

Investing in Children

Partnership for America's Economic Success

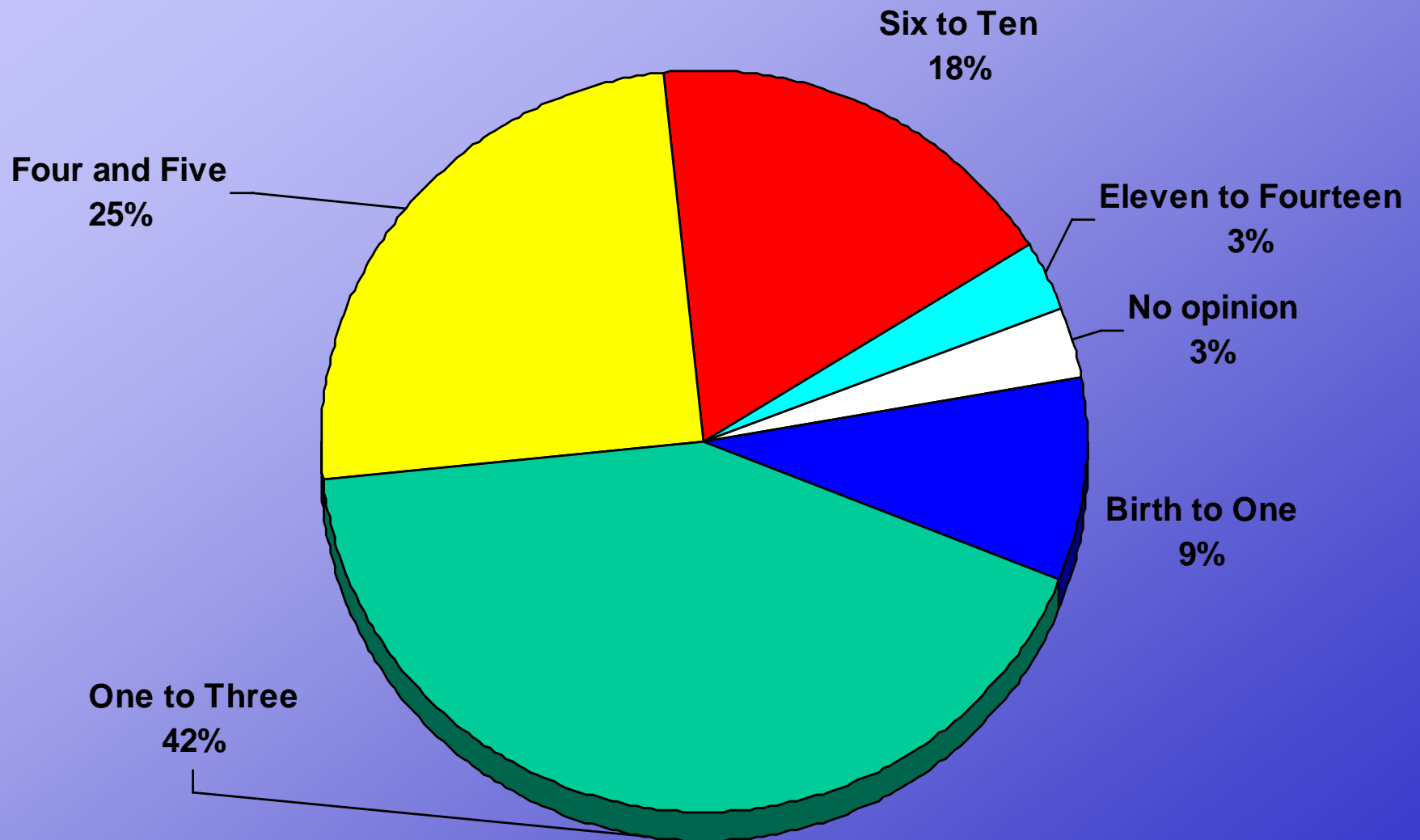
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January 28, 2008

