 59 classrooms across 35 independently operated child care programs in our community.

PreK Today plays a critical intermediary role supporting both child care programs and LEAs to enter into and operate viable Pre-K Partnerships. PreK Today provides essential backbone support, taking much of the administrative and implementation burden of partnerships off of both the LEA and the child care partners. This includes supporting the co-enrollment of eligible children across programs, blending and braiding funding, and most importantly supporting the child care programs and their teachers to deliver quality early learning services. **Last year, enrollment through Pre-K Today made up an estimated ~10% of the total statewide Pre-K Partnership enrollment.**¹

First established in 2019's House Bill 3, Pre-K Partnerships play a critical role in increasing pre-k access for working families, while also stabilizing the child care business model. However, several design flaws in the systems and standards outlined in House Bill 3 have resulted in limited uptake of Pre-K Partnerships statewide. Last school year, it was estimated that **less than 2% of our state's pre-k enrollment was accessed within a Pre-K Partnership setting.**² This is in comparison to other states like North Carolina, West Virginia or Florida where approximately 50% of their public pre-k seats are within community-based settings.³

Having worked personally with several school districts and child care programs interested in Pre-K Partnerships, I have seen many would-be partnerships fall through due to various challenges such as differing regulatory standards for pre-k and child care operators, staffing or curriculum discrepancies, shifting district priorities, and, most commonly, the inability to make the funding model work.

We believe that House Bill 2 is a positive step in addressing several of these challenges, and are therefore highly supportive of the following provisions outlined in the bill.

- **Section 1.13** – Applying additional funding tied to the Basic Allotment for children co-enrolled in certain Pre-K Partnerships. Assuming an equitable portion is passed through to the child care

¹ Texas Education Agency, Public Information Request regarding Prekindergarten Enrollment by Setting, March 2024

² Texas Education Agency, Public Information Request regarding Prekindergarten Enrollment by Setting, March 2024

³ North Carolina: <https://ncchildcare.ncdhhs.gov/Home/Data/Dashboards/NC-Pre-K>.

West Virginia: https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/3989/download?inline&file=State_Preschool_Mixed_Delivery_System_REPORT.pdf

Florida: <https://nieer.org/yearbook/2023/state-profiles/florida>

provider, this could ensure that providers have the resources needed to cover the statutorily required hours for prekindergarten services.

- **Section 1.07** – Creating stronger alignment between eligibility for Child Care Scholarships and prekindergarten services, increasing funding efficiencies when blending CCS and Pre-K funding within a Pre-K Partnership classroom.
- **Section 1.07** - Removing a common bureaucratic hurdle relating to program building codes, which often arbitrarily disqualify child care programs from providing Pre-K Partnerships if they did not share the same building code classification as a public school building.

While these are critical steps in the right direction, **we are concerned that the bill does not address the most significant barrier to PreK Partnerships—lack of district participation.** Without a willing district partner, child care programs have no pathway to engaging in Pre-K Partnerships.

When Pre-K Partnerships were first established back in 2019, we sent a certified letter to every public school superintendent in Tarrant County regarding participation in Pre-K Partnerships with local child care centers. Not a single district responded except for ResponsiveEd. As districts continue to grapple with many competing priorities, Pre-K Partnerships are often seen as a complicated undertaking that districts just aren't willing to take on.

Therefore, we encourage the committee to consider complimentary policies that directly address the remaining barriers to Pre-K Partnership expansion.

1. **Support the codification of regional backbone entities to remove the administrative burdens and ease implementation challenges for districts and providers alike.** We encourage the committee to model regional backbone entities off of successful models such as PreK Today in Tarrant County, as well as similar models in Austin and Houston—all which have demonstrated the ability to expand and operate partnerships at scale in their community.
2. **Include a policy lever giving eligible child care programs a direct pathway to partnerships, without being solely reliant on their home district's will to engage.** This could include granting regional backbone entities the autonomy to facilitate partnerships between child care programs and any willing districts within their region.
3. **Create assurances that child care programs actually receive the education funding necessary to deliver the required prekindergarten services.** I encourage you to require a minimum percentage of funding, generated by the children co-enrolled in the Pre-K Partnership classroom, that must be passed through from the districts to the child care programs.
4. **Set a statewide target for Prekindergarten Partnership enrollment** that holds policymakers, communities, and public schools accountable for ensuring equitable access to Pre-K Partnerships.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Chairman Buckley for his commitment to Pre-K Partnerships, as demonstrated by the current provisions in House Bill 2. We hope to continue working with you to ensure that the full intent of the legislation is met, and that all children can access prekindergarten in a setting that works best for them.

Best regards,
Amity Halstead
Director, PreK Today powered by Child Care Associates