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**Parents *as*  
Consumers**

OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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# Research Findings 2017

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# Parents *as* Consumers

## OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

This report summarizes a comprehensive research program undertaken by the Trust for Learning to provide insight into how and why parents make choices about their children's early childhood development from birth through age five.

**The Trust commissioned this research for two reasons:**

- 1. To help providers and advocates of highly developmental early childhood education better understand the needs and motivations of parents across the socioeconomic spectrum; and,**
- 2. To ensure that parents' voices are at the forefront of conversations about early childhood programs and policy. It is our belief that educators, policymakers and the broader public can be more effective in serving families and children when the motivations of parents are better understood and respected.**

This work was completed in three phases: literature review and summary; qualitative research in the form of 12 focus groups with parents and voters; and, quantitative research through a nationwide survey of 1,449 parents. A summary of key findings, methodology and detailed findings are below.

This research was funded by the Trust and its partners, including the Buffett Early Learning Fund, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Walton Family Foundation.

# KEY FINDINGS

**1. A review of 17 recent studies identified by philanthropists and organizations supporting work on early childhood issues found very little direct insight into how parents make decisions about their children's development during early childhood. Seven important contextual themes did emerge:**

- Parents are motivated to do a good job of parenting;
- Adults believe early childhood experiences have a lasting impact;
- Early childhood development is valued in principle, but not well understood in practice;
- The engagement of parents and caregivers in their children's formal early childhood education is extremely valuable for child outcomes;
- Early childhood is an important time to prepare for K-12 education;
- Parents value credible, clear, practical and accessible resources; and,
- Existing research provided a good perspective on where parents stood on some issues related to child development, but little insight into how they got there and how their perceptions and behaviors might be changed to better serve their goals for their children.

**2. The primary recommendation from the literature review was for additional research and subsequent message development to give providers effective tools to build a preference for developmental early childhood education and the motivation to invest in it on both personal and societal levels:**

- Identify the personal aspirations parents hope to fulfill by raising their children successfully;
- Establish parents' definitions of what they feel constitutes successful parenting;
- Link parents' understanding of child development to what they see as their responsibilities and opportunities during the early years; and,
- Understand how parents make choices about their young children's care and education as a means to meeting their own expectations and pursuing their aspirations.

**3. Qualitative focus group discussions provided the first step toward accomplishing the goals identified in the literature review and included the following insights:**

- Social-emotional development is the highest parental priority during early childhood. This development is seen as providing the foundation for enduring success in school and adulthood;
- Parents strongly feel that they hold the primary responsibility and authority to determine their child's social and emotional development;
- Practical barriers, such as cost and proximity, interfere with accomplishing outside-the-home early childhood education goals;

- Parents provided unaided articulations of what they believe is ideal early childhood education, the benefits of meeting those needs for the child and parent and parental behaviors and motivations;
- Self-identified and described attributes, benefits, emotional consequences and values provided a consumer-centric lexicon and framework for testing the rational and emotional elements of parent preferences and decision-making; and,
- Great consistency in motivation was found across the socioeconomic spectrum, with relatively minor differences in desired program elements.

**4. A nationwide survey of parents built upon the qualitative research, quantifying parental attitudes and motivations around their children's development during early childhood:**

- Parents prioritize the social-emotional dimensions of early childhood development;
- Parents aspire for their children to develop into capable individuals—defined as understanding and valuing themselves and others while possessing the intellectual skills and internal motivation to contribute productively in relationships, careers and communities;
- These parental aspirations for capable children are consistent across income levels, race and ethnicity.
- Parents expect to feel fortunate, proud and competent if they are successful in helping their children become capable individuals;
- Parent actions are motivated by a desire to provide a better future for their children, passing on their legacy to the next generation while creating a sense of harmony with family and values;
- Regardless of how parents provide it, they believe early childhood education is critical to the future success and well-being of their children;
- Parents invest a great deal of time and energy into direct support of their children's development and seek a variety of out-of-home supports and resources that help them fulfill their parental roles;
- Parents view early childhood programs as potential partners—while their expertise is appreciated, parents see themselves as the primary stewards of their children's development;
- Independent of actual enrollment, Asian (45%), African American (36%) and Hispanic (35%) parents are more likely than white non-Hispanic parents (30%) to place the highest priority on enrollment in high-quality early educational programs, centers or schools.
- African American, Hispanic and low-income parents of all backgrounds are also the most likely to participate in public programs over private ones; and,
- Parents perceptions of teacher quality are largely driven by how they perceive the teacher-child relationship and this is ultimately a major driver as parents select early childhood education experiences outside the home.

# METHODOLOGY

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Trust for Learning's intent was to provide new and comprehensive insight to the early childhood community. A key goal was not to duplicate research but to fill gaps in knowledge. Through the Trust for Learning, a network of philanthropies investing in early childhood development shared public opinion research results about parents and early childhood development. The project team analyzed 17 individual reports, identifying key findings and remaining information gaps in the body of work that ultimately shaped the design of the primary parent research.

## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

During March 2017, 12 parent focus groups were held in four cities—Minneapolis, MN; Seattle, WA; Dallas, TX; and, New Haven, CT. The focus group discussions were designed to solicit the unaided perceptions of parents about what they see as the ideal outcomes of their children's early childhood development and why those outcomes are relevant to parents and society. Participants in eight of the groups had a child under the age of six living at home. Participants in the other four groups had a child under the age of 17 living at home. Parents were between the ages of 21-50 and reported engagement in decisions about their child's education and school issues.

As part of these discussions, parents' desired outcomes for their children were explored at four different, but connected levels: desired attributes, their resulting tangible benefits, the emotional benefits and the ultimate motivations. Parent consumer experiences with early childhood education were also explored and documented, capturing behaviors, perceptions and sentiments surrounding early childhood development.

## QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

1,449 parents with one or more children age 16 or younger (27% 0-3 years; 44% 4-7 years; 29% 8-16 years) living at home participated in the nationwide online survey. These parents self-reported roles as decision makers in their children's early education and a minimum level of civic engagement in the past year (PTA/PTO, community meetings, voting, support a petition, contact public officials). The sample is representative of the U.S. population of parents with children ages 0-16 who report voting as documented in the 2010 U.S. Census. A demographic profile of the sample is provided in Appendix A.

The quantitative survey and analysis prioritized understanding how parents make decisions regarding their child's early development. Prominent decision-making approaches were identified and some key metrics of their consumer experience were captured.

## ANALYSES

In the quantitative survey, individual items constituting desired preparation for elementary education from birth through age five were rated by parents for their importance on a one to seven scale (1 = not at all important and 7 = extremely important). These ratings were statistically analyzed to understand parental decision-making:

### - 1 -

Factor-analysis identified groups of items that are strongly connected to each other as parents answered in consistent patterns.

### - 2 -

Individual factors were analyzed for their salience to parents—average rating on seven-point scale, percentage of parents rating the factor items a six or a seven and which single factor is most important to each individual parent.

### - 3 -

Connections between factors were quantified to identify the predominant links between one factor and another.

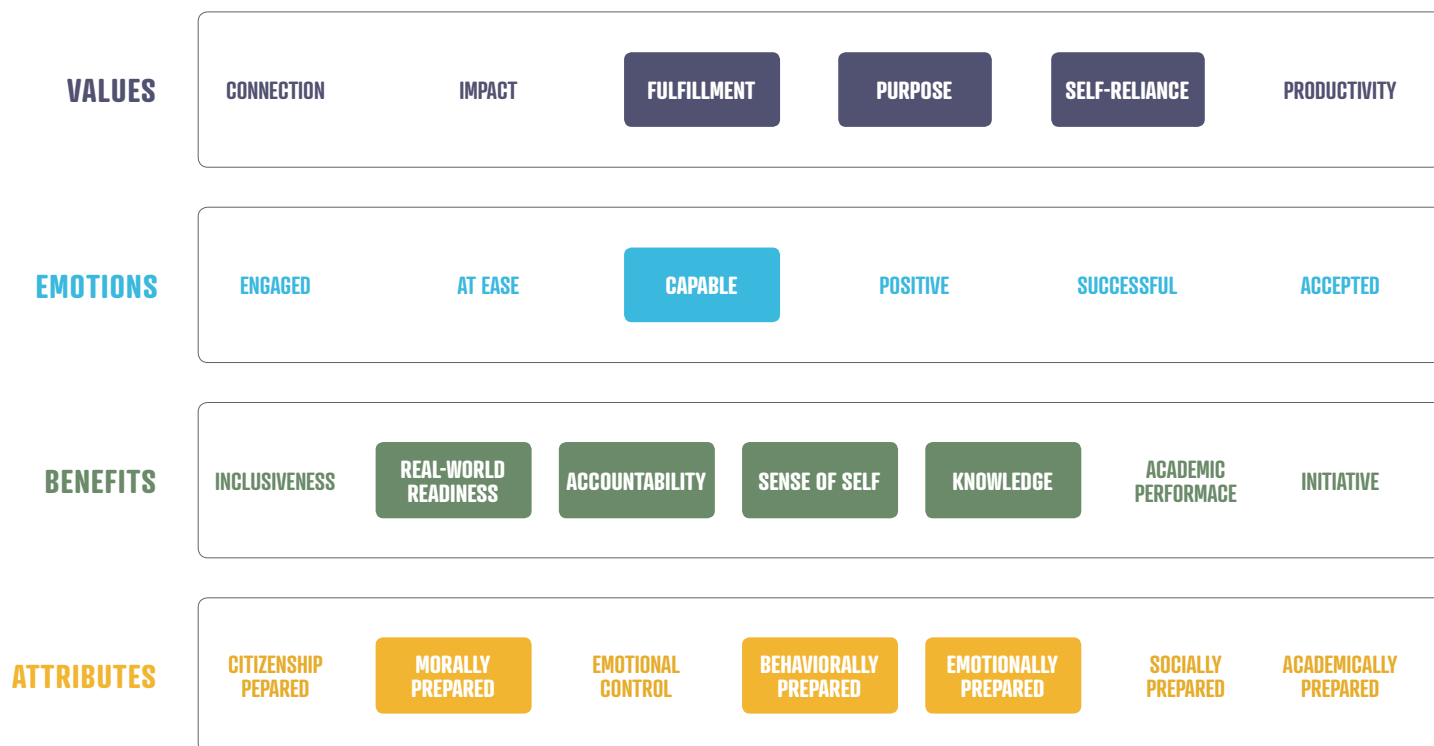
This set of analyses produces a map representing how parents connect the rational and tangible aspects of early childhood development with the emotional and motivational outcomes they desire for their children.

# RESULTS

## PARENTAL ASPIRATIONS AND MOTIVATIONS

This map of parental perceptions and aspirations reveals how they understand and act on their children's early development. In the map, the shaded ovals represent the most important connections between attributes, benefits, emotional and motivational outcomes for 76% of the parents surveyed. This is a robust majority that stakeholders and providers can motivate through experiences and messages that deliver on these priorities.

