



# Benchmarking Early Care and Education in Pennsylvania: The 2002 Family Survey

## Executive Summary

*Report prepared for the Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Education  
September 2002*

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*Universities Children's Policy Collaborative is dedicated to contributing to the health and welfare of children, youth, and families by providing nonpartisan information on public policy issues.*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The first five years of a child's life is a period of incredible cognitive, emotional and social growth. Experiences during these early years can set children on pathways that have lifelong emotional, social and academic consequences.

How can we invest in our children's early development to ensure subsequent academic, social and emotional success? This question has attracted widespread attention from Pennsylvania policy makers. Their goal: to develop a system of early care and education that will meet family's needs today and help prepare a sophisticated, educated workforce of the future.

Toward this goal, Pennsylvania's Governor Mark Schweiker signed Executive Order 2002-2 on April 17, 2002 to create the Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force. As part of the work accompanying the task force, the Governor commissioned a series of primary

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research efforts to be carried out by three major Pennsylvania Universities (Penn State University, University of Pittsburgh, and Temple University) that have joined together to form the Universities Children's Policy Collaborative (UCPC).

As part of this collaborative effort and under commission from the Governor's Office, the Temple University Center for Public Policy initiated the 2002 Pennsylvania Family Survey, one designed to collect information from families about their experiences and concerns regarding child care and early education. This executive summary summarizes the findings from the larger report on the survey and highlights the policy recommendations that stem from these findings. This executive summary is one of a series that summarizes reports from UCPC. The other reports include **A Baseline Report of Early Care and Education in Pennsylvania: The 2002 Early Care and Education Provider Survey, The State of Early Care and Education in Pennsylvania: The 2002 Higher Education Survey, and From Science To Policy: Research on Issues, Programs and Policies in Early Care and Education.**

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS GUIDING THE 2002 PENNSYLVANIA FAMILY SURVEY**

The 2002 Pennsylvania Family Survey was designed to provide answers to a number of important questions:

- What is the extent of usage of child care and early education in Pennsylvania?
- Does use of child care and educational programs differ geographically across the state?
- What is the quality and what are the costs of these services, according to parents and children's full-time caregivers?
- Are low-income and middle-income families using similar types of child care and early education programs?
- What problems do families face in accessing child care and early education?
- What services and supports do parents think would enable them to better prepare their children for school?

- Are families with special needs young children and children with behavior problems being adequately served?

### **DESIGN AND METHODS**

The design of this study was a baseline survey of 1005 Pennsylvania families. This survey was administered by telephone to adult respondents living in the home with responsibility for decision-making for children under 6 years of age. Most of the respondents were mothers (73%); there were also fathers (17%), grandmothers (6%) and other legal guardians (4%).

Households were selected using a list-assisted Random Digit Dialing (RDD) sampling procedure. The response rate was 78%. Trained, reliable interviewers using computer-assisted telephone interviewing techniques (CATI) conducted the interviews from May through July 2002. The interview lasted about 25 minutes and was conducted in either English or Spanish.

The survey included detailed questions about child care and early education experiences for a randomly selected target child less than six years of age living in the home. For families whose summer experiences differed from those in the academic year, child care and educational services during the month of April were examined. All other families were asked about the child's current experiences. For children in more than one type of care or education arrangement, detailed questions were asked about the arrangement in which the child spent the most time.<sup>b</sup>

The survey sample was varied, mirroring the rich diversity of Pennsylvania families.

About three-fourths of the sample was two-parent (or two-partner) households, with an average

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<sup>b</sup> Terms used to describe early childhood settings: 1) No Non-parental Care - child not regularly cared for by anyone other than the parents; 2) In-Home Care - someone regularly comes into the home to care for the child; 3) Family Care - child is cared for in another home with or without other children; 4) Program/Center Care - children attend a facility with a group of other children (Child care centers, preschool, Head Start, Early Head Start, pre-kindergarten, and kindergarten); and 5) Parent as Family Care Provider - child is cared for by parent in the home while the parent also cares for other non-related children. These terms were selected for the survey because they are terms that were meaningful to parents in describing their child's daily nonparental care and educational arrangements.

family size of four. With 40% of the sample earning dual incomes, the average yearly salary of the sample was about \$59,000. The highest level of education achieved by most respondents was a high school degree (31%); 26% of respondents had some college, and 23% had a 4-year college degree. Ten percent of the respondents did not have a high school degree or equivalent. Thirteen percent of the sample reported incomes lower than the federal poverty level, while 7% reported incomes over 100,000. The distribution of families across geographic location, child's age, family size, poverty, and ethnicity appeared very similar to the distribution in the State.

## **FINDINGS**

### **USE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR ALL CHILDREN UNDER 6 YEARS OF AGE**

- **The majority of Pennsylvania children under the age of six years were in some type of regular child care or educational program.**

Sixty-four percent of the families surveyed used some type of child care or educational program in which the parent was not present on a regular weekly basis. Even for children younger than three years of age, the majority (61%) experienced regular weekly nonparental care. (See Figure A.)

- **Some children were in more than one type of child care arrangement or educational setting on a weekly basis.**

Twenty-four percent of the children in the sample were in more than one type of child care or educational arrangement on a weekly basis. This is a slight increase from the 20% of PA families who reported supplemental arrangements in a similar survey conducted in 1989.

- **Many children were in care or education arrangements at least half-time.**

Forty three percent of all Pennsylvania children were in a nonparental arrangement or educational program at least part half time (20 hours/week), and 26% of the sample were in an arrangement fulltime (35 hours or more each week). The average amount of time per week these

children spent in their arrangement was 27 hours. There were no age differences in the hours per week children spent in their nonparental care arrangements.

▪ **Most care arrangements had been relatively stable over the last year.**

Few changes in children's education arrangements had occurred over the last year. Only 7% of families using nonparental arrangements reported making any changes.

▪ **A quarter of all children were cared for by a relative who was not their parent.**

Twenty four percent of children were cared for regularly at least four hours per week by a relative when their parent was not available. Care by a relative was most frequent in small cities (29%) and least frequent in metropolitan areas (21%). Relative care was more commonly used by families with lower incomes (31% vs. 19%), fewer children (36% vs. 20%), and lower levels of education (35% vs. 15%). Latino families had relatives caring for their children more than any other ethnic group in the sample (48% vs. 22-28%). Children up to the age of three were equally likely to be cared for by a relative as a non-relative caregiver. Older children, however, were much less likely to be in relative care.

▪ **Families varied in the types of care and educational arrangements in which they enrolled their children.**

Child Age. Fewer than half (46%) of the children under one year of age were cared for at home with their parents exclusively. Center-based care as the primary form of nonparental care increased with children's age: 9% of children younger than one year of age spent the majority of time away from their parents in Programs/Centers; 17% of 2-year-olds were in Programs/Centers; 37% of 3- and 4-year-olds were in Programs/Centers; and at age five, 51% of children were in a Program or Center for the majority of time they spent away from their parents. As children got older, families were increasingly likely to use some kind of group or center care,

and more likely to have their children in some type of educational program, even for part of the time they spent away from their families.

Geographic Location. Families in small towns and rural areas were more likely to use Family Care settings (29% and 31%) over center based care or educational programs (18%). Families using care in metropolitan areas were more likely to have their children in center-based care or educational programs (34%) than families in small cities (23%) or rural areas (23%).

Income Level. Poor families were *less* likely to have their children in Programs/Centers than families who were not poor (23% for poor families and 30% for families who were not poor). This is despite the fact that families in this income range (200% of federal poverty level) are often eligible for child care subsidies if they meet other family requirements.

The wealthiest families (over \$100,000 annual salary) were more likely to use Program/Center Care than other families (45% vs. 20-37%). Thirteen percent of the wealthiest families used In-Home Care (“nanny care”); these families were least likely to use out-of-home Family Care (15% vs. 23-27%) compared to families of lower annual income levels.

Partner and Employment Status. Two-parent, single-earner families were most likely (54%) to have their child at home with a parent, using no nonparental care or educational arrangements. Dual-earner families were more likely to use center-based care or educational programs (33%) than were two-parent, one-earner families (20%). Single-parent earners were most likely to use center-based care arrangements or educational programs (40%) for their children than were two-parent dual-earner families (20%) and two-parent single-earner families (33%). Non-employed parents were most likely to have their children at home with them on a full-time basis.

Respondent Education Level. Parents with higher levels of education were most likely to have their children in centers or educational programs outside the home (36-38%) than less educated parents (18-22%), who were more likely to have their children staying at home with them full-time (36-38% vs. 18-22%).

- **Child care centers were used far more often than preschools, Head Start programs, prekindergarten and kindergarten.**

Child care centers were used by a greater percentage of families than other types of Programs/Centers for children of all ages, in all geographic locations, from families of all income levels, education levels, and ethnicities, and by both single- and two-parent families. Only in the case of two-parent, single-earner families were preschools used more than child care centers (48% vs. 5-11%).

## **PRESCHOOL CHILDREN IN EDUCATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS**

- **Fewer than half (44%) of PA preschool children were enrolled in an educational preschool program.**

Although 75% of 3 and 4 year-old children were in some type of regular non-parental arrangement, fewer than half (44%) spent regular time each week in a program with educational curricular programming. (See Figure B.) Twelve percent of children between 3 and 4 years of age were enrolled in child care centers, 19% were in preschools, 5% were in Head Start programs, and 8% were in pre-kindergarten or kindergarten programs. Twenty-five percent of 3 and 4 year-olds were in the exclusive care of their parents. –Forty-two percent were in a neighbor's home, a relative's home, or in a family day care arrangement when their parent was not available.

▪ **Poor and minority 3- and 4-year-olds were less likely to be in center-based or educational settings than other children.**

Attendance in educational programs for 3-and 4-year-olds was lower for children from lower income families than children from upper income families (32-56% for the three groups of lower income families and 73% for the most upper income families), for two parent families (42%) than single-parent families (49%) , and for less educated families (21% and 27% for the two lowest educated groups of families) than more educated families (45% and 63% for the two highest educated groups of families).

▪ **Many five-year-old children are *not* enrolled in educational programming outside the home.**

Although 81% of 5 year-old children were in some type of regular non-parental arrangement, only 51% spent regular time each week in a child care program, a Head Start program, a preschool, a prekindergarten, or a kindergarten. Twelve percent of 5 year-old children were enrolled in child care centers, 23% were in preschools, 5% were in Head Start programs, and 21% were in pre-kindergarten or kindergarten programs.

Because many of the 5-year-old children in the survey were not yet eligible for kindergarten in their districts, according to their birth dates, it is difficult to compute what percent of eligible children were enrolled in kindergarten. Full day public kindergarten is not available in all school districts in Pennsylvania, and kindergarten attendance is not required.<sup>c</sup>

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<sup>c</sup> Because of the difficulty in establishing who is eligible for kindergarten and because of the discrepancy across school districts, further analyses of the kindergarten data is not included in this report. More information about kindergarten attendance in Pennsylvania can be obtained from the From Building Blocks to Books report released by the Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children in June 2002 ([www.papartnerships.org](http://www.papartnerships.org)). According to the Pa Partnerships for Children Report, only 121,000 children in PA are enrolled in kindergarten in the state's 500 public school districts, and only 29% of these are enrolled in full-day programs. There are 156,000 children who are 5 years old and a similar number who are 6 years old in PA.

