

Edition 2

The Texas Plan

**PUBLIC POLICIES TO BUILD A STATEWIDE
EARLY EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT
SYSTEM FOR TEXAS
“Texas SEEDS”**

**A joint initiative by
Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition
Austin, Texas**

**and
Texas Program for Society and Health of the
James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy
of Rice University**



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is important to stress that the policy recommendations specified in this paper were developed with intensive interactions and guidance of a great number of Texas early care and education organizations, researchers, and stakeholders. They spent considerable time individually and in groups focusing on specific policy issues and the achievement of a vision for quality early childhood education and development (ECED) for all children in Texas. Most of these participants are members of the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition (TECEC).

Edition I:

Converting the work of the many participants into The Texas Plan, Edition 1, which was completed and circulated in January 2004, was a collaborative effort. Alvin Tarlov and Lauri Andress of the Texas Program for Society (TPSH) and Health of the James A. Baker Institute of Public Policy Rice University served as primary authors.

Kaitlin Graham Guthrow, Executive Director of the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition; Karen R. Johnson, President of the United Ways of Texas and Co-Chair of TECEC; and Sandy Dochen, Manager of Corporate Community Relations at IBM and Co-Chair of TECEC provided review and counsel. And from the Collaborative for Children and the Center for Houston's Future, Carol Shattuck, Todd Litton, and James Calaway provided guidance and encouragement.

Lauri Andress served as overall coordinator for the document while Michelle Precourt, Kathryn Elizabeth Higgins, and Jane Geanangel of the Texas Program for Society and Health provided technical assistance for Edition 1.

Edition II:

Contributions are acknowledged from dozens of individuals and organizations in Texas and elsewhere in the United States that provided written criticism and suggestions for improvement. Their submissions were collected in a binder (2-3 inches thick) and provided the initial material for modifying Edition 1 to become Edition 2.

Conversations with individuals and full day meetings with organizational representatives in six locations in the state including Dallas, Austin, Houston, Weslaco, El Paso, and Abilene provided remarkably rich reactions and contributions of experiences, needs, and recommendations. Those conversations and community meetings were extraordinarily influential. Almost every guiding principle and recommendation and most of the supportive reasoning has been widely vetted. The process was not perfect; unanimity was not expected. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that most of the concepts and recommendations in this document bear the unmistakable imprint of the majority of the early childhood education and development community in Texas.

Allen Matusow provided moral support, encouragement, sensitivity and inspiration over the two-year period. He is Professor of History, and Associate Director for Academic Programs of the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, Rice University. He had been for many years Board Chairman of the Ser Ninos Charter School that serves low-income children in Houston.

Individual members of the TECEC Executive Committee contributed their participation in the development of the document, their guidance for implementation and public awareness and overall support and encouragement. Members include Co-Chairs of the Coalition Karen R. Johnson, President, United Ways of Texas; Sandy Dochen, Manager of Corporate Community Relations, IBM; Sandi Borden, Executive Director, Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association; Susan Craven, Executive Director, Texans Care For Children; Patti Everitt, Executive Director, Children's Defense Fund Texas; Jason Sabo, Vice President for Public Policy, United Ways of Texas; Drew Scheberle, former Outreach Director, Texas Business and Education Coalition; and Carol Shattuck, President, Collaborative for Children.

Leslie Schuster, LBSW, MSSW Candidate took the lead on developing the Glossary for this document and related research.

The actual writing, revisions, final copy was a cooperative undertaking with equal effort by (alphabetically) Marion Coleman, United Ways of Texas; Kaitlin Guthrow, Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition; Kara Johnson, Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition, and Alvin Tarlov, James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, Rice University.

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FOREWORD

The Texas Plan, Edition 2 that is contained in this document is the culmination of the gathering, sorting, considering, and adapting of literally hundreds of comments on Edition 1 from persons all over Texas concerned about the future of early care and education in this state. We are aware that this 2nd edition will be reviewed by both stakeholders who have already read and offered comments as well as by those who are reading it for the first time. To the first group, we would say that, while the overall framework of the conceptualization and policy is consistent with Edition 1 as well as the early version of Edition 2, there are significant differences throughout the text. For both groups, we would note that there has been a conscious attempt to streamline the document in several ways for easier access.

In particular:

- **Introductory material has been greatly reduced**—the first edition presented detailed background and research documentation. It is our sense that such depth of rationale and grounding does not need to be repeated, and that persons interested in that contextual framework can refer to Edition 1 that will be retained as a publication in its own right.
- **A glossary**—because the document should be understandable to any person concerned about early care and education regardless of background or orientation, we have attempted to keep jargon to a minimum and, in cases where particular language had to be used, provided definitions and explanations particularly as they pertain to Texas.
- **Tightening of document**—ancillary material, particularly examples of promising practices offered for specific policy areas have been moved to a special appendix of text notes.
- **Simplified format of document**—the core text of Edition 2 is divided into three sections:
 - Introduction: includes a brief theoretical justification, a new Texas-specific historical context, the overarching guiding principles, and the conceptual framework of the plan
 - The Texas Plan: presentation of the three system components, the ten policy areas, the guiding principles associated with each policy, and the specific policy recommendations derived from each area.
 - Appendices:
 - Appendix A: One page synopsis
 - Appendix B: Outline version of The Texas Plan
 - Appendix C: Glossary (To be added)
 - Appendix D: References (Bibliographic notes are denoted by superscript [#])
 - Appendix E: Text notes (Denoted by ^a) (Draft)
 - Appendix F: Listing of TECEC Organizational Principles and member organizations
 - Appendix G: Listing of organizations participating in development

- G1 Statewide Policy Retreat Organization Participants
- G2 Statewide Summit Organization Participants
- G3 Community Meeting Tour Organization Participants
- Appendix H: Contact information for The Texas Plan

INTRODUCTION

Child development is a continuous, interconnected process extending from conception (the genetic part, dependent on the mix of genes from each parent) to birth on to infancy, childhood and adulthood (the experience-driven parts) during which experiences and genes interact to condition cognitive, linguistic, emotional, behavioral, social and physical development (Figure 1.). It is too much of a simplification to say that child development is a complex process. The combination and recombination of 35,000 genes from each parent yields an array of 35,000 gene pairs that is almost infinite in its potential variations. Similarly, the number of experiences that a child responds to and assimilates on a moment-to-moment or day-to-day basis are practically limitless—parents, siblings, food, pets, toys, clothes, physiology, relatives, friends, playmates, neighbors, sounds of voices, vehicles, radio, television, books, communications, thousands of challenging opportunities, and on and on.

Nonetheless, the process of cognitive, behavioral, and physical development in unison with the brain's biochemical and structural differentiation is orderly and occurs in a rather predictable sequence. In fact, the process and the quality of child development can be intentionally guided toward success and realization of full potential by enriching the learning environment and the opportunities for experience. That, in essence, is the function of modern early childhood education and development. What might have started as a mechanism for child play, nourishment, and safety while parents worked has been propelled by science into a pivotal role in expanding human capacity and personal fulfillment. The knowledge gained from science provides a platform for enlarging individual and population educability, for expanding human and social capital, for building a region's economic vitality, and enhancing civil society. Simply put, the complex development of a person is a process that is an inseparable continuum from conception to adulthood.

From this rapidly expanding and vitally important body of research, a number of fundamental facts and concepts have emerged that must be taken into account when formulating a public policy for early childhood education and development.

- **Brain development.** Study after study explicitly and unambiguously documents that the early years are critical to a child's long-term cognitive and behavioral development and to physical growth in childhood and health in adulthood. Modern brain and child development research supports the need to provide nurturing, educationally stimulating, and safe environments and experiences in the early years. As is often stated by brain experts "brain development is experience driven." Even those who express concern about the misuse or overuse of this research acknowledge that statement's usefulness in crafting programs to ensure developmental success in the early years.
- **The essential components of successful early childhood education are known.** Research over the past 30 years has revealed in detail the important components of effective early childhood education and development programs. This knowledge extends from facility design, curriculum, teacher training, teacher-pupil ratios and learning standards to the provision of nurturing and stimulating

CASCADING EFFECTS OF ENHANCED ECED A LIFE-COURSE PERSPECTIVE

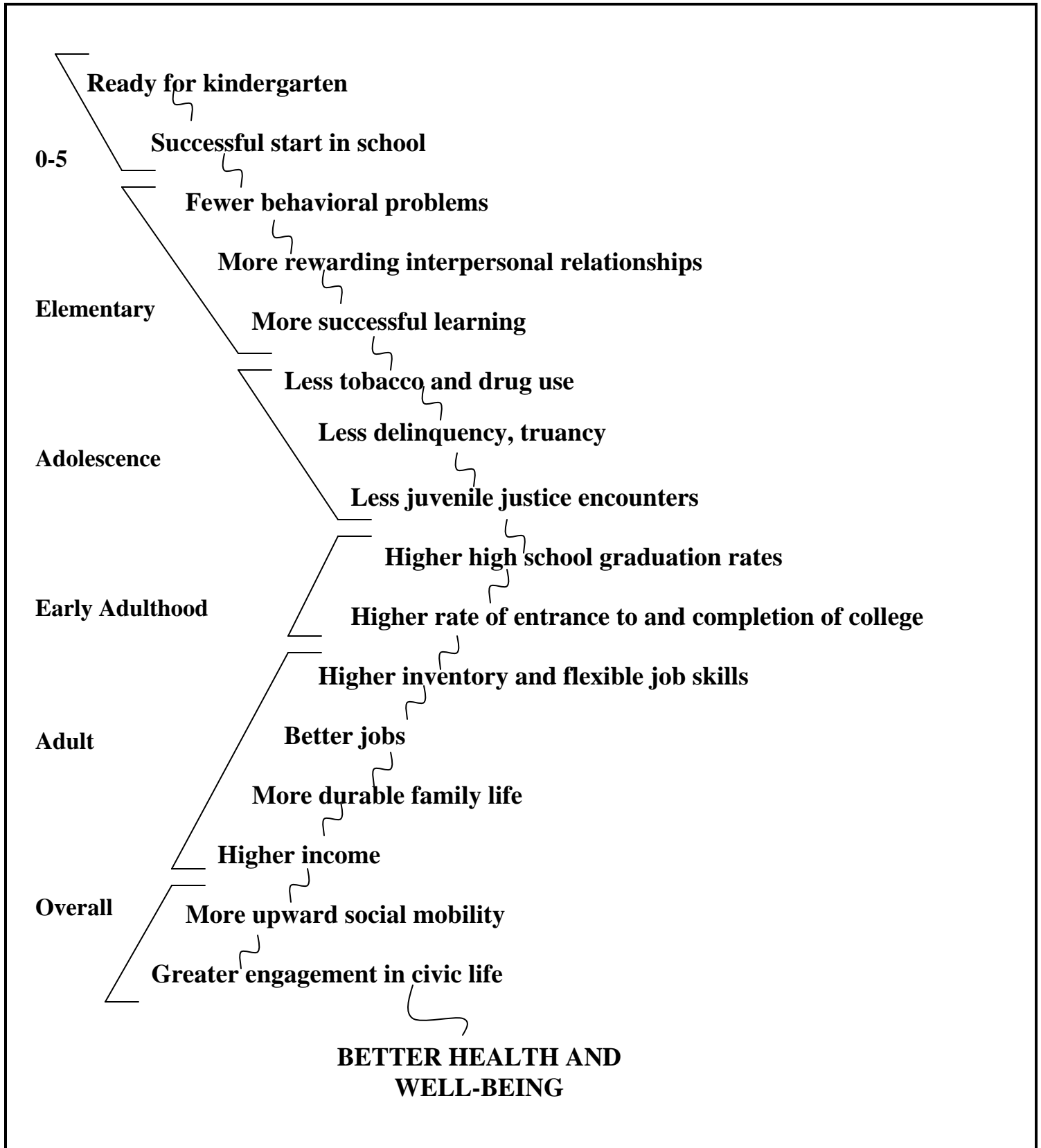


Figure 1. Diagram Developed by Alvin Tarlov, James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, Rice University

experiences, and the importance of quality ratings, parental roles, and community participation.

- **Early childhood education and employability are bound.** While early care and education is a public issue affecting the quality of society at a micro level, it also affects the quality of our workforce.¹ Employment has become a social norm for mothers as well as fathers. Parents are more productive at work if their children are cared for in a safe, nurturing, and developmentally effective environment. Reciprocally, employment is necessary to generate family income sufficient to afford quality early childhood education.
- **Availability, affordability, and quality.** Early childhood education services are not readily available to all children. This is true when one considers: the inconsistent availability of high-quality programs; the cost of the high-quality programs; and, the lack of facilities in certain communities. It has been shown that the high-quality services that are available often result in household expenditures that equal or surpass what one might pay for a college education.²
- **Early care and education needs affect all socioeconomic segments of the population.** Except perhaps for those at the highest income levels, most children in the U.S. are in households where the single parent or both parents are working and require early education services. Unfortunately, not only is access to early education services haphazard, but we sense that too large a fraction of the care provided to children, irrespective of family income, is neither educational nor developmentally promotive.
- **Return on Investment.** Evaluations of several early childhood education and development programs have yielded important results on cost-effectiveness. Some of these studies have followed the children closely into early adulthood and beyond. The results produced by this research indicates that for each dollar invested in 3 or 4 year olds the long-term return is between seven and eight dollars.³ The returns are almost evenly divided between the individual in increased wages, and the state in enhanced tax revenues and savings on costs of the criminal justice system, crime victim losses, and repeating grades in school. Unaccounted for in these studies in spite of the large return is the dollar value and savings from improved health in adulthood and the benefit to the national economy of a better educated, trainable, skilled, and adaptable workforce.

Development of early care and education policies, programs, and systems that respond to these facts and concepts requires that the complex interaction of multiple systems that affect child development be viewed comprehensively as a whole. Investing in a single age range (e.g., infants or toddlers), a single component (e.g., facilities or training), or even one provider sector (e.g., either private, nonprofit, or government), while benevolent, will not sufficiently address all of the interactive levels and subsystems that flow together to affect child development.⁴ Investments in single dimensions will not make a palpable difference in the development and future of children in Texas.

This document is directed at **system** building and improvement, not only regarding early care and education itself, but also including other systems that have

strong enabling effects on successful child development. The Texas Plan outlines a system that supports both development of the child and parents' ability to work. The effects of child development efforts will be diminished if the family is immersed in poverty with no hope of escape; if the family is incapable of producing a developmentally conducive home environment; if child dietary nourishment is inadequate; if child preventive services (immunizations) and medical care are not available, and so forth.⁵ In construction of this report we have avoided becoming so broad as to encompass all social services. We have, however, included those services that are obligatorily related to the effectiveness of early childhood education and development interventions.

