

Earning and Learning: Securing The Workforce of Today and Tomorrow

By LaShonda Brown

Child care helps Texas families meet two priorities: earning and learning. For many working parents, access to child care is crucial for participation in the workforce. For countless children, participation in high-quality early childhood education programs sets the foundation for later success in school and life. Unfortunately, finding affordable, high-quality early childhood programs is a daily struggle for Texas parents.

According to the Federal Reserve Bank and the Committee on Economic Development, high quality early care and education programs yield significant returns as these programs improve the quality of life of our children, reduce crime, make the workforce of today and the future more productive, and strengthen our economy. Unfortunately, with the average cost of care for a 4-year-old rivaling the cost of tuition at a public college or university in Texas, access to high quality early childhood education programs are financially out of reach for many families.

As a result, many families are forced to choose child care options, which are unsafe and unreliable. The quality of child care greatly impacts a parents' ability to be at work as well as their work performance. In a study performed by The Community, Families, and Work Program at Brandeis University, parents with high levels of stress resulting from anxiety about their child's care are significantly more likely to be distracted, make errors, and miss deadlines than their counterparts. Nationally, employers pay \$3 billion dollars a year for parental absenteeism directly related to child care issues.

The contribution of working parents in Texas has a considerable impact on our economy. The annual wages of parents with children in licensed child care facilities are an estimated \$14.5 billion. In addition, without access to child care, many low-income parents would be forced out of the workforce, unable to adequately support their families.

Child care is not only important to our current workforce, but also to the development of the state's future crop of workers. By 2040, it is projected that 30% of the labor force in Texas will not have a high school diploma. Failure to invest now in high quality early care and education programs will lead to low-wage jobs and a large, low-skilled labor force unable to compete in this global economy. Children who have participated in high quality, early childhood programs have shown significant increases in high school and college graduation rates than their counterparts.

As an early childhood education professional, I know the benefits of high-quality child care programs and their effects on the cognitive, social, and emotional development of young children. As a parent, I know firsthand the importance of having my son in a safe learning environment during my work hours. I have peace of mind that he is getting the necessary skills to become a successful adult both from my influence at home as well as from his early childhood education experiences.

Working parents in Texas need access to affordable, safe, high-quality early childhood education programs. These programs offer more than just a place for children to be while parents are away at work; high-quality programs lay the foundation for children to be successful throughout their schooling years as well as in life. The question should not be, *can we afford to invest in high quality early childhood education programs*. The question should be, *can we afford not to?*

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