



Early Care and Education in Louisiana 2019

Section I: *Why Does Early Care and Education Matter? The Most Profound Time of Brain Development and a Critical Support to Working Parents*

The research is now clear: Early experiences affect the very development of brain architecture, which provides the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health. Eighty percent of brain development takes place from birth through age three, and ninety percent by age four. High quality early care and education can have profound long term positive effects on children, including less referrals for special education services, fewer grade retentions, and more likely graduation from high school.ⁱ The science of brain development explains the connection between early learning experiences and long-term success. Just like a weak foundation of a house, a weak foundation of the brain can be fixed—but it is difficult, and therefore expensive, to do so.ⁱⁱ

Not surprising then, the research is equally clear that public investment in early childhood provides a greater return than any other time of life. Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman describes investing in the care and education of young children as “the most efficient use” of a state’s financial resources. His most recent research shows **up to a 13% return** on investing in high-quality early care and education programs.ⁱⁱⁱ

Meanwhile as more and more children have both parents in the workforce, the need for quality, affordable, early care and education has become even more critical. **In Louisiana, 66% of children age 5 and under have both, or their single parent, in the workforce and must spend significant time in child care.**^{iv} However, child care costs almost as much as a public college tuition in Louisiana and across the nation,^v and **the cost has risen by 12% over three years.**^{vi}

In addition, there are acute economic costs to Louisiana employers caused by child care instability. *[Losing Ground: How Child Care Impacts Louisiana’s Workforce Productivity and the State Economy](#)* found that one in seven Louisiana residents with a child age four or under had turned down a promotion at work due to child care issues. Almost half reported missing work regularly due to problems with child care, one in six had quit a job, and one in 13 had been fired because of child care issues. Overall, **the cost of inadequate access to reliable, quality child care by working parents totaled \$816 million to Louisiana employers** due to employee absences and turnover, nearly \$84 million in state tax revenue due to lost workplace productivity, and **\$1.1 billion to Louisiana’s economy** from the spillover effects of inadequate care.^{vii}

In other words, the research and data are clear: whether looking from the perspective of the child, the state’s educational system, the working parents, their employers, or Louisiana’s economy as a whole,

early care and education is an investment with a very high return on every dollar. However, for the state to gain the full benefits of an early learning program — both in terms of educational outcomes for children and financial savings— we must do two things: 1) promote, enable, and sustain high-quality programs, and 2) ensure children have access. In short, **both quality and quantity are key ingredients of a successful early care and education system.**

Section II: The State of the State: Act 3's Major Reforms to Louisiana's Early Care and Education System

The Early Childhood Education Act (Act 3) of 2012 mandated sweeping reforms to early care and education in Louisiana with the goal of improving school readiness among Louisiana's children.

Act 3 mandated the formation of one early childhood education system uniting all publicly funded early care and education programs for children birth through age four, including all pre-k programs, Head Start and Early Head Start programs, and child care centers, under the direction of the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and the Department of Education. Prior to Act 3, Louisiana resembled most states in that these programs were located across many departments, and though they often served the same children, had different quality standards, accountability systems, eligibility requirements and funding levels. These inconsistencies resulted mainly due to the fact that the programs were (and continue to be) funded through a patchwork of federal and state funding streams, each with its own requirements. The Act mandated the development of a definition of kindergarten readiness and a new uniform accountability system that would be mandatory for all programs receiving state and/or federal funds^{viii}, and later legislation mandated a common enrollment system for all publicly funded early care and education programs^{ix}.

To the great credit of BESE, the Louisiana Department of Education, and especially the programs themselves, **major progress has been made in the implementation of the reforms of Act 3, and the transformation of the early care and education system in Louisiana.** This has included the complete transition of all early care and education programs to the Department of Education under the supervision of BESE, the development and adoption of a state level definition of kindergarten readiness^x; Louisiana's Birth to Five Early Learning and Development Standards^{xi}; a new, now fully implemented, unified accountability system based on the CLASSTM assessment; a Performance Profile for each publicly funded early care and education site statewide^{xii}; a new professional development system in Louisiana for child care teachers, which has included the creation of an Early Childhood Ancillary Teaching Certification, the development of training programs, and the training of over a thousand teachers to achieve this certification^{xiii}; refashioning Louisiana's nationally recognized School Readiness Tax Credits to support the new certification and new accountability system^{xiv}; tiering of early childhood curriculum and a curriculum initiative to ensure programs have access to the quality options^{xv}; and the continued development of a common enrollment system for all publicly funded early care and education programs statewide for children birth through age 4^{xvi}, including a [website](#), that maps every publicly funded program in the state and provides information on program quality.^{xvii} Already, the quality of programs is improving, with 8% more sites receiving a quality rating (proficient or above) than last year, and the average score on each dimension and domain of the CLASS assessment improving as well.^{xviii}

