



Durham PreK

Eligibility for participation Sliding Scale

In November 2018 the Durham PreK Governance Committee approved the student eligibility requirements and sliding fee scale for Durham PreK services.

The Governance Committee began the program decision making process by **first** reviewing and consulting the recommendations made by the Durham PreK Task Force in their April 2017 report, *Voluntary, Universal Pre-kindergarten in Durham County; How Do We Get There from Here?* **Second**, Governance reviewed the results in the June 2018 *Durham County Preschool Supply and Demand Study*. **Third**, members of Governance reviewed income eligibility by comparing income eligibility across programs and then reviewing a data resource, the Income Eligibility Crosswalk, an illustration of common guidelines for subsidized early care and education programs. **The members then discussed and debated numerous points, including:**

- Some programs' eligibility cutoffs are very strict, leaving out many Durham families. Children from families with incomes just above the cutoff particularly lose out because their families make too much money to qualify for subsidized preschool, but too little to afford quality preschool on their own, and their needs are often very similar to those of children right below the cut-off
- The **Durham PreK Task Force** (over 50 community participants met over a 9 month period) felt strongly that the Durham community deserved a universal PreK program that gave priority to those families most in need
- The Supply and Demand Study showed that the majority of Durham's families supported cost free preschool, but if fee based, then on a sliding scale
- In 2016, the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#) announced a new standard of [affordability](#) of no more than 7 percent of family income for child care; the recommended cutoff had previously been at 10 percent. This means, simply, that no family should be paying more than 7 percent of their household income to cover the costs of child care. The percent of monthly income families spend on child care on average has stayed constant between 1997 and 2011, at around seven percent (most recent data according to the U.S. Census Bureau). Poor families on average spend approximately four times the share of their income on child care compared to higher income families. (*Who's Minding the Kids? Child Care Arrangements: Spring 2011*, U.S. Census Bureau, 2013.)
- All kids can benefit from quality early learning programs. Most publicly funded preschool programs in the U.S. focus on low-income children, so the research base is strongest on pre-K's impacts for low-income kids. But research on universal pre-K in [Tulsa, Oklahoma](#), as well as [international studies](#), shows that kids of all income levels can benefit from pre-K – although poor kids do benefit more
- Most publicly funded programs use family income as a proxy for need; however, there are many child and family factors that impact children's development and risk of struggling in school. Strict income guidelines do not allow for these factors

- Income eligibility makes it difficult for families to know what services they qualify for and the resulting fragmentation and complexity may actually increase the chances that the most-needy children fall through the cracks. Providers also waste time and resources verifying family incomes and recruiting children who may turn out not to meet income cutoffs
- Committee members wish to build public will for the program and to be fully inclusive of all groups in the community; universal pre-K changes families' expectations. In [communities](#) with universal pre-K, parents expect that their children will attend preschool. This, in turn, shapes parents' own perception of their young children as learners and their own role in supporting learning. Making pre-K universal, like K-12 education, also leads parents to think of pre-K (regardless of setting) as education, raising expectations for their children's learning experiences
- Tax payers with income levels above the traditional limits for public preschool programs are already contributing to the services through their tax payments, thus the cap of co-payments to the reimbursement rate was (\$1250) was debated

After robust discussion of all of the factors described, voting committee members approved a *universal* PreK program that uses an eligibility and sliding scale, along with a parent fee cap, through the end of the 2019-2020 school year. The committee will continue to discuss multi-child scenarios, household early care bill percentages and parent fee caps. **Governance voted to:**

- Make the program free for families at or below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and household size
- Begin charging a parent fee at 300% Federal Poverty Level (FPL)
- Charge parent fees on a flat percent of a family's gross monthly income
- Implement the following tiered system:
 - 4% at 300% FPL (aligns with the Durham Public Schools PreK sliding scale)
 - 7% at 350% FPL (aligns with NC Childhood Action Plan)
- Cap parent fees at \$1,250 so no parent pays more than the per child reimbursement rate
- Prioritize families up to 300% FPL, through the 2019-2020 school year, by only allowing up to 30% of Durham PreK slots for families that qualify for the sliding scale
- Track application and enrollment data for future eligibility and sliding scale policies.