

Messaging to Conservatives and Liberals

In 2018, the Bipartisan Policy Center partnered with Luntz Global to survey conservative and liberal viewpoints on child care and early learning.¹ The survey found that Americans across the political spectrum support funding child care and early learning initiatives.^{2,3} However, different political leanings respond to different approaches. For liberals, addressing the problem means ensuring access for all families, whereas conservatives focus on solutions that involve increasing parental involvement and faith-based connections. Despite these differences, crafting the right message and using targeted language can reach specific audiences- and even skeptics.

FRAMING THE CONVERSATION

When communicating to conservatives and liberals alike, certain terms and phrases work, while others do not. Specifically, the term **universal** does not work for conservatives or low-income families to describe an early learning program that would be available to all children, free of charge. However, both conservatives and liberals are receptive to the phrase **equal access**.

Conservatives are primarily concerned not about tax increases, but about government overreach. Conservatives worry that increased governmental involvement replaces interaction between parents and children and that the government will begin teaching values—a role they assign uniquely to parents. Liberals, on the other hand, believe responsibility for the problem lies with the federal government, but they are concerned the government will inefficiently and ineffectively manage the programs.

Both conservatives and liberals agree that:

Too many families are struggling. The cost of everyday life—including child care—is too expensive in this country. Moms and dads must work a second or third job just to make ends meet. And that means they're spending less and less time interacting with their children. Parents need more time with their children to teach fundamental values. Not less.

THEMES THAT WORK

Growth and Success

Talking about growth and success works. It is not about school readiness or improving long-term academic success; it is about preparing children to learn, grow, and succeed.

Child-Focused Messaging

Keep the message child-focused. Frame the issues around the impacts on children. Audiences may be less receptive to arguments focused on parents or the workforce.

An Equal Opportunity

Most Americans believe every child deserves an equal opportunity to a quality early childhood education. The term equal is strongly preferred over real or fair.

Every Family

Keep messages focused on programs for every family. Conservatives and liberals alike are receptive to designing high-quality learning programs for every family. Conservatives are also receptive to programs for hardworking families, while nearly half of liberals responded to struggling families.

Keep Messages Positive

For conservatives, making an argument for closing the achievement gap does not work. To reach conservatives, reframe the message using positive language.

Putting It All Together

Words that work: Every child deserves an equal opportunity to a quality educational foundation that will prepare them to grow, learn, and succeed.

21 Words for the 21st Century

Americans respond better to specific words and phrases, such as **equal access** and **efficient and effective** programs. Consider these terms when crafting a message:

- Every Family
- Parental Involvement
- Future-Focused
- Opportunity
- Equal (instead of "Fair")
- Educators (not "Instructors")
- Inclusive
- Faith-Based (for Conservatives)
- An American Issue
- Family Leave (instead of "Parental Leave")
- Strong/Solid/Quality Foundation
- Learn. Grow. Succeed.
- Healthy
- Accountable/Accountability
- Prepare/Preparing
- All Children
- Achieve Potential
- Kid-/Child-Focused
- Choice/You Decide
- Deserve
- Efficient and Effective

Endnotes

1. Bipartisan Policy Center, Building Support for Early Childhood Excellence, September 2018. Available at: <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Building-Support-for-Early-Childhood-Excellence-Survey-Findings.pdf>.
2. Ibid.
3. First Five Years Fund, Early Childhood Education: The Public Is Ready for Action, October 2018. Available at: <https://www.ffyf.org/ffyf-analyzed-years-of-polling-and-found-unwavering-support-for-greater-investment-in-ece/>.