

Testimony for Texas Early Learning Council, March 30, 2012

From: AVANCE, Inc., 118 N. Medina St., San Antonio, TX 78207

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"Improving the School Readiness of Children and Impacting Families through Partnerships with Independent School Districts, Higher Educational Research Institutions/departments and Community-based Organizations"

AVANCE (ah-vahn-ceh), a leading agency in early-childhood education, presented to members of the P-16 Council on Improving the School Readiness of Children and Impacting Families through Partnerships with Community-based Organizations. This testimony expands upon that presentation by encouraging local ISD's and higher institutions to assist with helping track and implement research to validate the effectiveness of early learning intervention programs.

Richard J. Noriega, President & CEO of AVANCE National and Dr. Glendelia Zavala, Chief Program Officer, along with Sofia Casini, Executive Director of AVANCE-Austin, addressed the P-16 Council about the importance of expanding their initiative "Cradle to Career" education strategy. The P-16 Council is responsible for ensuring that long-range plans and educational programs for the State of Texas complement the functioning of the entire system of public education, extending from early childhood education through postgraduate study.

AVANCE strongly believes that Texas higher education system needs to expand and embrace the realization that a child's ability to learn starts at birth and therefore, the education strategy should include programs and research focusing on parents with children birth to 3 years of age. National research has proven that investment in early learning programs, especially those with a focus on the parent, has a high yield of return. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce in its 2010 ICW report, "Why Business Should Support Early Childhood Education" states that for every dollar invested today, savings range from \$2.50 to as much as \$17 in the years ahead. The Pew Research Center report on "Childhood Poverty Among Hispanics" states that poverty rates for Latino children are on the rise and they are the largest and poorest ethnic group. According to the report, "This marks the first time in U.S. history that the single largest group of poor children is not white."

To stop this cycle of poverty AVANCE, for nearly 40 years, has served predominately low-income Hispanic families with its signature Parent-Child Education Program (PCEP) for parents with children birth to 3 years of age. AVANCE graduates, tracked in Dallas and El Paso through the local ISDs, consistently outperform their peers in reading, math, and writing. The AVANCE model contributes to the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development of children 0 to 3 resulting in school-preparedness, less remedial classes and higher graduation rates. Our unique program focuses on the parent and provides them the tools and resources they need to become effective role models in their child's lives.

AVANCE is honored to have this opportunity to provide testimony to the Texas Early Learning Council. With over 8 Chapter sites across the state serving over 20,000 families annually, AVANCE encourages partnerships and collaborations with higher institutions to implement innovative research that documents the effectiveness of early learning programs. The research data collected will prove invaluable in helping expand and fund early childhood programs across the state. AVANCE stands ready to assist in any way we can to further the initiatives of the Texas Early Learning Council, especially those focusing on the parent.

My name is Ariel Gonzalez, I am the Assistant Director at Little Dudes Learning Centers. Our three centers serve 200 low income children. Approximately 95% of those children receive subsidized child care from the Texas Workforce Commission. All three of our locations are Four Star Texas Rising Star Providers & Texas School Ready. We have been educating young children for over 50 years.

From our experience, having Teachers who obtain a CDA credential has had the most impact on improving the educational environment. While we acknowledge the importance of teacher training & education, we believe the training that is currently available is generally only "scratches the surface" of the topics. Having more in depth trainings that address extremely challenging behaviors, and how to prevent those behaviors rather than reacting to those behaviors would greatly benefit teachers.

A large number of parents routinely use social media websites.

Utilizing social media to outreach to parents about early care & education issues & services would greatly impact parents awareness of the issues & services pertaining to early care & education.

Another way to raise parent awareness ~~is through~~ is through Public Service Announcements. Using television or radio could effectively allow ~~Early Care & Education~~ Early Care & Education professionals to inform parents of early childhood education issues and services.

Thank you for considering these points and on behalf of my Director and our Child Care centers, I would like to express our appreciation for all that you do to improve quality childhood education!

Ariel Gonzalez: Assistant Director
Patricia Smith: Director/Owner

Little Dudes Learning Centers, Inc.



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1. What are the professional needs of the Texas early care and education workforce?

Affordable, ongoing professional training that enhances the knowledge of appropriate child development and teaching techniques is indispensable to the early care and education workforce. Since a great number of early educators, specifically those serving impoverished children, are under financial constraints, training must be offered at a reasonable rate. As early childhood legislation and research are continually developing, training must be offered in a timely, frequent manner. Targeted training that addresses topics such as pre-literacy, numeracy and socialization will provide the greatest leverage for making a difference for the children served by the early education workforce. Having received appropriate, adequate training, teachers are much more likely to care for and educate Texas' children with quality.

2. How can higher education support the early care and education workforce?

Educational First Steps (EFS) affirms that the pursuit of higher education is beneficial for child care center teachers and directors. For this reason, EFS subsidizes Child Development Associate Certificate courses as well as courses applying toward Associates Degrees for its assisted child care center teachers and directors. EFS supports higher education for those who have the financial means to pursue it, and encourages private/public partnerships that provide funding for teachers who could not otherwise afford higher education.

However, since higher education funding and partnerships do not exist in all areas, there are likely unintended consequences of requiring higher education, the majority of

which will impact child care centers serving economically disadvantaged children. These child care centers are not in a position to pass on costs to parents through tuition increases, nor do they have alternate resources to compensate for the additional costs. Therefore, the centers will either be forced to have less optimal teacher student ratios due to the inability to both pay the teachers their wages and subsidize their education, or they will eventually close due to requirements they are unable to uphold. In either of these cases, children in these environments are ill-served by mandatory higher education requirements for their teachers, even as these teachers should still be encouraged to pursue higher education generally. Additionally, while degreed teachers may benefit personally by having more options for their skills, children in impoverished areas may suffer as some teachers leave the community to work in higher paying climates.

3. What are the best models of outreach to parents on early care and education issues and services?

Parent/guardian involvement is imperative to student success in early childhood programs, creating stronger family ties, encouraging educator/family partnerships and promoting overall student well-being. Parents who interact with their children educationally and partner with their children's teachers are more likely to have successful early intervention outcomes, as well as a more positive early childhood experience overall.

Educational First Steps believes that the most effective outreach to parents occurs within their communities. Therefore, EFS promotes a model of parent/guardian courses that are hosted in neighborhood child care centers and involve hands-on learning for the entire family. Families are provided with a meal and are able to learn about and discuss practical topics such as emerging literacy skills, child engagement and temperaments. EFS also offers city based awareness events, such as Literacy Day, which are held at community venues and facilitate face to face interactions with the parents, guardians and children served by EFS.