



Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition
Kaitlin Guthrow, Executive Director
316 West 12th Street, Suite 105
Austin, Texas 78701
512.476.7939 Fax: 512.480.0995
www.tecec.org

Senate Bill 23
Great Start. Great State.
Investing Where it Matters Most, Early Childhood Education and Development

Madam Chair and Members of the Education Committee of the Texas Senate, my name is Kaitlin Guthrow, Executive Director of the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition (TECEC). The Coalition comprises a statewide network of more than 150 diverse, member organizations committed to systems-level change to ensure every child in Texas has access to high quality early care and education. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony before you today in support of Senate Bill 23 (SB23).

Based upon what we know about the science of brain development, we can now recognize that there is literally a window of opportunity during the early years when the foundation for later success in school and life is established. Parents are and always will be a child's first and most important teacher; however, in situations where parents choose to utilize out of home care during the preschool years, high quality programs including Child Care, Head Start and Prekindergarten, can also play an essential role in ensuring that children develop to their full potential, enter school ready to succeed, and stay safe. The state of Texas made a critical investment in 2003 with bi-partisan support and passage of Senate Bill 76 and the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM). The progress that has been made, the positive results that have been experienced by the children, and the momentum that has been built in communities across the state over the past two years of this landmark, statewide demonstration project must continue.

The link between access to high quality preschool and school readiness for children most at-risk of lower academic achievement, creates a clear incentive for Texas to continue the work of the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM) through SB 23 as investing in early childhood education benefits children, families, local communities and the state of Texas as a whole.

Children--Study after study unambiguously demonstrates that the first five years of a child's life are crucial to brain development as they are important for the growth of language, critical thinking and social skills. Waiting until a child enters kindergarten at age five to introduce key literacy skills that provide the foundation for learning to read is too late. According to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 80% of children reading poorly at the end of first grade are still reading poorly at the end of fourth grade.¹ Access to high quality programs is particularly important for low-income children due to research that shows this population makes the greatest developmental and educational gains by participating in high quality early childhood programs. Results of the Texas Early Education Model are exciting and show that it is possible to close the preparation gap, that is, the gap between those children that enter school ready to learn and those that do not.

Families--Today, finding quality preschool is a daily challenge for Texas parents as in Texas no uniform standard of care by which to assess preschool programs has been set. SB23 would allow for the expansion of the School Readiness Rating System to ensure that parents who choose out

of home care for their child during the preschool years have the information they need to identify which programs are going to give their children the essential skills to be successful in school.

Communities--Providing high quality preschool for young children impacts every sector of our community including our schools, businesses, juvenile justice system, families and communities at large. Economists have shown through research that communities that invest in early childhood education significantly increase their chance for economic growth. Recently released data shows that for every tax dollar invested in early childhood education and development, communities save more than \$17 over the course of that child's lifetime through the increased likelihood that children will be literate, socially well-adjusted, enrolled in college, and employed.ⁱⁱ SB23 will benefit the diverse communities of Texas including rural, urban, suburban and border regions by providing both teachers and parents with the necessary tools to ensure every child reaches their full potential.

State--Quality early childhood education programs is not just a public good, it is a public investment for the whole state. Currently one in four children in Texas are growing up in poverty, and, it is estimated that by the year 2040, 30% of the labor force in Texas will not have a high school diploma.^{iii,iv} Moreover, Texas currently has the fastest growing child population in the country and school enrollment is projected to double by the year 2040.^{v,vi} We must invest our money where we will get the greatest returns. Program coordination benefits the state by reducing duplication of services and maximizing public resources. A large part of our future, the workforce of tomorrow, is in our hands to ensure that children have the tools they need to succeed. We must invest in early care and education to ensure that Texas has the skilled workforce necessary to compete on a national and global scale.

It has been an honor to be a part of this growing movement around early childhood education and development and to work with the thousands of individuals across the state that have worked to make this project a success.

Thank you.

ⁱ Effective Early Childhood Programs: Turning Knowledge Into Action. Susan Landry, 2005. Page 54
Excerpt from Senate Testimony of Dr. Reid Lyon, Chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch of NICHD.

ⁱⁱ High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, "Long-Term Study of Adults Who Received High-Quality Early Childhood Care and Education Shows Economic and Social Gains, Less Crime"
<http://www.highscope.org/PressRoom/PressReleases/PerryP-Age40.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ A Report On The Agenda For The Decade, A Project of Texans Care For Children, page 6.

^{iv} The Population of Texas: Historical Patterns and Future Trends Affecting Education by Steve H. Murdock, Institute for Demographic and Socioeconomic Research College of Business, The University of Texas at San Antonio <http://txsdc.tamu.edu>

^v The New Texas Challenge: Population Change and the Future of Texas. College Station: Texas A&M University Press. 2003. Steve Murdock, Steve White, MD. Nazrul Hoque, Beverly Pecotte, Xuihong ou, and Jennifer Balkan

^{vi} Texas Population Estimates and Projections Program. Projections of the Population of Texas and Counties in Texas by Age, Sex and Race/Ethnicity for 2000-2040. Austin: Texas State Data Center, Texas A&M University System. 2001.