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# Franklin County Start Smart Initiative Parent Awareness Survey

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Community Research Partners  
In collaboration with  
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A partnership of United Way of Central Ohio, the City of Columbus and the John Glenn Institute at The Ohio State University



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## I. Introduction and Background

Franklin County Start Smart is an early, comprehensive childcare and child development project in Franklin County. Franklin County and the United Way of Central Ohio are members of a large, public-private collaboration that directs Start Smart. The purpose of the Start Smart initiative is to increase the quality and quantity of childcare and child development services. There are six major Start Smart goals:

1. Provide parenting information;
2. Create up to 1,000 new high quality childcare spaces;
3. Raise childcare quality through accreditation of childcare centers;
4. Link families of newborns with sources for medical services;
5. Focus community attention on early childhood and inform parents and caregivers; about child development; and
6. Advocate for policies and funding that support early childcare and education

Community Research Partners (CRP) is the evaluator for the Franklin County Start Smart initiative. Since 2000, CRP prepared an evaluation plan and conducted key informant interviews for Start Smart. In early 2002, Start Smart staff asked CRP to survey parents of children in childcare centers in two neighborhoods. CRP contracted with David A. Julian, Ph.D. and Lisa McConnell to do the field work and data analysis for the project.

The purpose of the survey is to understand the extent to which a group of users of childcare services understand key Start Smart messages about child development. A major part of the Start Smart initiative focuses on informing parents and caregivers about appropriate childcare practices and providing accurate child development information. Start Smart planners are interested in evaluating the success of various efforts to disseminate such information. The survey provides a snapshot of the perceptions of a relatively large group of childcare users in two of the targeted areas for the Start Smart initiative. This snapshot represents a "before" intervention picture. While some Start Smart materials are available to residents of Franklin County (web site, pamphlets, etc.), to date, no targeted dissemination of information in the test neighborhoods has taken place.

## II. Methodology

The Hilltop and Northland neighborhoods were selected as targets for this study. These neighborhoods will be among the first that will be formally introduced to Start Smart marketing materials. The Hilltop neighborhood includes zip codes 43223, 43228 and 43204, and the Northland neighborhood includes 43229, 43231 and 43224.

A list of childcare centers in these zip codes was obtained from Action for Children. Letters from Action for Children were sent to directors of all the centers in these zip codes (see Appendix A and B), asking them to participate in a study of perceptions of childcare in Franklin County. A trained interviewer contacted each center and asked the executive director if she/he would be interested in participating in an evaluation study related to local parenting practices. Parents with children in the centers were notified by their center directors and through a flyer (Appendix B)

that they would be asked to complete a short questionnaire. Each center director was offered a \$100 gift certificate for agreeing to participate.

A short questionnaire was designed that included a series of questions relevant to the study objectives (see Appendix C). The questionnaire consisted of knowledge questions, use questions, media habit questions and demographic questions. The trained interviewer scheduled an appointment and approached perspective respondents at each childcare center and asked them to complete the survey instrument. Table 1 shows the number of completed surveys obtained from childcare centers in each neighborhood

**Table 1. Distribution of Persons Surveyed by Center Location**

Location of Childcare Center	Number of Persons Surveyed	Percent of Total
Hilltop	80	45.2
Northland	97	54.8
Total	177	100.0

Table 2 indicates the ages of the children of the survey respondents. Start Smart planners were particularly interested in the opinions and perceptions of individuals with children five or under. One hundred and sixty-seven (167) of the study participants (94.4%) met this criterion. Two study participants had children who were six years old, and two had children who were seven years old. Six study participants elected not to answer this question.

**Table 2. Age of Youngest Child Picked Up When Participant Completed Survey**

Age	Number	Percent
<1	8	4.5
1	23	13.0
2	34	19.2
3	58	32.8
4	37	20.9
5	7	4.0
6	2	1.1
7	2	1.1
Missing	6	3.4
Total	177	100.0

### III. Survey Results

#### A. Roles of Parents and Government/Non-Profits in Childcare

Evaluators asked users of childcare services to consider the importance of the role of parents' and the government/nonprofit sector's roles in providing early childcare and educational experiences. Table 3 indicates that survey respondents placed a high degree of importance on the parental role. Almost nine out of ten respondents (88.1%) rated the importance of the parental role at nine or ten on the ten-point scale, with more than three-quarters rating it as a “ten”.

