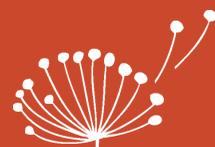


Nebraska Parents Speak About Early Care and Education

Buffett Early Childhood Institute/Gallup Survey on
Early Childhood Care and Education in Nebraska



Buffett
Early Childhood
Institute
at the University of Nebraska

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Introduction

IN MARCH 2016, THE BUFFETT EARLY CHILDHOOD INSTITUTE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AND GALLUP announced findings from the largest public opinion poll ever conducted about early childhood in Nebraska. More than 7,100 residents shared their beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge about early childhood. The groundbreaking report, *Nebraskans Speak About Early Care and Education*, revealed that the vast majority of Nebraskans value and support early care and education and believe more needs to be done to prepare young children for success in school and life. In overwhelming numbers, respondents said that high-quality early care and education is not available or affordable for all families in Nebraska.

This report, *Nebraska Parents Speak About Early Care and Education*, supplements the main report and further examines parents' perspectives on early care and education programs. For purposes of this analysis, respondents were divided into three groups: residents with children aged 8 or younger, those with children aged 9 and older, and those without children.

Research Questions

The Buffett Institute and Gallup designed the statewide survey to better understand Nebraskans' beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge about early care and education in the state. The research questions guiding this in-depth analysis of residents with children aged 8 and younger, those with children aged 9 and older, and those without children are:

1. What are Nebraska parents' perspectives about early care and education?
2. What are Nebraska parents' perceptions about the accessibility and affordability of high-quality early care and education in the state?
3. What are Nebraska parents' views about investment in early care and education?

Additional Reports

More information about the Buffett Early Childhood Institute/Gallup Survey on Early Care and Education is available online at <http://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/gallup-survey>. Materials include the main report, *Nebraskans Speak About Early Care and Education*, as well as follow-up reports that delve into additional areas and topics crucial to early care and education.

Executive Summary

THIS REPORT TELLS US THAT that the vast majority of parents rely on out-of-home early care and education programs for their young children. Most parents rate their child’s care setting and provider highly, yet they express strong concern about the quality of care available to all children in Nebraska. Families report struggling with finding affordable care, and there is strong agreement among Nebraskans — even those who do not have young children — that programs should be available for children whose families choose to use them.

Results from this survey are based on questionnaires completed by more than 7,100 Nebraska residents, including 1,100 parents of young children aged 8 and younger. Gallup conducted the survey in English and Spanish via mail in late August through September 2015. This report provides further insight into Nebraska parents’ beliefs about early care and education in the state. Key findings include:

1 Nebraska parents report a need for early care and education programs.

- About two-thirds of parents with at least one child aged 8 or younger (65%) report that their child is enrolled in an early care and education center, a home-based care setting, or an elementary school.
- The majority of parents with young children (57%) disagree or strongly disagree that families should care for their own children at home rather than sending them to early care and education programs.

2 Nebraska parents believe the early care and education their own child receives is good or excellent but are concerned about the cost — as well as the quality of care available to all children in the city or area in which they live.

- More than 90% of parents describe the quality of their current early care and education setting for their youngest child as good or excellent.
- More than three-quarters of parents (78%) describe the quality of their teachers or caregivers for their current early care and education setting as qualified or highly qualified.
- While parents give high marks for the care settings they have chosen, they are not yet satisfied with the level of care available to all. Only 15% of Nebraskans are very satisfied with the quality of early care and education programs in the city or area where they live.
- When asked to rate the potential challenges of finding high-quality early care and education for young children, 66% of parents with at least one young child rate cost as the first or second challenge to obtaining early care and education.

3 Nebraskans with children and without children want greater investment in early care and education.

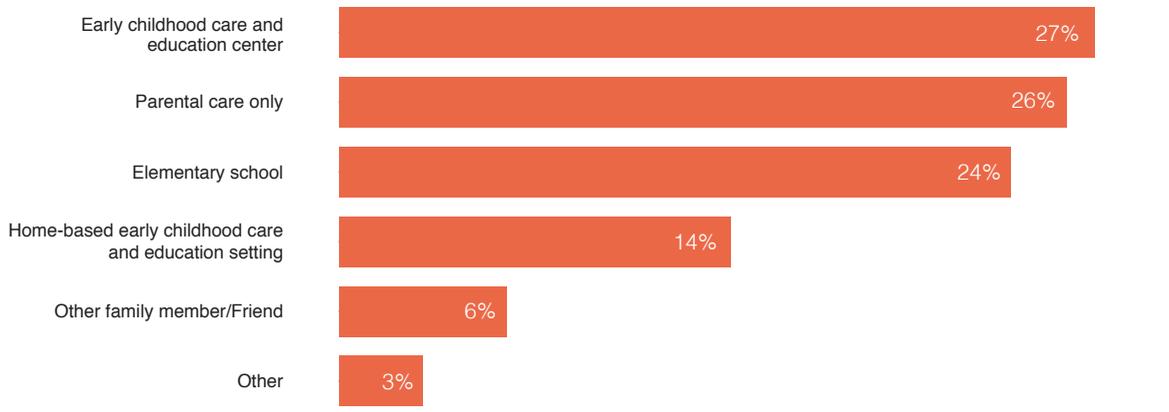
- The majority of Nebraskans (58%) say the state is investing too little in early childhood care and education programs. Parents with young children (63%), parents with older children (55%), and Nebraskans with no children (60%) agree.
- Nearly eight in 10 parents with young children (78%) agree or strongly agree that the state should make early care and education programs available for all 4-year-olds whose families choose to use them. This belief is shared by parents with older children (67%) and Nebraskans without children (72%).
- More than half of parents with young children (59%) agree or strongly agree that all 3-year-olds should have access to early care and education programs, and 42% strongly agree or agree that infants and toddlers should have access to these programs.

Nebraska parents report a need for early care and education programs.

EARLY CHILDHOOD, FOR THIS STUDY, is defined as children from birth through age 8. About one in four respondents (24%) have at least one child aged 8 or younger. These parents were asked to identify the type of early care and education setting they use for their young child or children.

Nearly two-thirds of these parents (65%) report that their child is enrolled in an early care and education center, a home-based care setting, or an elementary school. Of the five possible care options presented, 26% of parents say their youngest child, birth through age 8, is cared for only by his or her parent(s), while 27% say their youngest child is cared for in an early care and education center. Only 6% say a family member or friend cares for their youngest child, and 14% use a home-based care center. Almost one in four parents with at least one young child (24%) report that the child is in elementary school. Few (3%) use any other care option.

Which of the following best describes the early childhood care and education setting this child currently attends? Please mark all that apply.

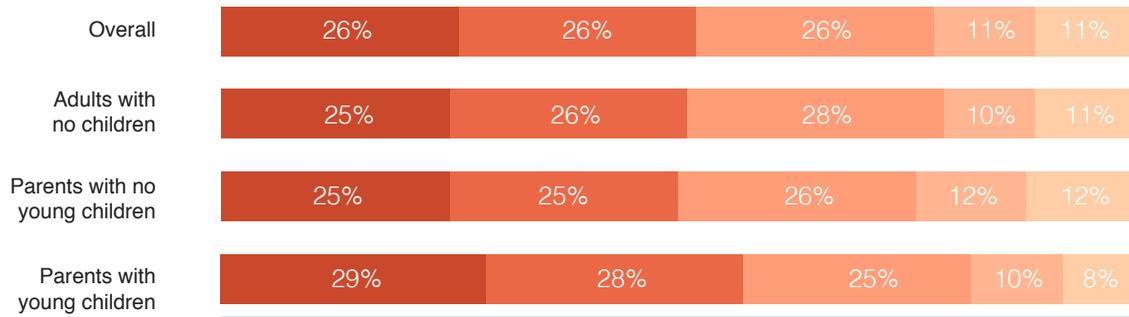


Note: This analysis includes results for parents who selected only one care setting for their youngest child, birth through age 8.

The majority of parents with young children (57%) disagree or strongly disagree that families should care for their own children at home rather than sending them to early care and education programs. Almost three in 10 (29%) parents with young children strongly disagree that children should only be cared for in their own home, which is slightly higher than the response given by parents with no young children or no children at all (25% for both).

On a five-point scale, where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 means strongly agree, please rate your level of agreement with the following item.

Families should care for their own child(ren) at home rather than sending their child(ren) to an early childhood care and education program.



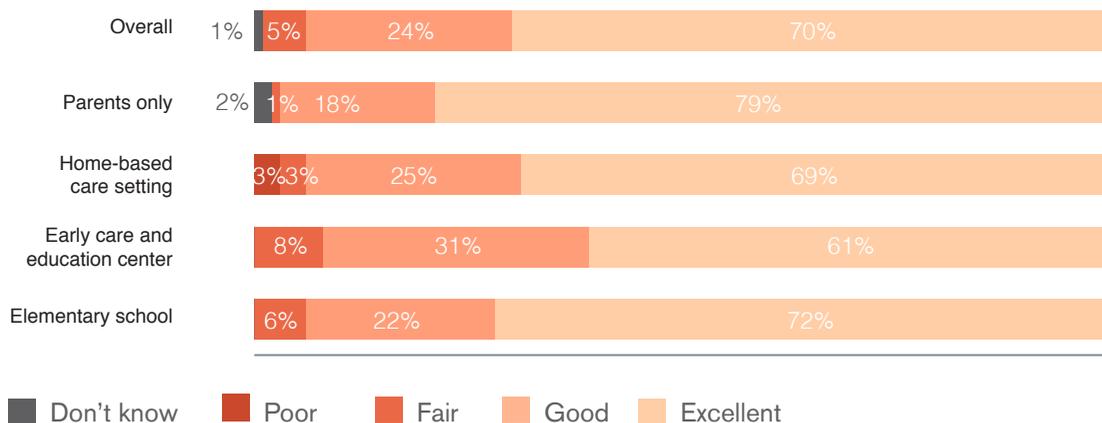
1 Strongly disagree
 2
 3
 4
 5 Strongly agree

Nebraska parents believe the early care and education their own child receives is good or excellent but are concerned about the cost — as well as the quality of care available to all children in the city or area in which they live.

PARENTS WERE ASKED TO RATE the care option used for their youngest child, aged 8 or younger. Only results for those who selected one care option are included in this analysis.

A large majority of parents with young children (70%) rate their chosen care option as “excellent,” and 24% rate it as “good,” though there are some differences in how parents rate settings. The highest marks were given to care provided by the “parent only” (79% “excellent”). Of parents whose youngest child is in elementary school, 72% rate that school as excellent. Almost seven in 10 (69%) rate their home-based care center as excellent. Fewer parents whose youngest child is cared for in an early care and education center rate the center as excellent (61%).

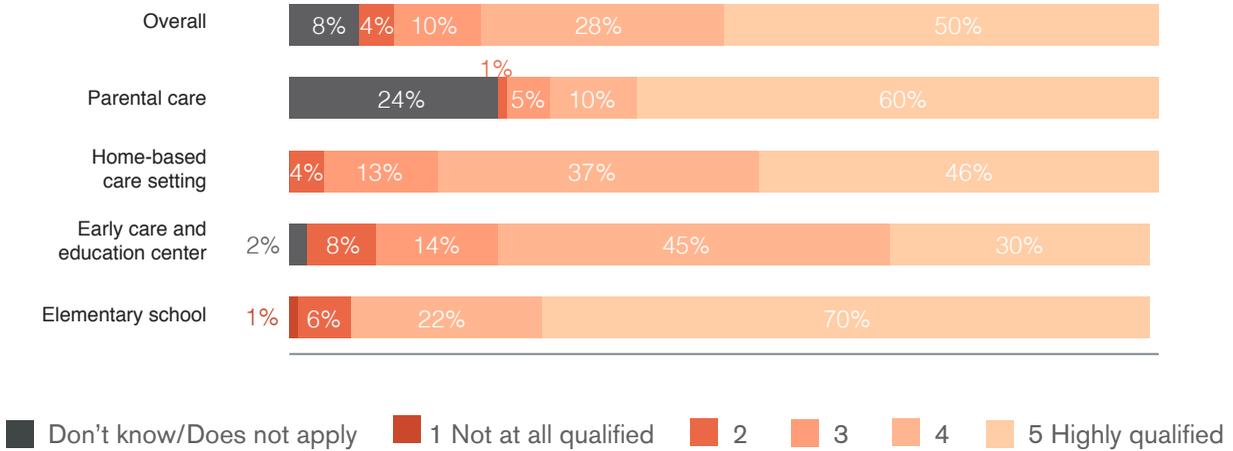
Which of the following best describes the quality of this care setting?*



*Ratings for “Other family member/Friend” and “Other” options not included because of low sample size.

