



Analysis of 2023 PreK Program Parent/Guardian Survey

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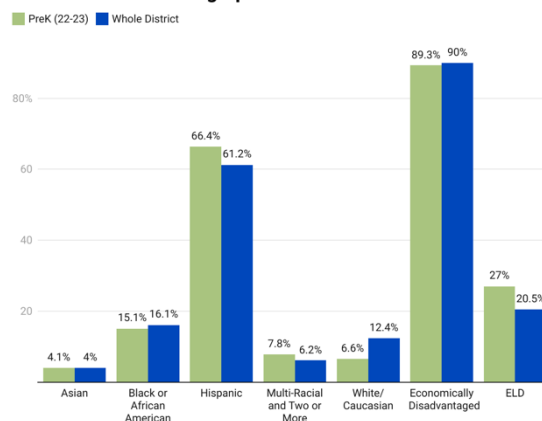
Introduction

In Pennsylvania, like many areas throughout the United States, Pre-Kindergarten education (PreK) is not mandatory before kindergarten enrollment. Despite this, research finds this education is extremely beneficial for students. PreK leads to students being better prepared for kindergarten and having a better mastery level of basic reading, math, and language skills which are predictors of academic success in elementary school (Flanagan et al., 2009; Meloy et al., 2019; Soliday-Hong et al., 2021). PreK education can be a useful proactive tool against widening educational gaps attributed to external circumstances of students. One study finds children who participate in high-quality PreK are about five months ahead in math and four months ahead in reading and writing, which can act as a buffer for challenges that may arise while avoiding a large learning gap (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2020). Formal settings of early childhood education (ECE) are more beneficial compared to daycare and home learning, and PreK is most beneficial for students who are believed to be at risk of falling behind due to specific environmental circumstances (Sanborn et al., 2016). One study finds PreK can boost intelligence by half a standard deviation. ECE's buffer is also seen as a viable solution to summer learning loss, as students are more likely to have mastered key concepts to better prepare them for more complex content (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2020). Furthermore, research finds PreK participation decreases long-term academic disruptions, involvement in criminal activity, and teen pregnancy, all of which contribute to overall academic attainment, job opportunities, and income (Sanborn et al., 2016).

Background

School District of Lancaster's PreK population in the 2022-2023 school year is almost identical to the demographics of the entire district. The PreK program's Hispanic population is about five percentage points greater than the district's while the PreK Caucasian population is about half of the district's population. 27% of the district's PreK participants are English language learners, compared to 20.5% of the district. Few differences exist in the percentage of students who are economically disadvantaged.

District vs PreK Demographics





Methods

School District of Lancaster administered the PreK survey as an online survey completed using the Qualtrics platform. The survey was distributed through several different methods from May 1-May 31, 2023. First, the Office of Data Analytics sent two emails directly to SDoL PreK parent/guardians with emails listed in the district's school information system. District PreK teachers also contacted parents/guardians directly using ClassDojo to encourage participation. Dr. Shaun Perez, Coordinator of State and Federal Programs, contacted district partners from Owl Hill Learning Center, Lancaster YWCA, and Lancaster Rec with an invitation for parents/guardians to complete the PreK survey.

