

December 20, 2007

Commissioner Robert Scott  
Texas Education Agency  
1701 Congress Avenue  
Austin, Texas 78701

Re: TEEM School Readiness Evaluation

Dear Commissioner Scott:

We read with concern and alarm the Dallas Morning News Article in this morning's edition entitled "TEA Report: Landmark Preschool Program Isn't Paying Off." As the authors of the evaluation referenced in this article, we felt it imperative to set the record straight with respect to our task as evaluators, our findings about the TEEM program and most importantly about the success of this groundbreaking but highly complex program.

Our task as evaluators was to take a "snapshot" of the initial pilot years of a program that, by the time our evaluation began, was then in its fourth year of operation, serving some 27,000 students across more than 30 communities across Texas. Our job was to go back to the first two years of the project, when it was serving 11 communities and fewer than 4,000 children and to "retrofit" an evaluation design to the project AFTER it had been in operation for four years.

At no time did our study find or our report indicate any fault on the part of the State Center or TEA with respect to receipts and expenditure tracking. To the contrary, we found that the State Center is in the unique position of having financial oversight from two different state agencies and rigorously tracks financial information not only for the Texas Education Agency, but for the Texas Workforce Commission. With regards to the "netherworld" statement, the language refers to the unique operational structure of this research based program.

Our task as evaluators was to determine which costs had the most impact with respect to TEEM communities. Our finding was that the reporting measures required of the State Center were too narrow for this aspect of the evaluation. We are pleased that the State Center recognized this as a result of our work and has instituted new processes for the 2007-2008 program year that will both track expenditures and provide cost impact information.

With respect to student performance, our report clearly states that the findings from year one did not have sufficient power to conclude whether or not students taught by teachers with TEEM training perform better than students taught by teachers without TEEM training. This is **not the same thing** as saying that TEEM students are not receiving benefit from the program and is a good example of the problems that can occur when an evaluation is, as mentioned above, retrofitted to a project. Due to the nature of state funding and the issues inherent in starting a pilot project, the TEEM intervention in year one did not start until January 2004. This meant that an intervention designed for 8 months was

delivered in fewer than four months. The initial TEEM year saw fewer than 1,600 students placed in randomly assigned target and control groups and their results analyzed. This is what created the statistical power issue.

Because so much of the success of Pre-K services delivered to at-risk children is dependent upon the skills of the teacher, it is most instructive to look at the change in teacher behaviors and teaching practices when teachers received TEEM training. For example:

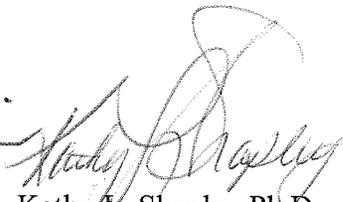
- ✓ Teachers with TEEM training had statistically significant gains on the Teacher Behavior Rating Scale (TBRS, a nationally recognized, valid measure) when compared to teachers **without** TEEM training.
- ✓ Teachers with two years of TEEM training had **higher scores** on the Team Teaching, use of Lessons Plans and Best Practice subtests as well as Total Score on the TBRS than teachers with one year of TEEM training.
- ✓ Teacher attitudes shifted during their participation in TEEM. Even teacher initially resistant reported a stronger confidence in their skills and **most importantly, recognized each child's potential for success as result of TEEM training.**

It is also important to look at a key area where the TEEM project has been **very** successful. The issue of community-based, **voluntary** integration of the services of school-based Pre-K, child care and Head Start to better serve the children and families of Texas, is a clear and prominent goal of both Senate Bill 76 and Senate Bill 23, the legislation that enabled and expanded the TEEM project. Working with communities to voluntarily integrate these programs is no easy task. All of these programs have long operated in isolation from one another, creating confusion for parents and duplication of services, while at the same time leaving needy, at-risk children without vitally important school readiness experiences in their early years. This is a task, however, at which the State Center has excelled. For example:

- ✓ Since its creation in 2003-2004 the number of communities that voluntarily participate in the TEEM project has increased from 11 to 38 for the 2007-2008 program year.
- ✓ By fall of 2006 45% of the classrooms in TEEM projects were in ISDs, 28% were in Head Start and 27% were childcare facilities.
- ✓ The number of at-risk children served in TEEM classrooms participating in the TEEM initiative increased from just under 1,600 in 2003-2004 to more than 45,000 for 2007-2008.
- ✓ For the 2007-2008 program year there are some 1,000-plus classrooms that cannot be served due to a lack of state resources that are on a waiting list for TEEM services.
- ✓ Children that typically have access to fewer resources due to geographic location were well served through the TEEM program, as at least 30% of TEEM communities are located in West Texas and the Mexico border region.

Finally, as individuals who have spent our professional lives working in and around the field of public education, we feel that it is important to close by noting the importance of school readiness services for at-risk children that the TEEM project is designed to serve. That the TEEM project is showing clear and measurable improvements for students on the three skill areas that years of evidence-based research have demonstrated are linked to school readiness for at-risk children, specifically rapid letter naming, rapid vocabulary naming and phonological awareness is not in question. Please do not hesitate to contact our office if we may provide further clarification. We wish you and your staff a Happy Holiday Season.

Sincerely,



Don Barfield  
President

Kathy E. Shapley Ph.D.  
Senior Researcher



Chuck Wilkins Ph.D.  
Senior Statistician

cc: Dr. Susan Landry, Director  
State Center for Early Childhood Development