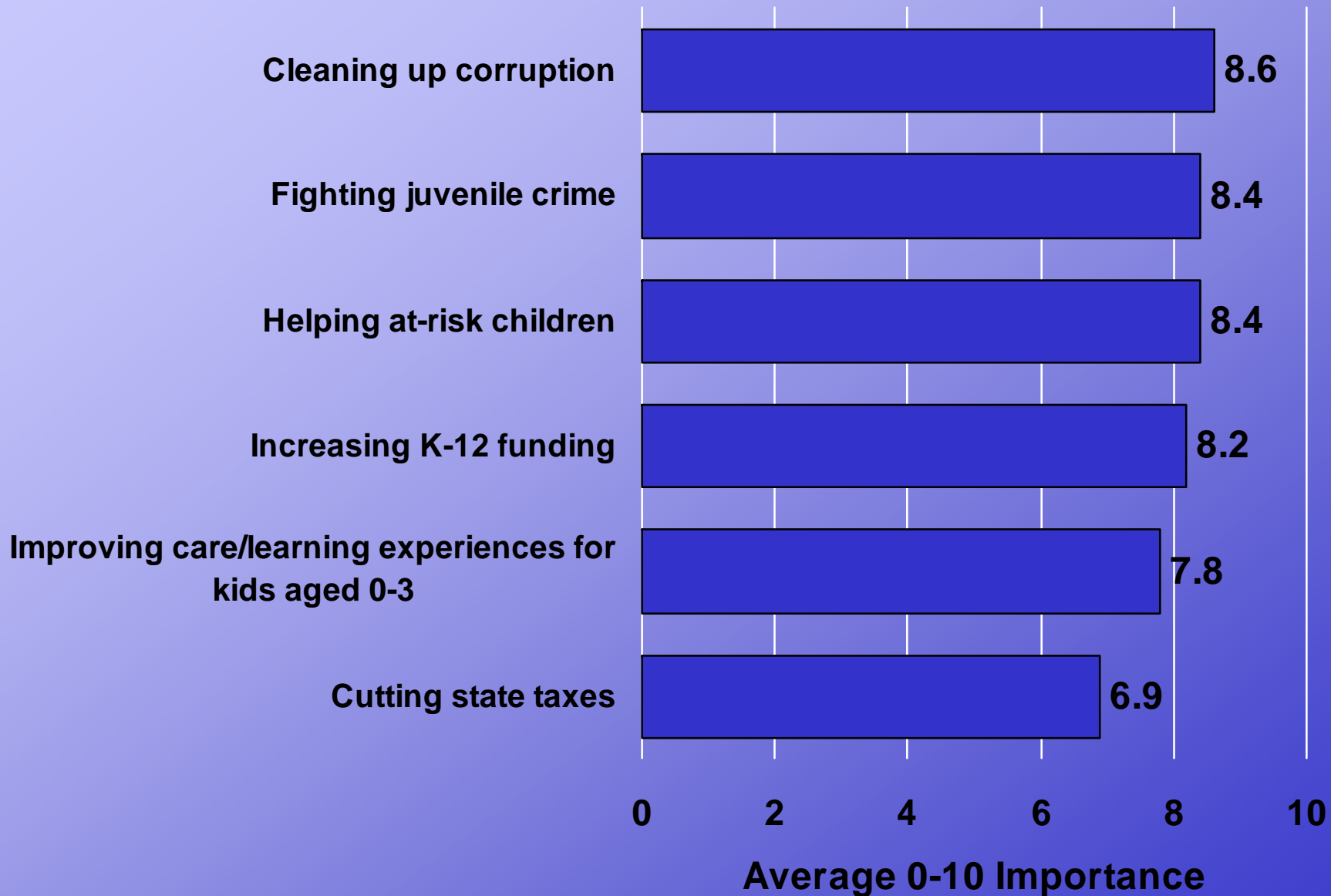
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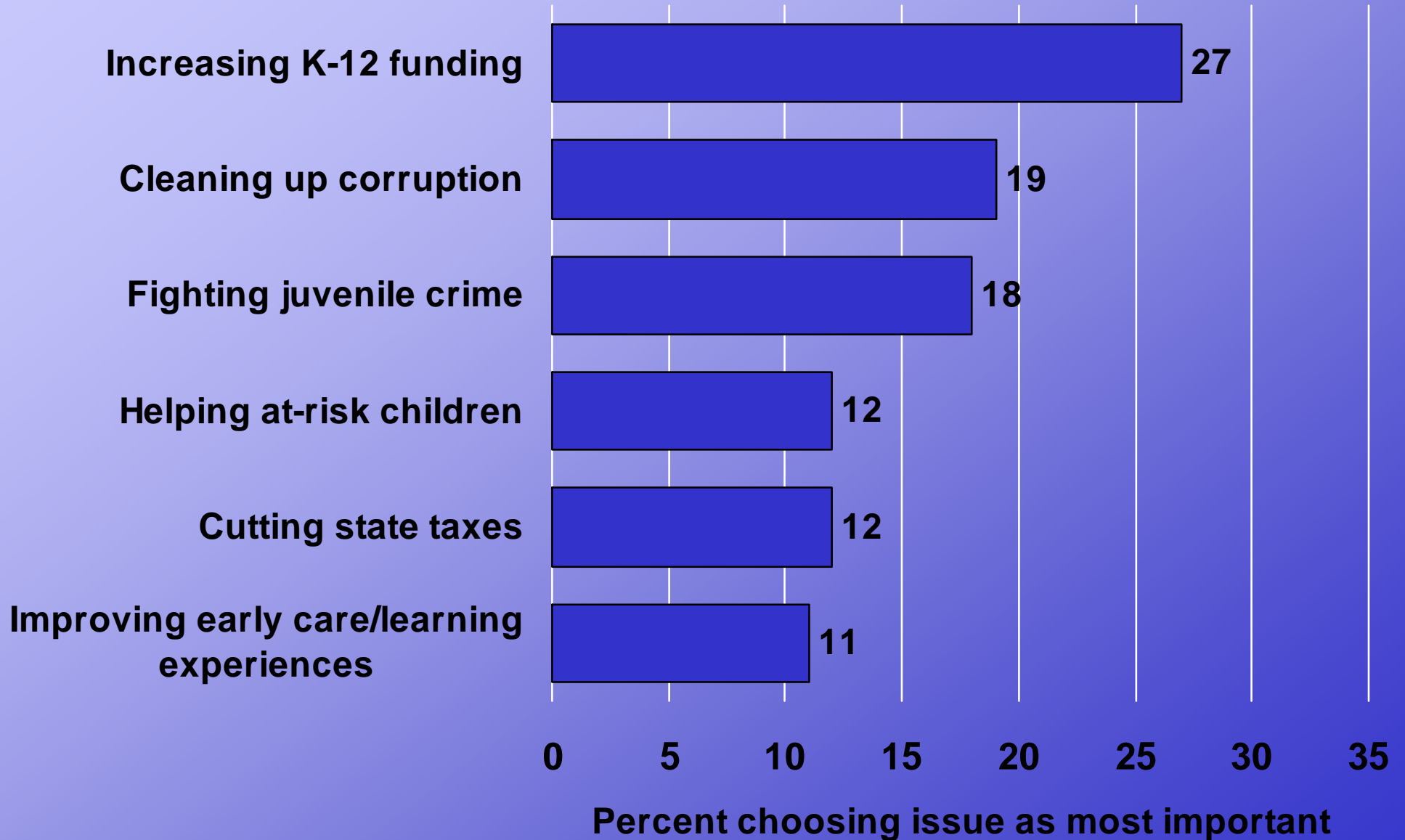
A majority believes the first three years are most important for developing a child's capacity to learn