### STRATEGIC MESSAGING PRIORITIES: 76% OF PARENTS



There are three motivational pathways that are most important to all parents across the socioeconomic spectrum:

1. Emotionally prepared produces the benefits of knowledge and sense of self, resulting in a capable individual who seeks fulfillment. This pathway is the single-most important set of aspirations for 33% of parents.
2. Behaviorally prepared produces the benefits of accountability and real-world readiness, resulting in a capable individual who seeks self-reliance. This pathway is most important for 28% of parents.
3. Morally prepared produces the benefit of real-world readiness, leading to a capable individual who seeks purpose. This pathway is most important for 15% of parents.

The key factors and connections meeting parents where they are in their understanding and aspirations for their children's development during early childhood are derived from both their importance as individual factors and their connection to other valued outcomes—as means to an end.

**Parents place the greatest value on their children being prepared morally (75% rate it a six or seven on seven-point scale), emotionally (61%) and behaviorally (61%)**

Emotional control—*is aware of and in control of own emotions*—is a single item factor identified as a priority during early childhood by 64% of parents (six or seven). However, this factor does not connect to any additional benefits, higher-order aspirations or long-term outcomes. It appears parents see it as a discreet developmental task for young children. The individual items in each of the key attributes constituting preparation priorities are listed below.

- Morally prepared (75% six or seven, 39% most important): Knows right from wrong; is respectful; is kind to others; takes responsibility for their actions;
- Emotionally prepared (61% six or seven, 13% most important): Has confidence in self; is internally motivated to learn; can say what they know want and feel; has confidence to explore; and,
- Behaviorally prepared (61% six or seven, 11% most important): Is able to complete full duration of class or day care; pay attention when shown something; complete simple directed tasks; follow instructions; listen and follow instructions; can cooperate with peers and work in a group; and, is able to concentrate and focus.

**These specific areas of preparation are valued for their ability to deliver benefits that parents desire for their children:**

- Accountability (58% six or seven rating, most important for 32%): Fosters self-discipline; will take responsibility for their learning; will be able to handle conflict and disagreements; builds their sense of self-worth; develops integrity;
- Knowledge (68% six or seven rating, most important for 20%): Builds their intelligence and prepares them to excel academically;
- Real-world readiness (58% six or seven rating, most important for 9%): Will interact well with adults; prepares them for the real world; will be well-behaved and polite; able to use good judgement; will be able to handle failure and rejection; builds common sense; will choose and make good friends; and,
- Sense of self (51% six or seven rating, most important for 5%): Fosters creativity; encourages self-expression; will develop healthy relationships; creates a sense of purpose; builds independence; builds their sense of identity; becomes self-reliant thinker; and, is motivated to contribute to community/society.

**These benefits are all relevant because of their importance in developing a child who feels capable:**

- Capable (64% six or seven rating, most important for 24%): A child who is competent, confident, focused, smart, capable, secure, empowered.



**Parents' desire for their children to become and feel capable is the singular gateway to the enduring lifelong values they aspire for their children to develop:**

- Self-reliance (77% six or seven rating, 55% most important): Self-sufficient, self-reliant, responsible;
- Fulfillment (68% six or seven rating, 11% most important): Has high self-esteem; truly happy with themselves; has a sense of belonging; enjoys life; has inner peace; emotionally secure; fulfilled; and,
- Purpose (65% six or seven rating, 6% most important): Lifelong learner; leads a meaningful life; productive citizen; balanced; well-rounded; purposeful; true to beliefs and values.

### Lower-income and minority parents

The three most prevalent pathways describing how parents perceive and experience the benefits of quality early childhood education are consistent for parents across income levels, race and residence (rural/urban). However, there are some subtle demographic differences in the ordering and emphasis within the top three pathways as shown below:

		HOUSEHOLD INCOME		RESIDENCE			RACE/ETHNICITY*			
	TOTAL	UNDER \$50K	\$50K+	URBAN	SUBURBAN	RURAL	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC	WHITE (NON-HISPANIC)	ASIAN
EMOTIONALLY PREPARED	33%	30%	34%	30%	33%	37%	24%	29%	36%	32%
BEHAVIORALLY PREPARED	28%	27%	28%	26%	29%	30%	35%	26%	27%	27%
MORALLY PREPARED	15%	16%	15%	13%	16%	15%	11%	15%	17%	12%

\*Racial differences noted are consistent within income overall.

Some slight differences to note within these commonly shared priorities that may be helpful in engaging specific audiences include:

- African American parents are more likely than non-African American parents to prioritize the decision-making pathways that start with Academically prepared and Behaviorally prepared, with particular emphasis on the benefits of academic performance and developing a sense of self. While the behaviorally prepared pathway best describes the aspirations of 28% of parents overall, it is prioritized even more often by African American parents (35%). These parents are also more likely (12% vs. 7%) to value academically prepared. Specific items within factors not enumerated above are listed here:

- Academically prepared: Knows numbers and simple math functions; has writing skills; has a solid foundation for reading; knows letters, numbers, colors and shapes; has basic science skills like observing and predicting; is comfortable with technology; has critical thinking skills; works well under pressure; is able to set goals and complete them; has problem solving skills; and,

- Academic performance: Prepares them to do well on standardized tests; will be ahead of other students; able to keep up with other students.

