

WINTER 2016

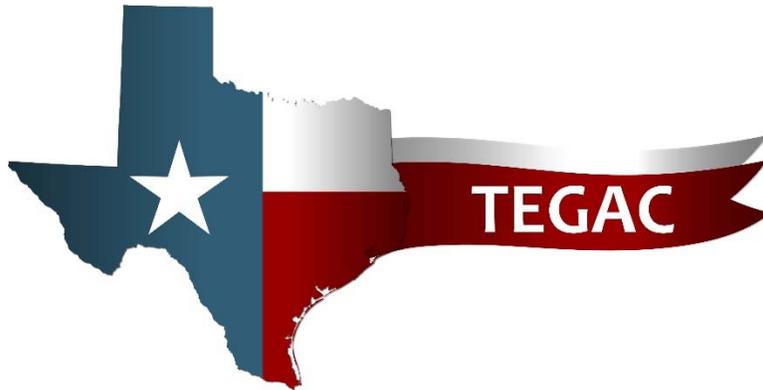
ANALYSIS OF MCLENNAN  
COUNTY PARTICIPATION IN  
THE TEXAS HIGH QUALITY  
PRE-KINDERGARTEN  
PROGRAM (HB4)



INSPIRING CHANGE. ACHIEVING RESULTS.

*The research included in this report was produced with the support of the Texas Education Grantmakers Advocacy Consortium. The Consortium is comprised of foundations and philanthropists from across Texas interested in ensuring that parents, educators, policymakers, media, and the general public have objective data about public education. The research contained in this report is objective and non-partisan.*

*Created in 2011, the Consortium is currently comprised of 37 foundations from throughout Texas and focuses its work on leveraging private resources to produce credible and necessary data on the most important educational challenges facing Texas. For more information on the Texas Education Grantmakers Advocacy Consortium, please visit [www.tegac.org](http://www.tegac.org).*



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2015, the 84<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature established House Bill 4 (HB4), a high-quality pre-kindergarten grant program. Under this grant program, districts and open enrollment charter schools that voluntarily met new standards would be eligible to receive additional funding. To ensure quality, applicants are required to meet enhanced standards in curriculum, teacher qualifications, academic performance, and family engagement. Services provided must be aimed at improving the quality of existing programs and should not be used to replace existing funding.

In McLennan County, 10 school districts and one charter school successfully applied for the HB4 grant. Successful grantees included Bosqueville ISD, Connally ISD, Hallsburg ISD, La Vega ISD, Lorena ISD, Moody ISD, Robinson ISD, Waco Charter School, Waco ISD, and West ISD. As of 2015, these school districts cumulatively served about 1,500 pre-kindergarten students, or 77% of the pre-kindergarten students in McLennan County. In total, the districts were awarded \$974,951 to be divided over the two years of the grant.

The following school districts and charters fall entirely or partially within McLennan County:

	Applied & Received Funding	Did Not Apply
Axtell ISD		✓
Bosqueville ISD	✓	
Bruceville-Eddy ISD		✓
China Spring ISD		✓
Connally ISD	✓	
Crawford ISD		✓
Gholson ISD		✓
Hallsburg ISD	✓	
Harmony Science Academy		✓
La Vega ISD	✓	
Lorena ISD	✓	
Mart ISD		✓
McGregor ISD		✓
Midway ISD		✓
Moody ISD	✓	
Rapoport Academy Public School		✓
Riesel ISD		✓
Robinson ISD	✓	
Waco Charter School	✓	
Waco ISD	✓	
West ISD	✓	



The goal of this report is to assist McLennan County’s community organizations, community members, and policymakers in understanding the districts’ motivations for applying or not applying for the HB4 grant, as well as how HB4 funding will be used locally.

### Methodology

Using a mixed-methods approach, this report was developed to understand the school districts’ motivations for applying/not applying, the application process, and the intended use of HB4 funds in McLennan County. The study consisted of an online survey of local school districts, interviews with early childhood specialists and those working with pre-kindergarten students, and a comparison of applicants.

### Motivations to Apply for Funding

A majority of the districts that applied for HB4 funding did so with the goal of obtaining additional training opportunities for its pre-kindergarten teachers and staff. Most of the school districts that responded to the survey felt they met several of the standards for high-quality pre-kindergarten as set forth by HB4. The districts saw the opportunity to add supplemental service through HB4 and wanted to send a clear message to state policymakers that the districts value the additional funding offered by HB4 and that continued fiscal support for quality pre-kindergarten improvement is necessary.

