

A Time to Learn, A Time to Grow

CALIFORNIA PARENTS TALK ABOUT
SUMMERTIME AND SUMMER PROGRAMS

Highlights from Research Conducted for the
David and Lucile Packard Foundation

 **PUBLIC AGENDA**



Introduction

What follows is a summary of key findings from a telephone survey of 1,204 California parents conducted in September and October 2009 in both English and Spanish. The survey was prefaced by four focus groups: in Oakland, San Jose, Fresno and Los Angeles. The survey highlights several important themes for educators and policymakers, the most important of which may be that California parents see a variety of activities—including academics—as potentially important and valuable for their children. Yet, despite this widespread appetite for rich summer programs for their children, about six in ten parents report that their children either did not attend a summer program or went to one for a relatively short period. That is, there appears to be a major gap between what most parents think would be good for their children in the summer and what actually happens when the summer months roll around. Very few parents appear to be specifically avoiding summer programs just so their children can “relax” or have several months of downtime.

Parents whose children are in summer programs with academic and enrichment components voice a great deal of satisfaction with these programs. At the same time, most parents appear to be interested in summer programs that are “different” from the regular school year. That is, they are interested in activities that help their children learn and thrive academically, but they also want summer to be a time when their children can have new experiences and enjoy a different change of pace from the regular school year. Most want to use some of that time for the family to be together, and they want to use some of that time for the children to be out-of-doors, exercising and enjoying the summer weather.

Minority parents, low-income parents and parents in rural areas are not as well served by the current system. They are most likely to say that there just are not good programs to choose from. Significantly, minority parents are even more concerned about using the summer to bolster their children’s prospects to succeed academically when they return to school in the fall.

Some experts concerned about expanding summer learning have worried that parents are in some senses “fighting” the notion. They worry that parents are so wedded to traditional ideas about “the good old summertime” that they resist placing their children in programs that would benefit them. This survey paints a different picture. Most parents are receptive to academics in the summer, and they believe they can be an essential part of good summer programs. At the same time, they do want their children to have new and rewarding experiences in the summer, the kinds of experiences that can make both learning and the summer itself “fun.”

For more information on this survey, including methodology and full questionnaire results, please visit: <http://www.publicagenda.org/pages/Calif-summer-survey>.

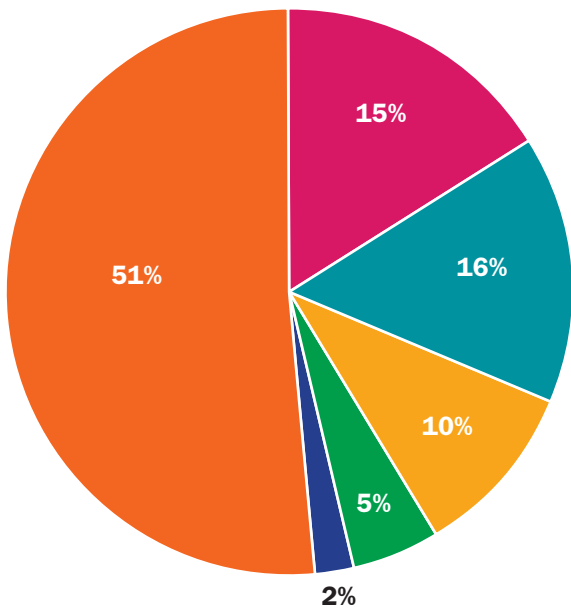
FINDING ONE:

In summer 2009, nearly 6 in 10 parents in California (59 percent) either did not enroll their child in a summer program at all or did so for less than half the summer.

- * Half of all parents (51 percent) say that summer is the most difficult time to make sure their child is well taken care of and has interesting things to do.

Parents say summer is the most difficult time to care for their child

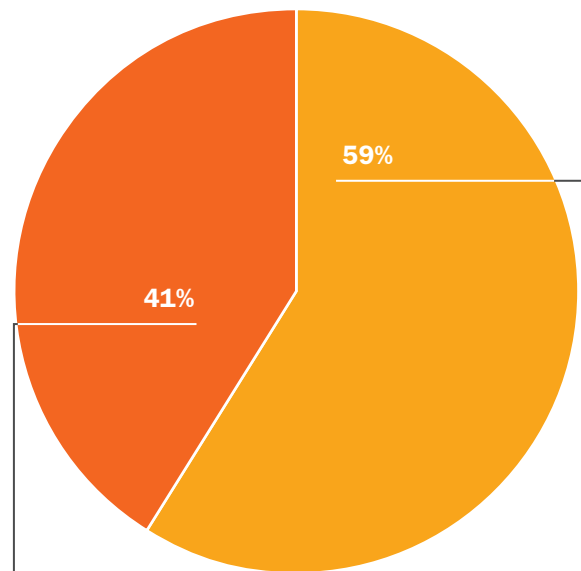
Which time would you say is the hardest to make sure your child is well taken care of and has interesting things to do?



- 51%** The summer months
- 15%** The hours after school
- 16%** The weekend during the school year
- 10%** Never have to struggle
- 5%** All
- 2%** Don't know

- * More than 1 in 5 (22 percent) say it was more difficult this year to find activities for their child to do this summer than in past summers.
- * Well over half (59 percent) report that their children, aged 5 to 15, were not in summer programs for at least half the summer—29 percent enrolled their child for less than half the summer; over 3 in 10 (30 percent) of parents did not enroll their child in a summer program at all.
- * Nearly two-thirds of all parents (65 percent) say they wish they knew about more summer programs that fit their budget.

Nearly 6 in 10 say they did not enroll their child for more than half the summer



41% Participated in programs for more than half the summer

Underenrolled in summer programs 59%

Participated in programs for less than half the summer 29%

Did not participate in summer programs 30%

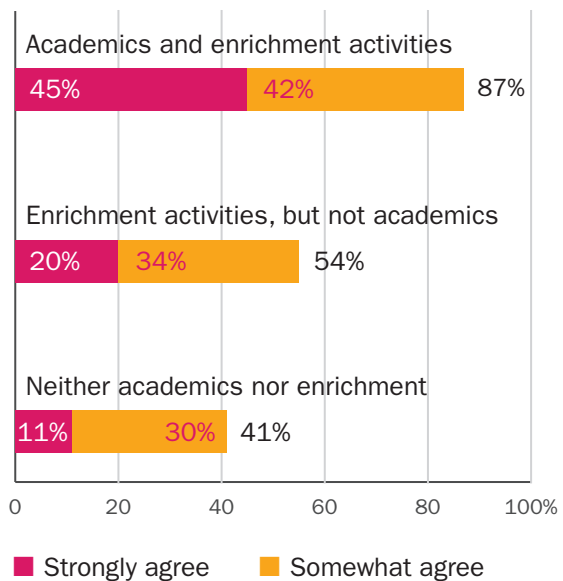
FINDING TWO:

Most parents say academics and enrichment activities should be an essential part of summer. More than half say that their child was either not enrolled in any summer program or one with an academic component.

- * While majorities of parents—whether or not they enrolled their children in summer programs—say that having their child do academics and summer enrichment activities is essential during the summer, more than half of all parents (58 percent) did not send their child to a program that had any academics, and 4 in 10 (43 percent) parents did not send their children to programs with enrichment activities.
- * Among parents who sent their child to a summer program that included both academics and enrichment (54 percent of those who participated) more than 8 in 10 (87 percent) agreed that the programs helped prepare their child for the school year, with 45 percent agreeing strongly. Among parents whose children attended programs without an academic or enrichment component, only 4 in 10 (41 percent) said that the program helped prepare their child for school.

Parents whose children participated in academic and enrichment activities say that they prepared them for the school year

Percent of parents who agree that the summer program helped prepare their child for school, based on those who also said the program had:



Note: Very few parents say they enrolled their child in summer programs that only included academic activities, so it is not possible to make a statistically significant comparison here.

FINDING THREE:

Finances and lack of available programs are important factors that prevent many families from participating in summer programs.

- * As much as parents might like their child to participate in a summer program, the cost of these programs is a major concern, especially for those with lower incomes or changed financial circumstances.
- * Among parents who say their family had a change in employment status last year, 73 percent said that they wished they knew of more affordable programs.
- * Among parents who did not enroll their child in a summer program in 2009, nearly half (46 percent) say there was a program they were interested in, but that they couldn't afford it this year because of changing finances.
- * Nearly half of parents (48 percent) who make less than \$35,000 did not enroll their child in any summer program. Looked at another way, among those who did not enroll their child in any summer program, more than 4 in 10 (43 percent) made less than \$35,000 a year.

