



EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT Among Latino Families in Montgomery County, Maryland June 2019

Purpose of the Needs Assessment

Identity undertook this needs assessment in response to the publication of the 2018 – 2019 Maryland Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) Report and the March 2019 announcement of the Montgomery County Government’s new Early Care and Education Initiative, to be initially supported with a \$7 million earmark and an additional \$1 million investment from the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Board of Education. Additionally, our intent is for this Needs Assessment to support and build on the Early Care and Education recommendations advanced by Montgomery Moving Forward.

According to the KRA Report, children enrolled in formal early care and learning settings are more prepared to succeed in kindergarten, and are presumably on a better footing for long-term positive academic outcomes. The KRA Report not only illustrates the enormous lack of kindergarten readiness among Montgomery County’s Latino children, but also highlights the achievement gaps that begin at the earliest academic stages for Latino students. In Montgomery County, Latinos make up 33% of all kindergarten enrollment, yet only 35% demonstrate kindergarten readiness. This is in stark contrast to their White counterparts who make up 27% of all kindergarten enrollment, with 70% demonstrating kindergarten readiness. (KRA 2018 – 2019 Report)

This needs assessment sheds light on Latino families’ knowledge and beliefs about early care and education in order to inform decision-making bodies in their effort to meet the early care and education and kindergarten readiness needs of Montgomery County’s Latino community. Most especially, we want to guide local policymakers in their intended expansion of early care and education services as well as to guide Identity’s own advocacy efforts, which were shared publicly at the Promise of Latino Youth Forum in November 2018. This Early Care and Education Needs Assessment complements the urgency expressed in our *Promise Challenge: A Call to Action* surrounding the need to radically bend the trajectory of kindergarten readiness trend lines.

Through our assessment, we gathered community input to better understand two issues:

1. the reasons Latino parents do, or do not, enroll their children in formal early care programs; and
2. how Latino children who are not enrolled in formal care settings are being cared for.

Methodology

Identity designed three separate survey instruments for Latino parents with children between the ages of 0 - 5 years:

1. a survey for parents with children currently enrolled in a formal early care and education program,
2. a survey for parents who attempted to enroll their children in formal early care and education programs but were unable to do so, and
3. a survey for parents that did not attempt to enroll their children in any early care and education program.

We also designed a short protocol that explained the criteria for administering each survey, how to submit the completed surveys for analysis, and a script to ensure consistency when staff explained the purpose of the surveys to parents. We met with separate groups of our program staff to review the protocol and details of each survey.

In light of the short period for carrying out this needs assessment (April 16 – May 31, 2019), Identity decided to gather survey responses only from its current clients. Since we administer detailed baseline assessments to the parents of youth enrolled in our programs, we had access to information regarding the ages of all the children of our Latino parents. This allowed us to easily identify all our Latino parents who might currently have a child between the ages of 0 - 5 years. We created client lists, which we then disseminated to the managers of all our programs, including at our three high school-based Wellness Centers and two community-based Youth Opportunity Centers. Each program contacted clients to ask if they would voluntarily complete a survey. We did not include parents from our Soccer, Mental Health or Correctional Facility programs in this effort.

Only clients' unique identifiers were included on the surveys to protect confidentiality. Our External Evaluator was able to link the surveys with each client's baseline assessment, eliminating the need to ask for demographic information on the new surveys, other than the age of the child about whom the parent was answering the survey questions.

We purposely did not ask about children that had aged out of pre-k, as parents' opinions and attitudes may have changed over time. Our surveys asked only about children currently 0 – 5 years of age.

Identity collected 148 surveys from Latino parents residing in Montgomery County who have children 0 – 5 years old. This number includes seven anonymous surveys from Latino staff members who also reside in Montgomery County and have children within the target age group.

We asked parents to complete a separate survey for each child they have within the age group. Eighteen parents had two or more children 0 - 5 years of age. For this reason, although we collected 148 surveys, they reflect data on only 130 individual families. The following is the breakdown of the number of surveys collected in each category:

- no attempt to enroll child in a formal day care/pre-k: 92
- child enrolled in a formal day care/pre-k: 39
- attempted to enroll child in formal day care/pre-k, but unable to do so: 17

One hundred twenty four respondents were mothers. Three fathers and three guardians completed surveys.