## QUALITY OF EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

- **Parents are not aware of whether or not their programs are licensed or accredited. Nearly half of the parents believed that their child's Program/Center was accredited.**

Although all Centers and Programs and many family day care programs are required to be licensed by law, parents' perception was such that only 79% of respondents using child care programs said their child's arrangement was licensed. Forty-three percent of parents reported that the Programs/Centers they used were accredited. Yet, as of 2002, only 6% of centers in Pennsylvania were accredited, suggesting that parents may have difficulty understanding the meaning of the terms "licensed" and "accredited".

- **A majority of parents rated their child's care/education provider as "excellent" in enhancing social and cognitive development. Few rated their child's provider "not very good" or as "very bad".**

More than two-thirds of families (62-89%) rated their provider or educational setting as excellent, and few PA parents rated their child's arrangement as "not very good" (1-6%) or "very bad" (1-5%). While this may be remarkable and a very encouraging sign, many researchers have reported that most parents overestimate the quality of their child care or early educational setting. When observers from the National Institute of Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care Study (NICHD SECC) sent trained observers into nearly 1000 child care settings around the U.S.<sup>d</sup>, they found that the majority of settings (53%) were only "fair" in quality according to a number of quality indicators; no more than 39% were rated as either "good" or "excellent". The NICHD SECC researchers also reported that fewer than 80% of settings conformed to experts' recommendations regarding the training of child care educators, and only 56% conformed with recommended child-staff ratios.

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<sup>d</sup> NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (2000). Characteristics and Quality of Child Care for Toddlers and Preschoolers. *Journal of Applied Developmental Science*, 4, 116-135.

Thus, it appears that PA parents may be greatly overestimating the quality of their children's care in their absence. This overestimation may reflect parent's lack of knowledge about what represents quality care; it may also reflect parents' difficulties acknowledging to themselves or others the imperfections in the daily care they choose for their children during the parents' absence.

At the same time, a third of PA parents rated their child's care arrangement or educational program as "reasonably good" as opposed to "excellent". Given the tendency of parents to overestimate their child's care, these results suggest that nearly a third of PA parents may have some doubts about the quality of their child's care.

- **Parents with children in kindergarten and other types of programs/centers gave higher quality ratings to their children's cognitive and social programming than did parents with children in other types of programs.**

Parents with children in all types of Programs/Centers were more likely to rate their child's program high in the quality of cognitive programming than parents with children in In-Home Care and Family-based Care (65-89% for all types of Programs/Centers vs. 52 for In-Home and 69% for Family-based Care). Parents of children in kindergarten or prekindergarten were most likely to rate their program high in cognitive development (89%). The parents of children in preschools and prekindergarten/kindergarten were most likely to rate these arrangements high in social development (73%).

The striking difference reported for kindergarten programs compared to the others suggests an important line of future research. Since parents perceive kindergarten programs to have the best quality when it comes to enhancing both social and cognitive development, future research should investigate how kindergarten programs are operated (i.e., privately, publicly, or

otherwise) and how elements of quality are implemented so that these techniques may be shared with other early care and education providers.

These findings also suggest that making kindergarten more widely available to children would provide higher quality care, at least as seen through the eyes of parents.

- **Parents with children in Programs/Centers were most likely to strongly recommend their arrangement to a friend than parents in the other care/education arrangement types.**

When parents were asked whether they would recommend their current arrangement to a friend, 63% said they would strongly recommend their current arrangement; 12% said they had doubts or would not. Almost three-fourths of parents of children in Programs/Centers strongly recommended their type of arrangement. Parents using In-Home Care and parents using Family-based Care were least likely to recommend their type of arrangement to other parents.

- **Parents thought child care should have more curricular activities, especially in the area of cognitive development.**

Parents using Programs/Centers were more satisfied with the educational activities occurring in their child's arrangements (58-67% for all types of Programs/Centers) than were parents using In-Home (31%) or Family-based settings (42%). About two-thirds of parents using Programs/Centers thought children's activities such as looking at or reading picture books, singing songs or playing games, reading books in groups, playing games with letters of the alphabets, and encouraging toy sharing and getting along with others were occurring at an appropriate level. In contrast, two-thirds of parents whose children were in settings other than Program/Center types of arrangements thought these kinds of activities should happen more often. These findings match that of a comparable question in the 1989 Survey, to which parents of children in center-based arrangements were the most satisfied with how often these types of educational activities were occurring. These data suggest that, while many parents would like to

see more educational curricula - both cognitive and social - in their children's early years, parents using In-Home and Family-based Care wanted these activities more often.

▪ **Providers and teachers administered medicine and provided health information.**

According to parent reports, most child care providers and teachers were trained in administering medication, and they administered this medicine relatively infrequently. Programs/Centers had more trained personnel (88% for Programs/Centers vs. 59% for Family Care providers), but Family Care providers administered medications more often (24% vs. 14%). Parents reported that fewer than a quarter of providers offered health care information (23% for Program/Center care providers and 15% for Family Care providers) or health insurance information (19% for Program/Center Care providers and 11% for Family Care providers). As these parental reports indicate, Program/Center providers were more likely to provide health information than Family Care providers.

**COST AND AFFORDABILITY OF EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION**

▪ **Of those who paid for child care or educational programs, the mean fee paid per month was \$336; however there was great variability.**

For those who paid for care, the average monthly expenditure for the child's main arrangement (i.e., only the one in which the child spent the most time) was \$336 (\$84/week and \$3.11/hour at the average of 27 hours/week). Considering the cost per hour across different types of care, In-Home Care by a relative appeared to be the least costly type of arrangement (\$2.46/hour). In-Home Care by an unrelated person (generally "nanny care") was most costly (\$5.79 per hour), and Program/Center Care the next most costly \$3.40/hour).