Parents also give high marks to the early childhood professionals who teach and care for their children, especially those in elementary schools. Ninety-two percent of parents with their youngest child in elementary school rate the teachers as qualified or highly qualified. Eighty-three percent of parents who have their youngest child in home-based care rate the provider as qualified or highly qualified, and 75% rate teachers and caregivers in early care and education centers as qualified or highly qualified. Of those who selected parent-only care for their youngest child, 70% say the caregiver (parent) is highly qualified.

On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means not at all qualified and 5 means highly qualified, how qualified are the caregivers and teachers caring for this child?*

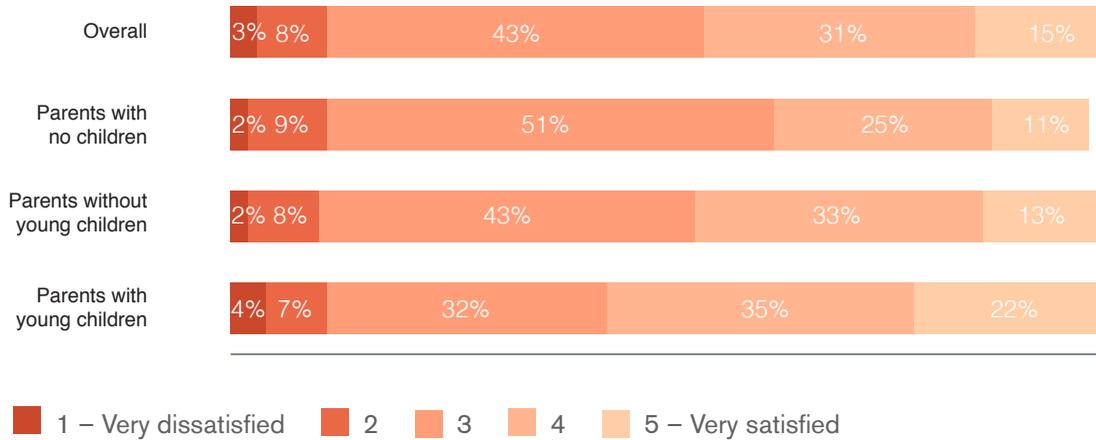


*Ratings for "Other family member/Friend" and "Other" options not included because of low sample size.

While parents give high marks for the care settings they have chosen, they are not yet satisfied with the level of care available to all. Only 15% of Nebraskans are very satisfied with the quality of early care and education programs in the city or area where they live. The positive perception of parents' selected education option resembles results from other Gallup studies in which parents of school-aged children typically rate the school their child attends as better than the schools in their area and the nation.¹

On a five-point scale, where 1 means very dissatisfied and 5 means very satisfied, please rate your level of satisfaction with the following items.

The quality of early childhood care and education programs in the city or area where you live.

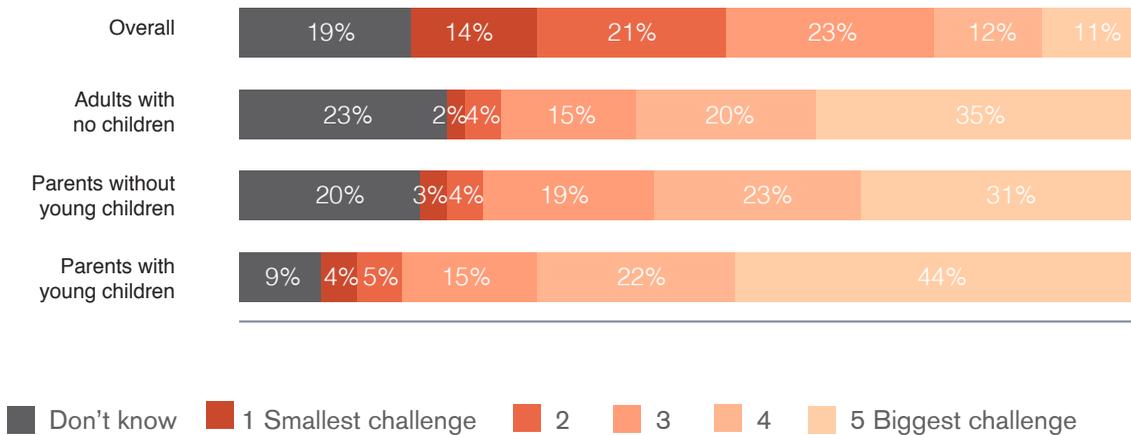


¹ The 47th Annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools. (2015). [Special supplement]. Retrieved April 14, 2016, from http://pdkpoll2015.pdkintl.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/pdkpoll47_2015.pdf.

