

## TEXAS PDG B-5 RENEWAL APPLICATION

**Project Title:** Texas Preschool Development Grant Birth to Five

**Applicant Name:** Texas Workforce Commission

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### Project Summary

Texas will support its goal of ensuring that children and families are ready for school and ready to learn by engaging families as leaders and connecting them to services, supporting local early childhood systems building, strengthening and building the early childhood care and education (ECCE) workforce, expanding access to high-quality programs, and developing a statewide integrated data system. The primary population groups to be served are children ages birth through five and their families, young children with disabilities, families in rural areas of the state, and families in areas with and without local early childhood coalitions. Additionally, Texas will support early educators, particularly those seeking education and career supports.

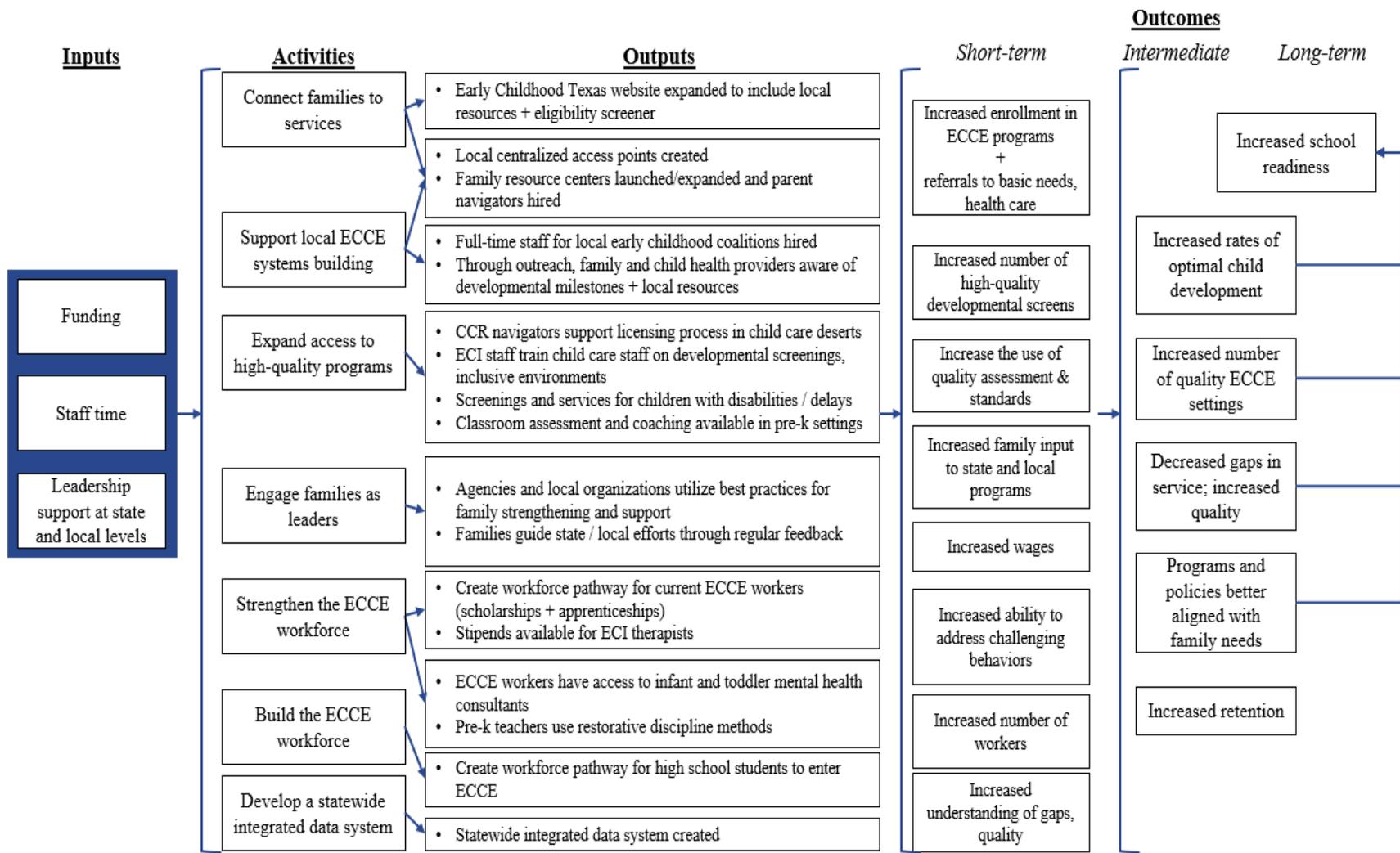
Texas conducted a statewide early childhood needs assessment in 2019. Through that assessment and subsequent *Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan 2020-2025*, as well as needs that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic, Texas has prioritized the following needs and gaps in services for the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) Renewal Grant: (1) there is a lack of meaningful family engagement in making program and policy decisions at the state level; (2) families are often not aware of the resources and supports available to them and local community coalitions are well-positioned to support families yet often lack the necessary resources to do so; (3) ECCE providers are struggling to recruit and retain qualified staff; (4) families need greater access to quality ECCE settings; and (5) ECCE data in Texas is decentralized and better data coordination and integration across programs and agencies are needed to improve the quality of programs across the state for young children and their families.

To address these needs, Texas will (1) engage families as leaders throughout all grant activities, creating direct feedback loops for ongoing engagement with state leaders and equipping local leaders with best practices to enable family leadership; (2) expand state-level resources to streamline early childhood resource navigation and fund local early childhood coalitions to strategically leverage and connect families to existing local resources; (3) build a pipeline of early childhood educators including current high school and higher education students as well as those already working in the classroom; (4) fund increased access to quality ECCE settings, including interventions for young children with disabilities or delays, classroom assessment and coaching in prekindergarten (pre-k), and mental health consultation for ECCE professionals; and (5) begin to build a statewide early childhood integrated data system.

The Texas PDG B-5 Renewal Grant application is respectfully submitted by the Texas Early Childhood Inter-Agency Work Group (ECIA Work Group), which includes representation from the four core state agencies serving young children: Texas Workforce Commission (lead agency for PDG B-5), Texas Education Agency, Health and Human Services Commission, and Department of Family and Protective Services.

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## Logic Model



Target population: Children in Texas ages 0-5 and their families

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## Expected Outcomes

Project outcomes center on the Texas vision that all children are ready for school. This means children and their families have the skills and supports necessary to be successful in school and to carry the benefits of early learning throughout their education. The long-term outcome of school readiness is influenced by a wide array of intermediate and short-term outcomes in the state’s ECCE system. For the purposes of this grant, ECCE programs include those the ECIA Work Group and its partners have in their purview (Table 1).

**Table 1. Texas ECCE System – State Agencies and Corresponding Programs**

State Agency	Programs
Texas Department of Family & Protective Services (DFPS)	Texas Home Visiting; Maternal, Infant, Early Childhood Home Visiting
Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS)	Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant
Texas Education Agency (TEA)	Early Childhood Special Education (IDEA Part B, section 619); Public Prekindergarten
Texas Head Start State Collaboration Office (THSSCO)	Head Start/Early Head Start (HS/EHS)
Texas Health & Human Services	Child Care Regulation; Early Childhood Intervention

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Commission (HHSC)	Services (IDEA Part C)
Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)	Child Care Subsidy; Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)

Intermediate outcomes include increased rates of optimal child development, increased number of high-quality ECCE settings, decreased gaps in service, and programs and policies that are better aligned with family needs. Short-term outcomes that drive these intermediate outcomes include increased enrollment in ECCE programs and referrals to basic needs, increased number of high-quality developmental screens, increased use of quality assessment and standards, increased family input to state and local programs, increased number of workers, and an increased local and state-wide understanding of gaps and drivers of quality. One key factor closely associated with school readiness is the quality of teacher child interaction. To impact the intermediate outcome of increased retention of quality workers, short-term outcomes include increased wages and an increased ability to address challenging behaviors.

### Approach

Texas is committed to the vision of ensuring all children are ready for school. Through this renewal grant, Texas will support this vision by:

- **engaging families as leaders** by providing opportunities for families with young children to share their expertise during the development, implementation, and evaluation of grant activities and other early childhood initiatives;
- **connecting families to services** through subgrants to local communities to develop or expand Family Resource Centers, Parent Cafés, or hire parent navigators; and improving access to community resources by enhancing the [earlychildhood.texas.gov](http://earlychildhood.texas.gov) website and the 2-1-1 system;
- **supporting local systems building** by providing subgrants to communities to strengthen

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local early childhood coalitions;

- **strengthening the early childhood care and education (ECCE) workforce** through cross-program training and professional development, expanding access to early childhood mental health consultation, and supporting qualified therapists and ECCE professionals in rural areas;
- **building the ECCE workforce** by developing a robust pipeline of effective early childhood educators and professionals through multiple pathways from high school to higher education and career;
- **expanding access to high-quality programs** by assisting child care providers in child care deserts to become licensed, supporting assessments and interventions for infants and toddlers with disabilities, and providing research-based classroom assessment tools; and
- **developing a statewide integrated data system** to align data across programs in order to improve the quality of programs across the state for young children and their families.

### Activity One: Update Comprehensive Statewide B-5 Needs Assessment

#### 1.1 Current Needs Assessment and Stakeholder Engagement for Update

Texas completed a statewide birth-five needs assessment in October 2019. Guided by the Texas Early Learning Council (TELC), the state's governor-appointed 20-member early childhood advisory council, the needs assessment aimed to answer over 50 research questions. The *Early Learning Needs Assessment 2019* included a meta-analysis of existing needs assessments, data sets from state and federal agencies, eight stakeholder focus groups, and an online stakeholder survey that received 8,848 responses, including 2,854 from families. Responses from early childhood programs were received from all 254 counties and responses from families were received from 174 counties.

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### *Status of Current Statewide Needs Assessment*

The TELC examined findings from the *Early Learning Needs Assessment 2019* to inform the *Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan 2020-2025*. While council members have worked toward reaching goals of the strategic plan, no formal updates to the statewide needs assessment have begun to date. However, since early 2020, Texas state agencies and organizations have reached out to families, ECCE providers, and other community stakeholders to understand their needs and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities and programs. Texas used the *Early Learning Needs Assessment 2019*, subsequent surveys, and listening sessions to direct stimulus funding for the state's COVID-19 relief initiatives supporting ECCE programs toward efforts that would have the most immediate and effective impact.

Over three months in 2022, the ECIA Work Group also partnered with the BUILD Initiative to conduct focus groups with early childhood coalitions across Texas. The BUILD Initiative is a non-profit that partners with state and community leaders across the country to promote equitable, high-quality child- and family-serving systems that result in young children thriving and learning. A total of 15 coalitions from 37 counties representing over 70 members and four family representatives participated. The purpose of the focus groups was to 1) leverage and learn from the existing coalitions across the state and to establish feedback loops between state agency partners, early childhood coalitions, and the families they serve, 2) identify geographic gaps where parent and family voice is not present and 3) strengthen the relationship between state leaders and community providers working closely with families with young children.

The *Early Learning Needs Assessment 2019* provided the TELC in-depth understanding of Texas demographics, the ECCE workforce, and existing data limitations. Highlights are described below.

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**Demographics.** Texas is home to more than two million children birth to age five, representing 10% of their subset of the population in the United States. Based on estimations from the *Early Learning Needs Assessment 2019*, 50% of the birth to age five population in Texas is Hispanic, 31% White, 12% Black, 4% Asian, and 4% identifying as other. The majority of young children (1.8 million) live in urban communities, 150,096 live in mostly rural areas, and 15,426 live in completely rural communities.

**ECCE Workforce.** In 2019, Texas had more than 95,000 professionals in the early learning workforce. However, the COVID-19 pandemic caused program closures and smaller class sizes, leading to staffing shortages across all early childhood programs. New data, including compensation and benefit data, is needed to determine the current state of the ECCE workforce.

**Data Limitations.** Through the process of creating the *Early Learning Needs Assessment 2019* and subsequent efforts to identify needs, Texas has identified limitations regarding available data on numbers of children served and the quality of programming. For example, there is current data overlap in the number of children enrolled in child care programs, HS/EHS, public pre-k, Early Childhood Intervention (ECI), and state-funded home visiting programs, making it difficult to calculate an unduplicated count of children served in these programs. Additionally, each program type has different quality standards. For example, the maximum child-to-teacher ratio for the same age group and monitoring of compliance with quality standards varies across agencies. The variance in quality standards and monitoring presents a challenge in establishing a clear understanding of quality in early learning settings.

**Stakeholder Engagement.** Collecting data for the needs assessment was a collaborative process between multiple state agencies, state and community organizations, and a broad range of stakeholders. Data was contributed by DFPS, HHSC, TWC, TEA, THSSCO, and the US

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Census Bureau. A group of 115 state agencies and local organizations distributed the stakeholder survey to ensure that it was shared broadly. Texas will continue to engage these organizations and others in 2023 to collect data and partner in survey distribution and dissemination of findings for the updated needs assessment.

In addition to the survey, Texas conducted eight stakeholder focus groups that included urban and rural early learning teachers, early childhood administrators, administrators and faculty from institutions of higher education (IHE), early childhood programs and partners, and families (including Spanish-speaking families). Texas plans to use a similar participatory approach for the updated needs assessment, as well as leverage local community organizations across the state to provide input from families and ECCE stakeholders.

