

Children's Funding Institute 2023

Recent Polls and Emerging Themes

October 5, 9:00 – 9:50 AM



- Slides will be available at childrensfundingproject.org/cfi2023
- For this session, please do not take pictures, tag participants, or share presenter quotes without asking permission from the session speakers.



© Children's Funding Project,
2023

Photo by Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for
EDUimages

Exploring New Messages: *Emerging Themes from Recent Public Opinion Research*

October 5, 2023



OPINION
RESEARCH
& STRATEGY

CHILDREN'S 
FUNDING PROJECT

There are a range of messages that have consistently polled well for investing in kids.

The top themes include:

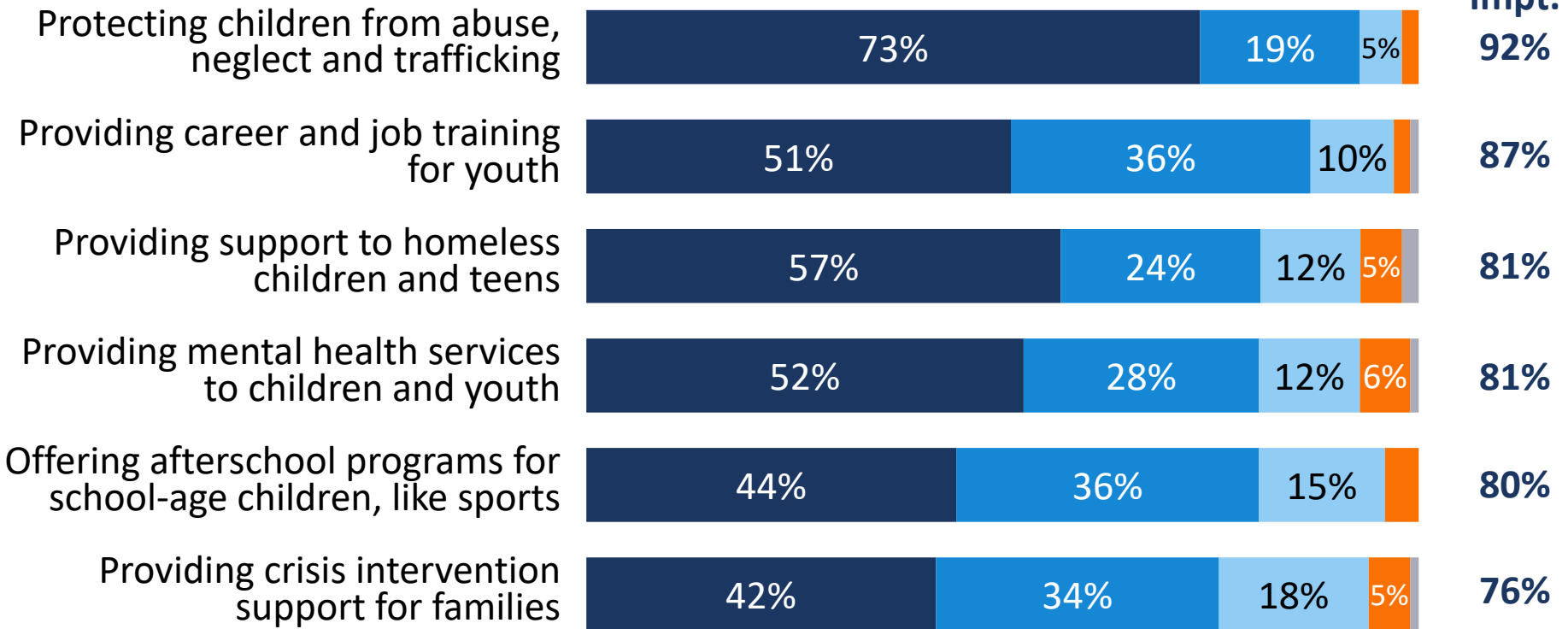
- 1. Brain Development**
- 2. Prevention and Early Intervention**
- 3. Strengthening K-12 Education**
- 4. Supporting Parents**
- 5. Emotional Appeals to Helping Kids**

**Our focus today is NOT on these messages,
but on other emerging themes.**

Polling in California this year typifies a new set of emerging investment priorities for voters.

