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It's Unanimous! 98% of PA Voters Believe Early Childhood Education is Important

New poll shows strong support among PA voters to increase state investments in pre-k, child care and evidence-based home visiting.

HARRISBURG, PA (February 21, 2023) — Just weeks before Governor Shapiro's first state budget address and negotiations begin, partners of the Early Learning PA Coalition held a Capitol Rotunda press conference today releasing new polling data on voter support for early childhood care and education programs.

The poll, commissioned by the Early Learning PA Coalition and conducted by Susquehanna Polling and Research from February 1-7, 2023, found that 98% of PA voters believe that early childhood education is important. It also showed strong voter support for increased investment for early care and education programs like pre-k, high-quality child care and home visiting services. Voter's overall support has grown several percentage points since a June 2022 poll, when 90% of voters said they found early childhood education to be important.

"Ninety-eight percent of Pennsylvanians have reached consensus that early childhood education is an important piece of what it takes to lead a healthy and productive life," said Steve Doster, State Director of Mission: Readiness – a principal partner in the Early Learning PA Coalition. "Even more amazing is that this level of support is consistent across all age brackets, education levels, ethnicity, and gender. There is also no discernable difference between the views of Republicans or Democrats, conservative or liberal - they are all at or above 98% in agreement. The same goes for voters in different regions of the state."

According to the poll, **78% of PA voters support increasing state funding to serve more eligible children in pre-k programs**, which is an increase from 65% in 2022. **Seventy-eight percent of PA voters also support increasing state funding to help more low-income working families afford high-quality child care**, up from 67% in 2022. **Support for**

increasing state funding to provide voluntary home visiting services to eligible families was 62% of PA voters (up from 60% in 2022). The poll also found that **81% of PA voters favor allocating state funding to increase wages of child care workers.**

“Few issues have united both Republicans and Democrats in Pennsylvania like early care and education,” said Kristen Rotz, President of the United Way of Pennsylvania and principal partner in the Early Learning PA Coalition. “At a time of political polarization, Pennsylvania voters responded unanimously that early childhood care and education is not only a uniting issue, but one that the majority want prioritized in our state spending.

“As we start budget season here in Harrisburg, the partners of the Early Learning PA Coalition urge Governor Shapiro and all members of the General Assembly to respond to this level of voter support for growing the Commonwealth’s investments in early care and education. Pennsylvania must make these programs more accessible to children and families that qualify and further stabilize and strengthen the system by addressing historic teacher shortages caused by low wages.” said Rotz.

Also participating in the event was State Representative and Senator-elect Lynda Culver and State Representative Pat Harkins — who both serve as House co-chairs of the Legislative Early Care and Education Caucus as well as TaTyana Abreu, a mother of a pre-k student and staff member at York Day Early Learning.

“Folks in our area have understood for a long time the important role that high-quality early care and education programs play in benefiting the social and economic needs of our local families and the educational and developmental needs of our children, said Rep. Culver. “It’s clear that we still have more work to do in expanding these services to more Pennsylvania children and families that are eligible. It’s also clear that Pennsylvanians want us to prioritize this.”

“Early care and education has been a priority for me for years,” said Rep. Harkins. “When more than 100,000 children are eligible for state-funded pre-k programs like Pre-K Counts and Head Start but don’t have access due to insufficient funding – we have work to do. When more than half of Pennsylvania residents live in child care deserts, and less than half of Pennsylvania’s child care is considered high quality – we have work to do. When there is a historic teacher shortage that is due to low wages in the early care and education sector – we have work to do. And today, we have a mandate from the voters to do it!”

“To say my husband and I are grateful for York Day is an understatement,” said TaTyana Abreu. “We now have two children, who we can confidently drop off every morning knowing that they are well taken care of, while we work. It is not surprising to me that so many Pennsylvanians want to see more children in our state have the same opportunities that my children have, and that they want their elected officials to invest more to make sure high quality early care and education is not out of reach for families who can’t afford the costs all on their own.”

About Pre-K for PA

Pre-K for PA is an issue campaign supported by individuals and organizations across Pennsylvania who believe that investing in our children is the right choice and an urgent necessity. Our vision is that every 3-and 4-year-old in Pennsylvania will have access to high-quality pre-k. For more information www.prekforpa.org.

About Start Strong PA

Start Strong PA launched in 2019 to support healthy child development, working families, and the economy by increasing access to and affordability of high-quality child care programs for young children. Learn more at www.startstrongpa.org.

About Childhood Begins At Home

Childhood Begins At Home is a statewide campaign launched in 2017 to help policymakers and the public understand the value of evidence-based home visiting and support public investments in the programs. Learn more at www.childhoodbeginsathome.org.

About Thriving PA

Thriving PA is a perinatal and child health campaign launched in 2021 and is working to ensure each birthing person, infant, and toddler in Pennsylvania has the opportunity for affordable, quality health care access. Learn more at www.thrivingpa.org.

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