The survey responses and interviews collected in this report clearly demonstrated the importance of early childhood education to local educators. When asked, all districts stated that pre-kindergarten is of moderate or high importance. All of the responding school districts reported that early childhood education was an important component of the future of children in McLennan County. All districts were in support of early childhood education, and some expressed concern about the lack of importance that Texas policymakers seem to place on early childhood education.

### Plans for House Bill 4 Funding

All of the school districts that participated in the study cited the ability to provide increased support for pre-kindergarten teachers and aides as an important opportunity offered by the grant. The funding will provide additional support through training opportunities (behavior management and addressing the needs of economically-disadvantaged students) and enhanced curriculum. It should also be noted that several districts felt the HB4 funding will set a higher standard for quality education in the area.

Additionally, the school districts have already begun to use the funding from HB4 to increase staffing and support family engagement. Funding will provide for additional communication



with the families and more opportunities for parent-teacher interaction, and it will allow school districts to hire family engagement coaches to engage parents.

### Overall Concerns

The largest concern expressed by district representatives about the grant was uncertainty regarding the sustainability of the program pieces to be funded. While school districts appreciated the commitment to improving the quality of pre-kindergarten programs, several components of the grant will require subsequent funding once the grant concludes. There was concern about how to continue funding professional development, additional certifications, and assessment tools.

Additionally, area districts cited confusion with the HB4 application process and about the grant's intended use, which prevented a few districts from applying. Some of the districts were unclear about what the grant would and would not cover. Those who participated in this study felt this confusion could have prevented other districts from applying or making the most of the grant funding. Likewise, the detailed reporting requirements further complicated the decision to apply.



# PRE-KINDERGARTEN IN MCLENNAN COUNTY

There are 21 school districts and charter schools in McLennan County, which serve just fewer than 2,000 pre-kindergarten students. The entities differ in total enrollment, pre-kindergarten enrollment and the percentage of economically-disadvantaged students. All but one successful HB4 grantee provides full-day pre-kindergarten.

## Community Landscape

McLennan County has a population of 239,717 residents, 25% of whom are under 18 years old.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, there are more than 17,000 children under the age of five in the county. Eighty-five percent of the adult population holds at least a high school diploma, and 23% have a bachelor's degree or higher. The median household income is \$46,602, and about 20% of the population lives below the poverty level. Almost 30% of children under the age of 18 are below the poverty level. Poverty is higher within the City of Waco, the seat of McLennan County, where almost 27% of all adult residents and 33% of children live below the federal poverty line.

## Student Characteristics by District

	Economically Disadvantaged <sup>2</sup>	English Language Learners	At-Risk Youth <sup>3</sup>	Percent Non-White
Axtell ISD	55.2%	1.1%	40.3%	22.2%
Bosqueville ISD	35.5%	2.3%	19.4%	30.5%
Bruceville-Eddy ISD	58.2%	3.5%	36.0%	32.9%
China Spring ISD	24.5%	1.3%	23.7%	23.8%
Connally ISD	77.0%	8.0%	62.4%	69.3%
Crawford ISD	23.7%	0.9%	22.5%	10.0%
Gholson ISD	77.3%	3.2%	18.6%	30.0%
Hallsburg ISD	55.7%	3.4%	38.6%	18.2%
Harmony Science Academy	58.3%	21.5%	41.4%	78.7%
La Vega ISD	86.4%	22.1%	59.3%	81.9%
Lorena ISD	26.3%	2.1%	30.2%	18.3%
Mart ISD	76.5%	3.9%	59.6%	53.1%
McGregor ISD	71.7%	12.0%	50.0%	59.2%
Midway ISD	32.9%	4.0%	34.1%	42.5%
Moody ISD	67.2%	7.4%	52.9%	40.5%
Rapoport Academy Public School	66.8%	4.0%	55.2%	74.8%
Riesel ISD	43.6%	1.0%	17.1%	24.9%
Robinson ISD	31.5%	1.3%	43.1%	32.3%
Waco Charter School	100.0%	24.0%	35.3%	98.6%
Waco ISD	87.5%	18.8%	76.3%	90.9%
West ISD	40.8%	4.9%	32.5%	23.2%