I am going to read you a list of programs for children, youth, and families. Please tell me how important it is to you personally that each item be funded in your community: extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or not too important.

■ Ext. Impt. ■ Very Impt. ■ Smwt. Impt. ■ Not Too Impt. ■ Don't Know **Ext./Very Impt.**



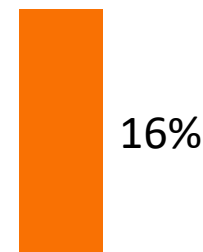
At a time when cost of living is high, set-asides may have increasing appeal.

I'd like to ask you more about one of the ideas I just described - dedicating a small percentage of additional funds from existing city budgets to support children and youth. I'm going to read you 2 statements about this idea; please tell me which one comes closest to your personal opinion.

Setting aside existing dollars is a good way to fund children and youth. Children are a huge and important part of our community, but right now almost no money is invested in them. By dedicating a small proportion of existing city budgets, we can shift priorities and improve support for kids without raising taxes.



Setting aside existing dollars is a bad way to fund children and youth. Shifting money to childcare or afterschool programs right now means less funding to provide affordable housing or fight crime (**Half Sample:** and it's essentially a way of defunding the police.)



Mentioning defunding the police has no meaningful impact on voters' selection.

Both/Neither/Don't Know 14%

Messaging around cost savings and return on investment is helpful, but not consistently top-tier.

We need to provide youth programs so that children facing challenges have the tools they need to improve their lives. These programs also save money and every dollar invested saves \$11 in taxpayer money – tax dollars that are guaranteed to remain here to help our kids. Investments in these programs pay off with reduced crime rates, lower health care costs, and less dependency on the welfare system when they get older. By investing in our children now we can make our communities stronger. **(46%)**

- Reactions to these messages seem to vary more than many others – highly compelling in some communities and less so in others.
- The specific numbers cited as evidence of return on investment seem less important than the broader case that the message makes.
- As noted earlier, arguments about long-term benefits (like reduced incarceration rates) tend to be less compelling than more immediate benefits like health and educational outcomes.



This measure is a smart investment. Research shows that for every dollar invested in early childhood programs, between \$7 and \$13 are saved in benefits to the community, including higher graduation rates, lower incarceration rates, and lower healthcare costs. **(42%)**

Messaging which explicitly highlights the cost of dis-investment in kids can be compelling.

Our county has one of the highest rates in the state for the incarceration of African-American males under 18 years old. The County spends \$33,000 per prisoner every year. A small investment in keeping children on the right path, away from drugs, alcohol and gangs can save the county much more than it spends while making for better lives and safer communities. **(46%)**

We have tested effective iterations of messaging like this in California, as well.



Messaging about the need to invest in educators – both articulating their value and highlighting the degree to which they are underpaid – is effective.

Early childhood educators who serve infants and toddlers have one of the most important jobs: caring for young children and helping them learn, grow and be prepared to succeed. But it is hard to recruit and retain qualified educators because many of them only earn \$10 per hour, with no benefits. This proposal increases the state's investment in early childhood educators working with our young children at a crucial time in their lives. **(48%)**

Early childhood educators are role models in the lives of the children they serve. Educators support children's natural curiosity, help them solve problems, provide them with comfort, help them make new friends, follow rules, set boundaries, be an example in their lives and have fun. **(58%)**

- The data show deep respect for early childhood educators, recognition that they are seriously underpaid, and an understanding that compensating them fairly will improve quality.
- In several surveys, improving wages for educators was among voters' top investment priorities.
- Specific comparisons to other occupations – the idea that fast food workers can be better-compensated than educators – resonates as well.
- Highlighting their position as “role models” was highly effective in national research.



