

How Jews Choose:
A Study of Early Childhood Decisions
Among Jewish Parents in Greater Boston

A Research Study Report of Combined Jewish Philanthropies

Prepared by:

Mark I. Rosen and Heidi Schwartz

Independent Researchers

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All of the contents and analyses included here are the sole responsibility of Combined Jewish Philanthropies and the authors.

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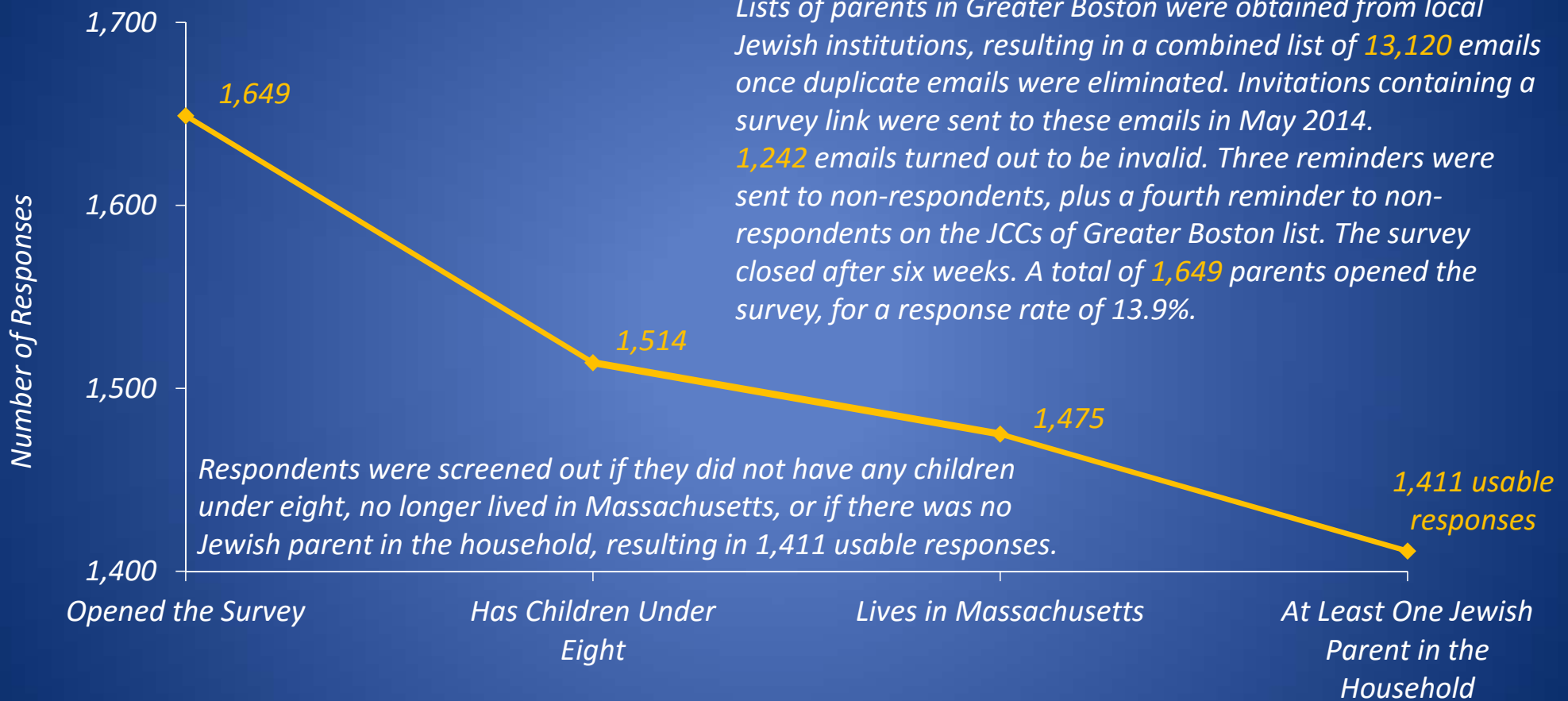
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Study Purpose and Design

- To obtain a better understanding of the decision factors that families raising Jewish children in Greater Boston take into consideration when choosing a preschool
- Data obtained through:
 - focus groups conducted with parents in geographic areas of interest
 - an Internet survey of households living in the CJP catchment area with at least one child under the age of 8 and at least one Jewish parent

Survey Responses

Lists of parents in Greater Boston were obtained from local Jewish institutions, resulting in a combined list of **13,120** emails once duplicate emails were eliminated. Invitations containing a survey link were sent to these emails in May 2014. **1,242** emails turned out to be invalid. Three reminders were sent to non-respondents, plus a fourth reminder to non-respondents on the JCCs of Greater Boston list. The survey closed after six weeks. A total of **1,649** parents opened the survey, for a response rate of 13.9%.



Respondents were screened out if they did not have any children under eight, no longer lived in Massachusetts, or if there was no Jewish parent in the household, resulting in 1,411 usable responses.

Study Purpose and Design

Profile of Parents Who Responded to the Survey

Preschool Choice

- Choices Made by Respondents

- What Parents are Looking for in a Preschool

- Preschool Schedules and Household Employment Patterns

- Geography

- Cost

- Interest in Judaism

- Reasons for Not Choosing a Jewish Preschool

Preschool Perceptions

- How Parents Learn About Preschools

- How Parents Felt About Their Jewish Preschool

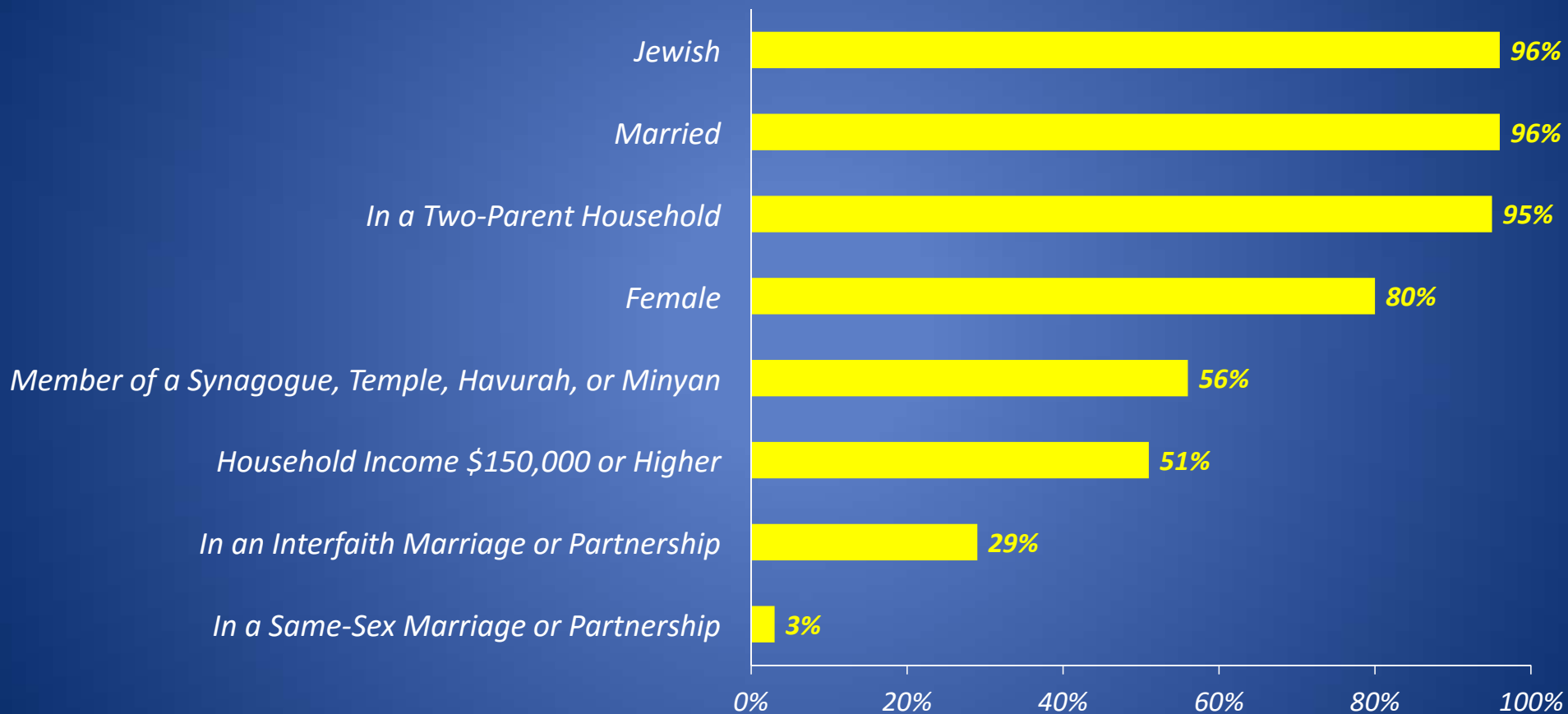
- Attracting Parents to Jewish Preschools

- Impact of Jewish Preschools on Parents

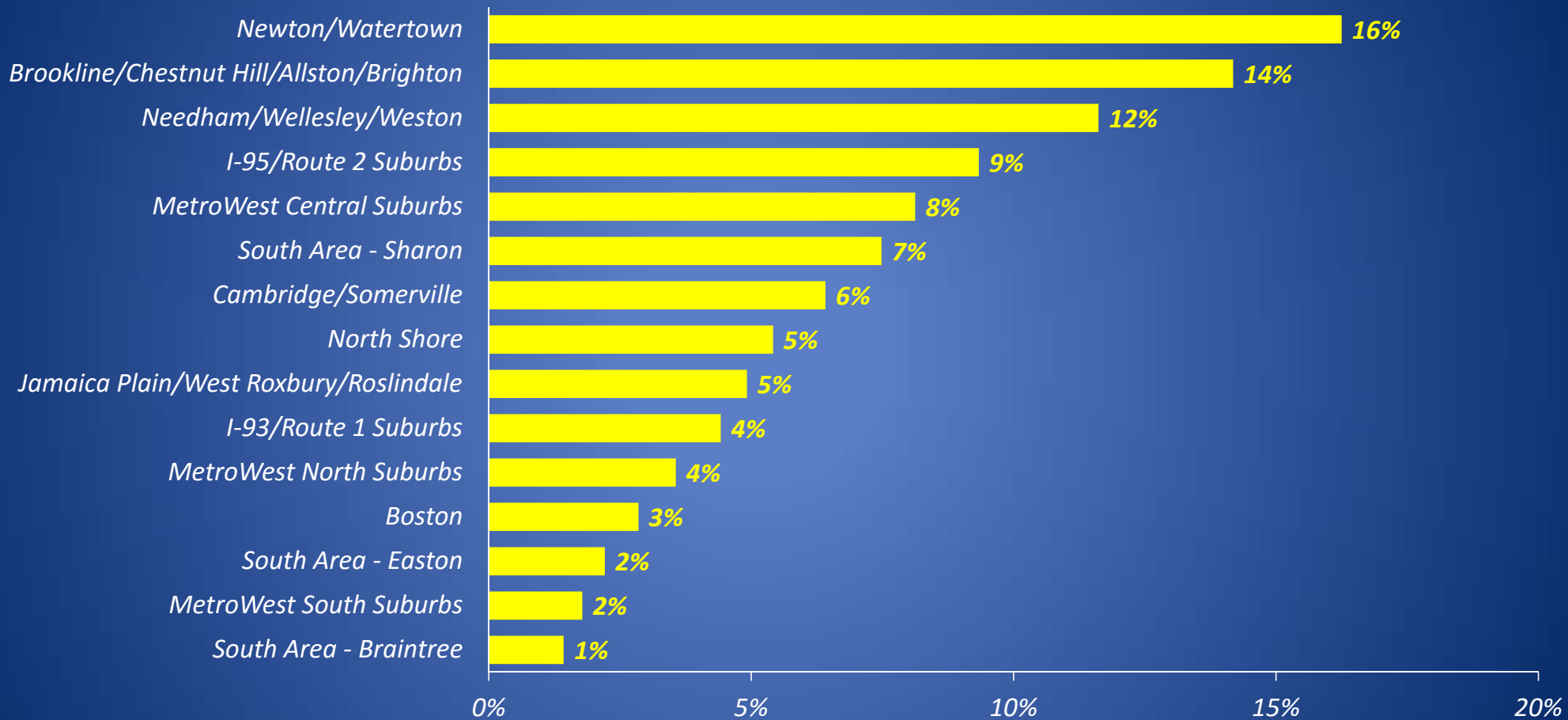
Connections and Community

Interfaith Families

Who Answered the Survey? A Snapshot of Responding Families



Where Responding Families Live



Observations: Respondents to the Survey

- Survey responses were suitable for studying how parents make preschool choices
 - 92 percent had already chosen a preschool
 - Parents from over 140 communities in Greater Boston responded to the survey
- To understand preschool choice, comparisons were made across four distinct groups:
 - Families that chose a Jewish preschool
 - Families that considered but did not choose a Jewish preschool
 - Families that did not consider a Jewish preschool
 - Families that had not yet chosen a preschool
- Respondents who received the survey link and responded to the survey invitation tended to be more connected and affiliated than the broader population of parents raising Jewish children in Greater Boston

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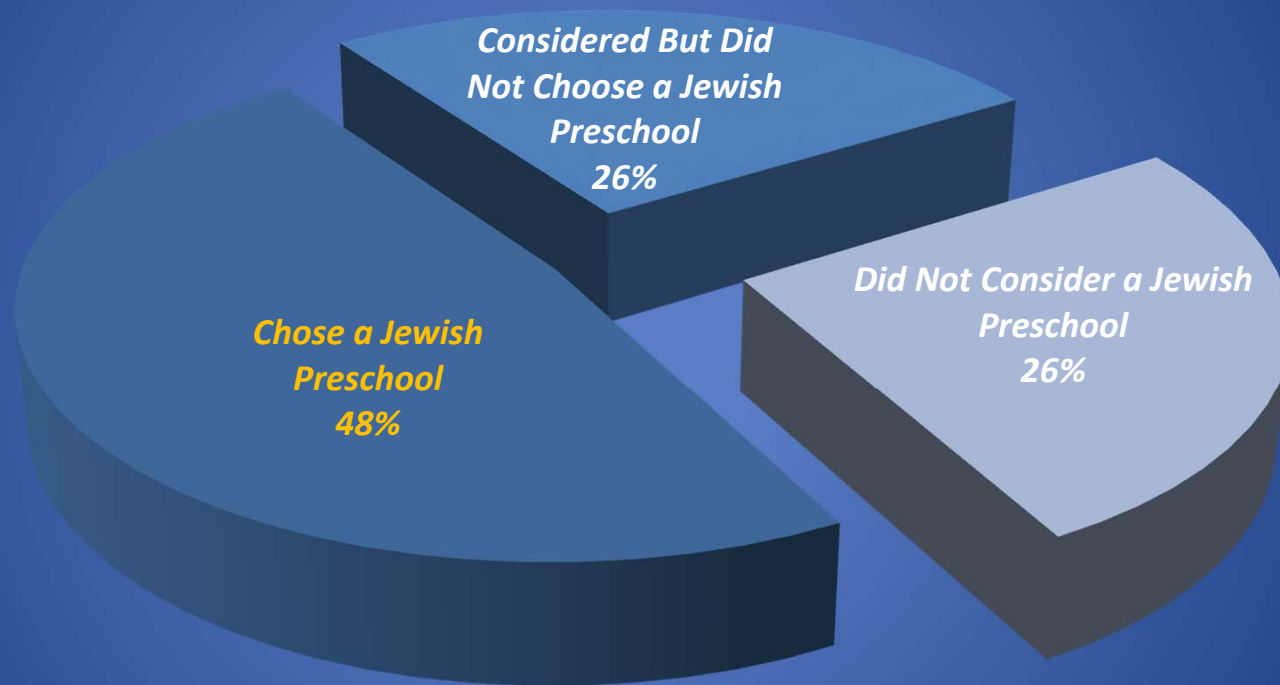
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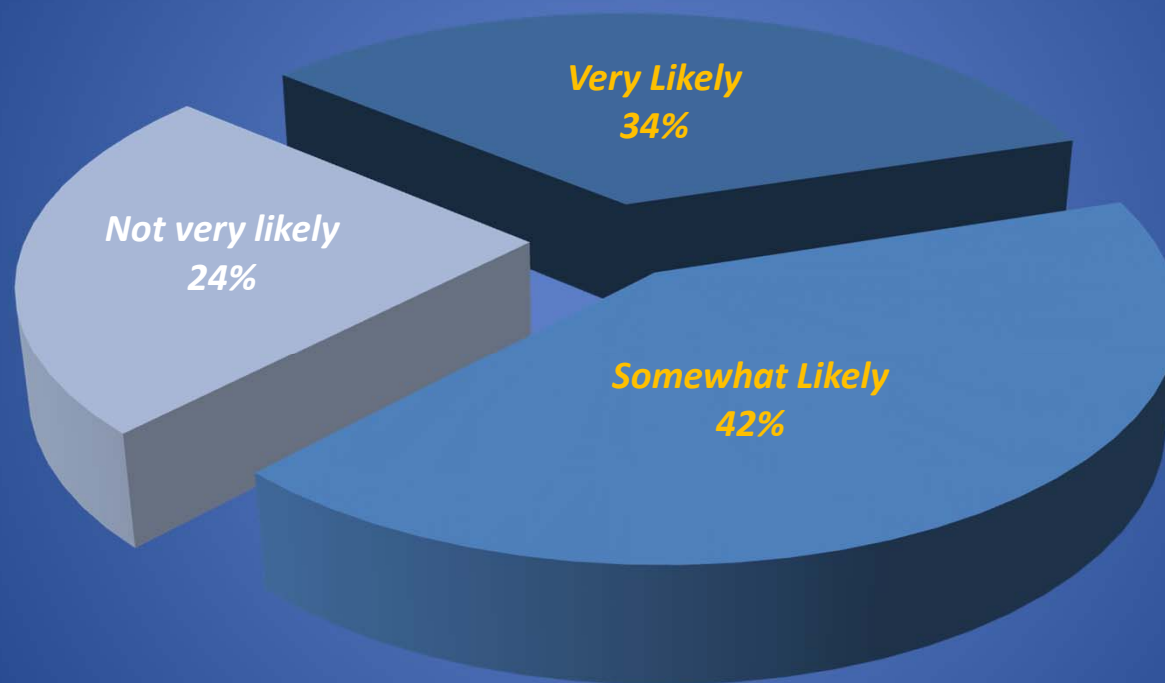
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Preschool Choices Among Responding Families Who Had Already Selected a Preschool



