By:  Talarico H.B. No. 51

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to establishing an Office of Early Childhood to coordinate, consolidate and integrate early childhood programs.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1.  Chapter 1001, Health and Safety Code, is amended by adding Subsection 1001.266 to read as follows:

Sec. 1001.266.  OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD. (a) There is hereby established an Office of Early Childhood ("the Office"). The Office is vested with all powers and duties transferred to it under this law and such other powers and duties as may be authorized by law. The Office shall be within the Department of State Health Services for administrative and budget purposes.

(b)  The Office of Early Childhood shall be headed by the Director of Early Childhood who shall be appointed within three months of the effective date of this Act by a committee composed of designees for the Governor, the speaker of the house of representatives, the president of the senate, the minority leader of the house of representatives and the minority leader of the senate; if the Committee cannot agree on an appointee, then the Governor shall make the appointment.

(c)  The primary duties of the Office of Early Childhood are to coordinate and integrate child care, early childhood, and early care and learning programs in Texas in order to administer programs and funding as efficiently as possible. The Office's duties shall include, but are not limited to:

(i)  The delivery of services to young children and their families to ensure optimal health, safety and learning for each young child;

(ii)  Developing and implementing an early childhood information system. Such early childhood information system shall facilitate and encourage the sharing of data between and among early childhood service providers by tracking:

(1)  the health, safety and school readiness of all young children receiving early care and education services from any local or regional board of education or school readiness program,

(2)  the characteristics of the existing and potential workforce serving such children, and

(3)  the characteristics of such programs serving such children;

(iii)  Developing and reporting on the early childhood accountability plan. Such plan shall:

(1)  identify and define appropriate population indicators and program and system performance measures of the health, safety and readiness of children to enter kindergarten, and early school success of children, and shall identify any new or improved data required for such purposes; and

(2)  include aggregate information on the characteristics of children and programs tracked by the early childhood information system established by subsection (c, ii) of this act;

(3)  the characteristics of such programs serving such children;

(iv)  Implementing a communications strategy for outreach to families, service providers and policymakers;

(v)  Not later than 6 months from the effective date of this act, beginning a state-wide longitudinal evaluation of the school readiness program examining the educational progress of children from prekindergarten programs through grade four;

(vi)  Developing, coordinating and supporting public and private partnerships to aid early childhood initiatives;

(vii)  Developing and implementing a state-wide developmentally appropriate kindergarten assessment tool that measures a child's level of preparedness for kindergarten, but shall not be used as a measurement tool for program accountability;

(viii)  Creating a unified set of reporting requirements for the purpose of collecting the data elements necessary to perform quality assessments and longitudinal analysis;

(ix)  Comparing and analyzing data collected pursuant to reporting requirements created under subdivision (viii) of this subsection with the data collected in state-wide public school information systems to enable population-level analysis of children and families and the impacts of supported programs;

(x)  Continually monitoring and evaluating all early care and education and child development programs and services, focusing on program outcomes in satisfying the health, safety, developmental and educational needs of all children, while retaining distinct separation between quality improvement services and child day care licensing services;

(xi)  Coordinating home visitation services across programs for young children;

(xii)  Providing information and technical assistance to persons seeking early care and education and child development programs and services;

(xiii)  Assisting state agencies and municipalities in obtaining federal funding for early care and education and child development programs and services, including to maximize federal dollars coming into Texas for federally-funded meals, home visiting, and other early childhood programs;

(xiv)  Providing technical assistance to providers of early care and education programs and services to obtain licensing and improve program quality;

(xv)  Establishing a quality rating and improvement system that covers home-based, center-based and school-based early child care and day care;

(xvi)  Maintaining an accreditation facilitation initiative to assist early childhood care and education and day care program and service providers in achieving national standards and program improvement;

(xvii)  Managing early childhood care and education and day care licensing to the extent such is under state jurisdiction;

(xviii)  Ensuring a coordinated and comprehensive statewide system of professional development for providers and staff of early childhood care and education, child development, and day care programs and services;

(xix)  Developing early learning and development standards to be used by early childhood care and education and day care providers; and

(xx)  Providing families with opportunities for choice in services including quality child care and community-based family-centered services;

(xxi)  Integrating early childhood care and education and special education services;

(xxii)  Promoting universal access to early childhood care and education; and

(xxiii)  Performing any other activities that will assist in the provision of early care and education and child development programs and services.

(d)  The Director of Early Childhood shall be responsible for implementing the policies and directives of the Office of Early Childhood. The director may seek and shall be entitled to receive from other state agencies such assistance as may be required to perform such director's duties pursuant to this subsection.

(i)  The Director may appoint such officers, employees, agents and consultants as he or she may deem necessary.

(ii)  To the extent practicable, the Director shall appoint the officers, employees, agents and consultants for the office of early childhood, from among the existing officers and employees of existing agencies and departments currently housing early childhood programs, as supervision for those programs is moved into the Office of Early Childhood.

SECTION 2.  This Act takes effect immediately if it receives a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this Act takes effect September 1, 2021.