Messaging around homelessness is strong.

California has thousands of homeless families with children living in cars or on the streets, and young adults including foster youth on the streets. No child should grow up this way. We need to make it a top priority to help these children and families to keep young people from becoming chronically homeless. **(53%)**

- In many urban areas homelessness is voters' top concern right now – and homeless families tend to be voters' top priority for assistance.
- Connections to “drugs and sexual exploitation” likely strengthen the message, but we have also seen that voters recognize that the simple lack of a reliable place to stay at night poses huge challenges to children’s mental health and educational performance.



COVID-19 recovery messaging with a can-do spirit has scored well.

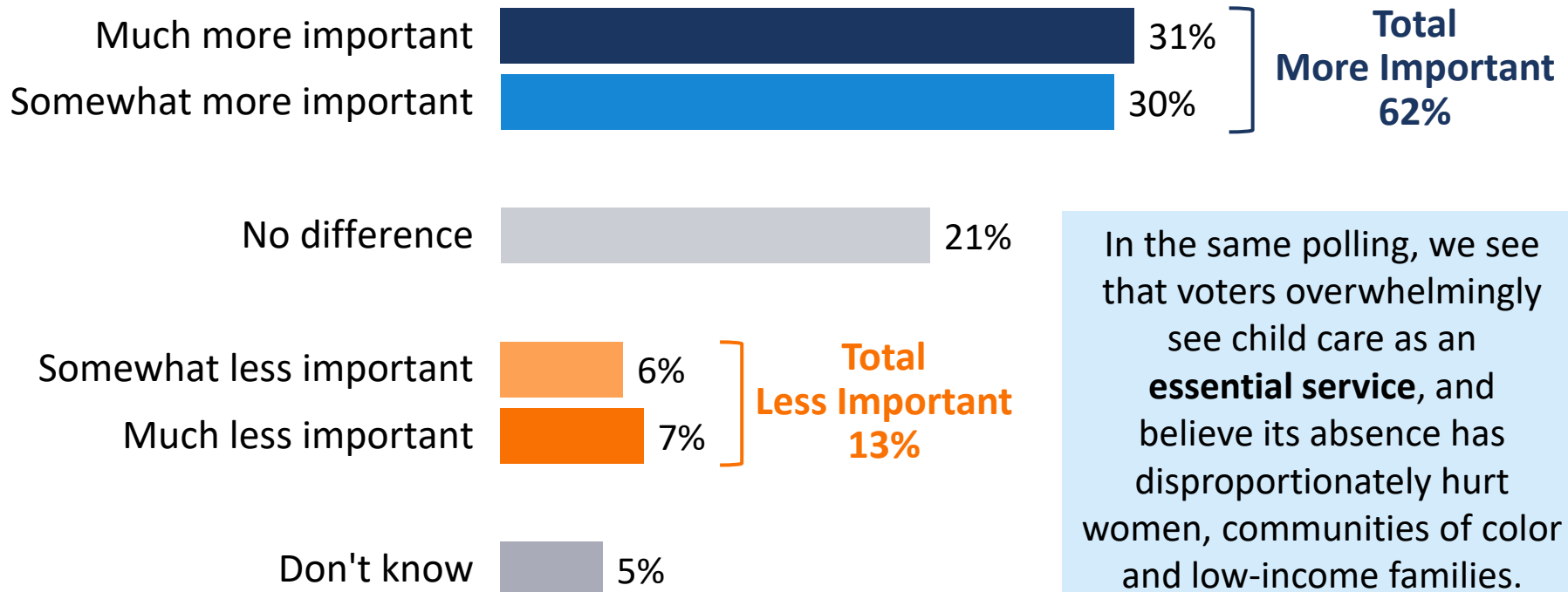
This last year has shown we are capable of doing big things to tackle serious problems. We've known for a long time that the earliest years in a child's life are critical, and that many families of young children need more support. Now is the time to step up to this challenge and ensure that families are getting the support and resources they need to give their young children a strong foundation. Recovery is not enough. We must also rethink how we support families in this country and rebuild in a way to finally provide what infants and toddlers need. **(40%)**



