

**A Call for Quality:
South Carolina Citizens Support a
Child Care Quality Rating System**

A Study Released by:
The United Way Association of South Carolina, *with*
Mary Black Foundation
Voices for South Carolina's Children
United Way of Greenville County Success By 6[®]
United Way of the Midlands
Trident United Way

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I. Introduction and Background

The issue of high quality early childhood education is not new to South Carolina. Ten years have passed since the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control first began looking into the state's child care system and commissioned an assessment of its critical child care needs. The critical needs identified in the 1996 "*Who Cares?*" document are the same critical needs that still exist today: availability, affordability, and most importantly, quality.

While there are a number of competing accrediting agencies and differing quality standards around the nation, both industry and consumer advocates agree that quality child care is determined by a number of factors, including:

- Promote positive relationships for all children and adults
- Implement a curriculum that fosters all areas of child development – cognitive, emotional, language, physical, and social
- Use developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and effective teaching approaches
- Provide ongoing assessments of child progress
- Promote the nutrition and health of children and staff
- Employ and support qualified early education teaching staff
- Establish and maintain collaborative relationships with families
- Establish and maintain relationships and use resources of the community
- Provide a safe and healthy physical environment
- Implement strong program management policies that result in high-quality service

In recent years, private and public groups have led efforts to address how South Carolina can improve the quality of its child care facilities, and in turn, improve children's school success. In time, this would help South Carolina ameliorate its historically low placement among the states in education and create an educated workforce for the 21st century economy.

In 2002, a team of nationally-recognized experts in the field, along with the South Carolina Task Force on the Cost of Quality Early Care and Education, a coalition of 32 public and private organizations and agencies, embarked on a landmark 18-month study that examined a range of high quality standards and financing options recommended by national researchers and experts. At the conclusion of the study, the SC Task Force provided the clear policy recommendation for South Carolina to develop a "comprehensive approach for addressing the early care and education needs of young children...[The approach] is a comprehensive and coherent program that links all necessary early care and education system components: high-quality standards, assistance to providers and parents, and enhancement of our state's capacity to effectively support and monitor quality ECE programs." This recommended program is a statewide, voluntary universal Quality Rating System for child care and early education facilities, focused on the quality of their staff, environments and programming.

With a comparatively small investment, the SC Task Force policy recommendation of implementing a Quality Rating System predicts significant, long-lasting benefits to children, in the form of school readiness and their opportunity for success in school and life; to parents, in

the form of empowering them to be educated and effective child care consumers; and to the state of South Carolina, in the form of short-term and long-term economic returns on its investment in children. Despite the unified voice of support for a Quality Rating System from groups throughout the state, most South Carolina policymakers have yet to embrace the concept.

II. Survey Results

In early 2005, a collaboration of statewide early education advocates, led by the United Way Association of South Carolina and including the Mary Black Foundation, Voices for South Carolina's Children, United Way of Greenville County Success By 6[®], United Way of the Midlands and Trident United Way, formed a leadership group to support the implementation of a Quality Rating System in South Carolina. In response to feedback from policymakers, the group commissioned a private research firm to conduct a statewide survey that would determine the public's opinion on the formation of a Quality Rating System. The survey was conducted in the first weeks of December, 2005, and showed overwhelming public support. Results of the survey are highlighted below and in the attached graphs.

A. Demographics (see Appendix I)

The survey sample of 1,200 statewide participants includes broad representation across all racial and age categories and educational and income levels. The sample used was determined to be highly statistically representative of the population of South Carolina.

B. Parents care about quality (see Appendix II)

Within the 1,200 individuals surveyed, 723 were parents. Of those parents, 347 have children in their immediate family who have been in child care outside of their home in the past five years or who anticipate putting a child in care within the next few years. Among these parents, their passion about the quality of child care for their children was unmistakably clear.

1. The plurality of respondents (107) named a child care setting's quality as the most important factor in selecting care for their child.
2. Furthermore, parents expressed willingness to pay more for a child care setting that had received a higher rating of quality (74% of the parents who currently pay for child care, out of a total of 292). Of those parents who were willing to pay more for quality, 97% would be willing to pay as much as an additional \$10 per week; of those parents, 84% would be willing to pay as much as an additional \$20 per week.
3. Ninety-three percent of parents said that they would like to have quality ratings for the child care programs in their area so they could compare them.