- Hispanic parents are more likely than others to value the Citizenship prepared (7% vs. 5% of all parents) and Socially prepared (15% vs. 12% of all parents) pathways, with particular emphasis on the benefits of academic performance and developing a sense of self. Some detail on the additional attributes these parents value:

- Citizenship prepared: Cares for the environment in which they live; has empathy for others; is accepting of others; is familiar with other cultures/languages; has a sense of justice/fairness; and,

- Socially prepared: Is outgoing and friendly; is at ease in social situations with different age groups; helps other children learn; loves going to school; is a self-directed learner; is imaginative and creative; and, is outgoing and friendly.

- Parents who use home-based early childhood education over other outside-the-home options are more likely to prioritize the Morally prepared pathway with an emphasis on real-world readiness. Though more likely to have home-centric experiences than higher-income parents (annual household income above \$50,000), lower-income parents are no less likely to esteem quality out-of-home programs and schools.



## PARENTS' EMOTIONAL BENEFITS AND MOTIVATIONS

In order to understand why their children's developmental outcomes were important to parents individually, the research applied the same methodology and analysis to their perceived emotional benefits and underlying motivations. When asked how they would feel as a result of their child developing in the ideal ways they indicated, parents prioritize a sense of being fortunate, competent and proud. These are key aspirations for early childhood providers and supporters of families to communicate and deliver as they work to engage parents and families.

- Fortunate (66% six or seven rating, 28% most important): Fortunate;
- Competent (60% six or seven rating, 23% most important): Competent, responsible, confident; and,
- Proud (57% six or seven rating, 18% most important): Proud, satisfied, happy, fulfilled, accomplished, joyful.

These emotional benefits for parents are the means to fulfilling their own motivating values, the ultimate aspirations the field should seek to fulfill as they communicate and provide services to parents as consumers:

- Good parenting (67% six or seven rating, 52% most important): I gave my children a better future, I feel good about myself as a parent, I have protected my family, I feel a sense of pride;
- In harmony (64% six or seven rating, 16% most important): I am closer with my family, I am able to stay true to my beliefs and values; and,
- Interconnected (62% six or seven rating, 14% most important): I passed on a legacy to the next generation.

### Lower-income and minority parents

While the top emotional benefits and motivating values are consistent for parents across demographic groups, there are some additional emotional and motivational dimensions for minority, lower-income and urban parents.

#### *Emotional benefits to parents*

- While the top three parental emotions are consistent for both African American and Hispanic populations, these parents are more likely than white non-Hispanics to also feel Empowered (58% six or seven rating among African American parents and 52% among Hispanic parents vs. 38% of white non-Hispanic parents) and Relaxed (57% six or seven rating among African American parents and Hispanic parents vs. 47% of white non-Hispanic parents).
- Urban populations are more likely than suburban and rural to feel Empowered and Relaxed.
- Lower-income (under \$50,000) parents are more likely than higher-income parents to feel Proud and Empowered.
- Specific items within factors not enumerated above are listed here:
  - Empowered: Important, empowered, powerful, smart, influential, appreciated;
  - Relaxed: At ease, relaxed, reassured, comfortable, relieved, secure.

### *Motivating values*

- In addition to Interconnected (74% six or seven rating, 14% most important), Good parenting (71% six or seven rating, 61% most important) and In harmony (63% six or seven rating, 7% most important), African American parents are also highly likely to also aspire to Accomplished (63% six or seven rating, 7% most important) and Successful (61% six or seven rating, 8% most important).
- Hispanic parents are more likely than white non-Hispanic parents to aspire to Accomplished (67% six or seven rating, 7% most important).
- The differences by race and ethnicity are consistent within higher- and lower-income levels and there are not significant differences in parent aspirations by income level.
- Urban populations also place greater emphasis on Interconnected, Accomplished, and Successful as compared to suburban and rural populations.
- Specific items within factors not enumerated above are listed here:
  - Accomplished: I am contributing to a better society, I feel at peace with my life and circumstances, I have accomplished something valuable; and,
  - Successful: I am more stable financially, my hard work and success are rewarded, I am achieving important milestones in my life.

## **SOCIETAL ASPIRATIONS AND MOTIVATIONS**

On many occasions, early childhood providers and advocates need to communicate the value of ideal early childhood development investments and supports to non-parent stakeholders. Survey respondents see the ultimate societal and community benefits as noted here. These provide insights into the key societal motivations parents have for supporting early childhood development:



- Better behavior (61% six or seven, 37% most important): Reduces crime, increases safety for the community overall;
- Better values (61% six or seven, 31% most important): Builds respect and tolerance, promotes acceptance of diversity and mutual respect in society, promotes better values;
- Better conditions (52% six or seven, 18% most important): Improves the environment, creates a more just and equitable society, creates a more peaceful society, reduces social problems; and,
- Better citizenry (51% six or seven, 14% most important): Creates future leaders, contributes to a more productive workforce, brings greater prosperity to society, increases interaction and communication among individuals and groups in the community, increases participation in community service and volunteerism, contributes to a better educated society, produces more balanced citizens, builds stronger communities, provides greater stability and security.

### **Lower-income and minority parents**

- African American, Hispanic, and Urban populations place more emphasis on all societal benefits as compared to their white non-Hispanic and Suburban or Rural counterparts (respectively).
- African American parents are more likely to view Better behavior as the top societal benefit.
- Hispanic parents are more likely to identify Better values as the top societal benefit.
- Lower income populations place more emphasis than higher-income populations on Better behavior, Values and Conditions.

