



March 11, 2009

The Honorable Florence Shapiro
Texas Senate
Chair, Senate Education Committee
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, TX 78711-2068

Dear Senator Shapiro,

Congratulations on your reappointment as chair of the Senate Education Committee. We appreciate your service to the people of Texas.

We are concerned that a piece of legislation, HB 130, by Rep. Diane Patrick, and SB 21, by Sen. Judith Zaffirini, unnecessarily increases the role of government in providing early childhood education, raises taxes on hardworking families, and moves Texas closer to universal pre-k.

Research conclusively finds that early childhood education has long-term academic gains only for the most disadvantaged children — children who are already eligible for public school pre-k, Head Start or subsidized child care.

In fact, there is strong evidence from both domestic and international preschool programs that the widespread adoption of preschool is unlikely to improve student achievement. Preschool enrollment has skyrocketed from roughly 16 percent in 1965 to 69 percent today and yet, student achievement has stagnated (according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the International Evaluation of Education Achievement and other sources).

Academic gains from pre-k tend to fade out by the 3rd grade. Unless elementary and secondary schools significantly improve, any gains from preschool are not likely to result in lasting gains.

HB 130 and SB 21 allow for an expansion of pre-k from a half-day program to a full-day program. With a documented fade-out phenomenon by third grade, we question the need for taxpayers to fund expanded preschool programs especially during a recession. This legislation increases the average daily attendance from .5 to 1.2 per student in pre-k. This is more than doubling the current spending.

Texas has a large private sector market providing early childhood education services to children. We are concerned that HB 130 and SB 21 do not include the private sector as a full partner in providing these services and actually dismantles the integrated model of public/private partnerships that the Texas Legislature embraced in 2003 with the creation of the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM). TEEM encourages shared resources among government-funded and private providers of early childhood education, aims to improve quality through rigorous professional development, and lowers costs by integrating the private sector instead of building new classrooms. The legislation as currently drafted appears to have the effect of limiting the participation of private providers to 20 percent.

In addition, we do not see any accountability provisions examining student outcomes to determine the effectiveness of an expanded public preschool program.

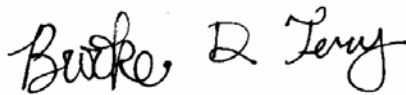
Implicit in the push for expanded government pre-k is the presumption that the state should take more responsibility for educating younger children. Yet parents of these children say they would prefer for their child to be at home full-time with a parent, according to a Public Agenda survey. If lawmakers are concerned about the affordability of early childhood education, why not give parents a tax cut so they can decide for themselves the best educational environment for their child?

Moving forward, we hope that any legislation concerning early childhood education transforms early childhood education funding into grants or tax cuts and give parents the ability to decide the most appropriate educational setting for their child.

Sincerely,



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Texans for Fiscal Responsibility



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Peggy Venable
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CC: Senator Judith Zaffirini
CC: Representative Diane Patrick
CC: House Education Committee Members
CC: Senate Education Committee Members