

"I don't know what we would do without our pre-k program. It is helping us and closing that achievement gap. If we were able to expand it even more, we would have a greater impact on those children coming to us as 4 year-olds. Whether we capture them or they go to some other quality program, the most important part is that all those kids gain the skills needed to enter kindergarten ready to learn."

- Superintendent Eric Holmes

SCHOOL DISTRICTS SEE THE DIFFERENCE

School District of the City of York, York County, urban

Eligible three- and four-year olds:	1,216
Children served in publicly funded, high-quality pre-k:	841 or 69.14%
Current classrooms:	42
Unmet need:	375 children or 30.86%
Additional classrooms required:	7



The District's Story

In the city of York, where many families struggle to overcome poverty, quality pre-kindergarten fills gaps in learning during those crucial developmental years before kindergarten. For instance, says Superintendent Eric Holmes, "well-known studies show that children from low-income families hear far fewer words than their more affluent peers."

"We're looking to close the gaps when students come to us in terms of their ability levels, in terms of their exposure to colors, to the alphabet, to words they should be hearing by the time they enter kindergarten," he says. "Our students need that preparation, and we believe we can give it to them through pre-k."

Among quality pre-k offerings city-wide, the district runs at least one pre-k in each of its K-8 buildings, and it wants more "because we need to better prepare our students for school," Holmes says. Of its 11 pre-k classrooms, nine are funded by Pre-K Counts, and two are district-funded. Even the district's state-ordered recovery plan, approved in 2016, cites expanded pre-k access as a steppingstone toward improved literacy, better test scores, and higher graduation rates.

Holmes and his district see positive results from high-quality pre-k:

Academic progress: In third- and fourth-grade PSSA results, students who experienced the district's pre-k showed significantly higher average scores in reading and math than their peers who hadn't been in the program. "Until third grade, students have been learning to read," says Holmes. "At third grade, they're reading to learn. If you don't learn to read and don't have those skills to start with, you won't see the same progress that you see with kids who may have had more opportunities when they were younger."

Strong start: Quality pre-k is "a valuable, valuable resource," says Holmes. Its value comes in providing extra assistance that puts at-risk children "at the starting line with everyone else, so they can successfully compete in the race. What we're seeing is kids who start a few yards behind the starting line, and they never catch up."

Classroom orientation: Teachers notice that children from quality pre-k "know how the classroom works and the expectations," Holmes says. "More importantly, they have the skills that the kids without pre-k don't possess. They're not as far behind." Quality pre-k even promotes active parent participation in the elementary years by instilling the importance of family in educational success.