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Executive Summary

Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) is a key component of California's holistic approach to education, aiming to provide whole-child support and foster community-focused schools. UPK integrates Transitional Kindergarten, California State Preschools, Head Start, private preschools, and expanded learning opportunities to bridge early childhood and TK-12 systems, enhancing school readiness. Orange County received the UPK Mixed Delivery Planning Grant to support this initiative, providing non-competitive funding over three years to plan UPK expansion through a mixed delivery system. The grant, managed by Orange County's Child Care Local Planning Council under the Orange County Department of Education (OCDE), focuses on conducting a needs assessment to guide planning. In this first year of the needs assessment, OCDE's Early Learning Team collaborated with its Evaluation and Data Center to collect feedback from PreK providers, families with children 2-5 years old, and community partners who provide services and resources in early learning.

According to the U.S. Census, in 2022, 5.2% of Orange County's population was under five years old. However, there has been a general decline in this population since 2018. Additionally, there are diverse needs across the County, specifically a third of the students in Transitional Kindergarten (TK) and Kindergarten are multilingual learners, nearly 4,000 preschool students are enrolled in Special Education, 9.6% of children under the age of five live below the poverty line, and in 2024 there are 850 open foster youth cases of children younger than six.

This executive summary provides an overview of the assets and needs identified by feedback related to the five focus areas of the UPK Mixed Delivery System: 1) Vision and Coherence, 2) Community Engagement and Partnerships, 3) Workforce Recruitment and Professional Learning, 4) Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, 5) Facilities, Services, and Operations.

Vision and Coherence

Strengths

- PreK and community providers are passionate about their role in the UPK system, supporting, educating, and collaborating with families about options and available services.
- A wide variety of resources and services are available across the County to support early childhood, the majority of which are in North County. Ninety percent of providers on the survey indicated that they felt prepared to provide developmental assessments. When a referral is needed, most shared they knew of partners to refer families.

Needs

- There is a strong need for improved outreach and resources to help families and PreK providers better understand what UPK is and what it means for them. They expressed concerns over the communication and messaging around UPK, including the terminology, options available, costs, and potential changes to business practices for private PreK providers.
- Lack of coordination and communication between providers, partners, and families hinders the referral process and service delivery, with families often bearing the responsibility of finding support. However, providers shared that families are also not as forthcoming with information as they could be. Both providers and families desire a unified resource for locating services and better coordination to support families, including data sharing and family education.

Community Engagement and Partnerships

Strengths

- Providers shared a variety of ways they communicate with and support families in the search for and enrollment in their PreK programs, including websites, brochures, open houses, checklists, and consultations. Families expressed they also turned to websites, open houses (when available), and their families and friends for information on PreK programs. Families who had access to and utilized these resources shared that this made the enrollment process much easier for them.
- Although families had varying needs and preferences for PreK programs, their main priorities aligned with that of the state's high-quality indicators. Across demographics, the top priorities were ensuring the program was safe and developmentally appropriate and that staff were trained to ensure children were treated fairly.

Needs

- Findings revealed that families were often burdened with searching for PreK information on their own. Because program websites and availability of information varied across sites, they had to rely on strong information literacy skills, family or friends, or be connected to the field to find the information they needed. These findings strongly suggest a need for increased outreach about options available or possibly identifying a way to have more consistency across sites or a centralized hub of resources to make it easier for families to navigate the system.
- Families faced additional challenges that impacted their decisions to enroll their child in PreK, including cost and availability, which was consistent with providers' feedback. Despite families specifying that a program should be "developmentally appropriate" as a top priority, they lacked specificity in what that looked like. These findings further demonstrate a need to support families in navigating the system so they can choose the best option for their child and needs.

Workforce Development and Professional Learning

Strengths

- Workforce development and professional learning were high areas of interest among PreK providers, including a desire to learn more about credential and permitting opportunities, and to have coaching at their sites.
- In training the new workforce, institutes of higher education have a strong pipeline for students, which could continue to be enhanced to help ensure students have the appropriate training for the classroom.

Needs

- PreK providers expressed concern about the decline in the number of teachers earning new credentials and the recruitment of new teachers and other educators into the workforce, citing primarily a lack of financial incentives, which indicates a need for creative solutions, such as stipends or credits, to help incentivize the new workforce.
- Numerous focus group attendees mentioned that while they may have strong teaching experience, they are concerned they are missing specific degrees or credentials that hinder their career goals. They requested additional training and information on topics such as learning more about the difference in credentials and permits, acquiring certain credentials and support for earning college degrees, and on-site training.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Strengths

- Two-thirds of PreK providers indicated they have had their programs evaluated with a formal assessment for high-quality, and half use a set curriculum in their classroom. Even for those without a curriculum, assessing children's academic and social-emotional skills was a key component identified to help prepare children for Kindergarten. Other ways providers prepared families for the transition to Kindergarten was to have meetings with parents about students' strengths and needs and what to expect in Kindergarten.
- Providers had a high level of confidence in seeking out professional learning opportunities and are self-motivated to find them. Notably, more than two-thirds of providers indicated they had received some type of professional learning related to curriculum and instruction in the past year.
- Supporting students with diverse backgrounds and unique needs is a high priority among PreK providers. 70% shared that they currently serve children with special needs, and 83% of providers received training on inclusive practices in the past year. Additionally, 69% have received training in the past year on multilingual learner strategies. This support is also a high priority across the County, where the various programs have been identified to support linguistic and cultural needs and inclusive practices.

Needs

- When asked about the greatest support needs, PreK providers indicated they would like more trainings to manage challenging behaviors and support children's mental health. They expressed interest in better understanding students' behaviors so they can identify interventions more appropriately, especially because, as they mentioned, even when there is extra support in the classroom, staff still often lack understanding on how best to provide interventions to students.
- Despite a high interest in professional learning opportunities to support diverse student needs, providers expressed they are unsure of where to find supports and resources for multilingual and inclusive practices support. Additionally, less than a quarter feel extremely prepared to provide supports for inclusion practices (19%), multilingual support (21%), and dual immersion programs (15%), suggesting a high need for not only more training opportunities, but also increased awareness of those opportunities.

Facilities, Services, and Operations

Needs

- PreK stakeholders briefly touched on facilities, services, and operations and mainly focused on the needs across the County. These needs primarily focused on potential changes in business operations to accommodate UPK, including changes in staffing ratios, ages of children, and materials. They expressed the financial burden this has caused, including private centers feeling they lacked the financial support compared to school districts and the high costs to maintain facilities.
- The availability of programs was a high concern among families, who shared there were often waitlists for programs they were interested in. This was affirmed by several PreK providers who expressed a desire for more space because they have extensive waitlists. On the other hand, other PreK providers shared they had extra space and empty classrooms, suggesting a possible need to connect providers to utilize all the space more efficiently and meet families' needs.

Introduction

A large body of research supports the fact that early childhood education and environment have a strong impact on long-term life outcomes, including highest educational attainment, life earnings, health, and more (e.g., Almond et al., 2017; Black et al., 2017). In the past 50 years, across the world, strong investments have been made in early childhood learning (UNESCO, 2018). In particular, high-quality preschool programs have been shown to improve the long-term outcomes of both highly disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children and families, often with high benefits for the costs and resources invested (e.g., Campbell et al., 2014; Garcia et al., 2016; McCoy et al., 2017). These benefits for children extend to California where children who engaged in high-quality PreKindergarten (PreK) saw, on average, higher academic achievement, likelihood of high school graduation, and possibility of attaining a college degree compared to children who did not attend preschool (Thorman, & Danielson, 2019). With this in mind, the state of California has developed the Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) initiative, which is the expansion of the State's mixed delivery system.

UPK is one part of California's holistic approach to schools that aims to provide whole-child support for children and families and orient California schools to a more community-focused approach. UPK brings together Transitional Kindergarten (TK), California State Preschools (CSPP), Head Start, private preschool options, and expanded learning opportunities. UPK aims to serve as a bridge between early childhood and TK-12 systems to increase students' readiness for school.

Orange County UPK Mixed Delivery Plan Background

The Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) Mixed Delivery Planning Grant was awarded to California counties to expand UPK in the state. The grant provides funding on a non-competitive basis over three years to the Child Care Local Planning Council (LPC) and Child Care Resource and Referral (R&R) agencies to plan for each county's expansion of UPK through the mixed delivery system. Orange County's LPC operates under the Orange County Department of Education. The grant is designed to support planning, emphasizing conducting a needs assessment.

UPK Mixed Delivery System (MDS) Options

Through a mixed delivery system, Orange County families have various PreKindergarten options. These options include:

California State Preschool Program (CSPP) (including subsidized preschool centers and school districts): These programs are funded through the Department of Education and include part- and full-day services for income-eligible families for children ages 2 years, 9 months to 5 years old. These programs provide a curriculum that is developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate for the children served, with a student-teacher ratio of 1 adult to 8 children.

Early Learning and Care (including Family Child Care and Private Preschool Centers): These are programs provided by community-based and private providers, which could also include family, friend, or neighbor care. Given the range of providers, these programs vary in curricula, age requirements, teacher qualifications, and student-teacher ratios.

Head Start: This is a federally funded program for income-eligible families. It supports school readiness for children 2-5 years old by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development, with a student-teacher ratio of 1 adult to 10 children.

Transitional Kindergarten (TK): This is the first of a two-year Kindergarten experience that is developmentally informed, based on the California Preschool Learning Foundations, and uses a modified kindergarten curriculum. Age requirements are based on the child's birthday and change slightly each year until the 2025-26 school year when a child has to turn four years old by September 4. The program requires credentialed teachers to complete 24 early childhood education units or obtain a Child Development Permit by August 1, 2023. In the 2023-24 school year, the student-teacher ratio is 1 to 10 children (as funding is available).



UPK Mixed Delivery System Workgroup

As part of planning, OCDE established a UPK Mixed Delivery System workgroup to identify available resources and what needs exist across the County related to quality program indicators (EC Section 8203). The workgroup's UPK Mixed Delivery Plan focuses on five areas aiming to provide targeted technical assistance (Figure 1. UPK Mixed Delivery Plan Focus Areas and Targeted Technical Assistance). The focus areas represent the priorities of the state and key stakeholders, such as families and educators. The progress made in each of these areas by the workgroup or through OCDE's Early Learning team is provided in their respective sections of this report.

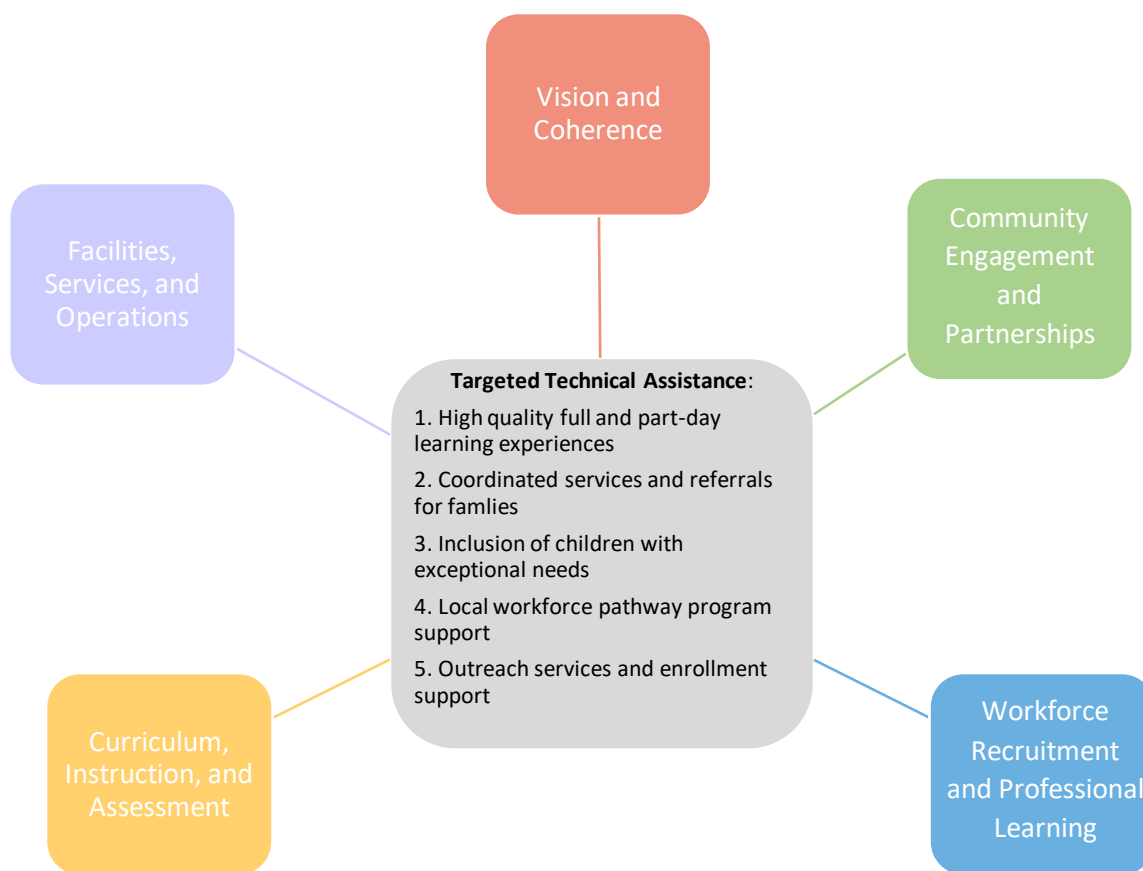


Figure 1. UPK Mixed Delivery Plan Focus Areas and Targeted Technical Assistance

UPK Mixed Delivery Plan Needs Assessment Scope

OCDE's Early Learning Team collaborated with OCDE's Evaluation and Data Center (EADC) to conduct a needs assessment in 2023-24. The goal of this needs assessment is to provide information on the strengths and growth areas of the current UPK MDS so that systems-wide changes can be made to improve the UPK MDS. This year's needs assessment aimed to collect feedback from key partners, including families, PreK providers, and community partners. The findings of this report are centered on the feedback they provided in the five focus areas, including the current strengths and challenges in each of these key focus areas.

Methodology

An overview of the timeline of data collection and potential future data collection is shown in Figure 2.

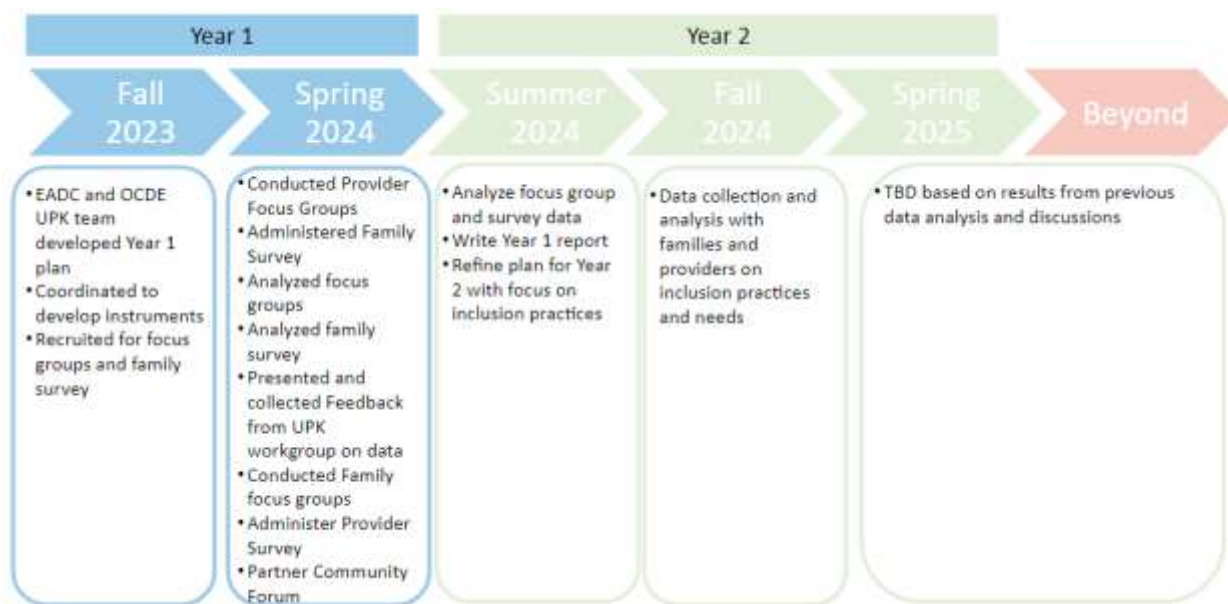


Figure 2. Timeline of UPK Needs Assessment Data Collection and Analysis

Surveys

Family Survey

OCDE administered a survey to families of prospective, current, and recent PreK students to better understand their knowledge and awareness of different PreK programs. This survey also served to better understand the challenges and barriers families face(d) in PreK enrollment and their priorities when selecting a PreK program. Overall, 1,159 people responded to the survey. This number was reduced to 625 as 345 respondents did not answer any questions beyond the first block of demographics questions, and 189 did not meet survey eligibility criteria (did not have a child who will soon be, is, or was recently in a PreK program). See [Appendix A](#) for a breakdown of respondents' demographics.

The survey included multiple choice, Likert-scale, and open-ended questions (see the complete survey in [Appendix B](#)). The evaluator used descriptive statistics and data visualizations to analyze the multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions. To analyze any open-ended responses, the evaluator developed a thematic coding scheme. Results are disaggregated by region of Orange County (e.g., South Coastal, North Coastal, etc.), respondent identified race/ethnicity, family PreK experience (e.g., prospective PreK family), and whether families had a child with special needs. OCDE staff recruited survey participants by reaching out to local PreK programs, going to libraries, early learning centers, and events, and using social media to share information. As an incentive, participants who completed the survey were entered into a raffle for early learning books. The survey was available to complete

using the online survey platform Qualtrics, or respondents had the opportunity to complete a paper version of the survey. The survey was translated into Spanish, Vietnamese, and Korean. It was available to complete from November 2023-February 2024.

Provider Survey

The evaluation team also administered a survey to providers of PreK programs in Orange County. This survey aimed to better understand the strengths and challenges of providing services to families, their most common techniques for supporting families' enrollment in PreK, and the types of supports providers would like to receive (see the complete survey in [Appendix B](#)). Overall, 116 people responded to the survey. This number was reduced to 54 as 45 respondents did not answer any questions beyond the first block of demographics questions, and 17 did not meet survey eligibility criteria. Of the 54 respondents, 40 were site directors, 9 were lead teachers, and 5 were assistant teachers or instructional aides. See [Appendix A](#) for respondents' demographic information.

This survey also had a mixture of multiple choice, Likert-scale, and open-ended questions and utilized similar analysis techniques as the family survey. OCDE's Early Learning Team administered the survey through listservs and workgroups and reached out to district partners to administer the survey. The survey was available to complete using the online survey platform Qualtrics in both English and Spanish from May-June 2024.

Focus Groups

Family Focus Groups

The evaluation team conducted nine focus groups/interview sessions with families. A total of 29 parents/guardians from 12 different cities across Orange County participated. Three sessions were for families currently searching for PreK programs for their children (5 total participants), four were focused on families who currently had children in PreK programs (19 total participants), one focused on families in Kindergarten (1 participant), and one had a mix of families (3 participants). (For a complete breakdown of participants' demographic information, see [Appendix A](#).) The sessions asked families about their perceptions and knowledge of UPK programs in Orange County, their experiences finding information on PreK programs, enrollment processes, and awareness of services and resources for children. (See [Appendix B](#) for focus group protocol.) Each focus group/interview lasted approximately one hour and was conducted virtually over Zoom in April and May 2024. Interpreters were provided at five sessions, four of which were in Spanish and one was in Arabic. The evaluator recruited families through the family survey. Additionally, OCDE asked for interest while at early childhood events around the County and reached out to schools to share interest forms with their families. Families who participated were entered into a raffle for event tickets. Interviews were transcribed by Otter.ai and reviewed for accuracy. A thematic coding scheme was developed for these focus groups, based on respondents' answers to focus group questions.

Provider Focus Groups

In addition to family focus groups, the evaluator also conducted eight PreK provider focus groups in January and February 2024 to examine three different themes related to Universal PreK: 1) Vision and Coherence & Facilities, Services, and Operation (2 focus groups), 2) Community Engagement and Partnerships (3 focus groups), 3) Workforce Recruitment and Professional Learning & Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment (3 focus groups). Across the eight groups, 25 individuals participated, representing 22 sites and 14 cities across Orange County. (See [Appendix B](#) for focus group protocol and [Appendix A](#) for an overview of participant demographics.) Each focus group was approximately 1-1.5 hours and was conducted virtually over Zoom. Three focus groups included a Spanish interpreter. Interview transcripts were generated by Rev.com and reviewed for accuracy. A thematic coding scheme was developed for these focus groups based on respondents' answers to focus group questions.

