

# TEXAS LYCEUM Journal



JANUARY 2003 ISSUE

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## President's Message

Dear Readers,

On January 31, 2003 the Texas Public Conference on Children's Issues brought together key voices in the debate over the needs and priorities of our state as we began the 2003 legislative session. The Texas Lyceum Association, along with the LBJ School of Public Affairs, Initiatives for Children, and the Texas Association of School Boards, in partnership with The Children's Defense Fund and Family Services Association, invited those with an interest in this growing public issue to join us for a one-day policy conference that was both informative and engaging.

Will addressing the financially constrained educational system two years from now be too late for Texas? Is the Robin Hood Plan leaving both high and low wealth school districts in a crunch? What impact will a Republican majority have on school vouchers, and how will that be reflected in Texas?

Over one-half of the women with children younger than six years old are the labor force. Over 2 million children under the age of thirteen live in families where the family head and spouse, if present, are working or are in an educational or training program.

Most daycare agencies today are unable to pay the salaries trained and certified teachers command. And childcare experts believe simulation learning experiences in the first five years of life are critical for proper development of the brain and thought process. So who is taking care of our future leaders?

Over one million children are already on Medicaid, and the number of uninsured children is rising. Why aren't our children receiving their complete series of immunizations?

So we ask the questions: How severe will the issues for Texas' children ultimately be? How will public officials deal with them? Are there viable options for program reforms, outright spending cuts, and restructuring that can be used to close gaps?

This issue of the Lyceum Journal continues the conversation on these key important issues. The Texas Lyceum is very appreciative of the public and private officials who took time from their busy schedules to participate in the conference and contribute to this edition of the Journal.



Rodney E. Nathan

Rodney E. Nathan  
President, Texas Lyceum Association

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The Texas Lyceum Association is an association of Texans whose purposes are:

1. to identify and develop the next generation of top leadership in the state of Texas.
2. to educate its Directors by identifying and exploring interrelationships of the major issues facing Texas, and then, based on this experience, by helping bring a better understanding of these issues to the state's key decision makers.
3. to promote an appreciation of the responsibilities of stewardship of the values, tradition and resources of Texas.

The Association acts as a catalyst to bring together diverse opinions and expertise to focus on national and state issues, and seeks to emphasize constructive private sector, public sector and individual responses to the issues. To accomplish these purposes, the Lyceum conducts periodic public forums, publishes the *Journal* and conducts programs for the Directors to explore and discuss key economic and social issues of the state and nation.

The Texas Lyceum Association is composed of a Board of Directors from across the state. These men and women all under the age of 45 have demonstrated leadership abilities not only in their own communities, but across the state. They are active, involved and interested; they are eager to contribute their talents and time to the betterment of Texas.

Editorial: Miles McCall, Director

Editors: Rhonda Minton, Stephen F. Austin State University Alumni Association, and Pat Spence, Stephen F. Austin State University

The views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Texas Lyceum Association, its directors or financial contributors.

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# The Texas Public Conference on Children's Issues — Agenda

Friday, January 31, 2003, in Austin, Texas, Four Seasons Hotel

- 7:00am - 8:15am Registration and Continental Breakfast
- 8:15am Welcome and Introductory Remarks  
**Larry Peterson**, Chairman of the Texas Lyceum Association  
**Rodney Nathan**, President of the Texas Lyceum Association
- 8:30am Keynote Address  
**Judge Eric Andell**, Deputy Under Secretary, Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools
- 9:10am Panel Discussion - Childcare & Early Development
- Moderator: **Alicia Rivera**, US-Mexico Border Partnership for Children at El Paso College
- Panelists: **Patrick Bresette**, Center for Public Policy Priorities; Suzanne Hinds, Initiatives for Children, Houston; **Richard Hoffman**
- 10:15am Break
- 10:25am Panel Discussion - Education and Our Children
- Moderator: **Charles Olson**, Haley & Davis PC
- Panelists: **Dr. Steve Miller**, Scientific Learning Corporation  
**Marsha Ridlehuber**, Waco ISD  
**State Senator Leticia Van de Putte**
- 11:35am Presentation of the Stewardship of Texas Values Award to former Governor Dolph Briscoe, Jr.
- 12:00pm Lunch
- 12:25pm Presentation **Tom Vander Ark**, Executive Director, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- 1:05pm Panel Discussion - Higher Education Initiatives
- Panelists: **Stefanie Sanford**, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation  
**Geoff Orsak**, Southern Methodist University  
**Robert Scott**  
**John Opperman**, Texas Tech University
- 2:30pm Panel Discussion - Health Care
- Moderator: **Ayse McCracken**, Texas Children's Pediatric Associates
- Panelists: **Dr. Julie Boom**, Texas Children's Hospital  
**State Representative Garnet Coleman**  
**Bryan Sperry**, Children's Hospital Association of Texas
- 4:20 Closing Remarks  
**Larry Peterson**, President of Texas Lyceum Association

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# WACO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT - STUDENT PROMOTION POLICY

By: Marsha Ridlehuber



*Mrs. Marsha Ridlehuber has B.S. and M.S. degrees in education from Baylor University. She has done post graduate work at Baylor University and Tarleton State University.*

*Marsha has worked for Waco ISD for 25 years as a speech pathologist for students of all levels of abilities and disabilities; middle school assistant principal; director of special education and special programs; Executive Director of System Accountability; Assistant Superintendent for Accountability and Administration.*

*Her current responsibilities include serving as district TAKS coordinator; coordination of school improvement program evaluations; coordination of district and campus improvement planning; serving as liaison to campus principals; development of a comprehensive system for the prevention and recovery of dropouts; and liaison to campus and district decision making councils.*

In June 1997, after a year of study and research, Waco I.S.D. and its school community embarked upon a journey designed to increase student achievement for all students through the implementation of objective standards for student promotion, including report card grades, assessment performance, and attendance.

## District Demographics

Waco I.S.D. is an urban school district in Central Texas with an enrollment of slightly less than 16,000 students in grades pre-K through 12. The student population is 38% African American, 44% Hispanic, and 18% White with more than 78% of students eligible for free/reduced lunch.

Waco I.S.D. has 33 campuses: 25 neighborhood schools, five magnet schools, one disciplinary alternative education program, and two alternative education campuses serving students at-risk of dropping out of school.

## Background and Impetus for Change

- Waco I.S.D. experienced years of a pattern of social promotion resulting in low passing rates on the Exit TAAS; too many students were at risk of not receiving a diploma due to not passing all parts of the Exit TAAS prior to their scheduled graduation date.
- District studies showed no correlation between report card grades and TAAS passing rates in grades three through eight.
- The district had no consistent, objective districtwide standards for promotion.
- There was a general lack of accountability by all stakeholders in the learning process, including parents and

students.

- After several years of schools on the low performing list, there was diminishing community confidence in Waco I.S.D.

The Board of Trustees, administration, staff and school community knew that a significant change would be necessary to bring about systemic improvements in student achievement across Waco I.S.D.

## Considerations for Change

Those studying possibilities for change knew that more rigorous and objective promotion standards would, in all

likelihood, lead to a significant increase in retentions, at least in the initial implementation period. A review of research on retention revealed that traditional retention (simple repetition of a school grade in the next school year) provides short-term gains but only limited long-term gains, leads to lowered self-esteem and increased dropout rates.

If the implementation of rigorous and objective promotion standards was to be successful, retained students needed a different, individualized program that included not only remediation, but more importantly, intensive acceleration of learning designed to help students regain their appropriate grade level placement, or at the very least, maintain growth in learning without further retentions.

## Promotion Policy Revision

In Summer 1997, after many months of research, planning, and collaboration, the Waco I.S.D. Board of Trustees took a bold step and revised Policy EIE (Local) to require

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***“Those studying possibilities for change knew that more rigorous and objective promotion standards would . . . lead to a significant increase in retentions . . .”***

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that students in grades one through eight meet three specific standards for promotion: Report card grades (a minimum grade of 70 on a scale of 100 in core content areas), standardized test performance, and attendance (90%).

