

A child is riding a green and white tricycle on a paved surface. The child is wearing a yellow shirt with smiley faces and dark pants. The tricycle has large green wheels and a white frame. The background is a blurred asphalt surface.

Gulf Coast/Houston

# **The State of Early Childhood Education in Texas**

*April 2026 Texas Tour*

children  
atRisk

# Mission Statement

---

CHILDREN AT RISK serves as a catalyst for change to improve the quality of life for children through



Strategic  
Research



Public Policy  
Analysis



Education



Collaboration



Advocacy

# C@R's ECE Team

---



**Mandi Kimball**  
Chief Government Affairs  
Officer



**Kim Kofron**  
Executive Director of Early  
Childhood Education



**Santrice Jones- Hare**  
Director of Strong Start



**Lyn Lucas**  
Associate Director of Early  
Childhood Education



**Martha Gonzales**  
Associate Director of Early  
Learning Quality Network



**Christina Alton**  
Assistant Director of Early  
Learning Quality Network



**Jacob Westjohn**  
Assistant Director of CSME

# Texas Prenatal-to-Three Collaborative



The infographic on the left features a central circular graphic with three segments: a red segment at the top labeled "HEALTHY BEGINNINGS", a teal segment at the bottom left labeled "SUPPORTED FAMILIES", and a dark blue segment at the bottom right labeled "EARLY CARE & EDUCATION". A circular arrow icon is in the center of these segments. Below the infographic are the logos for "children atRisk", "TexProtects", and "TEXANS CARE for CHILDREN". To the right is a photograph of a man in a grey hoodie feeding a baby with a bottle.



Sign up for the  
**Texas PN-3**  
**Newsletter**



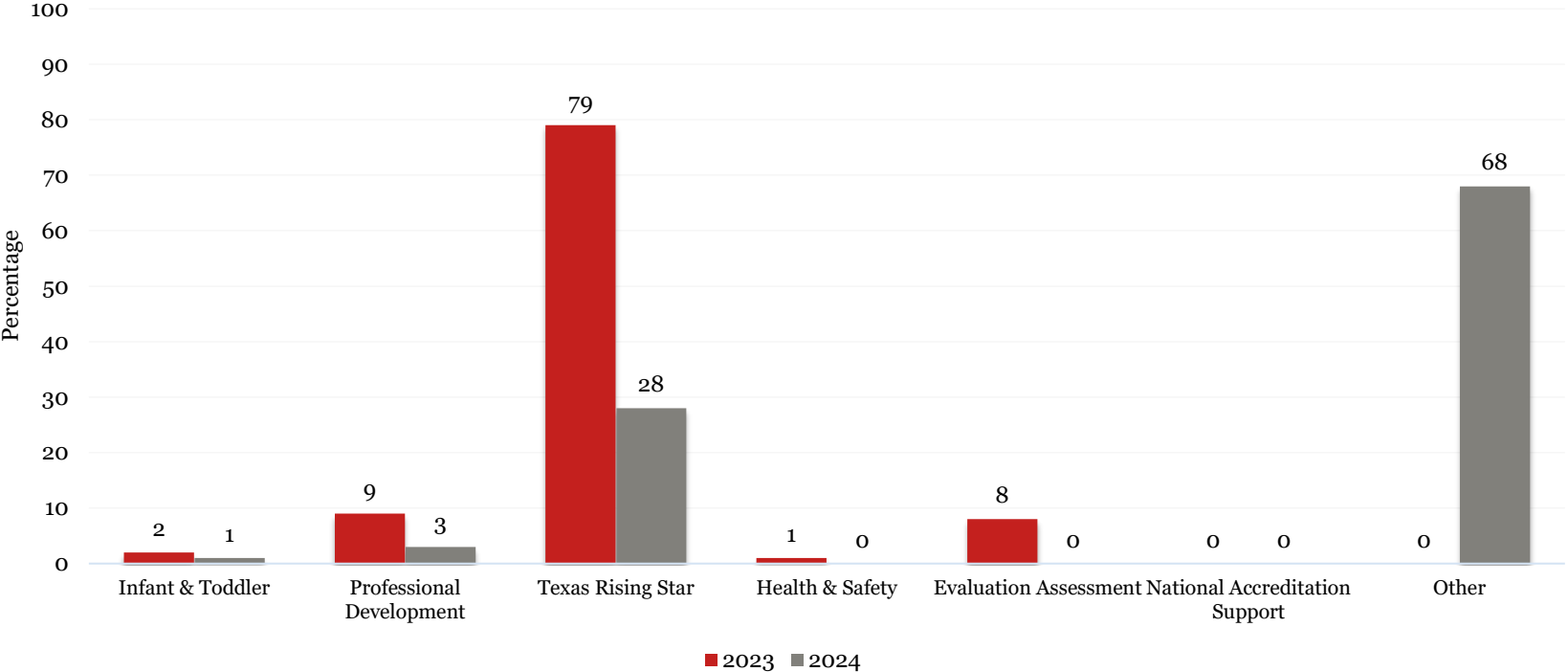
## **Paving the Way to Quality**

---

children **atRisk**

# Investments in Child Care Quality Funds

YEAR OVER YEAR COMPARISON: GULF COAST

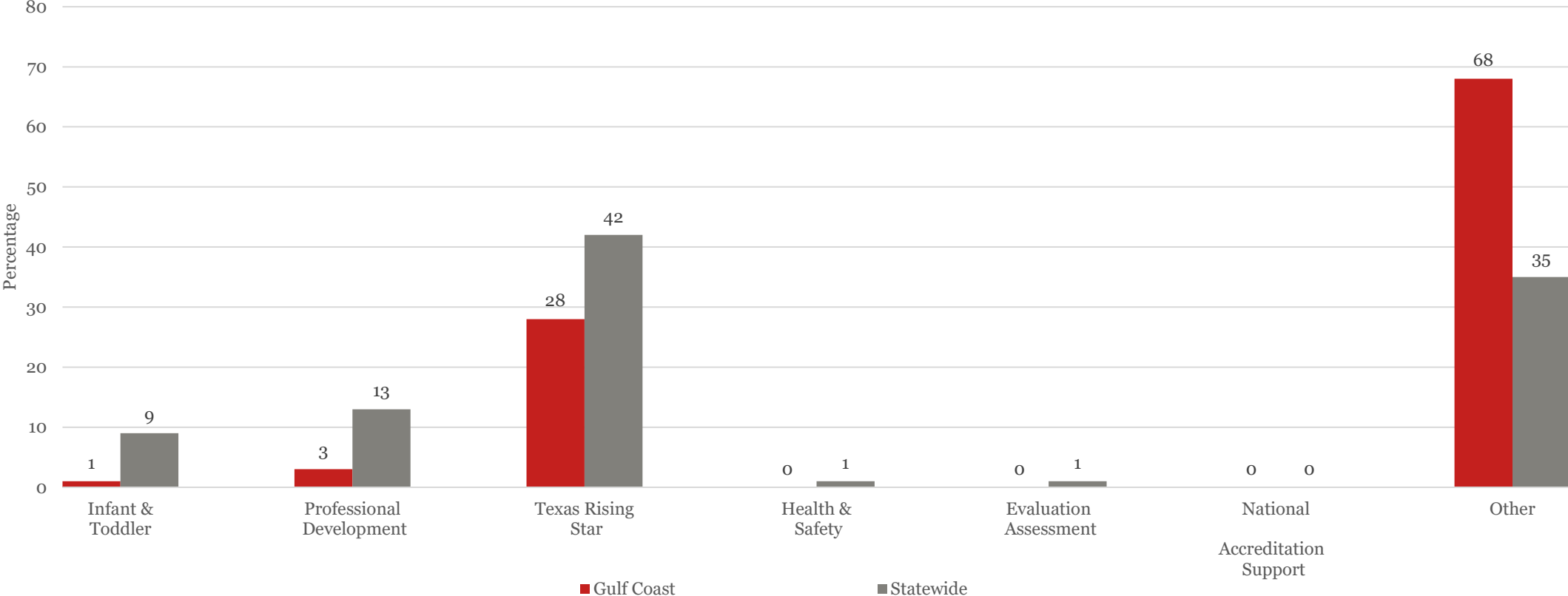


\*In FY24, LWDBs were required to allocate 4% of CCDBG funds following guidance within the Quality Activity and Expenditure Requirements Outlined by TWC. This data details LWDB's FY24 allocations.