When asked to rate the potential challenges of finding high-quality early care and education for young children, 66% of parents with at least one young child say cost is a big or the biggest challenge in getting quality care (ratings of 4 and 5 on a five-point scale). Transportation to and from care and limited hours of operation are the next greatest challenges, with 34% and 31% of parents, respectively, saying these are a big or the biggest challenge in getting quality care for their young children.

Following are challenges some families face in getting high-quality early childhood care and education for their young child(ren). Please rank the following challenges from 1 to 5 where 1 represents the smallest challenge and 5 represents the biggest challenge.

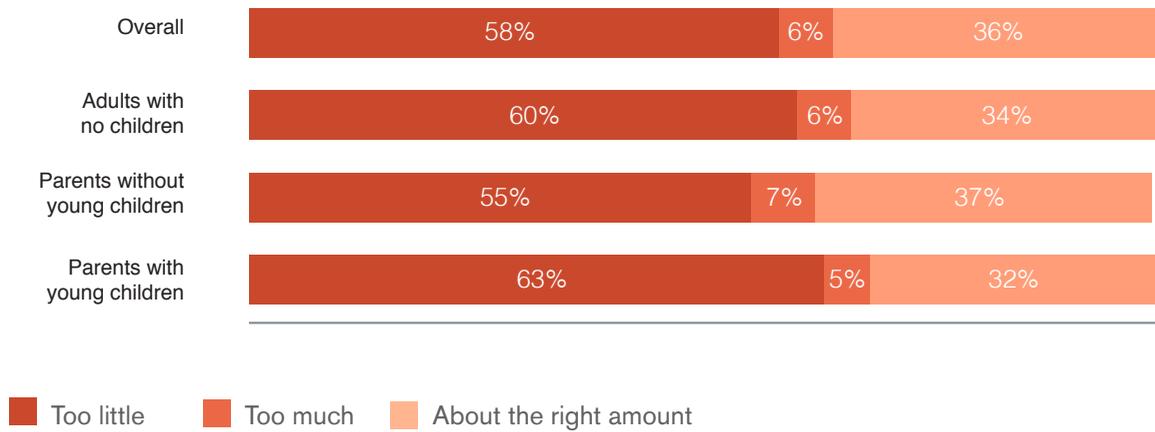
Early childhood care and education programs are too expensive.



Nebraska parents want greater investment in early care and education.

CONSISTENT WITH THE MAIN REPORT'S (*Nebraskans Speak About Early Care and Education*) findings that the majority of Nebraskans (58%) say the state is investing too little in early childhood care, many Nebraska parents want greater investment. Only 6% say the state is investing too much. Parents with at least one child aged 8 or younger (63%) are somewhat more likely than parents without young children (55%) to say the state is investing too little in early care and education programs. Six in 10 Nebraskans without children (60%) say Nebraska is investing too little.

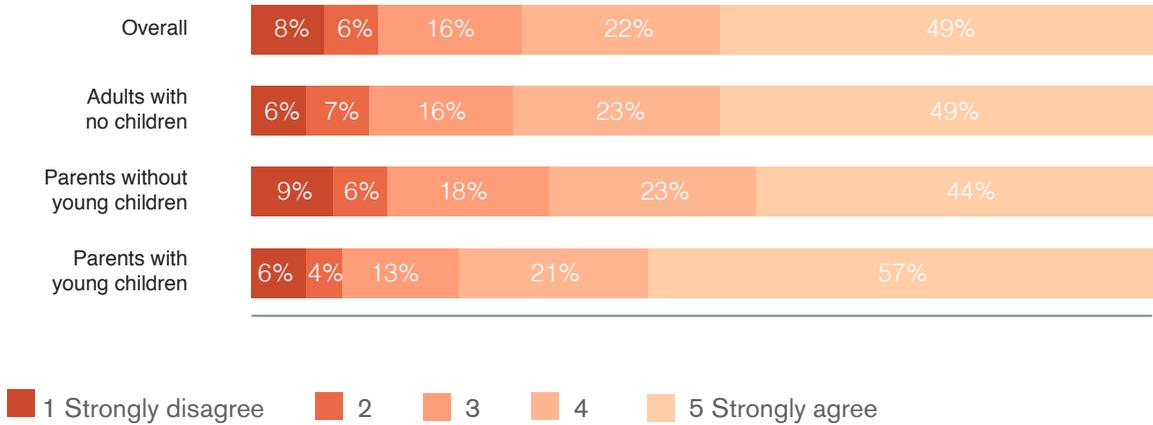
In your opinion, is Nebraska investing too little, too much, or about the right amount on early childhood care and education programs?



