

Child Care & Early Education Policy Priorities for the 88th Texas Legislature

*A child care system that works for **all** children, working families,
early educators and child care businesses*

Early education and care represents a critical opportunity to ensure that every child, regardless of neighborhood or circumstance, starts school prepared to be successful in school and life. It is also an essential underpinning of our broader community ecosystem—allowing parents to remain engaged in the workforce on the path towards economic security and prosperity. For all Texas families to access the quality early education and care they need to meet their unique family needs, policymakers must ensure a robust, diverse system of quality early learning and care.

Based on conversations and feedback from families, community-based child care providers, agency administrators, our local ISD-partners, and advocates across the state, we believe that the following policy priorities are **fundamental** to a strong and equitable early childhood system in Texas:

- 1. Sustaining High-Quality Child Care Small Businesses:** Right-size the child care business model, including the child care subsidy system, to ensure the true costs of quality, including early educator wages, are adequately funded without raising costs to hardworking families;
- 2. Expanding Choice for Working Parents:** Enable eligible children of working parents to access public prekindergarten in the context of full-day, high-quality community-based child care. This includes removing unnecessary barriers to participating in the current pre-k partnership model, ensuring sufficient resources for community-based early learning programs to provide high-quality prekindergarten, and piloting new mixed-delivery models that do not require complex partnerships with LEA's;
- 3. Fortifying the Child Care Educator Workforce:** Developing pathways for a sustainable, quality early educator workforce that honors and compensates educators for previous experience and existing expertise, provides equitable timelines and resources for child care educators to increase their credentials and advance in the profession, and achieve a self-sufficient wage similar to ISD educators with similar credentials.

This year, we urged the Texas Legislature to support young children, working families and child care educators during by enacting bold policies that would sustain quality child care small businesses; expand prekindergarten choice for working parents through a mixed-delivery system; and fortify the child care educator workforce.





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Recap of CCA Priority Bills for the 88th Legislature:

Remove Barriers to Prekindergarten Partnerships


Public-private prekindergarten partnerships (Pre-K Partnerships) are an important strategy for increasing access to pre-k for young children of working parents, and sustaining child care businesses, by enabling state-funded pre-k to be delivered within the context of a full-day child care program. Unfortunately, the current Pre-K Partnerships model currently faces several fundamental design flaws and bureaucratic barriers, making them difficult for communities to execute on the ground. The following bills addressed the three most pressing challenges:

-  **HB 2729** – Harris
The most significant challenge facing high-quality child care programs to deliver state-funded pre-k is their inability to provide a fully certified and degreed teacher. Currently, only 17% of child care educators in TX have a bachelor's degree due to inequitable pathways for them to advance in their career without leaving the role. HB 2729 improves pre-k access and choice for working families by allowing community-based child care programs an equitable way to participate in our state-funded pre-k system. It creates the flexibility for non-degreed, non-certified, yet experienced early educators who meet recognized, high-quality accreditations, to teach Pre-K 3 or Pre-K 4 under the supervision of a fully certified teacher.
-  **HB 1614** – Dutton
Different eligibility thresholds for TWC's child care scholarships and TEA's prekindergarten have made partnerships logistically difficult to execute and enroll children. For example, in an average partnership classroom, ~25% of children receiving child care subsidies do not qualify for prekindergarten. HB 1614 would have eased these administrative obstacles and extend Pre-K eligibility to low-income children from working families participating in Pre-K partnerships with private child care providers.




Strengthen & Provide Local Flexibility for Local Workforce Development Boards

-  **HB 1979** – Raney / Plesa / Bumgarner
Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) have critical responsibilities to help low-income families access child care services, allocate federal child care funding, and support local initiatives to improve child care in their regions. LWDB's, in partnership with their contractors, are currently held to a single performance target: the average number of children served by subsidy per day, without accounting for higher costs associated with certain types of care (*e.g., high-quality care, infant/toddler care, non-traditional houred care, etc.*). HB 1979 have provided LWDB's the opportunity to create alternative performance targets based on the community's unique childcare needs, while also ensuring they have the standards and supports needed to improve transparency and strengthen accountability.

Set Reimbursement Rates at the True Cost of Care

-  **HB 1834** – Thompson / Jetton | **SB 353**- Zaffarini
Texas child care providers set tuition prices based on what families can afford to pay. In some communities, providers cannot charge enough to support the added costs associated with quality. Under current law, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) cannot reimburse child care providers more than their published rate – even if poverty has driven that rate too low to pay for quality child care. HB 1834 and SB 353 would have ensured that providers in the TWC system would receive a reimbursement based on the quality of their program, not based on what parents can afford to pay.

Other Bills of Support

-  **HB 2923**—Dutton— Relating to the operation of free prekindergarten programs by certain school districts, in partnership with private child care, and to the early education allotment under the Foundation School Program
-  **HB 2264** – Talarico – Relating to requiring public junior colleges to award course credit to students who hold a Child Development Associate; strengthens career and educational pathways for child care educators
-  **HB1801** – Talarico | **SB 1145**—West - Relating to an exemption from ad valorem taxation of real property used to operate a child-care facility;

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ABOUT CHILD CARE ASSOCIATES

Child Care Associates (CCA) is one of the largest child development nonprofits in North Texas and has served more than half a million young children in the past 54 years. Through Head Start and Early Head Start and Child Care Management Services, CCA delivers quality early education programs to children and families of disadvantaged means, offsetting the high cost of child care for lower-income working families and increases the quality of child care delivered across Tarrant County. CCA offers an array of whole child, whole families services including services for pregnant moms, home visiting, Early Head Start and Head Start.

In partnership with the city of Fort Worth, Tarrant County and the city of Arlington, CCA is the convener and thought partner for the Blue Ribbon Action Committee on Child Care which was formed to boost outcomes for young children 0-5, working parents and child care educators by identifying bold, innovative, cross-sector solutions to improve access to, and the quality of, child care at scale. The Institute to Advance Child Care will work alongside the Blue Ribbon Action Committee, as well as CCA's policy team, to ideate and implement promising solutions that inform meaningful policy for impact at scale.