

August 1, 2016

City of Austin City Council Members
Austin City Hall
Austin, TX 78702

Dear City Council Member Houston ,

As you continue your hard work on crafting and approving a fiscally responsible City of Austin budget this year, the Leadership Team of the School Readiness Action Plan for Austin/Travis asks you to keep the needs of young children and their families at the top of your mind as you make difficult decisions.

Investments in young children generate enormous ROIs which are realized as early as the first year of service and extend for decades. The multiple, coordinated non-profit partners in Austin delivering research-based early childhood services can back up the investment case with strong data which is linked and leveraged across agencies. We are accountable, efficient, and non-duplicative – and hold ourselves to the highest industry standards.

In 2011, the City of Austin drastically reduced the level of early childhood spending for a number of years. The children who were born in 2011 are now in kindergarten – and according to compelling data from the E3 Alliance, the school readiness levels of these students dropped by over 10 percentage points this year. Furthermore, E3 data shows that school readiness scores predict 3rd grade tests far better than family income or language, so the outlook for this cohort of children is not rosy. In short, city investments in early childhood are a core ingredient in our community's education to workforce pipeline. We are grateful for an increase in COA funding for early childhood in 2015 that is beginning to close the gap left in 2011. The current funding, however, does not begin to meet the growing need in our City. An estimated 15,000 – 20,000 young children are without proven services that would improve their school readiness and increase the chances of their future graduation and employment.

The Leadership Team of the School Readiness Action Plan echoes the call from OneVoice Central Texas for increased COA HHS funding. We ask you to maintain or increase existing COA funding for the Ready Families Collaborative, direct child care, quality initiatives, and Child Inc. Head Start so that services are not de-stabilized. We also ask you to add funding to Workforce Solutions for *child care continuity*, which supports low-income families as they seek employment and/or positive job changes.

We appreciate your service to the community and stand ready to reply to your questions or comments.

Sincerely,

Sue Carpenter on behalf of the

School Readiness Action Plan Leadership Team

School Readiness Action Plan for Austin/Travis County

Leadership Team

*(note: individuals with * by their names recuse themselves from endorsing this letter because their organizations receive COA funding currently and they do not want to create an appearance of a conflict, or because they are employed by the City or County.)*

- Aletha Huston, PhD, Professor Emeritus, University of Texas
- Alison Bentley, PhD, UWATX Success By 6
- Ben Kramer*, PhD, KLRU
- Brook Son*, Travis County
- Cathy Doggett, KLE Foundation
- Elwin West, KidsRKids Owner
- Jacquie Porter*, AISD Early Childhood Director
- Jessica Dominguez, UWATX Success By 6
- Judy Willgren, Zero To Three national consultant
- Kyle Holder, Children's Discovery School owner, Chair, COA ECC
- Laura Olson, UWATX Success By 6
- Laura Koenig, E3 Alliance
- Mary Dunlap*, Child Inc. Head Start
- Meg Poag, Literacy Coalition of Central Texas
- Michelle Crawford*, Workforce Solutions
- Raul Alvarez, CAN
- Stacey Shackelford*, Austin Community College
- Susan Millea, Children's Optimal Health
- Suzanne Hershey, consultant, Project HOPES
- Tara Carmean*, Travis County
- Tonda Brown, Manor ISD Early Childhood Director