More than seven in 10 Nebraskans (71%) agree or strongly agree that the state should make early care and education programs available for all 4-year-olds whose families choose to use them. This belief is true among parents with young children (78%), parents without young children (67%), and Nebraskans without children (72%).

On a five-point scale, where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 means strongly agree, please rate your level of agreement with the following item.

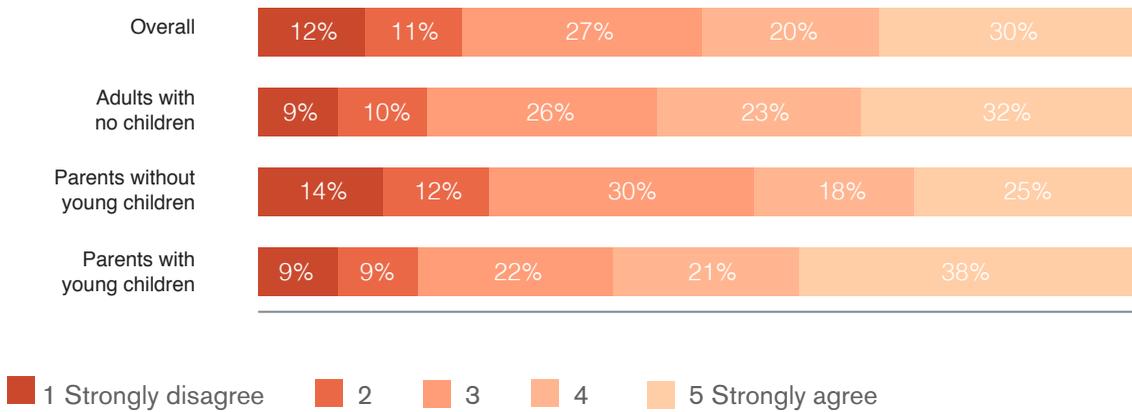
The state of Nebraska should make early childhood care and education programs available for all 4-year-olds whose families choose to use them.



Half of Nebraskans agree or strongly agree that the state should make early care and education programs available for 3-year-olds whose families choose to use them. Parents of young children are more likely than parents without young children to agree or strongly agree that this care should be made available (59% vs. 43%, respectively). More than half of Nebraskans without children (55%) agree or strongly agree that the state should make early care programs available for 3-year-olds whose families choose to use them.

On a five-point scale, where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 means strongly agree, please rate your level of agreement with the following item.

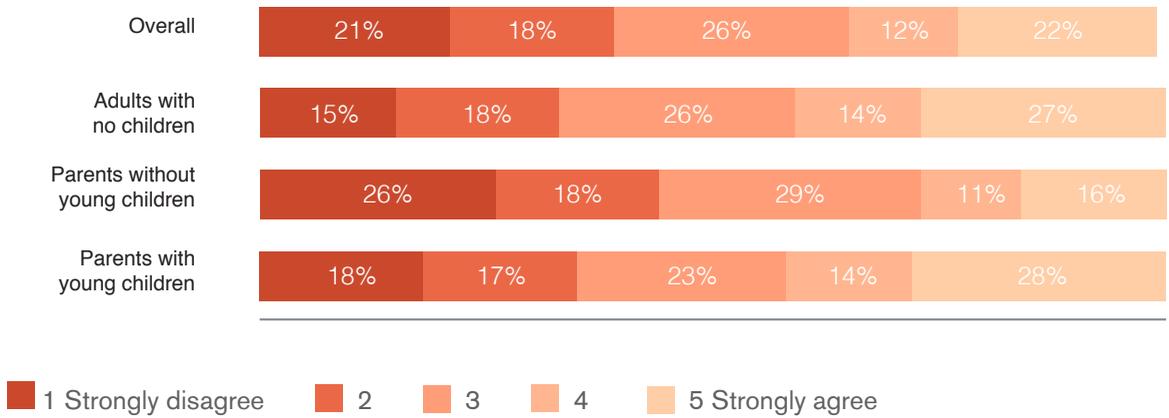
The state of Nebraska should make early childhood care and education programs available for all 3-year-olds whose families choose to use them.



