

How can schools boost enrollment in Pre-K programs?

In [2019-20](#), 42,683 students were enrolled in Pre-K in Oklahoma. In the 2020-21 school year, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, [Pre-K enrollment dropped by 4,734 students](#). Reversing this trend is critical; attending Pre-K provides a foundation of knowledge and skills that promotes student success well into the future. [Research on Pre-K in Oklahoma](#) shows that Pre-K students see academic benefits as late as middle school, including achievement in mathematics, grade retention and enrollment in honors courses. Additionally, students who attend Pre-K are less likely to be chronically absent.

The information in this document is intended to provide guidance to schools working to boost enrollment in Pre-K.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

To respond to the hesitation some families feel about enrolling their children in Pre-K during a pandemic, schools should provide resources that explain the protocols they are taking to mitigate and prevent the spread of COVID-19. This can alleviate fears and help families see that their child's safety is the school's top priority. Offering tours to families to meet the teacher and see firsthand that learning occurs in a safe environment can also make them feel more comfortable.

[Research](#) indicates the lasting impact attending Pre-K has on young learners for the duration of their school experience. This early instruction and intervention promotes growth and success socially, emotionally and academically.

It is important to identify students within the community who would benefit from a school's Pre-K program and actively work to get those students enrolled, no matter the time of year. For early learners, every day of learning counts.

Prior to engaging in an enrollment push, schools should determine open slots in their Pre-K programs to develop appropriate strategies based on availability. Even one or two openings could change the trajectory of a student or family not currently enrolled.

The school community itself is an effective entry point for recruiting Pre-K students. Surveying faculty can help identify students with siblings who might be age-eligible but are not currently enrolled. Word-of-mouth testimonials can also be a powerful motivator. Schools can create a [Parent Ambassador flyer or program](#) to

KEY INSIGHTS

- Communicate with families to determine their specific needs.
- Engage in targeted outreach efforts to families of unenrolled students.
- Work with community partners to share information about enrollment with families.
- Use social media platforms to advertise program availability.

SEE ALSO

- [How can community organizations develop strategic partnerships with schools?](#)
- [Pre-K Family Guide](#)
- [High-Quality Afterschool and Summer Learning Program](#)

encourage enrolled families to [share the benefits of Pre-K with others](#) in their community via social media, during play dates and in other settings. Schools can also leverage partnerships with community organizations to identify families who could benefit from Pre-K enrollment. [Pediatrician offices](#), local libraries, faith-based organizations and many others have frequent points of connection with families. The simple act of dropping off [enrollment information](#) or [flyers](#) to these community partners can build a bridge to welcome families into school.

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

It is important to consider enrollment barriers some families may face. The process may feel overwhelming or cumbersome, and some families may lack access to required documents. Providing [clear information](#) that supports families in obtaining needed paperwork can alleviate stress and allow a seamless transition to school. For example, schools can host [vaccine clinics](#) or start a fund to assist families who need to [obtain a copy of a birth certificate](#) for enrollment or other services. All resources should provide simple, clear instructions in the languages represented in the community to ensure all families feel recognized and welcome.

Some families may face logistical barriers. If a Pre-K schedule differs from that of an older sibling or if transportation is not available for the younger student, working families may be faced with a difficult choice. Connecting families with information and resources (area aftercare programs, [DHS child care subsidy information](#), etc.) may help remove these and other potential barriers.

RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS

- Create an Enrollment Committee that reflects school and community demographics to seek input and take action to encourage enrollment.
- [Create videos](#) and utilize [social media](#) to advertise availability within the Pre-K program. Ensure all communication is provided in the languages spoken by families.
- Help families consider these options if transportation is an issue:
 - Organize a [walking school bus](#) – a group of children walking together with one or more adult.
 - Connect families within the same geographical area for carpools.
 - Provide a list of available day care options available to provide transportation or assist families in using the [DHS Child Care Locator](#) tool.
 - Develop an afterschool care program to include Pre-K students.
- Host a Pre-K Fair to give families the opportunity to see the school and visualize the space where their child will learn and grow each day.
- Identify families within the school who have younger family members eligible for school.
- Create a [one-page document](#) or [web page](#) with strong graphics that outlines school safety procedures.