

# Messaging the Movement

March 24, 3:00 - 4:00 PM ET

*Part of the 2022 Children's Funding Institute*



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**FUNDING THE  
NEXT GENERATION**

**CHILDREN'S**  
FUNDING PROJECT

®

# Session Speakers



**Olivia Allen (moderator)**  
*Strategy Director*  
Children's Funding Project



**Ashley Mock**  
*Chief Operating Officer*  
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*Partner and President*  
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*Board President*  
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*Executive Director and CEO*  
Cincinnati Preschool  
Promise



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NEXT GENERATION**

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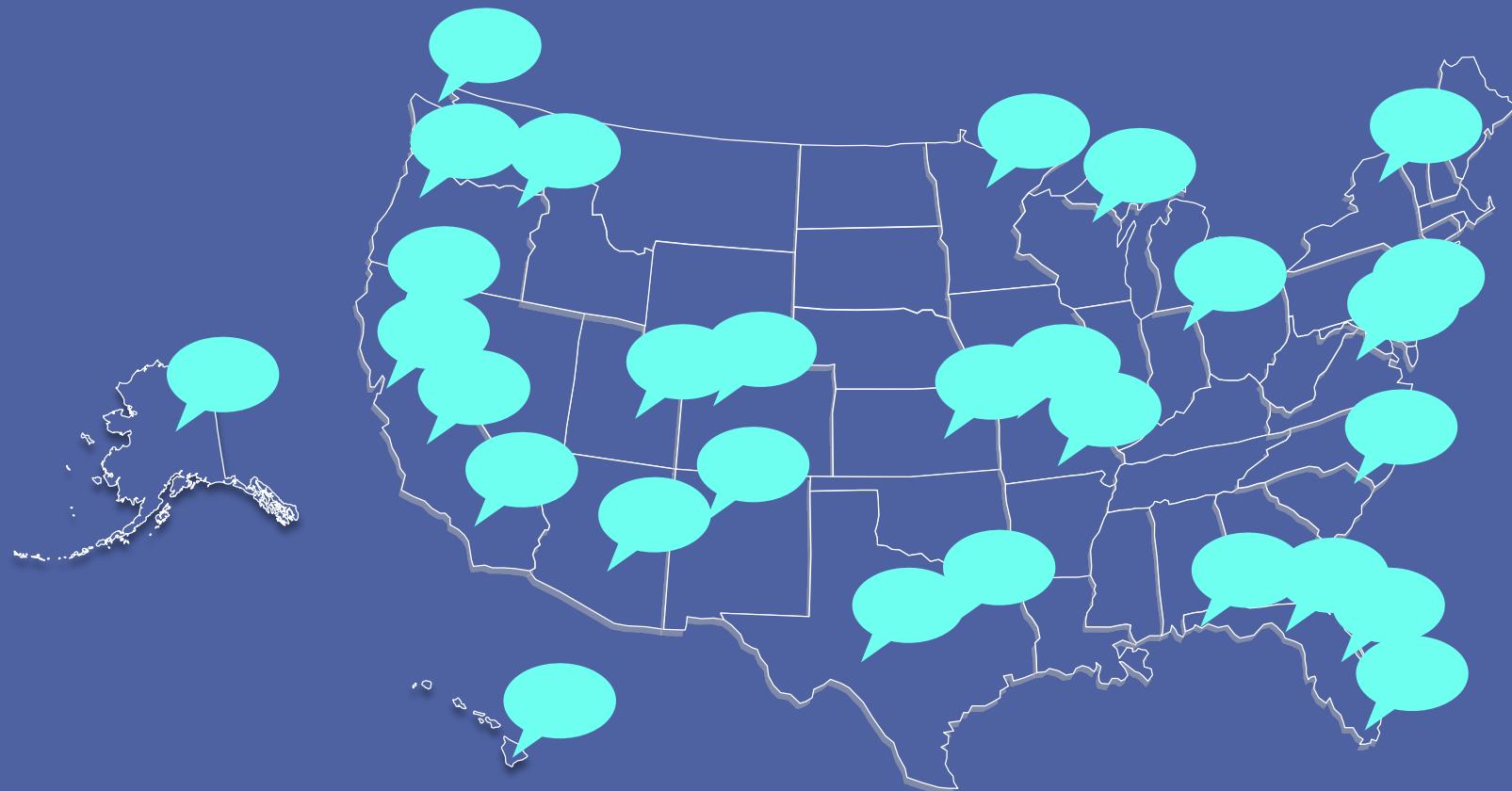


