



CENTER FOR
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

**Early Childhood Education Community Assessment
Focus Group Narratives
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Purpose

The purpose of the Early Childhood Education Assessment was to identify existing early childhood education resources and determine if additional services are needed. The assessment objectives were threefold: to identify existing resources of education for children from birth to 5 years in the defined community, to describe caregivers' and parents' perceived needs regarding early childhood education, and to determine what support current care providers need to provide early childhood education in family run childcares.

Methodology

The study included three focus groups; two composed of parents and the third composed of in-home, family-run childcare providers residing in the Yesler Terrace community. Participants were recruited by Saadia Hamdia the Education Engagement Specialist with the Seattle Housing Authority who participated in the design of the study. Focus Group One consisted of nine parents from the Kebero Court neighborhood of Yesler Terrace, Focus Group Two consisted of five in-home childcare providers living within Yesler Terrace housing, and Focus Group Three consisted of four parents of children receiving services within the Bailey Gatzert Elementary School. The focus groups lasted from one to two hours and were completed between May 25th and July 19th 2017. Participant languages included Somali, Tigrigna, Oromo and Spanish with interpretation available. Study participants received a \$15 gift card to a local grocery store at the end of each focus group.

Focus group questions were based on the goals of the study; identification of existing resources, description of perceived needs regarding early childhood education, and determination of support as identified by care providers needed to provide early childhood education (See appendix A and B for the list of questions). The initial plan was to audiotape the focus groups. This plan was revised after a discussion with the interpreters who expressed concern that audiotaping would inhibit participation. Therefore, hand written notes were taken during the focus groups by the investigators. Following the focus groups, the investigators compared their notes and common themes were identified.

Results

Focus Group responses were combined into general themes. Responses to the parent Focus Groups One and Three, are listed in Table 1. Responses to the provider Focus Group listed in Table 2.

Parents

Three themes emerged from parent responses on the importance of education for young children from birth to five years; support for parents as their children's first teachers and the need for educational skills for kindergarten success and classroom readiness. Parents reported that they were not aware of any educational services for children birth to three, even though later they would identify the Early Head Start program. Barriers to access of educational programs included limited availability of program space, the application process for program entry, transportation and parking, conflicting program schedules, and the costs associated with early childhood education.

When asked about which educational programs parents had accessed to, they identified Neighborhood House Preschool's Early Head Start and Head Start programs, and Bailey Gatzert Preschool. Overall, parents reported they liked these programs though barriers exist specific to each program. Parents identified safety concerns pertaining to parking and child drop-off/pickup when discussing Neighborhood House Preschool. They felt the Bailey Gatzert Preschool program had limited programming when compared to Neighborhood House Preschool. The parents also wanted to see more coordination among schedules for the early childhood programs and the elementary programs to assist with the drop-off and pick-up of children.

Parents identified areas where improved services for children birth to five would be desired. Those services included: provision of parenting skills; programs that occur more than once a week; additional skills training, such as swimming and self-defense; and improved traffic safety especially at busy intersections on the way to neighboring buildings. The traffic light at Boren Avenue and East Yesler Way was the main concern of the parents at Kebero Court.

Table 1: Parent Responses -- Focus Group One and Three

Questions	Answers
1. When you think about education for young children between birth to 5 years old, what is important?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prep skills for kindergarten success: reading, writing, math• Social skills: safety, rules, listening• General school readiness• Provide parents with skills: Parents as their children's first educators need education and support to teach their children, such as books on tape and English
2. What educational services are currently available to you for young children between birth to 5 years old in your neighborhood?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There are no perceived services for children birth to 3.• Head Start, Neighborhood House Preschool, Bailey Gatzert preschool• Barriers to access: Limited program space available, applications, transportation, variation in program schedules, cost

<p>3. Has one of your children attended an educational program for young children between birth to 5 years old? Did you like the program? Did you find it helpful?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, Neighborhood House Preschool, Early Head Start, Head Start, Bailey Gatzert Preschool • Overall, programs were well liked but barriers to access were expressed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Neighborhood House Preschool – parking ○ Bailey Gatzert Preschool – limited programming ○ Combined – uncoordinated program schedules with programs serving school age children
<p>4. What services would you like to have available in the neighborhood for young children between birth to 5 years old?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills for parents -- Structured programs with coordinated timing to other programs dedicated specifically to young children for parents to work with children and learn together • More than one day per week • Skills training outside of traditional school readiness -- swimming and self-defense • Safety concerning crossing busy streets with children
<p>5. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?</p>	

Childcare Providers

Childcare providers defined quality childcare as providing healthy food to enhance growing, talking to children to build minds, teaching skills of daily activities, rewarding social skills such as good behavior, and adapting teaching methods to be age-appropriate. All the childcare providers reported providing early childhood education in their home-based childcare setting at the time of the focus group. They described reading to children even if the children are not yet verbal. They also reported building vocabulary using pictures, pointing to words, and linking names to images.

Resources used by childcare providers to ensure early childhood education in their childcares included books and toys for different-aged children, painting materials, musical instruments, blocks, kitchen play areas, dramatic play, and hygiene education such as hand washing. Childcare providers stated they sought resources such as continuing education workshops and local community college courses for information on early childhood education.

