

COLLABORATIVE FOR CHILDREN

REVIEW OF THE 79TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION

June 22, 2005

Participation in the development of public policy is a tool that allows the Collaborative for Children (CC) to meet its goal of strengthening the overall system of early care and education. CC's legislative priorities for the 79th Legislative Session supported our mission to partner with families and communities to build a strong foundation for young children to succeed in school and life. They were meant to lay the foundation for a system of quality early and education in which all families have voluntary access to services that will get their children off to a healthy start. These priorities were to:

- develop common operating and performance standards for preschool;
- promote direct contracting between school districts and other preschool systems;
- expand access to pre-kindergarten; and
- improve quality of early childhood education for children, birth to 3.

In the last hours of May, the 79th Session of the Texas Legislature came to an end. Throughout the session, CC joined early care and education advocates from across the state to advocate for policies that support families and communities in the education, care, and development of young children.

School finance reform and legislation to expand the work of the State Center for Early Childhood Development presented important windows of opportunity for advancing our legislative priorities. Every opportunity, whether it ended in "success" or "failure," provided a chance for CC and our partners to educate the public and our legislators on the importance of early care and education. Although legislators were unable to come to agreement on school finance reform, the debate provided us an opportunity to voice our argument to invest early and often!

In our meetings with legislators and in testimony to committees in the House and Senate, we were heartened to hear that Texas legislators "get it." We welcome the efforts of Rep. Kolkhorst and thank her for raising her voice in support of policies that help young children. Thanks also go to Rep. Villarreal and Senator Zaffirini for their steadfast dedication in offering significant early care and education legislation each session. We look forward to continuing our work with legislators and their staff in the interim to educate our communities about the vital need for quality programs for all our children.

The 79th Session pulled together businesses, school districts, child care, Head Start, and community organizations, and proved that our collective voices can make a difference. While we were not successful in expanding funds for quality improvement activities for infants and toddlers, the early care and education community pulled together to block the passage of a bill that would have removed graduated reimbursement rates for Texas Rising Star providers. Through collaborative advocacy work with organizations such as TECEC, Texans Care for Children, and One Voice, the early care and education community strengthened its presence at the Capitol and built networks that we can draw upon in future sessions.

While the Texas Legislative Session is over, our work has just begun. In addition to following the special session on school finance, CC will be advocating for interim committee charges addressing early care and education challenges, making follow-up visits to legislators, and continuing to look for opportunities to educate, collaborate, and prioritize our goals in preparation for the 80th Session. In addition, as Congress makes decisions about the structure and funding levels of federal early care and education programs, we will continue to track and analyze legislation and other relevant developments. We will also continue to inform our federal legislators and their staff members about CC and issues that impact early care and education in Texas.

NEWS FROM THE STATE CAPITOL

Over forty early childhood bills were introduced this session. While not all of our priorities made it into law, CC had victories in three of four of our priority areas.

BILL	DESCRIPTION	STATUS
CC Priority: Develop common operating and performance standards for preschool.		
HB 2808 (MORRISON)	<p>Relating to the P-16 Council and to the functioning of certain educational programs.</p> <p>Directs the Legislative Budget Board (LBB) to study the resource needs of high-quality early care and education programs (all three systems) and to report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recommended options to secure additional funding for programs; • a plan to implement, in phases, full-day pre-kindergarten programs for at-risk children; and • a plan to expand the eligibility criteria for pre-kindergarten programs. 	Effective 9-1-05
CC Priority: Promote direct contracting between school districts and other preschool systems.		
SB 23 (ZAFFIRINI)	<p>Relating to subsidized child care services and early childhood care and education program coordination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TEA may establish an incentive program for providers of early care and education programs that coordinate services. • Expands demonstration projects for coordinated and integrated early care and education programs (TEEM) and establishes guidelines for memorandum of understanding and a program evaluation component. • The State Center for Early Childhood Development, in conjunction with the P-16 Council, shall develop a school readiness certification system by September 2006. 	Signed by Governor – effective 9-1-05
CC Priority: Expand access to full-day pre-kindergarten.		
SB 1 (OGDEN)	State budget	Article III (Education) vetoed by Governor
CC Priority: Improve quality of early childhood education for children, birth to 3.		
<p>Although legislation was introduced to set aside child care quality improvement dollars for grants to organizations that work with centers serving infants and toddlers, no bills passed in support of quality improvement activities.</p>		
Other Bills		
HB 1316 (ZEDLER)	<p>Relating to immunization requirements for children in regulated child care facilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adds to the list of required immunizations: invasive pneumococcal disease and hepatitis A. 	Signed by Governor – effective 9-1-05
SB 565 (DEUELL)	<p>Relating to the posting of a list of employees in certain child care facilities and family homes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each day care center, group day care home, and family home must post a list of all current employees at the center or home in accordance with rules adopted. 	Signed by Governor – effective 9-1-05

