

PEI EARLY CHILDHOOD PARENT SURVEY REPORT

2010

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ECE PARENT SURVEY 2010

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ECE PARENT SURVEY 2010

BACKGROUND

An on-line parent survey was available to parents during the weeks of February 8.2010 and February 15.2010. Although the survey was primarily designed for parents of preschool children, it was also possible for grandparents, aunts, uncles and other family relatives and friends to complete the survey. As well, a specific stream of questions was designed for those parents who were expecting their first child.

Business cards with information about the survey and how to access the link were printed, and provided to a variety of different types of programs for distribution to parents. Cards were provided to licensed ECEC programs, family resource centres, and public health nursing offices. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development supported the advertising efforts by placing advertisements about the survey in local Island newspapers.

Media reports (CBC Television and Radio) about the project that were aired during the same time period also provided information to parents about the survey.

Parents were able to access the survey via a link on the website for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The Early Childhood Development Association of PEI also hosted a link to the survey on their website. Family resource centres provided computer/internet access for parents to be able to complete the survey. The survey was available in English and French.

1. RESPONDENTS

A total of 785 people responded to the on-line survey. The majority of respondents (560) were parents of preschool children or expecting their first child. A total of 128 grandparents, aunts, uncles, and/or other relatives responded, as well as 97 individuals who categorized themselves as "other". The "other" category included parents of older children, early childhood educators, or interested persons.

The majority of respondents were women (89.5%) and a majority (95.5%) noted that English was the language spoken at home, while 4.2% indicated that French was spoken at home. There were slightly more respondents living in rural areas (55.5%) than in urban. Almost half (49.1%) of respondents were from Queen's County, with 34.2% from Prince and 15.9% from King's Counties. Five respondents did not live in PEI.

2. VOLUNTEERS

Grandparents, aunts, uncles and other relatives were asked if they would volunteer in programs for preschool children. Thirty six percent agreed that they would volunteer, while another 33% said "maybe". It was suggested, however, that it did not make sense to build an early childhood framework on the basis of volunteers – as the pool of volunteers was not well defined, and there was little accountability. However, the responses do indicate that there may be a number of

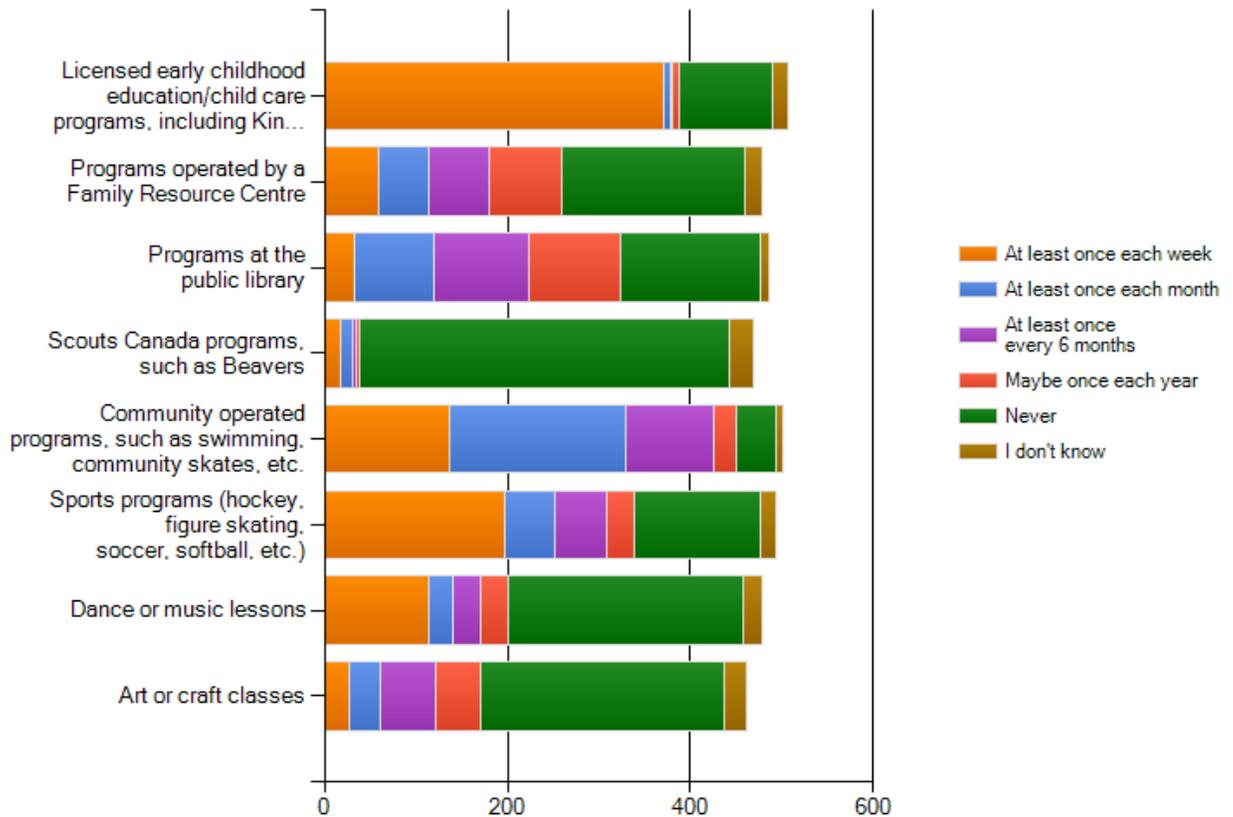
people in Island communities who would volunteer their time if they were asked to do a specific task or activity in an early childhood program.

3. AWARENESS/USE OF COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Parents of preschool children were asked about their use of community-based programs for preschool children. These programs may include licensed ECEC programs, but would also include programs sponsored by family resource centres, programs at the public library, recreation programs, etc. Parents indicated they used a variety of types of programs:

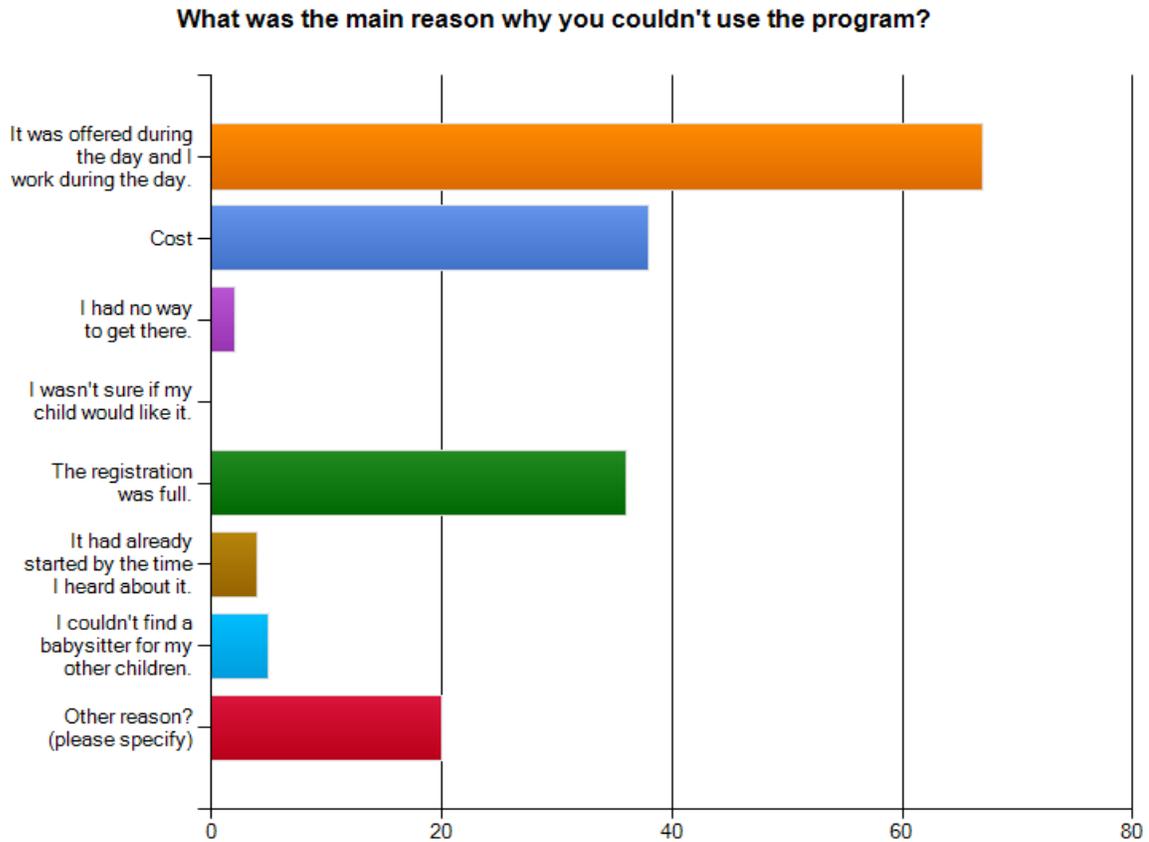
Table 1: Use of community-based programs

Across the Island, there are many types of programs for preschool children. Please tell us how often you may use the following types of programs:



Parents were also asked if they had experienced difficulty in using community based programs for their children. Approximately 1/3 of parents indicated that they had, with cost, transportation, and the time that the program was offered as the main reasons for not being able to use the program:

Table 2: Barriers to using community-based early childhood programs

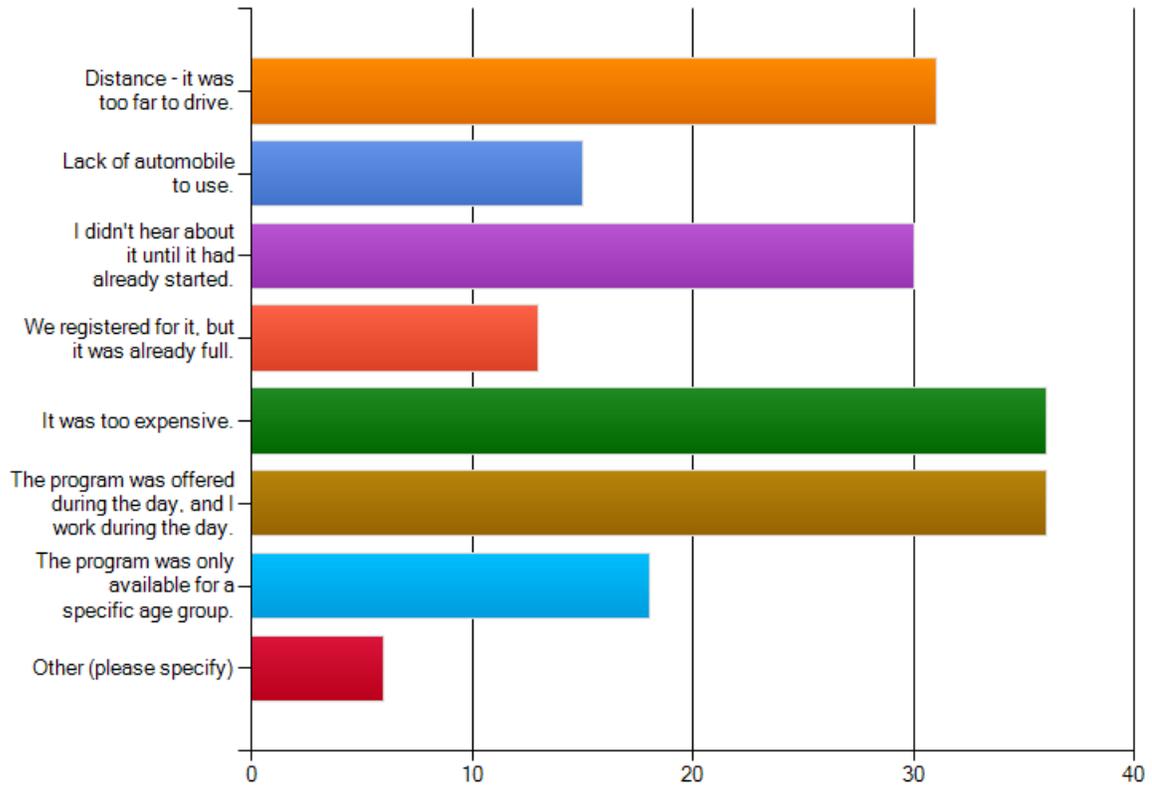


A few parents noted that because of severe allergies and/or sensitivities, they were not able to participate in programs due to the type of physical environment where the program was located. Others noted that sometimes when a program was advertised, it never actually took place due to limited interest and/or enrollment.

Grandparents and other relatives were also asked about their awareness and use of community-based programs for preschool children. The responses from grandparents and other relatives indicate a good awareness of what is available in the community, and a high level of use of these programs among the respondents. This group was also asked if there was a time when they wanted to use a program, but were not able to do so. Of those who responded to this question, almost 44% of respondents had experienced this. When asked why they were not able to use the program, reasons were varied, but transportation, cost, and hours of the program were among the most often cited reasons that this group was not able to access a program:

Table 3: Barriers to grandparents and other family members in accessing programs

What prevented you from being able to participate in that program? Please check all that apply.



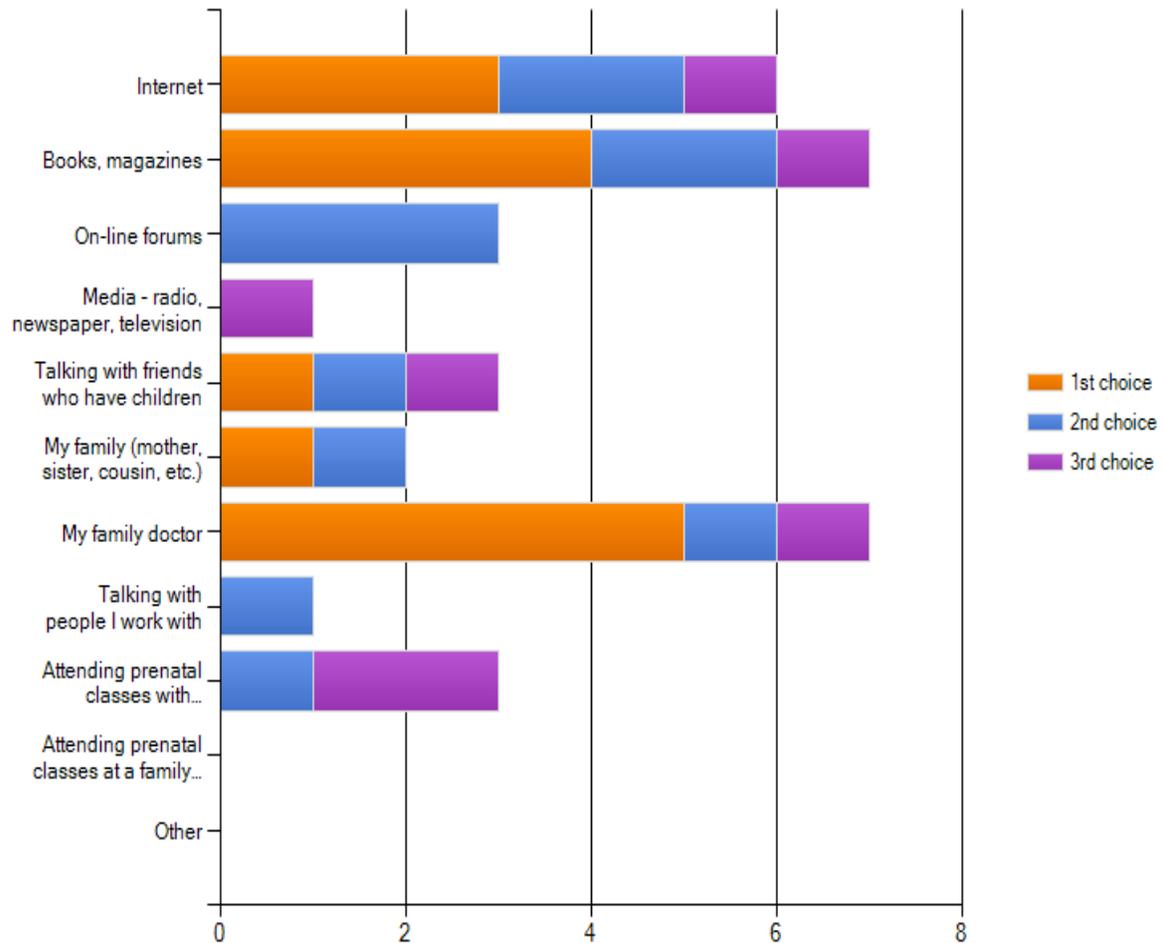
4. PARENTS' SOURCES OF INFORMATION

All parents were asked to identify their preferred methods of receiving information about child development. This is an important question, as it can help to identify strategies for providing such information to parents of young children, both before and after the birth of their child.

Both parents who were expecting their first child and parents of preschool children were asked this question. Responses suggest that both groups of parents rely heavily on the internet, books and magazines for information. For information about pregnancy and birth, parents rely on their doctor, while parents of preschool children rely on friends:

Table 4: Parents' preferred methods of receiving information about pregnancy and/or child development when expecting their first child

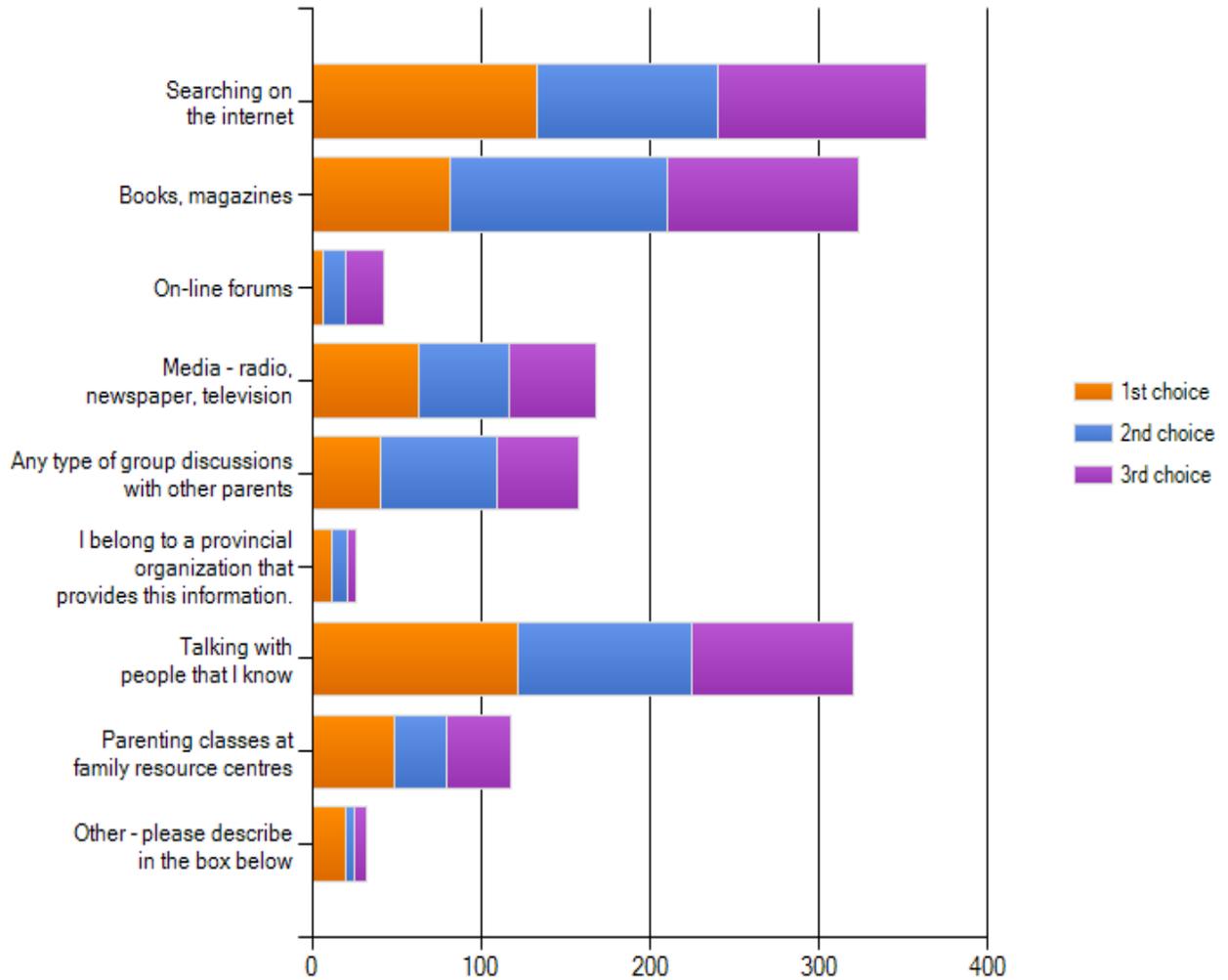
What have been your most preferred methods of receiving information about pregnancy and/or child development? Please indicate your top three choices.



