

The University of Akron Poll: Ohio Public's Views on Early Childhood Education Issues 2018

Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics
The University of Akron

Executive Summary

- Ohioans report being moderately aware of early childhood education issues—less aware of than opioid abuse but more aware of than Medicaid expansion.
- More than one-half of the Ohio public is not aware that most children are not ready for kindergarten when they first go to school.
- Most Ohioans are aware that children from well-off and less well-off families are not equally prepared to start kindergarten.
- Over two-thirds of Ohioans know that children who are not prepared to start kindergarten are not able to quickly catch up.
- A large majority of Ohioans know parents without childcare have a hard time getting and keeping a job due to financial and time constraints.
- Based on the answers to these four questions, Ohioans appear to be fairly knowledgeable of some basic facts concerning early childhood education.
- A large majority of Ohioans say new programs for all-day daycare, all-day preschool, and all-year programming were important and prefer such programs to be voluntary for families.
- Ohioans are evenly divided when forced to choose between all-day daycare or all-day preschool.
- Ohioans view families, rather than the state of Ohio, as having had the most responsibility for early childhood education.
- Only a minority of Ohioans said they are willing to raise taxes to pay for new early childhood education programs for all Ohio children; a larger minority indicate a willingness to pay taxes for such programs for disadvantaged children in Ohio.
- If taxes had to be raised for such new programs, a plurality favor state sales taxes, followed by business taxes and state income taxes, with local property taxes the least favored.

- Analysis of these data reveal four clusters of opinion on early childhood education: *Skeptical Daycare Followers* (48% of the Ohio public), *Reluctant Preschool Supporters* (17%), *Eager Preschool Backers* (17%), and *Enthusiastic Daycare Advocates* (18%).

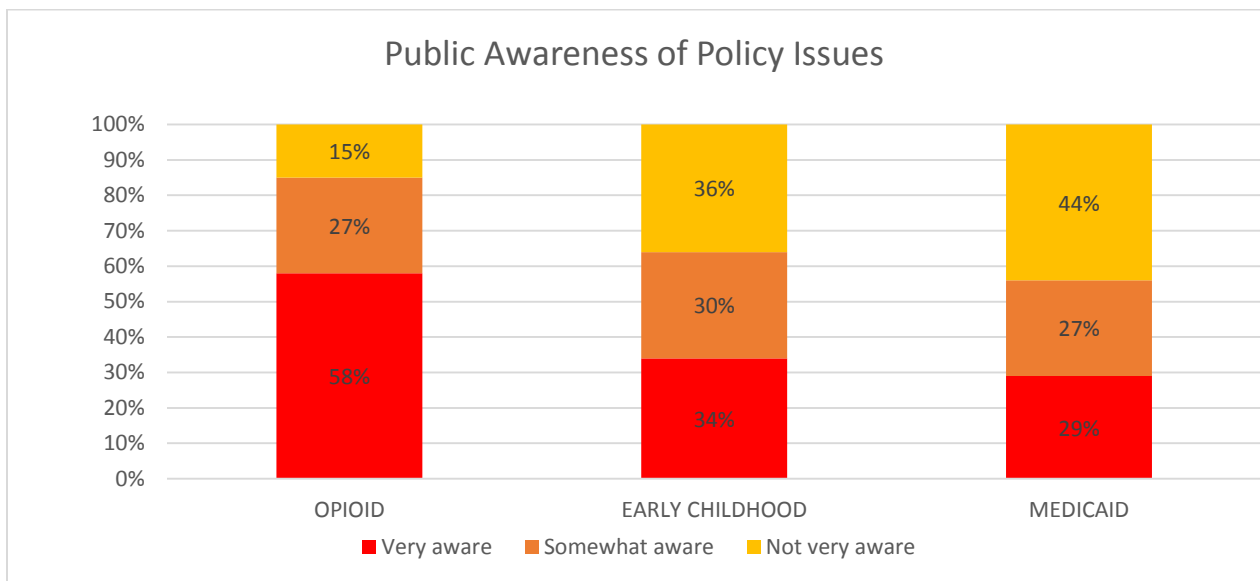
The Survey

This poll was conducted by the Center for Marketing and Opinion Research for the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at The University of Akron. It was a random sample of 1,000 Ohio eligible voters conducted by telephone (with cell phone and web components) between September 10 and October 4, 2018, with a margin of error of plus or minus three percentage points.

