
2-1-2016

Factors Influencing Parents' Decision to Use Public Pre-K Programs in Maine: Results of a Parent Survey

Janet C. Fairman PhD
University of Maine, Maine Education Policy Research Institute

Mary Ellin Logue EdD
University of Maine, Maine Education Policy Research Institute

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/cepare_improvement

Recommended Citation

Fairman, Janet C. PhD and Logue, Mary Ellin EdD, "Factors Influencing Parents' Decision to Use Public Pre-K Programs in Maine: Results of a Parent Survey" (2016). *School Improvement*. 13.
https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/cepare_improvement/13

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Education Policy, Applied Research and Evaluation (CEPARE) at USM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in School Improvement by an authorized administrator of USM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact jessica.c.hovey@maine.edu.

Factors Influencing Parents' Decision to Use Public Pre-K Programs in Maine: Results of a Parent Survey



Prepared by:

Janet C. Fairman, Ph.D.

Mary Ellin Logue, Ed.D.

Sharon LaBrie, M.S.

February 2016

Maine Education Policy Research Institute
University of Maine
Orono, Maine



Published by the Maine Education Policy Research Institute in the College of Education and Human Development, University of Maine.

MEPRI was established to conduct studies on Maine education policy and the Maine public education system for the Maine Legislature.

Statements and opinions by the authors do not necessarily reflect a position or policy of the Maine Education Policy Research Institute, nor any of its members, and no official endorsement by them should be inferred.

The University of Maine does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin or citizenship status, age, disability, or veteran's status and shall comply with Section 504, Title IX, and the A.D.A in employment, education, and in all other areas of the University. The University provides reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals with disabilities upon request.

This study was funded by the Maine State Legislature, and the University of Maine System.

Copyright © 2016

College of Education and Human Development
University of Maine, 5766 Shibles Hall, Orono, Maine 04469-5766 (207) 581-2493
A Member of the University of Maine System

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	i
Introduction.....	1
Methodology	2
Literature Informing the Study.....	2
Survey Development and Design.....	3
Recruitment of School Sample.....	4
Recruitment of Parent Participants.....	6
Survey Response Rates	7
Survey Findings.....	7
Choice of Preschool Program.....	8
Parents' Work Status and Choice of Preschool Program.....	11
Factors in Decision to Use Public Pre-K.....	13
Factors in Decision to Use Private Preschool	16
Comparison of Public and Private Preschool Choices	17
Factors in Decision Not to Use Public Pre-K.....	19
Factors in Decision Not to Use Any Type of Preschool Program	21
Views about Preschool Programs.....	22
Discussion	25
Conclusion	27
Implications for Research and Policy	29
Bibliography	31
Author Information	32
Appendix A: Preschool Experience Parent Survey Instrument.....	33
Appendix B: Additional Data Tables Using a Five-Point Scale.....	39

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a parent survey conducted in January-February 2016 by the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) at the request of the Maine State Legislature, to investigate barriers to participation in public pre-K programs for four year olds and other factors that influence parents' decisions to use preschool programs (public or private) or no preschool. The report builds on earlier MEPRI research on preschool programs in Maine conducted through surveys and case study interviews in 2015. Together, the MEPRI data serve to inform state and local decisions about public preschool and specifically the proposed legislation LD 1394 "An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Strengthen the Adequacy and Equity of Certain Cost Components of the School Funding Formula".

Fourteen public elementary schools that operate pre-K programs were invited to participate in the online parent survey. The school sample included schools that are in the MDOE's Preschool Expansion Grant program and have full-day preschool programs, while additional schools were included that typically run half-day preschool programs. The schools varied by geographic location, urban/ rural setting, enrollment, grade configuration, student poverty and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) status of students. A total of 148 parent surveys were returned from twelve of the fourteen schools, for a response rate of 16% for participating schools.

While the reader is cautioned that we cannot generalize the findings from this survey to the entire state, the results do show important trends that can inform decisions about increasing participation in preschool programs. Highlights of the major findings from the parent survey include the following:

- Parents chose public pre-K programs over private programs more than twice as often. Slightly more than half the respondents (55%) used only public pre-K, while about one fifth (22%) used private preschool only, and 14% used private childcare only.
- 10% of respondents used combinations of public, private, and/ or private childcare.
- Slightly more parents used a half-day program with no extension (52%) than used a full-day program (43%).

(Note that across Maine, the majority of preschool students attend half-day programs. The sample of 12 schools returning parent surveys over-represents full-day programs as the sample included nine schools that are in the MDOE's Preschool Expansion Grant Program and have full-day programs.)

- Only 5% of respondents used a half-day program with an extended before or after (wrap around) program.
- Over a third of respondents (34%) did not know if their child's preschool program was part of the Head Start program or not, while 43% indicated their program was part of Head Start.

- Roughly equal numbers of respondents indicated their child’s preschool program provided transportation (48% yes, 52% no).
- Almost three quarters of respondents (74%) indicated the preschool program provided meals.
- Over half of the respondents (54%) indicated they worked full time during the year before their child entered kindergarten. Roughly equal numbers of parents who worked full time used either full-day preschool programs or half-day programs. Overall, parents used public pre-K programs most often no matter their working status. Half-day programs and the challenge of multiple transitions during the child’s day were more significant factors for parents who indicated they worked full time.
- Factors related to the classroom environment and teacher quality, along with convenience of program hours and location, were the most important considerations for parents choosing either public or private preschool programs. A reduction in cost was important for 53% of parents choosing public programs. Factors related to transportation and meals were of lower importance.
- Respondents varied widely in the reasons they did not use public pre-K. Some factors that were important for less than half the respondents included: personal preference (41%), desire to avoid multiple transitions during the child’s day (38%), and needing a full-day program (34%).
- A high majority of parents indicated positive views about preschool education and the potential benefits for children attending preschool, in terms of fostering social skills (97% agreed), exposing children to classroom routines (97%), increasing a child’s readiness for kindergarten (95%), and helping to build academic skills (94%). Eighty-seven percent of respondents agreed that children benefit more from daily preschool attendance. And, 80% of respondents agreed that schools should provide enough pre-K slots for families who want to send their children.

The parent survey results were largely positive. That is, most parents preferred to use public pre-K programs and indicated positive views and expectations about the potential benefits of preschool education. Further, program quality considerations were among the most important factors that parents cited as reasons for choosing public preschool.

Areas of concern with implications for state and local policy included concerns about the availability of full-day public pre-K programs (or half-day with wrap around programs) needed for full-time working parents, and the availability of slots in public pre-K programs when needed by families. There were also concerns about the coordination and delivery of services to meet students’ special needs across preschool and kindergarten years. Ultimately, attention to these identified needs and concerns could increase participation in public pre-K programs and children’s readiness for kindergarten and long-term learning outcomes.

Introduction

At the request of the Maine State Legislature, the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) conducted a survey of parents in Maine to explore: 1) barriers to participation in public pre-K programs for four year olds, and 2) factors that influence parents' decision to use public pre-K programs.

This work adds to the research and data collected about preschool programs in Maine by MEPRI in the previous year to support the work of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee of the state legislature and the Essential Programs and Services (EPS) Commission. Specifically, the MEPRI work provides data to inform decisions about future funding of preschool programs as outlined in pending legislation LD 1394 "An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Strengthen the Adequacy and Equity of Certain Cost Components of the School Funding Formula".

In March 2015, MEPRI reported results of a statewide survey of school superintendents and preschool teachers which included data on current facilities, staffing, enrollment, operating costs, and child screening practices for preschool programs in existence at that time (Mason & Porter, 2015). The survey also asked about start-up costs and facilities needed to expand preschool programming in schools.

In June 2015, MEPRI reported research findings from case studies conducted with four schools that had well-established, quality public preschool programs (Logue, Tu, Fisher, & Mason, 2015). The four schools selected represented four different parts of the state, two from rural districts and two from urban ones. That study explored teacher and administrator perceptions of strengths and benefits of public pre-K programs as well as challenges associated with implementing those programs. Data collection included classroom observation and

interviews with teachers and principals about the evolution of their programs and anticipated changes in light of the Chapter 124 standards.

While the focus of MEPRI's case study site visits in 2015 was on the features of Chapter 124, all teachers and principals addressed issues related to attendance, although some issues were different for rural versus urban settings. Some parents who live in a rural school district but commute to work in a more urban setting often preferred the convenience of a private full-day program near their work rather than a public half-day program in their residential community. The interview comments also focused on challenges associated with implementing public pre-K programs, such as parents' concerns about the length of a child's bus ride, availability of seatbelts and bus monitors on school buses. Transportation was a concern for districts that did not provide that service. Other concerns about balancing small class size with availability to all children and the provision of special education services will be discussed at the end of this report. Findings from the earlier MEPRI surveys and case studies informed the development of content for survey questions for the parent survey described in this report.

Methodology

Literature Informing the Study

Development of the survey content began with a review of the research literature on factors associated with preschool attendance and what we've learned from prior MEPRI work. An online search of literature revealed little empirical evidence about the families who use public pre-K programs and those who do not. There is scant research available on this topic. What we do know is that preschool participation is complex and uneven and that many children attend a patchwork of programs, while many of the children in greatest need do not attend formal programs (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007). Children from lower-income families still have lower

participation rates than those from average income families. The highest participation rates are for children whose mothers have a bachelor's degree or higher (80%). In their 2007 publication, *Who goes to Preschool and Why Does it Matter?* Barnett and Yarosz, in trying to untangle the reasons parents use or do not use preschool programs, stated: "As children with employed mothers are more likely to enroll in a pre-K classroom, the growth of maternal employment has played some role in increased participation rates, but childcare demand is of secondary importance to education" (p. 2). It appears as though public opinion about the educational value of preschool education is becoming the norm. It is no longer thought of as primarily a childcare arrangement.

In another attempt to understand participation in various childcare arrangements, Miller and colleagues (2014) found different preferences based on income and culture. Among non-immigrant families, those with higher incomes favored center-based care while among immigrant families, the higher-income families preferred non-parental family care.

Survey Development and Design

Parents who had a child in either kindergarten or first grade during the 2015-2016 school year were targeted for this survey. The survey asked parents to reflect back on the factors that had influenced their decision to use a pre-K program or no program for their child. Parents were asked if they had used a public pre-K program, private program, homecare or private childcare arrangements (no preschool program), or some combination of these options. One survey question explored parents' general views of preschool programming and expectations about potential benefits for children. The survey was voluntary and anonymous.

The online survey was designed to be accessible using a computer or mobile device such as a smartphone, and required minimal time to complete (approximately ten minutes). Most items used a fixed-choice format that required participants to select a response or more than one

response from a list of response choices. Some items used a Likert scale and asked participants to rate how important a factor was to them, or their level of agreement with statements. In many cases, participants had the option to select “other” and type their comment.

The entire survey included a total of 19 potential questions. However, the program used to administer the online survey (Qualtrics) directed participants to questions based on their previous responses. Therefore, participants would not necessarily have to respond to all questions, but only questions that were relevant based on their responses about their use of a preschool program or no program. For example, a parent who indicated they used only a private preschool program for their child would be directed to a question about the important factors in their decision to use a private preschool program. Parents who indicated they did not use a preschool program would skip through some questions, but were asked about the important factors in their decision not to use any type of preschool program. All participants were asked to complete questions verifying the grade level of their child and which school the child attended, to verify that they met the criteria for participation in the survey. In addition, survey respondents indicated their relationship to the child and their working status during the year prior to their child starting kindergarten. A complete list of the survey questions can be found in Appendix A of this report.

Recruitment of School Sample

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Maine, MEPRI began recruitment of schools and participants for the online survey. We developed a sample of diverse elementary schools beginning with the nine public elementary schools in Maine that are currently involved in the Maine Department of Education Pre-K Expansion Grant. We invited these schools to participate in the survey through an emailed request to school principals and all nine schools agreed to participate. All nine schools operate a

full-day pre-K program. Six additional public elementary schools with established pre-K programs were also invited to participate, and five agreed. All but one of the five schools offers a half-day program. In total, 14 schools agreed to participate in the survey and all schools had operated a public pre-K program since at least 2012. Of the 14, 10 run full-day pre-K programs and four offer half-day programs.

The school sample represents different geographic regions of Maine, urban/ rural settings, variation in grade configurations, enrollment, and student demographics. Most schools had K-5 or K-6 configurations ($n = 8$) while two schools were K-8 and the remaining four schools ranged from K-2 to K-4. Total enrollment for these schools ranged from 105 to 483, and kindergarten enrollment ranged from 10 students to 80. Student poverty levels also varied, with a low of 37% students eligible for free or reduced lunch subsidy in one school up to 100% in an urban school, and an average of 68% for the sample, which is higher than the statewide average rate of 46.6% for the same year. Most schools had less than 10% of their students designated by limited English proficiency (LEP) status. However, two schools did have higher LEP rates than the statewide average of 2.9%. One school is located in a northern region of Maine with a larger Franco-American population. Another school is located in an urban setting with a high population of immigrants who are non-native English speakers. Table 1 presents an overview of the school sample.

Table 1. School Sample

School Name	District	School Grade Span	Kindergarten Enrollment	First Grade Enrollment	Total School Enrollment	Percent Free/Reduced Lunch	Percent Limited English Proficiency
Agnes Gray School	RSU 17/MSAD 17	K-4	18	19	107	74.8%	**
Chelsea Elementary School	RSU 12	K-8	26	30	253	57.7%	**
Downeast School	Bangor Public Schools	K-3	80	96	374	93.9%	**
Garret Schenck School	RSU 74/MSAD 74	K-5	10	13	100	74.0%	**
Governor James B Longley Elementary	Lewiston Public Schools	K-6	56	42	363	100.0%	59%
Guy E Rowe School	RSU 17/MSAD 17	K-6	62	59	483	72.3%	**
Madawaska Elementary School	Madawaska Public Schools	K-6	32	24	218	44.5%	11%
Newport Elementary School	RSU 19	K-4	49	50	292	55.5%	**
Oxford Elementary School	RSU 17/MSAD 17	K-6	46	51	393	73.3%	**
Paris Elementary School	RSU 17/MSAD 17	K-6	61	58	465	72.9%	**
Readfield Elementary School	RSU 38	K-5	27	30	182	37.4%	**
Rose M Gaffney School	Machias Public Schools	K-8	31	41	362	53.0%	**
Solon Elementary School	RSU 74/MSAD 74	K-5	12	14	105	66.7%	**
Waterford Memorial School	RSU 17/MSAD 17	K-2	36	24	111	75.7%	**

** Percentages under 10% are suppressed.

Enrollment is based on 2014-15 academic year

Recruitment of Parent Participants

The initial recruitment email message to school principals was followed by a phone call to explain the study to principals. A sample text was provided for principals to forward to parents

by email, containing an active hyperlink to the online survey and information about participation in the survey. In the email message, parents were informed that the survey was voluntary and anonymous. In order to increase the response rate, parents were offered a \$10 Amazon gift certificate for taking the survey. Email invitations to participate were administered to all parents who had an email address on file with the school. In some cases this included both parents. Some parents may not have received an invitation if they had no email address or an invalid email address on file. Due to the compressed timetable for the survey, we were not able to distribute and collect a paper version of the survey for this study.

Survey Response Rates

The survey was open for three weeks in late January and early February 2016. During this time, MEPRI sent reminders to principals, and principals emailed reminders to parents to complete the survey. Despite these efforts, two schools had no parents responding to the survey. One possible reason for the lack of response was the high immigrant population in one of the two schools, where many of the parents may not have email addresses and may also have an English language barrier. We verified with school officials that the survey was indeed emailed out to parents as requested. Overall, the response rate across all 14 schools was 14%, based on the number of parents that schools sent invitations to by email. The response rates for the 12 schools returning surveys ranged from 2% (another school with higher percentage of LEP students) to 33%, with a mean of 16%. The final valid response total was 148 surveys returned from 12 of the 14 schools.