# Investments in Child Care Quality Funds

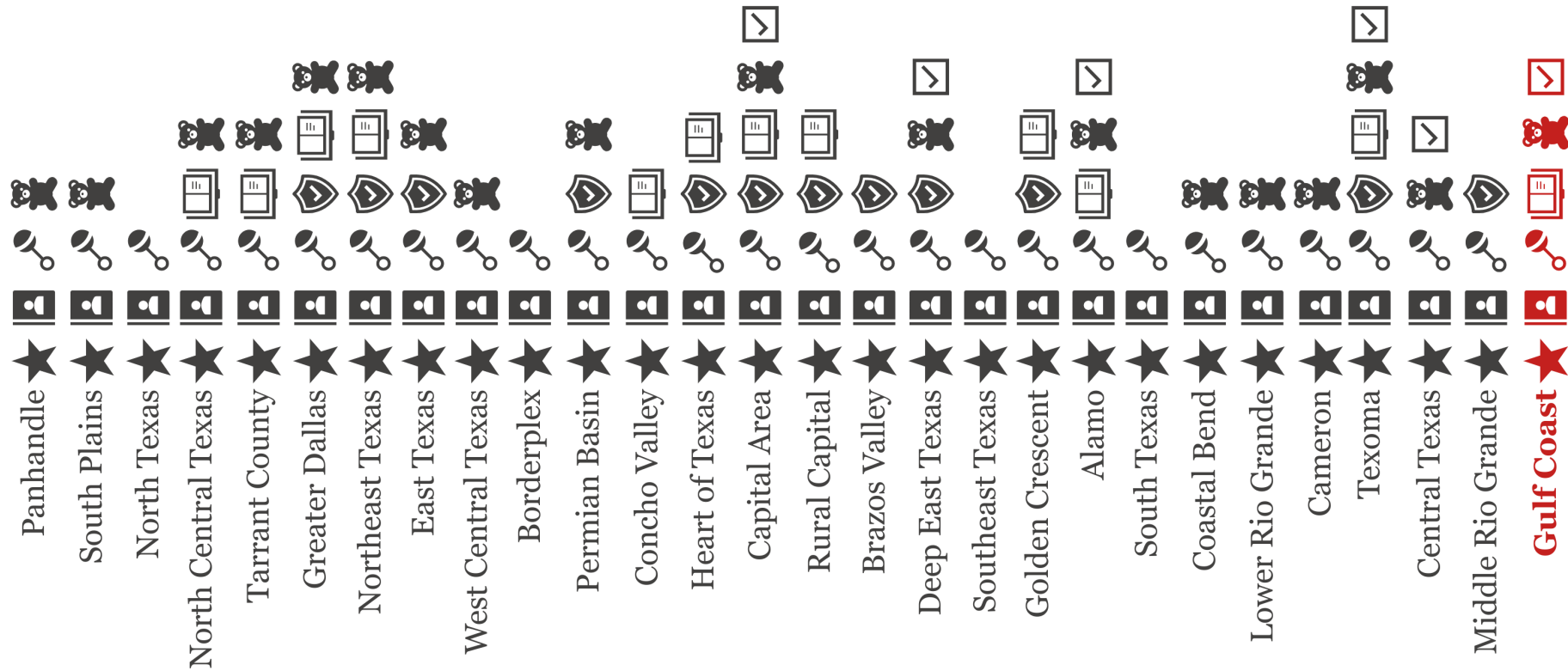


PERCENTAGE OF QUALITY DOLLARS SPENT BY CATEGORY  
LWDB & STATE




# Statewide Spending of Quality Improvement Dollars

★ TRS Supports   
  Professional Development   
  Infants & Toddlers   
  Health & Safety   
  Evaluation & Assessment   
  Other   
  National Accreditation



