RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

TargetPoint Consulting (R) and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research (D) conducted surveys in five presidential battleground states on behalf of Save the Children Action Network. Our findings highlight the importance of early childhood education, and demonstrate that investing in quality programs and better access should be a top priority moving forward.

In Colorado, Florida, Ohio, Virginia, and Wisconsin, 600 likely 2016 general election voters were interviewed on early childhood education topics for a total of 3,000 completed interviews. The survey was conducted using live telephone operators on both landlines and cellphones with 32% completed on cellphones. The margin of error for the full 3,000 interviews is +/- 1.8% and for the state surveys is +/- 4.0%.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Battleground voters universally agree on the importance of early childhood education.

2. With nearly all voters agreeing on the importance, it is no surprise that a significant majority support increasing access to and improving the quality of early childhood education and are willing to pay for it.

3. Increasing access to and improving the quality early childhood education could have significant impact on voters’ preference as we head into presidential campaigns in 2016.

4. There are a variety of funding methods with broad support, and results show voters across a broad range of key vote groups would back investing in early childhood education, even if it means a slight increase in their taxes.

5. While nearly all voters agree that investing in early childhood education should be a priority—different voter blocks are sometimes motivated by different reasons and arguments.
Battleground voters universally agree on the importance of early childhood education: 90% of all voters believe the years zero to five are extremely or very important to the learning, growth, and development for young children. Voters in each state are nearly unanimous on the importance of the years zero to five. Along partisan lines we see agreement with 87% of Republicans, 89% of Independents, and 94% of Democrats stating that those early development years are critical. For voters, the importance of this investment is a settled issue.

With nearly all voters agreeing on the importance, it is no surprise that a significant majority support increasing access to and improving the quality of early childhood education and are willing to pay for it: We asked all voters which statement best reflected their opinion on public education for young children.

- Public education should start with preschool and should be offered to all four year olds.
- Publicly provided preschool should only be offered to low-income and disadvantaged four year olds.
- Preschool should not be part of the public education system at all and public education should start with kindergarten at age five or later.

A strong majority of voters believe public education should start with preschool and that preschool should be offered to all four year olds. 63% of all voters, including 69% of all parents and 67% of those who are unmarried, want public education to start with preschool. At each education and income level we see almost two-thirds support among each of these groups for starting public education with preschool and offering it to all four year olds. Fifty-one (51%) of Republicans, 59% of Independents, and 80% of Democrats support public education starting with preschool. There’s greater support from parents who have put their own children through preschool, with 69% of those parents supporting public school starting with preschool compared to only 54% of parents who haven’t had firsthand experience with preschool recognizing the value in starting public education that early.

Increasing access to and improving the quality early childhood education could have significant impact on voters’ preference as we head into presidential campaigns in 2016: All candidates assembling their issues agenda should make investing in early childhood education a top-tier education priority. If a presidential candidate came out in favor of increasing spending to provide more access to and improve the quality of early childhood education, 59% of all battleground voters would be more likely to vote for that candidate. This issue generates significant levels of intensity with 28% of voters saying they would actively campaign for a candidate who supported finding funding for better quality and more access to early childhood education programs. Important target demographics for both parties in these key states are even more likely to vote for a candidate who supports early childhood investment than the average voter.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEMO GROUP</th>
<th>IMPACT ON CANDIDATE VOTE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White Millennials</td>
<td>63% More Likely to Vote for a Candidate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unmarried Women</td>
<td>73% More Likely to Vote for a Candidate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presidential Persuadables</td>
<td>59% More Likely to Vote for a Candidate</td>
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<td>Hispanics</td>
<td>71% More Likely to Vote for a Candidate</td>
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<td>African Americans</td>
<td>85% More Likely to Vote for a Candidate</td>
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There are a variety of funding methods with broad support, and results show voters across a broad range of key vote groups would back investing in early childhood education, even if it means a slight increase in their taxes:

Seventy-one (71%) of all battleground voters would support (48% strongly support) increasing access to and improving the quality of early childhood education programs, even if it meant a slight increase in their taxes. This includes 55% of Republicans, 69% of Independents, and 89% of Democrats. 72% of presidential persuadables – those who lean Republican, lean Democrat, or undecided on the 2016 presidential ballot – support increased early childhood education funding.

We then tested nine different mechanisms for increasing funding for early childhood education. Six of the nine options were only tested among individuals who already said they would support an increase in early childhood education funding, while three of the options were tested among all respondents.

Among respondents who already supported an increase in funding for early childhood education, the top three most popular funding options were:

- Giving parents tax credits or deductions that could be used to save money to help pay for preschool (80% support with 47% strong support).
- Reforming the tax code and investing the repatriation funds in early childhood education (78% support with 36% strong support).
- An income tax increase dedicated to these programs (74% support with 34% strong support).

