



## Board of Directors Meeting

May 9, 2013

### Media Items

**Item VI.G.**

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Tampa Bay Times: Pinellas County Schools Denied Head Start Grant

<http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/gradebook/pinellas-county-schools-denied-head-start-grant/2118523>

By Cara Fitzpatrick, Times Staff Writer

May 1, 2013 11:41 a.m.

Pinellas County Schools has been trying to make a push into the arena of early childhood education because many of its students are coming to kindergarten behind their peers. But it has suffered a setback - it was denied a \$12 million grant to run the county's Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

Instead the grant was given to Lutheran Services Florida, a non-profit organization based in Tampa, which has run a Head Start program in southeast Florida for about 30 years. The R'Club, which offers a lot of after-school programs in Pinellas County, applied for the grant with Lutheran Services Florida.

Samuel Sipes, president and CEO of LSF, released this statement about the grant: "We are thrilled to bring our Head Start and Early Head Start expertise into Pinellas County, and we look forward to helping children in Pinellas gain the skills they need to enter school ready to succeed."

Pinellas school superintendent Mike Grego released this statement: "We congratulate Lutheran Services of Florida on its successful application. We look forward to a positive relationship with the organization as we all work toward the betterment of our community through educational opportunities for all."

Pinellas County Schools hasn't yet received a report back as to why their application wasn't successful.

Head Start and Early Head Start are federal programs for low-income children. The programs, which are birth to age 5, are meant to prepare children for school.

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Dunedin Patch: Public Safety: Sheriffs at Touch-a-Truck: 4 Ways to Combat Child Abductors

<http://dunedin.patch.com/articles/pinellas-county-sheriffs-4-tips-to-combat-child-abductors>

By Katie Dolac  
April 29, 2013

For Sgt. Denise Nestor, prevention is a family affair.

Not just for her, but for all families.

Nestor, a mother and Pinellas County Sheriff's sergeant, offered plenty of preventative tips to parents and children during at Dunedin's 12th annual Touch-a-Truck on April 27.

While honks and toots from nearly 100 trucks and cars echoed across Highlander Park, she stressed the importance of constant dialogue between parents and young children in order to combat potential child predators Saturday during two Pinellas County Sheriff's seminars geared at families.

To help, Nestor brought along her husband, also a law enforcement officer, and 12-year-old son.

Nestor said her son is able to relate to the children on a kid-to-kid level, which actually helps them retain the information better than if she were to explain it. He took the mic toward the end of the presentation and spoke on using a code phrase to signal when they feel threatened, unsafe or creeped out.

Here are four of many tips Nestor shared with her audiences Saturday:

1. Have a plan. Before entering into any event or store, Nestor advised parents to get into the habit of designating a meeting place should they become separated from their child. She also said make sure your child can repeat back to you what you're wearing, your cell phone number, and who to turn to for help (i.e., a uniformed police officer, a store employee).
2. Use your voice. Teach your children to use phrases like "no" or "get away from me" if someone tries to touch them or asks them to do something that doesn't seem right.
3. Have a code word or phrase. Nestor says it's when, not if, your child will find him or herself in a precarious situation. Whether it's being lured by a sexual predator or facing peer pressure to consume drugs or alcohol, Nestor says it's statistically going to come from someone they know and trust. Having a code word or phrase in place allows your child the opportunity to call you for help without tipping off a would-be offender.
4. Carry up-to-date photos. Nestor suggests carrying a flash drive key chain with your child's latest photo saved on it. This saves time in the precious early minutes of a possible abduction because you'll already have something to give to authorities on the scene so the search can start immediately across jurisdictions via an Amber Alert, if necessary.

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Pinellas schools under review after low grades from the state

Posted: Apr 29, 2013 8:56 PM EDT Updated: Apr 29, 2013 8:56 PM EDT

By: Tanya Arja, FOX 13 News - bio

<http://www.myfoxtampabay.com/story/22112231/2013/04/29/pinellas-schools-under-review-after-low-grades-from-the-state>

ST. PETERSBURG (FOX 13) - Kalie Davis could have chosen to teach anywhere, but she wanted to make the biggest impact.

"I moved from Gainesville and I chose to be here at Melrose Elementary. It's the farthest from my house and it's the most challenging population. I really love the kids," she said.

But the kids at the school are not making the gains the state expects. So now, Davis and every other teacher at Melrose and four other Pinellas County schools have to reapply for their jobs.

The schools have either received a 'D' or an 'F' for the last three years. The schools are Maximo Elementary, Melrose Elementary, Fairmount Park Elementary, Azalea Middle and Pinellas Park Middle

The Superintendent for Pinellas schools has decided each teacher will have to go through a review. Then, based on their students' learning gains and other data, they will decide if the teacher can stay at their current school, or be transferred to another school.

The district says teachers at these struggling schools must be a perfect fit.

"We're talking about schools that have a high percentage of free and reduced lunch. We're talking about schools with students who don't necessarily come prepared at their grade level. And it does take a special educator to work with students in these schools," said Melanie Marquez Parra.

Kalie Davis teaches 2nd grade at Melrose. She says it puts them all on edge.

"It's scary, there's a lot of unknowns that are up in the air about everything," she said.

She says lawmakers who make these decisions have no idea what challenges they face. She wishes they would come, not just for five minutes, but for days to see what they are dealing with.

"I have snack bags in my closet; I have kids that come in hungry every day. I have kids that sleep. All the teachers across the board, we're buying snacks for our kids. We're watching them take naps and we can't even wake them up. They're so tired from not sleeping the night before."

In Hillsborough County, Potter Elementary and Sligh Middle are also under the state's watch. But they are not taking the same steps as Pinellas. Superintendent Mary Ellen Elia is still weighing the options. But in the past, Hillsborough has change the principal and brought in more support staff, like reading coaches.

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The Huffington Post: Preschool Funding Reached 'State Of Emergency' In 2012: NIEER Report

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/29/preschool-funding-2012-nieer-yearbook\\_n\\_3175249.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/29/preschool-funding-2012-nieer-yearbook_n_3175249.html)

Preschool Funding Reached 'State Of Emergency' In 2012: NIEER Report  
Posted: 04/29/2013 12:03 am EDT | Updated: 04/29/2013 1:17 am EDT

Download the NIEER Report here: <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2012.pdf>

States are drastically underfunding programs for their youngest learners now more than ever, according to a report released Monday, even as researchers and policymakers increasingly point to pre-school as a ladder to the middle class.

Funding per student for state pre-school programs has reached its lowest point in a decade, according to "The State of Preschool 2012," the annual yearbook released by Rutgers University's National Institute for Early Education Research. "The 2011-2012 school year was the worst in a decade for progress in access to high-quality pre-K for America's children," the authors wrote. After a decade of increasing enrollment, that growth stalled, according to the report. Though the 2011-2012 school year marks the first time pre-K enrollment didn't increase along with the rate of population change.

"The state of preschool was a state of emergency" in 2012, said Steve Barnett, NIEER's director. Between the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years, pre-K spending on state programs dropped by more than \$548 million overall, and \$442 per student (to \$3,841) when adjusted for inflation, according to the report.

This means state pre-K funding per child has fallen more than \$1,100 in real dollars from 2001-2002. "That's the lowest since we've been tracking pre-K," Barnett said. He called the cuts "severe" and "unprecedented." This is the first time NIEER has seen average, per-student spending slip below \$4,000.

The data shows a situation so dire that U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and American Federation of Teachers union president Randi Weingarten are expected to discuss NIEER's findings at a Monday event. "Our youngest learners will not be college- and career-ready if we slash preschool dollars," Duncan has said of the cuts.

Early childhood education has been tied to better life outcomes. In 2012, several police chiefs highlighted the need for more and better preschool as a tool for long-term crime reduction. University of Chicago professor James Heckman, a Nobel prize-winning economist, has demonstrated that every dollar spent on quality early childhood education yields a 7 to 10 percent return on investment as students graduate and begin contributing to the economy.

And the NIEER report comes as President Barack Obama tries his hand at a dramatic expansion of preschool programs, as first reported by HuffPost in January. In Obama's 2014 budget, the administration proposed "Preschool for All," a plan that would incentivize state spending on "high-quality" pre-K slots for 4-year-olds living below 200 percent of the poverty line by providing matching federal funds, paid for in part by an increase in the tobacco tax.

