



**Save the Children**  
*Action Network™*



# TENNESSEE VOTERS CARE ABOUT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

## ....**Inside:**

An in-depth report proves investing in high-quality early childhood education is a top priority for Tennessee voters.



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Current legislators and candidates looking for issues with broad appeal that can meaningfully improve the lives of their constituents should embrace Tennessee-specific policies that invest in our youngest learners and early intervention programs.

Our bipartisan polling team of TargetPoint Consulting, led by Michael Meyers, and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, led by David Walker, was commissioned by Save the Children Action Network to conduct survey research among Tennessee general election voters to gauge their opinions about early childhood education and early intervention policies. In addition to general election voters, we also conducted interviews among both Democratic and Republican primary voters.

Education is a leading priority among all voters and especially among Independent and Democratic voters. Voters of all partisan stripes understand the critical importance of years zero through five in a child's development and believe public education should start with preschool and be offered to all 4-year-olds.

Seven out of 10 voters in Tennessee believe improving our education system, including preschool, K-12, and higher education, should be a top priority.

As important as these results are, two discrete findings really stand out. First, voters are willing to put their money where their mouths are, which is to say, voters support additional investments in early childhood education, even when told it means a slight increase in taxes. Second, when voters are told in state-specific detail about the current inadequate financial support for early childhood education and assistance, they respond with real political urgency.

Huge numbers of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents describe themselves as more likely to support a candidate who advocates for investing in early childhood education and child care. Candidates would be wise to listen to these voters.

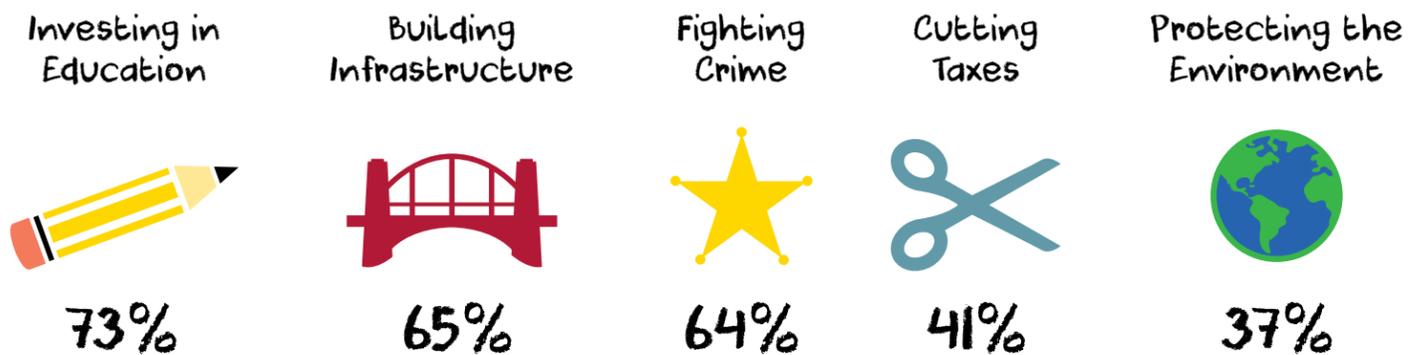
**David Walker** is a Vice President at Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, and 2018 marks his 30th year conducting public opinion research. He has worked on campaigns at every level of government, from national elections to local sheriff. He and his firm have extensive experience working on education and early childhood education issues, including work with the National Education Association, Education Minnesota, Colorado Education Association, Achieve, and D.C. Public Schools.

**Michael Meyers** is President and partner at TargetPoint Consulting. His two decades of experience bring a deep understanding of the views held by the national electorate. His past clients include the presidential campaigns of President Bush, Senator McCain, and Governor Romney. Numerous clients have benefited from his insights as a public opinion researcher, including the Michigan legislature, local ballot initiatives, and presidential campaigns.

# TENNESSEE VOTER ATTITUDES ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

## Education, Including Preschool, Is the Leading Issue

Voters rank improving Tennessee's education system—including preschool—as an “extremely or very high priority,” EVEN when compared to other popular issues.



## Voters Support Expanding Preschool

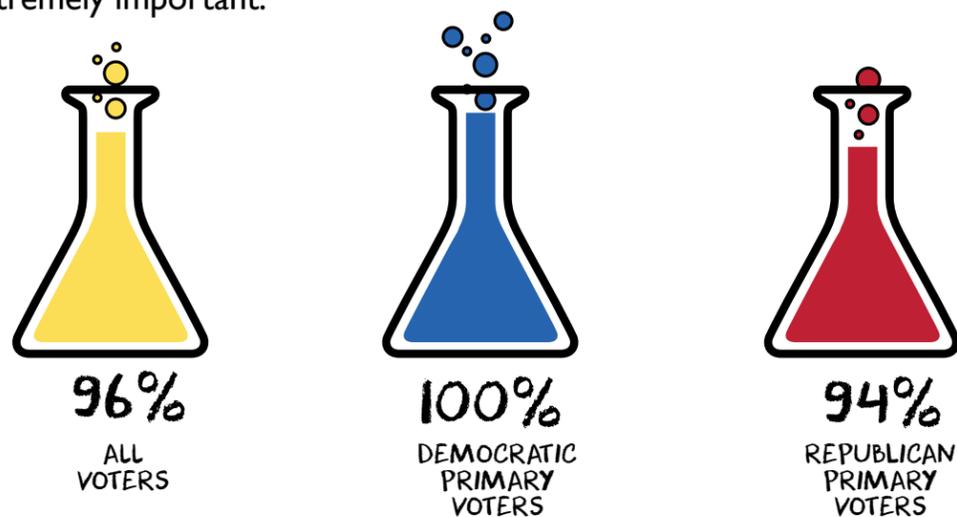


An overwhelming majority of voters are more likely to vote for a candidate who said this about preschool: “Only 16% of low-income children are being served by preschool programs in Tennessee. That means over 90 thousand low-income kids who could benefit most from high-quality early education have no access to pre-kindergarten. I want to expand funding so at least the lowest-income 4-year-olds who want to attend preschool have access in our state, and help ensure more kids have an equal opportunity to succeed.”



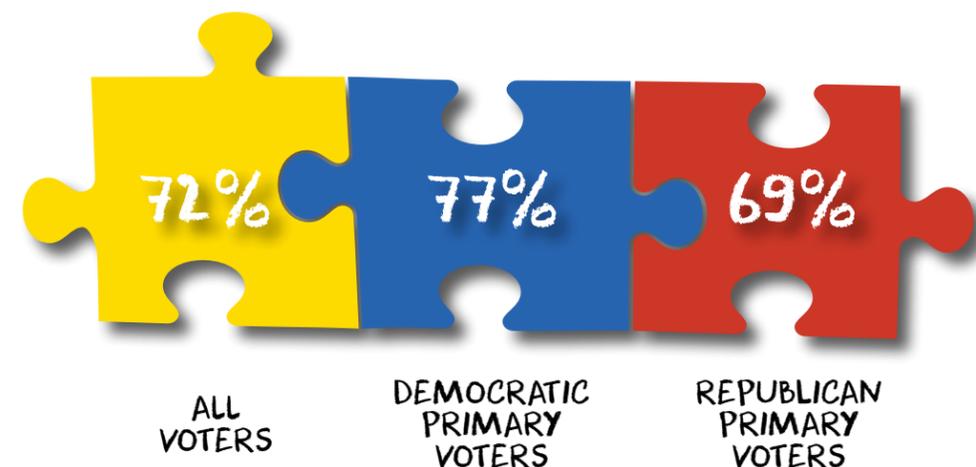
## Voters Agree: The Early Years Are Important

Voters recognize the vital role education can play in the early years of development, saying ages 0 to 5 are important, with a majority of voters recognizing that these years are “extremely important.”



## Child Care: A Bipartisan Issue

There is strong bipartisan agreement on changing child care assistance. Majorities of both parties agree they'd be more likely to vote for a candidate who would change how state-funded child care assistance works and end the strict income cutoff to benefits.



# MESSAGE GUIDANCE FOR CANDIDATES ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The six statements below are powerful messages that resonate with Tennessee voters to support new investments in early childhood education. At least 66 percent of voters say these statements are convincing arguments in favor of early childhood care and education.

Below are the top three messages, ranked in order of most powerful for each target audience of voters, color coded to correspond with the message chart on page 6.

82%

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

81%

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

74%

Scientific studies show the human brain develops most rapidly in the earliest years, between birth and age 5, but almost all the public money we invest in children happens after the age of 5. We should change this and invest more in high-quality early childhood education.