Community Partner Forum

On May 29, OCDE hosted a meeting with early childhood community partners. Seventeen attendees from 13 organizations attended the meeting. The OCDE Early Learning Team provided an overview of the UPK Mixed Delivery Grant at the meeting. EADC evaluators then led small discussion groups on two topic areas: 1) Services provided and referral processes, and 2) Community engagement and outreach. Participants were divided into two groups and discussed each one of these topic areas for 20 minutes. Discussions were transcribed by Otter.ai and reviewed for accuracy. A thematic coding scheme was developed based on respondents' answers to questions. Questions asked can be found in [Appendix B](#). Additionally, evaluators led a 15-minute whole group discussion for ideas on how to best collaborate to support families and children with early childhood needs. Although this discussion was not recorded, it was documented on chart paper, and the themes of the discussion are included in this report.

Additional Data Sources

The evaluation team also compiled data from public data sources, including the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, California Department of Education DataQuest, and the University of California, Berkeley's Child Welfare Indicators Project. The UPK workgroup also compiled a list of resources, services, and partners. These data were used to provide an overview of the landscape of early childhood experiences in Orange County. When appropriate, data is shown in trends over time. Links to data sources are provided with the figures in respective sections.

Strengths and Limitations

The strengths of the data collected for this project include that data were collected from a variety of stakeholder groups using different methods (i.e., quantitative and qualitative analysis). An additional strength was the wide response rates for both the family and provider surveys across regions in the County. Although results from the family and provider surveys indicated higher response rates in certain areas, there was representation from across Orange

County. In addition to the surveys, the richness and depth of discussion in both the provider and family focus groups allowed the evaluation team to gain a nuanced understanding of the strengths and challenges associated with PreK in the state.

Limitations that should be considered include a convenience sampling method where only those who actively wanted to participate did, and this is especially true for focus group discussions. This may have led to a somewhat skewed participation of those already connected to the education field, particularly in focus groups. In addition, all meetings and data gathering were done remotely, which may have changed the nature of interactions with participants. However, this remote data collection also may have allowed the evaluation team to meet with families and providers who otherwise may have been unavailable.

Early Childhood in Orange County

According to the U.S. Census, the total population in Orange County, CA in 2022 was estimated at 3,151,184, with 5.2% of the population under five years old.¹ The information below provides an overview of early child experiences across Orange County. As shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4, there has been a general decline in the population of children ages 0-5 across Orange County since 2018. The Anaheim-Santa Ana-Garden Grove region has a substantially larger population of 0-5 years compared to other parts of the County; however, there has been a decrease in population over the past five years, whereas Central Coast and Irvine-Lake Forest areas have remained relatively stagnant (Figure 5).

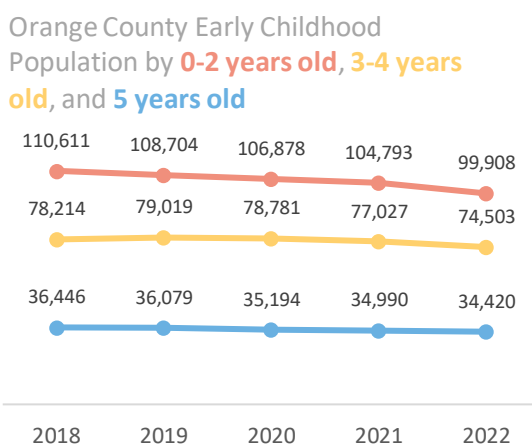


Figure 3. OC Early Childhood Population by Age Group and Year

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau. "Population Under 18 Years by Age." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B09001, 2022](#)

The number of births in Orange County

has decreased in the past five years, but remained relatively stable the past three years.

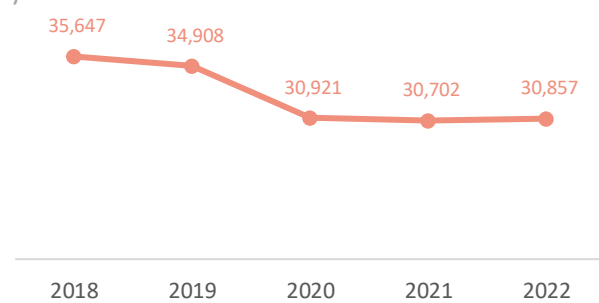


Figure 4. Number of Births in Orange County by Year

Source: [California Department of Public Health, Center for Family Health, Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health Division, Births Dashboard, Last Modified February 2024](#)

¹ Source: [U.S. Census Bureau. "Selected Population Profile in the United States." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Selected Population Profiles, Table S0201, 2022](#)

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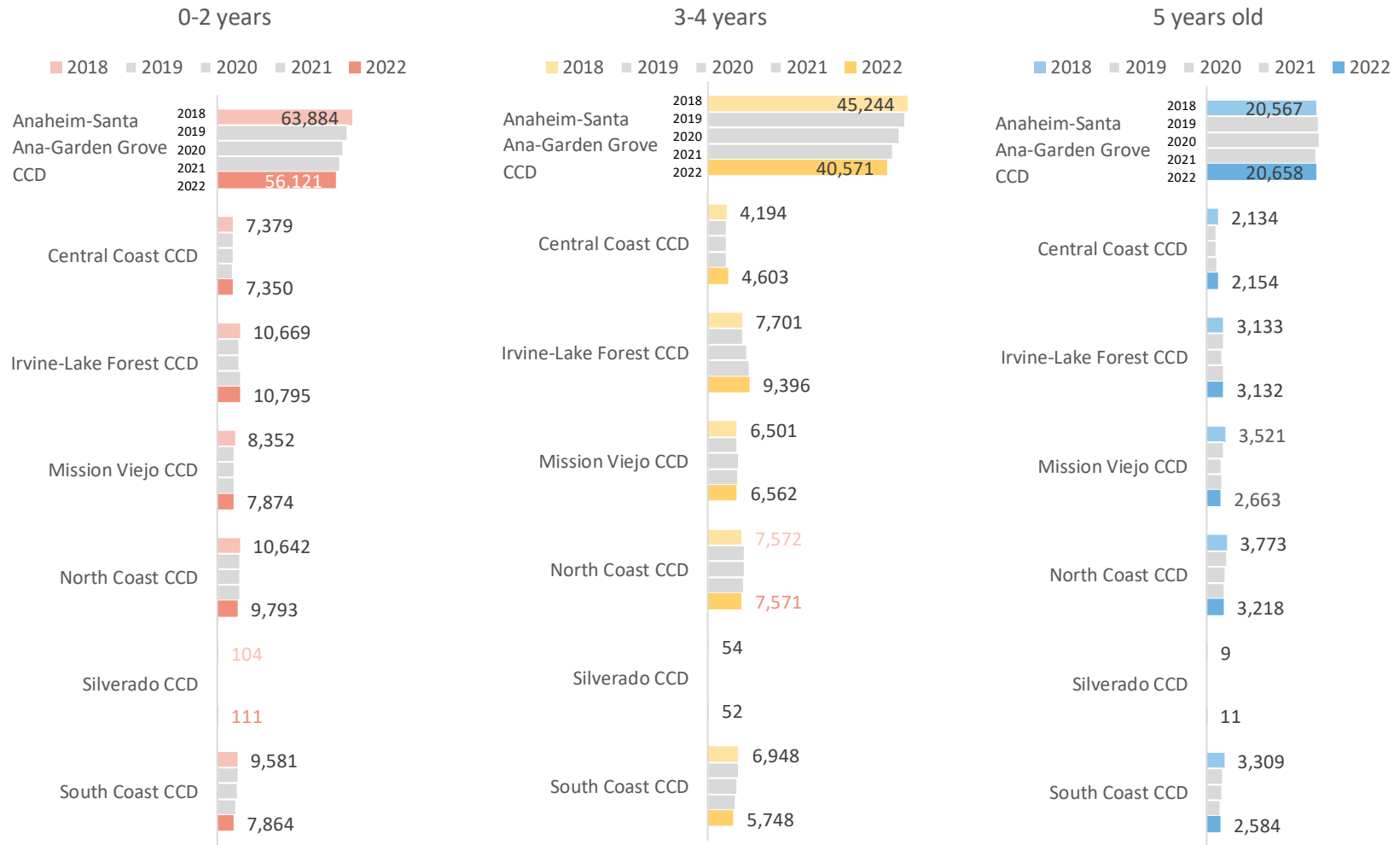


Figure 5. OC Early Child Population by Region and Year

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau. "Population Under 18 Years by Age." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B09001, 2022.](#)

Nearly **a third of TK and Kindergarten students² in 2023-24 were multilingual learners**, speaking 67 different languages, the majority of which was Spanish. The top 15 languages are shown in Figure 6 below.

	Transitional Kindergarten	Kindergarten	Total
Total enrollment	12,449	25,804	38,253
Total number of Multi-Lingual Learners	3,952	7,548	11,500
Percent of Multi-Lingual Learners	32%	29%	30%
Languages Spoken			
Spanish; Castilian	2,593	5,173	7,766
Vietnamese	585	768	1,353
Mandarin (Putonghua, Guoyu)	148	341	489
Korean	121	298	419
Arabic	77	167	244
Persian (Farsi)	72	149	221
Russian	57	140	197
Japanese	37	90	127
Philippine languages	30	37	67
Cantonese	24	28	52
Portuguese	20	29	49
Hindi	17	31	48
Turkish	8	29	37
Tamil	11	24	35
Pushto; Pashto	10	18	28
Other languages (52 additional languages)	142	226	368

Figure 6. Languages Spoken among TK and Kindergarten Children in 2023-24 School Year

Source: [California Department of Education, DataQuest, English Learner Students by Language and Grade](#)

In 2022, **16,736 (9.6%) children under five years old were reported as living below the poverty line**, half (49.5%) of which were living in single-parent, female head of households.³

In 2024, a total of 850 children 0-5 years old had open cases in foster care, 350 of which were PreK or Kindergarten age (3-5 years old) (Figure 7).

Age Group	# of Children in Foster Care Jan. 2024
Under 1 year old	174
1 -2 years old	326
3-5 years old	350
Total	850

Figure 7. Number of Children in Foster Care in Orange County in 2024

Source: Webster, D., Lee, S., Dawson, W., et al. (2024). CCWIP reports. Retrieved from [University of California at Berkeley California Child Welfare Indicators Project website](#)

² Source: [California Department of Education, DataQuest, 2023-24 Enrollment by Ethnicity and Grade, Orange County Report](#)

³ Source: [U.S. Census Bureau. "Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months of Related Children Under 18 Years by Family Type by Age of Related Children Under 18 Years." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B17006, 2022](#)

A total of **3,841 students were enrolled in Special Education in preschool** in 2023-24. Nearly half of those students experienced Speech or Language Impairment and 40% experienced Autism (Figure 9). More than half (51.9%) of the students enrolled in Special Education in preschool were Hispanic or Latino (Figure 8).

Disability Category	# of children
Autism (AUT)	1,566
Deaf (DF)/Hearing Impairment (HI)	15
Deaf-Blindness (DB)	*
Emotional Disturbance (ED)	2
Established Medical Disability (EMD)	24
Hard of Hearing (HH)	39
Intellectual Disability (ID)	75
Multiple Disabilities (MD)	46
Orthopedic Impairment (OI)	24
Other Health Impairment (OHI)	165
Specific Learning Disability (SLD)	0
Speech or Language Impairment (SLI)	1,881
Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)	0
Visual Impairment (VI)	4

*Data suppressed due to small sample size

Figure 9. Preschool Special Education Enrollment 2022-23 by Disability Category

Source: [California Department of Education, DataQuest, 2022-23 Special Education Enrollment by Program Setting](#)

Race/ethnicity	# of children
African American	59
American Indian or Alaska Native	2
Asian	571
Filipino	74
Hispanic or Latino	1,992
Pacific Islander	12
White	714
Two or More Races	166
Not Reported	251

Figure 8. Preschool Special Education Enrollment 2022-23 by Race/Ethnicity

Vision and Coherence

Vision and Coherence

Overview of Vision and Coherence

As part of the UPK Mixed Delivery System Plan grant, Orange County plans to create and expand partnerships and better coordinate services and referrals for families to access health and social-emotional support services. This includes identifying the types of coordination and referral processes currently in place across programs, and identifying key partners that provide key health and/or social-emotional support services for families of preschool-age children.

In order to develop a system that is based on the needs of the community, evaluators also explored the current vision and perceptions of the Universal PreK Mixed Delivery among providers, as this will help Orange County understand how to best develop a sustainable and high-quality early learning system in the County.

Perceptions of Universal PreK Mixed Delivery System

Providers' Views of What "UPK" is

When asked about the perceptions of Universal PreK, although several providers shared that it involves allowing families to have more options and flexibility for early childhood education, they simultaneously expressed there is generally a lack of clarity for providers and families. Providers shared that there was a lot of confusion related to the UPK system, namely the lack of clarity surrounding what "Universal PreK" actually is and means. Focus group attendees mentioned that the term "universal" typically means

We have a lot of choices within [our program] as well and trying to make sure that we're giving a great amount of opportunities, so parents feel very supported and they feel that they can find something that works for their family and that benefits their child on their road to kindergarten. -PreK Provider

free for all. However, this is not necessarily the case with UPK since it is an umbrella term that encompasses both TK and preschool options that entail different provider options, costs, and systems for families to navigate. Providers shared that they have had to spend time educating themselves and their families as to the different offerings encompassed under the UPK umbrella. One attendee said, "I feel like the messaging, when you talk about the vision, I feel like the messaging is wrong. Let's be very transparent of what [UPK] is and what it is not". They expressed frustration around the terminology because the program offerings and developmental needs for preschool and TK-aged children are different. (The implications of this confusion on families are discussed in the [Community Engagement and Partnerships](#) section of this report.)

These frustrations and confusions about UPK were particularly notable among private care and family child care providers who shared the changes to their business practices they were required to make as a result of the UPK system expansion. Providers mentioned that there were numerous questions that they had to answer with the expansion of UPK, such as, "How many teachers do we need? What age groups are we going to be serving? Do we change our model in regards to our preschool programs?". These questions and others like them have led to providers restructuring their classrooms (e.g., mixed-age group classrooms), hiring additional

staff to meet demand or required ratios, and adjusting to new student enrollment patterns where students sometimes change schools mid-year because school districts begin their PreK programs. Private care providers expressed this made them feel like they had been left out of the “universal” system. Overall, the challenge of business practices and program models seemed to stem from the unclear understanding participants had of the UPK system, its purpose, and the perception that there were few funds to support families in genuinely choosing the best option for their child. This perception led to a lack of belief that the UPK MDS system is a “true” implementation of MDS since families may still be constrained by the cost of private, paid PreK options. (The operational challenges faced by providers are explored further in the [Workforce Development and Professional Learning](#) and [Facilities, Services, and Operations](#) sections of this report.)

An overview of providers’ confusion around UPK is summarized in Figure 10 below.

Terminology	Differences between Districts and Private Programs	Costs and Business Structures
• Umbrella term • No clear definition	• Unclear what districts are offering • Unclear what age groups private providers will serve • Parents unsure of where to send children after preschool	• Parents are unsure of costs • Changes in business operations due to transition to new model and mid-year changes in enrollment
<i>UPK is an umbrella term, and that covers universal preschool, it covers TK. But then also, see what happens is then there's subcategories, but TK is only offered through LEA's, but preschool then is the option of private, community-based, in-home, and LEA. So, then they created this umbrella term to encompass all of the above, which is very confusing because preschool is not the same as TK.</i>	<i>We're trying to give parents some information on what their choices are. You can go to pre-K, TK, or you may be K eligible, but what is the difference between all of those three? And what happens if your child doesn't go to pre-K and goes directly to TK? Trying to give that definition of what a two-year kindergarten program looks like and what they're portraying it to be.</i>	<i>It kind of felt like it was just this, "Oh yeah, we forgot. We're supposed to include the private programs, so let's bring them in under that umbrella when there's really no funds." And it will change our models. We are having to change our models already to prepare for this.</i>

Figure 10. Providers' Confusion About UPK Mixed Delivery System

Providers’ View of Their Role in the UPK System

Despite confusion about the UPK system, providers see themselves as playing a vital role in the system and the community. As central players in the system, they indicated their roles fall into four categories, as displayed in Figure 11.

Educators First and foremost, providers saw themselves as educators of children in their early years. They felt they had a responsibility to ensure that their programming was developmentally appropriate to educate the age group of the children they serve. For those who needed to adapt their classes for different ages, this meant ensuring that they had the appropriate materials, staffing, and training to meet the needs of the students. As providers, they had a responsibility to ensure children were ready to transition to the next educational

phase. In addition to educating children, they felt it was also their role to educate and train the workforce by providing coaching and professional learning for their staff to ensure they felt prepared and were able to grow professionally. This also meant supporting the incoming workforce by providing mentorships and student teaching opportunities to new teachers. Providers wanted to ensure that new teachers had the appropriate training and experience to feel prepared in the classroom for early childhood learning, especially given the increased demand in the field and new qualifications and requirements for those in the field.

Communicators Providers shared that families are often confused about their options in the UPK system. They felt that it was part of their role to communicate to families what their options are, including what different programs are available for their child, what programs are the best fit, and what high-quality programs entail. They shared that there are often misconceptions about “competition” between districts, private programs, subsidized programs, and family child care. All providers want what is best for families, and they feel it is their role to communicate to families how to decide the best option for their child, even if it is a program other than their own. They also felt it was important to be transparent with parents about what financial supports families may have with each option as well as what student-to-staff ratio at each of the sites and what types of curricula could be used for each option so parents were aware of the possible variance in quality of programs.

Connectors With the expansion of UPK, PreK providers saw themselves playing a vital role in bridging the gap between the private sector and school districts, as well as preschool and TK/Kindergarten classrooms. They indicated they share information about students transitioning from one area of the County to another and build relationships with districts so families have the right information and help ensure students are prepared to enter the district. Additionally, they see themselves as connecting families to services and resources. They shared that they often identify resources for families that can be used to support their children, such as social-emotional or health resources or funding opportunities to afford programs.

Business owners Although providers shared that they felt a calling to the field, ultimately, most of them were also business owners who had a responsibility to staff and their own families to remain in business. They shared that as business owners, they have had to learn what changes are being made through UPK to identify if and what changes they need to make to their programs to meet the new standards. For example, several shared the need to train staff to ensure they have the appropriate credentials for the children they serve or plan to serve. This also included a need to grow their programs. Several shared that enrollment has decreased since the COVID-19 pandemic, and with the shift to UPK, they are looking at ways to adjust their programming and expand their outreach to keep their businesses operating. Additionally, private school providers shared that they also have to advocate for their programs in this new system because although their staff and programs may not hold the same credentials and permits as school districts, they have experienced and qualified staff who are specifically trained in early learning and should be considered in the process.



Figure 11. Providers’ View of Their Role in the UPK System

Services and Referral Processes in Orange County

Based on provider survey responses, the community partner forum, provider focus groups, and the UPK workgroup, 36 unique partners were identified to support health services, and 32 unique partners were identified to support social services across the County. (For a complete list of partners identified, see [Appendix C](#).) Providers shared that these partners have been helpful in providing: 1) early screening for prevention and intervention, which identified and confirmed the needs of students identified by staff; 2) services and expertise, including housing support and basic necessities; 3) information and education to families, including workshops such as empowerment programs, parenting classes, and workforce development; and 4) case management. Providers expressed gratitude for these partners, sharing, “All of these organizations have proven to be excellent assets over the years.” To find information about these services, families identified they had used school-related resources (e.g., district, Head Start, teachers and professionals in the school); city/county resources (e.g., Regional Center, Learning Link, 211); health-related resources (i.e., pediatrician, health insurance); parent/family-related resources (e.g., family resource center, parenting magazine); and online searches (i.e., Google, social media).

36 health partners

32 social-emotional partners

In focus groups and the provider survey, providers shared that although they have several partners and services/resources they can provide to address family and children needs, the

greatest needs for services included early assessment and intervention (including helping parents understand the importance of the intervention and what is age-appropriate), social-emotional and mental health support, support for behavior (including parenting classes and staff training for the classroom), language services for families, and health services. Support with health services was communicated to be particularly important because families do not have time to find and use resources and support for children with exceptional needs, such as inclusive programming, one-on-one ABA therapy, and respite for parents.

Referral processes

Most providers indicated that they rely on family information and/or they conduct observations/evaluations in the classroom to assess student needs. Notably, 59% of providers shared that they feel extremely prepared to provide developmental assessments at their sites. However, fewer feel prepared to provide health-related assessments. (See Figure 12 for a breakdown of responses.) Focus group providers shared that they often turn to partners to provide these assessments at their site or refer families out for these services.