Based on responses from parents with children currently or previously enrolled

Likelihood of Choosing a Jewish Preschool Among Families That Had Not Yet Made a Preschool Choice



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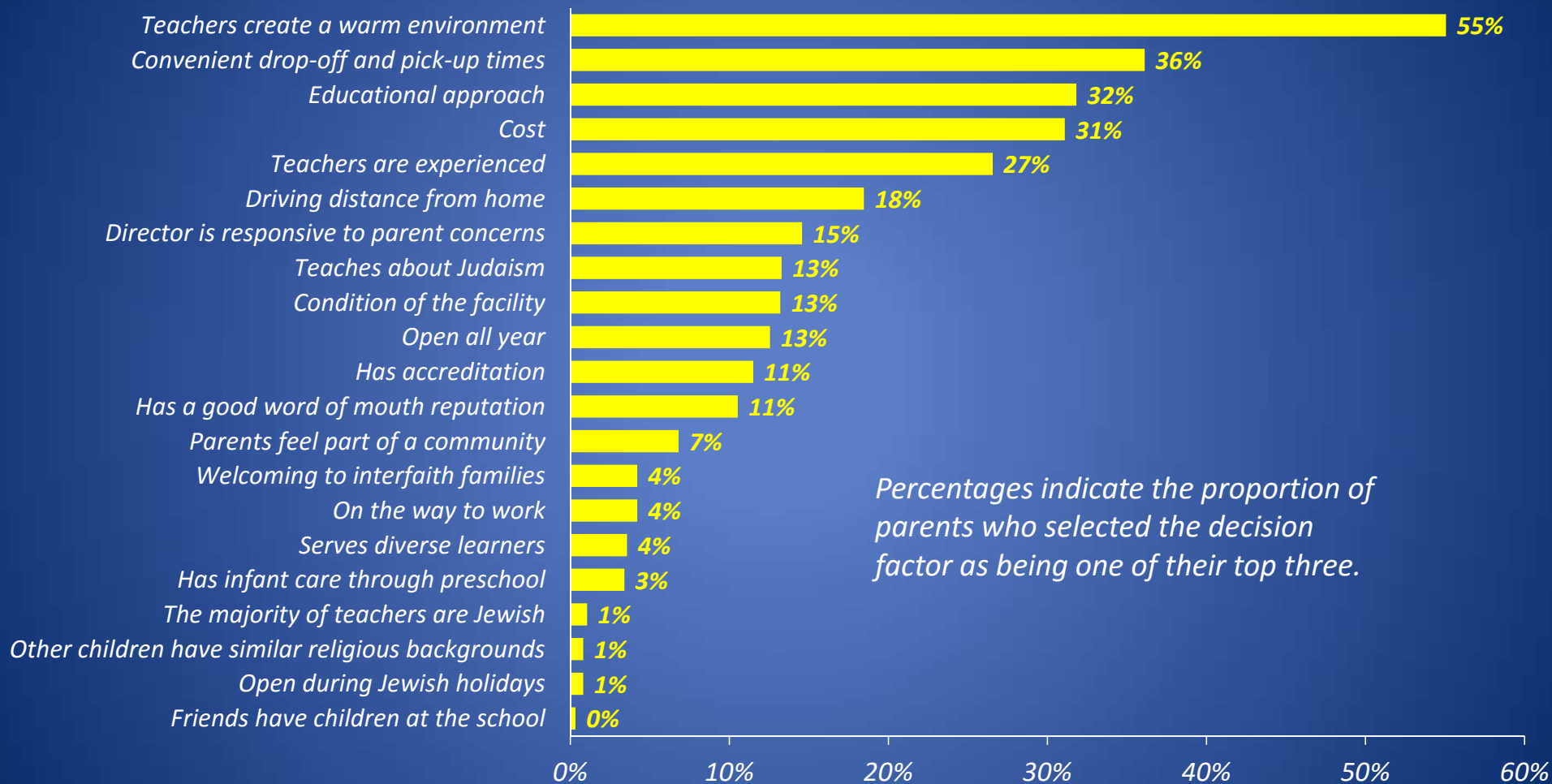
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Preschool Decision Factors - What Are Parents Looking For?



Percentages indicate the proportion of parents who selected the decision factor as being one of their top three.

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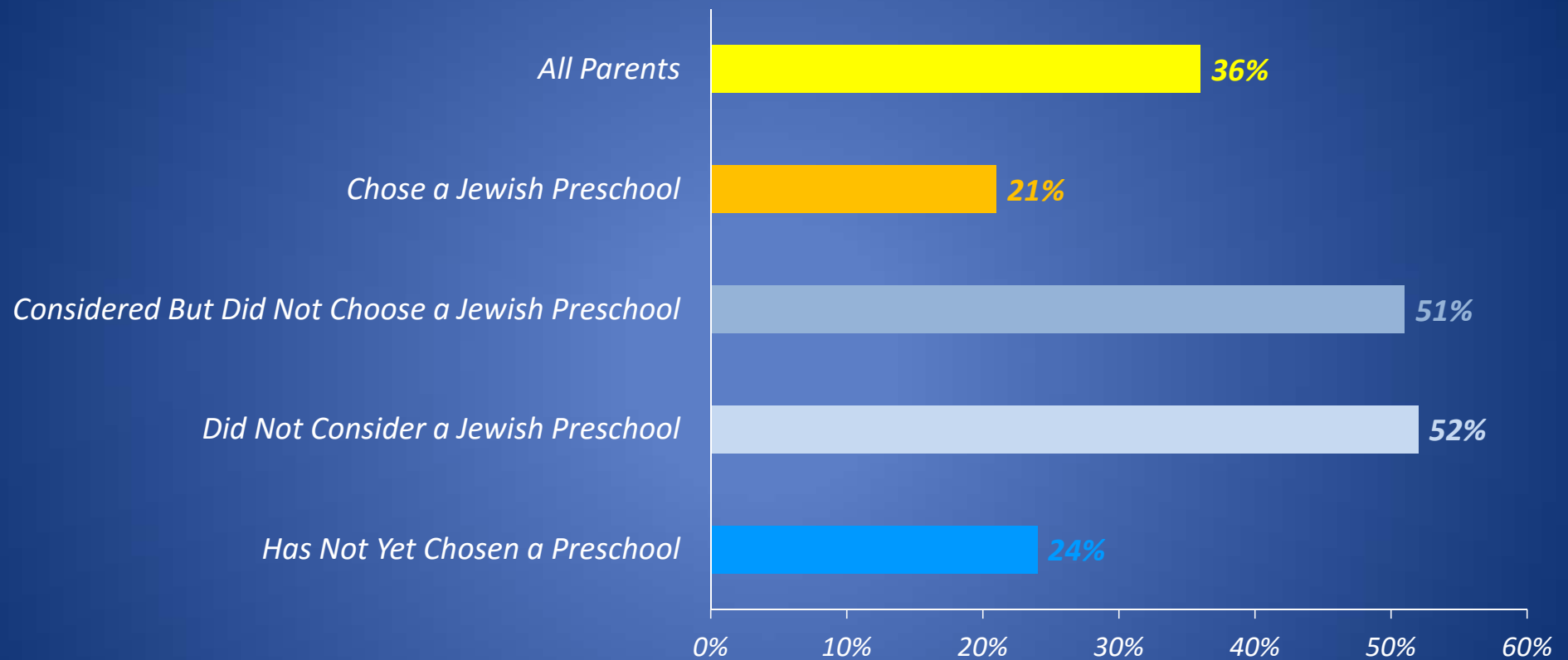
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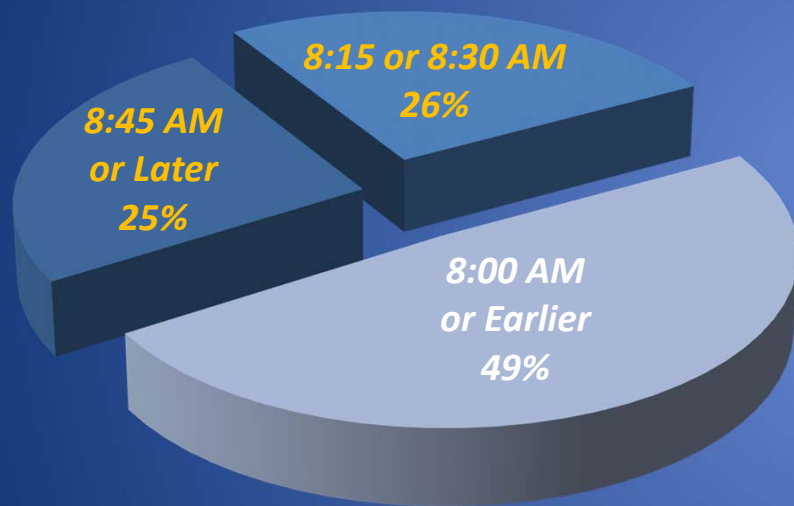
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Importance of “Convenient Drop-Off and Pick-Up Times”

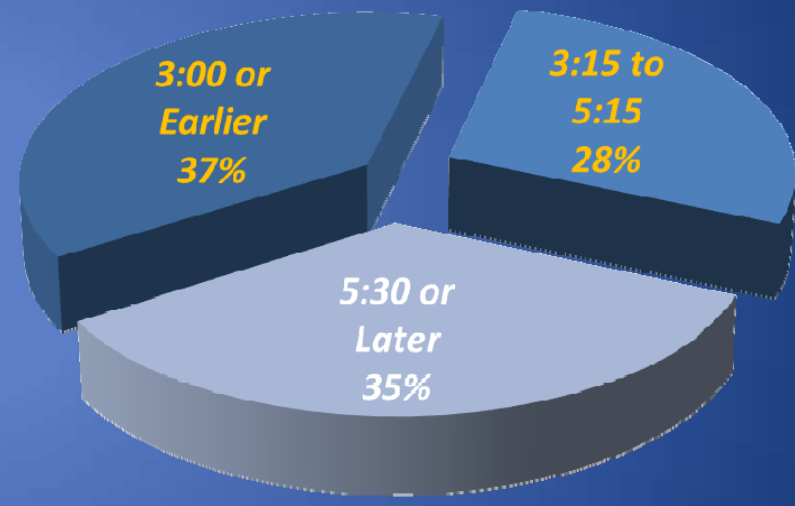


Percentages indicate the proportion of parents in each choice group who selected the decision factor as being one of their top three.

Preferences for Drop-Off and Pick-Up Times Among Parents

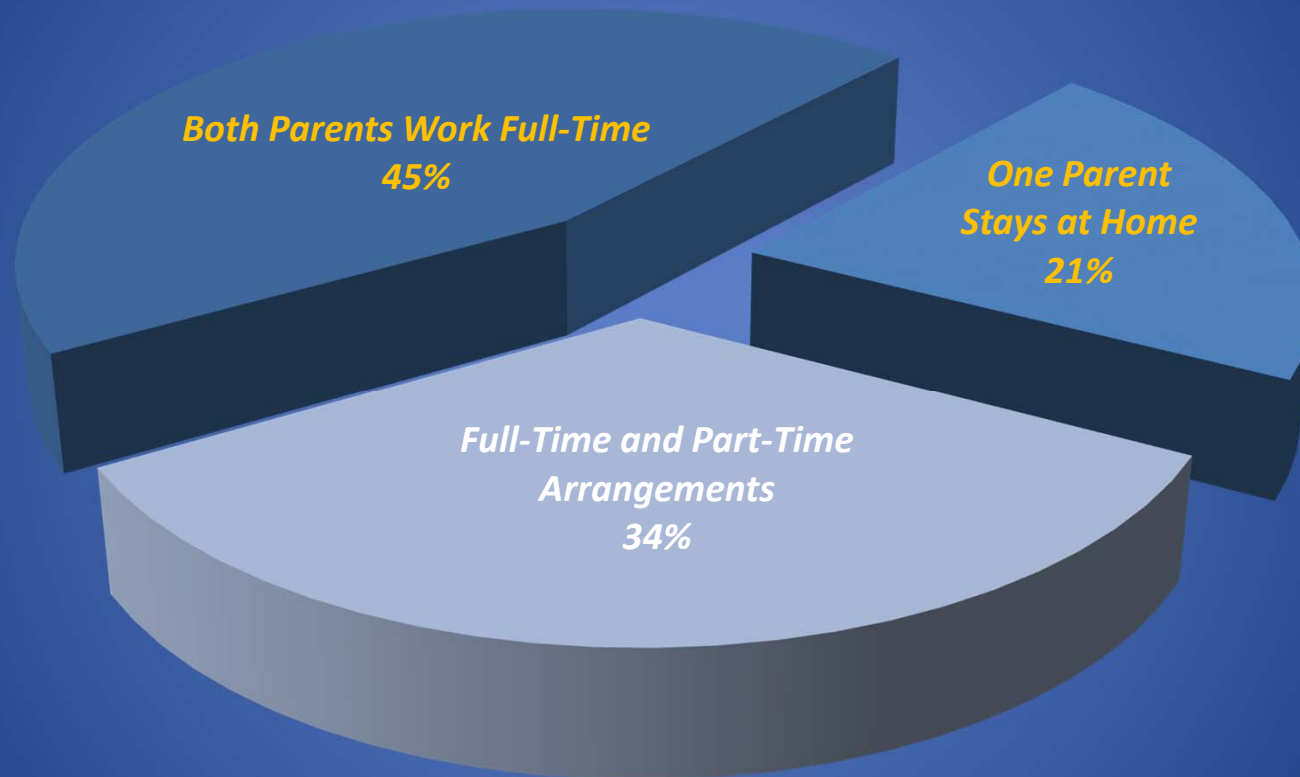


Drop-Off Time Preferences



Pick-Up Time Preferences

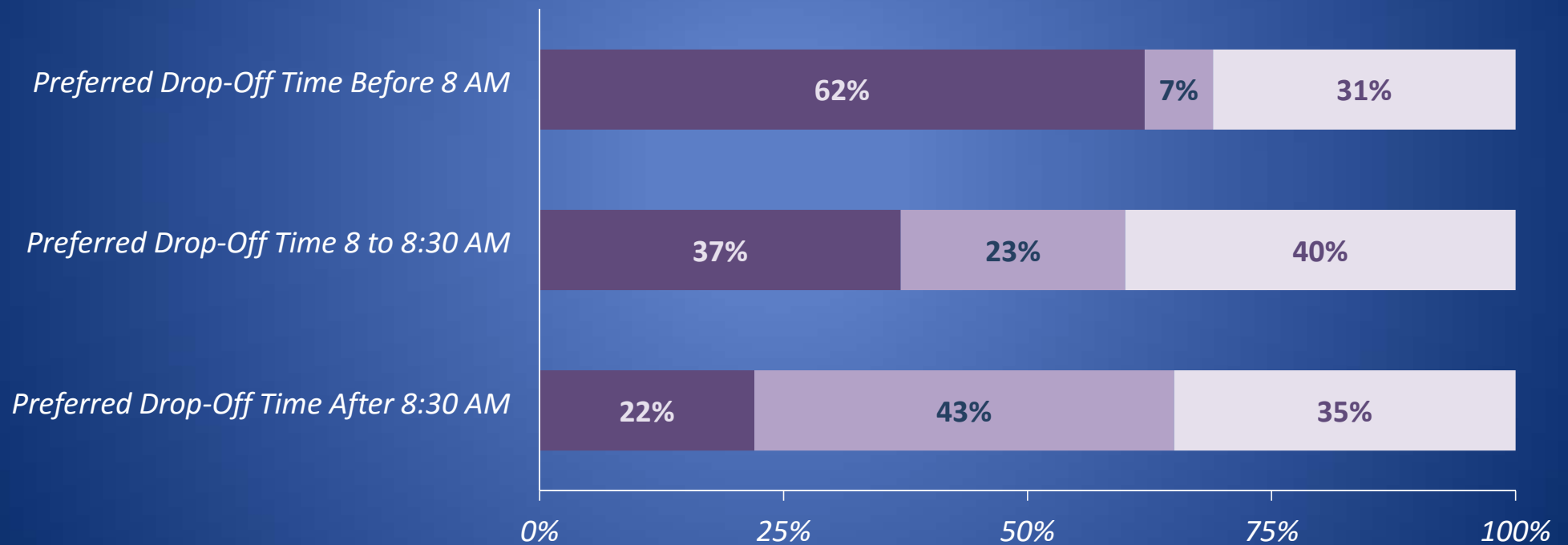
Household Employment



Based on responses from parents who were married or had a partner

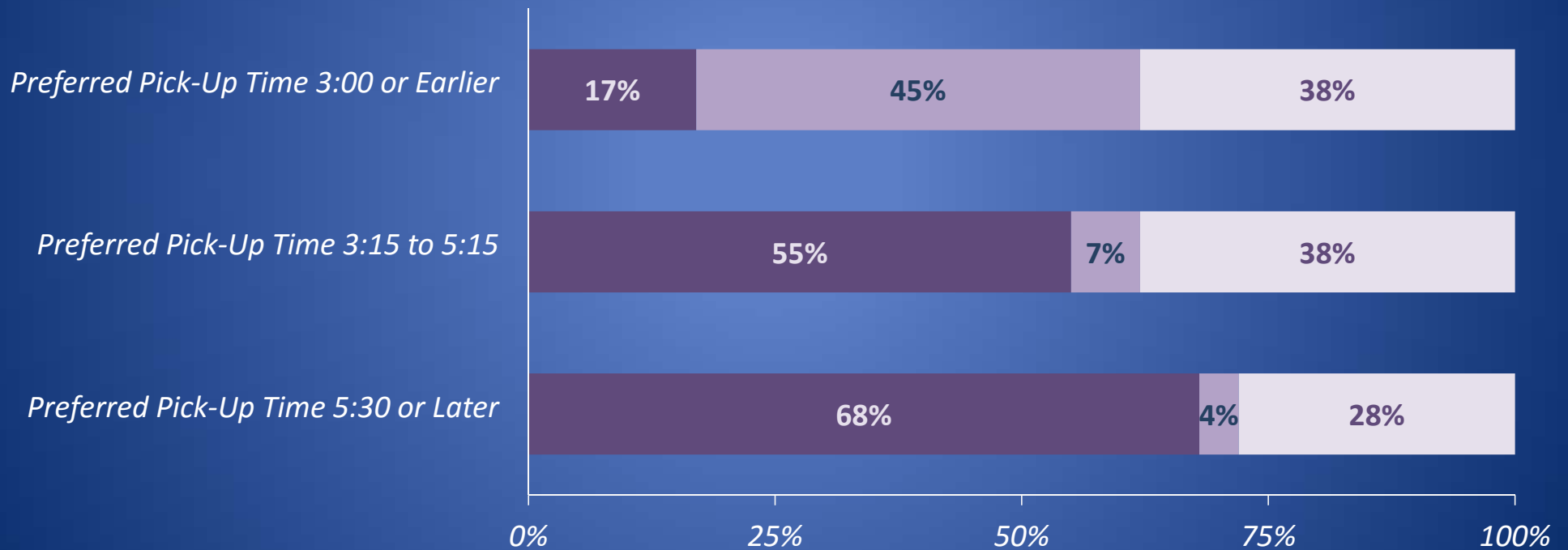
Household Employment and Preferred Drop-Off Times

