

Testimony of Dr. Stephen Barnett, Pediatrician and Former
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TEXAS SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE HEARING ON SCHOOLS

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TURNAROUND: Are we ready and willing to address
unnecessary and unacceptable outcomes of our youth?

School failure and drop out, teen parenthood, addiction,
violence and incarceration plague the youth of Texas. Youth in
other developed nations have a significantly lower prevalence
rate with these issues although their average family income is
less than ours. An ever-increasing percent of our youth coming
of age are not able to function in the workforce nor become
independent, productive and stable citizens.

Why are we doing so poorly? The issue is especially frustrating,
given that published interventions have demonstrated time and
again that cost effective proven programs can alter these
rotten outcomes.

Lisbeth Schorr spelled out our dilemma in her book “Within Our
Reach”, over twenty years ago. She described numerous

interventions that were piloted successfully, but never taken to scale with fidelity. These are complicated problems, she went on to say, and require complicated solutions; solutions that require significant community investment.

Texas, over the past twenty years, has begun to make some of these investments. Home visiting, Early Childhood Invention(ECI), addressing early education/child care quality issues including early reading, coordinated school health including Coordinated Action to Child Health(CATCH) to reduce obesity, Communities in Schools to reduce drop out, school based clinic and classroom interventions to reduce tobacco, alcohol and other drug initiation and use, teen pregnancy and accidents and early diagnosis and treatment of mental and behavioral disorders-these are a few of the initiatives started. As a primary care pediatrician, these programs are critically important and essential if I am to have any hope of reversing these rotten outcomes and steering my patients into healthy and productive citizenship.

However, today, these first steps are at risk. Because of our budgetary dilemma, the small amount of progress we have made over the past twenty years to invest more in our children and youth-really to invest in the future of our great state- is

threatened. These “complex solutions” cannot be turned off and on like a faucet because a freeze came to town.

All of us who care for and serve the children of this state would ask you please to:

1. Be acutely aware of the impact your budget cuts will have on children who do not vote, contribute nor campaign.
2. Its storming not raining; time to use the Fund.
3. Optimize federal matching dollars.
4. We need new dollars and resources to invest in our future; invest in the children of Texas. Pediatricians favor “sin taxes”.

Nothing less will work.

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