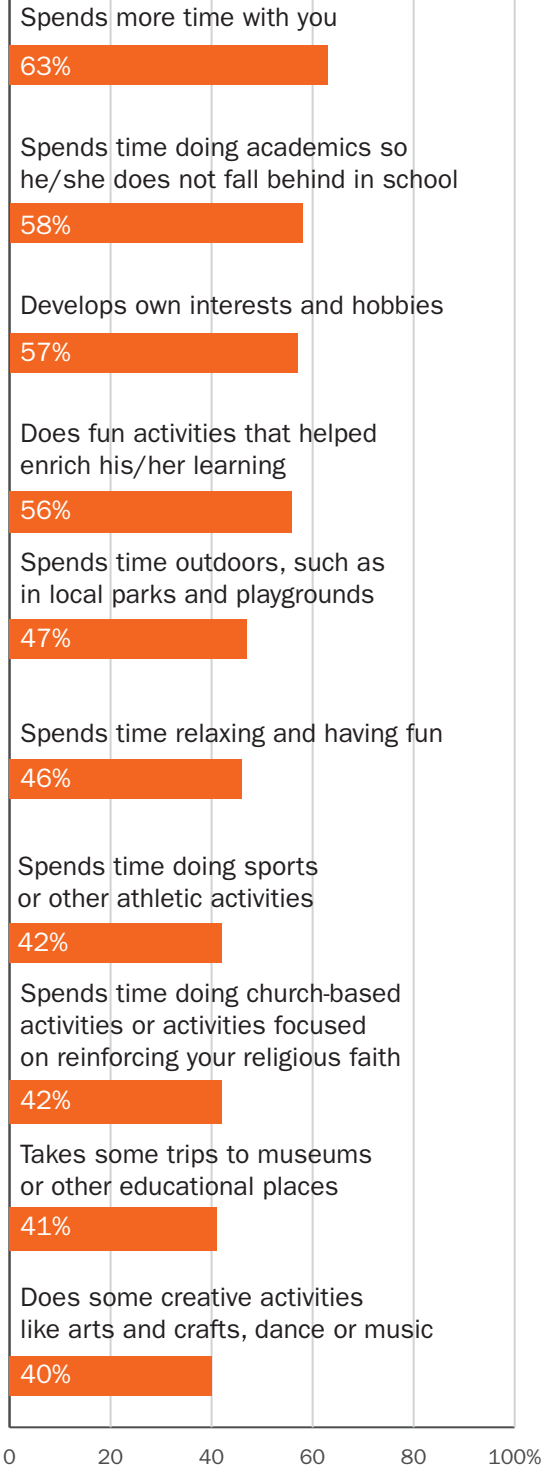
FINDING FOUR:

Parents believe that along with academics, many kinds of summer experiences are valuable for their children, ranging from spending more time with family to being outdoors to working on hobbies. In their view, an ideal summer is one that offers variety.

- * The survey asked parents about 10 different activities that might or might not be considered an essential part of their child's summer including both academic and enrichment activities. More than 4 in 10 parents said that every activity we mentioned was an essential part of their child's summer (See chart on following page). The results show that most parents believe that when it comes to summer plans, a variety of activities of different kinds are valuable.
- * In addition, more than three-quarters of California parents (76 percent) prefer a program that offers a variety of activities for the summer, including academics, compared with 11 percent that want the most academically focused program and 12 percent who favor an exclusively recreational program.
- * Parents also have a variety of concerns about how their child can spend their free time during the summer. A quarter say they are most concerned that their children will not keep up with educational activities and fall behind in school (25 percent). Nearly as many say their main worry is that their child will not have enough to do and will become bored (24 percent); about 1 in 5 (21 percent) are most worried that their children won't get enough exercise and be out-of-doors, while 16 percent worry that their child might not be well-supervised and might get into trouble.
- * In focus groups, the great majority of parents said that the ideal summer program for their child would have a variety of structured activities, but also some unstructured fun time. As one father in Fresno said, "I think there's something to be said for not [being in an organized activity]. You get to use your imagination. You get to play... just exploration is such a huge part. There's so much you can learn."

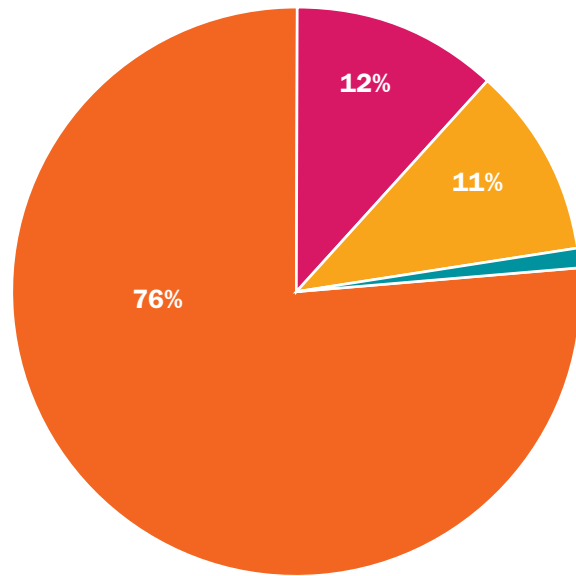
Parents say their child should participate in a variety of activities during the summer

Percent who say it is “absolutely essential” that their child does the following during the summer:



Parents want summer programs that have a mix of activities, including academics

Which comes closest to describing the ideal summer program for your child?