But insiders expect the proposal to have little political momentum: Already, the tobacco industry is rebelling against the proposed tax hike. And the program comes with a hefty price tag of \$75 billion over 10 years -- without the tobacco money, it's unlikely that a snip-happy and polarized Congress would fund it.

While some governors, both Democrats and Republicans, have expressed support for raising pre-school dollars, the NIEER numbers show that it will take a big boost to dig out of the current funding gap.

"States need to right the balance in terms of the tradeoffs they make between enrollment and providing enough money to make a preschool experience really meaningful," Barnett said.

In 2012, according to the report, state preschool programs served 1.1 million children at age 4, or just 28 percent of all 4-year-olds. Enrollment did not keep up with population growth, and 16 states reduced pre-K enrollment.

Meanwhile, funding declined in 27 of the 40 states with pre-K programs; in 13 states, it fell by 10 percent or more. States that cut the most money per student between 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 include Rhode Island, which cut \$2,419 per pupil; Connecticut, which cut \$1,268; California, which cut \$1,009; and Maryland and Georgia, which both cut around \$945. In Florida, funding levels have "fallen so low as to bring into question the effectiveness of their programs by any reasonable standard," the report's authors wrote. "While much of the economy is now recovering from the Great Recession, the nation's youngest learners are still bearing the brunt of budget cuts."

Only 12 states and Washington, D.C. increased pre-K funding per child, and only 15 states and Washington, D.C. met NIEER's preschool quality standards. Low funding, Barnett said, affects quality since states have been shown to skimp on things like visits to monitor preschool programs.

"Five states lost out in site visits, which is important," Barnett said. "That really puts quality in jeopardy."

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Tampa Bay Times: Pinellas homeless count draws criticism  
Anna M. Phillips, Times Staff Writer

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/localgovernment/pinellas-homeless-count-draws-criticism/2117957>

Sunday, April 28, 2013 4:30am

For one day in January, hundreds of volunteers spread out across Pinellas County to take a census of the homeless population. But as the deadline nears for the county to report its numbers to the federal government, some say the data collected is flawed and could jeopardize grant funding.

Like Hillsborough County, which sent out volunteers to recount its homeless population after early numbers were improbably low, Pinellas' count has been troubled as well. Organizers said that too few people took part in the census — about a hundred less than last count — making it difficult to find and interview those living on the periphery. And though a phone bank was set up so that families could call in to report themselves, few did.

In letters to the Homeless Leadership Board, which oversaw the count, the executive director of the Juvenile Welfare Board has been critical of the way the count was planned and organized.

The data have been compromised by limited volunteer training and little quality control for data collection, wrote Gay Lancaster, who leads the child welfare agency. There also was too little planning time, she wrote.

"We believe the lead time was insufficient for a study of this magnitude and importance to the community," Lancaster wrote.

While the federal government requires a minimum of eight months of planning, Homeless Leadership Board director Sarah Snyder said the board began preparing for the census about six months beforehand.

The data collected had "major holes or errors," according to a homeless board document.

In one instance, under a question asking respondents where they'd slept the night before, people entering the survey information into a database wrote the person's gender.

Fixing the problems has fallen to staff at the Juvenile Welfare Board and data are not yet available. But what is eventually produced will likely come with caveats.

Lancaster said she is especially concerned that this year's data will show low numbers of homeless families and youth, populations that most outreach groups believe are increasing. If the county reports a decreasing homeless population, she said, it could hurt Pinellas outreach groups in their applications for grant money.

"We pride ourselves in being able to tell the community what we can about the status of children in this community," Lancaster said. "We can't accurately report on that particular element of our community — those who are most vulnerable — and we'd like to be able to."

Sending the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development lower numbers would not result in less money for the county, Snyder said. In fact, HUD sometimes awards more funding if counties can show they have decreased their numbers of chronically homeless people and increased the supply of transitional housing.

But it is important, she said, for counties to have an accurate picture of their homeless population. For that reason, the board is planning another count next year, she said. Pinellas missed the cutoff date to ask HUD to approve a recount this year.

Snyder said that while she is concerned about the lack of volunteers, she did not share Lancaster's worries over training and organization.

This year, she said, they worked with outreach teams to target the encampments and parks where homeless people are known to congregate. The group also got better data on the imprisoned homeless population and sent letters to low-budget motels, asking for their help with the count.

"We made improvements based on the lessons in 2011," Snyder said. "I'm certainly more confident (in the data) than the JWB is."

The number of homeless people in Pinellas — and who exactly is considered homeless — has been a subject of debate for years. And nationally, homeless advocacy groups have voiced concern that the counts are inaccurate and understate the scale of the problem.

In 2011, the last time Pinellas tried to count the number of people in shelters and on the street, volunteers tallied 3,661 people, just over half of whom were living in the shelter system. But most groups who work with the homeless in Pinellas believe the actual figure is much larger.

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Pinellas homeless count draws criticism 04/28/13 [Last modified: Sunday, April 28, 2013 9:22pm]

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Tampa Bay Times: Tarpon Springs Mayor Archie succeeds with soft, helpful approach

Brittany Alana Davis, Times Staff Writer

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/localgovernment/tarpon-springs-mayor-archie-succeeds-with-soft-helpful-approach/2116239>

Friday, April 19, 2013 4:32pm

TARPON SPRINGS — In a small city like Tarpon Springs, there are no poll numbers or consultants to gauge the popularity of politicians. But fans of Mayor David Archie say there's a reason nobody challenged his recent bid for re-election: He's too good to beat.

"It's not because nobody wants to be mayor," said City Manager Mark LeCouris. "It would be crazy to run against David with his record of community service. What's going to be your platform?"

Archie, 60, who directs a community nonprofit while also serving as mayor, was sworn in recently for his second and final term as the city's highest elected official. He'll term out in 2016.

In Tarpon Springs, the hired city manager handles day-to-day operations, while the elected mayor acts as the figurehead, attending ribbon cuttings, lobbying lawmakers in Tallahassee and running City Commission meetings. For that, Archie is paid \$13,000 per year.

As mayor, Archie's power is the soft sort. He can use his platform to make his messages public and control the City Commission's debate. But like the four other members of the commission, he only gets one vote.

"People think I've got all this power," Archie said, laughing. "But I tell them, 'Look, my vote doesn't count any more than anyone else.' "

A self-described diplomat, Archie seeks to maintain a friendly atmosphere at meetings, talking softly and smiling wryly during occasional jokes. He measures his comments, speaking last at meetings and not for long.

His low-key tone has largely helped him avoid confrontation as mayor of a city where local politicians have had their share of showdowns.

In fact, Archie took some residents by surprise in January when he used an angry tone with the city's Planning and Zoning Board, calling volunteers out by name for bullying applicants who want to open Tarpon Springs' businesses.

"That is disrespectful and rude," Archie said at the time. "This is not a threat, but it is a promise: If you're disrespectful of people coming before the city, you should not be representing the people of Tarpon Springs, plain and simple."

Attorney Mary Klimis Coburn said she appreciates Archie's even keel, even if she often disagrees with his votes.

"He weighs each decision carefully," she said. "He doesn't shoot from the hip."

She offered this story about Archie: Two years ago, Coburn took on the legal case of a high school teenager who came to blows with another student over a girl.

The other student's family wanted tough penalties for Coburn's client, whom she called a model student.

Archie was acquainted with the teenager and testified on his behalf. The mayor's words were "icing on the cake for the judge," who gave the student 30 days in jail, probation and community service rather than prison time.

"(Archie) understood this was a good kid who would do the right thing if the court was to allow it," said Coburn, adding the student now attends St. Petersburg College.

Archie's City Hall office — which he jokes is a "city loan" — is spacious, with plush chairs, big windows and a shelf of awards. But he still works a full schedule at Citizens Alliance for Progress, which helps low-income people access tutoring, parenting classes and health care, among other things.

Even most of his mayoral work takes place outside the office.

"It doesn't matter if you're at the grocery store or walking down the street, people see you and you're the mayor and they want you to help with their problems," he said.