**Table 3. Importance of Parents' Role in Providing Early Care and Education**

Rating	Number	Percent
1 (low importance)	0	0.0
2	0	0.0
3	0	0.0
4	0	0.0
5	0	0.0
6	2	1.1
7	5	2.8
8	12	6.8
9	18	10.2
10 (high importance)	138	78.0
Missing	2	1.1
Total	177	100.0

Nearly seventy percent of respondents felt that government and non-profits have a highly important role (rating of 8-10 on a ten-point scale) in providing childcare and educational experiences (see Table 4). Only about six percent of respondents believe that the role of government and non-profits is of low importance (rating of 1-3 on a ten-point scale).

**Table 4. Importance of Government and Non-Profits Roles in Providing Early Care and Education**

Rating	Number	Percent
1 (low importance)	2	1.1
2	3	1.7
3	6	3.4
4	3	1.7
5	10	5.6
6	6	3.4
7	22	12.4
8	35	19.8
9	17	9.6
10 (high importance)	70	39.5
Missing	3	1.7
Total	177	100.0



## B. Knowledge of Start Smart

Only a small percentage of survey participants were knowledgeable about Start Smart. Table 5 indicates that 9.6% of respondents said they were "very knowledgeable" about Start Smart. Almost 22% indicated that they were somewhat knowledgeable. However, 68.9% of respondents indicated that they were "not knowledgeable" or "not sure."

**Table 5. Knowledge of Start Smart**

Level of Knowledge	Number	Percent
Very Knowledgeable	17	9.6
Somewhat Knowledgeable	38	21.5
Not Knowledgeable At All	68	38.4
Not Sure/Don't Know	54	30.5
Total	177	100.0

## C. Knowledge of Early Childhood Development

A key question posed by Start Smart planners involved the extent to which childcare users understand recommended childcare practices. This was assessed through sixteen true/false questions. The number of questions answered correctly ranged from seven (43.8% of questions answered correctly) to sixteen (100% answered correctly). As indicated in Table 6, most respondents scored in the higher range of the distribution of test scores. More than three-quarters (77.9%) of respondents answered thirteen or more true/false questions correctly. Almost one-quarter of respondents (23.7%) answered sixteen or 100% of the true/false questions correctly. About one in five respondents answered twelve or fewer questions correctly.

**Table 6. Correct Responses on Test of Early Childhood Development Knowledge**

Number Correct	Percent Correct	Number of Respondents	Percent of all Respondents
7	43.8	2	1.1
8	50.0	4	2.3
9	56.3	4	2.3
10	62.5	5	2.8
11	68.8	11	6.2
12	75.0	13	7.3
13	81.3	22	12.4
14	87.5	26	14.7
15	93.8	48	27.1
16	100.0	42	23.7
Total	NA	177	100.0

Table 7 shows the frequency with which individual questions were answered incorrectly. The data suggests that respondents were misinformed regarding the effects of holding infants and toddlers (40.1% incorrect) and the learning opportunities presented by play (25.4% incorrect).

**Table 7. Frequency of Incorrect Responses to Questions on Early Childhood Development Knowledge (n=177)**

Question	# Incorrect Responses	% Incorrect Responses
Infants can be spoiled if they are held too much.	71	40.1
Playing with your baby is of little educational value.	45	25.4
Keep the number of things your baby sees/hears to a few.	34	19.2
Interaction at an early age leads to later success.	29	16.4
Educational toys must be purchased from a store.	28	15.8
Experts feel that you should talk to your baby in complete sentences.	24	13.6
Listening to music is best reserved for children older than two or three.	23	13.0
Rolling in the grass is a good learning experience.	22	12.4
Reading is a good way to stimulate you baby's language.	21	11.9
Playing with books is a good learning opportunity.	20	11.3
Repetition helps your baby to learn.	15	8.5
Babies are too young to take to the library.	9	5.1
It is important to read to your baby everyday.	5	2.8
No point in talking to your infant because they can't understand.	2	1.1
Physical activity is important to your baby's learning.	2	1.1
Having a conversation with your baby will help him learn.	2	1.1

