A Boise State University
Public Policy Center "Briefing Report"

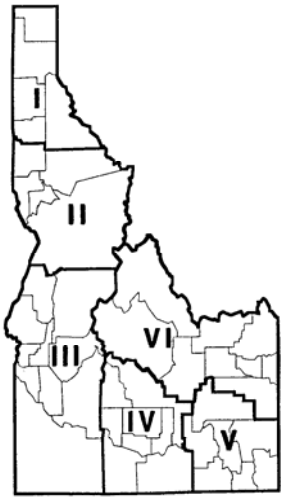
PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS ABOUT EARLY CHILDHOOD ISSUES

SUMMARY

A survey of the Idaho public reveals strong support for funding and programs aimed at enhanced early childhood education and childcare options, particularly for working parents and low-income households.

ISSUE SUMMARY

Idaho provides K – 12 public education for all children. Early childhood education (e.g. for children under 6 years of age) is not mandatory, nor does it receive significant programmatic support by the state. Working parents comprise a large constituency across the state: ranging from over 48% of adults in Southwest Idaho who identify themselves as working parents, to 25% in the Panhandle region. Currently, state support for childcare options for working parents, especially those with low incomes, is low. This session, the Idaho Legislature may consider a variety of options to enhance childcare and pre-K education for Idaho's youngest citizens.



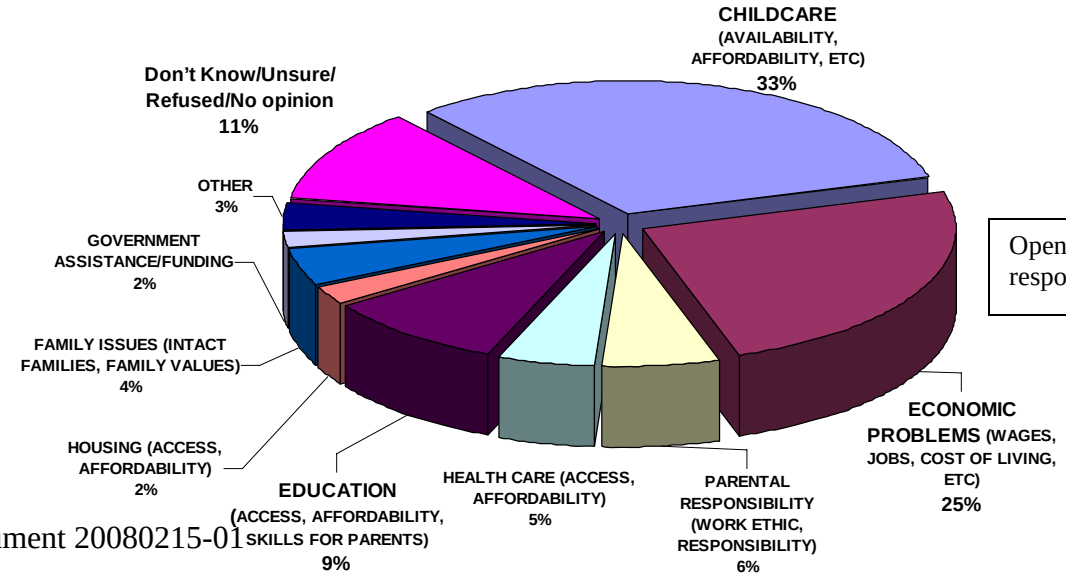
BACKGROUND

The Social Science Research Center, part of the Public Policy Center, measured citizens' attitudes across Idaho about early childhood issues related to childcare and education opportunities. These survey findings may help inform the policy discussion by providing a snapshot of public perception about the level of public support and opposition for programs to assist working parents and low-income families. Findings may also be used to plan for a healthy economic future by providing the youth of Idaho under 6 years of age (and their working parents) adequate program support.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

