



Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition (TECEC)
Legislative Priorities: 80th Legislative Session

Priority #1: Expand Access to Voluntary and High Quality Pre-kindergarten

Support targeted expansion of an integrated model of service delivery between Pre-kindergarten, Child Care and Head Start to increase access to full-day, full-year quality pre-k services under the control of local communities.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Texas is more poised than ever before to ensure every child a fair start on the path to school and life as a result of state specific research, proven models, and strong voter opinion. Texas now has a well-tested model of delivering pre-kindergarten content that works in partnership with school districts, Head Start, and child care providers (including for-profit, non-profit, and faith based providers). This model is called the **Texas Early Education Model (TEEM)** and it offers a unique approach in serving children through public/private partnerships in order to achieve the greatest return for every taxpayer dollar invested.

Senate Bill 76 (2003) and Senate Bill 23 (2005) both passed with bipartisan support to create and expand the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM) under the auspices of the State Center for Early Childhood Development designated by Governor Rick Perry in 2002 at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston. Results from TEEM are significant and show that children who participate achieve substantial learning of key oral language and emergent literacy skills that provide the foundation for learning to read.

TALKING POINTS:

General

- TEEM now exists in **32 communities** serving **40,320 children** in **2,016 classrooms**.
- TEEM reflects the goals of Governor Rick Perry's Early Start Initiative and the 80th Legislative Session will mark the third consecutive session of work on this effort.
- The Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) are now revising their policies to further align with TEEM and promote a partnership approach in providing pre-k.

Family Benefits

- The TEEM model improves access to a full-day of services for parents that are working or in school. When early childhood providers work in collaboration services include the core pre-k day with before and after school services as well.
- The TEEM model increases pre-kindergarten opportunities for our rapidly growing child population. A child eligible for pre-k can access the TEEM coursework in a child care setting, Head Start program, or their local participating public school district.

Program Quality Benefits

- TEEM promotes shared teaching strategies and activities that improve the school readiness of children.
- A collaborative approach results in reduced staff: child ratios for increased one on one attention with students.
- A partnership model allows for additional services and supports to families including wraparound care.

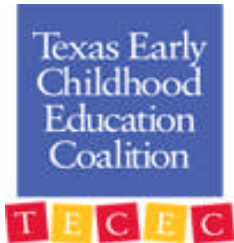
Cost Saving Benefits

- Collaboration between school districts, child care centers, and Head Start classrooms leads to program savings through shared materials, equipment, curriculum, and teachers.
- An integrated approach also allows school districts to save tax dollars by partnering with local child care and Head Start centers to provide pre-k services in their existing facilities instead of building new facilities or purchasing temporary buildings.

Overall Community Benefits

According to a recent study conducted by the Bush School of Government and Public Service, every \$1.00 invested in high quality pre-k yields at least \$3.50 to Texas communities through:

- Savings to the public school system as a result of special education and remedial costs;
- Savings to the criminal justice system due to reduced adult crime rates;
- Savings to the child welfare system as a result of early intervention and reduced cases of child abuse and neglect; and
- Increased lifetime earnings for mothers.



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Priority #2: Protect the Safety of Infants and Toddlers in Child Care

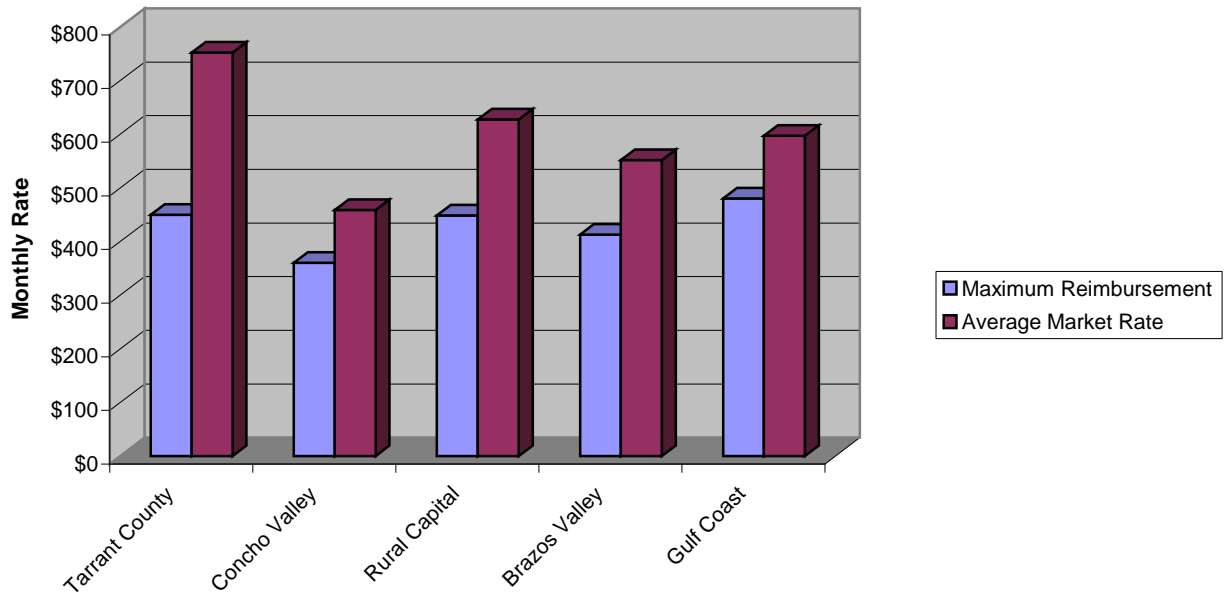
Increase payment rates to child care providers serving our highest need infants and toddlers to ensure that safe care is available for our youngest children.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The child care subsidy program, managed by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) serves the most at-risk children in Texas and is critical in supporting families making the transition from welfare to work. Unfortunately, due to state level funding decisions mandating higher levels of direct child care services, local workforce development boards have been forced to offer providers reimbursement rates that do not cover the cost of providing services, a condition that the state applies to no other industrial sector. In order to be true to our free market principles, Texas must pay child care providers a fair rate. As recent tragedies highlighted in the media have shown us, child care providers must have the resources necessary to provide safe environments. Understaffed and under resourced child care settings can lead to issues of regulation threatening the safety and well being of our youngest children.

