

REVIEW OF EARLY EDUCATION AND THE 2015 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Governor's pre-K bill signals early education consensus, first step towards class size limit and other policy improvements

The Governor's **pre-kindergarten** proposal, HB 4, dominated the early education discussion this session. The attention on the issue reflected a broad base of research showing that high-quality early education programs help students start school with the skills they need to succeed and reduce taxpayer spending on remedial education and other programs. The Governor's plan, ultimately funded at \$118 million starting in the second year of the biennium, will provide school districts with up to \$1,500 per student if their pre-K programs meet new standards: increasing teacher training requirements, using a curriculum based on the state's pre-K guidelines, developing a parent engagement plan, and collecting and reporting data.

A number of voices – ours included – called for a stronger bill and additional funding. While the Legislature did not require key pre-K quality standards such as limits on class sizes or student-teacher ratios, Texans Care for Children successfully made the issue one of the centerpieces of the HB 4 debate and future pre-K policy discussions. The final bill included a non-binding recommendation for districts participating in the HB 4 program to meet those standards. We also highlighted the need for school districts to collect additional pre-K data, and this provision was added to the final bill by an amendment in the Senate.



Many early education advocates called for full-day pre-K funding for all districts. About half of Texas school districts already have full-day pre-K in place. It helps provide access to families who cannot coordinate work schedules for their children to attend the current three-hour program that the state offers. The Legislature did not move to fund full-day pre-K this session, but many districts will have the opportunity to expand their days to six hours with the additional funding they will receive through the grant program.

The legislation passed overwhelmingly in the House and Senate and was signed into law, despite a few critics inside and outside the Legislature who challenged the validity and necessity of pre-K. The Governor's and legislative leaders' strong support of pre-K in the face of this criticism cemented a near-consensus endorsement of early education. That endorsement, and the new program established by the bill, can provide the foundation for future action after this first step.

While pre-K was the high-profile early education issue this session, we also worked to educate lawmakers about the important role of **child care** in early education. We made progress highlighting the importance of boosting child care quality, bringing child care directors to the Capitol to testify in support of improved child-caregiver ratios and pushing a child care training bill through the House and almost the Senate. While these child care initiatives did not pass, the discussion about lowering child-caregiver ratios in child care may pave the way for strong action by the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) as it takes up the issue during the interim. The Legislature did pass largely positive **Sunset bills** for the two primary state agencies for child care

issues, DFPS and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). The DFPS bill requires the agency to determine the appropriate disciplinary action to take against a person who violates child care licensing law or agency rule. It gives the agency increased authority to impose administrative penalties and to issue cease and desist orders. The TWC bill requires more data collection and analysis of child care services by TWC, regular assessment of Texas Rising Star quality standards, and creation of a policy for public input on all subsidized child care.

Outcomes of key early education initiatives this session:

BECAME LAW

SUPPORT CHILDREN

HB 4 - Establishing the program envisioned by the Governor to provide additional pre-K funding to school districts that meet new requirements

HB 173 - Improving pre-K data collection

- *Similar provisions were included in HB 4; HB 173 was left pending after a House hearing*

HB 1180 - Improving the child care database managed by DFPS

SB 1496 - Improving safety for children in child care by requiring listed and registered family home operators to submit fingerprints to DFPS

IMPACT CHILDREN

SB 206 - DFPS Sunset bill

SB 208 - TWC Sunset bill

DID NOT PASS

SUPPORT CHILDREN

HB 296 - Establishing statewide pre-K quality standards, including limits on class size and student-teacher ratios

- *Left pending after a House committee hearing*

HB 617, HB 3887 and SB 1123 - Creating an Office of Early Learning

- *Did not receive a hearing*

HB 1100 - Establishing a full-day gold-standard pre-K program

- *Left pending after a House committee hearing*

HB 2903 - Improving training for child care workers

- *Passed the full House and the Senate committee but was not voted on by the full Senate*

HB 3322 and SB 1269 - Improving child-caregiver ratios in licensed child care

- *Left pending after House and Senate committee hearings*

HB 3836 - Authorizing junior colleges to offer a B.A. in early education

- *Passed the House but did not receive a Senate hearing*

MAY HARM CHILDREN

HB 588 - Banning certain assessments in pre-K

- *Did not receive a hearing*

HB 1765 - Requiring TEA to develop a strategy to encourage Head Start participants to enroll in public school pre-K

- *Did not receive a hearing*