



Tarrant County/Fort Worth

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



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Texas Prenatal-to-Three Collaborative



Sign up for the
Texas PN-3
Newsletter

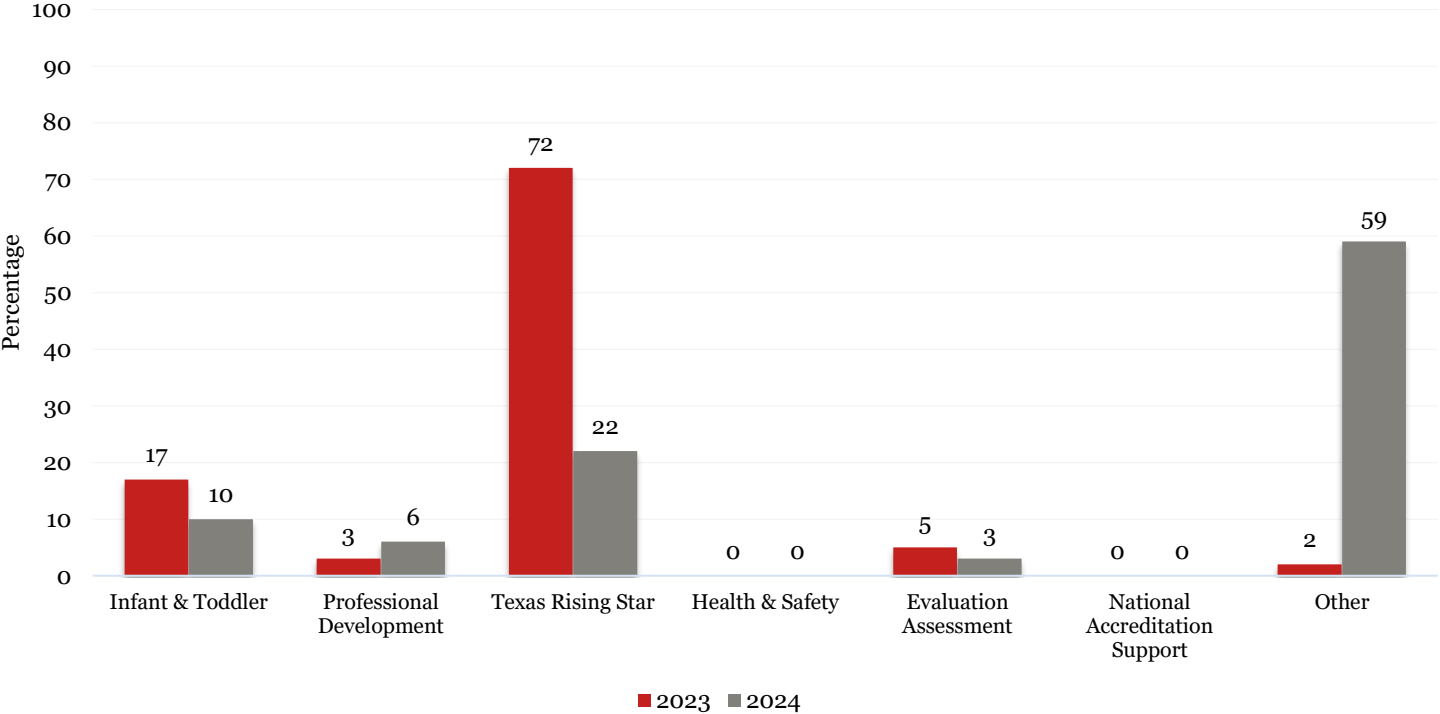


Paving the Way to Quality

children **atRisk**

Investments in Child Care Quality Funds

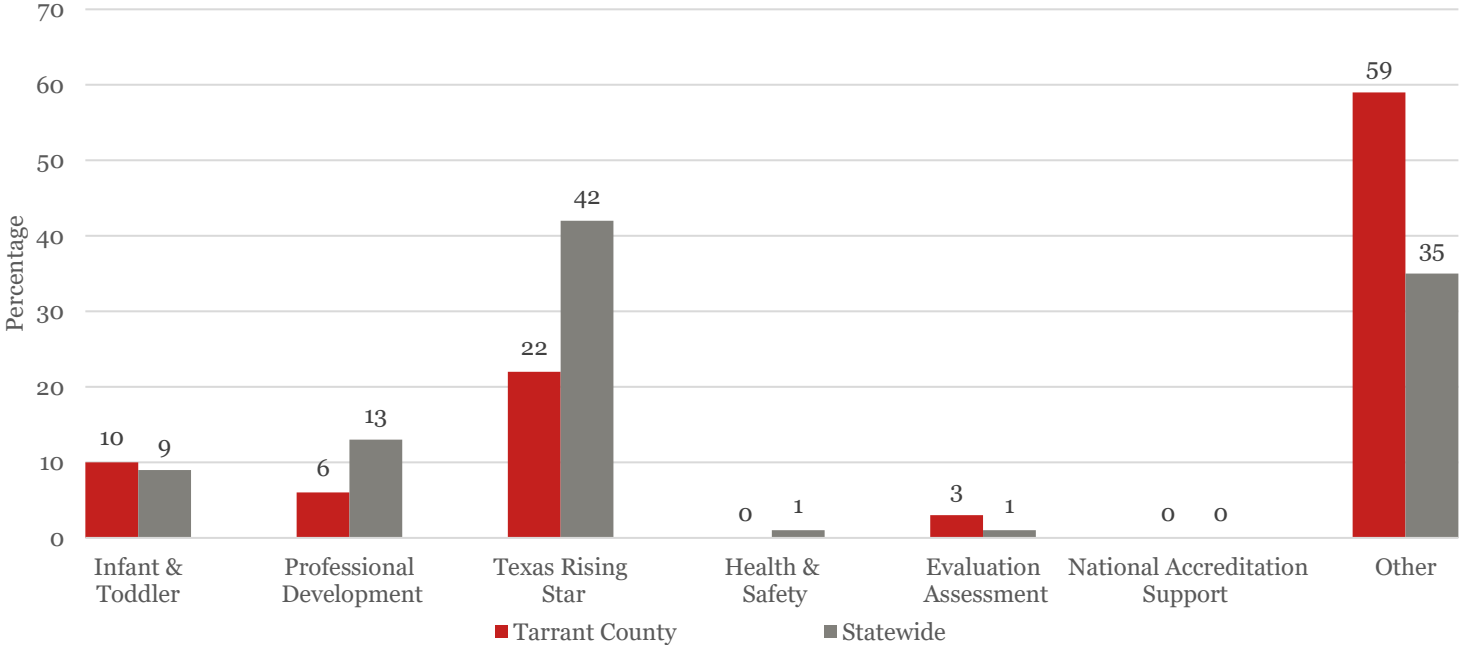
YEAR OVER YEAR COMPARISON: TARRANT COUNTY



*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.

