

Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts and
Head Start Supplemental Assistance
Program
Report on Program Operations
Fiscal Year 2020-2021



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

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Introduction

Act 45 of 2007 requires the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) to provide the General Assembly with a summary of the operations of the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance programs.

In the 2020-21 fiscal year (FY):

Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts assisted 20,038 students from families earning up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level. Head Start Supplemental Assistance Programs served 5,487 children from families earning up to 100 percent of the federal poverty level. The high-quality early education the children received in Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Programs prepared them to enter kindergarten.

Concerning Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, this report contains the program guidance used for the 2020-21 fiscal year, which outlines the eligibility and enrollment requirements for participating providers. This report also lists all participating providers, including county of residence, address, grant amount awarded, and actual enrollments.

Concerning the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program, this report contains a listing of all participating providers, including county of residence, address, grant amount awarded and actual enrollments.

PDE uses Title 22, Chapter 405.2 and 405.11 as the eligibility criteria for providers. Grants are awarded to approved providers on a cost per-child basis for eligible students the provider proposed to serve in their grant application. In FY 2020-21, Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts used a cost per child of \$8,750 per full day slot and \$4,375 per half day slot. Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program applicants request a per slot cost per child based on their proposal and needs. Applicants must justify the cost per-child amounts in their grant application to receive funding. Providers were permitted to use grant funds for the design and maintenance of a quality curriculum for students, for student transportation, for staff professional development, and for appropriate meals and snacks for students.

The FY 2020-21 state budget allocated \$217,284,000 for Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts. FY 2019-20 grantees applied to maintain their funding levels through a continuation grant application. See Appendix A for the 2020-21 Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts Continuation Grant Application.

The FY 2020-21 state budget allocated \$64,178,000 for the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program. FY 2019-20 grantees applied to maintain their funding levels through a continuation grant application. See Appendix B for the 2020-21 Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program Continuation Grant Application.

Additionally, FY 2020-21 was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Both Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance programs were allowed flexibility in how instruction during FY 2020-21 occurred. All providers used a blend of in-person, hybrid, and remote learning options throughout the school year, with models varying based on local and county-level COVID-19 levels, family needs, and staffing shortages. Both programs were afforded the opportunity to apply for federal relief funding under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act (2020) to address needs that arose during the pandemic. Information on this funding for Pennsylvania PreK Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Programs can be found in Appendix G: CARES Act Application Funding Guidance and Appendix H: CARES Act Applicant Details and Final Expenditure Reporting.

The Need for High-Quality Pre-Kindergarten in Pennsylvania

The chart below shows that more than 93,520, or 56 percent, of 3- and 4-year-old children living in families earning up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) did not have access to publicly funded high-quality early childhood education (ECE) programs, such as Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts and the Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program. This percentage of unserved 3- and 4- year-olds is referred to as the unmet need.

Table 1: Percent of Unmet Need by County, FY 2020-2021

County	Unmet Need*	County	Unmet Need*	County	Unmet Need*	County	Unmet Need*
Adams	67.8%	Columbia	57.9%	Lawrence	17.4%	Snyder	68.7%
Allegheny	46.9%	Crawford	58.4%	Lebanon	66.2%	Somerset	71.5%
Armstrong	52.9%	Cumberland	76.3%	Lehigh	59.4%	Sullivan	20.1%
Beaver	48.8%	Dauphin	59.4%	Luzerne	55.9%	Susquehanna	55.9%
Bedford	63.1%	Delaware	62.1%	Lycoming	58.2%	Tioga	36.3%
Berks	69.4%	Elk	67.6%	McKean	44.8%	Union	54.3%
Blair	37.8%	Erie	49.5%	Mercer	52.5%	Venango	33.0%
Bradford	33.9%	Fayette	37.4%	Mifflin	66.4%	Warren	60.8%
Bucks	63.3%	Forest	65.4%	Monroe	65.0%	Washington	49.1%
Butler	65.8%	Franklin	67.1%	Montgomery	70.2%	Wayne	51.6%
Cambria	61.8%	Fulton	69.6%	Montour	18.6%	Westmoreland	53.2%
Cameron	40.5%	Greene	53.4%	Northampton	59.9%	Wyoming	69.7%
Carbon	58.5%	Huntingdon	36.5%	Northumberland	66.9%	York	73.2%
Centre	52.8%	Indiana	44.2%	Perry	85.9%	Statewide	56.0%
Chester	65.0%	Jefferson	53.4%	Philadelphia	43.5%		
Clarion	44.0%	Juniata	55.6%	Pike	12.9%		
Clearfield	32.5%	Lackawanna	48.7%	Potter	74.2%		
Clinton	58.4%	Lancaster	74.8%	Schuylkill	61.7%		