# Statewide Spending Allocated to TRS Supports

 Equipment, Materials & Resources

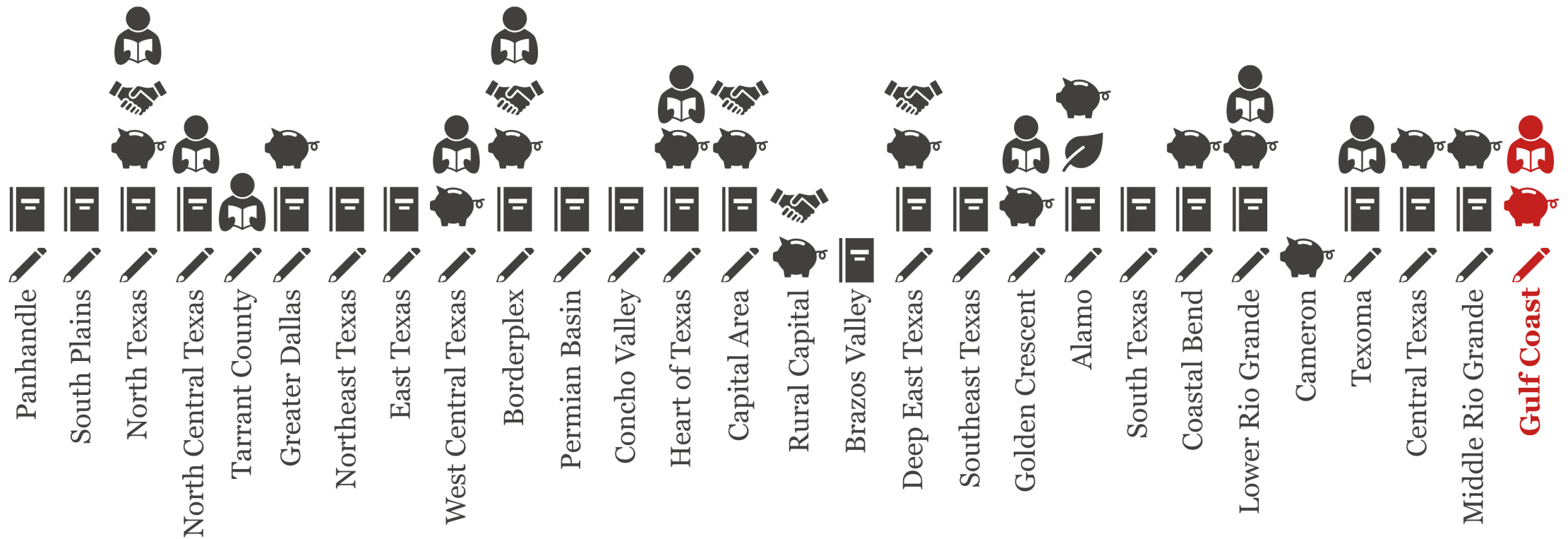
 Curriculum

 Outdoor Learning

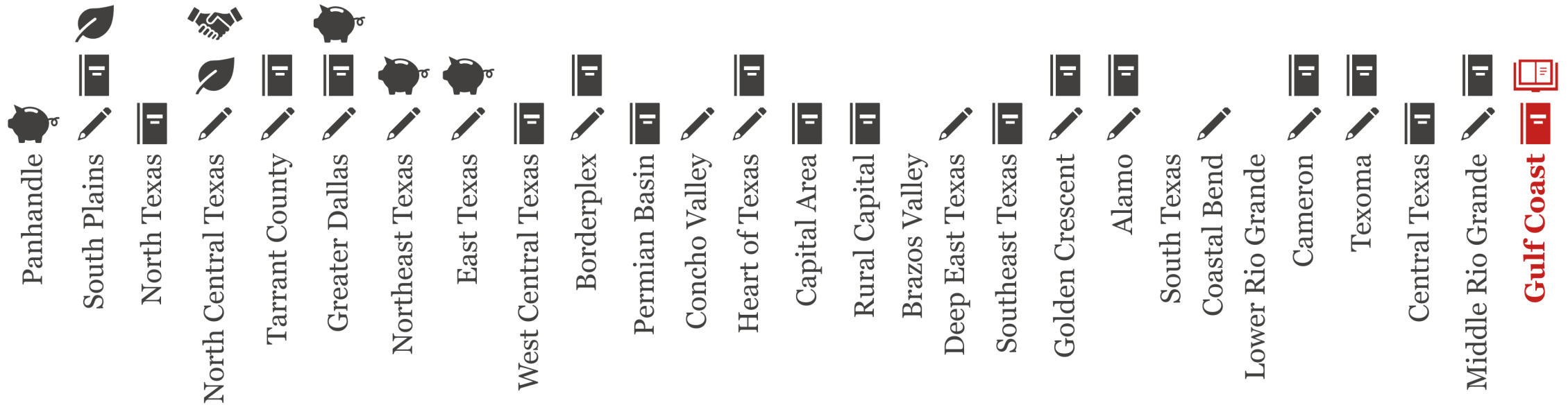
 TRS Mentor Salaries

 Family Engagement

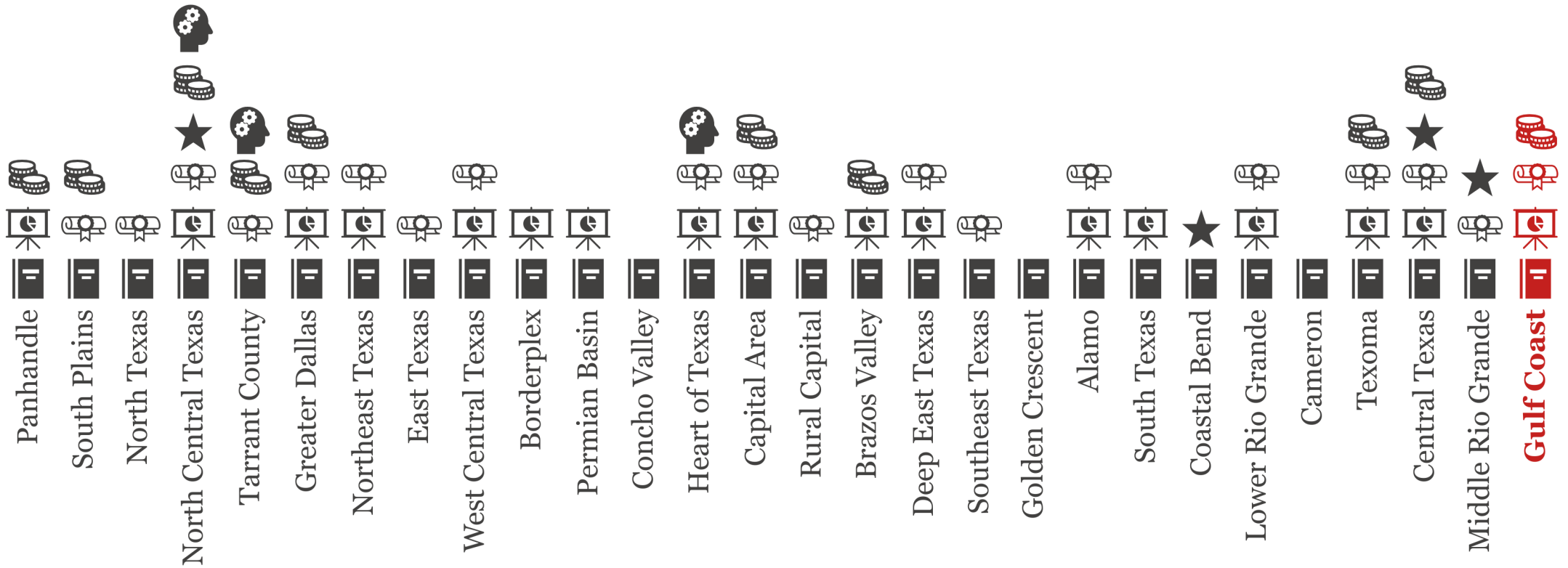
 TECPDS SME



# Statewide Spending Allocated to Infants & Toddlers



# Statewide Spending Allocated to Professional Development



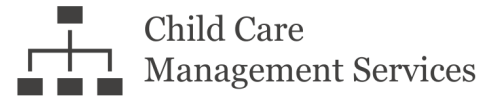
# Statewide Spending Allocated to Other



Wage Supplements



Pre-K Partnerships



Child Care Management Services



Panhandle



South Plains

North Texas



North Central Texas



Tarrant County



Greater Dallas



Northeast Texas



East Texas



West Central Texas

Borderplex



Permian Basin

Concho Valley

Heart of Texas



Capital Area

Rural Capital

Brazos Valley



Deep East Texas

Southeast Texas

Golden Crescent



Alamo

South Texas



Coastal Bend



Lower Rio Grande



Cameron



Texoma



Central Texas

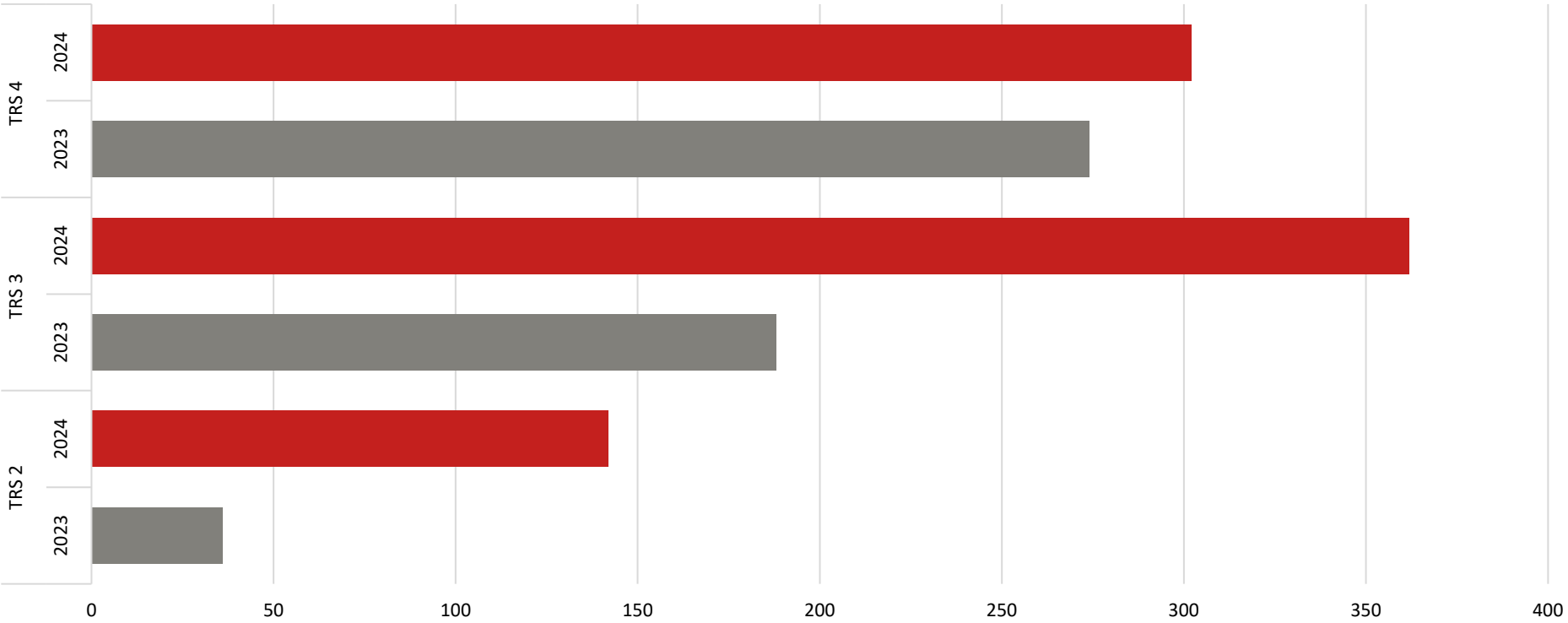
Middle Rio Grande



**Gulf Coast**

# Access to Quality Care

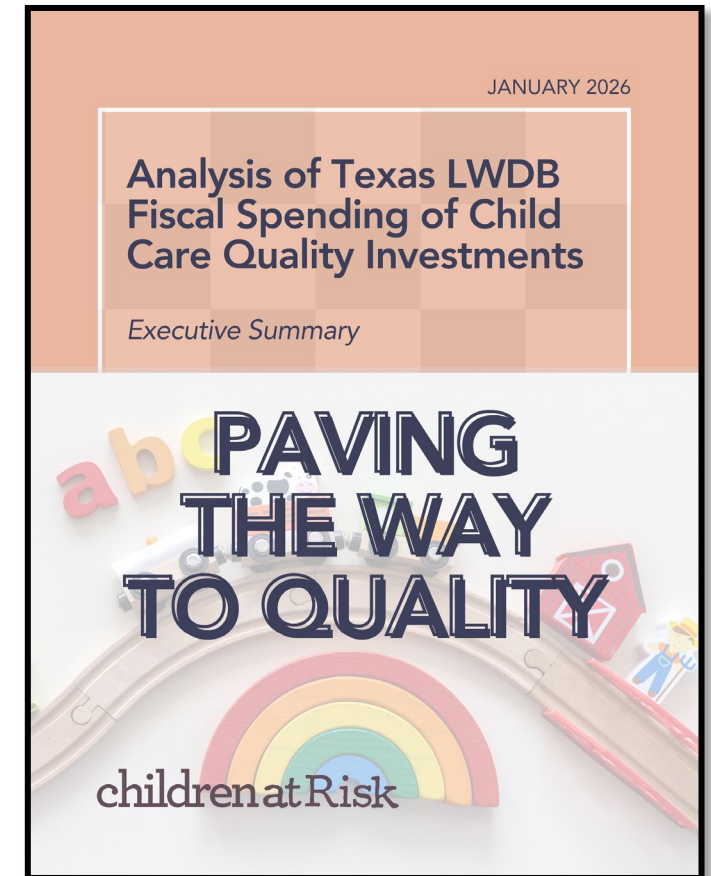
NUMBER OF TRS PROGRAMS BY RATING: GULF COAST



# Paving the Way to Quality

CHILDREN AT RISK has released its second analysis of Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) spending across Texas. Focusing on investments made in the 2024 Board Calendar Year, and noting statewide investment trends prioritizing professional development and training for child care teachers, improvements to infant and toddler classrooms, and staff retention strategies.

***Read this year's report at***  
<https://childrenatrisk.org/paving-the-way-to-quality-2026/>



A child is riding a green and white balance bike on a paved surface. The child is wearing a yellow shirt with smiley faces and dark pants. The bike has large green wheels and a white frame. The background is a blurred asphalt surface.

Gulf Coast/Houston

**What do you think about child care quality in  
your community?**

---

children  
atRisk



## **Child Care Deserts Data**

---

children **atRisk**

# What is a Desert?

---



## Child Care Deserts

Zip codes (US Census ZCTAs) with at least 30 children (ages 0-5) where the demand for child care is three times greater or more than the supply of child care.



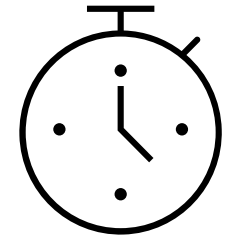
## Subsidized Child Care Deserts

Zip codes with at least 30 low-income children (ages 0-5) where the demand for subsidized child care is three times greater or more than the supply of subsidized child care.