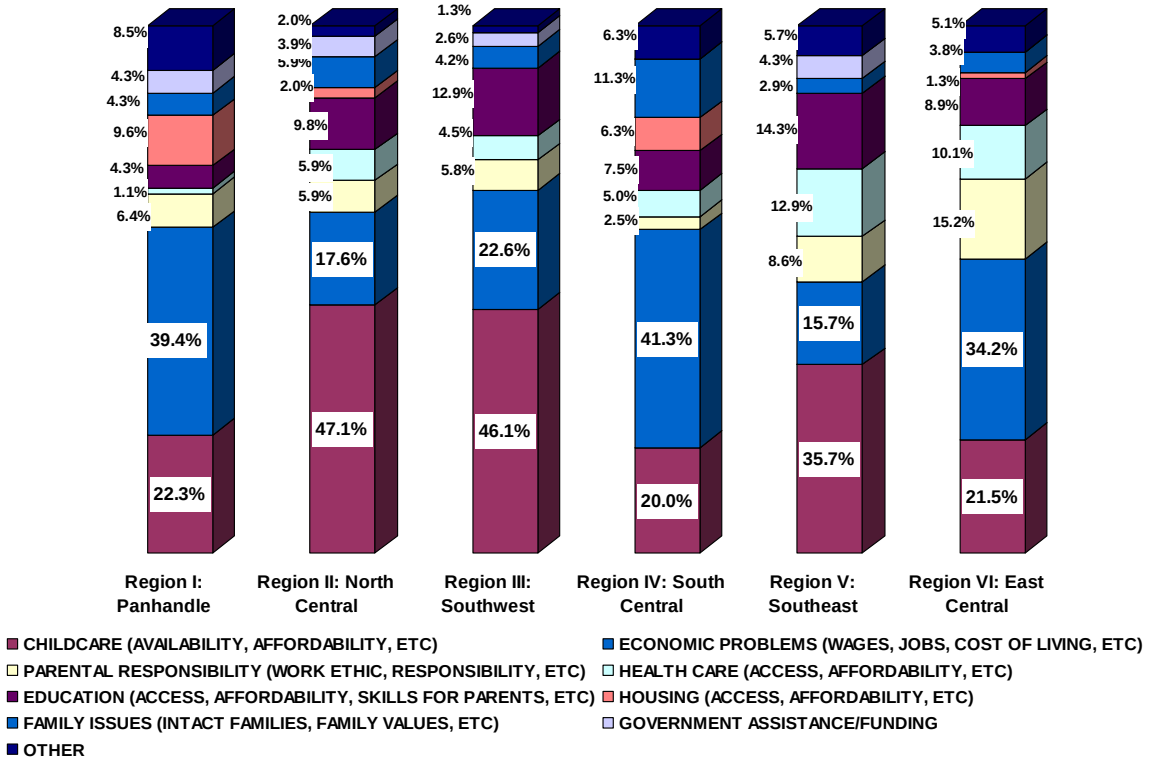
Public Attitudes about Early Childhood Care and Education

What do you see as the biggest challenge facing low-income working parents with young children?



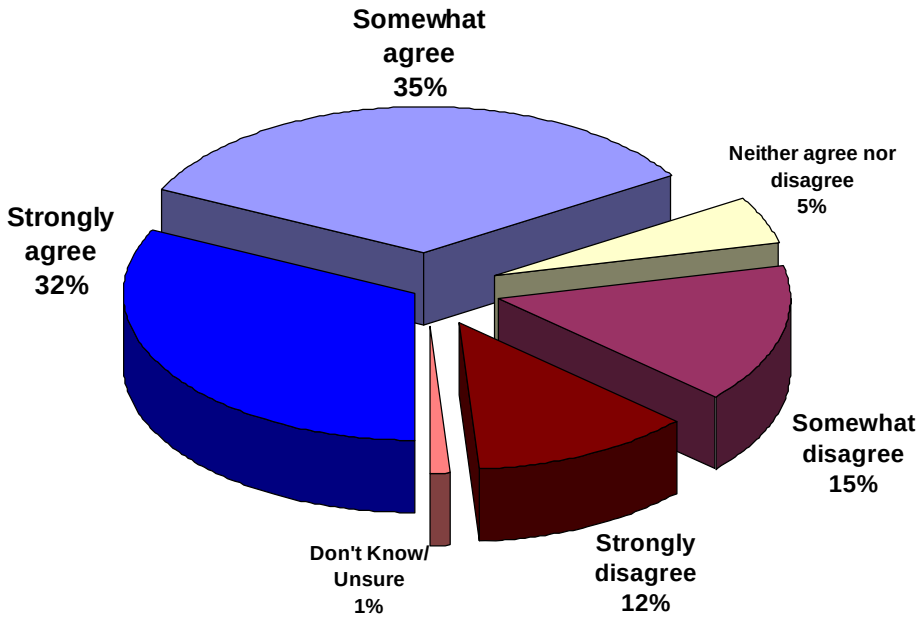
Open-ended, unprompted responses where n = 773

