ABOUT THIS REPORT

With the goal of identifying challenges and opportunities facing today’s parents nationwide as they prepare to arm their children with the tools they need to become lifelong learners, the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) has commissioned a Harris Poll to conduct a comprehensive survey exploring how parents spend time with their children.

Findings from the survey form the basis of this report. It was conducted online in October 2013 among over 2,000 American adults, 454 of whom are parents of children under 18 in their household (see full methodology below) and designed to examine parents’ philosophies when it comes to helping their families learn inside and outside of the classroom.

Overall, the findings point to a set of parents eager to help their children learn despite the myriad pressures they face in their own lives, says NCFL vice president and family learning expert Emily Kirkpatrick. Kirkpatrick’s commentary on the survey results, along with advice designed to aid parents in taking advantage of opportunities, can be found in the following report.
“Do you ever feel like you can’t turn on a TV without being bombarded by the message that parents today are alienated from their kids, too buried in their smartphones or on Facebook to be involved in their kids’ education? We sometimes feel that message can be deafening – but while that may be what we hear, it’s not what we see from parents every day in the work we do, both online and off.

The parents we speak with every day, in classrooms and across social platforms, are looking for ways to make the precious moments they spend with their kids more meaningful. They typically understand the absolutely integral role they play in their children’s education, and we’re inspired by their willingness to learn alongside them.

Given the breadth of parents from all walks of life we’ve been privileged to work with over our twenty-five years, we had a hunch that these parents are the rule, not the exception. So, we tapped Harris Poll to run a survey that is representative of American parents with children under 18 living in their household to ask them about their views, as much to confirm our beliefs as to learn how we can shape the resources and programs we offer families to most strongly align with their values, demands and desires.

In reflecting on the results, we find there’s much more that unites us than divides us as parents – with the greatest commonality being that nearly all of us (96% of the parents surveyed) believe it’s important that we play an active role in our children’s learning development. We’re also encouraged by the fact that today’s
parents across the board – whether single or married, working or stay-at-home, moms or dads, in low income or “wealthy” households, spend much more time with our children than popular narratives might have us believe. In fact, on average, even working parents (employed full-time/part-time/self-employed) spend nearly seven hours (6.7) with their kids each day. Yes, that time is filled with the realities and complexities of busy lives – jobs, carpool, errands, and homework – and none of us to have the power to change that reality. What we do have is the power to change the way we think about it. These moments together, whether you’re in line at the supermarket or riding the bus, are opportunities to encourage your kids to ask questions about the world around them. In doing so, you’re sowing the seeds of curiosity, building a foundation for a lifelong capacity to explore and grow.

We have long believed that not only does learning not end in the classroom, but also that some of the most powerful opportunities for learning come outside of it. They come sitting at the counter over dinner, when you ask your elementary-schooler to identify shapes on her plate. They come as you challenge your middle-schooler to shake up their morning routine by getting out of the other side of the bed.

Most importantly, they come when you’re ready to create them. Often, it’s easier than parents think. New resources from NCFL like Family Time Machine™, with easy activities designed to help guide family learning within the buckets of time they told us they already spend together, and existing resources like Wonderopolis®, are there to help guide their journeys. And so are we.”

**EMILY KIRKPATRICK**
Vice President
National Center for Families Learning
• Parents spend an average of **8.6 hours** with their kids each day. Despite the pressures working parents face, the employed parent spends an average of **almost seven hours a day (6.7 hours)** with his or her child(ren).
• An overwhelming majority of parents – **nine out of 10 (91%)** – feel that the time they spend time with their children every day is quality time.

• However, **more than half of parents (53%)** wish they knew how to make better use of the time they do have with their children.

• American family time still revolves around the dinner table, with **95 percent** of parents spending dinner time daily with their kid(s) – the most of any bucket of time we asked about.

• In addition to dinner time, parents, by the following percentages, spend time together with their kids on a daily basis during each of the following times:
  • TV time **(91%)**
  • Bedtime **(87%)**
  • Shopping and errands time **(82%)**
  • Game/play and activity time **(81%)**
  • Breakfast time **(81%)**
  • In transit – carpools, bus, trains, etc. **(77%)**
  • Homework time **(76%)**
  • Reading time **(76%)**
  • Getting ready for school time **(74%)**
  • Bath time **(65%)**
  • Scheduled activity time (sports practice, dance class, community groups) **(65%)**
  • Waiting time (waiting rooms, in line, for the bus) **(52%)**

“The traditionally held view is that parents’ big opportunity for helping their kids learn comes in the form of homework help. While that’s a core part of a parent’s responsibility – three out of four parents help with homework daily – it’s important to view time spent within the full framework of our daily lives. Consider, for example, that more parents and kids spend time together running errands or in transit every day than working on homework; it’s
crucial that they find ways to integrate learning experiences into these daily routines. Because we know that struggling to offer homework help has long been a pain-point for many parents, it’s our hope that realizing other moments you spend together provide equally important opportunities can make the learning process less intimidating — and more fun — for parents and students alike.” *EK*

**AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT WITH CHILD(REN) DURING DINNER TIME**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Duration</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 2 hours a day</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 1 hour to 2 hours a day</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 minutes to an hour a day</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 20 minutes a day</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

95% of parents spend some dinner time with their child(ren)

92% (18-34) VS. 73% (45-54)

Parents aged 18-34 are significantly more likely to strongly believe they play an active role in their children’s academic success than older parents.
KEY FINDINGS
PARENTS’ PLACE IN EDUCATION

- Nearly 20 percent don’t understand the subject matter
- Stay-at-home parents are significantly more likely than working parents to feel comfortable helping their children learn outside of the classroom
- Nearly 40 percent of parents are not comfortable helping their kids learn outside of the classroom. Of those parents:
- Parents that split custody are significantly less likely to feel comfortable
- Parents that split custody are less likely to understand the subject matter or feel like they have the time or feel like they have the tools to help

• Parents overwhelmingly shared that they felt a responsibility for helping their children learn. **Nearly all parents (96%)** think it’s
important they play an active role in their child’s learning development.

- However, more than one in five parents (21%) believes that their child’s education is the sole responsibility of their school and teachers.

- Similarly, nearly one in five (19%) parents agreed with the statement: “It’s not my job to assist schools or teachers with the education of my children.”

- Fathers are more than twice as likely as mothers to say assisting in their child’s education is “not my job,” with 28 percent of men vs. 13 percent of women answering as such.

- Parents with a household income of $75k+ are two times more likely to agree that assisting in their children’s education is “not my job” than those with a household income of less than $35k (26% vs. 13%). Similarly, those in lower-income households (with household incomes of less than $35k per year) are much more likely than those in households making $75k+ to strongly disagree with this statement (69%, vs. 52%, or just half of those in households making $75k or more).

- Just over three out of four (76%) parents spend at least some time helping their kids with homework on a daily basis.

- Over one third (35%) of parents spend between 20 minutes and an hour with their child during homework time per day.

- Just over one out in five (22%) parents spends less than twenty minutes during homework time, while 4 percent spend more than 2 hours.

- Nearly one out of four working parents (24%) spends less than 20 minutes a day with their kids during homework.
time, as opposed to 13 percent of stay-at-home parents who spend the same amount of time with their kids during homework time.

- Parents with a household income of less than $35k are more than twice as likely to spend more than one to two hours a day with their kids during homework time than those parents with a household income of $75k or more (21% vs. 9%).

- Nearly four out of ten parents (37%) admit they are not comfortable helping their kids learn outside of the classroom. Those parents were divided as to why, with reasons including:

  - They don’t understand the subject matter (17%)
  - Their children don’t want their help (13%)
  - They don’t have the time (10%)
  - They don’t know where to start, or they don’t have the tools (6% each)

“Study after study underscores the key role parents play in helping their children learn, and it’s both exciting and encouraging to see that American parents overwhelmingly want to heed that call. Given the literacy crisis facing this country – with national assessments showing two out of three fourth-graders currently unable to read at grade level, and those numbers increasing further as household income decreases – it’s absolutely crucial that we arm them with the tools to do so.

One particularly bright spot in these findings is that parents of those children statistically most likely to be struggling, are also the most likely to be inclined to help. What then becomes clear is that
if parents are willing to invest the time in helping their children learn, and it’s still not working, many of them may not know how. We firmly believe that every parent, regardless of socioeconomic standing, can play a positive role in their child’s education; whether or not they’re able to do so usually comes down to the training. It can be intimidating. The onus is on us as an education community to provide guidance to all parents in a way that’s approachable and realistic given the context of their daily lives – and that’s what we seek to do through programs like Family Time Machine™ and Wonderopolis®.

That said, there remains a considerable portion of parents – one out of five - who don’t yet feel this responsibility is theirs (with 19% of parents agreeing it’s not their job to assist schools or teachers with their children’s education). Some parents don’t feel that they have a place in their child’s classroom, while others simply may not understand the influence they have over their child’s learning – particularly if they’re investing in their educations financially. We believe it is our shared responsibility as a part of the education community to help break down those barriers, and make it clear to all parents – no matter their own cultural backgrounds, income or education levels – that their role in building a foundation of lifelong learning habits for their children is second to none.”  

