

Ensuring High Quality Pre-K Services *A Vision for Our Children's Future*

A United Way Capital Area Success By 6[®] White Paper



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Ensuring High Quality Pre-K Services

A Vision for our Children's Future

Background

United Way Capital Area Success By 6[®] is a collaboration of more than 75 organizations, agencies, coalitions, individuals, and businesses that are devoted to the development of a comprehensive system of care and education for children ages birth to six years.¹

The vision of Success By 6 is that every young child will be “happy, healthy and smart”—ready for school success. Success By 6 works closely with the City of Austin Child Care Council and other local service providers, community coalitions and organizations, governmental and private agencies, and local businesses to promote high quality formal and informal care and education for our young children, based upon nationwide research and best practices.

Success By 6 is committed to the development of high quality pre-k programs for three- and four-year-olds in our community. High-quality pre-k programs may include faith-based centers, Head Start programs, and private child care classrooms (for profit and not-for-profit), as well as public school venues (a “mixed delivery model”).

Austin Independent School District (AISD) has asked Success By 6 to present a white paper on the status of nationwide pre-k programs. AISD proposes to create as many as ten pre-k centers in the next few years. AISD officials have visited Houston and seen large pre-k centers in operation² and would like to establish at least two such centers for the 2006-07 school year. One proposed center would be located in the north and would accommodate up to 500 children from Wooldridge, McBee, Cook and Walnut Creek Elementary School catchment areas. Another pre-k center would be set up in the south (Becker) that would accommodate about 125 children. A third center is being discussed for east Austin (Oak Springs).

AISD has indicated that it presently has no plans to extend eligibility for pre-k programs beyond the current statutory guidelines (essentially, 4-year olds that meet low-income guidelines, have limited English proficiency, or have special needs). Dr. Pat Forgione, AISD superintendent, has indicated, however, that he is willing to engage in a dialogue with the community about extending pre-k to all four-year olds and three-year olds. He has further indicated his sensitivity to the fact that four-year old programs often “subsidize” infant-toddler care in the community.³

¹ Those organizations, agencies and individuals who have specifically endorsed the findings and recommendations contained herein **at the time of this writing** are listed in Appendix A. In addition, Success By 6 conducted a survey of child care providers in East and Central Austin during the week of January 19, 2006, the results of which are discussed in greater detail in Appendix B.

² Houston ISD offers a “mixed delivery model,” utilizing both free-standing pre-k centers and neighborhood school pre-k programs (including partnerships with private child care providers). Dr. Mary Jane Gomez, Houston ISD, addressing the AISD Board of Trustees, January 23, 2006.

³ Speech to Capital City African-American Chamber of Commerce, January 18, 2006.

In the last legislative sessions in Texas, drawing huge bipartisan support, Senate Bills 76 (2003) and 23 (2005), expanded the existing TEEM (Texas Early Education Model) under the auspices of the State Center for Early Childhood Development. This collaborative model also includes a program evaluation component to strengthen standards, enhance quality, increase access and expand professional development opportunities. It also implements a voluntary School Readiness Certification System to inform parents of the effectiveness of early care and education programs.

The TEEM legislation provides a variety of service delivery models, in recognition of the fact that families generally would like to see neighborhood schools. Effective collaborations with existing child care providers can help accomplish this objective. In fact, **AISD is a partner in the local TEEM model, which serves over 250 four-year-olds in the pilot classrooms, blending public school, Head Start and WorkSource Child Care Solutions pre-k programs.** Perhaps most importantly, in the next legislative session it is likely that the “mixed delivery” service model (TEEM) will be greatly expanded. If AISD were to adopt a different approach, it would most likely be working at cross purposes with statewide trends and funding opportunities.

The Gold Standard of Quality in Pre-K Programming

Research shows that children who attend high-quality pre-k programs perform better in school and throughout life generally.

The National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers University (NIEER), has indicated that the following are key components of a high-quality pre-k program:

- Well-educated teachers (who have at least bachelor’s degrees with specialized training in early childhood education)
- Low teacher-child ratios and small class size (a 1:10 staff-to-student ratio is considered ideal)
- Research-based curriculum aligned to K-12 standards (recognizing cognitive, physical, social and emotional developmental domains)
- Engaged families (parent conferences, home visits, regular reports, and opportunities for parents to serve on governing boards or committees and to assist in the classroom)
- Focus on the whole child and family (proper nutrition, vision/hearing/general health screenings, social services to support families—rendered by trained professionals and not merely the responsibility of teachers)

This is the “gold standard” that we should strive to meet in our community. Texas presently ranks 1-3 on NIEER’s 10-point pre-k program quality rating scale (where 10 is best). By contrast, Oklahoma ranks 7-8, and Arkansas 9-10 on the same scale. Success By 6 believes there is no reason that Austin cannot achieve a superior rating under the NIEER quality rating system. Nothing less should be acceptable.

