



EARLY LEARNING STRATEGIC PLAN
2020-2025



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Executive Summary

Overview of the Strategic Plan

There are currently more than two million children from birth to age five in Texas. The Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan provides a framework for public and private action to achieve the bold vision that **all Texas children are ready for school and ready to learn** through the achievement of measurable system, family, and child outcomes by 2025. The Plan is based on extensive stakeholder input and in-depth assessments of the current status of the Texas early learning system, and identifies six critical goals that, when achieved, will ensure that all Texas children birth to age five and their families have access to the supports, services, and resources necessary to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

Based on the results of the Texas Early Learning Needs Assessment and other data collection activities, this document outlines the goals, strategies, and associated focus areas and activities that will be undertaken to ensure that all Texas children are ready for school and ready to learn. Developed by the Council and with significant stakeholder input throughout the development process through surveys and focus groups, this Strategic Plan is intended to be used by individuals and groups at all levels of the early learning system to ensure the state's vision for its youngest learners is met.

Texas Early Learning Strategy & Plan



Vision and Guiding Principles

Vision for Texas Children

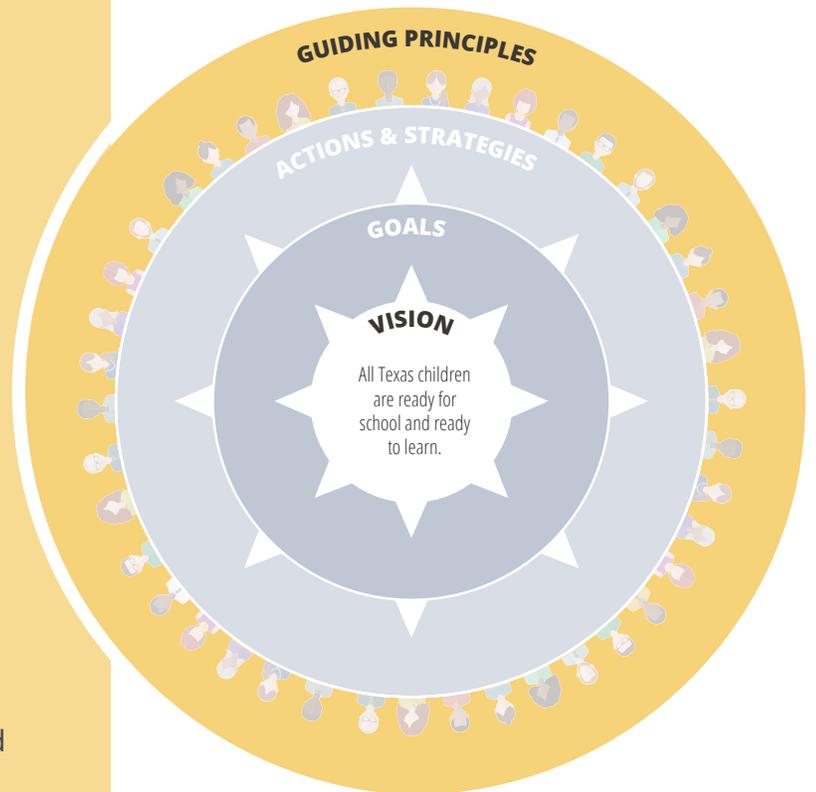
All Texas children are ready for school and ready to learn.

Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles are the fundamental beliefs used throughout the development and implementation of the Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan.

1. High-quality early childhood programs are critical to ensuring that children have the literacy and numeracy skills to succeed in school.
2. A young child's development and well-being, including academic readiness and social readiness, have an impact on their readiness and ability to learn.
3. Families are fundamental to ensuring that their children come to school ready and able to learn.
4. Community services and supports should be efficient, easily accessible, and targeted to meet the needs of children and families.
5. Early childhood professionals are valued and supported as important members of the early learning system and their communities.
6. High-quality programs need highly-qualified staff, professional development opportunities, resources, and support in order to reach and maintain higher levels of quality.
7. Texans at all levels of the early learning system need access to high-quality data to inform their decision making.

Texas Early Learning Strategy & Plan



The Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan At-a-Glance

Goals

Goal 1: Early childhood programs in Texas are aligned to ensure children are ready to learn by kindergarten.

Goal 2: All families have access to a variety of high-quality programs and the information needed to discern which programs are the best fit for their child.

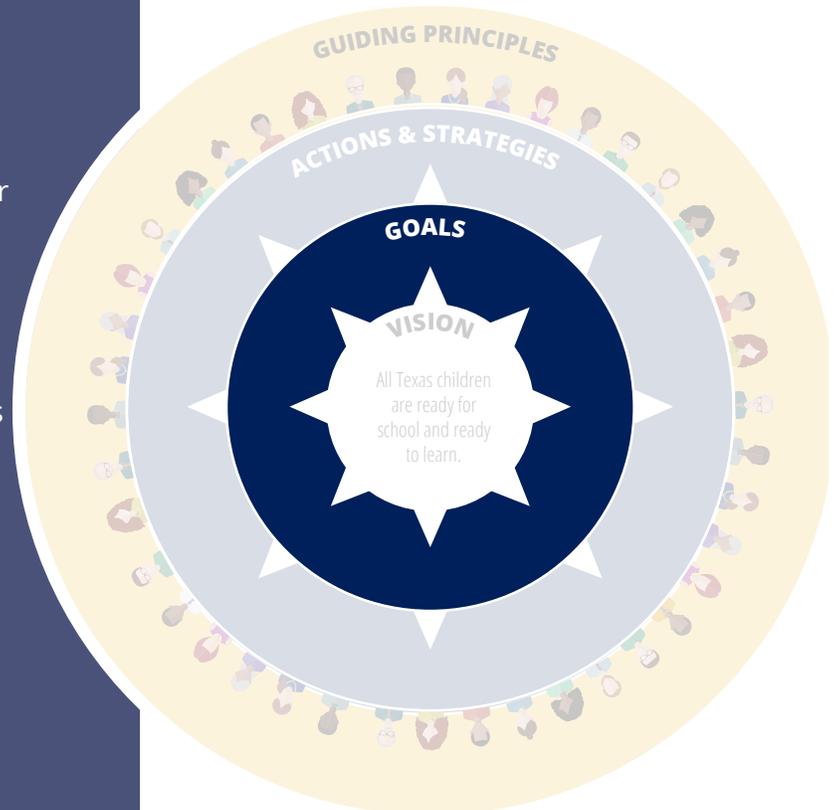
Goal 3: Families are equipped with knowledge and tools they need to be their child's primary caregiver.

Goal 4: Early childhood professionals are well-qualified and have access to the supports and training needed to improve kindergarten readiness and the resources to ensure they have a successful career serving children.

Goal 5: Each community has a plan for a coordinated system of early childhood services.

Goal 6: Texas has strong coordination across its early childhood system and the underlying data system to support a high degree of collaboration.

Texas Early Learning Strategy & Plan



GOAL 1: Early childhood programs in Texas are aligned to ensure children are ready to learn by kindergarten.

VISION OF SUCCESS

Early childhood programs understand child development and the importance of monitoring and supporting children's development across a coordinated system of supports and services.

2025 TARGETS

- By 2025, 75% of Texas' children will be ready for kindergarten.
Baseline: 52%
Interim Target: 65%
- By 2025, the number of completed developmental screeners for children birth to age five will increase by XX%.
Baseline: To be determined in 2020.
Interim Target: To be determined in 2020.

RELATED STRATEGIES

Strategy 1.1: Increase use of developmentally appropriate screening and diagnostics to monitor children's development and adapt programs to meet children's needs.

Strategy 1.2: Promote the use of the Texas Early Learning Guidelines and the Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines to inform diagnostic and instruction.

Strategy 1.3: Support educators' use of formative and summative data to guide children's development and learning.

GOAL 2: All families have access to a variety of high-quality programs and the information needed to discern which programs are the best fit for their child.

VISION OF SUCCESS

Across the state, Texas families and their children have access to high-quality early childhood programs of their choice. All families have information about the variety of programs and services offered in their communities so that they can make educated choices about programs and services based on their and their child's needs.

2025 TARGETS

- By 2025, there will be an increase in the availability of high-quality early learning programs across Texas' early learning system. Specific targets for program/service providers include:
 - By 2025, XX% of ECI direct service providers will be using the evidence-based practice of coaching families with fidelity
Baseline: To be determined in 2020.
Interim Target: To be determined in 2020.
 - By 2025, 100% of LEAs will conduct a Prekindergarten Program Self-Assessment.
Baseline: To be determined in 2020
Interim Target: To be determined in 2020

- By 2025, the number of repeated serious violations at regulated child care will decrease by 20%

Baseline: Average of 604 serious instances per year for FY17 - FY19

Interim Target: Reduce by 10% by FY22, to fewer than 544 serious violations

- By 2025, a higher proportion of children will receive high-quality child care services, with the goal of 50% of caregivers selecting quality programs for their children.
Baseline: To be determined in 2020
Interim Target: 40% of enrolled infants and toddlers
- By 2025, Texas will serve at least 60% of income eligible three- and four-year-old children in high-quality early learning programs.
Baseline: 50% of income eligible three- and four-year old children are served
Interim Target: 55% of income eligible three- and four-year-old children are served
- By 2025, Texas has a coordinated website that provides families with information about the availability of high-quality early childhood programs.

RELATED STRATEGIES

Strategy 2.1: Assess local needs, including rural community needs, and promote and support activities that improve access in local communities.

Strategy 2.2: Improve the quality of programs through evidence-informed practices and approaches.

Strategy 2.3: Increase children and families' access to high-quality programs, supports, and services across the early childhood system.

Strategy 2.4: Establish a centralized point of access for families and providers to retrieve information about the early childhood system.

Strategy 2.5: Educate families about high-quality early learning and how they can access existing programs and services.

Strategy 2.6: Incorporate families into planning, administrative, and programmatic operations.

Strategy 2.7: Incentivize quality improvement to increase the number of high-quality programs, supports, and services in Texas available to families.

GOAL 3: Families are equipped with knowledge and tools they need to be their child's primary caregiver.

VISION OF SUCCESS

Families understand their child's needs and the role they play in their child's learning and development. Families know where to find and how to access the resources and supports that address their child's needs.

2025 TARGETS

- By 2025, Texas has a coordinated website that provides families information regarding child development.

