

## **Arkansas Parent Pre-Kindergarten Survey 2023**

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### **Executive Summary:**

The Office for Education Policy at the University of Arkansas administered a survey to Arkansas parents about their perceptions of their students' Pre-Kindergarten experiences. The survey, administered in March of 2023, was sent to parents of Kindergarten students currently attending an Arkansas public school, as well as parents of students currently enrolled in Pre-Kindergarten programs housed in Arkansas public schools or enrolled in a Head Start program. A total of 772 parents responded to the survey.

The following findings that emerged from the survey are discussed in the report.

Arkansas parents...

- are likely to enroll their child in a pre-kindergarten program.
- consider quality, location and cost most important when selecting a pre-kindergarten setting.
- report low costs for pre-kindergarten care.
- are satisfied with their child's pre-kindergarten experience.
- rate their Pre-Kindergarten center as 'Excellent' or 'Good' across a variety of characteristics.
- feel that their child was/is prepared for kindergarten.
- are more likely to report their child as well-prepared for kindergarten schoolwork as classroom environment if he/she attended pre-kindergarten.
- want increased access to quality, affordable pre-kindergarten options.

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## **I. Introduction**

Early childhood care settings play an important role in communities throughout Arkansas and in providing children with the foundation that they need for success in Kindergarten and beyond. In January, 2023, Governor Sanders issued an executive order including an analysis of the gaps between what is currently offered and what parents and families seek with regard to early childhood education. While Arkansas has a state licensing system for early care centers, there are no data regarding parent perspectives on the opportunities for pre-kindergarten care in their communities.

To gather parents' perspectives, the Office for Education Policy at the University of Arkansas partnered with the Arkansas Department of Education and the Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services to administer a survey about pre-kindergarten experiences. The survey was administered to three groups of Arkansas parents: parents of students currently attending kindergarten in a public school, parents of students currently attending pre-kindergarten in a public school, and parents of students currently attending a Head Start program. The survey was administered between March 11 and March 30, 2023. A total of 772 parents responded to the survey.

The majority of respondents were parents of children currently attending kindergarten in a public school (n=600). Among these parents, 449 reported that their child had regularly attended an early childhood setting outside of their home the year before attending kindergarten, while 151

reported that their child had not regularly attended an early childhood setting outside of their home the year before attending kindergarten. There were 108 respondents that are parents of students currently attending pre-kindergarten in a public school, and 64 parents whose children were currently attending a Head Start program. We identify these groups as Prior PreK (any), No Prior PreK, Current Public PreK, and Current Head Start, respectively. We summarize parents' perspectives in this report.

## II. Findings

### **1. Among parents of current kindergarteners, 3 out of 4 enrolled their child in an early childhood setting outside of the home the year before attending kindergarten.**

75% of current kindergarten parents that completed the survey indicated that in the year prior to kindergarten their student regularly attended an early childhood setting outside of their home.

The pre-kindergarten settings attended by the children reflects the variety of options available to parents. Among these parents, 45% reported their student attended a community-based childcare center, and 38% reported that their child attended a pre-kindergarten program located at a public school. Eight percent of respondents indicated that their student attended a Head Start program, 7% reported their child attended Early Intervention, and 3% reported that their student was cared for in a family child care home.