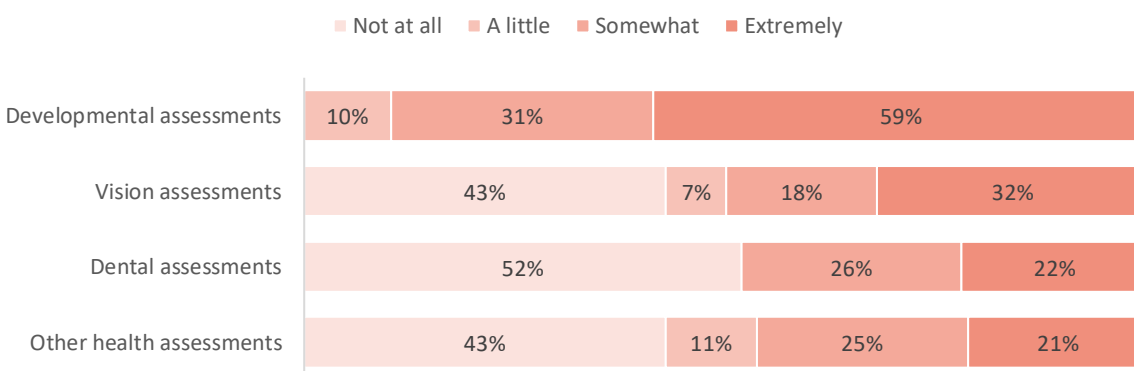


Figure 12. Providers' Level of Preparedness to Provide Services (n=27-29)

When a referral is needed, the majority of providers refer families to partners for services, but the onus is ultimately on the family to reach out to the partner. Only about a third of provider survey respondents indicated that they coordinate with partners to ensure the family receives services. Providers shared they have a list of partners to refer families, but less than half indicated they had a list of health partners to refer families. This finding aligns with community partners, who indicated that although providers will contact them about a family, most of their referrals come directly from the families contacting them, community outreach, and word of mouth. (See Figure 13 for provider survey respondents' referral processes.)

UPK MDS Needs Assessment Report

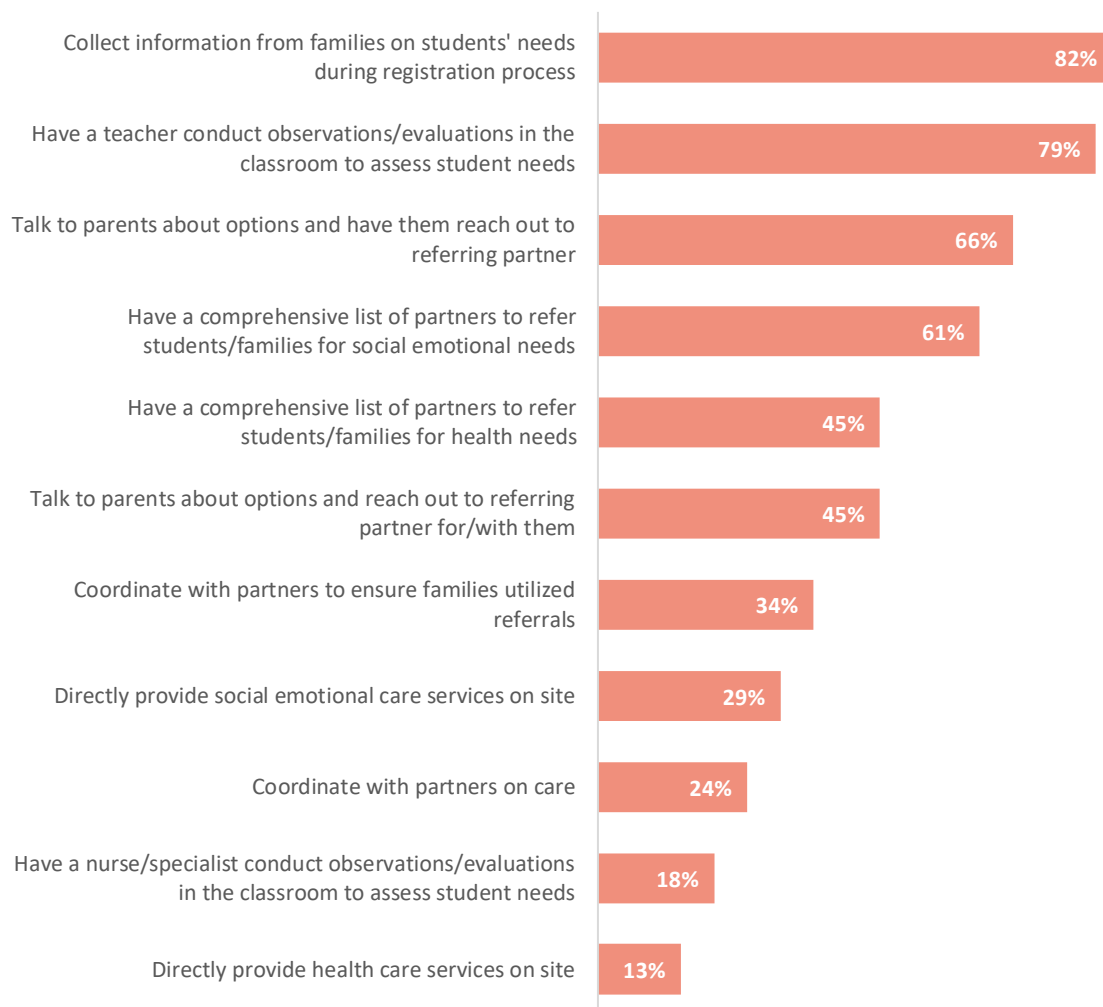


Figure 13. Referral system components used by providers (% of respondents on Provider Survey, n=38)

Once a referral is made, community partners explained that to reduce families' feeling overwhelmed and anxious, they often walk the family through the process, such as filling out paperwork, coordinating services, such as referring them to community-based organizations or using data systems to know what resources and services are available. These community partners shared that they check in on the process to ensure that families receive the services. Community partners felt that this process of collaborative working with the families to

provide a humanistic hand-off between partners was crucial in ensuring families received the services they needed. Although this collaboration between community partners and families seemed evident among those who participated in the forum, providers expressed a desire to be part of the process when they referred a family so they also had confirmation the family

I think that humanistic hand into it. So like that soft, not just giving them the paper, but being like, let me walk you through, let me actually transfer to the person. And let me introduce you to that person. If you have a time, because sometimes it takes five minutes. And that will make the biggest impact of them actually engaging in the services, versus if you give it to them. - Community Partner

received services, were getting the support they need, and to see if there was anything additional the providers should know to support the child and family in the classroom. (See [Appendix D](#) for an overview of referral processes and coordination between providers, families, and community partners.

Challenges in referrals and accessing services

"It's not the lacking resource. And a lot of people say, Oh, the lack of resources, they say it's the access to it, and what are those barriers to accessing our County is rich with resources. And but we're, it's an access issue." - Community Partner

Community partners revealed in their discussion that there are many resources throughout the County for families; however, one of the greatest challenges is making those services accessible to families. Partners' challenges in the referral processes stemmed mostly from finding ways to reach out to families to make them aware of what services and resources are available and finding ways to better support families in the bureaucratic process (documentation, data sharing, etc.). This

was consistent with providers and families who shared through focus groups and surveys that the lack of knowledge of services/resources available was the greatest challenge for them. Both providers and families expressed the desire for a "one-stop-shop" to identify what services are available by need and to include any qualification requirements.

"But kind of having some type of center that deals with Orange County [would be helpful], that again has one home page, one click, one link that kind of has, these are one to two-year-old centers, infant, these are preschool centers, these are TK, these are subsidized programs. These are referral pages that you can contact, having in that home page." - Parent/Guardian

Even when families and providers were aware of services and resources, they shared that the availability of services was often limited or there were long wait times. Families shared that they also experienced not being qualified yet for services, such as not meeting the income or age requirements for services. Families with children with exceptional needs indicated they had increased burden often because of the need for health services, and there needed to be more support for parents for more information on their availability. Additionally, community partners shared that although there are a lot of resources across the County, South County has had an increased need, and there are fewer resources available in that region, which has made it harder for those families to access services since they have to travel farther to get the support they need.

Families' preconceptions were also raised as a concern among providers and community partners. They noted that there are sometimes stigmas among families about receiving services and that families are not always forthcoming about information on their children's needs, which hinders the process. A third of providers indicated in the survey this was a barrier for them. Community partners also shared that there is often a need to explain the importance of a service (such as nutrition) to families to encourage them to access services. Both community partners and providers shared that often, families do not follow through on a referral or are not responsive to calls.

Finally, inconsistent information was also identified as a challenge. Several providers indicated in the survey that pediatricians or service providers often did not concur with their

assessments of children. Parents echoed this concern, sharing that doctors did not always diagnose the “root cause” of the child’s need or adopted a “wait-and-see” approach. This led to a delay in care and/or confusion and mistrust among families. Figure 14 provides an overview of the challenges identified by each group.

Challenges identified	Families	Providers	Partners
Lack of information/how to share program/services			
Limitation of service accessibility			
Lack of information from families about student needs			
Lack of availability of programs/services			
Bureaucracy (documentation process, contracting process, etc.)			
Inconsistency of diagnosis/identified need			
Family perception of services (stigma, do not see the importance of need)			
Language/cultural barriers of families			

Figure 14. Challenges in the referral process identified by educational stakeholders

To better coordinate referrals and services for families, community partners discussed that it would be helpful to better align their goals around early learning, share information across fields, and, most importantly, identify ways to more easily share data across organizations since families are often burdened with filling out multiple documents requiring similar information. They also expressed the importance of ensuring families are part of the conversation when developing processes for better coordination to ensure their opinions are validated, and needs are being met. At the community partner forum, partners made a commitment to meet more regularly to discuss ways to best coordinate services.

Community Engagement and Partnerships

Community Engagement and Partnerships

Overview of Community Engagement and Partnerships

As part of the UPK Mixed Delivery System Plan grant, Orange County plans to create and expand partnerships to increase access to UPK programs for children with exceptional needs and better provide outreach and enrollment supports to all families and providers. The County plans to assess current effective strategies, establish strong partnerships with regional centers and services, and assess the current landscape of UPK program enrollment.

To increase access and knowledge of the system for the families and providers, collecting feedback and hearing from those engaging with the UPK system is vital. Therefore, evaluators also explored the current practices, strategies, and resources available to the Orange County community at large to better help with engagement and strong mutually beneficial partnerships.

Families' Knowledge of PreK Options

As one part of this need's assessment, families were asked about their confidence, sources of knowledge, and experiences when trying to find more information about PreK options for their children. When surveyed, the majority of parents/guardians felt confident that they could select the best option for their child, that they were aware of the resources available to them, understood the different PreK options, and knew where to go to find more information (see Figure 15). Although the majority of families felt this way, when focusing specifically on prospective PreK parents (parents/guardians of children within one year of enrollment), the general confidence of this group to find information, understand their options, and understand the system as a whole was lower compared to families of children currently in or previously graduated from PreK.

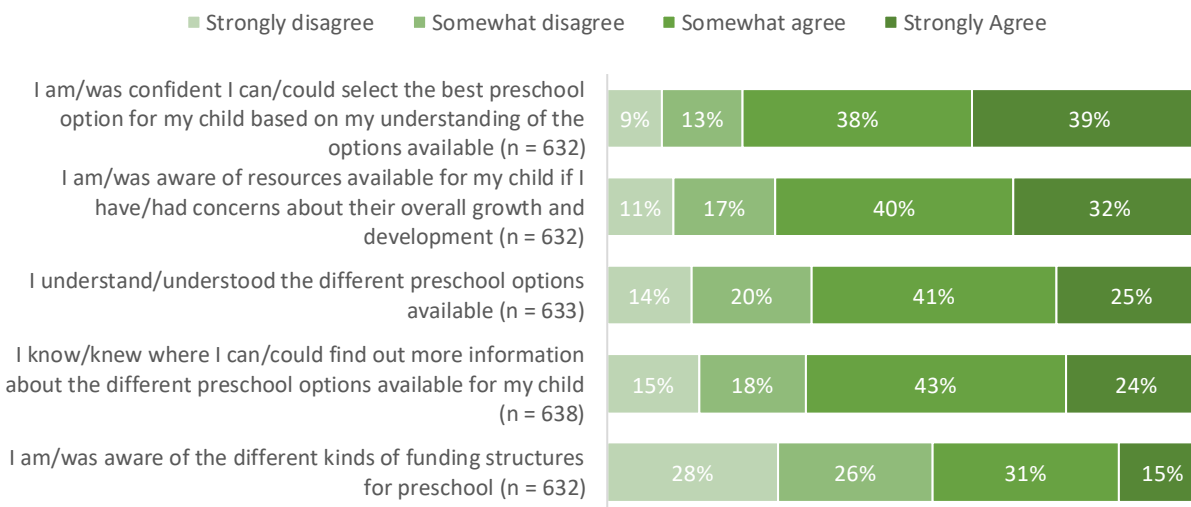


Figure 15. Families' Understanding of PreK Options

For example, when asked the extent to which a respondent agreed with the statement, “I understand/understood the different preschool options available,” overall 67% of families with a child currently in PreK or a child who graduated from PreK agreed with this statement. Meanwhile, only 53% of prospective PreK parents agreed with the same statement (see Figure 16). Providers echoed this concern, with 63% stating that lack of knowledge of the programs available was at least “somewhat” of a problem for the families of incoming students, and 60% stating that lack of knowledge of program differences was also an issue. Relatedly, families generally expressed confusion around the UPK system and the terminology, with one stating, *“I don't know about options, but we understand there's so many... There's kindergarten and there's PreK, and then there's a TK, transitional kindergarten. Some cost money, some don't. I think there's four different programs before they would reach first grade, so it's a little confusing”*. This general confusion with terminology is also covered in the [Vision & Coherence section](#), but the effects of this confusion spread to other areas of the UPK framework, including enrollment. The general confusion of this umbrella term and what it does or does not mean seems to have negatively impacted families’ ability to navigate the system and providers’ ability to create clear and concise dissemination materials to families about their options and eligibility criteria.

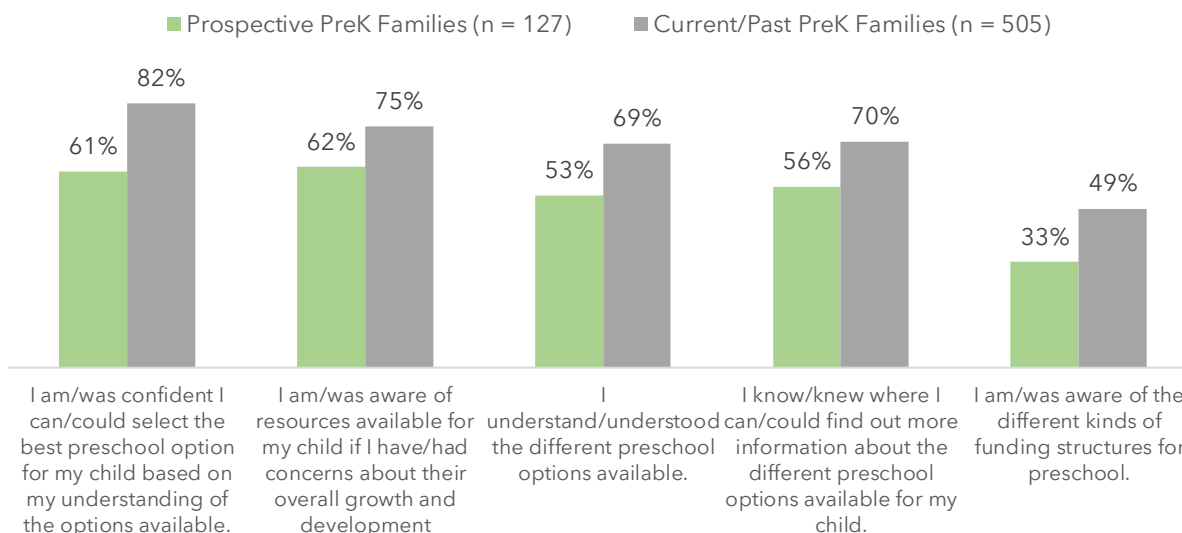


Figure 16. Percent of Families' Agreed with Statements by PreK Enrollment Status

This challenge with understanding information related to PreK options extended to families’ abilities to find information as well. The majority of respondents to the family survey indicated they utilized informal, self-initiated means for finding information about a PreK option, such as different websites (e.g., FACES), Google, hearing about options from friends or family, or because they had prior knowledge of options because they were/are an educator or know someone who is. Few participants indicated that they received information from places such as family resource centers, doctor’s offices, or child/daycare centers. The lack of a systematic method for information dissemination to families about UPK and the options available for PreK education led to families finding information in an ad-hoc way from numerous sources, leading one focus group attendee to say, *“I think the problem is you get into these websites and they’re*

enormous and wading through to find out what you really want can be really, really challenging.” On the other hand, providers indicated using various means to communicate with families about their PreK program, the most prevalent being a website. Other methods that were most commonly reported were brochures, open houses, family, and friends; interestingly, 32% of programs reported not using any method to communicate (see Figure 17). In general, there seems to be a gap in the current UPK community engagement system in providing all families with information on the UPK system, their options, and the differences between those options. Additionally, as it currently stands, providers rely on a wide range of activities to educate families, including passive means (e.g., a standing webpage) and other events such as community events or open houses. Families, however, are not engaging with or able to learn about these more proactive steps providers are taking, such as brochures or community engagement events. Community partners discussed potential solutions, including methods for building trusting relationships with families and creating dissemination materials other than text-based materials such as flyers or brochures.

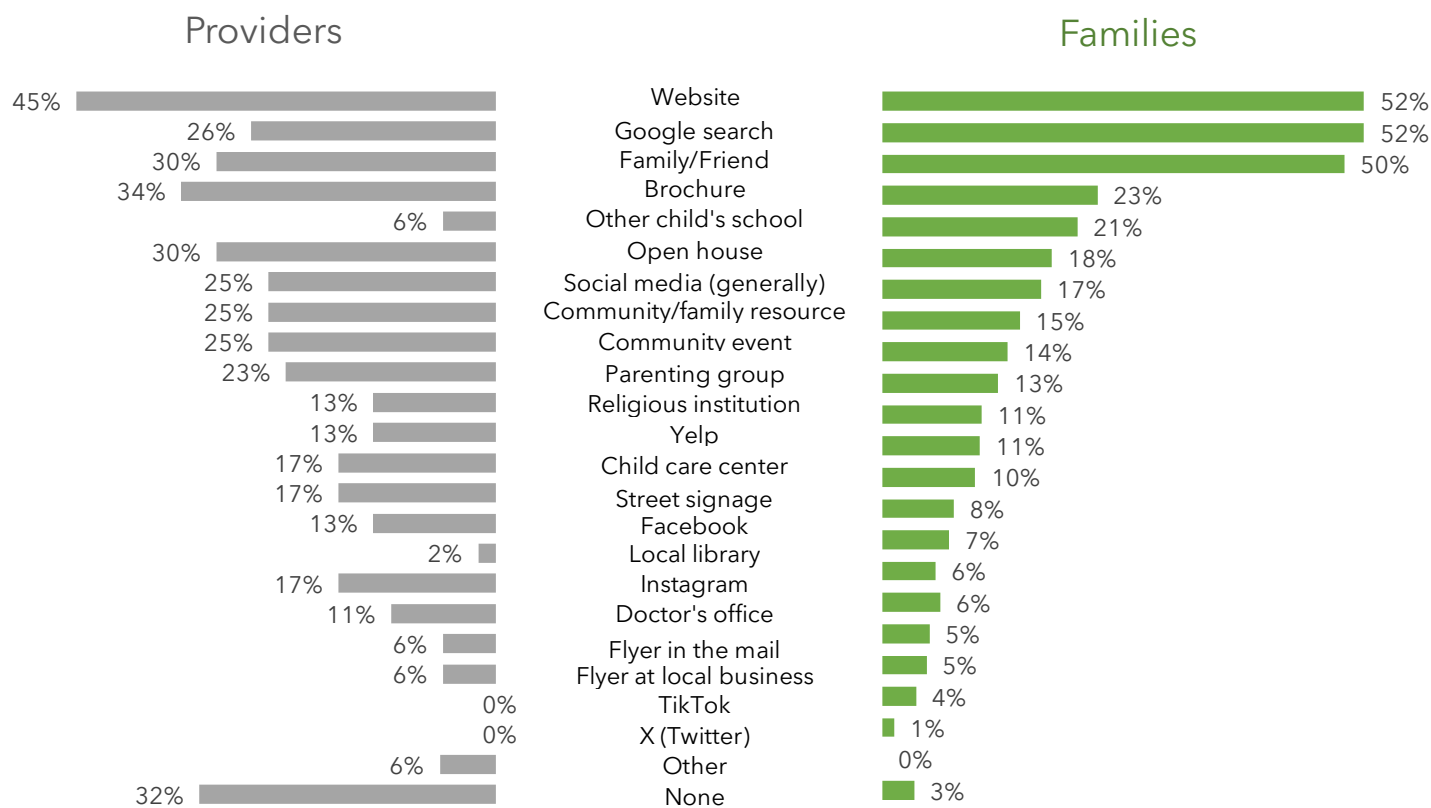


Figure 17. Family and Provider's most common communication methods

During focus groups, attendees reported that having additional resources, information, or supports would have been useful during the information-gathering process. Specific resources or supports that attendees mentioned were things such as: a one-stop shop for all information

(e.g., information about all programs and services on the OCDE website), a standardized web page template for each school to increase the ease of navigability, and centralized systems for making appointments or completing forms to reduce the number of webpages families need to visit. Currently, the ways families most commonly find information on PreK options are reliant on the strong technological and information literacy skills of individual families or family members or a well-connected social network of friends and family to learn more about their options. The lack of a systematic method for educating families presents a scenario where families are not selecting the best option for them and, as discussed with community partners, situations where families are choosing to home-school their children because of a lack of understanding and trust in the early childhood system.

Families' Priorities When Selecting PreK Options

Another important element when selecting a PreK option is considering different families' priorities. In general, the priorities of families were well aligned with those of the state, namely safe and appropriate physical environments, developmentally appropriate activities and services, and fair treatment (see Figure 18). In addition, other priorities were quite common amongst respondents, such as close proximity to home or work and low or no cost. Overall, families seemed to consider the distance, cost, and quality of the program most consistently. One theme that emerged consistently during focus groups with families was the schedule of the programs near them (e.g., full-day vs half-day). One participant expressed the difficulty in having only half-day enrollment options near them by saying, *"There's centers that are half day and she'll need full-day because it's like, okay, who's going to pick so-and-so up at that time when you're in the middle of work? And if you don't have family like us that lives local, you have to rely on paying out of pocket somebody else that you can confide in and trust"*. This sentiment and general difficulty finding programs with enough coverage was common across numerous focus groups and was supported by provider survey data. Of responding providers, the average number of spots available for full-day programs was nine, and for half-day was 4. Meanwhile, the average number of families on waitlists for full-day programs was 48, and 9 for half-day programs. On average, the demand for full-day programs specifically greatly outweighs the availability of these programs.

State Priorities Additional Family Priorities

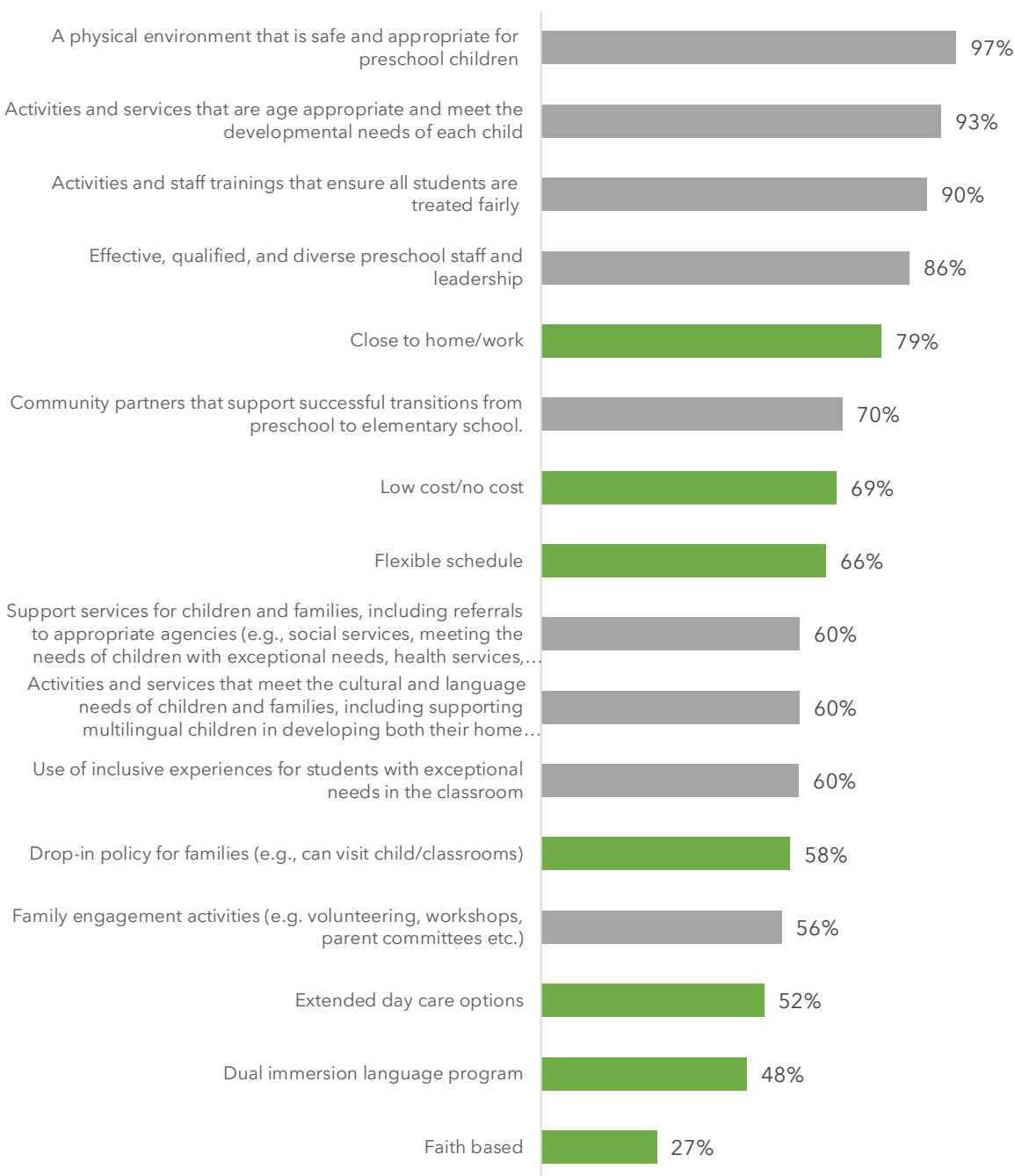


Figure 18. Family childhood learning center priorities alignment to State priorities

Importantly, the availability of these programs is only one factor in a family's decision making. Other limiting factors, such as reliable transportation and the cost of the program were also important factors in families' decision-making. As another part of these questions on priorities, attendees of focus groups were also asked what high-quality PreK looked like or meant to

them. In large part, the responses lined up with the priorities of the state, such as safe environments and teachers with credentials. What these responses were missing were indicators of high quality in teaching and learning. For example, families did not mention specific practices, activities, or content they would like to see when visiting potential providers. The generalities provided by families reflected an idea of the basic requirements of what it means to be an early childcare provider but largely did not reflect components of what it means for a learning space to be high-quality. In general, families seemed to be aware of the key phrases or ideas that are linked with high-quality early childhood education (e.g., developmentally appropriate or evidence-based) but expressed difficulty in identifying those components when looking for a program. Providing families with this type of information in resource sheets or other materials could be useful for families to make a more informed choice when selecting an early childcare provider. Families expressed that information or checklists they could bring with them when touring potential programs or when looking through websites would be useful to determine the quality of a program and if it met the needs of their child/children. Attendees of focus groups also identified spaces such as pediatrician's offices or First 5 as places where there could be a centralized hub of information.

Finally, to highlight cost as an issue specifically, 51% of respondents on the family survey indicated that a concern they had was the cost of programs. However, only 46% said they were aware of the different funding structures for preschool. When looking at family survey data separated by family experience, a much higher proportion of prospective families indicated concerns about cost and were more concerned with most of the issues raised in the survey than families of current or graduated PreK students (see

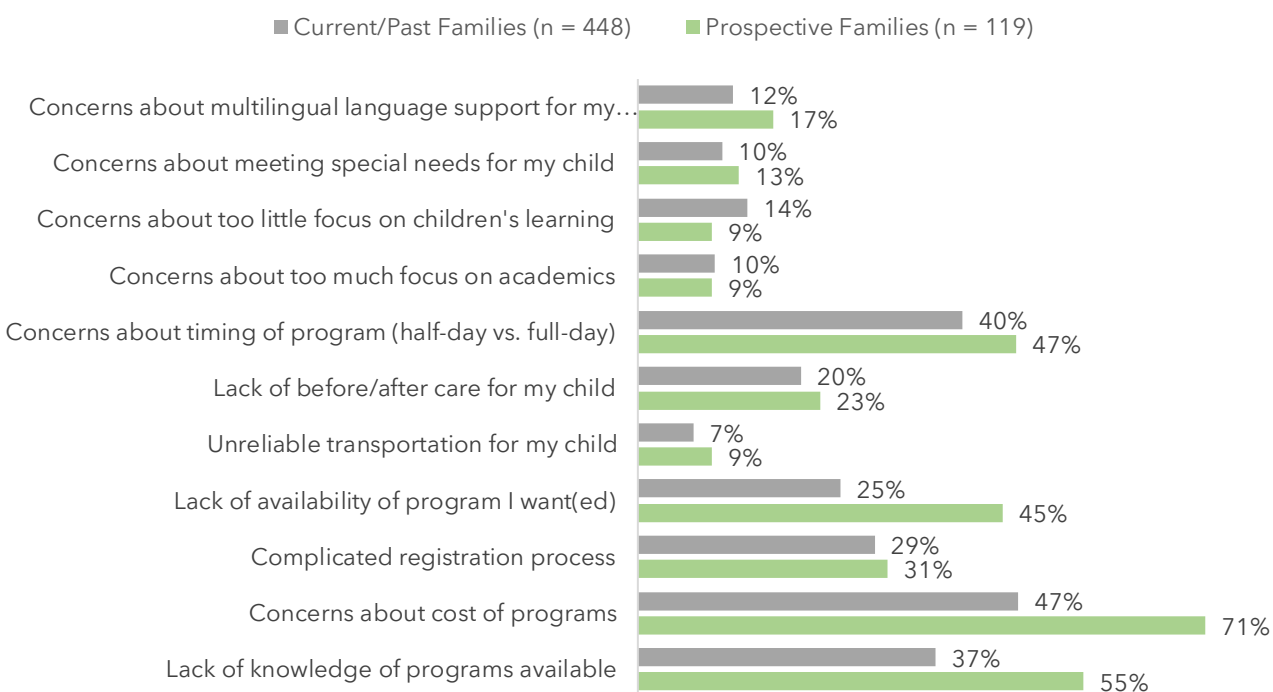


Figure 19). Additionally, only 33% of prospective preschool families said they were aware of funding structures. Focus group attendees also commonly cited cost as a primary factor in their

decision-making process, with some saying that it was a constraining factor when deciding what program to pursue for their child and that it would be helpful to have information about financial assistance more widely advertised to families. One attendee explained their decision-making process by saying, *“Right now we rent, we don't necessarily own a home. And part of it was because we do have another mortgage with our children's daycare. And so just being able to weigh off the costs, that was the choice that we made as a family.”* This trade-off between high-quality learning environments and other life milestones was a common theme across focus groups, and numerous attendees expressed that cost was the foremost among their priorities,

An additional finding of note is that across questions asking prospective families about their concerns with enrollment or about programs, families in South Central Orange County (e.g., Irvine, Lake Forest, Laguna Hills) reported, on average, much higher concerns than families in North Central Orange County (e.g., Orange, Villa Park, Garden Grove). For example, 68% of families in South Central Orange County reported concerns over the cost of programs, whereas only 38% of North Central families reported the same. Additionally, 50% of South Central families reported a lack of knowledge of programs as a concern whereas only 39% of North Central families reported the same.

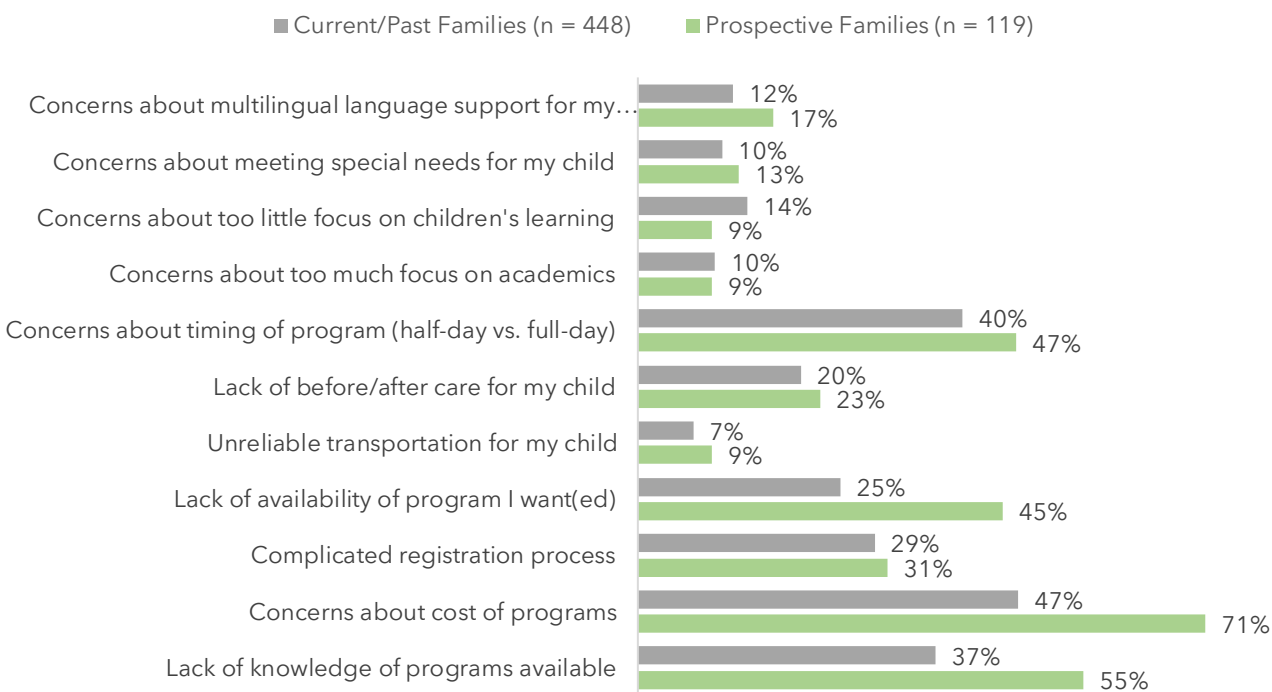


Figure 19. Family concerns by family experience with PreK

Enrollment Experiences

The process of enrolling their child into a program seemed to vary widely from family to family. Some families described the process as easy with the programs they enrolled their child in, providing clear deadlines, one-on-one support, and simple application processes to complete,

while others felt the opposite. Regardless of experience, a crucial step in the enrollment process described during focus groups was families visiting the prospective program to better understand the program and get a personalized experience seeing the space, and interacting with staff at the site. From a provider perspective, almost all providers indicated that they provide tours with site directors, and many provide a checklist of things families need to complete to enroll. In contrast, families that responded to the survey reported a very low prevalence of supports (see discussion below). This contrast between provider-reported supports and family experiences could be indicative of a difference in response areas of Orange County or a bias in the sample where only very motivated families responded, and only high-support providers made it to this question in the survey. This, amongst other theories, could explain the large discrepancy seen in the survey data.

While some families had very positive experiences with individualized support, numerous attendees expressed that the degree of paperwork, tight timelines, and ambiguity associated with the enrollment process were all difficult to manage. Results from the family survey indicated that fewer than 30% of families received some kind of support when enrolling their child (see Figure 20). Families in focus groups expressed their concerns with the enrollment process by describing the need to track different dates for each program, engage in lottery systems to enroll, and the competition of enrollment amongst families. One attendee recounted their experience enrolling their child by saying:

I was up [until] midnight literally enrolling my daughter and then they're like, "okay, but then you have to print everything out and bring it in person and it can only be between 9:10 or I'm sorry, 8:10 and 9:00 AM, and then 10:30 to 10:50, and then 12:00 to 12:15 or something like that. And it's like, "Wait, what?" And then when you go, there's a line of people. I understand, they try to structure it that way because they have other things that they need to do, but I just felt such an urgency and anxiety. I have to get everything in. And then what if I don't get it in? What if I miss something? She even said, "You don't get all your paperwork in, then we're going to start going through the list and once it's full, it's full." I felt like it was a very stressful process and then it was like, "Am I making the right decision?" That it gets you to second guess yourself. I didn't like that.

Between the results of the survey and focus groups, there seemed to be little uniformity in families' enrollment experiences, with some having very positive and others having distinctly negative experiences. Even in instances where a family's experience was distinctly positive or negative, there was little consistency in the ways in which those experiences were positive or negative. For example, one family described that acquiring all of the necessary paperwork was not particularly stressful, but showing up to their child's school at a specific time for enrollment was due to the pressure of the event. Alternatively, one family described that they had individual one-on-one sessions with school staff during the enrollment process, whereas another family found a well-organized website to be adequate in supporting their enrollment needs. This lack of consistency may speak to the diverse needs of families in Orange County and the wide degree of options and provider practices in the County. While complete standardization of these practices across providers is unlikely, working towards similarity of enrollment processes, paperwork, and timelines may be a worthwhile goal to assist families during this sometimes stressful and complex process.

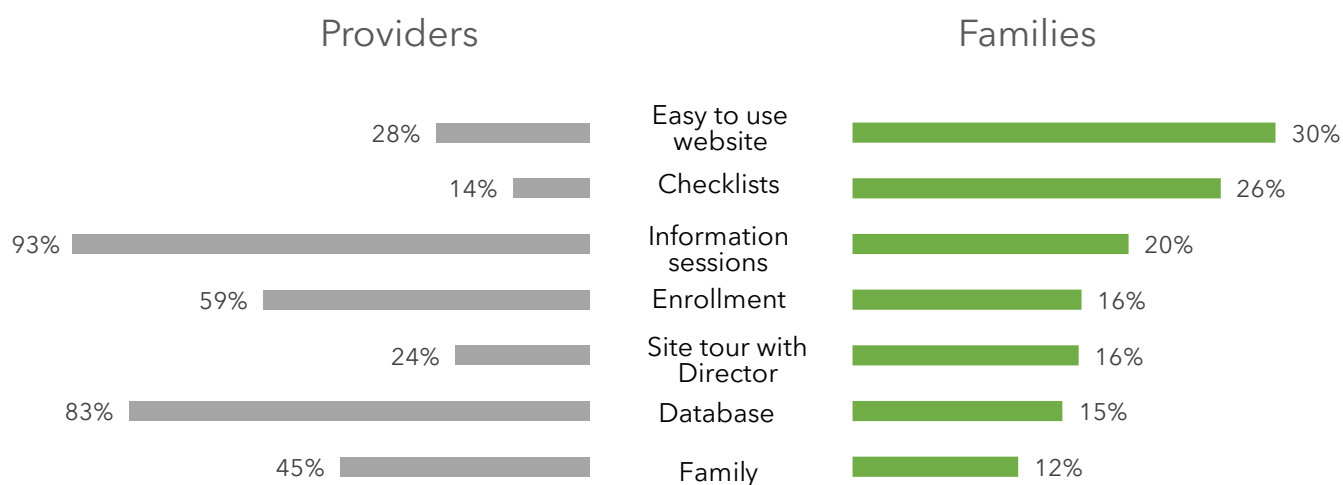


Figure 20. Family and provider communication methods

Workforce Development and Professional Learning

Workforce Development and Professional Learning

Overview of Workforce and Professional Learning

Strong educators and staff are crucial to the success and effectiveness of the UPK Mixed Delivery System. With this in mind, the County, as a part of the UPK program, plans to leverage and enhance existing workforce development initiatives, professional learnings, and programs to support the current and incoming workforce. To achieve these goals, the County plans to better understand the types of supports needed to retain current teachers and support aspiring ones, strengthen partnerships with current teacher support groups, and better understand the pathways for teachers to become certified.

The first step in these goals and actions is to better understand the current landscape of workforce recruitment, development, and continuous learning. Therefore, evaluators also explored current workforce development practices and talked with providers about how to keep them motivated and engaged with teaching, and the best ways to attract aspiring teachers.

Incoming Workforce

An essential part of the Workforce and Professional Learning section of the needs assessment was to better understand recruitment and the appeal of the teaching profession to incoming teachers. In recent years in the state, there has been a decline in the number of teachers earning new credentials (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2024), and the number of students majoring in education has steeply declined in the past 50 years (NCES, 2023). Educators who participated in focus groups found this to be the case with early childhood learning in Orange County as well. A common theme throughout focus groups was attendees expressing concern about recruiting new teachers and other educators into the workforce.

Understanding the Requirements to Teach

One area where attendees expressed concern was college students and “future teachers” understanding the requirements for being a teacher. Attendees often spoke about the confusion that college students feel in understanding how to attain a specific permit, credential, or certificate they are aiming for and the potential consequences of each permit, certificate, or credential. Attendees spoke of their experiences talking with current students who were unaware of the differences between a teaching certificate and a teacher permit. One attendee mentioned that at the community college level, there are different certificates awarded when students complete different numbers of units, but students are often not familiar with the differences between those certificates and their implications.

Providers also expressed that incoming teachers who engaged in Orange County’s ROP system or other comparable CTE training had different expectations or licensing requirements contingent on the program or area they came from. For example, one respondent had an experience where an incoming teacher was licensed through North Orange County ROP. Meanwhile, another potential incoming teacher was licensed from a different area of the County, but they unlike the North OC student, were unable to begin teaching with their

credential. This situation and others like it were examples of providers not understanding the requirements to be able to teach and, therefore, were unable to communicate to potential educators what those requirements were. These situations did not only manifest as potential educators requiring a different credential or qualification, but providers also described instances where potential educators believed they needed more schooling to begin working in the classroom in any way; as one attendee described, *"Some of them are like, oh, but I don't have my permit. Oh, but I don't have my AA yet. We're like, girl, get in here, you don't need that. We'll help you. So, I don't know what's being said in class with them, but that's the impression I keep hearing from people"*. As previously mentioned, these providers are largely feeling the effects of declining credentialing and general teacher shortages as their programs often have long student waitlists, but they have difficulty accepting additional students due to a lack of staff.

