



Early Childhood Education Families Research



The Early Childhood Education Families Research was commissioned by the department in order to develop a deeper understanding of the decision making process for parents across NSW about early childhood education. This study focuses on how parents make decisions on enrolment, choose a provider and their views on sector quality, the benefits of attendance and the transition to school.



Data collection

The department engaged a market research company to conduct both qualitative and quantitative research which included an online survey, focus groups and in-depth interviews. Parents or caregivers of children aged 4-6 who were both attending or not attending ECE were invited to participate.

Focus groups were held in different locations across Sydney and locations were chosen to capture a range of enrolment types and parents of socio-economic status. Parents of Aboriginal backgrounds, children with disabilities, and of a language background other than English were also targeted due to the fact that they generally participate in ECE at a lower rate.



1,143

Online survey responses



12

Focus groups



19

In-depth Interviews

Key Research Findings

Access to Information

How parents obtain information and make decisions about early childhood education



Parent, friendship groups and family



Online searching



On-street signage and advertising



Face to face visits

76% of parents surveyed felt satisfied with the information that was available to them.

The survey showed that parents use a broad combination of sources. The most common source of information was family and friends. The survey also found that many parents relied on on-street signage and advertising as their main source of information about prospective ECE services.

Choice of Provider

Most parents secured a place for their child at their first choice

The survey found that more than 50% of parents who had children on a waiting list secured a place in less than six months.

84% secured a place at their first choice of early childhood education

60% Spent no time on a waiting list

39% Enrolled their child for 3 days

33% Enrolled their child for 2 days

Parents want to feel comfortable leaving their child

Parents said they feel most comfortable when dealing with friendly and competent staff, and feel that staff at the service made them feel more comfortable by communicating openly and positively engaging with them and their children. Parents are also looking for a place near home or work, or on a travel route when making a choice about which service to choose.



"...that whole experience of 'did you feel that the people were honest when they were talking to you... did they seem competent... did your kid seem to be enjoying themselves'... all those little things, it's not one thing you can put your finger on..."



"A decent playground, a good atmosphere when you come in and you know that they're going to have a good time and there's plenty of fun things to do that are educational as well."





Sector Quality

What quality looks like to parents

68% Relationship between staff and children

65% Child is learning and developing

59% Child feels safe

56% Educational program

The study found that quality is a very broad term for parents and they find it quite difficult to define. There were however some common themes. Parents were open in sharing and the focus groups and interviews showed us that quality can also be very personal.

“Do they love and appreciate and want the best for my kids when I’m not there? I’d say that’s quality.”



“I just want to make sure my child is learning all the things that they should learn at that age... I think it’s really important that they have a formal process for learning or education.”



Benefits of attending ECE

Parents acknowledge the benefits of attending ECE

"I think it's important because children need to be around other children. It's not good for them to be with adults all the time. It has to be fun. Like a good childcare centre will have educational and fun things to do for the kids."



...it's nice to see them come home and be proud that they have learnt something new..."