The federal government recommends setting reimbursement rates at the 75th percentile of the local market rate or above to ensure subsidized families have access to quality care options. Currently, Texas does not set a statewide reimbursement rate paid to providers who care for children receiving subsidized child care assistance. Instead, 28 local workforce development boards (Boards) are responsible for setting rates in their respective regions. In establishing local rates, Boards must follow federal and state guidelines, consider the local market rates for child care, meet performance targets set by the Legislature, and work within the funding levels that have been appropriated. One key restriction has been a mandated freeze on raising maximum rates instituted in 2003. Although the Texas Workforce Commission lifted the freeze effective in late 2006, other policies remain in place that leave Boards struggling to meet the state benchmark of setting rates at the 65th percentile of local market rates. Given the restraints under which they must operate, the overwhelming majority of local Boards are forced to pay providers rates that are out-dated, substandard, and insufficient to cover the costs needed to provide safe and sound care for young children.

**Reimbursement Versus Market Rate
for Infant Care - 2006**



TALKING POINTS:

Children in Care:

- Half of all regulated child care facilities in Texas provide care for children in the child care subsidy program
- An average of 15,413 infants are served in the child care subsidy program 76% of whom are served in center based care
- An average of 23,027 toddlers are served in the child care subsidy program 80% of whom are served in center based care
- Just under half (45%) of infants and toddlers in Texas are in full time care, spending more than 35 hours a week being cared for by someone other than their parents.

Reimbursement Rates:

- Today, no Board is paying providers of infant or toddler care at the federally recommended 75th percentile of the market rate,
- Due to state level funding decisions, as of September of 2006, 27 of the 28 boards set their maximum rates for infant and toddler care below the 50th percentile.
- As a result of low rates, Texas is shifting more and more of the costs to providing services to parents and providers. As a result:
 - Parents must settle for lower quality care for their children often in informal settings not licensed or regulated by the state, which can be less safe and lack the resources to promote school readiness
 - Providers must choose between investing in high quality—enhanced materials, expanded training, improved facilities—or keeping their doors open.



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Priority #3: Support Early Childhood Education Professionals
Improve the recruitment, retention and quality of early childhood education professionals and establish a multi-level career path within the field.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Research clearly demonstrates that **increased teacher education has a direct impact on child outcomes**. Unfortunately, the professional preparation of early childhood education professionals that does exist in Texas takes place within a complex mix of widely varying standards. In addition, early childhood professionals lack incentives and face barriers to pursuing professional development and higher education opportunities. Exacerbating the issue is the fact that compensation including salaries and benefits across the early childhood education field varies dramatically as a result of sponsorship, funding, and program size. Professional development and compensation standards will improve early childhood education programs by enhancing professionals' status and satisfaction, reducing turnover, promoting continued education, and facilitating retention of administrators, teachers, and assistants who have attained an advanced level of skills.

TECEC supports the development of demonstration projects in several diverse regions of the state as well as proposed statewide reforms that will:

- Ensure the availability of quality professional development opportunities;
- Develop a plan for how certain professional development aligned with the Texas Early Care and Education Career Development System can be transferred into college course credits;
- Create a clear career path for early childhood education professionals;
- Develop incentives for early childhood education professionals seeking higher education and staff development opportunities;
- Provide improved compensation based on increased education and experience; and
- Create a Texas Council on Early Childhood Education Career Development to guide efforts at state level.

TALKING POINTS:

- Highly educated and fairly compensated early childhood teachers are more likely to develop strong, responsive, interpersonal relationships with their students, which affects each child's motivation to learn, social competence, and later school achievement.
- A recent large-scale study of school reform efforts shows that every additional dollar spent on more highly qualified teachers produced more gains in student achievement than any other single expenditure.
- Early learning experiences can influence the rest of a child's life.
- The professional preparation and ongoing education of teachers is directly linked with the quality of early childhood education programs.