- The upbeat nature of this argument is a contrast to much of the other COVID messaging, and may be well-suited to post-pandemic communications.
- At several places in the data, we see voters respond more to a positive vision of the future than a negative description of current challenges.
- We have seen the argument for “rethinking” our approach post-pandemic test well in other arenas – most notably the environment and transportation.

Specifically detailing the impact of COVID-19-induced closures can be helpful.

Since the coronavirus pandemic started, 16% of child care facilities and preschools have had to close and nearly half are at risk of closing, leaving many parents to have to manage care for children 5 and under on their own while working. In addition, many K-12 schools have moved to distance learning, meaning parents also have to care for and supervise older children at home. Since the start of the pandemic, do you view early learning and child care programs for children 5 and under as more important or less important than you did before?



In the same polling, we see that voters overwhelmingly see child care as an **essential service**, and believe its absence has disproportionately hurt women, communities of color and low-income families.

Mental health – especially for children and youth – is a broad concern and growing in intensity.

Since the start of the pandemic, we have seen a dramatic increase in depression, anxiety, and other mental health concerns among children and youth. We need to devote increased resources to help children and youth overcome mental health challenges, heal from trauma, and increase wellness at this critical time in their lives, with mental health programs, counseling services, and help for those most at risk. **(43%)**

- Data shows that most Americans have experienced mental health strain since the pandemic, and that it has been a particularly challenging time for children.
- Accordingly, measures that make specific provisions for addressing the mental health challenges kids face may be well-received by voters moving forward.
- Research should further explore which aspects of young people’s mental health voters see as the biggest concerns, and which approaches to addressing them voters see as most helpful.



Highlighting the inequities in current funding available for early learning and child care is effective.

Preschool and afterschool programs should not be a luxury only available to a few families. But in California, the cost of sending a child to preschool is almost \$1,000 per month and often more in high-cost areas. We need to make investments to ensure that all children and youth have access to the resources they need to thrive - regardless of where they live, their families' income or education, or the color of their skin. **(49%)**

- As income inequality has widened nationally, arguments based on a lack of access to early education and care have gained salience.
- This messaging is likely more effective in areas with a higher cost of living, like the California example above.
- As the following slide shows, framing the benefits of addressing inequities may be more effective than detailing the negative aspects of the disparities that currently exist.



