FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS
COUNCIL FOR A STRONG AMERICA
LOUISIANA

REPORT

High-Quality Early Care & Education: Cost-Effective Crime Prevention for Louisiana

Child care investments today can help prevent crime tomorrow



Acknowledgements

Council for a Strong America is a national, bipartisan nonprofit that unites membership organizations, including law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, and business executives, that promote solutions ensuring that our next generation of Americans will be successful, productive members of society.

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids
Thousands of police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors and violence survivors protecting public safety by promoting solutions that steer kids away from crime

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Summary

Research finds that early care and education (ECE) has the potential to positively change the life path trajectory for children, particularly children from disadvantaged backgrounds who face compounding barriers.[1] Early exposure to stimulating environments led by responsive and caring adults is an important predictor of later life outcomes in adulthood.[2] Children who do not receive the support they need early in life are more susceptible to poor life outcomes later, including developmental delays, academic failure, high school dropout, delinquency, and violent behaviors.[3]

About 60 percent of Louisiana children do not meet school readiness benchmarks at kindergarten entry,[4] and nearly three-fourths are not proficient in reading by 4th grade.[5] In addition, Louisiana students have the third highest disciplinary suspensions in the nation.[6] Many of these children may never catch up—low reading proficiency and suspensions dramatically increase likelihood for high school dropout.[7] In fact, nearly one in five Louisiana students are not graduating from high school on time, in four years[8] — heightening their risk for future crime and incarceration.[9]

When ECE is prioritized and elevated, children are more likely to be academically and behaviorally prepared to make positive contributions, rather than choose crime later. Parents and early care teachers benefit too: public safety relies heavily on the economic prospects of the labor force, and lack of preparedness and nonparticipation puts our state and nation at risk. While 63 percent of Louisiana children under age 3 have mothers in the workforce, and 47 percent of these children come from families with low incomes,[10] Louisiana's Child Care Assistance

Program (CCAP) serves only seven percent of in-need children in the birth-to-3 age range.[11] Low access has resulted in stagnated wage growth and job losses for Louisiana parents.[12]

A recent study of the infant-toddler child care crisis reports a staggering annual estimated cost of $1.3 billion in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue in Louisiana.[13] Given that Louisiana spends less than half of one percent of state dollars on early care and education,[14] state policymakers are in a unique position to put the full weight of their support behind significant investments in high-quality early childhood programs. To put Louisiana on the right path, policymakers must create more CCAP slots for children ages birth to 3. To make this happen, the Early Childhood Care and Education Commission recommends: providing $115 million in state funding per year for the next 10 years, appropriating $200 million of state aid to child care access, and appropriating 10 percent of state excess funds from the previous fiscal year to the Early Childhood Education Fund.[15] When we invest in early learning programs, we put our children—and our state—on a path toward greater safety and prosperity.

The early years are key to a strong foundation

Early childhood is a time when learning can have a profound and lasting impact on a child's life. Science supports the importance of working with young children from birth through the early years. The experiences and interactions in early childhood shape brain development and lay the foundation for positive lifelong outcomes.[16] Interactions that are reassuring and responsive foster a warm and nurturing environment that sets the stage for strong bonds between young children and care providers—inside and outside the family.[17] When care is consistent, healthy, and safe, this can result in improved cognitive and behavioral outcomes and enhanced school readiness.[18] Children born to economically disadvantaged families are less likely to have these fundamental experiences — creating vulnerabilities for developmental gaps and disadvantages in school and later life.[19] As more gaps and disadvantages accumulate and converge, successfully transitioning to productive adulthood becomes significantly less likely, and high school dropout and involvement in the criminal justice system more likely.[20] It doesn't have to be this way. Providing children with high-quality ECE in infancy and early childhood can buffer against risk factors and disadvantages, and facilitate the development of skills and accessibility to resources needed to avoid crime and have successful life outcomes.[21]

> "A safe and thriving community begins with high-quality early education. Lack of ample support can result in the development of unhealthy coping mechanisms, which can lead to crime."



Joseph Lopinto
Sheriff
Jefferson Parish, LA

Educational shortcomings leave Louisiana vulnerable to crime

There were more than 25,500 violent crimes and 147,000 property crimes committed in Louisiana in 2019.[22] There are nearly 13,000 adults incarcerated in state prisons in Louisiana,[23] and the adult correctional institutional budget is $434.3 million per year.[24] Meanwhile, the budget for Louisiana's Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) is $36.2 million per year.[25]

The link between crime and incarceration, and low educational attainment is well-known. Nationwide, six out of 10 inmates in state prisons did not complete high school.[26] In Louisiana, 60 percent of children are not prepared for kindergarten.[27] Lack of preparedness has resulted in too many young people not performing well academically. For example, about three-fourths of fourth graders are not proficient in reading. Reading proficiency levels are the same for eighth graders.[28] An estimated nine percent of Louisiana students are suspended for disciplinary infractions (the third highest rate in the nation).[29] Low reading proficiency and suspensions dramatically increase likelihood for high school dropout.[30] In fact, nearly one in five Louisiana students are not graduating from high school on time, in four years (the eleventh-worst rate in the nation).[31] While poor academic performance does not mean a child is destined for crime, it does increase vulnerability for delinquency[32] — which heightens risk for future crime and incarceration.[33] Law enforcement leaders in Louisiana agree that arrests and incarcerations are not the most cost-effective ways to solve this problem. We need to invest in effective strategies that prevent crime from occurring in the first place. ECE has been identified as an important component for crime prevention.



