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# Invest in Quality:

A Case for Paying Closer to  
What High-Quality Pre-K Costs

## INTRODUCTION

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania understands the importance of investing in three- and four- year olds. In the last five years, Pennsylvania's spending on pre-k increased by \$145 million for state-funded, high-quality pre-k programs - Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program (HSSAP). As the Commonwealth continues to increase public dollars for early childhood education, it is imperative that investments go towards increasing rates for publicly-funded programs so we can pay providers closer to what high-quality pre-k costs.



As Pennsylvania strives to be a leader in early childhood education, we must consider the balance between continuing to serve more children and increasing quality. Pre-k teachers remain at the center of quality. Without addressing inflation costs and increased basic expenditures, publicly-funded programs cannot support the skilled teachers who are the foundation of high-quality early education, nor can they keep up with the materials and resources necessary for creating high-quality learning environments. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the existing problem of the underfunded early childhood

infrastructure. We understand the competing priorities and fiscal challenges brought on by the pandemic; however, early childhood is a critical piece to economic recovery. Pre-k will not only be essential to supporting the growth of our youngest learners who have missed out on months of learning opportunities, it will also serve as part of the infrastructure for getting families back to work. In order to begin paying closer to what high-quality pre-k costs, the Pre-K for PA campaign is recommending increasing the rates for Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program.



## PENNSYLVANIA'S CURRENT PRE-K RATE

Since the pre-kindergarten investments Pennsylvania made in fiscal year 2015-16, approximately 14,835 more children received access to high-quality pre-k. There is also a need to focus on investments to go towards a rate increase per child in order to adjust for inflation. In 2015, the cost of a full time Pre-K Counts slot was \$8,500; according to the U.S. inflation rate this is equivalent to more than \$9,200 with an 8.8% inflation rate in 2020, however the Pre-K Counts rate for 2019-2020 was \$8,750.

In a Pre-K for PA partner report by Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, *The Road to Success Includes High-Quality Pre-K*, state by state comparisons paint a picture of where the Commonwealth falls. Pennsylvania ranks 19 out of 28 in per capita investments of pre-k programs according to the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).<sup>1</sup> If we want to keep pace and invest in the future, we need to increase our investments for high-quality, publicly-funded pre-k that focuses on access and quality.

Beyond adjusting for inflation rates and keeping pace for what other states spend on pre-k slots per capita, increasing the rate for pre-k slots supports quality. Across the early childhood field, state-funded pre-k programs have made the most headway toward addressing teacher compensation and qualifications.<sup>2</sup>



## TEACHERS ARE THE FOUNDATION OF QUALITY

A skilled and stable teaching workforce maintains a high-quality early learning environment. While quality expects and demands the appropriate knowledge and credentials of professionals, the compensation for pre-k teachers remains significantly lower than their colleagues in K-12 settings.

There are 23 states that have established pre-k salary parity policies with K-12 teachers with the goal to raise the salary of a pre-k teacher with a similar level of education and qualifications as their K-12 counterparts.<sup>3</sup> The NIEER data snapshot for lead teacher qualifications and pay parity considers the following aspects when comparing pay parity to K-3 teachers: starting salary, salary schedule, fringe benefits paid planning and/or professional development, and prorating to account for difference in the length of day.

Child Trends explored the effects of the pre-k salary parity policy in Alabama by speaking with teachers and center directors. Key takeaways included that salary parity increased interest in joining the early childhood education workforce and it may be helpful for retention of teachers in the field.<sup>4</sup> States with higher pre-k compensation also tend to have better funded pre-k programs. Higher salaries for pre-k teachers are linked to higher spending per pupil. The ratio of pre-k to kindergarten spending per pupil is higher for salary parity states.<sup>5</sup>

Pre-k teachers receive pre-service training and professional development just like their K-12 counterparts so they are well-prepared in developmentally appropriate practice and instruction for the age group/developmental period that they teach. **Table A (page 4)** provides an overview of requirements for lead teachers and compares the education and training for Head Start, Pre-K Counts, and elementary school teachers in Pennsylvania. Educational effectiveness in early childhood education requires educators to have specialized knowledge in child development. This specialized content knowledge supports children in their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development that lay the foundation for all future learning competencies. Teachers need to be equipped not only to teach curriculum but also to understand how to instruct young children and develop relationships with them. Stable, consistent relationships are best for young children as they develop social, emotional, cognitive, and physical skills.

