

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 292 Session of
2003

INTRODUCED BY STAIRS, ROEBUCK, BROWNE, HERMAN, T. STEVENSON,
CURRY, GRUCELA, SHANER, STURLA, YUDICHAK, BARD, BEBKO-JONES,
BELARDI, BELFANTI, BUNT, BUXTON, CAWLEY, COSTA, COY,
CRAHALLA, CRUZ, DALEY, DeWEESE, J. EVANS, FREEMAN, GEORGE,
HARHAI, HORSEY, JAMES, JOSEPHS, LaGROTTA, LAUGHLIN, LEACH,
LESCOVITZ, MANDERINO, MANN, MARKOSEK, McCALL, MELIO,
S. MILLER, PETRARCA, PISTELLA, PRESTON, READSHAW, ROBERTS,
SAINATO, SANTONI, SATHER, SEMMEL, SOLOBAY, STABACK, THOMAS,
TIGUE, WALKO, WASHINGTON AND YOUNGBLOOD, FEBRUARY 12, 2003

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, FEBRUARY 12, 2003

AN ACT

1 Establishing a State grant program to assist school districts
2 establishing prekindergarten programs and imposing powers and
3 duties on the Department of Education and the Secretary of
4 Education.

5 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
6 hereby enacts as follows:

7 Section 1. Short title.

8 This act shall be known and may be cited as the
9 Prekindergarten Program Incentive Act.

10 Section 2. Definitions.

11 The following words and phrases when used in this act shall
12 have the meanings given to them in this section unless the
13 context clearly indicates otherwise:

14 "At-risk students." A student at risk of educational failure
15 because of limited English proficiency, poverty, community

1 factors, truancy, academic difficulties or economic
2 disadvantage.

3 "Department." The Department of Education of the
4 Commonwealth.

5 "Eligible children." Children three years of age or older.

6 "Prekindergarten program." A preschool or nursery school
7 program established for eligible children as defined by this
8 act.

9 "Qualified staff." Teachers certified in early childhood
10 education and teacher aides with training in early childhood
11 education.

12 Section 3. Purpose.

13 The grants are intended to act as an incentive to encourage
14 school districts to establish and maintain prekindergarten
15 programs that enable at-risk students to be academically
16 successful and to make the programs available to eligible
17 children in their district.

18 Section 4. Incentive grants.

19 Beginning with the 2003-2004 fiscal year and continuing each
20 school year thereafter, the department shall award incentive
21 grants to eligible school districts in order to encourage these
22 institutions to establish quality prekindergarten programs and
23 make them available to eligible children in their district or
24 geographical area.

25 Section 5. Eligibility and funding.

26 (a) Guidelines.--The department shall establish guidelines
27 for grant recipients' eligibility and the amount of grant
28 awards. The department shall allocate grants to eligible school
29 districts from funds appropriated by the General Assembly for
30 the implementation of this act.

(b) Requirements.--School districts eligible for the grant shall:

(1) Operate or plan to operate a prekindergarten program.

(2) Demonstrate the ability to offer a quality prekindergarten program. The quality of the programs will be determined by:

(i) Meeting the needs of children and promoting physical, social, emotional and cognitive development.

(ii) Employing qualified staff, including teachers certified in early childhood education.

(iii) Stressing parental involvement in the prekindergarten program and giving parents needed resources to better understand and enhance their children's growth.

(iv) Linking children and their parents to insurance, nutrition, physical and mental health care and developmental screening services.

(3) Make the prekindergarten program available to all eligible students in the district, including targeting those that would be considered at-risk students.

(4) Comply with such application requirements, rules or standards as may be promulgated by the department pursuant to section 7.

(c) Preference in funding.--Preference in funding should be given to school districts on the education empowerment list or an education empowerment district as defined in Article XVII-B of the act of March 10, 1949 (P.L.30, No.14), known as the Public School Code of 1949, that would establish quality prekindergarten programs.

1 Section 6. Use of funds.

2 The grants provided for by this act may be used to:

3 (1) Establish a quality preschool program aligned with
4 the current academic standards contained in 22 Pa Code, Ch. 4
5 (relating to academic standards and assessments).

6 (2) Plan a curriculum and purchase those materials
7 necessary to carry it out.

8 (3) Hire certified staff to teach and qualified
9 teacher's aides.

10 Section 7. Duties of department.

11 (a) Applications.--Grant applications shall be filed on a
12 form and in such manner as determined by the department. The
13 application shall address the determination of eligibility
14 pursuant to section 5.

15 (b) Budget submission.--The department shall annually, as
16 part of the department's budget proposal submitted to the
17 Governor, include an estimate of State funds required for the
18 ensuing fiscal year to fund the grants provided by this act.

19 Section 8. Rules and regulations.

20 The department may promulgate such rules and regulations
21 necessary to administer and enforce this act.

22 Section 9. Program evaluation.

23 (a) General rule.--The department shall conduct an annual
24 evaluation of the prekindergarten program to determine its
25 effectiveness in providing prekindergarten programs to the
26 eligible children.

27 (b) Use of evaluation.--This evaluation shall be used to
28 determine the overall effectiveness of whether prekindergarten
29 education programs conducted by the school districts improve the
30 classroom learning environment and academic progress of students

1 toward the established academic standards.

2 (c) Report to General Assembly.--At the conclusion of every
3 school year in which prekindergarten program grants are awarded,
4 the department shall prepare a comprehensive report outlining
5 its findings concerning the effectiveness of the prekindergarten
6 programs. This final report shall be made to the Governor and to
7 the chairman and minority chairman of the Education Committee of
8 the Senate and the chairman and minority chairman of the
9 Education Committee of the House of Representatives no later
10 than July 1 at the end of the school year.

11 Section 10. Effective date.

12 This act shall take effect July 1, 2003, or immediately,
13 whichever is later.