

# Parents as consumers of early childhood education: Research findings 2017 <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Miller, S.

**Source:** Trust for Learning

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 31 May 2018

## AVAILABILITY

Full PDF online <sup>[2]</sup>

## 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
- 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.

**Related link:** The evidence is in: Parents want early education that teaches the whole child <sup>[3]</sup>

**Region:** United States <sup>[4]</sup>

## Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/18/06/parents-consumers-early-childhood-education-research> [2] <https://trustforlearning.org/resource/parent-research-findings-report/> [3] <http://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/18/06/evidence-parents-want-early-education-teaches-whole-child> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7865>