69%

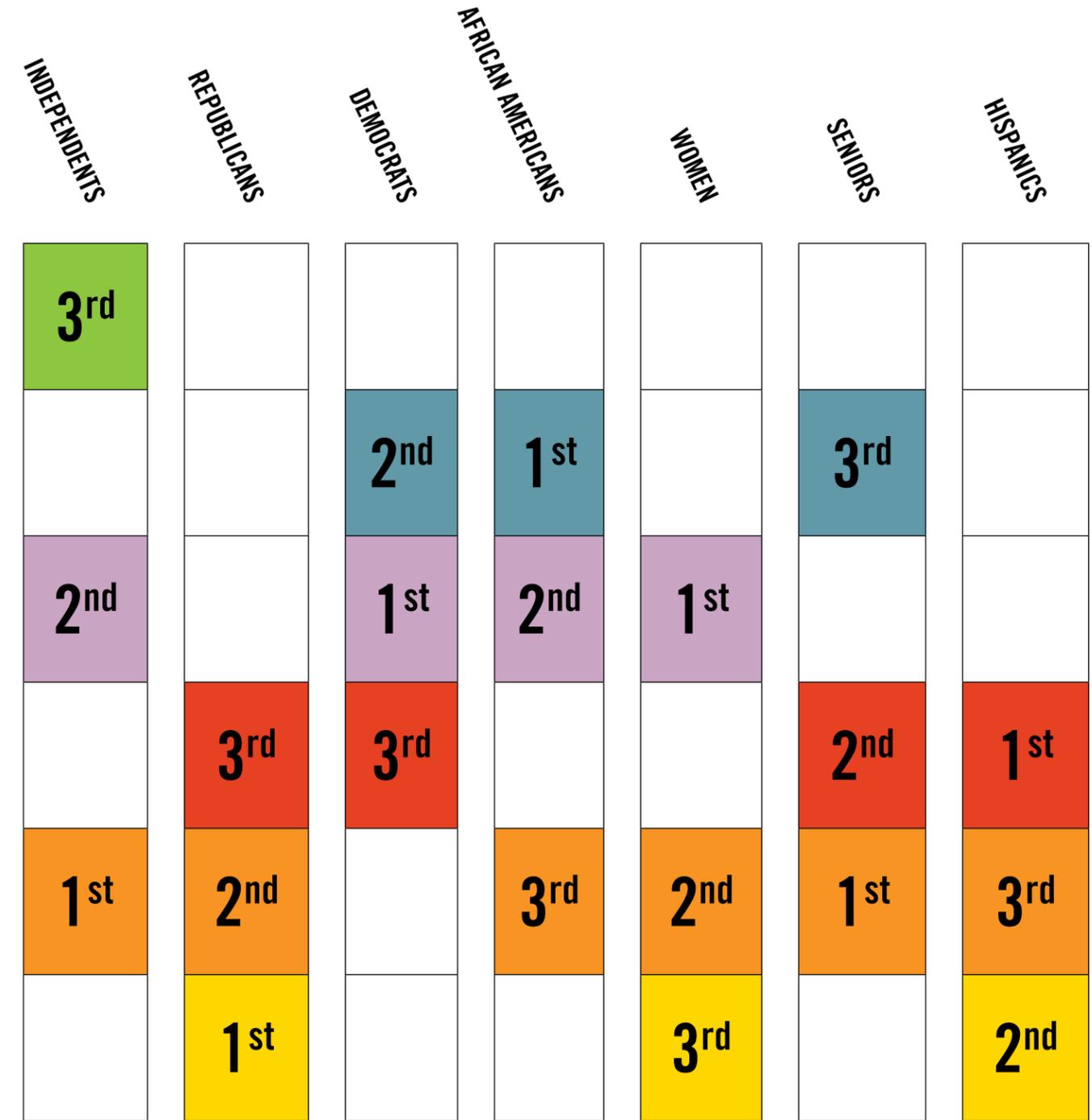
In science and math scores, American children are falling behind students around the world because other countries are investing in high-quality early education programs. It is time we put American children on a level playing field by investing in early childhood education programs.

69%

Our public school system is in desperate need of reform, and any effort to fix our state's public schools needs to include investments in high-quality early childhood education as a part of such larger education reform.

66%

A recent national news report on early childhood education cited positive long-term outcomes, including less grade repetition, lower high school dropout rates, and fewer teen pregnancies.



# POLICY THAT ADVANCES HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

## SUMMARY: PRESCHOOL SHOULD BE UNIVERSALLY ACCESSIBLE

A wide majority of Tennessee voters want preschool to be accessible to all families, and not be a needs-based assistance program. The proof: 63 percent of Tennessee voters believe public education should start at pre-K and be offered to all 4-year-olds. Only 6 percent say it should be offered to low-income kids, and just 27 percent think it should not be part of public schools.

