



2015 Louisiana Election Alert

CITIZENS, CANDIDATES, ELECTED OFFICIALS,
EMPLOYERS, PARENTS, AND MEDIA:



Key Questions to Ask and Facts to Know About Early Care and Education





LOUISIANA: EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

Questions for Candidates About Early Care and Education

1. How would you enable more working parents to be able to access high quality, affordable child care for their young children? Lack of child care options cost U.S. businesses \$3 billion annually, and in Louisiana, Child Care Assistance has been cut by 58 percent while demand for workers grows.
2. How would you ensure that the recent reforms do not result in more at-risk children under age 4 in lower quality early care and education settings-- the opposite of what was intended?
3. What are some ways that we can better fund early care and education so that all of our children enter Kindergarten ready for school? Research shows that children who begin school behind generally remain behind, and in Louisiana, almost half of our children enter Kindergarten already behind.
4. How can we create an accountability system for early care and education that will provide real improvement in the quality of care?
5. Would you support housing more public Pre-K classes in private child care settings in Louisiana as is done in other states?
6. Is it time for Louisiana to ensure basic health and safety for children in small centers by requiring them to be licensed?

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES:

Louisiana's Pathway to Success

Research on best practices and recognition of the state of its early care and education programs must shape Louisiana's pursuit of improved school readiness. In addition, to meet the needs of its growing economy, Louisiana must ensure that working families have access to high quality care for their young children. With those factors in mind, we issue the following call to action to stakeholders and policymakers across the state:

- Increase investment in early care and education programs
 - Increase per-child funding for children under 4
 - Expand the number of children under 4 served by publicly funded early care and education programs
 - Stabilize funding for LA4 and increase the amount per child to provide equity between Pre-K and Kindergarten
 - Utilize new revenue streams to better fund early care and education for children birth through age 4
- Help centers meet the higher standards established by the reforms of Act 3
 - Develop a quality rating and improvement system, including supports for continuous quality improvement, for child care centers as now exists for LA4 and Head Start
 - Ensure continuing access to mental health consultation as a critical source of support to child care centers
 - Sustain the statewide network of Child Care Resource and Referral organizations that provide local leadership, technical assistance and support for child care
- Promote family choice in early care and education
 - Use private centers as a fundamental part of Louisiana's Pre-K program by expanding the mixed delivery model
 - Ensure that access to quality care for at-risk children actually expands under Act 3's implementation by tracking its impact on at-risk children under age 4
 - Require licensing of small centers to safeguard the health and safety standards of all children in care outside the home



BACKGROUND:

Why Early Learning Matters

Louisiana is placing new focus on the care and education of children from birth through age 4. Yet inadequate investment and deep funding cuts imperil the opportunity for progress and pose new dangers to the state's workforce development, successful educational reforms and the chance to invest public dollars effectively.

This document makes the case to Louisiana parents, voters, elected officials and employers that all have a stake in the education of children from birth through age 4. It calls for new investments in proven models with a high return on investment and lasting benefits to children. It explores potential roadmaps for Louisiana based on best practices of other states. Above all, it argues that early care and education matters to Louisiana not only in the future, but now.

More Investment—Now

- Each year, roughly half of Louisiana Kindergartners enter the classroom already behind. School districts across the state spend millions of dollars to help these children catch up, but many will not.
- Education statistics underscore the toll of Louisiana's school-readiness deficit: More than half of fourth-graders do not read at grade level. Almost one in four K-12 students repeats a grade. Simply

BACKGROUND, STRATEGIES, QUESTIONS

put, the state's education crisis begins before most children enter the classroom for the first time.

- Early care and education is a current and future workforce issue. Poor access to quality early care impacts today's workforce through absenteeism, tardiness, workplace concentration and underemployment of working parents. Also, investing in quality early education is critical to building a skilled workforce essential to Louisiana's future success.

Brain Architecture Basics

The science of brain development explains the connection between early learning experiences and long-term school success.

- 90 percent of brain development takes place from birth through age 4. Neural circuits formed in the brain in these years lay the groundwork for future learning and behavior.
- High-quality early learning experiences rich in stimulation nurture the development of robust brain circuitry, while adverse experiences weaken it.
- A child's experiences from birth through age 4 wire that child's brain for success or failure in school, work and life.

Far-reaching Impact

Louisiana should not be left behind. There is growing recognition of the importance of early childhood education to communities, employers, economies and families.

