



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TEXAS

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Early Childhood Education Integral to Texas Economic Development

The League of Women Voters of Texas urges the 81st Legislature to maintain the development and implementation of policies, legislation, and programs that address the needs of all Texas children and families for accessible, affordable, quality child-care. Specifically, we urge support of professional development opportunities for early childhood educators, expanded access to voluntary, high quality pre-kindergarten, and increased reimbursement to improve quality of care for all children ages zero to five. Educated, productive, well-balanced children provide a stronger foundation for Texas' future economy and future workforce.

What is the Current Reality of Children Living in Texas?

- **Poverty Prevalence** – Over 9.1 million Texans (38%) are considered “low-income” with earnings below 200% of the poverty level, and 16.2% of Texans are living below the poverty level.
- **Education Role Models** – 24.3% of Texas adults (ages 25-54) lack a high school education, ranking Texas last in the country. Texas spends \$5.05 compared to \$46.65 per capita nationally on adult education and literacy (the least in the nation). Texas' young adults are also undereducated, compared to their national peers, with only 30.8% enrolled in postsecondary education, ranking Texas 43rd. The 2006 teen birth rate was third highest in the nation (63.1 births per 1,000 females ages 15-19) according to the 2009 National Vital Statistics.
- **Child Impact** – Of the 2,336,220 children ages 0-6 years residing in Texas, 52% or 1,214,835 are classified low-income (income below 200% of the federal poverty level), and 24.7% (577,047) are classified as poor (income below federal poverty level) as reported in the 2008 U.S. Current Population Survey.
- **Medical Care** - Texas has the highest number of low-income parents and children without insurance among the 50 states and District of Columbia. Texas Head Start coverage serves 65,886 (8% of 3 year olds and 10% of the 4 year old population).
- **Child Care Needs** – Child-care consumes 31.5% of the median single parent Texas income. The average child-care costs for a Texas infant/toddler or a preschool child in a center are \$5,564, as compared to \$5,940 for average public college tuition and fees.

According to the research, children who participate in high-quality pre-kindergarten programs perform better in school, earn higher salaries when they enter the workforce, and engage in less criminal activity. Therefore, high-quality early childhood education would ultimately reduce costs for criminal justice, child welfare, and remedial/special education, as well as increase income earned and taxes paid. Additionally, with a better-educated work force, Texas could attract the best global employers.

Why Target Early Childhood for Investment?

- Half of the achievement gap between white and African-American children seen in 12th grade is present before kindergarten starts, according to James Heckman, Nobel Laureate of Economics (2007).
- More than 85 percent of the brain is developed before the age of five.
- Research shows that infants and toddlers in low-income communities are exposed to approximately one-third as many words as children from more affluent communities.
- Early intervention lessens educational inequity by tackling the achievement gap before it widens to three or four grade levels.
- Quality and effectiveness of programs do not depend entirely on wealth, but on the vision that a state has for its children, backed by sound government planning, financing, and policy-making (Bennett, 2007).
- The holistic development of young children (their cognitive, social-emotional, physical development and

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creative/ critical thinking capacities) is necessary preparation for school.

■ Participation by families in community-based services and in their children's learning increases child educational attainment and graduation.

■ A distinct link exists between growth in the state's graduation rate and drop in crime. If another 10 percent of students graduated, homicides and aggravated assaults statewide could drop by 20 percent, according to the Fight Crime: Invest in Kids study (December 2007).

Cost and Future Economic Benefits

Economist Robert G. Lynch examined the costs and benefits of high quality pre-kindergarten programs and their positive impact over time on Texas budgets, crime costs, and the earnings of pre-K participating children and adults. A \$3 billion annual investment in fully phased-in early childhood programs in 2008 would start paying for itself in nine years. The total benefits from a 2008 universal pre-k investment would generate \$75.9 billion by 2050, an 8 to 1 rate of return, with the added savings benefit of \$16.8 billion from crime reduction in 2050. A more targeted pre-K program, which would focus on vulnerable populations, would yield \$37.8 billion in total benefits (July 2007).

Incidentally, child-care costs impact 25% of Texas families. The Texas child-care industry in 2006 generated a total economic impact of over 149,000 jobs and \$2.34 billion in wages. The child-care industry was the 8th largest employer in Texas in 2006, and it is expected to grow 34% by 2016. (Texas Labor Market & Career Information/TWC, 2008)

What is needed?

■ **Support Early Childhood Education Professional Development - Build a high quality early childhood education system by funding quality improvement activities, retaining high quality early care teachers, and promoting accreditation and workforce certifications.**

■ **Expand Access to Voluntary High Quality Pre-kindergarten, and expand early childhood innovations including the state educational data systems.**

■ **Strengthen infant/toddler/child-care and early childhood education initiatives in Texas Workforce Economic Development.**

It is a Texas choice whether to invest now in quality early childhood initiatives, laying a stronger foundation for future workforce development, or to spend later on adult services and remediation.

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