

High-Quality, Accessible Pre-K



Everyone deserves the opportunity to live a healthy, full life – but not everyone in our country has an equal opportunity to achieve this. CityHealth, an initiative of the de Beaumont Foundation and Kaiser Permanente, promotes a package of tried and tested policies that ensure all people in our largest cities have access to healthy choices.

Together, with visionary city leaders, we can make sure that all people have access to a safe place to live, a healthy body and mind, and a thriving environment. Policy solutions like High-Quality, Accessible Pre-K can help make communities healthier and resolve critical health disparities – now and decades down the road.

Early childhood education is an essential step to access real opportunities later in life – from successfully graduating high school to staying healthy. It also provides parents a safe place for kids to learn, play, and grow. When all families have access to high-quality pre-K, more children have the opportunity to succeed as they begin their educational journeys.

THE QUALITY PRE-K CHALLENGE

- Less than half (48%) of children in poverty are school-ready at 5 years old, compared with 75% of children from moderate- or high-income households.
- Not all pre-K programs meet high-quality standards. The National Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER) has identified ten quality standards benchmarks that identify the minimum policies that are needed to support optimal child outcomes. Additional equity-focused policies for cities include access, demographic data collection and a city's dedicated local revenue source.
- While the number of local pre-K programs is growing, many high-quality programs are reaching too few children. The minimal threshold enrollment should be more than 30 percent of the population of preschoolers.

A HEALTHY SOLUTION: HIGH QUALITY ACCESSIBLE PRE-K

- **Provides a Healthy Start in Life** – Children in High-Quality, Accessible Pre-K programs are more likely to go to a doctor, receive immunizations and screenings, and access dental care.
- **Sets Children Up for Long-Term Success** – High-quality pre-K programs lead to increased high school graduation rates, higher earnings, and provides linkages to early intervention and reductions in crime and teen pregnancy.
- **Provides a Safe Place for Children** – When designed as part of a comprehensive early care and educational system, pre-K programs provide working parents a safe place for their children; 65% of mothers with children under age 6 work.
- **Investing in Pre-K Pays Dividends** – High-Quality, Accessible Pre-K programs are a wise financial investment, with one leading economist estimating a return of \$7-\$10 for every dollar spent.

Going For Gold

CityHealth annually rates High-Quality, Accessible Pre-K policies in cities with criteria that set the “gold standard” in each policy area. These criteria were developed with input from national experts, are backed by evidence, and work to reduce or remove systemic barriers to health equity. Medals are awarded to cities that meet the elements necessary for the best quality policy (gold), a good quality policy (silver), and a passable quality policy (bronze). Cities with no policy, or that don’t meet the minimum threshold for a bronze medal, receive no medal.

HIGH-QUALITY, ACCESSIBLE PRE-K MEDAL CRITERIA



	Bronze	Silver	Gold
1. Policy meets 2 out of 3 criteria* (access, local funding, and equity data) and meets at least 4 quality benchmarks**	✓	✓	✓
2. Policy meets 8 out of 10 NIEER quality benchmarks	✗	✓	✓
3. Policy meets 9 out of 10 NIEER quality benchmarks	✗	✗	✓

Data are collected by examining public online records including websites, documents such as program guidelines and legislation; NIEER’s annual yearbook; through interviews with city and/or state pre-K administrators; and any external program evaluations if available as a public record. Quality and enrollment data comes from the school year preceding the assessment.

*CRITERIA INCLUDE:

- **Access:** Establishes a 30% access threshold for pre-K programs. Quality learning can only make an impact if children have access to the programming.
- **Equity:** City collects demographic data that allows local leaders and residents see who in their community is receiving services.
- **Local Funding:** Local funding is included in a city’s pre-K program. Pre-K programs with a local funding source often mean that cities have a stake in the quality, access, and equitable delivery of their pre-K programs.

** NIEER’s Pre-K Quality Policy Benchmarks can be found on the proceeding page.

SAN ANTONIO’S INVESTMENT IN HIGH-QUALITY, ACCESSIBLE PRE-K

In 2012, voters in San Antonio approved an increase in the city’s sales tax to pay for a high-quality early learning program for young children. Since then, Pre-K 4 SA has served over 450,000 children and has showed impressive financial and social returns for children, families, and the city of San Antonio. In 2020, voters reaffirmed their support for the program, and reauthorized the sales tax to support Pre-K 4 SA.

NIEER PRE-K QUALITY POLICY BENCHMARKS

Policy Benchmark	Description	Why It Matters
Learning goals	Comprehensive early learning and development standards to guide teaching and assessment	Programs need clear and appropriate goals explaining what children are expected to know and be able to do when they complete Pre-K.
Curriculum supports	Guidance for choosing and using content-rich curriculum	Programs should use curricula designed for young learners that focus on language, literacy, mathematics, science, and social-emotional development.
Teacher education level	Lead teachers required to have a bachelor's degree	Teachers with higher education levels generally provide higher quality learning environments for children.
Teacher specialized training	Lead teacher has specialized training for teaching Pre-K	Teachers need to understand how to teach young children in ways that are consistent with a child's learning and development.
Assistant teacher education	Assistant teacher has a formalized entry-level credential such as the Child Development Associates	All members of a teaching team influence classroom quality, so assistants should hold at least an entry-level qualification for teaching young children.
Professional development	Ongoing training for teachers and assistant teachers	Professional learning, including coaching and other classroom support, produces high-quality learning experiences for children.
Maximum class size	Maximum number of children per classroom is 20	Effective Pre-K programs have small classes, enabling teachers to understand and address each child's interests, needs, and capabilities.
Teacher-child ratio	Ratio of teachers to children is 1:10 or better	Working with small groups of children allows teachers to offer more individualized attention, which results in better outcomes.
Health screening and referral	Screenings for vision, hearing, health, and development concerns, along with referrals to needed services	Screening for health and development issues helps children get the help they need and often prevents later costly services.
Continuous quality improvement system	System to assess program quality used to guide improvement	Using data to inform program improvement helps educators provide the high-quality early learning opportunities children need.