



PLATFORM FOR MAINE'S CHILDREN

WHEN WE ENSURE THAT ALL CHILDREN have equal opportunity for healthy growth and development, we are making long-term investments in the future prosperity of our state. Fortunately, an explosion of research in developmental science in recent years provides us with a blueprint for designing programs and policies that can ensure strong foundations for our children's futures.

Our Children's Platform offers a vision for how we might close the gap between what we know children need for health and well-being and what we do to ensure it. It is intended to inform citizens and policymakers about the best ways to secure positive outcomes for children across all domains of child well-being. Because children can't vote, they must rely on adults in their communities to advocate on their behalf, and we're hoping you will be a voice for Maine kids.

Please join the Maine Children's Alliance in supporting our platform and working to advance the four priorities for children's health and well-being:

- * Access to high quality early care and education
- * Promoting children's health
- * Preparing our students for the future
- * Supporting family economic security



I.

Access to High Quality Early Care and Education

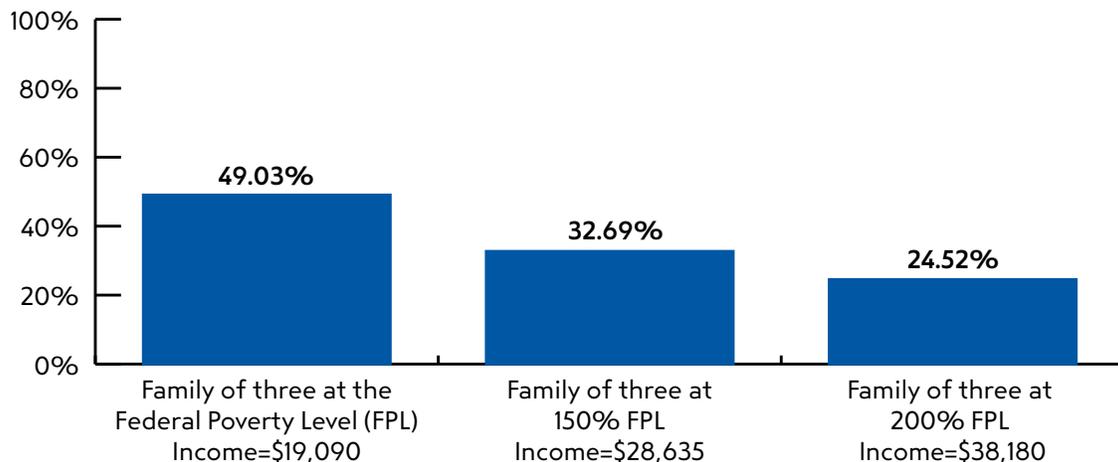
Science tells us that stable, consistent experiences and relationships early in life shape the architecture of the developing brain. Since all future development is based on the strength of early foundations, we must ensure that all Maine children aged birth to five have the opportunities for those positive experiences and relationships that are the building blocks for their future success. Science also tells us that severe or repeated exposure to traumatic events — such as violence, abuse or neglect — can cause toxic stress responses in those children who lack supportive adults in their lives, with lifelong effects on health, learning and behavior. But timely and appropriate interventions can buffer these effects and change the course of children’s development. Since both developmental science and the need for child care have expanded dramatically in recent years — 69% of Maine children under six have all parents in the workforce — we must strengthen our system of early childhood care and education so that it responds to the science of what children need, and accommodates families’ needs for flexibility and support as they raise young children.

Advocating for High Quality Early Care and Education

Maine’s early childhood services— home visiting programs, child care, Head Start and Early Head Start, and public pre-K — are there to ensure that all of Maine’s youngest children and their families have equal access to the opportunities that promote healthy development. We will continue to work to support and sustain high quality programs in every county in Maine.

