TEXANS CARE for CHILDREN

SB 1123, Sen. West, and HB 3887, Rep. Dutton
Establish an Office of Early Learning at the Texas Education Agency

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.

Texas has reduced its early learning funding and initiatives in the past four years. 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. Moreover, the Office of Early Childhood Coordination and the Raising Texas initiative at the Health and Human Services Commission have been eliminated, leaving a gap in early learning oversight.

Still, 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 Texas Education Agency (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 solely on early education, making it difficult to properly manage early education for our state. The shortcomings in TEA's recent unsuccessful application for federal pre-K funding demonstrate that we lack the basic infrastructure necessary for a strong state effort on early education.
- ✓ Splintered oversight means less overall accountability of the **$1.5 billion that we spend on pre-K each biennium**. Currently no state agency collects adequate data to assess the quality of our pre-K programs or how that money is being spent.
- ✓ The six agencies that monitor some aspect of early education do not systemically share information.

SB 1123 and HB 3887 would provide oversight and accountability of state pre-K programs, and encourage local solutions by:

- ✓ Formulating recommendations to improve the quality of pre-K, including the collection of data.
- ✓ Creating a memorandum of understanding between TEA, Texas Workforce Commission, Texas Head Start Office, Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, Health and Human Services Commission, and, Department of Family and Protective Services to coordinate and develop a comprehensive, statewide early childhood education system.
- ✓ Facilitating partnerships with high-quality child care centers, and development of a model contract, and communications and outreach plan to promote them.
- ✓ Conducting outreach on the use of tuition based programs and creating a process for districts to use.
- ✓ Creating the Texas Early Learning Council in statute to act in an advisory role to the Office.
- ✓ Requiring districts to submit community outreach plans regarding enrollment to the Office.
- ✓ Publishing approved assessments for districts' use.

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