



Early Childhood Initiative

Building Support for Early Childhood Excellence

A growing body of research shows that access to quality care and learning in the first years of life is crucial for building a strong foundation that allows children to succeed. Still, a partisan divide has complicated a vital national conversation on increasing child care quality and access.

The Bipartisan Policy Center partnered with Luntz Global to survey conservative and liberal viewpoints on child care and early learning. One overwhelming conclusion from this research: conservatives and liberals alike recognize that early childhood development is critical to the wellbeing of the nation as a whole and even align on some possible policy approaches.

Survey Findings

The survey found that targeted messaging can aid in increasing support for financing high-quality child care and early learning programs across both liberals and conservatives. Specifically, the majority of liberals and 40 percent of conservatives stated at the outset of the survey that they would support a small tax increase that would fund quality child care and early learning programs. After receiving additional information about the importance of high quality early learning, post-survey results showed increased support from liberals by 10 points, and an even greater increase from conservatives by 13 points. Similarly, both rural and urban parents showed increased support in the post-survey results.

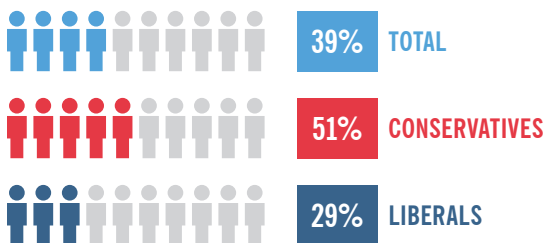
Additional information about survey methodology can be found in the appendix of this report.

Key Takeaways

AMERICANS ARE NOT OPTIMISTIC FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

With respect to the next generation, survey participants found that Americans overall are not optimistic about their future. Nearly two-thirds of Americans believe that the next generation of Americans will be worse off than their own generation. Liberals, low-income parents, and non-parents were the least optimistic, whereas conservatives and high-income families were more optimistic than other groups.

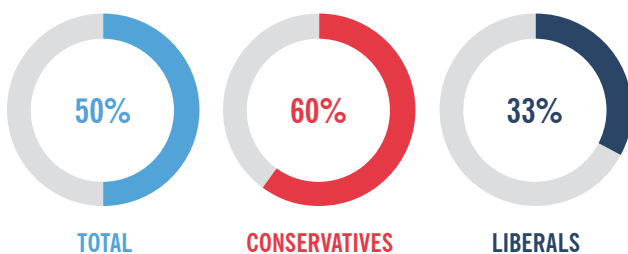
Percent of Americans who believe the next generation will be better off than their generation:



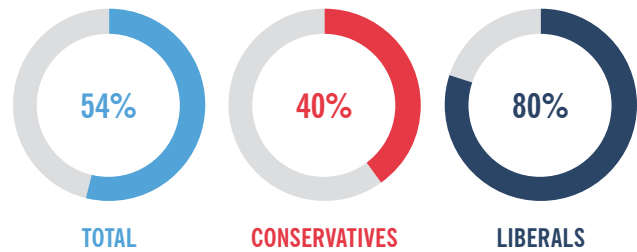
AMERICANS CONTRADICT THEMSELVES WHEN IT COMES TO FUNDING SOCIAL WELFARE

Public perceptions of social welfare: Over half of Americans are fine with paying more taxes to benefit children, even if their own children don't reap those benefits. However, half of Americans also agree that parents who cannot afford to raise a child without government aid should not have children. While the survey shows that most Americans want to support children, they are less willing to support the families who care for them.

Percentage of American who believe that those who cannot afford to raise a child without government aid should not have children:

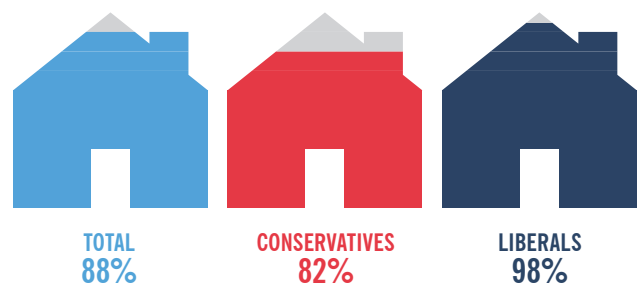


Percentage of people who are fine with paying more taxes to address children's issues, even if they might not directly benefit their children:

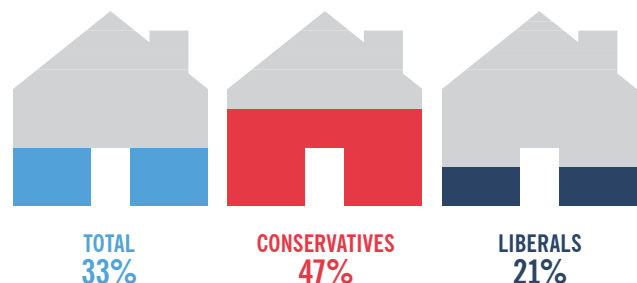


Expectation vs. reality: Nearly 90 percent of Americans believe that every child in America should have a guaranteed right to proper food, clothing, medicine, shelter, and education. While people expect that children receive quality care and services, they appear to understand that this is not available or accessible to every child — only one-third of Americans believe that the United States has affordable, high-quality child care options for every child, regardless of their family's circumstances. A plurality of conservatives, however, believe that every child already has access to high-quality child care options; thus, many do not see the problem.

Percentage of Americans who agree that every child in America should have a guaranteed right to proper food, clothing, medicine, shelter, and education:



Percentage who believe that the US has affordable, high-quality child care options for every child, regardless of their family's circumstances:



What Is the Answer?

The problem facing Americans is a lack of high-quality child care and early learning programs. The solution, however, is not so simple. For many, government is not the answer to this problem. There is **deep mistrust** of government among liberals and conservatives alike, especially at the federal level. However, levels of trust increase among both parties at the state and local levels of government.

“What percentage of conservatives and liberals trust* the government?”

CONSERVATIVES

Local government

52%

State government

45%

Federal government

39%

LIBERALS

Local government

62%

State government

55%

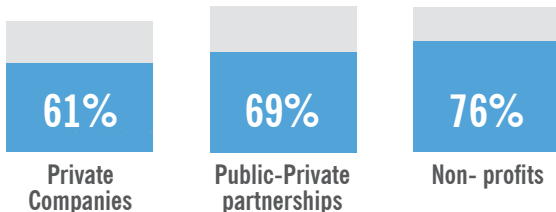
Federal government

33%

*Trust in federal government is closely associated with the party in power. It's why there's so much liberal mistrust in federal government right now.

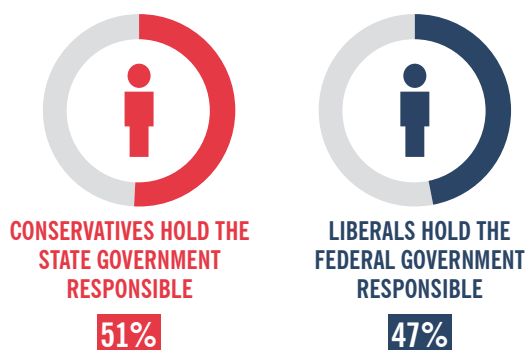
Liberal and conservative Americans have much greater trust in non-profit solutions for child care and early learning programs, followed by public-private partnership and private companies.

“To create effective solutions that will aid families who make too little income to afford quality child care, who do Americans trust?”



While Americans might trust local governments and non-profits more, conservatives and liberals place primary responsibility for funding quality child care programs on the state and federal governments, respectively.

“Which group is primarily responsible for funding quality child care programs and initiatives?”



And if given the option, conservatives believe responsibility lies outside the government entirely, placing responsibility on non-profits, public-private partnerships, and the private sector.

