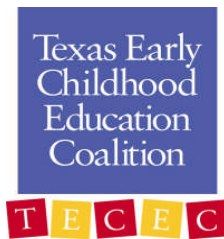


Testimony of:

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(TECEC)



Before the:

House Committee on Public Education

House Bill 130

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Good afternoon. 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 Eissler and the entire House Committee on Public Education for hearing my testimony. In addition, I would like to thank Representative Patrick, Chair Eissler, Representative Allen, Representative Aycock, Representative Dutton, Representative Farias, Representative Jackson, and Representative Shelton for serving as authors or co-authors of House Bill 130, TECEC's number one priority this session. Each of you is joined by an overwhelming number of your fellow legislators, and thousands of providers, teachers, community leaders, policymakers, and business leaders from across Texas that are eager to see this legislation implemented.

The purpose of my remarks today is to acknowledge the journey of the early education movement over the past few years and speak in support of House Bill 130, which would voluntarily expand the current pre-k program from a half day to a full day for currently eligible children in high quality settings.

For years, members of the Texas Legislature have been asking the early childhood sectors in Texas, including child care, Head Start, and public school pre-k to come to the legislature as a united front. Well, after 9 months of discussion, debate, and compromise, I want you to know that we come to you as

a collective, uniformly in support of House Bill 130. For those of you that have witnessed the infighting between the various sectors over the years, you know that this is a historic occasion. I think that the committee will be pleasantly surprised by the overwhelming support you will hear for House Bill 130.

I would like to share the top five reasons we would like for you to support this important legislation today:

#1: House Bill 130 is building upon existing good public policy. House Bill 130 was developed over a nine-month period with the expertise from a large collaborative child care, Head Start, and public school pre-k groups, as well as business leaders, and community leaders who have a vested interest in ensuring eligible children in their communities have access to full-day high quality pre-k programs. However, this journey started more than six years ago with the passage of Senate Bill 76 during the 78th Legislative Session. Senate Bill 76 created the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM) as a pilot project in 11 Texas communities.

As a result of the work of Dr. Susan Landry and her team in Houston, this model has continued to grow and provide communities with school readiness integration pre-k partnerships that ensure children are school ready. This journey of high quality early education continued with the implementation of the School Readiness Certification System through Senate Bill 23 in 2005, and the attempted passage of Senate Bill 50 during the last legislative session.

The past six years of work on the ground in communities all across Texas has paved the way for high quality school readiness integration partnerships that

include child care, Head Start, and public school pre-k. Therefore, the state of Texas is now in a position to fold in early education efforts that have been piloted and implemented in various Texas communities, with the larger overall pre-k system in the state. TEEM and the School Readiness Certification System would be a large part of the new structure, with flexibility for school districts to choose and implement which proven, high-quality efforts work best for their community's needs. This is critical because we want to build on the successes of the past and not reinvent the wheel.

#2: House Bill 130 has bipartisan support. Not only does the state of Texas have the history of implementing high quality pre-k initiatives, but this session House Bill 130 has enjoyed strong bipartisan support. House Bill 130 has 70 authors and co-authors, and the list of supporters continues to grow each day.

#3: House Bill 130 includes high quality, research-based components. This legislation would implement high quality standards in a full day program that are research-based and nationally recognized, including: staff to child ratios of 1:11; class size limits of no more than 22 students; a teacher with a BA degree and 9 credit hours of college education courses in early childhood; and a curriculum approved by the Commissioner of the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

In addition, partnering organizations, including child care and Head Start centers would have to demonstrate that they are highly qualified to partner. As a result, they would be one of the following: a Texas Early Education Model (TEEM) participant; certified through the School Readiness Certification System;

Texas Rising Star (three star or higher), which is a program managed by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) that provides higher levels of certification as child care providers voluntarily meet requirements that exceed the State's Minimum Licensing Standards; or accredited by a research-based, nationally recognized accreditation system.

Finally, House Bill 130 would require reporting and evaluation of individual programs, as well as a separate third-party evaluation of pre-k programs across the state. This would ensure transparency and ongoing quality.

#4: House Bill 130 ensures local governance and oversight. Texans value local control. House Bill 130 ensures local governance and oversight through district selected partnerships. As a result, locally negotiated service contracts are required between the school district and the local partners, ensuring schools districts and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) are not left carrying the financial burden without the ability to provide oversight.

#5: House Bill 130 complements the Early Start Grant Program. House Bill 130 and the Early Start Grant Program complement each other in scope and purpose which is to prepare young children for the start of school. The Early Start Grant Program, which is undergoing significant changes, was designed primarily to improve the quality of struggling programs, while providing resources for expansion of other programs. This program now includes a 2-5 year limit on participation by local ISD's. Programs seeking to improve may continue to make beneficial adjustments to their programs supported for a limited time by the Early Start Grant Program.

Existing pre-kindergarten programs, with proven records of success and quality care, have either lost their eligibility for additional Early Start funding or will roll off the grant program in the next 3 years. These programs would be supported by House Bill 130 long-term and would have access to resources that could be used to promote expansion and improve on programs that currently enjoy recognition for their high quality services to children and families.

The state of Texas is at a crossroads. The question is not whether or not pre-k works. The research is clear. High quality pre-k leads to increased graduation rates, reduced special education referrals, increased college entrance rates, and decreased numbers of Texas children entering the juvenile and adult justice systems. Our own Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University confirms it. A \$1.00 investment in high quality child care, Head Start, and public school pre-k produces \$3.50 in returns. The question before us today is whether or not Texas will make the investment.

As of today, we have 70 Republicans and Democrats signed on as authors or co-authors; scores of organizations dropping cards in support; and TECEC has the backing of its 275 member organizations, and thousands of individuals. The public and political will is overwhelming. Let's work together to make the next great step forward for Texas children.

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