



The 80th Texas Legislature wrapped up on Monday May 28th after 140 days of a very challenging legislative session. More than 6,000 bills were filed in the House and Senate and approximately 23% of those made it through the legislative process and are awaiting approval by Governor Rick Perry. We have included the following important information for you regarding a wrap-up of the 80th Legislative Session:

1. **How did early childhood education fare this session?**
2. **What happened to Senate Bill 50?**
3. **Are we making progress?**
4. **What did we learn?**
5. **What are next steps?**

How did early childhood education fare this session?

Of the approximate 50 early childhood education bills filed that TECEC has been tracking for the past 6 months, just 6 passed.

Key early care and education accomplishments this session:

- **Despite a call from the Legislative Budget Board (LBB) at the beginning of the legislative session to cut \$20 million in pre-k services from the budget, these cuts were restored and funding was secured for all three of TECEC's priorities**, including **\$15 million** to continue pre-k services through the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM); **\$18 million** to increase reimbursement rates to child care providers serving at-risk children; and **\$2 million** to support early childhood education professionals in the field.

Legislative Champions: Senator Judith **Zaffirini (D-Laredo)**, Representative Lois **Kolkhorst (R-Brenham)**, and dozens of legislators that support child care providers, early education professionals, and pre-k in Texas

- **Pre-k eligibility expansion to children who have been in the foster care system**, ensuring that kids who have been sexually abused, physically assaulted and/or neglected have a leg up before kindergarten. Originally in **Senate Bill 113**, this language was then amended onto **Senate Bill 758** as well as **House Bill 1137**, both of which have passed and are awaiting the Governor's approval.

Legislative Champions: Senator Leticia **Van de Putte (D-San Antonio)**, Senator Jane **Nelson (R-Lewisville)**, Representative Joe **Straus (R-San Antonio)**, Representative Patrick **Rose (D-Dripping Springs)**, and Representative Scott **Hochberg (D-Houston)**

- **Critical data collection language from Senate Bill 50** that will be key in the continuous development of the school readiness certification system by

the State Center for Early Childhood Development was amended onto **Senate Bill 1871**.

Legislative Champions: Senator Judith **Zaffirini (D-Laredo)**, Senator Leticia Van de **Putte (D-San Antonio)**, and Representative Scott **Hochberg (D-Houston)**

- **Residential infant care and parenting program** for incarcerated mothers. **House Bill 199** will ensure that bonding occurs during this critical time between mother and child and that women participating in this program will receive parenting skills.

Legislative Champions: Representative Jerry **Madden (R-Richardson)**, and Senator John **Whitmire (D-Houston)**

- Implementation of a **nurse-family partnership program**, a nurse home visiting program in 11 regions of the state as outlined in **Senate Bill 156**. The RAND Corporation and the Brookings Institution both identify nurse-family partnerships as programs with a strong evidence base to promote sound prenatal care and the healthy development of infants and toddlers.

Legislative Champions: Senator Florence **Shapiro (R-Plano)**, Representative Jerry **Madden (R-Richardson)**, and 16 co-authors

- **Ensuring the safety of children in employer based on-site child care** through **House Bill 1385**.

Legislative Champions: Representative Michael **Villarreal (D-San Antonio)** and Senator Carlos **Uresti (D-San Antonio)**

- **Communities in Schools**-Texas' largest and most effective dropout prevention program-**being mandated to serve pre-kindergarten children**. **House Bill 1609** is proof positive that Texans believe dropout prevention begins in pre-kindergarten.

Legislative Champions: Representative Myra **Crownover (R-Denton)**, Senator Eliot **Shapleigh (D-El Paso)**, and more than 35 authors

For additional information regarding the early childhood education bills filed this session, including the six that passed, please visit the [TECEC website](#).

Senate Bill 50: Pieces Amended to Other Bills and Budget

Senate Bill 50, TECEC's priority bill, stalled in the House and did not pass. However, as mentioned above, pieces of SB 50 were amended to other bills, and funding was still secured for all three priorities outlined in the bill to include a total of **\$35 million**. This includes \$15 million to continue pre-k services through the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM); \$18 million to improve reimbursement rates paid to child care providers participating in Texas Rising Star Certification Program, the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM), or the School Readiness Certification System; and \$2 million towards the creation of regional professional development partnership

projects to improve the recruitment, retention, and quality of professionals working with young children.

This funding is the result of your efforts! Approximately **7,000 letters** were sent to legislators throughout the session asking for their support; hundreds of face-to-face visits were made; and hundreds of specific phone calls placed within each district by you. **Your voices were heard loud and clear!**

NEXT STEPS: Be on the lookout for a final alert regarding the 80th Legislative Session. We must contact Governor Rick Perry and ask that he sign the above legislation into law and approve the budget by the June 17th deadline.

How do we know we are making major progress?

1. **Pre-k has clear legislative support** -- Pre-k has been a **bipartisan** issue in 2003, 2005, and 2007. Members of the House and Senate on both sides of the aisle have come together to expand pre-k to children of military families, to children in foster care, and have supported the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM) three sessions in a row that brings together all three delivery systems Child Care, Head Start, and public Pre-k to improve the school readiness of young children.
2. **Pre-k has strong voter support** -- In 2006, Impact Texas Communications, a leading Republican polling firm, released findings from a statewide poll that revealed: (a) 70% of Republicans, 78% of Democrats, and 70% of Independents support pre-k; and (b) 81% of Texas voters believe that pre-k supports the overall learning potential of children.
3. **Pre-k has widespread community support** -- the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition represents more than 230 diverse member organizations from across Texas and the 80th legislative session has opened up opportunities to build new partnerships with the business and education community. For example, Senate Bill 50 received overwhelming support in committee hearings in the House and Senate by numerous statewide organizations representing the business, health, and education sectors.
4. **Pre-k has support from the business sector** --The 80th Legislative Session brought about new champions from the business community. The recent study conducted by the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University highlights the return on investment in high quality pre-k programs and resonates with Texas businesses seeking a strong workforce in the future. Texans know that every \$1.00 invested in high quality pre-k returns at least \$3.50 to Texas communities.

What did we learn from this session?

Every legislative session brings about **new lessons learned**. The 80th Legislative Session was no exception. Here are the top 5 things we learned this session:

1. The Texas Legislature has a growing number of **legislative champions** on both sides of the political aisle that support early childhood education. However, we also now know that there are legislators that **do not** make

children and families of Texas a priority. We have 18 months to build relationships and ensure that every legislator becomes a champion on this issue.

2. There are a number of misunderstandings that still remain regarding early childhood education. We must continue to **dispel falsehoods and get the true facts** out about early childhood education for children ages birth to five. We **cannot** let the **rhetoric** and **false statements** to the Texas legislature speak louder than the truth.
3. There were several **crisis issues** that came up this session and we applaud the Texas Legislature for tackling issues such as reform of the Texas Youth Commission (TYC), additional Child Protective Services (CPS) reform, water regulation, and access to the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). However, as the Editorial Board of the Austin American Statesman so eloquently put it, "**Why does it take a scandal to move the Legislature to protect Texas children?**" We need to make sure that the next 18 months are spent educating the legislature on the importance of addressing early childhood education **before** it rises to an even greater level of crisis.
4. The **public school finance debate** is not over yet! Legislative leadership acknowledged that despite their efforts during the last special session, funding is **not** available to support public school finance in the long term and therefore approximately \$3 billion that could have been spent on key issues right now was set aside for property tax cuts in the future.
5. **Our work is not done!** We need to elevate the goals outlined in **The Texas Plan**, the 10-year public policy agenda that was collaboratively developed by hundreds of Texans, and includes 50 specific public policy recommendations on how to improve the early education system in Texas.

Next Steps

Although the Legislature has adjourned, our work for this session is not yet over. We knew that securing significant increases in funding to support high quality early childhood education would be an uphill battle. Although we did not receive the original money ask we had hoped for, **we still made significant progress.**

Next steps:

- Outline progress made in **The Texas Plan**, and collaboratively develop recommendations on where we go from here;
- Analyze further all **factors that impacted early childhood education legislation** this session so we can strategically develop next steps;
- Develop **interim charges** related to specific research for the Legislature to study between now and the 81st Legislative Session;
- **Analyze the state budget** which must be signed by Governor Rick Perry by Sunday, June 17, 2007;
- Organize a **statewide meeting** with TECEC members and partners to identify next public policy steps for the 81st Legislative Session;

- Participate in strong **candidate education** and **voter support efforts**; and
- Identify **media champions** to cover stories affecting the early childhood education and development system in Texas.

Stay tuned for two **“action alerts”** in the near future regarding:

1. Asking **Governor Rick Perry** to sign the above early childhood education bills into law by the June 17th deadline.
2. Collecting the names of the **leaders in your community** we need to thank for their amazing work this session; and

Thank YOU again for your tremendous efforts throughout the 80th Legislative Session! Legislators are now very much aware that there is a statewide coalition comprised of advocates from across Texas ready to be activated at a moments notice.

Congratulations on your amazing work!

Sincerely,

Kaitlin Guthrow
Executive Director