- By 2025, 100% of LEAs have a prekindergarten family engagement plan.
Baseline: 85% of LEAs have a prekindergarten family engagement plan.
Interim Target: 95% of LEAs have a prekindergarten family engagement plan.
- By 2025, Child Care Licensing will increase their community engagement events by 30% to reach families to inform them of their child care options.
Baseline: Average number of 179 community engagement events per year for FY17 - FY19.
Interim Target: Increase events by 20% by FY22 to 215
- By 2025, there will be a XX% increase in the number of families subscribing to Bright by Text.
Baseline: To be determined in 2020.
Interim Target: To be determined in 2020.

RELATED STRATEGIES

Strategy 3.1: Educate and connect parents and families about what constitutes high-quality early learning, supports and services that are available, and how they can access existing programs and services.

Strategy 3.2: Incorporate families' needs into planning, administrative, and programmatic operations.

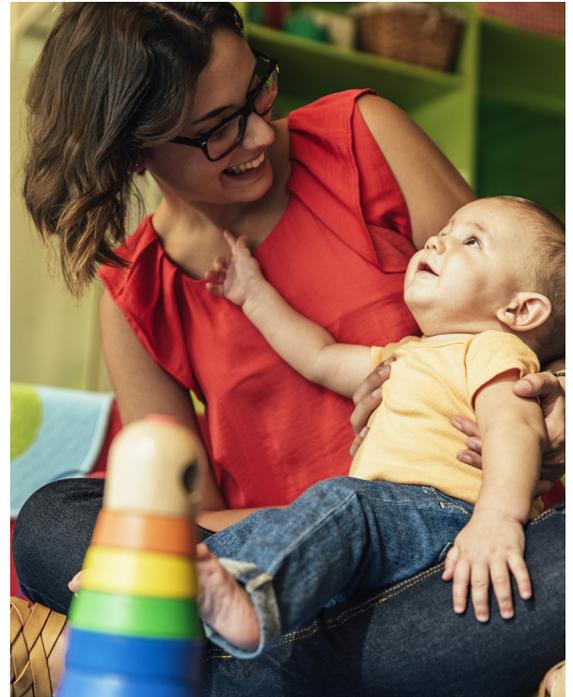
Strategy 3.3: Increase families' understanding of the needs of their family and child and the programs, services, and supports available to meet them.

Strategy 3.4: Increase families' access to high-quality programs, supports, and services.

Strategy 3.5: Establish a centralized point of access for families and providers to retrieve information about the early childhood system.

Strategy 3.6: Provide parent and family education opportunities to support positive family-child interactions.

Strategy 3.7: Increase families' understanding of early brain development and strategies they can implement to support optimal development.



GOAL 4: Early childhood professionals are well-qualified and have access to the supports and training needed to improve kindergarten readiness and the resources to ensure they have a successful career serving children.

VISION OF SUCCESS

Early childhood professionals across the mixed-delivery system have the supports, training, and skills necessary to ensure that each and every child is ready to learn and ready for school. Texas early childhood professionals have access to a comprehensive career ladder that supports their growth and development within the profession and a well-developed, sustainable, high-quality workforce.

2025 TARGETS

- By 2025, the number of master trainers registered through the Texas Trainer Registry will increase by 46%.
Baseline: 325 master registered trainers in the Texas Trainer Registry
Interim Target: 450 master registered trainers
Final Target: 600 master registered trainers
- By 2025, 85% of early learning professionals will access and participate in a variety of high-quality, competency-based pre-service and in-service training and professional development opportunities to meet their needs through the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System.
Baseline: To be determined in 2020.
Interim Target: To be determined in 2020.
- By 2025, the Texas Core Competencies for Early Childhood Practitioners and Administrators will be updated along with the associated career lattice to support the upward mobility of the early childhood workforce.

RELATED STRATEGIES

Strategy 4.1: Provide high-quality professional development opportunities across the early childhood workforce.

Strategy 4.2: Promote participation in state and national professional associations to elevate the field.

Strategy 4.3: Update the Texas Core Competencies for Early Childhood Practitioners and Administrators and the associated career lattice.

Strategy 4.4: Create a centralized point or points of access for providers to retrieve information about the early childhood system including available programs, supports, and services.

Strategy 4.5: Increase the number of early childhood professionals with an account through the workforce registry in the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System

GOAL 5: Each community has a plan for a coordinated system of early childhood services.

VISION OF SUCCESS

Communities across Texas have a system of early childhood supports and services that are well-organized, aligned, collaborative, and systematically support the development and learning of children within their community.

2025 TARGETS

- By 2025, the number of community-based early childhood coalitions will increase by 50%.
Baseline: To be determined in 2020.
Interim Target: To be determined based on 2020 baseline.
- By 2025, the number of LEAs in partnerships with child care providers and/or Head Start programs in which children are co-enrolled will increase by 40%.
Baseline: To be determined in 2020
Interim Target: 20% increase

- By 2025, the number of institutes of higher education who have developed articulation pathways between the Child Development Associate (CDA), and other degree programs will increase by 50%
Baseline: To be determined in 2020
Interim Target: To be determined in 2020.
- By 2025, the number of high schools offering an early learning program of study through Career and Technical Education will increase by 30%.
Baseline: To be determined in 2020
Interim Target: to be determined in 2020.

RELATED STRATEGIES

Strategy 5.1: Engage in intentional planning at the community level, informed by local needs and stakeholder input.

Strategy 5.2: Develop and disseminate resources that support the implementation of service delivery models that leverage existing resources and meet community needs, especially in rural communities.

Strategy 5.3: Develop procedures for effective transitions between programs.

Strategy 5.4: Invest in structural and operational support for local systems coordination.

Strategy 5.5: Establish articulation pathways between CDA, associate degree, and bachelor degree programs offered by high schools, community colleges, and colleges and universities.

Strategy 5.6: Support programs in braiding and blending funding streams to maximize resources to increase kindergarten readiness.



GOAL 6: Texas has strong coordination across its early childhood system and the underlying data system to support a high degree of collaboration.

VISION OF SUCCESS

Texas presents a unified vision and message about the importance of early childhood. Texas has a successfully coordinated early childhood system with established policies and procedures, and clear lines of decision-making authority and established efficient and cohesive policies and practices. This includes the collection and use of data across multiple agencies and programs.

2025 TARGETS

- By 2025, the Texas early childhood system will have established policies and procedures for accountability, decision-making authority and coordination across state-level agencies that house early childhood programs.
- By 2025, Texas will have an early childhood integrated data system that meets the needs of policy makers, families, and providers.
- By 2025, Texas' early childhood data system will link data points related to kindergarten readiness and other transition indicators from and across the early learning system.

RELATED STRATEGIES

Strategy 6.1: Align administrative processes across state agencies that affect early childhood programs.

Strategy 6.2: Establish processes and procedures for effective cross-agency coordination that include strategies for reducing duplicative efforts and efficiently utilizing resources.

Strategy 6.3: Assess and promote opportunities for leveraging existing funding streams, identifying new funding sources, and streamlining funding when possible.

Strategy 6.4: Increase understanding of quality across program settings and implications for partnership opportunities.

Strategy 6.5: Leverage HB 680 to build the foundation for an early childhood integrated data system.

Strategy 6.6: Strengthen data sharing across agencies to better inform state-level policy and program improvement.

Strategy 6.7: Support communities and stakeholders in utilizing data provided through existing data platforms to inform quality improvement and systems planning at the local level.

Organization of the Strategic Plan

The Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan is organized into the following sections:

- An Introduction that describes the Texas early childhood system including the services, programs, and supports available to children birth through age five and their families; a description and history of the Texas Early Learning Council and its role in the strategic planning process; and information about how the Plan was created.
- The Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan, which includes:
 - The vision and guiding principles for early learning in Texas;
 - The six goals of the Plan and their accompanying visions of success, targets, and related strategies;
 - Activities for each and every Texan to support this work by focus area;
 - The sustainability plan for the Strategic Plan; and

Use of the Strategic Plan

The purpose of the five-year Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan is to establish a vision of where Texas intends to go and to identify actionable strategies and activities for working together across the early learning system to meet this vision. Designed as a living document that reflects the needs of, and is responsive to, stakeholders across the early learning system, this Plan aligns with the governor's agenda and existing strategic plans of cross-agency state partners, and provides an opportunity to support each and every child and family and be more successful in the individual missions of each agency. Every Texan has a role in ensuring that young children birth through age five are ready for school and ready to learn. Whether an early childhood educator or provider, family member, policy maker, community leader, or anyone else committed to ensuring kindergarten readiness, this Strategic Plan details steps every Texan can take to support young children and their families and ensure the success of Texans for generations to come.

Introduction



Overview of the Strategic Plan

There are currently more than two million children from birth to age five in Texas. The Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan provides a framework for public and private action to achieve the bold vision that all Texas children are ready for school and ready to learn through the achievement of measurable system, family, and child outcomes by 2025. The Plan is based on extensive stakeholder input and in-depth assessments of the current status of the Texas early learning system, and identifies six critical goals that, when achieved, will ensure that all Texas children birth to age five and their families have access to the supports, services, and resources necessary to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

Based on the results of the Texas Early Learning Needs Assessment and other data collection activities, this document outlines the goals, strategies, and associated focus areas and activities that will be undertaken to ensure that all Texas children are ready for school and ready to learn. Developed by the Council and with significant stakeholder input throughout the development process through surveys and focus groups, this Strategic Plan is intended to be used by individuals and groups at all levels of the early learning system to ensure the state's vision for its youngest learners is met.

The Plan begins with a description of the process that was used to develop the Plan. Next are the vision and guiding principles that serve as the foundation for the Strategic Plan with a description of the data that was used to inform the identification of the elements of the Plan. At the center of the Plan are the goals that the state wants to accomplish in the next five years and the associated strategies that will ensure those goals are met. Given the integrated nature of the early childhood system in Texas, the Council has identified seven focus areas, or groups of strategies, that, when implemented, are likely to support the achievement of the goals of the Strategic Plan. Within each focus area the Council has identified activities that each and every Texan can take to support this work, acknowledging the important role that families, providers, businesses, and communities play in ensuring that all children are ready for school. Lastly, this document includes a plan for sustainability of the Strategic Plan to ensure that the Plan is a living document with opportunities for stakeholder engagement throughout implementation and ongoing reflection on the implementation of the Plan. The Strategic Plan concludes with identified key steps and a timeline for the completion of each.

The Texas Early Childhood System

There are more than two million children birth to age five in Texas, representing a very diverse subset of the Texas population and 10% of the birth–five population for the entire United States. For children birth to age five, 50% are Hispanic, 31% are White, 12% are Black, 4% are Asian, and 4% identify as “other.”