Survey Findings

The following sections present survey findings related to the two broad research questions guiding the study. A discussion of the broad findings and potential policy implications

follows later in the report. One caveat for readers to remember is that the response rate was somewhat low overall, despite the provision of a small financial incentive. We do not know if the sample of parents who chose to complete a survey is representative of all parents in the participating schools or in the state as a whole. Specifically, the participant sample may under-represent some groups of parents who are more transient, do not have email addresses, are not comfortable using computers or mobile devices, or who have limited English proficiency.

Choice of Preschool Program

One survey question asked parents to indicate what type of pre-K program or childcare arrangement they had used for their child on a regular, ongoing basis. Parents were able to check more than one response to indicate they used a combination of options for their child. More than twice as many parents indicated they had used a public pre-K program compared to a private preschool program (55% compared to 22%). However, some parents using public pre-K programs for their child also used private preschool programs or private childcare for part of the day or week. Eight percent of all respondents indicated they used a combination of both public and private preschool programs for their child. Only 1% of all respondents indicated they used a combination of public pre-K and other private childcare or homecare for their child. Fourteen percent indicated they did not use any type of preschool program but chose to keep their child at home or had other private childcare arrangements. Table 2 presents the results of this survey item in three broad categories of response, while Table 3 presents data on the number and percentage of respondents who used different combinations of preschool and childcare.

Table 2. Type of Pre-K Program or Childcare Used (*choose all that apply*) (n=148)

	Total Responses	Percent
Public preschool	95	64%
Private preschool	45	30%
Childcare (sitter/ nanny, family/ friends, or self)	23	16%

Table 3. Combinations of Pre-K Programs and Childcare Used (n=148)

	Total Responses	Percent
Public preschool only	81	55%
Private preschool only	32	22%
Childcare (sitter/ nanny, family/ friends, or self)	21	14%
Public AND Private	12	8%
Public AND Private AND Childcare	1	1%
Public AND Childcare	1	1%
Private AND Childcare	0	0%

For parents who indicated they had used a preschool program, one survey question asked if the program they had used for their child was full-day, half-day with an extended before or after program (a “wrap-around” program), or half-day without an extended program. Most respondents used either a full-day preschool program (public or private) (43%) or a half-day program without any extended program (52%). Only a small percentage of parents (5%) used a half-day preschool program with an extended before or after program. It is not clear if this was by choice or if this type of wrap-around program is not widely available in the participating schools or across the state generally. More data is needed to answer that question.

Table 4. Pre-K Program Options (n = 129)

	Total Responses	Percent
Full-day	55	43%
Half-day with extended before or after program	7	5%
Half-day without an extended program	67	52%

Note: two respondents selected half day with extended and half day without extended

One survey question asked parents if the public pre-K program they used was part of Head Start. Surprisingly, about a third of the respondents (34%) indicated they did not know if

their program was part of Head Start or not. Forty-three percent of the respondents indicated their program was part of Head Start. Table 5 shows the results for this survey question.

Table 5. Awareness of Head Start Programs (n=91)

	Total Responses	Percent
Yes	39	43%
No, not part of Head Start	21	23%
Don't know	31	34%

Two survey questions asked about whether or not the pre-K program (public or private) provided either transportation for the child or meals. Roughly equal numbers of respondents indicated their preschool program did provide transportation (48%) as indicated their program did not provide transportation (52%). Nearly three quarters (74%) of respondents indicated their preschool program did provide meals while slightly over a quarter of respondents (26%) indicated meals were not provided by the program they used. These results are somewhat different from the findings of the superintendent survey MEPRI conducted last year. In that survey, across the 44 school districts completing the survey, 73% of districts indicated they provided transportation for their pre-K program, and 57% indicated they provided meals (Mason & Porter, 2015). Tables 6 and 7 present results from the recent parent survey.

Table 6. Provision of Transportation for Pre-K Programs (n=127)

	Total Responses	Percent
Yes	61	48%
No	66	52%

Table 7. Provision of Meals for Pre-K Programs (n=127)

	Total Responses	Percent
Yes	94	74%
No	33	26%

Parents' Work Status and Choice of Preschool Program

The preschool experience survey included a question about the responding parent's work status in the year prior to the child's enrollment in kindergarten. We included this item to investigate the relationship between a parent's work status and the type of preschool program they chose. A larger percentage of respondents indicated they worked full time (54%) compared to part time (17%), while 29% indicated they did not work outside of the home in the year prior to the child's enrollment in kindergarten. Table 8 shows the results for this item.

Table 8. Parents' Work Status (n = 147)

	Total Responses	Percent
Yes, work full time	79	54%
Yes, work part time	25	17%
No, did not work outside the home	43	29%

When we looked at the relationship between a parent's work status and the length of program they selected (i.e., full day or half-day), we found that roughly equal numbers of parents who worked full time used either a full day preschool program (public or private) (39 respondents) or a half-day preschool program without an extended program (31 respondents). Parents who worked part time and parents who did not work outside the home also predominantly used a half-day preschool program without an extended program. Some of the parents using a half-day preschool program also used some other form of private childcare for the remaining part of the day or week (see Table 3 above). Table 9 shows the relationship between parents' work status and the length of preschool program (full day or half day) they used.

Table 9. Relationship of Parents’ Work Status and Use of Full or Half Day Programs (n=127)

	Worked full time	Worked part time	Did not work outside of the home	Total Responses
Full day	39	7	9	55
Half day with extended before/ after program	5	1	1	7
Half day without an extended program	31	15	21	67

When we looked at the relationship between parents’ work status and both the length of the preschool program (full or half day) and type of program (public or private), we found that a majority of respondents across all types of work status (full time, part time, no work outside the home) preferred to use the public pre-K program only, as opposed to other options, such as private preschool only or some combination of public and private options. Respondents choosing to use only a public pre-K program included 52% of respondents who worked full time, 64% who worked part time, and 56% who did not work outside the home.

For parents who indicated they worked full time, a majority (52%) used public pre-K only, while 27% used private preschool only. Further, 13% combined public and private preschool programs for their child, and 3% used some other combination of childcare (explain what this means). Table 10 below presents these data.

Table 10. Relationship of Parents’ Work Status and Type , Length of Program Used (n=148)

	Worked full time		Worked part time		Did not work outside of the home	
	Total Responses	Percent	Total Responses	Percent	Total Responses	Percent
Public preschool only	41	51.9%	16	64.0%	24	55.8%
Private preschool only	21	26.6%	5	20.0%	6	14.0%
Childcare only	5	6.3%	3	12.0%	12	27.9%
Public AND Private preschool	10	12.7%	1	4.0%	1	2.3%
Other	2	2.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

“Other” includes public AND private AND childcare (n = 1) and private and childcare (n = 1)

Using a five point scale 1- *Not at all important* to 5- *Very important*, parents were asked about their reasons for not using a preschool program. There was a statistically significant difference between parents who worked full time, those who work part time, and those who did not work outside the home ($F(2,44)=7.852, p=.001$) regarding half day pre-K programs. It was a more important factor or potential barrier for parents who worked full time ($M=3.64, SD=1.44$) that *the pre-K program was only a half day and they needed a full day program* than it was for parents who did not work outside of the home ($M=1.94, SD=1.06$).

A statistically significant difference between these three groups ($F(2,44)=6.748, p=.003$) was also found regarding multiple transitions for the child during the day. It was a more important factor or potential barrier for parents who worked full time ($M=3.68, SD=1.57$) that *the pre-K would have involved a combination of several child care programs* than for parents who did not work outside of the home ($M=2.06, SD=1.18$). There was no statistically significant difference for parents who worked part time.