## TRS Rising Star Deserts

Zip codes with at least 30 low-income children (ages 0-5) where the demand for subsidized child care is three times greater or more than the supply of Texas Rising Star-certified child care.



## Chronic Child Care Deserts

Zip codes with at least 30 low-income children (ages 0-5) where the demand for subsidized child care is three times greater or more than the supply of care for that category for **three consecutive years**.

# Child Care Deserts | Overall

## Texas Overall Child Care Deserts

**994,949** ↑

Total Number of Seats

**413** ↓

Overall Desert Zip Codes\*

*\*Out of 1,999 total zip codes in Texas*

## Gulf Coast Overall Child Care Deserts

**304,284** ↑

Total Number of Seats

**43** ↓

Overall Desert Zip Codes\*\*

*\*\*Out of 290 eligible zip codes in Gulf Coast*

# Child Care Deserts | Subsidy

## Texas Subsidy Child Care Deserts

**148,675** ↑

Total Number of Subsidy Seats

**884** ↑

Subsidy Desert Zip Codes\*

*\*Out of 1,999 total zip codes in Texas*

## Gulf Coast Subsidy Child Care Deserts

**35,743** ↑

Number of Subsidy Seats

**169** ↑

Subsidy Desert Zip Codes\*\*

*\*\*Out of 290 eligible zip codes in Gulf Coast*

# Child Care Deserts | Texas Rising Star (TRS)

## Texas TRS Child Care Deserts

**132,064** ↑

Total Number of TRS Seats

**938** ↑

TRS Desert Zip Codes\*

*\*Out of 1,999 total zip codes in Texas*

## Gulf Coast TRS Child Care Deserts

**31,130** ↑

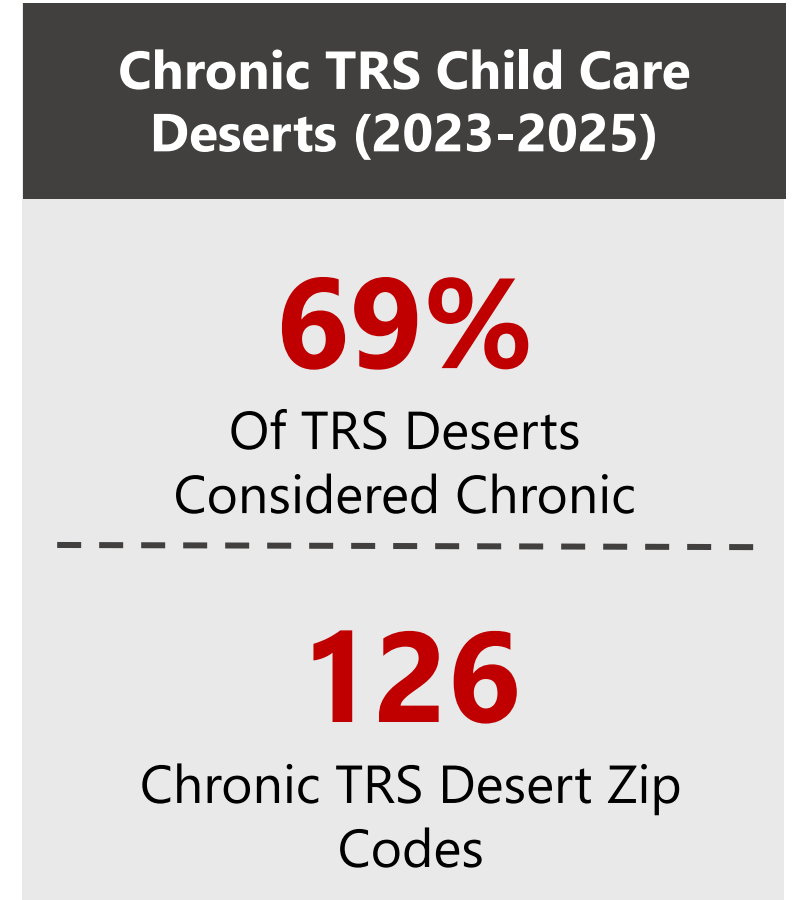
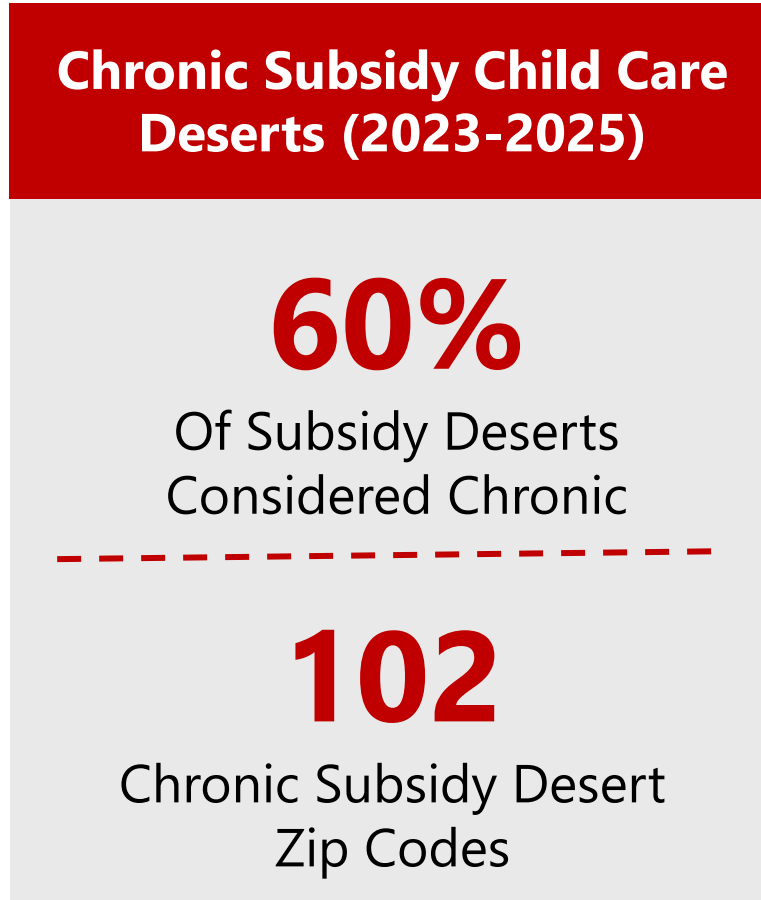
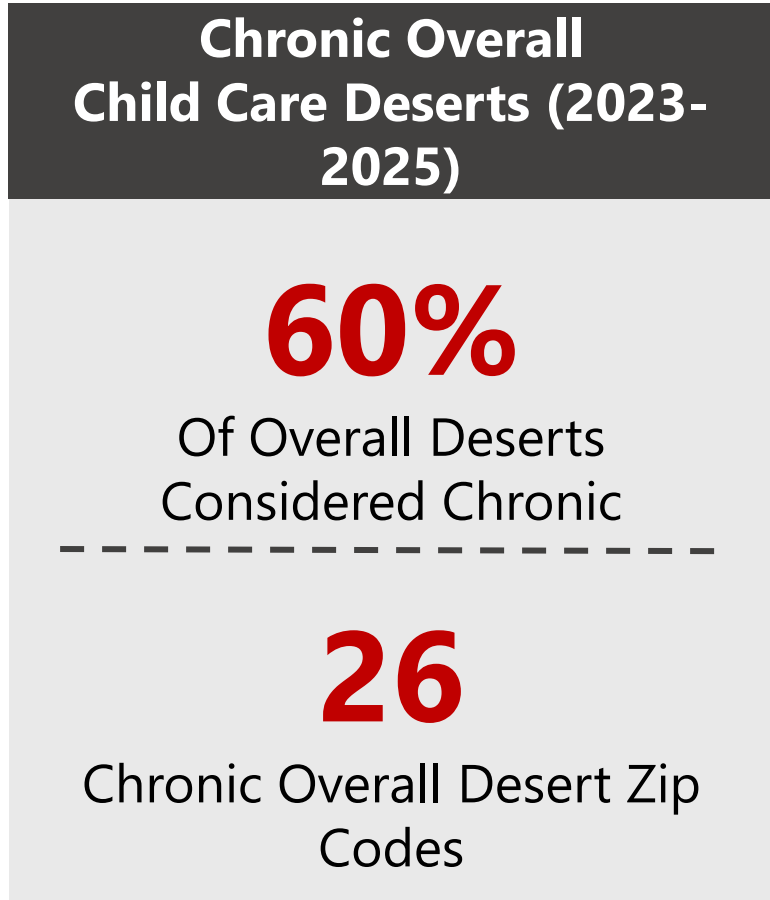
Number of TRS Seats

