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Parent Perspectives to Inform San Bernardino County's Universal PreKindergarten Mixed Delivery System



Prepared for the San Bernardino County Local Planning Council
Universal PreKindergarten Mixed Delivery Local Level Workgroup



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Executive Summary

An established body of work shows lasting results of participation in high-quality early care and education (ECE) programs. Therefore, investing in high-quality ECE is vital for ensuring positive individual and community outcomes. California has a wide array of ECE options offered through the “mixed delivery system,” ensuring the state can meet the diverse needs of children and families. Nevertheless, it is a complex system that often leaves parents confused about the available options for their children. The priority of providing preschool access universally for three- and four-year-old children through a mixed delivery system led California to release the Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) Mixed Delivery Planning Grant.

As part of the grant, the San Bernardino County Local Planning Council (LPC) secured the services of Child Care Resource Center (CCRC) to assess parents’ priorities, needs, and gaps in access to care for their three- and four-year-old children and then engage the community and partners to create a mixed delivery system that meets the needs of the County’s children and families. Information from this assessment will be used to plan for the expansion of high-quality UPK through a mixed delivery system in San Bernardino County.

Three research questions were used to guide this work: 1) Who are the families of three- and four-year-old children in San Bernardino County and how can San Bernardino County prepare to support them in a UPK mixed delivery system? 2) What are families’ child care needs and plans for their three- and four-year-old children as the children become age-eligible for preschool and Transitional Kindergarten (TK)? and, 3) What basic needs do families of three- and four-year-old children in San Bernardino County have and how can San Bernardino County support families so their children can thrive as they transition to preschool and beyond?

The needs assessment employed a mixed methods approach with a parent survey (n=601), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with parents (n=14), and GIS work overlaying data with San Bernardino County population data.

With a geography spanning more than 20,000 square miles, San Bernardino County is the largest county in the contiguous United States. Home to approximately 2.2 million residents, the County includes 570,238 children, with 39% of households reporting at least one child under the age of 18. Participation in the needs assessment closely mirrored the diverse population of San Bernardino County, including regional and demographic characteristics. Participants of this survey identified as Latino (65%), White or Caucasian (29%), Black or African American (8%), Asian or Asian American (4%), American Indian or Alaskan Native (2%), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (1%), or of multiple ethnicities (9%). A majority of the parents who completed the survey identified English (80%) or Spanish (19%) as their primary home language.

Survey and interview data revealed the complexities parents face when navigating the child care system. The process of finding and enrolling in care is difficult, and there is no centralized, accessible source of information for families and information about child care can be inconsistent and incomplete. Parents often rely on word-of-mouth and online sources. Geographic access also poses challenges. Families shared that child care options are limited in their immediate areas, a concern supported by GIS mapping from CCRC, which identifies multiple child care deserts across San Bernardino County, even when license-exempt care is included.

Language barriers add another layer of difficulty for Spanish-speaking families. Compared to English-speaking respondents, Spanish-speaking parents were less likely to use brochures or online resources, and less likely to be aware of the early care options available to them, particularly Transitional Kindergarten. They also placed a higher value on having caregivers who speak their home language, emphasizing the need for culturally and linguistically responsive services. Given that 32% of San Bernardino County's population speaks Spanish, addressing this need is essential for equitable access to early care and education.

Regardless of background, parents identified the following as the most important characteristics of care: well-trained and experienced caregivers, affordability, and convenient location. Many parents noted that while they had heard of TK, they lacked a clear understanding of what it entails. Families frequently described the need to create a patchwork of various sources of information and care arrangements to meet their needs. This study also found that most families require care for 21 hours or more per week, and over 40% use care during non-standard hours, further underscoring the need for flexible and accessible child care options.

When asked what would make the process easier, parents suggested tools such as a checklist of enrollment requirements, an easy-to-navigate website, and access to an enrollment specialist to guide them through the process. Notably, Spanish-speaking parents more frequently cited the need for enrollment specialists.



Given the importance of family well-being to optimal child development, a key goal of San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools (SBCSS) and the Workgroup is to support the basic needs of the families of San Bernardino County. Families in the County face a range of challenges that underscore the need for increased support to promote stability and well-being. The living wage for a family in the County is approximately \$96,553, significantly higher than the median household income of parents participating in the survey, which was between \$35,001 and \$50,000. Furthermore, 77% of families reported participating in at least one public assistance or support program, while 14% of parents identified as unemployed or underemployed. Basic needs continue to be a concern for many families. Sixty percent of respondents reported some level of need for food assistance, and one in four families indicated a need for both food and housing support. These material hardships appear to contribute to heightened levels of stress among families: 57% of parents reported feeling stressed or overwhelmed, and 36% expressed concerns about their child's behavior at home and / or in child care settings.

Five recommendations emerged from the results of the needs assessment and are intended to enhance and guide San Bernardino County's ability to support families in a UPK mixed delivery system.

Recommendation 1: Provide one centralized location for ECE program information that includes comprehensive information to support parents in making informed decisions for their families.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen the early care and education workforce in San Bernardino County to ensure the provision of high-quality care that aligns with the needs, priorities, and preferences of families.

Recommendation 3: Implement comprehensive, multi-faceted strategies to address geographic barriers to accessing child care that meets the diverse needs of families in San Bernardino County.

Recommendation 4: Design and implement targeted strategies to strengthen the early care and education system in San Bernardino County by ensuring it is linguistically responsive to Spanish-speaking families.

Recommendation 5: Cultivate family well-being by ensuring children in all child care arrangements have access to comprehensive services including support for the provision of basic needs such as food.





Introduction

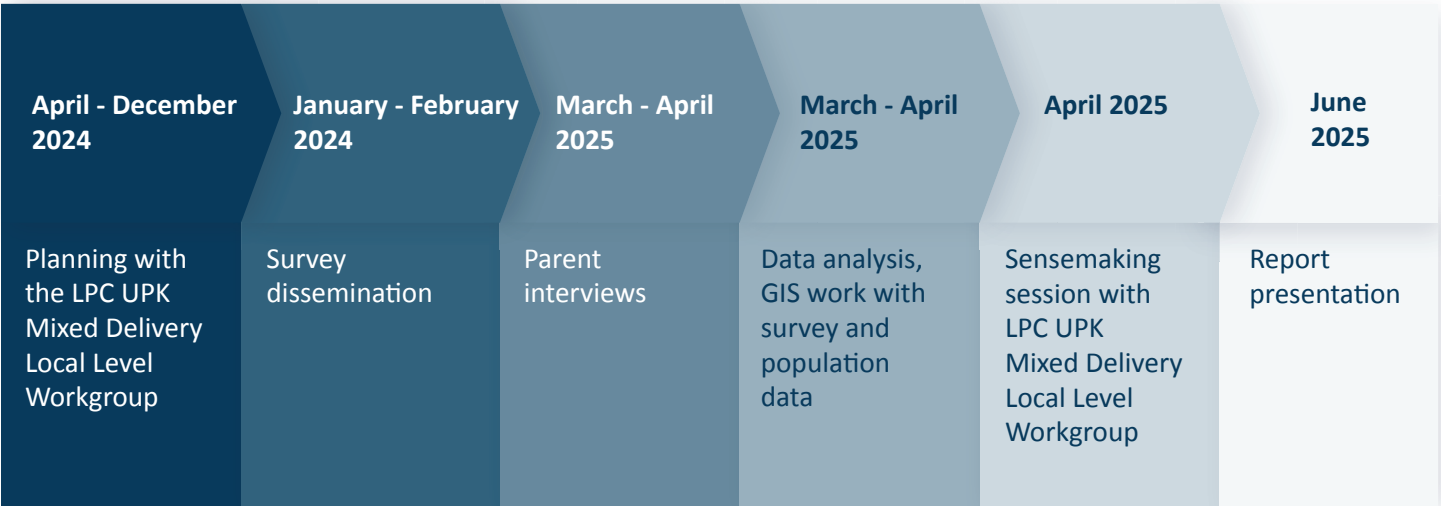
Research shows lasting results of attending high-quality preschool programs including closing the opportunity gap between children with more versus fewer advantages, long-term health outcomes including reduced cardiovascular disease, increased economic productivity and reduced crime (Heckman Equation, n.d). Investing in high-quality early care and education is therefore vital to positive individual and community outcomes. California has a vast array of early care and education program options to meet the needs of families and their children. These options are often referred to as the “mixed delivery system.” Parents have a wide range of options including licensed center-based and licensed or legally license-exempt home-based child care with some centers located on public school campuses and others in the surrounding community. While most parents pay for child care from their family budget, others qualify for subsidized child care or have access to free programs that are universal and do not require parents to income-qualify. One of the programs that is open to all parents and does not require them to qualify based on income is Transitional Kindergarten (TK) (Early Edge California, n.d.). California’s Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELOP) is a state-funded initiative that provides no-cost or low-cost before-school, after-school, intercession, and summer learning opportunities for students in transitional kindergarten through 6th grade (California Department of Education, n.d.). Additionally, Head Start, Early Head Start, and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships are federally funded programs that offer center or home-based options to parents who qualify based on established criteria (Head Start California, n.d.). Parents who qualify for voucher-based programs (CalWORKs Stage 1, 2, and 3, Alternative Payment Program, and Migrant Alternative Payment Program) can choose care in privately owned licensed centers, licensed family child care, or license-exempt care (California Department of Social Services, n.d.). Parents who meet specific qualifications can also access care at child care centers or family child care home education networks through direct contracts including General Child Care and Development, Migrant Child Care and Development Programs, Children with Severe Disabilities, Family Child Care Home Education Networks, and California State Preschool Programs. This wide range of programs in California ensures the state can meet the diverse needs of children and families. However, it also illustrates the complexities of the mixed delivery system of child care, often leaving parents confused about the available options for their children.

The priority of providing preschool access universally for three- and four-year-old children through a mixed delivery system led California to release the Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) Mixed Delivery Planning Grant. As part of the grant, San Bernardino County Local Planning Council (LPC) secured the services of Child Care Resource Center (CCRC) to assess the needs and gaps in access to care for their three- and four-year-old children. Information from this assessment will be used to plan for the expansion of high-quality UPK through a mixed delivery system in San Bernardino County.

CCRC is a large non-profit family resource center providing whole-child whole-family services across a 22,500 square mile service area of Northern Los Angeles County and the entirety of San Bernardino County with partnerships across the state of California. The CCRC Research Division has extensive experience conducting community-based research to drive data-informed decisions and support strategic planning. CCRC Communications is highly experienced in connecting with the community and developing tools to support partners in reaching the community of interest for any given focus, ensuring equitable access to services.

CCRC worked closely with San Bernardino’s Local Planning Council - UPK Mixed Delivery Local Level Workgroup to plan for the countywide needs assessment and fulfill the goal of community engagement and partnerships to create a mixed delivery system that meets the needs of the County’s children and families. CCRC’s Research and Communications teams participated in the workgroup facilitating multiple activities designed to leverage the group’s expertise and knowledge about the community of San Bernardino County, quality care and education, and families. As shown in Figure 1, planning began in April 2024 with initial meetings and work to design the survey. The workgroup provided input on priorities for the content of the survey and on the outreach strategy. Outreach materials, survey and interview tools were developed, translated and back-translated in the summer and fall of 2024. The survey was disseminated in January 2025 and was open for a month. Parent interviews were conducted between March and April, engaging parents who opted to participate in the interviews after completing the survey. Data analysis of the survey was conducted between March and April with results shared during a sense-making session with the workgroup in April 2025. The final analyses, including the analysis of the interviews were completed between April and June. A draft of the report and recommendations was completed in June 2025. Recommendations were shared and discussed with the workgroup in June 2025 to obtain their feedback.

FIGURE 1. PROJECT TIMELINE





Project Goals and Research Questions

The mission of SBCSS is to transform lives through education. Working in collaboration with school districts, families, community partners and other agencies, SBCSS provides leadership advocacy and services to ensure equitable, innovative, and inspiring educational practices. This endeavor is essential to the quality of life and economic vitality of communities. SBCSS has the goal of creating a mixed delivery system that meets the needs of the County's children and families and commissioned a countywide needs assessment to achieve this goal (San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools, 2022). The research questions guiding this work include:

Research Question 1: Who are the families of three- and four-year-old children in San Bernardino County and how can San Bernardino County prepare to support them in a UPK mixed delivery system?

Research Question 2: What are families' child care needs and plans for their three- and four-year-old children as the children become age-eligible for preschool and Transitional Kindergarten?

Research Question 3: What basic needs do families of three- and four-year-old children in San Bernardino County have and how can San Bernardino County support families so that children can thrive as they transition to preschool and beyond?

Methodology

This needs assessment employed a mixed methods approach with a parent survey, Key Informant Interviews (KII) with parents, and GIS work overlaying survey data with San Bernardino County population data. Parents' voices were central to this needs assessment as their lived experiences most closely reflect the community. Programs that are designed from the "user" perspective are more likely to be relevant for the recipient, effective, cost-efficient and have the greatest likelihood of achieving the goals of the program. Where applicable, local, state or national data are included to paint a picture of the landscape and full context within which families live.

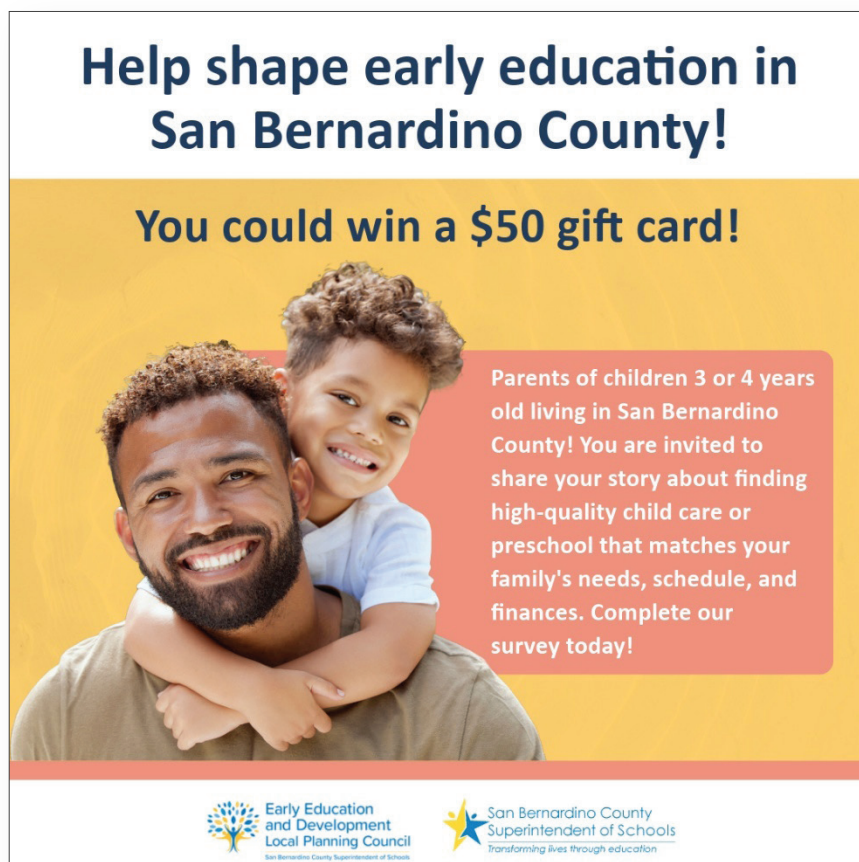
The LPC UPK Mixed Delivery Local Level Workgroup was deeply involved with all steps of the process. Starting in April 2024, the CCRC Research Team met with the workgroup on a bimonthly basis to plan the assessment, develop the survey, key informant interviews, and develop the outreach strategy and materials. After data collection started, the CCRC Research Team met with the workgroup to gather input on the preliminary findings and recommendations. The Research Team regularly facilitated activities and discussions to keep the group updated on progress and elicit feedback.

Sampling and Outreach

The CCRC Communications team designed the outreach material ensuring consistent branding so the survey could be widely distributed across San Bernardino County and reduce the possibility that parents would complete the survey multiple times if they received it from multiple sources. CCRC's Communications Division developed a Communications Toolkit consisting of email templates and flyers in English and Spanish tailored for direct communication to parents, email templates to engage community partners in the process of disseminating the survey, and graphics, hashtags, and taglines to be used in the distribution of the survey via social media including Facebook, X, and Instagram. These materials were reviewed by the Communications Team at SBCSS and approved to ensure alignment with SBCSS communications guidelines. An example of one of the communications tools is presented in Figure 2.

Connections and partnerships across the County were leveraged to disseminate the survey and resulted in a wide reach of families across the County. The toolkit was shared with the workgroup who then outreached to their community partners. In addition, CCRC who serves San Bernardino County also engaged in direct outreach to families by posting on social media (Facebook and Instagram) and distributing emails to parents of three- and four-year-old children who receive financial assistance for child care through CCRC or who had previously sought out child care through CCRC's Resource and Referral program.

FIGURE 2. SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POST IN THE PARENT SURVEY OUTREACH



Data Collection Methods and Analyses

Parent Survey

The parent survey was a main component of the needs assessment and integral in reaching a wide audience across San Bernardino County. It was designed in two main parts to mitigate the potential for non-participation due to the extensive length of the full survey. The first section of the survey was designed to query parents about their current and future use of child care, decision-making, and challenges and supports in accessing early care and education programs. This first part of the survey included questions on parents' current and future use of child care, where parents seek information, and what factors play into their decision-making on child care. This section of the survey was designed based on a literature review and existing tools used by UPK researchers and program developers in California (First 5 Orange County, personal communication, May 2024; Learning Policy Institute, personal communication, May 2024). This ensured relevance to the UPK system and comparability to other findings in the future. The first part of the survey was 59 questions long. Questions from this section will help guide communications about UPK programming as well as the development of the UPK mixed delivery system.

The second part of the survey focused on family basic needs including employment, food, housing, and other support for families. The basic needs section consisted of questions currently used to connect families to services in multiple programs at CCRC. This part of the survey included an additional 6 questions. The workgroup was interested in understanding basic needs because of the deep desire and goal of meeting not just the educational needs, but the holistic needs of the families in the County.



Validity of the survey instrument was tested through cognitive interviews with two parents during the development of the survey to ensure that the questions were clear, accurate, and interpreted as intended to elicit the information needed for the analyses. Minor modifications were made to the survey based on parental feedback received during the cognitive interviews. The survey was developed in English and translated into Spanish and back-translated into English to ensure language equivalency. The survey was administered using Jotform (Jotform, Inc., 2025), an on-line form-building platform which allows parents to complete the survey in either of the two languages, English or Spanish.

Parents received one entry into a \$50 gift card drawing by completing the first part of the survey (early care and education needs and preferences) and were given an additional survey drawing entry if they chose to complete the second part of the survey (basic needs assessment). A total of ten gift cards were awarded. The survey was active from January 2025 through February 2025. Survey entries were monitored and tracked daily to ensure that the project reached the minimal number of survey responses needed to conduct the analyses and that the distribution of participants by region, primary home language, and ethnicity was proportional to that of the population in San Bernardino County. Outreach strategies were amplified for Spanish-speaking participants when early monitoring of incoming survey responses showed an under-representation of participants from the Spanish-speaking community.

Key Informant Interviews

Fourteen parents took part in the Key Informant Interviews (KII). When completing the survey, parents had the opportunity to opt for further research. This resulted in a pool of parents from which to recruit for the

interviews. A recruitment matrix was developed to include a diversity of voices. This process ensured that parents from all four regions of the County, parents who spoke English or Spanish, parents across multiple household income levels, levels of education, and experiences with child care were represented. Once the matrix was completed, the CCRC Research Team reached out to the parents by telephone and email to invite them to participate. See Appendix A for a full description of the KII participants' backgrounds.

All interviews were conducted in either English or Spanish via Zoom phone (Zoom Video Communications, Inc., 2021), recorded in Zoom, and transcribed via Otter.ai in Zoom. Each parent received a \$125 gift card for their participation in a one-hour interview.

The interviews were analyzed using Dedoose (SocioCultural Research Consultants, LLC, 2021), a web-based software designed for qualitative and mixed-methods research data analysis. This tool allows for the organization of data from the survey and interviews. A content analysis of the data was conducted and is presented throughout the report with quotes from parents highlighted to illustrate themes central to the analyses of this report. KII questions are included in Appendix B.

Survey Data Analyses

For information on data governance and security, quality assurance, and validation of survey data, see Appendix C.

To ensure a sufficient sample size to detect group differences, a series of a priori power analyses were conducted using G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2009) to determine the required sample sizes for each primary research question. Separate analyses were performed for each planned statistical test, including chi-square tests of independence. For each analysis, power was set at 0.80 and the alpha level at 0.05. Effect size estimates were based on prior literature and standard conventions (e.g., Cohen's $w = 0.15$ for chi-square). The results indicated that the minimum required sample sizes ranged from 200 to 346 participants across tests. The final sample size ($N = 601$) exceeded all thresholds, ensuring adequate power to detect the expected effects.

Where meaningful and applicable, group analyses for the following were conducted by region (Valley vs. North Desert, East Desert, Mountain), by parent home language (English and Spanish), and by parent generational status (Generation Z or later, Millennial, Generation X or Prior). Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows (Version 27.0; IBM Corp., 2021).

Limitations

There is no centralized database to reach all families in San Bernardino County who have three- and four-year-old children. Therefore, partnerships throughout the County were leveraged to reach as many families as possible. Agencies who are part of the LPC and LPC UPK Mixed Delivery Local Level Workgroup worked with their own organizations, outreaching to their partners to disseminate information about the survey and distribute the survey. In addition, CCRC distributed the survey to families of three- and four-year-old children who receive financial assistance for child care or who called for child care resource and referral services in the prior year. Results show that the survey had wide reach across the County. However, it is possible that information about the survey did not reach a portion of the population of parents in the County who have three- and four-year-old children, specifically those who may not already be connected to the public school system. To gauge what percentage of this survey's response constituted parents who have engaged with the public school system the survey asked if they ever had a child enrolled in public school and 73% had. Therefore 27% of survey respondents were not previously connected to the public school system. However, there is no way of knowing how many families of three- and four-year-old children this survey did not reach.

Results and Discussion

The results in this report are organized around the three research questions. Data from all relevant sources are interwoven as they apply to each theme discussed in the report. Quotes from parents are included throughout to illustrate and highlight relevant themes and to contextualize data from the survey. To protect families’ identities no names are used and minimal descriptions of the families are provided with the quotes.

Research Question 1: Who are the families of three- and four-year-old children in San Bernardino County and how can San Bernardino County prepare to support them in a UPK mixed delivery system?

To support families in a UPK mixed delivery system, we must first understand who the families are and where they reside. There is a comprehensive body of research supporting the fact that familial experience with the early care and education system varies by demographic characteristics such as race and ethnicity, language, income, and parent education and by location (Magnuson & Duncan, 2022; Mendez & Suskind, 2018; Chaudry et al, 2023; Paschall, Madill, & Halle, 2021).

Demographic Information

This survey received a total of 601 valid responses from families across San Bernardino County. While a few caregivers who responded to the survey identified as adopted parents, step parents, foster parents, and grandparents, a majority (93%) identified as biological parents, as seen in Table 1. In addition, 93% of the participants were female. For the purposes of this report, all caregivers will be referred to as parents.

TABLE 1. PARENT CHARACTERISTICS

Relation to the Child	Percent of Participants (n=601)
Biological parent	93%
Adopted parent	3%
Foster parent	2%
Stepparent, Grandparent, Other Caregiver	2%

Where families live can significantly affect families’ experiences with the early care and education system by impacting accessibility to programs and the cost of care. For example, families who live in more urban areas frequently have more access to early care and education programs than parents in more rural areas. There are areas across the country that are considered child care deserts, areas where there is an insufficient supply of licensed child care to meet the demand in that geography. In the United States, more than half of all Americans lived in areas classified as child care deserts in 2018 (Malik et al, 2018). In San Bernardino County, only 16.8% of children ages 0-5 years with all available parents in the workforce have access to a licensed child care space while 23.9% have access to care when considering both licensed and unlicensed care (CCRC, n.d.). Where families live also affects their child care arrangements. That is, families living in rural areas are less likely to use center-based preschool programs than families living in more urban areas (Center for American Progress, 2019).

With a geography that spans over 20,000 square miles, by area, San Bernardino County is the largest county in the contiguous United States (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). The County is commonly divided into four distinct areas: Valley Region, North Desert Region, Mountain Region, and East Desert Region. The greatest percent



of the population resides in the Valley Region (72%), followed by the North Desert Region (22%), with lower proportions of the population in the Mountain (7%) and East Desert Region (2%) (San Bernardino County Community Indicators, n.d.).

Due to the County’s size and geography, families may have different experiences with accessing early care and education programs based on where they live. Therefore, having proportionate representation from families in each of the four different regions of the County participate in this survey was critical to ensure parent perspectives from across the County were included.

As seen in Table 2, the proportion of parents responding to the survey by region closely aligns with the distribution of the County’s population across the

four regions. The largest portion of the survey responses received were from the Valley Region (54%) which is the most populated region of the County and is comprised of Fontana, San Bernardino, Ontario, Colton, Rialto, and Rancho Cucamonga. The next largest group of surveys were returned by parents from the North Desert Region (36%) comprised of cities such as Apple Valley, Fort Irwin, Hesperia, and Victorville. Families from the Mountain Region, representing Big Bear, Crestline, Lake Arrowhead, Running Springs, and Wrightwood comprised 7% of the survey responses and families from the East Desert Region representing Yucca Valley and Morongo Valley made up 2% of the survey responses.

TABLE 2. SURVEY RESPONSES BY COUNTY REGION

County Region	Percent of Participants (n=601)	San Bernardino County*
Valley Region Fontana, San Bernardino, Ontario, Colton, Rialto, Rancho Cucamonga	54%	72%
North Desert Region Apple Valley, Fort Irwin, Hesperia, Victorville	36%	22%
Mountain Region Big Bear, Crestline, Lake Arrowhead, Running Springs, Wrightwood	7%	3%
East Desert Region Yucca Valley, Morongo Valley	2%	3%

*Source: San Bernardino County Community Indicators, n.d.

Race and Ethnicity

An extensive body of research illustrates disparities in families' experiences with the ECE system based on their race or ethnicity and language. Black, Latino, and Native American families are more likely to live in child care deserts (CCRC, n.d.; Malik & Hamm, 2017). Black and Latino families spend a higher proportion of their income on child care and have less access to child care subsidies (Malik & Hagler, 2017; Crosby, Mendez, & Barnes, 2019; Center for Law and Social Policy, 2014). Families whose primary language is not English have limited availability of early childhood educators who communicate in their language, have less access to outreach and enrollment materials in an accessible language, and have lower participation in public child care assistance programs, including Head Start and State Preschool than their English-speaking counterparts (Schumaker, 2019).

As illustrated in Table 3, the greatest proportion of parents completing the survey identified as Hispanic or Latino (65%). The next largest groups identified as White or Caucasian (29%), Black or African American (8%), Asian or Asian American (4%), American Indian or Alaskan Native (2%), or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (1%). Nine percent selected multiple categories. The proportion of parents in each race or ethnic category who completed a survey closely mirror the population in San Bernardino County, suggesting good representation of the survey respondents across these groups.

TABLE 3. PARENT RACE AND ETHNICITY

Race / Ethnicity	Survey Parents (n=596)	San Bernardino County*
Hispanic or Latino	65%	56%
White or Caucasian	29%	25%
Black or African American	9%	9%
Asian or Asian American	4%	9%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	2%	<1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1%	<1%
Multiple categories selected	9%	

Note: Participants were able to select multiple categories. Therefore, the sum of the percentages is greater than 100%.

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024



Primary Home Language

Having a firm understanding of the linguistic needs of the community is paramount to providing linguistically responsive services. Language may play a role in parents' access to the ECE system and in promoting equitable participation in ECE programs. According to the U.S. Census, 59% of the population reports English as their primary language and 32% of the population reports Spanish as their primary language in San Bernardino County. See Table 4.

Of the participants completing the survey, 80% reported English as their main home language, followed by Spanish (19%), and other languages (2%). The other languages included Chinese (Mandarin), Tagalog, Arabic, Farsi, Punjabi, Portuguese, and Korean. Parents also reported their child's primary home language and for most parents (95%), child's home language was the same as their own home language. In instances where there were language differences between children and parents, parents reported English as their child's primary home language but not as their own.

Compared to the population in the County, the survey had an overrepresentation of parents reporting English as their primary language and an underrepresentation of parents reporting Spanish as their primary home language. It is possible that the outreach efforts did not reach as many Spanish-speaking families as intended and this should be kept in mind for future outreach regarding the UPK mixed delivery work.

TABLE 4. PRIMARY HOME LANGUAGE

Primary Home Language	Survey Children (n=597)	Survey Parents (n=597)	San Bernardino County*
English	83%	80%	59%
Spanish	16%	19%	32%
Other	1%	2%	8%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2024



Parent and Child Age

In 2021, San Bernardino County was home to approximately 570,238 children, accounting for 26% of the overall population of 2.2 million people. In terms of households, 39% of households had at least one child. Of the child population, 85,967 children (15%) were between the ages of birth and two-years-old, 89,304 (16%) were ages three- to five-years-old, and 394,967 (69%) were between the ages of six- and 17-years-old. Population projections indicate that the number of children in the County is expected to remain relatively stable through 2060, with an estimated 541,769 children residing in the County by that year (Kidsdata.org, 2021).

This survey focused on three- and four-year-old children and included screening questions to exclude families who did not have a child within the age groups of interest. However, a group of completed surveys for two-year-old children was received and included in the analyses. This determination was made in collaboration with SBCSS because parents of two-year-olds also share in the experience of finding early care and education programs for their children and may seek early care and education programs for a child who is approaching three-years-old. In instances where parents had multiple children within the target age range for this survey, parents were asked to focus on the oldest of their children in the age range. As a result, 53% of parents reported on a four-year-old child, 43% on a three-year-old child, and 4% on a two-year-old child. Thirty-four percent of parents have at least one other child between the ages of 0-5 years old and 71% of parents have another child between 6-18 years old as seen in Table 5. Parents who completed a survey ranged in age from 21- to 73-years-old and a majority were between the ages of 30-39 years old as seen in Table 6.

TABLE 5. AGE OF FOCUS CHILD

Child Age (n=601)	Percent of Children
2 years old	4%
3 years old	43%
4 years old	53%
Parents with additional children 0-5 years	34%
Parents with additional children 6 years and older	71%

TABLE 6. PARENT AGE

Parent Age (n=601)	Percent of Parents
21-29 years old	16%
30-39 years old	59%
40-49 years old	22%
50-59 years old	2%
60 years old or more	<1%

Marital Status

There are key impacts of marital status on families of young children. Married families typically have dual income earners which tend to have higher incomes than single-parent households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024) which buffers children from financial hardship. And marital status is deeply tied to household living arrangements. That is, households with married marital status tend to have more than one adult present and tend to be dual-income households (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). In San Bernardino County, 58% of children live in households where two parents are present, 28% live in households with single mothers, 9% live in households with single fathers, 5% live in households where no parents are present, but other relatives are, and 0.9% of children live in households where no parents or other relatives are present (Kidsdata.org, 2021). While not a direct comparison, in San Bernardino County, 67% of children live in households in which the parent is married or living with a partner, 18% in households with a parent who is never married, not living with a partner, 3% in households where the parent is divorced, and less than 1% in households in which the parent is widowed as illustrated in Table 7.

TABLE 7. PARENT MARITAL STATUS

Parent Marital Status (n=601)	Percent of Parents
Married or living with a partner	67%
Never married, not living with a partner	18%
Divorced	3%
Widowed	<1%
Prefer not to answer	11%



Educational Level

The parents who completed the survey had a higher educational attainment than that documented for the population in San Bernardino County. In 2022, 82% of adults 25 years or older had a high school diploma or higher in San Bernardino County, compared to 91% in this sample. In addition, 23% of adults 25 years or older had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 30% in this sample. See Table 8. The median educational achievement was some college, and the mode was some college. Higher educational attainment is related to multiple child socioeconomic and health outcomes. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2023) found that children with college-educated parents are significantly more likely to complete high school and enroll in postsecondary education than children whose parents have lower educational attainment. In addition, parental education has an influence on family income which affects child nutrition, healthcare access, and overall well-being. Research from the Urban Institute in 2023 showed that higher parental education reduces child poverty risk by 40% (Urban Institute, 2023). Hence, supporting parents with their child care needs through a mixed delivery system is essential not only for working parents but is also a key resource for parents to achieve educational success.

TABLE 8. HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

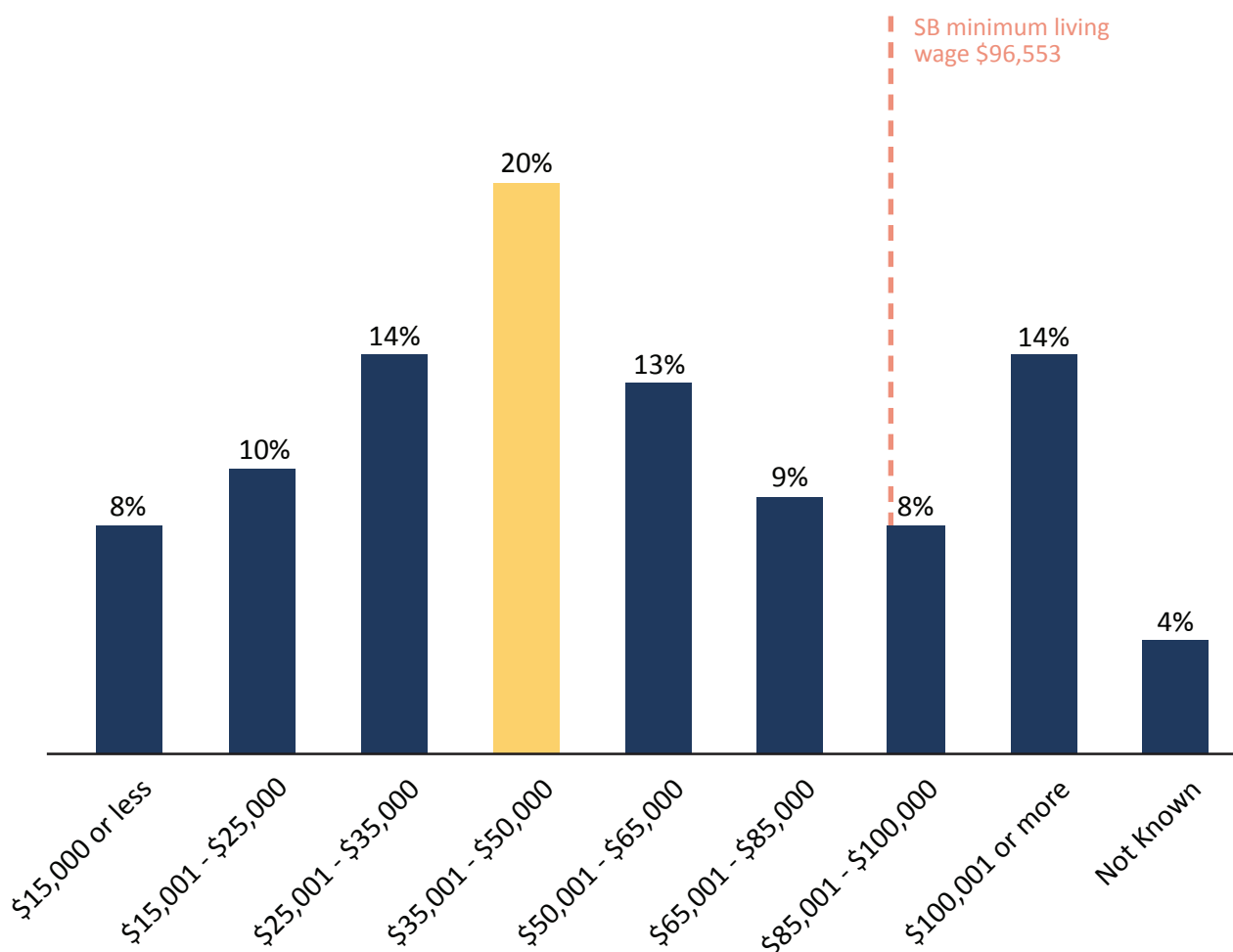
Education Level (n=601)	Percent of Parents
No high school or some high school	7%
High school diploma / GED	18%
Vocational or Trade school	9%
Some college	22%
Associate degree (AA, AS)	12%
Bachelor's degree (BA, BS)	19%
Advanced degree (Master's degree or above)	11%
Prefer not to answer	2%



Household Income

According to the MIT Living Wage Calculator (February 2024), a single adult with one child living in the Riverside-Metro-Ontario, California region must earn approximately \$96,553 a year to earn a living wage. This reflects the minimum income required to meet the minimum standards to live in San Bernardino County while being self-sufficient and takes into account the cost of food, child care, healthcare, housing, transportation, and other basic needs. In comparison, in San Bernardino County the median household income was \$82,184 a year and \$135,000 a year in California (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Among survey participants, the median household income was \$35,001-\$50,000 a year, well below the County and state medians. Additionally, 74% of families participating in the needs assessment reported an annual household income less than \$85,001, placing the majority of families below the regional living wage threshold for a family comprised of one child and one working adult. See Chart 1.