The Road to The Texas Plan

A blueprint for creating, operating, financing, and supporting a bold and innovative plan for child education and development must be crafted specifically to fit Texas history, culture, demography, and the existing mix of services already in place. While Texas has not historically been a leader in the formulation of policy advancing the quality and affordability of early care and education, there is a history of both public policy and system evolution that must be taken into consideration as any new configurations are considered.

There has been a long legislative history outlining program coordination efforts in Texas since 1969. The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health produced one of the first studies on the status of early care and education in Texas in their report, *Our Youngest Children*, released in 1970 that gave the impetus for the creation of an Office of Early Childhood Development. In 1995, The Interagency Workgroup on Early Care and Education was established to identify the barriers inhibiting program coordination among Child Care, Head Start and Prekindergarten. Moreover, in 1999, the 77th Legislature passed Senate Bill 665, which created the Office of Early Childhood Coordination for the purposes of promoting “community support for parents of all children younger than six years of age through an integrated state and local level decision-making process.” An advisory committee was created to develop a comprehensive strategic plan working with diverse stakeholders across the state.⁶

In the 78th legislative session in 2003, a major leap forward in moving toward quality, coordinated early childhood education was made with the passage of Senate Bill 76. This legislation created a framework for the study of school readiness among at risk children. Specifically, the State Center for Early Childhood Development (the State Center) located at the Center for Improving the Readiness of Children for Learning and Education (CIRCLE) at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston, was directed to conduct a multi-site exploration of how to better integrate the delivery of early childhood education for children across preschool programs including Child Care (For Profit, Non-Profit, Corporate Sponsored, Faith-Based and Home Based); Head Start; and Public Prekindergarten (referred to as systems integration). The early child care community eagerly anticipates the findings of this work, encouraged that this significant investment by the state will serve as the building blocks on which to further develop the ideas put forth in both Senate Bill 76 and The Texas Plan.

It was in this climate and historical context that the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition was created in the summer of 2002. Rallying a membership of more than 130 organizations from across the state concerned with early care and education, this

diverse collective has worked consistently since its formation on the development of a long-range plan for systems integration. Soon after TECEC began its deliberations, The Texas Program for Society and Health at the Baker Institute for Public Policy at Rice University became a partner, taking the lead responsibility for drafting the vision created by these many experts and stakeholders into a formal policy document. Thus, the edition of The Texas Plan detailed in this document represents the participation of hundreds of persons in numerous settings including statewide policy retreats, community forums, and a statewide summit over a two-year period.

This massive effort to build consensus around a policy plan for ECED in Texas is unprecedented, and its broad range of creators and supporters bodes well for its possible adoption and implementation.

The Texas Plan for a Statewide Early Education and Development System (Texas SEEDS): Overarching Guiding Principles and Conceptual Framework

Building a high-quality ECED system for all children in Texas first requires acknowledgement of and commitment to an overarching set of guiding principles. The task of identification of those tenets was the first major assignment for the working group. Of the many identified values from which the specific policy recommendations of The Texas Plan arose, six were selected as “overarching” principles from which the integrated structure emerged. The entire set of guiding principles is presented throughout The Plan and each are discussed within the context of the policy with which they are related. It is important, at this point, however, to highlight the major six agreed-upon principles. They are:

- **ALL Children.** The focus is on **ALL** children from birth to age at entry to kindergarten residing in Texas. Education and development should be regarded as a lifelong continuum. Arrest of development at one age will delay or forfeit development in later stages. Attention and funding of programs in one age group must never result in decreased efforts and resources in another. Responding to the need to focus, however, the overall scope of The Texas Plan is on children ages birth to 5. Due to the current policy and political landscape, the initial focus of The Texas Plan is on 3- and 4-year-olds. Such an initial emphasis, however, in no way signifies any less commitment to the development of infants and toddlers.
- **ALL Provider Types.** **ALL** currently operating types of early care and education service entities will be included, i.e., Child Care (For Profit, Non-Profit, Corporate Sponsored, Faith-Based and Home-Based); Head Start; and Public Prekindergarten
- **Costs Charged to Families Will Vary with Income.** Family charges should be scaled to family income, but the costs for all families should be subsidized to some extent.
- **Single Reimbursement Rate for all Provider Types.** The reimbursement rate per child to the early care and education service provider should be the same for all provider types. Competition for child enrollment should be based as much as possible on parent knowledge of quality assessments and on other parental preferences.
- **Quality Standards, Assessments, and Accountability.** A comprehensive quality assessment system should be routinely and equitably applied at each

provider site to monitor progress toward standards for all dimensions of the early childhood education and development program including the facility, the daily operating processes, and the outcomes to the children.

- **Parent Choice.** Parents should be given the choice of enrolling their children or not, and of selecting the specific early education and development service facility of their preference.

Conceptualizing the Plan

The Texas Plan is an ambitious proposal for the design and implementation of a Texas Statewide Early Education and Development System (Texas SEEDS). The first step in the conceptualization is the identification of the critical components. We propose that the requisite components can be organized into three categories: 1) Governance, Financing, and Infrastructure; 2) Quality Standards; and, 3) Families and Communities (Figure 2). Beneath each category heading are the specific components aggregated by their interrelatedness. This conceptualization leads naturally to consideration of policies to develop each component. The conceptual framework has led the Coalition’s deliberative process to an early adoption of four key features, which will be described next.

ECED for ALL children in Texas regardless of family socioeconomic circumstances and geographic location has been incorporated into the overall vision of The Texas Plan and, in some locations, implemented by advocates, teachers, other proponents of ECED, and some state and municipal governments across the country. This inclusive design reflects the growing realization that the unmet need for early care and education services is immense and affects families in all socioeconomic brackets. Accessibility and affordability for all children, with parental choice of participation and site is a key feature of the system we propose.

High-quality, standards-driven ECED services to attain the goal of all children in the state being ready for kindergarten is another characteristic that is driving a substantial portion of attention in The Texas Plan. In Texas, as in most other states and throughout the field of education generally, there has been adoption of the belief that setting quality standards, adopting a quality assessment system, and making the resulting information transparent and readily available to parents is requisite for achieving higher goals in education. Early care and education programs and their teachers must have standards to guide planning and to target goals and assessments to monitor progress toward goals and to help introduce course corrections when the evaluations indicate shortcomings or the assessments indicate that even better results can be attained. Standards may be legal—such as the ECED providers’ licensing standards of a jurisdiction. Standards can be voluntary and tied to funding mechanisms—such as grants or tiered reimbursement rates for early care subsidies. Or standards can be market driven—enforced by consumer behavior predicated on a quality-assessment mechanism. Many states utilize a combination of all three mechanisms. We have followed this approach in these policy recommendations.

Family and community participation is a key feature of The Texas Plan for ECED. Research demonstrates persuasively that parent participation not only in the school but also in specified home activities is critical for the success of ECED initiatives.⁷

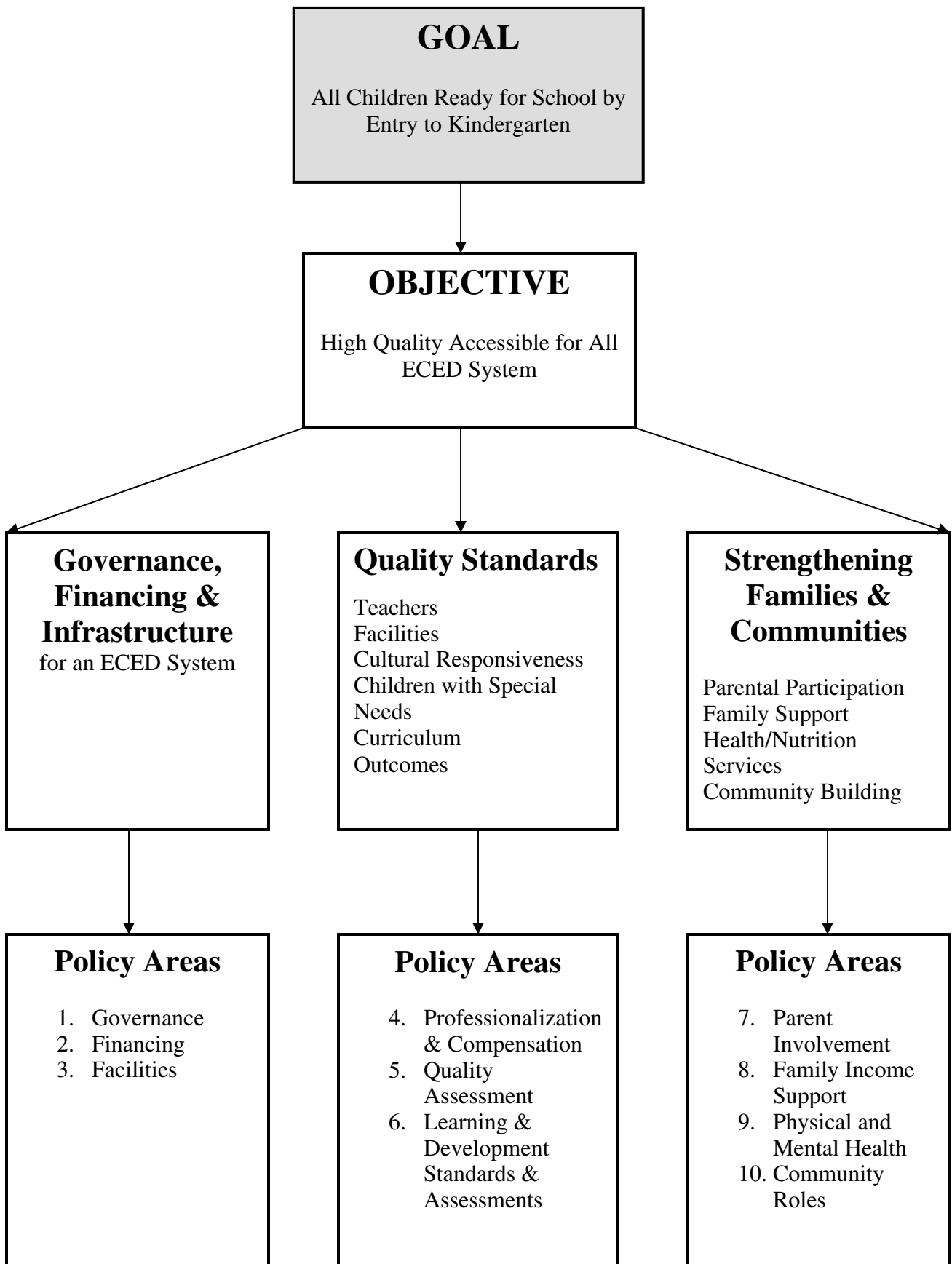


Figure 2. Conceptualization of a Statewide Early Education and Development System for Texas (Texas SEEDS) with ten policy areas to accomplish the objectives and goals

Family income support is required for some families because child education and development is almost always suboptimal in circumstances of persistent poverty. In all circumstances, health and nutrition should be monitored and services provided when needed. Likewise, a child-centered or child-attentive community can facilitate child education and development by creating safe and secure environments, providing supportive services, and in other ways supporting parents in their family and work lives.

Financing and governance systems are a cardinal feature of the Texas Plan for ECED. Behind the recommendations of this section is the fact that a very substantial child care infrastructure and capacity has been building over forty years, albeit under diverse sponsorship and of widely variant quality. The objective is to retain that capacity for a public-private system that will thrive on diversity but also create a “level playing field” among all provider forms. This equitable system must be based on high performance and achievement standards, applied equally to all provider forms and entities, and in part on competition for enrollment based on transparent quality assessments and parent choice.

First, all seven delivery mechanisms for early care and education should be included:

- Federal Head Start,
- State Licensed Child Care,
- Public prekindergarten,
- Registered and listed family homes
- On-site or corporate early care programs,
- Faith-based programs, and
- Military programs.

All of these organizational arrangements should be supported in a system that is advantageously pluralistic (or many-formed). Second, per-child payments to providers should be equalized across all seven organizational forms of care and education services, with perhaps some incentive for extraordinary accomplishment or innovation. Third, per-child payments must be adequate to support the higher standards sought in this proposal and to include funds and mechanisms for capital investment in facilities and equipment. Fourth, current funding streams from multiple sources could be collected into a single entity and dispersed to the provider organizations in a uniform way. Potential advantages might include simplification of payments, developing a single quality assessment system, administration of certification processes, uniform licensing requirements for all provider forms, and so on. Fifth, a mechanism should be established to allow parents to select the early care and education facility they prefer for their child. This could heighten competition among facilities based on the most essential of all incentives, quality. Sixth, a variety of organizational entities for administration of the Texas Plan have been discussed,^a and a model has been selected to meet the specific needs in Texas.

A. BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

POLICY AREA I. GOVERNANCE, ADMINISTRATION, AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES

POLICY AREA II. FINANCING

POLICY AREA III. FACILITIES AND PHYSICAL ARRANGEMENT OF SPACE

POLICY AREA I. GOVERNANCE, ADMINISTRATION, AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES

OBJECTIVE: To establish statewide governance, administration, and technical resource service structures that are accessible and accountable to all stakeholders to oversee and manage the development, operation, assessment, and improvement of a system to ensure that all children in Texas are well prepared to begin school.

An extensive array of Texas state government agencies that impact children is operating. In some cases considerable decentralization of functions has been accomplished down to the regional or local level or even to the independent school districts. The reasoning and recommendations in Policy Areas I and II represent our best thinking at this time. With further listening and consultation, the recommendations likely will be refined and rationales become more certain.

A considerable body of literature has accumulated over the years that reports on early childhood education and development (ECED) experiences and initiatives undertaken in other states. Additionally, here in Texas a large number of reports and recommendations have been developed by state agencies and independent organizations. Staff from the Texas Program for Society and Health, Baker Institute for Public Policy, and the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition reviewed most of that literature and conducted interviews with many experts from across the nation on the topic. The approaches implemented in other states have been diverse and undoubtedly customized to each state's circumstances.

The plan presented here builds upon that research literature but is crafted specifically for Texas within the vision of an estimated 10-year period for implementation. Due to the scope of this effort, a 10-year horizon has been selected in order to build the state's capacity to accommodate high standards for effectiveness and wide availability of services as envisioned. Further, a controlled incremental process of development will require less money in the early years.

