TEXAS EARLY LEARNING COUNCIL

Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan

2024 – 2026

Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan 2024-2026

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Document Acronyms

CDA, Child Development Associate

CLI, Children's Learning Institute

CTE, Career and Technical Education

DFPS, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services

DSHS, Texas Department of State Health Services

ECI, Early Childhood Intervention

ECIDS, Early Childhood Integrated Data System

ECIW, Early Childhood Interagency Workgroup

HHSC, Texas Health and Human Services Commission

HIPPY, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters

IDEA, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

LEA, Local Education Agency

PDG B-5, Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five

PEER, Professionalism Engagement Empowerment Resources

PEI, Prevention and Early Intervention

RA, Registered Apprenticeships

THSSCO, Texas Head Start State Collaboration Office

TEA, Texas Education Agency

TECPDS, Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System

TWC, Texas Workforce Commission

TELC, Texas Early Learning Council

Introduction

The Texas Early Learning System

All children are born ready to learn, and with a safe, stable, and nurturing support system, all children can thrive.[1] Early childhood experiences affect lifelong health and learning.[2] To meet the needs of the over 1.8 million families in Texas with children under the age of five, the Texas Early Learning System offers an array of services, programs, and resources across six state entities. Working alongside these entities is the Early Childhood Interagency Workgroup (ECIW), which consists of state entity representation, including DFPS, HHSC, TEA, and TWC, and the governor-appointed Texas Early Learning Council (TELC). TELC is Texas' State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care and consists of various early learning representatives. TELC representation includes state entities that provide early learning resources, higher education, advocates, nonprofits, business, and the early learning workforce, including child care providers. Please note that the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) also provides important services and programs like the Child and Adult Food Care Program (CACFP) that are vital to children and families, but TDA was not directly involved in plan development.

The following table on the following page lists the early learning state and system entities and the early learning services and programs they provide children and families.

Table 1. The Texas Early Learning System

Early Learning State and System Entities	Early Learning Services and Programs
Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS)	Child Protective Services Family Education and Support Services* Texas Home Visiting*
Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS)	Maternal and Child Public Health Initiatives
Texas Head Start Collaboration Office (THSSCO)	Early Head Start Head Start
Texas Education Agency (TEA)	Early Childhood Special Education Public Pre-kindergarten
Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)	Child Care Services Texas Rising Star
Early Childhood Interagency Workgroup (ECIW)	Not Applicable
Texas Early Learning Council (TELC)	Not Applicable

*Family Education and Support Services and Texas Home Visiting will be moved to the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) on September 1st, 2024.

Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan 2024-2026

To improve early childhood outcomes in Texas, the Texas Early Learning System proposes the following vision, goals, strategies, and actions for the years 2024 to 2026.

Through funding from the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) Renewal,[3] TWC contracted with the Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing at The Steve Hicks School of Social Work at The University of Texas at Austin to facilitate the strategic plan process. This process was a continuation of the 2019 strategic planning process and plan. This process took place from April–December of 2023 and was informed by:

- Three strategic planning sessions with the Texas Early Learning Council;
- Active engagement of family and early learning workforce stakeholders utilizing human-centered design tools such as focus groups, confidential and video recorded interviews, blogs and writing prompts, surveys, information mapping, persona profiles, and gallery walks to elicit and present rich qualitative data about current experiences within the early learning system;
- Coordination and consideration of the concurrent statewide early childhood needs assessment findings, which included surveys and focus groups with families, workforce, and coalition stakeholders, and included other state and federal data, needs assessments, research, policy scans, and funding analysis;[4] and
- A content scan of current early learning state entity strategic plans and documents.[5-17]
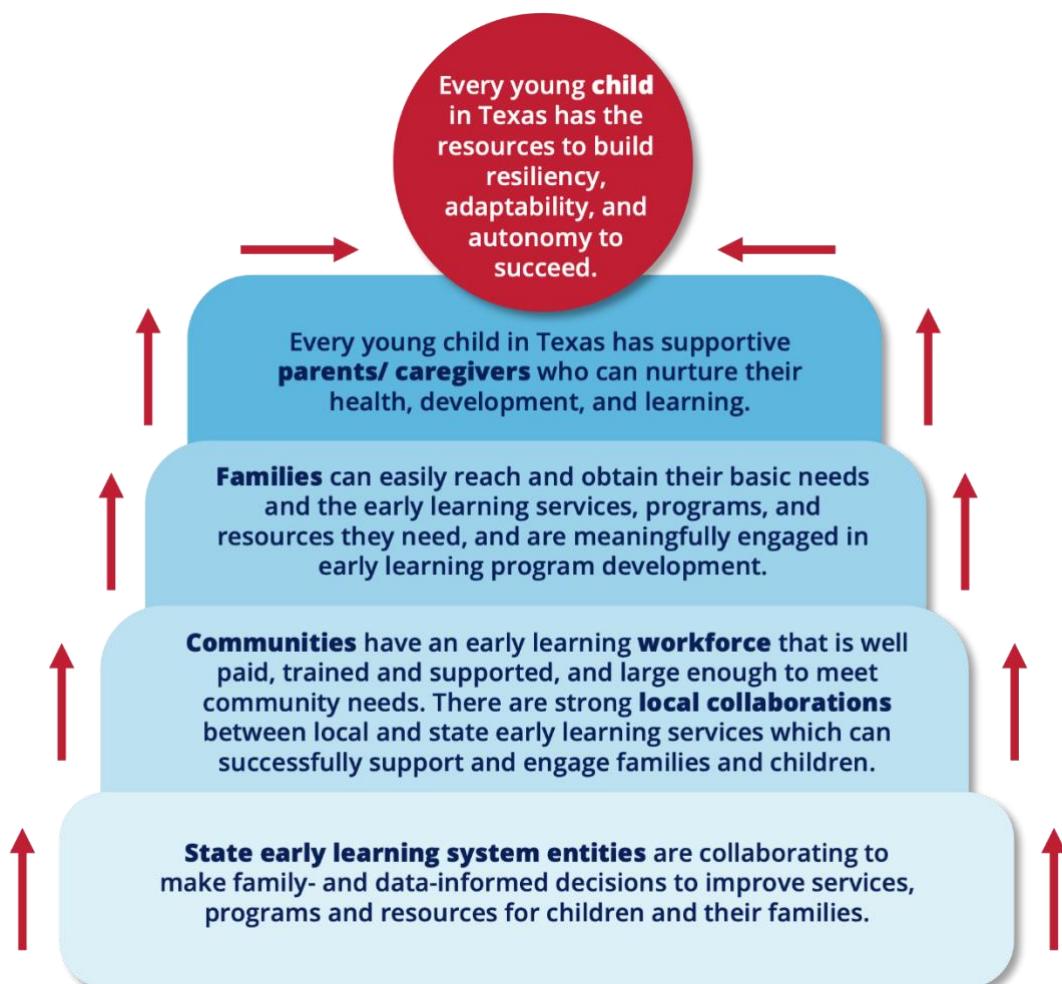
Along with the individual entities that provide early learning services in the state, this plan is also subject to state infrastructure, governance, policies, standards, regulations, and statutes. It will be adjusted accordingly throughout the plan's timeline. This plan will be reviewed quarterly at the public TELC meetings

