

Though economically disadvantaged students in the Houston Independent School District (HISD) have greater access to pre-kindergarten (pre-k) than their peers, English learner (EL) students do not. Equity in access to nearby pre-k would mean at-risk students, particularly those targeted for free public pre-k in Texas, would have *greater* access to nearby pre-k programs than their peers. Having access to a nearby pre-k program is important, as students who have a pre-k program in their elementary zone or within one mile of their homes are more likely to enroll.

Similarly, equity in access to high quality programs would mean groups targeted by pre-k policies, who may find greater benefit from enrollment in high quality programs, would be more likely to be enrolled in these programs. This study finds EL students are at a disadvantage compared to their peers, with lower likelihood of being enrolled in a high quality program despite being more likely to benefit from high quality pre-k than their non-EL peers.

This document summarizes prior HERC research examining pre-k access for students in HISD.

Key Findings

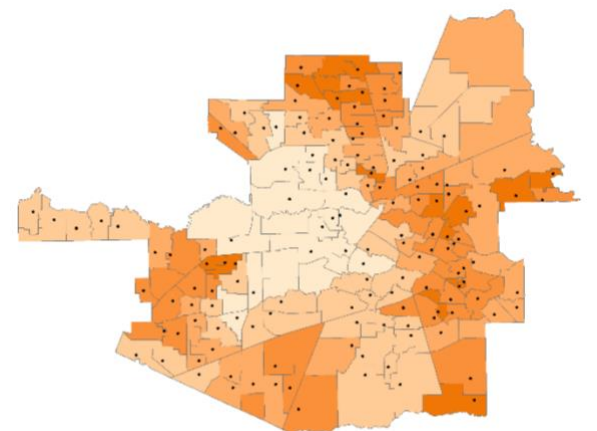
Pre-K Access and Utilization

- Economically disadvantaged students are *more likely* to live near a pre-k program than their non-economically disadvantaged peers. EL students are *not more likely* to live near a pre-k program than non-EL students. Ensuring every elementary zone had a pre-k program on an elementary campus or an Early Childhood Center (ECC) would decrease the distance to the nearest program.
- Geographic areas of higher pre-k need are *not more likely* to have a pre-k program. Areas of higher relative need were determined by examining the number of children under five, the percent of non-English speaking households, and the percent of households below the poverty line in each elementary zone.

Pre-K Quality in HISD

- EL students are *more likely* to benefit from being in a high quality pre-k program than their peers. EL students who are in higher quality programs experience a boost to CIRCLE scores at the end of pre-k. Non-EL students do not find the same benefit of being in a higher quality program. EL students who are also enrolled in bilingual programs find even greater benefit from program quality than non-EL students or EL students who are not enrolled in bilingual programs.
- English learner students are *less likely* to be enrolled in high quality programs. EL students are both *less likely* to be enrolled in the highest quality programs in the district and *more likely* to be enrolled in the lowest quality programs in the district.

Figure 1. Map of relative pre-k need in HISD



• indicates HISD pre-k program on zoned elementary campus
NOTE: Darker color reflects greater relative need

The purpose of The Equity Project is to identify the mechanisms through which HISD and the broader Houston community can work to improve equity and ultimately eliminate gaps in achievement and attainment.

Equity in access to pre-k programs in HISD

Economically disadvantaged students are *more likely* than their peers to live in a zone with a pre-k program or live within one mile of a program. However, EL students are *not more likely* to live in a zone with a pre-k program and are *less likely* to have a program within one mile than their peers. As English-language status is one of the ways in which students qualify for free pre-k in Texas, an equitable distribution of pre-k programs would result in EL students living in places with greater access to pre-k programs.

Equity in access to high quality pre-k in HISD

Variation exists in which students are more likely to be enrolled in high quality pre-k programs with some racial/ethnic, economic, and language differences (see Table 1).

Important to note is though EL students are more likely to benefit from high quality programs than their non-EL peers, EL students are less likely to be enrolled in a high quality program than their non-EL peers. As a result, findings illustrate a mismatch between need and access for this student population.

Table 1. Equity and pre-k program quality

Who is enrolled in higher quality pre-k programs?	Who benefits from higher quality pre-k programs?
Asian students <i>less likely</i> than white students	Non-economically disadvantaged students
Hispanic or Asian students <i>less likely</i> than Black students	EL students
Economically disadvantaged students <i>more likely</i> than non-economically disadvantaged	
EL students <i>less likely</i> than non-EL students	

Source: Baumgartner, 2017a; Baumgartner, 2017b

Recommendations

- **Improve quality of pre-k programs.** Consider ways to increase the quality of pre-k programs so all students are attending high quality programs. HISD should ensure teachers hired to teach pre-k students are highly trained in early childhood education as evident in their degree or certifications. Additionally, the district should focus on offering professional development opportunities for pre-k teachers and aides/teaching assistants.
- **Provide targeted outreach to families, particularly families of English learners.** Parents of English learners may need more information about program characteristics, availability, enrollment, and choice as it relates to pre-k options in HISD in their preferred language. HISD should consider areas within the district and communication strategies to conduct targeted outreach to these populations to provide information and assist with enrollment.
- **Consider location of pre-k programs to ensure populations targeted by state policy have greatest access.** It is not enough to add additional pre-k classrooms to existing buildings, but also important to consider whether they can better reach students by adding pre-k programs to existing elementary campuses where no programs currently exist or add standalone ECCs that are less reliant on existing campus locations.



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Referenced studies:

- Baumgartner, E. 2017a. Equality of Pre-Kindergarten Educational Opportunities: Examining Student Differences in Access to High Quality Pre-Kindergarten (Part 1)
 Baumgartner, E. 2017b. Equality of Pre-Kindergarten Educational Opportunities: The Relationship between Pre-K Quality and Student Outcomes (Part 2)
 Baumgartner, E. & Thrash, C. 2020. Strategies for Increasing Access to HISD Pre-K Programs (Part 2).
 Baumgartner, E., Thrash, C., & Sanchez, L. 2019. Availability of and Equity in Access to HISD Pre-K Programs (Part 1).