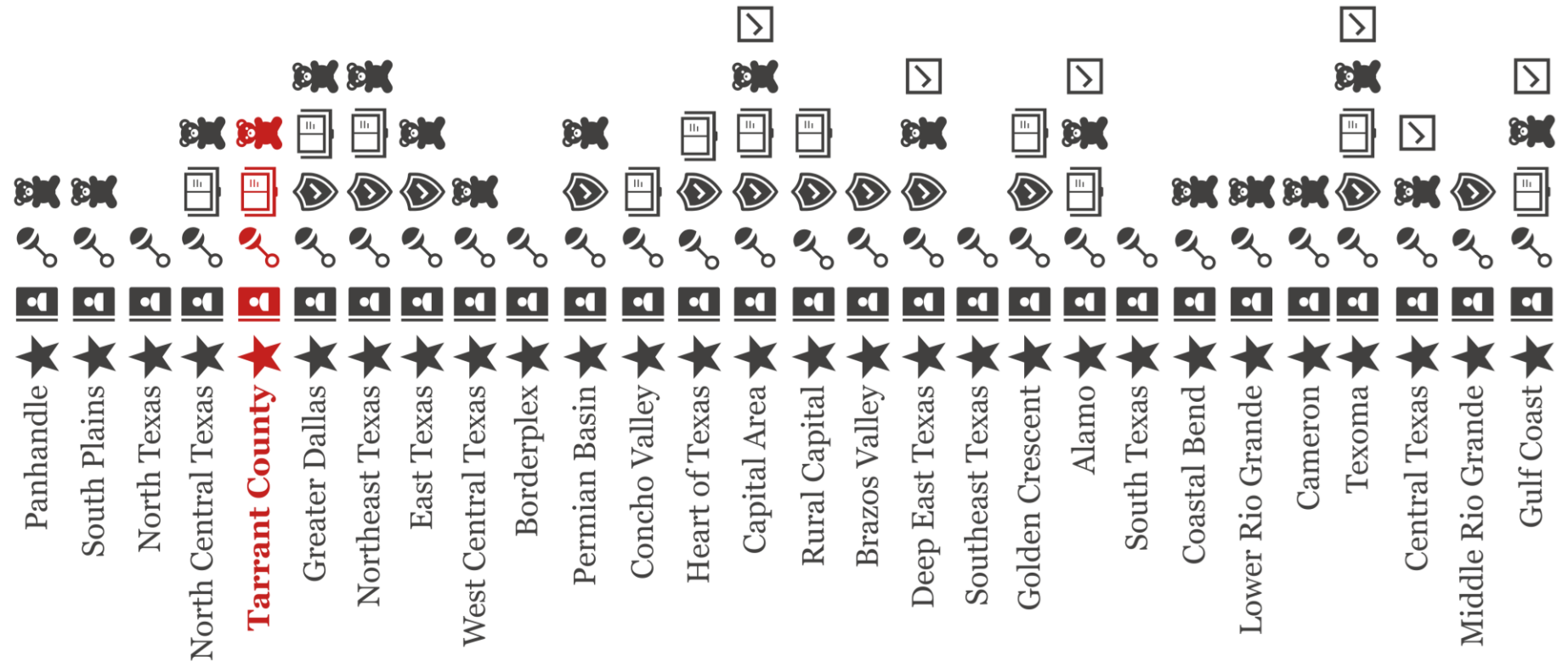
Investments in Child Care Quality Funds

PERCENTAGE OF QUALITY DOLLARS SPENT BY CATEGORY
LWDB & STATE

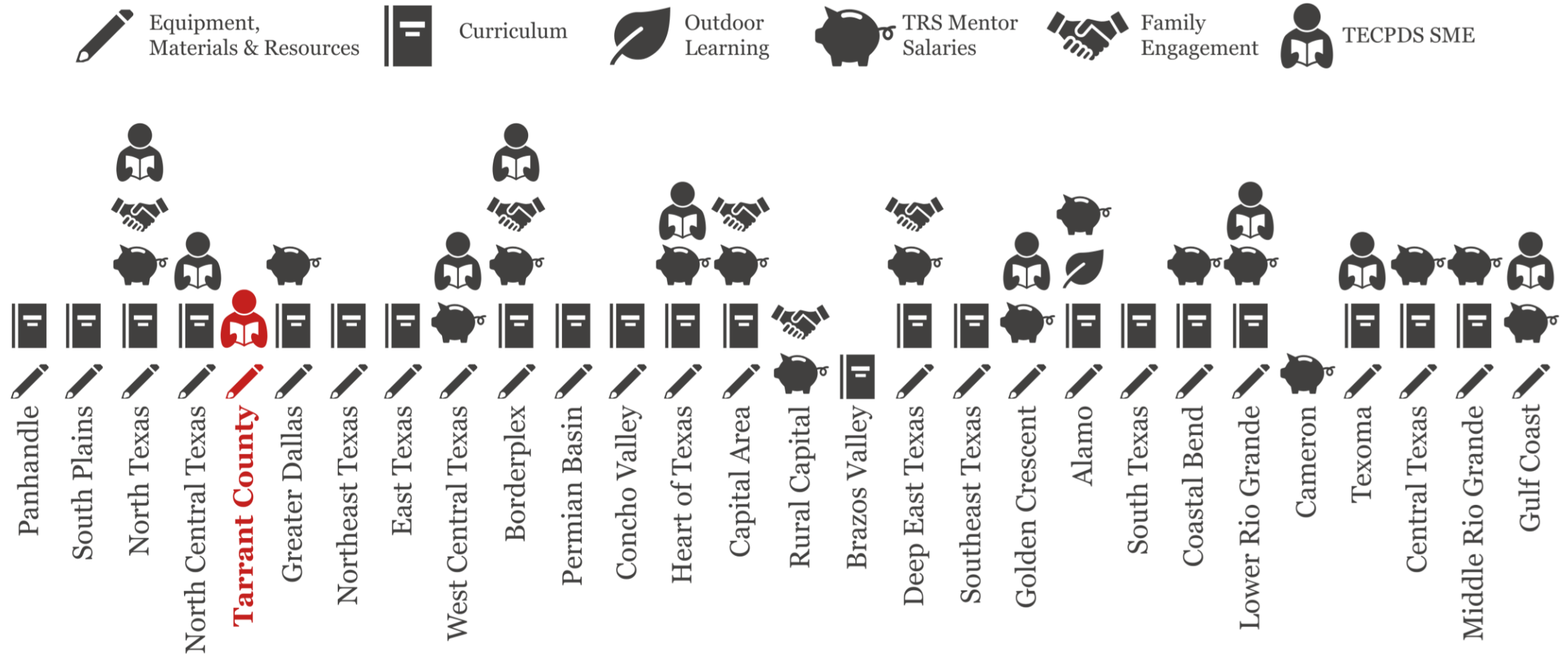


Statewide Spending of Quality Improvement Dollars

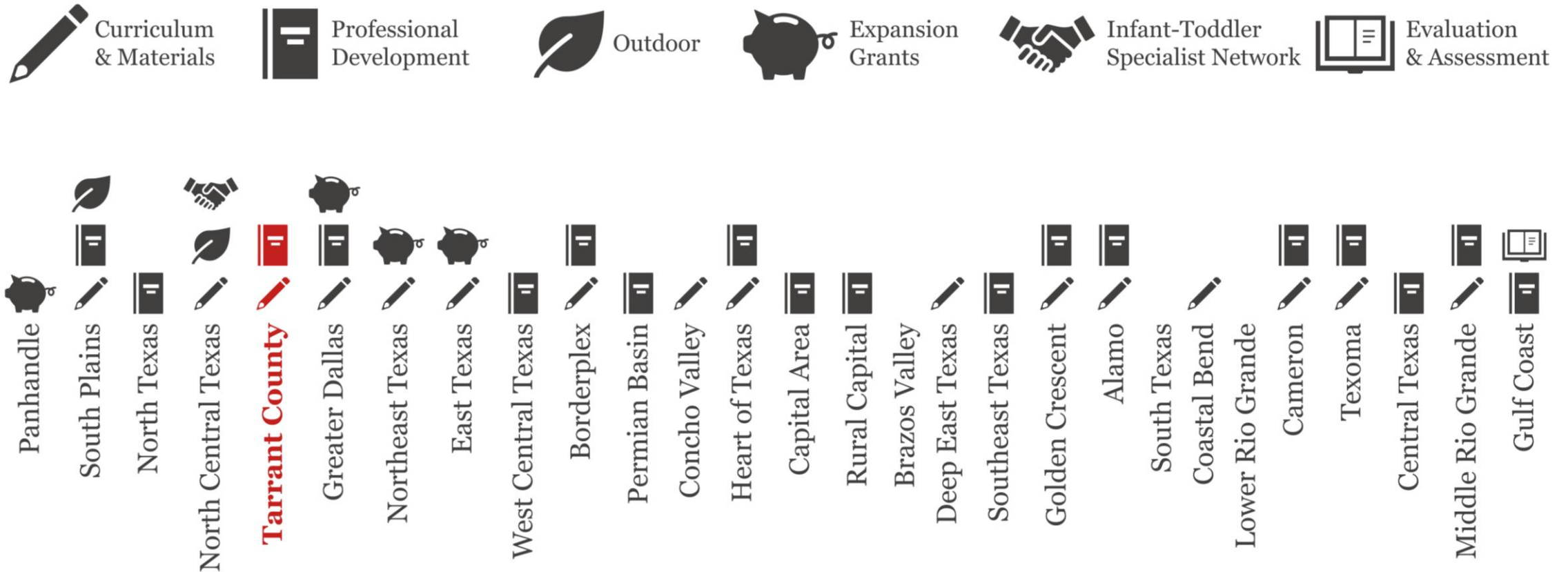
★ TRS Supports
👤 Professional Development
👶 Infants & Toddlers
🛡️ Health & Safety
📖 Evaluation & Assessment
🧸 Other
☑️ National Accreditation