*Unmet Need = [(Number of Children Ages 3-4 under 300% FPL)- (Total Pre-K 2019-2020 Funded Slots)- (Total

Providing High-Quality Services to Young Children and Families

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) is committed to ensuring that all children begin school ready to learn and to succeed in their schooling careers, as lifelong learners, and as productive citizens. Research confirms what most families already know—all children can tap into their innate potential to learn when they receive high-quality instruction that takes into consideration what is known about brain development and how young children learn. Early childhood education is a proven strategy that ensures a child’s readiness for school and school success.

“My child has had many changes that I have noticed since she came to the PA Pre-K Counts program and the main thing is her independence. I have noticed she likes to do a lot of things on her own.

Another thing I noticed was her social skills have gotten better. She is also learning how to adapt to change a lot easier and I just think that the program all together is a good experience.”

- An Allegheny County Parent

Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Programs meet or exceed most quality standards recommended by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

Table 2: Comparison of Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Programs Standards to NIEER Standards and Benchmarks

NIEER Quality Standard	NIEER Benchmark	Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts Standards	Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program Standards
Early Learning Standards	Comprehensive	Comprehensive	Comprehensive
Curriculum Supports	Approval process and supports	Approval process	Approval process
Teacher degree	Bachelor’s degree	Bachelor’s degree + ECE Certification	Half of lead teachers must have a bachelor’s degree
Teacher specialized training	Specializing in Pre-K	ECE certification	Specializing in child development
Assistant teacher degree	Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or equivalent	CDA or equivalent	CDA

NIEER Quality Standard	NIEER Benchmark	Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts Standards	Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program Standards
Staff professional development	At least 15 hours a year; individual PD plans; coaching	Meet requirements of Act 48 (180 hours over five years)	At least 15 hours a year; coaching
Maximum class size	20 or less	20 or less	3-year-olds – 17 or less 4-year-olds – 20 or less
Staff-child ratio	1 staff per 10 children (1:10)	1 teacher and 1 aide per 20 children (1:10)	3-year-olds – 2:17 or less (classrooms must always have two paid staff) 4-year-olds – 2:20 or less (classrooms must always have two paid staff)
Screening & referral	Vision, hearing, health, and referral	Vision, hearing, health, and referral	Vision, hearing, health, and referral
Continuous quality improvement system	Structured classroom observations; data used for program improvement	Structured classroom observations; data used for program improvement	Structured classroom observations; data used for program improvement

Description of Assessments Used to Measure Academic Performance

In Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program classrooms, teachers are required to assess students. Teachers are most qualified to perform the assessment since they observe children in authentic environments and are familiar with each child's development and learning expectations.

The goal of early childhood assessment in Pennsylvania is to:

1. Adapt instruction to meet individualized student and group needs;
2. Understand the status of children across a broad range of cognitive and non- cognitive domains;
3. Track achievement and developmental gains over time; and
4. Inform policy by providing pictures of student outcomes in classrooms and across the state.

Guidelines emphasize that programs should not use child outcome data to determine placement in a program, class or special education, or to deny or exclude access to services for those children who are age eligible.

