

Lawmakers want to fund daylong pre-K programs

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AUSTIN — The Texas Legislature is considering a measure that would make it easier for schools to offer full-day pre-kindergarten programs to economically disadvantaged 4-year-olds.

Texas currently pays for half-day preschool, widely thought to boost student performance in later years, for qualifying children. But under a bill winding through the Legislature, the state would pay for schools to offer full-day programs.

Rep. Diane Patrick, R-Arlington, said her proposal would add about \$300 million to the state budget now being crafted.

“But it would save millions of dollars in future costs to the state because these children are more likely to be ready from the start to start learning and less likely to drop out,” Patrick said of her bill, which also sets classroom standards for the programs.

Critics say the proposal would cost the state too much and doesn't do enough to encourage partnerships with private groups.

“This is basically going to be a tax increase on people during a recession,” said Brooke Terry, an education policy expert for the Texas Public

Policy Foundation.

Terry, who supports another proposal that would pay for eligible children to attend private preschools, said Patrick's bill doesn't do enough to work with private providers.

“Let's make sure students who are eligible for half day get in it versus going from half day to full day,” Terry said.

Versions of the bill are pending in both House and Senate education committees.

About 44 percent of 4-year-olds in Texas are in public preschool programs, according to the Southern Regional Education Board, which advocates for states to dedicate enough money to assure every 4-year-old an opportunity to attend pre-kindergarten.

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