



An Act Ensuring High Quality Pre-Kindergarten Education (H.462, S.267) Lead

Sponsors: Representative Alice Peisch and Senator Sal DiDomenico

Massachusetts has a significant and persistent achievement gap, evident long before children enter school. Too many children show up for school already behind and too many of them will never catch up. Experts agree that high-quality Pre-K has a short- and long-term impact on young children's educational, social and health outcomes. Preventing problems now, rather than remediating them later, is a cost-effective investment that benefits children and taxpayers alike.

More than 40% of third graders in Massachusetts are unable to read proficiently, and among low-income students, that number is a startling 61%. These rates have remained unchanged since 2001. These disparities are a key component in the stark achievement gap that exists between suburban students and their peers in urban districts.

High-quality Pre-K helps establish a strong foundation for children's learning in K-12, but currently an estimated 40% of 3- and 4-year-olds are not enrolled in any formal preschool program.

This legislation has been filed to help close the achievement gap and level the playing field to ensure that all Massachusetts children have the opportunity to succeed in school and in life. The legislation builds upon the Commonwealth's strong policy foundation for early education, including the ongoing work of the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE.) It offers a high-quality, full-day Pre-K program in communities that already offer Kindergarten to help make a seamless transition. It also capitalizes on the momentum for Pre-K, including the recent \$15 million award of the federal Preschool Expansion Grant.

About the Bill

Both the House and Senate version of the bills provide access to high-quality pre-kindergarten programs for 3-and 4-year-olds living in underperforming school districts through a targeted, phased-in approach. This comprehensive plan is modeled after the New Jersey Abbott preschool program, which has helped to narrow the achievement gap in those communities.

Key components include:

- A focus on 3- and 4-year-olds;
- Targeting of communities with level 5, 4, and 3 school districts as defined in ESE accountability framework;
- A multi-year phase-in of funding, beginning with level 5 and 4 districts;
- A commitment to the mixed-delivery system of public and private Pre-K providers;

- Adequate funding to ensure program quality and teacher salaries and qualifications comparable to the K-12 system;
- Program quality requirements aligned with federal Preschool Expansion Grant standards, including student-to-teacher ratios of 10 to 1, with no more than 20 Pre-K students, teacher qualifications and compensation, inclusion of children with disabilities, developmentally appropriate instruction, and family engagement;
- Thoughtful governance of state/local implementation. Districts will develop pre-K implementation plans that will be approved jointly by the EEC and ESE. School districts will have two years to fully implement pre-K programs in their communities.

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