While a decade of poll results shows consistent—and strong—voter support for public investments in early childhood care and education, policymakers continue to debate which early childhood services to prioritize, whether programs should target all children or some, and what “high quality” means to voters. Findings from a new national poll commissioned by Children’s Funding Accelerator and an analysis of 56 other state, local, and national polls offer insights on these and other questions about voter support for early childhood services. The state and local poll examples included here represent consistent findings observed across our analysis.

**The Early Childhood System Voters Want to Invest In**

COVID-19 increased the intensity of voter support for early childhood services.

- 71% of voters believe the challenges parents face balancing child care and work during the pandemic are a serious/very serious issue and
- 82% of voters believe it is extremely/very important for state and local governments to improve opportunities for all children to get a strong start in life.

These feelings translate to broad support for early childhood programs.

- Maternal and infant health services: 75%
- High-quality infant and toddler child care: 70%
- High-quality preschool programs: 69%

Across state and local polls, voters support spending plans that address all ages in early childhood.

- 46% of voters strongly/somewhat prioritize all children younger than 5 years
- 68% of voters either prefer providing services to all children younger than 5 years or do not express a preference for a specific age group
- 22% of voters do not express a preference
- 21% of voters strongly/somewhat prioritize 3- and 4-year-olds

Source: FM3 Research and New Bridge Strategy, Washington state poll, 2020; Children’s Funding Accelerator and FM3 Research, national poll, 2021
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Meanwhile, voters tend to show equal support for universal and targeted approaches for providing early childhood programs/services when these options are not compared directly.

In a national poll with a split sample of voters

70% say access to high-quality child care for all infants and toddlers is a high/very high priority while

72% say access for infants and toddlers with the greatest need is a high/very high priority.

However, when pollsters ask voters directly whether they would prefer an early childhood program/service designed to reach all children and families or one that targets a specific group of children, poll results vary by community. This highlights the importance of collecting local data to inform decision-making.

Source: Children’s Funding Accelerator and FM3 Research, national poll, 2021

Voters know that a variety of factors prevent many families from accessing the early childhood programs they need. They express the greatest concern about issues of program quality and cost.

Quality Cost Location Availability
80% 76% 73% 69%

Percentage of New Orleans voters who express a lot/some concern about each factor.

Source: LJR Custom Strategies; New Orleans, LA, poll; 2021

Voters believe early childhood educators are key to program quality and they support using public funds to increase educator pay.

92% of voters say early childhood educators "play a critical role in helping children grow and develop" while only 23% of voters see them as having "fairly easy jobs."

61% of voters nationally say it is extremely/very important to “combat the shortage of qualified child care, preschool, and after-school staff by increasing wages.”

Sources: FM3 Research and Public Opinion Strategies, national poll, 2015; Children’s Funding Accelerator and FM3 Research, national poll, 2021

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