

Pre-K 4 San Antonio¹

Background

In 2013, San Antonio created a model pre-K program funded and operated by the city, which also directly employs the staff in the program. The initiative began with four model pre-K centers strategically placed throughout San Antonio. Pre-K in these model programs is open to four-year-olds for a full school day plus before- and after-school care; tuition is paid on a sliding scale based on parental income and is free for qualifying students.² Beginning in 2016, the model centers were supplemented with a grants-based program for school- and community-based partners.³

How is the pre-K program financed?

Funding for the program was approved via a 2012 ballot initiative that raised the local sales tax 1/8th of a cent.⁴ Seven of the local school districts are currently contributing a portion of their state pre-K money to help finance the effort.

What is the current status of city efforts toward compensation improvement for pre-K teachers?

Salary: Pre-K teachers in the Pre-K 4 San Antonio model program are city employees and are paid in line with the city's policies, not school district policies. In practice, these Pre-K teachers are paid substantially more than beginning K-3 teachers (\$65,000 versus \$45,000 annually).

City policy also provides for raises over time, including periodic cost-of-living adjustments, as well as opportunities for merit raises based on performance (2 percent if standards were met, 3 percent if above standards, and 4 percent for exceptional performance).

Benefits: Benefits (paid holidays, annual and personal leave, health insurance, retirement plan contribution, and tuition reimbursement) are included, but similar to salaries, they are set in accordance with the City of San Antonio's policies, not school-district policy.

Payment for Professional Responsibilities: Paid time for professional responsibilities is included, and there is a heavy emphasis on professional development opportunities for teachers, including coaching. Teachers participate in three weeks of paid professional development before school starts, as well as weekly group learning sessions during the school year, and receive about an hour for planning in the afternoons.⁵

The policies outlined above apply specifically to pre-K teachers in the four model Pre-K 4 SA programs, as they are employed by the city. Pre-K teachers in public schools are subject to district policies and are paid the same and receive the same benefits as K-3 teachers, but this standard does not apply to pre-K teachers in community-based settings.

¹ All information in this profile comes from interview data, unless otherwise specified. Personal communication with Sarah Baray, Pre-K 4 SA, December 2016 (Follow-up: August 2017).

² City of San Antonio. (n.d.). *Pre-K 4 San Antonio: Enrollment Overview*. Retrieved from <http://www.sanantonio.gov/Pre-K-4-San-Antonio/EnrollmentOverview>.

³ City of San Antonio. (n.d.). *Pre-K 4 San Antonio: Competitive Grants*. Retrieved from <http://www.sanantonio.gov/Pre-K-4-San-Antonio/Competitive-Grants>.

⁴ Lantigua-Williams. (2016, March 8).

⁵ Barnett, W.S., Weisenfeld, G.G., Brown, K., Squires, J., & Horowitz, M. (2016b). *Implementing 15 Essential Elements for High Quality: A State and Local Policy Scan*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

Partners receiving a San Antonio pre-K program grant could potentially use these funds to increase compensation for their teachers; however, there does not appear to be any explicit policy or guidelines in place to encourage or require partners to adopt these compensation for their teachers.

What was the rationale for taking forward the issue of pay parity?

From the beginning, there was an emphasis on high-quality services in order to see the best possible results from the initiative. In 2011, the mayor convened a task force of educational and business leaders to identify the most effective method for improving the quality of education in the city, which resulted in a recommendation to develop high-quality pre-K services for four-year-olds.⁶ As part of this recommendation, there was an understanding that the best services required the best teachers, and attracting them would require appropriate compensation.

What was the approach/strategy for moving toward parity?

Appropriate compensation for pre-K teachers was built into the model from the beginning. An emphasis was placed on what is needed for high-quality teaching in early childhood, rather than setting a benchmark with K-12.

What has been helpful in moving these efforts along?

Popular support through a local ballot initiative as well as independent evaluations demonstrating the impact of pre-K on children have both contributed to general support for high-quality pre-K in San Antonio.

What positive outcomes have been seen as a result of the push toward parity?

Local administrators suggest that, due to high starting salaries, more teachers are interested in pre-K jobs, resulting in an excellent applicant pool, including from elementary schools.⁷ Independent evaluations for the first three years of the program have shown positive results in child outcomes,⁸ and there is an intention to investigate the specific link between higher teacher pay and the quality of the service, using data on teacher turnover and comparisons with school districts.

What has been challenging about these efforts?

Local administrators report that working with other stakeholders, particularly local school districts, has been a challenge. Seven local school districts provide a portion of their state pre-K funds to help finance the program, but this support may not continue if the program does not show improved school readiness for children. There is also some tension about higher salaries for city pre-K teachers compared with other pre-K teachers, including those in public school districts.⁹

⁶ City of San Antonio. (n.d.). *Pre-K 4 San Antonio: About*. Retrieved from <http://www.sanantonio.gov/Pre-K-4-San-Antonio/about>; Lantigua-Williams. (2016, March 8).

⁷ See also Lantigua-Williams. (2016, March 8).

⁸ City of San Antonio. (n.d.). *Pre-K 4 San Antonio: Student Assessment*. Retrieved from <http://www.sanantonio.gov/Pre-K-4-San-Antonio/Facts/StudentAssessment>

⁹ Lantigua-Williams. (2016, March 8).