- Both Parents Work Full-Time
- One Stay-at-Home Parent
- Other Employment Arrangements



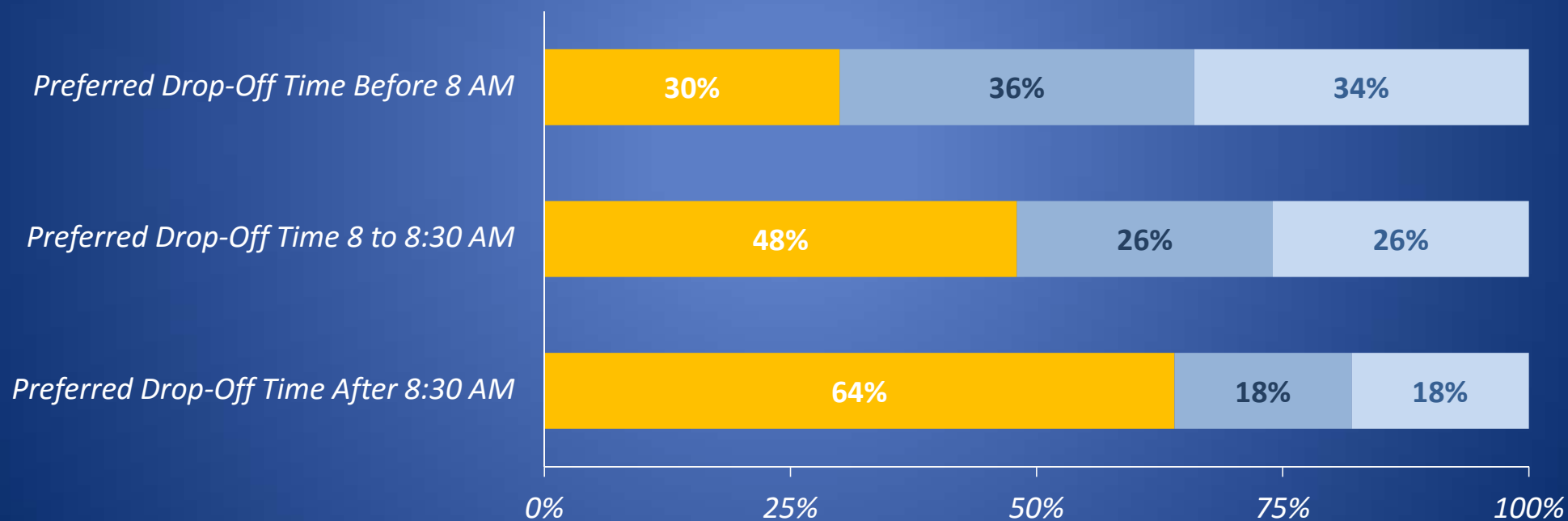
Household Employment and Preferred Pick-Up Times

- Both Parents Work Full-Time
- One Stay-at-Home Parent
- Other Employment Arrangements



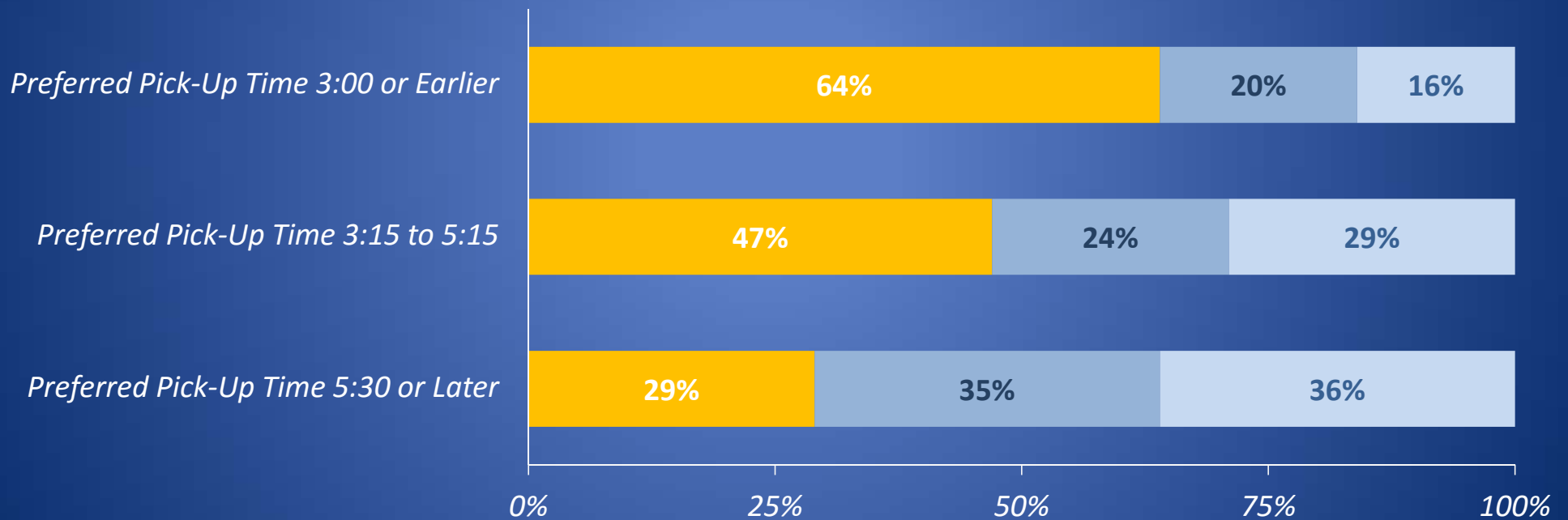
Parents Who Preferred Earlier Drop-Off Times Were Less Likely to Choose and Less Likely to Consider a Jewish Preschool

- Parents Chose a Jewish Preschool
- Parents Considered But Did Not Choose a Jewish Preschool
- Parents Did Not Consider a Jewish Preschool



Parents Who Preferred Later Pick-Up Times Were Less Likely to Choose and Less Likely to Consider a Jewish Preschool

- Parents Chose a Jewish Preschool
- Parents Considered But Did Not Choose a Jewish Preschool
- Parents Did Not Consider a Jewish Preschool



Observations: Preschool Choice and Preschool Schedules

- Almost half of all parents who responded to the survey preferred a drop-off time of 8:00 am or earlier, and just over a third preferred a pick-up time of 5:30 pm or later.
- Preferences for drop-off and pick-up times were strongly related to whether households have two parents working full-time.
- Whether parents chose or even considered a Jewish preschool was strongly related to their preferences for drop-off and pick-up times.
- Most Jewish preschools in Greater Boston do offer flexible options in the early morning and afternoon. In focus groups, a number of parents who had not selected a Jewish preschool indicated that despite these flexible options the Jewish preschools they considered did not have schedules that met their needs.
- Local Jewish preschool schedules appear to be incompatible with the needs of at least some families in which both parents work full-time. Parents indicated in focus groups they were disappointed that they were not able to enroll their child in a Jewish preschool and would have chosen one if a preschool with a suitable schedule had been available close to where they live.

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Profile of Parents Who Responded to the Survey

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Choices Made by Respondents

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Attracting Parents to Jewish Preschools

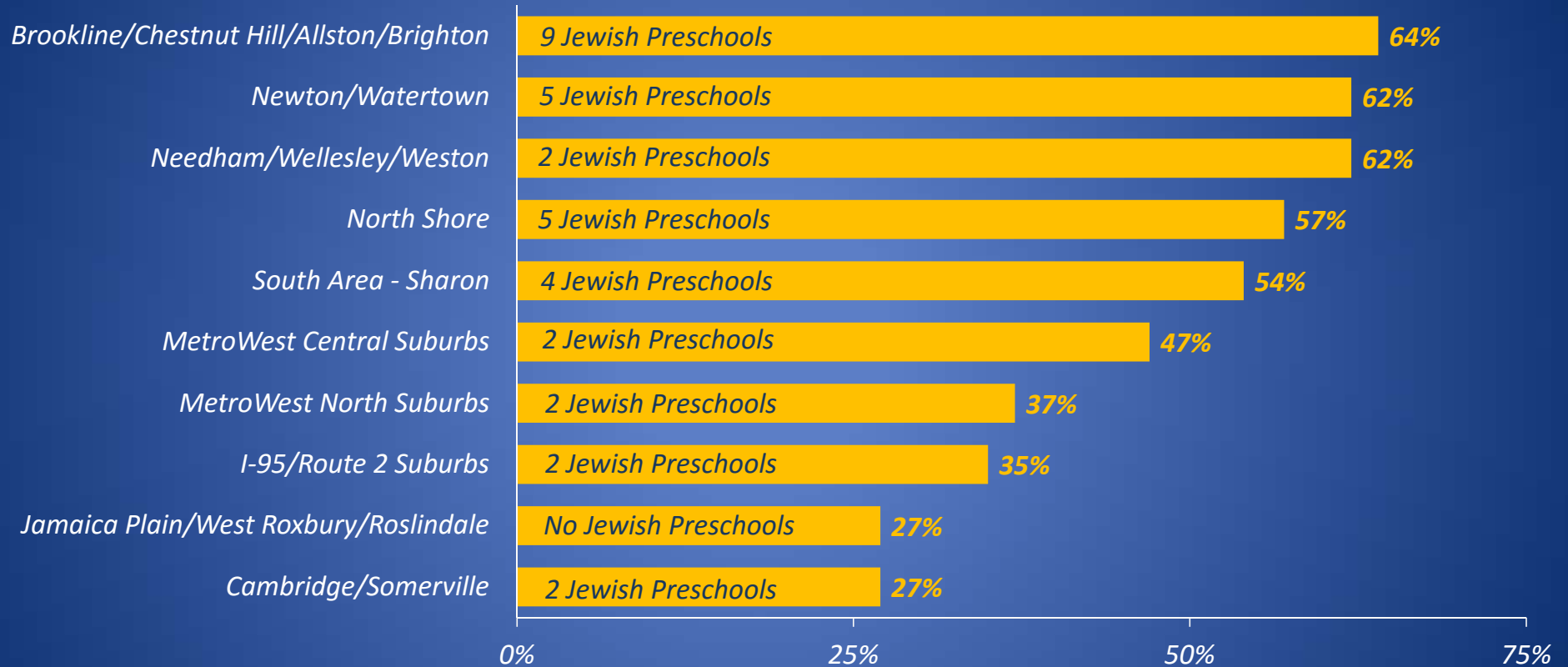
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Jewish Preschool Enrollment by Community

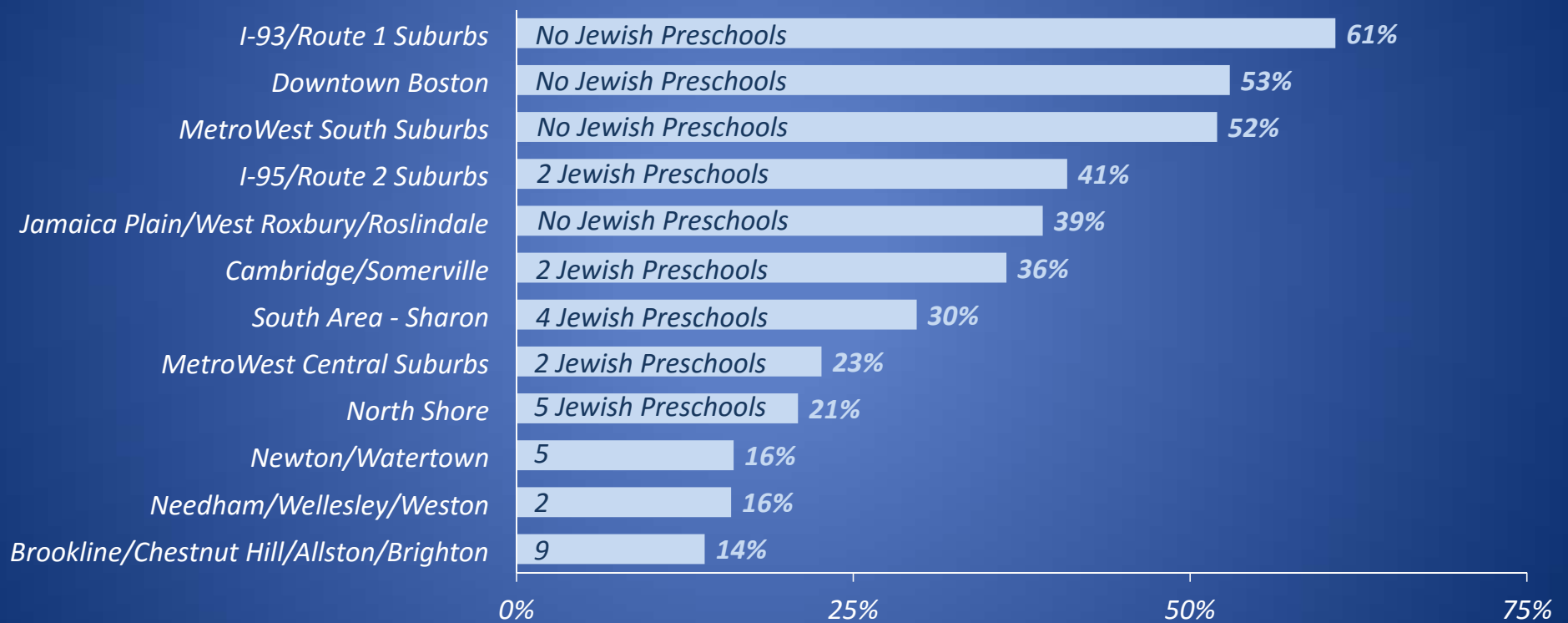
Percentage of responding families that chose a Jewish preschool (10 or more responses)



Note: Excludes MetroWest – South, South Area –Braintree, South Area –Easton, I-93/Route 1 suburbs because each had less than 10 responses in this category. One Jewish preschool with a Boston address that is located across the street from Brookline was categorized as a Brookline Jewish preschool.

Families That Did Not Consider a Jewish Preschool Tend to Live in Communities With Few or No Jewish Preschools

Percentage of responding families that did not consider a Jewish preschool (10 or more responses)



Note: Excludes MetroWest – North, South Area –Braintree, and South Area –Easton because each had less than 10 responses in this category

Observations: Preschool Choice and Geography

- Where a family lives is a significant factor in whether they choose a Jewish preschool. Families were much more likely to choose a Jewish preschool if it was close to where they lived. Families living in areas that are relatively far from Jewish preschools find that it is too inconvenient to travel long distances with small children twice a day.
- Prior research suggests that the geographic choices families make are determined by such factors as housing costs, number of children, income, quality of schooling, proximity to grandparents, and work commutes.
- Families who are strongly connected to Jewish life indicated in focus groups that they would have liked to live in places like Brookline or Newton where there are many Jewish families, but could not afford the housing costs. Instead, they purchased homes in areas of lower Jewish population density where there are few or no Jewish preschools.
- In areas where there are no Jewish preschools, programs that connect families with young children to the Jewish community and each other are especially important.
- A market study may be warranted to see if areas without a Jewish preschool could support one.