Source: Texas Education Agency, 2015-2016 District Profiles



## Enrollment

### Pre-Kindergarten Characteristics by District

	Total Enrollment PK-12	PK Enrollment	Economically Disadvantaged in PK
Axtell ISD	790	41	66%
Bosqueville ISD	660	49	47%
Bruceville-Eddy ISD	770	0	-
China Spring ISD	2,598	39	59%
Connally ISD	2,328	112	95%
Crawford ISD	561	0	-
Gholson ISD	247	12	92%
Hallsburg ISD	176	22	77%
Harmony Science Academy	9,478	0	-
La Vega ISD	3,025	170	98%
Lorena ISD	1,701	51	61%
Mart ISD	507	27	81%
McGregor ISD	1,425	98	68%
Midway ISD	7,793	148	65%
Moody ISD	677	25	80%
Rapoport Academy Public School	805	63	87%
Riesel ISD	598	16	88%
Robinson ISD	2,289	23	78%
Waco Charter School	221	20	100%
Waco ISD	14,929	962	96%
West ISD	1,311	55	72%
	52,889	1,933	

Source: Texas Education Agency, 2015-2016 District Profiles; Texas Public Pre-kindergarten Program Report by District

## Community Support

In 2006, former Waco Mayor Virginia DuPuy convened a group of community leaders who represented public education, higher education, business, and philanthropy to develop a vision for improving educational outcomes in McLennan County. Under Mayor DuPuy's guidance, these leaders established the Greater Waco Community Education Alliance, which regularly convened the community to collaborate in improving the educational outcomes of McLennan County children. The first of eight "assumptions" that guided the Education Alliance was the importance of children arriving at school ready to learn, having developed learning readiness and social skills between the ages of 0-4. In support of the Education Alliance, Waco Foundation commissioned a study in 2009 that resulted in the development of an Early Childhood Quality of Life Index. In 2011, the Foundation's Board of Trustees committed to leading an early childhood initiative in Waco/McLennan County.

In 2014, former Mayor DuPuy and then Waco Mayor Malcolm Duncan, Jr. convened a small group of community leaders to discuss how the work of the Education Alliance could be effectively joined with similar collaborative work on issues related to health and poverty. The result was the Prosper Waco collective impact initiative, which builds on years of community



work. In conjunction with overall health and poverty goals, the overall education goal specifically focuses on two areas, one of which is to increase the number of children entering school ready to learn by 50%, based on data from the Children’s Learning Institute Engage readiness assessment. Through the Prosper Waco initiative, the McLennan County community continues a decade of focused work on improving outcomes in early childhood education.



# DISTRICT PROFILES

Across Texas, 603 school districts applied for HB4 funding. Four applications were deemed ineligible based on the established criteria.<sup>4</sup> In total, 578 school districts and charter schools received funding after the Texas Education Agency review. Twenty-one school districts or charter schools declined HB4 funding after it was awarded by TEA. None of those entities were located within McLennan County. Every district or charter school within McLennan County that applied for funding received and accepted it.

In conducting and preparing this study, it was important to ensure that staff members who responded to the survey, as well as those who participated in the interviews, felt free to express their honest opinions about HB4. While the study administrators received identifying information, no educator or school district is identified by name in the subsequent profiles.

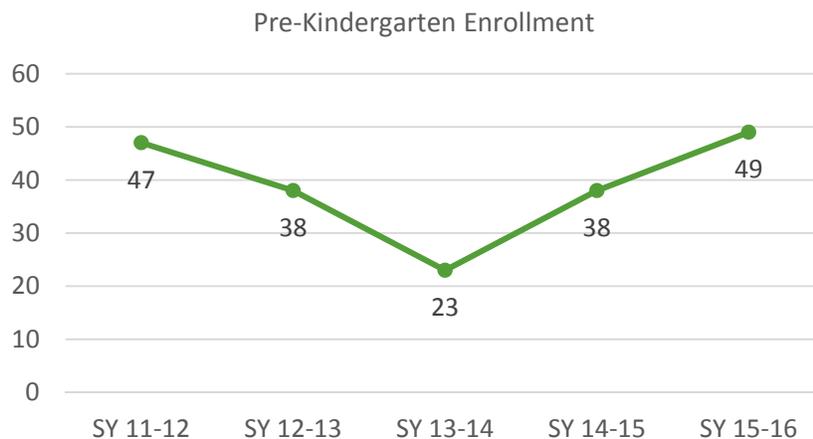
Pre-Kindergarten Program Expenditures, Per Student  
2014-2015, All Funds



## RECEIVED HOUSE BILL 4 FUNDING

### HB4 Grantee #1

As of the fall of 2015, this school district served more than 600 students, and experienced recent growth in its pre-kindergarten programs. Total pre-kindergarten enrollment has more than doubled since the 2013-2014 school year. The increase was found in both pre-kindergarten 3 and 4 classrooms. The pre-kindergarten 3 comprised about 40% of enrollment. About 60% of students are attending full-day instruction.<sup>5</sup>