## **CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES AND SETTINGS**

Parents participating in the study had at least one child age 16 or younger living in their household. Within this group of 1,449 parents nationwide, 27% had a child age three or below, 44% between the ages of four and seven and 29% ages eight to 16. These children were currently in a variety of educational settings:

- 43% Traditional public school
- 23% Day care setting
- 15% Not in a formal day care setting
- 14% Private school
- 12% Home school
- 3% Charter school

Parental reports of current, expected or past early childhood participation found strong participation in both home-centered and out-of-home experiences:

- 40% A mixture of in-home and out-of-home programs and experiences;
- 35% Home-based and family centric programs and experiences;
- 15% Out-of-home private programs; and,
- 10% Out-of-home public programs.

This variety of parent and child experiences provides a robust foundation for both the strategic insights identified in the decision-making maps, but also for understanding the consumer experience of parents as they seek resources to help them raise and develop their children successfully.

### **Lower-income, urban and minority parents**

- While public school is most common among all demographic groups surveyed, there are some differences for private school enrollment.
  - Higher-income (\$50K+) (17%) and urban (16%) or suburban (15%) parent populations are somewhat more likely and African Americans are less likely (8%) to have a child in a private school program.
    - Within race, all higher-income subpopulations are more likely to be enrolled in private school settings than their lower-income peers.
- African American populations are more likely to have children who are/were in out-of-home public early childhood education (18% vs. 10% of total).
- Lower-income groups of all races are more likely to be in/have experienced home-based, family-centric early childhood education.

### Formal vs. informal early childhood efforts and resources

Overall, parents see their roles as primary in supporting their children's development during the early years. We see this prioritization in a list of items parents characterized as a major focus of their efforts:

- 80% Be present and spend quality time with them
- 74% Model good habits and relationships
- 67% Provide hands-on toys and learning
- 67% Provide structure and routines at home
- 67% Include them in errands and activities
- 63% Teach academic skills in the home
- 60% Expose to arts, crafts and music in the home
- 59% Teach life skills in the home
- 59% Expose to nature
- 57% Expose to new things (field trips, museums, libraries)
- 56% Provide quiet, unstructured time
- 54% Enroll in a preschool program
- 54% Expose to different places and people

### The value of early childhood programs

Even though external supports are less of a focus than direct engagement with their children, parents do see them as highly valuable to successful development. Just because they recognize the importance of their personal relationships with their children does not mean that out-of-home programs are not considered important. In a forced-choice question designed to push for relative agreement with one position over another, 70% of parents feel quality early childhood education programs are valuable:

**41%**

I think it's totally worth investing whatever time, effort or money it takes to get my child into the best possible early childhood program.

**29%**

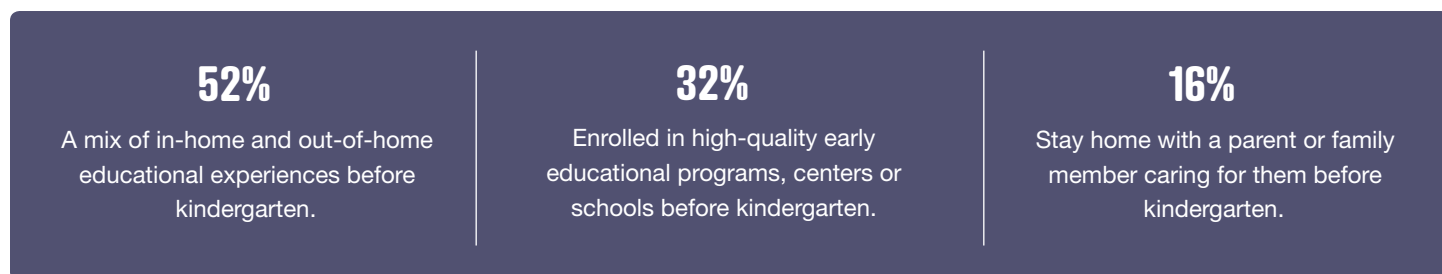
It would be great to be able to enroll my child in the best possible program but it's not a realistic expectation because it's probably out of my budget and if it wasn't, it would have a long waiting list to get in.

**30%**

I think people make far too much fuss over these fancy programs — kids just need a good, loving home environment and they will get all that they need.

- African Americans and Hispanics are even more likely to emphasize investing whatever time, effort or money it takes (48% African American, 47% Hispanic versus 39% white non-Hispanic).

When it comes to desired early childhood experiences—what helps children do best—84% of parents see a role for some level of out-of-home educational experiences.



Furthermore, parents invest a significant amount of effort to identify and learn about early learning opportunities and schools in their communities as seen in their identification of actions taken. The average parent identifies 4.5 actions taken:

- 57% Visit school
- 52% Talk with neighbors and friends
- 49% Talk with relatives and family
- 47% Look at school and district websites
- 40% Look at educational websites
- 39% Visit teacher
- 39% Look at social media sources online
- 35% Local organizations (YMCA, library, etc.)
- 30% Mom or parent group
- 20% Visit principal and leaders
- 20% Printed materials and newspapers
- 19% Pediatrician, doctor or nurse
- 2% Nothing
- Lower-income parents (<\$50,000) are somewhat less likely than higher-income parents to visit schools and teachers.
- African American and Hispanic parents are less likely than other parents to obtain information about early learning from their doctor/pediatrician.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE CHOICES

In a series of questions about their considerations for selecting out-of-home resources, parents identify priorities that start with quality teachers and safety, then acknowledge other access, cost, scheduling and quality dimensions (see figure below).