Recruitment of Potential Teachers

Across focus groups, attendees communicated that recruitment of new teachers into their schools, but more largely into the profession of teaching, was an area of potential concern. There were several themes that emerged from focus groups related to the recruitment of new teachers into the profession.

Pay and other Financial Incentives. One reason attendees commonly cited for the difficulties in recruiting teachers is the financial incentive, or lack thereof, to teach early childhood ages. One attendee recounted a conversation they had with a student who said, *"I want to be a preschool teacher, but I work at Tilly's as a retail manager and I make more money as a retail manager at Tilly's than I do as a lead teacher, going into a lead teacher position"*. This worry about teaching as a "financially attractive" career was common amongst focus group attendees both in comparison to other career options and when considering the feasibility of continuing as an early childhood educator in California specifically. Potential solutions for this issue that attendees thought of beyond simply raising pay for all teachers were subsidies or stipends for tuition, loan forgiveness, and other forms of financial incentives to attain a teacher credential and continue into the profession.

In addition to the discussion around pay, attendees also noted that in institutes of higher education (IHE), students had the perception that careers in early childhood are always low-paying. One attendee shared that their child was told by a counselor at their school that child development is the lowest-paying degree and that the counselor was "badmouthing" the degree. Attendees in focus groups felt as though this was another area to consider when thinking about recruitment into teaching. Considering not only what the pay is when students become teachers but also what the messaging about the prospects of the career are when students are in school.

Understanding What it Means to be a Teacher. Another area of teacher recruitment where focus group participants thought there was room for growth was creating pipelines and experiences for potential teachers to get a better sense of what it means to be a teacher and experience the profession. Focus group participants explained that while some have "pipelines" for recruiting new teachers, these often existed because of their personal connection to an IHE,

either as an employee or otherwise. Other attendees described programs that existed, such as early childhood education dual enrollment programs between Golden West College and Huntington Beach High School, but there were fewer programs cited that were between IHEs and providers. This gap was often identified by those in focus groups as one of great need and one that would be very useful for continuous staffing and coping with high turnover rates amongst staff.

Beyond creating pipelines to recruit candidates into programs, a common theme in the focus group was creating systems and processes so that students can get rich experience in teaching environments before beginning their work in the classroom. Focus group participants communicated that having apprenticeships or other similar programs could be useful to help incoming teachers gain more experience and would be able to provide extra support to current teachers as well. More opportunities for incoming teachers to gain experience in the classroom before having their own classroom may also counteract the “badmouthing” and potential negative perceptions college students have of teaching as a profession.

Current Workforce

Credentialing, Permits, and Career Advancement

A prevalent theme across provider focus groups was requests for additional training and information on topics such as how to acquire certain credentials, support for earning college degrees, and on-site training. Numerous attendees mentioned that while they may have strong teaching experience, they are missing specific degrees or credentials that they feel are barriers to their career goals and advancement, with one attendee saying, *“So I think for me, I just want to understand an outline of what are those degrees? Is there a pathway? Where do I start? How much does it cost? How long does it take? And then of course, because of what happens in our field, what are the income ranges so I can decide for my family is it worth all that extra time and money? Or should I just stay where I’m at, stay at the school I’m at?”* These questions and others like them were common for attendees who are or know someone who had been in the workforce for a long period of time in a position such as an assistant teacher or Aide. To better answer these questions and others like it, focus group participants also communicated that having a centralized, “one-stop-shop” to understand credentialing and permitting options and to keep a digital record of the permits or credentials they already have would be a useful resource. Interestingly, survey respondents did not express that a “one-stop-shop” or increased clarity would be an effective strategy for educator retention or recruitment. Instead, it may be the case that this increased clarity would be a sort of “quality of life” improvement for current educators rather than a deciding factor for those considering becoming teachers or deciding if they should continue to teach (see Figure 21).

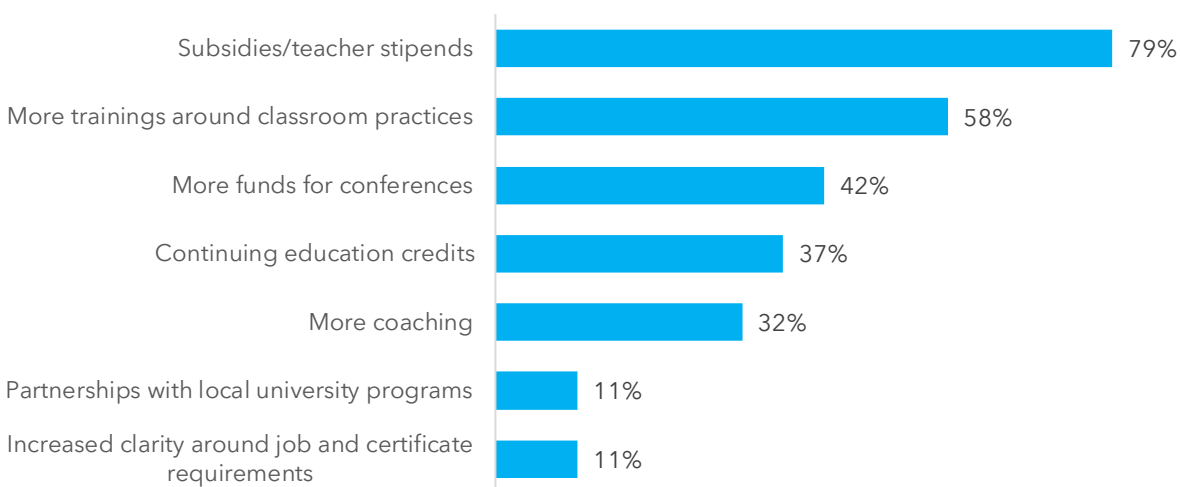


Figure 21. Provider beliefs of effective strategies for educator retention and recruitment (% of respondents, n=19)

Numerous attendees also mentioned that strong staff may be ready for a more significant teaching role and need more knowledge or time to earn the requisite credentials or degree to begin their teaching career. This lack of knowledge may be partly due to attendees not being aware of the resources available. Still, attendees also described a lack of clarity around the credentials needed to begin teaching. Specifically, one focus group mentioned the P3 credential and their understanding that it would soon be required of all teachers. Providers in this group had questions about why and how teachers would manage student-teaching again and their options for completing this certificate in the near future. Confusion over credentials extended beyond educators just looking for upward mobility, including an increase in pay or a move into a new role. One attendee expressed their frustration with the training, credentialing, and permitting process by saying, “So I just think we have all of these trainings and we have all these degrees and permits and things and we’re just going around and around and around and I just feel like we need something more out of this or you’re going to have a lot of people walking away, because I’m not the only one that feels this way.” Provider survey results indicated that most respondents had at least some interest in receiving resources or support in obtaining additional teaching credentials or trainings (see Figure 22) to support this theme found in the focus groups. A general takeaway from these discussions was that educators do not necessarily want credentials or permits just to have them but would like clearer explanations and communication on the concrete benefits of attaining them.

Financial Support

Another prevalent theme in this area was financial assistance, which would make the career of teaching preschool “more attractive.” Attendees ideas to do this included higher pay for teachers so that salaries are more competitive with teachers of other grades and non-teachers; financial support for attaining credentials and degrees; or support with continuing education and other professional learning opportunities. One attendee said about finding new staff, “It’s a constant search. I have two sites and 24 staff. So, people have babies, people get married,

people move out of California because they can't afford to live here. So, there's all kinds of things even if we want to retain our staff and pay them well and treat them well, it just doesn't always happen." In multiple focus groups, providers expressed confidence in the pay and benefits packages they could offer teachers but still found it difficult to retain staff and fill open positions. While most attendees felt that higher pay was the likely solution to this problem, others also suggested different possible solutions, including subsidies for training, continued education, or other "breaks" that could be offered to current educators to make the profession more financially feasible.

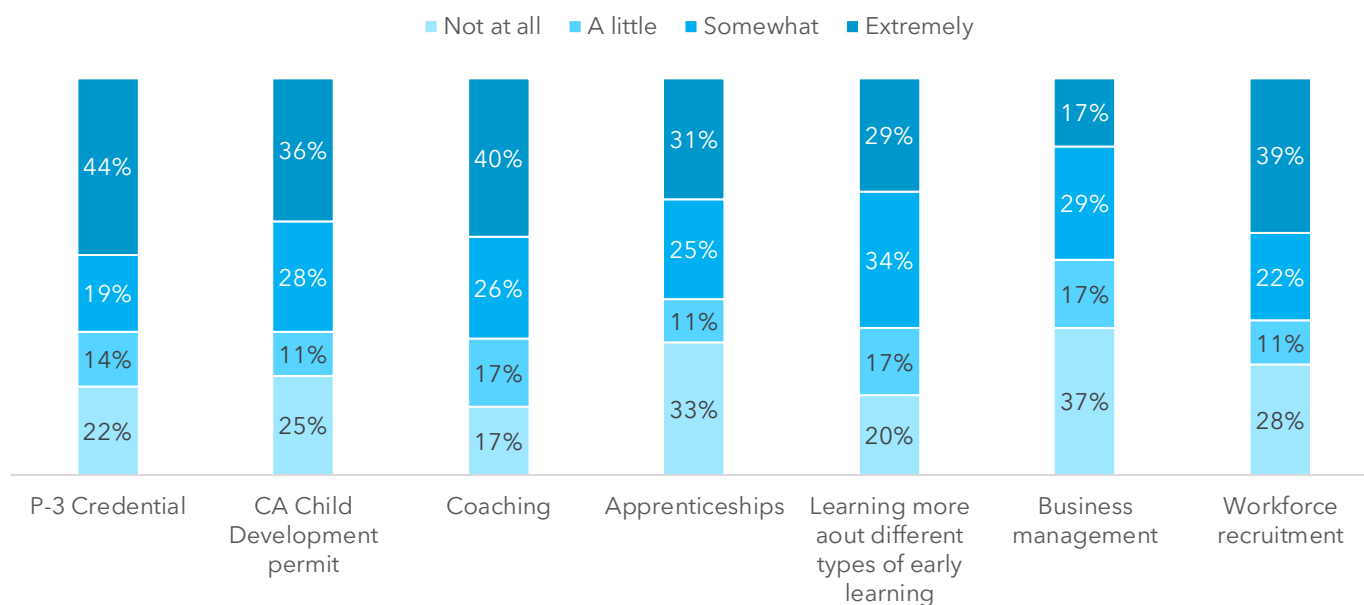


Figure 22. Provider interest in credentials and resources (n=35)

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Overview of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

To support Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, Orange County's UPK Mixed Delivery Plan includes understanding the professional learning opportunities available and identifying ways to enhance professional learning and resources to improve instructional practices that support students with disabilities and multilingual learners. As part of this needs assessment, the evaluators explored the current scope of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices, professional learning opportunities among providers, and their perceptions of professional learning needs.

Curriculum and Instruction

To better understand the scope of programs that self-evaluate, evaluators asked providers if they are evaluating themselves and, if so, which tool they use. About two-thirds of providers who responded to the survey indicated that they have had their program evaluated with a formal assessment (Infant-Toddler CLASS Assessment, PreK CLASS Assessment, or Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)) with about half indicating they have been evaluated using the ECERS.

Approximately half of providers indicated they used an academic and/or a social-emotional curriculum. However, the curriculum across programs varied widely. Figure 23 lists the curricula used by programs by focus area. Providers shared that to prepare students for the transition to kindergarten, they do focus on numeracy and literacy skills that are developmentally appropriate but primarily focus on social-emotional skills, such as self-regulation, following directions, relationship building, critical thinking, and problem solving.

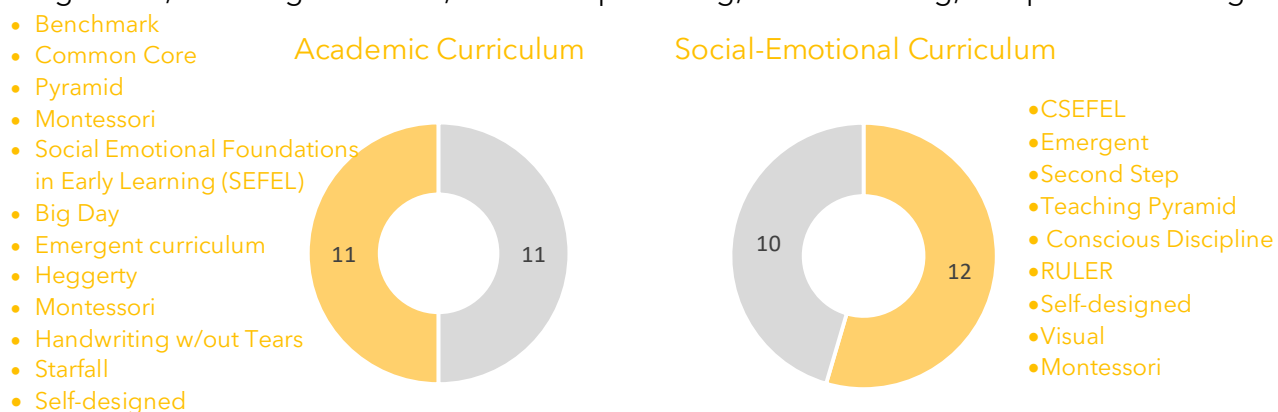


Figure 23. Number of providers indicating they use a curriculum and list of curricula used

Provider survey results indicated that the vast majority of respondents have received training in instructional practices in a variety of areas to support their curriculum and enhance their instructional strategies, with more than a third feeling like they are adequately trained in promoting positive-teacher interactions, skills, and activities for teaching early numeracy and literacy, identifying high-quality materials, and classroom set-up and environment. However, focus group attendees said they would like additional trainings to improve their classroom

practices. Focus group attendees expressed that trainings to manage challenging behaviors and support children's mental health were particularly important in the post-COVID education landscape, as it was a commonly held belief across focus groups that students display challenging behaviors more often and require more mental health support than pre-COVID. They voiced that children present with underdeveloped self-regulation and communication skills may lead to more challenging behaviors in the future. Provider survey results bolstered focus group findings, with over three-quarters of respondents saying they would like training in these areas. Other areas where providers commonly expressed interest in additional training were areas such as promoting positive teacher-child interactions, support social-emotional development, and teaching early numeracy (see Figure 24).

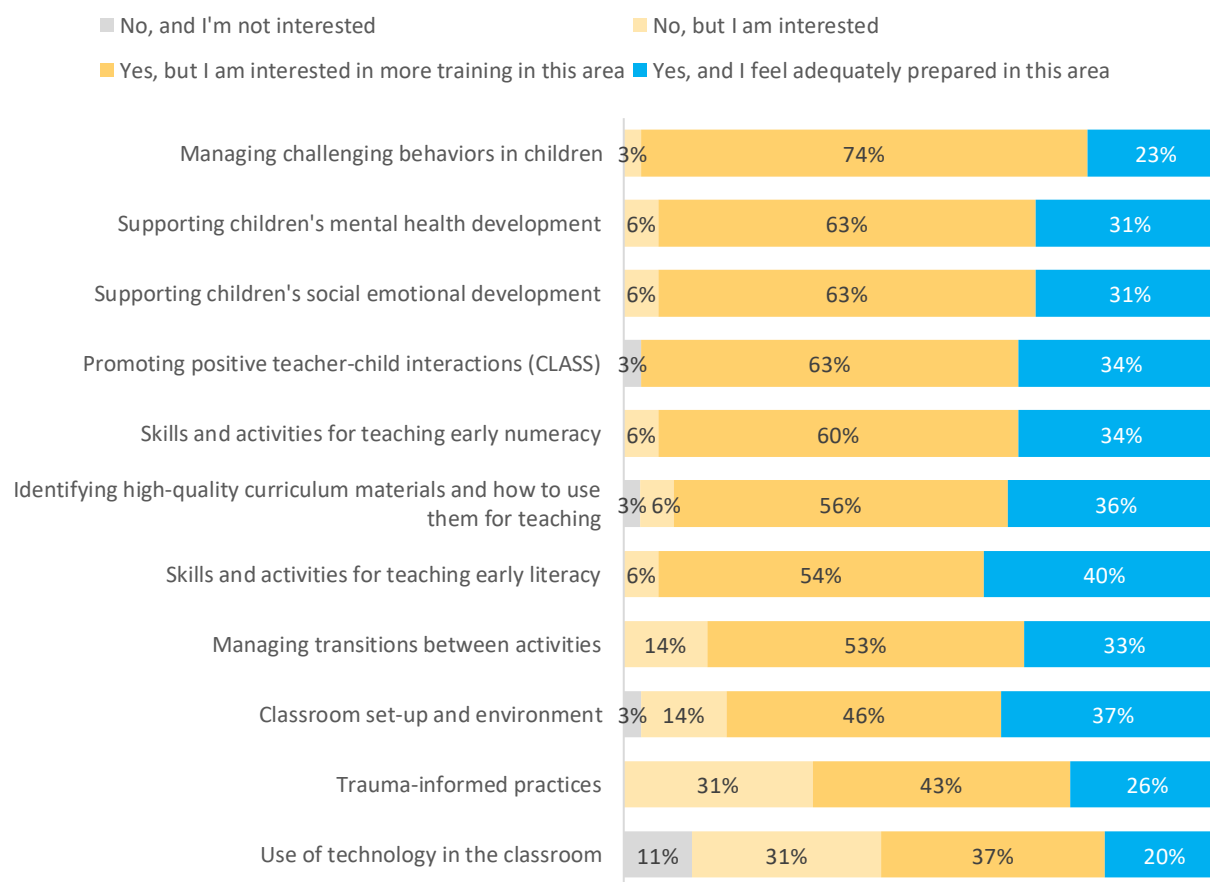


Figure 24. Providers' experience and interest in professional learnings (n=35)

Assessment

Overall, 43% of provider survey respondents felt adequately prepared to use assessments, and 37% indicated they have received training in this area in the past year but would like more. An additional 20% indicated that they have not yet had training this year (most of whom indicated they would like training in this area). Most providers indicated using the Ages and Stages Questions (ASQ) to assess children, followed by the Desired Results' Developmental Profile (DRDP). (See Figure 25 for assessments used by providers.) Providers in focus groups indicated

they use assessments not only to assess the needs of children but also as part of the process to ensure children are ready to transition to Kindergarten. Focus group participants shared that as part of preparing students for kindergarten, they assess the children to identify their strengths and areas of growth so they can focus on those skills during the year and communicate the child's needs with families. Since respondents indicated that the use of assessments was pivotal in the providers' role in providing support to children, it is not surprising that most survey respondents ranked the need for more training on how to conduct observations, how to use observation/assessment results, and increasing staffing to conduct assessments as some of the highest needs for supporting curriculum and instruction.

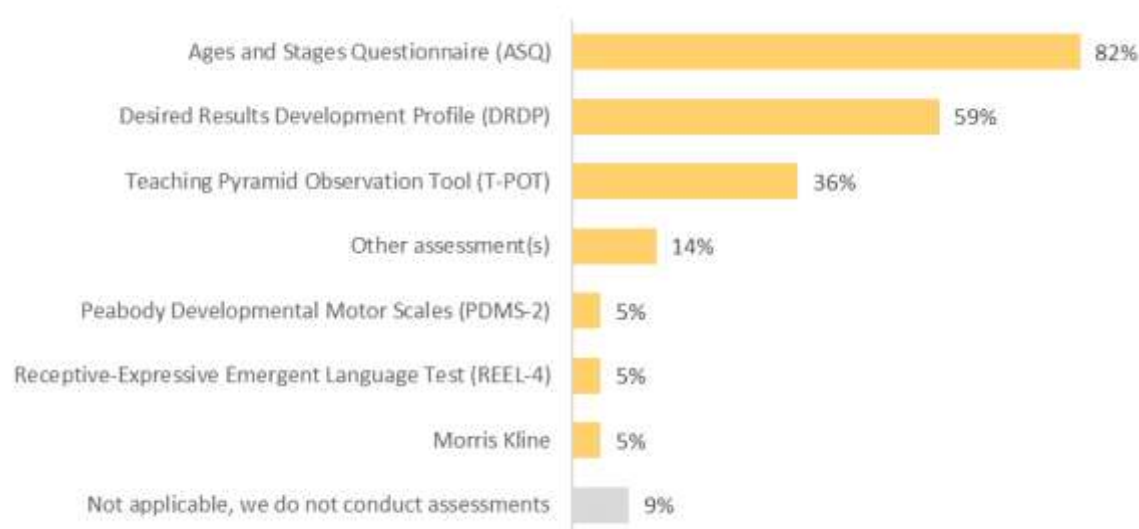


Figure 25. Providers using specified assessments (n=22)

Supporting student populations

Less than a quarter of providers felt extremely prepared to provide inclusion programs, multilingual support, or dual immersion programs (Figure 26). When asked about what kinds of training and support would be most helpful, these were also key areas identified by providers in focus groups. They shared that because students have such varied needs in the classroom, it would be helpful to identify ways to support all children. Providers expressed the importance of supporting children in multiple languages and were looking for strategies, curricula, or books and activities they could have available in the child's primary language. Notably, although 69% of provider survey respondents indicated they had training in this area in the past year, 69% also expressed an interest in it.

