



In partnership with

PEA RIDGE SCHOOL DISTRICT

"An Uncommon Education for All"



A Parent and Teacher Evaluation of Pea Ridge School District's Pre-K Program

Dr. Malachi Nichols – Director of Evaluation and Data Quality
September, 2019

A Message from ForwARd Arkansas Executive Director Susan Bonesteel Harriman

Research has proven that students with a strong start in school become educated, productive members of our workforce. While strides have been made — most notably, an increase of \$3 million in permanent funding for the Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) program during the 91st Arkansas General Assembly in 2017, ongoing investment in early childhood education is critical to improving educational outcomes in Arkansas.

Recognizing that the basis for sustained improvement resides with the local vision and capacity for equity and opportunity, community engagement and empowerment are the foundation for our work at ForwARd Arkansas. Alongside our efforts to increase funding for early childhood education, ForwARd Arkansas contracted with a top research firm to determine how the quality of Arkansas’s Pre-K data systems can be improved to provide more reliable longitudinal data. Based on ForwARd’s work, the Walton Family Foundation is currently funding further research on these topics.

Currently, ForwARd is involved in a “community-based data campaign” to empower local educators and parents in these five communities (Springdale, Pea Ridge, Lee County, Independence County and Crossett) that host a combined network of 54 schools to learn more about the effectiveness and efficiency of their Pre-K programs using current data and research methods. This campaign aligns with and supports our ongoing work to ensure that all Arkansas children and families, especially those in high-need areas, have access to high-quality Pre-K learning opportunities so students arrive at kindergarten ready to learn. This report, which focuses on the Pea Ridge School District in Northwest Arkansas, is one of a series of research briefs ForwARd will author as part of this “community-based data campaign.”

There are many pathways to change in Arkansas and we believe that access to quality, integrated longitudinal data to track outcomes between Pre-K, K-12, postsecondary education/training and workforce participation is essential to inform future planning and resource allocation.

In the months ahead, we will continue our work to raise awareness of the importance of early childhood education, while also continuing to advocate for policies and programs to advance education quality and equity, provide additional teaching supports and further improve Arkansas’s data systems. We invite you to join us in this important work.

Susan Bonesteel Harriman
Executive Director, ForwARd Arkansas



A Message from Pea Ridge School District Superintendent Rick Neal

Pea Ridge School District is innovative, providing personalized and customized learning that focuses on how the strengths and needs of individual students can best be addressed to allow them to make significant academic gains.

Pea Ridge School District and our community have worked collaboratively to build one of the best districts in the state, and that goal is reflected in our five-year plan to improve student achievement and create a roadmap for students after graduation through personalized and blended learning, virtual environments and traditional classroom instruction. To provide unique experiential opportunities and encourage our students to develop top-quality "employability" skills for today's workforce, we provide a wide range of unique experiential opportunities for students who both gain academic and life skills through internships and working with mentors.

Our robust Pre-K program provides a secure and caring environment that offers four-year-old children the opportunity to discover, share, make friends, grow and begin the journey of lifelong learning. The Pea Ridge Pre-K program has been recognized as an Arkansas Better Beginnings 3-star provider in quality child care and educational programs—the highest level a provider can receive, which signifies the best quality of child care in Arkansas. This rating was earned based on five quality components of the Pea Ridge Pre-K program: administration, staff qualifications and professional development, learning environment, environmental assessment and child health and development.

We take great pride in the fact that our pre-K program provides students with the skills and information they need for kindergarten and the bright future ahead of them by supporting their early learning in math, science and literacy, as well as the development of the social and academic skills that will lead to success in school and life.

ForwARd Arkansas has been an excellent partner to Pea Ridge School District in supporting our efforts to further improve our programs and to engage our parents, staff and community in a collaborative effort to expand access and opportunity for all our students.

We are carefully reviewing the findings of this report to support our ability to continue prepare our Pre-K students for success in kindergarten and beyond, to work with parents and our community to ensure they are aware of our excellent Pre-K program, and to inform the development of additional professional development programs for our excellent Pre-K teachers and staff.

Rick Neal
Superintendent, Pea Ridge School District



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Academic research generally indicates higher educational outcomes for Pre-K attendees compared to their peers who had no Pre-K experience (DeAngelis et al., 2018). In addition, Arkansas specific research tends to confirm the positive effects, found nationwide (Hustedt et al., 2015). This report seeks to expound upon the existing literature and gain a more holistic understanding of the effects of Pre-K, by providing a parent and teacher perspective of district-provided Pre-K within an individual community. We survey Pre-K parents, Pre-K teachers, and Kindergarten parents during the Spring of the 2018-19 academic year. We analyze Pre-K parents' opinions of their children's Pre-K experience, the preparedness of Pre-K teachers, and Kindergarten parents' perceptions on how Pre-K prepared their children for kindergarten. Six research questions guide the analysis, and you can find the research questions and a summary of the findings below:

Research question 1: Are current Pre-K parents satisfied with their children's district-provided Pre-K experience?

- Over 90% of respondents are satisfied with their experience.
- Over 75% of parents experienced growth in every area of their children's language, social, self-care, motor, pre-academic, and emotional regulation skills.

Research question 2: What factors into parents' decisions when choosing the district-provided Pre-K program for their children?

- Having a program close to the school of siblings, providing high-quality academics, and possessing friendly and welcoming staff appeared in the top three preferences of parents most often.

Research question 3: Do Pre-K teachers feel that they are preparing their students for kindergarten?

- All of the respondents felt their efforts were adequately preparing their students for kindergarten.

Research question 4: Are there any perceived or actual systemic, organizational, and individual challenges to an optimal Pre-K program?

- Two circumstances teachers report not feeling trained to sufficiently handle are student behavior and teaching students who have experienced trauma (i.e., abuse, neglect, or household dysfunction).