Several parents provided additional comments about their use of the internet as a vehicle for gathering information. Parents did not use social networking sites such as Facebook for this type of information, but rather relied on Google searches on specific topics, or followed specific blogs on topics they were interested in, or on parenting as a generalized topic area.

Table 5: Preferred ways to receive information as reported by parents of preschoolers

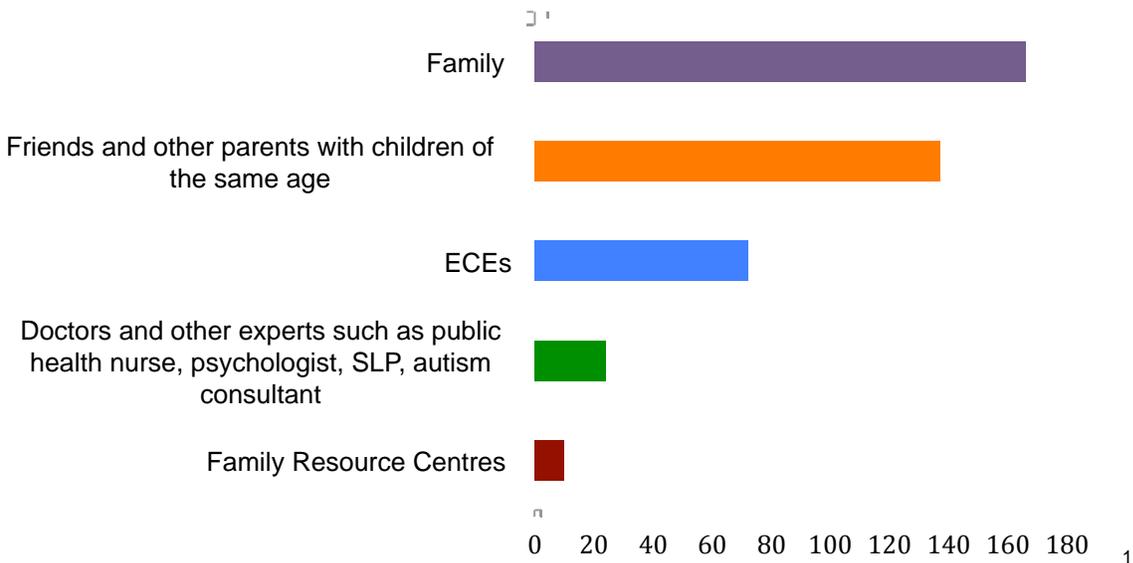
What are the three main ways you prefer to receive information about child development?



Parents of preschoolers were also given the option to indicate if there was one person they “talked with most often”. A total of 280 parents opted to answer this question, and identified the following:

□

Table 6: Person identified by parents of preschoolers as the person they “talked with most often” about child development issues



5. TOPICS OF INTEREST

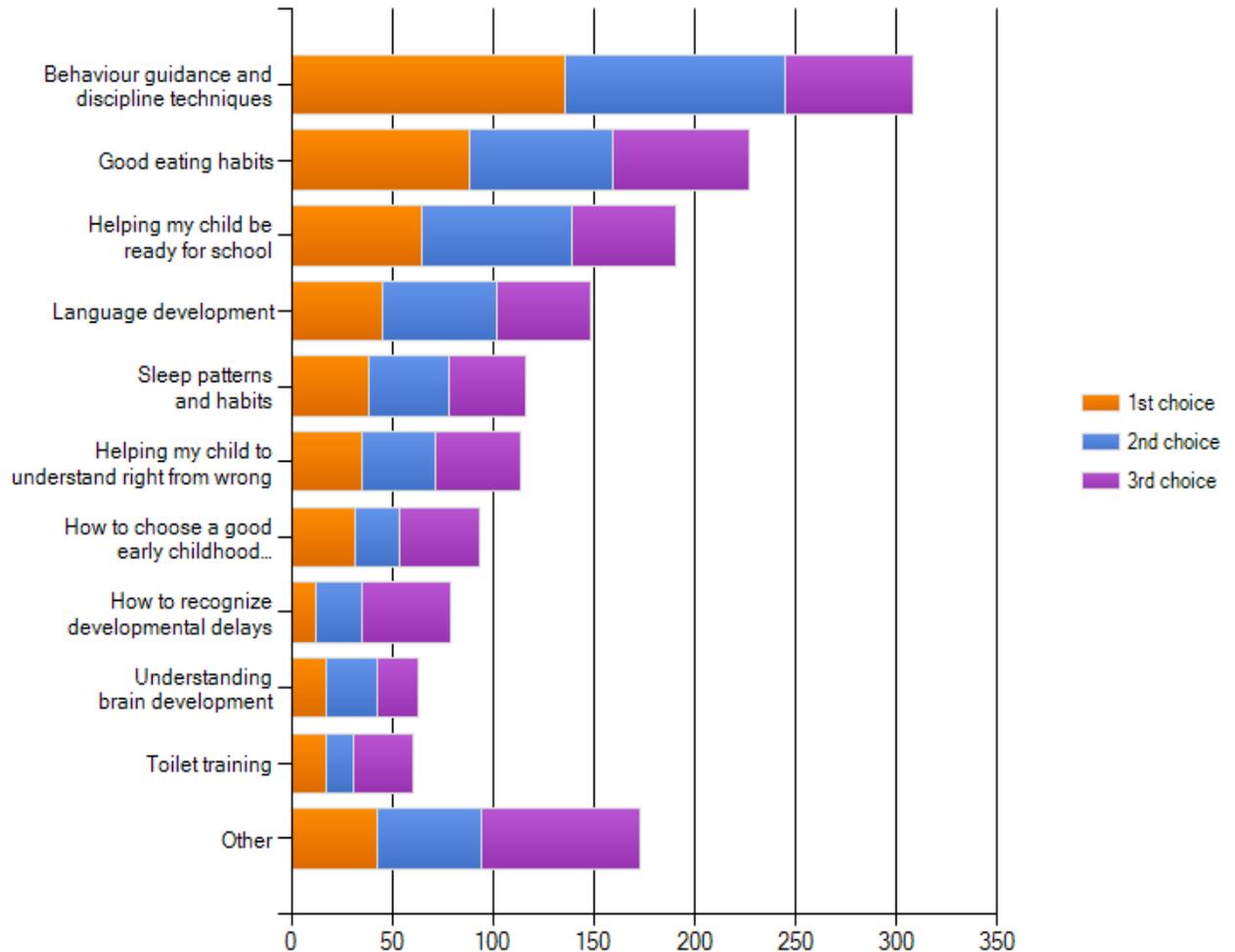
Parents were also asked to identify their top three choices regarding topics where they were interested in receiving more information. Again, this is an important question because it can give some indication about the types of information that parents are seeking, and be of assistance to those who plan for newspaper and magazine articles, information to be posted on parent websites, and topics for upcoming speakers at workshops and conferences.

Responses indicate a strong interest among parents for more information about behaviour guidance and discipline. A number of parents provided additional suggestions in the “other” category, including blended families, divorce, anxiety, and environmental (chemical) risks to healthy child development. Many parents noted that their interest in specific topics changed with the age and developmental stages of their children.

¹ Numbers do not add to the total as some respondents identified more than one person, e.g., family and friends.

Table 7: Weighted choices for topics of interest for information about children

What are your top three topics of interest for information about children?



6. SCHOOL READINESS

Parents were asked their opinions about what skills and knowledge were important for their children to develop in preparation for school. Parents were nearly unanimous in selecting the following skills and abilities as being very important or somewhat important:

- 100% thought it was very important (96.4%) or somewhat important (3.6%) that their child be able to **communicate needs, wants, and thoughts verbally**
- 99.4% thought it was very important (67.7%) or somewhat important (31.7%) that their child be **enthusiastic and curious about approaching new activities**
- 99.3% thought it was very important (87%) or somewhat important (12.3%) that their child be **able to take direction from an adult**

- 99% thought it was very important (72.7%) or somewhat important (26.4%) that their child be **able to take turns and share**
- 97% thought it was very important (65.5%) or somewhat important (31.5%) that their child is **able to recognize and name shapes such as circle, square, triangle**
- 96% thought it was very important (52.4%) or somewhat important (43.6%) that their child is **able to dress independently, including boots, coat, and mittens**
- 95.8% thought it was very important (63.6%) or somewhat important (32.2%) that their child is **able to use pencils and paintbrushes**
- 95.2% thought it was very important (48.9%) or somewhat important (46.3%) that their child is **able to sit still and pay attention**
- 93.8% thought it was very important (62.1%) or somewhat important (31.7%) that their child is **able to recognize numbers from 1 to 10**
- 93.6% thought it was very important (62.1%) or somewhat important (31.5%) that their child **knows the letters of the alphabet**

While a majority of parents felt that the following skills were also very or somewhat important, there was not the same 90%+ agreement as with the skills noted above:

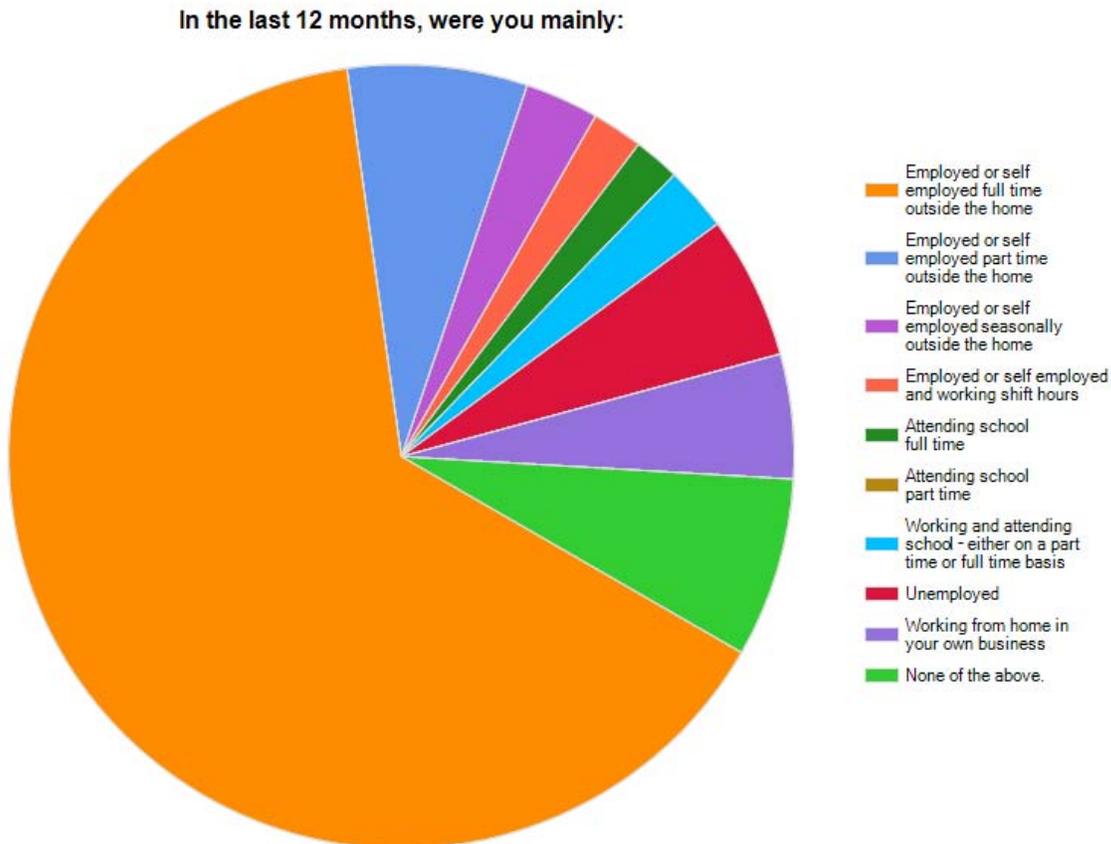
- Child is able to run, hop, jump.
- Child is able to print his/her name.
- Child is able to read a few words.
- Child is able to count to 20 or more.
- Child is able to do simple addition.

It is important to understand the types of skills and knowledge that parents believe to be important for school readiness, as parents will seek out and organize activities for their children that focus on the acquisition of these skills and types of knowledge. As well, parents make decisions regarding how “ready” their child is for school based on these opinions, and may determine that their child begin school at a later date based on these beliefs.

7. PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT AND CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS

A majority of parents (64.4%) who responded to the survey are employed or self-employed on a full time basis:

Table 8: Parental main patterns of employment and/or study in last 12 months



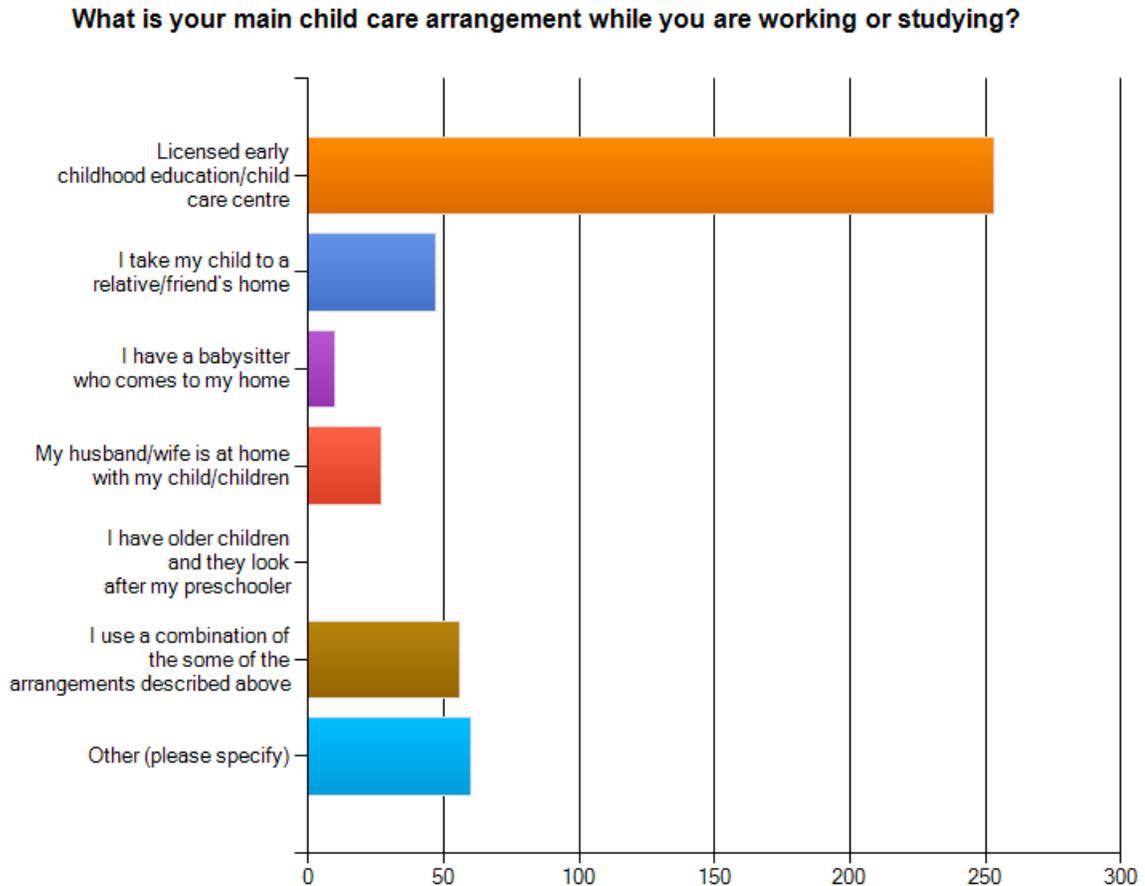
In addition, parents who were employed were asked what type of child care arrangements they made for their preschool children during work hours. A majority of respondents indicated that they used a licensed early childhood education and care program. However, a number of parents also indicated “other” child care arrangements. The majority of these respondents indicated that they used a babysitter or an unlicensed caregiver. However, some parents described complicated and unpredictable types of child care arrangements. Some parents indicated that their child care plans changed by the week, depending on who may be available to them:

As of right now I work shift work and arrange my schedule to work only evening and night shifts. This way I can have my sister (16 yrs old) babysit after school, or the children sleep at my parents' house when I do a full night. When I need to sleep during the day I have random family members babysit the children usually in our home. My husband works out west and watches them when he is home.

I have used a licensed early child care center in conjunction with a grandparent watching her a few days a week. My husband is home for part of the year. The licensed facility in my area is not very professional and they have talked about parents including myself and children. If the government is

planning on putting more money into these facilities, I believe there should be a code of ethics surrounding professionalism and privacy. Also most of the employees of this facility are not trained in early childhood education and some don't even have their grade 12 education. Privately run facilities are not all the same or equal and I don't believe they should be funded more until more consistency in policy and operation comes about.

Table 9: Parents’ responses regarding main type of child care arrangement while working or studying



In addition, there were a number of parents who selected “other” who themselves operated unlicensed child care homes. Some of these parents indicated that they could not afford to pay for child care for their own children and continue to be employed outside of the home, and so they opted to care for other children until their child was old enough to enter the public school system.

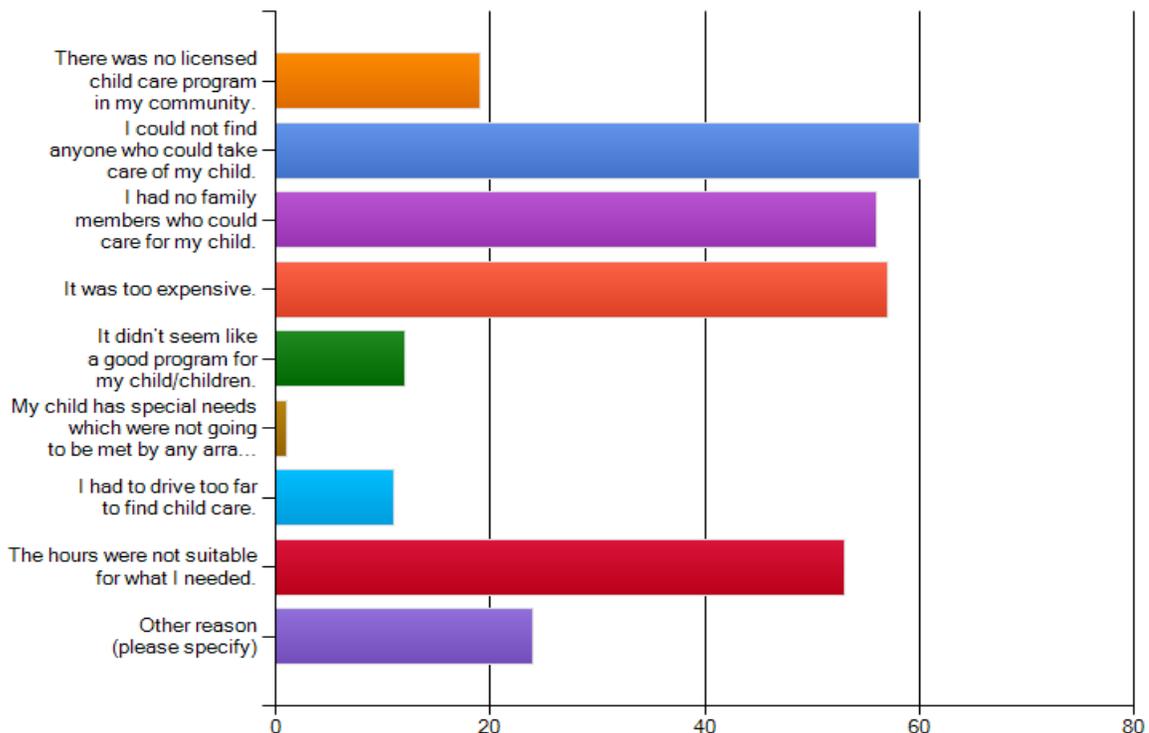
I've chosen to take care of other children in our home until our youngest child is in Kindergarten next year. I would have been giving my whole pay for child care should I have gone back to work. She goes three days /week to a childcare facility for pre-kindergarten, half days.