## Purpose of this session

**To share key messaging guidance that will help you:**

- Build support for community-wide collaboration and action for kids
- Get the votes needed to establish your fund
- Get the votes needed to increase or reauthorize your fund
- Get your community engaged with your fund's activities

We have the opportunity to reinforce shared messages around the country...



...And build a national constituency that is more informed, engaged, and supportive of funding for kids.



# Messaging the Movement

Key Themes for Communicating with Voters

*March 24, 2022*



OPINION  
RESEARCH  
& STRATEGY



The logo for Children's Funding Project. It features the words 'CHILDREN'S' in a large, bold, blue sans-serif font, with a small dollar sign (\$) symbol integrated into the 'S'. Below 'CHILDREN'S' is the word 'FUNDING PROJECT' in a smaller, blue, all-caps sans-serif font.

There are a range of messages that have consistently polled well in support of investing in kids, both pre- and post-pandemic.

In some cases, polling has suggested modifications for the post-pandemic context that may be helpful.

## **The top six themes include:**

- 1. Brain Development**
- 2. Prevention and Early Intervention**
- 3. Strengthening K-12 Education**
- 4. Equity Messaging with a Focus on Costs**
- 5. Supporting Parents**
- 6. Emotional Appeals to Helping Kids**

# 1. Stress the importance of supporting kids during the most critical years of their brain development.

- Voters understand intuitively that the pre-school years are critical ones for the development of kids' brains, and hearing that research further supports that conclusion reconfirms voters' belief.
- This message has scored near the top in nearly every national, state or local poll on early childhood education funding in which it was tested for the last several years.
- It is generally the strongest message about the direct benefits that accrue to children from attending quality ECE programs, whereas many other impactful messages focus on the indirect or societal benefits of ECE investments.



Children's brains develop faster in the first 5 years than any later point in life. When young children don't get what their growing brains need, they miss out on developing important social, emotional, and academic skills. Children who enter kindergarten behind are likely to remain behind throughout their school years and beyond. These gaps are difficult and expensive to close with kindergarten through high school education alone, and they can last a lifetime, particularly for children from low-income families. ***(50% Very Convincing)***

## 2. Show that investing in kids early helps to prevent harmful and costly problems later.

- The theme of investing in prevention is effective across a wide range of subject areas – voters would rather spend money to prevent problems than address their downstream consequences.
- Messaging that asserts these principles generally tends to resonate more than messaging which speaks solely in terms of economic ROI.

When children get what they need from the start—nurturing experiences at home and in high-quality child care while their parents work—they become healthy kids who are ready to learn and engage with the world. But today's working families struggle to find quality child care that's affordable. As a result, needs that could be addressed in the earliest years of life become delays that cost all of us more by the time a child reaches school, such as special education or addressing behavioral and emotional problems. **(46%)**



# Prevention-based messaging is rooted in voters' strong preference to put kids on the right path rather than deal with negative consequences later.

*I am going to read you two statements that describe different approaches to addressing youth related problems. Please tell me which one you think is the best way to prevent kids from falling behind and dropping out of school or turning to gang violence and drug abuse.*

Addressing root problems before they start by providing support services for kids and their families, like after-school and community based programs that keep kids out of trouble, encourage parent involvement, and teach non-violent conflict resolution.

**OR**

Setting up stronger consequences for criminal and unacceptable behavior, which means putting more cops on the street, getting tough on juvenile crime and truancy, and ending social promotion.