Nationwide Environmental Scan of Pre-K Programs

Several states have high-quality pre-k programs, as the following summary indicates. More detailed information concerning these programs can be found at Pre-K Now, www.preknow.org.

Arkansas: The Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) program is the only state pre-kindergarten that ranks a perfect 10 on the NIEER quality rating scale. The program is provided in center-based classrooms or through the Home Instruction Program for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPPY).

California: In June 2005 California joined Georgia, Oklahoma and Florida as the fourth state to make quality pre-k available to all four-year olds. The program will be part-day and voluntary. Los Angeles created its own universal high-quality preschool program for every four-year-old, regardless of family income, which should be fully operational by 2014. Efforts to expand the program to San Mateo, Santa Clara (Silicon Valley), San Francisco and San Diego are in the works.

Florida: Legislation was passed in 2004 to provide free, voluntary pre-k for every four-year-old in the state, effective August 2005. Maximum class size is 18 students with staff-child ratios of 1:10. Instruction takes place in both public schools and private centers ("mixed delivery"). Child advocates are working to assure adequate funding for the program, and to remedy legislation shortfalls such as requiring teachers to have bachelor's degrees.

Georgia: In 1995, Georgia became the first state in the nation to provide universal pre-k on a voluntary basis. The state pre-k program is a "mixed delivery" model, offering services in public schools, Head Start sites, and both for-profit and nonprofit private child care centers. Presently over 70,000 four-year olds are served by the program.

Illinois: Illinois' pre-k program reaches at-risk children from age birth to three. The state is committed to developing a high-quality early learning system available to all children age birth to five by expanding, improving, and better coordinating existing programs and services.

Iowa: In 2005, Iowa passed legislation to dramatically increase funds for early childhood programs and to expand pre-k access, via a system of Community Empowerment Boards (similar to Smart Start Boards in North Carolina).

Massachusetts: Legislation is pending that sets up a high-quality universal pre-k program for the state, to be phased in by 2012.

New Jersey: New Jersey offers full-time, year-round pre-k programs for three- and four-year-olds in many of its lowest-income school districts (Abbott program). Abbott program teachers must have a Bachelor's degree and early childhood certification, programs must use an approved curriculum, class size is set at 15 children with a teacher and an aide, and teacher salaries are equivalent to other K-12 teacher salaries. Students receive comprehensive services and hot meals. In addition, another program (ECPA) employs slightly lower quality standards (class size and curriculum are not regulated, and programs typically are only half-day and not available to three-year-olds).

New Mexico: In 2005, the New Mexico Legislature created a pilot pre-k program for all four-year-olds utilizing a voluntary “mixed delivery” (private-public school) system, starting with children in communities of highest need (the highest percentage of Title 1 schools and those that serve the highest percentage of students not meeting the proficiency component required for calculating adequate yearly progress). Interestingly, those involved in the pilot program recently have indicated that they will propose to increase the involvement of private child care providers from 50% to 75% to improve service delivery.

New York: New York, while early in the forefront of universal pre-k, reaches about 25% of the state’s four-year-olds (primarily children from low-income families). Efforts to expand the program continue.

North Carolina: North Carolina has always been the model for early childhood education. Smart Start is the state’s comprehensive early childhood program serving families with children ages birth through five. The program provides health education and screening, works to improve child care facilities, and provides subsidies to working families for high-quality child care. Local Smart Start partnerships manage the program at the county/regional level. Current goals include ensuring that all pre-k teachers receive adequate wages and benefits and have at least two-year degrees.

Oklahoma: Oklahoma has created a high-quality program in which four-year-olds are served in public schools, Head Start classrooms, faith-based and child care programs. If the pre-school program is offered outside of the public-school setting, the early childhood certified teacher is funded by the public school. All pre-k teachers, regardless of the setting, are required to hold a Bachelor’s degree with early childhood education, and they are paid a salary commensurate to public school teachers. Although voluntary, 95% of the districts currently offer pre-k programs, representing a 30% increase since 1998. Presently over 30,000 children are being served by the program.

Tennessee: In 2005, Tennessee passed legislation that permits local communities to decide whether and the extent to which they wish to participate in a voluntary pre-k program for low-income three- and four-year olds. Local school districts apply for state matching funds, and will have the ability to use federal funds, private dollars, or in-kind resources as part of their local match requirement (which varies by district).

