

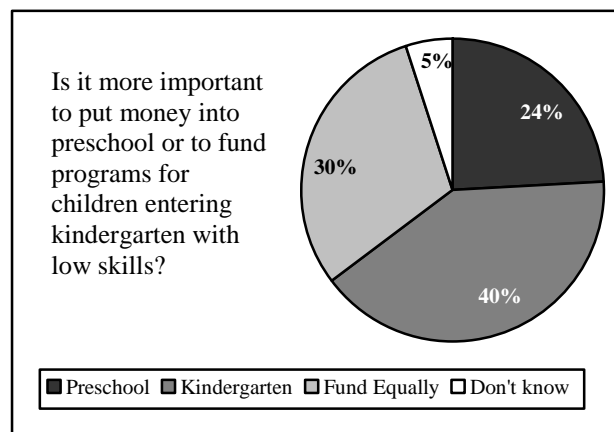


PUBLIC OPINION OF EDUCATION: EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

Highlights of the 2005 Statewide Public Poll on the Condition of Education in Delaware

June 2005

Public opinion in Delaware is divided concerning funding priorities for early care and education. While the greatest support is for funding kindergarten programs (40%), about one-fourth of residents chose either preschool or funding both preschool and kindergarten equally as their first priority. This issue of Public Opinion on Education focuses on Delawareans views toward important issues in meeting the educational needs of the youngest children in Delaware.



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

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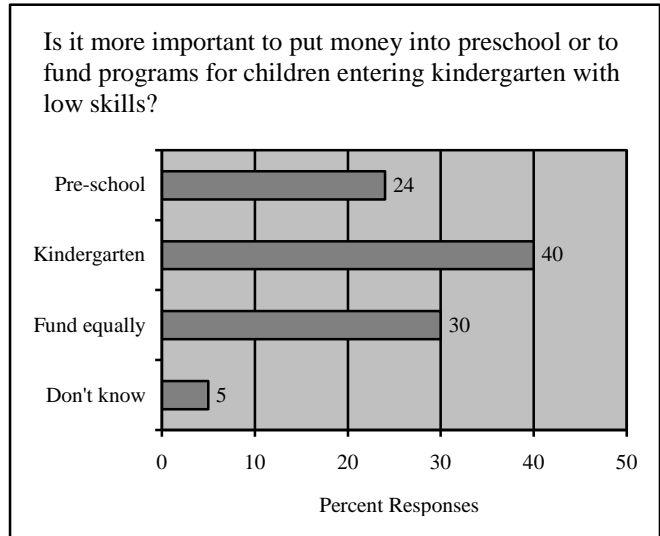
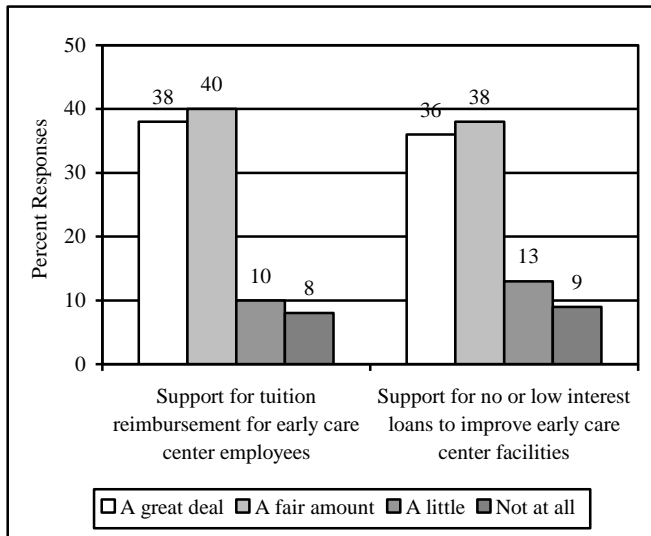
This poll is a collaborative effort of the College of Human Services, Education and Public Policy at the University of Delaware. The author extends special thanks to the Center for Applied Demography and Survey Research for conducting the telephone interviews, and to Delaware Education Research and Development Center staff member Heidi Sweetman for her assistance with the literature review and Steve Fifield, Kelly Scollon, and Pamela Stazesky for their editing assistance.

For more information on the 2005 Public Poll, please contact the R&D Center by email at ud-rdc@udel.edu or by phone at (302) 831-4433. The briefs and full report will also be available on the web as they are produced at <http://www.rdc.udel.edu>

SUPPORT FOR EARLY CARE CENTERS

Poll Results

Delawareans were asked about two proposed programs to help early care centers improve their facilities and educate their staff. The majority of residents, approximately 75%, indicated they would support proposals to reimburse tuition for apprenticeship programs and college courses a great deal or a fair amount. A similar percentage support low or no interest loans so centers can bring their facilities up to state quality standards.



Despite support for early care centers, when Delawareans were asked to choose whether preschool or kindergarten was more important to fund, there was significantly more support for funding kindergarten (40% vs. 24%). Thirty percent of Delawareans polled said preschool and kindergarten should be funded equally.

Putting it in Context

A study conducted by the National Federation of Teachers (2002)¹ examining preschool and kindergarten programming found that “eight states and the District of Columbia require all early childhood teachers to have a bachelor’s degree and all early childhood workers to have at least a child development associate (CDA) credential or equivalent” (p.6). In addition, 36 states provide funding for Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK) and Half-Day Kindergarten (HDK), while the remaining 14 states and the District of Columbia fund either FDK or HDK. Selected recommendations from the study include making preschool available to all 3- and 4-year-olds, guaranteeing FDK for anyone who wants it, requiring higher levels of education and training for individuals working in early child care, and establishing and enforcing standards for all early care programs.