The survey asked parents who were expecting their first child about their intentions for employment after their child was born, and after any available maternity and/or parental leave. Responses from this group of parents should be treated with extreme caution, as there was a very tiny sample of parents who fit this description who responded to the survey. Of those who did respond (8 parents-to-be), 75% (6 families) said both parents would be returning to full time employment, and 25% (2 families) said one parent would be staying home with the child after the allowable maternity/parental leave period. Parents were asked to consider what their plans would be for their child if cost and transportation were not factors for consideration. With all 8 families responding to this question, 75% (6 families) said they would prefer to enroll their child in a regulated ECEC centre; one would prefer to take their child to a family member for care, and one preferred to have a caregiver come to their home.

Parents were asked if there was ever a time when lack of child care meant that they had to either not accept or discontinue employment or studies. A total of 30% of parents responding to this survey indicated that they have found themselves in this situation. When asked why they were not able to arrange for child care, responses included the following:

Table 10: Reasons parents were not able to arrange for child care

Why were you not able to arrange for child care? Please check all that apply.



For parents in this situation, the majority of “other” reasons included lack of infant care (for children younger than 22 months) and need for hours that accommodate shift workers’ schedules.

There are no licensed childcare facilities that offer extended hour child care services. I am a shift worker and the mold of the 9-5 worker isn't appropriate for me when my job can be days, evenings and/or nights.

Our babysitter was going through a divorce and we were unable to find suitable care for our 2 year-old for a one-month period. (We were on a waiting list at our four year-old's childcare centre.) At 2, we wanted a licensed daycare, but those with strong programming have long wait lists.

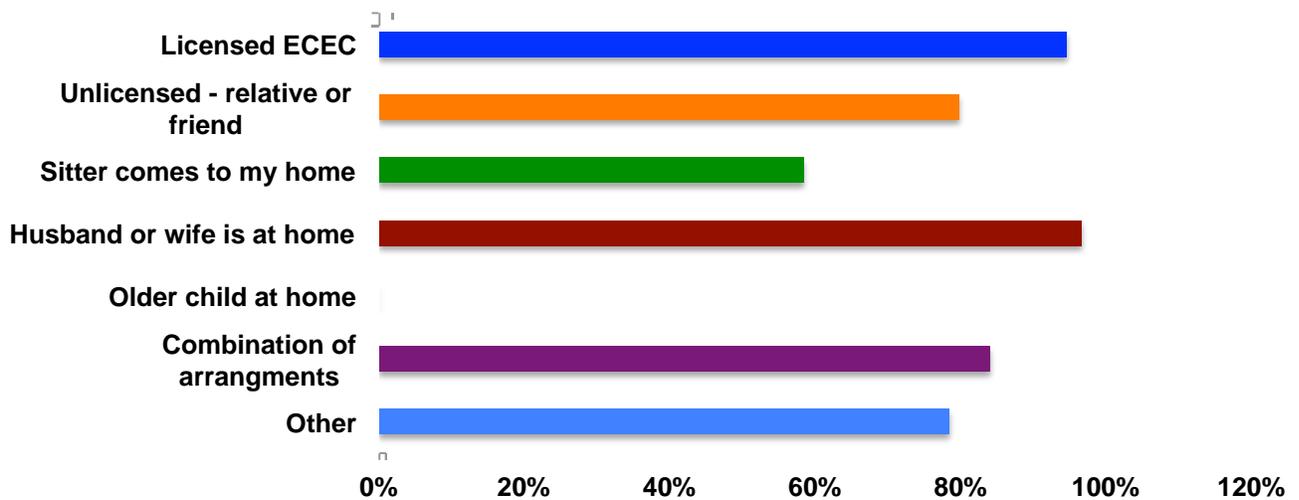
I have three children needing childcare. It was too expensive to go to work. After I paid childcare and gas I would take home \$6.00 a pay period.

I need daycare that provides later evening hours. I work as a chef and the hours are not consistent. I have limited funds as I am a single parent who is also in school full time. The licensed daycares that I applied to took my registration fee and then never contacted me again. Doesn't seem right to me.

And finally, parents were asked if they were satisfied with their current child care arrangements. Parents who were employed and whose husband/wife was at home with their preschool children were the most satisfied with their current arrangement (96.4%). Of those who used out of home child care arrangements, parent who used licensed centres were the most satisfied, at 94.4%. Parents who had a caregiver come into their home were the least satisfied, at 58.3%:

□

Table 11: Percentage of parents who are happy with their current child care arrangements



Parents who stated they were not happy with current arrangements noted a variety of issues, including:

I am unhappy with my current arrangements because I feel my children are bounced around between my parents, in-laws, babysitter and sometimes just at home with my husband. There is no real structure or reliability in their lives. I would like to be able to send my children to a certified day care center to learn both social and emotional development but I am unable to afford full time enrollment and part time is not available where we live. I believe that my child, who is 3 now, will suffer when put into full day kindergarten in the schools, without any prior programming. I feel that there is going to be a need for a children's 4 year old program just to get ready for the transition to kindergarten.... I also think that my 2 year old could benefit from being in a daycare from this early age. He needs to learn to play with others his age besides his sister without hurting them. He needs to learn about cause and effect from other adults. I believe that daycare should be more affordable but understand that the workers in these centers are not making much for the quality of service they provide, thus leaving me to settle for a babysitter, who takes excellent care of my children but is not progressing their social or intellectual growth.

I live in a rural area and I am from away. There is no organized child care available in my community and I have no relatives here to rely on. Finding reasonable, safe childcare has been an enormous issue for us since moving to the Island. Other children go to relative's houses. We don't have this available to us and there are just no other options. We were shocked to find that there are so few licensed child care facilities available.

I do not feel that my child is being stimulated enough at his current sitter. I would like to have him attend an Early Childhood Facility but the costs are very high. He is turning 2 in 5 months and my wife and I will have to make a decision soon of what we want to do.

I do not feel that my child is being stimulated enough at his sitters. The price is right but we would rather him attend a more structured program at an Early Childhood Centre that is affordable for us.

The time frames she is available is not always conducive to my schedule, she has her own policies on sick days and her taking days off that don't coincide with the policies around sick days in my office (i.e. if her child is sick it could mean her taking time off leaving me to find alternate care)

The daycare my children attend has friendly staff, and good programming, my children enjoy it, however it is now impending closure, and I live rurally, and do not have a lot of options for childcare. I work full time twenty minutes away from my home, and I'm also a single mom.

I am very happy with the care my children get. My oldest daughter is now in kindergarten and is struggling with some of her learning. I wonder now if we should have had her enrolled in pre k. I now struggle with what to do with my youngest child.

I would prefer if my children were all at the same place. My children aren't at the same place because of the age restriction on children under 20 months. Family members looked

after my youngest because she was under 20 months old while my oldest was at a daycare to get some interaction with kids her own age. Now I have an infant so next year I will have 1 in kindergarten, 1 in daycare, and 1 under 20 months. Possibly 3 different locations for my children. Very inconvenient for working parents.

I'm not sure if I like the type of teaching... Learning through play. They say that is the new way of teaching. I don't see much coming home showing me what she is capable of. They tell me that their arts and crafts table is open when they want to use it. But I believe it should be a group activity. I'm not seeing the work done now as when my son was there.

I know they are well looked after but think that they could benefit from learning based play that would be available in a child care centre.

I am lucky to even find a space for my children. I like that I feel that they are safe. I like that there are other children present to promote social interaction. I like that they are already becoming more autonomous because the daycare owner is not able to take care of each personal need all the time. I don't like that there are often too many children for personal attention. I don't like having the TV on so much. I want more emotional and cognitive activities for my children. At other daycares I have heard that the child is sent home with a daily 'report card' that explains, what he ate, played with, bowel movements/diaper changes, etc. THAT is something that I would appreciate. If this type of facility was available in my area my children would be there.

My child has just turned 2 and I am not certain that he is obtaining the learning time or structured time that he should be for his age, but he is happy where he is at but it is playtime, etc. I have looked at daycares in our community but I am not happy with the shape and environment of them, they are all tired.

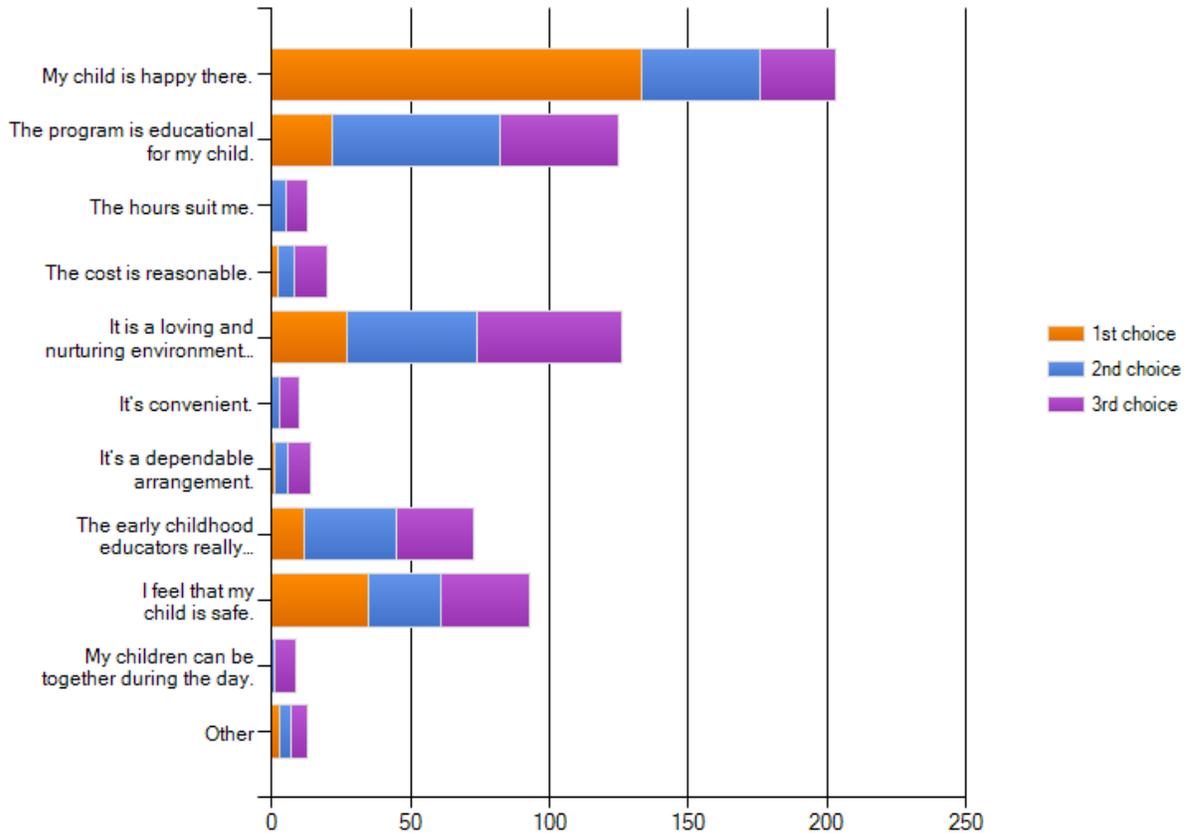
Parents who indicated they were happy with their current child care arrangements were also asked to indicate the three best things about it, or in other words, what was it that made them happy. In all types of non-parent child care arrangements, parents' reasons for being satisfied with their current child care arrangement were closely linked to their perceptions that their children were happy, safe, and in a loving and nurturing environment. When children were in licensed ECEC programs (either as their main arrangement or as part of a combined arrangement), parents were more likely to indicate that they felt it was an educational program for their children. In families where either a husband or a wife was at home during the day with the children, the most important reason for parents to be satisfied was because they perceived this as a loving and nurturing environment for the children. For parents who employed babysitters to come into their home, convenience was a factor in their reasons for being satisfied with this arrangement.