Most Idaho citizens cited the availability and/or the affordability of childcare as the biggest challenge facing working parents with young children. Many also said that economic problems, such as low-wage jobs, uncertain employment prospects and the rising cost of living as significant challenges facing them.



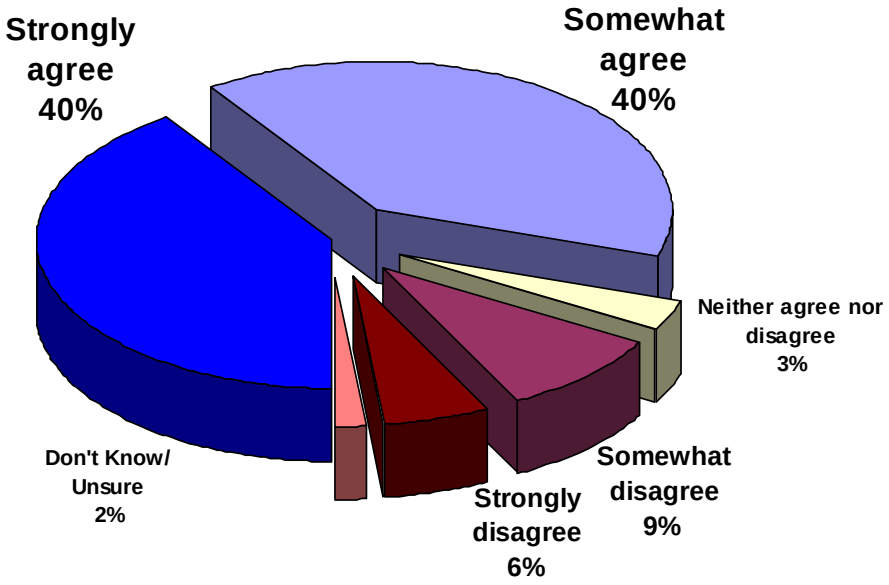
Regionally, childcare issues were most important for the North Central, Southwest and Southeast areas of Idaho. Economic concerns were most dominant in the Panhandle and South Central regions. Working parents (those with any children under 18 years of age) and working parents who had children less than 6 years old responded similarly; childcare issues were dominant. Working parents with children over 6 were also more concerned than the general population about economic problems

How strongly do you agree that the government should offer more financial help to working families who need it to pay for quality childcare?



