

## Establish an Office of Early Learning at TEA

### Background

With more and more research pointing to the benefits of early education, many states have strengthened efforts by consolidating agency functions or creating a separate early learning agency. However, Texas lacks adequate resources to lead early education efforts statewide, and ensure that state programs are performing adequately and preparing children for kindergarten.

Early education in Texas has five separate public funding streams and accountability authority dispersed among six separate entities, with no agency to drive coordination or ensure accountability of these efforts. Texas is the only one of the ten most populous states that does not have an Office of Early Learning dedicated to improving the quality of early education.

### Problems with Current Lack of Structure

- ✓ When TEA funding was reduced by about a third in 2011, pre-K was cut disproportionately, with elimination of 3/4 of pre-K staff and complete elimination of the Pre-K Early Start Grant Program.
- ✓ Currently, only one TEA staff member is focused on early education.
- ✓ While at one point the Texas Early Learning Council had the ability to provide resources, coordination and leadership to the field, its funding was eliminated in 2013.
- ✓ Splintered oversight means less overall accountability of the **\$1.5 billion that we spend on pre-K each biennium**. Currently no state agency tracks pre-K class sizes, or has the ability to assess the quality of programs.
- ✓ The six agencies that monitor some aspect of early education do not systemically share information among each other. The Health and Human Services Commission did have an Office of Early Childhood Coordination, but it was eliminated.

### What an Office of Early Education Could Do

Common functions of Offices of Early Learning in other states include:

- ✓ Oversight and accountability of state pre-K dollars
- ✓ Monitoring and supporting quality in the field of early education
- ✓ Providing guidance and leadership by working with school districts and federal educational service centers
- ✓ Linking parents to community and educational resources

### Policy Recommendation

- ✓ Establish an Office of Early Learning at TEA as a way to provide better accountability of pre-K funds, guidance to districts to ensure quality standards and best practices are used, and to encourage local solutions and improve outcomes for our state's youngest learners.

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