



Parent Qualitative Research

Key Insights



Methodology

- April-May 2023
- 14 interviews
 - 3 males
 - 11 females
 - + 2 LGBTQIA+
- 45-60 minutes, virtual; 1:1
- Regional breakdown
 - Pacific Northwest
 - Mid-Atlantic
 - West Coast
 - South

Analysis

- Barna analyzed the qualitative interviews looking for repetition and saturation of key insights. This report aims to accurately deliver on the following themes and ideas:
 - Parental Support
 - Opinions of the school in general
 - Opinions of the religious curriculum
 - Awareness of ELCA church support
 - Awareness of school/ELCA values and theology
 - Opinions of church and religion



Thematic Sections

- **Parent/Caregiver/Guardian:**
 - Insights into parenting philosophy, personal background, and challenges and needs around parenting.
- **School:**
 - Perceptions of and interactions with ELEA schools and staff; hopes around education and schools.
- **Church:**
 - Perceptions of and interactions with churches in general and ELCA churches in particular.
- **Community:**
 - Relationships that sustain a parent's community; community programs parents are familiar with, which benefit them, and where they feel they are being formed



General Summary



General Summary

- Regardless of their faith backgrounds, most parents want to instill **values of kindness, empathy, curiosity, and open-mindedness** in their children and noted that the ELEA curriculum does a good job of promoting and integrating these values into their programming.
- In the absence of nearby family members, parents feel the strain of raising their children on their own. Here lies an **opportunity for the ELCA and ELEA to provide deeper care for families.**
- The majority of parents were pleased with the ELEA school experience, **specifically noting the school's enrollment availability, affordability, proximity, and overall convenience.** The ELEA's religious affiliation did not seem to influence a parents' decision to enroll their child in the school, but most **parents were appreciative of the faith-based components and its exposure to new perspectives and cultures,** even if the Lutheran tradition was not their own.
- Some parents were very familiar with the ELCA church and their staff while others were not. ELCA churches have an opportunity to provide **deeper levels of engagement with school parents that could translate as authentic outreach.**
- Parents were largely unaware of the ELCA's theology, however many referenced knowing it was more **liberal and LGBTQIA+ affirming than other denominations.** The ELCA has an opportunity to distinguish itself from other churches in the community as one that highly values inclusivity and diversity.





Key Insights: Parent Dynamics

Key Insights | Parent Dynamics

- **Values**

- When asked about family values, parents named an array of principles including acceptance of self and others, honesty, hard work, and kindness. For churched parents, Christian values were often stated as primary values in their household, in addition to what was said before.

The biggest value that I did not grow up with that we're instilling in our kids is to be loving and accepting to everybody. When I left the church, my oldest had been at a Christian elementary school. She went there for kindergarten and that was a big no cause that school associates with the Assemblies of God churches. They were very non-accepting. They would outwardly talk against the LGBTQ community and say it was sinful. The experiences I had at the Lutheran church were very different. It was accepting. That is something that's really important. [Female, dechurched, Washington, 2 children]

- **Challenges**

- Parents without nearby family struggled to feel well supported while raising their children. Practical challenges with time management and socioeconomic and cultural barriers also surfaced.

I think one of the biggest challenges is not having enough support. We don't have family support. So, there's no relief between just the two of us, other than relying on friends but not having family. Of course, the financial aspect too. It's always a balance between, "Do I work? Do I not work and then pay for childcare?" It's a whole calculus of what makes sense for our family. Those are probably the two biggest opposite challenges. It's just no relief. [Female, churched, Maryland, 1 child]



Key Insights: School Engagement

Key Insights | School Engagement

- **ELEA school convenience**

- It was evident that affordability, availability, and proximity guided most, if not all, parents' choices to enroll their child in an ELEA program.

Just the right moment they had an opening for both my kids who were in, I guess, two levels apart, and it just worked out really well. It's very close to our house. It's a seven-minute drive, which is great... they say they run it at cost, which I assume is true, and that's really nice. It's hard to find here. I hear some of what our neighbors are paying and it's insane. [Female, dechurched, California, 2 children]

- **ELEA curriculum**

- Parents were quick to offer praise for the ELEA programming, affirming the play-based learning, teachers, facilities, values of inclusion and diversity, and the faith-based components of the curriculum, even for unchurched parents.

I kind of want my son to have different experiences, to him to be exposed to that and exposed to people that aren't religious. And for me, it can only do good. I mean, it's not really crazy structured, so I feel like it can only really do good for [him]. [Female, unchurched, Maryland, 1 child]

Key Insights | School Engagement

- **ELEA family engagement opportunities**
 - In light of the relaxed Covid restrictions and more opportunity for community events, some parents requested more school-hosted events to facilitate meeting other families and their children.

The biggest thing that I think would be really lovely is just opportunities to engage in person with other families. I don't know what normal is from pre-pandemic because my kid was in daycare for two months before the pandemic started. So I don't know what's normal, but that's something that would be really valuable for us I think. We've had some opportunities to attend birthday parties, but just none of those have ever actually worked out timing wise. So we don't have strong relationships with the other parents. And I think that that's something that would be really nice for us. Because we're new to this parenting thing still and we don't have that habit of connecting with the other kids' parents. [Female, unchurched, Washington, 2 children]



Key Insights: Church Attitudes & ELCA Engagement

Key Insights | Church Attitudes & ELCA Engagement

- **Perspectives on church-led community events**
 - Many churched parents were familiar with outreach and community engagement opportunities offered by churches in their communities, while those who were unchurched did not have much insight on the matter.

Lots of the churches here go are very creative in their outreach to community connections, whether it's community theater or whether it is family fun days – there are just other ways to connect to their community, especially for seniors, people with disabilities. That's been exciting to see because there are fewer of them and they have to be in order to survive, I think, and to be relevant. At the Methodist church, they're so creative with their welcome. Um, there is a group of trans African women, they're trans people and they're African American women, and they're homeless, so that's a very particular demographic. And to help create a safe zones of safety, they've purchased these, um, buses, like 60 passenger buses. [Male, churched, Washington, 2 children]

You know, I think a lot of times a lot of churches, and it doesn't matter the denomination they are, work to provide basic needs for the homeless population. That's such a complicated matter. I don't think they're gonna solve it. It's nearly impossible for anyone to solve it just based on the governments that we have and the types of money that would be needed. But I think they do a lot for the young children who are within their realm. I think churches do a good job of trying to mentor them. I think they provide, at least in our community, a lot of the different schools and churches provide like a fall festival, different community events to get people out and intermingling and talking to one another, um, and helping build that community, which I think is super important. [Female churched, California, 3 children]

Key Insights | Church Attitudes & ELCA Engagement

- **Perspectives on ELCA school-wide engagement efforts**
 - Most parents recognized the regular and intentional engagement efforts from the ELCA church to school parents. Many were appreciative of the ELCA's openness for promoting a more liberal and affirming space for diverse families and community members.

I do like that it's a ministry of the church. I think there are other pre-schools where it's completely separate. For instance, the teachers don't necessarily have to be a member of the congregation. The director doesn't have to be affiliated, a member of the congregation. I like that it's a ministry of the church and it's an outreach essentially. [Female participant 14, dechurched, California, 2 children]

- While most parents were largely unaware of the theological and missional philosophies of the ELCA, many referenced it being more liberal and affirming for LGBTQIA+ individuals and families.

The ELCA church in particular is loudly progressive and that's exciting. That's why we would've gone there. We would probably never have gone to a church that maybe had a more closed view of roles of men and women or the roles of marriage or even the ideas of sin and salvation. Those things are important to talk about the idea of God and the high Christology of where we see Jesus to be. [Male participant 2, churched, Washington, 2 children]



Key Insights: Community Engagement

Key Insights | Community Engagement

- Future ELCA community engagement opportunities
 - Parents offered insights on what they'd like to see the church invest in including community outreach, mental health resourcing, and parental support.

I think one, one main thing comes to mind and that's, that is mental health. This aspect is just being neglected in general, but it's really important. I'm coming from where I come from, mental health is really not something that's talked about. And whenever somebody's going through like, sort of a crisis, it's always like, oh, you don't believe enough. Like this is, this is the problem. You're just not a good enough believer. Like, if you only read the Bible a little more, your anxiety will go away or your depression will go away, or your marital problems will go away. He have not just paid enough attention to mental health. And I think this is something that some churches are now paying more attention to, but we're not doing nearly enough as we should be. [Female participant 1, churched, Washington, 2 children]