



**STRATHCONA
COUNTY**

2021 June SCOOP Mixed Topic Survey: Preschool Programs in Strathcona County



Research Results

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Communications

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I. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In June 2021, Strathcona County conducted an online survey as part of its Strathcona County Online Opinion Panel (SCOOP) initiative. This project, entitled *the Mixed Topic Survey*, consisted of different survey areas whereby only a limited number of questions were asked within one or more topic areas and was exclusive to residents who signed up to be part of SCOOP. The June 2021 mixed topic survey consisted of three distinct topic areas: Creeks and waterways in Strathcona County, returning to in-person engagement, and Strathcona County's preschool programs.

This report presents results pertaining to preschool programs in Strathcona County. Obtaining primary data from residents directly will provide Strathcona County departments with information and enable County officials to make decisions that accurately reflect the perspectives and attitudes of residents. This report will provide a comprehensive review of all steps undertaken in the development and implementation of the survey, as well as a detailed summary of the results. The results from this study were prepared by Phil Kreisel, Ph.D. (Communications); SPSS was used for the data analysis.

A review of the methodology associated in the development and implementation of this survey can be found in the next section of this report.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. The Questionnaire

The questions used in this study were new, using questions that were submitted by department representatives from Recreation, Parks and Culture. The survey was then created, reviewed and modified where necessary by members of Survey Central for wording, question ordering and general understanding. This included a final check of the content by FOIP¹ prior to the release of the survey to the public.

B. Sampling Design and Data Collection Procedure

The sample frame used in this study consisted of 576 people who did one or more parts of the June 2021 survey. All participants were drawn from people who had previously signed up to be part of SCOOP, Strathcona County's online opinion panel. Overall, 74% of the participants lived in the urban area, 23.4% came from rural parts of Strathcona County, and the remaining 2.6% worked in Strathcona County but did not live there.

Although poll-based data is derived from people who decide to participate, were not randomly selected and have access to the online poll, the margin of error for a comparable probability-based random sample of the same size is $\pm 4.1\%$, 19 times out of 20.²

During the fielding of the survey, respondents had the option to skip a section if they felt that the topic had no relevance to them.

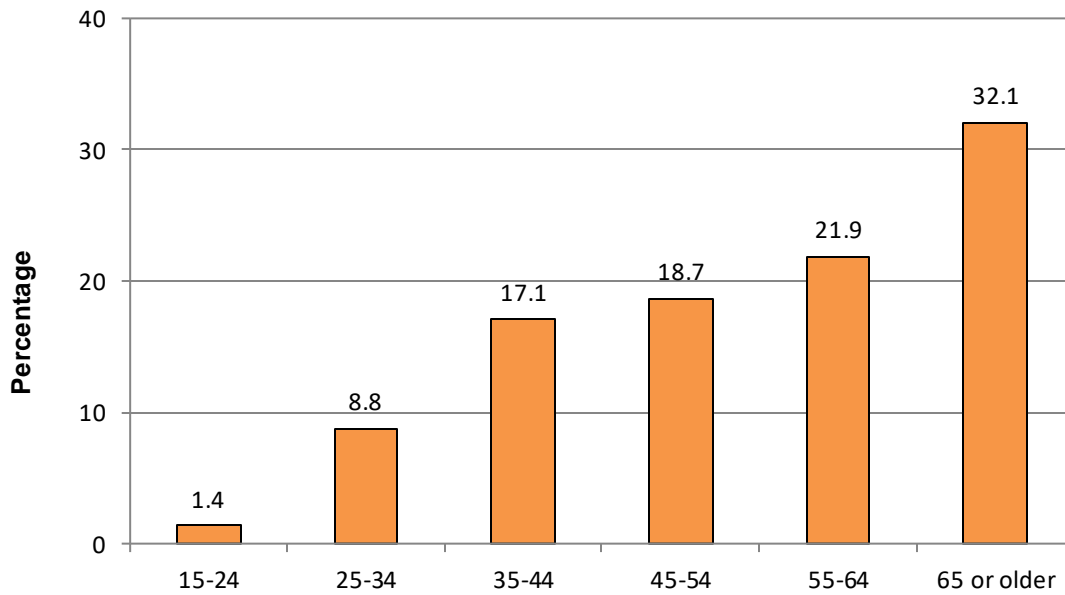
As seen in Figure 1, most of the respondents who participated in the survey are over the age of 44, with 25.9% of the participants between the

¹ FOIP stands for Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy and was reviewed by selected members from Strathcona County's Legislation and Legal Department (LLS).

² The $\pm 4.1\%$ is the *margin of error* associated with this study and refers to the potential percentage spread that exists within answers to questions. This means that an answer could be up to 4.1% higher or lower than what is reported. Please note, however, that the data was gathered through an online survey and no controls were undertaken to make this a random sample.

age of 25 and 44. Only a very small percentage of participants were under 25. Overall, 58.7% of participants were female while 41.3% were male.

FIGURE 1
Age of Respondents



III. SURVEY RESULTS

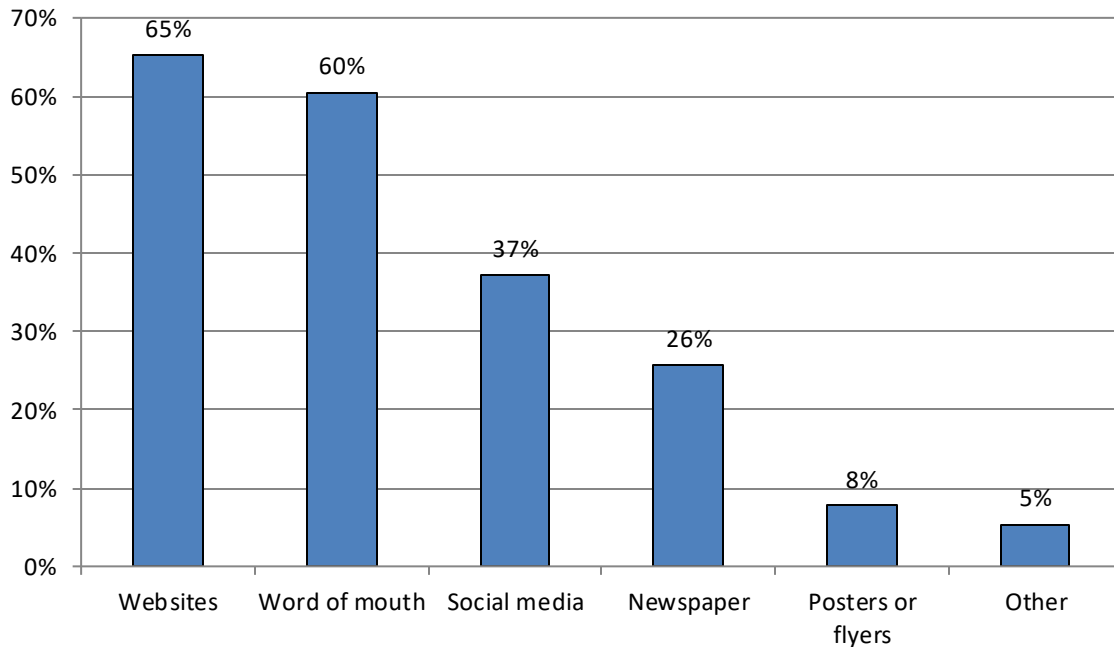
A. Preschool Programs

Respondents were asked if they would like to answer a series of questions about preschool programs in Strathcona County. Overall, 33.5% of the participants opted to answer questions from this topic.

Initially, respondents were asked if they had enrolled one or more children in a preschool program after January 2020. Overall, only 7.9% of respondents had done so. In terms of demographics, males were more likely to have enrolled at least one child in preschool (13.9%) than females (3.5%). Respondents older than 65 were less likely (2.6%), compared to residents ages 15-34 (9.7%) and 35-64 (9.4%).

All respondents were then asked where they look for information when they begin planning for preschool. A summary of these options is presented in Figure 3 below. Preferred sources of information vary, with most respondents preferring websites (65.3%) and other people they know (word of mouth, 60.5%). 86.8% chose at least one of these two options.

FIGURE 2
Preferred source of information about preschools



Demographic differences occur for the social media and newspaper information channels. Social media is the only channel that varies by gender; it is consulted by 46.6% of females but only 29.4% of males.

Those 65+ are less likely to use social media for information about preschools, while those 15-34 are less likely to use newspapers. There are no significant differences attributable to location for any channels. Respondents who choose "Other" mostly mention asking daycare providers, which could also fall under "word of mouth."

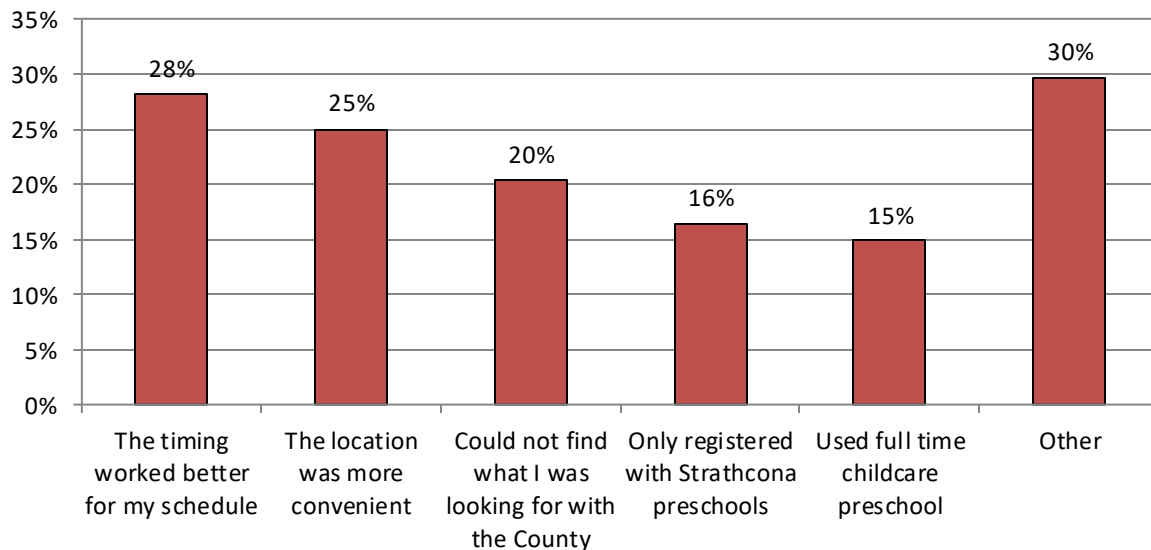
All respondents were then asked what reasons would motivate them to choose one preschool program over another, if COVID-19 was not a factor. Responses were open-ended, but the following themes emerged:

- Cost
- Timing (time of day/full day)
- Location
- Specific programming (academics, physical activity, other languages, etc.)

- Philosophy (Reggio, Montessori, religious affiliation, etc.)
- Employee qualifications
- Employee attitudes/engagement with children
- Class sizes
- Reputation/recommendations from others

All respondents were then asked if they chose a preschool offered by an organization other than Strathcona County, and if so, why. A summary of these options is presented in Figure 3, below. A majority of respondents (51.6%) chose one of the first three options (timing, locations, couldn't find what I was looking for with the County), and these options were chosen at similar rates to each other.

FIGURE 2
If you chose a non-Strathcona County preschool, why?



There were no significant demographic differences observed in terms of gender, age, or location. Females were slightly more likely to note timing concerns, while males were slightly more likely to note location concerns. Respondents age 65+ were less likely to note timing concerns. Rural residents were slightly more likely to note timing concerns than urban residents.

Responses in the “Other” category tended to note language options (Spanish, Ukrainian, French), concerns regarding children with developmental delays, or a preference for schools with an emphasis on physical activity (the Salto Gymnastics Preschool was mentioned by name).

Finally, respondents were asked if they had any other comments to share. Responses were open-ended, but fit into the following categories:

- Happiness with the current Strathcona County preschool programs
- Desire for more programming
 - Options for Friday, weeknight or weekend programs that parents can attend along with children
 - More variety/options for programming
 - Options for special needs children
- Disappointment that Strathcona County preschools closed for COVID when other preschools stayed open.
- Dislike of Strathcona County preschools and belief that the County should be less involved or not involved at all in preschools
- Desire for government subsidies to make preschool affordable or free for everyone