Both/Neither/Don't know



# Example: CSC St. Lucie County

## WHO WE ARE

The Children's Services Council of St. Lucie County is an independent district whose mission is to improve the quality of life for ALL children in St. Lucie County. Created in 1990 and reaffirmed in 2014, the Children's Services Council represents our community's commitment to creating a safe, productive, and flourishing St. Lucie County by making children a top priority. The Children's Services Council provides programs and resources for local families that focus on:

- Ensuring every baby is a healthy baby
- Stopping child abuse by building strong families
- Keeping kids in school
- Keeping kids off the streets, and
- Keeping kids away from drugs, alcohol, and other risky behaviors

Children's Services Council of St. Lucie County has worked tirelessly to ensure that our community is a great place to raise children. By evaluating local needs along with the help of our partners, and targeting resources strategically, we have been able to create a culture in our community that allows every family to have access to the tools they need that ensure St. Lucie County is a place for Our children. Our community. Our future.

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Capacity Building Coordinator

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“Children's Services Council provides programs and resources for local families that focus on...

- Stopping child abuse by building strong families
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# 2022

CSCSLC 2022 Annual Report

### **3. Make the case that investments in early childhood strengthen, rather than detract from, K-12 education.**



By improving quality child care and pre-school programs, this measure strengthens K-12 education. Currently, 70% of local kids enter kindergarten unprepared. Studies show that kids who go to high-quality pre-school are more likely to read proficiently by the third grade, and more likely to graduate and go on to college. **(40%)**

- K-12 education is a consistently high voter priority – both for voters who have school-aged children and those who do not.
- When investments in early childhood are seen as being in competition with investments in K-12 education, it can work to the disadvantage of early childhood.
- Highly effective messages stress for voters that investing in early childhood has dual benefits – both helping kids when they are young, and setting them up for even greater success in K-12.

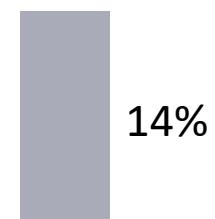
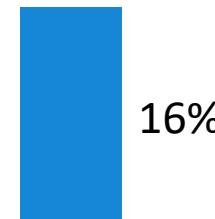
Data from neighboring communities found that 90% of kids who attended preschool showed up ready for kindergarten. And that success continued into elementary school, where 61% of preschool kids earned passing reading scores—compared to just 50% of kids who didn't attend preschool. **(39%)**

# The notion that pre-school strengthens, rather than detracts from K-12 education is highly credible to voters.

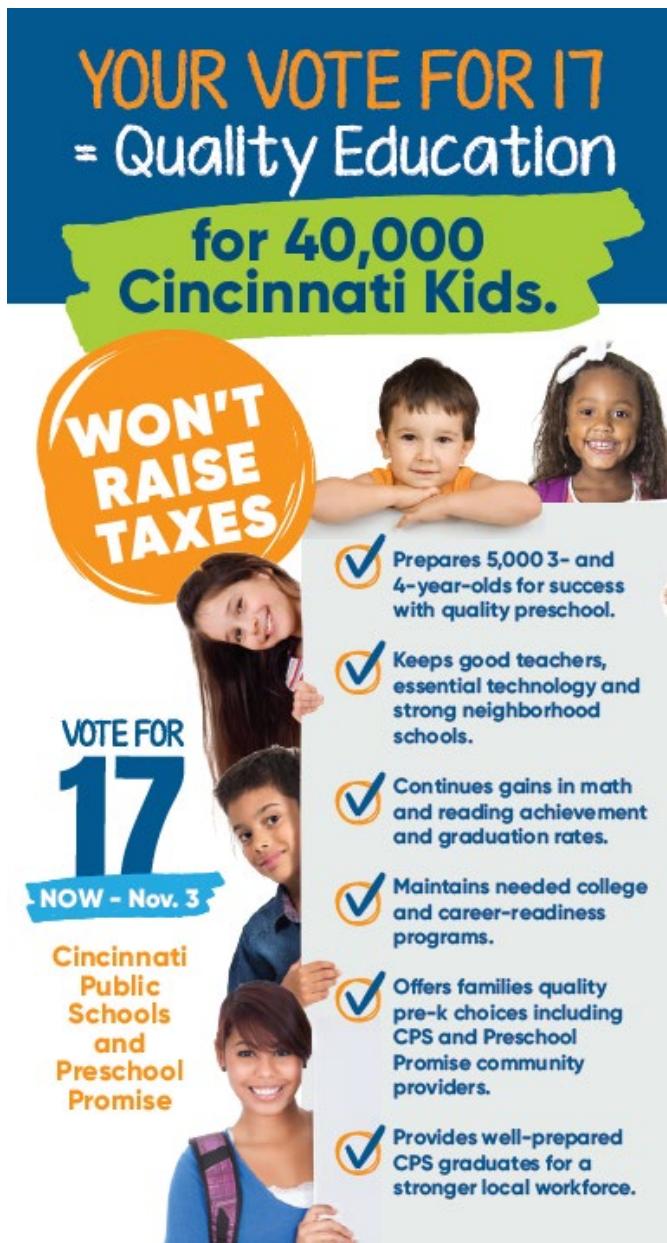
Pre-school programs strengthen K-12 education. Studies show that kids who go to pre-school learn to read faster, are less likely to fall behind their classmates, and are less likely to drop out of school.