Resident requests range from serious to ridiculous. Soon after Archie was elected, he was asked to settle a dispute between neighbors. A man's dog was defecating in his neighbor's yard.

Rather than roll his eyes, Archie smiled and tried to help.

"Have you consulted with your homeowner association?" Archie asked. "Talked to the neighbor?"

Archie's helpful attitude helped him make history in 2010 when, after a combined 10 years on the commission, he was elected Pinellas County's first black mayor.

His robust community support enabled him to squash the election's racial undertones, with some people of all backgrounds wondering whether Archie would steer money or favors toward the black community.

Archie acknowledges those voices, and responds carefully.

"When I was a child it didn't feel like everyone had access to city government. Only a certain group," Archie said. "These days, I hope everyone who wants to have their voices heard knows they can come to City Hall and get a fair hearing."

Archie said he frequently faces questions about his political goals when his reign as mayor ends. Does he want to be a county commissioner? A state legislator?

He's not sure he wants to deal with the back patting and "go along to get along" attitude required — especially at the state level.

Besides, Archie's roots are in Tarpon Springs, he said, where he's got constant, tangible reminders that change is possible.

He directs his nonprofit from the Union Academy building, where Archie attended the former all-black elementary school.

And when he takes the mayor's seat at City Hall, he remembers his dad, who also served with dignity at City Hall — as a custodian.

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Last modified: Friday, April 19, 2013 6:12pm  
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## ST. PETERSBURG TRIBUNE - Pinellas schools might open their playgrounds after-hours

By Anastasia Dawson | Tribune Staff

Published: April 22, 2013

<http://tbo.com/pinellas-county/pinellas-schools-might-open-their-playgrounds-after-hours-b82479800z1>

CLEARWATER - Long after the school day ends, James Gilchrist often plays basketball with his best friend, Jamie Barnett, on Mount Vernon Elementary School's playground in St. Petersburg.

It has been an almost-daily routine for the 11-year-old boys for as long as James can remember and one that Pinellas County officials hope soon will be replicated on more school playgrounds after hours.

"It's pretty cool that they keep their playground open; we can skateboard or play on the monkey bars," James said. "I go to Northwest Elementary, and they always lock up the gate, so you have to climb over it or something to get on the playground after school."

A proposal to open more or perhaps all Pinellas County school playgrounds after classes end each day came up at a meeting of elected school officials, Juvenile Welfare Board members and county commissioners last week. While matters such as operational costs and liability must be resolved, Pinellas commission Chairman Ken Welch said the idea will become a county priority.

Pinellas County Schools operates six joint-use playgrounds with the City of St. Petersburg – playgrounds that were built by both and remain open after the school day ends. St. Petersburg pays operational costs for the playgrounds, said Sherry McBee, the city's director of Parks and Recreation. In return, people in the community get a safe place to play.

"Our original goal was to have a playground within a half-mile walking distance of every child in the city without having to cross a major street, but we don't have enough city land to fill in all those gaps," McBee said. "So we identified schools that were in those areas and put new playgrounds on their property. They have an access gate to the outside that's locked during school hours and then they have a gate that's accessible through the school that's locked after school hours."

If the county decides to enter a similar agreement, it likely first would target elementary schools in unincorporated areas of Pinellas County, such as Gateway, Palm Harbor and Lealman, said Associate Superintendent of Operational Services Michael Bessette.

Parks primarily are funded by cities or municipalities, not the county, so residents in unincorporated areas sometimes don't have access to them, County Administrator Robert LaSala said.

At least seven of the county's 74 elementary schools are in unincorporated Pinellas.

Since the joint-use agreements were signed about five years ago, the City of St. Petersburg has paid for everything from maintenance to mulching on the six playgrounds, Bessette said. County officials are waiting for an estimate of that expense before deciding whether to propose similar agreements with the school system.

The city installed new playground equipment at each school, which usually costs about \$80,000 per campus, McBee said. The cost was worth it, as the playgrounds remain busy after hours, she said.

“I really don’t know why we haven’t expanded this, I find it interesting,” Bessette said. “We haven’t been approached by any other municipalities, either, about doing this; ... but I’m excited that the county wants to look at doing more. We’ve never had any issues. It’s safe. It’s right there by a school and the school benefits also by having its use during the day.”

A key provision for the school district is that it’s not liable for any accidents that happen after-hours on its playgrounds, so long as the injuries aren’t because of faulty equipment or maintenance that was neglected. The city is responsible for other accidents that happen after school hours.

The only issues School board member Terry Krassner could think of was potential overuse and making sure people are aware the playgrounds are available.

“We do have a large number of after-school organizations, like the YMCA and R’Club, that use these playgrounds, too, so we’ll have to make sure they don’t have any issues with timing,” Krassner said.

School district officials, though, say they are open to making the idea happen.

“It’s a great idea, and anything we can do to partner with municipalities or governments, we’ll do,” he said. “We want our schools to be community focal points.”

####

John Romano: You could boost schools thoughtfully, or you could be Tallahassee

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/k12/you-could-boost-schools-thoughtfully-or-you-could-be-tallahassee/2115798>

Wednesday, April 17, 2013 6:53pm

Legislators see failing schools and look for someone to blame.

They see struggling students and come up with one-size-fits-all solutions. They see funding for education and devise schemes to funnel it to their corporate friends.

And this is why every parent of a Pinellas County public school student should offer a word of thanks this morning for school superintendent Mike Grego.

On the job for seven months, Grego has approached the problem of low standardized test scores with rational, compassionate and proactive solutions.

In other words, he has made the type of grownup decisions that our children and lawmakers are incapable of making on their own.

How does the plan work?

The concept is simple.

Identify at-risk students as early as possible, and then provide extended learning programs after school and during the summer to get them the help they need.

"We have students who are further behind than it will take to catch up in a year," Grego said Wednesday afternoon. "I may not be the smartest guy in the room, but that tells me we have to spend more time on task."

If the philosophy is simple, the execution can be tricky.

The school system has to come up with money to pay for the additional instruction time. There is also the question of child care after the extra learning sessions, and the issue of getting parents to enroll their children in the programs.

To address some of the functional issues, Grego has teamed with the Juvenile Welfare Board to find community programs that can help.

"There isn't a single parent out there who doesn't want their kid to succeed. We just have to make parental involvement a more personal issue," Grego said.

"I don't have a problem with accountability. If we don't put the right system in place, then shame on us. We should be held accountable."

And this is where Grego and our lawmakers differ. Instead of pointing fingers, instead of empty gestures and political rhetoric, Grego has studied the problem to find a solution.

For instance, he knows that schools drawing predominantly from low-income neighborhoods are having a more difficult time with standardized tests.

And so high-poverty areas will likely have more after-school programs, although the plan is to make them accessible throughout the county.

This is exactly the type of nuance and statistical evidence that our friends in Tallahassee don't understand or, worse, choose to ignore.

Based on the Department of Education's most recent accountability review, there were 46 public schools in Pinellas County where the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunches was at 70 percent or higher.

That represents 39 percent of all the schools in the county. And yet those schools accounted for 100 percent of all the D or F grades in Pinellas.

So you can either believe that all of the worst teachers and administrators in the county are coincidentally lumped together on those campuses, or you can make the logical assumption that socioeconomic factors have a major impact on standardized test scores.

This ain't rocket science.

And yet it has taken an educator on the local level to point out the obvious signs that our state officials have been too slow to see.

Last modified: Wednesday, April 17, 2013 8:24pm]

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Largo Leader: Largo offers variety of camp options

[http://www.tbnweekly.com/pubs/largo\\_leader/content\\_articles/041713\\_1le-04.txt](http://www.tbnweekly.com/pubs/largo_leader/content_articles/041713_1le-04.txt)

Article published on Wednesday, April 17, 2013

LARGO – Largo Recreation will offer 10 full day camps, 17 sport camps, 26 specialty camps, theater and dance camps, aquatic camps, as well as pre-camp days this year, beginning June 10.

The city's 60 full and half-day summer camps for preschool, elementary, middle school and teenage children are filling fast, so register today. Mix and match summer camps and locations to plan a fun and exciting summer for your child.

Register at Southwest Recreation Complex, 13120 Vonn Road and, due to construction at Highland Recreation Complex, the Largo Community Center, one block east of the Highland at 400 Alt. Keene Road.