### **1.2 Plan for Updating Needs Assessment**

A new statewide needs assessment will be completed in 2023 and updated in 2025. To accomplish this, TWC will begin to procure a third-party researcher within the first month of award. The needs assessment results are a central component of the strategic plan development; therefore, the researchers will work closely with the TELC to develop the needs assessment and provide ongoing updates and data presentations on the results. These presentations will begin in the sixth month of the award and allow the TELC to work with the researchers to interpret the data and to translate the findings into the strategic plan before the final report is finished. A final needs assessment report will be provided to the TELC in the tenth month of the award.

The researchers will update the needs assessment in four phases and provide the TELC updates and a data presentation as each phase is completed. The phases will focus on the following topics: (1) workforce, (2) local systems, (3) parents, and (4) data systems. Early in the needs assessment, the TELC will engage stakeholders, including **families and providers**, to

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identify priority areas and emerging topics to be explored, including **workforce compensation and benefits** and the **impact of COVID-19 pandemic** on the ECCE landscape, and **changing needs of families**. Building on the 2019 statewide needs assessment, DFPS, DSHS, HHSC, TEA, TWC, and THSSCO will provide updated needs assessments and new relevant data to the researchers for analysis. The purpose of this initial landscape analysis is to identify commonalities and dissimilarities in needs and assets identified by the stakeholders. Further, the updated needs assessment will focus on understanding geographic nuances across the state. This focus will give the agencies insight as to where programs are needed and will be impactful.

***Primary Data to be Collected.*** The researcher will use a mixed methods approach for primary data collected to assess needs of the workforce, local systems, and parents. The researchers will focus primary data collection on assessing needs related to discipline, mental health, and **trauma experienced by young children** from the perspective of providers and parents. The researcher will also collect data on **barriers to high-quality services** from ECCE programs and staff, parents who need these services, and other community stakeholders. Providers will be asked specifically about barriers for children with disabilities or those that need early intervention. A special emphasis will focus on **new barriers that have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic**. Unlicensed providers will also be included to assess **barriers of moving toward licensure**. Data system needs will be a qualitative descriptive study focused on describing the harmony and disparity between existing data systems used in the needs assessment process.

The researcher will work with the TELC to develop and finalize survey questions aimed at measuring gaps identified by stakeholders. Prior to statewide survey distribution, the TELC will re-engage stakeholders and revise the survey based on feedback from these groups. Surveys will

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be distributed via online portal in English and Spanish by the sixth month of the award. Surveys will be distributed by a network of state agencies, local organizations, and stakeholder partners to reach families, providers, and other stakeholders across Texas.

The researcher will also work with the ECIA Work Group to conduct interviews and regional roundtables across a sample of rural and urban areas of the state in areas with and without existing early childhood coalitions. These interviews and roundtables will be designed to capture the **voices of families** that engage with ECCE systems and the **voices of field-level ECCE providers and educators** to capture their needs, constraints, motivations, strengths, and work contexts. The researchers will engage with individuals reflective of the diversity of the state's population (by race, ethnicity, and language), including populations that have been **traditionally underrepresented**, and with **families of children with disabilities or developmental delays**. The researcher will compensate parents by issuing gift cards valued at approximately \$70 per hour of participation time.

The researchers will also specifically work to collect data from early childhood coalitions. This data collection will focus on understanding the depth and reach of their coalition; their major focus areas; and the direct and indirect funding used in the coalition's work. These data will provide an understanding of the extent to which these coalitions braid funding for their work, barriers to coalition building, and their stability and sustainability.

***Secondary Data Sources to be Used.*** The researcher will use secondary data to analyze ECCE provider quality. These data will be taken from the TWC's *Texas Rising Star* program, which is the state's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), and child care licensing data from CCR to assess **current quality and availability of ECCE**. These data will be analyzed to assess disparities in access for **infants and toddlers, for children in underserved**

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**communities, high-poverty communities, and rural areas.**

The Texas Workforce Registry, funded by TWC through the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS), is a web-based application for early childhood professionals to keep track of all of their education and employment history, as well as document training they have accrued. The researcher will use aggregate data from this system and the Children's Learning Institute's (CLI) Engage platform to assess the level of **degree or credential attainment of early educators** in high-quality child care settings.

Additionally, the researcher will attain public labor market data to assess **compensation and impacts to the workforce as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic**. These data together will be used to assess pathway gaps for the workforce to attain a credential or degree.

In 2020, TWC began partnering with TEA to assign a unique identifier (Unique ID) to all children under age six who receive child care scholarships through the state's Child Care Services subsidy (or scholarship) program. TEA and TWC will provide the data showing **distinct counts for the number of children** enrolled across programs. The researcher will use Program Information Report (PIR) data to identify the number of children enrolled in HS/EHS and Migrant and Seasonal Head Start in Texas. Program participation will also be gathered from Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) and the early childhood programs administered through DFPS Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI).

American Community Survey (ACS) will be used for contextual community-level data. ACS metrics used in other Texas needs assessments will be used in this needs assessment. This metric harmony will help create continuity between these needs assessments. The researchers will also utilize aggregate birth data in the needs assessment to help identify potential need for ECI services. As with other state needs assessments, the data will be analyzed to assess geographic

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and regional disparities and to align service uptake with projected needs.

### Activity Two: Update Statewide B-5 Strategic Plan

Texas adopted a statewide early learning strategic plan, inclusive of common goals across programs, in early November 2019. TELC, with support from members of the ECIA Work Group, representing DFPS, DSHS, HHSC, TEA, and TWC, provided oversight for implementation of the plan beginning in December 2019.

#### **2.1 Update & Improvement of Statewide B-5 Strategic Plan**

The development of the *Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan 2020-2025* was led by the TELC with technical support from the ECIA Work Group following the statewide needs assessment survey that solicited public comment on the proposed framework of the strategic plan. The strategic plan identifies strategies to be implemented by state agencies, local communities, early childhood programs and services, early learning professionals, and families.

***Goals, Action Steps, and Accomplishments.*** The *Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan 2020-2025* includes six goals that support Texas in achieving its vision that all Texas children are ready for school and ready to learn. Each goal is accompanied with a rationale that leverages findings from the statewide needs assessment, a statement describing the shared vision of success, targets to reach by 2025, and a series of action steps. These steps aim to foster partnerships, collaboration, coordination, quality improvement, and policy alignment across all ECCE settings in Texas for children birth to age five. Although the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the immediate priorities brought on by its impact **presented challenges in implementing the strategic plan** and slowed down progress toward meeting the goals of the strategic plan, the TELC and ECIA Work Group continued to move forward with implementing the strategies identified to meet the 2025 targets. Table 2 outlines the goals of the strategic plan, along with notable milestones accomplished since 2020. Some milestones listed were systemic

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changes implemented to resolve issues that emerged during the pandemic.

**Table 2. Strategic Plan Goals and Milestones Accomplished**

<p><b>Goal 1:</b> Early childhood programs in Texas should be aligned to ensure children are ready to learn by kindergarten.</p>
<p><b>DSHS</b> funds Help Me Grow (HMG) Texas and Healthy Child Care Texas grants to increase cross-sector use of developmental screening. <b>HHSC</b>'s Early Childhood Intervention (<b>ECI</b>) expanded the options local evaluation teams can use to determine eligibility to include the Developmental Assessment of Young Children, second edition, which is suitable for administration via video conferencing. Also, <b>TEA</b> narrowed the approved list of kindergarten literacy instruments to two approved instruments, driving consistency in the ability to compare statewide results.</p>
<p><b>Goal 2:</b> All families will have access to a variety of high-quality programs and the information needed to discern which programs are the best fit for their children.</p>
<p>Since 2020, <b>DSHS</b> has been the HMG Texas organizing entity, providing oversight, technical assistance, and guidance to 35 counties on early childhood systems coordination to improve families' access to services. Since 2021, <b>PEI</b> has funded seven new Family Resource Centers and expanded Texas Home Visiting programs to five new communities. <b>ECI</b> offered training on the evidence-based practice of coaching families to support parents and other caregivers in learning to implement developmental strategies throughout the child's day. <b>TEA</b> funded schools to improve the quality of interactions between students and teachers through a coaching model designed to increase effective communication and address behavior management in the classroom. The percent of children receiving <b>TWC</b>'s child care subsidy who enroll in <i>Texas Rising Star</i> certified child care program has increased from 38% in FY20 to 48.5% as of July 2022.</p>
<p><b>Goal 3:</b> Families will be equipped with knowledge and tools they need to be their children's primary caregiver.</p>
<p>Texas launched <i>Early Childhood Texas</i>, a website that provides families with information about the availability of high-quality early childhood programs and other early childhood resources, and <i>GetParentingTips.com</i> for families to access helpful information and videos. <b>DSHS</b> and <b>ECI</b> integrated "<i>Learn the Signs. Act Early.</i>" educational materials into the HMG Texas network and existing <b>ECI</b> trainings to inform caregivers on developmental milestone monitoring and ways families can support children's development. The eight HMG Texas sites established or integrated existing central intake and referral systems to provide care coordination and family navigation between systems so that families receive necessary services and supports.</p>
<p><b>Goal 4:</b> 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.</p>
<p>Texas provided ECCE educators and professionals with training and professional development opportunities, including: registered apprenticeship programs; increased early childhood professional development scholarships; free online training packages to fulfill requirements for child care preservice training and Child Development Associate® (CDA) credential; training for early educators on strategies to support infant and toddler development and to help identify children with special needs within their programs; child care business training and business coaching for center- and home-based child care providers; training about evidence-based strategies for staff retention and recruitment. Additionally, <b>CCR</b> partnered with <b>TWC</b> to provide a <i>Virtual Collaborative Symposium</i> to strengthen the collaboration between child care licensing inspectors and <i>Texas Rising Star</i> mentors and assessors to build high quality child care throughout Texas.</p>

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**Goal 5:** Each community has a plan for a well-organized system of early childhood services.

To increase the number of pre-k partnership classrooms across the state, TWC hired 27 state staff to work across the state and provided funding to TEA to support their efforts to facilitate child care providers drawing down state funding for pre-k instruction. PEI released an online *Prevention and Early Intervention Community Toolkit* that offers a growing library of high quality tools and resources for organizations and communities working to develop or strengthen coalition work. PEI continued to work with ECCE grantees to participate in or lead early childhood coalition work in their communities through targeted training and technical assistance around collective impact, coalition building, and community outreach.

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

TWC and TEA are now assigning unique IDs to children under age six receiving child care subsidies through TWC and are collaborating on research to better understand the children the two agencies are serving and how their services and programs overlap. In August 2022, a TELC work group led focus groups and conducted a survey to collect stakeholder feedback that will guide recommendations for the development of an early childhood integrated data system (ECIDS). PEI funded a webinar series for community stakeholders in Spring 2021 to provide a deep dive on available early childhood data in state agencies.

*Updated and Improved Plan.* The updated strategic plan will build on prior work, reflecting the strategies identified in the 2019 plan, particularly those that address ongoing needs, and incorporate findings from the 2023 needs assessment to address issues emerging in the past few years. COVID-19 highlighted existing needs, and its impact created new challenges for the B-5 mixed delivery system. The updated plan will aim to address those issues with thoughtful and innovative strategies. To improve upon the 2019 strategic plan, the 2023 strategic planning process will incorporate elements of human-centered design so that stakeholders, **including families and providers**, are deliberately and meaningfully engaged from the beginning of the needs assessment process, and re-engaged throughout the development of the plan.

Immediately following notification of PDG B-5 Renewal Grant award, TWC will develop a request for proposals to procure a knowledgeable and experienced strategic planning facilitator. The facilitator will work with the TELC to hold virtual and in person strategic planning sessions. The strategic planning process will be informed by stakeholder perspectives captured through activities aimed at maintaining bi-directional communication between the state and stakeholders

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beyond the initial needs assessment phase. The process will be iterative, rooted in generating insights and co-creating strategies that are responsive to the needs assessment.

***Family Engagement.*** The same families taking part in the needs assessment update will be invited to inform the strategic plan as well. They will be engaged by the ECIA Work Group and strategic plan vendor through a series of roundtable discussions.

### **2.2 Lessons Learned and Plans for Improvement**

Implementing activities during the 2019 PDG required increased coordination and collaboration across agencies, resulting in strengthened relationships, increased understanding of partnership opportunities, and a greater awareness of overlaps in service. The following describes the activities under Texas' prior PDG and key lessons learned during the process.

***Activity One: Needs Assessment.*** Through the 2019 needs assessment, state agencies and stakeholders developed deep knowledge of the data available and the limitations with current data sources. As Texas implemented the strategic plan, state agencies increased the amount and transparency of data published publicly. For example, TWC developed a Child Care by the Numbers page on its agency website to share monthly and annual data about children receiving scholarships and the child care providers serving them. TWC also added the ACF-801 data files to the state's open data portal, allowing researchers and stakeholders to more readily access Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) program information. In 2021, PEI updated its Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Needs Assessment using geographically-based risk and resiliency data. PEI and partner state agencies use the data and mapping to target vulnerable communities, including those in rural areas, for outreach and service development. HHSC updated its Search Texas Child Care website to help parents better understand child care provider inspection reports. Through the project proposed in this application, Texas will build on

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ongoing work to develop an integrated statewide data system to align data across programs.

