



Kara Johnson: When it comes to children, sometimes 8 isn't enough

Texans tend to agree that teachers and principals should be well trained and prepared for their roles in educating our youngest children; our standards and requirements for schools reflect this. But, when it comes to child care, our state policies tell a different tale, one that ignores the needs of children. The Texas minimum standards for child care training are among the lowest in the country. Child care workers are required to complete a mere 8 hours of pre-service training before being entrusted with the education and safety of a roomful of children.

This paltry requirement becomes even more striking when compared to other Texas professions. For example, a cosmetology license requires a minimum of 1500 pre-service training hours, TABC bartending certification, 32, and a cashier position at a local grocery, 20.

One might argue that caring for and educating young children is instinctual enough to sidestep mandatory instruction. However, research has shown that at every level of education, greater teacher preparation and training is linked to higher student performance. The same holds true in child care settings.

During the 81st legislative session, Texas lawmakers heard many bills calling for improvements to standards of quality for child care. Among them, Senate Bill 1730 (Sen. Royce West, Dallas), called for an increase in pre-service training for child care professionals from 8 to 16 hours. The bill would have also raised annual continuing education training from 15 to 17 hours for staff and from 20 to 30 hours for directors. SB 1730 easily garnered enough support to pass in the Senate, but stalled in the House. Eventually, time ran out on the 81st legislative session before State Representatives could vote on it.

The popularity of SB 1730 suggests that an increase in the number of pre-service training hours for early childcare professionals is past due. Fortunately, Texas still has the opportunity to make these needed changes. This summer, the child care minimum standards will be reviewed by the Department of Family and Protective Services.

It is important that policy makers, parents, advocates, and others concerned about the low standards for child care professionals in Texas speak up during this review. Please join the Texas Early Childhood Education Coalition (TECEC) in asking DFPS to mandate increased training requirements for child care professionals. To participate in the process, visit the DFPS website at www.dfps.state.tx.us/, and go to the "Evaluation/Review of Day Care Minimum Standards" section. Or, get involved through the TECEC website, www.tecec.org.

Thousands of Texas families rely on child care everyday. Let's use this opportunity to enhance our child care system and to promote the safety and education of our children.

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