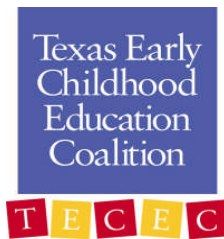


Testimony of:

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Before the:

Senate Committee on Education

House Bill 130

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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 Senator Shapiro and the entire Senate Committee on Education for hearing my testimony today.

The purpose of my remarks today is to speak to the incredible opportunity we have with House Bill 130 AND the Prekindergarten Early Start (PKES) grant program. Each of these programs complements one another in scope and purpose and is necessary for the state of Texas.

**SHARED OVERARCHING GOAL:** One of the goals of House Bill 130 is to ensure that high performing school districts rolling off the grant program will be able to continue their full day programs, so that the children who are being served in full day programs to date do not drop off as a result of the program shifting to half day. HB 130 supports the primary goal of the Prekindergarten Early Start (PKES) grant program to expand the state's capacity to provide high-quality prekindergarten services to a greater number of eligible preschool students. However, due to a lack of funding, PKES is unable to continue funding high performing school districts.

**SHARED VISION FOR COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS:** Both House Bill 130 and the Prekindergarten Early Start (PKES) grant program support coordinated

community partnerships that build on existing local resources to provide education opportunities that help children reach their full potential as learners. Further, HB130 requires that local providers receive a minimum of 20% of the program funding for pre-kindergarten services in an effort to move the state forward in building a system of high quality, tax saving partnerships.

**BOTH ENSURE HIGH QUALITY PROGRAMS:** House Bill 130 includes high quality components such as a maximum class size of 22 students; a staff to student ratio of 1:11; Texas Education Agency (TEA) approved curriculum; a student achievement report to the Texas Education Agency (TEA); and an evaluation component. In contrast, the Prekindergarten Early Start (PKES) grant program mandates participation in the Texas School Readiness Program as well as the requirement of school readiness components for Tier 3 school districts.

**BOTH PROGRAMS ARE VOLUNTARY AND SERVE CURRENTLY ELIGIBLE CHILDREN:** Both House Bill 130 and the Prekindergarten Early Start Grant Program (PKES) are voluntary and serve only the currently eligible children, that includes military, foster care, educationally disadvantaged, homeless, and English Language Learners (ELL). Neither program expands eligibility or force school districts or parents to participate.

**BOTH PROGRAMS ARE RESEARCH-BASED:** Both programs include necessary school readiness components that will prepare young children for school. Furthermore, House Bill 130 enables schools to continue their successful, full day programs. In addition to the research from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), the National Education Agency

(NEA), and Georgetown University, which found benefits of full day programs, Texans have 112 real life examples that full day pre-k works, as demonstrated by each of the school districts that now have their 3<sup>rd</sup> graders performing at or above state averages on the TAKS.

**BOTH PROGRAMS ARE NECESSARY FOR TEXAS:** As each of you know, the Prekindergarten Early Start (PKES) grant program was changed this year in order to ensure school districts that have previously been unable to access the grant program could do so. This was a positive and necessary change. However, the consequence of this change is that 112 high performing school districts will be penalized and forced to cut their programs back to a half day, unless they find funding elsewhere.

An investment of \$25 million towards HB130 is necessary to ensure that high performing school districts in Texas continue to prepare young children for success in the K-12 system. While both programs could use additional funding, Tier 2 school districts will be left without funding within the next 3 years if HB130 does not pass, whereas the Prekindergarten Early Start (PKES) grant program already has the needed investment of approximately \$185 million in order to serve school districts across the state.

**A MAJOR DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HB 130 AND THE PREKINDERGARTEN EARLY START (PKES) GRANT PROGRAM:** While both programs emphasize quality, House Bill 130 is the only program that financially incentivizes and rewards programs that are meeting proven, high quality standards such as class size limits, staff to child ratios, and reporting and

evaluation methods. Because a number of the Tier 2 districts already implement the required high quality components included in HB130, they will no longer be asked to do so without funding attached.

TECEC recognizes that tough decisions must be made in determining how to spend Texas tax dollars. The good news is that House Bill 130 is a research based investment which will yield a significant return to local communities. In addition, House Bill 130 is voluntary for parents and school districts; is only for currently eligible children; does not make appropriations according to the fiscal note; ensures local control and accountability; and has the support of two-thirds of the Texas House of Representatives.

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.