C. The citizens of South Carolina support the creation of a Quality Rating System (see Appendix III)

The survey contained several different questions to gauge general support for the creation of a quality rating system, including participants' desire for such a rating system and how important a rating system would be to parents navigating through the maze of choices in the child care marketplace. On each measure, survey participants overwhelmingly repeated their enthusiasm for a Quality Rating System.

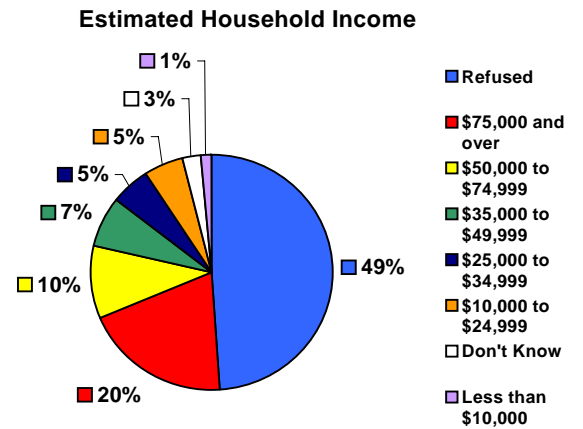
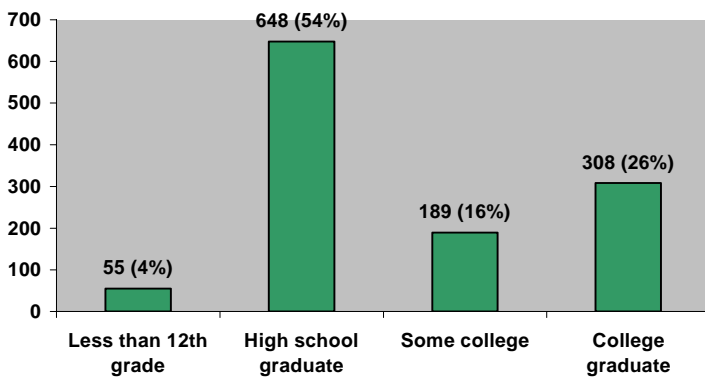
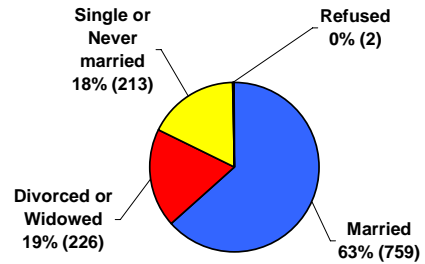
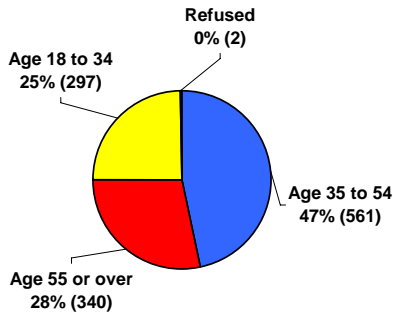
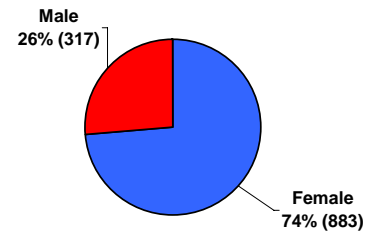
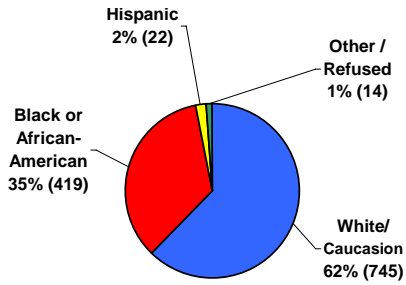
D. Child care programs should be rated by a group independent of the child care industry (see Appendix IV)

When asked about who should rate the child care programs if a quality rating system were implemented, survey participants indicated the importance of an independent group conducting the ratings, rather than the child care industry itself.

