

# Childcare in Boston

## Results from a BEACON Panel Survey

January 2020

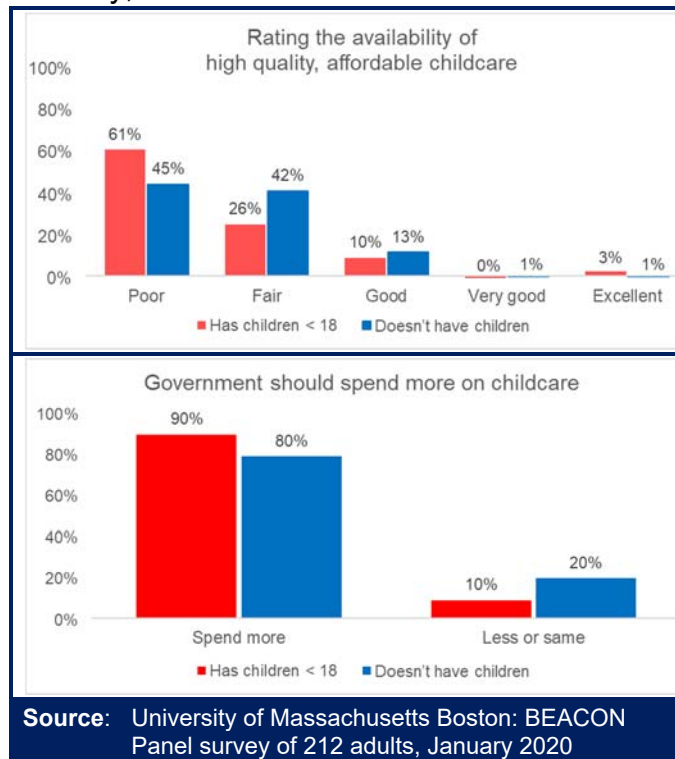
Boston residents who responded to a recent BEACON Panel Survey answered questions designed to gauge perceptions about childcare.

Panelists were asked how they would rate “the availability of high quality, affordable childcare for children under 5” and whether they believe government should spend less money, more money, or about the same money on childcare. Comparable questions were asked about “public elementary schools” and “parks and recreation.” Respondents who did not have children under 18 living in the household had slightly lower levels of support for childcare to those with children.

In the opinion of BEACON Panel respondents, there is a childcare crisis in Boston!

- Almost 9 in 10 respondents rated the availability of high quality, affordable childcare as “poor” or “fair.”
- 8 in 10 respondents believe the government should spend more on childcare.
- These sentiments were similar to those concerning public elementary schools and reflected much more concern than with parks and recreation.
- Respondents with children 17 or younger were somewhat more concerned with childcare availability than those without children living at home.

Figure 1. Ratings and Support for High Quality, Affordable Childcare



Source: University of Massachusetts Boston: BEACON Panel survey of 212 adults, January 2020

When we tabulated the answers by whether or not respondents had children under 18, there was a predictable tendency for those with children to be more critical of childcare and more interested in spending more.

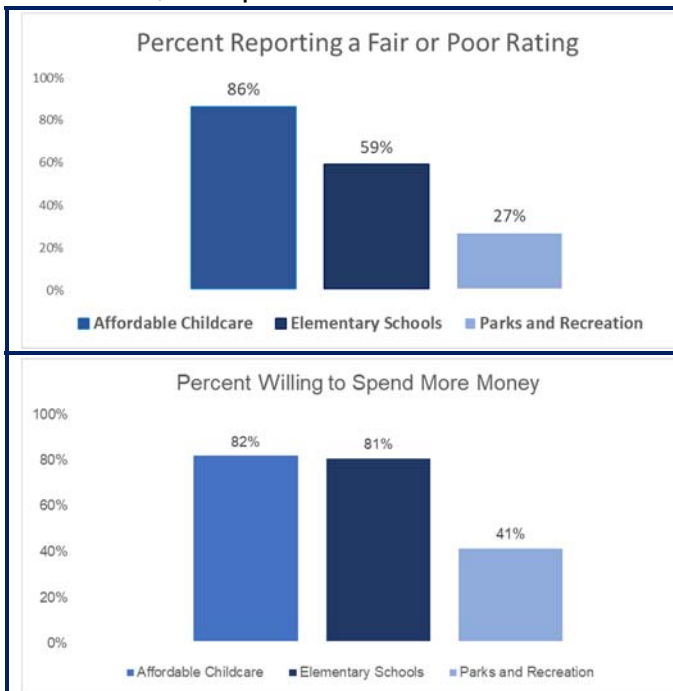
However, Figure 1 shows that the differences were not large, and the overall support for more spending on childcare services was consistent across the whole panel.

## Affordable Childcare, Compared to Elementary Schools and Parks

While the ratings of elementary schools were not very positive, Figure 2 shows the ratings of the availability of high quality, affordable childcare are much worse. Almost 6 in 10 respondents rated elementary schools in Boston as “fair” or “poor,” compared to over 8 in 10 rating affordable childcare as “fair” or “poor.”

Moreover, when asked about spending, while three quarters of respondents want to spend more on schools, even more (82%) of those responding want to spend more on day care for children under 5. Meanwhile, the ratings of the parks and playgrounds were comparatively positive, though only 41% would be interested in spending more on those as well.

**Figure 2.** Ratings and Support for Affordable Childcare, Compared to Schools and Parks



**Source:** University of Massachusetts Boston: BEACON Panel survey of 212 adults, January 2020

## Conclusions

In this panel survey of Boston residents, there is near unanimous negative feelings about the availability of high quality affordable childcare and near unanimous support for spending more to make it better. ♦

### Methods

The Center for Survey Research at UMass Boston recently created a panel based on a sample of Boston residents who provided their e-mail addresses and volunteered to provide their feedback on topics of current interest. To understand how the panel viewed childcare services in Boston, we asked them to rate the availability of high-quality childcare for children under 5 in Boston and whether they thought the government should spend more, less or about the same amount on such services. For comparison, we asked similar questions about elementary education and the parks and playgrounds in Boston. 212 panel members provided answers. Of these, 32 had children under 18 living at home and 180 did not.

The specific questions, based on the General Social Survey (GSS), were:

- In Boston today, how would you rate the public elementary schools—excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?
- Do you think the government should spend less money, more money, or about the same amount of money on public elementary schools?
- In Boston today, how would you rate the availability of high quality, affordable childcare for children under 5—excellent, very good, good, fair or poor?
- Do you think the government should spend less money, more money or about the same amount of money on high quality, affordable childcare for children under 5?
- In Boston today, how would you rate the parks and playgrounds —excellent, very good, good, fair or poor?
- Do you think the government should less money, more money or about the same amount of money on parks and playgrounds?

### Limitations:

Panel members were recruited using an address-based probability sample of Boston households. For the childcare survey, larger percentages of survey responses came from panel members with higher levels of education. Evidence exists that wanting the government to spend more on childcare is not related to level of education either in the Beacon panel or nationally in the GSS\* conducted by the University of Chicago. Therefore, the results cited are not expected to be affected by this panel characteristic.

\* <https://gss.norc.org/>