



America's Voters Show Support for a Holistic Early Learning Program

Data from a nationwide survey of 3,230 voters show support for young children to participate in a holistic early learning program outside of the home. Peter D. Hart Research Associates and Market Strategies, Inc. conducted this survey from November 29 to December 13, 2001 on behalf of the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).

Voting parents with children under 18 years old showed strong support for having young children participate in an organized learning program outside the home. This study revealed the following:

- 87 percent of these parents thought that it is very or fairly important for 5-year-old children to spend time in an organized learning program outside of the home.
- 73 percent of these parents thought that it is very or fairly important for 4-year-old children to spend time in an organized learning program outside of the home.
- 51 percent of these parents thought that it is very or fairly important for 3-year-old children to spend time in an organized learning program outside of the home.

When given a choice between a program that emphasizes social skills, such as discipline and self confidence, or a program that emphasizes academic and early learning skills, such as thinking and discovery, 52 percent of all voters *preferred* a program that emphasizes social skills compared to 23 percent of all voters who preferred a program emphasizing academic and learning skills. Moreover, when voters were asked to rank in order of most importance various benefits that 3- and 4-year-old children would receive from an organized early leaning program, 35 percent indicated “Being able to share, take turns, and play well with other children,” 29 percent indicated “Being able to listen, behave, and follow simple instructions,” 23 percent indicated “Challenging children’s minds and getting them interested in learning,” and only 22 percent indicated “having basic skills, such as counting and learning about letters and words.”

While high quality preschool programs certainly should emphasize cognitive skills, these findings also strongly suggest that voters want their preschool programs to emphasize the socio-emotional development of young children. Consequently, voters would be more likely to support a holistic organized early learning program, such as Head Start, than a narrowly constructed program focusing on cognitive skills, an approach favored by the Bush Administration. Moving Head Start from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to the Department of Education and block granting it to the states would jeopardize Head Start’s balanced approach to early childhood education and development by eliminating many of the socio-emotional services that Head Start currently provides and American voters clearly want.

For more information about the results of this study, contact NIEER at (732) 932-4350.