- 76%** One that has a variety of activities and also includes academics
- 12%** One that is all recreational and does not spend time on academics
- 11%** One that focuses on academics and only has a little time for recreational activities
- 1%** Don't know

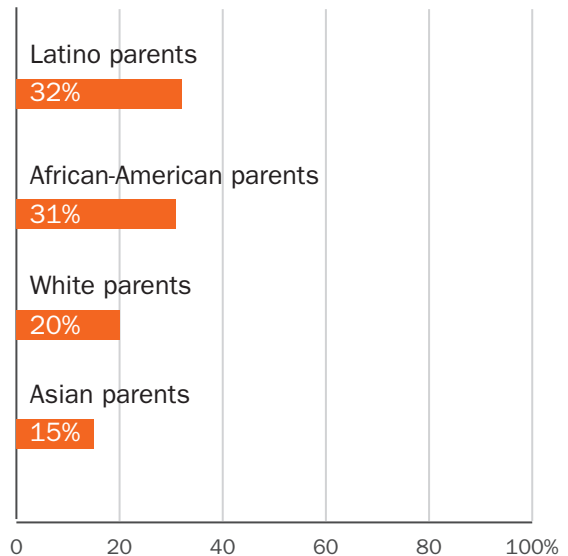
FINDING FIVE:

Access to quality programs is a special issue for rural parents, along with lower-income, African-American and Latino parents.

- * Latino parents (32 percent) and African-American parents (31 percent) are more likely to say that there are no high-quality summer programs available in their neighborhood, compared with 15 percent of Asian parents and 20 percent of whites parents.
- * More than 4 in 10 parents (43 percent) living in rural areas said that quality summer programs are not available, compared with a quarter of parents in urban (24 percent) and suburban (25 percent) areas.
- * Lower-income parents (those making less than \$35,000 a year) are twice as likely as higher income parents (those with incomes over \$75,000 annually) to say that there are no high quality summer programs available in their area, by a 37 percent to 18 percent margin. Both lower-income (42 percent) and middle-income (39 percent) area more likely than higher-income parents (19 percent) to say there were no affordable programs that would be good for their child.
- * In a Los Angeles focus group with Latino parents (conducted in Spanish), a number of the participants said there were not any good programs available for their child. One parent of a six year-old daughter said, “She was behind in her reading, and now during the summer she is forgetting what she learned... There was no program to enroll her [in].” Another focus group participant said, “As parents we cannot pay someone to take care of our children during the summer. Plus, almost all parks have a waiting list. We could not involve our children in park activities because there was a wait list and the places that were available were too expensive.”
- * Overall, 3 in 10 (30 percent) parents whose children did not participate in summer programs at all said that there are no high quality programs in the area. Nearly a quarter (24 percent) of those who enrolled their child for less than half of the summer said the same thing.

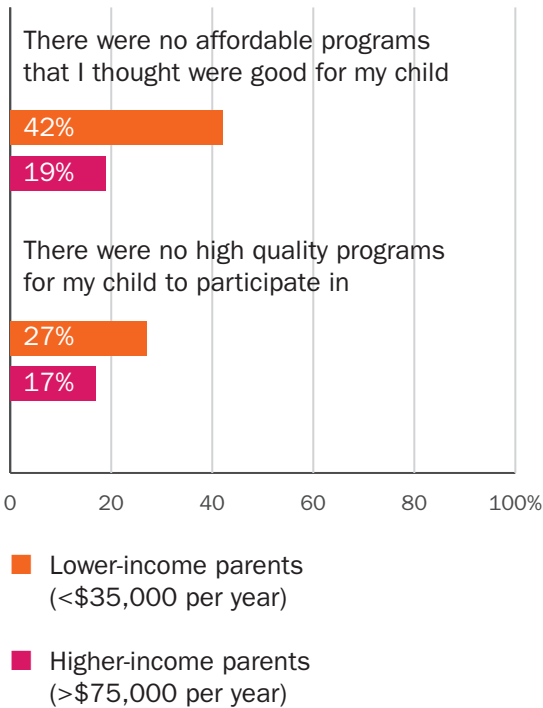
Latino and African-American parents are more likely to say that there are no high-quality summer programs available in their area

Percent of parents who say that there are no high quality summer programs in their area:



Lower-income parents are more likely to say there are no affordable or high-quality summer programs in their area

Percent who say the following is a reason why their child did not participate in a summer program:



Base: Asked of parents who did not enroll their child in a summer program.