Factors in Decision to Use Public Pre-K

The survey included tables asking parents to rate how important different factors were in their decision to use either public or private preschool, or the importance of different factors in their decision not to use a public pre-K program. Respondents used a five-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important), with 3 being a neutral response (neither important nor unimportant). The list of response choices included factors that represented:

- **financial incentives** (reducing the cost, transportation provided, meals provided)
- **convenience** (transportation provided, convenient to home, parent had another child in the same school, child could be in one location)
- **alignment with a parent's work schedule** (program offered daily, extended day program available, fit with parent's work schedule)
- **classroom environment or quality** (qualifications or friendliness of the teachers, classroom space was safe and inviting, small preschool class enrollment).

In addition, parents had the option to select “other” and write in a response.

Parents who indicated on the survey that they had used a public pre-K for their child were asked to rate the level of importance of factors in their decision to use the public program in their school district. An overwhelming majority (80% to 98%) of these respondents indicated that factors related to the classroom environment or quality were either somewhat or very important. These factors in descending order of importance included: a safe and inviting classroom space, friendliness of teachers, qualifications of teachers, and a small preschool class enrollment. A somewhat smaller majority of respondents (53% to 84% respondents) indicated that factors related to convenience for the parent were either somewhat or very important. These factors in descending order included: convenience to home, a daily program, ability to have child in one location during the day, and fit with parent’s work schedule. The appeal of a public pre-K program for the potential to reduce a parent’s financial cost of childcare was either somewhat or very important for over half the respondents (53%).

Factors that were rated lower in importance included having transportation or meals provided, having another child in the same school, or having an extended day program. Table 11 presents these data by collapsing the five response categories into three categories for ease of interpretation. A table of results using the full five-point scale and including the mean response values can be found in Appendix B.

Table 11. Importance of Factors in Decision to Use the Public Pre-K Program (n=95)

	Not at all important or slightly important		Neither important nor unimportant		Somewhat or very important	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
The classroom space was safe and inviting.	1	1.1%	1	1.1%	89	98%
Friendliness of the preschool teachers	1	1.1%	2	2.2%	88	97%
Qualifications of the preschool teachers	2	2.2%	4	4.4%	85	93%
The small number of students in class	4	4.4%	14	15.6%	72	80%
The program was in a convenient location to home or work.	11	12.1%	4	4.4%	76	84%
My child could be in one location during the day rather than in many places	12	13.2%	23	25.3%	56	62%
The program was offered daily.	16	17.8%	14	15.6%	60	67%
Reducing the cost of childcare	31	33.3%	13	14.0%	49	53%
The program fit well with my work schedule.	28	30.8%	15	16.5%	48	53%
Transportation was provided for my child.	36	39.1%	17	18.5%	39	42%
Meals were provided for my child.	36	39.6%	18	19.8%	37	41%
I had another child attending the same public school	44	48.4%	13	14.3%	34	37%
There was an extended day program (i.e., before or after-care).	45	50.0%	28	31.1%	17	19%

In addition to the response choices listed in the survey scale, respondents could select “other” and describe a different factor that was important for them, or write a comment. A total of 39 out of 95 parents offered additional comments on why they chose to send their child to public preschool. Several respondents reiterated factors cited in the table above, such as: convenience, teacher qualifications and friendliness, and reduction in cost. Others reported the views that public pre-K was a good transition into kindergarten, offered more structured learning, and provided an opportunity for interaction with children of the same age. One parent mentioned the additional advantage of CDS services such as speech therapy. From the survey, 39% of respondents rated transportation as *not at all* or only *slightly* important in their decision to use public preschool. Yet, one parent reflected, “[It] is difficult to enroll a child with only

partial transportation if both parents work full time. If not for [other childcare that offered transportation] I would not have been able to enroll my child.”

Factors in Decision to Use Private Preschool

Parents who indicated they had used a private preschool (either alone or in combination with public preschool or private childcare), were asked to rate the level of importance of factors in their decision to use a private preschool program. This survey scale included most of the same response choices as the scale used for parents choosing a public pre-K program, but did not include the response choices of: reducing the cost of childcare (since private childcare generally has a tuition cost to parents), having an extended day program, and having another child in the same school.

We found similar results for the parents using private preschool programs as we found for the parents using public programs described above. Among parents who indicated they had used a private program, an overwhelming majority (81% to 98%) indicated that factors related to the classroom environment or quality were either somewhat or very important. These included in decreasing order of importance: qualifications of teachers, friendliness of teachers, safe and inviting classroom space, and small class enrollment. A high majority of parents (62% to 91%) also indicated that factors related to convenience were either somewhat or very important. These included: having a child in one place during the day, convenient location, fit with work schedule, a daily program, and a full-day program. Table 12 presents these data by collapsing the five response categories into three categories for ease of interpretation. A table of results using the full five-point scale and including the mean response values can be found in Appendix B.

Table 12. Importance of Factors in Decision to Use a Private Preschool Program (n=45)

	Not at all important or slightly important		Neither important nor unimportant		Somewhat or very important	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Qualifications of the preschool teachers	0	0.0%	1	2.3%	42	97.7%
Friendliness of the preschool teachers	1	2.3%	1	2.3%	41	95.3%
The classroom space was safe and inviting.	2	4.7%	1	2.3%	40	93.0%
My child could be in one location during the day rather than in many places	3	7.1%	1	2.4%	38	90.5%
The program was in a convenient location to home or work.	5	11.6%	0	0.0%	38	88.4%
The program fit well with my work schedule.	6	14.3%	4	9.5%	32	76.2%
The small number of students in class	1	2.3%	7	16.3%	35	81.4%
The program was offered daily.	7	16.3%	4	9.3%	32	74.4%
It was a full-day program.	10	23.8%	6	14.3%	26	61.9%
Meals were provided for my child.	22	52.4%	5	11.9%	15	35.7%
Transportation was provided for my child.	32	78.0%	6	14.6%	3	7.3%

A total of 22 parents commented on reasons why they decided to enroll their child in a private preschool program. Nine parents (41%) reiterated that their public preschool option was only half-day and they needed a full-day program. The additional costs involved with a preschool without extended care and no transportation was also a consideration. One parent offered, “It would have actually been more costly in the end to send our child to public pre-K. Financially and to maintain daily routine and stability it was a better choice to remain in private pre-K.” Several parents also preferred private preschool because of the one-on-one attention given to their child, some with special needs, and because of the quality and reputation of the private preschool teachers.

Comparison of Public and Private Preschool Choices

Using the two similar attitudinal scales for rating the importance of factors in the decision to either a public preschool or private preschool program, we compared the rating results. We

found that factors related to the preschool classroom environment or quality were rated most high in importance for both parents choosing to use their public preschool program and parents who chose to use a private preschool program. The top three factors for both groups included: a safe and inviting classroom space, friendliness of teachers, and qualifications of teachers. Factors relating to convenience were rated higher in importance by parents who chose to use private preschool programs for some or all of their child’s school day or week. These convenience factors included: having the child in one location during the day, having a preschool program that was offered daily, and having a program that fit well with the parent’s work schedule. Table 13 presents this comparison between the two groups of parents. Recall that 8% of survey respondents who used public pre-K also used a private preschool program for some portion of the day or week.

Table 13. Comparison of Important Factors for Parents Choosing Public or Private Preschool

Question	Reasons for choosing Public preschool			Reasons for choosing Private preschool		
	Mean	n	Rank order	Rank order	Mean	n
The classroom space was safe and inviting.	4.77	91	1	3	4.67	43
Friendliness of the preschool teachers	4.75	91	2	2	4.81	43
Qualifications of the preschool teachers	4.56	91	3	1	4.81	43
The small number of students in class	4.17	90	4	7	4.16	43
The program was in a convenient location to home or work.	4.1	91	5	5	4.4	43
My child could be in one location during the day rather than in many places	3.87	91	6	4	4.43	42
The program was offered daily.	3.82	90	7	8	4.07	43
Reducing the cost of childcare	3.35	93	8			
The program fit well with my work schedule.	3.33	91	9	6	4.19	42
It was a full-day program.				9	3.76	42
Transportation was provided for my child.	3.03	92	10	11	1.61	41
Meals were provided for my child.	2.95	91	11	10	2.64	42
I had another child attending the same public school	2.71	91	12			
There was an extended day program (i.e., before or after-care).	2.41	90	13			

Scale: 1-Not at all important, 2-Slightly important, 3-Neither important nor unimportant, 4-Somewhat important, 5-Very important.