**Table A Lead Teacher: Education and Training Comparisons**

Head Start	Pre-K Counts	PK-4
Education: Associate's, Bachelor's, or advanced degree in child development or ECE- or in a related field with coursework equivalent to a major relating to ECE and experience teaching preschool children	Education: Bachelor's degree and ECE certificate	Education: Bachelor's degree and ECE certificate
Complete a minimum of 15 clock hours of professional development per year	Must complete a minimum of 24 post baccalaureate credits to convert from Instructional Level I to Level II within six years	Must complete a minimum of 24 post baccalaureate credits to convert from Instructional Level I to Level II within six years
	Participate in a PDE approved teacher induction program	Participate in PDE approved teacher induction program
	150 hours of Act 48 approved professional development every five years to maintain certification	150 hours of Act 48 approved professional development every five years to maintain certification

## HIGH TEACHER TURNOVER THREATENS QUALITY

Due to the inadequate compensation the turnover rate is high for pre-k teachers in this critical work. Nationally, the annual turnover rate for early childhood educators is 30%, with low compensation cited as the top reason for leaving the field.<sup>6</sup> High teacher turnover in early childhood programs undermines quality and is a financial burden on programs. High turnover of pre-k teachers can be detrimental to the quality of the environment and the development of young children, just as it would be for schools to lose and replace teachers in the middle of the year. Teacher turnover impacts the quality environment of the classroom and directly impacts the connection

with children and their families. When programs lose and replace teachers this can trigger stranger anxiety in pre-k students, which hinders the potential for growth in their early learning environment. The constant teacher turnover and struggle with retaining highly qualified professionals also has a detrimental impact on the program as it takes time to rehire a qualified professional and often causes staffing shifts. Often times certified pre-k teachers leave child care center-based classrooms for school districts or leave the education field altogether. Table B compares the statewide annual occupation wages for lead preschool teachers, kindergarten, and elementary school teachers.

**Table B Statewide Annual Occupational Wages**

	Entry Level	Average	Experienced
Preschool teacher	\$22,650	\$31,380	\$35,740
Kindergarten teacher	\$43,830	\$66,160	\$77,320
Elementary school teacher	\$48,540	\$69, 630	\$80,170

Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, Occupational Employment Statistics (OES), 2019

Despite working a highly-skilled, challenging job with similar education, certification, and training requirements, pre-k teachers make significantly less than teachers instructing older grades in an elementary school. Many of the pre-k teachers have the same PK-4 Pennsylvania teacher certification as their colleagues. While funding streams differ, we need to move towards parity for teacher compensation across programs and addressing rates will help achieve that goal. **The Appendix (page 6)** in this report shows the breakdown of annual earnings for several counties throughout the Commonwealth.

## BASIC EXPENDITURES CONTRIBUTE TO QUALITY

While teachers are the center of quality and personnel accounts for the majority of costs at early learning programs, basic expenditures such as rent, utilities, classroom materials, and food also impact the quality of care and education provided. Well-equipped and resourced facilities enhance child development and program quality. The environment is one of the “structural dimensions of care” that influences the quality according to Shonkoff and Phillips *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*. The physical space sets the stage and creates the context for everything that happens. Facilities and classroom materials play an important role in developing the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills. In addition to the typical operations costs, COVID-19 health protocol have presented a new set of costs for the PPE and sanitation materials to ensure the safety of children, staff, and families.



## CONCLUSION

Improving quality through rate adjustments in both Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program ensures these programs can maintain high-quality early learning experiences for children and families. This rate increase should be consistent with the rate increase provided through the federal CARES Act funding of \$9 million. Pennsylvania should allocate \$9 million to specifically go toward a rate adjustment for both Pre-K Counts and Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program and ensure these rate increases are directly passed through to providers in order to meet current needs.

- Support a \$7 million allocation to provide rate adjustments of Pre-K Counts current base rate from \$8,750 to \$9,025
- Support a \$2 million allocation to provide rate adjustments of Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program current average base rate from \$10,500 to \$10,805

## APPENDIX

### Annual Occupation Wages by County

\*Note some county data was not available

County	Role	Annual Entry	Annual Average	Annual Expr'd
Adams County	Preschool Teachers	\$21,910	\$27,030	\$29,590
Adams County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Adams County	Elementary School Teachers	\$45,270	\$60,880	\$68,690
Allegheny County	Preschool Teachers	\$23,090	\$35,950	\$42,380
Allegheny County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$53,710	\$77,960	\$90,090
Allegheny County	Elementary School Teachers	\$50,220	\$74,130	\$86,090
Berks County	Preschool Teachers	\$22,710	\$31,400	\$35,750
Berks County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$44,610	\$62,990	\$72,180
Berks County	Elementary School Teachers	\$46,910	\$66,050	\$75,610
Blair County	Preschool Teachers	\$18,600	\$25,150	\$28,420
Blair County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$35,360	\$50,560	\$58,170
Blair County	Elementary School Teachers	\$40,130	\$56,290	\$64,370
Bucks County	Preschool Teachers	\$20,330	\$26,400	\$29,440
Bucks County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$54,840	\$70,190	\$77,870
Bucks County	Elementary School Teachers	\$51,740	\$78,770	\$92,280
Cambria County	Preschool Teachers	\$24,650	\$33,570	\$38,030
Cambria County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$49,340	\$59,990	\$65,320
Cambria County	Elementary School Teachers	\$43,300	\$59,330	\$67,350
Centre County	Preschool Teachers	\$21,400	\$35,210	\$42,110
Centre County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Centre County	Elementary School Teachers	\$36,220	\$53,500	\$62,140