Early learning is not a high-salience issue for most voters. It needs to be connected to K-12.



Which ONE issue is MOST important?



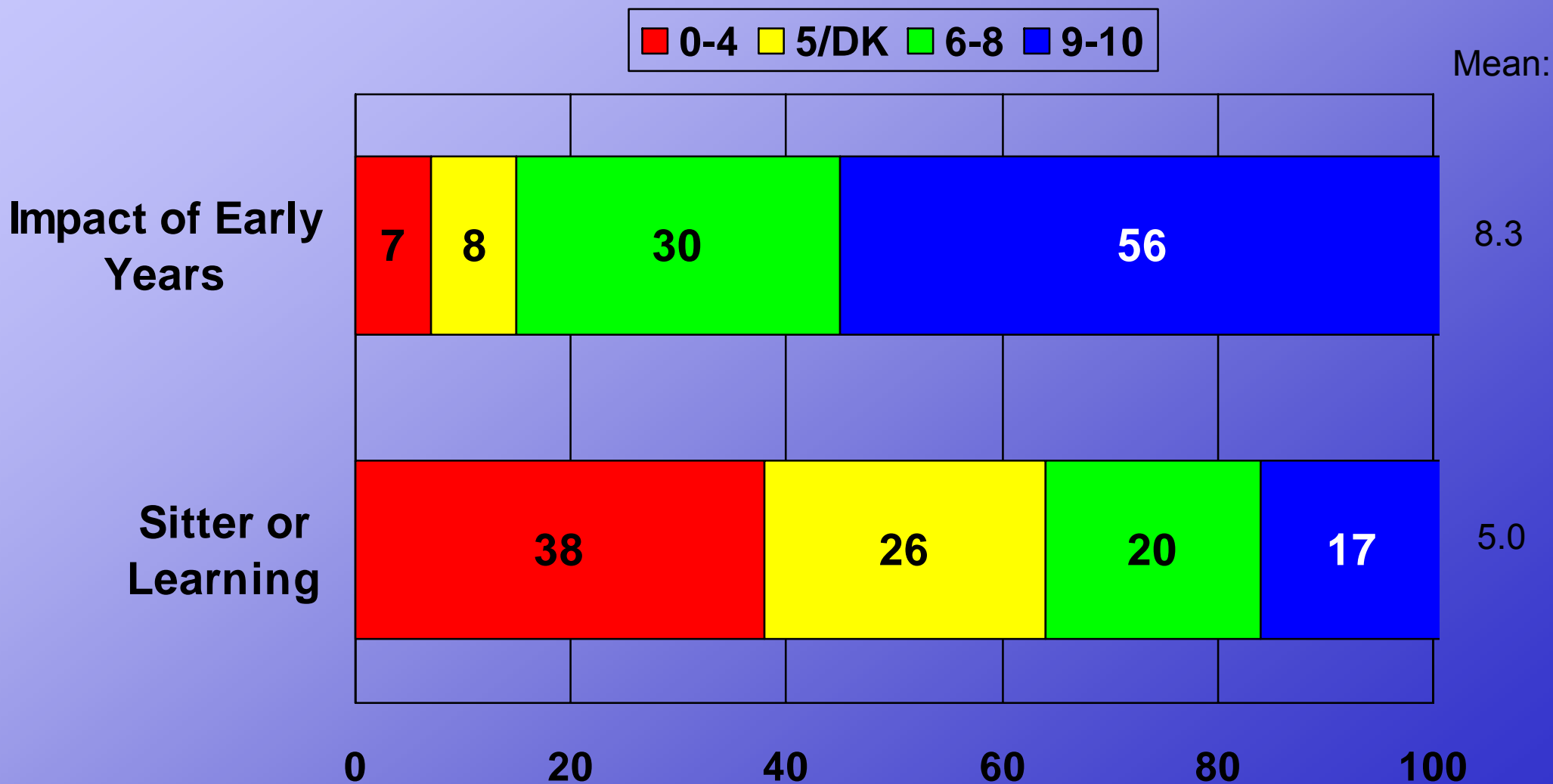
Perceived Importance of Early Learning Investments

- Age and gender, not surprisingly, have an important impact on perceptions of early childhood issues.
 - **Young women** attribute the most importance to the early years, and are most supportive of action to improve children's experiences.
 - **Older men** are the mirror image of young women.
 - Young men and older women are closer to young women than to older men.

Voters do connect early learning with school success, and think more should be done

How much of an impact do you think a child's early learning experiences, in the first three years of life, have on the child's later ability to do well in school?

Thinking about child care facilities which take care of very young children, aged zero to three: do you think the typical facility acts more like a simple baby-sitter OR more like a provider of good, quality early-learning experiences? Use a zero to ten scale, where TEN means a provider of quality early-learning experiences and ZERO means a simple baby-sitter.

