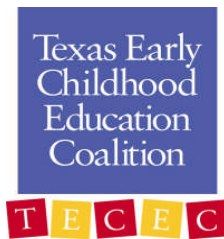


Testimony of:

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(TECEC)



Before the:

House Committee on Public Education

House Bill 1891

Tuesday, March 24, 2009

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.

The purpose of my remarks today is to express the Coalition's lingering concerns regarding House Bill 1891, which has the potential to negatively impact the early education system in the state of Texas.

#1: House Bill 1891 does not build upon existing good public policy, which includes cost saving, high quality partnerships between child care, Head Start, and public school pre-k. The author Robert Fulghum wrote, *"All I Really Need to Know, I Learned in Kindergarten."* A decade later that statement rings true where one of the first things you learn in pre-k is to share. Texans caught onto this idea of sharing in pre-k more than six years ago with the passage of Senate Bill 76 during the 78th Legislative Session, which piloted a school readiness integration partnership model, (the Texas Early Education Model) in 11 Texas communities. This model continues to grow and provide communities with cost saving partnerships between child care, Head Start, and public school pre-k. The various entities share resources in order to save valuable taxpayer dollars. These high quality partnerships continued with the

implementation of the School Readiness Certification System through Senate Bill 23 in 2005, and the proposed Senate Bill 50 during the last legislative session.

In 2009, following the proven success of the partnership model, the state of Texas is now in a position to build upon the existing, cost saving partnerships and merges them into the larger overall pre-k system in the state. Unfortunately, House Bill 1891 does not build upon the successes of the partnership model from the past and has the potential to erase all of the tremendous work that has occurred over the past six years.

#2: House Bill 1891 does not ensure quality and accountability. Texas has committed to the implementation of high quality pre-k initiatives, and is not prepared to move backward with the implementation of legislation that is not supported by sound scientific evidence. Further, legislation that does not include quality measures and accountability components will not ensure a solid pre-k program and is counterproductive to the efforts of the past Legislatures. House Bill 1891 does not include an evaluation component, nor does House Bill 1891 set minimum education standards for teachers in the classroom and require that at least one teacher hold a Bachelors degree. Because the Texas public school pre-k program serves the most at risk children in the state, including military children, the program must include components that are supported by scientific research. The program must include minimum education standards for teachers to hold a BA degree, and ongoing evaluation of the program.

#3: House Bill 1891 does not expand the program from a half day to a full day. Research demonstrates that full-day high quality pre-k improves

student performance, particularly for low-income children and Latino children which are two of the populations currently eligible in the state of Texas. House Bill 1891 would not expand the existing pre-k programs from a half day to a full day; a change that would support working parents. Full day pre-k in the state of Texas would provide a real boost to low income working parents struggling to find and keep employment in the current recession and in the future.

#4: House Bill 1891 does not ensure local governance and oversight.

House Bill 1891 eliminates the ability of school districts to choose which programs to partner with. As a result, locally negotiated service contracts are not required between the school district and the local partners, leaving school districts or the Texas Education Agency (TEA) carrying the financial burden without the ability to provide oversight. This could open up school districts or the state to liability.

#5: House Bill 1891 has the potential to unnecessarily raise child care tuition rates for middle and higher income families in Texas. Due to the payment structure required by school districts established in the bill, child care centers could potentially raise their monthly rates in order to guarantee that they receive the maximum allowable rates set by the state for local school districts. This would increase all rates at child care centers, forcing lower, middle, and higher income parents to pay a higher rate for care. Currently, the average cost of child care in the state of Texas rivals the cost of college tuition at the University of Texas and Texas A&M University.

#6: House Bill 1891 does not compliment the Early Start Grant Program.

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 Independent school districts (ISD's).

Existing pre-kindergarten programs, with proven records of success and quality care, are scheduled to be ineligible for continued funding through the grant program in the next 2-5 years and would not be supported by House Bill 1891. These programs will no longer have the funding needed to continue high quality pre-k programs and could result in school districts being forced to cut their programs.

In deliberating on this legislation, I ask you to consider all of the potential negative impacts that could occur if this legislation were to become law. Texas has come so far in developing a high quality system. Let us not move backwards with a system that does not ensure accountability or quality for our youngest Texans and could potentially expose children and parents to sub-standard programs that do not prepare children for school.

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