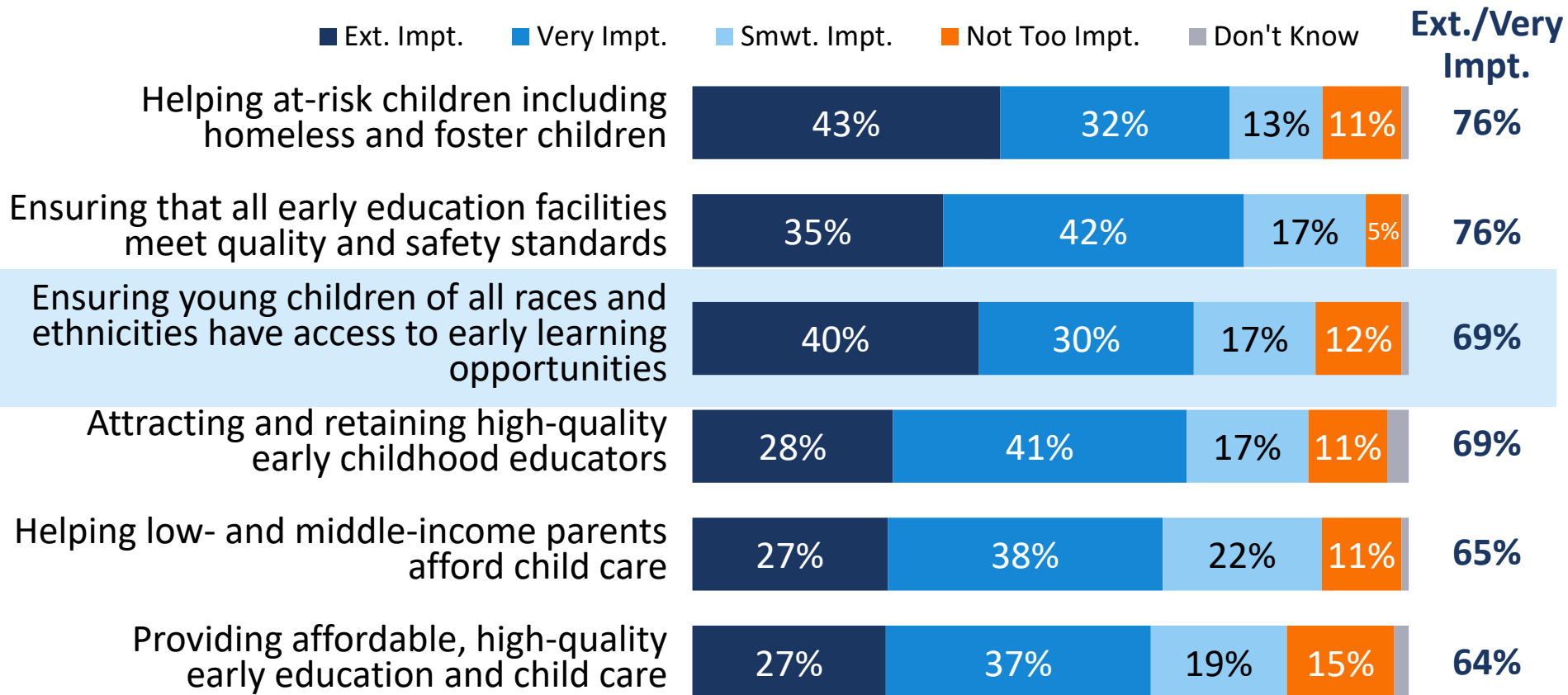
Positive equity framing has some advantages.

Proportions Selecting Each as a Top 3 MOST CONVINCING Argument

Program/Policy	All Policy Influencers	Race/Ethnicity				Party		
		Whites	African Americans	Latinos	Asians/Pacific Islanders	Dems.	Inds.	Reps.
<p>(EQUITY-POSITIVE) Every child deserves a strong start in life. By ensuring that all babies and toddlers have access to resources and services they need – regardless of where they live, their families income or education, their gender, or the color of their skin – we can strengthen our communities and live up to our promise as a nation. We must make investments to support families most in need so that all children can’t succeed in school and life.</p>	45%	45%	39%	48%	50%	50%	44%	39%
<p>(EQUITY-NEGATIVE) Every child deserves a strong start in life, but not every child start from the same place. A history of systematic racism has resulted in deep inequities simply because of where a child lives or the color of their skin. It can mean they begin life with fewer advantages than their peers and keep losing ground overtime. That is not how our country supposed to work we must demand that our systems work for all kids and families with programs that support every mother and give every baby the same strong start.</p>	40%	37%	54%	46%	42%	48%	32%	35%

Framing equity in terms of universal access resonated strongly in Spokane.

I am going to read you a list of different ways that public funds from this measure might be invested. Please tell me whether you consider each to be an extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or a not too important priority.



**For more information,
contact:**

Dave Metz

Dave@FM3research.com

1999 Harrison St., Suite 2020

Oakland, CA 94612

Phone (510) 451-9521

Fax (510) 451-0384



OPINION
RESEARCH
& STRATEGY