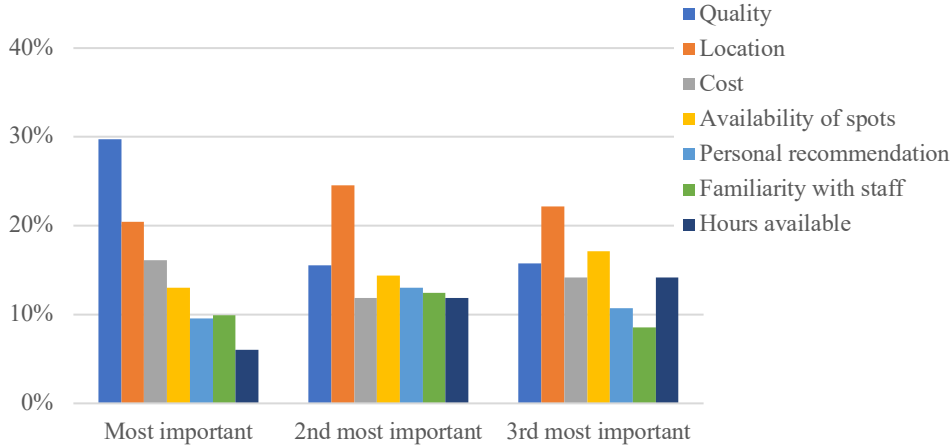
For the **25%** of parents who reported that they cared for their child in their own home during the year prior to kindergarten, 80% reported that a parent provided care for the child. A family member other than the parent provided care for 15% of the current kindergarten students, while the remaining 5% were cared for by a professional in-home caregiver or a friend of the family.

## **2. Quality, location, and cost were the most important factors considered by parents in selecting an early childhood setting.**

Among the parents who indicated that their child previously attended or is attending pre-kindergarten, **58%** of parents reported that they were aware of quality rating of the pre-kindergarten setting that they selected. Better Beginnings is the quality rating used by the state of Arkansas and is available for all licensed early childhood providers.

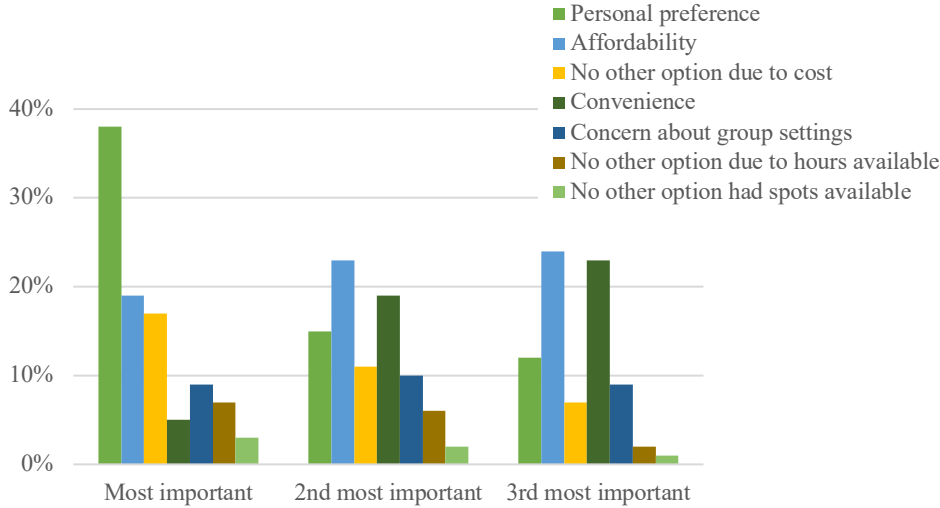
Quality, location and cost were identified most frequently by parents as the factors that they considered when selecting a pre-kindergarten setting. Among the 534 respondents, quality was the primary factor for 30%, and the secondary factory for 16%. Location was the primary factor for 20% of respondents, and the secondary factory for 25%. Cost was the primary factor for 16% of respondents, and the secondary factory for 12%. For 13% of respondents, availability was most important. Personal recommendation and familiarity with staff were primary factor for 10% of respondents, and 6% responded that hours available was their primary factor for selection.

**Figure 1.** Most Important Factors in Choosing Pre-Kindergarten Setting



Personal preference and affordability were the factors identified as most important by parents who indicated that their child did not attend a pre-kindergarten setting outside of their home. Among the 134 respondents, personal preference was the primary factor for 38%, and the secondary factory for 15%. Affordability was the primary factor for 19%, and the secondary factory for 23%. Closely related, ‘no other option due to cost’ was identified as the primary factor for 17%, and the secondary factory for 11%. A smaller percentage of parents identified convenience (24%), and concern about group settings (19%) as one of the top two most important factors considered when deciding to provide care at home in the year prior to kindergarten. The lack of other options due to hours of operation or availability were a top factor for only 13% and 2% of these parents, respectively.