PERCENT OF INCOME NEEDED TO PAY FOR CENTER-BASED CARE FOR AN INFANT

BY POVERTY LEVELS, 2012



Data Source: Child Care Aware of America

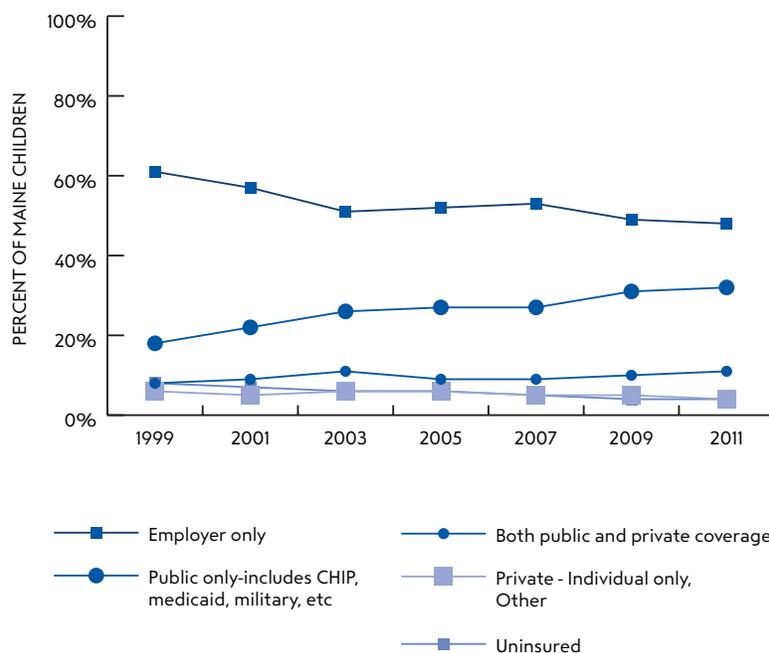
II. Promoting Children's Health

We know that the foundations of lifelong health are established in the early years. If we wish to improve health outcomes and reduce chronic disease in Maine, we need to strengthen the foundations of health in the prenatal and early childhood periods. That means maximizing access to affordable physical and mental health coverage for children and their parents, as well as regular and responsive health care. Sound health in the early years also requires appropriate food and nutrition, and safe and healthy physical environments, free from toxins and risk of harm to children where they live, learn and play.

Advocating for Children's Health

Nearly half of all Maine children receive health coverage through MaineCare (Medicaid and CHIP – the Child Health Insurance Program), which is jointly financed by federal and state governments. Because eligibility for MaineCare is tied to family income, and many Maine families experience a great deal of income fluctuation which results in gaps in health coverage for children and parents, we will work with federal and state lawmakers to ensure families can secure affordable and consistent health coverage regardless of income.

MAINE CHILDREN WHO HAVE HEALTH INSURANCE
BY HEALTH INSURANCE TYPE, AGES 0-17, 1999-2011



Data Source: KIDS COUNT Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org

III.

Preparing Our Students for the Future

When we think about the future of our state, we need to consider what we can do to prepare our young people for both the civic and educational demands of a 21st century economy. It used to be that students need only master the basics — reading, writing and arithmetic — but students now need mastery beyond these basic skills. They need a set of competencies that will enable them to adapt to a vastly changed economic and social landscape: analytical and problem-solving skills, communications skills, interpersonal and collaborative skills, financial and technological literacy. We need to ensure that our education system is similarly updated to accommodate this much-higher learning bar.

