Within Reach

Toolkit

Talking Points, Frequently Asked Questions, Sample Op-ed, Sample Letters to the Editor, and Sample Social Media & Shareable Graphics
High-quality affordable child care and pre-k are out of reach for millions of Americans. Quality child care costs more than median rent in every state, and it’s more expensive than the average annual tuition and fees for a public four-year university in 28 states and the District of Columbia. And access to pre-k is no better—only about 34% of preschool-aged children are enrolled in pre-k in the United States.

Right now our policies are out-of-step with the realities of American families—65% of children under age 6 have both parents in the workforce, which means parents, especially working moms, are often left to make an impossible choice: low-quality care to maintain their jobs or forgoing needed pay to stay at home and care for their child.

That’s why we must take action to put high-quality child care and pre-k within reach for working families. High-quality affordable child care and pre-k are a necessity, and win-win for everyone:

1. **Children are our nation’s future workforce and innovators**—high-quality early education positively impacts the rest of their lives.

2. **Working families are being squeezed and need affordable, high-quality child care and pre-k to make ends meet.**

3. **High-quality, affordable child care and pre-k levels the playing field and boosts the economy, benefitting everyone.**

Early education prepares children for school, gives families a fair shot to make ends meet and get ahead, and strengthens our economy. A strong economy starts with strong families. But low-quality and skyrocketing costs are putting child care and pre-k out of reach for millions of hard-working Americans, leaving families struggling to choose between their paycheck and their child’s care. An overwhelming majority, 88%, of Americans agree—it’s time to put child care and pre-k within reach for working families.

This toolkit includes the following ways to join the campaign and take action:

- Talking Points
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Sample Op-ed
- Sample Letters to the Editor
- Sample Social Media & Shareable Graphics

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EARLY EDUCATION STRENGTHENS OUR ECONOMY TODAY AND TOMORROW WHEN IT’S WITHIN REACH, BUT THE COST IS TOO HIGH AND THE QUALITY IS TOO LOW

- From 2000 to 2012, child care costs for a typical middle class family grew by 30% and the average price of a child care center exceeds $10,000 a year.
- In 28 states and DC, full time center-based child care costs more than the average annual tuition and fees for a public four-year university and the cost exceeds the median rent in every state.
- Only 10% of child care programs in the United States are considered high-quality.
- Only roughly 34% of preschool-aged children are enrolled in public pre-k in the United States.

ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY CHILD CARE AND PRE-K IS A GAME-CHANGER FOR CHILDREN, POSITIVELY IMPACTING THE REST OF THEIR LIVES

- Children are our nation’s future innovators and workforce, and high-quality early education drastically improves children’s early language, literacy, and math skills – 90% of brain development happens before age 5 – and impacts long-term outcomes such as
  - High-school graduation
  - Years of education completed
  - Lifetime earnings
  - Likelihood of crime, violence, and teen pregnancy
- Early education is proven to narrow the school-readiness gap between kids from wealthy and low-income families – disadvantaged children who participate in high-quality pre-k programs gain up to one year of additional learning.
- Kids in other countries are getting a huge jump-start over American kids – the U.S. is ranked 22nd for the typical age that children begin early childhood education programs, far behind fellow OECD countries.

WORKING FAMILIES ARE BEING SQUEEZED AND NEED ACCESS TO CHILD CARE AND PRE-K TO MAKE ENDS MEET

- 65% of American children under age 6 have both parents in the workforce, which means parents, especially working mothers, are often left to make an impossible choice between low-quality child care to maintain their jobs or forgoing needed pay to stay at home and care for a child themselves.
- Although mothers are now the primary breadwinners or co-breadwinners in nearly 2/3 of American households with children, women spend more than twice as much time providing primary care to children, making access to early education a necessity for women’s economic security.
  - 64% of women with children under age 6 are in the labor force.
  - For single mothers living below the poverty level, child care makes up 43% of their monthly income.
• Child care is a major household expense. For families living below the poverty level, child care costs take up 36% of an average monthly income, squeezing middle class families.

• With wages so low, child care workers are amongst those who struggle the most to afford quality care and pre-k for their children, forcing many child care workers to leave the workforce or rely on sub-par care for their own children.

BUT QUALITY CARE AND ADEQUATE WAGES FOR CHILD CARE WORKERS GO HAND IN HAND—WE CAN'T HAVE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER

• Chronic low wages are among the biggest obstacle to high-quality child care—the average child care workers earns $21,000 per year, more than $3,000 below the poverty level for a family of four.
  • 75% of child care workers live below the poverty level.

• Not only do child care workers need higher hourly wages, providers should pay staff an annual salary, not on an hourly basis, to prevent unpredictable earnings among staff who are often sent home without pay on days when child attendance is low.

• High-quality care largely hinges on the positive relationships workers are able to make with the children—workers need a reliable and livable income to maintain stability and retain their jobs.

