

*“The research is out there about the importance of preschool education. The research is also out there about students who aren’t successful in school and the likely outcomes for those kids, which are not positive. Considering that it costs less to educate a child than put an adult in prison, I would hope that our legislators and local leaders fight more to help our kids while they’re in preschool rather than supplement prisons.”*

- Superintendent Damaris Rau

# SCHOOL DISTRICTS SEE THE DIFFERENCE

School District of Lancaster,  
Lancaster County, urban

Eligible three- and four-year olds:	<b>1,833</b>
Children served in publicly funded, high-quality pre-k:	<b>818 or 44.63%</b>
Current classrooms:	<b>41</b>
Unmet need:	<b>1,015 children or 55.37%</b>
Additional classrooms required:	<b>51</b>



## The Story

When students enter School District of Lancaster kindergarten, it is “absolutely possible” to tell which students came from quality prekindergarten, says Coordinator of School Improvement and Federal Programs Karen Wynn.

“We find that students from early learning programs that aren’t operating at the highest quality don’t have the well-developed foundation we want in literacy and math,” says Wynn. “They may not be able to complete self-help tasks successfully. They may not have as well-developed social skills.”

In a diverse setting like Lancaster’s, high-quality pre-k can help children from non-English speaking families prepare for kindergarten language instruction, says Superintendent Dr. Damaris Rau.

“Their parents may not be educated themselves and are not aware of the importance of speaking to your child, and reading to your child,” say Rau. “They don’t have that strong background in how to raise their preschooler to be successful in kindergarten.”

The district funds its own pre-k with Pre-K Counts, Title I, and district funds. Whether kindergartners come from a School District of Lancaster pre-k or a partnering community program that also adheres to standards of high quality, district officials can see the difference:

**Kindergarten readiness:** On early literacy assessments, 73 percent of kindergartners from district pre-k performed at or above benchmark levels, compared to 40 percent of students with no known pre-k.

**Academic progress:** By third grade, the number of pre-k participants scoring proficient or advanced on English language arts PSSA tests was 40 percent higher than those who did not have access to high-quality prekindergarten.

**Classroom orientation:** When teachers spend less time on the social and emotional skills needed to get through the school day, they have more time to teach academics, says Rau. Time devoted to developing language skills is especially important to fill in the gaps known among low-income children, who grow up hearing far fewer words than their better-off peers. “Your language development goes to your reading development, and your reading development goes to everything you learn from there on,” she says.

**Less special education and remediation:** Students who lack the foundational skills learned in pre-k “often are the recipients of in-class intervention,” says Wynn. “They might have to have individual plans to meet learning gaps.” For those children already identified in pre-k as needing additional supports, the system is already in place when they enter kindergarten, for “a smooth transition,” she adds.