

earlymatters



Building a New Future for Early Childhood in Texas

*Presented to the Governor's Task Force on
Governance of Early Care and Learning*

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www.earlymatterstx.org

Who is Early Matters?

We are a statewide collaborative of **business, civic, education, nonprofit and philanthropic leaders** dedicated to economic mobility and prosperity for all Texas families through policies and practices that support children birth – age 8.



200+ coalition partners



What We Did: Listening at Scale

Early Matters conducted a survey and focus groups throughout the fall of 2025 and winter 2026 to understand experiences with child care regulation, agency coordination, and system challenges across the state of Texas.

STATEWIDE SURVEY

717 providers
child care providers

- Representation from all 28 Local Workforce Development Boards
- Center, home, and faith-based providers
- Designed with provider, TWC, & HHSC input
- Conducted in fall 2025



REGIONAL FOCUS GROUPS

70+ stakeholders

- Across 6 regions: Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Permian Basin, San Antonio, Waco
- Parents, providers, business and nonprofit leaders
- Winter 2025–2026



The System is Broken for Providers

Governance fragmentation was named as the #1 barrier in every region. It is the root cause, not a symptom.

1 in 3

providers receive conflicting guidance from different agencies

44%

say multi-agency requirements interfere with their ability to provide quality care

52 hrs

per month spent on compliance and equals time taken away from children

81%

of large programs (150+ children) say compliance crowds out quality

What Does Fragmentation Look Like in Practice?

“Childcare licensing and quality are separate systems. We spend more time managing paperwork conflicts than we do improving our program.”

“None of them communicates with each other. The assessor says we need something and then the mentor says we don't. They are literally contradicting each other.”

The TRS vs. Licensing Standoff

Shelving: TRS requires accessible shelving for child-led learning. Licensing flags the same shelving as unsafe because it obstructs sightlines.

Real materials: TRS encourages plants and real-world items in classrooms. Licensing flags many of those same items as hazardous.

The result: Providers face unresolvable standoffs, where satisfying one agency means violating another. There is no right answer.

Families are Navigating the Same Broken Maze

To access care, families must separately navigate:

**HHSC: Licensed
childcare and ECI**

**TWC: Child Care
Services and waitlists**

TEA: PreK programs

Head Start

1. Reapplication Fatigue

Different programs require different applications with different eligibility requirements

2. Program Cliffs

For example, if a child receives services from Early Childhood Intervention (ECI), there is a break in programming when they turn 3 and if they move to a PreK program.

Even highly educated families described navigation struggles. *“It’s as if you need to know someone connected to the space individually in order to navigate it.”* Dallas Focus Group participant

Texas Can Build Something Better, Now

Simplify the System for Providers

- Publish a clear org chart of all agencies and roles
- Identify and resolve Texas Rising Star and licensing conflicts with a clear resolution pathway
- Create communication standards & a single point of contact for childcare

Align and Strengthen Systems

- Establish licensing inspector standards & training
- Build one portal with shared data & common family application
- Create a public TRS assessment timeline dashboard

Build for Long-Term Impact

- Move toward unified governance with one decision-making authority
- Invest in infant/toddler care & educator reclassification
- Commission independent evaluation with defined success metrics