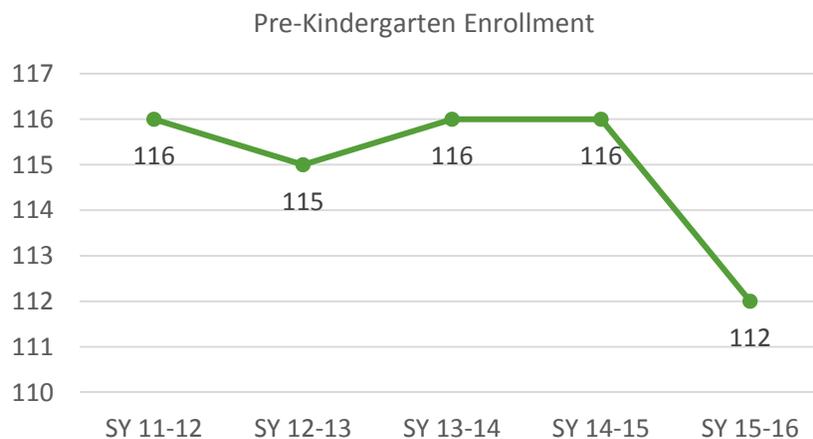
The representative from this school district expressed the belief that the district already met the standards for high-quality pre-kindergarten, as set forth by the HB4 grant. The district had previously designed a plan to improve its pre-kindergarten program and believed the HB4 funding would help accomplish its objectives. The district currently provides professional development to its staff and teachers through partnerships with organizations such as Education Service Center Region 12. Teachers have requested additional trainings, mostly around the topic of discipline.

A majority of the funding was used to purchase a new curriculum, Frog Street Press, for use in pre-kindergarten. The remainder of the funding will be spent on additional trainings for all pre-kindergarten staff and parents. The trainings, planned for the spring of 2017, will be held in the evenings to allow for parent participation.



## HB4 Grantee #2

As of the fall of 2015, this district served over 2,300 children from pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The pre-kindergarten cohort represented about 5% of the student population. Total pre-kindergarten enrollment was down by about 3.5% from the 2014-2015 school year. This school district currently provides full-day pre-kindergarten (no half-day option is available) for four-year-olds. While the district does not currently offer a pre-kindergarten 3 program, it considers the unmet need for pre-kindergarten 3 education in the community as high. Despite the slight decrease in enrollment, spending per student increased by 11% from the previous year.



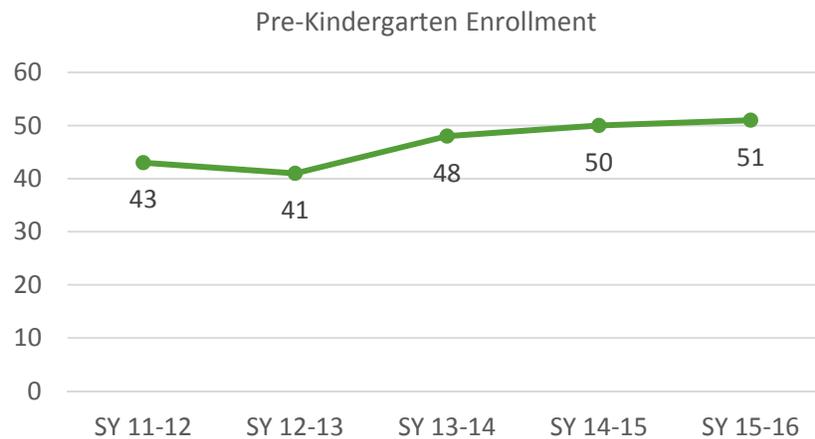
This school district placed a high value on pre-kindergarten education and expressed a desire to improve the professional development available to its educators. This is reflected in the district's allocation of the spending of the funds from HB4. The district developed plans to provide additional training and coaching for its teachers and staff through the Education Service Center Region 12, additional classroom materials (such as books, science kits, and puzzles) for math, science, and reading, and expanded educational field trips. The district also adopted the Ready Rosie Program and WATCH DOGS Program to assist with family engagement within its district.

When asked if there were any additional thoughts to share about the HB4 grant, the district representative noted that additional funding was still needed. While the district currently serves a large percentage of its four-year-old population, not every student qualifies, so additional funding "is needed to allow all students to attend pre-kindergarten." The representative elaborated about the importance of pre-kindergarten enrollment and early education, stating pre-kindergarten "is key to public education across the state."