Time is also required to gain parental confidence and enthusiasm for the opportunities provided for their children. Presented here are organizational entities (Policy Area I) and the financing requirements (Policy Area II) for a fully functioning, fully enrolled operation (see Figure 3).

As further in introduction to this section on Governance, Administration, and Technical Resources-indeed to all 10 policy areas-we stress again that considerable structure for ECED is already in place in Texas. Indeed, there is a wide heterogeneity in delivery systems for early childhood education and development within the state, in terms of auspices, affiliations, and locations. And as previously stated, an extensive network of state agencies, departments, commissions, and regulations, as well as local government and school district entities and private-sector associations are in place and interact with the wide and diverse array of ECED forms already serving families and children.

The financial sponsorship of existing early childhood education services is extraordinarily broad. It includes funds from federal, state and local governments, self-paying families, corporations, religious organizations, philanthropic foundations, and grant-making organizations such as the United Way.

Governance, Administration, and Technical Resources

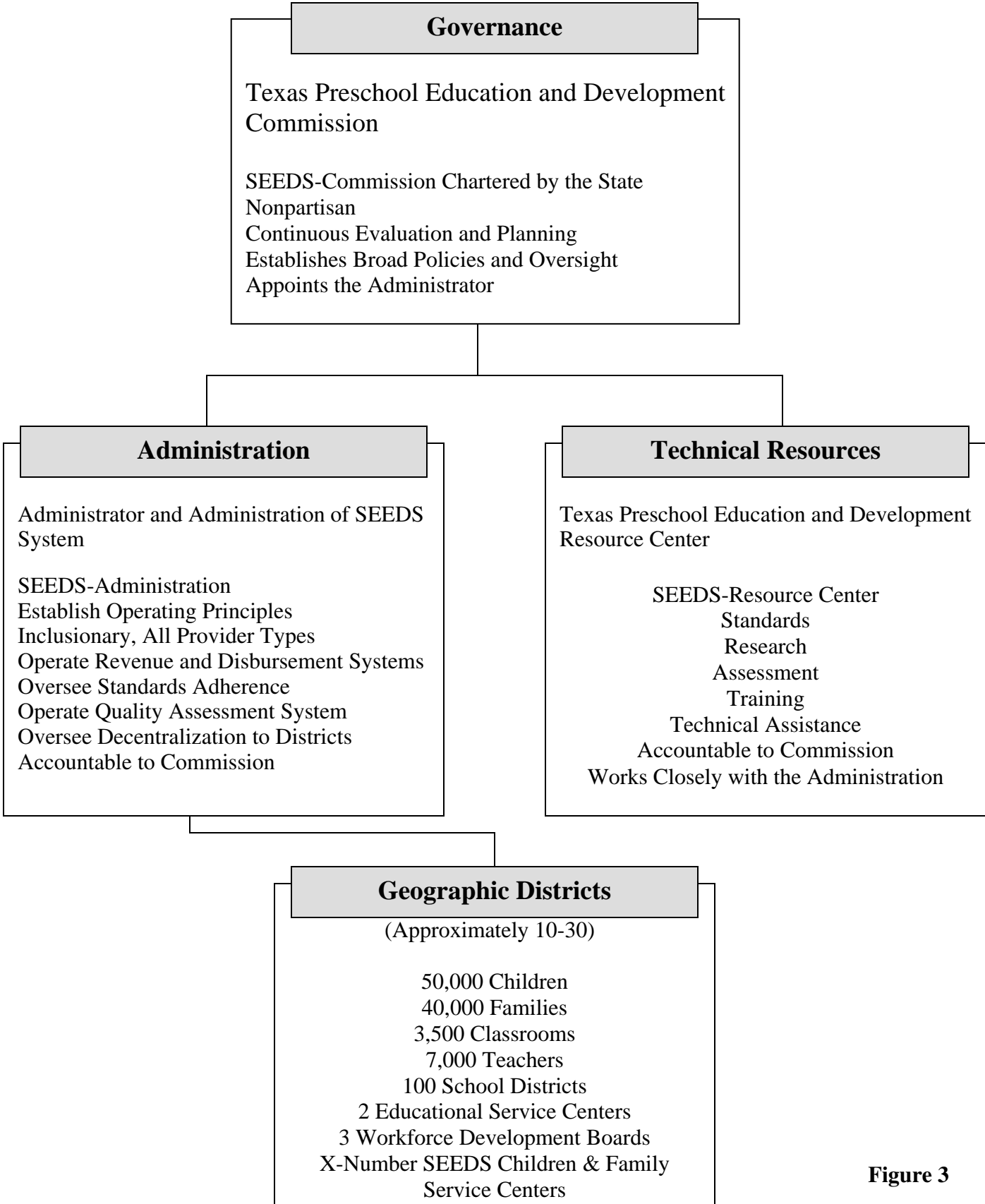


Figure 3

The existing operations have systematically built an experienced workforce, administrative structures, and operating savvy. In some cases, they have become reliable pillars of the community and provide services that permit parents to work in the comfortable knowledge that their children are in a safe, supervised environment.

In fact, by and large, a great majority of the early care and education entities are to be respected for what they have already accomplished at the individual child-family level. However, it is also safe to say that a large number of children are not in circumstances that are promotive of development and high-quality educational experiences.

Pre-existing challenges in Texas that have resulted in a less-than-effective ECED system include the following: 1) Texas does not have programs that cover all children at varying economic levels. 2) Programs sponsored by the state, for the most part, were designed and operate today as a benefit for low-income families. 3) Further, programs for low-income families have not sufficiently reduced long waiting lists for early childhood education services. 4) Programs and providers operate under remarkably heterogeneous standards creating a barrier to the development of a level playing field of quality across the state. And, 5) even with some movement toward collaboration in various jurisdictions, there is still very little interaction among systems and provider groups resulting in an absence of synergy and coordination of effort.

The result of this lack of coordination is wide disparities in quality, costs, and access; large shortages of well-trained teachers; ambiguous professional identity of the teachers; lack of opportunities for professional development and high staff turnover; unevenly applied accreditation, certification, and licensure procedures; absence of a vision of the ECED future; and lack of clarity among parents on the relationship of their child's experiences in early childhood education to progress in the child's brain, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development.

The need to develop early childhood education and development services for America's workforce is great. While the advantage of developing a single set of high standards for professional development, learning and assessments, and licensing, to name a few areas, is compelling, it would be wasteful and foolish to dismantle what is already in place.

Therefore, this section, and indeed the entire Plan, recognizes the precious private and public resources and institutions already in place and the need to preserve and support them. They are vital components in the formation of a collaborative, cost-efficient, well-functioning, integrated system.

Indeed, the public-private nature of the task required is evident in this first policy area on Governance, Administration, and Technical Resources. The recommendations might seem bold and unconventional on first reading. However, given the great need for substantive improvement in schooling in Texas, as well as throughout the whole U.S., and the attractiveness of building on resources already in place, the recommendations seem to be natural and reasonable.

Guiding Principles:

- **All Children Ages Birth to 5.** The goal of The Texas Plan is to support both child development and working parents. Its vision is one of high-quality early childhood education and development services available to all very young children in Texas prior to their entry into kindergarten regardless of parents' socioeconomic status or qualifications other than family residence in Texas. The

opportunity will be available to all children as a voluntary choice exercised by the child's parent(s). Education and development should be regarded as a lifelong continuum. Arrest of development at one age will delay or forfeit development in later stages. Attention and funding of programs in one age group must never result in decreased efforts and resources in another. Responding to the need to focus, however, the overall scope of The Texas Plan is on children ages birth to 5. Due to the current policy and political landscape, the initial focus of The Texas Plan is on 3- and 4-year-olds. Such an initial emphasis, however, in no way signifies any less commitment to the development of infants and toddlers.

- **Public–Private Partnership.** The governance and administration structures must reflect the functional requirement that public and private providers will work together on all aspects of the system. Further, within each sector there is broad diversity and separatism among provider groups that for the future must become interactive and supportive of the combined efforts in their locale.
- **Standards and Quality.** Standards are expectations and quality levels to be adopted to guide teacher training, facility design, curriculum selection, as well as outcomes. The early childhood education system in Texas should operate at a high standard that is supportable by research and is credible. A system for regular assessment of how well the standards are being met should be developed as a mechanism for continuous quality improvement. Further, each element of the education and development process should have been carefully evaluated for effectiveness and unintended effects before being adopted in the classrooms. With respect to proposed interventions that have not been rigorously demonstrated to be successful, use in the classroom should uniformly be accompanied by research and evaluation to ensure that the entire system in Texas is operating effectively.
- **Broad Stakeholder Input.** A broad constituency will be engaged in the governance and accountability processes including parents, educators, child development experts, community interest groups, diverse forms of early childhood education organizations, demographic-evaluative-statistical experts, business and financial experts, local and state governments, and others.
- **Nonpartisan Governance.** The state's ECED governing entity shall be nonpartisan, objective, and dedicated above all to the well-being of children.
- **All Diverse Providers Included.** Inclusion of all diverse forms of early care and education providers will be a central principle in the operating system. Included will be federally sponsored Head Start, state funded Prekindergarten in the independent school districts, and Licensed Child Care centers which include for-profit, nonprofit, community-based programs, corporate sponsored programs, faith-based programs, and registered, home-based child care programs. The opportunity for all systems to adopt high standards and to compete fairly for clients based on quality of service and parental preference for site shall be a central feature of the system envisioned. In order to support home-based child care providers, it will be important to also include a plan for ongoing technical

support as well as for resources to support both their credentialing and the technical assistance.

- **Connection to Comprehensive Child–Family Services.** The state ECED administration entity shall develop mechanisms that connect children to medical, dental, mental health, and nutritional services. Parents should be connected to adult education, literacy, and workforce skill-development services, and to other services that enhance family well-being and help foster a home environment conducive to successful education and development of the child.
- **Local District Orientation.** Early childhood education, developmental experiences, and all of the child and family services referred to above occur locally. Therefore, although the administration of the statewide program should be centralized in a single Administration accountable to the governing body, substantial devolution of authority to the district and community level should be incorporated into the plan.
- **Parental Choice and Provider Needs.** Parent selection of the form and site for early childhood education is a key feature of this plan. Regular quality rating and reporting will help ensure high standards and accountability. At the same time, safeguards must be built-in to provide stability for provider planning to avoid wide swings in enrollment, revenues, and expenditures.
- **Competition.** The competition should be driven by parents’ choice of site-program for their child, based on assessed quality of the program, responsiveness to family preferences, location preference, and capacity. These factors, rather than the lure of low charges to the family, should become the principal factors held by early childhood education organizations to maintain or increase child enrollment.

SPECIFIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following policy recommendations have been crafted after extensive deliberations during the statewide policy retreats and in widespread, subsequent interactions with other stakeholders, experts in the relevant area, and researchers. Organizational structures developed in other states have been examined. In the end, however, some distinctive characteristics of Texas were helpful in identifying priorities and envisioning an organizational form that is right for this state.

The following were among the characteristics considered in our deliberations: (A) High priority has been assigned to maintaining the diversity of early childhood education and development service systems, multiple funding streams, and well-established administrative and professional organizations already in place and operating effectively. (B) Governments, including federal, state, and local, play a critical role in funding, setting standards, and licensing yet need to be joined by a broader inclusion of stakeholders in order to gain the confidence and wide participation of families, providers, and other family services. (C) The need for early childhood education and development services opens an opportunity for Texas to participate fully in a great American experiment in public–private collaboration. (D) The governance and administrative structure envisioned in this report is compatible with the direction of the state

government toward reorganization and consolidation, (E) Finally, serious direction in formulating the recommendations was provided by the guiding principles.

Policy Recommendation I-1. **A COMMISSION. Recommend that the principal governing body of a Texas statewide early childhood education and development system (Texas SEEDS) should be a state-chartered but independently functioning Commission.**

Commission members and functions should be politically and ideologically nonpartisan. Commission members should be appointed by both the governor and by broad-based, key stakeholders in early childhood education including provider groups. The Commission should have authority to appoint the administrator, establish broad directions and policies, conduct needs assessments, oversee continuous evaluation and planning, and issue reports on progress toward specific goals to stakeholders on a regular basis (Figure 3).

Policy Recommendation I-2. **THE ADMINISTRATION. Recommend that the principal administrative organization of a Texas statewide early childhood education and development system (Texas SEEDS) should be an administrator and a senior administrative staff approved by and accountable to the Governing Commission.**

The administration should establish operating principles, ensure that all provider types are included, effectively integrate services, oversee adherence to standards, operate the revenue and disbursement systems, operate the quality assessment system, administer and coordinate decentralization of appropriate responsibility and authority to districts and communities, and maintain openness and accountability to the Commission (Figure 3).

Policy Recommendation I-3. **TECHNICAL RESOURCES. Recommend that a Technical Resource Center be established for the following purposes: to develop learning, professional development, and facility standards; to provide guidance on application of the standards; to continually update the standards; to conduct research and assessments; and to provide technical assistance to the administration, the districts, individual programs and perhaps the supportive components at the community level including the public schools, community colleges, public health programs, parent education and job skills initiatives.**

This center should be accountable to the Commission because the Commission's work includes continuous evaluation, planning, broad oversight and policy development, all requiring a scientifically credible quality assessment system that provides information essential to resetting the standards.

In 2003, under Senate Bill 76, the State established the aforementioned State Center for Early Childhood Development (SCECD) or The Center at CIRCLE (Center for Improving the Readiness of Children for Learning and Education at

the University of Texas at Houston). The State Center has been charged with conducting a statewide demonstration project, the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM). The purpose of the TEEM project is to integrate the various government-funded preschool programs (including Child Care, Head Start and Prekindergarten), promote access to these programs, and to develop quality standards and assessments to strengthen children's readiness to enter kindergarten. Whether or not the Center's agenda should be expanded to include the technical functions envisioned in this report is a subject worthy of deliberation. The entity recommended here will be referred to as the Technical Resource Center in the remainder of this report (Figure 3).

Policy Recommendation I-4. **DISTRICTS. Recommend that the day-to-day responsibility for provision of services directly to children, parents, teachers, and the communities shall devolve into 10 or more districts and from the districts to communities.**

Designation at the subdistrict levels should be compatible, whenever feasible, with already functioning independent school districts. In addition, the districts should geographically correspond to other vital service agencies such as public health regions, workforce development boards, and child and family service centers. Texas has great variations in population densities, cultural-ethnic distributions and economic vitality. A reasonable district size might be composed of 50,000 children aged 3 and 4 and about 40,000 families (Figure 3).