The following are policy proposals that Tennessee voters overwhelmingly support, to expand preschool and invest in early childhood education, ranked in order of popularity. The total percentage is the sum of voters who are "much more likely" or "somewhat more likely" to vote for a candidate who advocates for these policies during his or her campaign.

VOTERS  
**75%**  
APPROVED

Only 16% of low-income children are being served by preschool programs in Tennessee. That means over 90 thousand low-income kids who could benefit most from high-quality early education have no access to pre-kindergarten. I want to expand funding so at least the lowest income 4-year-olds who want to attend preschool have access in our state, and help ensure more kids have an equal opportunity to succeed.

In Tennessee, it should pay to work hard. I support changing the way childcare assistance works so that we can end the cycle of poverty. Families that reach a certain income level get cut off from any childcare assistance. Instead of a strict cutoff, I believe we should gradually lower the amount of assistance families get, so they still have help with childcare costs, enabling them to get out of poverty and move into the middle class.

VOTERS  
**72%**  
APPROVED

Tennessee needs to reform its public schools, and that includes investing in high-quality early childhood education so our youngest students enter the K through 12 system ready to learn. As governor, I will expand funding to improve the quality of, and increase access to, our state's Voluntary Pre-K program.

VOTERS  
**71%**  
APPROVED

VOTERS  
**68%**  
APPROVED

The State of Tennessee can assist families and help parents by providing voluntary home visiting programs that vulnerable parents can access, such as voluntary home visiting counselors to vulnerable parents in need, such as parents fighting heroin and opioid addiction. We currently reach less than 2% of the families who are eligible for these programs, and I support expanding this program to reach more families so our children's parents can parent better.

## DID YOU KNOW?

### Voters Want Investments in Early Education, Even if It Means a Slight Tax Increase

Sixty-seven percent of voters said they would support a candidate that came out in FAVOR of investing in high-quality early childhood education programs and child care, even if it meant a slight tax increase. Among the 67 percent, Republican primary voters are more likely to support this policy by 54 percent, and Democratic primary voters support it by 89 percent.



## WHAT TENNESSEE VOTERS ARE SAYING

“Preschool should be available to any parent who wants their kid to go to it.”

**DEMOCRATIC VOTER**

“I think on a cost basis, we are either going to spend the money earlier or we are going to spend the money later. I would rather spend it early and have them turn into productive citizens than to have these opioid problems, meth labs, meth clinics, and high crime rate.”

**REPUBLICAN VOTER**

“If you don’t go to school at all until kindergarten and you don’t have the parents who have the time to teach you because they have to go to work, what does your child know? It is unfair to them to sit in a classroom and the teacher has to go on whether your child knows it all or not. So what happens to those kids?”

**DEMOCRATIC VOTER**

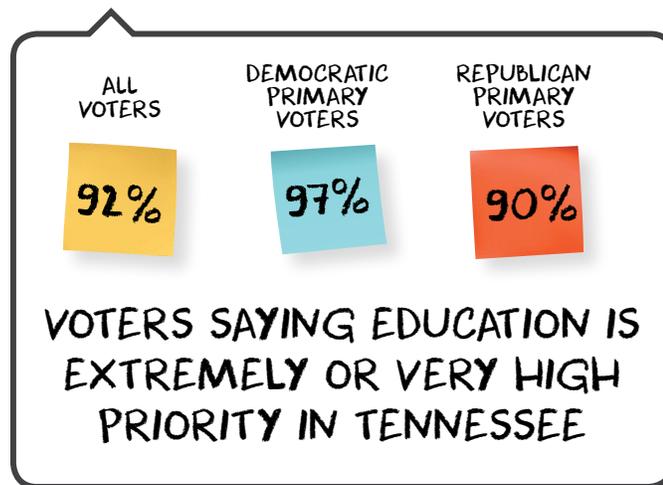
“My wife doesn’t work because we have 4 kids and preschool would be stupid expensive. So if we were able to put them in preschool then she would be able to create a full salary and not just a part-time here or there.”

**REPUBLICAN VOTER**



Save the Children Action Network supports efforts to invest in children from the beginning. By investing in early childhood education, we ensure a strong start for our children and a better future for us all.

**INSIDE:** Education and early childhood education is a top priority for Tennessee voters across partisan lines.



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