94% (MOMS) VS. 88% (DADS) AGREE
DADS ARE SIGNIFICANTLY LESS LIKELY THAN MOMS TO FEEL LIKE THE TIME THEY ARE SPENDING WITH THEIR CHILDREN EVERY DAY IS QUALITY TIME.
KEY FINDINGS
PARENTS AND TECHNOLOGY

• **Ninety-two percent** of parents believe that technology can be used as a tool to help their kids learn

• **Eighty-three percent** of parents believe technology can help motivate their kids to learn

  - **Mothers ages 35 – 44** are significantly less likely than any other group to see technology as an effective motivator, with **only 65 percent agreeing**

  - Just over **four in ten (42%) fathers** strongly agree that technology can motivate their children

• **Nine out of ten parents** spend time on a mobile device daily

  - Parents spend, on average, about **an hour and fifteen minutes** on a mobile device each day

“It’s a great sign that more than four out of five parents believe that technology can be used as a tool to help their children learn. However, that same statistic tells us that one out of five parents are in the dark as to how they can harness all the tools at their disposal to give their child a leg up in learning and help them develop strong foundational habits. Further, it stands out that mothers most deeply ‘in the throes’ of parenting school aged kids (those 35 – 55) are less likely to fully grasp technology’s potential as a powerful tool. This is a huge missed opportunity, and thankfully, one that’s easily remedied. We make our tools available free online – and make sure they’re compatible with mobile devices – to encourage parents to view technology not as an enemy in learning, but as an ally, as we truly believe it is.” **EK**
• Significantly more single parents surveyed (70%)* than married parents (51%) wish they knew how to make better use of the time they spend with their children.

• Of divorced or separated parents surveyed*, 79 percent think it’s important to play an active role in their children’s learning.
development. Of married parents, **98 percent** agreed it’s important they play a role.

- **Well over half** (56%) of divorced or separated parents surveyed* are not comfortable helping their children learn outside the classroom, as compared to just over one-third (37%) of married or single parents who said they were not comfortable.

- **Eighty-three percent** of married parents feel happy when spending time with their children; **sixty-four percent** of single parents surveyed feel happy*.

- Just **14%** of single parents surveyed* feel confident when spending time with their children.

“Families comprised of what were once considered ‘nontraditional structures’ face a unique set of challenges, but also opportunities, and we saw these struggles and questions reflected in what we heard from both single and divorced parents.

Many single parents not only feel the weight of helping guide their children’s learning on their shoulders alone, but also the pressures of life, including typically being the primary or sole breadwinner, compounding. The great news here is the inherent power of being able to spend 1:1 time with their kids. We need to give single parents the confidence to understand that devoting just fifteen minutes a day to sit and do a simple activity with their child will make a marked difference in their development. If they can give it a shot for just a few weeks, we know they’ll be inspired by what they see.

For a divorced or separated parent sharing custody, it can be difficult to understand the important role they play in guiding a
child’s learning if, for example, they’re not around when their child is working on homework. We’ve seen firsthand that thinking of education more holistically, beyond just the boundaries of formal education and a classroom setting and in a more 360 degree view, can be liberating for these parents in particular. In the time they do have together, we encourage them to connect with their children surrounding the passions and interests they share with their children, and find the learning moments there. Maybe that’s taking the time to explore basic math with a daughter whose world revolves around sports, or even fashion. Choosing to use your time together within a context of what truly interests you both will make you both more ready and excited to learn together.”

8.6 HRS VS. 1.25 HRS
PARENTS SPEND MORE THAN FIVE TIMES AS MUCH TIME WITH THEIR KIDS AS THEY DO ON MOBILE DEVICES EACH DAY

RESOURCES

• Family Time Machine, a new website community inspiring families across the nation to learn, interact, and thrive together

• Grants for communities to fund new family mentor programs and service learning programs targeting vulnerable families

• Online resources, such as Wonderopolis.org
FULL METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted online within the United States between October 8th and 10th, 2013 among 2,020 adults (aged 18 and over), among which 454 are parents/guardians of any children under 18 living in their household, by Harris Poll on behalf of NCFL. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was used to adjust for respondents’ propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, the words “margin of error” are avoided as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the online panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

*Caution - small base (n<100). Results should be interpreted as qualitative, or directional, in nature.

For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables, please contact ncf@shiftcomm.com
About the National Center for Families Learning
The National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to helping adults and children learn together. NCFL creates and deploys innovative programs and strategies that support learning, literacy and family engagement in education. From the classroom to the community to the digital frontier, NCFL collaborates with educators, advocates and policy-makers to help families construct hotspots for learning wherever they go. For more information on NCFL’s 24-year track record, visit www.familieslearning.org.

About Nielsen & The Harris Poll
On February 3, 2014, Nielsen acquired Harris Interactive and The Harris Poll. Nielsen Holdings N.V. (NYSE: NLSN) is a global information and measurement company with leading market positions in marketing and consumer information, television and other media measurement, online intelligence and mobile measurement. Nielsen has a presence in approximately 100 countries, with headquarters in New York, USA and Diemen, the Netherlands. For more information, visit www.nielsen.com.