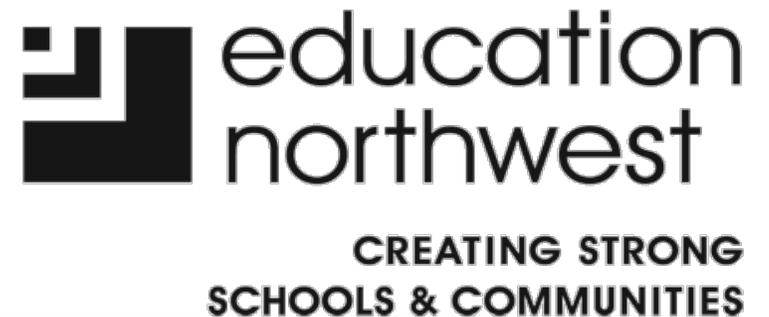


Preschool Needs Assessment

SUMMARY HIGHLIGHTS OF PARENT, PRESCHOOL, AND
COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS SURVEYS

Summary and Analyses
prepared by

Angela Roccograndi



Presented by

Sara Loewen, Regional Instructional Specialist, DPHHS

Montana Preschool Development Grant

- In winter 2014 the U.S. Department of Education awarded the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) and the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) a \$10 million Preschool Development Grant (PDG) to:
 - **build, develop, and expand high-quality preschool programs so that more children from low-and moderate-income families enter ready to succeed in kindergarten and in life.**
- One component was for local Best Beginnings Coalitions to conduct a preschool needs assessment to identify needs and children eligible for enrollment in MPDG-funded preschool centers.

Survey Development and Administration

- Summer 2015 MPDG-funded Best Beginnings Coalition members drafted an initial list of needs assessment survey items
- Reviewed by Best Beginnings Advisory Committee
- September 2015 DPHHS submitted to Education Northwest.
 - Evaluators created 4 surveys
 - Community-based organizations working with families with young children
 - Preschool Providers
 - Parents with a child enrolled in preschool
 - Parents without a child enrolled in preschool

Survey Participation

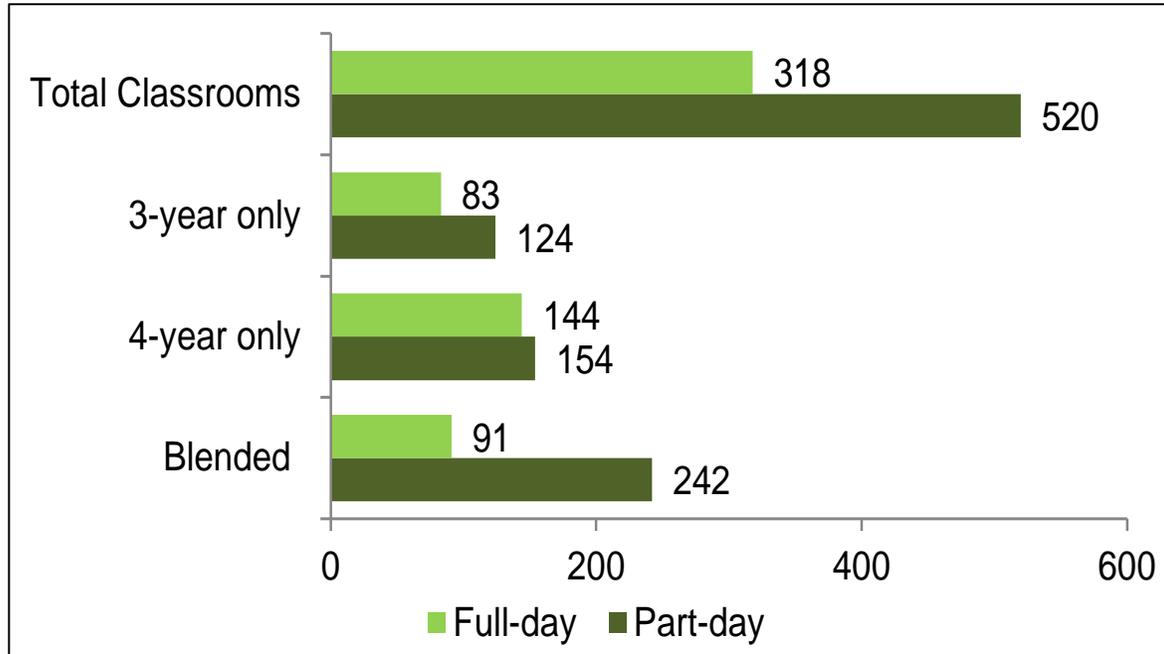
- Parents were more likely than community-based organization or preschool administrators to complete the survey
 - 84% participation rate
 - One quarter of responses necessary to provide reliable county-level results
- Community-based organization had a 62% participation rate
- Preschool administrators had 58%
 - Most preschool administrators completing the survey were from private (49%) facilities; public facilities made up 33% of sample, and Head Start facilities comprised 18% percent of completers.

