



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 early childhood education professional development, expanded access to voluntary, high quality pre-kindergarten and increased reimbursement to improve quality of care for all children zero to age five. An educated, productive, well-balanced child grows to become a stronger foundation for Texas' future economy and future workforce.

What is the Current Reality of Children Living in Texas?

- **Poverty Prevalence** – Over 8.7 million Texans are considered “low-income.” 16% of Texans are living below the poverty level. Furthermore, 38% of all Texans are considered “low income” (with earnings below 200% of the poverty level).
- **Education Role Models** – 21.3 % of Texas adults (age 25-54) lacks a high school education, ranking Texas 51st 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 teen birth rate is the highest in the nation (63 births per 1,000 females ages 15-19) according to 2007 Kid Count Data Book.
- **Child Impact** – 2,225,182 children ages 0-6 years reside in Texas of which 53% or 1,175,768 are as classified low-income (income below 200% of the federal poverty level) and 26% (588,824) are classified as poor (income below federal poverty level) as reported in the 2006 U.S. Current Population Survey.
- **Medical Care** - Texas ranks 51st in low-income parents and children without insurance among the 50 state and District of Columbia with the least desirable ranked 51st. Texas ranks 49th in Head Start coverage.
- **Child Care Needs** - Child care consumes 28.3% of the median single parent Texas income. The average child care costs for a Texas infant/toddler or a preschool child in a center is \$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. Not only that, high-quality early childhood education would ultimately reduce costs for criminal justice, child welfare, remedial and special education, and increase income earned/taxes paid. With a better educated work force, Texas would attract the best global employers.

Why Target Early Childhood for Investment?

- ✓ Half of the achievement gap between white and African-American children we see 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 the numbers of words as children from more affluent communities.
- ✓ Early intervention tackles the achievement gap before it widens to three or four grade levels to eliminate educational inequity.

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- ✓ 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).
- ✓ Preparation for school is necessary while effectively supporting the holistic development of young children (their cognitive, social-emotional, physical development and creative/ critical thinking capacities).
- ✓ Community-based services that incorporate the participation of families in 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 program in 2008 would start paying for itself in 9 years. The total benefits from the 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).

The child care industry generated a total economic impact of over 145,000 jobs, and \$2.3 billion in wages in 2003 ranking 8th in Texas employment and expecting to grow by 40% by 2012 (Texas Labor Market & Career Information/TWC, 2006). Child care costs impacts 25% of Texas families.

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, promoting accreditation and workforce certifications.**
- **Expand Access to Voluntary High Quality Pre-kindergarten- 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 of whether to pay now with quality early childhood initiatives or pay later with adult dysfunction.

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**Published by the League of Women Voters of Texas
1212 Guadalupe #107 * Austin, Texas 78701**

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January 2008