



State of New Mexico

Office of the Governor

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Governor Bill Richardson vows to increase Access to Pre-Kindergarten for 4-year-olds

ALBUQUERQUE - Governor Bill Richardson today announced plans to increase access to pre-kindergarten programs across the state. The New Mexico Pre-K plan, which will be presented to the 2005 Legislature, will be a public-private partnership that relies on community organizations to design local, high-quality Pre-K programs that are based on successful models.

“We’re investing directly in New Mexico’s children,” Governor Bill Richardson said of the voluntary pre-kindergarten plan, which was unveiled during a news conference today at Emerson Elementary School in Albuquerque. “It won’t be easy. But we must make that investment in four-year-olds, at the front end, early in the learning process.”

The plan calls for increasing access to high-quality pre-kindergarten programs for New Mexico four-year-olds. Currently, private and public programs, such as Head Start, serve half, or about 14,000 New Mexico four-year-olds. Another 14,000 kids either do not have access, or their families cannot afford pre-K programs.

Under the plan developed by the Children’s Cabinet, a group of the Governor’s Cabinet Secretaries led by Lt. Governor Diane Denish, the state would invest in voluntary pre-kindergarten programs designed by Early Childhood Community Councils.

“It will be voluntary and community based,” Lt. Governor Diane Denish said of the Pre-K plan. “Nobody knows a community better than the people who live there.”

The Councils, made up of early childhood educators, parents, schools, business and other community leaders, would design programs, and apply for state funding - initially between \$7 million and \$9 million. The Councils would propose new programs based on innovative pre-kindergarten models, or propose ways to expand existing, successful programs, using state resources to increase access to more children.

The State Public Education Department and the Children, Youth & Families Department would determine standards for the New Mexico Pre-Kindergarten programs, including how community proposals are selected for funding. The program would be phased in over a number of years, depending on the number of kids served and the type of programs that individual communities choose to implement.

Governor Richardson said he wants to build on the success of New Mexico’s full-day kindergarten program. But the Governor pointed to teacher surveys in other states that suggest between 35 and 50 percent of five-year-olds show up for Kindergarten not prepared to learn.

“Too many children are entering Kindergarten unprepared,” Governor Bill Richardson said. “We can make a significant and lifelong difference in the lives of children who aren’t prepared to learn by providing pre-Kindergarten in New Mexico.”