This study was not a random selection of the general Latino population. There is an inherent bias in this needs assessment because the Latino population we reached - Identity clients - is the same population that tends to be most underrepresented in early care settings. Identity's parents are mostly poor, linguistically isolated, and often have low levels of formal education.

Identity did not have any special funding for this effort. Our External Evaluator, Dr. Daniel Arretche designed the survey instruments with input from Identity directors. Identity staff administered all the surveys. Dr. Arretche conducted the analysis of the surveys for this needs assessment.

Demographics of Parents Surveyed

The following are the demographics of 123 parents/guardians that completed at least one survey. This information was collected from the original parent assessments that we had in our files. No demographic information is available for staff members, so they are not included in the demographic analysis.

Parents who did not try to enroll their children in any formal day care or pre-k program (n = 75):

- Born in the USA: 5%
- Born in Central America or Mexico: 88%
- Undocumented, or with a temporary status, including DACA, TPS: 79%
- Residing in the USA for more than ten years: 49%
- Less than a high school diploma: 70%
- High school diploma, technical school or university: 30%
- Median household income: \$35,340

Parents who enrolled their children in formal daycare or pre-k programs, and those that attempted to enroll their children but were unable to do so (n = 48):

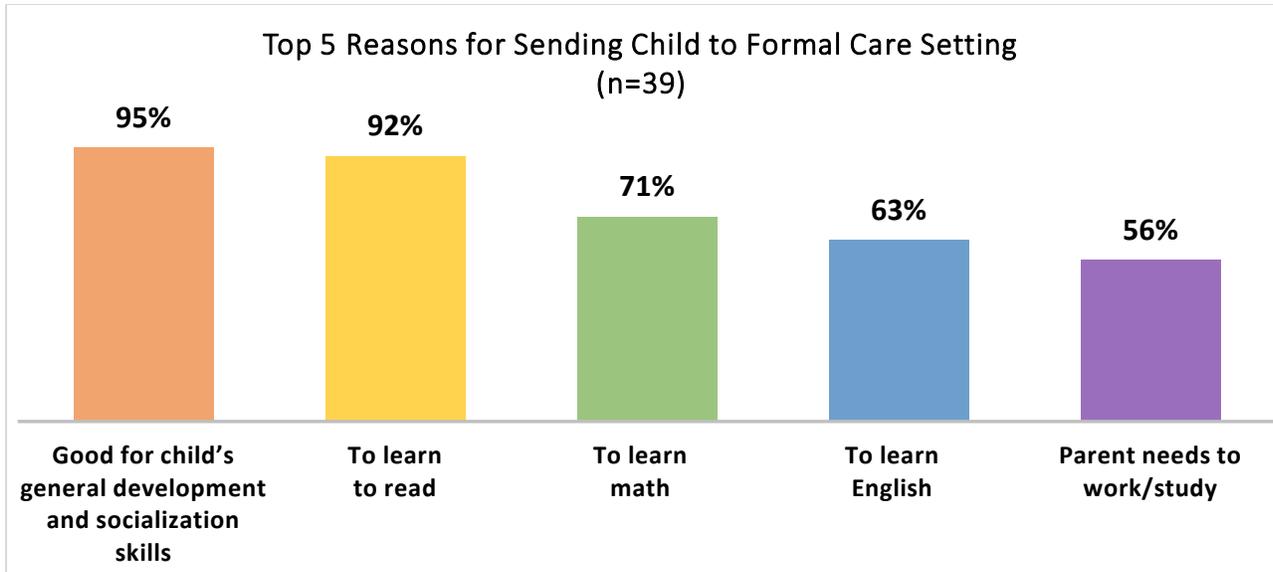
- Born in the USA: 12%
- Born in Central America or Mexico: 85%
- Undocumented, or with a temporary status, including DACA, TPS: 84%
- Residing in the USA for more than ten years: 60%
- Less than a high school diploma: 72%
- High school diploma, technical school or university: 28%
- Median household income: \$35,667

It is important to note that many parents from both groups who completed the early care surveys had experienced high levels of childhood trauma. When we cross tabulated our survey responses with the data from our parents' earlier baseline surveys, we saw that over 78% of the surveyed parents reported Adverse Childhood Experiences. Many had reported multiple adverse experiences. Over one-third of their experiences (36%) were related to physical or sexual abuse. Parents' past traumas could be an influencing factor in their attitudes about placing their children in formal care settings.

