

Early Childhood Advocacy Press Conference

by Rabbi Kimberly Herzog Cohen

Last Friday morning, my twelve-year-old twins graduated sixth grade at Brentfield Elementary School in Richardson ISD. Moving from elementary to junior high is a milestone moment that brings layers of emotions and memories. As I reflect on the celebration, I think about their educational journey, which began with the daily pilgrimage from our home to Temple Emanu-El's Early Childhood Education Center. At three months old, they traveled with me there, into a loving, creative, connective environment. Lifetime friendships were formed in our hallways, experiences shaped their social and intellectual development, and I was able to return to work, which was an essential step for our whole family's well-being. We keep reaping the countless blessings from those early years in the ECEC.

Unfortunately, my children's foundational educational experiences can be out of reach for so many. In partnership with Dallas Area Interfaith, Temple Emanu-El, a 154-year-old, 2500 family member congregation, is committed to creating strong relationships as we act on our shared, faithful values. For years, leaders in our community have been focused on access to early childhood education and now we are pursuing a specific path forward.

We want voters to decide in November on a Dallas County Children's Fund, modeled on other cities like Denver, San Antonio, Cincinnati, among others. There are staggering numbers of underserved children in our Dallas community who would greatly benefit from our investment in early childhood education, but the whole county would benefit as well. First, this approach strengthens the local economy by helping decrease the number of children on

the childcare wait list. More parents can go back to work, plus reliable care improves school readiness as all the studies show that brain and social development in these early years are critical for success over time, thus we will be supporting the county's workforce well in the future. Furthermore, this approach would increase teacher pay, which they so greatly deserve as caring adults, helping guide the next generation. And lastly, the Dallas County Children's Fund would help create safe and enriching programs for children year-round. This is essential in the summer months as too many children remain at home without structure or connections as their parents continue to work.

We find various practices of counting in the Hebrew Scripture, most recently in the form of a census which kicks off the fourth book of Moses, what we call the Book of Numbers. In ancient times a census was essential for military conscription and for taxes on people or property. We have examples of unjust censuses, warning us that counting people can lead to sin. For instance, King David only counted sword-wielding men so that he could grasp the number of people who could serve him instead of God. King David's count is anonymous, cold and self-serving.

But the census in the Book of Numbers is different. Instead of counting swords, Moses records people by their family names. Moses' count is based on the principle that each person is a holy entity. From ancient Israel to here in Dallas Texas, we have opportunities to bring Moses' faithful approach into our public life.

A waitlist 1000s of children deep, summer months without any opportunity for enrichment, this results in a loss for not only the child who will

struggle even harder to develop in healthy ways, but it is a loss for the fulfillment of what our local economy and community can be. Today and always, we pray that our Rock and Redeemer, the One who Sustains Us, guide our hands and hearts as we make our way, ensuring that each voice, each person, each child counts.