

# **Fiscal Year 2026 Child Care Statewide Initiatives**

## **Discussion Paper**

### **Background**

Child Care & Early Learning (CC&EL) Division staff would like the Texas Workforce Commission's (TWC) three-member Commission (Commission) to consider ongoing Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) support for several statewide initiatives.

### ***Initiative Increases/Decreases***

#### **Issue 1: Centralized Assessor Entity (76053)**

##### **\$18.5 million (\$8.5 million increase)**

House Bill (HB) 1792 (87th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2021)), amended Texas Government Code §2308.3155 to require the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to select a single entity through a competitive procurement process to oversee a statewide roster of qualified assessors who evaluate child care providers participating in the Texas Rising Star program. TWC selected the Children's Learning Institute, UT Health Science Center Houston, to serve as the Texas Rising Star Centralized Assessment Entity (CAE).

On April 1, 2025, the Commission approved an additional \$4.5 million for FY'25 to support increased staffing to support the large number of providers now participating in Texas Rising Star, bringing the total for the first three years of the initiative to \$34 million.

The CAE will need ongoing funding to support this expanded staff of qualified Texas Rising Star Assessors. Adding \$8.5 million to the previously approved \$10 million beginning in FY'26 will support the required Texas Rising Star assessment services from the CAE.

#### **Decision Point 1:**

Staff recommends budgeting \$18,500,000 beginning in FY' 2026 for the required Texas Rising Star assessment services.

#### **Issue 2: Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (76026)**

##### **\$3,400,000 (\$1,888,000 increase)**

The Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS) is a statewide web-based system designed to meet the professional development needs of early childhood education professionals. TECPDS includes the Texas Workforce Registry (TWR), which allows early childhood professionals to store and access their education, employment, and professional development hours information, and the Trainer Registry, which allows vetted and approved trainers to post the professional development offerings they have available in the state.

The annual costs for supporting TECPDS are \$1.8 million in Fiscal Year 2026. This is an increase of \$288,000 over our assumed annual operating costs developed for the 2026-2027 GAA. Additional FTEs are needed to support the expansion of the user base, and increased technology infrastructure costs. During the last Texas Rising Star Four-Year review, the TECPDS measure was revised, and now grants additional points based on the number of staff within the Texas Rising Star program that are using TECPDS.

In addition, staff are recommending \$1.57 million for one-time enhancements, outlined below. Several of these were the result of website structure re-design to align with strategic goals

identified by stakeholders, including the HB 619 workgroup, and recommendations from the TWC-funded usability study completed in 2024:

- *Exploring Early Childhood Career Pathways and Trajectories, Phase II*
  - New research-informed online tools for career exploration and advisement.
  - An AI-supported personalized career trajectory exploration tool.
- *TECPDS Mobile Implementation, Phase II*
  - Improvements to user experience on mobile devices; in the past year, about 30% of TECPDS traffic came from mobile devices.
- *Single User Implementation*
  - Implementation of single sign-on for user accounts across both TECPDS and CLI Engage, which are used by Texas Rising Star staff and child care provider staff statewide.
- *Data Clean-Up Project*
  - Clean-up of duplicative accounts and incomplete accounts to support improved data integrity, including in state and federal reports related to the child care workforce.
  - Implementation of new feature to securely contact users to collect and confirm data, and transfer information to their TECPDS accounts.
- *Early Childhood Education Reports Update*
  - Development of an interactive dashboard to replace current static reports, improving capacity for data analysis, enabling Boards to filter for their workforce area and other specific values related to the early childhood workforce and their training and education.
- *Texas Core Competencies for Practitioners and Administrator Online Training Modules Update*
  - Review and update existing modules to provide a more user-friendly online course experience that integrates with other TECPDS professional development resources; revise for a stronger focus on practice-based activities and competency-based learning checks.

### **Decision Point 2:**

Staff recommends budgeting \$3,400,00 in FY'26 for TECPDS to support ongoing maintenance, increased costs, and one-time enhancements that will address recommendations resulting from the 2023 Texas Child Care Workforce Strategic Plan.

### **Issue 3: Texas A&M AgriLife Child Care Training (76055)**

#### **\$3,000,000 (\$500,000 increase)**

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service provides support to the Texas early childhood workforce by providing access to free and low-cost online courses that meet Texas Health and Human Services Child Care Regulation (CCR) training requirements and by connecting participant course enrollment and completion data with the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System (TECPDS) for more efficient data collection (e.g., professional development training history) and reporting.

In FY'24, 304,000 participants completed free professional development that helped them meet minimum training requirements for child care providers in Texas. In FY'24, TAMU exhausted all available FY'24 funding and reduced the number of courses available free of charge. And in FY'25, TAMU fully expended all available funding by the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter grant period and will again reduce the number of courses available free of charge. Dedicating an additional \$500,000 to the approved \$2,500,000 for the initiative beginning in FY'26 will allow TAMU to

provide free, required training to approximately 40,000 additional participants per year.