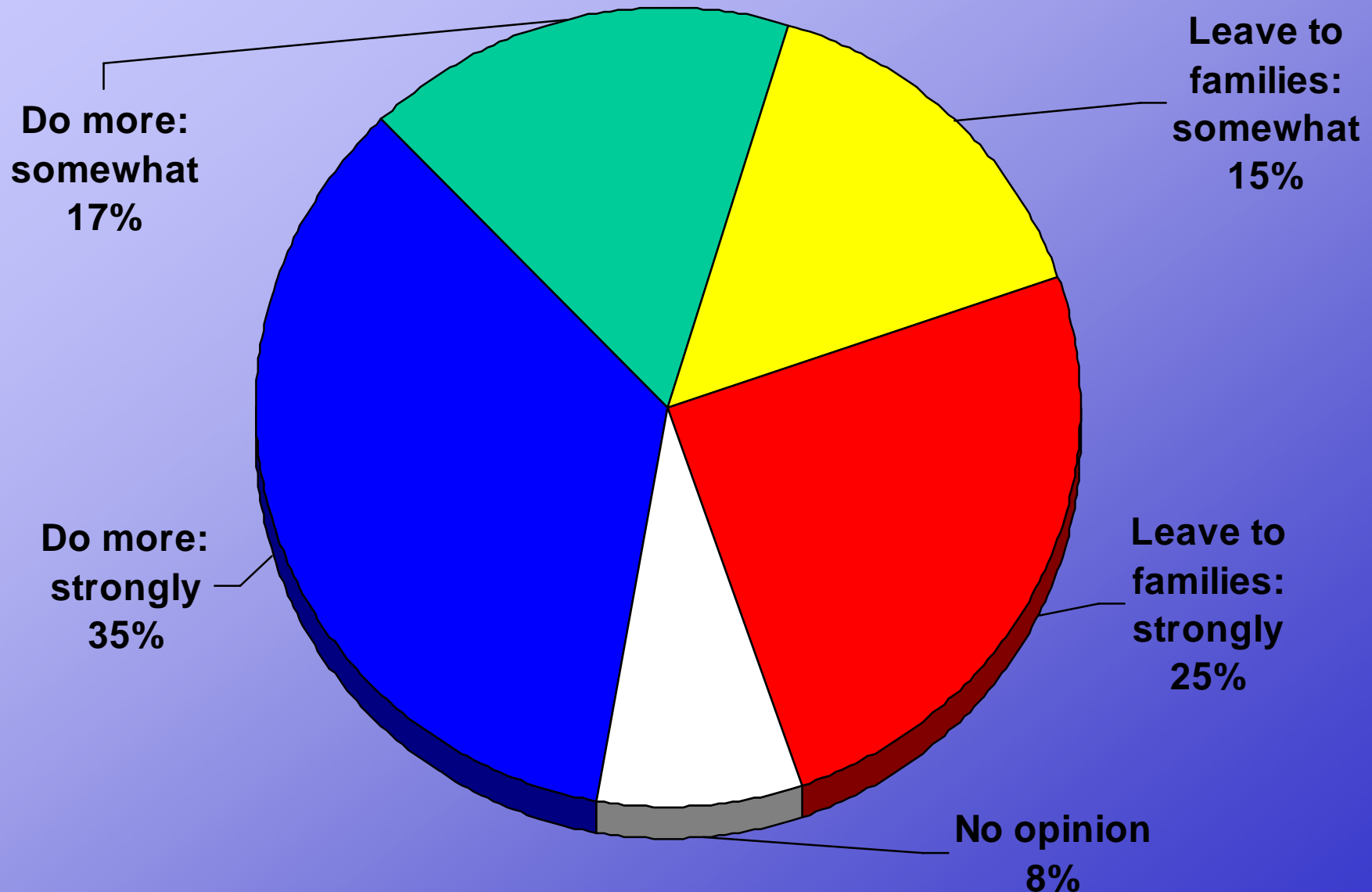


Role of Government

- Voters believe government can and should be doing more to improve the learning and care experiences of children, **especially for those with a chaotic home life.**
- There is **little consensus** on how government should/can make good child care more available and affordable.
- Government should make sure that **those who truly need it** can get it, but should not try to take the place of parents. (Subsidiarity)

Most see some role for state involvement, but the public is divided

Which ONE of the following TWO statements do you most agree with (ROTATE:) State government should do more to improve the learning experiences of very young children, aged zero to three; OR The learning experiences of very young children are none of the state's business and should be left entirely to families.



