

CITY OF SEATTLE

PROGRAM

Voluntary Full-Day Preschool for 3- and 4-Year Olds

FUNDING MECHANISM

Property Tax Referendum

OPPORTUNITY

Nearly one-quarter of Seattle children are not reading at grade level by third grade. The state pre-kindergarten program offered an opportunity to a limited number of children. The city had a challenge obtaining reliable data about children attending preschool. A gap analysis required by the City Council showed that between 3,300 and 4,500 were not enrolled in any preschool program. A citywide poll conducted in March of 2014 found only one-third of Seattle preschool-age children attended full-time preschool and about half reported using part-time preschool. Mayor Ed Murray sought to close the gap to promote school readiness and ultimately better school performance.

SUMMARY

In November of 2014, Seattle voters approved a referendum to increase property taxes to allow for 11 cents per \$1,000 in assessed value to fund the operation of the Seattle Preschool Program. The increase is estimated to provide about \$14.5 million per year for four years for a total of \$58.2 million. In practice, homeowners with a home worth \$400,000 pay an additional \$43 per year.

CHALLENGES

Failed Attempt in 2003 // Seattle tried a similar initiative financed by a 10 cent tax on espresso drinks (dubbed the “latte tax”). The lesson learned from the 2003 effort was to use a broad-based levy, not a levy that was product specific.

Complicated Proposition // Seattle faced two propositions related to creating a preschool initiative. Each side waged a campaign. Proposition 1B contained an offset to pay for the initiative; Proposition 1A did not.

Ongoing Challenge // The City Council Ordinance called for a mixed delivery model. Initial implementation appears primarily school-based. Even after approval, it is important to continue to engage in implementation efforts to ensure that the initiative is implemented in alignment with the Ordinance.

GETTING TO ACTION

The initiative was spearheaded by the Children’s Alliance and their coalition, the Early Learning Action Alliance, Fight Crime Invest in Kids, the University of Washington and Seattle business leaders. The key was obtaining support (and leadership) from the Mayor. City Council support spurred the preparation needed to inform a pathway to approve a citywide preschool program (i.e., a gap analysis, polling action plan).

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| Sept 2013 | Seattle City Council adopted Resolution 31478 supporting a voluntary preschool program. The resolution called for a gap analysis and an action plan. |
| Feb 2014 | The Gap Analysis Report was presented to the City Council. |
| May 2014 | Seattle Mayor Ed Murray proposed an Action Plan (a program proposal combined with a financing mechanism). |
| June 2014 | The Seattle City Council approved the Mayor’s plan (Ordinance 124509), which included a special election on November 4, 2014, a proposition to lift the limit on regular property taxes and authorized a four-year pilot program. |
| Nov 2014 | Proposition 1B won approval with 67 percent of the vote, authorizing the preschool pilot serving 2,000 children in 100 classrooms by 2018 and the 11 cent property tax increase to fund the program. |

RESULT

Seattle is funding a voluntary full-day preschool program for three- and four-year-olds that began in September of 2015. Tuition is free for families earning less than 300 percent of the federal poverty level, with a sliding fee scale for families earning more than 300 percent of the poverty level. Teachers receive on-site curriculum support and off-site training based on need, including best practices in inclusion, bilingual education, cultural competence and classroom management. The program is authorized for four years and is expected to serve 2,000 children.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

- ▶ *Mayor and City Council championed the initiative*
- ▶ *Initiative was time-limited (not in perpetuity)—a four year pilot program*
- ▶ *The measure was paid for and the revenue source was broad-based (all property tax owners)*
- ▶ *A first step was passing a resolution to gauge support by elected officials*
- ▶ *The resolution called for material to help make the case moving forward (i.e. gap analysis)*
- ▶ *Polling showed high support*
- ▶ *A broad-based advocacy effort/coalition assisted in waging a campaign in support of the Proposition*
- ▶ *Sufficient fundraising was in place to launch an issue-based campaign*



HOW DOES PROPERTY TAX WORK IN NORTH CAROLINA?

Local governments in North Carolina have the authority to raise property taxes for specific purposes designated by the North Carolina General Assembly. Within the area of “community development programs and activities” child care, health and education are listed explicitly. However, in consulting with several NC local government experts, it remains unclear if a broader set of early childhood programs or initiatives could qualify as a specified purpose.

Alternatively, local governments can adopt a resolution that affirms a desire to provide early childhood services with a portion of the property tax.