throughout the plan timeline. Plan progress reports will be published on the TELC website. https://earlylearningtexas.org/.

Our Vision: All young Texans have a strong foundation for success

The Texas Early Learning System seeks to support children, their families, and the professionals who serve them so that children in our state are physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially ready to transition to kindergarten and beyond. To accomplish this, the Texas Early Learning System believes that a strong foundation for success is built by holistically considering the adults, communities, and entities who support young Texans. The following graphic provides an overview of our vision of success.

Figure 1. Texas Early Learning System Vision for Success

Every young **child** in Texas has the resources to build resiliency, adaptability, and autonomy to succeed.

Every young child in Texas has supportive **parents/ caregivers** who can nurture their health, development, and learning.

Families can easily reach and obtain their basic needs and the early learning services, programs, and resources they need, and are meaningfully engaged in early learning program development.

Communities have an early learning **workforce** that is well paid, trained and supported, and large enough to meet community needs. There are strong **local collaborations** between local and state early learning services which can successfully support and engage families and children.

State early learning system entities are collaborating to make family- and data-informed decisions to improve services, programs and resources for children and their families.

Texas Early Learning Plan Organization

We propose four goals in four strategy areas. These strategy areas were developed to align with current state entity strategic plans[5-17] and the concurrent Early Childhood System Needs Assessment in Texas.[4]

Table 2. 2024-2026 Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan Goals

Family Navigation, Access & Engagement	**Goal 1**	Families can easily meet their basic needs and access the early learning services, programs, and resources they need, and are meaningfully engaged to provide feedback on services.
Workforce Recruitment, Retention & Support	**Goal 2**	The early learning workforce is well-paid, trained and supported; can reach and obtain the professional development resources they need throughout their careers; and is large enough to meet Texans' needs.
Local Systems & Partnership Building	**Goal 3**	Local early learning systems are well-coordinated, appropriately resourced, and successfully support the children and families in their communities.
Data & System Coordination	**Goal 4**	State early learning system entities are collaborating to make family- and data-informed decisions to improve services, programs and resources for children and their families.

Each goal will be presented with a set of strategies and actions to take within the plan timeline. The actions are presented in the following three categories to indicate their current progress.

Continue: Actions that refine, expand, or proceed with work already in progress.

Create: Actions that require developing something new that has yet to be created.

Explore: Actions that are preliminary in nature or process-oriented that will lead to future strategies and actions.

The following strategies are a part of the long-term work towards realizing our vision by defining the attainable actions we will take in the years 2024-2026.

Family Navigation, Access & Engagement

Goal 1: Families can easily meet their basic needs and the early learning services, programs and resources they need, and are meaningfully engaged to provide feedback on services.

As the child population of Texas increases, the demand for early learning resources grows. Families who can successfully find the services they need are met with challenges like unclear eligibility requirements, rising costs, and if accepted, program waitlists. The demand for lower-cost and higher-quality early learning programs surpasses the -availability of these services. According to the 2023 Early Childhood Systems Needs Assessment in Texas report, when asked about their preferred child care settings if availability and cost were not an issue, only 57% of families with an income below $60,000 indicated that their current child care was their ideal type of care.[4]

The COVID-19 epidemic has had a significant and lasting impact on Texas families. Financial issues were among the top COVID-related events families experienced, along with a loss of child care for a month or more. These families believe COVID had a lasting negative impact on their child's social development and learning.[4] Families need more support accessing and successfully using early learning services. To increase access and availability, the Texas Early Learning System seeks to continue streamlining eligibility screening, program applications, intake, and referrals and explore funding opportunities to expand service availability.