- Grade one and two standardized test performance requirements were based on ITBS Reading and Mathematics performance.
- Grade three through eight standardized test performance requirements were based on TAAS Reading and Mathematics performance (with TAAS writing performance added in 2000-2001).

TAAS performance was selected as the assessment standard for grades three through eight because these statewide assessments were developed to measure student performance on the state-mandated curriculum that students are to be taught.

To support students in meeting the new promotion standards, a number of other components were also implemented.

- Campuses have strict parent notification requirements at numerous points during the school year to ensure that parents know if their child is at risk of retention.
- Students are provided three opportunities in spring and summer to meet the assessment standard each year.
- Students at-risk of retention are provided individualized acceleration opportunities during the school year as well as in summer programs.
- Retained students also have an opportunity for mid-year promotion during the next school year, providing an opportunity for students to move on to their age-appropriate grade placement.
- A retention appeal process is in place for students whose parents wish to appeal the retention of the student.
- ARD Committees for students with disabilities determine each individual student's ability to participate in this promotion policy. The ARD Committee also serves as the retention appeal committee should one be necessary.

### Results Since Implementation of the Policy

- Increased retention rates: The retention rate in 1996-97 prior to policy implementation was 2.2%. In 1997-98, after one year of implementation, the retention rate rose to 10.4%. Since that time, the retention rate has declined to 7.7% in 1998-99, 6.7% in 1999-2000, 6.3% in 2000-01, and 5.6% in 2001-02.
- Increased TAAS performance: In 1996-97, prior to the policy change, 67.2% of all students passed TAAS Reading, 62.7% passed TAAS Mathematics, and 68.1% passed TAAS Writing. In 2001-02, 89.1% of all students

passed TAAS Reading, 90.3% passed TAAS Mathematics, and 86.6% passed TAAS Writing.

- Decreased performance gaps on TAAS passing rate between White students and each of the other student groups, African American, Hispanic, and Economically Disadvantaged: In 1996-97, gaps ranged from 18 to almost 30 percentage points across subject areas and student groups. In 2001-02, gaps ranged from 4 to just under 12 percentage points across subject areas and student groups.
- Prevailed in a court case filed by district parents challenging implementation of the policy on the grounds that it would be discriminatory against minority students: Both a district judge and the Commissioner of Education ruled in favor of Waco I.S.D.'s implementation of the policy. One change in the policy came about

as a result of a recommendation from the District Court judge involved in hearing the case. He recommended that the District make the grade one and two assessment standard requirement a recommendation since there was not a direct link between the assessment being utilized and the state curriculum being taught. (This assessment instrument was changed to the Texas Primary Reading Inventory and local nine-week mathematics assessments for the 2002-2003 school year to more closely align assessment to the curriculum being taught.)

- Improved accountability ratings: In 1996-97, Waco I.S.D. had one low performing campus and one recognized campus. In 1997-98, Waco I.S.D. had no low performing campuses, three recognized campuses, and two exemplary campuses. In 2001-02, Waco I.S.D. had ten recognized campuses, and seven exemplary campuses, including three middle schools and one high school.
- Increased parent and community support for the policy: Since 1997-98, parent and community polls conducted yearly by Baylor University have included questions designed to gauge parent and community support for the promotion policy. Support is greater every year, with 79% of the community indicating strong agreement or agreement in 2002. Minorities are only slightly less supportive than are Whites.

### Key Factors in Successful Implementation

- Marketing/Communicating the new promotion standards to all stakeholders: It was important to the successful implementation of the policy that there were no surprises for anyone involved.
- Setting high expectations for all of our students: Along with the high expectations, it was important to give students the support they needed to meet those expectations.
- Addressing each student's individual learning needs for both remediation and acceleration: It was important that the district have a model of retention that was different from the traditional model.

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***“It was important to the successful implementation of the policy that there were no surprises for anyone involved.”***

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- Providing additional learning time and opportunities for students to meet the standards: Students learn at different rates, and some students could meet the standard given the additional learning time they needed.
- Providing teachers with intensive professional development in the skills and strategies that will help them meet the needs of all students: When teachers participate in quality professional development relevant to their classroom situation, they are better able to meet the individual learning needs of the students in their classrooms.
- Aligning the written, taught, and tested curriculum with an instructional scope and sequence: This is an ongoing process with continuous refinement and revision as our statewide assessment program changes.
- Including student achievement in the performance appraisal of all professionals: All professionals, from classroom teacher to superintendent, have student

achievement as a major component in their performance appraisal.

- Focusing both human and financial resources on student learning: The first question asked when allocating resources is “How will this help us improve student achievement?”

### **New Challenges Ahead**

As the state moves into a new era of statewide assessment with the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, as well as the first year of implementation of the Student Success Initiative (state promotion policy), the District must realign its promotion standards for grades not included in the state promotion policy so that they are both challenging and realistic.

Waco I.S.D. and the school community look forward to the challenge as they continue on the journey to even higher levels of student achievement.

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## HIGH SCHOOL SHOULD NOT BE A TERMINAL DEGREE

By Dr. Geoffrey C. Orsak



*Geoffrey C. Orsak currently serves as Executive Director of the new federally funded Institute for Engineering Education at SMU. In addition, he serves as Associate Dean for Research and Development and Professor of Electrical Engineering in the School of Engineering at SMU. He is the chief architect and Director of the nation's leading high tech K-12 engineering education program - The Infinity Project - and also is creator of Visioneering, one of the country's signature events for school-age children aired during National Engineers Week. Dr. Orsak received his B.S.E.E., M.E.E., and Ph.D. degrees in Electrical and Computer Engineering from Rice University.*

This spring, some 200,000 students will graduate from high schools in Texas. For most of these students, this will be the last degree they receive. Fewer than one in three will go on to successfully complete a college degree.

This statistic underscores a sad truth about the state of education in Texas. While the state boasts some of the country's finest institutions of higher education, our K-12 educational system is not adequately preparing students to enter these institutions. The average high school student in Texas has an SAT score approximately 200 points below the average SAT score for The University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M-College Station - schools that were founded to educate students from Texas.

From a national perspective, much of this problem is rooted in the fact that our K-12 education system has changed little in the past 40 years. Prior to World War II, high school was conceived in the United States to be a terminal degree for most students, while so-called "prep schools" prepared the elite for college. This was a reasonable assumption since few jobs at that time required a college degree. Today, however, most jobs with upward mobility require higher education. Yet for 70 percent of students in the United States, high school is the end of their academic career - only 30 percent of high school students go on to college and complete a bachelor's degree. This number needs to be reversed for the sake of our nation and state's economic health. We need to begin structuring high school as if it is a prerequisite for college and not a terminal degree for students.

This issue is of paramount importance to those of us in the engineering community because the lack of proper preparation prevents students from pursuing engineering degrees. Currently only about ten percent of high school graduates in Texas have the educational prerequisites such as physics, pre-calculus and calculus needed to study engineering in college. This has resulted in a dramatic

decline in the number of students enrolling in our engineering schools and completing engineering degrees. Over the past two decades, there has been a national loss of 100,000 engineering students. Meanwhile, it is estimated that to meet our engineering workforce needs, we must add 100,000 engineers every year for a decade.

But it is not just engineers who should be concerned about this issue. Business and government leaders need to recognize the severity and consequences of the reality that the majority of high school students in Texas will not complete a college degree. Statistics consistently show that workers with a college degree have a higher earning potential than those with only a high school degree. In 1999, the average worker with a bachelor's degree earned \$45,000, while the average worker with a high school degree earned only \$26,000. The more money workers in Texas earn, the more money is returned to our economy.

Furthermore, our state's economy is being transformed from one based on ranching, agriculture, oil and gas to one based around industries including healthcare, engineering, telecommunications, aerospace, defense and transportation. Texas needs people who can fill the jobs we have worked so hard to attract. We need a highly qualified and diversified workforce to maintain economic growth.

Every engineer in the workforce creates five new jobs (far fewer jobs are created by people with only high school degrees.) And further, the percentage of residents with a college degree impacts our state's ability to recruit new companies. In addition, an education that includes the fundamentals of math, science, and engineering is critical for students to be well-informed citizens of the world today - whatever their chosen profession.

