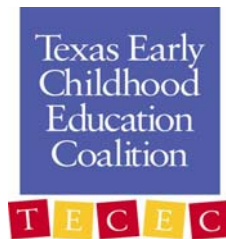


Testimony of:

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(TECEC)



Before the:

Senate Finance Committee
Texas Workforce Commission

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Good afternoon. My name is Kara Johnson and I am the President and CEO of the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition (TECEC). TECEC represents more than 350 organizations and 6,000 members and partners from across the great state of Texas. Our partners include representatives from public schools, Head Start, child care, the business community, higher education, foundations, community based organizations, and more.

This afternoon I am speaking on behalf of TECEC, as well as the Coalition on Pre-k Quality and Accountability. This is a new coalition that was formed during the interim and represents the bipartisan interests of business and education leaders across the great state of Texas. Members of the Coalition include the Texas Association of Business (TAB), Raise Your Hand Texas, the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition, the Texas Association of School Boards, the Texas Association of School Administrators, and the National Child Care Coalition.

I would like to begin my remarks by thanking Chairman Ogden, Vice Chairman Hinojosa, and the entire Senate Finance Committee for hearing my testimony. The purpose of my remarks today is to highlight the nationally recognized pre-k accountability system that has been created in Texas leading to children entering kindergarten school-ready. In addition, I am here to ask each of you to support funding for these critical Early Learning School Readiness Models, also known as the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM) and the Texas School Ready! Project (TSR).

Today, the state of Texas invests \$7.5 million in General Revenue (GR) each year of the biennium leveraging \$11.7 million in federal matching funds via the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). This General Revenue (GR) match source used to draw down federal workforce child care funds occurs at a favorable rate of \$1.56 for every \$1 General Revenue invested. If Texas ceases to invest in these programs, Texas will lose \$23.4 million dollars of federal funding each biennium towards proven, pre-k reform initiatives that prepare children to enter kindergarten school-ready.

The good news is the pre-k reform programs demand high quality from school districts, and their partnership programs in child care and Head Start centers by specifying that grantees have to spend money on the following proven school readiness components:

1. High-quality, developmentally appropriate, and rigorous curriculum;
2. Continuous monitoring of student progress in the classroom; and
3. Professional development, including mentoring, to promote student achievement.

As a result, we know these programs drive student achievement, improve educator effectiveness, and ensure accountability.

There is also no question as to the economic benefits of investing in high quality, pre-k reform programs. We now have data from the Bush School of Government at Texas A&M University, two federal reviews, and multiple peer reviewed journals as to the efficiency, accountability, and economic benefits of investing in high quality pre-k reform programs. These programs will help each of

you on this committee achieve many of your goals this session, including short and long-term economic growth, better prepared children for school, increased high school graduation rates, and a solid workforce in the future.

Each of you can also feel supported from the business community in your support of these pre-k reform programs. As I mentioned earlier today, business leaders from Raise Your Hand Texas and the Texas Association of Business have joined forces this session to build a Coalition on Pre-k Quality and Accountability because leaders from both groups recognize the critical role high quality early education programs play in economic recovery and the future growth of our great state.

Finally, TECEC would like to encourage each of you to consider changing the way the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) spends its Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) allotment from the federal government. Although the Coalition is pleased with the way the TWC administered the CCDF ARRA funds towards one-time quality improvement activities during the interim, their long-term investment in quality could be improved if the Texas Legislature would push for a change in the way the TWC sets its performance targets.

Performance targets determine the number of children that must be served per day in each of the 28 Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) areas. Often that number is so high that any desire to increase reimbursement rates paid to child care providers or to incentivize quality is rendered impossible. The 28 LWDBs govern the child care subsidy system regionally, but these LWDBs must follow directives and measures set by the TWC. Currently, the TWC, in

combination with budget recommendations from the Legislative Budget Board, has ultimate authority over the entire subsidized child care system.

In order to ensure that the TWC is not just utilizing federal dollars to provide child care for job training or work, TECEC encourages the Legislature to push for additional CCDF dollars being spent on accountable pre-k reform programs that have been proven to not just provide safe, high quality care, but also prepare children for entry into kindergarten. The state should invest in programs that provide two services (safe care and school readiness) instead of just one.

TECEC recognizes the tough position each of you are in as you decide which programs to fund this session. Please remember that economic recovery requires both a reduction in spending as well as an investment strategy. This session, we ask that you take this opportunity to invest in the right programs which can benefit our economy today and tomorrow.

Over the next three months, each of you will have hundreds of office visits and emails from constituents in your districts asking for your support of critical pre-k reform programs. The Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition (TECEC) would like to serve as a resource to each of your offices as other questions arise as to the effectiveness and accountability of these programs. On behalf of the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition, thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions.