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UNDERSTANDING DIVERSE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY NEEDS:

A Statewide Survey for the Illinois PDG B-5 Planning Grant

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Executive Summary

In 2023, we developed and conducted a statewide survey from our position as evaluators of the Illinois Preschool Development Birth through Five Planning Grant (PDG B-5). This survey had several purposes:

- To understand statewide needs in the early childhood space, with a focus on seeking out the experiences of those populations most historically marginalized within this space.
- To provide a novel tool and baseline data for researching parent and community voice as the new state early childhood agency takes form.
- To inform and complement the Illinois State Board of Education's many strategic plans and needs assessments in early childhood.
- To verify and contextualize the results of activities from this year's planning grant.

In this report, we share the responses from this survey.

The survey queried families (with small children) and community members (with and without small children) about three key areas: (1) use of the early childhood system, (2) goals for early childhood for their children and the state as a whole, and (3) access to the early childhood system. We received 995 responses, including healthy sample sizes for subgroups by geography (urban, suburban, town/rural), race/ethnicity (Black, Latino, White), and education level. We examined overall responses, both quantitative and qualitative, by subgroup. We then examined convergence across subgroups to generate key findings for the state.

Across subgroups, we found the following:

- Families are most likely to have experience with the Pre-K and daycare aspects of the early childhood system. Latino families and families with less than a college degree are less likely to have experience with daycare than other subgroups, but it is still strongly represented in their experience compared to other kinds of early childhood activities.
- Families with small children desire for early childhood programs "to develop my child's social and interpersonal skills." This goal was most popular across all target subgroups, representing a wide consensus.
- Communities (with and without children) believe that the Illinois early childhood system should "develop children's social and interpersonal skills" and "provide a high-quality education for students of all abilities and backgrounds." These two choices were popular for all respondent subgroups. Black and Latino respondents, as well as respondents without a college degree, especially emphasized the ideal of a high-quality education for all.
- Communities described many strengths on which they felt early childhood programs should build. These strengths included developing children's noncognitive skills and dispositions, as well as drawing on community, family, and culture as resources.
- Across the board, families struggled to find *affordable* and *high-quality* care, as well as care for children with disabilities. All subgroups identified these difficulties as the most pronounced. Respondents discussed the difficulty of evaluating early childhood programs' quality and safety, as well as the challenge of affording childcare while being just above the threshold cutoff for state assistance (otherwise known as the "benefits cliff").
- Many state initiatives appeared to have low awareness among survey respondents.

These sentiments echo national research on family use, goals for, and access to early childhood. They also converge with findings from other family voice activities in the PDG B-5 grant.

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Introduction

In 2023, we developed and conducted a statewide survey from our position as evaluators of the Illinois PDG B-5 Planning Grant. This survey had several purposes:

- To understand statewide needs in the early childhood space, with a focus on seeking out the experiences of those populations most historically marginalized within this space.
- To provide a novel tool and baseline data for researching parent and community voice as the new state early childhood agency takes form.
- To inform and complement the Illinois State Board of Education's many strategic plans and needs assessments in early childhood.
- To verify and contextualize the results of activities from this year's planning grant.

In this report, we share the responses from this survey. In the conclusion, we contextualize these responses within the outcomes of other relevant planning grant activities related to family needs and voice.

The survey queried families about three key areas: (1) use of the early childhood system, (2) goals for early childhood for their children and the state as a whole, and (3) access to the early childhood system.

Use of the early childhood system. Recent national data (Hanson & Bobrowski, 2024) suggest differences across demographic groups in use of the early childhood system. First, use differs by racial/ethnic identity. White families (59%) are more likely than Black (49%), Hispanic (50%), and Asian (48%) families to be in any sort of non-parental childcare arrangement. English-speaking families (56%) are also more likely to have children in childcare than families where one or no parents (39%, 44%) speak English.

Second, likelihood of use rises with education level (Hanson & Bobrowski, 2024). For example, 71% of graduate degree holders and 61% of bachelor's degree holders have children in childcare, while only 27% of those with less than a high school education have children in childcare. Slightly under half of high school and "some college" parents have children in care. Families also have differential interest in different types of childcare (see Sandstrom et al., 2024). According to Hanson and Bobrowski (2024), use of *relatives* for care is more common for those with less education, while use of *centers* for care is more common in those with higher education levels.

Finally, children aged 3-5 (67%) are more likely to be in childcare at all than children aged 1-2 (50%) or less than 1 (40%). Relative care decreases from 51% to 25% of care arrangements as children age, while center care increases from 35% to 85%. These data suggest that Pre-Kindergarten or Pre-K (which serves older children in center or center-like structures) is more utilized than other forms of early childhood education and care.

This study examines these trends by racial/ethnic group, education level, and geography within the state of Illinois. We note where our findings converge and diverge from this prior work. While the state does keep data on participation of different groups within their programs and services, this study adds value by examining the experiences of those who may or may not be participating in individual programs.

Goals for the early childhood system. Research on the goals parents have for early childhood education tends to focus on pragmatic goals like covering work hours. For example, Hanson and Bobrowksi (2024) find that reliability (88%) and availability of care provider (77%) are the top two factors influencing parents' selection of care arrangements. However, factors related to the child's experience are also top-of-mind, including qualifications of staff (71%), learning activities (68%), and time with other children (66%).

Gebhart et al. (2024) described two primary purposes for families seeking care: *meeting parents' needs* (which is more about the logistical support provided by childcare while parents work) and *supporting child's*

development, which is more about the experience and growth of the child in the care setting. This study explores the latter purpose in more detail, examining parents' goals for early childhood programs for their own children, as well as what goals parents and non-parents think early childhood should fulfill for Illinois as a whole.

Access to the early childhood system. Providing access to high-quality and affordable early childhood programs is a key goal for any state early childhood system. Hirilall et al. (2023) frame access to the early childhood system as involving four components: (a) *reasonable effort*, meaning that families can find information on quality, cost, and location and navigate the application and enrollment process, (b) *affordability*, (c) *meets the parents' needs* in terms of logistics and program type, and (d) *supports the child's development*, meaning that the program supports all children academically, physically, and socially, as well as provides specialized services for students with unique needs (such as children with disabilities or multilingual children).

National data (Hanson & Bobrowski, 2024) indicate that families of all backgrounds have difficulties with these elements of access and with navigating the early childhood system. Parents are likely to report challenges finding childcare, with lack of open slots and cost reported as common difficulties. These challenges do vary by family characteristics, with parents of infants, families working outside the traditional "9-5" hours, families in low-income and rural areas, and immigrant parents facing greater difficulties overall (Sandstrom et al., 2024).

According to Hanson & Bobrowski (2024), *lack of open slots* in a desired early childhood program is a bigger issue for White families (43%) than Asian (23%), Black (23%), or Hispanic (25%) families. Difficulty with slots also rises linearly by education level (16% for less than high school to 42% for graduate degree) and is uniquely high in concern for families making $100K+ (41%, compared to 25-30% for all other groups).

Conversely, *cost* is a bigger issue for Asian (42%), Black (38%), and Hispanic (43%) families than White families (28%). However, cost is least concerning for those with graduate degrees (25%), compared to all others (36%-40%). Perhaps speaking to the concept of the "benefits cliff" (wherein families just over an income cutoff for government support have to carry the full cost of daycare/Pre-K), cost is a concern for 45% of those making $50,001–$75,000, but less of a concern for others, with those making under $20K (27%) or over $100K (29%) citing less concern with cost. Interestingly, families of all backgrounds generally believe childcare covers work hours well (Hanson & Bobrowski, 2024).

How do families find childcare options? National research suggests that parents tend to rely upon word-of-mouth from family and friends, as well as internet searches, rather than formal child-care referral initiatives (Sandstrom et al., 2024). This study explores the issue of how families find childcare, as well as their challenges, more deeply for Illinois.

Method
Survey Development and Distribution
In Summer 2023, IWERC developed a statewide survey for families and community members intended to answer the following questions:
- What are Illinois families' experiences with early childhood care and education in Illinois?
- What are Illinois residents' goals for early childhood programs and services for their own children and for the broader community?
- What are Illinois families' experiences finding and selecting early childhood programs and services?
- What are Illinois families' awareness of various state initiatives?

The questions on goals were initially developed as part of a previous grant from CME Group Foundation on early childhood assessments, but they were used first for this project. The questions on experiences were designed to complement and confirm other work being done on family voice in the PDG B-5 grant. A full copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A (in English; a Spanish-language version was also distributed).

The survey was distributed beginning on November 1, 2023, in English and Spanish. It was shared via state offices and networks (provided by the Illinois State Board of Education), as well as community and policy groups (identified by IWERC), including: AOK Networks, Birth to Five Illinois, Family Advisory Council (IAFC), Bureau of Early Intervention, Illinois Head Start, Director of Regional Offices of Education, Bureau of Home Visiting, Bureau of Subsidy Management, INCCRRA, Latino Policy Forum, Start Early, ROE Lead Hubs, IARSS, We The Village Coalition, Metropolitan Family Services, Illinois Resource Center, Family Focus, Star Net Region II, Collaboration for Early Childhood, Connect Home Visiting, Community Organizing and Family Issues, YWCA Northwestern IL, Special Fathers Network, Family Matters, Neighborhood Parents Network, Childcare Network of Evanston, Centerstone, North Chicago Community Partners, Brightpoint, and Family Connects IL. The survey was left open for many months, although responses stopped coming in around January 2024, and the survey was thereafter considered final.

Sample
In total, 995 people began the survey, with 625 fully completing it (63% finish rate). For all results, responses are presented by item (i.e., percentages are out of those who answered the question only, which is generally less than 995). This item-by-item analysis allows us to make full use of all responses, even from those who did not fully complete the survey.

Survey respondents varied along several demographic dimensions. For each dimension, we give the total number of respondents who provided this demographic characteristic. We then summarize the distribution of respondents.

- ***Parental status***. The survey allowed any Illinois adult to respond, with those who identified themselves as parents/caregivers getting more detailed questions about their experiences with the early childhood system. In total, 928 respondents identified whether or not they were a parent and, if so, the age levels of their children. Understandably (and usefully), respondents were largely parents: 415 (45%) were currently parents of a child under 5 years old, 369 (40%) were currently parents of a child 6-18 years old, 247 (27%) were currently parents of adult children, and 142 (15%) were not parents. None of these options were mutually exclusive, excepting the selection of not being a parent at all. As such, these percentages sum to more than 100%.
- ***Education level***. A total of 865 respondents provided information about their education levels. On the whole, survey respondents were highly educated: 41% had a master's degree or higher, 32% a bachelor's degree, 12% an associate degree, and 14% less than a college degree. This sample population is much more highly educated than the Illinois population as a whole, in which only 36.7% have a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). This skew towards higher education may simply reflect the nature of those who would answer an early childhood survey, including those who work in early childhood (and have the necessary college credentials). However, it may also reflect the characteristics of Illinois parents who have their children in childcare/early education, as Hanson and Bobrowski (2024) showed nationally that parents with higher education levels were much more likely to have children in early childhood programs.
- ***Race/ethnicity***. A total of 866 respondents shared their racial/ethnic identity. Survey respondents were most likely to identify as White (74%), with other respondents identifying as Black (9%), Hispanic/Latino (8%), Asian (2%), and 2+ races (3%). This overall distribution differs from the U.S. Census Bureau's (2023) statistics on the Illinois population, wherein 59% are White (non-Hispanic), 15% are Black, 19% are Hispanic/Latino, 6% are Asian, and 2% are 2+races. Again, this distribution may reflect the characteristics of likely survey-takers, but it may also reflect characteristics of the Illinois population with children in early childhood services. As Hanson & Bobrowski (2024) illustrated, White families are more likely to have their children in care than Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian families.
- ***Gender***. A total of 865 respondents shared their gender identity. An overwhelming 93% of the sample was female, with only 5% male. This may reflect that mothers are more involved in the selection of early childhood programs for their children and/or that the early childhood networks through which we disseminated the survey are more likely to have contact information for mothers.

- *Geography.* The survey software recorded usable location data for 550 respondents. The system initially recorded location data for most survey completers (N = 621), but, of these completers, 11% were identified as taking the survey in out-of-state locations. These out-of-state location data showed up largely in border states (Missouri, Iowa, Indiana, etc.) and thus likely represented Illinois citizens living on the borders of the state whose location data was estimated as being out-of-state (due to, for instance, mobile devices drifting to an out-of-state tower for location identification or respondents taking the survey at work in an out-of-state office). However, because we could not pinpoint their in-state location, they were recoded as "unknown." Of the 550 respondents whose locations were known, we coded their locations using the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) "locale codes." These codes are generally used to classify schools and school districts into four categories: city, suburb, town, or rural. For this purpose, we used the locale codes to characterize each location (e.g., city name). A handful of locations were assigned multiple locale codes; for these, we used the most urban code (so, for instance, we used "town" if it was classified as both "town" and "rural."). Once all the locations were coded, we found that our sample was 46% from cities (of which just over half, 58%, were from Chicago), 26% from suburbs, 21% from towns, and 7% from rural areas. For analysis, we combined respondents from towns and rural areas into one locale of "town," in order to ensure a healthy sample size. We note that, although we felt that using location data from our survey tool would provide accurate information on geography without adding an additional question to the survey, we believe the amount of missing data is too high; as such, in future administrations of this survey, we would recommend asking about location directly.

Analysis

As presented above, the full respondent sample is not representative of the adult population of Illinois across several demographic characteristics. Likely because it was distributed through early childhood networks and state agencies, it is skewed towards parents with an interest in early childhood and with children in early childhood settings. Because of this skew, we, as researchers, were challenged to think deeply about how best to analyze and present our findings.

Our goal was to understand family experiences with early childhood in Illinois, particularly for populations historically underrepresented in conversations around early childhood, so as to inform statewide policy and practice. To do so, we decided to analyze these data as case studies—both qualitative and quantitative—of specific target subgroup experiences. For each subgroup, we describe richly all their answers to survey questions, examining what their collective responses indicate about the subgroup's experiences, goals, and perceptions with the early childhood system. This rich description varies by type of question on the survey. The survey contained mostly multiple-choice questions, for which we present data on percentages of respondents in each subgroup that selected each possible response. The survey also contained short-answer text fields, such as respondents explaining why they selected a response; for those, we provide representative and particularly illuminating examples. The survey also had one long-form text field asking respondents to share strengths of their community on which they thought early childhood programs should build. For this text field, we coded responses inductively for common themes. Three graduate students working on this project met to code a set of responses and discuss emergent themes. They then coded more responses independently, met to compare coding and resolve discrepancies, and revised the coding scheme. They continued this "training process" until eight clear themes were identified. Two coders then split the remaining responses to apply thematic codes to all; a response could be coded with multiple themes. We describe more about the analysis of each question on the survey as we present the first set of findings in the Results section, so that these details are at point-of-use.

In taking a case study approach, we make no claims that the percentage of respondents selecting each answer is an exact estimate of statewide sentiment for that subgroup; instead, we examine how each subgroup selects some responses relative to other responses. At times, we also look at how those rankings of responses compare to those of other subgroups; however, we make no inferences about statistical differences across subgroups. Instead, we largely look for convergence across case studies as evidence of

more general statewide experiences with the early childhood system. Where experiences are broadly similar across all subgroups, we argue that these experiences are likely pervasive and generalizable.

Taken together, these case studies can guide us towards places for improvement in the early childhood system, as well as identify places of convergence and divergence with other family voice activities. This survey tool can also be revised and used in the future to measure changes in those sentiments, and we note throughout places where the tool might be improved. (For instance, we recommend that a future study could send a revised version of this survey to a random sample of participants via Illinois phone records, a sampling method beyond the time and cost scope of this study.)

This approach is methodologically justifiable for several reasons. First, while many researchers would weight the sample by population and present top-level findings as representative of the state, we do not think that is appropriate in this case. First, we understand that this sample is skewed not just demographically, but inherently by the kind of person who would take it: someone with access to and interest in early childhood. As such, we have no true population metrics of Illinois early childhood-interested participants and non-participants by which to adjust our sample using weighting, nor would a weighted sample necessarily be an accurate depiction of a less early childhood-invested statewide population.[1] We accept that our sample is inherently a unique population, and we frame our findings accordingly: We believe that the sentiments expressed here are those of the most passionate, and that problems raised here are likely affecting many other Illinois residents who would have less interest or ability to articulate them.

Second, while we don't have a representative sample overall, we do have healthy numbers of respondents *within* each demographic group we wished to target. These groups are notably larger in size than the other family voice activities included in this PDG B-5 Planning Grant. As such, the data provide ideal sub-samples by which we can deeply analyze each target population's responses to systematic questions about the early childhood system, identify how their sentiments converge and diverge, and draw conclusions accordingly. Indeed, as we show in our findings, each target subgroup had more similar experiences than dissimilar. As such, we are able to walk away with clear, robust, and defensibly generalizable themes in the overall viewpoints on early childhood in the state. We can also compare these experiences and viewpoints to the findings of other family voice activities in the PDG B-5 grant, as well as national findings.

In the Results section, we capitalize on the strengths of our data and organize findings by target populations rather than survey questions, with a goal of painting a rich picture of the experiences and viewpoints of each group. First, we provide an overview of our findings for the full sample as context. Then, we explore the experiences of respondents by urbanicity, focusing separately on respondents from cities, suburbs, and towns. Next, we explore the experiences of Black and Latinx families. Finally, we explore differential experiences by education level, focusing on non-college respondents (with comparisons to college respondents where appropriate). We conclude by summarizing our findings across groups and by comparing our findings to the results of other family voice activities. For an unfiltered (and, again, unweighted) look at how responses differ by target population for each question, please see Appendix B.

Results

Findings from the Full Sample

In this section, we present findings from the full sample by survey section, as context for our deep dives into different target populations. We remind the reader that these responses are not representative of the full population of the state of Illinois. To begin, we asked respondents about their experiences with the early

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[1] There are also methodological drawbacks to weighting a sample to a full population, such as overemphasizing a small group that may itself not be representative. For instance, weighting our sample would give responses from the 5% of male respondents 10 times the emphasis (and the 93% of female responses about half the emphasis). If our male respondents are in some way different from the general male population in Illinois (such as being disproportionately employed in early childhood or raising children as a single parent), weighting those responses heavily could bias the data even further.

childhood system. Respondents (N = 728) had to be parents of children currently or recently under 5, and they could select all early childhood opportunities and programs they had experienced. Table 1 summarizes those findings, wherein a majority had experience with Pre-K and/or daycare[2], a third had partaken in parent-child classes of some kind, and far fewer had participated in more specialized activities. These findings align with national findings described in the introduction.

Table 1. Percentage of respondents with experience with each early childhood program or service.

Early Childhood Program or Service	Percentage of Respondents (N = 728)
Pre-K for 3- or 4-year-olds	63%
Daycare	59%
Regular classes/activities for parents and children	33%
A program to support children with a cognitive or behavioral disability	9%
Home visiting/parent coaching	7%
A program to support children with a physical disability	6%
A program to support children learning English	2%
None	4%
Other	6%

We next asked parents to share their goals for early childhood programs and services when enrolling their children. Again, respondents (N = 646) had to be parents of current or recently young children, and they were permitted to select three goals (or enter a goal unlisted in the selections). As Table 2 illustrates, the most common goal, by far, was "to develop my child's social and interpersonal skills" (85%). Around half of respondents selected "to have joy and feel happy and cared for" and "to prepare my child for Kindergarten." Other responses received minority support at varying levels.

Table 2. Parental goals for their children in early childhood programs and services.

Goal for Child's Early Childhood Program or Service	Percentage of Respondents (N = 646)
To develop my child's social and interpersonal skills	85%
To have joy and feel happy and cared for	50%
To prepare my child for Kindergarten	48%
To be a safe space for the child during the workday	39%
To support my child's concrete knowledge of academic skills	27%
To help my child think creatively	20%
To engage in art, music, and/or sports	9%
To experience instruction and activities that reinforce your family's cultures and/or values	5%
To provide instruction aligned with my child's specific disability	5%
To provide teachings related to my child's religious beliefs	2%
To provide instruction in ESL	1%
Other	2%

The next question was similar, asking both parents and non-parents to share what they felt the goals for the early childhood system in Illinois should be. This question asked respondents (N = 759) to think beyond their own children to the goals of the system as a whole, and it widened the scope to parents of adult children and

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[2] We use term "daycare" (rather than "childcare") in this report, as that was the term used in the survey itself. We selected this term to align with an everyday term for a childcare arrangement that is not Pre-K, a nanny, or babysitting.

community members. As Table 3 shows, the responses revealed a slightly lower—but still predominant—interest in "developing children's social and interpersonal skills" (66%). A close second choice was "to provide a high-quality education for students of all abilities and backgrounds" (59%). Again, other responses received minority support at varying rates. Interestingly, the response "to have children experience joy and feel happy and cared for" received less support as a general goal of early childhood than as a specific goal for one's own child.

Table 3. Respondent goals for Illinois early childhood programs and services.

Goals for Illinois Early Childhood Programs and Services	Percentage of Respondents (N = 759)
To develop children's social and interpersonal skills	66%
To provide a high-quality education for students of all abilities and backgrounds	59%
To provide a safe and secure environment for children while parents are working	35%
To have children experience joy and feel happy and cared for	32%
To prepare children for Kindergarten	29%
To encourage creativity in our youngest children	17%
To provide early support to children with specific needs or disabilities	17%
To ensure that all children are treated with respect	15%
To support children's concrete knowledge of academic skills like reading, writing, and math	11%
To engage children in art, music, and/or sports	4%
To provide children individual attention	4%
To reinforce each family's unique backgrounds, cultures, and values	4%
To teach children religious values and doctrines	1%
Other	1%

Having shared their goals for early childhood, all respondents were asked to share, in an open text field, the strengths of their community, family, or child(ren) that they believed an early childhood program should build upon or continue to foster. 422 text responses were coded for this question, falling into eight broad thematic categories, as summarized in Table 4 below.[3] Illustrative quotes for each code will be shared in the sections below for each target population. For now, we simply note that these themes suggest that respondents are interested in a host of goals well beyond the academic, including children developing non-cognitive skills and dispositions, as well as experiencing a warm and supportive environment.

Table 4. Themes in responses regarding the strengths of respondents' community, family, or child(ren) upon which they believed an early childhood program should build (with frequency of each thematic code in parentheses).

Thematic Code	Definition
Education (83)	The processes, infrastructure, and beliefs relating to teaching and learning
Non-cognitive (166)	Soft skills that families wish for their children to learn/gain as a result of their participation in early learning programs
Engagement with environment (39)	The way children view, interact with, or give attention to their surroundings both inside the classroom and throughout the community

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[3] Research staff developed, trained on, and implemented a coding system for thematic coding before the survey officially closed. As such, 24 late responses to this question were not included in the analysis. A review of these responses suggested they would not require development of new themes; thus, we believe the coded sample is representative of overall respondent sentiment.

Community support (212)	The environment where families and children are valued, connected, and academically and emotionally supported
Family engagement (49)	Active participation from, involvement of, and relationship-building with families in their child(ren)'s learning and development
Extracurricular (18)	Learning experiences relating to fine arts and other activities outside of the academic curriculum
Culture (64)	The shared values, backgrounds, traditions, etc. of a specific group of people
Program development (29)	The process of evaluating and updating programs over time

Moving on from broad goals and experiences with the early childhood system, parent respondents were asked to share their specific interactions with Illinois early childhood programs and services. First, respondents were asked to select how difficult various navigation tasks within the early childhood system were. For example, respondents were asked to share whether "finding childcare or Pre-K options that I could afford" was "easy," "hard," or "neither easy nor hard." Respondents could also share a text rationale for their reasoning.

In answering these questions, respondents were asked to leave blank (i.e., not select an answer) for tasks with which they had no experience. Unfortunately, when examining the use of the selection "neither easy nor hard" and the related rationales for its selection, we recognized that many respondents selected "neither easy nor hard" when they had no experience with the task or the task was not relevant to them. (For instance, while only 22% said "finding childcare or Pre-K options near my home" was "neither easy or hard," 62% said the same for "finding programs that could serve my child(ren) with disabilities." Given the lower respondent experience with programs related to disability found in Table 1, it was clear that a strong proportion of respondents were selecting that option as meaning their child(ren) had no disability to accommodate.) As such, we decided to limit the responses to those who answered "easy" or "hard" for each task and to present the findings as the proportion of those binary respondents who felt the task was "hard." This provides a window into whether respondents, on the whole, found each task more difficult than easy.[4]

Table 5 summarizes the percentage of respondents who thought each task was hard, with over half expressing that finding affordable childcare, finding programs that could serve their children with disabilities, and finding high-quality childcare/Pre-K was hard. These findings align with national data on challenges reviewed in the introduction.

Table 5. Percentage of respondents who found each early childhood navigational activity to be hard (out of those who selected easy or hard).

Navigational Activity	Percentage selecting "hard"
Finding childcare or Pre-K options that I could afford	62%
Finding programs that could serve my child(ren) with disabilities	61%
Finding high-quality childcare or Pre-K options	51%
Getting into the childcare or Pre-K options I had near me	45%
Finding childcare or Pre-K options near my work	43%
Finding childcare or Pre-K options near my home	42%
Finding activities for my child(ren) to learn about our family's culture, values, and/or religion	41%
Evaluating the quality of the childcare or Pre-K options I had near me	40%
Finding activities for my child(ren) to learn music or engage in the arts	37%
Finding safe childcare options	34%

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[4] We recommend that any future use of this survey should add a "not applicable" option to avoid this issue of respondent understanding of the question.

Finding programs that could support my child(ren) in learning the English language	34%
Finding activities for my child(ren) to engage in sports or physical fitness	24%

We share more illustrative rationale for the difficulty of each task by target population below. However, here we share some of the respondents' reasoning for why the top three most difficult tasks were, in fact, difficult. In terms of finding *affordable* childcare, respondents noted the plainly high costs and the threshold for qualifying for public assistance with childcare costs. Some quotes included:

- "Every option I've found is equal to or more than my mortgage."
- "I can personally and professionally (former daycare director) state the middle class struggles in this area. Do not qualify for child or assistance, but daycare expenses cost more than a mortgage. Compromising "quality" is sometimes the only viable option to afford childcare."
- "I did not qualify for support and private pay was expensive as a single parent."
- "I was $35 a year over the income threshold for assistance for a single mother, it was extremely challenging to decide which bill was late each month; creating lower credit score which ultimately created higher interest rates and inequality."
- "I was shocked at the cost. I'm a working mom so I didn't qualify for assistance and the cost is as much as my mortgage payment but many locations it was even more. It's so expensive."

Respondents also shared why it was difficult to find adequate care for children with disabilities, noting the lack of options and the lack of quality within the available options. Responses included:

- "Once you say you have a child with any disability, there is no longer a spot for your child in the program."
- "When they are in child care and not the ECE in public school at age 3. The teachers in child care are not equipped or knowledgeable to work with these kiddos."
- "My child that has a slight disability was completely left to herself, with absolutely no attention, so was my child that requires full attention"
- "My 6 year old needed SLP [speech and language] services, and he ended up being exited from his IEP [Individualized Education Program] early because of our special education coop being unable to comply."

Finally, respondents also shared why finding high-quality childcare was difficult, citing a cost versus quality tradeoff, a lack of options, a lack of stable educators, a lack of options for specific child needs (e.g., bilingual children), and a lack of available slots in quality options. Some illustrative quotes include:

- "There are many places in [my town], however, the majority are not high-quality programs. I have heard horror stories about several and personally feel that several centers in [my town] are not on my list of possibilities for my children-if [specific programs in my town] were my only options, I would sooner leave the workforce than subject my children to that."
- "We were so desperate for childcare we had to lower our standards when searching."
- "High quality programs had long waitlists, high costs, and did not work with my work hours"
- "Hard to find good educators in these settings - also hard to keep them."

Next, parent respondents were asked to share how they heard about the early childhood programs they selected and whether they had made use of various state services related to navigating early childhood. Table 6 summarizes how respondents (N = 520) heard about early childhood programs. Perhaps surprising in this internet era, the top two methods for learning about early childhood programs were interpersonal. Nearly two-thirds (63%) found programs via word of mouth from other parents, while a slight majority (51%) learned via local community resources for connecting families to early childhood programs (while no examples were given to respondents, examples of this could be outreach from local PK-12 school districts or early childhood networks). Internet-based options had smaller percentages, including Google (37%), Facebook (36%), and general internet search (20%). Only small percentages used state-supported options like the DCFS website, the Illinois Cares for Kids website, or the ExceleRate quality ratings for programs. These data confirm national

studies showing that word-of-mouth and internet searches are more highly used than official referral tools (Sandstrom et al., 2024).

Table 6. Information used to learn about early childhood programs by respondents.

Method of learning about early childhood programs.	Percentage of respondents (N = 520)
Word of mouth from other parents	63%
Local community resources for connecting families to early childhood programs	51%
Google search or maps	37%
Facebook parents/neighborhood group (or other internet-based community group)	36%
Other internet search	20%
Information from your employer on early childhood options	14%
Other	12%
Illinois DCFS website	9%
Information from your child's doctor on early childhood options	7%
Magazine, newspaper, or internet advertisement	7%
Illinois Cares for Kids website	5%
ExceleRate Quality ratings	5%
Ready4K parent texting	0%

To end, all respondents shared their general awareness of state-supported early childhood programs, services, and initiatives. As Table 7 illustrates, no initiative had been used by over 40% of respondents. Some initiatives suffered from a general lack of awareness. Over 30% of survey respondents had never used or heard of the CCR&R system, ExceleRate, the Birth to Five Action and Family Councils, Illinois Cares for KIDS, or Ready4K.

Table 7. Level of awareness of each state-supported early childhood program, service, or initiative.

	Used It	Heard of It	Never Heard of It	Respondents (N)
Early Intervention	39%	50%	11%	567
Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) System	35%	32%	32%	554
ExceleRate	29%	27%	44%	543
Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)	27%	45%	28%	548
Early Childhood Special Education	26%	58%	16%	551
Home Visiting	24%	51%	25%	535
Birth to Five Action Council	21%	41%	38%	529
Birth to Five Family Council	17%	47%	35%	527
Illinois Cares for Kids	10%	46%	44%	530
Ready4K	6%	26%	68%	513

In the remaining sections, we examine viewpoints by each of the target populations, examining their unique responses as sub-samples.

Early Childhood Experiences and Viewpoints by Geography within Illinois

City respondents. City respondents to our survey hailed from across the state, including Chicago, Champaign/Urbana, Springfield, Peoria, Rockford, Carbondale, and numerous other locations. There were 202 parents/caregivers who responded from cities. Over half of these parents reported having had children in daycare (61%) and/or Pre-K (58%). A sizable percentage (42%) also enrolled their young children in regular parent/child classes and activities. In sum, city parents' experiences with early childhood were largely with the educational and care aspects of the system (rather than with specific intervention programs).

Respondents were asked to share their goals for enrolling their children in early childhood programs, as well as their goals for the entire state early childhood system. When asked to share their goals for enrolling their own children in early childhood (N = 202), the top selection for city dwellers (86%), by far, was "to develop my child's social and interpersonal skills." Just over half (56%) also selected "to have joy and feel happy and cared for." The third most selected goal (41%) was "to be a safe space for the child during the workday." These selections were also broadly popular for suburban and town respondents, although city respondents selected "to have joy and feel happy and cared for" more than the average survey respondent (50%), while selecting "to prepare my child for Kindergarten" notably less than respondents from towns (39% for city respondents; 61% for town respondents).

When asked to share what the goals of early childhood should be in general, a majority of the 251 city respondents (both parents and non-parents) identified two primary goals: "to develop children's social and interpersonal skills" (61%) and "to provide a high-quality education for students of all abilities and backgrounds" (60%). These goals were broadly aligned with the selections of all respondents (and respondents from other geographic locales).

City respondents (N = 153) shared many strengths on which they felt early childhood should build. In Table 8, we provide the count of each thematic code for these strengths, as well as illustrative quotes. Please note that a single response could be coded as multiple themes. While in many ways aligned with respondents' previously selected goals for the early childhood system, these responses paint a richer picture of their hopes for these programs.

Table 8. City respondent answers to the strengths on which early childhood programs should build, by thematic code.

Thematic Code	Illustrative Quotes
Education (31)	"Love of education" "Foundations (counting, language)" "Reading, writing and math skills for every level and disability" "There should be more letters, numbers, colors, and shapes taught to them directly. They are not ready for kindergarten academically." "Being bilingual in English and Spanish"
Non-cognitive (63)	"Kindness and curiosity" "Independence, creativity, empathy" "Fostering play and social skills" "Care and respect for everyone and positive social interactions for all" "Sharing" "Strengths I believe a program should build or continue to foster would be independent skills, social skills, and creative skills" "Emotional regulation skills, the ability to think critically & make safe decisions, self-help skills, learning how to communicate" "To be welcoming of others, and be respectful, and kind to one another with their cultures, and abilities. To build children's self esteem, and confidence.

	To be independent, problem solvers, their creativity. There should be a balance of free time, and small group activities." "Teaching children morals and character. Respect, integrity, discipline, honesty and self control etc." "The inherent worth and dignity of all people, kindness, making mistakes is okay."
Engagement with environment (13)	"Respect/appreciation of nature" "Time spent outside" "The opportunity to experience life-indoors, outdoors, art, working together, getting muddy and messy."
Community support (78)	"Being an engaged member of a community and being curious about the world." "Building relationships with local businesses and organizations to support the program and provide resources and opportunities for children and families. This can include partnerships with healthcare providers, community organizations, and local businesses."
Family engagement (19)	"Using formative assessment to partner with family to develop child, engaging in parent as partner with everything that is done in ECE classroom" "The connection the teachers create with the child and their family." "Parent involvement in the education of their own children"
Extracurricular (5)	"My kids had library programs, went to preschool, played soccer and pee wee baseball. church sunday school, made them more socially and ready for school." "Music and arts"
Culture (28)	"I live in a bilingual Spanish-English community and I would like our early childhood programs to help children grow in both languages." "To teach about the racial/ethnic/cultural diversity of the world we live in" "Embracing and respecting the diverse backgrounds, cultures, and experiences of children and families in the program. This can help to create a inclusive and supportive environment that values and celebrates diversity." "I live near a university and there are lots of international and diverse families. Children should learn to value and celebrate diversity at a young age."
Program development (11)	"I think our community needs to expand universal Pre-K options." "Early childhood education needs to be affordable while highly compensating the individuals who work there for their expertise."

In terms of navigating the early childhood system, city respondents concurred with all respondents that finding affordable childcare options (63%), finding services for children with disabilities (61%), and finding high-quality options (47%) were difficult tasks. Interestingly, city dwellers appeared to find three activities notably less hard than all respondents: finding childcare or Pre-K options near work (34% of city dwellers versus 43% of all respondents); finding opportunities for their children to learn music or engage in the arts (29% of city dwellers versus 37% of all respondents); and finding programs to support their children in learning the English language (20% of city dwellers versus 34% of all respondents). Taken together, these findings suggest that city respondents may simply have access to more options, given the pure number of programs within cities.

Some comments from city respondents can shed light on different experiences with difficulty. On finding options near home or work, some respondents expressed ease, saying "Daycares are on every corner in the city of Chicago" and "It was easy to get a list of childcare options near my home. It took some time and effort to visit them to get a feel for the options and make a decision." However, others expressed much more difficulty, writing:

- "People were full to capacity, nobody was allowing tours of the facility and you couldn't meet with anyone other than the director. Extremely difficult when you have an infant."
- "Lots of options but expensive"
- "Lots of options but long waitlists"
- "Not enough childcare facilities"
- "It was hard to keep [my child] at a place, [my child] got kicked out of one because they were not equipped to handle autism."
- "There were no suitable ECE programs near our home."
- "I had to drive 30 minutes extra at morning and night to get my baby to daycare for six months."

City respondents had many of the same comments about the difficulty of finding affordable childcare as the general sample, noting costs in excess of $300/week per child and the "benefits cliff" of making enough money not to qualify for assistance, but too little to truly afford childcare. Interestingly, several respondents noted that they worked at a childcare facility in order to afford the cost.

Finally, city respondents had other comments about the difficulty of finding various options that revealed a lack of informational access, slots, and/or options for specific child needs. Sample responses include:
- On evaluating quality and safety:
  - "Can not always tell how good a place is until you have had the child there a while."
  - "There was no one place to go to compare and contrast all childcare options."
  - "Hard sending [your] child with strangers and you have no way of researching the daycare history. [There] should be a database like searching convicts that you can put the name of the provider and it'll tell complaints and incidents to make parents aware."
  - "I interviewed 10 in-home daycare. None felt entirely safe."
  - "I wasn't sure how to evaluate the programs or know what would be best. I felt I just had to take a chance which felt scary for my child."
- On getting into childcare settings:
  - "A few daycares made you pay to get on the waitlist, it didn't even go to enrollment or anything, just pay to be on the list ($10-$250)"
  - "Secured spot before child was born."
  - "Spent 9 months on a waitlist for our first choice."
- On programs for children with specific needs:
  - "So many daycares were uncomfortable with [my child's] disability."
  - "We got kicked out of the one that told us they could [serve our child with disabilities], there were many more upfront that they couldn't."

While city respondents may have had more options than other communities, city respondents also had clear challenges in getting into the options that were the best fit, finding options supportive of specific child needs, and evaluating the quality of the options.

Suburban respondents. There were 117 parents/caregivers who responded from suburban locations. As with city respondents, over half of these parents reported having children in daycare (64%) and/or Pre-K (62%), with slightly under half (41%) enrolling their young children in regular parent/child classes and activities. Suburban parents in our sample were twice as likely (16%) as both city (8%) and town (6%) respondents to have children in a program for a specific cognitive disability.

Respondents were asked to share their goals for enrolling their children in early childhood programs, as well as their goals for the entire state early childhood system. When asked to share their goals for enrolling their own children in early childhood (N = 117), the top selection for suburban respondents (86%) was "to develop my child's social and interpersonal skills," matching the city dwellers exactly in percentage. All other goals had support only from a minority of respondents. The second most popular goal (44%) was "to have joy and feel happy and cared for." The third most selected goal (43%) was "to prepare my child for Kindergarten." Perhaps reflecting the greater share of suburban parents with a child in a program servicing a specific

disability, suburban parents were the most likely of all three geographic groups to select "To provide instruction aligned with my child's specific disability" as a goal, but it was still a small percent (9%) of parents. Suburban parents were also more likely than other geographic groups to select "To engage in art, music, and/or sports" as a goal, with 15% selecting that response (compared to 10% for cities and 3% for towns).

When asked to share what the goals of early childhood should be in general, a majority of the 143 city respondents (both parents and non-parents) identified the same two primary goals as city and town respondents: "to develop children's social and interpersonal skills" (70%) and "to provide a high-quality education for students of all abilities and backgrounds" (66%). On goals for early childhood, suburban respondents were largely aligned with respondents from other geographies.

Suburban respondents (N = 89) shared many strengths on which they felt early childhood should build. In Table 9, we provide the count of each thematic code for these strengths, as well as illustrative quotes.

Table 9. Suburban respondent answers to the strengths on which early childhood programs should build, by thematic code.

Thematic Code	Illustrative Quotes
Education (18)	"High quality curriculum" "A blended approach to exposure of prosocial behaviors and skills and academic "readiness" exposure"
Non-cognitive (37)	"Diversity, collaboration, Empathy for others, Shared humanity" "Social skills, conversation, problem-solving, growth mindset, emotional regulation" "Mindfulness, kindness, emotional and physical well-being, nutrition, physical exercises, calmness, processing feelings and emotions, meditation and yoga, personal development and growth, personal freedom (not limiting the children to their age stigma, and give them more responsibilities)." "I believe an early childhood program should concentrate on strengthening a child's social emotional development first and foremost. Children need to feel supported, loved, and cared for before and in order to be ready to learn. If we can focus on developing social emotional skills over academics at this level, children will be more prepared to learn once they reach kindergarten. They'll have learned coping skills (emotional regulation strategies), which will help them in Kindergarten. Think of it as an extension of the home."
Engagement with environment (5)	"To explore the natural environment"
Community support (47)	"Providing a safe, kind community that children contribute to and participate in" "To accept families of a variety of backgrounds and respect their varied contributions to our program." "For my child: his curiosity and kindness. For our family: love, embracing difference. For our community: Spanish language"
Family engagement (11)	"Creating a partnership with parents and creating common goals and approaches for their children" "Respect that the parents/ guardians are the children's first teachers and hold them accountable to this."
Extracurricular (5)	"Different methods for early learning experiences (sports, arts, academic)"
Culture (17)	"Dual language accessibility"

	"They should build on native language and also the learning of many different cultures" "Value for cultural diversity, respect for others"
Program development (7)	"We are not doing any children a service by not being honest about the changes that we are all noticing in the classroom and following expectations that were created 20+ years ago."

In terms of navigating the early childhood system, suburban respondents concurred with all respondents that finding affordable childcare options (67%), finding services for children with disabilities (67%), and finding high-quality options (55%) were difficult tasks. Interestingly, suburban respondents reported less difficulty than the full sample in finding opportunities for their children to learn music or engage in the arts (30% of suburban respondents versus 37% of all respondents) and finding programs for their children to engage in sports or physical fitness (16% of suburban respondents versus 24% of all respondents).

Comments from suburban respondents illustrated reasons for difficulty or ease. In terms of finding options near home or work, some respondents expressed relative ease, while others noted the same difficulties finding affordable care, quality care, or available slots in care. Speaking specifically about the difficulty of finding affordable care, many suburban respondents noted their economic privilege in the ability to pay for care out-of-pocket, while others said it was still tough to afford despite such privilege: "I have 4 children and only have 1 child in childcare right now for half the week and still cannot afford it. This is also with two working parents in the home with 4 year degrees."

Suburban respondents' comments suggested comfort with evaluating the safety and quality of options, although some noted that "You have to meet with them all one on one to get any real info" and that there is "no parental assessment tool." Suburban parents shared some of the same comments about waitlists as city parents, and they also described difficulties finding specific programs for their children's needs and for their own desires for their children. This was illustrated in comments such as:
- "I preferred dual language programming, but it was not available in my area"
- "Most programs in the area are white-dominant with little cultural or linguistic diversity."
- "There are a lot of Christian programs and traditional programs, but I struggle to find affordable options that offer a more humanist/progressive approach to childcare that embrace LGBTQ+ and trans identities."
- "There aren't many Asian cultural/religious opportunities in the area."

In general, suburban respondents experienced common difficulties with finding affordable and high-quality options, despite the self-described economic privilege of many respondents. They also had nuanced desires for their children's care that were difficult to fulfill.

Town respondents. There were 131 parents/caregivers who responded from towns. Well over half of these parents reported having children in daycare (61%) and/or Pre-K (73%), with Pre-K enrollment notably higher for town respondents than for city or suburban respondents. In contrast, notably fewer (30% of town respondents, as compared to just over 40% of city and suburban respondents) enrolled their young children in regular parent/child classes and activities.

Respondents were asked to share their goals for enrolling their children in early childhood programs, as well as their goals for the entire state early childhood system. When asked to share their goals for enrolling their own children in early childhood (N = 132), the top selection for town respondents (82%) was "to develop my child's social and interpersonal skills," which was the top option for city and suburban respondents as well. However, the second most popular goal for town respondents (61%) was "to prepare my child for Kindergarten," receiving much more support from town parents than from suburban (43%) or city (39%) parents. Perhaps aligned with this interest in academic readiness, town parents also selected "to support child's concrete knowledge of academic skills" (35%) at a higher rate than city (20%) or suburban (27%)

parents. Town parents were also less likely than other geographic groups to select "To engage in art, music, and/or sports" as a goal, with 3% selecting that response (compared to 10% for cities and 15% for suburbs).

When asked to share what the goals of early childhood should be in general, a majority of the 153 town respondents (both parents and non-parents) identified the same two primary goals as city and suburban respondents: "to develop children's social and interpersonal skills" (68%) and "to provide a high-quality education for students of all abilities and backgrounds" (61%). However, town respondents were again relatively more interested in academic goals, selecting "to prepare children for Kindergarten" (39%) as their third-highest goal, much more than city (24%) or suburban (20%) respondents. Thus, while parents of all Illinois geographies are broadly aligned on the goals of early childhood, town respondents do appear more interested in the academic purpose of early childhood. This aligns, perhaps, with their relatively strong enrollment in Pre-K programs, which tend to be more academically focused than other forms of childcare.

Town respondents (N = 63) shared many strengths on which they felt early childhood should build. In Table 10, we provide the count of each thematic code for these strengths, as well as illustrative quotes.

Table 10. Town respondent answers to the strengths on which early childhood programs should build, by thematic code.

Thematic Code	Illustrative Quotes
Education (10)	"I will qualify that I encourage academic learning through play and age appropriate activities for fine motor and large motor." "Strong programs linked to the kindergarten classroom, creativity, play-based learning"
Non-cognitive (22)	"Our family puts the emotional well being and the feeling of being loved and cared as the number one priority. Everything else can be learned at the child's pace but love, safety and self-esteem are the foundation and imperative." "Self-expression, body autonomy, self help skills, creativity, kindness" "An early childhood program should build children's independence, self-esteem, social-emotional development, and assist those children that come into their program that are developmentally delayed or have behavioral issues (for various reasons)."
Engagement with environment (7)	"Connection with tourist spots and businesses that allow for walking field trips"
Community support (34)	"To help our community and encourage the family's [sic] that they are safe." "Community involvement, helping children learn diversity and how to be good citizens and community members; field trips to nursing homes, animal shelters, litter cleanup, etc." "Small town support and motivation." "I feel like all of the programs in the community should work closely with the school to help improve student outcomes over the long haul."
Family engagement (7)	"The program needs to help parents be better parents and offer support to them in their homes." "Parent/child activities and conferences to keep parents active in their child's life and to keep parents informed on their child's developmental growth or needs in educational development."
Extracurricular (2)	"YMCA programs"
Culture (7)	"Faith and family values" "Diversity, inclusion, social interaction."
Program development (5)	"Programs that expand past age 3 and get them ready for kindergarten."

In terms of navigating the early childhood system, the majority of town respondents shared the same challenges as their peers in other geographic areas: finding affordable childcare options (63%), finding services for children with disabilities (64%), and finding high-quality options (56%). However, majorities of town respondents also found additional tasks difficult: getting into the childcare or Pre-K options near them (56%), finding options near home (54%) or work (58%), and finding activities for their children to learn about their family's culture, values, and/or religion (51%). In sum, over half of town respondents found 7 different tasks difficult, while majorities of suburban and city respondents only found 2-3 different tasks difficult. Beyond these majorities, percentages of town respondents finding each task difficult were higher than for other geographies for 9 of the 12 tasks listed on the survey. This difference speaks to the relative lack of early childhood options in rural and town areas.

Town respondents' text answers underscored the lack of options in rural and town areas. On finding options near home or work, respondents largely shared that there were few options, particularly outside of public Pre-K programs. Some illustrative comments include:
- "Childcare was hard. Preschool easy."
- "Quality Pre-K is hard to find in rural areas. Schools are often the only option with limited availability."
- "There are VERY limited childcare options in my community for children under 3. Our preschool program does help that need once they are 3."
- "My kids attended a private preschool program taught by a retired teacher 2 days a week for 2 hrs. They went to a babysitter the rest of the time. My work is in a small community. The local daycare shut down and the preschool can't take my children. They wouldn't have qualified in it either."

In addition to the lack of options, town respondents also shared their difficulties finding affordable childcare, noting (like their urban and suburban peers) the "benefits cliff" for middle-income families.

The remarks of town respondents on quality, safety, and other issues all reinforced the lack of options in rural and town settings. Some quotes reflecting these challenges include:
- "I drove 45 mins passing work to take my child to a good facility for childcare"
- "Limited slots means prioritizing youngest children and leaving older siblings to care for school aged"
- "Safe and affordable was really hard [to find]"
- "There is only one preschool option and 4 in home childcare options in our whole county, so we go with whatever is available"

Many respondents repeated their remarks about difficulty several times for each separate task, emphasizing that the lack of options pervades all tasks related to finding childcare.

On finding extracurricular activities like music and sports, respondents again noted challenges, such as "There are very few options in our community and the things that are available take place during the work day." However, some respondents pointed to their libraries and park districts as rich resources for these activities. Respondents also noted the availability of faith-based activities for their children at local churches.

Early Childhood Experiences and Viewpoints for Black and Latino Families within Illinois

Black respondents. There were 66 Black parents/caregivers who responded. About two-thirds of Black parents reported having children in daycare (64%) and/or Pre-K (67%), which was in line with the overall sample. Black family participation in other early childhood activities was not notably different from the full sample.

Respondents were asked to share their goals for enrolling their children in early childhood programs, as well as their goals for the entire state early childhood system. When asked to share their goals for enrolling their

own children in early childhood (N = 53), a high proportion of Black respondents (77%) selected "to develop my child's social and interpersonal skills," which was the top selection by all racial/ethnic groups and the sample as a whole. All other goals received much less support from Black respondents. The next most popular selections for Black respondents were "to be a safe space for the child during the workday" (45%) and "to support my child's concrete knowledge of academic skills" (40%). Compared to Latino and White respondents, Black respondents were relatively more likely to select those two options. Black respondents were less likely than White families (and the full sample) to select "to have joy and feel happy and care for" (38% compared to 51% for White families) and "to prepare my child for kindergarten" (38% compared to 51% for White families).

When asked to share what the goals of early childhood should be in general, a strong majority of the 64 Black respondents (84%) selected "to provide a high-quality education for students of all abilities and backgrounds," a far stronger emphasis on this selection than the general sample (59%) and White respondents (55%). It's worth noting that this selection was the second-most common choice for the full sample and White respondents, but a particularly strong selection for Black and Latino respondents (see Appendix B for more). A slighter majority of Black respondents selected "to develop children's social and interpersonal skills" (52%) as the second most-popular goal; this was the primary goal for the full sample (66%) and White respondents (70%).

Black respondents (N=46) shared many strengths on which they felt early childhood should build. In Table 11, we provide the count of each thematic code for these strengths, as well as illustrative quotes.

Table 11. Black respondent answers to the strengths on which early childhood programs should build, by thematic code.

Thematic Code	Illustrative Quotes
Education (6)	"Make sure your children are in a highly qualify [sic] program that [gives] them life-learned skills."
Non-cognitive (17)	"Child-centered approach: Recognizing and valuing the unique strengths, interests, and learning styles of each child. This can help to create a nurturing and supportive environment that fosters a child's creativity and curiosity." "To help them to learn about themselves. It helps them learn how to tackle challenges, build knowledge, and thrive."
Engagement with environment (4)	"Have enrichment programs. Kids are [not] cookie cutter so exposing them to different activities at a young age is key to mental, social and physical development. However [there are] not a lot of options for working moms on the weekend. Everything is geared towards nanny's [sic] and stay at home moms during the week."
Community support (25)	"The ability to understand the importance of everyone's contribution and support to community." "Community partnerships: Building relationships with local businesses and organizations to support the program and provide resources and opportunities for children and families. This can include partnerships with healthcare providers, community organizations, and local businesses." "Strengths include: strong linkages to the community, collaborative partnerships with public and private sector."
Family engagement (8)	"All skills and goals set with the parents or guardians."
Extracurricular (4)	"Interdependence and reciprocity; mutual aid and inclusion; music and arts; joy"
Culture (8)	"Stress the importance of being proud of your race/ethnicity, help black children love themselves and believe in themselves."

	"Cultural awareness and respect for others" "Cultural and diversity: Embracing and respecting the diverse backgrounds, cultures, and experiences of children and families in the program. This can help to create an inclusive and supportive environment that values and celebrates diversity." "Respect for diversity in culture, ideas and beliefs."
Program development (3)	"Professional development: Providing opportunities for educators to continue to develop their skills and expertise in early childhood education. This can include opportunities for professional development, mentorship, and participation in professional networks. By building upon these strengths, an early childhood program can create a positive impact on children's development, families, and the community as a whole."

In terms of navigating the early childhood system, the majority of Black respondents shared the same challenges as the full sample (in a slightly different order): finding high-quality childcare or Pre-K options (69%), finding programs that could serve children with disabilities (64%), and finding affordable childcare or Pre-K options (63%). Interestingly, although respondents largely agreed finding quality daycare was hard, Black respondents indicated a higher level of difficulty with finding quality daycare (69%) than the full sample (51%) and White families specifically (47%). Conversely, they had fewer issues getting into childcare (28% for Black respondents versus 45% for the full sample) and finding options near work (27% for Black respondents versus 43% for the full sample). Finally, they expressed relatively higher difficulty than the full sample in finding activities for children to participate in music and the arts (48% for Black respondents; 37% overall), participate in sports (54% for Black respondents; 24% overall), and participate in activities to learn about their family's culture, values, and/or religion (57% for Black respondents; 41% overall).

Black respondents shared some insights into their difficulties finding options, especially affordable and high-quality options.
- "Quality programs cost while the cheaper options may not be the best."
- "MOST childcare options are NOT high-quality."
- "No night care."
- "I wasn't knowledgeable about the options and did not have transportation to explore."
- "I wanted my child to have Black admin and teachers."

These respondents also shared information on finding extracurricular activities, writing, "As a new mom I had no clue how to find activities for my toddler. I went to the library to print a document and saw a flyer about baby music class and started asking questions. Unfortunately, many activities are not available for working parents."

Latino respondents. There were 52 Latino parents who responded. A slight majority (52%) of Latino parents had experience with Pre-K. Only 42% of Latino parents had experience with daycare, which was far less than the overall sample (59%), White (60%), and Black parents (64%). Latino parents were also less likely than other groups to enroll their children in regular classes/activities for parents and children (21% for Latino parents, as compared to 33% of the full sample).

Respondents were asked to share their goals for enrolling their children in early childhood programs, as well as their goals for the entire state early childhood system. When asked to share their goals for enrolling their own children in early childhood (N = 46), a high proportion of Latino respondents (74%) selected "to develop my child's social and interpersonal skills," which was the top selection by all racial/ethnic groups and the sample as a whole. All other goals received support by a minority of Latino respondents. The next most popular responses for Latino respondents were "to prepare my child for kindergarten" (46%) and "to have joy and feel happy and care for" (38%). However, Latino respondents were less likely to select the latter than the full sample (50%) and White parents (51%). Interestingly, Latino respondents were also less likely to select

"to be a safe space for my child during the workday" (24% for Latino respondents versus 39% for the full sample) and much more likely to select "to provide instruction in English as a Second Language" (11% for Latino respondents versus 1% of the full sample).

When asked to share what the goals of early childhood should be in general, a strong majority of the 59 Latino parent and non-parent respondents (73%) selected "to provide a high-quality education for students of all abilities and backgrounds," a larger emphasis on this selection than the general sample (59%) and White respondents (55%). As noted above, this selection was the second-most common choice for the full sample and White respondents, but a particularly strong selection for Black and Latino respondents (see Appendix B for more). No other goals received majority support from Latino respondents, although "to develop children's social and interpersonal skills" (46%) was close; this was the primary goal for the full sample (66%) and White respondents (70%).

Latino respondents (N=40) shared numerous strengths on which they felt early childhood should build. In Table 12, we provide the count of each thematic code for these strengths, as well as illustrative quotes.

Table 12. Latino respondent answers to the strengths on which early childhood programs should build, by thematic code.

Thematic Code	Illustrative Quotes
Education (11)	"Dual language accessibility" "Getting them ready for kindergarten." "Provide a rich and safe environment that promotes learning, sense of belonging and high expectations"
Non-cognitive (16)	"Social and emotional learning, academic awareness, structure and routines for children, real life experience (field trips)" "Teaching children morals and character. Respect, integrity, discipline, honesty and self control etc." "Bilingual Education, Social Emotional Learning"
Engagement with environment (1)	"Safety and learning through play"
Community support (19)	"That we move away from a colonized approach to child rearing and instead move towards one of love, respect, and kindness. Children at this young age have so much neuroplasticity. There should be a heavier emphasis on second language exposure to all students." "Social Emotional Support, Providing Awareness on resources in community, Inclusive of all cultural backgrounds" "My community is very diverse and would benefit from a better daycare in our neighborhood. With quality teachers and affordable care. My children are excited for friends"
Family engagement (5)	"An early childhood program should build upon encouraging parents to be active participants in their child's education and provide students with a developmentally appropriate education." "I believe to have families heard. Some families aren't involved in their children's growth because they see the daycares as babysitting and not as teachers."
Extracurricular (0)	NA
Culture (11)	"To develop a sense of community/familia where we all help each other and do things for the common good. To develop collaboration and foster understanding of one another's differences and similarities. To develop an understanding of others whether by teaching a second language or learning about other cultures." "They should build on native language and also the learning of many different cultures"

	"Being bilingual in English and Spanish" "Dual language- Spanish speaking skills"
Program development (2)	"The basic standards of family growth no matter the race, religion or status, every child should be given educational resources for growth alongside their parents! Their parents should also be encouraged to inspire higher education and opportunities for the whole family to grow in education and given resources to help them become better families! As a family bilingual education and Home day care owner through the years, community services and grants need to be introduced more to families so they can be educated to inspire higher quality of life! Reach for a better life for the whole family!"

In terms of navigating the early childhood system, the majority of Latino respondents shared the same challenges as the full sample: finding programs that could serve children with disabilities (69%), finding affordable childcare options (68%), and finding high-quality options (61%). Latino respondents also found it difficult to find activities for children to learn music or engage in the arts (52%) and find activities for children to learn about their family's culture, values, and/or religion (55%). Compared the full sample, Latino respondents were also markedly more likely to express difficulty with finding safe childcare options (45% for Latino respondents versus 34% for the full sample). In many ways, Latino respondents were similar to Black respondents in that they found it more difficult than the full sample to find high-quality and specific options that they desired (see Appendix B for more).

Latino respondents shared some insights into their difficulties finding options that fit their specific needs, writing:
- "There are no daycares that share my beliefs and or vision for raising children."
- "Short time in program doesn't match long work hours/ transportation to programs."
- "None are affordable, all cost my entire paycheck, but this one is worth it because of its quality."
- "Our local district schedule and transportation options limited my child's access to preschool, so we are funding it through private school. Luckily, we are blessed to have the means but [would] prefer more options and more flexibility."

Indeed, Latino respondents shared many of the same challenges with affordability, quality, and fit as others in the sample.

Early Childhood Experiences and Viewpoints by Education within Illinois
In this final section of results, we share information about how families with less than a college degree experienced the early childhood system in Illinois, as compared to families with higher levels of education. We do this because of the relative underrepresentation of families without college degrees in early childhood programs and services (Hanson & Bobrowski, 2024), as well as the unique challenges faced by families with lower income (which is generally aligned with education level). Full results for all respondents by degree can be found in Appendix B.

First, parent respondents without a college degree (N = 108) were most likely to have experience with Pre-K (63%) than any other aspect of the early childhood system. This was perfectly aligned with the full sample (63%) and with parents of other education levels (60% of Associate degree holders, 61% of Bachelor's degree holders, and 65% of graduate degree holders). However, respondents without a college degree were dramatically less likely to have experience with daycare (38%) than parents with other education levels (59% of Associate degree holders, 60% of Bachelor's degree holders, and 67% of graduate degree holders). They were also less likely to participate in regular classes/activities for parents and children (18%) as compared to the full sample (33%) and Bachelor's (33%) and graduate degree (43%) holders. Conversely, they were much more likely to have experience with home visiting (17%) than the full sample (7%) or any group of college degree holders (5-6%). Indeed, their patterns of participation in early childhood programs and services seem fairly unique.

Second, when examining goals for the early childhood system, we see some similarities and differences across education levels. Parent respondents of all levels selected "to develop my child's social and interpersonal skills" as the top goal, including 78% of those parents without a college degree. However, parents without a college degree had a strong second goal: "to prepare my child for kindergarten" (64%). This percentage was much higher than for the full sample (48%) and dramatically higher than for parents with graduate degrees (36%). Conversely, parents without college degrees were much less likely to select "to have joy and feel happy and cared for" (39%) than the full sample (50%), as well as "to be a safe space for the child during the workday" (26%) versus the full sample (39%).

Responses from all participants without a college degree, both parents and non-parents (N = 104), showed similar trends in goals. The top goal for these respondents (54%) was "to provide a high-quality education for students of all abilities and backgrounds." These respondents were relatively less likely to pick "to develop children's social and interpersonal skills" (46%) than the full sample (66%). In contrast, they were relatively more likely to pick "to prepare children for kindergarten" (37%) than the full sample (29%), as well as "to encourage creativity in our youngest children" (28% as compared to 17% overall).

Respondents without a college degree (N= 43) shared strengths on which they felt early childhood programs and services should build. In Table 13, we provide the count of each thematic code for these strengths, as well as illustrative quotes.

Table 13. Answers from respondents without a college degree on the strengths on which early childhood programs should build, by thematic code.

Thematic Code	Illustrative Quotes
Education (7)	"Resources, Joyful Parenting, Positive Reinforcement, Routine, Play to Learn, Activities with Kids & Parents, Excellent Communication, Learn by Example, Flexible, Accepting Challenges Positively, Avoid Negativity!"
Non-cognitive (15)	"respect, honesty, drive, creativity" "Creativity (not just in the arts, but thinking outside of the box)"
Engagement with environment (4)	"Free play without screens or technology involved"
Community support (19)	"When children are bored do something with them" "Getting early intervention for children with special needs, treating each child as an individual, supporting staff who work with children" "We love having a variety of programs; child care, pre-k, family events - opportunities for families to decide which options are best for their children." "Feeling safe, loved and cared for. I believe our community holds high standards to early childhood and believe that some are unaffordable to some families"
Family engagement (8)	"More communication between parents/providers"
Extracurricular (2)	"Head Start, Early Head Start Programs and YMCA programs"
Culture (3)	"Biblical facts" "Connection with and respect for others, empathy for those with differences, and a creative approach to individual children's needs."
Program development (4)	"Childcare is a big one, stiffer penalties for sexual abuse cases"

Finally, respondents with less than a college degree had, overall, less difficulty navigating the system than the full sample and respondents with other education levels. Fewer than half of respondents without a

college degree found any task difficult, except for "finding activities for my children to learn about our family's culture, values, and/or religion," where exactly half (50%) expressed difficulty. For a majority of tasks, they were much less likely to find difficulty than respondents with other education levels. Given that this population is also less likely to have experiences with daycare, this relative "ease" may be due to these respondents not *attempting* to navigate some of these tasks, rather than actual ease. However, it might also reflect the intersection of education level and income: many early childhood programs target and are more affordable to parents with lower incomes. In that sense, these findings may suggest that the State of Illinois is positively serving families with lower income and making it simple for them to navigate the early childhood system.

However, in their written responses, respondents without college degrees shared many of the challenges finding affordable options as other parents. These responses were, of course, relatively fewer, given that these respondents were less likely to experience difficulty. Respondents shared some experiences with evaluating quality ("Staff attitudes generally negative toward children after parent leaves") and with finding extracurricular and specific activities.

Conclusion

To conclude, we summarize and compare our findings to various other family voice activities in the PDGB-5 planning grant.

Summary
Across subgroups, we found the following:
- Families were most likely to have experience with the Pre-K and daycare aspects of the early childhood system. Latino families and families with less than a college degree were less likely to have experience with daycare than other groups, but it was still strongly represented in their experience compared to other kinds of early childhood activities
- Families desired for early childhood programs "to develop my child's social and interpersonal skills." This goal was most popular across all target subgroups, representing a wide consensus.
- Communities believed that the Illinois early childhood system should "develop children's social and interpersonal skills" and "provide a high-quality education for students of all abilities and backgrounds." These two choices were popular for all respondent subgroups. Black and Latino respondents, as well as respondents without a college degree, especially emphasized the ideal of a high-quality education for all.
- Communities described many strengths on which they felt early childhood programs should build, including developing children's noncognitive skills and dispositions and drawing on community, family, and culture as resources.
- Across the board, families struggled to find *affordable* and *high-quality* care, as well as care for children with disabilities. These difficulties were most pronounced for all subgroups. Respondents discussed the difficulty of evaluating early childhood programs' quality and safety, as well as the challenge of affording childcare while being just above the threshold cutoff for state assistance (otherwise known as the "benefits cliff").
- Families expressed lack of awareness of many early childhood initiatives.

These findings converge with national research on these same issues of use, goals for, and access to early childhood programs and services.

Comparison to FAC Recommendations

The Family Advisory Committee (FAC) provided recommendations on (a) inclusion of family voice in decision-making and (b) inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood settings. The recommendations provided by this committee largely resonate with the results of this statewide survey.

Family voice. The FAC's selection of priority populations for family voice—particularly children with disabilities and children from families with lower income—align with key needs found in this survey. Parents of children with disabilities had difficulty finding childcare, as did families who were over and/or just above the CCAP cutoff. The FAC noted a need for further inclusion of historically marginalized populations in state outreach, and indeed the lack of participants of such backgrounds in this survey (distributed through all state channels, as described above), as well as in other activities on the grant (such as the home visiting needs assessment and the English Learner identification project), suggest the state should invest heavily in more effective and formal structures for reaching these populations. The current structures are not producing a representative or sizable sample.

Inclusion. The FAC noted that rural areas may struggle most with finding inclusive childcare options and that high-quality practices related to inclusion are lacking. Indeed, beyond the finding that families of children with disabilities struggled to find care, text comments on this survey noted a lack of options for care in town/rural areas and extreme distress over practices related to children with disabilities at childcare institutions. Survey respondents noted refusal to take on children with disabilities, expulsion of "difficult" children from childcare settings, and a lack of attention to children with special needs. The FAC's call for more training and support for this population is supported by this survey's findings. Additionally, survey respondents noted a lack of slots in Pre-K programs, resulting in children with disabilities going to community-based childcare with less training and support; this phenomenon was also detailed in the FAC's recommendations regarding the difficulties of implementing the itinerant special education model.

Comparison to Aligning Regional Intermediary Functions Recommendations

The report on regional intermediaries provided recommendations to "create a more efficient, simplified, consistent, and seamless experience for families to connect to services," among others. The survey findings suggest this is a need. Respondents reported difficulty finding affordable and high-quality childcare, as well as childcare for children with disabilities. Respondents also reported a concerning lack of awareness of the regional intermediaries queried in this study. Only 35% had used the Child Care Resource and Referral System and only 21% and 17% had heard of the Birth to Five Action and Family Councils, respectively. Beyond recommendations for streamlining these services, the state may need to invest more heavily in awareness of these services.

Comparison to NORC's Focus Group Findings

NORC conducted focus groups to explore family voice in policy decisions. Three elements resonate with this study. First, their report emphasized the importance of word-of-mouth between parents/peers about opportunities for engaging in policy conversation. This finding is similar to our finding about the importance of word-of-mouth for accessing childcare. A second element concerned the importance of garnering diverse family voices—including geographic and racial/ethnic diversity, as well as diversity of children's needs. Our findings underscore this importance, as we see that interactions with the early childhood system differ by those dimensions of identity. Finally, the report discussed the difficulty of truly capturing diverse voice; our survey also had this issue, and we recommend the new state early childhood agency investigate how to develop representative samples of voices from across the state to routinely inform agency work.

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Appendix A. Survey Questions.

Section 1: Background
This first set of questions asks you a bit about your background. Note that the term "child(ren)" is used throughout to refer to "one or more children."

Which of the following describe you? Select all that apply.
- I am currently the parent/caregiver of child(ren) under the age of 5. (1)
- I am currently the parent/caregiver of child(ren) ages 6-18. (2)
- I am the parent/caregiver of child(ren) who are now adults. (3)
- I am not a parent/caregiver. (4) [This selection is exclusive; no others can be selected if this selected.]