Download a copy of Largo's summer camp guide at [www.LargoCamps.com](http://www.LargoCamps.com) or pick up a Play Magazine at all Largo recreation facilities, Largo City Hall or Largo Public Library. The website includes information about camp scholarships, before and after-care programs and weekly fees or call 518-3125 or 518-3131.

#### Full day camps

All full day camps are open weekdays between 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., with optional after-care hours until 6 p.m. for an additional fee. In addition to after-care hours, camps at Highland and Southwest centers will offer care between 7 and 7:30 a.m. for an additional fee.

Full-day camps include:

- **Rec and Read Camp:** Get your child on the right track for a healthy mind and body this summer with a camp which will focus on literacy as well as fitness and wellness at the Largo Public Library, 120 Central Park Drive. Research has shown that children lose reading skills during the summer months. Rec and Read will feature a variety of fun activities, games, guest speakers and field trips that will encourage reading, storytelling and writing as well as participation in sports, swimming, nutrition and healthy cooking. Weekly themes include Amazing Adventures, Poetry & Motion, Fantastic Fairy Tales and more. Parents are encouraged to register their children in two-week blocks.
- **Naturemania,** a unique camp jam-packed with nature-related activities for children who have completed grades 1 through 5, is offered at McGough Nature Park, at 11901 146th St. N. Each week, campers will hike on trails, hear from guest speakers, explore the nature park, head to the swimming pool and make arts and crafts. Weekly themes include Birds and Bugs, Navigating Nature, Farm Week, Wildlife Detective and more.

Parents can register children for one week or for the entire summer.

- Kids City and Kids City Jr. is offered at Southwest Recreation Complex, at 13120 Vonn Road. Kids City is geared for children ages 9 to 14 while Kids City Jr. is for children ages 5 to 8. In both full-day camps, campers will participate in themed activities, play sports, hear from guest speakers, head to the swimming pool and make crafts each week. Limited scholarship funding is available at this location.

- Cool Kids is offered at the new Highland Recreation Complex, 400 Alt. Keene Road. Cool Kids II is a summer camp jam-packed with nature activities designed for children who have completed grades 6 through 8. Each week, campers will participate in themed activities, play sports, hear from guest speakers, head to the swimming pool and make arts and crafts. Weekly themes include Water Works, Spirit Week, Crazy Carnival and more.

- Camp Funshine is offered at Mildred Helms Elementary School, 561 S. Clearwater-Largo Road.

Award-winning staff

Largo Recreation is proud to have two Cooperman-Bogue award winning staff members heading up summer camp programs.

Camp Director Brandon Mai and Children's Program Specialist Jennifer Fawcett have both received the Cooperman-Bogue KidsFirst Award from Children's Services Council of Pinellas County's Juvenile Welfare Board. The award honors those who go above and beyond the call of their human services job duties to improve the lives of Pinellas County children.

Mai will direct Camp Funshine. Brandon has been with the city of Largo since 2002 and is described as a friend, leader and role model to the children who grow up in the program.

Fawcett will oversee Southwest Complex's Kids City camps. Jennifer has been in the childcare field for more than 20 years and with the city for nine years. In 2010, she was recognized at the Florida After School Alliance for excellence in single site supervision.

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Tampa Bay Times: Pinellas' solution for struggling students: more school  
Cara Fitzpatrick, Times Staff Writer

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/k12/pinellas-solution-for-struggling-students-more-school/2115535>

Tuesday, April 16, 2013 6:32pm

LARGO — Pinellas County school superintendent Mike Grego can't force kids to go to school year-round. But, little by little, he's finding ways to lengthen the school day and the school year.

He's rolled out a new summer program, adding six weeks of classes for struggling students. So far, about 3,000 students have signed up for Summer Bridge. And next year, 28 schools will offer an extra 60 to 90 minutes of instruction in reading, math and science each day. The

program, dubbed "Promise Time," will start in high-poverty schools with a grade of C or below — effectively adding one day of school per week.

Grego hasn't provided many details about the cost of the programs, which depends somewhat on enrollment figures. But on Tuesday, at a special joint meeting of the School Board, County Commission and Juvenile Welfare Board, he said that extra instruction will help tackle two of the school district's major challenges: the effects of poverty and the achievement gap between white and black students.

"This certainly puts a major divot in that achievement gap," he said.

The three boards met at the Stavros Institute to discuss major problems in Pinellas County, such as early childhood education, homelessness and health care. Grego gave short updates about summer classes and extended-day programs.

Both programs will rely on Pinellas teachers. Those in Summer Bridge will earn their regular rate of pay, minus the supplement they receive during the regular school year from a voter-approved property tax. It's not clear yet how teachers in Promise Time will be paid.

Grego told board members that many of the students targeted for Summer Bridge and Promise Time would otherwise spend after-school hours in child care facilities. He'd rather see them in school.

To make it easier on working parents, Grego is working with community organizations such as the R'Club to provide child care until 6 p.m. at Promise Time schools. He said students will receive academic instruction and recreation time, and learn "soft skills" such as manners and character building.

Promise Time will be offered at 22 elementary schools and six middle schools.

Although dollar figures for both programs haven't been revealed, one estimate that came out Tuesday suggests Summer Bridge could be more expensive than anticipated. When Grego announced the initiative in February, he said he planned to target 12,000 students for the program with a price tag of \$1.5 million to \$2 million. That estimate was based, in part, on paying teachers a flat fee, rather than their regular rate of pay.

On Tuesday, district documents gave a \$2.2 million price tag for just the elementary students in Summer Bridge. Two options were outlined with that price — operating 20 sites with 3,652 students or 27 sites with 3,082 students. Cost figures weren't provided for middle or high school programs.

Grego said school officials will know more about enrollment in those programs when the results come in for end-of-course exams and the FCAT.

Registration for Summer Bridge closes May 3.

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Tampa Bay Times - Editorial: Turning around troubled schools  
Tuesday, April 16, 2013 4:30am

<http://www.tampabay.com/opinion/editorials/editorial-turning-around-troubled-schools/2115517>

Moving large organizations is never easy. It can only be accomplished one measured step at a time. That's why it is refreshing to see Pinellas School Superintendent Michael Grego striving to take those quiet steps in a district so in need of a course correction.

Grego, on the job seven months and fresh off launching an optional summer program for struggling students, last week assembled key administrators to quietly brainstorm ways to improve the district's most struggling schools — from considering demographics and boundaries to curriculum. It is the first of several meetings he hopes to hold with the group before announcing any firm plan publicly.

The Tampa Bay Times reported Saturday that 11 schools were discussed in the meeting. But Grego told the editorial board Tuesday that the number is not set in stone. It could grow or shrink depending on where the group's discovery leads and the consensus that emerges on strategies to improve student performance. He anticipates it could include specific curriculum changes or new magnet programs or even some district wide change, such as a parental participation requirement to better communicate to families how they are expected to contribute to children's learning.

"Everything is on the stage ... but we can't do everything the first year," Grego said this week. "This is about looking at the research and forcing the questions about schools that could use the attention."

Pinellas school families and taxpayers alike look forward to hearing the plan.

[Last modified: Tuesday, April 16, 2013 5:55pm]

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St. Petersburg Tribune: Pinellas schools want to add extra tutoring next year

By Anastasia Dawson | Tribune Staff  
Published: April 16, 2013

<http://tbo.com/pinellas-county/pinellas-schools-want-to-add-extra-tutoring-next-year-b82479092z1>

LARGO - While they continue recruiting academically struggling students for their new summer tutoring program, Pinellas County Schools officials are also making plans to offer follow-up help next school year.

Superintendent Michael Grego unveiled a new plan Tuesday during a joint meeting with School Board members, County Commissioners and members of the Juvenile Welfare Board that would keep students working on their “problem areas” every day after school.

The “Promise Time” program will add an extra 60 to 90 minutes to a struggling student’s day for one-on-one tutoring with teachers. Teachers will make sure targeted students, identified by test scores and overall school performance, not only keep up with their required coursework but also

explore other interests. Students will be encouraged to join drama clubs, plant gardens, join book studies and listen to guest speakers.