- **Families in metropolitan areas pay more per month for child care and educational services than families in small cities and rural areas.**

Across all types of services, families in metropolitan areas are paying twice as much for child care and educational services as families in rural areas (\$404 vs. \$221). However, children in metropolitan areas spent more time in all types of arrangements than children in other geographic areas. Families in metropolitan areas or small cities used Program/Center Care more than those in rural areas (28 hours for metropolitan families, 24 hours for small city families, and 17 hours for rural families, on average per week). When looked at on a cost per hour basis, families in metropolitan areas paid more per hour (\$3.61) than families in rural areas (\$2.30). Families in small cities paid \$2.54 per hour, midway between families in metropolitan and rural areas.

- **Families with higher incomes paid more for their arrangements.**

Those families with incomes higher than \$50,000 paid more per hour and more per week for all types of care *except for In-Home Care*. Interestingly, the greatest disparity between families was in the area of non-parental In-Home care by relatives and non-relatives. Families earning less than \$25,000 paid more for relative care (\$2.35/hour) and less for non-relative care (\$1.09), while families earning between \$25,000 and \$50,000 (and those at all higher levels of income) paid more for non-relative In-Home care than relative In-Home care.

- **Families with lower incomes devoted a larger proportion of their annual household income to child care costs.**

Across all types of families, parents who paid for care or educational arrangements devoted, on average depending on the type of care, between 7% and 10% of their annual income to these expenses. The average proportion of a family's annual income did not differ by geographic location. However, low-income families (below \$25,000) devoted between 5% and

18% of their incomes to child care and education related expenses. High-income families (higher than \$100,000) devoted between 1% and 5% of their annual income.

## **SUBSIDIES FOR EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES**

- **Only 14% of families reported receiving some form of assistance in paying for early care and education costs.**

Of the 14% of families receiving assistance in paying child care/education costs (including those with a child in Head Start), 45% of these parents received assistance from governmental programs. Relatives and friends helped 17% of these families pay for services. Sixteen percent of unspecified types of assistance were also used, suggesting further study is warranted of how families find help paying for the care and early education of their children.

- **About half of the families who were eligible for subsidies were receiving them.**

Eligibility for early childhood services subsidies is based on several criteria<sup>e</sup>; we estimate that about half of those families eligible for subsidies and with children in Family Care or Program/Center Care were receiving a subsidy. Eligible single-parent families were more likely to be receiving a subsidy (59%) than eligible two-parent families (38%).

## **TRANSPORTATION ISSUES**

- **Transportation was not a problem for most families.**

Only a small percentage of those asked whether transportation was a problem said that it was either somewhat of a problem (8%) or a very big problem (2%). Distance and hassles were the leading reasons for those who reported problems. Transportation problems did not appear to be related to geographical area.

Almost half of PA families said that it took them up to five minutes to get their children to their child care or educational arrangement. Twenty-three percent of families reported

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<sup>e</sup> Only families at 200% of the Federal Poverty Income Guideline with parents who were working 25 hours or more and whose children were in either Family Care or Program/Center Care were considered eligible in this sample.

commuting between 6 and 10 minutes. Eighty percent of families drove their car to take their children to their care or education facility. The next most utilized methods of transportation were the bus (7%), and walking (6%).

For families who spent more time traveling, transportation was more of a problem ( $r = .34$ ). Also, the more troublesome transportation was, the less likely that the parent was to recommend their arrangement to a friend ( $r = .11$ ).<sup>f</sup>

### **SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES TO PREPARE THEIR CHILDREN FOR SCHOOL**

- **Parents wanted help with issues concerning their child's development.**

Parents were asked how often they found themselves needing help with knowing what is age appropriate behavior, knowing how to set limits or discipline their child, wanting information about how to help their child be ready to learn to read when he/she gets to first grade, and worrying about their child not learning enough in their care or education arrangement. Over a third of respondents reported being concerned about these five issues either *often* or *all of the time* (Range of 24-72%; See Figure C.)

- **Low-income and less educated parents reported needing more help than other families.**

Although the amount of concern about child development issues did not differ based on geographical distribution or child's age, it did vary by family income, ethnicity and parental education. Especially for low-income families, concern about age-appropriate behavior (74% vs. 51-62% for families from the other three income groups), setting limits/discipline (61% vs. 45-54%), health care (50% vs. 16-41%), and reading readiness (77% vs. 64-69%) occurred frequently. The respondents in the highest income level group (over \$100,000) were those least

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<sup>f</sup> Given the relatively high parent ratings for quality, the short traveling time on average, and the relationships between time traveling to care and the likelihood of recommending the arrangement to a friend, it is likely that parental selection of arrangements is constrained by distance. Thus, it will be important to examine the distribution of the quality of child care throughout the State of Pennsylvania in the study that is being completed this November for the Governor's Task Force.

often concerned with whether their children were learning enough in their care or education settings (8% vs. 22-37% for all other groups).

Parents with lower levels of education were concerned about child development issues more often than parents with higher levels of education. For example, while 40% of the parents with the lowest educational level reported being concerned about their children not learning enough in their child care or educational program, only 7% of parents with the highest educational level were concerned about their children learning enough in their child care or educational program. These data suggest that low-income and less educated parents are most in need of better child care programs and child development information.

- **Latino parents were most interested in getting help around parenting and child development issues.**

Latino families, compared to other ethnic groups, were the most concerned about all issues. They were particular concerned about helping their child to be reading ready (85% vs. 64-78%) and about setting limits/disciplining their child (73% vs. 52-62%). Caucasian families were the group least often concerned with health issues (32% for Caucasian families vs. 49-52% for all other groups) or whether or not their child was learning enough in his or her care/education arrangement (22% vs. 29-57%). These findings suggest that different groups of parents might want different types of services.

- **Parents sought support from a variety of sources.**

Parents looking for support in their parenting were most likely to use books or magazines, family members, health care professionals, and their care or educational program provider. Least likely to be used were parent support groups. When asked if the respondent would go to a place where parents can meet with other parents and can find training, resources or services at a minimal cost, 60% of parents said they would.

