



Massachusetts Early Childhood Family Survey: Regional Profiles

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Background on the Massachusetts Family Survey

Early Childhood Program Quality and School Readiness

While Massachusetts is widely recognized as a national leader in innovative school reform and has aggressively worked toward school improvement, policymakers have begun to reach the conclusion that learning is not limited to what occurs within schoolhouse doors and external factors have a significant impact on student's readiness to learn. Massachusetts and many other states have turned toward expanding the availability of high-quality early education and care programs as a strategy for improving school readiness.

To gain a better understanding of the existing needs of children and families, the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) commissioned a study to learn more about the demand that families have for early education and out-of-school-time programs and services, the current level of access they have to meet their demands and to better understand the conditions present that may affect the development of their children. The data contained in this summary combine the results of two surveys of Massachusetts families with children under age 14, a survey of a representative sample of 301 families throughout the state and a publicly available, non-scientific survey that received 2,028 responses. A full analysis of both surveys can be found in the *Massachusetts Early Childhood Family Survey*, the final report submitted to EEC.

Strengthening the Quality of the Early Childhood Experiences for Children

Integral to improving the school-readiness of children in Massachusetts is expanding the early learning opportunities available to children,

especially those most at-risk. EEC has articulated a series of strategies that seek to expand high-quality early learning experiences for children, including:

- Expansion of EEC's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) and related quality improvement initiatives
- Development of a comprehensive assessment system
- Expansion of family and community engagement initiatives
- Strengthening the knowledge, skills and abilities of educators in the early learning workforce

Gaining a better understanding of the needs that families have and the resources currently available to them is critical as EEC moves forward with the implementation of the initiatives highlighted above. To guide the implementation of these initiatives, EEC needs to better understand the current need that families have for early learning programs and services, the current level of access that families have to the programs and services needed, and the conditions present that may affect the development of their children. The family survey described below was commissioned by EEC to respond to this need for more information on the early learning needs of families and children in Massachusetts.

Overview of Needs Assessment and Family Survey

To inform the implementation of the initiatives described above, EEC began plans in March of 2011 to design a framework for conducting a statewide assessment of the resources necessary to support families and communities in the holistic development of children and youth. The needs assessment will allow EEC to



better understand the needs of young children from birth to age eight and to better understand the quality and availability of early childhood education and development programs and services for children from birth to school entry. EEC consulted with a research team from the *Wellesley College Center for Women (WCCW)* to develop recommendations for the overall framework for the needs assessment, including the development of logic models, sampling plan recommendations, and the content for surveys of families and educators.

In the WCCW's final report, *Development of a Massachusetts Periodic Statewide Needs Assessment*, the research team recommended two surveys – one for families seeking or using early learning programs and one for educators in the early learning workforce. Using questions compiled from surveys implemented across the country, the WCCW research team recommended a set of survey questions for each survey. For the survey of families, the recommended survey content was organized around the following research questions:

1. Which children and families have access to the programs that they need, including high-quality early education and care programs, health care and community resources and supports?
2. Are children, birth to age 8, on track to succeed when they enter school and beyond?
3. What are the needs for families to support child development?

EEC contracted with Applied Policy Analytics, in Partnership with the Public Consulting Group, to conduct a survey of a representative sample of families with children under fourteen in Massachusetts. The survey was designed around the three research questions listed above. After consultation with EEC leadership,

the research team also designed a public version of the same survey. The results of both surveys are summarized in the regional profiles contained in this report. The full description of both surveys, along with research findings and implications, can be found in the final report presented to EEC, the *Massachusetts Early Childhood Family Survey*.

Summary of Regional Variations

Detailed findings for both the representative family survey and the public version of the family survey are available in the final report for the *Massachusetts Early Childhood Family Survey*. The following data tables provide a summary of the combined data sets from both surveys and the response variations across regions. Notable observations include:

- Demand for early education and out-of-school-time care was highest in the Metro Region and the Northeast Regions, with 88% and 84% of families indicating need for some type of care, respectively. The demand for care across all other regions ranged from 76% to 79% of families.
- Current use of licensed center-based, preschool and public preschool was highest in the Metro Region at 46% of families and lowest in the Central Region at 27% of families.
- Use of family child care was highest in the Boston Region at 21% and lowest in the Southeastern Region at 10%
- Families reported similar problems in searching for care, with 52% to 55% reporting some type of problem across most regions. However, only 44% of families in the Central Region reported a problem in searching for care.