### HB4 Grantee #3

As of the fall of 2015, this district served more than 50 four-year-olds, which constituted 3% of its total student population. The district currently offers full-day pre-kindergarten education to three classrooms of four-year-olds. While the total enrollment has remained consistent for several years, the district recently experienced a 52% increase in per student expenditures from the previous year. About 60% of the enrolled pre-kindergarten students were eligible for ADA funding, while the other 40% paid tuition to attend.



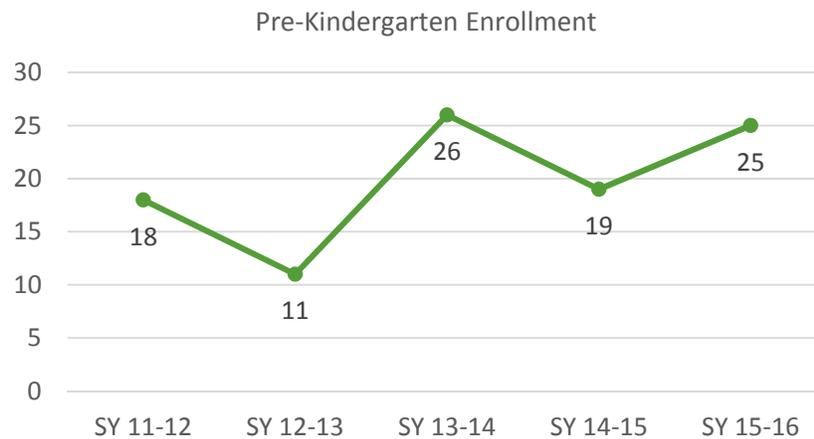
This district placed a high value on pre-kindergarten education and professional development. Prior to HB4 funding, the district felt it already met the state’s standards for high-quality pre-kindergarten education in the areas of curriculum, teacher training and quality, academic performance, and family engagement. It deemed pre-kindergarten education as vitally important to a student’s educational experience. The district planned to use HB4 funding to enhance and pay for its already existing programs.

The district planned to use the funds from the HB4 grant to provide more guidance and tools for educators to help students with challenging behaviors succeed, as well as general classroom management. The district planned to continue professional development programs to meet growing needs. The district also noted that its lack of available pre-kindergarten for three-years-olds was an issue of high importance.



### HB4 Grantee #4

As of the fall of 2015, this rural school district served just under 700 students from pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, and pre-kindergarten students totaled about 4% of the student population. About 80% of the pre-kindergarten students were economically disadvantaged and about 30% had limited proficiency in English. The district's total enrollment for pre-kindergarten and the per-student spending both recently increased about 30%. The district served its 25 pre-kindergarten students in two full-day classrooms.



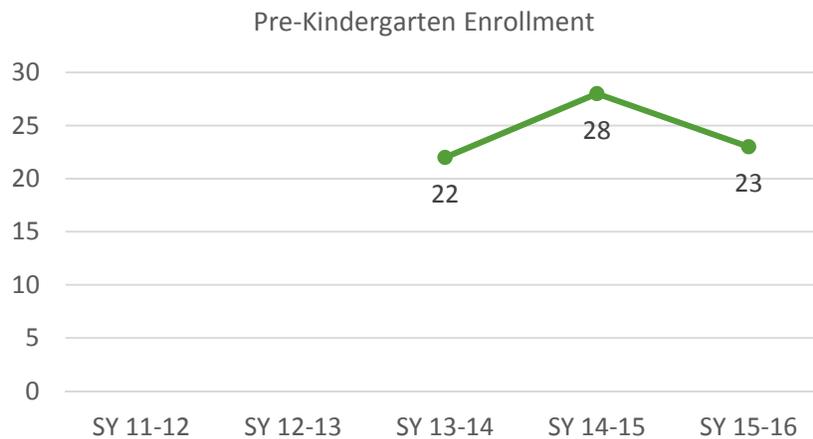
This school district had previously established the practice of hiring certified teachers for its pre-kindergarten classrooms prior to HB4 funding. The district also acknowledged the importance of continued professional development targeted toward early childhood education. The district requested additional guidance on family engagement, given the rural nature of its community, because it has, “great, hard-working parents in rural schools, but they are normally both having to work, etc.”