Wisconsin: Wisconsin has offered four-year-old kindergarten programs for many years. State funding provides approximately 2/3 of the school funding, and local communities provide the remaining funds through property taxes. Many Wisconsin school districts work with child care and Head Start programs to maximize the benefits to children of working parents and to minimize any negative impact on child care providers.

Community-Based Pre-K Providers Should Be Incorporated Into the Delivery Model for Pre-K Programming

Community-based child care providers play a crucial role in the development of any high-quality pre-k system. As seen from the above environmental scan, many states deliver pre-k through a “mixed delivery” system, which offers parents a variety of choices: faith-based centers, Head Start programs, for- and nonprofit child care centers, as well as public schools.

Local pre-k policy choices have the potential to strengthen the quality of community-based child care programs. Texas child care licensing standards focus only on very basic health and safety protections, and do not provide support to improve and strengthen child care provider quality. State child care subsidy programs, such as those operated by Austin’s WorkSource Child Care Solutions, are limited by rulings of the Texas Work Force Commission from engaging in so-called “quality” initiatives. In addition, funding through WorkSource is often less than the actual cost of care, as those reimbursement rates are set by state regulation.

Obviously, the impact of state policies and funding-related issues dramatically, and adversely, affects the performance of young children entering the K-12 formal educational system. But a strong local initiative could reverse this trend. AISD could, for instance, require—as does Delaware—that each contracting provider establish a written agreement demonstrating how it meets pre-k program standards. Other issues that could be addressed contractually include: service areas, recruitment and transition of children and families, sharing resources and information. We can learn much from the experience of other communities nationwide as they address the same issues.

Nationwide Support of Mixed Delivery Models

According to the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) in a recent study commissioned by The Brookings Institution,⁴ the emergence of this mixed delivery model is significant because it has the potential to address the needs of children in working families in a coordinated way, while simultaneously strengthening the overall quality of community-based child care programs.

Sixty-four percent (64%) of all mothers with children ages 0-5 are in the work force. Thus more “at risk” children are spending time in child care arrangements outside of the home, and the majority of working mothers need full-time care for their children.

Nationally, about 30% of all children served by state pre-k programs are in non-public school settings. At least 29 of the 38 states offering pre-k allow for mixed (or diverse) delivery systems, according to Pre-K Now. Nine states serve more than half of their pre-k children in non-school settings, and some states actually require that a certain percentage of children be served in community-based settings (New York, New Mexico and West Virginia). Several states (Florida, North Carolina, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Tennessee) use “local councils” to help determine which providers receive pre-k contracts.

⁴ The full CLASP report can be found at www.clasp.org/publications/cc_brief5.pdf.

If community-based centers meet stringent quality control standards, they often can contract directly with the state or local education agencies to provide pre-k programs. **Only a handful of states limit delivery of all state-funded pre-k initiatives, either directly or by subcontract, to the public schools, according to the CLASP report.**

Six states (Georgia, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, West Virginia and Wisconsin) either offer or are working toward offering universal pre-k, and all six allow delivery of pre-k in community-based settings. Four of the six have or plan to have more than half of their children taught in community-based pre-k programs.

The following summarizes the conclusions of six leading issues identified and discussed in the CLASP report concerning state and local practices regarding the blending of private and public pre-k programs:

1. Does the state allow or require inclusion of community-based child care providers?
 - Yes, with a required percentage: New York, West Virginia, New Mexico.
 - Yes, without a required percentage: Alabama, Arkansas, Wisconsin, Georgia
 - Yes, in a separate program: Michigan, South Carolina (each has two funding streams, for public and private providers).

2. Which type of providers are eligible to participate?
 - Center-based providers: All 29 states.
 - Family-child care providers: Delaware, Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin (some may not be eligible directly but rather as subcontractors).

3. Who decides which community-based providers receive funds to participate?
 - State agencies: Delaware, Iowa.
 - Local school districts (with required input from the community): Colorado, New York.
 - Local school districts have authority to subcontract with providers: Oklahoma, Wisconsin.
 - Local community councils or boards administer funds and set policies on provider participation: North Carolina, Massachusetts.
 - Local city officials determine the agency that administers funds with the input of a representative community advisory council: Connecticut.

4. Who hires teachers?
 - School district (to provide the pre-k part of the day): Oklahoma, West Virginia, Alabama.
 - Community-based provider (pre-k funds are targeted to part of the day and year and any required pre-k program and teacher standards are required to apply only to that timeframe, although the teacher may be a full-day teacher): Georgia, Arkansas, South Carolina.