The following tables describe parents' responses by each type of child care arrangement:

Parents who were satisfied in licensed ECEC centres reported:

Table 12: Parents’ weighted choices about what makes them happy about their current arrangement of having children in licensed ECEC centres

In order of priority, what are the three best things about your current child care arrangement?

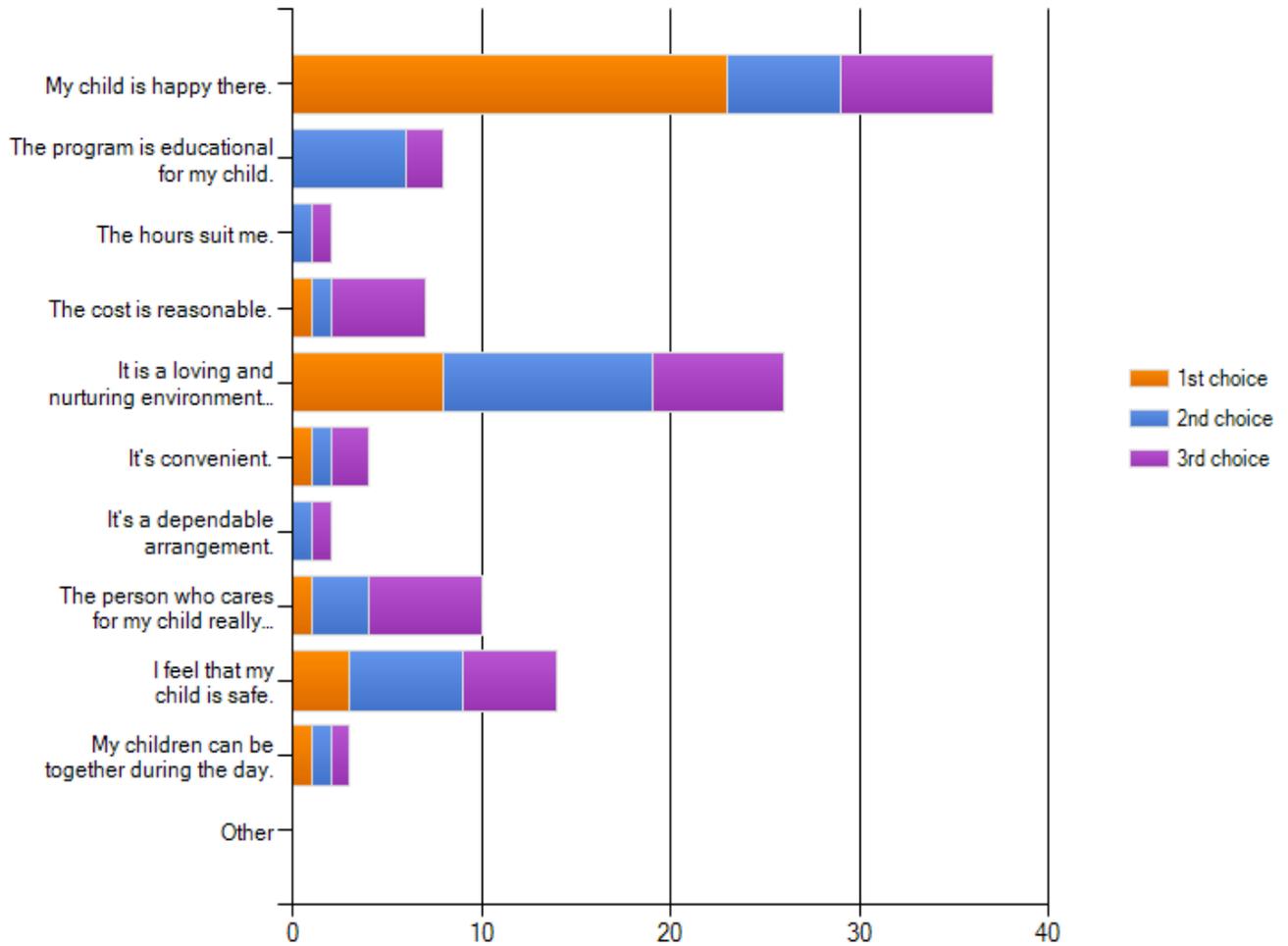


The parents using licensed ECEC programs who reported that they were not satisfied were asked to explain why this was the case. Those parents who responded to this question indicated primarily that they were not happy with some logistical aspect of the arrangement as opposed to the quality of the program itself. For example, a number of parents explained that they did not like the fact that they could not use the centre for a younger child, thereby necessitating two stops in the morning to drop children off, and in the evening to pick them up. Other parents indicated that they would be happier if fees were not so expensive.

Parents who were satisfied in unlicensed arrangements with relatives or friends reported:

Table 13: Parents' weighted choices about what makes them happy about their current arrangement of having children with relatives or friends

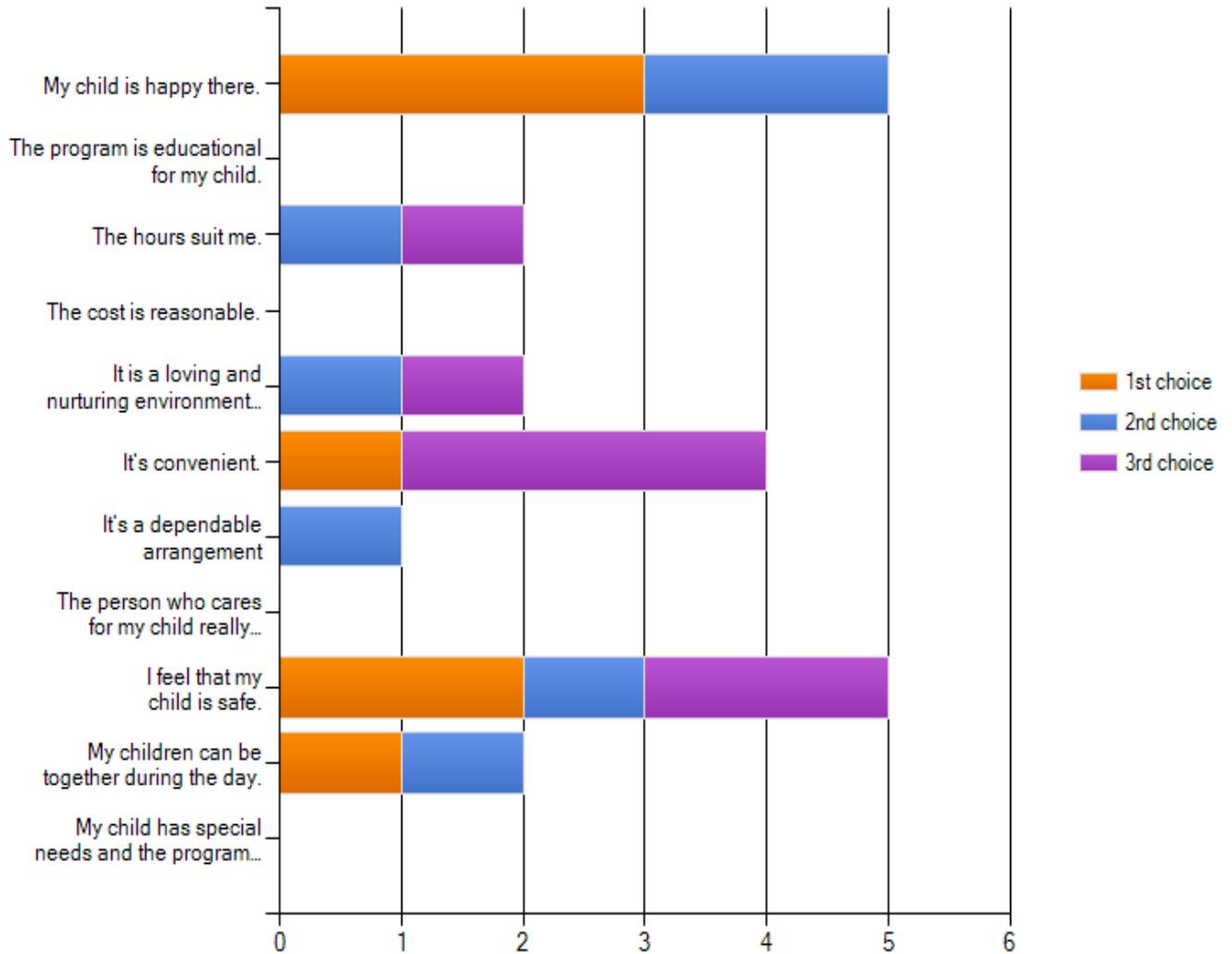
In order of priority, what are the three best things about your current child care arrangement?