The district's main concern was that HB4 does not go far enough, emphasizing a desire for the legislature to “just fund pre-kindergarten in the formula.” The district representative stated that the district “spends lots of money closing the gaps in the elementary and middle school,” and continued, that the district “is basically a triage system at that point.” The district representative concluded by emphasizing pre-kindergarten will be “more important than ever with the state's current demographic and socio-economic changes.” The representative also noted the importance of pre-kindergarten offerings in the rural communities because it “allows students the ability to adjust socially and have exposure to things they would not get at a babysitter or small-time child care facility.”



HB4 Grantee #5

As of the fall of 2015, this district served more than 2,000 students from pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The pre-kindergarten program only offered half-day education to its students. The district’s pre-kindergarten program served four-year-olds, who comprised about 1% of the total student population. Its pre-kindergarten total enrollment decreased about 18% from the previous school year, while its funding per student (\$2,605) remained the same as previous years.

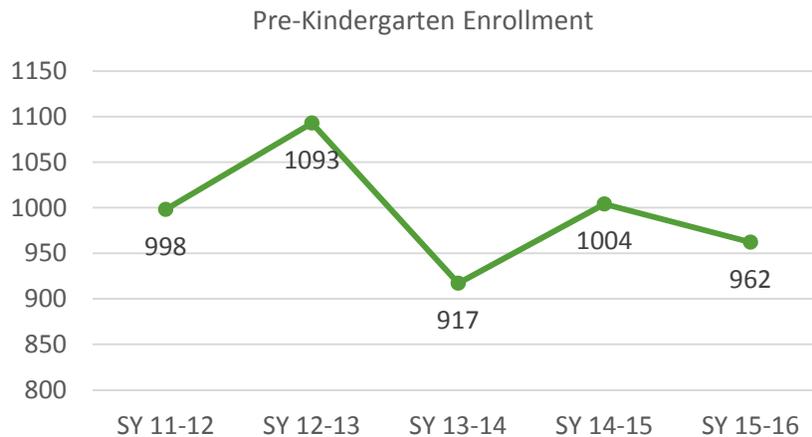


This school district has not experienced a large demand to increase its pre-kindergarten capacity. The district currently relies on partnerships with organizations such as Education Service Center Region 12 for professional development. Staff have been trained on the Children’s Learning Institute Engage platform, but were not previously using the system. Plans to provide professional development and a desire to secure additional funding for classroom technology and curriculum were driving factors in the decision to apply for funding.



### HB4 Grantee #6

As of the fall of 2015, this school district served about 15,000 students each year from pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Pre-kindergarten students accounted for about 6% of the total student population. The district provided full-day instruction on 13 campuses, while two other campuses offered both full and half-day instruction. The district served three-year-olds in 10 multi-age Montessori classrooms. This district experienced a slight decrease of about 4% in total pre-kindergarten enrollment. Pre-kindergarten expenditures per student also decreased by 6% from the previous year.



The district had many of the components of HB4 already in place when it applied for the grant. It had participated in previous grants, but the funding for professional development was not sustainable, so the district appreciated the opportunity for continued staff training. The district planned to use the money to improve overall quality of early childhood education and to add pieces that would enhance the pre-kindergarten program. Parent engagement, pre-kindergarten coaches, and Children’s Learning Institute online courses for teachers were three goals identified to improve the program. Teachers specifically requested additional training related to discipline (the district uses the Conscious Discipline model) and access to updated pre-kindergarten guidelines.

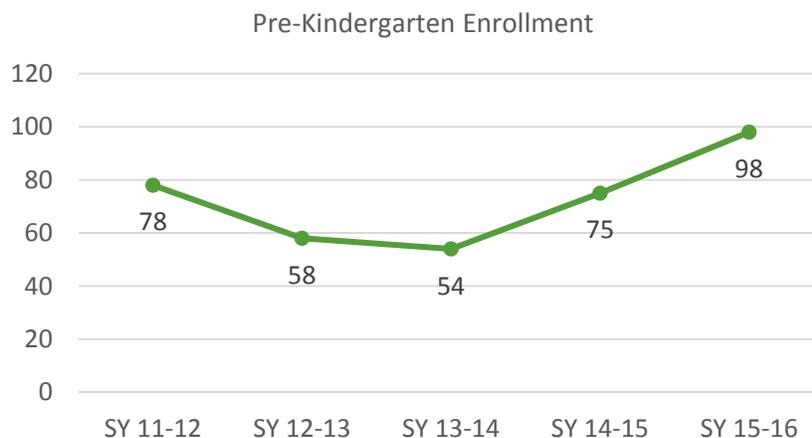
This district was especially concerned with the sustainability of the grant funding. It made a multi-year commitment to its teacher development program with little guarantee that the grant will continue. If HB4 funding does not continue, the district will have to decide how to fiscally manage this commitment in the future, which may pose a financial challenge. The district did not plan on expanding to pre-kindergarten for three-year-olds because of limited space in current school facilities.