5. Does the pre-k program pay for a full working day?
 - State pre-k program rules require a portion of programming address working families' needs and allow pre-k funds for that purpose: Massachusetts, Ohio.⁵
 - State pre-k program rules require a portion of programming address working families' needs and the state actively coordinates state policies across funding streams to provide pre-k services during the hours families are working: New Jersey.
 - State requires that pre-k programs address working families, but does not provide all the funding necessary and also does not coordinate funding streams: Connecticut⁶, South Carolina.
 - State policies encourage programs to address full-day or full-year needs of families through coordination, but do not provide that service: Colorado, Iowa, Illinois.

6. Are pre-k program standards and teacher qualifications the same for community-based and school-based providers?
 - Yes: Illinois, Kentucky.
 - Yes, with a grace period to comply: Arizona, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina.
 - Different standards are in place for some settings: Iowa, Michigan.
 - Local communities set their own standards (no requirement of similarity): Minnesota, Wisconsin.

Other issues such as availability of resources and program supports, how payments to pre-k programs are set, if community-based providers can add pre-k funds to child care subsidies, whether state child care and pre-k agencies are required to coordinate their policies, and the extent to which program and evaluation data are collected from community-based child care providers (and whether such data are used to improve program quality) are addressed in greater detail in the CLASP report.

⁵ In Massachusetts and Ohio, when pre-k funds are used to pay for full-day, full-year model, the standards would apply to that time. Connecticut: providers are expected to provide full day and year of service that meet school readiness program standards

⁶ Connecticut: providers are expected to provide full-day and year of service that meet school readiness program standards

Success By 6[®] Recommendations:

- **National quality standards (NIEER) should be the “gold standard” for our local program.** Success By 6 especially endorses teacher certification in early childhood education; bachelor’s degrees; “living wages” for all pre-k teachers (public or private, profit or non-profit); 1:10 classroom staff-to-student ratios; joint professional development opportunities; and alignment, braiding and leveraging of all funding streams (including child care subsidies, Head Start, Title I and Title III monies, etc.).
- **We must recognize that “one size does not fit all,” and be flexible in our approach.** Many existing public school and for- or nonprofit centers have excess capacity, while others are overwhelmed by the demand for services. Rather than create ten free-standing centers and transport very young children to such facilities, careful thought should be given to the possible utilization and further optimal coordination of existing resources, public and private. ***Success By 6 strongly supports a mixed delivery model, blending public and private resources as appropriate under the circumstances.***
- AISD should retain the services of **highly qualified early childhood education specialists and administrators for the AISD pre-k program.** Program evaluators likewise should have demonstrated experience in evaluating pre-k programs of similar high quality. ***There should be a recognition that the community goal is to seek what is best for four-year olds: that their care and education are intertwined, and that their social and emotional needs, as well as their cognitive development, are quite unique in contrast to those of older elementary school students.***
- **Some portion of pre-k should be provided in full-day, full-care settings to meet the needs of working families.** A minimum proportion requirement can help ensure that working parents are guaranteed a high quality care and educational environment for their children.
- **Pilot programs could be implemented, but should be held strictly accountable to the community for results and the feasibility of taking such projects to scale.**
- Collaboration and cooperation among public and private child care providers must be emphasized and encouraged from the top down, and **joint professional development opportunities** should be built into and encouraged by the resulting system.
- AISD should build into the pre-k program **accountability to the community at every level**, regularly reporting to and seeking input from diverse community interests, such as parents, business leaders, early childhood care and education experts and advocates, policy makers, educators, child care providers and civic agencies. SB6 further highly recommends the creation of a community pre-k advisory council comprising such stakeholders (or minimally a pro forma method for community input and oversight).
- AISD should carefully consider **solutions to community transportation issues**, not only those involving the safe transport of young children to and from the pre-k centers, but also those of parents and caregivers who may be hampered by lack of viable public transportation options from traveling to and from the pre-k centers if emergencies arise.
- AISD should carefully consider the impact of the proposed pre-k centers on families with children in multiple schools, as well as **concerns about very young children attending educational programs some distance from their neighborhoods, and also changing schools and reorienting themselves to a new school** after their first year of public school experience.

Conclusions:

Success By 6 views AISD's plans to open pre-k centers as a significant opportunity to **open community dialogue and galvanize community action toward the development of a collaborative, forward-looking community program that provides effective, high quality educational services to our youngest children.** By looking to nationwide best practices and research, and balancing those considerations with our local resources, our community can make the best informed decisions.

