

NEW MISSISSIPPI EARLY EDUCATION POLL

Mississippi Voters Agree: Early Care and Education Are Essential to School Readiness and Economic Opportunity.

Less than a week before the midterm elections, Mississippi First is releasing new statewide polling from McLaughlin & Associates, conducted on behalf of First Five Years Fund and Mississippi First.

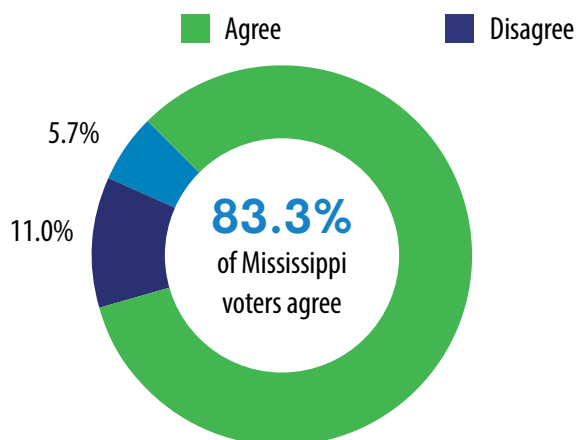
The work of Mississippi First is grounded in the belief that every child deserves access to a high-quality education, and that the foundation for success begins well before kindergarten. Early care and education not only help children prepare for school but also make it possible for parents to work and provide for their families. Because these priorities are so closely connected, we partnered on this poll to understand how Mississippi voters view them and to bring their perspectives into policy conversations. The findings will help inform our work with policymakers and partners as we advance solutions that support young children, strengthen families, and expand opportunity across Mississippi.

The survey finds that Mississippi voters overwhelmingly support early care and education, and they see it as essential to the workforce and to families' ability to provide for themselves. Voters agree that finding and affording quality childcare is a serious problem and support lawmakers taking action to make childcare more affordable and accessible. The findings also underscore the connection between affordable childcare, families' financial stability, and Mississippi's workforce and economy.

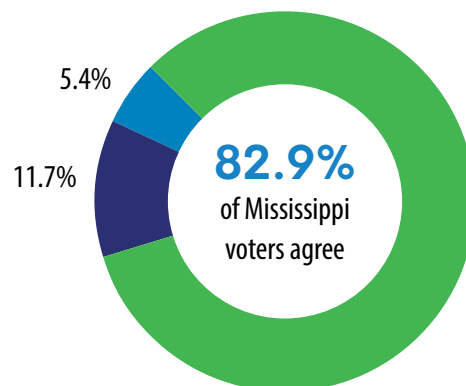
Key Findings

1

Mississippi voters value early care and education for the strong start it provides for their children.



Childcare helps children prepare for K-12 education.



Pre-K is important for preparing children for K-12 education.

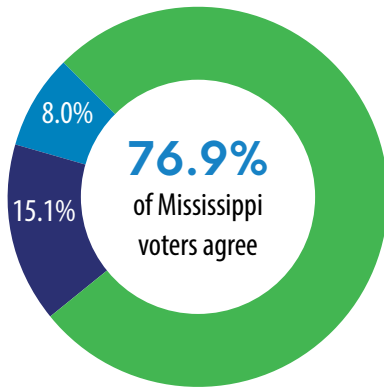
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Mississippi voters' support of early care and education is driven by their knowledge that **childcare is connected to the economy**. Voters recognize the broader economic benefits of expanding access to quality childcare, including its role in helping parents enter and remain in the workforce.

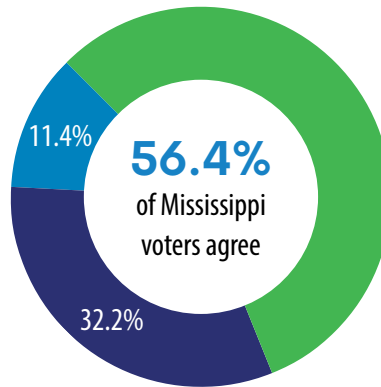
■ Agree

■ Disagree

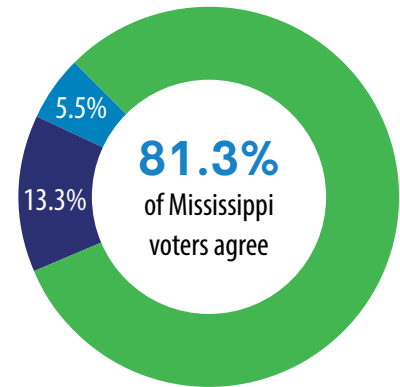
■ Didn't Know/Refused to Answer



Increasing access to high-quality childcare would strengthen Mississippi's economy and workforce.