Table 8 shows the extent to which study participants correctly identified the period in a child's life most important to future learning and success. Slightly more than two-thirds (68.4%) of respondents correctly stated that birth to age three was the most important period in a child's life for later success and learning. The next most frequently cited was age four to six. This period was identified by 21.5% of survey respondents. Slightly more than one-quarter (26.6%) of respondents incorrectly identified the most important period in a child's life.

**Table 8. Period Most Important to a Child's Success and Learning in Later Life (n=176)**

Period	Most Important	2 <sup>nd</sup> Most Important	3 <sup>rd</sup> Most Important	Total	Not Rated
Birth-Age 3	121 / 68.4%	22 / 12.4%	11 / 6.2%	154 / 87.5%	22 / 12.4%
Age 4-6	38 / 21.5%	97 / 54.8%	9 / 5.1%	144 / 81.8%	32 / 18.1%
Age 7-10	3 / 1.7%	28 / 15.8%	94 / 53.1%	125 / 71.0%	51 / 28.8%
Age 11-15	6 / 3.4%	5 / 2.8%	32 / 18.1%	43 / 24.4%	133 / 75.1%

Note: One survey had no response to this question



## D. Sources of Information about Childcare and Development

As indicated in Table 9, most respondents indicated that they used relatives as primary sources of information about child rearing and child development. Eight out of ten respondents (80.8%) said that relatives were their first (54.8% of respondents), second (18.1% of respondents) or third (7.9% of respondents) most important source of information. The family doctor was the second most frequently cited source of information. Almost two-thirds of respondents (64.4%) rated the family doctor as their first (17.5% of respondents), second (26.6% of respondents) or third (20.3% of respondents) source of information.

**Table 9. Sources of Advice about Child Development Issues  
(n=177)**

Source	Most Important	2 <sup>nd</sup> Most Important	3 <sup>rd</sup> Most Important	Total	Not Rated
Relatives	97 / 54.8%	32 / 18.1%	14 / 7.9%	143 / 80.8%	34 / 19.2%
Doctor	31 / 17.5%	47 / 26.6%	36 / 20.3%	114 / 64.4%	63 / 35.6%
Books	25 / 14.1%	16 / 9.0%	29 / 16.4%	70 / 39.5%	107 / 60.5%
Friends	8 / 4.5%	41 / 23.2%	29 / 16.4%	78 / 44.1%	99 / 55.9%
Church	6 / 3.4%	16 / 9.0%	18 / 10.2%	40 / 22.5%	137 / 77.4%
Teacher	5 / 2.8%	16 / 9.0%	33 / 18.6%	54 / 30.5%	123 / 69.5%
Magazines	5 / 2.8%	1 / 0.6%	2 / 1.1%	8 / 4.5%	169 / 95.5%
Other	5 / 2.8%	1 / 0.6%	1 / 0.6%	7 / 4.0%	170 / 96.0%

Table 10 indicates that Children's Hospital is a trusted source of information about childcare and development issues. Over eighty percent of respondents rated Children's Hospital and "health and human services agencies" as their first, second or third most trusted source of information. Over 50% rated "colleges and universities" as a trusted information source, although most of these were rated as their third most important source. Relatively few individuals rated other sources as particularly trustworthy.