“We can no longer afford, socially and academically, to just let these children go wherever,” Grego said. “We’re going to fight like heck to reduce learning regression, especially in impoverished areas, and we need total community support to do it.”

Next year, “Promise Time” will be offered at 22 elementary schools and six middle schools that scored C’s or lower on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. At least 80 percent of students at the targeted schools receive free or reduced-price lunches.

“It’s no secret that our students’ achievement gap and poverty are the two biggest issues facing our community,” County Commission Chairman Ken Welch said. “I would love to see this program expand, and I love the idea to almost create year-round school, though my fourth-grader probably would disagree with me.”

School district officials are still working out the details of the six-week Summer Bridge program, slated to begin June 17, though Grego did offer a few specifics Tuesday.

The Summer Bridge program is meant to curb summer learning losses among academically struggling students, particularly low-income and minority children. Students will study math, science, reading and writing four days a week and complete any unfinished coursework preventing them from progressing to the next grade level. So far, the school district is limiting enrollment to underperforming students.

The Juvenile Welfare Board has pledged to provide before- and after-care services for Summer Bridge and Promise Time, Grego said. Not only will the agency supply employees and activities to keep the children occupied, it will pay for them as well.

Preliminary cost estimates put the cost of providing before- and after-care for just elementary students at about \$2.16 million, though exact costs will be unknown until after all the students enroll. The deadline is May 3 for most students, but middle- and high-school students taking end-of-course exams will have to wait until the school year ends in June.

So far, about 3,000 of the 5,700 elementary students invited to attend the Summer Bridge have enrolled, though Grego expects that number to increase to 4,000 or 5,000 before the beginning of June. Enrollment remains well below the 12,000 students projected to enroll when the program was announced in February.

During the six-week program, 27 of the county’s 74 county elementary schools will be open, along with all but three middle schools and all Pinellas high schools. The school district could open additional schools if more students sign up, Grego said.

Funding for the academic portion of the two programs will come from state academic intervention funds, Grego said. School officials don’t know how much the program will cost, school district spokeswoman Melanie Marquez-Parra said.

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Tampa Bay Times: More details emerge about Summer Bridge  
Cara Fitzpatrick, Times Staff Writer

<http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/gradebook/more-details-emerge-about-summer-bridge/2115413>

Tuesday, April 16, 2013 10:14am

We're closing in on the summer, but many details about the Pinellas County School District's new Summer Bridge program are fuzzy.

Hundreds of teachers have applied for teaching positions. A couple thousand students have registered for classes. But it's still not clear how much the program will cost – or exactly how the school district is paying for it.

During a meeting of the county commission, School Board and Juvenile Welfare Board Tuesday, one dollar figure emerged: \$2.2 million. That was the cost given for each of two options, either operating 20 sites with 3,652 students or 27 sites with 3,082 students. Those are just elementary sites. The school district also plans to operate middle and high school programs.

So far, enrollment is the biggest piece that will determine cost. In the initial registration period, more than 2,100 students signed up. Registration is again open and will close in early May.

There were a few other interesting details that came out during the meeting. For instance, the percentage of eligible students who came to past years' summer school programs for third graders ranged from 44 percent to 60 percent. Last year, it was 53 percent.

The limited hours – just four to five hours a day – created a hardship for a lot of working families. There also were a limited number of sites, which created a potential problem for families with limited transportation. The program also focused only on reading.

The school district is trying to eliminate some of those problems by creating “wrap-around services” for after-school care and providing limited transportation. Those details, too, are still a bit fuzzy.

[Last modified: Tuesday, April 16, 2013 3:12pm]

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Juvenile Welfare Board names new executive director

Jo-Lynn Brown  
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Dr. Marcie Biddleman has been named the new executive director for the Juvenile Welfare Board.

Biddleman is currently the chief operating officer of the organization and has previously served as the director of the department of program development and support, according to a written statement.

She is tentatively scheduled to begin in her new position in June, the statement said.

The Juvenile Welfare Board offers community-based services and investment to assist children and families in Pinellas County.

Jo-Lynn Brown is Editorial Assistant for the Tampa Bay Business Journal.

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The Hell of American Day Care: An investigation into the barely regulated, unsafe business of looking after our children

APRIL 15, 2013

<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/112892/hell-american-day-care#>

BY JONATHAN COHN

It was 5:30 in the morning when Kenya Mire looked down at her baby girl, Kendyll, who was curled up tight on a foldaway crib. “Night, night,” Kendyll had just murmured in her quiet, serious way. At 20 months, she was picking up all sorts of words, like “baby,” the name of the doll she kept nearby, and “Bryce,” the name of her big brother. She hadn’t slept much that night, and Mire thought about calling in late to work so Kendyll could get more rest. But it was only Mire’s second day at a new job she badly needed, as a receptionist at a Houston oil company. Mire, who was 30, with an open face and wide smile, was intent on making a good impression. The best she could do was give Kendyll an extra hour to nap and prepare some warm milk for her breakfast.

When Kendyll got up, Mire dressed her in a purple shirt that matched her own—purple was Kendyll’s favorite color—and put a pair of purple-striped stretch pants in her backpack. It was a challenge to get Kendyll to sit still for the hour it took to unbraid and re-braid her dark hair, and on such a hectic morning, Mire didn’t even try. At around 7 a.m., they got into the car and drove to Kendyll’s new day care.

The place was called “Jackie’s Child Care,” but there wasn’t anyone named Jackie who worked there. The proprietor was Jessica Tata, an energetic 22-year-old registered with the state of Texas to look after children in the wood-paneled house she rented on a quiet, middle-class street. Her regulars included Elias, a chunky 16-month-old with a bowlegged walk, and 19-month-old Elizabeth, who always jumped into her mom’s lap when it was time to drop her off. As Mire walked back to her car that warm February morning in 2011, she noticed Kendyll hovering at the entrance—a little sleepy, a little curious, gazing at the scene inside. Mire felt uneasy about leaving, especially since it was only Kendyll’s second day there and she didn’t know Tata that well. Shortly after, she called Tata to check in, and Tata reassured her that Kendyll was doing just fine.

Just after lunch, Mire’s cell phone lit up. The number was Tata’s, but she didn’t recognize the voice. “There’s been a fire,” a woman said. “They’ve taken all the kids to the hospital, for smoke, as a precaution.” Mire tried not to panic; she clutched at the word “precaution.” Her phone buzzed again, this time with a text message from a friend: “What day care did you say Kendyll goes to?” Mire called the friend, who was watching live TV coverage of a burning Houston day care. Black smoke was billowing from windows and holes in the roof; firemen were running out of the house, cradling limp babies in their arms. One little girl had braided hair and a purple shirt, her friend told her. She looked like Kendyll. Mire ran to her car. I can’t panic, she

kept telling herself as she drove through heavy traffic and later past ambulances and fire engines. I just have to get there.

Trusting your child with someone else is one of the hardest things that a parent has to do—and in the United States, it's harder still, because American day care is a mess. About 8.2 million kids—about 40 percent of children under five—spend at least part of their week in the care of somebody other than a parent. Most of them are in centers, although a sizable minority attends home day cares like the one run by Jessica Tata. In other countries, such services are subsidized and well-regulated. In the United States, despite the fact that work and family life has changed profoundly in recent decades, we lack anything resembling an actual child care system. Excellent day cares are available, of course, if you have the money to pay for them and the luck to secure a spot. But the overall quality is wildly uneven and barely monitored, and at the lower end, it's Dickensian.

This situation is especially disturbing because, over the past two decades, researchers have developed an entirely new understanding of the first few years of life. This period affects the architecture of a child's brain in ways that indelibly shape intellectual abilities and behavior. Kids who grow up in nurturing, interactive environments tend to develop the skills they need to thrive as adults—like learning how to calm down after a setback or how to focus on a problem long enough to solve it. Kids who grow up without that kind of attention tend to lack impulse control and have more emotional outbursts. Later on, they are more likely to struggle in school or with the law. They also have more physical health problems. Numerous studies show that all children, especially those from low-income homes, benefit greatly from sound child care. The key ingredients are quite simple—starting with plenty of caregivers, who ideally have some expertise in child development.

