

The evidence is in: Parents want early education that teaches the whole child ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

Two years ago, I started questioning whether anyone had ever formally or comprehensively asked parents what they are looking for in their children's education. While many had researched a particular parent engagement philosophy or approach, there was little insight into why parents felt the way they did about their children's learning. Researchers were not evaluating the aspirations or motivations of parents--the consumers of early childhood education--when it comes to seeking out programs and resources. This gap in information was doing a disservice to children, parents, providers, and entire communities.

In an effort to help fill this gap, Trust for Learning commissioned research--including 12 focus groups and a national survey of nearly 1,500 parents--to better understand parents' needs and motivations when it comes to early education for their children. What we found was that across background, income, and race, parents share some common attitudes, beliefs, and aspirations. Most notably, parents said social-emotional development is their highest priority when considering a program--this development is seen as providing the foundation for enduring success in school and adulthood. Parents are largely united in describing their ideal early learning program for their children: highly developmental education that places an emphasis on the child as an individual and supports them in becoming a capable, lifelong learner and doer.

The main lesson we learned through this extensive research is that parents want their children in learning environments that address the whole child in order to set them on the best path toward achievement in school and life.

However, parents are not necessarily aware that such programs exist or that they can be realistically accessed. The lingering perception of developmental early childhood approaches, like Montessori, Reggio Emilia, or Waldorf, is one of a luxury only wealthier parents can afford. That should not and does not need to be the case. In fact, whole-child, developmental education approaches have been part of the public sector for years, available in school districts in states such as California, North Carolina, Connecticut, Texas, Minnesota, and South Carolina. Moreover, studies such as that of Dr. Angeline Lillard in the Hartford school district or that of the Riley Institute in South Carolinashow highly developmental, whole-child programs can close the achievement gap for low-income children while increasing performance for all students on measures of academic achievement, social skills, and executive functioning.

Expanding the reach of highly developmental education by making it accessible to all families and by raising awareness of what already exists is critical to enabling all children to achieve these ideal outcomes. The goal of our country's education system should be to encourage schools to integrate all aspects of development--social, emotional, and academic--to enrich student well-being. Until recently, though, conversations had largely been missing some critical participants capable of advancing positive change: parents.

Educators, policymakers, and the broader public can be more effective in serving families and children when the motivations of parents are better understood and respected. It's time to ensure that parents' voices are at the forefront of conversations about early learning and to empower them to demand whole-child programs in their communities.

Related link: Parents as consumers of early childhood education: Research findings 2017 ^[3]

Region: United States ^[4]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/18/06/evidence-parents-want-early-education-teaches-whole-child>

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