

FEBRUARY 2023



2001 - 2022
**A MODERN HISTORY
OF EARLY CARE AND
EDUCATION IN LOUISIANA**
A MOVEMENT STILL UNDERWAY



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Table of Contents 2
- Acknowledgements 3
- Executive Summary 4
- Introduction 7
- Laying the Groundwork 8
 - Louisiana passes legislation to create the foundation for public pre-K 8
 - Advocates lay the groundwork for quality child care for Louisiana’s youngest children (0-3) 11
- Spotlight: A Role for the Business Community 14
- Building Back Stronger 15
 - Advocates focus on quality 16
 - School Readiness Tax Credits incentivize the move to quality 17
 - Louisiana increases funding for pre-K for at-risk 4-year-olds 18
- Unifying Under LDE 18
- Long-Term Sustainability 20
 - The Louisiana legislature creates an incentive for local funding 21
 - Advocates stay the course during the Covid-19 pandemic 22
 - Spotlight: A Test Case for Municipal Funding 23
 - Localities explore local funding options 24
- Lessons Learned 25
- Conclusion 27



AUTHORS & CONTRIBUTORS

This report was written by Monica Candal Rahim.
It was made possible with generous support provided by Entergy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the following individuals who participated in interviews for the creation of this report.

Todd Battiste
Melanie Bronfin
Charmaine Caccioppi
Carrie Griffin Monica
Patty Riddlebarger
Hamilton Simons-Jones
Libbie Sonnier, Ph.D.

Thank you to the following individuals for providing feedback on initial drafts of this report.

Melanie Bronfin
Charmaine Caccioppi
Heather Cope
RuthAnne Oakey-Frost
Patty Riddlebarger
Hamilton Simons-Jones
Libbie Sonnier, Ph.D.

Sponsored by the Entergy Charitable Foundation.



Executive Summary

In the late 20th century, scientists realized that the vast majority of brain development takes place during the first three years of a child's life. At the same time, increasingly, child care was becoming one of the most common contexts in which child development unfolds.

In the early 2000s, Louisiana served only 27% of 4-year-olds in pre-kindergarten (pre-K), and the state ranked last in the country for access to child care for 3-year-olds. The state's early care and education (ECE) regulatory structures met only 4 out of 10 national benchmarks with no required teacher professional development or minimum staff-child ratios. Yet Louisiana's ECE advocates understood that affordable, high-quality ECE opportunities could be a game-changer for both children and their families, as well as for the state as a whole, and they began to organize themselves to support families with young children.

The story of ECE in Louisiana is a story of laying the groundwork to create fertile conditions for advancing ECE and seizing upon opportunities as they arose. The story of ECE in Louisiana is a story of tireless people coming together, from inside and outside government, from both sides of the political aisle, and from business and nonprofit sectors across the state, to make progress inch by inch, never losing focus on the importance of early childhood experiences.

States across the country have a lot to learn from Louisiana's story.

- **Use research to inform policy and advocacy.** Groups like Tulane's Institute of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health and the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children conducted research that heavily informed the design of Louisiana's ECE system and advocacy behind it. Nonpartisan, independently funded organizations that specialize in this type of work have an important role to play in ECE policy and implementation.

- **Respect each group’s role and expertise.** Louisiana’s ECE community organized itself for advocacy in several ways over the past three decades, always bringing together a variety of experts. Some were experts in child development while others were experts in running ECE programs as a small business, policy and research, community organizing, or the legislative process. Throughout their work together, the ECE community has respected each others’ expertise and worked in their respective lanes to fulfill whatever was needed for the movement.
- **Progress is incremental, but that doesn’t mean it needs to be slow.** Louisiana’s ECE landscape has changed dramatically over the past three decades, but the changes didn’t take place all at once. The state began by focusing on 4-year-olds and the definition of high-quality programs first, and then expanded its focus to cover ages 0-4, expanded access, and continued quality improvements. Now, the ECE movement is focused on ensuring the state adequately invests in affordable, high-quality ECE programs.
- **“Setbacks” are never *just* setbacks.** In Louisiana, the ECE movement never viewed a year with declining funding or a vote that didn’t go in their favor as a failure. Instead, they seized on these events as learning opportunities and to continue their drumbeat about the importance of ECE. The Early Childhood Education Fund took three years to fund, and the New Orleans millage failed on its first try. Still, the ECE community came together, regrouped, and adapted their strategy to lead to eventual success.
- **Clarity on desired outcomes illuminates opportunities.** The ECE movement did not intentionally create many of the opportunities they seized upon, but because they were clear about what they wanted for their movement — expanded access and higher quality — they were able to seize upon unexpected opportunities. For example, many in the ECE community were surprised by Governor Jindal’s Early Childhood Education Act, but once the legislation was passed, the ECE community viewed it as an important opportunity to improve the quality of programs through new learning standards and a revamped accountability system.

Speak to any ECE advocate in Louisiana today, and they will be clear that the work is not done. Yet Louisiana’s ECE systems have made remarkable progress over the past two decades.

Because of the tireless work of ECE advocates, including representatives from academia, nonprofits, governmental leaders, child care providers, and the business community, Louisiana now serves 90% of at-risk 4-year-olds in pre-K programs rated as high quality, and the state ranks 16th nationwide for accountability for pre-K programs. The number of high-quality ECE programs serving younger children continues to grow each year, ensuring that more and more families have access to affordable, high-quality programs.

Louisiana’s ECE journey is far from over, and the work continues as advocates continue to pursue increased funding at both the state and local levels. It will be exciting to see where the movement goes next.

Wednesday
Thursday
Friday
Saturday

Days of the Week

1. Make a set of 7 connecting paths.
2. Make a set of 7 connecting paths.
3. Join and connecting to make a day and night pattern.
4. Connect 7 day-night patterns to make a week day week.

Ready To Learn

Warning

Consequence

Parent Contact

N n

16	17	18	19	20
23	24	25	26	27

Today Yesterday Tomorrow

Today's Weather

0700



INTRODUCTION

In the late 20th century, scientists began to understand the fundamental importance of the first years of a child's life, realizing that the vast majority of brain development takes place during the first three years of a child's life. At the same time, child care was becoming one of the most common contexts in which child development unfolds. In the United States in the late 1990s, over 85% of 5-year-olds were enrolled in kindergarten, and 61% of children under 4 were in regularly scheduled child care.

The scale of these changes was accelerated by welfare reform in 1996. Prior to 1996, states were prohibited from requiring parents of young children to work to receive federal aid. As nonfamilial child care became more and more common due to necessity and funding made available through the creation of federal programs like the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), the National Research Council found that “the effects of child care derive not from its use or nonuse but from the *quality* of the experiences it provides to young children” (emphasis added). Research also began to define the elements of quality child care — the relationships between the child care provider and the child, the provider's education and training, and the child care environment.¹

Louisiana was one of the first states to respond to this burgeoning research and began to organize itself to support families with young children. At the time, the state served only 27% of 4-year-olds in pre-kindergarten (pre-K), and the state ranked last in the country for access to child care for 3-year-olds. The state's early care and education (ECE) regulatory structures met only 4 out of 10 national benchmarks with no required teacher professional development or minimum staff-child ratios. The state spent an abysmal \$2,389 per child on ECE, approximately one-third of what the state spent on K-12 students, even though providing high-quality ECE for young children is more expensive than traditional K-12 education.² This dire backdrop led researchers, funders, businesses, advocates, legislators, and ECE providers to come together to develop an ECE infrastructure that focused on quality opportunities to support child development.

Louisiana's ECE advocates understood that affordable, high-quality ECE opportunities could be a game-changer for both children and their families, as well as for the state as a whole. High-quality ECE opportunities provide children exposure to physical, mental, and socio-emotional stimuli that foster their learning and development and allow family members to attend school or work. Additionally, ECE programs are some of Louisiana's most thriving small businesses, small businesses that are overwhelmingly staffed by women and women of color.

¹National Research Council (US) and Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. A. (Eds.). (2000). *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. National Academies Press (US).

²Barnett, W.S., Robin, K.B., Hustedt, J.T., & Schulman, K.L. (2003). *The State of Preschool: 2003 State Preschool Yearbook*. The National Institute for Early Education Research. Retrieved online at <https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/2003yearbook.pdf>.

Given this context, it is no surprise that for every \$1 invested in pre-K, Louisiana recoups \$2.25 in benefits emerging from reduced student retention, fewer special education referrals, increased tax revenue, and other benefits.³

In addition to a high return on investment for the community, child care also has important economic benefits for businesses. Two-thirds of Louisiana’s children currently have both or all available parents in the workforce. Access to affordable, high-quality child care is an essential part of improving an economy with unprecedented employment vacancies, but implementing high-quality programs is expensive. Yet employee absences due to child care breakdowns are even more expensive, costing Louisiana businesses as much as \$762 million per year.⁴

This report describes the modern history of ECE in legislation and funding from the turn of the 21st century through 2022, including lessons learned. The story of ECE in Louisiana is a story of laying the groundwork to create fertile conditions for advancing ECE and seizing upon opportunities as they arose. The story of ECE in Louisiana is a story of tireless people coming together, from inside and outside government, from both sides of the political aisle, and from business and nonprofit sectors across the state, to make progress inch by inch, never losing focus on the importance of early childhood experiences.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

Louisiana’s ECE policies are the outcomes of coordinated, incremental work by tireless researchers, legislators, government officials, advocates, businesses, and child care providers. Although the work of the ECE movement in Louisiana did not suddenly start at the turn of the 21st century, the late 1990s and early 2000s represented the coming together of several groups’ work on school readiness and the wellbeing of young children. Researchers, legislators, government officials, and advocates worked together to create a policy infrastructure for high-quality, publicly funded programs for at-risk 4-year-olds and to make ECE a popular public priority, creating fertile ground for the work to come.

LOUISIANA PASSES LEGISLATION TO CREATE THE FOUNDATION FOR PUBLIC PRE-K

State Superintendent of Education Cecil J. Picard was a state superintendent who understood the importance of pre-K for child development and for setting children up for success. Originally from the Acadiana region of Louisiana, Picard served in the Louisiana legislature for 20 years prior to becoming state superintendent, forming important political relationships and

³Belfield, C.R. (2005). *An Economic Analysis of Pre-K in Louisiana*. Pre-K Now. Retrieved online at https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pes_assets/2004-2006/pewpknaeconanalysisreportjune2005pdf.pdf.

⁴University of Louisiana at Lafayette Kathleen Babineaux Blanco Public Policy Center. (2021). *Blanco Center Policy Brief: Child Care and the Economy in Louisiana*. Retrieved online at <https://policyinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Blanco-Center-Economics-of-Childcare-Policy-Brief.pdf>.



a deep understanding of how things moved in the Louisiana legislature. With support from the Louisiana Coalition for Pre-K for All, led by the United Way of Southeast Louisiana (UWSELA), as a legislator Picard began to lay the groundwork for widespread publicly funded pre-K for 4-year-olds. He traveled around the state, making the case for pre-K, with support from the coalition’s representatives from academia, nonprofits, child care providers, parents, and the business community.

In 1996, the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) appointed Picard as state superintendent, and in 2001 the Louisiana legislature passed legislation that created Louisiana’s groundbreaking LA4 program.⁵ The LA4 program funded high-quality ECE programs for 4-year-old children, and the program was free for children who qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. Other children could be charged tuition for participation in LA4. The program funded all no-cost LA4 seats at \$5,000 per seat, using a combination of federal and state funds.

The original LA4 statute also provided important cornerstones for the delivery of a quality 4-year-old program, including:

- A 10-hour day
- Educational content that “meets the standards required of accreditation of a high-quality early childhood education program as determined by the state Department of Education”⁶
- A certified lead teacher
- Small student-to-teacher ratios (20:1 for the lead teacher, 10:1 for adult-to-child)
- Classroom and instructional supplies consistent with the standards of high-quality programs
- Required professional development for all teachers
- “Space and facilities that meet the same requirements as those required to be licensed as a Class A daycare”
- Transportation for every student
- Appropriate meals and snacks
- Wraparound services for families



LA4 legislation quickly brought the Louisiana program for 4-year-olds into alignment with quality benchmarks established by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

⁵Establishes a Program of Universal Early Childhood Education and Care Classes for Four-Year Olds in Any Public School System that Wishes to Participate, Act 1146 (2001). Retrieved online at <https://legis.la.gov/legis/BillInfo.aspx?i=44865>.

⁶*Ibid.*



In 2003, the program initially aligned with 4 out of 10 NIEER benchmarks. The next year, that jumped to 7 out of 10 benchmarks.^{7,8}

LA4 also established a precedent of strong program evaluation. The University of Louisiana at Lafayette’s Picard Center began longitudinal cohort studies to trace the impact of LA4 over time. Beginning in 2006, the Picard Center provided “annual research and evaluation on the LA4 program,” even following students through 8th grade.⁹ The program evaluation regularly found positive outcomes for program participants. The Council for a Better Louisiana (CABL) also conducted a study, this time examining the long-term impact of LA4, and found that children who participated in LA4 were more likely to graduate from high school on time, qualify for college scholarships, and pass several high school courses required for graduation. Children who participated in LA4 were also less likely to be placed in special education settings.¹⁰

Although the funding for LA4 was never included in the state’s formula for K-12 funding, the Minimum Foundation Program (MFP), the program became so popular with local K-12 superintendents that even when state funding was insufficient or had to be cut, many local superintendents pieced together the funding for LA4 through federal, state, and local monies. The program started in a small number of Louisiana parishes, growing over time until it was located in every parish in the state.¹¹

Besides creating a high-quality program that significantly expanded access for 4-year-olds, one of LA4’s most enduring legacies was placing the responsibility for educating 4-year-olds within the domain of the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) and BESE. Prior to LA4 legislation, ECE had been under the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), but LA4 began the shift of these programs to the LDE.

⁷Barnett, W.S., Robin, K.B., Hustedt, J.T., & Schulman, K.L. (2003). *The State of Preschool: 2003 State Preschool Yearbook*. The National Institute for Early Education Research. Retrieved online at <https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/2003yearbook.pdf>.

⁸Barnett, W.S., Robin, K.B., Hustedt, J.T., & Schulman, K.L. (2004). *The State of Preschool: 2004 State Preschool Yearbook*. The National Institute for Early Education Research. Retrieved online at <https://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/2004yearbook.pdf>.

⁹Cecil J. Picard Center for Child Development and Lifelong Learning. *Birth to Five (LA4)*. Retrieved online at <https://picardcenter.louisiana.edu/research-areas/education/early-childhood/birth-five>.

¹⁰Asmus, G., Stokes, B., Ramey, S., & Ramey, C. (2021). *The LA4 Longitudinal Study: Findings from the High School Years*. Council for a Better Louisiana. Retrieved online at <https://cabl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-LA4-Longitudinal-Study.pdf>.

¹¹State of Louisiana. (2005). *Governor Blanco Sets Sights on Early Childhood Education* [Press release]. Retrieved online at <https://justfacts.votesmart.org/public-statement/91300/governor-blanco-sets-sights-on-early-childhood-education>.

To implement LA4, the LDE focused on growing LA4 within school systems. It did this for two reasons. First, the school systems were familiar territory for the LDE because they were already under the LDE’s regulatory purview. Second, in the late 1990s, private child care centers, even those receiving public funding, were largely unregulated. At the time that LA4 legislation was passed, the state did not have child care or quality standards beyond what was required for basic licensing, and the LDE did not want to become mired in an unregulated system where they had limited control.



The effects of LA4 legislation were overwhelmingly positive, establishing the infrastructure for an affordable, high-quality program for 4-year-olds that advocates could later build on. However, the legislation also had two major unintended consequences. First, the concentration of LA4 classrooms in school systems meant that these children were removed from private child care programs, eliminating an important income stream for child care centers and making quality care for children birth to age 3 even harder to provide. Second, the state’s laser-like focus on 4-year-olds meant the creation of a new early childhood certification for teachers teaching pre-K through third grade. At the same time, the state eliminated all existing educator certifications for children younger than age 3, except for those specializing in working with young children with disabilities. These financial and human capital effects illuminated holes in state ECE policy that the state corrected for in the following years.



ADVOCATES LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR QUALITY CHILD CARE FOR LOUISIANA’S YOUNGEST CHILDREN (0-3)

As Louisiana made progress around ECE programming for its 4-year-olds, little was happening at the state level for children birth to age 3. However, researchers and advocates began laying the groundwork for ECE policy for younger children.

From a research perspective, scientists at Tulane University sought to create a research base for ECE policy. Created in 2002, the Tulane University Institute for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) aimed “to discover, disseminate, and apply what they learned to advance the social and emotional wellbeing of young children.” In particular, the institute wanted to inform and influence early ECE policy through their research findings.¹² Although IECMH focused primarily on mental health, especially the mental health of vulnerable populations like foster youth, the institute saw that child care settings affected children's mental health.

¹²Tulane University School of Medicine. *Institute of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health*. Retrieved online at <https://medicine.tulane.edu/infant-institute>.

Meanwhile, state governments had grown more and more focused on child care as an essential tool to ensure that parents, particularly those receiving government assistance (e.g., welfare), were working.¹³ Thus, although federal programs increased funding so more working parents could access child care, the quality of child care had become secondary. Up until this point, in Louisiana there were few regulations for child care teachers beyond a required minimum age of 18 and a background check for basic licensing requirements.

IECMH used the Louisiana Children’s Cabinet as a prime opportunity to share their findings and to promote stronger ECE policies. Established by the state legislature in 1992, the Children’s Cabinet’s responsibility was to “facilitate and require coordination of policy, planning, and budgeting affecting programs and services for children and their families; to coordinate delivery of services to children and their families; and to eliminate the duplication of services where appropriate.” Representatives from several state agencies, including DCFS and LDE, served in the cabinet and developed the state’s ECE budget and policy recommendations. Louisiana statute also required the development of a Children’s Cabinet Advisory Board, which brought together providers, researchers, advocates, and community members, including a representative from Tulane’s IECMH, to advise the Children’s Cabinet.¹⁴

Due to research from organizations such as Tulane’s IECMH and national philanthropic organizations including Pew Charitable Trusts, states nationwide began to think about the importance of child care standards and a quality rating system that moved beyond basic licensing and safety standards.¹⁵ Many places increasingly focused on creating a system that would incentivize and support quality child care centers by using funding and other incentives.

At the same time this research base and advocacy in ECE policy was growing, a simultaneous nationwide wave of women’s philanthropy was underway. The national United Way organization capitalized on this wave and began the creation of Women’s Leadership Councils (WLC) across the country, and in 2002 UWSELA created its own WLC. As one of six focus areas, the UWSELA WLC took on the Success by 6 initiative, which sought to ensure that children entered school equipped with the skills for success by age 6.¹⁶

¹³Benefits.gov. *Child Care and Development Fund*. Retrieved online at <https://www.benefits.gov/benefit/615>.

¹⁴La. R.S. 46:2602. Retrieved online at <https://legis.la.gov/legis/Law.aspx?d=100738>.

¹⁵The Pew Charitable Trusts. *Pre-K Now*. Retrieved online at <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/projects/archived-projects/pre-k-now>.

¹⁶Chen, T. (2014). Founding the United Way Women’s Leadership Council of Southeast Louisiana: From the Women’s Funding Movement to United Way Today. *Women Leading Change*, 1(1), 30-38.





The UWSELA WLC was committed to the idea that all children deserve access to high-quality ECE to prepare them to enter kindergarten, to read by third grade, and to graduate on time. The WLC viewed strong ECE experiences as the impetus for creating lifelong learners, and its interactions with local sheriffs and district attorneys brought home the idea of the school-to-prison pipeline. If children didn't start with a quality ECE program, the gap between those who had access to high-quality ECE and those who didn't would only grow bigger.

Although proponents of Success by 6 viewed expanding access to child care as important, they were equally committed to ensuring that access was expanded to high-quality child care centers. The UWSELA WLC discovered that New Orleans had over 400 child care providers with little information to help families sift through the centers to determine which were high quality and the best fit for their family.¹⁷

Thus, Success by 6 coalesced around one mission — increasing the number of nationally accredited child care centers in each Louisiana parish. Success by 6 used national accreditation standards from the National Association for the Education of Young Children as its gold standard and set about focusing on needed changes at the policy and systems level. Success by 6 also funded the expansion of existing high-quality child care centers in New Orleans, such as Kingsley House (now known as Clover), but recognized that one-off support like this would ultimately be insufficient on its own.

To push forward its ECE policy agenda, Success by 6 became involved in local and state politics, asking 2003 gubernatorial candidates, including soon-to-be governor Kathleen Blanco, about their opinions on child care and hiring a lobbyist to advocate for a statewide quality rating system.¹⁸ Success by 6 also took its show on the road, analyzing school readiness data in each parish and preparing each parish to advocate for quality child care at the state capitol.

The stage was set for advocacy on behalf of Louisiana's youngest children. And then hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit.

¹⁷Ramsey, K. (2014). Evaluating the Mission and Methods of Success by 6 in Post-Katrina New Orleans. *Women Leading Change*, 1(1), 69-77.

¹⁸Ramsey, K. (2014). Evaluating the Mission and Methods of Success by 6 in Post-Katrina New Orleans. *Women Leading Change*, 1(1), 69-77.



SPOTLIGHT: A ROLE FOR THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Close coordination among ECE partners — from researchers and child care providers to nonprofit advocates, the business community, legislators, and government officials — has played an important role in expanding access to high-quality ECE programs in Louisiana. Resources from the business community have helped to make that coordination possible.

In addition to supporting coordination, local businesses like Entergy Corporation, the only Fortune 500 company headquartered in Louisiana, brought their resources to bear for the ECE cause in other ways, providing an example for business leaders and organizations around the country.

- Entergy’s senior leadership **participated in various ECE coalitions and initiatives** over the years, including the Coalition for Pre-K for All, UWSELA WLC’s Success by 6 committee, and Ready Louisiana (see section on Unifying Under LDE). Entergy employees led and served on these committees, even serving as chairs.
- In 2002, Entergy Chairman and CEO J. Wayne Leonard **commissioned a study** by economists Jerrold Oppenheim and Theo MacGregor that analyzed the economic impact of investments in early childhood in Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. Subsequent research funded with grants from Entergy included *Losing Ground* (see section on Long-Term Sustainability) and post-pandemic surveys (see section on Advocates Stay the Course During the Covid-19 Pandemic), and public awareness campaigns about the importance of ECE.

- **Sustained philanthropic support** from Entergy Corporation since the early 2000s to ECE organizations such as UWSELA, Jefferson Ready Start, the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children, Stand for Children Louisiana, the Campaign for Grade Level Reading, Agenda for Children, Kingsley House, and others helped provide the organizational capacity needed to drive ECE advances.
- Beginning in 2017, as localities began exploring opportunities for local ECE funding, Entergy Corporation **led local businesses in helping to fund education and outreach efforts**. In addition, philanthropic contributions from Entergy helped provide matching funds to enable Orleans and Jefferson parishes to leverage funds from the state's Early Childhood Education Fund.
- Entergy **leveraged its networks to activate the business community** on behalf of ECE, working in partnership with organizations such as the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI), Council for a Better Louisiana (CABL), and the Committee of 100 to highlight the importance of ECE as a business issue and to galvanize the business community to advocate on behalf of expanded access to high-quality ECE programs.

The multi-faceted support from leading state businesses like Entergy created an ECE research and advocacy infrastructure that allowed ECE supporters to pursue policies that expanded access to affordable, high-quality ECE programs.



BUILDING BACK STRONGER

Hurricane Katrina arrived in August of 2005, devastating Southeast Louisiana, and Hurricane Rita quickly followed, affecting Southwest Louisiana. Communities across the state were forced to deal with a triple blow from the loss of child care centers. First, the hurricanes decimated an entire sector of small businesses, causing a loss of income to individual providers, their employees, and local and state tax revenue. Second, the absence of open child care businesses made it difficult for parents to find safe places to keep their children while they dealt with the aftermath of the hurricane, such as cleaning their neighborhoods, helping family members and neighbors, and navigating insurance claims. Finally, parents who still had work had no dependable care for their children while they were working.

As Louisianians assessed the lives and livelihoods lost, federal and philanthropic dollars began pouring into the state to help with recovery, and the ECE community came together to support its providers and families.

ADVOCATES FOCUS ON QUALITY

After hurricanes Katrina and Rita, in early 2006, UWSELA WLC revisited its Success by 6 platform and decided to double down on the importance of quality in child care centers. At the same time, Success by 6 recognized that the majority of existing child care centers had been destroyed and rebuilding the child care community was urgent. Success by 6 focused on rebuilding in New Orleans and decided to partner with local nonprofits, child care providers, state agencies, and local resource and referral agencies to create the Greater New Orleans Rebuild Child Care Collaborative. The collaborative distributed millions of dollars to rebuild child care centers, focusing on disbursing grants to local child care providers who agreed to rebuild their centers and receive training to meet national quality benchmarks.¹⁹

This strategic approach and focus on rebuilding to quality gained the collaborative statewide bipartisan respect and established a model for how communities could come together to get the community back to work while serving children well. As the collaborative helped the child care industry recover across southern Louisiana, it also continued its statewide advocacy for a statewide quality rating system.²⁰

In 2007, as Louisiana continued its hurricane recovery, Governor Blanco increased state funding for programs that served children age 4 and younger. Around the same time, the Louisiana legislature passed a law requiring the implementation of a new voluntary Quality Start Child Care Rating System, a victory for advocates like Tulane's IECMH and Success by 6.



The Quality Start Rating System, which was designed to evaluate the quality of ECE programs, used a five-star rating system. Quality standards ranged from basic licensing requirements (one star) to programs that could earn points (up to five stars, depending on the number of points) based on observations, adult-child ratios, staff qualifications, administrative best practices, and family and community involvement.²¹

Louisiana was on the early side of states that decided to focus on improving the quality of ECE programs serving children younger than age 4. As the 15th state in the country to pass a rating system for ECE programs, the rating system represented a shift in focus for ECE programs serving Louisiana's youngest children. Rather than having a basic floor whose consequence was a revoked license, now the rating system defined what comprised quality ECE programs and created supports and incentives for programs to achieve that quality. What's

¹⁹ Ramsey, K. (2014). Evaluating the Mission and Methods of Success by 6 in Post-Katrina New Orleans. *Women Leading Change*, 1(1), 69-77.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Louisiana Administrative Code, Title 67, Part III, Subpart 12, Chapter 51, Subchapter C. Retrieved online at <https://doa.la.gov/media/tp3lmkyg/67.pdf>.

more, the legislation pushed Quality Start implementers and advocates to talk about how they could support centers to achieve those expectations.