Throughout Texas, there are seven main types of direct early childhood programs and services, including public prekindergarten, child care (center-based and home-based), Early Childhood Intervention services, Early Childhood Special Education services, Head Start, Early Head Start, and Texas Home Visiting. Each of these programs have varying availability across Texas counties, except for Early Childhood Intervention services and Early Childhood Special Education services, which are available in every county. Table 1 outlines the programs in the Texas Early Learning System and the State Agency responsible for each of the programs.

TABLE 1. PROGRAMS IN THE TEXAS EARLY LEARNING SYSTEM

State Agency	Programs
Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA)	Child and Adult Care Food Program National School Lunch Program School Breakfast Program
Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS)	Home visiting Family education and support services
Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS)	Maternal and child public health initiatives
Texas Education Agency (TEA)	Early Childhood Special Education Public Prekindergarten
Texas Head Start State Collaboration Office (THSSCO)	Head Start Early Head Start
Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC)	Child Care Licensing Early Childhood Intervention
Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)	Subsidized child care Texas Rising Star

Texas Early Learning Council

The Texas Early Learning Council acts as the state’s advisory council on early childhood education and care for children from birth to school entry as required by the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007. The Council is responsible for conducting periodic statewide birth–five needs assessments, developing and monitoring implementation of a statewide birth–five strategic plan, and developing recommendations to strengthen the Texas early childhood system.

History

In 2019, Governor Greg Abbott appointed all new members to the Council. The Council is now comprised of 20 representatives and is chaired by Jacquie Porter, Statewide Director for Early Childhood at the Texas Education Agency. The First Lady of Texas, Cecilia Abbott, serves as the honorary chair. Stephanie Rubin was elected Vice Chair by the Council at their February 2019 meeting.

The Council met four times throughout 2019 to develop and guide the Texas Early Learning Needs Assessment and the Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan. This was accomplished through on-going stakeholder engagement and partnering with state agency staff to understand the needs of the Texas early childhood system.

The Council was first established by Governor Rick Perry in late 2009. The Council was awarded a three-year grant from the federal government to achieve a series of goals focused on improving school readiness in Texas through targeted strategies stemming from the Council's four priority areas:

- Parental Outreach and Communications
- Early Childhood Workforce and Professional Development
- Collaborations and Standard Data Systems and
- Quality Rating and Improvement Systems

This work laid a strong foundation upon which Texas has built a thriving early childhood system.

Role in Strategic Planning

The Council provided guidance during the development of the Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan through two strategic planning sessions in July and September 2019. During these planning sessions, the Council developed a proposed framework for the Strategic Plan and determined priority areas to be addressed. With additional stakeholder input and support from state agency staff, the Council provided input and feedback in order to fully develop all of the components of the Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan.

The Council will monitor implementation of the Strategic Plan and advise adjustments to the Plan based on updates to the Texas Early Learning Needs Assessment and results from implementation.

Along with the Council, the Interagency Implementation Support Team played an integral role in developing the Strategic Plan. The team had representation from the following agencies:

- Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
- Texas Department of State Health Services
- Texas Health and Human Services Commission
- Texas Education Agency
- Texas Head Start State Collaboration Office
- Texas Workforce Commission

The team guided the Strategic Planning process by providing recommendations for the vision, guiding principles, strategy areas, goals, and the implementation timeline.

Approach to Strategic Planning

How was the Plan created?

This Plan is the result of comprehensive efforts by the Council to understand and address a number of challenges faced by children birth to age five in Texas. In January 2019, the Texas Education Agency was awarded a \$1,789,455 Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) from the US Department of Health and Human Services as part of a \$250 million competitive federal grant program designed to improve states' existing early childhood landscape by building upon existing federal, state, and local early care and learning investments. The Council, working with state agencies and other public and private early childhood system stakeholders, including families, began the strategic planning process in late spring 2019. Using an iterative process with significant opportunities for stakeholder feedback throughout, the Plan was revised and honed into the current document based on the input of Texans representing all aspects of the early learning system. The Council is committed to continuing to work with the field through the implementation of the Plan to ensure that the vision, goals, and strategies articulated herein belong to each and every Texan.

What information was used to create the Plan?

The Council used multiple sources of data to create the Plan. Stakeholder input and feedback on draft elements were provided through the comprehensive needs assessment in July 2019, from statewide focus groups conducted in August 2019, and from a statewide survey offered in October 2019.

In the late spring of 2019, the Council, using funds from the federal PDG B-5 program, began conducting the Texas Early Learning Needs Assessment with the following objectives:

- Understand the demographics and geographic locations of children from birth through age five in Texas (especially vulnerable and underserved populations), including estimating the unduplicated number of children from birth through age five being served in existing early childhood education (ECE) programs and children awaiting services;
- Understand the current quality and availability of existing ECE programs and facilities in Texas;
- Identify and analyze needs and gaps in providing and accessing ECE programs and services, including barriers to funding and availability of ECE programs and services, opportunities for resource integration and agency collaboration, and other elements; and
- Understand needs and gaps in supports for transitioning children from ECE to elementary schools.

This needs assessment included an analysis of more than 30 existing needs assessments and reports from program/service providers and agencies within Texas' early learning system. It also included an analysis of state and national data and a statewide stakeholder survey that solicited 8,848 responses from individuals representing early childhood programs and services (direct providers), early childhood organizations (non-providers), community organizations/partners, and family members. Findings from the needs assessment are used in the rationale for each of the six goals in the Plan.

The Council began the strategic planning process based on the results of this needs assessment in July of 2019 at a TELC meeting that included rich discussions about the results of the needs assessment and how they might inform strategic planning activities. In August 2019, ten stakeholder focus groups were held with representatives from various constituencies from across the early learning system, including urban and rural families, regional service providers, local service agency representatives, early education administrators and teachers, early childhood special education, home visiting, family services, and regional and state advocacy organizations. These focus groups were used to gather additional



information to build upon what was learned in the needs assessment, to more accurately understand some of the strengths and challenges of the current system from those that are closest to it.

At the September 2019 meeting, the Council continued strategic planning activities by engaging in a two-day process that included:

- A review and discussion of the vision, guiding principles, and goals of the Plan;
- A discussion of strategy areas;
- The identification of strategies related to each goal;
- The prioritization of strategies based on the required effort, the anticipated impact, their urgency and their importance; and
- The creation of an initial timeline for the implementation of strategies.

As a result of this meeting, an additional stakeholder engagement opportunity was implemented using a survey that solicited feedback from key external stakeholder groups on proposed components of the Early Learning Strategic Plan. The survey was used to ensure that the needs of the early childhood community were reflected in the language of the draft vision, guiding principles, goals, and strategy areas of the Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan. The target groups for the stakeholder survey were similar to those identified for the focus groups; these groups included families, education service centers, education providers, workforce development boards, service providers, and advocacy groups. The State tapped into existing networks of programs and providers to reach these populations. In addition, The State encouraged survey completion through printed marketing materials, such as posters with a QR code that linked directly to the survey. In total, 4,143 individuals completed the Texas Early Childhood Strategic Plan—Stakeholder Survey. The majority of participants identified as Direct Providers of Early Childhood Program and Service (N=3,009, 72.63%). There was a strong representation from family members amongst respondents as well (N=654; 15.78%). The results of this survey helped the Council finalize the contents of the Strategic Plan and ensure that it meets the needs of all Texans.

Data Limitations and Future Data Collection Opportunities

The Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan was developed using extensive statewide data collection and analysis activities. Texas is committed to achieving the goals identified by 2025, but also understands the need for this Plan to adapt and evolve based on new evidence, best practices, lessons learned, and newly available data. While a number of data sources were examined for the development of this Plan, there were limitations in data access, quality, and usability. Goal 6 of the Plan has associated strategies specifically designed to improve coordinated data collection activities and the quality of data available for ongoing evaluation of early learning activities in Texas.

Furthermore, current data limitations prevent baseline, interim targets, and 2025 targets from being fully set in some cases. The Texas Early Learning Council and the interagency implementation support team will work in 2020 to overcome these limitation and finalize targets. Targets for which this will occur have an XX within the target statement and/or “to be determined in 2020” as the baseline.

The Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan

Vision and Guiding Principles

Vision for Texas Children

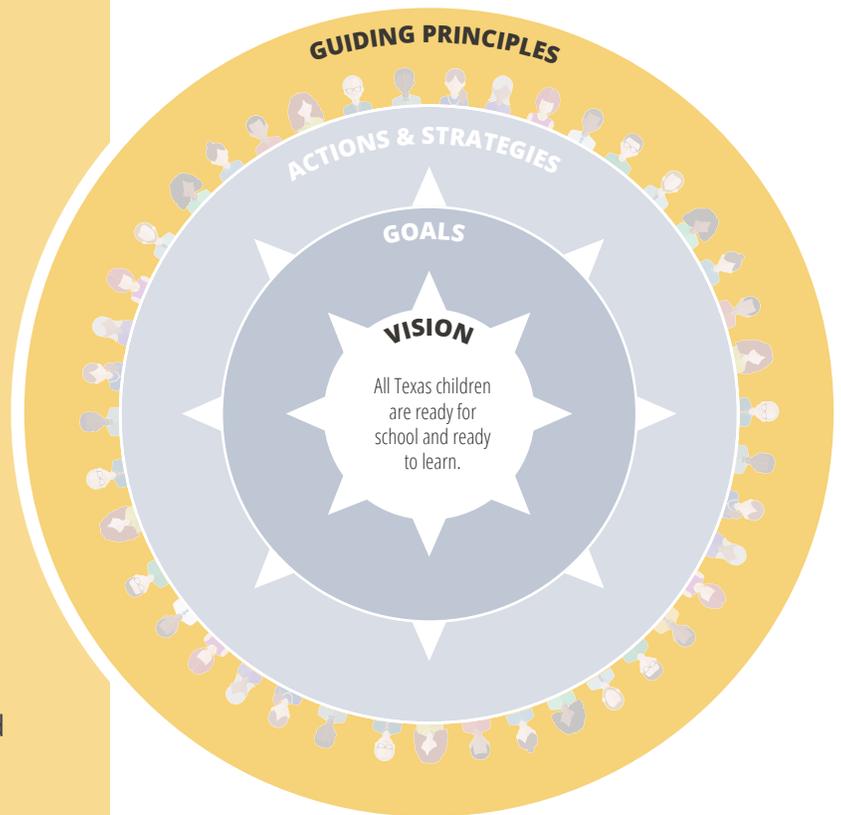
All Texas children are ready for school and ready to learn.

Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles are the fundamental beliefs used throughout the development and implementation of the Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan.

1. High-quality early childhood programs are critical to ensuring that children have the literacy and numeracy skills to succeed in school.
2. A young child's development and well-being, including academic readiness and social readiness, have an impact on their readiness and ability to learn.
3. Families are fundamental to ensuring that their children come to school ready and able to learn.
4. Community services and supports should be efficient, easily accessible, and targeted to meet the needs of children and families.
5. Early childhood professionals are valued and supported as important members of the early learning system and their communities.
6. High-quality programs need highly-qualified staff, professional development opportunities, resources, and support in order to reach and maintain higher levels of quality.
7. Texans at all levels of the early learning system need access to high-quality data to inform their decision making.

Texas Early Learning Strategy & Plan



2020-2025 Goals

Goals

Goal 1: Early childhood programs in Texas are aligned to ensure children are ready to learn by kindergarten.

Goal 2: All families have access to a variety of high-quality programs and the information needed to discern which programs are the best fit for their child.

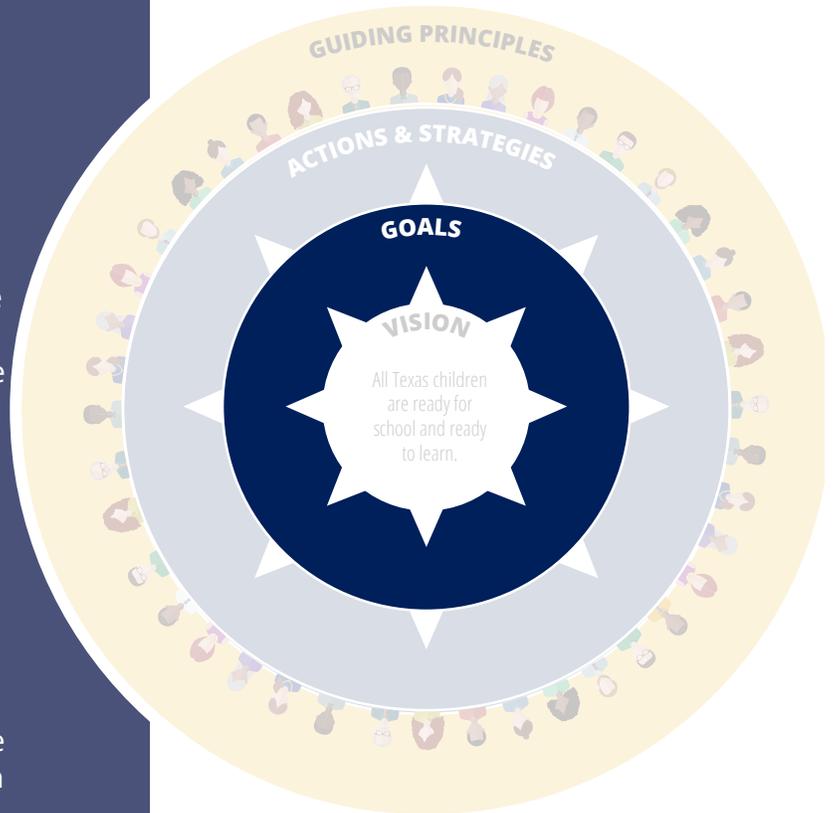
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Goal 4: Early childhood professionals are well-qualified and have access to the supports and training needed to improve kindergarten readiness and the resources to ensure they have a successful career serving children.

Goal 5: Each community has a plan for a coordinated system of early childhood services.

Goal 6: Texas has strong coordination across its early childhood system and the underlying data system to support a high degree of collaboration.

Texas Early Learning Strategy & Plan



GOAL 1: Early childhood programs in Texas are aligned to ensure children are ready and able to learn by kindergarten.

VISION OF SUCCESS

Early childhood programs understand child development and the importance of monitoring and supporting children’s development across a coordinated system of supports and services.

RATIONALE

In the 2017–2018 school year, only 47% of kindergarten students who were assessed demonstrated kindergarten readiness. This increased to 52% in the 2018–2019 school year but does not align with the state’s vision for early childhood, in which all children are kindergarten ready. In addition, kindergarten readiness has not been a standard measure across Texas as local education agencies (LEAs) may select from 14 assessments on the Commissioner’s List of Kindergarten Assessment Instruments.

Recent legislation will address this limitation, as it directs the Commissioner of Education to select one multi-dimensional assessment for all LEAs to use to assess kindergarten readiness. This change will allow for Texas to have a standard measure of readiness across the state and better utilize data to inform decisions, and have a common definition of quality indicators of kindergarten programming. Access to high-quality child care programs is also a challenge; 45% of counties do not contain a Texas Rising Star or nationally-accredited child care provider.

2025 TARGETS

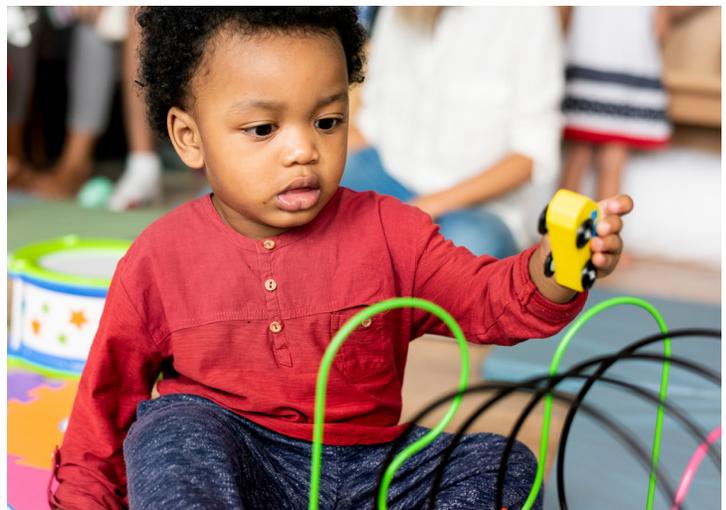
- By 2025, 75% of Texas’ children will be ready for kindergarten.
Baseline: 52%
Interim Target: 65%
- By 2025, the number of completed developmental screeners for children birth to age five will increase by XX%.
Baseline: To be determined in 2020.
Interim Target: To be determined in 2020.

RELATED STRATEGIES

Strategy 1.1: Increase use of developmentally appropriate screening and diagnostics to monitor children’s development and adapt programs to meet children’s needs.

Strategy 1.2: Promote the use of the Texas Early Learning Guidelines and the Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines to inform diagnostic and instruction.

Strategy 1.3: Support educators’ use of formative and summative data to guide children’s development and learning.



GOAL 2: All families have access to a variety of high-quality programs and the information needed to discern which programs are the best fit for their child.

VISION OF SUCCESS

Across the state, Texas families and their children have access to high-quality early childhood programs of their choice. All families have information about the variety of programs and services offered in their communities so that they can make educated choices about programs and services based on their and their child's needs.

RATIONALE

Access to programs and information is a critical component for achieving the vision of this Strategic Plan as families in Texas face a range of challenges in accessing early learning programs and services. According to the Texas Early Learning Needs assessment, these challenges include lack of programs, programs not operating outside of traditional hours, cost, eligibility requirements, and insufficient capacity to meet demand. Families working low-wage jobs often work during non-traditional hours, thus presenting a need for child care during evening, overnight, weekend, or irregular hours. Moreover, while participants reported that programs providers offered similar resources and supports



to communities, they were unable to meet community demand and therefore, have long wait lists. In addition, only 21% of the families reported through the needs assessment that child care services were available in their community outside of the standard operating hours (Monday–Friday 6:00am–6:00pm). Due to a lack of time (e.g., because of working multiple jobs) and lack of awareness of sources for learning about and accessing needed services, it is more difficult for low-income families to take advantage of available services.

Low-income families may also face significant challenges in affording child care, with the average cost of child care in Texas at 29% of the household income for a family living at the poverty level, and 8% of the household income for family living at the state median income level. Programs are also struggling with funding challenges. Focus group participants indicated that many local communities are struggling to meet the demand for supports and services with current funding levels. Even when programs are available, families may not have access to the information they need to choose programs and select the one most appropriate for their child. Families with a household income of less than \$30,000 reported learning about programs and services available in the community mainly through their public schools (38%), family (34%), and co-workers/friends (33%). Relatively-lower percentages reported learning about opportunities from their primary health care provider/family doctor (20%), public spaces (20%), and social services agencies (19%).

The provision of early learning programs across Texas is driven by funding streams from the state, federal, and local levels. Two recent pieces of legislation have contributed to increases in funding for early learning programs in Texas. HB 3 includes the enactment of the Early Education Allotment,

providing weighted funding for each student at the district in kindergarten through third grade who also qualifies for the compensatory education or bilingual allotment. This increase in funding is supporting a range of efforts in early learning, including full-day prekindergarten and high-quality prekindergarten efforts. Additionally, in 2018, Congress passed the Fiscal Year 2018 Omnibus Appropriations Bill, including a \$2.4 billion increase to the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG). As a result, Texas was immediately able to increase child care subsidy reimbursement rates, address child care subsidy waitlists, and increase investments in quality supports to assist child care providers in meeting TRS standards.

Texas is maintaining strong momentum in funding for early learning, due in large part to HB 3 and CCDBG increases. Administrators reported in focus groups that their programs have the opportunity to access various funding sources, including: federal funds (Title I), state funds, Early Head Start and Head Start, and local education agency funds. While it does require additional and intentional effort to adequately align program requirements, braiding funds when possible helps with providing and streamlining services. Stakeholders also identified the multifaceted system of funding as a challenge for the programs and communities working to optimize resources and quality and to effectively prepare children to enter school ready to learn.

2025 TARGETS

- By 2025, there will be an increase in the availability of high-quality early learning programs across Texas' early learning system. Specific targets for program/service providers include:
 - By 2025, XX% of ECI direct service providers will be using the evidence-based practice of coaching families with fidelity
Baseline: To be determined in 2020.
Interim Target: To be determined in 2020.
 - By 2025, 100% of LEAs will conduct a Prekindergarten Program Self-Assessment.
Baseline: To be determined in 2020.
Interim Target: To be determined in 2020.
 - By 2025, the number of repeated serious violations at regulated child care will decrease by 20%
Baseline: Average of 604 serious instances per year for FY17 - FY19
Interim Target: Reduce by 10% by FY22, to fewer than 544 serious violations
- By 2025, a higher proportion of children will receive high-quality child care services, with the goal of 50% of caregivers selecting quality programs for their children.
Baseline: To be determined in 2020.
Interim Target: 40% of enrolled infants and toddlers
- By 2025, Texas will serve at least 60% of income eligible three- and four-year-old children in high-quality early learning programs.
Baseline: 50% of income eligible three- and four-year-old children are served
Interim Target: 55% of income eligible three- and four-year-old children are served
- By 2025, Texas has a coordinated website that provides families with information about the availability of high-quality early childhood programs.

RELATED STRATEGIES

Strategy 2.1: Assess local needs, including rural community needs, and promote and support activities that improve access in local communities.

Strategy 2.2: Improve the quality of programs through evidence-informed practices and approaches.

Strategy 2.3: Increase children and families' access to high-quality programs, supports, and services across the early childhood system.

Strategy 2.4: Establish a centralized point of access for families and providers to retrieve information about the early childhood system.

Strategy 2.5: Educate families about high-quality early learning and how they can access existing programs and services

Strategy 2.6: Incorporate families into planning, administrative, and programmatic operations.

Strategy 2.7: Incentivize quality improvement to increase the number of high-quality programs, supports, and services in Texas available to families.



GOAL 3: Families are equipped with knowledge and tools they need to be their child's primary caregiver.

VISION OF SUCCESS

Families understand their child's needs and the role they play in their child's learning and development. Parents/guardians know where to find and how to access the resources and supports that address their child's needs.

2025 TARGETS

- By 2025, Texas has a coordinated website that provides families information regarding child development.
- By 2025, 100% of LEAs have a prekindergarten family engagement plan.
Baseline: 85% of LEAs
Interim Target: 95% of LEAs
- By 2025, Child Care Licensing will increase their community engagement events by 30% to reach families to inform them of their child care options.
Baseline: Average number of 179 community engagement events per year for FY17 - FY19.
Interim Target: Increase events by 20% by FY22 to 215
- By 2025, the number of families subscribing to Bright by Text will increase by XX%.
Baseline: To be determined in 2020.
Interim Target: To be determined in 2020.

RELATED STRATEGIES

Strategy 3.1: Educate and connect parents and families about what constitutes high-quality early learning, supports and services that are available, and how they can access existing programs and services.

Strategy 3.2: Incorporate families' needs into planning, administrative, and programmatic operations.

Strategy 3.3: Increase families' understanding of the needs of their family and child and the programs, services, and supports available to meet them.

Strategy 3.4: Increase families' access to high-quality programs, supports, and services.

Strategy 3.5: Establish a centralized point of access for families and providers to retrieve information about the early childhood system.

Strategy 3.6: Provide parent and family education opportunities to support positive family-child interactions.

Strategy 3.7: Increase families' understanding of early brain development and strategies they can implement to support optimal development.

RATIONALE

When families are well-equipped with the knowledge of what resources and supports exist in their local and state-level early childhood communities, they are able to address the needs of their child swiftly and effectively. Research indicates that when family members have access to more information and transparent communication they are more likely to be engaged in their child's development; this ultimately yields positive effects on a child's academic, social, and physical-mental health outcomes.¹ Likewise, there is a positive correlation between familial knowledge of child development milestones and the quality of parent-child interactions.²

While there are multiple initiatives in Texas to improve and increase family communication and knowledge, focus group participants expressed a need for additional information about the supports available to them through the Texas early childhood system, and more specifically, what high-quality programs and services look like.

¹ Melissa Dahlin, "State approaches to family engagement in pre-K programs," *New Brunswick*, (2016).

² National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. *Parenting matters: Supporting parents of children ages 0-8*. National Academies Press, 2016.



GOAL 4: Early childhood professionals are well-qualified and have access to the supports and training needed to improve kindergarten readiness and the resources to ensure they have a successful career serving children.

VISION OF SUCCESS

Early childhood professionals across the mixed-delivery system have the supports, training, and skills necessary to ensure that each and every child is ready to learn and ready for school. Texas early childhood professionals have access to a comprehensive career ladder that supports their growth and development within the profession and a well-developed, sustainable, high-quality workforce.

RATIONALE

Children's readiness for kindergarten is, in part, dependent on a well-qualified, sustainable workforce who are able to provide children with high-quality supports and services. The topics of professional development most needed by early childhood program staff include addressing challenging behaviors, supporting children with special needs, and child development/brain development. In focus groups, providers also noted a need for additional training on existing supports and services of local communities and the state to address the multiple needs of children and families. Professional development is important to the field of early learning to support professionals in career development and children's learning and success. However, early learning professionals also report barriers to accessing professional development, including when trainings are conducted, location of trainings, and costs associated. Early learning professionals also reported challenges accessing supports that would help them obtain additional education. Fewer than one third of early childhood program staff reported having access to supports in obtaining additional education. Similarly, early learning professionals report needing additional resources in the program operation areas of staff development, class size, ratios, and family engagement.

2025 TARGETS

- By 2025, the number of master trainers registered through the Texas Trainer Registry will increase by 46%.
Baseline: 325 master registered trainers in the Texas Trainer Registry
Interim Target: 450 master registered trainers
Final Target: 600 master registered trainers
- By 2025, 85% of early learning professionals will access and participate in a variety of high-quality, competency-based pre-service and in-service training and professional development opportunities to meet their needs through the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System.
Baseline: To be determined in 2020.
Interim Target: To be determined in 2020.
- By 2025, the Texas Core Competencies for Early Childhood Practitioners and Administrators will be updated along with the associated career lattice to support the upward mobility of the early childhood workforce.

RELATED STRATEGIES

Strategy 4.1: Provide high-quality professional development opportunities across the early childhood workforce.

Strategy 4.2: Promote participation in state and national professional associations to elevate the field.

Strategy 4.3: Update the Texas Core Competencies for Early Childhood Practitioners and Administrators and the associated career lattice.

Strategy 4.4: Create a centralized point or points of access for providers to retrieve information about the early childhood system including available programs, supports, and services.

Strategy 4.5: Increase the number of early childhood professionals with an account through the workforce registry in the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System.

GOAL 5: Each community has a plan for a coordinated system of early childhood services.

VISION OF SUCCESS

Communities across Texas have a system of early childhood supports and services that are well-organized, aligned, collaborative, and systematically support the development and learning of children within their community.

RATIONALE

In Texas, many decisions about early childhood programs and services are made at the local level. Texas has many examples of strong community-level coordination and collaboration that can be leveraged to share best practices and to build a strong network of community-based early childhood systems. For instance, programs and service providers within a community are collaborating by combining resources like professional development opportunities and facility spaces.

Each child and family are unique and will experience transitions through an early learning program in their own way. Transitions considered in this strategic plan include into an early learning setting, within services, between classrooms, exiting services, and transition to kindergarten. Texas does not have a statewide transition requirement, and therefore supports provided by early childhood programs and services vary across communities and programs.

Early learning partnerships allow all programs across the early learning system to leverage resources, funding, and expertise. There are many factors to consider when establishing early learning partnerships and data related to the existence of partnerships in Texas is limited. However, top barriers to creating partnerships indicated by early learning programs, include:

1. Understaffed/lack of time/lack of availability;
2. Insufficient/uncertain funding;
3. Staff turnover; and
4. Lack of information on how partnerships work

To establish and maintain partnerships, early learning programs and services indicated a need for funding, information about partners, and information about best practices in collaboration. More funding is needed for additional staff, administrative support, supplies, and existing staff salaries to establish and maintain partnerships. Early learning programs and services also noted needing more opportunities to network with other providers and create supports in sustaining partnerships, including the possibility of developing a leadership position dedicated to establishing and maintaining partnerships.

The Texas Early Learning Needs Assessment also identified that the multifaceted system of funding presents challenges to the programs and communities working to optimize resources and quality, who are preparing children to enter school ready to learn. Only 28% of administrators reported they are blending or braiding funding streams. These multiple funding streams, although providing a positive momentum in early learning, also present a challenge in managing regulations and compliance. Each federal and state funding stream has its own specific regulations and reporting requirements. As a result, program administrators face challenges in understanding each set of requirements, and the ability to comply with each funding stream.



2025 TARGETS

- By 2025, the number of community-based early childhood coalitions will increase by 50%.
Baseline: To be determined in 2020.
Interim Target: To be determined in 2020.
- By 2025, the number of LEAs in partnerships with child care providers and/or Head Start programs in which children are co-enrolled will increase by 40%.
Baseline: To be determined in 2020
Interim Target: 20% increase
- By 2025, the number of institutes of higher education who have developed articulation pathways between the Child Development Associate (CDA), and other degree programs will increase by 50%
Baseline: To be determined in 2020.
Interim Target: To be determined in 2020.
- By 2025, the number of high schools offering an early learning program of study through Career and Technical Education will increase by 30%.
Baseline: To be determined in 2020.
Interim Target: To be determined in 2020.

RELATED STRATEGIES

Strategy 5.1: Engage in intentional planning at the community level, informed by local needs and stakeholder input.

Strategy 5.2: Develop and disseminate resources that support the implementation of service delivery models that leverage existing resources and meet community needs, especially in rural communities.

Strategy 5.3: Develop procedures for effective transitions between programs.

Strategy 5.4: Invest in structural and operational support for local systems coordination.

Strategy 5.5: Establish articulation pathways between CDA, associate degree, and bachelor degree programs offered by high schools, community colleges, and colleges and universities.

Strategy 5.6: Support programs in braiding and blending funding streams to maximize resources to increase kindergarten readiness.

GOAL 6: Texas has strong coordination across its early childhood system and the underlying data system to support a high degree of collaboration.

VISION OF SUCCESS

Texas presents a unified vision and message about the importance of early childhood. Texas has a successfully coordinated early childhood system with established policies and procedures, and clear lines of decision-making authority and established efficient and cohesive policies and practices. This includes the collection and use of data across multiple agencies and programs.

RATIONALE

The Texas Early Learning Needs Assessment indicated a multitude of initiatives and opportunities available from state agencies to improve early learning programs, however, these are not well communicated, available in every part of the state, or well-coordinated with other initiatives currently underway. Through the needs assessment and stakeholder feedback, it is clear that there continues to be different sets of standards for programs to follow. Head Start and Early Head Start programs must comply with the Head Start Performance Standards set by the Office of Head Start within the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; public prekindergarten must comply with the High-Quality Prekindergarten Components in the Texas Education Code and Texas Administrative Code; child care providers must follow the Minimum Standards for Child Care Licensing established by the HHSC; and child care providers who accept child care subsidies may voluntarily participate in TRS, for which associated standards are established by the TWC. Coordination at the local level needs support from the state agencies, which in turn requires planning and coordination at the state level to provide meaningful guidance. Currently, this process is coordinated, but there is recognition that there is a need for a more formal approach to this coordination and collaboration in order to meet the goals outlined in this Plan.

The stakeholder feedback also indicated a need for coordination across early childhood data systems within state agencies. There are currently limitations with the availability of data, data sharing, and data use. For example, data related to a child's learning and development prior to kindergarten entry is limited. LEAs assess prekindergarten students and report assessment data to TEA, but assessment data for children in community child care or Head Start is not regularly reported. Adequate data is not collected in other parts of the early childhood system as well. For example, data related to program quality is not collected for all programs that have quality standards. At the provider level, participation in the Texas Workforce Registry is low and limited data is collected and connected to those who are registered. Limitations also exist with sharing data between ECI and LEAs to provide a continuum of services to children transitioning between programs.

Additionally, limitations exist with data sharing between early childhood programs and service providers in the community. This includes data on a child's participation in prior early childhood programs or services. Children's participation in early childhood programs and services prior to kindergarten cannot always be linked at kindergarten entry. As a result of these data challenges, the use of data to inform policy and program decisions at the state level is limited due to the lack of data collection regarding measures such as capacity, program quality, and waitlists. A portion of this challenge will be addressed by new legislation. Under House Bill 680, passed during the 86th Legislature, TEA and the Texas Workforce Commission will be working together to assign TEA's unique identifier from PEIMS (Public Education Information Management System) to children five and under enrolled in subsidized child care.

Moreover, although multiple funding streams provide opportunities in early learning, they also present a challenge in managing regulations and compliance. Each federal and state funding stream has its own specific regulations and reporting requirements. As a result, program administrators face challenges in understanding each set of requirements and the ability to comply with each funding stream.

2025 TARGETS

- By 2025, the Texas early childhood system will have established policies and procedures for accountability, decision-making authority and coordination across state-level agencies that house early childhood programs.
- By 2025, Texas will have an early childhood integrated data system that meets the needs of policy makers, families, and providers.
- By 2025, Texas' early childhood data system will link data points related to kindergarten readiness and other transition indicators from and across the early learning system.

RELATED STRATEGIES

Strategy 6.1: Align administrative processes across state agencies that affect early childhood programs.

Strategy 6.2: Establish processes and procedures for effective cross-agency coordination that include strategies for reducing duplicative efforts and efficiently utilizing resources.

Strategy 6.3: Assess and promote opportunities for leveraging existing funding streams, identifying new funding sources, and streamlining funding when possible.

Strategy 6.4: Increase understanding of quality across program settings and implications for partnership opportunities.

Strategy 6.5: Leverage HB 680 to build the foundation for an early childhood integrated data system.

Strategy 6.6: Strengthen data sharing across agencies to better inform state-level policy and program improvement.

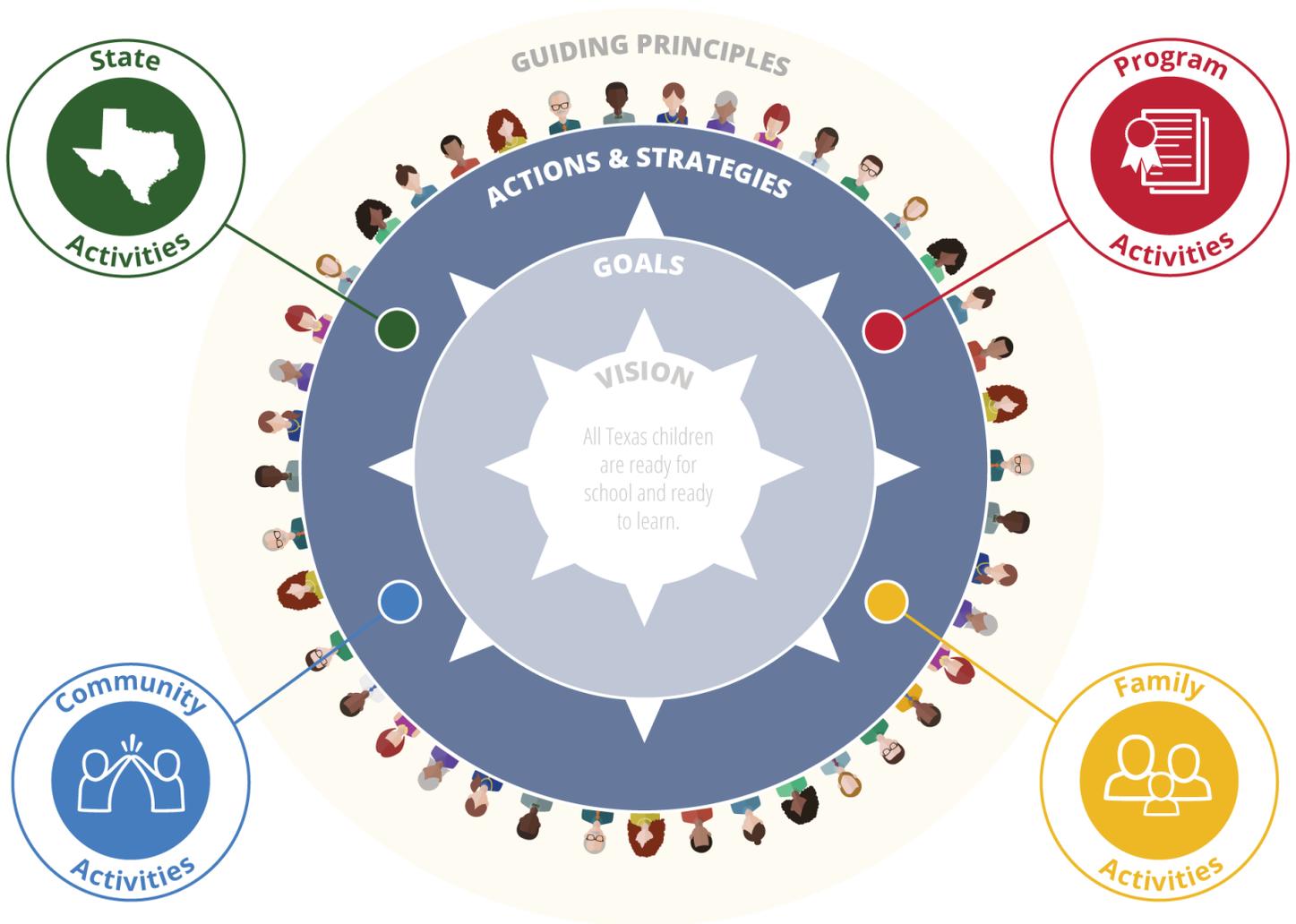
Strategy 6.7: Support communities and stakeholders in utilizing data provided through existing data platforms to inform quality improvement and systems planning at the local level.



Moving from Goals to Actions: Activities for All Texans

In the sections above, each of the six goals of the Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan identified related strategies. Each of these strategies may be addressed by activities that occur at multiple levels of the system and can involve individuals from the state, local communities, programs, and families. Due to the interconnected work of all aspects of the early learning system, many of the activities identified in the Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan address more than one Goal. The tables on the pages that follow outline the activities identified by the Council that each and every Texan can take to support the success of the Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan. The activities are grouped by the main actor in each: the State, local communities, individual early childhood programs, and families of young children.

Texas Early Learning Strategy & Plan



State Activities and the goals they support:

- Support prekindergarten programs with the implementation of required quality components in HB 3. (Goals 1, 2, 5, and 6)
- Continue to support efforts to increase the number of subsidized child care providers participating in Texas Rising Star by reviewing and assessing whether barriers to entry and to remaining in TRS are contributing to a quality system; analyze the child care licensing deficiency system and its impact on participation in TRS versus the goal of keeping children in safe, high-quality environments. (Goals 1 and 2)
- Increase access to child progress monitoring for subsidized child care providers through the TWC Individualized Assessment Project. (Goals 1 and 4)
- Align child care licensing standards and TRS standards. (Goals 2 and 6)
- Update and disseminate the Texas Early Childhood Program Standards Comparison Tool which was developed by the Head Start Collaboration Office. (Goals 2, 5, and 6)
- Share information about how each state agency's early childhood programs define quality and how these high-quality programs improve child outcomes. Align standards where possible to simplify regulatory requirements. (Goals 1, 2, and 6)
- Promote initiatives that improve quality in programs and services. Goals 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6
- Use data from the integrated data system to look for potential areas of improvement and design activities that result in more high-quality programs around the state. (Goals 2, 5, and 6)
- Leverage integrated data between state agencies to understand kindergarten readiness of children transitioning from early childhood programs into kindergarten (Goals 1, 5, and 6)
- Review, leverage, and expand/modify, as needed, existing platforms for consumer education including the current pilot coordinated enrollment systems, Texas Child Care Search, Texasrisingstar.org, 211 Texas, and Help Me Grow. (Goals 2 and 3)
- Implement communication strategies and communication campaigns to engage families. (Goals 2 and 3)
- Create communication strategies and training to support teacher and provider partnerships with families. Goals (2 and 4)
- Create and disseminate cross-agency information about developmental milestones and ways that families and communities can support children's learning and development. (Goals 1, 3, 5, and 6)
- Provide families with data and information on program quality and kindergarten readiness. (Goals 1, 2, and 3)
- Disseminate and provide support for the use of TEA's Partnership Guide Book, which provides guidance on creating partnerships and allowing for braiding and blending of funds. (Goals 2, 5, and 6)
- Review and consider the expansion of the DFPS model for providing technical assistance to communities to increase coordination and collaboration at the local level. (Goals 5 and 6)
- Spotlight community opportunities, including strong examples of articulation agreements; leverage these examples to learn their process and assist other communities with establishing articulation agreements. (Goals 5 and 6)

- Develop and disseminate resources that support the implementation of service delivery models that leverage existing resources and meet community needs, especially in rural communities. (Goals 2, 5, and 6)
- Provide and promote opportunities for local communities to come together to learn from one another, from state staff, and from experts as they strive to improve coordination and collaboration in their own communities. (Goals 5 and 6)
- Establish learning opportunities and engagement to support community programs' relationship building. (Goals 5 and 6)
- Explore innovative solutions to increasing the number of eligible infants and toddlers served in high-quality programs and services. (Goals 2, 5, and 6)
- Understand regional costs of providing quality care for infants and toddlers and the extent to which savings from utilizing Foundation School Program Funds to support eligible three- and four-year-olds can be used to increase child care subsidy reimbursement rates for infants and toddlers. (Goals 5 and 6)
- Support rural communities in creating innovative program models to help serve children and families in rural areas in which programs do not exist. (Goals 2, 5, and 6)
- Share local successes and challenges across the state to support building strong local early childhood systems across communities. (Goals 5 and 6)
- Create guidance documents to support establishing and maintaining partnerships in local communities. (Goals 2, 5, and 6)
- Create guidance documents to support braiding and blending funding at the local level. (Goals 2, 5, and 6)
- Establish opportunities and engagement to support improving and enhancing local communities' efficiencies and effective use of resources. (Goals 5 and 6)
- Facilitate opportunities to gather input from local communities to inform state policy and practice. Align professional development opportunities to better meet the needs of early learning programs. (Goals 4, 5, and 6)
- Hold Local Workforce Development Boards accountable for creating plans and goals for improving access to high-quality child care (including infant and toddler care) to meet demand in all areas of their region. (Goals 2, 5, and 6)
- Utilize the Inter-Agency Deputy Director to support coordination and alignment across the early learning system. (Goal 6)
- Assess the current system for unnecessary overlap in regulations to streamline administrative functions. (Goal 6)
- Develop policies and procedures that outline the accountability, decision-making, and data sharing responsibilities for state agencies governing early childhood programs. (Goal 6)
- Maximize existing federal and state funding through coordinating projects and programs to reduce duplicative efforts. (Goal 6)
- Increase outreach and awareness of the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System. (Goals 4 and 6)