According to conservatives

“Who should be responsible for funding quality child care programs that provide resources specifically for children whose parents work full-time but earn low wages?”

Nongovernmental organizations

37%

State government

25%

Local/City government

20%

Federal government

17%

Conservatives not only place responsibility for funding high-quality early learning programs on **nonprofits**, they trust them to create effective solutions as well. Nonprofits **are the clear winner** for conservatives.

Liberals believe responsibility for the problem lies with the federal government, but they don't trust it to create effective solutions in its current form. Instead, **state government has the right mix of responsibility and trust.**

Additionally, a plurality of conservatives believe responsibility for providing children with early learning and child care is solely the parent's responsibility, without government assistance. Liberals disagree; they maintain that responsibility lies with the government.

41% of conservatives

believe that "parents have the responsibility to provide their children early learning and child care, without government aid or intervention"



72% of liberals

believe that "the government has a responsibility to ensure that every child in America receives quality early learning and child care"



Rural kids deserve access to high-quality child care and early learning programs, too. Over two-thirds of parents expressed that the government should find a way to provide assistance to rural communities, although over 40 percent of rural parents believe there is no need to introduce the government into the solution.

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 conservative 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 were 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 child and that the government will begin teaching values — a role they assign uniquely to parents. Liberals, however, are concerned that the government will inefficiently and ineffectively manage the programs.

45%

of conservatives describe **governmental overreach** as their biggest concern, while



23%

of conservatives worry that it will **raise their taxes**.



When asked about the most important characteristics of high-quality early learning and child care programs, conservatives cited **parental involvement** and **faith-based curriculum**, while liberals cited **healthy environment** and **social-emotional learning** as the most important characteristics.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

28% TOTAL 33% CONSERVATIVE 22% LIBERAL

FAITH-BASED CURRICULUM

16% TOTAL 33% CONSERVATIVE 3% LIBERAL

HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

35% TOTAL 27% CONSERVATIVE 48% LIBERAL

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

24% TOTAL 23% CONSERVATIVE 37% LIBERAL

Understanding Conservative Context

Conservatives' model for ineffective government overreach is the Affordable Care Act. For them, it reduced access to and affordability of healthcare. Instead of lifting those who needed a hand, it brought everyone down to a **lower-common denominator**. Therefore, using words and phrases that are associated with the Affordable Care Act and government overreach (such as **universal**) will immediately make conservatives skeptical.

FOCUS ON BENEFITS TO FAMILIES

The answer to convincing conservatives is to focus on the benefits to families. Helping conservatives understand the real-world difficulty and stress of finding affordable child care can address the overreach argument. 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. More 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 kids. Parents need more time with their children to teach fundamental values. Not less.

CREATE IMPACT USING FACTS

In every state, the median income of a child care worker qualifies them for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) benefits, meaning their income is at best, slightly above the poverty line.

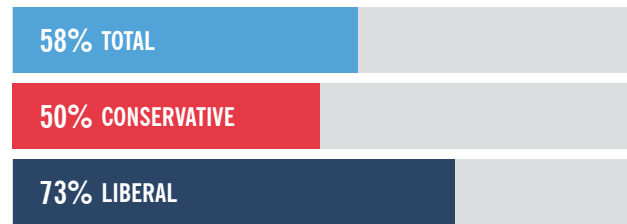
Given this information, a majority of both liberals and conservatives supported assistance programs that ensure child care workers receive a living wage.

SUPPORT



Conservatives and liberals also showed support for a tax on non-essential food items that would pay for high-quality child care solutions in their communities.