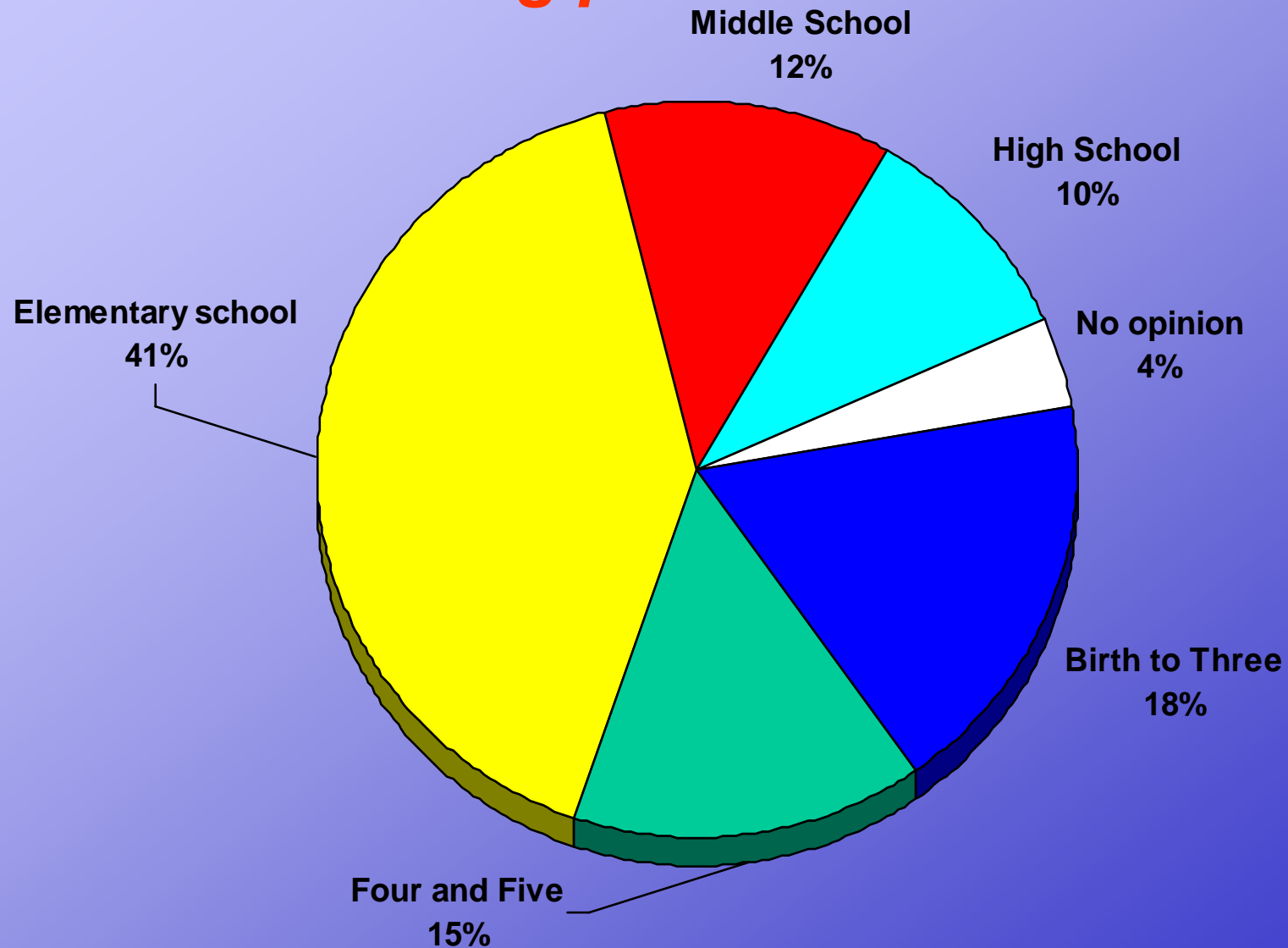
Government Action

- Support is strongest for providing new parents with education and helping high school kids *not* become parents.