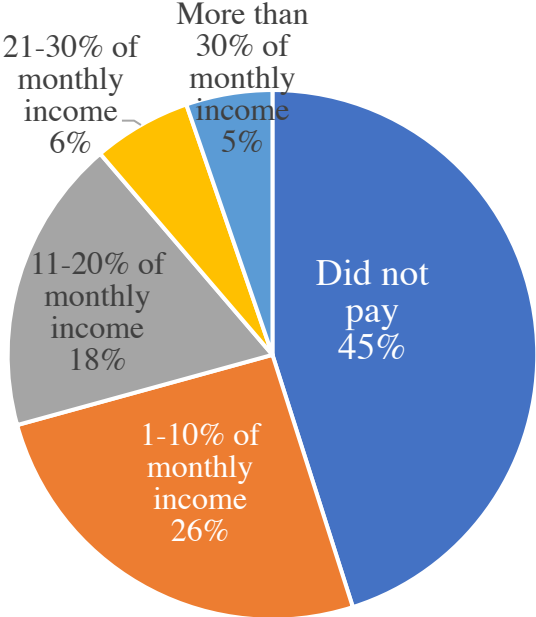
**Figure 2.** Most Important Factors in Choosing Home Care Setting



**3. The majority of parents whose children attended Pre-K reported little cost for care.**

Among the parents who indicated that their child previously attended or is attending pre-kindergarten, 45% reported that they did not pay for childcare, and 26% reported that they paid 10% or less of their monthly income on childcare. Eighteen percent of parents reported spending between 11 and 20% of their monthly income on childcare prior to kindergarten, while 6% spent between 20 and 30% of their monthly income. Five percent of parents reported spending more than 30% of their monthly income on childcare for their pre-kindergarten student.

**Figure 3.** Percentage of Monthly Income Paid for Pre-Kindergarten Setting

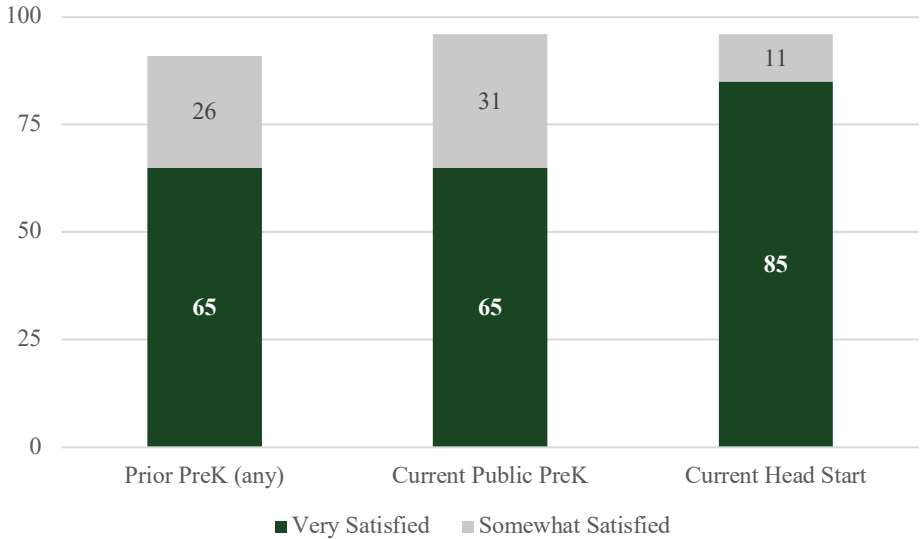


**4. Nearly all Arkansas parents report being satisfied with their child’s pre-kindergarten experience.**

93% of parents whose children attended pre-kindergarten or are currently enrolled in a public pre-kindergarten or Head Start program report being very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their child’s pre-kindergarten setting. While there is some variation by the setting selected, satisfaction is high across all groups.