**Table 10. Most Trusted Sources of Childcare Information  
(n=169)**

Source	Most Important	2 <sup>nd</sup> Most Important	3 <sup>rd</sup> Most Important	Total	Not Rated
Children's Hospital	111 / 62.7%	30 / 16.9%	10 / 5.6%	151 / 89.3%	18 / 10.7%
Human services agencies	30 / 16.9%	84 / 47.5%	33 / 18.6%	147 / 87.0%	22 / 13.0%
Public officials	10 / 5.6%	6 / 3.4%	22 / 12.4%	38 / 22.5%	131 / 77.5%
Mayor of Columbus	8 / 4.5%	12 / 6.8%	3 / 1.7%	23 / 13.6%	146 / 86.4%
Colleges and universities	7 / 4.0%	25 / 14.1%	59 / 33.3%	91 / 53.9%	78 / 46.2%
Local businesses	1 / 0.6%	3 / 1.7%	13 / 7.3%	17 / 10.1%	152 / 90.1%

Note: Eight surveys had no response to this question

In order to maximize the effectiveness of the Start Smart media campaign, parents were asked questions about their sources of news and weather information. Responses are shown on Table 11. TV channel 10 was the most often cited source for news and weather information. Seven out of ten respondents (72.7%) rated TV channel 10 as their first, second or third most important source of news and weather information. Both TV Channel 4 and “radio” were rated as a first, second or third news and weather source by about 50% of respondents. Ohio News Network (ONN) and community newspapers were cited much less frequently.

**Table 11. Sources of News and Weather Information**  
(n=172)

Source	Most Important	2 <sup>nd</sup> Most Important	3 <sup>rd</sup> Most Important	Total	Not Rated
TV Channel 10	76 / 42.9%	23 / 13.0%	26 / 14.7%	125 / 72.7%	47 / 27.3%
TV Channel 4	39 / 22.0%	24 / 13.6%	23 / 13.0%	86 / 50.0%	86 / 50.0%
Radio	19 / 10.7%	37 / 20.9%	27 / 15.3%	83 / 48.3%	89 / 51.7%
Columbus Dispatch	16 / 9.6%	23 / 13.0%	27 / 16.4%	66 / 38.4%	106 / 61.6%
TV Channel 6	15 / 8.5%	38 / 21.5%	21 / 11.9%	74 / 43.0%	98 / 56.9%
ONN	3 / 1.7%	8 / 5.1%	8 / 4.5%	19 / 11.0%	153 / 89.0%
Community newspaper	0 / 0.0%	2 / 1.1%	10 / 5.6%	12 / 7.0%	160 / 93.0%

Note: Five surveys had no response to this question

## E. Health Care

Almost all respondents (97.9%) indicated that they have a "regular family doctor" for their children. Only 2.3% of respondents said they did not have a regular doctor. Similarly, almost all (99.4% of respondents) said their children visited the doctor for regular check-ups. Table 12 summarizes the information on doctors and health insurance. Table 13 indicates that nearly all survey respondents (99.4%) said their children were covered by health insurance.

**Table 12. Have Regular Family Doctor and Regular Check-Ups for Children**

Response	Number/Percent Family Doctor	Number/Percent Regular Check-Ups
Yes	173 / 97.7	176 / 99.4
No	4 / 2.3	1/0.6
Not Sure/Don't Know	0 / 0.0	0 / 0.0
Total	177 / 100.0	0 / 100.0

**Table 13. Children Covered by Health Insurance**

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	176	99.4
No	1	0.6
Not Sure/Don't Know	0	0.0
Total	177	100.0

## F. Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Tables 14-18 provide information on the characteristics of the survey respondents.

**Table 14: Race of Survey Respondents**

Race	Number	Percent
White	95	53.7
African American	67	37.9
Asian	5	2.8
Hispanic	4	2.3
Other	3	1.7
Missing	3	1.7
Total	177	100.0

**Table 15. Primary Role of Survey Respondents**

Role	Number	Percent
Parent	162	91.5
Caregiver	4	2.3
Grandparent	6	3.4
Other Relative	1	0.6
Friend	0	0.0
Legal Guardian	0	0.0
Missing	4	2.3
Total	177	100.0

**Table 16. Gender of Survey Respondents**

Gender	Number	Percent
Female	136	76.8
Male	37	20.9
Missing	4	2.3
Total	177	100.0

**Table 17. Age of Survey Respondents**

Age	Number	Percent
18-24	22	12.4
25-31	70	39.5
32-38	48	27.1
39-45	19	10.7
46-52	2	1.1
53-59	4	2.3
>59	1	0.6
Missing	11	6.2
Total	177	100.0