Many of these accomplishments have positioned our state to be unique in the country, and have received national recognition. **Louisiana was ranked 8th among the 50 states for the effectiveness and efficiency of our new early care and education accountability system.**^{xix} In addition, our new professional development system and the School Finder Website have been featured in national publications.^{xx}

Section III: *The State of the State: Remaining Challenges-Severe Lack of Access to Quality Early Care and Education for Children Under Age 4*

Another one of Louisiana's successes is its pre-k programs for 4-year-olds. Louisiana has a number of quality programs, including the Cecil J. Picard LA 4 Early Childhood Program, the 8(g) Student Enhancement Block Grant Program, and the Nonpublic School Early Childhood Development Program. Combined with the federally funded Head Start 4-year-old program and the Title I funding used by school districts for pre-k, over 90% of at-risk 4 year olds in Louisiana can access a free 4-year-old pre-K slot,^{xxi} and 86% of these children are in a program rated to be a quality program^{xxii}.

By contrast, for children under age 4, quality early care and education is severely underfunded and out of reach for most low-income, working families. In fact, as quality has gone up under the reforms of Act 3 so has costs, so that **child care centers cost almost as much as a public college tuition**,^{xxiii} and **the tuition has risen by 12% over three years.**^{xxiv}

The only publicly funded early care and education programs in Louisiana for children under age 4 are Head Start (HS), which serves 3 and 4-year-olds, **Early Head Start (EHS),** which serves infants through 2-year-olds, **and the Child Care Assistance Program.** HS and EHS are entirely federally funded through grants to local public and private entities, such as school systems, Total Community Action agencies, parish governments and nonprofits. However, the total number of HS/EHS slots available in Louisiana serves only a small percentage of the eligible population^{xxv}.

The **Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)** is the only state administered early care and education program for children under age 4. To qualify, parents must be working, in school or in job training, and low-income. The funding is in the form of a subsidy paid to the child care center that the parent chooses. However, Louisiana rates for these subsidies are extremely low, below what 25%^{xxvi} of the centers actually charge and less than half the amount funded per child by HS/EHS^{xxvii}. Parents have to pay out-of-pocket to the center the difference between the subsidy and what the center actually charges for tuition.

Even with HS, EHS and the CCAP programs, **less than 15% of low-income children under age four have access to ANY publicly funded program,** including only 34% of three year olds, 11% of two year olds, 8% of one year olds, and 4% of infants.^{xxviii} This is in spite of the fact that **66% of children birth through age five in Louisiana have both parents – or their single parent – in the workforce.**^{xxix} Funding for the only state administered early care and education program for children under age 4, **CCAP, has been substantially cut** in the last ten years. The number of children served has gone from **almost 40,000 to under 17,000 today,** including the new funds restored to CCAP in 2019. In addition, **there is a waiting list for CCAP of over 3000 children.**^{xxx} **Numerous reports continue to show that quality child care is unaffordable for a substantial number of working parents in Louisiana.**^{xxxi} In addition, given the high cost of quality and the lack of public investment, it is not surprising that there is higher proportion of these publicly funded slots that are rated below proficient, that is, not at the minimum quality level established by the state.

One of the great challenges with early care and education for children under age 4 is that the delivery system is very different from the general public school system, with most of the slots for these children being paid for by private tuition. Furthermore, for centers to charge a tuition that parents can even stretch to afford, it rarely covers the cost of quality, especially for the younger children. The median

salary for a teacher in a child care center in Louisiana is \$8.95 an hour with few benefits, about half that of a kindergarten teacher^{xxxii}. Furthermore, the ratio for young children of teacher to child are much lower than in elementary classes. For infants, for example, licensing requires no more than five infants to one adult, making infant rooms extremely difficult to fund, and, hence, there are very few across the state. Cost models show that centers rarely charge families the actual cost for their younger children, using the 3 and 4 year old tuition to subsidize the infants through 2 year olds^{xxxiii}. Yet, most 4 year olds now attend free public pre-k in schools or Head Start programs.