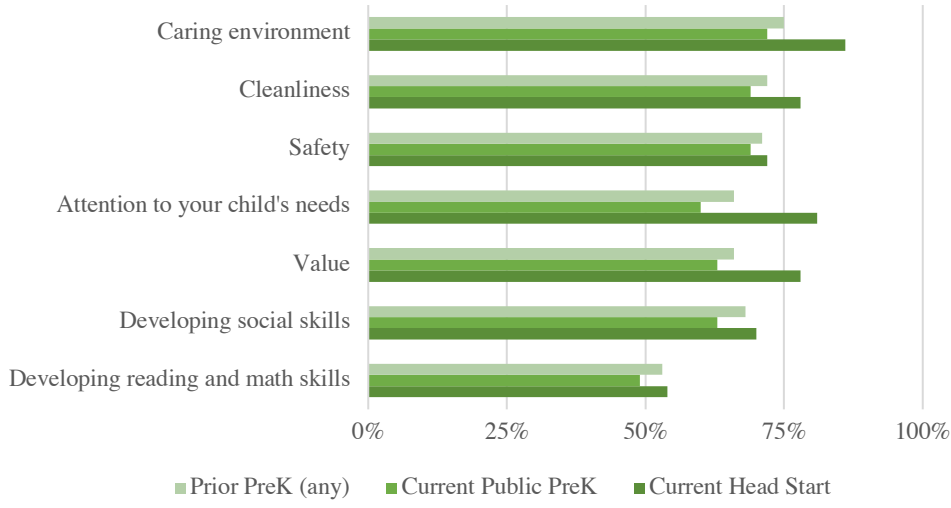
**Figure 4. Parent Satisfaction with Pre-K Setting by Group**



**5. Nearly all Arkansas parents rate their Pre-K center as Excellent or Good across a variety of characteristics.**

When asked to rate their child’s pre-kindergarten setting in a variety areas, over 90% of parents indicated the setting was “Excellent” or “Good” in almost every category. Parents felt that their child’s pre-kindergarten setting was a caring environment, that is was clean and the children were safe. Parents also reported that the caregivers paid attention to their child’s needs, and that they felt the setting was a good value. Parents felt that the pre-kindergarten setting attended by their child did a better job developing social skills and reading and math skills, which was the area where pre-kindergarten centers received the lowest scores. Only 52% of parents rated their pre-kindergarten setting “Excellent” in developing reading and math skills.

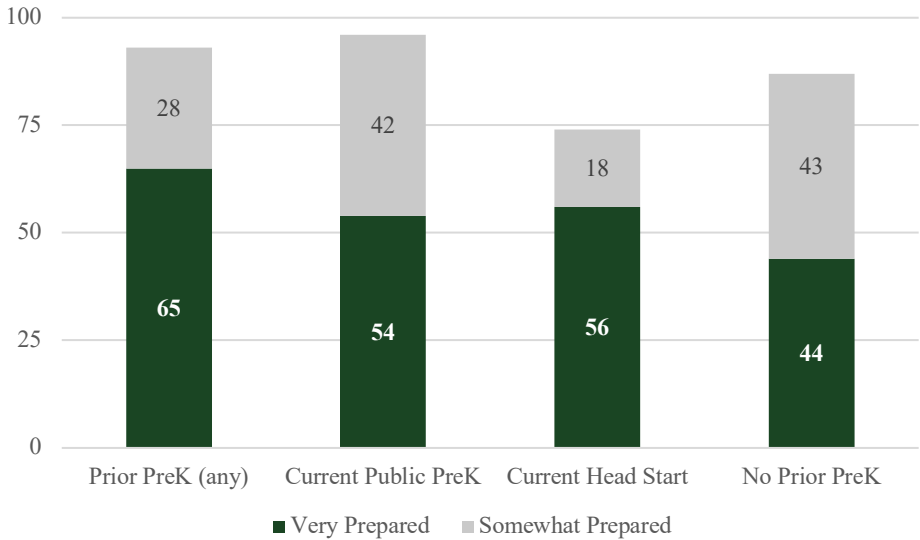
**Figure 5.** Percentage of Parents Rating Pre-Kindergarten Setting “Excellent”