- Increase outreach and awareness about state-funded professional development and education supports such as CLI Engage, T.E.A.C.H., the Texas Early Learning Summit, Texas AgriLife Extension Coursework, TEA monthly webinars, ECI Online Training Models, PEI Online Training Modules, CPS Online Modules, and training opportunities through ESCs, LWDBs and the Texas Trainer Registry. (Goals 4, 5, and 6)
- Increase the coordination and availability of opportunities for child care teachers to earn their CDA and associate degree through professional development partnerships that are funded by TWC. (Goals 4, 5, and 6)
- Increase access to the new Early Childhood: Prekindergarten – Grade Three teacher certification. (Goals 4 and 6)
- Disseminate the Texas Core Competencies for Early Childhood Practitioners and Administrators and identify ways to integrate it into other statewide work. (Goals 4 and 6)
- Increase use of the Texas Workforce Registry and the Texas Trainer Registry. (Goals 4 and 6)
- Increase articulation pathways between CDA, associate degrees, and bachelor's degrees beginning with CTE coursework in high schools. (Goals 4, 5, and 6)
- Incentivize high schools to offer CDAs and associate degrees. (Goals 4, 5, and 6)
- Identify financial resources to subsidize high-quality trainings for child development centers. (Goals 4, 5, and 6)
- Leverage the authority in HB 680 for TEA to assign a unique identifier to children receiving child care subsidies to help achieve an unduplicated count of children being served across programs and services. (Goal 6)
- Leverage authority provided in HB 680 to assign unique identifiers to children receiving early learning services that align with TEA PEIMS numbers to build the foundation for an integrated early childhood data system across additional state agencies. (Goal 6)
- Identify opportunities to expand the unique identifier system to other agencies/programs that express interest. (Goal 6)
- Support the development of a data governance body inclusive of all state agencies. (Goal 6)
- Develop a list of policy and practice questions that should be answered to inform the ongoing improvement of the early childhood system in the state. (Goal 6)
- Develop a plan for regular data analysis and continuous quality improvement among state agencies. (Goal 6)

Community Activities and the goals they support:

- Encourage all child care providers with a child care subsidy agreement to participate in Texas Rising Star. (Goals 2, 4, and 5)
- Come together as a community of early childhood programs, including early care and learning programs, family support, home visiting, health, mental health, and nutrition services and share what high-quality means in each of the different types of programs. (Goals 2 and 5)
- Develop and disseminate information about the standards of quality in all early childhood programs to raise community awareness. (Goals 2 and 5)
- Expand the reach of programs and services available in your communities to serve more children. (Goals 2 and 5)
- Promote positive familial outcomes by engaging caregivers in outreach activities tailored to children who are experiencing risks factors of childhood adversity such as homelessness, foster care placement, and poverty. (Goals 2, 3, and 5)
- Include families in the community action planning and base the plan's activities for promoting child development on the concerns and priorities of the families in the community. (Goal 5)
- Hold community fairs that focus on healthy growth and development, and invite all early childhood care and learning, family support, and health, mental health, and nutrition services in your community to participate and to share information and resources with families. (Goals 2, 3, and 5)
- Plan community activities that focus on promoting the development of families' knowledge as their child's first teacher. Include families in the planning of these events so they are tailored to families' specific needs and are more likely to be events they will attend. (Goals 3 and 5)
- Ensure that families have access to services that promote their health and well-being, such as screenings, nutrition consultations, and mental health services. (Goal 3)
- Coordinate waitlists across local programs and services to maximize the number of children and families served. (Goals 2, 4, and 5)
- Support relationship building across early learning programs. (Goal 5)
- Determine resources needed by programs to establish and maintain transition activities. (Goals 1, 4, and 5)
- Explore opportunities for collaboration, align and host joint professional development opportunities in your community to better meet the needs of early learning programs and services. (Goals 4 and 5)
- Identify the needs of families through family- and community-driven conversations and outreach activities. (Goals 3 and 5)
- Determine the availability of additional funding across program types to serve additional children. (Goals 5 and 6)
- Support the development and increase the use of shared services alliances to maximize cost savings to early learning programs and more efficiently utilize existing funds. Invest savings from shared service alliances into increased compensation. (Goals 5 and 6)

- Proactively share needs for information, guidance, and resources with state lead agencies. (Goals 4, 5, and 6)
- Share local action plans with state lead agencies and invite feedback, support or information related to the plan. Share updates and progress with state lead agency representatives as well. (Goals 5 and 6)
- Work with regional programs and other initiatives to stay connected to other work going on in the state. (Goals 5 and 6)
- Stay up to date on the coordination activities occurring at the state level and determine which may be modified to support coordination and alignment within your community. (Goals 5 and 6)
- Assess your current system for inefficiencies to streamline administrative functions.(Goal 5)
- Create a community action plan that focuses on coordination across community programs, promotes purposeful collaboration and communication between partners, and aligns with state efforts. (Goal 5)
- Assess the professional development and resource needs of early childhood educators and service providers in your area. Use this information to plan joint professional development opportunities. (Goals 4 and 5)
- Encourage and support community colleges and universities to work together to establish articulation pathways for students attending programs in your local area.(Goals 4 and 5)
- Assess what data is currently available in your community across programs. (Goal 5)
- Develop a list of policy and practice questions to be answered with the data and determine if the data to answer those questions is available. (Goal 5)
- Request assistance from the state to access, use, and understand data that is available through data-sharing agreements, or is publicly available. (Goals 5 and 6)
- Consider developing a data committee whose purpose it is to look at data regularly and to look for successes and progress as well as areas in need of improvement. (Goal 5)

Program Activities and the goals they support:

- Engage in conversations with families to understand their unique needs and how they can be best supported in a manner they prefer. (Goal 3)
- Identify and use evidence-based practices in your program to improve the quality of the experiences of young children. (Goals 1, 2, and 4)
- Participate in Texas Rising Star and work towards achieving the 4-star level if a center with a child care subsidy agreement. (Goals 1 and 2)
- Share information with and create opportunities and resources for families about developmental milestones for children birth through age five to increase awareness of what children of this age know and are doing. Share how the program is offering high-quality experiences for children and supporting caregivers in preparing their children for school. (Goals 1 and 3)
- Provide families with opportunities and resources to support their knowledge of child development and to help them understand what they can do to promote their child's learning at home. (Goal 3)
- Engage in outreach activities for families/guardians with children birth through age five who are experiencing homelessness, in foster care, or are living in high levels of poverty (or are experiencing other risk factors that lead to childhood adversity) to participate in your programs and services. (Goals 2 and 3)
- Define and incentivize a continuum of family participation and leadership in the program (for example, volunteering in classrooms or being on planning committees). (Goal 3)
- Utilize Act Early Texas, a free developmental screening website through UT Health Science Center at Houston to screen children for developmental disabilities. (Goals 1 and 3)
- Provide families with information about other programs, services and supports when waitlisting a family. (Goals 2, 3, and 5)
- Adjust program hours to align with family work schedules. (Goals 2 and 5)
- Create transition plans and establish transition meetings/coalitions across programs and communities. (Goals 1 and 5)
- Participate in local planning activities. Volunteer to work on joint projects or workgroups within your community or with regional and state agencies. (Goal 5)
- Sign up for listservs and newsletters that share information about other programs and services offered at the state level, as well as in the community. (Goals 2 and 5)
- Establish partnerships that braid and blend funding to support high-quality early learning. (Goals 2 and 5)
- Determine and coordinate early learning program capacity and work together to identify enrollment gaps of eligible three- and four-year-old children. (Goals 2 and 5)
- Coordinate waitlist data among programs and services. (Goals 2 and 5)
- Outline differences in program requirements between the LEA, Head Start and/or child care center. (Goals 2 and 5)

- Assist teachers in creating and maintaining a workforce account through the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System. (Goal 4)
- Use the Texas Trainer Registry through the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System to identify highly qualified trainers who can provide training related to the topics identified as areas of need. (Goal 4)
- Provide administrative support to staff's pursuit of CDAs and higher education to increase the level of education of staff in subsidized child care centers. (Goal 4)
- Establish apprenticeship programs to train and retain qualified staff. (Goal 4)
- Use diagnostic tools to monitor children's progress and make instructional decisions. (Goals 1 and 4)
- Use data from the Texas Kindergarten Entry Assessment (TX-KEA) to adjust program goals and instruction to better prepare children for kindergarten. (Goals 1, 4, and 5)

Family Activities and the goals they support:

- Ask your early care and learning providers, or other service providers, how they define quality. Ask for information that shows how their program benefits your family and your child. (Goals 2 and 3)
- Ask your early childhood educators or service providers for information about your child's development as well as the milestones and behaviors you could be seeing next in your child's development. (Goal 3)
- Let your early childhood educators or service providers know what kinds of ongoing information you would like about your child's progress in their program. (Goal 3)
- Participate in early learning activities in your community, such as library reading times, community fairs, and programs at parks to learn about child development and to enhance what your child is learning at home and in their early childhood programs. (Goal 3)
- Connect with other families in your community to share and solve challenges, look into resources, and plan activities to support your children. (Goals 3 and 5)
- Talk with your local leadership about the importance of aligning and coordinating services in your community and ask for their support to promote better coordination and collaboration across programs and services. (Goals 2 and 5)
- Connect your own service providers together by having a joint meeting or call or introducing them to each other via social media or email. (Goals 1, 2, 3, and 5)
- Learn about your local community's action plan and ask about opportunities to work with your community on the activities in the plan. (Goal 5)
- Sign up for listservs and newsletters that share information about other programs and services offered at the state level, as well as in your community. (Goals 2 and 3)
- Ask your early childhood educators and/or service providers about what they know about what's happening in your community and in the state. Follow up with internet searches to learn more. (Goals 5 and 6)