Parent Information

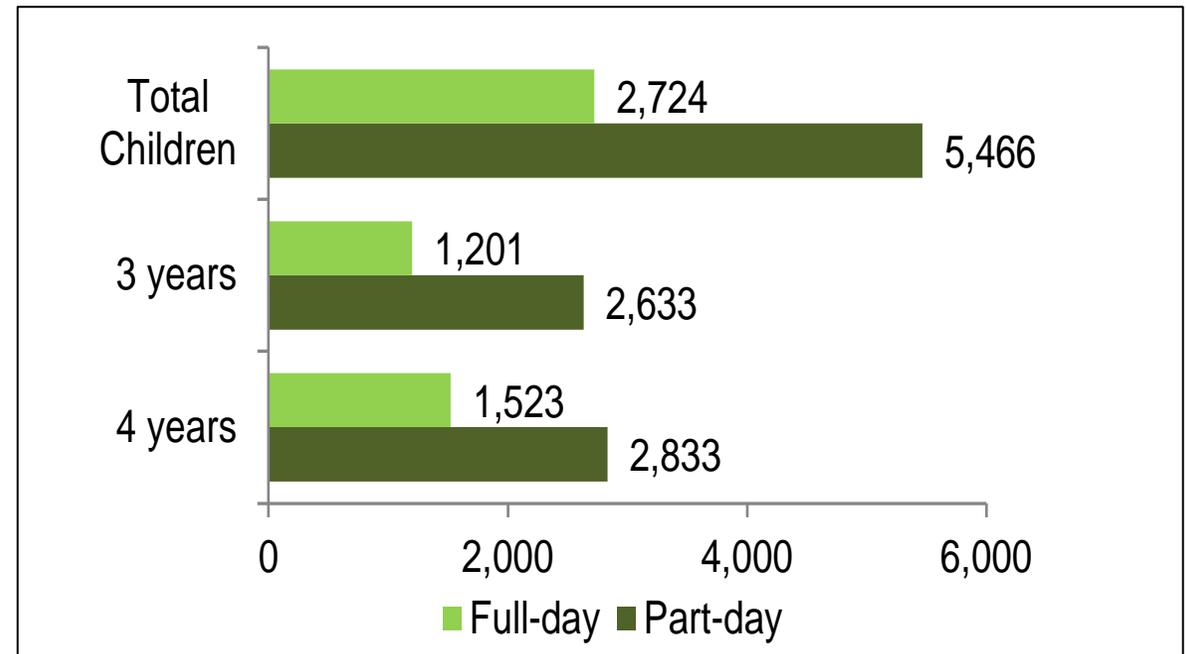
- 71% had a child currently enrolled
 - 15% of these received a Best Beginnings Scholarship
- 17% did not have a child currently enrolled, but wanted their child enrolled in a preschool
- 13% did not have a child enrolled, and did not want their child enrolled

Classrooms and Enrollment

Classrooms, by Age Group and Program Type



Enrollment, by Age Group and Program Type



Preschool Practices

Lead Teachers

- 602 lead teachers providing instruction to 3- and 4-year old preschool children:
 - 41% held a bachelor's degree
 - 156 or 26% held a Montana State Educator's license.
 - 6% held a master's degree
 - 42% had attended some college or held an associate's degree
 - 12% had some high school or a diploma/GED

Paraprofessionals

- Total of 505 paraprofessionals assisting lead teachers who provided instruction to 3- and 4-year-old children in their preschool classrooms
- Paraprofessionals were equally educated across the preschool types.

Promoting Quality Practices

- 81% of preschools were licensed
- 65% participate in MT Early Childhood Project's Practitioner Registry
- 38% participate in the Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Program
- 85% of facilities provided professional development to classroom staff
- 58% of preschools administer formal assessments

Suspension/Expulsion

- Just 13% of facilities reported a suspension/expulsion in the last year
- 26 children suspended/expelled from 19 facilities
- Of these, 84% report the suspension/expulsion was the result of the provider being unable to meet the child's needs (such as challenging behaviors, developmental issues, or need for specialized services)

Factors Affecting Preschool Enrollment

Parental Considerations

- 📖 Preschool provides a safe and nurturing environment (96%)
- 📖 Preschool provides opportunities for children to play and learn (93%)
- 📖 Preschool with well-trained staff members (86%)
- 📖 Preschool provides time for children to play outside (80%)
- 📖 Preschool is licensed (80%)

Parents were least concerned about

- Identified several issues with high percentages of parents responding “not at all” important:
- Preschools provide transportation to/from childcare (63%)
- Preschool participates in the Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Program (42%)
- Preschool provides half day (30%)
- Preschool provides full-day or extended-day (29%)
- Preschool has capacity to serve children with diverse needs (27%)