What can be done to remedy this situation? The answer is to better connect K-12 with higher education. This can be done in several ways. One way is to measure pre-college student performance using metrics that are critical to the long-term success of students. Much of the emphasis in K-12

in Texas schools has focused on tests such as Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). However, these tests measure only student performance in specific areas and have not been shown to assess student ability to think and reason.

Assessment in and of high schools should be augmented with tests such as the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) that are valuable to the greater educational enterprise. Our elite private schools in Texas already track student performance based on SAT scores – starting in 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades. Public schools should do the same.

A second need is to upgrade the high school curriculum. While college curriculums have become more rigorous, high schools are decades behind in meaningfully upgrading their courses. Our leading universities are now starting math, science, and engineering programs with the expectation that students have completed pre-calculus and calculus, however the recommended high school curriculum in Texas doesn't include these classes.

Currently, the highest math level in the recommended high school curriculum in Texas is Algebra II, yet only half of the high school students in Texas even meet this minimum standard. The recommended high school curriculum in Texas should include more rigorous courses in science, math, engineering, and technology to better prepare our students for success in higher education.

Furthermore, we need to re-examine how we teach math and science in high school. Currently, these subjects are taught without connecting the subject matter to topics of interest to students. If we want students to understand the value of math and science, we need to expose them to exciting topics that use math and science, such as economics, engineering and technology.

This year, approximately one third of full-time entering college freshman in Texas required remedial work in English and math. Since higher education classrooms cost the state more money than K-12 classrooms, this problem places not just an instructional burden on colleges, but also a financial burden on the state as well. Statistics also show that students who require remedial classes in college graduate at a much lower rate than those who do not require remediation (21 percent vs. 48 percent) – compounding the financial burden on the state.

K-12 education and higher education both have strengths that the other can benefit from. Higher education,

for example, offers a modern, research-based curriculum that is more closely tied to career paths. Institutions of higher education also put more emphasis on the content mastery of the instructors – and in fact reward faculty primarily on scholarship and less on teaching. High school education could clearly benefit from such emphasis. Colleges and universities also offer more hands-on laboratory based learning and smaller classes – both of which have been proven to enhance student performance and retention. Higher education, on the other hand, could benefit from the increased emphasis that K-12 institutions place on professional development for educators and administrators, as well as a long tradition of rewarding quality instruction. High

schools also offer colleges and universities a direct link to our state's potential future college students at a time early enough to influence their choices about colleges and majors.

Because of these reasons, universities must be actively involved in K-12 education – at all levels. There are already several good examples of this in Texas, including efforts such as the Infinity Project. This national program is

headed by The Institute for Engineering Education at SMU, which is university-based, but devoted to working with students in K-12 to increase their preparedness and interest in subjects such as engineering, math, and science, as well as the Texas Academy of Math and Science (TAMS) at the University of North Texas, which offers residential programs for gifted high school students.

Clearly, education in our state will benefit from more programs like these that arise from increased coordination between the Texas Education Agency, which oversees K-12 education in the state, and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, which oversees the state's colleges and universities. Unfortunately, due to funding mechanisms associated with having two separate educational agencies in Texas, most programs such as those mentioned above are limited in their reach. New funding strategies must be introduced that not only encourage but also facilitate greater collaboration between our fine universities and our public education system.

The issue of better integrating K-12 with higher education is a national issue, not one that just faces Texas. Texas has an opportunity to take a leadership role and become a model for the country. Our children – and indeed our entire state – will be the better for it.

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***“If we want students to understand the value of math and science, we need to expose them to exciting topics that use math and science, such as economics, engineering and technology.”***

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## THE MEDIA & ADOPTION: EDUCATING AND INFORMING

By Janet Rogers Deets



*Janet Rogers Deets is an adoptive mother of six children, five of whom are special needs children. She graduated from Sam Houston State University with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. She is a licensed social worker and has served as director of Family Services at Alternatives in Motion since 1986.*

I have been concerned about society's poor opinion of women who chose adoption for their child since I first held my six-week-old daughter in my arms. I looked in her face and marveled that someone could love a little baby so much that they would actually allow her baby to grow up calling another woman "mother". In the following years, I wondered who this "first mother" was and cringed every time I heard that a birth mother had "given her baby away" or "didn't want her baby". Society painted a picture of an uncaring mother who was devoid of the normal emotions associated with every other mother on the planet. I knew that the woman who gave birth to my daughter could not be that person. Who would even consider an adoption plan knowing that they would be judged in that light. Better to leave the baby in a dumpster, schedule a termination, or raise the baby in poverty or an abusive home.

Several years ago, the media was flooded with stories of "dumpster babies" whose desperate mothers chose to dispose of the child instead of face the consequences of announcing the birth. In most cases, these women had hidden their pregnancies from their family and friends and lived nine months filled with a mixture of denial and fear. The end result was often a fatal one for the precious child they carried within their bodies. Their desperate act created a sensation in the community and extensive news coverage. The public cried out for an answer to this epidemic. Fire departments, police stations, and hospitals blanketed our city with pleas for any mother considering abandoning her child. They offered her a safe place to "drop her baby off" with no questions asked. Although this seemed like a plausible opportunity to avoid announcing to others that she had given birth to a child, few mothers would actually trust these public agencies' claims of anonymity for the birth mother.

Our agency received 5 calls in the past month from young women whose babies had been removed from the

mother's care and placed in custody of Children's Protective Services. These young mothers contacted our agency to plan an adoption for the child. Each and every one of the mothers verbalized a desire for adoption since early in their pregnancies; however, they did not pursue adoption because their family and their friends told them they were a bad person because they even considered "giving their baby away". They were told things like, "Give it to me if you don't want it." Or, "You got pregnant, now you have to pay the consequences."

Not one of these young women heard one supportive word about planning for their child's future through adoption. Two of the mothers were using drugs and alcohol during their pregnancies...and the persons who were against adoption knew this and condoned the mother raising the child. Unfortunately, by the time we were contacted, their options were severely minimized because CPS was in a position to make decisions and a planned adoption was not in their child's future.

In most cases when a birth mother chooses to respond favorably to "Give it to me if you don't want it." Permanency planning is not a part of the situation. Most people offering this out to mothers are enamored of the idea of bringing home a little baby. Months or even years later the excitement and newness has worn off and the "friend" shows up on the mother's doorstep returning the child and she is again faced with parenting a child when she is unprepared. Again she begins the process of finding some place for this child.

Many children are "placed" in this manner many times during their lives...until they are so lost that they begin looking for a place of their own. The places they find often place them in the same situation that their birth mothers were in at the time of their birth...pregnant (or have a girlfriend carrying their baby), alone, and unprepared to parent the child. A circle unbroken because its links are one unprepared parent giving birth to a future unprepared

parent giving birth to another unprepared parent. Our welfare rolls are full of generation after generation of “at risk” adults producing “at risk” children because society is uneducated about the benefit of planning for a child’s future through adoption.

In both situations, the dumpster baby and the “at risk” generation, adoption should be a viable alternative. Society does not offer support for a mother to make this plan for her child. Society sees adoption planning as “the easy way out” or “giving away” the baby much the same way that we give away a dress that is no longer in style or does not fit any longer. They imply that a woman who would consider adoption for her child as “an un-natural mother” who “does not want her baby”.

Hours and hours of news media is spent on examining the reasons and the trauma associated with a desperate mother abandoning her baby in hotels, airports, and dumpsters. Millions of tax dollars, in Texas alone, are spent maintaining Children’s Protective Services for abused and neglected children whose mother’s would have considered adoption if she had known more about the process and if society viewed adoption in a more positive light. Yet, promoting adoption appears to be a taboo...indicating that the media and society embrace the belief that there is something wrong with the idea.

Imagine a young woman finding out she is pregnant and there is no father available to help raise the child. She is living at home with her parents and knows that when her father finds out, she will be kicked out of the house. She could never live in the same house with her parents if they knew about the pregnancy because of the shame. She thinks about adoption but knows that her parents would never accept the idea because they would not want their grandchild to go to strangers. She has no job. She has no education. She has transportation. She wants to go to school. She hides the pregnancy until she goes into labor. She is alone when she gives birth to the baby. What does she do?

Adoption is rarely the alternative that appeals to the mother. We get call after call from young women seeking abortion information for an unplanned pregnancy. When we explain that we are a child placing agency and ask if they would like adoption information, the answer is usually, “No, I want information about abortion, I could never give away my baby.” Where does that reasoning come from?

What a difference the media could make in thousands

of children’s lives if it devoted one day in 2003 to promote adoption in a positive light. Newspaper articles, radio public service minutes, and newscasts working together to enlighten mothers about the services and the counseling that is available.

Interviews with birth parents and adoptive parents would show the mutual respect they have for each other...as well as the love they share for the child. Interviews with adult adoptees, with adults who grew up in the child welfare system, and with adults drawn from the general public could show that that children of adoption respect their parents for making the decision. Many of our birth parents tell us that they feel positive about adoption because they themselves were adopted.

Another segment of our clients state that they are choosing adoption because they want their baby to have a stable home, a home to grow up in far better than the one where they were raised.

November is National Adoption Month. A month set apart to give recognition to the process that has saved the lives of thousands of children every year, the process that many couples use to build their

families, a process that is literally as old as Moses. The month celebrates the choices made by thousands of mothers, like the mother who placed her infant son in a basket and floated him down the river into the waiting arms of another, mothers who love their child enough to put their personal prejudices behind them and the security of their child before them.

A great idea, National Adoption Month, but is it enough? Does it do enough to eliminate the stigma associated with the mother’s sacrifice? Does it do enough to make a mother think first before she places her newborn son in a plastic bag into a dumpster? Does it enlighten the parents of the pregnant, alone, and scared young woman enough to support her in an adoption plan? Does it reach the friends of the drug abusing mother so that they encourage adoption rather than making her feel like her only decision should be parenting?

Can the media effectively change the public’s opinion of adoption and opinion of the mothers who chose adoption for their child(ren)? I think it can, it has done a bang-up job with sex., drugs, and violence. What can America’s policy makers do to encourage the media to embrace the idea of *educating* the public about adoption in addition to *informing* the public about the actions of desperate young mothers who feel they have no alternatives?

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### ***“A great idea, National Adoption Month, but is it enough? ”***

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## THE PEDIATRIC SAFETY NET IN TEXAS

By Bryan Sperry



*Bryan Sperry has been the president of the Children's Hospital Association of Texas (CHAT) since 1994. Before that, he served in Texas state government for more than 15 years, serving as the first deputy commissioner of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission; the first executive director of the Center for Rural Health Initiatives; special assistant for health and human services to Lt. Gov. William P. Hobby; executive director of the Texas Task Force on Indigent Health Care; and, an administrator at the Texas Department of Human Services for a variety of health programs.*

*Mr. Sperry was a Pew Fellow in health policy at the University of Michigan. He received his master's degree from the University of Texas at Austin and his bachelor's degree from Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut.*

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) has defined the health care safety net as “those providers that organize and deliver a significant level of health care and other related services to uninsured, Medicaid, and other vulnerable patients.” According to the IOM, the viability of safety net providers is more at risk than in the past because of the rising number of uninsured individuals, the effects of Medicaid managed care in a more competitive health care marketplace, and the erosion of direct and indirect subsidies that have helped to support safety net functions.

It's well recognized that the major urban public hospitals in Texas, supported by local property taxes, are critical safety net providers for the uninsured. In a state where almost 1 in 4 individuals lacks private or public health insurance coverage, these public institutions along with many nonprofit hospitals play an essential role to ensure uninsured Texas residents have access to medical and health care services.

The existence of a pediatric services safety net is less well known. Composed primarily of freestanding children's hospitals and a few other hospitals with strong pediatric programs, these hospitals provide clinical specialty services and social services to children with the most critical and complex medical problems. These services are generally available only in a limited number of regional facilities. In addition, these institutions serve a high proportion of children who rely on the publicly funded Medicaid program.

Because the Medicaid program plays such an extraordinary role in the financing of child health care in Texas and this country, changes to the funding and structure of Medic-

aid can have profound consequences for children's hospitals and for all children who may need the services of one of these institutions.

In the late 1980s, as a result of concerns about how state policy and funding decisions affected the delivery of health care to children, five freestanding not-for-profit children's hospitals joined together to form the Children's Hospital Association of Texas (CHAT). CHAT members include Texas Children's Hospital in Houston, Children's Medical Center of Dallas, CHRISTUS Santa Rosa Children's Hospital in San Antonio, Cook Children's Health Care System in Fort Worth and Driscoll Children's Hospital in Corpus Christi.

Most of the 6 million children in Texas are healthy and their health care needs are relatively simple. They need immunizations, check-ups, anticipatory guidance and occasional treatment. Ideally, a pediatrician or family physician in an ongoing relationship with the child and family (often referred to as a medical home) provides these services.

Because most kids are healthy, the economies of scale are different in pediatric hospital care than in the adult health care system. There simply is not the volume of children needing hospital care to support the concentration of expertise needed to provide high quality pediatric hospital services in every acute care hospital. Nationally and in Texas a quasi-regional system has evolved with major pediatric hospitals in the larger urban areas. These hospitals serve children from a large geographic area and typically have a major transport component to bring the sickest kids to the hospital. These facilities often support pediatric

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***“ . . .these hospitals provide clinical specialty services and social services to children with the most critical and complex medical problems.”***

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residency programs, and about half of the pediatric residents in Texas are training at CHAT hospitals.

About 2.57 million total hospital discharges were reported in Texas in 2000, and 551,000 or 21 percent of the discharges were children under age 18. With about 1000 children born every day in this state, and with most children born healthy, a substantial portion of the pediatric discharges from hospitals are in fact normal newborns. Excluding normal newborns and teen obstetrics, there were about 250,000 pediatric discharges. CHAT members cared for about 54,500 pediatric patients in the year 2000 or 1 in 5 of pediatric patients discharged by acute care hospitals.

These children's hospitals are responsible for a large portion of the specialized hospital care provided in 2000, including:

- Almost 80 percent of pediatric cardiac surgery days of care.
- 70 percent of the pediatric transplant days of care.
- 60 percent of the pediatric days of care for cancer patients.
- 67 percent of the days of care for children with cystic fibrosis.
- 70 percent of the days of care for children with sickle cell anemia crises.

About 1.4 million of the 6 million children in Texas get health insurance coverage through the Medicaid program. The program is administered by the state, and the federal government provides about 60 percent of the program cost. Children qualify for Medicaid because they are in low-income families or have significant disabilities. In 1999 the Texas Legislature created the Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP). More than 500,000 children who are uninsured and not eligible for Medicaid are covered by CHIP. The federal government provides more than 70 percent of the funding for CHIP.

Children on Medicaid account for more than 50 percent of the inpatient days of care and almost half the admissions in children's hospitals. For other hospitals in Texas, Medicaid represents about 17 percent of all hospital admissions. Because of its relatively recent implementation, CHIP statewide hospital data is not yet available.

Why does Medicaid play such a large role in a children's hospital? Children's hospitals are typically located in large urban areas where there are higher concentrations of low-income families. Medicaid covers low-income children, and there is a correlation between health and socioeconomic status. Low-income children tend to have more chronic health problems. These children need the specialty services that may be available only at a children's hospital. Many children with disabilities cannot get coverage in the private insurance market; they are uninsurable or private health insurance is unaffordable. Medicaid plays a substantial role

ensuring that these vulnerable children have coverage.

With the economic downturn of the last several years, the number of children covered by Medicaid has increased rapidly. Combined with continuing growth in health care costs, both the Medicaid and CHIP programs are getting attention for being too costly, too big, and consuming too much of the state budget. The debate is framed as living within our means and keeping state spending within the revenues that the current tax system generates.

Policy options that are likely to be considered include reducing income eligibility levels and making the eligibility process more difficult (thereby increasing the number of uninsured children), cutting back on benefits in CHIP, and reducing reimbursement levels to providers in Medicaid. Each of these changes will have some effect on state spending for the upcoming biennium.

Clearly the state can cut its spending on Medicaid and CHIP. But what are the other conse-

quences of cutbacks to these programs?

We are a frugal state. Our state leaders of the past twenty years, (George Bush, Bob Bullock, Bill Clements, Bill Hobby) have not been spendthrifts. Medicaid was 16 percent of the state general revenue budget in 2002, and Medicaid spending per enrollee is 40<sup>th</sup> among states. When Texans read of cutbacks to Medicaid programs in other states, it is important to recognize that these states are usually cutting classes of eligibles and services that Texas has never chosen to cover.

Moreover, we have had at least a decade of cost-containment in Medicaid, including implementation of managed care, selective contracting for services and rate cuts. Physician rates in the Medicaid program are well below Medicare or commercial market rates, leading increasing numbers of physicians to restrict their participation in Medicaid. Hospital payments to children's hospitals are below cost, requiring hospitals to cross-subsidize Medicaid patients through higher rates to private pay patients.

Because state spending in Medicaid is matched by federal spending, to cut \$1 in state funds for Medicaid, the state must give up another \$1.50 in federal funds.

It's well established that having health care coverage means fewer delays in receiving care and fewer avoidable hospitalizations. Immunization rates for children on Medicaid are better than immunization rates for children who are uninsured. In a study of CHIP, 19 percent of families said that the emergency department was the child's usual source of care before enrollment in CHIP. After 12 months of participation, less than 1 percent said the emergency department was the usual source of care.

Most sick kids get some care eventually. Under state and federal law, hospitals with emergency departments cannot turn away patients seeking emergency care. In

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***“Combined with continuing growth in health care costs, both the Medicaid and CHIP programs are getting attention for being too costly, too big, and consuming too much of the state budget.”***

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effect, the emergency department is an open door to services for the community, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The costs of uninsured or underinsured children are borne by the system somewhere. Sometimes the costs are paid directly through local property taxes that support a public hospital. Other times, local businesses pay for that health care through higher health premiums necessary to offset Medicaid losses and the costs of care for the uninsured. Neither of these subsidies for the uninsured takes advantage of federal matching funds.

Hospital emergency systems are at capacity in many communities. In addition to busy emergency rooms, limited access to critical care beds has resulted in short-term diversions of patients from some facilities. It takes resources to build and staff the capacity to care for a growing population

and to develop “surge capacity” to handle potential catastrophic events.

Consideration of cutbacks in state spending on Medicaid for children and CHIP must be tempered by an understanding of the longer term and health delivery system consequences, including reduced access to care, more uninsured children, reduced system capacity, loss of federal funds, more uncompensated care and increased cost shifting.

Our child population continues to grow, whether or not the state experiences a budget crisis. As a state we continue to need to train physicians to take care of children and to maintain the pediatric infrastructure to provide both routine and complex medical care to children. Program cutbacks in Medicaid or CHIP will have the effect of diminishing our state’s capacity to care for all children.

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## NO CUTS TO KIDS

By Sen. Leticia Van de Putte



*Senator Leticia Van de Putte, a pharmacist for more than 20 years, represents a large portion of San Antonio and Bexar County. A former-five term state representative, she is now serving her second term as a Texas State Senator for District 26. She is a strong advocate for children, health care, education, and economic development issues and has consistently authored and sponsored bills to assist families in securing opportunities. Senator Van de Putte currently serves as Chair of the Veteran Affairs and Military Installations Committee, and also is a member of the Senate Committees' on Education, Administration, Business and Commerce, and the Subcommittee on Higher Education. The Senator was a Kellogg Fellow at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government in 1993. She received her Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Texas at Austin, College of Pharmacy.*

The education of the State of Texas has seen a lot of movement and many positive changes during the last decade. We have made equity in education a policy priority for our state and we have made great strides in addressing the need for equitable funding between all Texas school districts. Our combined efforts have empowered our schools and communities with the ability to provide the children of Texas with an educational system that is committed to student achievement and academic excellence.

Indeed, our great State continues to serve as the exemplar model for President George W. Bush's "No Child Left Behind" legislation by making great improvements in accountability of school performance and by committing to reach for higher standards and higher goals.

These goals include stronger school accountability for students' academic results, successful teaching methods, and the recruiting and retaining of qualified teachers. Yet, while Texas is raising its standards in education, large disparities between districts in funding, quality teaching, and educational opportunities still exist.

Despite progress made, our state must continue to evaluate and improve our education system to fit the changing demographic needs of Texas. The population of Texas, according to the U. S. Census of 2000, recently reached 21 million people. This is up from only 16.9 million people in 1990 and has since been projected to be almost 22 million in 2003.

Our urban areas and schools have especially seen a large expansion in their population as growth continues to shift from rural regions to larger cities. In addition, by 2005, our state is estimated to become a majority minority state where Anglos will constitute less than half of the population. According to work by Steve H. Murdock of the Texas State Data Center at the Texas A&M University System:

"Projections indicate that by 2030, 7 of every 10 children

in Texas elementary and secondary schools, 6 of every 10 college students, 2 of every person in the labor force, and a majority of consumer expenditures in Texas will involve persons of minority status."

Our school districts are now being asked to meet these challenges of population growth and changing demographics with a strained budget and greatly limited resources. The answer must include a continued focus on the big picture of Texas education by addressing school funding, teaching quality and teacher preparation.

We must ensure, despite the tremendous growth of our state and its budget strains, that all students graduate with a high school diploma and are adequately prepared for higher education.

While we have raised the accountability bar for our students, we are now threatening to remove the funding floor from beneath them. We, too, must hold ourselves accountable for providing the adequate funding and intervention necessary to secure our students' success.

Our children need a strong, steady support in order to continue their growth toward a positive, more inclusive, more accessible future in which they can reach and surpass their educational goals.

To ensure that no child is left behind, it is essential that we make investments, not cuts, in the education of our children.

A stronger educational system means a stronger community. It means giving children a chance to develop into active and productive citizens. It means promoting the well-being of all Texans by advancing standards and equity in education. It means that our priorities, our actions, and our budget must all reflect the value we as a state place on the education of our children. In order to protect our children we must ensure that we make no cuts to kids and that we act now. Otherwise both our children and the future of Texas will fail.

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***"To ensure that no child is left behind, it is essential that we make investments, not cuts, in the education of our children."***

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## CHILD CARE LICENSING

By Richard S. Hoffman



*Richard S. Hoffman has been a member of the PRS board since 1997 and Board Chair since 2000. Since 1982, he has lived in Brownsville with his wife, Dixie, who teaches with Brownsville ISD. He graduated from Pontifical College Josephinum (Catholic Seminary) in 1966. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in Psychology from Bowling Green State University in Ohio, and earned a Law Degree from the University of Missouri in Kansas City in 1976. Hoffman is licensed in Texas and Missouri and is admitted to practice in U.S. District Courts, Southern and Western Districts of Texas, U.S. Court of Appeals 5th Circuit, and U.S. Supreme Court.*

There are over 4 million children in Texas between the age of one and thirteen, and one-fourth of them spend nearly as much time each day in a child care facility as they do in their own home. What are the consequences? Who decides the standards for proper child care and who regulates the child care facility? How can a parent make an intelligent choice when selecting a child care facility?

These are all questions that have become more relevant after numerous studies have shown the importance of early childhood development and as an increasing number of young children spend more and more time in child care outside their home.

The National Institute for Child Care Health and Development (NICHD) published a study in the *American Educational Research Journal* last year indicating that higher quality child care is clearly associated with better cognitive performance. What is higher quality child care and is it the function of government to provide it?

Today in Texas there are over 32,000 child care facilities, an increase of about 20 percent from only five years earlier. These include registered family homes, licensed group day care centers and licensed kindergartens and nursery schools. What any individual child care facility offers can range from a simple caretaking function to providing a learning environment with a detailed curriculum.

The Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services is a state agency that was formed by State Legislature in 1992. It has three primary functions: Child Protective Services, Adult Protective Services and Child Care Licensing. The annual budget for the child care licensing division approximates \$24 million and involves a licensing staff of 384 persons.

The specific charge of the Agency as to the child care licensing function is “to maintain standards that promote the health, safety and well being of children in out-of-home care.” There is considerable debate as to whether promoting or developing – or even suggesting - a curriculum for child care facilities is a function of the agency, but there seems to be general agreement that the Agency is required by statute to promulgate regulations that deal with the physical health and safety of the children in out-of-home care.

In January 2003 the Agency’s board, in response to its legislative directive, revised hundreds of the child care licensing rules and attempted to categorize them, simplify them and put them in plain English form. While there was again debate about the resulting rules, the revisions were not made until over 4,000 persons and groups made over 15,000 “comments” and after numerous public hearings and debate on at least 650 of the rules

The result was the publication of “Minimum Standards for Child Care” that must be adhered to by all facilities licensed by the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services. The rules, which become effective in September 2003, carry some fiscal impact (e.g. safety straps that may need to be purchased for infant seats, etc.) but most, simply require a change in the manner of caring for a child. All of the rules can be read online by searching for “TPDRS child care standards and regulations”<sup>\*</sup> and because it is a fluid process, the Agency welcomes comments and suggestions for future rule revisions.

Are the rules necessary? Unfortunately, the child care licensing division responds to and investigates close to 2,000 complaints that are made each year against a licensed facility. In 2002 the Agency determined that 313 of the complaints were valid, and while some may have been minor infractions other violations resulted in serious abuse or neglect of a child.

How can a parent make an intelligent choice when selecting a child care facility? Any person can contact the child care licensing division of the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services or can go online at “Search Texas Child Care”<sup>\*\*</sup> and through the information gained by this research,<sup>\*\*</sup> he or she is more likely to engage a facility that will provide the proper care and nourishment the child needs while outside the home.

<sup>\*</sup>Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (TDPRS) child care standards and regulations([http://www.tdprs.state.tx.us/child\\_care/child\\_care-standards\\_and\\_regulations/default.asp](http://www.tdprs.state.tx.us/child_care/child_care-standards_and_regulations/default.asp))

<sup>\*\*</sup>The site, provided by TDPRS, will list child care centers near a given address and will provide information about ownership, inspections, violations of standards, etc.

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## A RADICAL PROPOSITION FOR HIGH SCHOOLS: PREPARE ALL KIDS FOR COLLEGE, WORK AND CITIZENSHIP

By: Tom Vander Ark & Stefanie Sanford



*Tom Vander Ark is responsible for the development and administration of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's K-12 education grant programs and scholarship programs. For the five years before he joined the foundation, Vander Ark served as a public school superintendent in one of Washington state's larger districts. He was one of the first superintendents recruited from the private sector to lead a public school district. Prior to leading Federal Way Public Schools, Vander Ark ran a consulting practice for Cap Gemini and was a senior executive for a \$5 billion national retailer. Vander Ark serves on the board of the Washington Early Learning Foundation, Partnership for Learning and Communities in School.*



*Stefanie Sanford is senior policy advisor for education and libraries for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. She received a bachelor of science degree from Texas Christian University in 1988 and added a master's degree in public administration from Harvard University in 1996. She earned a Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin in 2002.*

? “Why are manhole covers round?”  
“How would you build an alarm clock for deaf people?”  
“How are M&Ms made?”

Leading companies have been asking such questions for over a decade, challenging job candidates to be well-informed and creative in their assessments, thinking and articulation of solutions.<sup>1</sup> At Amazon.com, for example, for *Time's* 1999 Person of the Year and CEO, Jeff Bezos, a “favorite is the one about how many gas stations there are in the United States.... If the question were put to him, Bezos would draw on his own experience: He'd figure there were 3,000 people in Cotulla, Texas, where he spent his boyhood summers with his grandfather. Cotulla had two gas stations. “I'm going to say there's a gas station for every 1,500 people....” “And I know there are 280 million people in the U.S. Divide that by 1,500 and there's my guess....”<sup>2</sup> Bezos came within 6.7 percent of the American Petroleum Institute's official 175,000-station figure.

Do we today, as educators, professionals and citizens want our children to obediently memorize dates, events and trivia – or, profoundly, to be challenged to think critically, analytically and creatively in environments where they can feel secure, confident and well-served by a dedicated and well-trained network of adult role models? The time has

come for such an inquiry into a reticent public sector relic: the American high school.

Think about the big American high school. You know the picture – 40 acres of football stadiums, classrooms, bells that ring every 48 minutes, shuffling herds of adolescents from one nondescript classroom to another, students sitting while someone talks for 45 minutes about a topic that neither of them willingly chose, awaiting another bell only to begin the exercise again. This current system encourages obedience, rather than innovative thinking and teaches students to accumulate points by completing worksheets, which often prompt regurgitation rather than critical thinking. The drudgery is occasionally interrupted by pep rallies, violence or proms, then once a student has participated in this drill for a predetermined number of hours, capped by an American tradition—the senior year—a complete blow off for students on both ends of the academic spectrum, they are granted a diploma. Even worse, nationally, graduation rates hover around 80% for Anglo student and closer to 55% of African American and Latino students. In content and in outcomes, high schools are failing to prepare a critical mass of kids for college, work and citizenship.

Contrast that passive industrial era picture with the contemporary workplace. *Fortune* magazine each year ranks the 100 Best Places to Work, among them Intel,

Starbucks, Southwest Airlines, Harley-Davidson and National Instruments. They judge those places on a range of attributes – autonomy, passion, respect for workers, staff support, a cohesive mission and leadership. Recruiters say they look for employees who are good at working in teams; who problem solve; and bring innovative, pluralistic ways of thinking to bear on contemporary problems, from software design to baggage handling.

Such practices echo findings resulting from surveys of businesses across the spectrum, asking leaders what qualities they look for in their recruits. Walk the halls of these enterprises. Walk the halls of our high schools. What about the latter might prepare young people to succeed in the former? The adult world ruminates over the effects of this mismatch regularly. Seemingly, each day's newspaper features accounts about the civic and intellectual incompetence of young people. "Kids today..." adults huff. Predictions abound of shortages of skilled workers, anemic voter turnout, and of a dearth of qualified leaders. Simply, the conventional wisdom is that young people are ill prepared for the adult world they enter. Walking the halls in these distinctive enterprises, we must agree. But should we blame the kids? Adults create the systems and demand attendance.

Is it the kids' fault that the institutions that purport to prepare them for the adult world look nothing like that adult world?

As at the nation's best companies, let us ask a demanding question: if we were to recreate the high school enterprise today, would we build these isolated behemoths? What if instead we built schools to turn out Jeffersonian citizens, Intel inventors and agile SWA gate agents? What if we created schools that helped create the kind of adults we wanted to populate our country? What might those schools look like? Would they all be the same? Or might they reflect the range of adult pursuits, and encourage a student to explore their passion for entrepreneurship through risk analysis in math class and the writing of clear, concise and persuasive proposals in English? Would we force everyone to go only to the school closest to them or would we allow meaningful choices based on what young people were interested in? What if high school was not a string of boring classes punctuated by the occasional football game, and instead became a place that helped young people find what the GI generation referred to a *seriousness of purpose*, the opportunity to find things that interested them, to work on issues that were important and set them on a path that prepared them all for a productive future?

What if we replaced a one-size fits all boring high school with a portfolio of small, rigorous and focused high schools that prepare all students for the future?

