



## **Testimony on the Sunset Advisory Commission Report of the Texas Education Agency**

**October 10, 2014**

Texans Care for Children is a nonprofit organization that works solely to improve outcomes for Texas children through policy change. We come by our recommendations and policy positions through active dialogue with our network of members throughout the state who together represent thousands of Texas children. We also co-convene various stakeholder groups, which bring together a wide range of organizations, families, and advocates around our areas of focus: early opportunity; infant, child and maternal health; children's mental well being; child protection; and juvenile justice.

I appreciate the Sunset Staff's work, and the opportunity to provide comments on the report. I agree with recommendations 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3 and recommendations 2.1 and 2.2. I offer an addition to the recommendations in issues 7 and 10.

### ***Issue 7***

Issue 7 states that elements of educator certification do not conform to commonly applied licensing practices. I am writing about the EC-6 certification, which is required to be a pre-K teacher. Prior to 2000, Texas had a pre-K to Kindergarten endorsement for teachers. The certification was changed in 2000 to an EC-4 certification to give schools more flexibility in moving teachers around. It was changed again in 2011 to become an EC-6 certification to provide even more flexibility.

Many early childhood professionals, such as representatives from school districts, and the Texas Association of Administrators and Supervisors of Programs for Young Children, believe the current certification does not provide adequate training for the needs of preschool teachers and students. Participants in our recent Early Education Alliance meeting, and others, say that teachers who aren't performing often get moved down to the pre-K level, which often leads to ineffective teaching for our youngest learners.

The certification is also not in line with other states' certification practices for preschool. Most states have certifications either 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 recommendation added 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. As a result of the review, it should

*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.*

then revise the certification or the content of the current certification, if warranted, to ensure that adequate early childhood information training is included.

### ***Issue 10***

This issue highlights the need to continue TEA, and Sunset writes that TEA's mission is to provide leadership, guidance, and resources to help schools meet the educational needs of all students. It also mentions accountability and collection of data.

Due to under-staffing, under-funding, and inability to keep up with national trends, the agency is not meeting its mission for its pre-K students, and for early education in general.

With respect to TEA's duty to "**distribute state and federal funding to public schools and ensure the proper use of those funds,**" TEA is not able to provide proper accountability and oversight for the \$1.5 billion spent per biennium on pre-K, as TEA now has only one staff person designated to work on pre-k for the entire State of Texas.

Moreover, five separate public funding streams are dedicated to early learning in Texas, and accountability authority is dispersed among six separate entities, with no agency to drive coordination or ensure accountability of these efforts. Further, Texas is the only one of the top ten most populous states in the nation that does not have a state Office of Early Learning devoted to the implementation and improvement of access to and quality of early education programs.

Likewise, while the Sunset Commission lists one of TEA's major duties as to "**collect, analyze, and make accessible a wide array of educational and financial data from public schools,**" TEA does not collect the data Texas needs to properly evaluate the quality or effectiveness of our pre-school programs. No data exists on class sizes, classroom performance, and how and if outreach is conducted in districts. Districts are also not required to evaluate their pre-K programs, which leaves little accountability or ability to identify which programs need support.

Texans Care recommends **Establishing an Office of Learning** at TEA as a way to provide leadership and assistance to districts and other partnering entities, collect necessary data to improve quality, and encourage local solutions, thus increasing accountability and efficiency, while improving outcomes for our state's youngest learners. This will also help TEA to better meet its mission, and carry out its core functions.

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