*Activity Two: Strategic Plan.* Developing the 2019 strategic plan provided a platform for state agencies and stakeholders to examine the ECCE system and to identify existing work that could be leveraged to support the strategic plan goals. Partnering agencies have increased the coordination of resources and funding streams to maximize supports to families, communities, and programs. Texas understands that to increase impact, communities must be engaged; therefore, activities in this grant application reflect community engagement. Additionally, the 2019 strategic planning process spotlighted the need for strong measurable indicators to assess progress. As Texas updates the strategic plan, emphasis will be placed on identifying and tracking **measurable indicators** for each strategy.

*Activity Three: Maximizing Parental Choice and Knowledge.* As the state and nation battled COVID-19, Texas learned the necessity of maximizing diverse family voices. This proposed project reflects a greater effort to incorporate parent voice throughout the grant period and engage parents as leaders in policy and program decisions that impact the B-5 mixed delivery system. Additionally, Texas will provide subgrants to support local systems building and strengthen local early childhood coalitions, as they are well-positioned to meet families where they are and assist them in accessing necessary supports and services.

Texas also learned about families' need for a coordinated enrollment system for ECCE programs. In Texas, ECCE programs, which have varying eligibility and data collection requirements, exist across multiple state agencies and Head Start grantees. TWC will develop an eligibility screener, beginning in Year 2 of the renewal grant, to help parents quickly assess their eligibility for multiple programs. Developing a coordinated enrollment system will require further coordination among agencies. Texas will explore this opportunity for Year 3.

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*Activity Four: Sharing Best Practices.* Texas learned lessons regarding the ongoing need to support partnerships between ECI and child care providers through Child Find activities.

Funding under the initial grant was distributed to a small number of ECI providers across the state to provide trainings. These trainings produced an increased number of appropriate referrals to ECI. Texas will continue these activities during the renewal grant period.

*Activity Five: Improving Overall Quality.* During the initial grant, early learning professionals surveyed expressed a need for additional professional development on a variety of topics, including addressing challenging behaviors, supporting children with special needs, and child development/brain development. These findings drove the professional development offerings of the initial grant, including Naturalistic Developmental Behavioral Intervention (NDBI) services for ECI providers, and informed the approach for the renewal grant period, including a focus on professional development for tools like restorative discipline, teacher-student interactions, and inclusive practices.

*Changes Caused by COVID-19 Pandemic.* COVID-19 brought many challenges; however, Texas is resilient. The families, ECCE providers, and agencies quickly adapted, coordinated, and helped one another address needs and move forward. Specific needs that existed previously but were further highlighted by the pandemic's impact concern equitable access to high-quality early childhood programs, ECCE workforce conditions, and the need for comprehensive support services for families. Texas is working to meet the needs in all of these areas and will use this proposed project to further advance that work. As part of its effort to ensure **equitable access to high-quality early childhood programs**, TWC has increased funding for child care scholarships and provider reimbursement rates to a base rate set at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of the market rate. Funding through this proposed project will provide training to support provider quality

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improvement and increased access for ECI services.

Staffing shortages that have plagued the ECCE industry demonstrated need for innovative solutions to improve its insufficient **workforce conditions**, specifically low wages. When Texas received \$2.45 billion in federal American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act funds to provide stabilization funds to child care providers, TWC used the opportunity to help providers and added an additional \$1 billion (a total of \$3.45 billion) to its Child Care Relief Fund 2022. TWC provided guidance on using those funds to support staff compensation, stipends, and bonuses. Because ECI did not use stabilization funding directly for staff compensation efforts, Texas will support ECI therapists through this proposed stabilization project. Texas will also develop a robust pipeline of effective early childhood educators and professionals through multiple pathways from high school to higher education and career.

One glaring issue highlighted by the pandemic was the need to support families with **comprehensive services**. Texas had to quickly mobilize early childhood system infrastructure to continue serving families. For example, the HMG Texas site serving Dallas/Fort Worth rapidly launched a call line that relieved some of the burden of early childhood calls to 2-1-1. The call line connected frontline workers to available child care slots. Texas will use funding from this project to offer sub-grants to communities to continue implementation or enhancement to early childhood systems building activities.

### **Activity Three: Maximize Parent and Family Engagement in the B-5 System**

Texas appreciates the critical role parents and families have in ensuring their children are ready for school and thus strives to understand their needs in order to provide resources and supports. Family voice and education are central to this project and ongoing work.

#### **3.1 Improving Family Choice and Engagement**

Texas will increase parent and family knowledge about the state's mixed delivery system,

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thereby improving family choice in decisions that work best for their needs, and engaging families in their young children's care and education.

***Current Work.*** PEI is currently developing a PEI Parent Advisory Council. The Parent Advisory Council will provide the state with valuable input from families on necessary resources and support related to prevention policies, procedures, and programs. Over the past three years, local entities funded by PEI have developed increasingly robust local parent advisory committees – engaging parents around local program planning, service considerations, parent support, outreach, and public messaging and communication. DSHS also supports HMG Texas sites' family and community engagement efforts to inform organizational policy and program decisions, build parent understanding about child development, and share information about supportive services available to families in the community. Currently, four of the eight HMG Texas sites have a formal structure to gather parent and caregiver input through parent advisory committees and workgroups. Additionally, ECI's Advisory Committee, whose members are appointed by the Governor, includes parent and family representation.

***Proposed Projects.*** The ECIA Work Group will provide ready **access to information** through its existing Early Childhood Texas ([earlychildhood.texas.gov](http://earlychildhood.texas.gov)) website. The website allows families with young children easy access to Texas state agency programs, services, and resources. Website materials are offered in the top three most frequently spoken languages in the state: English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. To build on the effectiveness of this resource, the ECIA Work Group will **collaborate with existing programs** to add local and regional components to the existing statewide resources, allowing families to find local service providers across a variety of programs including early intervention, parent education, home visiting, and child care scholarships in their county. The ECIA Work Group will also build out available resources on

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basic needs and mental health. To promote the site, TWC plans to include Early Childhood Texas in its broader outreach and education campaign, a \$10 million investment to use federal CCDF funds to emphasize consumer education around selecting high quality programs.

Currently, one half of the inquiries to the Early Childhood Texas general email inbox are from parents or caregivers who would benefit from a tool that would orient them to which program(s) to apply for, instead of researching eligibility requirements for each individual program separately. To address this need, TWC, TEA, and THSSCO will **simplify application practices** by creating a common eligibility screener across multiple early childhood programs with similar eligibility criteria, allowing families to determine more easily which services they could be eligible for, and therefore, they may apply for. The screener will be developed in Year 2 and launched in Year 3 of the grant cycle and will include, at a minimum, criteria for: child care scholarships, public school pre-k, and HS/EHS. The screener will be housed on the Early Childhood Texas website. Additionally, Texas is exploring possibilities for a coordinated cross-agency application for child care scholarships, pre-k, and HS/EHS.

### **3.2 Connecting Families to Services Needed**

*Current Work.* TEA's statewide Communities in Schools (CIS) program provides individual case management services for students to help them to persist in education and ultimately graduate from high school. Two of the qualifying criteria for CIS support are limited English proficiency and homelessness. In 2021-2022, CIS affiliates served over 1,400 campuses and 6,700 children in pre-k through kindergarten, connecting them with services like **housing, food, training or employment programs, income supports, and health and mental health services.**

Homelessness is a criterion that qualifies a family for free public school pre-k, child care scholarships, and HS/EHS. Because homelessness can expose families to physical, mental and

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developmental risks, ECI partners with organizations and stakeholders (including homeless and family violence shelters) to ensure families with children birth to 36 months who are experiencing homelessness are informed about ECI services and how to refer their children if there are **concerns about their development**. ECI services are provided in the child's natural environment, which could include a homeless shelter, park, or other location familiar to the family. ECI services are designed to coach parents so they can carry out intervention techniques and provide opportunities for the child to learn and progress during daily routines, regardless of their living situation. Additionally, all families enrolled in ECI receive case management to help connect and gain access to medical, social, educational, and developmental services.

Texas has three federally recognized tribes: the Tigua people of Ysleta del Sur Pueblo (El Paso, TX), Alabama-Coushatta (Livingston, TX), and Kickapoo (Eagle Pass, TX). These tribes have connections with local workforce development boards (LWDBs), which administer child care scholarships and oversee local child care quality improvement activities, and independent school districts (ISDs) near their communities. TWC reached out to contacts with these tribes in the development of this grant application and will continue to foster meaningful relationships with these groups as Texas learns how to better support tribal families.

DSHS works with communities to implement the Help Me Grow (HMG) System Model so all Texas children have access to supports and services that are child-focused, family-driven, community-based, culturally grounded, and sustainable. DSHS currently supports eight communities in the state. As part of the HMG System Model, participating communities create a "centralized access point" to connect children and their families to services they need. HMG care coordinators are centralized access point staff who provide education and support to families around specific developmental or behavioral concerns or questions, help families recognize

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typical developmental milestones, provide referrals to community-based supports and local resources to address parents' concerns about health, development, behavior and learning of their children, empower families to overcome barriers to accessing services, and follow up with them to ensure service linkages are successful.

***Proposed Project.*** One site under HMG Texas provides care coordination that includes a warm hand-off to the local 2-1-1 provider who coordinates resources for **housing, food, training or employment programs, and income supports**. To broaden connections to existing 2-1-1 resources, in Years 2 and 3 of the grant, HHSC Texas Information Referral Network will expand its use of application programming interface (API) connections to all HMG Texas sites interested in connecting their centralized access points with 2-1-1. This will allow for an automated information flow from the state 2-1-1 resource directory to the local HMG resource directory.

### **3.3 Children with Disabilities or Developmental Delays**

***Current Work.*** As the state entity serving disabled or developmentally delayed children through IDEA Part C, HHSC conducted a Child Find Self-Assessment (CFSA) in 2021, which included four focus groups with families across the state to understand barriers to access and reasons for declined service. Following this work, HHSC led a focus group of 31 cross-sector stakeholders, including three parent representatives. Themes from this work included identifying policies and practices that enhance the workforce, developing sustainable system coordination and partnerships, using social media/digital tools for education, and supporting delivery of ECI services using telehealth. While the final workgroup recommendations and action plans are in process, HHSC kicked off a targeted social media campaign in September 2022 to raise awareness about child development, tools to track milestones, and how to make referrals to ECI. Further action planning related to the recommendations of the CFSA workgroup will include

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input from the ECI Advisory Committee, made up of stakeholders including families, and will also involve engaging directly with families from previous focus groups as well as families who are currently receiving ECI services.

HHSC conducts Child Find activities at both the state and contractor level to locate, identify, and evaluate children with disabilities who need services. At the state level these activities include: providing trainings to educate individuals working with families both on how to identify a developmental delay and how to refer to ECI when appropriate; participating in conference exhibits to share information about ECI with a wide variety of partners (e.g., medical professionals, educational partners, and families), providing webinars targeted to increase education about ECI and developmental delays for specific referral sources, and developing memorandums of understanding outlining collaboration to support families involved with Child Protective Services and families transitioning from ECI to Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE). ECI providers use social media to post information about ECI, participate in community events to connect with families and provide information about developmental growth, and provide training targeted to those who work in child care settings to help promote early referrals when concerns about a child's development are identified.

***Proposed Project.*** Texas will provide additional support for ECI services to increase access to high-quality developmental assessments and interventions and to help support needs during a post-COVID enrollment boom (see Section 6.1).

### **3.4 Family Engagement and Leadership**

***Current Work.*** Since 2018, PEI has provided National Family Support Network (NFSN) trainings to local grantees including providers serving at-risk youth, home visiting and other early childhood programs, and newly established family resource centers. NFSN trainings

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provide best practices on how to **meaningfully involve** families in **designing and improving programs and services, interpreting continuous quality improvement data, goal setting, and family-centered planning**. PEI helped to establish the Texas Family Support Network to expand the use of the Standards of Quality. In FY 2022, the network secured 15 Standards trainings certifying almost 500 individuals. Training courses are well-attended and positively evaluated by attendees, who praise the information as valuable to their professional growth and overall organizational growth and ability to better support families.

PEI has also initiated use of Be Strong Families Parent Cafés through local partners across the state to support parent engagement at all levels. The research-informed Parent Café approach uses structured, small group convenings with peer-to-peer conversation to promote awareness and strengthening within families, develop relationships, build community, and engage parents as partners in initiatives, programs, and services. Parent Cafés are accessible, expansive, and enhance parent connection and support networks. The approach also serves as a platform to engage and affirm parents as leaders, creating additional opportunities for education, engagement, and parent partnership. These workshops are suitable for a wide variety of programs and highly requested by PEI grantees. Parent Café Training is an experiential and interactive workshop that prepares participants, both professionals and parents, to convene and host Parent Cafés. Since FY 2020, PEI has facilitated eight virtual and two in-person training workshops resulting in 186 individuals being trained. More than half of all PEI early childhood program grantees have incorporated Parent Cafés into their programming strategies.

***Proposed Projects.*** Through subgrants, PEI will offer local early childhood coalitions professional development opportunities and funding supports to enhance community-based efforts to **improve family engagement and leadership in improving the state's ECCE**

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**system**, specifically NFSN trainings, including Standards of Quality, and Parent Café training and materials. Staff of each agency in the ECIA Work Group will also participate in the NFSN Standards of Quality training to inform state-level approaches to family engagement.