We know what good schools look like – they look like places where adults want to spend time. They actively

engage students in learning. They encourage students to struggle with complex problems and ideas. And they reward students for *competence* rather than seat time. Great places to go to school are not unlike Fortune's great places to work. Distilling the research on successful schools, the following key attributes emerge:

- **Common focus** – Staff and students are driven by a shared understanding of what an educated person is and what good teaching and learning look like. Every decision, every action, is guided by this common vision.
- **Personalization** – The school promotes sustained relationships between students and adults; every student has an adult advocate and personal attention. Equity does not equal conformity.
- **Climate of respect and responsibility** – The environment is authoritative, safe, ethical, and studious; teachers model, teach, and expect responsible behavior; relationships are based on mutual respect. These schools are not mindlessly didactic, hamstrung by distant bureaucracies or rigid collecting bargaining agreements. Rather, they are centered around the needs of students, not the occupational demands of adults.
- **Time to collaborate** – Teachers have time to work collaboratively with one another to meet the needs of all students; the school partners with businesses, civic organizations, and institutions of higher education to give students the best opportunities.

- **Performance-based** – Students are promoted to the next instructional level only when they have achieved competency and are able to demonstrate their knowledge. They receive extra help when they need it.

In short, successful schools combine the rigor – high expectations and a meaningful course of study – with relationships – powerful, sustained involvement and caring adults who mentor, advise, and support students throughout their high school years.

Animating a system of schools like this will require a rethinking of long held and often controversial policies: policies around school choice, funding, and accountability. Up to now, these policies have been viewed as abstract processes designed to throw off data for distant bureaucrats, rather than as mechanisms to ensure that these institutions help all kids achieve at high levels. Instead, envision how these policies would interplay to create a system that better serves all kids and better prepares them for the world they will enter:

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***“We know what good schools look like – they look like places where adults want to spend time.”***

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- **Choice:** Choice among options exists in all parts of our economy and our democracy. Why do we “sentence” certain young people to a school regardless of their interest? We believe that all kids should have the same choices that have typically been reserved for the affluent – to choose a school based upon their interests and learning styles.
- **Data:** Simply, none of the reforms contemplated here can be sustained at scale without robust data systems at the state level. Without standards and assessments, there can be no comparable data on student achievement. Without these data, there can be no meaningful comparison between school choice options for parents.
- **Accountability:** In order to have an effective choice regime, where parents and students can make meaningful choices among a range of educational options, reliable information must be publicly available. Gathering, assessing and translating that information demands a thoughtful accountability system, meaningful standards and assessments that measure student progress and a data system that makes that information useful to parents, teachers and policymakers.

Substantial work has been done – and will need to continue – in early childhood education, literacy, teacher

preparation, and leadership development. In Texas, focused efforts in these areas have moved elementary school students to the top of the world in achievement, proving that attention and funding concentrated on one part of the educational system can reap significant reward. But the plight of American high schools continues, as demonstrated by the dismal performance of American high school students as compared to their international peers, showing that simply “fixing the younger grades” will not automatically fix the older grades. We commend the Governor and educational leadership of Texas for their creation of the High School achievement initiative and look forward to catalyzing the kind of sustained commitment to high school improvement that has so successfully turned around the nation’s elementary schools, to demonstrate how small, rigorous and focused high schools with a strong link to post-secondary institutions and workforce realities can more effectively prepare young people for further learning, employment, and civic participation.

*The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is building upon the unprecedented opportunities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to improve equity in global health and education. Led by Bill Gates’ father, William H. Gates, Sr., and Patty Stonesifer, the Seattle-based foundation has an endowment of approximately \$24 billion, and has committed nearly \$2 billion to learning. Tom Vander Ark is the executive director of education. Stefanie Sanford serves as senior policy officer for education and libraries. Information is available at [www.gatesfoundation.org](http://www.gatesfoundation.org).*

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sellbrothers.com/fun/msiview/default.aspx?content=question.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Leibovich, M. (2002). *The new imperialists: How five restless kids grew up to virtually rule your world*. Paramus: Prentice Hall.

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# CHILDREN ARE OUR FUTURE

By: Suzanne Hinds



*Suzanne Hinds joined the staff of Initiatives for Children as Executive Director in October 1996. The mission of the organization is to advance the quality of early care and education, as well as school-age child care, for all children in the Greater Houston and surrounding areas.*

*Suzanne has a B.A. in Sociology from Newcomb College of Tulane University, and a Masters Degree in Social Work from the University of Texas at Austin. She started her career in children's protective services in Austin with the Texas Department of Human Services, and worked for the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. She also was a staff member of the United Way of Metropolitan Chicago, and worked on projects to improve children's services in the Chicago area.*

Children are our future...

We hear this phrase so often when we talk of our children, and what they need. We instinctively know that we must give them the very best nurturing care and education possible.

But when does education begin? Well, research tells us that learning begins at birth and that the most optimal period of brain development occurs during the first five years of life. At birth a child's brain is remarkably unfinished. The "wiring" process that occurs in the first three years provides the brain circuitry that is needed for future cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development. Whether it is given by a parent or by a child care provider, nurturing care that is responsive, sensitive, and stimulating is crucial for making these final neural connections and for later growth and learning.

Opportunities missed at this critical early period may never be regained. Although children continue to learn throughout their lives, some critical areas of development, such as language skills and learning to trust in others, may be lost forever if not achieved during these first five years. That's why quality childcare in the early years is so important and why the topic is such a high priority public policy issue. Quality child care is equally, if not more, important as primary and secondary education in setting the stage for a child's future success.

Choosing childcare is one of the most important decisions parents will ever make. They want the very best for their children. Every parent looking for child care deals with these three concerns: can I find child care; can I pay for it; and most importantly, can I trust it. The issues of availability, affordability, and quality are central to understanding the gaps and barriers to child care here in Texas and in our nation. The child care system can be confusing for parents –

organizations like Initiatives for Children were created to help families make sense of the system and choose the very best care possible for their children.

Changes in the workforce and in the family structure have tremendously increased the need for childcare. Sixty percent of women in the workforce are mothers with children under six. These women have to feel good about their child care arrangements or they will not be productive at work. Men cannot be overlooked either. With so many families needing two salaries just to make ends meet, fathers are taking a more active role in the daily care of their children. Further, 2.1 million workers nationwide are single fathers and one in every six single parents is a dad.

The demand for child care is exploding. Over the next ten years, it is projected that 85% of the workforce will be working parents. Whether by choice or out of economic necessity, men and women with preschool and younger children continue to enter the labor force in record numbers.

Many of the youngest children in child care spend up to 10 to 12 hours per day in care away from home. Clearly, how this time is spent has a great influence on their future development and readiness for school.

Research confirms the positive impact of quality childcare in 4 areas:

- School readiness
- A child's ability to understand rules
- Their ability to share
- Their level of curiosity

Child care must be developmentally appropriate, introducing early literacy and math skills and most of all, allowing children adequate time to learn through play. Good child care helps a young child master cognitive

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***"Quality child care is equally, if not more, important as primary and secondary education in setting the stage for a child's future success."***

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learning and acquire social skills needed for success in school. And it's not just our youngest children that need quality child care. School-age children need access to a safe environment in the before and after school hours, and programs that offer opportunities for positive peer interaction, access to caring adult mentors, and activities that promote self-esteem and build interpersonal skills..

Parents are all too aware of the problems that face children when they are left home alone. Latch-key children in all income groups are at significantly greater risk for truancy, stress, receiving poor grades, risk-taking behavior and substance abuse. Sadly, far too many children are spending time alone, or are in settings where they are not learning skills to enhance their intellectual and social development.

There is a high return on investment for supporting early education. In the short term, benefits include fewer children retained in their early grades, fewer special education referrals, and higher math and reading scores. In the long run, an investment of \$1 in early education is estimated to return \$7 in the form of higher high school and college graduation rates, employment in higher paying jobs, lower crime rates, unemployment rates, teen pregnancy rates. Not a bad on investment for something that is so good for children and makes so much sense!

We know how well children thrive when they are in a safe, stable nurturing environment. But what about the situation with their caregivers? The average wage for a caregiver is less than \$15,000 a year. Low wages paid in the child care field are the most significant barrier to quality child care because they lead to high staff turnover. Since consistency is critical for children, the loss of an ongoing relationship with a caregiver can be damaging to their growth and development.

