

WORKING TO ENSURE A

bright
future

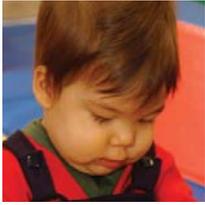
early childhood development

HEALTHY COMMUNITY

high quality care and education

Parents and children need it; community leaders agree it's important; and businesses and their employees know that access to it makes for a more productive workforce. *Positive early care and education are the foundations of a healthy community.*

Children who grow up healthy, in nurturing families, and with quality early care and education are more likely to enter school eager to learn, succeed academically, and grow up to be engaged and productive citizens. Research has demonstrated that young children need stable relationships and stimulating environments for optimal brain development. Conversely, high stress environments result in weakened brain architecture – a brain that isn't able to master new skills as readily or recover from setbacks as easily.



While quality care and education experiences are important for our young children, they are also important for the health of our entire community. A national study shows that children who experience high quality care and education are more likely to graduate from high school, obtain employment, earn a higher median annual income, and own a home and are less likely to require treatment for mental illness or be arrested. Quality early care and education promote the social, emotional, behavioral, and intellectual skills necessary to succeed in life. Therefore, it is more cost effective to invest in the early years of a child's life than to provide programs for older youth and adults. For every dollar spent on high quality early education programs, taxpayers can expect a savings of four to seven dollars.

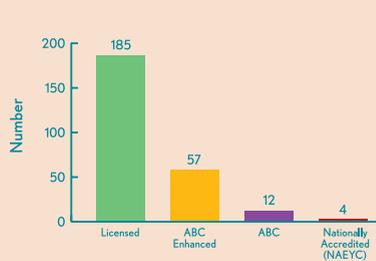
Because of the importance of early childhood development, the Mary Black Foundation selected it as one of its two grantmaking priority areas. The Foundation believes that its investment in projects that improve the care and education of all young children in Spartanburg County will improve the health of our community.

As part of its investment in early childhood development, the Foundation has contracted with Priority Metrics Group, a Spartanburg-based research company, to survey Spartanburg County residents about a variety of issues related to young children. The responses to the telephone survey will allow the Foundation to examine and track data over time. By highlighting some of the initial data collected, this report shows six areas that need improvement. More importantly, the report offers ways that all of us can contribute to change. *Systemic change will take time, hard work, and a long-term commitment on the part of our community, but improvements in early childhood development are essential to the health of Spartanburg County.*

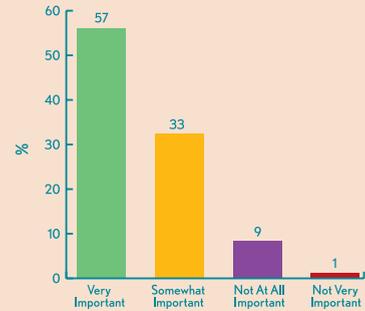
Encourage childcare providers to seek national accreditation.

It is clear that quality care and education are important to the development of young children; however, it is not always clear how to identify high quality childcare. Some key elements that affect the quality of care include the number of children in a classroom, the number of adults available to care for the children, the level of training for teachers and administrators, and the availability of age-appropriate educational materials. Currently, there is not a simple quality rating system to help parents select childcare. Furthermore, parents have very few nationally accredited providers from which to choose. The children of Spartanburg County deserve better.

Quality of Childcare Centers in Spartanburg County



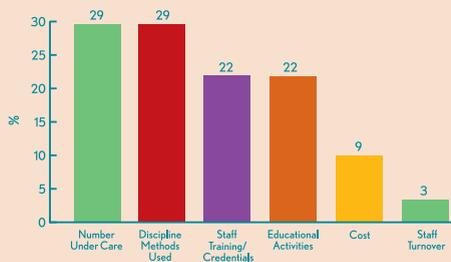
Importance of National Accreditation to Parents



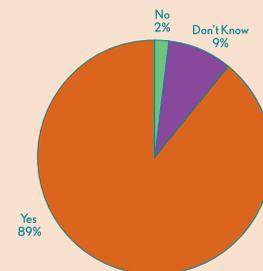
Encourage childcare providers to lower the ratio of children to teachers.

Although parents are concerned about the cost of childcare, they are more concerned about the ratio of students to teachers, the number of children in care, teachers' level of training, and the availability of educational activities. Crowded classrooms affect children's learning ability and teachers' interaction with students. Current regulations require less than adequate space for optimal learning environments, because the regulations allow calculations to include furniture, hallways, bathrooms, or storage areas. Imagine a 21 x 40 ft. room, a total of 840 sq. ft. Now, imagine that room with 24 two-year olds, 4 adults, and the furniture and equipment needed for their use. The noise, alone, would make it almost impossible to learn.

Two Questions (Other Than Hours and Location) Parents Ask When Seeking Childcare



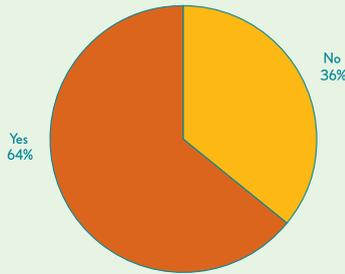
Percentage of Parents Willing to Pay More for High Quality Childcare if the Care Will Improve Capacity to Learn



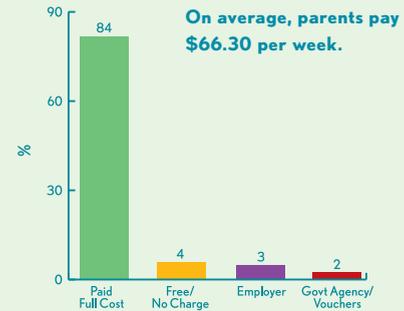
Provide employees with access to high quality childcare.

Employees who have access to quality childcare for their children are more productive during work hours and are absent from work less often. These employees worry less during the day about their children and are less likely to have to stay at home when childcare falls through. Finding high quality childcare, however, can be difficult and costly. Employers can offer their employees on-site childcare or "lease" spaces at off-site childcare facilities. This guarantees that working parents will have access to high quality care. Employers also may consider offering a stipend to parents to help offset the cost of care. Businesses that offer to pay a portion of their employees' childcare expenses are eligible for the SC Childcare Tax Credit.

Percentage of Parents Using Childcare for Their Children



Most Parents are Responsible for the Full Cost of Childcare



Improve the quality of childcare for all – sponsor a local childcare facility.

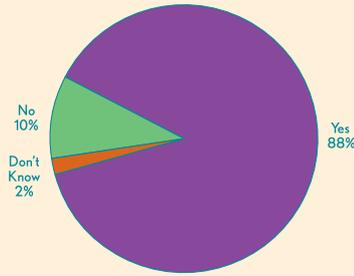
In addition to improving access to high quality childcare for their employees, employers might consider "adopting" a local childcare facility. Businesses can provide essential educational materials and supplies, offer employees time away from the office to volunteer with the children, and organize "renovation days." To improve the quality of children's environments, many childcare facilities need renovations such as new carpet, paint, or curtains to control light and improve acoustics. Businesses can volunteer time and money to build storage shelves, sand boxes, outdoor play areas, and other improvements that the childcare provider may not be able to afford.



Support the implementation of a quality rating system for the childcare industry.

Choosing a childcare provider is one of the most important decisions a parent will make. Currently, there is very little information available to assist parents in selecting a high quality childcare environment. Parents rely on subjective recommendations and information given by the childcare providers, without being able to compare one center to another. A quality rating system would give parents comparable information about the care and education provided and make parents more informed consumers. Furthermore, it would create a sense of competition and accountability within the childcare industry.

Percentage of Parents Who Think That All Childcare Centers Should Have to Participate in Palmetto STARS, a Proposed Quality Rating System



Invest in programs that encourage childcare providers to further their education.

The training of childcare providers and the stability of staff are two of the most critical indicators of quality childcare experiences. Improving providers' access to educational opportunities through programs such as TEACH has been successful in enhancing the quality of care. TEACH provides scholarships to encourage childcare providers to further their education. In addition to TEACH, the WAGE\$ program provides education-based salary supplements to teachers and family care providers who obtain higher education. TEACH and WAGE\$ allow childcare providers to attract and retain qualified staff and, thereby, improve the learning experience for children.







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Data Methodology

Information about the number and quality of childcare centers in Spartanburg County was provided by the Department of Social Services and Spartanburg Technical College.

All other data included in this report was collected by Priority Metrics Group (Spartanburg, SC) for the Mary Black Foundation. Priority Metrics Group conducted a telephone survey of Spartanburg County households with at least one child under the age of six from January – September 2005. Interviews were conducted throughout the day and evening to reach individuals who might be working or otherwise unavailable during normal business hours. Average survey time was approximately 19 minutes.

Survey results presented in this report are weighted using age and education of respondents.

The sample size (n=267) results in a confidence interval of ± 0.12 ($\alpha=0.05$, $\sigma=1.0$) around an average response and $\pm 5.4\%$ ($\alpha=0.05$, est. proportion=25%/75%) around a percentage response.

Please contact the Foundation for more information about this report or the data collection process.

Using this Report

Please acknowledge the Mary Black Foundation when using this report to improve the public's understanding of the importance of positive early childhood development.

Additional copies are available from the Mary Black Foundation.