For your children under the age of 5, which early childhood activities do you and/or your child(ren) currently participate in? Select all that apply.
[NOTE: If one activity serves multiple purposes below, please select all those purposes.]
- Daycare at a home-based daycare or childcare center (1)
- A Pre-K program for 3- or 4- year-olds (2)
- A home visiting or parent coaching program (3)
- A program to support children with a specific physical disability (4)
- A program to support children with a specific cognitive or behavioral disability (5)
- Regular classes or activities for parents and young children (e.g., music classes, sports) (6)
- A program or service to support children who are learning English as a second language (7)
- None. (8) [This selection is exclusive; no others can be selected if this selected.]
- Other (Please specify:) (9)

When your child(ren) were under the age of 5, which early childhood activities did you and/or your child(ren) participate in? Select all that apply.
[NOTE: If one activity served multiple purposes below, please select all those purposes.]
- Daycare at a home-based daycare or childcare center (1)
- A Pre-K program for 3- or 4- year-olds (2)
- A home visiting or parent coaching program (3)
- A program to support children with a specific physical disability (4)
- A program to support children with a specific cognitive or behavioral disability (5)
- Regular classes or activities for parents and young children (e.g., music classes, sports) (6)
- A program or service to support children who are learning English as a second language (7)
- None. (8) [This selection is exclusive; no others can be selected if this selected.]
- Other (Please specify:) (9)

What is your gender identity?
- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary / third gender (3)
- Prefer to self-describe (4)
- Prefer not to answer (5)

What is the highest level of education you have obtained?
- Less than high school (1)
- High school degree (or GED) (2)
- Associate's degree (2-year degree from a community college) or vocational/technical certificate (3)
- Some college but no degree (4)

- Bachelor's degree (4-year college degree) (5)
- Master's degree (6)
- Doctoral or professional degree (such as a Ph.D., M.D., or law degree) (7)
- Other (Please specify:) (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Please indicate your race/ethnicity (select all that apply):
- American Indian or Alaska Native (1)
- Asian (2)
- Black or African American (3)
- Hispanic or Latinx (4)
- Middle Eastern and/or North African (5)
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (6)
- White (7)
- Prefer to self-describe (8)
- Prefer not to answer (9)

Section 2: Early Childhood Education Goals
The remaining questions ask you about your perceptions of early childhood programs. If you are a parent/caregiver, please consider your experiences with all of your child(ren) when answering these questions. If you are not a parent/caregiver, please respond with your viewpoint as a community member and citizen.

When selecting early childhood programs/activities for your child(ren), what were your Top 3 goals, overall, that you hoped the programs would serve for your child(ren)?
- To prepare my child for Kindergarten (1)
- To help my child think creatively (2)
- To develop my child's social and interpersonal skills (3)
- To support my child's concrete knowledge of academic skills like reading, writing, and math (4)
- To engage in art, music, and/or sports (5)
- To have joy and feel happy and cared for (6)
- To experience instruction and activities that reinforce your family's culture and/or values (7)
- To be a safe space for the child during the workday (8)
- To provide instruction aligned with my child's specific disability (9)
- To provide instruction in the learning of English as a second language (10)
- To provide teachings related to our family's religious beliefs (11)
- Other (Please specify:) (12)

What, in general, do you think the goals of early childhood programs and services in Illinois should be? Please select up to three.
- To provide a high-quality education for students of all abilities and backgrounds (1)
- To prepare children for Kindergarten (2)
- To encourage creativity in our youngest children (3)
- To provide children individual attention (4)
- To develop children's social and interpersonal skills (5)
- To ensure that all children are treated with respect (6)
- To support children's concrete knowledge of academic skills like reading, writing, and math (7)
- To engage children in art, music, and/or sports (8)
- To have children experience joy and feel happy and cared for (9)
- To reinforce each family's unique backgrounds, cultures, and values (10)
- To provide a safe and secure environment for children while parents are working (11)

- To teach children religious values and doctrines (12)
- To provide early support to children with specific needs or disabilities (13)
- Other (Please specify:) (14)

What are some strengths of your community, family, or child(ren) that you believe an early childhood program should build upon or continue to foster?

Section 3: Needs and Barriers
How easy or difficult were the following tasks in securing early childhood programs and activities for your child(ren)? If you did not engage in an activity, please leave that item blank.
[For each item, respondents selected easy, neither easy nor hard, or hard. They were asked to "share briefly why it was easy or hard."]
- Finding childcare or Pre-K options near my home (1)
- Finding childcare or Pre-K options near my work (2)
- Finding childcare or Pre-K options that I could afford (3)
- Finding high-quality childcare or Pre-K options (4)
- Finding safe childcare options (5)
- Evaluating the quality of the childcare or Pre-K options I had near me (6)
- Getting into the childcare or Pre-K options I had near me (7)
- Finding programs that could serve my child(ren) with disabilities (8)
- Finding programs that could support my child(ren) in learning the English language (9)
- Finding activities for my child(ren) to learn music or engage in the arts (10)
- Finding activities for my child(ren) to engage in sports or physical fitness (11)
- Finding activities for my child(ren) to learn about our family's culture, values, and/or religion (12)

Which of the following tools did you use to find and select early childhood programs and services? Select all that apply.
- Google search or maps (1)
- Other internet search (2)
- Local community resources for connecting families to early childhood programs (3)
- Facebook parents/neighborhood group (or other internet-based community group) (4)
- Information from your employer on early childhood options (5)
- Information from your child's doctor on early childhood options (6)
- Illinois Cares for Kids website (7)
- ExceleRate Quality ratings (8)
- Illinois DCFS website (9)
- Ready4K parent texting (10)
- Word of mouth from other parents (11)
- Magazine, newspaper, or internet advertisement (12)
- Other (Please specify:) (13)

Section 4: Awareness

Are you aware of Governor Pritzker's "Smart Start" initiative?
- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Please briefly explain what you know about the Smart Start initiative.

Which of the following state early childhood resources have you used or know about?

[For each item, respondents selected "used or participated in it," "heard about it (but didn't use it)," or "never heard of it."]
- Illinois Cares for Kids (1)
- Ready4K (2)
- ExceleRate (3)
- Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) System (4)
- Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) (5)
- Home Visiting (6)
- Early Intervention (7)
- Early Childhood Special Education (8)
- Birth to Five Family Council (9)
- Birth to Five Action Council (10)

Thank you for completing this survey. Your responses will help inform a better early childhood system for Illinois. If you have any additional comments, please state them briefly.

Appendix B. Tables of Responses for All Groups.

Table B1. Activities in which respondents (parents only) enrolled children under the age of 5, by percentage of respondents in each target racial/ethnic group.

	All (N = 728)	Black (N = 66)	Latino (N = 52)	White (N = 539)
Daycare	59%	64%	42%	60%
Pre-K for 3 or 4 year olds	63%	67%	52%	65%
Regular classes/activities for parents and children	33%	27%	21%	34%
A program to support children with a cognitive or behavioral disability	9%	12%	8%	9%
A program to support children with a physical disability	6%	9%	8%	6%
Home visiting/parent coaching	7%	11%	12%	6%
A program to support children learning English	2%	8%	4%	1%
None	4%	0%	10%	5%
Other	6%	3%	6%	6%

Table B2. Activities in which respondents (parents only) enrolled children under the age of 5, by percentage of respondents in each target education level group.

	All (N = 728)	Less than college (N = 108)	Associate (N = 91)	Bachelor's (N = 218)	Masters+ (N = 296)
Daycare	59%	38%	59%	60%	67%
Pre-K for 3 or 4 year olds	63%	63%	60%	61%	65%
Regular classes/activities for parents and children	33%	18%	25%	33%	43%
A program to support children with a cognitive or behavioral disability	9%	10%	5%	9%	10%
A program to support children with a physical disability	6%	7%	5%	6%	5%
Home visiting/parent coaching	7%	17%	5%	5%	6%
A program to support children learning English	2%	2%	0%	2%	3%
None	4%	6%	5%	5%	3%
Other	6%	6%	9%	3%	6%

Table B3. Activities in which respondents (parents only) enrolled children under the age of 5, by percentage of respondents in each target geographic group.

	All (N = 728)	City (N=202)	Suburb (N=117)	Town (N =131)
Daycare	59%	61%	64%	61%
Pre-K for 3 or 4 year olds	63%	58%	62%	73%
Regular classes/activities for parents and children	33%	42%	41%	30%
A program to support children with a cognitive or behavioral disability	9%	8%	16%	6%
A program to support children with a physical disability	6%	5%	9%	5%
Home visiting/parent coaching	7%	8%	7%	11%
A program to support children learning English	2%	2%	3%	2%
None	4%	2%	6%	2%
Other	6%	7%	7%	5%

Table B4. Goals for early childhood identified by parents of enrolled children under the age of 5, by percentage of respondents in each target racial/ethnic group.

	All	Black	Latino	White
To develop my child's social and interpersonal skills	85%	77%	74%	87%
To have joy and feel happy and cared for	50%	38%	39%	51%
To prepare my child for Kindergarten	48%	38%	46%	51%
To be a safe space for the child during the workday	39%	45%	24%	39%
To support my child's concrete knowledge of academic skills	27%	40%	30%	25%
To help my child think creatively	20%	26%	30%	19%
To engage in art, music, and/or sports	9%	6%	15%	9%
To experience instruction and activities that reinforce your family's cultures and/or values	5%	8%	11%	5%
To provide instruction aligned with my child's specific disability	5%	8%	9%	5%
To provide teachings related to my child's religious beliefs	2%	2%	4%	1%
To provide instruction in ESL	1%	0%	11%	0%
Other	2%	2%	4%	2%
TOTAL N	646	53	46	486

Table B5. Goals for early childhood identified by parents of enrolled children under the age of 5, by percentage of respondents in each target education level group.

	All	Less than college	Associate	Bachelor's	Master's+
To develop my child's social and interpersonal skills	85%	78%	79%	88%	87%
To have joy and feel happy and cared for	50%	39%	38%	52%	56%
To prepare my child for Kindergarten	48%	64%	55%	53%	36%
To be a safe space for the child during the workday	39%	26%	39%	38%	43%
To support my child's concrete knowledge of academic skills	27%	36%	29%	21%	28%
To help my child think creatively	20%	17%	24%	19%	21%
To engage in art, music, and/or sports	9%	8%	5%	11%	10%
To experience instruction and activities that reinforce your family's cultures and/or values	5%	4%	5%	6%	5%
To provide instruction aligned with my child's specific disability	5%	10%	5%	4%	4%
To provide teachings related to my child's religious beliefs	2%	3%	0%	3%	1%
To provide instruction in ESL	1%	3%	0%	2%	1%
Other	2%	1%	1%	3%	3%
TOTAL N	646	92	80	200	263

Table B6. Goals for early childhood identified by parents of enrolled children under the age of 5, by percentage of respondents in each target geographic group.

	All	City	Suburb	Town
To develop my child's social and interpersonal skills	85%	86%	86%	82%
To have joy and feel happy and cared for	50%	56%	44%	43%
To prepare my child for Kindergarten	48%	39%	43%	61%
To be a safe space for the child during the workday	39%	41%	40%	42%
To support my child's concrete knowledge of academic skills	27%	20%	27%	35%
To help my child think creatively	20%	21%	22%	16%
To engage in art, music, and/or sports	9%	10%	15%	3%
To experience instruction and activities that reinforce your family's cultures and/or values	5%	4%	4%	8%
To provide instruction aligned with my child's specific disability	5%	6%	9%	5%
To provide teachings related to my child's religious beliefs	2%	2%	2%	2%
To provide instruction in ESL	1%	1%	2%	1%
Other	2%	4%	3%	1%
TOTAL N	646	202	117	132

Table B7. Overall goals for early childhood, by percentage of respondents in each target racial/ethnic group.

