

Testimony to TEA on HB 4 Implementation

We appreciate TEA's efforts to engage stakeholders in the HB 4 implementation process. Key areas in implementation include data collection, collaboration with child care and Head Start providers, and the enforcement of the legislation's requirement that districts attempt to achieve low student-teacher ratios.

My name is Stephanie Rubin. I serve as CEO of Texans Care for Children. We are a statewide, non-profit, non-partisan, multi-issue children's policy organization. We develop policy solutions, produce research and engage Texas community leaders to educate policymakers, the media and the public about what works to improve the well-being of Texas children and families. Our work includes child protective services, child health, child mental well-being, juvenile justice, and early childhood policy.

I want to make three points about implementation of HB 4, but first I'd like to thank TEA for holding this meeting today and for its ongoing efforts to keep stakeholders updated and engaged in the process. Texans Care for Children convenes the Texas Early Education Alliance, and we appreciated Howard Morrison coming out from TEA to meet with stakeholders at our last Alliance meeting and discuss HB 4 implementation. We look forward to continuing the dialogue with TEA and want to be a resource to you.

Regarding HB 4 implementation, I first want to highlight the importance of getting the data collection right. HB 4 is an important first step in improving the quality of early education and ensuring that all Texas children start kindergarten with the skills they need to succeed in elementary school and beyond. As we look to the second and third steps beyond HB 4, we want to be as smart and data-driven as possible.

As a reminder HB 4 requires all districts, whether or not they receive grant funds, to report to TEA the following:

- Number of kids eligible and enrolled and the demographic information of those enrolled
- Number of half-day and full day pre-k programs offered
- Sources of funding for the pre-k program
- Class size and ratio
- Curriculum being used
- What monitoring tool districts and classes use
- Progress as measured by the monitoring tool

Let's ensure the data collection tells us what is working and where quality is lacking, and that the data is easily accessible to stakeholders and researchers.



In addition, we hope TEA will work closely with other agencies, including HHSC, DFPS and others to ensure the pre-k data system is aligned and coordinated with other new child-focused data system improvements underway in the state.

Second, I want to highlight the importance of using the HB 4 grant program rules to boost school district collaborations with quality child care and Head Start. These providers must be a part of the state's early education plans. We need to acknowledge the critical role that many of them play in providing early education and collaborate with them to help families access full day, high-quality early education. Collaborations between districts and child care and Head Start can maximize resources, allow more children to be served in high-quality settings, and are crucial in communities where districts lack space to boost pre-k enrollment.

Third, I want to highlight the importance of student-teacher ratios. This is one of the main issues that Texans Care for Children raised during the legislative session. The research is clear that large pre-k class sizes are not high-quality. I have a four-year-old son, and I can tell you I wouldn't dream of inviting 20 or 25 other four-year-olds to our house for a birthday party if I was going to be the only adult there. I wouldn't be able to keep them all safe, take them to the bathroom, clean up all the spills and so on, much less accomplish all that while preparing these four-year-olds for kindergarten. A trained pre-k teacher would certainly do better than I would. **But we're setting up even the best trained teachers for failure if we put them alone in a classroom with 20 or 25 or even 30 four-year-olds -- many of whom have never been to any kind of structured preschool or child care.**

The Legislature listened to our concerns and included the following provision in the bill: **"A school district must attempt to maintain an average ratio in any prekindergarten program class of not less than one certified teacher or teacher 's aide for each 11 students."** We encourage TEA to work with districts to help them achieve this standard. We also encourage TEA to ensure that districts are following the law and making the legally required "attempt" to reach that standard.

I appreciate your attention and look forward to working with you.