Research question 5: What are the perspectives of kindergarten parents' of their children's early childhood experiences?

- Parents' whose children attended Community Center-Based Programs, Home Based Program, and District-provided Pre-K programs possessed the highest levels of satisfaction.

Research question 6: What factors into parents' decisions to not enroll their children into an early childhood program?

- The four factors at the forefront of parents' reasoning for not selecting an early childhood program include: 1. A desire to stay at home with their children, 2. Cost, 3. No transportation to the program, 4. No spots in the desired program.

DEFINITIONS

District-Provided Pre-K - District-provided Pre-K refers to the entire Pre-K program offered by the school district independent of Arkansas Better Chance status, sliding-scale enrollment, or other identifiable enrollment classifications.

INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE CONTEXT

According to a report by the National Institute for Early Education Research, the U.S. has about 1.5 million children enrolled in state-funded Pre-K programs (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2019). More specifically, state-funded programs serve 33% of the nation's 4-year-olds and 6% of the nation's 3-year-olds, numbers steadily climbing over the years (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2019). The increase in size and investment into state-funded Pre-K programs should naturally couple with a constant evaluation of the effectiveness and quality of the program.

Researchers are keen on the importance of evaluating Pre-K programs. In a rigorous and comprehensive review of the Pre-K research conducted in the U.S., overall Pre-K attendees experience boosts in both math and reading performance (DeAngelies et al., 2018). Such findings are comparable to the outcomes of Pre-K attendees in Arkansas. For example, Arkansas Pre-K attendees experience increases in elementary academic performance (Hustedt et al., 2015; Argue & Holland, 2017; Jung et al., 2013).

However, we should consider the effect and quality of Pre-K beyond the one-dimensional component of subsequent academic achievement (Pianta et al., 2005). Research shows that teachers' experience and training have associations with direct measures of quality (Pianta et al., 2005). In addition, parental perceptions of quality are modestly associated with program quality assessed by trained raters (Cryer and Burchinal, 1997; Mocan, 2007; Cryer et al., 2002). However, the connection is variable and sometimes nonexistent (Bassok et al., 2018). Such examples of various program characteristics and user perceptions, hint at the need to consider the effect and quality of Pre-K in a multidimensional way.

Therefore, the evaluation of Pre-K should take a holistic approach. Factors outside of subsequent attendees academic performance should be considered in the evaluation of Pre-K programs. The main goal of the report is to provide an analysis outside of academic achievement for one district-provided Pre-K program. We leverage the perspectives and voices of current Pre-K parents, Pre-K teachers, and Kindergarten parents. We employ three individual surveys to answer the following questions.

Pre-K Parents

1. Are current Pre-K parents satisfied with their children's district-provided Pre-K experience?
2. What factors into parents' decisions when choosing the district-provided Pre-K program for their children?

Pre-K Teachers

3. Do Pre-K teachers feel that they are preparing their students for kindergarten?
4. Are there any perceived or actual systemic, organizational, and individual challenges to an optimal Pre-K program?

Kindergarten Parents

5. What are the perspectives of kindergarten parents' of their children's early childhood experiences?

6. What factors into parents' decisions to not enroll their children into an early childhood program?

METHODOLOGY

Through three individual surveys, we aim to gain a general understanding of a district's Pre-K program through the lens of Pre-K parents, Pre-K teachers, and Kindergarten Parents. This section provides an overview of the survey tools used and the approach to surveying our three respective groups. The surveys used in each group used borrowed questions from existing surveys used in previous literature (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000; Irwin et al., 2014). The survey collection process began on March 5th, 2019, and completed on April 16th, 2019.

Pre-K Parents

The main objectives of the survey were two-fold. First, we wanted to gain a better understanding of each parents' perceptions of their children's Pre-K experiences. Second, we wanted to develop an understanding of a parent's selection process when choosing Pre-K. The survey included questions about satisfaction with the district-provided Pre-K program, mechanisms related to selecting the program, parental involvement, and general demographics. We administered paper surveys by sending surveys home with the students. Out of 40 surveys sent home, we received 28 surveys back, giving us a response rate of 70%.

Pre-K Teachers

Our goals for the Pre-K teachers' survey were the following. First, to gain an understanding of the preparedness of current Pre-K teachers to build upon students' academic and social skills. Second, to understand the perceived and actual systemic, organizational, and individual challenges to an optimal Pre-K program. The survey asked questions related to professional development training, classroom activities, perceptions of effectiveness, and general demographics. We administered paper surveys to the Pre-K staff to be completed during their planning time. We posted a 100% response rate with 4 out of 4 teachers completing the survey.

