

## MEMORANDUM

**TO: All Interested Parties**

**FROM: Jay Campbell, Hart Research Associates  
Dave Sackett, The Tarrance Group**

**DATE: September 23, 2010**

**RE: Survey Among Rhode Island Voters On Early Education**

From July 19 through 21, 2010, Hart Research Associates (D) and The Tarrance Group (R) conducted a statewide survey among 609 registered voters in Rhode Island on behalf of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. Respondents were contacted from a statistically sampled list of all registered voters in the state. Each voter in the state who has a telephone had an equal chance to be contacted to take the survey, thus the results are statistically representative of Rhode Island's voters' opinions. The survey carries a margin of error of  $\pm 4.0$  percentage points for the full sample; the margin of error increases when the data are viewed among demographic subgroups of the sample (for example, parents and non-parents, Democrats and Republicans, etc.).

This survey's purpose was to understand voters' attitudes toward early education, particularly the idea of the Rhode Island state government increasing its investment in high-quality pre-kindergarten programs. We find that improving education is a high priority for the electorate, that widespread recognition of the importance of early education and pre-kindergarten exists, and that voters—particularly "swing" voters who are not tied to either party—firmly support a significant increase in the state's pre-kindergarten budget so that it may serve more children.

- **A substantial majority of voters support increasing the state's investment in pre-k.** Sixty-two percent (62%) of voters support the state gradually increasing its funding of high-quality pre-k programs from less than one million to 10 million dollars, including 42% who *strongly* support this. Fully 79% of Democratic voters favor this, as do 58% of swing voters. Even a significant minority of Republican voters (41%) support this, while 55% of Republican voters oppose it. More than three in five parents (67%) and non-parents (61%) alike support this funding increase.
- **Improving education is a high priority for voters.** Given the state of the economy it is unsurprising that growing the economy and creating jobs are of the greatest import to voters—68% cite it as one of their top two priorities. But improving education comes in second place at 40%, well ahead of controlling state spending (34%), keeping taxes down (24%), and increasing access to health care (16%).

## Hart Research Associates / The Tarrance Group

- **Education at every level is important to voters.** Voters nearly universally believe that it is very or fairly important to provide high-quality learning opportunities for children in kindergarten through eighth grade (93%) and high school (92%). But large majorities also say that it is important to provide such opportunities to children ages four and five (79%) and even children birth through age three (61%).
- **Voters recognize the importance of pre-k education specifically.** Indeed, the sentiment that early education is important increases when respondents hear a detailed description of a high-quality pre-education program. After hearing the description, three in four voters (74%) say that it is very or fairly important for four-year-olds to spend time in such a program. It is interesting to note that this belief is nearly equally strong among parents (77%) and non-parents (74%).
- **Voters say the state is not doing enough to provide high-quality pre-k programs.** Fifty-six percent (56%) say the state is doing too little in this regard, 21% say it is doing the right amount, and just 9% say it is doing more than necessary. Again, parents and non-parents agree that the state is doing too little in this area (62% and 55%, respectively).
- **There is potential political benefit for leaders to support expanding pre-k programs.** Thirty-eight percent (38%) of voters say that they would be more likely to support a gubernatorial or state legislative candidate who favored expanding pre-k programs to make them available to more children, while just 17% say they would be less likely to support such a candidate. Thirty-nine percent (39%) say it makes no difference either way to their vote. Swing voters—who at 42% make up the largest share of Rhode Island’s electorate—say that they would be more likely to vote for a pro-pre-k candidate by 33% to 18%.