**182** ↑

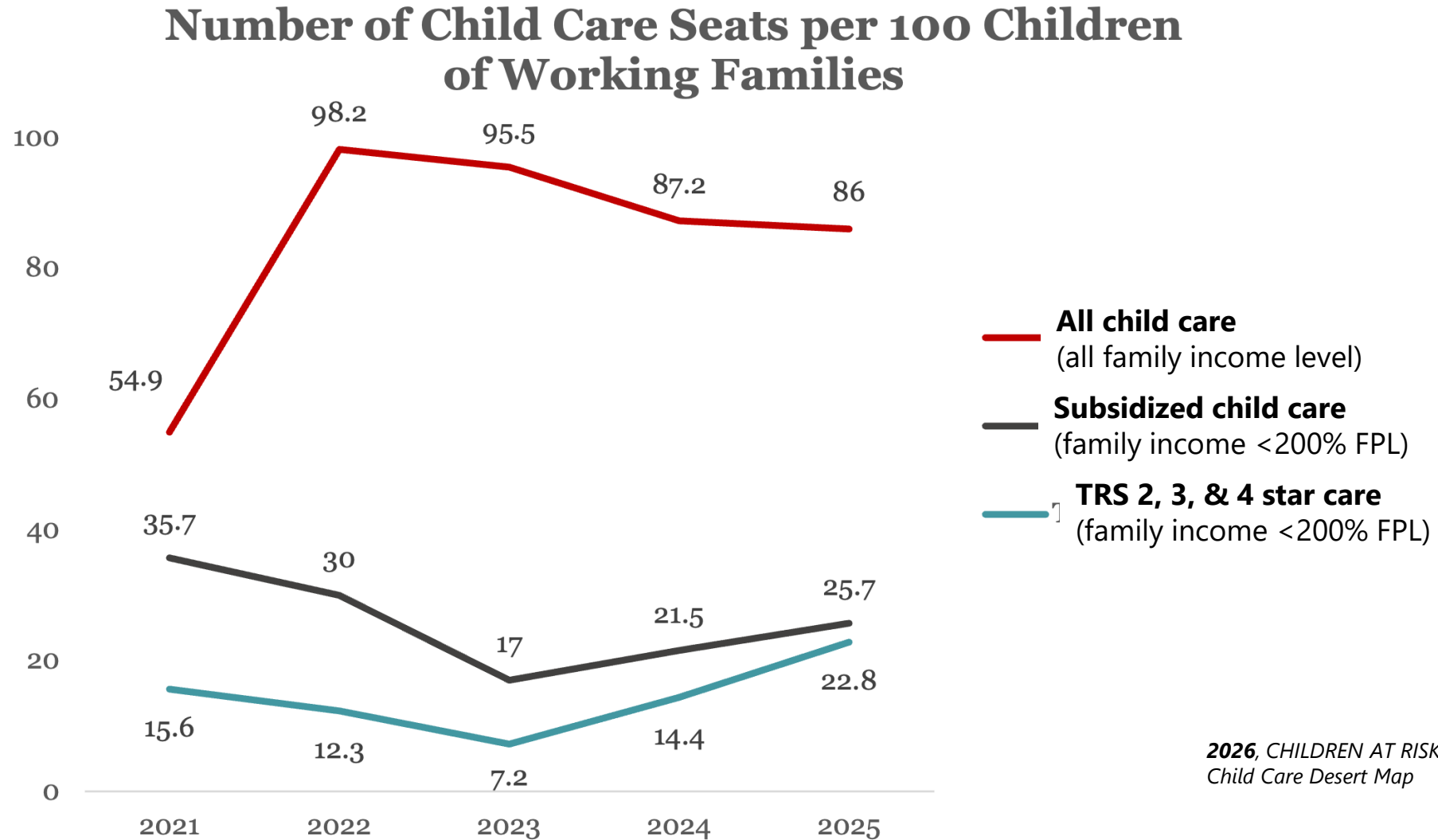
TRS Desert Zip Codes\*\*

*\*\*Out of 290 eligible zip codes in Gulf Coast*

# Chronic Child Care Deserts | Gulf Coast

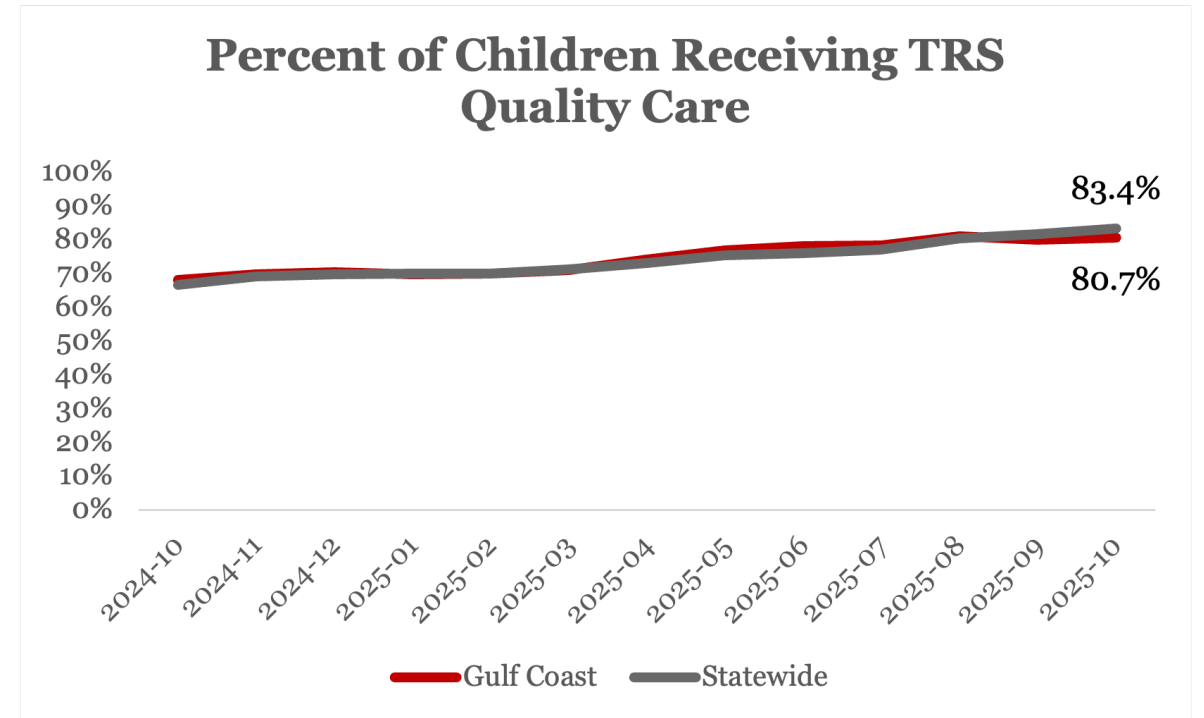
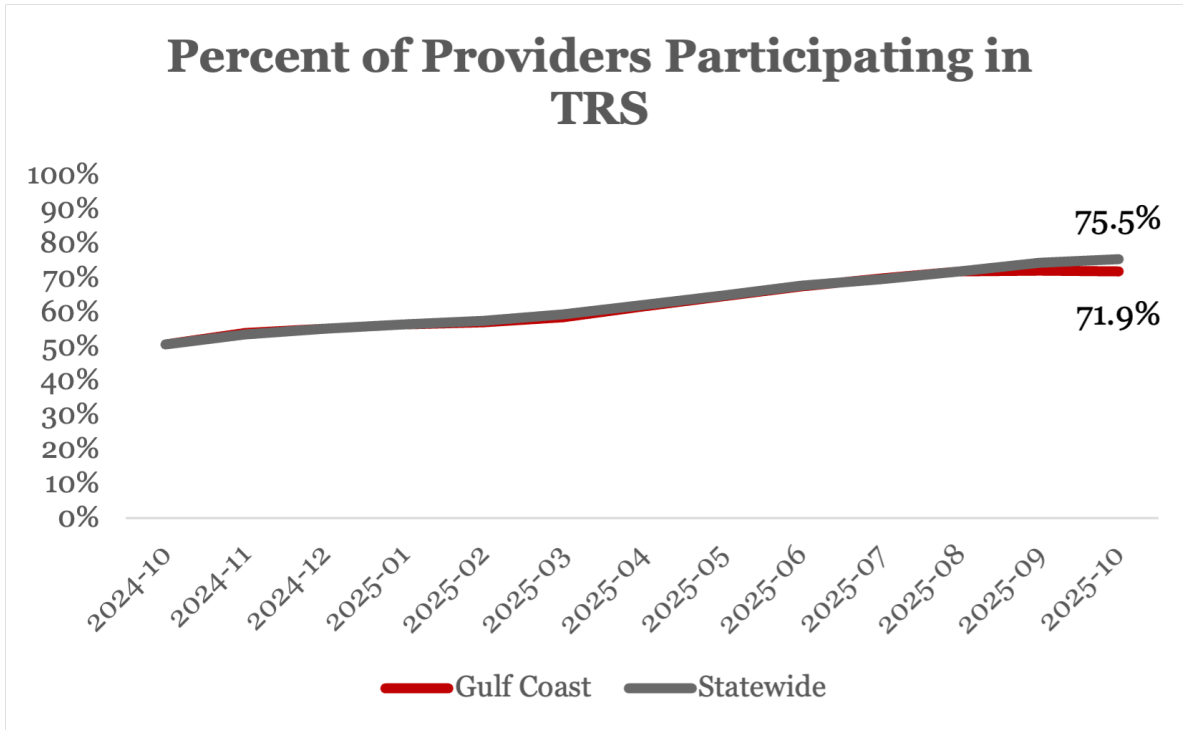


