

# HOW CAN LOCAL BOARDS HELP GET KIDS SCHOOL-READY?

*Preparing young children for success in school*

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## HIGHLIGHTS

*Local Workforce Development Boards (Local Boards) have the opportunity to ensure that children in subsidized child care are well-prepared for kindergarten, but to do so, they must support child care teachers in implementing high quality care and curriculum*

## CURRENT EFFORTS

Child care is an important support for working parents, but it also helps ensure children are ready for school. School-readiness has long been the responsibility of the Texas Education Agency (TEA), particularly through their public school Pre-K program. There is no formal system to ensure that children in subsidized child care are taught the necessary skills or competencies needed to succeed in school, though many of them will transition to the public school system. This could be remedied with greater continuity around curriculum standards, teacher professional development, and teacher assessments and coaching spanning all education systems from birth to age 8.

**Curriculum Standards.** TEA worked with Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) and other stakeholders to build the Texas Pre-K Guidelines, which are meant to support skill development and child outcomes to get kids school-ready. The Texas Infant, Toddler, and 3-Year-Old Guidelines are aligned with the Texas Pre-K Guidelines. Both sets of guidelines, however, are voluntary. Texas Rising Star (TRS) standards are based on these guidelines, but meeting those standards is also voluntary.<sup>1</sup>

**Teacher Professional Development.** Teachers in all early childhood (ECE) settings—including child care, public school Pre-K, and Head Start programs—need high quality training, both prior to teaching and as ongoing professional development. Interactions between teachers and children are incredibly important for supporting child development and helping children

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be school-ready.<sup>2</sup>

**Teacher Assessments and Coaching.** Some Local Boards are implementing quality teacher training and assessment programs, in addition to TRS. Two that are used in various regions of the state are Texas School Ready and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Both of these programs assess teachers and use assessment results to support trainings, in order to give targeted interventions to individual teachers. Research has shown that Texas School Ready improves teacher practice across a variety of domains.<sup>3</sup>

## NEXT STEPS

To form a system that prioritizes school-readiness, Local Boards can build on the investments they and TWC have already made.

**Using Connected Data Systems.** There are several state agencies, programs, and funding streams that are meant to help children be school-ready. Texas recently passed House Bill 680 which will help begin to coordinate data for children served in the subsidy program. Local Boards can advocate to make sure child care providers can access and analyze the data from their programs, just like school districts do for their classrooms. This can help Local Boards maximize existing resources, coordinate school readiness efforts, more efficiently use state funds, and implement strategies that build on TWC's priorities. Better data systems will allow child care providers to make informed programmatic decisions and help Texas leaders make good, data

-driven policy decisions. This could result in improved quality with respect to child care settings, professional development, and family services.

**Expanding Quality Child Care and Pre-K Partnerships.** Recently passed House Bill 3 expands funding for public school Pre-K to a full-day and will require some school districts to attempt to partner with TRS child care providers to deliver the full-day program. However, there are not currently enough TRS providers. Local Boards can target their recruitment and mentorship efforts to the school zones and partner with the school districts to help more providers reach the highest levels of TRS.

**Creating Contract Agreements with Partnership Providers.** To maximize the Child Care/Pre-K partnership model and its support for quality education, child care providers must be able to consistently rely on the financing available from both the public school Pre-K program and the child care subsidy program. Through contract agreements, a small portion of child care subsidy slots could be set aside for TRS child care providers who participate in partnerships. These contract agreements could require higher quality standards including TRS 4-Star, certain assessment tools, an application process, increased reimbursement rates, and/or lower parent co-pays. Local Boards can create contracts in a limited manner that support TWC's goal to improve quality and investments in TRS as well as a core Texas value of supporting parents to access the best opportunities possible for their children. Learning from other states that have

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implemented contract agreements, Local Boards might consider accompanying the contract agreement with any of the following tactics:

- Allow TRS 4-Star providers that partner with public Pre-K programs to move to the “**front of the line**” in search lists when parents are looking for quality in their area.
- Allow parents to pay **lower co-pays** if they choose a partnership provider.
- Use contract agreements as an **incentive to build and sustain a supply** of TRS 4-Star providers or Pre-K partnerships in high-poverty or high-demand neighborhoods.

**Combining TRS with other school-ready tools and programs.** TRS standards were not created using criteria proven to get kids school-ready. On its own, TRS is not designed to prepare children for school and does not meaningfully measure how teachers are promoting school-readiness in the classroom. However, quality teacher training and coaching programs such as Texas School Ready and CLASS do fill that gap. Local Boards can incentivize, encourage, or fund the pairing of these programs with TRS.

**Ensuring all Subsidized Infants and Toddlers are Served at TRS 4-Star Providers.** While TRS programs are not proven to get kids school-ready, these environments support children’s development in some of their most critical brain-building years – as babies and toddlers. There are currently not enough TRS 4-Star providers in Texas. Local Boards can focus on increasing TRS 4-Star certification for child care providers who currently accept subsidized infants and toddlers

and incentivize TRS 4-Star providers to accept more infants and toddlers. Another strategy might be to actively recruit high quality child care providers who are not accepting subsidy into the subsidy and TRS programs. Once there are more TRS 4-Star providers and more subsidized infants and toddlers in TRS 4-Star settings, it could make sense to phase in a requirement that all infants and toddlers must be in TRS 4-Star settings. In fact, some Local Boards already enroll 40% or more of their infants and toddlers in TRS settings. With an intentional, strategic approach, Local Boards have the capacity to meet this higher standard.

**Helping Children and Families Transition to Kindergarten.** The transition to kindergarten is critical for success in school. A smooth transition should include the sharing of data and other information from the preschool teacher and parents with the kindergarten teacher. Local Boards can work with their TRS providers and local school districts to develop policies that:

- Give children the opportunity to meet their kindergarten teachers and visit their new classrooms before school starts;
- Have kindergarten teachers visit children in their preschool classroom and at home;
- Provide events for parents, such as kindergarten orientation, workshops, and networking opportunities;
- Encourage parents to attend school-wide events for families;
- Develop parent-child learning programs at their schools;

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- Create shared transition forms across programs and schools;
- Implement transition teams in districts and schools;
- Coordinate professional development for ECE and early-grades teachers;
- Share data across systems; and
- Provide opportunities for the preschool teacher and kindergarten teacher to meet.<sup>4</sup>

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## NOTES:

1. Texas Workforce Commission. (2018). Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) 2019-2021 state plan preprint ; Texas Early Learning Council. (2012). Texas infant, toddler, and three-year-old early learning guidelines. Retrieved from <https://www.earlylearningtexas.org/itelg.aspx>
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