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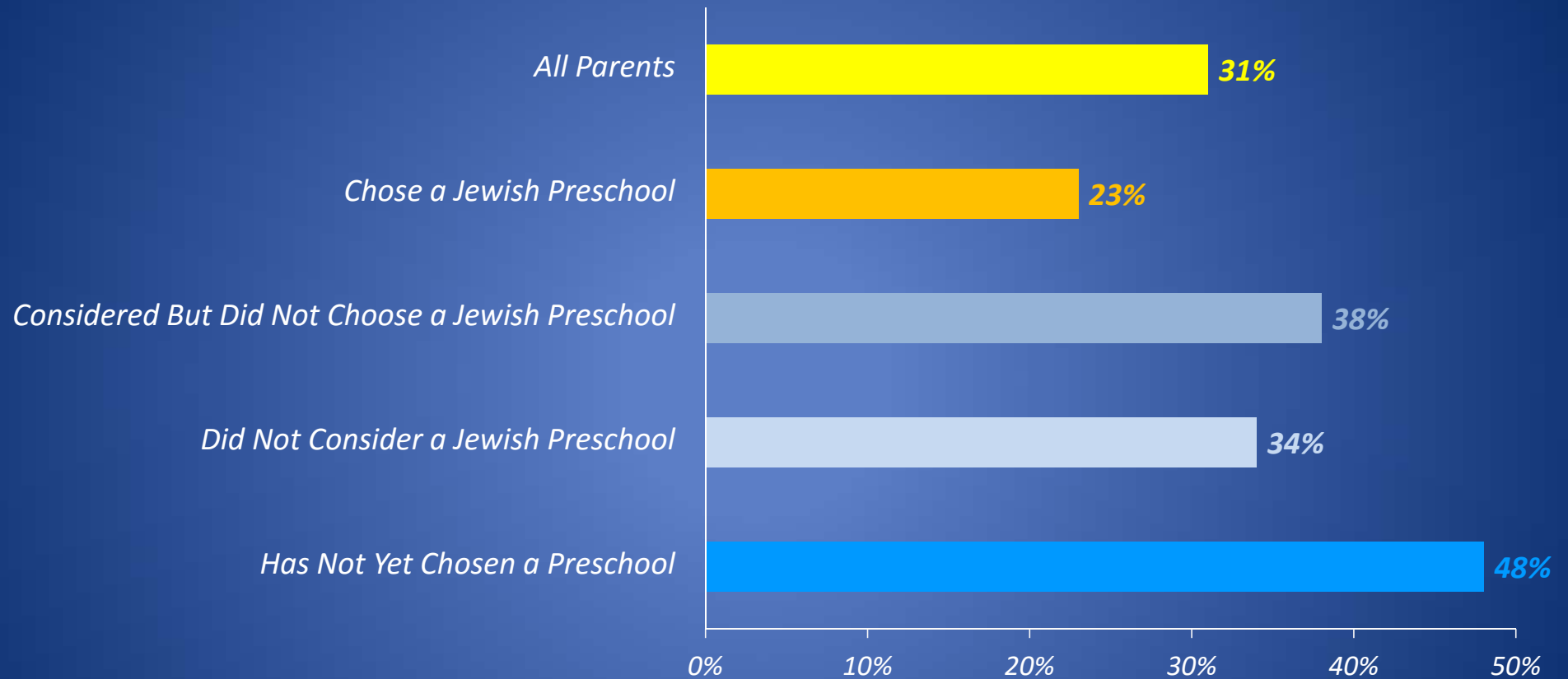
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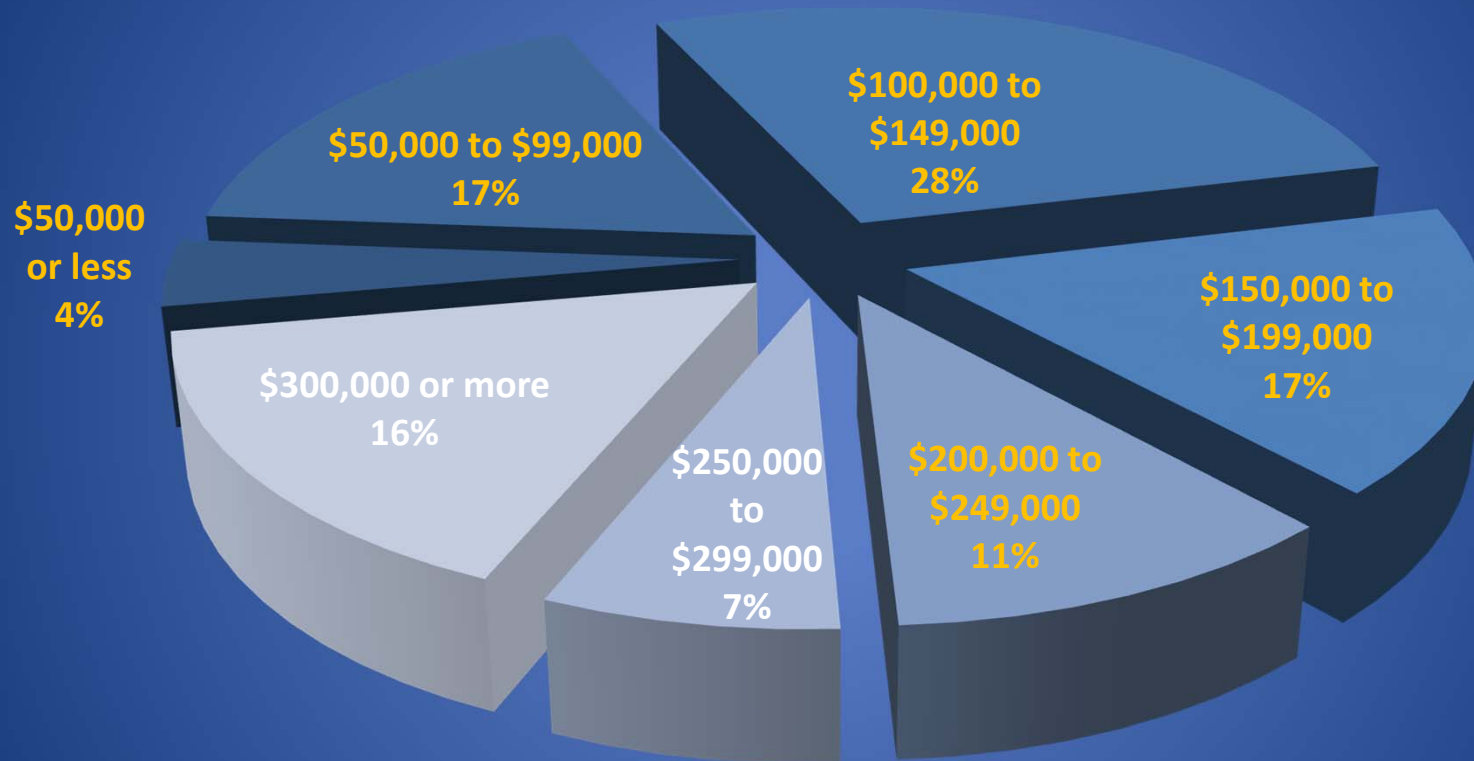
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Importance of “Cost”



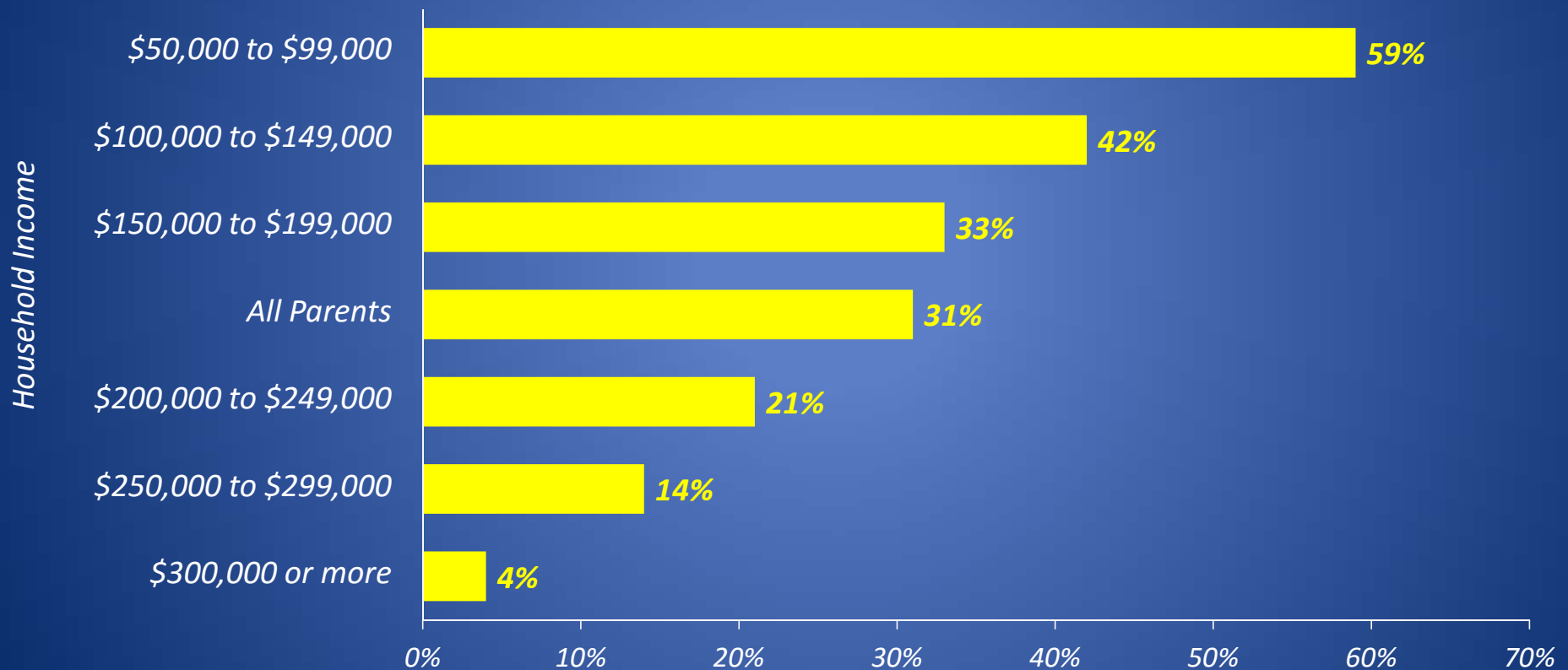
Percentages indicate the proportion of parents in each choice group who selected the decision factor as being one of their top three.

Household Incomes of Responding Parents

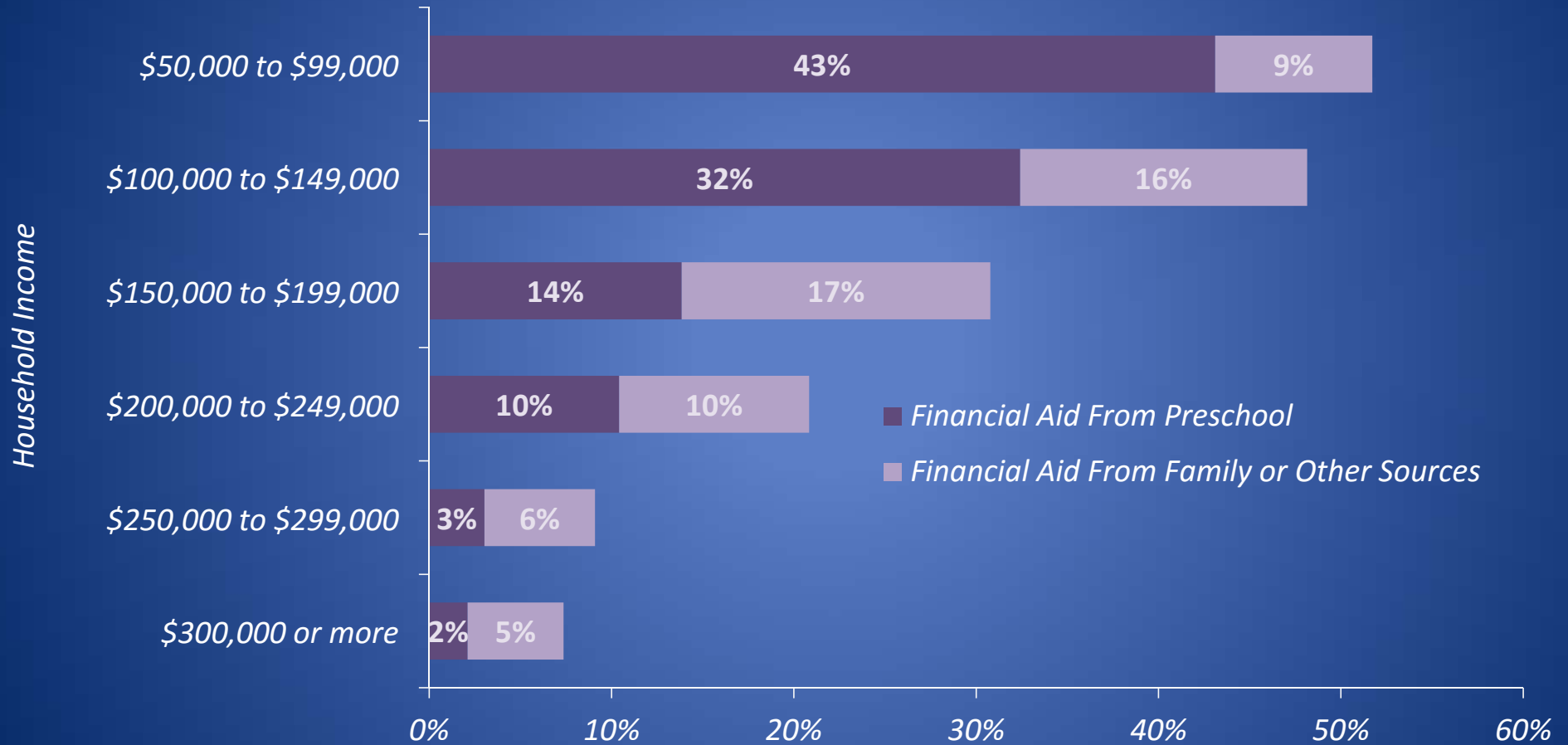


The Extent to Which Parents Consider Cost to Be Important When Choosing a Preschool Depends Upon Household Income

Percentage of responding families that chose cost as one of their top three decision factors

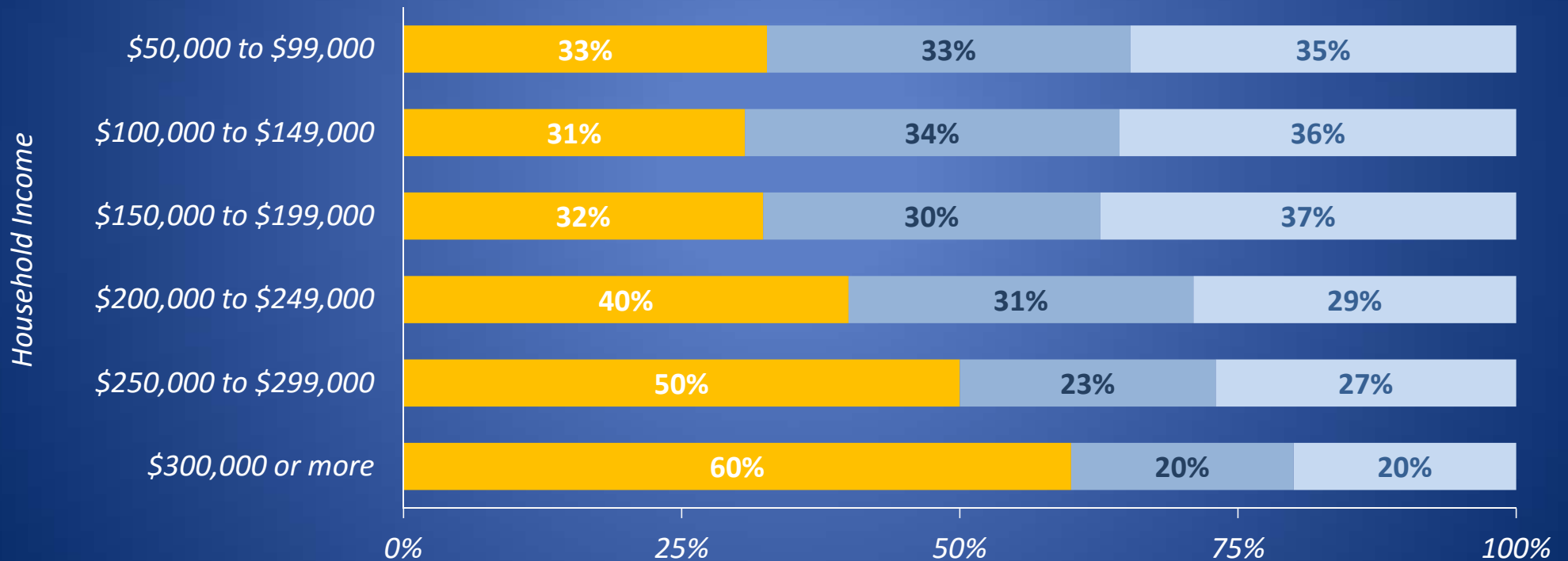


Recipients of Financial Aid Among Families Enrolled in a Jewish Preschool



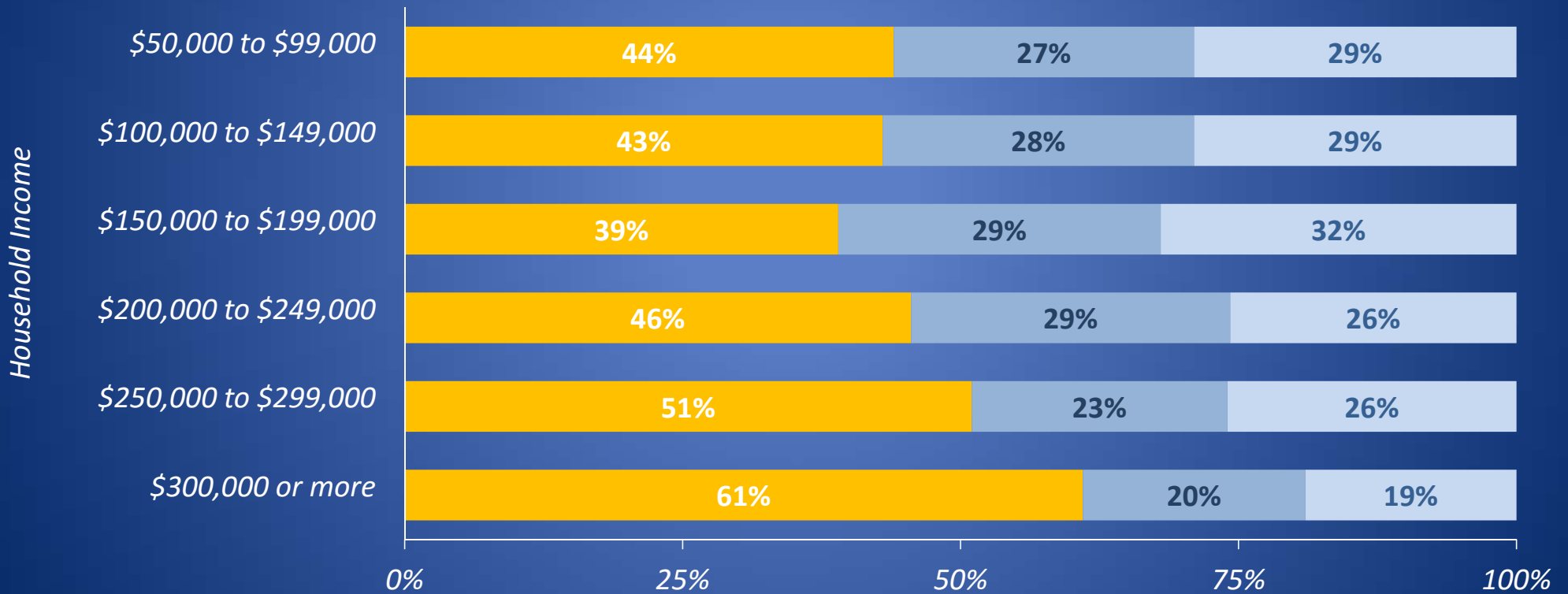
Household Income and Preschool Choice: Families That Did Not Receive Financial Aid

- Parents Chose a Jewish Preschool
- Parents Considered But Did Not Choose a Jewish Preschool
- Parents Did Not Consider a Jewish Preschool



Household Income and Preschool Choice: All Responding Families

- Parents Chose a Jewish Preschool
- Parents Considered But Did Not Choose a Jewish Preschool
- Parents Did Not Consider a Jewish Preschool



Observations: Cost, Preschool Choice, and Household Income

- The importance of cost to parents when making preschool choices is directly related to household income.
- Households at lower income levels are more likely to receive financial aid which supports the choice of a Jewish preschool.
- Households at higher income levels are more likely to choose a Jewish preschool irrespective of financial aid considerations.
- The relationship between income and preschool choice is complicated by geography.
 - Areas in Greater Boston where Jewish preschools are concentrated, such as Brookline and Newton, tend to be communities with more expensive housing. As a consequence, these communities have a greater percentage of higher income families.
 - These geographic considerations make it more difficult to draw conclusions about the impact of preschool costs on preschool choice. Parents at lower income levels may be less likely to choose Jewish preschools not just because of cost but because there may not be Jewish preschools nearby.