Texas is a large, diverse state with communities ranging from small rural towns to sprawling metroplexes. The need for accessible early learning informational resources continues to grow. Texas is experiencing significant demographic shifts, with the majority Hispanic child population increasing, and significant increases in immigrant populations.[4] In 2022, the Early Childhood Interagency Workgroup (ECIW) launched https://earlychildhood.texas.gov/ to connect families to early

learning programs and services.[3] To meet the changing needs of a growing Texas, the Texas Early Learning System will improve and expand on this work.

When parents believe their child care providers are partners in their child's wellbeing, they rate their own family's quality of life and resiliency higher.[4] Partnering with families by building service recipient feedback loops is essential to a high-quality early learning system. To directly address this, this plan includes a strategy and set of actions to incorporate and promote family voice in program development and decision-making. Family engagement is weaved into the other strategic plan focus areas as well.

Family Navigation, Access & Engagement Strategies and Actions

Strategy 1.1

Streamline intake and administrative systems for parents and providers to make it easier for families to navigate early learning programs and services.

Actions 2024-2026

Continue:

- TEA, THSSCO, and TWC will simplify application practices by launching a common eligibility screener on https://earlychildhood.texas.gov/.
- DSHS will continue to fund and expand Help Me Grow Texas and Healthy Child Care Texas to increase cross-sector use of developmental screenings.

Create:

- HHSC will work with ECIW to demonstrate early learning system connection points and cross-sector collaborations that support an integrated continuum of care for families.

Explore:

- HHSC will lead the exploration of ways to enhance the continuum of care for families through improved data and system changes, policy and technical assistance, and community engagement and coalition-building per SB 24, 88th Regular Legislative Session.
- ECIW will explore the use of AI to improve family navigation, access, and engagement.

- DFPS/HHSC will partner with local coalitions to collect family feedback to inform TELC and ECIW efforts in incorporating family voice in planning, materials and programming.

Measures of Success

The number of children utilizing each of Texas's early learning services and programs increases annually.

- Common eligibility screener is published on https://earlychildhood.texas.gov/
- ECIW has identified and made recommendations on how to use AI to improve https://earlychildhood.texas.gov/.

Strategy 1.2

Increase availability and supply of early learning programs and services.

Actions 2024-2026

Continue:

- HHSC ECI will continue to provide coverage for IDEA Part C services to children across the state. ECI will use PDG B-5 Renewal funds to support local programs already providing high quality intervention services to children who have a disability or developmental delay.
- HHSC ECI and TEA will continue Child Find activities.
- Local Education Agencies (LEAs) will participate in Child Find trainings annually
- DFPS/HHSC will continue to fund and expand Family Resource Centers and their Texas Home Visiting programs throughout the state, support the use of Parent Cafe training and materials, and offer National Family Support Network trainings, including Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening and Support.

- TWC will continue funding Child Care Navigators at HHSC Child Care Regulation to increase high-quality child care provider access in Texas.

Create:

- TELC and ECIW will share data, trends and resources regarding current early learning services supply and the increased demand.
- TWC will provide technical assistance to Texas employers to examine the child care needs of their employees, including strategies to increase the supply of available child care.

Explore:

- TEA will explore how LEAs can offer remote delivery methods that can reach rural communities with limited access to specialized providers for children with disabilities.

Measures of Success

- Increase of 4,500 Texas Rising Star Providers in FFY 2024-2026.
- HHSC ECI provided support for comprehensive ECI services to 37 ECI local programs using PDG B-5 renewal funds in the years 2024-2026.
- Ten new Family Resource Centers have opened in years 2024-2026.
- Texas Home Visiting Programs have expanded to 10 counties in years 2024-2026.
- TELC and ECIW have publicized early learning services supply and demand-related data, trends and resources by publishing this information on http://earlylearningtexas.org/ and disseminating it through early learning communications channels by the end of 2026.
- 100 Texas employers have received child care-related technical assistance by the end of 2026.
- By the end of the 2024-2025 school year, TEA will review and revise, if necessary, provisions in rule and the student attendance accounting

handbook to ensure there are no barriers to utilizing remote delivery when in-person specialized providers are not available.

Strategy 1.3

Increase access to early learning programs and services.

Actions 2024-2026

Continue:

- DSHS will continue to fund and expand Help Me Grow Texas and Healthy Child Care Texas.
- TWC will refine https://earlychildhood.texas.gov/ for families and providers to retrieve information about early learning programs. This access point will:
  - o Include local and regional resources related to early learning, early intervention, parent education, home visiting, child care scholarships, basic needs, and mental health in their county
  - o Educate families about what high-quality early learning is and how they can access existing programs and services
  - o Include the TEA, THSSCO, and TWC common eligibility screener, and
  - o Include social media outreach.
- Each state entity providing early learning services will include visible links to other state agency websites or online information.

Create:

- DFPS, HHSC, DSHS, THSSCO, TEA and TWC will train any relevant system navigators and case managers to efficiently use https://earlychildhood.texas.gov/ to connect families to early learning services.

- TELC will contribute to a centralized list of early learning service and program informational fairs that are held across the state and work with TWC to ensure publication on https://earlychildhood.texas.gov/.
- LEAs will network with local child care providers and families to assess community needs so that they may offer resources about programs and services that are available within their local networks.

Measures of Success

- Local and regional resources related to early learning, early intervention, parent education, home visiting, child care scholarships, basic needs, and mental health are available on https://earlychildhood.texas.gov/ by the end of 2026.
- A family-friendly webpage defining "high-quality early learning" with links to resources is published on https://earlychildhood.texas.gov/.
- Common eligibility screener is published on https://earlychildhood.texas.gov/.
- Existing early learning social media channels have promoted https://earlychildhood.texas.gov/ resources and content on a quarterly basis in years 2024-2026.
- DFPS, HHSC, DSHS, THSSCO, TEA and TWC have published links to each other's websites by the end of 2026.
- Four trainings to system navigators and case managers have been offered to efficiently use https://earlychildhood.texas.gov/ by the end of 2026.
- A list of early learning service and program informational fairs has been published on https://earlychildhood.texas.gov/ by the end of 2026.

Strategy 1.4

Increase family feedback to improve the quality and accessibility of early learning services.

Actions 2024-2026

Continue:

- LEAs will continue to create and post their Prekindergarten Family Engagement Plan on their district web pages for families to access.

Create:

- ECIW and TELC will share consumer insight and feedback collected across programs to inform family engagement and connection.
- Building off DFPS' family engagement activities, ECIW and TELC will create more opportunities for families to provide feedback on early learning system services, programs, and support.
- ECIW and TELC will elevate family voice by publishing and promoting family feedback and related service improvements and updates through early learning system communications channels.

Measures of Success

Market family report and regular family feedback reports have been published and disseminated by the end of 2026.

- For the 2023-2024 school year, the number of LEAs submitting a valid website link for prekindergarten family engagement will increase by 10% when compared to TEA data from school year 2022-2023.
- A summary of early learning family engagement activities, feedback and service improvements has been published on http://earlylearningtexas.org/ by the end of 2026.
- TELC members regularly share family feedback in existing meetings.

Workforce Recruitment, Retention & Support

Goal 2: The early learning workforce is well-paid, trained, and supported; can reach and obtain the professional development resources they need throughout their careers; and is large enough to meet Texans' needs.

For families to receive high-quality early learning services, the early learning workforce needs to be fully supported to provide services as they are intended. A portion of the early learning workforce is within the same socioeconomic status of the families they serve, experiencing the same stressors and challenges.[13] Like many public sectors, the early learning workforce has long experienced recruitment, retention, and support issues.

The COVID-19 epidemic had a profound impact on the child care workforce. The interruption of classroom and home-based early learning services were disruptive to workforce members and families alike.[4] In Texas, some child care centers were forced to close throughout the state. To address this, child care businesses and professionals received emergency stimulus funds.[18] In 2022, TWC published the Child Care Workforce Strategic Plan 2023-2025 to improve the quality of the infant, toddler, preschool, and school-age child care workforce in Texas.[15] According to the 2023 Early Childhood Needs Assessment, receiving adequate compensation and forming positive and supportive relationships with work supervisors, peers, and families is key to job satisfaction and retention.[4] The workforce is seeing more "challenging behaviors" in children post-COVID, and families with children with a developmental disability do not believe the system is currently equipped to meet their child's needs.[4] Families also want to see more consistency in the professional care they receive.[4]

The current plan proposes four strategies and sets of actions to move toward a growing early learning workforce that is well-paid, trained, and supported. The Texas Early Learning System will continue to provide and advocate for increased compensation for its workforce. The system will work to further define and realize

the many existing early learning career pathways. Throughout the years, the early learning workforce has had increased access to trainings and professional development opportunities, but the workforce needs more specific on-the-job skills training that can be applied to practical situations. Specifically, inclusivity of special needs, engaging with parents, child behavior management, mindfulness, trauma-informed practices, and with opportunities for supportive supervision and peer-to-peer learning are needed to avoid turnover and burnout.[4]

Workforce Recruitment, Retention & Support Strategies and Actions

Strategy 2.1

Increase financial support of the early learning workforce.

Actions 2024-2026

Continue:

- HHSC ECI therapist recruitment and retention will continue to be supported with stipends funded through PDG B-5 Renewal funding.
- TWC will continue to fund scholarships and Registered Apprenticeships (RA) to cover the cost of CDA, associates, and bachelors' credentials or degrees.

Create:

- TELC will develop and publish messaging that elevates the importance of the early learning workers as important members of the workforce and business owners who drive the Texas economy.

Explore:

- TELC will explore forming public/private partnerships to support the workforce, including support for the workforce, through philanthropy and corporate support.

Measures of Success

Average early learning workforce salary has increased compared to 2023 by end of 2026.

- 800 HHSC ECI therapists and other direct service professionals have received recruitment and retention stipends through PDG B-5 Renewal funding in the years 2024-2026.
- TWC has provided 750 scholarships, including Registered Apprenticeships (RA), in the FFY 2024-2026.
- TELC has published early learning workforce key messages on http://earlylearningtexas.org/ and disseminated messages via early learning communications channels by the end of 2026.
- An expanded community toolkit including guidance on public-private partnerships, has been published by the end of 2026 (see Strategy 3.1 for more information).

Strategy 2.2

Expand and refine early learning pathways to comprehensively include all professionals who work with young children.

Actions 2024-2026

Continue:

- CLI will publish and promote updated pathways on TECPDS.

Explore:

- CLI will explore adding all professions/positions in the early learning workforce and expand upon the existing Texas Early Childhood Career Pathways on TECPDS to create early learning pathways information that:
  - Includes educational, experience requirements and potential career ladder for each pathway
  - Connects each pathway to ideal salary trajectories and existing resources to pursue the path and

- o Provides real-life examples of how pathways are linked to personal fulfillment and values by conducting workplace climate surveys.

Measure of Success

All potential early learning careers are identified, and their potential career pathways are clearly defined. This information is easily accessible on TECPDS for potential and current workforce members by the end of 2026.

Strategy 2.3

Expand the number of people entering the early learning workforce.

Actions 2024-2026

Continue:

- TWC and TEA will connect high schools throughout the state to child care providers and offer work-based learning opportunities to students.
- TWC will conduct and publish a landscape analysis of Institutions of Higher Education offering early childhood degrees and LEAs offering Early Learning Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs of study.
- TWC will publish guidance resulting from work sessions with Institutions of Higher Education on credit transfer.
- TWC, through the 28 Local Workforce Development Boards, will assist early childhood programs by providing workforce development expertise and support, including job matching and employer supports.

Explore:

- TELC will explore how to expand the number of higher education programs for physical, occupational, and speech therapists that educate or train on early childhood service provision.

- TELC will explore engaging experienced, retired teachers to re-enter the workforce in an expanded range of roles in and outside direct services.
- Building off the DFPS HIPPY Home Visiting Program model, TELC will explore parent recruitment for those parents who want to enter the early learning workforce with an emphasis on non-native English speakers.

Measures of Success

Increase of early learning workforce members compared to 2023 by 2026.

- TWC and TEA have identified target numbers of high schools and child care provider connections to promote work-based learning opportunities to students by the end of 2024.
- TWC has published an early childhood degree and program landscape analysis report by the end of 2026.
- Guidance on credit transfer has been published by the end of 2026.
- TWC has provided early learning-related guidance and support to all 28 Local Workforce Development Boards in FFY 2024-2026.
- TELC has identified various workforce recruitment strategies to recommend to state and local early learning entities by the end of 2026.

Strategy 2.4

Retain early learning workforce professionals in the field by providing educational and social support.

Actions 2024-2026

Continue:

- TEA will expand access to the teacher-child interaction assessment and coaching model.
- TWC will continue to offer child care business training and coaching and training about evidence-based staff retention strategies.

- CLI will continue to improve the TECPDS system based on usability study findings.
- HHSC ECI will continue the Professionalism Engagement Empowerment Resources (PEER) Network for early intervention specialists and service coordinators.
- TELC will provide support for workforce preparedness and skill by promoting:
  - Existing early learning competencies and skill sets (e.g., Texas Core Competencies for Early Childhood, Texas Home Visiting Core Competencies).
  - Existing everyday leadership and supportive supervision resources to early learning workforce managers and supervisors by current training, coursework, and opportunities (e.g., McCormick Early Childhood Leadership modules available at Texas colleges and universities).
- HHSC ECI will continue to develop and make available trainings on inclusion of children with special needs, including autism, and on managing challenging behavior in young children.

Create:

- TELC will identify and promote current training and coursework that provide professional development around behavioral problems, mental health, parent engagement, and inclusivity, leveraging existing inventories.
- TWC and TEA will offer trainings for early learning professionals to address challenging behaviors, children with special health care needs, and child development and brain development.
- TELC will publish, promote, and maintain a list of all statewide early learning conferences and events for providers.

Explore:

- TELC will leverage current peer-to-peer mentoring programs (e.g., ECI PEER Network, Texas Infant-Toddler Specialist Network) to expand peer mentoring opportunities for the early learning workforce.

- LEAs will explore networking with local child care providers to assess professional learning needs within their communities and provide professional learning opportunities for child care providers to attend, targeting those needs.

Measures of Success:

- 100 teachers or mentors have been trained in teacher-child interaction assessment and coaching model by the end of 2026.
- 210 child care providers have received child care business training about evidence-based staff retention strategies by the end of 2026.
- 400 early intervention specialists and service coordinators have participated in the Professionalism Engagement Empowerment Resources (PEER) Network in the years 2024-2026.
- Training and coursework recommendations for workforce preparedness, behavioral problems, mental health, parent engagement, and inclusivity has been published on http://earlylearningtexas.org/ by the end of 2026.
- HHSC ECI local programs have provided 150 trainings on inclusion of children with developmental delays or disabilities in the years 2024-2026.
- TWC and TEA have offered 30 trainings to early learning professionals to address challenging behaviors, children with special health care needs, and child development and brain development by the end of 2026.
- A list of all statewide early learning conferences, events, and early learning peer-mentoring opportunities for providers has been published on http://earlylearningtexas.org/ by the end of 2026.

Local Systems & Partnership Building

Goal 3: Local early learning systems are well-coordinated, appropriately resourced, and successfully support the children and families in their communities.

Families and the early learning workforce that serves them live and work in communities with local ecosystems of early learning services, programs, and resources. These systems must function so families can find and obtain the support they need for their children to succeed. These local systems must also be connected and actively collaborating with the state entities in their communities.

In 2023, upon receiving the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) Renewal funding, Texas offered $5.5 million in sub-awards to communities to continue implementation or enhancement to early childhood systems building activities. These sub-awards were available to DFPS/HHSC PEI's HOPES local programs to expand Help Me Grow Texas or to expand other systems-building or engagement initiatives. Some of these activities included creating or expanding local family resource centers, adopting and implementing the National Family Support Network Standards of Quality framework, developing a parent advisory committee or implementing Parent Cafés. Local programs could use the funding to support staff dedicated to coalition-building activities.[3]

The 2023 needs assessment report found that trust among coalition members throughout the state was high and that they highly valued family experience to maintain relevance in their communities. Texas coalitions have a shared understanding of their vision and purpose and collectively use community data to inform decisions. The researchers found specific technical assistance needs across the state. These areas included governance and leadership, family voice and engagement, and innovation diffusion and evaluation. Often, coalitions had not gone through the process to develop a strategic plan, charter, or by-laws yet and there was often one main organization driving the coalition's progress. This was

also true about resources. Often, the leadership organization dedicated more types of resources while the membership organizations solely dedicated staff time.[4]

The following set of strategies and actions seek to strengthen state and local collaboration within the Texas Early Learning System. The strategies aim to provide informational and educational support and usable community-level data from the developing Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS).

Local Systems & Partnership Building Strategies and Actions

Strategy 3.1

Provide educational and informational support to local partnerships to help communities make informed decisions.

Actions 2024-2026

Continue:

- DFPS/HHSC will continue offering sub-grants to existing PEI local programs to help local communities focus on community needs. Grants can also be used to hire a full-time staff member for coalition work.
- TWC and TEA will continue to support statewide staff working towards pre-kindergarten and child care partnerships.
- Building off DFPS's online Prevention and Early Intervention Community Toolkit, TELC will expand this toolkit to include information that:
  - Shares best practices and examples of successful community partnerships
  - Promotes inclusivity in local systems by encouraging local community and family involvement in decision-making
  - Provides guidance on forming public/private partnerships, short-term and sustainable funding strategies, governance and leadership and innovation diffusion and evaluation

Create:

- TELC will increase awareness of local systems and partnerships by creating and publishing an accessible, centralized list of community collaborations and coalitions.

o ECIW will utilize local and regional entities to distribute information.

Explore:

- ECIW will determine how programs could work through existing infrastructure to promote coalition building and involvement.
- TWC will explore how LWDBs can partner with their city, county, school district, and business leaders to support child care.

Measures of Success:

- DFPS/HHSC increased investments in local coalitions by $5.5 million across 29 communities compared to 2022.
- 300 TWC-supported pre-kindergarten and child care partnerships have been formed in the years 2024-2026.
- An expanded and updated Community Toolkit has been published by DFPS/HHSC by the end of 2026.
- A list of community collaborations and coalitions has been published on http://earlylearningtexas.org/ by the end of 2026.

Data & System Coordination

Goal 4: State early learning system entities are collaborating on family- and data-informed decisions about the Texas Early Learning System to improve services, programs, and resources for children and their families.

To serve all children ages 0-5 and their families, the six state entities that provide early learning services, programs, and resources must build a strong collaboration. Part of this work is accomplished through the Texas Early Learning Council (TELC), Early Childhood Interagency Workgroup (ECIW), and the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative (TWI). Collectively, these collaborations and early learning state entities are working to answer fundamental questions about the early learning system, such as who and how many children and families are eligible for services, who receives services, and what gaps exist in service delivery. The long-term goal is to eventually understand if Texas' children, starting at birth, are healthy and on track to succeed. To answer these questions, Texas has started to explore the development of an Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS).[19]

In April 2022, the Texas Early Learning Council formed an Early Childhood Data Roadmap Work Group to explore a possible Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) in Texas. The Early Childhood Data Roadmap Work Group collaborated across early childhood programs and with stakeholders to create an ECIDS Roadmap for Texas.[19] The roadmap includes an overview of the current early childhood landscape, lessons learned from other states, and business case recommendations that could inform the development of an ECIDS in Texas. A more detailed view of Texas early childhood data systems and potential linkages can be found in a companion report, Early Childhood Data Landscape and Inventory, by Third Sector Intelligence (3Si).[20] The report covers the types of data included in the state's early childhood data systems, including key variables needed for the business case identified in the roadmap and variables that could be used to link data across systems.

This ongoing work has been integrated into the following set of strategies and actions and weaved into our family engagement activities throughout this plan.

Data & System Coordination Strategies & Actions

Strategy 4.1

Develop an ECIDS to strengthen data sharing across agencies and better inform state-level policy and program improvement.

Actions 2024-2026

Create:

- ECIW will develop a cross-agency data governance plan, including crafting an objective, framework, roles, and responsibilities, and documenting relevant privacy laws and regulations.
- ECIW will review existing statutory and legal requirements and develop required data sharing agreements for the priority business case(s) and a process for updating interagency agreements.
- ECIW will develop a design plan with opportunities for agencies to focus on the following various aspects of these data: security, storage, retention, management, processing, transportation, and analytics/products with clear plans for data integration roles and responsibilities of relevant agency personnel.
- ECIW will design and build the proposed business case(s) from the Texas Early Childhood Integrated Data System Roadmap and build any needed analytic tools based on those business case(s).

Measure of Success

By the end of 2026, an ECIDS can answer foundational questions around eligibility, access, and enrollment in early learning services and programs in Texas.

Strategy 4.2

Support data utilization by communities and stakeholders using data platforms to inform quality improvement actions and local systems planning.

Actions 2024-2026

Create:

- ECIW will develop an ECIDS data dashboard for communities with instructions on how to read and use data and provide dashboard viewers an opportunity to provide feedback.
- ECIW will regularly publish and promote data availability updates via early learning system communications channels.

Measure of Success

By the end of 2026, ECIDS data is used to create a preliminary consumer data dashboard.

Strategy 4.3

Increase alignment and coordination across agencies to improve family access, navigation, and engagement.

Actions 2024-2026

Create:

- TEA, THSSCO and TWC will streamline early learning program eligibility screening and applications by developing a mechanism to notify families of other service and program eligibility.
- ECIW will utilize the Texas ECIDS to identify overlap and gaps among families served by all early learning programs.

- ECIW will utilize the Texas ECIDS to inform improvements in family's enrollment, navigation and engagement in early learning programs, to provide a comprehensive continuum of services for families.

Explore:

- TEA, THSSCO and TWC will explore streamlining early learning program eligibility screening and applications to reduce redundancy in program applications.

Measure of Success

A data-informed early learning program eligibility screener has been published on https://earlychildhood.texas.gov/ by the end of 2026.

Plan Progress Reporting and Communication

In early 2024, a work plan and progress report template will be created to operationalize the strategies and actions outlined in this document further. Each action item has been assigned a lead state or system entity that will provide quarterly progress updates. Various workgroups may be formed to accomplish specific actions. Each action item will be assigned a due date and a progress indicator (e.g., Not Started, In Progress, Blocked, Complete). Plan progress reports will be published on the TELC website (https://earlylearningtexas.org/) after every quarterly TELC meeting.

As stated earlier, along with the individual entities that provide early learning services in the state, this plan is also subject to state infrastructure, governance, policies, standards, regulations, and statutes, which may lead to adjustments to the plan throughout the plan period. The plan will be reviewed quarterly at the public TELC meetings throughout the plan period. Based on the newest information, the TELC will evaluate all plan strategies and actions for relevance and appropriateness. TELC will also incorporate any feedback collected from family stakeholders during the progress report period. Throughout the plan timeline, TELC will provide opportunities for the public to provide feedback on the plan's content and reported progress. These opportunities will include a comment box on TELC's website and oral or written comments at all TELC meetings.

Each TELC member will act as an ambassador to this strategic plan by regularly updating their constituency groups using existing communications channels and meetings. TELC member constituency groups are listed on the next page. TELC members can provide a link to the website page dedicated to the strategic plan and its proceeding progress reports. TELC members will also receive a continuously updated slide deck summarizing major developments in the plan and ensuring consistent messaging about plan progress. As a part of the quarterly progress reports, TELC members must share how they communicated the plan to their constituency groups.

Participating Council Members and Constituencies

Council Member	Constituency
Katherine Abba, Ph.D., Child Development Program, Houston Community College	Higher education
Sarah Abrahams, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services	State agency - DFPS/HHSC-PEI/FSS
Weldon Beard, Texas Head Start State Office	Head Start
Terri Breeden, Texas Education Agency	State agency - TEA
April Crawford, Ph.D., Children's Learning Institute, UT Health Science Center at Houston	Research
Rachelle Daniel, Child Care Regulation, Texas Health and Human Services	State agency - HHSC - CCR
Alferma Giles, Ph.D., Texas Head Start State Collaboration Office at the Children's Learning Institute, UT Health Science Center at Houston	Head Start
Melissa Hoisington, Primrose Schools, formerly Texas Licensed Child Care Association	Child care provider
Becky Huss-Keeler, Ph.D., University of Houston-Clear Lake	Higher Education
Kim Kofron, Children at Risk	Advocate

Council Member	Constituency
Tori Lee, Texas Education Agency	State agency - TEA
Beatris Mata, Ector County Independent School District	School districts/charter schools
Reagan Miller, Texas Workforce Commission, Chair	State agency - TWC
Marisela Nava, Texas Southmost College	Higher education
Stephanie Rubin, Texans Care for Children, Vice Chair	Advocate
Amber Scanlan, PNC	Business
Kierstan Schwab, Texas Public Broadcasting Association	Community nonprofits
Jennifer Stockemer, Ivy Vine Preschool	Child care provider
June Yeatman, Austin Community College Children's Lab School	Early learning workforce
Meghan Young, Early Childhood Intervention, Texas Health and Human Services Commission	State agency - HHSC-ECI

Key Early Learning Programs and Services

Statewide Early Learning Programs

Program	Target Population
DFPS Child Protective Services	Children in foster care or placed with relatives, caregivers and foster families, or birth parents
DFPS/HHSC Family Support Services	Various programs that serve children ages 0-18 and families
DFPS/HHSC Texas Home Visiting	Expecting parent(s), caregiver(s), or primary caregiver(s) of a child up to age 5
DSHS Maternal & Child Public Health	Women of childbearing age, children, infants, children with special health care needs
HHSC Child Care Regulation	Child care providers (homes and centers)
HHSC Early Childhood Intervention	Children ages 0-3 with developmental delays, disabilities, or certain medical diagnoses that may impact their development, and their families
TEA School Readiness and Family Engagement	Children preparing for Pre-K and their families

Program	Target Population
TEA Early Childhood Special Education	Children with disabilities and their families
TEA Public Pre-kindergarten	Children in pre-kindergarten and their families who utilize public education programs
THSSCO Head Start	Low-income families with children preparing for kindergarten
THSSCO Early Head Start	Low-income families with children preparing for pre-kindergarten
TWC Child Care Services	Families who meet income requirements and need scholarships/subsidies for childcare
TWC Texas Rising Star	Child care providers (homes and centers)

Early Learning Workforce Resources and Programs

Resource	Brief Description
Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS)	Online website that lists thousands of early childhood trainings for early childhood specialists, center directors/administrators and practitioners. The system keeps track of training hours and certificates to verify experience. The system offers personalized navigation