## DID NOT APPLY FOR HOUSE BILL 4 FUNDING

### Did Not Apply for Funding #1

In the 2015-2016 school year, this district's pre-kindergarten enrollment included 98 students, which comprised 7% of the total student population. It realized a 30% increase in pre-kindergarten enrollment from the previous year. The district currently serves pre-kindergarten students through half-day instruction in six classrooms. While the district has seen an increase in enrollment, the pre-kindergarten expenditures per student have decreased by 94% from the previous year.

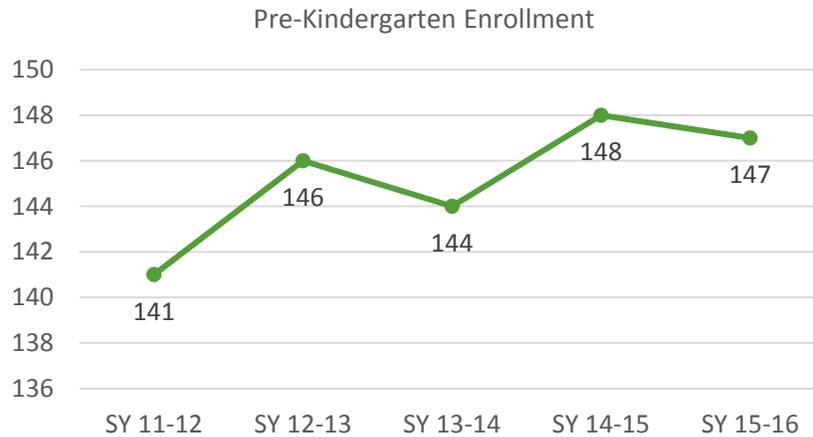


Although the district met several of the HB4 grant requirements, it chose not to apply for HB4 funding, stating that “it already had certified pre-kindergarten teachers and a certified aide in each classroom.” In addition, the district said it also offered pre-kindergarten to all four-year-olds in the district regardless of whether they qualified. The district hoped “for funding to help us continue the quality program we have been offering for years,” but was deterred from applying for the HB4 grant because the funding could not be used to supplant expenses that were already being incurred.



### Did Not Apply for Funding #2

As of the fall of 2015, this district served almost 8,000 total students from pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The district served 147 four-year-old pre-kindergarten students, which was about 2% of the total student population. This district increased per-student funding by 26% from the previous year. Six campuses in the district offered full and half-day instruction and about 45% of enrolled pre-kindergarten students attend the full-day program.



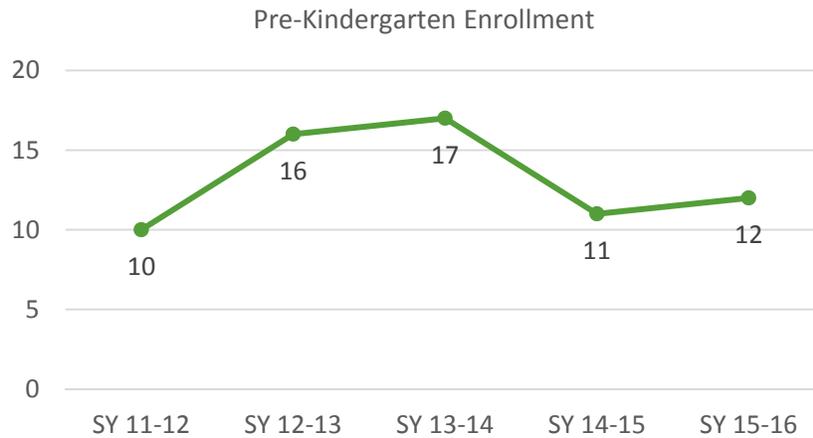
This district chose not to apply for HB4 funds due to a concern that it would not receive much funding, based on student demographics. The student population was about 30% economically disadvantaged, and 65% of its pre-kindergarten students were economically disadvantaged. The district recalled that the HB4 grant stated districts with an at-risk student population would receive funding priority. The district determined it likely did not fall into this category, based on the relatively small percentage of economically-disadvantaged students they serve.

