



Testimony to House Public Education Committee

For HB 1100, By Reps. Johnson, Farney

March 10, 2015

My name is Andrea Brauer, and I am the Early Education Policy Associate with Texans Care for Children. I also facilitate the Texas Early Education Alliance, a group of stakeholders that collaborate on improving early care and education in Texas.

Quality Improvements

We appreciate the depth of quality improvements that are a part of this bill, and the funding attached that would help districts to achieve higher quality. Ensuring use of the pre-K Guidelines, ensuring qualified teacher aides are in place, and including private providers in the plan, are all steps in the right direction that will improve early learning for children.

However, while teacher aides are addressed in the bill, the bill does not address the quality improvements for lead teachers. While a degree is required, the certification that goes with it is EC-6, or Early Childhood through 6th grade.

Many early childhood professionals believe the current certification does not provide adequate training for the needs of preschool teachers and students. The certification is also not in line with national best practices or other states' certification practices for preschool. Most states have certifications focused on pre-K to K, and some up to 3rd grade. It is unusual to have certifications that go into middle school, or even older elementary school, to be accepted in state pre-K programs.

Texans Care would like to see a provision that would require the State Board of Educator Certification, and TEA, to review the EC-6 certification and best practices to determine if it is meeting the needs of pre-K students. Teacher

Texans Care for Children is a nonprofit organization dedicated to fulfilling the promise of children through improved state policies and programs on child protective services; juvenile justice; mental well-being; health and fitness; and early childhood education and opportunities.

qualification is a key indicator of quality, and left unaddressed, I am concerned that we will not achieve a gold-standard program.

We also strongly believe that addressing quality should not be done through an opt-in system, but that the quality improvements in the bill should be required of all districts with a pre-K program. A misconception exists about the need to incentivize, or provide a "carrot" in order for districts to adopt standards for a quality program. This is simply not true. Texas is one of the only states that provides districts with funding for pre-K while having close to no accountability or expectations tied to those taxpayer dollars. Most states expect more from school districts, as you can see from the handout attached to my testimony. It is unclear why any plan would require accountability and standards for some pre-K programs, and not others. Texas schools should not have a choice to "opt-in" to quality. Increased funding and quality standards should automatically be applied to all districts, so no students are left in poor quality programs. If the requirement for full-day was removed from the bill but still available as an option for districts, more funding would be available to all districts to improve quality.

To implement higher standards and better oversight of our pre-K program, it is crucial that TEA has sufficient resources to accomplish this. Currently, only one staff member is dedicated to early education at TEA. And, of the ten most populous states, Texas is the only one without an Office of Early Learning. The cost for an office of early learning is a drop in the bucket compared to the \$1.5 billion we spend biennially in pre-K and would provide a great return on investment.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I am happy to take questions.

Andrea Brauer
Early Education Policy Associate
Texans Care for Children
512.473.2274
abrauer@txchildren.org
www.txchildren.org