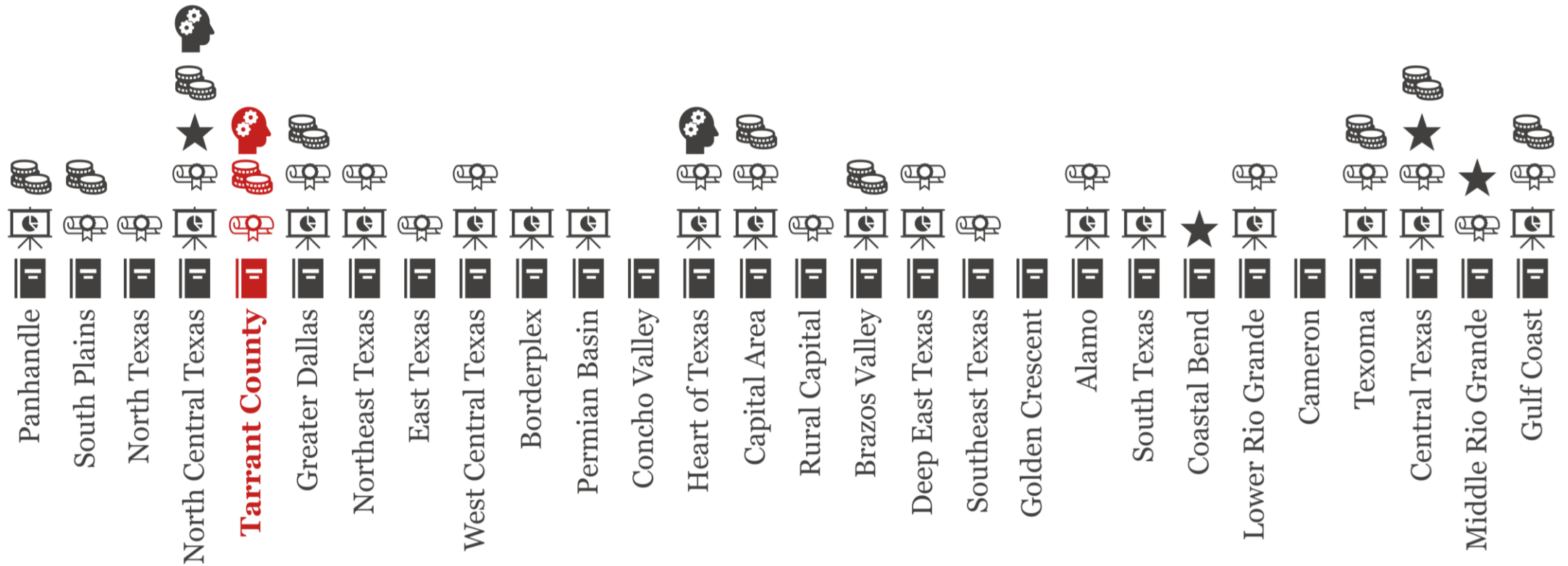
Statewide Spending Allocated to TRS Supports