Policy Recommendation I-5. **FINANCING. Recommend that funds for a Texas statewide early childhood education and development system should be derived by collecting all available current revenues from federal, state, and other sources, supplemented substantially by family resources contributed on a sliding scale basis, and from a substantial infusion of additional funds appropriated by the state.**

Often, federal funds and programs are earmarked for use by specific segments of a population, e.g., Head Start for low-income families. Those types of restrictions must be accommodated. Nonetheless, other funds that may not be categorized specifically should be aggregated to ensure that the investments per child after disbursement are approximately equal for all the children of Texas. The recommended plan for financing is presented in the next section of this report.

POLICY AREA II. FINANCING

OBJECTIVE: To provide adequate and stable financial resources for a system to make quality early education and development services widely available to all children in Texas.

A systematic approach to early childhood education financing is essential to ensure that sufficient funds are generated and efficiently utilized to address resource needs. A financing blueprint helps to define how various mechanisms and strategies fit together to provide services, resources, and benefits. For example, the financing mechanism for K–12 usually relies primarily on a public finance approach. Interestingly, some early childhood advocates and policy leaders champion the higher education financing approach—a combination of public and private financing—as a model for financing early childhood education and development.⁸

Ideally, financing is needed for three main purposes:

- (1) To subsidize the provision of widely available, quality programs including program start-up and expansion; program operating support to close the gap between what it costs to produce quality programs and the portion of the costs that families are able to pay; recruitment, training and development of staff; program quality improvement funds to achieve and maintain standards; incorporation of access to health, family support, and other community services; and mechanisms to provide technical assistance to providers and programs.
- (2) To support the infrastructure that will ensure that essential functions are carried out including facility construction, remodeling and maintenance, long-range planning, policy development, coordination, financing, governance, administration, technical assistance, public accountability, research, quality assurance, data collection, child outcome assessment, and so forth.⁹
- (3) To subsidize the needs of parents and families for information and resources that facilitate access to programs that best suit their children, including outreach services and information about child development, linkages and access to health and other community services, parent/family education, consumer information, a consolidated tuition assistance application, and one-stop processing for all sources of aid.

In agreement with experts, we believe that the investment in children ages birth–5 requires a collaborative venture among various public–private actors similar to the higher education financing system. Many families currently contribute a large share of their incomes to early education expenditures. Corporate funds, both in employee benefits and for on-site early care centers, while relatively small in the total early care and education expenditure context, are considered contributions. Faith-based organizations provide early care and education services to a large number of children.

Regarding public investments, since 1965 the federally funded Head Start program has served children age three to five from families with low incomes. Subsequently in 1994, the Early Head Start program was created to focus on the early development of children ages birth to three.

Head Start and Early Head Start, provide comprehensive services to low-income families and pregnant women including early education, health, nutrition, support services for the family and diverse opportunities for parent involvement. Federal funding

for Head Start services flows directly to the local level ensuring that community-based organizations can meet the diverse needs of their clients while continuing to improve quality and raising performance standards. Texas served 63,949 children in the Head Start program in 2003-2004.¹⁰

The Texas Welfare Reform Bill (Senate Bill 642 passed in 1995) created the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) and assigned to it the child care responsibilities of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG). Texas is the only state where the employment commission has this child care responsibility, and this linkage was purposefully made with the intention of underscoring the connectivity of child care and workforce participation.

The operation of child care services by TWC is conducted by the 28 Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDB's) working at the community level. Local Boards have authority over eligibility, reimbursement, and co-payment levels. LWDB's also have an added responsibility of raising matching funds in order to draw down all available federal dollars. The child care subsidy program serves children from low-income families, families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and parents transitioning off of welfare. The state of Texas is heavily reliant upon federal dollars to administer this program, with more than 80% of total dollars spent in Texas on child care services coming from the federal government. The average number of children served per day in the child care subsidy program in 2003 was 107,382 (the child care subsidy program serves children birth to 13, age-specific data not available).¹¹

At the state level, Texas created the Texas Public School Prekindergarten initiative; which provides a half-day (3 hours) of preschool primarily for four-year-old children. The Pre-k program is administered through independent school districts and is part of the K-12 public school system funded through a combination of state and local dollars. Prekindergarten in Texas, like the federal Head Start and Child Care programs serves children from low-income families including children who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, unable to speak and understand English, or are homeless. Although the Prekindergarten program is managed by the Independent School Districts (ISDs), the state encourages ISDs to utilize community-based child care and Head Start centers as program sites. During the 2003-2004 school year, Texas served 14,283 3-year-olds and 151,620 4-year-olds.¹²

Competitive expansion grants are available at the state level to school districts interested in providing a full-day (6 hours) of care for children in their community with priority of additional funds targeted to school districts with low third-grade reading scores. The Legislature recently reduced available funding for these grants for both the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 academic years from \$100 million to \$92.5 million.¹³

Despite significant investments at the federal, state and local levels in early care and education, current revenue sources are still not adequate to cover the need in many Texas communities and waiting lists are common across the three major sectors of care. Exacerbating the long waiting list for the child care subsidy program are budget decisions made at the state level regarding use of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant. Federal law allows states to transfer up to 30% of the TANF grant towards serving children in the child care subsidy program. However, Texas decided to eliminate all transfers of TANF funds to the Child Care Development Block Grant in the appropriation act for 2002 and 2003. Texas is one of a handful of states that does not utilize any TANF funds to expand child care assistance.¹⁴

Texas' ability to increase access to early childhood education programs will also be determined by the pending federal reauthorization of both the Child Care Development Block Grant and the Head Start program. Renewal of these programs and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) has been stalled in Congress for several years. Decisions made at the federal level in 2005 regarding these programs will have a direct impact on the availability of early care and education at the state and local levels.

While all of these financing mechanisms are required, clearly the Texas state government must make the largest new investment beyond the amount the state already provides. New streams of state revenue for education in Texas will be needed for widely accessible early education to the full extent of the vision espoused in this document.

Due to the magnitude of the funds required to support a high-quality early childhood education and development system for all children in Texas, it is our view that the confluence of six funding streams will be necessary:

1. **Existing State and Federal Allocations:** Maximize and make more effective allocations of federal and state appropriations. This will include pooling funds from different revenue streams or agencies and combining or leveraging funds from different levels of government.
2. **Family Self-pay:** on a sliding scale of affordability.
3. **New Sources of State Revenue:** Generation of new streams of state tax revenue will be required.
4. **Additional Philanthropic Funds:** Generation of private-sector resources including additional grants from foundations and corporate giving programs.
5. **New Public–Private Partnerships at the Local Level:** Leveraging resources through public–private partnerships is a strategy wherein public and private sector funds have been combined to increase total resources or to focus resources on specific efforts [e.g., professionalization of teachers (ex: San Antonio)] that have the potential to improve the quality of instruction and the outcomes in children.
6. **Employment-Related Resources:** Maximize employment-related resources including early care tax credits, expenditures by employers to directly provide early care and education services on-site or to defray employees' expenses for services they purchase.

Guiding Principles:

- **Comprehensive Early Childhood Education.** Comprehensive, high quality, early childhood education should be available for full work days, Monday through Friday, 52 weeks per year for all children ages birth to school age in Texas. While the great need for alternative-hour care is clear, it is beyond the scope of this document to address at this time. As implementation of the Plan takes place, this important issue should be addressed.

- **Public-Private Funding Partnership.** This should include pooling family payments, state funds, federal appropriations, corporate money, charitable donations, and philanthropic foundation grants.
- **The State's Role.** The routinization of quality early education for every child from birth for the purpose of assuring that every Texan's son and daughter is cognitively, emotionally, socially, and physically prepared to enter kindergarten is a bold innovation that will require significant modifications in the education system in Texas. Likewise, a widely available early education system will require an overhaul of the financial support system for education. The plan calls for a substantial and sustainable contribution of funds from the state's general revenues for this purpose, the outcome of which will be considerable enhancement in the value of the state's principal asset, its human capital.

Other public-private ventures should be encouraged, planned, and implemented to support the costs for quality initiatives. For instance, the state may incur the costs for quality in the areas of development, implementation and monitoring of programs, learning and curriculum standards, assessments, access to health and nutrition services. Alternatively, the state might provide matching funds to private initiatives that sponsor professionalization grants and technical assistance to providers or initiatives that offer guidance to providers or a one-stop resource and referral system for families.

- **Maximizing Allowable Federal Funds.** The state should aim to draw upon federal dollars to the maximum extent permissible, including funds from the following programs, and from others:
 - Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG)
 - Even Start (Title I)
 - Head Start
 - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
 - Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
 - Title 20 (XX)
- **Models of Care and Parity of Reimbursement.** All systems of early care and education should be included in the Texas Statewide Early Education and Development System (Texas SEEDS), including Head Start (federal), Pre-kindergarten (state), licensed Child Care centers which include private pay, for-profit and nonprofit, home-based child care, worksite child care (both corporate and employee pay), faith-based child care services (nonprofit), and others. All providers should receive the same reimbursement per child, tied to high quality standards. Provision of comprehensive services, incentives to improve quality, and accommodation of children with special needs will be supported with funding over and beyond the basic reimbursement. All providers should be required to meet the same standards for licensure. All providers should be rated by a single quality assessment system, the results of which will be available to families for use in their selection of the specific provider or program for their child's ECED. In this manner, all systems of early childhood education and individual providers

would compete on “a level playing field” for their enrollments based on quality and parental preferences.

- **Financial Arrangements at the Family and Provider Level.** a) The early childhood education opportunity is voluntary. Parents should have the option to enroll their child, or not. b) A family “co-pay,” or contribution to the tuition, should be on a sliding scale with income.
- **Texas SEEDS Administration.** A state-chartered, but Commission-appointed authority, with broad and diverse representation to be established incrementally over time is envisioned (see Policy Section 1, Governance). The Commission will be connected to districts that include collaborative arrangements among public and private provider systems.
- **The Development Period.** The financing mechanisms and governance system envisioned may develop naturally over time through an evolutionary process or purposefully based upon analysis, planning, and incremental steps. In the case of the latter progression, the actual development will be phased in gradually allowing for planning, the provision of adequate funds, and the growth of capacity.

SPECIFIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Policy Recommendation II-1. **STATE REVENUES. Recommend that the full day–full year, high quality early education system available to all Texas children be financed by a substantial infusion of State General Revenue funds.**

The costs of the ECED System will be borne by a variety of funding sources already being utilized for early child services in the state. These include federal, state, corporate and family funds. However, to achieve the vision of The Texas Plan will require a substantial modification of state financing mechanisms and the education support system in Texas. A substantial addition of state funds will be needed. (Table 1)

Policy Recommendation II-2. **FEDERAL FUNDS. Recommend that a systematic analysis and subsequent actions be undertaken to maximize the flow into the state of all potential federal funds for ECED.**

Some of the federal programs from which state funds can be derived include: Head Start; Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF); Title I; and the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG). Some mechanism should be put into place to monitor the States’ record on federal funding to the extent allowed. Current research on the draw down for CCDBG funds indicates that we currently receive all of those funds. This may or may not be so for other programs.

Policy Recommendation II-3. **PRIVATE FUNDS. Recommend that encouragement be given to local efforts to raise funds from private, foundation, and corporate sources for specific additional innovations to enrich children’s education and development.**

Policy Recommendation II-4. **PUBLIC FUNDS. Recommend that the state provide matching funds to stimulate efforts and success in local fundraising.**

Policy Recommendation II-5. **SLIDING SCALE FEES. Recommend that a family “co-pay” or contribution to the tuition be on a sliding scale related to family income.**

The tuition should be fully subsidized by the financing mechanism for all children in families with incomes less than 300% of the federally designated poverty level (A family of 4 at the federal poverty level has an annual income of \$18,850). Therefore, a family of 4 making \$56,550 (300% of FPL) or less on an annual basis will be fully subsidized. A diminishing subsidy with rising family co-pay will apply to families with incomes between 300% and 399% of the poverty level. Families at or above 400% of the poverty level will pay 75% of the full cost. In other words, all families would be subsidized to some extent from 25% up to 100%. The remaining 25% includes costs of quality assessment, licensing, administration and capital needs all of which will be funded centrally for all. The eligibility guidelines and co-pay rates will be determined once a year.

Much debate has centered on the term “portability”. The issue of portability is a complex one that needs far more examination before any specific recommendations can be made. Parent choice through portability could lead to a system in which providers experience chronic uncertainty of revenues and instability of plans for staffing, purchasing equipment and supplies, and so forth. A viable alternative worthy of serious study is a “contractual” system of payment to providers that does not fluctuate month by month with the number of children enrolled. A large majority of states have been able to provide parent choice operating on contractual terms with providers, and experience has revealed satisfaction with the arrangement.¹⁵

Policy Recommendation II-6. **A SPECIAL STUDY OF FINANCING. Recommend that a special blue-ribbon committee be appointed to study financing options and to make recommendations on every aspect of Financing in Policy Area II. The blue-ribbon committee’s report shall be made to the Legislature and to the public.**

The early education financing blue-ribbon committee should be non-partisan, high level, and esteemed with regard to members’ accomplishments, position in the state, and reputations. As examples, the committee might include a top Federal Reserve Bank official, a public and private university president, a

revered, high-profile business leader, and so forth. The committee should have a small staff.

The committee's function will be to study and then prepare a detailed report on preferred mechanisms to provide long-term and stable funding for a high quality early childhood education and development system in Texas. This committee should include, in its studies, the costs of attaining and retaining the high standards implicit in the quality assessment system, the costs of information collection for the assessment system, as well as the cost of facility remodeling, new constructions, building maintenance, and equipment. The committee should consider undertaking a "cost of quality" initiative similar to that of one performed in Seattle.

It is hoped that the committee will use, as a starting base, the Guiding Principles and Policy Recommendations advanced in this report, adding a great deal more specificity and detail to them. It is hoped that the vision, at least the boldness and far-reaching concepts, developed by the statewide working groups will serve as a guide for the committee's work. The committee should be given 18 months to complete its report.

FINANCING ESTIMATES—Table 1 summarizing early estimates of the costs and anticipated revenues of a fully operationalized Texas Plan were published in Edition 1. The table is undergoing revisions using a broader range of assumptions. The revised table will be inserted into this PDF as soon as the revisions have been completed.

TABLE 1 To Be Added Here

POLICY AREA III. FACILITIES AND PHYSICAL ARRANGEMENT OF SPACE

OBJECTIVE: To undertake long-range planning of facility needs including remodeling of existing space, new construction, and maintenance, and to formulate and promulgate standards for the physical arrangement of space that promote positive early childhood outcomes.