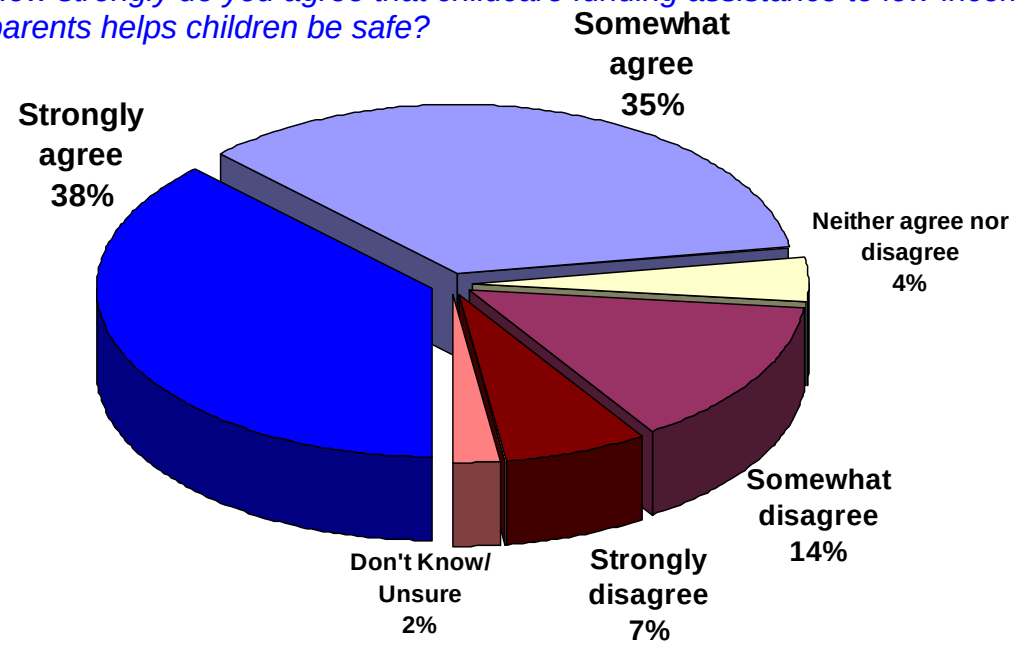
A strong majority (67%) of Idahoans support more financial aid to working families for childcare. Agreement was strong across all regions of the state, ranging from the highest level of support, 76% in the North Central region, to a low of 61% in both the Southeast and East Central regions of the state.

How strongly do you agree that providing childcare funding assistance to low-income parents helps them stay in the workforce?



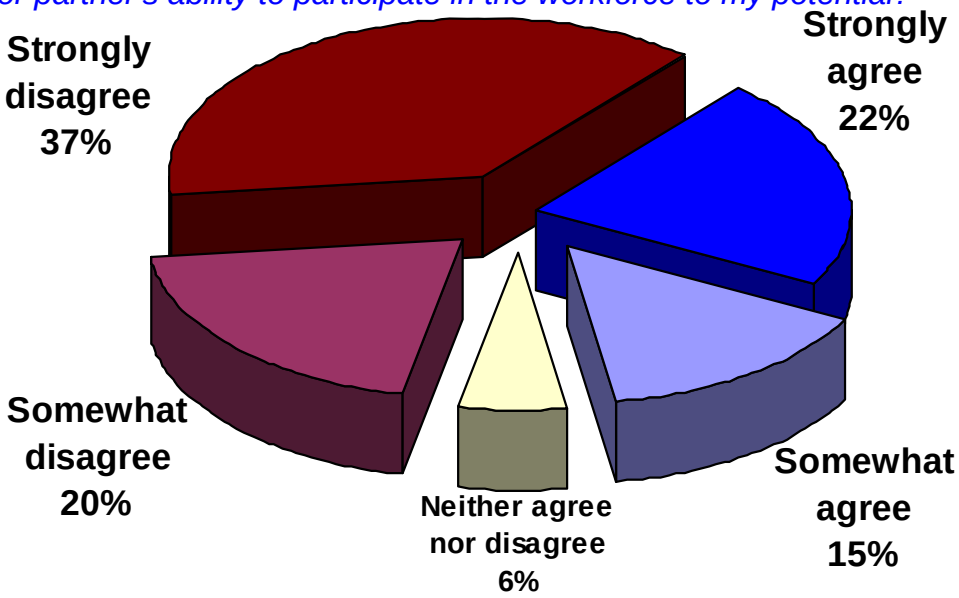
80% of the population agreed that by providing childcare assistance, low-income parents could stay in the workforce. This level of support was uniformly high across all of the state.