- **Many parents are receptive to parenting education.**

Forty percent of parents said they would be interested in a home visit from someone trained to talk about parenting and help them understand their child's development. More lower-income (53% and 41%) than upper-income families (37% and 32%) said they would welcome such a home visit. Dual-earner and two-parent single-earner families were least likely to welcome such a home visit (36% and 38% respectively), while employed single-parent families and unemployed parent families were more frequently interested in such a home visit (47% and 54% respectively).

- **Low income parents were less likely than other parents to engage in activities likely to prepare their children for school on a daily basis.**

Most parents reported reading to their child, telling stories with the child, and singing songs or playing music nearly once a day. Low-income parents and less educated parents tended to engage in such activities less frequently than higher income parents. At least once a month, most families engaged in community educational activities such as visiting a library, going to a play, concert or other live show; visiting a zoo, aquarium, or children's museum; or talking about family history or ethnic heritage. Parents with higher education levels and households with higher incomes participated in these activities more than other types of families (1.8 vs. 1.4 times on average per month).

- **Most parents thought government should have at least some responsibility in helping children become reading ready.**

A majority (56%) of the sample said government should have some responsibility; and 16% said that government should take a lot of responsibility in helping children become reading ready. (See Figure D.) This opinion did not vary by geographic location, family income, or respondents' levels of education.

Eighty-eight percent of the sample supported the spending of tax dollars on early care and education facilities and programs. Ranging from 83% to 95%, there were no differences in the support of tax dollars by geographic location or family characteristics.

### **CHILD CARE, EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, AND THE LABOR MARKET**

- **Families differed in the types and amount of care they used based on their earning status.**

Two-parent families with dual earners used Family Care (32% vs. 3-12%) and Program/Center Care (33% vs. 3-17%) more than other types of families and arrangements. Two-parent families with one earner were least likely to use any kind of nonparental care. Presumably one parent is available to care for the young child. Families with a single employed parent were most likely to use Program/Center Care (40% vs. 3-30%) and used Center-based care for longer amounts of time than other types of families (40% vs. 20% and 33%).

Children of two employed parents (29%) and children of an employed single parent (43%) spent the most time in a child care or educational arrangement. Children of single working parents were most often in more than a traditional full-time amount (over 50 hours a week) of care or educational programming (16% vs. 3-10% for all other groups).

The amount of time children spent in non-parental care did not seem to differ by family income levels, except for the highest income category. More children from families making over \$100,000 spent between 35 to 49 hours in some type of care arrangement (28% vs. 4-17% for all other groups). It may be that families with high incomes were frequently also dual-earner families, creating the need for more hours of care in their absence.

▪ **Nearly a quarter of parents lost time from work for reasons linked to child care usage.**

Losing between 1 and 4 days of work because of care issues occurred for 24% of the working respondents during the past year. Thirteen percent of employed respondents had lost between 5 and 10 working days in the past year.

▪ **Employers offered benefits to parents. Most parents who had access to benefits used them.**

Respondents were asked about three benefits that might have been provided by their employer. Employers offered flexible work hours to over half (57%) of the respondents. The ability to take one's child to work was offered less frequently, to 20% of respondents; and referral services for care and education were offered to about 15% of the respondents. Upper-income workers were more likely to be offered each of these benefits than lower-income workers.

Ninety percent of respondents whose employers offered flexible hours used this benefit. All respondents who had the benefit of taking their child to work had done so. Less than 5% used the referral services offered by their employer.

## **SERVICES TO SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES**

▪ **Nearly a fifth of Pennsylvania parents reported that their children had some kind of special need.**

Eighteen percent of PA families reported that their children had some kind of special need relating to a health or physical disability. The most common special needs were asthma (8%), visual problems (8%), and allergies (5%).

▪ **Fewer than 3% of parents of children under 6 years of age reported that their children had behavioral problems.**

The 3% rate that parents reported is about half that which would be expected in a sample of this nature using professional observation and diagnosis. Parents may be underreporting

behavioral problems, either because they do not observe them until their child enters situations with other children or because parents have difficulty recognizing their child's behavioral problems. These data suggest that parents may benefit from early screening efforts and early intervention problems. When parents did report a behavioral problem, they were most likely to seek help from a physician (36%), religious counselor (32%), or a psychologist/psychotherapist (24%). Just over a third of the children with behavioral problems received early intervention from the State, and 20% of the children with behavioral problems had an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individual Education Program (IEP). Care for children with behavioral problems was most often provided in the child care or educational setting by the child's provider or teacher (48%, or by someone brought into the care or educational setting (36%). Half of parents reporting that their children had behavioral problems also reported that their children had made some or a lot of improvements.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Child care and early childhood education are important issues to a majority of Pennsylvania families.**

More than two-thirds of Pennsylvania families had their young children in a child care arrangement or educational program on a regular basis. Forty-three percent of children under the age of 6 years were in a care or educational program at least 20 hours a week, and a quarter of children were in care or an educational program at least 35 hours per week. The similarities across metropolitan, small cities, and rural areas suggest that child care and educational concerns are pervasive across the state.

- **State leadership on child care and early childhood education would be beneficial to parents.**

A majority of parents believed that state government should be active in helping prepare children for formal schooling. Eighty-eight percent of parents supported the spending of tax dollars on early care and education programs.

- **Mechanisms are needed to enable parents to assess the quality of child care and educational settings.**

Parents across the nation, not just in Pennsylvania, tend to overestimate the quality of child care and educational programs that they use. Parents may need more help in identifying the features of high quality care and educational programs.

- **Increased information about preschool and kindergarten opportunities for Pennsylvania children is needed.**

More than half of Pennsylvania's 3- and 4-year-old children receive no regular educational programming outside the home that would prepare them for school entry. In addition, low-income families and less educated parents were *less* likely to use such programs than other families. Further study is needed on whether the lack of participation in kindergarten seen in the study is due to the lack of availability, affected by state mandated school-age cutoffs, parental choice, or some combination of these factors.