Kindergarten Parents

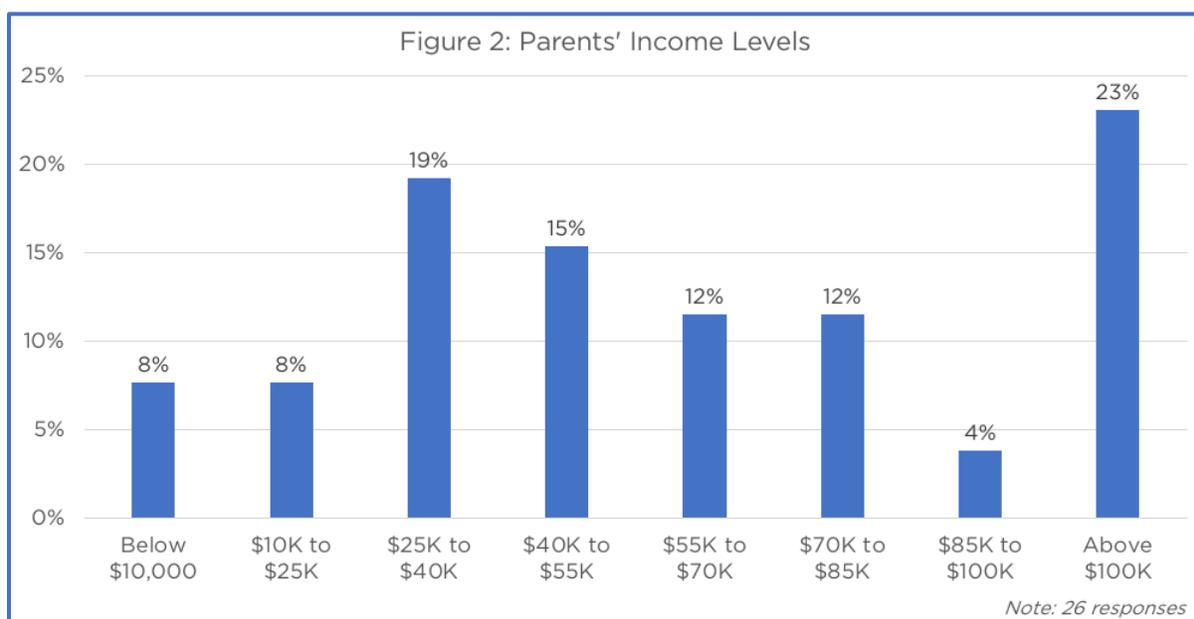
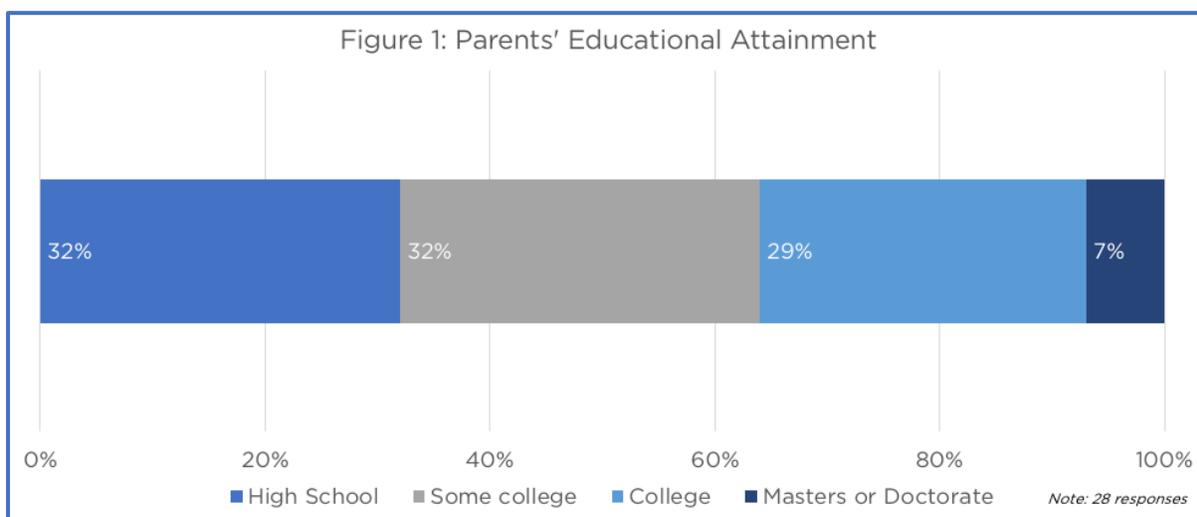
We had dual objectives for the kindergarten parent survey. First, to understand the perspectives of parents whose children had a district-provided Pre-K experience, on their children's preparedness and subsequent experiences in kindergarten. Second, to understand the views of parents whose children did not have a district-provided Pre-K experience on their children's readiness and subsequent experiences in kindergarten. The survey included questions centered on satisfaction with early childhood experience, factors related to choosing an early childhood experience, and demographics. We administered paper surveys by sending surveys home with the students. Out of 181 surveys sent home, we received 96 surveys back, giving us a response rate of about 53%.

RESULTS

Pre-K Parent Survey

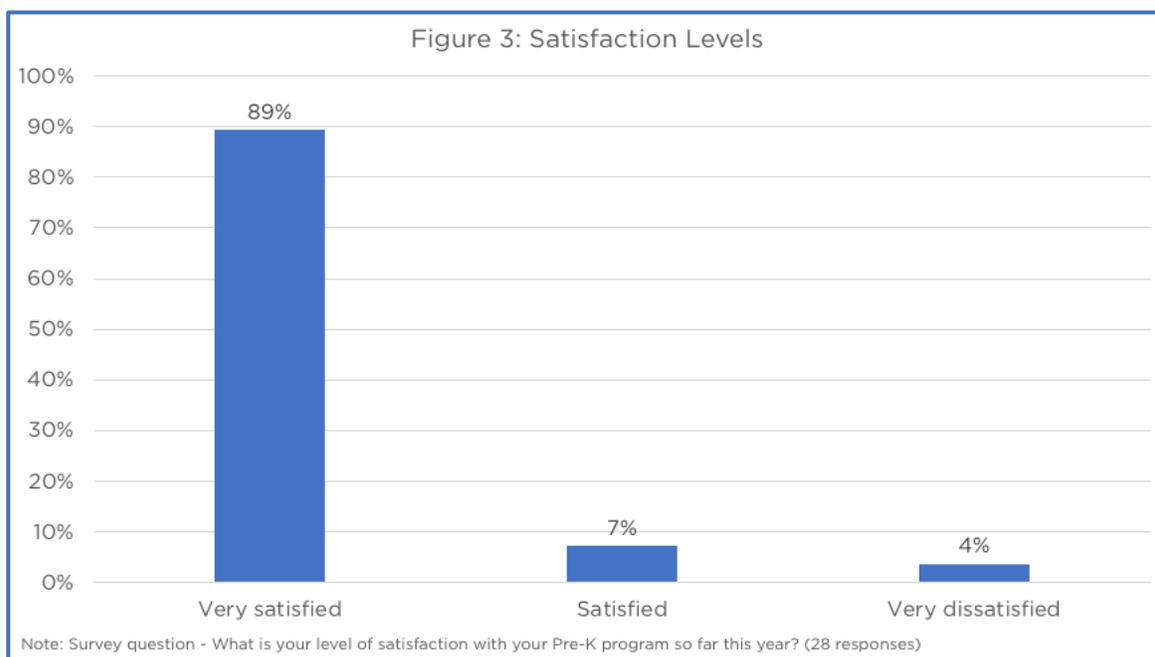
This section provides the responses from the Pre-K parent survey. The goal of the survey was to first understand each parents' perception of their children's Pre-K experience. Secondly, to pull apart the factors which influenced parents' choice in choosing the district-provided Pre-K program.

A majority of the respondents are Caucasian females (i.e. 96% white and 4% Hispanic; 82% female and 18% male) with a wide distribution of both educational attainment and income levels. Despite the lack of diversity in ethnicity captured, the respondents are similar to the surrounding local context, and the distribution of education and income provides us with a clear variety in perspective.



Are Current Pre-K Parents Satisfied With Their Children’s District-Provided Pre-K Experience?

In this section, we explore the parents’ perceptions of their children’s Pre-K experiences, currently enrolled at the time of completing the survey. The goal of the section is to gain a more holistic understanding of parental satisfaction regarding Pre-K. Overall, parents appear satisfied with their children’s experiences and see changes in their children across multiple areas of development. Over 90% of respondents are satisfied with their experiences and feel that Pre-K prepared their children for kindergarten, shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4. In addition, 75% of parents experienced growth in all areas of their children’s language, social, self-care, motor, pre-academic, and emotional regulation skills, shown in Table 1.



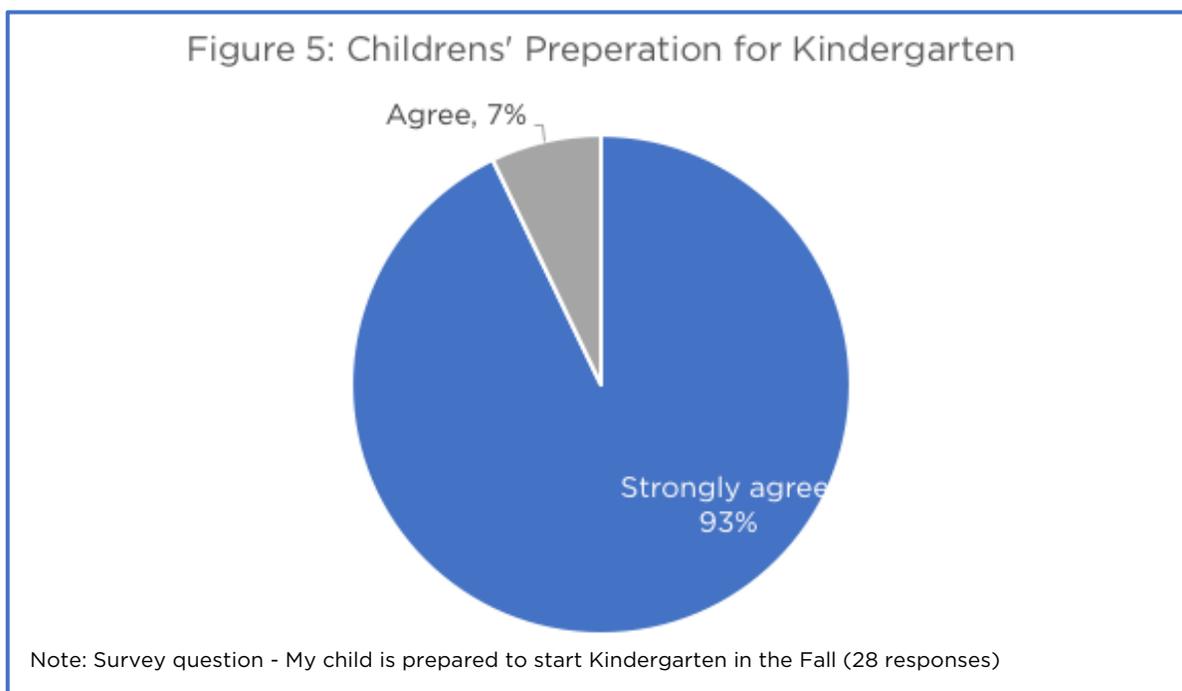


Table 1: Progression Areas During Pre-K

Survey question - I feel that my child has made progress during the preschool year in the following areas:	
	Response Percent
Language (understanding and using oral speech)	92.9%
Social (getting along with other children and adults)	92.9%
Self-care (taking care of his/her own needs, such as feeding, toileting, dressing, etc.)	92.9%
Motor (moving large muscles and using small muscles of the hands)	92.9%
Pre-academic (recognizing colors, printed name, letters of the alphabet, numbers, etc.)	100.0%
Emotional Regulation (calming themselves down after getting upset)	89.3%
All Six Areas	75.0%
<i>Notes: 28 total responses. Respondents were asked to select all that apply. All six areas is author calculated.</i>	

What Factors Into Parents' Decisions When Choosing The District-Provided Pre-K Program For Their Children?

Below is our attempt to understand the preferences of parents when selecting district-based Pre-K. From the responses, having a program close to the school of siblings, providing high-quality academics, and possessing friendly and welcoming staff appeared in the top three preferences most often.