SUPPORT



Themes That Work

GROWTH & 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**.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Prepares children to learn, grow, and succeed



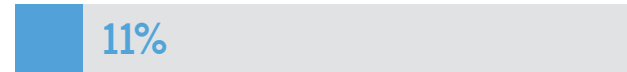
Prepares children for future success



Improves long-term educational outcomes

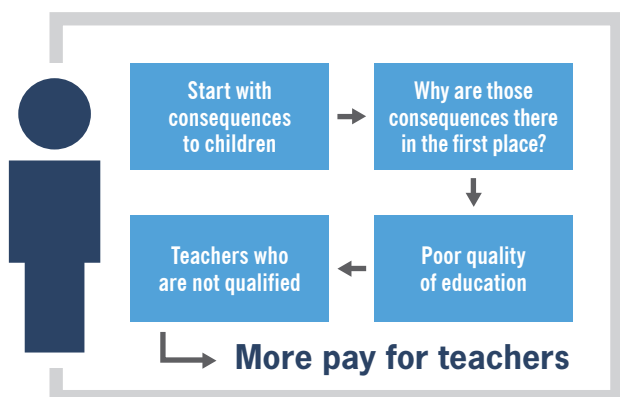


Boosts school readiness



CHILD-FOCUSED MESSAGING: GETTING TO EDUCATOR PAY

Keep the messages **child-focused**. The issues need to be framed around their impacts on children. Audiences may be less receptive to arguments focused on parents or the workforce. See below for examples of how to share a broader message or make an argument from a child-focused perspective.



When addressing wage issues for the child care workforce, start by focusing on **consequences to children** and why these consequences exist. From there, you can argue that higher quality early care and education depends on a qualified workforce who earn a living wage.

Child-Focused Messaging: Promoting Investments in Families

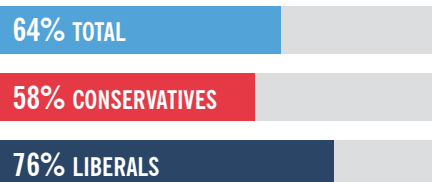
Children living in poverty may be at greater risk of behavioral and emotional issues. Parents can better support their child's development if they are lifted out of poverty with stable employment, living wages, affordable housing, and a community support system. It is important that the government invests in services and programs that can create economic stability for American families to promote the healthy development of all children.

EVERY FAMILY

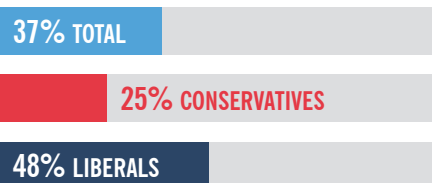
Keep messages focused on programs for **every family**. Conservatives and liberals alike are receptive to designing high-quality early learning programs for **every family**. Conservatives are also receptive to programs for **hardworking families**, while nearly half of liberals responded to **struggling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

“ Child care and early learning programs should be designed to help... ”

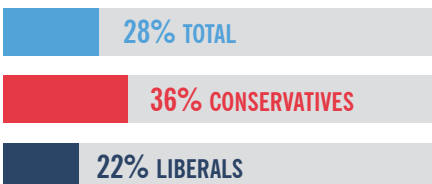
EVERY FAMILY



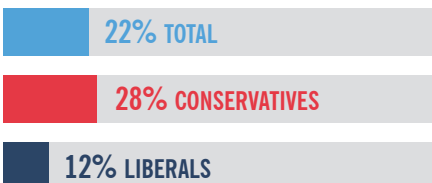
STRUGGLING FAMILIES



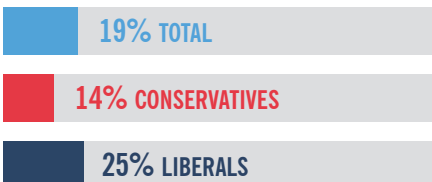
HARDWORKING FAMILIES



HARDWORKING PARENTS



WORKING PEOPLE



A plurality of Americans believe that early childhood education is crucial for giving children **a quality educational foundation**. Liberals and parents of children under age 5 also indicated that early childhood education is crucial for **improving chances for better life outcomes**.

“Early childhood education is crucial for...”