Labor shortages throughout the state are due in part to the lack of quality, affordable childcare.



Childcare helps parents go to work or school.

- ▶ **More than four in ten (44.5%)** say they or someone they know would consider entering the workforce if quality childcare were available, while nearly half (**49.5%**) say childcare challenges of their own or their coworkers have affected their workplace a lot or some.
- ▶ **84.7%** of voters say access to quality, affordable childcare is important or essential to Mississippi's economy and workers' ability to provide for their families.

These findings underscore the connection between childcare access and Mississippi's economic future, from helping parents participate in the workforce to supporting employers' ability to attract and retain workers.

3

Mississippi voters are concerned about the cost of living, with the price of gas, energy, utilities, and groceries topping the list of household expenses they are most worried about. The findings underscore the financial pressures facing families across the state, particularly parents managing the high cost of childcare.



73.1%

of voters identify the price of gas, energy, and utilities as one of the two costs they are most concerned about.



71.6%

of voters identify the price of food and groceries as one of the two costs they are most concerned about.

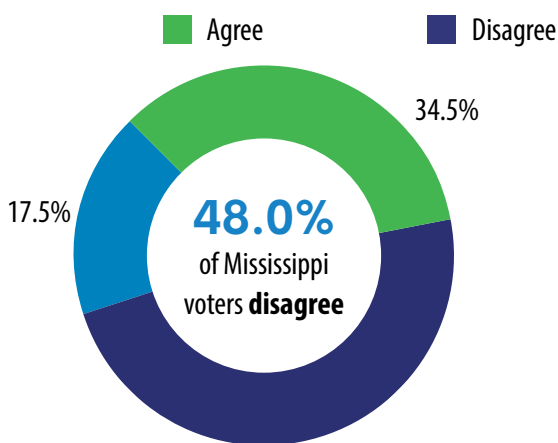
- ▶ **Nearly half of parents (48.4%)** say childcare costs are preventing them from saving money or getting ahead financially.
- ▶ **36.0%** of parents are cutting back on other household essentials to afford childcare.
- ▶ **One-third of parents (33.4%)** say they are struggling to pay for childcare.

For parents already managing high household expenses, childcare costs are making it harder to cover basic needs, build savings, and plan for the future.

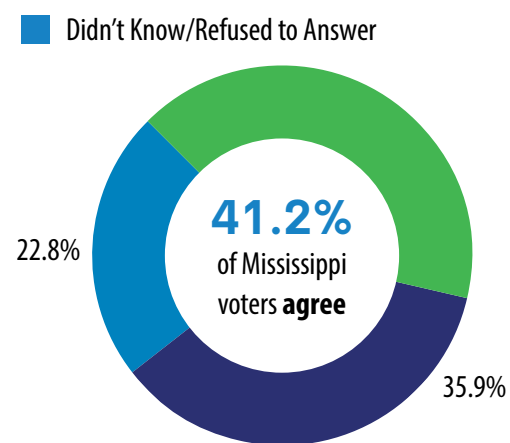
4

Mississippi voters overwhelmingly recognize childcare as part of the broader affordability crisis and agree that finding and affording quality care is a serious challenge for working families.

- ▶ **More than three-quarters of voters (76.4%)** say childcare costs are part of the country's affordability crisis, including **39.7%** who say they are a big part of the crisis.
- ▶ **71.1% of voters** believe the ability of working parents to find and afford quality childcare is either "in a state of crisis" or a "major problem."
- ▶ **More than half of voters (54.3%)** are concerned that young families may leave Mississippi or choose not to have children because they cannot find affordable childcare.



They have access to affordable **childcare** options in Mississippi.

