

Prepared for the Governor's Task Force on Child Care

What Texas Families Experience

Research Findings on Child Care in Texas

Based on surveys of 975 parents, 286 providers, and 138 employers;
a statewide poll of 702 registered voters;
and 11 focus groups across 5 Texas cities

What We're Asking This Task Force to Consider

A

Enable Parents to Choose What They Need, When They Need It

Child care needs change as children grow — from infancy through toddlerhood into pre-K. The system should expand options available at every stage, not constrain them.

This means structural cost reduction so more families can access quality care, and enabling regulation that doesn't arbitrarily eliminate options for working families.

B

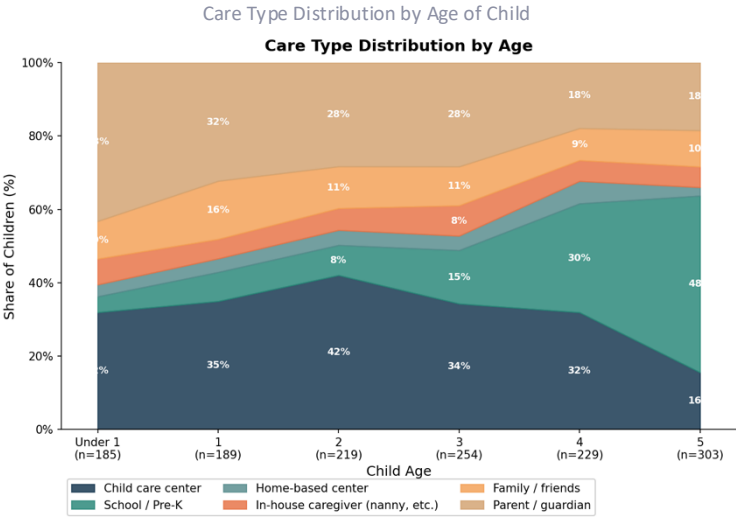
Unify the Purpose of State Spending on Child Care

Five state agencies currently spend on and regulate child care — each with a different answer to the question: what is child care for?

This task force can recommend a governance framework that aligns state investment around a single, accountable mission — and ensures someone is responsible for whether the system works for Texas families.

Parents' Needs Change — The System Doesn't

At Birth <i>Parents want it all</i>	Ages 1–3 <i>The hardest years</i>	Age 5 <i>School absorbs pressure</i>
<p>Curriculum 50%</p> <p>Staff quality 48%</p> <p>Safety 45%</p> <p>Price 45%</p> <p><i>All within 5 points. Parents haven't been sorted by the market.</i></p>	<p>Staff quality 48 → 67%</p> <p>Price peaks at 3 42%</p> <p>Difficulty peaks 53%</p> <p>Sacrifice quality 50%+</p> <p><i>The acute pressure point in the lifecycle.</i></p>	<p>Difficulty drops to 39%</p> <p>School becomes dominant</p> <p>Career damage already done</p>



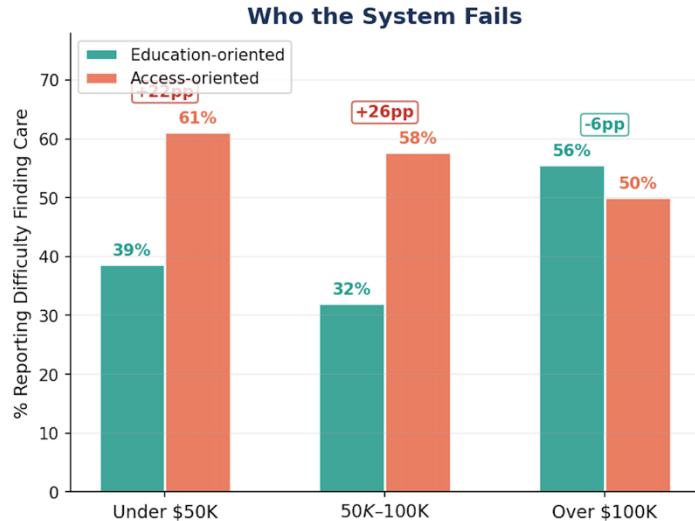
22% of families pay more than they say they can afford—at both ends of the income spectrum. Whether a family needs schedule flexibility or is prioritizing educational quality, cost is a shared barrier. Structural cost reduction expands options for every family type.

“We make too much to qualify for assistance, but child care is still a major burden.”