SCHOOL READINESS TAX CREDITS INCENTIVIZE THE MOVE TO QUALITY

As part of the system to support and incentivize centers to improve their quality, Louisiana created a unique package of tax credits. The same year that Louisiana passed its new Quality Start Child Care Rating System, policymakers realized the state needed to incentivize families and centers to invest in moving child care centers to quality, so the Louisiana legislature passed the School Readiness Tax Credits (SRTC) program. This collection of five tax credits gave tax breaks to families, child care providers, child care directors and staff, and businesses that supported child care centers rated at two stars or above.^{22,23}

By varying the amount of the tax credit based on the quality of centers, the SRTCs promoted the growth of high-quality child care centers statewide. The SRTCs had additional benefits that continue to this day.²⁴

- The tax credits served as a local match to draw down federal funding for child care for low-income families, maximizing funding for Louisiana’s youngest children.
- Because the amount of some of the tax credits were based on the number of low-income children served, the tax credits ensured that centers chose to serve low-income children.
- Many child care centers relied on the tax credits to make essential purchases, pay their teachers more, and invest in quality improvement.
- Because businesses could earn tax credits for donations to child care centers, the tax credits increased local support and investment in child care.

Since their implementation, SRTCs have borne out these benefits. Between 2009 and 2016, the percentage of low-income children under age 6 who were enrolled in centers with ratings of three stars or above increased from 20% to 46%. Additionally, between 2008 and 2015, teachers achieving higher levels of credentialing increased by 374%.²⁵ As such, Louisiana’s SRTCs have become a model for other states seeking innovative ways to fund ECE.

²²La. R.S. 47:6101, et seq. Retrieved online at <https://legis.la.gov/Legis/Law.aspx?d=453229>.

²³Louisiana Department of Revenue. *School Readiness Tax Credits*. Retrieved online at <https://www.revenue.louisiana.gov/IndividualIncomeTax/SchoolReadinessTaxCredit>.

²⁴Louisiana Department of Education. (2022). *School Readiness Tax Credits (SRTC) Guidance*. Retrieved online at [https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/early-childhood/school-readiness-tax-credits-\(srtc\)-guidance.pdf?sfvrsn=3b8a921f_17](https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/early-childhood/school-readiness-tax-credits-(srtc)-guidance.pdf?sfvrsn=3b8a921f_17).

²⁵Stoney, L. (2016). *Giving Credit Where It's Due: School Readiness Tax Credits Benefit Louisiana Families and Communities*. Louisiana Policy Institute for Children. Retrieved online at <https://policyinstitutela.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Giving-Credit-Where-Its-Due-Report-on-School-Readiness-Tax-Credits-FINAL-Fall-2016.pdf>.

LOUISIANA INCREASES FUNDING FOR PRE-K FOR AT-RISK 4-YEAR-OLDS

In 2004 and early 2005, Louisiana's LA4 program served approximately 8,500 4-year-olds. Coupled with Louisiana's other programs for 4-year-olds, the total number of 4-year-olds served across all programs was around 27,400, or 43% of the total 4-year-old population in the state. Research conducted by national foundations suggested that to expand LA4 to all families who would likely participate, the total cost would amount to \$109-\$120 million annually.²⁶ Governor Blanco, who became Louisiana governor in 2004, made education a major part of her platform, and through her 2005 budget she sought to expand the reach of LA4 to 20 parishes.²⁷

After Hurricane Katrina, Governor Blanco continued to push for increased funding for LA4. In 2007, the state secured an additional \$30 million to expand LA4.^{28,29} Although the total amount was still short of advocates' desired annual amount, by the end of Governor Blanco's tenure, LA4 had expanded enough to cover all at-risk children in Louisiana, turning the program into a national model and providing the program with the highest total funding it has ever had.³⁰



UNIFYING UNDER LDE

In 2008, Louisiana voters elected Governor Bobby Jindal to office, and he was reelected in 2012 with a heavy emphasis on education reform. Despite forecasting education reform as a priority, many advocates and legislators across the state were surprised when during the 2012 legislative session the Louisiana legislature easily passed three major education reform bills designed by Governor Jindal's office. Although advocates expected the school accountability and school choice legislation that passed, the Louisiana Early Childhood Act of the 2012 Regular Session, also known as Act 3, came as a surprise and a welcome opportunity.

²⁶Belfield, C.R. (2005). *An Economic Analysis of Pre-K in Louisiana*. Pre-K Now. Retrieved online at https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pes_assets/2004-2006/pewpknaeconanalysisreportjune2005pdf.pdf.

²⁷National Governors Association. *Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco*. Retrieved online at <https://www.nga.org/governor/kathleen-babineaux-blanco/>.

²⁸KTBS 3. (2007, June 21). *Blanco Praises State Senate for Passing Budget*. Retrieved online at https://www.ktbs.com/news/blanco-praises-state-senate-for-passing-budget/article_24629ddd-4cfe-582b-92cb-1b719ccb6ef8.html

²⁹Provides for the Ordinary Operating Expenses of State Government, Act 18 (2007). Retrieved online at <https://legis.la.gov/legis/BillInfo.aspx?i=206556>.

³⁰Mann, R. (2017, December 15). *Louisiana never had a governor who cared for children more than Kathleen Blanco*. nola.com. Retrieved online at https://www.nola.com/opinions/louisiana-never-had-a-governor-who-cared-for-children-more-than-kathleen-blanco-opinion/article_f27319b2-761c-59ee-95df-042f4181d49a.html.

The Louisiana Early Childhood Act created a statewide Early Childhood Care and Education Network. The Louisiana Early Childhood Act tasked the state network with defining kindergarten readiness; establishing performance targets for children age 4 and younger; creating a common assessment and accountability system for ECE programs; and coordinating with DCFS to align licensing, Quality Start, and the accountability system.³¹ In addition to shifting these regulatory responsibilities to the LDE, the Louisiana Early Childhood Act provided an unexpected opportunity to move funding from the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant, which at the time was managed by DCFS, to the LDE. The State Superintendent of Education at the time, John White, BESE, and state advocates began the work of advocating to move the funding for children age 3 and younger from DCFS to the LDE, and advocates began the hard work of educating the LDE on how educating and caring for children younger than age 4 would be different from the LDE’s LA4 and K-12 work.



