

LESSONS FROM THE ILLINOIS PARENT SURVEY PANEL

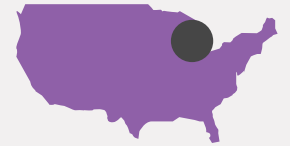
Illinois Action for Children is a nonprofit dedicated to improving the lives of families and children through early childhood care and education services, programs, and advocacy in Illinois. We have partnered with the RAPID Survey Project, based in the Stanford Center on Early Childhood, to hear directly from Illinois families with young children about their experiences, needed supports, and what's going well. Illinois Action for Children will use this data to inform its policy and advocacy initiatives.

Parents have many hopes and dreams for their children, especially regarding their social and cognitive development

Their responses to open-ended questions reveal the top skills that parents say their children need to be prepared for kindergarten include:

- **Social emotional and behavioral skills.** For example, forming good relationships and learning how to express their emotions.
- **Communication and speech skills.** For example, growing their vocabulary, speaking in full sentences, and improving pronunciation.
- **Cognitive skills.** For example, learning their shapes, numbers, and the alphabet.

ILLINOIS ACTION
FOR CHILDREN
Chicago, IL



About the panel

Illinois Action for Children worked with local partners to recruit parents with young children to participate in repeated surveys over 18 months. The findings represent 419 parents with young children across 34 Illinois counties who shared their experiences with material hardship, family well-being, child care, and more.

High cost of living and low wages make it difficult for families to pay for basic needs

Families indicated that they are having difficulty paying for one or more of these basic needs: utilities, housing, baby-specific materials (e.g., diapers, baby formula), food, child care, wellness activities, and healthcare, respectively.

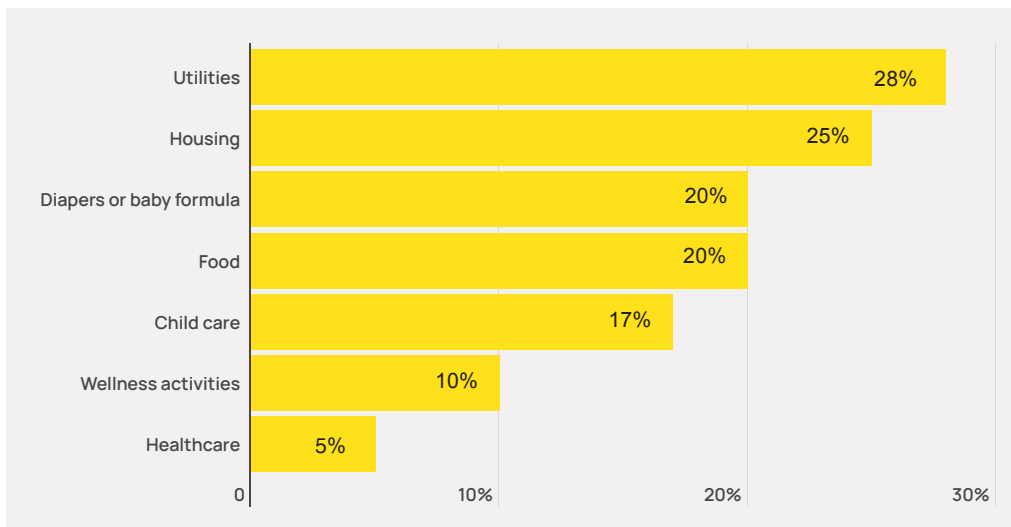
Furthermore, Latinx families are 5 times more likely and Black families are 4 times more likely than white parents to have a hard or very hard time paying for basic needs.

Parents' biggest challenges

"Financially making it day by day. The cost of living is extreme, and my money isn't enough to cover all my bills."

Parent in Cook County

Basic needs that are hardest to pay for, all participants



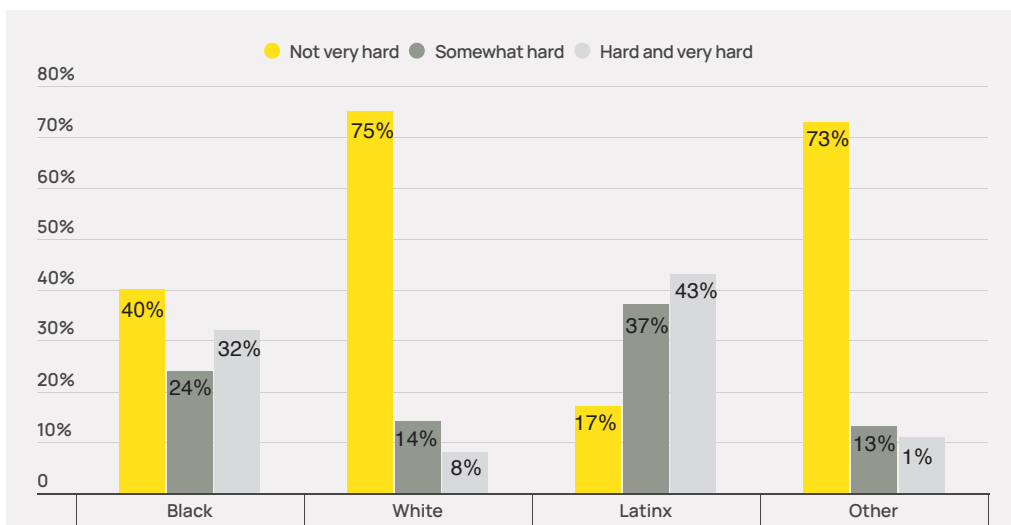
"Staying financially stable and helping my son through his speech delays."

Parent in Kane County

"Making enough money to pay for everything and having enough time in the day to enjoy my children."

Parent in Cook County

Hardship paying for basic needs, by race/ethnicity



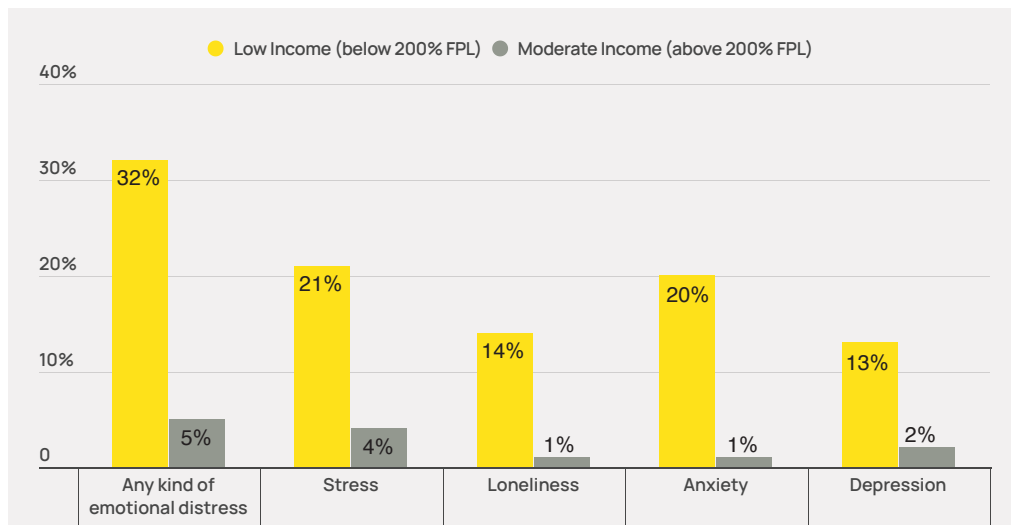


Lower-income parents are much more likely to experience emotional distress than moderate-income parents

Lower-income parents are also more likely to report concerns with behavior and emotional distress symptoms in their children. These findings are consistent with RAPID’s national data, which show

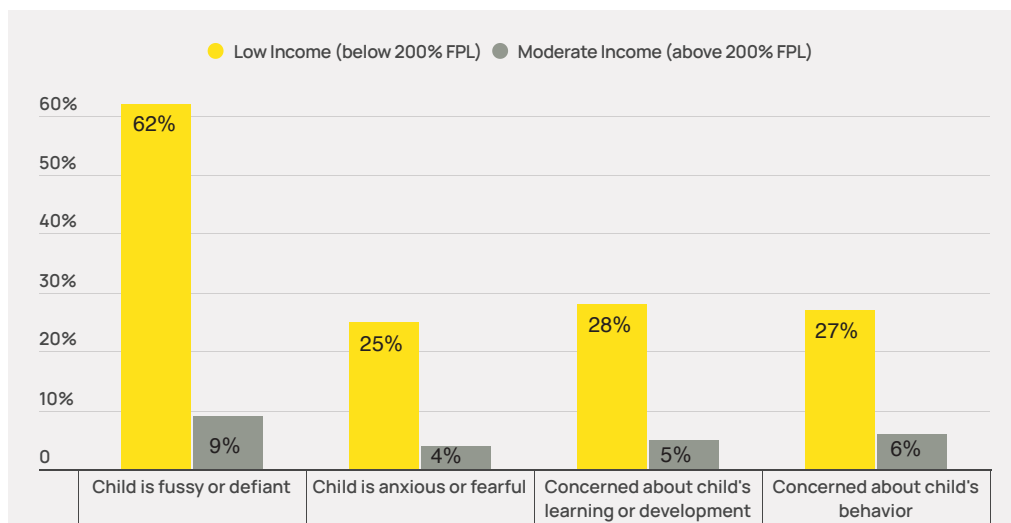
that experiencing material hardship is associated with increased emotional distress among parents—which then drives increases in children’s emotional distress.

Parents experiencing emotional distress, by income level



Note: We ask parents about their experiences with four symptoms of emotional distress: stress, loneliness, anxiety, and depression.

Children’s behavior and emotional distress, by family income level



Note: We ask parents to report how much the phrase “fussy or defiant” and “too fearful or anxious” fit their child’s behavior.

What parents want policymakers to know

“We all need help financially. Rent keeps getting raised, food keeps getting raised, everything goes up in price except for the money we make.”
Parent in Will County

“Provide more funding and have more licensed teachers in daycares to accommodate kids with special needs.”
Parent in Cook County

“Single moms are trying to find a way to raise our kids in a world where expenses are growing exponentially.”
Parent in Kane County

“For them to continue funding Head Start because it’s the reason I can go to school and work to provide.”
Parent in Kane County

Parents reported that government assistance, family support, and the love of their children are helping them the most

Their responses to open-ended questions reveal the top supports that have been helping parents include:

- Their own family's support, both financial and emotional, have been helpful.
- Government-supported food assistance programs, such as WIC and SNAP*, have been helpful.
- Family faith, community organizations, having employment, and child care, have all been helpful.

*Note: The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a federal nutrition program that provides nutritious foods, information on healthy eating, and referrals to healthcare to low-income women and their children. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a federal nutrition assistance program for low-income families.

What is helping families the most?

"We have a huge family. We are all very close and help each other. We would be lost without them."

Parent in Will County

"A big help for us right now is being able to get formula for my baby through WIC. Sometimes we use the food pantries. That helps us a lot."

Parent in Kane County

"The love that we have for each other."

Parent in Cook County

Summary and next steps

Parents with young children in Illinois, and particularly Latinx and Black families, are finding it hard to pay for basic needs. Parents with lower income are also most likely to report struggling with emotional distress, both in themselves and their children.

RAPID survey data has consistently revealed evidence of a chain reaction of hardship.

That is, as parents' experiences of hardship increase, they also experience more emotional distress (higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and loneliness), which, in turn, is associated with parents reporting increased emotional distress among their young children. There is also extensive evidence of the links between experiences of early adversity and poorer outcomes in terms of health, education, well-being, and income later in life. Reports of families experiencing both material hardship and symptoms of emotional distress are concerning and show that this chain reaction is still very much in play.

Parents say financial and emotional support, including assistance programs such as SNAP and WIC, are most helpful during hard times. Optimism for their children's future also fills them with hope. Illinois Action for Children aims to make these findings available to advocacy organizations and policymakers who are in the best place to make needed changes for these families.

Data presented in this community profile are based on the first survey conducted through the Illinois Parent Survey Panel. Analyses are based on responses collected from 419 households with young children between July 2023 and October 2023. A second survey was conducted in November 2023 and a third and fourth survey are planned for 2024.

Illinois Action for Children will continue to share survey data, communicate key findings, and elevate parent and community voices. [Learn more about the Illinois Parent Survey Panel.](#)

Parents' hopes for their children

“To start to pronounce words more, identify colors and numbers, and become fully potty-trained.”

Parent in Cook County

“To continue to thrive socially and meet her milestones on time or early.”

Parent in Lake County

“I hope he starts walking and talking and completing his baby milestones. I'm grateful he is such a healthy and happy baby.”

Parent in Cook County

The RAPID Survey Project partners with cities, counties, and states to gather timely and relevant data about the experiences of parents and caregivers of young children across the U.S. The findings reveal snapshots about communities and uplift parent voices to inform local policies and programs, and also support understanding national trends and their implications for all families. [Learn more about our work and where we conduct surveys.](#)