The advantages of aligning, blending and leveraging all available community assets and resources are obvious. The challenge will be to succeed in doing so in a manner that is thoughtful, strategic and timely, always retaining our primary focus: what is in the best interest of our children. Careful planning and communication with stakeholders will be crucial to success. **The reward will be the longer-term return on the upfront investment in high quality care and education: students better prepared for success in school and in life.**

Appendix A

Endorsements as of January 24, 2006

Note: Success By 6 stakeholders are still in the process of endorsing the findings and recommendations contained herein. Many have indicated that they have referred the matter of endorsement, with staff recommendations to do so, to their constituent Boards or Councils. Success By 6 anticipates a substantial number of additional endorsements.

Austin Child Care Council

Community Action Network

WorkSource Board (endorsement pending)

James Strickland, Agency Executive Director, on behalf of Child, Inc. (Head Start)

Kaitlin Guthrow, on behalf of Texas Early Care and Education Coalition

Jason Sabo, on behalf of United Ways of Texas

Louanne Aponte, Executive Director, on behalf of FamilyConnections

Jose del Valle, Executive Director, and Robert Rutishauser, Board Chair, on behalf of The Austin Project

Ellen Balthazar, Executive Director, and Janet Chapman, on behalf of Any Baby Can

Mary Ellen Galvan, Ph.D., and Stacey Shackelford, Ph.D., Region XIII Early Education Specialists (Dr. Galvan is also the Chair Elect of the City of Austin Child Care Council)

Sandy Dochen and Beth Tracy, Corporate Affairs, on behalf of IBM

Sandy Briley, Ph.D., Early Childhood Education, Director, University of Texas Child Development Centers, member of the Austin Child Care Council.

Maureen Britton, Executive Director, on behalf of The Institute for Child Care Excellence, member of the Child Care Council

Avis Wallace, Director, Rosewood Primary Schools, member of the Child Care Council

Chris Dietche, long-time child advocate and head of Early Start Coalition (the agenda of which has been incorporated into that of Success By 6)

Carmel Borders, on behalf of The Tapestry Foundation

Eileen Hegar, Executive Director, on behalf of Mainspring Schools

Ying Tang, Research Associate, University of Texas, Ray Marshall Center

Dale Simons, Executive Director, on behalf of Communities in Schools

Lawrence Elsner, Executive Director, on behalf of Open Door Preschools

Cindy Rojas Rodriguez, Executive Director, on behalf of Raising Austin

Quality Quinn, long-time advocate for young children and high quality early childhood care and education

Glennie Burgess, Director, on behalf of St. James' Episcopal School

Lila Carl, Ph. D., long-time advocate for children and member of the Austin Child Care Council, founder of Easter Seals of the Capital Area, Executive Director of Casa, Full-time professor of regular and special education at the University of Texas at Austin, and former Executive Director and founder of Any Baby Can of Austin

“The **Austin Association for the Education of Young Children Board** endorses the findings and recommendations of Success By addressing the AISD Pre-k Proposal. We believe that the White Paper reflects current research and knowledge of best practice for preschool children and families. Austin children and families’ needs and concerns must be represented and considered before implementing programs which will directly affect them. We appreciate the efforts of United Way Success By Six and the community they represent as they collaborate to provide relevant input into the Pre-k proposal of the Austin Independent School District.”

Toni Williams, Executive Director, and Belinda Rojas, on behalf of Austin Learning Academy

Arturo Hernandez, Austin Travis County Mental Health and Mental Retardation Center

Appendix B

Summarized Results of Survey of Private Pre-K Providers in East and Central Austin,
Conducted the Week of January 19, 2006
by the Institute for Child Care Excellence
as Commissioned by Success By 6

Of the 11 private child care providers (for profit and non-profit) responding to the survey:

- The combined 4-year old enrollment was 163 children. 46 slots were reported to be available for 4-year olds (representing in excess of 28% of total capacity).
- 36% are accredited facilities, and 45% are Texas Rising Star providers.
- 100% have “knowledge” of the AISD plan to open three pre-k centers.
- 64% think it would be a good (or great) idea to partner with AISD to provide high quality care and education opportunities for four-year olds.
- By contrast, 18% did not wish to partner with AISD, and another 18% were “apprehensive” about that possibility.
- 91% are interested in learning more about the details of the plan and resulting community decisions relating thereto.
- Regarding the percentage of four-year olds presently receiving child care subsidies:
 - Four centers reported that none of their 4-year olds were receiving subsidies
 - Two centers reported that 30-33% of their 4-year olds were receiving subsidies.
 - Four centers reported that 55-67% of their 4-year olds were receiving subsidies.
 - One center reported that 100% of its 4-year olds were receiving subsidies.

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