**6. Overall, 92% of Arkansas parents reported feeling that their child was prepared for kindergarten.**

Although parents were less likely to report that the pre-kindergarten settings were excelling at developing reading and math skills, almost all parents reported that their student was Very or Somewhat prepared for kindergarten. Parents of kindergarten children who attended prek were the most likely to report that their child was very prepared for kindergarten (65%), while parents of kindergarteners who were cared for at home were the least likely to report that their child was very prepared for kindergarten (44%).

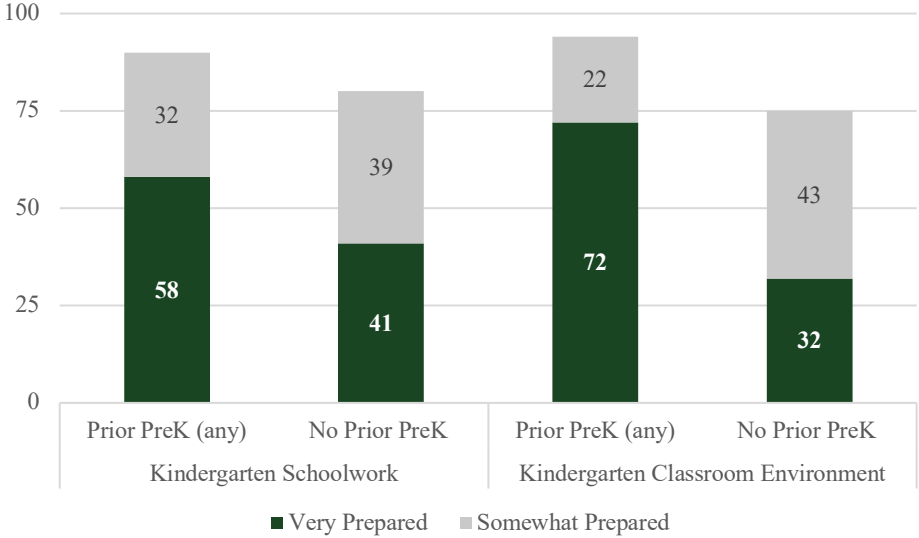
**Figure 6.** Percentage of Parents Indicating Child is “Very Prepared” or “Prepared” for Kindergarten



**7. Among parents of current kindergarten students, those whose students attended pre-kindergarten were more likely to feel their child was prepared for kindergarten schoolwork and classroom environment.**

Among those parents whose students are currently attending Kindergarten, those whose child attended pre-kindergarten are more likely to report that their child was well prepared for kindergarten schoolwork and classroom environment than those parents who provided care at home. The difference between the prior prek group and the no prior prek group of students reported as “Very Prepared” was substantial. The students who had attended pre-kindergarten were 17 percentage points more likely to be reported as “Very Prepared” for kindergarten schoolwork and 40 percentage points more likely to be reported as “Very Prepared” for the kindergarten classroom environment.

**Figure 7.** Percentage of Parents Indicating Child is “Very Prepared” or “Prepared” for Kindergarten Schoolwork and Kindergarten Classroom Environment



**8. Parents want increased access to quality, affordable pre-kindergarten options.**

Arkansas parents who indicated that they were less than Very satisfied with their child’s pre-kindergarten setting were asked to indicate what options they would have preferred. These major themes from the responses were increased access to pre-kindergarten programs, for the programs to have more curriculum and do more to prepare students for kindergarten, and more affordable options.

