

# *A Brief on the* **Bottom Line**

A 2011 AGENDA TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS  
FOR CHILDREN AND THE TEXAS OF TOMORROW



**TEXANS CARE**  
*for* **CHILDREN**

Texas business, community, and civic leaders agree: for the sustainability of our state, nothing matters more than ensuring our people have what it takes to contribute and succeed.

But the experts who look to the future say Texas is on the wrong path. If trends continue, the state

won't be able to compete. That's because today's children are falling far behind. Compared to almost any in the country, in fact, the children living in Texas face more barriers to success.

**For the first time in history, the next generation of Texans is projected to have less education, less wealth, and fewer years of life than the one before.**

As a state, we can see to it that children have a foundation for later success. We can be strategic about reducing crime and costs, about improving productivity and quality of life. We can reverse the trend.

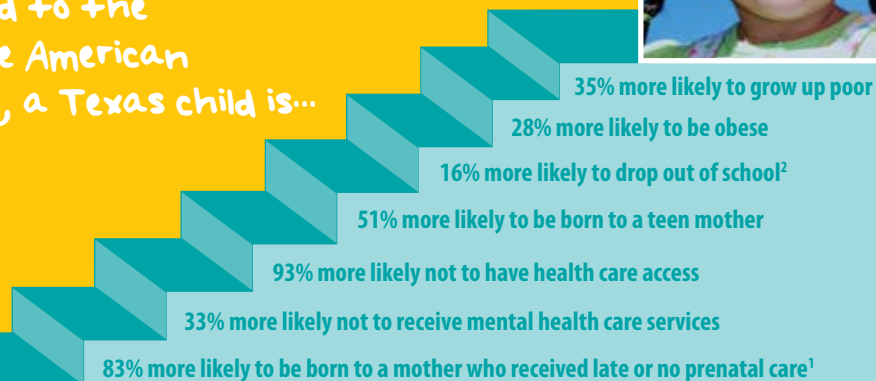
First, though, we have to acknowledge this bottom line: decisions Texas makes about children's policy affect much more than individuals and their families. They shape the Texas we all live in. They determine the Texas that we pass along.

of life. We can reverse the trend.

## An Uneven Playing Field

While other Americans are receiving what they need to grow up to be successful, Texas children are not. They face barriers other U.S. kids don't.

Compared to the average American child, a Texas child is...



*Calculations by Texans Care for Children based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau; the National Vital Statistics Report, 2009; Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation State Health Facts, 2007; Texas State Data Center and Office of the State Demographer, 2006; the National Survey of Children's Health; and the Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT Data Center;*

<sup>1</sup> Actual percentage may be higher, because figure only compares Texas to 18 states with a similar method for calculating this indicator

<sup>2</sup> Actual percentage may be higher because, for this indicator the U.S. figure also includes children in Texas

# TEXAS STANDS ALONE, WHEN IT COULD STAND AHEAD.



Texas is not a poor state, yet, by how our children are doing, one would think it must be.

All the other states that rank so poorly in national comparisons of child wellbeing are our nation's poorest places. We have the widest gap between overall wellbeing in the population and wellbeing for children. We are a place with the means but not the will to do better.

Many factors within a state's control shape child wellbeing—things like education and access to health care. Ensuring public systems do their jobs right today reduces tomorrow's overreliance on government and puts children on a bright path towards adulthood.

Decades of economic research have found that communities with quality programs for children reap remarkable savings and perform better. They gain multiple dollars back for each \$1 they spend on effective programs for children and their families. There are model programs with successful track records, nationally and right here in Texas, that could bring our state the same types of rewards. They range from early childhood education to prevention-based health services, from innovative school meal plans to college savings accounts. Each program proven to help children succeed in school and life offers unparalleled bang for the buck. Their effects last a lifetime.

Scientists understand this lasting effect. They know childhood and adolescence represent a unique window in time, a period that helps determine cognitive, physical, and social growth. For a thriving future Texas, there is only one solution. You need thriving children today.



## IN THE COMPANY OF POOR STATES



"Worst States for Children" <sup>1</sup>	State Median Household Income in 2009	% of Children in Poverty in 2009
Arkansas	\$ 38,815	26%
South Carolina	\$ 43,625	21%
<b>Texas</b>	<b>\$ 50,043</b>	<b>23%</b>
Oklahoma	\$ 42,822	22%
New Mexico	\$ 43,508	25%
Mississippi	\$ 37,790	29%
Louisiana	\$ 43,733	27%

<sup>1</sup> Every Child Matters Education Fund, "Geography Matters: Child Well-Being in the States," April 2008. Online at <http://everychildmatters.org/resources/reports>

# A 2011 POLICY AGENDA FOR TEXAS CHILDREN

At Texans Care for Children, throughout the year, we bring together Texas parents, youth, and community members, along with researchers and leaders from faith, business, government and nonprofit organizations. All of them share an interest in improving outcomes for children. In a series of monthly forums, these groups discuss the pressing challenges children in Texas face. Together, they identify solutions, based in public policy, that can help make a difference for children and our state. The recommendations in this brief are the result of that process and represent Texans Care for Children's 2011 agenda for children.

