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Pre-K Messaging that Works

Sending the right message
to the right audience

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Language Matters

“pre-kindergarten”

- Articulates a direct connection to K-12
- Evokes academic learning
- Specific

vs.

“preschool”

- Implies a program that happens before a child begins school
- Can connote programs servicing children ages 0-5
- Vague

“pre-k for all”

- Communicates fairness & equality
- Easy to emphasize voluntary

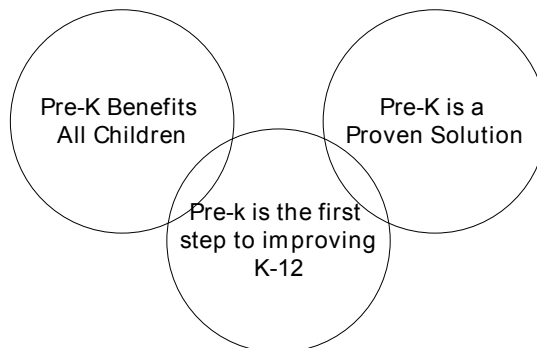
vs.

“universal pre-k”

- Implies mandatory programs
- “big government” language

Making the case: Why is pre-k a priority?

Channeling all of your messaging through one or more key points will keep your efforts focused.



Know your stakeholders

Messaging to the general public

- Use soft language and incorporate personal stories.
- Highlight the social benefits for the community.
- Emphasize social skills children learn, such as following directions, taking turns, and relating well to peers and teachers.

vs.

Messaging to lawmakers and business leaders

- Focus on the economic benefits of pre-k, both for the individual and for the community.
- Communicate about pre-k in the context of K-12 school reform.
- Stress pre-k as the foundation for a highly skilled workforce.

Target Audiences

- Parents, esp. with children age 0-5
- Republican Women
- Independent Men
- Evangelicals



Messaging to Parents

- We have underestimated children for too long. The most important brain development occurs by age five.
- High-quality pre-k helps children develop important social skills such as following directions, taking turns, and relating well to peers and teachers
- Children who learn how to learn early enter school better prepared.



Messaging to Republican Women & Independent Men

- High-quality pre-kindergarten gives children a competitive edge.
- We have underestimated young children for too long. The most important brain development occurs by age five.
- Pre-k for all gives parents a *chance* – and a *choice* - to have their children participate in high-quality learning experiences that can greatly increase school readiness.
- Pre-k gives children the basic social, emotional, and academic tools they need to be better students, which improves our schools and communities.

Messaging to Evangelicals



- High-quality pre-kindergarten gives children a competitive edge.
- Pre-k is an investment in our children's future.
- Pre-k is an essential part of U.S. economic development, keeping our labor force competitive around the world.

Messaging to Republican Legislators

- Communities with high-quality pre-k experience higher high school graduation rates.
- Children who attend high-quality pre-k have stronger early reading and math skills than children who do not attend.
- High-quality pre-k is critical to helping states meet the standards and mandates of No Child Left Behind.
- Decades of solid academic research from across the country have proven that children who attend high-quality pre-k have stronger reading and math skills.
- Pre-k is the perfect time to begin engaging English language learners.
- Political leaders from both parties advance pre-k as a proven school reform solution.

Messaging Pitfalls



- Emphasizing the benefits of crime reduction in low crime areas.
- Using tax increases to fund new pre-k initiatives.
- Overemphasizing the economic advantages of pre-k without putting a human face on the issue.
- Using negative persuasion: the public prefers to focus on the benefits of implementing such programs rather than on the risks of doing without them.
- Minimizing parental autonomy by underemphasizing the voluntary aspect of pre-k-for-all.

Tying Pre-k to School Reform

- Kindergarten teachers report that children who attend high-quality pre-k come to school prepared.
- Children who have attended high-quality pre-k are better readers in elementary school than their peers who have not attended pre-k.
- Children who attend high-quality pre-k are more likely to graduate from high school, go to college, and become productive members of the workforce.
- Teachers spend more time teaching and less time disciplining when children have high-quality pre-k.
- High-quality pre-k is critical to helping states meet the standards and mandates of No Child Left Behind.

Making the case: How can we provide pre-k?

Give examples of how pre-k works in other states:

- States that prioritize school readiness find the money.
Examples: GA uses lottery revenue, AR uses a beer tax plus general revenue, OK made pre-k part of the school funding formula.
- States that value high quality invest in qualified teachers.
Example: In OK, pre-k teachers earn the same salaries as that of K-12 teachers.
- Most states offer pre-k in a variety of settings – schools, for profit and nonprofit childcare, and faith based centers.
Example: Nationally, about 30% of children attending pre-k are in non-school settings.

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