	All	Black	Latino	White
To develop children's social and interpersonal skills	66%	52%	46%	70%
To provide a high-quality education for students of all abilities and backgrounds	59%	84%	73%	55%

	All			
To provide a safe and secure environment for children while parents are working	35%	42%	36%	34%
To have children experience joy and feel happy and cared for	32%	25%	25%	34%
To prepare children for Kindergarten	29%	17%	29%	31%
To encourage creativity in our youngest children	17%	16%	20%	16%
To provide early support to children with specific needs or disabilities	17%	11%	15%	18%
To ensure that all children are treated with respect	15%	19%	17%	14%
To support children's concrete knowledge of academic skills like reading, writing, and math	11%	16%	12%	11%
To engage children in art, music, and/or sports	4%	5%	5%	4%
To provide children individual attention	4%	2%	3%	4%
To reinforce each family's unique backgrounds, cultures, and values	4%	6%	7%	3%
To teach children religious values and doctrines	1%	0%	2%	1%
Other	1%	0%	0%	1%
TOTAL N	759	64	59	570

Table B8. Overall goals for early childhood, by percentage of respondents in each target education level group.

	All	Less than college	Associate	Bachelor's	Master's+
To develop children's social and interpersonal skills	66%	46%	68%	70%	69%
To provide a high-quality education for students of all abilities and backgrounds	59%	54%	47%	61%	63%
To provide a safe and secure environment for children while parents are working	35%	24%	34%	35%	39%
To have children experience joy and feel happy and cared for	32%	26%	28%	30%	36%
To prepare children for Kindergarten	29%	37%	31%	31%	23%
To encourage creativity in our youngest children	17%	28%	15%	17%	14%
To provide early support to children with specific needs or disabilities	17%	27%	21%	14%	14%
To ensure that all children are treated with respect	15%	17%	16%	14%	15%
To support children's concrete knowledge of academic skills like reading, writing, and math	11%	15%	13%	11%	10%
To engage children in art, music, and/or sports	4%	7%	2%	4%	4%
To provide children individual attention	4%	4%	4%	3%	4%
To reinforce each family's unique backgrounds, cultures, and values	4%	1%	2%	4%	5%
To teach children religious values and doctrines	1%	2%	2%	0%	0%
Other	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%
TOTAL N	759	104	85	247	310

Table B9. Overall goals for early childhood, by percentage of respondents in each target geographic group.

	All	City	Suburb	Town

To develop children's social and interpersonal skills	66%	61%	70%	68%
To provide a high-quality education for students of all abilities and backgrounds	59%	60%	66%	61%
To provide a safe and secure environment for children while parents are working	35%	38%	36%	33%
To have children experience joy and feel happy and cared for	32%	36%	31%	27%
To prepare children for Kindergarten	29%	24%	20%	39%
To encourage creativity in our youngest children	17%	13%	15%	16%
To provide early support to children with specific needs or disabilities	17%	16%	19%	15%
To ensure that all children are treated with respect	15%	15%	18%	12%
To support children's concrete knowledge of academic skills like reading, writing, and math	11%	13%	8%	16%
To engage children in art, music, and/or sports	4%	4%	4%	3%
To provide children individual attention	4%	3%	3%	3%
To reinforce each family's unique backgrounds, cultures, and values	4%	6%	3%	2%
To teach children religious values and doctrines	1%	0%	1%	1%
Other	1%	2%	1%	1%
TOTAL N	759	251	143	153

Table B10. Percentage reporting that each early childhood navigational task was "easy, "hard," or "neither easy nor hard."

Activity	Easy	Hard	Neither
Finding childcare or Pre-K options that I could afford	27%	45%	28%
Finding high-quality childcare or Pre-K options	34%	35%	30%
Getting into the childcare or Pre-K options I had near me	42%	34%	24%
Finding childcare or Pre-K options near my home	46%	33%	22%
Finding childcare or Pre-K options near my work	38%	29%	33%
Evaluating the quality of the childcare or Pre-K options I had near me	40%	27%	33%
Finding activities for my child(ren) to learn music or engage in the arts	42%	25%	33%
Finding programs that could serve my child(ren) with disabilities	15%	23%	62%
Finding safe childcare options	43%	22%	35%
Finding activities for my child(ren) to learn about our family's culture, values, and/or religion	29%	20%	51%
Finding activities for my child(ren) to engage in sports or physical fitness	51%	16%	33%
Finding programs that could support my child(ren) in learning the English language	23%	12%	66%

Table B11. Percentage reporting that each early childhood navigational task was "hard" as compared to "easy," by target racial/ethnic group.

Activity	All % "hard"	Black	Latino	White
Finding childcare or Pre-K options that I could afford	62%	63%	68%	62%

Activity				
Finding high-quality childcare or Pre-K options	51%	69%	61%	47%
Getting into the childcare or Pre-K options I had near me	45%	28%	38%	46%
Finding childcare or Pre-K options near my home	42%	38%	41%	42%
Finding childcare or Pre-K options near my work	43%	27%	48%	44%
Evaluating the quality of the childcare or Pre-K options I had near me	40%	48%	36%	39%
Finding activities for my child(ren) to learn music or engage in the arts	37%	48%	52%	34%
Finding programs that could serve my child(ren) with disabilities	61%	64%	69%	60%
Finding safe childcare options	34%	41%	45%	31%
Finding activities for my child(ren) to learn about our family's culture, values, and/or religion	41%	57%	55%	33%
Finding activities for my child(ren) to engage in sports or physical fitness	24%	54%	43%	19%
Finding programs that could support my child(ren) in learning the English language	34%	40%	40%	31%

Table B12. Percentage reporting that each early childhood navigational task was "hard" as compared to "easy," by target education level group.

Activity	All % "hard"	Less than college	Associate	Bachelor's	Master's+
Finding childcare or Pre-K options that I could afford	62%	48%	57%	60%	70%
Finding high-quality childcare or Pre-K options	51%	36%	45%	49%	59%
Getting into the childcare or Pre-K options I had near me	45%	32%	46%	43%	51%
Finding childcare or Pre-K options near my home	42%	30%	34%	46%	44%
Finding childcare or Pre-K options near my work	43%	31%	37%	42%	50%
Evaluating the quality of the childcare or Pre-K options I had near me	40%	21%	45%	39%	46%
Finding activities for my child(ren) to learn music or engage in the arts	37%	41%	39%	39%	34%
Finding programs that could serve my child(ren) with disabilities	61%	37%	71%	64%	70%
Finding safe childcare options	34%	33%	38%	36%	31%
Finding activities for my child(ren) to learn about our family's culture, values, and/or religion	41%	50%	26%	38%	45%

Finding activities for my child(ren) to engage in sports or physical fitness	24%	31%	28%	21%	23%
Finding programs that could support my child(ren) in learning the English language	34%	26%	41%	38%	35%

Table B13. Percentage reporting that each early childhood navigational task was "hard" as compared to "easy," by target geographic group.

Activity	All % "hard"	City	Suburb	Town
Finding childcare or Pre-K options that I could afford	62%	63%	67%	63%
Finding high-quality childcare or Pre-K options	51%	47%	55%	56%
Getting into the childcare or Pre-K options I had near me	45%	42%	41%	56%
Finding childcare or Pre-K options near my home	42%	38%	37%	54%
Finding childcare or Pre-K options near my work	43%	34%	40%	58%
Evaluating the quality of the childcare or Pre-K options I had near me	40%	40%	39%	47%
Finding activities for my child(ren) to learn music or engage in the arts	37%	29%	30%	46%
Finding programs that could serve my child(ren) with disabilities	61%	61%	67%	64%
Finding safe childcare options	34%	29%	36%	45%
Finding activities for my child(ren) to learn about our family's culture, values, and/or religion	41%	41%	36%	51%
Finding activities for my child(ren) to engage in sports or physical fitness	24%	26%	16%	25%
Finding programs that could support my child(ren) in learning the English language	34%	20%	40%	44%

Table B14. Percentage reporting use of each tool for finding early childhood programs and services, by target racial/ethnic groups.

	All	Black	Latino	White
Word of mouth from other parents	63%	59%	38%	66%
Local community resources for connecting families to early childhood programs	51%	59%	48%	52%
Google search or maps	37%	50%	45%	32%
Facebook parents/neighborhood group (or other internet-based community group)	36%	23%	35%	37%
Other internet search	20%	25%	18%	19%
Information from your employer on early childhood options	14%	14%	15%	14%
Other	12%	9%	18%	12%
Illinois DCFS website	9%	7%	8%	10%

Information from your child's doctor on early childhood options	7%	9%	13%	6%
Magazine, newspaper, or internet advertisement	7%	9%	3%	7%
Illinois Cares for Kids website	5%	14%	5%	5%
ExceleRate Quality ratings	5%	14%	3%	4%
Ready4K parent texting	0%	0%	0%	0%
TOTAL N	520	44	40	389

Table B15. Percentage reporting use of each tool for finding early childhood programs and services, by target education level groups.

	All	Less than college	Associate	Bachelor's	Master's+
Word of mouth from other parents	63%	49%	58%	64%	71%
Local community resources for connecting families to early childhood programs	51%	46%	64%	48%	50%
Google search or maps	37%	33%	22%	38%	42%
Facebook parents/neighborhood group (or other internet-based community group)	36%	33%	29%	38%	36%
Other internet search	20%	13%	17%	21%	23%
Information from your employer on early childhood options	14%	9%	10%	18%	14%
Other	12%	13%	5%	12%	15%
Illinois DCFS website	9%	9%	10%	10%	8%
Information from your child's doctor on early childhood options	7%	9%	8%	4%	9%
Magazine, newspaper, or internet advertisement	7%	4%	14%	7%	6%
Illinois Cares for Kids website	5%	9%	5%	5%	4%
ExceleRate Quality ratings	5%	0%	2%	7%	7%
Ready4K parent texting	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
TOTAL N	520	69	59	165	216

Table B16. Percentage reporting use of each tool for finding early childhood programs and services, by target geographic groups.

	All	City	Suburb	Town
Word of mouth from other parents	63%	61%	59%	68%
Local community resources for connecting families to early childhood programs	51%	47%	52%	53%
Google search or maps	37%	44%	47%	24%
Facebook parents/neighborhood group (or other internet-based community group)	36%	35%	41%	33%
Other internet search	20%	26%	20%	14%
Information from your employer on early childhood options	14%	14%	17%	13%
Other	12%	17%	11%	10%
Illinois DCFS website	9%	9%	11%	7%
Information from your child's doctor on early childhood options	7%	7%	10%	6%

Magazine, newspaper, or internet advertisement	7%	5%	11%	7%
Illinois Cares for Kids website	5%	7%	4%	6%
ExceleRate Quality ratings	5%	8%	9%	2%
Ready4K parent texting	0%	0%	0%	1%
TOTAL N	520	198	114	126

Table B17. Percentage indicating awareness or use of select Illinois early childhood initiatives.

	Used It	Heard of It	Never Heard of It	TOTAL N
Early Intervention	39%	50%	11%	567
Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) System	35%	32%	32%	554
ExceleRate	29%	27%	44%	543
Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP)	27%	45%	28%	548
Early Childhood Special Education	26%	58%	16%	551
Home Visiting	24%	51%	25%	535
Birth to Five Action Council	21%	41%	38%	529
Birth to Five Family Council	17%	47%	35%	527
Illinois Cares for Kids	10%	46%	44%	530
Ready4K	6%	26%	68%	513