**School Readiness Action Plan for Austin/Travis County**

**2013 Local Public Policy Priorities**

**Priorities for City of Austin:** In the upcoming fiscal year,use a portion of the excess sales tax revenue to invest additional dollars in the proven, high-return early childhood priorities described below. Furthermore, in the next Social Services competitive funding cycle, earmark significantly more funding targeted for early childhood education and child development interventions which align with the School Readiness Action Plan. Make early childhood a civic priority in 2013.

 **Recommendation 1** : Increase the number of locally- funded and administered *high-quality* subsidized child care slots for vulnerable families. $700,000 of new dollars from the City of Austin this year would fund at least 100-120 additional children.

**Rationale**: Currently over a thousand children are on the waiting list for subsidized child care slots and federal and state funds are maxed out. Subsidized child care for low-income families not only allows parents to seek and maintain employment, but it can provide early education if it is high quality. Parents from high-poverty areas in Travis County listed affordable quality child care as their greatest barrier to family stability and upward mobility.

**Recommendation 2** : Increase funding for research-based services providing family support prenatally and during the first few years of life for parents at risk in our community. $300,000 of new dollars from the City of Austin this year would fund services for 100 additional families, most of whom are English Language Learners.

**Rationale**: Most low-income families with young children cannot afford child care services, and the current subsidy system does not have capacity to serve all of them. Alternatively, parents need easily accessible neighborhood-based services that provide accurate parenting information, developmental and health screening, and enriching activities for their children. Like high-quality child care, family support services have a very high return on investment within 5 years of service delivery. Participating families are less likely to abuse their children, the children are less likely to be classified as “special needs” and are far less likely to be retained in the early elementary years.

**Recommendation 3** : Support robust Head Start and Early Head Start programs in our community.

**Rationale**: Head Start serves our community’s most vulnerable children – those living in families under the poverty level ($19,090 annual income for family of 3) or with multiple risk factors. The federal funding requires local matching funds. Recent changes in federal guidelines have triggered fundamental changes in our local Head Start delivery model, which will ultimately lead to better outcomes for children and families.