Giving children a quality educational foundation



Improving chances for better life outcome



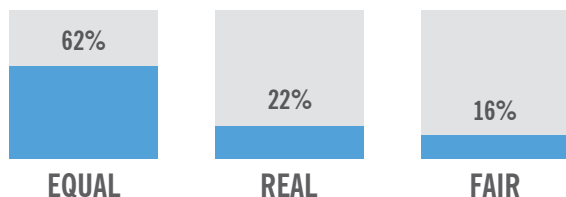
Creating a happy, healthy living environment for children



AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

The majority of Americans believe that every child deserves an **equal opportunity** at a quality early childhood education. The term **equal** is strongly preferred over **real** and **fair**.

“Every child deserves a/an _____ opportunity at a quality early childhood education.”



KEEP MESSAGES POSITIVE

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

WORDS TO USE: “All children in America deserve a quality educational foundation”

WORDS TO LOSE: “The achievement gap”

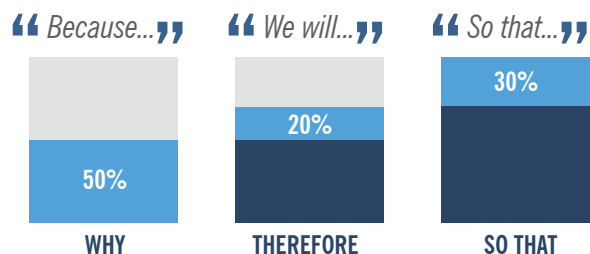
PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

✓ WORDS THAT WORK:

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

THE IMPORTANCE OF WHY

The **why** establishes the context and aligns your priorities with the target audience. Half of your message should focus on answering **why**.



Because every child deserves an equal opportunity to a quality educational foundation that will prepare them to grow, learn, and succeed, local nonprofits offer financial assistance for children in all low-income families to attend high-quality childcare.

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
- Equal (instead of “Fair”)
- An American Issue
- Learn, Grow, Succeed
- Prepare/Preparing
- Kid/Child-focused
- Efficient & Effective
- Parental Involvement
- Educators (not “Instructors”)
- Healthy
- Choice/You Decide
- Deserve
- Future-focused
- Inclusive
- “Family” leave (instead of “Parental”)
- Accountable/Accountability
- Achieve Potential
- Opportunity
- Faith-based (for Conservatives)
- Strong/Solid/Quality Foundation

What You Really Need to Know

THE RIGHT MESSAGING

- There is bipartisan support for funding early childhood education and care initiatives. And while there is a deep misunderstanding of the problem regarding child care and early learning in the United States, **crafting the right message** and using targeted language can convince specific audiences — and even skeptics.
- 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**.
- Conservatives are concerned about government overreach, but this can be overcome by messages on **benefits to families and children**. Conservatives also do not respond to negative messages.
- Focus on the right results: **A quality educational foundation for all children**.
- **Parents are allies**. Often, parents — especially new parents with young children — are more likely to support funding for initiatives aimed at improving early childhood care and education in this country. This is because they understand the difficulties of finding affordable child care, and they understand the need for accessible, high-quality care that allows them to continue to work to support their family. Lean on parents to be your advocates at the local level in raising awareness for your work.

Appendix: Methodology

The research was conducted in two parts: a session in which a 30-participant focus group, comprised of mostly rural, conservative Americans, responded instantly to videos and an online survey of over one thousand participants, both liberal and conservative, the majority of whom were parents.

The focus group was held on February 15th, 2018. The survey was conducted during March 2018.

The Audience and Methodology

Instant Response Dial Session

Denver, CO

- 30 participants
- Mostly Conservative
- Mostly Rural

Online Survey

- n = 1,028 Interviews |
M.o.E. +/- 3.1%
- 63% parents / 37% non-parents
- 44% Clinton vote / 43% Trump vote
- 26% Urban / 53% Suburban / 21% Rural

The webinar this report is based on can be viewed in full [here](#).

An infographic highlighting key survey findings is available for download [here](#).

Learn more about Bipartisan Policy Center's Early Childhood Initiative at <http://bipartisanpolicy.org/early-childhood>.