Statewide Spending Allocated to Infants & Toddlers



Statewide Spending Allocated to Professional Development



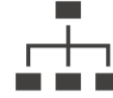
Statewide Spending Allocated to Other



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

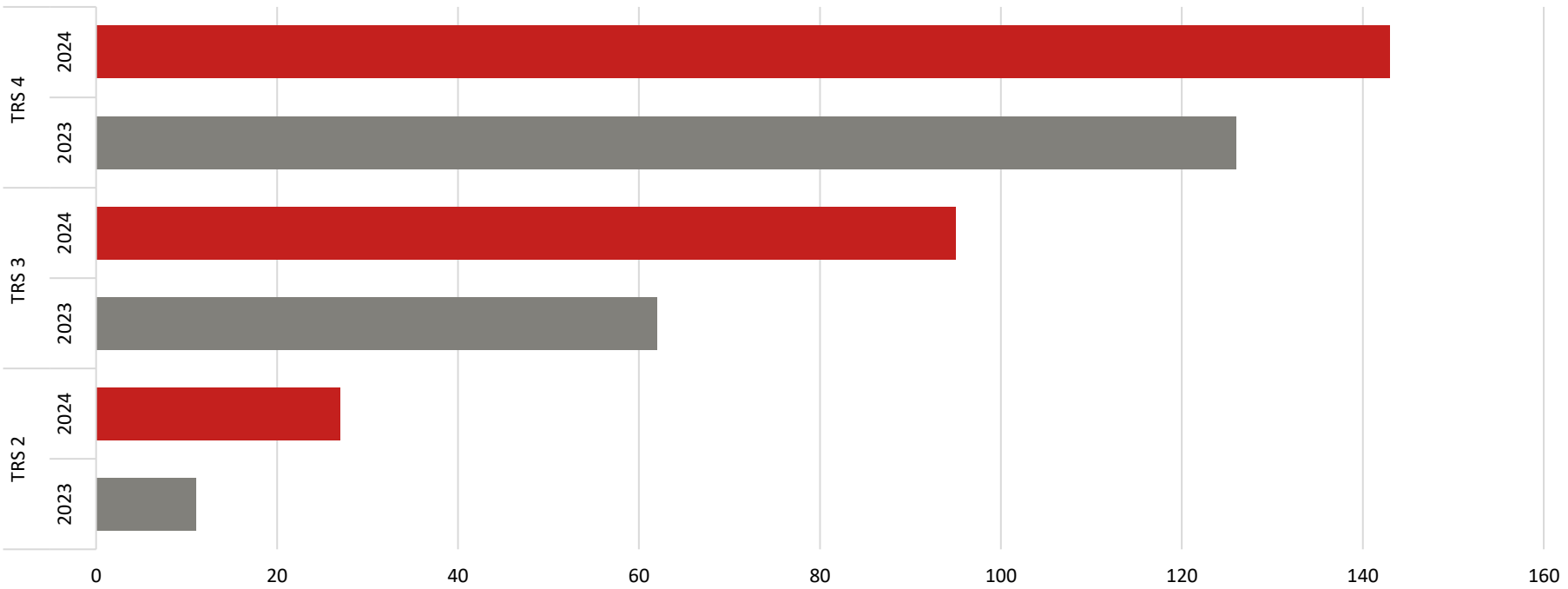
Middle Rio Grande



Gulf Coast

Access to Quality Care

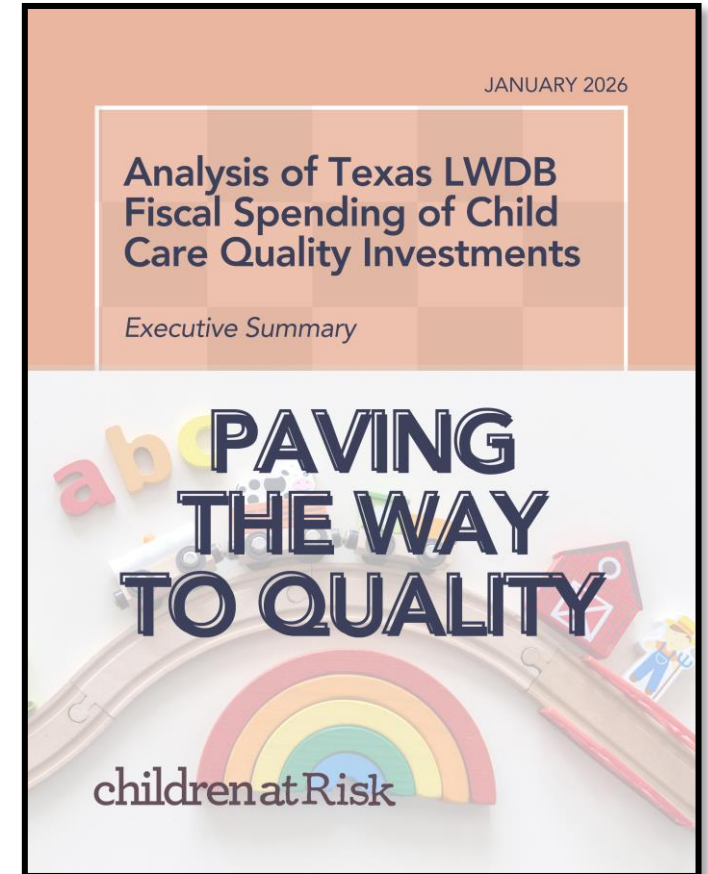
NUMBER OF TRS PROGRAMS BY RATING: TARRANT COUNTY



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 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.

Tarrant County/Fort Worth

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

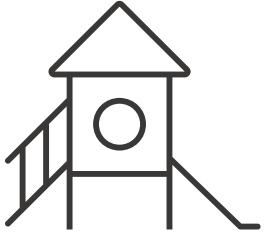
children
atRisk



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.



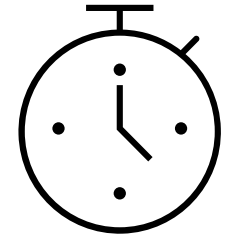
Subsidized Child Care Deserts

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*

Tarrant Overall Child Care Deserts

84,683 ↓

Total Number of Seats

15 ↑

Overall Desert Zip Codes*

***Out of 74 eligible zip codes in Tarrant Area*

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*

Tarrant Subsidy Child Care Deserts

9,711 ↑

Number of Subsidy Seats

61 ↑

Subsidy Desert Zip Codes

***Out of 74 eligible zip codes in Tarrant Area*

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*

Tarrant TRS Child Care Deserts

9,050 ↑

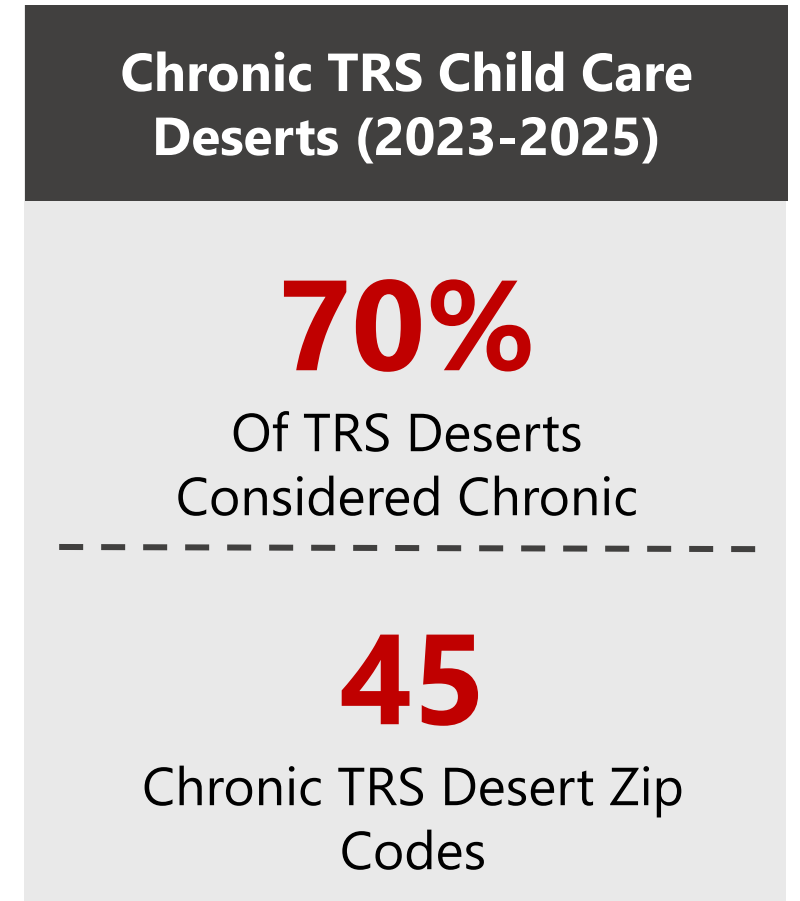
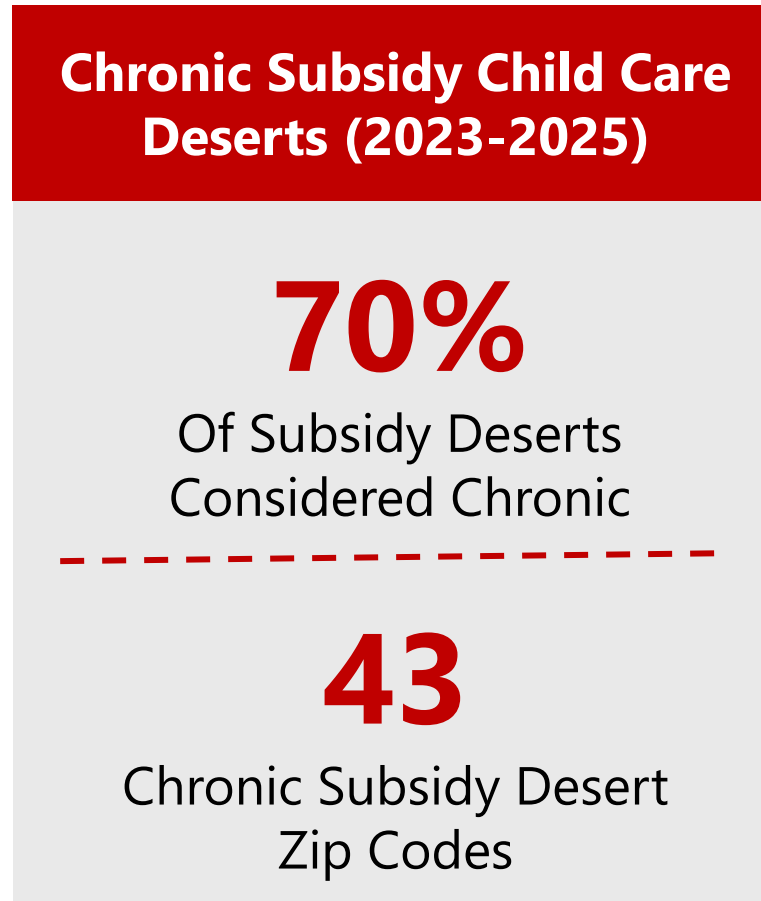
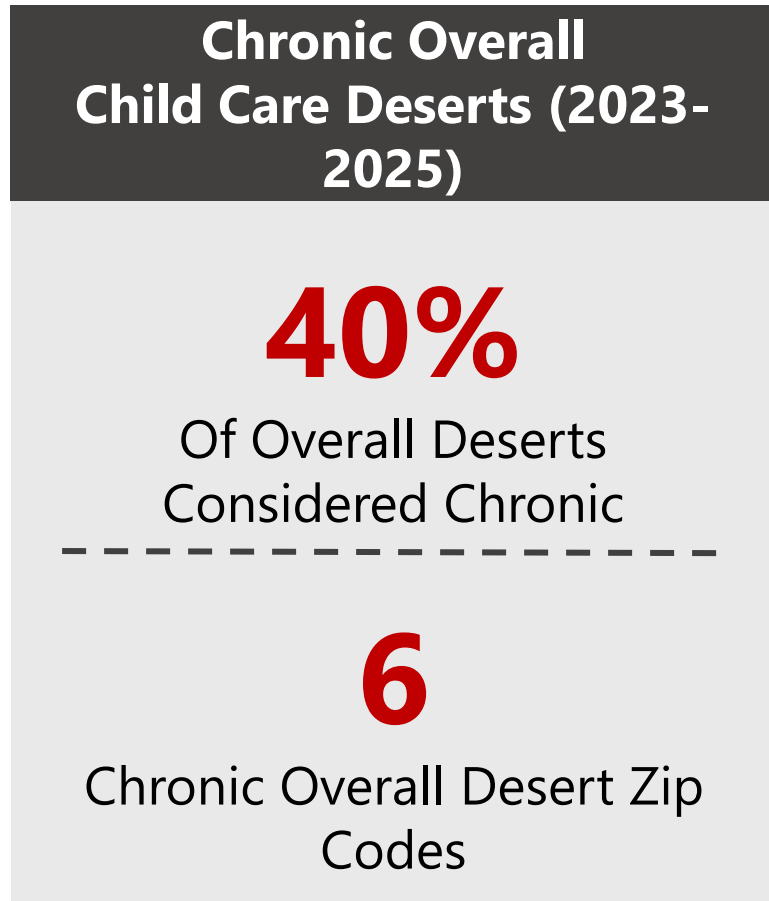
Number of TRS Seats