Development of facilities, largely classrooms with some outdoor space, is a major challenge confronting the Texas Plan. In some governmentally sponsored programs, funds for facility construction have been provided in the grant awards. Worksite-based early childhood education facilities have been built with funds provided by the employer (the business). Licensed early education centers that are for-profit have used a variety of fund development methods that seem to have depended upon individual entrepreneurship and private financing through banks. Municipally (school district) operated programs have used surplus space in public schools. Faith-based centers ordinarily have used available space in church-owned property, often dual-purpose rooms. Home-based providers, for the most part, use existing space in the home of the operator with only minimal renovation.

In essence, the ECED movement in Texas occurs in spaces that were not originally planned for use with very young children, and capital investment has been minimal. There are notable exceptions that are remarkable. Overall, however, facility development for a new chapter in child development in Texas requires a well-thought-out provision of capital that does not compromise the precious resources needed for teaching and learning.

A variety of methods have been used in other states for capitalizing the new construction and renovation of facilities. These include state-issued general obligation bonds (Minnesota); state general revenues (New York); tax-exempt bonds (Connecticut, Illinois); state loan guarantees (Maryland); state grants (Florida); combined public and private loan funds (Massachusetts); linked deposits, bank loans at low interest converted to mortgages after construction has been completed (Ohio); city-provided grants and loans at favorable rates (San Francisco).

Financing facility development is addressed in the section of this report titled Policy Area II, Financing. The Texas Plan envisions new facility development or remodeling to be financed out of the allowable reimbursement rate per child to each early education site, which includes a portion designated for facility development. Additionally, we support expansion and promotion of two franchise tax credits related to early childhood education and after-school-care programs. Currently, to be eligible for a child-care credit, a corporation must make certain qualifying expenditures for child care in Texas during the period upon which the tax is based. Qualifying expenditures that are eligible include amounts paid for planning the early education center, preparing a site to be used for the center, constructing the center, renovating or remodeling a structure to be used for the center, expanding the center, purchasing equipment necessary to the operation of the center and installing equipment for permanent use either in or immediately adjacent to the center, including kitchen appliances and other food preparation equipment. However, more thought and exploration of possibilities on the

overall subject of financing facility construction is needed, as indicated in Policy Area II-5, A Special Study of Financing.

Turning now to the interior design of spaces to meet the specific learning and developmental needs of early childhood education, research results and considerable experience have accumulated over the past 20 years. Specific design concepts that should be considered are pointed out in Guiding Principles (below) and a mechanism is proposed in the Recommendations to help ensure that early childhood learning environments are developed based on solid child education and development principles.

Guiding Principles:

- **A Statewide Assessment of Facility Needs.** A study should be performed to assure that the structures effectively and efficiently serve the functions required and the enrollment size anticipated and should include specific interior design, remodeling, new construction, and maintenance requirements

- **Design of the Learning Space.** The following principles summarize the knowledge related to design.
 - **Environment.** The early childhood education classroom, including the physical arrangement, curriculum materials, the ordering of events, classroom rules, safety and security, and child-teacher and child-peer relationships are all-important to childhood learning.
 - **The physical arrangement of space.** Room layout can promote development. Especially important are safety, traffic patterns, materials positioned at the children's level, routine and organized spaces for storage, child-accessible spaces for equipment and supplies, delineated areas divided by low dividers for specific functions, noisy areas separated from quiet areas, spaces for small group work and for independent work, large group areas, and so forth.
 - **The organization and routinization of activities.** The structuring of activities as they are related to physical spaces can promote development, e.g., classroom management, spatial opportunities for interactions, spatial design for optimal language and literacy practice, and so forth.
 - **Ambience.** The atmosphere generated principally by the teacher, and teacher-directed displays, is important to learning. This includes ethnically diverse posters, displays of children's work, and so forth.

- **Children with Special Needs.** Differences should be attended to, although generally children with special needs including disabilities should be assimilated into the everyday activities of the whole group whenever feasible. An inclusive early education and development program seeks to build a positive relationship with families of children with special needs so that the family and the child approach the school with optimism and, indeed, pride. An inclusive program ensures children with special needs receive the necessary tools to be included successfully in daily activities.¹⁶ Likewise, the other children in the school should learn to accept the child having special needs with understanding, patience, and helpfulness so that each is in a wholesome and harmonious relationship with the other.

- **Locales that Are Underserved.** Those areas that are lacking with respect to early childhood education facilities should receive high priority attention for program and facility development.
- **Periodic Quality Assessment.** Formal review of the design of learning places, with continuous improvement, should become routine.

SPECIFIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Policy Recommendation III-1. **FACILITY NEEDS. Recommend that the proposed Texas SEEDS Governance Commission be authorized to conduct (by contract) a comprehensive assessment of short-term and long-term facility requirements to meet anticipated enrollment needs and to provide information for financial and property planning.**

The Texas SEEDS Administration and the Technical Resource Center should be active participants with the contractor in this undertaking. Those two entities will have the experience and expertise to add specificity and possibilities for collaboration/cost efficiency in program development and space arrangement implications.

Policy Recommendation III-2. **INTERIOR DESIGN OF FACILITIES. Recommend that the proposed Texas SEEDS Technical Resource Center convene an advisory panel on facility design to research and prepare recommendations for providers that cover various issues including optimal floor plans, room and furniture design, and other important elements of spatial arrangements and the learning environment.**

Memberships on this panel should include individuals with high-level expertise in relevant subject areas. These include: early education teachers and administrators having lengthy experience in planning structures to facilitate specified functions; child development experts who have contributed substantially to research on the importance of place design for early childhood education and development; child psychologists; and architects and interior decorators experienced in building spaces for the education and development of young children.

B. BUILDING STANDARDS: TEACHERS, EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SITES, AND CHILDREN

POLICY AREA IV. TEACHERS: PROFESSIONALIZATION AND COMPENSATION

POLICY AREA V. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SITES: STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

POLICY AREA VI. THE CHILD: STANDARDS & ASSESSMENTS FOR EDUCATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL OUTCOMES

POLICY AREA IV. TEACHERS: PROFESSIONALIZATION AND COMPENSATION

OBJECTIVE: To adopt a research-supported set of uniform standards that defines the optimum formal education and continuing training and professional development of teachers of early childhood education and development for all public and private early childhood education centers, and to adopt salary and benefit structures and other features of employment that elevate early childhood teachers to a level of professionalization and pride worthy of the great importance and skill requirement of their work for children, families, and for society as a whole.

The standards should be relevant to all areas of child development including cognitive, linguistic, emotional, behavioral, social and physical development. The standards for teacher education and training and for the curriculum that prepares teachers should be applicable to both the teachers' formal education as well as to "on-the-job" and other post-graduation skill enhancement opportunities. Further, professional development standards should be appropriate for diverse cultures and ethnicities and for unique populations of children.

Research shows that increased teacher education or training has a direct impact on child development outcomes. It appears that the majority of commentators agree that, in the long run, a college degree in the area of child development or early education is most desirable. In 2001, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children approved standards to prepare early childhood professionals¹⁷. They require a four-year college degree and practical experience in which teacher candidates learn and demonstrate the abilities of effective teachers. Based on the state of knowledge of how children learn best in all the developmental domains (cognitive, linguistic, socio-behavioral, emotional, and physical) it seems reasonable that 1) specific formal education, 2) practical training, 3) experience, and 4) continuous professional development, are all required.

From a practical standpoint it will not be possible in a 10-year period to educate, train, and provide the mentored experience for the highly qualified teaching workforce envisioned as an ideal to be worked toward and attained in the long-term, perhaps 20 years. Further, there are large numbers of teachers in existing early childhood education systems who by experience and determination have, without the complete or optimal formal education, attained a high level of proficiency in facilitating children's successful preparation for kindergarten. Finally, classrooms with two teachers have become the accepted norm. One of the teachers might have the complete preparation of education, training and mentored experience, while the second teacher, perhaps a "teaching assistant," can be prepared and credentialed differently.

Thus while it is not feasible to attain the ideal over the short term it is important to adopt a reasonable timetable in moving toward the highly credentialed teaching workforce envisioned in the above paragraphs. Guiding principles and recommendations have been formulated for this purpose.

Professional development standards and compensation policies will also improve early care education and development by enhancing teachers' status and satisfaction, reducing teacher turnover, promoting continued teacher education, and facilitating retention of teachers who have attained advanced levels of skills. These projected

outcomes, as well as the primary benefit of increasing instructors' capacities to effectively teach, will, on the whole, improve the outcomes to children and the cost-effectiveness of the investment in children.

Guiding Principles:

- **Professional Development Standards.** A set of professional development standards predicated on sound research should be ratified and applied to direct the training of teachers and the delivery of the education and development services provided in public and private early education centers.
- **Current Teachers and New Teachers Over the Near Term.** Current teachers having demonstrated over a three-year period, effective skills in the classroom, but without the four-year bachelors degree requirement, should be allowed to stand for certification. In addition, selected new employees entering the teaching workforce over the next five years should be allowed to enter the certification qualification process through a combination of courses, experience, and supervised mentoring in the classroom.
- **Compensation Schedules.** Compensation for all teachers trained to the level of the adopted standards, or who by length of experience or on-the-job training have demonstrated the high-skill capacity envisioned in this document, should be at a level suitable to the high ideals of a skilled profession. Compensation includes salary, healthcare and retirement benefits, and other benefits (such as travel to meetings, subsidies for courses, access to books and journals, and so forth) consistent with the status of a skilled profession.
- **Accreditation of Teacher Training Program.** All training programs for teachers, whether a certified program in a community college, a baccalaureate program in a university, or on-the-job training program, must be evaluated at regular intervals by a process of accountability performed by the appropriate professional group.
- **Additional Support for Teacher Retention.** Additional actions intended to enhance professional satisfaction and pride should be taken to promote teacher retention. For example, mentoring has been shown to be an excellent, cost-effective means of investing teachers in their profession.

SPECIFIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Policy Recommendation IV-1. STANDARDS FOR TEACHER TRAINING AND PROFESSIONALIZATION, AND COMPENSATION

Recommend that the proposed Technical Resource Center (Recommendation I-3) propose standards for the training, professionalization, and compensation of ECED teachers and a plan for the systematic administration, monitoring, and enforcement of the standards. The finished proposal should be submitted to the Texas SEEDS

Commission for deliberation, possible modification, and ultimate adoption into the system.

In formulating its proposal, the Technical Resource Center should consult with and seek the advice of the Texas SEEDS Administration, relevant state agencies, and teacher and ECED associations in the state. The training and professional development standards should consider and integrate earlier work established through the Texas Early Care and Education Career Development System that includes the Trainer Registry and the career ladder. In addition, the standards should be flexible to allow the training to be customized to local circumstances, based upon approval by the proposed Technical Resource Center. These professional development standards are to be grounded in child development theory, practice, and research; developmentally appropriate; and inclusive of children with special needs and children whose primary language in the home is not English.

There is a strong need for mandatory professional development standards. However, a mandatory set of rules may present problems for the broad range of public and private providers in a system. Accordingly, it is recommended that a gradual phase-in of mandatory standards be used with a significant level of implementation evident by the end of the third year after development and completely implemented between the tenth and twentieth years. Initially voluntary compliance may be facilitated using grants and technical assistance as incentives to help providers. It is imperative to be mindful of the diversity that exists within the teacher and parent-child population in Texas and create standards and educational and training opportunities that are compatible with language and cultural differences.

Policy Recommendation IV-2. **ACCREDITATION AND CERTIFICATION. Recommend that the Technical Resource Center propose, to the Texas SEEDS Commission, systems for formal periodic accreditation of qualified ECED training programs and certification of the skill levels of the teachers of early childhood teachers.**

The Technical Resource Center should create a coherent, flexible, and well-articulated educational pathway linking all aspects of professional development for early care educators that includes high schools, community-based training, apprenticeship programs, technical schools, community colleges, and universities. This educational pathway should allow local programs or other providers or training programs to establish a professional development curriculum and provide training based upon approved guidelines. All institutions, organizations, and providers offering training courses would be subject to this credentialing process. This policy will be incentivised and voluntary initially, becoming mandatory after some period. It should be expected that the movement toward accreditation and certification to ensure high standards should be clearly evident by the fifth year, and fully implemented between the tenth and twentieth years.

Policy Recommendation IV-3. **EXPAND ECED TEACHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING CAPACITY. Recommend that the capacity of community colleges and universities to educate and offer continuing training for teachers be substantially increased.**

Ultimately, all ECED teachers in the state are envisioned to have completed high quality training in an accredited program in a community college or in a college or university. All of these teachers will be expected to become certified as ECED teachers. This will require a very substantial expansion of the training capacity in the state's higher education system.

Policy Recommendation IV-4. **EXPERIENCE-GAINED CORE COMPETENCIES. Recommend that acquisition of core competencies earned through years of experience or on-the-job training should under certain circumstances (examination or other forms of credible evidence) qualify an ECED teacher to become formally certified.**

This policy is meant to give credit to those teachers who have worked for years accumulating experience and on-the-job training without specific formal classroom education or a degree, and are proven to be effective as high quality teachers.

Policy Recommendation IV-5. **TEACHER COMPENSATION. Recommend that teacher compensation be adequate to professionalize and retain qualified teachers, and be supplemented by public and private funds for special purposes related to standards and quality.**

Salary levels should be the same for early childhood teachers of comparable qualifications, experience, and responsibilities regardless of setting or age of the children served. Wage increases should be linked to level of training and education as well as to performance merit.

State general revenues and CCDBG/TANF funds should be used to help retain qualified teachers. The objective is to provide compensation to teachers achieving higher education goals without passing the costs onto the early childhood education system and parents.

Policy Recommendation IV-6. **TEACHER BENEFITS. Recommend that subsidized health insurance and retirement plans be made available to attract, reward and retain qualified teachers.**

Both Rhode Island and New York City have developed health care plans for providers. These and other models should be carefully explored.

Policy Recommendation IV-7. **ADMINISTRATORS: PROFESSIONALIZATION AND COMPENSATION. Recommend that the above standards related to**

teachers for training, professionalization and compensation also apply to administrators. The quality of the early childhood education experience is impacted by not just the teacher, but also the program's administration. Thus, it is imperative that center directors and other professional administrative staff, likewise, meet a set of professional development standards appropriate for their duties and responsibilities and for the specific mission of early childhood education and development.