Table 2: Factors When Choosing the District-Provided Pre-K Program

Survey question: How important were the following when choosing a Pre-K program for your child?	
	How many times in the top 3
	3
The program was close to my other child/children's school(s).	28
The program had high-quality academics.	22
The staff at the school were friendly and welcoming.	21
The program had a reputation for being safe.	11
I knew other families whose children attended the program.	8
The program provided full-day care.	5
The program was free/subsidized.	4
The program was in walking distance from where I live or work.	0
<i>Notes: 28 total responses. Respondents were asked to rank their top 3.</i>	

Pre-K Teacher Survey

In the following section, we seek to understand the perceived preparedness of current Pre-K teachers and to learn about the perceived and real systemic, organizational, and individual challenges to an optimal Pre-K program. Overall, teachers feel they are adequately preparing their students for kindergarten; however, they face a multitude of challenges in preparing their students. The four teachers in the sample are all Caucasian females; three of the four have college degrees, two of those degrees are in an early childhood discipline.

Do Pre-K Teachers Feel That They Are Preparing Their Students For Kindergarten?

Ultimately, Pre-K is designed to help students transition into kindergarten. All of the respondents felt their efforts were adequately preparing their students for kindergarten, shown in Table 3. However, the preparation is not without challenges.

Table 3: Pre-K Teachers' Perceptions of their Performance

Survey question: Do you feel that you are adequately preparing your students for kindergarten?	
Yes	100%
No	0%
<i>Notes: 4 total responses.</i>	

Pre-K Teachers' Perceptions of Preparation

As seen below in Table 4, teachers feel prepared to teach students who have no Pre-K experience. However, they do not feel sufficiently trained to handle student behavior and students who have experienced trauma, such as abuse, neglect, or household dysfunction, shown in Table 5. This revelation by teachers is an important

finding that can help inform teacher preparation programs and professional development.

Table 4: Preparation to Teach Diverse Groups of Students

Survey question: To what degree did your previous and/or current education or professional development prepare you to teach the following groups of children?				
	Not at all	A little	Some	A lot
Children who are migrants	0	1	1	1
Children who transfer into the school mid-year	0	1	2	1
Children who are immigrants	0	2	1	1
Children who have no pre-K experience	0	0	1	3
Children with limited English proficiency	0	2	1	1
Children who have social or behavioral difficulties	0	0	1	3
Children from low income families	1	0	1	2
Children with disabilities/special needs	0	1	1	2
Children who are academically advanced	0	1	1	2
Children who have mathematics difficulties	0	2	1	1
Children who are racial/ethnic minorities	1	0	2	1
Children who have reading difficulties	0	1	1	2

Notes: 4 total responses.

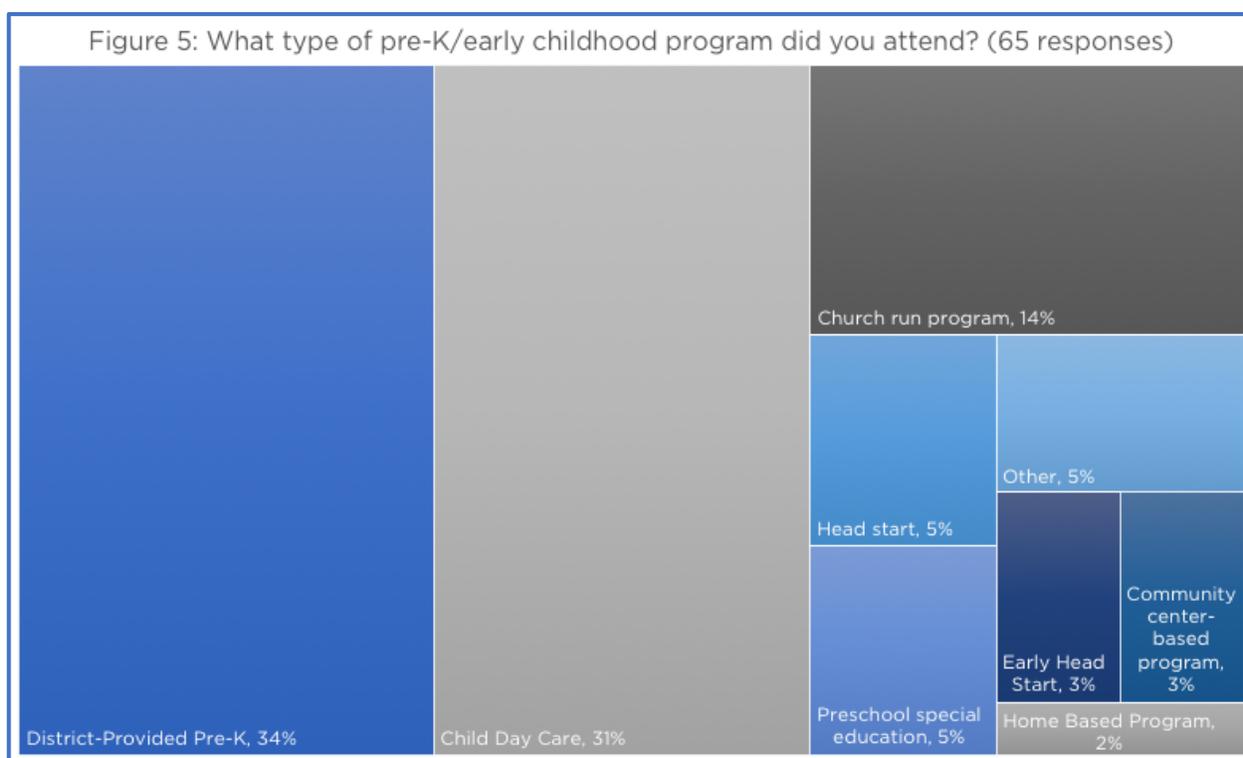
Table 5: Areas of Undertraining

Survey question: What situations or problems do you encounter consistently in your classroom that you feel most undertrained to address or handle?	
	Response Percent
Student behavior	75.00%
Students with traumatic experiences (abuse, neglect, or household dysfunction)	75.00%
Lack of parent engagement	50.00%
Student disabilities	50.00%
Toilet training	25.00%
Student social difficulties	25.00%
Understanding legal requirements	25.00%
Interacting with parents	0.00%
Giving social/academic assessments	0.00%
Interpreting assessment data	0.00%
Classroom management	0.00%
Other	0.00%

Notes: 4 total responses. Respondents were asked to check their top 4.