QUALITY AFFORDABLE EARLY EDUCATION LEVELS THE PLAYING FIELD AND BOOSTS THE ECONOMY, WHICH HELPS EVERYONE

• Access to high-quality early education ensures parents stay in the workforce and improves child outcomes, which means less spending needed on child welfare services and the criminal justice system down the road, and employers are able to keep talented, productive workers who are contributing to the economy.

• Early childhood education not only levels the playing field for children as they begin kindergarten, it also builds a workforce that will drive future economic growth, secures long term economic competitiveness, and develops our nation’s future leaders.

• For every $1 dollar invested in early childhood education the public receives $7 in benefits.

• Equal access to high-quality child care and pre-k would increase GDP by $551 billion by allowing more parents to seek and keep their jobs while simultaneously developing the next generation of innovators.

AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF AMERICANS AGREE THAT EARLY EDUCATION SHOULD BE WITHIN REACH FOR WORKING FAMILIES

• 88% of voters agree that access to high-quality early childhood education is a necessity, not a luxury, for today’s families.

• 76% of American voters support increasing federal investment to help states provide more access to high-quality early childhood programs for low- and moderate-income families, including 59% of republicans and 69% of independents.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHILD CARE AND PRE-K?

A: Child care typically refers to non-custodial care for children ages 0-3 and is primarily focused on child development, whereas pre-k refers to non-custodial care for children ages 3-5 with a particular emphasis on preparing children for school entry. Together, high-quality child care and pre-k provide a continuum of early childhood education that best sets children up for success.

Q: WHAT MAKES CHILD CARE AND PRE-K HIGH-QUALITY VERSUS LOW-QUALITY?

A: All states require that child care and pre-k programs have a license to provide care for young children. Licensing standards are the minimum health, safety, and operating standards that are acceptable, but a license does not indicate high-quality care.

High-quality child care centers are typically staffed by administrators and educators with backgrounds and training in child development and/or early childhood education. This means educators are knowledgeable about how young children learn and grow, and use developmentally appropriate learning activities and materials to facilitate children’s development. High-quality programs use a research-based curriculum that promotes children’s social-emotional, physical, language, and cognitive development. Additionally, administrators and educators create a warm, welcoming environment that encourages family involvement in children’s learning and supports the development of positive relationships between children and their peers and caregivers.

Q: WHY DO CHILDREN NEED PRE-K AND KINDERGARTEN, ISN’T THAT OVERKILL?

A: Pre-k lays the groundwork for learning before children enter kindergarten. Children who attend high-quality pre-k are more likely to enter kindergarten with the early math, language, reading, and social-emotional skills they need to be successful. But those who don’t may be lagging behind their peers in early math and literacy, and may not have the social skills necessary to navigate the day-to-day interactions with teachers and peers in a kindergarten classroom. They may also be at risk for higher rates of referral for special education supports. Disparities in kindergarten readiness are particularly high amongst children of color and those living in poverty, but many middle-income children are similarly lacking the skills necessary to succeed in school. These readiness gaps lead to long-term achievement gaps.

On top of the significant impact on early achievement, children who have access to high-quality early education are more likely to graduate from high school, less likely to engage in criminal activity or need to rely on public assistance, and have higher earnings as adults, contributing to their long-term economic security.
Q: ISN’T IT THE RESPONSIBILITY OF FAMILIES TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO PAY FOR CHILD CARE FOR THEIR KIDS? WHY DO WE NEED A NATIONAL SOLUTION?

A: Putting high-quality child care within reach for families requires a public solution because it is an economic issue affecting everyone. Currently, low- and middle-income families lack options for child care and early education that are both affordable and high-quality, limiting parents’ participation in the workforce and impacting families’ economic stability. Closing these opportunity gaps, beginning with equitable access to high-quality child care and pre-k, would increase the GDP by $551 billion by allowing more parents to seek and maintain employment while simultaneously developing the next generation of innovators – our future teachers, nurses, lawyers, and scientists. In other words, when you invest in children and families, you invest in the economy, which benefits everyone. (Yeah, even you)

Q: HOW CAN WE AFFORD TO PUT CHILD CARE AND PRE-K WITHIN REACH?

A: The issue isn’t that the U.S. can’t afford to make high-quality child care and pre-k accessible for working families, it’s that we’ve yet to make them a priority. The simple truth is that our current child care and pre-k systems aren’t cutting it for kids, for families, or for our economy—it’s time to set our priorities straight and invest in putting these necessities within reach.

Q: HOW CAN WE ASK FOR MORE MONEY TO INVEST IN CHILD CARE AND PRE-K AND ASK FOR WORKERS TO BE PAID MORE?