All providers were required to report child outcomes within an approved on-line assessment system. Providers select from the following approved on-line child assessment tools to report child outcomes:

- Assessment Technology Incorporated: Galileo®
- Cognitive ToyBox, Inc.
- Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP)
- Frog Street AIM Observational Assessment
- HighScope: COR Advantage
- LifeCubby: The Vine Assessment™
- National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER)/ Lakeshore: Early Learning Scale (ELS)
- Pearson: THE WORK SAMPLING SYSTEM®
- Pearson: THE WORK SAMPLING SYSTEM® for Head Start
- My IGDIs™: Profile of Preschool Learning and Development Readiness (ProLADR)
- Teaching Strategies LLC: Teaching Strategies GOLD®

Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts Overview

Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts provides high-quality pre-kindergarten education for at-risk 3- and 4-year-olds in Pennsylvania. Eligible children are age three through kindergarten entry age and live in families earning up to 300 percent of the FPL (\$79,500 for family of four). In 2020-21, there were 20,038 children served in Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts in 67 counties by 231 lead agencies at 865 locations.

Criteria to Determine Grant Fund Amounts

PDE awarded grants to approved providers on a per-child basis, in an amount set by the PDE, for each eligible student served by an approved provider. Half-day programs were required to provide a minimum of 2.5 hours per day of instructional activities for at least 180 days per year. For 2020-21, the cost per child rate

for half-day programs was \$4,375 per child. For 2020-21, full-day programs were required to provide a minimum of five hours per day of instructional activities or services for at least 180 days per year. The cost per child for full-day programs was \$8,750 per child.

Summary of Application Process for Grant Funds

Initial applicants for Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts were selected for a five-year period beginning in FY 2007-08 and ending in FY 2011-12. An additional year of continuation funding was offered for the FY 2012-13 program year. Pennsylvania held a competitive grant process to select eligible grantees for a second five-year grant period beginning with FY 2013-14. Another competitive grant process was held in the spring 2018 to select eligible grantees for a third five-year grant period beginning FY 2018-19.

In addition to continuation grants, expansion grants were awarded in FY 2014-15, FY 2015-16, FY 2017-18, and FY 2019-20. Due to a budget impasse in FY 2015-16, expansion funding was allocated at 25 percent. FY 2015-16 amounts were annualized in FY 2016-17. Due to the pandemic, expansion funding was not awarded in FY 2019-20.

"I think that it really, really helps a lot of families. I just hope nothing ever happens to this program because it helps so many families...academically, socially, in every way, in every domain. I don't know what people would do if we didn't have this program."

- PA PKC Program Administrator

Total Amount of Grant Funds Paid to Approved Providers

As shown in Appendix C, in 2020-21, \$217,122,927 in grant funds were paid to providers and used to manage state level administrative and information technology support for the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts program.

Summary of Allowable Uses of Grant Funds Under the Program

Funds may only be used for costs associated with providing program services to eligible students enrolled in the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts program. Funds may not be used for local administrative or indirect costs. See Appendix D for more information on program regulations. See [Program Impacts due to COVID-19](#) for more information on spending impacts and flexibility during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Approved Providers and Enrollments

See Appendix C.

Financial Summary of Total Expenditures of Each Provider

As of September 2021, total FY 2020-21 provider expenditures were being reconciled and thus are not available. Appendix C contains grant funds paid in FY 2020-21. It is anticipated that awarded funds will be fully expended.

Enrollment Goals

Children are considered enrolled when an intake meeting between the parent or legal guardian and the school has been completed, the necessary information has been gathered, and the child has been identified as a candidate for a Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts slot. Classroom start dates may differ if this enrollment has been completed prior to the start of the year.