The district used other sources of funding after making the switch from half-day pre-kindergarten to a full-day program. The change to a full-day program continues to be especially beneficial for students who receive special education services. The school district also began to utilize the Children’s Learning Institute Engage readiness assessment to monitor the progress of pre-kindergarten students. While the district previously committed to providing a full-day pre-kindergarten program, the respondent expressed concern over whether the legislature understood the importance of pre-kindergarten and would keep it at the forefront of educational funding priorities. There was deep regard for the social development that comes from pre-kindergarten and the impact in child development that is vital at such a young age.



Did Not Apply for Funding #3

As of the fall of 2015, this district's pre-kindergarten program served 12 four-year-olds, about 5% of its total enrollment. The pre-kindergarten program provided full-day instruction. The district increased per-student pre-kindergarten expenditures by 65% from the previous year.



This district did not apply for the HB4 grant funding because the maximum funding amount was too low to justify the time and effort required for participation in the grant. The district also noted that the application timeline, as well as concerns about sustainability of the grant funding, were important in its decision to not apply for funding. This district currently partners with Education Service Center Region 12 to provide training for its pre-kindergarten teachers and staff.



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## CONCLUSIONS

Districts that provided additional interviews expressed concern that pre-kindergarten education has not garnered enough attention or support from Texas policymakers. The school districts that did not apply for HB4 funding had already taken steps to ensure quality pre-kindergarten for at least the four-year-old students in their district. The school districts that applied and received funding appreciated that the grant provided an opportunity to improve the areas targeted by HB4. Even though the concept of universal pre-kindergarten is outside the scope of this grant, several of the school staff who were interviewed articulated its importance as well.

While most school districts explicitly placed an emphasis on increasing professional development opportunities, enhanced family engagement practices were also consistently identified as a key reason for pursuing HB4 funding. Several school districts had already begun utilizing funds from HB4 to hire pre-kindergarten coaches to assist in family engagement and integrate classroom technology (such as apps) into family engagement plans. Based upon district responses, family engagement will continue to be an important part of early childhood education in the community. This aspect of early childhood education provides community partners and organizations an opportunity to assist in the education of the youngest community members.

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<sup>1</sup> American Community Survey, 2015 1-year estimates

<sup>2</sup> “Economically Disadvantaged” is defined as the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch or eligible for other public assistance.

<sup>3</sup> “At-Risk” is defined as the percentage of students identified as being at risk of dropping out of school as defined by TEC §29.081(d) and (d-1).

<sup>4</sup> Three of the schools were not authorized in its charter to serve pre-kindergarten students. One district did not already serve pre-kindergarten or elementary school students.

<sup>5</sup> Texas Public Pre-Kindergarten Programs and Enrollment Ages 3 and 4 District Report



## DISTRICT APPLICATION LIST

	Funding 2015-2016	Funding 2016-2017	Funding Combined	Did Not Apply
Axtell ISD				✓
Bosqueville ISD	\$4,380	\$4,434	\$8,814	
Bruceville-Eddy ISD				✓
China Spring ISD				✓
Connally ISD	\$39,765	\$40,258	\$80,023	
Crawford ISD				✓
Gholson ISD				✓
Hallsburg ISD	\$5,839	\$5,911	\$11,750	
Harmony Science Academy				✓
La Vega ISD	\$62,018	\$62,786	\$124,804	
Lorena ISD	\$11,676	\$11,820	\$23,496	
Mart ISD				✓
McGregor ISD				✓
Midway ISD				✓
Moody ISD	\$8,028	\$8,127	\$16,155	
Rapoport Academy Public School				✓
Riesel ISD				✓
Robinson ISD	\$8,392	\$8,496	\$16,888	
Waco Charter School	\$7,298	\$7,388	\$14,686	
Waco ISD	\$322,850	\$326,850	\$649,700	
West ISD	\$14,229	\$14,405	\$28,634	
	\$484,475	\$490,475	\$974,950	



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*This research report was conducted and prepared by Prosper Waco's director of data and research, Brittany Fitz-Chapman, Ph.D., with special thanks to Baylor University's Department of Sociology Applied Research assistants: Tiffany Bounpaseuth, Neely Brown, Eli Ornelas-Lopez, Angelica Phillips and Alexander VanHee. Prosper Waco is a collective impact initiative that focuses on bringing together collaborative partners to identify and implement strategic efforts that will improve the outcomes in education, health and financial security for all members of McLennan County. Through cross sector-partnerships, community partners intentionally focus on alignment of mutually reinforcing activities for more effective outcomes that will help the community reach its goals. For more information about the Prosper Waco initiative, please visit [www.prosperwaco.org](http://www.prosperwaco.org).*