A: Quality child care and early education and adequate wages for child care workers go hand in hand—we can’t have one without the other. Chronic low wages are amongst the biggest obstacle to high-quality child care—the average child care worker earns $21,000 per year, nearly $3,000 below the poverty line for a family of four. This means a substantial portion of child care workers and early educators have serious concerns about their own family’s economic well-being. Quality care largely hinges on the positive relationships educators are able to make with the children—low pay is linked with low teacher morale and high teacher turnover. As a country, we deserve better, our kids deserve better, and so do the workers and educators that spend their days caring for them.
SAMPLE OP-ED: IT’S TIME TO PUT HIGH-QUALITY CHILD CARE AND PRE-K WITHIN REACH FOR WORKING FAMILIES

Right now millions of Americans are facing a crisis—high-quality child care and pre-k are out of reach for working families. Early childhood education prepares children for school, gives families a fair shot to make ends meet and get ahead, and strengthens our economy. A strong economy starts with strong families. But low-quality and skyrocketing costs are putting child care and pre-k out of reach for millions of hard-working Americans, leaving families struggling to choose between their paycheck and their child’s care.

[INSERT A COUPLE SENTENCES WITH YOUR PERSONAL STORY (IF YOU HAVE ONE) ABOUT HOW CHILD CARE OR PRE-K ARE OUT OF REACH FOR YOU AND HOW THIS HAS IMPACTED YOUR FAMILY]

Early education strengthens our economy today and tomorrow when it’s within reach, but the cost is too high and the quality is too low. In 28 states and DC, full time center-based child care costs more than the average annual tuition and fees for a public four-year university and the cost exceeds the median rent in every state. To make matter worse, only 10 percent of child care programs in the United States are considered high-quality.

The simple truth is that access to quality child care and pre-k is a game-changer for children, affecting the rest of their lives. Children are our nation’s future innovators and workforce and high-quality early education drastically improves children’s early language, literacy, and math skills, and impacts long-term outcomes, such as high-school graduation, lifetime earnings, and the likelihood of crime, violence, and teen pregnancy. Early education is proven to narrow the school-readiness gap between kids from wealthy and low-income families – children who participate in high-quality pre-k programs gain up to one year of additional learning.

But child care and pre-k aren’t just about kids, they’re about the reality faced by the majority of American families and our economy. Working families are being financially squeezed and need access to child care and pre-k to make ends meet. 65 percent of American children under age 6 have both parents in the workforce, which means parents, especially working mothers, are often left to make an impossible choice: low-quality care to maintain their jobs or forgoing needed pay to stay at home and care for a child themselves.

It’s important to note that quality care and adequate wages for child care workers go hand in hand—we can’t have one without the other. Chronic low wages are among the biggest obstacle to high-quality child care—the average child care workers earns $21,000 per year, nearly 3,000 below the poverty line for a family of four. High-quality care largely hinges on the positive relationships workers are able to make with the children —workers need a reliable and livable income to maintain stability and retain their jobs.

High-quality affordable early education is an everyone issue. For every $1 dollar invested in early childhood education the public receives $7 in benefits. Access to high-quality early education ensures parents stay in the workforce and improves child outcomes, which means less spending needed on child welfare services and the criminal justice system down the road, and employers are able to keep talented, productive workers who are contributing to the economy. Early childhood education not only levels the playing field for children as they begin kindergarten, it also builds a workforce that will drive future economic growth, secures long term economic competitiveness, and develops our nation’s future leaders. An overwhelming majority of Americans, 88%, agree that early education should be within reach for working families.
SAMPLE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FROM A WORKING MOTHER

In [state], child care costs [see 50 state map], which is XX% [see 50 state map] of my family’s annual income. Child care costs more than median rent in [state] and more than tuition for a public four year university [refer to state map to determine is you live in one of the 28 states where this is the case]. My husband and I have [#] children, [insert their ages and names], and we both work—[insert your occupations], but high-quality child care or pre-k are completely out of reach for us. I’m facing the impossible choice of keeping my job and putting [children’s names] in low-quality care or to stop working and lose my paycheck to stay at home and care for my kids myself because it no longer makes sense for us to shell out so much of our income for child care and pre-k.

Quality affordable early education shouldn’t be this hard to come by and I know my family isn’t alone. Friends, neighbors, and the parents of my kids’ classmates are facing the same obstacles. This isn’t just an issue for our kids or our family anymore, this is an issue affecting our economy, and families can’t fix it by ourselves. We need a larger solution, a bigger commitment to fix this problem. As presidential candidates talk about what they will do for our country, I want to hear what their plan is to put high-quality child care and pre-k within reach for families like mine.

FROM AN EMPLOYER/SMALL BUSINESS OWNER

I’ve lived in [city] for [X] years where I own a small business with [#] employees. [Insert sentence on what your business does]. I don’t have children, which is why I’ve been so surprised that the cost of child care and pre-k is constantly on my mind. Over the last year, several employees have come to me to express the difficulty they’re having balancing their work with the need and cost of enrolling their kids in early education programs, like child care and pre-k —I’ve even had one woman quit because she said it didn’t make sense for her to work and pay so much of her income for her kids to be in child care.

