

Legislation Text

File #: 14-0178, **Version:** 1

Recommendation to direct City Manager to examine case studies from similarly sized municipalities that presently guarantee free preschool for their residents and report back to the City Council in 120 days with his findings about ways to fund such a venture in Long Beach, along with concrete policy goals and eligibility requirements that would allow for universal access without a major impact on the city budget; coordinate with Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) to ensure that any proposed program would not interfere with existing teaching contracts or place an undue burden on their resources; and reach out to existing community groups that provide this service for children to hear their ideas and input.

The last thirty years have seen a dramatic change in how working families with young children manage their finances and daily schedules. The end result of these changes is a dramatic upsurge in the need for reliable, safe, and academically stimulating forms of childcare. Unfortunately this need resulted in an increasingly expensive and unregulated patchwork of industries and independent contractors. Today daycare expenses create unprecedented levels of stress on parents/caretakers, and many of the existing day care facilities for poor and working class families are failing to properly prepare young children for success in kindergarten.

Luckily for the working parents in Long Beach (and the rest of the country) children are guaranteed a free and quality education when they enter kindergarten. But an increasing body of science now confirms that a child's intellectual development demands formal education begin earlier than the age of 5. Studies, including the landmark work of James Heckman from the University of Chicago, consistently show children that enter a structured pre-k perform better throughout their time in school (specifically in areas of literacy, math, and language skills), live healthier lives, and are less likely to exhibit behavioral problems as they grow up.

"Universal Pre-k" is an idea that every President since Lyndon Johnson has mentioned as a policy priority. It has existed in affluent countries outside of the US for decades. Nations like Japan and Germany have actually increased spending in this area since the economic downturn because of the proven net benefit to society that subsidized preschool provides. Despite the recent efforts of President Obama in bringing attention to Universal Pre-K, (including his 2013 State of the Union), the United States has yet to modernize our public education system to include this service. Instead sequestration eliminated 57,000 slots for children in Head Start nationwide in 2013.

But while the federal government has failed to shepherd this policy into fruition, it has been successfully implemented in cities such as San Francisco, San Diego, Chicago, Tulsa, and

may soon become a reality in New York City. Even states like Alabama, Oklahoma, and New Jersey have expanded access to preschool despite their committed efforts to reduce overall government spending.

The number of places adopting these measures continues to grow because the benefits provided by this kind of program produce demonstrable benefits to a broad swath of people in society. This is good public policy that can help middle class and low wage workers, increases financial flexibility for all families, allow cities to save money through reductions in long term social spending, and creates enriching environments for children to develop. We have a duty to see if a similar program can be enacted in this city.

Recommendation: 1) Recommend the City Manager to examine case studies from similarly sized municipalities that presently guarantee free preschool for their residents and report back to the city council in 120 days with his findings about ways to fund such a venture in Long Beach, along with concrete policy goals and eligibility requirements that would allow for universal access without a major impact on the city budget, 2) Coordinate with LBUSD to ensure that any proposed program would not interfere with existing teaching contracts or place an undue burden on their resources, 3) Reach out to existing community groups that provide this service for children to hear their ideas and input.

There is no significant fiscal impact to this measure.

Approve recommendation.

ROBERT GARCIA
VICE MAYOR
COUNCILMEMBER FIRST DISTRICT