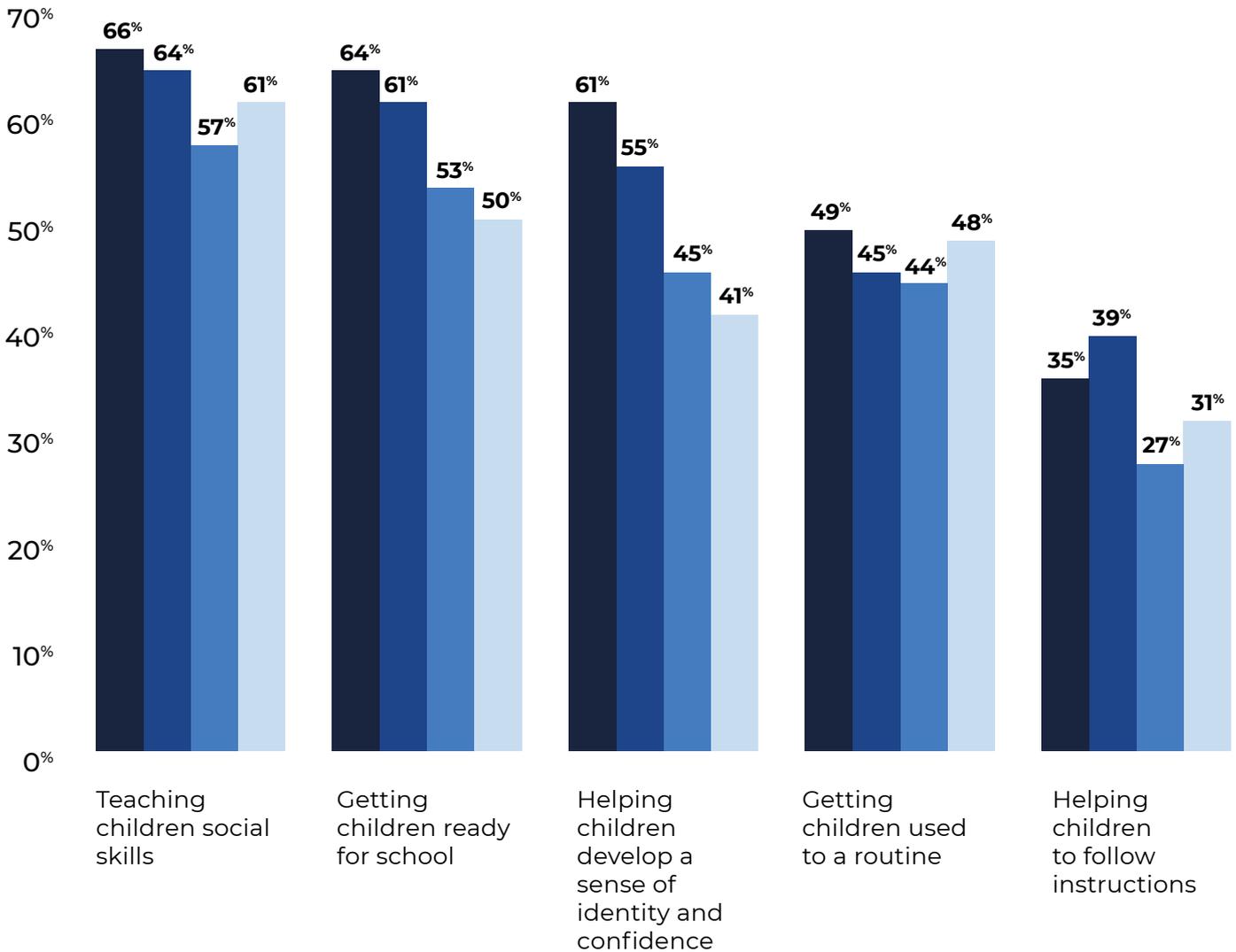
The study revealed that 64% of parents see the acquisition of social skills as the most important benefit of attending ECE. More than half of the parents who participated in the study saw the development of their child's confidence and identity as a perceived benefit. They also identified school readiness, learning routines, how to follow instructions and learning to read, write and count as the key benefits of ECE.

64% Social skills

60% School readiness

56% Confidence and identity

47% Get used to a routine



Staff Qualifications

79% of parents say they are aware of the qualifications of the room leader at the ECE service their child attends. Many parents also indicated they value skills, life experience and commitment over qualifications.

“Qualifications was a big one for me. I didn’t want someone to be caring for my child that I didn’t see fit to provide good enough care for her.”



“... experience and the passion to do it. You want them to love children and... want to be doing that job, because it’s a hard job.”





Non-attendance

Reasons children aren't attending ECE

28% someone can look after child

19% don't believe child needs to go

12% uncomfortable leaving child

The study also found many parents welcome the chance to spend one-on-one time with their child at this age and believe it is a unique moment that will pass quickly and that once their child has started primary school, this opportunity maybe lost.

Parents used other strategies to engage their child

While some parents choose not to send their child to ECE, many of them engage with their child at home through learning activities such as learning the alphabet, numbers and reading. Despite the decision to keep their child at home, many of these parents recognise their child might be missing out on the social and emotional development that interacting in an ECE environment offers.