At the same time, parents across the state, especially those in low-income families and those with lower levels of education, are concerned about preparing their children to become reading ready. Since parents with children in kindergarten appear most satisfied with their children's opportunities for cognitive and social development, increasing kindergarten opportunities might address many of these parents' concerns.

- **The availability of full-day kindergarten should be increased.**

Families may find it difficult to use part-day kindergarten because they have to make supplemental child care arrangements to provide child care during the time the parents are employed out of the home. Increasing the availability of full-time kindergarten programs may ensure that more children are in kindergarten.

- **The quality of educational content (social and cognitive) in children's early education programming should be made more consistent across the continuum of providers.**

Approximately a third of families reported that there was room for improvement in their child's care or educational arrangement, and low-income families and families with less educated parents were concerned about whether their children were learning enough in their education settings. By developing and funding training opportunities for child care providers and early education teachers, the educational content (social and cognitive) of children's programs should increase.

- **The costs of child care and education are high and often unaffordable for Pennsylvania's lowest-income families.**

Low-income families paid at least twice as much of their annual incomes for child care and education as did upper-income families, suggesting that child care is more of a burden to these families than to other families.

- **Families need more help in learning about and accessing child care subsidies.**

We estimate that only about half of Pennsylvania families with children in Family Care or Program/Center Care were receiving the subsidies for which they were eligible. Two-parent eligible families were less likely to receive subsidies than single-parent eligible families. Heightened awareness of subsidy eligibility and efforts to eliminate regulatory barriers to subsidy use may result in more families receiving the subsidies they need.

- **Transportation for early childhood programming may not be as much of a problem in Pennsylvania as has been thought.**

Only 10% of Pennsylvania parents, regardless of where they lived, said transportation was a problem; most parents traveled less than 10 minutes to take their children to their care or educational arrangement. Nevertheless, the State should seek to monitor transportation issues, identify problems where they exist, and offer solutions to ensure access to kindergarten and quality educational programming.

- **Increased parenting supports are needed for parents and families, especially for low-income, less educated parents.**

About a third of parents throughout the State were concerned about child development issues nearly all the time. Low-income parents, less educated parents, and Latino parents were most concerned about raising their children well, and said they could use more help in the form of more resources, increased parent training programs, and home visits.

- **Child care is an important employment issue, and the State can encourage employers to invest in child care and education for children and offer child care benefits to parents at all income levels.**

Investing in child care and education is likely to improve worker productivity. Nearly a quarter of parents lost time from work for child care-related reasons, such as illness and the high cost of child care. Employers can be encouraged to extend benefits to low-income as well as upper-income working parents. Further investigation of the effectiveness of employer benefits for helping employed parents meet their children's needs is warranted.

- **Adequate caregiver training for special needs children needs to be assured.**

Special needs children and children with behavioral problems are most often treated within the context of the child care or educational setting. Child care providers and early

childhood educators need to be appropriately trained to deliver care for children with special needs and behavioral problems.

- **Behavioral screening and intervention tools and benchmark services should be made available for all parents.**

Survey parents may be under-reporting behavioral problems. Since early intervention services are available and effective, the State needs to play a role in ensuring that behavioral problems are detected as early as possible. Providing parents more information about age appropriate behavior and easily accessible evaluation programs may help ensure that parents seek help when they need it.

### **FUTURE RESEARCH ISSUES**

The Governor's Task Force examination of care and educational programming for young children highlights the steps Pennsylvania can take to put in place a quality care and educational system for young children. With this report comes the recognition that this will take time, requiring that educational investments be accompanied by research that monitors Pennsylvania's progress as it goes down this path. This research has identified a number of important issues that will require continual investigation. We recommend that research on Pennsylvania families continue along the following lines.

