

READY LOUISIANA

INVEST IN EARLY EDUCATION

The Ready Louisiana Coalition — a bipartisan group of over 180 organizations, including businesses, chambers of commerce, civic organizations, and advocacy organizations representing more than 1 million people in Louisiana's workforce — exists to advocate for one issue: increased access to high-quality early childhood education (ECE) for children and families. Our membership believes that investing in high-quality ECE will enable parents to be productive in the workforce, serve as an economic engine for communities across Louisiana, and prepare our youngest children for a smart start in life.

In 2024, funding was reduced for several of our state's ECE programs, namely the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) and LA4. As a result, 720 children lost access to CCAP. This exacerbated an already existing and critical issue: approximately 100,000 in-need children in Louisiana do not have access to high-quality, affordable ECE. Investing in a child's earliest years has significant short- and long-term positive impacts on the quality and future of our communities and economy.

In light of this, we, the Ready Louisiana Coalition, urge the Louisiana Legislature to:

- **Ensure the maintenance of \$103.4 million in total funding for state pre-K programs for 4-year-olds**, including LA4 and the Nonpublic School Early Childhood Development Program (NSECD), between state and federal TANF funding sources to maintain seats for approximately 17,700 children.
- **Invest at least \$87.8 million in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)** to provide working families across the state with access to affordable ECE programs, as recommended by the bipartisan 2024 Louisiana Early Childhood Care and Education Commission. Investing at FY24 amounts would allow for the reinstatement of at least 720 ECE seats.
- **Appropriate at least \$30 million to the Louisiana Early Childhood Education Fund**, which provides a dollar-for-dollar match to local investments in ECE to specifically expand access to our most underserved population, birth to 3-year-olds. Securing a full state match would ensure the continuation of more than 2,000 ECE seats across the state.¹

Early childhood education is a critical piece of our economic infrastructure: Access to ECE supports parents as productive employees and reduces employer costs related to individual employee child care issues.

Nearly 10,000 independent child care businesses across the state employ over 15,000 employees and support tens of thousands of additional employees across all industries by providing early education to their young children, allowing them to be productive students and/or members of the workforce. Working families who benefit from state investment in child care are a crucial part of the

¹Parishes with qualifying investments for the Early Childhood Education Fund match in FY2025-26: Ascension, Avoyelles, Caddo, East Baton Rouge, Grant, Jefferson, Natchitoches, Orleans, Pointe Coupee, Rapides, Red River, St. Tammany, Tangipahoa, and Webster.

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workforce and keep our economy running by working as nursing assistants, cashiers, elementary school teachers, sanitation workers, construction laborers, and more.

The compounding negative impact that the lack of high-quality, affordable child care has on our short-term and long-term workforce is why investing in early childhood education is so important. In the short-term, when working parents do not have a reliable and affordable option for their child, they are often forced to arrive to work late, leave early, miss work entirely, or quit. These child care breakdowns cost our state economy \$1.3 billion every year. Increasing access to high-quality and affordable early education would have an immediate positive impact on workforce participation and our Louisiana families' financial stability, creating a stronger economy for everyone.

Louisiana is among the states with a severe labor shortage, and with two-thirds of our children under age 5 having all available parents in the workforce, this is not an issue we can afford to avoid. It is crucial that the Legislature invest at least \$87.8 million in CCAP and maintain our funding for pre-K programs to give thousands of parents the support they need to be productive members of the workforce.

Early childhood education is a critical piece to future workforce readiness: ECE is proven to better prepare children for a strong start in school and in life, yielding a high return on investment.

Early childhood education programs prepare children for successful school transitions and later career achievements, strengthening the workforce of tomorrow. Nobel Laureate James Heckman found a 13% return on investment for early education, making it a cost-effective use of public funds with both immediate and long-term benefits. Longitudinal studies, including one by the Council for a Better Louisiana, show that children in high-quality early education are more likely to enter kindergarten ready, excel on tests through 8th grade, need fewer special education services, and graduate high school on time. High-quality early education programs have also been shown to improve children's future earning potential and health outcomes and reduce the likelihood of drug use or criminal involvement.

To support early childhood access, the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Fund provides a state-match to local investments for early education seats. With more than a dozen localities investing in their youngest residents, the projected local investments have reached \$32 million for FY 25-26. Even with dedicated revenue sources for the ECE Fund, these sources currently fall short of meeting demand. Unless the legislature allocates additional funds, the state will not be able to follow through on its promise to locals. Substantial and sustainable investments in early childhood education will take all levels of government.

We, the Ready Louisiana Coalition, urge our leaders to invest state dollars in early childhood education programs and the Louisiana Early Childhood Education Fund during the 2025 session to ensure children have the quality early learning experiences they need and to support Louisiana working families.

READY LOUISIANA COALITION,



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