POLICY AREA V. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SITES: STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

OBJECTIVE: To establish a statewide, transparent, consumer-oriented, quality assessment system to monitor progress of every early childhood education center toward reaching/exceeding standards in all dimensions of the program including the classroom ambience and facilities, professionalization of staff, teaching practices, curriculum and materials, parent and community participation, child access to nutrition, physical health and mental health services, and family support services. Routine quality assessment should become a principal tool for continuous improvement, for gauging a program's effectiveness in reaching the standards, and for specifying the technical assistance from which an early education center might benefit.

Guiding Principles:

- **Purposes.** A properly financed and effective Standards and Assessment System for the sites is essential to:
 - a. Assure high quality expectations and attainment.
 - b. Assure that all aspects of the program are satisfactorily implemented including parent involvement; parent education; nutritional, medical and mental health services; community roles; and others.
 - c. Support continuous quality enhancement.
 - d. Provide information to parents for selecting a facility for their child, and to facilitate and promote parent involvement in the affairs of the center.

(See Figure 4)

COMPONENTS OF A COMPREHENSIVE ECED SITE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

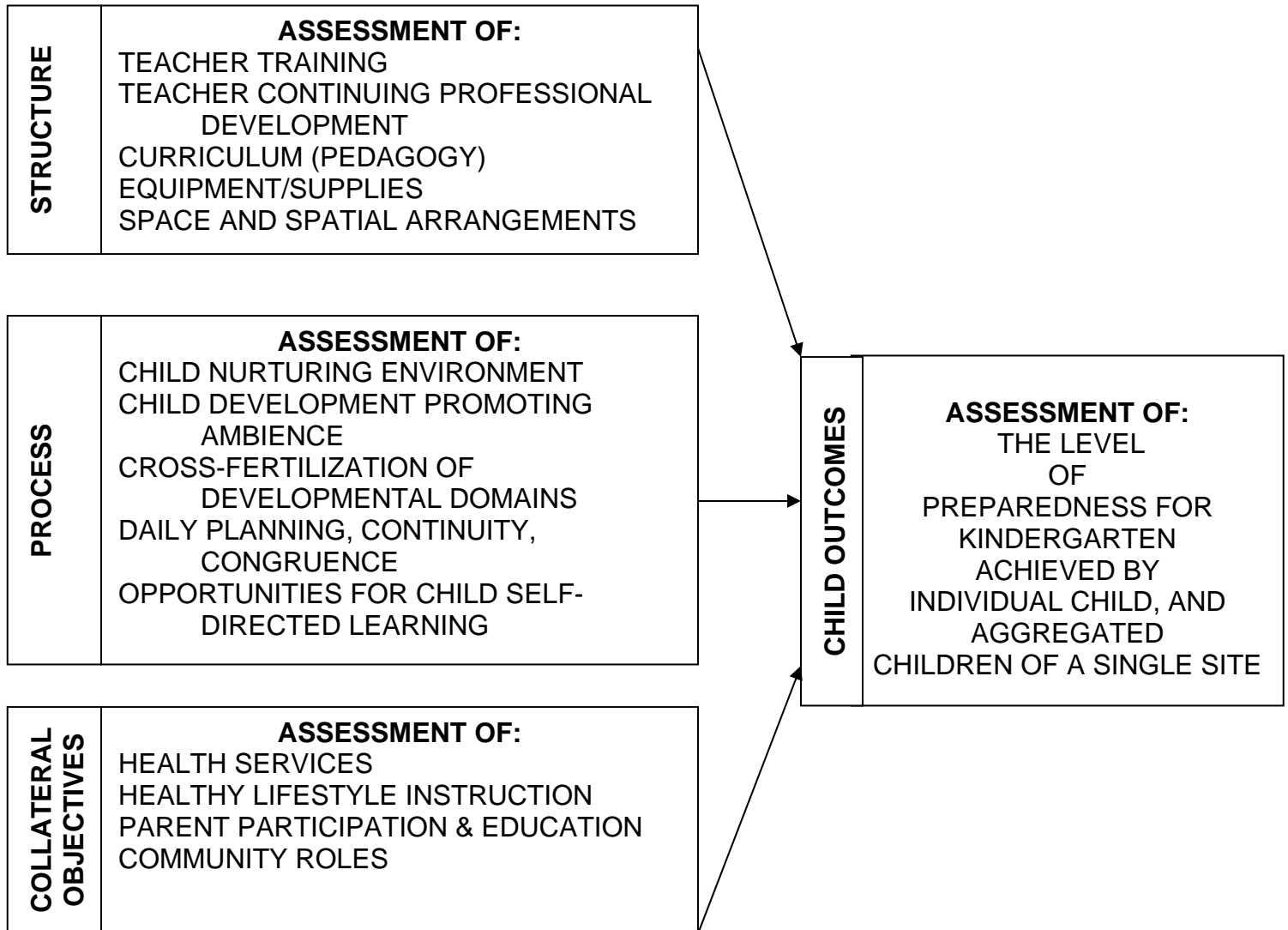


Figure 4

- **Universal Application.** The development of uniform high quality care and the achievement of the system’s objectives for all children requires that the system’s standards and assessments be equitably and fairly applied to all ECED facilities regardless of their auspices, ownership, affiliation, and location. This inclusionary principle must also apply to all other components of quality assurance including training, accreditation, certification, and licensure in order to produce a system of uniform high quality that is equitably accessible to **all** children in Texas. A multi-tiered quality system must be avoided. Children should be immersed at the outset of their lives, when they are most impressionable, in an educational system that provides all children with an equitable start.

- **Comprehensiveness.** Standards must be established, and assessments made, for the more obvious components of the early childhood education and development program such as teacher training, teacher practices, ambience, curriculum, equipment, and so forth. Standards and assessments must also be applied to a range of factors that can influence educational and developmental progress such as parent literacy; parent participation in the school; children’s nutritional, health care, and mental health needs; family income support; community engagement; and so forth.

- **Building Independence and Integrity into the Assessment System.** Consistent with other systems that are essential to the well-being of the broad public, e.g., accounting, investing, public utilities, transportation, and so forth, an independent entity should be charged with leading the standards and assessment system. The independent entity must be free of political bias and of the influence of stakeholders having a material or partisan interest in the assessments. The functions include: these items were not parallel
 - a. Assemblage and organization of all of the standards from the ten policy areas of the Plan, development of additional standards when necessary and maintain coherence, integration, and logic of the entire set.
 - b. Design and application of the assessment system
 - c. Analysis and interpretation of the assessment results and provision of the information to the child care sites, the Administration, and the Commission.
 - d. Provision of technical assistance to sites to further enable them to enhance the quality of their effort
 - e. Assistance to the Commission in preparing an Annual Report to the public on the state of the early childhood education and development system in Texas.

The standards and assessment entity should interact with and consistently seek the advice of stakeholders in the Texas SEEDS, especially the teachers and directors of the child care sites, but also of state and federal agencies, independent school districts, the business sector, parents, and others. The Technical Resource Center might be one candidate entity for this purpose.

- **Financial Support for Assessments.** The cost of operating the standards and assessment system should be borne centrally from the Commission’s budget. This is to protect the system from the inevitable budget squeezes that will occur at the individual site or district level, and to ensure that the assessments are uniform and fair.
- **Parent Access to Quality Assessments.** The assessment ratings for each site should be formatted and simplified into information that can be distributed to and easily understood by parents. This will be useful to them both in selecting an early education program for their child and for their informal participation in the affairs of the program.

SPECIFIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Policy Recommendation V-1. **DEVELOP A QUALITY ASSESSMENT SYSTEM. Recommend that the Texas SEEDS Commission charge its Technical Resource Center or another entity with the responsibility to oversee integration and coherence of all standards and to establish additional standards to make the set complete and unifying and develop, test, modify, implement, and maintain a quality assessment system built on those standards.**

It is important that a broad, diverse set of representatives from Texas as well as experts from around the nation provide advice on the measures and standards to be used as a part of the quality assessment system.

Policy Recommendation V-2. **INCLUSIONARY, ALL EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SITES. Recommend that the standards and assessments for the early childhood education and development sites described herein be equitably and fairly applied to ALL ECED sites regardless of their auspices, ownership, affiliation, and location.**

The selective requirement that some early childhood education entities be subject to regulation while others are exempt (licensure, for example) is antithetical to a public-private enterprise to serve **ALL** children. On its face, such a selective system will become inequitable and will result in a multi-tiered quality system that will contradict the long-term outcomes outlined in The Texas Plan in terms of building a highly capable workforce, strengthening human capital, and, ultimately, enhancing the future vitality of Texas. In this regard the commitment must be generated to gather all early childhood education entities in a collaborative effort under a single tent operating under a single set of standards, expectations, and assessment mechanisms.

Policy Recommendation V-3. **COSTS OF THE STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENT SYSTEM. Recommend that the Texas SEEDS Commission underwrite the full cost of development, implementation, application, interpretation,**

improvement of, and reporting relative to the standards and assessment systems for the early childhood education sites.

Centralized funding and administration are necessary in the pursuit of uniform high standards, expectations and outcomes. Responsibility for administering and paying for the standards and assessments system is the critical lever to ensure: uniform high quality; effective targeting of technical assistance and resources for continuing quality improvement; information flow to community colleges and universities where teachers are trained to guide their focus and curriculum; effective teacher continuing education; provision of reliable information to assist parents in selecting a site for their children; gaining teachers', administrators', and the public's confidence; and developing understanding and identifying ways to improve the effectiveness/cost ratio of the early childhood education system.

The standards and assessment system will have to be phased into an application schedule that is reasonable. Knowledge from other states' experiences will be helpful, but state-specific systems are required. From early conceptualization to complete functioning in the entire system might require five years, perhaps longer. During these years, technical assistance and grants should be made to sites to assist them in their own quality enhancement efforts.

Policy Recommendation V-4. **SUPPORTIVE PROGRAM COMPONENTS. Recommend that additional program components, collateral to the ordinary direct curriculum but nonetheless important for the child's learning and development, be assessed. These components include parental roles during the child's early education experience; parental education including literacy; nutritional, medical, and mental health services for the child; special needs; cultural awareness; dual language capacity; community roles; and so forth.**

These program components are presented and recommended in Section C. Strengthening Families and Communities, Policy Areas VII, VIII, IX and X. Mention of them is made here because the effectiveness of those dimensions of the program should be assessed so that they can be monitored, improved, and discussed with families, and to facilitate joint efforts in the district to address needs.

Policy Recommendation V-5. **INDIVIDUAL SITE INNOVATIONS. Recommend that, while a single system with uniform high standards that are equally applied be put in place, ample opportunity must be preserved for individual innovation.**

A single system with high standards will carry with it the liability of stifling innovation. Thus it is important that the implementation of the plan not preclude the opportunity for individual program innovations. The Texas SEEDS Commission, reinforced by the Administration and by the Technical Resource Center, must develop ways to assure uniform high standards,

avoidance of stifling inflexibility, and encouragement of individual initiatives and innovation. Individual site innovations will allow communities to build on local strengths and to ensure that the system is meeting local needs.

POLICY AREA VI. THE CHILD: STANDARDS & ASSESSMENTS FOR EDUCATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL OUTCOMES

OBJECTIVES: To establish officially approved: 1) health standards including health status monitoring, health services, nutrition, healthy lifestyle learning and adoption; 2) learning standards for ECED (expected child outcomes in each of the five dimensions of school readiness— physical health, social and emotional development, learning skills and habits, literacy, and cognition and knowledge); and 3) outcomes assessment system.

The purpose of health standards is to provide guidance for health education curriculum development and to establish benchmarks for child health assessments. Health standards recognize the critical interdependence in children of health, education and development. Health should be broadly construed in this regard to include instruction in nutrition and healthy lifestyles, as well as health screening, immunizations and other preventive measures, and to trigger prompt attention when a health problem is uncovered. The standards will establish a measuring stick against which the aggregated child health assessments can provide important public health information and needed interventions.

The purpose of learning standards is to provide guidance to individual sites and to multi-site systems on the desired outcomes to be achieved relative to the five dimensions of preparation for kindergarten. The standards should be set at a reasonably high level, reconsidered at regular intervals, and adjusted if needed. The standards should become an important component of continuous quality improvement and accountability at each provider site. Learning standards provide a yardstick against which child assessments can be measured.

The purposes of a child assessment system are twofold. One, child assessment provides information to a child's parents and teachers relative to progress in learning and health, pointing to areas of education and development in need of additional attention in the school, at home, or elsewhere. Individual assessments should not be used in ways that disadvantage the child. Indeed, individual assessment ratings will only be used by the teacher and the parent to guide the child's educational program. Whenever the assessments are used to measure the quality of the overall program, they should only be used in aggregate form and without individual child identifiers. Two, individual child assessment at entrance to kindergarten, for example, when aggregated for all children who had previously attended the same early education site, can provide useful outcomes information for assessment of the ECED site's effectiveness as measured against the standards and expectations.

In this respect, child outcomes become an important component of individual site assessments along with assessment of teachers, curriculum, facilities, classroom ambience, and so forth. In the composite, the comprehensive assessment system, if developed purposefully, should be capable of connecting specific child outcome deficiencies or achievements to assessments of teachers, teaching skills, curriculum, ambience, and other standards. The assessment system, therefore, provides the foundational platform for both continuous quality improvement and for accountability of the site, the district, the Technical Resource Center, the Administration, the Governance, and indeed the State—in brief, the accountability of the whole system.

Continuous quality improvements and requirements for accountability should be addressed in a comprehensive, site-specific, quality assessment system. Such a system is portrayed in Figure 4. Consistent with quality assessment in healthcare, the ECED quality assessment system is comprised of four components: structure, process, collateral objectives, and outcomes. Such a system provides the type of information necessary for individual sites to take appropriate action to improve child outcomes. The cost of the assessment system can be reasonable because information on three of the four components (structure, process, and collateral objectives) can be furnished by the ECED site on standardized forms from information already in the site's system. On-site visitation by a professional evaluator may be required only occasionally, say once every 5-7 years. Direct measurement of child outcomes can provide the most useful information relative to the effectiveness of an ECED site.