Factors in Decision Not to Use Public Pre-K

Parents who indicated they did not use a public pre-K program (i.e., they indicated they used a private preschool program, or private childcare option, or some combination of these), were asked to rate the level of importance of different factors in their choice. In combination with the other attitudinal scales, this survey question was included to help identify potential barriers to using public pre-K. The response choices included factors such as not having a public pre-K program in the parent's community, lack of available slots in the public pre-K program, not having a full-day option in the public pre-K program, and not having transportation provided, as well as personal preferences such as not wanting a child to ride on the bus, needing to combine several care options during the day, or preferring a private facility.

On this survey question, we found that parents were about equally likely to indicate a factor was not important as they were to indicate it was important. The reason may be that the respondents for this item include both parents who selected private preschool programs as well as parents who used no preschool programming at all. Parents in these two groups may have very different needs or priorities given their different work and home situations. Among the most important reasons for not selecting a public program was personal preference (41%), a desire to avoid multiple transitions for the child during the day (38%), or needing a full-day program when the public program was only half-day (34%). Table 14 presents these data by collapsing the five response categories into three categories for ease of interpretation. A table of results using the full five-point scale and including the mean response values can be found in Appendix B.

Table 14. Importance of Factors in Decision Not to Use the Public Pre-K Program (n=53)

	Not at all important or slightly important		Neither important nor unimportant		Somewhat or very important	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
I preferred to use a private preschool/daycare provider.	14	30.4%	13	28.3%	19	41.3%
Use of a public preschool program would have involved a combination of several child care programs and too many transitions for my child.	16	34.0%	13	27.7%	18	38.3%
The public program was only a half-day and I needed a full day program.	17	36.2%	14	29.8%	16	34.0%
A public preschool program was not available in my community when needed for my child	19	40.4%	17	36.2%	11	23.4%
I was not satisfied with the program structure or curriculum for the public program.	19	41.3%	17	37.0%	10	21.7%
Transportation was not provided by the public program.	23	48.9%	14	29.8%	10	21.3%
There were no available slots left in the public preschool program when needed	21	46.7%	15	33.3%	9	20.0%
I did not want my child to ride on a bus.	27	58.7%	11	23.9%	8	17.4%
The public program was full-day and I preferred a half-day program.	28	60.9%	15	32.6%	3	6.5%

Twenty-nine parents offered additional reasons why they chose *not* to enroll their child in a public pre-K program. Similar to the factors reported above, several parents had children with special needs or they were not satisfied with the public pre-K or teachers. Several parents reported there were no slots available, and as one parent commented, “Sadly this impacted my child’s ability to transition to kindergarten. . . . She was nervous for many weeks and emotionally not eased into all-day kindergarten.” A few parents expressed that preschool was “too regimented” and staying at home allowed their child to “be a kid” a bit longer, and some parents simply preferred to home school.

Factors in Decision Not to Use Any Type of Preschool Program

For the small number of parents (23 out of 148 respondents total) who indicated they did not use any type of preschool program, but had their child at home or in some other type of private childcare arrangement, we asked about the reasons for not enrolling in any type of preschool program. The response items included factors related to personal preference and the view that a child had special needs that could not be met in the preschool setting.

On this question, 21 of the 23 parents not using any preschool program responded, and there is no strong indication that any of the listed reasons were either somewhat or very important. Almost half of the respondents indicated that a preference for keeping the child at home was either not important or only slightly important (47%), or that the parent felt the child was not ready to be away from home (47%). A preference for using other childcare options was either not important or slightly important for 69% of respondents. A view that the child had special needs or dietary restrictions was either not important or slightly important for 56% and 69% respectively. The data from this survey question are simply not very revealing. In the written comments, the cost of preschool and a preference for home care were the primary reasons given by four parents for why they did not enroll their child in either public or private preschool programs.

Table 15. Reasons Parent Did Not Enroll Child in Any Type of Preschool Program (n=21)

	Not at all important or slightly important		Neither important nor unimportant		Somewhat or very important	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
I preferred to keep my child at home.	7	46.7%	4	26.7%	4	26.7%
I didn't feel my child was ready to be away from home.	8	47.1%	6	35.3%	3	17.6%
My child has a disability or special needs.	9	56.3%	5	31.3%	2	12.5%
I wanted more flexibility in the child's schedule.	9	56.3%	5	31.3%	2	12.5%
My child has special dietary needs or restrictions.	11	68.8%	4	25.0%	1	6.3%
I had already planned to home school my child during the elementary grade years.	10	62.5%	6	37.5%	0	0.0%
I preferred to use other childcare providers	11	68.8%	4	25.0%	1	6.3%

Views about Preschool Programs

All survey respondents were asked about their general views of preschool programs and the potential benefits of such programs (public or private) for children. The survey question asked respondents to rate their level of agreement using a five-point scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with a neutral response of 3 (neither agree nor disagree). On this question, the vast majority of all respondents indicated positive views and expectations about the potential benefits of preschool programs. Ninety-seven percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that preschool programs help to foster social skills, 97% agreed/ strongly agreed that children gain exposure to classroom and school routines in preschool, 95% agreed/ strongly agreed that preschool programs increase a child's readiness for kindergarten, 94% agreed/ strongly agreed that preschool programs help to build academic skills, and 87% agreed/ strongly agreed that children benefit more if they attend preschool on a daily basis. Further, 80% of respondents indicated they agreed/ strongly agreed that schools should provide enough preschool

program openings for any family who wants to send their child. These results are presented in table 16 below.

Table 16. Parents' General Views about Preschool Programs (n=140)

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Mean	Total Responses
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Preschool programs help to foster social skills.	2	1.4%	1	.7%	2	1.4%	26	18.6%	109	77.9%	4.71	140
Preschool programs help to build academic skills.	2	1.4%	1	.7%	6	4.3%	37	26.6%	93	66.9%	4.57	139
Children gain exposure to classroom and school routines in preschool.	2	1.4%	0	0.0%	2	1.4%	24	17.1%	112	80.0%	4.74	140
Children benefit more if they attend preschool on a daily basis.	3	2.2%	2	1.4%	14	10.1%	30	21.6%	90	64.7%	4.45	139
Preschool programs increase a child's readiness for Kindergarten.	2	1.4%	1	.7%	4	2.9%	23	16.4%	110	78.6%	4.70	140
Schools should provide enough openings for any family who wants to send their child (i.e., not close a program when it's full).	3	2.1%	10	7.1%	15	10.7%	26	18.6%	86	61.4%	4.30	140

We explored whether there were significant differences in parents' general views of preschool depending on whether they used public preschool only, private preschool only, or no preschool program. There was a statistically significant difference between parents who sent their children to public pre-K those who sent children to private preschool, and those who did not use preschool ($F(2,122)=4.795, p=.009$) regarding perception of potential benefits of preschool attendance. Not surprisingly, parents who sent their children to public pre-K reported greater agreement that *children benefit more if they attend preschool on a daily basis* ($M=4.62, SD=0.852$) than parents who did not send their child to any preschool ($M=3.94, SD=1.289$).

There were no statistically significant differences in responses for parents who sent their children to private preschool. On this item, the percentages of parents who agreed/ strongly agreed that *children benefit more if they attend preschool on a daily basis* were 91% for parents choosing public preschool only and 87% for parents choosing private preschool only, compared with 63% for parents choosing no preschool program of any type. Tables 17 below presents the disaggregated results for this survey scale by program type used.