It is helpful to compare the average amount paid per child to elementary schools, which receive over \$10,000 a year per child, to the current statewide market rate tuition of just over \$7500 per child (with the CCAP subsidy only paying around \$5700 a year per child). Elementary school is only for 6 hours a day/10 months a year with class ratios more in the realm of 1:30. Yet, child care is generally for 10 hours a day, 12 months a year. Without an infusion of public funds, private child care centers serving middle and working class families will continue to struggle to provide quality, and to be financially sustainable if they do. **Mixed delivery options, including placing well-funded public pre-k classrooms and Head Start and Early Head Start slots, as well as substantially more CCAP slots that are funded at the level of the actual cost of quality, into centers that also serve tuition-paying children are critical to create access to quality care for middle and working class parents at a cost they can afford.**

Finally, given that two-thirds of parents are working and the cost of quality child care is so high, the greatest fear is that more families are now using unlicensed, unregulated care for their children while they work. This care is much less expensive, but has no assurances of even basic health and safety, much less meeting quality standards during a child's most critical time of brain development.

In response to the growing understanding of the urgent need for increased investment in early care and education, the **Legislature and the Governor passed Act 639 of the 2018 Legislative Session**, creating a **bipartisan Louisiana's Early Childhood Care and Education Commission**, which was charged with developing a vision and framework for the future of early childhood care and education in Louisiana^{xxxiv}. **The Commission released a bold plan** in February 2019, **Funding our Future: LA B to 3**, which recommends substantially increasing access to quality early care and education for children under age four by investing \$86 million in new funding annually to increase the number of children able to be served from 22,000, as it is today, to 177,000 children under age four over the next decade^{xxxv}.

Endnotes

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- ^{vi} 2017 Louisiana Child Care Market Rate Survey. Retrieved from https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/early-childhood/2017-louisiana-child-care-market-rate-survey.pdf?sfvrsn=dc55901f_6 on July 13, 2019.
- ^{vii} Belinda Davis et al. "Losing Ground: How Child Care Impacts Louisiana's Workforce Productivity and the State Economy," Louisiana Policy Institute for Children (May 2017). Retrieved from http://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/20d35d_476f91b779d74b74937ccdd9965d74e3.pdf on July 13, 2019.
- ^{viii} Act 3 of 2012 Louisiana Legislative Session. Retrieved from <http://www.legis.la.gov/Legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=800894> on July 14, 2019.
- ^{ix} Act 717 of 2014 Legislative Session. Retrieved from <http://www.legis.la.gov/Legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=915816> on July 14, 2019.
- ^x For Louisiana's Kindergarten Readiness Definition, click [here](#). Retrieved on July 14, 2019.
- ^{xi} For Louisiana's Birth to Five Early Learning and Development Standards, click [here](#). Retrieved on July 14, 2019. Also see Louisiana Bulletin 136- - The Louisiana Standards for Early Childhood Care and Education Programs Serving Children Birth-Five Years at <http://bese.louisiana.gov/documents-resources/policies-bulletins>.
- ^{xii} See Louisiana Bulletin 140-Child Care and Education Network at <http://bese.louisiana.gov/documents-resources/policies-bulletins>. Also [click here](#) for detailed information on the accountability system and the Performance Profiles.
- ^{xiii} See Louisiana Bulletin 746- Louisiana Standards for State Certification of School Personnel at <http://bese.louisiana.gov/documents-resources/policies-bulletins>. Also [click here](#) for detailed information on Louisiana's Early Childhood Ancillary Teaching Certification.
- ^{xiv} For information on the Louisiana School Readiness Tax Credits in general [click here](#). For information on the recent changes to the School Readiness Tax Credit for teachers [click here](#) and scroll down to "School Readiness Tax Credit."
- ^{xv} [Click here](#) and go down to "Curriculum Initiative" for more information on this initiative.
- ^{xvi} See Louisiana Bulletin 140-Child Care and Education Network at <http://bese.louisiana.gov/documents-resources/policies-bulletins>. Also [click here](#) for detailed information on the Coordinated Enrollment System.
- ^{xvii} Louisiana School Finder at <https://louisianaschools.com>.
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