<p>HB 877 (TALTON)</p>	<p>Relating to certain complaints and information with respect to child care facilities and family homes and to procedures for certain disciplinary actions against child care facilities; providing a criminal penalty.</p> <p>The Commissioner of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services shall adopt rules regarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the receipt of anonymous complaints against child care facilities to limit the number of anonymous complaints investigated by the Department; and • procedures by which the Department removes information from the Department’s website that relates to an anonymous complaint if it is determined that that complaint is false or lacks factual foundation. • It is a Class A misdemeanor to knowingly or intentionally file a complaint that is false. 	<p>Signed by Governor – effective 9-1-05</p>
<p>HB 2048 (URESTI)</p>	<p>Relating to online services involving state agencies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition to health and human services information, the Texas Information and Referral Network shall provide a single point-of-access through which a person may be directed on how or where to apply for all child care and education services available in the person’s community. 	<p>Effective immediately</p>
<p>HB 183 (BROWN)</p>	<p>Relating to the use of safety belts and child passenger safety seat systems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person commits a moving violation of traffic law if the person operates a passenger vehicle, transports a child who is younger than five years of age and less than 36 inches in height, and does not keep the child secured in a child passenger safety seat system. • Directs the Department of Public Safety to conduct a study regarding legislative options to improve child passenger safety laws. 	<p>Effective 9-1-05</p>
<p>SB 316 (LUCIO)</p>	<p>Relating to information provided to parents of newborn children.</p> <p>A hospital, birthing center, physician, or midwife who provides prenatal care to a pregnant woman or at delivery of an infant shall provide the woman and the father of the infant or other caregiver, if possible, with a pamphlet that includes information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • postpartum depression; • the prevention of shaken baby syndrome; • diseases for which a child is required by state law to be immunized; and • the appropriate schedule for follow-up procedures for newborn screening. 	<p>Signed by Governor – effective 9-1-05</p>

What Happens Now?

- **Legislation Becomes Law:** Governor Perry had 20 days (until June 19) to sign or veto legislation. Passed legislation that was not acted on by the Governor automatically became law.
- **Special Session:** A special session on school finance, called by the Governor, began on June 21. The Legislature has 30 days to approve a new education budget and reform the school finance system.
- **Interim Committees:** Because the Texas Legislature only meets every 2 years, legislative committees often use the interim to do more in-depth analysis of important issues affecting Texas. The Lieutenant Governor and Speaker of the House can specify interim “charges,” or topics, to be studied by committees in the Senate and House. These committees take public testimony and compile a report with findings and recommendations to present to their fellow legislators.

CC's Public Policy and Research Team (Laura Smith and Leta Seletzky) provides policy support to CC by: gathering research; monitoring and summarizing legislation; communicating with elected officials, staff, and community partners on proposed legislation; and developing CC's legislative priorities and positions. If you have information to contribute or questions pertaining to legislative activities, please e-mail Laura Smith (lsmith@collabforchildren.org) and Leta Seletzky (lseletzky@collabforchildren.org).