



**To:** Strategies for Children

**Fr:** John Gorman, Chris Anderson

**Re:** Statewide Parent Survey

This memorandum reports the main findings of a statewide survey of primary caregivers of children under age seven living in Massachusetts. A total of 585 telephone interviews were completed, including a statewide base sample and over samples among non-white parents and those living in Boston. Interviews were conducted between the dates of April 13 and May 10, 2006. The margin of error associated with the overall statewide results is  $\pm 4.9\%$  at a 95% confidence interval.

Ninety-seven percent of the caregivers interviewed were parents or stepparents, while 3% were grandparents. For discussion purposes, survey respondents will be referred to as parents.

### **Executive Summary**

This survey was designed to gain insight into the wants and needs of the parents of young children in Massachusetts, as well as to develop a profile of current early education and care arrangements.

Almost all young children are regularly receiving early education and care from someone other than parents. Fully 92% of children receive early education and care from someone other than a parent at least once a week.

In selecting early education and care arrangements, parents indicate that issues of quality are of greater importance than issues of cost and convenience. Parents indicate that it is very important that early education and care arrangements provide social and emotional development, and prepare children to go to school. The survey findings also indicate that many parents wish their current arrangements were better in these areas.

Parents of children under age six express very high levels of interest in enrolling a child in a universal pre-kindergarten program. Fully 8-in-10 parents say they would be interested in enrolling their child in a free, high-quality early education program.

Some of the most interesting findings from this study are found in the differences between various subgroups of parents—specifically, Latino and black parents compared to non-Latino white parents (here after referred to as white). Latino and black parents are more likely than white parents to say it is important that early education and care programs prepare children for school, and they are less likely to think their current arrangements are doing so.

The remainder of this document provides a topic-by-topic discussion of the overall and subgroup findings from the study.

### ***Profile of current arrangements***

Parents were asked about their child/ren's current early education and care arrangements.

The vast majority (92%) of Massachusetts children under age seven receive early education and care from someone other than a parent or guardian on a regular basis. On average, children under age seven receive regular early education and care from 2.3 providers other than parents or other guardians. Approximately one-quarter (27%) receive early education and care from one non-guardian provider, one-quarter (27%) from two, a fifth (20%) from three providers, 13% from four or five providers, and 5% regularly receive early education and care from six or more providers.

Parents use early education and care providers an average of 3.9 days each week, for an average of 27 hours per week. On average, single parents use providers more days per week than married parents—4.37 days, compared to 3.80 days.

Among parents who regularly use providers, 61% report paying for the early education and care, 25% say it is free, and 5% report using vouchers or subsidies. Among those who report paying or receiving subsidies, the average reported, per-child cost of early education and care per month is \$574. Latino (\$548) and white (\$549) parents report spending the same amount per month, while black parents (\$495) report spending approximately 10% less, on average.

Overall, early education and care arrangements appear to be fairly stable, both weekly and seasonally. Fully 83% of parents report using the same providers each day their child is in early education and care, while just 11% report using different arrangements for different days of the week. In addition, just 7% of parents report having changed or adjusted their early education and care arrangements within the last six months.

### ***Choosing early education and care arrangements***

Parents rate issues of quality as more important than issues of cost or convenience in selecting early education and care arrangements. The factors most likely to be *very important* to parents when selecting arrangements include *safety* (93%), *opportunities for social and emotional development* (80%), and *getting your child ready to go to school* (64%). The factors of *cost* (46%), *convenience of location* (59%), and *convenience of hours of operation* (58%) are *very important* factors to fewer parents when selecting early education and care arrangements.

Parents also rated the performance of their current early education and care arrangements on these same factors on a scale of excellent, good, only fair, and poor. The *safety* of current situations is rated *excellent* by 70% of parents, *opportunities for social and emotional development* by 65%, and *getting your child ready to go to school* by 50%.

*Cost* is rated *excellent* by 40%, and *convenience of location* (62%) and of *hours of operation* (57%) are rated *excellent* by approximately 6-in-10 parents.

By comparing *very important* ratings to *excellent* ratings on each factor, we are able to identify the factors parents would most like to see improved. For example, *safety* is rated *very important* by 93% of parents and *excellent* by 70%, producing a 23-point gap. This is not to say parents think safety is poor (fully 93% rate it either *excellent* or *good*), but it does suggest that 23% of parents think safety could be better. The next largest gaps are for the quality factors of *opportunities for social and emotional development* (-15), and *getting your child ready to go to school* (-14). Gaps are smaller or non-existent for *convenience of location* (+3), *convenience of hours of operation* (-1), and *cost* (-6).

Latino parents are more likely than white parents to rate quality factors *very important*, and they are also less likely to rate their current arrangements *excellent* on these factors. Fully 93% of Latino parents rate *opportunities for social and emotional development* as *very important*, while 57% rate their current situation as *excellent* on this factor—a 36-point deficit, compared to a 10-point deficit among white parents. Similarly, 87% of Latino parents rate *getting your child ready to go to school* as *very important*, while 38% rate their current arrangement as *excellent* on this factor—a 49-point deficit, compared to just 8 points among whites.

Perhaps reflecting parents' desire for higher quality learning opportunities for their young children, we find very high interest in a new universal preschool program. Fully 8-in-10 parents (81%) of children under age six say they would be interested in enrolling their child in a free, high-quality early education program for three to five year olds. Interest in universal preschool is especially high among non-married parents (88%), Latinos (89%), and those with household incomes of \$25,000 or less (89%).

When parents are asked what other information would be important to know about a potential new, universal early education program, the most common responses center on education quality and content (30%), followed by background information on the teachers and staff (26%).

Parents would be most likely to enroll their child if the program was offered year round (58%), followed by during the school year (37%), while few would be most likely to enroll a child if the program was only offered during the summer (4%).

Parents are most likely to enroll their child if the program is offered five days a week (44%), while 36% would be most likely to enroll their child if it is a three day per week program. We find less consensus on how many hours a day the program should be offered—22% say two to three hours; 22% say four hours; 23% say five to six; and 24% say seven to ten.

### ***Full-Day Kindergarten***

Expanding the availability of full day kindergarten appears to be another area of interest to many Massachusetts parents. Currently 58% of parents with children in kindergarten report that their child is in full day kindergarten. Among parents who report that their communities do not offer full-day kindergarten, six-in-ten (61%) say they would rather send their child to full-day than half-day kindergarten.