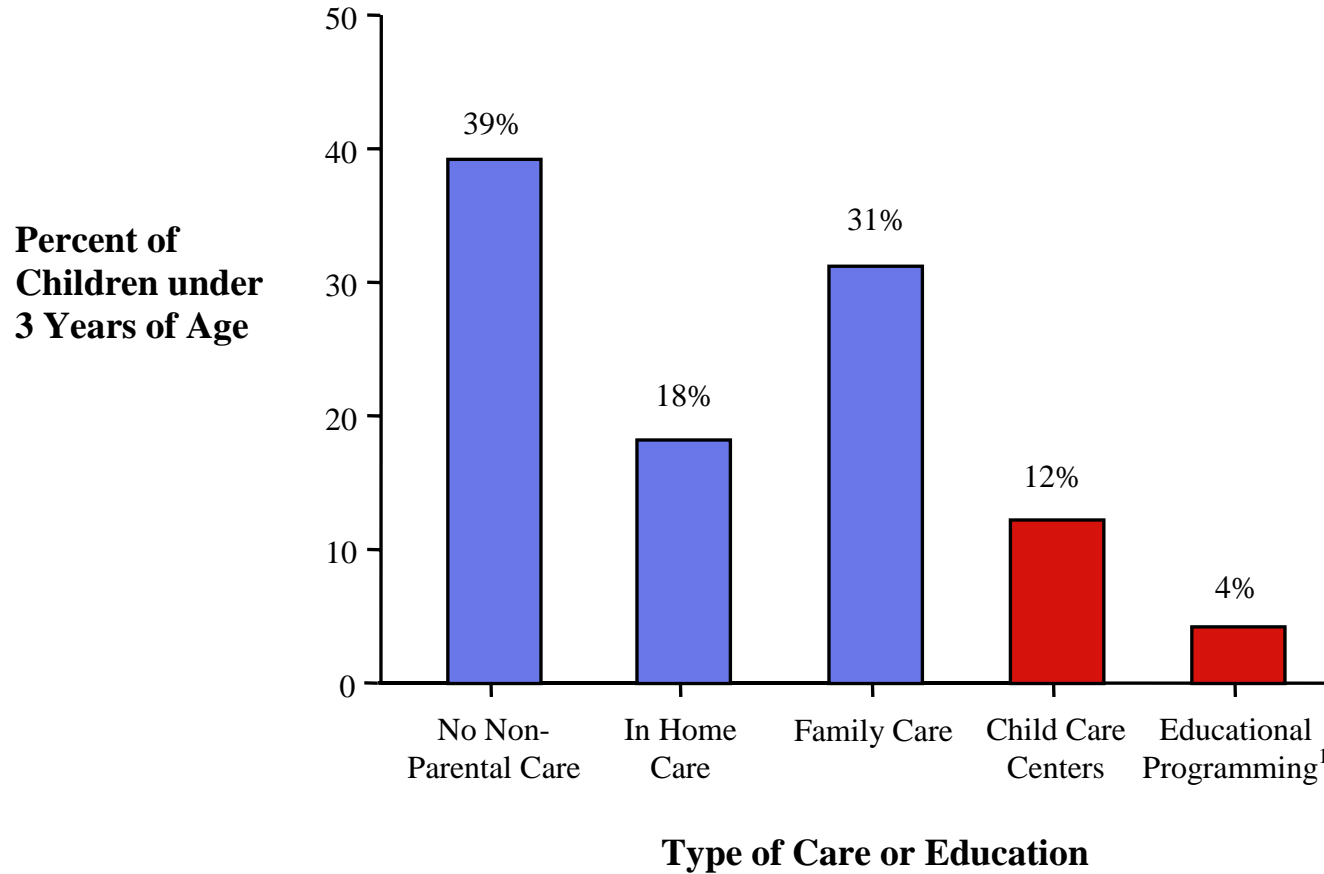
Periodic survey updates. Using the data in this report as benchmarks, periodic surveys of Pennsylvania families can review changes in the needs of Pennsylvania families and review the State's progress as it seeks to provide increasingly valuable services to families. We need to continually monitor what families are doing to manage work and family with the goal of ensuring that children are in appropriate facilities that will benefit them over the short- and long-term. While programs will be evaluated to see whether state expenditures are meeting their goals, periodic family surveys will establish whether the goals are still valid. Cooperative survey

planning among researchers, applied specialists and policymakers will ensure that researchers ask timely and relevant questions of families.

Are families with special needs children being adequately served? More information is needed from parents of special needs children to see what kinds of child programming they are using and whether it is meeting the needs of the entire family.

Effects of geographic area and family characteristics. The findings of this report suggest that geographic, income and ethnic differences exist in child care and educational usage patterns, parental needs, parental concerns, child care usage, and subsidy uptake rates. Educational programming is more frequently used by wealthier, more educated parents. To see whether the State's increased early care and education efforts are meeting the needs of all Pennsylvania families, both focus groups and large surveys of families from a variety of backgrounds and ethnic groups are necessary. Are there differences among families of different backgrounds in the kinds of early childhood services that they require? Why are not more families using kindergarten services provided by their school districts? As kindergarten and parenting support services become increasingly available to families, are all families equally benefiting? Are increased parental support systems meeting the greater need among low-income and less educated families? Why are Pennsylvania's low-income families not accessing the subsidies to which they are entitled? Are there transportation, structural and informational barriers that can be reduced to ensure that all Pennsylvania children have access to high quality educational services? These questions, and many others, can be addressed with high quality research so that programs may be developed that can most efficiently and fairly service families with young children.

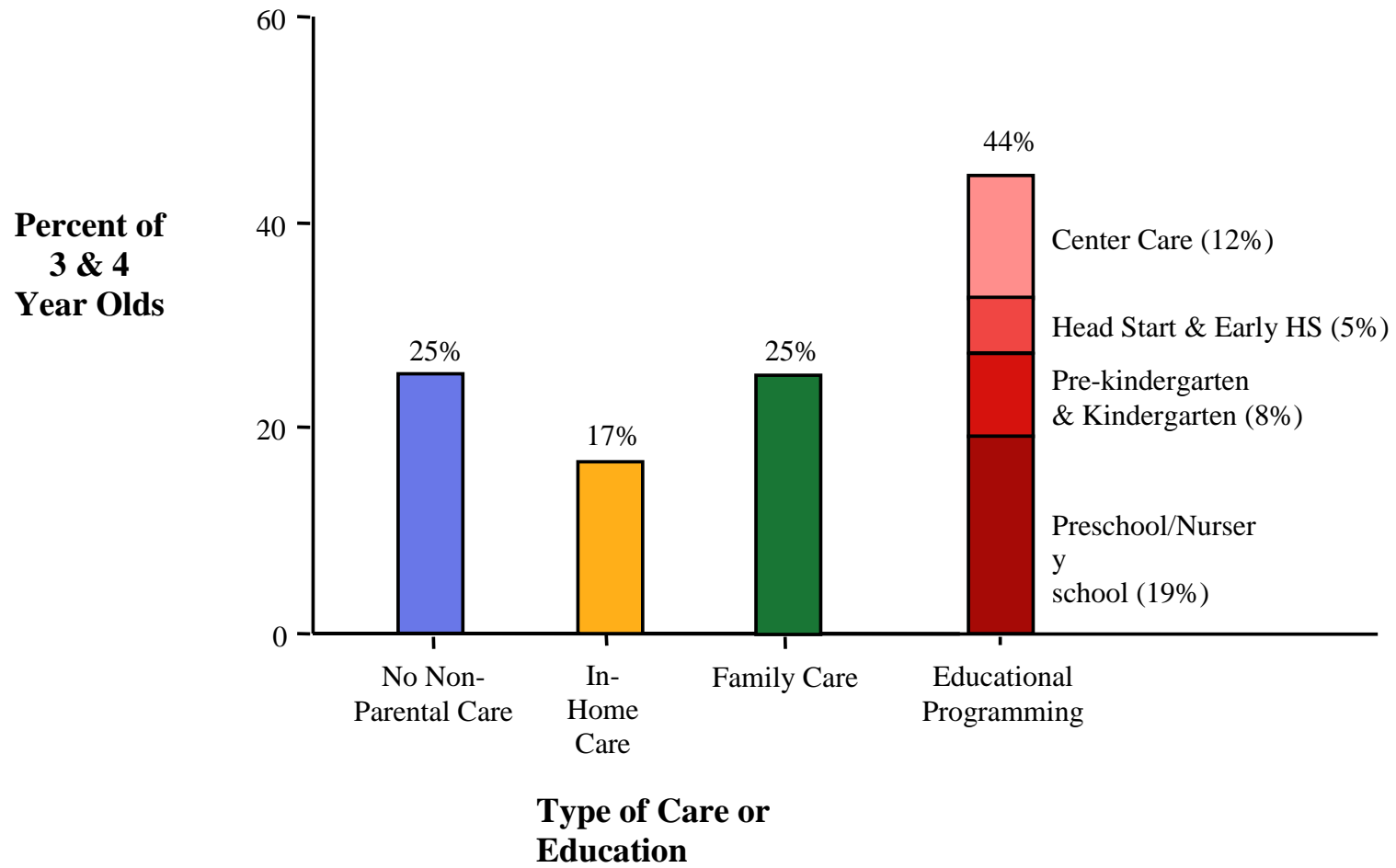
**Figure A. Primary Arrangements for Children under 3 Years of Age**