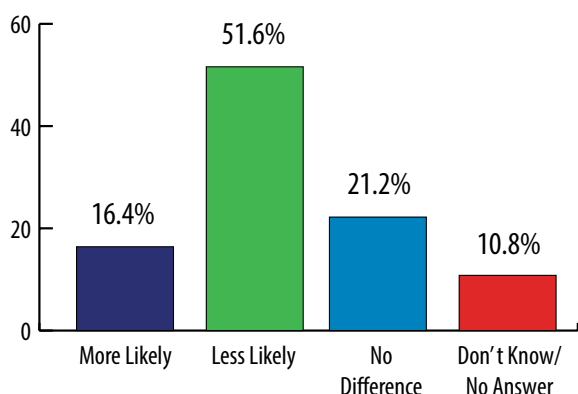


They have access to affordable **pre-K** options in Mississippi.

Together, these findings show that the availability and affordability of childcare affect more than household budgets. They also shape families' decisions about their futures and Mississippi's ability to attract and retain young families. Current investments in pre-K have made a difference for families ability to access affordable early care, but there are no state investments in childcare to help families with children younger than four-years-old.

5

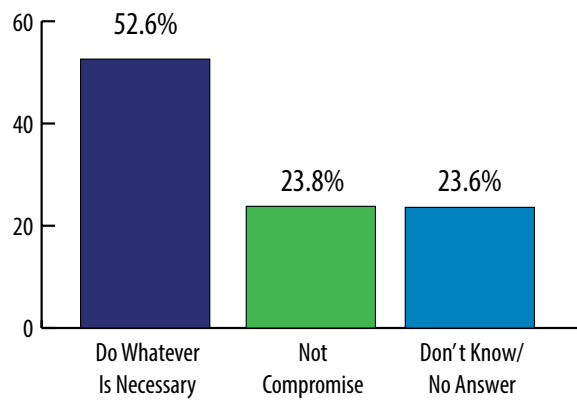
Mississippi voters also recognize the importance of lawmakers' decisions about childcare funding and access.



More than half of voters (**51.6%**)

say they would be **less likely** to vote for a candidate for the Mississippi state legislature if they learned that the candidate failed to fill a funding gap that would cause thousands of children to lose access to childcare assistance.

More than four in ten (41.9%) say they would be **much less likely** to support that candidate.



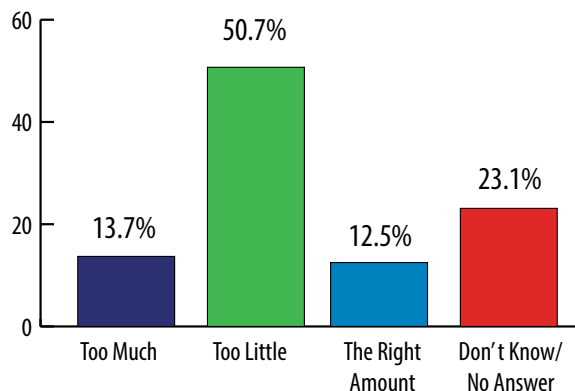
More than half of Mississippi voters **(52.6%)** think that members of Congress should do whatever it takes to pass childcare legislation, even if that means compromising with the other party.

6

Mississippi voters support a role for both state and federal policymakers in helping working families access and afford quality childcare and early learning opportunities.

AT THE STATE LEVEL:

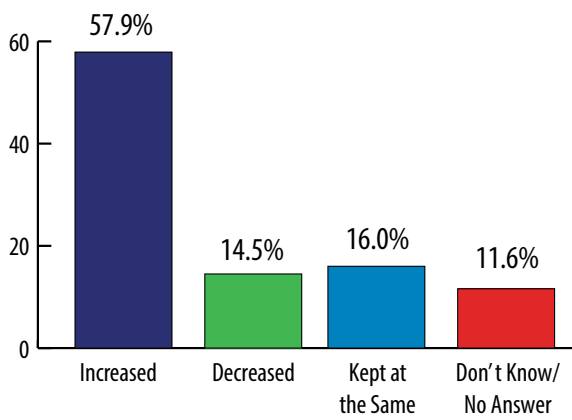
- ▶ **62.9% of voters** believe ensuring more working families have access to affordable, quality childcare should be an important priority for Mississippi in the next year.
- ▶ **Nearly two-thirds of voters (65.4%)** believe state investment in early childhood education programs is an effective way to strengthen Mississippi's long-term economic growth.
- ▶ **60.2% of voters** believe the state should pay childcare providers enough to cover the actual cost of providing care, rather than maintaining current reimbursement levels.