Findings

Attitudes

We asked parents who send their child to a formal care setting to select the top reasons for doing so. Ninety-five percent reported that pre-k services were beneficial for their child's overall development and building of socialization skills. Parents also reported that helping their child develop reading, math and English skills were some of the most important reasons for their decisions. Just over half said that their need to work or study was the most important reason for placing their child in a formal early care setting.



We asked parents about the age a child should begin to receive stimulation in reading or math. Interestingly, most of those that had children in formal care settings felt that children could delay learning to read until age three and delay learning math until age four. Yet, among the group of parents that was unable to enroll their children in an early care program, but had tried to do so, the majority felt that stimulating children to read should begin by age two, and learning math no later than age three.

Many of the parents that did not attempt to send their child to a formal care setting (62%) felt their child was very young and, at that age, should be in their own home. The average age of these children was two years old, and that of the children enrolled in a formal day care or pre-k was four years old.

We asked parents what they liked best about the day care/pre-k services their children were receiving. Forty five percent said it was the learning and development opportunities. Thirty nine percent pointed out the quality of care their child was receiving from the teachers and staff.

We also asked if they had any suggestions for improving the early care services. Most of the parents' suggestions for improving the services related to increasing the hours of care. Many specifically said they needed all-day care for their children.

Home-Based Care and Babysitters

We looked into the type of care the children not enrolled in formal care are receiving, and if there were differences between the type of care provided to children of the parents that never tried to enroll their child in a formal early care site and those that had attempted to do so.

Both groups were similar in that approximately 70% of all the children were being cared for at home by a parent or by another family member. The non-parental family members were almost all paid to provide the childcare services (86%).

We reviewed the level of formal education of the people caring for the children. Parents that never attempted to enroll their children in formal care settings were much more likely to have their children being cared for by a person without a high school diploma. Eighty percent of the non-parental family member babysitters had less than a high school diploma. Twenty percent of them never attended school and another 20% had not completed elementary school. A similar percentage of the non-family member babysitters also lacked a high school diploma, and almost 30% of them had not completed middle school.

Formal Early Care Programs

We asked parents about barriers or challenges they might have encountered in enrolling or trying to enroll their children in early care programs.

Twenty-six percent of the parents that had children in a formal care setting or tried to enroll them in one were working full-time. This group of parents reported that childcare costs were a major challenge (69%). Almost half (47%) had annual household incomes below \$35,000 and over half reported they were unaware of childcare subsidies or free daycare or pre-k programs. Among the parents that never tried to enroll their children in an early care program, 72% also indicated they were unable to pay for such services.

Families also reported that the documentation requirements to enroll their children in these programs were burdensome. Among parents that attempted to enroll their children in early care, but were unable to do so, 53% reported they did not meet the documentation requirements. One hundred percent of these parents reported they rented a house, apartment, room or basement, however none had a written rental lease or agreement.

A lack of trust was the reason most often given by the parents that did not attempt to enroll their child in an early care program. Seventy-six percent of parents in this group felt more comfortable caring for their child themselves or leaving them in the care of a babysitter whom they know and trust. Forty-four percent reported having heard about other children's negative experiences in formal care settings. Almost 40% also indicated they do not feel confident about early care facilities.

We asked parents to think about what would happen if their principal barriers were resolved. Seventy-four percent reported that transportation would then be a major barrier.

We examined whether challenges to enrolling children might be different up county or down county. Overall, we only collected 39 surveys from parents with children enrolled in formal care settings. Though the sample size is small, we believe the information is anecdotally relevant.

Of the 19 surveys collected from individual families through our down county sites – the Crossroads Youth Opportunity Center and the Wheaton High School Wellness Center – seven of those families reported having children currently enrolled in a formal day care or pre-k program. Despite the low number of children enrolled in those programs, all seven parents reported they are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their children's placements. Three of the seven parents reported it was “difficult” to enroll their children in the programs.

Of the 104 families from whom we collected surveys up county, 32 respondents had children enrolled in early care programs. One hundred percent of the parents reported they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the services. Yet, nine of the 32 parents described the initial process of enrolling their children in the programs as either “difficult” or “very difficult.”