The group identified additional areas in which they would like assistance, including access to electronics, educational programming for themselves to assist with language and early childhood education, alternative methods for learning about changes in certification or other regulations, a connection to Jump Start to assist with credentialing requirements, and help to organize childcare providers in Yesler Terrace. Other recommendations included the opportunity to teach their own cultural traditions, financial assistance to buy age-appropriate toys, and support from competent coaches or assessors who are knowledgeable, experienced and culturally

competent. The focus group members also identified a potential increase in childcare providers operating in the Yesler Terrace due to the completion of the Hoa Mai Gardens which includes several units for in-home childcare providers.

Finally, the childcare providers were primarily discontent with how continuing education classes were presented and taught. Requests were made for culturally and linguistically competent continuing education opportunities. They reported difficulty understanding new credentialing requirements and felt left behind. They also felt stigmatized by childcare coaches, such as Early Achievers. Observations of their childcares were not done in a culturally or linguistically appropriate manner and, as a result, the childcare providers worried about meeting expectations.

Table 2: Child Care Provider Responses-- Focus Group Two

Questions	Answers
1. When you think about education for young children between birth to 5 years old, what is important?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy food to enhance growing • Talk to children to help build minds • Daily activities such as tooth brushing • Good behaviors • Adapt teaching methods depending on age
2. Do you currently provide an educational program to the young children between birth to 5 years old in your child care?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • What does the educational program look like? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reading even when the child is not talking yet ○ Building vocabulary by using pictures, pointing to words and adding names to images
3. If you do provide an educational program to the young children between birth to 5 years old in your child care, what do you do? What resources or assistance were helpful to you to do an educational program? What resources or assistance did you wish you had?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources used for children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Different toys for different ages ○ Books for different ages ○ Painting, musical instruments, blocks, kitchen area, dramatic play, safety, hygiene (hand washing) • Resources used to open a childcare: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continuing education ○ Workshops ○ School
4. If you would like to include an educational program for young children between birth and 5 years old in your child care, what resources or assistance would be helpful?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources needed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Access to electronics to incorporate into childcare education ○ Educational programming for providers that meets their particular needs around language and learning styles

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Group meetings ▪ Round table discussions ○ Alternative method for learning about changes in regulation ○ Connections with Jump Start for ability to take time to meet credentialing requirements ○ Child care provider organizing such as formal Yesler Terrace providers meeting
5. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to teach culture • Financial assistance to buy age-appropriate toys • Support from knowledgeable, experienced and culturally competent coaches or assessors (Early Achievers)

Discussion and Recommendations

Based on the themes which emerged from the focus groups, recommendations for future improvement are separated into two categories; parent support and childcare provider support.

Parent Group

Central to the needs expressed by the parent focus groups was the request to train parents as their children’s first teachers. This included provision of early childhood education, specifically language and mathematics. Parents also expressed a desire for access to resources to assist them in preparing their children for school, both through programs and through home involvement.

Results from the study also indicate that parents desire improvements to educational programming. Such improvements include programming that focuses on social skills needed for Kindergarten, familiarity with rules similar to those seen in the formal educational system, and listening skills. Parents also emphasize the need for increased opportunities to teach their children swimming and self-defense stressing extra-curricular activities as equally important for early childhood education as preparation for Kindergarten.

It is also important to consider improvements to program coordination. Parents expressed time constraints and difficulty coordinating schedules for multiple children involved in different stages of the educational system. Additionally, they expressed a preference for all-day programs, and programs which offer services Monday through Friday.

Finally, focus on safety concerns expressed by parents should be prioritized. Physical barriers, such as a lack of parking availability for the Neighborhood House Preschool program, were expressed as both inconvenient and dangerous when attempting to load multiple children of a young age into a vehicle. Further concern for safety was expressed in relation to crossing the street for early educational programs present in neighboring buildings. Parents indicated unwillingness to attend programs in neighboring buildings, such as the Yesler Community Center, due to the perceived danger of crossing major thoroughfares with multiple children. Finally, parents asked for swimming classes and self-defense.

Childcare Providers

The childcare providers were interested in support to organization as a professional group, like their experience during the round-table focus group, to stay current on childcare requirements. The child care providers also expressed that a collaborative system among childcare providers would empower them to deal with these childcare providers to express their expectations to their coaches.

Appendix A: Parent Group Questions

Parents: Focus Groups 1 and 3

1. When you think about education for young children between birth to 5 years old, what is important?
2. What educational services are currently available to you for young children between birth to 5 years old in your neighborhood?
3. Has one of your children attended an educational program for young children between birth to 5 years old? Did you like the program? Did you find it helpful?
4. What services would you like to have available in the neighborhood for young children between birth to 5 years old?
5. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Appendix B: Family Home Childcare Provider Questions

Child Care Providers: Focus Group 2

1. When you think about education for young children between birth to 5 years old, what is important?
2. Do you currently provide an educational program to the young children between birth to 5 years old in your child care?
3. If you do provide an educational program to the young children between birth to 5 years old in your child care, what do you do? What resources or assistance were helpful to you to do an educational program? What resources or assistance did you wish you had?
4. If you would like to include an educational program for young children between birth and 5 years old in your child care, what resources or assistance would be helpful?
5. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?