



SB 50: Early Care and Education
Senate Education Committee
April 3, 2007

Chairperson Shapiro and members of the Education Committee, I very much appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on SB 50 and its provisions to support the early care and education of young children in Texas. I do this not only on behalf of my organization, Texans Care For Children, but also as a parent.

Texans Care For Children is a non-profit organization comprised of over 100 organizations and individuals working to improve the well being of Texas' children. When children do not have a healthy start, we all pay the consequences. It is more difficult for children to mature into productive citizens when they experience abuse, inadequate health care, poverty, and poor preparation in school. Texans Care For Children's Board is composed of leaders from across the state representing various sectors including business, church, professional, volunteer and non-profit organizations. Each session, in concert with our membership, we develop a legislative agenda that supports efforts to improve the lives of Texas' children in six areas - child poverty, child health care, child mental health, early care and education, child welfare, and juvenile justice.

Texans Care For Children Supports SB 50

As I child advocate, I know that:

...before entering kindergarten, a child has already developed many of the basic learning patterns and abilities that lay the foundation for future academic success or failure.

...in Texas, more than half of mothers with children younger than age five are in the workforce.

...a caregiver's education level is the strongest predictor of providing the type of care that improves a child's cognitive, emotional and social development.

...children in high quality early care and education programs reap benefits throughout their lives with higher rates of school completion, lower rates of juvenile arrest, and higher employment rates as adults. These impacts are more pronounced for children living in poverty.

...in Texas, reimbursement rates for subsidized child care fall far short of the costs associated with offering good care.

...providers often resort to increasing the rates charged to private paying families in order to continue serving children in the subsidy program - if they continue to serve these high-need learners at all.

...young children are being cared for in settings that do not provide the experiences and relationships they need to help them succeed later in school and in life.

As a parent of a young child, I know firsthand...

- ...the universal anxiety faced by parents in leaving their child in someone else's care.
- ...the high costs of child care, with a price tag which surpasses the cost of my college education.
- ...the stark reality that too often "you get what you pay for."

As a parent of young learner, I also witness...

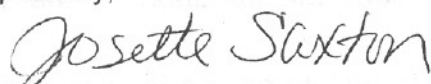
- ...the positive and very real impact of quality early care and education.
- ...the interactions of well-trained and skilled teachers responding to the children in their care.
- ...caregivers teaching children how to manage their emotions and behaviors.
- ...teachers encouraging children's independence, self-confidence and self-control.
- ...the deliberate and planned experiences provided to children that feed their imaginations, spark their curiosity, and lay the foundation for future learning.

My daughter attends an early care and education program that...

- ...is committed to providing children with the care and experiences that stimulate children's growth and maximize their potential.
- ...expects its staff to be well-grounded in early childhood development.
- ...requires lead teachers to have a Child Development Associates degree.
- ...recognizes the value of a well-trained and experienced staff and has recently raised their fees in order to more adequately compensate their teachers and caregivers.
- ...does not accept children in the state's child subsidy program.

My family is fortunate. Yet we are no more deserving than any other Texas family. Every child in Texas deserves the care and early learning experiences that my daughter receives. Texas schools deserve the better prepared students quality early education provides. Texas businesses deserve the skilled and educated workforce that quality early education helps to prepare. By supporting early care and education programs, SB 50 can help Texas realize these outcomes. ***Texans Care For Children respectfully calls on the Committee to support the early care and learning of Texas children by voting favorably on SB 50.***

Respectfully,



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A Closer Look At The Issues



Encourage Professional Development of Child Care Professionals

In Texas, a person must complete just 8 hours of pre-service training to care for young children. In comparison, Texas requires 1,500 hours of training to cut people's hair.

Why is professional development important?

- Research has found that a provider's education level is the strongest predictor of providing the type of care that improves a child's cognitive, emotional and social development.
- Children in high quality early care and education programs reap benefits throughout their lives with higher rates of school completion, lower rates of juvenile arrest, and higher employment rates as adults.
- Caregivers who are properly trained and adequately compensated are more likely to continue to develop their skills and remain in their current positions. Research shows that stable relationships are crucial to a young child's development.
- Children in care without adequately prepared caregivers spend more of their day in aimless, unproductive activities and show delays in language and social development.
- Early childhood caregivers and teachers earn an average of \$15,000 a year in Texas, well below the federal poverty level for a family of three.

What can Texas do?

Support the professional development of early care and education professionals by establishing a clear career path within the profession, increasing the minimum hours of pre-service and annual training required of caregivers, and requiring the use of qualified trainers in licenses child care programs.

What will it cost Texas if we do not act this session?

- Teachers and caregivers will be ill equipped to provide the experiences and care needed to foster healthy child development.
- Texas will miss a critical opportunity to help prepare young children to enter school ready to learn and succeed.
- High turnover rates will continue. Early childhood caregivers and teachers who are not adequately trained or compensated are at risk of leaving their jobs, contributing to the child care industry's annual turnover rate between 25 and 40 percent nationally.
- Lack of certification requirements and professional qualifications make it more difficult for child care centers to evaluate applicants and ensure the quality of their staff, increasing the likelihood that Texas children will receive inadequate care that might threaten their safety or development.



Fund Higher Rates for Child Care Providers Exceeding Minimum Standards

Texas has failed to provide funding for the Texas Rising Star program since 2003, placing increased burdens on local communities to fund this necessary and state-mandated quality project.

Why is rewarding quality child care important?

- Investment in a child's early years enhances the human capital and economic development of Texas. Children in high quality early care and education programs reap benefits throughout their lives with higher rates of school completion, a lower rate of juvenile arrest, and higher employment rates as adults.
- Providers who voluntarily exceed minimum child care standards can participate in the Texas Rising Star provider certification program, a designation that serves as an indicator of quality for parents trying to find good care for their children. It also entitles the provider to be reimbursed a subsidized rate 5% higher than paid to providers offering care that only meets minimum standards.
- Minimum standards are just that – minimum. Quality child care stimulates and nurtures children to maximize their intellectual and emotional development, and gives them a stronger foundation for school success.
- The Texas Rising Star status serves as an indicator of quality for parents trying to find care that is right for their family and with which they are comfortable. Studies have shown workers who feel good about the quality of their child care are more productive at work and have lower rates of absenteeism.
- Texas requires Local Workforce Development Boards to pay higher rates to Texas Rising Star providers and providers participating in the Texas Early Education Model (TEEM) pre-kindergarten pilot project, but it does not provide funding for the increased rate costs.

What can Texas do?

Provide state funding to pay for the higher subsidized child care reimbursement rates mandated to providers who voluntarily exceed minimum standards, such as Texas Rising Star providers and Texas Early Education Model (TEEM) participants.

What will it cost Texas if we do not act this session?

- Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) will continue to struggle to finance these key early care and education quality initiatives.
- Boards will remain unable to provide the technical assistance and support that providers need to reach Texas Rising Star status, leaving the certification out of reach to most child care providers.
- The number of Texas Rising Star providers will continue to fall, as it has been since 2003 when state funding was eliminated.
- Families seeking more than minimum standards for their children will have fewer options available to them. This is especially true for families in the subsidy program whose lower incomes prevent them from paying the higher costs associated with quality child care.