# Child Care Seats | The Last Five Years in Texas



2026, CHILDREN AT RISK  
Child Care Desert Map

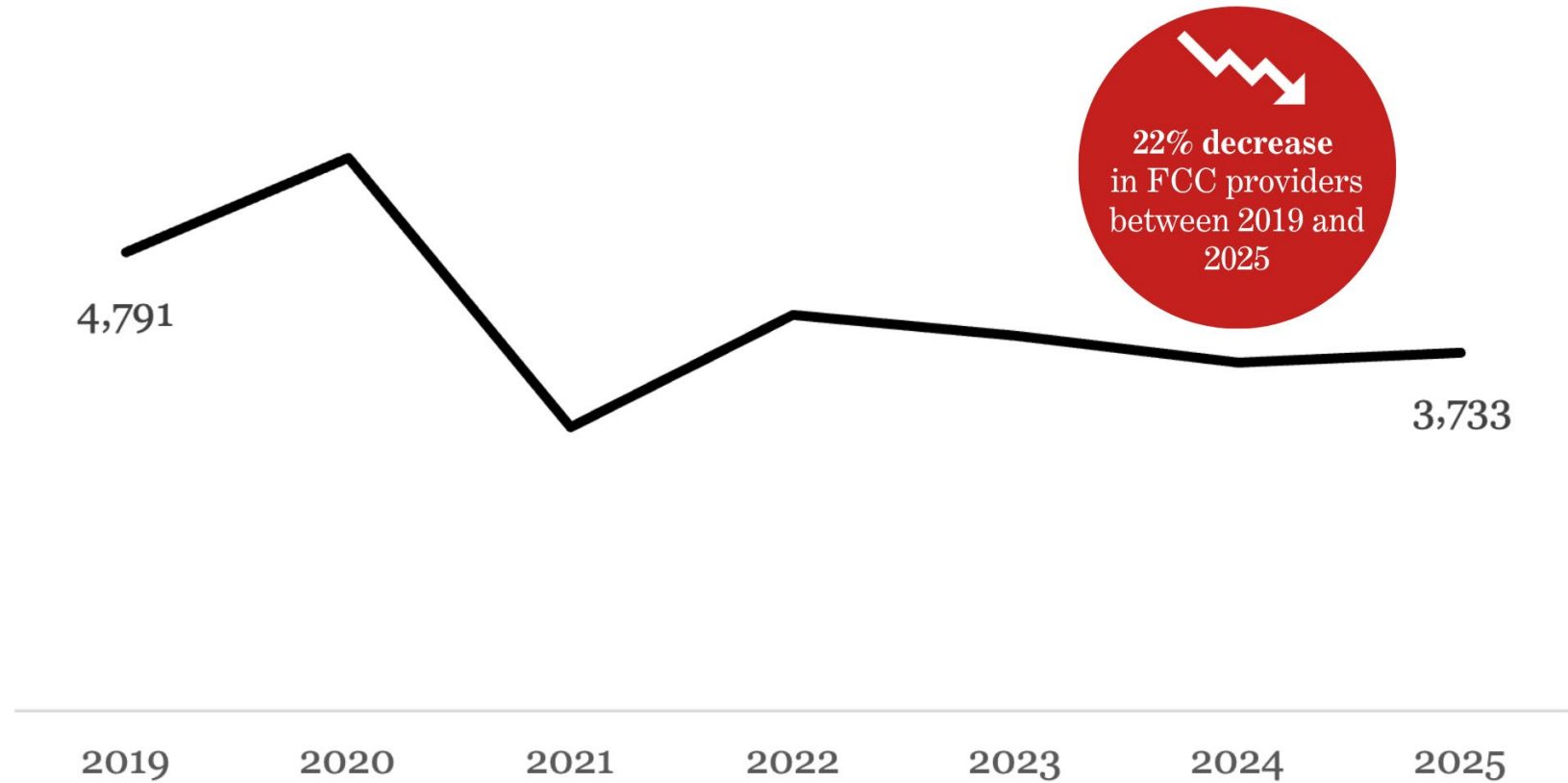
# Gulf Coast Texas Rising Star



2026, Texas Workforce Commission  
Child Care by the Numbers

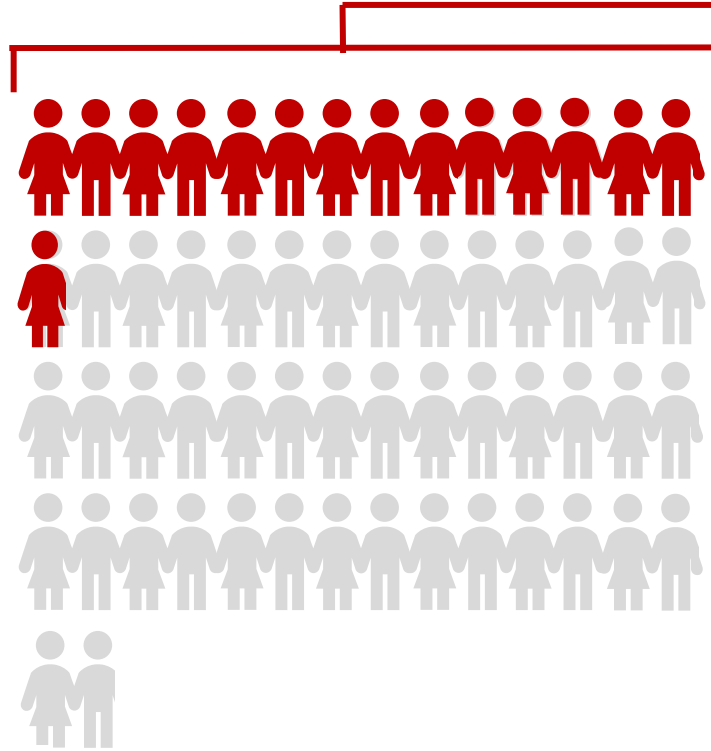
# Family Child Care Homes


Number of Child Care Home Providers  
Registered and Licensed Family Child Care Homes, 2019-2025



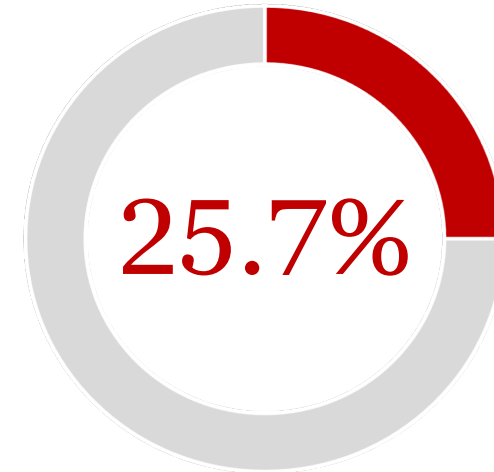
2026, Texas Workforce Commission  
Child Care Data

# Children Served with Funding vs Need



 = 10,000 low-income children ages 0-5 with working parents

 = children ages 0-5 served by CCS



Just over **one in four** low-income children ages 0-5 with working parents **receive subsidies for child care.**

*2026, Texas Workforce Commission  
Child Care Data*

A child is riding a green and white tricycle on a paved surface. The child is wearing a yellow shirt with smiley faces and dark pants. The tricycle has large green wheels and a white frame. The background is a blurred asphalt road.

Gulf Coast/Houston

**What do you think about access to child care in  
your community?**

---

children  
atRisk



## **Using Results in Advocacy**

---

children **atRisk**

# The Texas Early Childhood Ecosystem

---

## ACCESS

**47% of all zip codes in Texas qualify as Child Care Deserts** for low-income children, meaning that 3x more children live in the zip code than the number of available child care slots. Children deserve equitable access to safe care that supports their health, learning, and development.

## FAMILIES

**In Texas, caring for an infant and toddler can cost 10-50%** of many working families' annual earnings. According to federal recommendations, child care should cost no more than 7% of a family's income. Families need affordable care in their communities to be able to participate in the workforce.