By these metrics, American day care performs abysmally. A 2007 survey by the National Institute of Child Health Development deemed the majority of operations to be “fair” or “poor”—only 10 percent provided high-quality care. Experts recommend a ratio of one caregiver for every three infants between six and 18 months, but just one-third of children are in settings that meet that standard. Depending on the state, some providers may need only minimal or no training in safety, health, or child development. And because child care is so poorly paid, it doesn't attract the highly skilled. In 2011, the median annual salary for a child care worker was \$19,430, less than a parking lot attendant or a janitor. Marcy Whitebook, the director of the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment at the University of California–Berkeley, told me, “We've got decades of research, and it suggests most child care and early childhood education in this country is mediocre at best.”

At the same time, day care is a bruising financial burden for many families—more expensive than rent in 22 states. In the priciest, Massachusetts, it costs an average family \$15,000 a year to place an infant full-time in a licensed center. In California, the cost is equivalent to 40 percent of the median income for a single mother.

Only minimal assistance is available to offset these expenses. The very poorest families receive a tax credit worth up to \$1,050 a year per child. Some low-income families can also get subsidies or vouchers, but in most states the waiting lists for them are long. And so many parents put their kids in whatever they can find and whatever they can afford, hoping it will be good enough.

One indicator of the importance that the United States places on child care is how little official information the country bothers to collect about it. There are no regular surveys of quality and no national database of safety problems. One of the only serious studies, by Julia Wrigley and

Joanna Dreby, appeared in the *American Sociological Review* in 2005. The researchers cobbled together a database of fatalities from state records, court documents, and media reports. On the surface, they said, day care appears “quite safe,” but looking closer, they discovered “striking differences.” The death rate for infants in home settings—whether in their own houses with a nanny or in home day cares—was seven times higher than in centers. The most common causes included drowning, violence—typically, caregivers shaking babies—and fire.

Statistics on Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) are also revealing. ChildCare Aware of America, an advocacy group, calculated that, proportionally, about 9 percent of all reported SIDS deaths should take place in child care. The actual number is twice that. And while overall SIDS fatalities declined after a nationwide education campaign, the death rate in child care held steady.

Fatalities in child care remain relatively rare, but not as rare as they should be. In an investigation of Missouri day cares, St. Louis Post-Dispatch reporter Nancy Cambria documented 45 deaths between 2007 and 2010. One was three-month-old William Pratt, who died from blunt trauma after a caregiver threw him on a couch because she was frustrated with him. In 2012, a toddler named Juan Carlos Cardenas wandered off at an Indiana church day care. Nobody was watching him when he fell, face-first, into a baptismal pool and drowned.

Kenya Mire was an only child and hated it, and perhaps that’s why she liked kids so much. After finishing high school, in 1999, she started training to be a medical assistant, hoping to work in a maternity ward. “I was just so interested in the idea of pregnancy,” she says in her clear, measured way. “I always wanted to be that person where I was in the room with them from the time when they came in up through when they had the baby. I wanted to be the person that you told your story to.”

When she was 22, however, Mire had to put her plans on hold, because she was pregnant herself. She and the father weren’t together and her morning sickness got so bad she had to quit her job in a restaurant kitchen and move in with her mom. Despite all that, she felt “worry-free,” she says. “I was just so excited to have a child.” Eight years later, when she got pregnant again, it was different. This time, she knew how hard it would be.

When Mire went back to work, she put Kendyll in the same day care where she’d sent her son, Bryce: Grandma’s Place—a bright, cheery operation with a professional staff. But Grandma’s Place was expensive. Even with the subsidies Texas provides to low-income mothers, Mire had to pay \$200 a week from her \$12.50-an-hour job at a water utility company. Then the recession hit, and Mire lost the job. She had to pull Kendyll from the center.

For the next two years, Mire worked as the hostess at a steak house for five hours a night, earning \$10 an hour. Every day, she also checked in with several temping agencies. She relied on her mother and friends for child care, which meant she often had to pass up last-minute opportunities because she couldn’t find anyone to look after Kendyll. At one point, she scraped up the money to send Kendyll to a KinderCare franchise, but eventually fell behind on the payments and had to withdraw her. Once, she quit a customer-service job because she had nowhere for Kendyll to go.

When she was offered the oil company position, Mire felt like stability was finally within reach. “This was a really good opportunity,” she told me emphatically. “They were starting me on \$12.50, and if I became permanent, they would move to like \$13.” But in order to take the job, she needed child care.

First, Mire tried KinderCare again, but they wouldn't take Kendyll until Mire paid her debt; when she did, there were no openings. She called about a dozen centers, all of which were either too expensive or had no available slots. Mire thought she might have to turn down the job. "I just kind of broke down, because it seemed like nothing was going right, everything was just falling apart," she says. "I sat in my car for about thirty minutes. I was just like, I don't even know what to do anymore. Because I want to start this job, but I literally don't have nowhere for Kendyll to go."

Then a solution materialized. Mire's mother was shopping at Target when a woman named Jessica Tata handed her a business card for her home day care. Mire quickly called Tata, who said she could take another toddler. And the state subsidies—would Tata accept those? Yes, she said, she did it all the time.

Still, Mire was hesitant to leave Kendyll in a home day care—she'd never done that before. When she and Kendyll went to check out Jackie's, she noticed dirty dishes piled up on the kitchen counters. Over the next two hours, she plied Tata with questions, about everything from her experience to her education methods.

Tata's answers eased her anxiety. "She seemed like she understood the struggle of single parents and trying to work and take care of kids at the same time," Mire recalls. "She just seemed very open and honest, really." Mire liked the fact that Tata promised to teach the children Christian values through Bible reading and prayer. Most important, she seemed warm with children. Kendyll was usually wary in strange settings, but she left her mother's side and started playing with the other kids. Maybe the arrangement wasn't ideal, Mire thought, but it would be OK for now.

Mire's dilemma was one that American parents, particularly single mothers, have struggled with for generations. The United States has always been profoundly uncomfortable with the idea of supporting child care outside the home, for reasons that inevitably trace back to beliefs over the proper role of women and mothers. At no point has a well-organized public day care system ever been considered the social ideal.

The first day cares were established during the Industrial Revolution, as increasing numbers of women in cities had to work. Jane Addams, the Progressive Era activist, was horrified to learn that all over Chicago, children were being left alone in tenement homes, morning till night. "The first three crippled children we encountered in the neighborhood had all been injured while their mothers were at work," she wrote in her 1910 memoir, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*. "One had fallen out of a third-story window, another had been burned, and the third had a curved spine due to the fact that for three years he had been tied all day long to the leg of the kitchen table, only released at noon by his older brother who hastily ran in from a neighboring factory to share his lunch with him."

Addams and other do-gooders created "day nurseries," although in many cities they were little more than baby farms. Geraldine Youcha writes in *Minding the Children* that a survey from that era by Chicago authorities "found children unclean and crowded into one small room without any playthings, and several nurseries in which the 'superintendent' did not even know the last names and addresses of some of the children."

The prevailing assumption at the time was that child care outside the home was deeply inferior to a mother's care. At best, it was regarded as a useful tool to "Americanize" the children of recent immigrants. Even Addams believed the optimal solution was government subsidies that would

allow single mothers to look after their own children. (“With all of the efforts made by modern society to nurture and educate the young, how stupid it is to permit the mothers of young children to spend themselves in the coarser work of the world!” she wrote.) Toward that end, progressive states created widows’ pensions, which were eventually expanded by the New Deal. Decades later, most people would know this kind of assistance simply as “welfare.”

Arguably the best child care system America has ever had emerged during World War II, when women stepped in to fill the jobs of absent soldiers. For the first time, women were employed outside the home in a manner that society approved of, or at least tolerated. But many of these women had nowhere to leave their small children. They resorted to desperate measures—locking kids in the car in the factory parking lot, with the windows cracked open and blankets stretched across the back seats. This created the only moment in American politics when child care was ever a national priority. In 1940, Congress passed the Lanham Act, which created a system of government-run centers that served more than 100,000 children from families of all incomes.

After the war, children’s advocates wanted to keep the centers open. But lawmakers saw them only as a wartime contingency—and if day care enabled women to keep their factory jobs, veterans would have a harder time finding work. The Lanham Act was allowed to lapse.