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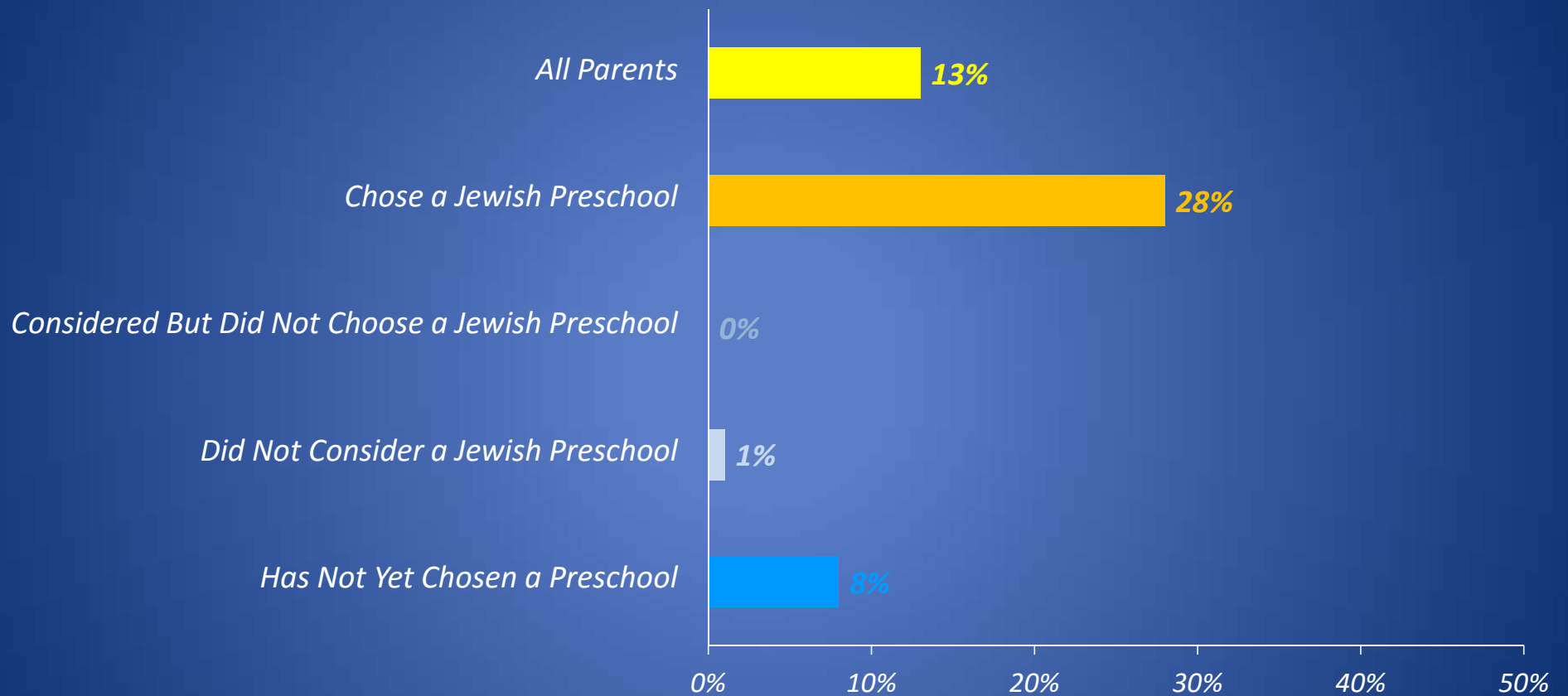
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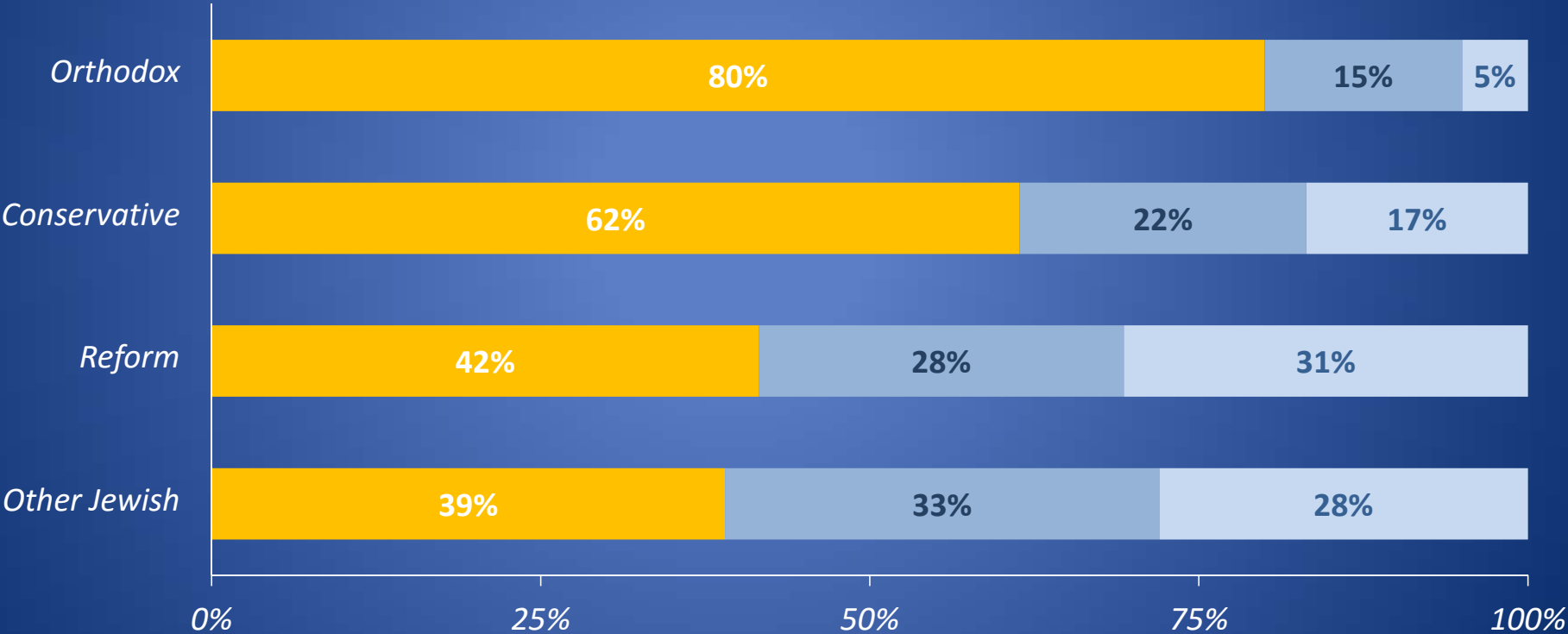
Importance of “Teaches About Judaism”



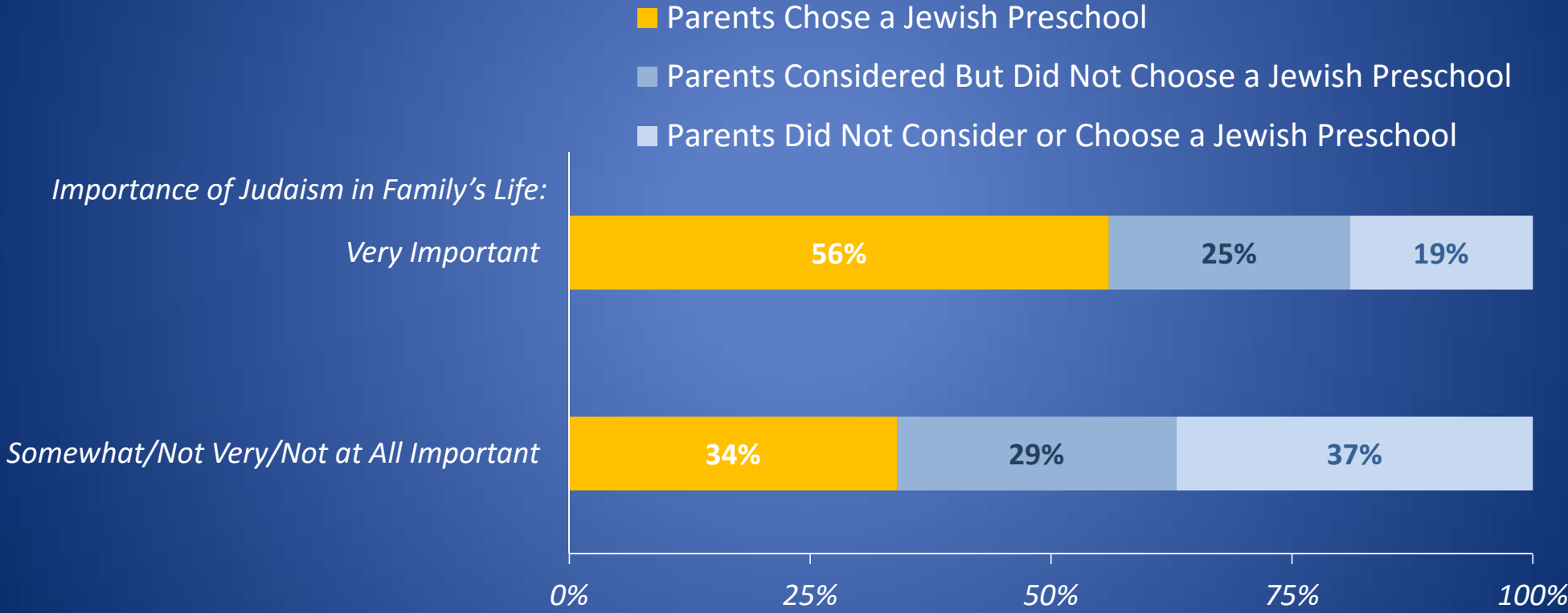
Percentages indicate the proportion of parents in each choice group who selected the decision factor as being one of their top three.

Impact of Denomination on Preschool Choice

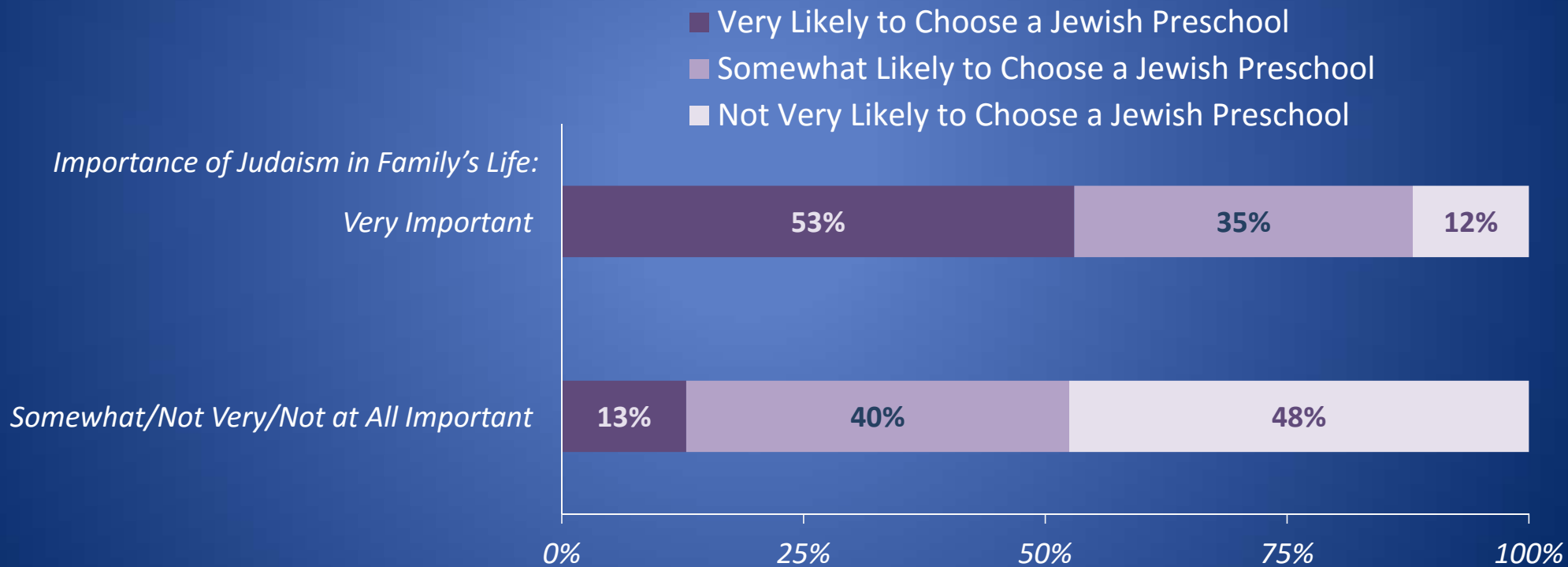
- Parents Chose a Jewish Preschool
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- Parents Did Not Consider a Jewish Preschool



Parents Who Considered Judaism to Be Very Important in Their Family's Life Were More Likely to Choose a Jewish Preschool



Parents Who Had Not Yet Chosen a Preschool Were Much More Likely to Indicate That They Would Choose a Jewish Preschool if They Considered Judaism to Be Very Important in Their Family's Life



Observations: Preschool Choice and Interest in Judaism

- Those who choose a Jewish preschool are much more likely to want their children to learn about Judaism than those who do not choose one
- A family's denominational identification and interest in Judaism are important factors in preschool choice
- Parents with strong Jewish identities are more likely to be receptive to recruiting efforts
- However, unless practical considerations such as schedules, location, and cost are workable for parents, even those with strong Jewish identities may not find it convenient to enroll their child in a Jewish preschool
- When Jewish preschools are attentive and responsive to parents' practical needs and attend to convenience factors, they may attract some parents who might not otherwise be inclined to choose a Jewish preschool

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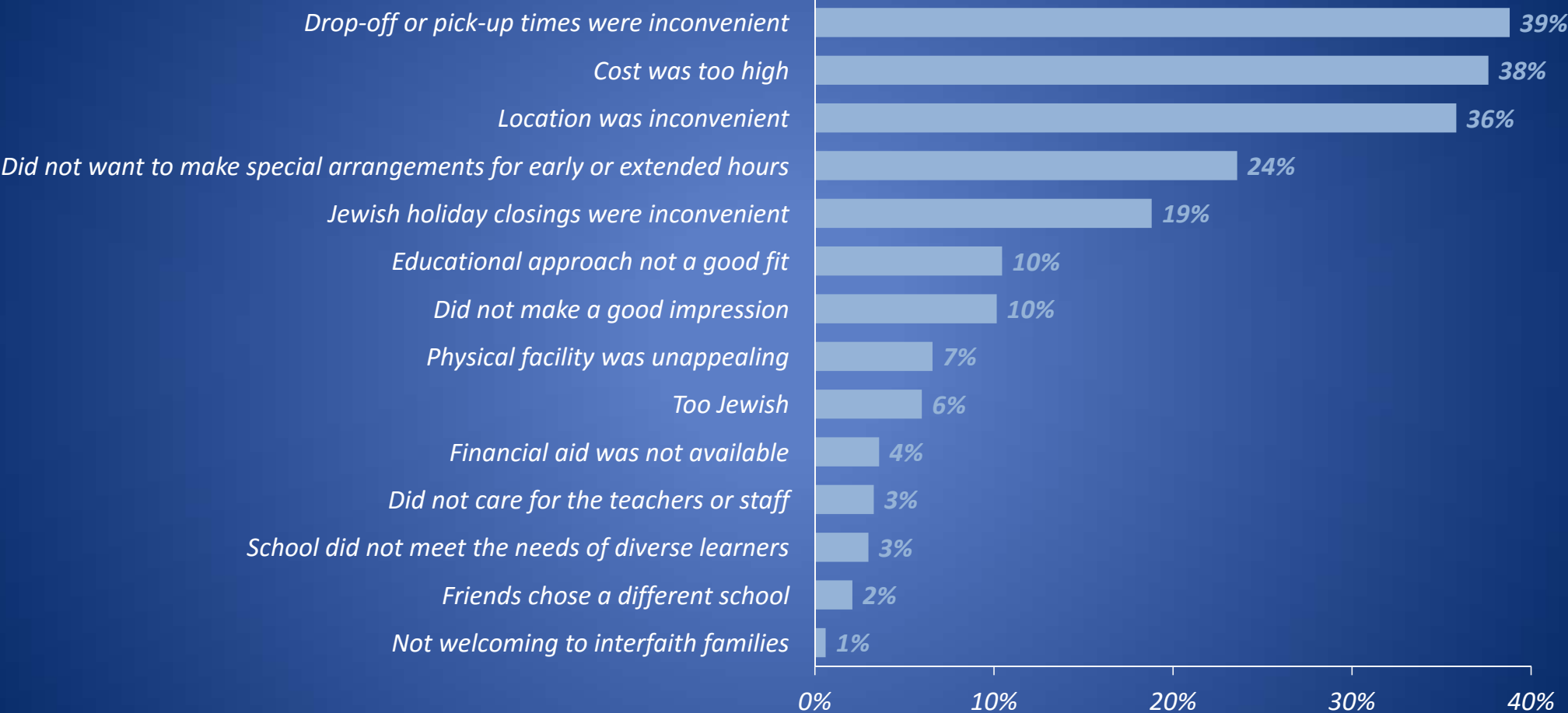
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Reasons: Parents Considered But Did Not Choose a Jewish Preschool



In Parents' Own Words.... Why Some Considered But Did Not Choose a Jewish Preschool

- Hours of operation – mentioned in written comments by 36% of parents
“The hours are the biggest issue. The Jewish preschools seem to not be designed for families where both parents work full time. We need preschool from 7 am – 6 pm and can’t make other arrangements.”
- Cost – mentioned in written comments by 34% of parents
“The Jewish preschools that we looked at were too expensive for us to afford. I wish my child could have gone to a Jewish preschool, and it makes me a little bit angry that they were all significantly more expensive than the other preschools we looked at.”
- Location – mentioned in written comments by 31% of parents
“We live in Belmont and both work downtown. I really, really wanted to make something work, but the locations and hours of program were just too inconvenient.”
- Importance of a work-friendly calendar – mentioned in written comments by 31% of parents
“They did not have a summer program and I work full time and was looking for a full-time / year-long program.”

In Parents' Own Words...Why Some Did Not Consider a Jewish Preschool At All

- Location – mentioned in written comments by 60% of parents

“All the Jewish centers we know of are located very far from either where we live or where we work. . . if there was a Jewish daycare center a reasonable distance from where we live, we might have considered it.”

“[My] child is only in preschool and this center was extremely convenient for me/located right near where I work, and I'd heard only good things about it. She started as an infant so [I] wasn't thinking then about 'Jewish education'.”

- Hours of operation – mentioned in written comments by 18% of parents

“100% because of the hours. I needed full-time daycare. We would have loved to take them to a Jewish preschool.”

- Cost – mentioned in written comments by 16%

“We decided on a preschool based on convenience (how close it was too us) and the cost. If a Jewish preschool was close to us and not too expensive then we would have enrolled our child there.”

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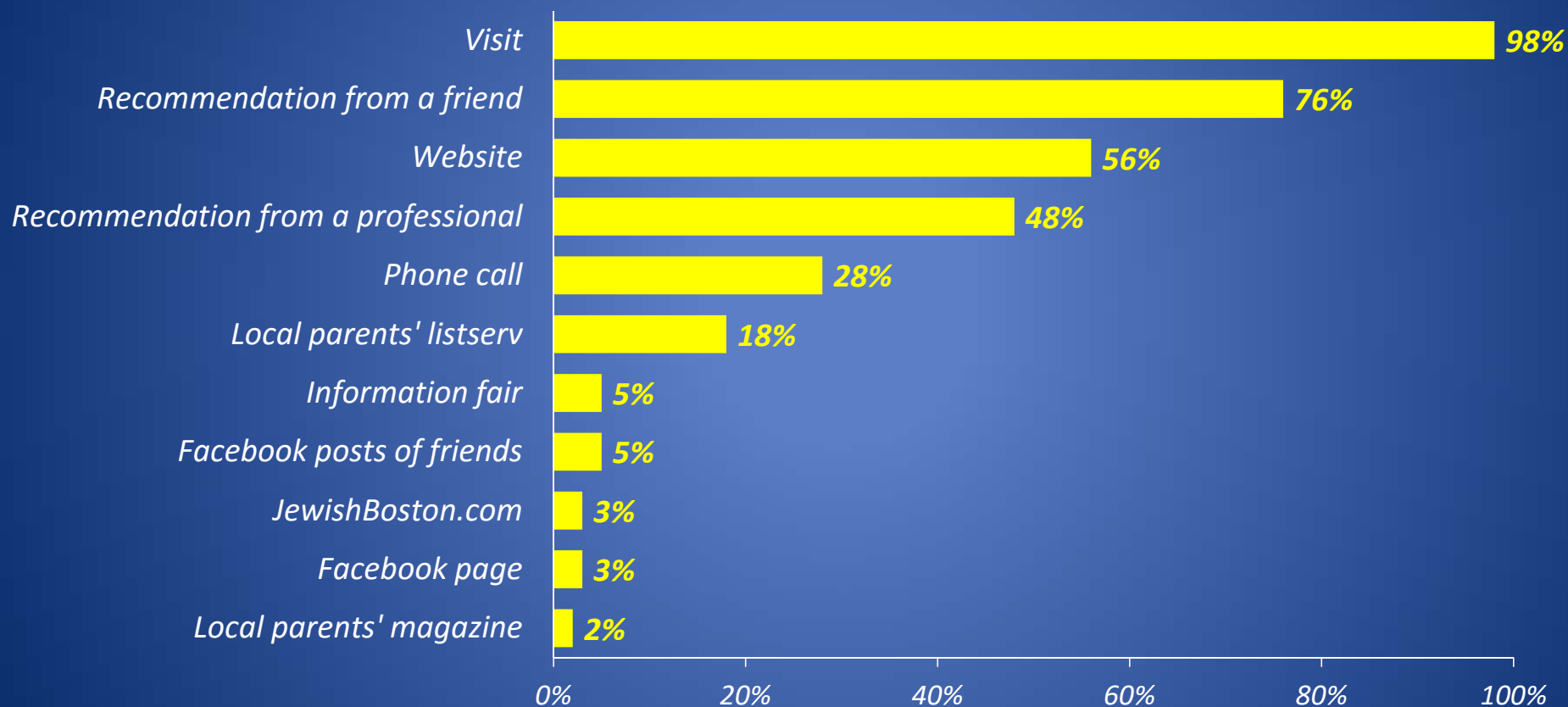
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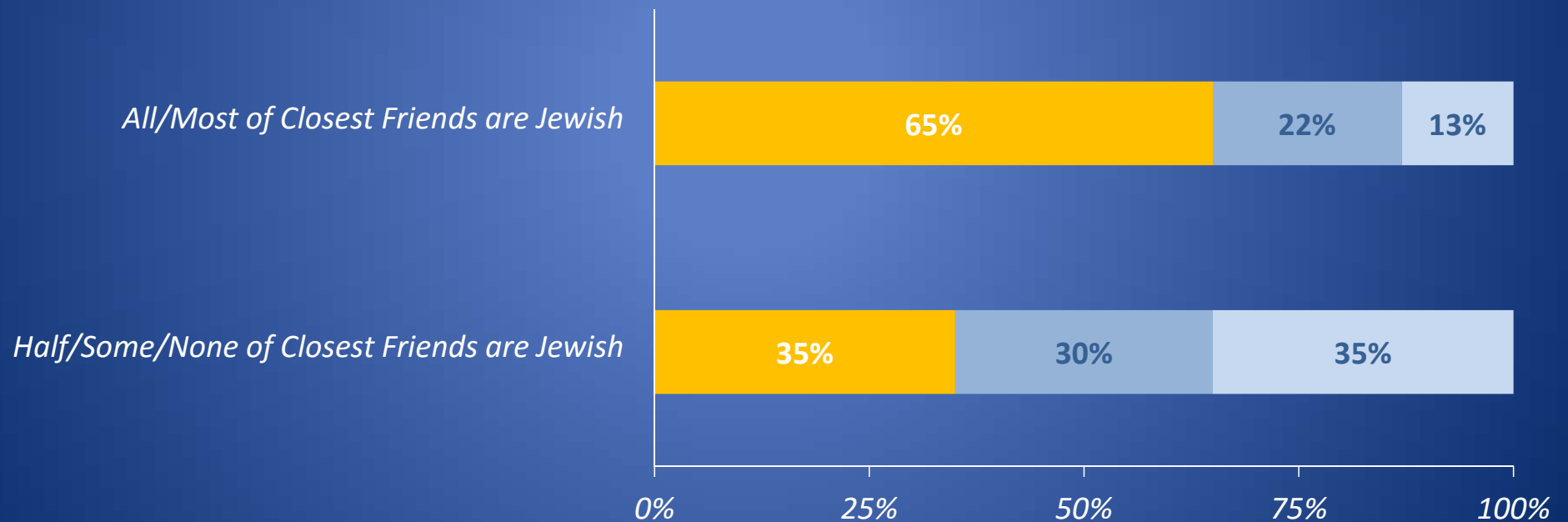
How Parents Obtain Information About Prospective Preschools

Percentage of responding parents who indicated the option was a "A major information source"



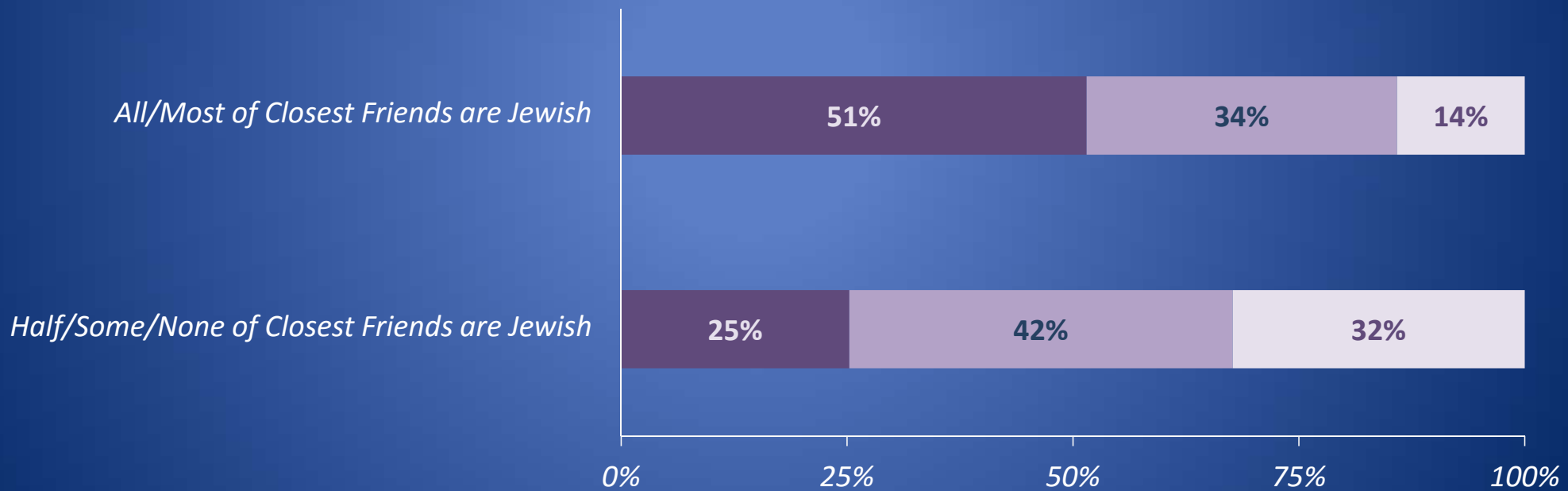
Parents Rely on Recommendations from Friends When Making a Preschool Choice, and Those Whose Closest Friends Were Jewish Were More Likely to Choose a Jewish Preschool

- Parents Chose a Jewish Preschool
- Parents Considered But Did Not Choose a Jewish Preschool
- Parents Did Not Consider or Choose a Jewish Preschool



Friends and Likelihood of Choosing a Jewish Preschool Among Parents Who Have Not Yet Chosen a Preschool

- Very Likely to Choose a Jewish Preschool
- Somewhat Likely to Choose a Jewish Preschool
- Not Very Likely to Choose a Jewish Preschool



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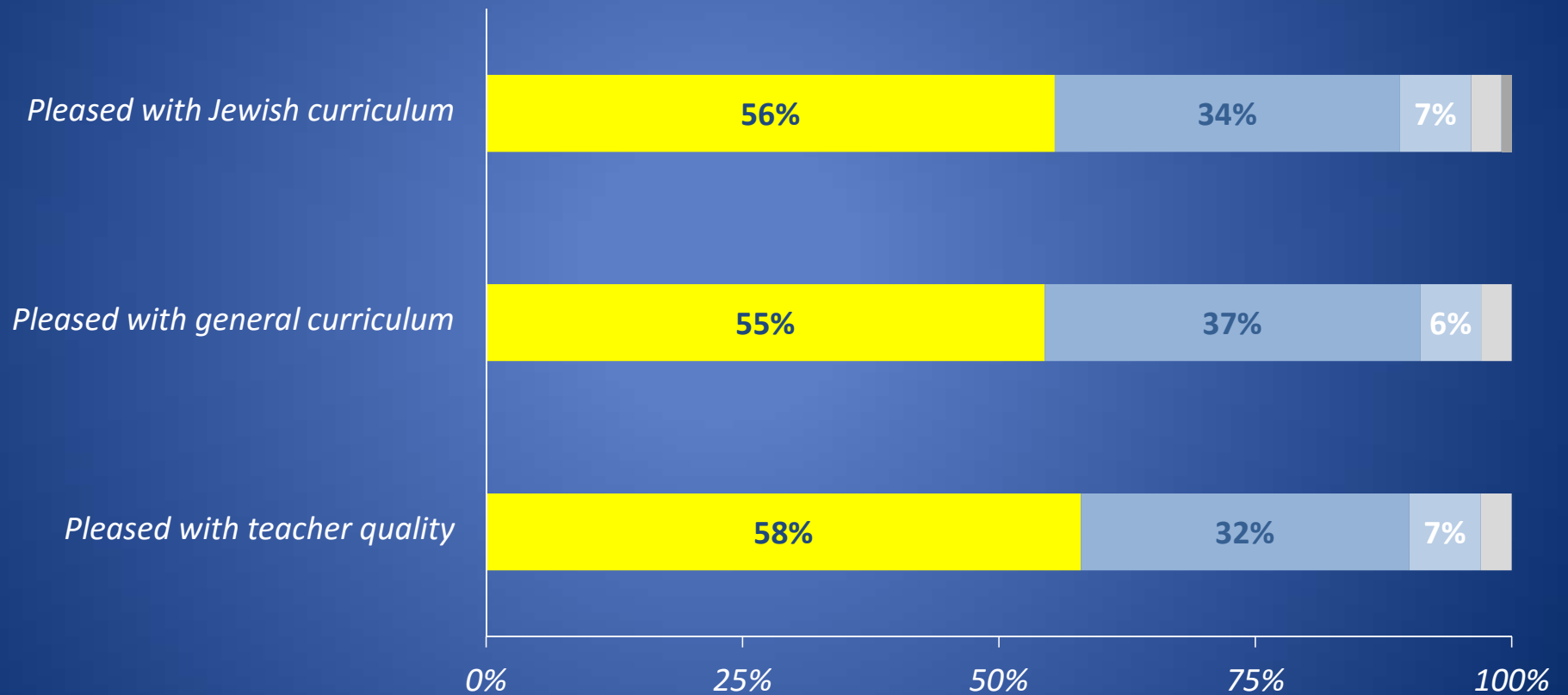
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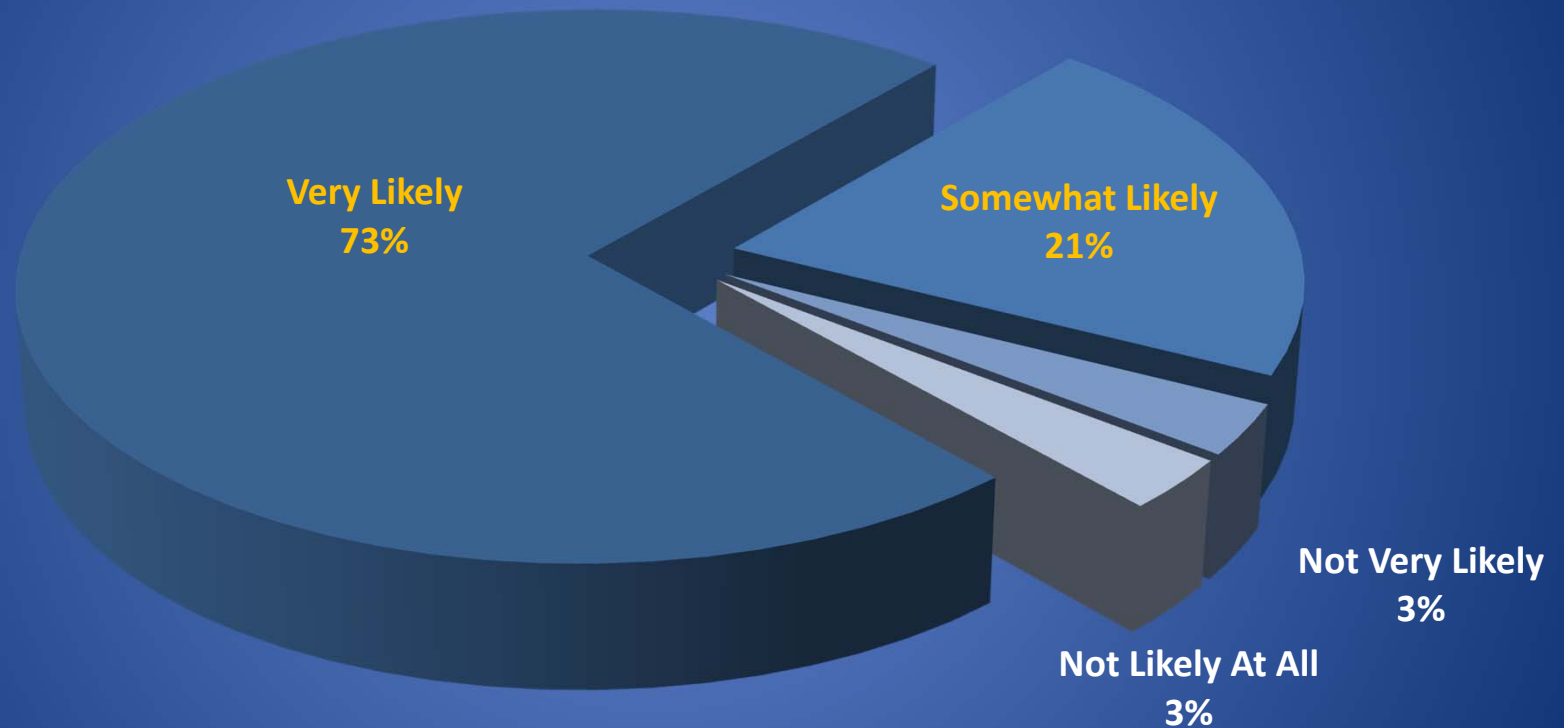
Interfaith Families

Parents' Perceptions of Jewish Preschools

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree



To What Extent Are Parents Likely to Recommend Their Jewish Preschool to a Friend?



In Parents' Own Words.... Why Some Would Recommend or Not Recommend Their Jewish Preschool

- In written comments, parents focused on what they liked about their Jewish preschool
- Teachers were what they liked most of all (43% of written comments)
“Each and every staff member has been absolutely wonderful - loving, professional, kind, smart.”
- Parents spoke of their satisfaction with the Jewish curriculum and their satisfaction with the general curriculum (27% of written comments for both)
“They make sure a major part of what the children learn is related to the religion while they also have other pre-school activities.”
- 21% of parents made positive comments about the community they became part of at their Jewish preschool
“This school has been amazing for my son and for our whole family. Our son has learned so much, we have all felt so welcome and have made such a nice community of friends.”

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Observations: Attracting Parents to Jewish Preschools

- Practical considerations come first
 - Parents consider hours, location, and cost first. Other factors enter into the decision process only after a particular preschool meets parents' requirements with respect to these considerations.
- Visits are a critical element in choice
 - Almost all parents visit preschools before making a choice. Once practical considerations are met, parents look first and foremost for a warm environment, since they are entrusting their young child to others. Preschool directors and staff should emphasize a safe, comfortable, nurturing environment.
 - Since visits are so important in the preschool choice process, preschools could benefit from training for directors and staff in order to create the best possible initial experience for prospective parents.

Observations: Attracting Parents to Jewish Preschools

- Parents rely heavily on recommendations from friends in making preschool choices
 - Parents with Jewish friends are more likely to choose Jewish preschools.
- Parents who have children enrolled in Jewish preschools have very positive perceptions
 - Highly positive parents can serve as ambassadors to recruit for their preschool, since word of mouth is important in the recruiting process.
- To attract families, preschools might consider...
 - having schedules that are compatible with the needs of households where both parents work full-time.
 - maintaining existing levels of quality while seeking further improvement.
 - attracting, hiring, and retaining the best teachers.

Study Purpose and Design

Profile of Parents Who Responded to the Survey

Preschool Choice

Choices Made by Respondents

What Parents are Looking for in a Preschool

Preschool Schedules and Household Employment Patterns

Geography

Cost

Interest in Judaism

Reasons for Not Choosing a Jewish Preschool

Preschool Perceptions

How Parents Learn About Preschools

How Parents Felt About Their Jewish Preschool

Attracting Parents to Jewish Preschools

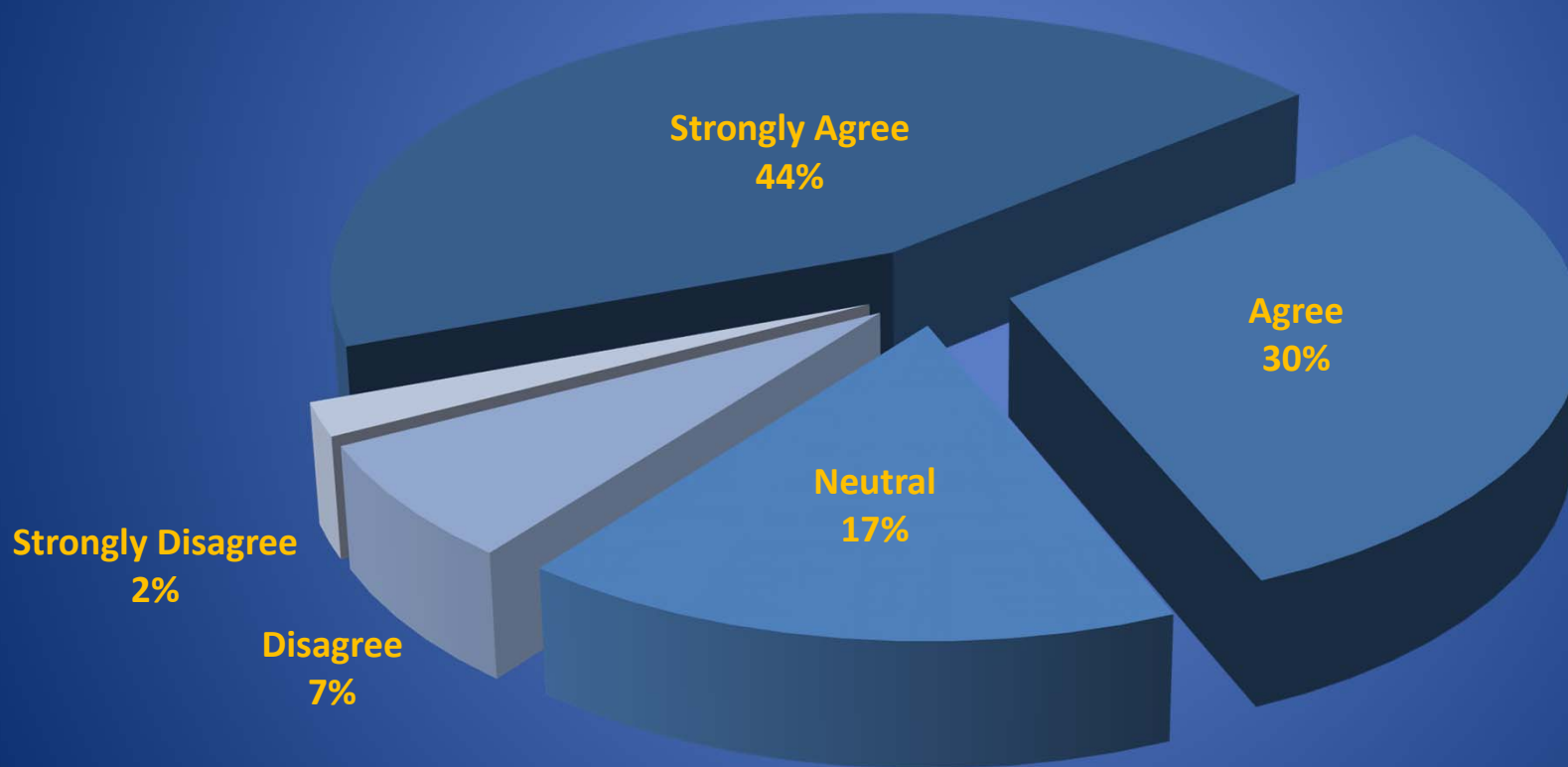
Impact of Jewish Preschools on Parents

Connections and Community

Interfaith Families

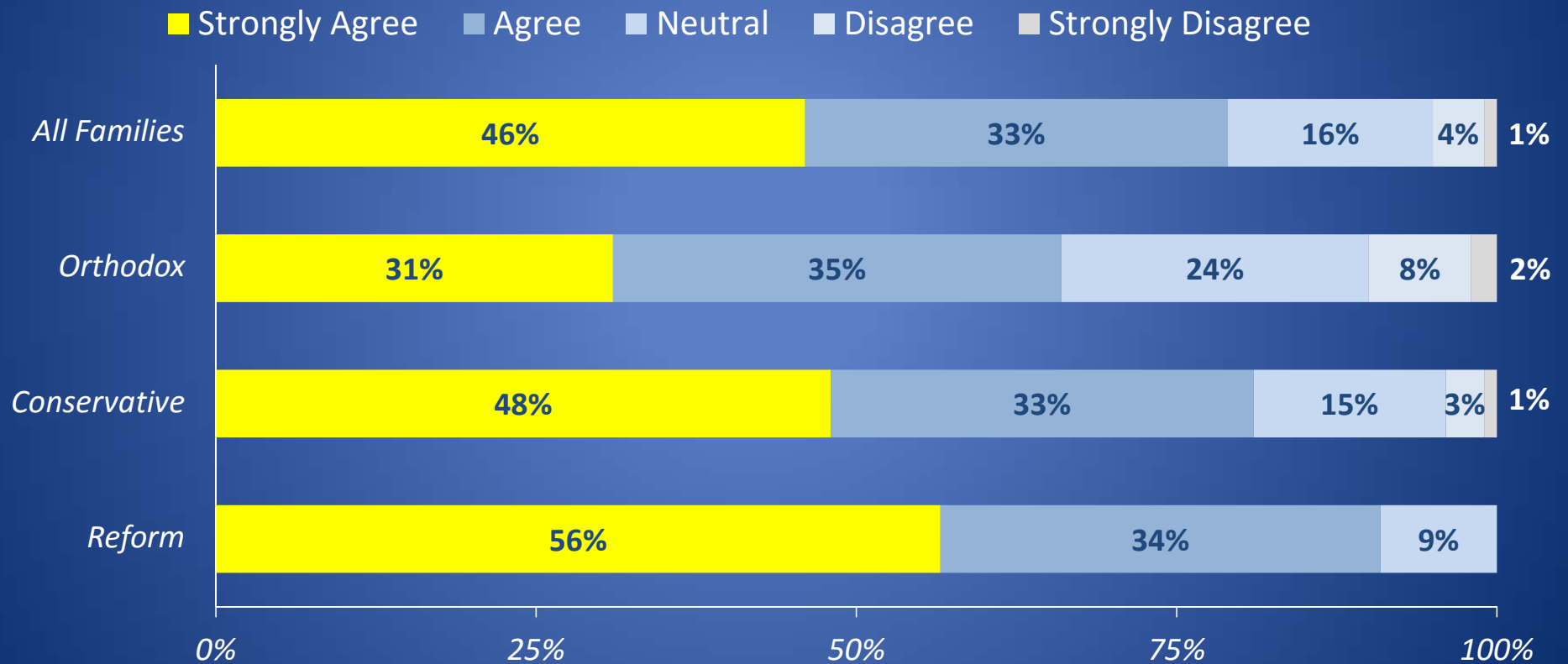
Jewish Preschool Enrollment and Feeling Part of a Community

"I felt a sense of community with the other families who had children enrolled"



Jewish Preschool Enrollment and Enhancement of Jewish Practice at Home

“What my child learned enhanced our Jewish practice at home”



In Parents' Own Words...How Jewish Preschool Enhanced Jewish Practice At Home

- The biggest impact is through the celebration of holidays (35%) and Shabbat (30%)
 - “Every week the kids make some challah. Every Shabbat dinner our son is now the ‘Challah Master’ where we've developed a ritual where he doles out the challah to us all. He loves that.”*
 - “They bring home age-appropriate ways for them to access the Jewish holidays and other concepts that we can share in together as a family.”*
- 13% of parents said that Jewish preschool enhanced their family's experience of Jewish practices they were already doing
 - “Our son now is able to connect traditions and practices at home with what he has learned during his time at [name of preschool] in a way that he understands.”*
- 12% mentioned their pleasure in the songs their children learned
 - “Of course, my favorite part is when my daughter just starts singing Hebrew songs that she learned while she is doing other activities.”*
- 13% said that Jewish preschool did not enhance their Jewish practice at home

Observations: Impact of Jewish Preschools on Parents

- Once parents have identified a preschool that meets their practical requirements, most prioritize a warm environment, quality teachers, and a compatible educational philosophy (Slide 14). However, what they experience once their child is enrolled is something they may not have been looking for initially.
 - Parents become part of a community
 - Jewish practice at home is enhanced
- Relatively few parents are looking to become part of a community when they enroll their children in a Jewish preschool, but many find they value the community that they join.
 - Most parents develop relationships with other parents that tend to persist over time.
 - Focus group data suggests that sporadic participation in family engagement programming, while offering fun family time in a Jewish context, does not create the same opportunities for community building as a Jewish preschool.
 - Some preschools are better at fostering community than others. Preschools could benefit from support to become more family-focused rather than being exclusively child-focused.

Observations: Impact of Jewish Preschools on Parents

- Unless parents already have a strong Jewish identity, learning about Judaism is not a high priority when enrolling children in a preschool. However, more than 3 out of 4 families who had children enrolled in a Jewish preschool indicated that their Jewish practice at home was enhanced.
 - Jewish preschool can be an entry point for families that are not currently involved in Jewish life.
 - Jewish preschools can help to strengthen Jewish identity, enhance Jewish practice, and foster Jewish learning.

Study Purpose and Design

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- Attracting Parents to Jewish Preschools

- Impact of Jewish Preschools on Parents

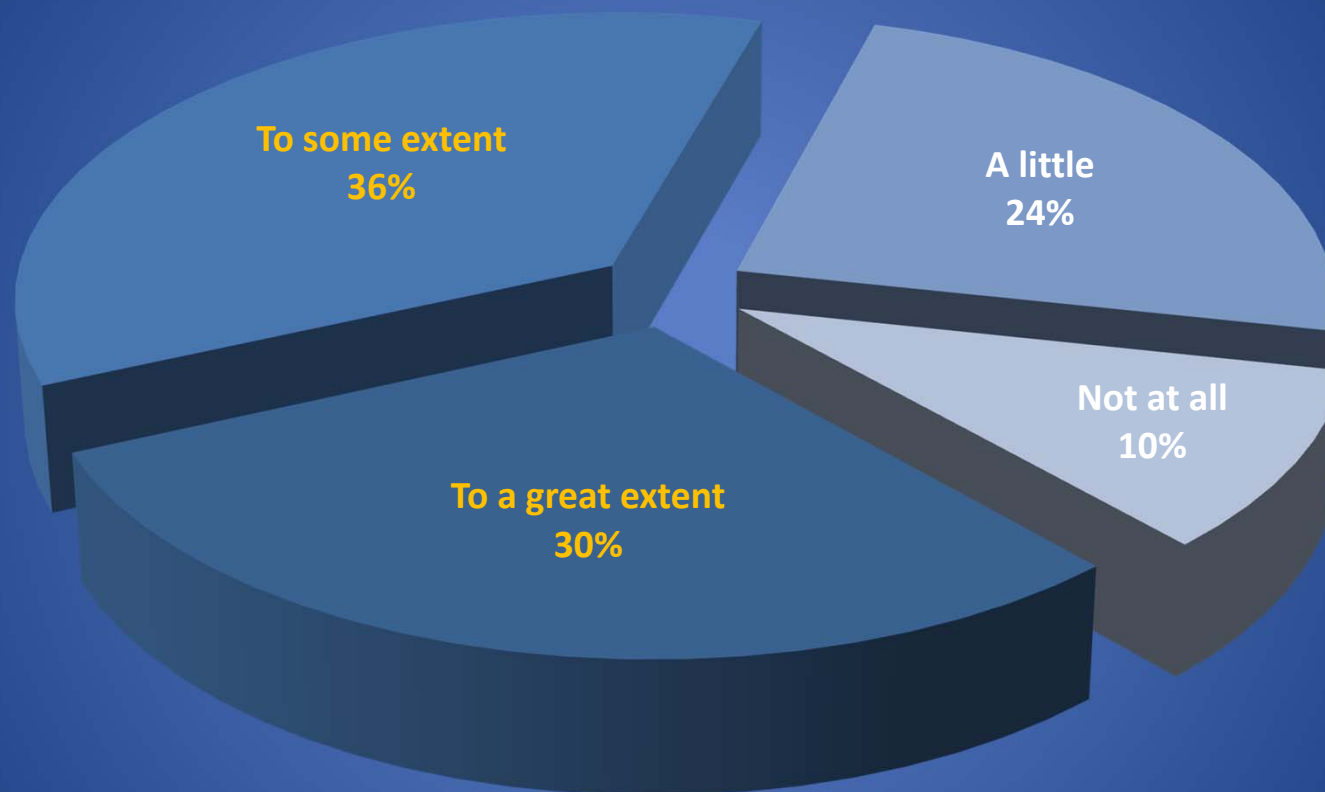
Connections and Community

Interfaith Families

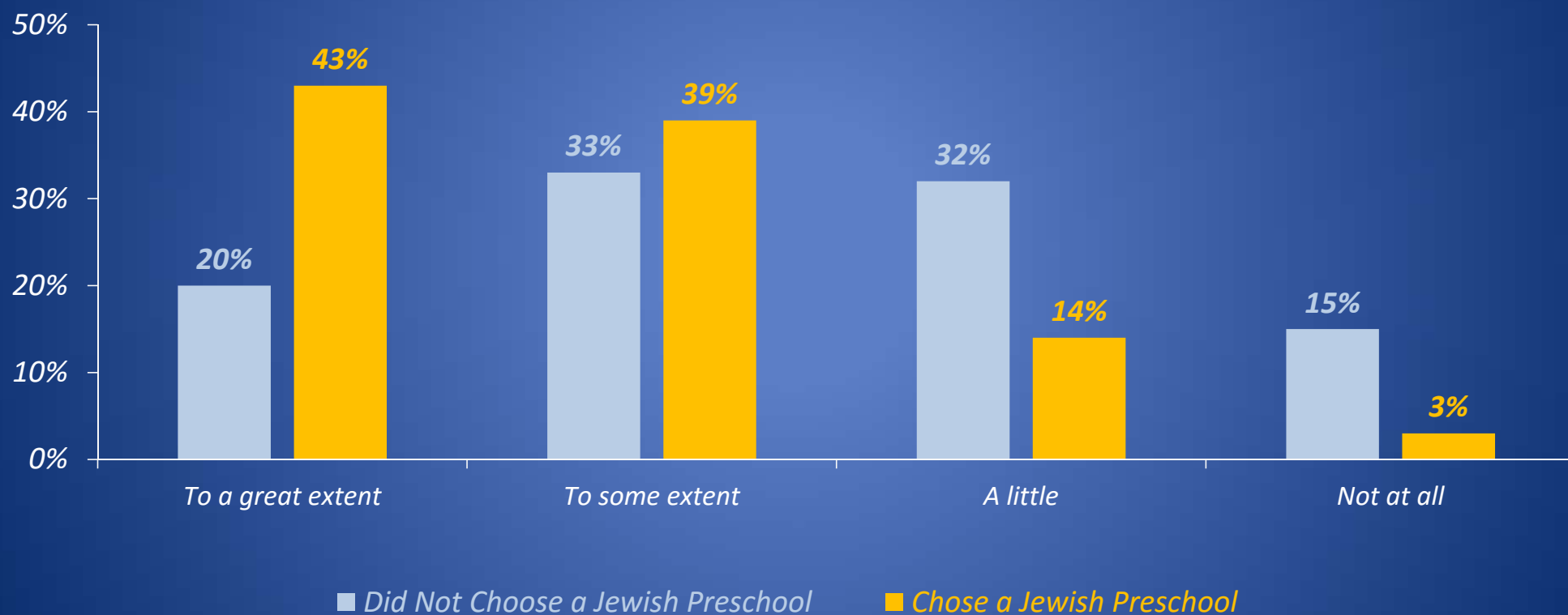
Connections and Community: Interest in Developing New Friendships Among Responding Parents



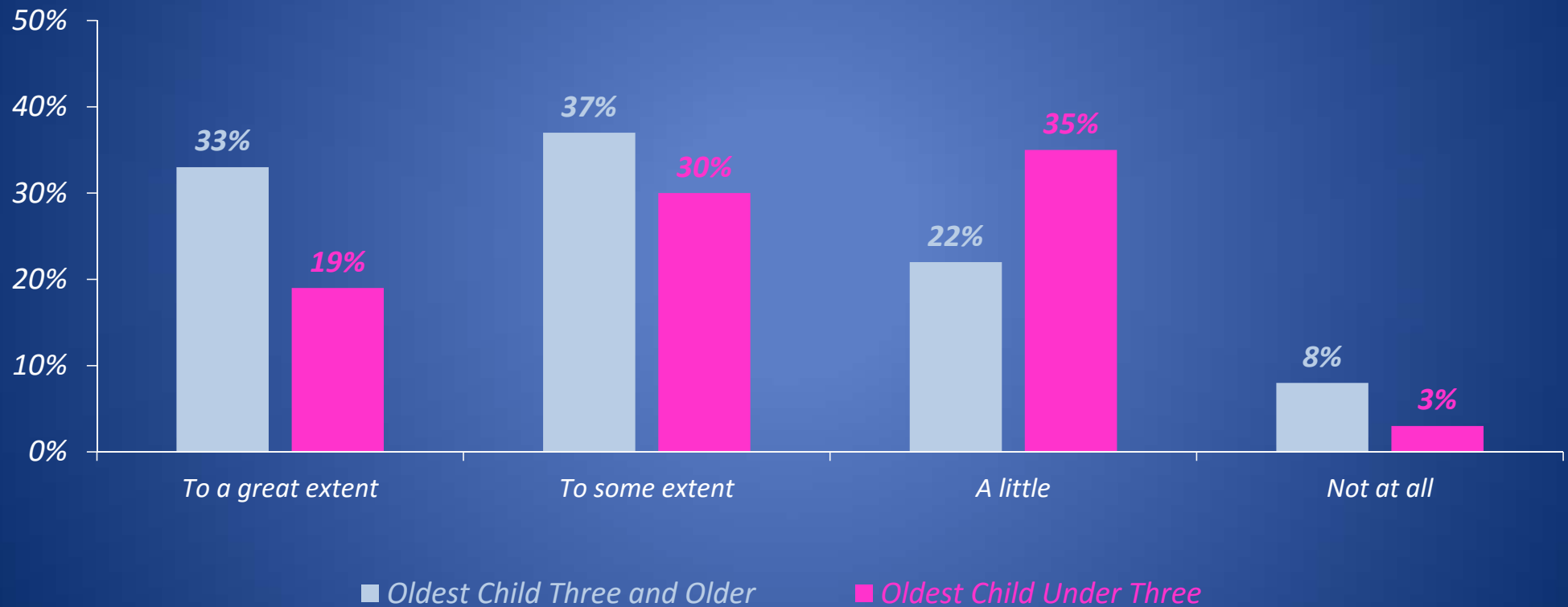
To What Extent Do Parents Feel Part of Their Local Jewish Community?



Feeling Part of the Local Jewish Community: Parents Who Chose a Jewish Preschool and Those Who Did Not



Households in Which the Oldest Child is Under Three Are Less Likely to Feel Part of the Jewish Community



In Parents' Own Words...

What Parents Are Looking For to Feel More Connected

- 29% of those who responded to the question want activities or institutions close to where they live

“More events in the neighborhood and community at large, as well as through the temple, and more ‘meet and greet’ events.”

“A JCC in the Arlington-Somerville-Lexington area with regular programs for interfaith and non-observant families would be a great way to connect with the Jewish community. It could probably lead me to be more observant as well.”

“It would help if there was a bigger Jewish community and it was more active in our small town. It is growing and we are as involved as we can be, but there just isn't a big Jewish population so that is a reality that makes it difficult. We are likely moving in the coming months, and we are only considering towns with known, large, active Jewish communities (close to Boston).”

In Parents' Own Words...

What Parents Are Looking For to Feel More Connected

- 28% view a synagogue as the place to be more connected, but some experience barriers to joining

"As our daughter gets older and we start doing more activities, we would like to enroll her in a Hebrew School and become a member of a local temple."

"I would feel more connected if we joined our local synagogue, but the cost of membership is too high for my family, and I can't find a way to make it work financially for us."

"We live pretty far from the temple we love, and the temple we tried closer to us isn't as warm."

- 18% want family activities
- 16% want friends, a community, or a peer group for themselves or their children

Observations: Connections and Community

- Parents are looking for new friendships
 - Connecting families raising Jewish children with other such families should be a priority.
 - Geographic areas where parents have fewer Jewish friends tend to be areas with fewer Jewish preschools. In these areas, family engagement programming could help to connect these families with each other.
- While the direction of causality is unclear, parents enrolled in Jewish preschools feel more connected to the larger Jewish community
- Families in which the oldest child is under three are less likely to feel connected to the community. There are several possible ways to engage these families.
 - Preschools might consider offering infant/toddler programs, both to help families with young children connect and as a recruiting strategy.
 - Preschools and other community institutions might consider offering family engagement programs for families with children ages 0-2 to help these families to make Jewish friends and feel more connected.

Observations: Connections and Community

- Parents are looking for local, convenient, low-barrier programming as a way to feel more connected
- Parents see synagogues as a place to connect but indicated in focus groups and in their survey responses that there are barriers to joining

Study Purpose and Design

Profile of Parents Who Responded to the Survey

Preschool Choice

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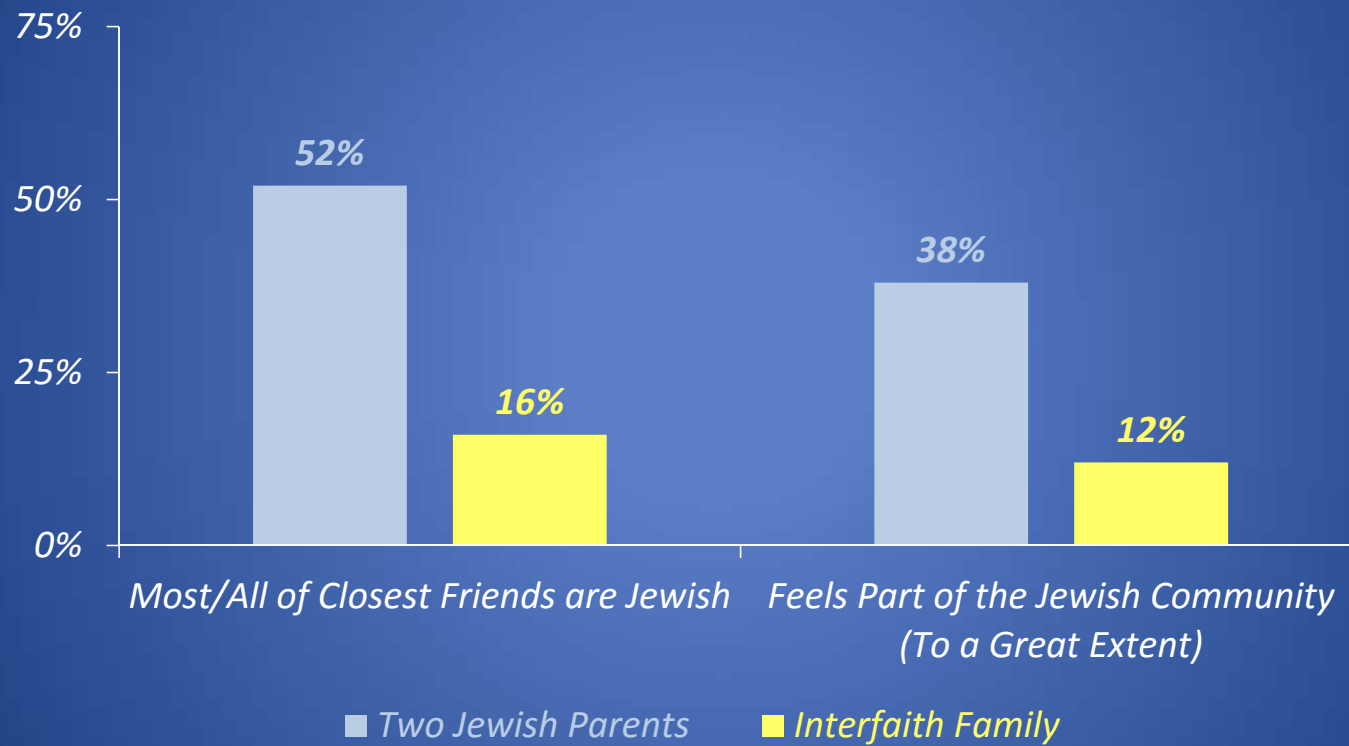
- Attracting Parents to Jewish Preschools

- Impact of Jewish Preschools on Parents

Connections and Community

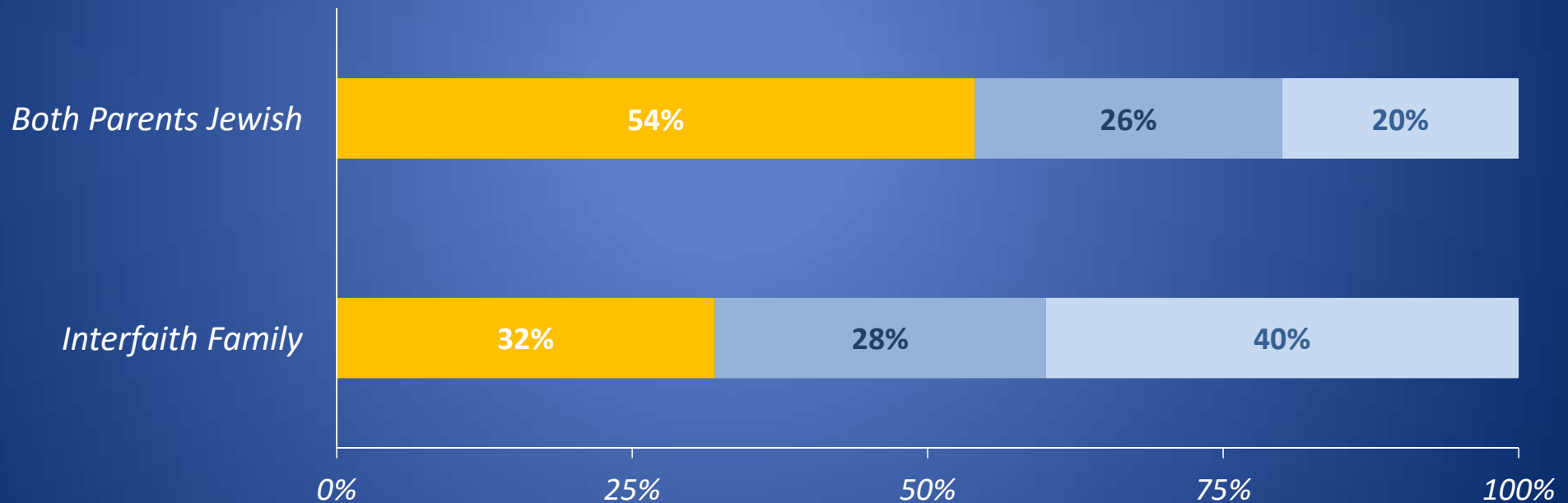
Interfaith Families

Interfaith Families: Friendships and Connections to the Jewish Community



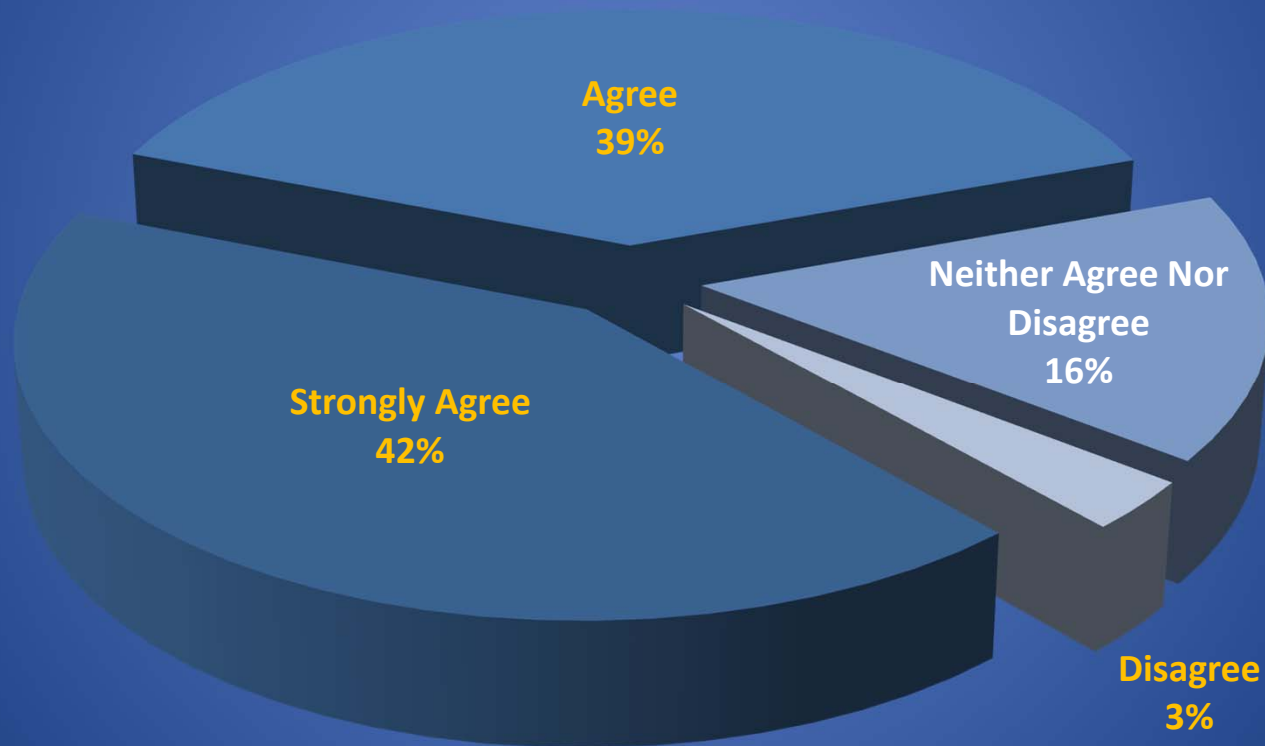
Interfaith Families Were Less Likely to Choose or Consider a Jewish Preschool

- Parents Chose a Jewish Preschool
- Parents Considered But Did Not Choose a Jewish Preschool
- Parents Did Not Consider or Choose a Jewish Preschool



Interfaith Families: Enrollment in Jewish Preschool and Enhancement of Jewish Practice at Home

“What my child learned enhanced our Jewish practice at home”



Observations: Interfaith Families and Preschool Choice

- Interfaith families are less likely to choose or consider Jewish preschools
- Interfaith families have fewer Jewish friends so they are less likely to learn about Jewish preschools
- However, three out of four of the interfaith families who enrolled their children in Jewish preschools reported that the choice enhanced their Jewish practice at home

About the Authors

Mark I. Rosen, Ph.D. is an associate professor in the Hornstein Jewish Professional Leadership Program at Brandeis University. He has been studying Jewish families with young children since 2003, and his many publications on the topic have influenced programs and initiatives across the country.

Heidi Schwartz, Ph.D. is an independent consultant who lives and works in the Boston area. She has 11 years of experience as a preschool parent at both Jewish and secular preschools.