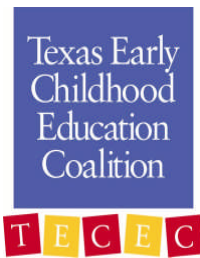


Testimony of:

Kara Johnson
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Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition
(TECEC)



Before the:

Committee on Public Health

House Bill 1240

Tuesday, March 10, 2009

Good morning. My name is Kara Johnson and I am the Executive Director of the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition (TECEC). TECEC represents more than 275 organizations and thousands of members 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. I would like to begin my remarks by thanking Chair Kolkhorst and the entire House Committee on Public Health for hearing my testimony.

The purpose of my remarks today is to speak in support of House Bill 1240, which would provide parents of newborn children with a resource guide relating to the development, health, and safety of their child from birth until age five. More specifically, the resource guide would include information related to:

- Dental care;
- Effective parenting;
- Child safety;
- The importance of reading to a child;
- Expected developmental milestones;
- Healthcare resources statewide;
- How to select appropriate child care; and
- Other resources available in the state.

Three of the listed bullets are of particular interest to members of the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition (TECEC). The first is the importance of reading to a child. Research supports the need to begin reading to children

during the first five years of life, because it leads to children being more likely to enter kindergarten ready for school. Unfortunately, there are still too many parents that do not know the importance of reading to their children. The facts are clear. Children from low-income families start school knowing far fewer words than children from middle or higher income families. As a result, the education gap starts early in life.

The next bullet of particular interest relates to parents having a framework for expected developmental milestones. Why is this important? Ask the parent who just found out that their child has Autism. The earlier parents recognize developmental delays, the more likely they are to seek medical and professional advice.

The third bullet of interest to Coalition members and partners relates to the information provided to help parents select appropriate, high quality child care.

There are a number of questions parents should know to ask, including:

- Is the child care center licensed by the state of Texas;
- What are the staff to child ratios;
- Is the child care center accredited or School Ready Certified;
- Will my child participate in activities where he/she will learn through play;
- What is the nutritional value of the food served;
- Are the staff well trained in child development;
- And more.

Many parents are lost when it comes to finding high quality care and they do not know what to look for in a high quality early learning environment. Why is high quality important? According to the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University, we know that every dollar invested in high quality early education programs returns at least \$3.50 back to Texas communities through increased graduation rates, fewer special education referrals, decreased rates of children entering the juvenile justice system, and greater lifetime earnings as adults. The resource guides will help parents choose safe and high quality programs over programs that are unsafe or do not prepare children to be “school ready.”

The question is how will the state of Texas find the approximately \$840,000 needed over the next biennium to pay for these guides? My suggestion is to utilize the Targeted Quality Expansion dollars from the CCDGB stimulus funds, and then assess the success of the resource guides for the next biennium.

On behalf of the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition, thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions.