

Child Care in Travis County

Prepared by E³ Alliance

Prepared for Teaching and Mentoring Communities
On behalf of the City of Austin Early Childhood Council

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Distributed October 15, 2011



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2011 Travis County Child Care Report

Child Care in Travis County Fast Facts

There are **75,774 children** five years old and under living in Travis County, a **29% increase** over the past 10 years.

Almost 1 in 4 children under the age of 5 are living in poverty. Hispanic/Latino and Black/African American children under five years of age have even higher rates of poverty, 37% (or 1 in 3 children) and 44% (almost 1 in 2 children) respectively. **The poverty threshold is currently \$22,162 for a household of two adults and two children.**



Travis County has the most expensive child care in the state of Texas.

In Travis County, **52,905 children under six years old live in families where their sole parent or both parents work**, making child care an essential work support.

Travis County has **441 licensed child care businesses** serving children ages 0-12. These businesses **employ over 4,000 people**,¹ provide child care **services to as many as 37,305 children**, and contribute to the local economy through purchase of goods and services provided by other businesses in the community.

Of the licensed programs in Travis County, **27% had either state or national quality rating**, with an estimated enrollment of 9,159, and a legal capacity of 11,493.

Travis County has **166 registered child care homes and 263 listed family homes** providing direct **child care services to as many as 2,490 children**. Only four of the registered child care homes, with a combined capacity of 48 children, participated in quality rating programs.

The maximum state reimbursement rate for child care centers accepting child care subsidy is **78% of the average cost of child care**.

78% of unemployed parents found employment within 12 months after receiving child care assistance, and 84% of parents maintained employment 12 months after receiving child care subsidies.

52% of Central Texas students were school ready when they entered Kindergarten in 2010.

Central Texas children who attended any type of Pre-K program were **3.5 times more likely to be ready for Kindergarten**.

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In 2002, the City of Austin Early Child Care Council, now the Early Childhood Council authorized a report on child care in Travis County. This report is the sixth in this series with the purpose of examining Travis County's child care demand, supply, quality and affordability. Hopefully this report will be used in planning how the City of Austin and other entities working on the issues of early childhood education, support child 0-5.

Child care is a complex system, with many different providers, and consumers who have different and often competing goals. Careful examination of the data available often leads to more questions, not necessarily answers.

Is there enough child care? – For whom?

Is it affordable? – What is “affordable” to people at different income levels?

Can families access it? - Which families?

Is it quality child care? How do we measure quality?

Looking at the purpose of child care and the outcomes desired from families and communities, can help better define the questions, and help get to the answers in order to inform community planning around child care.



What is child care?

A dictionary definition of child care:

“The supervision and nurturing of a child, including casual and informal services provided by a parent and more formal services provided by an organized child care center.”²

In the current system of child care in Texas, there is a great deal of emphasis placed on the supervision of children and less placed on nurturing, which prioritizes the richness of child hood experiences. Both are essential components in a quality child care system. The supervision of children allows parents to enter the workforce, and increase the family income and the Travis County tax base, whereas, nurturing promotes an environment that fosters optimum child development. Traditionally the Travis County Child Care Report has focused on child care that is either regulated or listed with Texas Child Care Licensing.

This report includes a description of this type of care as well as a deeper analysis of the changing demographics of our children and families who use child care services. The paper is organized by three overarching themes. The first section will describe the child care providers in Travis County. The second section outlines the changes to the county's child population since 2000. The final section juxtaposes these two realities to review the infrastructure for child care as well as the current sources of support for that system.

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E³ Alliance

E³ Alliance uses objective data and focused community collaboration to align the education systems so all students succeed and lead Central Texas to economic prosperity.

The E³ Alliance is a regional collaborative dedicated to strengthening economic competitiveness by increasing educational outcomes for all students. Founded in 2006 by partners the Austin Area Research Organization, The University of Texas at Austin and Austin Community College District; the E³ Alliance acts as a catalyst for change and is the P-16 Council for the Central Texas region.



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Travis County Child Care

What are the types of child care available?

There are many types of child care available to families in Travis County. Programs may be center or home based, regulated or unregulated, or quality rated or not. Table 1, details the types of child care available in Travis County and the numbers of child care slots available, including after school programs for school-aged children.

Table 1. 2011 Travis County Child Care Programs with Capacity, Utilization, Quality Ratings, Tuition and Regulation³

Type of Program	Description	Child Care Capacity	% of Total Child Care Capacity	% of Children on Subsidy Utilizing Care ⁴	% of Programs with Quality Ratings ⁵	Average Tuition (2010)	Type of Regulation
Licensed Child Care Centers	Provide care for seven or more children under 14 years old for less than 24 hours per day at a location other than the permit holder's home.	Part-time 3,282 Full-time 37,205	93%	95%	25%	\$589/mo. \$7068/ yr.	Required to follow Texas Minimum Standards. Background checks required. License issued after licensing staff completes on-site inspection(s). Inspected at least once every 12 months
Licensed Child Care Homes	Provide care for less than 24 hours per day for 7-12 children under 14 years old in the permit holder's own home.	492	1%	0.6%	10%	\$561/mo. \$6732/yr.	Required to follow Texas Minimum Standards. Orientation and background checks required. A license is issued after licensing staff completes on-site inspection(s). Inspected at least once every 12 months
Registered Family Homes	Provide care in the caregiver's home for up to six children under age 14; may also take in up to six more school-age children. No more than 12 children can be in care at any time, including children of the caregiver.	1,935	4.5%	2.4%	2%	\$527/mo. \$6324/yr.	Required to follow Texas Minimum Standards. Orientation and background check required. Registration certificate is issued after licensing staff completes an on-site inspection to ensure minimum standards are met. Inspected every 1-2 years.
Listed Family Homes	Provide compensated regular child care (at least four hours per day, three or more days a week, for more than nine consecutive weeks) in their own homes for 1-3 unrelated children.	555	1.2%	1%	0	\$326/mo. ⁶ \$3912/yr.	Providers must be at least 18 year old, submit an application and a background check. No minimum standards, orientation or training requirements. They are not inspected.
Family, Friends, and Relatives	Includes any unregulated and unlisted child care, such as nannies, or kith or kin care.	Unknown	Unknown	0.7%	0	Unknown	No minimum standards, orientation or training requirements. They are not inspected.

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Is there enough child care?

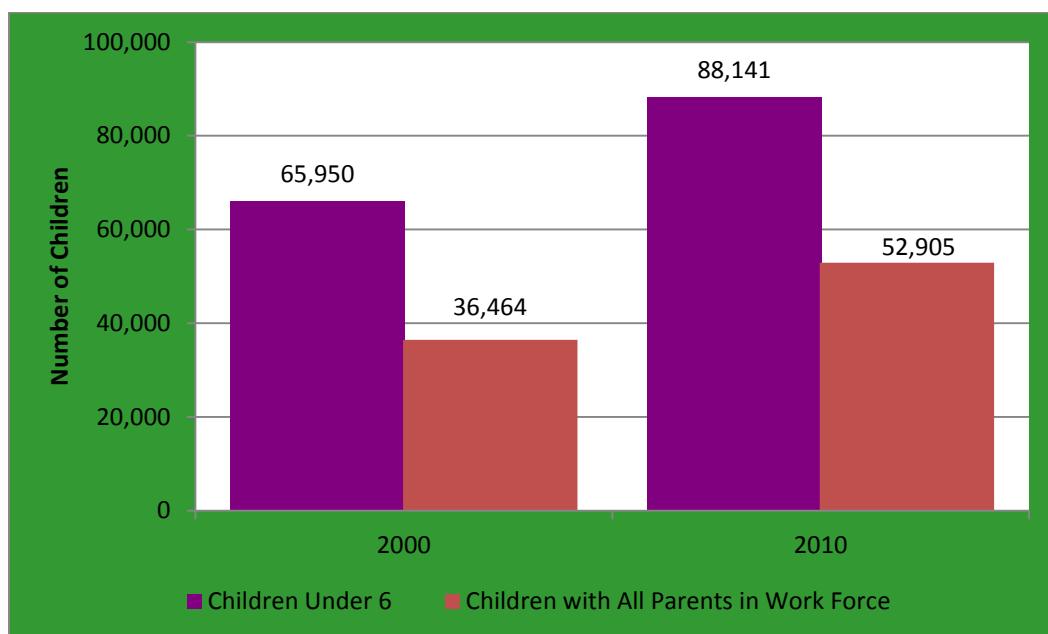
In 2010 it was estimated that Travis County had 75,774 children under the age of five.⁷ The total capacity of all known providers of child care in Travis County is 43,469;⁸ adding in pre-K enrollment for 2010, the total comes to 50,473. According to this calculation Travis County does not have capacity for at least 25,301 children under five, or 33% of the child population.

But that is not the whole story. First, not all families need or want child care. Second, not all child care capacity represents care that meets family needs. Some child care capacity is part-time care, such as mothers-day-out programs or half day child care programs that offer care less than 4 hours a day. These programs are included in counts of all licensed care; however, this type of care can be seen more as a child enrichment program, than a true work support. In addition, some child care capacity is only for school aged children, classified as “afterschool care” and is completely unavailable for children 0-5 who need full-time care.

Who needs child care?

Although families may seek child care for many different reasons, it is important to focus on families that need child care in order to obtain or maintain employment. A child who has their sole or both parents working will need child care. In Travis County, 52,905 children under six years old live in families where their sole parent or both parents work.⁹ The number of children under six with all parents in the workforce has increased 45% from 2000 to 2010, while the general population of children under six increased at 33% (Figure 1). Both the actual number and the percentage of children with parents in the workforce increased over this ten year period, driving up the need for full-time child care.

Figure 1. Children under Six with Their Sole or Both Parents in the Work Force 2000 and 2010¹⁰

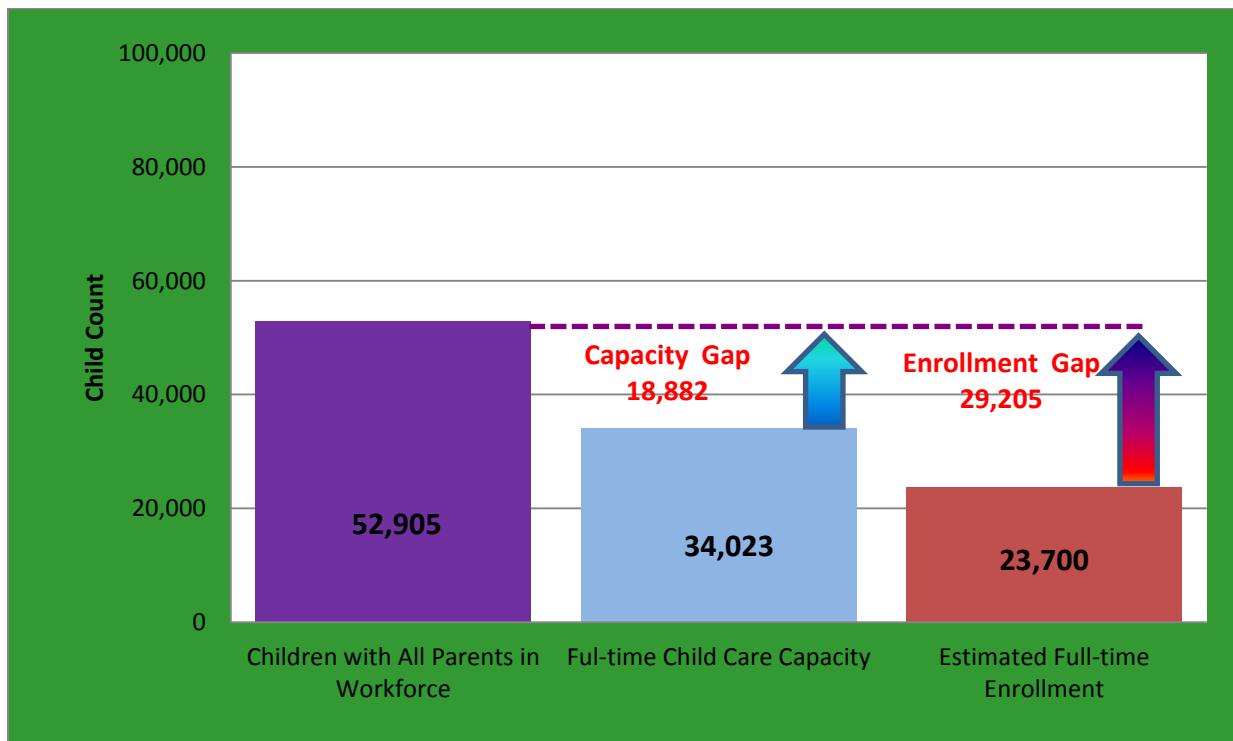


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What is the capacity of full-time child care?

For working parent families, childcare is a necessity, and typically, child care providers that offer full-time care to children 0-5 are the best match. It is also important to consider the difference between capacity and enrollment. Child care capacity refers to the number of children allowed to be cared for by the license holder. Child Care programs often have a licensed capacity greater than actual enrollment. This allows child care programs flexibility to increase enrollment without changing their license. Different studies have listed actual enrollment in Travis County between 75% and 80% of capacity.¹¹ A 2011 web-based survey conducted by E³ Alliance estimated Travis County licensed child care centers and homes enrollment to be 80% of actual capacity.¹² In taking into account the difference between capacity, enrollment, and number of children in Travis County, we can compute the gap between the available child care and the number of children who need child care. Figure 2 shows that in 2010, there was an gap in both the capacity and the enrollment of the full-time centers at 18,882 and 29,205 slots respectively. This gap opened even wider for quality rated child care. Of the licensed programs in Travis County, 27% had a quality rating, with an estimated enrollment of 9,159, and a legal capacity of 11,493. Thus between 41,412 and 43,746 (78%-83% of) children under age six with all parents in the workforce did not have access to a quality rated, licensed child care program.

Figure 2. Enrollment and Capacity of Licensed Child Care Programs serving children (0-5) in Travis County Number of Under Six with All parents in the Workforce in Travis County, 2010.



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Can families easily access child care?

Access to child care depends on many factors relative to the community and the individual. One question is - Does the community provide the opportunity for families to access child care? And, conversely, is the family able to access the available child care?

As the child population has increased, and the number of parents in the workforce has increased, the available of child care has not kept up with demand. Most child care focuses on, and is licensed for children 0-12. An appropriate population measure available is grouped as children 0-11. Since 2005, licensed child care capacity for children 0-12 has increased 11%;¹³ however, the growth rate for children 0-11 has increased 18% as outlined in Table 2. This disparity indicates a net reduction in the number of license child care slots available.

Table 2. Capacity of Licensed Centers (serving Children Ages 0-12) and Number of Children (Aged 0-11), Travis County, 2005-2010

	2005	2010	% Change
Capacity, Licensed Centers (Ages 0-12)	36,346¹⁴	40,487	+ 11%
# Children (Ages 0-11)	148,485¹⁵	174,661¹⁶	+ 18%

Often families cannot get in to the child care programs immediately, and the child is placed on a waitlist for services. A survey representing 56 or 13% of child care centers indicated that 40% of centers current had a waitlist. Waitlists ranged from 3 to 600 children. Fifty-eight percent of centers with a quality rating had a waitlist, compared with just 32% of non-quality rated centers surveyed.¹⁷ Families are also often unable to get immediate child care assistance.

Location

Families choose specific child care programs for many different reasons, and location is usually a primary factor. For low income families more dependent on public transportation, it is important to find child care near work or home and near public transportation.

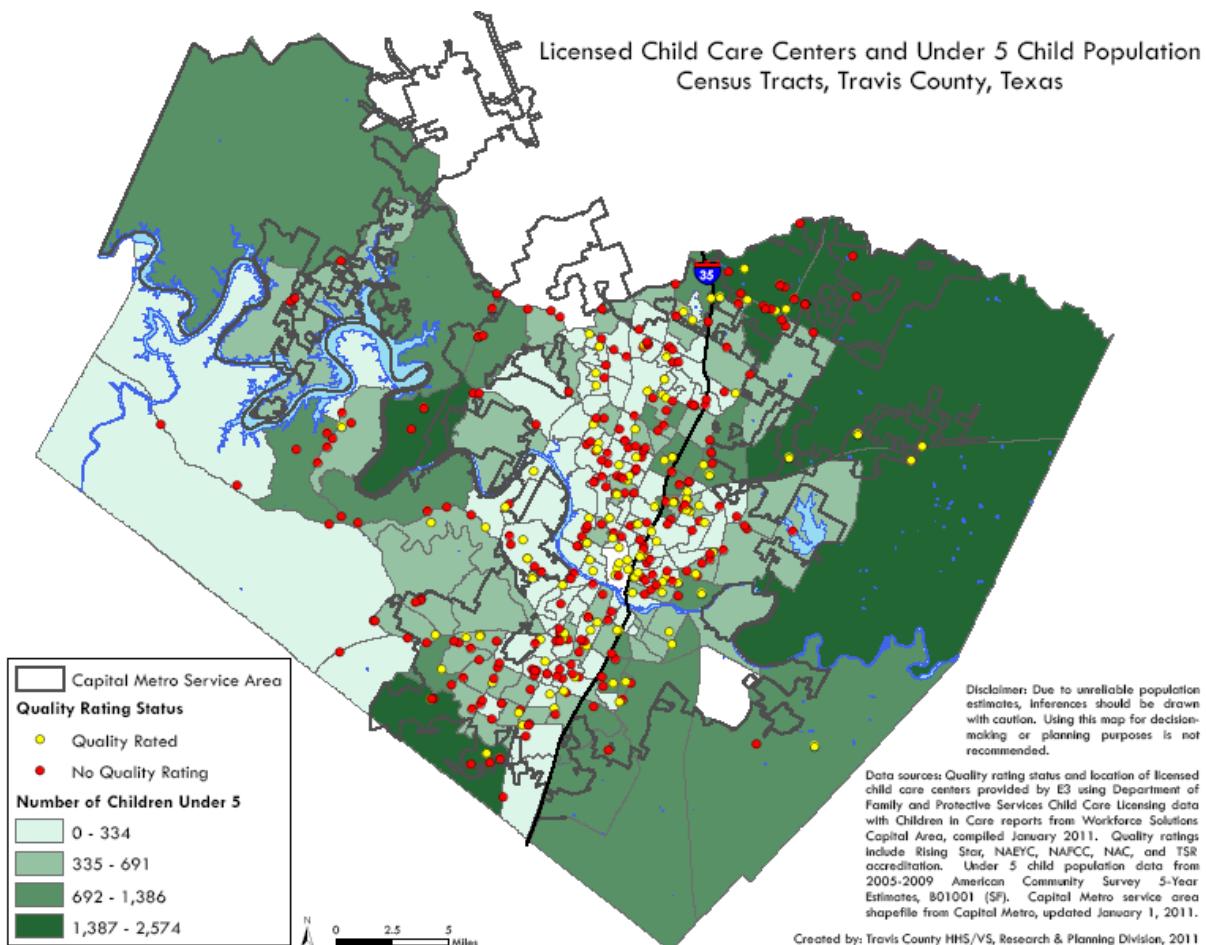
Figure 3 is a map of Travis County developed by Travis County, with areas of dense child population shaded darker on the map. Blue dots represent quality rated child care centers, and green dots represent child care centers that are not quality rated. Also on the map is the Capital Metro service area.



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Figure 3

Licensed Child Care Center and Children under 5 Population¹⁸



Child Population disclaimer:

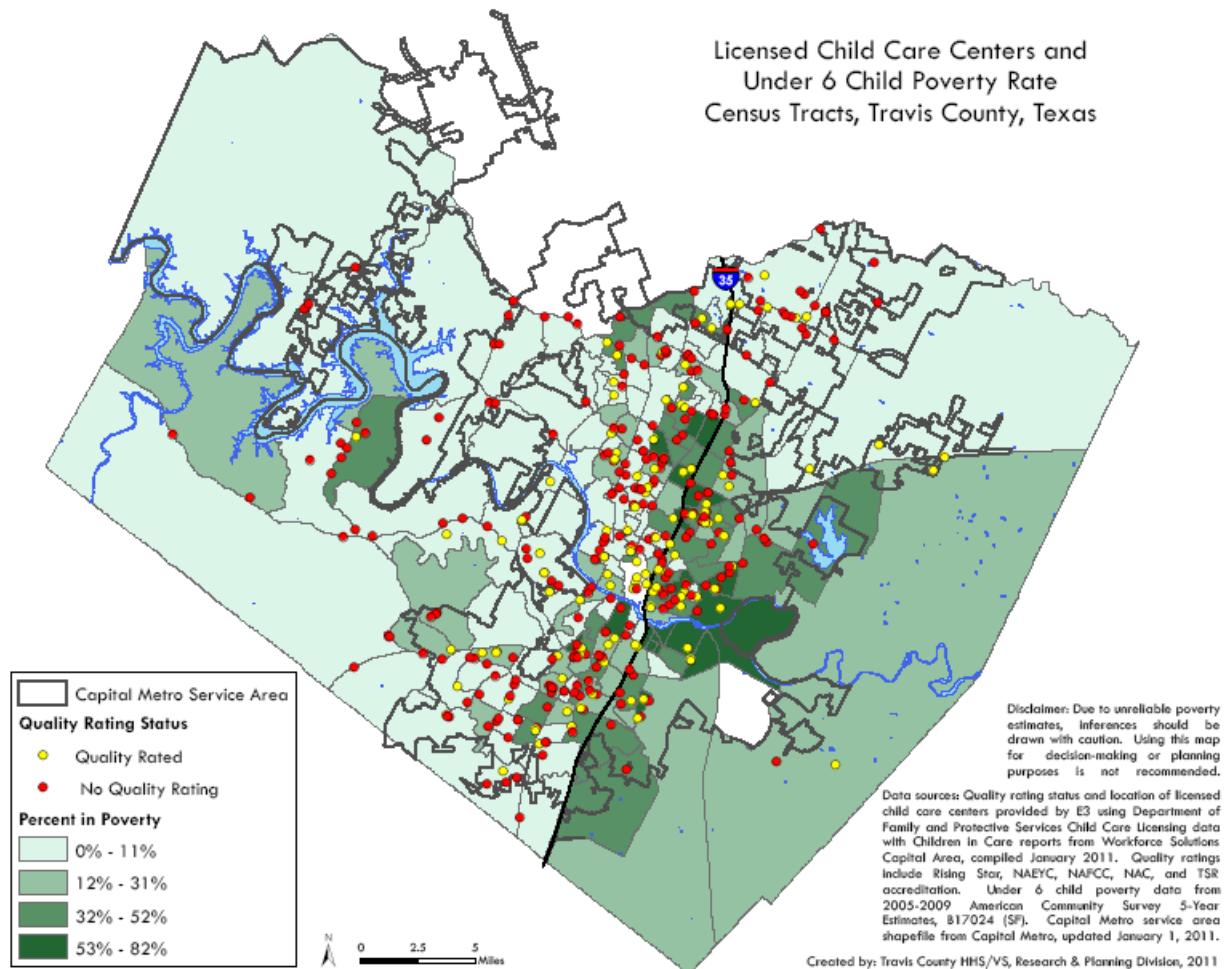
Note: Many of these census tracts have population estimates that are unreliable. Estimates are based on samples and are subject to a margin of error. Estimates for small areas often have high margins of error, so inferences should be drawn with caution. Further, the values for the census tracts in different classes may not be statistically different. A statistical test is needed to make such a determination.

In looking at the map, the perimeter of Travis County (North West, North East, and South Austin) appear to have a high number of children under five, but fewer child care centers than the densely packed core of the county. It would appear that child care centers are closer to Austin's urban core than to centers of child population. Child care centers do appear to be accessible via the Capital Metro service area.

Figure 4 shows a second map, depicting the percentage of children under the age of six living in poverty located on each census tract. Again, the darker the shading the higher the percentage of children who live in poverty in that census track.

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Figure 4. Licensed Child Care Centers and under 6 Poverty Rate¹⁹



Child Poverty disclaimer:

Note: Many of these census tracts have poverty estimates that are unreliable. Estimates are based on samples and are subject to a margin of error. Estimates for small areas often have high margins of error, so inferences should be drawn with caution. Further, the values for the census tracts in different classes may not be statistically different. A statistical test is needed to make such a determination.

The neighborhoods of highly concentrated child poverty appear to be clustered along IH 35 corridor with an area located just South East from the center. There are quality rated child care programs in 34 out of the 56 Travis County zip codes that have child care programs. About 11 % of children on child care subsidy do not have access to a quality rated program in their home zip code. Only 36% of children on childcare subsidy currently attend child care in their home zip code. An analysis by E³ Alliance showed a corresponding increase in the number of children on subsidies attending child in their home zip code and the overall availability of child care in their neighborhood. The link suggests that the more child care made available in neighborhood with high concentrations of poverty, the greater the chance low income families will access them.

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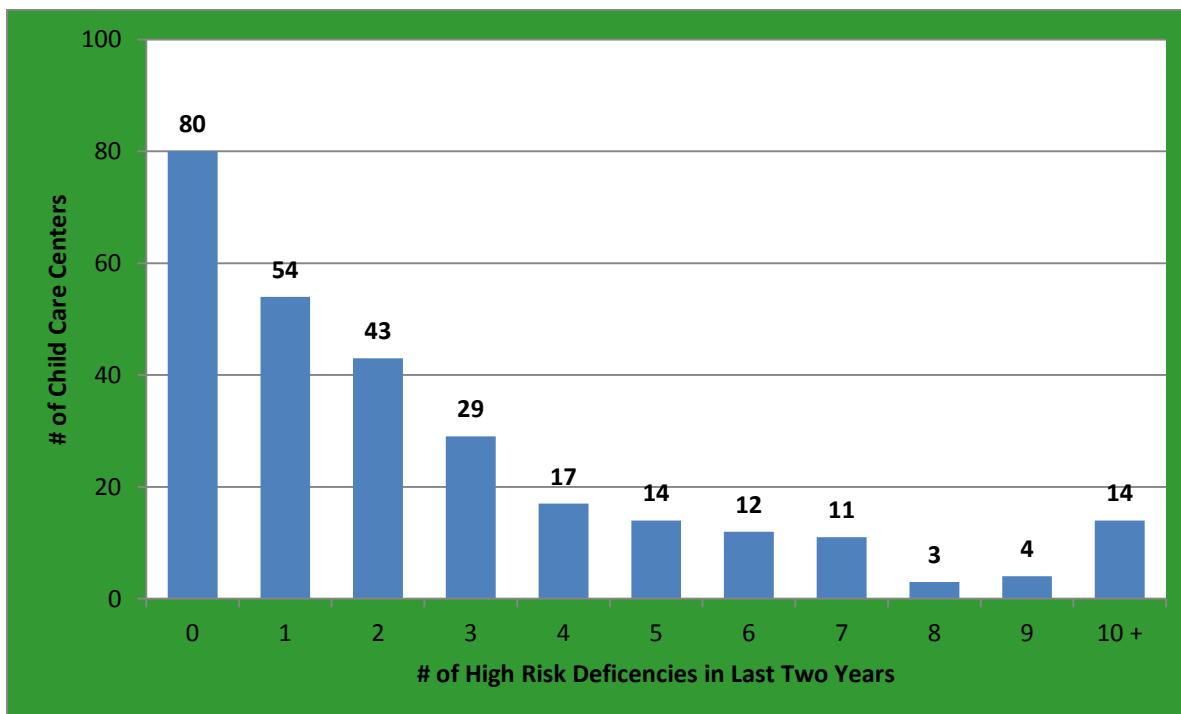


What is quality of child care?

Most the care available in Travis County is of unknown quality. Although Texas Child Care Licensing inspects and regulates child care programs, it does not regulate child care centers for quality, only for minimum health and safety. Licensing reports for child care are available on line, and parents are encouraged to check a child care programs history before enrolling a child in care. Licensing deficiencies are weighted as High, Medium-High, Medium, or Low risk.²⁰ High risk deficiencies relate directly to the safety of children in care.

Looking at high risk deficiencies can give a community insight on how well child care centers comply with the most serious standards. Examples of High Risk deficiencies include standards relating to supervision of children, staff background checks, storage of chemicals, etc. For most child care centers in Travis County, high risk deficiencies appear to be few and far between, and do not appear to represent a pattern of non-compliance with the Texas Minimum Standards. Figure 5 details the frequency of high risk deficiencies by center, for centers which had been licensed for two or more years. Eighty child care centers did not have any high risk deficiencies, representing over 28% of the centers examined. An additional 19% had only one high risk deficiency. The majority (63%) of child care centers in Travis County had two or fewer high risk deficiencies over a two year period.

Figure 5. Frequency of High Risk Licensing Deficiencies for Travis County Child Care Centers, 2009-2011²¹



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Quantifying a reasonable number of high risk deficiencies a child care center should have over a two year period is difficult. In many cases high risk deficiencies report actual incidences of harm caused to children in care due to lack of proper supervision or oversight. The idea that there can be a reasonable amount of harm to children is not tenable. An especially vivid example of this type of harm is from a narrative from the child care licensing web-site:

The caregivers did not use good judgment when toddler children were taken outside to the playground when they were aware that hazards were present. There were three live ant mounds at the time the children went outside and at least one child was bitten approximately 40 times.²²



Other high risk licensing deficiencies detail the potential harm for children in care, such as:

The director did not use good judgment when she left the stove on and unattended for almost one hour. During this time she left the operation.²³

One caregiver at the operation does not have a required background check.²⁴

In the regulation of child care programs Child Care Licensing focuses on preventing high risk situations for children and investigating the potential for re-occurrence of high risk deficiencies. Child care centers are asked to correct all deficiencies and set a date for coming into compliance with the minimum standards. Plans can include staff training, implementing safe guards and procedures, and even dismissal of staff. In cases where high risk deficiencies are considered a pattern and likely to re-occur, the entire center is more carefully monitored and placed on a corrective action plan. Most centers with 20 or more high risk deficiencies (4%) were placed on a corrective action plan. If a center cannot comply with the corrective action plan, or if violations constitute a major risk to children in care, a center could have a license suspended or revoked. Child Care Licensing has only revoked one child care center's license in Travis County in the past two years.²⁵

Another measure of looking at how well child care programs are meeting basic health and safety standards is to look at the how frequently they are scheduled for inspection. Once a child care center has an established record of compliance with child care licensing, their record of compliance determines how frequently an operation may be inspected. When operations have serious deficiencies or a significant number of deficiencies, repeat deficiencies, or fail to make timely corrections, they are inspected more frequently by licensing staff, to monitor the level of risk to children.²⁶ When looking at child care programs that had at least a two year history with Child Care Licensing 56% were on the minimum inspection plan, only calling for inspections once a year. Thirty-five percent of centers were on schedule to be inspected twice a year, and 8% of centers were on a schedule to be inspected 3-4 times a year. Over 40% of child care centers in Travis County receive additional monitoring to help ensure the basic health and safety of children in care. This demonstrates the difficulty in looking at measures beyond basic health and safety, or the supervision aspect of child care, and moving on to quality child care issues that concentrate on nurturing and child development.

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What are the measures of quality child care?

Going beyond minimum safety requirements, child care programs can choose to be part of a quality rating system or quality improvement program. These quality improvement programs often require child care programs to commit to following higher standards than required by state law, and often take additional time, effort, and cost more to implement than simply following the minimum standards. Quality standards call for lower student to teacher ratios, and higher levels of teacher education, as well as children having access to a variety of materials such as books and art supplies. To offset some of the additional cost of providing a quality program, programs receive enhanced state child care subsidy reimbursement rates when they participate in approved quality ratings systems. Programs are monitored to help ensure they are meeting quality standards, and parents are often surveyed about their experience in the child care program. Quality rating programs can be extremely helpful to parents in determining how to choose a child care provider. Research suggests that parents have difficulty in being able to identify markers of quality in child care programs.²⁷

This report examines four of the most commonly used rating systems in Texas.

- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- Texas Rising Star
- National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC)
- Texas School Ready

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Accreditation is often considered the “gold standard” of child care quality. Relative to most state quality rating systems, the NAEYC requires lower child to teacher ratios, higher teacher education levels and higher parental involvement. In Travis County, the number of NAEYC Accredited child care programs has remained relatively stable since 2008, according to the last child care report by Holly Van Scoy.²⁸ Table 3 shows that while Texas Rising Star increased by 26% and NAFCC decreased by 66%, NAEYC rated facilities decreased by 3%.

Table 3. Change in Quality Rated Child Care in Travis County, 2008-2011

Type	2011	2008	% Change
NAEYC	29	30	-3%
Texas Rising Star -Licensed Care	102	81	+ 26%
Texas Rising Star -Registered Family Homes	4	7	- 43 %
NAFCC	2	6	- 66%
Texas School Ready	12	Not Available	

Not all children are able to enroll in all child care programs, and access to NAEYC Accredited programs is limited in 15 out of the 29 NAEYC Accredited programs in Travis County.²⁹ Fifteen (about 50%) limited its enrollment to specific population groups, For example, Head Start provides child care and essential services to children aged 3-5 years old, has limited enrollment to children and families who meet very specific enrollment criteria, such as family income less 100% of poverty, homelessness, child with a disability etc.(see Table ?).. Other examples of limited enrollment include employer-sponsored child care programs limited to children of employees and church affiliated child care centers that give priority to congregation members.

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These programs are not fully accessible to the general public and represent 30% of the total NAEYC Accredited capacity in Austin. Currently there is no catalogue of how many child care programs have limited enrollment in Travis County. Parents find out such limitations through direct communication with the child care provider. The remaining 1,065 accredited child care slots have no restrictions on enrollment.



The Texas Rising Star Provider Certification process is another quality ratings system as well as a means to improve quality of child care facilities. . The Rising Star system is administered through local workforce boards, providing graduated levels of improvement or different “star” ratings (one, two, three or four stars) for providers. Both Licensed child care and registered family homes participate in the Texas Rising Star program.

The Texas Rising Star state quality improvement program is another quality rating system and through Workforce Solutions- Child Care Services partners with hundreds of child care providers in Travis County to improve child care quality.³⁰ In 2010, Workforce Solutions funded \$1,451,162 in quality improvement efforts for child care programs participating in Texas Rising Star with the goal of these providers to reach higher levels of quality. ³¹ Specific strategies have focused on improving quality of center-based providers over home-based providers. Center based providers have 95% of the children who are currently on child care subsidies, and improvements to one child care center can often effect more children than one child care home since more children can be enrolled in a center.

The National Association for Child Care (NAFCC) Accreditation is a nationally recognized accreditation system designed specifically for family child care providers. Accreditation requires a high level of quality not just in the safety and health practices and nurturing environment but also the professional and business practices of child care providers.³²

There is an overall decrease in Registered Family Homes participating in any type of quality rating program. Registered Family Homes serve up to 12, but typically fewer than 8 children and they represent 4% of total known child care capacity in Travis County.

Although there was a drop in the number of Registered Family Homes participating in the Texas Rising Star program, it was more than balanced by the increase in licensed child care programs participating.

The Texas School Ready Certification System is a multi-year process than involves teacher training, assessment, and environmental awareness of classroom components that support school readiness. Only teachers in pre-K classrooms are certified in the process. The program does include Infant or Toddler teachers. Classrooms of twelve child care providers in Travis County were certified as Texas School Ready in 2011.³³ Data was not collected on the number of Texas School Ready providers in 2008.

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Why does quality matter?

Many studies have found that quality child care helps prepare children for school and correlates to students with better school performance.³⁴ Similarly, a growing body of research has found that the conditions and experiences of children in their earliest years (5 years and below) profoundly influence not only their preparation for school but their aptitude for learning.³⁵ Longitudinal studies (that is, studies that follow the same children over a long period of time) found both higher outcomes in education achievement and lower outcomes in high-risk behavior for children that participated in high quality programs.³⁶

High quality early childhood experiences are very important to young children, especially children in poverty. Research suggests that having more experiences of high-quality childcare weakens the negative effects of poverty on children's achievement such as increase special education placement, increased retention rates, increased, drop-out rates, and increased at-risk behavior.³⁷ A study by E³ Alliance found that low income children in Central Texas who attended any type of child care program (including public pre-Kindergarten) were 3.5 times more likely to be ready for Kindergarten than low-income children who did not. Furthermore, household poverty was the strongest factor associated with school readiness.³⁸

Is child care affordable?

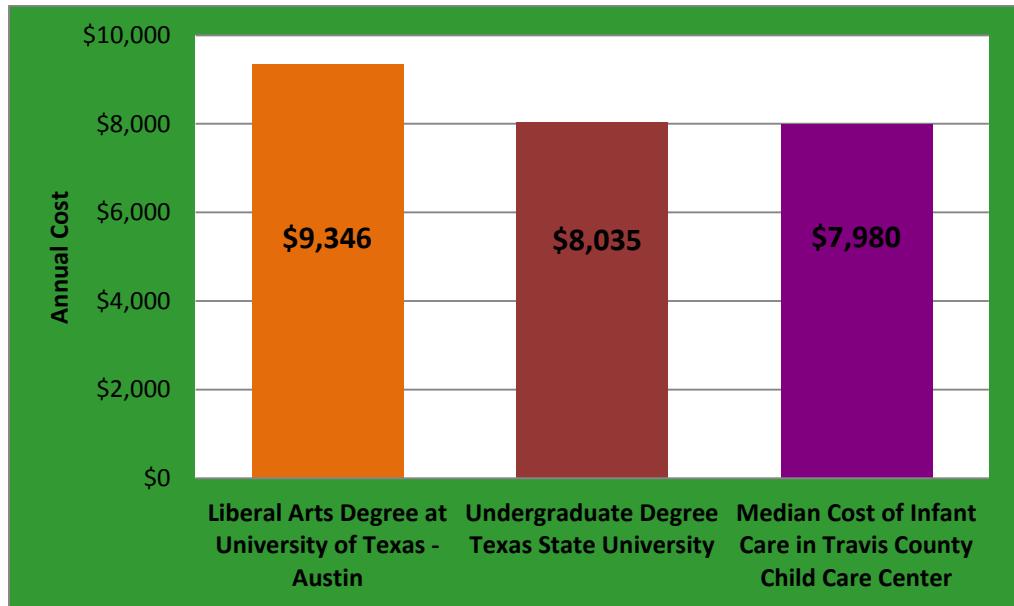
Travis County has the highest average cost of child care in the state of Texas despite ranking only 34th in the state for median income. Median income for Travis County was only \$53,434 in 2009 compared to Kendall (\$72,094), Williamson (\$69,862), and Comal (\$62,642) Counties³⁹. Travis County's average cost of child care in 2010 was \$6,690 per year compared to \$5,615, \$6,038 and \$5,615 per year for Kendall, Williamson, and Comal Counties (respectively).⁴⁰ Families in Travis County earn, on average, \$10,000 to \$20,000 less than families in these other counties, yet pay (on average) over \$1,000 more for child care.



Child care is a substantial expense for families. Figure 6 shows a comparison of annual child care costs to annual college costs, with cost of one year of college tuition with, annual child care costs being 85% of annual cost of a liberal arts degree at University of Texas at Texas. Families sending children to college are typically able to access scholarship and students loans in order to defer the cost of education. College students themselves can often contribute some income to help pay college. Compare this with families of young children, typically headed by young parents with lower earnings potential, and fewer sources of financial support.

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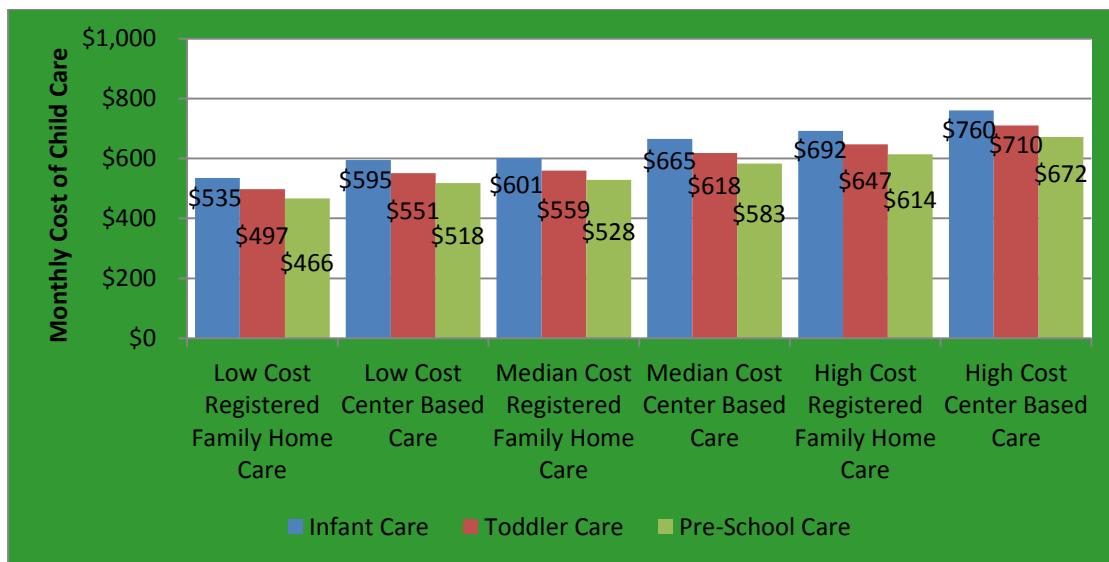
Figure 6. Annual Cost of Tuition at the University of Texas at Austin, Texas State University and Median Child Care Tuition for Infant Care in Travis County, 2010.



The benchmark for affordable child care is no more than 10% of a family's budget.⁴¹ A family with two young children in care at a child care center would need to earn approximately \$13,300 a month or \$159,600 for two infants ; \$12,300 a month or \$147,600 a year, to afford the average cost of child care two toddlers in Travis County. Given a Travis County mean income level of \$53,434, it unlikely that child care in the County is "affordable" to most families.

Figure 7 details the current costs of child care by type in Travis County. Most child care centers charge tuition by month, and this can give perspective of how child care expenses can affect a family's monthly budget.

Figure 7. Monthly Cost of Child Care in Travis County by Type, 2010⁴²

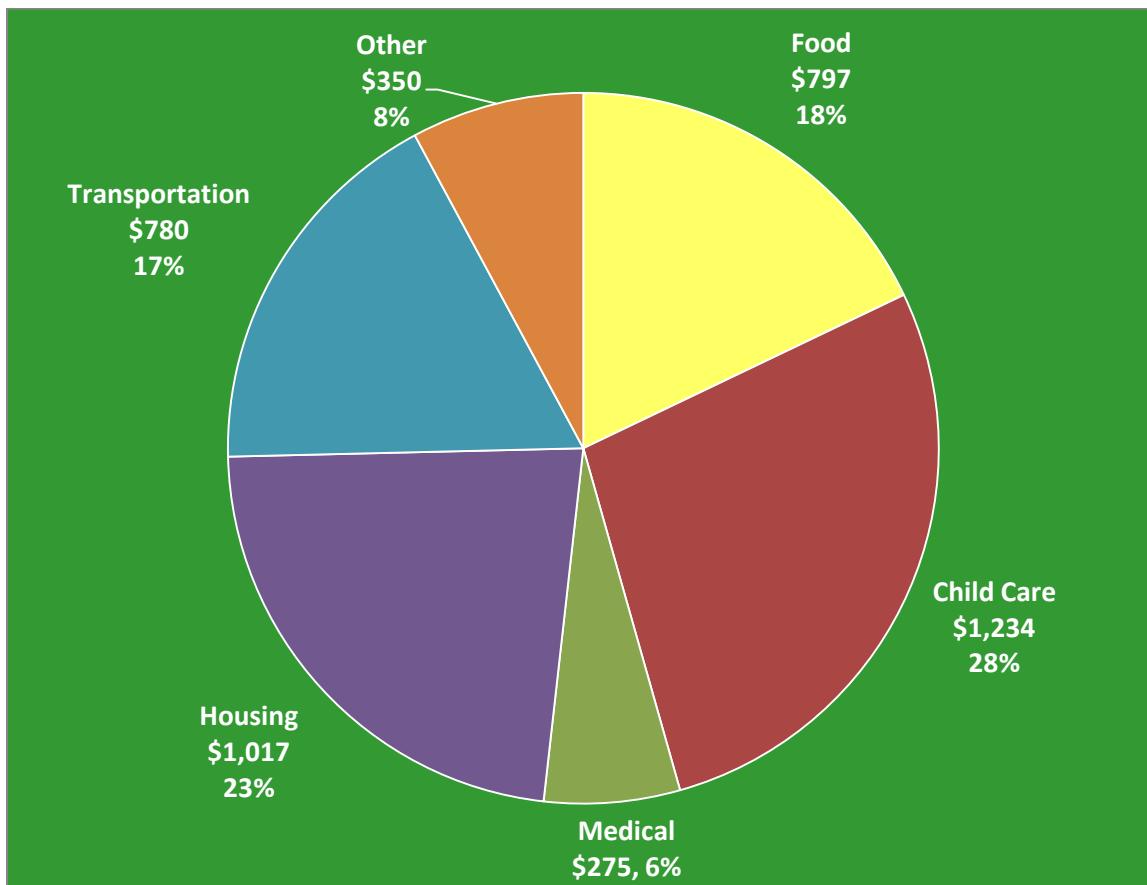


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In 2010, moderate monthly food costs for a family of four in Travis County with two adults and two young children was \$797.⁴³ Median rent for a two bedroom apartment in Travis County was \$1017 in 2010.⁴⁴

For a family of four in Travis County with two young children, child care for their two children (approximately \$1234) would likely be their largest expense. In Figure 8, we can see how the “affordability” measures, of child care being 10% of the family income, look at the mean income level, as combined with the actual average expenses for food, rent and child care in Travis County. With child care at 28% of the family budget, it puts a serious financial strain on the family. When such a large percentage of the family’s income goes to child care, very little is left in the family’s budget for food, medical, clothing, travel or other basic living expenses.⁴⁵ Families making between \$55,549 and \$148,320⁴⁶ per year do not typically qualify for any public assistance for child care or educational support such as Head Start, state subsidies or public school Pre-K, and would not earn enough to afford child care in Travis County.

Figure 8. Monthly Family Budget at Travis County Median (\$4,453) for 2 Adults and 2 Children, 2010⁴⁷



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Why does child care cost so much?

With the cost of child care not affordable for many families in Travis County, it is important to know what is driving the cost and how expenses compare with revenue. Table 3 shows six basic expenses of child care providers, the types of regulation, and what proportion of a child care center budget it represents. Labor cost make up the largest expense for both non-profit and for-profit child care providers. Because of minimum requirements for the number of workers needed per child set by the Texas Minimum Standards and minimum pay for workers set by Federal minimum wage rate,⁴⁸ child care providers have little flexibility in reducing staff pay or the number of staff in order to save on the cost of labor.

Texas Minimum Standards also require child care workers to have at least a high school diploma or equivalent, but quality standards from NAEYC and other quality assurance programs often require child care teachers hold at least an associate's or bachelor degree. A 2010 United Way Capital Area survey of child care providers in Travis County revealed the average wage reported for center teachers was \$11.57 per hour, with 68% earning between \$8.71 and \$14.43 per hour.⁴⁹ It is estimated the living wage (the hourly rate that an individual must earn to support their family, if they are the sole provider and are working full-time) for single adult working full time in Travis county is \$9.18 per hour⁵⁰, and average wage per job is \$23.87 per hour.⁵¹ Given where child care workers fall in this range of livable to average wage, combined with education requirements it is doubtful that Travis County employers would be able to reduce wages significantly to save on cost, especially if they wanted to have low staff turnover, which is typically used in quality assurance programs for child care.

Table 4. Estimated Child Care Center Expenses as a Percentage of Total Cost⁵²

Type	Description	Types of Regulation ⁵³	% of Child Care Budget
Labor	Wages, employment taxes or self-employment wages and taxes.	The state of Texas mandates a maximum number of children a teacher can care for. Required professional development hours. Required minimum education requirements. Minimum wage requirements of workers, no minimum for self-employed child providers.	62% For-Profit Programs 79% Non-Profit
Occupancy	Rent, Utilities, facility maintenance and repairs, property tax	Square footage per child regulations mandated by the state for both outdoor and indoor space.	20% For-Profit 7% Non-Profit
Food	Federal food programs estimate approximately \$3 /day per child	Basic food are requirements mandated by the state; however providers can choose to provide food or have parents provide food.	4% For-Profit 5% Non-Profit
Operations	Supplies, Transportation, Equipment, Day Care Liability Insurance	Texas Minimum Standards have numerous equipment requirements (resting mats, changing tables, playground equipment) that need to be maintained and in good repairs. Liability Insurance is required.	10% For-Profit 7% Non-Profit
Other	Dues, memberships, other overhead	Optional	3% For-Profit 2% Non Profit

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State requirements on occupancy and operation expenses include: regulation on the square footage needed per child, insurance requirements, fees for required background checks, requirements to meet fire code, and health department codes. These requirements support the health and safety of children in care, but make it difficult for providers to reduce the cost of care. Unregulated child care providers have more flexibility in lowering costs, but also parents have less assurance unregulated providers are meeting minimum health and safety requirements.



In addition, the true cost of child care often exceeds the cost of tuition and fees parents are asked to pay. Studies that have reviewed the actual cost of child care reveal, parent fees and tuition only cover a fraction of the actual costs of providing care. In looking at licensed child care centers, in non-profit child care centers parent fees cover 51% of program expenses. Non-profit centers use a combination of private donations, in-kind donations, and public funds to make up the difference. In for-profit centers, parent fees cover 89% of programs expenses.⁵⁴

The cost of labor, and minimum health and safety requirements are the main drivers of cost in child care programs. It is hard to imagine cutting cost from this system in order to reduce cost to parents. Although costs are typically less in home based child care settings, the cost to parents is still substantial, with median cost for Registered Family Home care between \$528-\$600 a month (Figure 7). Studies show most home based child care providers have very low earnings, between \$15,000 to \$25,000 per year, with long hours and no benefits such as health care and retirement plans.⁵⁵

Changes to the Travis County Child Population

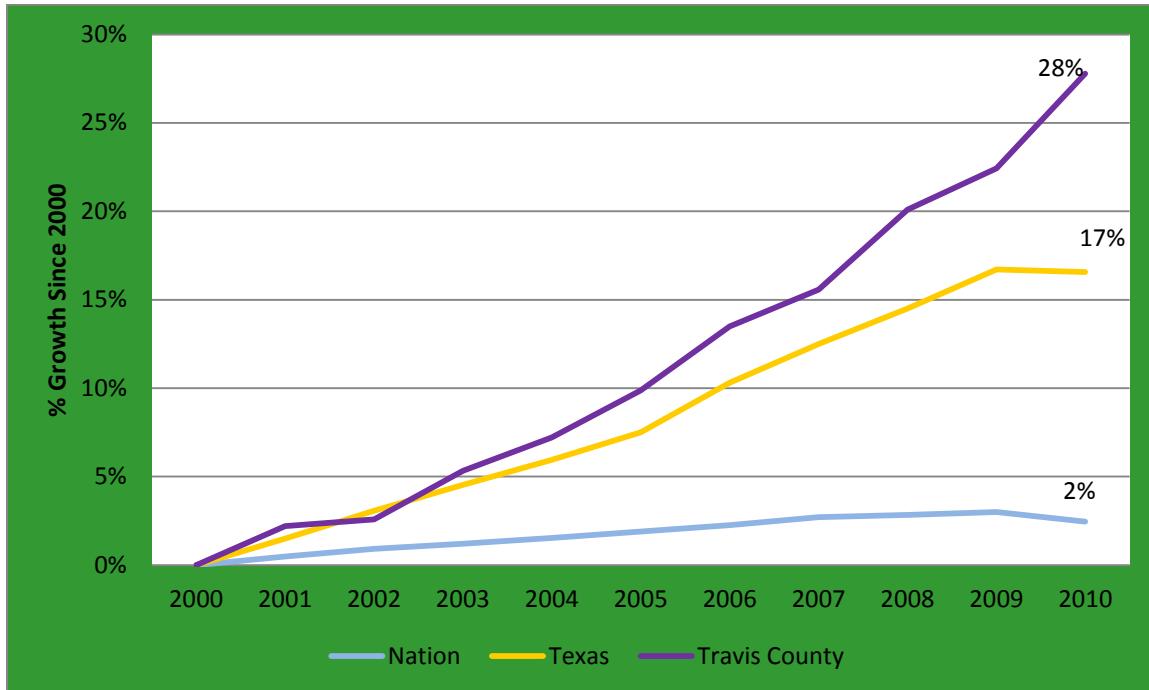
To what extent has the Travis County child population changed?



Child care in Travis County has changed over time, but the child population Travis County Population has changed dramatically. The Travis county population is growing rapidly with regards to youth and poverty population. Texas has the highest rate of population growth in the nation⁵⁶ and the Travis County child population is growing at over 1.5 times the state rate. Figure 9 shows the rate of child population growth in Travis County since 2000.

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Figure 9. Child Population Growth Since 2000 of Children, ages 0 through 18⁵⁷

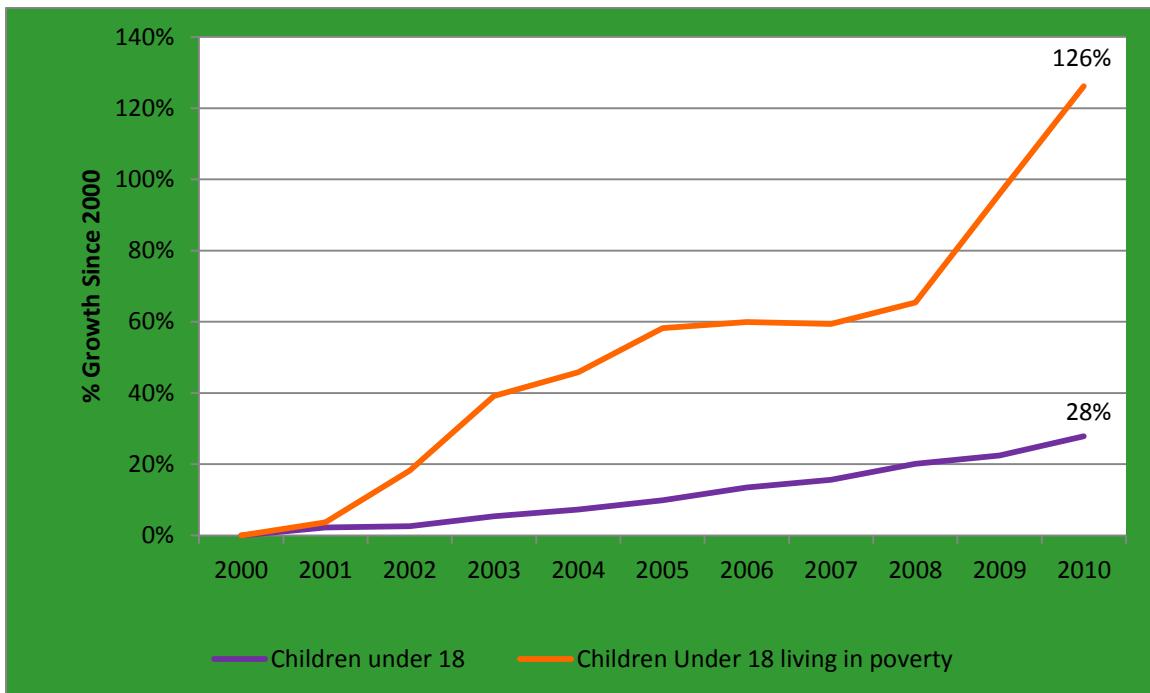


In the last 10 years, the Travis County population of children ages 0 to five years old has grown 29% 58,840 to 75,774, and children ages 0 through 18 years have grown 28% 192,944to 246,559.⁵⁸ Of particular note, however are the rates of change for children living in poverty in Travis County. Figure 5 shows that child poverty has grown an alarming 126% to 62,168 children living in poverty. The increase in the number of children living in poverty is 4.5 times greater than that of the Travis County child population as a whole, which indicates a shifting population and an increased need for resources for families living in poverty. For comparison, national figures for child poverty increased during this same period at 29% and the state child poverty rates increased by 40%.⁵⁹ With the detrimental effects poverty can have on children with respect to their development and academic success, it is imperative to understand the impacts that this dramatic growth in child poverty populations can have on children being ready for school as well as the child care infrastructure which supports both families needing care and child care providers.



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Figure 10. Travis County Population and Poverty Growth Since 2000 of Children Ages 0-18 in Travis County⁶⁰



Infrastructure supports

Travis County has several programs and organizations that work to support child care either directly through offering child care at no, low or subsidized cost to families or indirectly through supporting child care programs in reaching higher quality standards.

What is the infrastructure support to the child care system?

The combination of high child care costs to parents, and low profit margins, with little flexibility to reduce the actual expense of providing child care, makes it important to examine what infrastructure supports are available to help parents and child care providers. For families there are three main programs that offer support, detailed in Table 5.



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Head Start / Early Head Start

One program is Head Start. In Travis County, the federal Head Start program provides a grant to Child, Inc. to provide comprehensive child development services to economically disadvantaged children and families, with a special focus on helping preschoolers develop the early reading and math skills they need to be successful in school. Child, Inc. also administers the Early Head Start program serving children from birth to three years of age. Head Start programs are charged to promote school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to enrolled children and families. A major component of Head Start is parent engagement.⁶¹ In 2010 Head Start served 729 children in Center Based programs, 136 in a home based setting and 1,255 children in a special locally designed option in collaboration with public pre-K programs. Head Start enrollment for 3 and 4 year olds has grown 15% since 2000. The waitlist for Head Start enrollment was 200 in September 2011.

Table 5. Child Care Support Programs for Families: Eligibility and Enrollment, 2010

Program	Eligibility	Income Eligibility	# Served in Travis County	% of Served ⁶²
Early Head Start & Head Start	Children from birth to age five from families with income below the poverty line. Children from families receiving public assistance (TANF or SSI) regardless of family income. Foster children regardless of their foster family's income. Programs may enroll up to 10% of their children from families that do not meet the above requirements. ⁶³	100% of Federal Poverty Level For a family of 4: \$1,863 / month	2,246 total 991 unduplicated ⁶⁴	4%
Texas Child Care Subsidy	Parents who work, attend school, or participate in job training. These parents are eligible for child care assistance if they have children under the age of 13 and: - the parents are receiving or transitioning off public assistance; - the children are receiving or needing protective services; - or the family is classified as low-income. ⁶⁵	85% of State Median Income For a family of 4: \$4,629 / month	8,630 total 5534 children aged 0-5 ⁶⁶ 3,055 average enrollment	23%
Public School Pre-K	Three- and four-year-olds who are: - low income - homeless - limited English proficiency - children of active duty members of the armed forces of the United States - children of members of the armed forces who were injured or killed while serving on active duty - children in foster care. ⁶⁷	185% of Federal Poverty Level For a family of 4 \$3,399 / month.	7,004	29%

Child Care Subsidy

The Texas Workforce Commission administers a child care subsidy program to support parents who work, attend school, or participate in job training. These parents are eligible for child care assistance. The Child Care Subsidy program is administered through the local Workforce Development Boards. In Travis County the Capital Area Workforce Board administers the Child Care Subsidy program through a contract with Teaching & Mentoring Communities (TMC). In 2011, a household with two adults and two children earning \$55,548 or less per year can receive child care subsidy, assuming funds are available. In 2010, the Capital Area Workforce Development Board , Workforce Child Care Services spent over \$14 million to assist an average of 3,055 low income families with child care so that their parents could be employed. In 2010, 8,630 children spent at least one day in

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subsidized child care in Travis County. This number represents a 53% increase since 2000. There are currently 725 children on the wait list for child care subsidy.⁶⁸

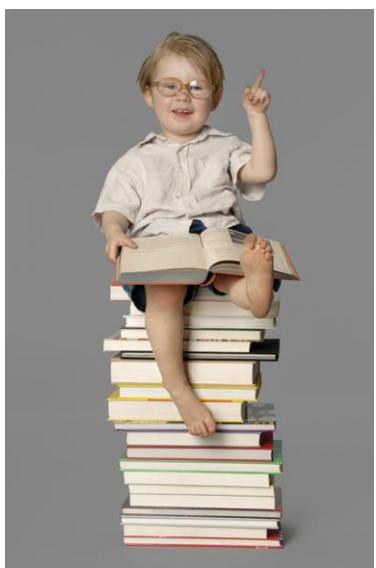
Each legislative session, Texas Workforce Commission reports on the efficacy of the child care subsidy program. Child care subsidies provide a successful work support to low income Texas families. In 2011, The Texas Workforce Commission reported that 78% of unemployed parents found employment within 12 months after receiving child care assistance, and 84% of parents maintained employment 12 months after receiving child care and experienced an average quarterly wage gain of 11 to 15 percent.⁶⁹

Despite its apparent success, the child care subsidy program also has its critics. The state pays child care providers a fraction of what child care providers would receive from parents who pay unsubsidized tuition. The current maximum reimbursement rates for child care providers in Travis County are 78% of the median tuition cost, and 68% of high tuition cost.⁷⁰ By accepting a child through the subsidy program a center could lose as much as \$2,749 a year per child in tuition they could have brought in with a non-subsidy child (See Table 6).

Table 6. Annual Difference Between Maximum Child Care Subsidy Reimbursement Rates and Child Care Tuition in Travis County, 2010⁷¹

Child Category	Annual Difference
Infant	\$1,509
Toddler	\$2,744
Preschool	\$2,749
School aged	\$2,152

In the month of July 2011, Travis County Child Care providers lost as much as \$763,950⁷² based on actual enrollment in the subsidy system. In essence, local child care programs are “donating” their potential revenue in order to enroll low-income children on child care subsidy. This silent supporter of low income child care comes at a cost of as much as \$7.8 million dollars a year in Travis County.⁷³



Public Pre-Kindergarten

Another program that offers low-income families access to early childhood services is the Texas school public pre-Kindergarten program. Texas state school funding provides half-day pre-kindergarten programs in districts that have 15 or more four-year-olds who meet any listed in Table 5. School districts may choose to expand to a full day program, but would have to find additional funding to do so. Pre-Kindergarten programs are designed to help at-risk preschoolers (low income, homeless, or limited English proficiency) develop the skills they need to be successful when they reach kindergarten. Emphasis is on language development, pre-reading and mathematics, and social skills.⁷⁴ Travis County area school districts served 7,004 students in Pre-K in 2010, an 87% increase from 2000.⁷⁵ There is no waitlist for public pre-K.

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Comparisons of the enrollment of the different kinds of early child care and educational programs between 2000 and 2010 are shown in Figure 11. Data are not available for all the intervening years, but the trend lines in Figure 10 show a clear increase in enrollment for Pre-K and subsidized child care.

Figure 11. Number of children served by public early care and education programs⁷⁶

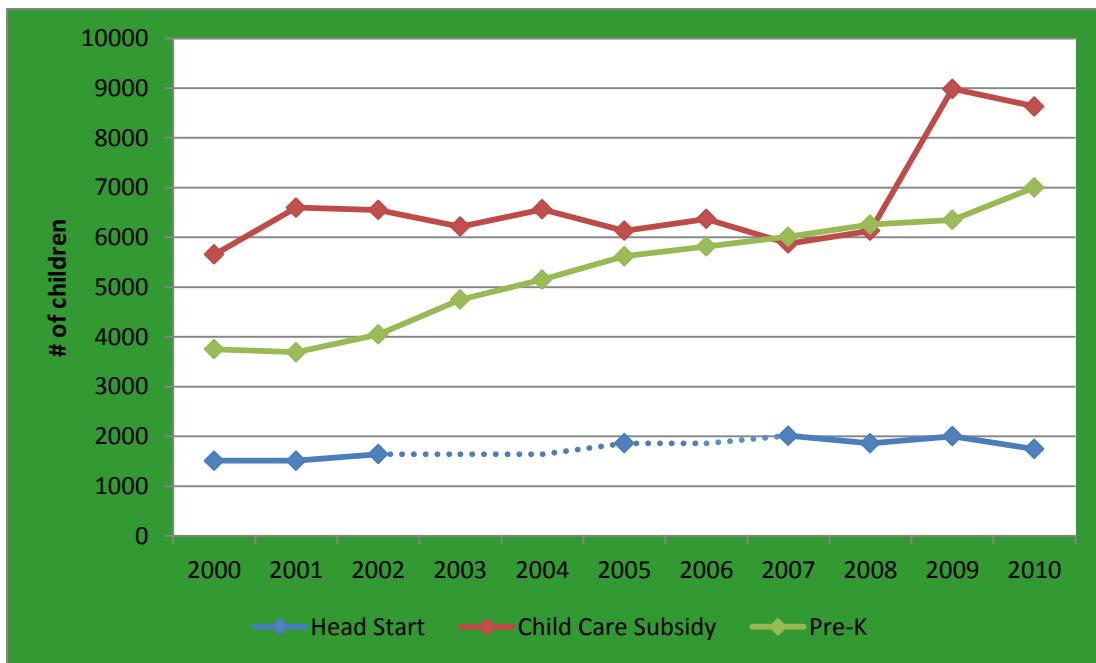


Table 7 details the number of children served in Head Start, state child care subsidy and Pre-K. Each of these programs have increased overall enrollment from 2000 to 2010, although they have not kept pace with dramatic increase in child poverty in Travis County. Combined, these programs served 10,922 children in 2000, or about 100% of the total number of children 5 and under in poverty. In 2010 they served 16,528, or 68%, of the number of children ages 0 to 5 years living in poverty.

