



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION:

Meeting the Expectations of Parents and the Public



The Trust for Learning’s comprehensive research on what parents and the public want from early childhood education provides valuable insight on how to align public policies with public expectations. While a wide body of public opinion research shows very strong and growing demand for more investment in quality early childhood education, there is little insight into what parents consider to be quality and why they make the choices that they do. The Trust’s new research found that parents want access to highly developmental, personalized, early childhood programs to help them raise capable children and complete their mission as good parents. A comprehensive research report can be found at <http://trustforlearning.org/parent-research/>

KEY INSIGHTS FOR POLICYMAKERS

Parents highly value quality early childhood education. Parents, regardless of race and income, value high-quality early childhood education, know why it is important for their children and want access to it. Awareness of the importance of early childhood education and aspirations for children are similar regardless of socioeconomic status. Low-income parents—who tend to have the least access—especially value center-based care.

A wide range of services is needed. Parents want full-day, half-day, center-based and home-based care to help them in supporting their child’s development and balancing their child care needs.

Parents recognize high-quality programs as highly personalized and focused on whole child development. Parents want Ideal Learning programs where each child is known and appreciated for their unique abilities, interests and talents—and they are challenged to reach developmental milestones and actualize their potential. Ideal programs are hands-on, self-directed with teacher guidance, collaborative and joyful.



The definition of school readiness is much larger than academic preparedness. Emotional, behavioral and moral development are parents' highest priorities during their child's early years. These abilities are seen as providing the foundation for developing into a capable person who has enduring success in school and life. This perception is aligned with social science research, which shows that effective early learning can produce better life outcomes.

Parents want programs that work with them as partners. They value programs that supplement their children's development and enhance what they feel they are doing to support their children in the home. Respecting parental self-agency is the key to effective parental engagement. Parents are best engaged around their goals for their children and will react negatively to early education that doesn't put them in the driver's seat.

Teacher competencies are critically important. Parents see teachers as their professional partner. The quality of any early childhood program is judged by the professional skills of the teacher, and the quality of help and communication parents receive from teachers. Curriculum, environment and staff are valued based on how well they support teachers.

Providing greater access to Ideal Learning programs results in grateful parents. Policymakers who deliver ideal early learning programs will gain the support of parents, who feel relieved and grateful to be able to provide such an important experience to their children. Parents frequently can't find quality programs in their communities that are also affordable, so they settle for less than ideal programs.

Safety, quality teachers, and personalized early learning are top priorities for parents. Safety is a given and paramount. Professional and prepared teachers are a mark of a quality program. Personalized education assures a focus on each child and their potential.

For complete results and additional resources, please visit trustforlearning.org.