Chart 1. The median yearly household income of \$35,001-\$50,000 for survey participants was well **below the minimum living yearly wage of \$96,553** for a family of one working adult and one child in San Bernardino County.



Research Question 2: What are families' child care needs and plans for their three- and four-year-old children as they become eligible for Transitional Kindergarten?

To gain insight into parents' current use and future needs for child care, parents were asked about their child care arrangements at the time of the survey and about their child care arrangements in the future. To focus parents on a date in the future, parents were asked about their child care arrangements for the upcoming school year, starting August 2025. Parents provided information on the early care and education setting (license-exempt, licensed family child care home, center-based), days and time of day of care, and number of hours during which their child was in care during the time of the survey (current) and what they would need in the future (August, 2025).

During the data analysis process information parents provided was coded into categories to designate child care that took place during standard hours and non-standard hours. Standard hours of care included weekday mornings and afternoons between the hours of 8am and 6pm. Non-standard hours of care included between the hours of 6pm and 8am and during weekends based on the categorization used in prior research (NSECE, 2015). To determine whether parents had variable schedules, they were also asked if their schedule varied week to week.

Current Child Care Use and Future Needs

Early Care and Education Setting

Overall, 76% of all parents reported that they had non-parental child care arrangements for their child, while 24% reported their child was not in child care. Charts 2 and 3 illustrate the arrangements by age of child and for overall group. Overall, 61% of parents shared their child was in center-based care, 12% reported their child received care in a family, friend, and neighbor setting, and 9% reported licensed family child care as one of their arrangements. Out of all parents who reported that they had child care arrangements for their child, 10% reported concurrent child care arrangements, that is, use of two or more child care settings for their child. Parents reported concurrent care for 13% of two-year-olds 11% of three-year-olds, and 9% of four-year-olds. The percent of children in concurrent care parents reported in this needs assessment was higher than the 5% found in a recent landscape analysis of home-based care in Los Angeles County (Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles, 2023) and lower than the 26% of parents in California reported in recent work by the Learning Policy Institute (Wang, V., 2025).

Several patterns emerged in both current and anticipated use of child care. During both timeframes, less parents reported non-parental care for two-year-olds than for the other two age groups with parents reporting only parental child care arrangements for 64% of two-year-olds currently and 59% in the future. For three- and four-year-old children a majority reported center-based care currently (54% and 69%, respectively) and in the future (60% and 76%, respectively). For 70% of parents, the need for child care will not change in August 2025. Eighteen percent reported that their needs would be different and 15% indicated that they were not sure yet of their future child care arrangements. Indeed, multiple parents who participated in the KIIs shared that they were working through multiple factors to make a decision on the child care arrangements for their child. These factors included which child care option would be best for their child, whether the hours offered in child care options available to the family would suit their needs, and considering whether to choose an option that would allow their younger child to attend the same school as their older children.



"I'm still trying to figure out what to do. He is supposed to be enrolled in TK, in 2 weeks, and the TK program is like down the street from the house but it's only a 3 to 4 hour program...So, in order to put him in that type of classroom environment, I have to find child care either before or after."

~ Parent of a 3-year-old

Chart 2. Over three quarters of parents (76%) have their child in at least one non-parental child care setting with 61% in a center-based setting. (n=601)

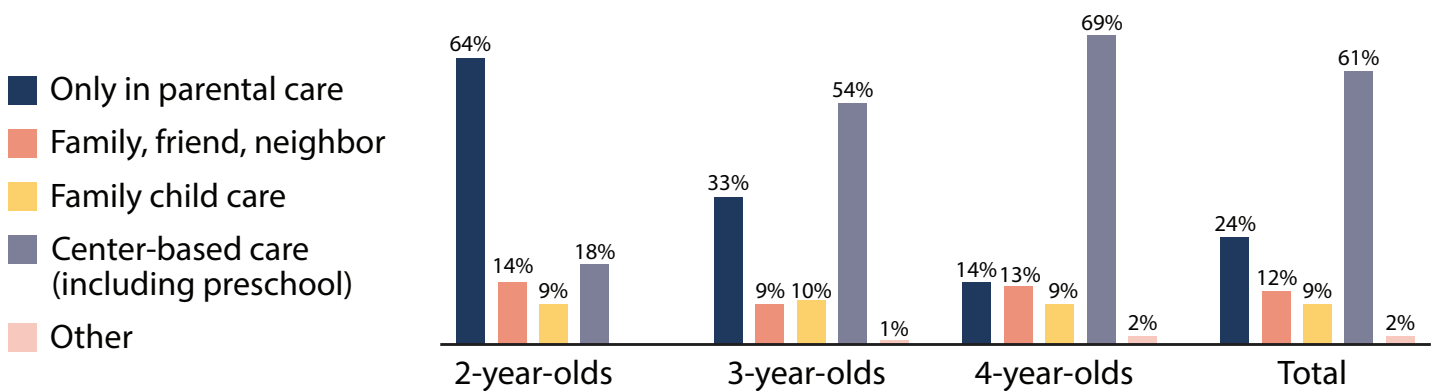
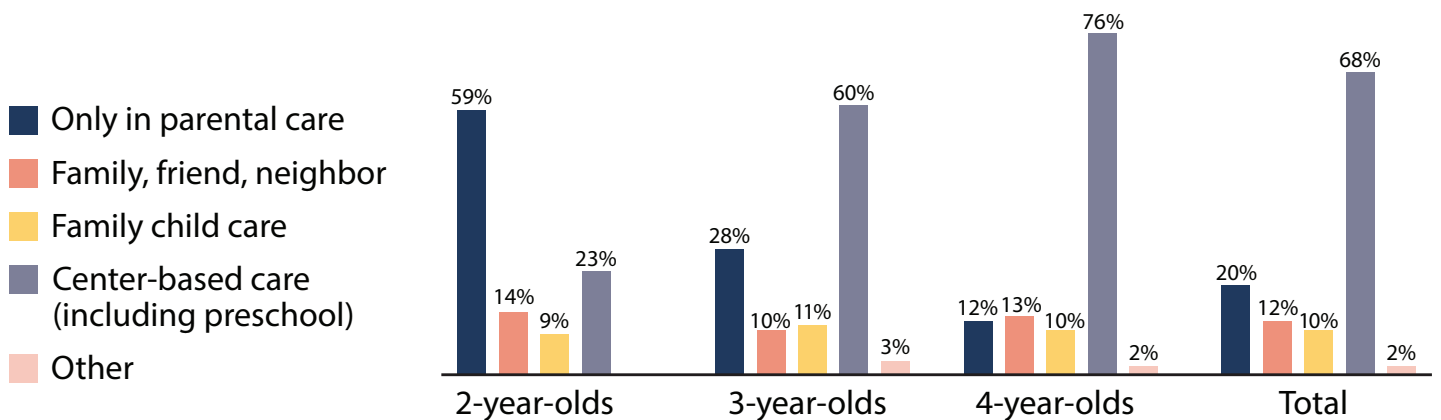


Chart 3. Eighty percent of parents anticipate using at least one non-parental child care setting with 68% planning to use center-based care. (n=601)



Hours of Care

The number of hours and timing of care needed by parents was consistent between current and anticipated future use. Notably, as presented in Chart 4, **50% of parents indicated that they would need care for 21 hours a week or more equating to over 4 hours a day, which exceeds the hours typically offered by half-day preschool center-based programs.** This gap in care availability was a prominent theme in KIIs, where parents expressed challenges in securing sufficient hours of care to accommodate work and school schedules. These findings highlight the critical role of home-based providers, such as family child care and license-exempt caregivers, who often serve as essential support in bridging the gap between formal program hours and families' actual care needs.

Two parents described the challenge they faced with the limited number of hours of care offered through a preschool and TK program:

"If we could have done preschool that was more like 6 hours, that would have been a lot more convenient. It's not convenient. But we make it work. It's a 3-hour program Monday through Friday. So, we try. We do our best when we make it work. But it's inconvenient, really."

~ Parent of a 3-year-old



"And so that's why TK is going to be really hard for me because I know that it's only like a 3- or 4-hour program. And that is definitely not going to work in my schedule. But everyone says that you should put him in TK. It's hard because it's not a full day schedule. It's not a workday schedule."

~ Parent of a 3-year-old

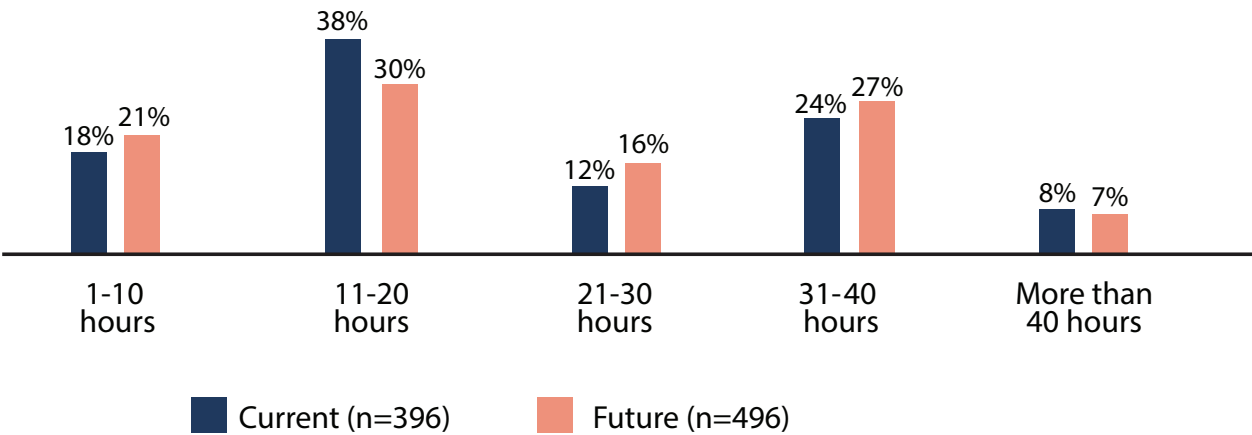
In response to this challenge, parents frequently create a patchwork of child care consisting of multiple arrangements that they eloquently described in the KIs. One parent described how she was able to piece together child care because one of the parents in the family had the flexibility to move the child from one child care setting to another. She also shared, however, that the family would not always have that flexibility. In this example, a parent described how they pieced together center-based preschool (state preschool) care with license-exempt care:

“In order to put him in that type of classroom environment I have to find child care either before or after. So, my thought was to keep him in his current care in the morning and then have him transported in the afternoon to a TK program and then have a family member or someone pick him up when the TK program is over. And I think that’s like 3:30, or 4. And then from there or a babysitter, somebody to pick him up, so then they could watch him ‘till the end of my schedule until the end of my day. So that’s kind of what I’ve come up with so far.”

~ Parent of a 3-year-old in Head Start



Chart 4. Half of parents reported a need for 21 hours of care or more for their child in the future. That is, more than 4 hours of child care per day.

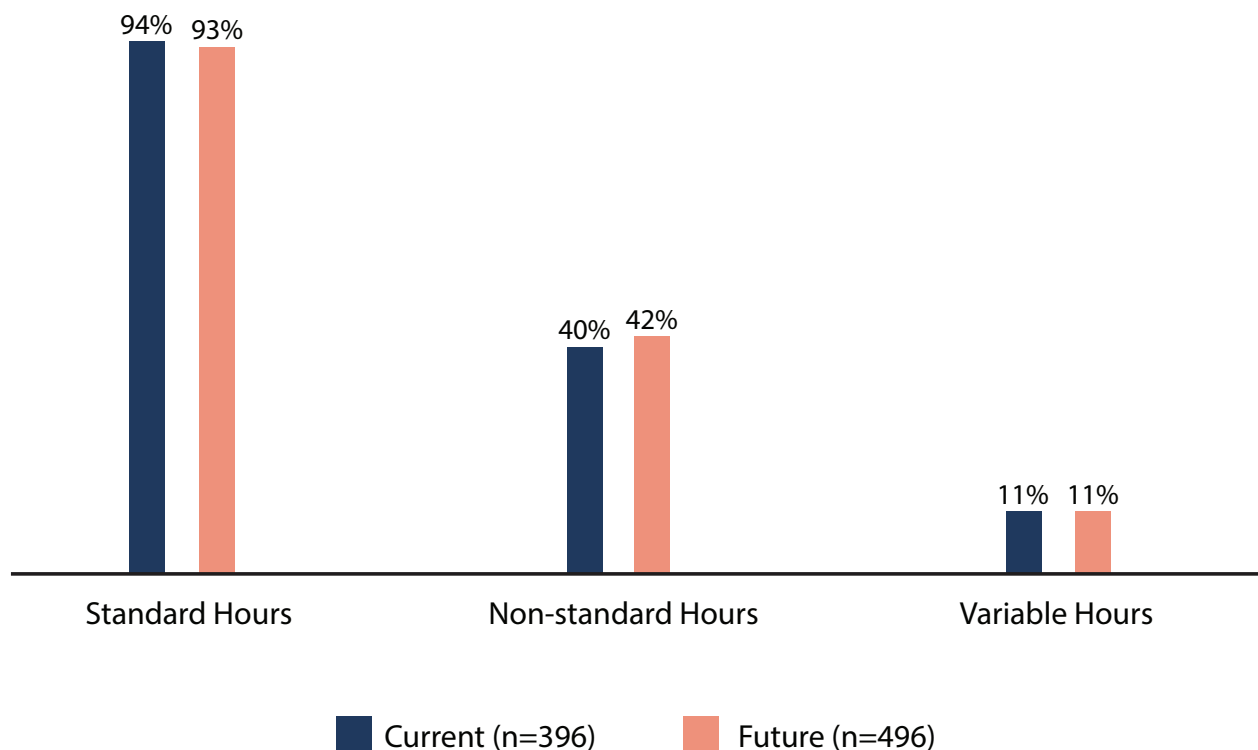


Schedules of Care

The need for child care during non-standard hours varies significantly among families. Research indicates that families with lower incomes, single-parent households, and parents who work full-time are more likely to require care outside of traditional hours, that is, between 6pm and 8am or on weekends (Borton, Datta, & Ventura, 2021). Chart 5 shows that 40% of parents in the current needs assessment reported currently utilizing child care during non-standard hours, and 42% anticipated needing such care in the future. The chart shows that more than 90% needed care during standard hours. The combination of these two results illustrates that some parents who use standard hours care also need non-standard hours care (e.g., those who need an early drop off time that extends into the traditional hours of a workday). This illustrates the need for extended hours of care within the mixed delivery system. These findings are consistent with a recent landscape analysis conducted in Los Angeles County, which found that 43% of families reported using child care during non-standard hours (Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles, 2023).

In San Bernardino County, the most common period of non-standard care use and anticipated need is during the early morning hours of 6am and 8am. Notably, 85% of parents who use care during non-standard hours currently rely on it during this time frame, and 72% expect to need it in the future. These findings highlight the critical importance of offering early care and education opportunities during early morning hours to better align with families' scheduling needs.

Chart 5. There is great **overlap between current and future schedule needs** with over **40% of parents** reporting a need for **non-standard hours**.



