



Children First Action Fund General 2022 Survey Results

The Children First Action Fund is surveying all candidates for Pennsylvania House and Senate to learn more about their views on issues affecting the lives of children. We invite you to learn more by reviewing their responses below; by contacting their campaigns; and by following them on social media. Let me know your views on the importance of ensuring young children in Pennsylvania get the early education supports they need and deserve.

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You are running for election in which district? PA House District 82

Q: What are your views on the benefits, or drawbacks, of allocating additional state funds for high-quality pre-k education?

A: All families should have access to high-quality, affordable early childhood care and education. Children's experiences in the first five years of life establish the foundation for ongoing learning and development throughout life. However, because the early childhood care and education system in Pennsylvania is insufficient and inadequate, children from families without significant economic resources enter kindergarten unready to learn. This leaves far too many children behind. High quality early learning education is simply a wise investment. My career has been spent working in a consultative role with educators, and I have often discussed with school leaders the challenges of meeting the needs of young students who are not ready to learn and the almost insurmountable difficulty of overcoming those early deficits. Additional state funds must be allocated to close these gaps.

Q: How important, or unimportant, are increased public resources to expand access and affordability to high-quality child care to working families in your district?

A: Expanding access to high quality childcare is critically important to working families not only in the 82nd House District, but across Pennsylvania. The combination of economic inequity and disparate access to high-quality early care and education is one of the root causes of achievement gaps between children of different socioeconomic statuses or geographical differences within Pennsylvania. In addition, given that 70% of PA children live in households in which all adults work, high quality child care is also critical to supporting working families, as well as the entire workforce and economy. The severe economic impact of the pandemic and the slow recovery has been hampered by the lack of reliable, affordable child care services. Pennsylvania's investment in Pre-K lags far behind that of many other states. We must expand funding so that all eligible children have access and opportunity to benefit from high quality pre-K. I would also support recent proposals to establish onsite child care start up grant programs that can support employers to co-locate childcare facilities within their workplaces.

Q: Should the wages for child care workers and preschool teachers be commensurate with those of other educators with similar qualifications and experience?

A: Yes, if we truly value early childhood education and high-quality childcare we should do all we can to professionalize and fairly compensate qualified providers. I support using proven, data-driven

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measures of quality for pre-K programs and providers such as the comprehensive benchmark standards set by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) and/or the Keystone Standards, Training/Professional Development, Assistance, Resources, and Support (STARS) child care rating systems. Public schools, Head Start programs, and licensed child care providers who meet these rigorous standards should be prioritized and fully funded. In addition to increased direct state funding, additional revenues can be generated through selective, targeted tax increases, tax credits, and creative public-private partnerships.

Q: Will you support the expansion of state investment dollars to serve those in your district who can benefit from home visiting?

A: Yes. In the short term, I would prioritize reallocation of available American Rescue Plan funds to address unmet needs in badly underfunded evidence-based home visiting programs such as Early Head Start, Family Check Up, and Nurse-Family Partnerships. The current shortfall is staggering. In Centre County, only 10% of low income children under the age of six are served by publicly funded, evidence-based home visitation services while statewide it has been estimated that less than 5% of eligible children receive such services. Longer term and as part of the annual legislative budgeting process, I would emphasize the tremendous economic and social return on investment of such programs. Cost-benefit analyses compiled by NCSL show that high quality home visiting programs offer returns on investment ranging from \$1.75 to \$5.70 for every dollar spent due to reduced costs of child protection, K-12 special education and grade retention, and criminal justice expenses.

Q: In addition to making child care more accessible and affordable, what other policies would you champion to help businesses facing a workforce shortage?

A: I believe that the state government can help partner with businesses to create workforce development programs and incentive programs to fill high-need jobs. These include potential programs to provide post-secondary educational opportunities where students can apprentice to earn a degree or credential while also interning or working with employers. Developing such creative programs would be a wise investment not only for businesses but for the public good and the future economic health of the Commonwealth as a whole.

Q: What other government resources or policies would you consider for families that are struggling with keeping costs, especially child care, under control?

A: Given the critical importance of high-quality early care and education for all children, we should look to provide universal affordable childcare through subsidies, universal high-quality Pre-K programs, and paid family leave. Increased state investments in subsidized child care in the form of direct state expenditures should be complementary to the larger effort to support working families. That includes raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour and other efforts to put money back in people's pockets such as state-level tax credits. For example, establishing a PA Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) could provide a benefit of up \$422M to PA working families, while a state Dependent and Childcare Tax Credit could provide an additional \$450M. These funds would not only help ensure higher quality early childhood care but help stimulate local economic growth across the Commonwealth. In addition, I would support incentive programs such as educational grants or student loan forgiveness programs for teachers and providers who commit to working in high-need areas. I would also work to reinstate and expand the Education and Retention Award (ERA) program to incentivize high-quality educators to pursue professional development opportunities to increase access and help retain high-quality early childhood educators. In addition to the policies and investments already outlined here, I believe it may be helpful to establish a framework for sliding-scale and maximum cap for costs related to childcare and early childhood education for working families. As mentioned, we should also look to remove as many barriers such as transportation or a lack of home visitation services that could keep families from utilizing those services.

Q: Which mental health supports are needed most in your district and how will you work to increase access to families that need them?

A: A lack of access to mental health care is one of the most consistent concerns I hear when talking with folks in our district and with educators across Pennsylvania. From the increase in depression, suicide, and social and emotional learning issues among school-aged children to adults battling addiction and to the elderly dealing with isolation and depression, we are dealing with a serious mental healthcare crisis here, and across the Commonwealth. There are however some model programs that are working and which we should seek to replicate such as team-based, coordinated care programs. However they lack consistent and sufficient funding as well as a shortage of qualified personnel. In addition to increasing funding in such programs, we should look to create incentives for current and future providers to return to the area. Such programs might include loan forgiveness or grant awards for those who commit to serving in high-need areas. In addition, we should look to creative solutions such as telehealth that could supplement or complement General service and help remove barriers that keep patients from seeking or continuing care.

Q: Would you support the creation of a refundable State Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)? Why/why not?

A: Yes, I would support establishing a refundable EITC for Pennsylvania. More than half of all states currently have such a credit and research shows that they are successful in not only reducing poverty but also improving both physical and mental health outcomes for recipients (reference below).
Reference: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34052090/>

Q: What would you do, if elected, to expand the access to affordable broadband internet?

A: Delivering affordable, high quality broadband internet access to every address in Pennsylvania will require a coordinated effort including both increased funding and the removal of existing legal and industry barriers to implementation. Doing so is critical for improving quality of life but ensuring equity in education, business and economic development, and access to healthcare. Pennsylvania recently established the Broadband Development Authority which should be fully funded beyond the \$100 million already allocated and empowered to make the investments necessary to achieve that objective. If elected, I would support all efforts to establish and maintain affordable, high quality broadband access to every home, business, and school across Pennsylvania.