Texas families need access to affordable child care and preschool to support working parents and to ensure that children start kindergarten ready to learn. During the first five years of life, children learn critical skills such as language and socio-emotional regulation, which provide a foundation for lifelong learning. High-quality preschool and child care can support healthy development and enable parents to work. Unfortunately, too many children are left behind by the status quo. In fact, differences in children’s cognitive abilities by income are evident at only 9 months old and significantly widen by the time children are age 2. Early learning has positive impacts for children, families, and the economy. It’s time to work to put these programs within reach.

High-quality child care and preschool programs help narrow school readiness gaps, which is particularly important for children of color and those living in low-income families. Thirty-six percent of Texas children under age 6 live in low-income families.

The supply of high-quality child care is limited. Many states have implemented quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) to assess and support quality in early care and education programs, but participation rates across the United States are low, and very few programs have been awarded the highest-quality ratings.

The cost of child care is out of reach for families
Annual costs at a child care center in Texas average $17,020 for an infant and a 4-year-old, which is 28 percent of the median income for families with children.

For low-income families and people of color, the average cost of child care would constitute the majority of income in most cases.
The current child care system is failing Texas families

On average, the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) serves only 10 percent of federally eligible children in Texas. This results in only 111,700 Texas children served through CCDBG funds. Of those served, 96 percent attend licensed or regulated center-based care.

Texas families need greater access to high-quality preschool programs

The Texas Public School Prekindergarten initiative serves 3- and 4-year-olds who meet specific risk factors. Risk factors include homelessness, foster care participation, or having a parent who has been injured or killed during active duty in the military. This preschool program meets, on average, 4 quality benchmarks set by the National Institute for Early Education Research and spends $4,127 annually per student.

In Texas, 15 percent of 3-year-olds and 58 percent of 4-year-olds are enrolled in a public preschool program.

Investing in high-quality early learning programs affects economies

Making child care more affordable for families can increase mothers’ workforce participation, resulting in a boost to the state’s economy.

In Texas, if child care costs did not exceed more than 10 percent of a family’s income, the state’s economy would increase nearly $201.39 million.

We can do better for Texas families

The Center for American Progress proposes two solutions to put high-quality child care and preschool within reach for Texas families and create an early childhood learning continuum for children:

- If child care costs are capped at 10 percent of a family’s income, Texas families would save $3,167 a year.
- Voluntary universal preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds. This would increase access for 566,200 children in Texas.


Ibid.

Note: In states that do not serve 3-year-olds or with no state-funded preschool program, enrollment rates include federal Head Start only.


Ibid.