Resource	Brief Description
	and action items on how to advance through a "career pathway" which is based on education/degree, professional development hours completed in the past 12 months, and years of experience in early childhood. Professionals are designated as "beginner," "Intermediate," " advanced" Administrators or Practitioners. The trainings offered are based on Texas Core Competencies for Early Childhood for Practitioners and Administrators. The trainers must be listed on the Texas Training Registry. To meet all the requirements for the Texas Rising Star Category 1 assessment, providers must be on TECPDS. These assessments are conducted on CLI Engage. Texas School Ready trainings are integrated, and Texas AgriLife Extension Coursework was recently added to the system. The system also has a workforce registry and job board.
Texas School Ready	Texas School Ready is a comprehensive early childhood teacher training program combining a research-based, state-adopted curriculum with ongoing professional development and progress monitoring tools. The goal of this program is to help children prepare to enter school.
Texas Trainer Registry	Trainers on the TTR meet the minimum DFPS requirements for child care facilities and are required to complete the Micro-Credential Program for Trainers which puts them into four levels. Trainers can apply to be put on the TECPDS system every three years. Trainers

Resource	Brief Description
	are registered based on what core competency they wish to train in and must meet the requirements of that core competency.
CLI Engage	CLI Engage houses research-based early learning resources for educators and families of children from birth through kindergarten.
T.E.A.C.H.	T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) Early Childhood® Texas Scholarship Program is an educational scholarship opportunity for early childhood educators who work in the licensed childcare setting across Texas.
Texas Early Learning Summit	TWC Child Care & Early Learning hosts a biannual Texas Early Learning Collaborative Symposium with support from the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) Child Care Regulation. This Collaborative Symposium brings together state and regional staff from across the early childhood education field to strengthen relationships across state agencies and share resources through professional development opportunities and collaborative discussions.
Texas AgriLife Extension Coursework	Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's online childcare training website offers a wide range of courses with certificates for workers looking to complete state-mandated training requirements, professional development, and CDA

Resource	Brief Description
	renewal requirements. Topics include: Texas Annual Training, CDA Renewal, Childcare Business Training, Home-based Childcare Business, Child Abuse and Neglect, Child Growth and Development, Child Health and Safety, Developmentally Appropriate Activities, Guidance and Discipline, Including Children with Special Needs, Infant Mental Health, Nutrition and Physical Activity, Observation and Assessment, Pre-Service, Professional Development and Leadership, SIDS, Shaken baby, and Brain Development, Transportation Safety, and Texas Healthy Building Blocks.
Texas Infant-Toddler Specialist Network	The Texas ITSN offers professional development opportunities and collaborative experiences for specialists (mentors) and teachers covering a wide range of topics specific to supporting infant and toddler development.
TEA Monthly Webinars	The Texas Education Agency offers professional learning sessions on topics of Early Childhood Education including best practices in ECE, assessment, Pre-K registration, and other High Quality Pre-K Components.
ECI Online Training Modules	Texas Health and Human Services provides online training modules as part of their Early Childhood Intervention programs. These webinars include information to assist ECI staff provide best practice services, including Quality Services series, Qualitative

Resource	Brief Description
	Determination of Delay (QDD) series, Young Infant series, Ethics, Autism, Evaluation and Assessment, Eligibility and the BDI-2, and other topics of interest. CPEs are provided. Partnering providers include Virginia 'Talks on Tuesdays,' Bilinguistics, the ECI Collection at the Department of State Health Services library, Texas Health Steps, Robin McWilliam, Baylor College of Medicine, and Second Language Literacy and Learning Connection (SLLLC).
PEI Online Training Modules	Texas Department of Family and Protective Services offers a Video Training Collection that includes Training for Evaluation and Data, Professional Development webinar recordings, Prevention Community webinar recordings and PEI Early Childhood webinar recordings. Users can enroll into the Achieve OnDemand self-paced courses through the Start Early, Essentials of Home Visiting learning portal. Participants can earn in-service training credits from First3Years Texas, or an Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Endorsement from the Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health.
CPS Online Modules	The US Department of Health and Human Services offers Online Child Welfare Trainings through their Child Welfare Information Gateway. This hub provides access to national organizations and/or educational institutions that offer web-based/online training, staff development opportunities, webinars, and e-learning on a broad

Resource	Brief Description
	range of child welfare topics. Additionally, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services offers trainings in Spanish and English on Normalcy for Foster Parents and Trauma-Informed Care.
Texas Core Competencies for Early Childhood Practitioners and Administrators and associated career lattices	Developed by the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System, the Core Competencies are a framework for assessing knowledge and skills, guiding training and professional development opportunities and monitoring progress. They refer to specific, basic concepts, skills, and abilities that early childhood professionals should learn, understand and be able to demonstrate. Practitioners and professionals can learn about the competencies through CLI Engage.
Higher education institutes offering the Child Development Associate (CDA) degree	To earn CDA certification in Texas, candidates complete 120 hours of formal early childhood education training covering the growth and development of children ages birth to 36 months, with no fewer than 10 training hours in each of the eight CDA subject areas. Candidates obtain 480 hours of professional work experience in a center-based setting with children ages birth to 36 months, or 3-5 depending on which CDA they are working to obtain and select a CDA Professional Development Specialist to conduct a CDA Verification Visit as part of the final assessment. Candidates apply using YourCouncil.

Resource	Brief Description
Texas Rising Star Quality Rating System Support	Texas Rising Star-certified programs and Entry Level-designated programs can work closely with a Texas Rising Star mentor to engage in a cyclical process that includes self-reflection, continuous learning, practice, and evaluation. Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) helps programs attain certification, achieve increasingly higher levels of quality, sustain high quality over time, and ensure high quality across classrooms and age groups.

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