At the government level, especially in the LDE, knowledge about children younger than age 4 was limited. Historically, many legislators and government officials were more familiar with programs for 4-year-olds, and LA4 was what they thought about when they heard the term “early childhood.” Due to the eliminated degrees and certifications for teachers of infants and toddlers, even those individuals who had early childhood certifications knew little about children younger than age 4, so few teachers, administrators, and LDE staff had formal training for working with children birth through age 3.

The Louisiana Early Childhood Act provided a prime opportunity for state ECE advocates to educate the LDE about young children. Organizations like the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children (LPIC), a nonpartisan nonprofit focused on Louisiana ECE research and policy, brought in national experts and research to inform design of the state network, and with this support, the LDE began to implement the rules required by the Louisiana Early Childhood Act. National and state researchers, school district officials, child care providers, and ECE advocates came together to write the Early Learning and Development Standards. These standards provided “a continuum of developmental milestones for each age level” for children age 4 and younger, unifying the three sets of standards for infants to 2-year-olds, 3-year-olds, and 4-year-olds that had previously been in place, and ensuring the standards connected with the state’s K-12 state standards.³² The LDE also revamped the design and implementation of the Quality Start Child Care Rating System, setting standards for high-quality curricula and updating the tools used to evaluate teacher-child interactions. Although the process was bumpy at times, the LDE and ECE advocates worked together to create an exemplary ECE accountability system.

³¹ Provides for the La. Early Childhood Education Act, Act 3 (2012). Retrieved online at <https://legis.la.gov/legis/BillInfo.aspx?i=220655>.

³² Louisiana Department of Education. (2013). *Louisiana’s Birth to Five Early Learning and Development Standards*. Retrieved online at <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/academic-standards/early-childhood---birth-to-five-standards.pdf?sfvrsn=6>.

LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

As local networks implemented the Louisiana Early Childhood Act through the new standards and a revamped rating system, child care providers and ECE advocates began to raise the issue of sustainable funding. Meeting quality standards required investing in new materials and facilities and, above all, investing in teachers. Higher credentialing requirements and more stringent adult-child ratios meant that programs needed to hire more teachers and compensate those teachers fairly for their higher levels of education. Once teachers met the new credentialing requirements, they were often able to find higher paying work elsewhere. To retain teachers, child care providers needed to increase their salaries. These changes were costly.

Despite increased bipartisan support for ECE, advocates felt that building a business case for ECE could help to grow even more bipartisan support, especially for improved funding. In 2017, LPIC conducted the first version of its *Losing Ground* study, which surveyed households about the impact of child care on their work and used that information to estimate the resulting costs to businesses. The study found that child care breakdowns were costing businesses over \$800 million per year and that Louisiana was losing \$84 million in tax revenue due to these worker absences.³³ More recent versions of the report reveal similar trends — \$762 million in annual losses for businesses and a \$1.3 billion impact on the Louisiana economy, including losses on collected tax revenue.³⁴

Statewide advocates took the results from the *Losing Ground* study and ran with it. To strengthen their case and their advocacy effectiveness, state ECE advocates formalized their collaboration and work together by forming the Ready Louisiana Coalition. The coalition included participants from the business community, child care providers, advocates, and ECE experts, and they worked together to create the state conditions favorable to raising the level of needed funds. Today, over 120 individuals and businesses are now members of the Ready Louisiana Coalition, which continues to coordinate ECE advocacy across the state.

ECE became an issue with such strong bipartisan support and political popularity that it became a key part of the platform for the second term for the current governor of Louisiana, Governor John Bel Edwards. After assuming office in 2020, Governor Edwards and the Louisiana legislature used federal funds to expand ECE access for infants to 3-year-olds and add additional funding to LA4.

³³ Louisiana Policy Institute for Children. (2017). *Losing Ground: How Child Care Impacts Louisiana's Workforce Productivity and the State Economy*. Retrieved online at https://policyinstitutela.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/20d35d_476f91b779d74b74937ccdd9965d74e3.pdf.

³⁴ University of Louisiana at Lafayette Kathleen Babineaux Blanco Public Policy Center. (2021). *Blanco Center Policy Brief: Child Care and the Economy in Louisiana*. Retrieved online at <https://policyinstitutela.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Blanco-Center-Economics-of-Childcare-Policy-Brief.pdf>.



THE LOUISIANA LEGISLATURE CREATES AN INCENTIVE FOR LOCAL FUNDING

In 2017, the Louisiana legislature created the Louisiana Early Childhood Education Fund.³⁵ As part of this fund, the state initially agreed to match one dollar for every three dollars raised by localities for ECE. Advocates hoped this could incentivize localities to raise funding for ECE. Although the legislation passed and a state fund was created, it began as an unfunded tool. Advocates had been hoping for more, but the fund created a starting point for continued advocacy.

The following year, advocates again worked with the Louisiana legislature to seed money in the fund, but again they were unsuccessful. Although advocates were disappointed by these setbacks, they saw each failure as an opportunity to bring more and more attention to the issue. Despite losing the battle to fund the Early Childhood Education Fund, in 2018 advocates succeeded in creating the bipartisan Early Childhood Care and Education Commission (ECCE Commission), made up of Democratic and Republican policymakers, government staff, child care providers, advocates, parents, and community members. The commission legislation tasked the commission with creating recommendations to increase access to affordable, high-quality ECE and identifying the amount and sources of funding needed. The ECCE Commission was just what advocates needed to explore and articulate what funding affordable, high-quality ECE would actually cost.³⁶

In 2020, the ECCE Commission initially estimated that to expand access to affordable, high-quality ECE programs for children younger than age 4, the state needed to invest \$86 million per year for a decade.³⁷ That number in and of itself raised eyebrows. In 2022, the number grew.

³⁵ Creates a Special Fund for the Purpose of Funding Early Childhood Education in Louisiana, Act 353 (2017). Retrieved online at <https://legis.la.gov/legis/BillInfo.aspx?i=232131>.

³⁶ La. R.S. 17:407.101. Retrieved online at <https://legis.la.gov/legis/Law.aspx?d=1108383>.

³⁷ Louisiana Early Childhood Care and Education Commission. (2020). *Funding Our Future: LA B to 3, Commission Report Addendum*. Retrieved online at [https://louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/early-childhood/funding-our-future---la-b-to-3-commission-report-addendum-\(jan-2020\).pdf?sfvrsn=b69e9b1f_18](https://louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/early-childhood/funding-our-future---la-b-to-3-commission-report-addendum-(jan-2020).pdf?sfvrsn=b69e9b1f_18).