Kindergarten Parent Survey

The goal of this section is two-fold. First, to understand the perspectives of parents whose children had a district-provided Pre-K experience on their children’s preparedness and subsequent experiences in kindergarten. Second, to understand the views of parents whose children did not have a district-provided Pre-K experience on their children’s preparedness and subsequent experiences in kindergarten. From the 96 parent responses that we received, 34% had children who attended district-provided Pre-K, 31% attended child day care, 14% attended church-run programs, and the rest attended other programs. Generally speaking, parents were satisfied with their children’s early childhood experiences independent of the type of program.



Kindergarten Parent Satisfaction Regarding Early Childhood

Parents whose children attend either a home-based program or a community center-based program were generally more satisfied with their experience. Also, those same parents felt their children were more prepared to start kindergarten, compared to other parents, shown in both Figure 6 and 7.

Figure 6: Parental Early Childhood Program Satisfaction

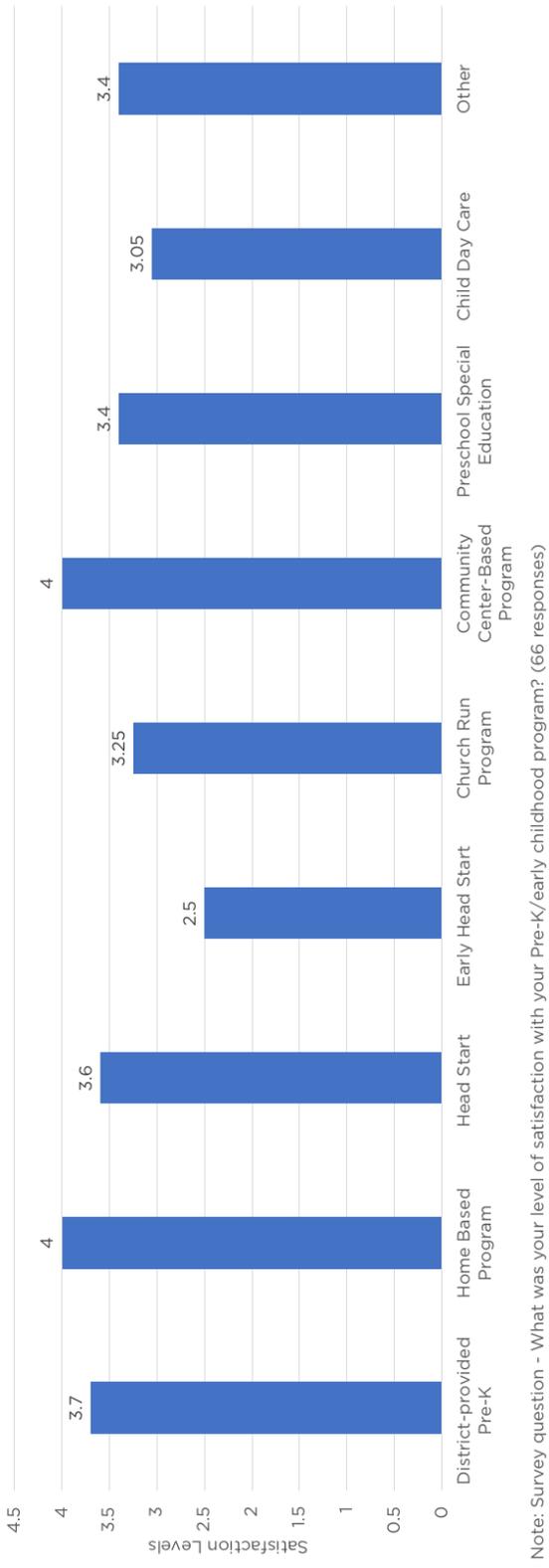
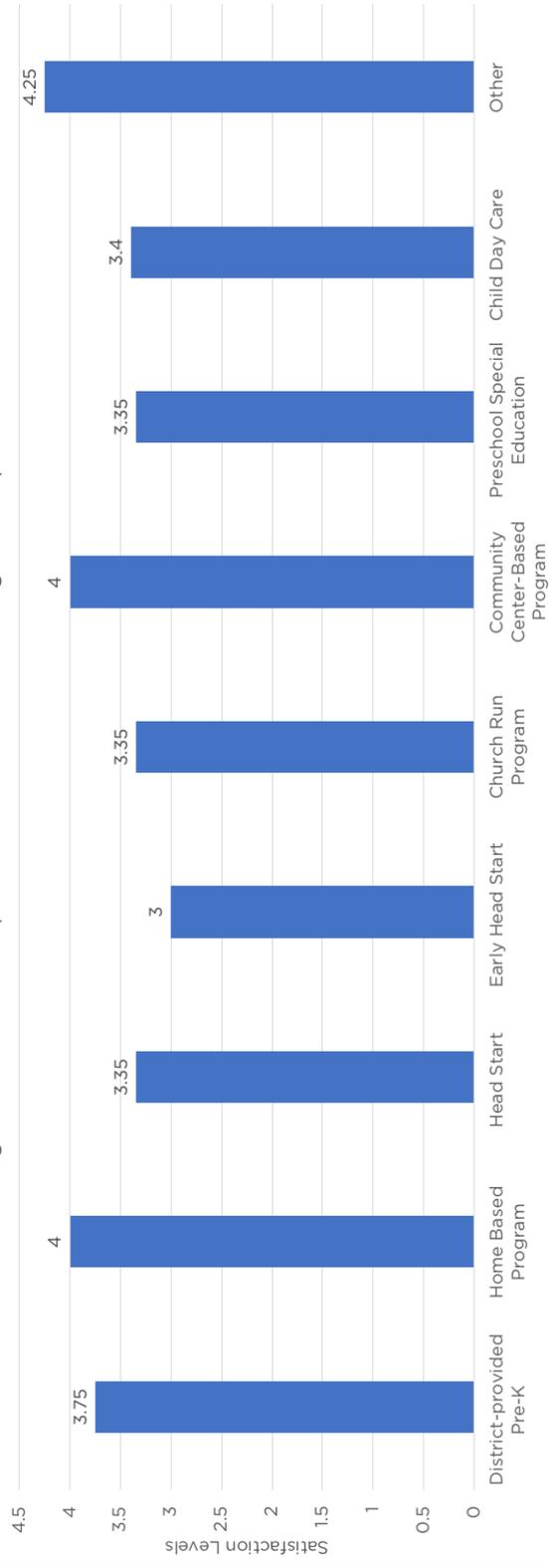
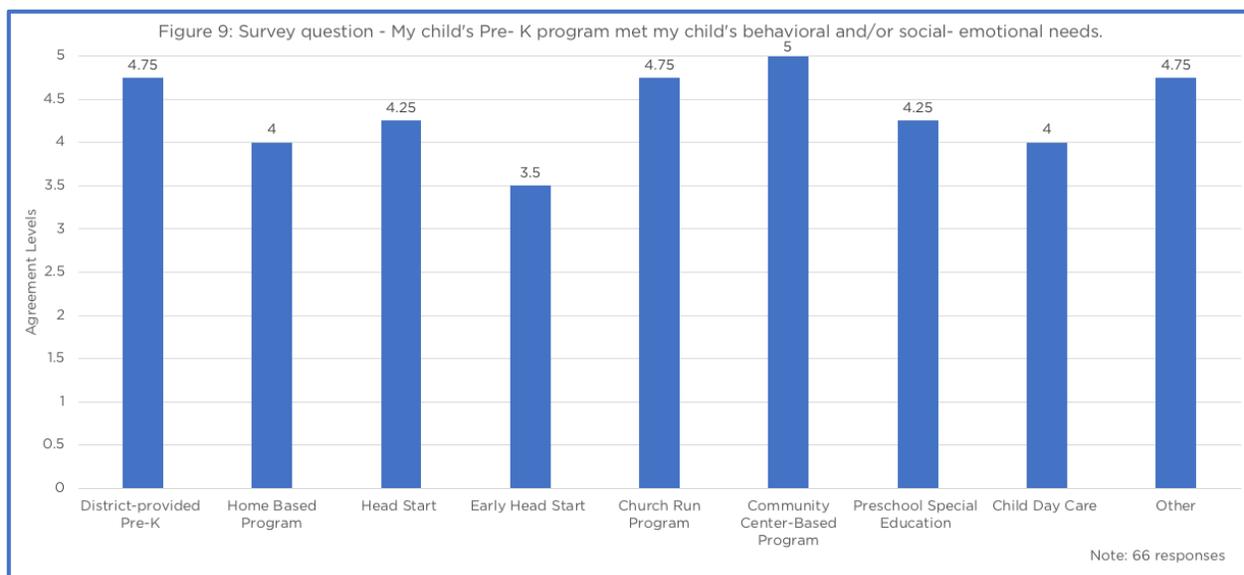
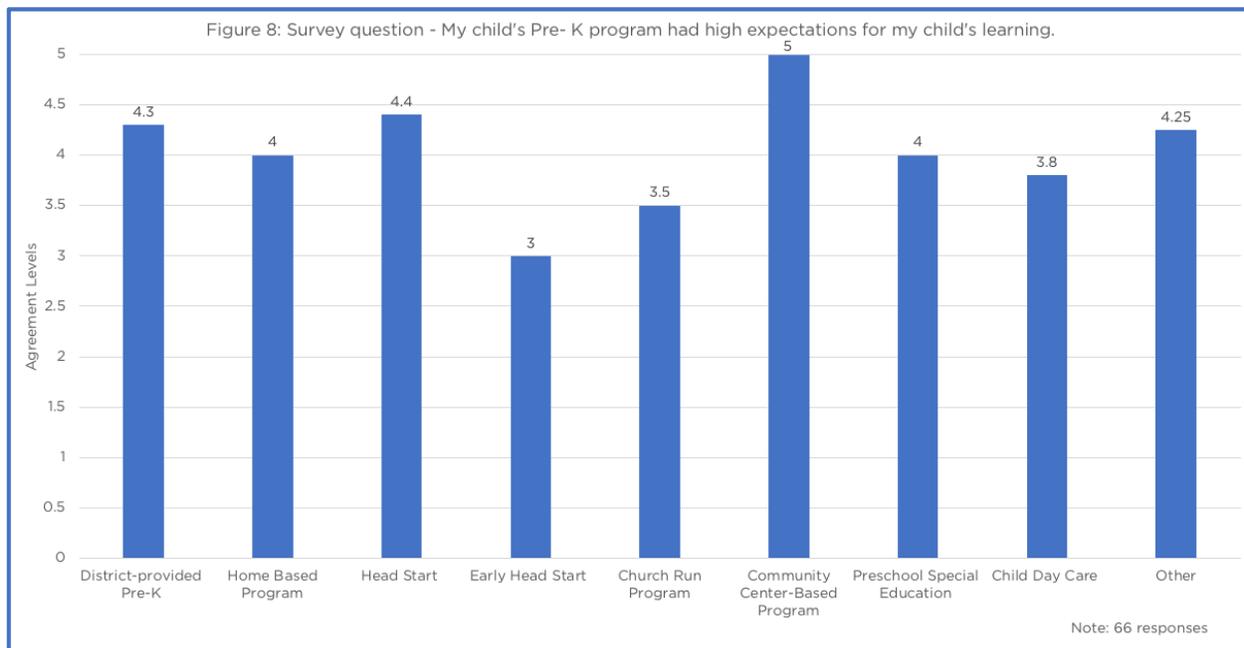


Figure 7: Parental Perceptions of their Children's Kindergarten Preparation



Similarly, most parents strongly agreed that their early childhood program had high expectations for their children’s learning, met their children’s behavioral needs, and met their children’s socio-emotional needs, shown in Figures 8 and 9.