- Ask your providers and early childhood education professionals how they intend to coordinate with one another as they work with your family. (Goals 2, 3, and 5)
- Ask questions about what other resources are available when you are put on a waitlist or told that a service is not available. (Goals 2 and 3)
- Ask your early childhood educators and service providers about their background working with young children, including their education and experience. (Goals 2 and 4)
- Talk with program leaders about the importance of ongoing professional development in early childhood and ask them to support staff in their program's effort to further their learning and education. (Goals 4 and 5)
- Request how to access publicly available data about your community or the state to learn more about what is being collected and measured. (Goal 2)
- Ask questions about the use of your child's data when you sign consent forms. (Goals 1 and 3)
- Participate in local community groups that look at data and make decisions about what to do next based on what they see. (Goal 5)

Sustainability Plan

The Council's Vision for the Sustainability of the Work

The Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan is intended to be a living document. The Texas Early Learning Council and the Interagency Implementation Support Team will support the implementation of the Plan throughout the Texas early learning system. Both the Council and the Interagency Implementation Support Team will ensure that the strategies and activities in the Plan are sustainable beyond the five-years articulated in the Plan. As the Plan is executed, the Council and the Interagency Implementation Support Team will review and update, as needed, the activities for each and every Texan to support at all levels of the system identified in the strategy areas. By continuing to identify how all Texans can support the implementation of the Early Learning Strategic Plan and by engaging in a cycle of continuous improvement, the Council will ensure that there is shared ownership of the Plan, that there is an ongoing effort to keep the Plan up to date, and that the activities and initiatives undertaken as part of this work are sustainable beyond the life of the Plan.

Ongoing Stakeholder Engagement

The Council will continue to be the overarching stakeholder group that is responsible for monitoring the activities and for providing feedback about stakeholder needs during the implementation. As a coordinated body, this group has the greatest potential to model the collaboration and communication needed for Plan activities to be successful. They will also be the group to whom data on progress indicators will be sent, and who will recommend adjustments, additions to activities, and course corrections to the Plan over the five-year implementation period.

Throughout implementation, the Council will continue to solicit input and feedback from stakeholders across the state, including families of young children and the professionals who serve them. As appropriate, surveys and focus groups will be used to determine if Plan activities are having the positive impact desired, and are resulting in the type of change indicated as needed to improve the system. Texas stakeholders at large are very responsive and are willing to participate in feedback sessions and surveys, but care will be taken to not overly tax the field to the point of fatigue. The Council will also ensure that feedback loops that are open to the public will close with information shared about decisions made based on feedback.

Community Opportunities

The Council understands the importance of working closely with communities throughout the state of Texas to implement this Plan, and to support and leverage existing work and pockets of excellence and innovation. For each strategy area, the Council has identified specific activities that communities can implement to achieve the state's early learning vision and ways in which the state and local programs can intersect with and support that work.

In addition, the Council recognizes that the State will need to take certain steps to initiate and maintain this purposeful connection between the state and local programs. In 2020, TEA will be sponsoring a set of Community Convenings, which are opportunities for groups of 20 urban communities and 20 rural communities to participate in their own early learning strategic planning process. Over the course of several months, these groups will participate in virtual professional learning communities, webinars, and a three-day conference with follow-up activities to develop their own community-wide early learning strategic plans. Each community will be supported in the identification of a local-level leadership team that will oversee the development and implementation of a plan aligned to the statewide Early Learning Strategic Plan.

Based on the goals, strategies, and activities identified in this Plan, the Council will continue to identify and support opportunities for communities to leverage existing resources and promote new and existing partnerships. This will be a regular part of Council meeting agendas, and will use the data that is available through the improved data system outlined in Goal 6. Additional information about how the Council will support this iterative process is provided in the next section.

Monitoring and Reporting Progress Plan

The successful implementation of the Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan relies in part on the ongoing evaluation of the implementation of the Plan and the state's progress towards achieving the goals identified in the Plan. The following section outlines the steps the state, led by the Council, will take to assess progress towards achieving the goals of the Plan.

Oversight of the Plan's Implementation

The Council will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Early Learning Strategic Plan. This oversight includes regularly revisiting the Plan as part of the Council's quarterly meetings and soliciting input from state agency representatives and other relevant stakeholders on progress towards implementation of the Plan. Progress reports will include: updates on progress towards implementing identified strategies and their associated timelines; a review of progress towards target metrics for each goal as data is available; and a review of challenges and opportunities that have arisen through the implementation of the Plan. The use of the Council as an oversight body will ensure that individuals with the knowledge, skills, and roles necessary to support effective implementation are engaged.



Evaluation of the Relevance and Appropriateness of the Goals and Strategies

The development of the goals and strategies outlined in this Strategic Plan was based on an extensive statewide needs assessment and other stakeholder engagement activities that examined the needs of individuals, programs, and communities across Texas. As part of the implementation of this Plan the Council will make recommendations for additional data collection and analysis activities as needed to clarify the results of the needs assessments, expand upon the data collected in the needs assessments, and/or any new data collection and analysis activities as needed to inform the ongoing implementation of the Plan. These activities will inform an examination of the Plan's goals and strategies in relation to current performance and activities and initiatives across the state. The purpose of these analyses is not to overhaul the Plan but rather to ensure that the Council and other statewide stakeholders are able to update the Plan as needed and that it remains a relevant, actionable tool to support increased school readiness.

Progress Indicators for the Relevance and Appropriateness of the Plan's Goals and Strategies

- At least annually, for each goal, a review of the goal and its alignment with current initiatives
- At least annually, for each goal, a review of the state's progress towards achieving identified targets and adjustments to the goal and/or strategies as needed based on that analysis
- At least annually, for each goal, a review of data sources (including potential new sources of data) used to measure progress towards the goal
- At least annually, a review of extant data in light of the Plan's goals, targets, and strategies to ensure identified needs are being addressed
- At least annually, collection of input and feedback from key stakeholders on the Plan's goals and strategies and their relevance and appropriateness for the field
- At least annually, an analysis of statewide activities that potentially align with the Early Learning Strategic Plan to ensure alignment and that opportunities for collaboration and coordination are maximized

Evaluation of the Implementation of the Plan

Ensuring the sustainability of the Early Learning Strategic Plan also requires evaluation of the implementation of the Plan, including an ongoing evaluation of the extent to which the Plan is being implemented as intended and reflection on opportunities to refine implementation as needed. The Council will oversee the evaluation of the implementation of the Plan through regular updates from the agencies responsible for implementing individual strategies and ongoing stakeholder data collection activities.

Progress Indicators for the Implementation of the Plan

- At least annually, for each goal, the number of strategies implemented and their implementation status.
- At least annually, a report from participating agencies on the challenges and opportunities they have encountered through the implementation of the Plan with recommendations for updates and/or revisions as needed.
- At least annually, the collection and analysis of stakeholder input about the implementation of the Plan at all levels of the early learning system to inform ongoing implementation and changes as necessary.

Appendix

Acronyms in the Plan

CDA	Child Development Associate
CLI	Children’s Learning Institute
DSHS	Texas Department of State Health Services
ECSE	Early Childhood Special Education Services
HHSC	Texas Health and Human Services Commission
LEA	Local Education Agency
PDG B-5	Preschool Development Grant Birth-Five
PEI/DFPS	The Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) Division at the Department of Family and Protective Services
TEA	Texas Education Agency
TRS	Texas Rising Star
TWC	Texas Workforce Commission

Definitions of Key Terminology

Access

Families, with reasonable effort and affordability, can enroll their child in an arrangement that supports the child's development and meets the parents' needs.

Collaboration

Individuals across the early childhood sector work with one another in an organized manner to accomplish specific goals/tasks.

Coordination

A governance model where different parts and programs of the early childhood system are connected in a meaningful, comprehensive way.

Early Learning

Early childhood care and education programs/services that provide learning opportunities and experiences to children before kindergarten.

Early Childhood Care and Education Availability

The presence of early childhood care and education programs/services within a given geographic area.

Early Childhood System

An overarching system consisting of programs and service operators targeting pregnant women and families with children birth through age three.

Efficient Use of Resources

Materials (staff and funding) are used in a non-duplicative way, and reach the largest number of children and families with the lowest possible effort.

Equity

Equity is the notion that each and every person will receive the necessary resources he/she needs individually to thrive.

Facilities

Defined space that is currently being used for early childhood care/education programs and/or services.

Family

Adults responsible for the child's care and children in the child's life who support the early learning and development of the child.

Goals

Broad statements that describe the intended results or directions the State would like to take.

High-quality Early Childhood Programs

A program that meets or exceeds evidence-based standards (i.e., program, personnel, content, or operational), has demonstrated outcomes (academic, behavioral, developmental) for children and a way of measuring said outcomes. High-quality programs/services are aligned with best practices, have high implementation fidelity, undergo continuous improvement, have a well-qualified staff (educational/professional qualifications), and have consumers who are satisfied with the program/service.

High-quality Staff

Early childhood professionals possess the necessary education and/or professional experience qualifications needed to provide high-quality services to children and families.

Integrated Data System

A data system that links individual-level data from multiple early childhood agencies, programs and service providers.

Kindergarten Readiness

Children are developmentally and academically prepared to participate in kindergarten programming.

Parent Education

Programs focused on improving parenting practices and behaviors, such as developing and practicing positive discipline techniques, learning age-appropriate child development skills and milestones, and promoting positive interactions between parents and children.

Participation

Involvement and engagement in early childhood programs and services.

Partnerships

Partnerships refer to intentional collaboration between two or more individuals, organizations, and/

or programs.

Professional Development

Learning and support activities designed to prepare individuals for work with and on behalf of young children and their families. Professional development encompasses education training and technical assistance (TA), which leads to improvements in the knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions of early education professionals.

Rural Area

A rural area is considered all populations, housing or territories that are neither urbanized areas (50,000+ people) nor urban clusters (population greater than 2,5000 and less than 50,000) as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Stakeholders

Those individuals within the state and community who are impacted by or who may have an impact on early learning.

Transition to Kindergarten

The processes, policies, structures, services, and supports associated with a child moving from early childhood education and/or care programs to kindergarten.

Unduplicated Count

Each child receiving services is counted once and only once in reporting.

Vulnerable or Underserved Children

Children who meet income eligibility requirements established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, children in foster care, and/or children experiencing homelessness.

Workforce

Individuals engaged in the care and education of young children, including: teaching, caregiving, and administrative staff, as well as consultants, learning specialists, and others who provide professional development, training, and technical assistance to programs.



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