



2009 TECEC LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Accompanying Background Information and Talking Points

Priority #1: Support Full-Day High-Quality Pre-Kindergarten Programs with an Emphasis on Local, Integrated Community-Based Partnerships

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Local communities need flexible options in order to offer high-quality early childhood education and meet the diverse needs of families and children. Historically, Texas has offered a half-day, free public school pre-k to children who qualify. While this option has been an enormous resource for local communities, research now shows that full-day programs, if operated properly, offer additional benefits to communities, families, and children. In addition, by drawing upon existing, established resources, local communities can further enhance the benefits of expanded day programs by integrating services and resources through the formation of partnerships with child care and Head Start in order to better meet the needs of working families.

Since 1999, Texas has offered local communities the option to expand its pre-k services, including the option to establish full-day programs through participation in the Texas Prekindergarten Expansion Grant program. Many communities have taken advantage of this opportunity and continue to do so. In order to build on the successes that have come as a direct result of participation in these programs, our members and partners discerned additional need for high-quality options. Since the grant program has literally been “maxed out,” communities need additional options. Not only do we need to continue to support expansion grant programs, but we also need to offer additional high quality options and resources that reflect the priorities and needs of communities throughout the state.

“We cannot view children as ISD children, Head Start children, or child care children but a community of children.”

-Texas Trailblazer

TALKING POINTS:
Support Full-Day High-Quality Pre-Kindergarten Programs
with an Emphasis on Local, Integrated Community-Based Partnerships

Half Day to Full Day	Enhanced Quality	Integrated Partnerships
<p>Numerous studies have shown the positive and long-term benefits high-quality pre-k programs have on child development, academic preparedness, and sustained success.</p> <p>Less established in the literature are the benefits children receive from programs of varying duration in terms of length of day. However, several studies have supported the benefit that full-day programs have for vulnerable children, including enhanced vocabulary, mathematics, and literary skills which are essential for school readiness and early success.</p> <p>In order to realize the potential of expanded day programs, it is clear that the higher the quality of program the greater the benefit in terms of magnitude of effect. In the research literature that supports the value of full-day programs, the following characteristics of quality were identified: (1) teachers were highly trained and well paid; (2) comprehensive, research-based curriculums were in place and implemented with strong supervisory support to classroom staff; (3) classrooms were well supplied, and families and children received additional support services.</p>	<p>Research has shown that a staff-to-child ratio of 1:10, with a maximum class size of 18 or less works best in terms of ensuring quality.</p> <p>Teachers cannot adequately respond to the individual needs of children unless they have support in the classroom to include not only reduced class sizes and improved staff-child ratios, but also effective curriculum, instructional practices, progress monitoring, and educationally-based professional development.</p> <p>Reductions in class size represent a key “structural” quality indicator that allows pre-k professionals to engage in the quality “process” we know works best for young children. Thus, both structure and process are mutually dependent on each other in order to ensure child success.</p>	<p>Integrated partnerships between public schools, Head Start, and private child care programs have a proven track record to support the school readiness of child in cost-effective ways.</p> <p>To build strong Texas communities, school readiness must be seen as a community-based responsibility not just one agency’s or programs responsibility.</p> <p>Shared understandings of quality and demonstrated plans to ensure quality are essential to child development and success. There is a strong body of research that supports ways that local partners can and should engage in developing integrated, quality programs.</p> <p>An integrated approach 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.</p> <p>Collaboration leads to program savings through shared materials, equipment, curriculum, and teachers.</p>



Priority #2: Increase Reimbursement Rates Paid to Child Care Providers

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The child care subsidy program, managed by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) serves the most vulnerable and economically disadvantaged 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. Texas must pay child care providers a fair rate. As regular tragedies highlighted in the media have demonstrated, child care providers must have the resources necessary to provide safe environments. Understaffed and under resourced child care settings can threaten 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. Unfortunately, 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.

Children in Care	Reimbursement Rates
<p>Half of all regulated child care centers in Texas serve children in the child care subsidy program.</p> <p>An average of 15,413 Texas infants are served in the child care subsidy program, 76% of who are served in center based care.</p> <p>An average of 23,027 Texas toddlers are served in the child care subsidy program, 80% of who are served in center based care.</p> <p>Just under half (45%) of Texas infants and toddlers are in full time care, spending more than 35 hours a week being cared for outside of the home.</p>	<p>Today, no Board is paying providers of infant or toddler care at the federally recommended 75th percentile of the market rate.</p> <p>Due to state level funding decisions, most of the 28 boards set their maximum rates for infant and toddler care below the 50th percentile.</p> <p>As a result of low rates, Texas is shifting more and more of the cost of providing services to parents and providers. As a result:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -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.

