



## **Talking About Early Childhood Development + Budgets and Taxes, Featuring SWAMPED!:**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

*This document is not intended to provide “the right answers” to questions you might be asked, but rather to offer illustrations of how to more effectively communicate about the linked topic of early childhood development and budgets and taxes. In the following question and answer sequence, we demonstrate how an advocate might think about turning unproductive frames embedded in questions into opportunities to advance a more effective message when combining these two issue areas. Creative communicators will find their own ways of putting these illustrative principles into practice.*

**Q 1: Many states began their new fiscal years with proposals to raise taxes and make additional budget cuts, which many people feel will make it even more difficult to prepare children for success. What can state legislators do to ensure that children are given the best educational opportunities to succeed in these hard fiscal times?**

*Less Effective Response:*

We all agree that the current state of America’s economy, with its lingering recession, is worse than any time since the Great Depression. In response, many states have decided to dramatically shrink their budgets, just as their taxpayers have been forced to do. For those in the early childhood development field, these cuts signal the impending magnitude of the recession’s impact on children’s programs where children pay the price for the federal government’s failure to soften the damage of state budget woes. But the truth of the matter is, states need public support to raise taxes in order to combat these budget cuts. Also, parents can be looked to for this support. By increasing state taxes to support early childhood development programs,

states can promote economic development and employment growth for communities.

**Analysis:**

- Triggers unproductive, “little picture” thinking that links household budgets to public budgets.
- Reminds the public of negative notions of government (e.g., vast bureaucracy, waste, and inefficiency) without discussing the greater social good of what public budgets and taxes do for all.
- Fails to explain how early childhood development contributes to economic development.

*More Effective Response:*

In order to keep America prosperous both now and in the future, we must think of the relationship between early child development and our economic development. Child development is a foundation for community development and economic development, as capable children become the foundation of a prosperous and sustainable, working society. State and federal budgets are instruments we can use to plan for a better future for all of us. They help us better understand our shared role in supporting innovative early child development. Because we pay forward with our taxes, we are able to use tax resources previously paid to support, develop, and replicate high-quality programs for young children as they grow into adulthood. When we postpone dealing with problems, they often get bigger and cost more to fix later on. Therefore, we need to take steps today to prevent the problems that we know will affect the long-term prosperity of our state and country—such as an impaired workforce and long-term health problems.

**Analysis:**

- Uses values Prosperity and Prevention to point to the important connection between early childhood development and public budgets and tax systems.
- Uses the metaphors Pay Now or Pay Later and Forward Exchange to explain why supporting early childhood development programming today can prevent problems before they occur.
- Makes the case for linking funding early childhood development to tax resources as a solution that benefits all.

**Q 2: Why should we have to pay for babysitting programs for other families through our taxes? Shouldn't the money be spent on other, more useful educational programs for older children or even adults, like workforce development training?**

*Less Effective Response:*

The issue of early child development programming is not about babysitting for working families. Such programming is about providing our youngest children access to quality education and social supports in their earliest years. All children, including those from years 0 to 5, need great learning and social environments with trained early childhood development teachers and educational resources in order to help them build the early skills they need to succeed in life. Financing early childhood development programs takes the money all taxpayers pay in to ensure very young children also receive these resources. If we cut taxes that support these programs, then we deny our youngest children a hope for a brighter future.

*Analysis:*

- Restates the problem and reinforces the argument that doesn't prove the claim.
- Clouds the notion of a collective good and invokes zero-sum thinking that pits those who pay more taxes against others they feel pay less but get more.
- Triggers "vending machine" mentality: you get out of government what you pay for.
- Doesn't help people understand how budgets and taxes are infrastructures that support entire communities both in the long- and short-term.

*More Effective Response:*

Supporting early childhood development is and should continue to be our top priority. It is one of the most important ways we ensure that our youngest children, from years 0 to 5, also develop the social and cognitive skills they need to become productive adults in our communities. Brain science has shown development during the early years of life (0 to 5 years) matters because early social and cognitive experiences affect the architecture of the maturing brain. The quality of brain architecture establishes either a sturdy or a fragile

foundation for all of the development and behavior that follows—and getting things right the first time is easier than trying to fix them later when the child is older or an adult. To do so, we need to ensure that adequate funding for early childhood development programming and resources is available today to help prevent problems from developing down the road. Indeed the current fiscal climate poses many challenges, however our budgets and tax systems help us overcome today’s problems by preventing long-term issues as we plan for our future. Public goods are not only paid for by taxes from people who need it now or in the near future. They are paid for in the past with taxes that were budgeted then to meet the community’s needs now. So, having a good public budget that accounts for improving early childhood development today is one that plans for the future. And we can say that good taxes are the ones that allow every community to pay for the public goods and services it will need in order to prosper.

**Analysis:**

- Takes a positive approach toward using tax resources and helps people see taxes as a shared responsibility, not something we should use to pay for initiatives of our choice.
- Highlights the simplifying model of Brain Architecture to illustrate how early childhood development programs can enhance development for young children as they grow into adulthood.
- Uses the simplifying model of Forward Exchange to build support for funding early childhood development programming and resources by considering how taxes, public goods and services are not immediate exchanges, but are distributed in time.