FINDING SIX:

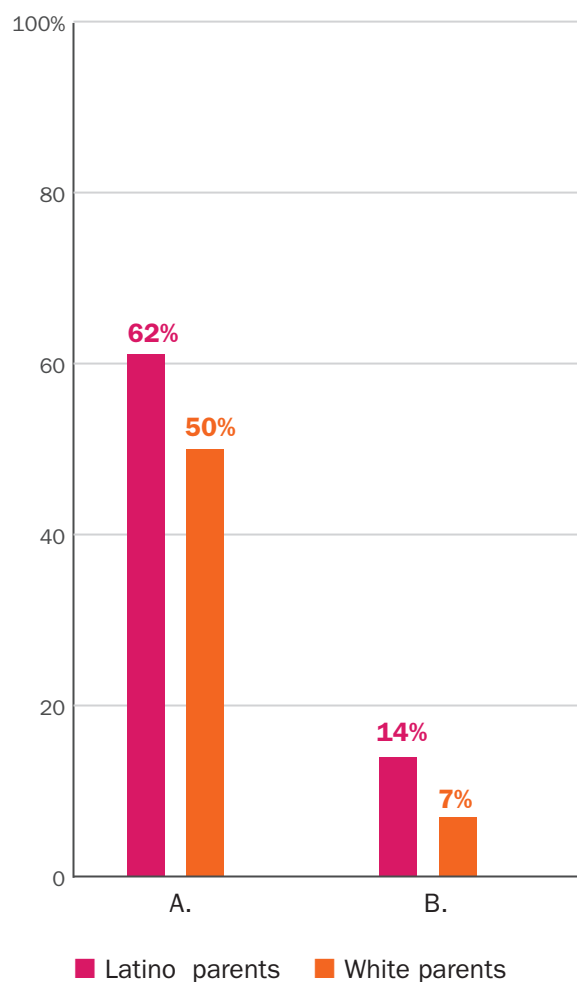
Latino parents are more likely than white parents to want academics and enrichment in summer programs and to be dissatisfied with the quality of summer programs their children attend.

- * Fifty percent of all children in California are Latino.¹ Public Agenda and other organizations have documented that Latino parents are more concerned about low academic standards in their schools than are white parents. The survey findings here reflect a similar worry: Latino families are more likely than white parents to voice concerns about lack of learning during the summer.
- * Fewer than half of Latino parents (41 percent) said that, overall, children get enough academics during the school year, compared to 55 percent of white parents.
- * More than 6 in 10 (62 percent) Latino parents said it is essential that their child's summer activities include academics to avoid losing what they have learned in the school year compared to 50 percent of white parents.
- * Latino parents were twice as likely as white parents to say that they preferred a program that focuses on academics (14 percent to 7 percent) and almost twice as likely to want to see a focus on classroom learning over outdoor enrichment activities (31 percent to 17 percent).
- * As noted in the previous finding, nearly a third (32 percent) of all Latino parents say there are no high quality programs in the area for their child. And among Latino parents who enrolled their child in a summer program, 1 in 10 (11 percent) gave it a fair or poor rating, compared to just 6 percent of white parents. Latino parents were also more likely to agree with the statement "the program really just supervised their child and did not involve any interesting or educational activities," 26 percent compared to 15 percent of white.

¹ "Kids Count 2008", 2008, Ann E. Casey Foundation <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/acrossstates/Rankings.aspx?ind=103>

Latino parents are more likely to prefer an academic summer program

Percent of parents who say:



- A. It is essential that their child's summer activities include academics
- B. The ideal summer program is one that focuses on academics

* And 37 percent of Latino parents did not enroll their child in a summer program at all, compared with 26 percent of white parents. As one parent in Los Angeles said, "There are a lot of options available but [not for me]. Because of the economy, they all require money."

About Public Agenda

Founded in 1975 by social scientist and author Daniel Yankelovich and former U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Public Agenda works to help the nation's leaders better understand the public's point of view and to help average citizens better understand critical policy issues. Our in-depth research on how citizens think about policy has won praise for its credibility and fairness from elected officials from both political parties and from experts and decision makers across the political spectrum. Our citizen education materials and award-winning website, PublicAgenda.org, offer unbiased information about the challenges the country faces. Twice nominated for the prestigious Webby award for best political site, PublicAgenda.org provides comprehensive information on a wide range of policy issues.

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"A Time to Learn, A Time to Grow" online at <http://www.publicagenda.org/pages/Calif-summer-survey>

Topline: Survey Methodology, Questions & Answers

<http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/Calif-summer-survey-topline.pdf>

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