While these overall priorities hold true across groups, African American and Hispanic parents are more likely to emphasize diversity of the student body. Furthermore, African American parents are more likely than Caucasian parents to prioritize past personal experience, discipline and structure and the specific educational approach and philosophy. Hispanic parents are more likely than non-Hispanic parents to take neighbors' and friends' choices, child's preference, family tradition and the community of people and families involved in the school into account.

### TEACHER QUALITY AND CHILD SAFETY ARE PARAMOUNT WHEN CHOOSING CARE AND EDUCATION: FACTORS CONSIDERED WHEN CHOOSING CARE AND EDUCATION FOR CHILD

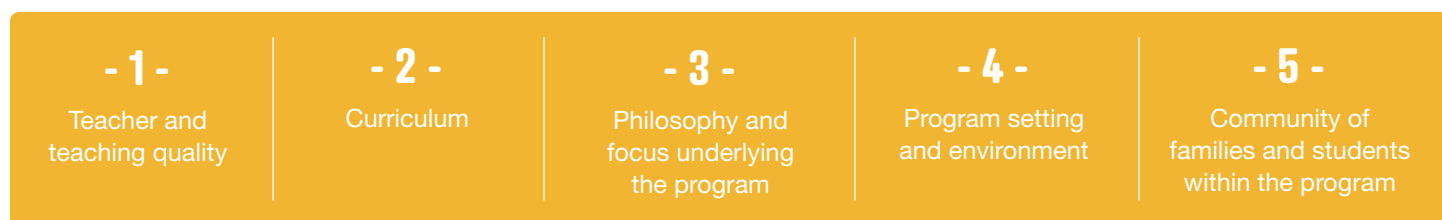
		EXTREMELY/VERY IMPORTANT FACTOR	IMPORTANT FACTOR	NOT ALL THAT IMPORTANT/NOT AT ALL A FACTOR
ESSENTIAL	Quality of teachers and staff	90%	9%	
	Safety of the school and learning environment	89%	9%	
	Quality of school administration and leadership	81%	16%	1%
	Open and available spot for child	80%	15%	2%
IMPORTANT BUT NOT ESSENTIAL	Daily schedule matches family needs	78%	16%	1%
	Teacher training and certification	78%	17%	1%
	Desirable location	76%	20%	1%
	Teacher and staff stability and retention	75%	19%	2%
	Discipline and structure	74%	22%	1%
	Quality of the building and classroom	71%	23%	1%
	Specific educational approach and philosophy	70%	24%	2%
	Cost of tuition	69%	20%	5%
	The community of people and families involved in the school	66%	26%	2%
	Past personal experience	58%	27%	6%
LESSER IMPORTANCE	Child's preference	50%	31%	7%
	Diversity of the student body	49%	27%	8%
	Family tradition	44%	24%	14%
	Neighbors' and friends' choices	43%	30%	9%

Base: Total respondents (n=1449)

Q9. When it comes to choosing care and education for a child, there are a wide range of factors that families often consider. Please identify the extent to which each of the following factors played a role in the decision you made for your child.



Parents see five dimensions of early childhood education programs that impact their quality, with teacher quality and curriculum rising to the top in their overall perception of importance:



African American and Hispanic parents are more likely to emphasize the classroom environment and integration into the larger community as underpinnings of quality.

Parents report generally high levels of overall satisfaction with their choices for their children's early childhood experiences as 72% report a six or seven on a seven-point scale that ranges from 1—completely dissatisfied to 7—completely satisfied. However, parents indicate that key elements of their child's education and experience are lacking, indicating that parents may be settling for programs that are less than what would be ideal for them.

When examining gaps between stated importance of specific early education elements and perceived experience of their children, parents see gaps where experiences lag aspirations within each dimension of quality. These gaps are noted below, showing the difference between parent ratings of importance vs. their ratings of what their child's experience is or was. The negative percentages indicate that experience fell short of importance.

*Quality of teachers and teaching*

- -20% Teachers focus on the abilities, interests and potential of each child
- -14% Teachers who understand my child's personality and learning style
- -10% Nurturing teachers
- -9 % Certified teachers

*Focus and philosophy behind the program*

- -18% Children encouraged to explore things and make mistakes
- -16% School focuses on developing a well-rounded child
- -16% Children encouraged to reach beyond their current abilities
- -15% Children are allowed time to become secure in their knowledge
- -13% Children encouraged to be curious and creative
- -13% Children's unique personalities and independence are nurtured
- -11% Children learn how to respect authority

*Community of families and students within the program*

- -14% Parents are actively involved in strengthening the school
- -13% Parents are involved in their child's education at home
- -12% Teaches children how to work and learn with other children

*Curriculum*

- -16% School focuses on developing a well-rounded child
- -15% Teaches science and math skills
- -15% Teaches children how to focus on tasks
- -13% Teaches listening skills
- -11% Teaches reading

*Setting and environment in which the program is offered*

- -15% Provides healthy food and encourages good nutrition
- -11% Provides experiences with nature and the outdoors
- -10% Provides hands-on learning