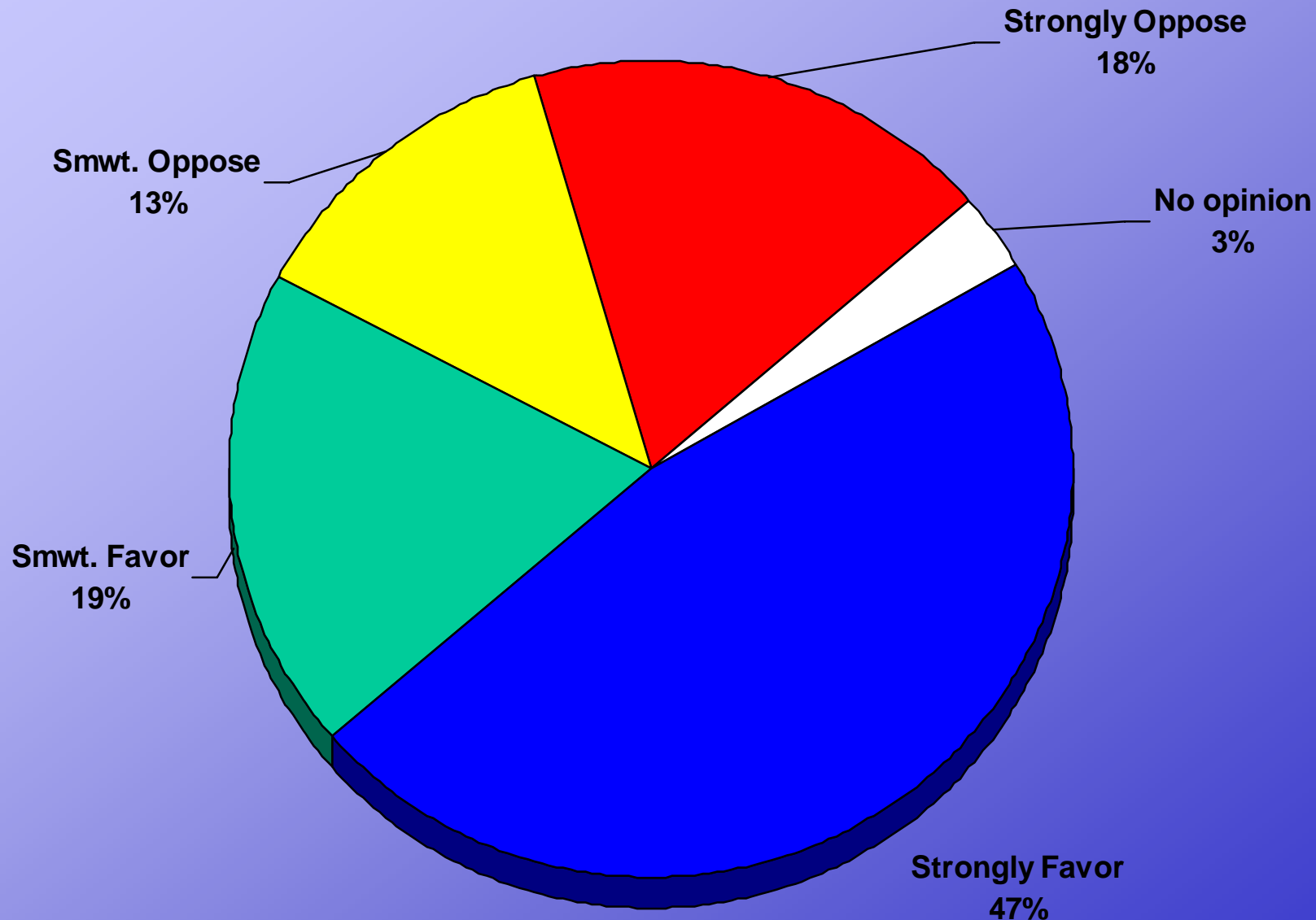


- Substantial support for improving child care facilities: raising standards of workers, making child care more educational and increasing salaries.

If we want to improve the learning experiences of children, which time period is MOST important for investing public funds? Is it...



In order to help all children be prepared to learn when they enter school, some people have proposed making quality early learning programs more available to children before they enter kindergarten. Would you favor or oppose using public money to fund high-quality, voluntary preschool programs for 3 and 4 year olds?



Preferences for Early Education

- More important for **older kids**.
- **Social skill development** should be a key aim.
- **Half or part day** programs, and not every day.
- Divided over **teacher credentials**.
- One-third say they would pay **more in taxes**.

Majorities strongly agree:

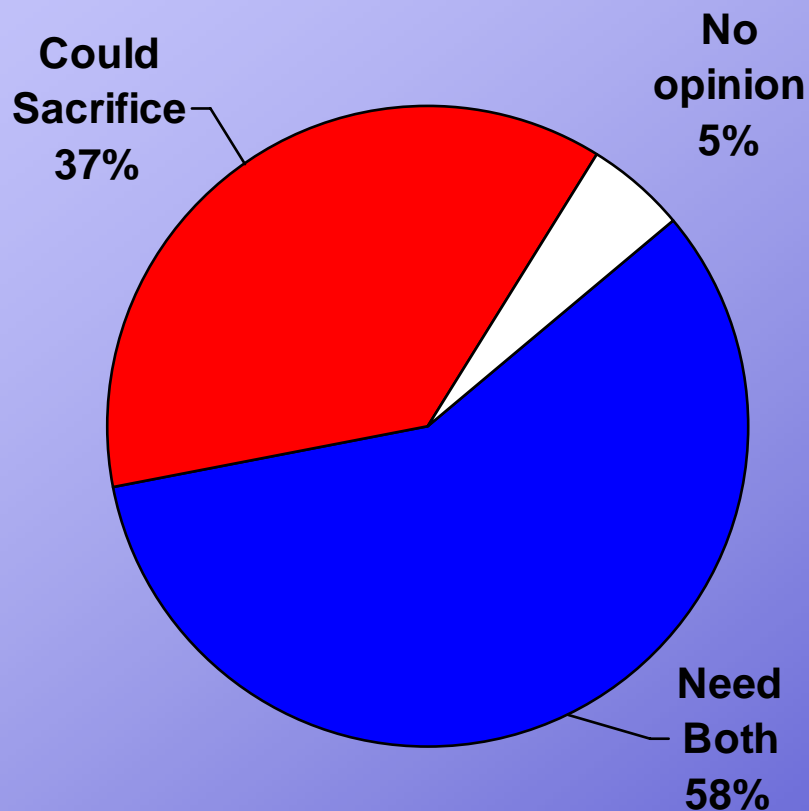
- State spending on early childhood programs is **truly an investment**, because kids with better early childhood learning experiences do better in school, are more productive as adults, and stay out of crime.
 - The state spends money on elementary schools because educating kids makes society better off. **It therefore makes sense for the state to support early childhood programs that help kids prepare for school.**
 - New research has shown that if children get high-quality learning experiences during the first three years of life, their **brains can undergo a tremendous amount of growth**. If more children had access to these high-quality experiences during the first three years of life, it would make all of us better off.
 - Elementary school teachers say they see a lot of kids who have a tough time in school because those kids had been warehoused in day care centers from a very early age. It **would benefit everyone if these kids were being better prepared for school.**
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- The **public schools are already starved for funds** and need a lot of help. The state should take care of the existing public schools before creating new programs.