### **Decision Point 3:**

Staff recommends budgeting \$3,000,000 beginning in FY'26 for the AgriLife Child Care Training initiative.

### **Issue 4: Texas Infant Toddler Specialist Network (76093)**

#### **\$3.75 million (\$250,000 one-time increase)**

The Infant and Toddler Specialist Network (ITSN) improves caregiver practices and increases the availability and quality of infant and toddler care across the state by providing specialized technical assistance, professional development, and coordination with other programs serving infants and toddlers through a network of Infant/Toddler specialists.

An increase of \$250,000 will support the one-time costs for making improvements to the Developmental Checklist Tool that is built into the Engage system and used by IT specialists and educators. Use of a developmental screening tool was added as a quality measure in the last Texas Rising Star Four-Year review, and the CLI tool helps programs achieve points for this measure free of charge.

### **Decision Point 4:**

Staff recommends dedicating an additional \$250,000 to the ITSN, bringing the FY'26 total to \$3.75 million

### **Issue 5: Texas Rising Star Infrastructure Support (76051)**

#### **\$1.73 million (\$227,000 increase)**

- *Differentiated Mentor Supports*

This initiative aims to build mentors' capacity by implementing differentiated Texas Rising Star mentor supports and learning opportunities through deepened content knowledge and increased alignment with evidence-based practices. Based on feedback from current mentors, initial content training will children's self-regulation and behavior, instructional formats to learning, and language facilitation.

- *Mentor Manager Academy*

The Texas Rising Star Mentor Manager Academy aims to equip Mentor Managers with the skills, knowledge, and tools necessary to effectively support and guide mentors. The program will focus on driving continuous improvement and ensuring consistent adherence to Centralized Assessment Entity (CAE) protocols.

- *Digital Resource Collection Improvements*

In late FY'2025, CC&EL will be transitioning the general program information from the current Texas Rising Star website hosted by CLI to a new website hosted directly by TWC. However, CLI's Digital Resource Collection (DRC) will not transition to the new divisional website, so CLI proposes to build upon the current iteration of the DRC so it can continue to serve as a quality improvement resource for participating programs and mentors.

- *Assessment-Related Document Storage*

CLI will design and deliver a solution for attaching documents and corresponding data to assessments to provide a record of the documents scored. Currently documents are not linked with the program's assessment dates or data, preventing automated access to a full audit history of supporting documentation.

1       • *Mentor Visit Management*

2       Refinement and scaling of the Mentor Visit Form will support more efficient and  
3       consistent data collection related to mentor visits with providers. Additionally, adding  
4       reporting functionality that will allow mentors, mentor supervisors, and TWC to view  
5       reports/visualizations of mentor capacity and program demand.  
6

7       ***Discontinued Initiatives***  
8

9       **Issue 6: Child Care Investment Partnerships (76052)**

10      In 2019, the Commission approved \$5 million for TWC’s Child Care Investments Partnership  
11      (CCIP) program. The CCIP program supports local workforce development boards (Boards) and  
12      their partners to work together to improve child care quality using both public and private funds.  
13

14      Since it’s inception five years ago, TWC has approved funding for projects in only four Board  
15      areas (Permian Basin, Capital Area, Borderplex, and Greater Dallas) totaling \$300,000.  
16

17           **Decision Point 6:**

18           Due to low uptake, staff recommends discontinuing the CCIP initiative and returning the  
19           uncommitted \$4.7 million to the Commission reserve.  
20  
21

22       **Issue 7: Child Care Registered Apprenticeships (76064)**

23      The Commission approved \$750,000 to continue to support the planning and implementation of  
24      Child Care registered apprenticeships. In FY’24, TWC released an RFA to award additional  
25      grants. This RFA had a very low response/success rate and only resulted in TWC awarding a  
26      single grant.  
27

28           **Decision Point 7:**

29           Due to market saturation, staff does not recommend pursuing this initiative in FY’26 at  
30           this time and returning \$750,000 to the Commission reserve.  
31

**Summary of Child Care FY'26 SWI Change Recommendations**

<b>Track</b>	<b>Initiative</b>	<b>FY'26 GAA</b>	<b>FY'26 Recommended</b>	<b>Increase / Decrease</b>
76053	Centralized Assessor Entity	\$10,000,000	\$18,500,000	+ \$8,500,000
76026	TECPDS	\$1,512,000	\$3,400,000	+ \$1, 888,000
76055	AgriLife Training	\$2,500,000	\$3,000,000	+ \$500,000
76093	Texas ITSN	\$3,500,000	\$3,750,000	+ \$250,000
76051	TRS Infrastructure	\$1,500,000	\$ 1,727,000	+ \$227,000
76052	Child Care Investment Partnerships	\$0	\$0	- \$4.7M *
76064	Child Care Registered Apprenticeships	\$750,000	\$0	- \$750,000

\* remaining funds carried forward year-over-year