

Poll: Voters increasingly support early education investments

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A [national poll](#) found that a majority of bipartisan voters would positively view a presidential candidate who supports improving federally funded early education – a topic that has gained support over the past three years.

The [First Five Years Fund](#), a national group that advocates for federal investments in early childhood programs, released Tuesday its annual poll, finding the strongest support for early education in the three years that the survey has been conducted.

About 54 percent of respondents said they would “hold a more positive view” of a presidential candidate who supports improving early education. Six percent of respondents said they would have a “less favorable” view, while 38 percent reported that it would make no difference in their opinions.

“Voters clearly want early childhood education in the national dialogue with the upcoming election,” said Kris Perry, executive director of the First Five Years Fund, during a webinar about the poll. “The data is compelling from a political standpoint.”

In the survey led by Public Opinion Strategies and Hart Research, interviewers contacted 800 registered voters across the country on landlines and cellular phones in September to ask questions for the survey.

Survey wording

This is the proposal that voters were asked about in the First Five Years Fund poll:

“Congress may consider a plan that helps states and local communities provide better early childhood education programs to parents of children from birth to five. It provides ten billion dollars per year for ten years in grants to states to provide all low- and moderate-income four-year-olds with voluntary access to high-quality preschool programs. It also makes available voluntary programs in high-quality early education and child care for infants and toddlers, as well as home visiting and parent education.”

When asked to rank the importance of issues from a list of policy topics, 89 percent of respondents said making sure children get a “strong start in life” and improving public education was “extremely” or “very” important. Those two issues tied for first and ranked higher than increasing jobs and controlling health care costs.

However, a related issue ranked second from the bottom of the list, just above “securing our borders.” About 68 percent ranked “ensuring there are better quality, more affordable early childhood education options for parents who



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Preschool students Kayla Nghi Du, left, and Gabriela Juarez read along with assistant teacher Kiersten Nakaishi during their class at Land School in Westminster, Calif.

wish to use them” as “extremely” or “very” important.

Like the previous two polls, participants were asked about a federal proposal to allocate \$10 billion per year for 10 years to states to expand preschool slots for low- to moderate-income families, as well as other efforts.

The idea was introduced by President Barack Obama in 2013 as part of his State of the Union speech. But the plan, called the Strong Start for America’s Children Act, has languished in Congress. Congress members last made progress on the proposal in May 2014, but lost momentum when key lawmakers left office. Even though the [bill was reintroduced in May](#), it has been stalled.

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Despite the lack of progress in Congress, 76 percent of poll respondents said they support the proposal – the highest percentage since the fund’s poll began. Last year, 71 percent of respondents supported the plan, up from 70 percent in 2013.

“We see a widening gap. We see more voters today siding with support of early education,” said Lori Weigel of Public Opinion Strategies.



Support for the proposal was highest among Democrats, at 94 percent, but a majority of Republicans, 59 percent, also backed it.

Across the country, support for the plan was lowest in the West, with 71 percent of respondents backing it, compared to 80 percent in the South, where support was strongest.

The survey looked at key voter groups, finding strong support for early education among Hispanics (86 percent); millennials, or voters age 34 and younger (87 percent), and suburban women (76 percent). By income level, support was highest among those making \$40,000 a year or less – 89 percent.

When asked if it would be better to invest more in early education or college, 42 percent of respondents chose early education. Twenty-one percent chose college and 33 percent said investments should be made equally.

“These poll results show the overwhelming bipartisan support for investments in quality early childhood education,” said Andrea Ball, senior policy advisor for Early Edge California, in a statement. “It’s a top priority for American voters, who recognize that access to quality early education programs is a necessity.”



[Sarah Tully](#) covers the Common Core and early education in the Los Angeles area.