Table 7. Travis County Enrollment in Child Care and Education Services with Growth Rates as Compared to Child Poverty 5 and Under, 2000-2010⁷⁷

	Head Start Services	Child Care Subsidy	Public Pre-K	Unduplicated Total Enrollment	Children 5 and Under in Poverty
2000	1512	5,657	3753	10922	10762
2010	1746	8,633	7004	16,628	24316
Growth Rate	15%	53%	87%	52%	126%

It is important to keep in mind that these services numbers primarily represent 3-5 year olds (Head Start and Pre-K), and gaps in Infant and Toddler services are expected to be even larger, when considering the numbers of children 0-2 that are currently served in any type of support system. Early Head Start served 190 children aged 0-2 in 2010⁷⁸, and 21% of child care subsidy or approximately 1,812 children aged 0-2 were served by child care subsidies in 2010.⁷⁹

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City of Austin and Travis County

Both the City of Austin and Travis County Health and Human Services allocate funding to help support child care subsidies in Travis County. City and county funding is used to help draw down Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) federal child care funding that supports the child care subsidy system. Annually over \$330,000 from the City of Austin and over \$220,000 from Travis County help Travis county meet the matching funding requirements need to support the program. In addition City and County funding also helps support Child, Inc. meet federal requirements that local communities provide a portion of funding for the Head Start Program and Early Head Start the combined total investment from City / County funding was approximately \$600,000 in 2010. The City of Austin also has funding set aside for child care services to help provide bridge funding for families in crisis who need child care immediately. Funding from the City and County was also used in initiatives to improve child care quality in Travis County. In total the City of Austin Budgeted \$1.99 million dollars in 2010-2011 to provide training and technical assistance to child care program providers and to provide early education and care services so that eligible families can access quality child care services.⁸⁰Travis County invests an additional \$200,000 to improve child care quality through training, scholarships for teacher and wage supplements.

Success by Six

Success by Six invests in programs to help improve child care quality across Travis County as well as target children who are not part of the formal child care system. Programs include:

- Home visits to vulnerable families to improve basic parenting skills.
- Supplements to non-profit NAEYC accredited child care centers. Centers receive \$2000 per year per low-income child eligible.
- On-site mental health consultation focused on children, parents, and early childhood teachers for child care centers serving vulnerable children and families.⁸¹



Workforce Quality Initiatives

In 2010, Workforce Solutions funded over \$1.45 million in quality improvement initiatives including programs that are tied to funding provided by the City, County and Success By 6. Quality initiatives include:

- Resources, materials, and equipment to child care providers working to improve program quality
- College Scholarships and books to child care providers seeking degrees
- Child Care provider training
- Evidence based child care director training
- Mentors to assist child care staff in meeting quality standards
- Wage supplements for child care staff with higher levels of education.⁸²

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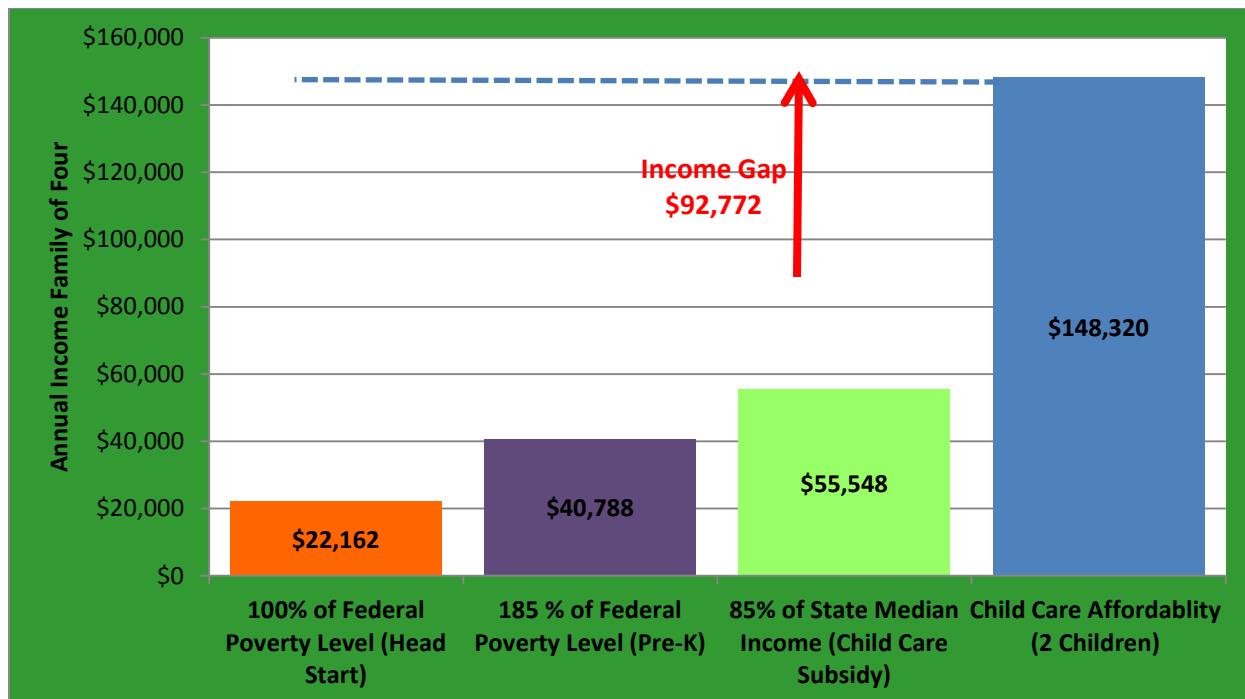
Individual programs and scholarships

A survey of child care providers conducted by E³ Alliance in August 2011 revealed that child care centers provide financial assistance to families, most on a case by case basis, but some programs had formal sliding scale or scholarship available.⁸³ These are managed by the child care programs themselves. There are also community programs such as the Salvation Army that provide child care vouchers as part of their family support program. The City of Austin also directly funds child care vouchers for families in need, often to help families who have lost current child care subsidy funding.

Do these programs help make child care more affordable?

Despite these support programs, which seek to bridge the gap between what child care costs and what families can afford, the cost of child care is not affordable for many families. As Table 4 outlines, families above 85% of the State Median Income (the highest income eligibility level for child care assistance) have very limited access to formal child care assistance programs, unless they also represent a special population (military family, child from the foster care system, limited English proficient, child with a disability). There is a gap in where assistance with child care ends and affordable care begins (Figure 11). This gap is surprisingly large, exceeding \$92,000 a year for a family of four. Parents are often left to make a difficult choice between cheaper, unregulated, often inadequate child care, on the one hand, and leaving the workforce, on the other hand.

Figure 11. Income Gap in Child Care Assistance Eligibility and Affordability of Child Care in Travis County, 2010.



Conclusion

What are the answers?

Travis County does not have enough capacity to serve children needing child care. Gaps in care exist for children with all parents in the workforce, children regardless of parental employment, and groups of children at different income levels accessing child care supports.

Travis County does not have child care that is affordable. With the highest child care rates in Texas, the median price of child care is unaffordable to most families.

The numerous programs focusing on improving child care quality, have kept quality program an option for Travis County parents, but it is only an option for about 1 in 5 children needing care.

Travis County appears to have child care programs located in most areas of high need, and available through public transportation, but there are still areas of the County where access to child care could be improved.

Programs that support poor and working families have not kept pace with the increase in demand for services based on the changes in our population as a whole. Population growth in the County, especially child poverty growth rates have out distanced the enrollment in child care and early education programs.

What are the questions?

If there are estimated 18,000-28,000 children needing child care, and they are not currently in our known child care system, where are the children? Are these children arriving to school ready? If not, how can the community reach these children and help ensure they are getting needed services?

Is the quality of our current system of child care high enough quality to prepare children for school and life-long learning?

Are there ways to improve the current infrastructure supports so they provide more comprehensive services to children and families?

How can Travis County services keep up with population growth?

What are the next steps?

Planning bodies and service providers like The Early Childhood Council, Success By 6, Travis County Health and Human Services, City of Austin, E³ Alliance, Workforce Solutions, Child, Inc., local area school districts, and many others all need objective data to be able to select appropriate strategies to address community needs. Using data and research can help identify the critical success factors needed to address the community issues and leverage community support in order to achieve goals.

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