The ECIA Work Group will create opportunities for meaningful family engagement and leadership at both state level and local programs levels. During the strategic plan phase of work in partnership with families, providers and other early childhood coalition members, the ECIA Work Group will work with the BUILD Initiative to co-design intentional opportunities for ongoing engagement between families, the TELC and ECIA Work Group members, including clear roles and responsibilities. BUILD has provided technical assistance to the ECIA Work Group since 2020 and brings expertise in improving connections and feedback loops between families, local coalitions, and state systems.

Details of ongoing family input for the state's PDG B-5 work will be designed jointly with families, under guidance from the BUILD Initiative. The feedback mechanisms will include engaging directly with families to advise the ECIA Work Group on an ongoing basis, including families engaged during the PDG B-5 needs assessment and strategic planning, representatives from existing regional coalitions, and members of communities that do not yet have an existing coalition infrastructure. Each selected representative will regularly engage with ECIA Work Group members in one-on-one meetings, focus groups, and as guests in ECIA Work Group and TELC meetings to share feedback and insights. Representatives will be compensated for their time and will be paired with a mentor (either a parent with experience serving on a Parent Advisory Council or a state agency staff member who is a parent themselves). In Year 1, the ECIA Work Group will conduct focus groups in high-need areas to understand the existing infrastructure, strengths, and needs in those communities to inform PEI's subgranting strategy

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for Years 2 and 3 (see Section 6.1).

The ECIA Work Group will develop a formal process for communicating externally and for receiving communication. It will also develop policies for parent and/or provider review of PDG B-5 public-facing materials prior to publishing content.

### Activity Four: Support the B-5 Workforce and Disseminate Best Practices

#### 4.1 Professional Development and Best Practices

##### *Current Professional Development to Support the Workforce*

The Texas B-5 mixed delivery system offers robust free and paid professional development opportunities, including many interdisciplinary and cross-program, cross-agency trainings.

*Texas Rising Star Early Educator Conference.* This free, three-day conference provides attendees with opportunities to share and learn best practices through keynote speakers, breakout sessions, and networking opportunities. Sessions include training on approaches to provide **trauma-informed care, inclusion strategies** for children with or at risk for disabilities and developmental delays, and **reduction of suspension and expulsion** of young children.

*Free Online Training.* Early childhood professionals can access up to 12 free online courses aligned with annual training requirements through Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's Promoting Early Education Quality program. Additionally, state agencies partner with the Children's Learning Institute (CLI) at the University of Texas Health Science Center-Houston to provide a comprehensive platform for early childhood programs that includes interactive professional development courses, child progress monitoring measures, observation and goal-setting tools, and supplementary activities with video-based demonstrations.

*Virtual Collaborative Symposium.* TWC and HHSC's Child Care Regulation division hosted a Virtual Collaborative Symposium on June 8-9, 2022. The purpose of this symposium was to strengthen the collaboration between agencies to build high quality child care throughout Texas.

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The team will host a second Virtual Collaborative Symposium in Fall 2022.

*Business Training and Coaching.* TWC provides child care business training and coaching for center- and home-based child care providers. Supports include in-person business summits, live and recorded webinars, free online self-paced courses, one-on-one business coaching, and resources specific to child care business development and maintenance in Texas.

*Skills for Small Business.* Through TWC's Skills for Small Business program, child care providers with under 100 employees are eligible to apply for funding for training through a local participating community or technical college.

### ***Proposed Opportunities for Professional Development and Sharing Best Practices***

Through the renewal grant, Texas plans to implement a statewide ECCE forum, bringing together local early childhood leaders to create a plan for ongoing, coordinated local work and transitions, and to provide input on the draft statewide PDG B-5 strategic plan. The audience will include designated early childhood coalition leads from participating communities and one community partner from outside their organization. This builds on the Community Convenings hosted by the state during the initial PDG B-5 effort. The forum will be held the day following the Help Me Grow National Forum, to be hosted in Fort Worth, Texas, in September 2023. The national conference will allow attendees to gain an understanding of or deepen their use of the HMG System Model, and the Texas ECCE content will provide technical assistance around coalition-building, scaffolded based on the maturity of attendees' early childhood coalition efforts and community size.

To build on the success of the Virtual Collaborative Symposium, the ECIA Work Group will hold a conference to bring together state and regional staff from across the ECCE sector to strengthen understanding and relationships across entities. In addition to TRS mentors, CCR

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inspectors, and state staff from TWC and CCR, invitees will include state staff from the ECIA Work Group affiliates and regional staff from each agency: TEA stakeholders (Education Service Center (ESC) and LEA staff), ECI contractors, DFPS home visitors, LWDB child care staff, DSHS Title V regional staff, and WIC local office staff. Structured similarly to the Virtual Collaborative Symposium, the first day will focus on cross-sector “day in the life” overviews and structured question and answer sessions to foment dialogue. The second day will focus on **best practice dissemination** and available resources related to **trauma-informed approaches to address adverse experiences and working with vulnerable populations**, including children involved with the child welfare system, children experiencing homelessness, and dual or multi-language learners. The two-day event will be held virtually to effectively reach all areas of the state. Based on feedback following the 2022 Virtual Collaborative Symposium, attendees were energized by knowledge of their peers in adjacent workforce sectors and were eager to connect. To promote local connections across programs, attendees will receive a local guide of conference attendees and the areas they represent.

### **4.2 Improving Training and Workforce Experience**

#### ***Current Supports***

*Child Care Subsidy Payment Rates.* Effective October 1, 2022, TWC **increased reimbursement rates** for child care providers participating in the subsidy system to a base level at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of the market rate. TWC shared information about the rate increases through LWDBs, who administer the program.

*Scholarships and Apprenticeships.* To offset the expense of higher education and improve the quality of the workforce, Texas will continue to provide funding for the early childhood professional development scholarship program, which supports the costs for educators to obtain

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their CDA® credential, associate degree, bachelor's degree, or for Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs). See Section 4.3 for details.

*Coaching and Mentoring.* Texas will support professionals in all settings to have increased access to coaches and mentors, including *Texas Rising Star* mentors, to allow child care providers to boost the quality of their programs leading to improved outcomes for children. TWC dedicated \$1 million of stimulus funding for CCR to hire five Child Care Navigators. As part of their responsibilities, navigators will connect child care permit applicants and new child care providers with experienced staff in other child care programs to serve as mentors. They will also connect new providers to *Texas Rising Star* and Child Care Services to access an additional funding source, quality improvement supports, and free one-on-one business coaching to help new providers build and maintain strong programs.

*Wage Supplement Study.* In 2021, TWC distributed \$30 million to the 28 LWDBs to promote increased and ongoing participation in the *Texas Rising Star* program. Twenty LWDBs chose to use a portion of the funds to implement **wage supplement strategies**, including one-time and repeated bonuses, to support ECCE educators and enhance staff retention. The wage supplement strategies varied across LWDBs. In August 2022, TWC partnered with Rice University's Texas Policy Lab to study the impact of Board-level wage supplement programs on staff retention and turnover among *Texas Rising Star* child care. **Texas will use the results of this study to inform activities for Years 2 and 3.**

*Strategic Plan to Support the Child Care Workforce.* In response to House Bill 619, enacted by the 87th Texas Legislature (Regular Session, 2021), TWC convened a workgroup consisting of child care providers, early educators, and community stakeholders to develop a strategic plan to support the child care workforce. The strategic plan will be submitted to the Governor,

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Lieutenant Governor, and Speaker of the House of Representatives in December 2022. The plan will detail recommendations of **strategies to improve, sustain, and support the child care workforce**, including recommendations for increasing compensation for and reducing turnover of child care workers, eliminating pay disparities in the child care workforce, increasing paid opportunities for professional development and education for child care workers. **Texas will use this report to inform activities for Years 2 and 3.**

### *Proposed Projects*

*Coaching and Mentoring.* Texas will continue the Child Care Navigator program in Years 2 and 3 (see Section 4.4). The renewal grant will further allow HHSC to provide stipends to ECI providers for mentoring new staff and interns (see Section 4.4), and TEA to provide select LEAs in mixed delivery settings with coaching on teacher-student interactions (see Section 5.1).

*Adopting Supports to Limit Suspension and Expulsion of Young Children.* Since 2015, TEA has offered Restorative Discipline Practices to LEAs. TEA partnered with the Institute for Restorative Justice and Restorative Dialogue at the University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work on a statewide roll-out of the model. Since 2016, 1,400 administrators and 400 coordinators have obtained training in the model, and the initial groups trained were selected based on the number of African American males who were suspended from the school districts in their regions. Building on this work, TEA will offer Restorative Discipline Practices coaching and training to LEAs and other early learning providers, with a focus on children in pre-k, to **limit suspension and expulsion of young children.**

*Supporting Inclusion Strategies.* In 2022, TWC partnered with HHSC to provide professional development and training opportunities to strengthen partnerships between ECI providers and child care providers and to provide strategies to support **inclusion of infants and toddlers with**

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**special needs** within their programs. Building on the success of this initiative, ECI providers will continue partnering with local early learning programs, including providing training on developmental learning strategies, early brain development, and inclusion to child care providers; training and supporting child care providers on screening for developmental delays; and building the capacity of ECI personnel to support social-emotional wellness and intervene when there are early childhood mental health concerns so they can support and equip the child care programs they work with to manage challenging behaviors in the classroom.

### **4.3 Aligned Systems of Service Provision and Career Ladder for ECCE Professionals**

Texas has experienced a devastating teacher shortage across the ECCE landscape. To address this crisis for child care providers and primary education, Texas will develop a **workforce pipeline** with the following goals: (1) increase the number of teachers in early learning classrooms; (2) reduce the educator turnover rates with ECCE programs; (3) create clear pathways from a child care classroom, early childhood certificate, or college degree into an early childhood career; and (4) provide reliable supports for individuals navigating those pathways.

The *Early Educator Pathways* envisioned for the renewal grant period will support the development of more robust pathways, beginning with students in high school and through the multiple pathways that students may pursue, such as the attainment of the CDA® credential, enrollment in Texas institutions of higher education (IHEs), and RAPs. The model builds a **pipeline of qualified early childhood professionals** through multiple pathways into child care and public schools with opportunities to grow their education/careers into other early childhood fields. The pathway consists of three basic tenets: articulation (credit for prior learning) between educational programs; paid work-based learning (including RAPs) with high-quality mentors; and scholarships for tuition and fees.

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***LEA and IHE Early Childhood Landscape Analysis.*** TWC, in partnership with TEA and THECB, will review the early education offerings in LEAs and IHEs. This landscape analysis will identify existing articulation or transfer agreements in place at IHEs and the number of credit hours that are available for prior learning, as well as available online courses at the high school or college level that could make courses more available to students statewide.

***Career and Technical Education (CTE) for High School Students.*** TWC will work with TEA to support the enhancement of the Early Learning CTE Program of Study to support the attainment of a nationally recognized CDA® and/or to provide dual credit toward an early childhood degree before graduation. Texas will also support CTE Programs of Study to establish partnerships with high-quality child care programs that are *Texas Rising Star*-certified, so CTE students can participate in practicum (work-based learning) programs in a quality child care setting. TWC will expand its existing early childhood professional scholarship program to cover the costs of a CDA® Exam for high school students. By earning a CDA® in high school, graduating students have an opportunity to start at a higher wage rate and can articulate their CDA® credential into college credit (see section below on *Articulation*). Texas will enhance its support for high school students and provide compensation support while they are participating in practicum programs.

***Career Pathway Information for High School Students.*** In addition to helping schools design and implement the CTE Program of Study, TWC and TEA will provide information on the early childhood field and how students can use experience in a child care setting as a foundation for many different careers (e.g., public school teacher, child care licensing inspector, quality mentor, child care administrator). TWC and TEA will share information with students on possible career steps after graduation, including information on *Texas Rising Star* providers (for

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immediate employment opportunities), RAPS, and attending college with minimum debt through TWC's existing early childhood professional development scholarship program.

***Articulation.*** TWC, TEA, and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) will collaborate with ISDs, LEAs, ESCs, and IHEs to develop effective articulation or transfer agreements that recognize students' prior learning. These pathways may include **credit for work experience or based on competency evaluations** to help current early childhood professionals reduce the number of college classes they need to take, the time they have to dedicate to classwork, and the cost required to earn their degree.

In Year 1, Texas will contract with an entity to conduct articulation work sessions for ISDs and IHEs. These work sessions will review opportunities and develop action plans to develop articulation agreements from CDA® to associate or bachelor's degree, associate to bachelor's degree, and bachelor's degree to traditional or alternative teacher certification. Through this renewal grant, TWC will fund approximately 10 colleges and universities **to develop clear pathways for early childhood professionals** that align the CDA® Credential, associate degrees, bachelor's degrees, or teacher certification options. This work will build on the work that TWC has already begun, in partnership with San Jacinto College, to develop early childhood articulation standards.

***Pathway Scholarships for Early Educators.*** Texas will incentivize the IHEs to implement their new articulation agreements by providing: 1) full-tuition and fee scholarships for eligible students enrolling in the program; 2) stipends for scholarship students participating in a practicum; 3) support identifying high-quality ECCE environments for practicums; and 4) mentor stipends to ensure highly qualified teachers are compensated for their participation. Participating universities will be expected to offer early childhood education programs that

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support the needs of working, nontraditional, rural area, and high school dual enrollment students. *Early Educator Pathways* will include a focus on virtual and hybrid offerings to ensure access for students to IHEs with articulated coursework to confer credit hours, aligned credentials, and degree programs that are not limited by geography. Additionally, Texas will support programs to ensure that **linguistically and culturally supportive** curriculum is available.