Seventy percent of provider survey respondents (n=27) shared that they currently serve children with special needs. Focus group participants shared that to support children with special needs, they use developmental assessments to understand the individualized needs of students. They shared that there was often a concern about behavior in this population and stressed the importance of preventative strategies, rather than having a reactive approach. As one provider stated, *"The intention is to be able to have the lead or the assistant who has more*

experience be able to work with that child for a period of time. But there's just a lack of understanding of exactly what to do. And that's what we're struggling with is how do we support that? Even when all of the things are taken into account, it's still sort of a reactive situation because we just don't have that background.” However, providers felt it would be helpful to be more prepared to serve this population. Seventy-one percent of providers indicated they would like more training on inclusive practices (Figure 26). In focus groups, they expressed interest in better understanding students’ behaviors so they can identify interventions more appropriately. They shared that even when there is extra support in the classroom, staff often lack understanding about how to best provide interventions to students.

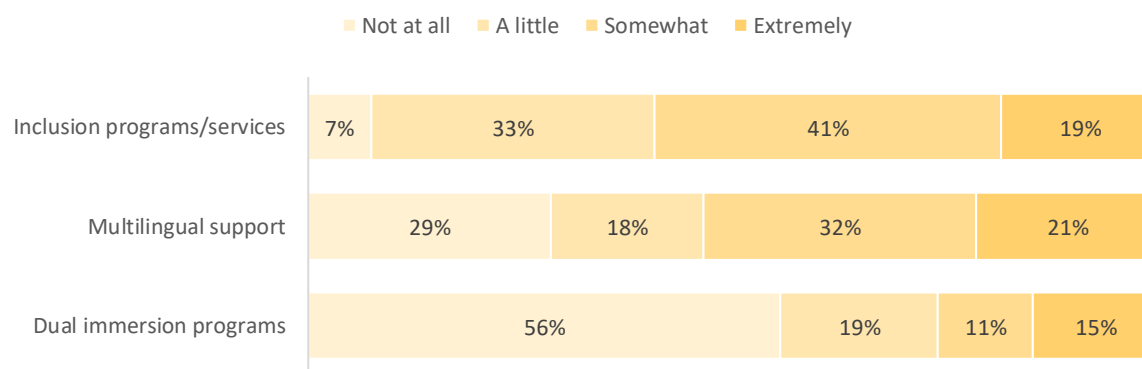


Figure 26. Provider survey respondents' level of preparedness to provide supports for student groups (n=35)

To support classroom practices targeted toward students with special needs and multilingual learners, providers expressed gratitude for their partners’ resources, which included Help Me Grow and the Priority Center. However, despite the high interest in training and support in these areas, providers are unaware of the available resources. Notably, the UPK workgroup started a list of partners that can help provide resources and support to meet families’ and providers’ needs in these areas. They identified six partners to support the cultural and linguistic needs of children and families and three partners to support inclusive experiences, listed in Figure 27 below.

Cultural and Linguistic Needs	Inclusive Experiences
• OCDE Early Learning Professional Learning • Preschool GLAD • OCAEYC Trainings • Head Start DLL (ECLKC) • National Assoc for Bilingual Education • Dual Language Immersion (DLI) programs for Spanish and Vietnamese	• Regional Center of OC • School Districts-Special Ed Depts • Family Support Network

Figure 27. List of partners to support inclusive experiences and cultural and linguistic needs of families

Family Preparation for Transition to Kindergarten

As part of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, providers in focus groups shared that preparation for Kindergarten was a main goal for them. They indicated that communication and collaboration with families was key in this process. As shown in Figure 28, at least half of

the providers on the survey suggested that they involve parents in some way to prepare children to transition to Kindergarten, including meetings with parents about students' strengths and needs (90%) and what to expect in Kindergarten (75%). Several providers shared that they supply resources to parents and help children get excited about Kindergarten by offering promotion parties where they give backpacks and school supplies to students transitioning to Kindergarten. Another area providers mentioned that they help with the transition is by collaborating and coordinating with the transitioning school. They share the needs of students and listen to what Kindergarten teachers are expecting so they can better prepare their students. They also help identify all the families going to particular schools so they can connect them.

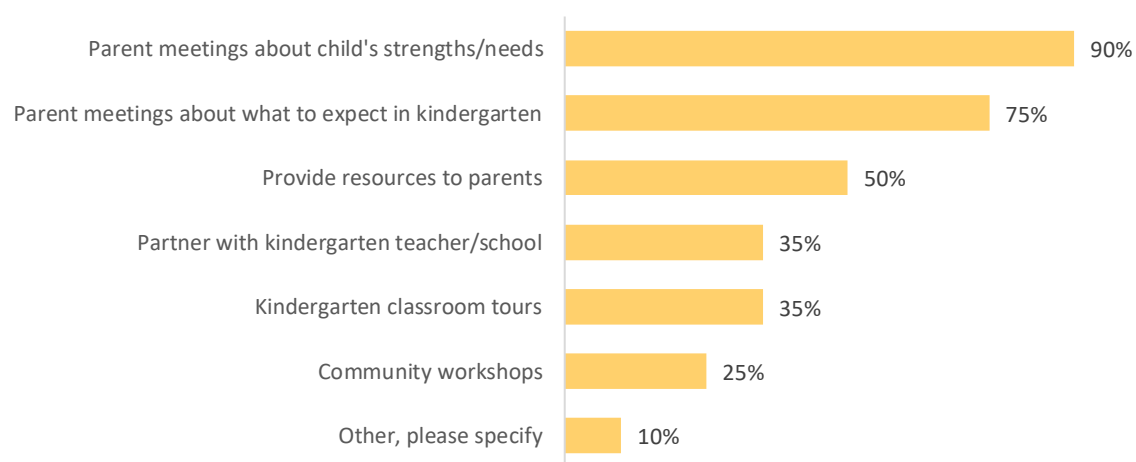


Figure 28. Providers' strategies to support children's transition to kindergarten (n=20)

Professional Learning Opportunities to Support Instructional Practices

Resources and supports

With the exception of resource sharing, in-person trainings, and hands-on practices, it appeared that providers' professional learning was slightly more self-motivated than supplied by their employers (Figure 29). Additionally, less than half have been receiving training in person through coaching, communities of practice, conference attendance, resource sharing from external partners, or hands-on practice over the past year, suggesting a need for more training opportunities. In addition to training on inclusion practices, behavioral support, and multilingual support, providers indicated that professional learning in a number of other domains such as parent engagement techniques, technology in the classroom, student social-emotional learning development, coaching programs, and others would be useful to improve their teaching practices.

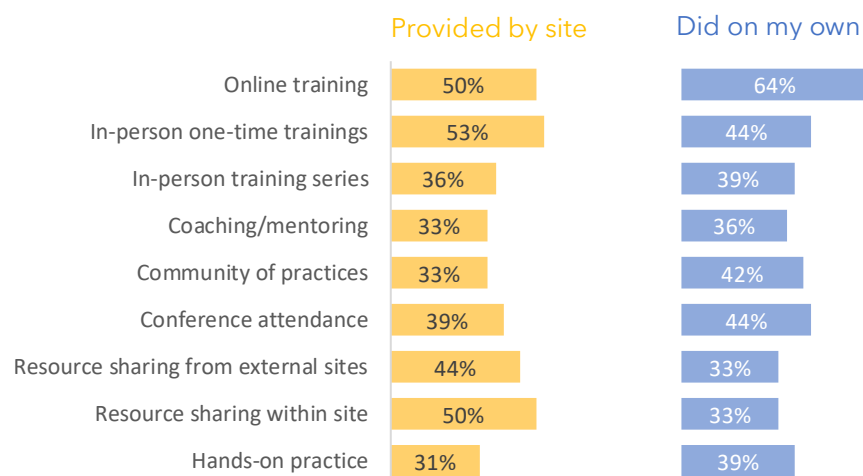


Figure 29. Providers receiving workforce or professional development support in the past three and ways they've accessed opportunities(n=36)

Notably, most providers felt confident seeking workforce development and professional learning opportunities if they wanted them. In focus groups and on the survey, they mentioned a wide range of sources for professional learning opportunities. These included OCDE, mainly through Quality Start, NAEYC, OCAEYC, First5 OC, Help Me Grow, American on Track, OC Healthy, CECO, CDE, ECE webinars, Fullerton College, and even from their families referring them.

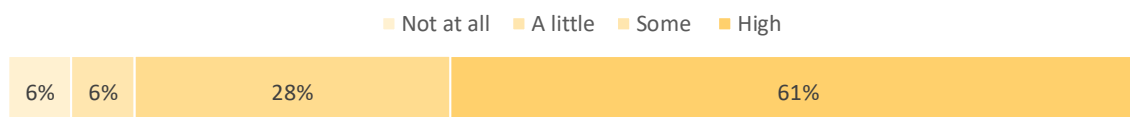


Figure 30. Providers' level of confidence in seeking out workforce development and professional learning opportunities (n=36)

Barriers to Professional Learning Opportunities

Despite having a high level of confidence in finding opportunities through different resources, they shared it would be helpful to have a hub or “one-stop” shop to learn about available and upcoming trainings in the area. Attendees also shared that this hub could also be a useful place for certificates and other credentials to be stored digitally. In the survey, providers indicated that time commitment is the greatest challenge for engaging in professional learning. Cost and location of opportunities were also top concerns for providers when seeking out opportunities. Providers elaborated in focus groups and on the survey that it is often hard to have release time to go to professional learning and that it is hard to take the time off to attend.

UPK MDS Needs Assessment Report

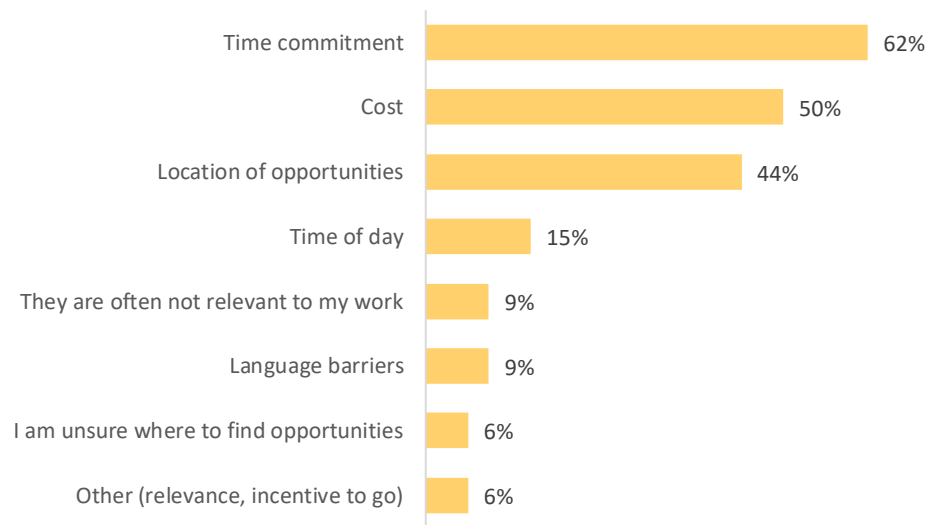


Figure 31. Providers' identified barriers to accessing professional learnings (n=34)

Facilities, Services, and Operations

Facilities, Services, and Operations

Overview of Facilities, Services, and Operations

To support Facilities, Services, and Operations, Orange County's UPK Mixed Delivery Plan includes identifying the key features of high-quality learning environments and assessing the needs, current partnerships, and practices that can be leveraged to work towards all spaces in the County becoming high-quality learning environments. As part of this needs assessment, the evaluators explored the current scope of facilities, services and operations practices, areas of need and struggles that providers often go through.

Programmatic Changes

Across numerous focus groups, private center providers expressed, in particular, that significant changes are needed to their programs to meet the needs of students and "match" the offerings of programs in school districts. For example, providing all-day and half-day care was posed as a challenge by providers, as was being able to provide after-school services that would interest families to enroll in their program. Finally, providers also suggested shifting from a TK/PreK-only site to a 0-3 site.

One provider of a private center described the impact of UPK by saying, *"The landscape has changed with UPK and it seems to be threatening, rightfully so, to different organizations because although family's needs are very different, it does provide a free, which is so important to families, educational system, whether it's for three hours or a full day, right?"* The programmatic changes required in response to the UPK Mixed Delivery System were emphasized as stressful, and expectations for private programs were often challenging to meet. Private providers frequently discussed these programmatic changes in the larger landscape of the UPK system as they tried to find "where they fit" in the system and try to understand better what schedules, services, or after-school programs to offer families. Private program providers also mentioned the lack of financial support they received to be competitive compared to school district or state-funded programs. The need to be competitive and maintain high enrollment rates was further emphasized by one provider who mentioned that even if enrollment rates decline, many expenses, such as staff pay and maintenance costs, stay the same (see discussion below). Relatedly, providers communicated that to remain competitive and provide additional services, offerings, and classes, they needed to raise the costs of their programs, putting stress on families who need to afford the costs of their preferred program and on providers who understand the ask they are making of families.

Facilities and Logistics

Facility Needs and Opportunities

For this focus area, providers described a mixture of situations where some providers expressed a need for more space because their program has extensive waitlists meanwhile other providers explained that they have extra space and empty classrooms. One attendee suggested connecting these providers to attempt to utilize all spaces effectively, saying, *"So we have a lot of private centers that have empty classrooms and so therefore there needs to be*

a way to connect these people, right? Or even if it's on empty classrooms, empty spaces. Somehow to connect what [participant] is talking about or when the district finds themselves without the right kind of space, how do we connect the two?" In focus groups discussing facility needs and operations, on multiple occasions, attendees began problem-solving their different issues while in the focus groups. This observation reinforces that better provider-to-provider communication pathways may be a solution to facilities problems. Finding one distinct theme in this focus area was difficult because when talking with providers, there was a lot of variation in needs, how much space they had or did not have, and the overall needs of their facilities. Additionally, providers said they often only knew about their facility's needs once a problem arose, such as a broken HVAC system or toilet. Therefore, anticipating the issues they may have and the costs of those problems was difficult (see discussion below). That being said, in the provider survey, prevailing needs for facilities such as building/classroom space, maintenance, and assistance with staff retention were common needs across respondents (see Figure 32).

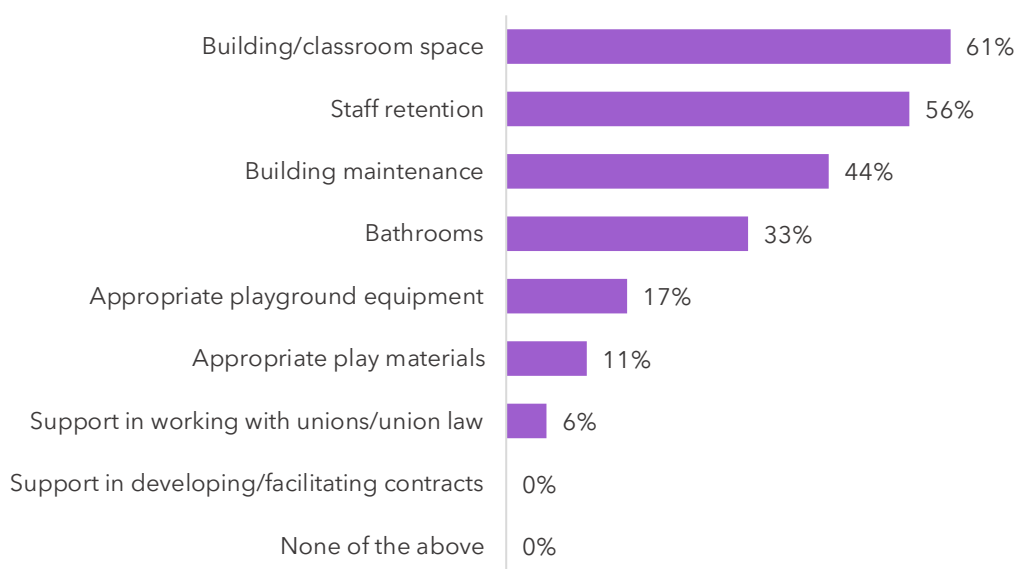


Figure 32. Provider facilities and operation needs (n=18)

Facility Expenses

Providers often mentioned the expenses associated with having an early childcare center. The costs mentioned covered a wide range of areas such as HVAC and heating systems, roof repairs, painting walls, and plumbing, and they spanned to other equipment such as benches and outdoor play equipment. One attendee expressed the constraints it puts on them, saying, "If I have work or things that need to be repaired outside, I have wooden structures. If termites are there, it's not our maintenance and operations department taking care of it. That's us taking care of it. Of course, we are fortunate

"I shampoo carpets, I unplug toilets, I paint walls. And I'm not alone. I know that a lot of my colleagues do the same because if I had to pay someone... If we had to pay somebody to do some of this stuff, we would've been gone a long time ago, a long time ago". – PreK Provider

to have a little bit of that extra support, but a lot of the overall cost does come out of our budget." Providers also discussed other large expenditures associated with operating their program, including shade and other structures that could cost upwards of \$70,000 or having to build new classrooms to replace portables. Providers did acknowledge there are grants or other funding sources to support these types of maintenance but expressed that the logistics and "red tape" around maintenance sometimes make it difficult to utilize these resources. For example, one provider operates at a university and must respect union bylaws. They cannot fix the facility themselves, but must contract out the work. Additionally, when contracting work, providers described their frustrations with bidding processes and the associated requirements. In one focus group, multiple providers described the process as "totally absurd," making the process of applying for and using renovation grants more difficult.

Implications of Findings and Next Steps

Implications of Findings

The Universal PreKindergarten Mixed Delivery System in Orange County includes various options to support early learning, including California State Preschool Programs, Family Child Care and Private Preschool Centers, Head Start, and Transitional Kindergarten. To ensure expanded services in early learning with a holistic approach, Orange County has a vast number of resources to support families and providers. Through various sources, 36 unique health service partners and 32 social-emotional service partners were identified across the County, all committed to improving experiences for children. PreK providers and families expressed gratitude for these partners, especially for early screening. Community partners also highlighted the importance of collaborating with families during referrals and receiving services to ensure they feel fully supported and understand the processes.

PreK providers are passionate about their role in the system in supporting children, families, and the incoming workforce. They have high expectations for themselves and the field and a high interest in continued professional learning and workforce development. They also indicated high levels of confidence in seeking professional learning opportunities, most of which was self-initiated. Most providers expressed that they rely on assessments and observations to monitor children's developmental, academic, and social-emotional progress to prepare them for kindergarten. Most providers also support students in special education and multilingual learners. They expressed a desire for additional resources and training to continue to support these students.

Families also strongly desired quality and cost-effective programs for their children. Their priorities mostly aligned with state indicators of high-quality programs (safe and developmentally appropriate, ensuring children are treated fairly, etc.). Although they expressed confusion around terminology and where to find information, they proactively sought the best options by using websites, Google searches, and talking with their friends and families.

As Orange County looks to continue to expand and enhance early learning services and resources for families, they should consider the following:

Developing resources and continuing outreach to communicate UPK options and terminology:

Findings among providers and families revealed significant confusion and misconceptions about UPK, the terminology, and how to enroll their children. Providers shared that they and the families are unclear about what UPK means for early learning in the County. There have been assumptions that "universal" means "free for all," while it actually means to include various options like TK and preschool, each with different costs and systems. Additionally, given the implications this has on private and family child care providers in changing business practices, there is a need to help better educate and identify resources to support providers. Furthermore, although families are confident in choosing schools, they are generally confused about the UPK system and program costs. These findings suggest that better outreach and communication to educate families and providers would be helpful. Given that families turned mainly to Google searches and program websites when looking for information, it is also worth considering identifying ways that providers and community partners can better market their

information online, particularly the use of search engine optimization, to make it easier for families to find the information they need.

When discussing PreK priorities, families in focus groups did not outright mention high-quality teaching and learning indicators; instead, they often referred to the qualities of staff members. They lacked specific practices, activities, or content to look for in potential providers, only referencing basic requirements for early childcare. Although familiar with terms like "developmentally appropriate" or "evidence-based," families struggled to identify these components in programs. Additionally, only half of the providers on the survey indicated a specific curriculum they used, and the curricula varied from program to program. To assist families in evaluating programs, checklists or information resources would help. Additionally, families identified places like pediatrician's offices or First 5 as potential hubs for centralized information further highlighting the need for better marketing and education strategies to inform families about developmentally appropriate practices, enabling families to have proactive discussions with PreK providers.

OCDE has developed resources demonstrating the differences between PreK options based on provider type and age level. Over the past year, these resources have been distributed through their website and across various outreach events (e.g., community events, early learning community partners, etc.). These resources are a helpful start in educating families and OCDE and community partners should continue to discuss marketing and outreach options to further reach families, especially those who may need to be more proactive in seeking information or knowledgeable about where to find information.