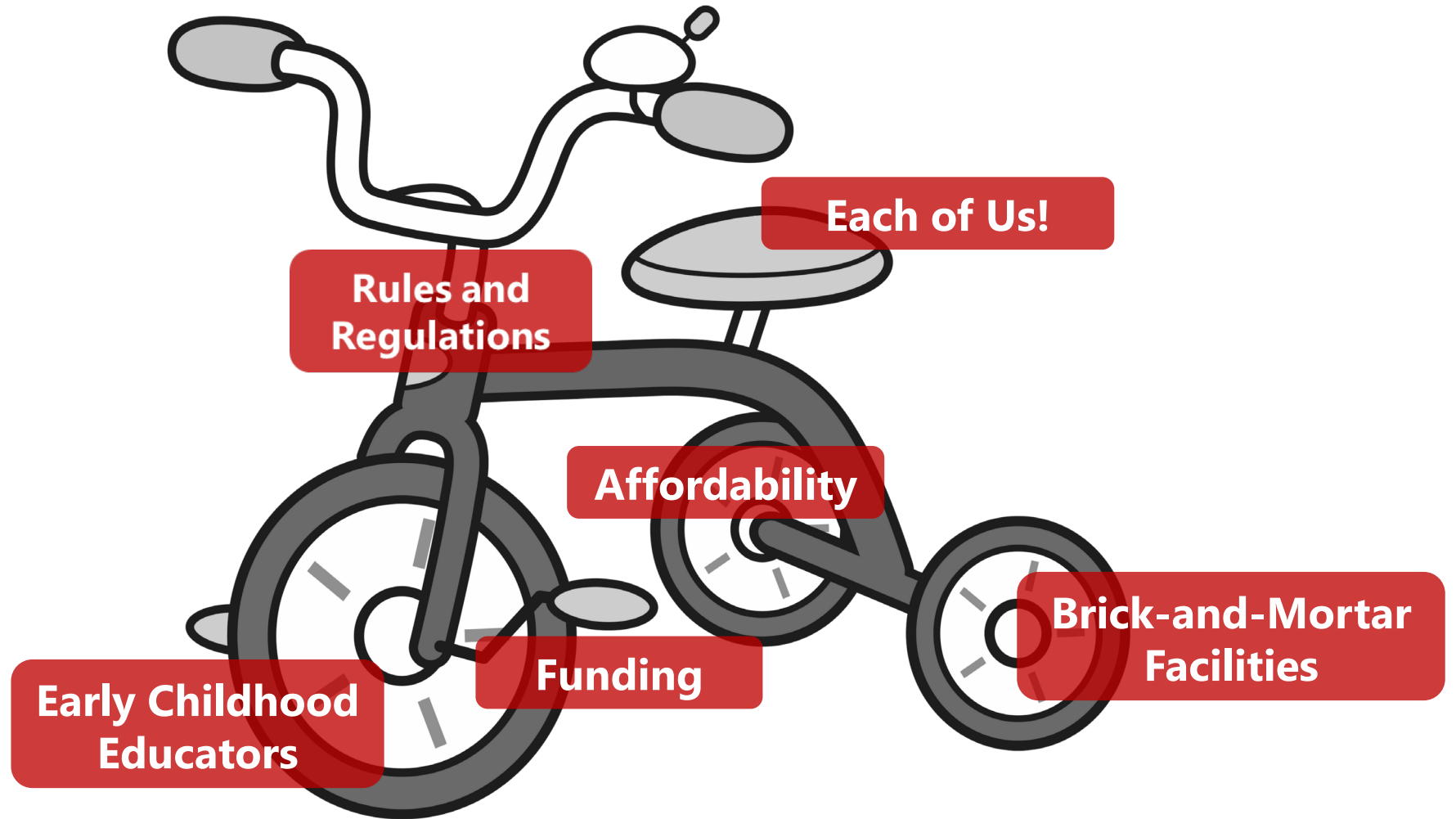
## EDUCATORS

**ECE Workforce is 6 times more likely to live in poverty** than elementary and middle schoolteachers.

**43% of Early educator households participate in one or more public safety net programs.** Early Childhood Educators deserve a living wage.

# The Tricycle for Success

---



# State of Texas Current ECE Governance Structure



## Health and Human Services Commission

- Child Care Regulations
- Family Support Services
- 211
- Early Childhood Intervention
- Texas Thriving Families
- Medicaid & CHIP
- SNAP



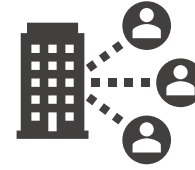
## Department of Family and Protective Services

- Child Abuse and Neglect Statewide Intake
- Foster Care
- Kinship Care



## Department of State Health Services

- Maternal & Child Health
- Help Me Grow
- ImmTrac2 (Immunization Records)



## Texas Workforce Commission

- Child Care Services
  - Child Care Subsidies
  - Texas Rising Star (QRIS)



## Department of Agriculture

- CACFP (Child and Adult Care Food Program)



## Texas Education Agency

- Pre-K
- Special Education Services

# Governance of Early Childhood Education

---



## **H.B. 117**

### **(Schoolcraft)**

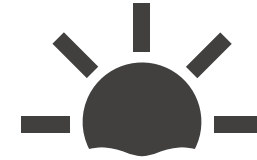
Establishes a Governor's Task Force on the Governance of Early Childhood Education and Care, a step toward improving coordination, accountability, and outcomes for Texas children.



## **H.B. 4903**

### **(Harris Davila & Birdwell)**

Establishes a Quad Agency Child Care Initiative focused on collaboration, coordinating policies, and reviewing and streamlining regulations among the participating agencies, which would include TWC, HHSC, DFPS, and TEA.



## **Sunset Review**

### **Commission**

**DFPS, HHSC, DSHS, & TWC** are all scheduled for the 2026-2027 Review Cycle, with recommendations reported in the 90th Legislative Session.

# Interim Engagement Opportunities

---

## Sunset Review Advisory Commission

TWC      HHSC      DFPS      DSHS

## Quad-Agency Child Care Initiative Commission

TWC      HHSC      TEA      DFPS

## Governor's Taskforce on Governance of Early Childhood Education and Care

TWC      HHSC      TEA      DSHS

## Regular Interim Charges

TWC      HHSC      TEA      DFPS      DSHS      Dept of Ag

# Community Voices | Child Care Survey & Texas Tour



## Statewide Child Care Survey

1,300 child care providers and parents representing Texas' 28 Local Workforce Development Boards



Read our Analysis & Recommendations



## Early Childhood Texas Tour

Conversations with 12 Communities across Texas  
Fort Worth | Lubbock | Amarillo | Brownsville | McAllen | Dallas | Austin | San Antonio | El Paso | Midland | Houston | Tyler