***Registered Apprenticeship Programs.*** TWC will offer new planning and implementation RAP grants to provide access to work-based learning for ECCE professionals across the state. Expanding RAPs by offering additional grants will target the retention of current teachers by increasing child care administrators' investment in their careers through mentorship and educational and professional development supports. This will build upon TWC's existing efforts supporting the development of several new RAPs in the state.

***Early Childhood Professional Development Scholarships.*** TWC currently funds scholarships for early educators to take the CDA® exam or pursue an associate or bachelor's degree, and apprenticeship training, **building in compensation increases** as progress is made. The scholarship program allows current early childhood professionals to gain an early childhood credential or degree with minimal debt while working at least 30 hours a week with a high-quality child care provider. The program also includes a wage increase or bonus for degree completion. The scholarship program supports **staff retention** by requiring a commitment from the teacher to stay with their current employer for a length of time commensurate to the level of education pursued, therefore addressing education, compensation, and retention with a comprehensive approach. The scholarship program also offers release time reimbursement to limit the burden on working teachers and their employers.

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To **reduce barriers to entry** into the ECCE field, TWC will expand this scholarship program to cover costs for high school students in dual-credit early education courses (where those costs are not waived or covered by the ISD or IHE). Additionally, TWC will expand the scholarship program to cover stipends for eligible high school students and to support the IHE Pathway Scholarships for Early Educators to include stipends/compensation for students enrolled in their practicum. The program will also be expanded to provide stipends for mentors within the work-based learning classrooms (for both high school and IHE work-based learning).

*Texas Professional Workforce Registry.* The state's workforce registry, Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS), includes a **career ladder** called the *Texas Early Childhood Career Pathway*. This career ladder assists the ECCE workforce in identifying the steps to take to seek higher pay scales and promotions and offers administrators a framework for making compensation and promotion decisions. To improve the career ladder and ensure the most efficient usage by teachers, Texas will also align the ladder with the new *Early Educator Pathways* model through a project funded with stimulus dollars.

### **4.4 Recruiting and Retaining the ECCE Workforce**

*Current Work.* TWC received \$2.45 billion dollars in ARP Stabilization Grant funding to provide Child Care Relief Funds (CCRF) to over 10,800 child care providers. In addition to this funding, TWC added \$1 billion in ARP Discretionary and Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) funds to CCRF. To support early educators, TWC encouraged providers to dedicate the increased CCRF funds to provide **enhanced compensation and benefits packages to recruit and retain child care staff**. The 2022 CCRF awards averaged \$30,000 for home-based providers and \$370,000 for center-based providers.

In addition to the increased relief funding, TWC offers free business resources on the

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childcare.texas.gov website and free one-on-one business coaching. In July 2022, TWC and HHSC partnered with the business coaching team to develop a collection of eight short videos and 15 accompanying tools on *Attracting and Retaining Staff*. TWC also dedicated \$10 million to launch outreach and education campaigns, including an early educator recruitment campaign.

TWC awarded grants to four entities to create or expand **Shared Services Alliances (SSAs)** focused on different child care provider populations and providing different services across Texas. Each SSA is organized by a Lead Entity who coordinates all member business, helps members identify common needs, and manages the implementation of the agreed-upon services. Grantees are in the early stages of developing or expanding their services, but the SSAs plan to offer various services including accounting support, marketing support, staff recruitment and retention support, digital literacy support, and substitute pools. One grantee will offer technical assistance to help members increase teacher compensation packages by providing high-quality benefits at a shared cost.

***Proposed Projects.*** To address the need to increase availability of qualified providers throughout the state, Texas will continue its investment in CCR navigator positions (See Section 4.2). These positions will launch in late 2022 to support prospective child care providers throughout the licensing process, with a focus on child care deserts and **rural areas**. The primary goals of the navigators are to decrease the length of time from application to opening, increase the number of licensed providers in high-need areas, and ensure sustainability of new programs. CCR's Unregulated Operations Unit identified over 2,700 unregulated child care operations in FY 2021. Navigators will work with these operations to overcome barriers to regulation and connect them with resources in their areas.

Texas will **support recruitment and retention** by offering hiring and retention payments

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(\$2,000 at hire and \$2,000 after two years of service) to ECI therapists, with a preference for those working in rural counties. Texas will also offer stipends for ECI providers who mentor interns or new staff. This approach builds on the efforts of the Personnel Retention Grant project, an ongoing effort between HHSC and the University of Texas at El Paso. Through this project, ECI contractors have identified the ability to offer a stipend upon hire as helpful to attract professionals in those specific disciplines for hard-to-fill positions. Splitting the funds to allow for a portion to be offered at hiring with the remainder at the end of a designated timeframe, supports retention efforts. Additionally, ECI contractors have found that offering small stipends to incentivize tenured staff to work with professionals in training during their clinical fellowship or mentoring new staff to be successful in providing appropriate mentoring and help ensure consistent, high-quality services for families.

### Activity Five: Support Program Quality Improvement

#### **5.1 Supporting High-Quality Programming**

##### *Current Work*

*ECCE Competencies.* TWC is funding CLI to review and update the existing *Texas Core Competencies for Early Childhood Practitioners and Administrators* to **identify competencies** needed to demonstrate the necessary early childhood workforce knowledge and skills. Additionally, PEI is currently working to establish Texas Home Visiting Core Competencies. The purpose of the Core Competencies is to provide a framework for the basic knowledge and skills needed by home visitors and early childhood professionals providing services to expectant families and families with young children birth to age five. The core competencies will be broad enough to accommodate evidence-based home visiting models while providing a shared language and set of expectations to enable training, professional development, and performance measurement. PEI is developing the competencies to help Texas families receive culturally

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competent, linguistically appropriate, and relationship-focused home visiting services. PEI will develop definitions and descriptions of each competency and connect the recommended knowledge and skills to available training opportunities. PEI will also illustrate a method for assessing the competence of home visiting and early childhood professionals using requirements for local Maternal, Infant, Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) implementation agencies.

### ***Proposed Projects***

*CCR Child Care Navigators.* As discussed in Sections 4.2 and 4.4, CCR is hiring five navigators to support child care permit applicants and new child care providers through the application process, an effort which will be extended through Years 2 and 3 through PDG B-5 renewal funding. The navigator role will support high quality programming by connecting new providers with *Texas Rising Star*, introducing them to the state's QRIS from the outset.

*Research-Based Assessment and Coaching Model.* Based on the findings from the *Early Learning Needs Assessment 2019*, 58% of early learning professionals surveyed requested professional development to address challenging behaviors, making it the most requested topic. In response to this need, TEA will expand access for pre-k teachers and administrators to training in a teacher-child interaction assessment and coaching model to drive quality interactions. The model will pair coaches with early childhood educators to observe, mentor, and provide feedback regarding teacher-student interactions, offering tools to improve their responses, and strategies to address challenging behaviors through building high-quality relationships with students. This effort builds on TEA's previous pilot of a research-based coaching model across the mixed delivery system in four regions of the state from 2019 to 2021. In the pilot, teachers participating in the coaching model demonstrated maintained quality interactions through emotional support and areas to support behavior management. The professional development provided by this

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coaching model will provide opportunities for teachers to support students through methods such as instructional support, behavior management, and emotional intelligence work.

TEA will fund entities in Years 2 and 3 that will recruit and support multiple LEAs in their regions across public school and private child care settings. The teacher-student interaction coaching will be offered in addition to the restorative discipline supports described in section 4.2. LEAs will be able to opt in to one or both opportunities. Preference will be given to underserved areas based on the planned 2023 Early Learning Needs Assessment.

These strategies will strengthen connections across early learning settings, focusing on LEAs in partnerships with private child care providers and Head Starts, offering shared methods across the mixed delivery system for addressing challenging behaviors and **best practices for high quality programming**.

*Supporting Inclusion Strategies.* Based on the findings of the *Early Learning Needs Assessment 2019*, the second and third most requested professional development topics among early learning professionals surveyed were supporting children with special needs (41%) and child development/brain development (31%). These needs, in addition to the need for additional professional development to address challenging behaviors, will be addressed in part through continued support for ECI's partnerships with local early learning programs. As described in Section 4.2, through these partnerships, ECI providers drive **best practices for high quality programming** by training teachers on topics including developmental learning strategies, early brain development, inclusion, and screening for developmental delays.

### **5.2 Statewide Quality Improvement Efforts**

#### *Current Work*

*Integrating Early Childhood Data.* The 2019 needs assessment also identified better data

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coordination and integration across programs, agencies, and data systems as an opportunity to improve the quality of programs across the state for young children and their families. As a result, the *Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan 2020-2025* included coordination across the state's early childhood system and the underlying data system to support a high degree of collaboration as one of its goals, with a target to build an integrated data system by 2025.

Texas has made progress toward achieving this target, accelerating its efforts to develop an ECIDS over the last year. In January 2022, the TELC tasked a Data Roadmap Work Group with representation from state agencies, research institutes, advocacy groups, and early childhood education providers to develop a roadmap to guide the development of an ECIDS.

The state's vision for an ECIDS is to provide an integrated and aligned approach to enable Texas to make informed decisions about programs and policies that promote positive outcomes for young children and their families. The state plans to use an ECIDS to **support high quality early childhood programs and services** by gaining better insight into how early childhood services are utilized across Texas, **improving decision-making** regarding use and refinement of early childhood programs, providing clearer information to stakeholders and policy makers, and **improving outcomes for the children** and families of Texas.

The Data Roadmap Work Group conducted eight virtual listening sessions with a diverse group of stakeholders, including parents, and administered a survey with responses from over 40 organizations to gather input on the roadmap and guiding policy questions. With this stakeholder input, the work group identified a set of foundational questions centered around which children and families are eligible, have access to, and are served by Texas early childhood services and programs to set the groundwork for an ECIDS in the state.

The Data Roadmap Work Group also identified a set of secondary policy questions that focus

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on program quality, school readiness, return on investment, and early childhood workforce effectiveness that will guide additional phases of ECIDS development. Building an integrated data system that can answer these key policy questions will not only **improve continuous program quality improvement efforts** at each agency but will also allow the state to better understand the current status, **identify inefficiencies, track progress, and collaborate to improve the quality of programs and services** across the entire ECCE system in the state.

To support this work, Third Sector Intelligence, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is donating a landscape analysis of early childhood services and programs in the state. This analysis is currently in development and will include a high-level map of existing data systems and documentation of common identifiers to inform the development of an ECIDS.

### *Proposed Projects*

*Integrating Early Childhood Data.* Building on the recommended use cases identified in the Texas ECIDS Roadmap, to be finalized in early 2023, Texas will identify the technical specifications and data integration requirements needed for implementation in Year 2 of the renewal grant. This implementation plan will map the next steps for system design, including developing the data matching methodology, and identify the technology necessary to establish an ECIDS in the state. During this time, the participating agencies will build the data governance structure that will support an ECIDS by creating a data policy committee and data governance committee, identifying data stewards and a data governance coordinator, and mapping the necessary data sharing agreements.

Texas will use the implementation plan recommendations to select a lead agency and build the necessary data infrastructure in Years 2 and 3. The Data Roadmap Work Group will build out the use cases identified in the Texas ECIDS Roadmap, prioritizing creating accessible and useful

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data products for stakeholders.

This work will align with and complement the work of the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative that was established by Governor Greg Abbott in 2016 and tasked TEA, THECB, and TWC to work together with the goal to help Texas grow in economic prosperity. One of the priorities of this initiative is to develop a modern data infrastructure and integrate data systems with research and development efforts across the three agencies to make educational and workforce data accessible and useful to the public, stakeholders, and decision-makers. All planning and implementation of an ECIDS will build upon work already underway to address this priority.

*Social Emotional and Behavioral Health Supports.* Additionally, the ECIA Work Group will leverage an existing HHSC pilot to provide access to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) consultants to ECI contractors to support their abilities to meet the social-emotional needs of the children and families they serve, expanding it to benefit other members of the ECCE workforce. Through this pilot, ECI contractors throughout Texas will have access to IECMH consultants who assist in identifying possible social-emotional/mental health concerns and needs; providing guidance and consultation to help providers support positive, nurturing parent-child relationships; offering strategies and guidance for prevention and mitigation of social-emotional/mental health delays. Participation in the pilot program will be voluntary and open to all ECI contractors. ECI began procurement in Fall 2022 and the pilot will run through August 2023. Based on the success of this pilot, Texas will expand the program for Years 2 and 3, **expanding developmental and social emotional learning supports** to child care providers and home visitors.