Awareness of Early Childhood Education Issues

To assess the Ohio public’s awareness of early childhood education issues, the survey respondents were asked if they had read or heard about “early childhood education programs, which help children be ready to start kindergarten.” If they answered “yes,” respondents were then asked if they considered themselves “very,” “somewhat,” or “not very” aware of the issue. (The “no” and “not very aware” responses were combined for ease of presentation.)

Parallel questions were also asked about two similar policy issues: “fighting opioid abuse and addiction, such as helping people stop or avoid drug addiction” and “Medicaid expansion, which helps fund health care for people in need.”



Overall, about one-third (34%) of the Ohio public said they were “very aware” of early childhood education issues, almost another one-third (30%) said they were “somewhat aware,” and a bit more than one-third (36%) said they were “not very aware.”

The Ohio public’s awareness of early childhood education issues fell between awareness of opioid and Medicaid programs.

On one hand, self-reported awareness of early childhood education issues was markedly lower than for opioid abuse, where nearly three-fifths (58%) said they were “very aware” and just one-sixth (15%) said they were “not very aware.”

On the other hand, self-reported awareness of early childhood education issues was higher than for Medicaid expansion, where more than one-quarter (29%) said they were “very aware” and more than two-fifths (44%) said they were “not very aware.”

Knowledge of Early Childhood Education Facts

To assess the Ohio public’s knowledge of some basic facts about early childhood education, the respondents were asked the following four true/false questions (correct answers are in **bold**):

	TRUE	FALSE	
A majority of Ohio children are not ready for kindergarten when they first go to school.	48	52	=100%
Children are about equally prepared to start kindergarten whether they are from well-off or less well-off families.	35	65	=100%
Children who are not as prepared to start kindergarten quickly catch up and do well in school.	31	69	=100%
Due to financial and time constraints, parents without childcare have a hard time getting and keeping a job.	86	14	=100%

Just less than one-half (48%) of the Ohio public correctly answered “true” to the statement that a majority of Ohio children are not ready for kindergarten when they first go to school.

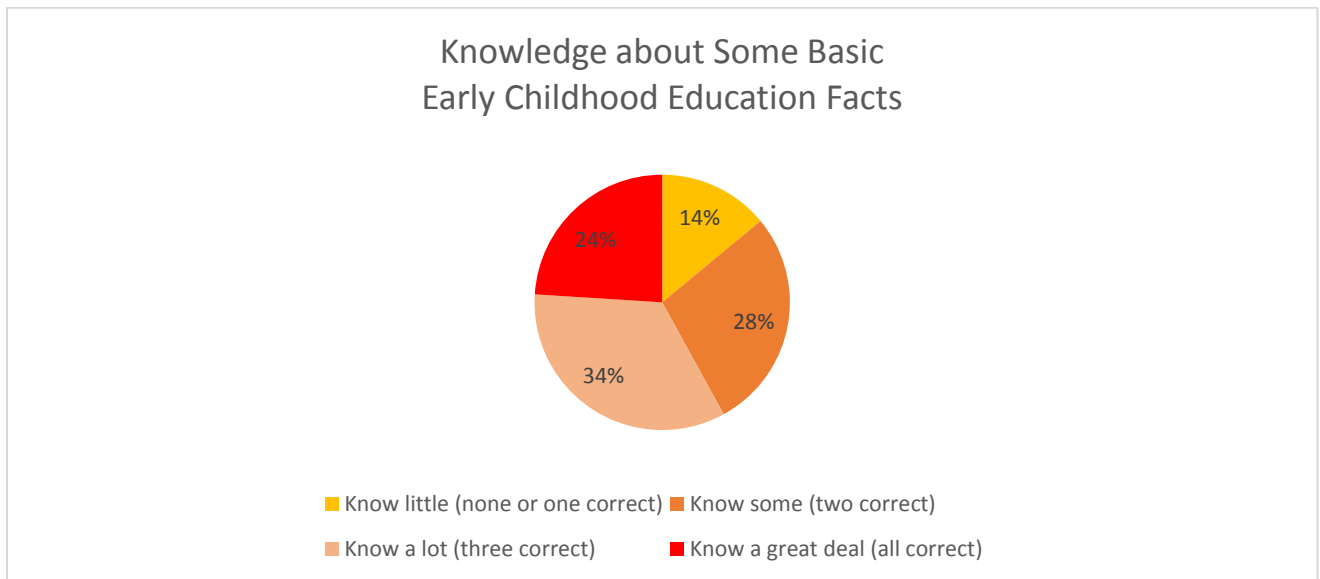
However, about two-thirds correctly answered “false” to the statements that children are about equally prepared to start kindergarten whether they are from well-off or less well-off families (65%), and that children who are not as prepared quickly catch up and do well in school (69%).

Finally, more than four-fifths (86%) correctly answered “true” to the statement that parents without childcare have a hard time getting and keeping a job.

The correct answers to these true/false questions were added together in a knowledge measure, ranging from none or one correct answer to all four correct answers.

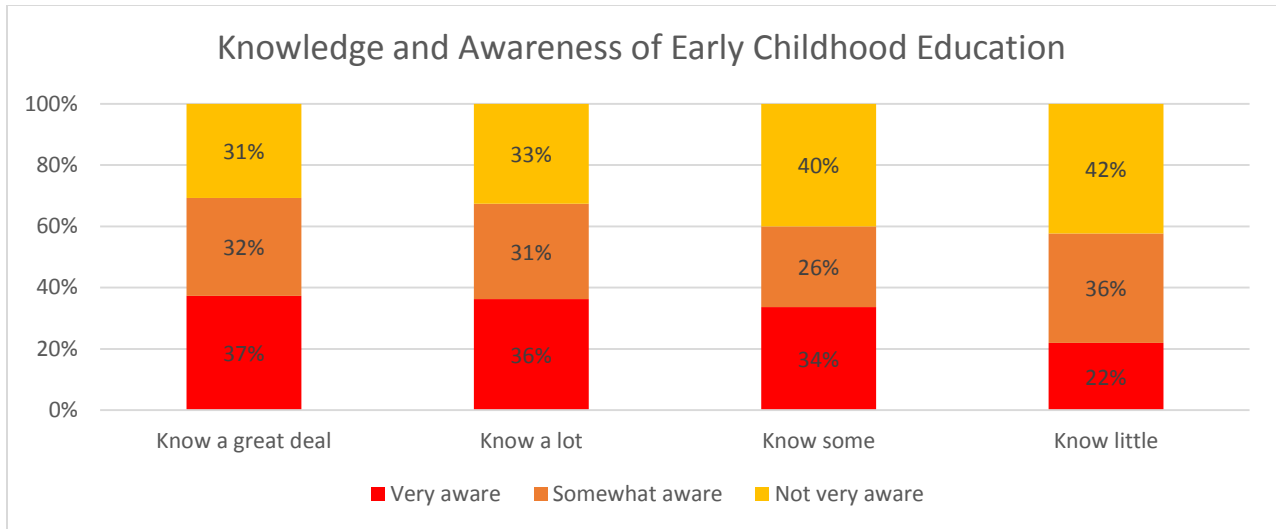
Overall, about one-quarter of the Ohio public (24%) knew “a great deal” about some basic facts about early childhood education; about one-third (34%) knew “a lot”; and about another one-quarter (28%) knew “some” about the subject. The remaining one-seventh (14%) know “little.”

Thus, a majority of the public (58%) knew “a great deal” or “a lot” about the four specific questions asked.



As one might expect, knowledge and awareness of early childhood education issues were closely linked: more knowledgeable members of the Ohio public tended to also be more aware of the issues.

For example, almost two-fifths of those who “know a great deal” (37%) or who “know a lot” (36%) also reported being “very aware” of early childhood education. In contrast, about two-fifths of those who “know some” (40%) or “know little” (42%) also reported being “not very aware” of the issue.



Views on Early Childhood Education Policy Proposals

Respondents were asked to assess the importance of four early childhood policy proposals, using a ten-point scale (10 = “very important” and 1 = “not at all important”).

The proposals were:

1. *High-quality, affordable all-day daycare for all families in Ohio.*
2. *High-quality, affordable all-day preschool for all Ohio children.*
3. *Organized year-round school programs for at-risk children.*
4. *Home visits to help families prepare their children for school.*

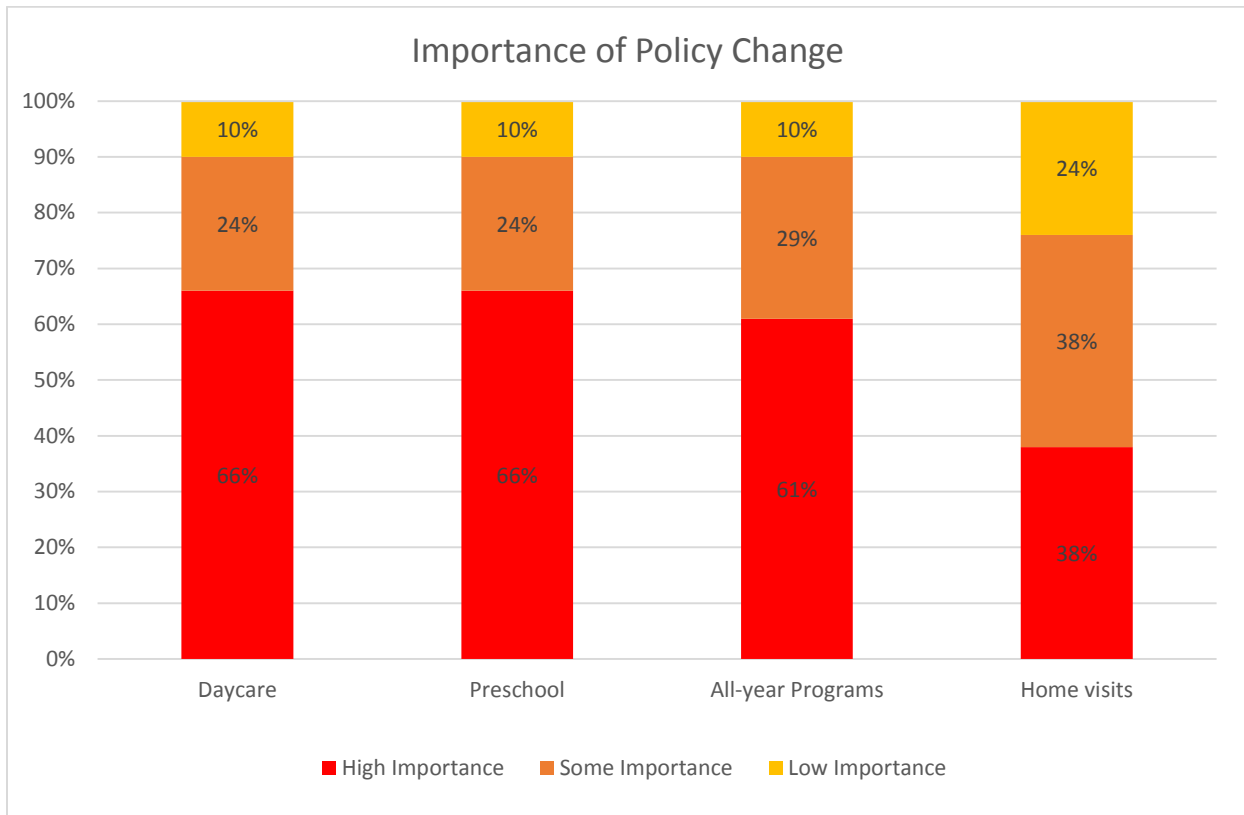
Overall, the Ohio public viewed all four of these early childhood education policy changes favorably.

For example, two-thirds (66%) of respondents rated the proposal for all-day daycare to be of “high importance” (8, 9 and 10 on the ten-point scale), one-quarter (24%) of “some importance” (4 through 7), and one-tenth (10%) of “low importance” (1 through 3).

The proposal for all-day preschool showed the same pattern of importance as all-day daycare (66% “high importance”), while the proposal for all-year programs was modestly less popular (61% “high importance”). The proposal for home visits was the least popular (38% “high importance”).

Respondents were then asked “if you had to choose” between the two most popular programs, all-day daycare or all-day preschool, “which is more important to have in Ohio?” Here, the

public remained evenly divided, with about one half each (46%) favoring all-day daycare and preschool (with the remaining 8% choosing neither).



Other Issues

When asked if such policy changes should be “mandatory or voluntary for families,” two-thirds (67%) of the respondents said “voluntary” and one-third (33%) said “mandatory.”

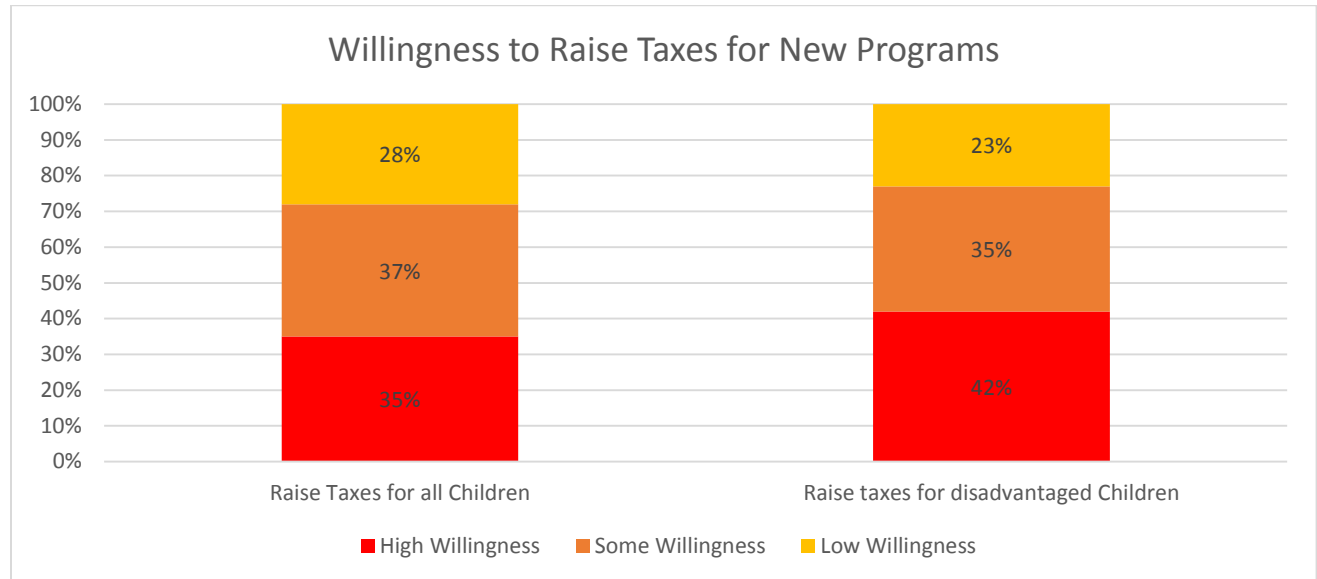
When asked to choose between these statements “The State of Ohio has the most responsibility to ensure that all children are kindergarten ready” and “Families have the most responsibility to make sure that children are kindergarten ready,” one-fifth (20%) of respondents said state government and four-fifths (80%) said families.

When asked if such changes should be provided by “public schools, non-profit groups, or a mix of both,” almost three-quarters (73%) of respondents said a mix of both, about one-fifth (19%) said public schools, and the remaining one-tenth (8%) said non-profit groups.

When asked “Overall, do you think the Republicans or Democrats are more interested in early childhood education programs, or is there no difference between the parties?” one-half (52%) of respondents saw no difference between the major parties, almost two-fifths (38%) chose the Democrats and one-tenth (10%) chose the Republicans.

Willingness to Raise Taxes to Fund New Programs

Respondents were also asked to assess “How willing would you be to increase taxes so all Ohio children have access to high-quality childcare or preschool?” and also “How willing would you be to increase taxes so disadvantaged children have access to high-quality childcare or preschool?” using a ten-point scale (10 = “very willing” and 1 = “not at all willing”).



Overall, about one-third (35%) of the respondents expressed “high willingness” to raise taxes to fund early childhood education programs for all Ohio children (8, 9 and 10 on the ten-point scale), while almost two-fifths (37%) reported “some willingness” (4 through 7) and more than one-quarter (28%) indicated “low willingness” to raise taxes for this purpose (1 through 3).

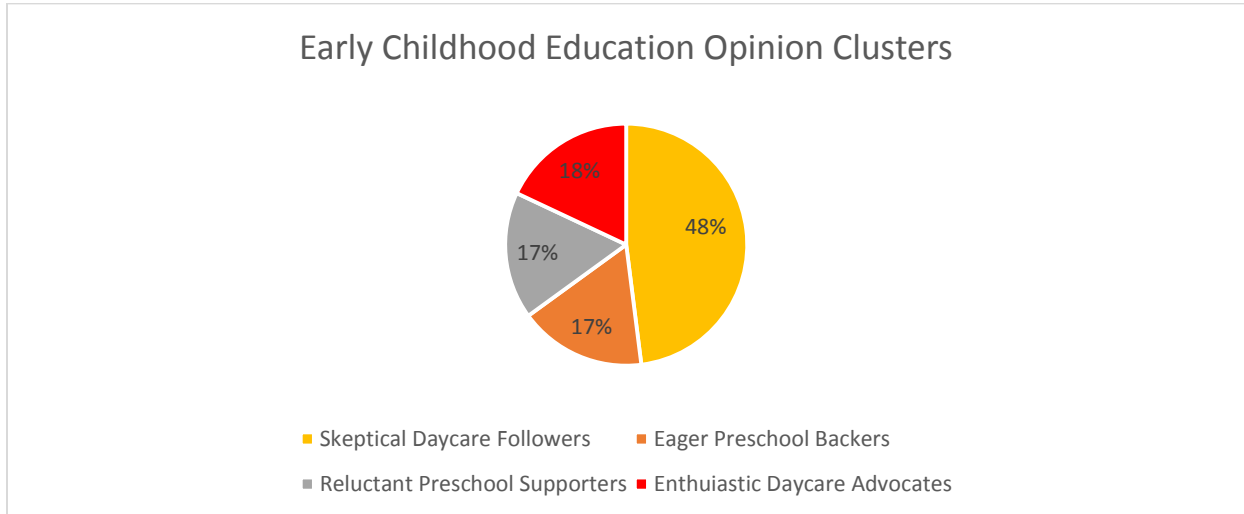
The Ohio public is more willing to raise taxes to fund early childhood education programs for disadvantaged Ohio children. Here about two-fifths (42%) expressed “high willingness” to raise taxes, while about one-third (35%) reported “some willingness,” and less than one-quarter (23%) indicated “low willingness” to raise taxes for this purpose.

Finally, the respondents were asked if taxes were increased for new early childhood programs, what kind of tax they would prefer. Under this stipulation, almost two-fifths (38%) of the Ohio public preferred increasing state sales taxes, almost one-third (30%) business taxes, one-quarter (24%) state income taxes, and less than one-tenth (8%) local property taxes for this purpose.

Clusters of Opinion on Early Childhood Education Programs

The Ohio public can be usefully divided into four clusters of opinion on early childhood education issues based on five survey measures. Four single questions included were: 1. the forced choice between all-day daycare and preschool; 2. whether such programs should be voluntary or mandatory for families; 3. whether the state of Ohio or families have the most responsibility for early childhood education; and 4. the willingness to raise taxes to fund new programs for all Ohio children. A final measure is a combined index of the importance of all four

of the policy proposals (daycare, preschool, year-round programs, and home visits).¹ The opinion clusters are summarized on the following pages, with their most notable demographic characteristics highlighted.



Skeptical Daycare Followers. This opinion cluster is the largest, making up almost one-half (48%) of the Ohio public. This cluster is skeptical of early childhood education, with no more than one-half assigning high importance to any of the four proposals.

As the label reveals, this cluster favors all-day daycare when forced to choose (59%), but almost all also favor a voluntary program for families (99%). It believes that families are most responsible for early childhood education rather than the state of Ohio (95%).

The Skeptical Daycare Followers are the least aware of early childhood education issues (26% self-reported “very aware”) and the least knowledgeable on early childhood education facts (50% know “a lot” and “a great deal” based on the four true/false questions asked). For example, two-fifths (42%) of this cluster correctly said that a majority of Ohio children are not ready for kindergarten when they first go to school.

This cluster is the least willing to raise taxes for new programs (41% “low willingness” vs. 17% “high willingness” to increase taxes to help all Ohio children; 32% vs. 24% to increase taxes to help disadvantaged Ohio children). If taxes have to be raised for this purpose, a plurality would prefer increasing state sales taxes (42%).

In political terms, the Skeptical Daycare Followers are conservative (58%) and Republican (59%); more than two-thirds (69%) said they voted for Republican Donald Trump in the 2016 General Election.

¹ The clusters were calculated using K-Means cluster analysis.

In terms of demographic highlights, this cluster has the most men (53%) and is the most likely to live outside of big cities (53%). Compared to the other clusters, it is modestly well educated (38% with college degrees or more education) and affluent (36% with annual income of \$75,000 or more).

Reluctant Preschool Supporters. This opinion cluster makes up a little less than one-fifth (17%) of the Ohio public. It is reluctant about supporting early childhood education, with slim majorities noting high importance to daycare, preschool, and all-year programs.

As the label reveals, this cluster favored all-day preschool when forced to choose (71%). Nine in ten members (90%) believe families have the most responsibility for early childhood education rather than the state of Ohio, but interestingly, even more say such programs should be mandatory for families (99%).

The Reluctant Preschool Supporters are not very aware of early childhood education issues (34% self-report “very aware”). However, they are fairly knowledgeable of early childhood education facts (59% know “a lot” or “a great deal” based on the four true/false questions asked). For example, less than one-half (48%) of this cluster correctly said that a majority of Ohio children are not ready for kindergarten when they first go to school.

This cluster is willing to raise taxes for new programs (29% “low unwillingness” vs. 33% “high willingness” to increase taxes to help all Ohio children; 21% vs. 43% to increase taxes to help disadvantaged Ohio children). If taxes have to be raised for this purpose, a slim plurality would prefer increasing business taxes (33%).

In political terms, the Reluctant Preschool Supporters tend to be conservative (52%) and Republican (46%); almost three-fifths (59%) said they voted for Republican Donald Trump in the 2016 General Election.

In terms of demographic highlights, this cluster is the youngest (51% less than 44 years old), the most unmarried (55%), the least well-educated (26% with college degree or more), and the least affluent (30% with annual income of \$75,000 or more).

Eager Preschool Backers. This opinion cluster also makes up a little less than one-fifth (17%) of the Ohio public. It is eager about early childhood education, with large majorities assigning “high importance” to daycare, preschool, all-year programs—and almost a majority on home visits.

As the label reveals, this group favored all-day preschool when forced to choose (91%). Nine in ten members believe families have the most responsibility for early childhood education rather than the state of Ohio (90%), but interestingly, even more say such programs should be voluntary (99%). Thus, the Eager Preschool Backers were the mirror image of the Reluctant Preschool Supporters on the issue of voluntary vs. mandatory programs.

The Eager Preschool Backers are well aware of early childhood education issues (40% self-report “very aware”) and are quite knowledgeable of early childhood education facts (63% knew “a lot” or “a great deal” based on the four true/false questions asked). For example, more than

one-half (54%) of this cluster correctly said that a majority of Ohio children are not ready for kindergarten when they first go to school.

This cluster is quite willing to raise taxes for new programs (9% “low willingness” vs. 63% “high willingness” to increase taxes to help all Ohio children; 11% vs. 66% to increase taxes to help disadvantaged Ohio children). If taxes have to be raised for this purpose, a plurality would prefer increasing state sales taxes (40%).

In political terms, the Eager Preschool Backers are almost equally divided between conservatives (41%) and liberals (42%), but tend to be Democrats (51%); about three-fifths (61%) said they voted for Democrat Hillary Clinton in the 2016 General Election.

In terms of demographic highlights, this cluster is the oldest (69% more than 46 years old), has the most whites (87%), the most married (58%), is the best educated (48% with college degree or more), and most affluent (40% with annual income of \$75,000 or more).

Enthusiastic Daycare Advocates. This opinion cluster also makes up a little less than one-fifth (18%) of the Ohio public. This cluster is enthusiastic about early childhood education, with large majorities assigning “high importance” in all four cases.

As the label reveals, this group favors all-day daycare when forced to choose (75%) and also says such programs should be mandatory for families (82%). Three-fifths (60%) of this group believes the state of Ohio has the most responsibility for early childhood education rather than families—it is the only cluster with this pattern.

The Enthusiastic Daycare Advocates are the most aware of early childhood education issues (46% self-report “very aware”) and the most knowledgeable of early childhood education facts (71% know “a lot” or “a great deal” based on the four true/false questions asked). For example, three-fifths (60%) of this cluster correctly said that a majority of Ohio children are not ready for kindergarten when they first go to school.

This cluster is also quite willing to raise taxes for new programs (10% “low willingness” vs. 63% “high willingness” to increase taxes to help all Ohio children; 10% vs. 67% to increase taxes to help disadvantaged Ohio children). If taxes have to be raised for this purpose, a plurality would prefer increasing state income taxes (40%).

In political terms, the Enthusiastic Daycare Advocates are liberal (54%) and Democratic (64%); a little less than three-quarters (71%) said they voted for Democrat Hillary Clinton in the 2016 General Election.

In terms of demographic highlights, this cluster has the most non-whites (31%), the most women (56%), and the most big-city residents (55%). Compared to the other clusters, they are modestly well educated (39% with college degrees or more education) and affluent (33% with annual income of \$75,000 or more).

