

CLASP

The Center for Law and Social Policy



OCTOBER 2021 | FACT SHEET

The Build Back Better Act: Child Care and Early Learning by the Numbers

The Child Care and Universal Pre-Kindergarten investment included in the [Build Back Better Act](#), is an economic, political, and racial and gender justice imperative. It supports children and families, while creating and enabling job growth and economic prosperity.

This long-overdue investment is essential to addressing the deep inequities of the system in which parents can not afford the cost, early educators are paid poverty-level [wages](#), and chronic shortages of both workers and facilities make finding care at all a Herculean feat.

The \$450 billion investments in child care and preschool in the Build Back Better package would be transformative, translating into:

- **Lower costs for families:** Under Build Back Better, the typical family in 32 states will save [more than \\$100 a week on child care expenses](#).
- **More children accessing high-quality care:** Nationally, [more than 8.2 million children](#) could be served by the child care and preschool proposals in Build Back Better - **11 times** more than those currently served.
- **More jobs created and supported:** The child care and early learning plans could create and support more than [2 million jobs nationwide](#). The Economic Policy Institute has recently estimated that the BBB Act child care and preschool programs would directly support [200,000 jobs in preschool and 340,000 jobs in child care each year](#). These jobs also support the employment of millions of parents, who would be able to work or increase their work hours.
- **Better job quality for early educators:** The policy would address the child care workforce shortage and improve working conditions by raising wages from the current [\\$13.50/hour](#) to **at least a living wage**, with raises reaching the equivalent for elementary educators with similar credentials and experience in the State and support for professional development.
- **Increased take-home pay for mothers:** It would **reduce the 'motherhood earnings penalty'** by one-third, from 15 percent of a mother's annual earnings to 10 percent, and result in a combined **increase of \$24 billion in annual earnings** among mothers with young children.

- **Increased availability of high quality care options:** \$22.5-\$45 billion of the child care funding is available in the first three years to states and territories to invest in high quality care, help recruit, retain and train diverse and talented early educators and staff; build new, and renovate, old facilities; invest in health and safety updates in family child care homes; license new providers; manage program operations and purchase supplies.

These investments could not be timelier as the evidence continues to mount that the status quo is untenable:

The economic imperative: September's job data shows that the child care sector has yet to regain its footing from before the pandemic, [with more than 1 in 10 child care jobs still missing](#). September also marked another dramatic exit of women from the labor force, [with 309,000 women ages 20 and over being pushed out](#) - the largest drop since September 2020. Today, women's labor force participation rate is 57.1%, the lowest it has been since October 1988, with women facing the same labor force participation rates as their own mothers a generation ago.

Small businesses are similarly feeling the crunch. An August 2021 national survey of over 1,000 small businesses found that [over half of small business owners](#) surveyed believe that the lack of affordable, high-quality child care for employees has had a negative impact on their business (55%).

Political imperative: Voters across party lines are demanding change. Poll after poll finds that child care and early learning are winning issues among progressive base voters and independents.

- [A September 2021 Poll from the First Five Years Fund](#) shows that 81% of voters see child care and preschool as a good investment of taxpayer money—including 80% of independents and 66% of Republicans. The same poll shows nearly 7 in 10 voters (including 69 percent of independents) see public funding to support better wages and benefits as the answer to the national child care shortage
- [A June 2021 poll from Community Change Action](#) that dove deep into more progressive constituencies found that "Child care is a motivating issue for base voters and surge voters"

especially for Democrats, Black voters, Latinx voters, women, and low propensity Democrats.

Racial and Gender Justice Imperative: Women of color - and the families who depend on them - have borne the brunt of the pandemic.

- Since the start of the pandemic, [the decline in mothers' labor force participation has been nearly double that of fathers'](#) and research shows that COVID has led to mothers of young children reducing work hours four to [five times as much as fathers](#).
- Child care is a key solution with a [new study](#) finding that public investments to guarantee high-quality, affordable child care for all would increase the number of women with young children working full-time/full-year by about [17 percent](#), [and by about 31 percent for women without any college degree](#).
- The disproportionately Black, [Latina](#), Indigenous, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and immigrant women who work in child care and early education need better jobs and working conditions. Black mothers who are more likely to be in the workforce and more likely to be their families' [primary breadwinner](#) than other mothers need child care they can depend on.
- The first years of a child's life are the period of the most rapid brain development, and they lay the foundation for all future learning. Access to quality child care and early learning options [profoundly shapes the early experiences of our youngest children](#) during this critical time in their development, and ensures that regardless of economic status, race, zip code, language and disability all children have a strong foundation.

As negotiations continue on the Build Back Better Act, child care and preschool must be prioritized with a public investment of \$450 billion to provide high quality child care and early education for families and meaningful support and good wages for providers. We can not squander this once-in-a-generation opportunity--children, families, and providers are counting on it.