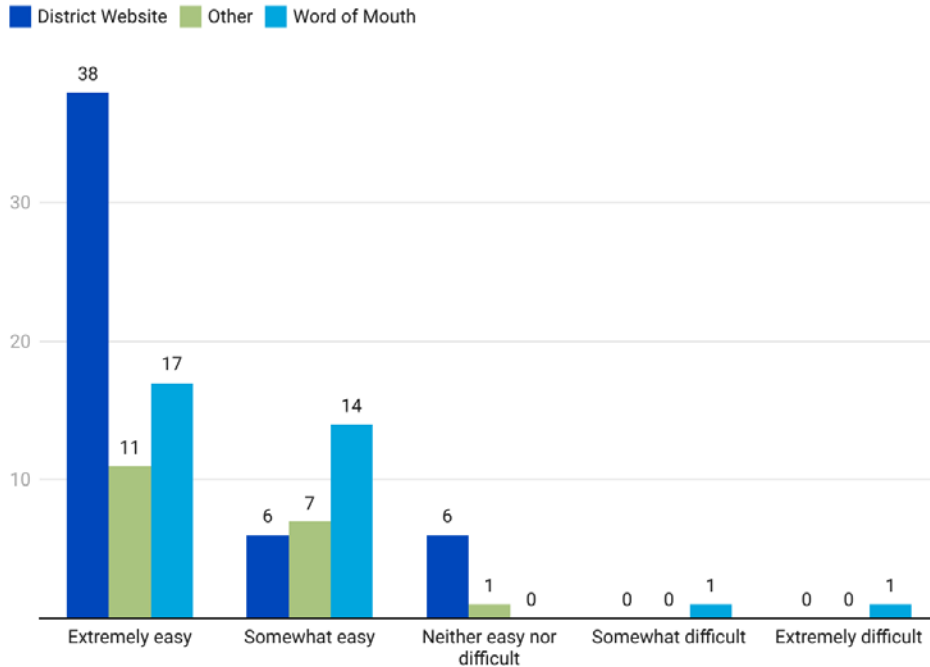
Survey Responses

The PreK survey had a 37% response rate for parents/guardians with students enrolled in SDoL PreK programs. This represents 117 responses from 316 unique households. An additional 18 responses came from three district partner PreK programs (Owl Hill Learning Center, Lancaster Recreation Commission, and Lancaster YWCA). SDoL parent/guardian engagement rate illustrates that they are well informed and highly engaged with their children's education in the earliest stages. In general, district parents/guardians are highly satisfied with the district's PreK program. District parents/guardians have the strongest level of communication with their child's program, with weekly and daily as the most frequent answer regarding updates about their specific students' progress and the overall goals and topics occurring in the classroom.

PreK Application

The district's PreK enrollment process is unique for families. Families must apply for consideration to the PreK program directly with eligibility based on a variety of socioeconomic factors to determine program needs. If the families are selected, they are then invited to complete the district's standard online registration process. Despite these steps, parents largely found registering for PreK was 'extremely easy,' especially when they learned of it through the district website. People had more trouble with registration when they found out about the program through word of mouth. When asked to provide follow-up comments about the experience, many answers describe the process as 'fast' and 'easy.' Those that had assistance from the district said that the staff was 'helpful' and 'kind.' Two respondents felt that the part of the application about lunch was a bit confusing. Two other respondents had difficulty getting ahold of someone to help them, and one respondent applied online but their application was lost. Clarification about the documents needed to register would have been helpful, as well as about the two-step process. Several parents felt including the documents needed for "nontraditional registration" on the district's website would have also been helpful.

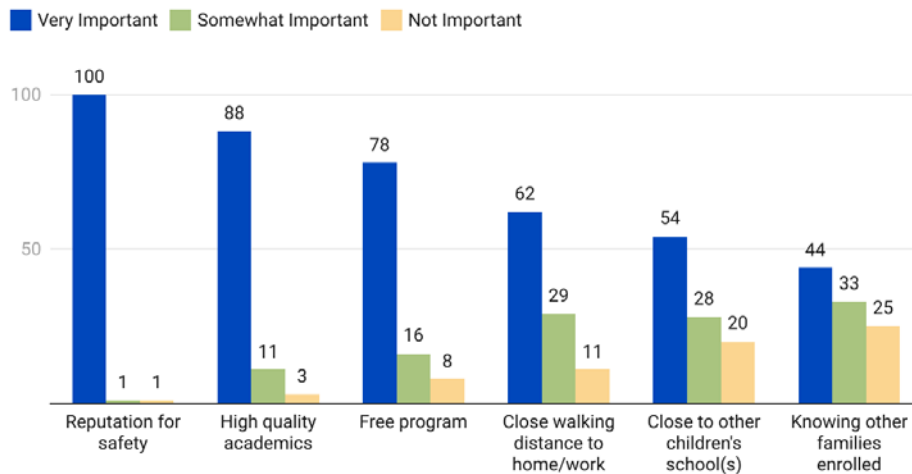
How easy or difficult was it to register your child for PreK?



Feedback

According to parent/guardian responses, a school’s reputation for safety was overwhelmingly their largest concern when choosing a PreK program, as 100 responses claimed it to be ‘very important.’ A school’s ability to provide high quality academics followed while the free cost of the school was third. The importance of the proximity and walking distance between school, work, and other children’s school(s), were more distributed between ‘very important,’ ‘somewhat important,’ and ‘not important.’ Knowing other families enrolled in a PreK had the most split responses.

How important were the following when choosing a PreK program for your child:



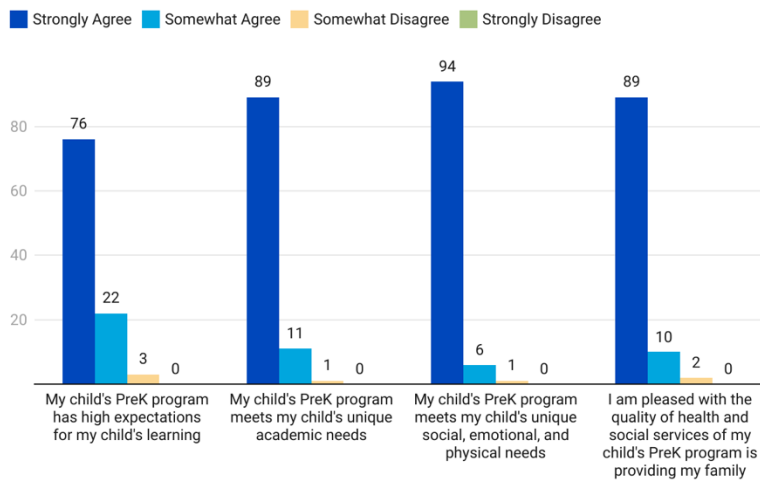


School District of Lancaster

Together We Can!

When asked to agree or disagree with statements regarding their satisfaction with their child’s PreK program in meeting their expectations. SDoL responses were overwhelmingly positive for all statements. SDoL responses ‘strongly agreed’ that their child’s programs had high expectations for students and met their child’s unique academic, social, emotional, and physical needs. SDoL parents also ‘strongly agreed’ that they were pleased with the quality of health and social services that their PreK provided. No SDoL responses ‘strongly disagreed’ with any of the statements.

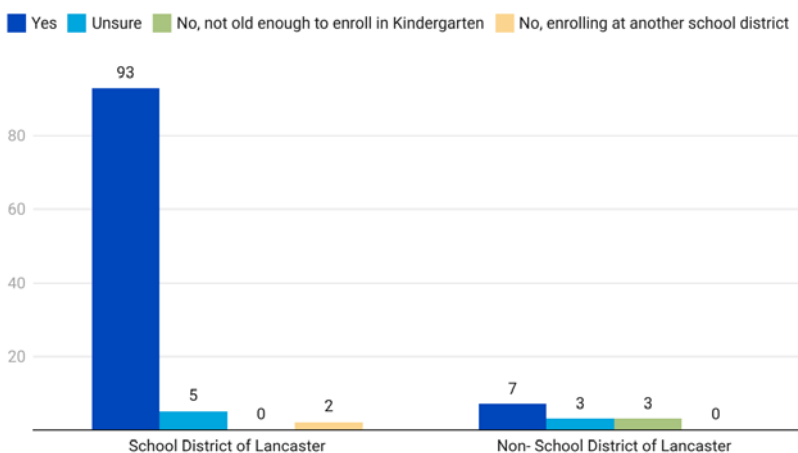
Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following...



Enrollment in SDoL Kindergarten

The district has extremely high rates of PreK to kindergarten retention. 93% of SDoL PreK students responded they were enrolling in SDoL kindergarten for the coming academic year. Meanwhile, almost 50% of families and students who participated in PreK outside of the district also responded they were going to enroll in SDoL kindergarten. No one from PreK outside of SDoL was planning to enroll in kindergarten at another school or district. While data is not available on Kindergarten enrollment for the 2023-2024 school year, based on past trends it is safe to assume enrollment will be high for district PreK participants. 93.2% of PreK participants from the 2021-2022 school year enrolled in SDoL’s Kindergarten class the following school year.

Kindergarten Enrollment





Recommendations

The high satisfaction illustrated in the survey results coupled with the positive research literature on the effects of PreK participation demonstrates the general and local benefits of PreK programs. Below are several recommendations for the application of these survey findings.

- Given the strong review of the PreK program, it is valuable for the district to market and share these results with the community and prospective parents. Findings could be condensed into a promotional tool for prospective PreK parents or different marketing efforts on social media and via mail. As families consider the district's PreK programs against other options, this could help make the case for the district's program.
- Given the strong response rate, we recommend administering this survey on an annual basis. This will let the district monitor and gain feedback on the continued success of the program. Given that the overall district parent/guardian survey does not include PreK, this will additionally capture responses from a currently excluded stakeholder group.
- PreK *participation* is not enough to equalize education disparities, investment in small classrooms, qualified teachers, as well as support and development resources for teachers is also needed to see the advantages which PreK can provide as outlined in the research literature (Meloy et al., 2019).
- A future, more in-depth study can be conducted to better understand the academic effects of PreK participation in School District of Lancaster, as more extensive results have been collected. Long-term effects such as graduation rates, post-graduate plans, and other measures of interest can be assessed in relation to PreK participation.
- Further study is needed on the positive financial impact of the PreK program on the district. Given that such a high percentage of students from the district's PreK program matriculate to Kindergarten, it appears to be a helpful tool for district enrollment.