I was astounded when they told me the cost of child care and pre-k, which is $XX [see 50 state map] in [STATE]—no wonder they’re having a hard time! To be honest, as someone without children, I didn’t think that these kinds of issues would ever affect me, but now it’s affecting the bottom line of my business. As the cost of early childhood education soars, I’m increasingly fearful of maintaining my workers and what that will mean for my business. As presidential candidates talk about what they will do for our country, I want to hear specifically what they’ll do to put early childhood education within reach for parents, like my employees, so that I can maintain my business.
FROM A CHILD CARE WORKER

I’ve been a teacher for [age of kids] at a child care facility in [city] for [#] years. I love working with children, I love being able to see them grow, develop, and learn everyday, but I don’t know how much longer I can continue doing the work I love and think is so important. I only make [$XX] an hour, which means I earn [$XX,XXX] a year to support my family, which include my [#] children, [names]. Child care costs $XX [see 50 state map] in [STATE], which adds up to XX% of my annual income. I try to work as hard as I can to provide for my family and to give the children I teach the best quality care I can, but both are becoming nearly impossible.

It is incredibly difficult to provide quality care for the children I’m teaching when I’m constantly worried about making ends meet for my own family at the end of the day. High-quality child care is hard to provide when I’m paid hourly and my hours are unpredictable—I’m often sent home without pay when attendance is low. Quality hinges on the relationships I’m able to build with the children—this just can’t happen if my job isn’t stable and I’m struggling on a daily basis. Not to mention that my salary as a child care worker far from allows me to be able to afford quality care or pre-k for my own children. Several of my friends that used to teach with me have quit because between their salary and the cost of child care for their kids, they’re take-home income is nearly nothing. As presidential candidates talk about what they will do for our country, I want to hear specifically what they’ll do for people like me who want to put high-quality early education within reach for the children I teach as well as for my own kids.
SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE
For Immediate Release
[DATE]

Contact
[Add a name, email and phone for the person[s] at your organization who can respond to inquiries]
[Organization’s name] calls on [candidate] to put high-quality child care and pre-k within reach for [State] working families.

Putting high-quality child care and pre-k within reach prepares children for school, gives families a fair shot to make ends meet and get ahead, and strengthens our economy.

[Insert Organization’s City] — Leaders from [organization’s name] called on [candidate] to announce their intent to put high-quality child care and pre-k within reach for [State] working families.

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[Quote from one of your organization’s leaders about the urgent need for a public solution to put high-quality child care and pre-k within reach for children, families, and the economy.]

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But child care and pre-k aren’t just about kids, they’re about the reality of the majority of American families and our economy. Working families are being squeezed and need access to child care and pre-k to make ends meet. 65 percent of American children under age 6 have both parents in the workforce, which means parents, especially working mothers, are often left to choose between low-quality care to maintain their jobs or forgoing needed pay to stay at home and care for a child themselves.

High-quality affordable early education is an everyone issue—it levels the playing field and boosts the economy, helping all of us. Access to quality early education ensures parents stay in the workforce and improves child outcomes, which means less spending needed on child welfare services and the criminal justice system down the road, and employers are able to keep talented, productive workers who are contributing to the economy. For every $1 dollar invested in early childhood education the public receives $7 in benefits.

[Organization] calls on [candidate] to prioritize this issue and provide solutions for putting high-quality child care and pre-k within reach for working families so they’re no longer forced to make impossible choices between their children and their paychecks, to the detriment of our economy. An overwhelming majority of Americans, 88%, agree that high-quality early education should be within reach for working families.
**SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA**

**TWEETS**

It’s time to put high-quality child care and pre-k #WithinReach for working families—we need a national solution: WithinReachCampaign.org

Right now high-quality child care and pre-k are out of reach for working families—we need a public solution #WithinReach

From 2000-2012, child care costs for a middle class family grew by 30% & avg cost of a child care center exceeds $10,000/year #WithinReach

In 28 states and DC, child care costs more than college and more than median rent in every state: WithinReachCampaign.org #WithinReach

90% of brain development happens before age 5 - time to put high-quality child care & pre-k #WithinReach

64% of U.S. women with children under age 6 are in the labor force—women need high-quality child care. #WithinReach

65% of American children under age 6 have both parents in the workforce, making quality child care and pre-k a necessity #WithinReach

For every $1 dollar invested in early childhood education the public receives $7 in benefits: WithinReachCampaign.org #WithinReach

Low wages for child care workers amongst biggest obstacles to high-quality child care—avg worker earns just $21,000/year #WithinReach

**GRAPHICS**

Download these graphics and more at WithinReachCampaign.org/act