



# University of Delaware Education Research & Development Center

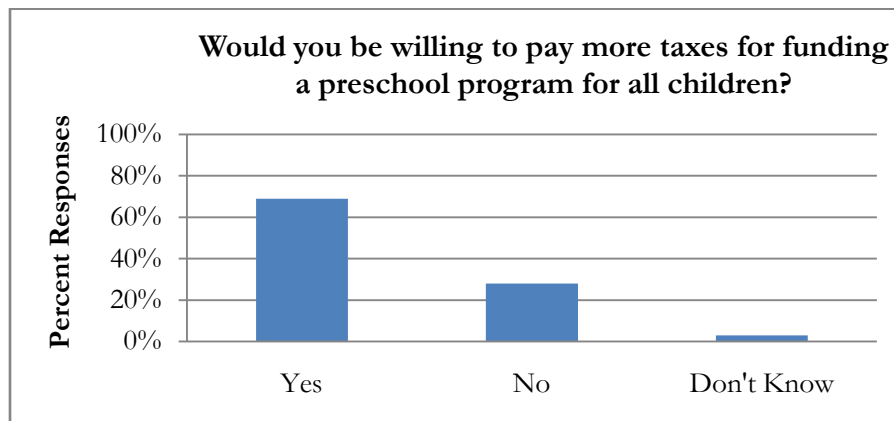


## PUBLIC OPINION OF EDUCATION: EARLY CARE & EDUCATION AND HOME LITERACY & INCLUSION

### Highlights of the 2007 Statewide Public Poll on the Condition of Education in Delaware

January 2008

This poll brief provides highlights of Delaware's annual public poll on the condition of education in the state. As shown in the following figure, most (69%) Delawareans appear willing to pay additional taxes to fund preschool programs for all children. In addition, 62% of Delaware residents would be willing to pay more taxes to fund preschool programs for low-income and poverty-level households. These opinions are consistent with national opinion where 66% of respondents said they would be willing to pay more taxes for funding preschool programs for children from low-income and poverty-level households.<sup>1</sup> In addition to addressing early care and education issues, this poll brief also covers home literacy and inclusion.



For more information or questions regarding the Public Poll, contact:

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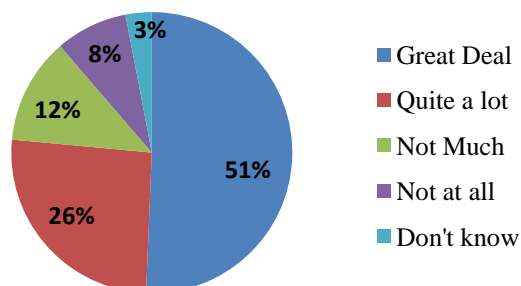
For more information on the 2007 Public Poll, please contact the staff of the R&D Center by email at [rdc@udel.edu](mailto:rdc@udel.edu) or by phone at (302) 831-4433. Additional briefs and the full report will be available as they are produced at <http://www.rdc.udel.edu>

## BENEFITS OF PRESCHOOL

### Poll Results

This year, Delawareans were asked several questions about preschool in Delaware; one question asked about their perceptions of the benefits of programming for specific groups. Seventy-seven percent of respondents believe that preschool programs for children from low-income and poverty-level households would help them perform better in school in their teenage years. These findings are consistent with those from the national Gallup Poll where a majority of respondents (74% in 1992 and 81% in 2006) believe that preschool programs for low-income and poverty-level households would help children perform better in school.<sup>2</sup>

**Do you think preschool programs for children from low-income and poverty-level households would help them perform better in school in their teenage years?**



### Putting it in Context

There are many reasons why quality early childhood development and preschool are important to the well being of a child. A 2005 study by the RAND Corporation examines the U.S. Department of Education's Early Childhood Longitudinal Study of the Kindergarten cohort (ECLS-K). Results indicate that children with more disadvantaged backgrounds enter school with lower levels of knowledge and social competencies important for subsequent school success than their non-disadvantaged peers. Not only do these readiness measures indicate children from more enriched environments enter school better prepared, longitudinal data demonstrate these early gaps persist and even widen as children progress through school.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, poor children who receive high quality early care have increased academic performance, a decrease in criminal conduct and an increase in adult earnings as compared to their peers who do not receive high quality early care.<sup>4</sup>