Guiding Principles:

- **Birth to Age 18 Continuum.** Education and development should be regarded as a lifelong continuum. Arrest of development at one age will delay or forfeit development in later stages. Attention and funding of programs in one age group must never result in decreased efforts and resources in another. Responding to the need to focus, however, the overall scope of The Texas Plan is on children ages birth to 5. Due to the current policy and political landscape, the initial focus of The Texas Plan is on 3- and 4-year-olds. Such an initial emphasis, however, in no way signifies any less commitment to the development of infants and toddlers.
- **All Inclusionary.** As stated elsewhere in this document, The Texas Plan is intended to serve all children in Texas, and to include all forms and categories of ECED providers. Standards and assessments should be applied equitably across all systems of providers.
- **Reliable Standards and Assessments.** As with standards and assessments generally for young children, establishment should be based solidly on knowledge derived from research and from critically evaluated best practices. All 5 dimensions of school readiness should be assessed: physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches toward learning; language development; and cognition and general knowledge.
- **Health.** Shortcomings in health inevitably compromise educational and developmental progress in children. Standards and assessments must be set for health screenings to identify children in need of health and special services, to provide services that: mitigate the effects of health-related impairments; immunize and take other preventive measures; offer healthcare when illness occurs; and provide health education including an emphasis on the importance of adopting health promoting habits and lifestyles.

- **Parents as First Teachers.** Information and support for parents as a child’s first teacher should be incorporated into the learning standards and assessment guidelines to enable parents to become more involved and effective in their child’s early care and education.
- **Validation for Diversity.** Standards and assessment tools should be validated on a diverse population of children, including children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, to substantiate the appropriateness of their use in the diverse areas of Texas.
- **Validation for Children with Special Needs.** Standards and assessment tools should be validated in children with disabilities and other special needs to substantiate the appropriateness of their use in the diverse areas of Texas.
- **Learning Materials.** Educational materials and resources should be widely available for home-based providers, family caregivers, and stay-at-home parents to promote favorable outcomes for these children.
- **Child Assessment Data Collection System-Preparedness for Kindergarten.** The establishment of an effective data collection system is required to support the necessary functions of a consolidated system and to enable accurate evaluation of its impact. The data collection system should collect information on health indices as well as on learning outcomes for children.
- **Sensitivity and Confidentiality.** Interpretation of individual assessment scores must be sensitive to wide inter-site variations in learning experiences and development of children prior to enrollment in an early education program enrollment. Absolute assessment scores may be less important than changes in scores over time. Data from such assessments shall be used by parents and teachers to monitor a child’s progress and to guide the learning plans and activities for that child. The individual child data, however, must not be used for any other purposes. There is wide apprehension among parents, child advocates, and some educators that child assessment can be used for inappropriate purposes. This must not occur, lest the ECED system be deprived of its most valuable quality and accountability data.

SPECIFIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Policy Recommendation VI-1. **LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS.**
Recommend that the Technical Resource Center develop and apply instructional and learning standards and assessments and health screening guidelines appropriate to the child’s age and developmental stage. The standards should cover a full spectrum of educational and developmental processes, e.g., cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, behavioral and physical.

The learning and content should be coordinated with state K–12 standards along with guidelines for health screenings, diagnostic testing, and developmental assessments. Use of the learning standards should be encouraged or mandated. The applicability of these standards and approved curricula for noncenter-based providers should be addressed. Funds for professional development and technical assistance should be provided to encourage use of the standards. The center should provide a recommendation on a gradual phased-in approach to mandate the use of the learning standards by all providers.

Policy Recommendation VI-2. **TRAIN TEACHERS IN USE OF STANDARDS. Recommend that the Technical Resource Center, working in collaboration with universities and community colleges, develop courses and training curricula to prepare ECED teachers to use learning and development standards.**

The training should address diversity in children including children with special needs, children whose primary language in the home is not English, and so forth (see VI-6).

Policy Recommendation VI-3. **HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT SCREENING. Recommend that funds and mechanisms be provided so that all children undergo health screenings and be referred for treatment, when indicated, upon entry into early education programs and again upon entry to kindergarten.**

Health screenings and referrals can uncover impairments that interfere with learning and with progress toward readiness for kindergarten. Referrals often lead to corrective actions that are valuable in preventing developmental lags.

Policy Recommendation VI-4. **LEARNING ASSESSMENT. The use of instructional assessments to monitor the progress of individual children, introduced over time, should be mandatory for all programs.**

Learning assessments help the teaching process and have been shown to enhance children’s learning. State regulations should indicate appropriate guidelines for completion and use of these assessments. Learning assessments to monitor the progress of individual children are different from evaluation or accountability assessments to gauge program effectiveness based on data from the random sampling of children. (See Policy Recommendation V-3).

Policy Recommendation VI-5. **CHILD ASSESSMENT. Recommend that individual child assessments related to standards of preparedness for kindergarten be performed on every child early in the kindergarten year and perhaps a second and third time later in that year.**

Individual child outcomes assessments comprise a key component of a Comprehensive ECED Site Assessment System (Figure 4) as described earlier

in this section. Child progress assessed against standards is the ultimate indicator of the effectiveness of early childhood education and development sites and systems.

Additionally, individual child assessments provides teacher and parent critical information to identify specific areas of a child's learning experience that are in need of additional attention, while at the same time providing information on other areas that can be used to compliment and encourage the child.

As pointed out in the guiding principle **Sensitivity and Confidentiality**, at the individual child level the assessment data must remain within the private sphere of teacher and parent to plan curriculum emphases for the individual child. Individual assessment information must not be used for any other purpose. (Aggregated, anonymous children's scores from a single ECED site should be used as a part of the Comprehensive ECED Site Assessment System.)

How standards and assessments will apply to children with special needs and those whose primary language in the home is not English needs to be clearly articulated.

Policy Recommendation VI-6. **CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS. Recommend that a task force, or the proposed Technical Resource Center, be convened to develop a report and recommendations on the relationship between the standards being applied generally in the early education system and their suitability for children in special circumstances including those with disabilities.**

How standards and assessments will apply to children with disabilities needs to be clearly articulated. Theoretical and practical issues regarding whether all children would be expected to learn the same things at the same rate and how accommodations can and should be made should be addressed. Recommendations should be research-based, integrating the most reliable and valid findings.

Further, a task force should examine the alignment of policies, guidelines, and procedures for children with special needs under the various programs, e.g., the school districts, Early Head Start, Head Start, IDEA, Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) and others. The alignment of these policies, guidelines, and procedures coupled with collaborative training would facilitate transition of children from one setting to another.

Policy Recommendation VI-7. **CHILDREN WHOSE PRIMARY LANGUAGE IN THE HOME IS NOT ENGLISH. Recommend that a task force be convened to develop a report and recommendations on the relationship between the standards being applied generally in the early education system and their suitability for children whose primary language in the home is not English.**

How standards and assessments will apply to children whose language in the home is not English needs to be clearly articulated. For English-language learners, the language of instruction in the early education setting is not always aligned with the language of instruction utilized at the district kindergarten level especially for children transitioning from a nondistrict early education program. Selection of the language of instruction for English-language learners should be carefully researched to determine to what degree the language of instruction affects reading skill proficiency in kindergarten and at higher grades.

All recommendations in this area should be research-based. For example, in the case of Spanish-speaking children, there are numerous projects currently underway including the oracy and literacy development study for Spanish-speaking children conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the Institute of Education Sciences of the Department of Education as well as Project ELLA (English Language and Literacy Acquisition), funded by the National Center for Education Evaluation, United States Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and conducted by Texas A&M, Sam Houston State University, Southern Methodist University, and the Aldine Independent School District. The purpose of these projects is to develop knowledge about the critical factors that influence the development of English-language literacy (reading and writing) competencies among children whose first language is Spanish. Comparable study and application of research findings in English-language acquisition for other language speakers should be undertaken.

Policy Recommendation VI-8. **COMPREHENSIVE STATE ECED DATA MONITORING SYSTEM. Recommend that the State of Texas develop and operate a system to collect, analyze and disseminate data and information on a continuing basis relative to the state of early childhood education and development, and progress made toward goals.**

The data collected should be large-scale trend data that ranges in nature from attainment of developmental goals (all five dimensions of school-readiness) to achievement or non-achievement of physical and mental health outcomes. This new early care and education data collection system should consider how to coordinate with existing systems already in place for kindergarten, grades 1-2 including the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI) and Tejas LEE (Spanish version of TPRI), and grades K-12. No single data element is more important than others, but monitoring progress towards and achievement of a state of being ready for school by entry to kindergarten, and indicators of physical and mental health, and monitoring how children with special needs and those who are English language learners are progressing in our early education system, should be part of the state's data set.

C. STRENGTHENING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

POLICY AREA VII. PARENTAL ROLES

POLICY AREA VIII. FAMILY INCOME SUPPORT

POLICY AREA IX. PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

POLICY AREA X. COMMUNITY ROLES

Up to this point this document has concentrated on public policies to establish a system of early childhood education and development for all young children in Texas. However, research has shown with certainty that child development occurs within a complex context of family, culture, social, emotional, economic, and neighborhood characteristics. The qualities of that context have important, even decisive, influence on the child's education and development.

Any policy blueprint built on standards for curricula, teacher training, and child-teacher-other child interactions can expect only limited effectiveness or no effect at all unless deficiencies in the broader context of the child's environment are addressed. The Texas Plan attempts to address this context in Policy Areas VII on Parents, VIII on Family, IX on Physical and Mental Health Services, and X on the Community. Early childhood education and development initiatives to be successful must be intensive, comprehensive in scope beyond the classroom, and well supported.¹⁸

POLICY AREA VII. PARENTAL ROLES

OBJECTIVE: To adopt policies that facilitate direct parental involvement in their child's early care and education experiences in centers and assists parents in acquiring knowledge and skills of early childhood learning and parenting that can be carried over into the home environment.

One of the most incontrovertible findings of research on early childhood education and development programs is the key contribution that parental involvement makes on more effective child outcomes. Parental participation, in fact, has been shown to be one of the top four features that influence successful outcomes in the Chicago Child Parent Centers.¹⁹

Parent involvement does not have to be intensive. With minimal flexibility it can be worked into a full-time job schedule. It involves sitting in on classes from time to time, occasionally reading aloud to the children, conferring with the teacher about the child's experience and areas needing improvement, early intervention when a problem is foreseen, interacting with other parents, learning basic parenting skills, and being a visible presence that emphasizes to the child the high value the parent places on early childhood education and development for the child.

A variety of programs have been tried to enhance parenting skills. These include separate classes on parenting in the home or in community centers, education on parenting as components of welfare packages, and so forth. However, it appears that direct parent involvement when classes are in session has the greatest effect on successful outcomes and readiness for kindergarten. In fact, an attitude has grown among the experts in early childhood education that effective direct parent involvement is one of the top three or four factors required for early childhood education and development success in generating preparedness for kindergarten.

Guiding Principles:

- **Parent involvement.** Roles for parents should be built into the expectations of the ECED centers. Research on the long-term outcomes of attendance at certain sites where parent involvement has been emphasized has demonstrated that parent involvement in the early education center, even brief involvement on a regular basis, improves the early and later outcomes for the child.^{20,21} Regardless of whether the ECED program has a specific parent education component, the opportunity for parents to participate in the classroom setting should provide them with additional tools to use in their teaching efforts at home.
- **Parental education.** Services and programs for parents should fall into three different categories including a) education on parenting; b) gaining empowerment and advocacy skills; and c) obtaining material and social support when needed to stabilize or improve family functioning.
- **Financing.** Programs that educate parents and help improve family functioning should be supported with public and private funds.

- **Mutual respect.** Each family is distinctive, and parents, teachers, and other service providers should work closely as a team based on equality and respect.
- **Advocacy.** Parents have a vested interest in improving services that assist their children and can be mobilized as a powerful force to advocate for such services.
- **Support.** Due to the significant negative impact of poverty on child development, some families may require extra assistance and financial support.

SPECIFIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

The advantages to the child, the parent, and the family of some direct involvement of the parent in the preschool center are compelling. Research results, as well as countless summaries of parent and teacher experiences, provide the rationale for policies that encourage three different dimensions of parental involvement, e.g., as teacher, as learner, and as public advocate.

Policy Recommendation VII-1. PARENT AS TEACHER. Recommend that policies and incentives be developed in early education systems and at the place of employment to make possible parent participation in their child's education and development in the classroom.

Results of research illustrating the benefits to the child from these parent-at-the-school programs should not be ignored. Emphasizing both effectiveness and efficiency, many parent involvement evaluations demonstrate that the length of time required of the parent can be brief and may even be accomplished with just minimal flexibility of hours at the parent's place of employment.

Providers should either utilize a parent involvement program approved by the Technical Resource Center or implement another parent involvement program while at the same time commissioning a formal evaluation of parent involvement initiatives in terms of measurable outcomes in the children.

Policy Recommendation VII-2. PARENT AS LEARNER. Recommend that all early childhood centers provide access to programs and materials that help parents acquire knowledge and skills to facilitate effective participation in their child's education and development both in the early childhood center and at home. Further recommend that all parents have access to other training opportunities to enhance their capacities in areas such as family nutrition, accessing medical services, improved literacy, family financial management, and so forth.

Policy Recommendation VII-3. PARENT AS ADVOCATE. Recommend that encouragement and incentives be developed for early education centers to provide opportunities for parents to become active advocates for the emerging early childhood education and development movements in their community and nationwide.

POLICY AREA VIII. FAMILY INCOME SUPPORT

OBJECTIVE: To eliminate poverty or ameliorate inadequate incomes in all families having a child or children below the age of five.

One does not have to review the research to know the enormous impact that poverty has on the economic security and overall health and well-being of families. Inadequacies in food supplies, shelter, warmth, toys to learn by, and the psychic distress of poverty and insecurity deprive the child of many of the life experiences that others take for granted. Poverty at any age negatively impacts health and development, but this is particularly true during the first five years of life. While the other sections of this report deal with the entire U.S. population of children, this section is focused on a subpopulation, the impoverished.

Guiding Principles:

- **Earliest Years.** Research has demonstrated that meeting a child's developmental needs is more critical in the years from birth to 5 than at any other time of life.
- **Home Environment.** In generating school readiness, the well-being of parents and/or guardians including the adequacy of family financial resources is important.
- **Family Friendly Work Policies.** It is important that employment policies be family friendly in order to avoid severe economic hardship in the early years of a child's life.
- **Family Economic Well-being.** Family economic literacy plus the ability of working age adults to earn enough pay and benefits to provide for their basic needs and to accrue long-term assets like homes and other resources plays an important role in promoting the positive development of a child and avoiding outcomes that are costly to society and the individual.
- **Poverty and Child Development.** The harmful effects of family impoverishment on a child's learning and development can be and must be prevented in all societies, but especially in those having advanced economies and mature democracies such as ours.

SPECIFIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Policy Recommendation VIII-1. **WAGE AND TAX POLICIES. Recommend that wage policies or tax policies or other initiatives be adopted so that a full-time employed parent receives an income at a multiple of the federally determined poverty level sufficient to support a household that promotes child development.**

This policy objective can be accomplished in a variety of ways: by providing incentives to employers to hire workers full time; by raising the minimum wage;

by supplementing the earned wage from governmental sources by a child tax credit policy. Using reasonable, but conservative, figures, the FSI [Family Security Index], created by the Center for Public Policy Priorities in Texas, provides a glimpse of the realities of working families throughout Texas and shows that the federal minimum wage is simply not enough to meet even the minimal needs of a working family anywhere in Texas.²²

Policy Recommendation VIII-2. **WELFARE WORK EXEMPTION. Recommend that Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) work exemptions allowed at the federal level be provided for households in which there is a child less than six months old or alternatively that full-day, full-year early education be provided.**

TANF allows states to create work exemptions. Mothers should have the choice to work or not when their children are younger than 6 months of age and have an option to be exempt from full-time work requirements when their children are between 6 months and one year of age.

Policy Recommendation VIII-3. **INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT ACCOUNTS. Recommend that a large scale, public-private demonstration project be funded to explore the benefits to families with young children of something similar to Individual Development Accounts (IDA).**

IDA's are dedicated savings accounts that can be used by eligible participants for purchasing a first home, paying for postsecondary education, or capitalizing a business. These IDA's are composed of participant savings from earned income and are matched by deposits of up to eight dollars for each dollar saved. These investments have the potential to bring a new level of economic and personal security to families and communities. The intent of the demonstration is to encourage participants to develop and reinforce strong habits for saving money, and thereby establish a family and home environment that is promotive of effective early childhood education and development.

Policy Recommendation VIII-4. **FINANCIAL LITERACY. Recommend that early childhood education programs at the local level be provided incentives to offer instruction in family financial literacy (family income management and savings) to families with young children.**

A financial literacy program is meant to help increase experience and understanding of families regarding economic advancement. The program can target pre-employed, under-employed and/or low-income families, providing education on attaining financial independence and stability and equipping them with the necessary tools to effectively join the economic mainstream. A curriculum will generally focus on getting and staying out of debt, establishing a banking relationship, managing money, and creating assets and wealth for the family.

POLICY AREA IX. PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

OBJECTIVE: To protect the physical and mental health of very young children by strengthening the capacity of early education programs to promote prevention, early detection, and curative treatment of disorders that, if undetected or ignored, could interfere with learning and development.

Parents, teachers, educational epidemiologists, physicians, and public health workers are aware of the consequences to children of acute and chronic illnesses. School absences, when limited, can be compensated for but often chronic infections of teeth, sinuses, and ears or mental health problems result in greater absenteeism and some loss of concentration when in school. Undetected, the influence on learning can become noticeable. This is especially so for children of low-income families where the threshold for seeking medical or dental care is high. For the parent of a chronically ill or emotionally disturbed child, lost time at work is a severe consequence that leads to loss of income and may result in loss of a job.

The objective above states that strengthening the capacity of early education programs is important. A cursory examination shows that some programs are set in large K-12 schools where a nurse or even a dentist or physician's assistant is on duty at the site. For most sites this is not the case. Accordingly, by "capacity" we mean a system in which teachers are trained to be alert to health problems, the program has worked out a system for efficient referral to health professionals, and the student record system contains health information that can be readily retrieved. In addition, capacity also refers to a keen alertness on the part of the staff to the possibility of a health problem in an underperforming child.

Guiding Principles:

- **Impact of Health.** The physical and mental well-being of children is an important factor affecting the child's learning in school and a family's economic success.
- **Early Identification.** Early identification and intervention in children having physical or mental health illnesses, or a disability, can prevent loss of time in school and developmental delays.
- **Children with Special Needs.** Children having developmental delays or disabilities, and their families, must be provided with resources, services, and skills for early detection and appropriate treatment to help them develop the skills needed for independence and success and for avoidance of disadvantage.
- **Least Restrictive Environments.** To facilitate the child's development of cognitive and behavioral skills, all children, including those with developmental delays or an identified disability, should be served in the least restrictive environment depending on the child's needs. This requires teacher training, education of fellow students and parents, materials, and emotional support.

SPECIFIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Policy Recommendation IX-1. **HEALTH SCREENING AND REFERRALS.** Recommend that financing and capacity should be developed to perform a health screening and referral to a health professional when needed for every child upon earliest entry into early education and/or kindergarten (cross-listed as VI-3).

Policy Recommendation IX-2. **CHILD HEALTH CONSULTANTS.** Recommend that child health consultants be linked to each early childhood education and development site.

The Texas Department of Health currently has a grant to train Child Care Health Consultants. These individuals could make visits to sites as a part of the licensing process or as part of a technical assistance program. On-site visits might include consultation with staff about health and safety needs and practices; care for children with special healthcare needs; policies and procedures for health/safety emergencies; provision of health education and wellness programs and solutions for managing injuries or infectious diseases; connecting parents and caregivers to community resources; advocating for and promoting developmentally appropriate environments and practices; educating families and early childhood providers on the importance of a “medical home;” and assisting in developing partnerships between families, early childhood education, and healthcare providers.

Policy Recommendation IX-3. **PARTNERSHIP WITH AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS.** Recommend that a State of Texas Advisory Committee be formed to develop a long-range partnership among state education and health officials and a health professional group (such as the American Academy of Pediatrics) having a well-established expertise and interest in early childhood health and child development. The Committee’s charge shall be to develop recommendations for an educator-parent-child-health professional system to provide at a high quality level physical, mental, and developmental health screening, early detection, treatment, referral, and teacher training.

Policy Recommendation IX-4. **HEALTHCARE INSURANCE FOR ALL CHILDREN.** Recommend that healthcare insurance be provided to all children aged birth to 5 and to their parents or guardians and to all pregnant women having incomes less than 300% of the federal poverty level.

Policy Recommendation IX-5. **SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS.** Recommend that the level of understanding and capacity to use services for children with disabilities such as through the Early Childhood Intervention program and through the public school system, be sharply improved among the interacting parties, i.e., children, parents, teachers, administrators and disability professionals.

Teachers should become fully aware that the Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) program in combination with the public school program in Texas provides services to all children aged birth to 5 having a disability.

The Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) program of the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services serves children from birth to 3 who have developmental delays and their families as required by Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Because ECI cannot serve children after their third birthday, the responsibility shifts to the public schools at that point.

One large issue for this system is the continuity of care for children transitioning from ECI into public school. A child who turns three in late spring or early summer may not get services from any provider (school or ECI). The law stipulates that schools must consider whether the 3-year-old needs summer services, but this has proven to be a gray area and, as a result, children fall through the cracks. Finally, there is a group of children who meet the criterion of “developmentally delayed” but are not found eligible for special education services.

The children who still need help are without support until age 4 or 5 when the district has kindergarten or pre-kindergarten available. Parents have to pay for any gaps in services since the child can no longer stay with ECI. Currently ECI is trying to collaborate with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to ensure that children exiting ECI programs and transitioning to school programs and services at age three will immediately receive the services and supports that they need to be successful. The agency will also continue to assist local programs in building collaborations with health and human service organizations to promote and enhance community-based transition options for all children exiting ECI, including children not eligible for IDEA services.

POLICY AREA X. COMMUNITY ROLES

OBJECTIVE: To expand the community’s ideals about engagement with, and development of services for early childhood education and development so that every child’s well-being becomes the public concern of the entire community in addition to a private issue for parents and families.

A central concept that should be emphasized is that the actions—or inactions—of governments, local as well as state and national, impact children more strongly than any other subgroup of the population. Practically every area of public policy (for example, economic vitality, work, unemployment, financial safety net, housing, transportation, education, public health, health care, and so forth) affects children—either directly or indirectly. But in many jurisdictions, local, state, and national policymaking fails to take children into account, threatening their education and development and, ultimately, their futures. Such a shortsighted approach has a negative impact on the future of all members of society by giving rise to policies that are non-supportive of social regeneration and well-being.²³

Guiding Principles:

- **Community Education and Understanding.** Key sectors of the community—business, policymaking, faith-based organizations, schools, financial institutions, the general public—should understand the goals of early childhood education and development and its importance to the social, economic, and civic future of the community.
- **Collaboration.** Private and community initiatives and partnerships involving various sectors of the community can be beneficial in building a system that supports and links various provider groups, social services, and parents.

SPECIFIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Policy Recommendation X-1. **PUBLIC EDUCATION. Apart from current parenting campaigns, a statewide public awareness and education program should be developed and sustained as a means of aligning public priorities toward child and youth development. A combination of public and private funds (auspices) and participation could be useful for this endeavor.**

Extending beyond efforts aimed at providing parenting information to the community and parents or information on the quality of providers in a quality assessment system, this campaign would have as its goal the education of the public and other key sectors on the importance of ECED and the resources required to build an effective system for all children in Texas. A potential side effect of the public awareness effort could be the development of a child-friendly, community-wide atmosphere.

Policy Recommendation X-2. **SINGLE POINT OF ACCESS FOR FAMILIES. Recommend that local communities be encouraged to create an accessible**

virtual or physical system or mechanism to link families to early education programs.

The single point of access system developed by the city of San Antonio, Single Portal of Entry [SPE] ©, is a web-based early childhood initiative which supports publicly funded early education and care programs by creating a community-wide early education safety net. The system allows for the maximization of the placement of eligible children into existing early education systems while serving as the basic building block to an overall one-stop seamless information system. No matter where a parent enters the system, he or she will gain eligibility information regarding what programs are available for their child.

With this system parents and caseworkers have a Web-based virtual one-stop that can help them: determine eligibility for publicly funded early education services; identify service alternatives for children who are eligible for early education services, but are currently waitlisted; find service alternatives for those rejected by a particular program; locate geographic alternatives; move children between programs as their eligibility status changes; place applications over the Internet or at any agency; select programs based on their needs; and decrease the amount of time families must wait to receive assistance. Benefits to the system include the following: creation of a data repository for children in programs to enhance trend analysis, demographics, budgeting, and automated reporting processes; sharing of early education population data among the partners; enabling programs to place applicants in other settings when resources are limited (which serves more children through optimization of resources); increasing responsiveness by reducing the time required to enroll applicants; and allowing for the combination of waiting lists to more efficiently provide service.

Policy Recommendation X-3. COMMUNITY-BASED ECED RESOURCE AND REFERRAL AGENCIES. Recommend that local community initiatives be expanded to develop agencies to provide advice and referrals to parents of children for needed services.

Resource and referral agencies serve as a visible facilitator to early education in communities helping parents learn about ECED provider options, and in some cases, how to select and monitor the provider. It has been recommended that these agencies be accessible like a library and free.²⁴ Additional services such as providing financial information to parents, and describing the range of options available from tax credits to early education tuition assistance have also been recommended.²⁵

In Texas, the statewide network of community-based organizations offering such services is the Texas Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (TACCRRRA). This organization's important role in providing support to local communities should be taken into account as the work on this recommendation moves forward.

There is much overlap between the responsibilities of resource and referral agencies and options for services within a single point of access for families entering the ECED system. Ideally these activities are combined in order to serve families most effectively.

Policy Recommendation X-4. **HOME-BASED EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION. Recommend that local community initiatives be undertaken to support early childhood home care providers (usually neighbors and family members).**

A large segment of the population utilizes kith-and-kin care.²⁶ In New York, the state contracted with Cornell Cooperative Extension to work with six sites across the state in identifying the providers and conducting focus groups.²⁷ Using the research, a set of support efforts and projects were developed to respond to the needs of these providers: newsletters to address specific topics such as health and safety, literacy, and other topics on caring for children.

Policy Recommendation X-5. **CHILD IMPACT ASSESSMENT. Recommend that the state provide funds for the early and limited trial development of a Child Impact Assessment methodology that will assess the likely impact on children's development of public policies enacted for a variety of purposes not necessarily all related to child development.**

A child impact assessment involves examining existing and proposed policies, legislation, and changes in administrative services to determine their impact on developing an ECED system for children and whether they effectively reflect and further the goals of a high-quality and developmentally appropriate early childhood education and development system. The project would be limited in scope and duration. Policies not directly or obviously concerned with ECED, such as those on immigration, transportation, social security, and environmental issues, would not be assessed for their impact. Further, the demonstration would last for the five–10 years projected to establish an ECED system for Texas.

Initially, the pilot would examine policies that emanate from those government agencies that influence the ECED system to be constructed in Texas. Additionally, because the financing of the system is important, the impact assessment would also examine fiscal and tax policies for their influence on ECED. An ECED child impact assessment might include the following: a description of how a measure affects—or might affect—the building of the ECED system; a description of how a measure affects—or might affect—children ages birth to 5; an account of how a measure promotes or impedes implementation of the Texas SEEDS Plan; an identification of controversial issues and of any gaps in information or expertise; guidelines on how a measure should be monitored; and proposed steps to ameliorate or solve any adverse effects that might be anticipated.

A Final Note

In a collaborative venture such as the Texas Plan, under the best of circumstances, we would like every recommendation to have been formally endorsed by every member of the Coalition or to acknowledge specific parts where there was less than unanimity. In the face of the impossibility of formally polling and receiving approval of every individual member of TECEC (much less the experts both within and without Texas who were called upon for advice), the Texas Plan staff sought to provide as many opportunities for input as possible. Before the first edition was published, strategic planning retreats were held. Upon its publication, the statewide summit at Rice University was convened for the single purpose of providing a venue for comment. Since that initial formal gathering, the Texas Plan staff have continued to provide opportunities for input via email, letters, phone calls and so forth, culminating in a “circuit ride” to six Texas communities for full-day meetings including Dallas, Austin, Houston, Weslaco, El Paso and Abilene. The additional contributions from these various inputs had significant impact on the current edition. We believe that Edition 2 reflects the views of most participating organizations. Nonetheless, we understand that further consideration will be given to the whole as well as to individual parts of The Texas Plan, and that some revisions will result.

We have no doubt that, on some points, there remain concerns and unanswered questions. For many of these issues, we have indicated in the Plan that more research and development will be done. In any case, it is important to keep in mind that the Texas Plan is an organic document that will continue to be revised as further thought and implementation is done. Its dynamic nature is further necessitated by the ever-changing policy landscape at both the state and national levels. It is our sincerest hope that one day, ten years from now, someone will come across a copy of one of the Texas Plan versions and say, “Remember when all this was just a vision on a piece of paper.”