64 ↑

TRS Desert Zip Codes

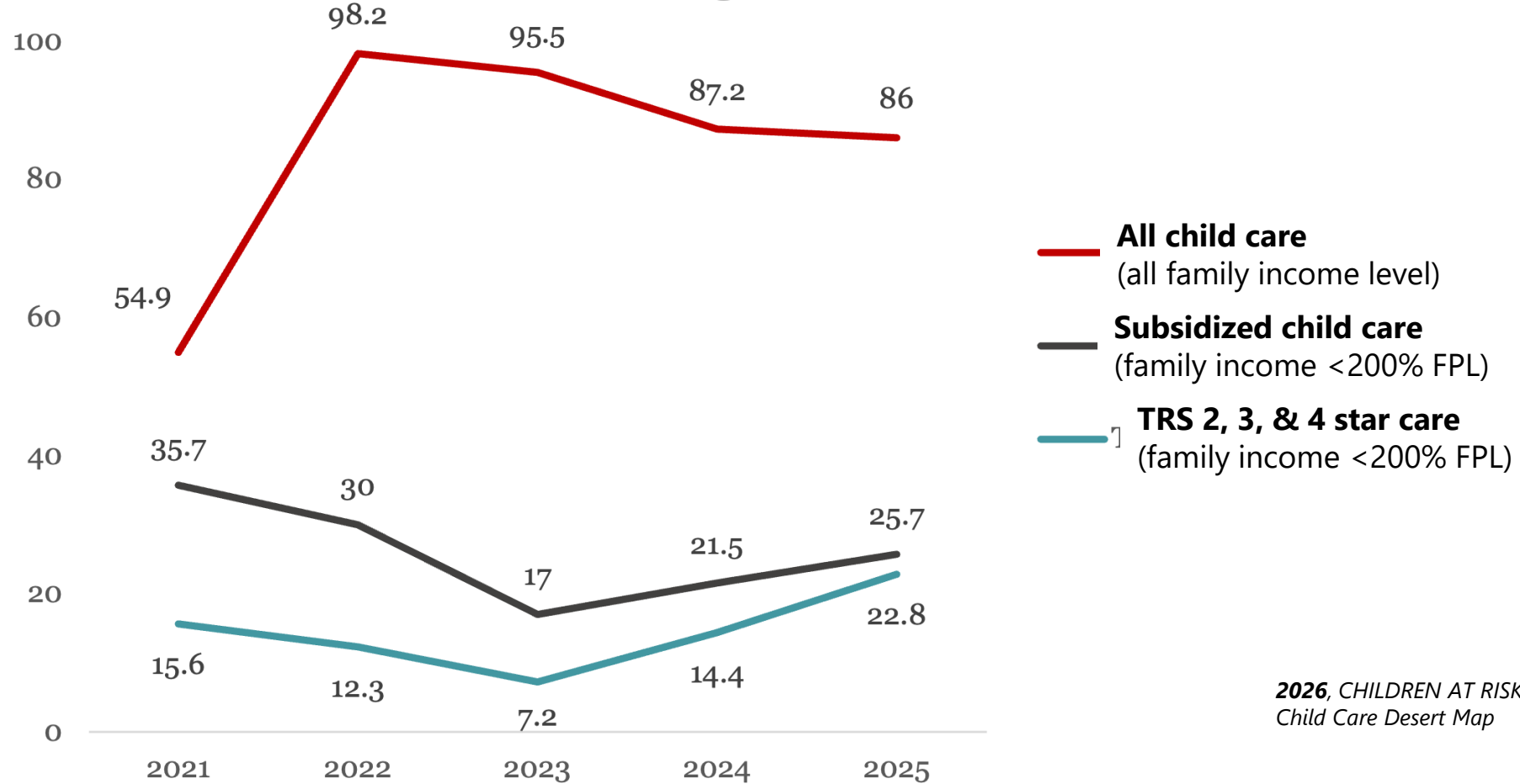
***Out of 74 eligible zip codes in Tarrant Area*

Chronic Child Care Deserts | Tarrant Area



Child Care Seats | The Last Five Years in Texas

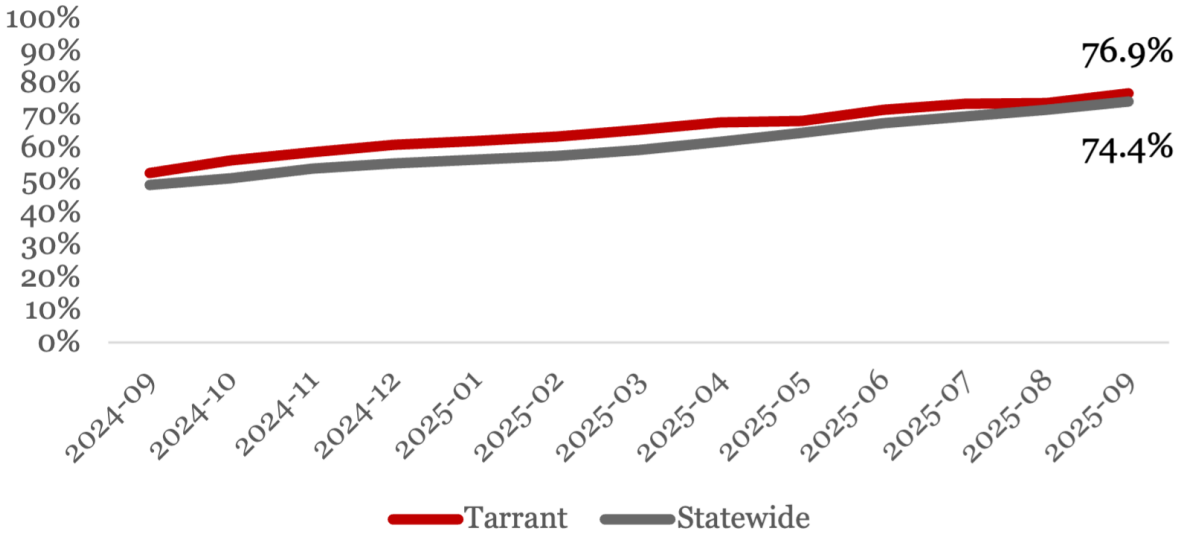
Number of Child Care Seats per 100 Children of Working Families