ECE can improve school performance and academic outcomes

Studies have found connections between early learning and children's later academic outcomes, including being held back in school, receipt of special education, and being suspended or expelled from school.[34] For example, a longitudinal study is following students who previously attended an Educare program into middle school. Results show that students who attended for at least two years had higher scores in math and reading on state assessments in elementary school, compared to similar peers who had not attended.[35]

High-quality early care programs can reduce behavior problems

Research points to the importance of social-emotional development, mental health, and executive function skills as significant factors in later behavioral outcomes. A study, for example, found that children who were randomly selected to attend a high-quality child care and early education program from ages 2 to 3 had fewer behavior problems (as rated by parents) than children who

Social-emotional development refers to how children express themselves, build relationships with others, and engage with their environment. It has implications for managing emotions; classroom behaviors; self-confidence; and establishing healthy relationships.

What are "social-emotional skills"?

These skills include, the ability to:

- Manage emotions and impulses
- Solve problems
- Take initiative
- Be flexible
- Communicate with and work well with others
- Persevere and be resilient
- Demonstrate empathy

Current research finds that managing emotions and behaviors is a strong predictor for academic success and deterring involvement with the criminal justice system. A study examined 800 children and found that social-emotional skills at kindergarten entry were related to later criminal justice system outcomes. Kindergarteners with high levels of social-emotional skills were less likely to later have involvement with police or be held in a detention center. By age 25, those with high levels of social-emotional skills in kindergarten were less likely to have been arrested or to have arrests for serious offenses.

Source: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1235885.pdf ; https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2013.825565 ; https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/full/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302630

were not selected.[36] A longitudinal study of more than 1,300 children found that children in higher-quality child care were better prepared for school at age 4 compared to children in lower-quality child care. At age 15, had significantly lower levels of behavior problems.[37]

High-quality ECE can reduce arrests and incarceration

Child care can make an impact on future involvement with the criminal justice system. Children not served by the Chicago Parent-Child Centers (CPC) program were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18.[38] By age 24, the people served were 20 percent less likely to have served time in jail or prison.[39]

Louisiana's child care system must improve to meet the needs of children, families, and educators

The Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) is Louisiana's only state-funded ECE program for children under age 4. CCAP is designed to support families with low incomes access high-quality child care while they are attending school or working.[40] Several interrelated challenges render Louisiana's child care system less than optimal:



- **Access:** Forty-two percent of Louisianans live in a child care desert – any census tract with more than 50 children under age 5 that contains either no child care providers or more than three children for every licensed child care slot.[41]
- **Availability:** In Louisiana, 63 percent of children under age 3 have one or both parents in the workforce,[42] making child care a necessity for employment sustainability. Over two-thirds of parents report difficulty finding affordable care for their young children.[43] Almost half of working mothers with young children are regularly absent due to child care issues.[44]
- **Affordability:** CCAP provides financial assistance to parents with low incomes that allows them to access high-quality child care while they are working or attending school.[45] Infant care in a child care center costs over $8,600 per year on average, just $1,500 less than public college tuition in Louisiana.[46] Despite the high cost, Louisiana spends less than one-half of one percent of state dollars on early care and education.[47]
- **Capacity:** In Louisiana, there are 173,000 children, birth through age 3, in need of early care and education.[48] CCAP serves only seven percent of in-need children in the birth-to-3 age range.[49] The younger the child, the lower the access, with 32 percent of 3-year-olds, 14 percent of 2-year-olds, 12 percent of 1-year-olds, and six percent of infants served.[50]
- **Compensation:** Despite the vital role of early care educators, in Louisiana, they are poorly compensated, with annual mean wages of $20,910 compared to $44,360 for kindergarten teachers.[51] Low wages contribute to teacher turnover and staffing shortages, creating instability for child care programs, parents, and children.

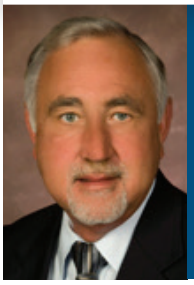
Beyond the negative effects on infants, toddlers, families, and teachers, problems with child care exact a huge economic toll: a staggering estimated annual cost of $1.3 billion in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue, from insufficient child care for infants and toddlers alone.[52]

Child care is critical for family self-sufficiency

Thirty-five percent of parents in Louisiana lack secure employment.[53] Children living in

families lacking secure employment are at an increased risk for poverty — a salient correlate for crime.[54] In fact, more than one quarter of children in Louisiana are in poverty.[55] Many parents who desire to work are forced to forgo opportunities for wage increases or quit due to child care issues. For example, a study of parents in the Louisiana workforce found that one in seven parents with a child age 4 or under had turned down a promotion at work due to child care issues, one in six had quit a job, and one in 13 had been fired because of child care issues.[56] Child care access facilitates Louisiana parents' ability to maintain employment. Employment means potential for increased earnings, which in turn can increase family self-sufficiency.

> We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future by making sure they have the skills they need in the future, today!"



Michael Cazes
Sheriff
West Baton Rouge, LA

Conclusion

Many Louisiana children start school behind their peers and may never catch up, which can lead to poor school performance, high school dropout, and involvement in the criminal justice system. Early care and education can make a difference — buffering against the disadvantages and gaps that increase susceptibility for poor later life outcomes. Our state's policymakers must create more CCAP slots for children ages birth to 3. This can happen by providing $115 million in state funding per year for the next ten years, appropriating $200 million of state aid to child care access, and appropriating 10 percent of state excess funds from the previous fiscal year to the Early Childhood Education Fund. Greater investments in high-quality early learning from the ages of birth to 3 years—a crucial time of brain development—will benefit Louisiana children and families, as well as improve public safety in the years to come. If we delay action, we run the risk of suspending future advancement, to the detriment of our children, families, and state.

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Council for a Strong America is a national, bipartisan nonprofit that unites membership organizations, including law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, and business executives, that promote solutions ensuring that our next generation of Americans will be successful, productive members of society.

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