Parental Search for Care

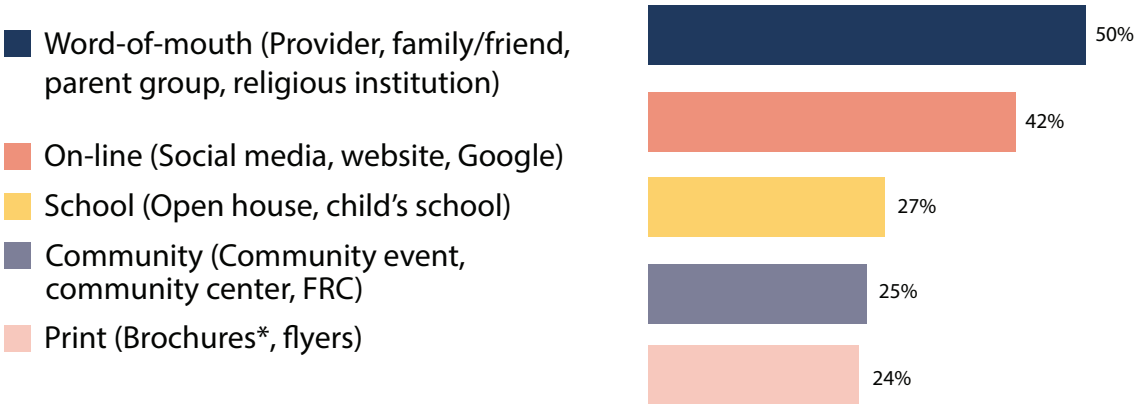
Research consistently demonstrates that parents consider a range of factors when selecting child care, and that the decision-making process is both multifaceted and dynamic (CCRC, 2021; Weber, 2011). Families weigh practical considerations such as location, operating hours, and cost, along with programmatic elements including the quality of early care and education, the learning environment, and characteristics of the staff, particularly cultural and linguistic alignment (NSECE, 2019; UnidosUS, 2022). Given the complexity of this process, gaining a deeper understanding of where and how parents seek child care, what specific attributes they prioritize, and the information they encounter during their search at the local level could provide valuable insights. Such knowledge can help improve support and resources available to families navigating the child care landscape.

How Parents Search for Child Care

A literature review conducted by OPRE in 2024 (OPRE, 2024) found that parents rely on trusted sources of information such as family, friends, and other close contacts as well as the internet for information about child care and early education programs. Through this needs assessment, parents completing the survey and those participating in the KILs provided information on their search for care.

Parents completing the survey were asked who their sources of information were when seeking out information about preschool programs, specifically. As illustrated in Chart 6, the most frequently cited source was word-of-mouth with 50% of parents reporting this, followed by on-line sources such as social media and Google (42%), and through school (27%). Twenty-five percent of parents reported learning about preschool programs through community sources such as community events, community centers, and family resource centers. Finally, 24% shared that they learned about preschool programs through print media such as brochures and flyers. While Chart 6 represents different source categories, parents were asked individually about each source and analyses were conducted to detect group differences in sources of information. Statistically significant differences were detected for brochures such that parents whose primary home language is Spanish were less likely to select that source of information than parents whose primary home language is English ($\chi^2 (df=1, N=585) = 14.62, p<.001$) with 32% of parents with English as a home language reporting this and 16% of parents with Spanish as a home language. This finding may be a result of a disparity in accessible print media with less accessibility in Spanish.

Chart 6. Word of mouth, on-line sources, and school were the **most frequently** cited sources of information to learn about preschool programs. (n=601)



Statistically significant difference between language groups at *p<.001.

During the KIIs, parents were asked about the sources of information they used when searching for child care for their three- and four-year-old children. The interviews mirrored the survey data that word-of-mouth and internet searches were among the most frequently relied upon sources. Specifically, 57% of parents identified the internet as a tool or source of information in their child care search. However, this reliance varied by language: 80% of English-speaking parents cited the internet, compared to only 33% of Spanish-speaking parents.

This disparity is consistent with broader patterns of unequal digital access. For example, in California, Latino Dual Language Learners (DLLs) are more than twice as likely as their non-DLL peers to reside in households without internet access, 12% versus 5%, respectively (Migration Policy Institute, 2021). Such disparities in digital connectivity may significantly limit access to critical information about ECE programs for certain families, particularly those with limited English proficiency.

Parents described their use of the internet as a source of information when searching for child care:



"I Googled; I searched on the Internet. Then I called around to them to get more information."

~ Parent of a 3-year-old



"I searched on the internet, and they gave me information and I went directly to the district to know how to do things."

~ Parent of a 4-year-old

"We used Google Maps initially saw that there was a daycare pretty close to me and then compared it to CCRC's online referral service to see if it was going to be covered by CCRC, and when I saw that they were reached out to them and started getting on boarded. But initially it was through Google maps."

~ Parent of a 3-year-old

One parent described going to her friend group on Facebook for advice:



"I still use Facebook. So, I went on there and asked. I'm part of this Mom's group on Facebook. I just asked on there if there was any preschool or Head Start program that I could put my child in at 3 years old. And I was just given information about that specific preschool."

~ Parent of a 3-year-old

Several parents described having complete trust in their friends and family and not expanding their search beyond what was recommended by the person they trusted. This was especially true if a trusted source was a child care provider or early care and education program that they had personally used and more prominent with parents citing Spanish as their home language.

One parent described asking a prior child care provider:



"Our previous babysitter who watched my child when he was a baby. She let me know that that was available to apply for because her son went through it, and she qualified through it. So, I was told through my other friend and our old babysitter."

~ Parent of a 3-year-old



"My mom takes my brother there. So, then that's why it was easy to find that place."

~ Parent of a 3-year-old

Parents who had already gone through a search process or had an older child in the school system had an easier time navigating and finding child care. When asked if there was any information that was difficult to find, they were less likely to share that they had experienced any challenges in finding information.

“I don’t know if it was really difficult, because I have 4 children. So, with him it wasn’t really difficult, because I kind of knew what I was doing.”

~ Parent of a 4-year-old

“The main reason we went with the program was first of all the expense. It’s a whole lot cheaper than all of the other places that we’ve looked at, and then my child already had a history with them.”

~ Parent of a 3-year-old



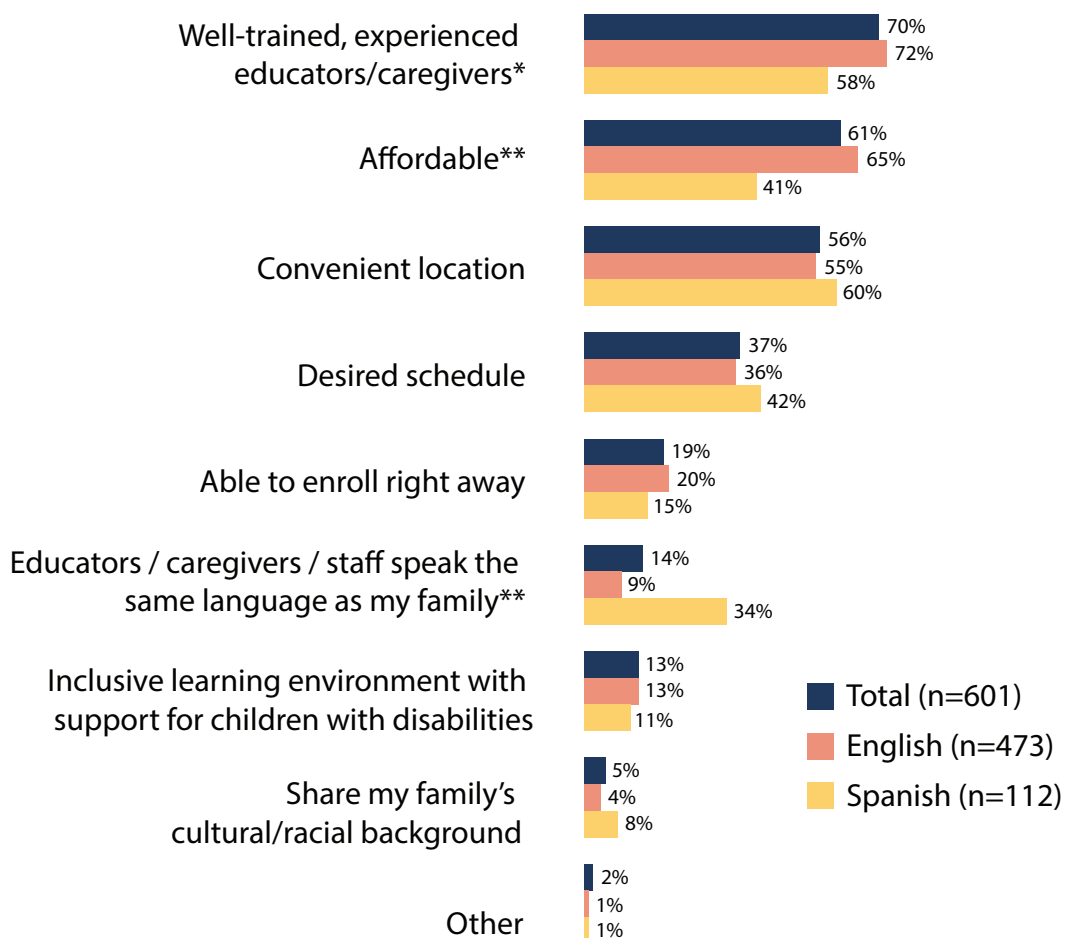
“Well, I mean, it was kind of evident we were kind of at an advantage, because our older daughter was still in preschool.... And so, it was easy. We were very happy with her sister’s program, and really wanted my younger child to do Head Start as well... We didn’t have to go searching for anything in particular for her, because we were already kind of immersed in the program through home base Early Head Start....”

~ Parent of a 3-year-old

Most Important Aspects of Care

Understanding what aspects of care are important to parents and their families is paramount in providing access to early care and education programs that fit families' needs. Parents completing the survey were asked to select the three aspects of care that were most important to them in searching for care for their three- or four-year-old. Parents most frequently selected well-trained, experienced educators or caregivers (70%), affordable care (61%), and convenient location (56%), as one of their top three most important factors in choosing care, as illustrated in Chart 7.

Chart 7. Qualified staff, affordable care, and convenient location were the top 3 **most important factors in choosing care** for their 2-, 3- and 4-year-old children.



Statistically significant differences between language groups at * $p < .01$ and ** $p < .001$.

There were statistically significant differences by language for three aspects of care: 1) educators, caregivers, and staff speak the same language as the family, 2) well-trained, experienced educator and caregivers, and 3) affordable care. Parents with Spanish as their primary home language were more likely than parents with English as their primary home language, to select educators, caregivers, or staff speak the same language as the family as one of their top three important aspects in their decision-making (χ^2 (df=1, N=585) = 48.13, $p < .001$). This may stem from multiple factors. One, the availability of programs with fluent Spanish-speaking staff might be limited, resulting in the need to intentionally search for this aspect of care. Communication is an important factor in developing strong partnerships between parents and early childhood educators and parents may specifically seek out early childhood programs with staff that can speak their language. In addition, parents may also seek out a caregiver that is able to support their children in the child's home language to maintain the language and the culture (Guzman et al., 2018).

Parents with English as their home language were more likely to select well-trained, experienced educators / caregivers (χ^2 (df=1, N=585) = 9.59, $p < .01$) and affordable care (χ^2 (df=1, N=585) = 21.91, $p < .001$) as child care priorities than parents with Spanish as their primary home language. It's not necessarily that parents whose home language is not English do not seek out qualified staff, however, there may be a hierarchy of needs expressed here. Parents with Spanish as their home language may give higher priority to the language accessibility offered by programs who can connect with them in their preferred language.

Data from the KIIs mirrored survey data, highlighting the significance of location in parents' child care decision-making. Proximity was not only a matter of convenience and accessibility but also an opportunity for families to strengthen ties within their local community. Parents emphasized that having child care located near their homes enabled them to reduce commuting time, engage in other responsibilities or activities, and ensured their children remained within a familiar and supportive environment. Additionally, nearby care facilitated greater accessibility for extended family or community members and allowed children to engage in their educational journey within the same neighborhoods in which they reside.

A couple of parents described the convenience of child care in proximity:



"Yes, exactly. It was closer, and I had more time to look after the other children."

~ Grandparent of a 4-year-old



"My family helps me sometimes. Like if I can't go. My family picks him up. This location is easier."

~ Parent of a 3-year-old

One parent described how choosing nearby care offered an opportunity to strengthen ties to her child’s community:

“I wanted to make sure she went to a school where she could see familiar faces, kids that were playing in our community. So, she will have friends. So, I looked at the two closest schools that work close to my house because I mentioned to you earlier too, that I was looking for distance.”

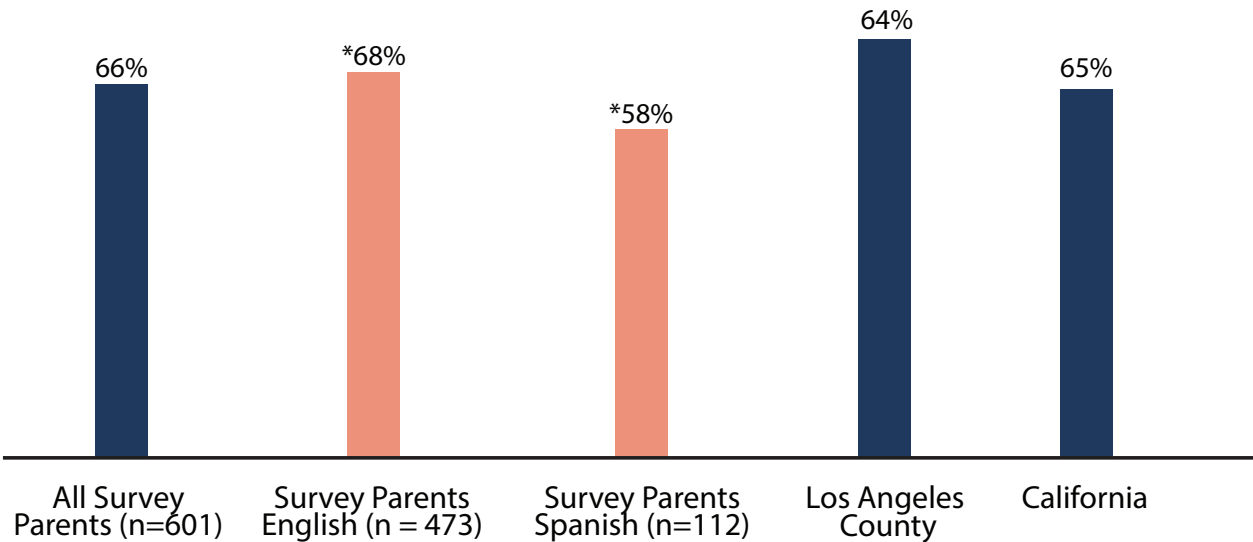
~ Parent of a 4-year-old in TK

What Parents Know About Transitional Kindergarten

To gain insight into parents’ awareness and knowledge about TK specifically, parents were asked if they had heard about TK. Sixty-six percent of the parents completing the survey indicated that they have heard about TK as shown in Chart 8. This proportion is similar to state and local findings from the RAPID Survey Project which found that 65% of families in California and 64% of families in LA County were aware of TK based on the survey conducted in December 2024 (RAPID Survey Project, 2025).

There were language disparities in parents’ awareness of TK in both the survey and interviews. Parents with Spanish as their primary home language were less likely to have heard about TK than parents with English as their primary home language (χ^2 (df=1, N=585) = 3.72, $p<.05$) with 68% of parents in the English group having reported this compared to 58% of parents in the Spanish group. In the KIs the difference was even more striking with 88% of parents in the English group having heard of TK but only 33% percent of parents in the Spanish group indicating an awareness.

Chart 8. Overall, **at 66% parents’ awareness in San Bernardino County** is similar to awareness in Los Angeles County and statewide. However, awareness is significantly less in the **Spanish-speaking community in San Bernardino with 58% reporting awareness.**



***Statistically significant difference between language groups at $p<.05$. Los Angeles and California data are from the RAPID-California Survey (RAPID Survey Project, 2025).**

Overall, the KIIs highlighted a need for further information about TK. **While a majority of parents heard about TK, parents did not always have clarity on what TK was, how it differs from preschool and kindergarten, when children are age-eligible to participate, what the income requirements are, or where it is offered.** Parents who were somewhat familiar with TK wanted to know more details about specific TK programs, such as the curriculum offered.

A few parents shared that they did not have complete clarity on what TK is:

"I really just only know that it is right before kindergarten. I don't know anything other than that. I've heard about it from the Preschool Department and Head Start, but that's it.

~ Parent of a 4-year-old

"I'm still kind of confused. What's the difference between preschool, TK, and kindergarten? All of it confuses me. I've heard of TK, but I don't really know much of a difference between preschool and TK. Are they all the same thing?... I don't know if they offer TK here at the elementary, or where it would be if they even offer it."

~ Parent with no current plan to send their child to TK

Parents have questions about the requirements:

"I know that at that point she would qualify for TK. I haven't been fully up to date on the information for that, like what area she can go to. But I know it's something she qualifies for. But I also need to be mindful because right now she has a speech impediment. So, she's going to speech therapy, and I also need to make sure she is mature enough.... I want to make sure she is not going to be outpaced by her peers...So do we go into transitional kindergarten? Do we wait another year of let you catch up?"

~ Parent who is not sure yet about sending her child to TK

"Basically. Yes, the thing for this coming year is the generalist who worked with us asked us if we were going to put my child in transitional kindergarten at the school where my older child attends. ... But my husband and I agreed that we really wanted our child to stay in Head Start as long as possible. And because we really like the program. And we've heard and understood kind of mixed things about TK. TK is actually a big reason why I wanted to do this interview, because I think that there's kind of a gap between preschool. I don't know about other preschools, paid preschool was not really an option for us, so we were super grateful when we learned we were eligible for Head Start, because we really wanted the kids to go to preschool. And that was the way it was going to happen for us, you know."