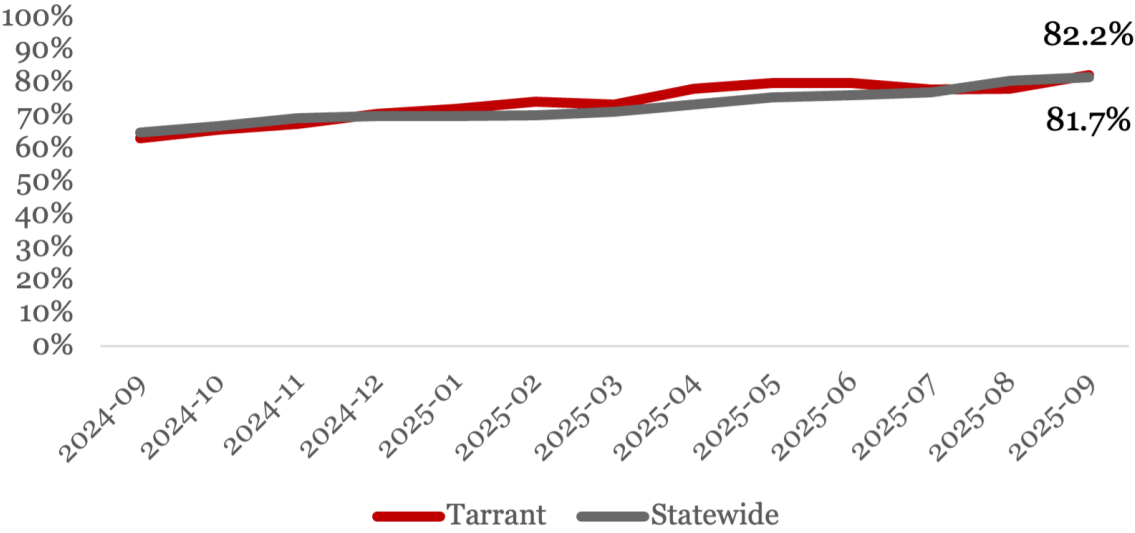
2026, CHILDREN AT RISK
Child Care Desert Map

Texas Rising Star | Tarrant Area Availability

Percent of Providers Participating in TRS



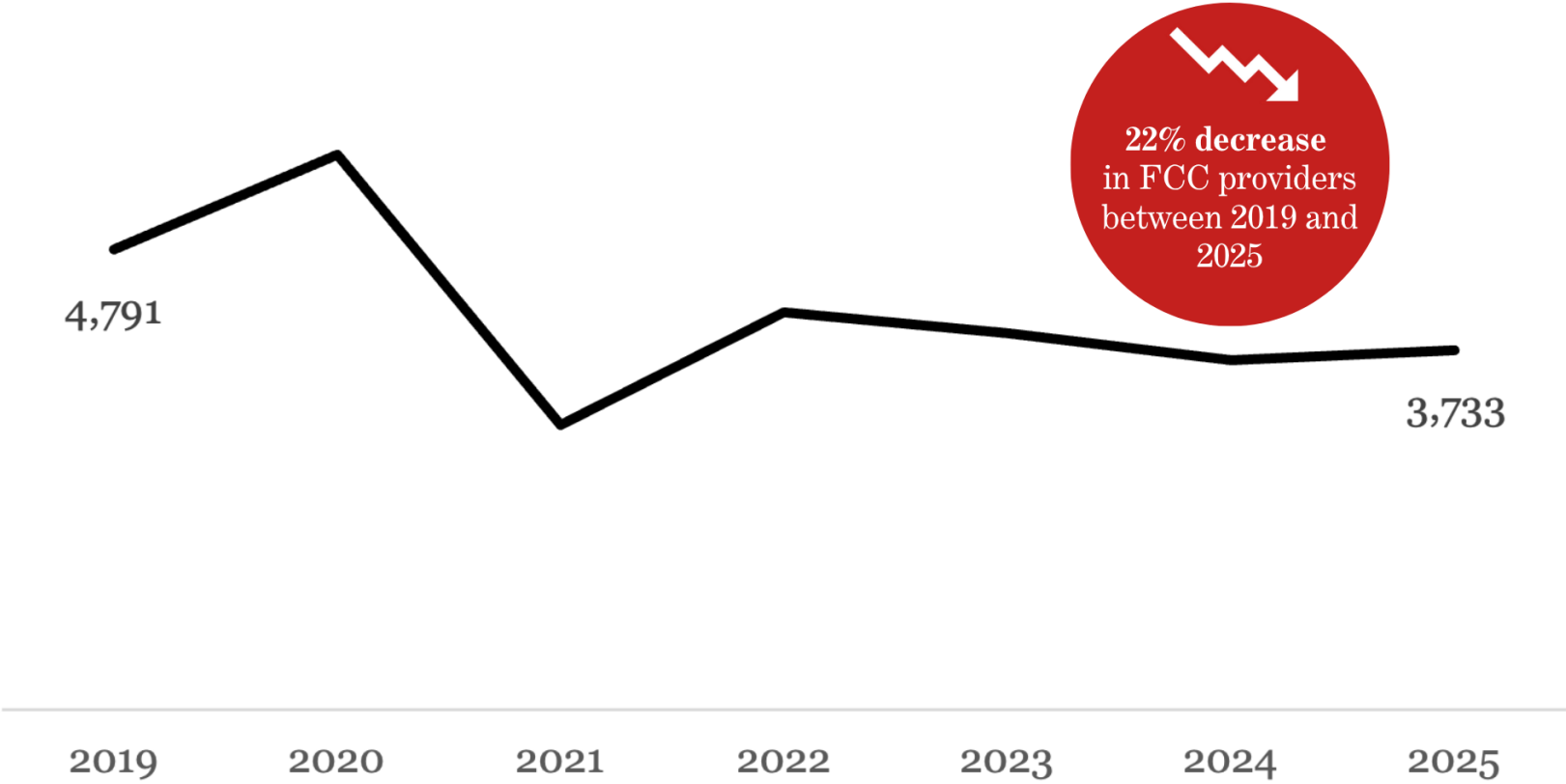
Percent of Children Receiving TRS Quality Care