Due to increased reimbursement rates and economic factors, the ECCE Commission estimated that Louisiana now needed \$115 million annually for a decade.³⁸

At the same time that the ECCE Commission was exploring the actual costs associated with funding expanded high-quality ECE programs, ECE advocates were also working with the Louisiana legislature to increase ECE funding. Because raising the amount of funding needed to truly provide quality programs for a larger number of children wasn't a matter of piecing together donations from here and there, advocates and implementers needed creative new ways to fund ECE.

In 2019, advocates were able to secure an \$18.2 million investment in ECE through general appropriation. That same year, the Louisiana legislature amended the original Early Childhood Education Fund statute to increase the state match for locally raised ECE dollars. For every dollar raised by localities for ECE, the state would now match with one dollar from the fund. Additionally, advocates expanded the types of child care seats that would be eligible for matching funds, and the state allocated \$3.6 million in land-based casino revenues, if casino revenues exceeded \$60 million, into the Early Childhood Education Fund. Although these weren't the large, recurring sources needed to adequately fund ECE programs on an annual basis, these small victories started to point the way to larger opportunities.

ADVOCATES STAY THE COURSE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

On March 13, 2020, like many leaders across the country, Governor Edwards decided to shut down schools, including ECE programs due to the threat of Covid-19. As the ECE community tried to orient itself to the new Covid-19 reality, advocates quickly convened to discuss the ramifications of closure for ECE providers. ECE programs operated, and continue to operate, on tight margins, and a prolonged closure had the potential to force programs to close their doors permanently. To understand the needs of ECE providers, LPIC launched an ECE provider survey, the first state in the country to do so. What was intended as a one-time survey administration turned into a five-time survey, collecting information about the ongoing needs of these small business owners.

The survey asked child care providers what a prolonged closure would do to their businesses, and providers were clear that any closure longer than two weeks would decimate their businesses. Providers illuminated the economic costs to their businesses and the issues they were facing, and with these data, the LDE was able to make informed decisions about recovery supports. Community advocates worked together to provide additional supports to support child care providers in keeping their businesses open, including providing webinars from the Small Business Association about the federal Paycheck Protection Program and coaching child care providers on business aspects of their programs.

³⁸ Louisiana Early Childhood Care and Education Commission. (2022). *Forging a Bright Economic Future: LA B to 3*. Retrieved online at https://louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/early-childhood/2022-forging-a-bright-economic-future---la-b-to-3-report.pdf?sfvrsn=e1b6518_4.

During the pandemic, as child care providers provided feedback through these surveys, the state continued to hold legislative sessions. Advocates felt strongly that ECE programs should not lose any state funding, especially due to the economic uncertainty of the time and a lack of clarity about how federal stimulus dollars would be distributed. To add to their arsenal of information, in Fall 2020 advocates delivered their first-ever parent survey to collect data from the parent perspective.

Advocates' strategy paid off. ECE funding remained stable in 2020, and during the 2021 legislative session the Louisiana legislature allocated 25% of sports betting revenue to ECE funding, up to \$20 million annually. Their successes continued through the 2022 legislative session, when advocates secured an historic downpayment of \$84 million dedicated to ECE. Of this, \$25 million went into the Child Care Assistance Program while \$18 million went to improve existing reimbursement rates in LA4. An additional \$40 million from excess Minimum Foundation Program funds was deposited into the statewide Early Childhood Education Fund, bringing the fund total to over \$50 million by the beginning of 2023.³⁹

SPOTLIGHT: A TEST CASE FOR MUNICIPAL FUNDING

As advocates pursued ECE funding at the state level, they also set the stage for local communities to pursue local funding for ECE and to create pressure on the state to provide matching funds. In New Orleans, local organizations like Stand for Children Louisiana and LPIC worked with child care providers and parents to educate locally elected officials about the importance of ECE for school readiness, public safety, and city revenues and costs.

In 2017, the New Orleans Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, a coalition of New Orleans-based nonprofits working to improve school readiness, held a mayoral candidate forum to draw attention to the lack of access to high-quality ECE programs in New Orleans, where over 10,000 children age 3 and under lacked access to high-quality care.⁴⁰ During that forum, the future mayor of New Orleans, LaToya Cantrell, committed to creating an Office of Youth and Families that would focus on ECE issues.

That same year, the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading secured a \$750,000 investment from the New Orleans City Council to fund ECE seats through City Seats, a new municipal funding stream for New Orleans' young children. Over the next two years, the city doubled its investment, eventually reaching \$3 million and serving 200 children from low-income families. Although advocates wanted more funding, this initial program provided a proof point for later advocacy.

³⁹ Louisiana Policy Institute for Children. *State of Early Care and Education*. Retrieved online at <https://policyinstitutela.org/early-childhood/state-of-early-care-and-education/>.

⁴⁰ Children's Funding Project. (2022). *New Orleans, LA's Early Childhood Education Millage*. Retrieved online at https://www.childrensfundingproject.org/s/New-Orleans-case-study_FINAL.pdf

In 2020, as several of the city’s existing tax levies were set to expire, Mayor Cantrell suggested renewing a library property tax that could combine funding for libraries and ECE programs. ECE advocates in the city decided to support the renewed property tax, but because the property tax effectively cut library funding and reallocated those funds to City Seats, library advocates fought against the renewal. Library advocates wanted to maintain the current level of funding for libraries and thus promoted voting “No” on the levy. This conflict damaged ECE advocates’ campaign and image, resulting in an ultimate loss for this source of ECE funding.

Members of the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading spent the next year repairing relationships and understanding why their efforts had failed. By Summer 2021, they began working on a new millage proposal centered solely on ECE. They spent their time educating the public on the importance of ECE and brought new constituencies into the campaign. They brought in business partners to help make the business case and educated new city council members on the issue.

In Spring 2022, the years of hard work resulted in the overwhelming passage of the Early Childhood Education Property Tax Measure. The millage will raise \$21 million annually over the next 20 years, significantly increasing the number of families with children birth to age 3 who can access quality ECE programs. These funds are eligible to be matched by state funds from the Early Childhood Education Fund, bringing the total additional funding to \$40 million per year and providing access to high-quality ECE programs for 2,000 additional children from low-income families.

LOCALITIES EXPLORE LOCAL FUNDING OPTIONS

The state’s increasingly funded Early Childhood Education Fund has created an incentive for localities to pursue local funding options. At the same time, the public popularity of ECE programs made ECE funding a realistic funding priority to pursue at the local level, and campaigns like the one in New Orleans, even in its early unsuccessful years, began to provide a roadmap for other localities interested in pursuing local funding for ECE.

These activities, as well as policy changes like expanding the definition of juvenile justice preventative services, have laid the groundwork for cities and parishes across Louisiana to pursue different local funding strategies.



- Residents in New Orleans approved a local property millage, raising \$21 million for ECE in its first year.