**Q 3: There is a lot of talk about getting “low-income children” into ECD programs, many of whom live in violent, drug-infested, and/or impoverished neighborhoods. Yet, why should taxpayers have to pay for early child development programs when it is the parents’ responsibility to help their own children stay safe?**

*Less Effective Response:*

The real issue here is that, of the approximate 10 million children in the United States, 42 percent of all children 5 years and under live in low-income families and are especially vulnerable for poor school outcomes and poor health. “Low

income” is defined as family income below twice the official federal poverty level or \$34,340 for a family of three. By supporting public policies that promote early childhood development, we can help parents help their children—no matter where they live or what their economic background. We can use tax monies to help us invest in early childhood development programming and initiatives to reduce young children’s vulnerability and minimize poor school outcomes. All children deserve a chance. Investing in their future today can bring huge returns tomorrow.

**Analysis:**

- Promotes a competitive and divisive “us vs. them” view of who is deserving of such public supports.
- Blames low-income children’s poor outcomes on parents only, thus making the issue an individual problem.
- Doesn’t explain why early child development should matter to all citizens.
- Makes early childhood development programming and initiatives a consumer good: to be bought and invested in.
- Doesn’t address concerns about how taxes and budgets can be used as strategies for promoting early childhood development policies and programming.

***More Effective Response:***

Preparing for America’s future requires us to ensure that we prepare all of our young children to be productive, contributing members of our communities—no matter where they live or how much their parents earn. Our task is to support positive social and cognitive developmental capabilities for all of our children today so that they will grow up with better educational, physical, and mental health outcomes as adults. Providing positive support mechanisms, which reduce toxic stress and increase positive social-emotional and environmental experiences early in life, we prevent problems that are costly to both society and individuals. It is more costly to fix problems with expensive crime rehabilitation and drug cessation programs later down the road. Our budgets and tax systems can be used to allocate funding and opportunities across communities in ways that place greater resources where they are needed most, whether they are rural or urban, or impoverished or not. Supporting early childhood development policies, which impact all citizens, gives our country its best chance that young children will grow up healthy and be able to positively contribute to our country’s future.

**Analysis:**

- Reinforces the notion of “Fairness between Places” to emphasize equitable resource distribution and de-emphasize competition and “us vs. them” thinking.
- Uses the value of Prosperity to remind people of the common good for everyone when making early childhood development a priority.
- Uses Can’t Do One Without the Other to show how cognitive, emotional and social capabilities are inextricably intertwined and that learning, behavior, and mental health outcomes are interrelated over a life course.
- Uses the simplifying models of Toxic Stress and Pay Now or Pay Later to explain how damages to a child’s brain architecture early in life have huge social and economic implications for our society, and redirects thinking toward realistic early childhood development policy supports.
- Points to ways our budget and tax systems can be used as a funding resource to support the early child development system.

**Q 4: Funding for ongoing professional development for early childhood teachers and childcare providers is a topic of much debate. Some people argue for increasing funding for teacher and provider trainings and education in order to improve child outcomes. Others argue the current fiscal environment prevents us from doing that. How can we support effective teacher and provider trainings that bring positive outcomes for children, their families, and the community without additional funding?**

*Less Effective Response:*

Early childhood teachers and providers care about the young children they work with. But they also benefit from rigorous preparation and continuous professional development training that helps them do their job well. Early childhood teaching is a profession; it is also built on the hard work, reflection, care, patience, persistence, and intellect of good providers. Good providers understand that teaching is not merely pouring content into children. It is about facilitating learning: motivating children to learn and giving them the support necessary to develop skills and knowledge. We rely on early childhood teachers to provide our young children with the important building blocks that

will truly prepare them for the future. So, why not support them and give them the resources they need to help these young children?

**Analysis:**

- Reinforces the cultural model of “caring teachers” and “intrinsic motivation” as the most important factor in early childcare provider quality and ability.
- Ineffectively argues against the belief that early childhood teaching is not a profession.
- Places responsibility solely on early childhood teachers and providers for improved child outcomes by focusing on child assessments as indicators for success and not what will accrue to society.
- Fails to address the important role budgets and taxes play in planning for and supporting effective, ongoing professional development training and resources for early childhood development teachers/providers.

*More Effective Response:*

Society needs to invent and replicate more effective early childhood development policies and provider programs that benefit young children in the long run. Child development is a foundation for community development and economic development, as capable children become the foundation of a prosperous and sustainable, working society. Innovative states have been able to make public investments in professional training, and improved recruitment, compensation, and retention of a high-quality early child workforce. These states realize the importance of what brain science tells us: the interactive influences of genes and experience literally shape the architecture of a child’s developing brain. In this interaction, the active ingredient is the “serve and return” nature of children’s engagement in relationships with their parents, other caregivers in their family, and the community of early childhood teachers and providers. To make sure early childhood providers have the ongoing resources they need to support children’s social and cognitive development, our public budget and tax systems need to adequately fund their profession. Without it, we simply won’t be able to realize the goal of improving developmental outcomes for all of our children. Budgets and taxes allow us to plan for and peer into the future. Because we pay taxes forward, we use their resources to provide the supports, including professional development, we will need to build the workforce of the future. It is only through the use of these

resources that we get early childhood teachers and providers to be the brain builders we need them to be.

*Analysis:*

- Includes the value of Innovation.
- Uses the simplifying model Serve and Return to point to the importance of children's engagement with providers in their development.
- Moves the focus away from public sentiment that early childhood teachers and providers are "caring," and instead, points to the ongoing resources that are needed to help support the quality of teaching and teaching effectiveness for early childhood educators.
- Uses the simplifying model of Forward Exchange to help people see how taxes distribute educational resources in time.