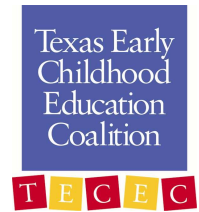


Dr. Donald J. Smith, Jr.
Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition
Testimony to the Business and Industry Committee
Texas House of Representatives
3/09/2009



Chairman Deshotel and members of the Committee on Business and Industry.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on Representative [Sylvester] Turners' HB 615 and the efforts to assist parents of special needs children. I am here today representing the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition, a coalition of 250 individuals and agencies whose members include educators, administrators, child care providers and parents who recognize the great value in early education.

Few will argue against the importance of parental involvement in the education of a child. An involved parent is one of the most effective ways of influencing the life of any child offering opportunities that no system is capable of providing. The return can be significant ultimately contributing to

- a child's ability to learn
- the drive towards higher education
- the ability to interact with others and form stable relationships
- be productive members of society
- and avoid the harmful influences that lead to mental health problems, substance abuse, criminal activity and prison.

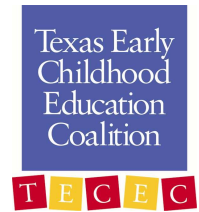
Today you are hearing testimony in consideration of a bill that gives Texas workers an opportunity to care for children with special education needs. This bill is a proactive attempt to help the Texas worker to care for and educate children with special needs. However, passage of this bill has the potential to have far reaching benefits for businesses, employers and employees alike. As evidence, I ask you to consider the following:

Consider the parent of a special needs child whose roles include parent, spouse and member of the workforce (employee or employer).

As a family member or spouse, the potential benefits include

- Improved family relationships
- Decreased personal stress

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- Improvements in child well being

As a partner with the education system, the benefits can include

- Increased involvement in child's education
- Enhanced educational experiences for the child
- Fewer behavioral problems in the classroom
- Improved classroom decorum
- Improved teacher morale

Ultimately, the business community benefits with

- Improved employee morale
- Improved productivity
- Decreased absenteeism
- Improved employee loyalty
- Long term, the business community is ultimately contributing to the development of the future workforce.

While HB 615 goes a long way to encourage involvement of parents of children in kindergarten through high school and is strongly supported, we respectfully ask that you also consider including children in pre-Kindergarten programs across this state. By involving the parents early in the education process, as early as pre-K, the opportunities for these children to be successful are vastly improved. Children, parents, communities and business interests across the state will benefit from your recognition of the importance of children and the ultimate impact that this legislation can have not only on the children and families of the state of Texas, but also on the success of businesses across the state.

We applaud the members of the Texas legislature for recognizing the importance of parents, the system's most effective partners in the education process, as they strive to meet the needs of their children and families.