While fewer Nebraskans overall (34%) agree or strongly agree that early care programs should be available for all infants and toddlers whose families choose to use them, far more parents of young children than parents without young children support the availability of this care (42% vs. 27%, respectively).

On a five-point scale, where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 means strongly agree, please rate your level of agreement with the following item.

The state of Nebraska should make early childhood care and education programs available for all infants and toddlers whose families choose to use them.



Implications

RESULTS FROM THIS REPORT DEMONSTRATE that the vast majority of children, birth through age 8, are enrolled in some form of child care or educational program, and parents value these settings and the early childhood professionals who work in them. However, many families struggle with affording care, and many Nebraskans — even those who do not have young children — believe that programs should be available for families who choose to use them.

Though this report focused on parents with children from birth through age 8, the findings are consistent with the first three reports from the Buffett Institute/Gallup Survey on Early Care and Education.

There is a consensus among parents with young children, parents with older children, and Nebraskans without children that the state should make a greater investment in early care and education. As expected, parents with young children feel most strongly, with nearly two-thirds stating that Nebraska's investment is too low. But most striking is the support from residents without children. Six in 10 respondents without children say there is too little investment in early childhood care and education. These findings confirm more needs to be done to ensure programs are affordable for all Nebraska families.

There is resounding agreement among Nebraskans that the state should make public programs available for 4-year-olds from families who choose to use them. Overwhelming majorities of parents with young children (78%) and Nebraskans without children (72%) agree or strongly agree with this statement. Majorities of parents with young children (59%) and Nebraskans without children (55%) recognize the need for programs for 3-year-olds.

Approximately four in 10 parents with young children and Nebraskans without children believe programs should be made available to families of infants and toddlers who choose to use them. This finding suggests that greater public education is needed to ensure that all Nebraskans recognize the critical role high-quality early care and education experiences play in the healthy development and learning of children during the first three years of life.

Methodology

RESULTS FOR THE BUFFETT EARLY Childhood Institute/Gallup Survey on Early Childhood Care and Education in Nebraska are based on surveys conducted by mail from Aug. 27-Sept. 30, 2015, with a random sample of 7,191 Nebraska residents aged 18 and older. The survey package included an English and Spanish survey to provide respondents with the flexibility to reply in their preferred language.

Gallup selected the sample of Nebraska residents using address-based sampling (ABS), a sampling technique used to select households from a list of all households on file with the United States Postal Service. The sampling frame includes approximately 97% of all Nebraska households. Gallup chooses respondents within the household at random based on which household member would have the next birthday. Gallup used a series of postcard reminders to encourage participation in the survey among nonresponders.

Gallup stratified the sample of Nebraska residents by area (small towns, large towns, and urban areas) to allow for estimates at the area and state levels. In addition, Gallup weighted the data to match state of Nebraska demographics of gender, age, education, race, and Hispanic ethnicity.

All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting.

- For results based on the total sample of 7,191 Nebraska residents, the margin of sampling error is ± 1.6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.
- For results based on the sample of 2,352 Nebraska residents currently residing in urban areas, the margin of sampling error is ± 2.9 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.
- For results based on the sample of 2,357 Nebraska residents currently residing in large towns, the margin of sampling error is ± 2.9 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.
- For results based on the sample of 2,482 Nebraska residents currently residing in small towns, the margin of sampling error is ± 2.8 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Margins of error may differ for other subgroups of the population. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

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About Buffett Early Childhood Institute

THE BUFFETT EARLY CHILDHOOD INSTITUTE at the University of Nebraska is an innovative research, policy, and outreach institute that draws on the resources of the four University of Nebraska campuses. The Institute is dedicated to promoting the development and learning of children from birth through age 8. Visit buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu for more information.

This survey was supported in part by the Buffett Early Childhood Fund. We acknowledge their help and that of the Buffett Institute/Gallup Survey advisory group for their input during the development of the survey.

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