Table 17. Parents’ General Views about Preschool Programs by Program Type Used

Public pre-K (n = 81)	Strongly disagree/ Disagree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Strongly agree/ Agree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Preschool programs help to foster social skills.	2	2.5%	0	0.0%	77	97.5%
Preschool programs help to build academic skills.	2	2.5%	3	3.8%	74	93.7%
Children gain exposure to classroom and school routines in preschool.	2	2.5%	1	1.3%	76	96.2%
Children benefit more if they attend preschool on a daily basis.	3	3.8%	4	5.1%	72	91.1%
Schools should provide enough openings for any family who wants to send their child (i.e., not close a program when it's full).	9	11.4%	5	6.3%	65	82.3%
Preschool programs increase a child's readiness for Kindergarten.	2	2.5%	1	1.3%	76	96.2%

Private preschool (<i>n</i> = 32)	Strongly disagree/ Disagree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Strongly agree/ agree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Preschool programs help to foster social skills.	1	3.3%	0	0.0%	29	96.7%
Preschool programs help to build academic skills.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	30	100.0%
Children gain exposure to classroom and school routines in preschool.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	30	100.0%
Children benefit more if they attend preschool on a daily basis.	0	0.0%	4	13.3%	26	86.7%
Schools should provide enough openings for any family who wants to send their child (i.e., not close a program when it's full).	3	10.0%	5	16.7%	22	73.3%
Preschool programs increase a child's readiness for Kindergarten.	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	30	100.0%

No preschool (<i>n</i> = 21)	Strongly disagree/ Disagree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Strongly agree/ Agree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Preschool programs help to foster social skills.	0	0.0%	2	11.8%	15	88%
Preschool programs help to build academic skills.	0	0.0%	3	18.8%	13	81%
Children gain exposure to classroom and school routines in preschool.	0	0.0%	1	5.9%	16	94%
Children benefit more if they attend preschool on a daily basis.	2	12.5%	4	25.0%	10	63%
Schools should provide enough openings for any family who wants to send their child (i.e., not close a program when it's full).	0	0.0%	2	11.8%	15	88%
Preschool programs increase a child's readiness for Kindergarten.	1	5.9%	2	11.8%	14	82%

Discussion

Researchers from the National Institute for Early Educational Research (NIEER) suggest that “Preschool education is increasingly seen as a middle income essential”. Parents’ growing recognition of the importance of early education is reflected in the choices they made in this study to enroll their children even when it involved making arrangements for employment or for other childcare arrangements. Childcare arrangements, of which public preschool remains a part, is a complex tapestry of evolving many options.

Taken as a whole, findings from the parent survey described in this report support evidence from the 2015 case study site visits to four Maine schools, as well as trends in the national landscape of research and policy on public pre-K. We can learn something about the evolution of public pre-K in Maine schools from the case studies. Each of the sites visited have supported preschool programs for over ten years and through this time, parents' beliefs about school and schooling have changed. One principal in a community where almost every eligible four year old attends pre-K suggested that the public sees school as beginning at age four in his community. Public pre-K, in these communities, is not seen as a form of childcare but rather, part of schooling. The school with the highest mobility was also the school with the highest immigrant population. We may need to learn more about family and community involvement among immigrant populations and in the highest poverty areas.

Another concern raised by principals and teachers in the site visits was how the enrollment caps specified in Chapter 124 might affect community belief that "school begins at age four". In each of the schools visited, all eligible children were served---if not in their neighborhood school, in a district program. When lotteries or first-come, first-serve procedures are put in place, will we be creating barriers for the children we most want to serve? If 80% of the parents whose children participate nationally in public pre-K have bachelor's degrees or higher, will there be room for children from lower-income families without carefully planning?

The results of the parent survey indicate that among parents who did not use the public pre-K program, 20% said that the lack of available slots in the program was either a somewhat or very important reason. A passionate comment added by a parent suggests that the lack of slots affected his/her child's adjustment to kindergarten. Such a comment might further suggest the public's belief in the importance of pre-K for kindergarten success. Further, the survey and case studies revealed that parents often prefer private preschool programs that are more conveniently

located near their workplace, and that parents who work full-time prefer full-day programs that would minimize the number of transitions during the day for their child. Interviews with principals and teachers in the case studies also revealed a persistent concern about delays in referrals for screening and delivery of special education services to children from CDS. Despite the availability of staffing and available time in the schedule within the public school to provide these services, preschool children (four year olds) could only be served by CDS. Once children advance to kindergarten, they are eligible to be served by the public school special education services. Delays in providing services to preschool children, for example speech therapy, result in lost opportunities to meet children's individual needs at a critical developmental time. The parent survey did not ask parents about their level of satisfaction with special education services or the degree of coordination in services, but some parents did comment on this. One parent noted in a comment that being able to obtain speech therapy from CDS during preschool was an advantage for the child. Others noted they chose to use a private program instead of the public preschool program due to concerns about meeting the special needs of their children. While all public pre-K programs and Head Start programs promote inclusion, parents of children with disabilities may not be convinced their children's needs will be adequately met in such settings. We need to better understand this population.

Conclusion

This report presented results of a survey of parents about their choices to use or not use public or private preschool programs. Twelve elementary schools that operate preschool programs participated in the online survey with an average response rate of 16% and a total of 148 completed surveys. While the reader is cautioned that we cannot generalize the findings from this survey to the entire state, the results do show important trends that can inform

decisions about increasing participation in preschool programs. Major findings of the survey include the following:

- Parents chose public pre-K programs over private programs more than twice as often. Slightly more than half the respondents (55%) used only public pre-K, while about one fifth (22%) used private preschool only, and 14% used private childcare only.
- 10% of respondents used combinations of public, private, and/ or private childcare.
- Slightly more parents used a half-day program with no extension (52%) than used a full-day program (43%).
 - (Note that across Maine, the majority of public pre-K students attend half-day programs. The sample of 12 schools returning parent surveys over-represents full-day programs as the sample included nine schools that are in the MDOE's Preschool Expansion Grant Program and have full-day programs.)
- Only 5% of respondents used a half-day program with an extended before or after (wrap around) program.
- Over a third of respondents (34%) did not know if their child's preschool program was part of the Head Start program or not, while 43% indicated their program was part of Head Start.
- Roughly equal numbers of respondents indicated their child's preschool program provided transportation (48% yes, 52% no).
- Almost three quarters of respondents (74%) indicated the preschool program provided meals.
- Over half of the respondents (54%) indicated they worked full time during the year before their child entered kindergarten. Roughly equal numbers of parents who worked full time used either full-day preschool programs or half-day programs. Overall, parents used public pre-K programs most often no matter their working status. Half-day programs and the challenge of multiple transitions during the child's day were more significant factors for parents who indicated they worked full time.
- Factors related to the classroom environment and teacher quality, along with convenience of program hours and location, were the most important considerations for parents choosing either public or private preschool programs. A reduction in cost was important for 53% of parents choosing public programs. Factors related to transportation and meals were of lower importance.
- Respondents varied widely in the reasons they did not use public pre-K. Some factors that were important for less than half the respondents included: personal preference (41%), desire to avoid multiple transitions during the child's day (38%), and needing a full-day program (34%).
- A high majority of parents indicated positive views about preschool education and the potential benefits for children attending preschool, in terms of fostering social skills (97% agreed), exposing children to classroom routines (97%), increasing a child's readiness for

kindergarten (95%), and helping to build academic skills (94%). Eighty-seven percent of respondents agreed that children benefit more from daily preschool attendance. And, 80% of respondents agreed that schools should provide enough pre-K slots for families who want to send their children.