## GENERAL ISSUES

- Use the Rainy Day Fund for spending in the 2012-13 budget.
- Maximize use of all appropriate, available federal funding.
- Create new sources of revenue that are equitable and can grow along with the growth in need for public services, including elimination of inequitable tax breaks.
- Support measures that reduce public health spending while increasing public health revenue, like a penny-per-ounce excise tax on sugary drinks.

## FAMILY FINANCIAL SECURITY

- Subject payday and auto title lenders to the same regulation as other lenders.
- Ensure our public benefits eligibility system meets federal standards for timeliness and accuracy.
- Reduce barriers—such as transportation and lack of coordination—to participation in summer food-service programs, so that hungry children have access to nutritious food during the summer months.

## CHILD AND MATERNAL HEALTH

### *Health Care Access*

- Protect health coverage options that allow children to have access to health care, including through maintaining Medicaid and CHIP provider rates so as to prevent further provider shortages.

### *Obesity Prevention*

- Require schools to report FitnessGram data to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) by student identification number in order to be able to correlate fitness data with academic data, and require TEA to make that data available to parents.
- Improve access to healthy foods by strengthening farm-to-school linkages and expanding access to farmers' markets and other retailers offering fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Make health education a high school graduation requirement.
- Support physical activity in the community by supporting "complete street" policies to encourage walking and bicycling for health.
- Fully fund and maintain the Texas School Health Network that provides training and technical assistance to schools seeking to create a healthy school environment.
- Make healthy beverage options available to children in childcare and school settings.

### *Infant Health*

- Support public and private access to healthcare for women to receive prenatal care and for infants to receive quality care including well-child exams and developmental screenings.
- Require hospitals to report non-medically indicated Cesarean section deliveries and labor inductions before the 39th week of pregnancy to the Department of State Health Services (DSHS).
- Support breastfeeding through:
  - Requirement that hospitals provide regular breastfeeding training for employees who care for mothers, newborns and infants.
  - Requirement that hospitals only provide breast-milk substitutes if medically indicated or requested by the parent.
  - Creation of a DSHS lactation consultant certification program.
- Promote a continuum of care for premature infants, a population at high risk of rehospitalization, by creating a task force to develop a standard discharge planning tool to help providers connect families with follow-up community services.
- In order to decrease fetal mercury exposure, require that the levels at which fish contamination advisories are posted by DSHS at lakes, rivers, and coastal waters reflect the latest research.

## CHILD MENTAL WELLBEING

- Support the use of standardized developmental screenings for social, emotional, and behavioral concerns in primary care settings.
- Require school-wide implementation of positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), a disciplinary approach supported and promoted by TEA and the U.S. Department of Education and shown to prevent problem behaviors by establishing clear school-wide expectations for behavior, which are taught, modeled, and reinforced by all school staff.
- Support efforts to link institutions of higher education and state child-serving agencies in order to promote children's social and emotional health.
- Require private insurance coverage of early childhood intervention services and treatment for serious emotional disturbance that interferes with children's ability to function successfully at home, school, and in the community.
- Prevent further shortages in available mental health providers by maintaining Medicaid and CHIP provider rates.
- Support the use of trained family liaisons or partners to assist families in navigating the various systems providing services to their children.

## CHILD PROTECTION

- Improve front-end assessments of children entering the child welfare system to promote a successful first placement and appropriate receipt of services through:
  - Comprehensive, multidisciplinary assessment provided to each child upon entering the child welfare system to minimize likelihood of inappropriate placement and insufficient or inappropriate services.
  - Requirement that a trauma screening be included as part of the initial assessment.
  - Development of state-level clinician taskforce to develop menu of tools approved for inclusion in assessments and to develop guidelines for what must be included in assessment reports.
- Support budgetary requests to:
  - Reduce caseloads for Investigation, Family Based Safety Services (FBSS), and Conservatorship caseworkers.
  - Increase supports to families that prevent the need for removal and speed reunification.
  - Add Child Safety Specialists to review FBSS cases prior to closure where children/families are at high risk of recidivism.

## JUVENILE JUSTICE

- Require TEA to collect data on school ticketing and arrests and to make school disciplinary data publically available so that districts may assess how they compare to other school districts.
- Limit ticketing at school as much as possible, redirecting revenue from remaining tickets away from police departments towards youth programs.
- Require school districts that disproportionately refer students of color or special education students to Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs to develop and implement a remediation plan.
- Eliminate discretion in categories of behavior that can result in expulsion from a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program and referral to juvenile court.
- Maintain community corrections funding and increase the impact of this investment by requiring that communities use strategies proven to be effective.
- Encourage probation departments to use diversion strategies.
- House youth certified to stand trial as an adult in juvenile facilities, make categories of adult certification offenses and opportunities for judicial review consistent with those of determinate sentenced youth, and give judges additional tools to use with offenders aged 19-21.
- Ensure that all facilities—county, state, and contract—that house youth are safe and provide appropriate services.



Texans Care for Children is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization working to promote the wellbeing of all children in Texas. Texans Care is a nonpartisan voice for children, a source on children, and a network for people who put kids first.

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