How strongly do you agree that childcare funding assistance to low-income working parents helps children be safe?



When thinking about the safety of young children, 73% of citizens agreed that assisting low-income working parents with childcare expenses would be beneficial. The least level of support 67% in agreement) was in the Southeast region of the state. The highest level of agreement was in South Central Idaho (83% in agreement).

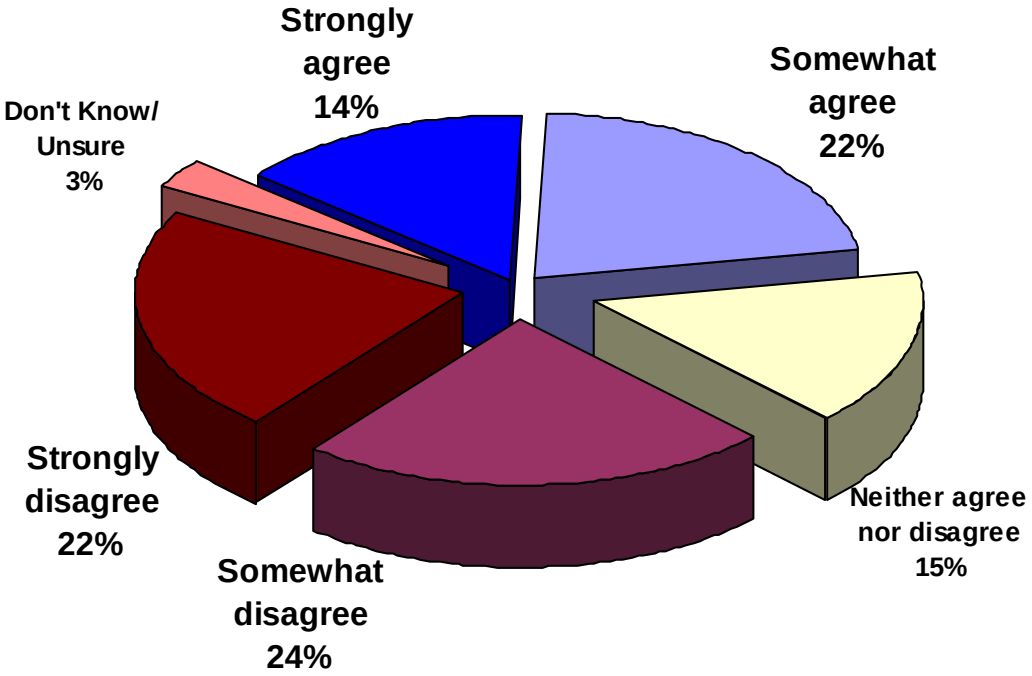
How strongly do you agree that childcare affordability has affected my or my spouse or partner's ability to participate in the workforce to my potential?



