



The Whole Child – Parents and Policy

A Meta-Analysis of Opinion Data Concerning School Readiness,
Early Childhood and Related Issues

Prepared for the Frameworks Institute

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May 2002

Method

The following meta-analysis of opinion research is based on a review of existing, publicly available data. The objective of this phase of research is to develop a strategic perspective of public beliefs that may influence policy support, with the ultimate goal of developing effective communications. This report is not intended to provide a catalogue of all public opinion research on this topic nor is it a review of policy evaluation efforts.

Since this topic touches on many other issues, data gathering required a broad search, including issues such as: child development, child care, early education, education, after school programs, poverty, welfare, juvenile crime, parenting, work, family values, and societal values, among others. Since survey results can be skewed by the context of the survey (meaning a survey about balancing work and family will result in different assumptions about child care policy than a survey about welfare and poverty), the analysis relied almost completely on research for which the entire survey was available. More than 100 complete surveys were reviewed (totaling thousands of public opinion questions). All surveys were conducted within the past five years, except for those instances in which a specific trend in response could help to illustrate a point.

This report is not intended to represent a catalogue of all available data, so not all of the reviewed surveys were included. Rather, this analysis is designed to offer strategic insights that will prove useful to later stages of the research process, so only the most relevant and useful findings have been incorporated.

Introduction

Children exist within the protective circle of the family. This strongly held perception among the public influences the way people view every problem facing children. No matter the issue -- education, poverty, crime, values -- the public looks first to parents. This emphasis on parental responsibility is a barrier to broader public policy responses to children's needs. The public looks first to individual solutions to problems facing children -- "fixing" parents rather than fixing a systemic problem, and this belief acquires the force of a "default" frame, meaning a belief that, in the absence of other information, will "fill in" to define the situation.

Assumption of parental responsibility is particularly strong when it comes to the youngest children. To bring early childhood into the realm of societal responsibility, advocates have attached early childhood issues to a variety of issue frames that highlight public concern over private concern -- education, welfare, crime prevention, work, to name a few. Ironically, within each of these issue frames, early childhood policies have to compete for attention with other reforms. For example, while people prioritize education and see it as a public responsibility, when they consider all the reforms that schools need, early education is frequently at the bottom of the list. Other school readiness issues such as health and economic security are virtually invisible to the public as solutions.

Importantly, none of the most widely used issue frames advances a holistic perspective of what children need. While Americans understand some key elements of child development, they do not demonstrate a cohesive philosophy of child development sufficient to fill in for those aspects they don't understand completely and consistently. For example, the public understands the influence of environment and relationships on children, even very young children. However, people also have developmentally inappropriate expectations for children. Compared to the advice of child development scholars, public views on spoiling and punishing children demonstrate a pervasive misunderstanding of child development that undoubtedly influences the public's perspective on policies.

People want to be good parents, and they use their definition of good parenting in assessing the worth of specific policies. For example, they see day care as an option of last resort, used only because parents have to work and have no other options for watching the child. From this perspective, good parents are those who stay home with their children, and good policies are those that provide tax cuts for at-home parents and paid parental leave. This world view does little to advance quality day care or other early childhood policies unrelated to the primary goal of keeping parents home with children because it does not advance a full developmental perspective, nor does it acknowledge the network of relationships that affect the healthy development of a child.

The task, then, becomes developing a message framework that attaches a developmental perspective, a whole child perspective, to the definition of being a good parent and a good citizen and, at the same time, widens the circle of responsibility to include the

community. In this way, a range of policies can be integrated into a single organic framework, inoculating against the distraction of competing policies that “trump” the early child emphasis.

The following analysis of public opinion data reports on the public’s views toward parenting and child development in order to provide a context for understanding public support and opposition to proposed child policy interventions and remedies. In addition, this report analyzes public opinion in response to four common issue frames for early childhood. The intent of this analysis is to provide a context for understanding public opinion on this issue, and to inform later communications research, not to arrive at a specific message recommendation at this phase of the research.

Issue Context

No issue exists in a vacuum; the public brings its personal experiences to bear on its consideration of public policy. In this instance, views toward parenting, knowledge of how children grow and develop, and assessments of problems facing the country, all influence the public’s response to policies for the nation’s youngest children. This section includes an analysis of: the public’s current issue priorities; prevailing philosophies about how children develop and what children need; and public views toward parenting and the pressures facing parents, including balancing work and family. By understanding these fundamental beliefs about children and families, advocates can be more effective in understanding the existing climate into which public policies are introduced.

Priorities

Security and the economy currently top the national agenda. However, education was the country’s top priority up until a year ago, and remains in the top tier of national concerns.

On the eve of George Bush’s inauguration, the public was clear about its expectations. Americans wanted the Bush Administration and Congress to prioritize education. One year later, the country has a new issue of concern – the war on terrorism – which is currently taking center stage. The faltering economy has also eclipsed education as a priority for the nation.

Priorities for Congress and Bush Administration		
(% Highest Priority)		
	2002 ¹	2001 ²
Handling the US campaign against terrorism	46%	--
Improving the Economy/Keeping America prosperous	45%	43%
Improving education	38%	50%
Protecting the Social Security system	33%	46%
Improving the healthcare system	32%	43%
Handling national defense/Providing military security for the country	31%	39%
Helping senior citizens pay for prescription drugs	27%	42%
Keeping the federal budget balanced	21%	40%
Protecting/improving the quality of the environment	17%	30%
Reforming/Improving the way political campaigns are financed	14%	25%

While most current polls continue to show terrorism and the economy at the top of the national agenda, education remains a top concern and one the public wants addressed. Three-quarters (73%) say education should be a top (38%) or high priority (35%) for federal funds,³ and 80% say their state should make education a top (42%) or high priority (38%) for state funds.⁴ Most (60%) report that their states have budget deficits (27% say their state has a serious deficit); even so, they want education budgets protected. A majority (53%) designates education as the last area to be cut. This ranks education higher than all other issues, including healthcare (18%), law enforcement (8%), welfare (6%), Social Security (6%) and services for seniors (4%).⁵

The public is even willing to have the federal government run a deficit for three priorities: to “increase spending for the war on terrorism and our nation’s military and defense” (78% would support a deficit to fund this priority); to “increase spending on education for students from kindergarten through college” (67%); and to “increase spending on steps to stimulate the economy” (62%). Far fewer would support deficit spending to “increase spending on prescription drugs” (46%) or to “make permanent the federal tax cuts implemented last year” (39%).⁶

Perspectives on Child Development

Some public opinion queries attempt to measure the public’s knowledge about the process of child development. For the purposes of this review, following the perspective of strategic frame analysis, the specific *factual* knowledge adults cite is less important than the philosophy of child development expressed by the patterns of response to these kinds of questions. This section reviews findings from a unique and comprehensive public opinion survey of development knowledge entitled, “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,”⁷ which provides an indication of the perspective adults bring to child development issues.

Adults understand that babies are influenced by their environment and relationships. They report that a child’s abilities are not predetermined at birth, and that early experiences influence children later in life. Adults believe brain development can be influenced from birth (or earlier) and that this early influence will have an impact on later school performance. Emotional development, they believe, is also influenced by these early years, with high percentages of survey participants responding that emotional closeness influences intellectual development, that violence can have long-term effects, and that self-esteem is developed early.

People understand that children are shaped by their relationships and environment. For example, 77% of adults point to the following statement as “false,” with 63% saying it is “definitely” false: “Children’s capacity for learning is pretty much set from birth and cannot be greatly increased or decreased by how their parents interact with them.”

Furthermore, they believe this influence begins early: 71% of adults say a parent can begin to significantly affect a child’s brain development right from birth or even before birth. And the early influence can have long-term effects: 76% of adults choose the statement “Some people say that a child’s experiences in the first year of life have a major impact on their performance in school many years later” over the competing statement “Others say babies 12 months and younger are too young for their experiences to really help or hurt their ability to learn in school later in life.”

Much of the early influence on development that the public can identify is grounded in emotions and relationships. Eight out of ten believe “Parents’ emotional closeness with their baby can strongly influence that child’s intellectual development.” A majority of adults (58%) and 72% of parents of children age 6 and younger say that an infant can

recognize his mother's voice within the first week after birth, and two-thirds of adults (66%, 78% of parents of children age 6 and younger) believe that children begin to develop their sense of self-esteem before age two. Finally, three-quarters reject the statement "A child aged six months or younger who witnesses violence, such as seeing his father often hit his mother, will not suffer any long term effects from the experiences, because children that age have no long term memory."

While adults believe children are influenced by their surroundings right from birth, many do not necessarily understand how significantly babies interact with the world around them and how sensitive they are to emotions.

While three quarters (72%) believe a "child begins to really take in and react to the world around them" within the first 6 months of life, only 26% understand that infants react to the world around them right from birth or in the first week of life. Only 40% of adults understand that babies can be affected by their parents' mood in the first 1-2 months of life and only 13% understand that a baby 6 months old or younger can experience depression.

Adults recognize the value of play and the kinds of activities that benefit children such as reading, art and providing a sense of security. While some beneficial activities are undervalued, and other less beneficial activities are more valued than they should be, the broader lesson is that people understand that stimulating activities matter to a child's development. Importantly, too many adults overvalue such "educational" activities as flash cards and educational television.

People understand the value of play in social development (92% of adults rate its importance 8, 9, or 10 on a ten point scale), intellectual development (85%) and in language skills (79%). They also recognize the importance of play for children of different ages. Eighty six percent of adults see play as important for a 5 year old, 80% say it is important for a 3 year old and 60% think it is important for a 10 month old (the interpretation of "play" probably reduced initial ratings of importance of play for infants, since people rate specific activities at higher levels).

Most adults understand the role of play in helping children to become better learners. The example of play that most adults see as effective in helping children become better learners is a four-year-old making art with art supplies (81% of adults rate this 8, 9, or 10 on a 10 point scale) followed by a 12-month-old rolling a ball with parents (77%) and a two-year-old having a pretend tea party with mom (74%). Two-thirds of adults also understand the benefit of a four-year-old collecting and sorting leaves (67%), a six-year-old playing pretend firemen with friends (66%), a six-year-old playing cards with his dad (66%), and a six-month-old exploring and banging on blocks (61%).

Importantly, two of three types of play that child development research suggests are less beneficial are rated highly by adults: a four-year-old memorizing flash cards (68%) and a four-year-old making art on the computer (63%). Only 46% see a two-year-old playing a computer activity as play that helps children become better learners.

Of several activities that child development experts say benefit children, some are universally understood by adults to be effective activities, including: reading with the child (95% all adults rate this activity 8, 9, or 10 on a 10 point scale), talking with the child (92%), providing a sense of security and safety (86%) and providing a healthy diet (84%). Other beneficial actions are rated highly, but are not as universally understood by adults to be effective activities, including: quality day care (69%), climbing on playground equipment while supervised (65%), and playing music the child enjoys during playtime (63%).

Two activities development experts say are not helpful to development are valued by nearly two-thirds of adults: watching educational shows on TV (64%), and educational flashcards (65%). Two activities experts say are not very helpful are also viewed as effective by less than a majority of adults: playing educational games on a computer by himself (45%), and playing Mozart as background music during playtime (36%).

The real gaps in public understanding of child development emerge when people are asked to consider expectations of children at various ages. Though most adults answer these questions correctly, a significant percentage set expectations of children too high and view developmentally appropriate responses as “spoiling.” Though a majority recognizes that spanking can lead to physical aggression in children, less than a third say it is never appropriate to spank a child. Inappropriate expectations and views on spoiling and punishment can lead to poor parenting skills as well as undermine worthy policies, programs and activities.

There are many indications in the survey data that large percentages of adults hold developmentally inappropriate expectations for children. For example, most adults (72%) understand that “three years old is too young to expect a child to sit quietly for an hour,” though a sizable minority of parents of young children as well as non-parents (26% each) thinks three-year-olds should be able to sit quietly for this length of time. Similarly, two-thirds (67%) of adults say a six-year-old who shoots a classmate could not understand the results of his actions, though a sizable minority (26% of adults and 30% of parents of children 6 years old or younger) believes a six-year-old would understand the consequences of this act. When asked for the motivation of a 12-month-old who turns the TV on and off repeatedly, most appropriately answered that the child could be trying to get her parents’ attention (89%) or is trying to learn what happens when buttons are pressed (88%). However, nearly half of adults (46%) incorrectly think that a child might do this because she is angry with her parents and is trying to get back at them. Finally, adults set expectations too high for sharing, with a majority (55%) of adults saying that a 15-month-old should be expected to share her toys with other children.

Views on spoiling demonstrate a pervasive misunderstanding of child development. Nearly two-thirds (62%) believe a six month old can be spoiled. Furthermore, many adults define a variety of developmentally appropriate actions as spoiling, including picking up a three-month-old every time she cries (55%), letting a two-year-old get down

from the dinner table to play before the rest of the family has finished their meal (44%), and letting a six-year-old choose what to wear to school every day (38%).

Finally, a majority of adults (57%) rejects the notion that “Spanking children as a regular form of punishment helps children develop a better sense of self control.” Even more (60%) agree that “Children who are spanked as a regular form of punishment are more likely to deal with their own anger by being physically aggressive.” Even so, only 32% of adults and 29% of parents of children 6 and younger say it is never appropriate to spank a child. In fact, 73% of adults agree (27% strongly agree) “it is sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a good, hard spanking.”⁸ Since the mid-1980s the percentage agreeing with this statement has dropped from 83%, but those who strongly agree has stayed the same (27%).⁹

Parenting

Most Americans believe good parenting means raising children to be independent. Of a variety of characteristics, adults say being able to think for themselves is most important in preparing children for life. Boys and girls should be raised in a similar fashion and with the same expectations.

Adults see independence as the ultimate goal in raising children. What children need to be prepared for life, they assert, is “to think for themselves” (63%), rather than “to be obedient” (29%).¹⁰ Even when the choice of characteristics is broadened, adults still prioritize the ability of children to be able to think independently as the most important preparation for life (49% choose it first among a list of five characteristics). The characteristics “work hard” and “help others” are closely rated as second and third in priority (67% chose hard work as second or third; 63% chose helping others). The ability “to obey” receives a mix of ratings, but a plurality (36%) rates it fourth in importance. Finally, three-quarters see being well liked or popular as the least important of the five characteristics in preparing children for life (75%). The negative associations with “popularity” probably skew response to this characteristic. If wording such as “ability to get along with others” or “ability to make friends” had been tested, we suspect it would have rated higher in importance.

Which in this list is most important for a child to learn to prepare him or her for life?
Second most important? Etc.¹¹

Rank Order	Think for Him/Herself	Work Hard	Help Others	Obey	Well liked/ Popular
1st	49%	17%	13%	19%	1%
2 nd	18%	36%	30%	12%	2%
3 rd	14%	31%	33%	17%	3%
4 th	13%	12%	20%	36%	17%
5 th	5%	1%	3%	15%	75%
No response	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%

Furthermore, men and women both believe that boys and girls should be raised the same way and with the same expectations. Fully 88% state, “Parents should have the same expectations of both boys and girls when it comes to their education and careers” while only 11% believe “Parents should have different expectations of boys and girls when it comes to their education and careers.” Men and women respond similarly on this measure.¹²

Most also believe that boys and girls should be raised the same, though women feel more strongly about this than men. More than two-thirds (69%) side with the statement, “Young boys and girls should be brought up alike, with similar toys and play activities” while only 28% say, “Young boys and girls should be raised differently, with different toys and play activities.” Though majorities of men as well as women believe boys and girls should be raised the same, more women feel this way (76%) than men (61%).¹³

Adults treat parenting as an important responsibility, though many did not feel prepared when they first became parents. Most view poor parenting and a lack of values as bigger problems facing children than drugs, education, or other topics in the news.

Parenting tops the list of adults’ life priorities. Nearly all adults (95%) point to “being a good parent” as “one of the most important” (41%) or a “very important” priority (54%). Parenting skill is closely followed by “having a successful marriage” (86%, 31% “one of most important”). Success in a “high paying career” is last among the priorities tested.

Personal Priorities in Life¹⁴

	One of Most Important	Very Important	Summary Importance
Being a good parent	41%	54%	95%
Having a successful marriage	31%	55%	86%
Having a satisfying sexual relationship with a spouse or partner	15%	58%	73%
Having close relationships with your relatives	17%	54%	71%
Having close friends you can talk to about things that are happening in your life	14%	51%	65%
Having an active sex life	14%	44%	58%
Living a very religious life	15%	37%	52%
Having lots of free time to relax or do things you want to do	8%	41%	49%
Being successful in a high paying career or profession	9%	32%	41%

As much as they value being a good parent, few (35%) felt well prepared for parenthood when they had their first child.¹⁵ They turn to their own parents for help. A majority of mothers rely on their own mother for child-rearing advice at least sometimes (61%) with one-quarter (26%) saying they rely on their mother “often.”¹⁶

At the core of problems facing children, the public reports, is poor parenting and an inability to impart values. Parents agree that raising well-behaved children is more difficult than attending to children’s physical needs.

When the public considers the problems that children face, they hold parents responsible. Topping the list of a series of problems facing families is “parents not paying enough attention to what’s going on in their children’s lives” (83% say it is a very serious problem). This is rated higher than peer pressure to use drugs (68%), the influence of sex and violence in the media (67%), divorce (63%), or inadequate schools (56%).¹⁷ Additionally, 45% point to “children learning respect and rules” as a bigger problem than education (39%), health care (29%), crime (29%), drugs (26%) or income (17%).¹⁸

Parents agree that it is far more difficult to raise children who are well behaved and who have good values than to provide for children’s health and physical well-being. Importantly, low-income parents are much more likely to say that providing for their children’s health and physical well-being is more difficult (41%) than higher-income parents (14%).¹⁹

Most think parents today are doing a worse job than their own parents did, and few mothers are very satisfied with their performance as a parent. Still, the public is forgiving. People overwhelmingly believe it is much more difficult to be a parent today than in past generations.

A majority of women (56%) reports that mothers are doing a worse job today, with older women more critical of today’s mothers than younger women. Two-thirds (65%) of women age 50-64 say mothers of children under 18 are doing a worse job as parents than their own mothers did, while 54% of women under 50 feel the same way.²⁰ However, the public overwhelmingly feels that it is harder to be a parent today (78%)²¹ and women feel it is more difficult to be a mother today (81%).²² Older women are more likely to believe it is harder to be a mother today than younger women (86% of women over 50 compared to 71% of women under 30).²³

Only 35% of mothers of children under 18 are “very satisfied” with the job they are doing as a mother. Whether moms are working or at home, they rate their performance similarly. The biggest distinction is by education level among stay-at-home mothers. Stay-at-home mothers who are college educated are the least satisfied with their own performance (only 28% are very satisfied) while stay-at-home mothers without a college education are the most satisfied (46% very satisfied).²⁴

Parenting is a two-person job. While one person can successfully raise children alone, children with two parents active in their lives are better off than those without two parents. But just having two parents is not enough. The ideal situation, according to the public, is a two-parent family in which one parent stays at home or works only part-time.

Most believe that one adult can successfully raise a child alone, even a child of the opposite sex. Fully 80% say women are “capable on their own of successfully raising boys into men” and 68% say men are “capable on their own of successfully raising girls into women.”²⁵

They do, however, see children of single parents as being at a disadvantage. Two-thirds (66%) report that children who grow up in one-parent families are worse off (19% much worse off) than children in two-parent families. Only 21% think they are just as well off.²⁶ Two-parent families provide children with advantages. Those children with fathers active in their lives “tend to develop more self-confidence” (90%) and “tend to be better problem-solvers” (80%) than children who lack an active father in their lives.²⁷

Not only do people see two-parent families as better than single parent families, they also look to work status as an indicator of a parent’s ability to do a good job of parenting. Most women see families with a stay-at-home parent, or a parent that works part-time as better able to do a good job than other families. In fact, families with two full-time working parents receive similar ratings as single parents.

