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## **NC Voters Want the State to Double Funding for Early Childhood**

Raleigh, NC - North Carolina voters across the political spectrum want the state to double its investment in early child development. Republicans, Independents and Democrats alike favor a wide range of state investments in young children's healthy development beginning at birth to ensure their success in school and life. The findings are from a new poll commissioned by the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation (NCECF) and conducted by the bipartisan polling team of Public Opinion Strategies and Hart Research.

NC voters recognize that early investments have immediate and long-term benefits that include supporting children's cognitive and social emotional development and growing a future skilled workforce. Voters said early learning investments are very important to help children achieve their third-grade reading goals (80 percent); help children develop curiosity and a love of learning (80 percent) and help North Carolina have a larger pool of highly skilled workers in the long-term (76 percent).

"North Carolinians are calling on policymakers to actualize their vision for young children. Voters want bold action," said Tracy Zimmerman, NCECF Executive Director. "They understand that children's healthy development requires a comprehensive set of resources available to all families, beginning with our babies and continuing through the birth-through-eight years. They overwhelmingly agree that the state is falling short—and they want the state to do more."

Support for early childhood investments has grown significantly since 2014. The percentage of voters saying we should do more for young children's education has increased by 15 points since 2014 to 80 percent, including a 15-point increase among Republicans and a 27 percent increase among Independents. Support for expanded investments in the state's signature early childhood programs, NC Pre-K and Smart Start, also has grown from 74 percent in 2014 to 86 percent in 2018, with Republican support increasing by 22 points.

"These findings are a testament to the strong programs we have and the recognition that far too few children have access to their benefits," Zimmerman said. "The findings are particularly timely given the most recent NC end-of-third-grade reading assessment results, which show scores hardly shifting from last year. What can we do differently? Follow the research and invest in a comprehensive set of strategies beginning at birth," Zimmerman said.

Highlights of the findings include:

- **80% of North Carolina voters support increasing annual state general funding for early child development programs to \$400 million** —an annual increase in state general funding from 1% to 2%.
- **80% of North Carolina voters say early education should be a higher priority than reducing business taxes in the state.** Majorities across all parties agree, including 60 percent of Republicans, 83 percent of Independents, and 94 percent of Democrats.
- **NC voters recognize that families need more help in the early years.** 81% of North Carolinians support the state providing more families with voluntary home visiting and parent education programs that help parents improve their child’s healthy development. 87% believe that parents should be able to take paid leave after the birth or adoption of a child. 72% of Republicans, 88% of Independents and 96% of Democrats support increasing access to the state’s early childhood programs, Smart Start and NC Pre-K.
- **Voters throughout the state say there is a lack of affordable and quality early education programs.** 65% of North Carolina voters say that half or fewer early childhood programs in their area meet both criteria. In fact, respondents making over \$100,000 per year are virtually just as likely (51%) as those who earn less than \$40,000 per year (53%) to say that only some or few programs near them are affordable and high-quality.
- **Voters recognize that young children need skilled and well-compensated teachers.** 91% of North Carolina voters support increasing wages for early childhood educators in order to reduce turnover, make sure they have a high level of preparation, training and skills and strong knowledge of early childhood development in order to improve the care and education children receive

NCECF is the state’s only organization focused exclusively on children from birth through age eight—the most rapid period of development in human life. It promotes public understanding, spearheads collaboration and advances policy to achieve its vision that each North Carolina child has a strong foundation for lifelong health, education and well-being supported by a premiere birth-to-age-eight system. Learn more at <http://www.buildthefoundation.org>

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