~ Parent of a 4-year-old in Head Start

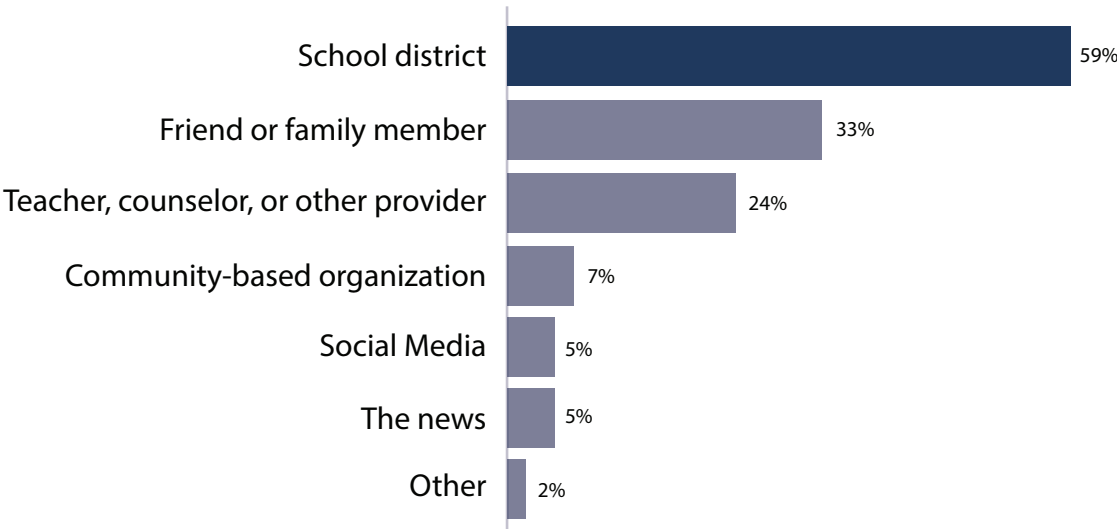
Another parent who has her child in TK shared the concerns that she has heard from other parents:

“I don’t know but I mean I have the fortune that I have my husband and me, but a lot of the moms that have their children in TK are single moms and a common problem that I found with them is the hours that the programs are offered. A lot of them have to go to work at 7 or 8 and there’s nothing that early for them. And I understand that it will mean that the program will have to open at 5 or 6 in the morning for this mom to go to work. And then a lot of them have to stay after hours after closing time. And there’s no one to pick up in that case. So, I see problems like with transportation or programs that don’t run that late for them.”

~ Parent of a 4-year-old in TK

This needs assessment also evaluated parents’ sources of information on TK. Of the parents who have heard of TK, the greatest proportion heard about it from the school district (59%) followed by a friend or family member (33%), and teacher, counselor, or another provider (24%) as presented in Chart 9. This contrasts with the prior finding that the top resources used for general child care search were word of mouth and internet searches. There were no language or generational differences in parental sources of information on TK.

Chart 9. Parents have heard about TK from multiple sources with a **majority (59%) having learned of TK through the school district.**



One parent described getting a list of preschool programs from a less common source, her doctor’s office. The information this parent received included information on the TK program that she ultimately chose for her child:



“I received the information in the wellness visit. They have a questionnaire asking about how you are doing as a mother and then if anything concerns you about your daughter. And I checked the boxes that I was overwhelmed. That I wasn’t doing very well. So, on top of the daycare programs, they also offer counseling programs I can look into.”

~ Parent of a 4-year-old in TK

Challenges in Finding Care

To support families in mitigating or breaking down barriers to child care access, this study assessed challenges faced by parents in their search for child care and enrolling their child in preschool (if they have already had that experience). The key themes that emerged through the interviews were challenges with location and challenges in the dearth of information available to parents during the child care search.

Location

One of the main challenges that surfaced during the KIIs was location. Parents described limited accessibility because there were not enough programs to fit their needs, either because there were none in specific areas or those that were available were at full capacity or did not fit the family's needs.

Three parents described this challenge:

"I used to live in Ontario...and so it's limited over here. Like everybody's kind of going to the same [child care provider]. And then that's why, even if you can't even tell if it's a bad one, because they're still full too."

~ Parent of a 4-year-old in the North Desert Region

"It's so limited where we live. That comes with living in a more rural area. When I speak to a lot of my colleagues, because they work down the hill, in a more metropolis area they have a lot more options. Whereas up here we're just so limited... We just don't have that much up here to be able to choose from."

~ Parent of a 3-year-old in the Mountain Region

"I think the challenges just really have been the amount of programs that are available in this area are small. It's a short list. It's not very long. I work in LA County, so of course that county is just as big as this one, but I think it's smaller. But with the amount of people space and just it, it seems like this county just doesn't have as many opportunities or resources that LA does. I always try to compare it and try to figure out what could be the differences. But I can't. I just know that for me, being here as a parent trying to get quality child care. I just don't feel like there's a lot of options that are here in the area."

~ Parent of a 3-year-old in the Valley Region

This lack of available programs points to the need to expand early childhood education programs capacity in specific regions of the County and a need to ensure that parents are aware and informed of all available options.

Limited Information About Programs

Although parents are interested in what the programs have to offer their children, including activities and curriculum, and in details such as information about the staff, many of the parents expressed that they were unable to easily find detailed information about the child care programs they were researching.

“It doesn’t tell you how they function, what their rules are or what their goals are. Are they a learning center? Are they a more arts and crafty center? Are they just there to keep your kids alive? Every one of those has a purpose. But you just get this very simple list, and it would be nice to kind of see the list and kind of have pictures right there just to have all the information, easily accessible. Like I said, a lot of the smaller ones don’t have websites or don’t have the information available on the Internet. And sometimes it can be hard getting a hold of somebody through the phone.”

~ Parent of a 3-year-old

“I think part of it is that it’s overwhelming because you’re not given a lot of information about the programs. You have to do it yourself. And you just kind of have to do your own research. If they don’t provide that information on any of the lists that were given to me. Nothing said, they focus on this, the size classes. There were no details other than the name and contact information. And where they were located. That was it.”

~ Parent of a 4-year-old in TK

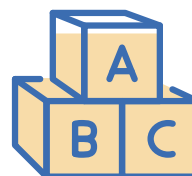
“The curriculum was difficult to find because it’s not a lot. And sometimes it’s not offered online through the website. I’d have to call to, to get it, to get the information... But once I was able to call and talk to somebody or get the tour, then I was able to get all of my questions answered, and then really figure out how the program would benefit or work it for our family, or if it wouldn’t.”

~ Parent of a 3-year-old

Enrollment in Publicly Funded Preschool or Transitional Kindergarten

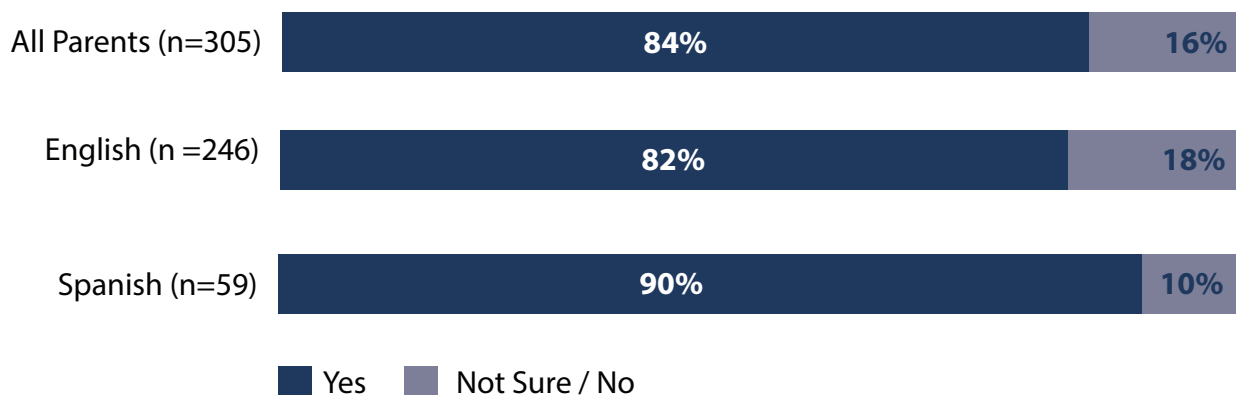
Plans to Enroll in Publicly Funded Preschool

Parents were asked if they planned to enroll their children in publicly funded preschool when their children become age-eligible. A subset of parents indicated that their children were already in preschool. Overall, 84% of parents reported that they would enroll their child in a publicly funded preschool when age-eligible. There were differences by language group such that parents who have Spanish as their home language were more likely than parents who have English as their home language to indicate that they plan to enroll their child in publicly funded preschool ($\chi^2 (df=1, N=305) = 4.15, p<.05$). See Chart 10.



84%
planning to enroll
their child in publicly
funded preschool

Chart 10. Eighty-four percent of parents plan on to enroll their child in publicly-funded preschool when they are age-eligible.



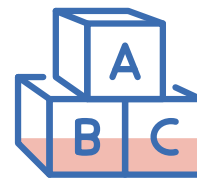
In addition, parents in the Valley Region, the most densely populated region in the County, were more likely than parents in the other regions of the County to report that they would enroll their child in publicly funded preschool. Specifically, 90% of parents in the Valley Region reported this compared to 82% in the other regions combined ($\chi^2 (df=1, N=305) = 4.13, p<.05$).

Parents provided reasons for why they plan or do not plan to enroll their child in publicly funded preschool, or reasons why they were unsure. Parents who plan to enroll their child in publicly funded preschool frequently provided multiple reasons for wanting to enroll their child with 70% of parents citing more than one reason. The most frequently cited reasons were because enrolling them in publicly funded preschool would prepare their child for kindergarten (56%), they have an older child who already attends the site where the parent would enroll a younger child in publicly funded preschool (50%), and because it is the most affordable option (50%).

The main reasons parents do not plan on enrolling their children in publicly funded preschool were because they want to keep their child in their current child care arrangements (47%), the school district does not offer before or after school care (23%), or they want to keep their child in the same child care arrangements as other children in their family (21%). Parents who were unsure about enrolling their child in publicly funded preschool were unsure because they want to keep their child in their current child care arrangement (33%), the child is not potty-trained (27%), or they are not sure when their child would be eligible (21%).

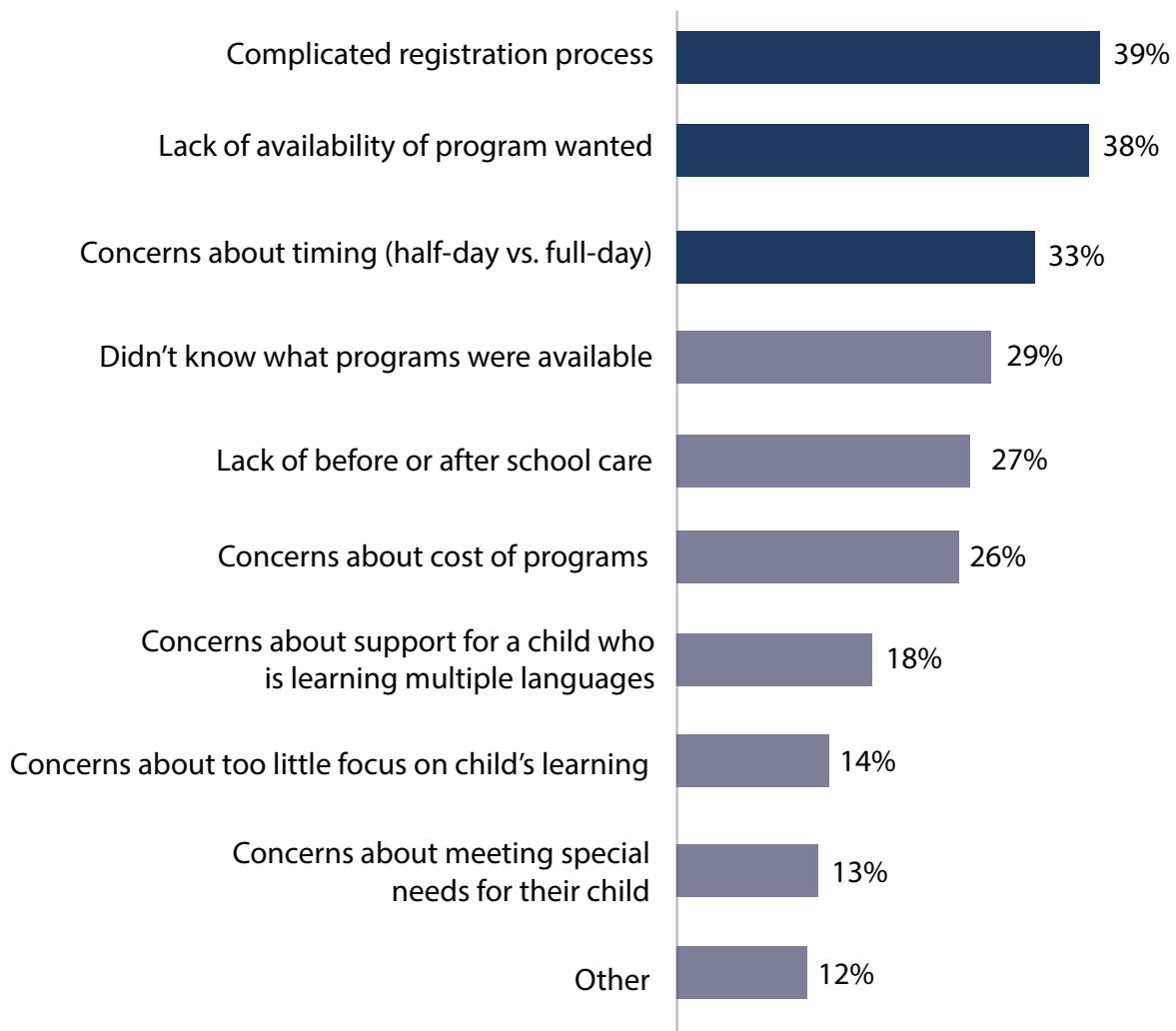
Prior Challenges in Enrolling Children in Preschool

Parents who completed the survey were asked if they ever attempted to enroll a child in preschool. Parents were then asked if they had experienced any challenges in enrolling a child. Twenty-three percent of parents reported a challenge in enrolling children in publicly funded preschool in the past. Of those who reported a challenge in the past, the greatest challenges reported were the complicated registration process (39%), lack of availability of the program they wanted (38%), and concerns about timing, such as half-day vs. full-day (33%). See Chart 11. No language or geographical differences were detected.



23%
reported a challenge
in enrolling children
in publicly funded
preschool

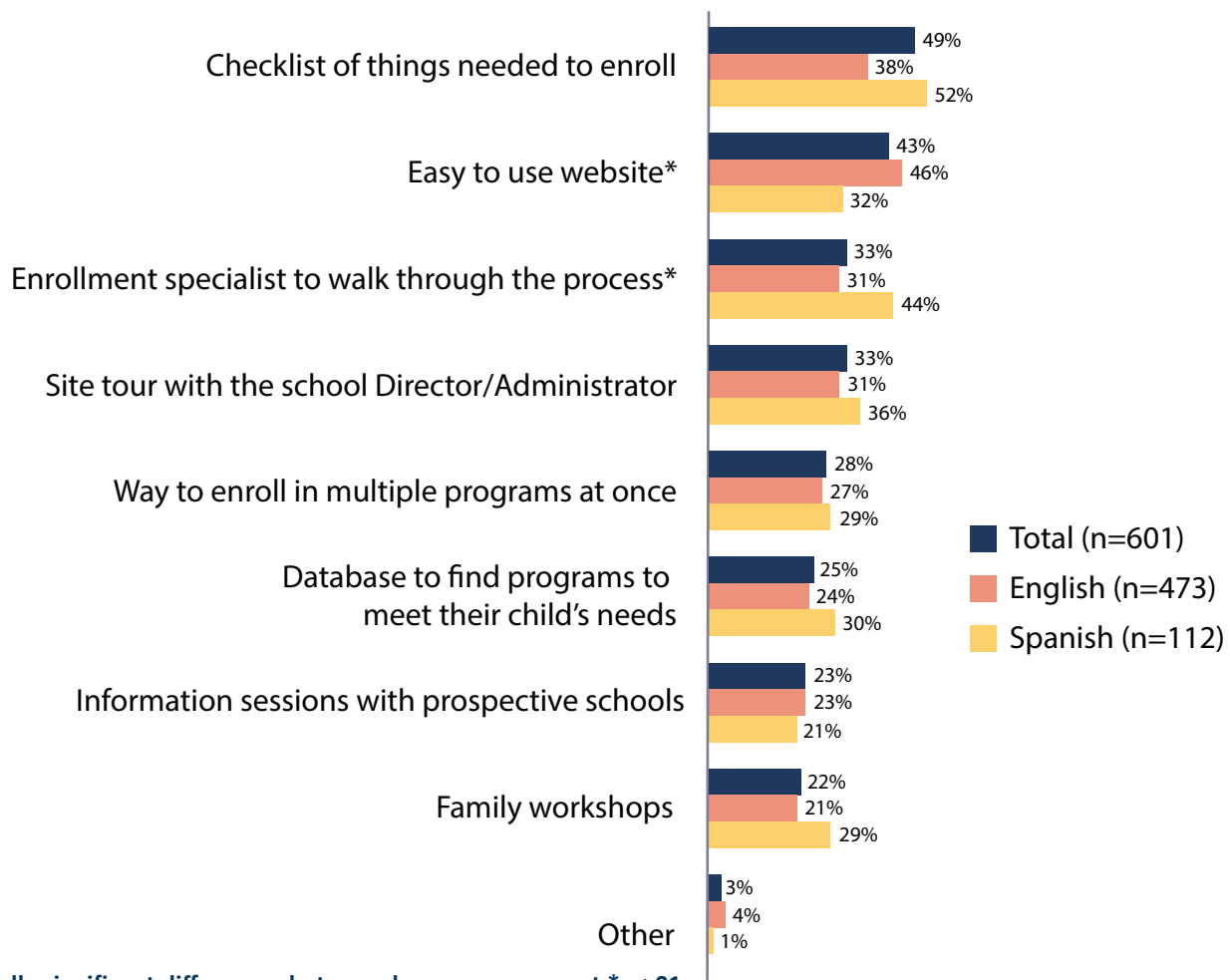
Chart 11. Complicated registration process, lack of availability, and concerns on timing were the **most frequently cited challenges** in enrolling children in preschool. (n=84)



Supports to Enroll in Publicly Funded Preschool

Underutilization of publicly funded preschool and TK in California is well-documented (Saucedo, 2024; Hill, Prunty, & Hsieh, 2022), particularly in Latino families who are disproportionately underrepresented in TK programs (Slovick et al, 2024). Underutilization is due to multiple factors including limited school capacity and barriers such as transportation and lack of access to wraparound services. This needs assessment identified not having a central location for information regarding early care and education as a significant challenge for parents. To identify support that could mitigate factors that serve as barriers or impede enrollment in a publicly funded preschool, parents were asked to report on support that would be helpful to them. Parents selected the following: a checklist of things needed to enroll (49%), an easy-to-use website (43%), and an enrollment specialist to walk parents through the process (33%) as the top three supports. This is illustrated in Chart 12.