The federal government didn’t get back into the child care business until the 1960s, with the creation of Head Start, which was narrowly targeted to support low-income children. A broader bill, designed to help working mothers by providing care to all kids who needed it, passed Congress a few years later. But President Nixon vetoed the legislation, saying he didn’t want the government getting mixed up with “communal” child-rearing arrangements. Other than some increases in government funding for child tax credits and subsidies, federal child care policy has hardly changed in the last few decades.

But family life has changed immeasurably. In 1975, most American families had a male breadwinner and a female homemaker, compared with one in five today. Around two-thirds of mothers of young children now work outside the home.

Meanwhile, the idea that it is preferable to support low-income women to stay home with their children has become toxic in American politics. Since the passage of welfare reform in 1996, single mothers no longer get cash benefits unless they have a job or demonstrate progress toward getting one. Millions of women with meager resources who would have qualified under the old welfare regime must find somewhere for their young children to go while they’re at work.

Day care, in other words, has become a permanent reality, although the public conversation barely reflects that fact. The issue of child care is either neglected as a “women’s issue” or obsessed over in mommy-wars debates about the virtues of day care versus stay-at-home moms. Whether out of reluctance to acknowledge a fundamental change in the conception of parenthood—especially motherhood—or out of a fear of expanding the role of government in family life, we still haven’t come to terms with the shift of women from the home to the workplace.<sup>1</sup>

On the day of the fire, as her house filled with smoke, Jessica Tata called 911. In the recording of the call, she is screaming: “Children are dying. I can’t see anything. I can’t even get there and get them. I can’t see anything. My kids are dying. Please hurry. Oh my god!”

Tata grew up in west Houston, the odd one out in a high-achieving Nigerian family. While her siblings excelled at academics and sports, Tata spent some time in juvenile detention, as well as a

special school for troubled youth. At one point, she admitted to a charge of delinquent arson for starting a fire in a school bathroom.

But when Tata was around 16, her family saw a radical change in her. She became a dedicated Christian and started volunteering at her church's day care. Her parents wanted her to go to college, like most of her brothers and sisters, but Tata decided to open a day care in her two-bedroom apartment.

In 2010, Tata started a bigger operation, Jackie's Child Care, which she registered with the state. She divided the lower floor of her house into different areas—mats on the tile floor for naptime, a classroom area with little desks, a play area with Legos and musical instruments. For the kids' lunch, she often cooked corn dogs or catfish. Tata liked to keep her older brother, Ron, posted on their progress, proudly describing the best speller or a child who had learned a new word. "I felt like she was trying to impress us all, like, Hey, you people thought I wouldn't go to college and I wouldn't be successful, but look at me now," he recalled. "I have this day care. I have these kids. I have everything that I dreamed of."

When the first-responders arrived at the scene, Tata told them she had been in the bathroom when a pan of heated oil caught fire on the stove and that she ran outside when she couldn't find any of the kids. A neighbor was trying to console a distraught Tata when she noticed that the children and the firefighters carrying them outside were covered in black soot. But Tata's white blouse, cherry-red vest, and matching knit beret were clean.

Other neighbors reported that they had seen her run out the door screaming, but, seconds before, some had also seen her drive up to the house, with nobody in her van. Later, a fire department investigator found a bag from Target behind the front door, with a receipt issued around the time of the fire.

Afterward—apparently the very next night—Tata returned to the charred remains of her home, retrieved her passport, and caught a flight to Nigeria. Interpol agents would eventually take her into custody, and at one point, Tata spoke with the mother of one of her charges on the phone. "I'm so sorry, Ms. Betty," she said.

As questions about Tata accumulated, many of them in coverage by the Houston Chronicle, 2 people started asking why authorities had allowed her to run a home day care in the first place. After all, she had a criminal record, even though Texas regulations state that children must not be supervised by anyone with "a history of criminal activity, abuse, or neglect."

I put the question to Sue Lahmeyer, former district director of licensing for the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). Her office was responsible for monitoring 6,000 child care providers in and around Houston, including Tata. Lahmeyer, a transplanted New Yorker who spent some 30 years working on services for children and families, explained how little power inspectors have to make sure kids are getting safe, quality care.

In Texas, a person only needs a high school qualification or equivalent to operate a home day care. (That includes online degrees.) As for Tata's juvenile record, she hadn't disclosed it on her application, and a computer background check hadn't uncovered it. In 2007, the agency had ordered Tata to close the day care in her apartment, because she was operating without a proper license. But, under the law, that didn't disqualify her from obtaining permission to start a new business.

Caregivers are also required to attend a state-sanctioned education session. According to a trainer, Tata had wandered in and out of the classroom, put her head down on the table, and spent much of the time texting. But since the law only requires applicants to show up, Tata had satisfied the requirement.

By national standards, Texas child care regulations are typical—better than average in some respects, worse in others. That is to say, they are painfully minimal. “You know, when we walk into some of these places, they’re meeting the letter of the standards,” Lahmeyer says. “But it’s like a warehouse for children. You know it when, as the inspector, you are the most interesting thing the kids have seen all day. They attach themselves to you and are trying to engage because there’s nothing else going on for them.”

Like most states, Texas inspects child care centers at least once a year, but only has the manpower to visit home day cares every two. Even egregious violations don’t always lead to shutdowns. Sometimes, that’s because parents, lacking alternatives, fight to keep notorious places open. An inspector named Carol McGinnis told me she’d recently visited a center in “total disarray,” with “feces smeared on the walls.” Nevertheless, if the agency closed it, McGinnis expected some parents would resist, because it was one of the few places offering care on weekends.

On other occasions, the process of closing a day care can be torturous. Lahmeyer recalled one place that racked up repeated violations over two years before a judge would shut it down. “I can tell you there are a fair number [of cases] that we lost because the judge decided, No child’s died yet, so they stay open,” Lahmeyer says.

All too often, it takes an incident to force a closure. Last November, for instance, DFPS closed a center after a caregiver left a nine-month-old infant alone on a changing table without a belt. The baby fell onto a concrete floor, sustaining a serious skull injury. In addition to the caregiver, DFPS cited the director for failing to “contact the parents the next day when a ‘mushy’ bump was observed on the infant’s head.” I asked McGinnis how many of the area’s providers she’d trust with her own child. She answered promptly: “Twenty percent.” 3

It took Kenya Mire about 25 minutes to get to the hospital, where she found a frantic scene. Parents were desperately seeking information; staffers were having trouble identifying the kids. Even then, Mire says: “I didn’t expect it to be to the extreme. I still was kind of hoping it was OK.” But then a nurse came into the waiting area holding a pair of purple striped stretch pants, covered in soot and cut into pieces. Mire practically had to be pulled into the emergency room. When they brought her in, she saw Kendyll laid out on a table like a doll. A doctor was pumping her chest, hard. Then a nurse pulled her aside and told her there was nothing more they could do.

Four of the seven children at the day care died that day. Elizabeth died before her mother, Betty Ukeru Kajoh, a teacher who met Tata through church, made it to the hospital. Elias was in a special breathing chamber, expelling smoke from his lungs, by the time his mom, Keshia Brown, finished a training session for a new job at a grocery store and learned about the fire. He died the next day in Keshia’s arms.

Tiffany Dickerson had two children at Tata’s day care: Makayla, two, and Shomari, three. She worked at West Houston Medical Center as a nurse’s assistant, and shortly after lunchtime, she heard a page over the intercom: “Code Blue, Double P.D.”—the shorthand for “pediatric department.” She thought nothing of it, until she called the day care a few minutes later and

found out what had happened. “Oh god, Tiffany, that’s who’s in the emergency room,” Dickerson’s manager told her. Makayla survived; Shomari did not.<sup>4</sup>

In many countries, day care is treated not as an afterthought, but as a priority. France, for instance, has a government-run system that experts consider exemplary. Infants and toddlers can attend crèche, which is part of the public health system, while preschoolers go to the école maternelle, which is part of the public education system. At every crèche, half the caregivers must have specialized collegiate degrees in child care or psychology; pediatricians and psychologists are available for consultation. Teachers in the école maternelle must have special post-college training and are paid the same as public school teachers. Neither program is mandatory, but nearly every preschooler goes to the école maternelle. Parents who stay at home to care for their children or hire their own caregivers receive generous tax breaks. It hardly seems a coincidence that 80 percent of French women work, compared with 60 percent of their American counterparts.