We did not find English language skills or a parent’s age to be factors in whether or not a parent might or might not enroll their child in formal early care. The parents that did not try to send their child to a formal care site, those that had tried to but failed, and those that had successfully enrolled their children in a site were equally comfortable speaking English. The average age of the parents that never tried to send their child to a formal care setting was 36. The average age of the parents that enrolled their children in formal care or tried to enroll them in care was 35.

One difference that stood out between these two groups was the time a parent had been residing in the United States. Parents who had resided in the US for over ten years were more likely to have enrolled, or tried to enroll, their child in a formal care setting. Although not statistically significant, it is a notable difference (60% versus 49%) between the two groups.

Recommendations

1. Increase Latino parents’ awareness of safety protocols and security measures at early care and education centers. Parents need to be reassured about safety and security. Over 78% of all our parents had experienced childhood traumas. Over one-third of those experiences (36%) were related to physical or sexual abuse. Without explicit reassurance about the safety of their children, many parents’ past traumas may keep them from trusting early care sites. Simply opening more early care centers may not be the answer; the County’s expansion initiatives may still fail to serve a large segment of the population. It seems that “build it and they will come” may not apply to Latino families with histories of personal childhood trauma.

2. Make enrollment forms and financial assistance opportunities for formal care more user friendly. Some enrollment requirements are complex and difficult for families to satisfy. For example, 100% of the families that had tried, but failed, to enroll their children in early care were renters who lacked written rental leases or agreements. A written lease is a requirement for demonstrating county residency in order to enroll a child in pre-kindergarten or Head Start (MCPS’ website, Prekindergarten/Head Start Programs, School Year 2019-2020).

Montgomery County DHHS’ childcare subsidy program, The Working Parents Assistance Program (WPA), asks for the Social Security Number of the applicant parent and his or her “spouse/mate” on the application. People need to contact the WPA to learn that the social security requirement is only a requirement for either the parent(s) or the child.

In addition, the Trump administration’s attempts to expand the types of services considered “public benefits” as a way to exclude individuals from eligibility for lawful permanent residency has created confusion and anxiety among the immigrant community. The county should remain sensitive to the concerns this has raised among immigrant Latinos about accessing social services. This should be taken into consideration for any education and/or awareness campaign to be effective.

3. Engage Latino parents as strong spokespersons and validators as a way to increase trust and awareness among the general Latino community given that 100% of Latino parents that sent their child to an early care center were satisfied with the services.
4. Develop early care and education interventions that are specifically tailored to support babysitters who lack a high school diploma who are caring for the children of parents who also lack a high school diploma.
5. Customize outreach to Latinos that have been in the US for less than ten years. We saw a tendency on the part of parents who were more recently arrived to be more reluctant to send their children to a formal early care center.
6. Ensure that early care centers are located in locations that are easily accessible via walking or public transportation. Seventy-four percent of parents that do not send their children to early care centers indicated that, even if their principal concerns/barriers were resolved, transportation would nonetheless be a barrier to enrolling their children in such centers.
7. Consider implementing the “census” administration technique to the KRA in Montgomery County to assess 100% of students entering kindergarten.

The 2018 – 2019 Maryland KRA Report highlights the importance of the KRA as a tool for measuring a child’s “readiness across four learning domains: Language and Literacy, Mathematics, Social Foundations, and Physical Well-Being and Motor Development.” Despite extolling the importance of assessments (“Assessments Matter,” KRA Report p.3), the Maryland State Department of Education allows districts to opt for a “sample” administration of the KRA, rather than assess every child.

Montgomery County is one of ten jurisdictions that opts for the “sample” technique. School district sample sizes range from 12% to 37%. Montgomery County assesses only 12% of its newly enrolled kindergarten students, with over 10,000 MCPS kindergarten students going unassessed. Fourteen Maryland school districts use a “census” administration technique, assessing 100% of the students entering kindergarten.

The fact that Montgomery County Public Schools does not use the “census” administration technique raises questions. For example, without assessment results for every child how do kindergarten teachers plan appropriate supports and interventions to address their students' specific “readiness” and needs in the four learning domains? Children may enter kindergarten with a strong foundation in one or two domains and a weaker foundation in the others. It would appear that teachers are only able to identify the needs of those who have been assessed. Would a “census” administration of the KRA improve the allocation of resources so that equitable and appropriate intervention plans are developed and implemented for all kindergarteners, as needed?