⁴¹ Louisiana Policy Institute for Children. (2022). *Local Funding Toolkit for Strengthening Early Care and Education in Louisiana Communities*. Retrieved online at <https://policyinstitutela.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Local-Funding-Toolkit-for-Strengthening-Early-Care-and-Education-in-Louisiana-Communities.pdf>.

- Ascension Parish repurposed funds used for juvenile justice preventative services to build a community center that will house an ECE program for infants and toddlers.
- The Jefferson Parish Council dedicated a \$275,000 line item in its annual budget for ECE, increasing the prior year's dedicated budget line item from \$225,000.
- East Baton Rouge Parish Public Schools repurposed unused space in public facilities to expand offerings for 3- and 4-year-olds.
- Pointe Coupee Parish leveraged SRTCs to encourage greater local investment in ECE programs serving 3-year-olds, increasing the proportion of 3-year-olds served in ECE centers to over 90%.
- Shreveport raised over \$1 million in philanthropic dollars for ECE, encouraging the city council to approve \$3 million in funding for the Shreveport Early Start Initiative.

These activities at the local level demonstrate an important next phase of the ECE movement in Louisiana, one which maintains state-level advocacy but will require local coordination and advocacy as well.

LESSONS LEARNED

Louisiana's ECE journey is far from over, and it didn't make its progress to date overnight. The work that has been done to date has been the result of a group of dedicated researchers, child care providers, government officials, business leaders, and ECE advocates across the state, who joined together in a coordinated and intentional movement. States across the country have a lot to learn from Louisiana's story.

- **Use research to inform policy and advocacy.** Groups like Tulane's IECMH and LPIC conducted research that heavily informed the design of Louisiana ECE system and advocacy behind it. Nonpartisan, independently funded organizations that conduct scientific research, national landscape analyses, and quantitative and qualitative research that illuminates what's happening locally on the ground have an important role to play in ECE policy and implementation.
- **Respect each group's role and expertise.** Louisiana's ECE community organized itself for advocacy in several ways over the past three decades, from the Success by 6 committee to the Greater New Orleans Rebuild Collaborative to the Children's Cabinet to Ready Louisiana to the ECCE Commission. This advocate community brought together a variety of experts. Some were experts in child development while others were experts in running ECE programs as a small business, policy and research, community organizing, or the legislative process. Throughout their work together, the ECE community has respected each others' expertise and worked in their respective lanes to fulfill whatever was needed for the movement.

- Progress is incremental, but that doesn't mean it needs to be slow.** Louisiana's ECE landscape has changed dramatically over the past three decades, but the changes didn't take place all at once. The state began by focusing on 4-year-olds and the definition of high-quality programs first, and then expanded its focus to cover ages 0-4, expanded access, and continued quality improvements. Now, the ECE movement is focused on ensuring the state adequately invests in affordable, high-quality ECE programs.
- "Setbacks" are never just setbacks.** In Louisiana, the ECE movement never viewed a year with declining funding or a vote that didn't go in their favor as a failure. Instead, they seized on these events as learning opportunities and to continue their drumbeat about the importance of ECE. The Early Childhood Education Fund took three years to fund, and the New Orleans millage failed on its first try. Still, the ECE community came together, regrouped, and adapted their strategy to lead to eventual success.
- Clarity on desired outcomes illuminates opportunities.** The ECE movement did not intentionally create many of the opportunities they seized upon, but because they were clear about what they wanted for their movement — expanded access and higher quality — they were able to seize upon unexpected opportunities. For example, many in the ECE community were surprised by Governor Jindal's Early Childhood Education Act, but once the legislation was passed, they viewed it as an important opportunity to improve the quality of programs through new learning standards and an accountability system. Similarly, the ECE movement was not involved in passing the legislation that created a sport betting revenue stream at the state level, but because the ECE movement unapologetically pursued funding for increased access to ECE, the ECE community was able to advocate for an allocation from that revenue stream, work that they will continue to pursue.

Fiscal Year	State Funding
2012-13	31M
2013-14	56M
2014-15	54M
2015-16	24M
2016-17	51M
2017-18	49M
2018-19	49M
2019-20	64M
2020-21	54M
2021-22	54M
2022-23	97M

CONCLUSION

Speak to any ECE advocate in Louisiana today, and they will be clear that the work is not done. Yet Louisiana remains at the national forefront of ECE policy and funding.

Because of the tireless work of ECE advocates including representatives from academia, nonprofits, governmental leaders, child care operators, and the business community, Louisiana now serves 90% of at-risk 4-year-olds in pre-K programs rated as high quality, and the state ranks 16th nationwide for accountability for pre-K programs. The number of high-quality ECE programs serving younger children continues to grow each year, ensuring that more and more families have access to affordable, high-quality programs. The state's funding for ECE programs has grown by over \$60 million in the past decade, from \$31 million in 2012 to \$97 million in 2022. Additionally, funding options for children younger than age 4 continue to grow, namely through the state Early Childhood Education Fund and local funding options.

There's a lot for ECE advocates to be proud of in Louisiana, but their work continues. In the coming years, the ECE community expects to maintain its focus on adequate funding for ECE, pursuing funding streams at the local and state levels. It will be exciting to see what the movement accomplishes next.

ECE in Louisiana A Modern History



1998

Governor Mike Foster creates the Children's Cabinet, which is charged with ensuring that children enter school ready to succeed.



2001

Louisiana passes legislation to create the LA4 pre-kindergarten program under the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE).



2004 – 2008

Governor Kathleen Blanco and the Louisiana legislature expand funding for LA4 to ensure all at-risk children have access to the program.



2005

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit, devastating southern Louisiana. The storms provide access to unprecedented funding for rebuilding, which Early Care and Education (ECE) advocates use to rebuild quality programs.



2007

Louisiana passes legislation that creates the Quality Start Rating System and School Readiness Tax Credits (SRTCs). Quality Start creates quality standards for child care centers (0-3), and SRTCs incentivize quality improvements through tax credits.



2012

The Louisiana legislature passes the Louisiana Early Childhood Act, which places authority and funding for child care (0-3) under the LDE. The bill spurs activity related to ECE, including new development standards and a revamped accountability system.



2017

The Louisiana legislature creates the state's Early Childhood Education Fund, which matches locally raised funding for ECE. The same year, New Orleans makes its first local investment in ECE, which it doubles the following year.



2018

The Louisiana legislature creates the Louisiana Early Childhood Care and Education Commission to develop a vision and plan to address affordable, quality child care.



2020

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupts the world, including child care centers and families who depend on them.



2021

ECE advocates secure a combination of recurring sports betting revenue, one-time surplus funding, and other recurring revenue sources.



2022

New Orleans voters approve a millage that raises \$21 million annually in local funding for ECE.





© 2023