- Twenty-four governors—Republicans and Democrats—mentioned early childhood education in state-of-the-state speeches in 2015.
- Absenteeism and lost productivity linked to inadequate child care cost U.S. businesses \$3 billion a year.
- In Louisiana, a skilled-labor shortage tied to \$50 billion in new investment will create a historic opportunity for low-wage earners to gain skills and go to work in middle-class jobs. But lack of access to quality care for their children

will prevent many from taking part in Louisiana's unprecedented expansion by keeping them out of school, training or the workforce.

- Nearly 70 percent of Louisiana's children age 5 and under have both or their only parent in the workforce and must spend significant time in child care.

A Formula for Success

Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman of the University of Chicago describes investing in the care and education of young children as "the most efficient use" of a state's financial resources.

- The U.S. Chamber of Commerce cites a return-on-investment of as much as 8-to-1 for each \$1 in funding for high quality early childhood programs.
- A 2015 Duke University report highlights a short-term benefit of such investment: At-risk children who took part in state-funded early childhood programs in North Carolina were 39 percent less likely to be placed in costly special education in the third grade.

We Know What Works

Louisiana can close its early childhood care and education deficit by aligning itself with the hallmarks of best practice and high quality programming in states with the most effective programs in the U.S. To do this, it must:

- **Invest in quality:** Early learning programs need well-trained teachers, low child-to-teacher ratios, research-driven curricula and other elements of quality to promote lasting gains that include higher math and reading scores in middle school.
- **Expand the mixed-delivery model:** Offering publicly funded Pre-K in private centers, in addition to elementary school sites—the mixed- or diverse-delivery model—is a national best practice that provides family choice and is the most cost-effective way to quickly enroll more children in quality programs.

- **Provide sufficient and innovative funding:**

States with the best programs invest in early care and education through a range of funding strategies:

- o Arizona raises \$150 million per year for early care and education through an 80-cents-per-pack tobacco tax, while Georgia, North Carolina and Tennessee help fund early care and education through lotteries.
- o Other states spend significant state general funds and federal TANF monies on both their Pre-K and their Child Care Assistance Programs.

- **Implement a quality rating and improvement system:**

States with the best programs offer quality rating and improvement systems that provide stepping-stones and support efforts to improve quality. This is in contrast to an accountability system that measures quality without providing means for improvement.

- **Assure health and safety standards at all centers:**

Forty-two states license small, home-based centers to ensure quality and safety. In Louisiana, centers are not required to be licensed unless they care for 7 or more children.

Where Louisiana Shines

Louisiana's LA4 Pre-K program for at-risk 4-year-olds is very high quality, ranked 8 out of 10 based on national standards.

- A longitudinal study of children who participated in LA4 identified long-term benefits that included significantly fewer special-education placements, significantly higher on-time arrival in 4th grade, and significantly higher test scores in the spring of 3rd grade on the iLEAP test.

Where Louisiana Falls Short

Early care and education in Louisiana is underfunded and out-of-reach for most at-risk children under age 4.



- Louisiana invests no state general fund dollars in slots for the education of at-risk children under age 4, and just 1 in 8 at-risk children birth through 3 is served by any public program.
- Investment in LA4 has come at the expense of child care subsidies for younger children. Funding for the Child Care Assistance Program has fallen by 58 percent.
- Louisiana's child care subsidy covers less than half the cost of tuition—with low income, working parents expected to make up the difference.
- Parents who cannot afford quality programs rely on unlicensed settings or a sometimes unpredictable network of care from friends and relatives.
- In Louisiana, small home-based centers are unlicensed and do not have to meet even basic health and safety standards unless they accept public funding.
- Less than 1 percent of public Pre-K programs in Louisiana use the mixed-delivery model, compared to 30 percent nationally. In addition, the funding per child for Pre-K has dropped by over 20% in 10 years.

New Risks in Louisiana's Changing Landscape

Act 3 of 2012 created sweeping reforms to early care and education with the goal of improving school-readiness for Louisiana's children. Despite its good intentions, the unfunded law may actually reduce access to high quality care.

Act 3 established higher program standards and mandated the creation of an accountability system to measure how well programs meet these new standards. But it contains a fundamental flaw: It provided no new funding. Even under the 2012 standards, all the early care and education programs were not funded at the cost to provide them. The disconnect between funding and standards is especially true for the Child Care Assistance Program, which is funded at substantially less than all other programs. The lack of funding could inadvertently push more children into unlicensed, potentially dangerous care settings.

- Facing an unfunded government mandate, some centers will raise tuition to meet standards or refuse to take publicly funded children.
- Low-income parents who cannot afford higher tuition may turn to less expensive, unlicensed centers that may pose new risks to their children.
- The new accountability measures under the state Department of Education do not include a quality rating and improvement system of the sort shown by best practice to support quality improvements.

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A Stronger Louisiana Starts
with Successful Children

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