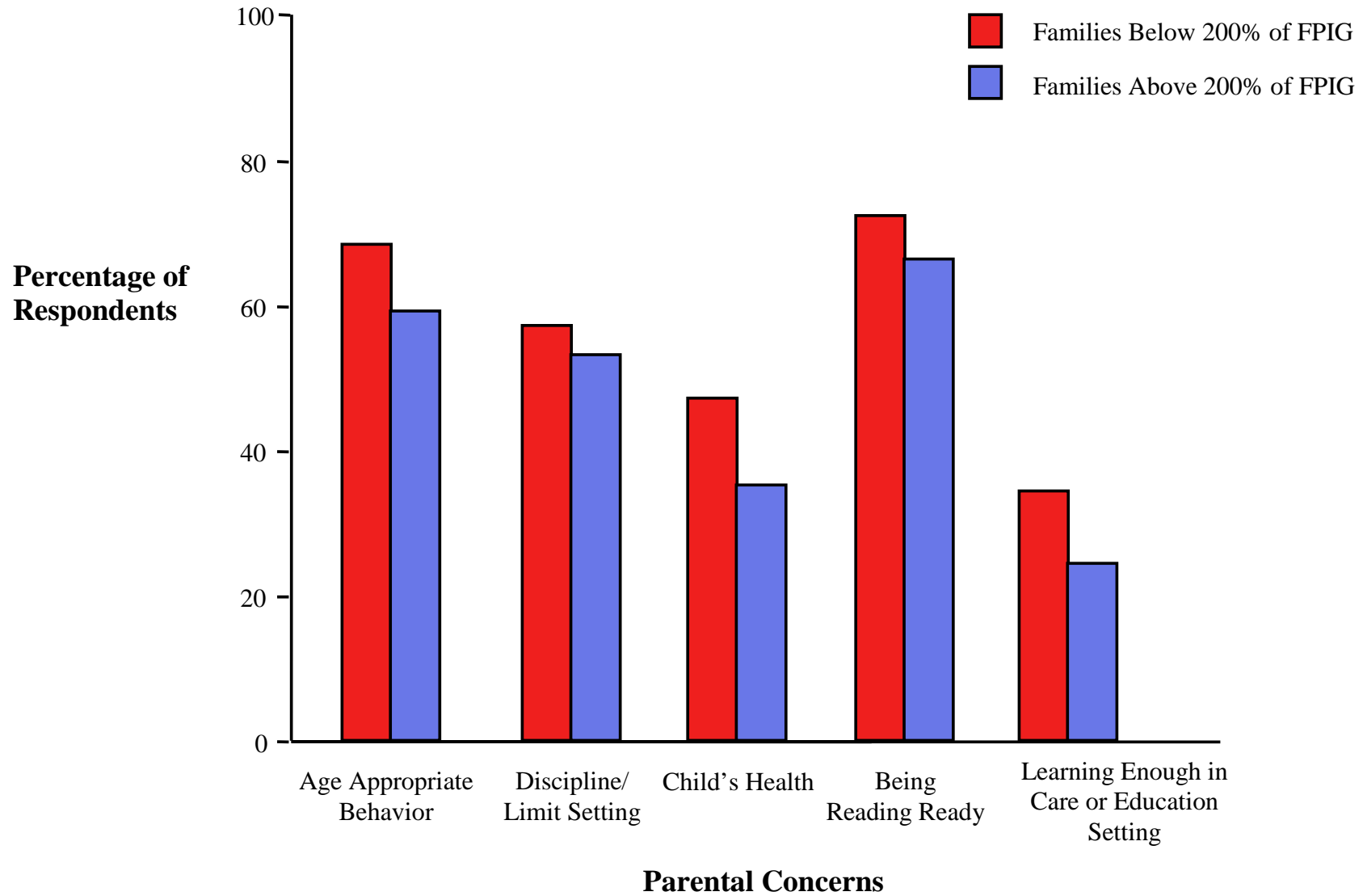
**Note:**

<sup>1</sup> Educational Programming includes preschool/nursery school, pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, Head Start or Early Head Start

**Figure B. Percent of 3 and 4 Year Olds in Different Educational Programs**



**Figure C. Percent of Parents Who Are Concerned about Issues Related to their Child’s Development “often” or “all the time”**



**Figure D. How Much of a Role Should Government Play in Helping Children to Become Reading Ready?**