OR

Pre-school programs weaken K-12 education. They take money and qualified teachers away from elementary and secondary school classrooms, where investments in education are more likely to help our kids.



# Example: Cincinnati Preschool Promise reauthorization



Issue 17 prepares 40,000 Cincinnati children, from preschool to graduation, with a strong start for a strong future.

- Prepares 5,000 3- and 4-year-olds for success with quality preschool.
- Keeps good teachers, essential technology, and strong neighborhood schools.
- Continues gains in math and reading achievement and graduation rates.
- Maintains needed college and career-readiness programs.
- Offers families quality pre-k choices including CPS and Preschool Promise community providers.
- Provides well-prepared CPS graduates for a stronger local workforce.

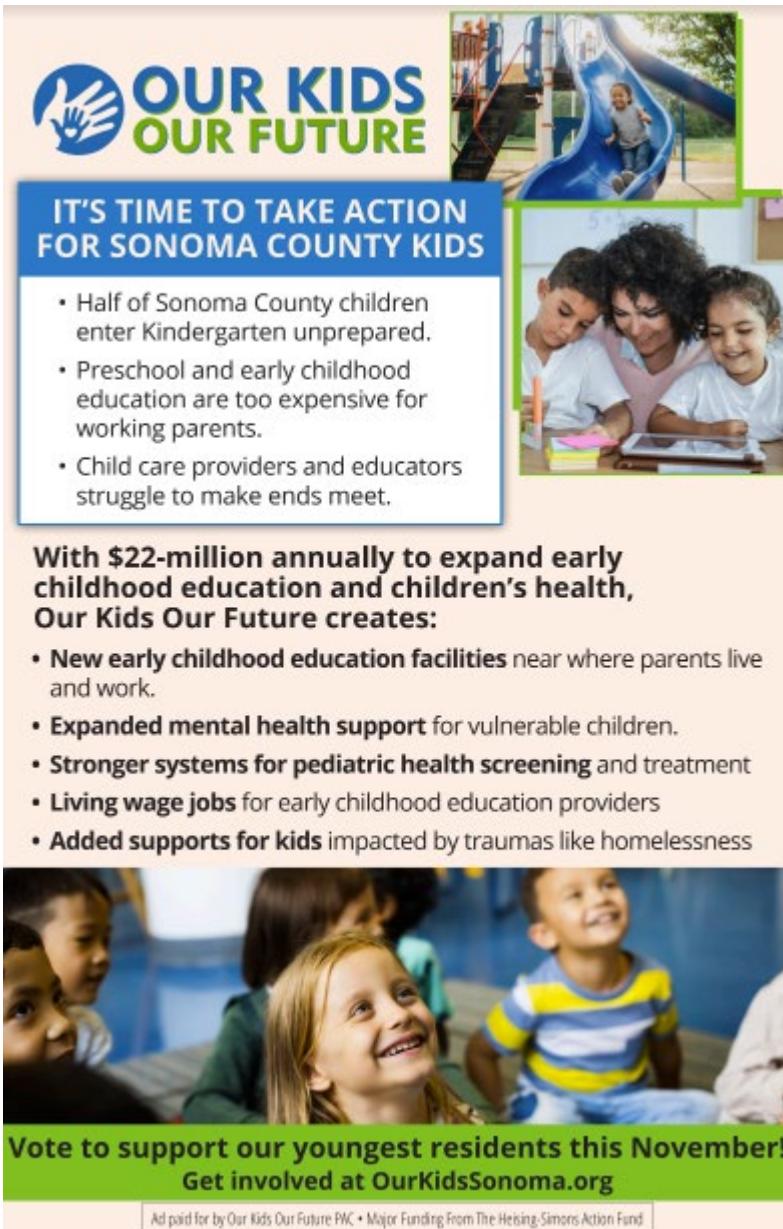
## 4. Highlight how investments in children and youth can promote equity – defined as broadly as possible.

