



# Parent Research Talking Points

- This is the first comprehensive study of parents as consumers of early childhood education.
- It was commissioned by the Trust and its partners, including the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Walton Family Foundation.
- Before embarking on this project, we painstakingly surveyed the field for existing research. Our goal was not to duplicate what has already been done, but to add a piece of new research that brought everything together.
- What we found in that survey was that many had done good research on where parents and the public were, but there was little insight into why they were there and how to get them to where they can and should be.
- This new research thoroughly probes parent aspirations and motivations when it comes to seeking out early childhood education programs and resources.
- It provides us with a map for making stronger connections with them on a number of levels—communicating the value of high quality, developmentally-based programs; delivering programs that truly develop the capabilities parents seek in their children; increasing parent engagement and satisfaction; and, why we should elevate the role and stature of teachers.
- What we call Ideal Learning—highly developmental, child-centric early education that creates a capable, well-rounded child—was constantly and consistently described as ideal early learning for their children—in their own terms and without any prompting from us.
- Parents understand the value of high quality programs and can recognize what those programs look like. They want their children to develop the behavioral, social, and emotional skills that will prepare them to be capable adults. Most of all, they know that these programs exist, but they're frustrated because they can't put their children in the best available programs because of cost, location or lack of availability.

## METHODOLOGY

- 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.
- Focus groups allowed parents to self-identify and describe their ideal capabilities in their children; their motivation as parents; and the ideal attributes, benefits, emotional benefits and value of early childhood education.
- Quantitative research tested self-identified parental motivations and statistically linked the self-identified ideal attributes, benefits, emotional consequences and value of early childhood education to create a map of parental decision-making.

## FINDINGS

- 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 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. While Latino and African American parents place slightly more emphasis on being part of a community and academic achievement, respectively, parents of all races and socioeconomic status overwhelmingly identify a capable, well-rounded child as the ultimate goal for early education.
- 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.
- 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.



## 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 teachers.

## ABOUT THE TRUST FOR LEARNING

- The Trust for Learning advocates for Ideal Learning—highly personalized, child-centric early education that creates a capable, well-rounded child. Ideal Learning is emotionally and intellectually engaging and accountable for developing the whole child.
- The Trust works directly with providers to help them scale their programs and effectively communicate their value to parents and policymakers.
- We also act as a convener in the early childhood education field, bringing together like-minded funding and advocacy groups and education providers to advocate cohesively for an increased supply of Ideal Learning programs.
- You can find more information about the Trust and this research at [trustforlearning.org](https://trustforlearning.org).