Addressing the requests for a "one-stop-shop": Feedback from providers and families highlighted a strong desire for a "one-stop-shop" for learning about resources. In focus groups, providers and families repeatedly requested a website to search for information to understand available resources and services better. This idea of a "one-stop-shop" was mentioned in a few different contexts, including 1) a centralized resource hub for available services and resources for families, including health, social-emotional, and social services. Providers, while having lists of partners, shared it would be helpful to have a centralized resource hub, and families reported spending considerable time searching for services across various sources. 2) a website to identify available PreK schools and options, including the availability of sites, age-level requirements, curricula used, options for open houses, tours, etc. Most families indicated they found PreK options through informal, self-initiated means like websites, Google, or personal connections. Providers currently use diverse methods to educate families, such as websites, community events, and open houses, but families often miss these proactive efforts. 3) a centralized source for professional learning opportunities and workforce development information. Providers used their professional networks and sites to identify opportunities, but felt it would be helpful to have one place to look for trainings and events, including dates and locations, so they can more easily plan. Although it may not be feasible to include all these areas in a centralized hub, it is worth discussing ways to better coordinate early learning opportunities, resources, and services in the County.

Identifying ways to share resources and knowledge across Orange County PreK providers: During focus groups, providers frequently engaged in active problem-solving for issues such

as facilities, staffing, and partnership opportunities. This collaborative approach underscores the need for a structured platform to facilitate such exchanges. Data on early learning experiences and feedback from providers illustrated a need to better support providers in understanding where they can go for resources. With 9.6% of children under 5 living in poverty, 850 children under age 6 in foster care in 2023-24, and nearly 4,000 preschool students enrolled in special education, the need for coordinated referrals and services is paramount. A lack of coordination and communication between providers, partners, and families further exacerbates this issue, with families often bearing the responsibility of navigating services alone. There is also a significant demand for improved multilingual learning support, as a third of TK students are multilingual, primarily Spanish-speaking. Although 69% of providers received training in the past year, there remains a strong interest in continued professional development. Given providers often problem solve with each other, sharing partners they work with and strategies they use, it would be helpful to facilitate a networking group, provider events, or some other means to allow providers to exchange information with each other.

Discussing potential standardization or consistency in practices: Feedback from families demonstrated a wide range of experiences across the County, between experiences looking for a PreK program, enrolling in one, knowing what programs look like for children, and identifying resources and services when needed. This variation in experiences illustrates a need for more consistency in early learning practices across the County to simplify processes for families and ensure equitable access to resources. Although it is not realistic or strictly necessary for all PreK programs to have the same practices across the County, it is worth discussing what standardization could occur in the County. For example, families indicated websites were often difficult to navigate when looking for programs, and they often included different kinds of information on the website from program to program. The County could develop a list of helpful things to include on the website for providers or create a template so the websites are similarly structured. Additionally, given enrollment experiences varied with different levels of support, the County could help providers develop similar enrollment strategies so the process is more consistent across the County. As mentioned by community partners, it is also essential, when relevant, to include families and providers in this discussion to ensure the County balances all their needs.

Coordinating resources and information across the County to elevate early childhood experiences: In addition to helping coordinate services and resources for families, as previously mentioned, discussions also revealed that it would be helpful to better coordinate resources and services for PreK providers. Concerns were cited about the declining workforce and opportunities for those in early learning teaching programs to engage in authentic teaching experiences. Providers suggested it could be helpful to coordinate with other early learning professionals, such as institutes for higher education, to identify opportunities for these students. Also, several providers in focus groups and on the survey shared they have long waitlists and limited space, expressing a need for more space. However, other providers described they have extra space and empty classrooms. Ensuring providers are aware that these spaces are available could help improve business practices for them all.

Despite the need for more consistency and coordination across the County, ultimately, there was a lot of variation in families' preferences, experiences, and needs. Given this level of variation, ensuring families have access to the information they need and the possible options available to make better decisions will help improve their experiences. It will be important to address outreach and communication concerns and ensure that programs and services remain flexible to meet families where they are and meet their unique needs.

Next Steps

Dissemination of report and discussion among County partners: Given the high need for increased collaboration and coordination across early learning stakeholders, it is suggested that OCDE share this report with partners, providers, and families, including the UPK workgroup, to discuss ways to address the identified needs. Some potential discussion questions to consider include:

- Despite limitations in data and information sharing, how can we help make referrals and access to services easier for families, such as through "holistic hand-offs"?
- What are some potential avenues to facilitate discussion between PreK providers in the County?
- How can we best connect PreK providers and community partners?
- What priorities would there be for standardization of practices in early learning for families?
- How can early learning organizations be more proactive in reaching families, particularly those who may not be connected to those in the field or have the technological skills and resources to find information on their own?
- Are there opportunities to collapse information for families in a centralized hub, and what would be the best way to develop and market that resource center?
- How can the County best support providers to ensure all are ready for the demands and expectations of UPK, including licensing and credentialing and modifying programs and facilities as needed?

Further information gathering and informing work for Year 2:

- 1) A significant component of the UPK Mixed Delivery Planning Grant is coordinating referrals and services for students with exceptional needs, including identifying services and professional learning for PreK providers and making the referral process more accessible to ensure high-quality, inclusive practices are incorporated. Given there are nearly 4,000 preschool students currently in Special Education in the County, families of children with identified needs expressed frustration in finding accessing services, and providers identified inclusive practices as a top professional learning opportunity, this will be a key area explored in Year 2. Evaluators will collaborate with OCDE to talk with providers and families about current strengths and areas of opportunity in special education and inclusive practices.

- 2) Given the high need for collaboration and coordination across the County, it is also important to identify how PreK providers and community partners are connected, the strengths of those connections, and who the most influential partners in the system are. Evaluators are proposing a social network analysis in the future to understand the system of support across the County and help identify potential “hub” centers for information or the most influential paths to reaching families and providers.
- 3) As mentioned by providers, there is a concern about the incoming workforce, not only because there are fewer entering the field, but also because of perceived negative impressions about the field being low-paying, the lack of opportunities to engage in authentic teaching experiences before being hired at a site, and confusion over credential, permitting, and certificate requirements. Therefore, in the future, it may also be helpful to explore talking with those entering the field of early education to best understand their concerns and areas of interest so those can be leveraged in recruitment and preparing the workforce.

The Evaluation and Data Center and Early Learning Teams at the Orange County Department of Education will continue collaborating to create a comprehensive plan to evaluate the needs and strengths in the next phase of this project.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Participant Demographics

Family Survey Respondent Demographics

	n	%
PreK Experience (could select more than one)		
I am currently searching for a preschool for my child.	130	21%
My child is currently in preschool and is at least 3 years old.	440	70%
My child completed preschool within the past year.	95	15%
Race/Ethnicity (could select more than one)		
American Indian or Alaska Native	7	1%
Asian	97	16%
Black or African American	21	3%
Filipino	13	2%
Hispanic or Latino	333	54%
White	193	31%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	6	1%
Other, please specify:	13	2%
Decline to State	19	3%
Primary Language(s) Spoken at Home (could select more than one)		
Arabic	6	1%
Cantonese	3	0%
English	457	74%
Japanese	2	0%
Korean	6	1%
Mandarin	8	1%
Farsi	6	1%
Spanish	171	28%
Tagalog	4	1%
Vietnamese	19	3%
Other	31	5%
Child with Special Needs		
Yes	100	16%
No	524	84%
Region (based on respondents' zip code)		
North Central	324	52%
Anaheim	110	18%
Buena Park	1	<1%
Cypress	3	<1%
Garden Grove	43	7%
Orange	11	2%
Santa Ana	140	22%
Stanton	2	<1%
Tustin	9	1%
Villa Park	5	<1%
North Coastal	42	7%
Costa Mesa	10	2%
Fountain Valley	7	1%
Huntington Beach	15	2%

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	n	%
Westminster	10	2%
North Eastern	35	6%
Anaheim (East)	4	<1%
Brea	2	<1%
Fullerton	6	1%
La Habra	8	1%
Orange	7	1%
Placentia	5	<1%
Yorba Linda	3	<1%
South Central	147	24%
Foothill Ranch	2	<1%
Irvine	38	6%
Ladera Ranch	27	4%
Laguna Niguel	13	2%
Laguna Woods	1	<1%
Lake Forest	14	2%
Mission Viejo	12	2%
Rancho Santa Margarita	9	1%
San Juan Capistrano	26	4%
Trabuco Canyon	5	<1%
South Coastal	40	6%
Dana Point	2	<1%
Laguna Beach	20	3%
Newport Beach	4	<1%
San Clemente	14	2%
Did not provide zip code	37	6%

Provider Survey Demographics

n=54	n	%
Type of Program		
CA State Preschool (CSPP)	6	11%
Center-based Parent Pay School District	4	7%
Center-based Parent Pay-Private (tuition-based)	21	39%%
Family Child Care	11	20%
Head Start	1	2%
Other	11	20%
Position		
Assistant Teacher, or Instructional Aide	5	9%
Director, School Administrator, Site Supervisor or Family Child Care Owner	40	74%
Lead Teacher	9	17%
Region (based on respondents' zip code)		
North Central	20	37%
Anaheim	3	6%
Buena Park	3	6%
Cypress	4	7%
Garden Grove	3	6%
Orange	1	2%
Rossmoor	2	4%
Santa Ana	5	9%
North Coastal	4	7%
Huntington Beach	4	7%
North Eastern	8	15%
Fullerton	5	9%
La Habra	1	2%
Orange	2	4%
South Central	15	28%
Irvine	10	19%
Laguna Hills	1	2%
Rancho Santa Margarita	2	4%
San Juan Capistrano	1	2%
South Coastal	6	11%
Corona Del Mar	1	2%
Dana Point	1	2%
Laguna Beach	1	2%
Newport Beach	2	4%
San Clemente	1	2%

Family Focus Groups Demographics

	n	%
PreK Experience (could select more than one)		
I am currently searching for a preschool for my child.	6	21%
My child is currently in preschool and is at least 3 years old.	22	76%
My child completed preschool within the past year.	3	10%
Race/Ethnicity (could select more than one)		
American Indian or Alaska Native	--	--
Asian	5	17%
Black or African American	--	--
Filipino	1	3%
Hispanic or Latino	12	41%
White	11	38%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1	3%
Decline to State/No response	5	17%
Has Child with Special Needs		
Yes	7	24%
No	22	76%
Region (based on respondents' zip code)		
North Central	11	38%
Anaheim	5	17%
Orange	2	7%
Santa Ana	3	10%
Tustin	1	3%
North Coastal	1	3%
Fountain Valley	1	3%
North Eastern	1	3%
La Habra	1	3%
South Central	8	26%
Irvine	1	3%
Ladera Ranch	4	14%
Laguna Niguel	1	3%
Mission Viejo	1	3%
San Juan Capistrano	1	3%
South Coastal	2	7%
Laguna Beach	1	3%
San Clemente	1	3%
Other/Did not provide zip code	6	21%
Preschool Program (currently in or past PreK)		
Head Start	1	5%
Parent pay tuition program	14	64%
Subsidized child care program through Children's Home Society or Orange County Department of Education	1	5%
Subsidized Preschool at a School District (CA State Preschool)	5	23%
Unsure	1	5%

Provider Focus Group Demographics

	n	%
Type of Program		
CA State Preschool (CSPP)	2	
Center-based Parent Pay School District	2	
Center-based Parent Pay-Private (tuition-based)	13	
Family Child Care	4	
Did not state	4	
Region (based on respondents' zip code)		
North Central	10	
Buena Park	1	
Garden Grove	1	
Orange	2	
Rossmoor	1	
Santa Ana	4	
Villa Park	1	
North Coastal	1	
Costa Mesa	1	
North Eastern	4	
Orange (East)	3	
Placentia	1	
South Central	6	
Irvine	3	
Rancho Santa Margarita	1	
San Juan Capistrano	1	
Trabuco Canyon	1	
South Coastal	2	
Newport Beach	1	
San Clemente	1	
Did not provide zip code	2	

Appendix B. Instruments

Universal Preschool Needs Assessment - Family Survey

We are collecting information from families regarding preschool needs in Orange County. This information will be used to help us plan and implement programs and services that support preschool enrollment in the County. The survey should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. At the end of the survey, you will have an opportunity to be entered into a raffle to win an early learning basket of items for you to use with your child at home. as a thank you for completing the survey.

Thank you very much for your time and feedback!

If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact:

Aubrey Roy

Evaluation Specialist

Orange County Department of Education

aroy@ocde.us

Demographics

Please indicate which statement(s) describes your current experience with preschool (check all that apply):

- I am currently searching for a preschool for my child.
- My child is currently in preschool and is at least 3 years old.
- My child completed preschool within the past year.
- None of the above ([skip to end of the survey](#))

If you are a parent of a current preschooler or your child was in preschool in the past year, which program is/was your child's enrollment funded under:

- Subsidized Preschool at a School District (CA State Preschool)
- Subsidized child care program through Children's Home Society or Orange County Department of Education
- Parent pay tuition program
- Head Start
- Unsure

For prospective preschool parents: Are you looking for full- or part-time day care?

- Full-time
- Part-time
- No preference

What is your zip code?

What is your race/ethnicity? (Please check all that apply.)

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Filipino
- Hispanic or Latino
- White
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- Other, please specify: _____
- Decline to State

Please indicate the languages you speak:

Primary language at home (choose one)

- Arabic
- Cantonese
- English
- Japanese
- Korean
- Mandarin
- Farsi
- Spanish
- Tagalog
- Vietnamese
- Other, please specify: _____

Additional languages spoken (check all that apply)

- Arabic
- Cantonese
- English
- Japanese
- Korean
- Mandarin
- Farsi
- Spanish
- Tagalog
- Vietnamese
- Other, please specify: _____

Do you have a child that currently has any identified special needs (i.e. IEP/IFSP)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Community Engagement and Partnerships

For prospective preschool parents: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

(Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree)

- I know where I can find out more information about the different preschool options available for my child.
- I understand the different preschool options available.
- I am aware of the different kinds of funding structures for preschool.

- I am confident I can select the best preschool option for my child based on my understanding of the options available.
- I am aware of resources available for my child if I have concerns about their overall growth and development

For prospective preschool parents: Please indicate all of the preschool options you have heard of:

- Parent-Pay (Tuition) Preschool Centers
- Head Start
- State Preschool Program (school district)
- Subsidized Preschool Center
- Transitional Kindergarten (TK)
- Family Child Care Home

For current/past preschool parents: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

(Strongly Agree, Somewhat Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree)

When I was searching for a preschool for my child...

- I knew where to find out more information about the different preschool options available for my child.
- I understood the different preschool options available.
- I was aware of the different kinds of funding structures for preschool.
- I was confident I selected the best preschool option for my child based on my understanding of the options available.
- I am aware of resources available for my child if I have concerns about their overall growth and development

For current/past preschool parents: Please indicate all of the preschool options you had heard of while you were looking for a preschool:

- Parent-Pay (Tuition) Preschool Centers
- Head Start
- State Preschool Program (school district)
- Subsidized Preschool Center
- Transitional Kindergarten (TK)
- Family Child Care Home

Please indicate any sources you have used to learn about preschool programs available (check all that apply):

- Brochure
- Community Event
- Community/Family Resource Center
- Parenting group
- Doctor's office
- Family/Friend
- Flyer posted at a local business
- Flyer in the mail
- Open House
- Website
- Google Search
- Yelp
- Street signage
- Other child's school
- Child Care Center
- Local library
- Religious institution (church, synagogue, mosque, etc.)
- Social media (generally)
 - Instagram
 - Facebook
 - TikTok
 - X (Twitter)
- Other

How important are/were the following in your search for a preschool: (note: list will appear randomized in survey)

(Not at all important, A little important, Somewhat important, Highly important, Necessary for my child's school)

- A physical environment that is safe and appropriate for preschool children
- Activities and services that are age appropriate and meet the developmental needs of each child
- Activities and services that meet the cultural and language needs of children and families, including supporting multilingual children in developing both their home language and English
- Family engagement activities (e.g. volunteering, workshops, parent committees etc.)
- Community partners that support successful transitions from preschool to elementary school.
- Effective, qualified, and diverse preschool staff and leadership
- Use of inclusive experiences for students with exceptional needs in the classroom

- Support services for children and families, including referrals to appropriate agencies (e.g., social services, meeting the needs of children with exceptional needs, health services, nutrition education and resources, etc.)
- Activities and staff trainings that ensure all students are treated fairly
- Low cost/no cost
- Close to home/work
- Flexible schedule
- Extended day care options
- Drop-in policy for families (e.g., can visit child/classrooms)
- Faith based
- Dual immersion language program

Please indicate whether you have experienced any of the following while enrolling (or trying to enroll) your child in preschool:

Barriers/challenges

- Lack of knowledge of programs available
- Concerns about cost of programs
- Complicated registration process
- Lack of availability of program I want(ed)
- Unreliable transportation for my child
- Lack of before/after care for my child
- Concerns about timing of program (half-day vs. full-day)
- Concerns about too much focus on academics
- Concerns about too little focus on children's learning
- Concerns about meeting special needs for my child
- Concerns about multilingual language support for my child

Supports/services

- Site tour with the school Director/Administrator
- Enrollment specialists that walked through enrollment process with me
- Checklist of things needed to enroll
- Family workshops
- Database to find programs to meet my child's needs
- Easy to use website
- Information sessions with prospective preschools

For current/past preschool parents: Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements:

(Strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree, not applicable)

- I feel/felt welcomed by my child's school
- I have/had regular communication with my child's school

- I enjoy/enjoyed participating in activities at my child's school
- I am/was able to have provide input on my child's learning experience
- I am/was able to take on a leadership role at my child's school (ex: parent group, PTA, site council)

Are there any additional comments about preschools in Orange County you'd like to share (max 300 characters):

Would you be interested in participating in a focus group to share additional feedback? The focus groups will be conducted in the Spring, online, via Zoom, and will last approximately one hour. We will contact you closer to the dates with more information.

☐ Yes, please enter your contact information on the next page.

☐ No

☐ Maybe, please enter your contact information on the next page.

If yes or maybe: Please indicate your availability to attend a focus group:

Mornings, afternoons, evenings, weekends

Would you be interested in completing an additional survey about resources available for children with additional needs (developmental, health/physical, behavioral, mental health, social services, etc.)? We will contact you in the future for how to complete this survey.

☐ Yes, please enter your contact information on the next page.

☐ No

☐ Maybe, please enter your contact information on the next page.

Would you like to be entered into a raffle to win an early learning basket of items for you to use with your child at home? We will contact you if you are selected as a winner.

☐ Yes, please enter your contact information on the next page.

☐ No

How did you hear about this survey?

If yes or maybe to any of the above: Because you indicated you would like to participate in future focus group/surveys and/or be entered into our raffle, please provide your contact information.

Please note: this information will only be used if we need to contact you regarding upcoming focus groups, surveys, or if you are a raffle winner.

Name: _____

Email: _____ Phone number: _____

Provider Survey

Background

- Which of the following best describes your workplace? (choose one)
 - CA State Preschool (CSPP)
 - Center-based Parent Pay School District
 - Center-based Parent Pay-Private (tuition-based)
 - Family Child Care
 - Head Start
 - Other, please specify:
- Your Position
 - Director, School Administrator, Site Supervisor or Family Child Care Owner
 - Lead Teacher
 - Assistant Teacher, Instructional Aide
- Zip Code of Center

Vision and Coherence (Directors only this section)

1. Please indicate the types of coordination and referral processes you have in place for a child/family that has a need for health or social emotional services:
 - Collect information from families on students' needs during registration process
 - Have teacher conduct observations/evaluations in the classroom to assess student needs
 - Have a nurse/specialist conduct observations/evaluations in the classroom to assess student needs
 - Have a comprehensive list of partners to refer students/families for social emotional needs
 - Have a comprehensive list of partners to refer students/families for health needs
 - Talk to parents about options and have them reach out to referring partner
 - Talk to parents about options and reach out to referring partner for/with them
 - Coordinate with partners to ensure families utilized referrals
 - Coordinate with partners on care
 - Directly provide social emotional care services on site
 - Directly provide health care services on site
 - Other, please specify: _____
2. Please list the partners you most commonly work with to refer students for health and social emotional services

Health	Social-Emotional

3. How has working with these partners helped to address children and families' needs at your site?
4. What types of barriers do you face in referring children/families to services?
 - Lack of knowledge of programs/services
 - Lack of availability of programs/services
 - Communication with partner
 - Limitation in service accessibility (e.g. for certain population, school type, etc.)
 - Lack of information from families about students' needs
 - Lack of information from previous school about students' needs
 - Lack of site staff to support students/families
 - Not knowing the cost of services
 - Bureaucracy to work with a partner (e.g., contracting process, payment processes, etc.)
 - Quality of services
 - Other, please specify: _____
5. What do you think are the greatest needs for services and resources for health and social emotional needs?