- The top problem encountered in searching for care in all regions was the high price of care, with 35% to 43% of families in the Boston, Northeastern, Western and Metro regions citing price as a problem. Families in the Southeastern and Central regions were somewhat less likely to cite price as a problem, at 26% and 27% respectively.
- In Boston, the second most common problem cited by families was concern over program quality, with 22% families citing quality as a problem. In all other regions, the second most common problem was that program hours did not meet family needs, ranging from 11% to 22% of families.
- A significant number of families across all regions reported that their child has never had dental care, ranging from 18% in the Central Region to 31% in the Metro Region.
- The proportion of families that read to their child every day is 80% to 83% in the Western Region and Metro Region, compared to 63% to 66% across all other regions.



Profile of Regional Responses Received

Respondent Educational Attainment

Table 1 - Profile of Regional Responses Received						
Regional Profiles						
Respondent Educational Attainment						
Region	West	Central	Northeast	Metro	Southeast	Boston
Number (N)	227	355	436	357	234	75
Some schooling, up to 8th grade.	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	5%
Some high school, no diploma.	1%	3%	2%	0%	2%	1%
High school diploma/GED.	7%	9%	9%	6%	7%	16%
Some college courses, no degree.	11%	14%	20%	6%	15%	16%
Associate's Degree (AA, AS).	4%	8%	8%	4%	9%	5%
Vocational/technical diploma, degree or certificate.	1%	3%	5%	2%	4%	4%
Nursing Degree (RN).	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%
Bachelor's Degree (BA, BS).	36%	35%	31%	32%	36%	29%
Master's Degree (MA, MS).	34%	22%	20%	36%	22%	19%
Doctorate/Professional Degree (Ph.D., Ed.D., etc.)	4%	4%	4%	11%	3%	3%

Respondent Race/Ethnicity

Table 2 - Profile of Regional Responses Received						
Regional Profiles						
Respondent Race/Ethnicity						
Region	West	Central	Northeast	Metro	Southeast	Boston
White or European American	92%	88%	76%	80%	87%	44%
Black or African American	2%	3%	4%	6%	5%	23%
Latino or Hispanic	6%	6%	18%	7%	6%	19%
Asian or Asian American	1%	4%	3%	9%	1%	4%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Native American/American Indian/Eskimo/Aleut	0%	0%	1%	1%	2%	1%
Other	1%	3%	3%	4%	3%	9%



Language Most Frequently Spoken in the Home

Table 3 - Profile of Regional Responses Received						
Regional Profiles						
Language Most Frequently Spoken in the Home						
Region	West	Central	Northeast	Metro	Southeast	Boston
English	96.9%	94.7%	88.3%	90.7%	98.3%	82.7%
Portuguese	0.0%	0.3%	0.9%	1.1%	0.9%	1.3%
Spanish	1.8%	3.3%	7.6%	2.8%	0.4%	12.0%
Cantonese	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Mandarin	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Vietnamese	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
All Other	1.3%	1.4%	2.8%	3.7%	0.4%	4.0%

Demand for Programs and Services

Demand for Early Education and Out-of-School-Time Programs

Table 4 - Early Education & Out-of-School-Time Arrangements Needed						
Regional Profiles						
Demand for Programs						
Responses	West	Central	Northeast	Metro	Southeast	Boston
Total Responses (N)	244	402	403	400	263	86
Day time program (approx. 8am-6pm)	68%	59%	70%	76%	62%	59%
After-school and before-school programs	27%	32%	30%	26%	28%	24%
Evening hours program	7%	7%	8%	6%	7%	6%
Summer-only program	17%	16%	12%	16%	17%	12%
Sick care	5%	8%	6%	10%	5%	2%
Overnight care	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%
I do not want/need	22%	24%	16%	12%	22%	21%



Access to Programs and Services

Access to Early Education and Out-of-School-Time Programs

Table 5 - Early Education & Out-of-School-Time Arrangements for Your Child
Regional Profiles
Currently Has Primary Care Arrangement

Responses	West	Central	Northeast	Metro	Southeast	Boston
Total Responses (n)	239	381	486	374	251	73
Does not apply. I do not use any of the above arrangements to care for my child.	22%	30%	18%	20%	33%	12%
Before-school or after-school program at a child's school	5%	5%	5%	3%	4%	7%
Early childhood/child care center	14%	16%	26%	27%	13%	29%
Family child care home	13%	14%	15%	13%	10%	21%
Head Start	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%
Preschool/nursery school	24%	10%	10%	15%	12%	7%
Public preschool	2%	1%	1%	4%	2%	1%
Relative in child's residence/your home	7%	10%	10%	7%	10%	10%
Sitter in the home	3%	1%	3%	5%	6%	7%
Community based activity (not affiliated with school)	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Other (please specify)	10%	12%	10%	6%	8%	7%
Currently Has Secondary Care Arrangement						
Has Secondary Arrangement	19%	17%	14%	19%	20%	7%
Does Not Have Secondary Arrangement	81%	83%	86%	81%	80%	93%