Of working parents where n = 298

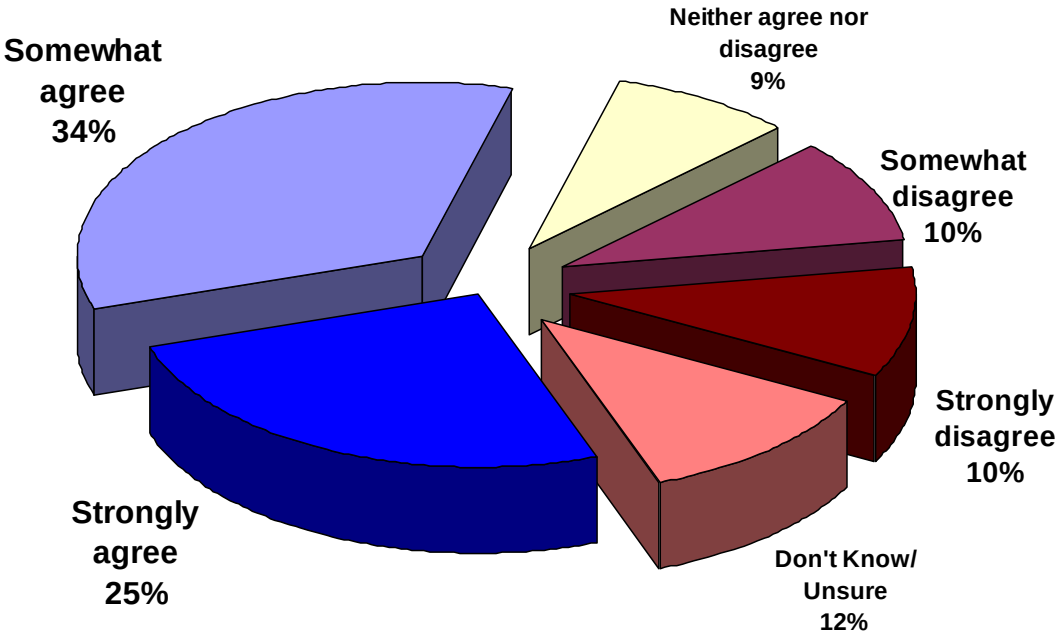
Working parents disagreed that having affordable childcare had affected their ability to work at their potential (by 20 percentage points). (Note that 60% of the population is not a parent.)

How strongly do you agree that low-income single parents should have higher priority for public funding than college students for childcare assistance?



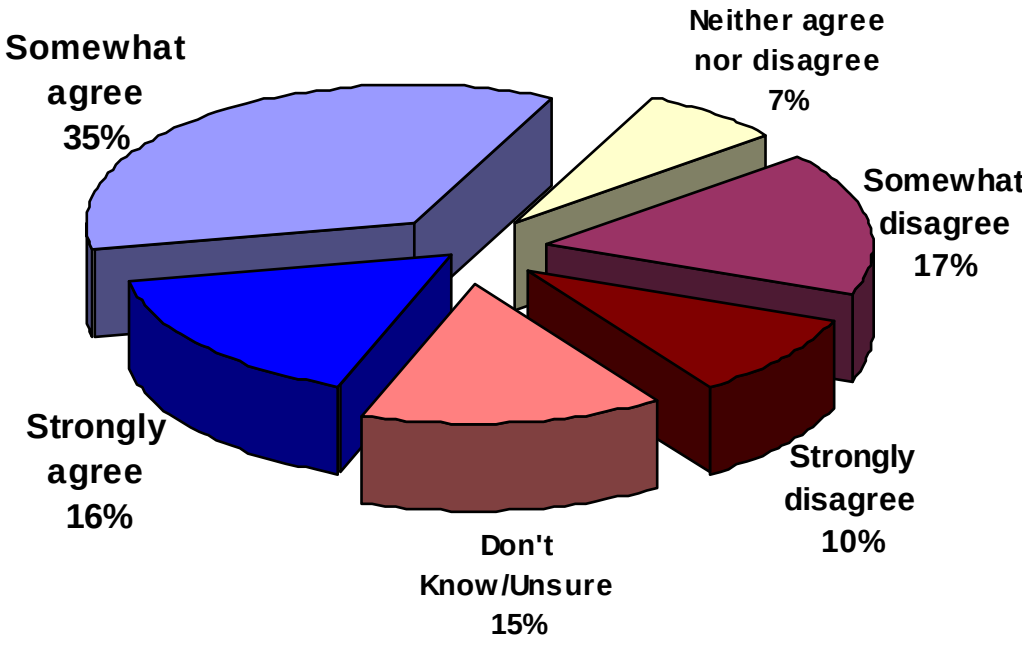
When prioritizing assistance for childcare, slightly more disagreed (46%) than agreed (36%) that low-income single parents should have access over college students.

How strongly do you agree that in my community, children have access to high-quality pre-kindergarten, nursery school or Head Start programs to help them become ready to succeed in school?