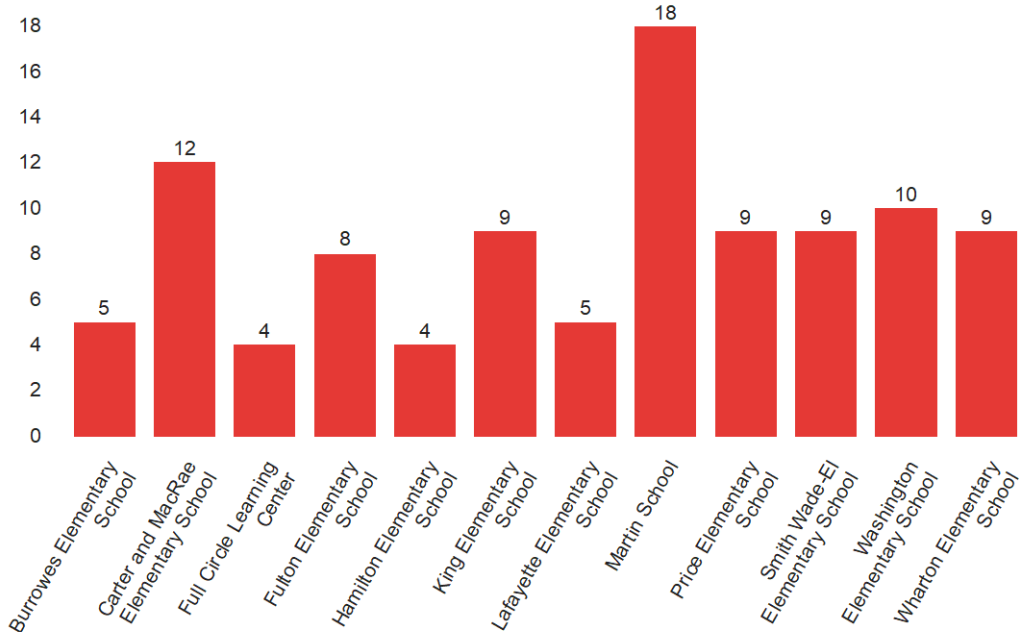


References

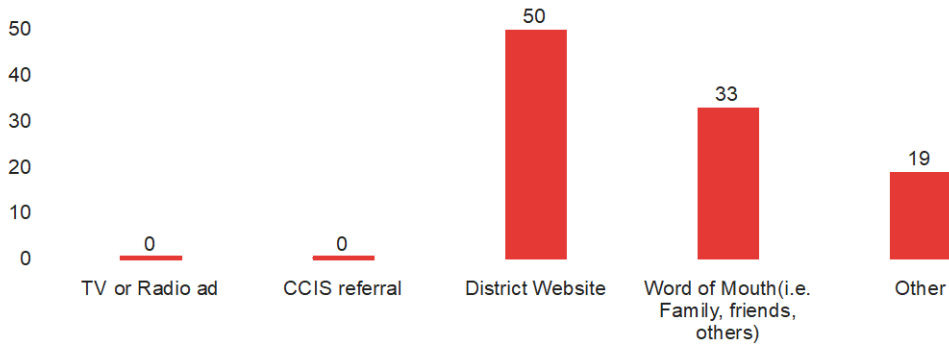
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Appendix 1: School District of Lancaster Responses

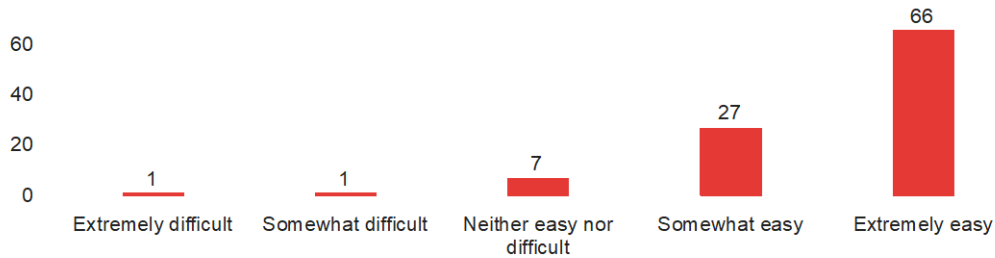
Q2 - Which School District of Lancaster school does your PreK student attend?