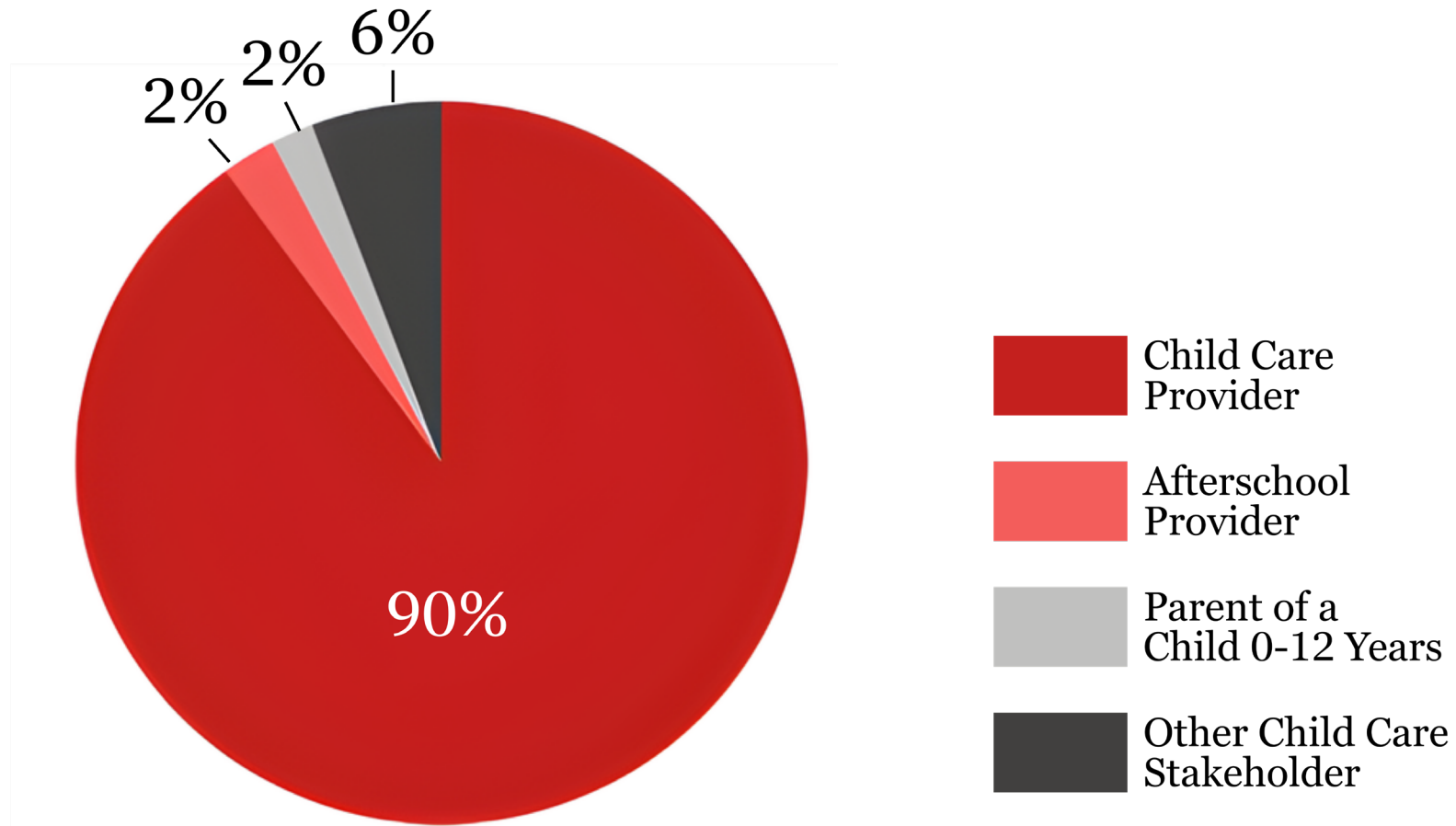


Learnings from the Last Texas Tour

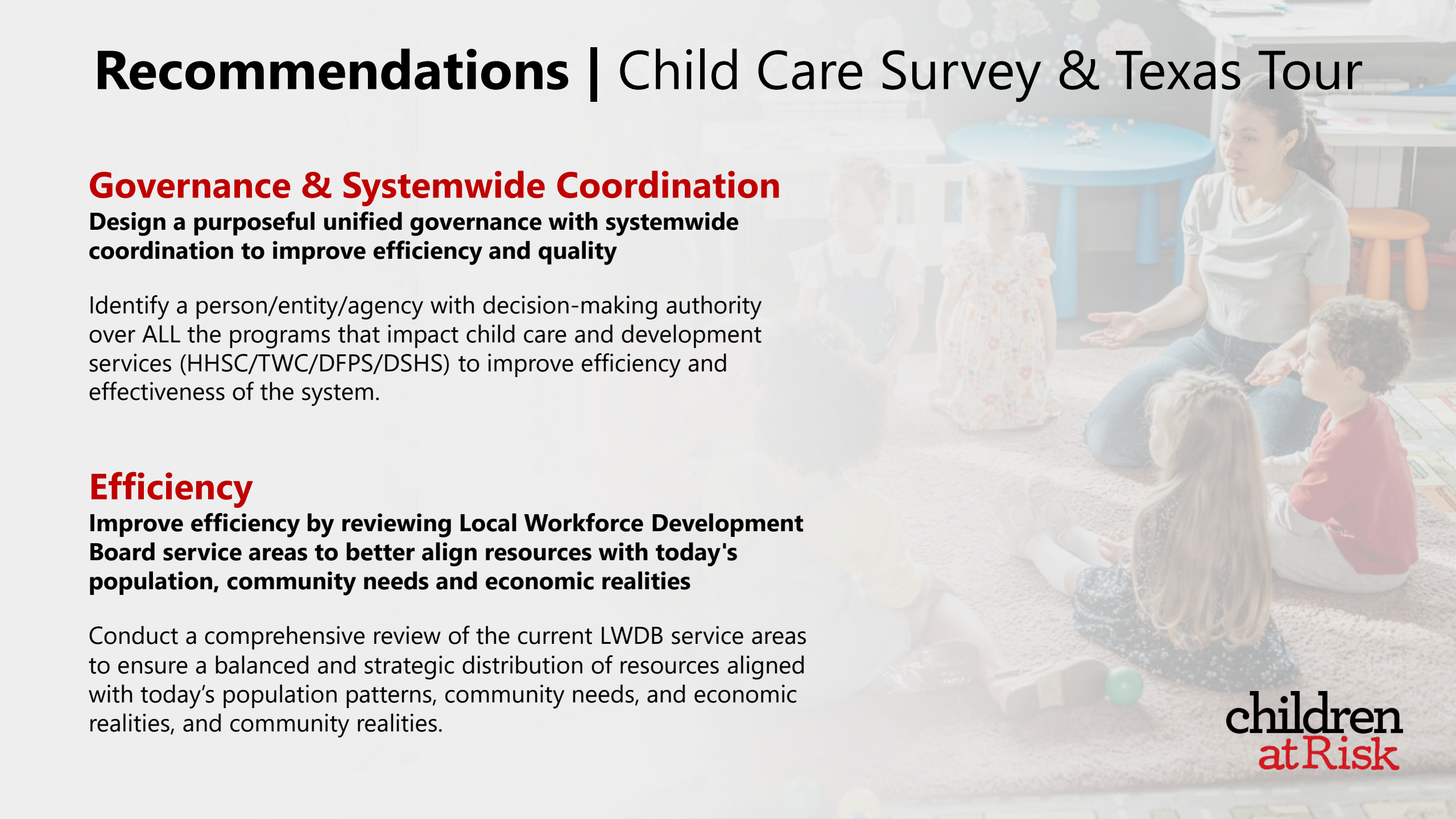


Spring 2026 Schedule & Dates

# Community Voices | Child Care Survey Respondents



# Recommendations | Child Care Survey & Texas Tour

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a light blue t-shirt and jeans, is sitting on a light-colored carpeted floor. She is surrounded by four young children. One child is a girl in a floral dress, another is a boy in a red shirt, and two others are partially visible. They appear to be in a playroom with a blue table and other toys in the background.

## **Governance & Systemwide Coordination**

**Design a purposeful unified governance with systemwide coordination to improve efficiency and quality**

Identify a person/entity/agency with decision-making authority over ALL the programs that impact child care and development services (HHSC/TWC/DFPS/DSHS) to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the system.

## **Efficiency**

**Improve efficiency by reviewing Local Workforce Development Board service areas to better align resources with today's population, community needs and economic realities**

Conduct a comprehensive review of the current LWDB service areas to ensure a balanced and strategic distribution of resources aligned with today's population patterns, community needs, and economic realities, and community realities.

# Recommendations | Child Care Survey & Texas Tour

## Application & Access Streamlining

**Streamline and modernize child care systems to improve access, efficiency, and transparency for families and providers, enabling the state to serve more families with existing resources**

Create a coordinated intake and referral system across TWC, HHSC, and other relevant agencies so that families can access multiple programs—workforce, human services, and education—through a single-entry point. This cost-saving recommendation will reduce duplication of resources and ensure that families are connected to all services for which they are eligible.

- Create a common application form for providers to access programs in TWC & HHSC
- Develop parent-facing portals, either standalone or integrated into the existing childcare availability portal, to provide real-time information on scholarship availability, eligibility, waitlists, and application processing times through a transparent public dashboard.

# Recommendations | Child Care Survey & Texas Tour

## Regulatory & Implementation Alignment

**Synthesize key regulations to reduce confusion and improve regulatory alignment**

Require coordinated, agency-wide training across all regions of the state for relevant agencies and programs on child care minimum standards and Texas Rising Star (TRS) standards, including their interpretation and application.

Ensure that all TWC TRS mentors and HHSC Child Care Regulation staff receive comprehensive training to provide consistent guidance and strengthen alignment between TRS standards and state licensing requirements.

# Recommendations | Child Care Survey & Texas Tour

## Contracting Accountability and Performance Management

### Improve oversight of contracted services to ensure quality performance

Develop a system to ensure coordination among LWDB Contractors so that programs are delivered uniformly statewide.

Conduct a comprehensive audit of the effectiveness of how TWC uses CCDBG funds, particularly quality initiatives and infant/toddler quality initiatives, while developing and auditing user-friendly technology systems, including parent-facing portals and the CCS platform (TX3C/KinderConnect).

## Access for Children With Disabilities

### Improve access to child care services for families of children with disabilities

Increase use of differential rates for children with special needs by expanding the eligible factors that earn the enhanced rate and simplifying the application process to make it easier for providers to secure the enhanced rate.

Create an inclusion badge to recognize programs that go above and beyond in serving children with disabilities or developmental delays and their families and establish and administer a grant program for providers who earn these optional certifications.

Promote and provide deeper guidance on establishing pre-k partnerships for supporting children with disabilities.

# Help Shape Texas's Early Childhood Inclusion Plan!

---

The Texas Education Agency (TEA), Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), and Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) are working together to improve early learning opportunities for young children with disabilities. This work is required by **House Bill 2310**. We want to hear from families, early childhood educators, and other professionals who work with or support young children with disabilities or developmental delays. **Open until May 3<sup>rd</sup>!**

***Take Survey:***

[https://utexas.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_dg7pEmlldQjHkDMG](https://utexas.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_dg7pEmlldQjHkDMG)

A child is riding a green and white tricycle on a paved surface. The child is wearing a yellow shirt with smiley faces and dark pants. The tricycle has large green wheels and a white frame. The background is a blurred asphalt road.

Gulf Coast/Houston

**What do you think about policy to support  
quality child care in your community?**

---

children  
atRisk

# Resources at childrenatrisk.org

---

## UPDATED CHILD CARE DESERTS MAP



**Learn more at:**  
[childrenatrisk.org/childcaresdesertmap](https://childrenatrisk.org/childcaresdesertmap)

L

## PAVING THE WAY TO QUALITY REPORT



**Learn more at:**  
[childrenatrisk.org/pavingthewaytoquality](https://childrenatrisk.org/pavingthewaytoquality)

## SIGN UP FOR C@R's ECE UPDATES



**Learn more at:**  
[childrenatrisk.org](https://childrenatrisk.org)

**Kim Kofron M.Ed.**

*Executive Director of Early Childhood Education, CHILDREN AT RISK*

[kkofron@childrenatrisk.org](mailto:kkofron@childrenatrisk.org)

**Lyn Lucas, M.Ed.**

*Associate Director of Early Childhood Education, CHILDREN AT RISK*

[llucas@childrenatrisk.org](mailto:llucas@childrenatrisk.org)

**children at Risk**  
[www.childrenatrisk.org](http://www.childrenatrisk.org)



**Thank you!**