Chart 12. Parents cited **checklist of items needed, easy to use website, and enrollment specialist to walk through the process** as the top supports that would be useful to enroll in publicly funded preschool.



Statistically significant differences between language groups at * $p < .01$.

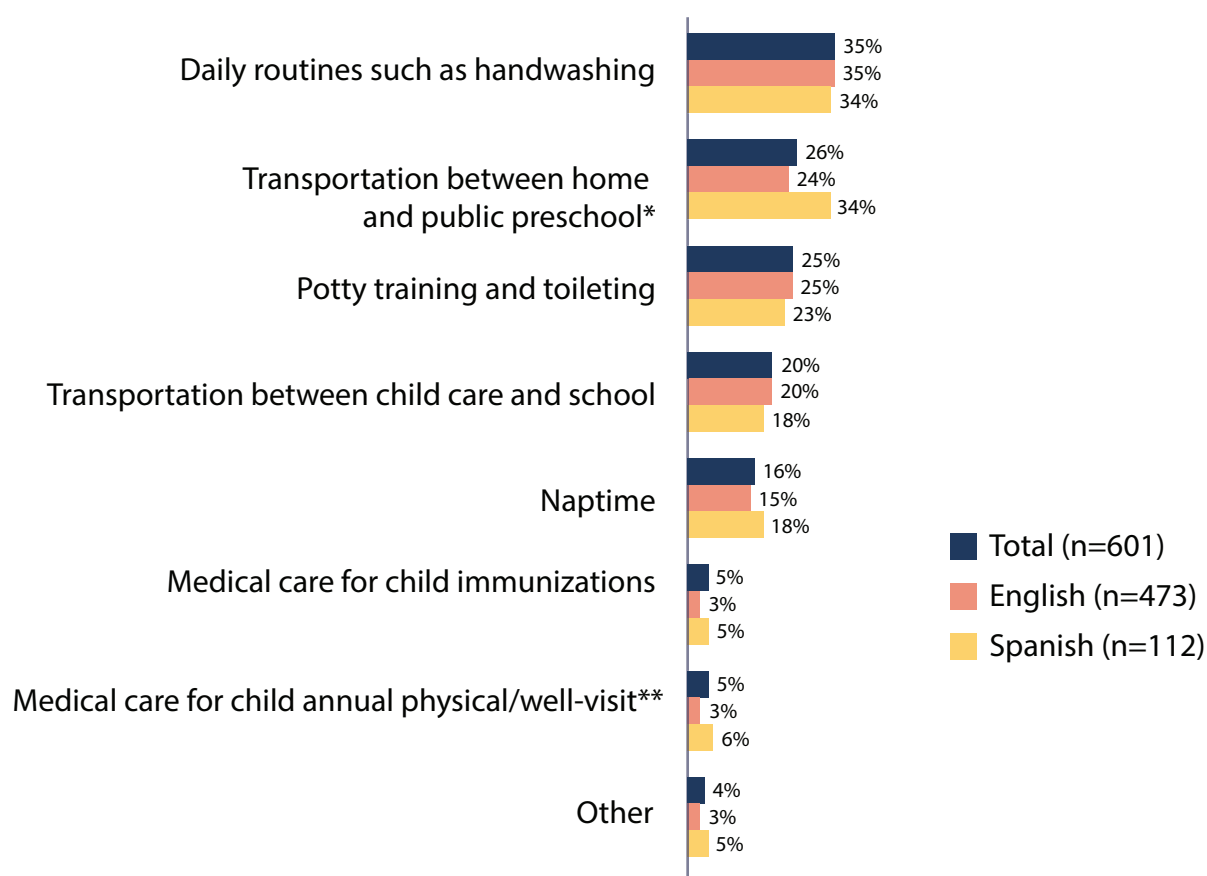
There was a language difference with parents whose home language is Spanish more likely to select having an enrollment specialist to walk through the process as a support that would be helpful in enrolling in publicly funded preschool (χ^2 (df=1, N=585) = 7.00, $p < .01$). Parents with English as their home language were more likely than parents with Spanish as their home language to select an easy to use website as a support that would be helpful (χ^2 (df=1, N=585) = 7.00, $p < .01$) and a checklist of things needed to enroll (χ^2 (df=1, N=585) = 6.51, $p < .01$).

Support to Transition to Public Preschool

Logistical Supports

Parents were asked what support would be helpful to their child in transitioning to public preschool. The largest group of parents reported that support with daily routines such as handwashing (35%), transportation between home and public preschool (26%), and potty training and toileting (25%) would be helpful. As seen in Chart 13, there were significant differences between the English and Spanish group where more parents in the Spanish group than parents in the English group reported needing support in medical care for physical / annual well-visits ($\chi^2 (df=1, N=585) = 15.47, p<.001$) and for transportation between home and public preschool ($\chi^2 (df=1, N=585) = 4.99, p<.05$).

Chart 13. Parents cited **daily routines such as handwashing, transportation between home and public preschool, and potty training and toileting** as the top three supports in transitioning to preschool.



Statistically significant differences between language groups at * $p<.05$ and ** $p<.001$.

Areas of Needed Support for Children

Understanding parental concerns about their child also sheds light on additional supports needed to help successfully transition children to preschool. Parents were asked about concerns regarding specific aspects of their child's development. Thirty-nine percent of parents cited at least one concern, as seen in Chart 14. Of the 61% of parents who cited a concern, 62% cited concerns with language development and speech, 57% with behavioral, social, or emotional development, and 29% cited concerns with their child's development in the ability to learn, think, and problem-solve as outlined in Table 9. Given the largest group of parents expressed concerns with their children's language development and speech, equipping staff with the capacity to support children in this area will help ensure that children thrive. Research supports the importance of early language and speech development on children's cognitive, social, and academic outcomes (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998).

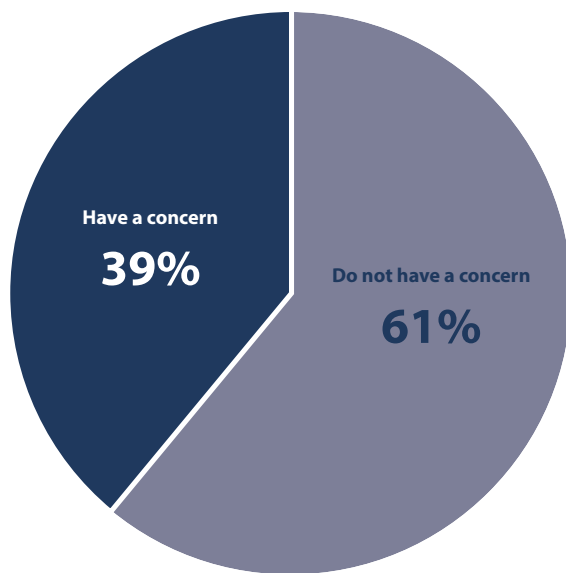


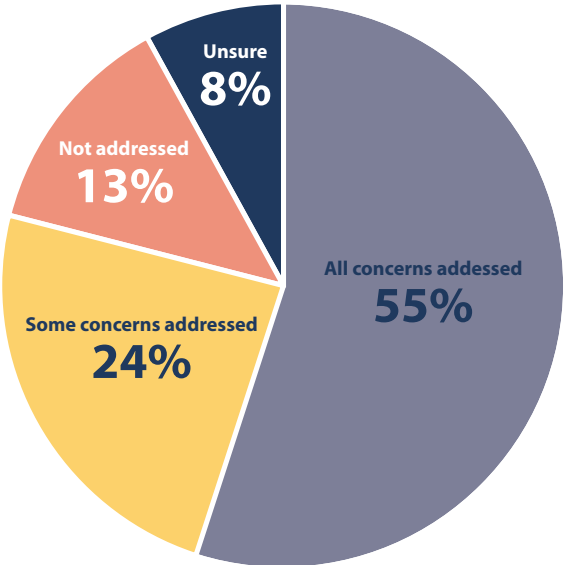
Chart 14. Thirty-nine percent of parents reported **at least one concern about their child.** (n=601)

TABLE 9. PARENTAL CONCERNS ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN

Concern (n=234)	Percent of Parents
Language development and speech	62%
Behavioral, social, emotional development	57%
Development in their ability to learn, think, and problem solve	29%
Physical development	9%
Vision	8%
Hearing	6%

Note: Participants were able to select multiple categories. Therefore, the sum of the percentages is greater than 100%.

Chart 15. Forty-five percent of parents reported that not all of their **concerns about their child were addressed** or they were **not sure if concerns were addressed**. (n=234)





Research Question 3: What basic needs do families of three- and four-year-old children in San Bernardino County have and how can San Bernardino County support families so that children can thrive as they transition to preschool and beyond?

For children and their families to thrive, their fundamental needs including access to food, stable housing, and healthcare must be adequately met. Research clearly demonstrates that basic material hardship can affect child and family well-being via multiple interrelated pathways. This includes direct pathways such as food insecurity leading to nutritional deficits in children that contribute to slow or compromised learning and development. In addition, indirect pathways can occur when families' inability to meet their basic needs results in parental emotional distress, which adversely affects children's emotional well-being. Indeed, the RAPID Survey Project found that higher levels of household material hardship are associated with lower developmental scores and higher levels of emotional distress for parents, which were then associated with higher levels of emotional distress in children (Liu and Raikes, 2025).

Hence, to support families with what they need most to help children thrive it is vital to understand the context within which families in San Bernardino County live. As described in the Survey Development section of this report, the second part of the survey consisting of questions regarding family basic needs was optional and of the 601 families who completed the first part of the survey, 294 families also completed the section on family basic needs. Therefore, results around family basic needs are based on the responses of these 294 participants.

Employment

Employment often provides a primary source of income contributing to family economic stability, enabling families to meet their basic needs such as food, shelter, transportation, child care, and healthcare. Adverse outcomes are typically mediated by financial strain, psychological stress, family conflict, and reduced access to resources as a result of unemployment or underemployment (Conger & Donnellan, 2007; Kalil & Ziol-Guest, 2005; Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). When reporting employment status for themselves, 14% of parents reported a status where support in employment may be wanted or needed. When reporting their partners' status, 9% indicated a status that may warrant additional support. See Table 10. While 21% of parents and 8% of partners were not actively seeking employment (stay-at-home parent or employed and works adequate hours) at the time of the survey, this does not preclude the potential need for professional development assistance in the future. Additionally, underemployment, including working for wages insufficient to meet the regional living wage, represents another significant challenge. Given the high cost of living in San Bernardino County it is important to assess and consider how parents can be supported in improving their earning potential through targeted workforce development, job training, or educational opportunities.

TABLE 10. PARENTAL EMPLOYMENT

Parental Employment	Parent (n=601)	Partner (n=601)
Stay-at-home parent (not seeking employment)	21%	8%
Employed and works adequate hours	51%	57%
Temporarily unemployed, or works less hours than needed	7%	6%
Does not have a job / needs one	7%	3%
Does not work because they are unable to do so	5%	1%
Prefers not to answer or does not have a partner	9%	24%
Other	4%	1%

"Everything is getting more expensive. So, we just need both of us to be working."

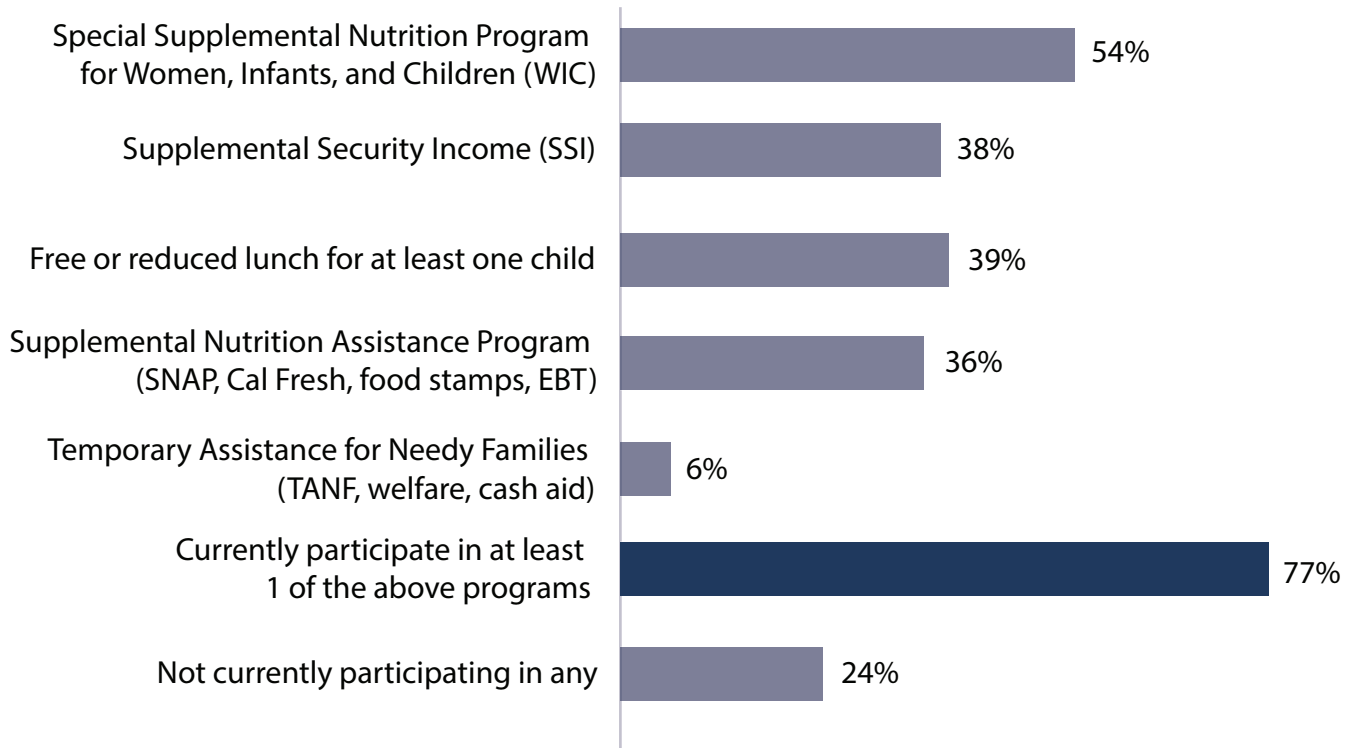
~ Parent of a 4-year-old in TK



Families Participating in Support Programs

Parents who completed the needs assessment were asked about their participation in social support programs. Parents' responses indicated that 77% of the families who completed this portion of the survey were participating in at least one program listed. The largest group participated in Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) with 54% reporting participation in the program. Thirty-nine percent were participating in free or reduced lunch for at least one child, 38% in Supplemental Security Income (SSI), 36% in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, Cal Fresh, food stamps, EBT), and 6% in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF, welfare, cash aid).

Chart 16. Seventy-seven percent of families participated in at least one family **support program**. (n=294)





Food Needs

Food insecurity, defined as “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.” (Wunderlich & Norwood, 2006). Food insecurity has been identified as a powerful stressor for families, with significant negative implications for child health and development. These include adverse impacts on physical, social, cognitive, and behavioral development, independent of poverty. It can affect the child’s physical, mental, social, and psycho-emotional development through direct impacts of poor dietary intake and indirectly through parental mental health which may mediate the relationship between household food insecurity and suboptimal child development (Perez-Escamilla & Pinheiro de Toledo Vianna, 2012).

Food insecurity has been a growing concern at the national, state, and local level with rates climbing noticeably after dipping during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the United States, 13.5% of all households were food insecure at some point during 2023, up from 12.8% in 2022 (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2025). In California, 22% of households faced food insecurity in 2024 with more dire statistics for families with children such that 27% of all households with children were food insecure during the same time period (California Association of Food Banks, n.d.). In San Bernardino County, food insecurity was lower than the national and state average at 9.6% for households and 14.9% for children (Stacker, 2022).

In this needs assessment, 60% of families had some level of food need. That is, when asked what their circumstances were around food, only 40% reported that they are able to meet their basic food needs without help. Twenty-five percent met food needs with some help, 31% reported they got most of their food from a food bank or SNAP, and 4% shared that their family often does not have enough food or a way to cook it or prepare it as seen in Chart 17.