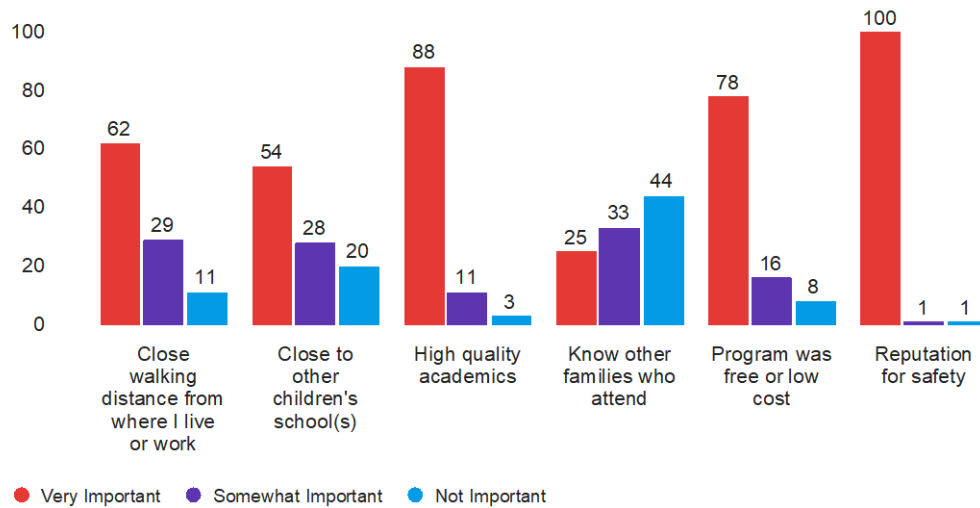
Q3 - How did you find out about your child's PreK program? - Selected Choice



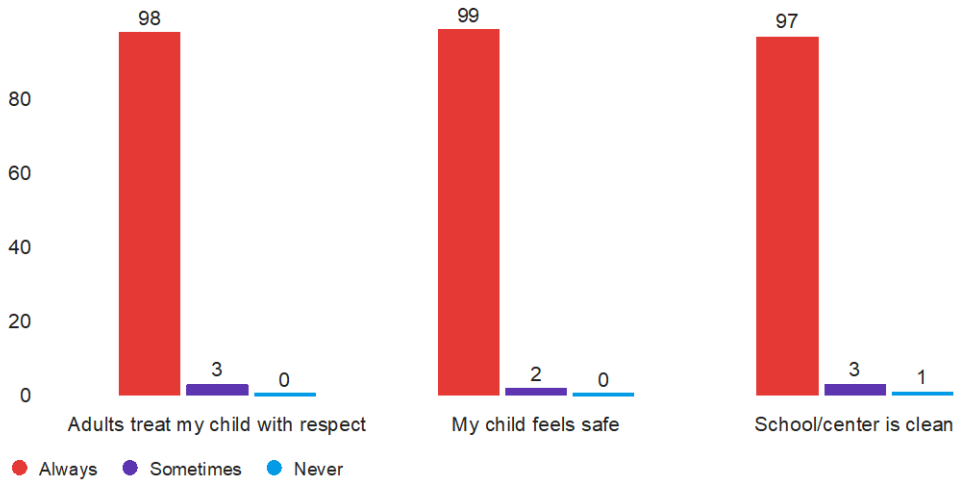
Q4 - How easy or difficult was it to register your child for PreK?



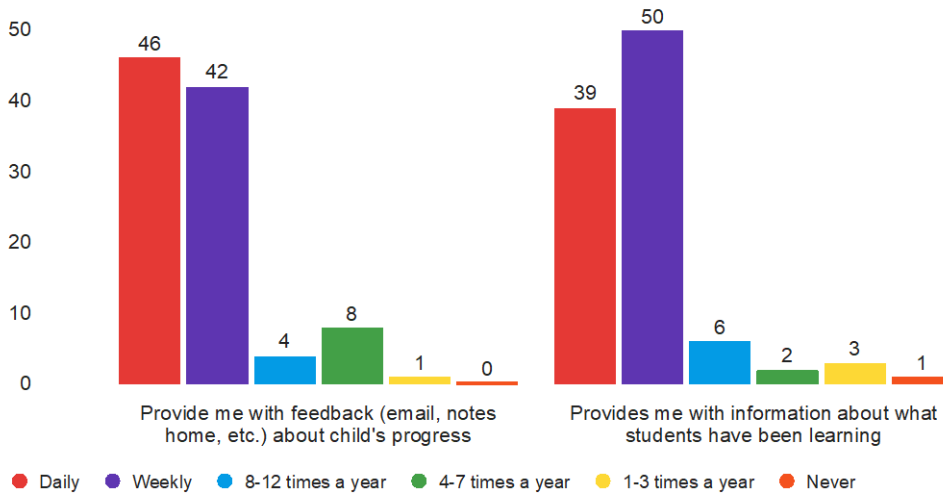
Q6 - How important were the following when choosing a PreK program for your child?



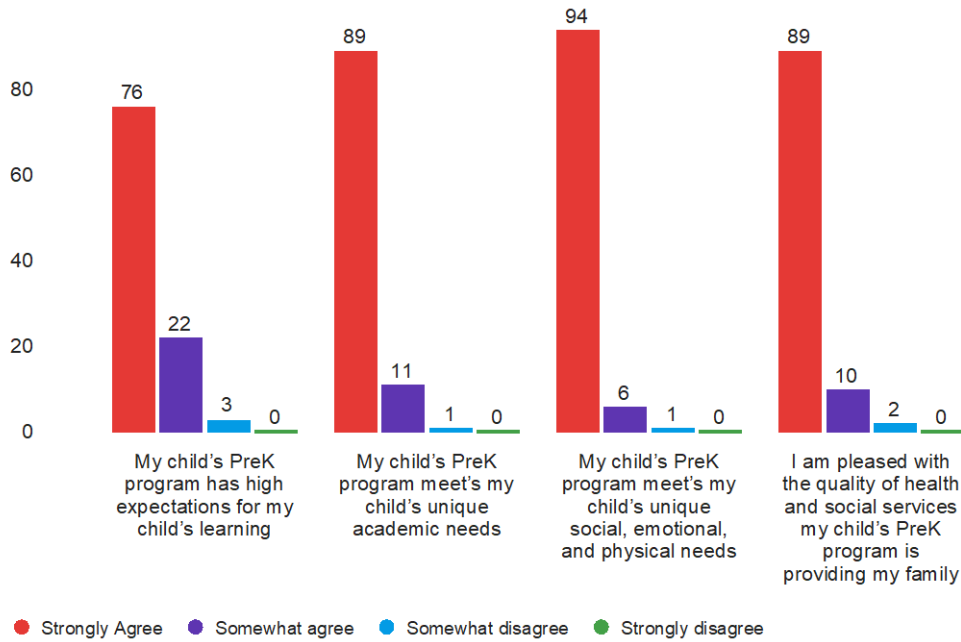
Q7 - How often are the following things true about your child's PreK program:



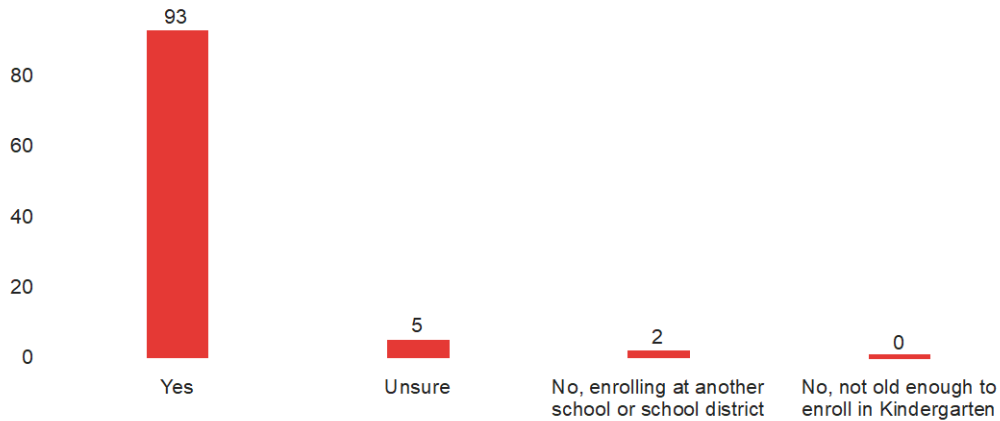
Q8 - How often does someone from your child's PreK program do the following:



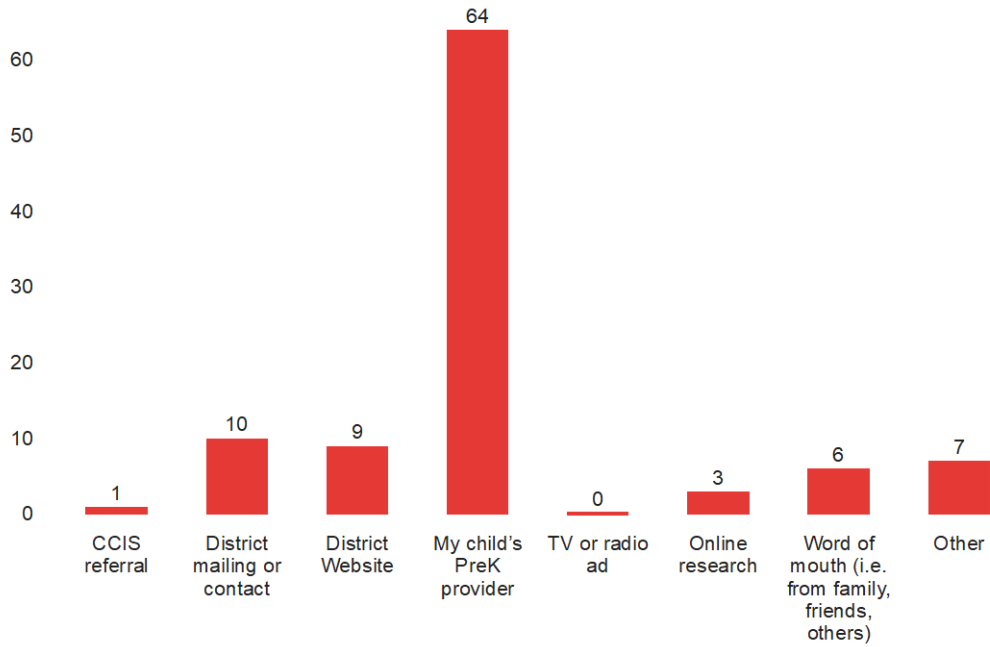
Q9 - Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about...



Q10 - Is your child planning to enroll in Kindergarten at the School District of Lancaster next year?

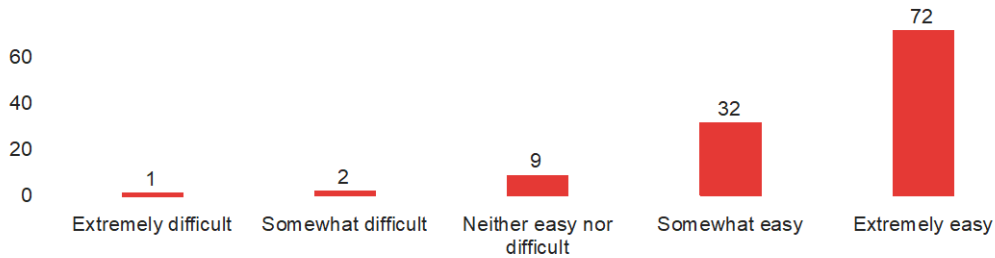


Q13 - How did you find out about Kindergarten registration?

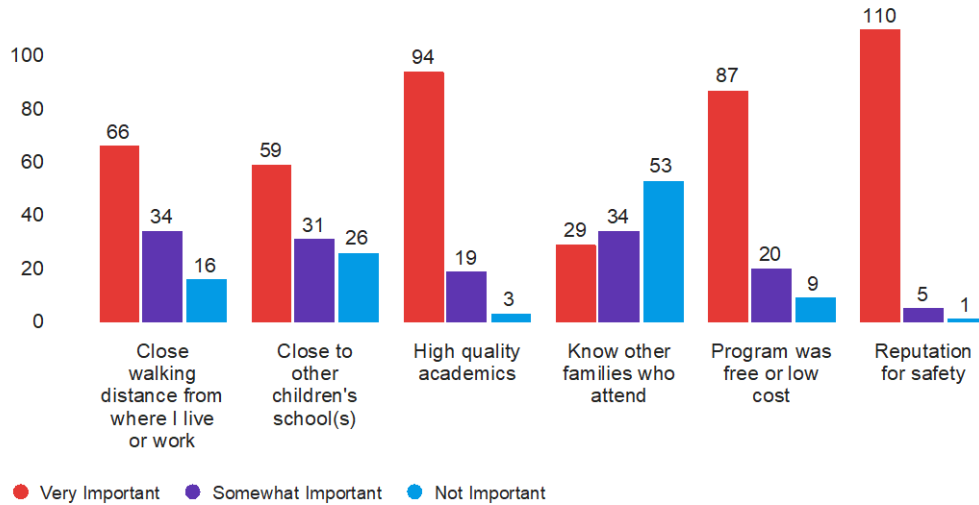


Appendix 2: All Responses

Q4 - How easy or difficult was it to register your child for PreK?



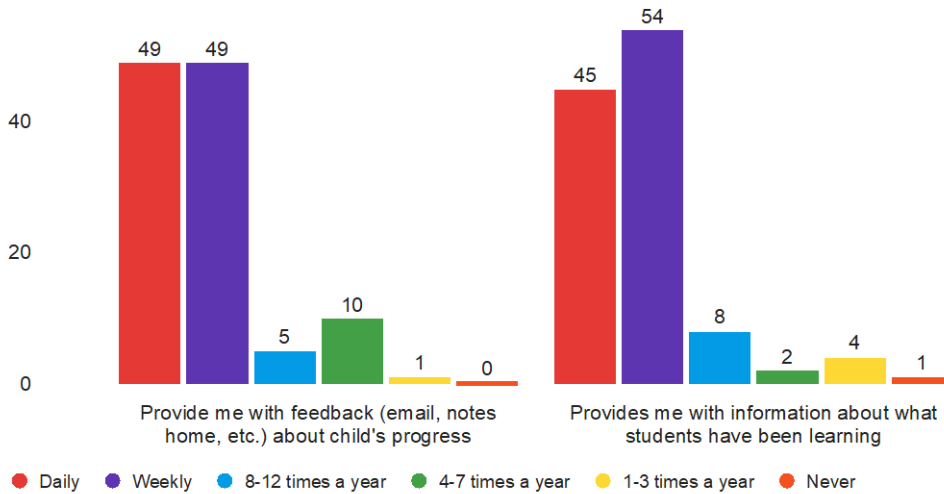
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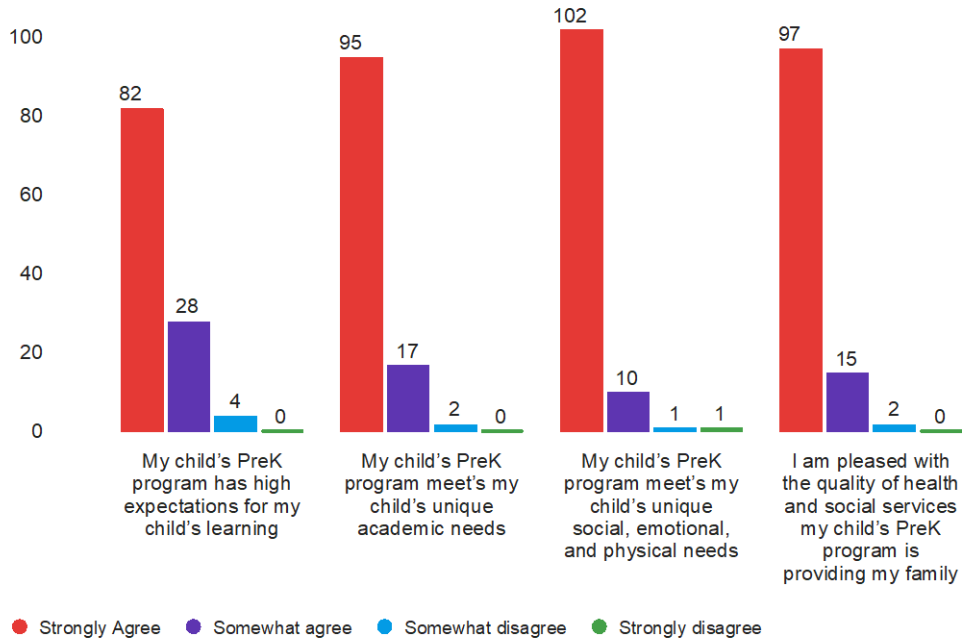
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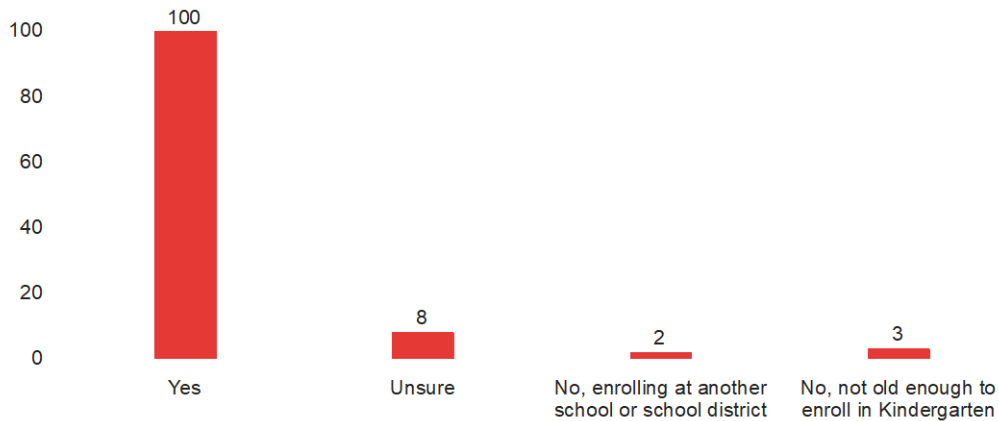
Q8 - How often does someone from your child's PreK program do the following:



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Q10 - Is your child planning to enroll in Kindergarten at the School District of Lancaster next year?



Q13 - How did you find out about Kindergarten registration?

