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## **Prekindergarten classes now open to dependents of active duty members of the military**

AUSTIN - Free public school prekindergarten programs are now open to children of active duty members of the military.

House Bill 1, the education reform law approved by the Texas Legislature and signed by Gov. Rick Perry, expanded the program to military dependants, beginning with the 2006-2007 school year.

Previously, prekindergarten services have only been available to children who are three or four years old by Sept. 1 and are economically disadvantaged, homeless or unable to speak English. In the 2005-2006 school year, there were 182,293 children served in Texas prekindergarten programs across the state.

It is difficult to predict how many eligible military dependents will actually enroll in prekindergarten. It is estimated that there are 5,395 three- and four-year-old military children in Texas and that at least 50 percent are already eligible for prekindergarten services because of their home language or family income level.

Under the new law, the program is available to children of:

- Active duty uniformed members, which includes parents or guardians, of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force or Coast Guard who are assigned to duty stations in Texas or who are Texans who have eligible children residing in Texas;
- Guard and Reserve-Activated/Mobilized uniform members of the Texas National Guard – Army or Air Guard or the Activated/Mobilized Members of the Reserve components of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force or Coast Guard who are Texas residents regardless of the location of the reserve unit; or
- Military parents who are missing in action or who have died.

Some school districts are exploring the option of providing prekindergarten classes at non-profit childcare centers already operating on military installations. Through this partnership arrangement known as a School Readiness Integration Plan, a certified educator employed by a school district would come to the childcare center to provide educational services.

### **Determining eligibility**

To verify eligibility for prekindergarten classes, a parent or guardian may present a Department of Defense identification, such as a DoD photo identification card.

To verify that a service member is an active duty member or mobilized Reservist or member of the Texas National Guard, the family may request a “statement of service” from the Installation Adjutant General/Director of Human Resources. The service member might also present an official letter from a commander stating that he or she is on active duty or mobilized.

If the prekindergarten student is the surviving dependent of a service member who is deceased, the family can present a copy of the death certificate or a Department of Defense form that indicates that the reason for the separation from service was because of death.

If the Department of Defense form is not available, the family would ask the Casualty Assistance Office of the closest Casualty Area Command in Texas to provide a memorandum signed by the Casualty Office stating the service member was killed in action or died while serving.

If the military parent was injured, the family may present the district with a copy of the Purple Heart citation, a copy of the Line of Duty Determination or a letter from a commander.

The new school year begins for most Texas districts and charter schools in mid- to late August. The prekindergarten program is a half-day program, though about a third of the state’s districts are recipients of the state’s prekindergarten expansion grant, which allows them to offer a full-day program free of charge to eligible district residents.

To learn about additional resources available to military families, please go to:  
<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/mil/index.html>.