Chester County	Preschool Teachers	\$26,710	\$32,140	\$34,850
Chester County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Chester County	Elementary School Teachers	\$49,100	\$72,210	\$83,770
Clearfield County	Preschool Teachers	\$22,800	\$37,450	\$44,780
Clearfield County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Clearfield County	Elementary School Teachers	\$44,980	\$57,380	\$63,580
Columbia County	Preschool Teachers	\$22,710	\$30,540	\$34,450
Columbia County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Columbia County	Elementary School Teachers	\$39,040	\$61,460	\$72,670
Cumberland County	Preschool Teachers	\$25,080	\$28,940	\$30,880
Cumberland County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Cumberland County	Elementary School Teachers	\$51,340	\$61,690	\$66,870
Dauphin County	Preschool Teachers	\$25,040	\$29,990	\$32,460
Dauphin County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$38,560	\$56,870	\$66,020
Dauphin County	Elementary School Teachers	\$46,350	\$61,450	\$69,000
Delaware County	Preschool Teachers	\$22,950	\$31,020	\$35,060
Delaware County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$29,060	\$60,250	\$75,840
Delaware County	Elementary School Teachers	\$50,900	\$78,230	\$91,900
Erie County	Preschool Teachers	\$21,130	\$26,300	\$28,890
Erie County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$32,880	\$60,910	\$74,920
Erie County	Elementary School Teachers	\$42,580	\$61,240	\$70,580
Franklin County	Preschool Teachers	\$17,910	\$24,150	\$27,270
Franklin County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$54,700	\$58,910	\$61,020
Franklin County	Elementary School Teachers	\$51,530	\$65,090	\$71,870

Lackawanna County	Preschool Teachers	\$17,420	\$23,900	\$27,140
Lackawanna County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$52,760	\$63,940	\$69,530
Lackawanna County	Elementary School Teachers	\$43,240	\$59,140	\$67,090
Lancaster County	Preschool Teachers	\$25,360	\$31,340	\$34,320
Lancaster County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$31,130	\$46,730	\$54,530
Lancaster County	Elementary School Teachers	\$47,320	\$65,740	\$74,950
Lebanon County	Preschool Teachers	\$23,680	\$28,200	\$30,470
Lebanon County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Lebanon County	Elementary School Teachers	\$51,570	\$67,760	\$75,860
Lehigh County	Preschool Teachers	\$21,210	\$32,340	\$37,900
Lehigh County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$57,680	\$78,470	\$88,870
Lehigh County	Elementary School Teachers	\$57,690	\$77,380	\$87,220
Luzerne County	Preschool Teachers	\$21,260	\$25,030	\$26,910
Luzerne County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Luzerne County	Elementary School Teachers	\$44,910	\$61,790	\$70,230
Lycoming County	Preschool Teachers	\$21,870	\$29,070	\$32,660
Lycoming County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$58,790	\$66,880	\$70,920
Lycoming County	Elementary School Teachers	\$56,800	\$68,160	\$73,840
Mercer County	Preschool Teachers	\$21,720	\$27,860	\$30,930
Mercer County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mercer County	Elementary School Teachers	\$45,590	\$62,460	\$70,900
Monroe County	Preschool Teachers	\$20,460	\$28,480	\$32,490
Monroe County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Monroe County	Elementary School Teachers	\$49,760	\$73,900	\$85,970