2026, Texas Workforce Commission
Child Care by the Numbers

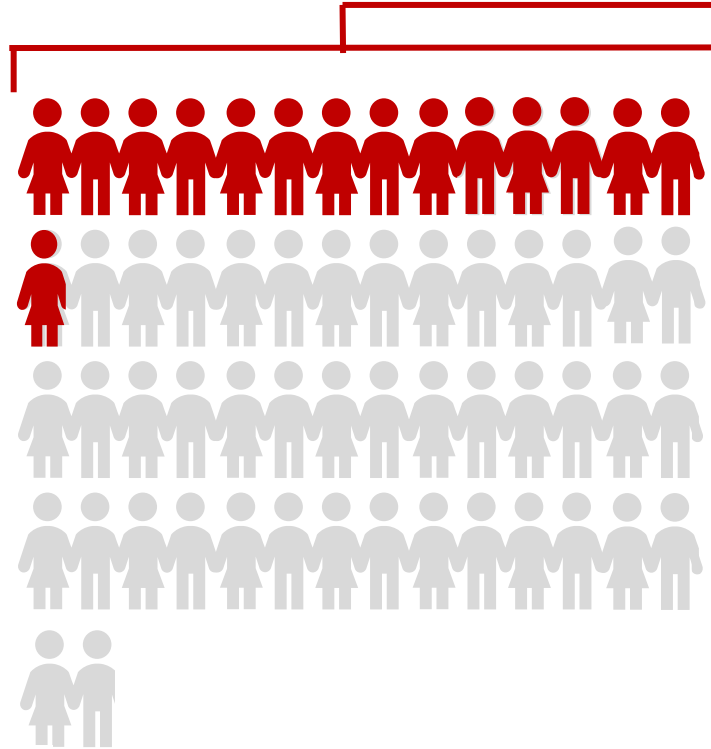
Family Child Care Homes


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



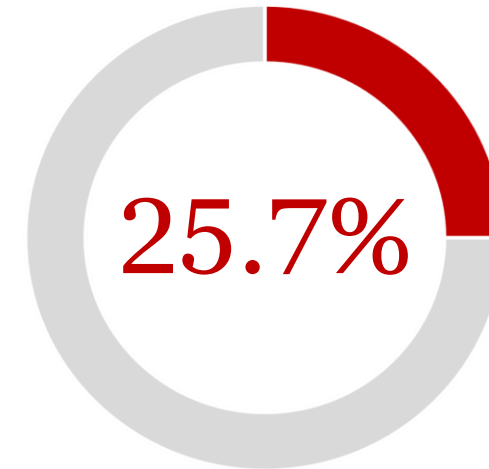
2026, Texas Workforce Commission
Child Care Data

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.

Tarrant County/Fort Worth

**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

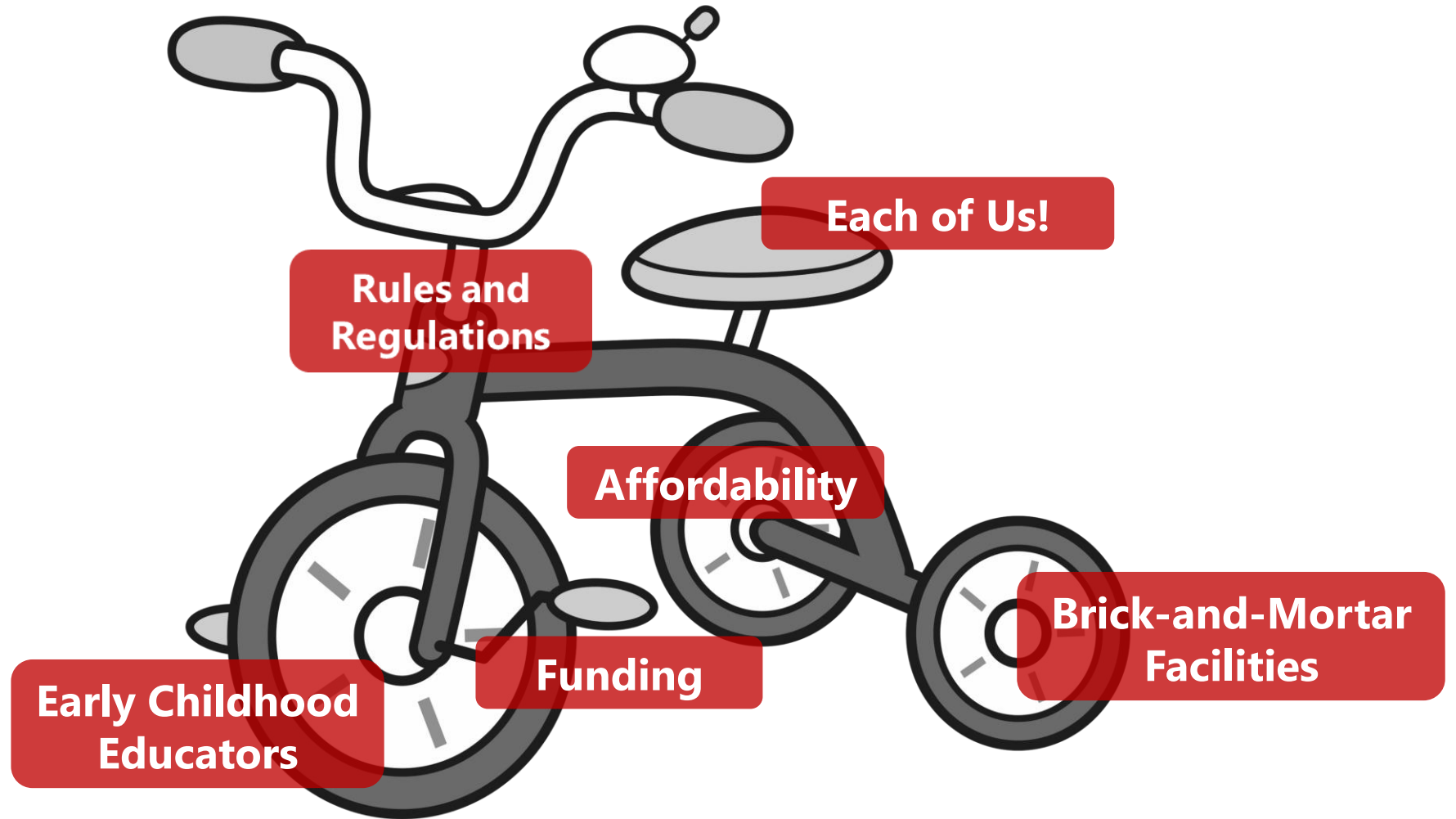
In Texas, caring for an infant and toddler can cost 10-50% of many working families' annual earnings. According to federal recommendations, child care should cost no more than 7% of a family's income. Families need affordable care in their communities to be able to participate in the workforce.

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



Governance of Early Childhood Education



H.B. 117

(Schoolcraft)

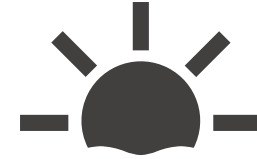
Establishes a Governor's Task Force on the Governance of Early Childhood Education and Care, a step toward improving coordination, accountability, and outcomes for Texas children.



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.

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



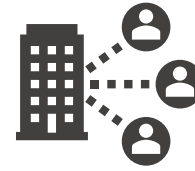
Department of Family and Protective Services