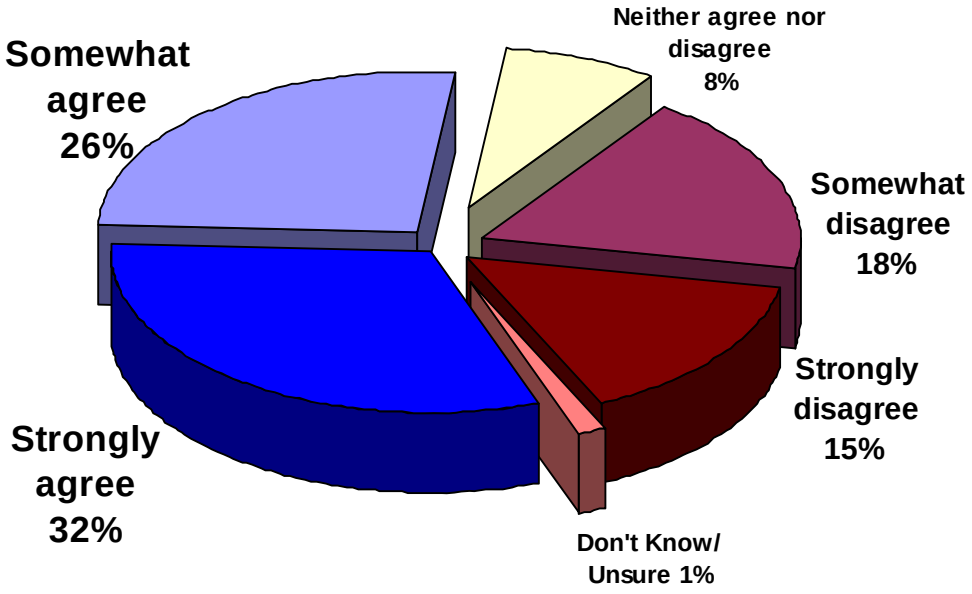
Generally, Idaho citizens agreed that early childhood education was available. However, the populous Southwest region agreed less than other regions (57%) and had the highest level of neither agree nor disagree responses to the statement (16%).

How strongly do you agree that in my community, programs that help get children ready to succeed in school are available and affordable?



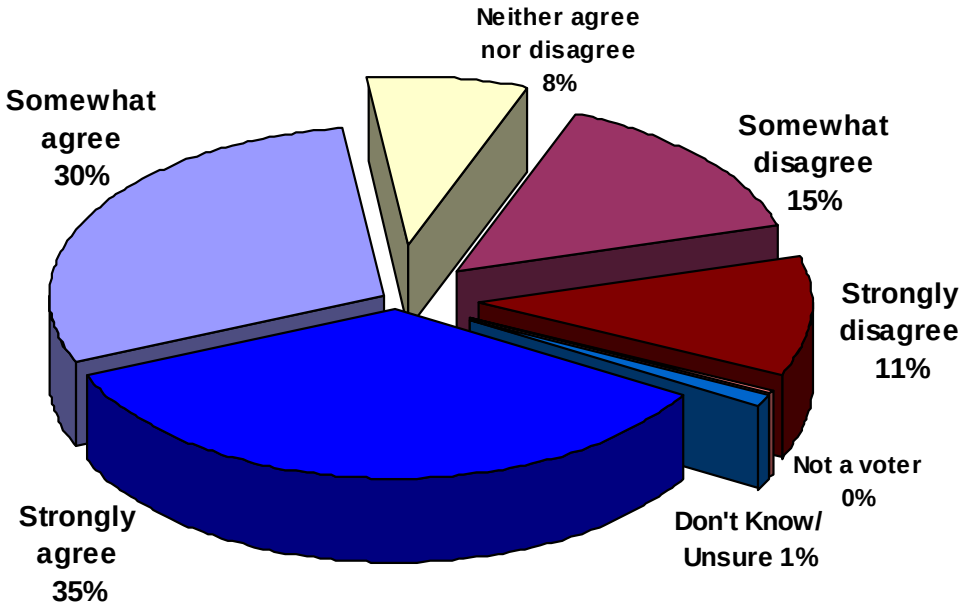
Half of the population agrees that early childhood programs are available and affordable in their communities. However, 15% volunteered that they did not know, or were unsure, and an additional 7% could neither agree nor disagree. These combined percentages may indicate an uninformed public on this topic. Regionally, the level of agreement/disagreement and those who do not know is not uniformly distributed. The North Central, Southeast and Southwest regions are less in agreement than other regions.