## CONCLUSIONS

- 1. More than half of all parents believe that children do best when they have in-home and out-of-home educational experiences before they begin kindergarten.** This indicates that parents value programs that supplement their children's development and enhance what they feel they are doing to support their children at home.
- 2. A large majority, 70% of parents, agree that formal early childhood education is valuable for children, although 29% of these same parents feel that enrolling their children in the best possible program isn't possible for them.**
- 3. Parents want early childhood education experiences that prepare their children to become capable, well-rounded members of society.**
- 4. Parents feel fortunate, proud and a sense of accomplishment as a result of their children's successful development into capable individuals.** These emotions are linked to aspirations to be good parents, pass on a legacy and be in harmony with themselves and their family.
- 5. Minority parents place slightly more emphasis on additional qualities that help their children become capable and well-rounded.** African American parents are more likely to highlight academic and behavior preparedness, as well as developing a sense of self. Hispanic parents gravitate more toward their children learning to be part of a community and wanting children to feel engaged and positive. However, it's important to keep in mind that all parents overwhelmingly identify a capable, well-rounded child as the ultimate goal for early education.
- 6. Parents seek partners who will work with them to help their children develop into capable individuals.** Parents see their personal involvement with their child—both the tangible activities they facilitate as well as the intangible behaviors they model—as a major focus in supporting their child's development, with formal early childhood education being a supplement to family investments.
- 7. Parents consult a number of sources when choosing an early learning program for their children.** On average, parents seek out 4.5 information sources when deciding among available early childhood education programs in their community. The most common ways parents learn about existing programs is by visiting the schools and talking with friends, neighbors, relatives and families.
- 8. The most important factors for parents when choosing early care and education are teacher quality and school safety.**

In application, these research findings provide clarity on how to move forward with public and private early childhood education in the United States:

- **Greater emphasis must be placed on access to quality for all children.** Parents, regardless of race and income, value high quality early childhood education, know why it is important to their children and need access to it in order to fulfill their mission as parents.

- **Highly developmental and personalized early learning is the preferred early education approach.** Parents are very much in alignment with the vast body of research that points to developmental early education as being the most effective.
- **The definition of school readiness is much larger than academic preparedness.** Social-emotional development is the highest parental priority during early childhood. This is seen as providing the foundation for enduring success in school and adulthood—a perception that is in alignment with social science research on effective development and later life outcomes.
- **Respecting parental self-agency is the key to effective parental engagement.** Parents are best engaged around their goals for their children and will reject early education that doesn't put them in the driver's seat. Educators can best serve children by understanding parent motivations and communicating how behavior change can actualize parental goals.
- **Teacher competencies are critically important.** Parents see teachers as their professional partner—the quality of any program is judged by the quality of help and communication parents receive from children.

# APPENDIX A:

## SAMPLE

### DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Parents in the study were representative of the US' population of parents – covering a range of geographic, socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds.

#### AGE

Age 21-24	4%
Age 25-34	38%
<b>Age 35-44</b>	<b>41%</b>
Age 45-54	14%
Age 55-59	2%

#### GENDER

Male	49%
<b>Female</b>	<b>51%</b>

#### REGION

Northeast	18%
Midwest	22%
<b>South</b>	<b>37%</b>
West	23%

#### EDUCATION

Less than high school	<1%
High school graduate	11%
Some college or trade school	23%
<b>College graduate</b>	<b>45%</b>
Post graduate	21%

#### MARITAL STATUS

<b>Married</b>	<b>77%</b>
Living with partner	8%
Single, never married	10%
Divorced	3%
Separated	1%
Widowed	<1%
Prefer not to answer	<1%

#### OF HISPANIC/LATINO/SPANISH ORIGIN

Yes	18%
<b>No</b>	<b>82%</b>

#### RACE

<b>White/Caucasian</b>	<b>78%</b>
Black/African American	13%
Asian/Asian-American	7%
Amer. Indian or Alaska Native	2%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	<1%
Some other race	2%

#### TYPE OF AREA LIVE IN

Urban	27%
<b>Suburban</b>	<b>55%</b>
Rural	17%

#### TOTAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME FOR 2016

Less than \$35,000	11%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	16%
<b>\$50,000 to \$74,999</b>	<b>22%</b>
\$75,000 to \$99,999	19%
<b>\$100,000 to \$149,999</b>	<b>22%</b>
\$150,000 to \$199,999	6%
\$200,000 or more	4%
Prefer not to say	1%
Don't know	0%

#### CURRENT EMPLOYMENT STATUS

<b>Employed full-time</b>	<b>66%</b>
Self-employed	4%
Employed part-time	8%
Student	1%
Full-time homemaker	18%
Not employed but looking	1%
Not employed not looking	0%
Retired	1%

## APPENDIX B:

### ATTRIBUTES, BENEFITS, EMOTIONS AND MOTIVATIONS

#### IDEAL EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT — ATTRIBUTES

% MOST IMPORTANT

4%	39%	16%	11%	13%	13%	4%
CITIZENSHIP PREPARED 43%   5.7	MORALLY PREPARED 75%   6.3	EMOTIONAL CONTROL 64%   5.8	BEHAVIORALLY PREPARED 61%   6.1	EMOTIONALLY PREPARED 61%   6.1	SOCIALLY PREPARED 39%   5.6	ACADEMICALLY PREPARED 45%   5.7
Cares for the environment in which they live	Knows right from wrong	Is aware and in control of own emotions	Is able to complete full duration of class or day care	Has confidence in self	Is outgoing and friendly	Knows numbers and simple math functions
Has empathy for others	Is respectful		Is able to pay attention when shown something	Is internally motivated to learn	Is at ease in social situations with different age groups	Has writing skills
Is accepting of others	Is kind to others		Is able to complete simple, directed tasks	Can say what they know, want and feel	Helps other children learn	Has a solid foundation for reading
Is familiar with other cultures/ languages	Takes responsibility for their actions		Is able follow instructions	Has confidence to explore	Loves going to school	Knows letters, numbers, colors and shapes
Has a sense of justice/fairness			Is able to listen and follow instructions		Is a self-directed learner	Has basic science skills like observing and predicting
			Can cooperate with peers and work in a group		Is imaginative and creative	Is comfortable with technology
			Is able to concentrate and focus		Is outgoing and friendly	Has critical thinking skills
						Works well under pressure
						Is able to set goals and complete them
						Has problem solving skills