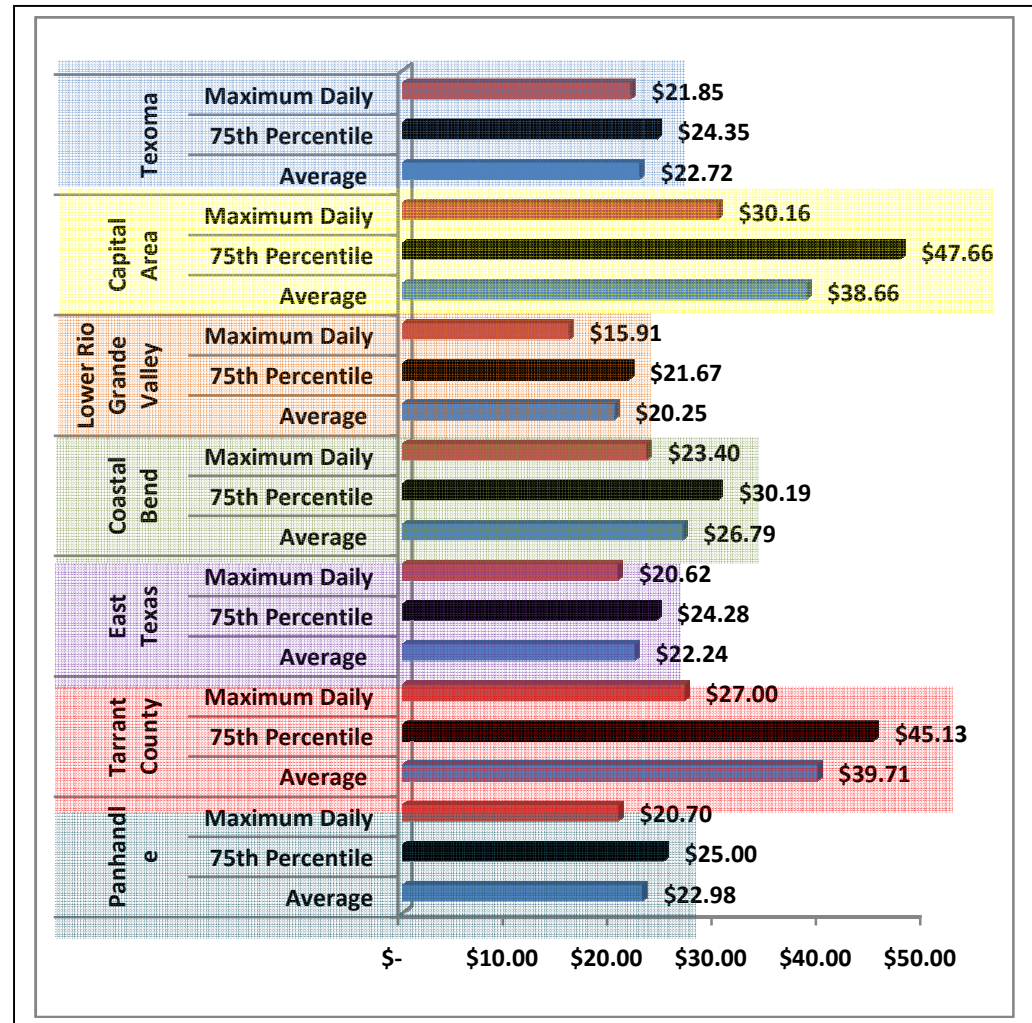
THE SOLUTION

Increase Reimbursement Rates Paid to Child Care Providers Serving Economically Disadvantaged Children in the State of Texas

Longitudinal studies have consistently shown that young children who attend high quality early education programs learn language, social and practical skills that increase their chances for future academic and economic achievement.¹ In addition, according to the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University, **every \$1.00 invested in high quality early education programs saves Texas communities at least \$3.50.**

Texas has the fastest growing child population in the country and more and more children are growing up in poverty. **There is an urgent need to increase child care reimbursement rates to child care providers who serve the most at risk children in Texas.** Most of the child care centers in Texas continue to serve children in the subsidy program because their mission compels them to continue caring for children. Unfortunately, some have little choice but to close their doors because they can no longer afford to serve the children in their area, the majority of which are on the subsidy program.