Grantees are required to maintain full enrollment and report enrollment in Pennsylvania's Enterprise to Link Information for Children Across Networks (PELICAN), the data system used for managing Pennsylvania's state-funded early learning programs. When a child withdraws from Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, the program has 20 instructional days to fill the vacant slot. Maintaining waiting lists ensures vacant slots are filled immediately.

See [Program Impacts due to COVID-19](#) for more information on enrollment flexibility during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Students Served Through Child Care Works (Child Care Subsidy) and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program

See Appendix C for information on Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts children also served in Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program or Child Care Works, Pennsylvania's subsidized child care program.

Per Act 24 of 2011, PDE no longer collects information on Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts children served in Federal Head Start and private pay child care, or the total number of children enrolled in Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program, Federal Head Start, Child Care Works, or private pay child care at each entity.

Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts Evaluation

Funded by the William Penn Foundation, the University of North Carolina's School of Education and Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute conducted both an impact and an implementation study of the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts program from 2018 through 2020.

The impact study examined the effects of participation in the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts Program on children's early academic, social, and executive functioning skills in

kindergarten. The findings show there were positive effects on children’s language and math outcomes with meaningful differences in months of learning gains. For more information visit:

[PA Pre-K Counts Impact Study Executive Summary](#)
[PA Pre-K Counts Impact Study Final Report](#)

The implementation study was designed to examine local variations in the statewide implementation of Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts in relation to the program regulations and early learning standards. The study used surveys, interviews, and review of administrative data. For more information visit:

[PA Pre-K Counts Implementation Study Executive Summary](#)
[PA Pre-K Counts Implementation Study Final Report](#)

Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program Overview

Head Start provides comprehensive early learning services to children and families who are most at risk of academic failure. Federal and state funding supports this program in Pennsylvania. In addition to educational programming, Head Start offers health/nutrition services, social service support to families, and a strong parent/family involvement component.

Eligible children are those age 3 to 5 years who live in families earning up to 100 percent of the federal poverty level (\$26,500 for a family of four), identified as foster children, or live in families experiencing homelessness. Up to 10 percent of enrollment slots can be used to support at-risk children whose families exceed the income guidelines. In 2020-21, there were 5,487 children served in state-funded Head Start by 41 lead agencies in 49 counties.

Providers were permitted to use grant funds for the design and maintenance of a quality curriculum for students, for student transportation, for staff professional development, and for appropriate meals and snacks for students. Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program design must follow the federally approved program models and includes both classroom and home visiting models. Each grantee offers the model that best meets their local community need. See Appendix B for the 2020-21 Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program continuation grant application, and Appendix E for details on applicants.

Summary of Allowable Uses of Grant Funds Under the Program

Funds can only be used for the costs associated with providing program services to eligible students enrolled in the program. Funds may not be used for administrative or indirect costs. See Appendix E for details. See Appendix J: COVID-19 Impact on Enrollment for more information on spending flexibility during the COVID-19 pandemic.