Rating of Ability to Do a Good Job as Parents²⁸
(Ratings by Women)

	Most Can	Some Can
Couples in which the father works full-time and the mother stays home	66%	29%
Couples in which the father works full-time and the mother works part-time	54%	38%
Couples in which both the father and mother work full-time	29%	50%
Single mothers	28%	54%
Stepmothers	28%	52%
Divorced couples who split custody so the children live with each parent some of the time	17%	50%

As they look to the future, most (67%) predict more babies will be born out of wedlock rather than fewer (29%).²⁹ Furthermore, due to the importance of two-parent families, most would like divorce to be harder to obtain than it is now (62%).³⁰ They rate divorced parents as the least able to do a good job as parents. Even so, they are divided about whether or not an unhappy couple with young children should get divorced (46% think they should, 50% think they should not).³¹

Work and Family

Americans continue to feel conflicted about working mothers. There have been significant changes in the roles between the sexes over the last half-century, and they see no going back. However, they do not see the changes as all bad. They are conflicted about whether it would be better for society or for their own family if roles reverted to the “traditional” roles of the 1950s. Most men and women prefer to work outside the home, but mothers of young children would rather stay home.

Three-quarters (76%) say there has been a great deal or quite a lot of change “in recent years in the relationship between men and women in their roles in families, the workplace and society.”³² Two-thirds see these changes as both good and bad for the country, with more pointing to “good” (18%) than “bad” (13%).³³ They hold mixed views of whether it would be better or worse for the country if men and women returned to a “traditional” role from the 1950s: 38% say it would make things better, 34% worse, and 25% no difference.³⁴ The public is also ambivalent about whether it would be good or bad for their *own* families to return to a traditional role: 28% say it would make things better, 33% worse, and 37% no difference.³⁵

Though people may not necessarily want to return to the 1950s, they do think that changes in gender relationships have made it harder: “for parents to raise children” (80%); “for families to earn enough money to live comfortably” (65%); “for marriages to be successful” (71%); “for women to lead satisfying lives” (47%, with women 6 points more likely than men to say harder); and “for men to lead satisfying lives” (48% with men 9 points more likely than women to say harder).³⁶

The public sees a lot of pressure for women to have it all. It is possible, people assert, for women to be successful at both career and home, but it is much more difficult to raise children well in that environment. Most feel dual income families exist because both parents need to work, but also believe society would be better if one parent could stay home with children. Importantly, a sizable minority thinks many families could have one parent at home if they were willing to sacrifice material things.

The public believes “there is too much pressure to have it all – marriage, family, and a successful career” (66% agree, 45% strongly), and women in particular feel strongly about this (71% agree, 49% strongly).³⁷ Still, the public believes it *is possible* for women to have it all. Nearly three quarters (71%) believe “A woman can have a very successful, high-paying career and also be a very good mother” while 27% think “A woman must decide between having a very successful, high-paying career or being a very good mother.”³⁸ Slightly more (78%) say “A man can have a very successful, high-paying career and also be a very good father” while only 20% think “A man must decide between having a very successful, high-paying career or being a very good father.”³⁹ Men and women respond similarly to a man’s career choices, but when it comes to a woman’s choices, men are slightly more likely than women to believe a woman must

choose between career and family (30% of men, 25% of women).⁴⁰

While it is *possible* for women to have it all, the public is divided about whether or not a woman should *try* to have it all. Only a slim majority (51%) of both men and women believe “It’s fine for a mother with young children to take a job if she feels she can handle both responsibilities,” over “A mother who is able to financially should stay at home with young children” (43% of women, 41% of men agree).⁴¹

A majority (57%) says most dual income families work because they need two incomes to make ends meet. However, a sizable percentage sees other motivations: 22% think most dual income families are motivated by the desire to live in good neighborhoods with better homes and schools; 18% think they just want more money for things they could really do without.⁴² People are struggling with values as they consider these issues. They do not want material things to stand in the way of parents raising children themselves (the preferred state). Yet, they recognize that families need to decide what is best for their own situation.

The ideal, according to the public, is for one parent to stay home, work part-time or work from home. Most adults prefer to work outside the home, except for mothers of very young children who would, in large percentages, prefer to stay home. What mothers most want in a job is flexibility in their work schedule.

One at-home parent is the preferred option for families today. More than three-quarters agree (80%, 52% strongly) that “It may be necessary for mothers to be working because the family needs money, but it would be better if she could stay home and just take care of the house and children.”⁴³ A plurality (41%) says that one parent staying home to raise the children is ideal, followed by one parent working part-time (24%) or one parent working from home (17%). The option favored by the fewest is both parents working full-time (13%). Older Americans are most in favor of one parent staying home (56% of seniors support this option, compared to only 31% of those under 30).⁴⁴

There is increasing acceptance of fathers taking more responsibility for home and children. Of those who choose one parent working part-time as the ideal, more than two-thirds (69%) say it doesn’t matter which parent is working the full-time position. Of those who say one parent should stay home, a majority (55%) asserts it doesn’t matter which parent. Both of these responses have changed over time. In the ten years from 1991 to 2001, the percentage saying it doesn’t matter which parent stays home jumped 21 percentage points; the percentage saying it doesn’t matter which parent works full-time or part-time grew 14 percentage points.⁴⁵

If they were free to do either, most adults would prefer to work outside the home (62%) rather than stay at home and take care of the house and family (35%). This response is driven by men, who far prefer working outside the home (73%). Women overall are more divided, with a slight majority (53%) preferring working outside the home, and 45% saying they would prefer to stay home.⁴⁶ It is those with young children who favor

this option most. Fully 80% of mothers of children under 6 years old would prefer to stay home.⁴⁷

Rather than part-time work or work from home, what mothers most want in a job is flexibility in their work schedule. Three-quarters (73%) choose a flexible work schedule as very important in a job – much higher than part-time work, telecommuting or on-site childcare.⁴⁹

Mothers' Job Priorities⁴⁸	
(% Very Important)	
Flexible work schedule	73%
Part time hours/job sharing	42%
Telecommuting	42%
On-site child care	41%

Most working parents feel they have sufficient time for their children, and can alter their work situations for their family. However, most also feel guilt when they leave their children for work in the morning, and see day care as an option of last resort.

Most working parents report they have enough time to spend with their kids (67%), but not enough time for themselves (56%).⁵⁰ To meet their family needs, most working parents say their employer would allow them to work fewer hours (69%), have flexible hours (67%), and take paid leave (53%).⁵¹ Few (27%) believe it would hurt their career if their employer heard they wanted more time with their kids.⁵² However, half (47%) also report that when their childcare falls through, it causes problems at work.⁵³

A majority of married parents who work agrees (53%, 29% strongly agree) that they “feel bad about leaving my kids in the morning when I go to work.”⁵⁴ Men and women respond similarly to this question. The public views day care as a last resort: 71% agree (28% strongly agree) “parents should only rely on a day care center when they have no other option.”⁵⁵

The guilt in leaving children and disregard for day care may result, in part, from the public’s belief that children do not have as strong a bond with working parents. Two-thirds (67%) believe it is true, and 45% report it is *definitely* true that “Children usually have stronger bonds with parents who do not work and stay home than they do with parents who work full time outside of the home.”⁵⁶

Balancing work and family is viewed as the responsibility of parents. When the public is thinking of childcare as a work issue, few see a major role for government or employers.

Parents have primary responsibility for making sure that working families have childcare (60%); far fewer place responsibility on government (22%) or employers (15%).⁵⁷ Even more (72%) place responsibility for the costs of childcare squarely on parents, rather than perceive quality childcare as a benefit to society that all taxpayers should share (24%).⁵⁸

When confronted with the fact that “many mothers reduce their hours and responsibilities at work so they can be home when their children are young,” two-thirds (67%) respond that “is just how life works – it is a choice that mothers and families make for themselves.” Only 29% choose the alternative statement, that “this is a problem – if our

nation had a better child care system, mothers would not have to make this choice.”⁵⁹ In fact, those mothers who choose to stay home with children are held in more positive regard than mothers who work outside the home. A majority (51%) has more respect for mothers of pre-school children who stay home full-time, while only 20% have more respect for mothers who work full-time outside the home.⁶⁰

When the role for government and employers is defined broadly, parents appreciate the role both can play in addressing parents’ concerns, though they do not see either entity doing much now. Parents are divided in their assessment of how much government is doing about parents’ concerns – 36% say government is doing a “great deal” or “somewhat” while 50% say government is doing “not very much” or “nothing at all.” They rate employers similarly, with 44% saying employers are doing something to address parents’ concerns and 48% reporting they are not doing much. However, 81% believe government could do quite a bit (44% “a great deal,” 37% “somewhat”) and just as many (79%) say employers could do quite a bit (38% “a great deal,” 41% “somewhat”).⁶¹

Framing Child Development Issues

Policies for young children have been communicated through a variety of frames. Some position policies for young children as being about day care and work. Others have attached child development policies to education or school readiness. Advocates for welfare reform and poverty have highlighted poor children's needs. Crime prevention has been frequently touted as a reason to pay attention to children, though most use this in the context of older youth. The choice of frame has important consequences for public perceptions of the child development issues. This section analyzes public opinion data related to young children but gathered through an issue lens of work, education, crime or poverty. While it is not possible to complete a thorough and balanced assessment of the impact of each frame by comparing across surveys, this kind of analysis provides insights into the connections people make in response to characterizing the issue within these distinct frames.

Day Care and Work

Much of the framing of childcare has been in the context of work. Knowing that the public dislikes leaving young children in the care of others, one response has been that parents have no choice – they have to work. To advance improvements in the accessibility, affordability and quality of childcare, some advocates have tied the issue to employer responsibility. This section explores public response to programs and policies when people approach children's needs from the perspective of work.

As noted in the previous section about work and family, when the public thinks of childcare as a necessity for working parents, people tend to see day care centers as a negative circumstance -- the course of last resort. They prefer that one parent stay home rather than place children in the care of someone else.

Three-quarters of the public agrees (74%, 39% agree completely) that too many children are being raised in day care centers these days.⁶² When thinking in a work frame, the public *and* children's advocates agree that the best arrangement for families is for one parent to stay at home (71% of advocates, 70% of adults). Advocates see a quality day care center as the next best solution (13%), while the public thinks "parents working different shifts" is a better choice (14%).⁶³

Parents of young children and children's advocates feel very differently about day care centers. Three quarters of advocates agree (78%, 36% strongly) that "when children go to a top-notch day care center, the care and attention they get is just as good as what they would get from a stay-at-home parent." However, only 35% of parents of young children agree (9% strongly).⁶⁴

Importantly, negative attitudes toward childcare are due to its association with work and leaving children in the care of another. If, however, the frame is early education and

people are thinking of a quality learning environment, they feel very differently. A majority feels “very positive” toward “pre-school” (56%), “early learning” (55%) and other learning-oriented labels. In comparison, only 32% feel “very positive” toward “child care.”⁶⁵

Parents who use childcare say that their biggest concern in finding childcare is safety -- finding a trustworthy provider. Majorities are concerned about abuse and neglect, even though they are satisfied with their own childcare arrangements. They feel children get more attention and affection with a stay-at-home parent, but children learn how to get along with others in organized childcare.

Half (47%) of those with children 6 and younger have children in childcare for which they pay.⁶⁶ Most say that childcare is not much of a problem (68%) or an occasional struggle (21%). Even low-income parents report that it is not much of a problem (56%) or just an occasional struggle (26%). Only 11% of parents and 18% of low-income parents say that childcare is a continuous problem they struggle with on a regular basis.⁶⁷

The most difficult part of selection, according to those who currently use childcare, is finding a trustworthy provider (57%). Far fewer point to affordability (14%) or convenience (11%) as the most difficult part.⁶⁸

Parents of young children are very satisfied with their current childcare arrangements (83%),⁶⁹ and 62% of those with children in a professional day care center say if they could choose their ideal childcare arrangements, they would choose their current arrangement.⁷⁰ Even so, parents have a variety of concerns about what could happen in a typical day care center. Parents of young children are most concerned about the possibility of physical or sexual abuse (63% very concerned), followed by neglect (62%), lack of attention (55%) or picking up bad manners or behavior (52%).⁷¹

In comparing the advantages of staying at home with a parent and attending childcare “with well-trained caring people,” the public believes children are more likely to get the affection and attention they need with a stay-at-home parent (81%) rather than in child care (18%). Nearly half believe a child would learn basic values such as honesty and responsibility in either setting (49%), but the remainder put the advantage with a stay-at-home parent. Only in learning life skills such as how to share and get along with others, do people give the advantage to childcare (46%).⁷²

As noted in the prior section, the public places primary responsibility for childcare with working parents. However, when asked to consider the role for government and business, the public gives these sectors poor marks for the job they are doing. Employers reject that childcare is an important benefit, though workers say they would use on-site childcare if it were available.

Two-thirds (63%) of adults say the government is doing only a fair or poor job in making changes in the workplace to help workers meet the needs of their very young children.”⁷³

Nearly as many (59%) rate employers poorly on the job they are doing in changing to meet the needs of workers and their very young children.⁷⁴

Employers disagree (79%, 55% strongly) that they have lost good employees due to a lack of childcare benefits.⁷⁵ Large percentages agree (86% agree, 59% strongly) that the responsibilities and liabilities of an on-site childcare center are too much for their company to assume.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, 73% of working parents say they would be likely (46% extremely likely) to use high quality childcare if it were offered at their workplace.⁷⁷

Reasoning within the work frame, in which the public sees day care as an unfortunate circumstance and safety as the most important consideration, the desirable public policies are those that help parents stay home and regulate childcare for safety.

Given the choice, the public prefers that policy concerning families and work focus on making it easier and more affordable for one parent to stay at home (62%) rather than improving the cost and quality of childcare (30%).⁷⁸ In addressing the weaknesses in the childcare system, parents of young children believe the best direction for government policy is to tighten regulations on the current system (48%) rather than move toward a universal childcare system (27%).⁷⁹ Children’s advocates disagree. They see the best direction for government policy as moving toward universal childcare (68%) over providing tax breaks to make childcare more affordable (16%) or providing tax breaks to encourage families to have one parent stay at home (6%).⁸⁰

There are several policies that the public believes would be helpful in improving the care that young children receive. However, as the following table demonstrates, the work frame highlights *encouraging stay-at-home parents* as a policy proposal, while *creating universal childcare* is the least supported policy proposal. Reasoning within the work frame, the public would rather help parents stay home than continue to place children in arrangements they view as a last resort. The work frame underscores the needs of parents, but does little to advance the need for quality early education programs.

Policy Support -- % Very Helpful⁸¹

Giving a much bigger tax break to parents who stay home to care for their children	64%
Requiring employers to give employees six months of paid parental leave	61%
Increasing funding for the Head Start program for low-income families	60%
Tightening state regulations and licensing for childcare and day care centers	54%
Extending the school day with after-school programs to accommodate the schedule of working parents	48%
Giving families a much bigger tax break when they use professional childcare	48%
Spending tax money to create a universal childcare system for all families	40%

Parental leave is one policy that receives strong support under the work frame. One-third of adults (37%) and even more parents of young children (41%) say that a working

mother with a newborn should be able to stay home up to three months after giving birth. A majority of adults and parents (54%) thinks four or more months is ideal.⁸² There is wide-ranging support for a paid parental leave policy (80% support, 56% strong support).⁸³ Support is even higher for a paid parental leave policy supported through an expansion of state disability or unemployment insurance programs (85% support, 55% strong support).⁸⁴

Education and School Readiness

By attaching policies for young children to the education issue, advocates are taking a non-existent public policy issue (young children), and linking it to one of the public's most important priorities. However, it is important to recognize that, once under the education frame, school readiness must compete with all other school reform policies. Since people have little understanding of child development, school readiness policies are frequently rated as lower priorities than other better understood school reforms. Furthermore, a misunderstanding of child development may cause people to misinterpret what is meant by "early childhood education," and cause adults to worry that society is putting too much pressure on three and four-year-olds, forcing them to learn letters and numbers before they are ready.

Americans expect and hope that there will be improvements in education. They prioritize education because they see it as the best way to help youth and to improve our future.

Americans' greatest hope for the future of the nation is that there will be improvements in education (36%), followed by declining crime and drug abuse (34%), better race relations (29%), economic prosperity (26%), a cleaner environment (18%), and more personal freedom (8%).⁸⁵ Furthermore, nearly half expects there will be big changes in education over the next 30 years (45%) – more than expects changes in work life (24%) or politics (24%).⁸⁶ People are twice as likely to believe the public education system will improve in the next 50 years (66%) than to believe it will get worse (30%).⁸⁷

People give schools significant responsibility for creating a better future. When asked how big a role various institutions will play in making life better in the future, schools and universities are near the top (79% major role) after science and technology (89%) and medical advances (85%). Schools are seen as having a larger role than government, business, the military, the media, or religion.⁸⁸

When it comes to helping kids, two-thirds view improving school quality as the most effective approach, higher than community centers or more flexible work schedules for parents, specifically: improving the quality of the public schools (68% very effective way to help kids); more programs and activities for kids to do after school in places like community centers (60%); employers giving parents more flexible work schedules so they can spend more time with their kids (59%); more involvement by volunteer organizations dedicated to kids, like the Boy Scouts and the YMCA (52%); and a

nighttime curfew after which kids could not be on the street without their parents (51%).⁸⁹

The public has serious reservations about schools. Most give their own schools solid marks, but give failing marks to schools nationally. People worry that American schools are falling behind the rest of the world. The school system requires major change, but they would rather reform the existing system than create a new one.

Americans conclude the United States leads the world in just about every area, but American schools are “average” (37%), “below average” (31%) or “among the worst” (7%) compared to other industrialized countries.⁹⁰ People have lost respect and confidence in public schools since the 1970s. In 1973, 58% said they had “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in public schools. That figure has eroded over time and now stands at 38%.⁹¹

When thinking of schools nationally, only 23% of adults give schools a grade of “A” or “B.” However, ratings of their local public schools are far higher, with 51% grading their local public schools “A” or “B.”⁹² Ratings of local public schools have been increasing steadily since the early 1980s -- from 31% in 1983 who rated their schools an “A” or “B” to 51% today. Similarly, the percentage of public school parents rating their own local school as “A” or “B” has risen from 42% to 62%. At the same time, ratings of the nation’s schools have remained low.

Ratings of the nation’s schools are driven by negative perceptions of inner city schools, rather than schools generally. For example, a majority of women rate their community public schools “A” or “B” (57%), but only 38% grade the nation’s schools at the same level. Looking at ratings of local schools by city size clarifies that few of those who live in big cities rate their local schools highly (41%). The high response for community schools is the result of the response of those who live in suburbs (57% rate their community schools an “A” or “B”), small towns (66%), and rural areas (69%).⁹³

To fix the nation’s schools, the public would rather reform the existing public school system (72%) than find an alternative (24%).⁹⁴ However, they believe the necessary changes are significant. Nearly two-thirds (63%) say “there are good things, but the public school system in this country requires major changes,” rather than “it’s basically okay, but does require some minor changes (39%).” However, few (6%) believe “we need to completely replace it.”⁹⁵

The goal of schools, according to the public, is to prepare students for life. That means training students in how to think well, and providing practical skills and basic values. These are not the areas that schools prioritize now. The public is divided about whether all students can achieve high academic learning, but absolutely believes that students now achieve only a small part of their potential.

Schools have the wrong priorities. In the public’s view, schools are giving priority to “preparing students for college” (38%) and “providing vocational skills that prepare

students for employment” (28%). By contrast, people *want* schools to be “teaching students basic values, such as honesty and respect for others” (37%) and “teaching students how to reason and think well” (36%). Civic responsibility is at the bottom of what schools prioritize (9%) and what the public believes should be a priority (11%).⁹⁶ More (50%) would emphasize “teaching practical skills that are useful in the workplace and daily life” over “teaching academic subjects and intellectual development” (32%).⁹⁷

They are divided about whether all students have the ability to “reach a high level of learning.” A majority (52%) believes students can achieve this, while 46% think, “only some have the ability to reach a high level of learning.”⁹⁸ Regardless of a student’s own limitations, the public overwhelmingly believes that “most students achieve only a small part of their academic potential in school” (81%), while only 16% think “most students achieve their full potential.”⁹⁹

Education needs more funding, and the public is willing to pay more taxes to provide that funding. However, a message based solely on funding is likely to fail because the public sees many of the problems facing schools as problems money cannot fix.

Two-thirds of adults (66%) say government spends too little on public school education,¹⁰⁰ and 65% would like to see federal spending on education increased.¹⁰¹ A majority of both parents (59%) and non-parents (53%) are willing to pay as much as \$500 per year in increased taxes to provide for education. This show of support is particularly compelling since respondents were also given options to support \$100 (9% favor giving \$100 but not \$200), and then \$200 (20% favor paying \$200, but not \$500).¹⁰²

However, the debate over fixing schools cannot rest on funding, since many of the problems people see are believed to be problems money cannot solve. While 33% believe that increasing funding for public schools is the most important thing that the federal government can do to improve education, 64% believe there are more important things that need to be done.¹⁰³ Only by a slim 8-point margin do people think the quality of schools is related to the amount of money spent (50% say “yes,” 42% “no”).¹⁰⁴

Money can address problems such as run-down schools, class size, equipment and teachers’ salaries. Decaying school buildings is a high priority. “Fixing run-down schools” is the strongest priority for funds (80% strongly favor), ranked even higher than reducing class size (69%), more computers (61%), teacher pay (60%), and increased security (53%).¹⁰⁵ The intensity of support for fixing run-down schools is likely due to Americans’ desire to improve inner city schools. Fully 86% state that improving the nation’s inner city schools is “very important,” and 66% are willing to pay more taxes to provide the funds to improve these schools.¹⁰⁶

However, the public also sees the need for fundamental changes that do not require money, such as standards and values. “High standards” is frequently at the top of the public’s favorite reforms, with 85% strongly favoring “making students meet adequate academic standards to be promoted or graduated.”¹⁰⁷

According to the public, the problem in education is a lack of parental involvement, and “fixing” parents is the best solution. People believe a child’s ability to succeed is more a function of parents than of schools, and they worry that schools are being asked to do parents’ jobs.

More people rate “lack of parental involvement” as a “major problem facing schools” than any other cause, including drugs, discipline, crowding and violence. Three-quarters (78%) see lack of parental involvement as a major problem for the nation’s schools; 55% say it is a major problem in their own community schools. Discipline and drugs follow, at 73% and 69% respectively for the nation’s schools, 50% and 51% for community schools.¹⁰⁸

Furthermore, parents are perceived to be more important than teachers in achieving educational success. Twice as many (42%) think “the involvement and attention of the parents” matters more in determining the quality of a child’s education than the “quality of the teachers and the school” (21%).¹⁰⁹ When thinking about “learning and getting ready for school,” two-thirds (66%) believe that “most young kids are better off with a parent at home full-time” rather than being in “high-quality educational child care” (19%). (Note that this finding is from a survey of Illinois residents, but we believe it to be the kind of question likely to reflect national sentiment.)¹¹⁰

At the same time, most people agree that schools are being asked to compensate for parental failures. Two-thirds (66%) believe “we are asking our schools to do too many things that really should be handled by parents at home” while only 24% think “with families and children under so many pressures today, it’s important for schools to take on more responsibilities concerning students.”¹¹¹

Parents want their children to love to learn, and when they do, parents define the school as being of high quality.

Though people show strong support for testing, standards, and more parental involvement, the proof of a quality school is very simple – children who like school (61% say it is one of the most important signs of a quality school). Only 11% of kids say they love school and an additional 28% “like school a lot.”¹¹³

The biggest challenge for children’s advocates is that when early childhood education is placed within an education reform frame, it is accorded a lower priority than many of the other desired reforms.

% One of the Most Important Signs of School Quality¹¹²	
Happy children who like school	61
High graduation rates	42
High attendance rates	40
High parental involvement	40
Small class size	37
High college attendance rates	36
Strong principals	36
Availability of technology	35
Small school size	29
Extra curricular activities	25
Low teacher turnover	22
High test scores	17
The way a school looks	17
Teacher awards	17
Awards in math and science	16

Majorities strongly favor a variety of reforms for education. Topping the list of NEA’s suggested reforms are policies that ensure a quality teacher in every classroom (64% strongly support) and increasing opportunities for higher education (62%). A majority also recognizes the need for repairing school buildings (56%), investing in low performing schools (56%), and encouraging federal funding for students with learning disabilities (54%). Early childhood education policies are supported by a majority (52%) but are last on the list of tested priorities.

Support for NEA’s Opportunity to Excel Program¹¹⁴

% Strongly Favor

Ensure that every classroom has a high quality teacher by promoting teaching as a career, raising teacher pay, and providing financial assistance to teachers to continue their education and improve their skills in the classroom	64%
Make college affordable for more families by expanding college loan and grant programs, and increasing student aid	62%
Provide funding to repair schools in poor condition and build new schools, and provide assistance to help schools wire classrooms for computers	56%
Invest in low performing schools by reducing their class sizes, using higher pay to attract good teachers, and expanding before and after school programs for students	56%
Require the federal government to live up to its funding obligation of 40 percent for students with learning disabilities and provide more funding, which allow local school districts to spend more of their local funding on the entire student population	54%
Expand early childhood education by providing full funding for Head Start, expanded day care programs in local school districts, and tax credits to help families pay for kindergarten and pre-school	52%

People worry about pushing young children into an educational setting too soon.

Even when early childhood education is a priority, some are concerned about pushing kids into education too fast. Generally they believe that kids younger than six should not be in an educational environment for too long at a time.¹¹⁵ They overwhelmingly prefer half-day programs (81%) to full-day programs (15%) and two or three-day-a-week programs (66%) over five-day-a-week programs (30%).¹¹⁶

Furthermore, the public values early learning programs for five-year-olds, but places less value in these programs at younger ages. While 71% feel it is “very important” for five-year-olds to spend time in an organized learning program outside the home, only 45% feel it is very important for four-year-olds and only 31% feel it is very important for three-year olds.¹¹⁷

People assess the value of these programs as helping children learn social skills, such as learning to share and play with others (35%) and being able to listen and follow instructions (29%). In fact, when forced to choose between the two, a majority (52%) prefers a social skills program to an academic program (23%).¹¹⁸

Crime Prevention

Some public opinion studies have shown that crime prevention is an effective frame for programs for youth. However, the frame has been used most frequently to promote after-school programs, and has been tested as an “after school issue” or an “after school and early education issue.” Few have tested this frame in advancing policies for children under five years old, and it is not clear that a crime prevention frame will effectively prioritize policies relevant to that age group.

When thinking in a crime and violence frame, the public wants to emphasize prevention over punishment. They see after-school programs and early education programs as effective crime prevention measures. Police chiefs agree with the public about the effectiveness of after school and early education programs.

Nearly all adults agree that youth outreach programs are effective in preventing crime. Fully 86% agree (56% strongly), “America could greatly reduce violent crime by expanding preventive efforts like after-school programs for school-age children and teens, Head Start and other early childhood development programs, and interventions for troubled kids.”¹¹⁹

Furthermore, police chiefs across the nation believe in the effectiveness of these crime prevention efforts. Nearly all (86%) police chiefs say “Expanding after-school programs and educational child care programs like Head Start would greatly reduce youth crime and violence.” They see after-school programs and educational child care programs as more effective crime prevention strategies (69%) than prosecuting juveniles as adults (17%), hiring more police officers (13%) or installing more metal detectors in schools (1%). Police chiefs prioritize three programs: after school and summer youth programs (57%), parent coaching for high-risk families (53%), and Head Start or similar early childhood education (49%).¹²⁰

While Americans recognize that there are frequently extenuating circumstances, they nevertheless believe children to be violent because their parents did not raise them well.

As is so often the case with children’s issues, the public holds parents responsible for creating many perceived problems and for solving them. Overwhelmingly, the public places responsibility for ensuring that children are not violent at school on parents (85%) rather than schools (9%). The main cause of school shootings like Columbine, they assert, is poor upbringing by their parents (42%) followed by violence in the media (26%) and peer pressure (14%). Few think children have a genetic tendency toward violence (4%). The leading solution, therefore, is paying more attention to kids’ anti-social behaviors (60%), rather than reducing violence in the media (13%), increasing school security (11%) or passing stricter gun control laws (6%).¹²¹

Still, parents are not alone in responsibility. The public perceives several other causes of school violence including the availability of guns and violence in the media. Even when considering juvenile crime more broadly, a majority of Americans point to a lack of strong families as the main cause (54%), followed by drugs (46%), not having a sense of right and wrong (38%), and gangs (37%). Fewer point to immaturity and bad judgment (29%), availability of guns (26%), violence on television (25%), poverty (17%) or poor schools (15%).¹²³

Importance of Causes of School Shootings	
% Extremely Important ¹²²	
The home life students have today, including their relationship with their parents	57%
The availability and ease of obtaining guns by students	46%
The portrayal of violence and use of guns in today's entertainment and music	38%
The coverage given to school shootings by the news media	32%
The way schools discipline their students	31%
Bullying and teasing of students at school	29%
The size of high schools today in terms of the number of students who attend	20%
The fact that families move around and the students don't have roots in one specific town	17%

It is not clear that crime prevention is the best frame for encouraging support for early childhood efforts, but conversely it does seem clear that a child development perspective helps bring more sensitivity to juvenile justice issues.

When asked to consider the factors in determining punishment for a juvenile who has committed a crime, most look first to the type of crime committed (65%). The public is then most likely to assess whether or not the juvenile has committed a crime before (52% choose it as their second choice). Far fewer choose the age of the juvenile as the first (8%) or second (20%) factor they would consider.¹²⁴

Still, the public wants to concentrate on prevention and rehabilitation (90%, 77% strongly) over imprisonment. Among a series of reasons to support alternatives to imprisonment, the most convincing statements include a developmental perspective: that most juveniles who commit crimes have the potential to be rehabilitated and to change (89% convincing, 42% very convincing); and that juvenile offenders often have emotional problems and need counseling not prison (84%, 44%). The strongest critique against the juvenile justice system would be that it does not try to rehabilitate juvenile offenders (57% extremely serious concern).¹²⁵

In the few instances where a crime prevention frame has been used to promote early childhood issues, it has proven less effective than other approaches.

As noted, most of the research testing the impact of the crime prevention message has been with issues related to older children, such as after school programs. Much of this research has demonstrated significant boosts in support for after school programs after hearing a crime prevention message, particularly when delivered by a police chief in tandem with a crime victim.¹²⁶

However, success in positioning after school programs for older children does not mean that this same message will prove effective for early childhood issues. In one recent poll about early childhood where the crime prevention message was tested, it rated much lower than messages about school performance, social development or opportunity. Crime prevention from a positive perspective (“children who participate are less likely to get involved with things like gangs...”) performed better than negative messages (“children who do not participate are more likely to have problems...”), but neither approach was particularly persuasive for early childhood issues.¹²⁷

Convincing Reason for Education¹ Programs for 3 and 4 Year Olds¹²⁸

“I’d like to list reasons that some people have given for why it is important to have (preferred label previously chosen) programs available for 3 and 4 year-old children. For each statement, please tell me whether you think it is extremely convincing, very convincing, fairly convincing, just somewhat convincing, or not really convincing.”

	% Extremely Convincing	% Very Convincing
Many children who participate in (LABEL) programs do better when they enter elementary school and score higher on basic skills tests.	30	33
Many children who participate in (LABEL) programs are more self-confident, better adjusted, and less likely to be disruptive and cause problems that affect other children in the classroom when they enter elementary school.	28	30
Good (LABEL) programs help motivate young children to become problem-solvers who are more successful in school, work, and in their communities.	25	32
Having children participate in (LABEL) programs strengthens families by giving parents the resources and support they need to help their children get a good start.	25	31
Good (LABEL) programs cost a lot more than most working families can afford, leaving many parents with few alternatives.	23	25
<i>Children who participate in (LABEL) programs are less likely to get involved with things like gangs and drugs as they get older and more likely to grow up and become productive, contributing members of the community.</i>	19	25
Good (LABEL) programs benefit the economy and save taxpayers two dollars for every dollar invested, because these programs prevent school failure and crime and produce a better educated, more productive workforce.	19	22
Children who do NOT participate in (LABEL) programs are less self-confident, less adjusted, and more likely to be disruptive and cause problems that affect other children in the classroom when they enter elementary school.	18	17
Good (LABEL) programs benefit the economy and save taxpayers two dollars for every dollar invested.	13	20
<i>Children who do NOT participate in (LABEL) programs are more likely to have problems in school and to get involved with things like gangs and drugs as they get older.</i>	14	16

¹ Respondents select their preferred label (preschool, early learning, etc.), which is then used throughout.

Welfare and the Poor

Considerations of what is best for children change significantly when people are thinking about what is best for *poor* children. While they want mothers to stay home with young children, most people want poor mothers to work. While Americans dislike childcare, they strongly support childcare subsidies for poor women. The driving motivation behind this seeming inconsistency is that the public values work, and believes it is in a child's best interest to see a parent go to work every day (something it does not believe happens when parents are on welfare).

When it concerns poor women, the public stands behind the value of work: 69% agree, "Single mothers who are capable of working should work even if they have young children or other family members to care for."¹²⁹ This is not to punish the poor, but rather to help break the cycle of poverty and instill the work ethic in children of welfare parents. The public assumes welfare parents are not working, even though low-income parents express higher levels of worry than upper-income people about parents not having enough time to spend with their children due to work and other pressures (63% of those earning less than \$30,000 worry a great deal compared to 46% of those earning \$75,000 or more).¹³⁰

Even parents of very young children believe the benefits of learning the value of work override the undesirability of childcare. Among parents of young children, 86% agree, 53% strongly, that "It's important for kids whose families are on welfare to see their parent working or going to school, even if it means the kids must be in child care."¹³¹ Even among young parents who believe it is important for a parent to stay home during the child's youngest years, they *still* think it is better for parents *on welfare* to use child care so they can go to work or school (73%), while only 21% believe it is better for them to stay home.¹³²

The public also views education differently when responding to children's issues from within a poverty frame. People perceive poor quality schools as leading to poverty and are then more willing to view early education programs as necessary to a child's future success. They support childcare subsidies to support work as well as to help poor children get a better start in life. Finally, education messages for low-income students are more powerful when they speak to opportunity than when they emphasize disparities.

Nearly half the public (47%) sees poor quality public schools as a major cause of poverty.¹³³ The scope of public education in addressing poverty includes pre-school and grade school education, in part because the public thinks a child's core personality is determined in elementary school. A majority believes that grade school has more influence than high school on the kind of person a child will be when grown (57% point to grade school, 27% high school).¹³⁴

Similarly, the public sees quality child care as a way to help poor children climb out of poverty. Eighty percent (80%) agree, 52% strongly, that “The nation’s poorest children need low-cost, high quality day care centers to have a fair chance of succeeding in school and climbing out of poverty.”¹³⁵

Messages that advocate improving education for poor students are most effective when linked to the value of opportunity. For example, fully 60% say a very good reason to increase federal spending on education is “Federal spending on higher education must be increased so that students from low-income families can have equal access to the opportunities that education provides.”¹³⁶ A majority (55%) says a very good reason is “Schools in low-income areas must receive more federal funding to ensure that all students have the same access to the opportunities that education provides as students in well-funded school districts.”¹³⁷ In comparison, a message about overt disparities proves far weaker in galvanizing support. Forty-two percent say a very good reason to support more funding is “Federal spending on education must be increased to minimize disparities in the quality of education across the nation.”¹³⁸

The public demonstrates high levels of support for child care assistance to support the working poor, and strong levels of support for Head Start as a way to give poor children greater opportunities.

Of a variety of actions designed to help the poor, more people support expanding subsidies for day care (85%) and increasing the minimum wage (85%). The seeming conflict in public opinion between what is best for all children and what is best for poor children helps to explain why parents of young children can both support giving a tax break to parents who stay at home to care for their children (64% say it would be very helpful), and also support increasing funding for the Head Start program for low-income families (60% very helpful).¹⁴⁰ It helps explain why fully 86% support childcare assistance for all low-income families so they can work,¹⁴¹ a higher level of support than for financial assistance for quality childcare for working families generally (65%).¹⁴²

Government Actions to Help Poor	
	% Support¹³⁹
Increasing the minimum wage	85
Expanding subsidized day care	85
Spending more for medical care for poor people	83
Increasing tax credits for low-income workers	80
Spending more for housing for poor people	75
Making food stamps more available to poor people	61
Guaranteeing everyone a minimum income	57
Increasing cash assistance for families	54

In considering a series of policies to address poverty, such as increasing the minimum wage, expanding childcare subsidies, and improving access to health care, a majority (56%) feels so strongly about these solutions that they are willing to pay more in taxes to effect them, with 44% willing to pay \$200 more in taxes.¹⁴³ At the same time, however, 86% agree, “If spent more wisely, there should be enough money in the existing federal budget to take care of the poor.”¹⁴⁴

The most critical fault in the poverty frame is the fact that positioning children's issues as poor children's issues limits personal engagement in helping to enact public policy change.

As noted in this section, day care subsidies and programs for low-income children such as Head Start are very popular programs. People frequently place higher priority on expanding opportunities for poor children, using these programs to "level the playing field." However, making this an issue for all helps people personally identify with the issue and a majority (55%) would prefer that early learning programs be free to all children (55%) rather than make them free just to poor children (39%).¹⁴⁵

The Role for State Government

As noted throughout this section, the level of public support for government programs for young children depends upon the message frame. For example, the public is less likely to support government funding for childcare if they are thinking of it in the context of helping working families, and more likely to support funding in the context of education. Beyond funding, the public looks to state government to set standards for early learning programs, but they are less enthusiastic about state government operating or evaluating these programs.

The public believes state government should be ensuring the safety of early learning programs through licensing and inspections (71% strongly support) and that state government should provide funding and financial support so that all parents who want to can afford to enroll their children (64% strongly support). A majority (59%) also believes state government should set standards for learning and teacher training. Fewer strongly support state governments working with school systems to operate early learning programs (43%) or holding programs accountable through evaluation standards (34%).¹⁴⁶

The existing economic climate will make it difficult for community stakeholders to advance new policies within state legislatures unless the new policies are tied to existing priorities. State legislators see the upcoming budgets as requiring spending cuts, and view education, the economy, jobs and a balanced budget as the highest priorities.

The National Center for Children in Poverty sponsored public opinion research of state policymakers in Spring 2002. The context of the poll is poverty, so it is too limited to be useful in developing a broader frame for early childhood that is the focus of this research effort. However, the research is useful in demonstrating the legislative context in which communities will be operating.

More than two-thirds (68%) of state legislators report that their state’s economy has gotten worse over the past year. Policymakers are getting ready to make tough choices in the upcoming budget session: 54% of state legislators say they will be “looking at making spending cuts” in dealing with their state’s budget (20% say the cuts will be “substantial”).¹⁴⁸

Their top priority is education, with 45% saying that improving public education is “one of the most important priorities.” Note that “public education” is rated as a high priority by many more legislators than related “educational” issues such as after school programs (33%) or affordable child care (28%). The economy, creating jobs and balancing the state budget are the next highest priorities (40%, 39% and 39% respectively).¹⁴⁹

Policymakers’ responses to these priorities demonstrate that they, just like the public, frame issues, and the framing of an issue influences its priority. For example, several of the issues with lower ratings are economic issues, yet they do not receive the same priority as the economy and jobs because they have not traditionally been framed as economic issues -- taxes, minimum wage, and housing. Similarly, “reducing the number of people on welfare” is rated as a higher priority than “helping low-income families with children” even though these two categories could reflect the same policies and the same audience.

Again, within a poverty framework, legislators see skill development and education as more effective approaches to alleviating poverty than adjusting income or expenses for low-income families. Like the public, legislators value the opportunity that education can provide for moving a family out of poverty for the long-term.

State Legislators’ Priorities	
% “One of the Most Important Priorities” ¹⁴⁷	
Improving public education	45%
Improving state economy	40%
Creating jobs	39%
Balancing state budget	39%
Reducing the number of people on welfare	36%
Providing after school programs	33%
Helping low-income families with children	30%
Provide affordable child care	28%
Reduce hunger and homeless	27%
Reducing child poverty	27%
Insure uninsured children	27%
Health insurance for child of working poor	26%
Affordable housing	26%
Help vulnerable families	24%
Hold down taxes	23%
Cut state spending	22%
Combat terrorism	21%
Increasing state minimum wage	18%
Cutting taxes	17%
Improve family values	16%
Protect patients in HMOs	15%
Protect environment	15%
Closing tax loopholes	13%
Fighting crime	12%

State Legislators’ Views of Policy Effectiveness	
% Saying “One of the Most Effective Policies” ¹⁵⁰	
Build knowledge and skill	35%
Expand educational opportunities	30%
Promote parental responsibility	19%
Raise the income of low-income families	16%
Reduce expenses of working families	13%
Promote marriage	10%
Reduce expenses of low-income families	10%

Conclusions

When confronted with most early childhood issues, the public consistently defaults to an assessment that “parents are responsible.” This means that communications must be very deliberate in framing early childhood in a way that promotes societal responsibility.

People value good parenting highly. They evaluate their own actions and the nation’s public policies through the lens of what they believe it means to be a good parent. This definition of good parenting, however, is not based on a philosophy of child development that is in line with child development experts. An appropriate, vigorous model of development would likely lead to stronger support for sound early childhood policies.

Each of the existing frames – education, work, poverty, and crime prevention – leads to support for some policies. Advocates with a narrow policy perspective might be well served by these frames. None of these frames, however, creates a “whole child” perspective that would unite the full range of early childhood policies.

The task for communications, then, becomes developing a message framework that attaches a developmental perspective, a whole child perspective, to the definition of being a good parent and a good citizen. Only in this way is it conceivable that a full range of early child policies can be advanced without falling prey to competing policies. This is the lesson we derive from the existing opinion research and one that must guide future studies.

¹ ABC News and the Washington Post, 1507 adults nationally, January 24-27, 2002.

² Gallup Polls – Gallup News Service, Jan. 24, 01

³ “Accountability for All: What Voters Want from Education Candidates,” sponsored by Public Education Network and Edweek magazine, conducted by Lake Snell Perry and Associates, 800 voters with an oversample of 125 registered African-American voters and 125 registered Latino voters, January 15–21, 2002.

⁴ “Accountability for All: What Voters Want from Education Candidates,” sponsored by Public Education Network and Edweek magazine, conducted by Lake Snell Perry and Associates, 800 voters with an oversample of 125 registered African-American voters and 125 registered Latino voters, January 15–21, 2002.

⁵ “Accountability for All: What Voters Want from Education Candidates,” sponsored by Public Education Network and Edweek magazine, conducted by Lake Snell Perry and Associates, 800 voters with an

oversample of 125 registered African-American voters and 125 registered Latino voters, January 15–21, 2002.

⁶ Sponsored by the Committee for Education Funding, conducted by Ipsos Reid, 1000 adults, Feb 1-3, 2002.

⁷ “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,” sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc. 3000 adults nationwide, including 1066 parents of children aged newborn through six. June 12 – July 5, 2000.

⁸ NORC General Social Survey, 1998.

⁹ NORC General Social Survey, 1983-87.

¹⁰ NORC General Social Survey, 1994.

¹¹ NORC General Social Survey, 1998.

¹² Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,202 adults nationally, Aug. 14-Sept. 7, 1997.

¹³ Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,202 adults nationally, Aug. 14-Sept. 7, 1997.

¹⁴ Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,202 adults nationally, Aug. 14-Sept. 7, 1997.

¹⁵ “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,” sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc. 3000 adults nationwide, including 1066 parents of children aged newborn through six. June 12 – July 5, 2000.

¹⁶ “Motherhood Today -- A Tougher Job, Less Ably Done,” sponsored by the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1,101 women nationally, March 14-26, 1997.

¹⁷ Hart and Teeter/NBC/Wall Street Journal, 6/99.

¹⁸ Greenberg/Quinlan Democracy Corps, 12/99.

¹⁹ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.

²⁰ “Motherhood Today -- A Tougher Job, Less Ably Done,” sponsored by the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1,101 women nationally, March 14-26, 1997.

²¹ Kids These Days, Public Agenda.

²² “Motherhood Today -- A Tougher Job, Less Ably Done,” sponsored by the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1,101 women nationally, March 14-26, 1997.

²³ “Motherhood Today -- A Tougher Job, Less Ably Done,” sponsored by the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1,101 women nationally, March 14-26, 1997.

²⁴ “Motherhood Today -- A Tougher Job, Less Ably Done,” sponsored by the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1,101 women nationally, March 14-26, 1997.

²⁵ Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,202 adults nationally, Aug. 14-Sept. 7, 1997.

²⁶ Roper Center/University of Connecticut, 3/97.

²⁷ “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,” sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc. 3000 adults nationwide, including 1066 parents of children aged newborn through six. June 12 – July 5, 2000.

²⁸ “Motherhood Today -- A Tougher Job, Less Ably Done,” sponsored by the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1,101 women nationally, March 14-26, 1997.

²⁹ Princeton Survey Research/Pew, 5/99.

³⁰ Washington Post/Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Value Study, 2,025 adults nationally, July 29-August 18, 1998.

³¹ Washington Post/Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Value Study, 2,025 adults nationally, July 29-August 18, 1998.

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- ³² Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,008 adults on November 20-23, 1997.
- ³³ Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,008 adults on November 20-23, 1997.
- ³⁴ Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,008 adults on November 20-23, 1997.
- ³⁵ Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,008 adults on November 20-23, 1997.
- ³⁶ Survey of Americans on Gender in the Workplace, sponsored by the Washington Post, Kaiser Family Foundation, Harvard University Survey Project, conducted by Chilton Research Services, 804 adults nationally, November 17-23, 1997.
- ³⁷ Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,202 adults nationally, Aug. 14-Sept. 7, 1997.
- ³⁸ Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,202 adults nationally, Aug. 14-Sept. 7, 1997.
- ³⁹ Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,202 adults nationally, Aug. 14-Sept. 7, 1997.
- ⁴⁰ Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,202 adults nationally, Aug. 14-Sept. 7, 1997.
- ⁴¹ The Shell Survey, conducted by Peter Hart Research, 1040 women and 413 men, January 7-13, 2000.
- ⁴² "Necessary Compromises" by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.
- ⁴³ Washington Post poll. 1,477 registered voters on September 7 -17, 2000.
- ⁴⁴ Conducted by the Gallup Organization, 1,015 adults nationally, April 20-22, 2001.
- ⁴⁵ The Gallup Organization, April 20-22, 2001 and July 25-28, 1991.
- ⁴⁶ Conducted by the Gallup Organization, June 11-17, 2001.
- ⁴⁷ "Necessary Compromises" by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.
- ⁴⁸ "Motherhood Today -- A Tougher Job, Less Ably Done," sponsored by the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1,101 women nationally, March 14-26, 1997.
- ⁴⁹ "Motherhood Today -- A Tougher Job, Less Ably Done," sponsored by the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1,101 women nationally, March 14-26, 1997.
- ⁵⁰ "What will parents vote for" by Charney Research for the National Parenting Association and Offspring Magazine, 500 American parents and oversamples of 50black parents, 50 Latino parents, and 50 parents who were welfare recipients, January 26 to February 8, 2000.
- ⁵¹ "What will parents vote for" by Charney Research for the National Parenting Association and Offspring Magazine, 500 American parents and oversamples of 50black parents, 50 Latino parents, and 50 parents who were welfare recipients, January 26 to February 8, 2000.
- ⁵² "What will parents vote for" by Charney Research for the National Parenting Association and Offspring Magazine, 500 American parents and oversamples of 50black parents, 50 Latino parents, and 50 parents who were welfare recipients, January 26 to February 8, 2000.
- ⁵³ Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,202 adults nationally, Aug. 14-Sept. 7, 1997.
- ⁵⁴ Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,202 adults nationally, Aug. 14-Sept. 7, 1997.
- ⁵⁵ "Necessary Compromises" by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.
- ⁵⁶ "What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development," sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc. 3000 adults nationwide, including 1066 parents of children aged newborn through six. June 12 – July 5, 2000.

⁵⁷ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.

⁵⁸ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.

⁵⁹ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.

⁶⁰ Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Gender Poll, 1,202 adults nationally, Aug. 14-Sept. 7, 1997.

⁶¹ “What will parents vote for” by Charney Research for the National Parenting Association and Offspring Magazine, 500 American parents and oversamples of 50 black parents, 50 Latino parents, and 50 parents who were welfare recipients, January 26 to February 8, 2000.

⁶² 1997 Pew Values Update Survey, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1,165 adults nationally, November 5-9, 1997 and November 13-17, 1997.

⁶³ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.

⁶⁴ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.

⁶⁵ Sponsored by the National Institute for Early Education Research, conducted by Hart Research, 3230 voters nationally, November 29-December 13, 2001.

⁶⁶ “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,” sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc. 3000 adults nationwide, including 1066 parents of children aged newborn through six. June 12 – July 5, 2000.

⁶⁷ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.

⁶⁸ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.

⁶⁹ Princeton Survey Research Associates/Newsweek, 8/00.

⁷⁰ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.

⁷¹ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.

⁷² “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.

⁷³ “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,” sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc. 3000 adults nationwide, including 1066 parents of children aged newborn through six. June 12 – July 5, 2000.

⁷⁴ “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,” sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc. 3000 adults nationwide, including 1066 parents of children aged newborn through six. June 12 – July 5, 2000.

⁷⁵ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.

⁷⁶ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.

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- ⁷⁷ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.
- ⁷⁸ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.
- ⁷⁹ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.
- ⁸⁰ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.
- ⁸¹ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.
- ⁸² “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,” sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc. 3000 adults nationwide, including 1066 parents of children aged newborn through six. June 12 – July 5, 2000.
- ⁸³ “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,” sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc. 3000 adults nationwide, including 1066 parents of children aged newborn through six. June 12 – July 5, 2000.
- ⁸⁴ “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,” sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc. 3000 adults nationwide, including 1066 parents of children aged newborn through six. June 12 – July 5, 2000.
- ⁸⁵ The Shell Poll, conducted by Peter Hart Research, 1264 adults nationally, November 5-8, 1998.
- ⁸⁶ The Shell Poll, conducted by Peter Hart Research, 1264 adults nationally, November 5-8, 1998.
- ⁸⁷ 1999 Millennium Survey, sponsored by the Pew Research Center, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1546 adults nationally, April 6 – May 6, 1999.
- ⁸⁸ 1999 Millennium Survey, sponsored by the Pew Research Center, conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1546 adults nationally, April 6 – May 6, 1999.
- ⁸⁹ Sponsored by the Advertising Council and Ronald McDonald House Charities, conducted by Public Agenda, 1005 adults nationally, December 1-8, 1998.
- ⁹⁰ The Shell Poll, conducted by Peter Hart Research, 1123 adults nationally, July 17-20, 1998.
- ⁹¹ Gallup trend.
- ⁹² Sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa, conducted by the Gallup Organization, 1,108 adults nationally, conducted May 23-Jun. 6, 2001.
- ⁹³ AAUW Survey, by Lake Research 675 women nationally, June 1998.
- ⁹⁴ Sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa, conducted by the Gallup Organization, 1,108 adults nationally, conducted May 23-Jun. 6, 2001.
- ⁹⁵ Sponsored by the Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard university, conducted by ICR, 1225 registered voters nationally, May 11-22, 2000.
- ⁹⁶ Shell Oil Company Poll, by Hart Research, 1123 adults nationally, July 1998.
- ⁹⁷ The Shell Poll, conducted by Peter Hart Research, 1123 adults nationally, July 17-20, 1998.
- ⁹⁸ Sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa, conducted by the Gallup Organization, 1,108 adults nationally, conducted May 23-Jun. 6, 2001.
- ⁹⁹ Sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa, conducted by the Gallup Organization, 1,108 adults nationally, conducted May 23-Jun. 6, 2001.
- ¹⁰⁰ Conducted by Louis Harris and Associates, 1011 adults nationally, April 22-27, 1998.
- ¹⁰¹ The ABC News/Washington Post Poll, 1083 adults nationally, March 30 – April 2, 2000.
- ¹⁰² NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Education Survey, conducted by ICR, 1422 adults nationally, June 25 – July 19, 1999.
- ¹⁰³ Sponsored by the Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard university, conducted by ICR, 1225 registered voters nationally, May 11-22, 2000.
- ¹⁰⁴ “Attitudes Toward the Public Schools 1998 Survey” sponsored by Phi Delta Kapa, by Gallup, 1151 adults nationally, June 1998.

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- ¹⁰⁵ NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Education Survey, conducted by ICR, 1422 adults nationally, June 25 – July 19, 1999.
- ¹⁰⁶ “Attitudes Toward the Public Schools 1998 Survey” sponsored by Phi Delta Kapa, by Gallup, 1151 adults nationally, June 1998.
- ¹⁰⁷ NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Education Survey, conducted by ICR, 1422 adults nationally, June 25 – July 19, 1999.
- ¹⁰⁸ NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Education Survey, conducted by ICR, 1422 adults nationally, June 25 – July 19, 1999.
- ¹⁰⁹ The Shell Poll, conducted by Peter Hart Research, 1123 adults nationally, July 17-20, 1998.
- ¹¹⁰ Illinois Early Childhood Statewide Survey, sponsored by Voices for Illinois Children, conducted by Market Strategies, 603 registered voters in Illinois, May 3-6, 2001.
- ¹¹¹ The Shell Poll, conducted by Peter Hart Research, 1123 adults nationally, July 17-20, 1998.
- ¹¹² Sponsored by the American Association of School Administrators, conducted by Lake Snell Perry & Associates, 750 K-12 public school parents, October 14-19, 1999.
- ¹¹³ The Shell Education Survey, conducted by Peter Hart Research, 1015 high school students, June 8-29, 1999.
- ¹¹⁴ Sponsored by the National Education Association, conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Research and The Tarrance Group, 1000 registered voters nationwide and an oversample of 200 registered voters with children under 18 years of age, February 4 - 7, 2001.
- ¹¹⁵ Sponsored by I Am Your Child, conducted by Hart Research and Market Strategies, 12 focus groups, February 2001.
- ¹¹⁶ Sponsored by the National Institute for Early Education Research, conducted by Hart Research, 3230 voters nationally, November 29-December 13, 2001.
- ¹¹⁷ Sponsored by the National Institute for Early Education Research, conducted by Hart Research, 3230 voters nationally, November 29-December 13, 2001.
- ¹¹⁸ Sponsored by the National Institute for Early Education Research, conducted by Hart Research, 3230 voters nationally, November 29-December 13, 2001.
- ¹¹⁹ Sponsored by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, conducted by the Opinion Research Corporation, 1,010 adults nationally, August 4-7, 2000.
- ¹²⁰ Poll of Police Chiefs, sponsored by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, conducted by George Mason University, 855 police chiefs, October 14-27, 1999.
- ¹²¹ April 2000 News Interest Index, by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 1000 adults nationally, April 12-16, 2000.
- ¹²² Conducted by the Gallup Organization, March 26-28, 2001.
- ¹²³ National Survey on Juvenile Justice, sponsored by the Youth Law Center, conducted by Belden Russonello and Stewart, 2003 adults nationally, January 30 – February 12, 1999.
- ¹²⁴ National Survey on Juvenile Justice, sponsored by the Youth Law Center, conducted by Belden Russonello and Stewart, 2003 adults nationally, January 30 – February 12, 1999.
- ¹²⁵ National Survey on Juvenile Justice, sponsored by the Youth Law Center, conducted by Belden Russonello and Stewart, 2003 adults nationally, January 30 – February 12, 1999.
- ¹²⁶ Sponsored by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, conducted by RMA, Inc., September 2000.
- ¹²⁷ Sponsored by the National Institute for Early Education Research, conducted by Hart Research, 3230 voters nationally, November 29-December 13, 2001.
- ¹²⁸ Sponsored by the National Institute for Early Education Research, conducted by Hart Research, 3230 voters nationally, November 29-December 13, 2001.
- ¹²⁹ “Devolution Survey on Healthcare and Welfare Reform Issues” sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation, conducted by Bonney and Company, 2221 adults, November 4-27, 1998.
- ¹³⁰ ICR/Washington Post, 10/99.
- ¹³¹ “Necessary Compromises” by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.
- ¹³² Conducted by Public Agenda, 754 parents with children age 5 and younger, who believe it is important for a parent to stay home during a child's youngest years, June 1-15, 2000.
- ¹³³ “Poverty in America,” NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll, 1,952 adults, January 4-February 27, 2001.
- ¹³⁴ Sponsored by Time/CNN, conducted by Yankelovich Partners, 1031 adults nationally, June 9-10, 1999.

¹³⁵ Conducted by Public Agenda, June 1-15, 2000.

¹³⁶ Sponsored by the Committee For Education Funding, conducted by Ipsos Reid, 1,000 adults, March 8-10, 2002.

¹³⁷ Sponsored by the Committee For Education Funding, conducted by Ipsos Reid, 1,000 adults, March 8-10, 2002.

¹³⁸ Sponsored by the Committee For Education Funding, conducted by Ipsos Reid, 1,000 adults, March 8-10, 2002.

¹³⁹ "Poverty in America," NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll, 1,952 adults, January 4-February 27, 2001.

¹⁴⁰ "Necessary Compromises" by Public Agenda, 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. It also includes responses from a nationwide mail survey of 218 employers and 216 children's advocates, June 1 and June 15, 2000.

¹⁴¹ "Devolution Survey on Healthcare and Welfare Reform Issues" sponsored by the WK Kellogg Foundation, conducted by Bonney and Company, 2221 adults, November 4-27, 1998.

¹⁴² "What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development," sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc. 3000 adults nationwide, including 1066 parents of children aged newborn through six. June 12 – July 5, 2000.

¹⁴³ "Poverty in America," NPR/Kaiser/Kennedy School Poll, 1,952 adults, January 4-February 27, 2001.

¹⁴⁴ "Devolution Survey on Healthcare and Welfare Reform Issues" sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation, conducted by Bonney and Company, 2221 adults, November 4-27, 1998.

¹⁴⁵ Sponsored by the National Institute for Early Education Research, conducted by Hart Research, 3230 voters nationally, November 29-December 13, 2001.

¹⁴⁶ Sponsored by the National Institute for Early Education Research, conducted by Hart Research, 3230 voters nationally, November 29-December 13, 2001.

¹⁴⁷ Sponsored by the National Center for Children in Poverty, conducted by the Mellman Group, 553 state legislators, February 15 – March 15, 2002.

¹⁴⁸ Sponsored by the National Center for Children in Poverty, conducted by the Mellman Group, 553 state legislators, February 15 – March 15, 2002.

¹⁴⁹ Sponsored by the National Center for Children in Poverty, conducted by the Mellman Group, 553 state legislators, February 15 – March 15, 2002.

¹⁵⁰ Sponsored by the National Center for Children in Poverty, conducted by the Mellman Group, 553 state legislators, February 15 – March 15, 2002.