— Parent, focus group

Source: Texas 2036 survey of 975 parents; 11 focus groups across 5 Texas cities (Feb. 2026)

What Parents Say vs. What Parents Can Get



Access-oriented parents report 22–26 points more difficulty than education-oriented parents at every income level. This suggests that many markets may be more attuned to education-oriented demand for lower or middle class incomes (though by no means perfect) — for everyone else, it isn't built for what they need or want.

The Voter Signal

89% of Texas voters say early childhood programs are important to the state's future

56% prefer an educational mission for public dollars vs.

38% workforce

Parents should tell us what the market needs to deliver. Voters should tell us what public dollars should accomplish. The current system clearly neither answers nor implements either question.

Source: Texas 2036 survey (N=589 stated preferences; N=931 revealed reasons); statewide poll of 702 registered voters

A System Not Designed Around Families

TWC

Measures: Children served per day

HHSC

Measures: Inspections and violations

TEA

Measures: Kindergarten readiness scores

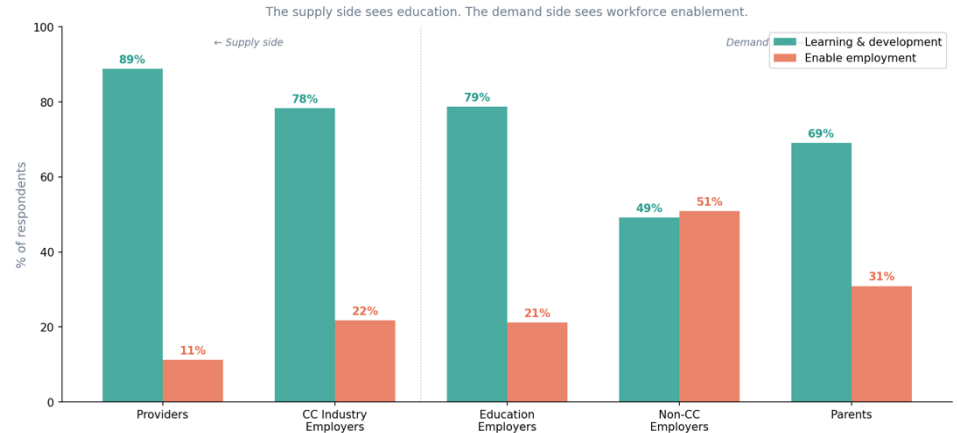
DFPS

Measures: Investigations completed

Comptroller

Measures: Tax exemptions processed

Nobody measures whether the system works for families.



Source: Texas 2036 State of Child Care Survey | "Purpose of Care" question across all respondent types

Governance reform addresses both challenges:

Rec. A — Simplified provider administration reduces compliance cost, freeing providers to meet diverse family needs.

Rec. B — Unified governance creates accountability for a single state mission and aligns fragmented spending streams.

Source: Texas 2036 State of Child Care Survey; Strategic Plan Review (provider responses)

Cost Drivers This Task Force Can Address

59%

of parents cite cost as their #1 barrier to finding affordable care — ahead of quality, availability, and hours.

22%

of families pay more each month than they say they can afford — at both ends of the income spectrum.

Three structural reasons why:

1

The Workforce Crisis

Staff leave for retail jobs paying \$15+/hr with benefits. This is the binding constraint on both quality and access.

2

Regulatory Compliance

Overlapping agency requirements create compliance costs that don't measurably improve safety — passed to parents.

3

The Insurance–Regulation Link

Enforcement patterns influence liability premiums, raising what insurers charge — and what families pay.

Addressing these structural cost drivers expands access and reduces what families pay — without relying solely on new state spending.

Source: 11 focus groups; Texas 2036 regulatory corpus analysis; Low-Enrollment Paradox analysis (n=228 providers, n=592 parents)

The Opportunity for This Task Force

1

Unify – and state clearly -- the mission.

Texas families interact with a system that has many agencies and no single definition of success. This task force can recommend a governance framework where someone is responsible for whether the system works for families — and for the state’s mission.

2

Focus on cost drivers that produce real savings.

Rather than asking only “how do we pay for expensive care,” ask “what makes care expensive, and which of those drivers can we address structurally?”

Both TWC and HHSC enter Sunset review this cycle, and the Legislature is in session. The window for foundational reform is open.

Texas 2036 looks forward to supporting this task force’s work with continued research and analysis.