Thirty-one percent of parents noted a need for greater access to pre-kindergarten programming. The following statements from parents are representative of those provided.

*“Options for pre-K in the public school system in closer proximity to our home.”*

*“Since we make more money than the poverty level my child was not eligible for prek and there are no other options available close to me.”*

*“I wish public schools offered all parents the option for early childhood education.”*

Parents also indicated that they would like pre-kindergarten to have more curriculum and more of a focus on preparing students for success in kindergarten. The following statements from parents represent key themes from the comments.

*“A pre-k setting that is a classroom setup similar to a kindergarten classroom with structure. Most of those settings are only available for those that are income qualified or are private school and the tuition is greater than daycare.”*

*“Better resources for the kids as far as learning to read, write, and [do] math”*

*“I would have preferred to have my child somewhat ready for kindergarten, [to be informed about ] what to expect, or at least ... what was needed to be taught to the child before entering kindergarten”*

*“More advanced options for younger children or a highly skilled class for those who already know their alphabet, colors, numbers, etc. My child entered the classroom ready to read, but since most of the other kids were not, she did not receive the level of instruction that she was ready for.”*

The cost of pre-kindergarten care was another consistent theme. Twenty-three percent of parents indicated a need for more affordable options. The following statements from parents represent key themes from the comments.

*“Not income based. According to the state we make too much money for prek, yet we live pay check to pay check.”*

*“I would prefer to have early childhood settings that are a lot more affordable for everyone, not just those that are considered low income.”*

*“Free public preschool.”*

Parents also mentioned a need for improved quality early childhood care providers, concerns about safety at early education center, and a desire for more opportunities for children who experience disabilities, delays, and disorders. Some parents indicated that they would like more alternative programs to be available like Montessori or dual-language pre-kindergarten settings.

### **III. Summary**

Parents that responded to our survey about their experiences with pre-kindergarten settings were generally satisfied with their experiences. Parents reported that quality, location and cost were the top three factors in selecting an early learning setting. Most parents reported paying nothing or very little for pre-kindergarten care, and parents were satisfied with their experience. Nearly all parents rated the Pre-K center highly, although lower ratings were given for developing reading and math skills. Almost all parents reported that their child was prepared for kindergarten, and those whose child attended pre-kindergarten were more likely to be perceived as very prepared for kindergarten schoolwork and the classroom environment than those who had not attended pre-kindergarten. Parents want increased access to quality, affordable pre-kindergarten options.

## *Survey Instruments*

### **Kindergarten Parent**

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Researchers from the Office for Education Policy at The University of Arkansas are gathering information from parents about early childhood education in Arkansas to inform state policies. We developed this survey in partnership with the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services, and it should take 10 minutes or less to complete. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. Survey data will be aggregated and will be used to describe the characteristics of parents' opinions about early childhood education. No identifying information will be used in any reports or publications resulting from this research. If you have questions or concerns about the survey, you may contact Sarah McKenzie at [oe@uark.edu](mailto:oe@uark.edu). By completing this survey, you indicate your consent to participate. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Ro Windwalker, the University's IRB Compliance Coordinator, at 479-575-2208 or [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu).

Did your current kindergarten student regularly attend an early childhood setting outside of your home the year before attending kindergarten (three or more days per week)?

Yes

No

Please select the option that best describes your student's early childhood setting the year before attending kindergarten. If your student attended more than one setting, please consider the one that your student attended the most regularly.

A pre-kindergarten program located at a public school

Head Start

A community-based childcare center

Family child care home

Early Intervention

What was the name of the early childhood setting that your student attended during the year before attending kindergarten? If your student attended more than one setting, please consider the one that your student attended most regularly.

Please select the top 3 factors that led you to choose this early childhood setting, with 1 representing the most important.