Pre-school should not be a luxury only available to a few families. In Sonoma County, the cost of sending a child to pre-school is nearly \$13,000 per year – that's 39% of the median annual income for Sonoma County women. This measure will provide scholarships to make early education available and affordable to families of all incomes, including middle-class families. **(46%)**

- Equity-based messaging has gained salience as income inequality has grown and voters have become more acutely aware of the deep financial inequities in our current system of youth services.
- Messaging which highlights ways that investments in young people can address these inequities is highly effective – especially when framed as making sure that all children – regardless of family income, race, where they live, etc. – have access to the services they need.
- Messages focused more narrowly on racial equity, while often positively-received, can be less universally accepted than those which stress multiple forms of equity – though these dynamics likely vary greatly between communities and between subgroups in the electorate.



# Example: Sonoma County, CA



**OUR KIDS  
OUR FUTURE**

IT'S TIME TO TAKE ACTION  
FOR SONOMA COUNTY KIDS

- Half of Sonoma County children enter Kindergarten unprepared.
- Preschool and early childhood education are too expensive for working parents.
- Child care providers and educators struggle to make ends meet.

With **\$22-million annually to expand early childhood education and children's health**, Our Kids Our Future creates:

- **New early childhood education facilities** near where parents live and work.
- **Expanded mental health support** for vulnerable children.
- **Stronger systems for pediatric health screening** and treatment
- **Living wage jobs** for early childhood education providers
- **Added supports for kids** impacted by traumas like homelessness

**Vote to support our youngest residents this November!**  
Get involved at [OurKidsSonoma.org](http://OurKidsSonoma.org)

Ad paid for by Our Kids Our Future PAC • Major Funding From The Heising-Simons Action Fund

\$22 million annually to create

- **Expanded mental health support for vulnerable children**
- **Living wage jobs** for early childhood education providers
- **Added supports** for kids impacted by traumas like homelessness

# Positive equity framing has some advantages.

*Proportions Selecting Each as a Top 3 MOST CONVINCING Argument*

Program/Policy	All Policy Influencers	Party		
		Dems.	Inds.	Reps.
<p><b>(EQUITY-POSITIVE)</b> 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%	50%	44%	39%
<p><b>(EQUITY-NEGATIVE)</b> 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%	48%	32%	35%

## 5. **Highlight in which investments will help and support parents – and not replace them.**

Before the coronavirus pandemic, many families needed two incomes to get by – and many single parents were forced to work multiple jobs. Many parents relied on professional early care and education programs just to get through the day. Many of these programs are at risk of closing if they do not get the emergency funding in this proposal to keep them open to help our state's economy restart and recover. **(44%)**

- Messaging that focuses on supporting, not replacing, parents is highly effective.
- Since the pandemic, highlighting the heightened burdens that parents – especially women – have had to bear helps make the case for investments.