Access Challenges Reported in Searching for Early Education and Out-of-School-Time Programs

Table 6 - Early Education Arrangements for Your Child						
Regional Profiles						
Problems Searching for Care						
Region	West	Central	Northeast	Metro	Southeast	Boston
Total Responses (n)	228	380	486	376	298	82
I did not have any problems	46%	56%	47%	45%	48%	46%
The hours didn't meet my needs	21%	17%	17%	22%	11%	15%
It's too expensive	38%	27%	38%	43%	26%	35%
The location was inconvenient	12%	6%	9%	14%	5%	16%
I was unsure of the quality of the program	13%	11%	16%	19%	10%	22%
The program did not offer services for my child's special needs	3%	2%	3%	2%	1%	1%
There were language barriers with the staff	0%	0%	3%	2%	0%	1%
I didn't know where to get information about early childhood or school-aged programs	7%	6%	7%	6%	3%	4%
I couldn't find anyone to take care of my child	6%	2%	6%	4%	2%	2%
Other (please specify)	6%	5%	7%	5%	3%	5%

Access to Community Activities and Resources Outside of Early Education Program or School

Table 7 - Access to Neighborhood and Community Activities						
Regional Profiles						
Participated in the Following Activities in Past Month						
Responses	West	Central	Northeast	Metro	Southeast	Boston
Visit a library	76%	55%	35%	66%	59%	51%
Gone to a movie	22%	30%	21%	24%	25%	37%
Gone to a play, concert or show	20%	18%	11%	20%	13%	18%
Gone to a mall, went grocery shopping	95%	93%	67%	93%	94%	86%
Visited an art gallery, museum, etc.	33%	17%	15%	29%	23%	33%
Visited a playground, park, etc./Visited a Zoo	80%	73%	55%	84%	80%	80%
Attended an athletic or sporting event	27%	27%	16%	24%	27%	21%
Visited with relatives	91%	88%	66%	86%	95%	76%
Gone to an activity at community ctr.	34%	26%	16%	24%	36%	24%
Gone to a religious service or event	34%	36%	24%	29%	37%	41%
Gone to a restaurant or out to eat	83%	83%	57%	85%	86%	80%



Family Strengths in Facing Challenges

Table 8 - Information on Family Strengths and Challenges – Solving Family Problems						
Regional Profiles						
In my family, when we have problems or disagreements, we take time to listen to all sides of the story.	Total Responses (n)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
West	231	34%	59%	6%	0%	0%
Central	375	38%	56%	5%	1%	1%
Northeast	459	39%	53%	7%	1%	0%
Metro	368	36%	54%	8%	1%	0%
Southeast	245	31%	64%	4%	0%	0%
Boston	78	32%	59%	9%	0%	0%

Table 9 - Information on Family Strengths and Challenges – Family Pulls Together						
Regional Profiles						
My family pulls together when things are stressful and when we need to solve problems	Total Responses (n)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
West	230	42%	51%	6%	0%	0%
Central	377	41%	49%	8%	1%	0%
Northeast	460	46%	48%	5%	0%	0%
Metro	369	38%	53%	8%	1%	0%
Southeast	245	37%	56%	6%	1%	0%
Boston	79	42%	44%	13%	1%	0%

Table 10 - Information on Family Strengths and Challenges – Can Talk to Others						
Regional Profiles						
When I have problems or am lonely, I have several people I can talk to	Total Responses (n)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
West	231	43%	48%	6%	3%	0%
Central	376	38%	50%	7%	3%	1%
Northeast	456	43%	47%	6%	3%	1%
Metro	367	40%	47%	7%	6%	1%
Southeast	244	33%	54%	7%	4%	2%
Boston	79	33%	58%	5%	3%	1%



**Table 11 - Information on Family Strengths and Challenges – No Idea Where to Turn
Regional Profiles**

I would have no idea where to turn if my family needed food, housing, or had trouble making ends meet	Total Responses (n)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
West	231	3%	6%	12%	50%	29%
Central	376	3%	11%	15%	47%	24%
Northeast	457	4%	13%	16%	42%	26%
Metro	368	2%	10%	15%	48%	25%
Southeast	244	3%	11%	15%	50%	21%
Boston	79	6%	10%	8%	58%	18%

**Table 12 - Information on Family Strengths and Challenges – Help in Finding a Job
Regional Profiles**

I would have no idea where to go for help, if I needed help finding a job	Total Responses (n)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
West	231	2%	5%	13%	56%	23%
Central	377	3%	9%	16%	48%	24%
Northeast	455	4%	9%	16%	45%	25%
Metro	367	2%	8%	15%	48%	27%
Southeast	244	4%	9%	16%	51%	21%
Boston	79	3%	10%	10%	58%	19%



Child Development

Opinions About Child's Health

Table 13 - Child Health

Regional Profiles

Opinions About Child's Health – Child is in Good Health

I feel my child is in good health	Total Responses (n)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
West	227	50%	44%	4%	1%	0%
Central	365	47%	45%	6%	2%	0%
Northeast	442	48%	46%	5%	1%	0%
Metro	361	49%	45%	5%	1%	0%
Southeast	238	49%	46%	4%	2%	0%
Boston	76	45%	46%	7%	3%	0%

Table 14 - Child Health

Regional Profiles

Opinions About Child's Health – Child has Regular Checkups

My child has regular health care checkups	Total Responses (n)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
West	226	73%	27%	0%	0%	0%
Central	363	72%	28%	0%	0%	0%
Northeast	440	72%	28%	0%	0%	0%
Metro	361	70%	30%	0%	0%	0%
Southeast	236	72%	28%	0%	0%	0%
Boston	76	61%	38%	1%	0%	0%

Reason for Child's Most Recent Medical Visit

Table 15 - Child Health

Regional Profiles

Reason for Child's Most Recent Medical Visit

Responses	West	Central	Northeast	Metro	Southeast	Boston
Child has not seen a doctor	3%	2%	2%	3%	2%	7%
Injury or accident	14%	12%	8%	16%	16%	7%
Child didn't feel well	60%	57%	44%	56%	66%	48%
Regular checkup	97%	94%	71%	98%	97%	93%
Other reason	21%	8%	7%	9%	8%	9%



Child Dental Health

Table 16 - Child Health						
Boston						
How Long Since Child Visited the Dentist or Dental Specialist						
Region	West	Central	Northeast	Metro	Southeast	Boston
Never Has Had Dental Care	25%	18%	30%	31%	27%	25%
Less than Six Months Ago	62%	67%	58%	55%	60%	54%
Between Six Months and One Year	11%	11%	12%	10%	10%	18%
Between One and Two Years	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	3%
Between Two and Five Years	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%
More than Five years	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Do Not Know	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%

Child Special Needs and Special Health Conditions

Table 17 - Special Need or Health Condition						
Regional Profiles						
Region	West	Central	Northeast	Metro	Southeast	Boston
Responses (n)	198	327	391	481	205	64
No diagnosis	71%	59%	69%	48%	64%	64%
Learning Disability or Developmental Delay	11%	12%	12%	6%	14%	6%
Mental Retardation	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	2%
Emotional Disturbance	4%	2%	3%	1%	2%	0%
Deafness or Hearing Impairment	1%	1%	2%	0%	0%	0%
Blindness	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%
Orthopedic Impairment	2%	2%	2%	1%	2%	0%
Autism or PDD	5%	3%	3%	1%	3%	0%
ADD or ADHD	4%	6%	5%	2%	6%	8%
Asthma	10%	14%	10%	5%	14%	16%
Diabetes	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Lead Poisoning	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	2%
Food Allergies	11%	13%	6%	4%	6%	6%
Other Chronic	2%	4%	3%	1%	4%	2%
Other	3%	4%	3%	3%	4%	5%



Family Activities with Children

Table 18 - Special Need or Health Condition						
Regional Profiles						
Region	West	Central	Northeast	Metro	Southeast	Boston
Responses (n)	230	371	448	366	243	77
Told your child a story	89%	84%	84%	86%	85%	82%
Taught your child letters, words, or numbers	83%	80%	81%	82%	82%	66%
Taught your child songs or music	78%	73%	75%	79%	80%	66%
Did arts and crafts, for example, coloring, painting, pasting or using clay?	86%	77%	72%	75%	78%	68%
Played sports, active games, or exercised together	87%	78%	77%	82%	79%	75%
Played board games or did puzzles with your child	76%	65%	59%	64%	63%	53%
Worked on another type of project with your child that you didn't...chore?	69%	57%	55%	61%	56%	55%
Talked with your child about your family's ethnic heritage?	33%	35%	33%	41%	37%	40%

Reading With Children

Table 19 - Information About Families and Family Activities						
Regional Profiles						
How Many Times Have You Read to Your Child in the Past Week						
Responses	West	Central	Northeast	Metro	Southeast	Boston
	229	366	452	361	240	78
Every day	83%	66%	65%	80%	70%	63%
Once or Twice	5%	11%	13%	5%	10%	13%
Three Times	9%	19%	16%	14%	15%	19%
Not at all	2%	5%	6%	2%	5%	5%