Community Engagement and Partnerships (Directors only this section)

6. Please indicate the types of sources you have used to communicate with families about your Preschool program and its features:
 - Brochure
 - Community Event
 - Community/Family Resource Center
 - Parenting group
 - Doctor's office
 - Family/Friend
 - Flyer posted at a local business
 - Flyer in the mail
 - Open House
 - Website
 - Google Search
 - Yelp
 - Street signage
 - Other child's school
 - Child Care Center/Day Care Center
 - Local library
 - Religious institution (church, synagogue, mosque, etc.)
 - Social media (generally)
 - Instagram
 - Facebook
 - TikTok
 - X (Twitter)
 - Other, please specify:

7. Please select the extent to which the following are challenges for families in Preschool enrollment

Not at all, a little, somewhat, a great deal

- Lack of knowledge of program differences
- Lack of knowledge of programs available
- Concerns about cost of programs
- Complicated registration process
- Lack of availability of program they want(ed)
- Unreliable transportation for child
- Lack of before/after care for child
- Concerns about timing of program (half-day vs. full-day)
- Concerns about too much focus on academics
- Concerns about too little focus on children's learning
- Concerns about meeting special needs for child
- Concerns about multilingual language support for child
- Concerns about too much focus on social emotional development
- Concerns about too little focus on social emotional development

8. Please indicate the types of supports you provide for families during enrollment

- Site tour with the school Director/Administrator
- Enrollment specialists that walked through enrollment process
- Talk through enrollment eligibility
- Checklist of things needed to enroll
- Enrollment timeline
- Family workshops
- Database to find programs to meet child's needs
- Easy to use website
- Information sessions
- Enrollment specialist
- Information on inclusion practices
- Check-ins after enrollment
- Other, please specify: _____

9. Please indicate how prepared you are to provide the types of programs/services listed below at your site

Not at all, a little, somewhat, extremely

UPK MDS Needs Assessment Report

- Developmental assessments
- Vision assessments
- Dental assessments
- Other health assessments
- Inclusion programs/services
- Multilingual support
- Dual immersion programs

10a. How many children can your site support?

Full-day	Half-day

10b. How many spots are currently filled at your site?

Full-day	Half-day

10c. How many spots are currently available at your site?

Full-day	Half-day

10d. How many children are currently on a waitlist at your site?

Full-day	Half-day

11. Do you serve any children with special needs or individualized family service plans (IFSPs) at your site?

☐ Yes

☐ No

12. What additional resources/services does your site provide that hasn't already been discussed?

Workforce Recruitment and Professional Learning

13. **(Directors only)** How many teachers do you have on staff with the following: (if unknown, please write “n/a”)

_____ CA Child Development Permits

_____ Single Subject or Multiple Subject Credential

14. **(For all)** Please indicate how interested you would be in receiving resources/support in obtaining any of the following:

Not at all, a little, somewhat, extremely

- P-3 credential
- CA Child Development Permit
- Coaching
- Apprenticeships
- Learning more about different types early learning programs
- Business management
- Workforce recruitment

15. **(For all)** Have you had an opportunity to participate in professional learning in any of the following areas:

No, and I am not interested; No, but I am interested in this area; Yes, and I feel adequately prepared in this area; Yes, but I am interested in more training in this area

- Supporting children’s social emotional development
- Supporting children’s mental health development
- Managing challenging behaviors in children
- Classroom set-up and environment
- Identifying high-quality curriculum materials and how to use them for teaching
- Promoting positive teacher-child interactions (CLASS)
- Skills and activities for teaching early literacy
- Skills and activities for teaching early numeracy
- Managing transitions between activities
- Using or understanding observation assessment scores (DRDP)
- Inclusive teaching strategies
- Multilingual learner support teaching strategies
- Trauma-informed practices
- Adult/Teacher mental health

- Use of technology in the classroom

16. **(For all)** What additional professional learning topics would be helpful for you?

17. **(For all)** Please indicate the types of workforce and professional development support you have received in the past three years and how you have accessed them:

(provided by my site, I did on my own)

- Online training
- In-person one-time trainings
- In-person training series
- Coaching/Mentoring
- Community of Practices
- Conference Attendance
- Resource sharing from external sites
- Resource sharing within site
- Hands-on practice

18. **(For all)** What additional supports have you had for your professional learning?

19. **(For all)** How would you describe your level of confidence to seek out workforce development and professional learning opportunities if you wanted them:

Not at all, a little, some, high

20. **(For all)** Where do you find information for workforce development and professional learning opportunities:

21. **(For all)** What barriers have you experienced in engaging in workforce development and professional learning:

- I am unsure where to find opportunities
- Time commitment
- Cost
- Location of opportunities

- They are often not relevant to my work
- Other, please specify:

Curriculum and Instruction (Directors only this section)

Curriculum:

22. Does your site have a primary academic curriculum?

- Yes, which one: _____
- No

23. Does your site have a primary social emotional curriculum?

- Yes, which one: _____
- No

24. Does your program use any of the following to conduct assessments:

- Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (T-POT)
- Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP)
- Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)
- Peabody Developmental Motor Scales (PDMS-2)
- Receptive-Expressive Emergent Language Test (REEL-4)
- Morris Kline
- Other assessment(s), please specify: _____

25. Has your program been evaluated using any of the following assessments:

- Infant-Toddler CLASS Assessment
- PreK CLASS Assessment
- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)

26. Which of the following would be helpful to you/your program to improve your ability to assess children for continuous improvement from most helpful to least helpful (most helpful as 1 and least helpful as 6).

- Training on how to conduct observations
- More staff to help conduct assessments
- Training on how to use results to strengthen quality
- Improved ways to store, compile, and report results/data from assessments

UPK MDS Needs Assessment Report

- Training on how to best communicate with parents/families about assessment results
- Resources/supports for assessments (e.g., transportation, materials)
- Other, please specify: _____

27. What additional professional learning opportunities not listed already would be helpful to you?

28. Please indicate which of the following strategies your site uses to prepare children and families as they transition into kindergarten

- Parent meetings about what to expect in kindergarten
- Parent meetings about child's strengths/needs
- Partner with kindergarten teacher/school
- Community workshops
- Kindergarten classroom tours
- Provide resources to parents
- Other, please specify: _____

29. What strategies do you offer to help families connect to your site and if you offer them, please rate how effective these strategies are:

We do not offer/provide this, not at all effective, a little effective, somewhat effective, extremely effective

- Volunteer opportunities in the classroom
- Volunteer opportunities outside the classroom
- Family events
- Newsletters
- Phone communication
- Website/social media
- Parenting groups
- Parent workshops
- Parent/teacher conferences
- Other, please describe:

Facilities, Services, and Operations (Directors only this section)

30. What do you think are the **top three** highest facility/operations needs for your site?

- Building/classroom space
- Staff retention

UPK MDS Needs Assessment Report

- Bathrooms
- Appropriate playground equipment
- Appropriate play materials
- Building maintenance
- Support in working with unions/union law
- Support in developing/facilitating contracts
- None of the above

31. Please indicate which of the following strategies you think would be most effective for teacher/staff retention and recruitment (**choose three**)

- Subsidies/teachers stipends
- Partnerships with local university programs
- More funds for conferences
- More trainings around classroom practices
- More coaching
- Increased clarity around job and certificate requirements
- Continuing education credits

32. **(For all)** Is there any additional information or feedback you would like to share that would be helpful to the Universal PreKindergarten Needs Assessment for Orange County?

Family Focus Group Discussion Protocol

Introduction:

Good Morning/Afternoon everyone, my name is... and I work for the Orange County Department of Education as an independent evaluator to gather data from across the County to understand universal prekindergarten perceptions, needs, and strengths. So I am collecting information on what is working and what is not working in programs, enrollment, and services and any suggestions you have for improvement to help support the County is providing support in this area. Do you have any questions about that?

Confidentiality:

Because we are going to be talking about things that don't work in the County and with PreK programs, everything you say today will be kept confidential. I am the only one who will know who said what. I hope also that you keep each other's confidentiality.

*I want to let you know that I will be recording this discussion. The recording is only so that I can take notes about what is said after we are done with the discussion. Kind of like a reporter, I will use the quotes of what you say in my reporting. But unlike a reporter, to keep your identity confidential, I won't say who said that. I will instead say something like, "parents said this... or students in the district said that." The reason I do that is because I want to ensure that you feel comfortable talking about things that don't work in the schools. The only exception to this is if you or any other student might be in danger, then I'm mandated by law to report that so that we can take care of them. I hope that makes sense to you? Do you have any questions about that? ok, **I'm going to start my recording now.***

Discussion format:

So before we begin I want to let you know how this will work... We will have a pretty informal conversation about your knowledge and perceptions of PreK programs in the County. I will ask you about a wide range of topics and I would like to hear what is working well and what is not working well and if you have any suggestions for improvement. It will be pretty informal, so you can just speak as you think of things. if your conversation starts going away from my topics I will interrupt and redirect our conversation, but otherwise I encourage you to jump into the discussion. I also want to note that we want to hear a variety of opinions, but I also want everyone to be respectful of others' opinions. If you feel like you're taking up a lot of the conversation, just take a few seconds to wait before responding to allow others to speak. Participation is voluntary, so if there's a question you don't feel comfortable answering, that's okay. If at any point you feel heightened emotions and need to step away or turn off your camera, that's okay too. ok, so let's start...

Knowledge of PreK Options

- When you're/were looking for information on PreK programs, where did you get your information?
 - (If mention resource centers/family centers - is this because these centers are more likely to have this information or because you visit the center?)

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- (if mention community events - what kinds of community events?)
- What kinds of information were you looking for?
- Do you feel like you had/have a good understanding of the different kinds of programs available?
 - Why/why not?
- What sources had the most helpful information?
- What would have been/would be helpful in looking for information about programs?
 - Where do you think this information should be provided?

Perceptions of quality PreK programs

- What does high-quality preK look like to you?
 - What priorities do you have for looking for a preK?
 - What are some important programs/services that you hope to see at your child's PreK?
 - **For current/past PreK parents:** How did you make your decision about which program to enroll your child?
 - How do/did you balance the decision between high-quality programs and other priorities (such as proximity to work/home and cost of program)
 - What challenges did you face in balancing these?
 - Did you have any supports in helping to make the decision?

Enrollment Experiences

- What was the enrollment process like for you?
- What are some helpful supports you have had from PreK providers in the enrollment process?
- What have been some of the challenges you've faced in the enrollment process?

Access to services

- If your child needed support for health or social services, do you know where you could find more information about services available?
- What kinds of barriers to services for either health or social services do you face?

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences with the universal PreK system?

Provider Focus Group Discussion Protocol

Introduction:

Good Morning/Afternoon everyone, my name is... I work as an evaluator for the Orange County Department of Education and I have been hired to collect feedback for the Universal Pre-Kindergarten Mixed Delivery System Needs Assessment for the County. Today we'll talk about your feedback regarding community engagement/ UPK Vision and Coherence/Workforce Development and Professional Learning. We have other focus groups related to the vision of UPK and workforce development so I want to stay focused on our topics today. Do you have any questions about that?

Confidentiality:

Because we are going to be talking about things that might not be working, everything you say today will be kept confidential. I am the only one who will know who said what. I hope also that you keep each other's confidentiality.

*I want to let you know that I will be recording this discussion. The recording is only so that I can take notes about what is said after we are done with the discussion. However, only myself and my evaluation colleagues will have access to the recording and it will be deleted after we've conducted the analysis. Do you have any questions about that? ok, **I'm going to start my recording now.***

Discussion format:

So before we begin I want to let you know how this will work... We will have a pretty informal conversation. I will ask you about a wide range of aspects and I would like to hear what is working well and what is not working well and if you have any suggestions for improvement. It will be pretty informal, so you can just speak as you think of things. However, please be mindful that we have an interpreter. Given the size of our group, if people start to talk over each other, or if you feel you didn't get a chance to something you wanted, we may switch to raising hand format, but also please feel free to also use the chat. if your conversation starts going away from my topics I will interrupt and redirect our conversation, but otherwise I encourage you to jump into the discussion. ok, so let's start...

Vision and Coherence

- How do you view your role in the UPK system?
- What do you think are the greatest needs for services and resources related to health and social-emotional supports for children and families?
- What kinds of referral systems do you have in place for families to access health and social-emotional support services?
- How do you coordinate with your partners to make these referrals?
 - What is working well with these referral systems?
 - What are some barriers and challenges you're experiencing with referral systems?

Facilities, Services, and Operations

- How have you collaborated with partners to expand full-day and full-year UPK program options?
 - What has been helpful about those partnerships?
 - What are some challenges you're experiencing in working with partners?
 - What kinds of partnerships/services from partners would be helpful?
- Based on enrollment projections, what facility needs does your organization foresee?

Community Engagement and Partnerships

- What kinds of supports do you provide to families in the enrollment process?
 - Have you received any feedback about these processes? If so, what has been that feedback?
- What kinds of barriers do you experience in the enrollment process?
 - What barriers do you think families experience the most?
 - How have you been able to address those barriers?
- How do you communicate with the public/potential parents about the preschool programs available at your site?
 - What have been the most effective methods?
 - What have been the least effective methods?
 - Do you prioritize any programs over others when explaining the options? If so, how do you prioritize?
- What types of services do you offer for child assessments?
 - What are some challenges you experience in conducting assessments?
- What types of programs or services do you offer for inclusion?
 - What barriers do you experience in providing these services?
- What kinds of supports would be helpful to offer an inclusive preschool?
 - What other types of engagement do you have with families?

Workforce Recruitment and Professional Learning

- What do you think are the greatest needs for workforce development in this County for preschool professionals? (e.g., degrees, permits, credentials, etc.)
 - What kinds of support would be helpful to receive?
 - What would ideal support look like?
- How knowledgeable do you feel about supports and opportunities available?
 - What are the most useful sources of information regarding professional learning opportunities?

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

- If not previously brought up: What types of professional learning and/or supports would be helpful curriculum and instruction? (prompt the following areas if not mentioned)
 - Effective teaching?
 - Instruction and classroom design?
 - Assessment
 - Supporting students with disabilities?
 - Supporting Multilingual Learners?
- What strategies do you use to support children to transition from preschool to kindergarten?
 - What challenges do you face in supporting students to transition to kindergarten?
- If not previously brought up: What types of services do you offer that include children with special needs, offer dual immersion, and support multilingual learners?

Community Forum Discussion Facilitation Protocol

Table 1 - Referral Processes

What is the referral process for families?

1. How do you help support providers and families through coordination and referrals for services? (e.g., what types of health or social-emotional services do you provide?)
2. What do you think are the greatest barriers to coordination and referral processes? (if need prompting, how do you currently receive referrals and what challenges do you have in that process?) (could be services or resources)
3. What are some examples of successes when you were able to coordinate with a provider or family to help them receive the right service or resource? What were the key elements that led to a successful process?

Table 2 - Partnerships and Community Engagement

What partnerships do you have with childcare or preschool providers?

1. Based on the needs of the organizations you support, what are their greatest needs for resources and services?
2. How do you do outreach and communicate to families of young children?
 - a. What kinds of barriers or challenges have you faced when trying to do outreach and communication to families of young children?
3. What support would you need to be able to disseminate information on UPK options?

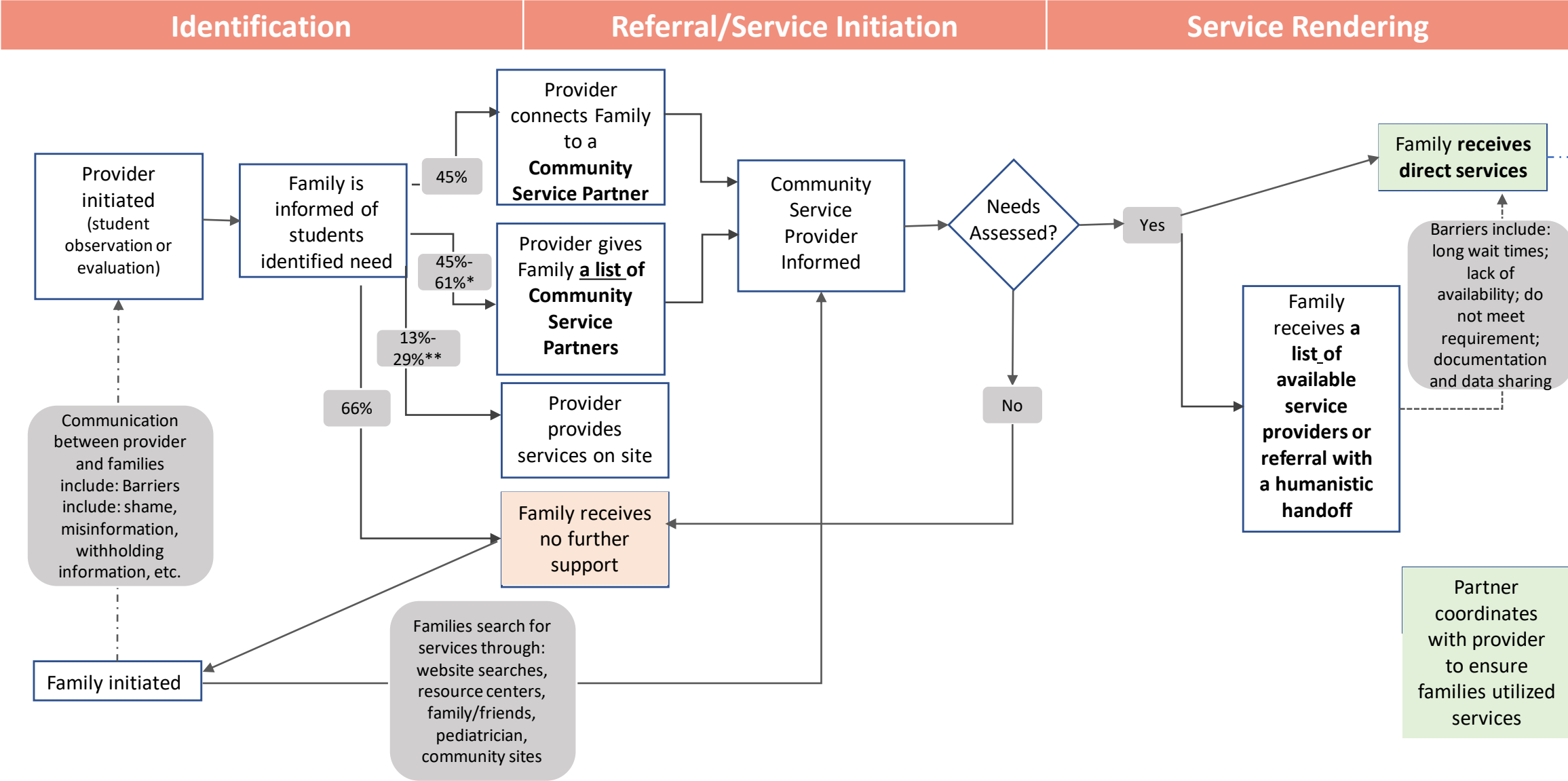
Whole Group discussion - Ideas for coordinating services

- Based on what you've heard from today, what ideas do you have for coordinating services?

Appendix C. Partner Agencies for Health and Social Services Identified by UPK Workgroup, PreK Providers, and Families

Health	Social Services
211 Info Line	211 Info Line
Bee-Have	Behavior Frontiers
Bloom	Black Hawk Family Development Center
California Sensory Screening, Inc.	Bloom Behavior Coaching
Cal Optima	California Department of Public Health
California Department of Public Health	CARD
Children's Home Society OC	Care Solace
CHOC Children's	Casa de la Familia
Early Childhood Learning Center	Chancey and Bruce
Elks Vision Screening	Children's Home Society
First 5 OC	Children's Learning Connection
Food Finders Food Pantry Locator	Christian Counselors
Grace Place Speech	Conscious Discipline
Harper Assessment Center-Newport Mesa Unified	CSEFEL Vanderbilt
Healthy Smiles OC	District - Student Services
Help Me Grow	Dr. Molina - Pathways to Potential
Kid Healthy	Family Support Network
Kida	Family Support Network
Latino Health Access	Fred Finch
Learning Link	Giving Children Hope
MOMS Orange County	Haylie Goldberg - Heart of Connecting
Neighborhood Resource Center	Help Me Grow OC
OC Dept of Health	OCDE
OC Health Care Agency	Olive Crest OC
OC Healthy	Pediatrician
Pediatrician	Priority Center
Pretend City ASQ online screening	Quality Rating Improvement System
Regional Center of Orange County	Quality Start
Sandpiper Speech Therapy	Regional Center
School Districts	SLP Riley
Second Harvest Food Bank	Start Well
SLP Riley	Teaching Pyramid
Speech Pathology Associates	The Salvation Army
Start Well	Western Youth Services
Valued Voices	
WIC/CalFresh	

Appendix D. Early Childhood Referral Processes



Percentages presented are based on Provider Survey data indicating how many provide these services at their sites. Providers could select more than one response; therefore, percentages add to greater than 100%.
*45% have a comprehensive list of health partners; 61% have a comprehensive list of social-emotional service partners
**13% provide direct health services on site; 29% provide direct social-emotional services on site