



An early learning scholarship for Tennessee's littlest learners—SB750/HB785

TENNESSEE'S EARLY LITERACY AND LEARNING CRISIS IS ACUTE.

Two-thirds of Tennessee third graders aren't proficient in reading or math.¹ Children not proficient in reading by third grade are four times less likely to graduate high school and 60 percent less likely to attend post-secondary.² Learning gaps start shortly after birth and widen from there along family income lines. Low proficiency in third grade is the sign of a weak early learning foundation.

CHILD CARE IS CRUCIAL ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE THAT'S FAILING OUR FAMILIES AND BUSINESSES.

Working families depend on it to earn a living and businesses depend on it to sustain the workforce. Yet 80 percent of Tennessee parents of young children report work disruption – such as quitting jobs and reducing work hours – due to child care problems. And 58 percent of parents cite lack of affordability as a contributing factor. Inadequate child care results in \$2.6 billion annually in lost earnings and revenues for parents, businesses and taxpayers.³

CHILD CARE IS EARLY EDUCATION AND, DONE RIGHT, CAN ADVANCE EARLY LEARNING AND LITERACY.

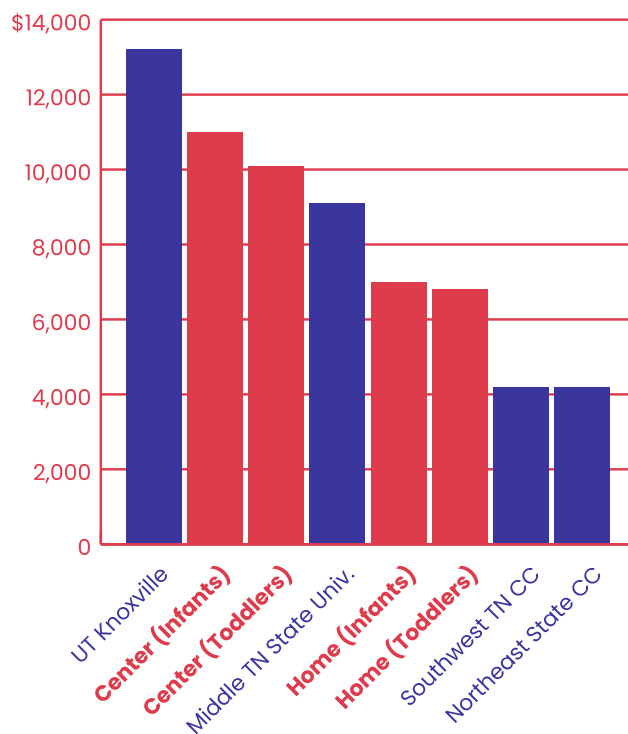
Learning begins at birth, and the quality of care for a child, regardless of the setting, determines whether the child builds a weak or strong foundation for future learning. Crucial brain “wiring” happens in the first years of life, with more than 1 million neural connections formed every second.⁴ Trained early educators don't just “babysit” – instead they use best practices that foster brain development during those crucial first years, ensuring children get a strong start in early learning and literacy.⁵

BUT PARENTS STRUGGLE TO AFFORD CHILD CARE AND EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS.

Unfortunately child care is largely unaffordable for working families – costing more than in-state college tuition.⁶ Many low- and middle-income families find that paying for it means short-changing other household necessities like food, housing, transportation and health care.⁷ High-quality programs are especially out of reach financially.

Quality child care, which enables adults to work while laying a foundation for children's success in school and beyond, is a powerful strategy for growing Tennessee's workforce of today and tomorrow simultaneously.

Annual Cost



Child care costs more on average than in-state college tuition in Tennessee

ENTER PROMISING FUTURES: SB750/HB785

Through the Promising Futures last dollar scholarship program, Tennessee can make quality child care and early learning programs more affordable, and thereby set our youngest children, their working families and our economy on a course for success.

The Promising Futures program takes a cue from the renowned Tennessee Promise post-secondary last dollar scholarship program, but instead invests in early learning where the returns are even greater.⁸

- **Promising Futures “last dollar” scholarship** may be used to pay for tuition at a quality early learning program after a family taps other sources of child care financial aid for which they may be eligible, such as federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and the Child Care and Development Fund.
- **Eligible children** will include those up to kindergarten age with working parents who live in low- and middle-income households up to State Median Income, and/or who live with foster or adoptive parents.
- **Parents may choose** to use the scholarships for any early learning program meeting Promising Futures quality standards, including community-based child care providers, home-based child care, Head Start, and public and private preschools.
- **Sports gambling tax revenue** – 80 percent of which currently goes to the state’s lottery for education account – would be placed into a Promising Futures Account for early learning and literacy.

Through the Tennessee Promise program, our state has made a big and meaningful commitment to post-secondary education. Now is the time to make a similar investment in our youngest Tennesseans and their working parents to ensure Tennessee’s workforce of today and tomorrow are equipped to power our state’s future.

TENNESSEE VOTERS ARE READY TO MAKE THE PROMISE!

An overwhelming 87 percent of Tennessee voters support expanding state financial aid to cover child care costs for more low and middle-income families so that parents can afford to work.⁹

1. Tennessee Department of Education. <https://www.tn.gov/education/news/2022/7/6/tdoe-releases-2021-22-tcap-district-level-results-driving-student-academic-achievement-and-acceleration-.html>
2. Early Warning Confirmed. 2013. Annie E. Casey Foundation. <https://gradelevelreading.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/EarlyWarningConfirmed.pdf>
3. Tennesseans for Quality Early Education, The Economics of Tennessee’s Child Care Crisis. 2022. <https://tqee.org/app/uploads/2022/12/2022-TQEE-Child-Care-Study.pdf>
4. Harvard Center on the Developing Child, “Brain Architecture”. Retrieved December 2022 from <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/>
5. Harvard Center on the Developing Child, “Serve and Return”. Retrieved December 2022 from <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/serve-and-return/>
6. UT study and college website data
7. United Ways of Tennessee, ALICE Report. Retrieved from <https://uwtn.org/106.5/alice>
8. James J. Heckman and Dimitriy V. Masterov, 2007, “The Productivity Argument for Investing in Young Children,” Review of Agricultural Economics, American Agricultural Economics Association, Vol. 29(3) 446-493, 09.
9. Tennesseans for Quality Early Education commissioned Public Opinion Strategies to conduct a statewide voter survey in November 2022. Voters across party lines overwhelmingly support investments in child care financial aid for working Tennessee families.