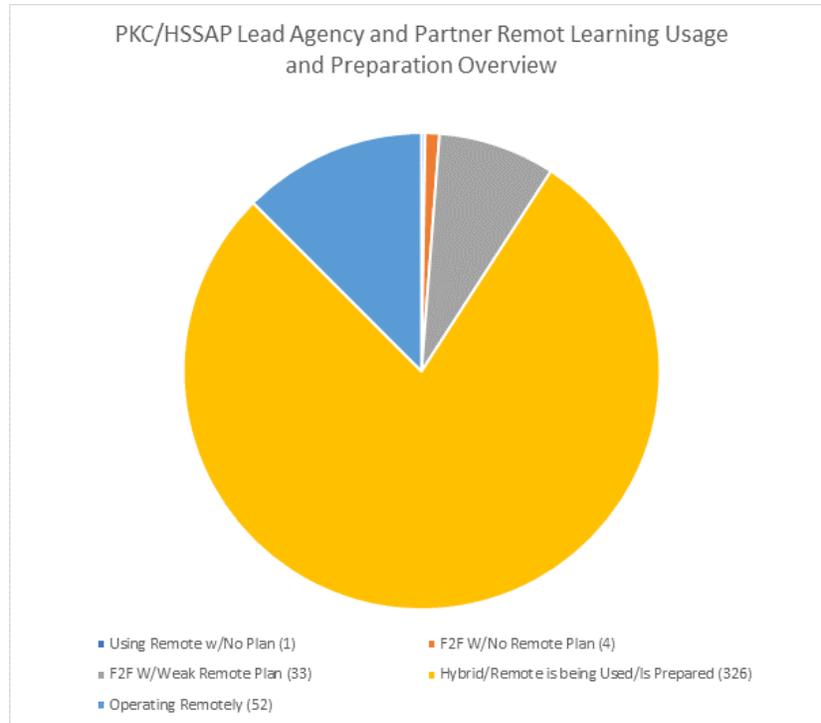
Program Impacts due to COVID-19

On March 13, 2020, Governor Tom Wolf temporarily suspended in-person operations at all Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Programs in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Although programs were closed for in-person operations, funding continued to programs based on the executed contracts and enrollments as of March 13, 2020. This continuation of funding assured program stability during the Covid-19 crisis. As such, both Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Programs were expected to pay staff during the in-person closures, and were asked, when feasible, to continue to provide meals and continuity of learning opportunities to enrolled students. These expectations were communicated to programs through Frequently Asked Questions documents posted to the Department's website. Programs were also provided flexibility in some typical fiscal spending policies through Announcement PKC 4/20 and HSSAP 4/20 (see Appendix F) to allow program expenditures to support virtual remote learning and other Covid-19 related expenditures.

During FY 2020-21, programs were expected to maintain full enrollment throughout the pandemic but were allowed continued flexibility in instructional design. In November 2020, program staff conducted an internal, informal survey of programs to understand the extent to which programs were able to continue remote operations for enrolled students. Figure 2 shows the results of the survey.

Figure 2: PA PKC/HSSAP Lead Agency and Partner Remote Learning Usage and Preparation Overview

Remote/No Plan .24%	In person/ weak remote plan 7.9%
Remote Only with Plan 12.5%	In person Only .96%
Hybrid with Plan 78.4%	



As seen in Figure 2, programs used a blend of in-person, remote, and hybrid options and shifted among these models in response to the changing COVID-19 landscape in local and county regions.

Enrollment data was tracked throughout the pandemic for both programs. Enrollment data showed that even with flexibility for remote learning, many grantees were under-enrolled in FY 2020-21. In response, PDE issued Announcement PKC 20-#005; HSSAP 20-#005 (see Appendix I) to explain how under-enrolled grantees would be identified. Identified grantees had the opportunity to submit narrative detailing the impacts of COVID-19 on their enrollments and submit budget revisions detailing how unspent funds would be reallocated to support program goals. Staff from the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL) reviewed all submissions. The most cited reasons for under-enrollment included the following:

- Families prioritizing virtual learning with older school-age students;
- Families questioning the appropriateness of virtual learning for prekindergartners;
- Hybrid/remote schedules did not work for families;
- Families not comfortable with in-person instruction or with CDC restrictions (e.g., masking);
- Staff shortages;
- CDC restrictions limited class sizes; and
- Family demographics changed due to pandemic (unemployed, relocating, taking care of elderly family members).

Appendix J: Covid-19 Impact on Enrollment details the identified under-enrolled grantees, percentage under-enrolled, and which grantees retained full funding.

CARES Act funding allocated by the Pennsylvania General Assembly through Act 24 of 2020 was used to supplement program needs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Funds could be spent for COVID-19 related expenses from March 2020 through November 2020. See Appendix G for the CARES Act funding application guidance which details how funds were distributed to grantees, as well as how funding could be used. Appendix H includes applicant information and final expenditures.