III. Conclusion

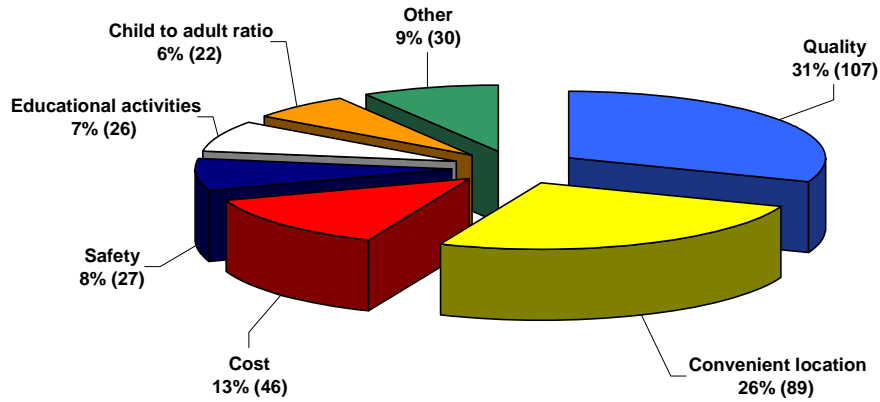
Recommended by the SC Task Force on the Cost and Quality of Early Care and Education, endorsed by national experts and leaders in early childhood education, and embraced by residents and parents, it is clear that the time has come for South Carolina to follow the lead of fourteen other states and create a statewide, voluntary universal Quality Rating System. With this system in place, we can give parents the ability to exercise their rights as educated consumers on behalf of their children. Most importantly, a Quality Rating System can help give our children the opportunity to succeed and reach their potential in a state that simply cannot afford to do otherwise.

Appendix I – Survey participant demographics (n = 1200)

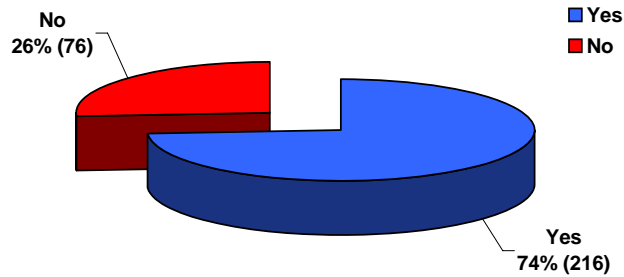


Appendix II – Parents care about quality

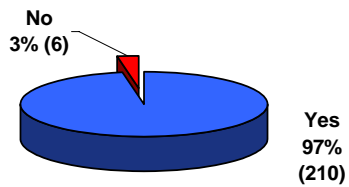
Most Important Factor in Selecting Care
n = 347



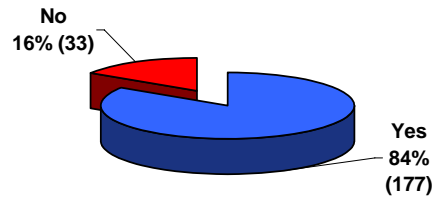
If you currently pay for child care, are you willing to pay more for a higher rating of quality?
n = 292



Pay as much as \$10 more per week?
n = 216

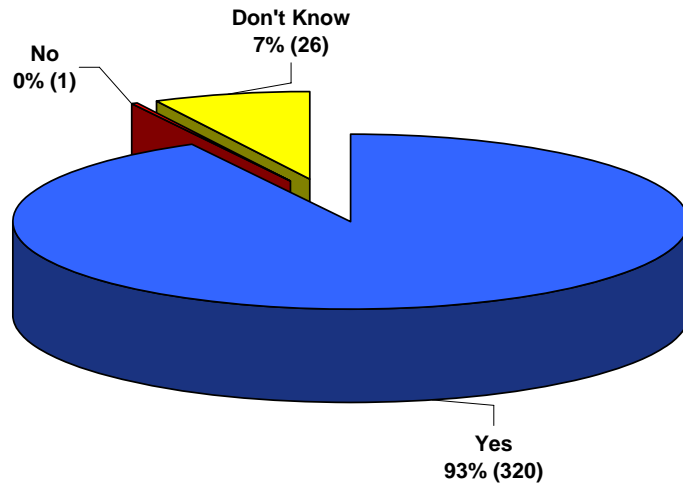


Pay as much as \$20 more per week?
n = 210



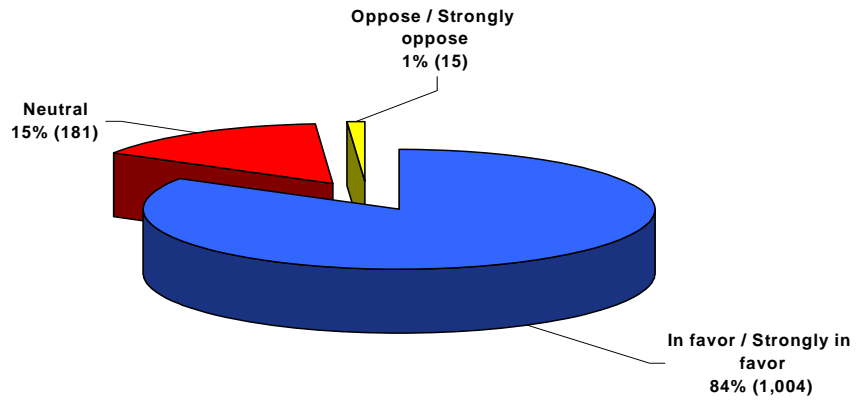
Appendix II continued

As a parent, would you like to compare quality ratings for programs in your area?
n = 347

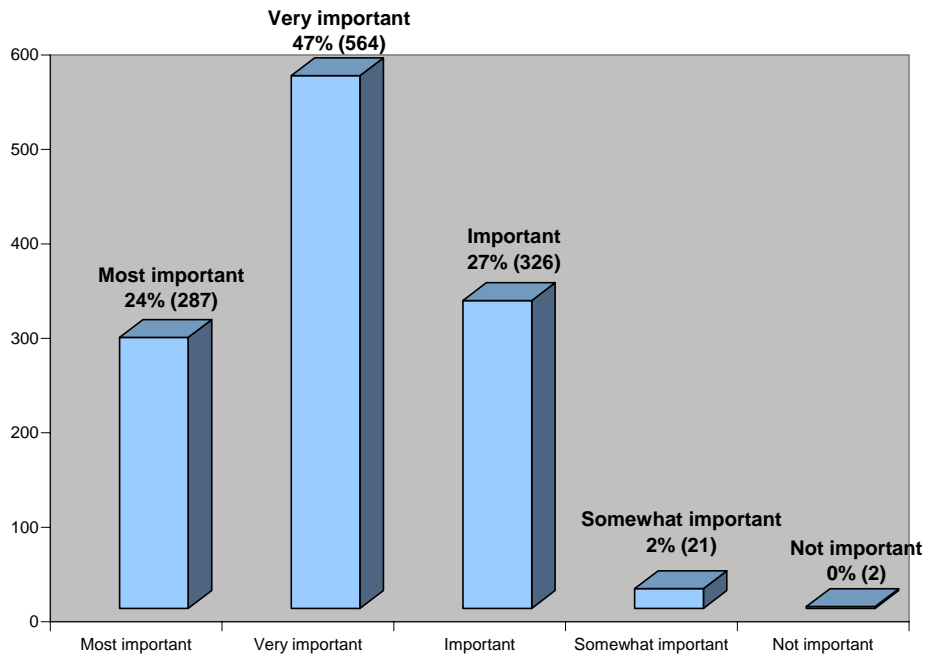


Appendix III – The citizens of South Carolina support the creation of a Quality Rating System

Feelings about a Quality Rating System
n = 1200

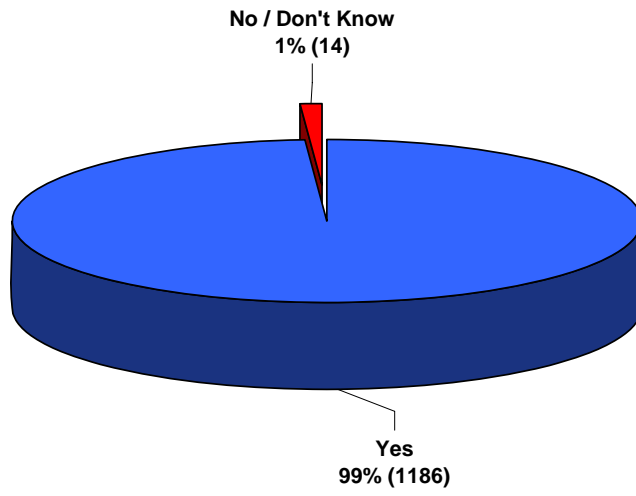


Importance of Quality Rating System for Parents Making a Child Care Choice
n = 1200



Appendix III continued

Would A Rating System be Helpful to Parents?
n = 1200



Appendix IV – Child care programs should be rated by a group independent of the child care industry

If there is a Quality Rating System, do you think child care programs should be rated by themselves or by an independent group?
n = 1200