\_ Cost

\_ Location

\_ Hours available

\_ Quality

\_ Availability of a spot for your child

\_ Familiarity with staff

\_ Personal recommendation



Were you aware of the quality rating for the early childhood center that you selected (e.g. Better Beginnings)?

Yes

No

Please rate the early childhood setting that your child attended on the following characteristics.

	Excellent	Good	Poor	Terrible
Safety	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Caring environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cleanliness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Value	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing reading and math skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing social skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attention to your child's needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Who cared for your child?

- Parent
  - Family member
  - Friend
  - Professional in-home caregiver
  - other
- 

Please select your top 3 factors that led you to choose caring for your child at home, with 1 representing the most important.

- Affordability
- No other options available due to cost
- Convenience
- No other options had spots available
- Concern about group settings
- No other options available due to hours needed
- Personal preference

In the year prior to kindergarten, approximately how much did you pay each month for care for your current kindergartener?

- I didn't pay for childcare (\$0 per month)
  - \$1 - \$250 per month
  - \$251 - \$500 per month
  - \$501 - \$750 per month
  - \$751 - \$1,000 per month
  - More than \$1,000 per month
- 

In the year prior to kindergarten, about what percentage of your monthly household income did you spend on care for your current kindergartener?

- 1 - 10% of monthly household income
  - 11 - 20% of monthly household income
  - 21 - 30% of monthly household income
  - 31 - 40% of monthly household income
  - 41 - 50% of monthly household income
  - More than 50% of monthly household income
- 

Did your child receive any therapies such as speech, developmental, occupational in early childhood?

- Yes
- No

How satisfied were you with the early childhood settings available to your child the year before attending kindergarten?

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

What would you have preferred to have had available for early childhood settings?

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In your opinion, how prepared was your child for kindergarten?

- Very prepared
- Somewhat prepared
- Somewhat unprepared
- Very unprepared

In your opinion, how prepared was your child for kindergarten schoolwork?

- Very prepared
- Somewhat prepared
- Somewhat unprepared
- Very unprepared

In your opinion, how prepared was your child for the kindergarten classroom environment?

- Very prepared
- Somewhat prepared
- Somewhat unprepared
- Very unprepared

**Prekindergarten Parent/ Head Start Parent Survey**

Please select the top 3 factors that led you to choose the early childhood setting that your child attends, with 1 representing the most important.

- \_ Location
- \_ Cost
- \_ Availability of a spot for your child
- \_ Hours available
- \_ Quality
- \_ Familiarity with staff
- \_ Personal recommendation

Were you aware of the quality rating for the early childhood center that you selected (e.g. Better Beginnings)?

Yes

No

Please rate the early childhood setting that your child is attending on the following characteristics.

	Excellent	Good	Poor	Terrible
Safety	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Caring environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cleanliness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Value	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing reading and math skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Developing social skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attention to your child's needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Approximately how much do you pay each month for care for your child?

- I didn't pay for childcare (\$0 per month)
  - \$1 - \$250 per month
  - \$251 - \$500 per month
  - \$501 - \$750 per month
  - \$751 - \$1,000 per month
  - More than \$1,000 per month
- 

About what percentage of your monthly household income do you spend on care for your child?

- 1 - 10% of monthly household income
- 11 - 20% of monthly household income
- 21 - 30% of monthly household income
- 31 - 40% of monthly household income
- 41 - 50% of monthly household income
- More than 50% of monthly household income

Does your child receive any therapies such as speech, developmental, or occupational in early childhood?

- Yes
  - No
-

How satisfied are you with the early childhood settings available to your child?

- Very satisfied
  - Somewhat satisfied
  - Somewhat dissatisfied
  - Very dissatisfied
- 

What would you have preferred to have had available for early childhood settings?

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In your opinion, how well prepared is your child for kindergarten?

- Very prepared
- Somewhat prepared
- Somewhat unprepared
- Very unprepared