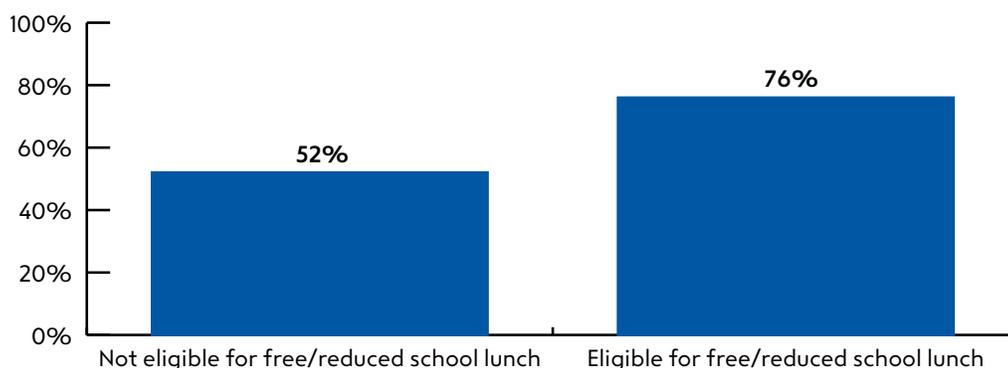
Advocating for Student Success

As we go about the work of reforming education, it is important that we recognize that programs and services are not equally distributed across all communities in our state, with implications for student success. We need to remodel our existing structure in ways that will ensure every community has access to quality schools and colleges. Effective education reforms would allocate state funding fairly among communities - whether they are rural, suburban, or urban – and would require more creative collaboration within and across communities.

In 2013, 76 percent of Maine students eligible for free and reduced lunch scored below proficient in 4th grade reading; 52 percent of Maine students not eligible for free and reduced lunch scored below proficient. While a majority of all students scored below proficient levels, an achievement gap of 24% existed between low-income students and students who were not low income.

FOURTH GRADERS WHO SCORED BELOW PROFICIENT IN READING

BY FREE/REDUCED LUNCH ELIGIBILITY, 2013

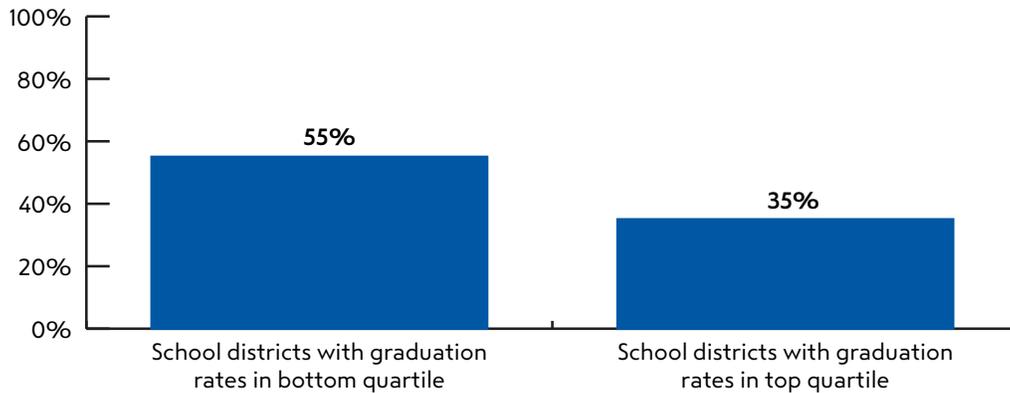


Data Source: KIDS COUNT Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org

The achievement gap can also be seen in the four-year graduation rate (2013) for Maine's high schools. The average free and reduced lunch rate of school districts with high school graduation rates in the bottom quartile (graduating less than 82.5% of students in four years) was 55 percent. The average free and reduced lunch rate of school districts with high school graduation rates in the top quartile (graduating more than 91% of students in four years) was 35 percent.

AVERAGE FREE AND REDUCED LUNCH RATES OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS

BY HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES, 2013



Data Source: Maine Department of Education Data Warehouse

School children are eligible for free school lunches if their family income does not exceed 130% of the federal poverty level (FPL). They are eligible for reduced price lunches if their family income falls between 130% and 185% FPL.



IV.