Parents who were satisfied with arrangements where a babysitter came into their home were more likely than other groups to report that convenience and the fact that their children could be together contributed to their satisfaction.

Table 14: Parents weighted choices about what makes them pleased with their current arrangement of having a babysitter come to their home

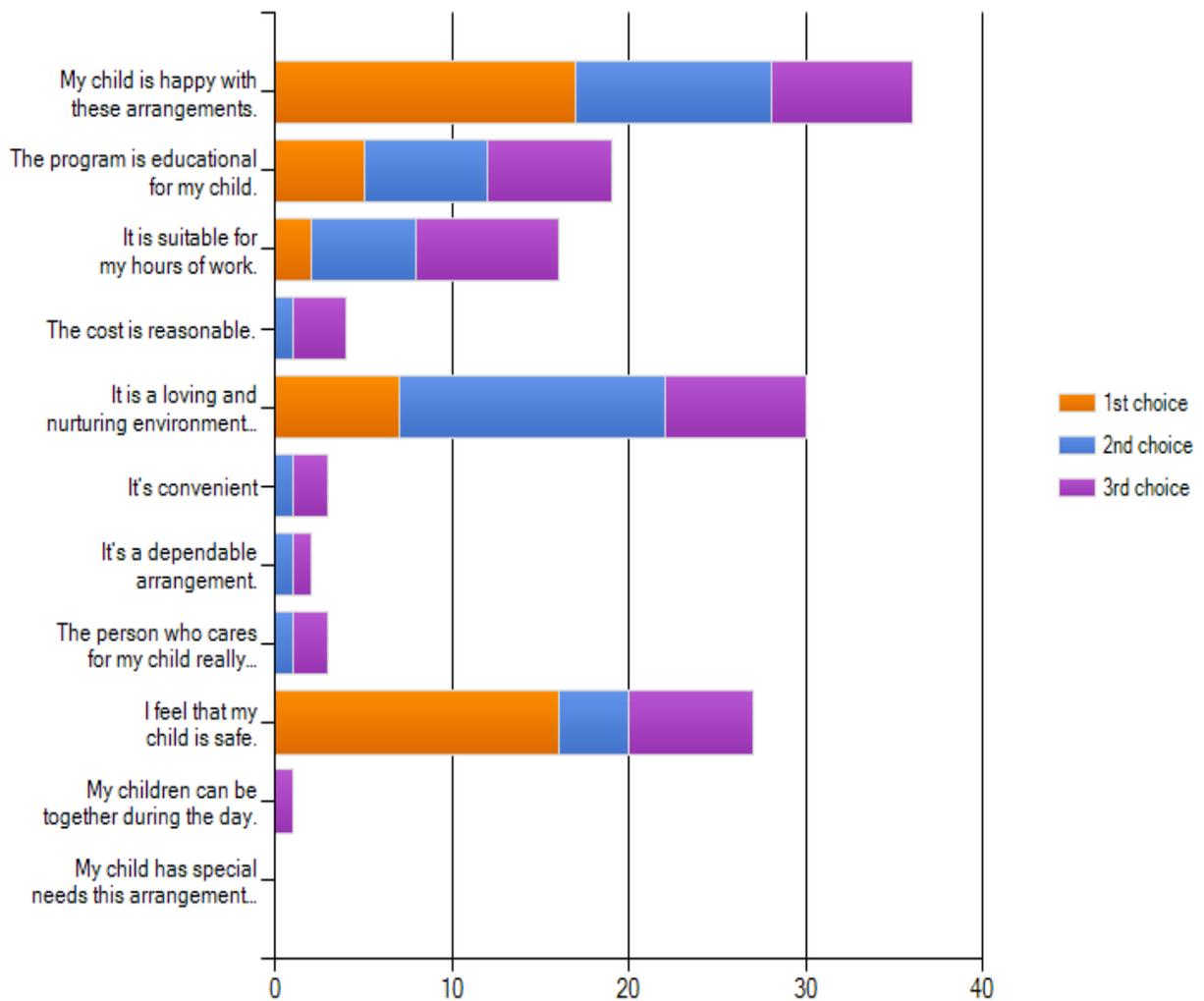
In order of priority, what are the three best things about your current child care arrangement?



Parents with a combination of arrangements generally reported that their children were in half-day ECEC programs, and then in some other private arrangement for the balance of the day. Parents who were satisfied with this arrangement reported:

Table 15: Parents' weighted choices about what makes them pleased with their current combination of arrangements

In order of priority, what are the three best things about your current child care arrangement?



8. WHAT WOULD HELP PARENTS?

Grandparents, family members and friends were asked “Do you have any suggestions about how to make it easier for parents to access preschool programs?” Almost 100 respondents gave suggestions:

Approximately 1/3 of people who responded to this question suggested that issues such as cost, hours/access, and transportation needed to be addressed. This response reflects the issues that were noted by parents in Table 10, and by grandparents and family members in Table 3 as being barriers to participating in programs.

Parents want to do the best for their kids, so help them to do it. If parents work during the day, there are very few types of things for them to do with their kids, as most of those programs happen during the day. Most parents I talk to want licensed early childhood programs for their kids but either they can't find one near them or it's too expensive – usually it's the cost that drives people into other arrangements.

The Government of Prince Edward Island has to help the parents of the children that can't afford to go to preschool! There are many families in my community that have both parents working and still can't afford the expense of child care so they have to have grandparents or other family members watching them or work their schedules so that one of them can be home with the children all the time. Making the rates for childcare more reasonable would be a great start!

The quality of preschool programs offered varies greatly and the cost for such programs is typically reflective of the level of quality (better quality = higher fees). The only way to ensure that every Island child has the opportunity to participate in a high quality preschool program is for government to subsidize child care on a much higher level than currently exists. Current subsidy rates for low income families are not reflective of the real cost associated with quality preschool programs and based on the current subsidy model many families are not eligible for subsidy. It is the responsibility of the provincial government to ensure quality preschool programs are accessible for every child regardless of household income.

Approximately 13% of people who responded to this question suggested that there needed to be more advertising done so that parents knew what programs and services were available to them in their communities.

It would be nice if there were more places that offered free advertising so people knew about programs. When I first moved to PEI I wasn't aware of the program until after my son was older so I missed out on a lot when he was young. When you take your child for needles or check up, community health should have a list of services or programs that are available.

Communication, communication, communication!

Everyone should get a letter in the mail to let them know all the information and what is going on that month.

Approximately 25% of respondents to this question suggested that PEI needs a fully funded, high quality early childhood system across the province.

The government needs to see the importance of the early years. They need to help fund some of these activities and make it more accessible to all children and their families. Not everyone can afford child care – it should be available for free to those parents that can't afford it. If we invest in ALL our children's futures and start them ALL off with the same benefits in the early years, we'd see less problems in their future.

These programs should be made available to all children. We have children graduating from high school that can not read. They are being pushed through school not understanding what is put in front of them. Our children are our future, we need to better prepare them for this.

Have programs in rural communities as well as in the cities. All should have equal opportunity.

For parents who don't require child care services, for example seasonal employees, it can be difficult for the parent to justify the expense for preschool programs. In order to ensure that parents have access to the programs, they need to be free of charge or for a very low cost.

Learning begins at a very young age and in order to ensure that PEI's children have the tools they need, they need to have access to preschool programs.

Subsidized preschool programs will allow parents to choose a program that best suits their needs and not have to base it on what they can afford.

Fund early childhood education across the board.

9. WHAT DO PARENTS WANT?

Parents of preschool children were asked:

"In thinking about your own family, what are the types of preschool programs and services that you would like to see available? You may tell us about things you like that are already in place, or you may make suggestions about what you would like to see."

Over 300 parents provided thoughtful responses to this question. Many parents spoke very highly of both early childhood education and care programs and the family resource centre programs; and many parents voiced their concerns and frustrations with trying to balance their competing responsibilities, and do what they felt was best for their children.

Overall, parent responses fell into two broad categories: comments about the regulated ECEC system, and comments about community activities that they could participate in with their children. Of the 311 parents who responded to this question, approximately 60% spoke of ECEC programs, and 40% commented on community based activities.

Of the 60% who spoke about ECEC programs:

- 19% spoke of the high cost

Don't make the centers raise their prices again!! We cannot afford any more :)

The cost of childcare on PEI is staggering, and I don't know how many people afford it. No wonder school enrollment is down, however with one less year of childcare costs with Kindergarten finally going into the schools, maybe people will have more kids!!

I just want to comment about the difficulty in finding childcare for preschool children, and the cost associated with licensed centers. My husband and I both have jobs with the provincial government and good salaries, and we were barely able to keep our two children in the daycare center in our community. We ended up taking them out of the center and we now take them to an individual who lives outside of our community that takes children into her home. It is costing us 14 dollars LESS PER DAY, and we are able to bring them part days when I work shift work. More needs to be done to help the middle-class individuals who make too much to classify for available assistance and too little to make ends meet.

Our family makes a good household income but the monthly cost of childcare for three young children is ridiculously high. We are lucky enough to qualify for a small amount of subsidy right now because of the high childcare costs for three children; however, once our oldest goes to school we will no longer qualify for this program. We recently built a new house and our childcare costs are almost as high as our mortgage. These costs make it difficult for young families to make ends meet and often make it prohibitive for families to have more than two children. Children are so important, we need to be taking steps to assist childcare centres in offering quality programs at a more affordable price for families.

- 30% spoke of issues with access, for rural areas, infant care, before and after school age care, difficulty in finding programs with hours of operation that supported work schedules, and difficulty in finding part time programs. On the other hand, some parents spoke of the difficulty in only finding part time programs, as this necessitated a complex arrangement of driving and car pooling in the middle of the work day.

I am concerned with my son entering kindergarten this year and wonder where can he go before and after school for about an hour on either side. I am a shift worker and DO NOT want my five year old taking a bus to and from school. My husband has to work at 8 a.m. until 4 p.m. and I work as a nurse from 7 a.m. until 7 p.m., and so this makes for very difficult arrangements when we have NO ONE to pick them up and drive him to school.... There are just the two of us!