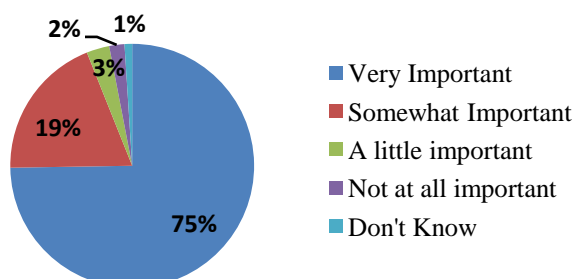
In addition to the developmental benefits children receive, there is also a high rate of return from the funding of these programs: there is a \$3 return for every \$1 invested in high quality early childhood development programs for all children.<sup>5</sup> Despite this projected rate of return, state funding for these programs has been declining since 2002.<sup>6</sup> Although initially universal quality care for low income children would cost billions of dollars, over time there are overall projected savings.<sup>7</sup>

## HIGH QUALITY STANDARDS

### Poll Results

Delaware residents were asked how important is it to hold all childcare and pre-school programs in Delaware to a set of high quality standards. The majority of respondents (94%) believe it is somewhat or very important to hold programs to high quality standards.

**How important is it that all childcare and preschool educational programs in Delaware be held to a set of high quality standards?**



### Putting it in Context

There are many facets to quality preschool and childcare. One definition that seems to capture the different dimensions of “quality” comes from ChildCareAware.\* They define quality childcare as “programs or providers [who] offer engaging, appropriate activities in settings that facilitate healthy growth and development, and prepare children for or promote their success in school.”<sup>8</sup>

What is happening in Delaware to distinguish quality early childhood education programs? First, according to the *Quality Counts 2007* report, Delaware is one of 42 states that have early-learning standards aligned with their K-12 standards.<sup>9</sup> Delaware has developed the *Delaware Infant and Toddler Early Learning Foundations: A Curriculum Framework*; this document contains broadly stated outcomes that can be used as a curricular guide for infants and toddler teachers.<sup>10</sup> Further, Delaware Stars for Early Success, is being piloted in 15 centers to help identify quality programs in Delaware. The Stars program, based on models from 16 states, is comprised of 5 different ratings. To determine what rating a center receives, the following criteria are examined: staff, director and curriculum coordinator qualifications; staff compensation; curriculum; family and community partnerships; business practices; and evaluation.<sup>11</sup> Another option for preschools in Delaware is to apply for National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Early Childhood Accreditation; their goal is to raise the quality of programs in early childhood education. As of July 2007, there are 24 NAEYC accredited programs in Delaware.<sup>12</sup> In addition to these programs, House Bill 126, codified the “Early Childhood Council” to ensure further work in this area.<sup>13</sup>

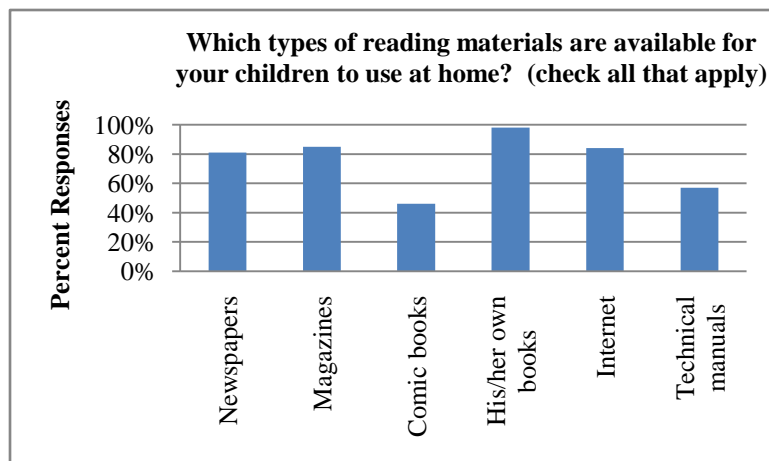
## HOME LITERACY

Research indicates that parental literacy actions and beliefs play a significant role in children’s motivation to engage in literacy activities and literacy development.<sup>14 15 16</sup>