Today, childcare workers on average earn less than parking lot attendees, secretaries, and bus drivers. Unlike other fields, though the demand for workers is high, wages remain extraordinarily low. Childcare workers cannot earn a living wage and often work without benefits. Staff turnover in programs ranges anywhere from 30% - 50% and children suffer when they are deprived of the stable care they need to grow and thrive.

The Texas minimum standards for child care require caregivers to have only a GED and receive 8 clock hours of training before they can take care of a group of 11 to two year olds. A hairdresser is likely to have had more training than a person caring for children! Child care staff should have a degree in early childhood education, and/or extensive training. Better trained staff are more likely to create the warm caring environments and provide the learning experiences that children need to be ready for elementary school.

A variety of factors make up a quality program, but the

level of education and training of the teacher is by far the most important. Contrary to what you might think, the younger the child, the more the learning is influenced by the relationship with a teacher. Good child care is not just babysitting. Training and education empowers caregivers to better understand and respond to the individual needs of children in their care. The other factors associated with quality care are:

- Attention to a child's overall cognitive, social, emotional and physical development
- Low child-to-teacher ratios
- Small group sizes for the (total number of children in the classroom)
- Families committed to being their children's first teachers
- Parents and teachers who partner together to create a positive learning environment

It's sad to report that for a state that takes such great pride in its higher education program, Texas minimum standards for child care are among the lowest in the nation, allowing high child/staff ratios, and larger class group sizes.

Licensing sets the basic level of care that is to be provided. The purpose of licensing is to achieve compliance with the state's regulations. Texas standards protect the health and safety of children, but do not regulate program curriculum or other quality issues.

Voluntary quality designations however, do exist for childcare programs, which pursue them on a voluntary basis. The state awards a Texas Rising Star designation for programs which meet prescribed quality criteria and are part of the subsidized care system. Programs can also seek accreditation from national standard setting bodies- particularly the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The costs associated with these designations can be significant in terms of staffing equipment and space. Recently, child care advocates have been discussing the possibility of creating a tiered rating system, much like those for hotels and restaurants, to aid parents in understanding quality and selecting programs.

The financing of child care is a pivotal issue in the public policy debate. Currently, families pay 60% of the total cost of childcare, government pays 39% and employers pay 1%. Regardless of income level, child care is the third greatest expense, after housing and food, for families with young children. The closer a family is to poverty, the greater the financial burden of child care. A quality full day full year preschool program can cost between \$7,000 and \$10,000 a year. This far exceeds the cost of tuition at a state supported university. Government programs for child care are aimed primarily at children from low-income families. There are three major funding sources for childcare in Texas:

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***“A hairdresser is likely to have had more training than a person caring for children!”***

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- The Federal Childcare Development Block Grant
- Head Start
- Public pre-school programs

The challenge is to coordinate these funding streams to provide care for as many children as possible. In our state, over 1 million children are eligible for child care yet we are serving only a little over 100,000 children per year with current funding.

With a budget crisis looming and federal cut backs proposed, we need to make every effort to maximize our very limited resources for child care subsidies and quality improvement. Child care is not just a parent's issue; it's an employer issue too. If employees do not feel good about where they are leaving their children every morning, they are not going to feel good about coming to work. And, if they are not feeling good about coming to work, that is a serious problem. This is a reality employers all have to consider.

U.S. employers lose over \$3 billion each year to childcare related absences and lost productivity. Child care is as much a workforce issue as a child development issue. More and more employees are finding out it's good business

to get involved in childcare and when they do they are likely to reap the rewards of:

- Reduced absenteeism
- Increased productivity
- Lower turnover
- Higher morale

Pro-active employers are investing in child care in a variety of ways:

- Supporting community initiatives for quality improvement
- Offering referral services as a company benefit
- Providing subsidies for employee childcare expenses
- Creating their own centers for a full day or back-up care

Children, families and employers, and communities all benefit from a strong system of quality child care. Yet, there is a real disconnect between what we know and what we do when it comes to child care. Our child care system needs strong community advocates for quality programs and for adequate funding so that quality early care and education can be available to those families who so desperately need it.

# THE 78TH TEXAS LEGISLATURE: HEALTHCARE NEEDS REMAIN UNMET

By: State Rep. Garnet F. Coleman



*Garnet F. Coleman has served as a state representative since 1991. He currently is a member of the House Committee on Public Health and the House Committee on Elections. In previous legislative sessions, he served as vice chair of the House Committee on Public Health. He attended Howard University in Washington, D.C. and graduated from University of Saint Thomas in Houston.*

The 78th Legislative session is proving to be one of the most challenging in history. State government in Texas finds itself in a precarious position. Diminishing revenues, a growing \$10 billion shortfall, escalating health care needs, and a ‘No New Taxes’ pledge are colliding at a time when unprecedented action is taking place in the Texas Legislature. For the first time since World War II, the Texas Legislature is likely to adopt a budget that spends less than the previous biennium. Revenue options have been disavowed in favor of deep cuts to state programs that provide health care services for working families, their children, the elderly, and disabled.

Texas has the highest number of uninsured children in the country and approximately 5 million Texans are uninsured overall. Texas is 45th in per capita health and human services spending, yet the 78th Legislature has chosen to take a step backwards by voting to lower enrollment in the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and Medicaid. If current proposals are adopted, up to 600,000 Texans will join the ranks of the uninsured. Denying health coverage to children, the elderly, and disabled only exacerbates the need for health care services in Texas. Shrinking the caseload numbers allows state government to abdicate its responsibility to provide health care to its citizens. However, the financial burden for health care services will not disappear. It will shift to local counties, hospitals, and property taxpayers.

Broad structural changes are being made to state health care policy including proposed income changes in eligibility for CHIP from 200% to 150% of the federal poverty level (FPL). This will restrict CHIP eligibility to children in a working family of four whose total monthly income does

not exceed \$27,150. The children who manage to remain enrolled in CHIP will see their term of continuous eligibility shorten from 12 to 6 months. Medicaid recipients will no longer receive uninterrupted 6-month continuous coverage if proposed single month terms become law. Assuring 12-month continuous coverage enables patients to access preventive services such as health exams and immunizations necessary to keep them healthy. The successes of Medicaid simplification have improved access to vital medical services

for thousands of children, elderly, disabled, and working poor. These services are now targeted for elimination.

A recent study conducted by the Perryman Group on behalf of the Texas Medical Association and the Texas Hospital Association outlined the statewide economic impact of cuts to the

health and human services budget. It concluded that state health care cuts not only hurt people who depend on programs, but damage Texas’ local and statewide economic viability. Eliminating access to preventive services provided under CHIP and Medicaid ensures that more expensive emergency room visits to already overburdened hospitals will multiply in the coming years and local taxpayers will be forced to pick up the tab.

According to the Perryman study, for every dollar cut from CHIP and Medicaid:

- Texas healthcare system loses \$2.81 in federal dollars
- Texas has a dynamic revenue loss of \$0.46
- Local taxes rise by \$0.51
- Insurance premiums rise by \$1.34
- Business activity declines by \$19.14
- Retail sales decline by \$1.77

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**“Denying health coverage to children, the elderly, and disabled only exacerbates the need for health care services in Texas.”**

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The leadership of this state has chosen as its top priority the reduction of state government to improve efficiency. Increasing efficiency in state government is a goal that enjoys wide support among all legislators, but collapsing the health care safety net in the name of fiscal responsibility is an irresponsible decision that creates more problems than it cures. The best public policy creates an opportunity for people in Texas to prosper and become productive citizens who contribute to the overall strength of the Texas economy.

At a time when greater access to health care and expansion of health coverage is needed, we are regressing. At a time when our citizens need state government to keep

them healthy and safe, we are turning a blind eye. Instead of addressing and eliminating problems, we are creating more. Implementing policy that increases the number of uninsured children in Texas is an unwise disinvestment in the future and calls into question the priorities laid out by the leadership of this state.

The duty of the legislature is to pass a budget that enacts balanced public policy and leaves the state in better shape than it was found. This budget falls far short of meeting that goal. Hope remains that we can fulfill our obligation to the citizens of Texas and protect important programs serving our most vulnerable citizens.

We can and must do better. For all of us.