How strongly do you agree that government has a responsibility to provide high-quality pre-kindergarten education for young children in low-income families?



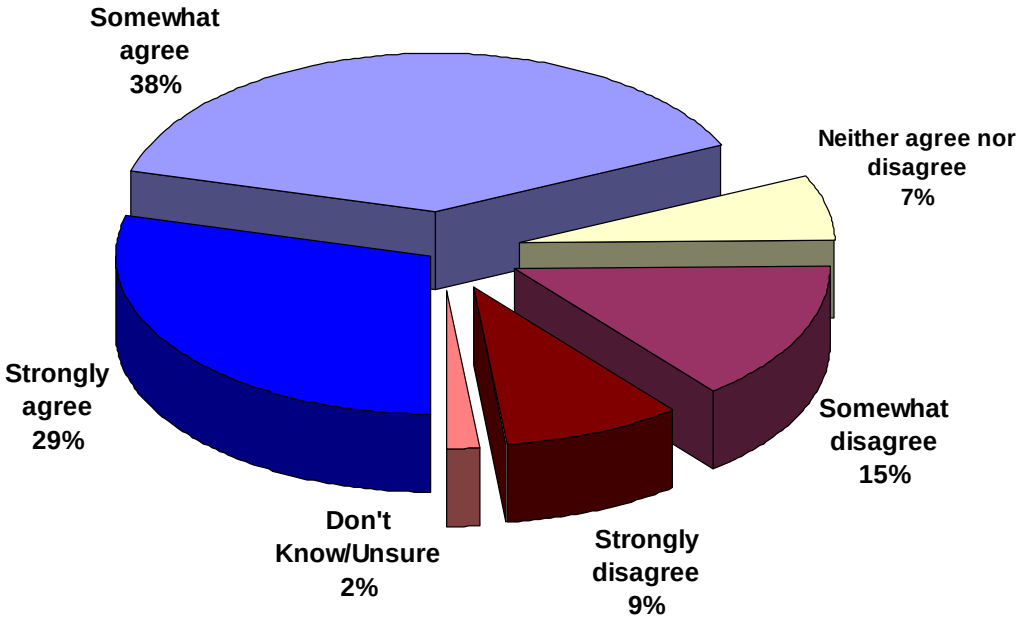
57% of Idahoans agreed that government does have a responsibility for early childhood education for low-income families. While every region agreed more than disagreed, the regions most in agreement (North Central, Southwest and South Central) had stronger levels of agreement and fewer citizens who neither agreed nor disagreed.

How strongly do you agree that, as a voter, I would more likely vote for a candidate who supported expanding access to pre-kindergarten programs for young children?



Almost two-thirds of the population indicated that they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports expansion of early childhood programs. (Note: 80% of the respondents indicated that they were voters.) Agreement was strongest in the North Central region (75% in agreement) and lowest in the East Central region (42% agreeing; 13% neither; and 34% disagreeing).

How strongly do you agree that, as a voter, I would more likely vote for a candidate who supported expanding funding for childcare assistance for low-income families?



Candidates supporting expanded assistance to low-income families would find support by 67% of the state's population. The highest level of support is in the Panhandle (75% agreeing). The lowest level of agreement was in the Southeast region (62% in agreement).

Source:
19th Annual Idaho Public Policy Survey, 2008
To access full survey reports, please go to http://ppa.boisestate.edu/ssrc

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The Public Policy Center at Boise State University

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