### Poll Results

Parents of Delaware children were asked several questions concerning their opinions of their child’s literacy. For example, they were asked which types of reading materials are available for their children to use at home; 98% of Delaware parents polled said their child had his or her own books. In addition, 84% of parents indicated that their child had access to reading materials at home via the internet.

When asked who they believe is responsible for teaching children how to become better readers, 41% of Delaware parents agree or strongly agree that schools, not parents, bear that responsibility, while 57% disagree or strongly disagree. Parents were also asked how often they encourage their children to read for pleasure: 58% of respondents said always, 30% said often, 8% responded sometimes, and only 3% replied seldom or never.



### Putting it in Context

Information on home literacy trends at a national level is available from a National Household Education Survey.<sup>17</sup> These national trends on internet access appear analogous to those observed in Delaware. For instance, although a National Household Education Survey did not inquire specifically about children’s use

\* A program of the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies.

of the internet at home, 76% of respondents reported children have internet access at home. Further, 83% of the respondents indicated they have a computer their child uses at home.<sup>18</sup>

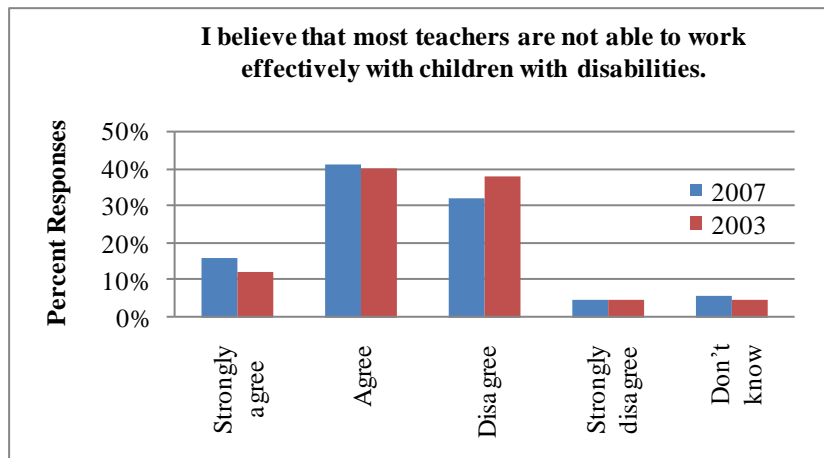
In addition, according to results from the ECLS-K, more than 99% of parents of 5<sup>th</sup> grade students surveyed said they read to their child.<sup>19</sup> Delaware is following a similar trend of high levels of at home reading with 36% of the Delaware parents reported reading to their child 3 to 6 times a week and 45% of the Delaware parents reported reading to their child everyday.

## INCLUSION

Including students with disabilities in general education classrooms, in addition to offering supplementary aids and services when needed, is one of the most effective ways to ensure their access to curriculum.<sup>20 21</sup>

### Poll Results

Similar to the 2003 Delaware public poll results, in 2007, the majority (88%) of Delawareans agree or strongly agree that the public school curriculum should be flexible enough to meet the needs of nearly all students. Delaware residents were also asked how much they agree that most teachers are not able to work effectively with children with disabilities: 16% of the Delaware parents polled responded that they strongly agree, 41% agree, and 6% don't know.



### Putting it in Context

According to Leyser and Kirk, inclusion in education is a world wide movement.<sup>22</sup> In the United States, amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act give rights to parents in the referral, testing, program planning, placement, and evaluation of their special needs child.<sup>23</sup> However, research shows parents' opinions may differ towards inclusion based on the type and severity of the child's disability, age, and current placement of the child. Leyser and Kirk's research found that parents whose child has mild disabilities held more positive attitudes about the benefits of inclusion and general education teachers' ability to teach children with special needs than parents with a child with a moderate to severe disability.<sup>24</sup> In addition, parents whose child's current placement is not inclusive/mainstream showed more confidence in general education teachers' ability to accommodate children with disabilities in regular education classrooms.