Supporting Family Economic Security

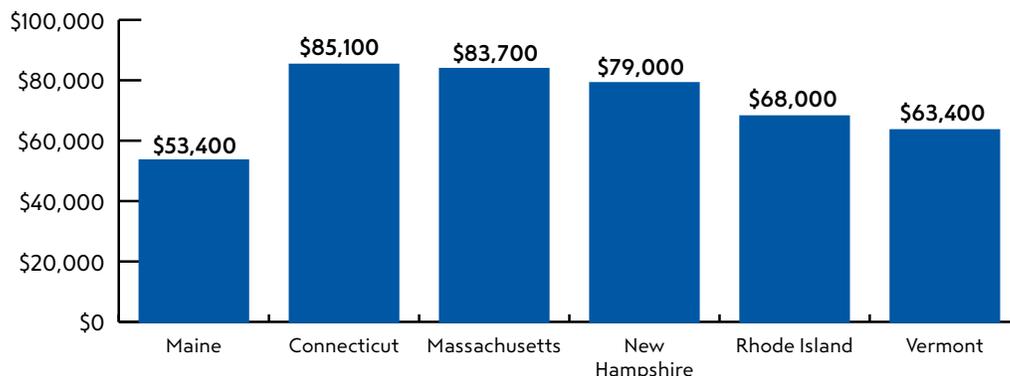
An economy that allows any part of our workforce to fall behind the rest is contrary to our belief that we are “one nation, indivisible.” We are stronger when we have an economy that allows everyone to move in the same direction. Drastically changed parental work patterns in recent years — including longer work hours, nonstandard work hours, and reductions in benefits — have transformed family life and the potential for economic security. Because children’s health and well-being are compromised when families face challenges in providing for their needs, good economic policy is good child policy. With responsible planning today we can create an economy that reflects our values and ensures good paying jobs for Maine workers, and healthy futures for our children.

Advocating for Family Economic Security

Growing numbers of young children live in homes with working parents whose earnings are insufficient to meet their family’s basic needs. Between 2008 and 2012, the number of Maine children under age six living in low-income working families increased from 19,000 (22%) to 22,000 (27%). The challenges that families face underscore the need for a measured and comprehensive evaluation of our state’s economic and income support policies.

In 2012, Maine’s median income of households with children was significantly less than the five other New England states.

MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME AMONG HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN
2012



Data Source: KIDS COUNT Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org

Conclusion

Mainers have always relied on our ingenuity and “can do” spirit to design programs and policies that make a real difference in communities throughout the state. And because we take seriously our role as stewards of the next generation, we have to make smart and sustainable commitments to fostering the health and well-being of our youngest citizens. We know that children’s brains are literally being built in the early years, and it is stable, consistent relationships with caring adults at home and in their communities that are the building materials. That’s why efficient, wise and timely investments in early childhood health and education can pay dividends later in improved health and learning outcomes. But when children and their families who face significant adversity are not provided the support they need, we are undermining not only their futures, but the future of our state, as well.

The demands of living in today’s economy also require us to think in innovative ways about how best to maintain and support Maine’s quality of life. Economic pressures on families have changed, with all adults in the household needing to work to make ends meet. We simply must provide working families with the resources they need — access to health care, quality education, jobs that pay — that help them support their and their children’s well-being. We also need to ensure that our education system — from early childhood, to K-12 and beyond — is preparing students to succeed in a rapidly changing world. We will improve Maine’s prospects for the future if we make sure that our education system is preparing students for life and work in the 21st century.

Mainers have a long tradition of working together to solve tough problems. And we know that even in difficult economic times we must make decisions that will benefit us in the long term. Preparing Maine for a prosperous future begins with recognizing that our youngest citizens must get what they need today to become the adults who will strengthen our communities and build our economy.



THE FOLLOWING RESEARCH AND ORGANIZATIONS HAVE INFORMED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLATFORM:

Alliance for Early Success

Bostrom, M. Responsibility and opportunity. Economy that Works Project of the Ford Foundation, 2002.

Boushey, H., Fremstad, S., Gragg, R., and Waller, M. Understanding low-wage work in the United States, 2007.

Center on the Developing Child

FrameWorks Institute

Topos Partnership

Unless otherwise noted, all data referenced in this Platform is from the KIDS COUNT Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org.



THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING FOR THEIR ASSISTANCE:

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