children at Risk

PRIORITIES FOR THE 90TH TEXAS LEGISLATURE | 2027

Executive Summary

- **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION:** Invest in high-quality child care and improve coordination, oversight, and access for Texas families.
- **PUBLIC EDUCATION:** Support equitable school funding, stronger attendance supports, effective teachers, and education-to-career pathways.
- **CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH:** Increase access to health care, strengthen maternal health systems, and expand school-based behavioral health services.
- **FOOD ACCESS AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY:** Invest in nutrition assistance programs, strengthen school meals, and improve SNAP education and workforce pathways.
- **OPPORTUNITY YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS:** Develop a statewide strategy to reconnect young people ages 16–24 with education, training, and work.
- **HUMAN TRAFFICKING PREVENTION AND SURVIVOR SUPPORT:** Strengthen protections against exploitation and remove barriers to relief for survivors.

INVEST IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

Early Childhood Education

Policy priority: *Invest in affordable, high-quality early childhood education and strengthen the coordination, oversight, and accountability of Texas child care programs so children are prepared to learn and working families can access reliable care.*

- Increase funding for early childhood education. Build on current investments to fund high-quality early childhood education for children.
- Establishing a unified governance structure for Texas' early childhood system. Strengthen cross-agency coordination, and empower leader to develop a vision and goals for children birth to five to improve access, quality and build consistency and accountability.
- Improve accountability for child care services across Local Workforce Development Boards and their contractors. Establish clear, consistent payment, contracting, and performance expectations for providers, state agencies, and local administrators.
- Simplify application and enrollment for state-supported early childhood education for working parents. Align eligibility rules, processes, and technology across agencies to reduce delays and administrative burdens for families and providers.
- Connect early childhood data systems across state agencies. Build on the Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) created by the Legislature in 2025 to improve coordination, efficiency, and the ability to evaluate outcomes.
- Strengthen LWDB Governance by requiring all Local Workforce Development Board members training on child care oversight.
- Make administrative reviews more transparent. Ensure child care providers disputing regulatory findings receive clear notice of their rights, timely access to evidence, a straightforward submission process, and written decisions.

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Public Education

Policy priority: *Ensure every Texas student has access to a well-funded, high-quality public education, effective attendance supports, strong teachers, and clear pathways to college, training, and careers.*

- Provide adequate, equitable funding to support every public school student.
- Strengthen student attendance policies. Require consistent policies that families can understand, that allow for early identification of attendance challenges, and that facilitate connections to appropriate supports.
- Provide targeted resources to schools with persistently high chronic absenteeism, including technical support for effective attendance interventions.
- Connect K–12 learning to postsecondary education and careers, particularly in high-demand fields such as STEM, oil and gas production, and health care.
- Strengthen and sustain the teacher workforce so every student has access to high-quality instruction.
- Expand apprenticeships, dual credit, and industry-recognized credentials through stronger coordination between education and workforce agencies.

SUPPORT CHILDREN'S HEALTH, WELL-BEING, AND NUTRITION

Health

Policy priority: *Strengthen access to essential health coverage, preventive care, and maternal health services to improve health outcomes for Texas children and families.*

- Protect existing immunization requirements, including those for public school enrollment, and provide campus-level data on exemptions from immunizations.
- Strengthen HHSC staffing and capacity to reduce backlogs in Medicaid and SNAP applications and processing delays.
- Maintain sufficient funding for Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Healthy Texas Women, the Family Planning Program, the Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee, and the Texas AIM (Texas Alliance for Innovation on Mental Health) initiative.
- Strengthen Texas' public health data systems by improving the timely collection, analysis, and annual reporting of maternal morbidity and mortality data to inform responsive, evidence-based policies and interventions that improve maternal health outcomes.

Mental Health

Policy priority: *Expand timely access to mental and behavioral health services in Texas public schools so students can receive the support they need to learn and thrive.*

- Expand access to school-based behavioral health services so more districts and students can participate.
- Establish minimum mental health counselor-to-student staffing ratios in public schools.
- Provide reimbursement for mental health professionals pursuing licensure to strengthen recruitment, improve retention, and expand the mental health workforce.

Food Access

Policy priority: *Reduce food insecurity by investing in nutrition assistance programs, strengthening school meal programs, and improving SNAP Employment & Training (SNAP E&T) to support long-term economic stability for Texas children and families.*

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- Establish a Texas School Food Task Force to strengthen school meal programs, support Texas agriculture, reduce unnecessary administrative burdens, and help schools use existing resources effectively.
- Increase funding for SNAP outreach, Double Up Bucks, school food programs, and the Surplus Agricultural Products Grant.
- Make SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) a pathway to meaningful education, training, and employment by:
    - Aligning Texas participation requirements with the federal baseline of 20 hours per week or 80 hours per month.
    - Recognizing qualifying postsecondary education and valuable credentials as equivalent to SNAP E&T activities.
    - Expanding third-party partnerships through simpler agreements and reimbursement processes for community organizations, colleges, and workforce partners.

PREPARE YOUNG PEOPLE FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Policy priority: *Create a coordinated statewide strategy to reconnect Opportunity Youth and Young Adults ages 16–24 with education, workforce training, and employment, with clear accountability for results.*

- Improve outcomes for Opportunity Youth and Young Adults (OYYA) aged 16–24 and strengthen the Texas workforce.
- Adopt a consistent statewide definition of OYYA to improve planning, and resource allocation.
- Strengthen coordination and accountability across state agencies serving young people. Develop a statewide OYYA strategy, reflected in agency strategic plans and reporting, to coordinate investments and measure progress.
- Establish an OYYA Ombudsman within TWC to lead coordination, identify service gaps and barriers, and report publicly on outcomes.
- Track and report education and employment outcomes for young adults transitioning from state systems.
- Improve transitions between school districts and Local Workforce Development Boards so young people can connect to education, training, and employment.

PREVENT HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND SUPPORT SURVIVORS

Policy priority: *Strengthen protections against human trafficking and child sexual exploitation, remove barriers for survivors seeking relief, and promote pathways to safety and long-term stability.*

- Expand eligibility for orders of nondisclosure to cover additional nonviolent offenses committed while a person was being trafficked and remove barriers to accessing this relief.
- Prohibit massage service providers from advertising on sexually explicit websites.
- Criminalize the distribution of AI-generated child sexual abuse material (CSAM), including its use to groom or sexually extort children.
- Strengthen workforce connections for survivors of human trafficking by establishing designated points of contact at the state and local levels to improve coordination and maximize available programs.

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