## IDEAL EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT — BENEFITS

% MOST IMPORTANT

19%	9%	32%	5%	20%	5%	11%
<b>INCLUSIVENESS</b> 65%   6.1	<b>REAL-WORLD READINESS</b> 58%   6.1	<b>ACCOUNTABILITY</b> 58%   6.0	<b>SENSE OF SELF</b> 51%   6.0	<b>KNOWLEDGE</b> 68%   6.1	<b>ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE</b> 40%   5.4	<b>INITIATIVE</b> 59%   5.9
Will be more inclusive and accepting of others	Will interact well with adults	Fosters self-discipline	Fosters creativity	Builds their intelligence	Prepares them to do well on standardized tests	Develops leadership skills
Will respect themselves and others	Prepares them for the real world	Will take responsibility for their learning	Encourages self-expression	Prepares them to excel academically	Will be ahead of other students	Motivates to be successful
Encourages happiness and hope	Will be well-behaved and polite	Will be able to handle conflict and disagreements	Will develop healthy relationships			
Becomes a well-rounded individual	Able to use good judgement	Builds their sense of self-worth	Creates a sense of purpose		Able to keep up with other students	
	Will be able to handle failure and rejection	Develop integrity	Builds independence			
	Builds common sense		Builds their sense of identity			
	Will choose and make good friends		Become self-reliant thinkers			
			Motivates to contribute to community/society			

## IDEAL EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT – EMOTIONS

% MOST IMPORTANT

11%	19%	24%	15%	9%	21%
<b>ENGAGED</b> 59%   6.0	<b>AT EASE</b> 51%   6.0	<b>CAPABLE</b> 64%   6.2	<b>POSITIVE</b> 54%   6.0	<b>SUCCESSFUL</b> 41%   5.4	<b>ACCEPTED</b> 64%   6.1
Curious	Relaxed	Competent	Happy	Competitive	Accepted
Hopeful	At ease	Confident	Proud	Gratified	Connected
Joyful	Comfortable	Focused	Special		Appreciated
Enthusiastic		Smart	Excited		
Optimistic		Capable			
Passionate		Secure			
		Empowered			

## IDEAL EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT – MOTIVATIONS

% MOST IMPORTANT

13%	6%	11%	6%	55%	9%
<b>CONNECTION</b> 67%   6.3	<b>IMPACT</b> 51%   5.8	<b>FULFILLMENT</b> 68%   6.3	<b>PURPOSE</b> 65%   6.2	<b>SELF-RELIANCE</b> 77%   6.3	<b>PRODUCTIVITY</b> 64%   6.1
Be in a loving relationship	Vibrant	Has high self-esteem	Lifelong learner	Self-sufficient	Good employee or professional
Good parent	Leader	Truly happy with themselves	Leads a meaningful life	Self-reliance	Productive work
Strong family	Create a better world	Has a sense of belonging	Productive citizen	Responsible	Financially secure
Good friend		Enjoy life	Balanced		
Able to bond with others		Inner peace	Well-rounded		
		Emotionally secure	Purposeful		
		Fulfilled	True to beliefs and values		



## APPENDIX C:

### EMOTIONAL CONSEQUENCES, VALUES SUPPORTED, COMMUNITY VALUES SUPPORTED

#### IDEAL EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT – PARENTAL EMOTIONAL CONSEQUENCES

% MOST IMPORTANT

5%	18%	9%	11%	6%	23%	28%
<b>EMPOWERED</b> 43%   5.6	<b>PROUD</b> 57%   6.0	<b>RELAXED</b> 48%   5.8	<b>ENTHUSED</b> 54%   5.9	<b>RESIGNED</b> 27%   4.6	<b>COMPETENT</b> 60%   6.0	<b>FORTUNATE</b> 66%   5.9
Important	Proud	At ease	Enthusiastic	Resigned	Competent	Fortunate
Empowered	Satisfied	Relaxed	Excited	Absolved	Responsible	
Smart	Happy	Reassured	Optimistic		Confident	
Influential	Fulfilled	Comfortable	Hopeful			
Appreciated	Accomplished	Relieved				
	Joyful	Secure				

#### IDEAL EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT – PARENTAL VALUES SUPPORTED

% MOST IMPORTANT

4%	52%	7%	7%	16%	14%
<b>ADMIRABLE</b> 39%   5.4	<b>GOOD PARENTING</b> 67%   6.1	<b>ACCOMPLISHED</b> 57%   5.9	<b>SUCCESSFUL</b> 49%   5.7	<b>IN HARMONY</b> 64%   6.0	<b>INTERCONNECTED</b> 62%   5.7
Shows others that I am responsible	I gave my children a better future	I am contributing to a better society	I am more stable financially	I am closer with my family	I passed on a legacy to the next generation
Shows others I have succeeded	I feel good about myself as a parent	I feel at peace with my life and circumstances	My hard work and success is rewarded	I am able stay true to my beliefs and values	
I feel more connected with others	I have protected my family	I have accomplished something valuable	I am achieving important milestones in my life		
	I feel a sense of pride				

## IDEAL EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT – COMMUNITY VALUES SUPPORTED

% MOST IMPORTANT



**For more information, please visit [trustforlearning.org](https://trustforlearning.org) or  
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