

Poll overview: 91.5% of Illinois business leaders seek greater public investments in child care, early education



Decades of research demonstrate the economic significance of key investments in the learning and development of young children — priorities such as high-quality preschool, child care, and key birth-to-3 services. These are priorities long championed by the nonprofit, nonpartisan ReadyNation network of 270

business leaders throughout Illinois. ReadyNation does not administer any of these services, but speaks up for those provided by local schools and community-based organizations.

As our state and nation grapple over where best to invest public resources, ReadyNation commissioned the national polling firm of Zogby Analytics to survey 400 Illinois business leaders concerning these early learning priorities. Results of this online poll — conducted between Dec. 9, 2024 and Jan. 9, 2025 — reveal overwhelming support for early childhood services and their role in maintaining a stable and productive workforce. Here is an overview of key survey findings.

Employers and managers continue to see costly fallout from child care challenges, both for working parents and for employers' own bottom line.

- 81.1% of surveyed business leaders agree that their employees “struggle with finding and retaining stable, affordable child care and early childhood programs” (24.3% strongly agree).
- As a result of these challenges, 66.4% of respondents say they’ve seen their employees losing work hours. Other consequences they’ve witnessed among employees lacking stable child care:
 - Lost wages – 58.3%
 - Lost jobs/positions – 48.8%
 - Lost promotions – 37.3%
- Executives have also experienced these business problems resulting from child care struggles:
 - Reduced productivity – 66.8% of respondents
 - The need to replace displaced workers (63.3%) and train/retrain new hires (49.5%)
- Overall, 92.8% of surveyed executives concur that high-quality child care and early education are important to “workforce stability and productivity” (59.3% strongly agree).

Business leaders have struggled to hire skilled workers — and they value the long-term solution represented in quality early childhood services.

- 81.5% report difficulties hiring job candidates with strong technical/hard skills (such as math, science, and literacy abilities); 76% see these challenges growing “somewhat” or “a great deal.”
- 78.5% say it’s been hard to hire candidates with strong non-technical/soft skills (e.g. creativity, teamwork, communications); 71.9% see the problems increasing “somewhat” or “a great deal.”

- 94.8% of executives note their businesses are spending more to recruit skilled applicants than in previous years (19% report significant additional spending).
- More than three-quarters of business leaders relate that skills development is more difficult for adults than for children in their early years of development.
- Accordingly, impressive majorities of respondents agree that high-quality child care and early education programs are important for:
 - Laying “an early skills foundation for young children’s success” in life (86% of business leaders, and 50% stress very important)
 - Making local communities “desirable for businesses and employees” (88.8%, with 53% emphasizing very important)

An economic priority: Business leaders overwhelmingly want to increase public investments in young children’s learning and development.

- 91.5% of poll respondents support “greater public investments in high-quality child care and early childhood education,” with 51% expressing strong support.
- 97.1% of business leaders say investing to improve the quality and stability of early childhood teachers and staff is “beneficial for the state’s economic development.”
- 95.3% concur that public investments in early childhood facilities’ construction and renovation would “enhance the availability and quality” of such programs statewide.
- Regarding the new Illinois Department of Early Childhood that’s being developed, to consolidate oversight of core birth-to-5 programs spread across three agencies:
 - 85.8% of business leaders express confidence this unfolding effort will improve services’ access and quality
 - 92.8% agree “streamlining and simplifying” these early care and education programs will benefit kids, families, service providers and local communities
- Looking to the future, 93.1% of executives agree that Illinois’ current, multiyear approach to improve early childhood services — based on the research and recommendations of a bipartisan commission in 2021 — will “positively impact the workforce in Illinois.”

Additional survey details: The ReadyNation poll targeted executives from a wide range of Illinois businesses employing at least 100 people and reporting annual revenues of at least \$10 million. The top industries represented by respondents were finance/banking, manufacturing, retail, and information technology. The top titles/roles held among respondents were HR executive, manager (e.g. senior or regional managers), and director (e.g. operations and finance managers). The poll’s margin of error is +/- 4.9 percentage points.

For more information, contact ReadyNation Illinois Co-Directors Sean Noble (snoble@readynation.org) & Sally Puleo (spuleo@readynation.org) Full Zogby poll analysis available at tinyurl.com/ezpf9a3j. February 2025