One problem I encountered when I was returning to work from my maternity leave was to find child care for my one year old son. I started looking early on but spaces at child-care facilities were limited and good home caregivers were hard to find as well. I felt quite desperate in my search to find an arrangement that I would be comfortable with. After dozens of phone calls and asking everyone I knew, I finally found a home caregiver that was twenty minutes outside of town. I stayed there until my son was 22 months and could

attend a reputable centre in downtown Charlottetown (I had him on the list to attend, prior to his birth).

- 51% spoke of the need to have a province wide system of early childhood education and care so that all children had equal opportunities, and that all children would be able to participate in high quality programs. Parents spoke of the need for pre-kindergarten programs, need for French language programs, better quality programs for children with special needs, more timely diagnosis for children with special needs, the need for qualified early childhood educators, and the need for consistent levels of quality in ECEC programs.

I'd like to see more licensed centres with play based learning curricula and waiting lists that aren't three years long.

All of the rural communities are so different, and some people still think that their tax money should not be used to raise other people's children. My tax money pays for addiction services, and I have no addictions. My tax money pays for the jails, and I'm not in jail, and no one in my family is in jail. Why can't my tax dollars be spent to support the development of all children, when I know that this will help everybody in the long run?

We have a parent in our house who can and does stay home and who has a lot to offer our children – experiences and education and creative play. But we still want a province that puts a priority on early childhood care and education in licensed child care centres. It is so important to this province that early childhood centres be supported and that childcare be affordable to families. It is equally important that the early childhood educators be well paid for the work they do. There is no way to ensure that this can happen without government support – or none that I can see. And everyone benefits from happy, healthy, well-cared for children and parents who feel supported and unstressed. What could be more important that our kids?

I have two older grown children who never attended pre-school or kindergarten (they are now in their 20's) and my 5 year old is currently attending (local program). I was always against the mandatory kindergarten idea because I never thought it made a big difference in my older children that did not attend. However, since having my youngest daughter currently in daycare and kindergarten I must confess that the wonderful care and attention that she gets has definitely made a believer out of me. It is truly amazing watching her as she learns a new letter or word, and how she has picked up books just to hear the story. An interest my older children have never acquired I'm afraid. My daughter is learning new things so quickly and a large reason for that is the wonderful head start she has gotten with her daycare program that has carried into the kindergarten program and I hope will now continue into her school years!!!!

I am concerned about the impact that moving kindergarten will have on the funding that goes to the child care centres. The cost of providing a safe, happy, and educational option for children less than 5 is already outside of certain individuals' means. If the cost to parents goes up, this will mean that option will be available to even less families. This is a critical time in their development and would encourage the government to continue funding early child care centres in our Province – in fact I would recommend increasing the funding to early child care centres – look to Quebec as a model.

I think there should be a standardized curriculum for early childhood education centres. I think early childhood educators should be better paid. I think the government should subsidize more child care spots – and not just for low income families as this punishes those of us who are just above the income cut offs and both work.

There were many parents who spoke responded to this question by speaking about the need for more community-based activities that they could participate in with their children:

- 47% of parents who spoke about the need for more community-based activities suggested that there be more opportunities for music, dance, art, and in general more educational types of activities outside of the regulated ECEC system.

Dance classes that are close by and affordable. I would also like to see a program to help people pay for skates, helmets. These seem to only help a certain group of low income families. I don't fit this criteria, but I still can't afford them. I would like to see a drinking milk program. I keep milk available, but sometimes I can't afford it.

- 21% suggested that there need to be more opportunities for parents to find out what is available in their communities, and to have access to parent education and information sessions

We should take advantage of our public libraries or churches to house or sponsor information sessions aimed toward families with young children, e.g., toilet training, sleep, development, behaviour management, choosing an ECEC program.

It would be nice to receive a weekly or monthly e-news letter or e-calendar telling parents of preschool children about community events and activities for children.

- 27% suggested that they wanted more activities on weekends; many parents said they find that many programs for preschool children and their parents are held during the week, when most parents are working. Some parents suggested evening activities, and suggested that these could be held in ECEC centres.

I believe there are programs in place but the fault I see is that they are offered during the week during regular work hours so it creates guilt on me as a mom that I am unable to take my child to these programs as there are not a lot of opportunities to take a two year old to. Those that are available are only available to those who do not work.

I think there are a great many programs already available. What I do see as a problem is that many programs offered to preschool children are during the day and I don't have the luxury of being home with my daughter during the day. So I would like to see more programs available in the evenings or weekends.

I would love to see more activities held in the schools after hours so my children could get comfortable with the building before entering the school system. Maybe offer a story time in the school library after hours once a week or an indoor sports program in the gym. I would also like to see more preschool programs in French.

I would like to see more programs offered to parents who work during the week. What's the point of having a play group for children aged 1-5 during the week when the majority of the clients are only available on the weekend or early evening because the parents work.

- 5% of parents suggested more opportunities for indoor sports, and several parents voiced strong support for a children's museum.

10. FINAL WORD TO PARENTS

At the end of the survey, parents were asked if there was anything else they wished to add to their responses. Almost 200 parents took the opportunity to do so.

Some parents emphasized that their preference was to stay at home with their children rather than enroll them in any type of ECEC or preschool program:

Again, I believe the best place for a preschooler is at home with their parent. Every parent who wishes to stay home should have the option to raise their child at home, supported financially, socially, emotionally where and when needed. I had this privilege of raising my children at home until they were in Grade 1. My daughter does not have this option to raise her daughter at home, although she would dearly love to. Yes, some parents do not, choose not to raise their own children, but some do want to. Parents should be able to have the option.

I don't believe in sending my children to a structured school program at 4 years old. I think that kids need to be allowed to play in mud puddles if they want. I think that kids have too much responsibility and pressure at a very young age lets keep it light and fun for them.

I firmly believe that the early years of education is the cornerstone and foundation of our life long learning. I am all for change and have a child going into grade 1 in Sept 2010, she is well prepared, adjusted and excited to go to school. I hope that funding and programs will be able to assist these young children in their early years while attending day care facilities to identify needs and still give the children the cornerstone that they need to learn for attending school. The age range of children should also be looked at. Why rush these youngsters? There are plenty of children ready before they meet the entrance age and some that are not ready. Have an assessment program for early beginners and maybe an age entrance of at least turning 5 before Sept 1st of their kindergarten year. Three months makes a big difference in the maturity and development of a young child. Thanks

Many parents, however, spoke of their concerns about the future viability of the ECEC system:

There is a crisis upon the early childhood field. The government must step forward and provide funding to ensure the continued availability of QUALITY early childhood centres.

Licensed Early Childhood Centers and programs are very important... the first 5 years is what they learn the most out of all their life... take that into account please... we don't help them now where are they going to be in 20 years??

I am very concerned that with the Kindergarten going into the school system that many childcare centers will need to raise their prices and many families will not be able to afford

to send their children to licensed daycares. I think this will result in many daycares closing their doors in the next year or two.

I feel that our children are our greatest resource and that we need to invest in quality, affordable child care services that are accessible for ALL families so that people do not have to make the difficult choice to quit their job when they cannot afford to do so, or so that they don't feel on the other hand, that they can't afford to go to work. That would only result in our children being affected by lower income households where parents could not afford to provide the necessities, or extra curricular activities that are beneficial to children i.e., hockey, figure skating, swimming lessons, gymnastics, music lessons...which help promote self-esteem, learning and sharing, discipline, and respect for teachers/coaches and well as opportunities to interact with their peers, and develop skills and interests that may last them a lifetime. All of these things are very expensive and difficult to afford at the best of times, but are also a very important part of childhood development. It would be a shame for people not to have access to affordable child care in their communities and not allow them to have a choice to provide all these activities to their children. We must acknowledge the people who look after our children day after day and provide them with love, patience and a wonderful learning environment, and finally allow them to earn a decent wage for the services they provide.

Our children are very important no matter where they are being raised, rural, urban, they all deserve to have the many opportunities that everyone else has. They have the right to a good solid education as well as many options to further learning in all areas.

I just want to continue to urge the Government to do something for these families/children and the Educators who work with them each day. As a parent I need to feel confident in the childcare I choose for my children. I need to be able to ensure that each day my children are being engaged and given many opportunities to be the best he/she can be to reach their full potential. Let's keep quality licensed childcare in our communities!!!!

Many parents were appreciative of the opportunity to be able to share their ideas and to describe the types of challenges they were facing. However, they wanted to be sure that their voices were being heard:

I think this survey was an excellent idea and hope that all comments/suggestions are taken into account, seriously, to make a difference in our precious children's lives.

Please use this survey to make a difference. Don't let it become another piece of research - our children's future depends on it.

Just that there is so much research about how important it is to invest in young children - I hope you do it.

Thank you for considering the needs of our children.

I think you are doing a great thing with this survey. One small step at a time.

I think it is great this is being done!

And finally, many parents voiced their hopes and fears for the future for them and their children:

As I stated before I hope that the government listens to the parents who have completed this survey. The education of children between the age of 2 - 4 is very important to me as my child will be 2 soon and we want him to get the best start possible. I also feel that the Early Childhood Educators should be rewarded for their important, dedicated work. They have one of the hardest jobs in the world and many of them only make minimum wage. The government needs to support these centres so that the owners can pay their workers a fair wage for the job that they do. If the pay is good then there will be less turn around and workers would not have to leave a centre because the pay is not enough. Thank you for allowing parents to give feedback!

I am unhappy with my current arrangements because I feel my children are bounced around between my parents, in-laws, babysitter and sometimes just at home with my husband. There is no real structure or reliability in their lives. I would like to be able to send my children to a certified day care center to learn both social and emotional development but I am unable to afford full time enrollment and part time is not available where we live. I believe that my child, who is 3 now, will suffer when put into full day kindergarten in the schools, without any prior programming. I feel that there is going to be a need for a children's 4 year old program just to get ready for the transition to kindergarten. I don't think that this should be a full day program, but I do think a few hours a day will make a huge difference. Even just three or four times a week could be beneficial.

I also think that my 2 year old could benefit from being in a daycare from this early age. He needs to learn to play with others his age besides his sister without hurting them. He needs to learn about cause and effect from other adults. I believe that daycare should be more affordable but understand that the workers in these centers are not making much for the quality of service they provide, thus leaving me to settle for a babysitter, who takes excellent care of my children but is not progressing their social or intellectual growth.

My son turned 4 yesterday and would be eligible for preschool this coming school year. It is a shame that he doesn't even have the opportunity to attend.