Lastly, shown in Table 6, for those parents who did not enroll in either a Pre-K nor an early childhood program, about 42% reported a desire to stay at home with kids, and about 38% reported cost as the reason for their decision.

Table 6: Factors for Not Enrolling in an Early Childhood Program

Survey question: What was the reasoning for your child not enrolling in a Pre-K/ early childhood program?	
	Responses
I desired to stay at home with my children	41.67%
Cost	37.50%
No transportation to a program	8.33%
No spots in desired program	8.33%
I didn't know about Pre-K/early childhood programs	4.17%
Programs did not align to family values	0.00%
Other	0.00%
<i>Notes: 96 total respondents</i>	

CONCLUSION

As the state continues to provide access to early childhood education, the need to continuously evaluate the program is ever-present. Even with the presence of research supporting the effectiveness of Pre-K in Arkansas, at a state-level, districts will always need a gauge of their district-provided programs. This report was our attempt to leverage the voices and experiences of parents and teachers in one district-provided Pre-K program to inform district-level leaders. With the summary of the findings below, we hope this report provides stakeholders with relevant data to make informative decisions.

Pre-K Parents

Research question 1: Are current Pre-K parents satisfied with their children's district-provided Pre-K experience?

- Over 90% of respondents are satisfied with their experience.
- Over 75% of parents experienced growth in all areas of their children's language, social, self-care, motor, pre-academic, and emotional regulation skills.

Research question 2: What factors into parents' decisions when choosing the district-provided Pre-K program for their children?

- Having a program close to the school of siblings, providing high-quality academics, and possessing friendly and welcoming staff appeared in the top three preferences most often.

Pre-K Teachers

Research question 3: Do Pre-K teachers feel that they are preparing their students for kindergarten?

- All of the respondents felt their efforts were adequately preparing their students to enter kindergarten.

Research question 4: Are there any perceived or actual systemic, organizational, and individual challenges to an optimal Pre-K program?

- Two circumstances teachers report not feeling trained to sufficiently handle are student behavior and teaching students who have experienced trauma (i.e., abuse, neglect, or household dysfunction).

Kindergarten Parents

Research question 5: What are the perspectives of kindergarten parents' of their children's early childhood experiences?

- Parents' whose children attended Community Center-Based Programs, Home Based Program, and District-provided Pre-K programs possessed the highest levels of satisfaction.

Research question 6: What factors into parents' decisions to not enroll their children into an early childhood program?

- The four factors at the forefront of parents' reasoning for not selecting an early childhood program include: 1. A desire to stay at home with their children, 2. Cost, 3. No transportation to the program, 4. No spots in the desired program.

REFERENCES

1. Argue, S., & Holland, G. (2017). *Late Elementary Outcomes for Children Participating in Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) Program*. Conway, AR: University of Central Arkansas, Arkansas Research Center.
2. Bassok, Daphna, Markowitz, AJ, Player, D, and Zagardo M. (2018) "Are Parents' Ratings and Satisfaction With Preschools Related to Program Features?" AERA Open. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858418759954>
3. Cryer, D., Burchinal, M. (1997). Parents as child care consumers. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 12, 35-58*.
4. Cryer, D., Tietze, W., Wessels., H. (2002). Parents' perceptions of their children's child care: A cross national comparison. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 17, 259-277*.
5. DeAngelis, C., Holmes Erickson, H., & Ritter, G. (2018). What's the state of the evidence on pre-K programmes in the United States? A systematic review, *Educational Review*.
6. Friedman-Krauss, A. H., Barnett, W. S., Garver, K. A., Hodges, K. S., Weisenfeld, G. G. & DiCrecchio, N. (2019). *The State of Preschool 2018: State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.
7. Hustedt, J. T., Jung, K., Barnett, W. S., & Williams, T. (2015). Kindergarten readiness impacts of the Arkansas Better Chance state prekindergarten initiative. *The Elementary School Journal, 116(2), 198-216*.

8. Irwin, C. W., O'Dwyer, L., & DeMeo Cook, K. (2014). *Early Childhood Educator and Administrator Surveys on the use of assessments and standards in early childhood settings*. (REL 2014-019). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast & Islands. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.
9. Jung, K., Barnett, W. S., Hustedt, J. T., & Francis, J. (2013). *Longitudinal effects of the Arkansas Better Chance Program: Findings from first grade through fourth grade*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.
10. Mocan, N. (2007). Can consumers detect lemons? An empirical analysis of information asymmetry in the market for child care. *Journal of Popular Economics*, 20, 743-780.
11. Pianta R.C., Howes C., Burchinal M., Bryant D., Clifford R., Early D., Barbarin O. (2005) "Features of Pre-Kindergarten programs, classrooms, and teachers: Do they predict observed classroom quality and child-teacher interactions?" *Applied Development Science*, 9(3): 144-159.
12. Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Pianta, R. C., & Cox, M. J. (2000). Teachers' judgments of problems in the transition to kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 15(2), 147-166.