REIMBURSEMENT RATE SYSTEM IN TEXAS



The maximum daily rate is the limit Boards are allowed to reimburse providers. As is evident in the chart, the maximum daily rate for all Boards falls below the federally recommended reimbursement rate, which is the 75th percentile of market rate.



Priority #3: Support the Development of Early Childhood Education Professionals

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Child care teachers play a critical role in providing care, education, and guidance to a child. Research clearly demonstrates that increased teacher education has a direct impact on child outcomes. The more qualified and experienced a child care program's teachers and staff are, the more equipped and knowledgeable they are to effectively provide the needed care and learning environment that positively influences a child's growth.

Currently, the professional preparation of child care professionals that does exist in Texas takes place within a complex mix of widely varying standards. Presently, the state requires eight clock hours of pre-service training and 15 hours of annual training for teachers in topics ranging from child development, health and safety, and age-appropriate program activities for lead teachers and assistants in child care centers. In an effort to ensure a qualified workforce, it is imperative that Texas' child care workforce is well-trained and possesses a strong foundation in the fundamentals of providing high-quality early learning. Enhanced professional development will improve overall early childhood education programs.

TECEC supports reforms that will:

- Ensure the availability of quality professional development opportunities for child care personnel;
- Enhance teacher and staff preparedness for the classroom through increased training hours to include a minimum of 40 hours of pre-service training and 24 hours of on-going annual training to promote child development and school readiness. Areas of emphasis include:
 - Developmentally-appropriate activities;
 - Health and safety;
 - Engaging, quality curricula;
 - Positive socio-emotional interactions and cognitive stimulation; and
 - Child mental health and special needs identification.

TALKING POINTS: Support the Development of Early Childhood Education Professionals

Enhanced Professional Development	Child Population and Family Diversity on the Rise
<p>Highly educated early childhood teachers are more likely to develop strong, responsive, interpersonal relationships with their students, which affect each child’s motivation to learn, social competence, and later school achievement.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The professional preparation and ongoing education of teachers is directly linked with the quality of early childhood education programs.</p>	<p>The rise in child population and the diverse needs of all families in the state heightens the demand for early childhood professionals in Texas classrooms.</p> <p>Texas has the opportunity to take the lead over states such as California and Arizona, which have similar trends in population growth, in educating the Texas workforce that will educate the workforce of tomorrow.</p> <p>Overall child population in Texas has increased each year, with approximately 2.17 million children under six years-old living in the state.</p> <p>Projections indicate by 2009, children will represent 26% of the overall state population.</p>



Priority #4: Maintain Support for Existing Quality Programs throughout Texas

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Maintaining support for existing, state funded high quality programs is a top priority of TECEC. As a result of high quality programs such as the pre-kindergarten expansion grant program, the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM), the School Readiness Certification System, and Texas Rising Star, child care, Head Start, and public school pre-k classrooms are providing safe as well as quality early learning environments which prepare children to be school ready upon entry into kindergarten. Quality programs such as these, work to ensure that the most vulnerable and economically disadvantaged children in Texas do not enter school behind their peers. In addition to preparing children to be “school ready,” high quality programs also yield \$3.50 for every \$1.00 invested by local communities through fewer special education referrals, less grade retention, increased high school graduation rates, fewer children entering the juvenile and adult justice systems, and increased college entrance rates. Quality is well worth the investment.

Pre-kindergarten Expansion Grant Program

The Prekindergarten Expansion Grant Program has been in place since 1999. Since its inception, 287 districts/charter schools have been served, in addition to local, non-public school partners that participate in School Readiness Integration Plans. Currently, 46,131 children are served throughout these various programs.

Texas Early Education Model (TEEM) and the School Readiness Certification System

Senate Bill 76 (2003) and Senate Bill 23 (2005) both passed with bipartisan support to create and expand the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM) and develop the School Readiness Certification System 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 reading, a major predictor of future school success.

Texas Rising Star

Texas Rising Star is a certification program that encourages child care facilities in Texas to both serve subsidized children as well as exceed the state’s minimum licensing standards for child care facilities. A provider receives graduated levels of certification as higher

certification requirements are met. TECEC and its members and partners worked to ensure that the Texas Rising Star program remained in statute during the 79th Legislative Session in 2005.

