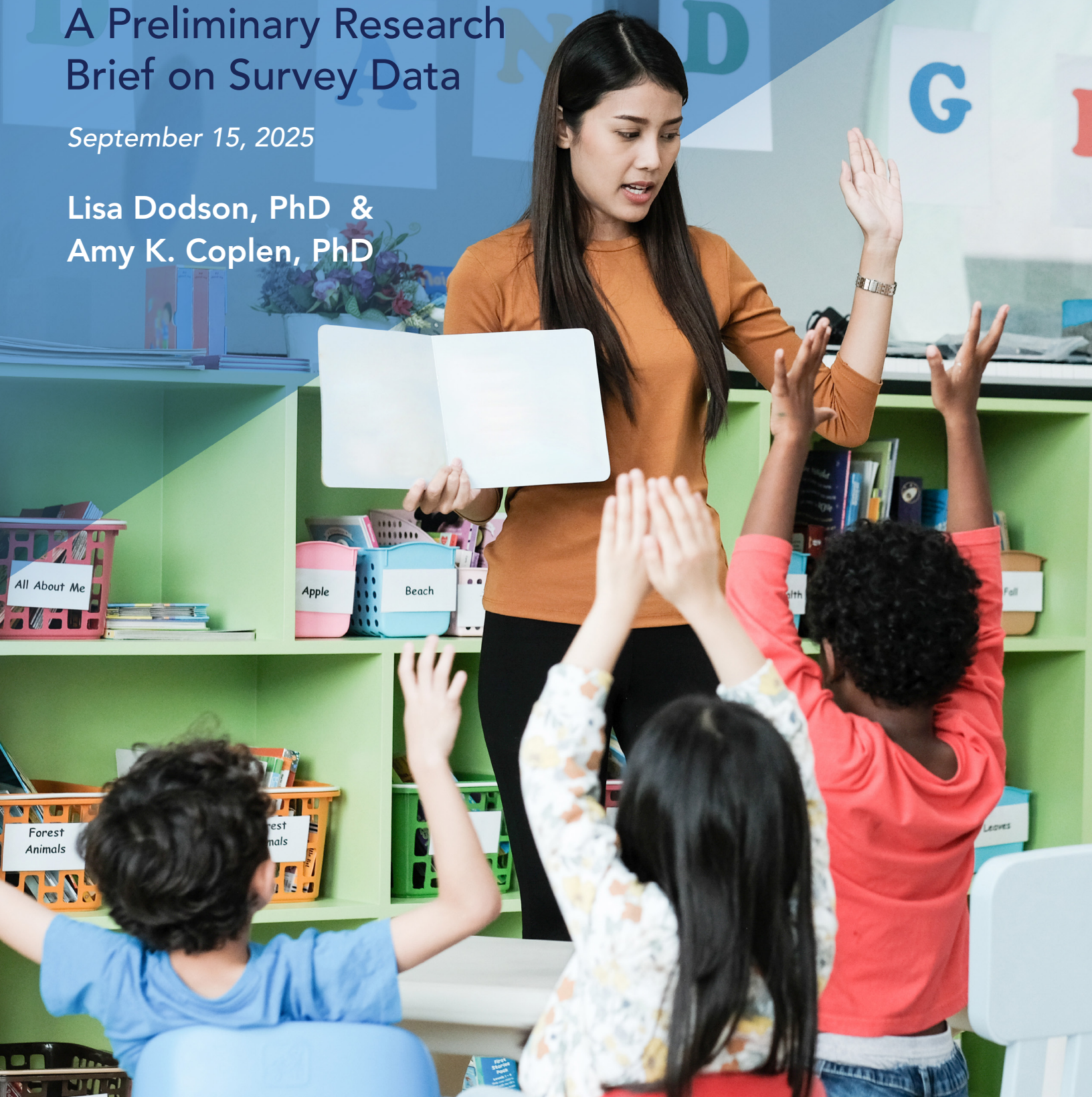


Multnomah County's Preschool for All: Valuing children, improving family wellbeing, and strengthening the teaching workforce

A Preliminary Research Brief on Survey Data

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INTRODUCTION

Multnomah County's Preschool for All (PFA) program is on track to achieve full universality by Fall 2030, offering free preschool to all of the County's three- and four-year-olds whose families wish to enroll them, through a flexible "mixed delivery" model. This approach allows parents to choose the schedule, language, cultural context, and size of their child's preschool setting. PFA also supports teachers with resources for working with children with special needs, and compensates them with living wages, benefits, and professional development.

Despite decades of research confirming the benefits of early childhood education, local reporting in Multnomah County has yet to reflect the experiences of PFA participants. This report shares findings from an online survey of 68 parents and 20 teachers conducted between June and August 2025, informed by [earlier in-depth interviews](#). **The consensus among parents and teachers is that PFA is a profoundly valuable resource, setting children up for a successful transition to kindergarten, boosting family wellbeing and economic stability, and enabling teachers to see a more viable future in the field of early childhood education and care.**

Our findings indicate that **Preschool for All is effectively meeting its goals. It provides culturally responsive, inclusive preschool particularly for historically underserved families, including those with lower-incomes, families of color and families with children with disabilities. These groups are prioritized for enrollment in the early years before full universality is attained. Additionally, PFA is fulfilling its commitment to improve preschool educator wages and job quality, in a field that has long been low-paying and unstable.**

The program is also playing a vital role in helping teachers and families – including couples, single parents, immigrants, and foster parents – cultivate a sense of belonging in Portland and Multnomah County.

While parents and teachers agree that PFA has brought positive changes, they recommend a higher teacher-to-student ratio, more support for students with developmental and behavioral needs, and greater involvement in planning and implementation. The most common recommendation voiced by parents is that **PFA roll out more quickly so that it can benefit all of the county's preschoolers as soon as possible.**

PFA HAS A STRONG POSITIVE IMPACT ON PRESCHOOLERS

The families who responded to our survey report that PFA has an overwhelmingly positive impact on their children. The family members we surveyed are working to meet the needs of children with a wide range of needs and experiences – including children who are neurodivergent, children who have experienced living unhoused, children of color, children in bilingual/bicultural families, and children living with foster parents. Despite these diverse perspectives, families hold widely shared views about the impact of participating in PFA, and it is evident that PFA has had a profound influence on their children's development and wellbeing. Of the 68 family members who responded to the survey:

93% feel good about their child's preschool program,

79% believe their child is more prepared for kindergarten,

72% report that their child is doing better socially or emotionally, and

44% indicate that they've gotten help identifying or supporting their child's developmental needs early.

Parents elaborated on these findings, describing how PFA provided their families critical access to a supportive environment that prepared their children for kindergarten. One parent wrote "Our child has benefited from a **kind, supportive, and rigorous school environment** we likely wouldn't have access to otherwise, which prepared her for kindergarten." Another parent wrote, "My son is about to start kindergarten and **is so much more prepared** from his preschool experience."

One parent explained how PFA helped her family recover from the COVID 19 pandemic: "Our daughter was just one year old when Covid started. As a hairstylist, my income was greatly impacted during Covid. The fact that we got free preschool helped me go back to work and **gave my daughter much needed social learning** where she excelled in a Spanish immersion preschool, which led to an amazing kindergarten year." Another parent who reported getting help supporting their child's developmental needs early, wrote that having their son enrolled in preschool just three days a week has positively impacted his behavior, and that they "find great reward in his interaction with similar kids."

PFA CONTRIBUTES TO FINANCIAL SECURITY AND OVERALL FAMILY WELLBEING

The majority of parents who responded to our survey report a significant reduction in their family's stress levels and an overall improvement in their wellbeing. Gaining access to high-quality preschool that did not "put us in more debt," as one parent put it, enabled many parents to go back to work, work more hours, pursue better employment, and no longer rely so heavily on others for child care. Of the 68 family members who responded to the survey:

- 79%** feel less financial stress,
- 68%** feel more stable or secure as a family,
- 49%** have been able to increase the number of hours that they work,
- 44%** have been able to return to work,
- 41%** have been able to pay down debt,
- 41%** report less reliance on family or friends for childcare,
- 16%** have been able to go back to school or enroll in job training, and
- 13%** have been able to move into a better housing situation.

Across different family compositions – including couples, single parents, and foster parents – respondents added compelling comments about the impact of PFA on their family stability and wellbeing. One parent highlighted how PFA, "stabilized our family financially, which in turn **stabilized the marriage.**" On the other end of the spectrum, a single mother wrote that PFA "has been my saving grace. **Without it, I would have lost my house and not been able to provide QUALITY, intentional childcare for my daughter.**"

Reflecting the PFA priority of serving foster families, three respondents who identified as foster parents emphasized how crucial PFA support is. "My foster child in my care depends on Preschool for All!" wrote one parent, **"It is the only way I can afford to have [my foster child] in my care."** Another foster parent identified what was perhaps an unexpected positive outcome of PFA: increasing the capacity for parents to foster more children. They wrote, **"We were able to take in another foster child** as our older foster child was able to attend preschool during the day. While that may not be your usual result, we believe it was significant. The older child LOVED being in school, and the baby received the attention [they] needed."

Another parent pointed to the importance of PFA in supporting families who might be feeling a heightened sense of fear due to the current political landscape. "As a Latino working family," they wrote, "PFA has helped our family not live paycheck to paycheck while at the same time **nourishing our family's mental well being, especially with the political climate we face.**"

"We would not be able to afford living and working in Portland without Preschool for All."

Parents expressed deep gratitude for PFA, a lifeline that has **"literally changed our lives,"** according to one parent. This parent of three had faced the tough choice of finding more affordable, but scarce co-op programs that she finds to be disorganized and "impossible" to put the work-trade time into, or "paying for a preschool program that we can't afford and puts us in debt." However, "PFA changed all that," and now **"our son is thriving socially, his teachers are exceptional, and we feel a true connection to his new school. Plus, we are out of credit card debt for the first time in years."**

As the survey data overwhelmingly shows, the PFA program is instrumental in helping families feel more financially stable and secure, improving their wellbeing, and fostering a sense of belonging in Portland and Multnomah County. One parent put it simply, **"We would not be able to afford living and working in Portland without Preschool for All."**

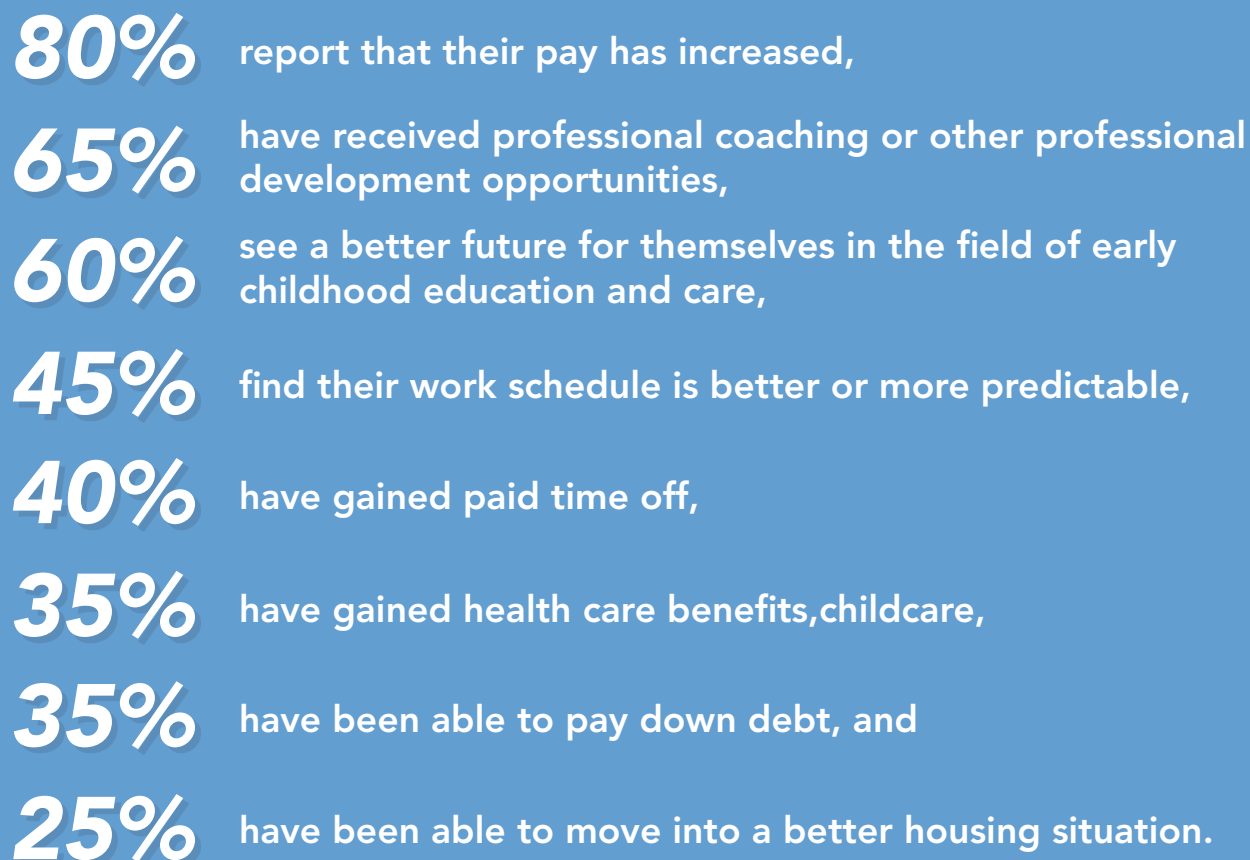
PFA PRESCHOOL TEACHERS IDENTIFY SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN AND A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR THEMSELVES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The majority of teachers who we surveyed identified significant benefits for children enrolled in Preschool for All and see a better future for themselves in the field of early childhood education and care. Of the 20 teachers who responded to our survey:

- 85%** report being able to work with a more economically and ethnically diverse group of children and families,
- 65%** feel that their classroom is better supported for working with children with special needs or other issues,
- 65%** see children becoming better prepared to succeed in kindergarten,
- 55%** are able to provide a preschool experience that is a better fit for children in their classroom,
- 20%** are able to provide a preschool experience that is closer to their culture, and
- 25%** are able to offer care in a language other than English.

These results indicate that Preschool for All is meeting its goals of providing culturally responsive and inclusive preschool and prioritizing families who have historically had the least access to childcare, including lower-income families, families of color, and families with children with disabilities. According to one teacher, **"I have seen the impact PFA has made for children and families with disabilities. It makes the greatest attempt to be inclusive and support children with differences."**

Teachers also reported that PFA improved the quality of their jobs.



These responses suggest that PFA is delivering on its promise to improve wages and job quality in a field that has historically been low-paying and precarious. One teacher commented that, although they and their colleagues are still underpaid, **"I don't have to live paycheck to paycheck** as much. Another teacher remarked, **"I can afford medications that I couldn't otherwise."**

Several teachers noted how working in a PFA setting had dramatically changed their work and life. As one teacher put it, "I was reaching a breaking point working in early childhood education. As much as I knew that working with young children was my passion, and incredibly meaningful and needed work, it started to feel unsustainable as a career. It was frustrating to feel like I didn't have the resources to support the kids in my care and to go home at the end of the day barely making enough money to survive. After working at a Preschool for All site **I feel much more able to stay in early childhood education in the long-term, which I feel so sure of and excited about.** I have access to coaching and a lot more resources to support my students, and am able to better afford housing and other basic necessities."

IMPROVING PRESCHOOL FOR ALL

When asked to identify how they would like to see Preschool for All improve, many parents and teachers who responded to our survey identified the need for Preschool for All to expand more rapidly to accommodate more children on a shorter timeline. Some respondents recommended loosening requirements and lowering barriers so that more preschools are able to become PFA sites and create more spots for children. Some respondents suggested expanding the program to encompass children younger than three.

While all of the teachers whom we surveyed identified work in PFA settings as an improvement, some also named challenges and needs, including insufficient support for students with developmental and behavioral needs. One teacher wrote that while PFA does offer additional support, “it doesn’t seem to take into account the severity of needs for kids who need much, much more support.” Other teachers echo this concern, adding that they’d like to see smaller class sizes, more support staff in the classrooms, and “out of classroom support” for students who need to be removed from their classrooms for safety reasons. A parent also suggested a higher ratio of teachers to students and more professional support staff such as counselors, psychologists, and social workers.

Parents and teachers who responded to our survey wished that the PFA administration would involve them more in planning and implementation meetings, and do a better and more timely job of communicating changes, so that, according to one parent, “everyone is on the same page about what they can expect.” For one teacher, it was important that this communication happen directly to teachers, not just to their employers, so that they can “follow along easier.”

CONCLUSION

Our preliminary survey results show that PFA is significantly improving the lives of the children, families, and preschool teachers in Multnomah County. Parents and teachers overwhelmingly agree that PFA prepares children for a successful transition to kindergarten. PFA strengthens children’s social and emotional skills, helps identify and support children’s developmental needs early, and better serves neurodivergent children, children of color, bilingual/bicultural children, and foster children.

Families with children enrolled in PFA report feeling less financial stress and greater family stability. Parents have been able to go back to work or school, work more hours, and pursue job training opportunities. PFA is instrumental in helping both families and teachers feel more financially stable and secure, improve their wellbeing, and foster a sense of belonging in Portland and Multnomah County. Teachers benefit from higher pay, improved benefits, greater professional support, and increased longevity in the field, thereby creating a more stable preschool workforce in Multnomah County.

Parents and teachers share some important feedback on how to improve PFA – including staffing classrooms with more teachers, providing more support for students with developmental and behavioral needs, and better communicating programmatic changes in a timely manner. The most common recommendation voiced by parents, however, was that PFA roll out faster so that it can benefit all of the county’s preschoolers as soon as possible.

PFA is on track to reach full universality by 2030, enrolling growing numbers of children each year. These preliminary results indicate that PFA is meeting its goals of providing culturally responsive and inclusive preschool, prioritizing families who have historically had the least access to childcare, and improving preschool educator wages and jobs, in a field that has historically been low-paying and precarious. This public investment in early childhood education and care is already delivering significant returns.

SURVEY DESIGN

Parents and teachers share some important feedback on how to improve PFA – including staffing classrooms¹ with more teachers, providing more support for students with developmental and behavioral needs, and better communicating programmatic changes in a timely manner. The most common recommendation voiced by parents, however, was that PFA roll out faster so that it can benefit all of the county’s preschoolers as soon as possible.

1 Lisa Dodson and Amy Coplen. The Impacts of Participation in Multnomah County’s Preschool for All Program on Families and Teachers: A Preliminary Report. July 27, 2025.

https://familyforwardoregon.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/REPORT_The_Impacts_of_Participation_in_Multnomah_Countys_Preschool_for_All_Program.pdf