The Values War

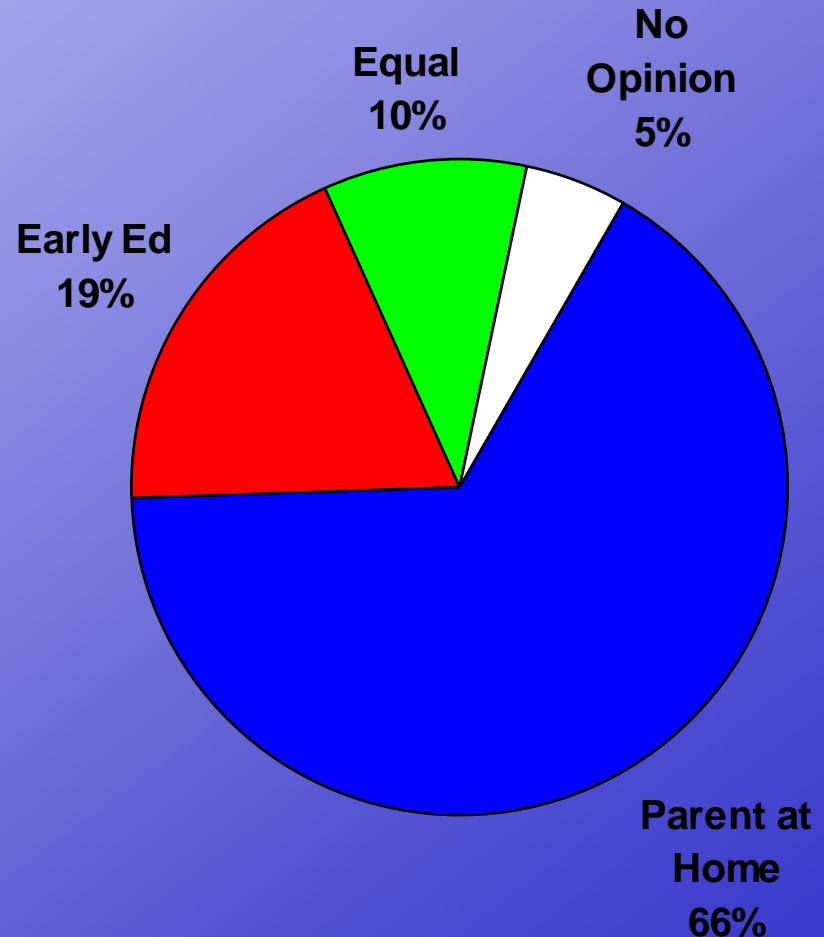
- Resentment at perceived **materialism** of modern dual-income families can be strong, especially among the older generation.
- There is more sympathy for parents who have no choice (single mothers, low-wage workers), **but these parents often are seen as the exception rather than the rule.**
- A real sense that there is ***no one minding the store.*** Crime, disorder, drug use, arise from mothers not at home (and families not intact) in early, formative years.
- Make light of these concerns at your peril!

Americans are conflicted: They think two incomes are a necessity, but they also think young kids should be at home with a full-time parent.

Do most two-earner families really need two incomes or could they make it on one income if they made more sacrifices?



Are most kids better off with a parent at home full time or in a high quality early education child care?



Conclusions

- Early childhood programs should *complement*, rather than *supplant*, traditional K-12 education — and the work of dedicated parents. **Voters think fewer K-12 dollars would be needed if kids were better prepared before kindergarten.**
- The right early childhood programs are seen as **true “investments,”** returning better-educated kids for fewer dollars.

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