## Design, Data Collection, and Sampling Error

From February 2 to April 14, 2006, telephone interviews were conducted with 910 citizens throughout the state comprised of 309 parents of school-age children and 601 non-parents. The data collection procedure for the polls was scientifically developed and random digit dialing was employed to obtain a random sample of citizens. All analyses conducted by the R&D Center for the Public Poll involved weighting the data to reflect the statewide population more accurately.

All surveys using a sample are subject to sampling error; that is, the extent to which the results may differ from what would be obtained if the entire population of Delaware citizens had been surveyed. It is important to remember that small differences may not be statistically significant. The size of the sampling

error depends largely on the number of people surveyed. Therefore, the sampling error for the poll's sample size and for a 95% confidence interval, ranges from approximately 1.4% - 3.3% for the total sample, 1.8% - 2.0% for the non-parent sample and 2.5% - 5.7% for the parent sample. The sampling error for sub-groups, like those related to income level, are larger.



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- <sup>1</sup> Rose, L.C. & Gallup, A.M. (2006, September). *The 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*. Retrieved October 1, 2006, from [http://www.pdkmembers.org/e-GALLUP/kpoll\\_pdfs/pdkpoll38\\_2006.pdf](http://www.pdkmembers.org/e-GALLUP/kpoll_pdfs/pdkpoll38_2006.pdf)
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- <sup>3</sup> Karoly, L.A., Kilburn, M.R., & Cannon, J.S. (2005). *Early Childhood Interventions Proven Results, Future Promise*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.
- <sup>4</sup> Lynch, R. G. (2004). *Exceptional Returns Economic, Fiscal, and Social Benefits of Investment in Early Childhood Education*. Washington: Economic Policy Institute.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Barnett, W.S., Hustedt, J.T., Hawkinson, L.E., & Robin, K.B. (2006). *The State of Preschool 2006*. Rutgers: National Institute for Early Education Research.
- <sup>7</sup> Lynch, R. G. (2004). *Exceptional Returns Economic, Fiscal, and Social Benefits of Investment in Early Childhood Education*. Washington: Economic Policy Institute.
- <sup>8</sup> ChildCareAware. (n.d.). *Child Care Glossary*. Retrieved June 11, 2007 from <http://www.childcareaware.org/en/tools/glossary/?filter=Q>
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- <sup>11</sup> Information from and e-mail on August 27, 2007 from the Delaware Department of Education.
- <sup>12</sup> NAEYC Accreditation search results for Delaware. Retrieved July 15, 2007 from <http://www.naeyc.org/academy/web%5Fready/search/state.asp?state=DE>
- <sup>13</sup> House Bill No. 126 from the Delaware 144<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.
- <sup>14</sup> Baker, L., & Scher, D. (2002). Beginning readers' motivation for reading in relation to parental beliefs and home reading experiences. *Reading Psychology*, 23(4), 239-269.
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- <sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2006b). *National household education surveys program 2001-05 electronic codebook and public-use data files (NCES 2006-078)*. Washington, DC.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2006a). *ECLS-K longitudinal kindergarten-fifth grade public-use data file and electronic codebook (CD-ROM) (NCES 2006-035)*. Washington, DC.
- <sup>20</sup> Lee, S., Amos, B. A., Gragoudas, S., Lee, Y., Shogren, K. A., Theoharis, R., et al. (2006). Curriculum augmentation and adaptation strategies to promote access to the general curriculum for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities*, 41(3), 199-212.
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- <sup>23</sup> Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997, 20 U.S.C. §§1400 et seq. U.S.C. PL 105-17.
- <sup>24</sup> Leyser, Y., & Kirk, R. (2004). Evaluating inclusion: An examination of parent views and factors influencing their perspectives. *International Journal of Disability Development and Education*, 51(3), 271-285.