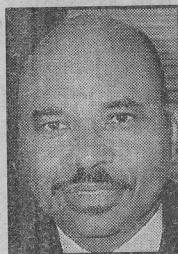


Panel tackles child-care issues

■ Foundations, businesses, agencies seek solutions for Austin parents

By CLARA G. HERRERA
American-Statesman Staff



Michael Lacour: Panelist from IBM says community must make quality child care a priority.

Resources for IBM in Austin.

IBM is part of the American Business Collaborative for Quality Dependent Care, a group of companies that have committed to spend \$100 million to improve child- and elder-care programs by 2000.

Lacour said getting a collaboration off the ground in Austin has been taxing. "I'm ashamed to say we're having a tough time doing so," he said.

One major difficulty is getting businesses to commit money because they want to see clear results for their dollars, Lacour said. During Tuesday's discussion, panelists and audience members gave their ideas to improve child care. Some included:

- Creating savings plans with incentives at banks so people can invest in child care before becoming a parent.

- Giving discounts at child-care centers to people who take parenting classes.

- Linking with businesses such as car dealerships that will make donations to specific child-care centers when customers make a purchase.

- Educating the public about the importance of quality child care and bringing all parts of the community together to come up with solutions.

The challenge ahead will be getting money to make some of the initiatives become a reality, said many who attended the meeting.

Several people said they have more hope that the foundation-sponsored event will lead to tangible solutions than some events that have been held in the past.

"The key thing about this particular revival is we have the commitment and ear of city leaders," said Julie Todaro, board president of the Connections Resource Center, a nonprofit agency that provides information to parents and child-care providers. "There are also so many foundations involved that might provide, seed

money for some of these solutions."

"I feel very hopeful because we had six foundations sponsoring this event," said Gretchen Lara Shartle, executive director of Expanding Horizons. "By lending their name to this, they are saying that they want to get behind this issue."

Shartle said she hopes several of the foundations can pool their money to award grants to nonprofit groups tackling solutions or use the money as leverage to get businesses or government agencies to make commitments. A followup meeting is planned for July, she said.

Today's high school graduations

AUSTIN HIGH SCHOOL

Ceremony: 5 p.m., Erwin Center



Kristen Schroeder

College: University of Texas at Austin

Parents: Ken and Frankie Schroeder

Valedictorian: Kristen Schroeder
Activities: National Honor Society, National Merit finalist; Hall of Honor Steering Committee historian

BOWIE HIGH SCHOOL

Ceremony: 8 p.m. Erwin Center



Tabrez Ebrahim

Valedictorian: Tabrez Ebrahim
Activities: Teen Leadership Austin; Cross Country; year-book; American Legion's Boy's State; Rotary Club's Camp Enterprise; National Honor Society; Spanish Honor Society
College: University of Texas at Austin
Parents: Yusuf and Niloufer Ebrahim



FIRST TIME EVER!

