

QUALITY START

RIVERSIDE COUNTY

Excellence in Early Learning

RIVERSIDE COUNTY PARENT AND EDUCATOR SURVEY FINDINGS

APRIL 2017



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The survey and survey report were developed by VIVA Strategy + Communications for First 5 Riverside, the Riverside County Office of Education, and the Consortium for Early Learning Services. The survey was made possible by funding from First 5 California IMPACT.



**RIVERSIDE COUNTY
OFFICE OF EDUCATION**
JUDY D. WHITE, Ed.D. | County Superintendent of Schools



■ INTRODUCTION

In 2017, Riverside County QRIS success relies in part on educators and parents understanding and utilizing QRIS. For educators, this means that they understand and value the benefits of quality improvement through QRIS participation. For parents, this means understanding the importance of quality improvement and utilizing ratings information to inform their child care choices.

Riverside County has made significant investments to raise the quality of early care and education in the county. The county's QRIS, Quality Start Riverside County, builds on these investments through the creation of a framework for rating, supporting, and improving early learning programs. This framework is aligned to the California QRIS quality standards.

In February and March of 2017, Quality Start Riverside County engaged VIVA Strategy + Communications to survey parents with children 0 through 5 years old, early educators currently participating in Quality Start Riverside County, and early educators not currently participating. Surveys were conducted in February and March 2017. The surveys asked questions about these groups' understanding of and feelings about quality early learning, quality improvement, and Quality Start Riverside County, as well as questions related to their communications preferences.

These survey findings provide insight into educators' and parents' current understanding of quality early learning and how that impacts their decisions around early care and education and quality improvement. The findings give information that will guide the development of a Quality Start Riverside County Strategic Plan and Communications Plan, which will collectively guide QRIS implementation and outreach during the next three years.

Quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) support child care programs and preschools to provide the highest quality early learning experiences possible for children by:

- Establishing standards that define what quality means and looks like for early learning programs.
- Measuring programs using the standards.
- Offering and connecting educators to professional development opportunities.
- Helping parents and caregivers find quality programs for their children.

■ ORGANIZATION OF FINDINGS

The survey responses from parents and educators provide insight into the specific child care landscape of Riverside County, including parents' and educators' perceptions, needs, and priorities, both generally related to quality early learning, and specifically related to Quality Start Riverside County.

Therefore, survey findings have been organized into three general categories:

- 1. Understanding Quality Early Learning:** This category includes findings related to the meaning of quality to parents and educators, what factors affect quality, child care decision making, and beliefs around school readiness.
- 2. Understanding Quality Start Riverside County:** This category includes findings related to reasons for and benefits of participation in Quality Start Riverside County, awareness of participation, and preferred methods of getting and sharing early learning-related information.
- 3. Communications Preferences:** This category includes findings related to parents' preferences for how they get news and information, resources on parenting, and communications from their child care educator. It also includes educators' preferences for getting information and resources related to Quality Start Riverside County and to their program and field.

Findings from both parents and educators are grouped within each survey category.

■ SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

■ Understanding Quality Early Learning

Educators' Views on Early Learning and Quality

Educators currently participating in Quality Start Riverside County were asked why they participate.

- Most reported that they participated to improve the quality of their classroom or program.
- The second most popular response was to learn about child development and receive professional development support.

Educators not currently participating in Quality Start Riverside County were asked what quality means related to early learning.

- Most mentioned that it supports development and that it is tied to quality standards.

All educators were asked what they thought parents should know about quality early learning.

- The most common answers were related to the teacher's role in creating quality (and the importance of teacher training and development) and to the fact that children's early years are their most critical time for learning.
- A specific connection to school readiness was infrequently mentioned, as were specific quality indicators such as those measured by QRIS.

Parents' Views on Early Learning and Quality

Questions for parents focused on their understanding of the role of early learning in their child's development and what quality means.

- The majority of parents surveyed believe that a child begins to learn before he or she is born.
- They also believe that child care plays a role in their child's learning and development; the majority of parents listed both socialization and school readiness as reasons they send their child to child care (in addition to needing care due to work or school).
- Furthermore, most parents expressed confidence that their child care educator was helping their child be ready for kindergarten.

Parents were asked what quality in early learning meant.

- Most parents equated it with curriculum, teachers/teaching, attention and focus on children, excellence, and school readiness.
- Very few mentioned thinking that quality meant that a program met specific standards.

Parents were also asked what children needed to be ready for school.

- Parents frequently mentioned self-regulation and social emotional skills, as well as academic skills, such as knowing the alphabet and numbers and basic writing and pre-reading skills.
- Infrequently mentioned were critical thinking and creativity, as well as physical readiness, such as potty training and motor skills.

Parents' Early Learning Decision Making

Parents were asked about their trusted resources when making decisions about child care.

- Friends and neighbors were reported to be parents' most trusted resources.
- Other popular responses included local agencies, such as the Riverside County Office of Education, the resource and referral agency, First 5 Riverside, and others.

■ Parents speak..

What does quality mean in relation to early learning or child care?

"An experienced teacher with knowledge and compassion for young children."

"Develop communications skills and learn something new constantly."

"That the level of early learning or child care is above and beyond excellence."

To understand how parents make decisions around early care and education, parents were asked to rank eleven factors.

- The vast majority of parents ranked safety as the most important factor when making child care decisions; nutrition received the second highest ranking.
- Teacher personality and interactions with children, educational curriculum, and teacher qualifications fell closely together in third, fourth, and fifth places, suggesting that parents consider these factors similarly and fairly highly when making decisions.
- Location and cost were ranked sixth and seventh. Reputation was ranked tenth.

Educators were similarly asked why they thought parents selected their programs.

- The top response among educators was their reputation (or recommendations from friends and neighbors), which did not emerge as a top reason in the parents’ surveys.
- Teachers’ personality and interactions with children was also chosen as a primary reason, which aligns with parents’ responses.
- However, teacher qualifications, another top response for parents, was low on educators’ lists.

■ Analysis

Parents’ and educators’ views on and understanding of quality early learning frequently overlap with each other and with the quality standards that Quality Start Riverside County measures as part of the California QRIS.

This overlap provides a solid foundation for increasing these audiences’ understanding of quality and the impact of quality early learning on children’s learning and development. Where there is common understanding, these topics can be starting points for conversations between educators and parents and for messaging from Quality Start Riverside County.

Key areas of understanding on which to build:

- **The importance of the first five years.** Both parents and educators indicated that they understand that the first five years are a critical time for learning. Parents and educators also both value the role of early learning programs in supporting children’s early development and school readiness. This is an essential component of understanding and valuing the work of Quality Start Riverside County.
- **Teacher qualifications and interactions.** The role of the teacher was expressed as an important concept by educators. Teachers, teaching, and attention paid to children were described as key components of quality by parents. This presents an opportunity to increase understanding of what high quality interactions look like and how they support children’s development.
 - **Idea to introduce:** Highlight the role that teachers play in supporting children’s social-emotional development, which was an important component of school readiness for parents.
- **Learning activities.** Curriculum was a key aspect of parents’ understanding of quality; this presents an opportunity to develop their understanding of how children’s learning needs are assessed and used to inform learning activities, as well as how different types of activities contribute to learning.
 - **Idea to introduce:** Emphasize that play is how children learn, and that high quality learning activities support children’s critical thinking skills. Neither of these ideas were mentioned frequently by parents.

■ Understanding Quality Start Riverside County

Educators and parents were asked questions to provide guidance on Quality Start Riverside County’s outreach and implementation, including educator satisfaction and parent awareness.

Educators’ Views on Quality Start Riverside County

As mentioned in the previous section, most participating educators choose to do so to improve their quality and learn more about child development.

- A majority (70%) report that participation has been “beneficial” or “very beneficial.”
- The benefits that educators experience align with their reasons for participating; they feel that it helps them improve their services and better understand child development.
- A full 90% of respondents said that they would recommend that other educators participate in Quality Start Riverside County.

Educators were asked what they would change about the program.

- Most said nothing, although several suggested changes to the supports and/or incentives provided, including when trainings are scheduled.
- Others mentioned changing the matrix to be more flexible.
- It is worth noting that the majority of respondents have not yet received a rating through Quality Start Riverside County. Some said that they may have more feedback after going through the rating process.

Respondents were also asked to share what would encourage them to continue participating in Quality Start after receiving a rating.

- Most felt that once they had received a rating, professional development and training opportunities and financial incentives would be the most compelling reasons for them to continue participating.
- A peer support network, business support, and re-rating opportunities were not selected as likely reasons for continued participation.

Of those educators surveyed who do not currently participate, the majority reported that they don’t have enough time to participate.

- The top three things that would encourage them to choose to participate were improving their quality, learning about child development, and financial incentives.

Parents’ Understanding of Quality Start Riverside County

Awareness of Quality Start is relatively low among parents.

- Half of parents reported being unsure if their child’s program participates in Quality Start Riverside County. This is unsurprising, as 73% of parents reported not knowing anything or not knowing much about Quality Start.
- However, of those parents that did know their child’s program was participating, 90% believed that Quality Start was helping the program improve its quality.
- Conversely, 68% of participating educators reported that they told parents in their program about their participation.

Educators’ Views on Communicating About Quality Start Riverside County

Educators were asked both what they had told parents, and what they thought parents should know about Quality Start Riverside County and educators’ quality improvement efforts.

- Most indicated that what they had told parents was related to how their participation would benefit the child or family.
- The benefit for the educator and the impact on the program (e.g., funds for new materials) were also mentioned.
- As far as what they thought parents should know, the most common responses aligned with what they had told them.
- Also mentioned was the effort required to participate.

■ Educators speak..

The primary benefit of participating in Quality Start Riverside County is..

“Increasing the quality in my program.”

“Providing awesome care and education to children.”

“Financial incentives and improving the quality of care I provide.”

Participating educators were asked to consider a number of tools that could support their communications with parents; responses were fairly evenly divided among all types of tools. They were also asked how they would like to be recognized for their participation. The three most preferred methods of recognition for participation chosen by educators were:

- Materials they can distribute to let parents know more about the program.
- A plaque or certificate.
- Materials distributed by other organizations to raise parent awareness.

■ Analysis

Educator satisfaction with Quality Start Riverside County is high. They feel that the program is enabling them to improve their knowledge and their services and they feel that it is important to communicate these benefits to parents.

However, the survey confirms what was already relatively well understood; parent awareness of Quality Start is low, because very little communications with parents has happened. While many participating educators have told parents about their participation, the survey indicates that most parents know very little about Quality Start, and many are unsure if their child’s program participates.

This suggests a few important next steps:

- **Give educators communications materials and tools** to support ongoing conversations about Quality Start with parents. This will support parent recognition of the Quality Start program and understanding of what it is.
- **Communicate broadly with parents across the community.** The importance of quality early learning should be understood by all parents, regardless of whether their child’s program participates. Furthermore, increased parent awareness can encourage educator participation.
- **Emphasize the aspects of Quality Start participation that are most significant for educators when communicating to parents and when recruiting teachers:**
 - How it increases educators’ understanding of child development and early learning;
 - How it supports children’s early development; and
 - What participation means for educators in terms of effort and benefits.

■ Communications Preferences

Educators and parents were asked questions about their general communications preferences and preferences related to communications between parents and educators and between educators and Quality Start Riverside County.

Educators’ Communications Preferences

Participating educators were asked about communications related to Quality Start.

- Most surveyed educators said they found out about Quality Start Riverside County through the Riverside County Office of Education.
- The second most common sources were through a peer or colleague, or through First 5 Riverside.
- Email was their preferred way to receive updates from Quality Start Riverside County, followed by phone calls, mail, and in-person meetings.

Participating educators were asked what resources they turn to when they have general questions about their program.

- Most educators responded that they reach out to peers and colleagues.
- Other common responses were the Riverside County Office of Education and First 5 Riverside.
- Most non-participating educators report getting resources and tools to improve their teaching from the Internet; other sources are local agencies and peers.

Parents’ Communications Preferences

Parents were asked how they prefer to get information.

- Generally, TV, websites, social media and family/friends are reported as the most common sources of news and information for surveyed parents.

Parents also reported who their trusted parenting resources are.

- Most surveyed parents say that they most trust their pediatrician or health care provider as a resource for parenting support.
- Next on the list for parenting support are friends and neighbors, followed by local agencies, then parenting websites and books.
- This is a contrast to responses to the similar question about trusted resources for child care decisions, mentioned previously, in which pediatricians ranked very low.

The majority of parents prefer to receive information and non-urgent updates from their child care educators in person; their next preferred methods are email and text.

■ Analysis

Findings related to communications from the educator survey indicate that peer-to-peer learning could be a useful component of educator support, as educators already utilize their peers as resources.

Findings from the parent survey suggest that parents’ trusted parenting resources could be leveraged to support understanding of high quality early learning. For example, pediatricians could be given information to share with parents on what quality early learning looks like in and out of the home.

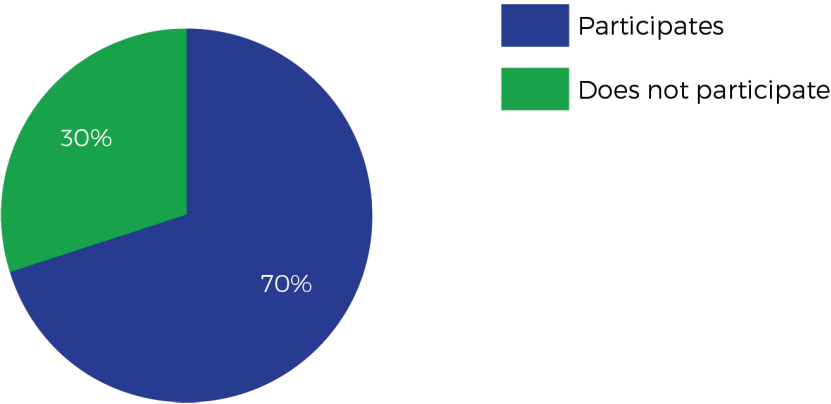
SURVEY RESPONSES

The following pages provide detailed information on the survey responses, organized by audience (educators and parents) and then by response category (demographic questions, questions related to understanding quality, questions related to understanding Quality Start Riverside County, and communications preference questions).

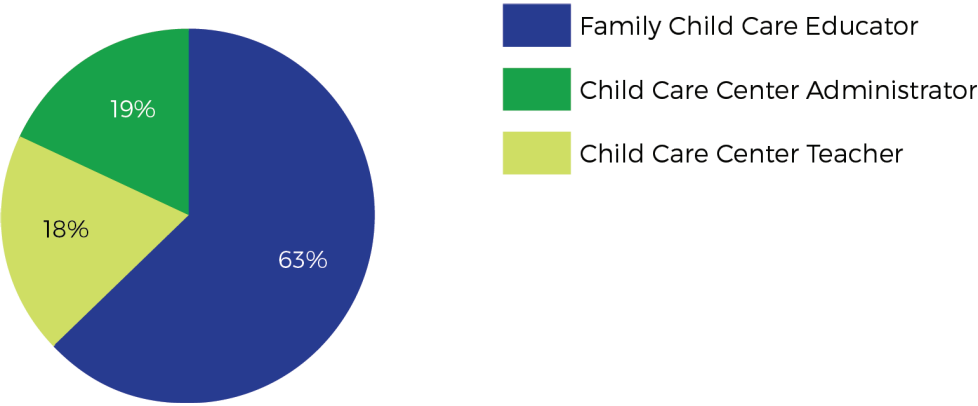
Survey Responses: Educators

EDUCATOR DEMOGRAPHICS

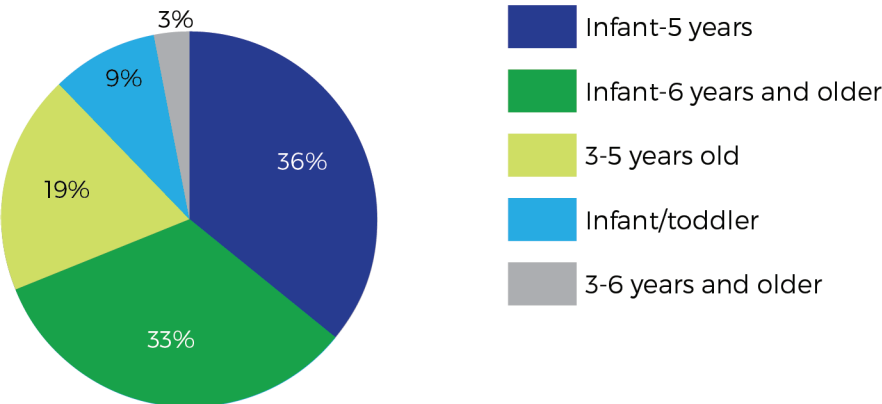
Participation in Quality Start Riverside County (N=77)



Educator type (N=77)

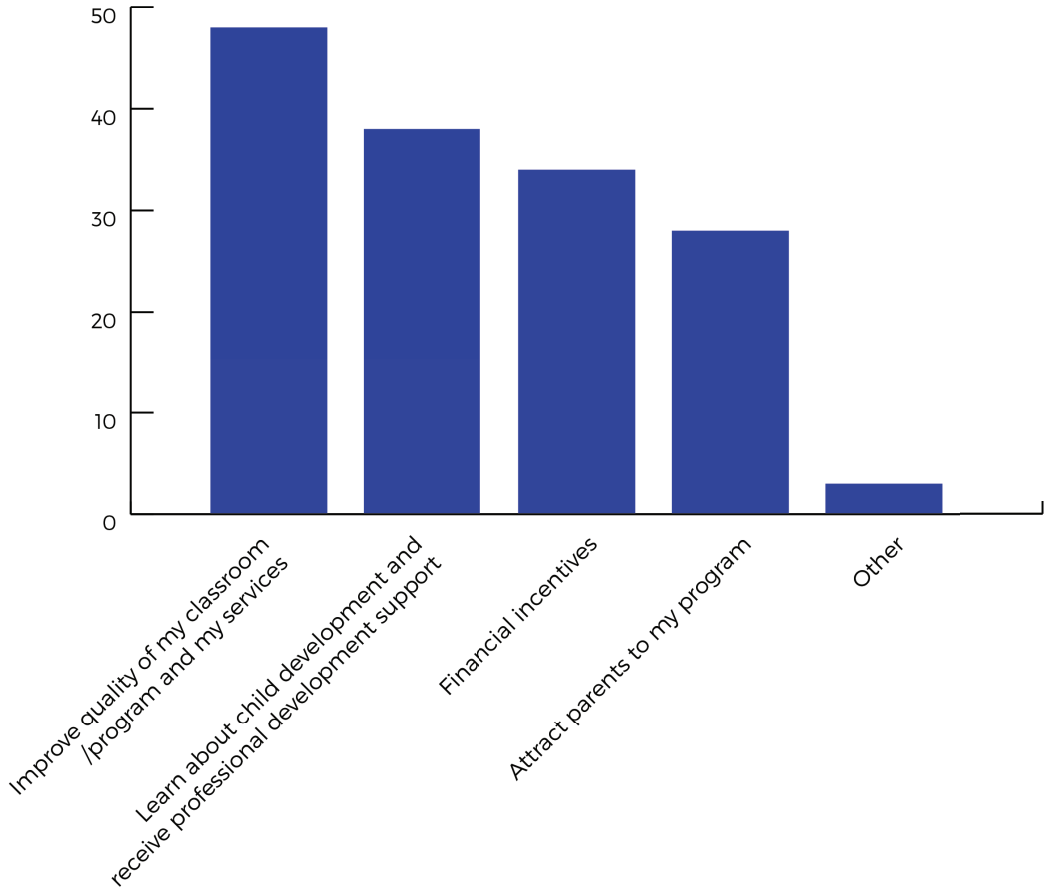


Age group(s) of children served (N=77)

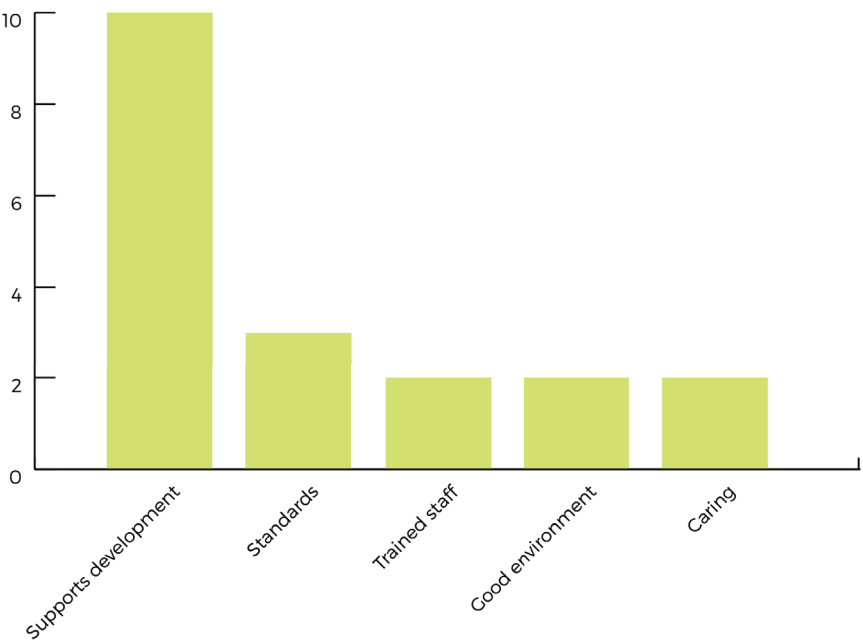


EDUCATORS' RESPONSES RELATED TO UNDERSTANDING QUALITY

Participating Educators: Why did you choose to participate in Quality Start Riverside County? (N=55)



Non-Participating Educators: When you hear the word 'quality' related to early learning, what do you think of? (N=20)



Examples of responses to this question:

Supports development: "I think of being in tune to the whole child's development and offering a enriched environment for children to explore, with positive learning and teaching."

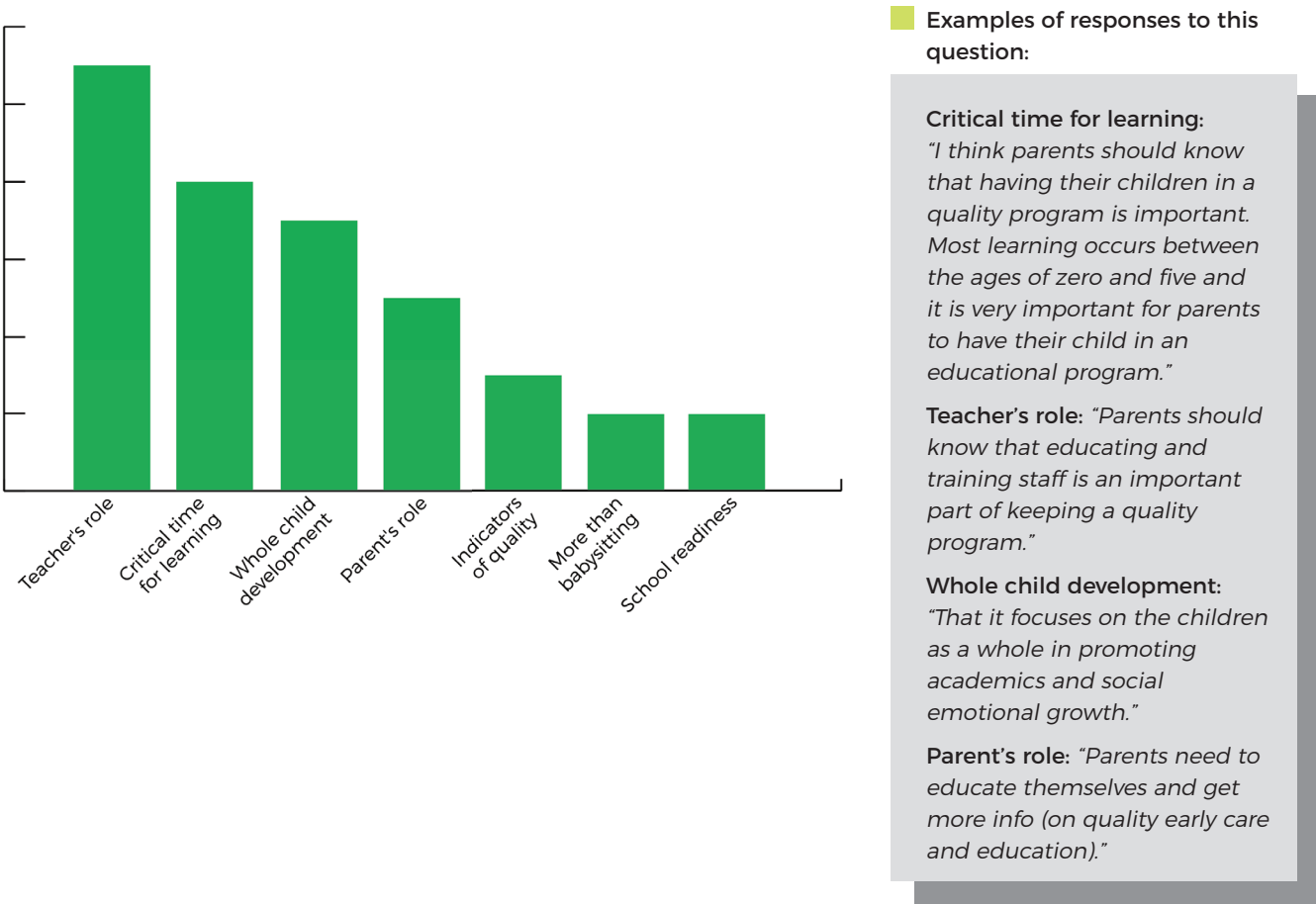
Trained staff: "Excellent, educated teachers, top notch program."

Good environment: "Enriched environment for the children and good relationships with them and their parents."

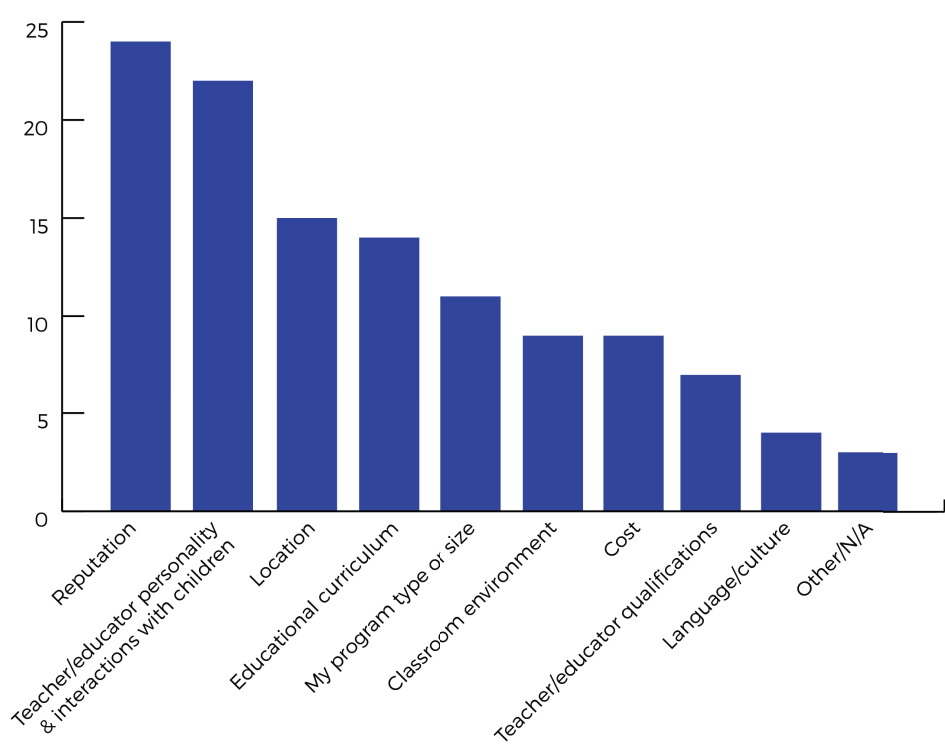
Caring: "Care with ethical principles and respect for children and their families."

Standards: "Quality care."

All Educators: What do you think parents should know about quality early care and education? (N=50)

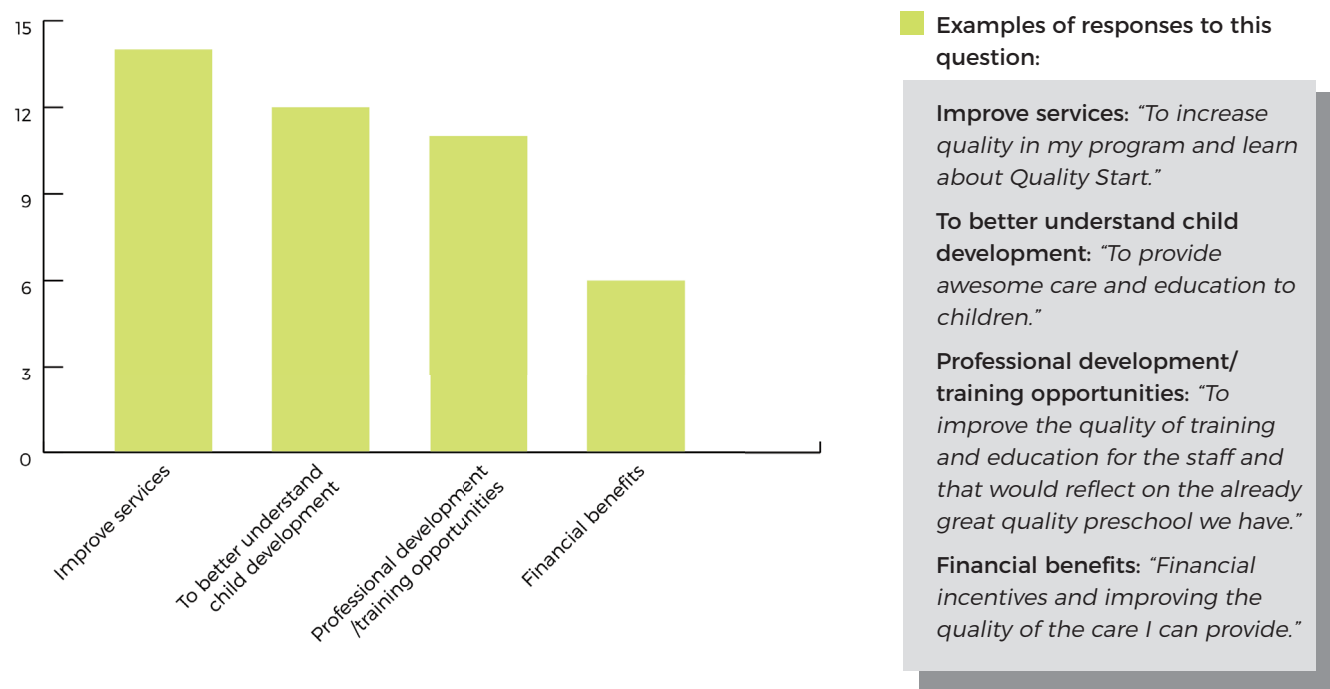


All Educators: Why do you think the families in your program chose you? (N=74)

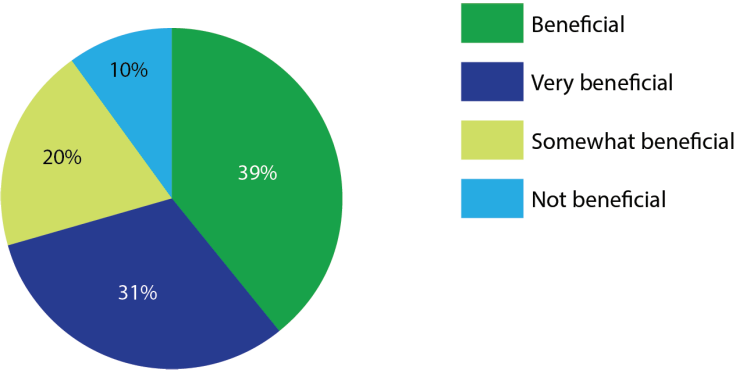


EDUCATORS' RESPONSES RELATED TO UNDERSTANDING QUALITY START RIVERSIDE COUNTY

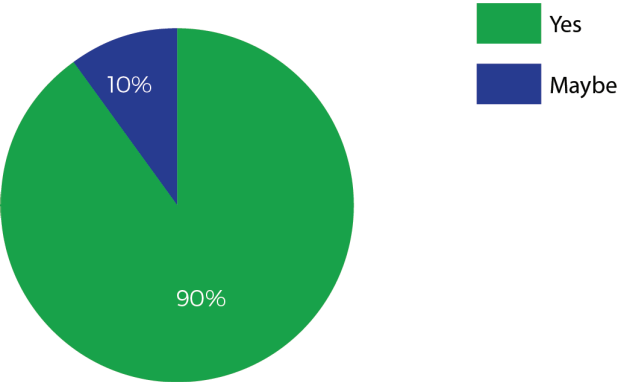
Participating Educators: What is the primary benefit of participation in Quality Start Riverside County? (N=47)



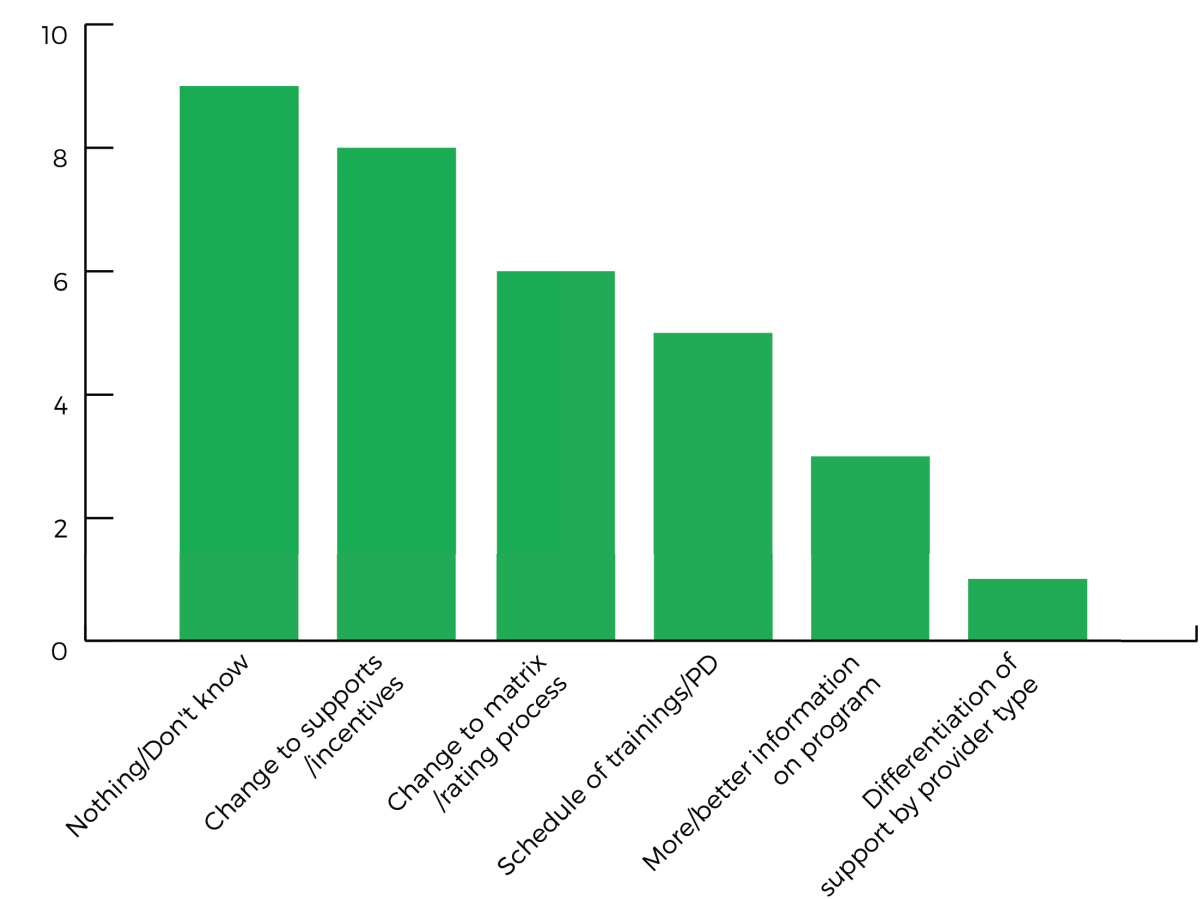
Participating Educators: How beneficial has Quality Start Riverside County been in your program's ability to provide high quality child care? (N=52)



Participating Educators: Would you recommend that other Riverside County educators participate in Quality Start Riverside County? (N=53)



Participating Educators: If you could change any aspect of Quality Start Riverside County, what would it be? (N=37)



Examples of responses to this question:

Nothing/Don't know: "I'm not really sure because I am not familiar with all of the aspects of Quality Start."

Change to supports/incentives: "The reimbursement scale because I feel like this program will require a lot of work to be a participant. The difference in payment between family child care educators and child care centers should be taken into consideration more."

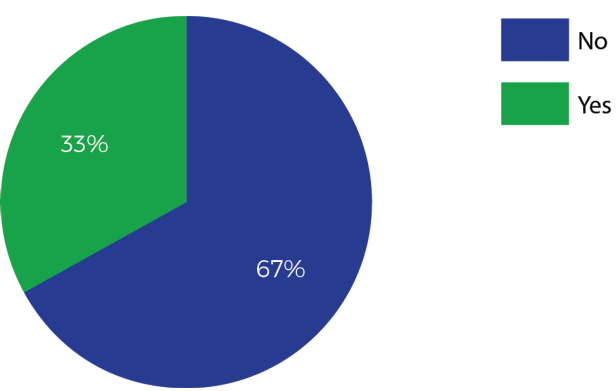
Change to matrix/rating process: "Modify the matrix to use other tools beside ASQ and to have other quality indicators regarding teacher's education and experience."

Schedule of trainings/PD: "Workshops and Trainings to be held on Saturday and tailored to meet the unique needs/interests of family child care homes."

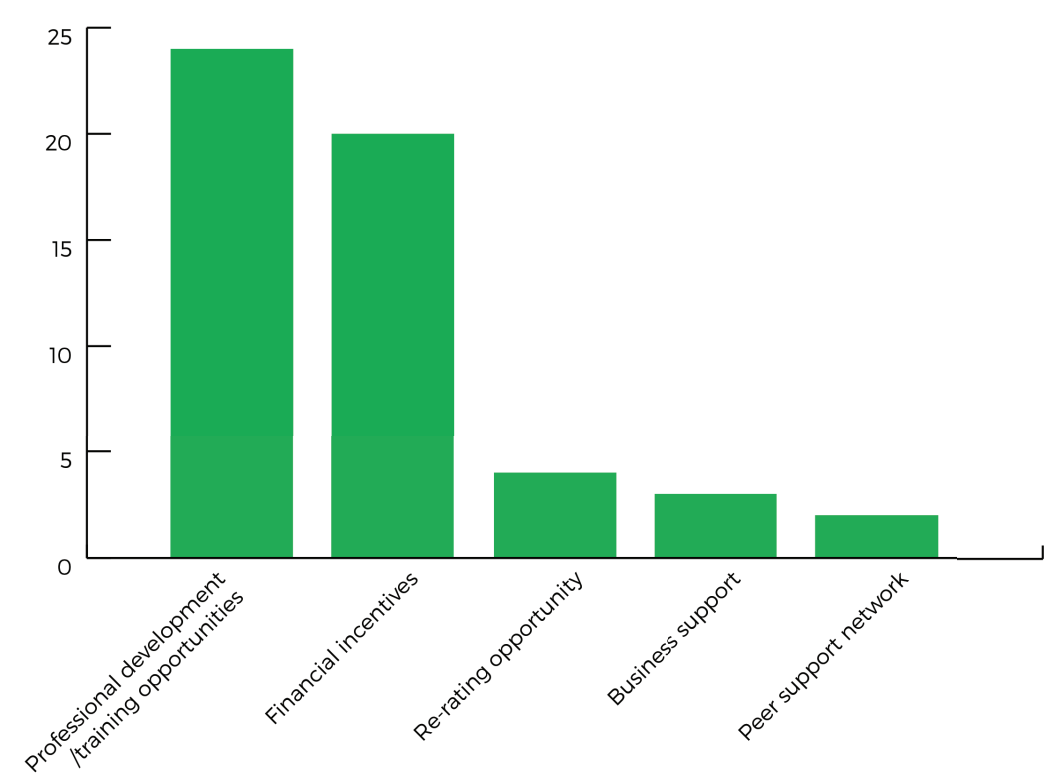
More/better information on program: "Clearer and more consistent information."

Differentiation of support by educator type: "To have coaches that specialize in family child care and understands our needs."

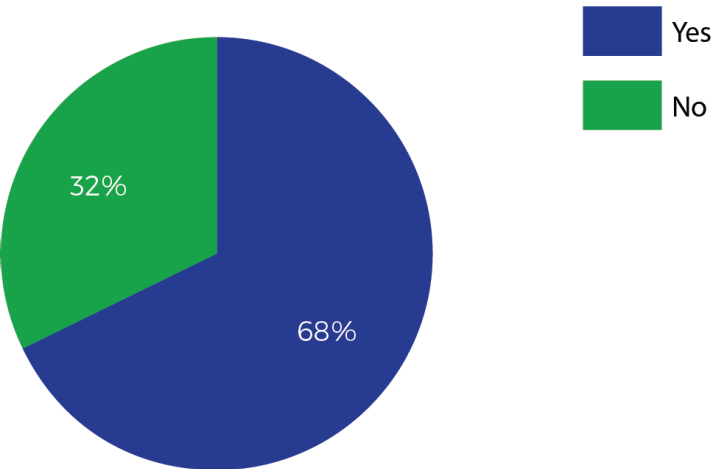
Participating Educators: Have you received a Quality Start Riverside County rating? (N=51)



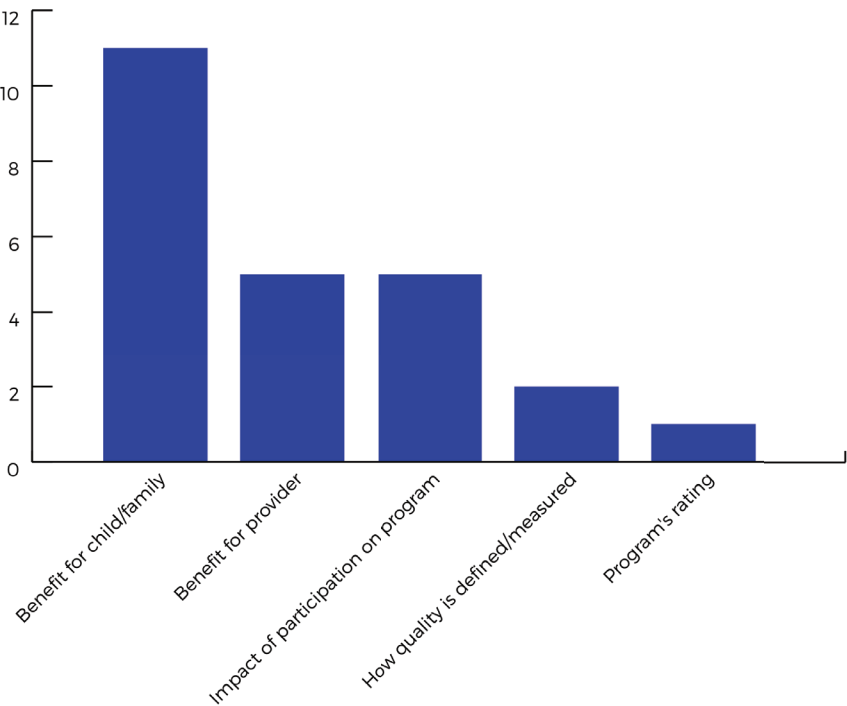
Participating Educators: After receiving a rating, what does/would encourage you to continue to participate in Quality Start Riverside County? (N=53)



Participating Educators: Do the families in your program know that you are participating in Quality Start Riverside County? (N=54)



Participating Educators: If parents know you participate in Quality Start Riverside County, what have you told them? (N=28)



Examples of responses to this question:

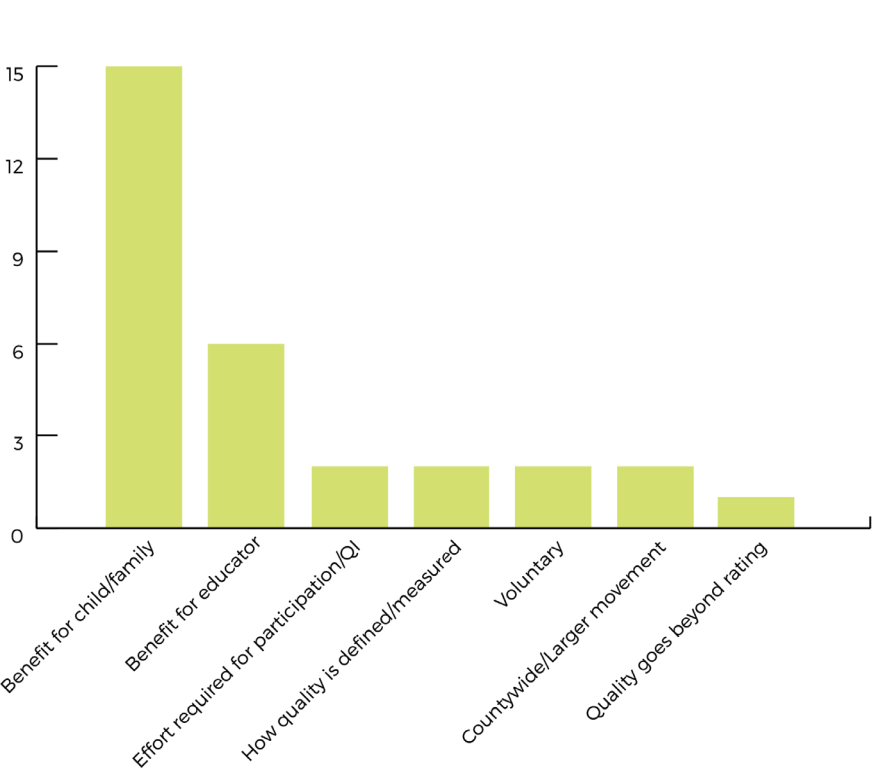
Benefit for child/family and for educator: "That I have enrolled in a quality care program that will help me increase the quality of child care provided for their children."

How quality is defined/measured: "Partnering to be able to offer them an even higher quality child care program."

Impact of participation on program: "The program provides funds to acquire materials and training for staff and their child's classroom."

Program's rating: "PAC meetings, email, and shared QRIS Quality rating."

Participating Educators: What do you think parents should know about Quality Start Riverside County and your quality improvement efforts? (N=33)



Examples of responses to this question:

Benefit for child/family: "The importance of Quality Start for the children of this community. Our dedication and commitment to high quality care."

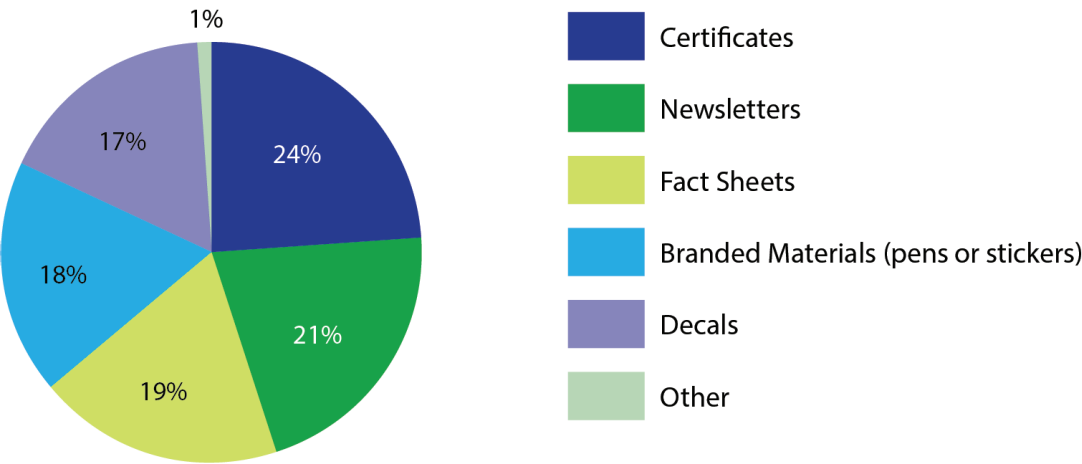
Benefit for educator: "That the Quality Start program will help me improve the quality of my program."

Effort required for participation: "That the process of the rating and score is the work of the teachers/program."

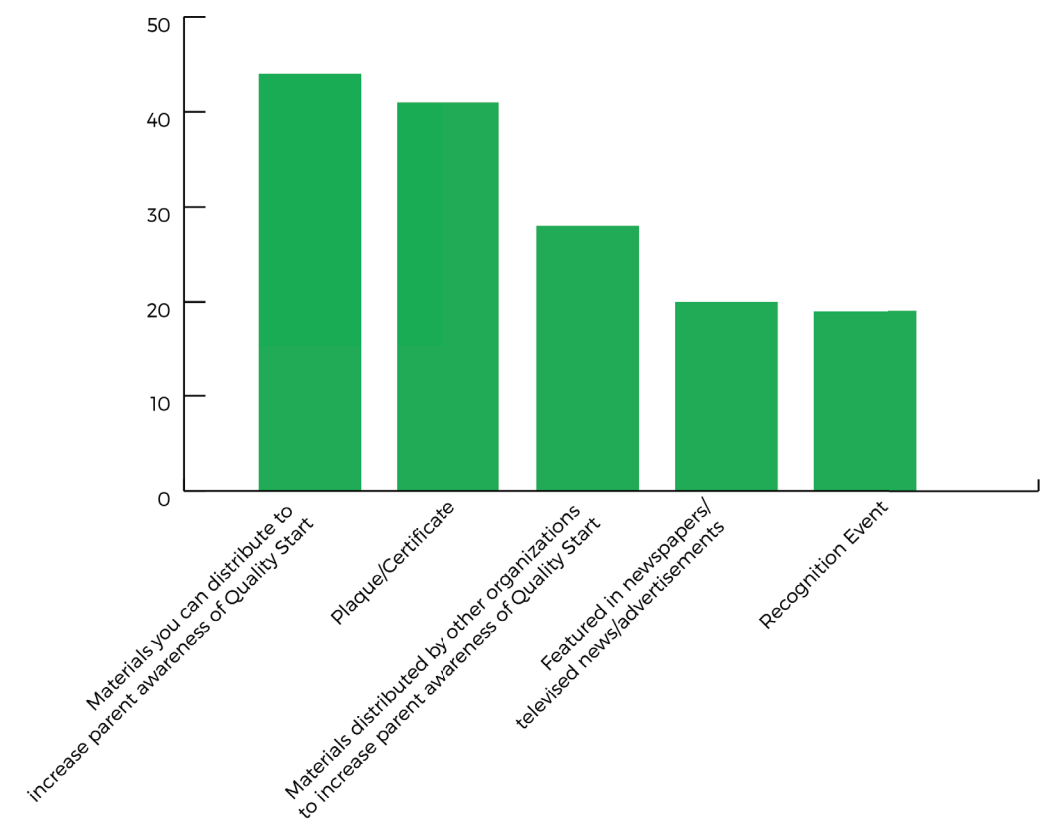
How quality is defined/measured: "More information about all of the quality indicators, not just a whole score."

Voluntary: "That it's a voluntary program, and we aren't required to make the changes. We are doing it for the benefits of the children, families, and staff."

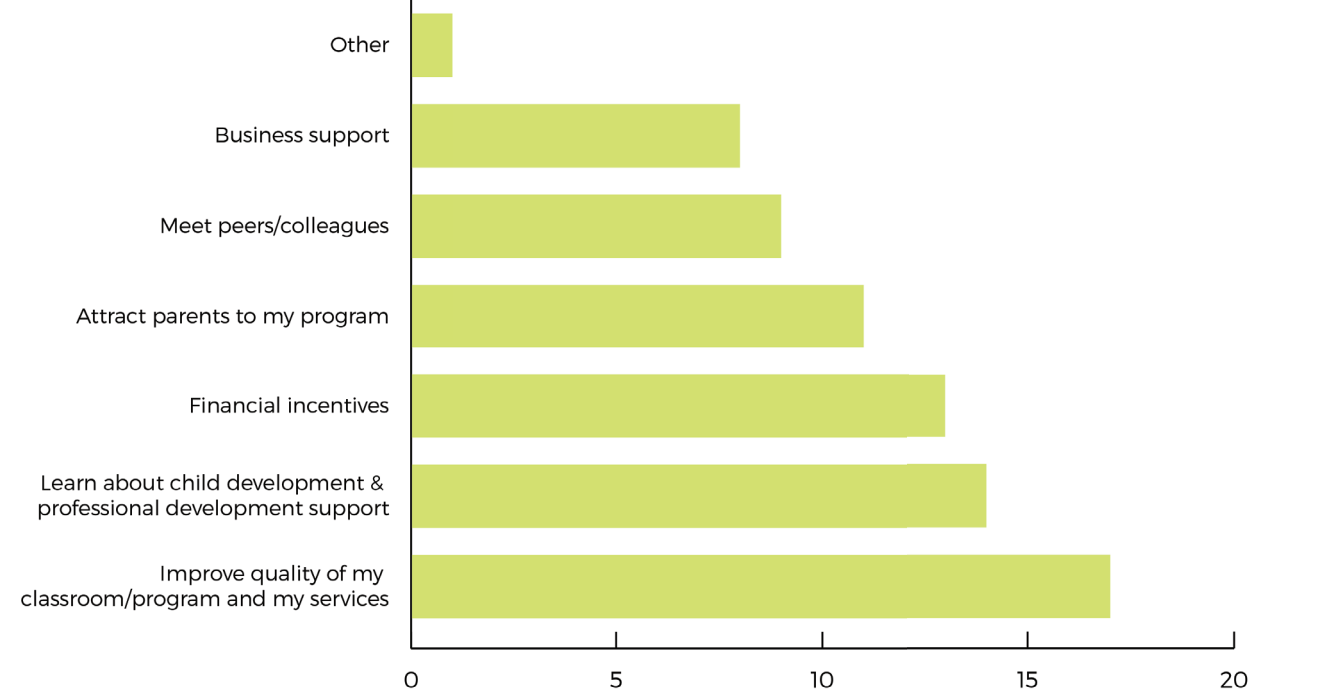
Participating Educators: What materials would be most useful to communicate your participation to parents? (N=54)



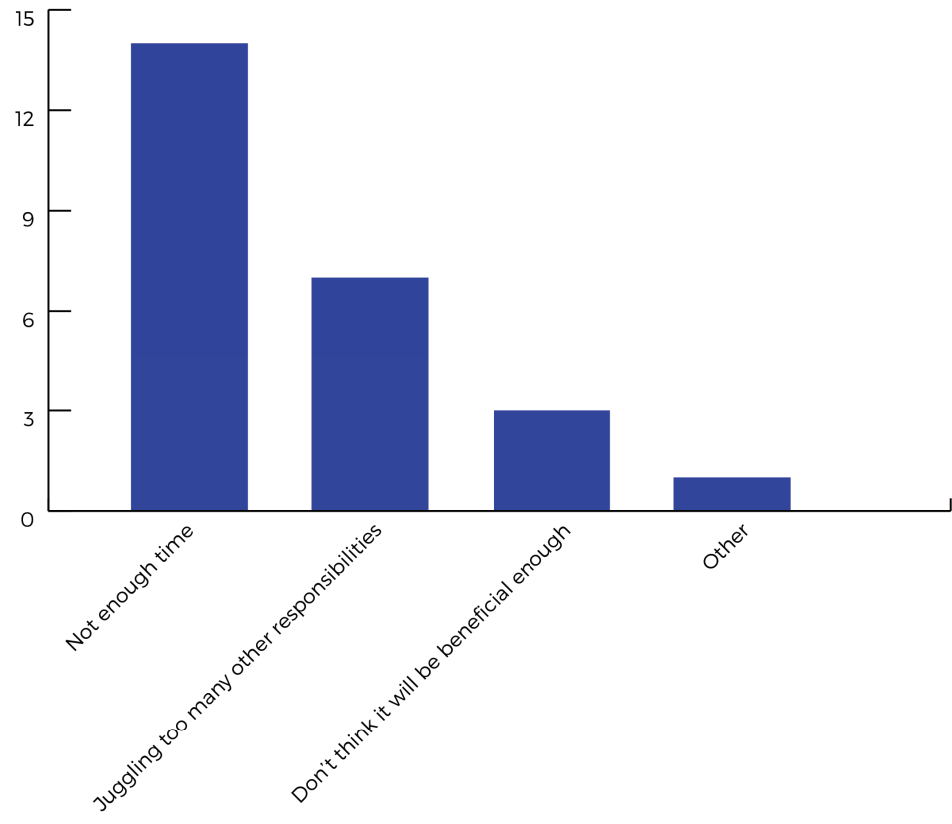
Participating Educators: How would you like to be recognized for participating in Quality Start Riverside County? (N=52)



Non-Participating Educators: What would encourage you to participate in an early care and education quality rating and improvement system like Quality Start Riverside County? (N=22)

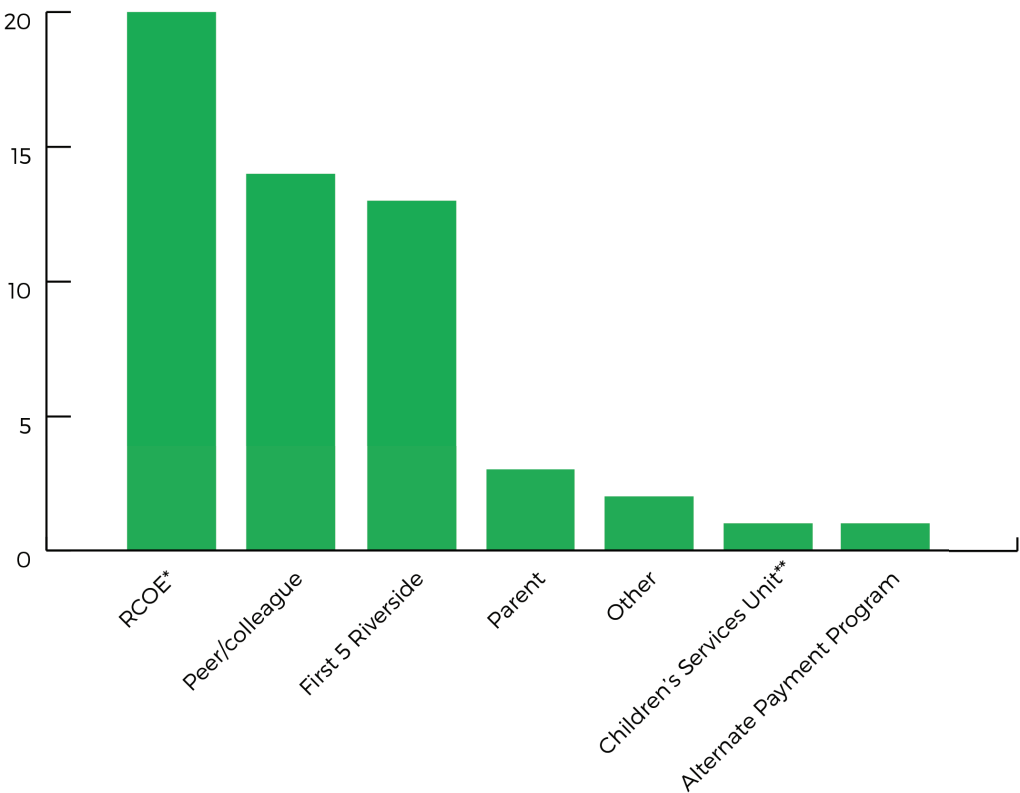


Non-Participating Educators: What are some reasons for which you would choose not to participate in a quality rating and improvement system like Quality Start Riverside County? (N=22)



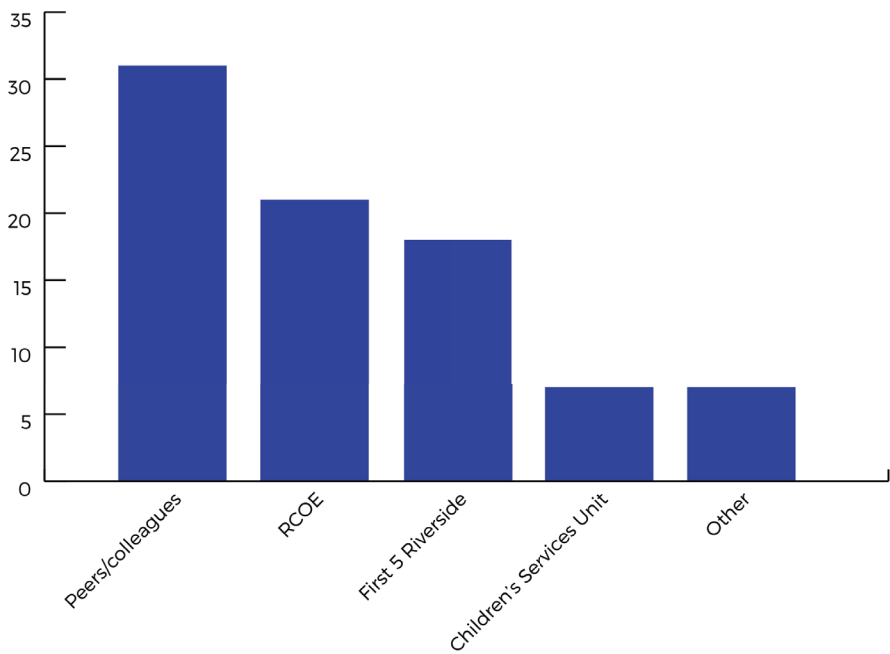
EDUCATORS’ RESPONSES RELATED TO COMMUNICATIONS PREFERENCES

Participating Educators: How did you find out about Quality Start Riverside County? (N=53)

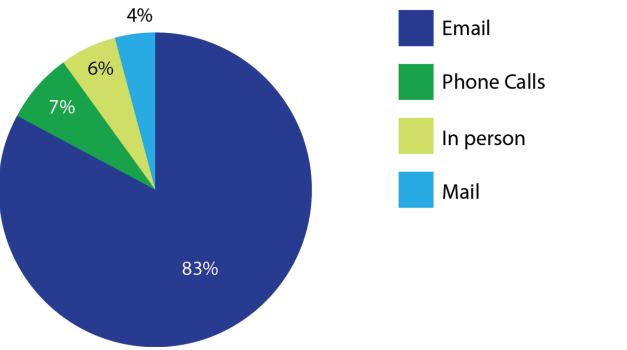


* Riverside County Office of Education
** Resource and Referral Agency

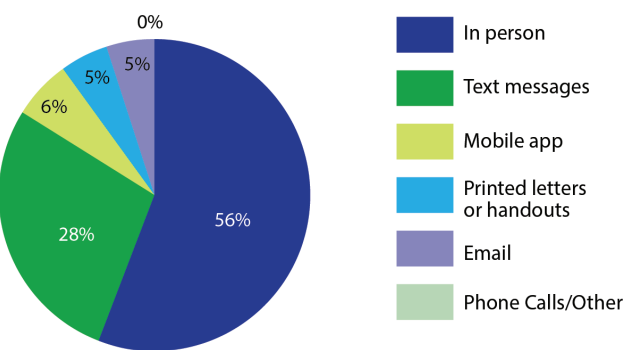
Participating Educators: Who do you reach out to with questions about operating your program? (N=52)



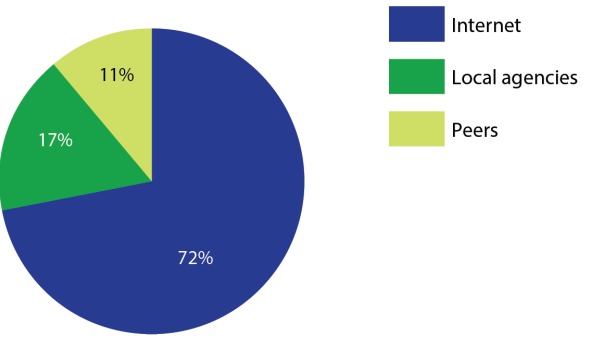
Participating Educators: How would you prefer to receive updates from Quality Start Riverside County? (N=53)



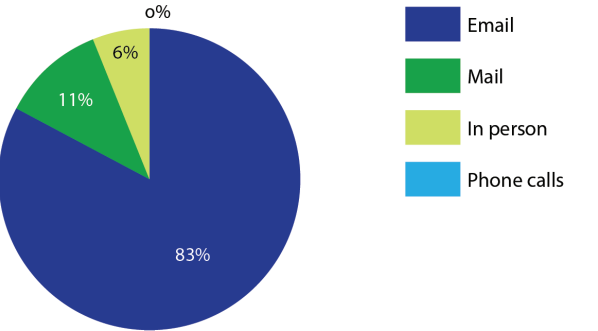
Non-Participating Educators: How do you generally communicate news and updates to parents in your program? (N=18)



Non-Participating Educators: Where do you most often find resources and tools to improve your teaching/services? (N=18)



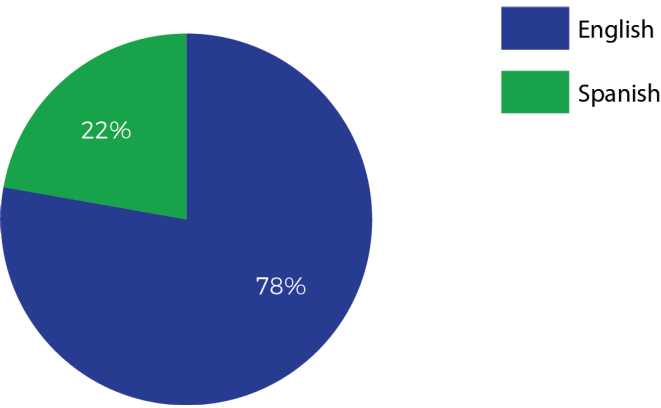
Non-Participating Educators: How do you prefer to receive information on local quality improvement /professional development opportunities? (N=18)



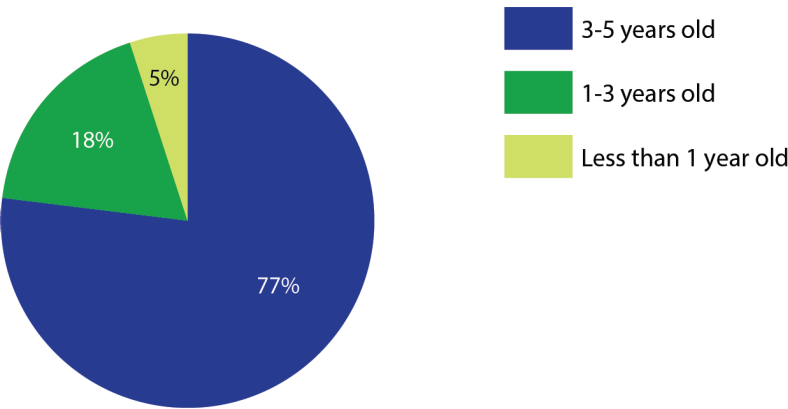
■ **Survey Responses: Parents**

PARENT DEMOGRAPHICS

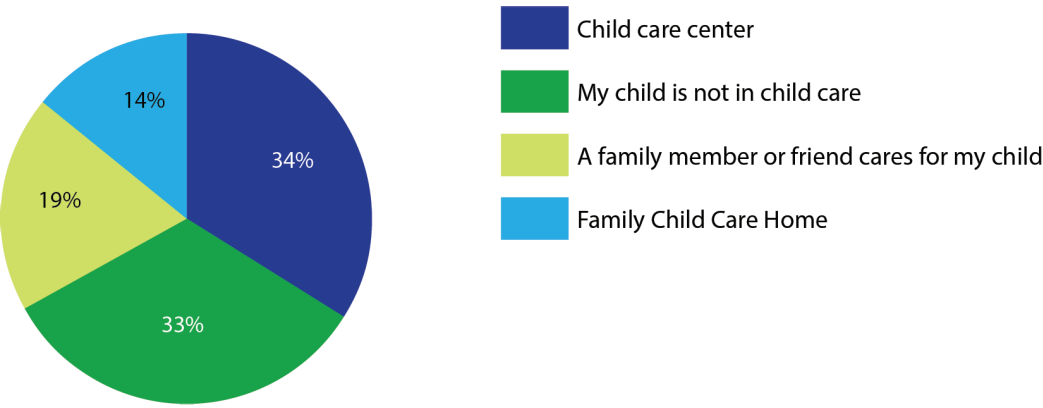
Language used to respond to survey (N=2,137)



Age of youngest child (N=2,124)

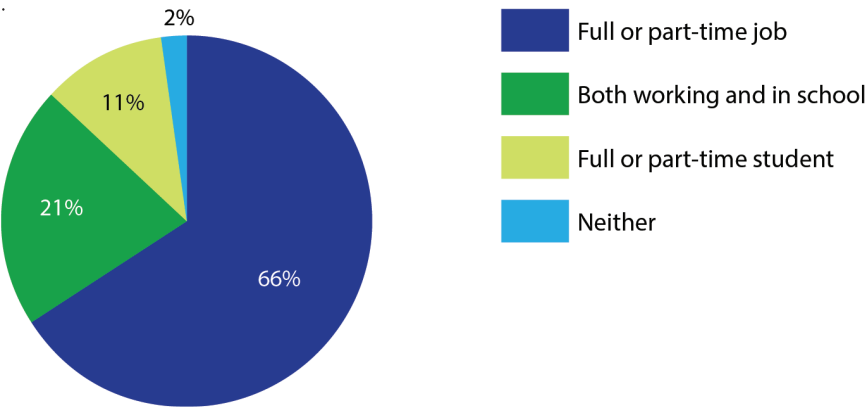


Type of child care setting (N=2,087)

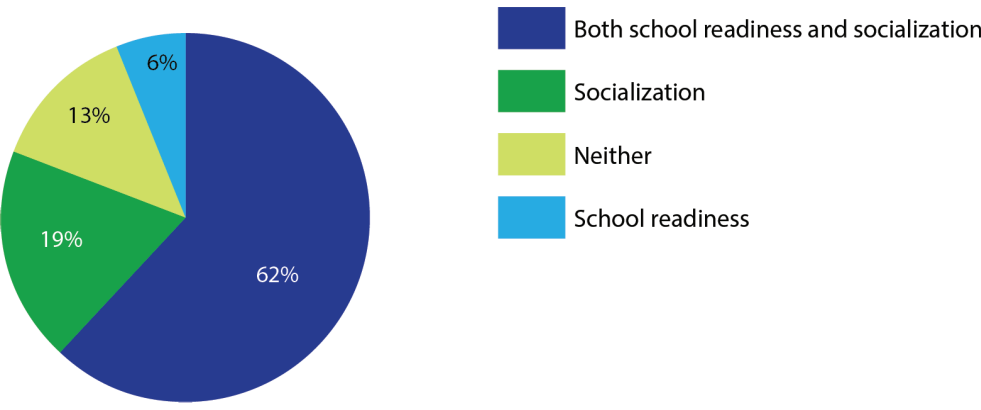


PARENTS' RESPONSES RELATED TO UNDERSTANDING QUALITY

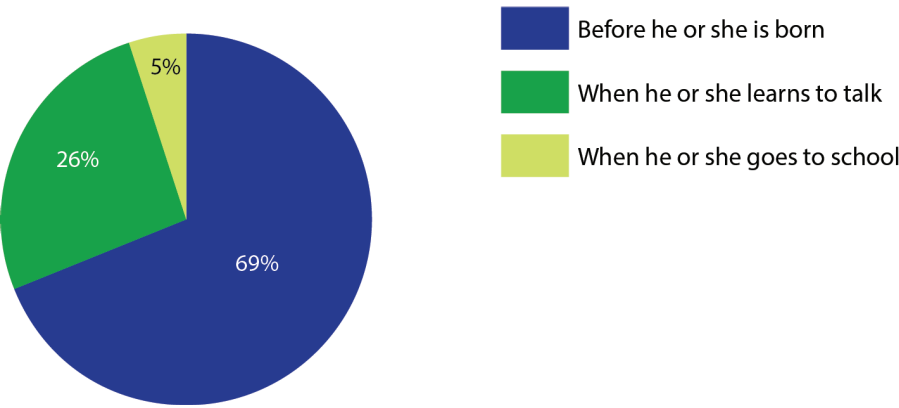
Reasons Why Child Is in Care (Logistical) (N=2,044)



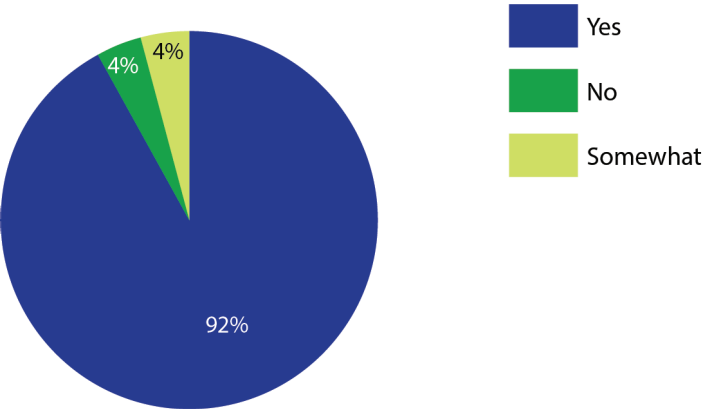
Reasons Why Child Is in Care (Full-time/Part-time Workers and Students) (N=335)



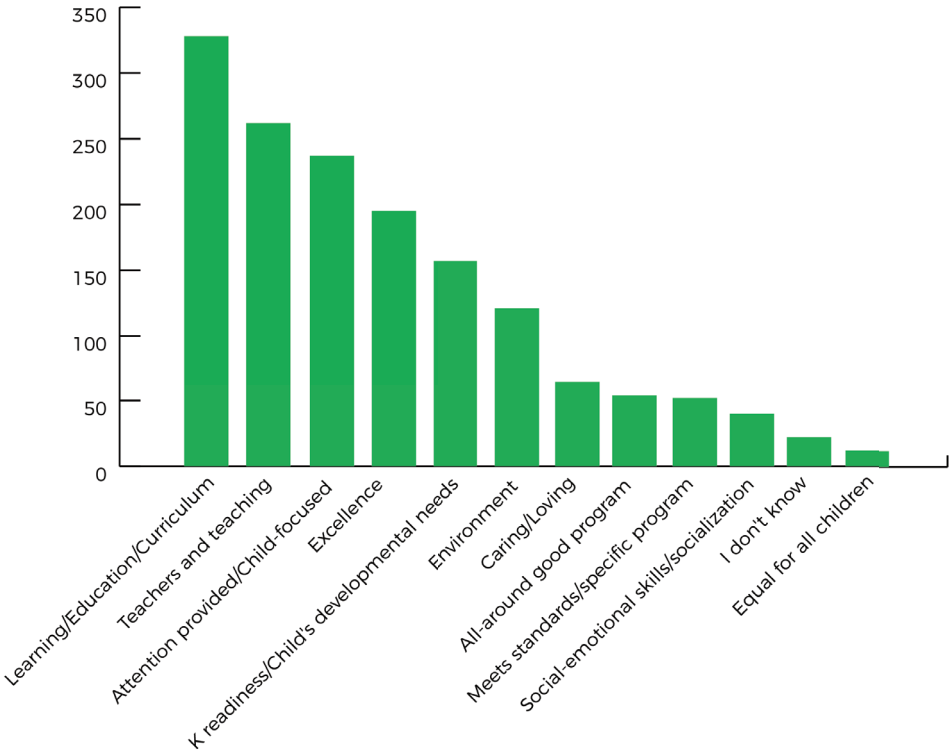
In your opinion, a child begins to learn... (N= 2,081)



Do you think your child care educator helps your child be ready for kindergarten? (N= 2,003)



What does quality mean in relation to early learning or child care? (N=1,651)



Examples of responses to this question:

Learning/Education/Curriculum: "A set of curriculum learning to write letters and numbers, counting, not just playing and coloring." / "An age related curriculum based on educational studies."

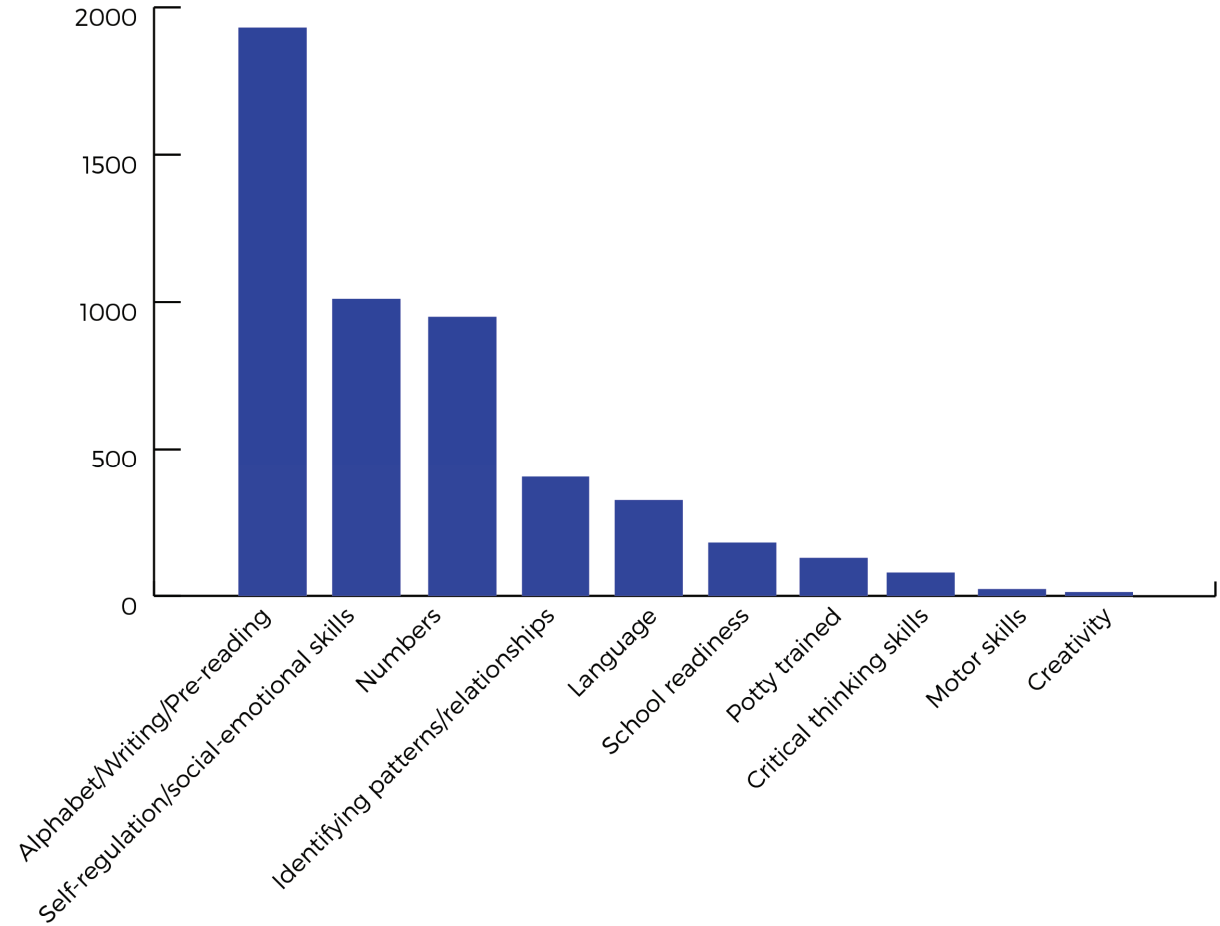
Teachers and teaching: "A good and loving teacher or helper to your child / children." / "An experienced teacher with knowledge and compassion for young children."

Attention provided/Child-focused: "They pay attention to every child and help them with class work and socializing." / "Child gets one on one time to learn."

Excellence: "Above and beyond the required curriculum." / "That the level of early learning or child care is above and beyond excellence."

K-readiness/Child's developmental needs: "A firm grasp of understanding words, letters, number, shapes." / "Develop communications skills and learn something new constantly."

What is most important for your child to know or do to be ready for kindergarten? (N=1,952)



Examples of responses to this question:

Alphabet/Writing/Pre-reading Skills: "To know all of the alphabet and identify the letters." / "Recognize letters and sounds of letters (phonics)"

Self-regulation/Social-emotional: "To socialize and not be shy around other kids." / "Be independent and confident."

Numbers: "Count to 30 and identify the numbers."

Identifying patterns/relationships: "Colors and shapes." / "Animals." / "Body parts."

Languages: "Know how to communicate and speak clearly." / "Speaks English."

School readiness: "Interested in learning." / "Excited to learn new material."

Potty Trained: "Use the bathroom alone."

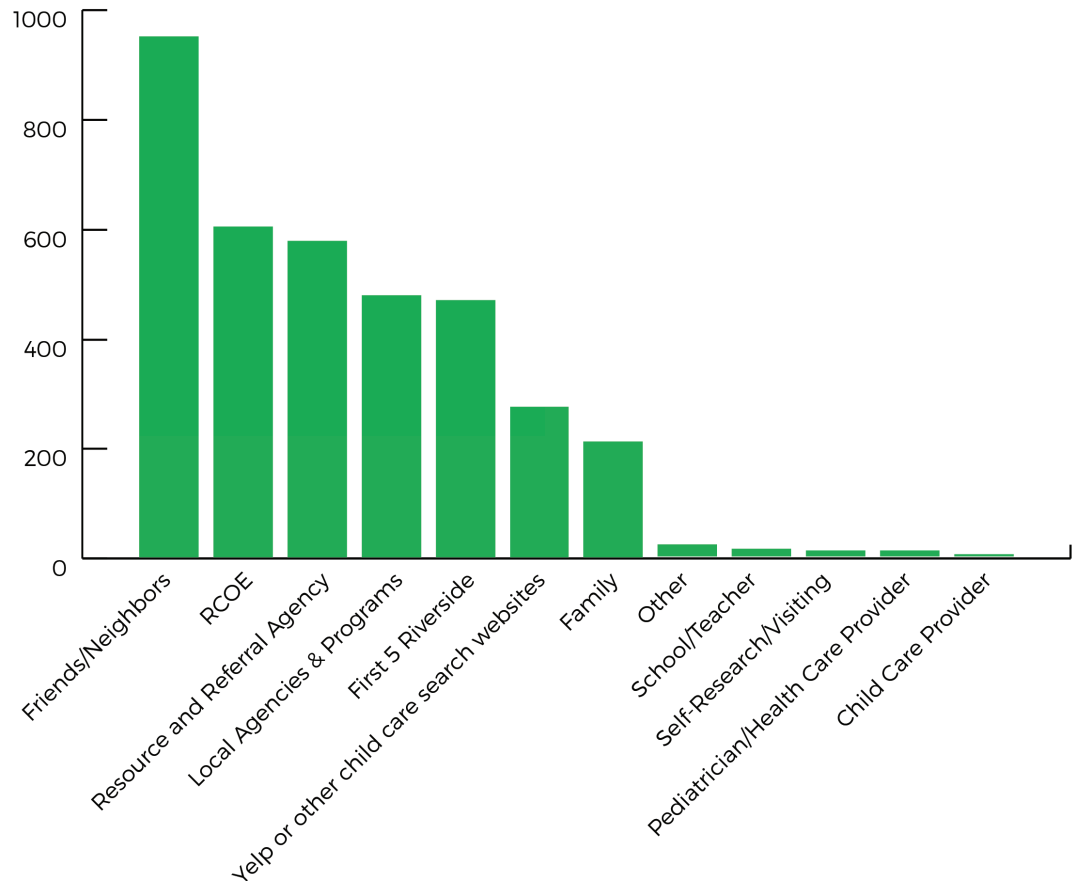
Critical thinking skills: "Understand the concepts of what she's learning." / "Ask questions."

Motor skills: "Properly holding scissors." / "Walking."

Creativity: "Be able to draw better."

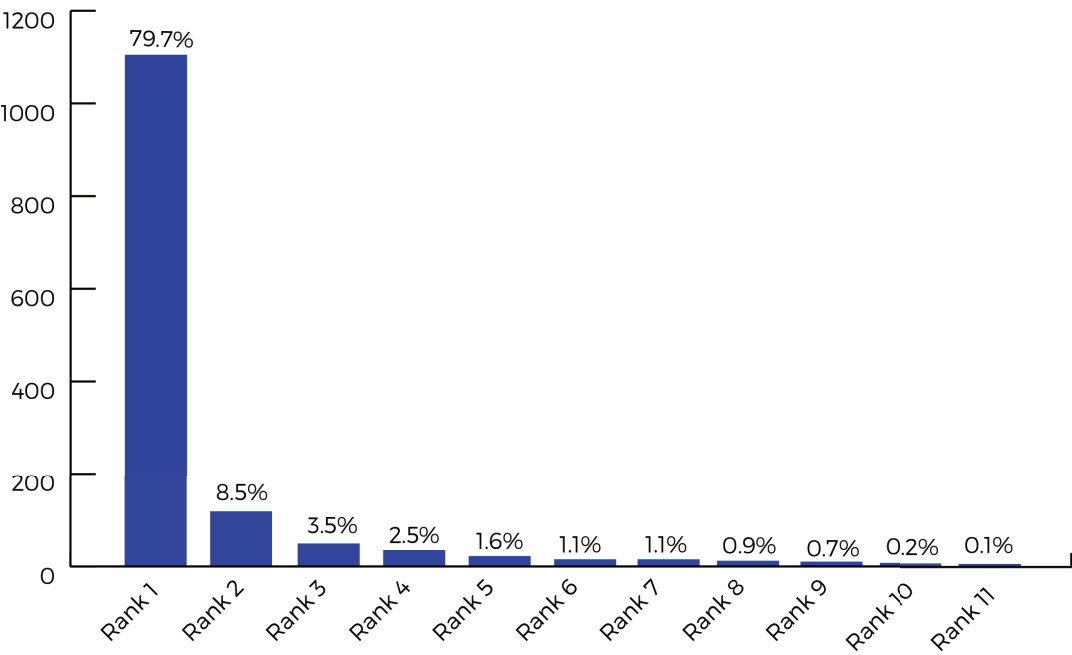
PARENTS' RESPONSES RELATED TO DECISION MAKING

Most trusted sources when making decisions about child care (N=1,971)



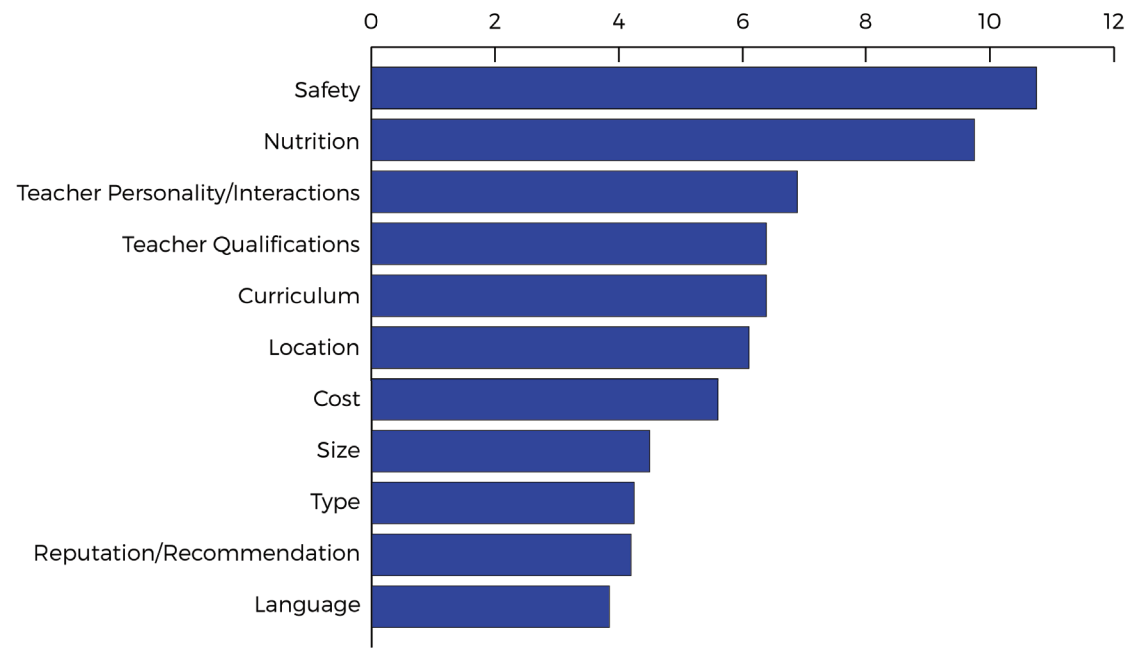
The following charts show the breakdown of parent’s responses for each decision making factor.

Safety (N=1,386)
Safety ranked as #1 factor by 79.1% of parents.

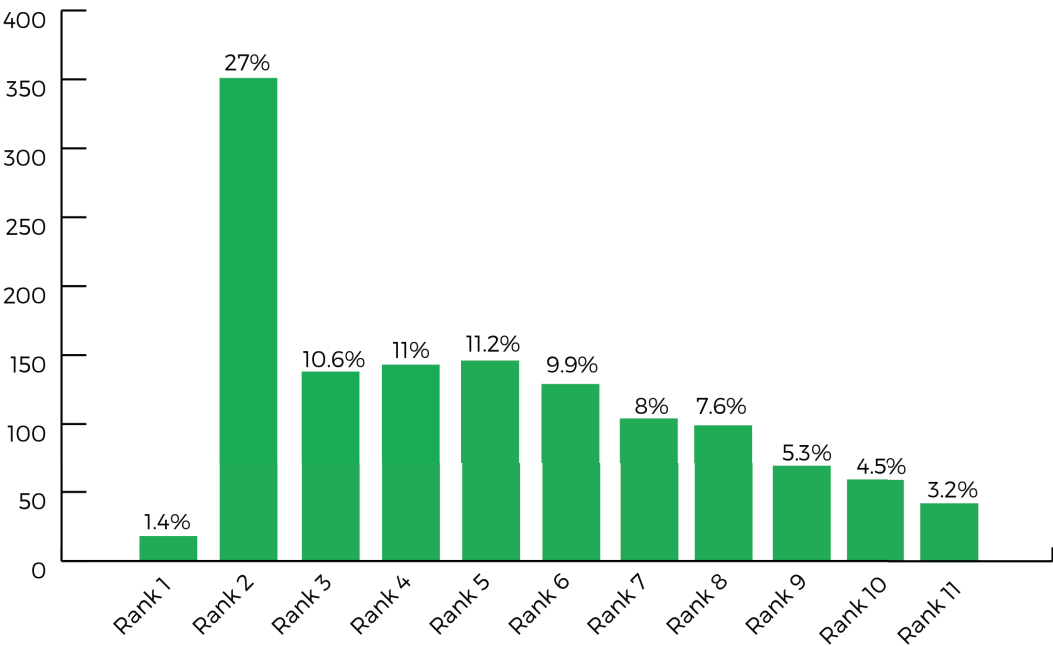


FACTORS IN PARENTS' CHILD CARE DECISION MAKING

Overall rankings of 11 decision making factors (N=1,386)

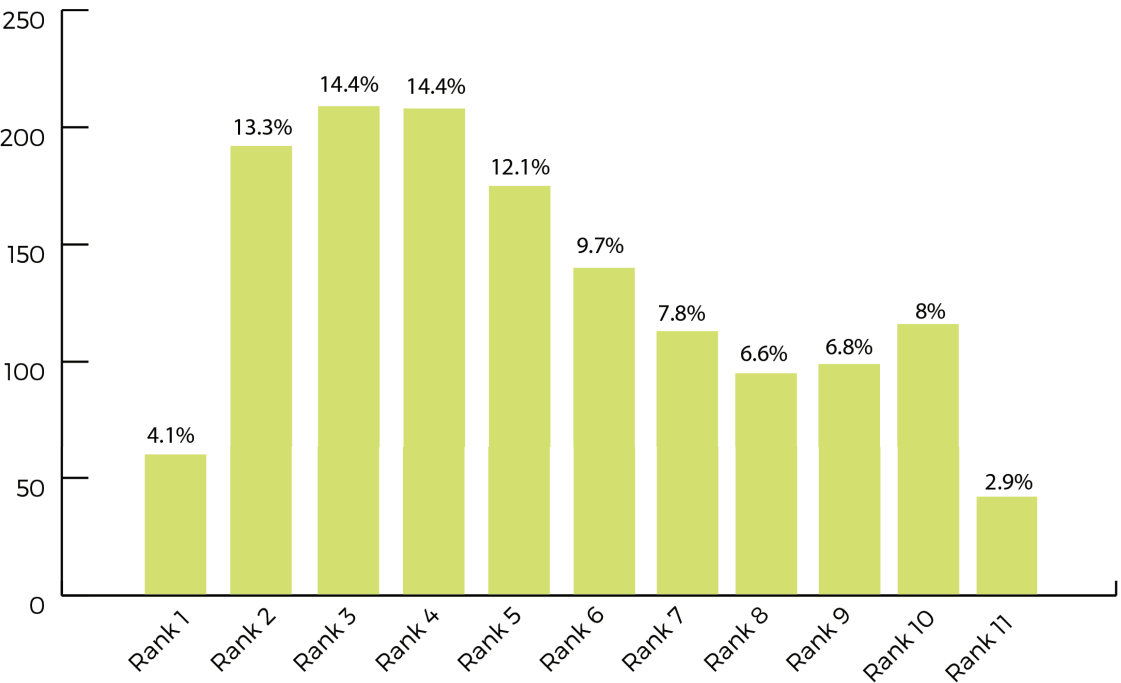


Nutrition(N=1,296)
Nutrition was ranked as factor #2 in importance by 27% of parents; it was ranked from #3 to #8 by similar numbers of parents (7% to 11%).



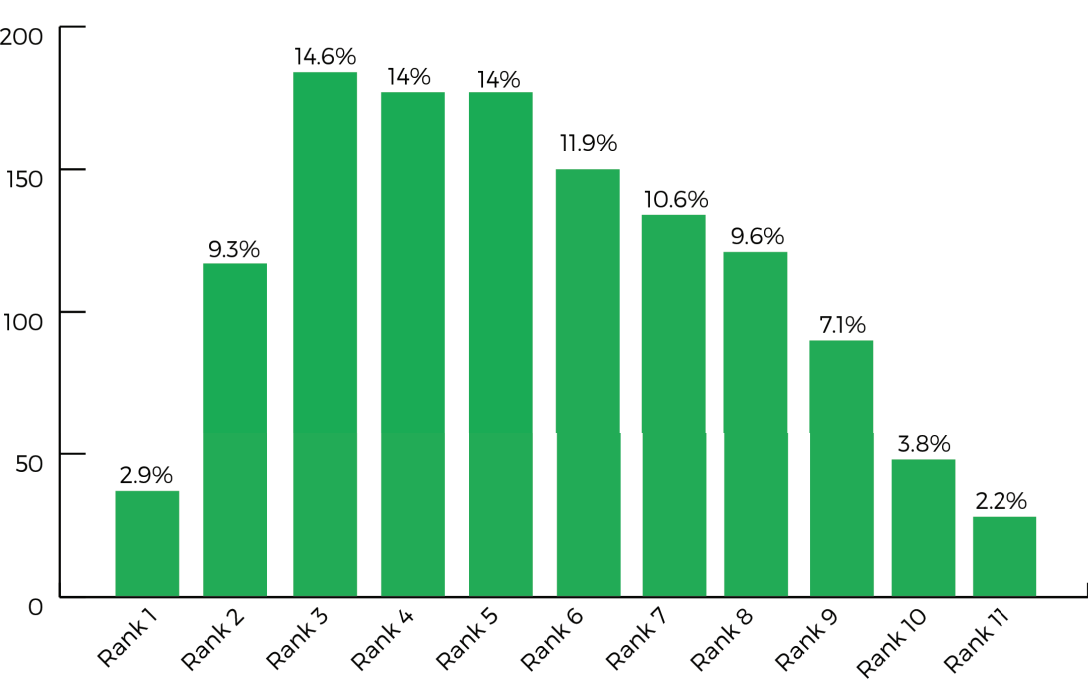
Teacher interactions with children (N=1,262)

Teacher Personality/Interactions was ranked as factor #2, #3 and #4 in importance by an almost equal percentage of parents (13% to 14% each group)



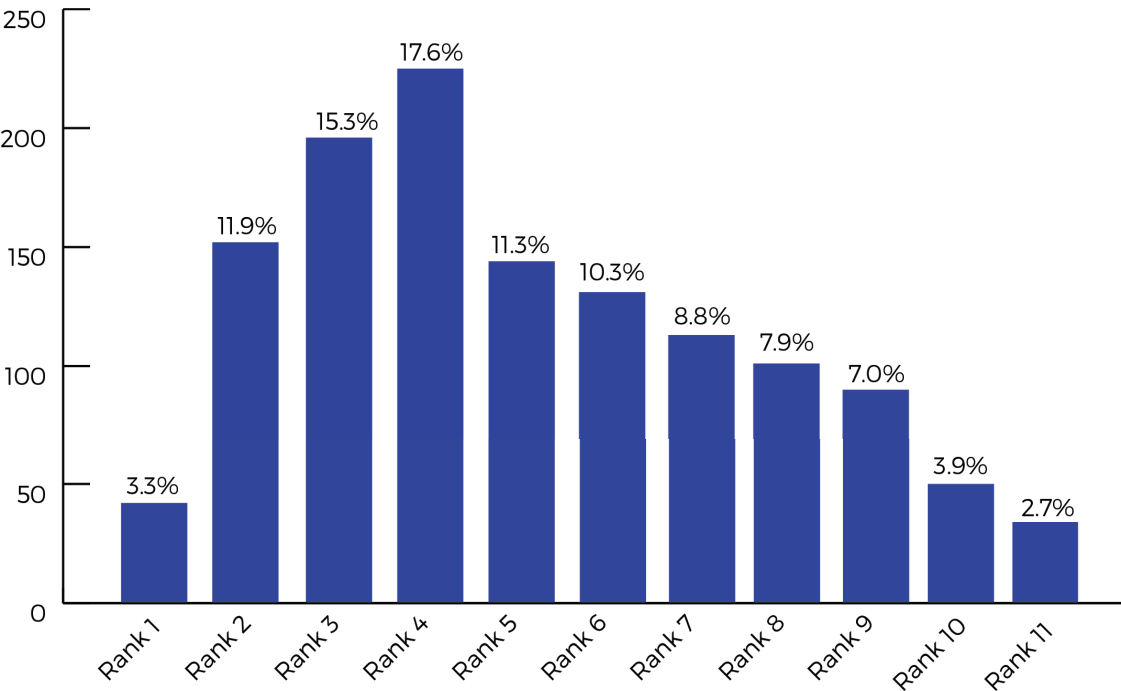
Educational curriculum (N=1,271)

This was ranked as factor #3, #4, and #5 in importance by an almost equal percentage of parents (approximately 14% in each group).



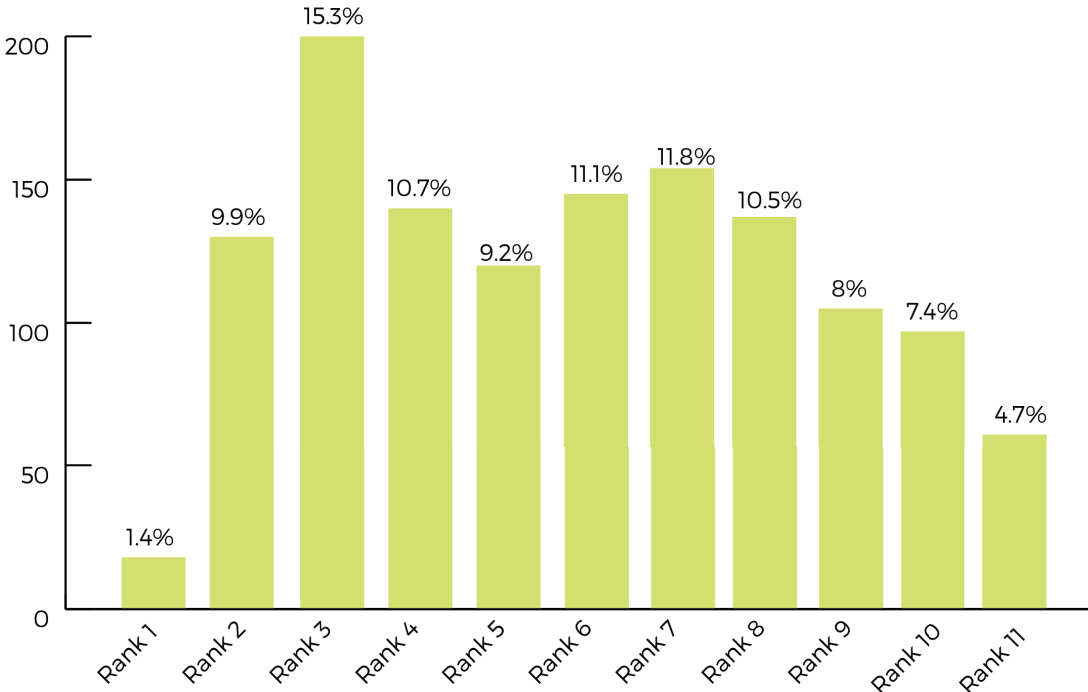
Teacher qualifications (N=1,261)

17.6% of parents ranked the qualifications a teacher has as #4.



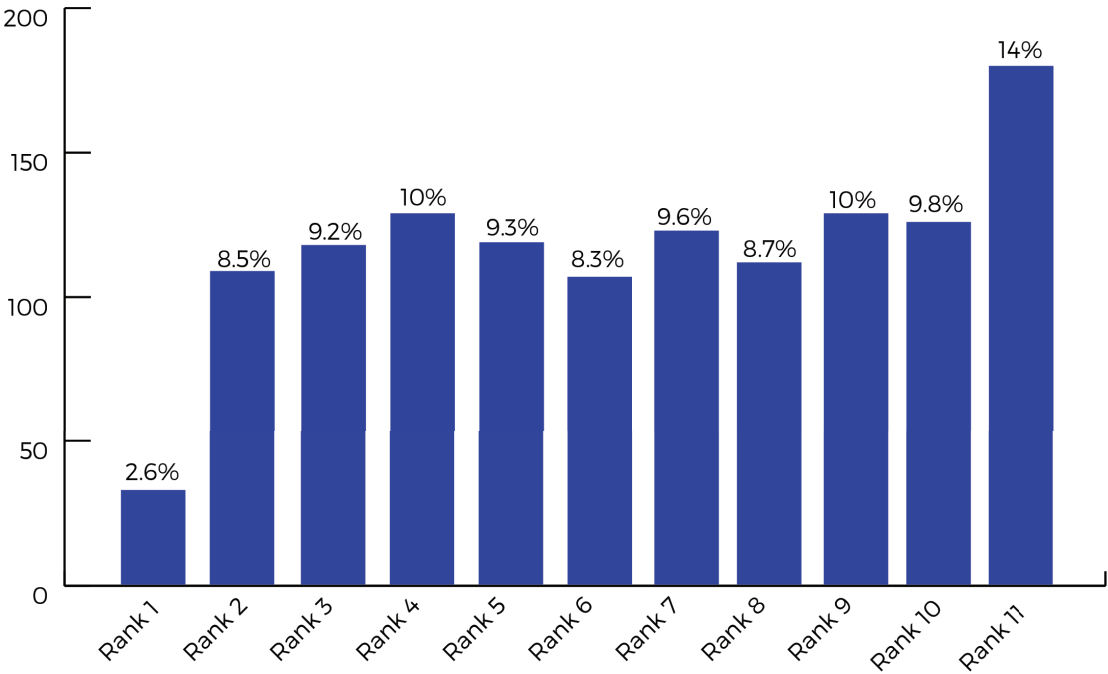
Location (N=1,305)

There was a fairly even distribution of rankings, with slightly more parents ranking location as #3.



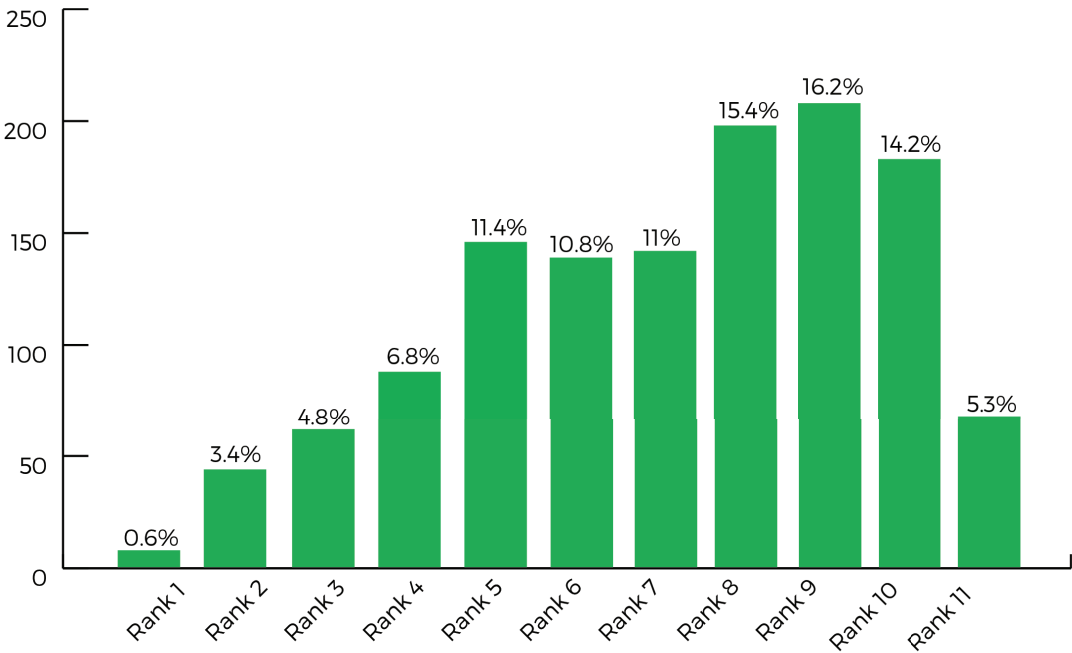
Cost (N=1,283)

There was a fairly even distribution of rankings; however, a slight majority of parents ranked cost at the bottom of their decision-making factors.



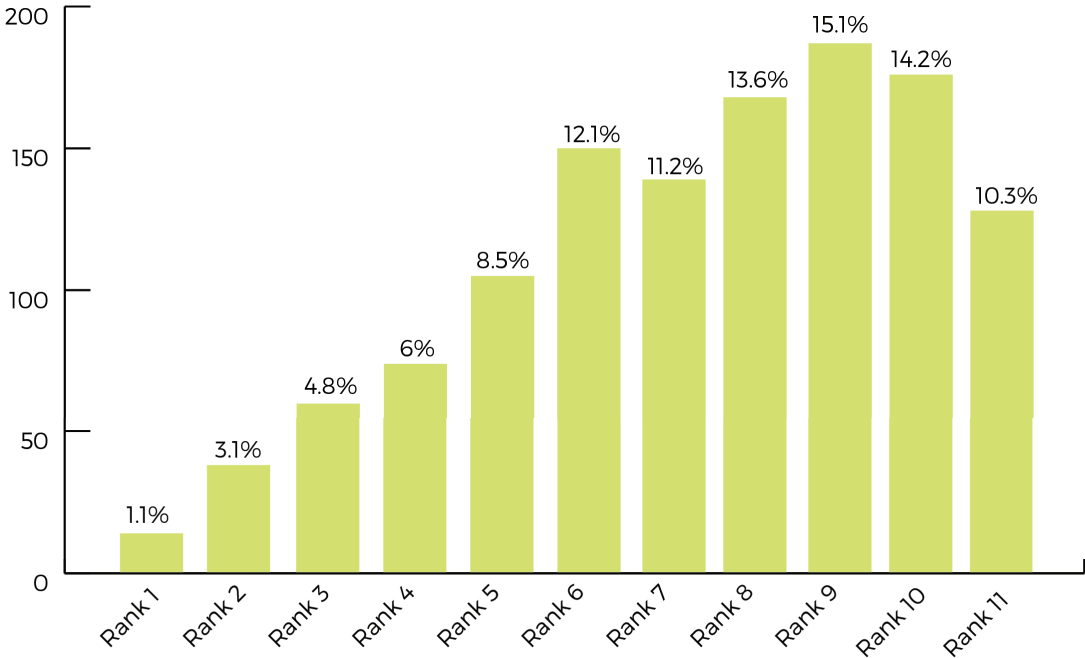
Size/number of children in the program (N=1,284)

Most parents ranked this near the bottom, as #8, #9, or #10.



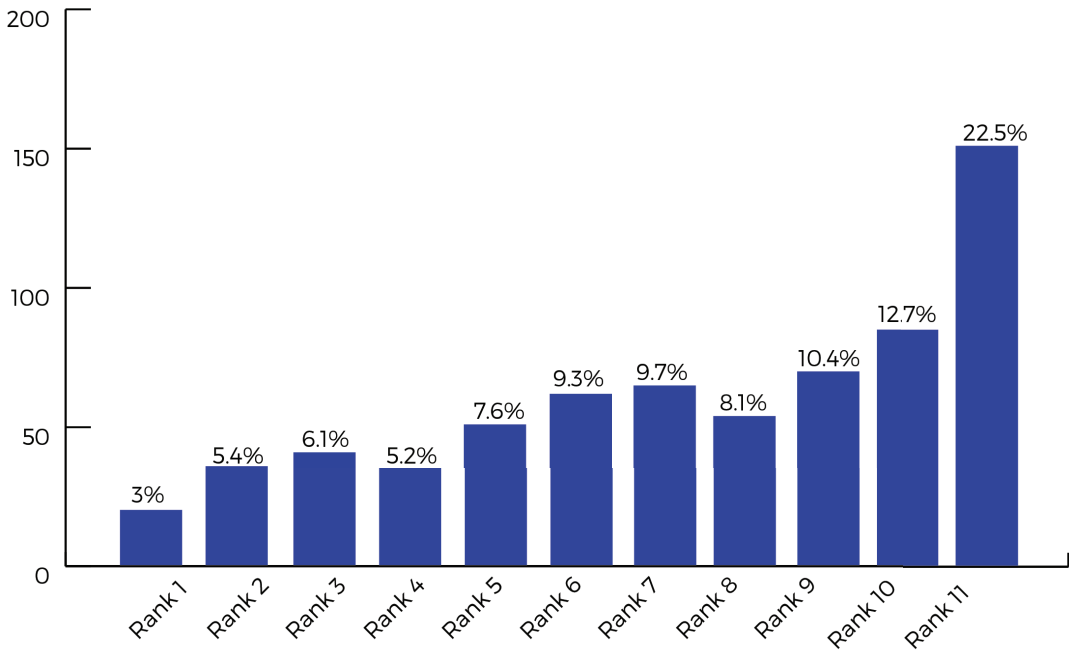
Type of program (child care center or family child care home) (N=1,267)

This factor was mostly likely to be in the bottom half of parents' rankings.



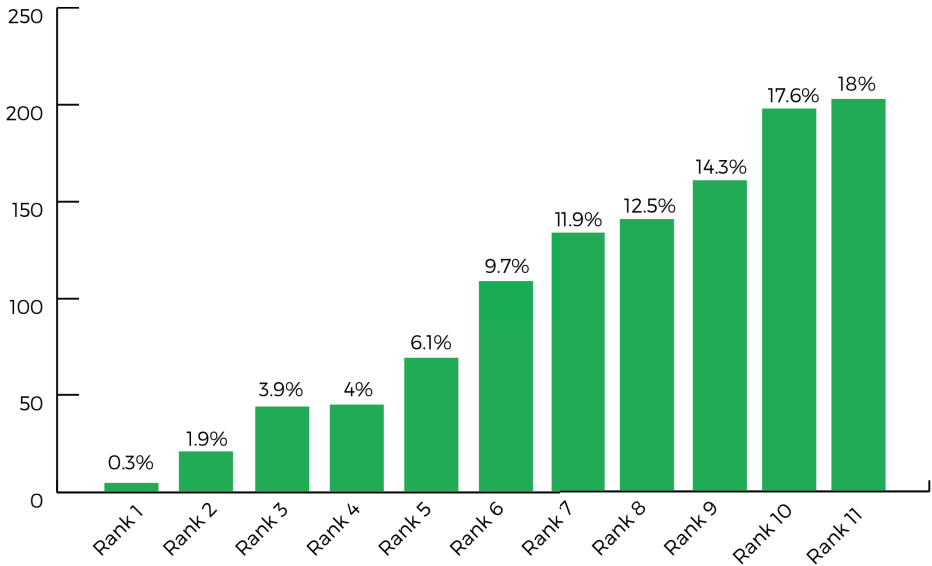
Reputation/recommendation from friend or neighbor (N=668)

The majority of parents ranked this as #11.

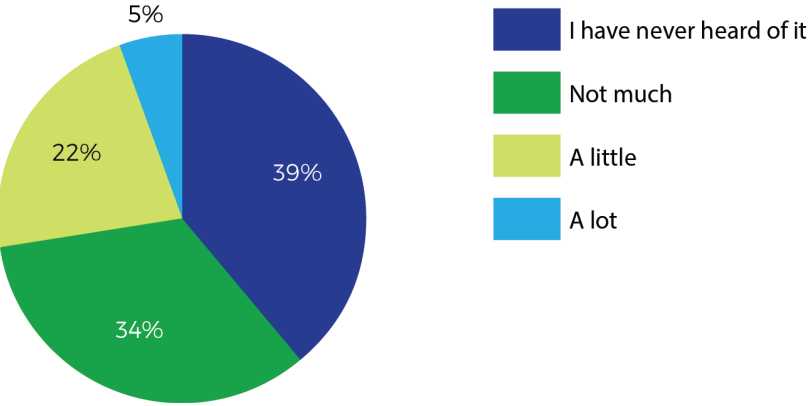


Language(s) spoken (N=1,225)

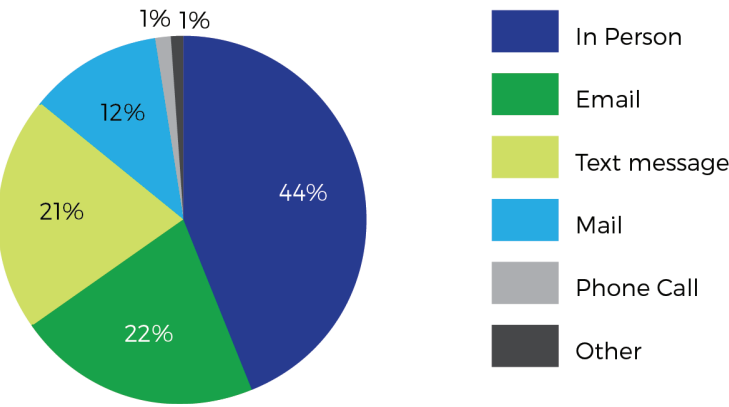
The majority of parents ranked this as #10 or #11.



How much do you know about Quality Start Riverside County? (N=2,066)

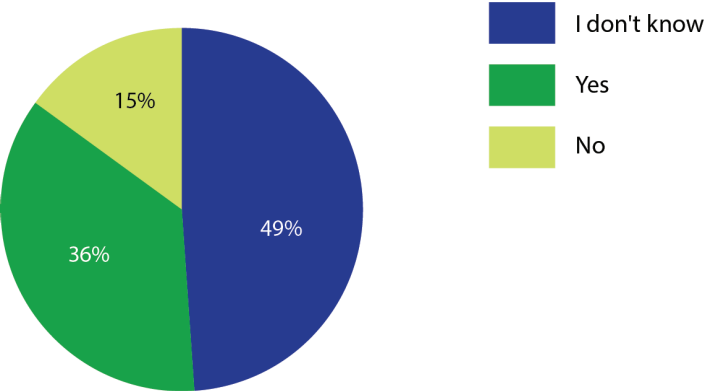


How do you like to receive general information and non-urgent updates from your child care educator? (N=2,091)

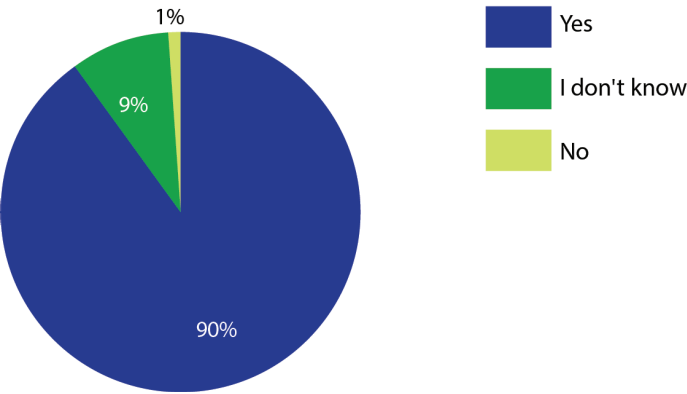


PARENTS' RESPONSES RELATED TO UNDERSTANDING QUALITY START RIVERSIDE COUNTY

Does your child's program participate in Quality Start Riverside County, Riverside County's quality rating and improvement system? (N=2,075)

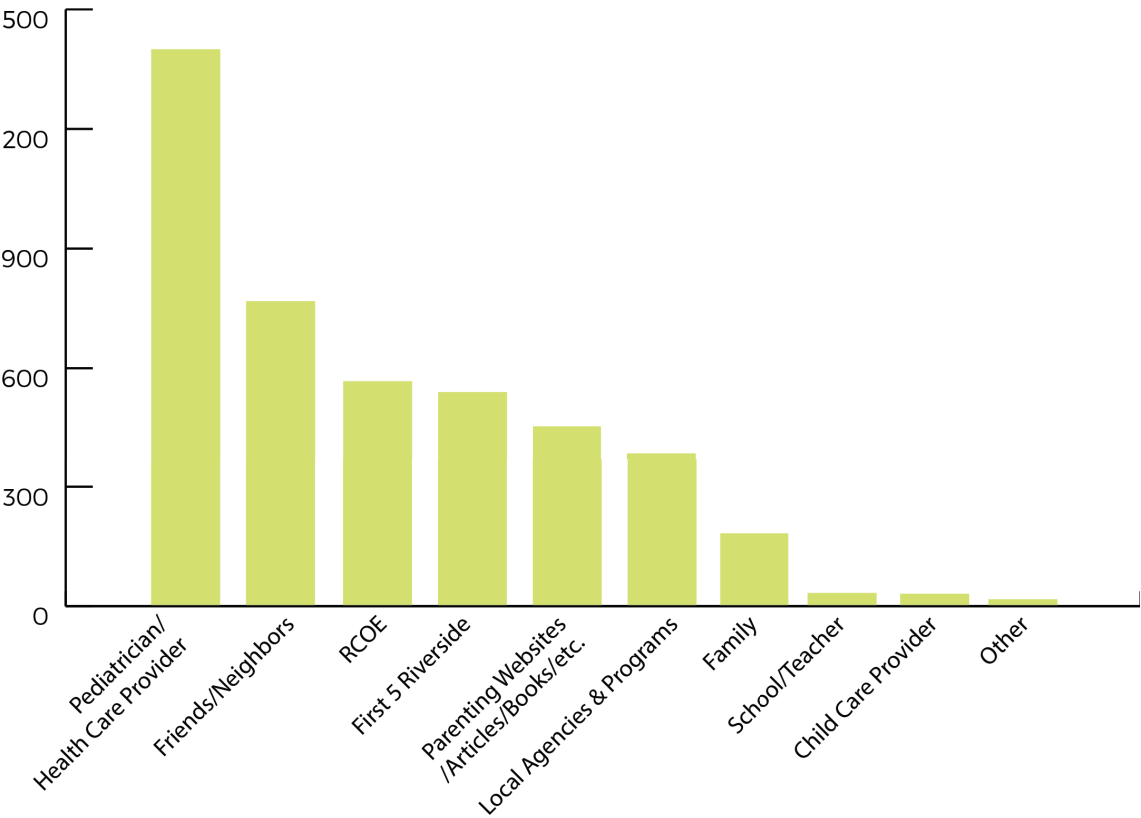


If you answered yes, do you feel that Quality Start Riverside County is improving the quality of your child's program? (N=729)

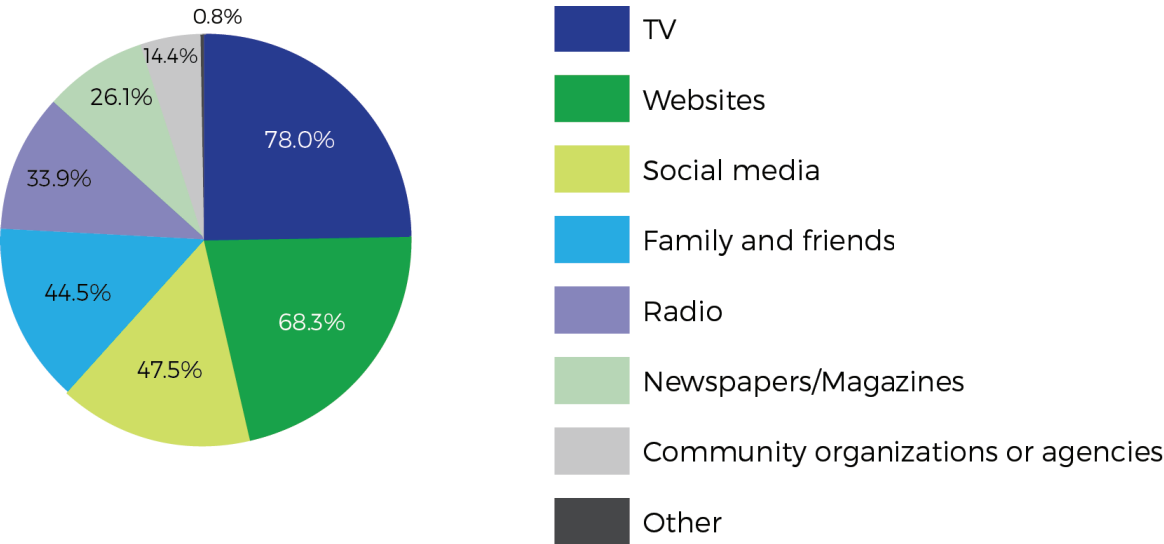


PARENTS' RESPONSES RELATED TO COMMUNICATIONS PREFERENCES

Who do you trust most for parenting resources and support? (N=2,074)



Where do you go most often to get local news and information? (N=1,657)



Prepared by VIVA Strategy + Communications





QUALITY
START 
RIVERSIDE COUNTY