Implications for Research and Policy

Broadly, the research on parents' preschool preferences, attitudes, and experiences is very limited. What we know from the literature and the parent survey described in this report is that parents tend to patch together a combination of educational and childcare arrangements for their children during the preschool years. The growth in full-time working mothers and dual career parents in recent decades has increased the demand for preschool and childcare for four year olds. While full-day public pre-K may still not be widely available in Maine, working parents select to augment public pre-K with private preschool programs or private childcare to achieve the full-day coverage they need. But the literature also points to the problem of lower preschool participation rates among lower income families or families where parents have lower levels of educational attainment. More research is needed to better understand specific populations of families. We did not collect demographic information from parents to ascertain if language status or income affected beliefs and attitudes toward schooling. The literature is clear that children from low-income families show the greatest benefits from public pre-K programs and we know (as confirmed by our survey) that there is a changing perception about the importance of early schooling for kindergarten success, but we do not know how the beliefs and practices of parents differ by income group or home language/culture.

The research conducted by MEPRI in 2015 (through surveys of superintendents and preschool teachers, and case study interviews with principals and teachers in four school sites), and in 2016 (through a parent survey described in this report), along with relevant research

literature on preschool attendance, provide data and guidance to inform policies both at the state and local levels related to funding and implementing preschool programs and expanding programs to better meet the needs of four year olds and their working parents in Maine. This work indicates a shifting attitude toward preschool education where parents increasingly see preschool as the beginning of their child's formal education rather than simply a convenient childcare alternative. Concern about availability of slots in preschool programs given the perpetual budget cuts that school districts experience and the changes in Chapter 124 that may limit public pre-K class size were apparent in the data MEPRI collected. Where slots are not available and public sentiment is that "school begins at four" or that "pre-K is necessary for kindergarten success", some families, perhaps those in greatest need, may be disadvantaged. Chapter 124 caps group size and ratio for programs and encourages full-day over half-day programs.

The implications of these changes may have unintended consequences for some children and families. Regardless of changes to public Pre-k, some parents need longer hours of care than even a full-day provides or may opt for more expensive private preschool programs or no preschool. The MEPRI research also revealed concerns about the coordination and delivery of services for students with special needs between the preschool and kindergarten years. The desire to improve students' school readiness and long-term educational outcomes argues for policies and programs that encourage higher participation in public preschool and a better coordination of special services.

Bibliography

- Barnett, W. S., & Yarosz, D. J. (2007). Who goes to preschool and why does it matter? *Preschool Policy Matters*, 7, pp.1-4.
- Logue, M.E., Tu, S., Fisher, S., Mason, C.A. (June 2015). Public preschool programs in Maine: Four case studies of quality programs. A report of the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI). Orono, ME: University of Maine.
- Maine State Legislature. (2015). Proposed bill, LD 1394 *An act to implement the recommendations of the commission to strengthen the adequacy and equity of certain cost components of the school funding formula*. Augusta, ME.
- Mason, C. A., and Porter, M. (March 2015). *Public preschools in Maine: Current status and characteristics*. A report of the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI). Orono, ME: University of Maine.
- Miller, P., Votruba-Drzal, E., Coley, R. L., & Koury, A. S. (2014). Immigrant families' use of early childcare: Predictors of care type. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 29(4), 484-498.
- Sall, S. P. (2014). Maternal labor supply and the availability of public Pre-K: Evidence from the introduction of pre-kindergarten into American public schools. *Economic Inquiry*, 52(1), 17-34.

Author Information

Janet C. Fairman is Associate Research Professor in the College of Education and Human Development, University of Maine, and co-Director of MEPRI. Dr. Fairman holds a doctorate degree in education policy and has expertise in the areas of education policy analysis, program evaluation, and qualitative research methodology. Her research includes a focus on STEM education, innovative and reform practices in education, and teacher leadership.

Mary Ellin Logue is Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education and Chair, Department of Teacher and Counselor Education, in the College of Education and Human Development, University of Maine. Dr. Logue holds a doctorate in Early Childhood Education and a master's degree in Counseling and Special Education. Her research involves exploring ecological factors affecting children's learning and early education, including play, receptive language and the roles of adults in promoting learning. She has extensive experience working with federal programs serving children in high-poverty programs. She is a member of the Maine Early Childhood Learning Standards committee.

Sharon LaBrie is a Research Associate in the College of Education and Human Development, University of Maine. Ms. LaBrie has a master's degree in human development and has expertise in project management, program evaluation, survey administration, and data management and analysis.

Appendix A

Preschool Experience Parent Survey

Welcome

Faculty from the University of Maine are conducting this survey on behalf of the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) and the state legislature to learn more about the factors that influence parents' decisions to enroll or not enroll their children in public preschool programs. The information will help state policymakers improve access to quality preschool programs in Maine.

The survey is voluntary and anonymous and takes approximately 10 minutes or less to complete.

Please indicate that you have read the "Informed Consent Information" that was emailed to you and whether you agree to participate in this survey.

- I agree
- I do not agree

If "I do not agree" is selected, Respondent skips to end of survey.

Section 1 General Information

1. What is your child's grade this year?

- Kindergarten
- First Grade

Q2. What school does your child currently attend?

- Agnes Gray School
- Chelsea Elementary School
- Downeast School
- Garret Schenck Elementary School
- Governor James B. Longley Elementary
- Guy E. Rowe Elementary School
- Madawaska Elementary School
- Newport Elementary School
- Oxford Elementary School
- Paris Elementary School
- Park Avenue Elementary
- Readfield Elementary School
- Rose M Gaffney School
- Solon Elementary School
- Waterford Community School

Q3. What is your relationship to your child?

- Mother
- Father
- Grandparent
- Aunt or Uncle
- Guardian
- Other

Q4. Thinking back to the year before your child started kindergarten, did you work outside the home?

- Yes, full time
- Yes, part time
- No

Section 2 Use of Preschool Programs

Q5. What preschool program or child care did you use on a regular, ongoing basis (i.e., for more than a couple of hours per week)? (Choose all that apply)

- Public preschool (free, offered by our school district)
- Private preschool
- No preschool program used -- sitter/ nanny provided child care
- No preschool program used -- family/ friends provided child care
- No preschool program used -- I provided care to my child

Q6. Name of the most recent preschool program used:

Respondents who chose Public or Private preschool in Q5 answer Q7 – Q10

Q7. Type of the most recent preschool program used

- Full-day
- Half-day with extended before or after program
- Half-day without an extended program

Q8. Was transportation provided by the preschool program?

- Yes
- No

Q9. Were meals provided in the preschool program?

- Yes
- No

Q10. Was the public preschool program part of Head Start?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Respondents who chose Public preschool in Q5 answer Q11-Q12.

Q11. Please rate how important each of the following factors were in your decision to use the PUBLIC preschool program in your school district.

	Not at all Important	Slightly important	Neither Important nor Unimportant	Somewhat important	Very important
Reducing the cost of childcare	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transportation was provided for my child.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Meals were provided for my child.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The program was offered daily.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There was an extended day program (i.e., before or after-care).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The program fit well with my work schedule.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The program was in a convenient location to home or work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Qualifications of the preschool teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friendliness of the preschool teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The classroom space was safe and inviting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The small number of students in class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I had another child attending the same public school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child could be in one location during the day rather than in many places.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q12. Please list any other reasons for your decision to use the PUBLIC preschool program in your school district:

Respondents who chose Public preschool in Q5 answer Q13-Q14.

Q13. Please rate how important each of the following factors were in your decision to use the PRIVATE preschool program in your school district.

	Not at all Important	Slightly important	Neither Important nor Unimportant	Somewhat important	Very important
Transportation was provided for my child.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Meals were provided for my child.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The program was offered daily.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It was a full-day program.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The program fit well with my work schedule.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The program was in a convenient location to home or work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Qualifications of the preschool teachers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friendliness of the preschool teachers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The classroom space was safe and inviting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The small number of students in class	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child could be in one location during the day rather than in many places.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q14. Please list any other reasons for your decision to use the PRIVATE preschool program in your school district:

Respondents who did not choose Public preschool in Q5 answer Q15-Q16.