France spends more on care per child than the United States—a lot more, in the case of infants and toddlers. But most French families pay far less out of pocket, because the government subsidizes child care with tax dollars and sets fees according to a sliding scale based on income. Overall, the government devotes about 1 percent of France’s gross domestic product to child care, more than twice as much as the United States does. As Steven Greenhouse once observed in *The New York Times*, “Comparing the French system with the American system ... is like comparing a vintage bottle of Chateau Margaux with a \$4 bottle of American wine.”

There is one place in the United States where you can find a very similar arrangement: the military. In the 1980s, the Defense Department decided to address, rather than ignore, the same social changes that have transformed the wider economy. More women were entering the military, and many had children. Increasingly, the wives of male soldiers had jobs of their own. Believing that subsidized day care was essential for recruitment and morale, military leaders created a system the National Women’s Law Center has called a “model for the nation.” More than 98 percent of military child care centers meet standards set by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, compared with only 10 percent of private-sector day cares.

A growing number of economists have become convinced that a comprehensive child care system is not only a worthwhile investment, but also an essential one. James Heckman, the Nobel-winning economist, has calculated that, in the best early childhood programs, every dollar that society invests yields between \$7 and \$12 in benefits. When children grow up to become productive members of the workforce, they feed more money into the economy and pay more taxes. They also cost the state less—for trips to the E.R., special education, incarceration, unemployment benefits, and other expenses that have been linked to inadequate nurturing in the earliest years of life. Two Fed economists concluded in a report that “the most efficient means to boost the productivity of the workforce 15 to 20 years down the road is to invest in today’s youngest children” and that such spending would yield “a much higher return than most government-funded economic development initiatives.”

In a July 2012 speech, Fed Chairman Ben Bernanke made the case that significant investment in early childhood would deliver even broader gains to the U.S. economy. “Notably, a portion of these economic returns accrues to the children themselves and their families,” he said, “but studies show that the rest of society enjoys the majority of the benefits.” Right now, too many Americans make major choices about work or finances based on the scarcity or cost of child care. Sometimes, this means women curtail their careers because it’s cheaper to stay home or take a more flexible job than to pay for full-time care. Sometimes, a person of limited means

pours a significant portion of their income into day care, which limits their ability to build a financial foundation for the future. When parents can find safe, affordable child care, they are more likely to realize their full economic potential. Their employers gain, too: Numerous studies show that access to quality day care increases productivity significantly.

This year, President Barack Obama has put forward what he calls a “universal pre-kindergarten” proposal. It would provide states with matching funds, so that they could set up their own programs for three- and four-year-olds, while modestly increasing subsidies for infant and toddler care. This plan would cost \$75 billion over ten years, financed by higher cigarette taxes, which means it will meet serious political resistance. But the concept has support from key Democrats like House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, who has spoken of “doing for child care what we did for health care.”

Since the 1930s, with the introduction of Social Security, the United States has constructed—slowly, haphazardly, often painfully—a welfare state. Pensions, public housing, health care—piece by piece, the government created protections for citizens that the market doesn’t always provide. Child care is the major unfinished part of that project. The lack of quality, affordable day care is arguably the most significant barrier to full equality for women in the workplace. It makes it more likely that children born in poverty will remain there. That’s why other developed countries made child care a collective responsibility long ago.

In November 2012, Tata went on trial for multiple charges, including felony murder. Family and former clients talked about her love of children. A nurse named Eudora Walcott said Tata was the first caregiver who didn’t make her grandson scream. “The person I know was always there for the kids,” she recalled. But Tata herself never took the stand. (She also declined interview requests for this article.)

A young woman who’d worked with Tata briefly in 2010 testified that Tata sometimes left her alone with a dozen kids for hours at a time and that when she arrived in the morning, the place occasionally had “diapers on the floor, throw up under the playpen.” A seven-year-old girl told jurors that Tata once took the older kids to McDonald’s while the younger ones slept at home. A neighbor described several occasions when she’d knocked on Tata’s door and nobody answered, even though she could hear children inside.

The prosecutor, Steve Baldassano, played surveillance video taken at Target during the fire that showed Tata browsing the aisles and then stopping by a Starbucks. A manager testified that he asked Tata to take a customer survey, but she told him she didn’t have time—because she had something on the stove and little kids were at home, sleeping.

Tata’s attorney, Mike DeGeurin, didn’t dispute that she had left the kids alone. But while Tata was guilty of bad judgment, he said, she hadn’t meant to hurt anyone. “It was a terrible accident,” DeGeurin told the court. “What it’s not is murder.” The next day, the jury found Tata guilty. She is now serving an 80-year sentence in a state prison.

Mire also testified, but when the trial was over, she felt disappointed, like there were more things she wanted to say. “I wanted to come to her face-to-face and be like, what happened?” she says. “I could look at babies now, not even my baby, and I’m still just like, it’s a comfort feeling to know that something so precious is here. You cherish that. You keep that close. You can look at a baby or child and just see their innocence. Even when they do something bad, there’s still innocence to that.

“So when you hear a story where people have done neglective things to that kind of innocence, it’s heartbreaking because I don’t fathom it. I just can’t imagine what she was thinking.”

Nearly a year after the fire, Mire got a steady job at the same hospital where Kendyll died. Oddly, the experience has provided her with a measure of peace. Some of the nurses in the emergency room remembered Mire, and when firefighters brought in patients, some of them recognized her, too. They talked to her about the day of the fire, and Mire learned that, by the time Kendyll reached the hospital, she had already passed away. “They think that she was sleeping and the smoke just put her in a deeper sleep,” she says. “It was kind of like a comfort, because I was able to get answers that I needed.” For months, she said, she had been tormented by the thought that her daughter had died alone and in pain. “It scared me to death because I always wondered if she was awake, if she was in the crib crying for me. I just didn’t want her to feel like I left her there.”

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JWB picks its chief operating officer to lead the child welfare agency Anna M. Phillips, Times Staff Writer

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/localgovernment/jwb-picks-its-chief-operating-officer-to-lead-the-child-welfare-agency/2114614>

Thursday, April 11, 2013 4:54pm

The search for the next director of the Juvenile Welfare Board began with political turmoil. It ended quietly Thursday with the selection of the board’s chief operating officer.

By a unanimous vote, the board chose Marcie Biddleman, a former Marine and Juvenile Welfare Board employee since 2009, to lead the organization. The decision to select someone familiar with the agency’s inner workings appealed to board members, who said Biddleman would be able to start making improvements on day one. She will replace the agency’s outgoing director, Gay Lancaster, who is retiring in June.

Yet the choice is an unusual one given the priorities the board set at the beginning of its search.

Like other child welfare agencies across Florida, the Juvenile Welfare Board will face a referendum in 2016 that will determine its future. That event had some board members focused on hiring a politically savvy director with experience courting the public’s favor.

In February, an applicant who seemed to fit that description appeared. But Pinellas County Commissioner Ken Welch’s decision to apply encountered enough opposition that he soon withdrew.

“We were looking for a rockstar, somebody with a big name in the community,” said Pinellas-Pasco State Attorney Bernie McCabe. “But I think we’ve sobered up as we went along and realized it’d be better to find someone who could do the job well than someone with a name.”

Biddleman, 67, has decades of experience working with and running child protection groups, both public and private. Politics is not on her resume, and that’s fine by the board.

It was "her vision and her day-to-day working knowledge," that led to her selection, said board member Jim Sewell.

Biddleman grew up in St. Petersburg and joined the Marine Corps immediately after high school.

While getting a bachelor's degree at the University of South Florida, she began working with the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services in Pinellas. That led to years of work with similar agencies in Pinellas, where she led the St. Petersburg Free Clinic for nine years, and in other parts of Florida.

She said the JWB already is working on ways to publicize its work in advance of the referendum.

"The JWB has kind of been the silent neighbor for so many years," she said. "So we are looking at some different ways to put the JWB name out there in the public eye, still without going overboard."

[Last modified: Thursday, April 11, 2013 7:35pm]

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