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN PARTICIPATION

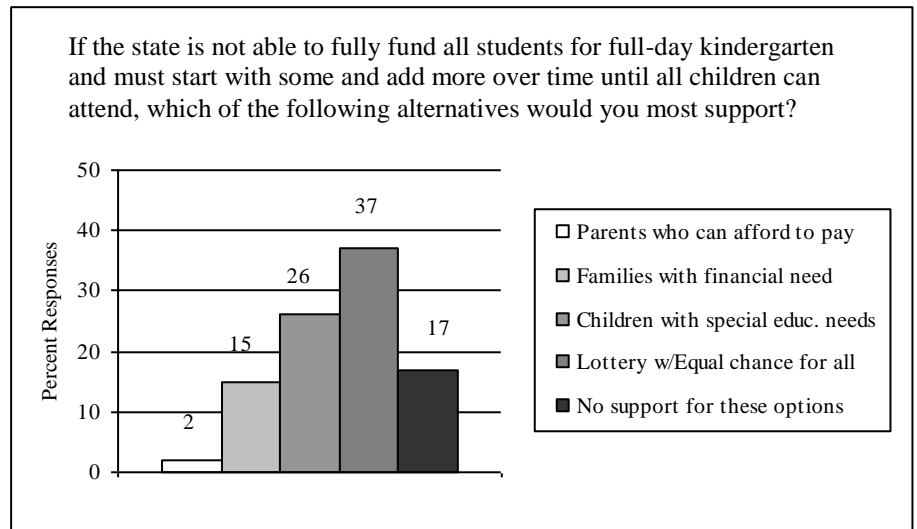
Poll Results

Public opinion in Delaware is mixed regarding how to choose initial participants for statewide full-day kindergarten (FDK) programs if there is insufficient funding for all children to attend: 37% of Delawareans preferred using a lottery system where all children would have an equal chance of attending, 26% percent

avored giving priority to children with special education needs, while smaller percentages favored either prioritizing families with financial need, some did not support any of the options described.

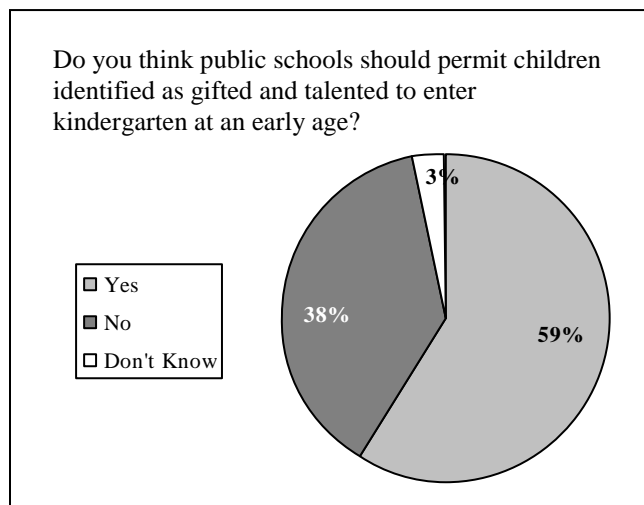
Putting it in Context

A report by the American Federation of Teachers indicated that 93% of U.S. children attend kindergarten.² In 2003, the Education Commission of the States reported that 60% of kindergartners attended FDK.³ In the 2003 Public Poll, the majority of Delaware residents (76%) supported FDK programming statewide, and 95% of this group favored of FDK for all students.⁴ Two reasons cited in the literature for increasing FDK programs are, a) to reduce special education placements and grade retentions⁵, and b) to provide an attractive alternative to paying for daycare⁶ given the increase in the number of two income families⁷. In a recent study of FDK and Half-Day Kindergarten, Fifield and Shepperson (2004) noted: “the existing research suggests that FDK benefits the learning of some children, especially those deemed academically ‘at-risk,’ but questions remain concerning the scope and duration of its impact” (p. 2).⁸



EARLY ENTRANCE TO KINDERGARTEN FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS

Poll Results



Nearly 60% of Delaware residents indicated that children identified as gifted and talented should be permitted to enter kindergarten at an early age. Parents and non-parents showed similar levels of support.

Putting it in Context

Current Delaware policy allows for early entrance of gifted and talented students at the discretion of each school district. At present, 13 of the 16 school districts that have kindergarten programs have policies in place for early admission to kindergarten. However, concerns exist about long-term effects of early admission, social maturity of children, and individual appropriateness of the curriculum for each applicant.

Research results on children admitted to kindergarten at an early age show positive academic and social outcomes for some gifted and talented children.^{9,10} However, early entrance is not appropriate for all advanced learners; a systematic assessment is necessary to determine whether a child will benefit from entering school at a young age¹¹. Important issues to consider when identifying children for early entrance include level of intelligence, academic ability, social maturity, physical maturity, experience in group

settings, available curriculum, among others.^{12,13} In addition to guidelines for the admissions process, the *Iowa Acceleration Scale* provides a means to help make decisions about individual children.¹⁴ It is the instrument best known in the field.

Design, Data Collection, and Sampling Error

From February 9 to March 25, 2005, telephone interviews were conducted with 910 residents throughout the state, 410 parents of school-age children and 500 non-parents. The sampling plan for the polls was scientifically developed and data were collected using random digit dialing to obtain a random sample of residents. All analyses conducted by the R&D Center for the Public Poll involved weighting the data from the sample to reflect the statewide population more accurately.

When using a sample, all measurements 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 residents 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. The sampling error for the poll* ranges from $\pm 2.0\%$ - 3.3% for the total sample, $\pm 2.7\%$ - 4.5% for the non-parent sample, and $\pm 3.0\%$ - 4.9% for the parent sample.

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* These error ranges used a 95% confidence interval.