During COVID-19, many women have reduced employment in order to take on greater child care responsibilities, and this is especially true for lower-income families. This measure funds child care, which means more women, especially lower income women, will have access to child care, thus promoting gender equity through increased opportunities for parents to participate in the workforce. **(39%)**

**(PARENTS)** The most important factor in helping children succeed in school and in life is getting their parents involved. That's why this measure supports parents and encourages them to actively participate in their children's health and well-being: talking, reading, singing, and playing with their children. **(52%)**

# A message that frames early childhood investments as explicitly *creating* strong families is worth more exploration.

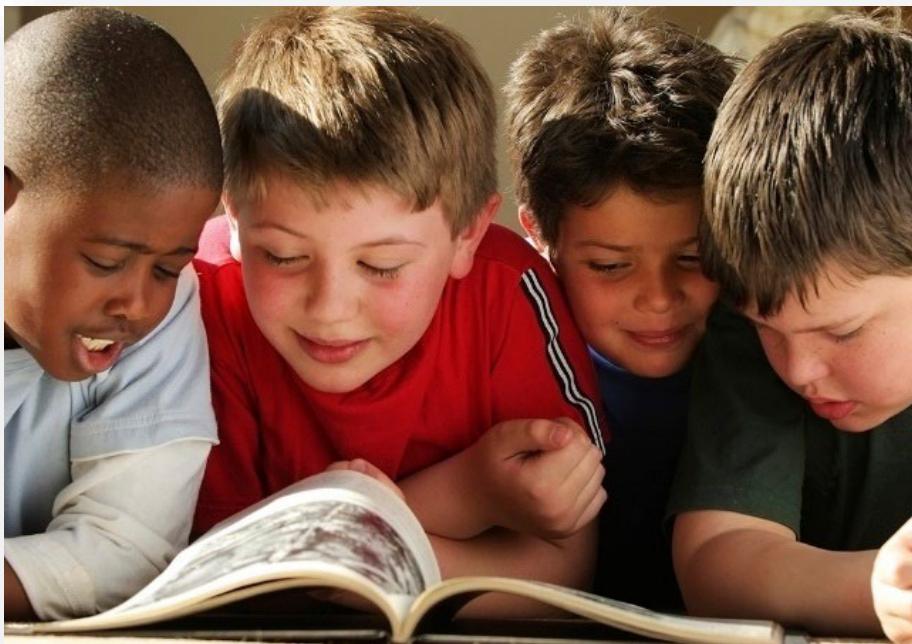
Messaging which pro-actively asserts that investments in kids help to create strong families (as in this Missouri message from 2015), rather than simply supporting them, merits a closer look.



Strong families are the building blocks of a strong society. It's crucial that parents have the tools they need to support children with stable and nurturing environments in their earliest years and this proposal will provide funding to ensure that help is available to any parents who need it. **(38%)**

# 6. Make the most of voters' emotional connection to children, particularly with images.

Kids are essential. The start we give them creates our future. We cannot expect a healthier, more resilient, more prosperous country if we don't invest in our future. Our country is at its best when we recognize that children, particularly your youngest, are our greatest resource. Infants and toddlers must be our highest priority and they need our investment now—because they only get one chance at a strong start. This is our chance to make a powerful commitment to our youngest generation. **(46%)**



- Fundamentally, we should not forget how important kids are to voters. While there are lots of rational arguments that make a strong case for investing in kids, voters' emotional connection to young people is a core motivation for their vote – messaging should strike those chords as well.
- In limited qualitative research, imagery of kids has been highly effective in helping to invoke this emotional connection.

# Other Key Messages Worth Considering

1. Point out the remarkable **return on investment** in children and youth.
2. Stress the importance of **early childhood educators** and the challenge of recruiting and retaining them given their **low compensation**.
3. Show how policy proposals bring together a **range of different services** that benefit kids, including education, preventive care, physical health, nutrition, mental health, and more.
4. Highlight examples of **prior, successful investments**.
5. Focus on help for **particularly vulnerable children** – including those who are experiencing homelessness, poverty, abuse or other challenges.