In parallel with the ECI pilot, TWC will partner with the Texas Institute for Excellence in Mental Health (TIEMH) at the University of Texas at Austin to conduct two reports, which will

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include recommendations for the use of PDG B-5 funds to sustain and expand access to IECMH consultants. TIEMH is a multi-disciplinary center of excellence that focuses on improving the social, emotional, and behavioral health of Texans. TIEMH partners with university faculty, state governmental agencies, community agencies, behavioral health providers, and families to enhance the use of effective practices throughout the state, to support communities to develop resilience-oriented systems, and to evaluate state and local efforts to improve service systems for adults, youth, and children. TIEMH will work with early childhood stakeholders across the state to develop the report content. The first report will provide details on the current landscape of children's mental health infrastructure and resources across the state through resource mapping and key informant interviews and surveys. The report will identify crucial stakeholders, indicate gaps in services and/or infrastructure, and provide recommendations for expansion efforts in Years 2 and 3. The second report will focus on the implementation science of infant and early childhood mental health consultation, including best practices, case studies, and impact. This report will include recommendations for a statewide structure to provide early childhood information to families and ECCE providers, as well as administrative oversight for the IECMH Consultants. TIEMH will also include case studies from other states and explore the types of early childhood settings that could be supported by IECMH Consultants, such as ECI, home visitation, child care, pre-k, and HS/EHS. Additionally, it will discuss best practices regarding IECMH Consultants, including administrative structure, trauma-informed care, and reflective practices to support educational and health equity. The ECIA Work Group will reserve funds in Years 2 and 3 to implement the recommendations from both reports.

### **Activity Six: Subgrants to Enhance Quality and Expand Access to Existing and New Programs and/or Systems Enhancement**

#### **6.1 Subgranting Activities**

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If awarded the renewal grant, Texas will prioritize subgrants under Option A and Option C to provide services and improve quality of local programs.

### ***Subgrant Option A - Local Programs in Targeted Communities***

In Year 1, ECI will pursue Subgrant Option A to support young children with disabilities or developmental delays through PDG funding allocated for assessments and early interventions, as well as training and support to strengthen partnerships between ECI providers and child care providers to promote inclusion (see Section 4.2). ECI will distribute \$4.5M to its 41 contractors, who provide coverage for IDEA Part C services to children across the state. The inter-agency contract between TWC and HHSC ECI will be initiated in the first month and funding will be disseminated to the ECI programs by the third month following award. ECI will use funds provided to support contractors already providing high quality intervention services to children who have a disability or developmental delay. These funds would ensure ECI can effectively serve the increased number of children being referred and enrolled in ECI services coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic in Year 1.

The *Early Learning Needs Assessment 2019* identified a need for the state to ensure the families of eligible infants and toddlers are aware of available supports and services. ECI serves infants and toddlers in every Texas county and provides services to families whose children have a qualifying diagnosis or delay, including families of various incomes, educational levels, types of insurance coverage (Medicaid), living status (homelessness), cultures, races, or involvement with child welfare agencies. Funds will be distributed to ECI contractors to help support services needs during a post-COVID enrollment boom and to support ECI programs during a time when inflation has led to significant increases in the cost of providing services.

Many families and children experienced stress and isolation due to the COVID 19 pandemic

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that resulted in negative impacts to children's social-emotional and other development and contributes to an increased need for intervention services, including in rural and low-income areas. Some families may have opted to discontinue or delay services during the peak of the pandemic and have now returned to ECI, leading to a sharp increase in families needing services. ECI uses evidence-based practices that focus on coaching families and caregivers to implement strategies that facilitate improved outcomes for children experiencing developmental delays. Equipping these families with the knowledge and tools they need to support their child's development not only improves outcomes for their own child, but since parents learn from other parents, these knowledge and skills can be shared among parent groups and community settings bringing further improvements to the community. Because these funds will be provided to an established program with existing contracting, enrollment, and service delivery systems, ECI does not anticipate any barriers to distributing and spending the subgrant funding.

### ***Subgrant Option C - Improving the Quality of Local Programs***

In Year 1, the ECIA Work Group, will pursue Subgrant Option C to improve the overall quality and service integration of ECCE services in local communities by supporting existing early childhood coalitions through two subgranting strategies: 1) early childhood systems building and 2) activities to connect families to services and engage families as leaders.

PEI will serve as the lead subgranting agency and will distribute \$5.5 million to early childhood coalitions (approximately 34% of the budget) in Year 1, with a projection of \$3.2 million and \$600,000 for Years 2 and 3. The interagency contract between TWC and DFPS PEI will be initiated in the first month and funding will be disseminated to PEI grantees by the fifth month following award.

To guide efforts, the ECIA Work Group and PEI will advise applicants on their planned areas

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of focus based on the needs and goals in their community and the level of maturity of their local coalition. In both approaches, funding can be used to hire a full-time staff member focused on coalition work if the applicant does not yet have one, as well as to pay stipends to families for their time to provide input and serve as leaders.

For the *early childhood systems building* strategy, funding can be used to implement the HMG System Model or as seed funding to work toward readiness for full implementation of the HMG System Model in the future. PEI and DSHS (the HMG Texas organizing entity) will collaborate on the design and implementation of the HMG Texas funding opportunity. Allowable activities under this funding include the following strategies.

- *Conduct family and community outreach*, including creating and convening early childhood systems building workgroups and committees; identifying and engaging community partners, families with lived experience, or other individuals; and planning and implementing family and community engagement events and trainings.
- *Establish or enhance a central intake and referral system*, including establishing a call center that is available through a toll-free phoneline, fax, and email; creating and maintaining a web-based early childhood development community resource directory; and training child developmental specialists on screening, referral, and follow-up.
- *Conduct health care provider outreach*, including connecting with health care providers through office-based education, trainings, and workshops; recruiting a Provider Champion to participate in early childhood systems planning and implementation; and promoting and tracking developmental surveillance and screening.
- *Perform data collection and analysis*, including developing or modifying a database for collecting and tracking data; and sharing data with partners to identify continuous quality

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improvement and community change.

For the *activities to connect families to services and engage families as leaders*, applicants can use funding to:

- *Create, maintain, or expand an existing Family Resource Center (FRC)*, including hiring a parent navigator. Based on the PEI model, FRCs include resource navigation as an element of their service delivery, and other service activities can include parent education, child development education and/or screening, parent leadership opportunities, skill-based workshops, and basic needs assistance. FRCs can be established in a variety of settings and serve to unify early childhood service professionals including parent educators, health and mental health professionals, child care providers, home visitors and others as part of a holistic early childhood service delivery system.
- *Implement the National Family Support Network's Standards of Quality* professional development opportunities to increase family engagement and leadership in coalition activities, advance inclusion of all families, and strengthen early childhood workforce and programming in the community.
- *Implement Parent Cafes* to facilitate peer-to-peer conversation to promote awareness and strengthening within families, develop parent connection, build community, and engage parents as partners in initiatives, programs, and services (see Section 3.4).

PEI plans to make up to 28 subgrants in Year 1 with the opportunity for further grants in Years 2 and 3 based on the results of the needs assessment and on strategies identified to support rural communities. PEI will use existing contracts with grantees offering parent education and home visiting programs through Healthy Outcomes through Prevention and Early Support (HOPES) and Texas Home Visiting programs. Project HOPES is a flexible community grant that

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funds a wide variety of innovative initiatives and supports for families with children 5 years old and younger. HOPES grants also include local collaborations with health care, faith-based organizations, child welfare, early childhood education, and other child and family services in the community, meaning these entities already have existing coalition infrastructure from which to build. PEI grantees will formally apply to receive Early Childhood Coalition Funding to supplement existing requirements and funding from PEI, providing clear models for growth, documenting alignment with existing efforts, and allowing for integrated data collection to measure impact on community systems and families served. PEI grants are selected based on community and state needs assessments and geographic and population diversity, in part based on community vulnerability for child maltreatment outlined in the University of Texas Child Maltreatment Risk Maps. Because these funds will be provided using an existing grant structure, PEI does not anticipate challenges to distributing the funding.

### **6.2 Using the Needs Assessment and Strategic Plan to Inform the Approach**

*Subgrant Strategy Grounded in State Needs.* As mentioned previously, the top requested professional development topics among early learning professionals surveyed through the *Early Learning Needs Assessment 2019*, were addressing challenging behaviors (58%), supporting children with special needs (41%), and child development/brain development (31%). The ECI-led subgrant strategy directly addresses these topics, through education for child care providers on child development, and evidence-based coaching strategies that provide early learning educators with strategies for challenging behaviors. Additionally, the *Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan 2020-2025* identified the goal that each community has a plan for a coordinated system of early childhood services.

The approach to subgranting was selected based on state priorities and need, as identified in

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the initial PDG B-5 work, as well as on the results of the ECIA Work Group’s focus groups with existing coalitions across the state, which highlighted a need for more state support of coalition work – not just the underlying services of coalition members. The direct support for ECI services is important because supporting ECI contractors to meet the increased demand in services during a post-COVID enrollment boom is critical to the findings of the needs assessment and goals of the strategic plan. Additionally, for many families, their ECI service coordinator is how they connect to other high-quality programs and access information to identify which early learning program will best fit their child’s needs.

Overall, the connections built through these subgrant strategies – among communities to create comprehensive coalitions that effectively coordinate to serve and listen to families and between ECI contractors and child care centers to refer children with disabilities or delays – will lead to improved child, family, and community outcomes. This infrastructure and these relationships will live on far past the end of the grant funding.

***Support for the Early Childhood Workforce.*** The ECI-led strategy will support the early childhood workforce by providing outside expertise and coaching for teachers to use in classroom settings. ECI providers’ training for child care providers on developmental screenings equips early educators to better identify students’ needs and when to refer them for additional supports, as well as how to have difficult conversations with parents about service referrals.

***Ensuring Quality.*** ECI contractors are monitored regularly through data reviews, contract performance reviews, and quality monitoring **to ensure services are high-quality** and provided in a way that supports families with the knowledge and tools they need to support their children’s development to ensure children are ready to enter school with foundational knowledge and skills to be as curious, confident, and successful as peers of their same age. Oversight, child outcomes

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related to development progress, and family satisfaction measures already in place will facilitate ensuring compliance and expectations are met.

HHSC and PEI will **monitor programs for compliance with applicable state quality data standards**. HHSC and PEI have rigorous monitoring practices that ensure local entities comply with both state and federal regulations and expectations for high quality services. In addition, the HHSC and PEI state offices monitor the quality of local service providers to review practices and propose measures to address challenges and improve services, when necessary.

**Comprehensive B-5 ECCE System.** The selected subgrant strategies will support a comprehensive B-5 ECCE system by enabling local coalitions to utilize early childhood systems building frameworks like the HMG System Model, which strengthens the network of community resources, linking families to an organized flow of resources allowing them to easily access the services and supports they need. Through the support for ECI (which serves children under age 3) and HOPES grantees (which serve families with children birth to five), the Texas subgrant approach offers a strong focus on **infants and toddlers**.

### Project Timeline & Milestones

**Table 3. Project Timeline & Milestones**

ACTIVITY	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
<b>YEAR 1 (CY 2023)</b>												
Activity 1: Needs Assessment												
Activity 2: Strategic Plan												
Activity 3: Maximize Parent and Family Engagement												
Engage families for regular input												
Offer training in best practices (state and local levels)												
Expand Early Childhood Texas Website												
Activity 4: Support the B-5 Workforce												
Statewide ECCE Forum												
Early Education IHE articulation landscape analysis												
IHE articulation												
High School CTE Program alignment												





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from non-Federal funds.” TWC will ensure its procurement policies and procedures conform to governing state statutes and guidelines during the period of performance. In addition, TWC will ensure proper oversight in accordance with 45 CFR Part 75 Subpart D for awards received from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

### *Plan for Oversight of Federal Award Funds and Activities*

Reagan Miller, Child Care and Early Learning Division Director, will maintain oversight of program activities, staff, and partners. Catherine Arwood, Child Care Program Policy Manager, will serve as the TWC contact for the grant and support TWC programmatic activities and reporting. Megan Schneider, Inter-Agency Deputy Director of Early Childhood Support, is a shared employee of the ECIA Work Group (a position housed at TEA) and will serve as the primary contact for the grant, manage the programmatic activities across agencies, and coordinate meetings with project staff. The activities for this grant will require a significant number of interagency agreements and subgrants or contracts. Fu-An Lin, Manager of Child Care Statewide Initiatives at TWC, will oversee grants and contracts, with one contract specialist on her team dedicated to supporting these projects. Key personnel from the interagency team are listed in the Table 4.