60%
reported a food
need



25%
reported a food
and housing need

The data on the percentage of families who require help in meeting their food needs is staggering. It is more disconcerting when coupled with data the RAPID Survey Project (2025) has gathered on caregivers' access to essentials from food pantries. In December 2024, the RAPID Survey Project found that one in four parents with children under the age of 6 looked for support at food pantries one or more times during the year and in addition to accessing food, caregivers used food pantries to cover necessities such as soap, diapers, and wipes. However, caregivers cited challenges in accessing food pantries which included not being able to access food that is nutritious. However, not all families who could use food pantries used them because families believe others may need the pantries more than they do or families feel embarrassed or ashamed to access food pantries or banks. There is also a lack of information on available food pantries.

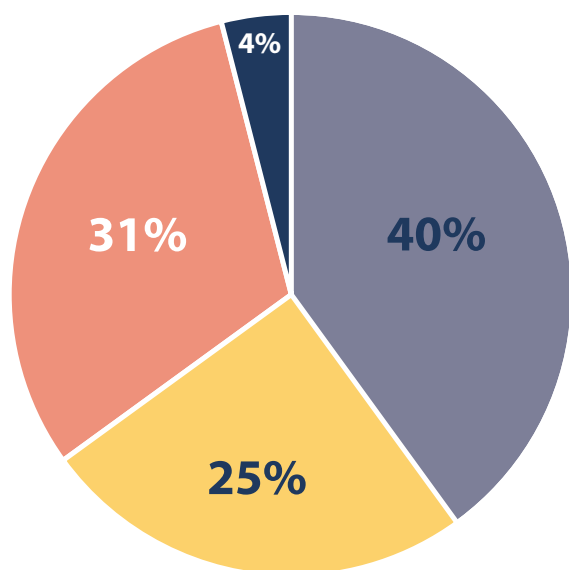


Chart 17. Sixty percent of families reported a **need for food**. (n=294)

- Meet basic food needs without any help
- Meet basic food needs with some help
- Get most of food from a food bank or SNAP
- Often does not have enough food or a way to cook/prepare it

The need for support in accessing food was also evident in the KIIs as parents shared that rising costs of everything, including food, impacted their families' financial stability. One parent shared how losing a social safety net program that she previously qualified for impacted her family's ability to access food.

"We lost WIC because my husband just started working, so he makes too much, even though we don't make any money.... I haven't been able to work since August of last year. And my husband by himself makes too much, so we lost WIC. We can't afford to go grocery shopping on a regular basis, so I go to a food bank every single week. And that is pretty much where we get our food."

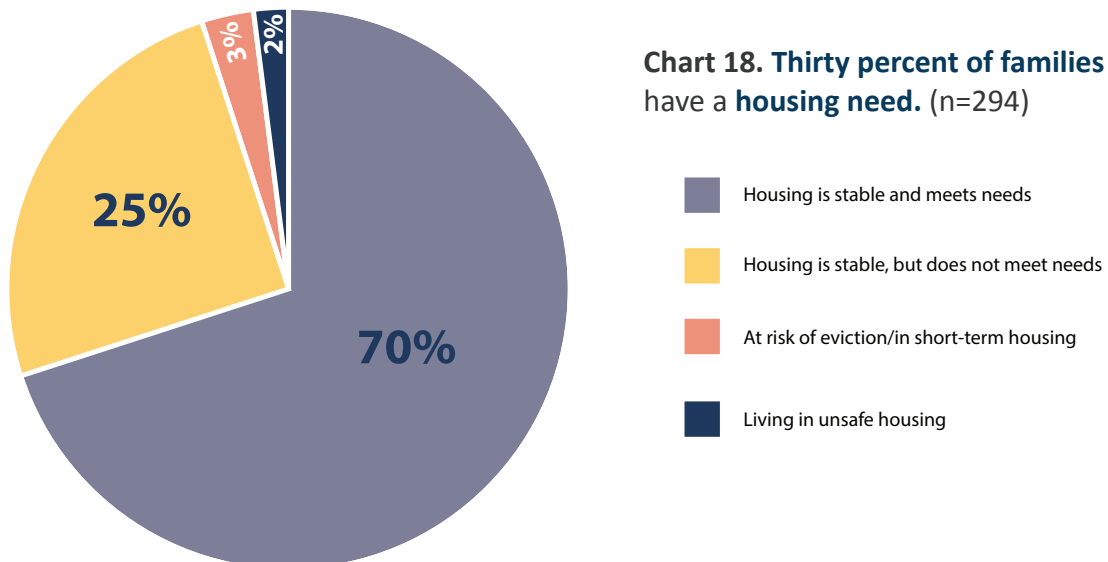
~ Parent of a 3-year-old and a newborn

Collectively, the data underscore the importance of supporting families in accessing food resources essential to their overall well-being and long-term stability.

Housing Needs

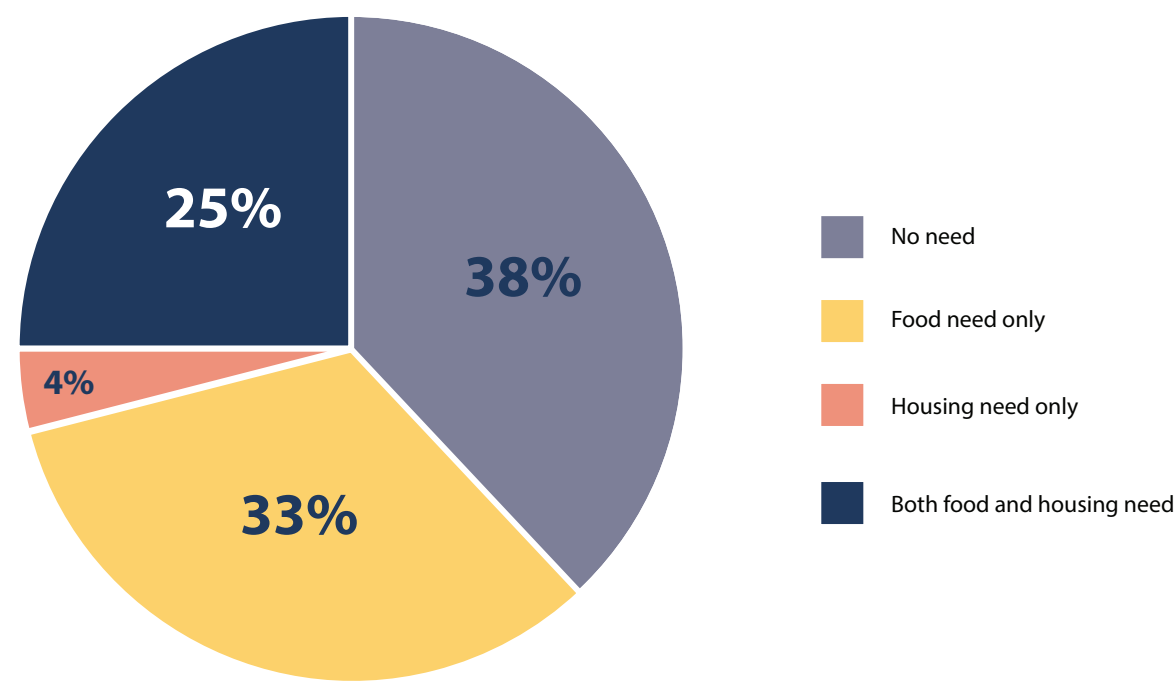
According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), households are considered cost-burdened when they spend more than 30% of their income on rent, mortgage payments, and other housing costs and are severely cost-burdened when they spend more than 50% of their income on housing costs. In the United States nearly half of the renter households for whom the rent burdened was calculated are considered cost burdened (Census.gov, 2024). Locally, in San Bernardino County, 47% of renting households were cost burdened (San Bernardino Indicators, n.d.). In terms of dollar amounts, asking rents in San Bernardino County have increased 29% between 2019 and 2024. Renters need to earn 2.4 times the minimum wage or a total of \$6,687 per month to afford the average monthly rent of \$2,006 in the County (California Housing Partnership, 2025). For homeowners in the Riverside-San Bernardino metro area, the mortgage-to-income ratio reached 67.8% in early 2025 and purchasing power weakened such that 59% of households could afford an entry-level home in the County, compared to 69% in 2020 (San Bernardino County Community Indicators, n.d.).

While the needs assessment did not ask specifically about costs related to housing, families were asked about their perception of housing need. Many families (70%) reported that their housing is stable and meets their needs, 25% shared that housing is stable but does not meet their needs, 3% are at risk of eviction or are in short-term housing, and 2% live in unsafe housing. See Chart 18.



Because there is a chain reaction of hardship where one form of economic stress such as high rent can cascade other economic difficulties and the effects of multiple hardships at once can magnify their impact (Kolluri, 2017), this study examined the co-occurrence of food and housing needs. In other words, what percentage of families are experiencing at least one of the two hardships? Meeting basic food needs with some help, getting most of their food from a food bank or SNAP, or often not having food or a way to cook or prepare food were coded as having a food need. Having housing that was stable but did not meet families’ needs, being at risk of eviction or in short-term housing, or living in unsafe housing were coded as having a housing need. Results showed that 62% of families were experiencing at least one of the two basic needs of food or housing and one quarter (25%) experienced both food and housing needs. See Chart 19.

Chart 19. A quarter of families are experiencing **both a need for food and housing**. (n=294)



“By mid-month, I have no money left, and practically everything goes to food and necessities, because it’s not just for the children. We have to pay the electricity. We have to pay the water; we have to pay the gas. There are many things in the house that have to be paid. And if we don’t pay everything, well, they have no electricity, no gas, no water, and the bills have gone up too much, and I don’t have enough money.”

~ Grandparent of a 3-year-old

Family Access to Medical and Dental Insurance

Data from this needs assessment on access to medical and dental insurance aligned with that reported from families across California. According to data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey as cited on kidsdata.org, 97% of children ages 0-5 in California and in San Bernardino County had health insurance coverage compared to 95% of the children in the survey and 90% of parents. While this level of information was not collected from survey families, it is notable that in California 52% of the children and in San Bernardino 44% of the children had insurance through public coverage such as Medi-Cal or the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP). See Table 11. This underscores the necessity of public investments in reducing what would otherwise be widely disproportionate access to health insurance, especially for the most vulnerable, young children. In terms of dental coverage, the numbers were slightly lower with 91% of parents reporting having dental coverage for their child and 82% of parents reporting this for themselves.

TABLE 11. PERCENT OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN WITH HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE

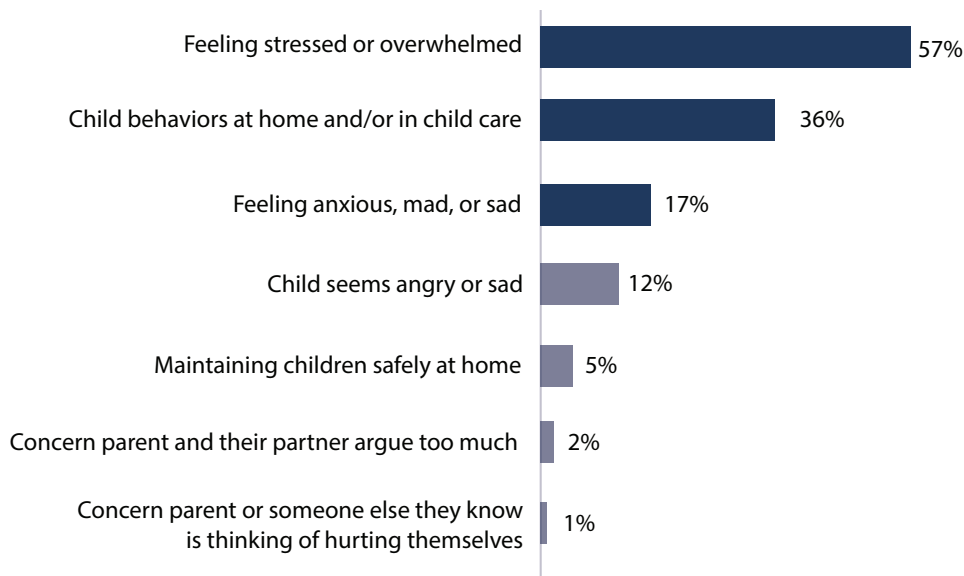
Population	Insured	Insured – Private Coverage	Insured – Public Coverage
Survey parents (n=294)	90%	n/a	n/a
Survey children (n=294)	95%	n/a	n/a
San Bernardino County ages 0-5 years	97%	49%	52%
San Bernardino County ages 6-18 years	95%	48%	51%
California children ages 0-5 years	97%	59%	44%
California children ages 6-18 years	96%	58%	44%

Source of San Bernardino County and California data, kidsdata.org

Family Well-being

Understanding parents’ and children’s well-being is also a vital part of designing an early education system to support families. In this sample, parents cited feeling stressed or overwhelmed, challenging child behaviors at home and/or in child care, and feeling anxious, mad, or sad as the top three family well-being concerns with 57%, 36% and 17% of parents reporting this, respectively. See Chart 20.

Chart 20. Feeling stressed or overwhelmed, child behaviors, and feeling anxious, mad, or sad were parents’ most frequently cited concerns. (n=294)



Discussion and Recommendations

Five recommendations emerged from results of the needs assessment survey and interviews as well as input from the LPC UPK Mixed Delivery Local Level Workgroup stakeholders. These recommendations are intended to enhance and guide San Bernardino County's ability to support families in a UPK mixed delivery system.



Recommendation 1: Provide one centralized location for ECE program information that includes comprehensive information to support parents in making informed decisions for their families.

Findings from this study contribute to the growing body of literature highlighting the complexity of the child care search process for families. The data show that parents rely on a range of resources when seeking early care and education options, with word-of-mouth recommendations and internet searches emerging as two of the most commonly used sources. While many parents reported using the internet, no specific website was consistently referenced, suggesting a lack of centralized or definitive online information source.

In addition to the diversity of sources used, this study revealed a widespread lack of comprehensive, easily accessible information that parents need to make well-informed decisions about child care. Parents expressed a desire for details on program activities, curriculum, and staff qualifications, elements that are often missing or inconsistently provided across existing platforms of information.

Given the reliance on online resources, the development of a centralized, multilingual website that offers comprehensive, up-to-date information on available ECE programs would be a critical support. Such a platform would need to be adequately resourced to maintain current data and provide content in multiple languages, including Spanish, to help mitigate existing disparities in information access and ensure equitable engagement across diverse communities.



Recommendation 2: Strengthen the early care and education workforce in San Bernardino County to ensure the provision of high-quality care that aligns with the needs, priorities, and preferences of families.

The presence of well-trained, experienced educators and caregivers is a top priority for parents in San Bernardino County, with 70% identifying it as one of the three most important factors in selecting child care for their three- or four-year-old children. In addition to staff qualifications, parents frequently cited the quality of child activities and the overall program environment as key considerations in their decision-making process. These findings underscore the critical importance of ensuring that the early care and education workforce is equipped to create and sustain enriching, developmentally appropriate learning environments that support children's growth and align with parental expectations.

Supporting the ECE workforce is essential, particularly for immigrant educators and those with limited English proficiency, who often bring valuable linguistic and cultural competencies needed to serve California's diverse families. However, these workforce members may face their own language-related barriers when entering or advancing within the field. Targeted support is necessary to ensure they can fully participate in and contribute to the ECE sector.

Moreover, workforce capacity challenges are already evident. According to a 2023 report by the Learning Policy Institute, four-fifths of Lead Education Agencies (LEAs) in California reported insufficient numbers of qualified staff to implement TK programs effectively (Leung-Gagné et al., 2023). These shortages highlight the urgency of developing and investing in strategies to expand and strengthen the workforce to meet the demands of Universal PreKindergarten implementation.



Recommendation 3: Implement comprehensive, multi-faceted strategies to address geographic barriers to accessing child care that meets the diverse needs of families in San Bernardino County.

Geographic location plays a critical role in families' decisions about child care. In this study, 56% of parents identified location as one of the top three most important factors when selecting a child care arrangement. Parents emphasized the practical importance of proximity, noting that having care options near home or work provided convenience and peace of mind, particularly in the event that they needed to access the program during the day.

However, geographic barriers pose significant challenges for many families in San Bernardino County. Feedback from parents revealed that they had difficulties in accessing care in certain regions, particularly with respect to center-based programs and those that serve infants and toddlers. The County's vast geography, including sparsely populated or rural areas, contributes to an uneven distribution and availability of services. Additionally, several areas remain child care deserts even when accounting for license-exempt options in the region.

To address these geographic disparities, it is necessary to implement comprehensive, multi-faceted strategies that strengthen both the supply and accessibility of child care across the County. Expanding and supporting the local early care and education workforce is a key approach, particularly in underserved regions where investment in provider capacity can help increase the availability of high-quality, licensed programs.

Improving the visibility and discoverability of existing programs is also essential. Parents need clear, accurate, and localized information to make informed choices. Developing a centralized, countywide website that houses information about all available early childhood programs, ideally with an integrated GIS-based search tool would significantly improve families' ability to locate care options near their homes, workplaces, or along commuting routes. Integrating TK sites into existing platforms at the two Child Care Resource and Referral agencies that serve San Bernardino County would substantially increase accessibility of the full range of early care and education programs for parents.

By addressing these geographic barriers through a coordinated strategy that enhances provider capacity, expands program visibility, and leverages technology, San Bernardino County can better ensure that all families, regardless of where they live, have equitable access to early care and education that meets their needs.

Recommendation 4: Design and implement targeted strategies to strengthen the early care and education system in San Bernardino County by ensuring it is linguistically responsive to Spanish-speaking families.

Language plays a pivotal role in facilitating equitable access to early care and education and is a key factor in ensuring meaningful participation among diverse families. In San Bernardino County, findings from this community assessment reveal persistent language-related barriers that disproportionately impact Spanish-speaking families. Compared to their English-speaking counterparts, Spanish-speaking parents reported lower awareness of TK and were less likely to use brochures or online platforms to seek ECE information. These patterns suggest systemic shortcomings in how information is disseminated and underscore the need for linguistically responsive outreach and communication strategies.