# Key Post-Pandemic Themes

1. Describe the harm the pandemic has done to the **availability of child care**, and the urgency of addressing the resulting unmet need.
2. Highlight supports for kids struggling with **mental health challenges** caused by the pandemic.
3. Emphasize the need for local funding to **sustain and build upon federal funding**.



# Slide – notes on language

- Focus on outcomes over naming types of programs (we found something on this in the meta-analysis right? When compared to public safety/police etc.?)
- Use consistent language that people outside your field will understand (i.e. avoid policy jargon, be clear and consistent in how you refer to early childhood services like pre-k, child care, infant and toddler supports, etc.)
- Focus on the impact your fund will have over the funding/taxing mechanism. (Focus on the value that taxpayers will get, rather than the cost to them).
- Balance messaging about long-term outcomes with messaging about short-term outcomes! Don't over-rely on one at the expense of the other.
- Focus on your vision for the future of your community – voters will value this more than negative comparisons to other communities, which they might dismiss or which might make them feel defensive.
- Differentiate your messaging with various audiences (ex. use ROI language with business leaders more than with voters, and early childhood policy jargon with providers more than with voters!)

# Example: CSC St. Lucie County - BEFORE

## Children's Services Council of St. Lucie County



### Who We Are

The Children's Services Council of St. Lucie County is a small taxing body that invests in children.

Created and supported by the community for 20 years, the Children's Services Council is the only child-centered organization in St. Lucie County that generates revenue for the community to promote healthy families and babies; increase school readiness and school success; and reduce child abuse, substance abuse and youth violence.

The majority of the Children's Services Council funds are used to support prevention-based programs for children and families. Children's Services Council supports programs that promote *Healthy Babies & Families*; ensure *School Readiness & School Success*; increase *Family Building & Strengthening*; provide *Afterschool Activities & Youth Development*; and promote *Healthy Lifestyles & Decision Making*.

Funded programs are evaluated on an on-going basis to assess their accomplishments towards achieving program goals. Additionally, programs are funded on a reimbursement basis allowing for monthly fiscal review.

The Children's Services Council is governed by ten local community representatives. According to Florida law, the Council is made up of four elected officials: one County Commissioner, one School Board member, one Juvenile Judge, the Superintendent of School; the District Administrator of the Department of Children and Families; and five community residents appointed by the Governor.

Kathryn Hensley, *Chair; School Board Member*

H.L. "Vern" Melvin, *Vice-Chair; Department of Children & Families Administrator*

Chief Deputy Garry Wilson, *Secretary; St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office*

Pat Alley, *TD Bank*

Cynthia Angelos, *Weiss, Handler, Angelos & Cornwell, P.A.*

Dennis Corrick, *Dean, Mead, Minton & Zwemer*

Judge Burton Conner, *Juvenile Judge*

Michael Lannon, *Superintendent of Schools*

Paula Lewis, *County Commissioner*

Queen Townsend, *Retired Educator*

**"The Children's Services Council of St. Lucie County is a small taxing body that invests in children."**

**"Created and supported by the community for 20 years, the majority of the Children's Services Council funds are used to support prevention-based programs for children and families."**

# Example: CSC St. Lucie County - AFTER

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# 2022

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# Thank You So Much!

*Your participation in this year's institute was invaluable!*

- Please take our short follow up survey to let us know what you thought about the institute.
- If you're interested in continued coaching & peer expertise in one of our cohorts, reach out to
  - CALIFORNIA: Margaret at [margaret@fundingthenextgeneration.org](mailto:margaret@fundingthenextgeneration.org)
  - US: Allie at [allie@childrensfundingproject.org](mailto:allie@childrensfundingproject.org) for more info!
- Visit [Childrensfundingproject.org/CFI2022](https://Childrensfundingproject.org/CFI2022) for the agenda, participant list, faculty list, and other materials. Slides and recordings will be made available in the coming week.