**Table 4. Key Personnel**

Agency	Key Personnel
<b>Inter-Agency</b>	Megan Schneider, Inter-Agency Deputy Director of Early Childhood
<b>DFPS</b>	Sarah Abrahams, Deputy Associate Commissioner of Prevention & Early Intervention Jody Snee, Division Administrator for Early Childhood Programs <b>NEW Position, Program Specialist</b> <b>NEW Position, Contract Specialist</b>
<b>HHSC</b>	Rachelle Daniel, Director of Day Care Field Operations Lindsay Rodgers, Interim Director of Early Childhood Intervention
<b>TEA</b>	Tori Lee, Director of Early Childhood Education TBD, Family Engagement Director TBD, Family Engagement Specialist
<b>TWC</b>	Reagan Miller, Director, Child Care and Early Learning Division

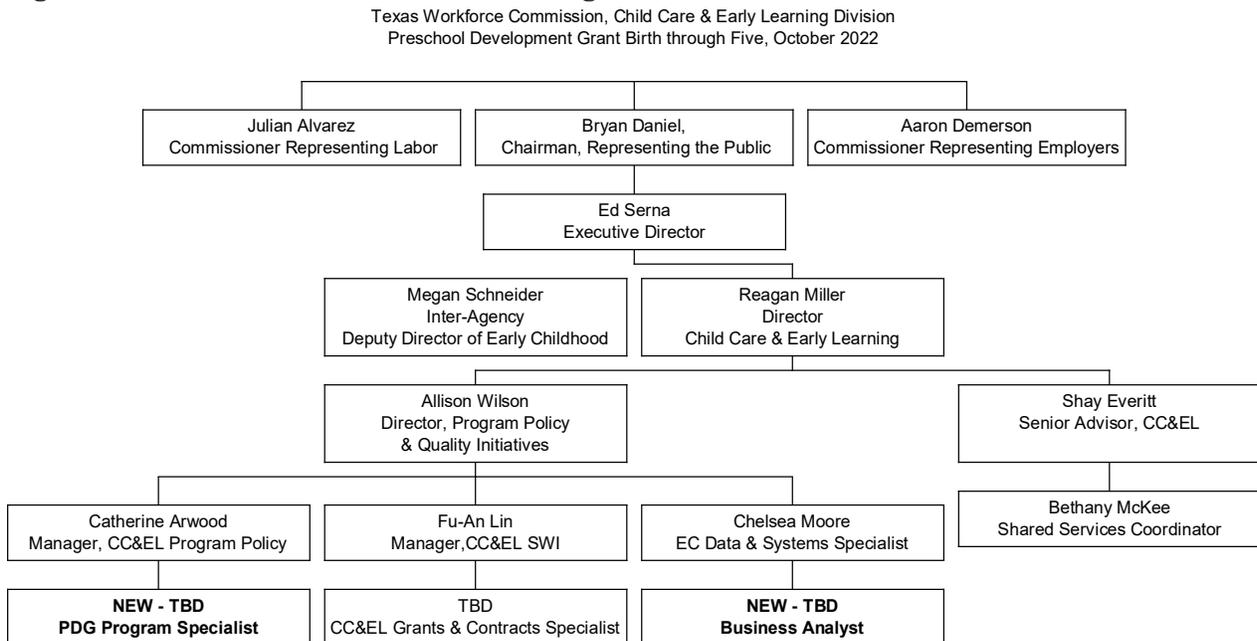
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<p>Allison Wilson, Director, Program Policy and Quality Initiatives          Shay Everitt, Senior Advisor          Chelsea Moore, Early Childhood Data Policy Analyst          Cathi Arwood, Manager, Child Care Program Policy          Fu-An Lin, Manager, Child Care Statewide Initiatives          TBD, Contract Specialist, Child Care Statewide Initiatives          Bethany McKee, Shared Services Coordinator  <b>NEW Position, Business Analyst</b>  <b>NEW Position, PDG Program Specialist</b></p>
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### Organizational Charts

Figure 1 demonstrates the organizational structure for TWC, the lead agency for the PDG B-5 Renewal Grant. Please see File 2 for DFPS, HHSC, and TEA organizational charts.

**Figure 1. TWC PDG B-5 Renewal Grant Organizational Chart**



### Governance Structure and Stakeholder Engagement

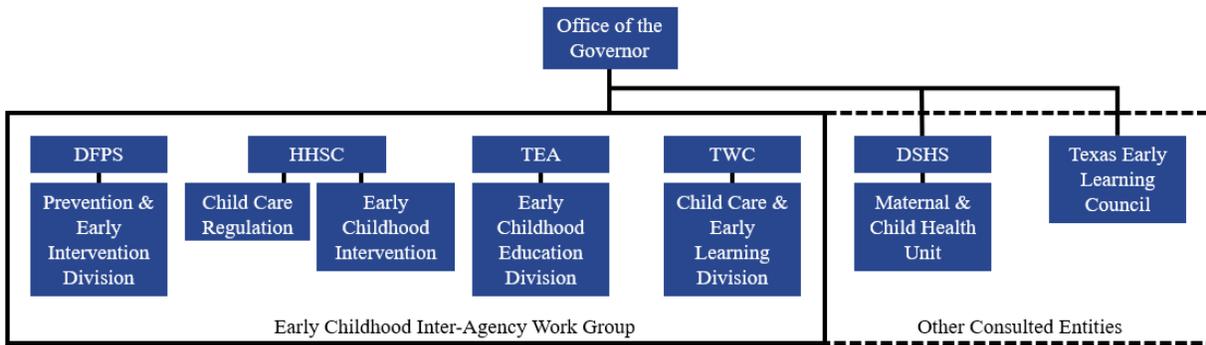
**Governance Structure.** Texas employs a coordinated governance structure across the state agencies (i.e., DFPS, HHSC, TEA, and TWC) that provide oversight and management of early childhood programs and services through the ECIA Work Group. To support a coordinated governance model, the four agencies have jointly funded an Inter-Agency Deputy Director of Early Childhood. This role, along with the reappointment of the TELC, was established at the

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onset of the initial PDG B-5 grant period. The Inter-Agency Deputy Director leads the ECIA Work Group and supports the TELC. The TELC serves as Texas’ State Advisory Council on Early Childhood Education and Care (see following section, State Early Childhood Advisory Council). The ECIA Work Group is the party responsible for executing the activities proposed in this grant, with input from both the TELC and DSHS.

Within the four state agencies, decisions are made by each agency’s Commissioner, Deputy/Associate Commissioners, or Division Directors. The organizational charts in File 2 (or above for TWC) provide additional detail regarding the decision path within each agency.

**Figure 2. Texas Decision Path**



**Stakeholder Engagement.** As in the initial grant, the proposed activities for this renewal grant will be implemented by DFPS, HHSC, TEA, and TWC, the four core state agencies for early childhood programs and services with support from TELC and community-level partners. Table 5 details the agencies and stakeholders engaged in the six proposed activities, key personnel, and TELC members. Agencies will work with the lead agency, TWC, in assessing, planning, and implementing their activities under the renewal grant.

**Table 5. Stakeholder Engagement**

Stakeholders Categorized by Involvement (A = Assessment; P = Planning; I = Implementation)				
Organization/Affiliation	Activities	A	P	I
TELC	Activities 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6	X	X	
DFPS	Activities 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6	X	X	X
HHSC (ECI, CCR)	Activities 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6	X	X	X

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TEA	Activities 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6	X	X	X
THSSCO	Activities 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6	X	X	X
TWC	Activities 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6	X	X	X
LWDBs	Activities 1, 6	X		X
Parents/Families	Activities 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6	X	X	X
Early Learning Programs	Activities 1	X		
ECI Providers	Activities 1	X		X
Local Early Childhood Coalitions	Activities 1 and 6	X	X	X
University of Texas System	Activities 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6	X	X	X
Community Organizations	Activities 1 and 6	X		X
Early Childhood Advocates	Activity 1	X		
Institutions of Higher Education	Activity 1	X		X
LEAs	Activity 1	X	X	X

Families and providers will be engaged regularly during TELC meetings. Additionally, at the state level, the ECIA Work Group will intentionally engage families and providers in under resourced areas of the state to better understand the strengths and barriers to opportunity in those communities in order to guide policy design and implementation. At the local level, existing early childhood coalitions and organizations will have the opportunity to access resources to guide family engagement efforts and empower families as leaders (see Section 3.4).

### **State Early Childhood Advisory Council**

To ensure stakeholder representation and strong agency coordination, Texas Governor Greg Abbott appointed the 20-member TELC. The TELC serves as the state’s advisory council for early care and education as required by the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007. TELC members represent state agencies (DFPS, DSHS, HHSC, TEA, and TWC) and stakeholders (complete list below). TELC meets quarterly and is tasked with conducting periodic statewide birth-five needs assessments, reviewing the statewide birth-five strategic plan, and developing recommendations to strengthen the Texas early childhood system.

***Table 6. Texas Early Learning Council Members***

<b>TELC Members</b>
<b>Dr. Katherine Abba</b> , Faculty, Child Development Program, Houston Community College
<b>Cecilia Abbott</b> , First Lady, State of Texas

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<b>Sarah Abrahams</b> , Deputy Chief Officer of Prevention and Early Intervention, DFPS
<b>Dr. Travis Armstrong</b> , Director of Early Learning, Wichita Falls Independent School District
<b>Weldon Beard</b> , Director of Head Start, Greater East Texas Community Action Program
<b>Terrie Breeden</b> , Section 619 Coordinator, TEA
<b>Dr. April Crawford</b> , Co-Director, Children’s Learning Institute
<b>Rachelle Daniel</b> , Director of Daycare Regional Operations, HHSC
<b>Dr. Alferma Giles</b> , Director of the THSSCO, Children's Learning Institute
<b>Melissa Hoisington</b> , Franchise owner, Primrose Schools
<b>Dr. Becky Huss-Keeler</b> , Professor of Early Childhood Education, University of Houston – Clear Lake
<b>Kim Kofron</b> , Director of Early Childhood Education, Children at Risk
<b>Jerletha McDonald</b> , CEO, Arlington DFW Child Care Association
<b>Vacant/TBD</b> , Director of Early Childhood Intervention Program, HHSC
<b>Reagan Miller</b> , Director of the Child Care and Early Learning Division, TWC
<b>Stephanie Rubin</b> , CEO, Texans Care for Children
<b>Amber Scanlan</b> , Senior Vice President and Director of Client and Community Relations, PNC
<b>Kiersten Schwab</b> , CEO, Texas Public Broadcasting Association
<b>June Yeatman</b> , Infant and Toddler Teacher, Austin Community College Children’s Lab School
<b>Audrey Young</b> , Maternal and Child Health Unit Director and Title V Children with Special Health Care Needs Director, DSHS

### **Promoting Accountability Across the ECCE Mixed Delivery System**

**Accountability.** Texas promotes accountability across each program in the mixed-delivery system through data reporting and monitoring efforts. For public pre-k, LEAs are required to report child and program data annually to TEA through the Early Childhood Data System. TEA uses this data to monitor program quality and compliance. The Texas Open Data Portal hosts public data from state agencies including up-to-date child care provider data from CCR and monthly child care subsidy program data (ACF-801) from TWC.

**Fragmentation and Overlap.** Texas experiences fragmentation and overlap in two main areas: (1) program quality requirements and (2) program eligibility criteria. The three main early learning programs in Texas (public pre-k, child care, and HS/EHS) have varying program quality requirements. This is a barrier to establishing partnerships as programs must navigate multiple program standards. Furthermore, Texans experience misalignment in eligibility criteria across these same programs.

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### **Program Performance Evaluation Plan**

To support the project goals outlined in this application, Texas will conduct a Project Performance Evaluation (PPE) to promote system accountability, assess progress on the state's activities and strategic plan, and facilitate continuous quality improvement. As such, the draft research plan is divided into three research aims to capture the state's performance on *program implementation*, *quality improvement* activities, and the target *outcomes* of these projects.

Texas will use a combination of broad-based statewide approaches and targeted interventions delivered in select communities to achieve the goals of this grant. The evaluation team will build the evaluation methodology using a hybrid implementation and impact framework. To address the research aims of the PPE, the evaluation team will use a mixed-methods approach and collect and analyze data from both administrative sources and through primary data collection.

In the first six months of the award, the evaluation team will work to achieve three major goals that will lay the foundation for the direction of the PPE. The first goal will be to establish a route for community input on the outcome focused activities of the PPE. The second goal will be to understand and align contracting requirements and evaluation goals with the PPE. The third goal will be to meet with implementing agencies and the TELC to refine the aims and research questions of the PPE. Preliminary research aims are shown in relation with the activities of the logic model in Figure 3.

One of the first evaluation activities will be to establish an Early Childhood Community Advisory Research Board similar to those that are common in NIH funded Centers for Clinical & Translational Science (CCTS). The evaluation lead is faculty at a university affiliated with a CCTS and can use her university's infrastructure to establish and train the community members for this advisory research board. In the CCTS framework, boards consist of community members

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who have lived experience with the topic under study. Their purpose is to provide feedback to researchers on community engagement strategies, study design, cultural adaptations, and whether the study questions are appropriate for the community. The first six months of the award will be dedicated to recruiting and training a community advisory group specific to early childhood. This advisory group will provide feedback on all *outcome* evaluation activities over the course of the grant cycle and members will be compensated for their time.