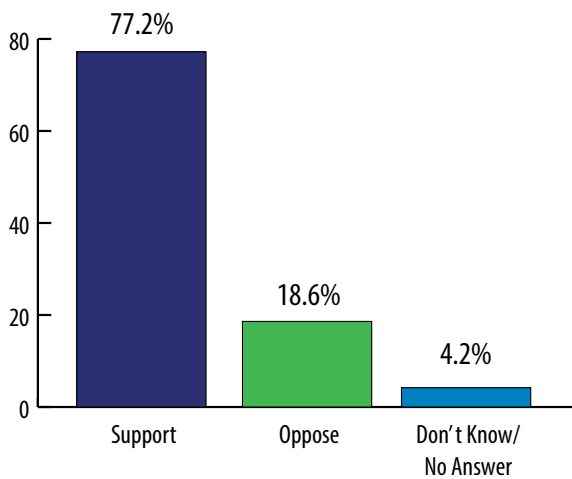
More than half of voters **(50.7%)** say Mississippi spends *too little* on childcare.

AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL:

- ▶ **72.2% of voters** believe federal funding for childcare and early learning programs for low-income working families is a good investment of taxpayer dollars.
- ▶ **62.3% of voters support the Child Care Modernization Act.** The bipartisan legislation would strengthen the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), the federal program that helps low-income working families afford childcare.



Nearly three-quarters of voters (**73.9%**) believe federal funding for quality childcare programs for working parents should be **increased or kept at current levels**.



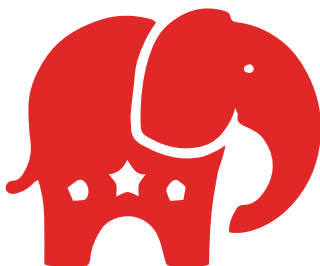
77.2% of voters support Head Start.
58.0% of voters oppose eliminating funding for Head Start.



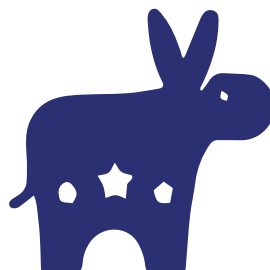
These findings demonstrate broad support for investments and policy solutions that help families access affordable childcare and early learning programs.

7

More than half (50.7%) of those surveyed say they align closely with the Republican party.



50.7%
 Republican



36.8%
 Democrat



8.8%
 Pure Independent

3.7% of respondents didn't know or refused to answer which party they aligned with most closely.

BOTTOM LINE

The results point to a clear message from Mississippi voters: early care and education is a valued part of the education system that helps families work. When families struggle to access affordable childcare, it impacts their household budgets and workplace stability throughout the state. Voters recognize the connection between childcare, household affordability, and the state's economic future, and support state and federal efforts to expand access to quality, affordable care for working families.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The results are from a statewide survey of 600 registered voters in Mississippi that was conducted October 14-18, 2026, and has a margin of error ± 4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Interviews were conducted by cell phone (62.9%), text-to-web (35.6%), and landline (1.5%). 28.0% of respondents (168) have children under 18 at home.

ABOUT MISSISSIPPI FIRST

Mississippi First is a nonpartisan, nonprofit education policy organization driven by our mission to champion transformative policy solutions that ensure educational excellence for every Mississippi child. Through research, partnerships, and advocacy, we identify education challenges, develop strong solutions, and work alongside policymakers and practitioners to put those solutions into action. Learn more at mississippifirst.org.

ABOUT FIRST FIVE YEARS FUND

The first five years last forever. At First Five Years Fund, we work to protect, prioritize, and build bipartisan support for early learning and child care programs at the federal level. Reliable, affordable, and high-quality early learning and child care can be transformative, not only enhancing a child's prospects for a brighter future but also bolstering working parents and fostering economic stability nationwide. Learn more at ffyf.org.

ABOUT MCLAUGHLIN & ASSOCIATES

McLaughlin & Associates is a polling and public opinion research firm with decades of experience conducting surveys for political campaigns, businesses, and nonprofit organizations. Led by longtime pollster John McLaughlin, the firm also works with organizations seeking to better understand public opinion on major policy issues. Learn more at mclaughlinonline.com.