TALKING POINTS: Maintain Support for Existing Quality Programs throughout Texas

Pre-k Expansion Grant Program	TEEM/ School Readiness Certification System	Texas Rising Star
<p>The Texas Education Agency (TEA) recognizes the value of high quality initiatives such as the Pre-k Expansion Grant Program and requested an additional \$65 million towards the program in its 2008-2009 Legislative Appropriations Request (LAR).</p> <p>Collaboration between child care, Head Start, and public school pre-k is a key component of the Pre-k Expansion Grant Program.</p>	<p>TEEM now exists in 38 communities and with the support of both the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) is projected to serve 61,000 children.</p> <p>Since its inception in 2003, TEEM has been implemented and expanded with bipartisan support every session.</p> <p>TEEM reflects the goals of Governor Rick Perry’s Early Start Initiative.</p> <p>Of 727 eligible classrooms, 67% or 487 were recently awarded the Texas School Ready! Certification. There was an almost equal success level for certification within these 487 classrooms in terms of public school, Head Start, and private child care programs. 13,300 children are now in the system, 69% of which are Hispanic, 67% of are low-income, and 48% are learning English as a second language.</p>	<p>Subsidized child care is essential to enable low-income families on public assistance to achieve self-sufficiency.</p> <p>Quality child care is vital to the development of the state's current and future workforce.</p> <p>The establishment of quality criteria raises the norms for child care services.</p> <p>Having the Texas School Ready! seal of approval, in addition to Texas Rising Star or national accreditation, allows local programs to market themselves as effectively preparing children for school.</p> <p>Texas Rising Star certification is based on criteria such as director and staff qualifications; staff training; health and safety; group size; and parental involvement.</p>



Priority #5: Establish a Pilot Early Childhood Behavioral Consultation Program in Texas

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Two thirds of child care providers in Texas report caring for young children with a behavioral or emotional difficulty, leading to these children being removed from care. The failure to appropriately respond to the challenging behaviors can result in these children being retained in school and/or entering more restrictive and costly programs (i.e. alternative education, mental health, or juvenile justice systems). Early childhood behavioral consultation is a proven method for keeping children in early childhood education programs through technical assistance, screenings/assessments, parent education, resource and referral, and training.

What is the Early Childhood Behavioral Consultant Project?

A Consultant works with caregivers, parents, and child-serving agencies as needed to develop a seamless and effective program for children experiencing social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties in certain child care settings. Grants would be awarded to a community based organization to staff an Early Childhood Behavioral Consultant who would be available for consultation and technical assistance at the request of child care providers or parents concerned with challenging or atypical behaviors of a child aged birth to 36 months being cared for in certain licensed child care settings.

Consultants would work with providers and parents to develop strategies to best address challenging behaviors and to meet the social and emotional needs of both the identified child and all children in the child care setting. Interventions are intended to be short term, and would address both child and programmatic concerns.

Goals:

- To support child care providers and families in successfully creating a nurturing setting that meets the social and emotional needs of infants and toddlers;
- To prevent problem behaviors in young children from developing into more complex problems; and
- To help young children succeed in child care settings that are safe, stable, and promote school readiness.

TALKING POINTS:
Establish a Pilot Early Childhood Behavioral Consultation Program in Texas

Survey and Study Results	A Community of Support for Child Care
<p>As a result of research conducted by Dr. Walter Gilliam (Yale University Child Study Center) which found that toddlers and preschoolers in Texas are being removed from child care and public school pre-k programs at alarming rates, Raising Texas and the Texas Association of Child Care Resources and Referral Agencies (TACCRRRA) conducted a survey of licensed child care and registered family child care centers across Texas. The survey highlights include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 66% said that they have children in care with suspected and diagnosed behavioral or emotional difficulties; • 58% have seen an increase in challenging behaviors in the past 5 years; • 60% said that it had become necessary to ask a parent to remove the child from care; • 81% said that they had received somewhat or no training at all to address emotional behaviors; and • 24% received no training to address emotional behaviors. 	<p>Collaborative relationships between early childhood consultants and child care providers have been shown to be a promising practice in improving the care provided to young children.</p> <p>The Center for Law and Social Policy recommends creating a statewide networks of infant and toddler specialists and networks of trained mental health consultants available to providers and parents.</p> <p>The National Association for Educating Young Children (NAEYC) requires its accredited programs to have established relationships with specialized consultants to meet the needs of the children they serve.</p> <p>Healthy Child Care America, a federal program out of U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in partnership with the American Academy of Pediatrics, recommends statewide systems of child care health consultation.</p> <p>The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) identifies mental health consultants as an important resource to help child care providers find effective ways to work with children experiencing multiple challenges.</p>