**Figure 3. PPE Research Aims**

Activities	Implementation Research Aims	Quality Improvement Research Aims	Outcomes Research Aims
<b>Systems Building &amp; Connecting Families to Services</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website expansion</li> <li>• Family Resource Centers &amp; Parent Navigators</li> <li>• Hire EC Coalition staff</li> </ul>	Describe the connections between local organizations in the ECCE eco-system	Describe changes in the number/quality of connections and collaborative efforts between organizations	Assess the impact of systems building on family access to and navigation of services
<b>Expand Access to High-quality programs:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCR navigators</li> <li>• Developmental screening training</li> <li>• Screenings &amp; services for children with disabilities/delays</li> <li>• Classroom assessment and coaching</li> </ul>	Describe how CCR navigators are supporting the licensing process  Describe training & use of developmental screening across the ECCE system  Describe how ECCE organizations evaluate classroom quality	Assess the use of best practices in screening and referral for developmental delay/disability  Describe improvements in methods/frequency of classroom assessment	Assess impacts of CCR navigation on access to high-quality ECCE in childcare deserts  Assess the impact of ECCE screening and referral practices on ECI service uptake
<b>Engage Families as Leaders:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use best practices for family strengthening &amp; support</li> <li>• Families guide efforts through feedback loops</li> </ul>	Describe how family leaders are included in ECCE planning and implementation	Describe the implementation of best practices in family strengthening and support and feedback loops for family input	Describe families' perceptions of their participation and level of influence on ECCE planning and activities; how well ECCE reflects their input and meets their needs
<b>Build &amp; Strengthen ECCE Workforce:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase access to mental health consultants</li> <li>• Teachers use restorative discipline</li> <li>• Create pathways for students</li> <li>• Create pathways for workers (scholarships, apprenticeships &amp; stipends)</li> </ul>	Describe changes in access to & use of mental health consultants  Describe changes in access to training on restorative discipline  Describe changes in state policy and procedures related to career trajectories & professional development in ECCE	Describe changes in teacher attitudes, classroom management, disciplinary practices and teacher-child interaction  Assess perceptions of changes in career pathways and professional opportunities among state officials and ECCE leaders	Assess impacts on ECCE worker behavior management and job satisfaction  Describe families' experiences with child behavior, teachers and mental health consultants  Assess impacts on rates of Pre-K suspension & expulsion  Assess impacts on size & retention of ECCE workforce

In the first six months of the award, the evaluation team will also meet with groups from each

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participating agency to identify how required reporting from subcontractors and PPE data collection can be aligned. Alignment across contracting and evaluation will reduce data reporting burden on the subcontractors and increase participation with the evaluation. Further, these meetings will be used to gain an understanding of each agency's approach to quality assurance and continuous quality improvement activities. These meetings will provide the framework for developing evaluation activities focused on quality improvement processes.

Finally, the evaluation team will meet with leadership of the implementing agencies and the TELC to refine the aims and research questions of the PPE. These meetings will be in conjunction with needs assessment reporting and strategic planning. The evaluation team will review project documents and conduct key informant interviews to assess programs, services, reach, available data, coordination of data systems, planned activities, existing accountability systems, and sustainability. These activities, conducted early in the first year, will allow the team to outline which evaluation metrics can be taken from existing data. This work will focus primarily on aims that are addressing *program implementation* and *quality improvement*.

Together, these activities will allow the evaluation team to outline which metrics will require primary data collection and which will be sourced from administrative data or required contract reporting. Further, these activities will align timelines for data collection with evaluation reporting. The evaluation team will take advantage of the natural variation in the way that the program goals of the grant are being implemented and use quasi-experimental methods to assess impact of the programs. Guided by needs assessment analyses, the evaluation team will be able to match communities on risk and needs, which will allow comparison of outcomes in matched communities. In consultation with the Early Childhood Community Advisory Research Board, the evaluation team will also develop the methodology for assessing the family focused

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outcomes of the grant activities. This early work will result in a revision of the PPE within the first year that includes the full methodology of the evaluation, the metrics to be assessed, the data sources of these metrics, and the analyses to be conducted.

### **Data Integration, Management and Data Use**

**CCDF, State Pre-k, Head Start.** TEA, in collaboration with TWC, is now assigning unique IDs to children under age six receiving child care subsidies through CCDF. The IDs will allow TEA and TWC to better understand the children they are serving and how their services and programs overlap. TEA and TWC staff have jointly developed an initial set of research questions that can now be addressed with the addition of unique IDs, including questions related to the overlap between pre-k eligible children enrolled in child care scholarships and LEAs, to better understand how many pre-k eligible children are not being served. Head Start programs also have the option to report data to TEA and could potentially be included in the agencies' investigation to address the research questions.

**Part B 619 and Part C.** HHSC shares a quarterly report with TEA with child-level details for children exiting ECI who are likely to be eligible for ECSE. Starting in school year 2021–2022, TEA collects child-level data regarding State Performance Plan Indicators 11 and 12.

**Medicaid, SNAP, TANF.** HHSC uses the Texas Integrated Eligibility Redesign System (TIERS) as the system of record to determine the financial eligibility status of people applying for services or currently receiving services across Medicaid, SNAP, and TANF.

**WIC.** Medicaid, SNAP and TANF data is regularly shared with WIC, allowing WIC staff to notify current WIC clients who are not yet enrolled in WIC of their potential eligibility. Medicaid and WIC also developed a reimbursement method, providing Medicaid reimbursement for physician prescribed formulas issued to infants through the WIC program. HHSC is also

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working to add a module directly into the WIC management information system that will automatically check if a potential WIC participant is enrolled in Medicaid, SNAP or TANF.

**Enhancing State Data Systems.** As discussed in Section 5.1, the state’s vision for an ECIDS is to “provide an integrated and aligned approach to enable Texas to make informed decisions about programs and policies that promote positive outcomes for young children and their families.” The state plans to use an ECIDS to support high quality early childhood programs and services by gaining a better insight into how early childhood services are utilized across Texas, improving decision-making regarding use and refinement of early childhood programs, providing clearer information to stakeholders and policy makers, and improving outcomes for the children and families of Texas. Statewide linking of data from health and early learning programs is not yet planned in Texas. However, ECI completes a periodic data match with HHSC Medicaid to identify children who are enrolled in HHSC Medicaid but not currently identified as such in the ECI system. This matching facilitates ECI programs’ ability to follow up with these families for consent to bill HHSC Medicaid for ECI services.

### **ECCE System Coordination**

There are over 2.4 million children from birth to age five in Texas, which represents 10% of the total number for the United States. The system providing programs and services to this early childhood population in Texas is large, complex, and administered by multiple state agencies (Table 1. State Agencies and Corresponding Programs, p.3). In response to these challenges, agencies are working to collaborate and coordinate services to serve children and families.

To assist in this coordination and collaboration, TEA and TWC have regional entities that provide additional support for program implementation. TEA coordinates with 20 ESCs to support LEAs via training and technical assistance. TWC coordinates with 28 LWDBs

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responsible for implementing the child care subsidy program and supporting *Texas Rising Star*.

The primary area of intersection between child care scholarships and public pre-k is through pre-k partnerships, which are collaborations between LEAs and quality-rated child care programs to provide high-quality care and education to eligible three- and four-year-old children. TWC and TEA have invested in this model since 2019. There are currently 26 state-level staff across the agencies to raise awareness, broker relationships, and facilitate partnership agreements. Many of the children enrolled in pre-k partnership classrooms are eligible for both programs.

To simplify access to public benefit programs, the ECIA Work Group, under the leadership of TWC, launched the *Early Childhood Texas* website in March 2022. Early Childhood Texas provides families and early childhood professionals who serve families a “one-stop shop” of existing state agency programs and resources for families with young children. The site includes a Child Care and Education section, listing relevant resources for the three main early learning benefits programs in the state: public pre-k, child care scholarships, and HS/EHS. State agency staff also field inquiries from families regarding early learning programs through the general email inbox associated with the website. As further discussed in the Bonus Points section, the ECIA Work Group will launch a coordinated screener across public school pre-k, child care scholarships, and HS/EHS and explore the possibility of creating a coordinated application across these three programs.

### Bonus Points

#### **Coordinated Application, Eligibility, and Enrollment for Families**

*Common Eligibility Screener.* Texas will simplify application practices by creating a common eligibility screener across multiple early childhood programs with similar eligibility criteria, allowing families to determine more easily which services they could be eligible for, and therefore, may apply for. The screener, which will be developed in Year 2, will include at a

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minimum: child care scholarships, public school pre-k, and HS/EHS (see Section 3.1).

### **Improving Workforce Compensation**

*Registered Apprenticeship Programs.* Texas will expand TWC’s RAPs for early childhood professionals. TWC awarded planning and implementation grants for entities to create or expand RAPs for early childhood educators in Texas. By gaining new skills, education, and credentials, teachers have an opportunity to rise within the child care industry, build on their early childhood work experience, and move to another position in a related field (e.g., public school, licensing, quality, social work). TWC will use the best practices from the evaluation of current grantees to inform and expand this work. Through the renewal grant, TWC will fund additional grants for RAPs focusing on increased qualified providers throughout the state through improved compensation embedded in RAPs and practice-based mentoring for professional development that aligns with educational classes and training. RAPs also target the retention of current teachers by allowing child care provider management to demonstrate its investment in mentorship, education, and professional development supports for employees (see Section 4.3).

### **Increasing Access to Inclusive Settings**

Building on the success of a current initiative, ECI providers will continue partnering with local early learning programs, including providing training on developmental learning strategies, early brain development, and inclusion to child care providers; training and supporting child care providers on screening for developmental delays; and building the capacity of ECI personnel to support social-emotional wellness. (See Section 4.2)

## **Project Sustainability Plan**

### **Collaboration across the System**

Texas has two important statewide mechanisms in place to support the sustainability of PDG B-5 efforts. The Inter-Agency Director of Early Childhood Support is a position jointly funded

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by the collaborating agencies for this grant, and the position has been in place since 2018. This position exists separately from the PDG B-5 infrastructure and will continue to play an integral role in the state's systems building efforts after the grant ends. Similarly, created in 2019, the TELC will continue to serve as the steward of the state's early learning systems building efforts beyond the end date of the grant. The core sustainability strategy of the Texas plan is to leverage PDG B-5 funds as a one-time investment in the well-supported, cross-agency infrastructure that both precedes and will outlast this single grant, including the build-out of the Early Childhood Texas website and support for early childhood coalitions led by existing state grantees.

The ECIA Work Group has **supported blending and braiding funds across programs in the mixed delivery system** by creating a forum to share opportunities across agencies and programs. Using stimulus funding, TWC has funded ECI and CCR initiatives to strengthen the child care workforce; both initiatives are included for continued funding in this application. TWC and TEA have also partnered since 2019 on efforts to expand the pre-k partnership model for three- and four-year-olds, which allows private child care providers and Head Start programs to draw down state average daily attendance funding for eligible students. This model increases access to an additional funding stream for early learning providers in private or Head Start settings, while also increasing enrollment for the school district. To **determine what existing program rules or requirements may be preventing collaboration and blending or braiding funds**, the evaluation team will include this topic in the statewide needs assessment survey.

### **Aligning Initiatives for Program Delivery**

This project will build on progress from the initial PDG B-5 funding, including the *Early Learning Needs Assessment 2019*. The ECIA Work Group has **adjusted how the state plans to use new funding, if awarded, based on lessons learned and reflection since the initial grant**

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**year.** In the initial PDG B-5 grant, the timeline to first procure a vendor and then conduct a needs assessment proved to be a challenge and greatly lengthened the time required. For this renewal funding, TWC plans to work with a state entity, the University of Texas, through a streamlined interagency agreement process to conduct the needs assessment, allowing the work to begin soon after notification of the grant award. Additionally, the vendor on the initial grant faced data limitations related to disparate data systems across the various state agency partners. In advance of receiving the renewal funding, the ECIA Work Group will partner with the selected state entity conducting the needs assessment and PPE to begin putting any needed data use agreements in place, as the partner entity is already familiar with available Texas early childhood data. The strategic plan will also build on the work of the initial PDG B-5 grant. Another challenge of the initial grant was the concurrent timeline of the needs assessment and strategic plan; therefore, the state’s approach under the renewal funding is to strategically separate the work into phases. This will allow the timing of these activities to overlap without causing delays in the analysis and synthesis of needs assessment outputs for the strategic plan. Other initiatives building on regional efforts from PDG B-5 initial funding include the work of the coordinated screener and application and ECI’s work to partner with child care providers to raise awareness about creating inclusive classrooms.

### Dissemination Plan

**Table 7: Texas Dissemination Plan**

Strategy	Objective	Timeline
Stakeholder Webinars	State and local systems leaders are aware of progress, successes, and challenges in implementing grant projects.	Quarterly throughout the grant period
Presentations at stakeholder meetings	Local systems leaders and early childhood programs are aware of grant projects in their communities and how to support implementation.	1-2 presentations quarterly starting in Quarter 2 of Year 1 and continuing throughout the grant

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Presentations at statewide conferences	Local systems leaders and early childhood programs are aware of grant projects in their communities and how to support implementation.	Annually during the grant period
Annual PDG B-5 progress report and final report	State and local systems leaders are aware of the progress, successes, and challenges of grant activities each year.	December 2023, December 2024, and December 2025
Annual strategic plan update report	State and local systems leaders, early childhood programs, and families are aware of the progress towards goals in the strategic plan, revisions made to strategies	October 2023, October 2024, and October 2025
Spotlights in agency newsletters	Early childhood programs are aware of the grant projects and resources they can access in their communities.	Spotlights in two agency newsletters quarterly throughout the grant period
Early childhood Texas webpage and other online resources	Provide families easy access to Texas state agency programs, services, and resources. This grant will be used to build out online content on local programming and services.	Ongoing throughout the grant period
<i>GetParentingTips.com</i> media campaign advertisement on social media	Ensure families have access to information, curated articles, and videos through paid social media advertisements on <i>GetParentingTips.com</i> . Link “Get help now” to county level search for local services and support.	Ongoing throughout the grant period
Texas Parent/Youth Helpline	PEI is building out the capacity of its parent helpline to connect families to information and resources that will include referrals to grant-funded programming and activities.	Ongoing throughout the grant period
Texting platform for community outreach	Families that enroll in the texting platform will receive text messages related to parenting, child development, and local programs and activities. Community organizations partner with the platform to send localized messages with information on resources and activities. As of 2021, there were over 18,000 subscribers.	Ongoing throughout the grant period