Non-attendance

Reasons children aren't attending ECE

80% satisfied with support

85% agree child was ready for school

80% of parents are happy with the support they received with their child's transition to school from their ECE provider. They received support in a number of ways including learning and development checklists, engaging with other families about school and visiting a local primary school. Most parents also agreed their child was ready for school after attending ECE.

Parents also suggested some key improvements to the kinds of support they receive in transition their child to school.

53% Engage more with families about school

50% Share information about their child to kindergarten

47% Provide information about primary school curriculum

Awareness of National Quality Standard (NQS) and service ratings

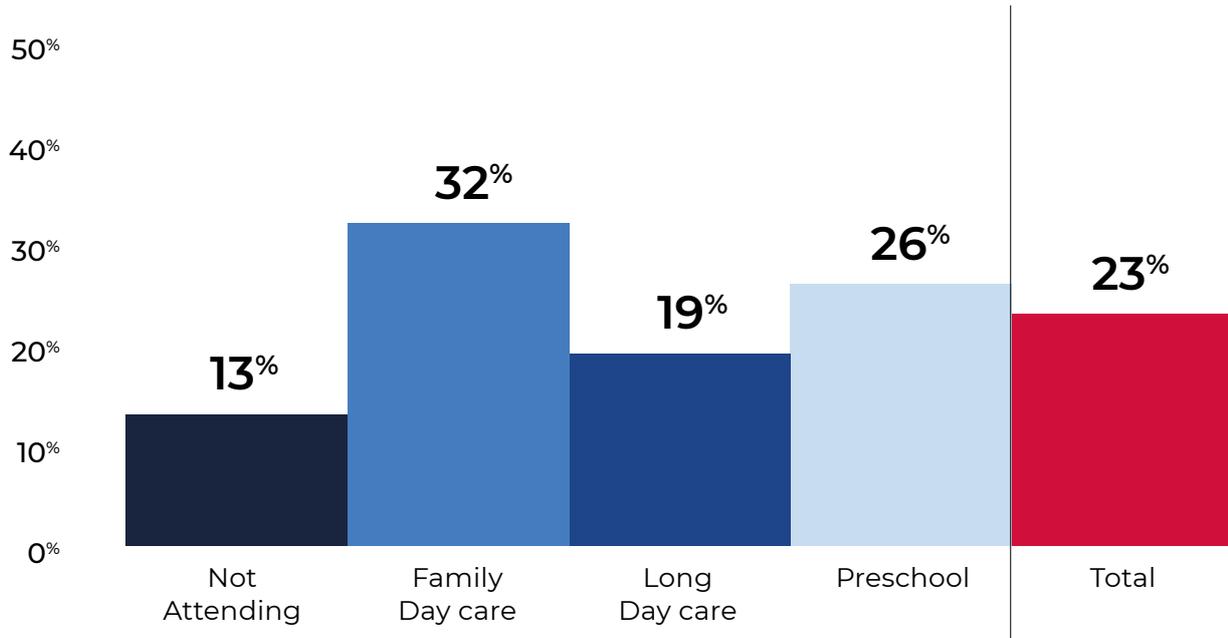
45% of parents with children attending ECE said they did not know very much about the NQS, and 23% of parents surveyed admitted to not having any knowledge of it at all.

Almost half of the parents who participated in the survey did not know the NQS rating of the service their child attended. Parents with children attending services with exceeding NQS rating were most likely to be aware of the rating.

Parents in metro areas of NSW or who have a child with a disability are much more likely to be familiar with the NQS and the rating of the service their child attended.

600 hours of a preschool program the year before school

Only 23% of parents are aware of the NSW Government’s target of every child attending 600 hours of a preschool program the year before school. This varied depending on the type of service their child attended.



Key Findings

Most parents believe attending an early childhood education service is beneficial for their child, enhancing their development and preparing the child for transitioning to school.

Participating in a high quality educational preschool program is a priority for some parents.

Awareness of the National Quality Standard is low among parents and families of young children.

The majority of parents are not aware of the government’s target of 600 hours of preschool program for every child in the year before school.

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