Q15. Please rate how important each of the following were in your decision to NOT use the public preschool program in your school district

	Not at all important	Slightly Important	Neither Important Nor Unimportant	Somewhat Important	Very Important
A public preschool program was not available in my community when needed for my child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There were no available slots left in the public preschool program when needed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The public program was only a half-day and I needed a full day program.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The public program was full-day and I preferred a half-day program.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transportation was not provided by the public program.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I did not want my child to ride on a bus.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Use of a public preschool program would have involved a combination of several child care programs and too many transitions for my child.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was not satisfied with the program structure or curriculum for the public program.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I preferred to use a private preschool/ daycare provider.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q16. Please list any other reasons for your decision NOT to enroll your child in a PUBLIC preschool program in your school district.

All Respondents answer Q17.

Q17. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following views about preschool programs in general:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Preschool programs help to foster social skills.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preschool programs help to build academic skills.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preschool programs increase a child's readiness for Kindergarten.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children gain exposure to classroom and school routines in preschool.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children benefit more if they attend preschool on a daily basis.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Schools should provide enough openings for any family who wants to send their child (i.e., not close a program when it's full).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Respondents who did not choose Public or Private preschool in Q5 answer Q18-Q19.

Q18. Please rate how important the following factors were in your decision NOT to enroll your child in any type of preschool program (public or private):

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Neither Important nor Unimportant	Somewhat Important	Very Important
I didn't feel my child was ready to be away from home.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I preferred to keep my child at home.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child has special dietary needs or restrictions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I had already planned to home school my child during the elementary grade years.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child has a disability or special needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I preferred to use other childcare providers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wanted more flexibility in the child's schedule.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q19. Please list any other reasons for your decision NOT to enroll your child in any type of preschool program (public or private):

Appendix B

Table B1. Importance of Factors in Decision to Use the Public Preschool Program (n=95)

	Not at all important		Slightly important		Neither important nor unimportant		Somewhat important		Very important		Mean	Total Responses
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
The classroom space was safe and inviting.	1	1.1%	0	0.0%	1	1.1%	15	16.5%	74	81.3%	4.77	91
Friendliness of the preschool teachers	1	1.1%	0	0.0%	2	2.2%	15	16.5%	73	80.2%	4.75	91
Qualifications of the preschool teachers	1	1.1%	1	1.1%	4	4.4%	25	27.5%	60	65.9%	4.56	91
The small number of students in class	2	2.2%	2	2.2%	14	15.6%	33	36.7%	39	43.3%	4.17	90
The program was in a convenient location to home or work.	6	6.6%	5	5.5%	4	4.4%	35	38.5%	41	45.1%	4.10	91
My child could be in one location during the day rather than in many places	8	8.8%	4	4.4%	23	25.3%	13	14.3%	43	47.3%	3.87	91
The program was offered daily.	10	11.1%	6	6.7%	14	15.6%	20	22.2%	40	44.4%	3.82	90
Reducing the cost of childcare	23	24.7%	8	8.6%	13	14.0%	11	11.8%	38	40.9%	3.35	93
The program fit well with my work schedule.	20	22.0%	8	8.8%	15	16.5%	18	19.8%	30	33.0%	3.33	91
Transportation was provided for my child.	28	30.4%	8	8.7%	17	18.5%	11	12.0%	28	30.4%	3.03	92
Meals were provided for my child.	29	31.9%	7	7.7%	18	19.8%	14	15.4%	23	25.3%	2.95	91
I had another child attending the same public school	40	44.0%	4	4.4%	13	14.3%	10	11.0%	24	26.4%	2.71	91
There was an extended day program (i.e., before or after-care).	35	38.9%	10	11.1%	28	31.1%	7	7.8%	10	11.1%	2.41	90

Table B2. Importance of Factors in Decision to Use a Private Preschool Program (n=45)

	Not at all important		Slightly important		Neither important nor unimportant		Somewhat important		Very important		Mean	Total Responses
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Qualifications of the preschool teachers	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	2.3%	6	14.0%	36	83.7%	4.81	43
Friendliness of the preschool teachers	0	0.0%	1	2.3%	1	2.3%	3	7.0%	38	88.4%	4.81	43
The classroom space was safe and inviting.	0	0.0%	2	4.7%	1	2.3%	6	14.0%	34	79.1%	4.67	43
My child could be in one location during the day rather than in many places	3	7.1%	0	0.0%	1	2.4%	10	23.8%	28	66.7%	4.43	42
The program was in a convenient location to home or work.	2	4.7%	3	7.0%	0	0.0%	9	20.9%	29	67.4%	4.40	43
Private Please rate how important .-The program fit well with my work schedule.	5	11.9%	1	2.4%	4	9.5%	3	7.1%	29	69.0%	4.19	42
The small number of students in class	1	2.3%	0	0.0%	7	16.3%	18	41.9%	17	39.5%	4.16	43
The program was offered daily.	2	4.7%	5	11.6%	4	9.3%	9	20.9%	23	53.5%	4.07	43
It was a full-day program.	10	23.8%	0	0.0%	6	14.3%	0	0.0%	26	61.9%	3.76	42
Meals were provided for my child.	16	38.1%	6	14.3%	5	11.9%	7	16.7%	8	19.0%	2.64	42
Transportation was provided for my child.	31	75.6%	1	2.4%	6	14.6%	0	0.0%	3	7.3%	1.61	41

Table B3. Importance of Factors in Decision Not to Use the Public Preschool Program (n=53)

	Not at all important		Slightly important		Neither important nor unimportant		Somewhat important		Very important		Mean	Total Responses
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
I preferred to use a private preschool/daycare provider.	14	30.4%	0	0.0%	13	28.3%	7	15.2%	12	26.1%	3.07	46
Use of a public preschool program would have involved a combination of several child care programs and too many transitions for my child.	14	29.8%	2	4.3%	13	27.7%	6	12.8%	12	25.5%	3.00	47
The public program was only a half-day and I needed a full day program.	13	27.7%	4	8.5%	14	29.8%	4	8.5%	12	25.5%	2.96	47
A public preschool program was not available in my community when needed for my child	17	36.2%	2	4.3%	17	36.2%	2	4.3%	9	19.1%	2.66	47
I was not satisfied with the program structure or curriculum for the public program.	16	34.8%	3	6.5%	17	37.0%	7	15.2%	3	6.5%	2.52	46
Transportation was not provided by the public program.	21	44.7%	2	4.3%	14	29.8%	0	0.0%	10	21.3%	2.49	47
There were no available slots left in the public preschool program when needed	21	46.7%	0	0.0%	15	33.3%	3	6.7%	6	13.3%	2.40	45
I did not want my child to ride on a bus.	25	54.3%	2	4.3%	11	23.9%	2	4.3%	6	13.0%	2.17	46
The public program was full-day and I preferred a half-day program.	27	58.7%	1	2.2%	15	32.6%	0	0.0%	3	6.5%	1.93	46

Table B4. Reasons Parent Did Not Enroll Child in Any Type of Preschool Program (n=21)

	Not at all important		Slightly important		Neither important nor unimportant		Somewhat important		Very important		Mean	Total Responses
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
I preferred to keep my child at home.	6	40.0%	1	6.7%	4	26.7%	1	6.7%	3	20.0%	2.60	15
I didn't feel my child was ready to be away from home.	6	35.3%	2	11.8%	6	35.3%	0	0.0%	3	17.6%	2.53	17
My child has a disability or special needs.	8	50.0%	1	6.3%	5	31.3%	1	6.3%	1	6.3%	2.13	16
I wanted more flexibility in the child's schedule.	9	56.3%	0	0.0%	5	31.3%	2	12.5%	0	0.0%	2.00	16
My child has special dietary needs or restrictions.	9	56.3%	2	12.5%	4	25.0%	0	0.0%	1	6.3%	1.88	16
I had already planned to home school my child during the elementary grade years.	9	56.3%	1	6.3%	6	37.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1.81	16
I preferred to use other childcare providers	10	62.5%	1	6.3%	4	25.0%	1	6.3%	0	0.0%	1.75	16