**Table 18. Zip Code of Residence of Survey Respondents**

Zip Code	Number	Percent	Zip Code	Number	Percent
43229	28	15.8	43081	2	1.1
43224	26	14.7	43201	2	1.1
43204	24	13.6	43222	1	0.6
43228	23	13.0	43206	1	0.6
43119	11	6.2	43062	1	0.6
43211	11	6.2	43220	1	0.6
43206	9	5.1	43110	1	0.6
43223	9	5.1	43035	1	0.6
43231	5	2.8	43207	1	0.6
43123	4	2.3	43205	1	0.6
43230	3	1.7	43240	1	0.6
43082	3	1.7	Missing	3	1.7
43203	3	1.7	Total	177	100.0
43202	2	1.1			

## IV. Conclusions and Implications

While it is important to note that the results of the survey cannot be generalized to the larger population of users of childcare services in Franklin County, the survey results do provide insights into the feelings and opinions of a group of parents and caregivers of young children in two Start Smart target areas. The survey was not a random sample survey that could produce significant data by neighborhood. However, review of the survey results found no distinctive differences in the responses of parents using childcare centers in the Hilltop neighborhood and those in the Northland neighborhood. The zip codes of the residence of survey respondents show that about one-third of the persons surveyed reside outside of the targeted zip codes.

The following are conclusions that can be drawn from the parent awareness survey:

- **Most are not familiar with Start Smart.** Two out of three respondents indicated that they were “not knowledgeable at all” about Start Smart or responded “not sure/don’t know” to this question. This data can provide an informal baseline against which to test the effectiveness of the targeted information campaign.
- **Parents need targeted messages about early childhood development.** Ninety-five percent of respondents correctly identified parents as having a highly important role in early child care and education. The study included questions to assess how well-equipped parents are to fulfill this role. Most study participants possessed reasonable knowledge of child development. Nearly eighty percent of the respondents scored over eighty percent on the test of child development knowledge. About seventy percent correctly identified the period of birth to age 3 as the period most important to a child’s success and learning. The survey did identify, however, a few key areas where at least one out of five respondents gave incorrect answers. The greatest misconception was the “infants can be spoiled if they are held too much.” This data can be used to target Start Smart educational messages.
- **Relatives are the most trusted source of information.** When asked about the most important source of advice about “raising your baby or toddler,” over half identified a relative. This was over three times the next highest “most important source.” A strategy that makes use of grassroots organizations, community groups, churches and other locations where information could be passed from one relative to another, or where relatives can participate in educational activities together, may be indicated.
- **Health care providers are trusted by parents.** Responses to two survey questions indicate that health care providers can play an important role in disseminating the Start Smart message. Nearly ninety percent of respondents indicated that Children’s Hospital is a trusted source of information about child care. Respondents also identified doctors as the second most important source of advice about child development issues. Nearly all respondents have a regular family doctor, take their children for regular check-ups and have health insurance for their children. These responses indicate that the component of the Start Smart initiative that involves working with physicians and hospitals may be a very effective way to reach parents and other caregivers.
- **Human services organizations play multiple roles.** About seven out of ten respondents rated the role of government and non-profits as highly important in providing early child care

and educational experiences. When asked about the most trusted source of childcare information, eighty-seven percent identified human services agencies (which may be government or non-profit) as their first, second or third most trusted source. This would indicate that these organizations should be an important vehicle for disseminating the Start Smart message to parents and caregivers. In addition, staff of human services agencies should understand the early childhood development messages of Start Smart and incorporate them into their work with young children. Human services organizations may play a particularly important role in disseminating the messages of Start Smart for families that do not have a regular doctor or health insurance.

# Appendix A

## Child Care Centers in Targeted Zip Codes

Source: Action for Children

## Appendix B

Letter to Center Directors  
Notice to Center Clients



# Appendix C

Survey Tool and Instructions