Additionally, placing a sin tax on goods and services such as e-cigarettes or online gambling and dedicating that revenue to these programs had 73% support, with 50% strong support. Less popular but still with majority support were a sales tax (65% support) and a property tax (60% support).

Sensitivity to raising or creating new taxes can be avoided with new methods of funding early childhood education such as Pay for Success bonds or through Higher-Ed Tax Parity. 55% of all battleground voters support the Pay for Success form of financing for early childhood education programs where a public-private partnership is formed. The private entity arranges the upfront funding for a program that aims to reach clear goals like increasing college acceptance rates. The government doesn’t repay the investors unless they meet the agreed upon goals. A majority of the following groups support Pay for Success bonds: 51% of Republican voters, 52% of Independent voters, 55% of presidential persuadable voters, and 65% of Democratic voters. Higher-Ed Tax Parity was widely supported across all groups. 70% of all battleground voters support making the same types of tax benefits and savings accounts that are available for college students and their parents available to help parents pay for early childhood education. Voters support making these benefits available for preschool, childcare, and other programs that improve early development, including 63% of Republicans, 69% of Independents, and 80% of Democrats.

There are many reasons why voters are increasingly supporting early childhood education investments and those reasons can at times vary for different blocks of voters.

Voters clearly want to see early childhood education prioritized by presidential candidates. However, the reasons for these demands can vary slightly for different voting blocks.

Opportunity-based messaging was the most popular among traditionally conservative-leaning voters, as well as among independent and persuadable audiences. Below are two examples of this opportunity based messaging:

“It is ultimately the responsibility of parents to raise and instruct their children, but early education can assist families, particularly those facing tough times, so that all children have an equal opportunity to succeed in life.”
“High-quality early childhood education exposes kids to reading earlier in life and results in increased literacy rates for participants by third grade.”

Four message combinations worked well among more progressive-leaning groups.

Democratic voters overall responded best to literacy messaging coupled with the call to invest earlier.

“A high-quality early childhood education exposes kids to reading earlier in life and results in increased literacy rates for participants by third grade.”

“Scientific studies show the human brain develops most rapidly in the earliest years between birth and age five, but almost all the public money we invest in children happens after the age of five. We should change this and invest more in high-quality early childhood education.”

African American voters saw literacy and messaging on a well-educated workforce as the most motivating of reasons.

“A high-quality early childhood education exposes kids to reading earlier in life and results in increased literacy rates for participants by third grade.”

“Investments in early education do not just benefit the participants, they benefit all of America by helping to produce a more well-educated workforce that can better compete globally.”

Hispanic voters are also motivated by the need for a well-educated workforce and this message was most effective when paired with messaging on the role of the parents in raising their children.

“Investments in early education do not just benefit the participants, they benefit all of America by helping to produce a more well-educated workforce that can better compete globally.”

“It is ultimately the responsibility of parents to raise and instruct their children, but early education can assist families, particularly those facing tough times, so that all children have an equal opportunity to succeed in life.”

Unmarried women were best persuaded by the need for a well-educated workforce and investing earlier.

“Investments in early education do not just benefit the participants, they benefit all of America by helping to produce a more well-educated workforce that can better compete globally.”

“Scientific studies show the human brain develops most rapidly in the earliest years between birth and age five, but almost all the public money we invest in children happens after the age of five. We should change this and invest more in high-quality early childhood education.”

White millennials responded similarly to the conservative-leaning and persuadable groups and were most convinced by the messaging on parent responsibility. Other popular messaging focused on STEM, breaking the cycle of poverty, and return on investment:

“In science and math scores, American children are falling behind students in other countries who they have to compete against later in life. We need to invest in science and math earlier and expose more kids to these important subjects at a younger age.”

“In America, a child’s future should not depend on his or her beginning. Yet, studies show that children born in low-income families tend to stay low-income. Early childhood education gives these children a chance to work hard and earn their way forward, breaking the cycle of poverty.”
“It’s smarter to invest taxpayer money in the early stages of a child’s education so that we don’t have to spend more for remedial education and repeating grades later. It is estimated that every dollar spent on early childhood education saves taxpayers to 10 dollars in the long run.”

All seven of the messages we tested were popular with battleground voters, with at least 71% saying that each argument was a convincing reason to increase public spending for early childhood education.

CONCLUSIONS

Results from our interviews in battleground states show conclusively that early childhood education should be a mainstay on candidates’ agendas and at the forefront of national debate on educating the next generation. Voters realize the value of early development, support universal access to early childhood education and are willing to pay for it. With convincing arguments in hand and a variety of funding options available to proceed forward, we see a foundation for voters and candidates to make early childhood education issues more visible in the months to come.