Parental Expectations

Areas where at least 75 percent of parents indicated their child's preschool "very much" met their expectations included:

- 📖 Opportunities for children to play and learn (89%)
- 📖 Availability of licensed preschool programs (88%)
- 📖 Safe and nurturing preschool environments (87%)
- 📖 Opportunity for outdoor time (82%)
- 📖 Preschool availability/choice (number of programs) (75%)

Factors Preventing Enrollment

- 📖 Preschool cost/affordability (56%)
- 📖 Preschool availability/choice (number of programs) (44%)
- 📖 Safe and nurturing preschool environments (38%)
- 📖 Well-trained preschool staff members (37%)
- 📖 Availability of licensed preschool programs (33%)

Community Needs

- ▣ Preschool-provided transportation to/from childcare
- ▣ Preschool staff member training
- ▣ Enough qualified preschool staff members (workforce)
- ▣ Cost/affordability
- ▣ Preschool availability/choice/distribution
- ▣ Capacity to serve a diverse child population
- ▣ Availability of full-day or extended-day options

Preschool Curriculum

'Very' Important for Children to learn

- 📖 Building relationships with adults and other children
- 📖 Following rules and making safe choices
- 📖 Building confidence in their abilities
- 📖 Positively expressing feelings and emotions
- 📖 Learning about books and reading
- 📖 Speaking
- 📖 Listening comprehension
- 📖 Developing fine motor skills

Preschools meeting expectations

- 📖 Learning about math (-17 percentage point difference)
- 📖 Learning about science (-16)
- 📖 **Building confidence in their abilities (-16)**
- 📖 Appreciating different cultures and learning about the community (-14)
- 📖 **Positively expressing feelings and emotions (-13)**
- 📖 Learning about writing (-13)
- 📖 Learning about books and reading (-12)
- 📖 Eating healthy and exercising (-12)
- 📖 Learning about creative arts (-12)
- 📖 Developing gross motor skills (-11)
- 📖 **Listening comprehension (-10)**
- 📖 Learning about social studies (-10)

Comments

Affordable, quality preschool is crucial. 75% of my paycheck goes toward preschool/daycare costs. It makes it very difficult for my husband and I to make ends meet. We both have full time jobs to provide for our family, but it is still difficult with student loans, insurance costs, groceries, gas, mortgage, etc. We do the best to provide what we can. (Parent)

Quality pre-schools should be available to lower SES families. Some families are put in a tough situation when the cost of quality pre-school for their children exceeds their entire income. (Parent)

Comments

It appears to be very difficult to find preschool for those parents who are on the line income wise. You either end up paying a lot, or else your child can't go because you can't afford to pay for preschool. This has been very frustrating. (Parent)

High quality programs have extensive wait lists, this means 1+year of wait list time! (Parent)

There is a strong need for quality preschool in our area. The preschools that we currently have are maxed out and are very difficult to get into. (Parent)

Comments from Administrators

Affordability is HUGE. There are many parents I know that cannot send their children to preschool because they simply cannot afford it. It's hard when they hear the statistical data showing that children have a better success rate when they do attend school before preschool, but it has been expressed to me that parents feel like they are failing when they cannot afford that opportunity simply because of money. (Preschool Administrator)

There are lots of places claiming to be preschools, but very few are actually preschools. Most are daycare programs that do not have actual preschool experiences. We need to recognize the value in Early childhood education as a whole, especially preschool. (Preschool Administrator)

Offering a quality wage and benefit package that is worthy enough to recruit quality staff, including the director. This is difficult to do if overhead costs continue to rise without additional funding support. (Preschool Administrator)

Considerations

Preschool Quality

- 📖 Address training/workforce issues
- 📖 Use CLASS and ECERS data to ensure they are providing the best possible environments for child development
- 📖 Encourage enrollment in Best Beginnings STARS to Quality Program
- 📖 Become licensed facility and participate in MT Early Childhood Projects Practitioner Registry
- 📖 First Aid and CPR certifications

Parental/Community Concerns

- 📖 Affordable preschool options
- 📖 Encourage preschools to use social-emotional curriculum
- 📖 Public education campaign around importance and use of Montana Early Learning Standards
- 📖 Explore options for transportation to/from childcare
- 📖 Work with preschools to identify challenges in operating full-day/extended day programs
- 📖 Evaluate focus on work with Family Engagement Coordinators

Needs Assessment Outreach

-  Work with local MPDG-funded Best Beginning Coalitions to prepare for the administration of the needs assessment in fall 2016 so that they can obtain reliable, county-level results.
-  Obtain feedback from Best Beginnings Coalitions about their participation in the 2015 needs assessment process and work to improve the process for 2016.
-  For the 2016 needs assessment, consider using social media as another means of outreach. Help Best Beginnings Coalitions and Education Northwest identify a source for identifying the universe of preschools and community-based organizations working with young children in their county to improve and determine response rates.