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



Department of State Health Services

- Maternal & Child Health
- Help Me Grow



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

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

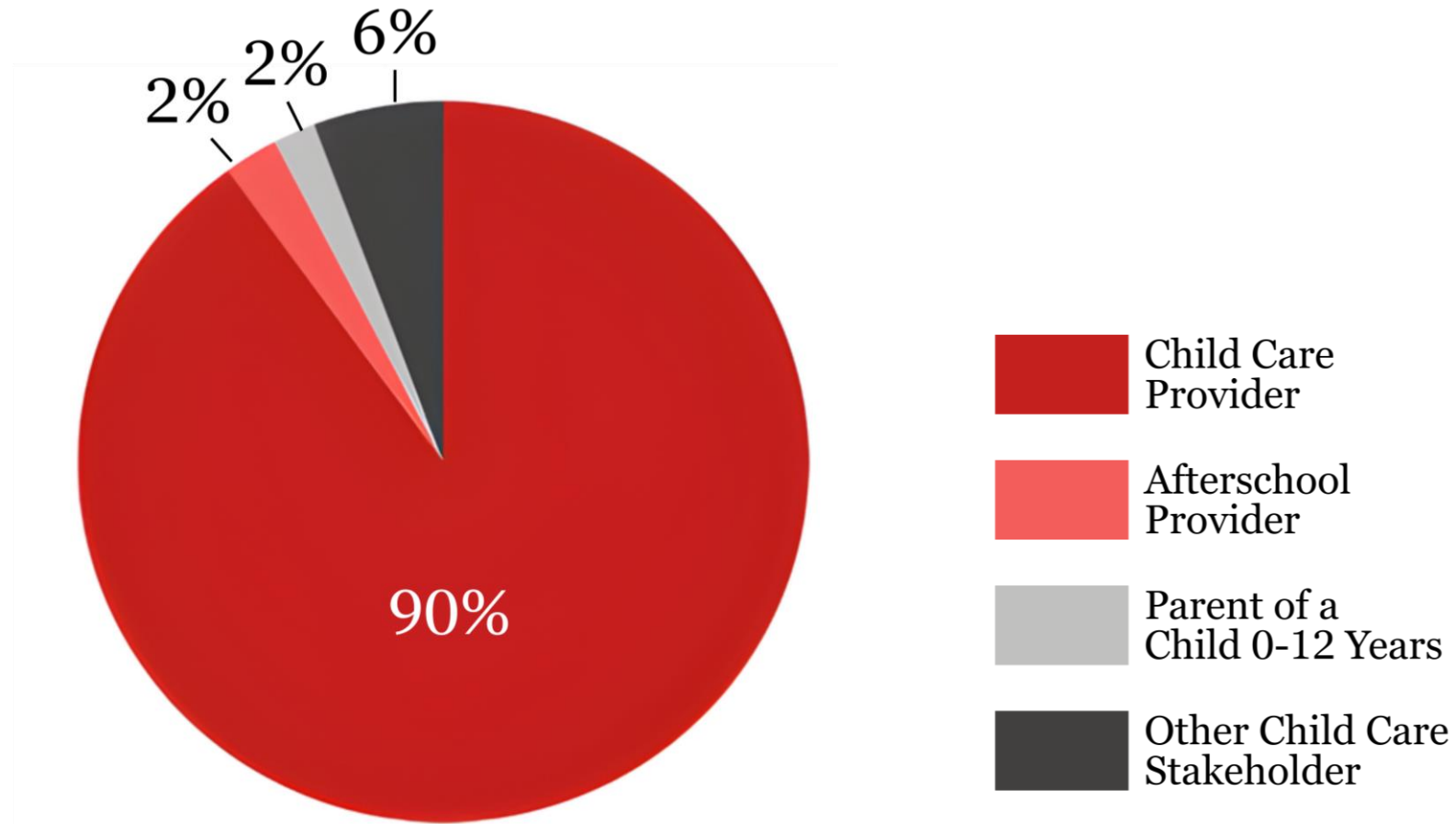


Learnings from the Last Texas Tour

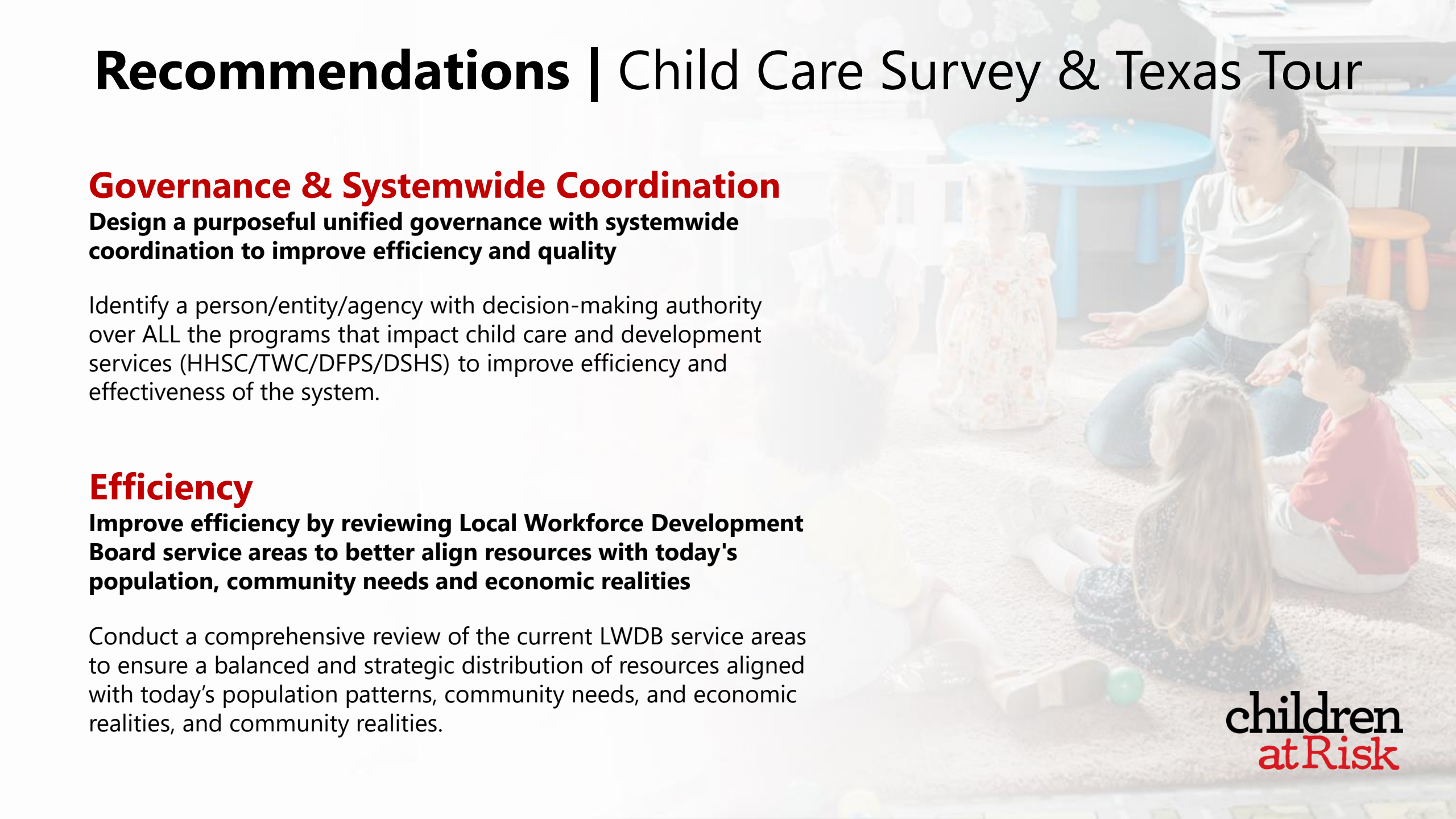


Spring 2026 Schedule & Dates

Community Voices | Child Care Survey Respondents



Recommendations | Child Care Survey & Texas Tour

A woman with dark hair, wearing a light blue shirt and dark pants, is sitting on a light-colored carpeted floor in a playroom. She is surrounded by four children: a boy in a white shirt and dark overalls, a girl in a floral dress, a girl in a dark patterned dress, and a boy in a red shirt. They are all looking towards the woman, who has her hands open as if in conversation. In the background, there is a blue round table and some toys.

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.

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Tarrant County/Fort Worth

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

children
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Resources at childrenatrisk.org

UPDATED CHILD CARE DESERTS MAP



Learn more at:
childrenatrisk.org/childcaresdesertmap

L

PAVING THE WAY TO QUALITY REPORT



Learn more at:
childrenatrisk.org/pavingthewaytoquality

SIGN UP FOR C@R's ECE UPDATES



Learn more at:
childrenatrisk.org

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