Ensuring linguistic responsiveness goes beyond the enrollment process and must be embedded throughout the ECE experience. If families face challenges accessing accurate, comprehensible information at the point of entry, it raises concerns about whether programs are equipped to support them effectively once they are enrolled. Moreover, the lack of sustained, culturally, and linguistically appropriate communication may further marginalize families and hinder their engagement in their child's early learning journey. These recommendations align with the intention of SBCSS: *"By addressing systemic educational inequity, SBCSS believes we can continue to improve upon a county culture that values the diverse backgrounds of all students and see differences as assets to the learning environment rather than obstacles to overcome to teach them,"* and their stated goals for ensuring equitable and inclusive access and service for all students and their families.¹

To address these challenges, it is essential to design and implement targeted strategies that strengthen the ECE system's responsiveness to Spanish-speaking families. It is recommended that these strategies include expanded investment in high-quality translation and interpretation services, ensuring that all critical program information is accessible in Spanish. Additionally, many parents expressed a desire for personalized support, such as having a specialist guide them through the enrollment process, highlighting the importance of staffing and resourcing models that facilitate one-on-one assistance.

It is recommended that local early childhood educators be supported in building their capacity to engage Spanish-speaking families through professional development, culturally responsive practices, and community partnerships. Investments should be made in the ECE workforce, which already has the capacity to serve children in accessible languages but does not have the means to engage in professional development to enhance their own skills and build their capacity. Engaging trusted cultural intermediaries can help build bridges with Spanish-speaking communities, not only addressing language barriers but also fostering trust and promoting long-term engagement.

By prioritizing linguistic responsiveness within ECE systems and services, San Bernardino County can better meet the needs of its Spanish-speaking families and promote equitable outcomes for all children.

¹ <https://www.sbcss.net/superintendent/equity-and-access>



Recommendation 5: Cultivate family well-being by ensuring children in all child care arrangements have access to comprehensive services including support for the provision of basic needs such as food.

It is recommended that the workgroup expand its membership to include partners outside the early care and education field to leverage resources across the County for the benefit of children and families.

Findings from both public data and this needs assessment underscore the critical importance of addressing the basic needs of families to support child and family well-being. In this study, 60% of families reported some level of food insecurity, and 25% indicated a need for both food and housing assistance. Such material hardships are well-documented risk factors for adverse child outcomes, and addressing them is essential to creating the stable, supportive environments children need to thrive in any early care and education setting.

When families lack consistent access to necessities such as food and housing, parental stress increases, which can, in turn, negatively impact children's development and emotional health. This is especially relevant in San Bernardino County, where 57% of parents reported feeling overwhelmed or stressed. These findings highlight the urgent need for comprehensive, family-centered support integrated within the early care and education system.

To advance this goal, it is recommended that the workgroup expand its membership to include partners from sectors beyond ECE, such as housing, food security, and healthcare to collaboratively develop strategies and leverage resources that promote family well-being. Ensuring that all children, regardless of their child care arrangement, have access to comprehensive services, including support for basic needs like food is essential to achieving equitable outcomes for young children and their families.

Appendices

Appendix A. Demographic Information of Key Informants

Characteristic	Percent
Primary Home Language	
English	57%
Spanish	43%
San Bernardino Region	
Valley	50%
North Desert	36%
East Desert	7%
Mountain	7%
Child Age	
2 years old	7%
3 years old	64%
4 years old	29%
Has another 0-5 year old child	4%
Has at least one child 6-18 years old	50%
Relationship to Child	
Biological parent	93%
Grandparent	7%
Parent Gender	
Female	100%
Parent Age	
21-29 years old	29%
30-39 years old	36%
40-49 years old	29%
60 years or older	7%
Marital Status	
Married or living with a partner	79%
Never married, not living with a partner	21%

Characteristic	Percent
Race or Ethnicity	
Hispanic or Latino	57%
White or Caucasian	29%
Black or African American	21%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	7%
Multiple Ethnicities	14%
Annual Household Income	
\$15,000 or less	7%
\$15,001 to \$25,000	14%
\$25,001 to \$35,000	29%
\$35,001 to \$50,000	7%
\$50,001 to \$65,000	7%
\$65,001 to \$85,000	14%
\$85,001 to \$100,000	7%
\$100,001 or more	14%
Highest Education Level	
No high school or some high school	14%
High school diploma or GED	14%
Vocational or Trade School	7%
Some college	21%
Associate degree (AA, AS)	7%
Bachelor's degree (BA, BS)	14%
Advanced degree (Master's degree or above)	21%

Appendix B. Key Informant Interview Questions

1. How did you learn about the survey you completed regarding your child care and family's needs?
[Probe to ask about modality, where or who the invitation was received from]

Thank you. For the next few questions, I'm going to shift to ask you about your children and their child care arrangements.

2. How many children do you have and what are their ages?
3. Several of the questions will focus on your oldest three- or four-year-old child. What is the name of your three- or four-year-old? [If they have multiple three- and four-year-old children, focus on the oldest].
4. The next question will be about the child care arrangements that you have for your children. I'll be using a very specific definition of child care. Specifically, I'm defining child care as time where children are in someone's care other than a parent or legal guardian, for 5 hours or more a week on a regular basis. This may include preschool or TK. What child care arrangements do you have for your children?
5. Thinking back to when you were looking for child care for [name of oldest three- or four-year-old], how did you go about doing that?
 - a. What information did you look for?
 - b. Where did you look for information?
 - c. What information, if any, was difficult to find?
6. Thinking back to when you were looking for child care for [name of oldest three- or four-year-old],
 - a. What went well during that search? Were there any resources that were particularly helpful to you in your search? What were those?
 - b. What was challenging in your search? Was there anything that was missing or you wish you had during your search? What was that?
7. After your search, what child care or early education options did you feel were available to you for [name of three- or four-year-old]?
8. What were the reasons you chose the child care and early education arrangements that you selected for [name of three- or four-year-old]?
 - a. Which of these was the most important to you in making the decision you made?
 - b. Was there a different program or arrangement that you would have preferred and can you tell me about that?

9. Thinking about the next school year, what are your plans for [name of three- or four-year-old] later in August?
- a. [If not sure] What are you currently considering?
 - i. During what days and times would you need care for [name of three- or four-year-old]?
 - b. [If no TK or preschool] During what days and times will [name of three- or four-year-old] be in child care and who will be taking care of him / her?
 - c. [If preschool or TK] During what days and times will [name of three- or four-year-old] be in TK / preschool?
 - i. What preschool program [TK, State Preschool, Head Start, private preschool] will you be enrolling your child in?
 - ii. Will [name of three- or four-year-old] be in child care before or after preschool or TK?
10. [If child care arrangements differ from prior arrangements] Why different, or why the change?
- a. How did you go about your search for [name of child's] TK or preschool?
11. [If child not in TK] Have you heard about Transitional Kindergarten or TK?
- a. [If yes] Where have you heard about Transitional Kindergarten or TK and what do you know about it?

In the next few questions, I'll be focusing on needs that families may have to help their family thrive. We are asking you and other families in San Bernardino County these questions so that we can share with the funder of this work, San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools about the need in San Bernardino County to better support families of young children.

12. At certain times, some families worry about general things, like food, clothing, housing, employment, or medical care. Sometimes it can be hard to meet those needs without help. Is there anything that you feel that you or your family need support with right now?

We appreciate you sharing this information with us as this is invaluable to us helping inform San Bernardino County of Superintendent of Schools of what the community need is so that we can better advocate for programs for families in the future.

13. What is something that you hope to see [name of three- or four-year-old] gain or learn in preschool?
14. What makes you happy about your family? Is there anything specific that has been going well for you? [Probe if needed, this could be anything from relationships that you have with each other, areas such as education, employment, finance, which may be going particularly well for you.]

Appendix C. Data Governance and Security, Quality Assurance, and Validation of Survey Data

Data Governance and Security

All data collected, including survey and recordings of KIIs, were stored on secure servers at CCRC. Folders that store the data have strict permission and access settings that allow only authorized users in the CCRC Research Division to view and access the data. Electronic data were de-identified by creating a link file where a participants' names and contact information were removed, each participant was then assigned a unique ID, and this ID linked the contact information file with the anonymized survey and interview files.

Quality Assurance and Validation of Survey Data

Measures to ensure that only valid survey submissions were included in the dataset for this study were taken throughout the process starting from the design of the tools through the analysis of the data.

Guardrails and attention checks were embedded into the surveys when they were built in Jotform to ensure responses that were not feasible were disallowed as entries in the surveys. For example, lower and upper limits were set for fields such as year born to exclude responses that were outside the realm of possibility. Attention checks took the form of embedded multiple-choice questions with simple directives. For example, "The following question has been added for data control purposes only. Please select 'B' below." If participants failed to respond correctly to attention checks, their survey responses were reviewed for exclusion. After the survey launched, entries were monitored in real time to ensure the survey was functioning correctly and that any issues that arose were rectified immediately.

Measures were also taken to validate the data after it was submitted to prevent the inclusion of data that could have potentially been fraudulent. The process used to review the data was systemized using the REAL (Reflect, Expect, Analyze, and Label) framework (Lawlor, Thomas, Guhin, et al, 2021) which informed the determinations to exclude or include specific survey submissions in the dataset for analyses.

Reflection on potential vulnerabilities of the survey and built-in design elements to avoid fraud: Because the survey link had been distributed widely, including via social media postings, it was necessary to carefully review the data as the survey may have been vulnerable to fraud in order to receive the incentive for participating in the survey, entry into a drawing for \$50 Target gift cards. Measures such as requiring participants to provide their name, telephone number, and either an email address or a physical address to be eligible for the gift card drawings were put in place. To ensure confidentiality, this identifying information was removed from the data file used for data analysis after the data verification process was complete. All gift cards for this work were funded through CCRC.

Expectation of data, identification of specific patterns, and review of irregular data: Data identified as irregular were examined. For example, some initial survey submissions indicated that parents had 10-20 children in each age group, a number beyond what would be expected or perceived as realistic. Additionally, some IP addresses connected to submissions were outside of the country and numerous surveys included invalid area codes.

Analysis of the data for patterns: Additionally, several patterns were identified indicating that submissions may have been fraudulent, including multiple surveys with almost the same exact responses, multiple submissions entered at almost the same exact time, errors in names where last names were repeated, a specific pattern in email addresses provided, and other anomalies.

Identification and determination of valid survey submissions: Finally, criteria to uniformly identify and remove fraudulent submissions from the analytic data set were developed. No single piece of information alone was used to determine whether a record was valid or not. As patterns were analyzed, each submission was marked to indicate whether it fit any of the potentially fraudulent patterns and determinations were made regarding which submissions to include and exclude. Data were always evaluated by at least two reviewers.

Data were reviewed to identify potential duplicates. As potential duplicates were identified, they were reviewed, and determinations were made about which submissions to include or exclude. While this data was not deemed fraudulent, a concerted effort to remove duplicates was made to ensure that the data were not skewed by multiple responses from the same individuals. In total, 972 responses were received and 601 were deemed valid and unduplicated responses included in the analysis.

Appendix D. Input from the LPC UPK Mixed Delivery Local Level Workgroup on Report Recommendations

The UPK Mixed Delivery Local Level Workgroup met on June 9, 2025, to discuss initial recommendations from this needs assessment and begin developing strategies based on the recommendations. This is a summary of the discussion and activity during that meeting.

Recommendation 1: Provide one centralized location for ECE program information that includes comprehensive information to support parents in making informed decisions for their families.	
What could your organization do to address this recommendation?	Leverage existing digital platform such as those maintained by local school districts, First 5 San Bernardino, and San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools by enhancing them to include clear, accessible, and regularly updated information on ECE programs. Develop a centralized and dedicated website to serve as a comprehensive hub for ECE program information, ensuring it is cross-linked with existing agency websites to increase visibility and ease of access for families. In addition, employ a multi-channel outreach strategy that incorporates both social media and printed materials featuring QR codes placed in key community locations to promote the centralized website and streamline access to essential resources. Utilize the communication reach of First 5 San Bernardino and partner agencies to disseminate detailed and user-friendly information about available preschool options. Include a comprehensive Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section that clearly outlines the differences among early learning programs, such as Head Start, CSPP, and TK. To further support families, consider integrating a customer service feature such as a live chat or multilingual helpdesk to assist parents in real time with navigating enrollment, eligibility, and program selection.
How can these findings or recommendations inform the UPK Mixed Delivery Campaign the workgroup will be embarking on?	<p>Leverage cross-sector partnerships and collaborative networks to promote and disseminate timely, relevant resources that support families in navigating ECE options. Ensure that all staff, including instructional and support personnel, are well-informed about available programs and trained to communicate effectively with families in culturally and linguistically responsive ways. Additionally, allocate funding to strengthen digital outreach by enhancing the accessibility and visibility of information related to preschool options and eligibility requirements. This includes providing multilingual content and integrating user-friendly tools, such as QR codes, to facilitate easy navigation and meaningful engagement across diverse family populations.</p> <p>Leverage partnerships and collaborations by cross-promoting resources that provide relevant and timely information for families. Ensure that all staff, including instructional and support personnel, are well-informed about available resources and equipped to communicate effectively with families in linguistically and culturally accessible ways.</p>

<p>With additional resources, how could this recommendation be implemented?</p> <p>What resources would you need?</p>	<p>Develop an integrated, centralized system to enhance family access to ECE resources and support services. This includes the creation of a comprehensive, user-friendly website that provides detailed information about UPK and other ECE programs, including eligibility criteria, program features, and educational philosophies. The platform should incorporate a GIS-based mapping tool that allows families to view program locations in relation to school district boundaries, facilitating informed decision-making based on proximity and service availability. To ensure the site remains current and accurate, assign dedicated personnel to manage ongoing content updates and data maintenance. The system should include a robust data management infrastructure capable of reflecting real-time changes in program availability and service offerings. In addition, implement a bilingual parent information helpline (a “411” system) staffed by trained English and Spanish-speaking operators who can guide families through available resources and support their navigation of the ECE system. To further enhance service coordination, establish an interagency tracking mechanism that monitors family engagement with programs, evaluates whether their needs have been met, and flags cases requiring follow-up ensuring continuous, responsive support across the County. Finally, leverage existing partnerships and collaborative networks to promote awareness of the platform and proactively address common questions and concerns from families.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2: Strengthen the early care and education workforce in San Bernardino County to ensure the provision of high-quality care that aligns with the needs and preferences of families.</p>	
<p>What could your organization do to address this recommendation?</p>	<p>Provide free professional development opportunities to the ECE workforce with a focus on evidence-based practices for creating high-quality learning environments for three- and four-year-old children.</p>
<p>How can these findings or recommendations inform the UPK Mixed Delivery Campaign the workgroup will be embarking on?</p>	<p>Utilize existing partnerships and funding streams to implement a comprehensive professional development plan for the ECE workforce. Allocate resources to communicate workforce qualifications and quality indicators to families in accessible ways.</p>
<p>With additional resources, how could this recommendation be implemented?</p> <p>What resources would you need?</p>	<p>Allocate funding to enhance family engagement and increase awareness of the qualifications and quality of the ECE workforce. Support the professional growth of ECE providers by offering comprehensive training on essential topics such as social-emotional development, addressing challenging behaviors, and other foundational areas of early childhood education.</p>

Recommendation 3: Implement comprehensive, multi-faceted strategies to address geographic barriers to accessing child care that meets the diverse needs of families in San Bernardino County.	
What could your organization do to address this recommendation?	Create a regularly updated database that allows parents to search and filter early care and education programs based on key criteria such as location, program type, and other relevant factors.
How can these findings or recommendations inform the UPK Mixed Delivery Campaign the workgroup will be embarking on?	Fund support for opening child care sites in child care deserts. Develop a website with site contact information and an interactive map for parents to filter by location.
With additional resources, how could this recommendation be implemented? What resources would you need?	Develop one central website that allows parents to search for preschool and/or child care options by filtering for location, number of open slots, ratings. Leverage community partners to disseminate information about the website. Consider community agencies such as movie theaters, doctor's offices, outside of the direct service ECE field to share the information.
Recommendation 4: Design and implement targeted strategies to strengthen the early care and education system in San Bernardino County by ensuring it is linguistically responsive to Spanish-speaking families.	
What could your organization do to address this recommendation?	Ensure all materials and information shared is offered in at least English and Spanish. Provide support for bilingual staff.
How can these findings or recommendations inform the UPK Mixed Delivery Campaign the workgroup will be embarking on?	Ensure website and any communication material that is developed are available in Spanish. Include consideration for home languages other than English and Spanish.
With additional resources, how could this recommendation be implemented? What resources would you need?	Fund Spanish speaking staff or community resource specialists to provide support for Spanish speaking families, including funding for staff to learn Spanish. Leverage respected/well-known community sources like social media influencers or doctors' offices to help share information in Spanish about preschool programs.

Recommendation 5: Cultivate family well-being by ensuring children in all child care arrangements have access to comprehensive services including support for the provision of basic needs such as food.

What could your organization do to address this recommendation?	Include information and links to community resources for families such as food banks, WIC, SNAP on agency websites.
How can these findings or recommendations inform the UPK Mixed Delivery Campaign the workgroup will be embarking on?	Collaborate with community resource partners to share information on what is available in the County. Work together to support families' basic needs, by hosting food banks or resource fairs where multiple needs are addressed.
With additional resources, how could this recommendation be implemented? What resources would you need?	Advocate with legislators to address community needs at the policy level. Work with community resources to offer new ways to meet families' basic needs, such as offering weekly/monthly/quarterly food banks or food boxes families can take home from child care programs. Provide information and staff to support families where they can access resources.

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