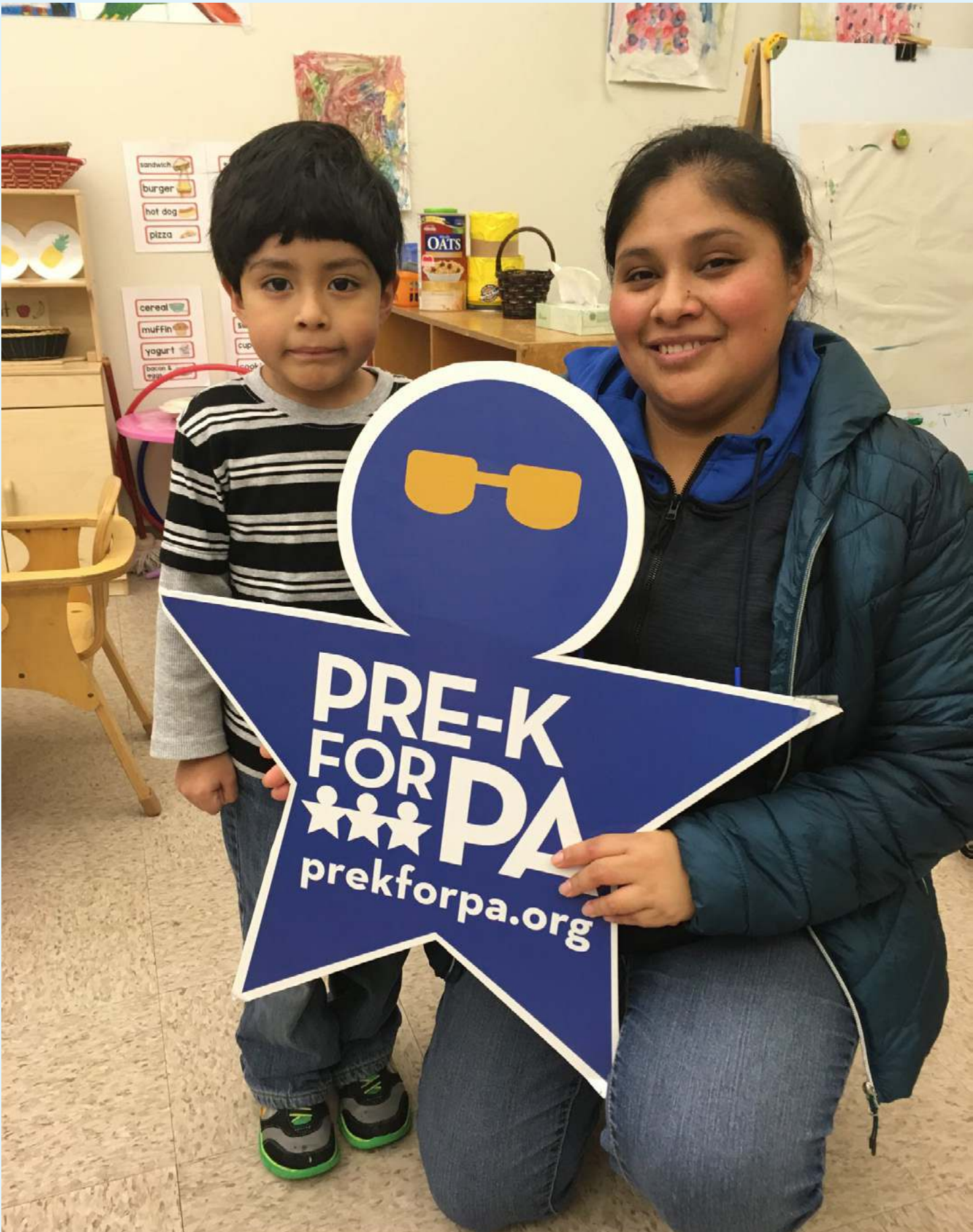


Montgomery County	Preschool Teachers	\$25,100	\$30,260	\$32,840
Montgomery County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$46,140	\$75,600	\$90,320
Montgomery County	Elementary School Teachers	\$48,940	\$83,150	\$100,250
Northampton County	Preschool Teachers	\$17,240	\$22,760	\$25,520
Northampton County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$59,360	\$78,410	\$87,930
Northampton County	Elementary School Teachers	\$59,850	\$77,250	\$85,950
Philadelphia County	Preschool Teachers	\$23,170	\$33,460	\$38,610
Philadelphia County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$32,340	\$50,290	\$59,270
Philadelphia County	Elementary School Teachers	\$46,100	\$70,960	\$83,380
Schuylkill County	Preschool Teachers	\$29,890	\$40,640	\$46,020
Schuylkill County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Schuylkill County	Elementary School Teachers	\$37,470	\$56,190	\$65,550
Westmoreland County	Preschool Teachers	\$23,760	\$29,410	\$32,230
Westmoreland County	Kindergarten Teachers	N/A	N/A	N/A
Westmoreland County	Elementary School Teachers	\$51,110	\$68,710	\$77,510
York County	Preschool Teachers	\$24,000	\$29,090	\$31,630
York County	Kindergarten Teachers	\$50,570	\$75,000	\$87,220
York County	Elementary School Teachers	\$54,550	\$73,420	\$82,850

Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, Occupational Employment Statistics (OES), 2019

## Sources

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- <sup>2</sup> McLean, C., Dichter, H., & Whitebook, M. (2017). *Strategies in Pursuit of Pre-K Teacher Compensation Parity: Lessons From Seven States and Cities*. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment and National Institute of Early Education Research. Retrieved from <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/files/2017/10/Strategies-in-Pursuit-of-Pre-K.pdf>.
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