



Polling Memo: Oklahoma Voters on Child Care Challenges, Workforce Impact, and Need for Action

On behalf of Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness Foundation and in partnership with First Five Years Fund, UpONE Insights conducted a statewide survey of registered voters in Oklahoma. The survey found that Oklahomans believe child care is both a family necessity and an economic driver. Nearly half of young voters would enter the workforce if quality care were available, and young parents are cutting back on basics, struggling to pay bills, and delaying having children because of the high cost. Voters across party lines see child care as key to strengthening the economy and supporting working families, and they strongly back state and federal action to expand access. **Below are key findings:**

Oklahomans are worried about money. Child care challenges add to that stress.

Oklahoma voters are feeling financial strain.

Half of the voters surveyed say their personal finances are “only fair” or even “poor”. And 64% say they anticipate their financial situation will stay the same or get worse over the next year.

Child care expenses are hitting young Oklahoman parents hard.

- A strong majority of young parents (63%) say they’re putting off having more children because child care is so expensive.
- One in three young Oklahoma parents (34%) are cutting back on basic necessities to pay for child care.
- One in three young Oklahoma parents (32%) are struggling to pay for child care costs.
- And 82% of Oklahoma voters say the ability of working parents to find and afford quality child care is either in a “state of crisis” or a “major problem.”

Voters also see broader benefits of child care, like driving workforce participation, and helping the economy.

- Nearly half (49%) of young voters say they, or someone they know, would consider entering the workforce if quality child care were available.
- And 66% of voters believe investment in early childhood education programs and access to quality, affordable child care play an important role in the state’s economy.

And they also expect the Oklahoma state government to act.

- Paid family leave is incredibly popular, with nearly 80% of Oklahoma voters supporting the creation of a state-funded paid leave program for working parents.

- 63% agree that the state should be doing more to help and support working families.
- And 77% strongly believe that providing greater support for working families with children is a good investment of state taxpayer money.

Federal support for child care is overwhelmingly popular with Oklahoma voters

Oklahoma voters want federal action to expand options for affordable, quality child care.

- Voters strongly support funding for federal child care programs and want to see it increased.
- Nearly three-quarters (73%) of Oklahoma voters say federal funding for child care and early learning programs is a good investment of taxpayer money.
- And fully 60% of Oklahoma voters believe taking action to ensure more working families have access to affordable, quality child care should be an important priority in the next year.

There is strong support for Head Start.

- A strong majority of Oklahomans (76%) say they support Head Start, including 65% of Republicans, 87% of Independents, and 91% of Democrats.

The expansion of child care tax credits is very popular.

- 70% of Oklahoma voters support the expansion of the child care tax credits included in this year's tax package, including 77% of Republicans, 73% of Independents, and 56% of Democrats.

But, Oklahoma wants Congress to go further.

- 72% of voters want Congress to take additional steps to help working families find and afford quality child care, including 67% of Republicans, 83% of Independents, 73% of Democrats.

About the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness (OPSR): OPSR was created to help Oklahoma families access the early care and education, family support, and health and mental health services they need to support their children during their most critical period of development from birth through age 5. OPSR facilitates collaborative planning and decision-making to increase coordination between programs, to maximize the use of public and private funding, and pursue policies that improve learning opportunities and environments for Oklahoma. To learn more visit www.okschoolreadiness.org.

About First Five Years Fund: The first five years last forever. At First Five Years Fund, we work to protect, prioritize, and build bipartisan support for quality child care and early learning programs at the federal level. Reliable, affordable, and high-quality early learning and child care can be transformative, not only enhancing a child's prospects for a brighter future but also bolstering working parents and fostering economic stability nationwide. Join us at www.ffyf.org.